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Dynamics of Transformation, Elite Change and New Social Mobilization

Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen

Edited by
Muriel Asseburg and Heiko Wimmen



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This book was previously published as a special issue of *Mediterranean Politics*.

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Contents

Citation Information

Notes on Contributors

1. Dynamics of
transformation, elite change and new
social mobilization in the Arab World

Muriel Asseburg and Heiko Wimmen

2. Managing change:
how Egypt's military leadership shaped
the transformation

Stephan Roll

3. Youth movements
in the Egyptian transformation: strategies
and repertoires of political participation

Nadine Abdalla

4. Libya's local
elites and the politics of alliance building

Wolfram Lacher

5. Mobilized
publics in Post-Qadhafi Libya: the
emergence of new modes of popular protest in
Tripoli and Ubari

Rafaa Tabib

6. Islamists,
secularists and old regime elites in
Tunisia: bargained competition

Amel Boubekour

7. Contested
transformation: mobilized publics in
Tunisia between compliance and protest

Anna Antonakis-Nashif

8. Political
bargaining and violent conflict: shifting
elite alliances as the decisive factor in Yemen's
transformation

Mareike Transfeld

9. Yemen's enduring
resistance: youth between politics and
informal mobilization

Atiaf Z. Alwazir

10. Explaining the

Arab uprisings: transformations in
comparative perspective

Steven Heydemann

Index

Citation Information

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Chapter 1

Dynamics of transformation, elite change and new social mobilization in the Arab World

Muriel Asseburg and Heiko Wimmen

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 1–22

Chapter 2

Managing change: how Egypt's military leadership shaped the transformation

Stephan Roll

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 23–43

Chapter 3

Youth movements in the Egyptian transformation: strategies and repertoires of political participation

Nadine Abdalla

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 44–63

Chapter 4

Libya's local elites and the politics of alliance building

Wolfram Lacher

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 64–85

Chapter 5

Mobilized publics in Post-Qadhafi Libya: the emergence of new modes of popular protest in Tripoli and Ubari

Rafaa Tabib

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 86–106

Chapter 6

Islamists, secularists and old regime elites in Tunisia: bargained competition

Amel Boubekur

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 107–127

Chapter 7

Contested transformation: mobilized publics in Tunisia between compliance and protest

Anna Antonakis-Nashif

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 128–149

Chapter 8

Political bargaining and violent conflict: shifting elite alliances as the decisive factor in Yemen's transformation

Mareike Transfeld

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 150–169

Chapter 9

Yemen's enduring resistance: youth between politics and informal mobilization

Atiaf Z. Alwazir

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 170–191

Chapter 10

Explaining the Arab uprisings: transformations in comparative perspective

Steven Heydemann

Mediterranean Politics, volume 21, issue 1 (January 2016), pp. 192–204

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Dynamics of transformation, elite change and new social mobilization in the Arab World

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a conceptual framework for a special issue of Mediterranean Politics that investigates the transformation processes inaugurated in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen in 2011 in the wake of the uprisings commonly referred to as the “Arab Spring”. It proposes that these processes should not be conceptualized as linear and centrally crafted transitions from authoritarian orders towards preconceived outcomes, but rather, as contested and open-ended transformations. These are best understood through an actor-centered approach that focuses on the choices and strategies of the ‘Politically Relevant Elite’ (PRE) and its interactions with citizens intent on exerting influence, described here as ‘Mobilized Publics’. Drawing on the results of eight research papers presented in this volume, this article argues that the PRE perceived the transformation processes as mechanisms to maximize political resources and monopolize power. The ensuing, increasingly polarized contestations hastened the cooptation and instrumentalization of mobilized publics by the PRE, thus spelling the end of their capacity to offer avenues for broad, bottom-up participation and preparing the ground for renewed top-down control in Egypt and Tunisia, and to state failure and civil war in Libya and Yemen.

Contested Transformations

The upheavals that have shaken the Arab world since December 2010, often subsumed under the rubric ‘Arab Spring’, have precipitated dynamics of change and conflict ranging from gradual or piecemeal reform to authoritarian retrenchment, deepened internal conflict and all-out civil war. In four Arab countries – Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen – the formal prime decision makers of the authoritarian regimes that had been in power for decades were forced out of office by combinations of popular movements, military defections

or coups and, with the exception of Tunisia, external involvement ranging from verbal encouragement (Egypt) to robust mediation and the threat of sanctions (Yemen) to military intervention (Libya). As a result, these four countries have been in the throes of drawn-out transformation processes. While the trajectories of these transformations have taken distinct forms, they have all been marked by several central challenges.

First, consensus over key components and principles of the new order has remained elusive. Democratic representation, good governance and the rule of law were the declared, or at least the assumed, objectives of the transformation processes. Yet, in reality, intense struggles over power and competition for influence in elected and executive institutions have dominated the political processes. Conflicts over ostensibly incompatible values, as well as memories of past and fear of future marginalization and victimization have informed the behaviour of nearly all the actors involved in the processes and the attitudes of the public toward them. Consequently, crucial political actors have mostly failed to reach consensus on the direction, depth and speed of transformation.

Second, the countries in transformation have experienced eroding capacities for central state control, governance and policy making rather than more effective or better governance. With the demise of the old core elites, institutions of the central state lost part of their capacity to control society and provide security nationwide. They have also become focal points of contention in the struggle over power, influence and access to resources. Fierce competition over the control of state institutions has prevented the consensus necessary to reform them, as actors have feared rivals exploiting such reforms to impose their own domination. These struggles also left precious little capacity and interest for policy making among decision makers and obliterated common ground for pragmatic co-operation between them. This issue has been most salient in the

security sector. Political violence shook Tunisia and Egypt in 2012 and 2013 and has remained a serious threat in both countries. The capacity of Libyan and Yemeni state institutions to control militarized non-state actors appeared all but non-existent, and in late 2014 the territorial integrity of both countries remained at stake.

Third, the emerging orders and the new rulers have failed to achieve broad legitimacy, so contentious politics have persisted. Against the backdrop of the 2011 uprisings, acquiring a popular mandate became an essential condition for legitimate rule. What constitutes a popular mandate and its limits remained disputed, however, with electoral success recognized as a necessary but by no means sufficient condition alone. Polarization led some segments of society to dispute the legitimacy of certain actors and to blame them for faltering governance; others despaired of the transformation altogether. To borrow an image proposed by Robert Dahl, the reservoir of legitimacy created by the 2011 popular mobilizations appeared to be constantly draining (Dahl, 1971: 124–88).¹ In response, parts of the public have remained engaged in contentious politics.² Strikes, street protests and political violence have become normal(ized) forms of political contestation. Partially formalized structures and entirely informal, local or spontaneous congregations of citizens carried out decentralized and recurrent social protests and remained an unpredictable factor that the new rulers, short on legitimacy and resources, struggled to control. Such groups also became political resources that warring camps attempted to appropriate and use against one another.

These parallels between Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen's distinct trajectories suggest that a focused and structured analysis of the four cases could yield useful insights into the dynamics of the contested transformations of authoritarian political systems initiated by the Arab Spring. They are also part of the argument for including Yemen in this volume despite its

geographical location. In addition, the internationally sponsored transition pact for Yemen, the so-called GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Initiative, constitutes a test case for an approach that has been the subject of much attention among academics and policy makers and has been proposed as a model for conflict resolution in other countries in the region.³

The contributions in this volume examine the transformation processes in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen between early 2011 and late 2014. The overall objective is to identify the crucial actors and understand the dynamics behind the cycles of contestation that shaped these processes and led to a significant variety of preliminary outcomes ranging from state failure, civil war and de facto partition (Yemen and Libya) to authoritarian restoration (Egypt) and precarious consensus on a more participatory and liberal order (Tunisia). With regard to Tunisia and Egypt, the objective is also to determine the extent to which these preliminary outcomes offer prospects for a sustainable balance among meaningful participation, effective governance and stability.

An Actor-Centred Approach to Understanding Transformation

As noted by Pace and Cavatorta (2012: 127), the events of 2011 initiated a process of 'soul-searching' among scholars of the region.⁴ Democratization theory, long out of favour due to the apparent failure of economic and political liberalization to generate momentum towards democratic rule in many parts of the world, appeared poised for a revival. Debates arose over a possible fourth or fifth wave of democratization (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Szmolka, 2012, 2014). Other scholars advanced more cautious narratives under the label of post-democratization (Valbjørn, 2012, 2014). In contrast, the notion of authoritarian resilience (Brumberg, 2002; Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004; Heydemann, 2007) appeared ripe for major revision.

Beyond proposing explanations for the popular uprisings and the ousting of authoritarian rulers – which at the time of writing still constitute the bulk of the academic literature concerned with the Arab Spring – the various paradigms also imply predictions for the ensuing transformations. Advocates of a post-democratization perspective draw attention to the multi-dimensional re-politicization of Arab societies (Valbjørn, 2012) and the emergence of a vibrant civil society (Khatib, 2013) as indications that a return to stable authoritarianism is unlikely. According to Lynch (2014: 16), ‘the emergence of turbulent, contentious societies may ultimately be more important than who sits in the presidential office’. Authors committed to the democratization and good governance discourse prevalent in international institutions and elsewhere presume a basic consensus around such principles among all local actors involved and thus present inventories of ‘achievements’ (and remaining challenges) along the path of political transition mostly focused on institutional processes (Yahya et al., 2013; Mabrouk & Hausheer, 2014).

At the same time, chaotic processes and the partial return of authoritarian practices have buoyed sceptics who view the post-2011 developments as yet another, if particularly dramatic, episode in the process of authoritarian learning (Heydemann & Leenders, 2011). Pessimistic views on the transformation processes have also been presented through structuralist interpretations that emphasize the unfavourable conditions for democratization (Brownlee et al., 2013). The initial electoral successes of Islamist parties triggered renewed speculation about an alleged incompatibility between democracy and Islamic culture (Jones, 2013) and predictions of hybrid regimes as the best possible outcome (Schmitter, 2012; Stepan & Linz, 2013). Some scholars have offered interpretations connecting structural factors (such as economic conditions and levels of education) as well as the agency of political actors (e.g. their capacity for ideological consensus), but assume that resources and actors’ orientations remain

stable throughout the process and that outcomes are a function of the interplay of these factors (Ishay, 2013).

In contrast, the inquiries assembled in this volume start from the premise that the developments that have unfolded in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen since 2011 cannot be characterized as linear, centrally crafted and steered transitions from authoritarian orders towards specific, preconceived outcomes. Rather, they approach these developments as ‘dynamic, ambivalent, and open-ended processes of transformation’ (Bouziane et al., 2013: 2) driven by actors who negotiate, struggle and at times violently fight over rules of governance and representation as well as norms and values, all of which serve as means or political resources potentially influencing the trajectory of the transformation.⁵ Therefore, the authors do not intend to measure the dynamics at play against benchmarks of institutional transformation, nor do they strive to identify causal links between structural factors and preliminary outcomes. Rather, legacies and structural conditions are seen as yet another set of political resources or as part of ‘a good or a bad “hand” to play in the political struggle over new institutions’ (Ahmed & Capoccia, 2014: 9). Institutional arrangements, such as new constitutions, should therefore be seen as the expression of specific balances of power as evolved during the transformation process.⁶ To understand how they are created, Ahmed and Capoccia (2014: 9) propose ‘focus[ing] on the strategic interaction of key actors in fighting over institutional innovations’.

Accordingly, the research presented in this volume takes an actor-centred approach in analysing the dynamics of political contestation and co-operation between the key actors that have been driving the political struggles in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen. This approach is based on the central assumption that an analytical focus on the strategies, choices and performances of those actors who wield significant influence over the political process - referred to here as

the politically relevant elite (PRE) – as well as the evolving relations between them can identify the key dynamics at work in the four cases discussed here. At the same time, consideration is given to the criticism of many studies on political transformation: the ‘over-emphasis on the role of the state, ruling elites and traditional political and civil society actors to the detriment of societal forms of unstructured mobilization and non-traditional, leaderless and horizontal social and political actors’ (Pace & Cavatorta, 2012). Hence, half of the case studies focus on what this volume refers to as mobilized publics – i.e. citizens who become active in a variety of ways in order to influence the political process. The two avenues of inquiry first intersect in discussions on how the PRE are constrained by sustained social mobilization and to what extent they engage with bottom-up participation, ignoring and suppressing it or utilizing and exploiting it. They intersect again concerning the issue of whether the extended scope of popular mobilization generates increased opportunities for participation and whether this contributes to the legitimacy and stability of the emerging political order or causes instability and conflict.

The Politically Relevant Elite

An actor-centred approach of course requires identifying the people and groups who play relevant parts in the struggle, thus affecting the transformation process. In doing so, a look at nominal positions of power – such as the presidency, leadership of the armed and security forces and leadership of political parties – offers some information on the actors involved, but does not ascertain their relative weight. It also tends to omit actors with significant influence who do not hold nominal positions (e.g. business elites), especially as informal institutions and arrangements remain of crucial importance in the political orders analysed here. Therefore, a combination of positional, decisional, reputational and network approaches used in elite

studies can help to identify a wider array of relevant actors.⁷

In their analysis of changing power structures of Arab regimes in the early 2000s, Perthes and his colleagues (Perthes, 2004: 5) proposed the term *politically relevant elite*, defined as

those individuals, groups, and networks ... in a given country who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values (including the definition of 'national interests'), and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues.

This implies that even in the unmistakably authoritarian orders preceding the uprisings, political power was not necessarily restricted to a narrowly circumscribed core elite. Around the president or king and his immediate entourage, the model describes a significantly larger secondary elite – middle ranks of the ruling party, officers corps, representatives of large businesses and state institutions – that wields influence on the centre and trades loyalty for shares of resources and local or sectoral franchises of power. A tertiary elite – clerics, representatives of interest groups, prominent journalists and so on – may at times or in regard to certain issues of national relevance have the power to set and influence agendas.

In such an environment, distribution of power may vary between actors in different phases and manifestations of the regime, and the influence and bargaining power of individual actors are likely to wax and wane in response to changes in the economic order, challenges in the areas of security and foreign policy, the type of opposition the regime encounters and so on.⁸ In addition, actors in the secondary and tertiary elite often compete with each other for favours from the centre and for control over resources and institutions that allow them to consolidate and expand their positions of power. As Migdal points out, it often remains ambiguous to what extent the core elite of an authoritarian regime is indeed in control, or rather rests its power on mediation between

actors who constitute semi-autonomous centres of power and may only be subdued at significant cost. Such a power structure can be described using the 'metaphor of the web ... of multiple rule-making loci, and the hidden and open conflicts between these multiple centres seeking to exercise domination' (Migdal, 2001: 36).⁹

The contributions in this volume start from this understanding of the PRE. Thus, it is assumed that in the four countries under consideration, the ousting of the formal prime decision maker provided actors located in the second layer of the PRE with far greater autonomy and control over resources of power than they previously wielded. The opening up of the political sphere also allowed players formerly excluded from the three elite circles, or admitted only in a very restricted fashion, as well as some entirely new actors to enter the political arena. The transformation processes were perceived by these actors as opportunities to establish a new balance of power and lay down rules of the game to ensure their dominant (or improved) position.

Consequently, all the actors involved scrambled to control as many resources as they could mobilize in the struggle for domination. The formation of coalitions between actors of similar backgrounds and orientations stood as an obvious means to this end. That said, heterogeneous, albeit sometimes temporary, alliances between actors who had little in common or were former adversaries (e.g. the military and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes in Tunisia) offered an opportunity to pool complementary resources (e.g. the capacity for mass mobilization with support from segments of the state bureaucracy or the security apparatus), thus making the combined power of the alliance more than the sum of its component parts.¹⁰ As a consequence, actors who do not wield direct influence over decision-making processes and may not be classified as elite in the sociological sense have at times been included in alliances with the PRE as long as they offered valuable resources that the PRE could not

access without them. For instance, the Salafist Nour Party's endorsement of the July 2013 coup in Egypt and the candidacy of General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi furnished the new political order with a degree of Islamic legitimacy.

PRE, Civil Society and Mobilized Publics

As many observers have noted, a significant part of the protesters who took to the streets in 2011 did not restrict their ambition to the overthrow of a detested dictator or regime, but kept pushing for significant changes in the ways their societies were ruled or, as Challand (2013: 178) puts it, sought to 'reclaim and re-appropriate ... the process by which a given community defines the priority and modalities of functioning between the three main sources of power: political, economic and normative'. Consequently, in the period that followed the initial wave of protest, the PRE encountered recurrent cycles of contentious action that challenged its monopoly over the formal transformation processes and concrete policy decisions. As the 2011 uprisings consecrated the inherent legitimacy of such manifestations of the popular will, the PRE initially faced difficulties in dismissing or repressing such challenges.¹¹

While the heuristic model of the PRE acknowledges the potential of leaders of mass movements or prominent representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) to become part of the PRE (Perthes, 2004: 5; see also Abdelnasser's application of the model for Egypt, in *ibid.*: 120), it does not foresee or conceptualize sustained influence from broader parts of society through contentious action. This is an omission it shares with the (likewise elite-centred) models for transition from authoritarian rule forged in response to the largely peaceful transfers of power from authoritarian to democratic rulers in southern Europe and Latin America since the mid-1970s. While these approaches recognize the importance of a popular upsurge in initiating a transition, their authors expected and even required such forms of mobilization to be 'always ephemeral'

(O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 55–56), as they were considered a liability with the potential to generate radicalization and jeopardize the sought-after transfer of power to institutionalized political parties and the establishment of a liberal democratic order (Przeworski, 1986; Huntington, 1991).

In contrast, after 1989, a 'lively and independent civil society', credited with initiating the demise of Eastern Europe's communist dictatorships (Arato, 1981), was reassessed as 'invaluable ... at all stages of the democratization process' (Linz & Stepan, 1996: 9) and as foundational for the 'conditions of liberty' (Gellner, 1994). Yet the 'perennial liberal fear of an "over-mobilized" society' (Baker, 2002: 95) remained present in these approaches and, as Della Porta (2013: 130) notes, the new theoretical appraisal was, at least initially, not matched with significant empirical research on the ambiguous reality of civil society involvement in the post-1989 transformation processes. The correlation between evolving civil societies and the prospects for democratization also became an important topic in the Arab world during the 1990s. In this context, a significant part of the debate focused on the question of whether the strong support for Islamist movements and organizations observed in many Arab countries should be considered as or might evolve into a specific expression of civil society (see, for instance, Norton, 1994, 1996) or whether this category should be restricted to actors professing liberal values.

Research concerned with civil society groups on the one hand often focused on quantitative criteria (number of and membership in registered associations) and legal frameworks (regulating the licensing of associations and access to governance procedures) to make pronouncements about the strength of civil society, and hence the prospects for democratization, in a given country or region. On the other hand, those studies that looked at civil society from this volume's angle – namely, the capacity to exert influence on the political process –

mostly arrived at discouraging conclusions, dismissing the existing associational structures as 'more an instrument of state social control than a mechanism of collective empowerment' (Wiktorowicz, 2000: 43) that would further de-politicization rather than encourage resistance (Bishara, 2011; Langohr, 2004). First evaluations of the post-2011 developments also mostly drew on quantitative criteria as 'positive sign[s] for the potential to widen both formal and informal participation in the region' (Khatib, 2013) without further investigating whether and how these potentials translated into actual citizen participation.

Yet, as many observers have noted (e.g. Cavatorta, 2012; Beinin, 2014; Bayat, 2014), the 2011 uprisings were initiated neither by Islamists nor by liberal CSOs, nor did these groups assume leadership of the citizens who took to the streets in the course of the uprisings. Despite the partial and in some cases temporary removal of obstacles to the establishment and work of political parties and CSOs that followed, a significant part of these 'activated citizens' (Cavatorta, 2012: 78) continued to challenge the PRE outside and beyond such formal channels of representation, clearly not thinking that their immediate influence on and intervention in the political process should be ephemeral. Thus it appears appropriate to extend to the transformation period under discussion here Cavatorta's (2012: 80) proposition that 'the Arab Spring calls for a profound rethinking of the definition, normative conceptualization and concrete application of the term [civil society]'.

As a consequence, the original PRE model is complemented here by the category of mobilized publics, which is significantly broader than 'civil society' but at the same time more specific. Mobilized publics should be understood here to include any collective of citizens that becomes active and mobilizes others to do so with the explicit objective of exerting immediate influence on the political process. Describing these actors as 'publics'

denotes their defining characteristic: namely, a mode of operation predominantly geared towards obtaining broad support, and hence leverage, for their claims and agendas through representation in the public sphere.

Thus the category covers an array of collectives that includes, among others, fully institutionalized associations, impromptu and partly or entirely non-formal social movements, as well as interest groups and political parties. Including political parties indicates that the PRE and mobilized publics often overlap. Groups and individuals that are part of mobilized publics frequently seek out allies within the PRE to leverage their influence, and some (such as leaders of mass movements) might accumulate enough resources to become part of the PRE themselves. PRE actors in turn attempt to use (or even create) mobilized publics to generate evidence of popular legitimacy for themselves and their agendas (or counter and undermine that of rivals) and as a resource in intra-PRE struggles for influence. One of the challenges of investigating mobilized publics therefore lies in assessing the degree to which they retain autonomous agency (which may include the decision to accept certain PRE actors as allies or align with their agendas) and where agency gives way to co-optation, instrumentalization and top-down conformity. This is obviously not only an analytical, but also a political challenge of the real world, as the association of mobilized publics with particular actors of the PRE is liable to compromise their credibility by nurturing suspicion of ulterior (e.g. partisan) motives and restrict their ability to obtain broad support, in particular in environments dominated by polarization and identity politics.

The definition of mobilized publics proposed here excludes groups that adopt violent means and armed struggle as their main mode of operation, that is, those that pursue their objectives through imposition by force rather than persuasion. This limitation does not ignore that contentious action by mobilized publics might lead to

violence (in particular when met with repression), that activists adopt forms of contention that opponents construe as violent or engage in acts of violence to further what they view as a broader strategy of political persuasion, or that armed actors might exert considerable influence over the transformation process. It should also not be construed as a value judgement on the legitimacy of the use of violence or armed struggle. Rather, the assumption is that imposition by force represents an entirely different mode of action, with its own dynamics, and that groups adopting it as their main mode of action constitute a distinct category of actors fundamentally different from the mobilized citizens examined here. They should therefore be investigated separately.

In sum, the heuristic model of the PRE is adapted in this volume for three purposes: to account for more fundamental and abrupt changes between the PRE and newly emerging forces, be they counter-elites or mobilized publics during times of transformative change; to focus on changing power relations between different segments within and between elite circles; and to draw attention to the dynamics between mobilized publics and segments of the PRE.

Research Questions and Approaches

Drawing on the above observations, the following three questions lie at the centre of the individual contributions:

Who are the actors critically influencing the transformation process?

How have the dynamics between critical actors evolved at the level of the PRE, the mobilized publics and between these two levels?

What impacts have these dynamics had on the emerging political orders?

All of the contributions are based on extensive fieldwork conducted primarily during 2013–14 – in Libya and Yemen under increasingly difficult security conditions – and predominantly employing qualitative research methods (such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews and analysis of official documents

and speeches) to map a wide range of actors and trace dynamics between them. They draw on a variety of tools from different strands of theory, but above all, elite studies and social movement theory. The following priorities drove the research.

The contributions concerning the PRE analyse the processes of bargaining for power that followed the events of 2010–11 in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen with a focus on the key actors that participated in the formal, institutional transformation process as well as in renegotiating the underlying power balance. They investigate the visions these actors had, the strategies they have pursued and the resources they have mobilized to these ends, as well as their various alliances and confrontations in the process. Rather than generating snapshots of power relations or balance sheets of achievements and shortcomings, the objective is to identify the dynamics of contestation that evolved between the key actors and to trace the trajectories that led to specific choices, alliances and elite configurations.

To this end, an analysis examining crucial turning points in the transformation processes appeared most promising, as the calculations and priorities of actors are likely to become most apparent at moments when critical decisions can no longer be avoided and priorities and alliances are reassessed. The expectation was that analysis of the underlying rationale of actors' behaviours and strategies would reveal the power dynamics driving the transformations and explain the conditions and calculations facilitating or obstructing emerging elite bargains.¹² Where such a bargain occurred, the analysis would assess the stability of the power balance that evolved as well as the extent to which it facilitated further transformation towards a more inclusive and legitimate political order.

The contributions concerned with mobilized publics focus on the types of mobilization and collective action initiated by citizens acting with autonomous agency. As noted, the initial opening of the public sphere in 2011

and the weakening of central authority and control resulted in a significant expansion and diversification of collective contentious action. These contributions look at actors ranging from institutionalized advocacy groups and CSOs to entirely informal movements and nascent political parties. They trace these mobilized publics' trajectories – again involving crucial turning points – as they seek to build their capacity and support bases and interact with the PRE, combining ethnographic approaches with some of the tools developed in the study of social movements, such as political opportunity structures, resource mobilization, framing strategies and network analysis (for overviews of the various approaches, see McAdam et al., 1996; Opp, 2009).

Examining a wide selection of different modes of contentious action and mobilization that citizens use to intervene in political processes and governance in the four countries under scrutiny offers valuable insight into the varied forms and relevance that conventional and non-conventional forms of participation have assumed in post-2011 Arab transformation countries. Furthermore, the ways in which mobilized publics and the PRE engaged with each other also permit more general conclusions as to whether bottom-up mobilizations have contributed to making the new political orders more inclusive, legitimate and capable of processing conflict or, to the contrary, have provided fuel or triggers for exclusion, conflict and repression.

Research Results

Nearly four years into the four transformation processes, substantial change has occurred in the composition of actors involved in political decision making and agenda setting and in relations between them. The extent of these changes covers the wholesale removal of core PRE (as in Libya) to the entry of new major players and dramatic advances by formerly marginalized or outlawed groups in the political process (as in Tunisia and Egypt). In Yemen, the power-sharing deal between different segments of the old PRE and the traditional opposition

initially provided a degree of continuity, but in autumn 2014 Ansarullah (the Houthi movement) imposed itself by force of arms, ousting parts of the old PRE and seeking agreements with others, including the former president.

Parties and actors propagating variations of political Islam initially achieved significant popular support in competitive elections in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and hence solid representation in transition governments and constituent assemblies. The power-sharing arrangement in Yemen likewise gave the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Islah party a say in government. These Islamist groups therefore appeared well positioned to exert significant leverage over the transformation processes that were to follow.

At the same time, a significant number of actors who had been involved with the old regimes as beneficiaries or in official capacities managed to retain or reclaim significant footholds within the PRE. The most obvious example is Egypt, where the leadership stemming from the 2013 coup reinstated a number of prominent actors from the Mubarak era in pursuit of a new authoritarian elite bargain under the vanguard of the military. In Tunisia, Nidaa Tounes succeeded in providing a platform resurrecting central tenets of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's rule, in particular state-enforced secularism, while simultaneously distancing itself from the abuses of the regime and, in contrast to Egypt, allowing for the continued inclusion of forces of political Islam. Even in Libya, realignments of the political alliances have increasingly worked towards the return of some prominent figures of the Qadhafi regime in parts of the country. Although the GCC road map for Yemen explicitly sidelined then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, it preserved a role for his political camp and allowed his family continued influence and power, in particular in the military.

With the partial exception of Yemen, the return to positions of power or persistence of influential elite

segments in such positions did not occur as the result of a preconceived strategy engineered by remnants and partisans of the old regime to roll back the 2011 uprisings. Rather, the intense polarization that ensued when the new arrivals to the PRE attempted to convert their apparent leverage into real influence and control engendered the creation of heterogeneous political alliances against them. For these initially defensive coalitions, the support of the core constituencies of the former regimes – public sector employees, including but not restricted to the security sector, as well as business communities – was an extremely valuable political resource. Whether for reasons of vested interest (fear for positions and privileges), social prejudice (against newcomers with different behavioural and cultural codes) or ideological antagonism, these constituencies remained mostly hostile towards the new arrivals to the PRE. Political actors who could plausibly be identified with positive aspects of the old order without being too obviously tainted by its abuses were attractive for these constituencies. In addition, their position within the emerging political landscape received added boosts as populations increasingly began to tire of drawn-out and chaotic processes that failed to bring them tangible benefits.

With regard to the evolving balances of power, political resources clearly mattered more than the procedural frameworks of the transformations. Thus, in the four cases analysed here, institutional designs were largely the outcome of power politics rather than formative of these outcomes as the literature concerned with constitutional and institutional ‘engineering’ assumed they would be (Diamond, 1999; Von Beyme, 2001; Reynolds, 2011) and as expected by external actors promoting democratization. The cases also demonstrate that formal transformation processes, such as the drafting of new constitutions, are not necessarily incompatible with nor do they preclude significant levels of political violence. Actual violence – along with explicit and implicit threats and stoking fears of impending

violence – was used by an array of political actors as a political resource to gain leverage. Rather than leading to the collapse of the transformation processes, such high-risk strategies changed dynamics in sometimes paradoxical ways. In Egypt, the 2013 military coup initiated what could be described as a reset of the formal transformation process, which paved the way to authoritarian restoration. In Libya, a formal transformation process continued to coincide for a significant period of time with widespread violence evolving into civil war. Political violence unlocked the blocked constitutional process in Tunisia, as the threat of escalation compelled the parties to compromise. In Yemen, Ansarullah forcibly entered the capital and took over state institutions but initially remained committed to the terms of the GCC Initiative, at least on a rhetorical level, aiming to rectify what it considered to be fatal flaws in its implementation.

Alleged influence by external actors on domestic power dynamics has loomed large in domestic discourses and contributed to heightened suspicions about hidden agendas and resources. In reality, however, the struggle for power has been driven first and foremost by domestic actors, who requested and accepted foreign support in pursuit of their own interests and agendas. Above all, these external actors ultimately failed to steer the process according to their objectives. Even in Yemen, where they intervened most consistently and where dependency on external aid and a credible threat of international sanctions provided significant leverage to them, they were not able to determine outcomes. In addition, although the external provision of resources for domestic actors bent on confrontation certainly contributed to the drastic deterioration in the security situation in Libya and to the 2013 coup in Egypt, the slide in that direction was initiated and driven by local actors.

The cases discussed here also do not support the notion that the ‘tyranny of starting conditions’ (Diamond

et al., 2014) ties the outcome of 'noncooperative transformation processes' (McFaul, 2002) to the distribution of political resources in a linear, path-dependent relationship. Resources matter, but they are not fixed assets, and the effectiveness of their use depends on how and by whom they are deployed and at what point within the broader dynamics of contention. Repressive tactics, including lethal violence against opponents, undermined the Egyptian military's rule in late 2011, but restored its claim to leadership in 2013. Street mobilizations were an asset for Ennahda in Tunisia in 2011, but became a liability further down the road. Electoral success created momentum for Libyan actors in 2012, but in 2014 it did not empower the winners to form a government with a national reach. External backing allowed Yemen's new president to whittle down parts of the entrenched networks of the Saleh faction in the early phases of the transformation, but was of no help against Ansarullah's advance in mid-2014.

