

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

More than Just Chanting:
The Role of the Egyptian Football Ultras in Authoritarian Regime
Breakdown

The Case of Ultras Ahlawy

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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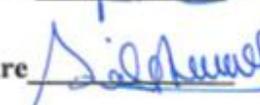
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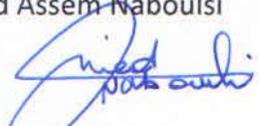


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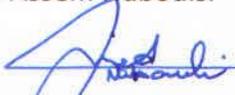


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*To my loved ones,
To Curva Sud Milano,
To Ahlawy who fought courageously and died for what they believed in: Liberta,
You Will Never Walk Alone...*

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More than Just Chanting:
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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the January 2011 popular uprising, the most powerful challenge to the Egyptian regime's authoritarian control over public space came from a nonpolitical group: the Ultras. Their substantial pre-uprising experience in combatting the police, spirit of activism, and perpetual mobilization allowed them to successfully confront the state's coercive apparatus. This thesis examines the role of the Ultras in Egypt's 2011 uprising, relying on a contextual framework that considers them as both Social Movements and Non-Movements. The role of the Ultras Ahlawy, the most influential Ultras organization in Egypt, is examined before, during, and immediately after authoritarian regime breakdown. The thesis thus unpacks the role played by the Ultras in authoritarian regime breakdown in Egypt, and their motivations to assume this role. It also spells out the limits of non-political movements in bringing about sociopolitical change after authoritarian regime breakdown.

Keywords: Social Movements, Ultras, Egypt, Ahlawy, Authoritarianism, Mubarak, Football.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACAB	All Cops Are Bastards
CAF	Confederation of African Football
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
CSF	Central Security Forces
EFA	Egyptian Football Federation
FC	Football Club
FIFA	International Federation of the Football Association
FJP	Freedom and Justice Party
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MOI	Ministry of Interior
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SCAF	Supreme Council of Armed Forces
SMT	Social Movement Theory
UA07	Ultras Ahlawy 2007
UWK	Ultras White Knights

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

With more than a billion viewers yearly, Football is the largest spectator sport in the world. The popularity of the game is based on the competitive nature of the game, and the concept of fandom. In addition to cheering for their team, fans inside or outside the stadium have a lot to express. Football is seen by many as a platform to display their national identity, political affiliation, ethnic pride, and religious belonging. This gives Football many characteristics that make it more than just a sport to many. The symbolism of Football clubs, players and colors can mean for the fans an intimate sense of belonging and identity. The latter is also crystalized by the economic, social and political settings that surrounds communities associated with Football clubs. According to Scalia (2009), the fall of the Berlin wall caused the collapse of the ideological confrontation and the loss of legitimacy of the international political system, therefore communitarianism was enhanced by the dynamics associated with Football.

Local, regional and international politics usually find their way to the Football stadium. When Netherlands beat Germany in the semifinal of European cup in 1988, “nine million Dutchmen took the streets to celebrate the victory, in what was described as the largest public gathering since the liberation” (Kuper, 2006, p. 4). This nationwide celebration was attributed to the feeling of retribution, in response to the military occupation that Germany imposed on the Netherlands during the Second World War. On a regional level, the FIFA world cup qualifiers of 2010 were a chance to expose nationalist, antagonist and supremacy feelings that the people of Egypt and Algeria possessed towards each other. Violent clashes occurred between the fans of

the two countries both on the first and second leg matches, which even escalated to become a major diplomatic crisis after both sides called their envoys back to their home countries (BBC, 2009). On a domestic level, the “clash” between Iran and the United States of America in the 1998 World Cup in France, “wasn’t a political clash between Iranians and Americans at all, but between Iranians and Iranians” (Kuper, 2006, p. 290). Most of the spectators were Iranians opposing the *Khomeini* regime and living in exile, they wore T-shirts that had the pictures of the leader of the *Mujahedeen* movement, which was the para military opposition movement based in Iraq.

Football also is a way to express religious and ethnic identities, which are sometimes translated in violent manifestations. In Scotland, brutal clashes occur almost every time after matches between “Celtic” the team representing the Catholic minority demanding separation from the crown rule and “Rangers” the team linked to the protestant majority loyal to the crown rule in England. The confessional system in Lebanon ends the possibility of sectarian competition in politics, because the constitution guaranteed equal representation to Muslim and Christian sects. Lebanon gives the best example on Football teams representing different religious sects in the country. The major sects (Sunni, Shia, Druze, Christian Maronite, Christian Orthodox and Christian Armenian) have different Football clubs administered by prominent sectarian figures. Therefore, Football is considered a platform for sectarian competition and rivalry in Lebanon. “There is no other sector with so much competition, not only within sects, as in politics, but also between sects. There is no other field with direct confrontation among the different sectarian and political groups” (Reiche, 2011, p. 270).

In Spain, Catalans have a successful way in showing their ethnic identity and in voicing their demands of independence from the Spanish monarchy: the Barcelona Football club. The royal team Real Madrid does not only symbolize the monarchy but is also associated with the military dictatorship under General Franco back in the 1930s. Franco was also believed to support Real Madrid team. In the mindset of the Catalans, FC Barcelona was the team that represented the ethnic group of five million Catalans, forming their nation. “Only at the Football stadiums did Catalonia still exist, and the only Catalan symbol Franco never dared touch was *Barca*” (Kuper, 2006, p. 103).

Dictatorships and authoritarian regimes also try to use Football as a way to contain and coopt the people, taking advantage of the huge fandom and exposure of this sport to the populous. In Argentina, during the rule of the military elite dictatorship, the world cup of 1978 was thought to be organized to deviate the people’s attention from the mass murders that the *junta* (military elite) committed. “A smashing *Mundial* won by Argentina, would make up for the occasional death at home. It was their chance to reunite the people” (Kuper, 2006, p. 210). President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt tried to associate his image, along with the image of his son Gamal and Alaa, to the success of the Egyptian National Football team in Africa. “Football had been a convenient tool to distract normally curious minds from questioning the economic, social and political direction of Egypt” (Mazhar, 2012). The National Democratic Party (NDP) was gaining advantage of Football as a mean of distraction to assert its political and economic domination of the state assets.

Moreover, Football stadiums were some of the few places to contest authoritarian regimes and challenge their authority. In Libya, a riot broke in 1996 and turned into an anti-regime protest after a penalty was wrongfully awarded to a team

that was considered loyal to President Gadhafi. This incident is significant because it was one of the rare cases of public unrest against the ruling regime in Libya, and it came out of a Football match. In Iran, Football even went further to challenge the political, social and religious norms imposed by the *Mullah's* regime. After beating Australia in 1997, and qualifying for the World Cup in 1998, Iranians poured into the streets and celebrated. "Men and women (some of them without veils) danced and kissed defying government warnings and religious taboos. It was a popular explosion on the scale not seen even when Khomeini returned from exile in February 1979" (Kuper, 2006, p. 290).

1.2 Characteristics of Football as a Social Sport

Football in the world relies mainly on the grassroots for its extreme popularity; it is the game of the people. The crowd is referred to in the language of Football as the 12th player (Football team consists of 11 players), to show the important role of the spectators in the game. Through Football, it is easy to grasp the sensation of identity in its ethnic, religious, national dimension. Archetti (1999) describes Football as a game that captures the notion of an imagined community perfectly. He suggests that when players are representing a nation, it is much easier to imagine the nation and confirm to the national identity.

Football has many characteristics that qualify it to be a platform for political activism, social mobilization and sentiments of nationalism. The most prominent feature of Football, is that it relies on the Durkheimian concept of "organic solidarity of the masses" (Durkheim, 1997). This is attributed to the nature of the sport itself, which relies on a known team, with a clear division of labor that exists between its members. This simplifies the process of mass synthesization, enhances solidarity and creates a feeling of social bonding to achieve a common goal. Bromberger see that

Football values teamwork, solidarity, division of labor, and collective planning, “it resembles the image of the industrial world which originally produced it” (Bromberger, 1995, 296). Benefitting from the characteristics of this spectator sport, nationalism thrives in the subconscious of the masses, and consequently the actions resulting from that feeling will be evident. “Nationalism peaks because many consider collective action a truer test of a country’s spirit than individual talent” (Chehabi, 2002, p. 78).

The game of Football is therefore an arena for competition between nations, ethnic and religious groups, identities and ideologies. The imagery of Football transcends the feeling of a collective identity to a detailed symbolism of ethnicity, religious affiliation and ideologies. These notions and images are “gamified” in Football, where one team wins and the other loses, and therefore makes the Football field an arena where community identities, in all their forms, are tested, challenged and confronted. Bromberger also describes Football as a “complex social phenomenon that puts on stage different and often contradictory aspects of society” (Bromberger, 2012, p. 6). Pickford adds that it is seen as “a game in which each team works together to try to occupy as much of the “territory” of the other as it can, culminating in attempts symbolically to “conquer” side’s stronghold by kicking the ball into the goal” (Pickford, 1941, p. 8). Therefore, the game ultimately marks a winner and loser, not only inside the stadium.

1.3 The Politicization of Football and the Footballization of Politics

Football is a platform for political activity both on the level of the governing elite and on the grassroots level. Football is an urban sport, invented in industrial England, therefore it represented largely the working class. It crystalized the workers’

collective identification, organic solidarity and class struggle. Therefore, the ability to manipulate, influence and channel the crowds is very appealing to the governing elite. Consequently, governments diffuse political messages utilizing the fandom and spectatorship of the game. For example, Mubarak meant to associate his name with the Egyptian national Football team by making sure to appear at international games. Therefore, the Egyptian team's national games constituted a valuable opportunity for a political rally to the NDP regime. Another advantage of Football grassroots messaging is that it can be altered to fit the purpose of the regime. Instead of spreading the message of unity and nationalism, the ruling elite can use Football to upsurge the division between societal communities to weaken the social fabric. This enhances their control over the political system, by dividing and conquering the population. An example on that is Lebanon, where religious, ethnic and political leaders established Football clubs that represented the antagonist sectarian communities. The political and power struggle of these communities was portrayed in Football stadium, and outside of it.

However, the messages and symbols political elite transmit through Football are not always interpreted according to government's will. After the forced unification in Yemen, officials organized a Football tournament to advocate and promote the northern ideology, representing the central government. "These official conjecture that government prepared banners displayed at the stadiums and stressing the unity of all Yemeni people set the tone of the very popular matches and promoted the idea of Yemeni nationality" (Stevenson and Alaug, 2000, p. 12). The messages failed to make an impact on the Yemeni people because they had limited popularity amongst the crowd that built its own conclusions inscribed. Lebanon is also a good example that shows that Football can play a role in division rather than unity. Ownership of

Football clubs in Lebanon are divided along the different sects present. This can be attributed to deeply engrave sectarian tensions in the minds and the communal memory of the Lebanese. The politicians tried to spread the message of unity through playing a symbolic Football match on April 13 2010, three years after the Lebanese civil war, but the empty crowd seats and extraordinary military and security presence showed that the country's torn social fabric needs more than a Football match to patch it. Instead the match was taken with sarcasm and irony rather than a true feeling of nationalism, patriotism or a simple sense of belonging to a nation.

Another example of the use of Football to personalize communal identity is in post-colonial India. Football clubs emerging at that era “took on political meaning in a charged climate of antagonism and emerging identities, when anti-colonial nationalism gave way to religious communalism between Hindus and Muslims” (Dimeo, 2003, p. 378). The imagined religious identity of Hinduism and Islam is expressed through the different Football teams the fans supported: “The imagined identity and the historical process are suddenly given physical immediacy and bodily impact in sport” (Mills, 2003, p. 162). Football clubs have also helped in changing the nature of Muslim identity in India, paving the way for the creation of Pakistan. Football clubs in this case helped to shape the process of partition, and didn't act as a safety valve for social tensions” (Dimeo, 2003, p. 393).

Football solidifies and materializes the communal feelings and identities based on religious, sectarian, ethnic, political, social and political divisions or unities. What is deemed intangible becomes a hard felt reality to the people. It is easy for the authority to exploit the successes and the failures of the Football teams, along with the accompanying symbolism of these results. Chanting at Football stadiums is more than what it seems; it is a chance for the different societal communities to say what they

want, without being afraid of oppression. In this case, group dynamics play the role of the protector for individuals, and under authoritarian regimes, the Football stadium is very important because it gives the people their right of freedom of expression, in a concrete urban space.

The influence between the Ultras (fanatic fans) and the political parties on each other was reciprocal. “The Italian Social Movement, which was banned from the streets and squares , tried to make instrumental use of a certain rebelliousness in young Football supporters usually to be found in the stadium’s *Curva* and tried to influence their behavior” (Brown, 1998, p. 90). The Ultras were receptive to this political influence and welcomed it with open arms, in terms of their behavioral patterns and organizational structure. Although they shared the tendency to violence and rivalries with English Ultras, politics dominated the Ultra’s relationships with each other in Italy. For example: the leftist Ultra group at the city of Bologna became hostile to the Verona rightist Ultra group, while becoming ‘twinned’ with the Milan Ultra group who shared their left-wing tendency. Sometimes even matches were political platforms to the extent that Football was forgotten in chants.

Not only did politics influence Football, but in Italy for example, it is also the other way around. The “footballization of politics” was personified in many ways. Under authoritarian rule, such as the interwar fascist regime, the coverage of Ultras in the media was negatively oriented. This boosted the notorious reputation Ultras had and as a result, made them well known. Moreover, politicians found the stadium a perfect opportunity for a political rally: a large crowd that can be controlled, directed and politicized. Moreover, the politicians were influenced by the successes of the Football teams, especially in national competitions, which helped in creating a feeling of national sentiment that was politically used. A key example on footballization of

politics in Italy is Silvio Berlusconi's political career. "When announcing his decision to 'enter the pitch' of Italian politics, gave a boost to the transformation of language and communication in Italian politics. The name of his party, *Forza Italia* ('Go for it, Italy!'), openly recalls the cry of support for the Italy international Football team. The nicknaming of his MPs as *Azzurri*, is only a small part of a political language that nowadays focuses on the performance of the 'government team', calls for a 'referee' dictating the rules in the political arena and refers to the mistakes made by politicians as 'own goals'" (Scalia, 2009, p. 49).

Some political figures in Egypt were inspired by the hardcore fandom the Ultras displayed, and decided to have Ultra club themselves. Abdul Meneim Abul Fotooh, the former presidential candidate, had established directly or indirectly "Ultras Abul-Fotooh", which reportedly "have a presence in several governorates, and they use familiar elements of Egypt's Football-fan culture – including Ultras-style songs, banners and slogans – to promote the moderate-Islamist presidential candidate" (Gundy, 2012).

1.4 Football Fandom: Aspects of Political Activism

Fans are very important in almost every sport and in Football especially. The large quantity of people a Football stadium can hold, have not only helped in boosting the game's popularity, but also have established a platform where cultures, ideas, ideologies, beliefs and rivalries can compete. This platform can broadcast ideas of nationalism, cultural distinctiveness, ethnic and sectarian hatred, racism and all other messages that are popular in a certain community. The messages are propagated by the fans of Football, in their activities and actions inside and outside the stadium while supporting their team, in other words the concept of "fandom" came to exist.

This concept varies in different countries, and is enhanced by the internal characteristics of every society.

In Italy, the society is founded on the concept of “*campanilismo*” (enhancement of local identities) and that has lived through sharp political division and bitter conflicts for a great part of its history” (Foot, 2008). This concept, which was enhanced after the Second World War, facilitated the integration of Football, politics and communal identities. The *Barrio* clubs were important in building up a generation of young males that had the confidence to provoke, face and engage the authorities in the shanty towns in Chile. The physical attributes of the working class population gave them better chances in engaging, fighting and fleeing the coercive institutions of the state. The *Barrio* Football image gave the fans an image, and somehow true to a certain extent, of a revolutionary working class character, which they (fans) embraced as their identity in the road of fighting economic and social injustice. The athleticism most people who supported shanty town teams enjoyed and their belief in it as well, allowed them at many times to “to escape unscathed from the skirmishes with police that were occurring every day in Santiago” (Elsley, 2009, p. 612).

