

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Contestation in Marginalised Spaces:
Dynamics of Popular Mobilisation and Demobilisation in
Upper Egypt Since 25 January 2011

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ABSTRACT

Why and how do ordinary citizens lacking previous activist experience, come, at certain times, to stage protests, block roads, close public administrations, or occupy public spaces, in order to reclaim what they consider is their right? In Egypt, ordinary people have increasingly, albeit occasionally, endorsed protest as a means to press demands, as shown by a continuous frequency of popular mobilisations despite a very repressive context since July 2013. However, despite the persistence of serious grievances and limited results, most of these collective actions have not exceeded the local scale, remaining dispersed, discontinuous and ephemeral. This thesis argues that beyond repression and other authoritarian constraints, which only provide a partial explanation, most popular mobilisations are also prevented from expanding by the vicissitudes of leadership on the one hand, and a set of local sociocultural features on the other.

Beyond traditional social movement studies, which mainly focused on urban and organised movements, this thesis analyses ordinary people's isolated protests characterised by a basic organisation and a strong local anchorage. Based on fieldwork in southern Upper Egypt between January 2014 and April 2015, it provides an account of recent local dynamics of (de)mobilisation. Focusing on these discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral forms of activism, it sheds light on the factors that interact in preventing a widening of local collective action. These factors include leaders' limited ambitions, experience, and difficulties in coordinating in a highly authoritarian environment; activists' co-optation; local logics of patronage and loyalties; gender, generational and other social divisions; and perceptions of cultural identity. The thesis also establishes that current national campaigns, mainly revolutionary change, labour protests and the pro-Muslim Brotherhood protest movement, do not appeal to the majority due to their lack of alternative political projects and perceived exclusionary character. This ultimately suggests why the beginning of a revolution was suspended.

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Notes

Transliteration

I have used a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES)'s system of transliteration of Arabic words into the Latin alphabet. Diacritics are used for the Arabic letters 'ayn (‘) and hamza (‘) and the long vowels *alif* (ā), *waw* (ū) and *yeh* (ī). The Arabic letter jim has been rendered as J, except when the Egyptian colloquial pronunciation G (gim) has appeared more relevant (the informant Haggag but Luxor's Midan Abul Hajjaj, the *naja* ' but the village of Nagaa Abdel Qader). I give 'al' rather than 'el' for the definite article. Most Arabic names of persons, places and organisations are transliterated without diacritics following the IJMES system, except in cases where a more commonly accepted English transliteration exists or when the person named has provided a transliteration (Rabaa al-Adawiyya and not Rāb'a al-'Adawiyya, Algomhuria and not al-Jumhūriyya).

Informants

I changed the names of some informants in order to protect their privacy and security.

Currency exchange

One Great British Pound (GBP) is equivalent to 11.63 Egyptian Pounds (EGP) as of 27 July 2016.

Translation list of commonly used Arabic terms and phrases

'ashwāiyyat: slums

'askar: military (pejorative)

al-ikhwan: the (Muslim) Brothers

bandar: police station

bayt: home, family

fa'awiyya: factional, sectorial

filūl: remnants (here supporters of former President Mubarak)

ihbāt: disappointment, frustration, defeat

Infitāh: openness (President Sadat's policy of economic opening to foreign investment)

intifāda: uprising, insurrection

lamm al-shaml: reunion, rally

mīdān: square

Mājistīr: the Egyptian equivalent of a master's degree

munaqqabat: women wearing the full veil

niqāb: full veil

qabīla (plural: *qabā'il*): tribe

routine: red tape, bureaucracy

Sa'id: Upper Egypt

Sa'īdī (plural: *Sa'āyda*): Upper Egyptian

sha'b: people, populace

sūlār: Diesel fuel

Tamarrod: rebellion

uṣūl: traditions, principles

Acronyms

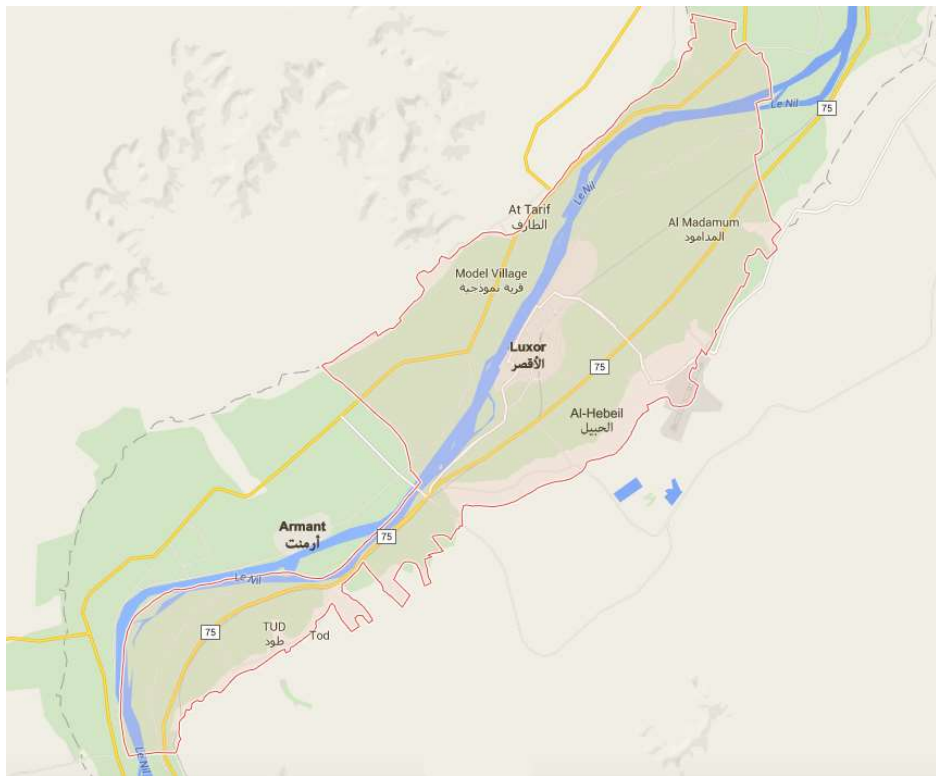
HMLC	Hisham Mubarak Law Centre
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
NAC	National Association for Change
NDP	National Democratic Party



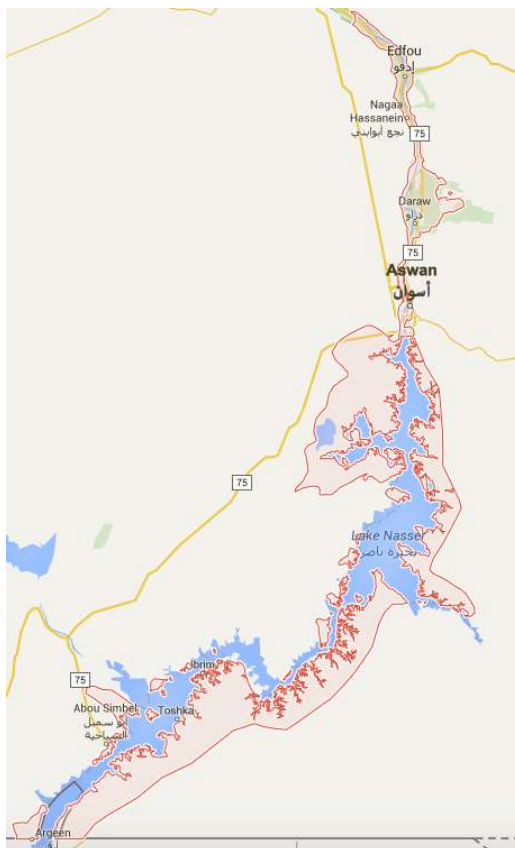
Map 1: Egypt's governorates - © 2016 Google



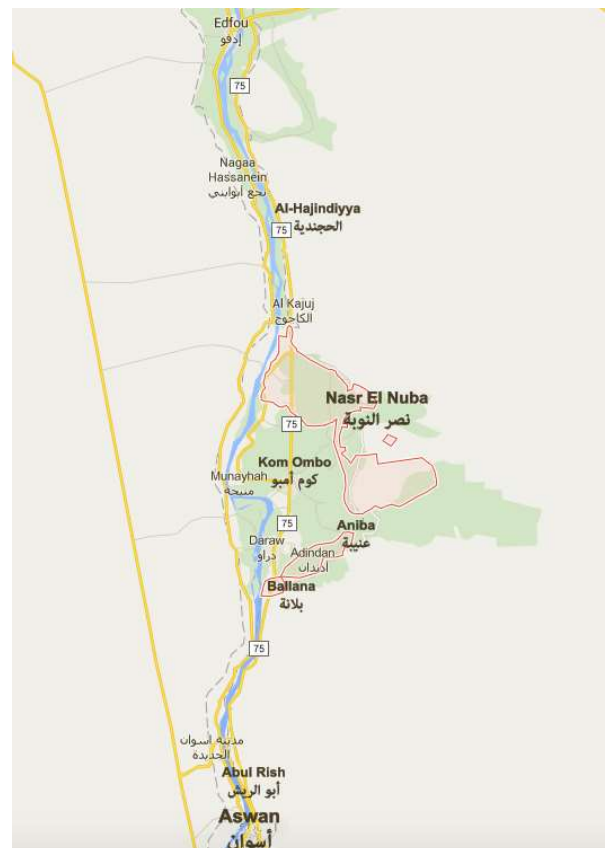
Map 2: The governorate of Qena - © 2016 Google



Map 3: The governorate of Luxor - © 2016 Google



Map 4: The governorate of Aswan - © 2016 Google



Map 5: Aswan, Nasr al-Nuba, Edfu - © 2016 Google

Introduction: examining the local dynamics of contestation

1. Popular mobilisations in Upper Egyptian cities and villages since 2011

On 28 January 2011, I woke up alone in my parents' flat in the neighbourhood of Mohandessin in western Cairo. My mother was out. She had not mentioned going out, so I completely ignored where she was. Later, I wanted to call her and realised that I had no network on my mobile phone. Internet was also cut. I turned on the TV, and saw what had been happening. From my window, it looked like a normal Friday. On TV, it was all about violence, but also hope. As many analysts of Egyptian politics, I knew that popular discontent had been increasing. I knew that something would soon have to change, that something would happen. However, I could not tell what, how or when it would happen. A few days earlier, Tunisian President Ben Ali's flight changed that. That day, I remember telling an old friend who was going abroad for a long period that he would find a revolution in Egypt on his return. I could not have put it better. On 28 January, as I was watching live on TV demonstrators being watered, tear-gassed, and soon shot by policemen and Central Security forces, I was mesmerised. Despite the huge violence, numbers kept growing. By the end of the day, the army took over the streets while the police, completely surpassed, suddenly disappeared. Thousands of protesters were now gathered in Cairo's central Tahrir Square, chanting the famous slogan taken from the Tunisian revolutionaries, "the people want the fall of the regime". I understood that this was a solemn, unique, historical moment, a moment that would affect my life and that of millions of people.

Billions of people across the world live on the fringe of societies structured by exclusionary socioeconomic, political, and even cultural orders which maintain them in poverty, or deteriorate their living conditions. Yet, only a few raise their voices in rather rare circumstances to denounce their marginality and demand a recognition of their existence and rights. Particularly in authoritarian contexts, ordinary citizens face immense risks when engaging in open contention vis-à-vis the authorities. They generally lack the mobilising structures used by more experienced political and social activists. Long internalised inequalities largely prevent them from challenging "the beliefs and rituals

laid down by their rulers”¹ which reproduce the conditions of their exclusion (Piven and Cloward 1978, Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay 2007). When they rise against the authorities, it is often when their immediate interests are perceivably threatened (Bayat 1997, 2010; Posusney 1994; Sadiki 2000).

The Arab uprisings constituted one of the latest instances of such exceptional mobilisation of the ordinary and the poor (Chalcraft 2012). However, the popular mobilisations that have agitated the Arab world since early 2011 differ from previous occurrences of ordinary people’s contentious politics in their forms, scopes and modes of organisation. Despite a significant degree of spontaneity in the eruption of many protests, they have constituted neither momentary local rebellions in reaction to political decisions directly affecting poor people’s livelihoods, nor mass “bread riots” (Walton and Seddon 1994, Sadiki 2000). They have not been extensions of poor people’s everyday resistance, or survival strategies such as “quiet encroachments” (Bayat 1997, 2010). The latter designate forms of grassroots activism aiming at winning new spaces, which include “noncollective, but prolonged, direct actions by individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of life (land for shelter, urban collective consumption, informal work, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming, yet illegal, fashion”².

Characterised by a recurrent occurrence of protests directly targeting the authorities and advancing demands which often exceed local, communal or particular interests, a new kind of popular contentious politics has emerged in 2011 in Egypt. The post-uprising era was characterised by a continuous participation in protests of many ordinary people. Driven by a new sense of possibility and agency, by the high expectations and the subsequent frustrations that the successful removal of presidents generated, the disenfranchised sought to keep the pressure on the authorities. Not only did they growingly mobilise in their villages and neighbourhoods, but they also increasingly extended, and sometimes radicalised, their “repertoires of contention”³ (Tilly 2006,

¹ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements. Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

² Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

See also Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics. How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

³ According to Charles Tilly, the notion of “repertoire of contention” refers to the historically changing assortment of means available to a given population to raise contentious claims. See Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

2008). These repertoires have ranged from mass street demonstrations to sit-ins and occupations of public spaces, road and transportation blockades, and labour strikes. In the countryside, many people have, for the first time, mobilised to demand a decent life and basic services from the state. Poor workers such as garbage collectors have demanded pay raises and better working conditions. Corrupt local officials have been targeted. The increasing resort to disruptive protests and open confrontation seemed to signal evolutions in the political culture of ordinary people. Animated by “a new sense of efficacy”⁴, people seemed to believe that they could achieve much more through public protests than via formal political channels remaining inaccessible to them. As reflected by the apparent spontaneity of many protests, as well as by their coordinated rather than organised forms, ordinary people’s mobilisations have not necessarily been led or controlled by political actors. Regardless of “people power”⁵’s impact on Egypt’s future, this relative trivialisation of protest as a legitimate and efficient means to obtain significant changes from the authorities suggests deep implications for the nature of ordinary citizens’ political participation. It points at an increased popular awareness of the ability to positively influence change rather than passively watching it. It reflects a new common sense of citizenry, of belonging to the polity, to the *sha’b*.

This renewed contentious politics has experienced a slowdown since the army removed President Morsi in July 2013. When I travelled to Egypt in December 2013, the context was very tense. Almost daily protests by supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) were resulting in many casualties and arrests. The Brotherhood had been demonised and labelled a terrorist organisation. Militant attacks targeting security forces had become very frequent, and the security situation had been globally deteriorating, especially in Sinai, but also in Cairo and some areas in the Delta. On the political front, the military-backed interim authorities had been intensifying their efforts to eliminate all kinds of political dissent. The media propaganda in support for the government, including for a “yes” vote at the January 2014 constitutional referendum, was at its peak. The polarisation between MB supporters and those hoping to achieve stability and security through the

⁴ Piven and Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements. Why They Succeed, How They Fail*.

⁵ McAdam and Sewell describe “people power” movements as “relatively nonviolent demonstrations in which hundreds of thousands simply show(ed) their disgust, lack of fear, and unwillingness to cooperate with the old regime in massive demonstrations in urban public spaces”. Doug McAdam and W.H. Sewell, “It’s about time: temporality in the study of social movements and revolutions”, in Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

election of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as president appeared deep. Supporters of the new interim authorities had largely demobilised, having obtained President Morsi's ouster and the MB's political isolation. With a majority of ordinary Egyptians, they were waiting for the election of a new president. On the contrary, supporters of President Morsi were not abandoning their mobilisation against what they called a military coup, despite the violent repression of their protests. Three months after the bloody dispersal of two sit-ins in Cairo on 14 August 2013, despite violence and the detention of many MB leaders, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood continued to stage weekly protests across Egypt. However, these unsurprisingly gathered lower numbers and covered less spaces.

Although the revolutionary ideals contained in the famous slogan "bread, freedom and social justice" remained essential among ordinary people, there was an obvious fatigue and even a rejection of what was called the "25 January revolution"⁶. Particularly in regions over-relying on tourism revenues such as Luxor and Aswan, many people said they regretted the Mubarak era, for understandable reasons. The tourism industry had been dramatically affected by political and security events, leaving thousands of people jobless or surviving through small activities. After three years of political turmoil and deteriorating economy and security, people's overwhelming aspirations were for the return of security. The hope for stability was in everyone's mouth, and the idea of taking to the streets to protest was increasingly denigrated as a move against it. Now was the time to work, build, and give a chance to existing politicians to reform the country's economy and restore safety and security. The main exception to this general trend was the Islamist, mainly pro-MB current. For these people, ousted President Morsi had represented a real hope to see the country reformed on religious, moral bases. The military "junta" had become their enemy since it had simply seized their dream. It had "thrown their votes into the dustbin", in the words of a then regular participant in protests supporting President Morsi⁷. Another exception was a fringe of the population, mainly young supporters of the "revolution", who felt *ihbāt*, meaning disappointment, frustration or defeat.

⁶ Throughout the thesis, I put in inverted commas the terms "revolution", "revolutionary" and "revolutionaries" to use them in the same way informants and the media generally do, without having to discuss their appropriateness. I personally prefer the term "uprising" when referring to the events of January- February 2011 and, to some extent, those of June-July 2013. Yet, I consider that some kind of revolutionary process has started with President Mubarak's departure, and suffered a major setback since President Morsi's ouster by the army in July 2013. After largely analysing throughout the thesis the impact of both uprisings, I come back to this discussion in conclusion.

⁷ Interview with Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), March 2014.

In summer 2016, the situation in the Egypt of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi remained predominantly repressive and dangerous for protesters, political opponents, government critics, activists, journalists and researchers alike. Nevertheless, all sorts of popular mobilisations remained frequent, proving that the harshest repression could not completely silence urgent grievances. This work is about the contentious politics under authoritarian conditions of ordinary people residing in marginalised spaces. In *Dynamics of Contention* (2001), McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly define contentious politics as the “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, and object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realised, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants”⁸. Throughout the thesis, I also use a broad definition of the term “mobilisation”, referring at the same time to people’s participation in contentious (but not necessarily transgressive) collective actions to raise claims, and to the efforts deployed by movement leaders and activists to convince others to join their cause. Mobilisation can imply the resort to street protests or to less transgressive forms of contention such as filing lawsuits or reporting on violations.

A heterogeneous group constituting the majority of the citizenry (Bermeo 2003), ordinary people are ordinary simply because they usually “have no extraordinary powers vis-à-vis the states in which they live”⁹, “are neither politicians nor military officers”¹⁰, and “spend most of their lives in personal endeavours – earning money, supporting families, and pursuing whatever leisure activities their social status allows”¹¹. Among numerous politically, socially and economically marginalised populations, it is generally understood that the ordinary are those people who, under authoritarian settings, lack access to the formal political arena. They constitute a distinct category from the “professional”, more or less experienced activists, and are “the non-activist citizens of a polity, who tend to be disengaged from politics, other than when they vote in elections”¹². Contrary to many political activists, ordinary people generally engage in wide-scale, open contention in

⁸ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁹ Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times. The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Olga Onuch, “Why did they join en masse? Understanding ‘ordinary’ Ukrainians’ participation in mass-mobilisation in 2004”, *Political Science*, 2011.

very specific and rather rare circumstances, while possibly displaying an everyday resistance and defiance vis-à-vis the authorities and the dominant order through rather discrete and diffuse practices. Additionally, contrary to “polity members” defined as “constituted political actors enjoying routine access to government agents and resources”¹³, most of the ordinary citizens present throughout this research are not established, organised political actors, and lack such access to the authorities. This is a component of their marginal condition that they have been increasingly denouncing. In sum, following Nancy Bermeo (2003) and Olga Onuch (2011, 2014), I interchangeably use the terms “ordinary citizens” and “ordinary people” to designate populations whose mobilisation remains relatively exceptional. In the Egyptian context, such ordinary people rarely had any protest experience before the 2011 uprising. Thus, I oppose ordinary people to experienced political activists. I deliberately use this general category to encompass diverse socioeconomic profiles. That said, most of the ordinary citizens I interviewed in Upper Egypt belonged to the middle and lower classes, and generally had either a secondary level of education or a vocational or technical diploma.

This research often refers to the role in mobilisation of ordinary local networks, understood as the “microstructural forms that socialise and connect activists, facilitate information flows, help to create solidarity and shared identities, influence decision-making processes, and that, importantly, can limit membership if they fail to create brokerage opportunities to (potentially) new participants”¹⁴. Therefore, I mean those proximity social networks, including solidarity and problem-solving networks, religious associations or sites, family associations, popular committees, and neighbourhood public places (markets, cafés, gardens), which may drive and sustain participation in protests. I also explore political culture, defined as the general set of beliefs, ideas and practices that shape people’s political perceptions and subsequent behaviour or participation. Marginalised spaces or areas of the “periphery” here refer to places that have been enduring a state policy of neglect for a very long time. What generally distinguishes these areas is a high level of poverty, an elevated portion of residents surviving thanks to the informal sector, a lack of and poor condition of public infrastructure and services, and an absence of significant development projects.

¹³ McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

¹⁴ Joseph Pierce, Deborah G. Martin and James T. Murphy, “Relational place-making: the networked politics of place”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2010.

2. Research questions

Why and how do ordinary citizens devoid of previous activist experience, come, at certain times, to stage protests, block roads, close public administrations, or occupy public spaces, in order to reclaim what they consider is their right? Even though many images of popular protests may come to one's mind, such a question cannot entail a monolithic answer. If poverty, injustice, corrupt rulers and violated freedoms are all reasons potentially invoked by protesters, they have never constituted sufficient motive for rebellion, and "even under the most extreme conditions of human misery and exploitation, the emergence of collective protest is not assured"¹⁵. Everywhere, people have found ways to cope with the most intolerable living conditions and injustices, without systematically expressing discontent. Yet, on relatively rare instances, some people decide to take action. This research aims at providing a better understanding of the rationale behind common people's decision to take their demands to the public sphere through staging protests. Noting that a significant number of protests do not exceed the local scale, do not last, do not intersect, are disseminated and sporadic, a more specific research question emerged: Why do certain popular mobilisations remain discontinuous, ephemeral and dispersed?

This question is inspired by a number of findings in Egypt since the 25 January 2011 uprising. Firstly, Ordinary people have increasingly, albeit occasionally, endorsed protest as a means to press demands, as shown by a continuing frequency of popular mobilisations despite a very repressive context since July 2013. However, despite the persistence of serious grievances and limited results, most of these collective actions have not exceeded the local scale. In most of the local protest movements I mention throughout this thesis, there was no "attribution of similarity", referring to "the mutual identification of actors in different sites as being sufficiently similar to justify common action"¹⁶. Such local movements have essentially remained dispersed, since protesters have not tried to build connections with others sharing the same grievances elsewhere. They have been discontinuous and sporadic, with ordinary people's participation remaining occasional. Finally, they have been ephemeral, with actions generally not lasting in time and quickly

¹⁵ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam. Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

losing momentum. Secondly, the grievances raised during these local popular mobilisations have not really been addressed by the nationwide protest campaigns that currently remain on offer in Egypt. Whether the labour movement, the “revolution”, or the protest movement led by the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, none has convincingly spoken about the issues prompting such popular mobilisations. None has significantly attempted to coordinate national campaigns raising such issues mattering to ordinary people. This may partly explain the essential unattractiveness of such nationwide movements to a majority of ordinary Egyptians.

This thesis finds that beyond repression and other authoritarian constraints, which only provide a partial explanation to the failure to expand of most local protest movements, most popular mobilisations are constrained by the vicissitudes of leadership on the one hand, and by a set of local sociocultural constructions, beliefs and practices on the other. In other words, heavy repression and other potential threats (and opportunities) do not entirely explain mobilisation dynamics and processes. Mobilisation is a complex and lively process embedded not only in a particular historical and economic context, but also in a sociocultural environment that differs from a place to another. Therefore, analysing the local patterns and dynamics of mobilisation and demobilisation from the perspective of protest organisers and occasional participants is the only way to identify these factors preventing activism from embarking to the regional or national level. A thorough analysis of (de)mobilisation locally unveils the power struggles, class divisions, communal concerns, and social constructions that may influence protagonists’ behaviours.

This study of instances of dispersed, discontinuous and ephemeral activism hopes to provide a unique insight into participants’ motivations and choices in relation to their environment, resources and immediate preoccupations. In Upper Egypt¹⁷, factors that have prevented these forms of activism from becoming wider include leaders’ apparently limited ambitions; activists’ occasional co-optation; clanship, local logics of patronage and subsequent loyalties; patriarchal constraints, tensions between generations, gender and other social divisions; and ordinary people’s perception of their Upper Egyptian identity. At the same time, currently available national campaigns have essentially failed

¹⁷ Upper Egypt generally refers to all the regions situated south of Cairo, particularly starting from Beni Suef. Throughout this study, I mainly talk about southern Upper Egypt, encompassing the governorates of Qena, Luxor and Aswan, where I conducted fieldwork (see maps above).

to attract a majority due to their lacking alternative political project and their perceived exclusionary character.

3. Literature review and location of the thesis

Traditional approaches have often considered ordinary people's participation in protests the outcome of efforts by organised political actors (Auyero 2001, Schneider 1995). For Sidney Tarrow, "contentious politics occurs when ordinary people – often in alliance with more influential citizens and with changes in public mood – join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities, and opponents"¹⁸. This thesis challenges the traditional domination in the contentious politics literature of large, urban-based and relatively well organised social movements. It analyses these small protests isolated from other movements, characterised by a basic organisation and a strong local anchorage, which exceed Asef Bayat's "nonmovements"¹⁹ and are more audible than "quiet encroachments" and other forms of everyday resistance. Indeed, studies focusing on dispersed, ephemeral and discontinuous forms of activism to explain the varying dynamics and processes of mobilisation and demobilisation are lacking. Yet, despite their generally limited resources and coordination, such popular mobilisations including strikes, blockades and sit-ins, have the potential, if they last, to durably disturb whole sectors of the economy, public infrastructure, road traffic and transportation. Indeed, ordinary people's power is their ability to occupy, disrupt, shut things down (Piven and Cloward 1978, Piven 2012). Therefore, this work pays attention to the ways ordinary people accommodate with the hegemony of the state and its local representatives. A process more than a condition, hegemony designates "a form of domination in which coercion is outweighed by consent, or coercion is armoured by consent"²⁰.

This study attempts to shed light on some of the factors influencing mobilisation through emphasising the perspective of the occasional, not-so-committed participant in protest movements. It also tackles processes of individual disengagement and collective

¹⁸ Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ "The non-deliberate and dispersed but contentious practices of individuals and families to enhance their life chances". Asef Bayat, "The Arab Spring and its Surprises", *Development and Change* 44(3), 2013.

²⁰ Paulo Drinot, "Hegemony from Below: Print Workers, the State and the Communist Party in Peru, 1920-40", in John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani, eds., *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

demobilisation, less explored in the literature. Indeed, the risk of demobilisation is omnipresent, whether as a result of the lack of organisation (Schneider 1995), harsh repression, divisions among participants, or the institutionalisation of ordinary people's protest movements into formal organisations having lesser options to pressure the authorities (Piven and Cloward 1978). While demobilisation and defection have been the object of interesting studies (McAdam 1988, Fillieule 2005 and 2015, Hipsher 1996), they were often neglected to the benefit of individuals' mobilisation. This thesis is full of testimonies by ordinary people who have demobilised or never mobilised. Additionally, it does not exclusively focus on transgressive forms of contention and pays attention to the ways agents adapt their strategies to changing contexts.

A number of scholars have noted the emergence of ordinary people as political actors in their own right: "these movements of marginalised and thus hard-to-mobilise sectors have become crucial political actors challenging the existing polities"²¹. "To be subaltern is not to be powerless. The most submissive peasantry is capable not only of 'working the system' to its advantage – or rather to its minimum disadvantage – but also of resisting and, where appropriate, of counterattack"²². There are precious contributions to studies of subalterns and ordinary contention (Schneider 1995, Hobsbawm 1998, O'Brien 2003, Schock 2005, Onuch 2011 and 2014), including poor people's movements (Piven and Cloward 1978, Bayat 1997). While some scholars focused on ordinary citizens' everyday resistance and discrete survival strategies (Bayat 1997, 2007, 2010; Scott 1985, 1990, 2009; Tripp 2013), others have studied the occurrence of "bread riots" (Sadiki 2000, Walton and Seddon 1994). Before the 2011 uprising, studies of contention in the Middle East, including applications of the social movement theory²³, remained mainly focused on Islamist movements and activism (Wickham 2002, Clark 2004, Wiktorowicz 2004). Egyptian subalterns' contentious politics have been studied from the perspective of workers (Lockman 1994; Beinín 1989, 2007, 2015; Toth 1999; Hopkins 2009; El-Mahdi 2011; Duboc 2012) and peasants or farmers (Brown 1990, Kazemi and Waterbury 1991, Ayeb 2010, Ayeb and Bush 2014, El Nour 2015) as homogeneous classes or socioeconomic categories, but not so often from the perspective of the more

²¹ Jonas Wolff, "(De-)Mobilising the Marginalised. A Comparison of the Argentine Piqueteros and Ecuador's Indigenous Movement", *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39:1, 1-29, 2007.

²² Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People: resistance, rebellion and jazz*, (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1998).

²³ See, for example, Rabab El-Mahdi, "Enough!: Egypt's Quest for Democracy", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol.42, N°8, August 2009.

heterogeneous group constituted by ordinary people. There were yet some studies of local popular mobilisations before the uprising(s) in Egypt (Sowers 2012, Abul Magd 2013) and the Middle East in general (Cronin 2008, Chalcraft 2016).

Throughout the thesis, I particularly pay attention to the way ordinary people's actual and self-perceived marginalisation influences their mobilisation. I thus aim to contribute to a body of literature studying marginality and exclusion in relation to contentious politics (Wolff 2007, Bush and Ayeb 2012). For De Certeau (1984), minority groups are not the only ones to be disregarded; instead, it is often the majority that is massively and pervasively marginalised. This study presupposes that most ordinary Egyptian citizens have been de facto marginalised from the political directions taken by their rulers at least since the beginning of the *Infitāh* or economic opening in Egypt under President Sadat in the seventies. As pointed by Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay, approaches focusing on poor people's voices and perspectives "have been more concerned with practical, material and procedural aspects of empowerment and participation, rather than with change in mentality and the transformation of the subjectivity of the poor"²⁴. Yet, political culture is important because it comprises "the possible alternative venues which different dispossessed groups (in different countries) often deploy to address (or not to address) their exclusion"²⁵. This study aims to contribute to the literature focusing on the ways marginalised populations deal with, reconsider, challenge and sometimes overcome "their own sense of alienation"²⁶ (Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay 2007). It explores how ordinary people contest their marginality, question the dominant cultural order's elements which exclude them and keep them into poverty (Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay 2007), become "active subject agents"²⁷, and finally reclaim their citizenship and belonging to a broader community, the nation, the *sha'b*.

The thesis also studies how instances of ephemeral, discontinuous and dispersed local popular mobilisation are partly structured by their geographical and cultural context, as well as spatial constraints (Sewell 2001), while paying attention to their interaction with

²⁴ Nandini Gooptu and Nandinee Bandyopadhyay, " 'Rights to Stop the Wrong': Cultural Change and Collective Mobilization – The Case of Kolkata Sex Workers", *Oxford Development Studies*, 35:3, 251-272, 2007.

²⁵ Asef Bayat, "Politics in the City-Inside-Out", *City and Society*, Vol. 24, Issue 2, pp. 110-128, 2012.

²⁶ Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay, " 'Rights to Stop the Wrong': Cultural Change and Collective Mobilization – The Case of Kolkata Sex Workers".

²⁷ Ibid.

the national level. Indeed, contentious politics are shaped and constrained by the spatial environments in which they take place (Sewell 2001), which affect choices of strategies and protest locations. This research aims to contribute to studies of mobilisation taking into account the role of space, networks and sociocultural features. It attempts to replace the individual at the core, in relation to her/his environment, her/his understanding of it and her/his reactions to changes affecting everyday life. For Salwa Ismail, “the infrastructure of mobilisation and protest lay in the microprocesses of everyday life at the quarter level, in their forms of governance and in the structure of feelings that developed in relation to state government”²⁸. Such purpose implies paying attention to the sociocultural characteristics of Upper Egypt as a distinct geographical and cultural space. It also means exploring the resources available to contentious actors, which potentially affect (de)mobilisation. It also means assessing how national events have impacted mobilisation in provinces.

As noted by Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow (2001), mobilisation is not isolated but interacts with other processes and mechanisms. This study offers insight in some of these intersections, especially repression and the diffusion of contention. At the same time, without strictly entering the debate about potential contentious actors’ perceptions of political opportunities and threats, it aims to show how these intermingling processes and mechanisms vary over time and evolve in different historical contexts. The initial postulate is that repression and the other restrictions to activism imposed by authoritarian conditions do not account for the full story. The thesis particularly explores the interactions, at the local level, between (de)mobilisation processes and, on the one hand, leadership issues, and social and cultural elements on the other.

The role of informal, local networks, in contentious events, their premises and aftermath, has been well explored (Gould 1991, Denoeux 1993, Castells 2012, Hmed and Raillard 2012, Beinin and Vairel 2013). Auyero (2001) studies the everyday relationships that make up the political culture(s) of the urban poor, the ways politics interacts with people’s daily lives, through an ethnography of clientelist networks. Other scholars have put into perspective the mobilising strengths of informal networks, as Beinin and Duboc (2013), who showed that the Egyptian labour movement’s strong reliance on local networks largely prevented it from expanding to the national level. I similarly establish that

²⁸ Salwa Ismail, “The Egyptian revolution against the police.” *Social Research* 79, no.2 (2012), 435-464.

dispersed, ephemeral and discontinuous forms of activism such as small movements against deteriorating public services partly fail to expand because of the vulnerability of the local networks they strongly rely on. Indeed, these ordinary informal networks are quite exposed to internal divisions and external co-optation attempts, for example. Another approach has emphasised the interactions in the mobilisation process between ordinary local networks and formal political resources (Schneider 1995). Scholars have also studied the creation of new social ties and organisational networks during instances of mobilisation (Gould 1991²⁹), and the process by which informal networks of survival and political networks become overlapping (Auyero 2001). Such perspectives have highlighted the role of activists (Schneider 1995), other intermediaries or “brokers”³⁰ (Auyero 2001), focusing on networks’ structure (Gould 1991), or compensations given to populations in exchange for their loyalty (Auyero 2001, Schneider 1995, Blaydes 2013). These studies constitute precious contributions. However, they do not fully account for popular mobilisations occurring in areas lacking well-established political brokers and organisational networks. Overall, my research about discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral forms of local activism is also in line with recently-initiated discussions on various aspects of contentious politics in post-2011 uprising Egypt, ranging from youth activism (Abdalla 2016), to organisation and leadership (Abdelrahman 2015). It pays close attention to leadership, not that explored in the contentious politics literature, and largely shows how leaders’ initiatives are also decisive in the course of local protest movements.

A number of scholars of contentious politics have, in the wake of the work of Thompson (1971), explored the moral economy perspective to explain the eruption of protests by ordinary people or subalterns (Scott 2009), including in the Middle East (Aytekin 2012, Zemni and Ayeb 2015) and Egypt (Posusney 1993). Socioeconomic grievances have certainly constituted a significant factor in individual and collective decisions to protest, but the recent popular contentious politics in Egypt is resolutely driven by broader political incentives, perhaps by a long violated “moral polity” (Roberts 2002). While

²⁹ Roger V. Gould, “Multiple Networks and Mobilisation in the Paris Commune, 1871”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 56, N°6, pp. 716-729, December 1991. Gould demonstrated how Parisians were mobilised for insurgency during the Commune through neighbourhood networks: “mobilisation typically creates organisational networks that overlay and interact with pre-existing informal networks”.

³⁰ “Brokerage” is defined as “the web of relations that some residents establish with local political brokers”. Javier Auyero, *Poor People’s Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

considering this approach to understand the rationale behind small, local, discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral protest movements, I find that the ordinary participants in protests against poor public services are somewhat motivated by the memory of a strong state able to deliver (framed as the Nasserist state), and subsequently, perhaps, by the memory of an old moral economy.

The thesis aims to add to an abundant literature about the “Arab Spring” in general (Dabashi 2012, Haddad, Bsheer and Abu-Rish 2012, Achcar 2013, Gerges 2013, Tripp 2013), and Egypt’s uprising(s) in particular (Sowers and Toensing 2012, Korany and El-Mahdi 2012, Alexander and Bassiouny 2014, Gunning and Zvi Baron 2014, Ketchley 2016). It provides some insight about how the 2011 and 2013 uprisings were experienced in the less known provinces of southern Upper Egypt, and how both events have respectively affected the everyday lives and contentious practices of ordinary Upper Egyptians. While a number of studies have explored how ordinary people gradually radicalised until mobilising in the Arab uprisings (Allal and Cooper 2012, El Chazli and Cooper 2012), they have rarely emphasised the ordinary participation in protests in remote provinces and the countryside, to which this study partly gives the floor, generally studying urban subalterns instead (Ismail 2011, 2013). While media coverage was very limited during the “18 days” of the 2011 uprising in Egyptian provinces, academic research about the event and its consequences in remote regions has similarly remained scarce. One exception is Lila Abu-Lughod’s account of the 2011 uprising in a village in the region of Luxor (2012), in which she denounced journalists’ disinterest in what was happening in provinces³¹. While social movement studies have essentially prioritised large movements able to disrupt public order over small mobilisations or “self-limitation phenomena” (Vairel 2015), research on contentious politics in the Middle East since 2011 has too often ignored local expressions of discontent, leaving aside regions of the “periphery” such as Upper Egypt. While “the local has long been stigmatised as the place of permanence, of resistance to change, of conservatism”³², Upper Egypt’s provinces have been traditionally described as unadventurous and therefore non-contentious³³. Their remoteness from Cairo’s central government and their essentially rural character

³¹ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Living the ‘revolution’ in an Egyptian village: Moral action in a national space”, *American Ethnologist*, Volume 39, Issue 1, pages 21–25, February 2012.

³² Jean-Louis Briquet and Frédéric Sawicki, « L’analyse localisée du politique : lieux de recherche ou recherche de lieux ? », *Politix. Travaux de science politique*, n°7/8, 1989, p. 6-16.

³³ On the common clichés about Upper Egypt, see, for instance, Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad, eds., *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*, (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004).

partly explain this isolation, real or perceived marginalisation, and their relative ignorance by the rest of Egypt. This thesis hopes to add to too rare studies of Upper Egyptian politics (Hopkins and Saad 2004, Abul-Magd 2013, Gamblin 1997 and 2007).

Perhaps some readers will reproach me a certain distance vis-à-vis the social movement literature in its traditional and revised versions. It is not my intention to deny that, indeed, I found it relatively difficult to detect its models in the specific reality that I was observing, whether in Luxor, Aswan or Qena. I also sought to overcome the state-centric bias of McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow's *Dynamics of Contention*. In addition, I deliberately avoided to systematically engage in some debates, such as the one about the role in (de)mobilisation of political opportunities and threats. Scholars such as Kurzman have shown, against the classic opportunity model, that repression sometimes encourages mobilisation. Others have sought to introduce the concept of threat (Goldstone and Tilly 2001), defined as "the costs that a social group will incur from protest, or that it expects to suffer if it does not take action"³⁴. Of course, there are circumstances that are more favourable to the organisation of protests than others, and situations that are more threatening than others. However, people's motives and paths to mobilisation are so diverse and complex that it would be too reductive to exclusively explain their decisions in terms of opportunities and/or threats.

Without engaging in the theoretical components of this debate, I still give, I think, the historical context and particularly the characteristics of the authoritarian conditions all the significance and attention they deserve. The history of ordinary contention in Egypt shows that collective actions take place despite the constraints of a continuously authoritarian environment, including a lack of resources and the prospect of repression. I define the period between the 2011 and 2013 uprisings as particularly encouraging for protests due to some political openings. Successful mobilisation fosters more mobilisation, renews the confidence in one's ability to drive change (Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay 2007), eradicates fatalism, allows to raise new demands, and so on. This has been obviously the case in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. I suggest that the persistence of protests in a renewed hostile context since 3 July 2013 shows that an

³⁴ Jack A. Goldstone and Charles Tilly, "Threat (and Opportunity): Popular Action and State Response in the Dynamics of Contentious Action", in Aminzade, Goldstone, McAdam, Perry, Sewell, Tarrow and Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*.

environment characterised by a lack of opportunities to mobilise does not necessarily prevent people from protesting. At the same time, the presence of threats to people's livelihoods and achieved gains might explain the occurrence of some popular mobilisations (Beinin and Vairel 2013, Beinin and Duboc 2013). However, this is not a fatality, since people do not systematically react to political decisions having the potential to negatively affect their lives. Structural opportunities and those perceived by agents are also two different things (Schock 2005), meaning that people can perceive the context as favourable to act while it is objectively not for various reasons, or conversely.

Moreover, the thesis establishes the importance of the cultural environment in shaping, fostering or constraining ordinary people's protests. Briquet and Sawicki (1989) called for a more systematic focus on the local scale, the characteristics of the local political space, and its interactions with the national. This is key because the local space offers the resources and the organisational settings to protest organisers. Only a few scholars have considered the contribution of social and cultural constructions, traditions and beliefs to contentious actors' options and strategic decisions (Polletta 2009) as at least equally important as political opportunities or threats. These reservations towards the social movement theory and its more recent versions do not mean that the thesis does not acknowledge the usefulness of some of the tools that were defined by McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow. On the contrary, these provided a significant source of inspiration to this research which, in turn, attempts to strengthen concepts such as "scale shift", "certification" or "brokerage", by demonstrating their empirical occurrence or explaining their absence in a number of situations.

This research also wishes to get over with a post-orientalist, fatalist literature emphasising the "Arab exception", the Middle East's deep authoritarian nature, and the intrinsic incompatibility between Islam and Muslim cultures on the one hand, and prospects of democratic change on the other. The Arab uprisings have shown that even in the strongest and most resilient authoritarian regimes, popular dissent could occur and force the departure of rulers. Ordinary people's increasing marginalisation and despair was never really seen as a time bomb whose potentially spectacular explosion could subvert everything. Yet, the mass participation in large-scale protests of ordinary people in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab region shook previous attempts to demonstrate the persistence and omnipotence of authoritarianism (Schlumberger 2007, Posusney and

Penner Angrist 2005), the predominant role of political elites as agents for change (Perthes 2004), as well as weak democratic prospects. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, an essential part of the literature has continued to draw on previous traditions emphasising the “robustness of authoritarianism”³⁵ (Bellin 2012, Stacher 2012) and wondering “how these regimes survived for so long”³⁶. The Arab uprisings may indeed, in certain cases, further demonstrate the adaptability of authoritarian regimes (Kienle 2012, Dalmaso 2012), as Egypt’s “counter-revolution” could perhaps suggest. Yet, the foundations of these regimes have been seriously shaken.

Eventually, this research hopes to add some food for thought to a broader body of literature studying emerging forms of popular politics that have been observed mainly in Latin America under the label of “horizontalidad” or “horizontalism” (Sitrin 2006, Motta 2011, Chalcraft 2012), “rhizomatic struggles” (Herrera 2011, Kienle 2012), or elsewhere the “multitude” (Hardt and Negri 2004). The Arab uprisings are part of a broader trend which saw popular movements developing worldwide in reaction to the excesses of neoliberalism and to political representatives’ inadequate responses to them. Ordinary, poor people across the world have been, in different ways, resisting policies increasingly resulting in their marginalisation. They have also been rejecting representational politics, amid a crisis of today’s globally leading economic and political models and an increasing “frustration with conventional politics”³⁷ (Ross 2013). Egyptian subalterns, including in Upper Egypt, are no exception to this. Their mobilisations have reflected a crisis in representational politics, as well as their increasing intolerance of their enduring marginalisation and unfair living conditions.

4. Research methodology

I travelled to Egypt in December 2013 with the intention to conduct fieldwork. I had initially planned to be there by October. However, due to personal circumstances and a certain anxiety at ongoing tensions in Egypt, I had delayed my trip. I quickly realised once there that the situation would not improve any time soon. While preparing myself

³⁵ Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East: lessons of the Arab Spring”, *Comparative Politics*, 2012, 44, 2 pp. 127-149.

³⁶ Bassam Haddad, Rosie Bsheer and Ziad Abu-Rish, Introduction to *The Dawn of the Arab Uprisings*, (London: Pluto Press, 2012).

³⁷ Carne Ross, *The Leaderless Revolution: How Ordinary People Will Take Power and Change Politics in the 21st Century*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

for this fieldwork, I had never imagined I would have to work in such tense circumstances. I started my PhD in October 2012 when, despite the election as president of Muhammad Morsi, the conservative Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, there was still hope for a revolutionary process to gradually suppress the authoritarian regime. The post-2011 uprising period was a relatively open period in terms of freedoms, including the freedom of speech, and I thought I would conduct research in Egypt in this kind of context. In addition, Egyptians are among the most welcoming and friendly people. Therefore, I had imagined I would be rather welcomed as a researcher.

In contrast, the context in December 2013 was highly authoritarian and repressive. I had not prepared myself to face suspicion in an environment characterised by the spread of eccentric conspiracy theories. In a context of high deterioration of freedoms, Egyptian and foreign journalists, activists and researchers, were described by the media as agents of enemy intelligence agencies allied to the Muslim Brotherhood and/or the United States and Israel, and seeking to destabilise Egypt. Intolerance was at its peak: claiming a non-support for the military-backed interim government was assimilated with supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, and vice versa. Stories about denunciations of alleged pro-Muslim Brotherhood neighbours or the torching of cars displaying pictures of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi or the *Rāb'a* sign³⁸ were widely circulating, poisoning the atmosphere. This made me quickly realise that fieldwork would be a particularly difficult challenge for the unexperienced and timorous researcher I was. Research in Egypt in the aftermath of the military coup would be much more complicated than initially planned. I had come to Egypt to study ordinary people's contentious politics in a highly repressive context for protests and any kind of oppositional behaviour. A November 2013 law which was supposed to regulate protests soon appeared to aim at their complete suppression, while providing the authorities with a legal ground to arrest and imprison protesters. Such protest law had successfully discouraged street dissent. Consequently, I decided to be modest in both my research agenda and methods, and to accept the idea that my findings would be very different than what I would have expected when, long before the coup, I started to imagine what my PhD would look like.

³⁸ From Rabaa al-Adawiyya, the name of the mosque and square in Cairo's Nasr City area where a sit-in by thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters demanding President Morsi's reinstatement was violently dispersed by security forces on 14 August 2013, leaving hundreds of civilian casualties. In Arabic, *Rāb'a* means "fourth", which prompted Muslim Brotherhood supporters after the massacre to raise four fingers (while bending the thumb) in a sign of support and identification.

My purpose was always to explore Egyptian provinces, outside Cairo and Alexandria. I wanted to get to know the Egypt that was generally absent from postcards, advertising films, and media reports, the one that had no voice and was often ignored, misunderstood, mocked, or despised. I wanted to see how ordinary Egyptians lived, their grievances, how they were affected by the ongoing political developments, how they responded to them, and how they got organised to defend their interests. The purpose was to reach rather silent voices in public records and go beyond official, mainstream narratives characteristic of authoritarian contexts. I initially intended to select a number of areas where levels of protests had been generally high since the 25 January “revolution”, as well as places where street dissent had been low. The idea was to make comparisons between locations characterised by similar socioeconomic and demographic figures, in order to identify recurring patterns of mobilisation. However, I was soon forced to admit that I would not be able to pick up places because they were convenient and simply go there. I subsequently gave up on the idea of conforming to a strict methodology, since it would have been unrealistic. Indeed, ordinary people’s protests had been so numerous since 25 January 2011 that it quickly appeared very tedious to map and typologise them. Additionally, as a half-foreign young woman, it would have been difficult to simply go and talk to people in the streets.

Therefore, the easiest and safest way to get in touch with ordinary participants in past protests, especially in popular areas, was to get the help of local political or human rights activists, social workers or journalists. This strategy had the advantage of more easily getting the trust of respondents and reaching people of all kinds of social, educational and political backgrounds. However, this reliance on some people to get access to respondents put a limit to my research since the latter were selected by others on criteria not always scrupulously followed. Yet, I had determined rather simple criteria. I wanted to interview people who were ordinary in the sense that they had not been involved in any kind of formal political activism, and who were occasional protesters or had participated in at least one protest. I was not looking for a specific age, gender, social or educational background. On the contrary, I welcomed meetings with a diverse range of people, since ordinary citizens constitute a heterogeneous category.

I reviewed my fieldwork ambitions also because, I must admit it, I was a little intimidated and afraid by the then prevailing climate of violence and repression. I did not really know where to start, since I had no particular knowledge of a specific area. As a woman travelling alone in rather conservative regions where half-foreign researchers are not so common, my first concern and priority was my safety. How would I travel? Where would I stay? Who would I be able to contact should I have any problem? How would I reassure many of my family members, already worried about me while I was still home in Cairo? In addition, I was a self-funded student exclusively living from regular freelance work for a risk forecasting company based in London. This implied the need of further discretion regarding my activities, which could have also been assimilated with intelligence work since I used to write about Egypt. It also meant that I needed an Internet connection to be able to do my daily three to four hours of paid work in addition to the time spent researching the field. My financial resources were quite modest, which would affect my choices of accommodation and travel.

These were some of my concerns in December 2013, while I was busy meeting, calling and writing to contacts, initially other researchers familiar with Egypt, who could be helpful either in putting me in touch with other people or in thinking of potential strategies. At the same time, as advised by my supervisor, I contacted many political activists based in provinces, sometimes via a common acquaintance, but most often directly via Facebook. Despite a certain suspicion expressed by a number of people, this proved to be a rather efficient way to get in touch with members of the activist community in various places. I still had to pick up a first location to begin my enquiry. A day trip to Zagazig, in Sharqiyya province, to meet a group of members of the April 6 Youth Movement, made me realise that it would be complicated to simply go and stay somewhere without almost immediately coming to the attention of people residing in the area and, more worrisome, local security agents.

My aunt and uncle's travel to their hometown Aswan for their usual annual winter holiday gave me the push I needed to make a decision and get started. My mother's family is from Aswan, and even though almost all my aunts, uncles and cousins now live in Cairo, some of our relatives are still in Aswan, and they have kept many friends and acquaintances there. For me and for my family, this was somehow reassuring, and relatives could host me there, which meant that there would be no need to stay in a hotel. In addition, Aswan

did not seem that big, I had already been there many times, and it seemed more peaceful at the time than many troubled regions, including in Upper Egypt. Finally, I loved Aswan and was curious about the Upper Egyptian culture. At the time, I essentially knew the common clichés about Upper Egypt and the old stories of my parents, who had met and lived in Asyut before my birth. One could have objected that Upper Egypt was perhaps not the best choice to study popular dissent since its people had barely participated in the 2011 uprising. However, after spending several months in the regions of Aswan, Luxor and Qena, I could guarantee that, in addition to being highly affected by political developments since the 2011 uprising, ordinary Upper Egyptians had been strongly mobilising to defend their rights and raise grievances.

After a night in the sleeping train, I arrived in Aswan, where I was welcomed by my aunt and uncle, on 25 January 2014. I spent the first week meeting local activists I had contacted by email or via Facebook. Most of them promised to put me in touch with others, and I soon had a fair number of interviews scheduled. My aunt and uncle allowed me to stay in their flat after the end of their holiday for as long as I wanted. The flat was situated in a very convenient location next to a big bus stop in Abul Rish area, just at the outskirts of Aswan. Microbuses were available all day, and it took between five and ten minutes to be in Aswan's city centre. There were also daily microbuses going everywhere in the province, to Kom Ombo, Nasr al-Nuba, Edfu... Furthermore, I had the advantage of the privacy of my own flat, which was in a building belonging to the family of my aunt's husband. Therefore, my neighbours were his parents, brothers, sisters, their wives and husbands, whom I had known since my childhood. This made me feel safe, in addition to having the privilege of occasionally sharing with them delicious meals. Additionally, most of my uncle's brothers and sisters and their partners were Salafi followers and fierce supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. While it was difficult to find Muslim Brotherhood supporters for interviews for obvious reasons, I had the unexpected opportunity to actually get access to the intimate environment of such people who, in addition to being well-at-ease in their homes, knew they could trust me and talk freely in front of me. This gave me a unique insight in how Muslim Brotherhood supporters then lived and adapted to the hostility towards them.

Indeed, when I arrived in Egypt, the overwhelming protest movement was the pro-MB or anti-coup movement. But despite being only a semi-organised movement (most political

leaders and prominent sheikhs were now in jail), it was partly led by the National Alliance to Support Legitimacy and university students. I wanted to study the participation in protests from the point of view of the ordinary, occasional protester, and not from the one of the experienced activist. Therefore, I decided to put aside the pro-MB movement, while welcoming meetings with MB supporters when possible. In any case, when I asked, I was rarely put in touch with people identified as MB supporters, probably because they were too scared to talk to a stranger. However, I sometimes found out during an interview that my respondent was sympathetic to their cause and had participated in a number of pro-MB protests following the 3 July 2013 ousting of President Morsi and the 14 August bloody dispersal of pro-MB sit-ins in Cairo. These almost casual occurrences gave me an idea of how people perceived the MB and more generally the ongoing conflict between them and the interim authorities. I also spoke with many ordinary people and local activists happy to declare their support for then future President Sisi, as well as with people sceptical about politicians, the transition, and the “revolution” alike.

I often spent hours explaining to my local contacts what I was looking for, and still, I was not always successful. Many people did not understand why, as a researcher, I would be so interested in meeting people who had no specific knowledge of politics or a low level of education. They often led me to the contrary of what I was looking for, namely experienced activists (which yet allowed me to have very interesting and useful conversations) or people who had never taken part in any kind of protest (which was also helpful to try to understand why they did not mobilise). Sometimes I succeeded in getting in touch with the public I was more specifically looking for and, when I did not, I still collected interesting material from people either refusing the idea of protesting in the streets or raising their demands in other ways. I also met many activists from all kinds of political backgrounds, and learnt a lot about their strategies of mobilisation, their political cultures and their hopes. However, I got the most interesting material from the ordinary participants I met during six months in Upper Egypt, who always welcomed me and shared their stories and experiences despite fears to talk.

As already mentioned, informants were selected and approached through various means, mainly with the help of activists I got in touch with via online social networks. Samples were diversified as much as possible in order to include people from different generations, genders and education levels. However, the large majority of my informants were men

aged between 20 and 50 (the average age was 37), who had a vocational or technical education. One-to-one, in-depth interviews were my most frequent and preferred method. Narratives are crucial in capturing people's "contentious memories"³⁹ and self-understandings of events in which they participated, as well as to recreate the meanings of these events (Auyero 2002) and understand subsequent evolutions in individual and collective identities (Polletta 2006). As argued by Auyero, "the interview not only facilitates the emergence of meanings that would otherwise be lost but also provides a window into the type of identity work performed by stories"⁴⁰. Additionally, the ethnographic interview constitutes "a space where some displaced meanings can be recognised, and some interpretations can be challenged"⁴¹, and a source of "valuable evidence about the ongoing shaping and reshaping of local political culture"⁴².

In addition, focus groups discussions on collective experiences, and limited participant-observation in protest events and their prior organisation, also enabled to collect data shedding light on participants' motivations, demands and opinions about the existing protest movements, political institutions, groups and representatives, ideologies, and so on. I sometimes decided to conduct group interviews when respondents were too numerous and I feared to lose some of them by making them wait for too long, or when I felt that male respondents were too ill-at-ease to sit alone with a woman, something they were not accustomed to. Group interviews presented the inconvenient of all collective discussions: some people had more self-confidence and louder voices, while more discrete or shy people remained silent unless I gave them the floor. My questions aimed at understanding why ordinary people mobilised, demobilised, or stayed away from contentious activities; assessing the place of protests in their political culture; and determining whether rather established political actors, local networks, and other social and cultural factors, potentially played a role in fostering their mobilisations, or, on the contrary, in discouraging them or encouraging demobilisation. In addition to interviews, I largely used social media sources and newspaper reports to corroborate and supplement informants' testimonies.

³⁹ Javier Auyero, "The judge, the cop, and the queen of carnival: ethnography, storytelling, and the (contested) meanings of protest", *Theory and Society*, 31: 151-187, 2002.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

After spending some time exploring Aswan province, I decided to go to Luxor, only three hours in train from there, and a tourist place where it would be easy to find cheap accommodation. I found a reasonable hotel in a central location, a ten-minute walk from the train station, where buses were also available to go everywhere in the province. From Luxor, I would also go a couple of times to Qena province. This helped me diversifying my samples, while remaining in Upper Egypt and therefore being able to acquire more knowledge about the local culture. In total, I spent almost six months in southern Upper Egypt, between the first half of 2014 and then in March and April 2015. I spoke with more than 150 people and formally interviewed about 110 among them. I partly succeeded in keeping my focus on discontinuous activism from the perspective of occasional protesters, as well as political and social activists, in their local context. This approach enabled me to produce case studies of popular mobilisations in Upper Egypt including analyses of how people saw protests, viewed, justified and created meaning to their participation.

Yet, the relatively repressive context prevailing while I was in the field significantly affected my research purposes and methods, since it was not easy to gain people's trust, make them talk about their participation in protests and their general political views. Fear likely made some people in Aswan cancel meetings with me. Similarly, some people, especially tourism workers and opponents to military rule in Luxor, did not approve my request to record them, or even refused to respond to my questions. While somehow limiting the extent of my empirical research, these difficulties made me further pay attention to people's perceptions of threats and opportunities⁴³ and to their ways to deal with a changing political environment. Suspicion was not absent when it came to talk about politics and other issues deemed sensitive at the time. I was perceived as a stranger by ordinary followers of conspiracy theories. When I could not convince people of my innocent intentions, I simply did not insist. Some people, including activists, made me feel concerned about being potentially monitored by security services. They sometimes accused each others of spying on me and warned me against talking to specific people. Some people seemed to deliberately attempt to scare me, as this informant who told me a security state officer was sitting next to us in the coffee place where I had just interviewed him. Others were asking me too many personal questions to appear completely innocent.

⁴³ See, for instance, Aminzade, Goldstone, McAdam, Perry, Sewell, Tarrow and Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*.

It took me time to admit that a number of informants could be lying to me, and it is sometimes only when I listened to our recorded meetings later that I realised the vagueness or incoherence of things they were saying. But at the time of my fieldwork, I did not know who to believe. Thus I did my best not to trust anyone, except two or three activists who, with time, became real friends. It would have been easy to become paranoid, and I sometimes felt very depressed, discouraged, and a little scared by what were unsubstantiated rumours. To protect respondents and myself, I tried to remain as discrete as possible while playing transparency. I was always honest about my intentions, showed that I had nothing to hide, but refrained from giving unnecessary details.

Sometimes, suspicion was not the main difficulty. Convincing people to give me some of their time and respond to a few questions without being offered anything in exchange was probably the toughest challenge, especially in rather poor areas. It even made me question the whole point of my PhD, because I was not sure how this kind of research could do anything to help my informants. In Luxor in particular, the difficult economic situation of many people made it hard to justify that I needed some of their time without offering any compensation. This was a constant difficulty since I always remained honest and took the time to explain what I was doing. But I could often see how disappointed some people were not to meet a social worker, someone with political connections, a journalist, or basically anyone who could help them or at least write or talk about their problems. As a young, often walking alone, half-Egyptian, but also half-French woman, dressed in decent western style and unveiled, I did not go unnoticed. I also had to be patient with people trying to sell me tours, or young people mistaking meetings for interviews with romantic dates.

Being a half-Western female researcher in Upper Egypt had obvious constraints, but also a number of benefits. My double nationality turned out to be an advantage. While my French side likely gave me some credibility and attention, my Egyptian side and knowledge of the culture, traditions and the local Arabic dialect considerably helped me gain the trust of respondents. As a Western woman, I was admitted in popular cafés and other settings almost exclusively frequented by men. And as an Egyptian girl aware of the local female obligations and the expected behaviour to be seen as a respectable woman, I had access to the world of women. In Aswan, it was even easier because of my family origins. I also frequently wore a *'abāya*, a traditional black dress imported from

the Gulf countries and very widespread in the countryside in Upper Egypt, and sometimes a veil, to show respect for the local traditions.

When I returned to Luxor and Aswan in March and April 2015, I found an even worse context. I travelled to Egypt a few days after the investment conference that President Sisi's administration had presented as the beginning of a new era in Egypt. The Sisi mania was probably at its climax, before the first disillusionments. Yet, explosions targeting security forces remained frequent, not only in North Sinai but also in Cairo, other cities in the north and, increasingly, the south. Power cuts and drinking water shortages were restarting in many places. Repression had partly succeeded in suppressing protests, now less frequent, numerically and spatially constrained. In Luxor and Aswan, tourists were scarce. My experience and a number of reliable contacts in the region made me feel more confident than at the beginning of my first trip. Yet, I would stay shorter than I would have ideally liked, and avoid taking any risky moves, in a context of intensified repression against potential opponents, now increasingly encompassing researchers.

Overall, despite obvious frustrations and mainly the renouncement to my initial ambitions, the fieldwork was a positive experience. It generated significant data on mobilisation processes from decision-making at the household and neighbourhood levels, to the role of informal networks, existing movement organisations, and various types of structures potentially serving as springboards for people's participation in protests. Moreover, the access to ordinary people's intimate environments enabled me to gather some information on gender specific forms of contention and on potentially changing gender roles in relation to protests. Indeed, women have had an increasingly visible presence in protests since the beginning of the Arab uprisings. Therefore, it was important to pay attention to the rationale and meaning of their increasing numerical participation in potentially dangerous contentious activities that have been traditionally dominated by men, especially in the conservative regions of Upper Egypt. An analysis of ordinary people's contentious politics would have been incomplete without an assessment of women's potential role in, and contribution to, the organisation of protests.

5. Thesis outline

Focusing on ephemeral, dispersed, discontinuous and partly spontaneous forms of activism, the thesis has six chapters. Each chapter explores a distinct aspect of (de)mobilisation dynamics and processes illustrated by case studies in the regions of Aswan, Luxor and Qena. After a first chapter aiming at historically and geographically contextualising the research, and a second chapter demonstrating how mobilisation usually takes place at the local level, chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 attempt to explain why the persisting frequency of local popular mobilisations despite a very repressive context since the July 2013 military coup has not led to their expansion in scope and scale. While suggesting that repression is not sufficient to explain the occurrence and fluctuating levels of protests, each of the four chapters analyses a particular parameter interacting with and therefore potentially affecting (de)mobilisation processes and dynamics: the state's strategies of repression, the vicissitudes of leadership, the social and cultural characteristics of a given place, and the availability of social or protest movements transcending the local level.