Despite the attention paid to ideological conflict, in particular concerning the role of political Islam in Tunisia and Egypt,¹³ ideological positions have turned out to be an equally insufficient predictor of the behaviour of actors, formation of alliances and course of transformations. In Egypt after the July 2013 coup, many self-styled liberals had no qualms about co-operating with the Nour Party (which is much more ideologically rigid and socially conservative than the Muslim Brotherhood) and endorsing arbitrary arrests and extra-legal killings. In early 2014 in Tunisia, the Islamist Ennahda party endorsed a constitution that won wide praise for its liberal content and found enough commonalities with its supposed ideological arch-enemy, Nidaa Tounes, to consider a power-sharing deal. Conversely, in Libya and Yemen, where the relationship of religion and politics appeared much less controversial among most actors at the outset of the transformation, sectarian and ideological differences emerged as a

result of power politics and have been deployed in an obviously instrumental fashion. In Libya, the power struggle between the emerging political blocs has been increasingly construed as part of the region-wide struggle between supporters and opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Yemen, the initial empowerment of the Islah party and later the ascent of Ansarullah prompted supporters and opponents of the respective groups to adopt an increasingly sectarian discourse.

It is tempting to describe such ideological inconsistencies and adaptations as expressions of opportunism and cynical power politics by the actors involved, but alternatively they might actually suggest that the interactions experienced transform the actors themselves. As noted, some of the political blocs that came to define post-uprising politics only coalesced around an ideological platform in response to specific threats and opportunities emerging over the course of the transformation process. Even groups that entered the process as apparently coherent entities have been deeply affected. Thus, the trajectory of Ennahda may be described as the evolution of an anti-system movement with social-revolutionary aspects into a conservative state party. Even before the ruthless crackdown against the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood that began in July 2013, major defections and the rise of the Salafist parties challenged its claim to ideological hegemony. Indeed, tactical alliances within the PRE have been a decisive factor influencing the trajectories of transformation, but they have also been products of the trajectories themselves. Alliances struck in response to a specific balance of power and dynamics of contestation may hold the possibility of consolidating into networks of strategic co-operation and evolving into key components of new or re-established elite bargains.

In Egypt and Tunisia, there were clear signs that strong coalitions were forming around the priority of restoring state authority and fending off challenges to the existing social order, including the networks of privilege

that had thrived in the shadow of the anciens régimes. It remains doubtful, however, whether the emerging elite bargains in Tunisia and Egypt will usher in stable and legitimate orders. Technocratic rule, in Egypt augmented with a heavy dose of authoritarianism, may generate a modicum of legitimacy and hence support among populations weary of turmoil and dysfunctional governance. Yet a reproduction in Egypt of the alliances between privileged business actors and the military (with a much more prominent role than before 2011) and the restoration of networks of privilege connecting the political, business and administrative sectors in Tunisia are unlikely to yield legitimacy, and hence stability, in the medium to long term. Bound by the rationale of shared interest, such coalitions will be inherently incapable of uprooting clientelist networks. At the same time, in both Egypt and Tunisia, there was a clear tendency (albeit to very different degrees) to restrict the scope for non-formalized participation and contentious action. Securitization of public spaces, restrictions on associations, the lack of reform of state institutions (in particular the security sector), the absence of meaningful transitional justice and the persistence of patronage networks all suggested that the PRE would continue to perceive demands for participation and transparency as threats to the social and political order, rather than as opportunities to increase its legitimacy and therefore overall stability.

In Libya and Yemen, the confrontational strategies of the PRE have driven both countries to the brink of state failure and de facto partition. Armed conflict rather than institutional processes ultimately emerged to determine realities. In Libya, old and new elites tried to control cities, regions and critical infrastructure and thus grab a share of the country's wealth rather than coalescing around political agendas or engaging in building a new political order. In Yemen, the GCC-initiated transformation process was severely undermined by the (traditional) lack of state control, an upsurge in violence by groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and a reinvigorated

drive by militant movements, such as Ansarullah, to realize their demands through the barrel of a gun after being sidelined in the transformation process.

Mobilized publics have persistently rallied to influence the transformations and challenge the exclusive control of elite actors over these processes, but the results have been limited and ambiguous in all four countries. As Bayat (2013: 597) notes, the 'revolutionaries' of 2011 had no intention of taking over and radically transforming political and state institutions, but simply aimed to end the abuses by the old political elites and compel the new elites to initiate substantive reforms. Few of them attempted to take part in the formal transformation processes as active participants, and apart from those who joined transitional governments or constituent assemblies or went to work in a handful of already well-established CSOs, most were stymied. Among the new parties founded by those who participated in the revolution, only those linked to well-entrenched organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia and the Salafis in Egypt, gained significant representation in transition parliaments and other transitional bodies. Hierarchies of existing parties often mirrored the authoritarian environment that they had operated in for decades, thus blocking the rise of newly entering reform forces.

The few independent activists and civil society representatives directly involved in the formal transformation processes had very limited influence on deliberations. Only in Yemen were they able to push through progressive reform proposals, in the National Dialogue Conference. However, the international actors that had championed and strongly supported a broad-based dialogue later declined to put pressure on a government deemed a strategic ally in the so-called War on Terror to implement the assembly's reform agenda. In addition, protest and lobbying campaigns influenced public debate and, through it, the deliberations in the formal transition bodies to a certain extent in Tunisia and

to a lesser degree in Egypt. Yet such influence remained restricted to specific policy fields (e.g. the legal status of women) to the exclusion of others (such as social and economic issues) and did not mount serious challenges to the PRE's control over the political agenda. In some cases, they were able to induce changes (even if minimal and mostly local) in political culture through their actions, such as challenging traditional social hierarchies (e.g. in Yemen and Libya).

Many accounts blame this lack of leverage on the 'intrinsic incoherence and diversity' (Durac, 2015: 241) of the protest movements or their lack of structure and organization (Abdelrahman, 2013). The cases discussed in this volume appear to tell a slightly different story. Even informal movements often proved adept at organizing their activism in an enduring fashion under adverse circumstances and at times formed alliances and far-flung networks to compensate for their lack of resources. What most limited their capacity to exert influence were the exclusionary attitudes and confrontational strategies of the major PRE actors in their attempts to maximize influence over the political process. As polarization surged, the public sphere was converted into a battleground for hostile encounters between seemingly incompatible sets of political objectives and social values. Social media, which had facilitated broad solidarity and rapid mobilization during the initial uprisings, turned out to be an equally effective amplifier of mutual fear and hostile attitudes. Little room and attention was left for those advocating the issues that had motivated many citizens to protest in the first place (e.g. social and economic policies). Furthermore, as more and more issues got drawn into the vortex of partisan polarization, the line between issue-based activism and partisanship became increasingly blurred, raising questions about the actual meaning of the popular support activists managed to generate. For instance, whether the broad mobilization during 2012 against introducing the principle of complementarity (as opposed to equality) between men and women in the

new Tunisian constitution was read as an expression of broad popular support for liberal values or as a partisan mobilization launched by the opponents of Ennahda depended to a large extent on the position of the observer vis-à-vis the larger political conflict. Since broad mobilization by definition implies a heterogeneous community of supporters and participants, evidence could easily be found for both.

Paradoxically, in three out of the four cases, it was precisely at the apex of polarization, with the PRE paralysed by deep division and the transformation processes on the verge of breakdown, that mobilized publics gained renewed relevance. In summer 2013, the Egyptian Tamarod (Rebellion) movement was instrumental in generating the wave of public protest that tilted the balance of power against President Mohammed Mursi.¹⁴ Against the backdrop of the July coup in Egypt, in Tunisia, the Tunisian General Labour Union (Union générale tunisienne du travail), backed by large demonstrations, took the lead in getting the warring political camps to compromise. In Libya, a popular movement against militia rule emerged as the political process ground to a halt, while the inability of the central government to control large parts of the country allowed mobilized publics to organize locally and push the demands of marginalized groups and areas, a trend also observed in Yemen.

However, as they stepped into the void, a significant part of these mobilized publics assumed a partisan character and disintegrated or fractured as a result. Those that chose alignment with the PRE quickly lost their autonomy, in particular where and when rising levels of violence furthered discourses that demanded unquestioning loyalty to those supposedly leading the fight against an existential threat (Simmel, 1955). Although they might still have been able to reach social milieus that formal parties could not, and thus perform a valuable service for which they could demand returns, their capacity and even will to challenge the political

leadership all but disappeared. Those who refused to choose sides and continued to challenge the PRE often found themselves isolated from or even vilified by a public rallying behind antagonistic PRE protagonists.

Conversely, political movements, among them the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Nidaa Tounes (during the autumn 2013 protests) and even the militant Ansarullah in Yemen (in 2014), integrated into their repertoire of political contestation popular mobilizations that mimicked the outward appearance of the 2011 uprisings. Also, as such actors were not in full control of their supporters, the danger existed that cycles of mobilization and counter-mobilization might lead to political violence and civil strife, providing pretexts for violent crackdowns, as occurred in Egypt in 2013 and in other cases, such as Bahrain in 2011 (Wimmen, 2014). Thus, rather than being forged into a political force for change (Bishara, 2011), the momentum of the 2011 uprisings was instead appropriated by old and new PRE actors that have increasingly mastered new forms and tools of mobilization and in this way voided forms of political expression with participatory and emancipatory potential.

There remain residual groups of activists who have continued to develop their skills and sustain the social memory of resistance. It is conceivable that in the long run they will become part of an evolutionary build-up towards effective repertoires of activism and leaderships that constitute a more serious challenge for the PRE in the next cycles of contention. The more imminent result of disappointed expectations, fruitless engagement and deteriorating living conditions, however, might well be that significant parts of society translate the lost hope of 2011 into rejection of any involvement in the public arena or into support for populist, chauvinist or radical tendencies.

Notes

1. Using a more recent conceptualization of political legitimacy developed in governance studies, it may be said that neither the input side of the process (participation of the governed through elections and

consultations) nor the throughput side (the procedures shaping the transformation) nor the output side (governance and service provision) has found broad acceptance (See, for example, Schmidt, 2013: 2–22).

2. Contentious politics is defined here as making claims on government and other actors in society through means of collective action; see Tilly and Tarrow (2007).

3. As Durac (2012) argued in *Mediterranean Politics*, the persistence of power networks established by the Saleh family in Yemen also makes the country of ongoing relevance to the literature on authoritarian resilience.

4. For an overview of the literature up to 2013, see Weipert-Fenner (2014).

5. The term *political resource* is used here in the broad sense proposed by Dahl (1961: 226) as ‘anything that can be used to sway the specific choices or strategies of another individual’.

6. In a recent debate, Francis Fukuyama noted that paying ‘too much attention to the formal rules obscures the fact that things are so fluid in these early democracies that everything really depends on the ability of the underlying social groups to mobilize and to get their way’ (Diamond et al., 2014: 97).

7. For an overview of the terminology and approaches of elite studies, see Knoke (1993: 23–45).

8. Cf. the graph in Perthes (2004: 180) that illustrates Werenfels’ application of the model to Algeria.

9. Egypt under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak is a frequent reference in Migdal’s work.

10. This passage draws on the concept of strategic groups, which has been proposed by German development sociologists as a conceptual framework for the analysis of societies undergoing change. Accordingly, actors with different but complementary interests pool their resources to maximize their leverage over the ‘dominance system of society’. Such alliances have the potential to stabilize and evolve into long-term strategic partnerships (Evers & Schiel, 1988; Berner, 1995).
11. To give but one example, the repression of protests in Egypt in the autumn of 2011 was widely perceived as illegitimate and thus hastened the formal handover of power from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to a civilian government.
12. Elite bargain is understood here as ‘the particular way in which the elite agrees among itself and organises support around ... a common understanding about the “rules of the game”, especially concerning property rights, law enforcement and access to resources’ (Hesselbein, 2011: 1).
13. For an overview of the Arab debate, see Kanie (2014).
14. Tamarod serves as a case in point for the ambiguous character that mobilized publics can assume and their vulnerability to penetration and appropriation by the PRE. Many reports have documented the role of the military and the Egyptian business elite in launching, funding and facilitating Tamarod. This, however, does not detract from the

autonomous agency of the vast and heterogeneous cross-section of initiatives and citizens that eventually joined the movement, including many with 'revolutionary' credentials dating back to 2011 and before. For contrasting perspectives on Tamarod compare Dzenis (2013) and Frenkel & Atef (2014).

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Managing change: how Egypt's military leadership shaped the transformation

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ABSTRACT

Egypt's military has been the real winner of the country's political transformation. It was not only successful in preserving the overall power structure, which was challenged by young revolutionaries and Islamist opposition between 2011 and 2013. It also expanded its power within the political relevant elite. The article argues that the gradual approach chosen by the Generals in managing change as well as their ability to maintain a cohesive corporate structure and act therefore as a strong institutional player explain this outcome. However the military's dominance will hinder socio-economic progress and makes the political order unsustainable over the long run.

For Egypt's politically relevant elite (PRE), the mass demonstrations that began on 25 January 2011 came as a surprise. In particular, the core elite surrounding President Hosni Mubarak was paralysed in the face of hundreds of thousands of mostly young Egyptians who occupied streets and squares all over the country.¹ Immediately after the outbreak of the upheaval, the composition of the core elite changed dramatically. With the collapse of the presidential centre of power and the ruling party, only the military leadership, institutionalized in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), remained.² To preserve their own interests, the generals had to leave their comfort zone as political veto players working behind the scenes, a position they had held under Mubarak (Albrecht & Bishara, 2011: 17), and take direct political responsibility. Thus, over the following four years, the SCAF became the 'manager' of Egypt's transformation. Yet the SCAF by no means had unlimited authority to steer the political process. Rather, its

members had to take into consideration the disruptive power of sustained street protests as well as organized political forces, first and foremost the Muslim Brotherhood. In addition, they could not ignore Egypt's economic problems and the country's external dependency following from them.

What did the generals want? As many previous studies have pointed out, the Egyptian military's main interest was securing, if not increasing, its political autonomy, as well as preserving its considerable economic empire (Sayigh, 2012; Abul-Magd, 2014; Albrecht, 2013). In addition to these particular interests, however, the SCAF had to keep the stability of the nation-state in mind. A state within a state cannot exist without a state, a simple fact of which the generals were aware.

Against the background of the military leaders' interests, the analysis here focuses on the question of how SCAF tried to shape the transformation process. Although the analysis takes into account how the military reacted to street protests and tried to use them to legitimize its actions, the main focus is on how the military tried to affect political decision making and to defend its dominant position within Egypt's core elite. This is done by tracing the decision-making process between January 2011 and September 2014 primarily through qualitative interviews with politicians, bureaucrats and members of research institutes and non-governmental organizations conducted during several field visits to Egypt as well as analysis of primary and secondary sources, such as constitutional texts, news articles and think tank publications.

The analysis identifies three phases in Egypt's transformation, each initiated by distinct turning points: the first phase began with the 25 January uprising, which was followed by Mubarak's ousting two weeks later. The main focus for this period is the issue of how military leaders channelled revolutionary demands into a structured process of political transformation. The

second phase began with the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliamentary elections of late 2011 and early 2012 and comprises the SCAF's attempt to reach a power-sharing arrangement with the moderate Islamists. The analysis centres on how this arrangement came into being and why it ultimately failed. The third phase began with the July 2013 military coup. The decisive issue during this phase concerns the extent to which the military, or its leadership, lost its role as an autonomous player within the core elite to a new presidential power centre under former military chief Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

The generals' reaction to 25 January 2011

Dominating the core elite

The composition of Egypt's core elite was fundamentally shaken a week after the outbreak of unprecedented mass protests in all the major cities. In a desperate move to avert a total loss of power, President Mubarak scrapped his plan to install his son Gamal as his successor. Instead, he appointed as vice president Omar Suleiman, his closest confidant and the powerful and internationally well-connected chief of the General Intelligence Service. In the same breath, the highly unpopular, private sector-oriented cabinet under prime minister Ahmed Nazif was dissolved and a new one formed under Ahmed Shafiq, a former air force general and minister of transportation. With these moves, Mubarak disempowered the leadership of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) as well as some highly influential business families with close ties to his son. Members of both groups had constituted the core of Egypt's PRE during the last decade of Mubarak's rule together with Suleiman and the leadership of the armed forces (Abdelnasser, 2004: 118). Mubarak's manoeuvre was not, however, successful in quieting the protesters.

The mass demonstrations continued, and the organized opposition – first and foremost the Muslim Brotherhood – began calling for Mubarak's resignation.³

In fact, not only was the situation on Egypt's streets increasingly out of control, but there were also indications that the reshuffling of the PRE was taking a toll on political stability. Elite members who had been sidelined or scapegoated, such as NDP cadres and businessmen connected to Gamal Mubarak, lost interest in stabilizing the situation and shoring up the regime. An assassination attempt against Suleiman at the beginning of February 2011 can be seen as a sign of this development. The professionalism of the attack, which Suleiman nevertheless survived, indicated to many that it must have been planned within the PRE.⁴

During the street protests, the military initially remained remarkably passive, presenting itself as a neutral actor. By doing so, however, the military leadership actually took a position against Mubarak and the narrow power circle around him. When it became obvious that Mubarak would not be able to calm the protests, the army abandoned its political passivity and took political control. On 11 February 2011, president Suleiman announced that Mubarak had stepped down and that the leading military body, the SCAF, would be administering the affairs of the country. Headed by the 75-year-old minister of defence, Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, the council consisted of some 20 of the most senior officers and was a purely military body that until January 2011 had played no public role in politics. Its status was not even enshrined in the constitution.

Given the escalating situation on Egypt's streets, the generals' decision to take power came as no surprise. In the face of hundreds of thousands of protesters, and the increasingly pressing demand by important western military and economic partners, including the United States, to avoid bloodshed, a violent crackdown was not a viable option. In fact, parts of the protest movement and the organized opposition had demanded that the military step in, although the popular slogan 'the people and the army are one hand' was initially meant as a call

for nonviolence (Ketchley, 2014: 172). That the military acted to comply with the will of the people, as the SCAF proclaimed in its statements, is far from the reality. Rather, it seems, concern about the stability of the state drove its actions.

The SCAF's actions, however, indicate that the generals' takeover of the core elite must also be viewed against the backdrop of discontent within the officers' corps that had grown with its creeping marginalization within the country's power system. Egypt's military had been the power centre for several decades, beginning with the 1952 military coup and the establishment of Egypt's republican system by the Free Officers movement under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Under Mubarak's predecessor, Anwar al-Sadat, however, the civilian leadership began systematically distancing the military from direct involvement in politics (Stacher, 2012: 60). Under Mubarak, this trend took on a new dimension with the expansion of the internal security and foreign intelligence (al-Mukhabarat) apparatuses, a move obviously intended to counterbalance the army's remaining political influence (Kechichian & Nazimek, 1997: 128). Consequently, Egypt transformed gradually from a military state into a police state (Kandil, 2012: 4).

In addition, Gamal Mubarak, being groomed to succeed his father, established his own power networks among members of the Egyptian business elite (Roll, 2013: 8). Therefore, for the generals, the social mobilization against Mubarak and his cronies was also an opportunity to settle scores and to restore their former supremacy. In so doing, the SCAF did not hesitate to sideline former military comrades. Suleiman was not granted a position in the new political leadership and was thus excluded from the core elite. The same applied to Shafiq, who had led the government for almost three weeks after the military takeover. Their removal at this stage of the transformation was effected either for pragmatic reasons – i.e. to appease the protest

movement demanding their resignation – or because of personal animosities among the military leadership, as rumoured in military circles.⁵

The ‘Gradual’ approach

It is unlikely that the SCAF, after its takeover, developed a master plan for the complex challenges of political transformation. At the same time, given its members’ military training as well as their institutional capacities, it is even more unlikely that the generals would not have systematically analysed the political challenges lying ahead. In retrospect, one key principle can be identified that explicitly or implicitly served as a guideline for their political manoeuvring once in power: gradual change. Thus, the military leaders aimed at keeping maximum control over the political process, not least to secure their own position of power within the emerging political system.

Immediately after Mubarak’s ousting, this gradual approach came to the fore with two important SCAF decisions: the first was to preserve the country’s established legal framework as much as possible, and the second was to not form a broad-based, national unity government. In the first instance, instead of following the Tunisian example and kicking off the transformation process by electing an assembly to draft a new constitution, the SCAF decided to work on the basis of the constitution in force, only amending nine articles through an appointed technical committee that worked out the revisions in closed sessions. These amendments were then put to a referendum on 19 March 2011. The referendum was followed on 30 March by a constitutional declaration by the SCAF in which the military leadership appointed itself the ultimate decision maker and manager of the transformation process, the scope of the latter remaining more or less obscure. Most important, the transformation road map outlined in article 60 of the declaration gave the SCAF de facto the last word over the beginning of the constitutional process after the election of a new parliament. The constitutional

amendments approved by popular referendum, on the other hand, had reserved that right for the president, implying that the drafting of a new constitution would not start before legislative and executive powers were transferred to elected politicians (Moustafa, 2012: 5).

By changing the rules of the game some ten days after the referendum, the SCAF gave the first indication of its attitude towards due process and democratic procedures. It did not even try to open a debate or achieve national consensus, but put itself in charge of determining the path of the transformation. The whole procedure was backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, which, at that time, saw the military as a natural partner.⁶ Instead of creating a broad revolutionary front with other political forces and mobilized youth to implement an entirely new political framework, the Muslim Brothers as well as other Islamist groups opted for quick elections, counting on their organizational strength to win substantial shares of the vote.

The military leadership also retained the state of emergency that had been established under Nasser in the late 1960s and adapted in various forms ever since. Under that law, state institutions were allowed to detain individuals without charge and try them before military courts, contrary to international standards. Despite the SCAF's promise to lift the emergency law, it allowed its use extensively as a tool not only to restore law and order, but also to repress political opposition. As documented by Human Rights Watch, more than 12,000 civilians were prosecuted by military courts during the first year of the transformation alone (Human Rights Watch, 2011: 11).

The SCAF's second major decision was to appoint successive 'technocrat' governments rather than forming a government including representatives of all the relevant political factions and societal groups. The technocrats ruled the country until mid-2012. In their cabinets, key portfolios – including interior, justice and international co-operation – always remained in the

hands of 'SCAF loyalists', while Field Marshal Tantawi held the defence portfolio himself (Springborg, 2011: 430). The position of prime minister was first given to Essam Sharaf and then to Kamal al-Ganzouri, both politicians who had belonged temporarily to the Mubarak-era PRE but were sidelined because of conflicts with the networks close to the president's son Gamal. Their appointment spoke to the intra-elite shifting of power from a network close to the family of the ousted president to one with strong connections to the military. At the same time, the SCAF successfully staved off fundamental change through which actors outside the established PRE might have gained access to power.

Not only was the government in the hands of the generals, there was also no fundamental reshuffling of staff within important state institutions, especially in the security sector. A prominent example was the case of the prosecutor general, Abdel Maguid Mahmoud, who had been appointed by Mubarak in 2006. His dismissal became one of the main demands of the young activists in 2011, as they blamed him for preventing criminal prosecutions against former regime stalwarts and members of the police. The prosecutor general's office as well as other relevant state entities had been very selective in starting criminal investigations. Only a few members of Mubarak's inner power circle, in particular those connected to Gamal Mubarak, were ever brought before the courts, while many others were never held accountable for their actions.⁷ This indicates that the SCAF used the existing state structures, as well as their personnel, to settle old scores and to 'manage' the (partial) transformation rather than coming to terms with the old regime and initiating a process of transitional justice.

Dealing with the brothers

From parliamentary to presidential elections

By spring 2011, the military and the Muslim Brotherhood had established a fruitful alliance. In contrast to the

Mubarak regime, the SCAF opened the way for the movement to formally participate in politics.⁸ In turn, the Brotherhood not only accepted the transitional road map presented by the generals, it also mobilized its members to vote for the SCAF's constitutional amendments. Initially this alliance – whether based on an explicit yet unofficial or an implicit deal – seemed to pay off for both sides. The generals would be able to tamp down the revolutionary dynamics and put themselves in the driver's seat of the transformation process with the backing of the country's best-organized political force, while the Brotherhood would be able to capitalize on its organizational strength in the upcoming elections.

However, after the 2011–12 parliamentary elections, in which the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) emerged as the strongest force by far, with some 45 per cent of parliamentary seats, it quickly became clear that the relationship between the moderate Islamists and the army was rather complicated.⁹ As a result of the 2011 constitutional declaration, the legislative competencies of the newly elected parliament remained limited, and as noted above, the military maintained de facto control over the constitutional process. As a consequence, Brotherhood members slowly began to realize that despite their landslide election victory, they would not be able to shape the transformation process, and their power would remain severely restricted.

The SCAF not only allotted itself de facto veto power over the constitutional process, it also actively tried to predetermine its outcome. The most offensive step was an attempt by deputy prime minister Ali al-Selmi, acting on behalf of the SCAF, to push through supra-constitutional principles by which the drafting process would have been predetermined.¹⁰ The so-called Selmi Principles, published at the beginning of November 2011, granted the military even greater autonomy than it had under the previous constitution.¹¹ The initiative met with strong opposition not only from the Muslim

Brotherhood, but also from other political forces and the revolutionary youth. In the end, the principles were withdrawn, but through this document the military leadership had outlined its vision of the future political order by emphasizing its complete autonomy from the political leadership.

In its attempt to shape and dominate the political transformation, the SCAF found an important ally in the judiciary, which was pervaded by crony networks established during the Mubarak era. Although an opposition had emerged within the judiciary during the last decade of Mubarak's rule, it never gained the upper hand (Brown, 2012b: 4). The effective collaboration of the judiciary and the SCAF became visible around two issues during this phase. First, on 14 June 2012, two days before voting in the second (and decisive) round of presidential elections began, the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that the law regulating the 2011–12 parliamentary elections was unconstitutional. The correctness of this verdict from a legal perspective has been widely debated. In any case, the timing and speed of the ruling were remarkable (Brown, 2012a). It provided the SCAF with a golden opportunity to dissolve the lower house of parliament before a president could be elected and to pass a constitutional addendum on the basis of which it reinforced its own (rather than the president's) ultimate authority over the army and assumed full legislative power until the election of a new parliament (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2012: 5). The SCAF saw this as a necessary step to prevent any measures being adopted to the detriment of its privileges, a possibility it sought to head off should Mohammed Mursi win the presidential elections and the Muslim Brotherhood therefore be in control of both the legislative and executive branches of the government.

The second event in which this collaboration crystallized was the disqualification by the Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission (SPEC), a body of

judges appointed by the SCAF, of several presidential candidates in the run-up to the 2012 elections.¹² These decisions have also been heavily scrutinized with regard to their legality. Indeed, the SPEC's decisions were not only directed against the Muslim Brotherhood, whose prominent candidate, Kheirat al-Shater, was banned from running, forcing the organization to put its weight behind an alternative candidate, the widely unknown Mursi. The decisions were also directed against former spy chief Suleiman, whom the SCAF had sidelined in 2011 but who was trying to make a comeback through the presidential elections (Ahram Online, 2012). Neither event shows that the judiciary, or even part of it, was fully controlled by the military, but the SCAF undoubtedly let the judiciary interfere in politics as long as that worked to its own advantage and did not use its powers to overturn court rulings in favour of a more participatory transformation.

Mursi's 'Civil Coup'

Mursi won the June 2012 presidential election in a close vote. Regardless, the new president initially remained de facto politically impotent because of the SCAF's constitutional addendum giving it ultimate decision-making authority. In August 2012, Mursi surprisingly took a step that seemed to dramatically change the balance of power. After the killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers by militants in northern Sinai on 8 August, Mursi sacked several high-ranking officers in the broader security apparatus, among them Murad Mawafi, the country's intelligence chief. In a second move four days later, the president proclaimed the nullification of the SCAF's June constitutional declaration and executed a far-ranging reshuffling of the army leadership. Army chief Tantawi, chief of staff Sami Annan and several other high-ranking generals were retired and replaced by more junior SCAF members.¹³ The 59-year-old chief of military intelligence, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, became the new minister of defence, and Sedki Sobhi, one year younger and a former commander of the 3rd Field Army, became chief

of staff. For many observers of Egyptian politics, these surprising developments indicated that the Muslim Brotherhood had capitalized on public anger against the army leadership, which had been embarrassed by the events in Sinai. According to this reading, Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood seized the moment to increase their own power by launching a 'civil coup', thus putting themselves at the centre of Egypt's PRE.¹⁴ Several other indicators, however, suggested otherwise.

It was no secret that Tantawi and Mawafi's relationship had been tense, suggesting that the latter's removal was not against the military leadership's interests and should therefore be considered separately from the subsequent comprehensive reshuffling of the SCAF. Moreover, in security circles, rumours had been circulating at least since the beginning of 2012, before Mursi's presidency, of plans among SCAF members for a comprehensive rejuvenation of the military leadership and replacement of its most senior members.¹⁵ What is even more important for understanding Mursi's reshuffle, however, is that the nullification of the SCAF's constitutional declaration was not followed by an attempt by Mursi to subordinate the army to civilian leadership. Therefore, much more plausible than the civil coup narrative is that Mursi's decision was worked out with the majority of the SCAF's generals in advance and thus did not come as a surprise to them.¹⁶ Mohammed al-Assar, one of the SCAF's most influential members, has confirmed this.¹⁷ Indeed, Mursi's decision can be read as part of a power-sharing deal that put certain areas under the authority of the president and others under the authority of the military. Whether such a compromise was struck explicitly or implicitly cannot be verified, but in any case the power-sharing arrangement was short-lived, the reason for which can be found in the difficulty of clearly separating the military and civilian spheres of influence in Egypt.

This problematic overlapping of spheres became obvious in the September 2012 power struggles

involving the Hay'at al-Raqaba al-Idariyya (Administrative Control Authority). Established in the 1960s to monitor and supervise state institutions and to fight corruption in the administration, the Raqaba had become one of the most powerful state agencies in the country. Indeed, within Egypt's authoritarian regime, the agency developed into one of the most important instruments at the head of state's disposal for 'managing' the elite. The agency was said to have assembled dossiers about important members of the bureaucracy, businesspeople and politicians that could be used at the appropriate point in time for 'punishing opponents, and keeping regime supporters in line' (Sayigh, 2012: 12). Remarkably, the head of the Raqaba and some senior staff were always former army officers. Thus the agency became 'the most important instance of military penetration of the civilian bureaucracy' (Sayigh, 2012: 12).