Fans attending a Football match are divided into eight categories, according to Mohammad Gamal Bashir, author of *The Book of Ultras* (2012, p.23). There are first the television audience, which as indicated by name, these fans follow Football matches from their houses and on their television sets. They engage with their friends in Football tactic analysis and they rarely attend a Football match. The second type are normal fans who attend Football matches in an occasional manner. Their fandom is limited in the stadium and they work under the supervision of the ultra-groups. The third group are the classical fan associations that are mainly founded by the clubs

themselves to organize their fans. They are looked down at from the ultra-fan groups because they are linked financially, systemically to the club management and they are believed to be founded to control the dynamism of the “true fans”. The fourth group are the hooligans. They are violent in nature inside the stadium and outside it, and attack other team fans and destroy and vandalize property. Intolerant ideologies such as racism, violent sectarianism and hate speech are popular within the hooligan communities. The hooligans usually do not have a political orientation nor do they have any interest in challenging a regime. Their sole purpose is to raid, fight and vandalize the other team’s fans and property. The Hools are the fifth category of Football fans. They are the mercenaries of Football, as they have tight relations with dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. They are not interested at all in Football, but their main task is to try to fight the Ultras and coopt them. They are usually formed from police agents, military personnel, thugs, and ex-convicts. They are the Football militias of stadiums, who are loyalists to the governing regime.

The Bara Brava, more likely resemble mafia formations rather than fans of Football, and they are the sixth category. These groups are more popular in Latin America in poor and overpopulated areas controlled by gangs. They are powerful groups, using the influence of money generated from money laundering, drugs and arms dealing to pressure the team’s administration and interfere in club decisions such as transfers of players. The Torcida are the seventh type of Football fans and they are mainly the music band of the stadium. They are the ones who provide the artistic parades, displays of the crowd and music of the Football field. They are mainly found in Brazil where the cultures of “Samba” and “Salsa” dancing are popular. The final type of fans are the Ultras, or the *Curva* (in Italian, referring to an area in the stadium located behind the goals), which are the scope of this research.

1.5 The Ultras: Origins, Characteristics and Organizational Framework

The term Ultra is derived from politics, and is traced back to “supporters of the French kings, or post 1968 left wing groups which were politically extreme” (Brown, 1998, p. 88). This term is used to separate the fanatic supporters of a certain cause from the normal ones. The fanaticism can be expressed in many violent and nonviolent ways, but this type of Football fans is directly linked to political activism especially under authoritarian regimes for many reasons that will be explained later. The Ultras phenomenon started in Italy, after the Second World War, where the political conflict found its way to public life and sport events of the Italian society. The latter was divided between pro-fascist right wing ideology and left wing communism, the two camps fighting in Europe at that time. This political division found its way to Football stadiums, where it was easy to associate Football teams and their fans to a political ideology based on the colors of the team, social class of its supporters and chants coming from its Ultras. “In Milan, AC-Milan represented the team of the working class, and was considered left-wing, whereas *Internazionale* was the team of the middle class of Milan and its suburbs and was considered closer to conservative ideas” (Brown, 1998, p. 89).

Therefore, after the end of the war, the political divisions between the left and right in Italy were associated with the rivalry between Football teams, and their respective Ultra groups, because the Football stadium provided an arena for ideological competition. In the city of Torino in Italy, the Ultra organizations supporting the teams of the city declared their political belonging to the left by holding flags and banners that bear political slogans, and clashing with other Ultra groups who supported the rightist fascist ideology. “An ultra is more than an ordinary

spectator; it is someone who unconditionally supports the team in an active, constructive but critical manner. Being ultra is not restricted to match days but is fundamentally a way of life, devoting a large part of one's spare time to organizing activities or preparing displays for the next match (Spaaij and Vinas, 2005, p. 80).

Ultra ideology gained significance also during actions such as student protests and working class strikes. Workers in factories that used to fabricate arms for the World War Two demanded that they have their rights fulfilled after the war ended. These rights include better wages, better working hours, better social security, insurance and other demands that were considered socialist "Leninist" ideals. These groups marched the Italian streets and occupied the plazas in protest, they fought with the police, and Ultras groups were influenced by that and joined the fight. Both right and left controlled the streets and new highly politicized communitarian cultures were formed, directed by the rebellious nature and enthusiasm of the youth whom also opposed the government for the confrontation and coercion. For example, Football clubs enhanced the leftist ideology in Chile, and backed its impact on public associations. The image of the *Barrio* Footballer personified the class inequality in the shanty towns of Santiago, compared to the middle class and rich cities. This local class model was in better physical shape, had better Footballing skills and came from the workers themselves and became a symbolic hero to the working classes. Therefore, the *Barrio* was the best representative of those areas, and in this period in Chile, Football players began to participate more openly in the public political sphere and became a link between formal and informal politics. "The idea that men from San Miguel were macho, in their sexual prowess, political militancy, and in the arduousness of their labor, was central to the *barrio* Football icon they created. This icon provided the left with a magnetic symbol that contained a multilayered criticism

of inequalities” (Elsey, 2009, p. 67). The Ultra members however didn’t come from rural, impoverished and marginalized classes only but from the middle class, having good education, jobs and overall better standards of living.

What is common to all these different societal associations is “Aggressive behavior, strong ties to territory, tight access rules, and defense against intruders” (Brown, 1998, p. 90). Therefore the era at which the Ultras as informal organizations came to exist in the Football field was marked not only by social and cultural changes, but also with many significant political and economic shifts. The first Ultra group that was officially established was “*La Fussa Del Leoni*” or The Lion’s Den in 1968; and it belonged to AC Milan fans whom were mainly leftists. In response to that, the “Inter Boys” was created, a rightist Ultra group that supported *Internazionale* the arch rival of AC Milan in the city of Milano. Consequently, Ultra fan groups started appearing in different cities in Italy, supporting different Football teams and different political ideologies. The permeability of Ultra ideologies was not only limited to Italian cities; European countries at that time also witnessed the establishment of many Ultra groups in a spillover effect. At that time there were two infamous models of Football fans in Europe: The Hooligans of England, and the Ultras of Italy. The latter were inspired mainly by political differences as a legacy incurred from the World War, while the former remained politically neutral and more oriented towards social and economic class differences. “The Ultra movement was made up, therefore, both of ‘people having experimented with mass violence in the political field’ (proletarians, lower middle class and middle class fans, and from both left and right) as well as by ‘people having experimented with violence in the fulfillment of everyday needs [in local gangs]” (Brown, 1998).

1.6 The Curva: The Ultras “Sanctuary”

The Ultras are driven by a sense of emotional attachment to their team, their colleagues and to the part of the stadium they occupy. This is called *topophilia*, a Greek word that means the strong attachment and love of a place. Usually, *topophilia* is mixed with a sense of cultural and communal identity to a certain population. To the Ultras, the place they prefer is the *Curva*, which they make sure to dominate, promote and protect during Football matches. The *Curva* can be regarded also as a “sanctuary of passion, identity and memory” (Scalia, 2009, p. 45). Therefore, the clashes, confrontations and riots are confined to the premises of the stadium and the areas that surround it. This is different in the case of the Egyptian Ultras, in which they took the streets and confronted the police, during and after the uprisings.

The Ultra groups soon began to identify themselves with a specific type of clothing and colors, and took control of the *Curva*, the area of the stadium directly behind the goal, and banned outsiders from entering it. There are many reasons why the Ultras chose this area of seating in particular. When ticket prices began to rise, a lot of enthusiastic fans could not afford coming to the stadium and sitting in the middle. The cheap seats were located behind the goal area, or the *Curva* in Italian. Fanatic fans started to concentrate, organize and choreograph their entrance to the stadium using music, banners, flags and pyro (colorful flares). Ultras supported their team throughout the game and demonstrated violent actions against the fans of the other teams. “These entrances described the fans loyalty to their club, and the cheering would continue nonstop throughout the 90 minutes of the game, this is what differentiates and Ultra from any other fan” (Bashir, 2012, p. 34).

AC-Milan Ultras are called *Curva Sud*, in reference to the southern area behind the goal in the stadium, whereas *Internazionale* Ultras were known as the

Curva Nord. Naming groups according to the seating arrangements was then adopted thorough Europe and the world. The Ultras in Italy exerted no effort to hide their political affiliations. They started wearing the same colors as their favorite political parties: urban clothing that made their image appear as radicals, rebels or vigilantes. The music they played was inspired from the working class demonstrations, or fascist movements and their slogans, banners and flags were imported from political demonstrations. The Organizational framework of the Ultras in Italy also allowed them to coordinate direct membership rituals or activities, similar to what political parties conduct. The purpose of these activities was to increase the sense of belonging and socializing.

The organization of these activities was not concentrated only in the Football match but passed it to the different days of the week. These activities helped create a culture that attracted young rebellious youth who longed for a sense of belonging. “The retrieval of some popular supporting traditions, together with other characteristics of the Ultra support, made the groups very attractive to young fans and they became a powerful instrument of identification” (Brown, 1998, p. 98). These activities helped establish a semi-formal hierarchical organization that has a clear decision-making process and respectable leaders which aim is to take over the *Curva* and defend it from other supporters, symbolizing indirectly the supremacy and dominance of an ideology in a specific territory through a group towards the other group. Capturing the *Curva* in every stadium by the Football fans and claiming it for them had much more symbolism than the act itself. It is the “transgression of the conceptual boundaries of modernity” (King, 1997, p. 588), in which the concepts of nationalism and masculinity flourished. The boundaries of this section in the stadium became in the mindsets of the Ultra members national borders that need to be

defended using violence, a masculine trait. The pleasure and euphoria that accompanied the transgression of the fans seemed more appealing to them, and helped in the propaganda that attracted to them additional fans. Moreover, the constant defamation and portrayal of the opposite team as “bastards,” or insulting their mothers and sisters, contributed to the masculine picture of the Ultras. This fandom solidified through the unified chants that created a solid body of masculine, active and angry young men.

“Nationalism should not be regarded as an objective entity but as a style of imagining and sociologists should examine the way this style of imagining informs social practice and relations. The masculinity and nationalism, whose historical origins have been traced here, exist in the imaginations of the people who articulate these concepts but they are no less real for that, because those imaginings determine social reality and therefore meaning-full social practice. In terms of hooliganism, this necessitates taking the accounts which fans give of their activities seriously for these accounts crucially constitute their fandom. The boundaries of nationalism and masculinity which inform foot-ball violence and which enable violence to be regarded as liminal are imagined by the fans but that imagining has real effects upon the fans' social relations and social reality” (King, 1997, p. 582).

1.7 The Evolution of the Ultras Concept of Violence

Violent clashes between supporters of each team were common in the seventies and the eighties in Italy. The improved policing measures made clashes hard between fans very difficult inside the stadiums so the Ultra groups managed to take it to the streets. Many Ultra organizations started to appear bearing names of radical military organizations of the right and left at that time. “The names of the new groups

were still influenced by the political situation of those years: many groups defined themselves ‘Brigades’, referring to the terrorist groups active in that period and several symbols belonging to left-wing terrorism appeared (e.g. the five-pointed star of the Red Brigade) and to right-wing terrorism (the two-edged axe which was the emblem of ‘*Ordine Nuovo*’ or ‘New Order’)” (Brown 1998, p. 93). The concept of violence is believed to have been imported to the Ultras from the state coercion apparatus. The violence was directed from the masses to the masses (fans) or against the state represented by the security forces. Political parties, local administrations and police forces made little effort to contact them or to establish any formal or informal rules of interaction. Because of this, they lost the chance to gain a deeper knowledge of *Ultras* sub-culture, as well as the possibility of working out any possible strategy to solve the negative aspects of organized Football support. This mutual choice of non-communication, paved the way for the transformation during the next decade (Scalia, 2009, p. 45). This transformation referred to, is the evolving of the concept of violence as a requirement of the Ultra identity.

Football violence is more related to the political and economic changes in a certain country rather than a construct of the Ultras themselves, as Scalia explains. “The embitterment of violence is the outcome of a social construction involving: the inadequate management of *Ultras* by the police forces, clubs and city administration; the financial crisis deriving from the transformation of Football into business; the growing power of *Ultras* as mediators between the owners and the supporters; and the excessive use of Football as a conveyor of political propaganda by prominent politicians” (Scalia, 2009, p. 52). The Ultras in Spain were coopted and suppressed from the beginning, which is a main reason of why they resorted to violence. Many measures were taken by the federation of Football, state and by the crowd themselves

against them (Ultras). These measures include: banning the most radical fans from entering the stadium, formulating additional fan groups that ban violence, and extra policing measures which inevitably backfired and caused the Ultras to become more violent.

1.8 The Media and Public Opinion Portrayal of the Ultras

There are two contradictory ways the media portrayed the Ultras according to Anthony King. The first is the “moral panic” model which focuses on the behavior of these Football fans, and suggested “a hard line as the only appropriate response to this threat to law and order” (King, 1997, p. 583). The second approach is that the media outlets were dependent on the sensational stories that these Ultras constituted. “The very dangerousness of the hooligan, which stimulated moral panics, also rendered that figure irresistibly fascinating... the very fact that the fans’ activities was regarded as dangerous by the press rendered hooliganism particularly attractive to the fans” (King, 1997, p. 584). Therefore, both the moral panic and the sensationalization with the Ultras increased their ambiguity, which make them more appealing to the masses. “The fans were influenced by the press’s representation of them but more importantly, that they enjoyed the notorious liminal status that the press accorded them” (King, 1997, p. 585).

The media portrayed the Ultras as organized gangs who engaged in violence as their way of life. This presentation often stereotyped them with negative connotations in the mindsets of the people. The state considered them the “anomaly of Football, to be treated through the implementation of repressive policies” (Scalia, 2009, p. 43). These approaches failed to analyze Football fandom as social events that bring political and social debates to the surface. The fandom actions performed by the

Ultras are therefore “enshrined in a symbolic frame that follows independent rules from the rest of society” (Lago 1992).

The relationships between Ultras and their clubs are not always problematic, however. Football clubs consider powerful Ultra groups as key actors whom can assist the management in influencing the crowd of supporters and loyalists, which also adds a political dimension to their role in Football. “Their organization, their persistent presence in the stadium and their knowledge of the inner dynamics that develop inside the clubs, provide them with power, turning them into one of the important Football forces” (Scalia, 2009, p. 47). Sometimes, management and fans of certain clubs have welcomed the Ultras because they consider them pressure groups that can “possibly influence refereeing decisions” during matches and because they (Ultras) can “support the club politics, especially in presidential elections” (Spaaij and Vinas, 2005, p. 85).

The broader public opinion will thus relate *Ultras* to urban guerrillas, riots and the over policing of Italian cities during Football matches. It is important to note the paradoxical fact that, although Italian public opinion has increasingly stigmatized the *Ultras*, their improved organization, as well as the legitimacy they enjoy among supporters, allows them to perform “*aggro*- like ritualized confrontations, has allowed them to gain importance in the dynamics related to the control of Football clubs” (Scalia, 2009, p. 46).

Although the Ultras in Egypt were established only in 2007, they have had a significant impact on the Egyptian public sphere. This thesis will analyze this significant oppositional group, and their role in fighting the police, and in questioning authority. Ultra groups constituted along with labor unions, syndicates and other Social Movements, the core of the street movements that lead to the fall of the

Mubarak regime. Nevertheless, the role of the Ultras will be examined before, during and after the January 2011 uprising. Football in Egypt, transcended its role as a way to express political dissent to authoritarianism when limited opposition was allowed, into having an active role in the mobilization of grassroots until the regime fell.

The Ultras effect on the Egyptian domestic politics, and public sphere was sensed even after the fall of Mubarak. The role of Ultras Ahlawy will be explored further in this thesis by relying on Social Movements Theory (SMT) and Bayat's literature on social Non-Movements.