Chapter 1 consists in a historical background chapter exploring the trajectories and patterns of Egyptians' contentious politics since President Nasser's time. It explains that authoritarian conditions combined with lacking support organisations and dispersed contentious agents essentially limited the expansion of yet recurrent popular mobilisations mainly against changing economic policies since 1967. It poses the 2011 uprising as an important moment in the contentious politics of ordinary Egyptians who have, since then, continuously, yet intermittently, endorsed protest as a means to press demands.

Chapter 2 studies two local protest movements against deteriorating public services that erupted in the months following the 2011 uprising in two villages: al-Hebeil, near Luxor, and Abul Rish, near Aswan. It explains how mobilisation is typically achieved thanks to the leadership, initiative and coordinating role of local activists and/or influential members of the community able to rely on ordinary informal networks and communal solidarities. It also sketches some of the constraints and limits to these local mobilisations that remain essentially short-lived, disseminated and irregular.

Chapter 3 explains how state strategies are partly efficient in locally containing popular mobilisations, demobilising or impeding people from mobilising. It argues that media

strategies of manipulation of emotions and beliefs, including a discourse marginalising the “revolution” to restore stability, as well as mechanisms of local co-optation, are not less important than national repression in containing local protests. Both strategies are illustrated by two case studies: the intervention of local pro-government political activists to contain a strike by garbage collectors in Kom Ombo, Aswan province; and the apparent co-optation of village elders refusing to confront the authorities about drinking water shortages in Nagaa Abdel Qader, Qena province.

Chapter 4 explains how the vicissitudes of leadership potentially prevent local protests from expanding. It argues that protests do not become wider because leaders rarely attempt to coordinate with others sharing similar grievances elsewhere. This lack of motivation may come from divisions within the activist community, a lack of experience in coordinating at a higher scale, a priority given to local matters, personal political ambitions or co-optation by local authorities. However, activists have been exploring various ways to get involved in politics despite extremely constraining conditions. This is illustrated in a case study of the *Lamm al-shaml* initiative, which appears as an imperfect but useful laboratory for activists to conceive new ways of doing politics locally, pursue their political socialisation, and perhaps acquire some leadership skills.

Chapter 5 identifies three kinds of sociocultural determinants that have the potential to influence (de)mobilisation in the Upper Egyptian context: people’s perceptions of their Upper Egyptian identity, including matters of masculinity and honour, as well as feelings of remoteness and marginalisation; clanship and tribalism, which generally entail loyalties; and patriarchal constraints often hindering young people and women’s mobilisation.

After analysing the rare example of successful national coordination provided by the *Tamarrod* campaign, chapter 6 explains why the three currently available protest or social movements in Egypt – the “revolution”, the pro-Muslim Brotherhood protest movement, and the labour movement – have remained largely unattractive to a majority of ordinary Egyptians. This stems, the chapter argues, from their failure to articulate alternative political projects addressing the wide population’s everyday grievances.

Chapter 1: Egyptians' contentious politics: patterns and trajectories (1967 – 2013)

1. Introduction: a long protest tradition

Many ordinary Egyptians did not discover in January 2011 the various types of protests allowing them to express their grievances, “show their disgust”⁴⁴ with institutions oppressing them, defend their interests, or demand rights they had long been denied. In a rare historical account of protests in Upper Egypt, Zeinab Abul-Magd (2013) documents five centuries of “subaltern revolts championed by peasants, women, labourers and ever-ruthless bandits” in the Upper Egyptian province of Qena⁴⁵ against five world “empires”⁴⁶: the Ottoman (1500-1800), the French (1798-1801), Muhammad Ali’s empire (1805-48), the informal British empire (1848-82), and the formal British empire (1882-1950). She analyses mass popular revolts such as those which occurred in 1820 and 1864, labour strikes, petitions, as well as forms of daily-life resistance, including the refusal to pay land taxes, peasants’ escape from plantations and corvée, workers’ stoppages at production lines, attacks on village leaders, mayors, state officials and properties, sabotages of public works, blockades of irrigation water, rejections of army conscription, and many other kinds of protests against perceived unfair rulers and local landlords.

The history of contemporary Egypt since the 1952 revolution was marked by diverse resounding episodes of contention, including the 1967 protests following the military defeat, the 1977 “bread riots”, the 1986 conscripts’ revolt, and the Islamist insurgency in the nineties. Starting from 1967, labour actions became relatively more frequent, while a renewed opposition activism was primarily displayed in universities through a leftist student movement until the mid-seventies, before the ascension of Islamist groups. Since

⁴⁴ Doug McAdam and W.H. Sewell, “It’s about time: temporality in the study of social movements and revolutions”, in Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ The governorate of Qena previously included the region of Luxor, which now has its own governorate. The Qena governorate was restricted to the regions between Abu Tisht and Higaza. Located about 60 km north of Luxor and 577 km south of Cairo, Qena City is the capital of the governorate. See maps 2 and 3.

⁴⁶ Defined as “an all-encompassing political entity capable of penetrating places big and small, near and far, and establishing full hegemony”, the empire’s “semidivine omnipotence” is a myth, an imagined entity which failed in its conquest, submission and assimilation mission. Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013).

the decline of Nasserism starting from 1967, Egyptians have never ceased to mobilise in response to variations in state policies. Far from passively watching events, ordinary people occasionally took part in protests. Yet, publicly protesting may have not been their preferred or perceived most appropriate means to raise demands, especially in the enduring authoritarian context. Instead, defiance and contestation by largely economically and politically marginalised populations essentially took discrete forms aimed at securing livelihoods, rather than direct encounters with the authorities. Still, ordinary people occasionally took part in open confrontations mainly when they felt that their immediate interests and achievements were threatened. These contentious episodes usually gravitated around specific demands and goals, and did not extend beyond a few days. Starting from the mid-2000s, some direct and louder challenges to the political status quo contrasting with ordinary people's usual discontinuous activism, erupted, pointing at an increasing discontent. Indeed, in the years preceding the 2011 uprising, protests essentially driven by workers and pro-democracy activists became more frequent and involved increasingly political demands. In short, factors of rebellion have never been lacking in Egypt, especially starting the 1967 defeat against Israel, the subsequent aggravation of the economic recession, the gradual decline of the Nasserist model, and President Sadat's decision to liberalise the economy. The effects of gradually implemented neoliberal policies, including widening disparities, declining standards of living, and increasing pauperisation of the popular strata, were particularly devastating. Yet, a mass popular uprising did not occur until January 2011.

The study period of this thesis starts in 2011 with the uprising, but particularly focuses on the prevailing repressive context since the Egyptian army ousted President Morsi in July 2013. While the corresponding fieldwork was entirely undertaken in the post-coup era, this research largely refers to the period between January 2011 and July 2013 since it deals with several protest movements and patterns which began before the army's removal of elected President Morsi. Indeed, the field research uncovered many memories of contentious events that took place between January 2011 and July 2013, while informants reported on movements that had their roots and first steps before July 2013, and sometimes before the 2011 uprising. In addition, current dynamics in many ways stand in continuity with long-lasting patterns of ordinary contention in Egypt, regardless of the exceptional parentheses of the 2011 and 2013 uprisings. This is the reason why it is useful to review the popular mobilisations that have shaken the country's modern

history, before studying more recent forms and dynamics. In order to better contextualise the study that follows, this historical background chapter attempts to explain why ordinary Egyptians' episodes of contention have traditionally remained limited in scope and time. It also sheds light on why the 25 January 2011 uprising was another important moment for Egyptians' contentious politics. Provinces of Upper Egypt before 2011 were not exempt from episodes of contention. While being the main stronghold of a violent Jihadist insurrection that expanded from the late seventies, the region saw all kinds of discontinuous protests which rarely exceeded the local scale and were less visible than in Cairo and other big cities. After the 2011 uprising, less authoritarian conditions combined with multiple grievances fostered a greater number of ordinary Upper Egyptians to mobilise, thus definitively burying the cliché of a passive, apolitical region remaining distant from national, historical events.

This first chapter hopefully helps answering the following questions: Why did recurrent contentious episodes prior to the 2011 uprising remain limited in time and scope? How did, however, ordinary people's mainly discrete and diffuse contentious practices, as well as political activists' experiences, slowly prepare the ground for bigger mobilisations? How did the 2011 and 2013 uprisings respectively affect mobilisation levels and processes in the remote Upper Egyptian provinces? I demonstrate how ordinary people have, in various ways, slowly challenged the political, economic, and ideological dominant, exclusionary order throughout the Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak eras. I argue that not only authoritarian constraints such as the fear of repression and subsequent self-restraint by activists, but also weak organisation and a lack of publicity prevented most instances of mobilisations from growing. The lack of organisations to support mobilisation efforts made it particularly difficult to gather dispersed contentious agents and geographically, numerically and durably expand protests. I also argue that the 2011 uprising has partly shaken ordinary people's traditional avoidance of the political sphere. Indeed, ordinary people have increasingly, albeit discontinuously, endorsed protest as a means to press demands, as shown by a persisting frequency of popular mobilisations despite a very repressive context since July 2013. While this was initially due to more favourable conditions in a changed political environment after the 2011 uprising, it appears less logical in the renewed context of repression and severe authoritarianism since the 2013 military coup. I argue, here and there, that ordinary people have increasingly got used to thoroughly take their grievances to the streets for three main reasons: firstly,

because it is often the only way to attract the attention of negligent authorities; secondly, because they have been increasingly and openly defending their rights; and thirdly, because they have realised through the withdrawal of two presidents that they could influence the destiny of their country. At the same time, I will attempt to establish in the rest of the thesis that the most recent context has not allowed for the expansion of local protest movements, partly due to the persistence of long existing patterns mentioned in this first chapter.

Following a chronological outline, the chapter is divided into four parts corresponding to distinct historical sequences, and analysing contentious politics in Egypt since President Nasser's era. It often refers to the way national dynamics and patterns were reflected in the provinces of Upper Egypt, in a move to contextualise the case studies exposed in the other chapters of the thesis. The first section is about ordinary Egyptians' contentious politics from the gradual decline of the national mass politics embodied by Nasserism, which accelerated with the multifaceted crisis of 1967, to the 1977 uprising. A turning point in Egyptian politics, the 1967 defeat entailed a wide public disillusion and was followed by a resurgence of popular mobilisations, mainly driven by labour and opposition activists. Increasing discontent since 1967 was recurrently expressed through more or less loud episodes of contention essentially responding to state challenges of perceived rights and gains achieved under President Nasser. Ordinary people occasionally joined these movements, the most emblematic being the "bread riots" of January 1977. The second section deals with the two following decades and the acceleration of austerity measures. From the eighties, ordinary people have gradually resorted to more discrete and diffuse forms of activism, while disenchantment with an increasingly exclusionary dominant order continued to grow. Disillusionment with the state was partly expressed through the rapid expansion of political Islam. In Upper Egypt, these years were particularly marked by the emergence of an Islamist student movement which, in its most radical form, turned into an armed insurrection. The latter particularly affected the tourism sector, prompting sporadic protests in the nineties. In addition, peasants resisted in various ways the effects of a new tenant law adopted in 1992, in a context of accelerating pauperisation of the countryside. The chapter's third section analyses the emergence in the past decade of relatively more organised forms of activism. Led by "pro-democracy" activists and workers, including industrial workers, tax collectors and doctors, these responded to a new wave of impoverishment caused by neoliberal policies,

combined with the perspective of President Mubarak's end of reign and succession crisis. Yet, open confrontations remained relatively marginal at least until the mid-2000s, and the observed predominant forms of contention at the time did not give birth to a mass protest movement for change. Still, they subtly prepared the ground for a mass uprising yet to come. While new movements mainly appeared in Cairo and other cities in Lower Egypt, many Upper Egyptians acquired activist experience at the time in the north before returning home. The fourth section of the chapter studies the 2011 uprising as an important step for ordinary Upper Egyptians' politics. We will see that contrary to previously common clichés, the remote Upper Egyptian provinces took part in the 2011 and 2013 uprisings, although to a lesser extent than Cairo and other Lower Egyptian regions. More importantly, from January 2011 to July 2013, Upper Egyptian cities and particularly governorate headquarters were regularly the scenes of protests over very diverse grievances, including old claims such as the Nubian cause and local issues, mainly related to the deterioration of public services.

2. Contestation under authoritarian conditions (1967 – 1977)

With the decline of Nasserism starting from 1967, weakened national mass politics gradually left space to the resumption of popular mobilisations. However, we will see that with the exception of important episodes of unrest such as in 1977, most protests were short in time and gathered small numbers. This was mainly due to the common constraints of authoritarian conditions, combining a fear of repression with contentious actors' difficulties to get organised.

2.1. Explaining the relative scarcity of protests under Nasserism

The 1952 revolution, followed by the advent of Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency, initiated a period of relatively low protest activity in Egypt (Posusney 1994). However, starting from 1967, a noticeable renewal of protest actions and opposition activism pointed at an increasing discontent towards gradual changes in economic and political conditions. Why did this disillusionment with a system that had apparently secured a wide popular support emerge? How did ordinary people react to the first signs of a state henceforth in crisis?

The tacit social pact put in place under Nasser had successfully silenced most opposition activism and popular protests. Although resolutely authoritarian and repressive, the state had managed to secure a mass adherence thanks to the combination of a powerful ideology with a rather generous system of provision of benefits to the wide population, ranging from subsidies to basic commodities and free education, to increased job security and employment in state institutions and companies. The Nasserist social contract essentially consisted in the allocation of resources to the people in exchange for their implicit renunciation to political rights. The notion of *dimuqratiyyat al-khubz* or “democracy of bread” (Shalabi 1993)⁴⁷ best illustrates this implicit pact between rulers and ruled, involving people’s political deference in exchange for the provision of public services. Thus, the right to strike had been prohibited since 1952, while an “unspoken bargain”⁴⁸ implied the absence of strikes in exchange for employers’ renouncement to unfounded or unfair dismissals (Beinin 1989). Workers were granted a wide range of their previous demands, including security of employment and large benefits (Beinin 1989, Tripp 2013) in exchange for their loyalty. A state-sponsored trade unionism had emerged with, at its core, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF). Founded in 1957, it was mainly conceived as an instrument to monitor and control the working class, rather than to promote its interests (Achcar 2013). Price controls and increasing subsidies to food, energy and most basic commodities were implemented alongside a series of measures which directly improved workers’ standard of living and social status. Most notably, the ‘socialist decrees’ of July 1961 included significant wage increases, a reduction of the workweek to six days of seven hours, higher pensions and a better access to health insurance. These corporatist policies, including significant benefits for the working class, resulted in a wide demobilisation of workers, who had a low interest in challenging their employer, namely the state for a majority. In addition, workers occupied a specific place in the Nasserist rhetoric, turning from “a despised underclass”⁴⁹ to builders actively involved in the development of the Egyptian economy and state (Beinin 1989).

At the same time, the access to free education, including higher education, increased chances of social mobility for the popular strata (Hoodfar 1997). By employing the

⁴⁷ See Larbi Sadiki, “Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.32, 2000.

⁴⁸ Joel Beinin, “Labor, Capital, and the State in Nasserist Egypt, 1952-1961”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Feb., 1989), pp. 71-90.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

educated popular classes, the Nasserist state turned them into its most supportive constituency (Hoodfar 1997). In Upper Egypt as elsewhere, popular classes had access to a wider range of opportunities for education, employment and social mobility. The countryside benefited from more equalitarian policies, especially during the fifties, when rural poverty diminished thanks to the effects of the agrarian reform laws (El Nour 2015). Although not without a number of negative consequences⁵⁰, infrastructure projects such as Aswan's High Dam provided employment, while many Upper Egyptians were hired in the growing public sector. The potential of the youth to challenge the Nasserist state was also eliminated by its economic, political, and ideological incorporation to the system⁵¹. In addition to their improved position in the labour market (Hoodfar 1997), women enjoyed the same access to education as men, while their employment mainly in the public sector was encouraged through many specific, attractive gender-oriented benefits (advantageous maternity leave, nurseries at workplaces, and so on)⁵². This made them, with workers and youth, another pillar of the Nasserist state.

Nasserism was immensely popular not only due to its redistributive policies and its promotion of social mobility, but also for what it had come to represent to the eyes of the wide population. In addition to their improved situation in terms of job security, living standards and social status, popular classes, including peasants and workers, broadly supported the Nasserist state because they strongly adhered to its revolutionary project and ideology in which they felt involved, occupied a specific place, and towards which they had roles and responsibilities (Mossallam 2012). As pointed by Alia Mossallam, "Nasser as a person embodied a collective dream"⁵³, while providing "the opportunity for people to build a new nation"⁵⁴, as well as "better futures for themselves"⁵⁵.

In sum, the immense popularity of Nasserism, the state's tacit social contract, as well as the gradual improvement in living standards of large portions of the Egyptian population,

⁵⁰ For instance, the construction of the High Dam in the sixties marginalised the Nubian community residing south of Aswan, in the region of the current Lake Nasser, who was forced to relocate in the largely desert area of Nasr al-Nuba, east of Kom Ombo (see map 5).

⁵¹ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam. Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁵² See Homa Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market, Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵³ Alia Mossallam, *Hikayat Sha'b – Stories of Peoplehood: Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt, 1956-1973*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

significantly contributed to preserving social control and to reducing the occurrence of protests during the fifties and the sixties. In addition, initially repressed, the opposition, of which leftist currents were the strongest at the time, was gradually co-opted by the patron-client state. The Islamist opposition, including the Muslim Brotherhood, was essentially repressed. Further opposition was also silenced thanks to a process of homogenisation of the population (Al-Khafaji 2004). Not only did this occur in the cultural and educational fields, but it also took place in politics with the instauration of a unique political party and trade unions, peasant organisations, student, youth and women unions, all supporting the new state system: “For the first time, the state began to produce and impose its own ‘politics’; i.e. an explicit political ideology which citizens were expected to adopt, and extend it to the remotest regions”⁵⁶. In such conditions, opposition activism almost disappeared (Wickham 2002). However, Nasser’s era was not completely devoid of protests. In the sixties, the countryside experienced a crisis during which the cost of living jumped by more than 50% in four years⁵⁷, seriously affecting the rural poor. In the Delta in particular, this prompted many protests (Mitchell 1991). Protests also took place in workplaces, but usually remained constrained and ended rapidly most often thanks to the state’s satisfaction of protesters’ main demands. For instance, in Spring 1962, poor working and living conditions on the construction site of Aswan’s High Dam prompted a number of labour protests and strikes (Toth 1999). While the army was sent to mitigate the crisis and avoid further disruptions of work, the decision was made to change unpopular managers⁵⁸.

2.2. The political and economic crisis and the resumption of popular protests

The frequency of ordinary people’s protests gradually increased starting from the mid-sixties with the first signs of an economic recession. However, it is the 1967 military defeat and the subsequent political crisis which really marked the resurgence of popular protests and opposition activism. Anouar al-Sadat’s implementation of *Infitāh* or “open-door” policy from 1974 would also be followed by a critical wave of popular

⁵⁶ Isam Al-Khafaji, *Tormented Births. Passages to Modernity in Europe and the Middle East*, (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

⁵⁷ Timothy Mitchell, “The Representation of Rural Violence in Writings on Political Development in Nasserist Egypt”, in Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury, eds., *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ See James Toth, *Rural Labor Movements in Egypt and Their Impact on the State, 1961-1992*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

mobilisations, including labour actions in response to ongoing changes, culminating with the 1977 uprising. Overall, people increasingly resisted economic policies and reforms potentially questioning their dreams and achievements since the 1952 revolution.

Egypt constituted no exception to the spread of a debt crisis across the developing world in the sixties, in a context of increasing integration of world economies (Walton and Seddon 1994). The gradual implementation of austerity measures and structural adjustment programmes entailing price increases and public spending cuts (in subsidies, public sector wages, and so on), would soon affect large portions of the population, including the urban poor and working classes. The sustainability of the Nasserist state's redistributive system and centrally-planned strategy of development highly depended on state income and resources. The latter gradually diminished in the sixties as a result of economic downturns and foreign military interventions. The state gradually became unable to carry out its developmental and welfare functions (Ayubi 1995). By the mid-sixties, state capitalism and the Nasserist social contract had begun their slow decline. Aggravated by the cost of foreign interventions, the 1967 defeat against Israel and the subsequently widening external debt, the economic recession accelerated the erosion of a model that would increasingly appear untenable. The ensuing gradual transition from a centrally-planned to a market economy, from an economic development strategy of import substitution industrialisation to an accelerating economic liberalisation and open-door, dramatically affected Egyptian lower and middle-classes. Unemployment started to rise among the educated. Accelerating urbanisation resulted in more pressure on subsidised goods, which cost increased, further burdening state budget (Hoodfar 1997). The government gradually attempted to reduce subsidies, facing recurrent resistance from low-income earners whose standard of living was immediately affected by such cuts.

Starting from 1967, Nasserism began to face increasing criticism, including from its supporters. The crisis precipitated a split within the political leadership, between a pro-Western faction who resolutely moved to the right and would gradually break with Nasserism, while a minority went further to the left (Halliday 2002). A previously relatively silenced political opposition, together with the worried and the disappointed with Nasserism, started to organise anti-government protests over deteriorating economic conditions and the political crisis entailed by the military defeat. A student movement from 1968 to 1973 embodied the end of young people's alleged political quietism which

had prevailed during most of the Nasserist years. The leading role of the left in this movement marked the return of opposition activism. Many women were also involved in the student movement and in renewed leftist politics in general (Al-Ali 2000). In parallel, ordinary people increasingly expressed concern over ongoing changes in the streets and at work. Many supporters of Nasser's state, including workers, students, the youth, and educated middle-classes, felt threatened by the effects of economic liberalisation, while seeing their expectations increasingly frustrated. These populations resisted the challenges to their perceived prerogatives and acquired standard of living, as well as the decline of the revolution's achievements (Mossallam 2012).

Throughout this period, essentially reactive popular protests responded to mainly economic changes potentially affecting ordinary people's standards of living. People sought to resist the decline of the welfare state which, under Nasserism, acted as a reassuring safety net while providing opportunities to the popular classes in terms of education, employment, and social mobility. Ordinary people's contentious politics in the seventies remained resolutely defensive, targeted specific goals and raised modest and limited demands, usually the reinstatement of benefits or privileges that the state had attempted to question. With economic downturns, "the gap between the citizen's expectation of what a legitimate state should deliver and what the state actually delivers"⁵⁹ gradually widened. More concretely, mainly driven by the state's increasing inability to deliver the incentives that the wide population had become accustomed to⁶⁰, most protests erupted in response to the government's attempts to diminish subsidies to basic commodities, decrease wages, increase taxes, or extend working hours without compensation. They targeted the authorities since the state was at the time the biggest employer, as well as the supplier of benefits to the population. However, protesters did not go as far as demanding a regime change. Instead, mostly short-lived contentious episodes reflected a popular resistance to changes carrying the risk of overthrowing a system which benefited the majority. They generally ended with the authorities' consent to the main demands, at least in the short-term, to preserve social peace.

Posusney refers to the moral economy view to explain this kind of "restorative" protest. According to this framework, collective actions usually respond to perceived violations

⁵⁹ Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market, Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*.

⁶⁰ Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam. Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*.

of rules and/or rights which people believe are their legitimate prerogatives and therefore expect the rulers to maintain. Consequently, the purpose of such protests is to re-establish the previous status quo, in order to regain what was taken away, rather than forward new claims⁶¹. In the same vein, Sadiki used the notion of “khubz-iste” (Sadiki 2000) to account for this system involving deferential political behaviour in exchange for state provision of benefits. Defined as a “quietist bread seeker”⁶², the “khubz-iste” loudly reacts when the state challenges his livelihood⁶³.

Among those who benefited from the Nasserist social contract and whose prosperity was henceforward threatened by its attrition, the working class was at the forefront of popular resistance to economic changes starting from the seventies. As argued by Posusney, a patron-client relationship between the working class and the state consisted in workers’ political support and contribution through their labour to national development. In exchange, the state committed to provide decent pay, various benefits and job security, while controlling the prices of basic commodities⁶⁴. Workers were likely convinced of their role in national production, and believed they had rights, but also obligations towards the state (Posusney 1994). This relationship was likely internalised, as reflected by workers’ apparent self-imposition of limits on their protests. Indeed, labour protests rarely radicalised, and workers resorted to strike only as a last resort, preferring instead a wide range of repertoires of contention which did not result in work disruption. These included the then widespread in-plant sit-in (during which work continued while employees occupied the factory), petitions and telegrams to government officials, and the boycott of deemed insufficient checks (Posusney 1994).

Labour protests responded to policies challenging the payroll’ standard of living, and sought to preserve workers’ rights and status, rather than renegotiating relations with the state or attempting to change the established order. They also targeted disparities in wages, particularly between industrial workers and civil servants or company managers, between public sector and private sector employees. Finally, there were protests over frustrated expectations due to unmet promises by the state or employers. These

⁶¹ See Marsha Pripstein Posusney, “Collective Action and Worker’s Consciousness in Contemporary Egypt”, in Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁶² Sadiki, “Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization”.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Posusney, “Collective Action and Worker’s Consciousness in Contemporary Egypt”.

“entitlement protests” (Posusney 1994) responded to “a sense of injustice among workers, a feeling that they were being denied something to which they were entitled”⁶⁵. Thereby, cycles of workers’ actions followed price and tax increases, working hours’ increases without compensation or deductions from salaries. They took place in 1965-66 amid the economic recession, in 1967 after the military debacle, in February 1968, in 1971 after the advent of President Anouar al-Sadat. Labour protests became more frequent as a result of the implementation, starting from 1974, of the *Infitāh* or open-door policy aimed at reversing the economic recession through measures promoting the private sector, Arab and foreign investment (Owen and Pamuk 1998). However, workers’ protests remained sporadic and essentially localised in large public-sector companies in a few sectors and industrial areas⁶⁶. They included labour actions at the Iron and Steel factory in 1968, 1977 and 1989; Kafr al-Dawwar Weaving and Spinning in 1995; railway workers’ strike in 1986; and a strike at Helwan Steel in 1989.

After the formal adoption of the *Infitāh* as a result of pressures from “the state bourgeoisie opting for alliance with international capital”⁶⁷, workers increasingly escalated protests. Industrial, public sector “workers were among the principal beneficiaries of Nasserism and potentially big losers from the open door policy”⁶⁸, and were therefore among the first to protest against it (Beinin 2005). Protests sometimes exceeded the scope of working places, such as workers’ sit-in at Bab al-Luq railway station on 1 January 1975⁶⁹. Workers continuously protested from 1975 to 1977, culminating with the “bread riots” of January 1977. The state’s frequent yielding to protesters’ demands, often involving the cancellation of price increases, wage reductions or subsidy cuts, tended to acknowledge people’ sense of injustice (Walton and Seddon 1994), even though the removal of such austerity measures was often temporary, aiming at ending unrest in the short-term.

Political opponents and activists performed a limited role in workers’ protests. Posusney observed a relative coincidence between the occurrence of labour protests and the periods during which the Left had some leeway to operate, including the strike waves of 1974-76

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Joel Beinin, “Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand Up?”, in Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East*.

⁶⁷ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Joel Beinin, “Political Islam and the New Global Economy: The Political Economy of an Egyptian Social Movement”, *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 2005, pp. 111-139.

and 1984-87⁷⁰. The essential role of leftist activists consisted in spreading information about labour actions that were not covered in state media, thus allowing other workers to realise that they could achieve some gains by protesting⁷¹. Beinin considers that industrial workers' mobilisation against the open-door policy was largely organised without support from trade unions or the political opposition (Beinin 2005). However, the Left had an active and even leading role in labour protests from 1984 to 1989⁷². The government generally responded rapidly with a combination of repression and concessions, in order to avoid protests to extend in duration and spread to other sites. Overall, the authorities often ultimately preferred to meet most protesters' demands rather than risking an expansion of labour actions potentially endangering order.

Overall, beyond actual or feared material losses, ordinary people's protests after 1967 were largely motivated by the decline of their dreams associated with the 1952 revolution and Arab socialism, and embodied by Nasserism and its regime combining "Etatisme" and welfarism (Ayubi 1995). 1967 represented less an ideological turmoil than a crisis of the political leadership, blamed for the military defeat by the opposition and the popular strata. After fifteen years of political deference, people reminded the government that they had a say in the way political power was exercised (Shukrallah 1989).

Despite disappointments, popular renunciation to Nasser's era took time as the dreams entailed by the revolution largely survived the president's death while resistance to changes persisted beyond the first disenchantments (Mossallam 2012). For example, pro-Nasser slogans could be heard during the 1977 bread riots. Like other powerful state ideologies such as, for instance, Peronism, Nasserism has remained a reference model of the role and duties the state should perform vis-à-vis its population⁷³. In chapter 2, I suggest how this is still present in Egyptians' political culture. In the wake of President Morsi's ouster by the army in July 2013, then Minister of Defence General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was largely compared to Nasser for allegedly saving the country from an Islamist dictatorship.

⁷⁰ Posusney, "Collective Action and Worker's Consciousness in Contemporary Egypt".

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Beinin, "Political Islam and the New Global Economy: The Political Economy of an Egyptian Social Movement".

⁷³ For an analysis of Peronism's trajectory beyond Peron's death, see Jon Beasley-Murray, *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

2.3. Ordinary people's intensifying resistance: the turning point of the 1977 uprising

Egypt's emblematic "IMF riot" or "austerity protest"⁷⁴ (Walton and Seddon 1994), the 1977 uprising shared many features with the first days of the 2011 uprising. State repression of initially rather peaceful workers and students' protests led to a rapid escalation of violence. Tens of people are said to have died during the uprising, while hundreds were injured. But unlike the 2011 uprising, the "bread riots" erupted in reaction to a specific, identified threat, namely the government's decision to partially cancel subsidies on many basic goods, which immediately increased the prices of bread, sugar, tea, gas, and other essential commodities. The uprising ended on 20 January 1977 when the government reversed its decision to decrease subsidies. It "did not open the way toward a coherent movement of militant opposition and a radical change in Egypt's economic and political direction"⁷⁵. Beinin attributed this failure to the dispersion of the masses gathered in spontaneous collective actions, and the inability to form sustainable coalitions including the diverse components of Egypt's popular classes (Beinin 1994). The protesters did raise neither reformist nor revolutionary demands, and did not call for the fall of the state. Instead, the defensive nature of the uprising which erupted in reaction to a government decision threatening the standards of living of the ordinary was in line with most protests against neoliberal policies during this period. Nevertheless, several distinctive features made the 1977 "bread riots" exceptional and a turning point in the history of Egyptian politics.

Firstly, the shift from the contestation of the removal of subsidies to the direct questioning of the state's legitimacy in anti-government slogans made the uprising resolutely political. Beyond their rejection of increased food prices, the industrial workers who started to protest on 18 January 1977 were expressing their resistance to the "open door" policy (Beinin 1994), in continuation with the waves of labour strikes, sit-ins and street demonstrations of 1975-1976. The large crowds of ordinary people who joined the

⁷⁴ Such protests are defined as "large-scale collective actions including political demonstrations, general strikes, and riots, which are animated by grievances over state policies of economic liberalisation implemented in response to the debt crisis and market reforms urged by international agencies". John Walton and David Seddon, *Free markets & Food riots. The Politics of Global Adjustment*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994).

⁷⁵ Beinin, "Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand Up?".

protests reflected general concerns and popular discontent vis-à-vis the neoliberal economic policies being implemented since the beginning of the *Infitāh*.

Secondly, as in January 2011, the authorities were quickly overwhelmed by the striking numbers in the streets, the assaults on properties and symbols of power and political elites, the rapid spread of protests to most major cities, and therefore the simultaneity of riots occurring in many different places. Protests started on 18 January 1977, when workers at the Misr Textile Company in Helwan marched to downtown Cairo. Urban poor, university students, trade unionists, unemployed, youth, recent migrants from the countryside, women (Walter and Seddon 1994) and other disenfranchised populations joined public sector workers. As a result of security forces' indiscriminate repression, demonstrations quickly turned violent. Protesters stormed places symbolising the state, its institutions and recently-enriched elites, smashing windows of luxury shops, assaulting police stations and administration offices, and so on. Some roads and train lines were blocked. Steelworkers protested in the industrial city of Shubra al-Khayma. Protests also took place in Alexandria on the same day, and had expanded to seventeen cities nationwide by 19 January. Until today, the spectrum of the bread uprising recurrently makes the Egyptian authoritarian governments anxious.

Thirdly, the 1977 bread uprising was the result of a rare, rather spontaneous, mass mobilisation of ordinary people along with workers and students. Marginalised from the political arena, with no access to formal channels of expression, ordinary citizens had no choice but to go to the streets to state their discontent vis-à-vis government policies. This "angry eruption of Egypt's subaltern masses"⁷⁶ shook the foundations of the regime and particularly surprised the authorities after decades of relative political quiescence. The "bread riots" symbolically marked the beginning of the end of the Nasserist social contract since people openly reversed their habitual political deference. As pointed by Walton and Seddon, the spontaneous character of the protests did not mean they were random or irrational, as shown by the attacks on properties symbolising the newly-enriched, as well as state institutions and representatives⁷⁷. Rather than sabotage, it was a revolution against symbols of an ostentatious luxury accessible to a very small minority (Shoukri 1979).

⁷⁶ Beinín, "Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand Up?".

⁷⁷ See Walton and Seddon, *Free markets & Food riots. The Politics of Global Adjustment*.

Fourthly, rather disconnected from the working class, especially industrial workers, leftist activists and (banned) political parties did not play any role in the organisation of the protests and had no influence over the course of the uprising⁷⁸, despite accusations of the regime (Shoukri 1979). On the contrary, they were rather surprised by the wide numbers in the streets.

Popular attempts, from 1967 to 1977, to resist economic liberalisation, as well as the demise of Arab socialism and Nasserism as a national ideology and state-led model of development, led to mixed results. On the material front, people's mobilisations had obtained a relative deceleration of austerity reforms required by the *Infitāh* and the debt crisis, preserving the essential architecture of the Nasserist system of state redistribution of incentives. However, this relief would prove temporary. By the early eighties, it was clear that Arab socialism had been definitely abandoned. Increasing IMF pressure and the acceleration of structural adjustment measures confirmed the evolutions observed since the mid-seventies.

3. The definitive marginalisation of the poor (1977 – 2000)

Encouraged by “the relatively less repressive atmosphere of the early Mubarak era”⁷⁹, labour protests continued to regularly erupt as a result of waves of neoliberal reforms and their consequences in 1982-1983, 1985-1986, and so on. They were responded to by a mix of state concessions and repression. They occasionally turned violent due to the involvement of police repression, as at Helwan Iron and Steel Works in October 1989, where clashes between protesting workers and security forces resulted in several casualties and 600 arrests⁸⁰. Essentially defensive protests remained manifestations of the resistance of declining popular classes confronted to the cost of austerity policies (Sadiki 2000). Indeed, the latter resulted in rising unemployment, including among the most educated, increasing social polarisation, growing inflation, decreasing public sector salaries, and so on. At the same time, the redistributive capacity of the state pursued its decline as a result of the global recession and the aggravation of the debt crisis, further burdened by an accelerating demographic growth and urbanisation. These international

⁷⁸ Beinin, “Will the Real Egyptian Working Class Please Stand Up?”.

⁷⁹ Beinin, “Political Islam and the New Global Economy: The Political Economy of an Egyptian Social Movement”.

⁸⁰ Walton and Seddon, *Free markets & Food riots. The Politics of Global Adjustment*.

and domestic changes made the tacit pact between the state and the people increasingly unaffordable (Sadiki 2000).

The same trend prevailed in the nineties and beyond, with worsening socioeconomic conditions due to the acceleration of economic restructuring, including more and more privatisations of large portions of the economy. In the labour sector, pay and working conditions increasingly deteriorated with the acceleration of the privatisation of public sector companies. Popular classes suffered a decline of state transfers, as well as a deterioration of the subsidy system, which remained in place but affected less and lower quality goods (El-Meehy 2011). The gap between the rich and the poor widened, mainly affecting the standard of living of middle and lower-middle classes who suffered a degradation of their social status. As a result, labour protests doubled in the nineties compared to the eighties (El-Mahdi 2011), while essentially remaining isolated and limited in scope (Tripp 2013).

In the sixties and the seventies, no particular competing ideology to the Nasserist nationalism or Arab socialism seems to have guided ordinary people's participation in protests. Leftist movements, which until the mid-seventies represented the main current in the political opposition, remained largely separated from popular constituencies and the working class. By the late seventies, political Islam as an alternative ideology started its gradual ascension among popular constituencies, especially educated youth and the declining lower middle class. Additionally, mutations of the authoritarian state starting from the advent of President Mubarak gradually drove popular classes away from an increasingly coercive state.

By the eighties, increasingly unable to rely on the state and a disintegrated Nasserist social contract, many ordinary people resorted to the informal sector to survive, while being progressively marginalised by a growing exclusionary political, economic, and social order. Their contentious politics increasingly took the form of subtler and less confrontational practices. Protests remained relatively exceptional and involved small numbers. Ordinary people's collective actions essentially failed to organise beyond the local, communal level, while the political elites searched to avoid the repetition of such an episode as the 1977 riots potentially threatening the regime. Thus successive governments tried to gradually but discretely reduce subsidies on basic consumer

commodities. Why did ordinary people increasingly retreat into more diffuse forms of contention? How did they cope with ongoing changes directly affecting their livelihoods?

3.1. From discrete resistance to open collective action

In the eighties and nineties, workers continued to occasionally rise against economic reforms directly challenging their livelihoods, as previously mentioned. In February 1986, thousands of Central Security Forces' conscripts revolted against poor pay and working conditions. However, the majority of the outcasts of such an emerging exclusionary order had no choice but to get organised in order to acquire their own means of subsistence, resist ongoing changes, while subsequently redefining their relationship with the state. Indeed, not only due to the declining redistributive and welfare role of the state, but also because of its henceforward failure to secure an equitable access to educational and professional chances to everyone, the relationship between the state and the people dramatically changed. The latter's dependence upon state resources declined as they increasingly got organised locally to ensure their survival. "Informality" became the norm for increasingly marginalised populations. The poor were now mainly established in "informal neighbourhoods" or '*ashwāiyyat*'⁸¹, worked in the parallel economic sector, and avoided as much as possible direct encounters with authorities either denying their existence, or perceivably threatening their livelihoods and achievements.

Forms of ordinary activism evolved concomitantly to these changes. The poorest managed to survive thanks to strategies of "quiet encroachment" (Bayat 1997, 2010). These practices include daily violations of property rights and urban rules in the pursuit of two main goals, according to Asef Bayat: an autonomy from the authorities and a redistribution of social goods. Indeed, ordinary people sought to fill the gap created by the state's gradual retreat from its previous redistributive role. As the government seemingly sought to avoid dealing with their existence, lower middle classes increasingly survived thanks to quiet, silent illegal activities ranging from squatting private land and the piracy of urban utilities, to informal working. On the other hand, residents of informal neighbourhoods "tend to function as much as possible outside the boundaries of the

⁸¹ Slums and other residential areas that were not planned by the authorities and were, instead, haphazardly built by poor populations in need of shelters.

state”⁸² because they trust their community more than the authorities. This trend was confirmed with the gradual transformation of the authoritarian regime under President Mubarak into a police state increasingly perceived as a “racketeer government” (Tilly 1985)⁸³, a threat to people’s security rather than a protector (El-Meehy 2011).

Overall, ordinary people’s increasing mistrust towards the government, combined with the henceforth inability to count on state redistribution of resources, gradually led them to rely on themselves. This trend was reinforced by an emerging order increasingly excluding those who could not afford the “costly condition” of modernity (Bayat and Denis 2000). Expanding state violence and abuses further diverted most people from the authorities. Bayat emphasised the non-ideological character of “quiet encroachment” strategies, since the dwellers of informal neighbourhoods relying on parallel sectors primarily intend to survive. At the same time, these everyday practices carry the possibility of defying the state and its institutions since informality “expresses a certain resistance to state control”⁸⁴. Yet, Bayat rejected James Scott’s vision of resistance as an intentional act⁸⁵, arguing that intentionality “leaves out many types of individual and collective practices whose intended and unintended consequences do not correspond”⁸⁶. Whether voluntarily or not, quiet encroachment strategies or other “clever tricks that people use in their daily life”⁸⁷ to obtain something from the powerful challenge the state’s control upon space, order, public utilities and general regulations. Such diffuse forms of contention may be understood as signs of a mounting discontent (Tripp 2013), foundations upon which resistance in the form of collective action can be organised (Ismail 2006), and/or ways to generate social and political change (Bayat 2010), even though people are not necessarily aware of the consequences of their activism. In the Middle East and elsewhere, authoritarian regimes have adopted different attitudes

⁸² Asef Bayat and Eric Denis, “Who is afraid of ashwaiyyat? Urban change and politics in Egypt”, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.12, N°2, October 2000.

⁸³ See Asya El-Meehy, “Transcending Meta-Narratives: Unpacking the Revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia”, *E-International Relations*, 2011: <http://www.e-ir.info/2011/05/08/transcending-meta-narratives-unpacking-the-revolutions-in-egypt-and-tunisia/>

⁸⁴ Nicholas S. Hopkins, cited in W.J. Dorman, *The Politics of Neglect, The Egyptian State in Cairo, 1974-98*, PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 2007.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁸⁶ Asef Bayat, “Globalization and the Politics of the Informals in the Global South”, in Ananya Roy and Nezar Alsayyad, eds., *Urban Informality. Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*, (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004).

⁸⁷ Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002).

towards such everyday survival practices, including ignorance, tolerance, co-optation and repression.

The everyday silent encroachment of the ordinary becomes openly contentious when confronted to the state. The poor most commonly mobilise when their gains are exposed to state's coercive policies (Bayat 1997) such as eviction from illegally-occupied lands, demolition of settlements or utilities' removal. The street then becomes the ultimate field of contestation for those, marginalised by the dominant order, who lack other means of expressing discontent (Bayat 1997, 2010). Bayat also noted that "the street as a public space possesses this intrinsic feature, making it possible for people to mobilise without having an active network"⁸⁸. Indeed, people did not necessarily rely on formal institutions to organise a struggle and engage in collective action. When "the instantaneous communication among atomised individuals", "established by the tacit recognition of their common identity" and "mediated through space"⁸⁹, a "passive networking" allows the emergence of collective action. And still according to Bayat, "what mediates between a passive network and action is a common threat"⁹⁰.

In Egypt, quiet encroachment and open acts of resistance in reaction to state intrusions have cumulatively coexisted since the seventies. In numerous cases, ordinary people's mobilisation around common concerns successfully extracted state concessions, including the state's renunciation to destroy many informal settlements or their de facto legalisation, or the provision of utilities. Yet, the scope of these open acts of resistance has remained limited due to their local, communal character preventing their connection to broader grievances shared by others. The lack of more structured organisations and networks did not allow for the development of solidarities extending beyond kinship or the neighbourhood level.

By the turn of the century, ordinary open resistance and confrontational attitudes towards the authorities were not uncommon, despite a larger use of discrete, diffuse forms of protest. Open contention increasingly took the form of incidents involving state institutions, especially the police. Rather than ensuring people's safety and security, police

⁸⁸ Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

brutality and harassment was increasingly perceived as a threat by ordinary people (Ismail 2012). Therefore, open contention by the ordinary intermittently took the form of violent manifestations of anger directed at the police, including assaults on police stations, and fights with officers. Furthermore, although limited in scope and time throughout the eighties and the nineties, labour protests persisted. For instance, strikes took place at cement and steel plants in Cairo's Helwan suburban area in 1992 (Toth 1999).

Peasants also resisted the new order in the countryside, including laws on property ownership, and were sometimes confronted to violent state repression (El Nour 2015, Tripp 2013). Indeed, Sadat and Mubarak's policies gradually undermined the important gains achieved by small farmers with Nasser's agrarian reform laws. In particular, Law 96 of 1992 questioned their previous tenancy security, landholding rights, access to cheap seeds and pesticides and loans from the Agricultural Development and Credit Bank. Law 96 made hundreds of thousands of poor small tenant farmers, who constituted the majority, lose the lands they had been cultivating (El Nour 2015). As a consequence, the countryside resisted the implementation of the new law and experienced various episodes of contention, particularly between 1996 and 1999. 49 peasants were killed and 949 others injured in clashes with landlords and security forces⁹¹. Tens of peasants and political activists seeking to support them were also arrested as a result of demonstrations. The law marked a decisive rupture between rulers and peasants increasingly seen by the first as obstacles to a modern, capitalist and liberal agriculture (Ayeb 2010).

3.2. Islamist movements' increasing popularity among the ordinary

The erosion of the state Nasserist system starting from the seventies, combined with the broad decline of the left, left an ideological vacuum that could be exploited by newly-emerging political actors. Similarly, the state's gradual retreat from his providential role left a space where other actors could intervene in the provision of goods and welfare services to the needy, especially in popular quarters. Political Islam began to score within society in this context of weakening providential, caretaker state, while the effects of economic liberalisation became increasingly devastating for the most vulnerable populations. Indeed, prices continued to increase along with taxes, educated unemployment pursued its rise, and public sector workers saw a decline in their working

⁹¹ Habib Ayeb, *Crise de la société rurale en Egypte : La fin du fellah?*, (Paris: Karthala, 2010).

conditions, standards of living, and social status. More generally, ordinary people were increasingly impacted by deteriorating state services, including public health, education and housing. Particularly affected by ongoing changes, the working and urban educated middle-classes, students and unemployed graduates, who constituted the main supporters of the Nasserist state, were progressively abandoned. Increasingly discontented, they became a reservoir of constituencies and a prime target for Islamist political entrepreneurs (Wickham 2002). Islamist movements' extensive welfare activities ensured them a steady popularity, if not loyalty, among many ordinary people.

Political Islam emerged principally in universities in the early seventies, but truly developed starting from the eighties due to a combination of factors. Islamic activism benefited from the decline of the leftist opposition and the crisis of Nasserist nationalism and Arab socialism, the dominant ideologies since the 1952 revolution. Islamism revived thanks to a more favourable political environment under President Sadat who, in an attempt to weaken both Nasserism and the leftist opposition, released throughout the first half of the seventies many Muslim Brothers who had been jailed during Nasser's era. Islamists came to dominate student politics by the end of the seventies. Disillusioned with the state's decreasing capacity as an employer, the increasing number of unemployed graduates would become the main constituency of the Islamist movement in the eighties (Wickham 2002, Bein 2005).

Islamist activism emerged as a more organised and diffuse form of contention compared to the loud, rather spontaneous protests of the late sixties and seventies. In general, it did not seek to directly confront the state in street protests, preferring instead a strategy of islamisation from below, gradually advancing its pawns and expanding its constituencies. Thus, Islamist movements were essentially absent from the rather intense labour protests of the eighties (Bein 2005). Instead, they discretely developed through the formation of institutions alimenter a parallel sector. Relying on informal networks⁹², they gained popularity through the provision of goods and services at the neighbourhood level, and gradually imposed themselves as the strongest organised opposition current in the Mubarak era. Except radical groups' militancy, which remained marginal, Islamist

⁹² See Diane Singerman, "The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements", in Quintan Wiktorowicz, eds., *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

activism did not adopt a confrontational stance towards the state. Instead, it massively filled the gap left by the retreat of the providential state, gaining popularity through its welfare activities. It largely did so with the implicit consent of the authorities, if not their explicit approval (Denoeux 1993).

Nevertheless, peaceful Islamist activism had its limits. Many ordinary people did not identify with Islamist leaders and activists who could be “associated with the most ‘modern’ citizens in Arab societies”⁹³. For Wickham, the typical Islamist was a young, educated student or professional, and not a poor peasant or worker⁹⁴. Perhaps more important, the Islamist project did not seek to deconstruct prevailing relations of economic and political domination⁹⁵, and did not fundamentally disagree with state policies, at least in their economic content. According to a number of scholars, the Muslim Brotherhood, the strongest Islamist movement in Egypt, thus largely failed to expand beyond its core constituency of urban educated declining middle classes⁹⁶. Up to now, it lacks ties to the rank-and-file, the poorest populations, and industrial workers⁹⁷. Yet, according to Beinin, “the social base of political Islam extends well beyond the modern, middle class intelligentsia”⁹⁸, not only encompassing the disappointed “lumpen intelligentsia” (Wickham 2002) now lacking prospects for a prosperous future, but also “the poor, the unemployed, and private sector craft and service workers”⁹⁹. This is the case because, paradoxically, “Islamism appeals to both the losers and the winners of global neo-liberal economic restructuring”¹⁰⁰.

However, the wide-scale violence perpetrated during the nineties by some radicalised movements discredited various Islamist groups among the population. Indeed, the clandestine armed wing of al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya¹⁰¹ waged a war against the state,

⁹³ Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam. Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Joel Beinin, “Political Islam and the New Global Economy: The Political Economy of an Egyptian Social Movement”.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ An Egyptian Islamist Movement, the “Islamic Group” fought in the nineties an armed insurgency against the government and perpetrated several attacks, including the massacre of tourists at Luxor’s Deir al-Bahari Temple in 1997, before officially renouncing violence in 2003. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, several of its leaders were released and formed the Building and Development Party. The group joined the Anti-Coup Alliance after President Morsi’s ouster by the army in 2013.

targeting government officials, state institutions and the Coptic Christian minority. It sought to undermine the economy through hitting tourists. The Egyptian state violently repressed the insurrection, including in Cairo's Imbaba in December 1992, resulting in the gradual decline of militant Islamism starting from the mid-nineties. The Jihadist movement found a particularly fertile ground in the impoverishing south of the country. After the death of Nasser, Upper Egypt was increasingly neglected. The lack of employment accelerated migrations to the north, while those who stayed found themselves in a precarious situation. The economic crisis combined with a decline in public services would soon leave space for political Islam, first with the expansion of radical Islamism in Upper Egyptian universities such as Asyut under President Sadat.

Later, a more radical Islamist insurgency would erupt, culminating in the region with the targeting of tourists in Luxor in 1997. These provoked spontaneous protests against violence and terrorism (Gamblin 2004). Radical Islamists also renewed sectarian tensions and subsequent clashes with security forces as in summer 1992, when Islamists attacked several police headquarters in Upper Egypt (Toth 1999). Saker El Nour (2015) linked the expansion of Islamist militant groups in the nineties in provinces such as Minya and Asyut to the state's recent agricultural policies. According to him, resistance to the latter led to confrontations with the police and landowners, while farmers who had endured intimidation, detention and torture by the police, may have been encouraged to join the Islamist militancy. But as elsewhere in Egypt, Islamist militancy only attracted a minority, while theoretically nonviolent movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and, increasingly, Salafi groups, build their popularity through vast networks of charities. Overall, many ordinary people came to support movements which they increasingly valued for their perceived integrity and respectability, especially when opposed to corrupt state institutions and representatives. While they successfully islamised society, Islamist activists, however, essentially failed to formulate a real political alternative encompassing the interests and demands of the poor. As the strongest opponents to the state, they have only faintly attempted to question neoliberal policies threatening the most vulnerable, and failed to articulate development policies extending beyond direct charity.

4. New dynamics of protest (2000 – 2010)

In the 2000s, social movements of a new kind emerged, demanding political reform and increasingly denouncing various injustices, the endemic corruption within state institutions, police brutality and torture. Cycles of protests began in 2000 with mobilisations supporting the Palestinians' second *Intifāda*, followed by demonstrations against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. These campaigns paved the way for further mobilisations by providing an available reservoir of mobilising structures (El-Mahdi 2009), networks, and activists, as well as by habituating people to stage public protests in order to express complaints. At the same time, the accelerating implementation of a neoliberal agenda revived workers' protests, especially in the second half of the decade. New movements appeared in the delicate context of a multidimensional crisis that was aggravating popular anger every day.

A persisting socioeconomic imbalance between the rich and the poor remained the direct consequence of the government's neglect and marginalisation of entire sections of the population. Thus, the urban poor, workers and peasants amongst other groups, were essentially left out of a Western-style modernisation decided by an exclusionary and elitist authoritarian order promoting the most fortunate populations. As a result of neoliberal policies, elevated inflation and high unemployment considerably weakened the most vulnerable populations. Inequalities widened with implemented neoliberal policies, which increased the poverty rate from 19.6% of the population in 2008 to 21.6% in 2010¹⁰² and 26.3% in 2015¹⁰³. Furthermore, much of the population depended on government subsidies on basic commodities that liberal policies were decreasing, further accelerating pauperisation. Finally, the situation was further aggravated starting from 2008 with the global economic crisis.

The grassroots' impoverishment and the increasing socioeconomic imbalance were driving growing levels of popular resentment. The crisis of legitimacy of the Egyptian regime was not only derived from the state's decreasing ability to perform its role as a welfare provider and to fulfil its part of the populist social contract. It was also the consequence of excessive authoritarianism increasingly angering the population. Moreover, people were gradually concerned with the regime's flagrant manipulations of

¹⁰² United Nations Development Programme and the Institute of National Planning, Egypt, "Youth in Egypt: Building our Future", *Egypt Human Development Report*, 2010.

¹⁰³ UNDP Human Development Report 2015, Egypt Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS): <http://www.eg.undp.org/content/egypt/en/home/countryinfo.html>.

the constitution and frequent violations of laws, as well as with increasingly unpopular foreign policy orientations, both eroding the state's legitimacy.

In addition, Egypt in the 2000s experienced important changes at the governmental level, while the spectre of a nearing political transition strengthened uncertainty. Mubarak's generation, assuming power since three decades, had begun to retire. Important tensions existed regarding its future replacement, and the increasing popular "aversion to dynastic politics"¹⁰⁴ intensified an unprecedented succession crisis. Many people rejected the perspective of Gamal Mubarak's advent to power. However, this succession had increasingly appeared inexorable with the son of the president's growing involvement in the state's economic and political affairs as the secretary general of the Committee of Public Policies, a powerful organisation within the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). Moreover, the regime's repression of opponents to this scenario was institutional as the state endorsed modifications of the Constitution aiming at dissuading civilian challengers from entering electoral competitions (Zahid 2010).

A relative novelty (El-Mahdi 2009), activists began to mobilise exclusively to demand political reform. A revisionary¹⁰⁵ protest movement, Kifaya was established in 2004 by leftist, Islamist and liberal activists "as a loose, heterogeneous, and non-hierarchical movement that aimed to unite the different actors in the opposition behind a shared democratic agenda"¹⁰⁶. A unique form of dissent at the time, Kifaya illustrated a new phase in Egyptian contentious politics as its demands exceeded the scope of past mobilisations around often immediate concerns. Of course, collective struggles for basic amenities such as bread, decent wages or electricity did not disappear in Egypt in the 2000s. Popular mobilisations against expensive bread, informal buildings' demolition, drinking water shortages, pollution and other environmental issues (Elmusa and Sowers 2009) took place. However, struggling for such basic goals was increasingly associated with a fight for rights. Capitalising on previous experiences of relatively recent collective

¹⁰⁴ Max Rodenbeck, "A special report on Egypt. After Mubarak - Change is bound to come, but when?", *The Economist*, 15 July 2010: <http://www.economist.com/node/16564206>.

¹⁰⁵ Jessica Glover classifies protest into three types: revisionary protests question the authoritarian regime, while limited protests and labour protests aim at extracting concessions from the existing regime. Jessica L. Glover, "The Role of Protest in Egyptian Politics", *IMES Capstone Paper Series*, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Dina Shehata, *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt. Opposition, conflict, and cooperation*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2010).

mobilisations, Kifaya constituted a “new dynamic of opposition politics”¹⁰⁷ and incarnated a climax in the mobilisations of the 2000s demanding political reform. It demanded a democratic political transition and overtly denounced the illegitimate nature of the authoritarian state. It was the first, in a long time, to break a wide range of authoritarian taboos, ranging from the organisation of public protests without official authorisation and the denunciation of the state’s violations in all fields, to the direct criticism of the leader and questioning the right of Gamal Mubarak to succeed his father.

The collaboration of numerous actors of the anti-authoritarian opposition was facilitated by the “umbrella” structure of Kifaya. Indeed, decentralised organisations relying on networks then proved efficient in establishing connections between different groups, providing them with the opportunity to coordinate common activities. Thus, Kifaya was able to gather the activities of very different movements and organisations which, with the exception of the Ghad Party, were all listed as illegal by the regime. Kifaya’s organisers and leaders played an important role in both increasing public awareness and helping people overcome their fears. They widely used media coverage and new information technologies and social media to publicise their cause, depicting the political order as unjust and unacceptable. In spite of the government’s censorship, activists extensively used Facebook, Twitter and diverse blogs, in order to release videos of their public actions on the web, publishing pictures showing the intense violence of the government’s repression, and channelling news related to arrests of activists. To some extent, they succeeded in framing the situation at the time as intolerable and in increasing people’s sense of injustice.

Kifaya’s relatively successful mobilisations provided a significant stimulus to protest at the time and contributed to an expansion of political space (Glover 2010). Indeed, they fostered people to organise and take part in public collective actions in order to voice complaints. This is reflected, first, by the involvement in protest movements of people who had long been excluded from the political arena: youth, women, workers and urban poor, amongst others. Even though the movement was criticised for its elitist nature and for insufficiently reaching popular classes, it initiated a progressive reintegration of

¹⁰⁷ Holger Albrecht, “Authoritarian opposition and the politics of challenge in Egypt”, in Oliver Schlumberger, eds., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 63.

previously marginalised groups to public affairs. The second element supporting this expansion of a new culture of dissent in Egypt in the 2000s is the appearance of other movements for change increasingly resorting to protest, tactics and strategies that were popularised by Kifaya. The latter inspired the creation of many sub-movements promoting the interests of particular groups while sharing a common pro-democracy agenda: Youth for Change, Students for Change, Journalists for Change, Artists for Change, Lawyers for Change and Doctors for Change, amongst others. In parallel, several sectorial protest movements also demanding an end to the authoritarian status quo and refusing succession politics emerged. Kifaya's "demonstration effect"¹⁰⁸ included an unprecedented mobilisation of judges demanding a full supervision of elections and a real independence of the judiciary¹⁰⁹, peasant protests against irrigation water shortages, and Cairo' shantytown dwellers claiming the housing that was promised by the government. Moreover, workers' movement reached a climax with several waves of strikes between 2006 and 2008, notably in Mahalla al-Kubra, forcing the government to capitulate on several occasions. The crackdown on a planned labour strike in Mahalla al-Kubra in 2008 gave birth to the April 6 Youth Movement, another all-inclusive group gathering a majority of young people, which would play a decisive role in the 2011 uprising. In sum, Kifaya inspired and encouraged the eruption of other protest movements, or fostered existing movements to express more radical demands. It also contributed, at least within activist circles, to building a new culture of contestation throughout the years preceding the 2011 uprising.

In the Upper Egypt of the 2000s, political activism outside the ruling NDP was relatively rare, especially in the countryside. However, there were occasional popular mobilisations, including by disenfranchised peasants and workers. Zaineb Abul-Magd even wrote that "the southern provinces were the most rebellious among Egypt's regions against the central government in Cairo, which applied the dysfunctional US policies of market reform"¹¹⁰. At the same time, many Upper Egyptians temporarily or permanently living in Lower Egypt acquired activist experience there, sometimes before returning home and participating in the 2011 uprising and the protests that followed. Confirmed political

¹⁰⁸ Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid, "Kifaya at a Turning point", chapter in Nicholas S. Hopkins, eds., *Political and Social Protest in Egypt* (Cairo: the American University in Cairo Press, 2009), 58.

¹⁰⁹ See Nathalie Bernard-Maugiron, "Judges as Reform Advocates – A Lost Battle?", chapter in Hopkins, eds., *Political and Social Protest in Egypt*, 60-84.

¹¹⁰ Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt*.

activists from Aswan and Luxor as Mahdi, Sabri and Nabil, whom I expose the portraits in the next chapters, all started in pro-democracy movements, youth groups or opposition parties prior to the 2011 uprising. For example, Hani, a member of the April 6 Youth Movement in Aswan, went to Tahrir Square on 28 January 2011. He had previously been active in Muhammad al-Baradei's National Association for Change. Leading the contestation against drinking water pollution in Aswan (see chapter 2), Sabri has a relatively long experience in anti-government protests. He was a rather unruly student in business studies at Cairo's al-Azhar University, which he never graduated from. He claims that this is due to his participation in several protests in the first half of the 2000s, mainly in support for Palestinians.

Yet, new social movements such as Kifaya and, from 2008, the April 6 Youth Movement, lacked many things, starting with a significant grassroots base. Indeed, the new culture of protest did not really reach the disenfranchised, who remained largely unaware of these movements' existence. The most vulnerable sections of the population were difficult to reach because they often lacked structures to represent them. They tended to remain outside all forms of oppositional activity. In addition, pro-democratic aspirations of such movements were unable to suppress traditional ideological divisions such as those between Islamists and secularists (Shehata 2010). Many scholars also emphasised a failure of these movements to raise positive propositions and an alternative political project to the authoritarian rule, a lacuna that would persist long after the 2011 uprising.

Despite a number of successes, the labour movement of the 2000s similarly failed to give birth to an organised opposition able to durably challenge the Mubarak regime and articulate a new political vision. For Beinin and Duboc, "the Egyptian workers' movement of the 2000s was primarily a class-based response to neoliberal economic restructuring"¹¹¹, including the increasing job insecurity, the decline of public sector employment, the acceleration of the privatisation of public sector companies and workers' reduced social benefits. Workers wanted the state to intervene to correct perceived injustices by company managers and preserve their achieved rights and standard of living. According to Beinin and Duboc (2013), this is similar to the moral economy based on the

¹¹¹ Joel Beinin and Marie Duboc, "A Workers' Social Movement on the Margin of the Global Neoliberal Order, Egypt 2004-2012", in the second edition of *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* by Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, eds., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

populist pact under President Nasser described in the first section of this chapter. Workers' declining status led to above 3,300 strikes, sit-ins and other collective actions by millions of Egyptian workers from 1998 to 2010¹¹². Yet, while presenting all the features of a social movement, the labour movement could not form a durable organisational body, regional or national coordinating structures, which would support broader collective action (Beinin 2016). Instead, the organisation of workers' protests relied on a few factory leaders and committees, and local informal networks. However, "the local and informal character of the networks that enabled the Egyptian workers' movement of the 2000s simultaneously limited its ability to act as a national force because those relationships could not be replicated beyond their local social context"¹¹³. In addition, "professional" political activists remained largely isolated from workers, who "were suspicious of 'politics', which they typically understood as opportunistic meddling of Cairo-based intellectuals seeking to co-opt their struggles for some other purpose"¹¹⁴.