When Mursi became president, Major General Farid al-Tuhami, said to be Sisi's mentor, headed the Raqaba. He was seen by the Muslim Brotherhood and by many activists as a 'guardian of the system of corruption under Mubarak', protecting the established patronage networks within the state apparatus (Kirkpatrick, 2013). On 2 September 2012, Mursi dismissed Tuhami, evidently without consulting the military leadership.¹⁸ This step was celebrated by leading Muslim Brothers in the Egyptian media. Still, Mursi did not try to end the military's dominance of the Raqaba, probably to avoid a head-on confrontation with the SCAF. Instead, he appointed another military officer, Major General Mohammed Haiba, to lead the agency.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Mursi's direct interference in the military's traditional sphere of control seriously damaged the power-sharing arrangement between the generals and the Brotherhood.

The brothers' miscalculation

Despite the sacking of Tuhami, the SCAF avoided an open confrontation. From the generals' perspective, an

open attack on the elected leadership seemed unnecessary given that the Mursi administration was becoming increasingly entangled in political power struggles with different parts of the established PRE, among them business and media elites (Roll, 2013). The most visible of these conflicts was with the judiciary and the non-Islamist opposition. These struggles were particularly obvious in the constitutional process, which was progressively boycotted by more and more non-Islamist political forces, while parts of the judiciary tried to stop it through legal means. The conflict culminated in President Mursi's decree of 22 November 2012, in which he put himself, at least temporarily, above the law and tried to immunize the constitution-drafting process against interference from the judiciary (Kirkpatrick, 2013; Kirkpatrick & El-Sheikh, 2012). The split in the political spectrum was thus sealed. Nearly all the non-Islamist parties and several activist groups denounced the decree as undemocratic and mobilized against it, calling for a boycott of the constitutional process. Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood aggressively pushed the charter through the Constituent Assembly without any members of the opposition present. After a widely boycotted referendum, Mursi signed the new constitution into law at the end of December 2012.

The military's representatives remained in the Constituent Assembly, indicating that according to its own cost-benefit calculations, the SCAF still saw an advantage in at least formally co-operating with the Mursi administration, if on its own terms. This became evident during the assembly's debate over the formation of the National Defence Council (NDC), the constitutional body given authority over all affairs related to the military. In response to the proposal of a Muslim Brotherhood delegate to balance membership on the NDC between civilian and military representatives instead of giving the military the majority, as had previously been determined (by the military), the SCAF's representative, Mamdouh Shatin, yelled, 'If you put one of yours, I will put one of

mine!’²⁰ In the end, the nondemocratic composition of the NDC made the 2012 ‘Muslim Brotherhood Constitution’, as it was called by its critics, favourable for the military with the result that substantial civilian control over the armed forces became impossible, and the SCAF remained de facto the ultimate decision maker on all questions of ‘national security’.

Despite this constitutional arrangement, the relationship between the Brotherhood and the SCAF hit rock bottom. The Tuhami éclat, along with the obvious attempt to change the balance of power during the constitutional process itself, had exacerbated mistrust and resistance against the Islamists. This became apparent in several SCAF statements in which the generals more or less implicitly articulated their dissatisfaction with the Mursi administration. Remarkably, Mursi and the Brotherhood’s leadership appeared to be oblivious to the relevance of this smouldering conflict. They obviously saw themselves in a strategic alliance with the generals and felt in a position to move on and take full control of state institutions. The reality was quite different, however. For the SCAF, accommodating the Brotherhood was only an intermediate and tactical step. From its perspective, in a situation in which the economy was progressively collapsing – making it increasingly difficult for the government to finance the budget deficit (Samhuri, 2013) – it would permit the military leadership to return to its political comfort zone of maintaining control without being blamed for unpopular political decisions. How short-lived this tactical interplay was became obvious six months after the new constitution entered into force.

The coup and its aftermath

New and old alliances

On 3 July 2013, the SCAF again took power. The elected president was stripped of his office and detained, and leading Muslim Brotherhood members were imprisoned. The constitution was suspended, and the SCAF installed

Adly Mansour, head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, as interim president, a position he would retain until Sisi's election in May 2014.

The military's intervention was the prelude to the restoration of authoritarian rule. In the following months, Egypt experienced a new dimension in state repression. Whereas until mid-2013, state violence had been used rather erratically, after the coup the security forces cracked down systematically on every sign of resistance, opposition or criticism, especially but by no means only from members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The imprisonment of tens of thousands of individuals for political reasons severely weakened the organizational structure of the Brotherhood and intimidated Islamist and non-Islamist protesters alike. State violence, in which the military was directly involved, culminated in August 2013 in one of the 'most bloody incidents of mass unlawful killings of largely peaceful protesters in recent history' (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 32), during the raids on the protest camps established by Mursi supporters in central Cairo and Giza.

Coup supporters have presented the military takeover as the fulfilment of the will of the people, like the situation in early 2011. According to that narrative, the military was forced to react in light of the mass protests against the Mursi administration that had begun at the end of June 2013. Yet not only is it questionable that the ousting of a democratically elected government through a military coup can be considered a legitimate implementation of the 'will of the people' (Demmelhuber, 2014), but the assertion that the military's intervention was in response to the demonstrations is also implausible. On the contrary, a growing number of reports point to the support, if not instigation, of the mass mobilization before June 2013 by state institutions – first and foremost the Ministry of Interior and the General Intelligence Service (Frenkel & Atef, 2014; Al-Sharif & Saleh, 2013) – in alliance with other members of the

established PRE, most notably prominent businessmen (Roll, 2013: 25).

At the centre of these allegations is the Tamarod (Rebellion) campaign, in which activists collected signatures against Mursi and then organized mass protests. The extent to which the military as an institution supported Tamarod cannot be verified, but it does not seem plausible that the SCAF, and especially military intelligence – at the time under the direct command of minister of defence Sisi – was unaware of the support state entities were apparently lending the rebel campaign.²¹ The immediate endorsement of the coup by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait is another indicator that the military had prepared to assume political responsibility. Twenty-four hours after the coup, these three countries promised some \$12bn in financial assistance and energy supplies. Without this assistance, Egypt would have been forced to declare insolvency within months, given that its currency reserves had fallen from \$35bn at the end of 2010 to around \$15bn in June 2013.²²

The Gulf leaders' rationale was obvious. Given their own Islamist opposition, the monarchs feared that events in Egypt might become a role model for successful Muslim Brotherhood rule in the Arab world. In addition, they were concerned about Mursi's policy of (timid) rapprochement with Iran. Economic interests also played an important role, because of the sizeable investments of business groups from the three Gulf countries in Egypt.²³ For the monarchies, it must have been alarming for such an important investment location to be ruled by a supposedly untrustworthy and unreliable political leadership. In the end, the speed with which the three countries committed such a large amount of money not only suggests consultations with the generals prior to the coup, but explains also why the generals were motivated to once more leave their comfort zone. The billions available from the Gulf dramatically altered the SCAF's calculations in favour of taking direct political control

instead of haggling with the detested Muslim Brotherhood. Whereas in 2012, direct rule would have meant presiding over bankruptcy, austerity and being pressured into International Monetary Fund tutelage, the Gulf states' largesse presented an opportunity for the military-dominated leadership to actively reorganize the economy, launch major projects and act once more as the effective repository of Egyptian statehood.

In the months after the coup, Egypt's new rulers made efforts to strengthen their domestic alliance with members of the youth movement as well as its external alliance with the Gulf donors. On the domestic scene, Tamarod representatives became involved in drafting a new constitution, and loyal youth groups were offered state support (Abdallah, 2016). Concerning external affairs, companies from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE benefited significantly from business contracts tendered by the Egyptian state. Minister of defence Sisi would later seek to capitalize on these alliances for his presidential ambitions, by then an open secret.²⁴ This came to the fore in March 2014 when Sisi, three weeks before he announced his candidacy, signed a framework agreement for a huge project with one of the UAE's largest construction companies: Arabtec would build 1 million housing units in the coming five years. The project was a win-win opportunity. Arabtec, in which the UAE government has a stake, was granted a mega-contract, valued at \$40bn, without a public tender, and Sisi could explain to the Egyptian public that the project was part of an initiative for Egyptian youth and thus successfully launch his presidential campaign, attracting the support of youth activists.

Institutionalists gain the upper hand

Immediately before its return to the political stage in summer 2013, the military leadership had emphasized its self-conception as an autonomous institution above the political fray. This became apparent through public discussion about whether to uphold a 1970s rule introduced under Sadat barring armed forces officers

and conscripts from voting. In a May 2013 decision, the Supreme Constitutional Court proclaimed that the prohibition violated the country's new constitution, which stipulated that all citizens had the right to vote. Instead of capitalizing on the verdict and organizing 'a coup through the ballot boxes', as feared by representatives of civil society, the SCAF argued against it (Atteya, 2013). The generals explained that due to security concerns, they had decided to demand a postponement of the implementation of the court ruling until 2020, a move approved by the upper house of the Egyptian parliament. Although this at first appears contradictory, it makes sense from an institutional perspective in light of the military coup two weeks after the decision. The members of the SCAF, or at least most of them, were against an instrumentalization of the military institution for partisan purposes or personal ambition. For Sisi, this proved to be a serious disadvantage, which became clear during the presidential elections half a year later, when he had problems mobilizing Egyptians to vote.²⁵

The institutionalist stance did not change after the coup, even when Sisi's presidential aspirations became apparent. To the contrary, the SCAF sustained or even intensified its efforts at guaranteeing the institutional autonomy of the military within the emerging political order, including in legal terms. To cite but one example, in late August 2013, outside the media's glare, interim president Mansour amended the text of the oath sworn by soldiers. Instead of pledging loyalty to the president, as in the past, the new oath declared loyalty to the republic.

The military's efforts to ensure its institutional autonomy became far more evident during the course of the new constitutional process. Drafted by a committee led by Mansour, the new constitution was accepted by public referendum in mid-January 2014, two weeks before the military leadership officially gave Sisi the green light to nominate himself for president (Ahram Online, 2014a). The 2014 constitution gives more

decisive power to the military than previous constitutions in regard to questions of 'national security', budget matters and military justice (Chams El-Dine, 2014: 1). In doing so, the military 'is no longer treated as part of the executive branch of government but rather a branch unto itself' (Brown & Dunne, 2013). Article 234 is especially remarkable, as it stipulates that for at least two presidential terms, the minister of defence should be appointed with the SCAF's approval. This is the strongest evidence that the SCAF was unwilling to subordinate itself to a new political leader, even if that leader were to hail from the military leadership itself.

Against the background of the SCAF's institutionalist course, it is difficult to imagine that Sisi's presidential ambitions had not been contentiously discussed by the generals. Although there were no public debates among SCAF members on the matter, an October 2013 interview with General Ahmed Wasfi, commander of the 2nd Field Army and one of the more popular members of the SCAF, is remarkable. Wasfi responded to the question of whether the military takeover in July was a coup d'état by saying it was not, citing as evidence that immediately after the military's intervention, the minister of defence had not become president.²⁶ Thus, he indicated that Sisi's presidential candidacy had by no means been predetermined by the SCAF. In connection with this is the remarkable fact that Sisi had to resign his military position and abandon his military uniform before he could formally announce his candidacy. Although this was a logical consequence of Egyptian law, it was unique in that it put him in a limbo that none of his military predecessors in the presidential office had experienced.²⁷

Before his resignation from the army at the end of March 2014, Sisi put some of his closest confidants in strategically important posts. Of particular note, Mahmoud Hegazy, whose daughter is married to Sisi's son, became chief of staff, and Tuhami became chief of the General Intelligence Service. Representatives of the

military leadership could also be found in Sisi's entourage in the president's office, most notably General Abbas Kamal, who had been Sisi's closest assistant during his time as chief of military intelligence and came to act informally as chief of the presidential staff.²⁸ Nevertheless, Sisi seemed to be unsuccessful in controlling the institutionalists within the military leadership and their networks in various state institutions. Noteworthy here is Sisi's successor as minister of defence, Sobhi, who was widely characterized as an institutionalist.²⁹ Therefore, that the SCAF in the end backed Sisi's presidential candidacy should not be interpreted as the beginning of a new era in which the presidential power centre controls the military establishment. In fact, the first three months of Sisi's presidency rather pointed in the opposite direction.

In the economic realm, in particular, the military expanded its interests tremendously. The policy of giving public contracts to military entities or military-controlled companies without competitive tendering, formally implemented after the coup, culminated in a new Suez Canal project that Sisi inaugurated in early August 2014, describing it as 'the gift of Egyptians to the world' (Alsis, 2014). The project includes the expansion of the existing canal as well as development of an international industrial and logistics hub in the Suez Canal Zone. The army, formally in charge of this non-transparent, mega-development scheme, gave subcontracts to members of the Egyptian business elite.³⁰ Big business also stood to benefit from the army-led development approach, but only according to the terms set by the SCAF. In addition, the military would not only benefit during the construction phase, through the involvement of its companies and entities, but the army would also get a share after completion of the extension project because of the military's de facto control over the Suez Canal Authority, the owner and operator of the canal. Therefore, the projects served as a strong indicator that the military had

positioned itself to play a much stronger role in economic decisions than during the last decade of Mubarak's rule.

Conclusion

Egypt's military leadership was in two respects highly successful in managing the political transformation that began in 2011 with the emergence of mass protests against the Mubarak regime: first, it effectively defended the basic features of Egypt's authoritarian order, established by Nasser more than half a century before, and second, it capitalized on the transformation process, expanding its power within the PRE.

Egypt by the end of 2014 had an even more repressive political order than before, and state institutions were more autonomous from the political sphere than during the last decade of Mubarak's rule. Whether the brief arrangement with the Muslim Brotherhood was a tactical manoeuvre aimed at finally getting rid of the organization, or whether the SCAF seriously intended to share power for a time with the Islamists to preserve the regime as such, will only be clarified if members of the core elite speak out. Regardless, in the end, the SCAF relied on its far-ranging networks with other members of the established PRE who also had no interest in changing the socio-political order.

The military did not simply preserve the established ruling system during the transformation process; rather, a new power configuration emerged even more in favour of the military than under Mubarak. After the turmoil in 2011, the military progressively expanded its domination over the country's core elite and reversed the loss of political influence it had experienced during the Mubarak era. Even during the year in which the Muslim Brotherhood successfully entered the core elite, the military leadership remained the ultimate decision maker in all affairs concerning the field of 'national security', which was largely undefined. That the military's role as a state within the state was de facto enshrined in the

constitutions of 2012 and 2014 reflected the dominant position of the generals not only over the political opposition, but also over the other members of the PRE. This became particularly evident in the case of the Interior Ministry establishment and Egypt's wealthiest business families. Both elite factions lost to the military part of the direct influence on political decision making that they had acquired during the Mubarak era. They remained part of the PRE, but now sat in the secondary circle rather than at its core.

The generals' success can be explained, at least in part, by the gradual approach they consistently pursued until the 2013 coup. Instead of immediately cracking down on political protests in 2011, they decided to position themselves as guardians of the revolution and therefore as managers of the process of political change. This strategy was selected against the backdrop of massive public protests as well as demands by western partners to adopt a peaceful approach towards them. Over the course of the transformation, the generals played their cards well. Their approach contrasts starkly with that of the Muslim Brotherhood, which abandoned its gradual approach early in the political process by trying initially to gain a dominant position by fielding more candidates than originally announced for the 2011–12 parliamentary elections, presenting a candidate in the 2012 presidential elections contrary to its earlier statements and Mursi's issuing the November 2012 presidential decree.

Another reason for the military leadership's success was that it maintained a cohesive corporate structure, at least until summer 2013. Field Marshal Tantawi obviously had no ambition to succeed Mubarak as the country's political leader. Under his chairmanship, internal power struggles were (temporarily) avoided. The institutionalists within the SCAF clearly dominated the council's decision making. Sisi's presidential ambitions, however, complicated the situation. Even if his grip on power were accepted, or even supported, by military

leaders, the question arose of how long his relationship with the generals would remain intact. Egypt has a long tradition of power struggles between the military leadership and the presidency. Take, for instance, the fierce rivalry in the 1980s between Mubarak and Field Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala, Egypt's popular minister of defence.

Yet given that Sisi's successor as minister of defence, Sobhi, belongs to the army's institutionalists, the threat of personal rivalry appeared to be limited. Nevertheless, the alliance between Sisi and the army's leadership is not set in stone. In particular, the country's economic situation might become the Achilles heel of the new power configuration. As a result of having primarily aligned Egypt's economic policies with the interests of the military, Sisi is unlikely to be able to deliver economic progress. Large development projects are no answer to the socio-economic challenges faced by the country, as they usually ignore the needs of the population and have no trickle-down effects. Therefore, increasing dissatisfaction among the populace could force the military to step outside its comfort zone once again and, if necessary, take a political stance against Sisi. By that time, however, replacement of the president and the complete takeover of the core of Egypt's PRE will not be sufficient to guarantee the survival of the system. The parasitic military's state within the state makes Egypt's political-economic order unsustainable in the long run.

Notes

1. For the concept of PRE, see Asseburg and Wimmen (2016).
2. For an analysis of Egypt's PRE under Mubarak, see Abdelnasser (2004).
3. The Muslim Brotherhood did not initially participate in the mass demonstrations, but decided to join them two days after their outbreak (Mekhennet & Kulish, 2011).
4. There were numerous rumours surrounding this event. Foreign minister Ahmed Abu al-Ghait officially confirmed that the attempt had taken place (Al-Gamal, 2011). Whether the disempowered Gamal Mubarak was behind it, as Suleiman himself reportedly claimed, cannot be verified (Al-Khazin, 2012). Given the professionalism as well as the

concrete political circumstances of the attempt, it remains highly plausible that it was ordered by disappointed stalwarts of the regime.

5. See for example the *al-Watan* interview with the former intelligence officer Tharwat Gawda, who provides insight into the military leadership's calculations between 2011 and 2013 (Madkur, 2014). Remarkably, as a consequence of the interview, Gawda was sentenced to one year in jail by a military court for 'revealing secrets harmful to national security' (Ahram Online, 2014b).

6. Interview with a Muslim Brotherhood leader, August 2011, Cairo. He argued that given their strong organizational structures, both had a lot in common and were able to negotiate in a constructive way.

7. Many cases reported to the investigative authorities were never brought before the courts (Roll, 2013).

8. Beginning in the mid-1980s, members of the Muslim Brotherhood had participated as 'independent' candidates in parliamentary elections, but the organization was prohibited by law from registering as a party. The SCAF, through its March 2011 declaration, annulled article 5 of the constitution (amended in 2007), which forbade political activity within 'any religious frame of reference'.

9. The electoral alliance formed by the FJP won 37.5 per cent of the vote. The Salafist alliance, headed by the Nour Party (Party of the Light), got 27.8 per cent of the votes and 25 per cent of seats (Pioppi, 2013: 57). Therefore the 2012 parliament was dominated by Islamist forces, which controlled 70 per cent of the seats.

10. Although Selmi acted in his own capacity, observers generally agreed that the principles were written in consultation with the SCAF; see, among others, Sayigh (2011).
11. Article 9 of the first draft of the Selmi Principles stated, 'The Supreme Council for the Armed Forces is also exclusively competent to approve all bills relating to the armed forces before they come into effect'. In the later version, this was deleted.
12. Of note, the SPEC was composed of the most senior judges from various courts. This indicates once more how the SCAF relied on its old networks in the judiciary.
13. Approximately 70 older generals were retired and replaced with younger officers (Wenig, 2014).
14. For example, on 16 August, *al-Ahram Weekly On-line* ran the headline 'Exit SCAF, enter Mursi' (Howeidy, 2012).
15. Interview with a military expert, Cairo, March 2012.
16. A remarkable exception was chief of staff Annan, who was said to be dissatisfied with his retirement.
17. Assar was assistant defence minister and considered the military's shadow 'foreign minister' (Reuters, 2012).
18. For background on Mursi's move, see Baghat (2014).
19. As Haiba was not unseated after the 2013 military coup, it would appear that his appointment was not against the will of the SCAF.

20. A video excerpt of the discussion is available on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLPfggij2N4&playnext=1&list=PL1A0ADFB0FFD1B5D1&feature=results_main (accessed 6 November 2014).
21. Tamarod organizers claim that they had no contact with the generals before 3 July 2014 (Rizk, 2014).
22. Other economic indicators were even worse (Heineman, 2013).
23. According to official Egyptian data, the \$50bn in investments by Gulf Cooperation Council states in Egypt exceeded western states' investments (Roll, 2014: 2).
24. In an August 2013 interview with the *Washington Post*, Sisi denied any interest in running for president, but he did not rule it out, widely seen as an indicator of his ambitions (Weymouth, 2013).
25. The low turnout forced the election commission to extend voting for a third day
26. The full interview with Wasfi, conducted on 2 October 2014 by Egyptian TV host Amr Adib, is available on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yc31diCPdBs> (accessed 6 November 2014).
27. Sadat and Mubarak had both been appointed president before they became president.
28. Interview with a foreign diplomat, Cairo, October 2014.
29. Interview with a military expert, Cairo, November 2013. A prominent example of an institutionalist outside the military apparatus is the economist Ahmad Said al-Naggar, appointed chairman of the state-owned al-Ahram media empire in January 2014. Naggar was considered a fierce supporter of state-led development schemes and several times defended the leading role of the military in Egypt's politico-economic system.
30. The single biggest contract, for development of the huge industrial and logistics hub, was given to a consortium of private companies that seems to be affiliated with the Egyptian army (Al-Sharif, 2014).

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Youth movements in the Egyptian transformation: strategies and repertoires of political participation

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ABSTRACT

The accumulated research on youth movements in general, and on Egyptian ones in particular, analyses the characteristics of the youths who triggered the Arab Spring as well as the particular forms of activism and structures they adopted. Academic work focused on youth activism in Egypt, however, thus far lacks research on how the youth movements modified their strategies according to the political context and the repercussions this had on the transformation process. Hence, through the analysis of the strategies pursued by four youth movements during the course of the Egyptian transformation, this article will show that on one hand, the choice of a certain strategy could be successful in one political context but could fail to yield influence in another. On the other hand, it will show that the choice of a certain strategy can enable the movements to induce political change in the short term, but it can be liable to become ineffective in the longer term and vice versa.

Mobilized publics, with youth activists at their core, initiated and led the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Immediately after President Hosni Mubarak's resignation in February 2011, the youth movements that had triggered the 25 January events became a major part of the political scene. Politicized youth seeking to exert political influence coalesced into various kinds of organizations claiming to defend the revolution's aims, expressed in the slogan 'Justice, Freedom and Dignity', and pushed for their inclusion in the new system. Hence, these mobilized publics affected the transformation process beyond just providing an 'initial and ephemeral upsurge' (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 55–56). Rather, during the ensuing difficult transformation process, Egypt's politically relevant elite (PRE) and mobilized publics engaged in continuous and dynamic interactions.¹ Indeed, the restructuring of the PRE as

well as rapidly changing power relations forced mobilized publics, including youth movements, to adapt their strategies, tactics and alliances and the framing of their demands. This was required merely to survive and, in the best-case scenario, to exert some kind of influence on the political decision-making process to induce socio-political changes.

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, youth activism has attracted wide attention in academia. Hoffman and Jamal (2012), for example, emphasize the characteristics of the Arab world's current youth generation compared to earlier cohorts, explaining their grievances and how their political attitudes and behaviours vary. Murphy (2012: 5) considers Arab youth as a phenomenon rather than a social category constituted by 'a lived and shared generational narrative of the exclusion and marginalization which have resulted from post-independence state failures in the political, economic and social realms'. A considerable number of studies look at Egyptian youth activists' instrumental use of social media in mobilizing the public and how they have been 'learning citizenship, forming a generational consciousness, and actively engaging in politics through cyberactivism' (Herrera, 2012). Others focus more on the dynamics of youths' political engagement in Egypt (Sika, 2012) as well as cycles of contention prior to the 25 January uprising and their impact in triggering the revolution (Shehata, 2012; El-Mahdi, 2014). Abdel Rahman (2013) examines some of the dilemmas of the 'revolutionaries' – i.e. those youth activists at the heart of the 25 January uprising. She argues:

The characteristics of New Social Movements, especially the absence of sustainable organizational structures, although well suited to the phase of mass protests in the lead-up to the ousting of Mubarak, poses one of the main challenges to the prospects of genuine revolutionary change in the post-Mubarak era. (Abdel Rahman, 2013: 570)

The accumulated research on youth movements in general, and on Egyptian ones in particular, analyses the characteristics of the youths who triggered the Arab Spring: their history of activism, the cycles of contention

they experienced, the new tools of mobilization they used, as well as the particular forms of activism and organizational structures they adopted. Academic work focused on youth activism in Egypt, however, thus far lacks research on how the youth movements modified their strategies according to the political context and the repercussions this had on the transformation process. The following questions are therefore discussed here: how did the youth activists' strategies and repertoires (or modes) of political participation evolve in relation to the political environment? How did youth movements, through the different strategies they adopted, influence Egypt's transformation process? Four youth movements predominantly concerned with achieving political objectives are examined: the Constitution Party (Hizb al-Dustur), the Strong Egypt Party (Hizb Misr al-Qawiyya), the Revolutionary Front (Jabhat Tariq al-Thawra) and the Future of the Nation Party (Hizb Mustaqbal Watan). The four are representative of large, politically active youth groups that either participated in the 25 January revolution, thus claiming a revolutionary identity (the Constitution Party, the Strong Egypt Party and the Revolutionary Front), or emerged in the aftermath of President Mohammed Mursi's ousting on 3 July 2013 (the Future of the Nation Party).²

Indeed, Egypt's youth scene has remained fragmented. Its groups vary in terms of social background, and they represent various ideological and political trends. Despite their differences, however, the youth movements resemble one another insofar as they are defending and enacting what Asef Bayat (2010: 118) calls 'the youth habitus, ... a series of dispositions, ways of being, feeling, and carrying oneself (e.g., a greater tendency for experimentation, adventurism, idealism, autonomy, mobility, and change) that are associated with the sociological fact of "being young"'. Indeed, the four movements discussed share the same collective identity insofar as they aim to either challenge political authority and the PRE or seek accommodation and alliances with

it to defend or pursue their collective aspiration for genuine change, in line with the 'youth habitus', which they enacted in the 25 January uprising.

This contribution relies on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with youth leaders of the four political groups conducted between April and June 2014. It also builds on the author's participant observation and informal encounters with a variety of youth and other political groups' representatives before and after the 25 January revolution. In addition, qualitative content analysis of Egyptian media is used to verify and put youth activists' statements and positions in context.

The analysis of the youth movements' strategies and their impact on the unfolding transformation process relies on a relational or interactional approach (Diani & McAdam, 2003; McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007; Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Goodwin, 2011; Jasper, 2004). The relational approach implies two levels of analysis. The first level involves the dynamics between youth movements and the PRE. It focuses on how youth movements perceived the changing political context in which they have had to operate, including the opportunities provided and the constraints imposed, and the effects of their perceptions on the different choices they made. Youth movements' strategies evolved in relation to previous experiences of failure and success and in relation to the modification of the political context under successive leaders. The analysis pays special attention to two main turning points in the Egyptian transformation: first, the Muslim Brotherhood's success in parliamentary elections (November 2011–January 2012) and presidential elections (June 2012) followed by Mursi-led rule, and second, Mursi's ousting (July 2013) and the subsequent reconfiguration of the PRE.

The second level of analysis considers the implications that individual strategies adopted by youth movements had on their capacity to influence the transformation process. In this respect, the analysis focuses on short-term outcomes as well as on possible

long-term consequences of the movements' actions and strategies (Andrews, 1997). In this context, it is argued, certain sets of resources that can be effectively employed in one particular socio-political context are likely to have less impact in another, and strategies that work in a given context may be entirely ineffective in other political settings (Giugni, 1998). In a similar vein, a strategy or set of resources that can be successfully employed in the short term might be less influential in the longer term, and vice versa.

Each of the three main sections of this article discusses a particular strategy adopted by the four youth movements during the course of the transformation process as well as the impact that their strategies and the movements' interactions with the PRE have had on the emerging political order. The first section focuses on the movements' choice of street politics as their main strategy, with a focus on the Revolutionary Front. The second section centres on the strategy of achieving gradual change through participation in formal politics, with emphasis on the Constitution Party and the Strong Egypt Party. The third section discusses alliance building with the PRE, with a special focus on the Future of the Nation Party.

Strategy 1: The supremacy of street politics

The removal of Mubarak was a landmark in the Egyptian transformation. It opened the political space and therefore gave youth activists the opportunity to engage politically after years of repression. During the governing tenure of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) (February 2011–June 2012) as well as during the Mursi era (July 2012–June 2013), mobilizing people and organizing demonstrations was an effective tool for youth activists and enabled them to influence the PRE. An example is the Coalition of the Revolutionary Youth, composed of activists from the main political groups that had organized the protests of January 2011: the 6 April Youth Movement, the leftist Justice and Freedom Movement, the nationalist Dignity Party, the liberal

Democratic Front Party, the National Association for Change (combining several political parties), the Campaign for Change (led by Mohammed ElBaradei but mainly composed of politicized youths) and a group of youths who defected from the Muslim Brotherhood.

The members of the coalition focused on street politics to pressure the SCAF into meeting the youth activists' 'revolutionary' demands. They succeeded through street demonstrations in effecting the dismissal of Mubarak's appointed prime minister, Ahmed Shafiq, and setting a date for transferring power to a civilian leadership in November 2011. Street politics also enabled the revolutionary youth activists to put pressure on the Mursi administration, which came to be perceived by the activists, non-Islamist parties and the Salafist Nour Party as running the country in an exclusionary manner. This resulted in massive street demonstrations against the constitutional declaration Mursi issued on 22 November 2012 to prevent judicial challenges to the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly (tasked with preparing a new constitution) and attempts to override presidential decisions.³ The regime's refusal to discuss nullification of the declaration with the opposition further enraged the protesters. The continuous demonstrations that erupted in the aftermath of Mursi's decree put the Muslim Brotherhood government in a difficult position, unable to implement either economic or institutional decisions. The country, thus, fell into a state of paralysis. The Tamarod (Rebellion) youth movement emerged from this environment as the driving force mobilizing millions of people against Mursi in what would become the 30 June 2013 uprising. After three days of large-scale, anti-Mursi demonstrations backed by an alliance of state institutions (i.e. the judiciary and police), the SCAF intervened on 3 July and removed the Brotherhood leader from power.

The June uprising and military intervention became a turning point for the youth movements, significantly affecting their capacity to act and to exert influence.