1.9 Research Questions

Are Ultras Social Movements or Non-Movements given their organizational characteristics? The Ultras developed, through numerous encounters with the police, many features that qualified them to be a force for change, and an organized social movement, or a non-movement. Their horizontal hierarchy and structure, activism, dynamism, and high level of street mobilization helped them to be an efficient actor of change in the Egyptian public sphere. Moreover, what was the role of the Football Ultras in authoritarian regime contestation before the uprisings that took place in Egypt?

Before the uprising, Football Ultras constituted semi-formal organizations that allowed youth to express their feelings of discontent, and challenge authoritarian regimes in stadiums. The violent confrontations Ultras had with the police made them develop their fighting and street mobilization skills. The slogans that were raised in Football stadiums before the uprising of January 2011, challenged the authorities' domination of the public space. Ideas such as freedom, police brutality and social justice were integrated in the songs and chants of the Ultras. This was a key factor in developing their group mentality and solidarity with their society against the regime.

What was the contribution of the Ultras to the regime breakdown in Egypt? The contributions of the Ultras in the revolution were crucial to safeguard its continuity. The Ultras were the backbone of protests in decisive days such as the “Battle of the Camel” and the fight in Mohammad Mahmoud street. The Ultras also defended Tahrir Square from the attacks of the pro-government forces who wanted to capture the square and end the revolution. Finally, will the Ultras transform their “street politics” into real politics in the future? The ideology and actions of the Ultras indicates that they are not interested in politics, and never will be. Therefore a transition from street to real politics is unlikely. However, they have a major influence on the domestic political and social arena using their numbers, organization and the support they get from citizens and activists. The question remains whether the Ultras can maintain the unity of their ranks in the different circumstances they are facing in Egypt is yet to be determined.

1.10 Methodology

Applying social science theories to this research is essential to studying the phenomenon of the Ultras. This thesis examines the Ultras as both a Social Movements and Non-Movements. In this reference, the works of Asef Bayat, Rabab El-Mahdi, James Tully, Charles Dobson and others were used. This academic perspective helps understand the Ultras as a social group, and how it operated in the streets of Egypt. Moreover, it is essential to project the future of the Ultras in politics, society and the public sphere.

This thesis anchors its research on one case study: Ultras Ahlawy. Ahlawy is the most prominent Ultra organization in Egypt, based on the number of supporters, violent encounters with the police, and its role in challenging the authoritarian control

over the public sphere. It focuses on the academic literature discussing the Ultras worldwide, and in Egypt specifically. In this review, many scholarly articles were analyzed to unpack the Egyptian context. Moreover, the analysis is based on non-scholarly information from media outlets, specifically in Egypt. Information from governmental and nongovernmental sources and other information hubs was also used. Consequently, I conducted a detailed media screening, sifting reports and articles from news websites, governmental and NGO reports that deal with the Ultras specifically. After collecting and analyzing the relative information, I examined the different trends that characterized the Ultras behavior, and their response to different events in the Egyptian public sphere. Some of these events constituted milestones that altered the Ultras behavior and the reactions of anti-governmental groups to them. Events such as the January 2011 uprising, fighting in Mohammad Mahmoud Street, Friday of correcting the path, Port Said massacre and the verdict issued in that case which constituted turning points for the engagement of the Ultras in politics.

In addition to a survey of primary and secondary sources, my research involved conducting interviews with academics, scholars, journalists and some Ultra members who wished to remain anonymous. These interviews were used to match theory with facts and practice, and to adopt a comparative approach between the Ultras in Egypt and the Ultras in other parts of the world. In this sense, and during my field visits to Egypt in 2012 and 2013, I visited Cairo and Alexandria to meet with Ultra members in the places they gather secretly at. This could not have happened without the help of some individuals close to the Ultra inner circle, as the latter are a much closed group. Moreover, I participated in many protests, marches and sit-ins with the Ultras in the streets of Cairo. Experiencing the Ultras in action allowed me to get a closer look at their tactics and bravery in battling the police, which gave me

direct experience in knowing how they operated and functioned. The content of the interviews are adapted indirectly in my thesis, as the names and details are kept confidential to protect the individuals from government persecution. I also collected original audiovisual material of the protests that were revisited and analyzed to compliment my argument.

In addition to the analysis of the written material and the fieldwork, I collected and analyzed existing multimedia sources such as videos, pictures and sound clips available online and with activists in the field. These multimedia sources constitute additional information that augments the official research, as evidence of the activity of the Ultras.

1.11 Map of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter discusses social movement theory in detail (SMT), in addition to the works of Asef Bayat on social Non-Movements. The theoretical background constitutes a contextual framework for understanding the role of the Ultras in Egypt specifically, and the role of internal grassroots movements in catalyzing social and political change. The third chapter examines the role of Ultras before the Egyptian uprising in January 2011. In this chapter, the underlying reasons on why Ultras participated in the uprising will be exposed and analyzed. Chapter four discusses the role of Ultras during and after the regime breakdown in Egypt, shedding the light on different milestones that constituted turning points in the participation of Ultras in politics. the final chapter attempts to predict the level of future engagement of the Ultras in the Egyptian public sphere, trying to answer the question of whether the Ultras can undergo the transition from street politics to real politics.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Before the Arab uprisings in 2011, analysts and political scientists were mostly interested in analyzing the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab countries. The literature on authoritarian persistence was influenced by many factors, most importantly by the orientalist approach that argued that Arabs are incapable of demanding democracy. Some scholars and policy makers take the “Arab street” protests at its face value. Bayat describes the “Arab street” as an extension of the “Arab mind” which is “another subject of the Orientalist imagination, reminiscent of colonial representation of the “other” (Bayat, 2003, p. 11). Consequently, most of the scholars adopting that school of thought, failed to predict the wave of popular protests that started in Tunisia and spread out throughout the Arab world.

This chapter neither dwells on the persistent authoritarianism literature, nor explores the failure of scholars to predict the Arab uprisings. Instead, the literature reviewed in this chapter deal with defining Social Movements, and distinguishing them from social Non-Movements, or what Bayat calls “urban-subalterns”. Moreover, this literature explores the dynamics of street politics, shedding light on the concept of violence as a tool of resistance used by grassroots movements, and how this concept evolved to become a characteristic that defines Football ultra-fandom.

This chapter discusses the relationship between political activism and Football fans. For this, a debate of opinions will be put for examination, which holds Rabab el Mahdi and Asef Bayat, and other scholars examining that literature. Moreover, this chapter will tackle the effect of “street politics” on decision-making, showing the

limits of the politicization of Football and the Footballization of politics. Finally, the chapter discusses the concept of violence adopted by the Ultras that evolved to become a defining social distinctive that characterizes the fans in their struggle with the police.

2.2 Social Movements and Social Non-Movements

The role of civil society in struggling for democracy under authoritarian regimes is a debated topic among different scholars. It is argued by many political theorists that civil society organizations carrying western values of democracy and civil participation in the political process will transmit these values to Arab culture, creating the basis for potential political change. Other scholars countered that idea by saying that regimes managed to mitigate effects of civil society organizations on people's perception, by adopting flexible authoritarianism, a form of ruling that maintains coercion and appealing as methods of cooptation by the elite. As a result, some NGOs either were infiltrated by regime supporters, faced tough registration and working laws, or were closed by force, as in Egypt.

Asef Bayat argues that the concept of civil society in the Arab world requires both the domestic and the external dimensions to be analyzed correctly. Moreover, James Tully describes the "Arab Spring" as the "demand to call into question, subject to political discussion, negotiate, modify and perhaps transform their form of government and law." (Tully, 2012, p. 2). Tully also adds that the "multiplicity of informal organizations (networks of informal normative relationships and forms of self-government) interact in complex ways with official institutions of law, government and military" (Tully, 2012, p. 13). Therefore, Arab civil society should

have its own definition derived out of the existing political context and society dynamics, and not to be based only western models.

The literature reviewed in this chapter focus on analyzing the process of social change in Social Movements and Non-Movements, rather than in formal institutions and organizations. Brynen stresses on the importance of informal groups in mobilizing urban youth, “formal groups were increasingly complemented by informal groups, many of them formed by a younger generation of activists...were not mobilized by Egypt’s established opposition parties... instead they represented a broad cross section of society, especially urban youth, who mobilized through informal means” (Brynen et al, 2012, p. 24).

Rabab Al-Mahdi explores the role of Social Movements in Egypt by examining “Kifaya”, the campaign initiated in Egypt to oppose Jamal Mubarak’s candidacy for the presidential elections. *Kifaya*, Al-Mahdi argues, was a “consortium of new political contenders overcoming historical ideological divides.” (Mahdi, 2009, p. 1019). They constituted the remnants of leftists, Islamists, liberals and Nasserites, formed mostly from the middle class. Al-Mahdi adopts the Social Movement Theory (SMT), arguing that grassroots Social Movements prepared the ground for the uprising in Egypt. She suggests a variety of factors to explore the rise of prodemocracy movements in Egypt. The changing of the regional map after Oslo Accord and the invasion of Iraq and the *Intifada* in Palestine was the first reason. The second reason was the end of Mubarak’s ruling pact. Mubarak, as al Mahdi described, depended on the momentum of his successors Sadat and Nasser, in combining nationalism with open markets. People no longer saw Sadat’s *democratic bargain* as a viable social pact. The democratic bargain was the deferral of people’s rights in

political participation in return for socioeconomic rights or a project of national independence.

While analyzing the failure of pro-democracy movements, Al-Mahdi suggests that repression cannot explain the failure because the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) were more repressed yet managed to mobilize “prodemocracy demonstrations”. The author falls into the mistake of generalizing the definition of democratic practice, as the Muslim Brotherhood’s political program revolves around incorporating religious doctrine with political practice under the motto of “Islam is the Solution”. Moreover, the large numbers they used to mobilize their supporters are directly proportional to the powerful religious doctrine they promote, and are popular among the Egyptian mainstream. Al-Mahdi attributes the limited expansion of Kifaya is due to the political-economic structure and dynamics of the flexible authoritarianism adopted by Mubarak. Moreover, Al-Mahdi mentions some “hurdles within” that hindered the process of democracy promotion through civil society.

What is then the role of the Football Ultras in the Egyptian uprising? And what are the characteristics they share with other Social Movements and Non-Movements? Charles Dobson identifies three factors critical to Social Movements: political opportunity, organizational capacity and framing ability (Dobson, 2001). These conditions were met in Egypt’s case, where the Ultras were able to organize and frame their political demonstrations within the revolution, which constituted their political opportunity. Moreover, Dobson identifies certain preconditions that are favorable for the creation of a social movement. Some of these settings were witnessed in Egypt, which makes the characterization as a social movement very much adequate.

Ashraf el-Sherif explores the Ultras “politics of fun”, and the chaos they make that “may play a role in waking up Egypt's middle class” (Sherif, 2012, p. 1). He believes that the Ultras are a political entity as well as a Football association after witnessing the organization and dedication the Ultras showed at many events during the January revolution in Egypt. This dedication was evident in fighting the Central Security Forces and the Ministry of Interior at the “battle of the camel”. The revolution “needed a bold adventurous spirit defiant of social norms to translate the feelings and expectations of the Egyptian people into huge popular unrest” (Sherif, 2012, p. 2).

The Ultras phenomenon in Egypt developed after the 1990s, as Sherif explains. “Rooting for Football teams was detached from any broader emotional, social or organizational attitudes” (Sherif, 2012, p.2). With globalization in the late 1990s, the new phenomenon of Ultras came to life that depended on young fans that shared the same language, behavior and tools of Ultras worldwide (Sherif, 2012, p. 3). The internal characteristics of the Ultras helped the revolution: Dynamism, flexibility, a positive attitude, the refusal of patriarchy and traditionalism, group mentality and rebellion mentality that the Ultras enjoyed (Sherif, 2012, p. 3). Individual psychology is not important as group psychology, a feature common to Egypt's Ultras, where the group mentality is dominant over any individual mentality, goals and targets. Physical concentration is another favorable condition for Social Movements. Ultras are a product of the Football stadium, where they are highly concentrated in mass numbers. Moreover, in the streets of Cairo and major cities around Egypt, they have their own locations to meet and organize. Moreover, the Ultras are a grassroots organization that predates the revolution. It involved the concentration of highly active youth around their club before, during and after matches. Their logos, mottos and slogans all imply

that their speech is popular and not elitist, which makes them speak the language of the street. Dobson also suggests that sudden grievances and their dramatic presentation can also affect the establishment of a social movement. This is apparent in Egypt after the death of Khaled Said while in custody due to the brutal beating of the police, and how the case received interest of social media, which in turn helped mobilize society.

Dobson identifies other individual inducements that favor the establishment of Social Movements, such as prior contact with members of similar external organizations. This is found in Egypt because many Capos (leaders) of Ultras Ahlawy (Al-Ahly team) or Ultras White Knights (Zamalek team) are members of other Ultra organizations outside Egypt, or are influenced by it. Mohammad Gamal Bashir, himself a member of Ultras White Knights, suggests that many Ultras organizations team up with different organizations in countries all around the world. Bashir gives the example of the link between Ultras White Nights and Ultras Winners (for Al-Wadad Moroccan team). He also indicated that many Ultra capos in Egypt have had prior experience by coming into contact with other Ultras in Europe and Latin America, during and after matches (Bashir, 2012, p. 59). Thus, the condition of individual inducements Dobson identifies prior contact and prior activism is also focused in the Egyptian Ultras movement (Dobson, 2011, p. 3).

Dobson also identifies the ingredients for mobilization of Social Movements (Dobson, 2011, p. 4). The latter are very similar to the Egyptian Ultras movement. The first ingredient is “Kindling in small groups”, where most of the times the groups are informal, and connected in a loose network to other groups. Ultras supporters are young, active and highly motivated individuals. The second ingredient is “familiar members”, which is also found in the Egyptian Ultras movement because the

members are usually very close friends and know each other well. A co-optable communications network is the third ingredient Dobson identifies. The Ultras operate in different groups in different cities, where they are connected loosely to each other via communication tools that facilitate their mobilization. These communication networks are social media tools that help spread the word about different protests, and therefore facilitated mobilization. The presence of “capable leaders” is essential for the social movement to survive and evolve. The leaders of the Ultras movements are “natural leaders” who assume their role during events that happens in and outside the stadium. This gives them respect and admiration from other followers and nominate them to be the capos or leaders (Bashir, 2012, p. 37). The fifth and most important ingredient that Dobson cites and is present in the Egyptian Ultras movement is a mobilizing frame. Moreover, Dobson describes this frame as being “homogeneous and highly interactive group where people question “blame-the-victim” frame and begin to see a problem deriving from not from flawed individuals by from flawed public policy”(Dobson, 2011, p. 6). The Egyptian Ultras are an example of this because their main approach is to blame government policies for existing living conditions. Whether it is for economic, civil or social rights, the Egyptian Ultras adopted these universal standards and started to demand them even before the uprisings. Songs such as “*Huriyya*” (Freedom) or “*Shams el Huriyya*”(The Light of Freedom) or “*Ghurab Maashesh*” (The Crow that Nested)or “*Mush Nasyeen el Tahrir*”(We will not forget Tahrir), suggest that their main demand is freedom and social justice (Bashir, 2012, p. 73)

Jonathan Christiansen characterizes Social Movements according to their purpose: revolutionary, advocating reforms in existing system, or conservative opposing social change. The Ultras in Egypt fall under the first category, because they

call for massive social and political change. Moreover, Christiansen believes that Social Movements do not emerge out of a void in society. He identifies four stages for the development of Social Movements: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization and decline. The first stage involves “participants unhappy with some policy or some social condition (Christiansen, 2009, p. 2). The second stage, coalescence (or the popular stage), is where a clear and defined sense of discontent is identified. Stage three is the bureaucratization of the movement. This is characterized by “higher levels of organization and coalition building strategies” (Christiansen, 2009, p. 3). The Ultras in Egypt assigned capos to follow, and formed alliances with previously rival Ultras organizations against the regime and security apparatus. However, at this stage “Social Movements can no longer rely on mass rallies or inspirational leaders to progress towards their goals; they must rely on regular staff to carry out the functions of the organization.” (Christiansen, 2009, p. 3) The Ultras in Egypt have not reached this stage yet because they refuse to pursue any political goals that require a level of formalization. The fourth level is decline or institutionalization (Christiansen, 2009, p. 4) reached through repression, co-optation, success and failure. In the case of the Egyptian Ultras, repression and co-optation by the regime before, during, and after the revolution failed to suppress the movement. Success has not been achieved, however. The Ultras continue to organize demonstrations to demand the rights of the Egyptian people in general, and justice and retribution to their members who fell during clashes with the police. The Ultras movement in Egypt is still at the popular level, or coalescence, the second level in Christiansen’s stages of Social Movements.