Less organised, farmers also largely failed to make their voice heard beyond the local scale. Yet, they tried to resist the state-led gradual transformation of agriculture at their expense, albeit essentially in informal and spontaneous ways (Ayeb and Bush 2014). The 2009 and 2010 years totalised 180 sit-ins, 132 demonstrations, six strikes, 400 subsequent deaths, 2,500 injuries and 3,000 arrests in rural areas, according to figures by the Sons of the Soil Land Centre¹¹⁵. For instance, sugarcane cultivators went on strike, rejecting the deemed unfair low prices offered by the government in exchange for their harvest, several times in Qena and Luxor provinces in the 2000s (Abul-Magd 2013). However, peasants and farmers' protests seemed more unrelated, dispersed and locally contained than workers' collective actions, resembling more what Asef Bayat calls non-movements¹¹⁶ (El Nour 2015) than a proper social movement.

5. From the national to the local: the shift of the 25 January uprising (2011 – 2013)

¹¹² Joel Beinin, "Political Economy and Social Movement Theory Perspectives on the Tunisian and Egyptian Popular Uprisings of 2011", *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series*, 14, January 2016.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ See Habib Ayeb and Ray Bush, "Small Farmer Uprisings and Rural Neglect in Egypt and Tunisia", *MER272*, vol.44, fall 2014.

¹¹⁶ "The non-movements had emerged largely to lower the cost of mobilization in the face of tyrannical regimes". Asef Bayat, "The Arab Spring and its Surprises", *Development and Change* 44(3), 2013.

In the same way the 1977 bread riots have long haunted Egypt's political rulers, making them think twice before significantly reducing state subsidies on basic commodities, the 2011 mass popular uprising that led to the withdrawal of President Mubarak marks an important change in Egyptian politics. Every president would then feel deeply vulnerable, as shown by President Sisi's enduring crackdown on opponents and critiques. Significant resources are also deployed to limit popular discontent at rising prices, unemployment and deteriorating living conditions. The partial success of the 2011 uprising, combined with the relative relaxation of authoritarian conditions and the opening of the political arena that followed, encouraged many new actors to get involved in local or national politics in various ways. It also fostered an unprecedented number of ordinary people to mobilise for sometimes long existing grievances. These trends were observed in Upper Egypt, challenging the typical cliché about a lacking political participation in the region, whereas some scholars, on the contrary, estimated that residents "were building on a long tradition of expressing discontent and rebelling"¹¹⁷.

5.1. Southern Upper Egypt during the uprising (25 January – 11 February 2011)

It is not true to say that no protest took place on 25 January 2011 in Upper Egyptian cities. Indeed, largely ignored or underestimated protest plans, especially in provinces and even more in the south of country, led to an under-coverage of such events. Yet, many activists from Aswan, Luxor and Qena told a different story. While they were often a minority in the streets and squares of their cities on 25 January, they were joined by more important crowds starting from 28 January, as elsewhere in Egypt. The "revolution" may not have occurred in the countryside. However, numerous testimonies of participants and abundant online material prove that protests took place in the cities of Aswan, Luxor and Qena between 25 January and 11 February 2011. In addition, as I demonstrate below, the 2011 uprising would have a deep impact on regional politics and ordinary people's participation. It directly fostered many common citizens to go to the streets for the first time of their existence to raise demands, culminating with a another mass popular mobilisation ahead of the military coup in 2013. But let us first briefly address the circumstances of the 2011 uprising in the cities of Aswan and Luxor.

¹¹⁷ Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt*.

In Aswan, several of my respondents¹¹⁸, reported that about 30 activists had demonstrated on 25 January in the city. Several lawyers at the local branch of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC) attended the event. Ahmed D., a Kifaya member I met in Aswan in January 2014, was also one of them. An old-generation activist, he had participated in the 1977 protests. Activists of the April 6 Youth Movement also attended this first demonstration. Many of my informants claimed that numbers significantly grew as elsewhere in Egypt on 28 January, when they were joined by crowds of more ordinary people angry at security forces. Opposition to police brutality, more than to President Mubarak, allegedly drove people to the streets¹¹⁹. Facebook events and the distribution of leaflets helped to mobilise beyond the initial activist community that organised the first protests¹²⁰. Fawzi, a leading Nubian activist, participated in the protests in Aswan after receiving calls from Kifaya and 6 April Youth Movement members.

In Luxor, protests followed similar trends, with people going out in significant numbers from 28 January 2011 mainly to express their anger at security forces' exactions. Al-Teri, who claimed to have participated in the "revolution" in Luxor, remembers: "*At the beginning of the revolution, people didn't know how the world was going. People were afraid to go out*"¹²¹. In addition to nationwide motivations, mainly the hatred for the police (Ismail 2012), people mobilised for local concerns. In Luxor, there was a wide resentment against Governor Samir Faraj, seen as responsible for the unfair implementation of a UNESCO tourism project that implied the relocation of families residing next to archaeological sites, such as in Karnak area¹²². On 28 January, people marched across Luxor's city centre, ending their demonstration at the governorate building. There were clashes and tear gas, and the local office of the ruling NDP and other buildings were torched. Some people accused the authorities of infiltrating protests, and instructing their agents to destroy public assets in order to make the "revolutionaries" appear as destroyers (*mukharribīn*)¹²³. After 28 January, protests became daily.

¹¹⁸ From various meetings and interviews with the pro-revolution activist Amr A. and several lawyers at the local branch of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre.

¹¹⁹ Informal conversation with Muhammad S., 45, Electricity Company employee, Aswan, April 2015.

¹²⁰ Informal conversation with Mahdi, 33, travel agent, Aswan, January 2014.

¹²¹ Interview with Al-Teri, 39, owner of several shops and bazars, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

¹²² Interview with Nabil, 36, unemployed (Bachelor in business studies), Luxor, March 2015.

¹²³ Ibid.

Some public places, including central city squares, governorates' headquarters, other local public buildings such as courts, and some public companies, became habitual and recurrent protest locations. As almost every provincial capital, Aswan has its *mīdān*, which is the big square hosting the railway station at one extremity, the governorate building on a side, and a series of popular coffee places on the other side, frequented by activists and tourists. The square also has several grass areas and is surrounded by two gardens, where it is easy to imagine the multiple past sit-ins. As a small Tahrir Square, Midan al-Mahatta (the "station square") or al-Mahatta Square used to be the place where all kinds of people gathered for a common cause; where informal networks overlapped; where new networks were born; where people exchanged views and educated themselves politically; where passers-by could join a demonstration or unwillingly breathe tear gas; and where protesters could initially gather without previously contacting each other. The big protests of the 2011 and 2013 uprisings took place there. Of course, the square I discovered in late January 2014 was quieter than it used to be. The protest law had discouraged gatherings, except for pro-government demonstrations as the celebrations that took place on 25 January 2014. MB supporters had moved their weekly protests to other neighbourhoods after the police had been waiting for them in the square on several Fridays¹²⁴. Luxor's main *mīdān* is Midan Abul Hajjaj, facing Luxor Temple and only a short walk from the train station. While MB supporters were still occupying it during 30 June protests, anti-MB protesters used to gather in Saladin Square¹²⁵. Qena also has its Midan al-Mahatta, while the court and the Lawyers' Syndicate headquarters have also been frequent protest locations¹²⁶. Under Muhammad Morsi's presidency, MB supporters used to gather in another major square, Midan al-Sa'a, while anti-MB protesters usually stayed in Midan al-Mahatta to avoid clashes potentially escalating into tribal conflicts¹²⁷.

5.2. In the aftermath of the uprising, an unprecedentedly favourable environment facilitates protests in the region (February 2011 – July 2013)

Throughout the two years that followed the 2011 uprising, Egypt experienced a proliferation of all kinds of protests in all sectors, including in rural areas. The economically unstable context that prevailed after the uprising, combined with a

¹²⁴ Interview with Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), April 2014.

¹²⁵ Interview with Youssef, 23, student (technical education), Armant (Luxor), March 2014.

¹²⁶ Interview with Moemen, 20, university student, Qena, May 2014.

¹²⁷ Interview with Mahmud, 25, lawyer, Qena, May 2014.

relatively open political environment, encouraged many ordinary people to mobilise through peaceful protests to raise the attention of the authorities. In most Egyptian provinces, staging demonstrations or sit-ins outside governorate buildings has been one of the most common repertoires, understood as a way to be seen and compel local authorities to initiate a dialogue. People sometimes expanded their “repertoires of contention” (Tilly 2006, 2008), occupying diverse public spaces or blockading major roads. The initial success of the 2011 uprising made many ordinary Egyptians inspired by the intuition of new possibilities more than by a thought sense of opportunities¹²⁸, gain confidence in their ability to mobilise for the resolution of long-standing problems. In other words, a favourable context combined with examples of positive responses by the authorities to some protest movements suggests that an increasing number of citizens considered that they could obtain much more through public protests, rather than via the traditional political and legal steps. Workers also mobilised en masse to demand better incentives, with the number of strikes and labour protests rising from 1,256 in 2011 to 2,161 in 2012 and 1,972 in the first half of 2013¹²⁹. As for small farmers, they staged 158 protests throughout 2012, according to a report published by the Land Centre for Human Rights¹³⁰.

The less authoritarian and relatively open political environment that followed the 2011 uprising had several characteristics. Firstly, there was less repression, especially in the immediate aftermath of the uprising. One of the biggest losers of the uprising, the police was felled, largely absent from the streets, and subsequently from demonstrations. Particularly hostile to labour protests, the army did not systematically repress them, and could not prevent the hundreds of labour actions that took place after the 2011 uprising. Military rulers also continued to tolerate for some time street protests. From time to time, most notably during the 2013 uprising against the Muslim Brotherhood, security forces supported and even incited protests (Ketchley 2015).

¹²⁸ For a critique of the theory of political opportunities in social movements, see, for instance, the chapter 1 in Marie Duboc, *Contesting without Organisations: Mobilisation Strategies, Social Question and Space of Visibility in Strikes of the Egyptian Textile Industry 2004-2010*, Doctoral Thesis in Sociology, EHESS, Paris, 2012.

¹²⁹ Data by the NGOs Awlad al-Ard and the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights, quoted in Irene Weipert-Fenner and Jonas Wolff, “Socioeconomic Contention and Post-Revolutionary Political Change in Egypt and Tunisia: A Research Agenda”, *PRIF Working Paper* No. 24, March 2015.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Saker El Nour, “Small farmers and the revolution in Egypt: the forgotten actors”, *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 8:2, 198-211, 2015.

Secondly, the post-2011 uprising transition period was characterised by weakened local authorities, which suffered from the national political instability, as well as the disgrace of Mubarak's NDP. Across governorates, especially the remotest ones, the dissolution of the NDP and the local councils it dominated led to a political vacuum. Mostly former NDP members, local officials and traditional mediators between citizens and the authorities were partly discredited. In particular, local NDP leaders and members of parliament had partly vanished or had lost influence or credibility. In addition, local officials showed some reluctance towards making decisions outside the daily management of common affairs. Indeed, the people had emerged from the uprising as a threat to rulers, who now feared to provoke any expression of discontent. Khaled, an Aswan social activist, said that after the "revolution", officials were "*afraid of facing people*"¹³¹. Political instability also directly affected the administration of provinces: governors were changed three or four times since February 2011 in some governorates, including Luxor and Aswan, sometimes after popular protests demanding their removal. This largely left ordinary people, devoid of legitimate representatives to voice their demands, with no means other than staging public protests to communicate their demands to the authorities. Therefore, the resort to public protests also became more widespread in a response to lacking channels of communication.

Thirdly, protests nurtured and encouraged each other. Indeed, the examples of successful protests spread by the media and social media made many people perceive that there was an opportunity for them to obtain their demands in a similar way. For instance, I met garbage collectors in Kom Ombo, north of Aswan, who said they had gone on strike to demand the same benefits that their colleagues from Aswan had obtained after staging strikes. In addition, some key protests, such as the anniversaries of past protests or deadly events, simultaneously took place in Cairo and provinces, or the latter reacted to events that had happened elsewhere in Egypt. Thus, starting from 2012, the massacre of protesters outside Cairo's national TV and Radio Maspero building and in Muhammad Mahmud Square would be commemorated in most city squares across Egypt. Finally, local mobilisations would benefit from the experience of some local activists who had lived in Lower Egypt and joined various political movements in the 2000s, and others who had participated in the 2011 uprising in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

¹³¹ Interview with Khaled, accountant, Aswan, April 2015.

These rather favourable conditions fostered ordinary people to go to the streets, including in Upper Egypt, where multiple protests took place between February 2011 and July 2013. Even though Upper Egyptians' participation in the 25 January revolution was limited to a few activists and educated youth, ordinary people have been highly affected by all political developments since then, and have also learnt to mobilise to defend their rights or express demands. In Aswan and Luxor in particular, the tourism industry has been dramatically affected by political and security events, leaving thousands of people jobless or surviving through small activities. Interviews in the regions of Aswan, Luxor and Qena, unsurprisingly confirmed that the very wide majority of ordinary people had participated in protests for the first time after the 2011 uprising. In particular, respondents had occasionally participated in social or political protests related to local issues and labour strikes to demand permanent contracts and pay increases during the period immediately following President Mubarak's removal. Later, the official discourse supported by the media and backed by the army blaming the persisting instability and the deterioration of the economy on street protests, partly discouraged popular mobilisations. Without completely demobilising, many past protesters then chose to wait for the parliamentary and presidential elections and the political transition to continue.

In this first phase of intensive protests following the 2011 uprising, Upper Egyptian women and men rose against sometimes old grievances such as those related to a deterioration in public services (see chapter 2), which had gradually accelerated throughout the last ten years of the Mubarak era. This was a consequence of the state's increasing inability to assume its duties and sometimes deliberate neglect. Particularly in rural areas, including in the remote provinces of Upper Egypt, public services have been further worsening since the 2011 uprising due to national and local political instability, lacking structural reforms to end crises in key sectors such as energy, and a persisting government prioritisation of large urban centres over the countryside. Upper Egyptian provinces have long been excluded from most development projects undertaken by Cairo. In these regions as elsewhere in Egypt, fuel shortages, power cuts and deteriorating road infrastructure amongst other failures, have become increasingly frequent, correspondingly driving popular discontent.

Ordinary people also participated in more politically-driven protests. Thus, Nubians staged several protests against their marginalisation by Cairo's central government and to

demand a recognition of their right to return to their ancestral lands on the banks of Lake Nasser, south of Aswan. Families of Nubians who were displaced and relocated in the area of Nasr al-Nuba in the sixties were particularly active. Nubians' movement culminated with a sit-in in September 2011 that lasted eight days, during which protesters maintained the governorate building closed¹³². The sit-in comprised only Nubians, who were about 1,000 participants¹³³. While several political parties and movements, including Kifaya and the Wafd Party, were known for their support for the Nubian cause, they were not officially involved in order to avoid potential divisions among protesters¹³⁴. A member in Muhammad al-Baradei's Constitution Party and leading Nubian activist, Fawzi was 11 when his family had to move to Ballana, a village in Nasr al-Nuba area. He still remembers those hard times and is a strong supporter of the Nubian cause. Partly organised by Fawzi, who spent there five nights, the sit-in outside Aswan's governorate building was part of a series of Nubian protests that took place in Aswan, Cairo and Alexandria between 2011 and 2013. It ended when Nubian leaders obtained concessions from the government. However, it is only with the 2014 constitution that Nubians formally obtained the right to return to their ancestral lands, a constitutional clause whose implementation remains pending. Fawzi confirmed that more than a land issue, what has been at stake is the recognition of Nubians' existence and rights as Egyptians.

From September 2012, Aswan also saw a 40-day sit-in outside the governorate building to demand Mubarak-era and deemed corrupt Governor Mostafa al-Sayyed's departure. The governor briefly resigned in October 2012, but was definitely removed only in 2013. Nubians were among the strongest opponents to Al-Sayyed, whom they accused of opposing their cause. In particular, they accused him of wasting public funds in the chaotic implementation of an agricultural and housing project launched in 2010 in Abu Karkar, an area southwest of Aswan that was eventually found unfit for cultivation. Political protests also took place in Qena where, for instance, about 500 students protested at the governorate building to demand reforms in the education sector two months after the "revolution". The movement was followed by a sit-in and other protests, and had a national resonance¹³⁵. Other protests had a sectarian connotation. In 2012 in Qena, ordinary protesters demanded the appointment of a Muslim governor to replace the Coptic

¹³² Informal conversation with Fawzi, 60, retired, former worker in Saudi Arabia, Aswan, April 2015.

¹³³ Interview with Amir, 26, school teacher, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

¹³⁴ Meeting with Fawzi, 60, retired, former worker in Saudi Arabia, Aswan, April 2015.

¹³⁵ Interview with Moemen, 20, university student, Qena, May 2014.

Christian then occupying the post, accused of inertia. Coptic Christians also protested at the governorate building in Aswan to support the construction of new churches.

Public sector workers also protested in Upper Egypt, whether at sugar factories and the Drinking Water and Sewerage Company. Various strikes took place at the latter's branch in Aswan in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Demands were related to workers' perceived oppression¹³⁶, corrupt managers, pay increases and permanent contracts. Many workers obtained permanent positions in March 2011 thanks to a successful strike. In July and September 2011, workers at the sugar factory in Armant, near Luxor, staged several protests and strikes that lasted for several days. They also demanded the resignation of the board of directors, as well as pay increases. They obtained the majority of their demands, according to a factory union leader¹³⁷. Teachers on fixed-term contracts protested in 2011 to demand their appointment at permanent posts, including in Aswan province. As many other public sector workers, they simply demanded the implementation of a law giving permanent contracts to people who have been employed for above three years. In November 2011 in Kom Ombo, after two months of negotiations had failed, 1,400 teachers closed the Education Directorate during eight days¹³⁸. The movement expanded across the province, and teachers' sit-in did not end until they obtained pay increases. Garbage collectors and postal workers also mobilised in southern Upper Egypt throughout the same period. They all demanded permanent contracts, higher wages and, sometimes, the implementation of a minimum wage. Protests in provinces also regularly echoed events taking place elsewhere in Egypt. For instance, a protest took place in Aswan against the massacre of football fans in Port Said.

Under the presidency of Muhammad Morsi, who was quickly perceived as failing to implement promises, a new wave of popular protests took place. Discontent gradually grew as a result of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed government's perceived inability to respond to a widening economic crisis, declining tourism, fuel, power and water shortages, and persisting insecurity and terrorism. Ordinary people's expectations were high, and they could not forgive President Morsi for taking orders from what was increasingly perceived as a mafia seeking its own interest rather than taking care of the

¹³⁶ Interview with Ali, 29, operator at the Drinking Water Company, Aswan, March 2014.

¹³⁷ Interview with Muhammad, 45, quality manager at Armant's sugar factory, Luxor, April 2014.

¹³⁸ Interview with Hamdi, 33, school teacher, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

poor and reforming the economy. Increasingly galvanised by the anti-MB media propaganda, many ordinary people took to the streets, blaming all their problems, including frequent electricity cuts, on President Morsi's administration. Groups began to form on Facebook against the president and the Brotherhood, such as "Luxor online" or "Youth against the brothers" (*Shabab dedd al-Ikhwan*). Coptic Christians also participated in protests against the rule of the MB. Additionally, some government decisions were perceived as provocations or evidence of the authorities' incompetence. In Luxor, in June 2013, protesters prevented a newly-appointed governor, a figure of the hard-line Islamist group al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya accused of being involved in the 1997 massacre of tourists at Deir al-Bahari Temple, from entering his office in the governorate building until the decision of his appointment was reversed. Such sources of discontent combined with security forces' support and numerous local activists' engagement in *Tamarrod*¹³⁹, drove significant numbers to mobilise against the president in June-July 2013 mass protests (see chapter 6).

6. Conclusion: Upper Egyptians reclaiming their belonging to the national polity

Welcome back Egypt, from every corrupt era
 Welcome back Egypt, from an Egyptian occupation of Egypt
 Welcome back Egypt, for the people I protect her every day
 And if you asked the occupier, he will not know who she is
 Welcome back Egypt, from people living in mews and forgotten shanties
 And people in villages and towers, who were thieves
 Welcome back Egypt, from where you have in you blindness to bring me back and victim
 And if you asked the illiterate victims, ignorance will increase
 If you asked the illiterate starved, you will add a hundred to a billion
 Welcome back Egypt.¹⁴⁰

As suggested by this poem, for every Egyptian, there will be a before and after what was quickly called the "25 January revolution". Even for the most remote populations of southern Upper Egypt, the 2011 uprising has definitively turned a page, whether that of disinterest in politics or fear to question authorities. The event and its consequences have

¹³⁹ *Tamarrod* ("rebellion") is the name of a petition campaign demanding President Morsi's resignation followed by the organisation of early elections. Organised throughout the weeks that preceded the mass demonstrations which led to Morsi's ouster by the army on 3 July 2013, it mobilised many activists of diverse political backgrounds, who collected signatures of citizens across the country (see chapter 6).

¹⁴⁰ Poem about the "revolution" told by Abdelrahim, a 37-year-old driver at the cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014. Translated by author from mainly Colloquial Arabic.

dramatically affected ordinary citizens' daily lives, regardless of their participation. It has also encouraged an increased segment of the population to embark on direct collective action to raise demands. However, contrary to a rather popular view essentially spread by the media, the Arab "masses" did not abruptly awaken in 2011. They did not suddenly realise the extent of grievances they had long accumulated due to massive injustices and breaches to their rights. Constituencies for political change did not rise from nowhere but most likely emerged with several trends fuelling discontent. These have included aggravating socioeconomic conditions, widening inequalities, an increasing pauperisation of lower and middle classes and a rampant corruption in all areas. The decline of a previous tacit social contract between the people and the authorities, the weakening of the public sector, and an increasing overreliance of the state on violent coercion accelerated the erosion of a regime plagued by malfunctions. This situation of "domination without hegemony" (Chalcraft 2012) had long prevailed, with ordinary people collectively expressing their concerns about, and opposition to changes deeply affecting their lives, in many different ways. These ranged from everyday resistance tactics and quiet encroachment strategies, to labour actions and street protests.

While their contentious politics did not imply the rejection of a widely popular state system under Nasser and most of Sadat's years, but rather sought to preserve its foundations, the mass ideological support for the regime gradually declined under Mubarak. However, with the exception of some Islamist groups' radical militancy, this decline of national mass politics did not immediately result in a widening open opposition to the state. Islamic activism essentially sought to mobilise at the local level through the provision of commodities and welfare services in lieu of the state, largely succeeding in constituting a mass popular movement evolving on the fringe and autonomously from the state, and in imposing a conservative vision and practice of Islam within society. However, the Islamists essentially failed to conceive a political project and a real alternative ideology able to compete with the dominant order. This partly explains why, only one year after bringing them to power with the election of Muhammad Morsi as president, ordinary people turned away from them and supported a military coup.

Before the 2011 uprising, with no entity to adequately represent them and promote their interests, most ordinary people acted rather pragmatically to ensure their survival. Marginalised by an increasingly exclusionary, elitist order, they mainly resorted to

discrete, diffuse repertoires of contention to tackle immediate, individualistic needs, while occasionally rising against perceived threats and injustices. Collective struggles for bread, decent wages or electricity, continued to take place in workplaces and the streets. A shift in the number and scale of contentious events slowly took place starting from the late nineties, including an increasingly more active labour movement, renewed opposition activism and popular mobilisations, and the appearance of movements exclusively demanding political change. In particular, the second part of the last decade saw an increasing vitality of labour protests, which growingly evolved from work-in actions to work-stoppage lasting more time (El-Mahdi 2011). This relative radicalisation in workers' repertoires of contention was accompanied by the raise of new demands and their increasing politicisation. Most of these protests constituted signs of an increasingly widespread discontent towards state policies and inaction, preparing the ground for the mass uprising of 2011. However, as pointed by Charles Tripp, these yet recurrent acts of resistance and contentious events have often been described as "episodic, rather than systemic"¹⁴¹. Indeed, geographically dispersed and lacking transcending networks and organisations to coordinate their contentious actions, ordinary people were not able to assemble in collective struggles overstepping the local level, and identify with others sharing similar grievances. In the other chapters of the thesis, I will attempt to explain why this has been an enduring curse until today and despite the parenthesis of the 2011 uprising.

¹⁴¹ Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People. Paths of Resistance in the Middle East*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Chapter 2: Local leaders, networks and solidarities in the protests against deteriorating public services

1. Introduction: examining the local coordination of protests in two case studies

Ordinary people go to the streets on rare occasions. Outside democracies and large agglomerations, popular protests against expensive life, price increases, water shortages, electricity cuts, or deteriorating infrastructure, usually go unnoticed. Often ephemeral, these movements, which have taken place everywhere, from Algeria to South Africa and Egypt, are hardly observed outside the geographical space where they remain contained. Without experienced activists or “brokers”¹⁴² to connect them to similar mobilisations happening elsewhere, and significant media coverage to expand their visibility beyond the local level, these protests do not really alarm the authorities. Yet, their socioeconomic demands often exceed the neighbourhood or the village where they erupt. They usually reflect a broader demand for a stronger state, which has perceivably neglected its citizens by failing to provide the most basic services. In addition, these mobilisations, especially in rural areas, raise questions regarding the protest culture of relatively marginalised populations that had been distant from activism in big cities.

We saw in chapter 1 that throughout the two years that followed the 2011 uprising, Egypt experienced a proliferation of all kinds of protests in all sectors. The economically unstable context that prevailed after the uprising, combined with a relatively open political environment, encouraged many ordinary people to mobilise. Many citizens protested against the deterioration of public services, which had gradually accelerated throughout the last ten years of the Mubarak era as a result of the state’s increasing inability to assume its duties and sometimes deliberate neglect. Particularly in rural areas, including in the remote provinces of Upper Egypt, public services have been further worsening since the 2011 uprising due to national and local political instability, lacking structural reforms to end crises in key sectors such as energy and water, and a persisting government prioritisation of large urban centres over the countryside. In addition, Upper Egyptian provinces have long been excluded from most development projects undertaken

¹⁴² By “brokerage”, I here mean “the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites”. This is Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow’s definition in *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). I do not use Auyero’s definition of brokers as part of clientelist networks.

by Cairo, while health, road, water, electricity infrastructure have deteriorated. In these regions, fuel shortages, water and power cuts, deadly road accidents, amongst other failures, have been particularly frequent, potentially driving popular discontent. In this chapter focusing on popular mobilisations denouncing failures in services normally provided by the state or its local representatives, I intend to modestly contribute to the puzzle of ordinary people's motivations to take action, bearing in mind the following questions: Why do ordinary people resort to street protests at particular times? How do they adapt their mobilising strategies to switching contexts? What does facilitate or restrain popular mobilisations? Despite their structural roots, why have mobilisations against deteriorating public services remained discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral?

Occasional, but not less noticeable, protests organised by ordinary citizens to demand the re-establishment of public services such as drinking water or electricity, or to denounce an injustice or a threat to their community, are the object of this chapter looking at how mobilisation takes place locally. I explore the eruptions and trajectories of two cases of "service delivery protests"¹⁴³ since the 2011 uprising in two Upper Egyptian villages. I emphasise the contribution to mobilisation of ordinary networks, activists and solidarities, to show how local coordination is generally achieved. I do so by analysing protests against drinking water pollution in Abul Rish, just outside the city of Aswan, as well as a dispute over a small piece of land turned into a football field, which legal use has been continuously denied to residents of Al-Hebeil, near Luxor. The chapter argues that mobilisation is typically achieved at the heart of the village or the neighbourhood thanks to the initiatives of a few influential members of the community able to rely on experienced activists, communal solidarities and ordinary informal networks. It also sketches some of the constraints and limits to these local mobilisations that remain essentially short-lived, disseminated and irregular, before systematically discussing, in the remaining chapters, why such movements do not grow further. In addition, I intend to shed light on the impact of national events in the "periphery", and particularly on how the 2011 and 2013 uprisings respectively affected mobilisation levels and processes in the remote Upper Egyptian provinces.

¹⁴³ Luke Sinwell, Joshua Kirshner, Kgopotso Khumalo, Owen Manda, Peter Pfaffe, Comfort Phokela and Carin Runciman, "Service delivery protests. Findings from quick response research on four 'hotspots' – Piet Retief, Balfour, Thokoza, Diepsloot", Centre for Sociological Research, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, 1 September 2009.

Firstly, I analyse the trajectories of small protest movements in Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish, arguing that a multitude of overlapping ordinary, local networks and often brokers using their own activist experience and connections, facilitated mobilisations for decent public services between February 2011 and July 2013. I show that the solidarity among friends, neighbours, clan members, increases the number of participants, or decreases it when the movement loses momentum. I also demonstrate that the involvement of more or less experienced political or social activists in a protest movement enhances its visibility and raises chances to engage in negotiations with decision-makers. Secondly, I discuss the motivations behind the occasional resort to public protests. I wonder whether, in both cases, ordinary people had gone to the streets to denounce violations to specific norms sustaining their relationship with the state, or simply because they perceived an opportunity to successfully do so. Indeed, in such rural areas, protests against deteriorating public services could signal a crisis of moral economy where the state is rather demanded, not rejected, to correct a negligence or to re-establish a past gain. I argue that ordinary protesters may have been motivated to mobilise by the memory of a strong state, and perhaps of an old moral economy. However, I also attempt to demonstrate that even though moral values and the belief in raising legitimate demands have indeed incited people to act, their mobilisations have been conditioned by their perceptions of an opportune context to go to the streets in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Eventually, this is reflected by the large demobilisation that has taken place since President Morsi's ouster in July 2013, while some key activists have pursued the fight through less transgressive and deemed more acceptable means.

2. Al-Hebeil residents' fight for a football field

Al-Hebeil, a village¹⁴⁴ located about ten kilometres from Luxor's city centre, has only one youth centre for approximately 35,000 inhabitants. Dotted with farmland, sugarcane farms and modest concrete houses, the village looks like many other Upper Egyptian rural areas. The typical way to reach Al-Hebeil is by microbus from Luxor's train station. Most residents are farmers usually having a second job, public sector employees, small shop

¹⁴⁴ In Egypt, the *naja'* (plural: *nujū'*) is the smallest administrative unit. The village (*qarya*) is usually an agglomeration of multiple *nujū'*, including rural and sometimes semi-urbanised areas. This explains the high number of inhabitants in the village of Al-Hebeil, which includes 17 *nujū'*. Al-Hebeil is the most populated village in al-Bayadiyya *markaz* (plural: *marākiz*), another administrative unit that gathers several local units (*wihdat mahalliyya*), themselves encompassing various cities, towns and/or villages.

owners or drivers. Unemployment and poverty are high. The village reportedly has four primary schools, two secondary schools, one health unit which includes only one doctor, and a unique youth centre. It has no high school, no supply bureau, and sewage networks are underdeveloped. Water and electricity networks are connected, which is a complication, especially in summer when power cuts are frequent and therefore simultaneously lead to water cuts. The village suffers from most of the typical problems that can be found in Upper Egyptian rural areas. A Google search of Al-Hebeil in Arabic shows links to diverse press articles on protests related to endemic problems affecting the village, from polluted drinking water¹⁴⁵ to failures in sanitation services and power cuts.

Yet, the residents I first met in April 2014 had been involved in a rather different kind of fight. They had been struggling for a small piece of land with local officials for years. In the nineties, a number of residents began to informally use a vacant state land as a football field, without a proper authorisation of the Ministry of Endowments, the owner of the land. Residents had plans to build a youth centre, but were stopped due to a dispute which erupted around 2010, when a local official seized the land. Consequently, residents embarked on a complex administrative process asking the Ministry of Youth and Sports to buy the land from the Ministry of Endowments. The sale would formalise their use of the land and avoid further attempts to seize it for other purposes. After years of bureaucratic intricacies and several protests organised by the villagers at the governorate headquarters in Luxor, the Ministry of Youth and Sports continues to refuse to purchase the land, under the pretext that its fixed price is too high. Because of two state bodies' inability to reach a consensus, families came to a temporary arrangement with the authorities, whereby they were allowed to use the land in exchange for an EGP10,000 annual rent paid to the Ministry of Endowments, a considerable sum for the villagers.

As in many other similar cases, this land dispute goes back to before the 2011 uprising. However, it is only in its aftermath that villagers significantly radicalised their action. Indeed, they saw the "revolution" as an opportunity to increase pressure on decision-makers and solve the longstanding issue of the football field: "*After the revolution, our only goal was the issue of the playing field*"¹⁴⁶. For Taha, a 40-year-old government-

¹⁴⁵ For instance, residents blocked a public administration building in a protest against the pollution of drinking water in February 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

employed technician, things were taken for granted in Upper Egypt, but the “revolution” changed this and “*opened a door*”¹⁴⁷. Residents first bombarded different administrative entities involved in the issue with petitions. They addressed the governorate, Luxor City’s General Administration of Youth, the Egyptian Endowments Authority, Luxor *markaz* and Bayadiyya City, the presidency of the Council of Ministers and the National Council for Youth. After being denied several requests to meet the governor, Youssef, a 45-year-old electrician employed by the city council and one of the most active villagers pursuing this issue, decided with two of his friends to organise a sit-in outside the governorate building in Luxor to demand the right to legally use the football field. Several protests, including a sit-in in May 2011, took place at the governorate headquarters in Luxor. Protesters demanded the governorate to intervene to solve the land dispute. Salman, 39, is a well-known and respected local entrepreneur, and an activist of the Popular Current¹⁴⁸. He justified the resort to public protests in these terms: “*Nothing happens unless you make popular pressure, media pressure, so that your demand is achieved*”¹⁴⁹.

Residents’ protests outside the governorate headquarters in Luxor had a relative visibility. Several newspaper articles were written about Al-Hebeil residents’ fight for a football field, while a number of reports were aired on TV, including on the privately-owned channel ONTV¹⁵⁰. However, no concrete result was achieved. The arrival of a new governor in 2013 brought the case back to square one. Mainly in their thirties and forties, the men I met were outraged. Beyond practical issues, they questioned their perceived marginalisation from the rest of Egypt, while reclaiming their rights as Egyptian citizens: “*The Sa’id is outside the map*”¹⁵¹, a resident told me. According to Taha, Upper Egyptians have suffered since the end of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s era, when the region was disregarded¹⁵². He complained that no major development project had been undertaken in the area since the construction of Aswan’s High Dam. He regretted what he understood as politicians’ disinterest vis-à-vis Upper Egypt on the one hand, and popular classes on the other:

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

¹⁴⁸ The Popular Current (Al-Tayyar Al-Shaabi) is the political movement led by the former presidential candidate at the 2012 and 2014 elections Hamdeen Sabbahi.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Salman, 39, entrepreneur, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3ZzfTrnAI>.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Mahmud, employee at Al-Hebeil’s only youth centre, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

¹⁵² For an analysis of memories of Nasser’s era by Upper Egyptians through the example of former High Dam workers in Aswan, see Alia Mossallam, *Hikayat Sha’b – Stories of Peoplehood: Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt, 1956-1973*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012.

*“I have not participated in any political protest... Not because I am passive. But because I know what happens. What happens is that politics consists in positions, and in people looking for positions. No one cares about the people”.*¹⁵³

Youssef similarly blamed the authorities’ ignorance of poor people, claiming that they had obtained nothing since the 2011 uprising:

*“The people who live in Cairo don’t feel what [has happened to us] for three years: there is no work, no jobs, no tourism, and 90% of people in Luxor work in tourism”*¹⁵⁴.

In Al-Hebeil, it is youth networks involved in the conflict with governorate officials, and more generally the people who used the field, that essentially organised and coordinated the protests and other steps. Friends, fellows, neighbours, had sometimes jointly participated, after the 25 January “revolution”, in the popular committees tasked with ensuring security outside homes while the police were absent. According to Youssef, the “revolution” had at least one positive outcome: it had gathered and unified the youth. These “youth”¹⁵⁵, who usually gather on a daily basis, including in the little office of a local family association¹⁵⁶, essentially organised everything among themselves in order to defend a largely symbolic cause. Indeed, they justified the need for this field with social and educative purposes since it was better to provide the youth with a space to gather and practice sports, rather than to leave them to spend the entire day at a café in idle unproductive activity, taking drugs, or even falling into violence or terrorism. However, what seemed to be really at stake in this issue was the claim for a violated collective right.

Yet, this movement has enjoyed the support of a number of more or less experienced activists. Salman has a bigger protest record than most of his fellows. He participated in numerous demonstrations, especially under President Morsi. He went once to a demonstration against Morsi’s constitution in Luxor. He was particularly active in

¹⁵³ Interview with Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Here, youth has uncertain boundaries. My informants in Al-Hebeil were between 39 and 45 years old, and all claimed being part of the youth of the village.

¹⁵⁶ The Islamic Welfare Association for the Well-being of Al-Hebeil (*Al-Gameeyya al-Khayreyya al-Islamiyya Balsawalha Al-Hebeil*), founded in 2012 and located in Al-Hebeil’s main street.

protests related to the *sūlār*¹⁵⁷ crisis with fellow workers at other companies. Indeed, Diesel shortages paralysed their work since they needed this fuel to transport goods. They organised a six-hour protest outside the airport, which prompted the authorities to provide them with significant quantities of *sūlār*. However, this protest did not lead to comprehensive solutions to the problem, and shortages recurred. With his employees, Salman organised a second protest, this time outside the governorate headquarters. After threatening to block roads, including the Airport Road, he forced officials, including the governor and the security director, to negotiate. He obtained, along with other colleagues, an official contract of *sūlār* supplies from the governorate. Salman attended mass protests against the MB and spent 25 days in an anti-government sit-in in Cairo's Tahrir Square in June 2013. He also collected signatures for the *Tamarrod* campaign. An activist checking Facebook on a daily basis, he is rather a protest organiser who claims his support for "revolutionary" forces. Salman explained that he had joined the Popular Current because it aimed to gather diverse political currents around the goals of the "revolution", namely "bread, freedom, social justice". He said these goals would be achieved thanks to Egypt's numerous resources, which are currently monopolised by a minority "eating" the country's prosperity. According to him, everyone should benefit from a minimum wage. If there was justice, everyone would work with conscience (*damīr*).

Salman has connections in activists' circles in Luxor thanks to his membership in the Popular Current. For example, he knows well Nabil, the coordinator in southern Upper Egypt of the April 6 Youth Movement (see chapter 4), who put him in touch with journalists to publicise the football field issue. In 2014, Salman joined Hamdeen Sabbahi's presidential campaign. He said his increasing political activism had been affecting his work. Salman is also the head of a welfare association. He voted in most elections, even under President Mubarak, always against the candidate of the formerly ruling NDP. Salman had not participated in protests since 30 June 2013, admitting the protest law had been discouraging him. He opposed it, considering that a government which came to power thanks to demonstrations, should not ban them. He had a rather negative opinion of politicians, whom he considered particularly active in the media, but not in the field. According to him, the football field issue would be easy to solve in a couple of days if politicians took the time to negotiate a consensus.

¹⁵⁷ Widely used in Upper Egypt, the *sūlār* or Diesel fuel experienced several long-lasting shortages under President Morsi's rule.

All political trends were present in Al-Hebeil. Media reported numerous marches by MB supporters in the village in 2013, 2014 and 2015, as well as motorcycle protests¹⁵⁸. Both Youssef and Salman confirmed that figures of Mubarak's NDP also remained present and influential in the area. Other villagers involved in the football field dispute had limited activist experience.

Youssef had participated in a number of politically-driven demonstrations. He attended a small pro-Palestinian protest in Luxor after the 2011 uprising. More recently, he had gone to the streets the day after the bloody dispersal of Muslim Brotherhood' sit-ins in Cairo in order, he claimed, to protest against the use of violence, and not in support for the Islamists. When I met him for a second time in March 2015, Youssef did not hide his support for the Muslim Brotherhood, especially because of the services they used to provide. However, he was not a formal member of the organisation and did not necessarily endorse their political or religious agenda. At the 2012 presidential elections, Youssef voted for former MB member Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh at the first round, and for Muhammad Morsi at the run-off. Treasurer in a local welfare association, he believed political parties were in another "valley"¹⁵⁹, and boarded the boat depending on the climate. He said that he would not give his voice to a party which would not care about his concerns. He specifically expressed disappointment towards the Salafi Nour Party, whose pro-coup stance during the 30 June 2013 events was reportedly opposed by many people in the area¹⁶⁰. As many Egyptian ordinary citizens (see chapter 4), Youssef defined politics as a "dirty game" (*li'ba wiskha* or *li'ba qazira*), as well as a "verbal game" (*li'ba lafziyya*). Politicians were busy talking instead of delivering what people expected from them. Thus, presidential candidates were only good at making promises in platforms that did not specify how they would achieve the beautiful things they were proposing to accomplish. He said he would however participate in the 2014 elections in order to avoid regrets, and would vote for the less bad candidate. His life had changed since 2011 because citizens had started to get involved in politics and would no longer remain silent: "*25 January made us get involved in everything*"¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁸ In February 2014 and April 2015, respectively: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8kBkbHXomQ>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgDrBDDMrVg>.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

¹⁶⁰ For more details about self-proclaimed Salafists now rejecting the Salafi Nour Party and supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, see chapter 6.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

Taha did not support any political current and claimed he was not involved in formal politics either: “*we are out of politics, in Upper Egypt, they made us out of it. [...] They drove us away, and we went away*”¹⁶². He said he would never listen again to politicians, whom he did not trust anymore. Since they were not able to provide them with a football field, what could they do for more important issues such as education or health? When asked about his opinion on political parties and movements, he answered with a smile and a single word: “decoration”¹⁶³. Taha participated in the 2012 presidential elections because he thought there was some ongoing change. He was now delusional and said he would probably not vote in the next polls. Taha mainly followed pro-government media, reading Algomhuria state-run newspaper. He also watched the conspiracy theories-expert TV channel al-Kahera wal nas, as well as the “anti-revolution” and pro-Mubarak figure Tawfiq Okasha’s al-Faraeen channel.

To my knowledge, no external actors, whether NGOs, political parties or brokers, played any important role in the issue of the football field. In 2014, Nabil, the coordinator in southern Upper Egypt of the April 6 Youth Movement, asked one of his journalist friends to make a report about the land dispute. In addition to his friendship with Salman, Nabil participated in a number of charity events and campaigns in Al-Hebeil. For example, in winter 2015, he distributed blankets to the poor. This has made him increasingly close to some of the members of the previously-mentioned family association who are active in the field issue. During my last visit in March 2015, Nabil was helping them with small things. For instance, he created a Facebook page for the association. However, Nabil never became directly involved in the football field issue.

Al-Hebeil residents’ protests for a football field did not constitute a rebellion against the government. Instead, it was a demand addressed to the authorities, asking back their right to enjoy the football field. The November 2013 protest law deterred villagers from organising more protests. They have resorted to administrative and legal steps instead, through writing petitions and the like. They have been unsuccessful so far, however. Worse, the leaders of the contestation have been subject to several intimidation attempts and indirect threats aimed at discouraging them from acting further, while their leaders have been threatened with lawsuits for illegally occupying land. Seven of them facing

¹⁶² Interview with Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

¹⁶³ He used the English word.

such charges were recently cleared. This likely explains why some of the people involved in the issue were scared to talk to me, despite the fact that I was introduced by Salman, whom they trusted and respected. Some of them agreed to help me only after making me promise to write and publish something on the issue, which I naturally did¹⁶⁴. However, a number of protagonists in the issue never let me individually interview them. One of them specifically asked for his name not to appear anywhere.

Since 30 June 2013, prospects to solve this land dispute have appeared more distant than ever. The opportunity that residents had seen after the 2011 uprising seemed to be definitively gone. Youssef says, with humour, “*God bless her soul*” each time he mentions the 25 January “revolution”¹⁶⁵. None of this would have happened if the Ministry of Youth and Sports had agreed to buy the land from the Ministry of Endowments a long time ago. “*The two ministries belong to the Arab Republic of Egypt. What’s the problem? [...] Routine¹⁶⁶ and administrative corruption*”¹⁶⁷, Al-Teri Hassan Abdu, a local parliamentary candidate, told me. However, despite obstacles, Al-Hebeil residents expressed their determination to continue the fight in a peaceful way, prioritising legal steps for now. “*It’s a matter of life or death*”¹⁶⁸, Taha explained. Not only do Al-Hebeil residents see their demand as legitimate, but they also take responsibility for their past actions, even the most contentious ones. Even though no more protests had taken place since President Morsi’s ouster, this apparent demobilisation was only partial: residents were waiting for the outcome of their legal steps, while attempting to publicise their cause.

Ultimately, I have used this case to show how residents locally organised to raise both a formal demand, the legal use of the football field, and a symbolic one, the recognition of their legitimacy to raise this grievance. They did so thanks to various supporting networks: local activists who contributed to organising protests, mediating the issue and obtaining dialogue with local officials on the one hand; family associations and communal solidarity networks who provided a moral and financial support on the other. The cohesion of this group of men leading the contestation, all in their thirties and forties

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/12/20/opinion/society/villagers-demand-a-football-field/>.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

¹⁶⁶ *Routine* is the popular denomination used to refer to excessive red tape and bureaucracy.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Al-Teri, 39, owner of several shops and bazars, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

and all sharing the same passion for sports, has nurtured their determination despite failures, disappointments and intimidations. I also showed how villagers engaged in this issue have been combining official ways, including administrative and legal steps, with occasional disruptive protests, including the occupation of the land and demonstrations at the governorate building in Luxor, in order to press the authorities to respond.



Figure 2.1: The building of the Islamic Welfare Association for the Well-being of Al-Hebeil, March 2015.



Figure 2.2: The disputed field in Al-Hebeil, March 2015.

3. The intervention of local activists combined with the presence of multiple local networks: a more visible mobilisation in Abul Rish

In Abul Rish village¹⁶⁹, just outside Aswan city, residents suffer from the multiple consequences of polluted tap water. Fifteen years ago, it was a village surrounded by agricultural land. Nowadays, it is largely urbanised, especially in the area of al-Aqalim bus station where I used to live. Buildings have gradually eroded farmland, while many informal constructions have arisen, sometimes to the slopes of the hills. Many of these areas are affected by the pollution of drinking water which, in addition to sewage water, mainly comes from the waste of several factories and public facilities. These include a chemical industries factory of the Kima Company, a Coca Cola factory, Aswan's public hospital and other clinics such as the Magdi Yaaqub Heart Centre. In the absence of an appropriate sewage system, these wastes are thrown into a canal, which was originally dug to evacuate rain water falling from surrounding hills. With time, this canal, as many canals across Egypt, has become an open-air discharge endangering the health of residents in the areas where it passes. The 20-kilometre "Kima Canal"¹⁷⁰ flows into the Nile River only a few hundreds of metres from the network that supplies drinking water to Aswan and surrounding villages, including Abul Rish. It is widely admitted that the subsequent pollution of drinking water has continuously caused liver diseases, renal failures and cancers, in popular areas where mainly low-income families cannot afford the cost of mineral water to drink, cook or cultivate lands. In Abul Rish, residents reported the presence of worms and sand in tap water¹⁷¹. According to them, analyses of drinking water samples showed high rates of nitrate, ammonia and organic products. They denounced that some officials had denied the results of tests, saying that the water was not polluted and that diseases were caused by something else.

The Kima Canal poses a threat to the health of populations far beyond Aswan. It is only one example of a widespread phenomenon and a structural issue in Egypt. According to national statistics, the access to safe drinking water has continuously improved over the

¹⁶⁹ Abul Rish is, in fact, a "local unit" (*wihda mahalliyya*), another administrative unit between the village (*qarya*) and the centre (*markaz*). Comprising about 55,000 inhabitants, Abul Rish includes three villages.

¹⁷⁰ It was initially called *Tir'at Kima* (the Kima Canal) because the Kima Company was considered the main entity responsible for the pollution of water. We now know that several hospitals and other companies also throw their waste in the canal.

¹⁷¹ Informal conversation with a group of women residing near al-Aqalim bus station, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

past decade. However, important regional disparities have persisted, while the countryside and urban slums have less access to clean drinking water. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Community reported in 2007 that while 89% of urban households were connected to a public sewer system, only 37% were in rural areas, and only 6% of villages enjoyed sewage systems and wastewater treatment services. In 2010-2011, the Egyptian national statistics agency CAPMAS reported only 24.7% of the rural population, against 88% of the urban population, was connected to a sewage system. Lacking sanitation services and safe drinking water, and subsequently poor hygiene, contribute to the propagation of water-related diseases, including severe diarrhoea. In addition, wastewater from industrial pollution has maintained a high level of diseases such as kidney failure, renal diseases, Hepatitis C and cancer.

Sabri, 28, gave his mother a lobe of his liver. She needed this transplant to recover from a liver failure allegedly caused by a too high level of ammonia in drinking water. She still regularly needs to travel to Cairo for medical care and to get fresh blood. In April 2011, Sabri came back to Aswan after spending several months in Cairo with his mother between surgeries and convalescence. He was then determined to do something so that no one else would have to endure what his family had just suffered. He used his own story to mobilise other residents in his neighbourhood and beyond, circulating it online and on leaflets, while calling on families to gather outside the governorate headquarters in Aswan. He created an event for a protest on Facebook, and was surprised to see large numbers of potential participants. He then called for the protest on Aswan's local Tiba TV channel, after which he received a call from the governor himself, who offered him some compensation for treatment costs in exchange for the cancellation of the demonstration, an offer that Sabri declined¹⁷².

Sabri has a relatively long experience in anti-government demonstrations. He claims he never obtained his degree from Cairo's al-Azhar University due to his participation in several protests. In addition, later, he had to leave a job as food inspector in the health sector in Hurghada, in the Red Sea governorate, because he had many problems with the management after denouncing abuses and bribes taken by his colleagues. Sabri now works as a customs inspector at Marsa Alam Airport, but spends an average of one month of two in Aswan since activity has been low in the Red Sea resort due to the scarcity of

¹⁷² Informal conversation with Sabri, 28, airport customs inspector, Cairo, April 2015.

tourists. Sabri participated in most of the 18 days of the 2011 uprising in Cairo's Tahrir Square, where he went on a daily basis between 28 January and 7 February. He remembers those days: "*Whoever attended 28 January in Cairo will never surrender to anything until the revolution rules this country... Until bread, freedom, social justice, are implemented [...] because, honestly, we saw torture in the streets*"¹⁷³. In Tahrir Square, he said he had felt Egyptian and part of this country for the first time in his life. Afterwards, he also took part in a number of big demonstrations in Cairo, including protests against military rule, in Muhammad Mahmud, at the cabinet building, and so on. On returning to Aswan, he also participated in many protests. For instance, he went to a march against the Port Said Massacre from Midan al-Mahatta to the Security Directorate. During these instances of mobilisation, he met most of Aswan's political activists, including other supporters of the "revolution". While studying journalism in Aswan after the "revolution", he wrote "down, down with military rule" on an exam paper. He also got involved in Hamdeen Sabbahi's first presidential campaign in Aswan. Sabri is against both military rule and the Muslim Brotherhood. He said the regime had not changed a lot since Mubarak's fall. Sabri's last participation was in 30 June protests and *Tamarrod*. After that, he was not convinced by the *Tafwīd*¹⁷⁴, and felt that the army was going beyond its traditional role. Later, he felt ill-at-ease when pro-MB sit-ins were violently dispersed in Cairo. Overall, Sabri was disappointed with the army's ouster of President Morsi, which he called a coup. He was also disappointed with *Tamarrod*, considering that they had been "fooled" since nothing of what they had demanded was implemented¹⁷⁵.

Two key activists helped Sabri to increase awareness among Abul Rish residents. On the one hand, Khaled, one of his relatives also residing in the area, is an accountant and a well-known social worker often collaborating with the Aswan branch of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC)¹⁷⁶. On the other, Mostafa al-Hassan, the director of HMLC Aswan and a founding member of the law firm, is also a resident in Abul Rish. He has been leading with his team the legal file of the Kima Canal issue, which dates back to 1996¹⁷⁷. The three activists toured the associations of the area, including family

¹⁷³ Interview with Sabri, 28, airport customs inspector, Aswan, February 2014.

¹⁷⁴ *Tafwīd* or "mandate", was the name given to a mass protest convened by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in July 2013 to give the army a mandate to fight "terrorism".

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Sabri, 28, airport customs inspector, Aswan, February 2014.

¹⁷⁶ The Hisham Mubarak Law Centre has only two branches, the main one in Cairo and another one in Aswan. Founded in 1996, the last one is supposed to cover all Upper Egypt.

¹⁷⁷ Lawyers at HMLC have been filing and winning lawsuits related to the Kima Canal, which have not been implemented, for almost 20 years.

associations and charities, as well as youth centres and mosques, to get some help in spreading the news about the protest event. The demonstration eventually took place in July 2011 outside the governorate building in Aswan. Tens of residents of Abul Rish participated, including elders which, according to Sabri, gave the movement more credibility before the governor since people of their age did not usually attend public protests¹⁷⁸. Even though the pollution of drinking water was not new, the choice of the timing, in the post-uprising context, was justified in these terms by a woman living in the area: *“we felt we could speak, and people would listen to us”*¹⁷⁹.

Following the demonstration, a governorate committee was sent to a youth centre in Abul Rish to start a dialogue with the leaders of the contestation. Another protest followed in September 2011, further pressuring local authorities to act. This time, residents called for the governor’s resignation. Even though activists and protesters blamed the Kima Company and the other entities contributing to the pollution of water through throwing their waste into the canal, they mainly emphasised local authorities, especially the governorate’s, responsibility¹⁸⁰. In a leaflet calling for this protest, Sabri denounced governorate officials’ neglect, slow reaction and corruption, referring to a “strange” use by the governor of millions of Egyptian pounds that should have gone to the construction of a new sewage station. Presenting his own story as an example of what could happen to anyone in the area, he used relatively strong vocabulary, referring to an issue which “kills our children”. He warned the governor: “we won’t return from our protest without a solution”. Regardless of their political opinions, most people blamed the local authorities without necessarily attacking the central government. In April 2013, tens of local residents again protested at the governorate building in Aswan, denouncing the authorities’ failure to solve the Kima Canal issue despite the waste of more than EGP 80 million. They demanded the prosecution of officials involved in this waste of public money.

Activists’ degree of organisation took another step when they formed a “popular” coordination committee¹⁸¹ to brainstorm on solutions and represent Abul Rish residents.

¹⁷⁸ Informal conversation with Sabri, 28, airport customs inspector, Cairo, April 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Informal conversation with a group of women residing near al-Aqalim bus station, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

¹⁸⁰ Interviews with local activists Khaled, accountant, and Tariq, High Dam administration employee, Aswan, April 2015.

¹⁸¹ Activists and residents called it the “popular committee”.

This committee includes three to four activists as Mostafa al-Hassan and Khaled, as well as a number of local residents, one farmer, one engineer, less than ten members in total having different roles. While lawyers mainly act on the legal front, an engineer, a farmer and other ordinary people work on proposing feasible solutions to the problem of the Kima Canal¹⁸², and local activists campaign to increase awareness among residents. The HMLC, several local associations and a youth centre, have hosted meetings. Women have been invited to attend meetings, but there is no woman in the coordinating committee. Family associations and mosques (using their microphones) used to spread information on meetings¹⁸³.

Tariq, a 45-year-old employee at the High Dam administration residing in Abul Rish, is one of the members of the coordination committee. He is a well-connected local activist. Heading the union at his work, where he once organised a protest which disrupted traffic by the High Dam, he is a member in several associations and in a youth centre in Abul Rish. He is also a political activist, who used to be the youngest member in the local council, in charge of youth issues. Tariq explained that he was a member of the NDP from 1997 to 2001 because this used to be the only way to provide services locally. He said he had opposed the lead of businessmen such as Ahmed Ezz within the party, and the rigging of the 2010 elections, which made him participate in the 2011 uprising in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Later, he joined the pro-government Egypt My Country Party (*Hizb Misr Baladi*)¹⁸⁴ as the secretary of Aswan's *markaz*. Tariq did not like the MB, denouncing its deemed opportunism and corruption, which he qualified as bigger in one year than Mubarak's corruption in 30 years. He participated in the 30 June anti-MB protests in Aswan, and then in the pro-Sisi campaign *Mustaqbal Watan*¹⁸⁵. Tariq is also a well-experienced speaker to the media, and a mobile activist who often travels to Cairo and elsewhere, including to attend human rights and other activist trainings.

Other activists, including women, played a significant role in the mobilisation against the Kima Canal, which was apparently not the case in Al-Hebeil. A mother, Nahed is a local, Nubian activist engaged in diverse community and welfare activities related to women's status, the Nubian cause, and health issues. She now has her own association, mainly

¹⁸² Interview with Khaled, accountant, Aswan, April 2015.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ One of the small political parties that re-emerged after President Morsi's ouster in 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Initially a campaign supporting Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's presidential bid, *Mustaqbal Watan* became a party.

involved in women issues. For instance, she organises training sessions on how to vote freely and avoid manipulations because, she says, “*the woman has awareness*”. Active in other associations and member of the Modern Egypt Party (*Hizb Misr al-Haditha*)¹⁸⁶, which essentially gathers former NDP members, Nahed has connections in Abul Rish and at the governorate level. Her political activism goes beyond her participation in meetings and symposiums, since she is a former candidate at local elections (*mahalliyyat*) and intends to run at the next local polls. She explained that she wanted to represent her community because she was one of them, had the same living conditions, and similarly suffered from the polluted tap water. She wanted to become a local representative in order to provide services to her community.

Admitting that her party had done nothing in Aswan, she said people worked better in family associations than in Parliament or local councils. As for the pollution of water, she said that she had learnt from protests to never remain silent again, vowing to continue to mobilise until the problem was solved. At the opposite of “revolutionary” activists’ pro-democracy discourse, Nahed insisted: “*we can’t be ruled, except by the army*”¹⁸⁷. When I met her in winter 2014, she had just joined a campaign of support for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s presidential bid. Like many other people at the time, she did not hide her admiration for the minister of defence, seen as a patriot, a saviour, a new Nasser. Nahed is a cousin of Sabri’s father, which may explain that they could mobilise together despite their different political backgrounds. She obviously had a better access than Sabri and other male activists to her female neighbours. When I went back to Aswan in April 2015, her sister’s husband had just died at the age of 56, allegedly from a disease caused by the polluted drinking water. This new tragedy shows that despite residents’ mobilisation, the problem is far from being solved.

Following protests by Abul Rish residents, the local authorities took multiple commitments, but quickly failed to honour most of them. More than five years after the 2011 uprising, nothing has changed. A wastewater treatment plant was built but, for unclear reasons, was never used. High suspicions of corruption are associated with the disappearance of between EGP80 and 90 million, which were originally released to fund

¹⁸⁶ The Modern Egypt Party was founded in July 2011 by former members of the NDP following the latter’s dissolution.

¹⁸⁷ Informal conversation with Nahed, social worker, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

diverse works to fill and replace the Kima Canal. Some parts of the canal were covered with concrete; however, this did not disrupt water flow, and was undertaken exclusively for esthetical and business motives¹⁸⁸. A promise by the new governor to completely fill and ban the use of the Kima Canal by 30 August 2015 had not been completely fulfilled as of mid-2016, and nothing indicated that it would be in a near future. In any case, this would constitute an only temporary solution. What is much needed is the construction of sewer systems for the entities that pollute the canal. Court decisions vindicating residents have not been implemented. Ultimately, nothing significant had been undertaken to solve the problem, despite Abul Rish residents' mobilisation, a relative media coverage of their movement, and the support of several activists and organisations. Additionally, Khaled explained that getting rid of the Kima Canal was only one problem to solve. There is also the need for sewage networks, healthcare for people, and so on. For instance, activists have asked the authorities to provide them with an ambulant health unit in order to conduct blood tests and detect diseases at an early stage¹⁸⁹. Equally important, progress on this issue has been delayed by the corruption of local officials.

Even though a legal battle had been engaged against the Kima Canal for almost two decades by the HMLC, it is the personal initiative of Sabri and the support of a few key activists which triggered an escalation of the movement in 2011. Several activists residing in Abul Rish played an important role in mobilising their neighbours, using their own networks in Aswan and beyond to give the movement against the pollution of water a larger visibility. Activists have represented the families in negotiations with the authorities, mainly at the governorate level. Through their "popular committee", they have regularly briefed the families during local meetings. Leaders of the contestation have widely used the media, social media and storytelling to mobilise support and publicise their cause. Numerous local and national newspaper articles relating the issue were published, while the leaders of the movement against the Kima Canal appeared in many TV reports¹⁹⁰. Lawyers and multiple local networks supported the mobilisation, including family associations, Nubian networks, youth centres/sports clubs and mosques. The joint efforts of activists having very different backgrounds shows that for a cause of communal

¹⁸⁸ Behind the army's hotel in Aswan, not far from the Corniche and the train station, some bazar shops were even built above the canal and despite the persisting bad smell.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Khaled, accountant, Aswan, April 2015.

¹⁹⁰ A few reports on the pollution of water were released on private TV channels such as ONTV between 2011 and 2014, while youth and activist groups in Aswan posted numerous videos on YouTube and Facebook.

concern, solidarity goes far beyond political and class differences. The heterogeneous profiles of the participants in the protests against the pollution of drinking water resulting from the Kima Canal appeared as a strength to federate at the beginning of the movement. As pointed by Sabri, having elders attending the protests gave credibility and legitimacy to the contestation.

However, in Abul Rish, the escalation also proved to be only momentary. When I first visited the village in February 2014, I could feel a certain despair. Protests were no longer on the agenda, partly due to the November 2013 protest law. Coordination meetings now took place less often, and no one seemed to know what to choose as a next step. Yet, members of the committee have remained active and determined to keep the pressure on the authorities, while lawyers continue to follow up on the related legal issues. However, partly but not exclusively due to the constraints of an increasingly repressive context, Abul Rish residents' protest movement has not exceeded its local setting.

In such a centralised political system as the Egyptian regime, social movements are rarely heard if they do not go out of their localities. In Abul Rish, we saw that local activists were active in representing and defending their neighbours. But as far as I am concerned, they have not attempted to link their fight to other similar cases elsewhere in Egypt. They have not organised protests in Cairo, for instance at the Cabinet headquarters, as other movements in search for a national visibility have done (the Nubians for example). Without credible brokers to link different but similar movements across Egypt or at least in a sole region, activists' pressure will remain too weak to represent the kind of threat which usually forces the authorities to significantly respond.



Figure 2.3: View of the Kima Canal in the area of Aswan's public hospital in April 2015.



Figure 2.4: Nile view in Aswan, where the Kima Canal and its filth flow into the river, April 2015.