Youth activists found Egypt's previously vibrant and pluralistic political life reduced to the struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood (and its supporters) on the one hand and the new military-led regime seeking to establish its legitimacy on the other.⁴ Contrary to Mursi, the new military rulers enjoyed the full backing of the security forces and were thus able to use violence against protesters. In this increasingly polarized and violent political context, the youth movements realized that their dream of a democratic state respectful of human dignity, freedom and social justice was endangered.⁵ Compared to their position during the two previous years, they found themselves marginalized within a new order imposing political and social constraints on their actions. The SCAF-appointed interim president, Adly Mansour, former head of the Constitutional Court, issued a law in November 2013 restricting the right to demonstrate,⁶ and large segments of the public, fed up with the on-going instability, turned into enthusiastic supporters of his approach.

Against this background, a group of activists, including many youths, established the Revolutionary Front (or Road of the Revolution Front) on 24 September 2013. Instead of forming a coalition of political groups, however, the Front's founders made it a coalition of activists who had been involved in the 25 January uprising. Representatives of leftist groups – including the Socialist Revolutionaries, the unregistered Bread and Freedom Party and the 6 April Youth Movement – had a strong presence, as did those from political groups dominated by former Muslim Brotherhood members, such as the Strong Egypt Party and the unregistered Egyptian Current Party, which merged on 1 October 2014. Their objective was to form a political movement that would reclaim the revolution's original goals: a democratic state that respected human dignity, freedom and social justice. As the focus of political life narrowed to the conflict between the military regime and the Muslim Brotherhood, these activists mobilized to

confront what their political called 'the two wings of the counter-revolution': the military-led regime, which sought to restore a police state, and the Muslim Brotherhood, which was pushing towards violent confrontation.⁷ Mobilizing and organizing the masses behind the goal of 'abolishing the state of authoritarianism and corruption and establishing the society of justice and democracy' became their stated political objective. Accordingly, in the same , the Front also presented the three main positions that defined its political orientation: abolishing authoritarianism and restoring participatory democracy through the decentralization of both the decision-making process and governance; achieving social justice through the redistribution of wealth (such as raising the minimum wage and restructuring the system of taxation); and transitional justice (such as prosecution of the perpetrators responsible for crimes against the revolutionaries and adequate compensation for those injured or killed during the uprising and their families).

Despite the socio-political constraints that the post-Mursi context imposed, and consistent with the youths' previous use of demonstrations as a tool for exerting influence, the Revolutionary Front chose to stick to street politics as the core element of its repertoire of contentious action. This choice reflected its willingness to confront the regime's security apparatus, which was bent on restricting and ultimately outlawing demonstrations. The leaders were primarily concerned with what they called 'revolutionary actions' – that is, challenging the regime's red lines. Hence, the Front organized demonstrations, some of which resonated with the media. The first one was held during the third week of November 2013 to commemorate the Mohamed Mahmoud Street protests, the demonstrations held 19 November 2011 calling on the SCAF to transfer power to a civilian government. According to the Front's leaders, around 5,000 people took part in the action. A second protest was held at the end of November in front of the Shura Council (the upper house of parliament) to

challenge the protest law as well as the possibility of military trials for civilians. The latter was being discussed by the Committee of 50, a group appointed by the interim president, Mansour, to review a draft constitution prepared by ten legal experts. According to Revolutionary Front leaders, around 800 participated in this demonstration. The third demonstration was organized for the third anniversary of the 25 January revolution to protest against military rule, which, according to the Front, was violating the rule of law and human rights while paving the way for the restoration of autocracy. The Front's leaders claimed that some 3,000 or 4,000 people participated.

The demonstrations alarmed the military-led regime, which had been attempting to consolidate its legitimacy and power. This was especially true of the third demonstration, which met with severe repression and the arrest of around 1,000 activists.⁸ This affected the Front's subsequent ability to mobilize. Moreover, solidarity protests for detainees led to the arrest of others, in a sort of vicious circle. In the end, the Front's choice of street politics as its main strategy harmed its capacity to appeal to society at large and to exert influence, because its members were subjected to repression and arrest, and the public had grown tired of protest actions. The Front's activities boiled down to repeated expressions of rejection of the regime's repressive actions.

As a consequence of this approach, the Front's remaining resources were transferred primarily to organizing legal committees to help defend its arrested members in court. A group of the Front's leaders founded the Freedom for the Brave campaign for this purpose and to provide the detainees with moral support. In autumn 2014, the campaign organized hunger strikes to increase pressure on the Sisi regime to release prisoners, including one of the Front's leaders, Alaa Abdel Fatah, a political activist and blogger who had been arrested in the aftermath of the Front's

demonstration against the protest law. Indeed, the Front's campaign of spreading news of the arrested activists through social media resulted in a significant online presence, which enabled it to build extended transnational networks of solidarity and to generate debates about human rights violations. They also acquired visibility in mainstream Egyptian media, such as *al-Masry al-Youm* and ONtv, which gave significant airtime to the hunger strikes, increasing their resonance in the public sphere.⁹ Nevertheless, the campaigns launched by political activists with access to the media drew attention only to a relatively small circle of known activists, while the fate of thousands of other prisoners who did not benefit from such networks remained unaddressed (Stevenson, 2015). In addition, the Front's ability to appeal to the broader society was weakened because its decentralized organizational structure, designed to permit quick decisions and activities, hindered its ability to formulate a coherent strategy for inducing change. The Front's activities were thus reduced to physical or virtual protest campaigns that reacted to events instead of pushing its own agenda. In addition, the 'revolutionary framing' that the Front had adopted became increasingly disconnected from the urgent priorities of the broader society, which was suffering from revolutionary fatigue and economic distress, leading people to crave stability after two rounds of upheaval.

The Revolutionary Front achieved mixed results. Raising awareness of repressive regime actions via social media and through transnational networks helped to compromise the legitimacy of the military-led regime established in the aftermath of Mursi's ousting and drew attention to the repressive practices of the administration of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi after his election as president in June 2014. It also negatively affected the domestic support that Sisi had previously benefited from among some segments of society, as the Front's actions generated debate on human rights and repression.

Nevertheless, its ability to exert influence on the PRE was non-existent, and its capacity to induce concrete changes exhibited similar weakness. Although street politics had been a resource that enabled youth movements to exert pressure on the PRE during the first two post-revolutionary years, this was not the case in the aftermath of Mursi's ousting, mainly because of repression and the lack of widespread public support for the Revolutionary Front and its activities. That the protest law was never amended despite the Front's efforts against it illustrates the movement's ineffectiveness. Moreover, as the Front lacked both a long-term vision and a proactive strategy, it failed to generate the potential to exert sustained influence on the PRE in the longer term. Therefore, one can say that while this movement pushed for a more liberal order, its strategy reduced it to being a disruptive power.

Strategy 2: Participation in formal politics

As noted, immediately following the 25 January uprising and during the SCAF's rule, youth movements focused on street politics as their primary tool for exerting influence. They stuck to mobilizing people and building social networks able to take to the streets and protest continuously against the decisions they perceived as hindering a democratic transition. The youth movements failed, sometimes from lack of will, to negotiate pacts or agreements with the SCAF in particular and the PRE in general. Meanwhile, the better-organized Muslim Brotherhood, initially hesitant to use the streets as the primary way of exerting influence, succeeded in negotiating the transition's road map with the SCAF and pushed for its implementation.

Moreover, youth movements that lacked strong organizational structures failed to compete well in the 2011–12 parliamentary elections and the 2012 presidential ballot. The social liberal Justice Party (Hizb al-'Adl), with a majority of youths as members, won only one seat in parliament. The coalition called The Revolution Continues (Al-Thawra Mustamirra) –

representing parties with a large number of youths as members, such as the social liberal Free Egypt Party (Misr al-Hurriyya) and the Egyptian Current Party as well as some leftist parties, including the Popular Alliance (Al-Tahaluf al-Sha'bi) – won eight seats. The revolutionary youth activists' preferred presidential candidates – Hamdeen Sabahy (leader of the Nasserist Karama Party) and Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh (a dissident former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood popular among the rebellious youth of the organization) – lost the election to Mursi.

The difficulties youth movements confronted during the transformation process and their experiences during the 2011–12 parliamentary and presidential elections prompted many activists to reconsider their position. They came to recognize that organizational structure was a necessary precondition for influencing the PRE and that the ballot box represented a decisive tool in achieving political change. In the eyes of many youths, formal politics gained in importance, as did creating strong party structures to be able to perform more effectively.¹⁰ After the June 2012 presidential elections, three potentially influential political groups formed as a result of this new perspective. The third- and fourth-place contenders in the presidential elections, Sabahy and Abul Futuh, formed the Popular Current (Al-Tayyar al-Sha'bi) and the Strong Egypt movement (later the Strong Egypt Party), respectively. ElBaradei, the former secretary-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who had withdrawn from the presidential race in January 2012, established the Constitution Party.

The Strong Egypt Party represented the institutionalization of sorts of Abul Futuh's election campaign. The party was officially established in November 2012, with 8,500 founding members. Some of these founding members consisted of Muslim Brotherhood members who had left the organization in response to the lack of internal democracy, possibilities for participation and the belief that Abul Futuh

represented the objectives of the revolution (Abdalla, 2013: 4). The Strong Egypt Party positioned itself as centre-left moderate Islamic. Islam is considered an essential component of Egyptian identity, and the party committed itself to the principles of shariah. The main positions it adopted and that define the party's orientation were guaranteeing a participatory democracy through decentralization of power; social justice and inclusiveness through redistribution of wealth (such as a minimum wage and restructuring of the state's system of subsidies); and an independent foreign policy, free from the influence of hegemonic powers, that would enable Egypt to reclaim its regional role (Abdalla, 2013).

Unlike the majority of political parties that emerged in the aftermath of the 25 January uprising, the Strong Egypt Party developed solid organizational structures, including internal mechanisms for participation and management of differences. The party's internal organization reflected the organizational capacities of its founders who had once been Muslim Brothers. Abul Futuh was practically the only prominent member of the party from an older generation, which facilitated youths acquiring leadership positions. Young people have been represented in large numbers in all the party's decision-making bodies, including its political bureau. The party regularly held elections to assure internal democracy.

The student movement that supported Abul Futuh during the presidential elections became institutionalized in the Strong Egypt student movement, which although affiliated with the Strong Egypt Party intentionally remained administratively and financially independent. According to the movement's leader, it was thought that such independence would help in forming political cadres able to formulate independent political positions and to defend them.¹¹ The groups affiliated with the movement at universities are called The Word Is Ours (Usar al-Kalima Kalimitna). They have succeeded thus far in establishing a presence at all 23 public universities in Egypt. They provided social services to students and

organized political activities as part of their recruitment efforts. The movement's long-term vision consisted of forming an alternative elite for the trade unions and in politics. In September 2014, several universities banned student groups backed by political parties, such as those affiliated with the Strong Egypt and Constitution parties. This fell in line with the promulgation of other restrictive laws, such as the protest law and a statute restricting local and foreign funding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some of the student groups elected to continue their activities despite the ban, at times leading to confrontations with authorities. In other instances, the groups decided to focus on building a base among students through social activities, forgoing explicitly political activities at least for the time being.

ElBaradei's Constitution Party had the significant advantage of the pre-existing infrastructure from the Campaign for Supporting ElBaradei and the Demands for Change movement, which had been formed in early 2011 with significant participation by formerly non-politicized youth surrounding ElBaradei. At that time, many regarded ElBaradei as a credible alternative to Mubarak. When founded in September 2012, the Constitution Party, which has a social democratic outlook, had around 20,000 founding members (Abdalla, 2013: 3f.). Its political consisted of three main pillars: rebalancing relations between the state and citizens by enforcing the separation of powers and guaranteeing public and individual freedoms; rebuilding Egyptian culture to guarantee acceptance of differing religious or political views and to promote a culture of diversity; and establishing an economic order guaranteeing a minimum of social justice, including using progressive taxation as a tool for achieving this objective (Abdalla, 2013: 3). The party held its first internal elections in June 2014. A representative political body was formed, and youths obtained the majority of leadership positions in the political bureau and the higher committees.

Students backing the Constitution Party founded The Square groups, establishing a presence at around 20 universities. The recruitment methods the organization adopted were almost identical to those of The Word Is Ours. It also adopted a long-term vision with the hope of creating alternative elites. In response to the ban on party-affiliated groups, The Square groups, similarly to The Word Is Ours, escalated confrontation with the authorities at some universities while sticking to social and cultural activities with hidden political agendas in others.

Although representing a great opportunity for youth participation in politics, the two parties discussed here faced a set of challenges limiting their public outreach and ability to exert sustained influence on the political process, the more important being a lack of sustainable funding and organizational weaknesses.¹² Their main impact was limited to disrupting the decisions taken by Mursi's administration that they perceived as being authoritarian or exclusive. One example was the demonstration youth activists, primarily from the Constitution Party and the Popular Current, organized in response to Mursi's November 2012 constitutional declaration. The demonstrations were initiated by the National Salvation Front, a coalition of most of the opposition leftist and liberal parties and movements.

Under the post-Mursi military leadership, these parties continued to have little say. ElBaradei was appointed vice president, and some Constitution Party leaders were designated ministers, including Ahmed el-Borei as minister of social solidarity and Hossam Eissa as minister of higher education. In addition, two of the party's youth leaders were appointed to the Committee of 50. The participation of youth activists in the Committee of 50 together with personalities representing the aims of the 25 January uprising helped guarantee a minimum of freedoms and rights in the 2014 constitution. Moreover, those youths who sat on the committee acquired social and political resources that they might be

able to exploit later – for instance, in future parliamentary elections. On the other hand, the Constitution Party was unable to influence important policy decisions or was excluded from them. This was highlighted by ElBaradei's resignation from the vice presidency in mid-August 2013 to protest at the decision to break up the Muslim Brotherhood's Rabi' al-'Adawiyya sit-in with lethal force. ElBaradei stressed that he would not take responsibility for more such decisions, which he said would have disastrous consequences for society.¹³ Both the Constitution and Strong Egypt parties were marginalized or excluded from the decision-making process, and those among them who took to the streets were subjected to repression.

The political context in the aftermath of Mursi's ousting pushed several youth movements to revise their strategies. Street demonstrations had become unappealing because of repression by the security forces, lack of political backing and the possibility of harming the public image of revolutionary youth. Conflicts emerged in the Constitution Party and the Strong Egypt Party between those who wanted to adopt a so-called principled revolutionary approach and those who preferred gradual change. Advocates of the principled approach wanted their respective parties to emphasize street politics or at least boycott the June 2014 presidential elections and parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2015 as a symbolic rejection of the prevailing political process. Those who preferred the gradual approach sought to build social structures that could induce change gradually by 'colonizing' new public and political spaces, for example by participating in student and trade union elections as well as in local and parliamentary balloting.

Representatives from the Constitution and Strong Egypt parties acknowledged that their chances of winning seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections were slim due to the electoral law adopted under the interim president in May 2014. Article 3 stipulates a mixed

system for electing representatives and gives greater weight to the majority vote system, through which 420 individual deputies (around 78 per cent of seats) are elected. Another 120 deputies (around 22 per cent), distributed among the four districts designated by the election law, are elected through a closed list system.¹⁴ The president appoints 27 deputies (5 per cent). The majority vote system weakens the influence of political parties and favours the old tribal and business elite's clientelist networks. In addition, the new closed list system, in which the composition of the lists have to comply with rather complex criteria, limits the chances of parties with youth majorities, since each list can only win as a whole, by obtaining an absolute majority of the vote in a district, or lose as a whole. This deprives the list system of one of its most important characteristics: proportional representation.

In contrast, the parties perceived an opportunity to win a number of seats in local elections, whenever they take place, thanks to the 2014 constitution, which reserves 25 per cent (around 13,000 seats) of local councils' seats for youths. Article 180 defines youth as a societal category comprised of those 21–35 years of age. The Constitution and Strong Egypt parties have viewed local elections as an opportunity to build their structures from the ground up and a chance for their youth members to gain hands-on training in building societal networks and communicating with state officials. The municipalities are considered an important conduit for getting in touch with the public as they deal with citizens' daily problems and their need for social services and infrastructure, such as electricity, water and roads. Both parties prepared their youths for this task by providing practical training courses related to public management and organizing citizen campaigns to deal with such local challenges as getting streets cleaned and roads improved. Thus, the parties have tried to solve local problems by playing a mediating role between local officials and the people. Indeed, the hope was that the engagement of youths

affiliated with the parties in local social initiatives would help them build social capital that could be transformed into political capital in the future (Bourdieu, 1986).

The influence of the Constitution Party and the Strong Egypt Party on the decision-making process has been weak or absent at the national level. Nevertheless, the choice of a gradual approach to achieving change – a result of the interaction between the youth movement and the political context – holds the potential to induce sustained change in the longer term. It could facilitate the formation of new political cadres and provide an important social resource for the parties that they might be able to harvest, for example in local elections. Two conditions need to be fulfilled, however, for such a strategy to bear fruit. First, there must be freedom to conduct local infrastructure and social service initiatives. Repression, of course, could easily derail this approach. The banning of student groups linked to political parties was alarming in this regard, signalling that the political space was closing. Second, achieving some success in elections should provide the means of channelling grievances into the political system. In this respect, the Strong Egypt Party has remained one of the few legal channels for political participation by non-Salafi Islamists. Still, it would be difficult to predict whether the party will be able to draw on the Muslim Brotherhood's voter base given the Brotherhood's strategy of boycotting elections and the perception among its members of the Strong Egypt Party as being less politically and religiously conservative.

Strategy 3: An alliance with the PRE?

The political context that emerged after Mursi's ousting, combined with youth groups' political revisions, pushed several actors – namely, the Tamarod campaign, the Future of the Nation Campaign (Hamlat Mustaqbal Watan, founded in December 2013 and transformed on 30 November 2014 into a political organization, the Future of the Nation Party) and the Front of the Egyptian Youth (Jabhat Shabab Misri) – to take a different political

path: supporting the new military-led regime and then the Sisi regime and working as its allies.

The Future of the Nation Campaign was founded with the goal of empowering youth and enabling them to be included socially and politically. Its establishment coincided with the process of drafting the 2014 constitution, from October to December 2013. The driving force and general co-ordinator of this movement was Mohamed Badran, head of the Egyptian Student Unions and a member of the Committee of 50. The movement has been undergoing a process of institutionalization and legalization, and, similar to the Tamarod campaign, morphing into a political party.

Several factors rooted in the new context pushed these youth groups, especially the Future of the Nation, to establish an alliance with the military-led regime. First, they wanted to profit from the regime's need to build legitimacy for itself. The latter was particularly obvious in several meetings that interim president Mansour held with youth groups between September 2013 and February 2014. During some of these meetings, Mustafa Higazy, the president's political advisor, explicitly mentioned the necessity of forming youth structures affiliated with the state or directly supported by it.¹⁵ The state would provide youth with the political education necessary for their empowerment and passage from the protest phase into preparing to potentially serve as state officials (Al-Borsa News, 2013; see also Basal, 2014). By supporting the post-Mursi military regime, the Future of the Nation provided the PRE with legitimacy in the form of youth support. Like Tamarod, the Future of the Nation Campaign joined Sisi's presidential election effort. Badran became a member of the campaign's youth committee. In return for its co-operation, the PRE provided the Future of the Nation with two important privileges: first, access to funding by a network of businessmen loyal to the military-led regime and later to the Sisi regime and, second, state officials' backing and support for their activities. Therefore, the Future of the

Nation Campaign should be viewed as part of a strategic alliance formed just after Mursi's ousting. The PRE aimed to replace oppositional youth groups with more loyal and non-revolutionary organizations.¹⁶ In addition, it was trying to channel youths' social and political grievances into an institutional format – for example, through their incorporation into local councils. In this context, it is not surprising that the party that emerged from the Future of the Nation Campaign gave its support to Sisi.

The second factor contributing to youth movements co-operating with the regime was the societal climate, which had generally become hostile to the revolutionary youth after what was widely perceived as the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood's tenure in power. Large segments of Egyptian society held youth activists responsible for Mursi's victory in the 2012 presidential elections, recalling the famous Sheraton (and now Fairmont) Hotel meeting in early June for the purpose of endorsing Mursi in the second round of the presidential elections. Political figures who had been opposed to the Mubarak regime as well as several revolutionary youth groups, including the 6 April Youth Movement, attended the meeting, which indeed ended with an endorsement of the Brotherhood leader, driven by the aim of preventing the 'return of the old regime'.¹⁷ Thus, revolutionary youth were blamed for the chaos that characterized Mursi's rule. This led the Future of the Nation's leaders to adopt a strategy that would challenge the perception of youth as a source of disruption and at the same time respond to the more conservative sectors of society.

That the party's president had also served as head of the country's student unions – the structure unifying all the university student unions – hinted at the party's potential to recruit members from among students across Egypt. Before the revolution, Badran had been head of Banha University's student union, a situation that helped him build extensive networks. Students were

recruited for Future of the Nation on a social and apolitical platform. While the student groups of the Constitution and Strong Egypt parties were banned at several universities, the Groups of the Future of the Nation Party (Usar Hizb Mustaqbal Watan) operated without problems. The party's university groups have focused on social services for students,¹⁸ but in contrast to other groups, the Future of the Nation Party has only worked on political education for its affiliated students and members outside the university.

After three years of political and economic disorder, recruitment came to rely on constructive activities in line with the slogan 'Youth are building the Future of the Nation'.¹⁹ Youths were invited to serve the country by participating in political and social activities, such as cleaning the streets, organizing demonstrations against terrorism, organizing conferences discussing the 2014 constitution and volunteering for the Suez Canal project inaugurated by President Sisi in August 2014 (Al-Dawy, 2014).²⁰ Future of the Nation's leaders claimed to have a reformist agenda, not a revolutionary one, arguing that their strategy consists of building an alliance with the state and achieving change through inclusion in the system. A concrete vision of the nature of this change has yet to be presented. Like other youth parties, Future of the Nation had aspirations to run in local and parliamentary elections.

The above types of activities proved to be attractive for those seeking greater inclusion in Egypt's political and social life but without having a specified agenda for political change. Youths from the lower middle and lower classes were motivated to join the movement for three main reasons: it allowed them to obtain the necessary resources for participating in social and political activities, such as local elections; they could profit from a wide range of social services at their universities; and they experienced a feeling of being included, as they were taking part in a larger network backed by the regime. These types of activities and this sort of framing

were also attractive to the more traditional forces within society, such as the politically conservative tribes of Upper Egypt. In an interview with *Al-Shorouk*, Badran said that several tribes supported the movement (see Faiz, 2014). Due to their social networks and moral influence, tribal leaders have historically won seats in local and parliamentary elections and can thus prove useful allies during elections. Obviously, such alliances with conservative forces contrast sharply with the youth parties, which were based on more progressive social networks, attracted members mainly from the middle class and were established during the 25 January uprising and shortly afterwards.

Yet even the Future of the Nation has faced challenges. The inability of the movement's leaders to transparently manage funds led to internal struggles and it split as a consequence.²¹ The head of Kafr al-Shaikh University's student union broke away to establish the Front of the Egyptian Youth (Jabhat Shabab Masri), which has followed the same strategy and framing as the Future of the Nation Party.²² The transparency issue reflected the lack of bottom-up accountability, as the movement's decision-making process remained highly centralized. Moreover, the movement's decision to support Sisi contradicted the social, apolitical platform used to recruit youths, especially at universities. Although the move to back Sisi received considerable support, it also led to additional splits. Moreover, the presence of leaders within the movement's rank-and-file who had previously been National Democratic Party members pushed some of the youth to leave the party, which they perceived as being co-opted.

The Future of the Nation Party has remained in an ambiguous position between participation and co-optation. It gained a certain margin of manoeuvre, as its foundation reflected a shared interest between the PRE on the one hand and the movement's leaders on the other. The movement's foundation was not a PRE-led initiative, nor were its strategies and tactics. To the

contrary, its emergence reflected the choice of some youth leaders to be included politically within the new socio-political context of a reconstructed regime and reconfigured elite. The movement's close co-operation with the core elite, however, made it susceptible to co-optation by the latter or to being transformed into an extension of the existing business and tribal clientelist networks. Also, the movement's various activities, by channelling youth demands and energies, were helping to stabilize the new order. Its capacity to push for a more participatory order in the longer term, however, remained limited because of its lack of capacity to further a dynamic of socio-political, bottom-up change.

Conclusions

Despite being credited with triggering the events of 2011, mobilized publics, including the youth movements discussed here, only played a limited role in the transformation processes that followed. During the SCAF's rule and the Mursi era, youths were able to exert pressure on and influence the PRE with their impressive mobilizing capacities. Youths succeeded, for example, in obtaining the dismissal of the Mubarak-appointed prime minister Shafiq and pressured the military authorities into setting a date for transferring power to a civilian government. Revolutionary youth activists also exerted tremendous pressure on the Mursi administration, with the Tamarod movement mobilizing millions of people for street protests against it in June 2013. Nevertheless, the youth movements' impact remained disruptive rather than formative. While they succeeded in reversing some of the decisions and rules they opposed, they failed to impose their own political agenda or to exert sustained influence on the PRE and the decision-making process. A major reason for this was the lack of organized structures. As the cases here show, youth movements were unable, throughout the transformation process, to morph into political actors in their own right.

The youth movements' patterns and strategies of political participation were far from static. Rather, they

evolved in response to the political context. The impact they made depended on interactional processes involving the PRE and the strategies the movements developed. The choice of a certain strategy could be successful in one political context but fail to yield influence in another. Street politics allowed the youth movements to exert pressure on the PRE during the two years following the 25 January revolution, but this was no longer the case in the aftermath of Mursi's ousting because of changes in the socio-political context. Repression of the opposition combined with a lack of societal support for demonstrations rendered the Revolutionary Front's strategy ineffective. One of the indicators of this lack of influence was that the protest law was not amended in spite of the Front's mobilization against it. Moreover, its members were continuously subjected to repression.

In addition, although the choice of a certain strategy enabled the movements to exert influence on the PRE and induce political change in the short term, it was liable to become ineffective in the longer term and vice versa. Thus, on the one hand, although the influence of the Strong Egypt Party and the Constitution Party on the decision-making process has thus far remained weak, their gradual approach holds some potential to induce change in the longer term. This is dependent upon their capacity to consolidate by developing their internal structures and on the level of constraint the regime imposes on such parties. Indeed, a gradual approach will only be fruitful if they are allowed to conduct activities. The banning of these parties' student groups at Egyptian universities points to a narrowing of the political space. On the other hand, although the close connections that the Future of the Nation Party has established with the PRE have provided it with important resources, the risk of the movement's co-optation by the PRE remains high. Therefore, the peril is that it will be transformed into an extension of the latter's clientelist networks, rather than develop into an autonomous actor, limiting its capacity to exert influence on the PRE in the longer term.

Notes

1. On the PRE and mobilized publics, see Asseburg and Wimmen, in this volume.
2. Islamist youth activists organizationally affiliated with either Salafi movements or the Muslim Brotherhood are excluded here, the main reason being that their belonging to these groups clearly trumped the revolutionary identity that the non-Islamist groups shared. Although Islamist youth participated in the 25 January events side by side with non-Islamists, their actions and strategies largely depended on decision making in already extant movements or parties. Islamist youth thus require separate investigations of their trajectories and changing repertoires of contention.
3. For more on the declaration, see Hisham el-Mayani, 'Al-Ahram tanshur al-nass al-kamil li qararat al-ra'is ... Mursi yuhassin qararatahu bi i'lan dusturi wa yamna' hall al-ta'sisiyya wa-l-shura' [Al-Ahram publishes the complete text of the president's decisions ... Mursi protects his decisions through a constitutional declaration and prevents the possibility of dissolving the Constituent Assembly and the upper house], *Al-Ahram*, 11 November 2012, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/275479.aspx> (accessed 29 December 2014).
4. Unless otherwise indicated, the references to the positions and approaches adopted by the Revolutionary Front in this section rely on interviews with prominent activists from the Front and its committees conducted in Cairo during May and June 2014.
5. For an account of the build-up of polarization and atmosphere of violence from a socio-anthropological perspective, see Schielke (2014).
6. The full text is available on the oppositional *al-Wafd* newspaper's website at <http://www.alwafd.org/الجماعة-رابخا/578584-صن-رشنن-قيدصتال-دع-رهازتال-نوناق> (accessed 5 December 2014).
7. For this and other positions cited in this paragraph, see Mashru' al-barnamij al-siyasi li-Jabhat Tariq al-Thawra [Project of the political of the Revolutionary Front], <https://www.facebook.com/notes/726125747404226/> (accessed 5 June 2015).
8. Interview with leaders of the mass committee of the Revolutionary Front, Cairo, May 2014.
9. See for example Abdel Aziz (2014) and 'Al-Hurriyya lil-Jid'an tu'lin idraban tasa'udiyan 'an al-ta'm lil-mutalaba bil-ifraj 'an sujana' qanun al-tazahur' [Freedom for the Brave declare an escalating hunger strike asking for the release of the prisoners held over protests against the anti-demonstration law], ONtv, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9A8YgoJ73Y> (accessed 10 June 2015).
10. Interview with three of the former youth leaders of the Coalition of the Revolutionary Youth and former leaders of the Constitution Party, Cairo, January 2013.
11. Unless otherwise indicated, the references to the positions and approaches adopted by the Strong Egypt and Constitution parties in this section rely on interviews with prominent members of these parties and their committees conducted between May and October 2014 in Cairo.

12. For further information, see Abdalla (2013).
13. See ElBaradei's resignation letter, 14 August 2013, at <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/382972.aspx> (accessed 5 December 2014).
14. The four lists cover Cairo, the centre and south of the Nile Delta (45 seats); Upper Egypt, starting at the Giza governorate (45 seats); east of the delta, including the Suez Canal cities and Sinai (15 seats); and west of the delta, including Alexandria (15 seats). The full text of the 2014 parliamentary election law is available at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/449934> (accessed 5 December 2014). For further information, see Abd Rabou (2014).
15. Higazy used the expression 'youth commission' (*mufawwadiyyat al-shabab*) (Al-Borsa News, 2013).
16. On the day announcing the establishment of the Future of the Nation's Campaign, Higazy gave the opening speech (Hafnawy, 2013) 15 December 2013.
17. See Abdel Moneim's (2012) summary of the 6 April movement's statement.
18. Unless otherwise indicated, the references to the positions and approaches adopted by the Future of the Nation Party in this section rely on interviews with prominent members of the party and its committees conducted in Cairo in May 2014.
19. Interview with a leader of the Future of the Nation Party, Cairo, June 2014.
20. The project involves building another canal, running parallel to the Suez Canal, to increase state revenue.
21. Information concerning these internal disputes was obtained from prominent former members of the party in interviews conducted in Cairo in May 2015.
22. Mohamed el-Amin, a businessman strongly supportive of the military-led regime established after Mursi's ousting, was present at the Front's inauguration. Amin is co-owner of the Amer Group Company, a real estate firm, and owner of the CBC satellite channel, which has backed the new leadership and had strongly opposed the Muslim Brotherhood's rule.