Social Non-Movements, or the urban subaltern as described by Bayat, is another vehicle for change in Arab societies. Non-Movements share many characteristics with Social Movements, yet they differ in many ways. “Whereas

Social Movements in general represent a long lasting and more – or – less structured collective action aiming at social change, “Non-Movements” carry strong elements of spontaneity, individualism, and inter-group competition, among other features” (Bayat, 1997, p. 57). Non-Movements turn to Social Movements only if they “become conscious of their doings by articulating their aims, methods and justifications”. Therefore, the activity of the Egyptian Ultras in the uprising shares some characteristics of a social non-movement.

The Ultras joined the revolution within two days of its commencement, without a political or social agenda. They saw their role in what they did best: to fight the police. They are capable and ready to “participate in street demonstrations or riots, but only when these methods enjoy a reasonable degree of legitimacy, and when they are mobilized by outside leaders” (Bayat, 1997, p. 59). Bayat then discusses the role of the “urban subaltern” as a political force. He defines them as “those men and women who remain on the margins of political and economic power, such as the urban disenfranchised, the unemployed, the working poor, and the impoverished middle class” (Bayat, 2013, p. 2). These subalterns have made numerous encounters with authoritative regime’s coercion apparatus, where they “emerged as an un-articulated strategy to reduce the cost of mobilization under the repressive conditions” (Bayat, 2013, p. 2). Overthrowing repressive regimes, or pushing for political reforms is not an objective of the urban subaltern rather, they aim at enhancing the life chances of the common, or the grass root actors. Bayat (2013) sees the only intersection of these actors and the Arab uprisings lying in the fact that these Non-Movements keep their actors at a constant state of mobilization. In other words, when political opportunity emerges, these forces are prepared to engage in larger political

and social mobilization as a result of an intersection of interests, and not from a will of social and political change.

Bayat (2010) also underscores the importance of what he calls the “imagined solidarity or passive networks” as a key to form social Non-Movements. He also adds that the collective actions of non-collective actors embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people trigger social change (Bayat 2010, p. 14). The collective actions of the Ultras, which constitute a shared ideology throughout the Egyptian territories, have contributed to social change even if the latter was not intended. Bayat concludes that “instead of perceiving the Middle East as having either a civility deficit or the ‘wrong’ kind of civility, it should be recognized that there are different ways to produce civilities outside the boundaries that characterizes mainstream debates on civic behavior and civil society” (Bayat 2011, p. 15).

Taghreed El-Ghandour argues that the Ultras became involved in politics in Egypt “as a result of the brutal treatment of police security officers”, “the Ultras converted from just fans to activists, carrying the responsibility of calling for freedom and the departure of the Mubarak Regime”. Ghandour claims that the Ultras were the chief defenders of Tahrir Square, especially during the “camel battle”, when Mubarak loyalists marched into the square in an attempt to intimidate the protestors and disperse them. Ghandour discusses the role of identity formation through Football clubs, arguing, and “clubs in Egypt became increasingly a central part of people’s identity, and fans found their identity in Football” (Ghandour, 2012, p. 5). She adds that the youth began to create alternative groups by joining the Ultras, which was transformed from a virtual entity to a real one on the ground. This created an alternative home (nation), which did not mean a distinctive national belonging, but a different way of life for these youth. “For them, becoming a Football fan became a

symbolic action that is both joyful and a means of self-expression, but the broader social psychological and cultural contexts in Egypt were unable to adapt to the groups' activities in part by virtue of their rebellious nature and defiance of norms.” (Ghandour, 2012, p. 3).

2.3 Football Ultras: Spontaneous Encounters or Street Politics?

Bayat defines street politics as “the seat of conflicts and the attendant implications between a collective populace and the authorities, shaped and expressed episodically in the physical and social space of the ‘streets’ from the alleyways to the more visible pavements, public parks or sport areas” (Bayat, 1997, p. 63). He almost limits the street as a platform for showing political dissent to people lacking an organizational or institutional setting to express their dissatisfaction. The transformation of street dynamics to street politics involves using urban space as power. Street pavements, cross roads and urban land become spaces for assembly and public expressions, as Bayat explains. This is evident in Egypt’s Tahrir Square and other places were main areas in which protestors gathered, organized and defended their march in violent confrontations with the police. The second element Bayat describes as essential for the formation of street politics is the passive network among the people occupying a public space. This passive network enables them to acquire a certain degree of organization, communication and networking among themselves, essential for collective action. Bayat considers urban communities not as blank spots devoid of interaction, but small villages subject to individualism, anonymity and competition, in which they contain numerous forms of networks and institutions.

Egypt’s popular uprising “telescoped the daily encounters between people and police that had played out for more than ten years, this in turn made it possible for

citizens to reimagine the parameters of the possible” (Brynen, et al, 2012, p. 291). Therefore, street politics became a manifestation of the will of the people to bring change through nonviolent means. This involves according to Tully: “self-organization, protesting, acting in a wide variety of loosely coordinated ways, discussing, negotiating among their diverse members and subgroups, negotiating with the government, army, foreign powers and media, setting up committees, organizing new political parties, initiating legal and constitutional reforms, holding new representatives, officeholders and changes to democratic accountability, scrutinizing and reforming the reforms, and risking their lives to bring the military under democratic and constitutional authority” (Tully, 2012, p. 2).

Bayat criticizes the western view of the Arab street as “primarily a physical entity, which expresses itself mainly in mob violence and riots”. He refers to the Arab street politics as an “expression of public sentiment, an urban theatre of contention par excellence” (Bayat, 2003, p. 11). Therefore, the street in the Arab world is platform for ordinary people where collective dissent is expressed; networks are built and identities forged. In turn, this threatens the authorities and makes them “exert pervasive power over public spaces with police patrols, traffic regulation and special division” (Bayat, 2003, p. 12).

Street politics is therefore an arena for activism to be realized, formulated and perused. In turn, activists use different strategies to achieve their goals indicate. “Production technologies are sets of knowledge about ways of achieving goals, such as lobbying, demonstrations, strikes or attending a public hearing, while mobilization technologies are sets of knowledge about ways of accumulating the resources (such as time and money) necessary for production technologies” (Oliver and Marwell, 1992, p. 266). In the case of Egypt’s Football Ultras, they moved with minimal resources

but with organization and with discipline. They also refused money from donors and their agendas therefore were formulated at the street level, making it dynamic and independent. The Ultras used mainly “federated mobilization”; they approached the leaders of existing organizations, and persuaded them to solicit the participation of their members. This created an informal grassroots organization with a structure that activists can participate in to voice their political and non-political demands against the regime (Oliver & Marwell, 1992, p. 267).

2.4 Violence as a Social Practice or Violence as Resistance?

Violence in Football fandom has many explanations. Susan Faludi relates it to “downsized men deprived of traditional work because of globalization. These men desperately need to affirm their masculinity and soccer violence gave them that opportunity (Foer 2005, p. 13). Armstrong and Harris suggest that violence is rooted in socioeconomic factors namely the lower working class practices and dynamics. (Armstrong & Harris, 1991, p. 427). Structural Marxists explain violence in Football fandom as a ‘moral panic’ spread out by capitalism. This moral panic frightens people as Armstrong and Harris state, and lets them assume right or left wing positions, and adopt political slogans which might lead to violent confrontation. Moreover, kinship, locality and hostility towards others are emphasized as characteristics that accompany members of rougher working classes. As a result, violence became one of the few sources of meaning and status in a system of complex interaction between material conditions and working classes. The end consequence is a romanticized image of a Football hooligan “as a defender of Football’s traditional working class communitarianism against a growing embourgeoisement of the game” (Back & Crabbe & Solomons 1999, p. 424).

Politics had its say in branding Ultra soccer fans with a violent profile, and therefore contributing to creating the image of the Ultra. Margaret Thatcher, England's former prime minister regarded Football fans as the "enemy within", and "a disgrace to civilized society" (Foer, 2005, p. 11). The media also had a major role in asserting the image of the Ultra fan or hooligan as a violent individual and an anarchic group of people with no aim but to vandalize. Before trying to acquire Manchester United, Rupert Murdoch's paper *The Sunday Times* famously branded soccer "a slum sport played by slum people" (Foer 2005, p. 92). The media also promoted the 'moral panic', against Football, consequently making the silent majority support the state's coercive apparatus in criminalizing these Ultra fans, and in turn making them more violent.

Other explanations relate violence to globalized gangsterism spread by movies, music and fashion all around the world. Violence as a quality became a distinction that marked Ultra fans inside stadiums in their interactions with other fans, and outside the stadium with their interaction with police. However, violence sometimes transcended the purpose of urban street confrontations in some countries. "Militarization of Football fans in Serbia made the Red Star Fans Milosevic's shock troops, the most active agents of ethnic cleansing, highly practitioners of genocide" (Foer 2005, p. 12).

In the context of authoritarian regimes violence became another symbol for political and social resistance against oppression and brutality. Resistance is a "wide variety of actions and behaviors at all levels of human social life (individual, collective, and institutional) and in a number of different settings, including political systems, entertainment and literature, and the workplace" (Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p. 534). Individual acts of refusal become collective actions of resistance. This

also complements what Bayat describes as the ‘quite encroachment’, where every day acts of resistance of social Non-Movements also contribute to social change.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined different literature on Football Ultra fandom in the world, in addition to exposing the debate on Social Movements and Non-Movements. Some characteristics of Ultra groups qualified them to be considered as Social Movements in the works of many scholars, while other features qualified them to be considered as social Non-Movements. Moreover, this chapter shed the light on Ultras as an actor for street politics highlighting the dynamics between the state, the grassroots and the Ultra groups. Also, this chapter examines violence as a distinctive of the Ultras that lead them to effectively resist the police forces. Violence was adopted by the Ultras as a defense mechanism in response to the continuous brutal coercion by the state forces.

The next chapter will shed the light on the daily encounters the Egyptian Ultras had with the state before 25 January 2011. It will focus on the dynamics and reactions that qualified the Ultras to be a prominent actor in the mobilization of youth, which made them challenge the domination of the Egyptian public sphere, by the security forces.

CHAPTER THREE

ULTRAS PAVING THEIR WAY TO THE UPRISING

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the roots of the Football Ultras movement in Egypt, prior to the popular uprisings in 2011. It will shed the light on the factors in the Egyptian context that made the Ultras in constant street mobilization, which integrated them into the uprising straightforwardly. Class struggle, state oppression, and media representation shaped to a great extent the dynamics of the Ultras in practicing what Bayat called “Street Politics” or Horizontal politics. The characteristics that Ultras in Egypt share are inherited from a transnational Ultra movement with the same set of ideals: pride in their identity, independence and anti-authoritarian mentality. Ultras are known worldwide to protest against “modern Football”, in other terms fighting the trend of commercialism corporatism in the game. Ultras have emerged, in Mohammad Gamal Bashir’s opinion, in response to the frustration from official supporters organizations. Consequently they made themselves financially independent to isolate their decision making process from external influence. The organizational structure of Ultra groups is elaborate, but loose: it leaves the individuals the freedom of choosing whatever political and religious beliefs as long as their love for the club supersedes every other personal sentiment.

Therefore, are the Ultras in Egypt considered Social Movements? Are they politically and socially alienated? Are they divided according to social economic divisions? Or are they class cross cutting? What drives the Ultras dynamism and

political activism? And what qualified them to take the streets to voice their dissent against Mubarak's authoritarian regime?

3.2 Ultras Ahlawy

Defending the front line at Mohammad Mahmoud Street, tossing tear canisters back at the police and protecting protestors from the attacks of Mubarak loyalists, the Ultras in Egypt proved a force to be reckoned with. How did the Ultras take their Football spirit and chant tactics to the streets and deploy them as a force in the uprising? The case of Ultras Ahlawy, the most powerful Ultra organization in Egypt, and the most influential one on and off the pitch, is examined to demonstrate the role of the Ultras in the Egyptian uprising. Power dynamics, the motives of political engagement and composition of their ranks are important factors that shed the light on their actions. The discussion starts with the role of Ahlawy before the uprising of 2011.

Arab authoritarian regimes employ continuous and relentless efforts to try to coopt and regulate public spaces. This is the key for any autocratic regime to suppress any voices of dissent and therefore sustain regime survival. In Egypt, silencing public discord at Football stadiums proved impossible due to a specific type of fans armed by a dynamic and vibrant fandom that made them almost invincible to subdue: the Ultras. "There were many forms of dissent, but they were largely suppressed except for the mosque and the soccer pitch. With these two institutions, the numbers were too big and the emotions they evoked were too strong" (Anderson, 2013). Therefore, the nature of the game itself, and the exceptionalism it enjoys in Egypt as the top popular sport that can easily relate and move the impoverished grassroots enabled the birth of

many informal and well organized groups trained to stand up and face the attempts of regime cooptation.

The first public incident of Ultras Ahlawy confronting the police before the uprising in Egypt was in 2009, after Egypt versus Algeria Football World Cup qualification match. Egyptian Ultras attacked the Algerian team and the Algerian embassy after Egypt lost 1-0 in the last qualifying match in Sudan. The reasons of this Football outrage was attributed to many threats and attacks on the Egyptian fans in Sudan, that eventually also lead to a diplomatic dispute between the two countries (*The Guardian* , 2009). This riot, laid the foundations for a more active and politicized mobilization of the Ultras in the Egyptian street, especially that Ultras came to find this mobilization as a tool to express their resentment against authoritarianism and economic inequality. On the other hand, it is essential not to inflate the collective role of the Ultras in politics before the Egyptian uprising of 2011, as there are limited events that validate their engagements.

The independence from political influence that the Ultras maintained from 2007 till the uprising in 2011, is an indicator of their strong organization and commitment. Despite some attempts of influence and coercion from Mubarak's regime, the Ultras managed to create a socio-political identity that they displayed in their mobilized expressions. "Ultras remained autonomous organizations, creating politically charged graffiti and planning independent choreographies, performances, and demonstrations" Jerzak describes. He continues "in these acts, Ultras asserted group autonomy in public space, a fact that challenged the control of the state in these spaces" (Jerzak, 245, p. 2013). The latter enabled them to establish a forum in which they can fight back the oppression, extensive surveillance, physical intimidation, and

degrading verbal abuse and disturb what Jerzak calls the “pattern of humiliation” imposed by the authoritarian regime prior to the uprising.

3.2.1 Origins

In previous chapters, Football was portrayed by many authors as one of the few arenas that allow social and political identities to emerge, organize and demonstrate under totalitarian regimes. In the absence of effective labor unions, opposition political parties and proper grassroots movements, Football stadiums became the platform for displaying political disagreements and popular unrest.

In March 2007, five Egyptian fans of Al-Ahly FC (Football Club) met to discuss how to take Egyptian Football fans to the next level. After numerous interactions with Ultra movements in Europe, the founding Al-Ahly fans wanted to shift the concept of fandom in Egypt, detaching it from the influence of the clubs’ administration, money and political figures. Thus materialized Ultras doctrine in Egypt: self-funding, no media and anti-state especially its coercive apparatus, the police.