4. The choice to protest: a political opportunity or a response to the state's violation of well-established norms?

Both examples of local protest movements show that mobilisation essentially takes place in an informal way, typically thanks to the initiatives taken by a few influential members of the community, who then convince their relatives, neighbours, friends or colleagues to join the cause. Therefore, contrary to common accounts of “spontaneous”, emotion-driven protests by angry villagers, these cases show the key role often played by local leaders not only in mobilising others and deciding on the means to raise demands, but also in negotiating on behalf of protesters with the authorities. A number of “external”¹⁹¹ activists have also either contributed to mobilisation, talks with governorate officials, following up on the legal dimensions or enhancing the media visibility of both cases. Abul Rish residents’ fight against polluted drinking water has been widely supported by a formal organisation, the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre. In Al-Hebeil, a leader of the April 6 Youth Movement residing in Luxor helped residents to publicise their cause in various ways. Local, ordinary networks, have also been crucial in supporting mobilisation. In particular, family associations have provided spaces for gatherings to inform residents and decide on the next moves. In Abul Rish, local youth centres and mosques also contributed to mobilisation. Other studies have insisted on this crucial contribution to (de)mobilisation of local informal networks¹⁹², on the links between formal organisations and informal networks¹⁹³, while observing how mobilisation also creates new social ties¹⁹⁴, as through the popular coordination committee formed by Abul Rish activists to follow up on the Kima Canal issue. Finally, the solidarity among residents has been vital to sustain both movements over time and despite a gradual return to repressive conditions after the July 2013 military coup. In Al-Hebeil, the young fathers who constitute the majority of the protagonists of the issue have not yielded to threats of repression, while their families have financially contributed to paying the rent for the football field. In Abul Rish, the participation of heterogeneous populations, including

¹⁹¹ By “external”, I do not necessarily mean from outside the village or the region, but outside the activist networks present in the area. I thus consider lawyers of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, a nationwide firm, as external actors that have contributed to the mobilisation of Abul Rish residents, even though a number of them reside in the area.

¹⁹² See, for instance, the contribution of cafés to processes of (de)mobilisation of the youth in Gafsa in Amin Allal and Jasper Cooper, “‘Revolutionary’ trajectories in Tunisia. Processes of political radicalization 2007-2011”, *Revue française de science politique* (English), 2012/5 Vol. 62, p. 55-77.

¹⁹³ See Roger V. Gould, “Multiple Networks and Mobilisation in the Paris Commune, 1871”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 56, N°6, pp. 716-729, December 1991.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

different socioeconomic statuses, generations, genders and political backgrounds, has shown how neighbourhood solidarity around a communal concern could transcend the divisions that traditionally impede wider mobilisations.

In sum, the analysis of both cases has shed light on some of the mobilising agents, structures and mechanisms that are typically at play in local instances of mobilisation, especially those which denounce a deterioration or failure in public services. However, the question of the motivations behind ordinary residents' decision to resort to public protests at specific times remains to be answered. Why did residents of Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish go to the streets for the first time after the 2011 uprising? I suggest that the memory of a strong, all-inclusive state framed as the state under President Nasser, as well as the related reminiscence of an old moral economy, have been important in encouraging ordinary people to mobilise. This is clearly illustrated in their invocation of rights to justify and legitimate their actions, including the most contentious ones. However, the timing was not innocently chosen by protest organisers and participants who, undoubtedly, perceived a historic opportunity to mobilise in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 uprising, as other Egyptians did (see chapter 1). I thus argue that, in addition to temporarily easing authoritarian conditions, the 2011 uprising has revived the memory of authorities able to deliver decent public services in exchange for popular support, subsequently encouraging ordinary citizens to claim their due.

The question of timing has been widely discussed in social movement studies, including perceptions of political opportunities and threats¹⁹⁵, in relation to repression and the characteristics of a given historical context. The moral economy approach generally focuses on subsistence and on commonly shared, acknowledged norms and values whose violation fosters mobilisation. It has been relatively popular since Thompson's inspiring work emphasising the moral values guiding the mobilisation of the English populace in the eighteenth century (Thompson 1971). A number of scholars have used this approach to study popular mobilisations in the Middle East, and particularly labour and peasant protests (Lockman 1994, Posusney 1994, Aytakin 2012). Lockman defined collective actions corresponding to a moral economy view as responses to "violations of norms and

¹⁹⁵ See Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

standards that the subalterns have become accustomed to and expect elites to maintain”¹⁹⁶, which aim to restore the previous status quo. Posusney situated this process in the framework of a patron-client relationship between the state and a given population, in her case workers¹⁹⁷. More recently, Aytekin defined Ottoman peasants’ moral economy as a “combination of subsistence ethics, a notion of what is just and what is not, and a tendency to valorise labour”¹⁹⁸.

Is there a crisis of moral economy behind the decisions to protest of Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish residents? Firstly, the presence of moral economy norms implies a kind of social contract in which the authorities constitute a full stakeholder. However, in both villages, residents depicted a state that has long been distant and neglectful. In addition, the pollution of drinking water resulting from the Kima Canal and the dispute over the land of the football field both go back to a long time before the 25 January “revolution”, while residents did not significantly mobilise until 2011. Therefore, if there were once norms that people were accustomed to, these were broken by the authorities a long time ago. In addition, even since the 2011 uprising, ordinary residents’ protests have been exceptional, which makes them distinct from the systematic reactions to violations or threats described by Thompson, Posusney and other scholars.

Secondly, even though it is generally admitted that most ordinary people tend to mobilise when their immediate interests are at stake (Bayat 1997, 2010; Posusney 1994; Sadiki 2000), protests in Abul Rish and Al-Hebeil were not only about mere subsistence or survival. In Al-Hebeil, there is no doubt about that since the absence of a football field cannot be seen as something threatening people’ subsistence. Yet, some residents have described their fight as a matter of life or death. In Abul Rish, where the provision of drinking water and health issues are involved, one could argue that there is, indeed, a matter of survival. However, people have long managed to survive by themselves. Beyond concrete and clearly formulated demands¹⁹⁹, what is really at stake in both cases

¹⁹⁶ Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

¹⁹⁷ See Marsha Pripstein Posusney, “Irrational Workers: The Moral Economy of Labor Protest in Egypt”, *World Politics* 46 (1), October 1993, 83-120.

¹⁹⁸ E. Attila Aytekin, “Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt, and the Tanzimat Reforms”, *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IRSH)*, 57 (2012), pp. 191–227.

¹⁹⁹ Solutions were generally raised by protesters along with demands. In Al-Hebeil, residents considered the purchase of the disputed land by a ministry from another as the best way to formalise their use of the land. Different ways to fill the Kima Canal or divert water flow have been similarly suggested to the authorities by members of Abul Rish’s popular coordination committee.

largely exceeds subsistence concerns. The response lies in the protagonists' language of rights. What all these people have definitely in common is their quest for a recognition of their rights. Youssef said he was "*asking for a public service for everyone*"²⁰⁰. This mention of a general interest is meant to oppose individual or sectorial interests such as workers' demands, often referred to as factional or *fa'awiyya*²⁰¹. It also aims to present a claim supposed to be unquestionable in terms of legitimacy. It ultimately refers to a right, in this case the right to decent public services.

Individual and collective rights infer the presence of an ultimate authority accountable for their protection. Thus, in both cases, ordinary people have been demanding the return of a largely absent state to, firstly, recognise their rights and, secondly, protect them. Because they are all related to a failure in a public service, demands are directed to the state in general, and not only to its local representatives. Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish residents' protests demanded the return of a powerful state giving them their legitimate rights back. Even though moral values are not absent from this claim, more important are the various issues of political economy behind the protests against deteriorating public services. These include national choices of economic development and plans that have tended to prioritise some places and some groups, while neglecting or ignoring others. In both cases, residents have questioned state policies that have resulted in their marginalisation from the rest of Egypt, in the neglect of their regions. The deterioration of public services is seen as a consequence of this neglect. This is the reason why people raise their demands to the state, whom they consider as both the cause and the solution to these failures. In other words, while the state is responsible for the deterioration of the services it is supposed to provide, it is responsible for the re-establishment of citizens' equal right to decent public services.

However, the demand for state accountability presents an apparent paradox. The state's persisting failure to deliver decent services has entailed a decline of its credibility as a provider. Some residents have indeed expressed a mistrust, especially in politicians and officials' ability to solve their problems, or at least engage in dialogue and take significant steps. Corruption and bureaucracy were widely denounced as failures in the state system.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

²⁰¹ The term has been widely used since February 2011, especially by the Egyptian army and its supporters, to discredit labour protests, qualified as disturbances of the "wheel of production" and the country's stability by a minority seeking specific, not collective interests.

In particular, local officials were somehow perceived as “incompetent and unresponsive”²⁰² to people’s needs. Additionally, in both cases, people decided to organise protests after formal attempts to communicate their demands had all failed. In consequence, a moral economy approach is not sufficient to explain these cases, because there is no system of exchange of mutual duties in a relationship of trust between people and the state. While the memory of a past moral economy may be driving protests, ordinary citizens have been predominately reclaiming the restoration of the state’s basic mission of protection of their rights through the provision of adequate public services. Where does this claim come from? Why has it apparently resurfaced after the 2011 uprising?

In the historical memories of most Upper Egyptians, even among the youngest, there was once in Egypt a powerful state serving people’s needs. According to several respondents, the last emanation of this state was under the rule of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Indeed, particularly in Al-Hebeil, the leaders of the contestation referred to the deteriorating situation of Upper Egypt since the end of President Nasser’s era²⁰³. Under Nasser, even in Upper Egypt, the state used to carry on its duties, not only delivering services, but also caring about the poor and the marginalised, and favouring social mobility. Many of the people I met in Upper Egypt expressed nostalgia for an idealised Nasser era (see chapters 1 and 5), during which the state supposedly used to carry on its duties, including in the southern provinces. According to this vision, not only did the state deliver decent services, but it also cared about the poor. A strong and fair state then sought, instead of marginalising the poorest segments of the population, to educate them and favour social mobility. This nostalgia sometimes coincided with a support for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, then often seen as a patriot exercising his duty who would take care of the poor. The 25 January “revolution”, which emphasised the ideals of equality and social justice, served as a click reminding many citizens of the state’s duties towards them. While many informants claimed they had no great expectations from the authorities before the 2011 uprising, they said the “revolution” had made them hope for a better future that would be driven by political change:

²⁰² Sinwell, Kirshner, Khumalo, Manda, Pfaffe, Phokela and Runciman, “Service delivery protests. Findings from quick response research on four ‘hotspots’ – Piet Retief, Balfour, Thokoza, Diepsloot”.

²⁰³ Interview with Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

*“Do you know the only thing that makes me sad? I was born in corruption. I found it like that. But a light came. I looked at my time and found achievement, so I was happy.”*²⁰⁴

The “light” that Youssef refers to is the hope generated by the “revolution”. The sadness he expresses comes from the removal of this hope, with the state becoming again authoritarian and corrupt. While the uprising made popular expectations increase, it also generated the hope for a return of a powerful, fair and all-inclusive state giving to all its citizens the same access to public services and life opportunities. Combined with the perception of a more suitable political environment, it is this memory of a strong state revived by the 2011 uprising which encouraged ordinary people to mobilise. The use of a moral economy approach has thus helped to uncover some of the moral motivations and justifications behind the protests against deteriorating public services that have erupted since 2011 in Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish, as elsewhere in Egypt.

Since there is no relationship based on an absolute trust between people and the authorities, and the systematic endorsement of mutual rights and duties, we cannot strictly say that there is a moral economy informing these popular mobilisations, simply because the state has been largely unable to perform what residents would expect as its duties, namely the equal provision of decent public services to all citizens. However, I have tried to establish that what was really at the core of people’s demands was the recognition of their citizenship and its associated rights. While reclaiming their belonging to the polity, to the *sha’b*, people demanded the return of the state. Using a language of rights and legitimacy, people have expressed a desire, a dream, a hope for a strong state carrying its mission. Since this desire is mainly framed in well-known, popular historiography of the Nasser era, it could be referring to an idealised “moral polity” similar to the one Roberts detected in the 1988 riots in Algeria²⁰⁵. The 2011 uprising awakened these ideals, while the less authoritarian political conditions that prevailed in its aftermath made people perceive an unprecedented opportunity to mobilise.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

²⁰⁵ See Hugh Roberts, “Moral Economy or Moral Polity? The Political Anthropology of Algerian Riots”, Crisis States Programme, Working Papers Series No. 1, DESTIN, London: London School of Economics, 2002.

5. Conclusion: a latent contestation in marginalised spaces

This analysis of small protest movements against deteriorating public services in Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish sheds light on the way local coordination is achieved. The citizens I met in both villages have mobilised in accordance with two main things. Firstly, they have reacted to opportunities and threats, adapting the forms of their mobilisation to changing contexts. Secondly, their mobilisations have been shaped by the local social and cultural settings where they erupted. I have argued that three interacting parameters typically played an essential role in the successful mobilisation of ordinary people: the presence of local leaders, the availability of area support networks, and a communal solidarity transcending traditional divisions. In addition, people were encouraged to stage protests by the favourable and relative openness of the political context after the 2011 uprising, as well as the hope for a return of an idealised state reintegrating all its citizens and carrying its traditional duties. Not only has the 25 January “revolution” encouraged many ordinary people to resort to protests in the hope to solve persisting problems, but it has also made them reclaim their rights as citizens. Denouncing the state’s deficient presence in their region, Upper Egyptians have, including through demanding a better provision of public services, called for the central political power to perform its traditional duties of protection and (re)distribution. This is partly the legacy of the 25 January “revolution”.

The ideals of justice and equality expressed by many ordinary people who mobilised for decent public services in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising have persisted. However, the then opportunity to attempt to make them triumph has now largely disappeared. This has led most ordinary people in Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish demobilise, while leading activists have been forced to adapt their strategies to the renewed repressive context. When I first visited Abul Rish and Al-Hebeil, in January and April 2014 respectively, residents had largely stopped organising demonstrations to voice their demands. While some progress had been made in both cases, movements had essentially secured promises that still need to be delivered on. Residents justified their demobilisation either by a discouragement resulting from the failure to achieve significant results, the increased repression now supported by a November 2013 law criminalising protests, or a demand for stability²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ Using the language of the official propaganda mainly spread by TV channels, many ordinary people now saw protests as destabilising the economy and the security of the state (see chapter 3).

ahead of decisive presidential elections expected to take place in May 2014. Indeed, there was then a large hope to see Abdel Fattah al-Sisi initiate a new era during which the concerns of the ordinary would be finally taken into account, which seemed to justify people's patience. As for the more sceptical, they estimated that nothing significant would be decided before the elections, and that they consequently had to wait. Some people also sought to differentiate their mobilisations from the then ongoing protests, deemed violent, of the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Various intimidations were also mentioned by interviewees, including attempts by governorate officials to dissuade them from reorganising public protests.

When I returned to Al-Hebeil and Aswan in spring 2015, I was confirmed that the leaders of both protest movements had not totally given up. They were now resorting to apparently less transgressive or less contentious forms of mobilisation, namely avoiding street protests and prioritising discrete initiatives. They were displaying a certain degree of self-restraint or "self-limitation" (Vairel 2015) in their choices of tactics and collective actions, now ranging from diverse administrative and legal steps, as well as actions to increase the visibility of their causes, including through media coverage²⁰⁷ and online campaigning on social media.

Ultimately, in Abul Rish and Al-Hebeil, many residents have accused the authorities of ignoring the poorest, the weakest, the youngest, denouncing their marginalisation and Upper Egypt's isolation. In the long term, issues such as the football field and the Kima Canal may further fuel popular discontent. This is how Youssef imagines it:

*"We entered the bottle, and we were shut inside. One day, we'll break it and escape. And on that day, no one will be able to stop us, because we're suffocating in it...Either we obtain what we want, or we will die".*²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ I have already mentioned, for instance, that Al-Hebeil residents had asked me to publish their story.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

Chapter 3: When the tide turns: state strategies of containment and the marginalisation of protests in favour of stability

1. Introduction: renewed repression and its implications for mobilisation

In chapters 1 and 2, we saw that Egyptians, including in the remote and rural regions of Upper Egypt, have never totally stopped mobilising for a wide range of issues. In particular, the unprecedented opening of the political climate that followed the 2011 uprising encouraged many ordinary people to voice old and new grievances, whether political, social or economic in nature. Chapter 2 analysed two examples of local protests against deteriorating public services that erupted in the favourable context of the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Popular mobilisations culminated with the mass protests that enabled the army to oust the first ever-elected civilian president in July 2013. Since the aftermath of the coup, an overwhelming popular desire for stability combined with repressive steps taken by supporters of the “counter-revolution” (Abdelrahman 2015) have caused a mass demobilisation and discouraged most people still having ambitions to protest. The “revolutionary” enthusiasm that had pushed many ordinary people to engage in contentious politics between February 2011 and June 2013 was essentially gone. While demobilisation dominated, remaining forms of activism have tended to be less transgressive and/or more discrete since favourable conditions for protests had vanished. In other words, since President Muhammad Morsi’s ouster in July 2013, ordinary citizens have either demobilised or embarked on less disruptive or confrontational collective actions.

Dissent has persisted through essentially discrete or less transgressive actions. This is reflected by residents of Abul Rish and Al-Hebeil’s abstention from staging protests since July 2013 while insisting on their demands in other ways. A number of larger protest movements also persevered, particularly the anti-coup movement led by the Muslim Brotherhood, “revolutionaries” and workers, but failed to attract support beyond their traditional base (see chapter 6). Additionally, a multitude of small socioeconomic protests has subsisted. In June 2016, a new water crisis erupted across Egypt, leading ordinary people to stage protests and block roads and highways in the provinces of Aswan, Luxor, Qena, North Sinai, Daqahliya, Beheira and New Valley. These examples of protests persisting despite unfavourable conditions once again confirm that fierce repression does

not fully suppress dissent. More importantly, repression fails to explain the discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral nature of a number of popular mobilisations, especially local socioeconomic protests related to structural deficiencies which are present across Egypt. Even between 2011 and 2013 when conditions were less repressive, protests remained very occasional, while people usually displayed a preference for negotiations within the “legal” framework and for non-transgressive forms of contention.

Drinking and irrigation water shortages are widespread in nearly all Egyptian provinces, especially in rural areas, due to poor infrastructure. Water pollution poisoning villagers is not uncommon in the Egyptian countryside, where sewage systems are generally obsolete or non-existent. Recurring electricity cuts can also be traced back to a severe energy crisis caused by shortages of fuel necessary to aliment power stations, the latter also needing to be upgraded. Yet, people have protested against these failures locally, without seeking the association of other populations suffering from similar dysfunctions in the state’s provision of infrastructural services. Local protests such as those that recur every summer against water shortages and electricity cuts have remained occasional and short-lived. They have often been followed by their protagonists’ demobilisation even when, frequently, they do not succeed in securing significant guarantees from the authorities. In addition, these protests have remained dispersed despite the existence of similar grievances elsewhere in the country, which generally point to structural problems necessitating broader reforms at the national level, and not only pragmatic measures at the local level. Chapter 2 showed that movements against polluted drinking water and to demand a football field never expanded from their original space. Despite their often-structural roots, why have mobilisations such as those erupting on a regular basis against deteriorating public services remained discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral? What is the contribution of state strategies in locally containing such popular mobilisations?

In this chapter, I explore state strategies aiming at limiting popular mobilisations and containing protests. This is essential before turning to other potential factors preventing ordinary people’s contentious politics from expanding. These may include the vicissitudes of leadership, which I explore in chapter 4, sociocultural constraints as suggested in chapter 5, and the low attractiveness of the currently available nationwide protest movements, which I attempt to explain in chapter 6. Bearing in mind that the level and forms of mobilisation are closely related to, and evolve with, the characteristics of

the historical context in which contention takes place, I assess in this chapter state strategies' efficiency in avoiding, restraining and ending popular mobilisations since July 2013 in Egypt. The chapter argues that media tactics of manipulation of emotions and beliefs, as well as mechanisms of local co-optation²⁰⁹, massively contribute to avoiding or containing protests, or to completely demobilising ordinary people, in addition to the direct repression of protests and opponents. Indeed, an anti-protest propaganda and conspiracy theories have undermined many political activists' reputations, and therefore their ability to mobilise. At the same time, they have contributed to convincing people that protests were the problem behind Egypt's persisting instability, and definitely not the solution. This has encouraged many people to marginalise the "revolution" and other protest campaigns in favour of stability. Local logics of patronage, including governorate officials and pro-government activists offering services or mediation, as well as the co-optation of local leaders, have similarly impeded many mobilisations to grow.

In a first section I review the range of options available to the state to demobilise the population and limit mobilisations, including open moves such as the direct repression of protesters and opponents, and subtler strategies aiming at delegitimising and co-optating current and potential opponents. I also discuss the forms of activism that have persisted despite these repressive state strategies. In a second section, I attempt to interpret Upper Egyptians' non-mobilisation, demobilisation or weaker mobilisation in interaction with the implemented state strategies of containment. I particularly emphasise the deterrent role of the official propaganda and conspiracy theories mainly spread by television, which have helped frame the Muslim Brotherhood and the "revolution" as the enemies of the new regime, and define protests as threatening Egypt' stability. I also suggest the efficiency of co-optation strategies through showing how the intervention of local pro-government political activists has successfully contained a strike by garbage collectors in Kom Ombo, Aswan province. In the third section, the case study of a low-intensity mobilisation against drinking water shortages in Nagaa Abdel Qader, a village in Qena province, illustrates the effectiveness of some of these state strategies of containment. I attempt to explain the reticence of village elders to directly confront the authorities,

²⁰⁹ Joshua Stacher defines co-optation as "a mechanism that allows for a government to extend power and garner support within society", "a process of incorporating, mobilizing, and sometimes, depending on the context, neutralizing individuals in the state's structural and institutional framework", "within a system of informal patron-client and corporatist relationships". Joshua Stacher, "Adapting authoritarianism: institutions and co-optation in Egypt and Syria", PhD Thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2007.

pointing at their apparent co-optation and self-restraint in adaptation to the repressive context.

2. Non-mobilisation, demobilisation, or discontinuous mobilisation?

2.1. State strategies to limit mobilisation and demobilise the majority: repressing, delegitimising, co-opting

The study of demobilisation processes has been rather neglected by researchers of contentious politics, generally more interested in collective actors and individuals' resources and motivations for participation, than in their gradual or brutal retreat. There is no strict consensus on the term "demobilisation" itself, which may encompass distinct realities. These range from the simple and sudden withdrawal of individuals or groups from a contentious episode, the end of a mobilisation campaign that has either succeeded or failed²¹⁰, to a more or less long process of collective or individual disengagement with people returning to the common occupations of everyday life. For Charles Tilly, demobilisation designates the return to passivity of individuals that used to actively participate in public life²¹¹. Olivier Fillieule distinguishes "demobilisation", referring to a collective phenomenon, from "disengagement", an individual decision observed at the micro level (Fillieule 2015).

More importantly, students of contentious politics have rarely addressed the case of discontinuous activism, of these occasional participants in episodes of contention who remain demobilised most of the time. As pointed by Fillieule, "apart from a few exceptions, research has mainly dealt with committed activists, without exploring not-so-committed participants"²¹². Demobilisation, a process supposed to follow a previous state of mobilisation, seems to be a term a little excessive to qualify the withdrawal from participation of occasional activists. Indeed, these people may have never really mobilised in the first place, at least if we understand mobilisation as a sustained participation supported by the full adherence to a cause. On the contrary, we are dealing

²¹⁰ "Demobilization may relate less to a specific sector than to the slow collapse of a mobilization campaign, as a result of its success or, conversely, its failure". Olivier Fillieule, "Demobilization and disengagement in a life course perspective", chapter in Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, November 2015).

²¹¹ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 54.

²¹² Olivier Fillieule, "Demobilization and disengagement in a life course perspective".

here with those people who may attend a number of protests or even a unique one, often for a specific demand, and not necessarily for a more elaborate or long-term project. For these people, mobilisation remains an exception motivated by very specific reasons and constrained by a wide range of characteristics of the political, social, economic and cultural environment, as I intend to establish throughout the coming chapters. However, this does not necessarily mean that people are passive and/or insensitive to changes occurring in their environment. It only means that they are less active, or differently active, that they do not assess transgressive contention as an appropriate or worthwhile way to act, or that they are simply waiting for what they perceived as a success of previous episodes of contention to materialise.

In Egypt, the 2011 uprising that removed President Mubarak after 30 years in power was seen and analysed by many researchers as the beginning of a long revolutionary process. According to the same observers, this process underwent its first setback with the 3 July 2013 military coup that overthrew President Morsi only one year after his election. But what about the large numbers of Egyptians who supported President Morsi's removal? Why has a majority apparently turned away from the changes initiated in 2011? Ethnography proved essential to understand this apparent turnaround because it highlighted ordinary citizens' concerns, hopes and perceptions of possibilities in relation to a constantly changing context. While reasons to mobilise have never lacked in Egypt since July 2013, my field research in the provinces of southern Upper Egypt shed light on two main factors maintaining a majority of ordinary people in a non-mobilised, demobilised or less mobilised condition: the repressive context and the weariness towards instability.

Firstly, the repressive context has discouraged most initiatives to organise or get involved in contentious politics. Repression, understood as "state or private action meant to prevent, control, or constrain noninstitutional, collective action (e.g., protest), including its initiation"²¹³, cannot be restricted to security forces' actions and may take multiple forms (Duboc 2012). In Egypt, the post-July 2013 immediate context was characterised by a spectacular, unbounded repression of Muslim Brotherhood supporters, quickly followed by attempts to silence all political opponents and government critics, now

²¹³ Jennifer Earl, "Political Repression: Iron Fists, Velvet Gloves, and Diffuse Control", *Annual Review of Sociology*, April 2011.

labelled terrorists and/or foreign agents seeking to destabilise the state. Repression has involved multiple strategies, open or subtle, implemented by supporters of the new regime. These have included the use of violence to crush protests; the mass detention of protesters and political opponents; the deployment of a legislative arsenal to justify and cover human rights violations; the harassment of journalists and all real or potential critics of the government; the co-optation of many public figures in the media, judiciary, and civil society sectors, as well as local community leaders and activists; the co-optation of ordinary citizen through glorifying their patriotism; the mobilisation of national and private media to promote the regime's agenda, as well as spread conspiracy theories accusing political opponents of seeking to destabilise Egypt; the deconstruction of the 25 January uprising's legitimacy; and the blame on protests for the persisting instability. These strategies have all contributed to gradually re-installing a harsh authoritarianism, with fears and suspicions retaking top position among ordinary people. Occasional participants in contentious episodes, often mobilised in essentially networked movements for the sake of short-term goals and/or local interests, are particularly vulnerable to these repressive strategies, precisely because their commitment tends to be only partial and short-sighted. Even people who were not involved in direct contentious activities could be arrested. A Writers' Union member, Mahmud once mentioned the Security State (*Amn al-dawla*) in a poem, which has earned him to spend 20 days in custody on suspicion of being a MB member. Yet, Mahmud denied this and claimed he had never participated in a protest or joined a party²¹⁴.

Secondly, most respondents expressed a deep fatigue towards the instability prevailing in the country since the 2011 uprising. Far from the romantic accounts of and hopes generated by the 25 January "revolution", most ordinary people have suffered from its attributed negative consequences, and mainly from an aggravating economic crisis and the accelerating deterioration of public services resulting from the political instability. The latter has been reflected at the local level by a certain paralysis of decision-making. In the remote regions of southern Upper Egypt, political instability and increasing insecurity have led to a desertion of tourists, while ordinary people have been severely hit by shortages of fuel, electricity and water, as well as record inflation rates. In 2013-2014, some people saw in Abdel Fattah al-Sisi a new Nasser, a saviour, a providential man able to care about the poor and impose social justice and the other goals of the

²¹⁴ Interview with Mahmud, employee at Al-Hebeil's only youth centre, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

“revolution”. Many others were simply hoping that his accession to power would restore stability and security, even if this would occur at the expense of the “revolution”.



Figure 3.1: Poster of al-Sisi saying “Egypt is the mother of the world and will be like the world”



Figure 3.2: Poster displaying Abdel Fattah al-Sisi next to a picture of former President Nasser

2.2. Mobilising otherwise: forms of activism in time of intensified repression

“The return to ‘normalcy’ implies for some people a ceasing of the protest, and for others, an even stronger form of political radicalisation”²¹⁵. The first has characterised the attitude of a majority of Egyptians since July 2013 due to the above-described conditions and state strategies of containment further analysed in the following section. Further radicalisation has been the situation of many Muslim Brotherhood supporters. However, there is a middle-way adopted by some activists, especially occasional, discontinuous ordinary protesters. The absence or scarcity of protests does not necessarily mean that everyone has become passive or inactive, especially when key grievances remain. On the one hand, some occasional participants in protests (and not protest organisers) said they had not attended a protest in recent times simply because the “offer” was low or inexistent, especially regarding the issues that matter to them. For example, a young man committed to the Nubian cause said there were no more protests organised by Nubians²¹⁶. On the other hand, many people have sought to continue to campaign for their cause within certain limits thought to be tolerated by the repressive, authoritarian authorities. Between contained and transgressive forms of contentious politics as defined in *Dynamics of Contention*²¹⁷, this less confrontational activism keen on respecting the legal authoritarian framework while bearing some degree of provocation has been called “boundary-spanning contention” (O’Brien 2003). Encompassing “acts located near the boundary between official, prescribed politics and politics by other means”²¹⁸, it includes repertoires of contention that cautiously avoid transgressions. The latter are those practices which may lead to open confrontations with the authorities. At the same time, boundary-spanning contention is not necessarily contained since it can have some visibility, last over time, and obtain concessions from the authorities, who therefore recognise that the movement in question could become a threat if it was left to escalate.

²¹⁵ Amin Allal and Jasper Cooper, “‘Revolutionary’ trajectories in Tunisia. Processes of political radicalization 2007-2011”, *Revue française de science politique* (English), 2012/5 Vol. 62, p. 55-77.

²¹⁶ Interview with Amir, 26, school teacher, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

²¹⁷ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly distinguish two variants of contention. Contained contention encompasses “those cases of contention in which all parties are previously established actors employing well established means of claim making”, which implies that “all parties to the conflict were previously established as constituted political actors”. Transgressive contention takes place when “at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors” and/or “at least some parties employ innovative collective action”. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²¹⁸ Kevin J. O’Brien, “Neither Transgressive Nor Contained: Boundary Spanning Contention in China”, *Mobilization*, vol. 8, n°1, 2003, p. 51-64.

As noticed by John Chalcraft, “there is no reason to suppose that both transgressive and contained forms of mobilisation – while analytically separable – do not co-exist, often but not always in tension, in a given movement”²¹⁹.

In Egypt’s post-coup context, many people have kept raising grievances while refraining from organising street protests, the ultimate transgression. Instead, they have resorted to less contentious tools falling into the boundary-spanning contention category. Their behaviour has been characterised by “self-limitation” (Vairel 2015), a repertoire of collective action allowing “contentious actors to maintain their activist practices without paying a heavy price”²²⁰, within certain limits tolerated by the authorities. In post-coup Egypt, self-limitation means carefully avoiding transgressive forms of mobilisation such as public protests at the governorate building, criticising the governor and central authorities, suggesting accusations of corruption, amongst other tactics that were more commonly used between 2011 and 2013 when the context was perceived as more permissive. The idea is that people tend to act within the framework of the institutions without questioning them, within the boundaries of what they perceive as feasible and acceptable by the authorities, and without risking a confrontation with the latter. Actions seem to have varied in accordance with actors’ perceptions of the tolerable, since options are largely conditioned by their anticipation of the authorities’ reaction (O’Brien 2003, Vairel 2015). Self-limited or self-restrained contention may include a myriad of possibilities. It has involved the continuation of mobilisation through less loud means, including legal or administrative steps and strategies to gain visibility, for example through media coverage. I mentioned in chapter 2 a number of such tactics used by protesters in Al-Hebeil and Abul Rish. The use of social media, mainly Facebook, has become for more or less committed Egyptian activists, especially the youth, a very popular tool to campaign for a wide range of issues (denouncing cases of corruption for example), or just vent their frustrations. In particular, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as “revolutionaries”, have been increasingly left with no other platform than online social media to voice their opposition and campaign against the new regime as street politics were no longer tolerated. In an authoritarian environment, this

²¹⁹ John Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²²⁰ Frédéric Vairel, “How Self-Limiting Mobilizations Work: Morocco to the Bedside of Social Movement Studies?”, Paper presented at the London School of Economics and Political Science, Middle East Centre Seminar, 20 May 2015.

sort of “flash activism is harder for authorities to control and less costly for protesters than street protests”²²¹, and “has increasingly allowed social movement participation outside of organisations”²²².

Boundary-spanning contention and self-limitation usually hide a certain dose of self-censorship. In Egypt, even when there was more freedom of speech between February 2011 and June 2013, the army managed to preserve its position, standing as a red line for a majority of Egyptians who avoided to directly criticise the institution. Even when anti-military rule protests erupted in 2011, most people were careful to differentiate between the army as an institution seen as the ultimate foundation of the Egyptian state, and its leaders ruling the country, mainly the members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Despite reported exactions, the army has always managed to maintain its popularity and its image as last bulwark against chaos. Many of my respondents said they loved the army, praising its patriotism, arguing that it had never failed the Egyptian people. Many people saw no alternative to a strong military rule since Egyptians did not behave and were supposedly unable to respect civilian rulers.

Eventually, some people believed in playing by the rules. For instance, residents of Aniba, a village in Nasr al-Nuba, Aswan governorate, organised in November 2013 a protest to demand the release of Maha, a 19-year-old science student from the village who was among a group of girls arrested in a pro-MB demonstration in Alexandria and quickly sentenced to 11 years in prison. Ramadan, a 53-year-old social worker from the village, requested from the police station a permit to stage this protest, in accordance with the requirements of the new protest law. But despite obtaining this authorisation, Ramadan explained that not everyone participated. Some people were still afraid, while others, mainly youth, disagreed with the fact that organisers had requested an authorisation from the police and did not recognise the protest law²²³. In addition, the authorities had ordered the protest to take place on a Sunday, a working day, which limited the attendance of employees and students²²⁴.

²²¹ Jennifer Earl, Jayson Hunt, R. Kelly Garrett, and Aysenur Dal, “New Technologies and Social Movements”, chapter in Della Porta and Diani, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Interview with Ramadan, 53, social worker, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

²²⁴ Ibid.

According to my research, most instances of boundary-spanning contention are easily explained and determined by their protagonists' fear of repression. However, in a number of situations, fear is not necessarily the main or the only motivation for avoiding to confront the authorities. People may perceive that they have a better interest in maintaining a good relationship with local officials, as suggested by the below example of a limited contestation against drinking water shortages in Nagaa Abdel Qader. The latter indeed shows that, whether co-opted or sincerely loyal to the authorities, elders of the village have declined to radically confront officials through louder public protests. For now, I aim to understand why a majority of ordinary Upper Egyptians have demobilised since July 2013, while others have continued to mobilise in restricted ways.

3. Interpreting Upper Egyptians' large demobilisation or limited mobilisation

3.1. Media propaganda and conspiracy theories: framing the Muslim Brotherhood and the "revolution" as the enemies

In preparation for my first trip to Aswan, I first tried to get in touch with local activists. To this end, I wrote to the administrators of Facebook pages containing references to the "revolution", the April 6 Youth Movement, the *Tamarrod* campaign (see chapter 6), and the main political parties present in the region. This is the reply of the administrator of a page supporting *Tamarrod* (but apparently, not the official page of the campaign in Aswan, though the page is called "*Tamarrod* campaign in Aswan"), dated 25 December 2013:

"I would like your excellency to know that *Tamarrod* Aswan and every free Egyptian's view on research about Egyptian internal affairs in the interest of foreign entities and organisations at this time of the nation's age is intelligence work that is hostile and does not carry anything good at all... Egyptian affairs and Egyptians' problems are non-tradable issues or cannot be made a research topic or a scientific thesis, as you cannot tell citizens in Egypt to write history so that you can study it... No research of unknown identity, source and order is sane... You asked for advice... I advise you to change your research topic and research something else that would be the widening size of the political crime and the extent of the United States' support to terrorism in the world... It is still your specialisation... What do you think? Or such research works don't bring money?"

When I read this note, I had been in Cairo for two weeks, busy making contacts and deciding on regions to visit for my research. This was also my first visit since the military coup that ousted President Morsi in July of the same year. Even though I had been following events on a daily basis, I had not anticipated that the atmosphere had changed to such extent. It took me some time to really comprehend this new context, and even more time to deal with it, first as a returning Egyptian, and second as a research apprentice. My first shock was to hear how happy people were about the violent repression of Muslim Brotherhood supporters. Even among some of my relatives, I could hear things like “they deserve it”, “they had it coming”. My second shock was television. While all channels were openly campaigning for the “yes” to the new constitution, they glorified Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, demonised the Muslim Brotherhood, denounced the 25 January “revolution” as a foreign conspiracy, in short participated in a conventional propaganda supporting the new authorities. Therefore, I was not really surprised by the suspicion expressed in this *Tamarrod* supporter’s message, although it was a little strange to have the confirmation that some people really viewed research in social sciences as a form of espionage. I first sought to reassure this person about my intentions and try to understand this suspicion. On 12 January 2014, he wrote back:

“The crimes of the Third World are also known so why repeat researching them? Don’t you see the limitation of scientific research to certain countries and from certain countries, and that research works usually end in the drawers of politicians in these (same) countries... It is a duty to respect scientific research having impact on the internal affairs and offered to responsible entities within the country to reform and repair the problems that can be contained... There is a question I hope can be answered... If these research works go to other countries, what is the promise and what is the benefit for Egypt of your scientific research?”

Despite being sceptical, he gave me his name and phone number, saying I was welcome in Aswan. I had probably amused him or stimulated his curiosity. He then asked about my real name and the name of my family in Aswan, probably in a way to test me. I made a few jokes to relax him, like “you still think I am a Mossad spy”, and so on. After ending this conversation, I decided I would not contact him once in Aswan. He could have been some kind of security informant after all. If I bumped into him in Aswan, I was never aware of it. I chose to relate this anecdote because it gives an example of the prevalent

discourse at the time of my presence in the field, and of the way foreign researchers were increasingly depicted. Regardless of his identity, my interlocutor was obviously well educated, curious and aware of the ongoing developments in Egypt. As many of his compatriots, he probably reads and watches the news on a regular basis. He displayed a suspicion regarding the possible financial gains that my research would generate. Through mentioning alleged US support for terrorism, he probably meant the so-called US backing of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was then demonised and portrayed as a terrorist organisation receiving foreign support. While trying to convince me that my research would not benefit Egypt since it would go to foreign entities, he may have borrowed the assimilation of academic research to intelligence collection from the then dominant narrative.

This narrative full of conspiracy theories was mainly spread by television, both public and private. At that time, Amani al-Khayyat used to present a programme called “Sabah” every morning of the working week on Naguib Sawiris’ ONTV channel. For example, one morning, I saw on this programme a so-called expert accusing members of the Beirut-based Carnegie Middle East Centre, including the Egyptian academic and activist Amr Hamzawy and the American researcher Michelle Dunne, of being foreign agents working for the US, Israel and/or the Muslim Brotherhood. Another TV programme specialised on conspiracy theories (which I would later hear about in my interviews) that was popular at the time was called the “Black Box” (*al-ṣandūq al-iswid*). Broadcasted on al-Kahera wal nas private TV channel, it was presented by Abdel Rahim Ali, now a pro-government member of parliament. Its official purpose was to unveil the alleged crimes of many opposition figures, whose private telephone conversations (the famous leaks or *tasrībat*, whose provenance remains a mystery since Abdel Rahim Ali has always refused to divulge it) were aired and used in an attempt to make them appear as actors in a so-called conspiracy to destabilise Egypt. Many of my respondents also said they watched on a regular basis the former programme of famous conspiracy theorist and vocal opponent to the 25 January “revolution” Tawfiq Okasha on al-Faraeen TV channel.

Formal interviews and informal conversations with many Egyptians made me realise the resonance of these kinds of programmes among the general public. Even though their impact is hard to measure, they unquestionably contributed, as I will show, to the deterioration in public opinion of the image of the 25 January “revolution” and its main

protagonists, including members of the April 6 Youth Movement and opposition figures such as Muhammad al-Baradei, Ayman Nour and many others. From a retrospective point of view, this narrative contributed to justifying the repression, arrest, “forced disappearance”²²⁵, prosecution or killing of thousands of alleged opponents, human rights activists, journalists, researchers, without anyone really criticising it apart from some brave NGOs and human rights groups. Charges were all related to the destabilisation of the regime and “threatening national security”, ranging from inciting or participating in protests, spreading false news, harming the “wheel of production”, and so on. At the same time, the propaganda of the “counter-revolution” went hand in hand with the implementation of an anti-opposition legislation. This has included the November 2013 protest law, the ban on the Muslim Brotherhood and all its affiliated organisations, the April 6 Youth Movement and the Ultras Ahlawy football fan club, and the labelling of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group. Finally, in 2015, an anti-terrorism law was amended to widen the definition of terrorism, now including striking workers and anyone reporting on issues bothering the regime. This atmosphere made many people fearful to talk about their own political opinions. People subsequently sometimes got suspicious about my research purposes, which complicated my ethnographic task. Forced to go through known and respected intermediaries, I had to secure people’s trust first, and open these now sensitive topics in a roundabout way. Finally, the previous anecdote suggests that media propaganda has contributed to the development of a paranoia towards foreigners’ activities in Egypt.

Conspiracy theories have identified two main enemies of the new regime: the Muslim Brotherhood firstly and, increasingly, the 25 January “revolution”. Indeed, “regularly used in history by counter-revolutionaries [...], theories of conspiracy or handling crowds, whether attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood, the CIA or organisations such as OTPOR, can be seen as ways to deny the importance, and even the historical reality of the event”²²⁶. My conversations with Upper Egyptians enabled me to conclude that many people had a poor knowledge of what had really happened between 25 January and 11

²²⁵ This term, which appeared in 2015, designates the abduction by security forces of persons, who are then taken to an unknown location, often tortured before being formally arrested and charged, and sometimes killed.

²²⁶ « Régulièrement utilisées dans l’histoire par les contre-révolutionnaires (Cochin, 1921), les théories du complot ou de la manipulation des foules, que ceux-ci soient attribués aux Frères musulmans, à la CIA ou à des organisations comme OTPOR, peuvent être vus comme des façons de nier l’importance, voire la réalité historique de l’évènement. ». Guillaume Mazeau and Giedre Sabaseviciute, « Archéologies révolutionnaires. Regards croisés sur la Tunisie et l’Égypte (2011-2013) », *L’Année du Maghreb*, 2014.

February 2011 (see chapter 6), making them relatively receptive to all kinds of narratives of those events, including the version of the foreign conspiracy. For instance, Amira, a 22 unemployed recent graduate in business studies from Al-Hajindiyya village, a very remote village in Aswan governorate located about 35 kilometres north of Kom Ombo, believed that *“the beginning of the revolution was planned from abroad”*²²⁷. In the same way, information about the pro-MB protest movement was relatively scarce and definitively biased; thus, most people believed that MB supporters had all turned violent, denying the occurrence of peaceful pro-MB protests. Conspiracy theories were not the exclusive prerogative of the regime. Muslim Brotherhood supporters also used them. In 2015 in particular, I often heard that security forces were behind the bombings in Sinai and elsewhere in Egypt, in order to put the blame on the Muslim Brotherhood²²⁸.

Yet, limited information about and poor knowledge of events are not sufficient to explain the adherence to the simplified reality of conspiracy theories. The common view relates this to the level of education. However, my evidence refutes this. Indeed, many people living in Upper Egypt’s Aswan and Luxor regions and having a basic education expressed suspicion or distrust regarding news that they could not verify because of their remoteness, or topics they acknowledged they did not particularly understand. Some people had noticed contradictions in the news, accusing media personalities and politicians of lying. Despite many Egyptians deploring the “ignorance” (*jahl*) of the poor, making them easy to manipulate, I found that not everyone was politically naïve or believed everything he/she heard. For example, Fatma, a 44 accountant living in Aniba, has a degree in business studies. She clearly expressed doubts about what she saw or heard: *“Personally, I hated politics after the revolution...due to what I see from politicians, the media...we don’t see where the truth is”*²²⁹. Mahmud, a 64 retired veterinarian from Aniba, was also cautious: *“I am one of the people who are about 1,000 km from the political scene in Cairo... so this makes us get information from the radio and TV... And it is possible that the truth doesn’t reach us”*²³⁰. Hoda, a 54 housewife holding a middle degree in business studies and living in Ballana, expressed similar doubts: *“We don’t believe... Muhammad Morsi and all those who are now imprisoned,*

²²⁷ Interview with Amira, 22, unemployed (Bachelor in business studies), Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

²²⁸ Informal conversation with Haggag, 24, journalist, Luxor, March 2015.

²²⁹ Interview with Fatma, 44, accountant, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

²³⁰ Interview with Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian and shop owner, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

have they really done all these things?”²³¹. Ayman, a garbage collector from Kom Ombo, similarly said: *“We meet people in the street, polite, good, respectable people... So I don’t know if the truth is what we see, different from what we hear. And what we hear is different from the people we deal with”*²³². On the contrary, even among highly educated Cairene “elites”, I sometimes heard the anti-Western, anti-MB and anti-revolution discourse of renowned TV presenters as Tawfiq Okasha, a then fierce supporter of the 25 January “conspiracy”. Based on memorising more than on critical thinking, the educational system does not teach people to argue or substantiate their assertions with evidence. As such, education has its share of responsibility. Cultural factors should also be considered. In Egypt, and even more in the conservative countryside, people are not used to question their elders, and more generally anyone enjoying a higher social status or authority.

To what extent are the populations of the Qena, Luxor and Aswan governorates exposed to media and social media? Southern Upper Egypt may be far from Cairo. However, it is not completely isolated as common beliefs might suggest it. Television is by far the main source of information for the majority. Upper Egyptians watch the news but also political talk shows on TV. They not only watch public and private TV channels such as Dream, ONTV, CBC, Tahrir, and diverse pro-MB channels, but also international news channels such as BBC Arabic, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. It is true that many households, especially in villages, still lack access to satellite TV channels. However, national TV is hardly the only source of information for residents of the countryside. Most adults and younger people have cell phones, which constantly keep them in touch with larger circles exceeding the village or the neighbourhood. People have relatives in Cairo and/or elsewhere in Egypt, who keep them aware of news they would not necessarily hear on TV. These relatives are either people who have permanently moved to Lower Egypt for economic reasons, or youth studying at universities in Upper Egyptian cities as Asyut or Sohag. A number of respondents told me that they were aware of the lies of the media, especially national TV, during the 18 days of the 2011 uprising because they had contacts with relatives and friends who had attended or seen the mass protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and elsewhere. For instance, Hassan, a resident in Aswan, said he was in touch with one of his cousins in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, which made him realise that the media

²³¹ Interview with Hoda, 54, housewife (middle degree in business studies), Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

²³² Interview with Ayman, 30, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

was lying²³³. If Internet access, widespread in southern cities, is scarcer in villages, it does not prevent most youth (generally up until their forties) from having at least an account on Facebook, another increasingly important source of information.

3.2. Protests threatening stability and Upper Egyptians' fatigue towards the "revolution"

How have conspiracy theories and media propaganda contributed to ordinary citizens' mass demobilisation or weaker mobilisation since July 2013? In addition to turning the majority away from opponents of the "revolution" or the Muslim Brotherhood, and from protests in general as detailed in chapter 6, they have exploited most Egyptians' lassitude after years of political and economic crisis. In particular, the new authorities have succeeded in presenting protests as troublemaking and threatening Egypt's national security and stability. This constituted a strategy to prevent further dissent complementary to the violent suppression of street protests and the legal tool provided by the protest law to justify the crackdown on opponents. The media had already played an important role in mobilising against President Morsi ahead of June-July 2013 mass demonstrations, exciting public anger towards the MB, exploiting the then daily power cuts, and directly encouraging citizens to participate in protests (see chapter 6). In the aftermath of the uprising, they were similarly active, but this time in deterring collective action. In addition to describing pro-MB protests as exclusively violent, they aimed to respond to most ordinary people's quest for stability and security and capitalise on the popular discontent caused by three years of economic turmoil, political instability and rising delinquency in a country unused to it. They also glorified the respectability and patriotism of those citizens who did not disturb the wheel of production, emphasising the destructive character of protests. At the opposite, they blamed those protesting, and therefore disturbing public order. Protests were often, justifiably or not, associated with destruction. In addition, the mainstream media tended to exaggerate incidents affecting the security situation across the country, recycling former President Mubarak's discourse "either me or chaos". In Al-Hajindiyya, residents regretted the end of the Mubarak era because they used to feel safe, which was no longer the case. They told me that they feared security problems, making security a priority, while admitting that there was no insecurity in their village.

²³³ Interview with Hassan, 35, bazar employee, Aswan, February 2014.

In accordance with this discourse making dissent since January 2011 the source of Egypt's instability, many respondents denounced protests as threats to national stability. The official propaganda succeeded in portraying protests as the source of Egypt's instability and increasing insecurity. Now that protesters were depicted as violent and soon called "terrorists", they were blamed for the continuous economic turmoil and tourists' persisting avoidance of Egypt. While many ordinary citizens praised the "bread, freedom and social justice" revolutionary slogan, they generally insisted on bread and social justice. Freedom seemed not to be a priority, contrary to stability and security. Many people said they regretted the Mubarak-era for its stability and security. "Democracy" was almost a swear word, and part of a foreign conspiracy aiming at enslaving Egypt. In Upper Egypt, the 25 January "revolution" was blamed for an unprecedentedly long crisis in the tourism sector and a further deterioration of public services. This explains that protests, whether organised by political opponents or workers, were almost systematically denounced in Luxor, where tourism constitutes the first economic sector of activity. Stability was seen as a precondition for tourists' return, while Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was often seen as the providential man able to reverse this situation. Yet, tourist workers were not always against protesting. Many of them had taken to the streets in June 2013, when President Morsi appointed as governor of Luxor an al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya leader, who allegedly participated in the 1997 massacre of tourists. They also participated in the demonstrations that eventually ousted Morsi.

The official discourse linking instability to protests and the revolution succeeded in convincing many other ordinary Egyptians that protests had to stop in order to achieve stability. Hamdi, a 33-year-old teacher based in Kom Ombo, was now against protests. He believed there was no more reason to go to the streets now that there was a political roadmap: "*now I ban protesting for the destiny of the country to go on*"²³⁴. In addition, he was proud about having learnt how to solve problems without staging protests, explaining: "*I protest to oppose, whereas I participate in the elections in order to build*"²³⁵. After leading a protest movement to demand permanent posts and a minimum wage for teachers in 2011, Hamdi successfully positioned himself as a credible negotiator with the local authorities. He was now acting as a mediator for others and served, for example, as an intermediary when garbage collectors went on strike in 2014 in Kom

²³⁴ Interview with Hamdi, 33, school teacher, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Ombo. In addition to his connections at the governorate level, Hamdi was anxious to preserve good relations with security services. I was interviewing him in the cafeteria of the Kom Ombo Temple, when he interrupted the meeting to go greet and reassure officers of the State Security Investigations Service who were sitting a few tables away.

The quest for stability also partly explains the weak solidarity with most protests by workers, also seen as relatively privileged in comparison with those devoid of a stable activity. I will elaborate on that in chapter 6. For now, it is sufficient to say that the discourse blaming protests for chronic instability, combined with the repression of all political oppositions, affected ordinary people's levels of mobilisation and chosen repertoires of contention. In addition, ordinary people often expressed a preference for the security of something they knew rather than the instability of a revolutionary situation. Even though they were not always fully happy with the new regime, many really thought that after successfully getting rid of President Morsi, a new era of stability and prosperity would begin. This prompted them to demobilise since “feelings of pride and satisfaction in the attainment of movement goals can encourage demobilisation”²³⁶.



Figure 3.3: Campaign poster saying yes to the 2013 constitution because “it ends the transitional phase and brings stability back to Egypt”, Aswan, January 2014.

²³⁶ Ronald R. Aminzade and Doug McAdam, “Emotions and Contentious Politics”, in Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3.3. Local protest movements' vulnerability to co-optation strategies: the case of a short strike by garbage collectors in Kom Ombo

One of the trends that the 25 January 2011 uprising apparently encouraged is the youth's increasing interest in getting involved in local and national politics. But this has not meant a systematic commitment to the idea of a radical, "revolutionary" change. Not everyone has agreed on the way to achieve the ideals of "bread, freedom, social justice". Many activists, especially at the local level, have sought to work within the rules of the current authoritarian regime²³⁷. In particular, many youths previously involved in Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) have been seeking a greater participation in activities aiming at improving living conditions in their communities. They have deliberately chosen to work within the system in order to benefit from the networks and resources of government entities and be able to do concrete things and deliver services. I develop this in chapter 4, which is about local activists. For now, I am interested in the way these local activists can participate in co-optation mechanisms that contribute to containing protests.

In Kom Ombo, in February 2013 and again in March 2014, garbage collectors went on strike over three main demands in addition to clothes and better equipment: being appointed permanently and obtaining the same rights and benefits as permanent workers, earning the minimum wage, and enjoying the status of other public sector workers and salary equality with their colleagues in Aswan. This demand for equality with their regional colleagues was described by most respondents as more important than minimum wage. This was also due to minimum wage being seen by many as a demand less likely to be met. Minimum wage "was given to people sitting under air conditioners, and not to people working in the field"²³⁸, according to a garbage collector. Another one explained that they had gone on strike in the hope to obtain what they wanted, as others had succeeded this way before:

"The Water and Agriculture Company staged a strike, and they obtained pay increases. The sugar factory went on strike and they got pay increases and permanent jobs. The electricity also in the same way. Real estate also in the same way. Today there

²³⁷ See Nadine Abdalla, "Youth movements in the Egyptian transformation: strategies and repertoires of political participation", *Mediterranean Politics*, 21:1, 2016, 44-63.

²³⁸ Interview with Muhammad A., 44, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

*is nothing except when you stage a strike. Everyone went on strike in the same way [...] All factories staged strikes... we are the only ones who have not obtained permanent jobs or money increases. But we still hope for the best”.*²³⁹

There was a 100% participation rate in the strike, a new escalation after the previous February 2013 strike. Garbage collectors and their colleagues said they had ended their strike because streets were dirty. Yet, they had not obtained results other than promises that their demands would be examined, with no specific dates or terms. Local officials, whether at the City Council or the Aswan governorate, shirked all responsibility, saying such an issue was not in their hands, that only the central government could answer their demands²⁴⁰, and that there was no money²⁴¹. One of the garbage collectors denounced that they were not given receipts of their wages, which made them unable to prove how much they were being paid exactly. This prevented them from proving to officials that their colleagues in Aswan and elsewhere received higher pays, and those who publicly revealed how much they earned could end up on a “blacklist”²⁴². This shows how officials use workers’ fear to lose their jobs, as well as their inability to provide evidence of wage inequalities, to delay pay increases.

Garbage collectors had suspended their strike not only out of fear of residents becoming ill but also because they had been pushed to do so by a number of pro-government activists mediating between them and the government. A garbage collector remembered that members of *Mustaqbal Watan* had told them that they should keep working, while on their side they got in touch with the governorate to raise their demands²⁴³. According to several workers that I interviewed, “youth” from the then pro-Sisi *Mustaqbal Watan* campaign had stood by their side, praising their cause at the governorate and helping them getting access to officials. However, they all agreed that this mediation had not succeeded in obtaining what they demanded yet. In Kom Ombo, *Mustaqbal Watan* was then led by Hamdi, a primary school teacher I previously mentioned. Hamdi claimed he had “solved” the garbage collectors’ issue, no more, no less. He explained that with his colleagues they had mediated between the garbage collectors and the governorate via their political

²³⁹ Interview with Erkabi, 48, driver at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Muhammad A., 44, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

²⁴¹ Interview with Erkabi, 48, driver at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

²⁴² Interview with Muhammad K., 30, supervisor at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

²⁴³ Ibid.

connections to make sure negotiations would take place and demands were communicated²⁴⁴. However, he did not specify what they had achieved. In this case, it seems that young pro-regime activists' intervention has contributed to containing the garbage collectors' strikes. Their ability to reach local authorities made them trustworthy and credible interlocutors, inciting workers to wait for promises to be fulfilled. At the same time, they successfully prevented the movement from escalating. Garbage collectors said that apart from these activists, no one had helped them.



Figure 3.4: Posters of the pro-Sisi campaign *Mustaqbal Watan* campaigning for the “yes” to the new constitution, displayed in the office of the garbage collectors in Kom Ombo, April 2014.

Muhammad A., a 44-year-old garbage collector, said the NDP was still present in each household in the area²⁴⁵. However, Muhammad A. and his colleagues were not necessarily linking NDP remnants to *Mustaqbal Watan*. For instance, Khaled, a 43-year-old head of sector at the cleaning company, said he had rejected several offers to join the NDP because they were not good in the area. On the contrary, he intended to join

²⁴⁴ Interview with Hamdi, 33, school teacher, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Muhammad A., 44, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

Mustaqbal Watan, a group of good, reassuring faces, that wanted to help the country and especially the youth. He confirmed they had connections at the governorate level and could make you sit with officials, without always being able to force the latter to do anything. He praised their involvement in the garbage collectors' issue:

*"They began to appear with us on the picture, here in Kom Ombo... they came to Aswan with us... they chose to provide the service first, so that we join them afterwards"*²⁴⁶.

In sum, local pro-government activists such as Hamdi, involved in the pro-Sisi *Mustaqbal Watan* campaign, have contributed to discouraging garbage collectors from escalating their strikes. It remains to be seen whether their intervention manages to obtain all of what the striking garbage collectors had demanded. In April 2015, I called Muhammad A. for an update on the situation. He said that their situation was better and that some of them had obtained permanent positions.

4. The case of a limited mobilisation without challenging the authorities: Nagaa Abdel Qader residents' fight for drinking water

It is a hot day of May 2014 in the village of Nagaa Abdel Qader, near Dishna, in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Qena. I am having tea with some elders of the village. We are talking about recurrent, prolonged drinking water cuts, the area's main problem, which often compels residents to walk various kilometres to other villages to get water. The conversation sometimes slips to political matters, with my hosts expressing their hope to see the army and future President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi fix Egypt's problems and restore a long awaited stability after more than three years of turmoil. What strikes me is these men's indulgence and even loyalty towards the authorities despite, in my view, the latter's persisting failure to provide the village with the most vital public service. Buying bottled water is too expensive for the mainly low-income residents of Nagaa Abdel Qader. Water cuts consequently meant that people could not drink, wash, irrigate farmland or take care of cattle, entailing a higher risk of dehydration, deplorable hygiene and the impossibility for farmers to make a living. I wondered how the villagers could tolerate

²⁴⁶ Interview with Khaled, 43, head of sector at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

such an unbearable situation, especially in summer, and why they remained loyal to politicians that had been unable to end it.

In Luxor, I met Mahmud Al-Desuqi, a journalist based in Dishna, in the province of Qena. He publishes in state-run al-Ahram and Dishna al-Yom newspapers. He covered various water crises in Nagaa Abdel Qader, and told me about protests that had taken place in the village of Nagaa Abdel Qader. I consequently decided to visit the village with a journalist and colleague of Mahmud in Dishna.

Nagaa Abdel Qader looks like many other Upper Egyptian villages. Houses, all similar, have generally no more than one floor, include two or three rooms, and still look relatively new. The village was indeed entirely rebuilt further up in 1994 following floods that destroyed original constructions. It looks peaceful, especially during hot hours. Streets are calm and cars are scarce. However, an attentive visitor could notice one particularity. From time to time, a child on a donkey passes by with a jerrycan. Children of all ages, boys and girls, as well as old people, would go at any time of the day to the drinking water tank at the entrance of the village, hoping to find some of the precious liquid for their homes. They would often come back with their jerrycans empty, or have to walk several kilometres in the heat to another water tanker. In Nagaa Adel Qader, recurrent and long-lasting water shortages have been an enduring curse, especially in summer. They have occurred since April 1996, according to residents.

In Nagaa Abdel Qader, residents have long been suffering from the multiple consequences of these frequent shortages of tap water. The latter have aggravated both in their extent and in frequency since the January-February 2011 uprising. They have been limiting land cultivation, threatening cattle' survival and deteriorating hygiene conditions. Nagaa Abdel Qader was conceived as an agricultural village. But water scarcity has considerably reduced its agricultural potential, while farmers have been desperately watching many of their animals die from thirst. Despite the availability of agricultural land, many men had to seek jobs outside the village, and were employed as drivers or temporary workers at the sugar factory in nearby Dishna. Furthermore, when available, tap water was not always clean. Various health issues related to water, including cases of renal failure, have been reported. More importantly and urgently, water

shortages have been condemning the 7,000²⁴⁷ residents of the village to thirst, particularly during hot summers. This has even led some of them to drink the water of local canals²⁴⁸.

[This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 3.5: Young girl on a donkey carrying a jerrycan, on her way to or coming from a water tank. In the background, an elder of the village. Nagaa Abdel Qader, May 2014.

It is only after the 2011 uprising that residents started to take initiatives to make themselves heard. One of the worst, prolonged crises took place in June-July 2011, with water shortages lasting several weeks. While the water tank of the village was empty, residents had to walk several kilometres to fetch water from surrounding villages. Officials at the governorate level did nothing, while the *'umda*²⁴⁹ had expressed his powerlessness. Residents essentially directed their anger towards the local branch of the National Water and Sanitation Company, filing a lawsuit. They also organised a petition in June 2011, followed by a protest under the scorching sun at the water tank in the

²⁴⁷ Some media sources quote 3,000 people, a figure that I could not independently verify.

²⁴⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTXEwYyiJb0>.

²⁴⁹ In many villages in Upper Egypt, the *'umda* or mayor remains an intermediary between villagers and higher authorities. In practice, he may be a respected figure without real power.

village²⁵⁰. Residents testing this “new” way to pressure the authorities did not demand anything but drinking water. They did not criticise the local authorities or the government. However, this movement, which essentially aimed at attracting the media and authorities’ attention, had little visibility apart from some brief newspaper reports in al-Ahram and Dishna al-Yom²⁵¹. No permanent solution was raised to a structural problem affecting many other villages in the governorate and elsewhere in Egypt, and despite the recurrence of similar crises. Even during the presidential elections of May 2014, media reported a low turnout in the village, as residents were busy getting water²⁵². Despite shortages, the only place in the village where water was available during the elections was a school transformed into a polling station, suggesting that residents may have abstained from voting in protest against this situation²⁵³. The media also reported water cuts persisting for several days and weeks during the 2014 and 2015 summers. On 5 August 2015, reporters at the local newspaper Dishna al-Yom posted a video on YouTube showing residents angry at the burning of the water tank’s engine, and denouncing officials’ inaction²⁵⁴.