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Libya's local elites and the politics of alliance building

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ABSTRACT

In post-revolutionary Libya, the collapse of central authority and the fragmentation of territorial control have produced a fundamental change in the political elite. Local elites emerged as the leading actors and held the key to whether central authority would be re-established. These local elites faced strategic choices in building alliances among themselves: they could seek to enter and back the central government; build an anti-government coalition to exert veto power; or focus on consolidating control over their local turf. What determines local elite strategies? This article charts the rise of local elites in Libya and examines their attempts at alliance building until autumn 2014. Based on five weeks of field research conducted in 2014, the article analyses elite strategies in three Libyan cities: Misrata, Bani Walid and Tobruk.

Post-revolutionary Libya has been defined by the collapse of central authority and the fragmentation of the political landscape and territorial control. After the fall of the Qadhafi regime, there was no political force, or alliance of forces, that could take power. Instead, a multitude of actors engaged in power struggles, exerting nuisance power and preventing the re-establishment of central government control. During 2014 such actors coalesced into two warring camps making competing claims to legitimacy and authority, but neither was able to prevail. These actors were mostly organized at the local level. Their influence derived from control over local territory and the ability to speak for local constituencies: cities, tribes, ethnic groups or regions.

Territorial fragmentation produced a fundamental change in the political elite. Local territorial control offered opportunities for accumulating power and wealth. This applied to well-established local elites, who expanded their power, as well as to newcomers, who owed their rise to armed force or revolutionary

legitimacy. These local elites – businessmen, notables, leaders and sponsors of armed groups – held the key to whether central authority would be re-established. Following the end of the 2011 war, they exploited the weakness or absence of the state by grabbing state budgets, smuggling or seizing control over the energy infrastructure. Whether they dissolved their armed groups into the state security apparatus determined whether the state would regain control at the local level. These local actors came to constitute Libya's politically relevant elite (PRE; Perthes, 2004), and being politically relevant in post-revolutionary Libya meant being able to prevent other groups from seizing power. To paraphrase Asseburg and Wimmen (2016), local actors who had previously been firmly tied to the core PRE now acquired wide-ranging autonomy. At the same time, regime collapse allowed new actors to enter the arena. Both processes took place first and foremost at the local level.

Because many among the local elites benefited from the state's weakness, their lowest common denominator was to obstruct the re-establishment of central authority. On the other hand, entering and backing the central government could open up opportunities for local elites: they could potentially expand their influence from the local to the national level or use the central government's resources to cement their local position. Re-establishment of the state thus depended on whether local elites could form a coalition to create an effective central government while also accommodating their own interests.

This paper charts the rise of local elites in Libya and examines their attempts at alliance building until autumn 2014, by which time power struggles had led to renewed civil war, and attempts to re-establish state authority could be considered to have failed, at least for the time being. Under what circumstances and to what end did Libya's local elites engage in coalition building at the national level? What determined their strategies? How did their strategic actions shape the emerging political

disorder? More specifically, how did their actions affect the potential re-establishment of central authority and ultimately prevent it, forestalling the emergence of a sustainable and legitimate order?

The starting assumption is that Libya's local elites could theoretically choose between three different strategies. First, they could attempt to establish or participate in a dominant elite coalition at the national level, with the aim of expanding central government control and their own influence. Second, they could form or participate in alliances to exert veto power at the national level and counter attempts at expanding central government control (including alliances for autonomy or secession on a regional rather than national basis). Third, this perhaps being the default option, they could try to consolidate control over their local turf and prevent the return of the state to the local level. By the second half of 2014, with the fragile state-building process having collapsed into civil war, the strategic choices available to local elites changed fundamentally: the questions now were whether to enter the war, and if so, on which side; with which government and parliament to associate themselves; and what approach to take towards neighbouring communities with diametrically opposed positions.

What determined the interests, capacities and constraints that shaped the strategies of Libya's local elites? The argument put forward here relies on a combination of structural factors and dynamic processes. The structural factors fall into two categories: local elites' internal cohesion and the resources they commanded. These factors were partly determined by historical contingencies-most important, local elites' role under the former regime and during the 2011 revolution. For example, their internal cohesion partly depended on choices made during the revolution. Cohesion was central to local elites' ability to exert influence over and speak on behalf of local communities; internal rifts exposed local elites to constraints from their peers and

their communities.¹ Command over resources included control over the means of violence, which defined local elites' modes of resource accumulation as well as their relations with local communities. Their economic resource base defined local elites' interests vis-à-vis the state, depending on whether their economic activities were linked to the state (administration), independent of the state (commerce), outside state control (smuggling) or usurped from the state (control over oil infrastructure). Traditional, religious and revolutionary prestige were additional potential resources, along with access to external support.

At the same time, Libya's local elites adapted, switching their strategies when necessary in the three years following the collapse of Muammar al-Qadhafi's regime. Clearly, these strategies were not simply conditioned by a set of predetermined factors, but shaped by the interplay of local power and national politics. Local elites' strategic action in bargaining processes could alter their cohesion and command over resources. Their engagement in national-level alliances could provoke rifts at the local level, affecting their position within local communities.

Following a brief summary of the dynamics that saw Libya's local elites emerge as central players after the revolution, this article presents case studies for elites in three cities that followed radically different trajectories in post-revolutionary politics: Misrata, Bani Walid and Tobruk. These cities were chosen for their dissimilarity in respect to the structural factors expected to shape their elites' strategies: internal cohesion and command over resources. They also diverged with regard to their elites' role during the revolution. During the post-revolutionary period, all three cities' elites were at times actors in events of major national importance and part of national-level alliances, but only Misrata's elite emerged at the core of an alliance key in shaping national dynamics.

Research for this article was conducted first and foremost through interviews with leading local

protagonists and observers on visits to Tripoli, Misrata, Bani Walid and Tobruk in April, June and October 2014. Given the dearth of written sources on developments in the three cities, efforts to reconstruct developments and analyse strategic action were made by drawing on multiple local viewpoints and, where possible, triangulating the often conflicting accounts of local actors.

The rise of Libya's local elites

The emergence of local power centres during and after the 2011 war was closely linked to the disintegration of central authority, but the fact that political and military organization mainly occurred on a local basis during the war had its roots in the Qadhafi era (1969–2011) and the monarchy that preceded it (1951–69). Qadhafi had deliberately prevented the emergence of strong state institutions, with the exception of a security apparatus focused on protecting the regime, and recruited from tribal constituencies considered loyal. Eschewing state institutions, Qadhafi's rule relied instead on patronage networks through which influential local figures were co-opted. Some of these networks, such as the Popular Social Leaderships, also used tribal ties and thereby perpetuated or revitalized them (Mattes, 2008; Ouannes, 2009). The PRE of the Qadhafi era was never a national elite. Instead, localism prevailed in that its members were defined by their membership in specific communities or by their ability to maintain order within their communities.

Accordingly, local politics and rifts between communities were central features of the 2011 revolution and civil war. In western Libya, certain towns and cities emerged as revolutionary strongholds, while their neighbours hosted regime troops and mobilized volunteer fighters. Even where entire regions supported the revolution, such as in the western part of the Nafusa Mountains, military organization remained confined to the local level (Lacher & Labnouj, 2015). Each town maintained its own local and military councils that sought

to co-ordinate their revolutionary brigades. For many protagonists on both sides, Qadhafi's demise signified the capture of power by the victorious cities and tribes and the defeat of communities that had clung to the regime (Lacher, 2013b).

Yet, along with the regime, central authority all but collapsed, and the localism of revolutionary forces prevented its immediate re-establishment. Locally organized military forces persisted, obtained official recognition and grew as local figures gained influence in the transitional governments and were able to channel resources to their clients (International Crisis Group, 2012). Such local forces also began to seize control over borders, government facilities and vital infrastructure, such as oil fields and refineries, for economic gain or to pressure the central government. Some larger cities, including Tripoli, Benghazi and Sabha, and smaller divided communities, among them Kufra, became theatres (rather than bases) for rivalry between local forces. Across the country, increasingly brazen actions by local armed groups underscored the total impotence of the central government. From early 2013 onwards, armed groups on the state's payroll began blocking oil fields or ports to press their demands, including for eastern regional autonomy or secession. By early 2014, Libya's oil exports had virtually collapsed. Communities whose elites had supported the regime, and were now politically marginalized, were generally at a disadvantage in these rivalries (Lacher & Cole, 2014).

Gradually, local power centres began to coalesce into alliances. In places that had paid a heavy price for their leading role in the revolution, including Misrata, Zawiya and the Amazigh towns, leading figures now promoted a revolutionary agenda of purging former regime elites and building a new security sector with revolutionary forces at its core. Their supremacy was contested by communities in western and southern Libya that had been considered pillars of the former regime. Zintan, while having been at the forefront of the revolution,

increasingly moved away from its former allies and reached out to marginalized groups from its privileged vantage point. In the east, which had joined the revolution overnight and largely without local conflicts, tensions now emerged within cities between revolutionary or Islamist forces and the elites of the former regime, each side slowly finding allies in the fractious west (Lacher, 2013a).

A number of turning points marked the ensuing power struggles. In October 2012, the revolutionary camp led an offensive to capture Bani Walid, seen as a counter-revolutionary stronghold. Proponents of the revolutionary camp had pushed the decision to intervene through the General National Congress (GNC), the first transitional legislature, elected in July 2012. Some GNC members even participated in the operation, starkly illustrating the new balance of power. In May 2013, the same coalition successfully pressured the GNC into adopting the Political Isolation Law, which excluded figures who had held responsibility in the Qadhafi era from political office. The core regime elite had fled into exile or had been killed or arrested during the war. The isolation law now excluded those politicians, technocrats and military officers who had defected at the beginning of the revolution, thereby helping it to succeed. The law's winners and losers were unevenly distributed across Libya's towns and cities. The beneficiaries were members of the former exiled opposition – often descendants of families who had played a leading role under the monarchy – and figures who had risen to prominence through the revolutionary struggle. This included Islamist movements across the country, but also formerly marginalized local constituencies, such as the Amazigh.

The revolutionary camp's drive to dismantle the old army and purge established elites produced a convergence among the disparate interests that stood to lose from this agenda. Led by Mahmud Jibril's National Forces Alliance (NFA), they opted for increasingly

destructive political tactics, drawing on the support of particular tribal constituencies and military forces. In eastern Libya, officers of the old army allied with the tribal politicians leading the federalist movement and reached out to the networks surrounding NFA leaders and Zintani armed groups in the west.

Another turning point came with the sharp escalation of conflicts beginning in May 2014, when renegade military forces led by General Khalifa Haftar attacked Islamist groups in Benghazi, in the so-called Operation Dignity. With Libya Dawn, an offensive by a Misratan-led coalition against Zintani positions in Tripoli and its airport in July, a second theatre of major conflict emerged. The Libya Dawn offensive successfully dislodged the Zintanis and consolidated control in greater Tripoli. Operation Dignity caused revolutionary, Islamist and jihadi groups in Benghazi to close ranks against their common enemy.

Whereas previous conflicts had been confined to the local level and had generally been short-lived, these large-scale confrontations reflected the emergence of two broad rival alliances. The composition of the camps differed: in contrast to the armed factions defined by their local origin that were clashing in Tripoli, jihadi groups such as Ansar al-Shariah were prominent in Benghazi. Still, the two arenas of conflict were increasingly linked to each other and to the protracted power struggles over the central government. The May 2014 offensive by Haftar and Zintani forces in the west had partly aimed at dissolving the GNC and forcing early elections to the House of Representatives. The revolutionary and Islamist camp suffered severe losses in the June elections, and the Misratan-led offensive in Tripoli was partly a reaction to this electoral result. Faced with the prospect of diminishing influence in the legislature, Misratan hardliners and their allies had sought to establish territorial control over Tripoli as a political bargaining chip.

The result, as of the end of 2014, was a split of state institutions and the emergence of two governments and

competing claims to legitimacy – one based in Tripoli, the other based in the eastern cities of Tobruk and al-Baida.² Neither camp was able to prevail militarily or establish an effective and legitimate government.

Misrata's push for national dominance

A port city with a population of 300,000 and a key hub for Libya's import and retail sectors, Misrata became a major political and military power centre through the revolution thanks to the financial clout and cohesion of its business elite.

Misrata's wealthy business families, whose local prominence often dates back to the Ottoman era, had hardly been marginalized under Qadhafi. Admittedly, their relations with the regime had suffered after a Misratan officer led a coup attempt in 1975 (Ouannes, 2009) and soured further when the regime began nationalizing the property of Libya's upper classes in the late 1970s. Many members of Misrata's notable families left the country and joined the exiled opposition. Nevertheless, in a survey of individuals who held ministerial positions between 1969 and 1999, Misratans made up the single largest group, exceeding the number of ministers from Tripoli and Benghazi, both cities with several times Misrata's population.³ As the regime launched a large-scale investment drive in housing and infrastructure in the mid-2000s, a handful of Misratan businessmen used their privileged relations with core regime figures to obtain prime positions for benefiting from the largesse. However, after security forces began killing protesters in the city in February 2011, the vast majority of Misrata's business families quickly threw their weight behind the revolution. Those who did not left the city.

In other regions of the country, revolutionary forces were able to seize weapons and ammunition from army bases and storage facilities. In Misrata, besieged by regime forces from March to May 2011, buying arms and moving them into the city via the port became crucial to

the city's resistance. Close links emerged between the armed groups leading the war effort and the business families financing it, their members often participating in armed combat themselves. After the siege was broken in May, and Misratans began pushing back regime forces along larger front lines, smaller armed groups consolidated into larger brigades, for which strong logistical backing became even more important. The number of fighters in these units rose to 40,000 by October 2011 (McQuinn, 2015). In the final months of the war, Misratan groups established themselves in Tripoli, exacted revenge against the regime stronghold of Sirte and forcibly displaced the population of the nearby town of Tawargha, which they accused of having perpetrated crimes in Misrata.

After the war, Misratan politicians emerged as leading proponents of a revolutionary agenda. Misrata was strongly represented in successive transitional governments, and Misratan figures obtained leading positions at major investment vehicles and state-owned companies. Misratan brigade leaders successfully lobbied for the official recognition of the city's units and pushed for the former revolutionary forces to act as a substitute for the army. These forces gaining recognition and budgets under various institutional arrangements was an evolution that both further cemented their power and created vested interests in the distribution of security sector resources (Lacher & Cole, 2014).

The growing influence of elite networks linking revolutionary leaders and businessmen benefited from local sentiment that the city should play a leading role after having greatly suffered in the revolution. These networks also, however, gradually removed themselves from public accountability. Through demonstrations, civil society activists uniting as the 24 December movement successfully pressed for the election of a local council in Misrata in February 2012 in one of the earliest initiatives of its kind in Libya. Actual decision-making, however, took place in the Shura (consultative) Council formed by

political heavyweights and brigade leaders, as the city's armed groups became drawn into local conflicts in western Libya during 2012.⁴ Though having more than 100 members, the council was in reality dominated by a small group of politicians and businessmen with close links to the brigades. For the most part, this was not a new elite: many came from well-established families, and some remained close to Misratan magnates who had comfortably ensconced themselves among the former regime's corrupt networks. Meanwhile, the 24 December movement gradually disappeared, as its members faced threats from armed groups or were co-opted by elite networks.⁵

A decisive moment arrived in October 2012, when the city's GNC representatives stood among the leading proponents of Decision no. 7, authorizing the creation of a force to capture Bani Walid following the detention of several Misratans in that town. Misratan units made up the largest component in a coalition of forces from revolutionary strongholds now enjoying official status as the Libya Shield Force. One Misratan GNC member, Salah Badi, personally participated in Bani Walid's capture. The few prominent Misratans opposed to the action, such as Colonel Salim Jha, a leading figure in the revolutionary struggle, were quickly isolated. Across Libya, the episode shaped perceptions of Misrata as an uncompromising, ruthless force determined to dominate the new order.

Misrata's leadership in the hard-line revolutionary camp was cemented by its politicians' role in the push for the Political Isolation Law. In March 2013 GNC members Badi and Abd al-Rahman Suwaihli reportedly called in armed groups to besiege the GNC and force it to pass the law. The attempt failed, but caused a moderate Misratan GNC member, Hassan al-Amin, to publicly denounce his colleagues' tactics and then flee the country, fearing for his life. Some Misratan brigade leaders also participated in the subsequent occupation of ministries that aimed at exerting pressure on the GNC.⁶

Following the law's adoption in May 2013, another moderate Misratan GNC member, Juma Atiqa, resigned to pre-empt his removal under the law.

With the adoption of the law, Misrata's hard-line politicians had won a major battle, but at the expense of provoking increasingly confrontational tactics in the struggle for power in Tripoli. The Misratan-led camp was far from controlling national politics, and its repeated attempts to take over the transitional government failed. Moreover, Misratan leaders' actions provoked hostile public reactions across the country. They also damaged Misratan business interests: two major markets relocated to neighbouring cities, and Misratan-owned shops in Sabha or Sirte were targeted in times of tension.⁷ In November 2013, after a protest in front of a base in central Tripoli controlled by a Misratan brigade escalated into clashes in which 43 people were killed, anti-Misratan sentiment hit a new high (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Incensed, Misrata's local, military and Shura councils ordered the city's units to withdraw from Tripoli in an ostensible demonstration of unity.

Beneath the surface, however, tensions were rising. On the one hand, some brigade leaders contested the authority of local institutions' decision to withdraw from Tripoli, which allowed units affiliated with Zintan to expand their reach in the capital. Brigade leaders formed a new body, the Committee of 21, to represent their interests, but the city's power brokers succeeded in co-opting the initiative.⁸ On the other hand, a growing number of Misratan politicians and businessmen began opposing the hard-line stance that had pushed Misratan leaders into an alliance with Islamist currents at the national level and provoked a public backlash. For the most part, however, such opposition was confined to closed-door meetings, not least because those who challenged the city's stance too openly were silenced by threats. Such divisions may explain why Misratan leaders initially refused to respond in like terms when in May 2014 General Haftar launched his offensive against

revolutionary and Islamist groups in Benghazi, and Zintani brigades attacked the GNC in Tripoli to force its dissolution. Pushed by the hardliners, some Misratan units redeployed to Tripoli, but did not confront Zintani groups outright.

The mood shifted radically after the June elections to the House of Representatives. In Misrata, the vote returned a triumph for the city's businessmen-cum-revolutionary leaders, including Suwaihli, Sulaiman al-Faqih, Fathi Bashaagha and Muhammad Ibrahim al-Darrat. Nationwide, however, these figures' revolutionary and Islamist allies suffered heavy losses, substantially reducing the Misratan-led bloc within the parliament. The prospect of diminishing influence in formal institutions most likely served as the trigger for the offensive launched by a hard-line fringe of Misratan units in July 2014, joining with revolutionary and Islamist forces from other cities to attack Zintani positions in Tripoli. Depicted by the campaign's leaders as an all-out war against counter-revolutionary forces, Libya Dawn apparently aimed at taking control of Tripoli to increase the revolutionary camp's political leverage.

After initially meeting with much rejection in Misrata, the campaign quickly gained local backing. Opponents were silenced; brigade leaders were coaxed into joining the war after the battles claimed their first victims among Misratan fighters; incendiary language from both Misratan media and its adversaries also did its part.⁹ In their drive to dominate national politics, the hardliners within Misrata's elite were ready to push the country into civil war and stigmatize any local dissenters as traitors to their city. Libya Dawn also included units from Tripoli, Zawiya, Gharyan and some Amazigh towns, distinguished by local loyalties or their leaders' Islamist outlook and united by their vision of 'protecting the revolution'. Misrata's brigades, however, provided the bulk of the Libya Dawn alliance's firepower, the city's political heavyweights were the offensive's masterminds, and its business elite raised funds for the operation

although the fighting caused major damage to Misratan business interests in Tripoli.¹⁰ In a stark reversal of the influence the city's representatives had wielded in the GNC, Misrata's eight members of parliament (MPs), together with some 20 representatives from Tripoli, Benghazi and other cities, boycotted the legislature now meeting in Tobruk. They mobilized several large demonstrations in Misrata in support of the Tripoli operation and against the Tobruk rump parliament.

By late August, Libya Dawn had achieved its objective of pushing the Zintanis out of Tripoli. The UN Security Council, in Resolution 2174, threatened to target with sanctions those responsible for threatening peace and security, and foreign mediators began rounds of shuttle diplomacy between Tobruk, Misrata and Zintan. At this point, the united front of Misrata's elite began to disintegrate. Distrustful of the politicians meeting with foreign envoys behind closed doors, the city's brigade leaders formed a new body to represent their interests, the Authority of 17.¹¹ Parts of the Libya Dawn alliance, including some Misratan politicians, supported the establishment of a rival government under Umar al-Hassi in Tripoli, believing that de facto control could be converted into formal government authority. The leading Misratan figures behind the offensive, however, now positioned themselves as architects of a compromise with Tobruk and were backed in this by the Authority of 17. The politicians and brigade leaders performing this about-face were ready to abandon their tactical alliance with Islamist groups in exchange for building a centrist coalition that would give them a stake in a unity government. Hardliners were temporarily isolated, and attendance at their demonstrations against plummeted.¹² Meanwhile, the rift in Misrata's elite over negotiations with Tobruk continued to widen, but without leading to open internal confrontation.

Bani walid: counter-revolution and its enemies

The homeland of the Warfalla, one of Libya's largest tribes, and a city of 80,000 residents lacking a strong economic base, Bani Walid became one of the biggest losers of the revolution. Bani Walid's elite had been inextricably linked with the Qadhafi-era bureaucracy and security apparatus. Qadhafi had begun courting the tribe's leaders following a 1975 coup attempt led by a Misratan officer (Ouannes, 2009). In doing so, he not only invoked the Warfalla's historical alliance with his own tribe, the Qadhadhfa, but also exploited Bani Walid's old rivalry with Misrata going back to a war in 1920.

Since the late 1980s, only two politicians from Bani Walid had consistently featured as senior officials of ministerial rank, but their role in tying the town to the state had been crucial. As minister of labour and of education, Matuq Mohammed Matuq had favoured Bani Walid youths in selection for study abroad programmes, from which they would return to enter the administration. As head of the electricity authority and the infrastructure ministry, Umran Bukraa equally recruited heavily in Bani Walid for a public utility that served a domestic security function parallel to its official purpose.¹³ More generally, until 1993, the town had been among the regime's most important recruitment bases for the military and security services.

In 1993 the security apparatus foiled a coup plot implicating a disproportionate number of Warfalla officers. Bani Walid tribal elders refused to see the culprits executed in the town itself, since it would have made them complicit in the execution. Perceiving such local unity as a threat, Qadhafi set out to destroy the town's tight-knit social fabric. A wave of arrests in Bani Walid and among the Warfalla ensued; the families of those involved in the plot were banned from jobs, exiled from Bani Walid or had their houses flattened. The regime built up a counter-elite of new tribal figures and security officials.¹⁴ After almost a decade of tense relations, and despite an unofficial ban on new

recruitment of Warfalla into the officer ranks, the regime's hold over the town eventually became even stronger than before the coup plot (Cole, 2015).

The small demonstrations that erupted in Bani Walid at the revolution's outbreak were therefore rapidly suppressed, as the regime co-opted local figures with cash, recruited volunteers and began investigating opposition activists. Bani Walid's notables helped mobilize support for the regime among tribal constituencies. At the Conference of Libyan Tribes in Tripoli in May 2011, both the chairman, Ali al-Ahwal, and his deputy, the religious dignitary Muhammad al-Barghuthi, hailed from Bani Walid. When demonstrators eventually moved into the open on 28 May, they were violently repressed. Thirteen protesters were killed, provoking a deep divide between the town's leadership and those who had lost relatives in the incident or were arrested in its aftermath. Bani Walid remained among the regime's last strongholds and fell only in October 2011. Its senior politicians fled the country.

With the entry of revolutionary forces, a small group of Bani Walid revolutionaries established a local council in the town, relying on an armed group called the 28 May Brigade. Its attempts to arrest those accused of involvement in regime crimes rapidly caused a backlash, and in January 2012 the local council and the 28 May Brigade were forced to flee Bani Walid despite having called in a revolutionary brigade from Tripoli for support. In the local council's place, Barghuthi now headed the newly formed Social Council, whose name and insignia made no reference to the new order, but were instead reminiscent of the Qadhafi era. Consisting of ten men from each of the Warfalla's five sections (*aqsam*, an Ottoman-era structure established for taxation purposes), the Social Council claimed to be the town's sole legitimate representative and decision-making body. Its consent was essential to the ability to hold GNC elections in Bani Walid in July 2012. The two candidates backed by the council won by a large margin, one of

them, Salim al-Ahmar, being the council's deputy chairman.¹⁵ Voters associated with the revolutionaries were able to cast their vote for the Bani Walid district in Tripoli.

Although many Social Council members had been active in Qadhafi's Popular Social Leadership and remained in close contact with former regime officials now in exile, the council not only represented the interests of former regime elites but could also count on strong support from the community. Counter-revolutionary sentiment in Bani Walid was not, however, identical to loyalty to the former regime. Ahmar had spent five years in prison following the post-1993 wave of repression. Salim al-Waer, leader of the Warfalla 1993 Brigade, which forced the revolutionaries out, had been among the coup plotters and only returned from exile after the regime's demise. In contrast, the leader of the 28 May Brigade, Mbarik al-Futmani, had headed Bani Walid's Popular Social Leadership until May 2011.¹⁶ Divisions ran through Bani Walid's clans and families, provoked primarily by the events of 28 May, the destruction suffered by the town at the hands of revolutionary brigades and the transgressions of the 28 May Brigade. These experiences had shaped majority opinion in the town, as had the capture of more than 200 suspects from Bani Walid by revolutionary brigades in Tripoli and elsewhere. Moreover, after the departure of the local council, the town was cut off from government services. Medical supplies for Bani Walid, for example, continued to go to the local council, which had no presence in the town.

In this climate, the town's leaders increasingly openly challenged the new order. The Social Council reached out to other marginalized constituencies, holding two Conferences of Libyan Tribes in May and June 2012, during which they denounced their exclusion from the new political scene, the arbitrary reign of revolutionary brigades and the summary displacement of some smaller communities. In these meetings, the

independence flag that had become Libya's official standard was nowhere to be seen. Instead of the mushrooming revolutionary brigades now on the state's payrolls across the country, a number of armed groups emerged in Bani Walid that did not even try to gain official recognition, the largest being the 1993 Brigade.

In July 2012, such groups seized five Misratans on roads near Bani Walid. While the Social Council sought to use the hostages in negotiations for the release of Bani Walid prisoners from Misrata, it quickly became clear that the council was not in full control of the armed groups that held them. One of the five hostages, Umranshaaban, had been among Qadhafi's captors in Sirte. He was injured during his capture by Bani Walid fighters and died of his wounds shortly after being released in late September. This triggered Misrata's mobilization and the push for Decision no. 7, which gave Bani Walid ten days to hand over the suspects in his abduction and injury or face military force (International Crisis Group, 2013). The Social Council refused, and the attack on Bani Walid began before the deadline had passed.¹⁷

After suffering major shelling, displacement and renewed looting, Bani Walid was captured yet again by revolutionary forces, in late October 2012. The Social Council and counter-revolutionary armed groups fled; several units were deployed to the town, among them two army units and the 28 May Brigade. Around the same time, Bani Walid's GNC representatives were suspended by the Integrity Commission, a predecessor of the body enforcing the Political Isolation Law. The two candidates who replaced them were affiliated with the town's revolutionaries, mainly representing those citizens still living in Tripoli. As a result, Bani Walid remained politically marginalized and again quickly escaped state control. Social Council members gradually returned and met covertly. In February 2013, they re-emerged into the open and compelled the 28 May Brigade to leave Bani Walid. The army units were targeted and later withdrew to a checkpoint outside Bani Walid, which they

eventually abandoned after a major attack in September.¹⁸

Following Bani Walid's second capture, however, the Social Council refrained from adopting the openly defiant stance that had provoked the conflict. No counter-revolutionary armed groups surfaced, and the Social Council no longer held meetings of former regime constituencies. Negotiations with the town's revolutionaries eventually brought about the formation of a local council whose members accepted the post-revolutionary order. In May 2013, the local council began operating in Bani Walid with the Social Council's reluctant agreement, trying to build support by disbursing central government funds for public works projects and compensation for war damages.¹⁹ Social Council chairman Barghuthi, previously among the town's hardliners and arrested during the capture of Bani Walid, promoted a conciliatory stance after his release from captivity in Zawiya in December 2013. When hot-headed Social Council members in January 2014 issued a fiery statement in support of groups from the Warshafana, which were in conflict with revolutionary brigades south of Tripoli, Barghuthi resigned in anger.²⁰ The divisions among Bani Walid's counter-revolutionary tribal politicians reflected pressure from the local community, part of which attributed the town's recapture to the Social Council's intransigence. Nevertheless, Bani Walid's disenchantment with the post-revolutionary order persisted. In June 2014, the Social Council split over whether to boycott the parliamentary elections. Voting eventually took place, but participation was dismal, and the vote fragmented. The winners could hardly claim to represent Bani Walid.²¹

These internal rifts increasingly prevented Bani Walid's elite from playing a role on the national stage. While the Social Council remained united in its successful efforts at reconciliation with Zawiya, it divided over more significant matters.²² In the escalating national crisis of mid-2014, Bani Walid's ostensibly neutral position

concealed deepening rifts. Hardliners on the council, backed by former regime figures from Bani Walid now based abroad, pushed for a counter-revolutionary war effort. They oversaw limited recruitment into an Army of Tribes fighting alongside the Zintanis in the Warshafana area and, in August, sought to hold a conference of the Supreme Council of Libyan Tribes and Cities in Bani Walid, apparently to take a clear position against the Libya Dawn coalition.²³ Moderates within the Social Council, however, blocked the conference, and neutrality remained the council's majority position, not least because Bani Walid lacked the military muscle to defend itself. For counter-revolutionary figures in the town, this represented a major missed opportunity. At the same time, the council was unable to capitalize on its neutral position to mediate between the warring parties, because its relations with the revolutionary camp remained tense. For example, Social Council hardliners thwarted an initiative by Misratan leaders and some Bani Walid representatives for the release of Warfalla prisoners in Misrata (Al-Rasifa, 2014). Riven by internal divisions, Bani Walid became irrelevant in the escalating national power struggle.