The beginnings of police brutality against the Ultras in Egypt dates back to 2009¹. Both Ultras Ahlawy (Fans of *Al-Ahly*) and Ultras White Nights (Fans of *Zamalek*) were chanting in solidarity with Gaza, at a time when public support with the Palestinians or any Arab nationalistic cause was banned by the Mubarak regime. Police cracked down on the Ultras in a campaign of large scale arrests, unjustified brutality and a media campaign that portrayed the Ultras as thugs and hooligans. Here forth, the relation between the two sides became more violent.

¹Interview with an Ultras Ahlawy member, What are The Role of Ahlawy in Egypt, Cairo, December 12, 2012.

Al-Ahli sport club was established in 1907, in an era when the struggle against British colonial rule was at its peak. “Student unions formed a core of the anticolonial struggle, but their unions needed premises where they could congregate and plan activities. For this purpose Al-Ahli, meaning ‘national’ in Arabic, was founded. The club came to embody the rebellion against colonization. At the time of its founding Al-Ahli was the only club where local Egyptians could be members” (Tuastad, 2013, p. 2). Al-Ahli club spearheaded the fight against colonialism by constituting an ideal cover for political activists. Consequently, the first connection between sport and politics was established in Egypt.

The violent rivalry between Al-Ahly and Zamalek clubs, and ultimately their fan bases, is historical. “Zamalek, wearing white, were considered the team of the foreigner (the British) and the outsider. It was also the club of the hated King Farouk” (Montague, 2008). The team was even named after the king, and later changed to Zamalek after his removal. The main supporters of Zamalek were the monarchial loyalists and the skeptics of a new Egyptian nationalism free of British influence. They were the bourgeoisie and the liberals, the elite and socially advantaged classes in society.

By contrast, the name of Al-Ahly translates in local Arabic in Egypt as “The Popular Club”, or “the National”, which combined with the red colors of the jerseys (colors of the pre-colonial flag), constructed the image of the club as “a team for the nation, a bulwark against occupation and a chance for the average man on the street to come together for a common nationalistic cause” (Montague, 2008). Therefore, Al-Ahly grew to constitute the club of the impoverished masses in Egypt, struggling every day in what Bayat calls the “quite encroachment of the social Non-Movements”.

These identity based divisions between the two clubs were transmitted to the fan base, which ultimately paved the way for much antagonism, hatred and violence during and after Football matches in Egypt. The divisions and rivalry remain until today, but were significantly transformed throughout the years and specifically after the Egyptian uprising. The current identity of Al-Ahly and Zamalek is a complex one: Zamalek fans are considered to be more oriented towards pan-Arabism, specifically to the Palestinian cause; Al-Ahly's fans gained a reputation of being ultra-nationalistic under Mubarak's rule and as a result of cooptation of the club.

Al-Ahly is by far the most successful club in Africa; it won the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Champions league eight times, and 36 Premier League titles. Al-Ahly gains the majority of its support from the disadvantaged lower class and impoverished citizens of Egypt. One hundred years after its establishment, a group of hardcore fans formed the basis of a new Ultra movement and introduced it to Egypt in 2007. They wanted to protect the fans from the influence of the management of the club, political parties and the media. Ultra fandom introduced for the first time the three essential rules: no media, self-funding and no to modern Football, which inevitably meant rejecting the influence of money and state over the game. These ideals constituted the root of resistance that motivated Ultras to participate in any actions directed against the state's coercive apparatus.

One of the founders of Ultras Ahlawy also preferred to stay anonymous, suggesting that the state opposed them from the start. They banned them from undertaking their choreography inside the stadium (*tifos*), and placed the members under strict supervision (Dunmore, 2007). Despite these hindrances, the Ultras grew rapidly from a "five member group, to having 200 active members inside and outside the stadium in just six months".

Football clubs in Egypt represent also to some local sentiments of rural and disadvantaged cities. The most popular team in Port Said - a city that symbolized resistance for Egyptians due to its role in the 1967 and 1973 wars against Israel - is Al-Masri. The name of the club attributes nationalism to its fans solely in an attempt to resurrect Port Said's economically disadvantaged city *vis a vis* Cairo. These tensions lead inevitably to an explosion in the Football arena, in what was referred to as the "Port Said Massacre". Seventy-two Ultra Ahlawy fans were killed in one of the bloodiest Football violence incident in the world, after the two crowds clashed in the stadium of Al-Masri, on 1 February, 2012.

The incident at Port Said was more than just Football violence, it "lays its roots in a complex and historical antagonism between the two clubs and what they resemble" (Montague, 2012). The struggle between the center and peripheries also contributed to this feeling, although Port Said is the second most productive city in Egypt. (United Nations Development Program, 2009-2010). The feeling of marginalization in Port Said was aggravated by the fact that Al Masri enjoyed little success in Football compared to Al-Ahly. Therefore, "nationalistic competition", economic deprivation and Football success constituted the source of cumulative feelings of detestation and antipathy between the two Football clubs, and consequently their fans. This paved to the way towards the worst Football tragedy in modern history.

The famous "derby" (Football match) between Zamalek and Al-Ahly, with all its violence and clashes between the two Ultra fan bases, and with the Police, was the first "training ground" for the Ultras in opposing the police. The concept of defending territoriality created the fundamental principle for defending Tahrir Square, the emblematic space of the Egyptian revolution. Prior to the 2011 uprising, the Ultras

had gained, through their numerous violent encounters with the police and with each other, important experience in street fights, extraordinary partisanship sentiments and extreme hatred towards the law enforcement agencies of the state. Thus, the uprising came to provide the perfect scenario for thousands of young, undereducated and unemployed 'militant' fans to settle their score with the state, by confronting its coercive apparatus: the *Dakhliya* or the Ministry of Interior (MoI).

3.2.2 Breaking the Wall of Fear

Confronting the police meant antagonizing and defeating the culture of fear that exists in authoritative regimes. This culture was created by the "continuous monitoring, surveillance, humiliation and abuse" (Dorsey, 2012). Dictatorial governments take the form of corruption, police brutality, constant monitoring and surveillance and the abuse of the basic human rights (in the mind of citizens). Football provides the impoverished social classes living under authoritarian regimes a platform to express themselves. The marginalized political, social and economic classes' natural resistance against the state was revealed inside Football arenas before the Arab uprisings. The concealment and obscurity provided by Football stadiums makes it ideal for suppressed sentiments and affiliations to surface without fear of state oppression.

The nature of resistance displayed by Football fans was derived from hatred of the security apparatus of the state and political aspiration to change the regime. The Ultras solidarity with the uprising provided them with the golden opportunity to fight the police, under ethical and socially accepted circumstances. The nature of resistance and solidarity between Football fans displayed in Egypt was more attributed to the hatred of the state and the police rather than derived from a will to change.

The Ultras are not recognized easily by their face or by their clothes, but you can hear them from afar. They used the used the songs of the stadiums in street battles, but this time with political lyrics. The main subjects of their chants were freedom of expression, the rights of their “martyrs”, and detesting police brutality. The Ultras utilize the loudest music instruments, such as drums and horns, to announce their arrival on the field and in a protest. Music is produced in gatherings where members who write songs present them to the whole group, who in turn amend and vote for the songs they will chant in the streets.

The same chants used by the Ultras inside Football matches are transplanted to the streets and modified with political themes. They recite songs calling for freedom of expression, to honor their victims, and to condemn the ruling regime. It is a team effort to come up with the songs, where the latter are usually inspired by the current events and therefore they mark the official position of the Ultras on different topics. The songs usually are corresponded with loud musical instruments that resemble military marches and chanting, all fit within the culture of the city and country in general. Since anonymity is a critical characteristic of the Ultras, the credits of the songs go to the group as a whole, providing more protection from individual persecution by the state. In Football matches aired live on TV, the anti-regime chants were muted by the broadcasting network in an effort to repress the political opinion of the Ultras and contain them within the Football stadium.

Graffiti is very popular in Ultras culture, and is commonly used to portray messages of victory and triumph of the team in competitions. The political and social turmoil that spread in Egypt transformed the messages portrayed by graffiti into political ones. The paintings now expressed anti-regime slogans, and pictures of fallen comrades who died in clashes with police. The messages are discussed internally

between *capos* (leaders) of the Ultras movement and then the most effective messages are chosen to be portrayed on the walls of Cairo. “Instead of praising their Football teams, like before, those walls have gradually transformed into large canvases to honor those who were killed during the revolution and to send out anti-regime messages emphasizing that the revolution is still alive”(Montaser, 2012).

The significant concept of territoriality is also emphasized in the purpose of graffiti. Ultras compete to mark their territory and challenge authority by painting walls near symbolic governmental buildings, such as the Ministry of Interior (MoI) or the Presidential Palace, even if they risk arrest and detention by the security forces. One piece of graffiti on Mohammad Mahmoud Street shows the Mubarak regime and the SCAF as vampires, dancing on corpses of the dead Ultras. Numerous graffiti portray police brutality, along with the famous acronym ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards).

Although Ultras in Egypt, and specifically Ahlawy, were not the first organized group to be targeted by the police, they nevertheless became the first group to openly resist because they had developed the skills and strength to do so. This gave an incentive for the masses of unemployed, impoverished and oppressed youth to resist the authoritarian regime and break the wall of fear built by these regimes. The Ultras notorious reputation grew before the revolution, and their population ranks swelled. They became experienced in fighting the police forces four years before the uprising started, and were the focus for young people looking for a cause. The willingness to confront showed by the Ultras is attributed to their history with police brutality. Therefore the Ultras were fully equipped to take the battle to the streets. All what was missing was the right pretext and moment.

3.2.3 Class Confrontations and Survival Tactics

El-Mahdi views the Ultras as a form of “clear class confrontations”.²Moreover, she stresses the fact that police brutality helped harden the Ultras as a street fighting group, capable of resisting state violence. “Ever since the Ultras were created, they were always targeted by state security. They are seen as a mob or as hooligans,” El-Mahdi conveys that the Ultras emerged by nature as a response to police brutality. The Ultras are considered a social movement by El-Mahdi because they cut cross class lines and are neighborhood based: “you have them from “*Embaba*” and “*Ashwaiyyat*”, and from *Zamalek* and *Heliopolis*. In that sense, they are a grassroots movement ... they challenge authority and the security apparatus in particular, which is a clear feature of a social movement”.³El-Mahdi describes the Ultras as having minimal class divisions, having in their ranks many individuals from different socio-economic classes. Therefore, Ultra groups are bound by a great deal of clandestineness that characterizes their loose organizational structure.

On the other hand, Amr Kamal, a well know Egyptian sport critic, sees that “Ultras of Egypt, especially the leaders, are very well educated and come from high-class families. They have been exposed to Ultras in Europe and are trying to copy what can be applied here” (Mazhar, 2009). Therefore there lies a clear distinction between the Ultras members and leaders (called *Capos*), in relation to belonging to a relative socio-economic class.

These divisions between the Ultras members and leaders was not recorded to witness any differences in their activism in the streets or their distinctive of resistance and anti-government sentiments. Moreover, Ultra groups managed to create a hybrid class of young men, most of them underprivileged, uniting them through a bonding of

²Interview with Dr. Rabab El-Mahdi, Associate Professor at the American University of Cairo, Beirut, May 8, 2012.

³Ibid.

brotherhood of Football fanaticism, communitarianism and later on after the uprising social activism. However it remains that the strongest bond that unites Ultra fans together is their love for Football and their team, which surpasses all other affinities, ideologies and socio-economic divisions. Ultras organizational structure can be categorized as horizontal, however many features can “combine elements of centralized and decentralized leadership”(Jerzak, 2013, p. 244). This enables the Ultras to shape “group attitudes and soften divisive issues among members with diverse ideological leanings”, Jerzak concludes.

Bilal sees that the Ultras developed skills that none of the middle class was forced to develop. He adds “Moreover, they come from backgrounds where such skills are needed on daily basis simply as survival mechanisms”(Bilal, 2011). As to why the regime adopted violence as a first resort to confront the Ultras, El- Mahdi contends that “they (Ultras) do not control any of the keys that the state usually thought that they were threatening. Unlike the labor movements to control production and go on strike and they are not in a particular university campus that they can just close down. The regime mistakenly and imprudently assumed that the Ultras are dispersed and sporadic group and violence as adopted against them. El-Mahdi also argued that the organization of the Ultras has different features: horizontal and vertical “There is always a “Capo”, which is vertical hierarchy, but it is horizontal in terms of its spread”. Moreover, being anonymous made it very difficult for the regime to control, coopt or buy the loyalty of the Ultras, “hence the element of flexible authoritarianism, which means using coercion and cooptation, was not feasible as a strategy with the Ultras”.⁴

⁴Ibid

Prior to 2011, Egyptian Ultras also gained experience from their counterparts in the world. One Ahlawy leader noted that “We had been in contact with other Ultra groups from Tunisia who had been involved in the protest there. They told us to dab Pepsi under our eyes. It worked” (Montague, 2011). Some of the tactics used in the street by the Ultras describe how they were battle hardened, and highlighted their veteran experience in fighting the police. “There is a war between us and the police,” Amir said. “We are fighting them in every match. We know them. We know when they run, when we should make them run. We were teaching [the protesters] how to throw bricks, hit-and-run tactics (Montague, 2011).

3.2.4 Marches of the Ultras:

The groups, numbering in their thousands, were remarkable for their homogeneity, organization and purpose. All were young males, some bare-chested but most kitted out in red Football shirts or street-smart tops and hoodies. They marched with almost paramilitary precision, shouting well-drilled slogans in exaggeratedly gruff voices to the menacing beat of a loud bass drum, clapping their hands above their heads, every so often pausing in unison to pogo aggressively up and down. Well-produced banners proclaimed their demand for “*Al-qissas aw Al-damm*” (translated in many Western media reports as “Justice or Blood”) for the *shuhuda* (martyrs) whose portraits they carried aloft as vast icons (Chakravarti, 2013).

The language, tone and choice of these words in which the Ultras shape their demands at the protests reveal the various objectives and goals they stand by. Ultras are influenced by traces of Islamism, feudalism, nationalism and pan-Arabism. “*Al-Shuhada*”, “*Al-Qisas*” which are mentioned in almost every protest made by the

Ultras is two concepts deeply rooted in Islamic theology of martyrdom and punishment. Islamism is combined with secular nationalistic sentiments to commemorate the people who had fallen in the struggle against colonialism (Great Britain and Israel) and compare it to the ones who fell while fighting the authoritarian state. Using the word “*Al-Qisas*” specifically connotes Islamic Sharia punishment, and surpasses the civil legal punishment known as “*Al-Ikab*”. “In Islamic jurisprudence it denotes the harshest possible punishment that can be imposed against a wrongdoer, and is by definition applicable only in cases involving the most heinous of offences against the moral and divine order”(Chakravarti, 2013). The purpose of calling for “*Al-Qisas*” by the Ultras may consist of many factors: lack of trust in Egyptian institutions and decision making, immediately ruling out any form of clemency or compensation by the state, and the tribal-feudal pre-Islamic notion of vendetta when they call to spill blood “*Al-Damm*” in the Egyptian street if the punishment wasn’t fulfilling the standards of “*AL-Qisas*”. This means that the Ultras were influenced by the different political, social and religious context in Egypt and this was reflected in their actions.

3.3 Conclusion

Although the Arab Uprisings in 2011, influenced Egyptian youth, specifically the Ultras, into deepening their involvement with politics and the public space, the continuous contestation of the Ultras to the political and security apparatus before the uprising, helped in forging an alternative formula that other active youth wished to join because it provided them with a sense of freedom from government control and manipulation. Before the 2011 January uprising, the Ultras in Egypt were a dynamic and active social movement, inside and as well as outside the stadiums. They

constituted a melting pot for different political, social and economic classes that were united by Football. Their street skills and courage made them act as a prime mobilizer and catalyst for demonstrating against the Mubarak regime. Young, spirited and politically aware, the Ultras were well prepared to join the uprising of the Egyptian people against Mubarak's authoritarian regime. The coercive institutions of the government controlled the streets and therefore curbed any form of public dissent questioning the legitimacy of regime. Public space management, especially targeted at the Ultras, was dealt with brutal swiftness rather than with flexible authoritarianism defined in previous chapters.