Without openly criticising the authorities, residents of Nagaa Abdel Qader defended their fight for water as a legitimate cause while widely denouncing their marginalisation. As in many Upper Egyptian villages and remote areas, they complained about the state’s neglect and ignorance of their problems, saying they had been completely abandoned: “*Why? Aren’t we Egyptians?*”, one of them wondered. Another resident told me that even the dead had water. According to another one, no one has taken care of Upper Egypt since Nasser’s era. Residents have been increasingly demanding the attention and support of the media, civil society organisations and local authorities. Despite efforts to publicise their cause, they were claiming no one had come to visit them, whether the governor, the head of the City Council or others. Officials had made promises, without taking any steps.

²⁵⁰ As explained below, I experienced difficulties in gathering data about the protests from the residents I met. The media reported at least one protest against water shortages in Nagaa Abdel Qader in June 2011: <http://www.masress.com/ahramgate/84091>.

²⁵¹ Apart from Mahmud Al-Desuqi and his colleague, I have not been made aware of other journalists covering water issues in Nagaa Abdel Qader.

²⁵² “Bisabab inshighālhom bitawfīr al-miya limanāzilhom.. lagna ‘15’ biQena tashhad taṣwīt 40 muwaṭāninan faqat” (“Because they were busy providing water to their homes.. Station ‘15’ in Qena sees the votes of only 40 citizens”), by Mahmud Al-Desuqi, *al-Ahram*, 26 May 2014:

<http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/496848.aspx>.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ty5bjFIdk4U>.

Residents largely expressed their scepticism towards politicians, who were perceived as looking for their own interests.

When I visited Nagaa Abdel Qader in May 2014, residents were no longer organising demonstrations to voice their demands. Their mobilisation now focused on legal steps rather than on street protests. After the fall of President Morsi, most protests became assimilated with an opposition to the government, sometimes framed as an association with the Muslim Brotherhood's protest movement. Despite the unsolved, long-lasting problem of drinking water shortages, the people I met in Nagaa Abdel Qader remained resolutely reluctant to escalate their action. They expressed a will to go exclusively through what they perceived as the official channels, therefore privileging the legal path and allowing media coverage. Protests never intensified despite a clear deterioration of the situation, combined with frequent electricity cuts compelling people to stay indoors after the dark. Nagaa Abdel Qader residents' mobilisation against water cuts never escalated beyond the geographical framework of the village. I saw no signs of local or external brokers' involvement, while residents never organised protests outside the village, which limits the visibility of their contestation. Indeed, organising protests outside the village and gathering higher numbers of people entailed the risk to send a message that could be wrongly interpreted by the authorities as political dissent. On the contrary, village elders leading the water issue, mainly retired workers in their sixties with a basic school education, expressed their full support for, and loyalty to, the authorities. How can we explain this continuing support? Why have residents of Nagaa Abdel Qader remained loyal to the authorities despite the persistence of water cuts?

The particular context prevailing during my fieldwork suggests why the men I met in Nagaa Abdel Qader expressed a certain embarrassment towards public protests and the possibility to escalate a confrontation with the authorities. Despite that they had participated in protests in the past, protest was now for them a swear word, a synonym of violence, and/or an insult to the ruler(s), which could not be tolerated. Ahmed, a 49-year-old blacksmith, explained that he avoided demonstrations because he was a "respectful" person²⁵⁵. Contrary to his elders (see below), he showed no particular interest in politics or parties, was rather annoyed by my questions, and actually left in the middle of the meeting. Even the local reporters at Dishna al-Yom and al-Ahram covering water issues

²⁵⁵ Interview with Ahmed, 49, blacksmith, Nagaa Abdel Qader (Qena), May 2014.

in the region showed reticence when I asked them about past protests. This embarrassment was not surprising since many people were afraid to talk due to the repressive context that prevailed at the time, as all forms of political opposition were being crushed. However, when I insisted, Nagaa Abdel Qader residents admitted that they had participated in protests in the past, at least against the Muslim Brotherhood in June 2013 and once in the village to denounce water shortages. In the last case, they strongly insisted on the peaceful character of the protest, which was mainly a way to attract attention on this issue, while emphasising the apolitical nature of their demand. They were not really qualifying their protests as contentious. They wanted to avoid a confrontation with the authorities at any price, claiming their support for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for president, hoping to obtain some change through his election. On the other hand, my interlocutors were more willing to talk about their participation in anti-MB protests in Dishna and Qena in June and July 2013, seeing them as legitimate. In particular, village elders expressed a strong hostility towards the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi, blamed for the persisting deterioration of public services, including fuel shortages, electricity and water cuts. However, as I mentioned above, water shortages went back to long before Morsi's arrival to the presidency, and lasted several weeks in summer 2015 in Nagaa Abdel Qader as elsewhere in the Qena governorate, while the Muslim Brotherhood could no longer be blamed.

The loyalty of the most influential village householders towards the government, and thus its local representatives, seems to partly explain the weak mobilisation in the water issue. One of my interlocutors mentioned that he had a family of eight, including one of his sons who had been home since his graduation in 2003, while the others were still being educated. He explained that he had been delaying a much-needed surgery for more than year, waiting from some local officials to help him get financial assistance to be able to do it. This suggests that the loyalty to the authorities might be motivated by the provision of services, at least individually. Village elders and local tribal leaders might be co-opted by higher authorities. However, I could not dig into this issue since I did not have the opportunity to conduct more thorough research in the village. Indeed, when I asked, through the mediation of journalist Mahmud Al-Desuqi, if I could come back to the village in spring 2015 to conduct more research on water issues, I was told that I was welcome at the condition of having an authorisation from security forces. People were obviously anxious and did not want to provoke any conflict with the authorities, while

perhaps lacking trust in my intentions. Conspiracy theories involving “foreign agents”, including academics, remained common at the time, and my interlocutors in Nagaa Abdel Qader said they watched some of the TV channels or programmes known for spreading these views²⁵⁶.

A more social factor potentially encouraging or discouraging people to mobilise is the solidarity among villagers. Whatever they decide, everyone usually commits to the entire group’ stance. Loyalty to the group, sometimes itself loyal to external actors, appears determinant in mobilisation and demobilisation processes. Nagaa Abdel Qader has several public spaces potentially appropriate for political socialisation, including a social club and a “house of events”. In such places, elders and youth, mainly men, discuss issues of interest for the whole community. In addition to elders’ homes, it is essentially in these places that householders have decided on protests and other actions related to water shortages. It is also there that many signatures for the *Tamarrod* campaign were collected. Loyalty to the community, whether to the extended family, the village or the tribe, plays a role in the organisation of collective actions (see chapter 5). Ahmed confirmed that even voting at elections was influenced by the stance of the group. In addition, tribal allegiances remain strong in Nagaa Abdel Qader and condition many political behaviours. The only Facebook page mentioning the village is called “Nagaa Abdel Qader youth” (*Shabab Nagaa Abdel Qader*) and mainly supports the Hawara tribe, one of Qena region’s prominent historical tribes. It shows pictures of young men carrying weapons in an apparent attempt to intimidate potential rival tribes, especially the Arab tribe, another important one in the area.

In Nagaa Abdel Qader as elsewhere in Upper Egypt, elders’ authority is rarely directly questioned. This is reflected in the attitude of Zakaria, a 38-year-old driver, who was embarrassed by the presence of his elders when I asked him about his political opinions, and told me almost nothing. In Nagaa Abdel Qader, rather conservative elders are the true leaders and decision-makers of the village. Gomaa, 64, used to be a petty merchant. Having himself only primary education, he talks about his children’s higher education with pride. He is one of the elders of the village who has been leading actions to re-establish tap water. He is politicised, and was a member of the Arab Democratic Nasserist

²⁵⁶ Such as Tawfiq Okasha’s programme on al-Faraeen channel or, more recently, Ahmed Moussa’s talk show on Sada al-Balad.

Party²⁵⁷, which he left shortly after the 2011 uprising because it saw it as an old party. Gomaa seems to have played an important role in mobilising his neighbours against the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2013, he collected signatures for *Tamarrod* and participated in protests against the Muslim Brotherhood in Dishna and at the governorate headquarters in Qena. He said he was informed about the protests by acquaintances, including members of al-Karama Party²⁵⁸. More recently, Gomaa collected signatures for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for president's campaign "Continue your duty" (*Kammel Gamilak*)²⁵⁹.

Gamee, 62, illiterate, used to be a driver but stopped working twenty years ago due to health issues. He hates the Muslim Brothers, whom he considers as traitors. According to him, they were not good people since Gamal Abdel Nasser's time. He voted for Ahmed Shafiq at the 2012 presidential elections. He thinks Morsi was the president of the Muslim Brotherhood, whereas he should have been the president of all Egyptians. Under his rule, terrorists of Hamas and Hezbollah were released from prison, put in Sinai, and left to divide Egypt, according to him. Gamee confirmed the Brotherhood was present in the area, used to give cooking gas tubes only to its supporters, and utilised people's ignorance to buy their votes. According to him, even Israel was better than the MB. Gamee supported Abdel Fattah al-Sisi but warned that the people would rise against him if he did like the MB, and that this time it would be more violent. Nostalgic about the Nasser era, Gamee said Sisi should look at the poor, peasants and Upper Egypt. In addition to his apparent allergy towards the MB, Gamee seemed to subscribe to conspiracy theories, and considered Muhammad al-Baradei a traitor who had financed the April 6 Youth Movement.

Nagaa Abdel Qader elders remained resolute Mubarak supporters, for whom they used to vote and whom they regretted. They had supported him during the 2011 uprising, which they thought was a conspiracy driven by the US and the April 6 Youth Movement. One of them even confessed having cried when Mubarak announced his departure. They all saw the former president as a respectable man, blaming his entourage for all the crimes. They naturally intended to vote for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in 2014. Like many people, they

²⁵⁷ It was founded in 1984.

²⁵⁸ Founded in 1996, this other Nasserist Party used to be headed by former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi.

²⁵⁹ The campaign, which gathered supports for Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's presidential bid in autumn 2013 and winter 2014, has a Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/KamelGmeilak/info/?tab=page_info.

saw the latter as a saviour, a patriot, and the only trustworthy leader able to rule Egypt at the time. They had opposed the MB and actively contributed to the *Tamarrod* campaign in the village. Overall, they displayed a paradoxical view of protest actions. While being discrete about the small demonstrations they organised in the village to demand drinking water, they seemed proud of their participation in the mass protests that led to President Morsi's ouster. In order to justify this participation, residents claimed they had suffered under the latter's presidency. Ahmed and Gamee mentioned a huge increase in the price of Diesel fuel, affecting their activities. Zakaria claimed he sometimes had to wait two days to get gasoline amid severe shortages. Although apparently paradoxical, their view of protests is consistent with the then dominant narrative giving an important share to conspiracy theories, glorifying the army's patriotism in the fight against "terrorism", denouncing the drifts of the 25 January uprising, qualifying al-Baradei and the 6 April Youth Movement of being traitors, and so on. Now that the Muslim Brotherhood had been replaced by what they saw as true patriots, there was no more reason to go to the streets. In short, while remaining active in the water issue and lobbying for its resolution, Nagaa Abdel Qader elders did not want to risk their relationship with the authorities, and apparently with local officials. This is ultimately a case where no mistrust towards the authorities has been directly expressed, a fact that may come either from village elders' will to remain loyal to the authorities in exchange for services and hopefully a solution to water shortages, or simply their fear to talk about it in front of me.

5. Conclusion: assessing state strategies to prevent protests' expansion

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate the efficiency of a number of state strategies other than or along with the direct repression of protests and opponents in containing popular mobilisations since July 2013 in Egypt. I have particularly suggested how media propaganda and local co-optation strategies successfully deterred most protest ambitions, without necessarily undoing all forms of mobilisation. I have tried to demonstrate that the borders between mobilisation and demobilisation are porous, especially when we are dealing with instances of discontinuous activism. Indeed, both are the product of dynamic relationships interacting with a constantly evolving political environment.

Beyond the multiform repression persisting since July 2013, the people I met in the governorates of Aswan, Luxor and Qena, expressed a big fatigue towards protests and the 25 January “revolution”, perceived as the main source of political and economic instability. In particular, the authorities and the media have never ceased to portray most public protests as violent and destabilising the country’s stability. The official propaganda has successfully damaged in the eyes of many ordinary people the image of labour protests, pro-MB dissent and the “revolution” altogether. Therefore, not only have state strategies of containment been largely effective in discouraging popular mobilisations, but they have also turned many ordinary people against protests in general. This hostility towards protests was largely expressed by Nagaa Abdel Qader village elders, who also refused to openly challenge the authorities. Their reluctance to escalate their contestation against drinking water shortages also suggested a certain dose of co-optation. Local strategies of co-optation similarly limited the extent and duration of Kom Ombo garbage collectors’ strike. In the next chapter about leadership challenges, I more systematically explore how the same state tactics of containment have influenced movement leaders’ strategies, partly making them self-restrained and more cautious in their moves.



Figure 3.6: The village of Al-Hajindiyya, Aswan governorate, in February 2014.

Chapter 4: The vicissitudes of leadership

1. Introduction: Leaders' indispensability

When I started my fieldwork in Aswan in January 2014, I first contacted local social and political activists. However, my goal was to get to know, through their intermediary, those people that I call ordinary, occasional protesters, unprofessional activists, who engage in contentious politics on very rare occasions and for specific motives. The purpose was to understand their rationale for mobilisation and reconstitute their path to direct participation in episodes of contention. Therefore, the “professional” activists I met did not constitute my primary concern. However, they quickly emerged as essential political actors whose initiatives and strategies greatly affected the course of most contentious episodes, and this despite the fact that they operated in extremely constrained conditions since the July 2013 military coup. In Aswan in particular, I found a multitude of activists' networks implanted in their communities in a relatively solid manner, that played a role in popular mobilisations, including those related to communal concerns. Many of them had a rich history of activism in the region, especially since the 2011 uprising. Their role deserves a place in this research well beyond the mediation and help they offered me to enter into contact with more ordinary protesters.

Contrary to common stories about allegedly spontaneous protests (Polletta 2009), episodes of contention are rarely completely unplanned. Even when their organisation is basic and crowds do not seem to follow particular directions, protests do not come out of nowhere. It is true that they do not systematically correspond to the ideal-type of the orderly procession led by well-identified organisers. However, protests are generally the result of the choices of strategies and efforts to mobilise of more or less recognised leaders. At the local level, an identified leadership is particularly essential, especially for mobilisations that do not follow particular national campaigns or episodes of contention that are advertised in the media. Chapter 2 showed how the involvement of more or less experienced political or social activists in protest movements against deteriorating public services enhanced their visibility and opened up chances to engage in talks with decision-makers. Against the so-called spontaneity of local protests, this chapter aims to demonstrate the indispensable character of leadership in local mobilisation processes, its intrinsic weaknesses, as well as its resourceful adaption to difficult conditions. How does

leadership affect levels of (de)mobilisation? Why do some vicissitudes of leadership prevent local protests from expanding?

This chapter attempts to explain how strategies adopted by movement leaders are key in shaping the course of protest movements. It argues that protests often remain localised because leaders rarely attempt to coordinate with others sharing similar grievances elsewhere. For instance, leaders may fight for a normal provision of drinking water in their village or neighbourhood, without relating shortages to a countrywide problem of procurement that may require structural reforms. Most local protests have usually been short-lived, and even when they turned into prolonged sit-ins, protesters have almost systematically gone home once demands were met, some concessions obtained or, in most cases, when local authorities agreed to begin negotiations. The general emphasis on local concerns has limited dissent, enabling local authorities to contain protest movements, isolate them geographically, and solve them on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, a handful of citizens, as angry as they are, do not risk worrying anyone when they stage a momentary protest in their remote village.

Apart from some initiatives to publicise their causes, protest leaders have rarely attempted to transcend the local level and export their contestation through, for instance, launching nationwide campaigns and coordinating actions with people suffering from the same ills elsewhere. They have not addressed the structural causes at the macro level of issues such as the energy crisis, or poor electricity and water infrastructure. This lack of motivation and limited national projection may come from divisions within the activist community, lacking experience in coordinating at a higher scale, a priority given to local pressing matters, personal political ambitions implying strategies to become known and respected locally, or co-optation by local authorities. However, beyond these factors, there is often the high cost of opposition activism in a repressive environment, as well as subtler state strategies to contain all forms of political dissent (see chapter 3). In addition, characteristics of the local political culture such as, in the Upper Egyptian context, ordinary people's mistrust of politicians combined with their expectation of services in exchange for their potential support, may constrain leaders' options.

Firstly, I describe the diverse profiles of leaders and protest organisers that I have met in southern Upper Egypt, including community leaders, political representatives and

established political and social activists. I also refer to the informal networks activists have been able to rely on to mobilise, sketching a non-exhaustive typology and emphasising the formation of new connections through various instances of mobilisation. I then analyse the myriad of strategies leaders have implemented, distinguishing those that privilege local matters from those seeking coordination at a wider level. The latter include joining a political party, a nationwide movement or campaign, while the local provision of services and joining local welfare associations generally belong to the first category. I show how various motivations and constraints lead to different strategies, through a comparison between opposition and pro-government activists. I establish that leaders' popularity and credibility's reliance on their ability to provide services has constituted a serious obstacle to many activists, especially those who have no access to government resources and networks. While many local activists have complained about their lack of resources to enhance their base through providing services, others have abided by the existing rules and therefore supported the authorities locally to have access to government resources. I suggest the different ways leaders deal with loyalties built thanks to the provision of services and logics of patronage. I finally use the trajectory of Aswan's *Lamm al-shaml* initiative, launched by a local activist to gather different people around common communal demands, to illustrate some of the different factors behind the containment of most local mobilisations. This case mainly shows how local social divisions and political differences among activists are hard to overcome, potentially preventing wider gatherings. Despite being imperfect, such initiatives have appeared as useful laboratories for activists to conceive new ways of doing politics locally, pursue their political socialisation, and perhaps acquire some leadership skills.

2. Local leaders and activist networks

In the Upper Egyptian context, who are the local leaders, mobilising agents and potential or actual protest organisers? Whether community leaders (village elders, tribal leaders...), political representatives (members of Parliament, local council members, governorate officials, former members of the ruling NDP), more or less known and respected social or political activists, all have an ability to mobilise others for a particular purpose, including for protests. Often members in several formal organisations and informal networks, leaders of protest movements and activists in general rely on multiple local solidarity mechanisms to mobilise. Knowing the difficult context in which they

sometimes operate, especially since President Morsi's fall in 2013, what are activists' motivations to act? How do they operate? What are their relationships with more ordinary citizens? What challenges have they been facing? Based on the portraits and trajectories of several activists I met in Aswan and Luxor, this chapter attempts to shed light on their networks, activities, motivations, challenges and weaknesses. The purpose is not to establish a history or a map of activism in the region, but to give a glimpse of the diversity of profiles, before studying activists' strategies to engage with matters of national or local concern and mobilise support.

2.1. Local activists' profiles

In southern Upper Egypt as elsewhere, there is great diversity within the social and political activist community. There are firstly members in national movements, whether political parties, NGOs, human rights organisations or youth movements. "Revolutionary" groups such as the April 6 Youth Movement and the former Revolution Youth Coalition (Ittilaf Shabab Al-Thawra) generally used to have branches or at least a coordinator or representative in provinces. Most traditional political parties remain present in southern Upper Egypt, including the leftist Nasserist Al-Karama and Al-Tagammu. Some of the parties that emerged after 25 January 2011, including Muhammad al-Baradei's Constitution Party (Hizb Al-Distur) and Hamdeen Sabbahi's Popular Current (Al-Tayyar Al-Shaabi), also opened branches in Upper Egypt, but have so far essentially failed to attract support beyond a certain section of the youth. Some important human rights organisations are also present, such as the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC), which has an office in Aswan, while other Cairo-based NGOs have coordinators or representatives across the provinces.

In the wake of the 2011 uprising, many new and older "revolutionary" movements that were mainly formed by activists in Cairo established branches in the provinces, including in Upper Egypt. Nabil founded branches of the 6 April Youth Movement not only in his hometown of Luxor but also in Qena, Sohag, Aswan and Hurghada. He remains at the head of the Luxor branch, as well as the main coordinator of the movement in southern Upper Egypt. At 37 years old, Nabil has been unemployed for several years despite a long professional experience in business management and a bachelor's degree in commerce. He remains unmarried and lives with his parents. In addition to his personal account,

Nabil manages the Facebook page of the local branch of the 6 April Youth Movement, as well as *Ibn al-Nil* (the son of the Nile), a personal page where he posts articles on mainly local stories of human rights violations, corruption cases and so on. As of late April 2016, he has 3,528 ‘likes’ on the latter. Even though he has largely stopped planning and attending protests since the adoption of the November 2013 protest law, he keeps reporting and sharing many issues, which makes him a permanent target for security services. Like many opposition political activists, Nabil could be arrested at any time under any pretext, including inciting protests, threatening national security, spreading false news, or simply belonging to a banned organisation since the 6 April Youth Movement was prohibited by a court verdict in April 2015. But this does not prevent him from constantly denouncing government violations.

As many Upper Egyptian experienced activists, Nabil first entered the world of politics in the 2000s when he frequently spent time in Cairo. He was a witness to most mobilisations demanding change at the time, including Kifaya and the April 6 Youth Movement, but did not attend demonstrations. He became more interested in politics in 2007, when Facebook started to spread in Egypt:

“When Facebook started to open in 2007, there were only 100 people... a very little portion used to talk about politics. I was among these people. I liked to air the corruption of the state...Of course, I had to face many friends telling me to stay away... At this time, we started to know people in the political world”²⁶⁰.

Nabil started to write articles, including on corruption issues, and share them on Facebook, which was also a platform for discussions on diverse political topics. Social media also gave him a way to form new networks. He explained that at the time there were only three interesting political movements that he could join: Kifaya, which, according to him, was controlled by old people; Muhammad al-Baradei’s National Association for Change (NAC), which, still according to him, had started to decline when several members of the April 6 Youth Movement left it; and the 6 April Youth Movement. In 2010, he chose to join the latter because of its majority of young people, decentralised structure, defence of an independent speech, gathering of diverse trends and ideologies, and internal democracy. On 25 January 2011, anticipating that demonstrations would not

²⁶⁰ Interview with Nabil, 36, unemployed (Bachelor in business studies), Luxor, March 2015.

gather large crowds in his city as calls on social media had remained largely unanswered, he chose to stay home and share everything he heard on Facebook. Then he participated in protests in Luxor from 28 January, and gradually became known during these days of the “revolution”. Many people now had his number and used to call him to know daily protests’ itineraries, and join with their acquaintances. He gathered a group of people who had protested with him during the uprising and shared the same thinking, and they formed in April 2011 the local branch of the 6 April Youth Movement, of which he became the coordinator. By the end of 2011, he was also the main coordinator of the group in southern Upper Egypt after founding other branches in several cities. Nabil explained that the 6 April Youth Movement had been conceived as a resistance movement, mainly to oppose corruption. Therefore, it could not become a political party, as this would generate divisions beyond members having different political orientations – whether Leftists, Nationalists, Islamists, and so on.

After actively participating in gathering signatures for the *Tamarrod* campaign and mobilising for the 30 June 2013 anti-Morsi protests (see chapter 6), Nabil had bitter regrets just as many of his fellow “revolutionary” activists did. His presence at street protests essentially ceased after the adoption of the law criminalising protests in November 2013. His political activism has, since then, essentially remained online. For many of his friends and fellow activists in Luxor, Nabil remains a leader, a sort of mentor for the youngest, a man of integrity and a devoted partner for his fellows in other movements such as the Popular Current (see chapter 2). When asked about his ambitions, he hopes to have a political future.

In southern Upper Egypt, I also met a number of lawyers and human rights activists. When I arrived in Aswan in January 2014, my first move was to seek to meet Mostafa al-Hassan, a founding member of the HMLC and the director of Aswan’s branch. This small law firm comprised of four or five lawyers in Aswan plays an important role in human rights promotion through acting for local issues and defending political detainees, including Islamists and “revolutionary” activists. When it was founded in the nineties, its lawyers defended many leaders of the Islamist militant group al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya detained under the emergency law. In the 2000s, they got involved in cases related to sectarian conflicts, and marches organised by Kifaya and the 6 April Youth Movement. The law firm cooperates with Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other

international and Egyptian NGOs. HMLC has played an active role, since the 2011 uprising, in promoting and mediating the fight against Nile pollution and the Kima Canal (see chapter 2), amongst other issues. It has also defended many people, mainly Muslim Brotherhood supporters, who were arrested and sometimes tortured since the fall of President Morsi.

Lawyers at the HMLC are well-connected to the vibrant local activist community, in which they enjoy a generally good reputation. They often work in coordination with other lawyers and human rights activists as Khaled, an accountant and human rights activist from Abul Rish who has an office at the HMLC, and Ahmed R. a lawyer and representative in Aswan of the Egyptian Centre for the Economic and Social Rights²⁶¹, both active in the Kima Canal issue. They know most of the local leading activists and protesters, whom they defended on several occasions. Many of them used to have in their mobile phones an already written SMS, which would be sent automatically to HMLC lawyers if they were arrested²⁶². Thanks to the centre's main branch in Cairo and frequent travels, HMLC lawyers are also well-connected to national networks of human rights activists. Although they generally claim their political neutrality for the purpose of defending everyone²⁶³, they are rather close to liberal or secular activists. The director Mostafa al-Hassan participated in the 25 January uprising in Cairo, attending sit-ins in Tahrir Square. Between 3 and 5 February 2011, he said he was abducted with others during three days by the military intelligence, then headed by future President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Another HMLC lawyer, Wael explained:

*“It is not appropriate for me to enter any party, because the MB, the secular, come to me (everyone)... and I provide him with legal assistance [...] I can disagree with you politically, but I don't disagree with you humanly”.*²⁶⁴

Overall, lawyers at HMLC enjoyed a good reputation and obvious credibility. Their contribution to major legal cases as the one surrounding the Kima Canal is significant, as I established in chapter 2. Their commitment to human rights made them unavoidable

²⁶¹ Headed by former presidential candidate and labour activist Khaled Ali, this NGO has two main branches in Cairo and Alexandria, and a network of lawyers in provinces.

²⁶² Meeting with Mostafa al-Hassan, director of HMLC Aswan, Aswan, January 2014.

²⁶³ Lawyers claim that they provide legal assistance to anyone, regardless of political affiliations.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Wael, 28, lawyer (HMLC), Aswan, April 2015.

leaders of the local activist community, as well as important mediators to voice the grievances of subaltern populations such as Abul Rish residents.

Other activists were involved in human rights associations having or aiming at developing a regional coverage. For example, Amani, a university graduate in her mid-twenties, was a founding member of the Free Southern (Woman) Initiative (*Mubadarat Janubiyya Hurra*). As indicated on the Facebook page²⁶⁵ of the movement founded in Aswan in 2012, the purpose is to support southern women's rights. The movement is conceived as a tribune for southern feminists, who evolve in a more conservative society where the patriarchal guardianship, tribalism and various rural traditions, are usually stronger and harder to overcome than in Cairo. The initiative thus aims to address issues such as violence against women and sexual harassment, which are almost taboo in the conservative Upper Egyptian regions, as well as increase women's awareness about their political and social rights, provide psychological and legal support to the needy, and fight the "social repression"²⁶⁶ of women in Upper Egypt. The movement organises shows, training sessions, conferences and workshops to inform women about a wide range of issues (for example the constitution, violence targeting women in the private and public spheres, and so on). Amani and other founders of the initiative participated in various protests in the wake of the 2011 uprising, when not in the "revolution" itself. On these occasions, they met other women and men sharing similar concerns, and are now part of Aswan's vibrant activist community. When I met Amani in January 2014, they were about to inaugurate the initiative as a registered civil society organisation. Amani was a rare Upper Egyptian feminist activist and a true "revolutionary" in the sense that she really wanted to improve the condition of women in society. In addition to protests, Amani had been involved in the Cairo-based Nazra (Foundation) for Feminist Studies²⁶⁷ (Nazra lildirasat al-nisawiyya) and briefly joined the Socialist Popular Alliance Party²⁶⁸ (Hizb al-tahalof al-sha'bi al-ishtiraqi) before enrolling in the Bread and Freedom Party²⁶⁹ (Hizb al-'ish wal hurriyya).

²⁶⁵ https://www.facebook.com/Ganoubia/info/?entry_point=page_nav_about_item&tab=page_info.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ The feminist group has an English website: <http://nazra.org/en>.

²⁶⁸ Founded in 2011 after the uprising, this leftist party initially gathered former members of the Tagammu Party. Internal divisions led many members opposing the party's siding with the repression of the army and the police after the coup to leave in November 2013 and found the Bread and Freedom Party.

²⁶⁹ Founded in late 2013 by former members of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, it is also a leftist party promoting the goals of the 2011 "revolution".

Hani, a member of the April 6 youth Movement in Aswan, used to be involved in the South Centre for Rights (Markaz al-janub lil-haqq), an initiative founded by “revolutionary” youth and lawyers²⁷⁰ that used, since the 2011 uprising, to post on its YouTube page videos of protests and the “revolution” in southern Upper Egypt, including in Aswan, Luxor, Qena and Sohag provinces²⁷¹. As such, it constitutes a precious source of information about protests in the region, including during the 2011 and 2013 uprisings. First registered as a law firm in 2013, the South Centre for Rights registered in 2015 at the Ministry of Solidarity as the South Foundation for Economic and Social Studies (Mo’assasat al-janub lil-derasat al-iqtisadiyya wal ijtimaiyya). It now has a website²⁷² and a Facebook page²⁷³, on which it denounces Upper Egypt’s economic and social marginalisation. Aiming to defend social and economic rights, the centre has organised training sessions and conferences on various issues. For instance, it hosted in 2013 a talk about independent unions by labour activist and former presidential candidate Khaled Ali. It claims its support for peasants and workers planning to form independent unions. Hani had previously been involved in Muhammad al-Baradei’s NAC. When the 2011 uprising erupted, he was at university in Port Said. He managed to go to Tahrir Square in Cairo on 28 January 2011, and has pursued his political and social activism since then.

In Aswan province, there are also many activists dedicated to advocating the Nubian cause. Increasingly active and organised since the 2011 uprising, they are often members of the General Nubian Union or the Nubian Union of associations²⁷⁴, as well as various political parties. These organisations, and particularly the General Nubian Union in Aswan, contributed to Nubians’ mobilisation, including for the 2011 sit-in at the governorate building. While many Nubians were wary of adopting an opposition stance, some of the youngest had joined “revolutionary” movements, thus distancing themselves from elders traditionally close to Mubarak’s NDP. For instance, Olfat is a young pro-revolution lawyer involved in various political and social campaigns, not all related to the Nubian cause. Some rare renowned leaders of the Nubian cause were now resolutely in the opposition such as Fawzi, a leading member in Muhammad al-Baradei’s Constitution

²⁷⁰ The researcher Zaineb Abul-Magd was also among the founders of the initiative.

²⁷¹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/scregyl>.

²⁷² <http://sfess.org/>.

²⁷³ https://www.facebook.com/S.C.R013/info/?entry_point=page_nav_about_item&tab=page_info.

²⁷⁴ Comprised of about 40 associations based in various Nubian villages, the union has its headquarters in central Aswan. It has a role of coordination, tries to speak for all these organisations and act as an intermediary with the authorities.

Party, who was among the organisers of the Nubian sit-in at Aswan's governorate building in 2011. Since the 2011 uprising, Nubians have mobilised on various occasions (see chapter 1), obtaining the inclusion in the current constitution of their right to return to their ancestral lands on the Nile banks south of Aswan within ten years. However, a 2014 presidential decree, the famous "444", questioned this right. Approved by the Parliament in January 2016, the "444" presidential decree prohibited settlement in a big stretch of land next to the border with Sudan, making it a new restricted military zone located in old Nubian territory. In February 2016, Nubian activists mainly affiliated with the General Nubian Union, staged a protest against this allegedly anti-constitutional presidential decree at Abu Simbel Temple.

In addition, many social and political local activists turned out to be formerly affiliated with President Mubarak's ruling NDP. Many of them claimed they had chosen to join the NDP because it used to be the only way to get access to officials and resources in order to be able to provide services to their community:

*"Why did we join the NDP? We entered the NDP to achieve interests for the village."*²⁷⁵

*"I was in the NDP not because I liked its policies, but to provide services to the village. We used to see our brothers, with different views...who could not take any services from the country.... We felt we could not provide anything, any services, any plus, to our country... So our direction is the ongoing way to get services... it's not political thinking... personally, I have nothing to do with politics apart that I like to know, hear and see... but no politics like opposing to a political issue... and it eventually proved that I was right... because I found out that everything we knew was a lie... the truths that we knew from state figures, from the big officials of the state..."*²⁷⁶

I elaborate on this strategy below, while showing that beyond the provision of services, many of these activists, including those who were active in 2013 and 2014 in pro-Sisi campaigns such as *Kammil Gamilak* and *Mustaqbal Watan*, have electoral ambitions. Opportunistic, simply pragmatic, or perhaps far-seeing activists in their thirties and forties

²⁷⁵ Interview with Muhammad H., 46, Agriculture Ministry employee, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

such as Hamdi in Kom Ombo (see chapter 3) or Al-Teri in Al-Hebeil, said they preferred to be in pro-government organisations so that they could prepare the youth, including themselves, to win the *mahalliyyat*, the election of the local councils. Thus they implicitly recognised pro-government parties and organisations as the best placed, organised and resourceful to win seats. This pro-government affiliation also gave them the ability to act as mediators between local authorities and more ordinary people, among whom they therefore tend to enjoy a good reputation thanks to provided services. However, many of these former NDP members were somehow ambivalent: they did not hide their pro-government stance, while sometimes claiming that they had been on the side of the 25 January “revolution”. As Tariq in Abul Rish (see chapter 2), they often justified this support by their internal opposition to corrupt businessmen close to Gamal Mubarak such as Ahmed Ezz or Zakaria Azmi, whom they blamed for the deterioration of the former ruling party’s integrity, which culminated with the spectacular rigging of the 2010 parliamentary elections. This ambivalence is similar to the stance of ruling party members who participated in the Tunisian uprising (Allal and Cooper 2012). Sometimes but not always close to pro-government circles, protest leaders are also union leaders. I have already mentioned, in the previous chapters, the cases of Tariq and Hamdi.

Other activists in Luxor and Aswan claimed no membership in or affiliation with any organisation or movement, just like Sabri, who led the mobilisation against the Kima Canal in Abul Rish (see chapter 2). While being a supporter of the “revolution” and after participating in Hamdeen Sabbahi’s presidential campaign in 2012 in Aswan, he was no longer involved in any movement or party²⁷⁷. An independent activist from Esna, south of Luxor, Zaineb had also left the Constitution Party, while continuing to support the “revolution”. At 30, Zaineb has a vocational diploma in business, and is currently studying journalism. She previously worked as a local reporter, but stopped because she considered the media to not be free and preferred to be independent.

2.2. Mobilising, exchanging and building connections

Activists network and exchange knowledge and ideas through various means as online social media, and during different kinds of events, including training sessions and conferences organised by human rights groups or political parties. Those who are able to

²⁷⁷ Interview with Sabri, 28, airport customs inspector, Aswan, February 2014.

do so, of course, attend training sessions, sometimes elsewhere in their region or in Cairo. However, mobility is the privilege of some well-connected people who are able, sometimes, to secure grants from NGOs organising trainings to fund their trips. Women have even less mobility since Upper Egyptian women travelling on their own are generally badly perceived, even when they are allowed to do so. Otherwise, activists are sometimes able to travel not too long distance in their region. For instance, in March 2015, a training on human rights issues and international laws and conventions took place in Aswan. Independent activists or members of groups such as the April 6 Youth Movement from Aswan, Luxor and Sohag, participated in this training session, which lasted about three days. Three of the activists I had been following attended the event, where they met for the first time: Sabri from Abul Rish, Nabil from Luxor, and Zaineb from Esna. Having found common interests, they remained in touch. In addition, other relatively known young activists participated, including Ibrahim, a young journalist from Aswan who used to work for the media al-Badil, an activist close to Olfat, whom I previously mentioned, and Alaa, a member of the 6 April Youth Movement in Luxor.

Zaineb was shocked by the resources that some organisations could deploy for these trainings. She denounced a gulf between human rights organisations' principles and the reality of the costly trainings they organised, a waste of money according to her. She mentioned the example of a training by a Cairo-based group, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Graduates (Markaz al-Qahira likhariji huquq al-insan)²⁷⁸ at the five-star Sonesta Hotel in Luxor. The event undoubtedly cost too much money for Zaineb, including an open buffet with a multitude of appetisers she had never seen in her life²⁷⁹.

Khaled, involved in the Kima Canal issue, also mentioned previous mutual visits and trainings with other groups denouncing pollution in Giza and Suez, but said that these did not go very far. During regional trainings, they met people suffering from similar problems elsewhere, said they should meet again but never did so. He said that in Aswan they no longer had the financial resources to organise these visits, and that coordination with others working on the same issues elsewhere was difficult because each group did not entirely cover its own area of intervention²⁸⁰. This suggests that the priority for some

²⁷⁸ In reality, it is the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, an NGO founded in 1993. Zaineb probably mixed the name of the organisation with the topic of the event.

²⁷⁹ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Khaled, accountant, Aswan, April 2015.

activists may be to first work and obtain results in their region, before considering to ally with others elsewhere in Egypt.

Apart from specialised activist networks, leaders rely on multiple, sometimes overlapping, local social networks in order to mobilise, including those based in popular cafés, professional clubs, youth centres, religious sites, family associations, as well as cultural, religious and kin-based networks. I previously mentioned that Nubians had many welfare and cultural associations, while Christians and other minority groups also have their own organisations. In addition, activists build new connections during episodes of mobilisation. Thus, in Aswan and Luxor alike, those who participated in diverse protests in 2011 met again later, either in other demonstrations (for example on 30 June 2013), or when they got involved in local or national campaigns or other newly-politicised networks. As a result, most activists in each place knew each other at least by sight or reputation.

This non-exhaustive description of activists, leaders and protest organisers' profiles and networks has aimed at showing the great diversity of actors possessing a mobilising potential. It has also attempted to show that even though the typical local activist community is small with its representatives largely able to identify fellows of past mobilisations and campaigns, contacts with activists based in other regions, especially elsewhere in Upper Egypt, were not that uncommon. These took place not only via Facebook but also during various events generally organised by human rights groups. Yet, these transregional connections have not given birth to large-scale, durable protest movements able to mobilise the ordinary. In search of an answer to this query, I now analyse local leaders' strategies.

3. Leaders' strategies: focusing on the local or seeking to coordinate at a wider level?

How do potential leaders and activists campaign, attempt to mobilise others, expand their networks and acquire knowledge? I here expose their main strategies corresponding to diverse motivations. I distinguish strategies prioritising local concerns, including providing services and joining family associations, from those motivated by national ambitions, such as joining a political party, a national movement or a specific campaign.

I argue that, even though many activists have proved their ability to locally mobilise their relatives, friends, neighbours, and other regional fellows on some occasions, they have been constrained from embarking on wider-scale coordination by two main sorts of difficulties, both affecting their personal motivations, their mobilising ambitions, and their organisational capacities and efficiency. On the one hand, they have been operating, especially since the July 2013 military coup, under extremely repressive conditions. This has led many opposition activists, now increasingly discredited and facing a constant danger of being arrested and imprisoned, to adopt a more discrete stance. At the same time, previous Mubarak-era NDP networks started to resurface, providing pro-government activists with resources to maintain and build new constituencies. On the other hand, complying with the requirements of ordinary citizens' political culture remains for many trendsetter activists, or outsiders, a serious challenge. While they do not always have access to key support networks and resources to satisfy people's demand for the provision of services, they also face the populace's general distrust of politicians and politics in general. Overall, such difficulties have limited leaders' organisational and mobilisation capacities at the local level, as well as their ambitions for escalation or coordination at a larger scale.

In addition to the media, online social media, local and informal social networks, which all provide spaces and tools for mobilisation campaigns, leaders have access to several means of campaigning depending on their motivations and purposes. Joining political parties is essential for some activists, but proved to be an only transitory step for others seeking to acquire political experience since the 2011 uprising. Many others have been active in local or regional cultural, welfare and human rights associations. The majority has been involved in at least one political or social campaign, whether national or local. Their motivations behind chosen strategies have varied, from curiosity and a new or renewed interest in politics in general, to the purpose of becoming known and acquiring support, at least locally.

3.1. Campaigning in a repressive environment

In early 2014, when I first started my fieldwork in Upper Egypt, *ihbāt* was felt by most young supporters of the 25 January 2011 uprising. They had been forced to leave streets and squares across Egypt by a not only violent but also vicious, multiform crackdown.

They had been excluded, along with other opponents to the authoritarian military rule, from the conventional political arena. Yet, many of them remained active, trying to find means of political participation that would still be tolerated by the authorities. Therefore, their non-resort to risky actions whose coordination would exceed the local scale must be put into perspective with the constraints of a renewed repression.

Unsurprisingly, protests have been relatively scarce since July 2013. By 2014, most of the opposition activists I met in the *Sa'id* had stopped organising or attending protests mainly due to the repressive environment. Witnessing a small protest in support of presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi in Aswan's Station Square in March 2014, I could realise myself how public protests had become marginal. Activists involved in a campaign to support Sabbahi, mainly members in the Nasserist Party and "revolutionaries", had agreed on Facebook, by calling or sending mobile text messages to each other, to meet at 4.30 pm in a café on the square prior to starting the protest. The majority arrived late and many of them, including the girl who had informed me, never showed up. The protest started at around 5.45 pm, was attended by about 15 people, and did not last for more than half-an-hour. Protesters chanted "I am a revolutionary and I support Hamdeen, I am neither a liar nor a religion trader".



Figure 4.1: Protesters standing in support for Hamdeen Sabbahi in Aswan, March 2014.

A second-year student in tourism and hotels in Luxor, Alaa, 21, is one of the last active members of the April 6 Youth Movement in the region since President Morsi's removal. In November 2014, he said they were only five at a protest in commemoration of Muhammad Mahmud protesters' killing, after which they were taken to the *bandar*, the police station. Policemen warned them against demonstrating again and, just because they had organised a protest, accused Alaa and his friends of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Alaa said he had attended a last protest with another seven people on 25 January 2015. After being in the "nation without torture" (*Watan bi lā ta'zīb*) campaign²⁸¹, he is now in a human rights group, attempting to give more visibility to local problems and acting as intermediary in issues such as the "pipes mafia"²⁸².

In the repressive context that has prevailed in Egypt since 3 July 2013, the primary space for most activists to share ideas, discuss grievances and extend their networks, remains Facebook. Like Nabil (see above), many activists strive to report violations and incidents that are little covered or totally ignored by the mainstream media. Against the official stance, they write what they see, denounce cases of human rights breaches or corruption, spread news on underreported or non-reported events, share opinions, discuss, comment, on a daily basis. They claim this role of reporting to raise awareness about issues occurring even in remote and poorly known places. Zaineb explained that she had abandoned a more formal kind of journalism in order to be more independent. She said she posted articles on local issues on the Facebook page and the press blog *Shabab al-Nil*²⁸³ ("the Youth of the Nile"), and mentioned Esna news and *Luxor baladna* ("our country Luxor"), a video page. This private, informal, home-based reporting has never ceased despite the arrest and detention since 2013 of numerous activists and more ordinary people denouncing abuses from behind their screens. Zained denounced the increasing danger of reporting on violations:

*"We started to be afraid of fear itself."*²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Launched in 2012, this nationwide initiative fights against torture.

²⁸² This popular label designates the people who sell the butane gas pipes at high prices in the black market during recurring periods of shortages.

²⁸³ Managed by young people claiming a different way of doing journalism, the initiative has a website: <http://shbabalnil.com>.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

Additionally, activists sometimes use their networks in media circles to increase the visibility of an issue. For example, Nabil asked a journalist friend to make a reportage on the football field issue in Al-Hebeil following a request by his local friend Salman (see chapter 2). This constitutes both a way to provide a service, through calling a person having a concrete means to help, and a step further to report on an irregularity.

3.2. Trying to comply with the local political culture by providing direct services

Often presented by activists as a main purpose of their actions, providing direct services to ordinary citizens is nonetheless a strategy to gain visibility and support among constituents. This is particularly true in a social environment governed by patron-client relationships, characterised by a high level of clientelism, understood as “the particularised exchange of votes and support for goods, favours, and services between the poor and the elites”²⁸⁵ or, to put it simply, “a relationship between parties of unequal status that involves some form of exchange”²⁸⁶. At the same time, failing public services impel many ordinary people to rely on actors other than the state to obtain what they need. In the Upper Egyptian countryside in particular, leadership requires the ability to provide services to ordinary citizens. In exchange, activists acquire credibility, popularity and the loyalty of their people.

This apparent pragmatism of the ordinary, who tend to prioritise the immediate satisfaction of a specific need rather than bet on a representative who will plead their cause on a larger scale, apparently stems from a poor opinion of politics in general and politicians in particular. Indeed, the everyday experience of flawed interactions with the state have been maintaining most ordinary people at a distance. Local representatives of the authorities are often seen, at best, powerless and incompetent to solve their problems and/or, at worse, malicious and corrupt. Some ordinary people openly expressed mistrust towards politics and state institutions in general:

“Security forces in the whole country do not fulfil their duty. Because there is no security, there are thugs, explosions. Security is also doubtful. The role of judges, officers,

²⁸⁵ Javier Auyero, *Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks and the Legacy of Evita*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

²⁸⁶ Lisa Blaydes and Safinaz El Tarouty, “Women's Electoral Participation in Egypt: The Implications of Gender for Voter Recruitment and Mobilization”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 2009, pp. 364-380.

*soldiers. They are the ones who have the weapons, and they are unable to fix the country [...] and the ordinary people does not want anything other than being well in its eating, drinking, health and these things [...] they don't care about politics".*²⁸⁷

Such perceptions explain that ordinary people sometimes turn to those who can intercede on their behalf with the local authorities, assist them to overcome bureaucratic complexities and corrupt officials, protect them from various abuses, and so on. They also explain why many people continued to support local pro-government, generally ex-NDP activists, or MB leaders, rewarded for their services. Such loyalty to service providers may affect mobilisation processes for protests in the same way it does for elections. For instance, I met several people who told me that they had taken to the streets to express support for the MB after President Morsi's removal because members of the MB were honest people who used to be known for their kindness and generosity.

Aged 39, Al-Teri was a parliamentary candidate competing on the pro-government list of *Mustaqbal Watan* in Al-Hebeil in 2015. He holds a *mājistīr* (a master's degree) in history of sciences and civilisation. A bazar owner, he started his political career when he was 30. Before the 2011 uprising, he had always run against NDP candidates, in 2005 and 2010. He participated in the 2011 and 2013 uprisings in Luxor. In 2012, he voted for Hamdeen Sabbahi at the presidential elections. Formerly independent, Al-Teri this time chose the list of *Mustaqbal Watan* Party because it mainly comprised youth. He insisted on the ability to provide services to local residents as a major criterion for a politician to succeed in Upper Egypt. In other words, the credibility of a political figure relied on his/her ability to deliver on what ordinary citizens typically expected. Therefore, the ability to provide services was the most important criteria to win political support:

*"Thank God, we have a good base and presence in the street".*²⁸⁸

*"Before running in elections, go serve the village first".*²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Interview with Dina, 33, housewife (Bachelor in social services), Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Al-Teri, 39, owner of several shops and bazars, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

For candidates such as Al-Teri, proving the ability to provide services was the main purpose of campaign strategies to convince local constituents. Al-Teri's phone rang several times during our meeting, which made me suggest to him to answer to what could be an emergency. He had just been talking about the mediation role he had been performing between ordinary citizens and the bureaucratic apparatus:

*"The state administrative apparatus is not adapted for each citizen to go to this place to receive his service. There are specific things such as routine, which stand against him, the citizen himself is ignorant, he does not know, for instance, how to bring his right. [...] I serve him and teach him at the same time".*²⁹⁰

Al-Teri answered the call and mentioned the words "hospital" and "doctor", and everyone understood he was trying to arrange an appointment for someone needing medical assistance. Albeit unplanned, this call was another occasion to show how he was helping his more ordinary fellow citizens. This role of mediation between the ordinary citizen and the local authorities or public services has often been raised by respondents as an important criteria of respect for a leader.

On a larger scale, politicians are described by most respondents as ambitious opportunists seeking their own interest, sometimes as "sons of a dog"²⁹¹, while politics is called a "dirty game". In addition, political parties remain largely unknown, except the populist ones. The former ruling NDP and its remnants are identified by everyone. Islamist parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the Salafi Nour Party are also known to most people. Otherwise, the ordinary Upper Egyptians that I met often qualified political parties as "decoration", meaning that they considered they had no popular base or meaningful presence in the field, and that they were useless to them, except for the NDP and some Islamist parties, which have provided services. In addition, the proliferation of parties after the 2011 uprising left ordinary people confused:

*"The parties...Honestly, I am not convinced by them. Their number increased... The most important thing is not to have a party, the most important is to do something".*²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Interview with Hala, 50, public sector employee, Qena, May 2014.

²⁹² Interview with Fatma, 44, accountant, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

*“We don’t want parties in the country. For us, the most important is to have a good president, and judges. They are the ones who will fix the country”.*²⁹³

Among these “decorative” or “cartoon” parties (*ahzāb cartūniyya*), old leftist parties such as the Nasserist al-Karama Party retain some presence in Upper Egypt. However, they are largely forsaken. In Aswan, Al-Senoussi, the head of the local branch of the Nasserist Party, is a well-known and respected figure. He hosted me twice at the central Aswan’s dusty office of the party, in a meeting room which, despite its golden statue of former President Nasser, no longer hosted crowds.

Regardless of their political affiliation, southern Upper Egyptian activists and potential leaders are aware of this political culture. They are also aware that loyalty usually goes to those who provide assistance and/or protection, which can be key in (de)mobilisation. Indeed, why would people take risks for a few adventurers making promises for the future, but unable to offer anything concrete in the time being? Therefore, activists’ strategies often attempt to meet the requirements of this particular local reality, aiming first of all to gain the sympathy of their fellow citizens through offering services. However, the local logics of patronage and loyalty to service providers constitute a serious obstacle to many activists. In particular, “revolutionary” activists have been facing difficulties to compete with Islamist activists and former NDP members now often in pro-Sisi groups, seen as the traditional service providers. In Upper Egypt as elsewhere, most political activist networks are based in cities, rather than in rural areas, even though some activists come from the countryside. This partly explains why “revolutionary” activists are less known in rural areas, where many people told me, for instance, that they believed the April 6 Youth Movement was made up of agitators paid by foreign entities (see chapter 3). They have largely suffered from their inability to provide services in these rather rural areas where patron-client relationships still prevail, and where the poorest tend to seek the protection of those, well connected to the local authorities, who have access to a very wide range of resources. Not only do these encompass material resources for everyday needs, but they also include the ability to intercede for the provision of all kinds of services, ranging from an emergency appointment with a doctor, to assistance for administrative steps and giving a ride to some remote place. Apart from officially apolitical family associations which provide all kinds of services to their community, two

²⁹³ Interview with Dina, 33, housewife (Bachelor in social services), Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

types of actors have traditionally fulfilled this mission: organisations or activists who are members of or are close to the ruling National Democratic Party on the one hand, and Islamist organisations, networks and mosques affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya or Salafi entities, on the other. When I undertook my field research in the post-Morsi era, many Islamist organisations had been weakened by repression, which forced them to essentially return to clandestinity. However, there was a revival of the first group despite the ban on the NDP.

While many activists have been complaining about their lack of resources to further enhance their base through providing services, others have been abiding by the existing rules and supporting the authorities in order to have access to resources. Indeed, contrary to “revolutionaries”, many activists said they had entered pro-regime organisations to have access to resources. Five years after the 2011 uprising, many politicians were aware that the essential principles driving patron-client relationships, namely loyalty and support in exchange for the direct provision of services, remained. Al-Teri explained that he had joined the pro-government list of *Mustaqbal Watan* because if elected, this would allow him to get access to the wide resources of an organised entity:

*“The party proved its success in the presidential elections and the constitution... [...] After winning, I will have with me a party or organisation through which I will be able to have an impact...”*²⁹⁴

Aged 39, Hesham is a teacher at a vocational school. He participated in teachers' protests following the 2011 uprising, but also mediated between other workers and the local authorities. He supported a strike by natural gas workers, and obtained permanent contracts for 11 among them. Later, he attempted to speak for garbage collectors also demanding permanent contracts because, he said, they were unorganised and relatively ignorant²⁹⁵. Hesham is well connected to pro-government networks. Having several relatives employed by the governorate, he is also a former member of Mubarak's NDP and of Aswan's local council.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Al-Teri, 39, owner of several shops and bazars, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Hesham, 39, school teacher, Aswan, March 2014.

3.3. Taking part in local or national campaigns

Generally devoid of significant financial resources, activists who belong neither to Islamist networks nor to pro-government circles have been attempting to provide some assistance in areas where they have acquaintances. Despite difficulties, many opposition activists have remained active in their community and beyond. Some attempts to provide direct services have included citizen campaigns undertaken thanks to the initiatives of some local activists. For instance, activists have cleaned streets and public spaces on various occasions. In Aswan in particular, activist campaigns have flourished since the 2011 uprising. Some initiatives and movements seeking to respond to nationwide changes had often been founded in Cairo before giving birth to local versions. For instance, *'askar kādheḃūn* (“military liars”) aimed at denouncing violations of human rights and others by the armed forces. Launched by young “revolutionaries” in December 2011 after security forces’ massacre of protesters near the Council of Ministers in Cairo, the nationwide campaign vowed to reveal the truth about the alleged crimes and lies of the ruling SCAF, denounce army and police violence against protesters, and gather evidence against or beyond what the mainstream media abstained from showing. It essentially circulated pictures and videos on YouTube and social media, and projected videos on big screens during events in various governorates. The idea was to dissociate in the eyes of the general public the army as an institution from the SCAF, which allegedly committed crimes against civilians. More recently, some MB supporters used the campaign to denounce security forces’ exactions against them²⁹⁶. In Aswan, I met several activists who had been active in *'askar kādheḃūn*.

'alashānik ya baladī (“For you my country”) aimed at fighting poverty and unemployment and providing services to local communities. A development association based in Cairo, the latter was founded in 2002 and has an English website²⁹⁷. Its activities have mainly relied on volunteerism and university student networks, and have expanded in the governorates from 2010 onwards. Both young volunteers in *'alashānik ya baladī* in Aswan, Hani and his friend Shazli said local actions of the association had included a campaign entitled “the exemplary neighbourhood” to clean streets (in March 2012²⁹⁸ and

²⁹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/official.page.4.rab3a/?fref=ts>.

²⁹⁷ <http://www.ayb-sd.org/ayb2/>.

²⁹⁸ <http://www.masress.com/elbalad/110806>.

January 2014²⁹⁹) and distributing second-hand clothes³⁰⁰. They explained that they usually refrained from talking about politics with local residents to whom they provided services³⁰¹. Activists of *'alashānik ya baladī* also distributed blankets to the poor and orphans in various villages in Aswan province in January 2014. The association's Aswan activists have a Facebook page³⁰².

Other groups sought to attract larger constituencies through declaring an apolitical stance. Founded in February 2013 in Aswan, *ḍidd al-tayyar* ("against the current") is a student movement claiming on its Facebook page³⁰³ its support for the "revolution" and the poor, and its opposition to violence. It says it is not affiliated with any political party, and has no electoral ambitions. Yet, the movement chose to support presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi in 2014. One of the most active figures in *ḍidd al-tayyar*, Haytham is in his early twenties. A known "revolutionary" in Aswan, he chanted slogans in the previously mentioned protest to support Hamdeen Sabbahi for president in March 2014. Haytham had participated in most protests and campaigns in Aswan since 2011, including in the uprising itself while he was only 17, in the sit-in against Governor Mostafa al-Sayyed, in *Tamarrod* and 30 June demonstrations. He was also active in *'alashānik ya baladī*. He was opposing both military rule and the MB, but had voted for Morsi in 2012 as many other "revolutionaries" fearing that Ahmed Shafiq would have restored Mubarak's regime. Despite his young age, Haytham seemed respected among Aswan's activist circles, and probably comes from a well-known and connected family that has been able, so far, to protect him from security forces' crackdown. He explained that, despite its initial apolitical stance, *ḍidd al-tayyar* had to intervene and support Hamdeen Sabbahi to express its opposition to the military state, call for a civilian state and protect the "revolution". Indeed, Haytham goes on, the "revolution" was then in the doldrums. While the most powerful ball the "revolutionary" youth used to have was the *mīdān*, they were increasingly losing it. "*People in the streets started to hate you*"³⁰⁴, Haytham deplored. *Ḍidd al-tayyar*'s other claimed purposes are to improve ordinary people's political awareness and improved participation, the achievement of the goals of the "revolution" (bread, freedom and social justice), and justice for its "martyrs". For

²⁹⁹ <http://www.masress.com/ona/1435532>.

³⁰⁰ Informal conversation with Hani and Shazli, Aswan, January 2014.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² <https://www.facebook.com/HrktlshankYabldy>.

³⁰³ <https://www.facebook.com/dedeltayar>.

³⁰⁴ Informal conversation with Haytham, 20, university student, Aswan, April 2014.

example, its activists organised campaigns of awareness about the new constitution in late 2013, to explain its importance to ordinary people. They also participated in welfare activities, far from politics. For instance, they distributed clothes and food boxes to the poor during Ramadan, without putting any logo or slogan, to avoid potential accusations of attempting to exploit people politically³⁰⁵. They also participated in the celebration of the orphan day. “*We are continuing...until these people take their rights*”³⁰⁶, Haytham said.

Activists of *didd al-tayyar* participated in many campaigns and protests, particularly in 2013 and 2014. In July 2014, they opposed the rise in fuel prices and recurring water cuts. In December 2014, they attended a protest against former President Mubarak’s acquittal in Aswan’s Station Square. The movement’s Facebook page has also served as a space to share news, including during the clashes between the Halayil and Dabudiyya tribes in Aswan between April and June 2014. It published news about and pictures of pro-MB protests in Aswan in January 2014, of incidents where MB supporters reportedly set on fire security vehicles with Molotov cocktails in November and December 2013, of an alleged MB supporter who was shot dead in December 2013 and presented as the first of this kind in Aswan, of 20 youth who were arrested in Aswan in a protest against the new protest law in November 2013, of 30 June 2013 anti-MB protests in Aswan in which many women took part. In November 2013, the movement announced its temporary suspension due to reasons “against its will”: this likely happened after some of its members, including Haytham, were arrested at a demonstration against the new protest law. However, the campaign has been largely inactive since December 2014 but kept, as of August 2015, releasing news about local cases of corruption.

In the aftermath of President Morsi’s ouster, some activists tried to transcend political, communal, and sometimes tribal differences. For example, *wahhadūha* was an initiative by some of the most renowned activists and lawyers of the “revolution” in Aswan, to reunify ranks in the context of the deepening polarisation between supporters of the military-backed power on the one hand, and those of the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. The first who told me about it was Wael R., a lawyer and one of the founders of the initiative. Mahdi, another well-known “revolutionary” in Aswan, was also among the

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

founders. However, the initiative quickly became inactive, probably because the third way it proposed could not convince at the time and certainly because of the increasing repression of the activists leading it. Haytham, who was also involved in it, explained that *wahhadūha* was a great idea to strengthen revolutionary ranks, but it could not work at a time when most people did not want to hear others' opinions³⁰⁷. Activists behind *wahhadūha*'s Facebook page³⁰⁸ essentially posted news and pictures about topics that mattered to them, including protests against police brutality. The same activists were often involved in other movements and campaigns gathering Aswan's "revolutionaries", including *didd al-tayyar*, *Tamarrod*, and the Aswan branches of the "Revolution Youth Coalition" and Kifaya.

More inclusive, seeking to gather a wider public than Aswan's "revolutionaries", *Lamm al-shaml* was another self-proclaimed apolitical initiative aiming at transcending political divisions and tribes to provide services, mainly in the health sector. I will attempt to demonstrate below through an analysis of the first meetings of *Lamm al-shaml* campaign the challenges faced by such initiatives and their leaders, once they had convened a few meetings and created a Facebook page. Indeed, social and political divisions have proved hard to transcend, especially in the polarised context that has prevailed since July 2013. Many initiators and members of these initiatives renounced their commitments when they faced organisational challenges, the identifying of priorities, a certain lack of vision for the provision of services, and a visibility and communication concern. Because of the impossibility to get organised around a commonly agreed agenda, most of these local initiatives quickly vanished or became almost inactive, reporting news on Facebook from time to time at the best.

Overall, young activists generally got involved in such campaign actions on an individual basis and without systematically displaying the role of the organisation or group they belonged to for fear of retaliation or bad reaction in areas where they were poorly known. In consequence, revolutionary activists did not often take credit for their possible actions, and have appeared powerless in gathering support beyond their traditional predominantly young, urban, educated networks. If the participation in local or national campaigns has certainly taught them a lot about the political world, about their rights and ways to

³⁰⁷ Informal conversation with Haytham, 20, university student, Aswan, April 2014.

³⁰⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/wa7doha/?fref=nf>.

promote them, and has enabled them to acquire new connections and widen their networks, it has not allowed them to gain a foothold in the local political landscape.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, pro-Sisi campaigns that emerged in the wake of the 3 July ouster of President Morsi did not face such difficulties. National campaigns such as *Kammil Gamilak* and then *Mustaqbal Watan*, were often carried out by local activists who used to be close to the NDP under Mubarak. Still active, *Kammil Gamilak* in Aswan has its own Facebook page³⁰⁹. Now a political party, *Mustaqbal Watan* has 58 seats in the Parliament and an official website³¹⁰. It claims its support for the 25 January and 30 June “revolutions”, and its mainly young membership. In the wake of the 30 June uprising, other pro-army campaigns appeared, including in labour circles of Upper Egypt. Muhammad, a 45-year-old quality manager at the sugar factory in Armant and a union leader, was involved with some of his colleagues in *'ummāl li-ajl Miṣr lida'm al-jaysh fi ard wujūd al-irhāb* (“Workers for Egypt Supporting the Army in the Era of Terror”). This nationwide campaign was also present in Minya and Mahalla al-Kubra.