Tobruk: capitalizing on the margins

An oil port with a population of around 180,000 and located close to the Egyptian border, Tobruk had seen a thriving smuggling economy develop since the 1970s (Pliez, 2009). In the late Qadhafi era, managing that economy became a main focus of the local elite, in addition to controlling the levers of the administration to direct state funds and to appropriate land (Hüsken, 2009). Tobruk's economy and local politics were run by an elite of prominent families operating in a social framework structured around four large tribes whose networks straddled the border. By and large, these tribal politicians eagerly entered the administration; several local notables who had been arrested in the 1970s or 1980s later reconciled with the regime. Consequently, Tobruk's elite, while consisting of competing networks at

whose top even leading players of the same tribal subsection might engage in persistent personal rivalries, was not riven by serious internal rifts. When the uprising erupted, Tobruk's army units and security forces, mostly recruited from local communities, refused to suppress demonstrations and defected to the rebels. Meeting on 18 February 2011, the Tobruk Popular Social Leadership still offered lukewarm support for the regime, but was then rapidly overtaken by events. Within days and almost without bloodshed, the city and its pragmatic tribal leaders had joined the revolution.

As a result, the revolution did not substantially alter the composition of the local elite. Some notables formerly excluded by the regime came to play a prominent role, among them Faraj Yasin al-Mabri, who had been temporarily imprisoned under Qadhafi and now headed Tobruk's local council. Only a handful of local regime officials, most prominently Al-Tayyib al-Safi, fled the country. Contrary to other cities in the east, no revolutionary armed groups formed in Tobruk, which was far from the front line and unthreatened by regime forces. A small number of Tobruk's army officers and some civilians joined brigades from other eastern cities, but did not form separate units upon their return.²⁴ As elsewhere, Tobruk's army units acquired wide-ranging independence from central oversight, and some officers recruited civilians into a new border guard unit, but no rivalry over the control of military force developed. Security in the city was assured primarily through the mutual deterrence of tribal loyalties and recourse to customary law to resolve disputes.

With Tobruk's peripheral location and limited military weight, and without a strongly revolutionary or counter-revolutionary political stance, Tobruk's elite rapidly lost influence in national politics after the end of the war. Local politicians were poorly positioned to participate in the aggressive rivalries over Tripoli institutions involving interests from Zintan, Misrata and other western cities.²⁵ The local council, which remained unelected until

municipal elections in May 2014, was ineffective in mobilizing investment from the central government and was widely accused of wasting its budgets.²⁶ Largely left to fend for themselves, local heavyweights instead took advantage of the booming smuggling economy or invested in rampant unregulated construction. In the GNC, Tobruk's representatives mostly sided with Jibril's NFA, whose opposition to a sweeping exclusion of former regime officials resonated well with the town's elite. The NFA's defeat on the issue combined with the eastern groups' frustration over their disadvantaged position in Tripoli to push many tribal politicians into the nascent movement for regional autonomy (Kane, 2015).

The participation of some Tobruk notables in the shutdown of eastern oil export terminals by the Political Bureau of Cyrenaica from August 2013 onwards was based on a complex political calculus. Tobruk's involvement was crucial for the negotiating position of Ibrahim Jadran, the bureau's head. Jadran's blockade at Ras Lanuf, Brega, Sidra and Zuwaitina – Libya's 'oil crescent' – would have been much less of an acute problem for the government had exports continued via Tobruk's Hariqa terminal. The bureau's demands included investigations into oil sector corruption; the relocation of the National Oil Corporation and other institutions to the east; amnesty, reintegration and the payment of back salaries for the Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) enforcing the blockade; and the appointment of a new PFG head. This reflected in part the roots of the unrest among PFG units led by Jadran, which had been in charge of securing the export terminals in the oil crescent. In Tobruk, however, the closure was not enforced by the PFG; instead, the mere threat by local heavyweights that any tanker entering the port would be attacked sufficed.²⁷ For Jadran's allies in Tobruk, the potential prize was control over oil sector institutions and, possibly, the direct sale of crude held in the terminals' storage tanks.

The local elite was far from united over the issue. Several prominent players were fiercely opposed to the blockade, among them Faraj Yasin, a cousin and longstanding political rival of the leading figure behind the closure of Hariqa, Mansur Salihin. Given Tobruk's neglect by the Tripoli government, however, there was little incentive to confront the blockaders as long as they failed to obtain material benefits from their brazen acts. At the regional level, several leading federalist politicians also distanced themselves from Jadran, whose personal ambitions and focus on major financial gain appeared all too obvious. Eventually, in March 2014, an almost successful attempt by Jadran to sell 200,000 barrels of oil, aborted only when the US Navy seized the tanker carrying the cargo off Cyprus, led the GNC to authorize military action. Jadran's losses in clashes with advancing Misratan units, and his willingness to attack other eastern brigades, weakened his position both in the east and vis-à-vis the government. In April, the government agreed to some of the demands of Jadran's PFG, including an allegedly substantial cash payment, but without granting concessions on oil sector institutions, let alone regional autonomy. Whatever share Jadran's allies in Tobruk were able to negotiate, it certainly fell far short of their demands. Their strategy had proven at least a partial failure.

Another opportunity for Tobruk's elite to play a role in national politics came with General Haftar's May 2014 offensive. Operation Dignity was not only a campaign by old army units and tribal militias against Islamist and revolutionary brigades in Benghazi, but also part of a national political battle against the revolutionary camp (Lacher & Cole, 2014). As such, it gained the support of many local political players and military officers. A handful of officers in senior positions opposed Haftar's campaign, but did not do so openly, to avoid coming under pressure. Air force officers loyal to Haftar even used the local military airbase for mounting attacks on targets in Benghazi. Proponents of regional autonomy, in turn, most likely saw in Haftar's open defiance of the

chief of staff and his attempt to wrestle power from the GNC an opportunity to create a parallel government in the east. More generally, the open confrontation with the revolutionary camp allowed former regime figures to reassume prominent local positions, after having previously kept a low profile. In Tobruk, this included Al-Tayyib al-Sharif and Faraj Yadam Buatiwa. In sum, different local interests joined to back the all-out revolt against the Tripoli government led by Haftar.

Tobruk's support for the loose tactical alliance of Haftar, the federalists and the NFA acquired broader significance in August 2014, when MPs affiliated with this alliance conspired to hold the inaugural and subsequent sessions of the House of Representatives in Tobruk.²⁸ The move to Tobruk, and its acceptance by a majority of MPs, gave a clear advantage to the revolutionary camp's adversaries, but it also exposed the discrepancy between the balance of power in the rump parliament and that on the ground. The institution Tobruk was hosting represented only one arena of struggles among others. In many ways, the real struggles continued in Tripoli and Benghazi.

Tobruk's elite suddenly found itself thrust from the wings into the spotlight. The town's politicians strongly supported the uncompromising approach adopted by the new majority in the rump parliament. Tobruk did not have to fear much direct backlash, given its peripheral location. Beyond this general stance, however, rival local politicians associated themselves with divergent interests in the fractious alliance. Relations with Haftar's command structure, in particular, differed sharply between leading local players. Some local politicians and officers associated themselves with Haftar, expecting to benefit from the close alliance emerging between the rump parliament and the Egyptian leadership under Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, not least because Tobruk's location was crucial to the provision of Egyptian military support. Among proponents of regional autonomy, by contrast, relations with Haftar were often strained due to what

appeared to be conflicting political objectives. Even among themselves, the federalists were divided. For example, only one faction of Tobruk federalists associated itself with Jadran. When the latter re-emerged in November 2014 threatening secession, three of the six politicians appearing with him were from Tobruk.²⁹ Overall, however, Tobruk's stance played into the hands of the autonomy movement, particularly the rump parliament's determination to monopolize formal authority even if that meant a loss of control over much of western Libya. Tobruk's support for the rump parliament therefore served diverse local interests and agendas, but it effectively helped set Libya on a path towards de facto partition.

Conclusions:

Explaining choices and shifts in local elites' strategies

After the fall of the Qadhafi regime, Libya's local elites gradually coalesced into two rival camps, provoking escalating violent conflicts. As of December 2014, competing claims to legitimacy had forestalled the establishment of a broadly accepted political order. The return to a single government will depend on whether local interests can realign themselves from two polarized camps to a loose and heterogeneous coalition at the centre.

The trajectories of local elite strategies in the three cities varied. Misrata built a national coalition of revolutionary forces with the ambition of seizing central authority. Faced with a backlash from rival local power centres and the rifts this provoked in Misrata itself, the city's hardliners opted for all-out confrontation, closing ranks at home but dividing the country before splitting again when the time came for negotiations. Bani Walid's attempt at building a counter-revolutionary coalition of groups excluded from the new order had dire consequences for the town and provoked internal divisions that made it irrelevant to the national political

game. Meanwhile, Tobruk remained at the margins, in part by choice. However, after a brazen attempt by local actors to seize state assets failed, Tobruk's elite joined a broad coalition with ambiguous goals, eventually finding itself at the core of this alliance more by accident than by design.

The central government hardly featured as a player in these struggles, for the primary reason that it was completely at the mercy of diverse local interests with a stake in it. The government's weakness and its function as a bounty for local interest groups also explained why local councils were not the central loci of decision making in the three cities: Informal networks and ways of exerting pressure were much more effective in mobilizing state resources, and little local legitimacy could be gained by acting as the official link between the local level and an embattled government.

Structural factors and historical contingencies were important in shaping elite strategies. Misrata was able to emerge as a leading player because of the resources commanded by its business elite, which directly translated into military power. Bani Walid's elite was reduced to the symbolic capital of tribalism and tribal alliances once its long-standing source of influence – its role in the security apparatus and the administration – had dried up. Tobruk's failure to emerge as a player on the national stage stemmed in part from its peripheral location and from the local elite's focus on a transborder economy that was by definition outside state control. Seizing the local oil infrastructure and opposing the revolutionary camp taking power in Tripoli made sense from Tobruk's marginal perspective.

Structural factors and historical contingencies also shaped these local elites' attempts to pool resources. Misratan hardliners allied themselves with local revolutionary strongholds and national Islamist forces, thereby building a substantial bloc in the GNC and the country's dominant military alliance. For Misrata's elite, this was useful not only because of the greater influence

that came with the alliance, but also because it served to dilute the widespread perception of Misratan supremacy in national politics, a perception that increasingly became a liability. Bani Walid's counter-revolutionary elite largely focused on pooling symbolic capital, by uniting tribal constituencies excluded from the new order that were unable to challenge the revolutionary forces militarily or in formal institutions. Parts of Tobruk's elite built a regional alliance that combined tribal prestige, business interests and the military power of its allies in the oil crescent. After this failed, Tobruk joined a broad coalition in which federalists connected with the political networks of the NFA and the military power of Haftar and Zintan. Political, military and financial resources created a formidable tactical alliance.

These structural factors, however, only partly explain strategic choices, as shifts in strategies by all three local groups suggest. Using the typology of strategic choices open to local elites outlined above, Misrata's elite set out with a strategy of the first type (dominant alliance), but shifted to a strategy of the second type (veto power) when the balance of forces in government institutions changed. Bani Walid's counter-revolutionary elite initially opted for a strategy of the second type (veto power), but was shattered by the backlash this triggered and thereafter vanished as a strategic player in the national arena. Bani Walid's revolutionaries sought to join a dominant alliance to expand their local influence, but given the central government's weakness, they had limited success with this strategy. After a period of remaining focused on the local level, parts of Tobruk's elite experimented with a strategy of the second type, pushing for autonomy, but joined a potentially dominant coalition when this strategy failed and proved locally divisive.

These shifts were partly reactions to the moves of other groups, rival and allied, but they were also driven by local reactions to the strategies adopted by dominant local players. A credible claim to speak for their

communities was local elites' most valuable symbolic resource. Local elites' strategies at the national level in part aimed at strengthening their credibility as representatives of their communities and shaping local opinion. In all three cities, local elites mobilized demonstrations to show that their positions enjoyed broad support while also discouraging or repressing alternative views. Elites in Misrata and Bani Walid pursued confrontational strategies at the national level to cement their position at the local level, thus forcing local actors to choose between supporting their town's leaders or being stigmatized as traitors. In Bani Walid, this strategy backfired because of the town's military weakness. In contrast, Misrata's hardliners pursued this strategy ever more radically after the first signs of local opposition became apparent. In late 2013 and early 2014, Misrata's national role caused local quarrels, weakening the ability of leading figures to speak for the city. When its leaders called for the defence of the revolution, however, local interests closed ranks, at least in public. In Tobruk, one elite faction's attempt to extort the central government also provoked local divisions. Local unity in backing an alliance of conservative elites from May 2014 onwards could be attributed to the ambiguous goals of that alliance, which claimed control over national institutions but also served the interests of the autonomy movement.

The hypothesis emerging from these observations is that alliance building by Libya's local elites inevitably provoked local divisions. This was not simply because of the impact on local politics of the increased influence that came with local actors' participation in larger alliances. It was also due to the necessity that such alliances be based on a supra-local political project – such as regional autonomy, revolutionary purges or an Islamic state – that would necessarily provoke local dissent. Forming larger political alliances put local unity at risk, threatening the credibility of local elites as representatives of their constituencies – their key symbolic resource – and, ultimately, their control over

local territory. In other words, building alliances at the national level posed a strategic dilemma for Libya's local elites. This dilemma helps explain why, three years after the demise of the Qadhafi regime, cohesive national political forces had yet to emerge.

Notes

1. In stressing the importance of internal cohesion for the interaction of local elites and local communities with the state, this article follows Skocpol's (1979) study of social revolutions and state formation as well as Boone's (2003) argument that variations in the political capacities and interests of rural elites caused West African governments to diverge in their strategies for governing the countryside.
2. For the first session of the House of Representatives in August 2014, 30 out of the 188 elected members boycotted the Tobruk sessions, including all eight Misrata parliamentarians. The House adopted an increasingly partisan stance, designating the Misratan-led Libya Dawn alliance a terrorist group, calling for foreign intervention to fight terrorism and mobilizing military assistance from Egypt. As a result, attendance plummeted further, and by September the parliament in Tobruk essentially represented a coalition of interests opposing the Misratan-led camp. Meanwhile, parts of the Libya Dawn alliance resurrected former GNC members to provide a veneer of legitimacy to the formation of a rival government in Tripoli, under Umar al-Hassi.
3. This is according to Mogherbi (n.d.), who appears to have included ministers of (sometimes distant) Misratan origin from other cities in his count.
4. Interview with former Shura Council member Abdallah al-Bayudi, Misrata, April 2014.
5. Interview with former activist in the 24 December movement, Misrata, October 2014.
6. Interview with former GNC member Muhammad Ali Abdallah al-Darrat, Tripoli, June 2014; see also Al-Amin (2013).
7. Interviews with Misratan businessmen and observers, Misrata, March 2013 and April 2014.
8. Interviews with Misratan businessmen and observers, Misrata, March 2013 and April 2014.
9. Interviews with brigade leaders, politicians and businessmen, Misrata, October 2014.
10. Interviews with politicians and businessmen, Misrata, October 2014.
11. Interviews with brigade leaders, members of the Authority of 17, Misrata, October 2014.
12. Interviews with members of the House of Representatives, brigade leaders and observers, Misrata, October 2014.
13. Interviews with Bani Walid politicians, Bani Walid and Tripoli, April and June 2014. See also Cole (2015).

14. Interviews with local observers and politicians, Bani Walid and Tripoli, April and June 2014.
15. Interviews with Social Council members Salim al-Ahmar and Imhemmed al-Tumi, Tripoli, June 2014.
16. Interviews with local observers, Bani Walid, April 2014.
17. Interviews with former GNC members Salim al-Ahmar and Muhammad Ali Abdallah al-Darrat, Tripoli, June 2014.
18. Interview with Social Council member Muftah Ijbara, Bani Walid, April 2014.
19. Interviews with members of the local council and Social Council, Bani Walid, April 2014.
20. Interviews with local observers and members of the local council and Social Council, Bani Walid, April 2014.
21. Out of 60,000 potential voters, only 3,785 cast ballots in Bani Walid. Hassan al-Tahir al-Barghuthi was elected with 650 votes, and Muhammad al-Waer with 474.
22. Opponents of reconciliation had prevented the Zawiyan delegation from entering Bani Walid. In protest, the Social Council dissolved itself, forcing the offenders to apologize. The reconciliation agreement then went ahead, and the Social Council reinstated itself. See the video of the reconciliation ceremony with statements from Social Council members (Ali Muhammad, 2014).
23. The Supreme Council had been formed at a conference in Aziziya in May 2014 as an initiative of politicians from the Warshafana tribe. The selection of communities represented resembled that of the Bani Walid tribal conferences of 2012. Several members of the Social Council attended. The discourse at the conference was counter-revolutionary. Networks surrounding the Supreme Council created the Army of Tribes, which from July 2014 onwards fought the Libya Dawn coalition in the Warshafana and Nafusa Mountains areas. Interviews with Social Council members and other Bani Walid politicians, Tripoli, June and October 2014.
24. Interviews with senior army officers from Tobruk, Tripoli and Tobruk, April and June 2014.
25. Interview with Tobruk politician Mansur Salihin, Tobruk, April 2014.
26. Interviews with local observers and activists, Tobruk, April 2014.
27. Interview with Mansur Salihin, a leading figure in the blockade, Tobruk, April 2014.
28. The question of where the parliament should convene was disputed among the rival camps. A GNC road map had chosen Benghazi as the seat of parliament, but fighting and changes in territorial control in Benghazi and Tripoli meant that representatives associated with one camp or another would have been under threat in these cities.
29. They included two former members of the Tobruk Popular Social Leadership, Othman Bkhatra al-Qutaani and Faraj Buhassan al-Marimi, as well as Saad al-Tajun, a former political prisoner and later a local regime official.

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Mobilized publics in Post-Qadhafi Libya: the emergence of new modes of popular protest in Tripoli and Ubari

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ABSTRACT

As the formal transformation process in Libya faltered and political and local elites were locked in contestation over shares of power and resources, spaces opened for non-formal movements of citizens pushing to exert influence on the political sphere, and to pursue their interests vis-à-vis state institutions with hitherto unknown forms of contentious action. This article investigates two distinctively different examples of such initiatives: on the one hand, the movement against militia rule and the extension of the mandate of the General National Congress (GNC) that emerged in Tripoli in the fall of 2013 and organized demonstrations for new elections throughout the spring of 2014. On the other, a movement for more equitable access to resources and citizenship rights that emerged in the provincial town of Ubari in the Fezzan region and gained momentum in late 2013 through the (largely peaceful) disruption of oil production. The chapter argues that through their mobilization capacities and innovative forms of contentious action, both movements compelled political and institutional actors to recognize mobilized publics as a force to reckon with, and modify the ways they interact with citizens and the general public.

Introduction

The year 2013 was marked by the resurgence of popular protest movements in Libya. This new wave of protest originated in the confluence of a profound sense of exasperation among the population and the eroded legitimacy of transitional institutions (Borasy, 2014). The demands articulated during these protests were, on the one hand, directly political, such as holding elections for a new House of Representatives to replace the deadlocked General National Congress (GNC), the first elected post-revolution decision-making body, and, on the other hand, engaged with social issues often

associated with demands for access to local resources, in particular work opportunities for unemployed youth. The protests took place against the backdrop of a difficult security situation and deteriorating public services that fuelled the proliferation of hubs of dissent and unrest (Bensaâd, 2012).

After elections in 2012 for the GNC, successive governments failed to build stable and effective security institutions, in particular a national army, at a time when the country faced an uncontrolled proliferation of weapons. Instead they used militias as auxiliary forces to intervene in local conflicts, rendering the government dependent on these non-state forces and thus empowering them (Al Abboud, 2014:11–12). The central government found itself increasingly unable to impose its authority over the militias and local elites (Lacher, 2016). Lack of central government control also led to poor governance and ineffective delivery of services, which further undermined trust in state and political institutions. This lack of trust manifested itself in a dramatic decline in electoral participation: while more than 50 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2012 elections, less than 20 percent did so in the June 2014 elections for the House of Representatives (Romanet Perroux, 2014).¹

This gave rise to contradictory developments that saw the return of leaderships built on traditional and tribal legitimacies as well as the emergence of new forms of political activism (Tabib, 2014). Activists from urban milieus and marginalized social strata, including predominantly tribal regions, responded to the increasing fragmentation of the political system by developing multifaceted and dynamic tactics for putting forward their demands related to the social, political and security situations. Activists who declared themselves to be without political or partisan allegiance led the popular initiatives underpinning these protest movements. Despite harsh criticism, repression and violent attacks, those taking part established these initiatives as symbols of a disparate but determined movement bringing

together a broad spectrum of citizens, male and female, to rally around political and social programmes.

This contribution provides a chronological analysis of two protest movements that mobilized citizens to become active with the explicit objective of exerting immediate influence on the political process and may thus be described as mobilized publics according to the concept proposed by Asseburg and Wimmen (2016). The No to the Extension Movement (Harak La li-l-Tamdid, hereafter Harak)² was started by young Tripolitarians opposed to extending the tenure of the GNC between late 2013 and early 2014 and hence represents an attempted direct intervention in the formal process of institutional transformation initiated in 2011. By contrast, the movement that coalesced into the Coordination Committee for Rights (Tansiqiyyat Huquq, hereafter Tansiqiyya) rallied the unemployed and marginalized youth in the Ubari region within the resource-rich yet neglected Fezzan region of the south-west. With its battle for social and civil demands – namely, equal access to work and citizenship – the Tansiqiyya pushed to influence the distribution of wealth and income between the centre and the periphery, as well as relations of domination between different demographic groups and social strata in the region itself. The contribution explores the movements' capacities, strategies and practices and highlights the effects that grass-roots activism has had on the political landscape by identifying disruptions, fragmentations, reorganizations and alliances. It primarily builds on several rounds of field research involving first-person interviews with activists, local personalities and observers in Tripoli, Fezzan and Hammamet in August and September 2014. The prime objective is to understand how the different protest dynamics influenced Libya's political transformation.

Turning points and key moments of Libya's transformation

Any analysis of mobilized publics in post-revolutionary Libya must take into account a series of key moments that decisively shaped the rules of the game by which political actors engaged with one another and that in turn determined the political and institutional environments within which their movements engaged. For the period under consideration, a few events constituted turning points that marked decisive shifts in the mode of political interaction. One is the GNC's May 2013 adoption at gunpoint of the Political and Administrative Isolation Law, which made it possible to exclude an array of actors from the political process on the basis of alleged co-operation with the old regime (Smith, 2013; Lacher, 2016).³ Among those barred were many whose early defections had made the revolution possible. The law thereby reinforced and formalized exclusionary tendencies that had been developing since the 2012 GNC elections, boosted the position of political actors claiming 'revolutionary leadership' and further entrenched the dominance of armed force over formal institutional processes. Thus, it foreshadowed and to a certain extent paved the way for the violence that followed.

Indeed, since late 2011, the political process in Libya had been punctuated by alternating periods of elections and episodes of bloody confrontation, with the opposing camps concentrating on building alliances to ensure their supremacy on all fronts, armed and political. After the GNC elections, the political landscape essentially split into two rival camps. One was the alliance of clans and militias from the towns of Gharyan, Misrata, Zawiya and Zliten and the eastern districts of Tripoli, as well as some southern tribes, including the Awlad Suleiman, Hasawna and Zwayya. They all came together around the political platform of the Justice and Construction Party (Hizb al-'Adala wal-Bina', JCP), the political wing of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. Opposing them was an alliance of a confederation of eastern tribes (the Awaqir, Bra'ssa, Haraba, Magharba and Ubaidat) and the Zintan, a powerful tribe from western Libya. On the political level,

it was represented by a group of deputies in the GNC (and later the House of Representatives) called the National Forces Alliance (Tahaluf al-Qiwa al-Wataniyya, NFA). While the latter alliance referred to itself as 'liberal' and 'civil', the use of these adjectives should be read, for the most part, as an attempt by these actors to distinguish themselves from the 'Islamist' orientation of the JCP. On issues such as social norms and the role of religion in politics, the two blocs did not hold decidedly different positions. They have, however, disagreed in regard to the former regime elite. While the JCP pushed for radical replacement and the exclusion of all individuals who held positions under Muammar al-Qadhafi, the NFA exhibited a more flexible attitude, not least because the deepening confrontation with the JCP required it to urgently find allies.

In late 2013, the NFA received support from unexpected quarters: a fast-growing wave of popular mobilization that challenged the Misrata militias' dominance over the eastern quarters of Tripoli and ultimately forced their withdrawal. While the stances of the movement that became Harak were officially independent of the political parties and unrelated to the tribal origins of its members, they coincided with the positions and strategies of the coalition formed around the NFA, creating an opportunity for alliance. The wave of popular demonstrations organized by Harak starting on 7 February 2014, especially those in Tripoli, constituted another turning point, after which debates and political divisions hitherto restricted to the formal transitional institutions spilled over into the public sphere. While up to this point only the JCP had had the capacity for mass mobilizations to support a political agenda, the increasing alignment of Harak with the NFA meant that the power struggle over control of the government and political institutions was now carried out vicariously by mobilized publics.

The proliferation of actions begun in August 2013 to block Libyan oil fields and terminals signalled that

petroleum resources had become part of the protest equation, valuable to political actors as levers in their power struggle over institutions and resources and to decentralized groups whose attempts to secure social rights had been ignored.⁴ In the meantime, the outbreak of large-scale violent confrontations, such as Operation Dignity ('Amaliyyat al-Karama) in May 2014 and Libya Dawn (Fajr Libya) in July 2014 (Zaabiya, 2014), profoundly reshaped the political and military sphere, most notably when the Misrata-led alliance of 'revolutionary' militias forced units from Zintan to leave Tripoli in September 2014, effectively preventing any form of political protest in the capital (Tabib, 2014) and establishing the de facto partition of the country.

Harak la li-l-Tamdid: activism for a political reconfiguration

From local protests to a national project

In early October 2013, activists in Tripoli launched a local initiative to rid the capital of all militias. Originally called the 9 November Movement, after the date of the activists' first public appearance, the group soared to national prominence on 15 November, when it organized a protest march to the base of one of the Misratan militias in Tripoli's Gharghour district. Armed groups from Misrata had been selected as their first and foremost target.⁵ Calls to join the protests were widely relayed using social media and by sympathetic imams at mosques. To maintain order, the route of the demonstration was published along with calls to avoid violence and provocation. Despite a fatwa issued by Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariyani prohibiting participation and the militias' many attempts at intimidation, several thousand protesters gathered. As the marchers approached the militia's headquarters, they chanted slogans condemning its arbitrary use of violence. The competing narratives of the event agree that the demonstration was peaceful up to this point. Witness accounts begin to differ, however, at the moment the first shots were fired. Activists insist that militia members fired into the crowd with a heavy

machine gun.⁶ Conversely, observers close to the JCP coalition assert that the casualties resulted from an exchange of fire from several directions.

Images from the 'Gharghour massacre' – 47 dead and some 500 wounded – caused an outcry throughout the country,⁷ in particular as women and elderly men were among the victims, a transgression of the moral code that strongly resonated in Libyan society and prompted comparisons with the practices of the old regime. Thus, from the perspective of the Misrata leadership, the presence of the militia in the capital had turned from a trump card into a liability. In addition to undermining the 'revolutionary legitimacy' on which they staked their claim to a leading political role, it also threatened the interest of the city's strong business community in other parts of Libya (Lacher, 2016). A week later, the militias were withdrawn. Thus, armed violence was defeated by its own image.

The Gharghour episode made activists aware of the full extent of the public's resentment towards militia rule and the potential for mass mobilization this implied. Building on the experience and networks it had created during the November protests, the local initiative against militia abuses transformed into an organization capable of mobilizing a significant portion of the capital's population around issues of national relevance. In December 2013, the movement began pushing for the dissolution of the GNC and the election of a national parliament. To underline this expanded scope of action, the activists involved re-named their organization Harak La li-l-Tamdid – No to the Extension Movement.

From resistance to victory

Between December 2013 and July 2014, the activities of Harak focused on pushing for parliamentary elections and preventing the extension of the GNC's mandate. According to the NFA, the council was supposed to be dissolved by 7 February 2014, but the JCP disputed this interpretation and argued for the prolongation of the

assembly. In the end, the latter interpretation prevailed in a controversial vote on 23 December 2013, by which the GNC extended its own tenure for one year by an absolute (if narrow) majority of 102 out of 200 delegates (only 126 of whom attended the session). Ultimately, both positions were informed by electoral calculations: whereas the NFA hoped to improve its share in new elections, the JCP feared a loss of support. As the GNC had stymied many attempts by the government to develop coherent policies, and as the JCP had dominated the body through a shifting array of volatile alliances throughout much of its tenure, opponents of the Islamist party could conveniently blame both the party and the congress for bad or non-existent governance. Critics of the extension, including the Harak movement, also argued that because many of the delegates had changed their political allegiance over the previous 18 months (in some cases several times), they could no longer claim to represent the political preferences of the Libyan people.⁸

The activists opted for a strategy of permanent presence, alternating continuous tent sit-ins with demonstrations. An assassination attempt against one of the movement's leaders, Abdallah al-Gharyani, and the endorsement of several Tripoli imams, thus providing religious backing, attracted attention to the movement and enhanced its impact. The protests also received support from part of the capital's security forces, which protected them against attacks by JCP supporters. Participation in the demonstrations peaked at several tens of thousands.⁹

The mass demonstrations accelerated the erosion of the GNC's legitimacy and functionality. On several occasions, the governing majority responded with cabinet reshuffles, but these failed to stem the unrest and additionally prompted spirals of resignations that further paralysed the institution. By May 2014, a rapidly increasing number of army units had begun declaring allegiance to the Benghazi-based renegade general

Khalifa Haftar, who had been ridiculed by the GNC majority when he joined those calling for the dissolution of the assembly in February. Although the decision of the GNC on 22 May to reverse its position and hold elections for a House of Representatives a month later resulted from a confluence of several developments, Harak was widely credited with initiating the campaign leading to this major concession because of the perseverance with which it maintained public pressure through popular mobilization.¹⁰

After achieving its first objective, the movement continued its activities by putting its networks and media skills to use for candidates who presented themselves as part of an emerging 'civil alternative' to the perceived dominance of Islamists in state institutions and as proponents of 'national independence', instead of allegiance to the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood and Qatar, of which the Islamists were accused. In practice, this meant taking sides against the JCP and its allies. The movement's mobilization machinery took over campaign groundwork for the June 2014 elections, such as distributing posters, updating candidates' Facebook pages and accompanying them to rallies in urban areas. Their physical presence at these events served as a show of popular support, but also provided a measure of security in a politically tense situation. Nearly all the candidates that Harak supported – more than 50 nationwide – were eventually elected, leading the activists to decide to disband the movement in the aftermath of the polling, as it had 'met all of its objectives', while announcing the formation 'of a nationwide popular movement for the support of the HOR [House of Representatives] and to cleanse the institutions of the state of the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism' (Harak, 2014).