When the Ultras movement was born in Egypt, a new actor that debated the street dominance of the streets emerged. The independence that the Ultras sought to acquire was confronted with antagonism from the state coercive apparatus. It is clearly evident how the Ultras shifted their rhetoric from Football driven to civic activism, and this shift can be directly attributed to the violent confrontations they encountered with the police.

The fight over the domination of the public space between the Ultras and the police is what characterized the pre-uprising era. The Ultra groups, although violently competitive amongst themselves, slowly formulated before the uprising a common adversary: the security forces. The next chapter will examine the role of the Ultras during the uprising, the margins of the space they occupied in the Egyptian political sphere after it.

CHAPTER FOUR

ULTRAS AFTER JANUARY 2011:

THE LIMITS OF POLITICS IN FOOTBALL

FANDOM

4.1 Introduction

It did not take a lot of time for the Ultras to have a central role in the January 2011 protests in Cairo. They shocked the Egyptian street when they put their military like discipline, fighting experience and spirit of resistance into the favor of antigovernment protests. As the uprising climaxed, the level of politicization in their ranks increased. The large scale, one-million and more demonstrations, or what Egyptians refer to as “*Malyouniyyat*”, were the perfect context for the Ultras to show their strength. The respect and trust from the anti-government protestors soon followed, after an anonymous video was uploaded to the internet, stating that the Egyptians have nothing to fear in the demonstrations because the Ultras will protect them.

At the beginning of the protests, the Ultras participated as unorganized individuals. Soon however, their tactics, accompanied with their mass numbers, enabled them to drag the security forces into a street attrition fight, which lead the latter to become weak and incapable of managing the masses reclaiming the public sphere. The Ultras resorted to dividing themselves into small groups of twenty people, managing to assemble in public squares, launch mass organized attacks on the police and then de-assemble and disappear again, making their pursuit almost impossible.

The constant state of mobilization demonstrated by Ultras Ahlawy before the uprising, allowed them to seize the moment on 25 January, 2011. The importance of their role is highlighted in the words of Stephan Lacroix: “There were two groups that were crucial for the Egyptian revolution to succeed: The Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Ahlawy Ultras, Ultras were the most important” (Tuastad, 2013, p. 2). Ahlawy kept the momentum of the uprising alive by defending the front line protestors and fighting the security forces and their thugs. Their Football dynamism and enthusiasm was the catalyst of the street movement, and the driving force of change.

This chapter examines the role of the Egyptian Ultras, specifically Ultras Ahlawy, in the events of the uprising and after the fall of Mubarak. The main question to be addressed is how the Ultras reacted to the different changes and events in the political turmoil that occurred after January 2011. Reviewing the chain of events trends will reveal the dynamics that mobilized Ultras into politics, getting them closer and away from the uprising’s goals. At the end of this chapter, more evidence will be extracted to support the classification of Ultras as a social movement, or a social non-movement. Ultras gained respect and admiration from anti-government supporters due to their experience and discipline in the field. This reputation proved essential due the lack then of organized opposition in the Egyptian public sphere. Therefore, Ultras were trapped between two agendas: Their own, and what the anti-government current expects them to do. This hypothesis will be put to question in this chapter. It will be validated by analyzing some milestone events that constituted a turning point in the political engagement of Ultras Ahlawy. The chapter also comments on Ahlawy’s future in mainstream activism and “real” politics.

4.2 25 January 2011: The Uprising

No one predicted the scale of events that transpired on 25 January 2011, nor the after effect complications that changed Egypt forever. While the world stood stunned, the Egyptian people took to the streets protesting and demanding bread, freedom and social justice (*aish, huriyya, adala igtimayiaa*). Mubarak, and under the pressure from the street, turned down power to the military council after eighteen days of unprecedented protests that galvanized millions under one slogan: “The people want to overthrow the regime”, (*al-sha‘b yureed iskat al-nizam*).

Many speculated whether Ultras Ahlawy joined the uprising as a collective initiative on the 25 January. A video was released on “YouTube” that held a statement from Ultras claiming that they will not participate in the uprising as a group, but they left the freedom of the individuals to participate. This was in line with the Ultras ideology as they considered themselves an apolitical group. However, events on 25 January seem to imply that the decision to participate in the uprising was collective, yet implicit. This interpretation was enhanced by the fact that 25 January, coincided with the commemoration of “Police Day” in Egypt, an event that the authoritarian regime used to assert the readiness of the police to control the streets. With the Ultras’ violent history with the police, 25 January was the perfect opportunity for them to voice their demands and to be part of a movement that delegitimized the regime and its coercive apparatus. Slowly but steadily, their numbers increased and their chants were noticed at Tahrir Square. They soon became one of the uprising’s most dynamic actors and mobilizers.

Tahrir Square was strategically important for the Egyptian uprising for many reasons. Tahrir is described as the “epicenter of Cairo”(Rubin, 2014), the downtown area where most of the elite financial, commercial and residential zones exist. “The

Square” has also substantial symbolism to Egyptian identity as the place where nationalism, pan-Arabism, resistance and liberation were demonstrated throughout Egypt’s modern history. During the January uprising, Tahrir became the beating heart of the movement after protestors managed to occupy it. Consequently, its outskirts became the front line that protestors defended against the attacks of the police and loyalists to Mubarak’s regime, who tried to take back the square.

Ultras constituted prime defenders of this front line, after attaining substantial experience from their violent confrontations with the police. “They knew how to act collectively, to hit and run, to survive and escape prolonged exposure to tear gas, to change their front fighters so as to rest them periodically, to bang the drums to warn of police attacks, to identify provocateurs, to cheer and whistle when in need of tactical withdrawals, to avoid collective running knowing the danger of stampedes and panics, to regroup, and return fireworks, to suffer and endure pain as many having been subject to mistreatments and even torture at the police stations” (Tuastad, 2013, p. 14). Without this kind of defense that ensured the survival of the protests and constant pressure on the regime, it was highly possible that the process of regime change would have been hindered, and even likely that Mubarak would still be in power today.

4.3 Ahlawy and White Nights: From Violent Rivalry to Strong Alliance

What was noticeable about the dynamism of Egyptian Ultras in the uprising is that at times of conflict some Ultras transcended their violent rivalry to form a street alliance against the police. This was crucial to overthrowing the regime later on.

Ahlawy and White Nights, rival Ultra groups of Al-Ahly and Zamalek, fought the police leaving their differences, competition and violent past aside.

Eight months after the January uprising, Ahlawy and White Nights returned to Tahrir Square to join other revolutionary forces calling for fulfilling the demands of the revolution. Ultras however were there to settle a score: a clash with the Ministry of Interior. Ahlawy and White Nights demanded the release of their members arrested during the revolution, and during games when the crowd was attacked directly after curses and insults were heard against former president Mubarak, and Interior Minister Habib Al-Adly.

4.4 The Port Said Massacre

Ultras Ahlawy members knew that the blood feud with the police would not end with the fall of Mubarak. The Port Said incident can be described as a major turning point in the Ultra's role and engagement in the Egyptian political sphere. Seventy two Ultras Ahlawy fans died on the first of February 2012, after a clash between the crowds of Al-Ahly and Al-Masri. It was described as the "Port Said Massacre", or the "worst disaster in the country's Football history" (Leyne 2012). However, this was not any 'ordinary' incident of crowd violence. Many pointed out that the events were orchestrated by the police in retaliation to the Ultras role in the uprising. This bloody incident, created a series of reactions which mutated the Ultras from seeking regime change and made them adhere only to their personal demands of justice and retribution for their fallen comrades.

Al-Masri club is largely believed to be tied to the economic and political interests of the Mubarak family. The fans of Al-Masri have prided themselves on representing the national identity of Egypt, and took great honor in calling themselves

“the descendants of 56”, in reference to the resistance movement against the tripartite French-British-Israeli aggression against Egypt when Gamal Abed El-Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. These national sentiments intensified consistently with the marginalization of the city, after Cairo had monopolized most of the country’s political and economic power. The feeling of being sidelined changed into resentment against Cairo, and inevitably Al-Ahly Football Club. Consequently, the Al-Masri fans that attacked Ahlawy in the match were thought to be “supporters of the deposed Mubarak regime and were exacting revenge on Al-Ahly supporters”(Gibbs, 2012).

The game against Al-Masri in February 2012 influenced the actions of the Ultras in the political sphere forever. Police presence was scarce at the entrance of the stadium, but especially the near absence of the Central Security Forces (CSF). Mohammad Zurki, a player for Al-Masri, claimed that the events were orchestrated by the police (*The Observer*, 2012). He describes the series of unusual events that happened on that day even before the match. “Firstly, there was no real searching of fans as they entered the stadium, which is really unusual,” he said. “Tickets weren’t being checked, and there was no searching at all. And for the first time in the history of our town, the governor and chief of police did not attend this game”(The Observer, 2012). Zurki claimed that hired thugs were paid by the former National Democratic Party (NDP) to beat and kill Ahlawy members.

Reports indicate that death threats were issued to Al-Ahly fans on social media before the game. “Port Said is waiting for you with knives and pistols,” one of the messages read. “If you are coming to Port Said, write your mother a will because you will die for sure,” read another (Dorsey, 2012). Moreover, it was claimed that Ultras Masri Capo Mohammad Adel Mohammad, notoriously nicknamed *Hummus*, chaired a meeting before the game and planned the attack on Ultras Ahlawy. The prosecution

of the case of Port Said stated that “defendants premeditated the killing of some of the Ahly club fans (Ultras) to retaliate for previous disputes between them and to show off their strength (Ismail, 2013). *Hummus* was later sentenced to death, and became a symbol for the protests in Port Said.

All of these events created suspicions among the fans, and as soon as the game ended, thugs armed with knives, bats and machetes attacked Ahlawy. Other eyewitness testimony suggests that police blocked stadium exits and turned off the stadium lights to prevent video footage and to increase the mayhem (Jerzak 2013, p. 252). The video footage showed the police standing still and not interfering to stop the attack. Fans were killed by knives, thrown over the terraces, and brutally beaten. In just one hour time, 72 Ultras Ahlawy fans lost their lives in Port Said.

That almost all deaths and injuries were of Ahly supporters suggests premeditation on the side of the aggressors (*Al-Masry Al Yawm*, 2012). All of the aforementioned facts made Ultras Ahlawy believe and claim that the attack was orchestrated by the police, as a payback to Ahlawy for the role they played in the revolution.

The ‘massacre’ of Port Said had many effects on the Ultras’ engagement in the public sphere, and generated different reactions from the Egyptian street. The conservative part of Egyptian society was now more convinced that the Ultras are violent, anarchic youth with no political path or guidance. In turn, this belief magnified the calls for order and security, which meant inevitably reaffirming the role of the police, which had not changed its violent methods of oppressing and dominating the street. While some people argue that Ultras became more politicized after Port Said, others claim that the Ultras diverted away from the uprisings’ goals, with no return.

Jerzak argues that after Port Said, Ultras' "political demands expanded to include justice in the legal system and the reform of the police" (Jerzak, 2013, p. 253), enhancing the political nature of the demands. On the other hand the celebration of the court ruling by the Ultras in Port Said was deemed by many as disengagement from the collective interest and the overall general political discourse of anti-government protestors. Moreover, the crowd ban that the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) imposed affected drastically the movement and the mobilization of the Ultras. The Ultras even struggled to keep their unity. As one leader explained, "everything has changed, yet nothing has really changed [since Port Said]— for us, the biggest challenge has been trying to stay united without our common ground of Football"(El Nabawi, 2012).

Jerzak suggests that, there are two contradictory tendencies that characterize the post Mubarak Ultras movement. First, "the popularity and visibility of Ultra groups led to overextended memberships" (Jerzak, 2013, p. 250), in which the Ultras grew in numbers rapidly, enabling the security forces to infiltrate their ranks and manipulate them at certain events. On the other hand, Jerzak contends that "many Ultras have continued to challenge authoritarian tendencies of Egyptian leaders", by their protests against the military regime and the Muslim Brotherhood.

4.4.1 Political Support to the Ultras Ahlawy after Port Said

On many occasions the Muslim Brotherhood supported the demands of Ultras Ahlawy, especially after the Port Said massacre. The FJP (Freedom and Justice Party) affirmed its "full support" for the Ultras and their "just cause," noting that "none of those who killed their colleagues have been punished." Senior Muslim Brotherhood figure Khairat El-Shater also implicitly sided with the Ultras' demands. "Preserving

the stature of the state will be achieved when the real perpetrators of the Port Said massacre are brought to justice.” El-Shater also denounced the headline story of the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Newspaper which in had described the Ultras as “troublemakers” (Rashwan, 2012). The “*Al-Tayyar*” Party, formed by ex-Muslim Brotherhood members, also supported the Ultras demands. The Current Party suggested that the resumption of Football activity before the Port Said perpetrators were punished was an attempt by the “corrupt Mubarak regime figures” who control the Football association to distract the Egyptian people from the issue (Rashwan, 2012). Hamdine Sabbahi, the prominent Nasserite leader, and the presidential candidate, joined the parliamentary sit-in the Ultras organized to demand justice for their martyrs. Sabbahi chanted with the Ultras: “Down with the military rule” (Ahram, 2012).

4.4.2 The Ruling

On 6 February 2013, Egypt’s Court of Cassation issued its verdict on the 73 defendants accused of setting up the violence of Port Said. On that date, 21 death sentences were issued, however, only two of them were for police members. The court ruling sparked mass protests in Port Said, where citizens of this marginalized city claimed that the decision was politically motivated, and was a form of collective punishment (BBC, 2013). Riots and clashes with police paralyzed the city, and resulted in the death of more than 40 people and left more than 300 wounded. In response President Mohammad Mursi assigned the army the responsibility to restore order instead of the police, and activated Martial Law. Feelings of outrage and animosity against the Ultras. The anti-government protestors described the

celebrations as immature, and accused Ultras of falling into a trap authorities had set up for them divert away from the uprising.

On the other hand, Ahlawy rejoiced with the court decision, calling it retribution for their fallen comrades. Ultras celebrated the ruling in the stadium of Cairo, although most of the convicted were not members of the police. Many considered this a turning point between the Ultras and what remained of the political and social goals of the 25 January uprising. Anti-Brotherhood and anti-regime currents in the Egyptian political arena came to a realization that the Ultras had willingly turned a blind eye to the bigger picture, the brutality and impunity of the security forces, and the authoritarianism of the state. The Ultras were, in the eyes of most of the revolutionary forces, not interested in perusing the goals of the 25 January uprising. They were rather more concerned with their own goals.

The reactions in Port Said were different, however. The city viewed the government response towards the massacre and the court ruling as targeting the whole city in a collective punishment. As noted previously, Port Said is marginalized compared to Cairo, and the citizens feel sidelined by the central government (Amrani, 2013). Port Said citizens were convinced that the cause of violence was not the “Green Eagles” (Ultras Al-Masri), and the perpetrators had nothing to do with the city or Al-Masri club. Rather, for Port Said residents the violence resulted from “external thugs and professional hit-men, hired by none other than the police and/or the army to exact revenge against the *Ahly* Ultras for ‘vanquishing’ them in earlier street battles leading to the Mubarak regime’s downfall” (Chakravarti, 2013). This perspective promoted a conspiracy view of hidden alliances between economic and political interests, and the underworld figures that had an interest in sustaining the Mubarak regime. None of the latter, whom Port Saidies accused of being think they are

responsible of the massacre, had been presented in front of a court of law. Instead, the people convicted were widely considered innocent in Port Said, sentenced to death by a Cairo regime that wanted to use them as scapegoats to contain the rage of Ultras Ahlawy.

After the incident, the Green Eagles of Al-Masri club and Ultras Ahlawy of Al-Ahly broke into a war of words and symbols. Analyzing the discourse of this confrontation reveals many insights on the background of the conflict between the two clubs in specific, and the two cities in general.