Because of such campaigns’ support for the government, their political affiliation was clearly identified and they did not fear hostile reactions. In addition, as nationally organised and clearly pro-government campaigns, they benefitted from all the required freedom they needed, from local clientelist networks, as well as financial resources. The latter’s source remains unclear, but many opposition activists saw in this the contribution of former NDP members and/or businessmen close to the army, as well as Mubarak-era remnants. In addition, these initiatives were rather successful in mobilising ordinary people because their purpose, supporting Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for president, was simple. And at the time, the figure of Sisi gathered all kinds of people desiring security and stability. Regardless of their diverse political affiliations, in their opinion, he was the providential man capable of restoring security and political stability in Egypt.

3.4. Joining political parties

I have emphasised activists and leaders’ attempts to gather support through providing services to potential constituencies, including via their involvement in local or national

³⁰⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/KamelGmeilak.Aswan>.

³¹⁰ <http://www.m-watan.com/>.

campaigns. Less frequently, activists and leaders have sought to get involved in national political parties either to pursue their political education, become known for actions undertaken under the banner of the party, build transregional networks, just out of curiosity, or for all these purposes. If most ordinary citizens have not expressed great interest in political parties, many opposition, pro-revolution activists, told me they had had a phase of “tourism” in political parties, especially the new ones. Some of them seriously committed to a party, while many others attended a few meetings and left, saying it was a waste of time. Aladdin, for instance, said he had joined the Free Socialists Party in order to do something for his province and his people³¹¹.

In Luxor, Aswan and probably the rest of Upper Egypt, I have mentioned that political parties are generally perceived as useless, when they do not have a bad reputation. With the exception of the NDP or its remnants and Islamist networks, parties are not praised for the services they provide. More importantly, multipartyism is rather new in Egypt. Before the fall of Mubarak, even though some opposition parties were old and well known in the region such as the Nasserist Party or the Wafd Party, people were aware of their “decorative” function and knew that the NDP would always be the overall winner. Mostafa, a resident in Ballana, explained that it was hard to have an opinion about new parties, because the only party they used to know was the NDP, which he called the “National Destructive Democratic Party”³¹². Now that dozens of parties have emerged, people have shown even more confusion regarding their political intentions, platforms and leaders. In addition, ordinary people often have a bad perception of political parties, accusing them of appearing only during election time, like Salafists and other religious parties reportedly offering incentives in exchange for votes before the 2012 presidential elections. Yet, since 2011, most ordinary citizens have exercised their right to vote, offering a new opportunity for political parties and activists to conquer supporters. Or, at least, this is the way some activists envisaged it when deciding to join political parties.

Finally, political parties are often perceived as decrepit and full of old people unable to think about new ideas, innovations and changes, by young activists seeing them as unsuitable for their creativity. This explains that available political parties have attracted only a small minority of young “revolutionary” activists, and an even smaller one since

³¹¹ Interview with Aladdin, 36, owner of a printing house, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

³¹² Interview with Mostafa, 36, heavy equipment technician, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

30 June 2013 and now that they perceive the political scene to be closed in the same way it was under President Mubarak. National movements that claim their leaderless and networked organisation have generally attracted young people more interested in politics than parties. The most emblematic of these groups is the April 6 Youth Movement, whose members generally insisted on the youth component of the group.

Eventually, activists often combined various or went from one to another of these different strategies and tools to get known, gather support, educate themselves and others politically. Young revolutionaries had often attended meetings by different political parties before choosing one or rejecting them altogether to the benefit of more informal youth groups better fitted to what they were looking for. Many “revolutionaries” had joined the youth groups that formed in the wake of the 2011 uprising such as the Revolution Youth Coalition, before integrating a party or more organised group such as the April 6 Youth Movement. They participated in many local and national campaigns, on top of which *Tamarrod* enabled the creation of new connections transcending the local scale. Other activists clearly got involved in local campaigns to provide services in order to become known ahead of their potential candidacy at local elections. This was the case of Walid, the initiator of *Lamm al-shaml* campaign (see below). Equally ambitious, Tamer, an engineer at the Water Company branch in Aswan, directly offered to help me get contacts for my fieldwork and come with me to many places in order to prepare for being a candidate at the election of local councils. He probably got involved in *Lamm al-shaml* for the same purpose. The last time I saw him in April 2015, he had joined a political party, probably to perfect his candidate calibre. Regardless of their political affiliation, for many political activists like Tamer, assistance on the ground is increasingly becoming a strategy for becoming known and building a base (Abdalla 2016).

Now that I have detailed activists and leaders’ choices of strategies, showing some of their difficulties and dilemmas, I will turn to a case study suggesting why these strategies have not enabled them to mobilise more efficiently and be able to transcend the local scale. The case of *Lamm al-shaml* campaign will be used to illustrate the various weaknesses of these movements relying on informal networks with an all-inclusive purpose, but that lack a clear project. It will ultimately demonstrate the challenges, whether related to the repressive context or the common political culture, that have prevented activists from organising more efficiently, even if only locally.

4. Focusing on the local: *Lamm al-shaml* initiative in Aswan

On 14 March 2014, I attended the first meeting of a new campaign called *Lamm al-shaml*, meaning “reunite”, “reunify”, or “gather everyone”. The meeting took place at Aswan’s Flower Garden, on the Nile Corniche, next to the Summer Theatre. The idea of this initiative of Walid, a young Nubian tourist guide and renowned pro-revolution local activist, who graduated from Cairo’s Ain Shams University, was indeed to gather people from multiple tribes and political currents in order to “do something” for their common region. According to Walid, people had to change themselves first before being able to change the entire society or country. To this end, he insisted on the need to unify the youth and start working in the field, to prioritise social work instead of political activism, to participate in local projects and solve concrete problems across the governorate. I will show that the initial ambiguity in this new initiative’s purpose, despite its good intentions, has limited its success. Indeed, the dispersion of goals, the difficulties in being organised, and the relatively too ambitious agenda of this campaign supposed to transcend traditional political and tribal cleavages, have made its heterogeneous profiles quickly disperse. The main goals of the *Lamm al-shaml* initiative that were published on its Facebook page on 22 March 2014 are the following: “Getting rid of tensions and tribalism for the youth of Aswan to be one hand”; “for the unity of the sons of Aswan in order to build the future of Aswan”; “for a resolution of all problems in Aswan”; “for the provision of opportunities to young people from Aswan (Parliament – local councils)”; “expose corruption files in Aswan”. Administrators of the page also hoped for a process of national reform to begin from the south of the country in order to concretise the slogan “bread, freedom, social justice”. These are all noble but rather vague purposes, that were listed without a proper strategy to implement them.

Prior to convening this first meeting, Walid exchanged ideas on a new initiative with other youth on Facebook. After setting a date, they all contributed to bringing numbers, starting from their own acquaintances in Aswan and elsewhere in the governorate since the idea was to build a regional initiative. They mainly invited relatively known activists in the region, either social workers active in charities, fellows in past protests, or members of political parties. The latter then brought more of their acquaintances from their organisations, villages or neighbourhoods. Consequently, they all knew someone else attending the meeting, without knowing everyone. People came from different areas of

Greater Aswan, including al-Cubaniyya, Gharb Aswan, the High Dam area, and more remote places such as Edfu, Kom Ombo and Ballana, in Nasr al-Nuba. In total, I counted at least 23 participants in this first meeting, including some activists I had already met in Aswan. Profiles were varied, but the majority were men, as commonly observed in Upper Egypt. There were at least three women though, including Olfat, a well-known local Nubian pro-revolution activist, and a social worker. Although there were some very young people and elders, the majority was in its thirties and forties. At this meeting and the two others that I had the opportunity to attend as a participant observer, there were Nubians, “revolutionaries”, supporters of the ex-NDP and/or of at the time presidential candidate Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, members of the Free Socialists Party, the Democratic Social Party, Kifaya, the April 6 Youth Movement, the Aswan Youth Coalition, the Nubian Union. Some of them also knew each other because they had attended protests together or participated in local campaigns such as *'alashānik ya baladī* (see above). However, Islamists appeared to be excluded from the initiative, as no one representing them was apparently present at these meetings.

[This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions.]

Figure 4.2: Meeting of the *Lamm al-shaml* initiative, Aswan, 23 March 2014.

The first thing I noticed was the little in the way of organisation as people were stopping by the meeting at any time and for some of them up to two or three hours after it had begun, forcing Walid and other participants that had arrived early to repeat the same things several times. The second thing that became quickly obvious is that even Walid, the convenor, had no specific, determined agenda. Some participants, especially the youngest, quickly started to complain about the high number of meetings of this kind that they had attended in the past without them leading to anything, wondering about the concrete purpose of this one. Therefore, participants discussed possible purposes for the new initiative, ranging from fighting corruption, improving access to health and housing, to drainage issues. Some of them insisted that they did not want to talk about politics, which generally divided people. They objected to others who suggested that social work could be a way to prepare the youth for the local and parliamentary elections. Others complained that the resources of Aswan, a “buried treasure”, often went to Cairo instead of benefitting people from the region. They also denounced the lack of industrial activity in the region, recalling that apart from the Kima and sugar factories in Kom Ombo and Edfu, most plants had closed. A participant suggested focusing on health issues since many people had mentioned the bad situation in most hospitals in the region, specifically proposing to conduct a survey. However, the pro-revolution activist Olfat said that they had done something similar in Daraw³¹³, had gone to the authorities with the results, but the latter had done nothing. While the meeting was concluding on the need to prioritise the health sector, a recently-arrived government supporter started to argue that the Aswan General Hospital was not that bad, which led to an argument with other participants saying that they had overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that they had had negative experiences, that people had died because of a failure to attend to them. The meeting ended in a cacophony, but participants managed to agree on a next one for a week later, in the same place. The government supporter left on the table a number of small notebooks displaying the logo of the pro-Sisi campaign *Mustaqbal Watan*.

I had the chance to attend the next two meetings of *Lamm al-shaml*, the first being on 21 March of the same year. This time, almost everyone was late, while people were coming in groups of two or three. I took advantage of these delays to get to know some of the participants, as there were new faces. I had myself brought two activists I knew: Tamer, a Water Company executive in his late thirties, who was instantly interested in the

³¹³ 7 km south of Kom Ombo and about 35 km north of Aswan, Daraw is known for its camel market.

initiative, probably because of his ambition to run at the next local elections as previously mentioned; and Sabri from Abul Rish, who told me after the meeting that most participants were *filūl* (i.e. Mubarak remnants), and that he would not attend *Lamm al-shaml* again despite his friendship with Walid, whom he knew from previous mobilisations. In the presence of a group of Nubians, who left in the middle because they had another meeting at the Nubian Union, a discussion on disputes between tribes and Nubians follows, with some people insisting on the need to forget differences. It is strange now to remember these conversations, which took place only two weeks before the deadliest tribal feud in a long time erupted in Aswan³¹⁴. After a significant group of participants had arrived (I counted at least 32 persons, including seven women this time), the meeting began in a relatively more organised way as everyone introduced herself/himself, saying a few words about her/his expectations. I introduced myself too, and two or three participants immediately expressed suspicion and annoyance towards my presence since I was a stranger to them: “We don’t know you”, “what’s your *jiha* (side, direction)?”, they asked. I invited them to stay with me after the end of the meeting to get to know each other. However, they all quickly left at the end. I would soon be informed by Sabri that they had specifically called Walid to ask him to tell me not to attend meetings anymore. Walid was too embarrassed to ask me himself, so he asked Sabri to talk to me. Of course, I did not insist, my purpose was never to cause problems or generate potentially dangerous suspicion.

Participants, this time including two journalists, agreed that the previous meeting had led to nothing and that this time they needed to come up with a project. They endorsed *Lamm al-shaml* as the name of the initiative, meaning that they were welcoming everyone. Olfat and Tamer proposed to collect data in each location about residents’ problems at health units. Other youth got impatient, saying they wanted to work, that they had heard enough talking (*kifāya kalām*). Several participants mentioned common problems of the countryside, the lack of sewers, dog bites, insects and bad hygiene, the difficulty to cultivate land in desert areas, and so on. They talked about ways to get organised and coordinate, about management and leaders for each location, coming up with a decision to divide into committees working on different issues, mainly health and agriculture. The

³¹⁴ Fighting erupted in Aswan between members of the Arab al-Halayil (Bani Hilal) and the Nubian al-Dabudiyya tribes on 4 April 2014, two days after school students from both sides had exchanged insults following the harassment of a girl. It is only the intervention of the army that managed to end the clashes. About 30 people were killed in three days.

idea of having a different group hosting each meeting was raised. Then they started to allocate positions within each committee, already talking about communication issues.

I attended a third meeting three days later, on 24 March, just before being told that a number of people were annoyed by my presence. Among the raised topics, there was the need to have the governor on their side, although the same people acknowledged that many issues were out of the latter's hands. They talked about youth under 30's problems to obtain public sector jobs, as well as a general sense of depression and fears of vendettas between families. Regarding the organisation of the campaign, some people mentioned that other meetings had been organised at the same moment and that the timing should be changed, which was the reason why there was a fewer number of participants this time. However, was a time conflict the real reason, or was it that many people, especially young activists, had just been disappointed by previous meetings?

When I returned to Aswan in April 2015, only two persons mentioned *Lamm al-shaml*. Tamer said the initiative had been largely inactive. He had himself joined a new political party as head of a youth committee, and seemed busy preparing his local political future. Olfat was not involved in it, and said that members remaining active in the campaign had been preparing the coming parliamentary elections. I did not hear about the campaign again until February 2016, when I saw by chance a post by Walid on Facebook, saying they were ready to hand over evidence of incidences of corruption to the governor. The initiative may not be very active on the ground, but it still enjoys a virtual life. The Facebook page entitled "*Lamm al-shaml* Initiative in Aswan"³¹⁵ shared on 11 November 2015 Walid's campaign picture, which says "the candidate of Aswan's youth at the local elections...your brother / Walid Adnan...For the youth". The creator of *Lamm al-shaml* also displayed his intention to run at the next local elections on his personal Facebook page³¹⁶. Others among these young people, as elsewhere in Egypt, have maintained some kind of social or political activism in order to become known by the population ahead of the next *mahalliyyat*, the local council elections³¹⁷. Although a date for the latter has not

³¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-287258934765016/>

³¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Walid.adnan.3>

³¹⁷ For an analysis of young activists' strategies aiming at winning new constituencies through securing seats at the next local elections, see Nadine Abdalla, "Youth movements in the Egyptian transformation: strategies and repertoires of political participation", *Mediterranean Politics*, 21:1, 2016, 44-63.

been scheduled as of mid-2016, Prime Minister Sherif Ismail said in late June that they would be organised by the end of 2016. Tamer, Walid and other local activists' electoral ambitions stem from the fact that 25% of seats within local councils are supposed to be allocated to the youth, in accordance with the current constitution. I have already mentioned how such local campaigns have increasingly constituted for some young activists a springboard to create a popular base, a well-assumed strategy within the current rules of the game, a self-limited but not less ambitious form of activism. Yet, past local councils had a rather bad reputation since they were mainly occupied by NDP, sometimes corrupt figures under President Mubarak³¹⁸.

In addition, recent developments suggest that Walid and a few of his friends have remained active as they publicly announced on Facebook that they would hand over to the governor of Aswan a set of files denouncing local corruption cases. On 19 February 2016, Walid posted on his own page, as part of a campaign against corruption in the governorate, a new petition naming several governorate officials accused of corruption. Addressing his fellow Aswan citizens, who “live in a coma of personal interests”, he accuses outsiders (i.e. people who are not originally from Aswan) of stealing the belongings of Aswan sons and maintaining a corrupt system. He calls for the beginning of a petition campaign against all corrupt people in Aswan, urging: “Sons of Aswan, leave personal interests and unite for Aswan governorate”. He calls on his fellow citizens to reject the appointment of a new governor since all corrupt officials would remain in place, meaning that nothing would change.

حملة نعم لاقالة رؤوس الفساد
بديوان عام محافظة اسوان

مصطفى ابو الحسن – سمير رسلان – جابر طه
عبد الرازق المقاول – محمد الحسيني – حمدي حجاج
يوسف ابو الحجاج – خالد عبد الجليل
..... المغتربين هم سبب فساد محافظة اسوان
لانهم سبب لكل مشكلات المحافظة

Figure 4.3: List of alleged corrupt governorate officials posted by Walid on Facebook, 19 February 2016.

³¹⁸ Interview with Khaled, 43, head of sector at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

A group of people from Ballana has also remained active in *Lamm al-shaml*, as suggested by a post on 28 March 2015 in which they called for a protest on the same day against the detention of three youth (including Amir, a young Nubian activist that I had interviewed in Ballana in 2014) for their involvement in an initiative aiming at transferring dangerous waste outside the village to preserve the health of their neighbours. The Free Socialists Party, of which several residents of Ballana are members, also shared pictures of the detained. Residents denounced the fact that Ballana had become the garbage dump of the entire governorate³¹⁹, that garbage was burnt but not buried, that very dangerous toxins from medical waste threatened residents' health. According to them, the governorate has failed to solve the problem, while residents were demanding an alternative location to move the waste. The protest call that was distributed, and was also shared by the Free Socialists Party, mentioned that the problem of the waste was not only the problem of the three detained young men but also the problem of all families residing in Ballana. Therefore, all residents were standing together to denounce this issue and demand the release of the detained activists. The protest call also denounced the corruption of the local authorities and threatened to submit lawsuits against all the officials responsible for the illegal garbage dumps. Administrators of the Facebook page of *Lamm al-shaml* have also been sharing information about laws on various issues such as the rights of detainees and environmental violations, mainly in Ballana. In the first posts, the page mainly highlights the purpose to fight corruption in the region. In April 2014, the page shared a statement opposing sectarian violence in Aswan. It also endorsed a parliamentary candidate for Ballana, Mostafa G., a friend of Walid on Facebook.

In conclusion, the initiative, as others that have flourished since 25 January 2011, has alternated periods of activity mainly denouncing corrupt officials at the regional level and local issues such as garbage dumping in Ballana online, with times of apparent inactivity. Overall, far from coordinating at a larger level, the campaign has proved unable to gather people locally beyond differences around precise goals. Yet, it has provided to activists with the ambition to participate in local politics with a useful forum of discussion, a space to exchange ideas and raise critical issues (related to corruption, health, agriculture, public services), pursue their political training, build new connections and perhaps acquire new leadership skills. It has remained a tribune for its initiator Walid, who has been using it as a platform for his various initiatives and his future candidacy at the local elections.

³¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDywQqpLOUA&feature=youtu.be>.

Lamm al-shaml also served as a laboratory of activism for several youths from Ballana, including Nubians. While activists' presence seems to be mainly online, such initiatives and spaces help activists and potential leaders acquire more political experience, learn to deal with others, and find supporters and allies in other localities.

5. Conclusion: Leaders' limited options

In this chapter, I have suggested that the vicissitudes of leadership are important to analyse in order to understand why most protest movements and campaigns failed to exceed the local scale, remaining discontinuous, ephemeral and dispersed. I have tried to minimise the apparent lack of experience and limited ambitions of leaders, who have rarely attempted to export elsewhere, for example, protests against deteriorating public services. Indeed, to my knowledge, activists involved in nationwide movements or political parties have not really engaged with their fellows based elsewhere in Egypt in protest campaigns over common ills that more urgently matter to ordinary citizens, such as water shortages or environmental problems. Defined as "the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites"³²⁰, brokerage usually enables the creation of new connections and collective actors, and facilitates the process of diffusion of contention. The popular coordination committee created by Abul Rish residents and lawyers of the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre in Aswan against the Kima canal was useful at least in giving identifiable faces to a movement and an interlocutor for the authorities (see chapter 2). It constituted perhaps the beginning of a process of brokerage, as in other similar contestations³²¹, but has not gone further.

In the wake of the work of Nadine Abdalla (2016) on youth movements' evolving strategies in adaptation to the political context, this chapter has argued that movement activists' self-restraint, impeding processes of brokerage, mainly came from the constraints of the more repressive environment since July 2013, as well as local logics of patronage that require leaders to provide services in order to secure support among

³²⁰ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³²¹ In Damietta, for instance, a similar popular committee against a fertiliser factory was formed by independent lawyers after an environmental protest that was repressed. See Sharif Elmusa and Jeannie Sowers, "Damietta Mobilizes for Its Environment", *Middle East Report Online*, October 21, 2009.

ordinary citizens. Additionally, the case of the *Lamm al-shaml* campaign illustrates many of the attempts of local activists to maintain some political participation despite repression, as well as persisting social and political divisions. Leaders' choices appear to be the main factors responsible for the absence of "scale shift", defined as "a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities"³²². However, I have demonstrated how leaders' options to acquire political experience were limited because of, on the one hand, risks of repression and, on the other, the difficulty to overcome a common political culture hostile to politicians and acknowledging as leaders those having the means to provide services. In the next chapter, I show how a set of sociocultural factors can also act as impediments to the emergence of wider protest movements.



Figure 4.4: Men watching Bassem Youssef' satirical show before its banning in a café in Luxor, April 2014.

³²² McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

Chapter 5: Sociocultural determinants influencing (de)mobilisation: mobilising in Upper Egypt

1. Mobilising as an Upper Egyptian

Upper Egyptians or *Sa'āyda* occupy a special place in Egypt's popular culture. They are the almost exclusive naïve victims of Egyptian jokes, and often appear in films and soap operas as comic characters unaware of being hilarious. They are made fun of because they supposedly are backward peasants who do not understand the “modern” world, have exotic traditions such as polygamy, and speak a dialect that sounds funny to Cairene and other Lower Egyptians. Many other clichés such as their so-called propensity for violence often leading to sectarian or tribal conflicts give a rather bad representation of Upper Egyptians and their culture (Hopkins and Saad 2004). How do the natives perceive themselves compared to other Egyptians? A couple of years ago, I tried to explain this image of the *Sa'īdī* in popular culture to two friends visiting from France while on a train to Luxor. We were sharing a compartment with three Egyptian men whom I stupidly assumed did not understand French, an ethnocentric prejudice on my part. Unfortunately for me, one of them, a native of the region of Luxor, was a fair francophone. Upset by what I had just said, misinterpreting as disdain my clumsy explanation of what I assumed was a reality of Egyptian folklore, he reprimanded me, making me feel quite embarrassed. Even though this man may have been particularly susceptible, he seemed to instinctively react to what he probably saw as a mockery of his native region by an outsider perpetuating clichés. This little misadventure shows that far from being indifferent to what others say about them, Upper Egyptians have a “strong sense of regional identity”³²³, of which they are proud and that they are willing to defend.

Indeed, Upper Egypt is widely recognised as a region or a set of regions presenting a specific geography, history, culture and identity, which clearly distinguishes it from the rest of the country. Nevertheless, as I have already demonstrated in previous chapters, Upper Egyptians see themselves as part of Egypt. In addition, they consider that they have reclaimed their place as Egyptian citizens, not least through their participation in the 2011 and 2013 uprisings. Beyond the common stereotypes, which I shall strive to break, several

³²³ Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad, Preface to *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*, by Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad, eds., (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004).

questions inspire this chapter which addresses what it means to mobilise in Upper Egypt, where I carried out my research. It quickly became clear, when I was in the field and asked about their political participation or involvement in protests, that ordinary people and experienced activists alike often referred to their *Sa'īdī* identity. Therefore, this relatively high regionalism has to be considered a parameter having potential implications for local mobilisation dynamics and processes. Are there any elements related to Upper Egyptians' perception of their regional identity that impact (de)mobilisation? Do the provocative stereotyped representations of *Sa'āyda* as rural, backward, ignorant, or conservative, possibly influence Upper Egyptians' contentious politics? Are there social structures or traditions in Upper Egypt that constrain or, on the contrary, encourage mobilisation by the ordinary people? Are there specific Upper Egyptian sociocultural features that tend to prevent popular mobilisations from becoming wider?

Bearing in mind that “to account for movement groups’ strategic decisions, scholars must pay attention to the cultural beliefs that make some tactical options attractive or unattractive regardless of how effective those options are likely to be”³²⁴, this chapter focuses on the social and cultural factors that may affect regional patterns of mobilisation and demobilisation. It argues that sociocultural features or their perception by ordinary citizens are as important as political opportunities and threats in driving and shaping people’s contentious politics. It assesses the importance of the sociocultural context in shaping the course of (de)mobilisation, and emphasises the challenges faced by Upper Egyptians. I acknowledge that “either indigenous innovation or external pressures can produce change, but that change is filtered through social and cultural processes”³²⁵. I argue that mobilisation is shaped, constrained, but also sometimes facilitated, by a number of conventions, norms, institutions, traditions and practices commonly identified as specific to Upper Egyptian culture and society. I identify three kinds of sociocultural determinants usually raised, including by the locals, as Upper Egyptian institutions and traditions that have the potential to influence (de)mobilisation in the region. Firstly, *Sa'āyda*’s own perceptions of their regional identity, including matters of masculinity and honour, as well as feelings of remoteness and marginalisation, may be strong motivations to mobilise, or to stay away from northern decision-makers that have scorned and

³²⁴ Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

³²⁵ Hopkins and Saad, Preface to *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*.

neglected the region. Secondly, clanship and tribalism, which generally entail loyalties, may standardise the stance of a group, thus driving it towards mobilisation or the contrary. Thirdly, a number of patriarchal constraints often hinder or influence young people and women's mobilisation.

Firstly, I will show that feelings of marginalisation and/or contempt by the rest of Egypt are important elements in Upper Egyptians' self-identification, suggesting how their perceptions of a different cultural identity potentially affect decisions to participate in protests. Secondly, I attempt to explain how clans and tribes can encourage, limit or completely deter mobilisation through loyalty mechanisms. I then suggest how generational tensions have a mobilising potential, while the young still struggle to impose themselves in a society largely controlled by elders. Thirdly, I demonstrate that protests in the region have rarely reached significant magnitude also because women are excluded from most forms of activism and rarely participate in contentious episodes. I conclude that these different components recognised by the locals as constitutive of a specific Upper Egyptian culture partly prevent them from identifying with other people suffering the same ills elsewhere in Egypt. This is a significant impediment to the emergence of large, cross-regional social or protest movements.

2. Being Upper Egyptian

Upper Egyptians, whether from Minya or Aswan, generally display a relatively strong attachment to their regional identity, often referring to a set of traditions, values and a way of life allegedly distinguishing them from other Egyptians. This sense of belonging to a distinct region and culture, and the subsequent "emergence of a collective identification",³²⁶ has further developed since the seventies with the migration of numerous Upper Egyptians to Cairo and other parts of Lower Egypt, as well as to the Gulf States (Miller 2004, el-Aswad 2004). Therefore, the *khawāja*, the stranger against whom this different identity is claimed, can be anyone coming from outside the region, whether from Cairo or abroad (Gamblin 2004). Of course, the components of this alleged distinct identity vary from a person to another, and Upper Egyptians who have always lived in the region have different discourses to those who have temporarily or

³²⁶ Catherine Miller, "Between Myth and Reality: The Construction of a Sa'idi Identity in Cairo", in Hopkins and Saad, eds., *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*.

permanently left. In addition, according to the locals, the Upper Egyptian identity sometimes includes cultural features that can be found in the countryside elsewhere in Egypt, while people who live in cities such as Luxor or Aswan do not necessarily have the same discourse.

However, the majority of Upper Egyptians express affection for social values that do not necessarily appear specific to the region. These often include attachment to the family, the respect of elders' authority, and the commitment to essential traditions or *uṣūl*, ranging from visiting acquaintances to offer condolences, to always filling the plate of a visitor even if she/he says she/he is not hungry. In addition, values such as honour, bravery, virility and generosity are important. These are all traditions and social institutions that can be found among most Egyptians, elsewhere in the Middle East and beyond. Many scholars have studied these traditions in the Upper Egyptian context, I will therefore not dwell on this. What matters here is how Upper Egyptians' specific self-identification potentially affects their decisions to mobilise.

Nearly all the people I met in the regions of Aswan, Luxor and Qena, referred to their Upper Egyptian identity at least once during our meetings. I could not count the cups of tea I was offered during my fieldwork, or the number of times I forced myself to eat again to be polite, because when I attempted to decline I was told that *mayinfa'sh* (it is not possible). As a guest, I had to drink and/or eat something because this was part of the local *uṣūl*. When I first arrived in Aswan, each time I mentioned that my mother was originally from the city, I was asked from which *bayt* (home, family) we were. Most people highlighted the importance, in the region, of extended families or tribes, although the latter was mainly referred to in the countryside. Others insisted on Upper Egyptians' sentimentality or emotionality (*'āṭifiyya*), which sometimes incited people to rise against an injustice³²⁷. How do these expressions of regionalism affect mobilisation dynamics and processes?

The usually proud affirmation of being Upper Egyptian contrasted with many natives positioning themselves as victims when denouncing their marginalisation from the rest of Egypt:

³²⁷ Interview with Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

*“Upper Egypt is out of service.”*³²⁸

*“They should look a little at the Sa'id, we are buried, really, we were crushed with shoes, no one feels us. [...] We are the victim, and we are the ones who pay the price, no one else, especially in Upper Egypt”.*³²⁹

In Kom Ombo, a garbage collector told me that they were forgotten by the rest of Egypt, that then Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb did not know where Kom Ombo was on the map, and that even though Mubarak and his wife Suzanne used to go to Aswan, they had never heard of Kom Ombo³³⁰. A potentially powerful motive or justification for mobilisation, this exclusion is mainly described as an economic one. Many Upper Egyptians I met felt marginalised and even insulted by the central government's investment policies in the region. Indeed, several respondents expressed frustration vis-à-vis projects that were implemented in the region with little benefit for the local populations. For instance, Muhammad, an activist supporting Nubians' right to return to their lands south of Aswan explained:

*“When we heard that the state had launched the Toshka Project³³¹ [...] instead of the investors, I am first [...] this is my homeland [...] I am not saying he (the non-Upper Egyptian investor) should not come, but he comes after me, not before, I am the owner of this land”*³³².

This is a very important and recurrent critique of both the state's neoliberal policies and its recurrent marginalisation of the area's original residents. Muhammad also gave me the example of a 65,000-feddan³³³ local project in which only five or six participants were from Aswan, while all the others were from other governorates. Fawzi, a leading Nubian activist, also accused the Mubarak regime of selling lands cheaper to Arab investors than to locals. He said Nubians had been encouraged to get involved when their lands were

³²⁸ Interview with Moneim, 35, tourist guide, Luxor, April 2014.

³²⁹ Interview with Moemen, 20, university student, Qena, May 2014.

³³⁰ Interview with Khaled, 43, head of sector at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

³³¹ Also called the New Valley Project, the Toshka Project was launched in the late nineties with the purpose to develop a new valley in the Western desert thanks to digging canals that would bring water from Lake Nasser, south of Aswan. Mostly inactive since 2005 due to important technical difficulties, the project may be revived under President Sisi, who announced plans to do so.

³³² Interview with Muhammad, 46, Ministry of Agriculture employee, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

³³³ A unit of area, one feddan is equivalent to 4200 square metres, 0.42 hectares, or 1.038 acres.

sold at cheap prices to external investors³³⁴. Nubians were also angry about the lies spread by media accusing them of wanting to separate from Egypt³³⁵.

The development of the city of Luxor in the last twenty years is a particularly striking example of policies implemented by “outsiders” regardless of the local populations’ needs and demands. According to Sandrine Gamblin, the management of the city “lies entirely in the hands of outsiders, either people from Cairo who are close to the central authorities and/or the private sector; or foreigners from international organisations (UNESCO, World Bank, UNDP)”³³⁶, leading to a feeling of dispossession and exclusion among local populations (Gamblin 2004). Outsiders owning hotels, cruise boats, travel agencies, similarly exploit and benefit from the revenue generated by tourism much more than the locals, who work in maintenance, catering, driving, crafts, and other petty jobs (Gamblin 2004). Luxor’s urban division between both Nile banks also reflects a certain cultural, elitist vision: “on one side of the river is a world of backward peasants and robbers of antiquities; on the other side is a world of urban civility”³³⁷.

The tourism crisis since 2011 has highlighted the other side of the coin, behind archaeological sites and five-star hotels, with Luxor’s poor population now more visible to the scarce tourists visiting the city. If we leave the city for the countryside, just at the outskirts of Luxor, we find a totally different world, “an agricultural region in structural crisis and where industry is virtually non-existent”³³⁸. This is a world where “aid for development projects is inadequate and basic social infrastructures (such as health and education) are among the most deficient”³³⁹. I myself saw this in areas such as Armant and Al-Hebeil. In the latter, I spent an afternoon touring very poor neighbourhoods with the members of a local association in charge of identifying potential beneficiaries of housing renovation projects. Thus, we visited houses where roofs and walls could collapse at any moment; where large families cohabited with cattle in no more than two sheltered rooms; where hygiene was disastrous. I remember a house that was so infested

³³⁴ Interview with Fawzi, 61, retired, former worker in Saudi Arabia, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Sandrine Gamblin, “Luxor: A Tale of Two Cities”, chapter in Hopkins and Saad, eds., *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

by flies that we could not enter. This is at only a fifteen-minute drive from the five-star hotels of downtown Luxor.

Upper Egyptians' indignation about changes imposed by the central government regardless of their needs, including their marginalisation from agricultural or tourism development projects, is not new. However, recent changes have likely encouraged people to react more. This victimisation somehow endorses the idea of an oppressor from the north exploiting a weaker south, as in the "southern question" approach (Gran 2004). However, a more positive language of rights often goes along with a victim posture. Most people I met claimed they were only seeking to obtain their right through mobilising, trying to give their cause an irrefutable legitimacy. In addition to indignation vis-à-vis injustices inflicted by often northern outsiders, people were proud of their Upper Egyptian identity. Leading activists sometimes used this pride for mobilisation purposes. For instance, Khaled mentioned tickling his fellow garbage collectors' pride to mobilise them, arguing that people from the north were not better³⁴⁰. Once again, the invocation of the so-called superiority of Lower Egyptians through implying an inability of Upper Egyptians to mobilise, is here meant to provoke.

Upper Egyptians' sensitiveness originating, I suspect, from an aggrieved regional pride after decades of actual scorn and mostly ignorance from northern Egyptians, is best illustrated by a popular story circulating after the 25 January 2011 "revolution", which several people in Luxor reported to me. According to them, young people from Lower Egypt scribbled on trains that travel to Upper Egypt this sentence described by respondents as highly provocative: "if you want women, go to Luxor and Aswan"³⁴¹. What was implied by this sentence is that Upper Egypt was not participating in the revolution because Upper Egyptians were women, not real brave men. This significantly hurt the pride of a number of Upper Egyptians, who maintained that protests were taking or had taken place in their provinces just as in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and other northern cities. In addition, it demonstrates how the female condition can be assimilated to an insult in the Egyptian culture, due to its deemed inferior character. More importantly, this story shows the importance of cultural identity in people's decisions to mobilise, since several

³⁴⁰ Interview with Khaled, 43, head of sector at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

³⁴¹ "*law 'āyiz neswān, ruh Luxor u Aswan*". In other versions of the same story, it was written "Sohag, Qena and Aswan", with Luxor curiously disappearing.

respondents mentioned it as a provocation that justified their participation in protests. It is not only regional pride that is at stake here, it is also about defending an insulted masculinity³⁴². The latter can be a powerful mobiliser to preserve one's honour, especially when it is insinuated by Lower Egyptians. In Kom Ombo, a garbage collector told me that their lives had changed since the 2011 uprising because they had learnt manhood, virility (*rujūliyya*)³⁴³. Women also adopted this discourse glorifying virility despite its misogynist content, as shown by a blogpost on the train incident, written by a woman from Sohag³⁴⁴. This insulted masculinity framed as a cultural trait explains why several of my respondents were upset by mockeries of the north when it came to the number of participants in protests in Upper Egypt, compared to Cairo and other big cities. The train incident was a provocation because it implied that *Sa'āyda* had not participated in the "revolution"³⁴⁵. Others said that after 30 June 2013, it was no longer possible to say this about Upper Egyptians because, this time, they had allegedly massively mobilised:

*"Unfortunately, the Cairene thought that Upper Egypt was not interested in politics... despite having participated. On 30 June, they (the Upper Egyptians) wanted to show that if they want to participate, they participate."*³⁴⁶

Upper Egyptians are sometimes the first to spread or nourish the typical clichés about the *Sa'āyda*, including those living in Cairo, who "tended to provide a stereotypical description of their home region"³⁴⁷. In the political field, parties were commonly seen as baseless or completely failing in Upper Egypt³⁴⁸, as if they were succeeding elsewhere. Even some more or less experienced political activists were convinced of the region's lack of contentious politics:

*"I live in Upper Egypt, where there is no organised operation for protests"*³⁴⁹

³⁴² Or "humiliated masculinity". See Salwa Ismail, "The Egyptian revolution against the police", *Social Research* 79, no.2, 2012, 435-464; and Marie Duboc, "Where are the Men? Here are the Men and the Women! Surveillance, Gender, and Strikes in Egyptian Textile Factories", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Volume 9, Number 3, Fall 2013, pp. 28-53.

³⁴³ Interview with Muhammad, 32, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

³⁴⁴ <http://fashion.azyya.com/212961.html>. Apart from this blogpost, in which a woman from Sohag expresses her outrage at what she describes as an insult by people from the north, I have not found any track of this story in Egyptian media or elsewhere.

³⁴⁵ Interview with Haggag, 24, journalist, Luxor, April 2014.

³⁴⁶ Interview with Zaineab, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

³⁴⁷ Miller, "Between Myth and Reality: The Construction of a Sa'idi Identity in Cairo".

³⁴⁸ Interview with Shazli, 23, student, Aswan, February 2014.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Hala, 50, public sector employee, Qena, May 2014.

One reason to this is that many Upper Egyptians were simply not aware that demonstrations were taking place not that far from their home, especially during the 25 January 2011 uprising. Indeed, many of my informants, especially in the countryside, said that they had not heard about the important numbers of protesters who gathered in the main squares of Aswan and Luxor during the “revolution”, and that they thought events were mainly taking place in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. Overall, remoteness did not encourage ordinary people to stage protests:

*“There are no protests here. When there are demands for the village, we raise them to the local units and the local units raise them to the governor. And even if we protested here, there is no media, no way to communicate the protest.”*³⁵⁰

I have suggested above some characteristics of people’s perceptions of their Upper Egyptian identity, mainly defined in opposition to Cairene and other Lower Egyptians, which have a mobilising potential. These include the denunciation of outsiders’ marginalisation and exploitation of Upper Egypt through a victimisation discourse increasingly combined with a language praising natives’ rights. The exasperation vis-à-vis an insulted masculinity and regional pride also seems to encourage mobilisation. I will now consider the potential impact on mobilisation of three key patriarchal components of this claimed Upper Egyptian identity: clanship and subsequent loyalties; the implications of generational divisions; and women’s marginalisation from contentious politics.

3. Loyalty to the clan and tribal solidarities

An essentially rural region, Upper Egypt still has many features of a traditional patriarchal society. Tribal and clan affiliations³⁵¹ govern important aspects of social relations, especially in southern Upper Egypt’s countryside. Extended families are the norm; each member has duties towards its *bayt*, family or tribe, and loyalty is fundamental. Kirsten H. Bach noted the ambiguous and porous definitions of the terms tribe, clan and kin in the Upper Egyptian context. She noted that villagers sometimes referred to big kin groups as *qabā’il*, a term usually translated as “tribes”: “In most literature *qabīla* is translated as

³⁵⁰ Interview with Mona, 45, kindergarten director, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

³⁵¹ Tribes in southern Upper Egypt include the Ja’afra, the Ba’abda, the Aswanliyya, the Ansar, the Abbaseyin, the Bishariyya, the Halayil, and so on. A distinct ethnic and cultural minority, the Nubians are also divided between several tribes or families such as the Kunuz, Fadikiyya and Dabudiyya.

‘tribe’ but as with other concepts such as *usra* (household) I have noticed an ambiguity in the use of the word. Villagers use it both for small kinship groups and for larger ones such as the whole Ja’afra tribe, including thousands of people as well as other large kin groups of Arab descent [...]”³⁵². Bach described these links as the strongest social institution in Upper Egypt: “Kinship appeared as the most durable institution in the village; it entailed the most binding and extensive obligations and expectations for support among its members. Networks of friendship, neighbourhood, and even Sufi orders appeared to vary over time.”³⁵³

Local politics reflect this social reality in many ways. Inside each tribe or clan, families display a high solidarity, especially when it comes to competing with rival tribes or clans on elected or unelected political positions, or when a conflict arises³⁵⁴. Feuds are not uncommon in Upper Egypt. One of the most recent and worst tribal feuds took place while I was in Aswan in early April 2014, and left nearly 30 people dead. Tribes and clans play an important role in the prevention and resolution of crises of this kind. A Nubian activist explained that tribal leaders and elders guided people, who usually all followed the same direction after agreeing on something specific³⁵⁵. He said people listened to elders, even if at polls everyone had the opportunity to express her/his own opinion. Elders explained why people should support a local candidate in the interest of the village, insisting on the importance of local stakes³⁵⁶. Gamblin (1997) showed how in Luxor, tribes or extended families enjoying a central socioeconomic position had a major role in local politics. The authority and moral influence of clan leaders is generally associated with their economic position, as well as their connections and ability to mobilise interest or family networks³⁵⁷. Al-Teri, a parliamentary candidate in 2015 in Al-Hebeil, also invoked the tribal factor during elections:

³⁵² Kirsten H. Bach, “Changing Family and Marriage Patterns in an Aswan Village”, in Hopkins and Saad, eds., *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Saad and Hopkins (2004) identified two political functions for tribes: “providing leadership including members of the national Parliament as well as village leaders”, implying to support members in elections; and supporting fellow members when conflicts arise with others.

³⁵⁵ Interview with Muhammad, 46, Agriculture Ministry employee, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ See Sandrine Gamblin, « Familles, pouvoir et territoires : les élections législatives de 1995 dans une circonscription de Haute-Égypte », in Sandrine Gamblin, eds., *Contours et détours du politique en Égypte. Les élections législatives de 1995*, (Paris: L’Harmattan/Cedex, 1997).

*“The situation during the elections here in the village is different, the tribal society we live in is different...the citizen sees who is close to him...who has a social participation with me...in weddings, funerals, who serves me, if there is an issue, who supports me, who provides me services, who serves my interests”.*³⁵⁸

Clan and tribal solidarities often affect contentious politics in a manner similar to elections. When a group participates in a protest, especially over an issue of concern for the entire community, the main members of the group are expected to stand together. For instance, Nubians started to protest to demand the right to return to their lands in 2011 in Aswan. Mainly organised around cultural and welfare organisations such as Aswan’s General Nubian Union, members of the community engaged in a not-so-common public show of solidarity. In Nagaa Abdel Qader (see chapter 3), I suggested that clan solidarities combined with village elders’ apparent loyalty to local government officials had prevented water protests from escalating to a higher scale. In the first case, clans mobilised together for an issue transcending their differences. An example of this is Nubian leading activist Muhammad S.’ participation in the Nubian sit-in at Aswan governorate building. Yet, he lives in Suheil Island, a relatively prosperous Nubian area in Aswan. His community was not affected by Nubians’ relocation in the sixties, since their island is located north of the High Dam. However, he explained that many Nubians who, like him, are natives of the regions situated north of the High Dam, mobilised in solidarity with their brothers who were relocated in the sixties in the Nasr al-Nuba area, near Kom Ombo, due to the flooding of their lands resulting from the construction of the dam³⁵⁹. Therefore, in this case, ethnical and cultural Nubian solidarity is more important than differences between families and clans. At the same time, belonging to a Nubian family was a necessary condition for the participation in pro-Nubian demonstrations. Non-Nubians were not allowed to camp at the governorate building, to avoid a potential confusion over protesters’ demands³⁶⁰. Overall, clans played a positive role in the mobilisation of the Nubian minority.

On the contrary, in the case of Nagaa Abdel Qader, loyalty to the clan appeared to have played a demobilising role, since it impeded villagers within the same clan from

³⁵⁸ Interview with Al-Teri, 39, owner of several shops and bazars, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Muhammad S., 45, Electricity Company employee, Aswan, April 2015.

³⁶⁰ Informal conversation with Fawzi, 61, retired, former worker in Saudi Arabia, Aswan, April 2015.

questioning the authority of elders reluctant to confront the local authorities in wider protest actions. This reluctance appeared to come from a certain co-optation of village leaders by the authorities providing them services in exchange for their support and loyalty. Relying on these local clan and tribal divisions to exert its power in Upper Egypt, the Mubarak-era NDP used to choose people to represent large families and tribes³⁶¹. I argue that clans' key position in patronage networks led by the authorities potentially limit ordinary people's contentious mobilisations through the entailed loyalties. Gran proposed to analyse Upper Egypt as a "southern question", an interesting approach suggesting "a certain kind of capitalist nation-state hegemony"³⁶², a national domination of the North over the South, of the centre over the periphery, in sum a model emphasising regional imbalances³⁶³. If one follows this reasoning, a particular vision of regionalism considering Upper Egyptian citizens as inferior to Cairene and other northern populations appears behind policies neglecting Upper Egypt. Indeed, the North has been the main beneficiary of the central government's development policies at least since the seventies, while using southern migrants as cheap labour (Gran 2004). This exploitation of the popular classes and other resources of the south by Northern elites is partly facilitated by Southern elites, mainly heads of clans and leaders of villages, who accept benefits in exchange for their cooperation and loyalty³⁶⁴.

This interpretation has the merit to shed light on the contribution of largely co-opted Upper Egyptian elites, including numerous leaders of tribes and clans, to the perpetuation of this national system of domination, marginalisation and neglect of southern provinces. Traditional Upper Egyptian elites have continued to tap into government resources (through NDP and now pro-Sisi networks) to maintain their authority over large families and tribes through patron-client relationships. In other words, tribes and clans are largely imbricated into the pro-government clientelist networks. This system of delivery of services maintains the exploitation, the consent or, at least, the loyalty of the poor populations of the south, and is a strong impediment for people to mobilise on larger scales.

³⁶¹ Interview with Hamdi, 33, school teacher, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

³⁶² Peter Gran, "Upper Egypt in Modern History: A 'Southern Question'?", in Hopkins and Saad, eds., *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*.

³⁶³ Largely borrowing from Gramsci's analysis of the Italian case, Gran defined the "southern question" approach against "oriental despotism". The latter model viewed provinces and the countryside as "areas where a simplified traditional life carries on rather statically while change and movement occur in the larger cities".

³⁶⁴ See Gran, "Upper Egypt in Modern History: A 'Southern Question'?".

While loyalty to the tribe and/or clan potentially encourages, restrains or limits contentious mobilisations, depending on their context, it also has implications for the course of protests. For example, many informants said that the repression of protests tended to be less deadly in the *Sa'id* than in Cairo and other big cities of Lower Egypt. The scarcity of figures about protests since 2011, including death tolls, has prevented me from conclusively verifying this claim. According to Wikithawra, a website that has been gathering various statistics since the 2011 uprising, casualties including all categories of populations (protesters, members of security forces, journalists, doctors...) during the 18 days of the “revolution” stood at nine in Qena province, three in Aswan and none in Luxor, against 406 in Cairo and 132 in Alexandria³⁶⁵. Under the rule of the SCAF, three people were killed in Qena province, two in Aswan and two in Luxor. The website reports a slightly higher number of casualties, both civilian and security, in political violence between 3 July 2013 and 31 January 2014, which reached ten in Qena, nine in Aswan and five in Luxor, but this time compared to 1667 in Cairo, 382 in Giza and 123 in Minya.

However, protests have remained underreported in Upper Egypt. In consequence, even though the few figures we can find seem to attribute a higher number of protest casualties in Cairo, Alexandria and other northern cities, this may well come from lacking news and facts about demonstrations and clashes in Upper Egyptian cities. In addition, we may well find a correlation between a lower number of casualties and a lower number of protesters, compared with Cairo for example. Regardless of statistics, which are lacking, the fact remains that many of my respondents believed that there was a lower level of violence in protests in their region. They explained this alleged difference with the fact that participants often knew each other or at least had the possibility to easily identify others' family, *bayt* or tribe. This applies to members of security forces, as well as potential outsiders who may attempt to sow discord within a protest. Any evidence of violence targeting a person within a protest could result in a revenge feud if the identified assailant, whether a civilian or a member of security forces, belonged to another clan. The awareness of this risk of deadly vendettas apparently encourages most people, whether in the ranks of protesters or security forces, to exercise self-restraint. They generally think twice before using violence against rival protesters or members of security forces. The avoidance of violence due to the fear of retaliation therefore often discourages security forces from using live ammunition. When the latter became systematic to end pro-MB

³⁶⁵ <https://wikithawra.wordpress.com/2013/10/23/25jan18dayscasualties/>.

protests in Cairo and elsewhere in the country in 2013, tear gas remained much more common in Upper Egypt, as reported by several informants in Aswan.

Referring to such risks of conflicts between clans, Moemen, a young activist from Qena, claimed members of security forces tried to discourage people from their own clans from participating in protests, fearing an escalation into a tribal crisis, which “*used to influence us (them) at each step*”³⁶⁶. The risk of violence and deadly clashes similarly affected protest organisers’ strategies. Thus, in 2013, supporters of President Morsi usually demonstrated in different locations than opponents to the Muslim Brotherhood, especially when protests occurred at the same time, mainly on Friday afternoons and evenings (see chapter 1). In Qena and Luxor, pro and anti-MB protesters usually marched to different public squares. This does not mean that clashes did not occur. However, participants and security forces’ relative self-restraint due to the fear of tribal or sectarian feud probably made them less frequent and less deadly than in Cairo.

4. Youth and Elders’ respective roles

Hopkins and Saad (2004) noted that features self-identified by Upper Egyptians as differentiating them from others reverberated “as a form of social control – of elders over youth, of men over women”³⁶⁷. In Upper Egypt, the young are supposed to manifest an unconditional respect for elders. In turn, the latter try to maintain full authority and control over young people, whom they raise to become the future protectors of the tribe or the clan’s values. As elsewhere, generational divides imply political differences. In the aftermath of the 2013 coup, it was common to see many young people who were still supporting the “revolution”, or were sceptical of the transition, while elders were frequently supporters of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the providential man who would restore stability and security. Some families that I met typically reflected this divide, just like the owners of a café in Luxor’s Abul-Jud neighbourhood: while the father resolutely supported Sisi, both his sons were Ultras football fans supporting the “revolution”³⁶⁸. It is true that many younger people (i.e. below 45-50 years old) are politically committed to

³⁶⁶ Interview with Moemen, 20, university student, Qena, May 2014.

³⁶⁷ Hopkins and Saad, “The Region of Upper Egypt: Identity and Change”, introduction to *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*, by Hopkins and Saad, eds.

³⁶⁸ Interviews with Ahmed, 20, vocational student; Islam, 24, unemployed (Bachelor in tourism and hotels); and Ashraf (Ahmed and Islam’s father), 53, public sector employee and owner of a café. Luxor, April 2014.

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for various reasons, but this was not necessarily an anti-revolutionary orientation. At the time, and to some extent until now, Sisi incarnated a nationalist hope that appealed to part of the youth, and was not always seen as a contradiction of the goals of the 25 January “revolution”.

Even though young people’s challenges to elders are not new, tensions between generations were particularly palpable at the time of my stay in southern Upper Egypt. Often perceived as backward, elders have had their authority questioned by young activists, at least verbally. Many young people lamented being ruled by old, conservative people preventing the youth from introducing changes that would benefit the entire society. Confessing their wide frustrations, many others regretted that current rulers did not listen to the youth, challenging this perceived marginalisation of young people only because of their age and supposed lack of experience. Activists widely denounced this excess of power retained by elders:

*“After the revolution, these elders are not suitable.”*³⁶⁹

Whether young pro-revolution activists like Haytham in Aswan, or NDP-affiliated and pro-government activists like Hamdi in Kom Ombo, both similarly expressed ambitions for the youth in an era that would see them being granted more prerogatives. Haytham explained that Sisi supporters were *“a few old people sitting in their headquarters and concerned about their interests”*³⁷⁰. In addition, as analysed in the previous chapter, many activists from across the political spectrum intended to press the authorities to implement the constitutional clause reserving 25% of seats in elected local councils to the young. Others claimed that they were running under the banners of a pro-government party in order to be able to obtain some resources to act within their community³⁷¹. Indeed, many young people joined pro-Sisi movements and parties for the exact same purpose that they had/would have joined the ruling NDP under President Mubarak: joining a pro-government organisation gave access to resources and networks of influence that helped improve social status through the provision of services, and greatly supported electoral candidates (see chapter 4).

³⁶⁹ Interview with Hesham, 39, school teacher, Aswan, March 2014.

³⁷⁰ Informal conversation with Haytham, 20, university student, Aswan, April 2014.

³⁷¹ Interview with Al-Teri, 39, owner of several shops and bazars, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

The difficulties to openly oppose elders made many young people think of strategies to discretely evade their control. Some of them admitted that they had participated in protests without asking for their parents' authorisation. In particular, online social media such as Facebook have provided a relatively free space for young people to exchange and interact on a wide range of issues, including political matters. With 3G connected mobile phones becoming less expensive, even in the countryside, many young people are now connected. This relative emancipation due to increased Internet access may also change the youth vote. Al-Teri insisted on the generational gap. He explained that elders still voted within their tribes, while the youth increasingly reviewed platforms before choosing candidates:

*"Elders make a tribal choice, 100%...my cousin, neighbour, a native of the village... Youth are different, they squeeze the candidate like this, look what his election platform is, sit with him once or twice, comment on him...choose a thinking and not a tribal prejudice"*³⁷².

For Al-Teri, the state was responsible for the traditional way of thinking and voting:

*"The state has a role in which it did not educate the people during this time...And there was the patronage system (niẓām al-mahsūbiyya) before the revolution. For example, a person who had someone close to his family (in a state administration), he used to serve him. So people got used to this. [...] The choice is for the close (person), and if there are two (people) close, I think about who... I look at his election platform... This is for young people. But elders got used to something specific...youth now look for who is behind thinking."*³⁷³

Security forces also abide by the traditional authority of elders over youth, often approaching parents before considering arresting their adult sons. For instance, Ashraf, an Aswan student, told me that his father had received a phone call from a security officer warning him against his son's political activism³⁷⁴.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Informal conversation with Ashraf, 20, university student, Aswan, April 2014.

5. Gender divisions and women's activism

In Upper Egypt, gender divisions matter for the study of mobilisation since women rarely participate in protests and are excluded from most forms of public activism. Particularly true in the countryside, this exclusion stems from a mix of practical, cultural and patriarchal justifications. In a male-dominated world, it is not easy for a woman to invest the public sphere, and even less the presumably dangerous world of contentious politics. How do the idealised gender roles in the Upper Egyptian context affect local processes and dynamics of mobilisation?

In Upper Egypt, scenes of entire families going to demonstrations on Fridays as if it was a weekly recreation, as it occurred in Cairo's Tahrir Square, were not so common. Groups of male friends and acquaintances dominated protests in numbers. Men rarely took to the streets with their female relatives and children, officially for fear to involve them in potentially dangerous situations. Young men and women attending protests usually did so with their friends and fellows, not with their families, sometimes fearing their elders' disapproval and hiding from them. The primary reason accounting for women's rare participation in public protests is therefore their family's reticence, especially disapproving male relatives for both reasons of security and mores. It is normally required for women to request the permission of their male relatives for every move, sometimes simply to go out. When they mentioned their female relatives' participation, men usually said they had "brought them" as Salim, who implied that his wife's participation depended on his will or authorisation: "*No, I didn't make her participate*"³⁷⁵. In addition to fearing for the security of women, who are considered vulnerable and unable to defend themselves against sexual harassment and in clashes, many fathers and husbands thought it was not socially acceptable to leave women open to promiscuity within mainly male crowds. A Kom Ombo garbage collector said:

*"Sorry, I saw women in demonstrations. The individual who takes his wife to demonstrations is not a good man... I am an Egyptian man. How can I put my wife in the middle of men?"*³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Interview with Salim, 40, employee at the Water Company and microbus driver, Aswan, February 2014.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Muhammad, 32, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

50 year-old Hala, a former public sector employee and a Coptic Christian from Qena, said she was kicked out from a demonstration in Qena on 11 February 2011 by Islamists opposing the presence of women in protests³⁷⁷. She was also accused of being an American spy. Most of my male respondents confirmed that they feared for women being harassed, assaulted, maltreated or worse if they were arrested by the police. These risks actually deterred many women from participating in protests. One notable exception were the female MB supporters, still very present in marches at the time of my stay, including in Aswan:

*“Women... No, it’s not a minority (in pro-MB protests), on the contrary, there are many women, many. Actually, here in Aswan, people’s number diminished, men, however women still go. They still take to the streets and are determined to do so, but the kids, the exams, etc., make them a little busy. But they participate and insist on participating, they don’t care about the arrests or about anything.”*³⁷⁸

In addition, women were usually authorised to take part in public celebrations such as the one that followed the army’s removal of President Morsi on 3 July 2013, as in Al-Hajindiyya³⁷⁹ and Esna³⁸⁰:

*“We were happy, we wanted to express our feeling and go to the streets. Of course, we are a rural society, it is hard for a woman to go to celebrations in urban centres, but we celebrated here by the houses... On 3 July, we went to the streets to support the army, we felt there was freedom”.*³⁸¹

On the other hand, women who could attend protests were almost always banned from staying overnight, due to the same risks mentioned previously. An exception would be if their families participated in an overnight sit-in. However, in Upper Egypt, this is quite unusual. It is generally groups of relatively young men who camp overnight. Some respondents as Amani, a feminist activist in the Aswan-based Free Southern initiative, complained about a sexist division in protests, according to which women were usually

³⁷⁷ Interview with Hala, 50, public sector employee, Qena, May 2014.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), April 2014.

³⁷⁹ Meeting with several residents, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

³⁸⁰ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

³⁸¹ Interview with Intissar, 39, social worker, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

standing behind men, so that they could be protected from possible violence³⁸². Zaineb had a more positive vision of these gender divisions and remembered that on 30 June 2013, girls distributed bottles of water to young men during protests, while the latter formed human chains to protect them³⁸³.

A second reason possibly limiting women's attendance in protests is their sometimes-remote place of residence. Enjoying less freedom of movement than their male relatives, women cannot stay out late at night if they are on their own. In Upper Egypt, protests usually take place in big cities, usually the capitals of governorates. Therefore, participants residing out of the city have to commute:

*“Here if girls want to participate, they can't go, it's difficult, the woman has no freedom. Here the man takes all freedom. And the man does not participate because here you have the crops [...] he does not go. The distance is far, two hours to go to Aswan and two hours to come back... it's far. If it was here, in the street, everyone would go. But we have nothing here in the street.”*³⁸⁴

*“Here protests are in Aswan. We (women) don't go to Aswan [...] the youth are those who go to demonstrations”.*³⁸⁵

Consequently, commuting is more complicated for women. Let us take the example of a protest taking place in the city after sunset, which is often the case most of the year due to high temperatures during the day. A woman or a group of women living in a village whose distance from the city requires significant time in public transports would generally not be able to attend. If they participated in a protest starting earlier in the day, they would have to leave at a reasonable time, therefore potentially missing important developments during the event, such as, for example, the setting of a date for a next demonstration. Zaineb attended 30 June 2013 protests in Luxor, however, she had to leave early to reach the last train to Esna, her hometown, scheduled at 9pm³⁸⁶.

³⁸² Informal conversation with Amani, social worker, Aswan, January 2014.

³⁸³ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

³⁸⁴ Interview with Aisha, 52, pensioner (primary education), Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

³⁸⁵ Interview with Hoda, 54, housewife (middle degree in business studies), Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

³⁸⁶ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

In addition to restrictions on their movements outside their home, women also have less freedom of speech than men. Here again, this was particularly the case in the countryside, where it was hard for women to express themselves in public, and therefore take a stance in political or social debates. I remember walking around Al-Hebeil village, where poverty is sometimes striking, and talking to a number of women who all said they were not complaining about anything in particular, except unemployment, on which they were sensitive since it overwhelmingly affected their sons. A woman told me that they were fine at home, contrary to men who had problems at work for instance. Despite being a woman myself, I was usually received by male respondents while the women of the house were confined to another room. When I interviewed women, I often joined them in this separate room since they would not speak in front of a male audience. Privacy was a condition for women to speak relatively freely. The situation was different in cities, especially with young girls who were generally well educated and enjoyed more freedom of movement. In addition, even though women sometimes complained about their lack of freedom and inequality with men, they usually did so in an indirect way. As their male counterparts, they often talked about oppression and violated rights, without necessarily referring to the condition of women, which they rarely questioned.

Women are similarly banned from many public places exclusively frequented by men, such as popular cafés, which have proved to be important mobilisation sites (Schielke 2013, Allal and Cooper 2012). Young men, including activists, assiduously frequent these places, where they have their habits and acquaintances, often because they are cheap. I had to conduct many interviews in such cafés in Aswan, Luxor and Qena. As almost always the only woman present in the entire place, I was an object of curiosity, including, I suppose, for the security informants rumoured to go to these cafés. When they go out, women more usually frequent outdoor places such as public gardens and private (professional) clubs, and some more expensive, allegedly more elegant and respectable cafés, for those who can afford it. As in Cairo, with the exception of some Upper class rebels, Muslim Upper Egyptian women never smoke in public and wear the Islamic veil. Women who do not wear the veil are generally identified as Coptic Christians.

Thirdly, women's participation in protests as in other public events is constrained by their duties at home, especially when they have young children whom they cannot leave. These responsibilities make their daily schedules often less flexible than men's. Husbands and

fathers assumed that women had to fulfil their domestic duties, especially in their absence. Salim said his wife had to stay home and take care of their young children, rather than going to demonstrations³⁸⁷.

Fourthly, Upper Egyptian women have an obligation of discretion and modesty conditioning their respectability, and therefore risk their reputation and honourability when they attend protests. Zaineb was told by her father that going to a demonstration was not a respectable attitude for a young woman. Yet, she participated in several protests, including the one against the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya governor in Luxor in June 2013 and on 30 June. She explained that in Esna, her hometown, women who simply go out may have a bad reputation. In addition, she reported that MB supporters used to spread the rumour, during the 30 June uprising, that women attending anti-MB demonstrations were not decent women. Zaineb explained why she was banned by her family from going out after someone from the State Security had called her father:

“When the State Security calls a girl in the Sa'id, from any family, it is a catastrophe, a problem [...] if a girl is summoned in an investigation, her reputation is ruined. [...] My family banned me from going out for three months...I had to forget about Luxor³⁸⁸. But I insisted, I could not leave what I had built, it was not easy for me.”³⁸⁹

“I told him (her father), I am a girl. I saw something wrong and wanted to talk about it. I am a citizen; I want to do something. Father, when you see the country working with wasta³⁹⁰, your son has finished university, he has a business diploma and works in electricity... but he does not work [...] I was prevented from going out, and I was also grown up, I used to raise my brother, tell him this is wrong, this is right, so I told him (her father), if I am prevented to go, I won't be able to continue raising by brothers. How will I tell what's wrong and right if I did right and was punished for it as if it was wrong?”³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Interview with Salim, 40, employee at the Water Company and microbus driver, Aswan, February 2014.