Victory was declared prematurely, however, as the losers of the election had already initiated a military offensive to reverse the results by force with the Libya Dawn campaign, launched on 13 July 2014. Fighting

pushed the Zintan brigades from Tripoli's international airport and, after breaking the resistance of neighbourhoods inhabited by members of the Warshafana tribe on the margins of Tripoli, ended in the de facto capture of the capital by an alliance of militias from Gharyan, Misrata, Zawiya and Zliten. Pursued by these armed groups, Harak activists took refuge in the working-class districts of Bouslim and Fashlum, areas beyond the reach of the Libya Dawn campaign, or crossed the border into Tunisia, becoming resistance fighters in exile. On 11 September 2014, the most steadfast among them published a manifesto, denouncing what they called the 'tragic repression' of activists and the 'return of dictatorial politics', announcing the 'resumption of the struggle and activities of Harak' and thus reversing its dissolution declared the previous month.¹¹

Civic activism and tribal authorities

Harak's development was characterized by complex and ambiguous relationships with tribal leaders as well as in the political scene. Two distinct phases can be discerned in its relations with tribal elites: a phase of alienation and exclusion followed by a phase of reappraisal motivated by compatible political agendas.

Following the collapse of the Qadhafi regime, armed militias emerged as the predominant power within the tribes that had fought against it. Their military successes enabled brigade leaders to exert substantial influence within the *marbu'a* (spaces for tribal consultation), which developed into tribal bodies that assumed the role of defunct state institutions. The resurgent role of tribal structures brought with it a wave of social conservatism. The tribal elders' and their militia allies' distrust of urban civil society and young educated people seeking political participation soon spread among the actors dominating the political process (Quesnay, 2012). During this period, traditional leaders keen on accumulating power for themselves considered customary values to be incompatible with western models of democracy and

excluded progressive groups, young and educated city-dwellers and especially women from the political sphere (Hüsken, 2012). In response, young intellectuals and professionals from urban backgrounds, especially from Tripoli, opted to frame their activism independently of tribal actors. Their actions were henceforth based on demands for democracy, and above all, on opposition to the armed militias, traditional tribal leaders and established political parties.

The Misrata-led military expedition against the 'counter-revolutionary' town of Bani Walid in the autumn of 2012 (Lacher, 2016) marked a turning point in the calculations of elite actors. Tribal leaders and the military elite from the eastern coastal region of Cyrenaica, who opposed the hegemony of the Misratan militias, realized that the nature of the battle had shifted beyond institutional competition or mere military confrontation. Rather, it was now being recognized as a multifaceted struggle that required the mobilization of all available resources, including the capacity to develop a discourse of legitimization that could counter the claims of real or self-proclaimed revolutionaries. This realization also paved the way for a reappraisal of intellectuals and civil society in general and of activists, in particular such as those standing behind Harak.¹² Political elites aligned with the NFA began to recognize the strategic value that these activists and their capacity to mobilize represented in the larger political contestation and therefore set out to increase co-ordination with them.

Harak members had varied biographies, but many of them had been involved in violent struggle during the revolution. The path of one of Harak's most prominent leaders, Hisham al-Wendy, provides an interesting example. Born in 1988, this son of a former Libyan diplomat had participated in the uprising from the beginning, had fought in the fierce Nafusa Mountain battles and was among the first insurgents to penetrate the Bab al-Aziziya barracks, Qadhafi's headquarters in the capital. An image of him wearing Qadhafi's military

insignia, seized during the capture of Bab al-Aziziya, became one of the icons of the young insurgents.¹³ Demobilized after the fall of Tripoli, Wendy advocated disbanding the militias and building a democratic society. Yet his origins in a small tribe from the area of Kikla, some 100 kilometres south of Tripoli, left him marginalized during the phase dominated by tribal alliances and militias. Thus, Wendy applied himself to building a network of young Tripoli activists to form a civil movement. His status as an insurgent, a revolutionary of the tough days and a peaceful activist thereafter gave him credibility despite his origins, and he became a leading figure in Harak. His background, however, became the preferred avenue of attack for his adversaries, who accused him of belonging to a 'vassal' tribe of the Zintan and of being a secret NFA executive mobilizing popular support on behalf of the alliance.

Mehdi Shanduli, a young medical student from the Tripoli neighbourhood of Fashlum, where much of Harak's mobilization was based, is another example of the ambiguous backgrounds of these activists. As the grandson of a local leader from Bani Walid, the main town of the Warfalla tribe, he boasted a prominent lineage. Yet Shanduli was in fact from a modest home, as his father had spent years in Qadhafi's prisons for alleged involvement in an aborted coup in 1993. After joining Harak in November 2013, he quickly proved his rhetorical skills and took charge of organizing and animating debates and discussion circles with intellectuals before becoming a leader of the clandestine resistance in the wake of Libya Dawn in July 2014. Shanduli became popular among young Libyans, not least for his talent for interspersing his interventions with impromptu poetry. Yet Shanduli himself has conceded the importance of his family background to his credibility – a member of one of the most important tribes in the country as well as an extended family victimized by the Qadhafi regime and Misratan militia leaders alike. In particular, the latter featured heavily in the discourse that

Harak employed to win support among youths at the marginalized periphery of Tripoli and to ward off accusations that it represented the interests of the elites of the old regime.¹⁴

NFA vassal or aligning objectives?

Harak militants rubbed shoulders with members of the NFA alliance during numerous activities. Beyond supporting the political alliance formed around the NFA, Harak also organized demonstrations against the Libya Dawn campaign that were protected by troops from the Zintan brigades. NFA strategists avoided any direct controversy with Harak activists, even when the latter openly criticized the compromises made by the alliance's leaders, for instance during debates over establishing a national army and concerning indictments against those responsible for the Gharghour massacre. The reason for this attitude was not so much that these political or military leaders had respect for divergent opinions, but the realization that their interests and those of the activists were complementary and that allying with them conferred on them a significant advantage in the struggle for power in Libya. NFA leaders gradually became aware that Harak brought to them a resource of prime importance: the capacity to mobilize the capital's inhabitants, who were tired of political speeches but among whom the activists enjoyed great credibility. Harak's discourse against the parties affiliated with the Islamists and Misratan militias greatly helped discredit the slogans of the NFA's opponents and mobilize the population of Tripoli for the alliance on election day and beyond.

Thus, as Harak moved to intervene in formal politics by mounting pressure for new elections and attempting to influence their results, it transformed from a bottom-up movement coalescing around concrete demands into an actor firmly allied to a specific part of the political spectrum. Consequently, its detractors persistently portrayed the movement as a mobilization machine for the NFA, while movement activists continued to assert

their independence from the institutional political landscape, tribal factions and armed militias. According to the activists, quite the opposite was true: Rather than serving the agenda of the political actors, Harak's pressure and momentum as a civil movement compelled the politicians to abandon their practice of tactical and often flawed compromise and rally around demands for new elections.

The ubari tansiqiyyat huquq movement: rallying against social marginalization

Ubari, the administrative centre of western Fezzan, became the heart of the Wadi al-Hayat area after its designation as the capital of the governorate in 1993. It has also served as the main logistical base for the two large oil sites of Al-Fil and Al-Sharara, which together account for a major share of Libya's oil production and reserves.¹⁵ The benefit of this wealth to the economically vulnerable local population, however, has been negligible. The city borders the Tuareg and Tubu peoples' traditional settlement areas, which extend into Algeria, Mali, Niger and Chad. Both groups share a history of marginalization dating back to the practices of the old regime and are characterized by strongly hierarchical internal structures.

Under Qadhafi, the loyalty of tribal leaders was preserved through clientelistic arrangements that also served to maintain a steady flow of recruits for the military, needed for the ruler's ambitious attempts to project his influence beyond Libya's borders (Brody, 2014). State resources reached these areas exclusively through mediation by tribal leaders, who amassed significant fortunes in the process. In particular, tribal leaders traditionally controlled access to employment in the oil fields. These techniques of rule respected traditional tribal practices and were compatible with local customs.

Economic marginalization in Fezzan in general and in Ubari in particular affected the population in a highly

differentiated manner. Tribal leaders did not face a homogenous populace of dependants awaiting the redistribution of resources, but a plethora of groups with different statuses determined by such factors as origin, proximity of lineage to that of the dominant families (who descended from warrior tribes of noble ancestry), date of first settlement in the area and position in the local smuggling economy. The social margins were occupied by those who had recently migrated to the area and lived in informal settlements, called *campo* in local parlance, on the periphery of Ubari. A significant part of the immigrant population was also marginalized because they did not hold Libyan citizenship, despite having lived in Libya for decades. Many Libyan politicians have perceived the 'Tuareg and Tubu issue' as part of a much larger Sahelo–Saharan migration question and consider the refugees in Ghadames, inhabitants of the Tayuri camps near Sabha and thousands of residents of the Ubari slums illegal immigrants from Algeria, northern Mali or Niger. A closer reading of the ethnic–tribal map of western Fezzan, however, reveals a situation much more nuanced than the various discourses on the issue suggest.

On the one hand, the Libyan south has long been a destination for migrants from the Sahel and its southern fringes. In the 1970s, the oil boom in Libya, Qadhafi's involvement in regional conflicts and the wars and famines that affected Sahel countries all contributed to a steady influx into Fezzan localities. The Libyan regime exploited these migrations for military recruitment. The new arrivals were mainly Tuareg and Tubu, and moved within a contiguous space settled by them, paying little heed to the borders of the nation-states that had only recently become independent political units. However, as border regions became increasingly militarized and poverty reduced mobility, many migrants were cut off from their places of origin and continued to live on the margins of society, with no access to Libyan citizenship (Integrated Regional Information Network, 2012). The Tuareg and Tubu populations already living in Libya, on

the other hand, looked upon more recently arrived immigrants mostly as competitors for scarce resources, creating a latent antagonism between *asil* (Arabic for 'original, native') and *wafid* (Arabic for 'incoming') inhabitants of the area in addition to the so-called *ahali* (Arabic for 'natives'), tribeless ethnic Arabs descended from former slaves who occupied the bottom rung of the social ladder. While precise figures are not available, rough estimates suggest some 80,000 people live in the wider Ubari area, divided among Tuareg (slightly more than half of the population, of whom some two-thirds are *wafid*), Tubu (roughly a quarter, mostly *wafid*) and *ahali* (around a fifth).¹⁶

After Qadhafi's ousting, the weakening of the Libyan state coincided with the arrival of new migrants from Niger and northern Mali, when a French-led international intervention in early 2013 helped the government in Bamako roll back a Tuareg uprising backed by several Islamist and jihadi groups there. The new influx further complicated the situation for *wafid* Tuareg and Tubu hoping for naturalization, while the *asil* segments of society, in particular the local elites, were worried by the arrival of groups that had retreated from the conflict in Mali and brought their weapons with them. On the eve of the social protests that would be led by the Tansiqiyya movement, the ethnic-tribal situation in Ubari was extremely complicated, with tensions rising not only in regard to the central government, but also, and above all, among the local ethnic groups.

Controversy surrounded the role of the Tuareg and the Tubu during the 2011 insurrection against the Qadhafi regime, with the various Libyan narratives unable to agree on the positions taken by these two southern ethnic groups (Cole, 2012). What matters for the analysis here is that the armed groups among them that existed after the fall of the regime – mostly remnants of former battalions of the Libyan army – stood down when the new rulers in Tripoli dispatched revolutionary brigades from Zintan to secure the resumption of oil

production in December 2011. Subsequently, the Zintan brigades imposed themselves as the sole intermediary between the oil companies and the local population. Hiring workers for the oil installations, building sites and providing guard units became a prerogative held exclusively by the brigades.

The first protests: failure in tripoli

In January 2012, a delegation of young unemployed persons from Ubari led by Tuareg and Tubu activists set off for Tripoli to present the grievances of Wadi al-Hayat inhabitants to the government. The initiative had resulted from consultations among local groups and was organized mainly by former students from Sabha University. Shared educational experience removed from the immediate tribal environment – Sabha is some 200 kilometres to the east of Ubari – had created awareness of their common experiences of marginalization; hence, the participants included asil as well as wafid Ubaris and individuals with ahali and Hausa backgrounds. Wadi al-Hayat's local tribal elite had not been party to the discussions, so the delegation travelled to Tripoli without their blessing or support. Once in the capital, however, the activists quickly discovered that on the one hand, government officials were too preoccupied with getting the transformation process on track to heed demands for social justice, dignity and work, and that on the other hand, without the support of tribal elders, the authorities would not receive them.

Those in charge in Tripoli were also accustomed to negotiating under the threat of arms and dealing with the tribal factions' elites. Since the protesters had neither military power nor the support of tribal elders to back them up, the authorities saw no reason to talk to them. Attempts at approaching members of the Tuareg and Tubu elite were likewise rebuffed, as the delegation did not seek personal favours, which would have been in keeping with the established practices of clientelism, but sought a fundamental change in the relationship between the state and its marginalized citizens that

would have undermined the position of these very elites. A sit-in outside the Ministry of Interior also brought no results.¹⁷ When the group returned to Ubari empty-handed, they encountered a cool reception. Many among the asil population disapproved of the mixed nature of the group and considered access to employment and government resources prerogatives they were not prepared to share.

After failing to gain access to political decision makers in the capital, the Ubari activists decided to take their activities directly to the objects of contention and organized a series of demonstrations in the vicinity of the oil sites. The protests were peaceful and did not disrupt operations. In October 2012, the Zintan brigades mediated an agreement with the local managers of the oil companies active at al-Sharara: 80 men from Ubari would be employed as auxiliaries in the oil field protection units, most of them from families closely connected to tribal leaders. Since a valid Libyan ID was required for application, this opportunity was restricted to those able to produce proof of Libyan citizenship, thus excluding a significant proportion of the local population. Such modest gains, which clearly fell short of the objectives of the activists, nonetheless reflected the balance of power between a heavily armed militia with connections in high places in Tripoli and leverage over security in the oil sector versus an impoverished and marginalized segment of the population that did not (yet) have the means to bring significant pressure to bear. The months that followed saw a dramatic reversal in the balance of power in western Fezzan.

The fezzan spring: towards appropriating local resources

In spring 2012, armed confrontations between the Ouled Slimane and Tubu tribes in Sabha had signalled that the Tubu were back as powerful local actors.¹⁸ Then, in late 2012 and early 2013, local wafid Tuareg who had participated in the fighting in northern Mali began

returning with their weapons and formed their own militias or joined existing ones. This combination of factors led the Tuareg and Tubu to believe the time had come to reopen negotiations with the Zintan brigades on a much more assertive footing. In early March 2013, processions of demonstrators demanding jobs marched on the entrances to the oil sites, accompanied by columns of vehicles with mounted machine guns manned by Tuareg militias.

At a meeting, representatives of the local protest movement and the leaders of the Zintan brigades from the al-Sharara site agreed on recruiting young Tuareg from Ubari and Ghat as well as on a to improve living conditions in the two districts. The terms of the agreement were favourably received by the inhabitants of Ubari and led to the formation of the Tansiqiyyat Huquq, an informal co-ordinating body intended to relay the agreements' terms to jobseekers. In an obvious break with established clientelist patterns, the activists decided to create a transparent recruitment process based on clearly defined criteria. Apart from age and education, social aspects – such as marital status, the number of family members already with stable employment and place of residence (including in informal areas) – were established as criteria, allowing an equitable distribution that disregarded ethnic and other cleavages in local society. The results of the recruitment process, as well as negotiations with the employers, were publicly announced, marking another break with the local customs of secrecy and the unspoken arrangements sustaining favouritism.

While these arrangements were positively received by youth from the marginalized clans of the city, others, mainly of asil status, had reservations. Meanwhile, the tribal chiefs resisted the procedure, demanded changes to the criteria and attempted to appropriate shares of the employment quota to impose themselves as mediators. Ultimately, these attempts to challenge Tansiqiyya's control over the distribution of the spoils of protest

succeeded. Faced with a rapidly growing number of applicants, Akakus Oil Operations (AOO) and the Zintan brigades insisted on the establishment of a new steering committee, which was tasked with finalizing and implementing the .¹⁹ This new body consisted of representatives of tribal chiefs from the asil Tuareg elite, the commanders of the Ubari militias (mostly wafid) and Tansiqiyya.

From co-operation to dissent: young tuareg

With so many different and partially incompatible interests represented on the steering committee, AOO and the Zintan brigades had ample opportunity to exploit internal rifts and shirk their commitments or to delay the hiring process and the implementation of the project indefinitely. Tribal chiefs again favoured their close family members and the dominant clans of the town and, above all, young people from asil families to the detriment of the less privileged, thus reaffirming the customary practices of unequal access to community resources not uncommon in societies with multiple divisions (Amselle & M'bokolo, 1985). In parallel, the Zintan brigades managed to recruit a number of Tuareg fighters into their brigades, some of whom were given responsibility for securing the approaches to the oil sites. Their instructions included the repression of any further demonstrations in front of site entrances. The oil company, some of the Tuareg and Tubu elites from Ubari and the Zintan brigades thus worked together to exploit local ethnic and demographic cleavages to channel and neutralize the pressure created by the protests and to dissuade activists from pushing for more. By pitting young men from the same region against each other, the promoters of this strategy hoped to 'endogenize' the conflict, so that they might then propose themselves as arbiters between the factions, concealing their role as parties to the conflict.

The strategy appeared to work, and protests declined. Then, in October 2013, the blockade of oil exports by separatist forces in the Cyrenaica region reinforced the

potency of disrupting the oil sector as a lever of political pressure. Emboldened, Tansiqiyya opted to radicalize its actions as well, even at the risk of confronting the tribal hierarchy and asil families, a step its members had until that point avoided. The activists accused members of the steering committee of restricting access to the employment opportunities obtained during previous rounds of protests by using ethnic and tribal criteria, thus 'reproducing the same hierarchical schemes of social inequality as the former tribal society' and driving the marginalized strata of the local population into the arms of the militias.²⁰

On 15 October 2013, several groups of activists accompanied by their families set up tents in front of the entrances to the oil sites and next to the pipelines. For these protests, Tansiqiyya mobilized the most destitute and economically vulnerable strata of the population, rallying the inhabitants of entire districts. The objective was not to gain higher visibility for the protesters as before, but to impose a blockade on the sites, blocking employee access and impeding pumping operations. The site protection units were stupefied by the scope of the mobilization and its degree of organization. Warning shots did not intimidate the crowds getting ready to set up their tents. To deter an escalation towards violence, Tansiqiyya activists posted wounded veterans of the northern Mali conflict as lookouts facing the Tuareg militiamen guarding the sites, many of whom had fought on the same frontlines, and brought women and whole families along. After a week of protests, work on the oil field came to a complete standstill, and AOO opened negotiations with the movement's leaders to evacuate its foreign staff. For the first time, the site director received a Tansiqiyya delegation without the presence of protection units or tribal chiefs. Instead, the activists were able to present their list of grievances to the company managers in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Energy, dispatched for the occasion by the government in Tripoli. Thus, by disrupting oil

production, the protesters succeeded in directly accessing government representatives, bypassing the traditional intermediates between local society and central state institutions as well as the militias exerting local control on behalf of the state.²¹

The Zintan brigades, accustomed to fighting regular troops or militias, turned out to be incapable of using violent repression against the unconventional opponent they faced. Since the strategy of recruiting locals to police local unrest had failed, they bet on wear and tear, waiting for the movement to run out of steam while trying once more to play on local divisions to make some Tansiqiyya leaders break ranks. Politicians from Tripoli paid several visits to the sit-in, calling on the protesters to be aware of the damage for which they were responsible and the impact that the closure of the sites was having on the country's finances and its credibility with the international operators of the hydrocarbon market. In the eyes of Tansiqiyya leaders, their attitude reflected the state's desire to control Libya's oil resources in a quasi-colonial manner, and this only served to stiffen their resolve. When the central government attempted to play the ethnic card – in one negotiation with Tansiqiyya, the deputy minister of the interior raised the question of the presence of 'foreign elements' – the movement's leaders retorted by adding another demand: that all inhabitants of Ubari be naturalized.

This position marked yet another fundamental break with the existing stratification of the social structure and a new challenge to the local elite. The tribal chiefs argued for a policy of selective naturalization that would have made them the gatekeepers of Libyan nationality. In the absence of any civil register from colonial times, this authority would have turned them into the only plausible source for verifying an applicant's claim to Libyan lineage. This would have afforded them a renewed opportunity to expand and solidify their networks of patron–client relations and, with it, control

over the distribution of resources. The leaders of Tansiqiyya were perfectly aware of these machinations, and those of asil background consciously chose to transcend their own ethnic status and demand equal nationality rights for all. This step had an enormous symbolic impact on local society. To the wafid and ahali clans, it signalled that at least a part of the local elite no longer considered the demand for naturalization an encroachment on their rightful privileges, but a just demand that they were willing to support.²² Consequently, Tansiqiyya leaders received overwhelming support from the marginalized population of the area. Among the asil population, however, dissent was voiced against 'capitulating to the demands of the immigrants'. Yet the asil members of Tansiqiyya resisted the social pressure, not least from their own families, and stuck to their positions, even as antagonism between them and the tribal elite hardened and transformed into a tangible political conflict.

The local balance of power shifted once more towards the end of 2013, when the conflict in Tripoli between militias from Misrata and Zintan escalated, compelling the latter to considerably draw down their presence in Fezzan and transfer extensive prerogatives to local Tuareg militias. With the Zintan brigades gradually disengaging, the Ubari ethnic groups found themselves alone, with no single group strong enough to dominate by military means. The situation was finally resolved with the mediation of minister of defence Abdullah al-Thinni, who hailed from the south and had participated in the negotiations between the companies, protection units and Tansiqiyya from the beginning. The authorities accepted several of the protesters' demands, principally the recruitment of young people by the subcontractors and service companies of the oil sites. More than 300 positions were opened up in a first phase, while policies on housing benefits and on developing run-down districts were to be reviewed. Unlike the earlier rounds of 'concessions', a substantial part of handling the

claimants' files was given to a committee consisting entirely of Tansiqiyya activists. The blockade of the sites was suspended, and production resumed in early January 2014, almost four months after the start of the protests (Reuters, 2014).

From the social to the political: tansiqiyya and the new nationality code

In February 2014, the central government introduced a national identity number for the Wadi al-Hayat region. This number would henceforth be indispensable for such procedures as obtaining a passport, accessing state benefits or employment in the civil service and buying land. The system was designed to keep track of the awarding of citizenship and to put an end to the arbitrary naturalization policies of the former regime, which had often granted or withdrawn citizenship in a selective or punitive fashion. For instance, thousands of Tubus were naturalized when Qadhafi needed them for his military campaigns in neighbouring Chad in the 1980s. After the conflict ended, their citizenship was withdrawn, leaving tens of thousands of Tubus stateless again but now also estranged from fellow Tubus whom they had fought against in the conflict. While details of the new regulations remained opaque, information that became public suggested that the new law would restrict rather than open access to naturalization and create new injustices and hierarchies. Obtaining Libyan nationality was said to require proof that one's paternal ancestors had lived in Libya before 1951. In practical terms, this required producing official documents issued by the colonial Italian and French administrations or the Senussi monarchy that followed them. The overwhelming majority of Libyans from nomadic backgrounds, mainly the Tuareg and Tubu, would be unable to provide such documents for the simple reason that they were never issued to them (Al-Taghamini, 2013).

The Tansiqiyya activists felt strongly that introducing such a system would reinforce the ethnic cleavages they

were struggling to overcome, endangering everything they had gained in their struggle. Reiterating their demands for equal access to citizenship and employment, they organized public debates and discussion circles to preserve the unity of their movement. In late February 2014, they moved to block oil sites once more (UPI, 2014), demanding that the proposed law be withdrawn and the implementation of commitments they had received a month before be accelerated. Drawing strength from their previous experience and the credibility they had earned among the local population, the activists opted for the tactic of progressively occupying the access routes to oil sites and pumping stations. The fear of renewed exclusion turned out to be a powerful mobilizing factor that raised collective awareness among the most destitute communities of Ubari. Young people from migrant families and from the Sahel were convinced that the provisions of the new ID law were a legal ruse to strip them of everything that they had managed to wrest from the authorities during their previous protests. In contrast, the local tribal elites continued in every way to dissociate themselves from the new wave of Tansiqiyya protests, once more emphasizing the difference between asil (who mostly held Libyan citizenship) and wafid (most of whom did not).

The position of the protesters hardened with the controversial appointment of Ahmed Maitig, a vocal supporter of the ID law, as prime minister in May 2014. At the same time, the escalation of violent conflict on the national level served to increase the protesters' leverage. When the oil facilities in the Cyrenaica region were again blocked, the government was compelled to rely exclusively on the production sites in Fezzan, which were connected to the Tripoli area by pipeline. As a result, the activists were able to successfully pressure for employment of hundreds of youths on the production sites in June and July. Tansiqiyya also endorsed two successful local candidates in the June elections to the House of Representatives, both strong supporters of its

social agenda and its position on naturalization. With these new successes, which now included formal representation at the centre of political decision making, the movement decided to lift the blockade once more, on 8 July 2014 (Bloomberg Businessweek, 2014).

Conclusion

On the sidelines of the conflict between tribal and ideological militias being waged with arms rather than arguments, young activists in Libya created movements that have acquired substantial agency. The objectives of these mobilized publics of mostly young people derived from local experiences of militia rule and social and political exclusion, but acquired national dimensions with demands for political participation, a more just distribution of resources and an end to ethnic discrimination, clientelism and favouritism. By holding demonstration after demonstration and dealing with conflict and negotiation, the protest movements demonstrated their perseverance and willingness to remain mobilized in the long term.

As a result, they achieved several undeniable breakthroughs and gains. Harak imposed itself as a political actor with which both political camps had to reckon. Its increasing alignment with the NFA raised questions concerning its independent agency, which illustrates the ambiguous relationship between mobilized publics and political parties that develop after the former intervene in the competition of the latter. Nevertheless, Harak compelled its allies in the political realm to take seriously urban youth and civil society actors, thus overcoming the confines of tribal and social hierarchies. The vast mobilizations achieved by Harak demonstrated to the political and militia forces that ultimately took over Libya's capital by force of arms that merely repeating revolutionary phrases would not lead to legitimacy and that efforts to rule the population at gunpoint would encounter serious resistance.

The Tansiqiyya activists managed to mobilize a public around social demands that transcended local tribal and ethnic cleavages. In so doing, they challenged local hierarchies and prevalent patterns of clientelism as well as the salience of lines of fragmentation and the exploitation of peripheral regions by the political centre. Even though these cleavages have remained a constant threat to the solidarity forged by the movement, Tansiqiyya established the precedents of social mobilization across ethnic divides and breaking the monopoly of local elites as intermediaries between the population, the authorities and the oil companies. Furthermore, with its actions against the oil sites, Tansiqiyya reminded the rest of the country that the 'southern question' persisted and that resource extraction in Fezzan could no longer proceed in a quasi-colonial fashion. In the overall picture, then, both the Harak and Tansiqiyya movements compelled actors on the level of the politically relevant elite (PRE) as well as existing social hierarchies, to recognize mobilized publics as actors with whom they must engage.²³

Notes

1. In absolute figures, turnout dropped from 1,764,840 votes cast in 2012 (by an electorate estimated at 3.4 million) to around 630,000 in June 2014.

2. For a correct rendering of the name in formal Arabic, the transliteration would be *hirak* rather than *harak*. Throughout this contribution, however, it is rendered according to the local pronunciation.

3. See 'Full Text: Libya's Political Isolation Law', <http://muftah.org/full-text-libyas-political-isolation-law/#.VJEpSCusXxY> (accessed 17 December 2014).

4. The blockage of the fields and terminals was initiated by units under the command of Ibrahim Jadhra in the hydrocarbon crescent around Ajdabiya and at the al-Sharara and al-Fil oil fields near Ubari. Such actions peaked in November 2013; see Al-Abboud (2014).

5. Interviewees in Tripoli also criticized the behaviour of some of the Zintan brigades in Tripoli at the time, but considered these units a legitimate part of the Libyan army. Evidently, these perceptions were influenced by political preferences and hence remain contested.

6. Interview with J. Chibani, Harak activist in the Tripoli quarter of Bouslim, Bouslim, 9 August 2014.

7. Interview with A. Ghariyani, Harak activist responsible for mobilization, Guergaresh, 3 August 2014.
8. Interview with Harak spokesperson A. Jali on al-Assima TV, 8 March 2014.
9. Organizers claim a peak of 150,000 participants. Although an estimate of between a third and a half of this number appears more realistic, the size and type of the protests were nonetheless without parallel in post-revolutionary Libya.
10. See for instance the interview with JCP chairman Mohammed Sawwan, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 26 April 2014, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=161224> (accessed 5 January 2015).
11. A facsimile of the manifesto can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/7eraklaleltamded/photos/a.643233292413628.1073741830.612230515513906/736711026399187> (accessed 5 January 2015).
12. Interview with S. Basti Ellafi, Tripoli intellectual and early member of the Harak, Fashlum, 3 August 2014.
13. The image was widely distributed by the international media. See for instance the cover illustration for Crawford (2012).
14. Social as well as traditional media are replete with accusations linking the activists to the former regime by highlighting such evidence as family background. See for instance 'A'da' harak ma yusamma 9 November' [Members of the so-called 9 November movement], <https://www.facebook.com/LibyaGhost/posts/548821035206101> (accessed 4 July 2015). On alleged similarities of slogans and banners, see for instance Kheiri (2014).
15. See Al-Wasat (2014).
16. Estimates based on conversations with local activists. Since the presence of the majority of these residents was never officially acknowledged or documented and remains an object of political contention, no reliable statistics exist, and estimates are likely to remain contested.
17. Interview with A. Hmid Laghi, one of the members of the Ubari delegation who participated in the sit-in, Ubari, 3 August 2014.
18. During the Qadhafi era, the Tubu had been marginalized and repeatedly revolted against the regime beginning in 2007 (Tabib, 2015).
19. Akakus Oil Operations is a joint venture between the Libyan National Oil Corporation (NOC), Spanish Repsol, Austrian OMV and France's Total established in 1996.
20. Interview with A. Khosso, a young engineer and notable sent by the Tubu tribal elite to negotiate improved employment quotas, Hammamet, 14 September 2014.
21. A facsimile of the manifesto declaring the suspension of the protests is available at <http://libyens.net/تعليق-الاعتصام-بحفل-الشرارة-النقطي-بم/> (accessed 5 January 2014).
22. Due to political calculations and favouritism in the implementation of naturalization policies, there are groups of residents who consider themselves asil but do not hold Libyan nationality, while a certain

(small) percentage of the wafid population managed to be naturalized, in particular by joining elite units of the Libyan army.