4.4.3 The War of Words

Green Eagles (Ultras Al-Masri) Graffiti depicted the incident of Port Said from a different perspective. The words used were “*Al-Adl aw al Mawt*” (Justice or Death), which is similar to the equation that Ultras Ahlawy were mainstreaming “*Al-Qisass aw Al-Dam*” (Punishment or Blood). However, a deeper analysis of these terms reveals that both Ultras are divided radically on different concepts. “*Al-Adl*” means justice, connoting equality, fairness and a demand for proportionality, which Port Said’s sociopolitical history was laden with. On the other hand, Ultras Ahlawy were demanding “*Al-Qisas*”, which was a more direct invitation of the death penalty, the capital punishment executed by the state, which has its roots in the Islamic dogma that greatly influences Egyptian society. Ultras Al-Masri also raised in their protests the slogan “*aw al-Mawt*” which indicates the death they are willing to face in their quest for justice. By contrast, Ahlawy’s demand for “*Al-Dam*” was a clear symbol that the blood spilled will be their opponents’.

This war of words continued on social media platforms between the two Ultra organizations. Some Ahlawy fans celebrated the death sentences issued to the indicted

Al-Masri fans. This abrasive language and harsh vocabulary described reflects a “militant masculinity”. Ahlaway described Port Said as “*balad mafihash rigala*” or a city without men, in an attempt to defame the city that was too feeble to join street battles against Mubarak’s regime, during the uprising. In their defense, Al-Masri always tends to recount the battle-hardened legacy of Port Said to sustain their “masculine honor”. This legacy is preserved with Port Saidies reminding Cairo of the invasion and bombardment that the city suffered by colonial powers in the invasion of 1956.

The hate sentiments soon intensified, as widespread riots broke out in Port Said, Ismailia and Suez, and other canal cities, rejecting the court verdict. At the same time, protests erupted in Cairo, against President Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood regime, accusing the latter of betraying and hijacking the revolution. Although the protests in Cairo were violently repressed by police and central security forces, President Mursi soon sent the army to Port Said to restore order. This was seen by the Port Saidies as more discrimination against the city by Cairo’s central government, which escalated into calls for an “independent state of Port Said” (Kingsley, 2013). They declared it independent from the sovereignty of the central state and political regime. In a clear act of defiance, Al-Masri Ultras lead the marches in Port Said despite the curfew imposed by the central government. Although a violent confrontation with the army was avoided, Port Said remained under imposed curfew, and President Mursi considered issuing martial law (Hope, 2013).

4.5 Public Discontent of the Ultras and Emergence of Other Social Movements

The Port Said sentences were a turning point for the Ultras and their departure from the uprising. After the announcement of the court rulings, Ultras Ahlawy issued a statement declaring that the verdict was the beginning of justice served, and that they still held the military responsible for the massacre (Rashwan, 2013). Distancing themselves from the protests against Mursi, and assuming that justice had prevailed, led to many reactions from the anti-government forces, as this announcement created a void in anti-government street movements: now the front line lacked the principal defending force against the attacks of the security forces, thugs and sexual harassers. This void catalyzed the formulation of other Social Movements to fill the gap, and take up the role of Ultras as vigilantes.

Characterized by their all-black garments and faceless identities, one of the Social Movements that emerged was the Black Bloc. The Black Bloc can be described as a group of vigilantes, who take the initiative to protect protests, attacking offenders and fighting off the police. They mask their identity because they are violent in their actions and tactics, and therefore break the law to defend what they think is right. They are very similar to the Ultras in terms of their paramilitary discipline, energy and dynamism, which made some observers link them to the Ultra movement itself (BBC News, 2013). The origins of the Black Block can be traced back to Germany. In 1970, the German police forcefully evicted an anti-nuclear protest, attacking 5000 peaceful protestors. This violence prompted a group of protestors to use violent methods in confronting the police. On a day that was labeled Black Friday, 20,000 individuals, all dressed in black, took to the streets and destroyed a shopping district. The Black Block continued to appear in many places around the world, and was

present in the anti-World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, in 1999. Many consider the Black Bloc movement as a tactic and not as an independent social entity. They emerged as a consequence of the lack of a social movement that can effectively control the streets and fight back the police. They do not have a specific dogma or fixed ideals. Mostly anarchic, Black Bloc protested against globalization in the United States in 1999, against anti-austerity measures in the United Kingdom in 2011, and against governmental policies in Brazil's 2013 protests.

In Egypt, the Black Bloc is believed to have emerged as an actor in the street for many reasons. One of them was to fight sexual harassers, who thrived molesting female protestors in Tahrir. Numerous reports indicate many cases of organized sexual harassment and even gang rapes, by perpetrators who, in many cases, were pro-government thugs (Kingsley, 2013). The group had many public announcements. In one of them it “vowed to protect demonstrators against the security forces and what they termed ‘ruling Muslim Brotherhood thugs’” (Dorsey, 2013), in a reference to the brotherhood who attacked the demonstrators. In Cairo, a number of Red Devils Ultras, linked to Al-Ahly club, have reportedly “exchanged their red El Ahly club shirts for black hoodies and balaclavas, appearing within the ranks of the newly mobilized Black Bloc anarchists operating under the (clearly derivative) slogan “*Al-qissas* though this time against the security forces who have killed protestors – or else...*al-fawda* (chaos)” (Chakravarti, 2013). This also is an indicator that some of Al-Ahly Ultras joined the Black Bloc to continue fighting the police, since they cannot do so explicitly anymore as Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras Red Devils.

Another movement that emerged was ‘Wilad Sis’ (Children of Sis), a group of impoverished, unemployed and socially marginalized youth and children living on the outskirts of Tahrir. ‘Wilad Sis’ occupied an area referred to as “*Ashwaiyyat*”, or the

shantytowns in Cairo; with Ahlawy they were the core of the protests directed against the Ministry of Interior in November 2011. “The confrontation, which has been referred to as the second Egyptian revolution, led to as many as forty people being killed and more than 600 injured, mostly Ultras and *wiladsis*” (Shenker, 2011).

4.6 Ultras as a Pressure Group

Although Ultras Ahlawy was part of the 25 January uprising, they nevertheless possessed their own agenda. Ahlawy considered the politicization of the uprising the result of an overlap with the antigovernment current but not an end goal in itself. Nevertheless, in many incidents, Ultras Ahlawy proved to be a difficult pressure group; it influenced many political and Football decisions in Egypt.

The post uprising political current in Egypt banned the former National Democratic Party (NDP) of the Mubarak regime from practicing politics and engaging in the public sphere. Similarly Ultras Ahlawy also had their say in the elections of the members of the Egyptian Football Association (EFA), a highly politicized act. Ahlawy demanded candidates against Hani Abou-Reida and Ahmad Shobeir to withdraw from the elections to the EFA board. Abou-Reida and Shobeir were considered by many, including the Ultras, as prominent figures of the former NDP, and “collaborators against Ahly in Port Said’s case”. In addition to their influence on politics, Ahlawy had their own stance against the media as well, which is the core of the Ultras principles.

Ultras Ahlawy stormed Cairo’s Media Production City (MPC) to protest against the Modern TV channel, which was broadcasting. They chanted specifically against “Medhat Shalaby and Ahmad Shobeir, two television presenters known for

their frequent anti-Ultras comments” (Maher, 2012). They later released a song to mock numerous TV anchors, whom they accused of defaming the Ultras.

Ultras Ahlawy also engaged in many protests to demand the rights of their fallen comrades. The Ultras overtly demanded “the punishment of police officers involved in the disaster, including the interior minister, the Port Said security director, the Port Said governor and the manager of Port Said Stadium. The group also demands the purge of the interior ministry from corrupt elements, and has accused the minister himself of inciting violence against its members” (Ahram Online, 2012). Ahlawy also accused the security forces of intentionally neglecting stadium security.

The Ultras went even further, attacking their own club for its failure to voice their demands. Ultras openly opposed the resumption of the league before the sentences were issued in the case of Port Said. Al-Ahly club was stormed and besieged by furious Ultras who were against Al-Ahly’s decision to participate in the league again, before justice was served. The fans physically assaulted the players for taking part in that decision, and demanded that “domestic Football activities to remain suspended until the perpetrators of February’s Port Said disaster are brought to justice”(Maher 2012). Some players sided with the Ultras’ demand, such as Ahly’s playmaker Mohammad Abou Treika. The fans welcomed that decision and warned other players to take the same stance. Ultras Ahlawy also attacked the EFA headquarters for the same purpose. Ahlawy issued a statement listing six demands that should be fulfilled or “matters will be worse”. These demands symbolized the new political and street orientation of the Ultras after the Port Said massacre. This underscored their departure from the revolution.

4.6.1 The Six demands and their Political Significance

Ahlawy influenced the decision making process in Egypt many times. Perhaps the most important time was the public stance they took against the Egyptian Football Association (EFA), AL-Ahly board of directors and the Ministry of Interior, after attacking the EFA headquarters in September 2012. Analysis of these demands make clear the objectives of the Ultras, and how they converged and diverged with the goals of the Egyptian uprising. The Ultras called for a “revolution against Football corruption”, listing six demands deemed essential otherwise “matters will be worse”, and vowed not to let EFA resume Football in Egypt until “justice is served” (Maher, 2012). The demands as stated by the Ultras were: 1-The withdrawal of Hani Abou-Reida, Ahmed Shobeir and their comrades from the upcoming EFA elections, in references to the former members of the dismantled National Democratic Party (NDP); 2- The resignation of the entire Ahly Board of Directors following their complicity with the EFA (in the Port Said saga); 3- The resignation of the EFA board of directors following their complicity in the case of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS); 4- Football games should not be held without the presences of fans; 5- The interior ministry must not be in charge of security at Football games; and finally, 6- The media should not include who figures who sow sedition between fans (Maher, 2012).

These demands shed light on Ahlawy’s new role in Egyptian politics. The first demand called for the withdrawal of two prominent members from the EFA elections, because they were linked with the former National Democratic Party (NDP). This indicates the animosity Ahlawy held against the former regime. The second involved the resignation of Al-Ahly board, because they were accused of being “collaborators” with the EFA, in relation with the Port Said massacre. Demands two and three clearly

state that Ahlawy's main concern was the rights of their fallen comrades and retribution. In the same context, Ahlawy also demanded the resignation of the entire EFA Board of Directors. Since fandom is their heart and core, Ahlawy naturally demanded that no Football matches will be played in Egypt without the presence of the fans inside the stadiums. In their final demand, Ahlawy demanded the banishment of the ministry of interior from the stadiums. In other words, revolved around the four core Ultra principles: anti-regime, anti-the corruption of modern Football, anti-police, and anti-media. Ahlawy also added to this list retribution for their fallen comrades, and their right to attend matches at the stadium.

In a strongly worded statement, the Al-Ahly administration condemned their own Ultra fans after they stormed the club's training stadium. Al-Ahly attacked the club's premises, disrupted the team's training and attacked their own players after accusing them of "doing nothing but shedding crocodile tears" and "failing to even wear mourning armbands" (Maher,2012), after the Port Said incident. The latter caused an indefinite suspension of Egyptian premier league matches, and of all domestic Football activities due to security concerns. Al-Ahly's condemnation of their own fans proved that the Ultras are independent of any influence from their club's administration. They pursued their own agenda which ultimately drove them away from the uprising.

The Ultras' reaction towards different events in Egypt suggests that they carefully maintained their distance from direct involvement in politics, portraying themselves as a Football group only. "We do everything when we need to do it, not when someone needs us to do it. That's why nobody can use us from the political side. A lot of people tried to use us and convince us to join political parties, but we still maintain that we are a Football group and we're not concerned with politics",

declared Ahmad, a prominent Ahlawy capo, (Anderson, 2013). Nor is Ultras opposition limited to a certain political regime. It is rather directed against any authority. This is proven by the protests staged by the Ultras in the Mubarak, SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood eras. “It seems to me that the Ultras are, by now, very seasoned protesters and are able to bring a lot of attention to their demands and create a problem for the government that is its power...It almost doesn’t matter who is in charge” (Anderson, 2013). The Ultras, as unified as they may appear, are a very diverse youth group, struggling to control the street. However, Anderson indicates that it is not street politics that matters most; it is the transition and shift to real politics that is proving challenging to the Ultras.

4.7 The Friday of Correcting the Path

After many consecutive disappointments since the 25 January protests, the revolutionary forces of the uprising restated their call for all Egyptians to take to the streets and to put pressure on the government to fulfill their demands. Protestors demanded a fixed time frame set by the SCAF to hand over power to a civilian government, an end to civilian trials in front of military courts; they also condemned torture in military detentions (Tarek, 2011). Most of the protestors in Tahrir Square lacked organization and common demands, whereas the Ultras “spoke with one voice” (Tarek, 2011). Ultras, represented mostly by Ahlawy and White Nights, demanded the release of their members from state prisons, the prosecution of old regime members, and the overthrow of the military regime. Observers described these demands as “settling of scores with the police” (Tarek, 2011). Ultras Ahlawy, were the most prominent street group in the protests, marching and clapping in

synchronized fashion, lighting their flares and chanting the same slogans as they usually do in Football stadiums.

Two days before the protests of “Correcting the Path”, the Central Security Forces (CSF), abruptly chased Ultras Ahlawy after the final whistle of the match in the Egyptian cup between Al-Ahly and Kima Aswan. The CSF forces used batons and brutal force to chase the Ultras and make them evacuate the stadium. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) argued that “The police forces were provoked by the fans, who were chanting offensive slogans against them” (Maher, 2011). This crackdown was considered by many, including the Ultras, as payback by the police regarding the role, played by the Ultras in the uprising, which undermined and challenged the security apparatus. The EFA also described the Ultras behavior as “unacceptable”, charging that “insults are never justified” and that “there are no reasons to insult the former minister or the current minister” (Maher, 2011). The deputy Interior Minister Mohsen Murad, claimed that the security forces were “forced to react” after attacking the CSF were attacked forces verbally and physically. In turn the Ultras denied these accusations and considered the assault related only to the chanting of offensive songs against ousted president Mubarak and Former Interior minister Habib Al-Adly.

On 9 September, Ultras renewed their chants and curses against Mubarak and Al-Adly, in Tahrir and in front of the Ministry of Interior. On 19 November, clashes erupted after the security forces tried to disperse a group of protestors, chanting against military rule. The clashes later erupted into a huge street fight, specifically in the street of Mohammad Mahmoud, killing tens and injuring hundreds. The Ultras ultimately entered the fight for their own reasons but also because they felt morally obliged to protect the protestors. “The whole thing began when the police beat up those who had been injured in the revolution, and that enraged the Ultras and urged

them to join the brawl. “They were on the forefront of the confrontation, because they cannot stand such excesses from the police” (Sherif, 2012).

Ultras Ahlawy gained support from several revolutionary groups such as the 25 January Revolution Youth Coalition and the 6 April Youth Movement. The latter released a statement saying that “The Ultras are being punished for the role they played and their heroics in the revolution”. The statement also added that, “We will never allow anyone to undermine our revolution. We are demanding the immediate release of all the youths who were arrested and a thorough investigation over what happened” and “We are assuring Ultras Ahlawy that we are following them on the same path of democracy and freedom” (Maher, 2011).

4.8 Ultras under Fire

The relationship between political parties and Ultras Ahlawy was never a proper one. On many occasions, political groups and figures expressed their support to the Ultras while on others, expressed their anger towards them. This mixed attitude was rooted in the fact that the Ultras did not fit into a definite political agenda. On many milestones during the Egyptian uprising, Football Ultras joined the revolutionary actors in demanding political actions.

During the post-uprising presidential elections, Ultras Ahlawy joined to 6 April movement in a mass protest calling for excluding Ahmad Shafiq, a prominent NDP figure, from the presidential race. Ahmad Shafiq, a former prime minister in the Mubarak Era, represented to the Ultras what they referred to as “*folool*” or remnants of the old regime.