³⁸⁸ Although she works and has most of her social circles in Luxor, Zaineb lives in the town of Esna, about 58 km south of Luxor.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

³⁹⁰ *Wasta* refers to connections and influence that help acquire interests and social positions.

³⁹¹ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

Zaineb's mother died when she was 15 and, as the elder, she largely raised her younger brothers and sisters. She grew up by Esna temple, and when she was a child, she used to take tourists to several places, showing them for a few dollars, for example, women making bread.

In rather conservative Upper Egypt, we have seen that women's participation in public mobilisations remained limited. Political and social activism is similarly often the privilege of a few women, as Amani, coming from rather well-educated and socially elevated backgrounds. The female activists I met in Aswan and Luxor regions faced different dilemmas and constraints. Particularly in the countryside, women are often excluded from most forms of activism, even in some welfare associations. An employee at Al-Hebeil's health unit told me that women had not been invited to join the family association advocating the football field issue where we had met³⁹². Women seem to be often deliberately kept away. For instance, Khaled, a leading activist in the movement against the Kima Canal, admitted that even though some women had attended the meetings of the coordination committee, the latter did not include any female member. He acknowledged that this constituted a weakness for the movement³⁹³. In addition, women engaging in social or political activism are often constrained to a limited number of roles, usually involving women, children, education and health issues. Whether in associations or parties, they provide services and trainings mainly to a female public. In addition, women are no safer than their male fellows are, from the risks of co-optation or instrumentalisation by some political parties or movements.

Overall, Upper Egyptian women struggle to be taken seriously. For example, Tariq from Abul Rish talked about women's activism with amusement, joking about Nahed (see chapter 2), whom he called a "problem". At the same time, he denounced some traditions which discriminate against women that persist in Upper Egypt despite contradicting the Qur'an, such as preventing them from inheriting. Quoting Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, which did not ban women's activism, Tariq claimed he supported the latter, while proudly insisting on the strength of their women:

³⁹² Informal conversation with Suad, health unit employee, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

³⁹³ Interview with Khaled, accountant, Aswan, April 2015.

*“One day, the water was cut, broken, and was going to flood everything. They called the company, [...] but no one asked about them. What did the women do? They brought rocks and closed the street. No one would pass. They stood up.”*³⁹⁴

As for participating in protests, restrictions to their freedoms of movement and speech, their concern for preserving their social reputation, as well as many men’s reticence vis-à-vis women devoting too much time to professional or outdoor activities, can also restrain their activism, even in welfare organisations. This is often even harder to justify for women engaged in political movements. Intissar, a 40-year-old social activist, lives in Al-Hajindiyya, a small village between Silwa and Edfu, in the province of Aswan. She has a degree in business studies and is the executive director of the Association for Development in Al-Hajindiyya. Most of her activities involve regular trips to Aswan, the capital city of the governorate, about two hours in microbus from home. As a result, and because she is a woman travelling alone, she has to leave very early in the morning and come back in the afternoon before sunset. This makes her miss many events that take place at night in the city. For instance, when I told her about *Lamm al-shaml* initiative (see chapter 4), she was interested but said she would not be able to attend their meetings since they often took place after sunset. Furthermore, because of her well-known activism, she confessed difficulties to find a husband. She had been engaged several times, but nothing had worked out. She even told me that one of her candidates for marriage had asked her to renounce her social work. She chose her activism instead, and remained unmarried at above 40, a heavy social burden in such a village.

Overall, these restrictions to women’s activism limit the number of participants in protests, contributing to constraining them to a small, local scale. Women themselves contribute to perpetuating these patriarchal traditions and “idealised gender roles” (Khater 1996) excluding them from swathes of public life for the alleged purpose of their protection. As for young adults, women are often under the yoke of an almighty paternalistic authority. However, this seemed to be slowly changing. Some young men as Shazli saw some shifting attitudes towards women’s contentious politics thanks to the 25 January “revolution”, arguing that even Islamists used to take women to protests³⁹⁵. Even in the deep *Sa’id*, girls increasingly enjoy a higher level of education, and studies, work

³⁹⁴ Interview with Tariq, 45, High Dam administration employee, Aswan, April 2015.

³⁹⁵ Interview with Shazli, 23, student, Aswan, February 2014.

or marriage, often send them away from their rural hometowns to bigger cities. This was the case of Zaineb, who grew up in Esna, but had been commuting to Luxor for work:

“I used to be like everyone in a simple village...principles, traditions and tribalism to some extent rule. [...] Among the laws of this city or village, the girl should not go out, should not talk to someone, should not walk on her own, there are specific times when she can go out. I was like any girl, whose dream is to get married, become a woman after graduating, and stay home. But I had a dream, I used to see people talking about politics on TV programmes, and there were girls who were political activists, got detained, and they had a cause and I felt they were proud... Why shouldn't I be like this girl? Why shouldn't I be on the small screen of the TV, which is seen by everyone? I don't have to be a political activist or talk about politics, but at least I should have something people would listen to, which would matter to them. So at the time, I decided to continue my dream and look for a job, a craft. Here, there is no girl who has a craft, a girl who works in fabrication. So I left Esna for Luxor... the city of tourism, a different city...even if it's the same governorate, we were very different...”³⁹⁶

Commuting to cities therefore gave women more opportunities to escape parental or marital authority. Women as Zaineb described their commitment to a form of social or political activism as a means of emancipation. Indeed, probably more than Facebook³⁹⁷, the association, the youth movement, the campaign or the party, and even the workplace³⁹⁸, have tended to provide a relatively free space for women to evade domestic patriarchal authority. This has allowed them to assert themselves as individuals with opinions and ideas. In other words, despite often reproducing the traditional gender divisions, diverse forms of social and political activism offer women some possibilities of emancipation. They contribute to shaking up the traditional boundaries between the private and public spheres and the limits of the permissible³⁹⁹ (Ghannam 2002). This was particularly the case for women from the countryside who studied or worked in a city.

³⁹⁶ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

³⁹⁷ Many young girls and activists also used Facebook for political purposes though.

³⁹⁸ See, for example, Akram Fouad Khater, ““House” to “Goddess of the House”: Gender, Class, and Silk in 19th-Century Mount Lebanon”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Aug. 1996, pp. 325-348.

³⁹⁹ These definitions are central to the reproduction of power relationships and gender inequalities. See Farha Ghannam, *Remaking the Modern. Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002).

Zaineb remembers her first steps in the world of political activism, after she started to work in Luxor:

*“The world started to widen, I learnt how as a woman I have an existence, I have a right in life at least, it’s not just about eating, drinking and sleeping.”*⁴⁰⁰

6. Conclusion: studying contentious politics in distinct sociocultural contexts

In conclusion, in this chapter I have striven to demonstrate how the social and cultural context matters when studying mobilisation dynamics and processes. Taking the example of southern Upper Egypt, where I undertook the research on which this thesis is largely based, I have shed light on cultural and identity issues that often constrain, but also sometimes encourage, ordinary people and more experienced activists to mobilise. In the same way as political opportunities and threats, the sociocultural environment also shapes the course of and forms taken by mobilisation, simply because it sets the range of options that are available to people. This chapter has thus emphasised, on the one hand, the weight of traditions and usages and, on the other hand, the identity perceptions, that seem to be important to ordinary people considering mobilising on all kinds of issues. A too often despised regional pride has pushed some people to engage in various forms of activism, while an insulted masculinity has provoked some Upper Egyptian men (and women), likely encouraging them to more actively engage in nationwide protests, at least until the 30 June 2013 uprising. I have suggested through various examples in this chapter and the previous ones how mechanisms of co-optation relying on patriarchal institutions and traditions, including tribes and clans involved in pro-government clientelist networks, persistently impeded most attempts by more progressive, often younger people, to coordinate protests at a wider scale. Clans and tribes have sometimes stood together to defend a common cause, as the Nubian community in Aswan since 2011. The fear of tribal feud has encouraged self-restraint both by contentious actors and security forces. Young people in general, and women in particular, who have been facing challenges to overcome the patriarchal authority, have found in various forms of activism a degree of emancipation.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

Whether generational and gender divisions, clan logics or the attachment to the homeland, most of the sociocultural features analysed here are not that specific to Upper Egypt. Many of them can be found elsewhere in Egypt, for instance in the countryside in Delta provinces. Reem Saad and Nicholas Hopkins (2004) noted a decade ago that statistical differences between Lower and Upper Egypt were not that important. Sholkamy argues that “what some may project as specificities or eccentricities of an Upper Egyptian identity are products of the physical, social, material, and moral conditions that prevail in many villages of the *Sa'id*”⁴⁰¹. In addition, a number of these characteristics, especially patriarchal traditions, exist in most Middle Eastern societies. If Upper Egypt is not that exceptional, what does the analysis of these sociocultural traits bring to our study of popular mobilisations, especially those that remain locally contained?

Using the case of Upper Egypt, this chapter has argued that the social and cultural traditions and institutions of a given location affected ordinary people’s contentious politics as much as their perceptions of political opportunities and threats. It has suggested that the constant nurturing of this Upper Egyptian identity in the exchanges between the North and the South combined with mechanisms of loyalty often based on the belonging to possibly co-opted clans or tribes, potentially prevent people from imagining ways to ally with other populations suffering from similar ills elsewhere. Generational and gender divisions resulting from patriarchal traditions have similarly influenced (de)mobilisation. In addition, my intuition is that Upper Egypt has been suffering, since the seventies, from an exile of some of its best-educated and affluent populations, remaining stuck with less progressive leaders. Further empirical research would be required to demonstrate this. Eventually, the dominant “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) was often the Upper Egyptian identity, defined by informants as distinct from other Egyptians. I less frequently heard people mention the *sha'b* than the *Sa'id*. Perhaps this impedes them from mobilising more significantly on a national scale, since they tend to see themselves as bearing specific grievances. I have also demonstrated that people resorted to a language of rights to reclaim their belonging to the national polity, meaning that far from being a fatality, their exclusion is increasingly contested. I now turn to the last chapter of this thesis, which explains why, apart from the exception of *Tamarrod*, most Upper Egyptians have not adhered to the currently available nationwide protest campaigns.

⁴⁰¹ Hania Sholkamy, “Constructing the Feminine...and the Masculine: Child Rearing and Identity”, in Hopkins and Saad, eds., *Upper Egypt, Identity and Change*.

Chapter 6: Large protest movements' failure to gather new constituencies

1. Introduction: the decline of street politics and opposition campaigns

On the eve of the 30 June uprising, street politics were flourishing. At the time, the nature of the political polarisation seemed clear. On the one hand, supporters of President Morsi were determined to defend their ruler across Egyptian squares. On the other hand, the very heterogeneous opponents to the Muslim Brotherhood, including “revolutionaries” and *filūl*, were equally determined to depose the president. On 30 June, they took to the streets, partly answering a call by the *Tamarrod* petition campaign. Indeed, the success of the 30 June uprising against the Muslim Brotherhood owes a lot to the efficiency of the nationwide *Tamarrod* campaign. However, in the weeks that followed the coup, many people who had protested to demand President Morsi’s withdrawal, especially the supporters of the 25 January “revolution”, distanced themselves from a transition roadmap towards which they increasingly felt uncomfortable. By the time I started my fieldwork, in early 2014, the post-coup regime’s multiform repression had started to pay off. Street politics were declining, and opposition movements were in retreat. In chapter 3, we saw how the political and economic conditions that have prevailed in Egypt since the July 2013 military coup have discouraged most ordinary people, especially “not-so-committed” activists (Fillieule 2015), from engaging in contentious politics, while encouraging those who do still take to the streets to adopt less transgressive strategies.

Despite the fierce repression since the coup, three sectors for dissent have persisted. Yet, ordinary citizens have largely failed to join these three campaigns. On the one hand, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, including many Salafists that had voted for Muhammad Morsi and opposed the coup, members of radical al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya and more moderate Islamist parties such as al-Wasat Party, have been engaged in a protest movement. Three years after the coup, the movement has largely demobilised as a consequence of the mass killing and detention of most of its leaders, including not only Brotherhood executives but also many preachers and university students who used to organise protests. While a small number of MB supporters may have joined the ranks of violent militant groups such as the Islamic State in Sinai, the remaining supporters have been increasingly constrained to short marches and human chains that are easier to

disperse, and which are confined to the backstreets. This trend has been observed in Upper Egypt, where the number of pro-MB protests has gradually diminished. But has repression really been the main reason behind the weakening of the pro-MB protest movement? Or has it been a matter of public support? On the other hand, those remaining loyal to the 25 January “revolution” have progressively withdrawn from the streets, often retreating into online reporting of violations and local initiatives focusing on social work (see chapter 4). Here again, exacerbated repression has undeniably played an important role, but is it the only reason of the so-called revolutionaries’ essential withdrawal from the political scene?

Finally, labour protests have persisted despite repression. Both the working class and white-collar workers, including industrial workers, temporary employees, doctors and lawyers, have continued to mobilise to demand their rights and dues. The year following the 30 June uprising witnessed several labour protests, including in southern Upper Egypt, where garbage collectors, postal workers, and others went on strike. The Democracy Meter, an Egyptian NGO, reported across Egypt 493 labour protests in the first four months of 2016⁴⁰², and a total of 1,117 labour protests in 2015⁴⁰³. The also Egyptian Mahrousa Centre for Socioeconomic Development had reported 2,274 labour protests in 2014⁴⁰⁴, including 1,651 in the first half alone. This decline between 2014 and 2015 is most likely due to the regime’s efforts to silence protests. However, it may be temporary as shown by the numerous labour protests that took place in the first half of 2016. Yet, such protests have failed, so far, to unite. Why, despite a gradual deterioration of the situation in the country, have remaining protest movements failed to gather more popular support? Why has the wide majority of Upper Egyptians stayed distant from the main instances of mobilisations since the aftermath of the 30 June uprising?

This chapter begins by analysing the rare example of successful national coordination provided by the *Tamarrod* campaign. It then explains why the three largest available protest or social movements in Egypt – the “revolution”, the pro-Muslim Brotherhood protest movement, and the labour movement – have remained largely unattractive to a majority of ordinary Egyptians, who have come to associate protest with instability. I

⁴⁰² <http://arabtradeunion.org/content/egypt-labour-protests-are-increasing>.

⁴⁰³ <http://demometer.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/1117-2015.html>.

⁴⁰⁴ <http://elmahrousacenter.org/english/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/The-Annual-Report-Brief-on-Labor-Movement-in-Egypt1.pdf>.

suggest that repression and fatigue towards the “revolution” do not fully explain the persisting demobilisation of the majority of the Egyptian population, especially while various protest movements are still available. Their unattractiveness stems, the chapter argues, from the three dissent trends’ failure, until now, to articulate clear, credible, long-term alternative political projects addressing the everyday aspirations and grievances of all the components of the Egyptian society, and particularly of the poor. This inability partly comes from the internal divisions that have plagued the opposition to the new authoritarian regime, impeding the emergence of true, cohesive, ambitious social movements that could constitute political actors able to shake the balance of power. Additionally, such campaigns have suffered from their perceived exclusionary character, their failure to transcend social divisions and challenge the marginalisation of the poor. Focusing on ordinary people’s perceptions of these movements, the chapter gives examples of common views, opposing them to the testimonies of some participants in these movements.

In the first section, I argue that the *Tamarrod* campaign was successful in mobilising large numbers ahead of the 30 June uprising because, firstly, it transcended the traditional divisions around a simple goal and, secondly, it benefited from the nationwide involvement of activist networks, and the support of security forces, the media, and other actors who were able to exploit growing popular discontent. In the following sections of the chapter, I will show that such conditions were never recreated, whether in favour of the “revolution”, the labour movement, or the protests supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. In the second section, I attempt to demonstrate that, since June 2013, there has been no significant mobilisation in support for the 25 January “revolution” because the popular adhesion to the uprising has remained marginal, especially in provinces and the countryside. 25 January is unpopular because it is perceived as having brought instability to the country (see chapter 3). Its leaders have been unable to articulate a credible alternative vision addressing the needs of the wide public and particularly the poor. I outlined in chapter 4 several factors that have prevented them from reaching wider constituencies. In the third section, I suggest that workers’ protests pursue only very specific workplace demands that do not mobilise broader constituencies. In particular, people seeing themselves as part of popular classes have criticised protests by perceivably less needy populations such as industrial workers, doctors, or teachers. The latter, in turn, have not really attempted to mobilise support beyond their profession or sector. In the

fourth section, I show that the Muslim Brotherhood has also failed to present a comprehensive alternative political project, while being perceived as sectarian and exclusionary. Although it has been able to call on the support of many Salafists and other radical Islamists, it could not grow beyond that constituency.

2. The only exception: explaining the success of the nationwide *Tamarrod* campaign

Tamarrod or “rebellion” was a grassroots petition campaign demanding President Morsi’s resignation followed by the organisation of early presidential elections. *Tamarrod* was born from the mounting discontent of supporters of 25 January seeing their “revolution” being stolen by a new authoritarian regime. While many revolutionaries had voted for Morsi in 2012 to avoid a potential return of the Mubarak regime, the point of no return was likely reached when protesters were violently repressed outside al-Ittihadiya presidential palace in Cairo in December 2012, after the president granted himself immense powers in a constitutional declaration. Launched in May 2013 and organised throughout the weeks that preceded the mass demonstrations which led to Morsi’s ouster by the army on 3 July 2013, *Tamarrod* mobilised many activists of diverse political backgrounds, who collected signatures of citizens across the country. Led by Mahmud Badr, Muhammad Abdel Aziz and Hassan Shahin, three young “revolutionaries” and middle-class journalists who met in the ranks of *Kifaya* in the 2000s, the purpose of the petition campaign was to collect 15 million signatures, above the 13 million of people who voted for Morsi in 2012, in an attempt to pressure the president to resign. The petition, which turned into a protest movement, also affirmed a commitment to the goals of the “revolution”. As a result of the crowds of Egyptians who went to the streets from 30 June 2013, the campaign reached at least one of its aims when President Morsi was deposed by the army on 3 July. How can we explain this success?

Firstly, the campaign’s success is explained by the nationwide involvement of multiple activist networks. Indeed, *Tamarrod* exemplifies a rare case of nationwide coordination of local activists, who were able to successfully mobilise in a protest movement. Distinct from the role of local activists in popular mobilisations against deteriorating public services, *Tamarrod* sheds light on the way activist networks operate at the local level as part of a major national campaign. In Upper Egypt as elsewhere, supporters of the

“revolution” and other activists played a key role in gathering signatures from residents of villages and remote areas, where Internet access was less available and MB influence sometimes stronger. In other words, local activists enabled *Tamarrod* to penetrate places that national coordinators of the campaign would have never been able to reach. By giving the campaign access to multiple local networks thanks to a decentralised organisation that proved very efficient, activists significantly contributed to the success of the *Tamarrod* campaign. The petition was widely circulated online, including on social media. Any activist or ordinary citizen could print the form, sign it, and hand it over to local activist groups or political parties. Activists coordinating the campaign at the national level then toured Egyptian provinces and collected those signatures. Activists encouraged ordinary people, including residents of the most remote villages, to sign the petition demanding President Morsi’s resignation and the organisation of early elections. Most of the non-Islamist political activists I met in Aswan and Luxor participated in the *Tamarrod* campaign. Some ordinary citizens, devoid of previous activist experience, also did.

In Aswan, those who most actively engaged in the campaign were already experienced political activists. Mahdi, a 33-year-old travel agent, was a leading revolutionary activist in Aswan. A member of the Wafd Party since 2000, he was active in Kifaya, then in Muhammad al-Baradei’s National Association for Change (NAC), before calling for protests on 25 January 2011 in Aswan in leaflets and events on Facebook. He then joined the Revolution Youth Coalition. He was very active in *Tamarrod* in Aswan: not only was he among the administrators of the official page of the campaign in Aswan, he also gathered signatures in the field. He explained the campaign was an idea by (former) Kifaya members, which came up as soon as October 2012 after President Morsi’s completion of his first 100 days in power. *Tamarrod* quickly grew with the accumulation of signatures. Campaigning included the use of vehicles with loud speakers, the distribution of tasks in small groups, the broadcasting in public places of videos about President Morsi’s mistakes, the cooperation with many political parties, amongst other strategies to rally against the Muslim Brotherhood⁴⁰⁵. Still according to Mahdi, the petition was a very powerful mobilising strategy since it made people feel responsible and pushed them to participate in anti-MB protests to show their commitment⁴⁰⁶. As pointed by Caroline Barbary and Maria Adib Doss, “the strength of the petition has thus

⁴⁰⁵ Informal conversation with Mahdi, 33, travel agent, Aswan, January 2014.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

consisted in a personal involvement of the signatories, therefore creating a civic commitment available to everyone”⁴⁰⁷.

Nabil, the coordinator of the April 6 Youth Movement in Luxor and most of southern Upper Egypt, recalled his participation in his province of Luxor. He was very active in gathering signatures for the *Tamarrod* campaign in his region, while remaining sceptical:

*“There is an information no one knows, I was the last one to sign Tamarrod ... I wasn’t convinced, I wasn’t reassured by it... I was making people sign, but I wasn’t signing. On the day when I signed, my friends celebrated.”*⁴⁰⁸

He remembers that not everyone in 6 April was in favour of *Tamarrod* and explained that if large numbers of April 6 members had participated in the campaign, they had done it on an individual basis, as the movement had not taken a firm stance for it: *“Whoever signed Tamarrod did it privately...far from the organisation”*.⁴⁰⁹

However, despite obvious doubts, Nabil deployed considerable efforts to gather signatures, even in very remote villages. He said it was the Muslim Brotherhood’s “stupidity” that made him eventually sign. He meant both the stupidity of MB leaders ruling the country and the stupidity of many ordinary MB supporters he had met while campaigning for *Tamarrod*. Activists such as Nabil often toured villages with a trustworthy local, who introduced them to other residents. They went door to door to collect signatures, distributing copies to residents willing to make other copies and repeat the same process. They were sometimes warmly welcomed, and sometimes rejected by mistrustful people or MB supporters. For example, Nabil was rejected on several occasions by Islamist supporters saying that they would not sign the petition because they had made their ablution (for prayers). While this reference to their religious duties was a way to translate their hostility or fierce opposition to the campaign, it was taken as a further provocation by activists of *Tamarrod* who also happened to be practicing Muslims as Nabil, fostering them to pursue their anti-MB activism. In addition, a sectarian rhetoric

⁴⁰⁷ « La force de la pétition a donc consisté en une implication personnelle des signataires, créant ainsi un engagement citoyen à portée de tous ». Caroline Barbary and Maria Adib Doss, « Tamarrod (« rébellion ») : une autre lecture de l’action politique dans le processus révolutionnaire égyptien », *Confluences Méditerranée*, N° 88, 2014/1, p. 155-169.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Nabil, 36, unemployed (Bachelor in business studies), Luxor, March 2015.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

was also sometimes used by MB supporters, who said they believed that the people behind *Tamarrod* were Christians⁴¹⁰. Arguments sometimes erupted, and activists were threatened, insulted, even beaten, and forced to leave the area where they were trying to campaign. People sometimes defaced the petition, by spitting on them⁴¹¹.

Secondly, *Tamarrod* benefited from the support of security forces, the media, political parties, and other elites who were able to inflate and exploit popular discontent aimed at President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, local activists' contribution to the mobilisation of the populace ahead of the 30 June protests cannot be understood without apprehending the context in which the *Tamarrod* campaign developed. According to Nabil, most people who signed the petition did not need convincing. President Morsi was blamed for his inability to reach beyond the membership structure of his movement and be the president of all Egyptians. More importantly, the MB in power had caused widespread discontent with its policies. In rural areas, people were particularly suffering from recurrent electricity cuts and fuel shortages, which affected their work and daily lives. In Luxor, where many people depend on tourism, a persisting crisis in the sector was blamed on the Muslim Brotherhood's inability to restore security and stability in the country. In addition, President Morsi's decision in June 2013 to appoint a figure of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya as the new governor of Luxor further angered residents, who even took it as an insult, since the latter was suspected of involvement in the 1997 massacre at Deir al-Bahari temple, a catastrophe for the tourism sector and the city. Ordinary people of *Hizb al-canapa* (the "Sofa Party") took to the streets mainly for the defence of tourism after this last provocation, according to Nabil⁴¹².

However, it is only when the *Tamarrod* campaign appeared potentially successful that supporters of the former regime really became interested in exploiting it politically (Barbary and Adib Doss 2014). Increasing popular discontent, including as a result of fuel, power and water shortages, was further excited by most media's incitement against President Morsi and the MB. The *Tamarrod* campaign became quickly known thanks to its expansive media coverage. It benefitted from the support of the mainstream media, as well as private TV channels owned by businessmen, which offered its leaders extensive

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

publicity. Political parties were also actively engaged in the campaign, including in provinces. Businessman Naguib Sawiris' Free Egyptians Party offered the campaign its main HQ in Cairo's Heliopolis neighbourhood. The tycoon also provided coverage through his media empire.

In particular, it now appears obvious that the success of *Tamarrod* would have been incomplete without the endorsement of the security apparatus and its business allies, the real winners, if not the main architects, of the 30 June 2013 uprising against the Muslim Brotherhood. The security apparatus actively strived to mobilise the populace against the MB. The army and the police alike had made public not only that they would not disperse anti-MB demonstrations (Ketchley 2016), but that they would protect protesters from potential intrusions by supporters of President Morsi. This reassured ordinary people, who felt they could safely mobilise on 30 June. Several activists acknowledged that people had participated en masse in the 30 June protests because they knew the army and the police were on their side, which limited fears⁴¹³. Salman, a member in Hamdeen Sabbahi's Popular Current, explained that he was not afraid, mainly because the police was against the Muslim Brotherhood and therefore on protesters' side⁴¹⁴. Activists involved in *Tamarrod* also knew that they had the endorsement of the security apparatus. Mahdi described the resistance by MB supporters as the only obstacle to their fieldwork since security forces let them campaign freely⁴¹⁵.

In conclusion, the *Tamarrod* campaign was successful in rallying wide numbers across Egypt ahead of the 30 June uprising because it mobilised across the traditional political and socioeconomic divisions around a simple goal, President Morsi's departure. The campaign indeed succeeded thanks to its appropriation by many ordinary people from different social categories (Barbary and Adib Doss 2014), and its transcending of political affiliations apart, of course, from its anti-MB stance. While the 30 June uprising was certainly an occurrence of "elite-facilitated contention" (Ketchley 2016), it was nevertheless reliant on local activists' involvement in the *Tamarrod* campaign across Egypt. As such, it constitutes an example of successful brokerage that helped contention spread and led to a scale shift. The case of *Tamarrod* shows that popular grievances can

⁴¹³ Interview with Nabil, 36, unemployed (Bachelor in business studies), Luxor, March 2015.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Salman, 39, entrepreneur, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

⁴¹⁵ Informal conversation with Mahdi, 33, travel agent, Aswan, January 2014.

be exploited and redeployed by powerful political actors. However, *Tamarrod* and the 30 June uprising only gathered momentum because of the conjunction of most political actors in opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. When a popular opposition figure for most “revolutionaries” such as Muhammad al-Baradei resigned from the position of vice president following the deadly dispersal of pro-MB sit-ins in Cairo in August 2014, the previous consensus definitively ended. And the success of *Tamarrod* in the streets was quickly diverted by the officers and their allies.

Indeed, the proposed alternative to Morsi’s presidency had a fundamental weakness: it was rather vague, and did not propose any timeline for the organisation of presidential elections. The officers would then use this flaw to impose their own transitional roadmap. The similarity with the outcome of the 25 January uprising is striking. In both cases, the army took advantage of mass uprisings to overthrow presidents. And in both cases, most people went home once it was done. In July 2013, when the first signs of repression of opponents appeared, it was already too late. Once again, it seems that most political activists had exclusively focused on the purpose of forcing the ouster of a president. Whilst campaigning to this end, they did not expose a vision for the aftermath. Nor did they take credit for the success of the 30 June uprising among the populace, who generally welcomed the return of the army and rapidly forgot the activists, especially the “revolutionaries”. Once again, political activists appeared divided and insufficiently organised. *Tamarrod* itself did not survive very long after 30 June. Divisions quickly appeared between those who firmly kept the ideals of the “revolution”, and those who got closer to the army and endorsed military rule, including some leaders of *Tamarrod*. Others estimated that, the movement having accomplished its original mission, it had to be dissolved.

Once activists supporting the “revolution” realised that they should not have believed that the army would organise new free and fair presidential elections, naïvely repeating the February 2011 mistake of leaving the country’s future into the hands of the officers, it was already too late. Many “revolutionary” activists expressed regrets vis-à-vis the 30 June 2013 protests and the success of a campaign they actively contributed to. According to Nabil, 30 June was not a revolution. On the contrary, it made appear those who were the true revolutionaries, who had stayed loyal to their principles, in opposition to the large crowds from *Hizb al-canapa* who mobilised for other reasons. Many activists

retrospectively denounced a conspiracy orchestrated by the security apparatus. According to Nabil, the 30 June uprising succeeded because it was well planned by the intelligence services, the army and former members of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party. For Tariq, an Abul Rish activist, *Tamarrod* was also a plot orchestrated by the intelligence services⁴¹⁶. Ahmed D., a Kifaya member in Aswan, said *Tamarrod* had been infiltrated by security forces⁴¹⁷. Today, Mahdi is one of the numerous repentant activists opposing the current regime. In April 2016, he was arrested for defying the November 2013 protest law when he participated in a demonstration in Aswan against the transfer of Red Sea islands Sanafir and Tiran to Saudi Arabia.

It is easy to understand why *Tamarrod* and the popular discontent under Muhammad Morsi's presidency constituted an obvious windfall for all the nostalgic of the Mubarak era, and an opportunity for security forces and old regime figures to resolutely come back. However, the rally to the anti-Muslim Brotherhood movement of a wide number of "revolutionary" or pro-democracy activists, especially those who had claimed their opposition to military rule under the SCAF, is less understandable. Why did they participate en masse? Was it for naïveté, inexperience, personal ambition or something else? Despite facing multiple difficulties, as previously described, many activists deployed considerable efforts to gather signatures and mobilise for the 30 June protests. Were they expecting rewards for their efforts? Or did they really believe that the campaign had the potential to force President Morsi to step down and organise early elections? Did they truly ignore the role of the army and remnants of the Mubarak regime in the whole mobilisation process ahead of 30 June? Or did they really imagine that a potential intervention of the army had the ability to revive the transition to democracy?

The truth is that even though *Tamarrod* participants' decisions now seem shortsighted and misinformed, it was then difficult to predict the harsh repression that would hit Muslim Brotherhood supporters and all opponents to the authoritarian regime in the aftermath of President Morsi's ouster by the army. No one anticipated that such a regress could so rapidly happen. Without a clear vision for the future, many activists sank in the blindness of their hatred for the Muslim Brotherhood, becoming a crucial tool in the hands of Mubarak remnants preparing their comeback after more than two years of dishonour

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Tariq, 45, employee at the High Dam administration, Aswan, April 2015.

⁴¹⁷ Informal conversation with Ahmed D., Aswan, January 2014.

and humiliation. More importantly, many supporters of the 25 January “revolution” simply “saw *Tamarrod* and the 30 June protests as a means of reigniting a revolutionary process that had stalled under Morsi’s presidency”⁴¹⁸, as a way to fight the MB’s perceived tyranny and prevent its durable installation. And the only thing they had experience in, the only thing they thought they could do, the only answer, was street politics.

3. The disgrace of the 25 January “revolution” and its activists’ marginalisation

After the 30 June uprising, no other protest movement would be able to reach the magnitude of the popular mobilisation to which *Tamarrod* highly contributed. In particular, the 25 January “revolution” would suffer a massive setback. After 3 July, most ordinary Egyptians simply turned away from the “revolution”, now hoping for a return to stability, even at the price of the installation of a new military dictatorship. This section aims to give an understanding of the somehow unpopularity of the 2011 uprising among many ordinary residents in the provinces of Aswan and Luxor. Why has the “revolution” essentially failed to conquer these populations?

Soon after starting my research in Aswan in January 2014, I realised that apart from a few young activists, many people had a rather bad image of the 25 January “revolution”. Of course, the new rulers’ propaganda had played its part in tarnishing the image of the uprising and its leaders (see chapter 3), but it was not the only reason of this unpopularity. The “revolution” was disliked because it was seen as the starting point of an era of instability characterised by a real deterioration of people’s living conditions. According to many interviewed Upper Egyptians, the 2011 uprising had brought insecurity, including mounting delinquency and terrorism. Importantly, it had worsened economic conditions, including price hikes and a crisis in the tourism sector. It had also generated shortages of essential goods, including fuel. Even those who had benefitted from decisions resulting in a direct improvement in their lives, for instance public sector workers who had their salaries increased or obtained permanent positions, did not always attribute these achievements to the “revolution”. The difficulties of the everyday life explain why many people have openly expressed regrets of the Mubarak era, when at

⁴¹⁸ Neil Ketchley, *Egypt in a Time of Revolution. Contentious Politics and the Arab Spring*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

least they had their landmarks and felt safe. This was the case of Mona, a 45-year-old kindergarten volunteer director in Al-Hajindiyya, a village in the governorate of Aswan:

“I didn’t participate in protests. Honestly, when Mubarak was removed from his post, we cried. Because it is sufficient to say that we used to live in safety, what we hear today did not use to happen. Yes, there were many things left out, neglected, but the safety that we were living in was enough for us [...] We are affected by the events we see on TV, by our kids that die. Yes, in our village there is nothing, but we are affected by the others, we are upset about them, about what happens in Sinai”⁴¹⁹.

Intissar, a female activist from the same village, explained that in the Mubarak era, women used to take public transports and go to other cities even after nightfall because it was safe, whereas they now had to avoid to go out after sunset⁴²⁰. For many people as Al-Hajindiyya residents, security was associated with an era when the ruler was feared. *“We used to be scared to say Mubarak’s name”*, Mona said. On the contrary, her friend Aisha, a 52-year-old unemployed divorced mother with a primary education, said:

“Now no one is afraid of a soldier. The soldier is beaten... but in the Mubarak era, people were afraid... the soldier used to patrol in the street. Any problem, he was present. You used to find security rapidly, at any time [...] After he (Morsi) left, we felt a little safe from Sisi”⁴²¹.

Adel, a 42-year-old farmer and carpenter based in Armant, near Luxor, had a similar view and estimated that it was in the Arab nature to disrespect a too nice leader, which is why a feared one was necessary⁴²². Mubarak was often described as a good man, and differentiated from his sons, his wife, and NDP leaders, generally seen as corrupt. Many people also talked about the deterioration of living conditions since Mubarak’s withdrawal, as Aisha from Al-Hajindiyya:

“Life was cheaper, gas was working, there were no problems [...] now is a very bad time, and we have Sisi... then what?... we don’t know what there will be after the

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Mona, 45, kindergarten director, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴²⁰ Interview with Intissar, 39, social worker, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴²¹ Interview with Aisha, 52, pensioner (primary education), Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴²² Interview with Adel, 42, farmer and carpenter, Armant (Luxor), May 2014.

elections, it is possible that he crushes us after the elections, we don't know, we can guarantee nothing... What are our needs now? We need cooking gas pipes, this is the most important thing... (people need better wages) to buy medicines for diabetes, blood pressure... you enter a pharmacy with EGP100, you leave it without it... where are we going to find (money)? Our sole income is pension. The most important thing we want them to look after is pensions [...] they give us the pension here and increase prices of things there [...] We would have liked Mubarak to have a second chance to show us what he could do [...] he was going to reform the country, but the people did not give him his chance”⁴²³.

Evidence also suggests that if the 2011 uprising has such a bad image, it is because it is relatively poorly known in the first place. Let us remind that demonstrations in Upper Egyptian provinces essentially took place in big cities and gathered small numbers, mainly experienced activists. The wide majority could watch protests in Cairo on satellite TV channels but, however, was not always aware of protests taking place closer to them because of their very limited coverage and an almost exclusive attention to Tahrir Square, Alexandria and a few other big cities mainly in Lower Egypt. In addition, many ordinary participants in the 2011 uprising had mobilised against the police, for “bread, freedom and social justice”, and not necessarily against President Mubarak himself. As a matter of fact, the origins, protagonists, circumstances and main steps of the uprising were not very well known. Equally important, its main front-runners and the role of leading organisations such as the April 6 Youth Movement and the National Association for Change were almost unknown. Politicians were often described as looking for their own interests and remaining far from people. This sometimes included “revolutionaries” such Ahmed Maher, the founding leader of the April 6 Youth Movement, and Alaa Abdel Fattah, an anti-military rule activist⁴²⁴. In Al-Hajindiyya, most people referred to the 30 June 2013 uprising when they mentioned the “revolution”. 25 January had little echo there and was definitely not a “revolution” for Intissar.

The countryside and farmers seemed particularly distant from the largely urban-based 25 January “revolution”. Have the “revolutionaries” ever mentioned peasants and the countryside? Have they sketched responses to their problems? In Al-Hebeil village, near

⁴²³ Interview with Aisha, 52, pensioner (primary education), Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴²⁴ Interview with Mahmud Z., 25, lawyer, Qena, May 2014.

Luxor, I interviewed in March 2015 a group of 13 farmers aged between 31 and 62. Nabil, the head of the April 6 Youth Movement in Luxor, joined me in this informal discussion that would prove quite useful to understand why farmers did not frequently mobilise. Most of the members of the group did not own the land they were cultivating. Only one among them exclusively lived from cultivating a land. All the others had a second occupation, whether in the public (two were employed in a health unit, one at a police station, two at Supply Ministry institutions, one at the Education Directorate, one at Luxor's city council), or the private sector (two were drivers, for example). Accordingly, the typical day of these farmers started early in the morning. Employees usually went to work until 1400. They then had lunch and rested, before farming for about four hours. While the majority had a vocational degree, some of them had a primary school certificate or had not finished school, two of the elders had not gone to school at all but had learnt to read and write, and one had a *mājistīr*.

As farmers, they all suffered the same difficulties. Firstly, the surfaces of land they were cultivating were too small to ensure a living for a whole household. According to them, current land parcels did not “open homes”. This is not new, and comes from previous legislations, as well as the division of inherited land between sons in each house. The growth of the population also put pressure on farmland. At the same time, farmers said the state had not given them the means to develop lands in the desert, giving those lands to investors instead, while lands along the Nile have been the same. They said they were too poor to form investment companies to develop agriculture in the desert. Youth needed resources for that, and only the government could give them the means to expand in the desert. They cited the example of the Toshka project.

Weather conditions and other problems made it difficult to cultivate commodities other than sugarcane, which constituted about 90% of the crops. Wheat, parsley and other aromatic plants were some of the other cultivated items. Sugarcane has some disadvantages, including its heavy consumption of water and chemicals. It is costly in terms of resources and manpower. However, according to farmers, it is also convenient because once the harvest season, typically from January to May, is over, and their crops sold to the government sugar factories of the region, they are done until the following year. Rising prices of electricity, fuel and, more importantly, fertilisers, constituted small farmers' main difficulties. A lack of subsidised fertilisers forced them to spend high

amounts to purchase them from the black market. Farmers said they were waiting for the government to act, saying that the latter was not subsidising fertilisers enough, letting prices considerably increase at the beginning of 2015. High prices on the black market were decreasing their income. Ali Omar, a farmer whose voice had been louder than others since the beginning of the meeting, explained that the quantity of subsidised fertilisers allocated to the faddan was lower than the quantity needed by the faddan. This is what enabled the black market to expand. A former member of President Mubarak's ruling NDP, a *mājistīr* holder and supply inspector, Ali Omar admitted farmers' complaints were not necessarily arriving to a high level. They would typically warn the local agriculture superintendent about problems, relying on the directorate to submit complaints to the Ministry.

Apart from requesting local government officials' mediation, farmers denounced the inefficiency of their syndicate, saying it had no activism. Only their private, informal, associations were helpful. The agriculture cooperative associations' only task was to distribute subsidised fertilisers. After farmers said that no one, no organisation, association or syndicate, was really supporting them, I attempted to initiate a discussion about the 25 January "revolution". I first asked if there were farmers who had participated in the "revolution", to which a general "yes" answered, prompting Nabil to ask which "revolution". Unsurprisingly, Ali Omar responded the 30 June "revolution". But I heard another farmer saying that others had participated in 25 January. A confused discussion followed, during which several names were raised. They did not all agree, but a number of farmers of the village, who did not identify themselves, had apparently participated in the 25 January "revolution". Others had gone to the governorate building in Luxor to protest against the Muslim Brotherhood's government on 30 June.

I then asked if those who had participated in the 25 January "revolution" could raise their hands, and almost no one did. Perhaps some of them were embarrassed by the presence among them of a former NDP member, which impeded them to talk. Or they may have mixed between protests against the regime in 2011, and protests that took place in support for President Mubarak. Or they may have been a little mistrustful of my question, unrelated to agricultural issues, or of Nabil's presence. They looked sincerely intrigued when they found that he was a member of the April 6 Youth Movement. Someone said they had participated in the 30 June "revolution" instead. Ali Omar said that on 25

January, they had taken part in *Asfīn ya rais* (“we are sorry president”) demonstrations in support for President Mubarak. Another one said no, they had not participated in the 25 January “revolution”. While some group members started to shout *teslam al-ayādi*⁴²⁵ (“many thanks”), Ali Omar said: “*We are sorry president until now. We haven’t see anything good since he (Mubarak) left, even in Sisi*”. He added that in the village everyone had signed the *Tamarrod* petition, even at funerals. He said Morsi’s year as president “*was the blackest year in Egypt’s history*”, and claimed that everyone had gone to 30 June protests. Others confirmed that it was a hard year of deteriorating security, shortages of cooking gas, and so on. They said not every problem had been solved two years after Morsi’s ouster, but that the situation was better: employees earned higher wages, pensions were also higher, the price of the tonne of sugarcane had been raised, social security had improved, a normal access to butane gas was back and security was better since popular committees were no longer needed for protection.

I asked for the last time, to be sure, if no one had supported 25 January “revolutionaries”, and this time the answer was a clear “no”. Metwalli, the convener of the meeting, explained that 25 January had taken place in Tahrir Square, not in governorates. I then let Nabil, at his request, explain that demonstrations mainly against the Interior Ministry had actually taken place in governorates, including in Luxor. I also asked them what they thought of the April 6 Youth Movement. Metwalli said the group had no activism in Al-Hebeil, to which Nabil responded that it was present in some villages, inviting them to attend meetings. Nabil then started to explain how and why some activists had received training in Serbia, a topic that had been widely used by pro-government journalists and TV presenters to make members of the April 6 Youth movements and other pro-revolution groups appear as conspirators trained by foreign agents to destabilise Egypt. They asked Nabil about other political topics, including Egypt’s intervention in Yemen.

Farmers said there were some political parties in the area, including the Free Egyptians Party, al-Wafd Party, Masr al-Haditha Party (“Modern Egypt Party”), the Nasserist Party... However, Ali Omar again spoke louder than his fellows, saying that he regretted the NDP: “*at the time of the NDP, personal relationships were working*”. He explained

⁴²⁵ Meaning “many thanks”, *teslam al-ayādi* was directed to then Minister of Defence Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who quickly became popular after allegedly responding to the will of the people protesting in the streets by withdrawing President Morsi. In the aftermath of the 30 June 2013 uprising, *teslam al-ayādi* became a slogan of support for Sisi and was even turned into a campaign song.

that active party members like him used to be able to mediate and end problems more easily. He claimed that those who were implementing projects in the health and education sectors for instance used to be from the NDP, and that they were missed for that. I finally asked farmers about what they expected for the future of the Egyptian agriculture. They said again that they hoped the government would help the youth to develop desert lands. This would decrease unemployment. They said they did not want investors to come and youth to work for them, because lands should be allocated to the local youth.

Another day, also with Nabil, I had a conversation with a farmer in another area in Al-Hebeil. Gamal had a bachelor degree in education and trade, and was also a teacher of computer science. He similarly complained about shortages of fertilisers, now becoming very expensive. He mentioned farmers' obsolete equipment while, a few metres from where we were sitting, an old irrigation machine was generating a thick black smoke which made me cough more than 24 hours after that. He also denounced: "*the state does not help us in acquiring modern technologies*"⁴²⁶, arguing that equipment was expensive. Gamal was surprised to learn that Nabil was a member of the April 6 Youth Movement: "*6 April scares, honestly*"⁴²⁷.

I reproduced here the main points of my discussions with small farmers in an attempt to show why the 25 January "revolution" had not succeeded in inspiring them. Overall, farmers wanted the state to intervene to improve their lives through providing them with affordable fertilisers and resources to exploit desert lands. They continued, to some extent, to rely on the "old regime", mainly through local former NDP members and government officials, to trace complaints to higher authorities. These people had apparently proved themselves relatively efficient as service providers in the past. Exchanges between the farmers and Nabil confirmed the first's lack of knowledge of the 25 January uprising's circumstances and main actors. Perhaps the "revolution" still had to appropriate in a yet-to-come revolutionary project countrymen's concerns, and particularly those of peasants and farmers, which include expensive fertilisers, fuel and electricity, and the lack of farmland. It seemed, while listening to these farmers, that the "revolution" had not completely entered the countryside, and that young, "revolutionary" activists had not engaged with the main concerns of rural residents.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Gamal, 48, teacher and farmer, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

Yet, there were exceptions. As mentioned in chapter 1, some farmers had participated in protests between the 2011 and 2013 uprisings. However, they did not always attend protests as farmers. For instance, Adel went to various protests in Armant and Luxor in 2011, a few weeks after the “revolution”. He said he had not participated in the 2011 uprising, watching it on national TV instead. He felt the government was controlling national TV channels. He confirmed the NDP was still present in the area and that it distributed gas tubes to residents. He participated in peaceful demonstrations in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising because of the bad situation, because policemen were above the law, because the police and government employees used to treat people as slaves. However, he quickly stopped going to protests and did not intend to attend any in the future because he was disappointed about the “revolution”.



Figure 6.1: Farmers coming from the fields with sugarcane, Al-Hajindiyya, February 2014.

The “revolutionaries” had essentially failed in building popular constituencies. While the “bread, freedom, social justice” slogan continued to resonate in the most remote countryside, the leaders of the 2011 uprising had failed to tackle the daily needs of the

poor, at least in a coherent, long-term vision for their country. No real recognition of the 25 January uprising or “certification”⁴²⁸ of the revolutionaries had taken place. Most people showed no real sense of ownership of this “revolution”⁴²⁹, generally situated themselves outside the events of January-February 2011, and felt no responsibility or role to play towards the uprising. According to Alia Mossalam, “Nasser as a person embodied a collective dream, [...] articulating it and translating it into projects that provided the opportunity for people to build a new nation”⁴³⁰. Indeed, “revolutions then long remain “open” to the constantly renewed reading that people project on them”⁴³¹. My evidence does not support such a sense of ownership of the “revolution”. With hardly identified leaders and an unclear political vision, the 2011 uprising has largely failed to incarnate such a dream for the wide majority of Egyptians. Worse, increased economic and political instability, deteriorating public services and living conditions, rising insecurity, made many people think that, on the contrary, the “revolution” was the beginning of a nightmare.

In Upper Egypt as elsewhere, for the majority, there was no radical change of perception (Allal and Cooper 2012). On the contrary, most of my respondents expressed a feeling of remoteness and even of being forgotten by the rest of Egypt. They perceived that their daily local reality as Upper Egyptians was radically different from what had been happening in Cairo and Lower Egypt. The “explosion of the poor”⁴³² had not happened at such a great scale in their remote provinces. Additionally, Alaa explained that “*the period of the rule of the MB made many people hate the revolution*”⁴³³, sadly admitting that his father, once a “revolutionary”, now supported Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Without necessarily rejecting the “revolution”, many people denounced that the poor had not benefited from it, and quite the contrary because living conditions had been deteriorating.

⁴²⁸ Certification has to do with the recognition, the legitimization of a new political actor. See Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴²⁹ For an explanation of how President Nasser’ speeches made all kinds of people, including popular classes and Upper Egyptians, feel involved in the revolution, with responsibilities and duties towards it, see Alia Mossallam, *Hikayat Sha‘b – Stories of Peoplehood: Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt, 1956-1973*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012. She explains that this sense of ownership persisted long after Nasser’s death and despite following disenchantments.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ « Les révolutions restent ensuite longtemps « ouvertes » aux lectures constamment renouvelées que projettent sur elles les populations », in Guillaume Mazeau and Giedre Sabaseviciute, « Archéologies révolutionnaires. Regards croisés sur la Tunisie et l’Égypte (2011-2013) », *L’Année du Maghreb*, X, 2014.

⁴³² John Chalcraft, “Egypt’s 25 January Uprising, Hegemonic Contestation, and the Explosion of the Poor”, in Fawaz Gerges, eds., *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 155-179.

⁴³³ Interview with Alaa, 21, university student, Luxor, March 2015.

For Fatma, a 44-year-old accountant in an agricultural family association, the same oppression persisted: *“I don’t see that the revolution succeeded, honestly...the same negative issues remain...there is nothing new”*⁴³⁴. Many of my respondents also said they did not like the 2011 uprising because it had brought the worst in Egyptians. This generally meant indiscipline and disrespect in their daily lives (in their way of driving for instance), the increasing resort to delinquency (then on the rise), and so on. For Adel, Upper Egyptians had seen nothing from the revolution, except that it had added bad things. He said his life had changed a lot. Before the revolution, he used to work well. Now, there is no work, prices of fertilisers have risen, which subsequently increased the sugarcane’s cost of production⁴³⁵.

4. The weak solidarity with labour protests

When I asked the Upper Egyptians I met what they thought about labour protests, my first finding was the confirmation that an overwhelming majority, whether in cities or in the countryside, was unaware of most of them. This is unlikely to be an Upper Egyptian specificity. Labour protests and strikes across Egypt have traditionally received little media attention, and their coverage has been squarely discouraged as many other politically sensitive topics since 30 June 2013. For instance, one of my respondents said he had not heard about local garbage collectors’ strike⁴³⁶.

The relatively scarce information getting to ordinary citizens about workers’ protests is often framed in a pejorative way. According to the official narrative that has prevailed since July 2013 and even before, labour protests disrupt the wheel of production and, as such, threaten national security. Their purpose is to secure special, factional interests (*fa’awiyya*), and not a general interest. Therefore, in addition to a lacking support, or even clear opposition to the “revolution”, labour protests have enjoyed a generally weak support in the aftermath of the coup. In line with the official discourse blaming protests for the persisting instability, labour strikes were often accused of contributing to Egypt’s general turmoil. But some labour protests resisted the repressive climate and the anti-dissent, “special interests” rhetoric. The months preceding the election as president of

⁴³⁴ Interview with Fatma, 44, accountant, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴³⁵ Interview with Adel, 42, farmer and carpenter, Armant (Luxor), May 2014.

⁴³⁶ Interview with Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian and shop owner, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi saw various workers, mainly in the public sector, rise for the minimum wage, permanent contracts and better working conditions. The most visible of these movements was perhaps doctors' mobilisation, which lasted several months. In Luxor and Aswan regions, many workers also went on strike, including garbage collectors and postal workers.

Even when they recognised workers' legitimacy to mobilise for their rights, many ordinary people whom I interviewed in early 2014 considered that the timing was not appropriate for three reasons. Firstly, the country was in a political transition, which meant that no significant decision may be taken before the election of a president. Secondly, the country needed stability, and it was thus better to wait until after the elections. Thirdly, the economy was in crisis, which made many workers' costly demands appear unrealistic at the time.

More importantly, many of my respondents opposed labour protests because they viewed them as illegitimate, primarily for economic reasons. Indeed, many ordinary people seeing themselves as part of popular classes have criticised protests by populations that they perceived as less needy, first of all because they have stable jobs and a regular income. These included industrial workers with permanent positions, doctors, teachers, and other civil servants. This criticism suggests a lack of solidarity between different factions of rather low-income populations: the working class benefitting from some job security on the one hand, and those who survive thanks to more precarious, temporary positions in the formal or informal economy, or are unemployed on the other. Many of my respondents, whether farmers, young unemployed, drivers, petty merchants, or public sector temporary workers, viewed themselves as the poorest segment of society because of their low level of education, lower social status or professional precariousness. Therefore, they could not support the claims for better wages or improved working conditions of people they saw much better off, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, other civil servants, and sometimes industrial workers. The latter, at least, had a job. In these people's eyes, the priority is to provide bread and jobs to the poor. Higher classes' claims should wait. Better off, Haggag, a 24-year-old journalist holding a bachelor in Islamic studies from Cairo's al-Azhar University, had a similar view:

“When the doctor opposes his salary, when the engineer doesn’t like his salary, the nurse, the airline staff, where is the poor who is not working at all? Why when he goes to the street, because he has no union to protect him, he is hit in the foot? [...] We should give to others, open others’ homes, we have 40% under the poverty line Yasmine. If someone fair decreased this to at least 30%, he would have done something. It was 20, under Nasser, then 30, then maybe 60 under Mubarak, but the majority says it is 40. [...] Are these people (those who protest for wages) the only ones to live? ... I know people who live the entire day with EGP5. With EGP5, I can take a bus for example. Can you imagine, with four kids, the entire day with EGP5? [...] So how can you raise a “special interest” demand while there are people who have nothing?”⁴³⁷.

Fatma also considered that doctors or postal workers had no right to stage protests at the time because they had already obtained their rights and had a good financial situation. Some people, who are “underground” (*taht al-ard*), should come first and protest⁴³⁸. Mahmud, a 64-year-old retired veterinarian, believed that those protesting were not the poorest workers:

“What strikes me is that those who organised demonstrations and strikes, and won, are those who were originally taking a lot of money from the state... electricity, health, education, oil workers...”⁴³⁹.

Mahmud said postal workers, doctors, hotel employees, teachers, nurses, all had good wages, bonuses, retirement packages. At the opposite, farmers, employees at the factories of the village council or the local unit were poor: *“The day when he (the poor) holds a demonstration, they will dismiss him from work”⁴⁴⁰*. Labour protests in specific sectors were also often seen as potentially destructive or harmful to users. This was the case of doctors, who were constantly needed.

Eventually, I found no evidence of attempts by contentious workers to mobilise support beyond their profession or sector, to gather more ordinary citizens around health or

⁴³⁷ Interview with Haggag, 24, journalist, Luxor, April 2014.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Fatma, 44, accountant, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian and shop owner, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

education issues⁴⁴¹. This constitutes a serious limit to the labour movement in Egypt in general, which has so far failed to really exceed the scale of the factory or the profession to rally other workers and beyond around a common purpose (Beinin and Vairel 2013).

5. The Muslim Brotherhood's failure to attract sympathy beyond its core base

Three years after the coup, the pro-MB protest movement remains, despite its considerable weakening, a significant opposition threat to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's administration. However, the Muslim Brotherhood has not really attracted additional supporters. Its original supporters have been the first victims of the current regime's brutal repression of opponents. Yet, outside the ranks of its supporters, popular compassion vis-à-vis the MB has been weak. It was shocking but not uncommon, in the months that followed the coup, to hear Egyptians praise the killing, arrest, torture, imprisonment and prosecution of thousands of MB supporters. How can we explain this incommensurable hatred for the MB? Why has the pro-MB movement failed to generate larger sympathy?

5.1. Anti-coup protests

The months that followed the coup in 2013 witnessed numerous pro-MB protests in Luxor and Aswan's city centres. These gradually diminished in terms of frequency and numbers of participants throughout 2014 and beyond. Protests were still relatively frequent during my first stay in Aswan (January-April 2014), although I did not attend any for obvious safety reasons. According to the few people who confessed having participated in some of these marches, despite their peaceful character (MB supporters never admitted the contrary), said they were often met with tear gas and beating. However, it seems that pro-MB protests generally experienced less violence in southern Upper Egypt, in comparison with those taking place in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and some cities of the Delta. As an explanation, locals often cited the tribal or sectarian factor: since people knew each other, they would generally refrain from using violence for fear of retaliation. Indeed, any incident had the potential to lead to a dispute between families or clans, potentially escalating into a tribal feud (see chapter 5). This self-restraint may be behind a lower

⁴⁴¹ At the MESA 2015 meeting, I asked this question to Soha Bayoumi, who presented a paper entitled "Egyptian Doctors' Fight for Health and Social Justice: The Paradox of the Activist-Expert". According to her, no significant attempt has been made in this direction mainly because of the ongoing repression.

number of casualties resulting from security forces' repression of pro-MB protests in the region. Still, people feared to be beaten, tear-gassed or arrested amid protests.

In the provinces of southern Upper Egypt, where the MB's presence is more limited, the post-coup movement greatly benefitted from the rally of many Salafists who turned against the Salafi parties that supported the coup. As elsewhere, Salafi groups often originating from outside the region have expanded throughout the past 15 years. Indeed, many Upper Egyptians have returned from the conservative Gulf States and Salafi strongholds in Lower Egypt⁴⁴². While many hard-line Salafists had voted for the Nour Party, which came second at the 2012 parliamentary elections, the party lost numerous supporters when it decided to back the coup. Many Salafists then joined the ranks of the anti-coup movement, in support for the MB and what they called the "legitimacy". This was the case of the relatives who hosted me between January and April 2014 in Aswan. Most of the brothers, sisters and sisters-in-law of my aunt's husband, who is himself a supporter of the "revolution", claim their support for Salafism. They joined, with varying degrees of commitment, the anti-coup movement.

Khadija, 43, is a schoolteacher and a mother who wears the *niqāb*, the full black veil. She is the younger sister of my aunt's husband. Back to school time, she used to go to dance with my aunts. She endorsed a more conservative practice of Islam later, after getting married and having her kids. Most of her brothers and sisters living in Aswan have gradually "converted" to a more or less radical form of Salafism, especially throughout the 2000s. Khadija was a regular participant in the weekly pro-MB marches in Aswan during the first year that followed President Morsi's ouster. She used to go by herself, and despite her husband's warning against it. As many protesters of the time, she had no previous experience of political activism. She went to the streets for the first time in pro-MB protests that took place before the coup. She said that, before the coup, they felt a conspiracy would take place:

"Before the coup, we had gone to the streets. Because there was apparently something wrong. And it appeared from the media, the TV, bizarre decisions, comments, and I don't know what, it appeared that there was a strong attack on him (Morsi) and it was obvious that no one was giving him a chance, and it was obvious, you know, you see,

⁴⁴² There are transregional connections through marriages, for instance.

that they were pitting him numerous obstacles. We just wanted them to give him a chance. To give him a chance. His right, he had to take his right, he didn't take his right. He was oppressed. Even though he would have been bad, or had committed mistakes, done the good or not good, he should have had his four years. And if he had not been good, he would have been removed through the elections. It was not necessary (to oust him). It is obvious that it was a conspiracy, a big conspiracy, a conspiracy to make him fail. Everything is apparent, everything is clear now. Even the one who was lying to himself at the beginning and was telling you al-ikhwan, al-ikhwan, al-ikhwan, now it's over, everything appeared, everything appeared, a plan. A plan from the intelligence services, a plan from the State Security [...]"⁴⁴³.

According to Khadija, the 30 June uprising was the result of the conspiratorial efforts of Hamdeen Sabbahi, Amr Moussa and Muhammad al-Baradei, in cooperation with security services and the army. Leaders of the Salafi Nour Party were traitors, and Khadija bitterly regretted voting for them in 2012. After the coup, Khadija used to attend protests three to four times a week, and later at a lesser frequency due to health reasons. She explained that she was usually informed about the marches by someone she knew, typically by telephone in the hours, sometimes the minutes preceding the protests:

*"I know the people, there is a long experience, long months. [...] At the beginning, there were particular days on which we used to protest. There were three days in the week, Sunday, Tuesday and Friday. [...] Sometimes we used to protest four days a week, Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday we used to form a human chain on the Corniche, and on Friday a march. And sometimes there was a change in the days, for example Saturday and Monday, and Wednesday. And there were days when we used to protest every day during an entire week. At the moment, it's approximately three or four days, but they change the days."*⁴⁴⁴

She explained that for fear to be caught, the location was often a last-minute decision, and was sometimes changed to fool the police. The mobilising role of preachers had almost disappeared as many got arrested, and mosques were under scrutiny. Meetings no longer took place before protests, for safety reasons. At the same time, TV and online statements

⁴⁴³ Interview with Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

by the National Alliance to Support Legitimacy gave an outline calendar. Khadija was not an Internet user, but she said the youth organising the protests had a Facebook group called *Midan Aswan*⁴⁴⁵ (“Aswan’ square”).