Ultras Ahlawy also joined forces with Ultras Devils in calling for immediate mass rallies to “protest the controversial verdicts reached in the trial of deposed

president Hosni Mubarak, and six of the latter's assistants” (Tarek, 2012). Ahlawy and Devils were joined by the Muslim Brotherhood to 6 April Youth Movement, the Revolution Coalition and the presidential campaigns of the eliminated candidates Hamdeen Sabbahi and Abdel Meneim Abul Fotooh. Ahlawy declared on their official Facebook page that “The final scene of the farcical play [the trial] and the underestimation of the Egyptian citizen's mentality indicates the return of the oppressive regime, and the end of the revolution. So you either participate in the killing of the revolution or breathe life into it” (Tarek, 2012).

Before assuming power, the Muslim Brotherhood declared their “full support” for the demands issued by Ahlawy, and their “just cause”; they noted that “none of those who killed their colleagues have been punished” (Rashwan, 2012). Senior Brotherhood official Khairat al-Shater stated that “preserving the stature of the state will be achieved when the real perpetrators of the Port Said massacre are brought to justice”(Rashwan, 2012). He later also denounced the headline of the Freedom and Justice Newspaper (affiliated with the Brotherhood and the FJP Party), which described the Ultras as “troublemakers”. El-Shater called on the newspaper's editor-in-chief to issue an official apology.

However, the Brotherhood’s stance shifted after they assumed power with the election of President Mohammad Mursi. On 26 January 2013, and during the protests held on the anniversary of the 2011 uprising, the Muslim Brotherhood made it clear that Mursi’s regime “was extremely concerned by the Ultras’ tendency towards politicization” (Anderson, 2013). The same statement advised the media and political parties not to incite those [Ultras] to “subversion and the use of violence and thuggery” (Anderson, 2013). The statement continued using strong words that “All Egyptians must condemn those violent criminals and hold them accountable in

accordance with the provisions of the law. It certainly is most absurd that such individuals or groups should pretend they are claiming martyrs' rights with yet more unlawful killings and bloodshed". Thousands of Ultra Ahlawy members joined forces later with anti-Mursi protestors, and engaged in street fights with Mursi loyalists near the Presidential Palace (Ahram, 2012).

4.9 Conclusion: Ultras and Politics: A point of no Return?

The post-Mubarak era in Egypt has proven to be a challenging one for the Ultras. As argued in this chapter, Ultras in Egypt sparked controversy during the uprising for their commitment to the "revolutionary goals". However, carefully analyzing the timeline of events reveals that there were many misconceptions by anti-government groups about the role, tasks and reasons that lead the Ultras to participate in the uprising in the first place. "There is an exaggerated reliance on the Ultras, whether positive or negative ... to spearhead confrontations, although its due moment passed on 28 January 2011" (Sirgany, 2013). Wael Abbas a prominent Egyptian blogger and activist, described the Ultras as "testosterone-driven youth with an animosity toward the police, lacking an ideology to inform or direct their actions toward a larger purpose". "People amongst us activists overhyped the Ultras role [in the revolution] and made a legend out of them" (Sirgany, 2013).

Not only did the celebration of the court ruling by the Ultras spark street rage against them, but also it was the way the Ultras depicted Port Said as a city, collectively responsible for the massacre. This attitude reveals political and social immaturity from the Ultras, deeming them unqualified to spearhead a political opposition, or act as a force of social change. Moreover, more than forty people died in the protests that erupted in Port Said against an 'unfair' ruling. This fueled

celebrations in Cairo by Ahlawy, and in turn caused more feelings of anger and resentment against the Ultras. The Ultras in Cairo did not realize that the people of Port Said considered the convicts as scapegoats, while the real perpetrators of the massacre were left to walk freely. Some have assumed that this was a trap orchestrated by the regime to tarnish the image of the Ultras during the uprising. Indeed, anti-Ultra resentment afterwards escalated to become overt accusations of vandalism, inciting violence and working against the uprising's goals.

Journalist Tamer Wagih provided a different explanation of the Ultras' behavior: "everyone forgot to debate them, to try to develop their awareness and present them with a critique. It's only natural that under the pressure of the events – massacres, blood, confrontations and pressure from intelligence agencies, intimidation, terrorization and bribery attempts – that they made wrong decisions and took contradictory stances" (Sirgany, 2013). The revolutionary forces that were concerned only with either cheering them on or condemning them failed to provide the kind of political leadership that would have contained them.

The Ultras' engagement in the Egyptian public space was bound to politicize them. "Chants against the military and the president are automatically political, even if their purpose is retribution for tens killed – and not a constitution" (Sirgany, 2013). However, whether or not they have political objectives and make political change is highly questionable. The mobilization, dynamism and activism of the Ultras in the public space was and remains rooted in Football and in settling scores with the police's brutal practices inside and outside the stadiums. The next chapter spells out this study's theoretical and practical implications.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Anti-Government Protests: Political Awareness or Testosterone Driven Vendetta?

Ultras Ahlawy, composed of thousands of young enthusiastic individuals, bound by the passion for their team and the game, have risen to become one of the most influential groups in Egyptian street politics. While their ultimate goal remained cheering for their team, one cannot overlook the political role Ultras played at a crucial moment in Egyptian politics. Moving outside stadium walls, the Ultras initiated the “battle” for the public sphere against Mubarak’s authoritarian regime in 2007, and challenged the state’s coercive apparatus during the uprising in 2011 and beyond.

However, despite the Egyptian anti-regime’s expectations from the Ultras, they remain a group of individuals lacking political maturity, social awareness and a will for large scale political change. Nevertheless, Ultra groups established a new forum for active youth to express themselves in the stadium, when public feelings of discontent were not allowed by the regime. These feelings later found their way to the streets with the start of the uprising, as the Ultras gained new public space. The level of politicization and freedom of mobilization was not without hindrance as the Egyptian security apparatus resisted the Ultra’s newly established autonomy. Despite the high levels of police brutality against the Ultras, their level of politicization and engagement in the public sphere was enhanced. As a social movement or non-movement, Ahlawy managed to claim the streets and squares of Cairo from the

police. With the 2011 uprising, Ultras seized control of the anti-government sentiment to delegitimize the state's institutions and security apparatus, making them a prominent and influential player in the public sphere.

This thesis examined the Ultras' reactions to different before and after the Egyptian 2011 antigovernment protests. These milestones constituted different challenges which made the Ultras converge and diverge from the path of the uprising and the anti-government current. Despite what Egyptian society thought of the Ultras' response, Ahlawy kept seeking independence in the public sphere. Many interpretations help explain the reasons why the Ultras joined the 2011 January uprising. Political actors and street activists have tried to influence the position of the Ultras. Enhancing consciousness of individual's rights, inducing socio-political change, a chance to control the public sphere or a simple vendetta were all motives that can interpret the attitude of Ahlawy, during and after the uprising.

Although a culture of resistance and activism exists in the ranks of Ahlawy, a general socio-political consciousness is not yet formulated. The behavioral pattern of the Ultras suggests that a strong solidarity based on fandom exists, which seems to influence and guide their actions. Understanding this sentiment is crucial in projecting the future role of Ahlawy in anti-government protests and in street politics. Others also suggest that "the first and foremost reason why they took part in the January 25 Revolution is their terrible relationship with the police; vendetta was their motive ... the police were simply their enemies and they had absolutely no political awareness" (Tarek, 2011). What can be certain however, is that opposition sentiments are no longer contained to Football stadiums. The January 2011 uprising came to transfer these sentiments into strong feelings of contestation expressed in the Egyptian public space. Their contestation of the regime benefited from the knowledge and experience

that Ultras had accumulated through numerous encounters with the police inside the stadiums. Choreography, joyous chants and fighting tactics made Ahlawy battle hardened and prepared for their fight with the security forces in regaining the streets. This proved to be an asset for the anti-government forces, in turn made them misinterpret Ultras as a pro-democratic force aiming to induce a large scale socio-political change. Ultras joined the January 2011 uprising because they had the chance to vocalize and visualize their struggle with the police in the Egyptian public space. Moreover, they were influenced by the general sentiment of morality that anti-government protests carved for themselves in contesting the authoritarian regime of Mubarak. “Most people are not into politics, thanks to years of oppression under the old administration, and that’s a main reason why folks join fan firms in the first place. They want to belong to some entity and get the chance to express themselves, and Football is the only way” (Tarek, 2011). In sum, what made Ultras participate cannot be described in terms of a socio-political consciousness or as a testosterone-driven vendetta. The real reason is somewhere in between.

5.2 Ultras: A Social Movement or a Social Non-Movement?

Al-Mahdi adopts social movement theory (SMT) to explain grass root movements in Egypt that paved the way for the uprising. In this sense, she sees that the Ultras qualify to be a social movement since they are “class cross cutting, challenge authorities and have a certain level of a horizontal organizational structure” (Mahdi, 2013). Dobson contends that a “political opportunity, organizational capacity and framing ability” (Dobson, 2001) must exist as necessary conditions for a social movement to be established. In case of Ahlawy, all these conditions were present, as

the Ultras with their horizontal organizational hierarchy took the streets at the perfect opportunity in January 2011 to voice their protests.

Whereas previous opinions suggest that Ultras in Egypt are qualified as a social movement, Bayat suggests that Social Movements in general represent a long lasting and more – or – less structured collective action aiming at social change; “Non-Movements” carry strong elements of spontaneity, individualism, and inter-group competition, among other features” (Bayat, 1997, p. 57). Non-Movements turn to Social Movements only if they “become conscious of their doings by articulating their aims, methods and justifications”. Therefore, the activity of the Egyptian Ultras in the uprising shares some characteristics of a social non-movement as well. Moreover, Bayat identifies other characteristics that the Ultras share with social Non-Movements. The constant state of mobilization the Ultras maintained before the uprising allowed them to be almost immediately mobilized on 25 January, and continue their effective mobilization in the events that followed. Bayat also describes the “imagined solidarity and passive networks” (Bayat, 2010, p. 14) as key for social change. Their solidarity, and horizontal networks were proved to be critical features that maintained Ultras’ unity and effectiveness in street protesting. Finally, the everyday acts of resistance of social Non-Movements is a type of ‘quite encroachment’, which contributes to social change, and is an essential feature of the Ultras.

Other scholars, such as Woltering, contend that the Ultras do not qualify as a social movement: “They are informal organizations consistently pressuring the government for changes, their key concern revolves not around society but around their team”. He suggests that the only time the Ultras acted as a social movement was after the Port Said incident, as Woltering views, because they were “out of work”, due

to the suspension of the Football league. “Their actions speak louder than their political discourse”, continues Woltering, and “the potential for social protests is inherited from the global Ultra movements: anti-authoritarianism, group dynamics of youth energy, having this abstract idealism against commercialization of Football” (Woltering, 2013). Now that the Football league has returned, however, the Ultras will cheer for their team, and for the game, without a political objective or a will to induce social change.

5.3 Street Politics to Real Politics? An Unlikely Transition

This thesis argued that the level of politicization of the Ultras in Egypt increased with the increasing level of police brutality against them, and with the beginnings of streets protests after January 2011. Since then the Ultras constituted a major force at the level of street politics, an important pressure group and an influential organization at the youth level. Many political parties tried to absorb the Ultras to benefit from their dynamism, activism and street mobilization and experience in fighting the security forces. Ultras were encouraged to formulate a political entity that can display their demands along with other Egyptian parties, and seek official representation in state institutions. Some anti-government forces tried to absorb the Ultras by creating similar entities, making them more politically oriented. The objective of the opposition movements was to utilize the Ultras’ activism and numbers to gain more momentum in the street.

However, Ultra leaders refused such actions, and called for their own de-alienation. Two factors explain this reaction “First, Ultra members are young men who focus on soccer, and, as a result, it would be difficult to expect that Egyptian leaders would take Ultras seriously in political debates. Second, Ultras’ greatest asset

lies in their flexibility: Ultras do not have the burden of creating contentious political platforms but can nevertheless shape Egyptian politics through selective interventions” (Jerzak, 2013).

It is safe to assume that the Ultras will remain, above all, organizations focused on Football. After Port Said, most of the anti-government current recognized that the Ultras lost most of their credibility and returned to the stadiums. This is partially true, however. The Ultras will also continue to face the police and challenge security forces in the public sphere. Their activism, dynamism and resistance ethos will likely return to the pre-uprising level as individuals interested in politics but collectively a group dedicated to Football. A full conversion to politics is therefore highly unlikely, as the Ultras are a young group, and the older members are bound to move out of the group as they start perusing private lives.

5.4 Ultras in Egypt: Challenging Stereotypes

Not only did the Ultras refute the literature on the Arab World that mainly viewed the area in terms of its exceptionalism to democracy and its persistent authoritarianism, but also they defied many stereotypes from within. They challenged three main stereotypes in Egyptian society. First, Ultras were a youth group that wasn't infiltrated by the Islamic radicalism of Social Movements under authoritarian regimes. The Ultras were also viewed by the regime and western observers as “anarchical and destructive” (Jerzak, 2013), which was not the case. Despite their violent confrontations with the police, Ultras remained a highly organized and disciplined organization directing their violence mostly against the regime's coercive apparatus, therefore they cannot be described or compared to the hooligans of England, for example. Finally, the struggle the Ultras lead against authoritarianism

has nothing to do with the Western description of the Middle East anti-government actors as “pro-western liberals” and their opponents as “anti-western fundamentalists” (Jerzak, 2013). Although the experience of the Ultras was imported from Europe, Ultras in Egypt are “a byproduct of Egypt’s historical experience” and therefore are not concerned with the western definition of democracy.

5.5 Future Prospects of: Back to the Stadiums?

The Ultras in Egypt constituted one of the most important groups to challenge state domination over the public space. They spearheaded the protests against the authoritarian regime of Mubarak after the uprising of January 2011. It was their chance to voice their demands outside Football stadiums, but also benefit from the wave that called for delegitimizing their enemy: the security forces. The “politics of fun in confronting tyranny” as described by Sherif and “team pride and rebellious spirit” according to Jerzak, qualified Ultras as the best candidates to challenge state control over the public space. The Ultras’ characteristics such as their solidarity between its members, motivation and horizontal hierarchy-were key in making their ranks flexible but not diluted, widespread but not penetrable, politically influential but not politically influenced.

Throughout the uprising, the Ultras’ reactions were not consistently perceived with welcoming arms. While many anti-government forces considered the Ultras as heroes in the field, they were accused of being politically immature and unfaithful to the course of the ‘revolution’ after the Port Said massacre. Despite these varying perceptions, Ultras were faithful to their brotherhood, teams and the game. With the exceptions of Kifaya and April 6 movements, the lack of political parties backed by a strong youth representation in the street, overemphasized the role of the Ultras in

social activism. In parallel, nobody consulted the Ultras about their expectations of the uprising, which made them feel marginalized, despite their sacrifices on the front lines. As a result, Ultras diverged from what was described as the “course of the revolution”, and pursued again their ‘quite encroachment of the ordinary’, as Bayat describes it, back to the stadiums. This does not mean, however, that the Ultras will withdraw from the Egyptian public sphere. On the contrary, they will continue to contest the state’s endeavors to coerce public expressions of discontent. It is safe to conclude that the Ultras will not give up easily the access and influence in the public space that they fought to achieve in the January 2011 uprising.

Ahlawy and other Ultra organizations in Egypt can be a worthy example on how anti-government grassroots movements do not all have democracy, social change and political interest in their scope, even in “democratic” uprisings. Football stadiums in Egypt will be remain the prime platform to experience autonomy, freedom and to develop values of resistance among the youth, essential attributes for any prospects of real change. Perhaps the next revolution will start from the Football stadiums, and will be, as James Montague describes it, a “Football revolution” (Montague, 2008). The transition from street to real politics, although it is highly unlikely, will prove to be difficult to the Ultras. Their main challenge in light of the political turmoil facing Egypt is to retain their enthusiasm-for Football, protect their autonomy from political influence, maintain their unity, and keep contesting authoritarianism in the ongoing fight for the public space.

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