*“It’s usually the coalition (the National Alliance to Support Legitimacy) that makes the march go out, so the march goes out, and actually the coalition calls on TV, so we know that today people will go out so we go out. With the long experience, months and more, people got to know each other. So they call each other and go out. But you know, there are no meetings, there is no organisation, there are no public calls, or orders.”*⁴⁴⁶

When I asked if she was afraid, Khadija said the youth protected female participants:

*“I participated I swear, it is something strange, I was still on my way and I was scared, fear came to me, as soon as I saw them, everything was gone, I swear, as soon as I saw them, everything was gone, so you see, whoever is sitting far, as long as he is far, he hears from TV, he sees the people who were beaten, the people who were arrested, the people who were tortured. And whoever hears this talking, no, don’t take to the streets, it is dangerous, it is I don’t know what, and how come women participate, how come girls participate, so people scare each other like this. But all these people who participate, fear disappeared from them.”*⁴⁴⁷

Regarding the demands, she recognised that President Morsi had made mistakes, while arguing that he was not left any chance to really do something, despite being elected for four years:

“I see someone that they oppress, they oppressed him (Morsi). I went to the streets and voted for him. I didn’t choose him for a year or a few months, but for him to take his time, to take his four years. He should take four years. They did not give him a chance. And honestly, unfortunately, he has his own mistakes. Among his mistakes is his exaggerated goodness, his forgiving nature... He wanted to reform. [...] Revolutionary

⁴⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/621985494508355-ميدان-أسوان/>. No one has posted on it since November 2014.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

*trials should have taken place, he should have removed these people, all the people that were not good. He should have sued the TV channels that were, day and night, insulting him, it was necessary. But unfortunately, this was among his mistakes, he was too forgiving, with disrespectful people, unfortunately. [...] My participation, it is not about Morsi at all. For me, it is a story of oppression, only.”*⁴⁴⁸

In a language insisting on oppression, she went on saying it would be either freedom or death, and that she was doing this for the future of her children. As for herself, martyrdom would be better than being wounded or arrested:

*“Either you kill me, or you give me my right. There is no turning back. We are not against negotiating, dialogue, but they refuse dialogue. They want to implement the coup at any case and that’s it. They have weapons, they have the TV, they have judges, they have the police, they have a corrupt army, they have everything. But we have our will. [...] We have God. There is a wisdom. The delay in victory has its wisdom. We go to the streets, and we don’t expect victory, we go to the streets to do what we have to do, and the rest is on God, that’s it. We go to the streets and do not wait for the result. The result will go to our children, the children of our children, but more importantly... They threw our votes to the dustbin, [...] and they indeed threw us to the dustbin. And they killed the youth, beat the youth, torched the youth, and indeed threw people to the dustbin. It’s like that. Either freedom or death. Freedom has a price.”*⁴⁴⁹

Khadija also denounced the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood:

“If there are fair judges, when there is a girl carrying a balloon on which Rabaa is written, and she takes 7 years?! Why, what did she do? Is it halal (lawful) or haram (forbidden)? And a student who said ‘down, down with military rule’, he takes 21 years? [...] they raised the wages of policemen, a policeman now takes EGP4,000 and I don’t know how much, who else at government positions takes such an amount? At the same level? Why do you give him so much? And the officers in the army and the police, why do

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

*you give them so much money? So that they don't think about anything other than money? Are you giving them so much money so that they kill people?"*⁴⁵⁰

Khadija also regretted the attitude of some opponents to the Muslim Brotherhood:

*"I can disagree with you politically, but I don't wish that someone kills you, I don't hope anything bad for you, I don't hope evil for you... I saw people whom I didn't expect to be with the legitimacy, and unfortunately I saw people telling you it's the best, let them kill them, let us get rid of them, let the country be cleaned".*⁴⁵¹

Regarding Salafists' relations with the MB, she said:

*"I am not MB. But I swear, I had a very bad idea about them, but now I hope I could be from the MB, but I am not MB, unfortunately. [...] They are not for violence at all, they like music [...] For us, the niqāb is a requirement, for them it is sunna (tradition). You see, there are many things we disagree on, but no, it is not because I disagree with you that I leave you being killed, oppressed, crushed, tortured, insulted".*⁴⁵²

For Khadija, the country had decisively changed:

"At the beginning, the world was taking us. The political topic was not that important. We didn't watch a lot. Yes, we knew that the country was destroyed and that there were oppression and bribes, and that there was no justice, judges were not normal [...] There are no good hospitals, no good medical facilities, we didn't get our dues from the salaries, there are no good transports, there is nothing good. We were living with this, we used to see oppression, the way the police treated us, it had been very bad for a long time, it is not a new thing. We used to see all of this, but with time we got used to it, I don't know how to explain to you... That's it, we are alive and that's it. But after the revolution, no. Why am I silent? Why should I shut up? Why do I tolerate that the officer treats me bad? He is a human, like me, he is an employee, like me, he takes his salary like me from the state or the government, why? And why he does not treat me with humanity,

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

*in a respectable manner? Why? [...] Why should I be scared, why when his behaviour is wrong I don't complain about him? And take my right, why? This was not the case before the revolution, but after the revolution no. Before the revolution, I did not use to vote, honestly, because we knew that the elections were rigged. All of them. We did not bother ourselves. We were leaving them alone, whoever was rigging rigged. But after the revolution we said no, my vote is important, I must participate, but unfortunately the situation came back as it used to be. And even worse.”*⁴⁵³

Yet, Khadija was optimistic, because “*to every oppressor there is an end*”⁴⁵⁴. This may be a solution:

*“People thrown in prisons should be freed. And compensated. And those who mistreated them in prison should be tried. And after that, negotiations are possible. But also among the conditions to negotiate, the army must go away from politics, leave us and go to the borders. And it should not ever again participate in politics. Never again.”*⁴⁵⁵

I here reproduced much of Khadija's testimony because she was the only regular pro-MB protester that I could properly and freely interview at the time. She felt relatively safe talking to me because, having family connections, we already knew each other. But Khadija is hardly an isolated case. Numerous people were, and are still, supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and/or opposing the military coup. More than President Morsi himself, MB supporters were defending the legitimacy of their votes. They were fighting for what they considered their violated right. And as repression took the life of many of them, as a greater number was arrested and imprisoned, a majority stopped attending risky protests, while a small minority seemed increasingly tempted to escalate the movement into more radical actions.

The other MB supporters of Khadija's family had essentially stopped going to protests since the days that followed the deadly dispersal of pro-MB sit-ins in Cairo. I collectively interviewed three women of the house hosting me: Heba, a sister of Khadija and my aunt's

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

husband, aged 53, holding a high school certificate and employed by the Electricity Company; and two sisters from Mansoura, married to two brothers of Heba and Khadija, Malika and Basma. Aged 43 and 41, respectively, they both have vocational degrees in business and do not work. They are both very religious Salafists who wear the *niqāb*. Also claiming her support for the Salafi current, Heba wears the *hijab*, but not the *niqāb*. All three had never attended a protest before the 2011 uprising. Heba is the only one who attended a few protests against military rule under the SCAF after the “revolution” in Aswan. All three went to several pro-MB demonstrations after the coup, mainly in Aswan. Heba also went to protests in Cairo during summer 2013. Malika went to two demonstrations and to a human chain in Aswan. Basma went to a bigger number of protests before stopping because of repression, which made her husband, who used to participate on a regular basis, worry about her. Basma explained that her husband used to call people who knew where marches would start, but the usual location to meet was the court in Aswan. Now they had to be discrete about places of gathering because each time they announced specific locations the police was there waiting for them. A number of TV channels, especially Qatar’s al-Jazeera, called for protests, according to them. In the demonstrations, they used to meet relatives, friends, fellows, acquaintances. The three women participated in protests because “*all our votes were thrown to the dustbin*”⁴⁵⁶. Additionally, Basma explained:

“I went out because religion was attacked [...] They used to attack mosques and attack people in mosques [...] They were beating the munaqqabat (women wearing the niqāb) in the streets”.⁴⁵⁷

Malika explained that she had gone to the streets for democracy because, even though “*the MB are not angels, they fail, they made many mistakes*”⁴⁵⁸, only the ballot box should have removed President Morsi. It was the principle, not the person, that mattered. Heba included herself in the “revolutionaries”. She was disappointed because, after reaching 50 years old, she had voted for the first time in her life, first at the referendum under the rule of the SCAF, then at the parliamentary and presidential elections, after which “they”

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with Basma, 41, housewife (technical diploma in business), Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Malika, 43, housewife (technical diploma in business), Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

erased, simply cancelled everything⁴⁵⁹. In addition, Heba denounced that all state institutions, including the police, the army and judges, were against President Morsi. Malika, Basma and Heba denounced police violence against protesters, especially after the dispersal of pro-MB sit-ins in Cairo. “*They (the police forces) don’t treat you as a human*”⁴⁶⁰, using tear gas and gunfire. “*The police should be at the service of the people, not killing the people*”⁴⁶¹, Heba said. Malika said that as *munaqqabat* they were identified as MB supporters and targeted. Basma’s husband was no longer letting her participate because of the way policemen treated women. Yet, they explained that it was less dangerous to attend protests in Aswan than in Lower Egypt. On summer holidays in Mansoura, where protests were very violent, Malika waited to be back in Aswan to go to a demonstration. None of them had joined a political party or any other political movement. They were not Internet or Facebook users, and used to be informed by and go to protests with relatives and acquaintances. Basma explained that they knew they were monitored and used false statements when talking over the phone to mislead the police. For instance, they used to say “we are going to a wedding” to say they were going to a protest⁴⁶².

The three women denounced the attitudes of the secular “revolutionaries” since the coup, while vowing to reunite against the current regime and be one hand, according to Malika. Basma said that on 25 January 2014, “revolutionaries” had quickly left, whereas pro-MB protests continued despite the torture and killing of many people. Heba admitted that MB supporters had left the “revolutionaries” in Muhammad Mahmud for instance, but that in turn, the latter had left them in Rabaa al-Adawiyya and had been watching the violence targeting them throughout the following months. Yet, Heba believed problems and disagreements should be put aside by both sides, which should unite as during the 2011 uprising. All three denounced their opponents’ attempts to tarnish their image through arguing that their religious practice was oppressive. They explained that contrary to what is said about them, religion teaches them to treat Christians well and give them their rights, that the Islamic *shari’a* had improved women’s condition, that they would never

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with Heba, 53, Electricity Company employee, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Basma, 41, housewife (technical diploma in business), Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Heba, 53, Electricity Company employee, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴⁶² Interview with Basma, 41, housewife (technical diploma in business), Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

force anyone to wear the veil, that cutting a hand is the last means to punish a thief, and so on.

Apart from Khadija and her family, only a handful of my informants confessed a sympathy for the MB. A few number told me that they had participated in pro-MB protests. In Aswan, I met Salim, a 40-year-old microbus driver and employee at the local branch of the national Water Company. He had taken part in a number of pro-MB protests from before the coup and until the violent dispersal of sit-ins in Cairo in August 2013. He also had some protest experience as an employee at the Water Company, where they mobilised for permanent contracts after the 2011 uprising, a demand that was successfully met. Salim confirmed that the news and typical locations for pro-MB protests were usually known. At the time of his participation, indeed, MB supporters still used to gather mainly after Friday prayers in a few usual protest places such as Midan al-Mahatta (the square where the train station is located). Salim also claimed that there was no violence in pro-MB protests in Aswan at the time. He said protests were already organised and that you only had to show up. He compared the coup with a film whose scenario was written in advance by rulers: *“Whatever the government, the strongest want, is what will happen”*⁴⁶³.

Another example of MB supporter is Omar, a 35-year-old owner of a small dry-cleaning and ironing shop in central Luxor, who has a Bachelor in media studies. A Salafist who used to be a member of the Nour Party⁴⁶⁴, Omar has supported the MB since President Morsi’s fall, arguing he was on the side of justice and martyrs, who had not taken their right. He said the MB and President Morsi were stupid but were not thieves. They had failed to win the people, and should have shared power with young revolutionaries. Omar was angry: *“If I go to jail, I will destroy everything when I go out”*⁴⁶⁵. He went to pro-MB demonstrations before and after the coup, including at least twice after the dispersal of pro-MB sit-ins in Cairo’s Rabaa al-Adawiyya, before stopping. Repression had also forced him to reduce his activism, and Omar was one of the rare informants to ask me not to publish his real name. He also used to hear about planned protests from acquaintances, through phone calls or on the Internet. He claimed he had convinced several friends and

⁴⁶³ Interview with Salim, 40, employee at the Water Company and microbus driver, Aswan, February 2014.

⁴⁶⁴ Omar had kept his membership card in the party in case of problems (i.e. if he was questioned by security forces), to say that he is on the ‘right’ side, since the Salafi Nour Party was a supporter of the new regime.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with Omar, 35, dry-cleaning shop owner, Luxor, April 2014.

customers to join protests. He used to protest against corruption, nepotism, differences between social classes, for social justice, jobs, and so on. He was convinced that there would be no other election after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi becomes president, and that the next revolution would be more violent. Long politicised, Omar is also a member in a welfare association that distributes clothes, amongst other activities. He displayed some support for youth movements and showed respect for Nabil, the coordinator of the April 6 Youth Movement in Luxor, who took me to him.

I also found interesting the case of Moneim, a 35-year-old tourist guide in Luxor. He constituted a rare example of protester employed in the tourism sector. A supporter of the MB, he participated in a demonstration in support for President Morsi's constitution. Between Morsi's ouster and the Rabaa dispersal, he went to at least two anti-coup marches. These often started in Luxor's al-Mahatta Street (the main street between the train station and the temple of Luxor). MB supporters usually marched two days a week at the time, deciding on the next protest at the end of each march, according to Moneim⁴⁶⁶. He said there was no longer hope after 30 June 2013.

Aged 29, Murad is a health inspector working in Luxor and living in Armant. He participated in pro-MB protests on 30 June 2013, after which he stopped going to protests due to repression. A number of his relatives were arrested amid a pro-MB protest on 6 October 2013. Murad was never involved in a formal political movement, but used to support the MB's Freedom and Justice Party. He had participated in a few other protests before 30 June, including a protest against presidential candidate Ahmed Shafiq and on 28 January 2011 in Luxor's Midan Abul Hajjaj. He had also taken part in strikes at work, and admitted his standard of living had improved since the 2011 uprising because his wage had increased. He said that Muhammad Morsi should have continued until the end of his mandate since he was elected, regardless of being a bad or a good president. According to Murad, it was unacceptable to designate the MB as terrorists and to exclude them from the political arena.

Overall, supporters of the "legitimacy" in the regions of Aswan and Luxor were often not MB members themselves. Mainly from the Salafi current that opposed the Nour Party's support for the coup, they got involved in the pro-MB protest movement because they

⁴⁶⁶ Interview with Moneim, 35, tourist guide, Luxor, April 2014.

had voted for Morsi for president and could not accept his removal after the completion of only one year out of four in power. They sometimes acknowledged the Brotherhood's mistakes, but were fighting for a principle: the respect of their votes. This is somehow reminiscent of the "Where is my vote?" slogan of the post-electoral protests in Iran in 2009. The movement has increasingly faced difficulties to get organised. At the beginning, protesters used to gather in big squares. They would typically talk about the next gathering during the protest itself. As repression increased, communication became more difficult, forcing participants to often get organised at the last minute. Gathering in one place also became a challenge, since it facilitated the work of security services. To avoid this, protesters multiplied marches coming from different locations to gather in bigger streets. Smaller side-streets would then make it easier for protesters to run when security forces fired tear gas, birdshots or live bullets. Finally, the fierce repression appears to have weakened the unity of the pro-MB protest movement. While several groups left the National Alliance to Support Legitimacy or Anti-Coup Alliance⁴⁶⁷, the coalition of Islamist groups supporting President Morsi which used to call for protests and was banned in October 2014, the MB has increasingly been plagued by internal divisions between its old guard and its younger supporters. Worse, it seems that an increased number of radicalised MB supporters has joined the ranks of violent groups.



Figure 6.2: *Rabaa* signs and the slogan "Leave Sisi", Aswan, 2014.

⁴⁶⁷ The Wasat Party left the alliance in August 2014, followed by the Homeland Party in September 2014, the Salafist Front in November 2014, the Independence Party in December 2014, and so on.



Figure 6.3: “Sisi murderer” written on the floor, Aswan, 2014.

5.2. Hostility towards the Muslim Brotherhood

Khadija claimed that the majority of people was supporting the MB, and that MB supporters were much more numerous than one could imagine:

“I swear, the people I know are with the legitimacy, but the old ones are scared, so no, I could not convince them at all, my colleagues at work for example, these people are with the legitimacy in their hearts, but, because they are women, to participate, and expose themselves to the police, they see it as a bahdala (“hassle”) that is too big for them.”⁴⁶⁸

“I swear, I don’t want to lie to you, all the people I know, even the youth I know, are with the legitimacy, but they are afraid to take to the streets, they are afraid of being arrested or shot.”⁴⁶⁹

However, beyond circles of MB supporters, my evidence shows that anti-coup protests enjoyed little sympathy, either from long opponents to political Islam or from a brainwashed audience seeing them as destabilising for the country. Apart from the few people whose testimonies are referred to above, the majority of my respondents, whether in Aswan or Luxor, usually expressed distrust towards the MB, if not a fierce opposition. This was yet only a year after Morsi’s constitution had gathered a majority of supports in the same regions. As mentioned by Khadija, many people supported the transitional

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

government's harsh repression of MB supporters, believing they deserved it for having been conspiring against Egypt. All sorts of rumours circulated about the Brotherhood. Aged 23, Muhammad M. is a student in hotels and tourism from Luxor. An Ultras Ahlawy football fan, he is close to secular "revolutionaries", including the April 6 Youth Movement. He displayed a fierce hatred of the MB, whom he accused of all evils. He claimed male MB supporters dressed up as *munaqqabat* in order to hide their weapons in demonstrations, that everyone was armed at Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiyya, that on the day of the dispersal corpses were moving. He even said that MB supporters shot at each other in protests to make the Interior Ministry look very bad, which explained the big number of casualties. Muhammad used to watch al-Kahera wal nas TV channel, expert in conspiracy theories. He described fights during 30 June protests in Luxor. According to him, the MB did in one year what President Mubarak did in 30 years⁴⁷⁰.

In line with the official propaganda labelling the MB a militant group, some people believed there were links between the Brotherhood and terrorists:

"He (Morsi) was going to bring Ansar Beit al-Maqdis⁴⁷¹ here".⁴⁷²

In addition, many ordinary people saw pro-MB protests as violent. This is, for instance, what Mahmud said without naming the MB:

"What we see now is a demonstration where there are weapons, people who die... We can never accept this... because this gave an opportunity to foreign entities... without naming them... [...] I give the possibility to kill my people with other people..."⁴⁷³.

In a similar way that they largely ignored the occurrence of labour protests, some people were unaware of most pro-MB protests because of the latter's lack of coverage, especially in the mainstream media. In addition, many people who had participated in protests in the past vividly sought to differentiate their mobilisations from the then ongoing protests, deemed violent, of the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Fawzi, a leading Nubian, pro-revolution activist from Ballanah, said he refrained from participating in any anti-

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Muhammad M., 23, university student, Luxor, April 2014.

⁴⁷¹ Now called the Islamic State in Sinai.

⁴⁷² Interview with Khaled, 43, head of sector at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴⁷³ Interview with Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

government protests, fearing that this might benefit the MB, who could say that people were in the streets to support them⁴⁷⁴. He considered that the MB should accept their failure as Mubarak and the NDP had, saying they had no right to protest because their president had failed⁴⁷⁵.

Ordinary people, including many who had voted for Muhammad Morsi in 2012, expressed disappointment towards the MB, denouncing their incompetence and alleged lies. People also commonly mentioned all that was missing under Morsi, as opposed to what they had under Mubarak. For instance, Aisha, from Al-Hajindiyya, mentioned cooking gas shortages and long queues under Morsi's presidency, as well as prices of basic items' rise, meat for example. The lack of support for the pro-MB post-coup protest movement is also explained by their perceived religious fanaticism and their instrumentalisation of religion for political purposes. Most people denounced the MB's attempts to gather supports through providing goods, bussing people to demonstrations, threatening those supporting the transitional authorities, and so on.

In Al-Hajindiyya, the women I interviewed expressed hostility towards the MB and their supporters. Intissar, a prominent activist in the village, said she had seen people being bussed by the MB during election times. A colleague also told her she was offered money to vote for them. She said that the MB scared them even before they arrived in power. In Al-Hajindiyya, supporters of the Salafist leader Hazem Abu Ismail threatened them, saying that women should not work. So when the MB left, Intissar said it was a relief. She called them liars, accusing them of removing subsidised bread and insulting the army. Indeed, for Intissar as for many people, the army was a red line that could not be crossed. Insulting the army was like insulting all Egyptians. This is why people hated the term '*askar*', employed by opponents to military rule, then MB supporters in their majority:

*"I got upset at insults targeting the army, the word 'askar... the Egyptian army is a strong army... they released lands in 1973, it is not possible for the MB to call them 'askar, this is an army cited in the generous Qur'an'"*⁴⁷⁶.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview with Fawzi, 61, retired, former worker in Saudi Arabia, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Intissar, 39, social worker, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

Coptic Christians were particularly afraid of the MB and relieved since President Morsi's ouster. Aged 19, Girgis was abducted on 3 July 2013 by MB supporters who, during three days, threatened to kill him if he refused to say the *shahāda*, the Islamic creed declaring belief in God's oneness and Muhammad as his Prophet⁴⁷⁷. He lives in Aswan's Sheikh Haroun area, where MB supporters and several Coptic families reside.

Not everyone seemed conditioned by media assumptions about the violent character of pro-MB protests. Some people were simply disappointed at Morsi's year as president, and many people who had voted for him confessed that they had since then turned against him. People denounced President Morsi's mistakes. Aisha summarised it this way: "*We celebrated Morsi's victory, then we went to the streets again to celebrate his ouster*"⁴⁷⁸. Supposed tunnels in Sinai, renewed terrorism, the crisis regarding Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam, were all attributed to President Morsi's incompetence. For Gamee, 62, a retired driver living in Nagaa Abdel Qader, the MB fooled the people when they said they were Muslim and would reform the country. President Morsi should have been everyone's president, not just the MB's. They had divided the country, released terrorists from prisons and brought them to Sinai⁴⁷⁹. Some people explained that they had voted for Morsi because he was the least bad choice and was supposed to care about religion: "*After Mubarak, we were put in a situation when we had to choose between two bad people [...] I chose religion*"⁴⁸⁰. For Haggag, a graduate from Cairo's al-Azhar University, Mubarak was much smarter than Morsi:

"I was against 30 June. Why? I was seeing that Morsi had to take his chance, not because he is good, unfortunately he was politically stupid. He did not have the power to rule, he used to make decisions and then reverse them, and he used to make decisions at the bad time, for example he increased taxes while people were demanding money, so he did not have political wisdom like Mubarak's wisdom. Mubarak used to take money from us but with politeness. So he used to say 'I increased pensions by 30% or 15%', ok? You calculate these 15% on EGP1,000, they are like EGP100, good. But at the same time I increase the price of sugar from EGP3.5 to 6. We are a weak people; we won't understand this. But he was a conscious man. He fooled us, but on the contrary, he succeeded and

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Girgis, 19, student (vocational), Aswan, April 2014.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Aisha, 52, pensioner, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Gamee, 62, former driver, Nagaa Abdel Qader (Qena), May 2014.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview with Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

*took 30 years. It is his son who was stupid, who wanted to eat everything at once, he could have stayed until being 90, he could have also made his son inherit. What happened is that... his wife and his son wanted to eat once*⁴⁸¹.

The MB's use of religion to either mobilise or threaten was also decried by many Egyptians seeing themselves as highly pious, who had difficulty accepting these sermons. Stability was another important argument often raised by sometimes former supporters of the MB that had switched sides. By supporting the army-backed transitional authorities, they expressed a hope for a return of stability, just like they did when they chose to support the MB's constitution a year earlier. This is particularly true in Luxor and Aswan, where political stability and restored security were seen as the preconditions for the return of foreign tourists, so essential for the local economy.

People who dared to publicly defend the MB were less common. A few people recognised their right to protest as Fatma, who thought that violence also came from the police and that the MB was oppressed. She believed the MB would not destroy Egypt because they had a religion⁴⁸². Youssef, from Al-Hebeil, deplored that people had lost their sense of humour since the coup:

*"I have colleagues on the Internet... Once I said something, a joke... If I had an accident and lost one of my fingers, will I become Rab'awi*⁴⁸³? *They told me to raise my son and daughter, and avoid this talking... We got to the point that we can no longer joke... Even under Mubarak, we joked*⁴⁸⁴.

In April 2014, I met Rawya, the sister of the owner of the hotel in which I was staying in Luxor. A mother in her fifties, Rawya introduced herself as a political and women rights activist. From an influent family in Luxor of the Banu Hilal tribe, Rawya regularly participated in informal reconciliation meetings. A former member in the Free Socialists Party, she was now in al-Sadat's Party despite disagreements since the coup. She was a candidate in the Shura Council elections in 2004, as well as the 2010 elections, after which

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Haggag, 24, journalist, Luxor, April 2014.

⁴⁸² Interview with Fatma, 44, accountant, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

⁴⁸³ An opponent to security forces' massacre of pro-MB protesters in Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiyya on 14 August 2013, and thus a supporter of the MB.

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

she denounced fraud and went on a three-day hunger strike with other women. She regularly writes on Facebook and elsewhere, mainly about women issues, and has published two books. Aladdin, in his thirties, is the manager of the hotel and Rawya's younger brother. He participated in the 2011 uprising in Cairo's Tahrir Square. He seemed to be completely jaded, and was considering to join his girlfriend in Holland in order to live a more comfortable life.

Rawya had participated in the 30 June protests against the MB, before realising it was a coup orchestrated by the army and the intelligence services. She then participated in two or three demonstrations and human chains against the Rabaa dispersal and military rule with other women. Therefore, Rawya's stance towards the MB had switched from opposition to the direct denunciation, in the streets, of the state violence targeting them. However, Rawya denied being a MB supporter, and explained her uncommon stance as something natural since the MB were her neighbours. Because of that, she thought she was part of a "black list" despite the fact that she used to know many people in the State Security, and the governor himself. She claimed her son was detained during six days in November 2013 for being a bearded man, despite the fact that he was not involved in any political activities.

Ultimately, the pro-MB protest movement could not keep the same strength in the long term, because of the intense repression described by MB supporters on the one hand, and, increasingly, the lack of popular support on the other. This lack of support is partly explained by the official propaganda associating the MB with terrorism, the Brotherhood's perceived religious fanaticism, President Morsi's alleged mistakes while in power, and the MB's relatively limited presence in southern Upper Egypt. Although the post-coup movement greatly benefitted from the rally of many Salafists, it could not grow beyond its initial constituency. Framing their cause in the language of "legitimacy" instead, perhaps, of rights and/or the rule of law, likely prevented the pro-MB protest movement from gaining more support. This interpretation of "legitimacy" was unable to compete with the one of the thousands⁴⁸⁵ that went to the streets against President Morsi in June and July 2013. More than repression, which was not as strong in southern Upper

⁴⁸⁵ According to several researchers such as Neil Ketchley, the very high numbers mentioned by the Egyptian media are highly disputable.

Egypt as in Cairo and elsewhere in Lower Egypt, the lack of support of the wide population has likely contributed to the gradual fatigue of the pro-MB protest movement.

6. Conclusion: endorsing a perceived safety rather than adventurous alternatives

Eventually, most ordinary Egyptians expressed a clear exhaustion after years of economic and political instability they associated with the “revolution” that had toppled President Mubarak. They largely opposed those who still dared to stage street protests, including “revolutionaries”, MB supporters and workers alike, whom they accused of maintaining the prevailing instability. They showed reluctance towards perceived adventurous projects which kept failing to present real political alternatives addressing ordinary people’s everyday needs. As elsewhere, a well-known authoritarian system appeared safer than the unknown outcome of a perpetual revolution. More importantly, this chapter sheds light on the persisting importance of socioeconomic, and sometimes cultural, divisions in current Egyptian politics. Differences of social statuses are also behind the non-adherence to the 25 January “revolution” of numerous Upper Egyptians who have felt apart, distant, abandoned and poor. Such divisions also separate employees mobilising for higher wages and better working conditions, from more precarious workers or unemployed, poor people.

Eventually and perhaps more importantly, for the essentially marginalised (or self-perceived as such) populations of the southern provinces and the countryside, the three nationwide campaigns are not attractive because they do not propose any political and economic project presenting a real alternative to the current exclusionary order. None of the labour movement, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, or the “revolutionaries”, have convincingly articulated a project reintegrating the subalterns in the national polity. For Ray Bush, marginality and exclusion are systematically found in capitalist societies, in which “poverty is the result of people being actively dispossessed rather than being simply left on the margins or being excluded from the creation of wealth”⁴⁸⁶. In Egypt as in other countries, many people are deliberately excluded from development. Informants

⁴⁸⁶ Ray Bush, “Marginality or abjection? The political economy of poverty production in Egypt”, in Ray Bush and Habib Ayeb, eds., *Marginality and Exclusion in Egypt*, (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

sometimes complained that no one among the political elites cared about ordinary people, especially the poor, arguing that when someone was arrested in Cairo there was publicity. At the opposite, when an ordinary citizen was arrested in Upper Egypt, no one stood with him⁴⁸⁷. Additionally, many ordinary and poor citizens simply felt better away from politics, claiming they were not competent enough to understand it:

*“I don’t know about politics... I am illiterate... I am not educated to know...”*⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁷ Interviews with Moemen, 20, university student, and Mahmud Z., 25, lawyer, Qena, May 2014.

⁴⁸⁸ Interview with Ayman, 30, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

Conclusion: the legacy of the 25 January uprising

Who does the people want?
Don't tell me Morsi or Sisi
A fair president, if God wills, will be my president
His own decision, out of doubt
No subservience to the Americans or the Muslim Brothers
Don't worry about these words
A human, a good man who knows God
Cleaning agent at Amun Temple, or seller of lemons
He sells with honesty, does not cheat,
while saying he does not care about the number of lemons
Thus he will be a perfect president
We only want peace for everyone
Especially for the poor and the wretched
The one who sits on the steps, his hand under his cheek, and laments his bad luck
Because there is not a piece of bread at home
And because his children need to eat, drink, school fees, books and private lessons
But from where?
The need for money has made everything impossible.

Both destroyed it, Morsi and Sisi,
They caused the division
Enemy brothers at home
Revenge princes at work
Shameless thugs in the street
May God curse you, we are in Egypt with no security.
To the power and money owners, we demand
A look of tenderness
At every area in the republic
And particularly at Luxor
Because the cart owner forgets himself while thinking about his horse's food
The Peugeot (taxi) owner waits for any person (client)
I fear this person is a thief or a thug who steals his Peugeot
And throws him in the most remote place
The bazar owner is in debt and on the verge of bankruptcy
Everyone in Luxor relies on tourism
Even the civil servant relies on tourism
To obtain an income that provides for the bare necessities
But where is tourism?
A look at the past, at the temple of my ancestors,
At the Temple of Hatshepsut, in Deir al-Bahari
To those who committed this crime⁴⁸⁹
Who do not belong to any of the divine religions
And this event did not have durable consequences on tourism
Except for two or three months, after which tourism reappeared.

⁴⁸⁹ The massacre of tourists in 1997.

To the officials assuming high positions, please
 Let us be hand in hand
 To build Egypt and live in safety
 And relive the past with its joys and not its sorrows
 Let us show the entire world that Egypt is the country of safety
 In acts, and not words
 To have a positive image of our country abroad
 To resurrect the glory of our ancestors
 And finally a question:
 Do truth and justice have the human being's attention?
 No, and a thousand times no
 But oppression and corruption are widespread at the time
 By His majesty and generosity, oppression and darkness will disappear
 everywhere in the world and in Egypt
 Because Egypt is cited in the Qur'an.⁴⁹⁰

This oral poem recited by an ordinary woman in Luxor in 2014⁴⁹¹ I believe reasonably reflects the mind-set of most common Egyptians after years of political and economic instability. It describes the sense of injustice and the frustrations that most of my informants have expressed, and that I have conveyed throughout this thesis. As I conclude this study, the situation in Egypt appears more tragic than it was on the eve of the 25 January 2011 uprising. It looks as if the regime was precipitating its own fall. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's administration has failed in restoring security, as shown by the almost daily killing of security personnel. It has unsuccessfully crushed a Jihadist insurrection in Sinai. It has failed in re-establishing stability, increasingly threatened by its own security forces. Indeed, the security state has multiplied the worst excesses to silence critics amid growing paranoia and obsession with its own survival. This has gradually triggered what the regime fears most, namely popular protests and instability.

On 3 February 2016, fellow PhD student Giulio Regeni, undertaking research about independent trade unions in Egypt, was found dead in Cairo's outskirts after being savagely tortured. His murder has deeply shocked and shaken all of us. Giulio's mysterious vanishing on 25 January, the 5th anniversary of the 2011 uprising, was highly reminiscent of numerous other cases of 'forced disappearances'. This term was coined to reflect security forces' kidnapping of individuals without formally arresting them.

⁴⁹⁰ Audio recording of a woman provided by an informant in Luxor, April 2014. Translated from Colloquial Arabic by author.

⁴⁹¹ She said they were poor people who supported neither the MB nor Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Various foreign media such as the New York Times on 12 February⁴⁹², accused Egypt's Interior Ministry and security agencies. They quote witnesses who confirmed that plainclothes security agents had arrested Giulio before he disappeared. The Egyptian authorities have been handling the case in a clumsy, to not say incompetent manner, which recalls their response to the Russian plane crash in Sinai, and the killing of Mexican tourists and their Egyptian guides in the western desert in 2015. In addition to hundreds of cases of arbitrary detention, 'forced disappearance', torture and/or killing of alleged political opponents, many recent incidents involving policemen have been contributing to rising popular discontent. In early 2016, several cases of police assaults in hospitals pushed doctors to demonstrate against police brutality. Discontent culminated on 18 February, when a policeman shot a driver dead in Cairo's Darb al-Ahmar area, prompting hundreds to protest outside the Cairo Security Directorate. This is highly reminiscent of the discontent at police brutality that culminated after Khaled Said was tortured to death by policemen in 2010, just a few months before the start of the uprising.

In addition to such security breaches, a number of recent negligent economic decisions have further endangered deteriorating living conditions since the 2011 uprising. The current government has failed to solve the economic crisis, demonstrated by ongoing labour protests, dollar shortages, and persisting high unemployment and inflation rates. It has also failed to improve public services, as shown for instance by recurring electricity and water shortages. In particular, drinking water cuts prompted ordinary people to stage numerous protests during the Islamic month of Ramadan in 2016. Ordinary citizens are increasingly suffering from shortages of subsidised food items such as rice and cooking oil, due in part to increasing tariffs on imports and dollar shortages that have raised prices. Furthermore, the tourism industry, which is the source of income for thousands of Egyptians, has been deteriorating as a result of persisting insecurity and apparent instability. Labour protests have also erupted on a regular basis, sparked by unpaid wages and other allowances, as well as arbitrary dismissals. Additionally, the existence of laws such as the Civil Service Law that threaten workers' rights, the failure to grant permanent positions to long-term temporary workers, corruption and nepotism within public sector entities, have also contributed to the raise in protests. For these reasons, ordinary Egyptians' disappointment towards the government is growing, while the latter has largely responded with short-sighted decisions to buy more time. During this time,

⁴⁹² http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/13/world/middleeast/giulio-regeni-egypt-killing.html?_r=0.

President Sisi has been increasingly criticised by elites, whether media figures or politicians, including his own supporters. The rest of his reign will most likely be troublesome.

This research project aimed to understand and explain, through various case studies of contentious politics in southern Upper Egypt, why most popular mobilisations did not exceed the local scale; why they remained ephemeral, discontinuous and dispersed; and why activists and leaders rarely coordinated their struggles with others based elsewhere. The project also attempted to elucidate the disinterest and lack of support towards wider protest campaigns currently existing in Egypt. In conclusion to the thesis, I propose to elaborate on one such available protest movement, namely the “revolution”. Like many analysts of Egyptian politics, I have struggled to explain the immense setback that occurred in July 2013, whereas Egypt had appeared to be on an interesting, albeit challenging path towards reform. Additionally, all Arab uprisings have so far failed to reach their initial goal, instead giving way to more violence and suffering, except for certain positive developments in Tunisia. As part of this thesis, I strove to provide some answers to the persisting failure of contentious politics in Egypt, as well as in other Middle Eastern countries, in generating positive revolutionary change.

In the first section of this conclusion, I summarise the main arguments of this thesis, supported by evidence provided by the case studies. In the second section, I discuss some wider implications of this research, that also span issues that go beyond the Egyptian case. I also suggest tracks for future research, prior to providing prospects for Egyptian politics and contentious politics in the coming years. I argue that the relative unpopularity of the concept of revolution does not mean that change is not taking place.

1. Explaining discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral forms of activism

Throughout the six chapters of this thesis, I have attempted to shed light on factors other than state repression that interact in preventing local collective action from expanding. I have demonstrated that, beyond the usual authoritarian constraints that only provide a partial explanation, most popular mobilisations are constrained by the vicissitudes of leadership on the one hand, and by a set of local sociocultural constructions, beliefs and practices on the other. I have also provided a potential explanation as to why the

beginning of a revolution was quickly swept away by a harsher authoritarian regime. Indeed, I established that current national campaigns, mainly revolutionary change, labour protests and the pro-Muslim Brotherhood protest movement, do not appeal to the majority due to their lack of alternative political projects and perceived exclusionary character.

Chapter 1 demonstrated that, in the history of contemporary Egypt before the 2011 uprising, authoritarian constraints have essentially curbed the advent of large and lengthy protest movements, without preventing the emergence of various forms of contentious politics. By exploring the trajectories and patterns of Egyptians' contentious politics since President Nasser's time, the chapter explained how authoritarian conditions, combined with lacking support organisations and dispersed contentious agents, have essentially limited the expansion of yet recurrent popular mobilisations. These protests were mainly directed towards changing economic policies since 1967. Initially students and workers were leading the resistance against the questioning of the changes consolidated under Nasserism. Political Islam soon began to play an increasing role, thereby becoming a haven for many disillusioned populations, including in Upper Egypt. However, most instances of ordinary people's contentious politics remained local and discrete, thereby avoiding direct confrontations with the authorities. A renewed, louder contestation took place in the turn of the century. This time, it was mainly led by secular, pro-democracy activists and workers. Then the 25 January 2011 uprising gave the opportunity to an increased segment of the population to embark on direct collective action. Renewing ordinary Egyptians' interest in politics and reducing their fear of repression, the uprising was indeed perceived by many ordinary people as an opportunity to relatively safely raise demands. My evidence shows that this trend has not spared the provinces of southern Upper Egypt, where multiple protests took place in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Even though it may appear too soon to qualify the uprising as a point of no return, I have argued that it was an important moment in the long history of contentious politics in contemporary Egypt, simply because it widened ordinary citizens' horizon and sense of possibility. The 2011 uprising may appear as a hiatus now that state repression has resumed and intensified since the army deposed elected President Morsi in July 2013, making opportunities for mobilisation less obvious. However, popular protests have remained numerous, while the 2011 uprising and its enduring consequences have dramatically affected ordinary citizens' daily lives and, to some extent, the popular

political culture. This finding constituted the starting point of the rest of the study, which sought to explain the persistence of discontinuous, ephemeral and dispersed forms of activism.

Chapter 2 analysed two cases of such small local popular mobilisations characterised by their intermittence, brevity and isolation, which erupted in the wake of the 2011 uprising. In al-Hebeil, near Luxor, residents perceived an opportunity to raise their demand for the legal use of a local football field in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. As authorities became less tolerant to street protests, protest leaders nonetheless continued to move things forward by pursuing official steps and publicising their cause, putting pressure on authorities as a result. In Abul Rish, near Aswan, it was also the 2011 uprising that encouraged local residents and activists to stage protests against the Kima Canal, which has contaminated drinking water for a long time. Here again, protests stopped after the 2013 uprising and coup, while the leaders of the contestation continued to apply pressure and negotiate with the authorities. Both cases illustrated how local coordination is generally achieved and how ordinary protesters mobilise at the heart of their village or neighbourhood. The chapter introduced some of the patterns of mobilisation that I more deeply and systematically analyse in chapters 3, 4 and 5. In Abul Rish and al-Hebeil alike, the chapter established that local activists and available support networks had played a key role in mobilising ordinary people. Movement leaders have adapted their modes of organisation and mobilisation strategies to the changing political contexts, evolving from public protests during the favourable period between the 2011 and 2013 uprisings, to less transgressive attempts to secure gains such as media publicity and legal steps when repression resumed. They sometimes have access to resources and connections exceeding the local scale. In addition, local sociocultural features, including neighbourhood or village solidarities and Upper Egyptians' sense of marginalisation, have motivated and shaped these mobilisations against deteriorating public services. Eventually, the chapter showed that people were also mobilised by the memory of a strong state and, to some extent, of an old moral economy.

Chapter 3 demonstrated the relative efficiency of several state strategies other than or along with the direct repression of protests and political opponents, in limiting popular mobilisations since July 2013 in Egypt. In particular, post-coup official propaganda mainly spread by the media successfully turned many Egyptians away from and even

against protesters and opponents. As a result, my evidence shows that many ordinary people developed resentment towards the “revolution”, perceived as the main source of a lasting political and economic instability. Muslim Brotherhood supporters were similarly often described by respondents as violent rioters, if not terrorists. Overall, informants estimated that it was no longer the time to stage street protests because, often in line with what they heard and read in the media, protests nurtured instability. Co-optation strategies at the local level also helped to contain emerging episodes of contestation. The intervention of pro-government activists in ending a strike by garbage collectors in Kom Ombo is a good example of this. Combined with renewed harsh repression taking many different forms, these state strategies discouraged most protest inclinations, without suppressing all forms of mobilisation. However, such persisting popular mobilisations have displayed a high degree of self-restraint. The case of a limited contestation against drinking water shortages in Nagaa Abdel Qader, in Qena governorate, demonstrated this self-limitation, as well as the relative efficiency of the previously described state strategies of containment. In this village characterised by the high influence of tribalism and its subsequent loyalties, elders clearly refused to openly confront the authorities. They expressed hostility towards public protests, a means they had, however, used in the past. Yet, they did take steps to publicise their cause. They talked to journalists and targeted the local branch of the Water Company with lawsuits. However, their apparent concern to maintain good relations with local officials appeared to show their refusal to escalate their mobilisation, suggesting a possible co-optation.

Chapter 4 inquired into the link between leadership and the scale of popular mobilisations. It particularly examined the vicissitudes of leadership potentially preventing a larger coordination of protests. Studying the diverse profiles of leaders in southern Upper Egypt, I first sought to show how vibrant the local activist community was, especially since the 2011 uprising. I then demonstrated that leaders’ options of strategies to mobilise and rally support among ordinary people were limited, not only because of the dangers and constraints of authoritarianism, but also largely due to the requirements of popular political culture. To put it simply, the highly repressive environment prevailing since the July 2013 coup d’état has largely forced movement leaders to restrain themselves to the local level and to a limited number of deemed low-risk forms of activism. These have included joining political parties or participating in local or national campaigns focusing on the provision of communal services. Many activists also joined pro-government

organisations, preferring to work within the system and/or hoping to enter local councils. Attending political and human rights trainings and using online social media to report on violations, network and exchange ideas, were also common. Moreover, I demonstrated that the political culture prevailing in the areas where I conducted fieldwork was characterised by a relatively high mistrust and suspicion vis-à-vis politics, politicians and political parties alike, as well as clientelism and patronage. This also appeared to limit considerably the room for manoeuvre in leaders' strategies. This is especially the case for new entrants and political opponents who have no access to government resources and thus struggle to provide services to ordinary citizens. Finally, the case study of the *Lamm al-shaml* initiative illustrated many of these challenges encountered by leaders and activists trying to expand their constituencies and pursue a level of political participation at least locally, despite the risks of repression and other constraints. These range from the struggle to transcend the traditional social, cultural and political divides, to the challenge to unify efforts around a common purpose.

Chapter 5 demonstrated how some of the sociocultural characteristics of a given place affected (de)mobilisation processes and dynamics, potentially encouraging or constraining activism by ordinary people. Examining the characteristics of the Upper Egyptian culture and society, it particularly emphasised the implications for mobilisation of identity issues, social institutions and cultural traditions. I argued that sociocultural features or their perception by ordinary citizens were as important as political opportunities and threats in leading people to mobilise or demobilise. I attempted to demonstrate that a strong regionalism and ordinary people's perception of belonging to a specific regional cultural identity distinct from the rest of Egypt often affected or shaped their participation. A sense of marginalisation combined with a perceived contempt from northern elites has sometimes provoked Upper Egyptians, encouraging them to mobilise to claim their belonging to the national polity, as well as establishing their rights as Egyptian citizens. At the same time, this belief in being dissimilar and having different needs carries the potential to impede popular mobilisation on a national scale since ordinary Upper Egyptians do not always identify with nationwide struggles. I also established the importance of patriarchal institutions and cultural traditions in (de)mobilisation, especially clanship and gender divisions. I attempted to demonstrate that tribalism and clanship implied solidarities and loyalties that encouraged or constrained people to mobilise, while inciting self-restraint to avoid sectarian violence. I

suggested that the key position of the clans in patronage networks led by the authorities potentially limited ordinary people's contentious mobilisations through the entailed loyalties. I also shed light on the challenges faced by women's activism due to their status and role imposed by local patriarchal traditions. At the same time, I suggested that young people and women alike occasionally found some emancipation in various forms of activism enabling them to partly circumvent patriarchal authority. I concluded that, just as much as political opportunities and threats, social and cultural institutions and traditions influenced the contentious politics of ordinary people, often limiting their expansion beyond the local scale.

Chapter 6 eventually wondered why, contrary to the exceptional success of the *Tamarrod* campaign that led to the 2013 uprising, the three nationwide protest campaigns currently available in Egypt – revolutionary change, labour protests, and Muslim Brotherhood supporters' protest movement – persistently failed to attract wider numbers. The argument was made that ordinary people's lack of support for, and, on occasion, reluctance towards such perceived adventurous projects stemmed from these movements' continuous failure to address everyday needs through credible, all-inclusive political alternatives to the authoritarian regime. In other words, none of either the labour movement, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, or the "revolution", have convincingly articulated a political project reintegrating the subalterns in the national polity. In contrast, the *Tamarrod* campaign successfully appealed to many because it transcended traditional divisions. It was built around a simple goal and benefited from the nationwide involvement of activist networks, as well as the support of the security forces, the media, and other actors who were able to exploit popular discontent. The chapter shed light on the socioeconomic and sometimes cultural divisions impeding Egyptians to unite and become involved in these movements often perceived as exclusionary. Since June 2013, there has been no significant mobilisation to defend the 25 January "revolution" because popular support for a little known uprising and its leaders has remained marginal, especially in the provinces and the countryside. Workers' protests have similarly failed to attract larger solidarity because they have raised targeted sectorial demands, that do not speak to the poorest segments of society. Finally, the Muslim Brotherhood has essentially appeared sectarian and exclusionary, also failing to represent a credible alternative and conquer new constituencies.

2. *Maḥsh faīda*⁴⁹³?

In July 2016, residents of Al-Hebeil, near Luxor, blocked the main road to protest persistent water cuts⁴⁹⁴. Protests against drinking water shortages had erupted throughout the month of Ramadan across Egypt, particularly in rural areas in the Upper Egyptian and Delta provinces. Often brandishing jerricans, angry ordinary citizens demonstrated outside governorate buildings and local headquarters of the Drinking Water and Sanitation Company, and sometimes cut major roads and highways. A certain diffusion⁴⁹⁵ of water protests took place since these erupted during the same period in many different places. However, no nationwide movement has emerged from the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of ordinary people who have mobilised to demand a standardised supply of drinking water. In this case as in many others, no “scale shift” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001) has taken place, and the multitude of water protests remained isolated from each other, occurred sporadically, and did not last very long. The six chapters of this thesis have attempted to explain this absence of escalation and scale shift in most occurrences of discontinuous, dispersed and ephemeral forms of activism. They have confirmed the importance of a favourable context in motivating activists and more ordinary citizens to mobilise. However, the study assumed that a predominantly authoritarian environment, which is intrinsically unfavourable to contentious politics, does not always stop all forms of popular activism.

2.1. Opportunities for scale shift in authoritarian contexts

Through its repression, intimidation, co-optation and divide and rule strategies, it is true that authoritarianism accounts for a large part of local protesters’ inability to escalate an issue. Strategies of containment implemented by the authoritarian state not only deter ordinary people from joining protest movements, but also reduce options for more experienced political activists and leaders. Furthermore, the latter have to cope with the demanding requirements of a local political culture largely pervaded by clientelism and general mistrust of politicians. This has further jeopardised leaders’ inclinations to bring

⁴⁹³ A common idiom in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic meaning “there is no hope”.

⁴⁹⁴ <http://www.albawabhnews.com/2008913>.

⁴⁹⁵ With brokerage, diffusion is the other process enabling contention to spread and potentially leading to a scale-shift. It usually “involves the transfer of information along established lines of interaction”. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

protest movements to a higher level, elsewhere called brokerage attempts. In addition to the vicissitudes of leadership and to the authoritarian restrictions to opportunities of mobilisation, the thesis has insisted on the importance of the sociocultural environment. In particular, it has demonstrated that the local logics of patronage and the occasioned loyalties, sometimes entrenched in partly co-opted clans, have often prevented protest movements' escalation. Ultimately, the evidence brought by this research definitively discards deterministic explanations of the occurrence of contentious politics, because mobilisation and demobilisation are extremely complex processes. They involve the interaction of too many factors and mechanisms, whether political, social or cultural in nature. This thesis offers insight into some of these intersections between mobilisation and other processes and mechanisms, particularly repression, the diffusion of contention and the role of leadership.

What does this study's focus on dispersed, discontinuous and short-lived forms of activism bring to the debates on contentious politics? One can legitimately wonder what is the purpose of devoting an entire thesis to such popular mobilisations which, contrary to the mass uprisings that took place in Egypt in 2011 and 2013, have remained small and locally contained. As such, indeed, they have neither really alarmed the authorities, nor significantly attracted the attention of students of contentious politics. However, should movement leaders implement strategies to connect and ally with others who, in various other places, share similar grievances, such protests carry the potential to threaten the authorities. They could significantly disturb the economy, state assets, road traffic, security forces and other state institutions. Scale shift could originate from below and from the provinces if local leaders were to seize sometimes less obvious opportunities or were even to create them. After all, authoritarianism does not completely suppress opportunities, which are ultimately decided by contentious actors. The popular uprising that took place in Tunisia in late 2010 and early 2011 is a case in point since it started in the poor in-land provinces to the South of the country (Ayeb 2012). In the Egyptian case, competent local activists and leaders are not lacking. They often have access to transregional or nationwide networks that put them in touch with others elsewhere in the country. Additionally, they sometimes have the advantage of access to a myriad of local informal networks, organisations and associations on which they can rely to campaign and mobilise. They also have a crucial knowledge of the political culture, as well as of local culture and traditions.

In consequence, are there opportunities for a significant shift of these local popular mobilisations under authoritarian conditions? In light of this thesis' findings, the answer is yes, although these are hard to predict. Such opportunities appear to depend intimately on movement leaders' will to take risks and face a highly repressive authoritarian regime. Ultimately, this thesis' focus on dispersed, discontinuous and ephemeral forms of activism has thus shed light on the importance of organisation and mostly leadership to understand and to explain political change. It is true that both are constrained by repression. However, the outcome of mobilisation mainly depends on movement leaders' resilience, determination and innovation to circumvent state repression and authoritarian conditions. Discontinuous, ephemeral and isolated forms of local activism appear unimportant until a number of factors and mechanisms, on the top of which is the activism of leaders, interact and favour scale shift. According to Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow (2001), diffusion and brokerage are the main processes leading to scale shift. These are processes that are not incompatible with authoritarian conditions, especially if a culture of protest already exists as is the case in Egypt. Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow also noted that "contention that spreads primarily through diffusion will almost always remain narrower in its geographic and/or institutional scale than contention that spreads through brokerage"⁴⁹⁶. Therefore, for larger social or protest movements to emerge, for instance against the deterioration of public services, leadership exercising brokerage appears essential. As summarised by Asef Bayat, "revolutionaries are always in a minority; and revolutions are always carried out by a minority [...] Revolutions are won not because the majority of people fight the regimes, but because only a tiny minority remains to resist"⁴⁹⁷.

The focus on ordinary people's contentious politics inscribed in their local context has also shed light on the importance of the sociocultural environment in shaping, fostering or constraining popular mobilisations. Indeed, the thesis demonstrates how popular mobilisations are partly structured by their local geographical and cultural context, as well as how the local level interacts with its national counterpart. It showed that people's motives and paths to mobilisation are so diverse and complex that actual or perceived opportunities and/or threats are not sufficient to explain their decisions. I hope to have contributed to this debate by encouraging a more thorough analysis of identity issues,

⁴⁹⁶ McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

⁴⁹⁷ Asef Bayat, "The Arab Spring and its Surprises", *Development and Change* 44(3), 2013.

social and cultural constructions, traditions and beliefs, to better understand contentious actors' options and strategic decisions. Such a sociocultural angle in the study of discontinuous, ephemeral and dispersed forms of activism in the marginalised periphery will hopefully enable scholars to unravel the puzzle of the relative failure, so far, of the Arab uprisings. This thesis also hopes to encourage further research on issues of leadership, especially at the local level. While many observers were quick to call the 2011 uprising a leaderless revolution, we now know that it was rather driven by a multitude of front-runners. Local support and organisational networks used for mobilisation and campaigning purposes also need further research. More case studies of popular mobilisations in the provinces in Egypt and in other Middle Eastern countries, would be very useful to broaden our knowledge of all the processes and mechanisms discussed in this thesis. While fieldwork in Egypt will remain risky for Egyptian and foreign researchers alike at least for a while, hope and interesting avenues for future academic research remain.

2.2. Prospects for Egypt

Did a revolution, basically understood as an event triggering a deep process of transformation of power and state institutions, happen in Egypt in 2011? I am inclined to say that a revolutionary opportunity emerged, but was hit by a decisive setback with the 2013 military coup, which was partly supported by a separate popular uprising. However, can we say that the latter has eliminated all prospects for revolutionary change, or at least gradual political reform? This is a thorny issue that only time will definitively resolve. However, as reflected throughout the thesis, constituencies for change exist in Egypt. In addition, ordinary Egyptians may not have been ready to experiment revolutionary change in 2011 or 2013. But this does not discard any prospect of change. Five years on, what is left of the 25 January "revolution"? I established that the 2011 uprising has not left anyone completely indifferent. However, interviews with ordinary people showed that stability and security were often more important than deemed uncertain political adventures. This certainly explains part of the infatuation with the army's takeover in 2013. More than a rather vague revolutionary project, the demand has been for gradual change, for authoritarian regimes to reform themselves, for what was elsewhere called "refo-lution" (Bayat 2013). This is understood as "revolutions that aim to push for

reforms in, and through, the institutions of the existing regimes”⁴⁹⁸. Indeed, authoritarianism was not necessarily rejected:

*“When there is a right dictator, he acts in the interest of the country.”*⁴⁹⁹

In addition, many ordinary people insisted that they had more important things to do than caring about politics or going to protests, often citing poverty as a justification:

*“Someone who works for EGP10 a day...an employee [...] Do you think that after coming back from work, someone who has 7 or 8 children...will still go out to participate in a march? Or go to a demonstration for example?”*⁵⁰⁰

*“We have no time. We want to feed our children. The most important thing for us is to provide for the home... We have no time for problems, we want to eat a piece of bread”.*⁵⁰¹

That said, almost everyone talked about the famous slogan of the “revolution”, “bread, freedom and social justice”. With bread, social justice seemed particularly important:

*“The individual who is standing in the sun in the street, working... And there is someone sitting in an office, earning millions, isn’t that a scandal?”*⁵⁰²

*“In any case, the citizen is oppressed...He can’t talk to you about democracy or freedom or bread or social justice. When someone stands for 3-4 hours at the oven in a long and large queue for 1 Egyptian pound of bread, while someone standing by his side has bread made especially for him [...] because he is the son of the prince, and I, the son of the black duck, must wait in the queue and take bread full of bolts and dust, and will eat it as a grace, a favour from God... The citizen always feels this”.*⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁸ Asef Bayat, “Revolution in bad times”, *New Left Review* 80, 2013.

⁴⁹⁹ Interview with Muhammad H., 39, lawyer, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

⁵⁰¹ Interview with Erkabi, 48, driver at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

⁵⁰² Interview with Ayman, 30, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

⁵⁰³ Interview with Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

A hotel employee in Aswan, Ahmed S. complained that ordinary and poor people were treated as less than second class citizens by Egyptian managers, while foreigners were more human⁵⁰⁴. These testimonies and many others reported in this study suggest that the 2011 uprising has somehow liberated the capacity of the people to speak out. In other words, ordinary people now more openly and freely denounce social inequalities, discriminations, nepotism and other corrupt practices they have yet always endured. They have similarly challenged their marginalisation while at the same time attempting to reclaim their place among national citizenship. This thesis is also a story of the exclusion of a wide majority from policies affecting their country and their lives, generally because they live in remote areas and/or are poor. These challenges to social injustices and discriminative policies constitute, I believe, a significant legacy of the 2011 uprising with an inherent potential to push for reform.

Moreover, even while stating that they were not particularly interested in politics, most ordinary people confessed that they had voted in elections since the 2011 uprising. This is in contrast to the tiny minority which used to vote under President Mubarak. The uprising undoubtedly renewed ordinary people's interest in the destiny of their country. Politics was not black or white, and people often switched their support. While before the "revolution" many young leaders were members of former President Mubarak's NDP, they sometimes enthusiastically participated in the uprising. For instance, Hamdi, who was a member in the NDP before the 2011 uprising, voted for Khaled Ali, a leading labour activist, in the first round of the 2012 presidential elections. He only chose Ahmed Shafiq, the establishment candidate, at the second round. In addition, many respondents who had voted for Muhammad Morsi in 2012, sometimes protested against him in 2013, and now supported Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

What is next for Egypt? Despite the fear that currently prevails after more than three years of mass killings, arbitrary arrests and harsh prison sentences, nothing can completely erase the legacies of the 25 January "revolution" from the minds of the people. Some informants are convinced that "*a third revolution will happen*"⁵⁰⁵. As I write these concluding lines in July 2016, popular discontent and disappointment with President Sisi's regime keeps growing. Small, locally contained protests regularly erupt against

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with Ahmed S., 39, hotel employee, Aswan, February 2014.

⁵⁰⁵ Interview with Fawzi, 61, retired, former worker in Saudi Arabia, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

drinking water shortages, police brutality, corrupt officials, and many other grievances. The prospect of a new uprising, this time mainly driven by socioeconomic concerns, cannot be completely excluded. In 2014, an informant had told me:

*“The coming revolution will be a bread revolt. Only the working class will participate. It will trump 25 January [2011], 30 June [2013], and all the revolutions. No one will be able to control it”*⁵⁰⁶.

However, with no organised political opposition to take over power, it is unlikely that a new uprising would lead to significant political change. Consequently, Egypt will likely experience gradual change over many years, probably a generation or two, during which new political players will refine their project and prepare to assume power.

In particular, there is hope that “revolutionaries”, who should be preparing for the future, will first learn from past mistakes. They have to transcend their political differences, and find ways to work with less revolutionary but still reformist elements. These will need to include young supporters of the current regime that are increasingly disillusioned, as well as moderate Islamists. Revolutionaries must also systematically take into account ordinary and poor Egyptians’ daily needs in order to gradually build constituencies. They have to accept that 25 January is an unloved revolution and that most of their compatriots cannot afford more instability. By seeking to gradually work from inside the current system, as various examples exposed in this thesis have showed, some of them will have understood that they are unlikely to win the coming battles in the streets. Change will be a long, demanding and painful process, but it will come eventually. People change, societies evolve, and regimes revolve. In Egypt, it is only once the revolution has won that justice will be able to triumph.

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- Gamee, 62, former driver, Nagaa Abdel Qader (Qena), May 2014.

Girgis, 19, student (vocational), Aswan, April 2014.

Gomaa, 64, retired, Nagaa Abdel Qader (Qena), May 2014.

Haggag, 24, journalist, Luxor, April 2014 and March 2015.

Hala, 50, public sector employee, Qena, May 2014.

Hamdi, 33, school teacher, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

Hani, unemployed graduate, Aswan, January 2014.

Hassan, 35, bazar employee, Aswan, February 2014.

Haytham, 20, university student, Aswan, April 2014.

Heba, 53, Electricity Company employee, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

Hesham, 39, school teacher, Aswan, March 2014.

Hoda, 54, housewife (middle degree in business studies), Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

Islam, 24, unemployed (Bachelor in tourism and hotels), Luxor, April 2014.

Intissar, 39, social worker, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

Khadija, 43, school teacher, Abul Rish (Aswan), March 2014.

Khaled, accountant, Aswan, April 2015.

Khaled, 43, head of sector at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

Mahdi, 33, travel agent, Aswan, January 2014.

Mahmud, 25, lawyer, Qena, May 2014.

Mahmud, 64, retired veterinarian and shop owner, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

Mahmud, employee at Al-Hebeil's only youth centre, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

Mahmud D., journalist, Luxor and Dshna (Qena), April 2014.

Mahmud Z., 25, lawyer, Qena, May 2014.

Malika, 43, housewife (business technical diploma), Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

Metwalli, 51, accountant and farmer, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

Moemen, 20, university student, Qena, May 2014.

Mona, 45, kindergarten director, Al-Hajindiyya (Aswan), February 2014.

Moneim, 35, tourist guide, Luxor, April 2014.

Mostafa A., 32, archaeologist, Luxor, April 2014.

Mostafa al-Hassan, director of HMLC Aswan, Aswan, January 2014.

Mostafa, 36, heavy equipment technician, Ballana (Aswan), March 2014.

Muhammad, 45, quality manager at Armant's sugar factory, Luxor, April 2014.

Muhammad, 32, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

Muhammad A., 44, garbage collector, Kom Ombo (Aswan), March 2014.

Muhammad H., 39, lawyer, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

Muhammad H., 46, Agriculture Ministry employee, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

Muhammad K., 30, supervisor at cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014.

Muhammad M., 23, university student, Luxor, April 2014.

Muhammad S., 45, Electricity Company employee, Aswan, April 2015.

Murad, 29, health inspector, Armant and Luxor, March 2014.

Nabil, 36, unemployed (Bachelor in business studies), Luxor, March 2015.

Nahed, social worker, Abul Rish (Aswan), February 2014.

Olfat, lawyer, Aswan, February 2014 and April 2015.

Omar, 35, dry-cleaning shop owner, Luxor, April 2014.

Ramadan, 53, social worker, Aniba (Aswan), April 2014.

Rawya, hotel owner, Luxor, April 2014.

Sabri, 28, airport customs inspector, Aswan, February 2014, and Cairo, April 2015.

Salim, 40, employee at the Water Company and microbus driver, Aswan, February 2014.

Salman, 39, entrepreneur, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

Shazli, 23, student, Aswan, January-February 2014.

Suad, health unit employee, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), March 2015.

Taha, 40, technician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014.

Tamer, 37, Water Company executive, Aswan, February 2014 and April 2015.

Tariq, 45, High Dam administration employee, Aswan, April 2015.

Wael, 28, lawyer (HMLC), Aswan, April 2015.

Walid, tourist guide, Aswan, March 2014.

Yosri, 52, lawyer (HMLC), Aswan, April 2015.

Youssef, 23, student (technical education), Armant (Luxor), March 2014.

Youssef, 45, electrician, Al-Hebeil (Luxor), April 2014 and March 2015.

Zaineb, 30, artisan, Luxor, March 2015.

Zakaria, 38, driver, Nagaa Abdel Qader (Qena), May 2014.

Audio recordings:

Poem about the “revolution” told by Abdelrahim, 37, driver at the cleaning company, Kom Ombo (Aswan), April 2014. Translated by author from mainly Colloquial Arabic.

Audio recording of a woman provided by Mostafa A., 32, archaeologist, Luxor, April 2014. Translated from Colloquial Arabic by author.

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