23. For the concept of the politically relevant elite, see Asseburg and Wimmen (2016).

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Islamists, Secularists and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia: bargained Competition

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the confrontations and compromises for domination of the political arena and its rules that are going on in Tunisia since the 2011 revolution between the Islamists of Ennahda party and the networks of so-called secularists and old regime elites – in particular, Nidaa Tounes.

On the contrary to accounts that claim that the taming of ideological conflicts between religious and secular parties has given birth to a new democratic society, I argue that the new Tunisian order is the result of a particular type of post-authoritarian political culture that I call bargained competition. It consists in Islamists and old regime elites bargaining on their mutual reintegration and their monopolization of the post-revolutionary political scene while fiercely competing over political resources through various (often informal) power-sharing arrangements.

The ousting of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011 raised hopes among Tunisians for better access to politics as well as a more equitable distribution of economic resources, but it also divided them concerning the kind of political order that should be established. On the one hand, revolutionaries from deprived interior regions as well as civil society activists and political parties of the radical Left pushed for a complete overhaul of the political system through a revolutionary constituent assembly and local representative councils involving citizens in a bottom-up process geared towards tackling such issues as health, education, redistribution of resources, abuses by the security forces, corruption and social justice. On the other hand, parties already involved in politics under Ben Ali focused on consolidating their presence on the political scene, maintaining or gaining access to state structures and the informal patronage networks that he had left behind.

Maintaining the existing institutional framework and holding elections provided a legitimate avenue for the return to politics of representatives from Ben Ali's Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD) who had previously been marginalized by his immediate family, in particular relatives of his wife, Leila Trabelsi, and for adherents of former president Habib Bourguiba, who had been overthrown by Ben Ali in 1987.¹ At the same time, liberalization of the political space allowed the reintegration of Ennahda, the long-repressed Islamist opposition party. By jointly steering post-revolutionary priorities towards the re-establishment of centralized state authority and the election of a National Constituent Assembly (Assemblée nationale constituante, ANC) to write a new constitution, processes dominated by political parties, both Islamists and old regime representatives positioned themselves as central actors in the politically relevant elite (PRE), those controlling the resources of power and influence in shaping political orders.² They thus seized Tunisia's transformation process, quickly marginalizing the young revolutionaries.

This article analyses the competition and compromises since the 2011 revolution between Ennahda and the networks of so-called secularists and old regime elites – in particular, Nidaa Tounes (Call of Tunisia), led by Beji Caid Essebsi – for domination of the political arena and its rules.³ Many accounts claim that the Tunisian 'transition to democracy' has been successful due to the taming of ideological conflicts between Islamist and secular parties. Are elite pacts enough to turn post-authoritarian orders into democratic societies? In Tunisia, Islamist and old regime elite interactions have been shaping a political culture that I call 'bargained competition'. The term refers to a specific type of transformation that differs from the concept of a pacted transition, which has been applied to describe processes of transformation from authoritarian to liberal political orders in many countries of the so-called third or fourth wave of democracy. While the term *pacted*

transition describes a negotiated process between distinct ruling and opposition blocs providing for the liberalization and democratization of the political sphere (e.g. Schmitter, 2010), in Tunisia the almost total absence of Ennahda leaders in the protests of December 2010 and January 2011 and the collaboration of Ben Ali's own power apparatus in his ousting (Jebnoun, 2014) have blurred the lines between who should be credited for the revolution and who should be held accountable for the dictatorship. This has motivated Islamists and old regime actors to seek a bargain on their mutual reintegration into the political order and thus become the central players on the post-revolutionary political scene.

At the same time, fear of being dominated and repressed by the other side has kept the Islamist and old regime elites in a state of prolonged and intense competition over political resources. The priority that the main political actors have given to normalizing and consolidating their political participation means that their interest in building new institutions has been rather limited. In 2011 as well as in 2014, the main purpose of free elections was to regulate their competition and provide for subsequent power-sharing arrangements. On the one hand, fierce competition was waged over domination of formal and informal institutions and networks inherited from the previous authoritarian regimes, access to the state bureaucracy and control of the judiciary, in addition to obtaining support from foreign actors and business and media networks.⁴ Narratives of Islamist versus secular polarization were used to foment confrontational street protests, and rival alliances formed between parties and civil society activists. On the other hand, informal consensus and non-elected temporary structures – such as the 2011 Higher Commission for the Fulfilment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (Haute instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, des réformes politiques et de la transition démocratique, HIROR) and the 2013

national dialogues – allowed for mutual inclusion and provided fora in which to resolve or manage disputes.

To date, this post-authoritarian culture of bargained competition has spared the country a major conflagration. An elite consensus by Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes has shaped the political arena in a relatively nonviolent way and consolidated post-revolutionary power-sharing agreements. Both camps have avoided politically costly and potentially explosive issues, such as structural economic reform and transitional justice, which required addressing if the new political order were to be based on the central grievances of Tunisians but also could have caused the basic consensus in the political arena to collapse. Thus, bargained competition prevented the institutionalization of rules that would have made it possible to process and resolve such conflicts in a transparent way. It has also not led to a broadly inclusive political culture. Rather, the two blocs have increasingly monopolized the political arena, and the revolutionaries' demands for change and participation have been re-channelled into a reductive form of pluralism that ostensibly pits Islamists against representatives of the old regime.⁵ Since late 2013, both blocs have sought compromises struck for the sake of consensus but against the will of much of their political grassroots. This has not only led to growing internal dissent and volatility within political alliances, but has also worked to alienate Tunisians from the political process as such. More than 70 per cent of Tunisians aged 18 to 30 abstained from voting in the 2014 legislative and presidential elections.⁶

This article is based on more than 60 in-depth interviews with party activists, unionists, lawyers, state officials, student association activists, intellectuals and revolutionaries conducted after the 2011 revolution and during several rounds of field research in Tunisia as well as Doha, London and Paris between 2004 and 2014. It also draws from the literature on elite bargains in transitions (e.g. Higley & Burton, 1989; Higley & Gunther,

1992; O'Donnell et al., 1986; Przeworski, 1991) and considers the importance of informal governance in times of political uncertainty. Interactions between different forces and their impact on political transformation help in analysing the three phases in the evolution of the dynamic relationship between Tunisia's Islamist and old regime PRE over the past four years (Bennani-Chraïbi & Fillieule, 2012). The first phase involves how, in the aftermath of the January 2011 revolution and until the elections for the ANC on 23 October 2011, the strategies of both camps were guided by their priority for political reintegration. The second phase witnesses the rise of Islamist–secular polarization involving the governing coalition led by Ennahda and an emergent anti-Islamist counterweight in the form of Nidaa Tounes. The third phase concerns how the consensual appointment of an ostensibly neutral, technocratic cabinet to replace the Islamist-led government in early 2014 prepared the institutionalization of the power bargain struck by the two blocs after the 2014 legislative elections without having to resolve central conflicts or crucial policy issues.

Ennahda and the Old regime: negotiating post-revolutionary reintegration

During the second half of the first decade of the 2000s – that is, the last years of Ben Ali's rule – few political actors were expecting fundamental change, let alone a revolution, in Tunisia. Within the PRE, RCD members who had been increasingly marginalized by the business and security networks linked to the president's family were at best hoping that a handover of power to the president's young son-in-law would mean more state resources for themselves (Hibou, 2006). The loyal opposition had equally been weakened. Some organizations were tolerated, if only to a limited degree, among them the Tunisian General Union (Union générale tunisienne du travail, UGTT), the centrist Progressive Democratic Party (Parti démocrate progressiste, PDP), led by Nejib Chebbi, and the

socialist Democratic Forum for and Liberties (Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés, Ettakatol), led by Mustafa Ben Jaafar. So-called secular progressive intellectuals and co-opted middle-class activists were calling for democratization from within while often remaining silent about the violent repression meted out to Islamists and the radical Left.⁷ Other opposition parties – including Ennahda, led by Rached Ghannouchi, the Congress for the Republic (Congrès pour la république, CPR), headed by Moncef Marzouki, and the Worker's Communist Party (Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie, PCOT), led by Hama Hammami – were outlawed or repressed, their members often jailed and their leaderships exiled. On 18 October 2005, members of these parties had come together around an opposition platform, the 18 October Collective,⁸ and launched a month-long hunger strike in Tunis to demand respect for human rights and political liberalization. After 2008, it appears that exploratory talks took place on a potential pacted transition between Ennahda (whose political prisoners began to be pardoned in the mid-2000s), the UGTT and Ben Ali's internal challengers, among them foreign affairs minister Kamel Morjane.⁹ This may have created suspicions among the other opposition parties that a pacted transition was already under way behind the scenes and could explain why, apart from the 18 October group, no structured alliance against the dictatorship emerged.

During the first three months after Ben Ali's ousting, opposition parties, civil society and revolutionaries were at odds about whether to co-operate with former regime members in a transition government or to continue the revolution. Some centrist parties, including the PDP and Ettakatol, chose to join the first interim government, established in mid-January 2011. Radical leftist parties, including the PCOT, formed the 14 January Front (Front du 14 Janvier), which sought to establish completely new, popular political institutions. Advocating a new order that would meet their demand for socio-economic

‘dignity’ (Marzouki, 2011), the front encouraged inhabitants of the deprived interior regions of the country as well as local UGTT activists, who had started the revolt in December 2010, to continue their protests. Its members, alongside young revolutionaries from the interior and local UGTT branches, constituted most of the participants at the sit-ins known as the Kasbah 1 and 2 protests, which brought down the first two interim governments, dominated by Ben Ali-era ministers, on 27 January and 27 February 2011.

Ennahda, whose exiled leaders and activists quickly returned to the country and whose clandestine domestic cells came into the open after the revolution, chose a two-track strategy that prepared the ground for the bargained competition that would later ensue. While opposing the monopolization of the political scene by former Ben Ali loyalists, it simultaneously entered into negotiations with them. At the same time, in February 2011, Ennahda joined the initiative by the 14 January Front in an attempt to take control of the transition through the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution (Conseil national de protection de la révolution, CNPR), an alliance of 28 associations established on 11 February with the objective of preventing a return to power of the old elites and monitoring the interim government that was supposed to be non-partisan and composed of ‘technocrats’ unaffiliated with the RCD.¹⁰ Interim prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi initially refused to legalize the council, but then proposed merging it with the Political Reform Commission (Commission supérieure de la réforme politique), a body of legal experts appointed soon after the fall of Ben Ali to design the transitional framework, to create a new institution, HIROR. The majority of the 14 January Front refused to accept this compromise, calling it a betrayal of the revolution, but Ennahda, set on winning elections, and the UGTT, whose leader had been close to Ben Ali and was trying to reposition himself on the post-revolutionary scene,

broke ranks and agreed to back the new body. Despite maintaining a public position against the political reintegration of members of past regimes, Ennahda also accepted the nomination of Essebsi to head the interim cabinet that took over on 15 March 2011. Essebsi had been minister of interior (1965–69) and of foreign affairs (1981–86) under Bourguiba and president of the National Assembly (1990–91) under Ben Ali. Thus, despite his claims of being ‘independent’, he was clearly a creature of the ancien régimes.

Both the UGTT and Ennahda faced strong criticism from their revolutionary bases for joining HIROR without consultations. Their participation in the commission was seen as collaborating with the former regime PRE to attempt to close a chapter of the revolution without addressing political and economic freedoms. The repeated enlargement of HIROR through the co-optation of parties and civil society organizations, including the Tunisian Union for Industry, Commerce and Handicrafts (Union tunisienne de l’industrie, du commerce et de l’artisanat, UTICA), the national union of employers associated with Ben Aliera corruption, diluted the influence of local citizen committees and eventually put an end to their supervisory role, paving the way for an agenda that prioritized elections. New protests in May and July 2011 by what remained of independent local councils and civil society activists – dubbed Kasbah 3 by their organizers – pushed for Essebsi’s resignation and were violently repressed. Continuous strikes and sit-ins by local UGTT chapters were condemned by HIROR for ‘blocking the country’s economic and political stabilization’.¹¹

The Islamists’ demands for the exclusion of former RCD members from politics on the one hand, and their willingness to engage in bargaining with them on the other, might appear contradictory. One explanation for their preference for joint management of the transition over the creation of revolutionary institutions can be found in their traumatic experience in the aftermath of

the 1989 legislative elections. After supporting Ben Ali's coup against Bourguiba in 1987, they participated in elections but were targeted for repression after their significant success at the polls running as independent candidates. In 2011 negotiating with the remaining RCD and security sector players instead of striving for all-out power was a way to enter the electoral arena in a non-threatening way. It also aimed at reassuring the urban middle class, which had supported the protests in January, but had been reluctant to overturn the entire system after Ben Ali's departure (Allal & Geisser, 2012). This confluence of interest between the old and new PRE regarding their mutual reintegration did not, however, resolve their conflicts, but merely served to postpone them. Thus, while these interactions allowed Ennahda to become a leading force within HIROR and Essebsi to build a political platform that would later become Nidaa Tounes, mainly by appointing interim ministers who would join his party, they also institutionalized the rules of their future political competition (Koehler & Warkotsch, 2014).

In 2012 and 2013, the various issues Ennahda and former RCD cadres had dismissed earlier to ensure their control of the post-revolutionary scene re-emerged. In a context where the middle classes were glorifying Bourguiba's legacy over Ben Ali's, and Essebsi represented someone who had supposedly opposed Ben Ali's corrupt entourage and had no personal political ambition, the endorsement of Essebsi as a Destourian technocrat set the stage for the political comeback of old regime members and their networks.¹² Essebsi's interim government may have agreed to disband the RCD and the secret police, but only second-rank RCD members and businessmen were in fact tried for corruption; the majority of Ben Ali's close associates were allowed to exit the country. Also, only 23 security officers were tried for crimes against civilians committed between 17 December 2010 and 14 January 2011. Starting in May 2011, all complaints filed for crimes perpetrated before

and during the revolution were adjudicated by military tribunals, with most defendants receiving short sentences. Former security officials who had served under Ben Ali were reappointed by Essebsi to the Ministry of Interior; the torture of protesters and human rights activists continued (Amnesty International, 2012). Representatives of the ancien régime and their close allies were also appointed to head such institutions as the commission in charge of ensuring the return of Tunisian assets illegally transferred abroad and the administrative tribunal, which Essebsi later used to reject the political exclusion law discussed in the ANC and in 2014 to reject appeals against the election results made by Marzouki, his competitor in the presidential elections. On the day before the October 2011 ANC elections, the interim government passed a law that forbade prosecutions for torture going back more than 15 years. All this would serve to complicate Ennahda's attempts to manage security and justice issues once in power.

HIROR, under the influence of Ennahda and the CPR and tasked with preparing the ANC election law, decided to prohibit candidacies in the 2011 elections by former RCD top officials, people who had called for Ben Ali's re-election before the revolution and members of the interim government.¹³ Yet the government authorized the creation of parties by former RCD ministers, among them Morjane and former RCD executive and Interior Ministry official Mohamed Jegham, and their participation in the 2011 elections. At the same time, HIROR's legal experts established an unrealistic one-year timeframe for the ANC to draft the constitution. This would later play into the hands of Nidaa Tounes, allowing it to demand that the Islamist-led government resign for not having finished the draft within the allotted time.

As the ANC elections approached in October 2011, the schism between the old regime and the opposition that had framed early post-revolution bargaining processes gradually came to be replaced by an Islamist versus secular divide. This resulted from efforts by the

smaller opposition and progressive parties to limit Ennahda's expanding influence within HIROR, with the former accusing the latter of having a hidden radical agenda (Heurtaux, 2014). In response, Ennahda promised not to govern alone and to build an Islamist–secular coalition to attract the support of voters and foreign actors fearing the potential Islamization of the state. It appears that Ennahda helped the CPR in the elections through informal encouragement of its own followers to cast their vote for the party.¹⁴ After winning a plurality of seats in the ANC balloting, Ennahda first supported Essebsi remaining as prime minister, thinking that he might help secure former RCD resources, but only the CPR and Ettakatol responded positively to its invitation to join the government. While this new Islamist–secular coalition gave Ennahda democratic credentials internationally (Werenfels, 2011), its lack of a joint agenda on how to tackle the country's challenges and the unequal power distribution within this alliance soon provoked internal dissent and gave the opposition ample opportunity to criticize the government's inefficiency.

The troika's failure and islamist–secular polarization

Following Ennahda's victory in the ANC elections, the so-called Troika of Ennahda and its secular coalition partners, CPR and Ettakatol, was initially considered historic, but it soon began to look like a political failure. Assuming leadership of the government after three decades of repression and marginalization, Ennahda proved to be inept. It began to prioritize control over formal state structures as well as the remains of the deep state – the security, judiciary and business networks – over supervising the writing of the constitution, the task for which it had been elected (Bras, 2012). This approach reduced the space for co-operative decision making within the Troika, despite the initial promise of consensual power sharing between Islamist and secular actors. The Troika thus soon became a badly functioning arrangement, incapable of putting

forward a common government strategy to address the country's security, economic and political crises. In particular, the distribution of competencies among prime minister Hamadi Jebali (Ennahda), President Marzouki (CPR) and ANC president Ben Jaafar (Ettakatol) was repeatedly undermined by the intervention of Ennahda's party leader, Rached Ghannouchi, as well as co-operation between Ennahda and Essebsi, who was preparing the establishment of Nidaa Tounes, particularly on security and foreign policies. Decisions taken in Ennahda's Shura (consultative) Council were repeatedly imposed on the ANC or on the government without consultation with the CPR and Ettakatol. In one example, in May 2012 prime minister Jebali decided to extradite to Libya Baghdadi Mahmoudi, former prime minister under Muammar Qadhafi, on the demand of Essebsi and without the authorization of President Marzouki. Nominations for governors and heads of national media were also decided by Ennahda without consultation among the Troika, as were negotiations with foreign donors.¹⁵

Internal dissent in Ennahda also resulted in inconsistent performance by the government. While youth representatives favoured the complete exclusion of former regime members and strongly Islamic-inspired policies, the old Islamist guard was less adamant. In the beginning, Ennahda used a revenge discourse to mobilize its base against the 'scorn of the secularist elite', asserting the right of those who had suffered under Ben Ali's rule to be compensated, thus creating hopes among its followers for a new system of social control and economic redistribution in which they would benefit (Meddeb, 2011). Indeed, the first months of the Troika government witnessed a strong expansion of councillors, ministerial positions and public sector jobs. According to some sources, 87 per cent of the new recruits in the public sector (often without competitive examination) belonged to the Troika parties, 93 per cent of them being Ennahda activists and followers (Weslaty, 2013).

Ennahda's youth wing and the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution (Ligues de protection de la révolution, LPR), which emerged from among the Committees for the Protection of the Revolution (Comités pour la protection de la révolution), are examples of Ennahda's constituencies seeking to profit from the party's political dominance after October 2011 by pushing for the complete exclusion of RCD members, an Islamic-inspired constitution and subsidies they could distribute to their neighbourhoods. They also regularly took to the streets to defend the party against its secular and leftist opponents' criticism for neglecting economic and security reforms. The result was an escalation of rivalries on the street that often saw violent government repression of leftist protesters and those from the disenfranchised regions. The government also often blocked public investigations into police abuses, such as on the occasion of the demonstrations for the martyrs of the revolution on 9 April 2012 in Tunis and the November 2012 protests in Siliana, where some 220 protesters demanding economic reform were wounded by the police (Human Rights Watch, 2012). When President Marzouki proposed the formation of a cabinet of technocrats to overcome the crisis stemming from police repression, Ennahda's parliamentary bloc went so far as to threaten a motion of no confidence against him to shoot down the initiative.

Ennahda's position on the RCD and delays in launching measures to advance transitional justice and fight corruption were major points of contention within the party's ranks as well as between Ennahda and its coalition partners. Promises of the exclusion of former RCD leaders from the political process had at first contributed to strengthening the Troika, but Ghannouchi's volte-face on the issue in mid-2013 fuelled criticism from the Islamist, CPR and Ettakatol bases against their leaders. An important segment of the party had been banking on appropriating the networks of business tycoons, the media, the magistrates and the security apparatus that Ben Ali had left behind, ensuring

the party's full reintegration through control not only of the formal but also the informal channels of power. This led at times to bizarre personnel decisions. For example, after asking Habib Essid, minister of interior in the interim government, to resign in 2011 because of his role in Ben Ali's policies, Ennahda later nominated him as a security affairs counsellor to the Jebali cabinet. In the same vein, it appointed Chedly Ayari, several times minister under Bourguiba and a member of the Senate under Ben Ali, as chief executive officer of the Central Bank and president of the national commission in charge of ensuring the return of Tunisian assets transferred abroad. Those decisions led the CPR and Ettakatol to lose a considerable number of members through resignations from the parties and as deputies in the ANC.¹⁶

The disagreements within Ennahda, among the parties of the Troika and between the coalition partners and their grassroots prepared the ground for the 2013 crises that ultimately led to the dissolution of the Troika government. Although the CPR and Ettakatol had repeatedly demanded a cabinet reshuffle in 2012, it took the 6 February 2013 assassination of Choukri Belaid, a leader of the leftist Popular Front (Front populaire) coalition and early member of the 14 January Front, and the street demonstrations it sparked to push prime minister Jebali to finally offer to form a government of technocrats to solve the crisis. When the central institutions of his own party rejected this move, Jebali resigned, and Ennahda's Ali Laarayedh, minister of interior, replaced him. Of note, Laarayedh obtained the ANC's vote of confidence not the least thanks to the support of Al-Moubadara (The Initiative), the Destourian party headed by Morjane, formerly of the RCD. This has been widely interpreted as a sign that Ennahda, parallel to its Troika alliance, was also investing in informal relationships with some of the old elites to stay in power and therefore postponing debate about the latter's exclusion from the political process.

Such bargains lent Ennahda only temporary dominance, as one of the most important consequences of the Troika's various difficulties in governing and launching meaningful reform was allowing representatives of the old regime to make comebacks within opposition ranks. In April 2012, Essebsi announced the launch of a new party, Nidaa Tounes. He justified his initiative by citing the need to gather all opposition forces to put an end to the economic and security crises for which he held the Troika responsible. Essebsi later emphasized that the Troika and the ANC had lost their electoral legitimacy by surpassing the one year allotted for drafting the constitution, a limitation that the HIROR experts had pushed for in 2011 under his influence while interim prime minister. He also accused the government of lacking experience, pointing to his own know-how due to long-time civil service.¹⁷ Nidaa Tounes would consequently become the 'neutral and technocratic', 'democratic' and 'secular' alternative to Ennahda. Indeed, the anti-Islamist approach of Nidaa Tounes, accusing Ennahda of being a proxy of the Salafi and Qatari pan-Islamist project, not only attracted former regime figures, but also many self-proclaimed progressive intellectuals and secular democrats, leftists and former UGTT members. To them, Nidaa Tounes was an opportunity to 'put the revolution back on track and correct the transformation' in view of 'Ennahda's obsession for power'.¹⁸ The party attracted working- and middle-class Tunisians frustrated by the lack of economic progress. It also received funding from the bourgeoisie of Tunis and businesspeople close to the Sahelian milieu – i.e. from Tunisia's favoured regions, the coastal plains from which Bourguiba and Ben Ali hailed and that strongly rejected sharing the country's resources with the interior regions.

Reinforcing the anti-Islamist, secular alliance approach, in December 2012 Essebsi announced the establishment of a new coalition: the Union for Tunisia (UFT). This anti-Ennahda front – consisting of Nidaa

Tounes and the centre-left coalition Al-Jamhuri (Republican) party, formed by Chebbi's PDP, the Socialist Party, the leftist Patriotic and Democratic Party (Parti du travail patriotique et démocratique) and al-Massar (Voie démocratique et sociale) – allowed Essebsi to position himself as a central actor despite not being elected. As ANC members from other parties, among them Ettakatol and the CPR, joined Nidaa Tounes, the party gained de facto representation in the ANC without having participated in elections. The UFT provided a forum in which representatives of the former regime normalized their relationships with former leftist and opposition enemies. During the 2014 election campaign, Chebbi would even declare on Tunisian television that although Essebsi 'had supervised his torture', he still regarded him with 'esteem'.¹⁹ The coalition around the charismatic leader was driven more by fear of a common threat than agreement to a common agenda (Van Dyke & McCammon, 2010). Meanwhile, decisions in Nidaa Tounes and the UFT were being taken by a restricted circle around Essebsi, with his son among the most influential figures.

In July 2013, the second assassination of a Popular Front leader, this time Mohamed Brahmi, offered Nidaa Tounes the opportunity to increase pressure on Ennahda to resign. Although the Popular Front had initially refused to join the UFT in January 2013, after Brahmi's assassination it decided to co-operate with both Nidaa Tounes and the UFT in the framework of the National Salvation Front (NSF), a newly formed alliance that included nearly all the political forces opposed to the Troika. In July 2013, the NSF launched a protest campaign under the slogan 'Errahil' (Departure) in front of the ANC in Tunis' Bardo neighbourhood, demanding the assembly's dissolution and replacement of the Troika government as well as the removal of Ennahda-appointed governors and public officials. The campaign expanded in August, attracting more than 100,000 demonstrators. This allowed Nidaa Tounes to use public

opinion to reverse the balance of power established on the basis of the 2011 elections and to present itself as a corrective force in the transformation, playing Ben Ali's traditional repertoires of national unity and a particular Tunisian identity (Sadiki, 2002) against what it labelled Ennahda's 'foreign ideology' – that is, its alleged control by Qatar and the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Throughout this period, both Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes used the ideological polarization manifested in street protests and coalitions to sustain their institutional inclusion instead of rationalizing the political arena in a manner that would have featured two clearly competing projects over the political order. They also favoured bilateral negotiations for settling their (above all, electoral) competition and preferred mobilizing their supporters outside the representative institutions over formal decision making. Indeed, even before the summer 2013 Errahil crisis, the rising competition between the Islamist-led government and the Nidaa Tounes-led opposition had resulted in so-called national sessions behind closed doors to negotiate the path towards new elections, thus marginalizing the ANC. After having boycotted a national initiative launched by the UGTT in October 2012 because of Nidaa Tounes' participation, the CPR and Ennahda, which wanted to be in control of the bargaining, initiated their own dialogues in April 2013. They invited a restricted circle of political actors, among them the Troika parties and Al-Moubadara as well as Nidaa Tounes, which they were finally pushed to acknowledge as a force due to its rising importance in Tunisian society and in the eyes of international actors. Indeed, Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes successfully monopolized the bargaining over the main features of the future political order. They gathered in the presidential palace in Carthage and reached consensus on some issues, such as a semi-parliamentary rather than a presidential system, the sequencing of legislative and presidential elections and the electoral law. They disagreed, however, on the nomination of particular

members to an independent election-monitoring committee, the creation of a constitutional court and the dissolution of the LPRs accused of serving as Ennahda's 'militias'.

During the Errahil campaign, 60 deputies from parties that had joined the UFT withdrew from the ANC to protest at Ennahda's refusal to resign. On 6 August 2013, ANC president Ben Jaafar suspended ANC sessions against Ennahda's will. In September, the UGTT, along with UTICA, the Tunisian League for Human Rights (Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme) and the National Bar Association (Ordre national des avocats), formed the so-called Quartet and offered their mediation to bring Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes together in closed national sessions to agree on a road map out of the crisis. Although these talks were formally open to all parties represented in the ANC, the central role that bargaining between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes assumed ended the Errahil protests de facto as well as the Popular Front's project of dissolving the ANC and replacing it with a government of 'national competence'. The bargained character of the Ennahda–Nidaa Tounes competition was further illustrated when Ghannouchi 'secretly' met Essebsi in Paris in August 2013, in the presence of Slim Riahi, a young businessman and head of the Free Patriotic Union (Union Patriotique Libre, UPL), a party created in 2011 without a distinct platform or grassroots. Several sources reported that Ghannouchi had offered Essebsi the presidency of a national unity government at the meeting.²⁰

With the objective of stabilization, the international community – that is, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank as well as the United States and Gulf countries – conditioned their financial support to Tunisia on Ennahda's acceptance of the terms of the national as put forward by the Quartet: re-examining the Troika's administrative nominations, dissolving the notorious LPR, finalizing the constitution, agreeing on an electoral law, forming a

technocratic interim government and an electoral commission as well as holding legislative and presidential elections before the end of 2014. Ennahda further found itself in a situation in which the ousting of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (in July 2013) fuelled violent conflict in Tunisia, with Salafi groups out of control and inhabitants from the interior regions increasingly engaging in clashes with the police. As a consequence, the threat of an uncontrollable escalation deterred Ennahda from mobilizing the streets once more to defend its 'electoral legitimacy' (Boubekour, 2015). In the end, the Islamists acquiesced, finally joining the national sessions and accepting the Quartet conditions in December 2013.

The compromise on a technocratic government that depoliticized and stabilized the formal exchanges between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes while they continued to compete for control of the political sphere can be considered an illustration of bargained competition. Above all, it demonstrates that political rivalry was activated when it allowed for institutional integration but was downplayed in the name of consensus when it became a risk to inclusion. While the compromise successfully contributed to easing tensions and allowing the transformation process to proceed, it did not resolve many of the conflicts between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. For instance, they agreed on a constitution, which after difficult bargaining was finally ratified in January 2014 despite ambiguities in a number of articles, including those on the role of Islam and the sacred and the balance of power between the president, the prime minister and parliament (Pickard, 2014). Attempts to remove Ennahda members from public administration posts often ended in balancing them with Nidaa Tounes members, rather than replacing them with non-partisan technocrats. For instance, Lotfi Ben Jeddou, minister of interior in the second Ennahda-led government (under Laarayedh), remained minister due to his intimate knowledge of terrorism-related issues but was given as a deputy minister Ridha Sfar, who had

worked in the Ministry of Interior under Ben Ali. In the end, the technocratic government was less obviously partisan, in fact reflecting Nidaa Tounes' dominance. This became clearer during the campaign for the October 2014 elections.

The limits of consensus politics and bargained competition

The period from the appointment of the technocratic government in January 2014 to the eve of the October 2014 legislative and presidential elections was of crucial importance for consolidating Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes' bargained competition. After the legislative elections, in which Nidaa Tounes won 85 seats and Ennahda 69 (i.e. 20 fewer than in 2011), the two parties chose to co-operate, agreeing on Nidaa Tounes assuming the presidency of the parliament (no other parties nominated candidates) and allocating one of the vice presidential posts to Ennahda (the other went to the UPL). Nevertheless, this consensual reintegration based on cohabitation in formal institutions may in the future again be negatively affected by the unresolved conflicts between them as well as within the two parties, as the bargained competition has greatly altered Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes' internal dynamics and their policy priorities.

Indeed, while after the revolution the Islamists had chosen to use to their advantage the ideological polarization that had primarily been imposed upon them by secular opponents and former regime members, they realized that this had ultimately led to their losing control over the transformation process and that a negotiated approach downplaying ideological issues might serve them better for staying in the game. This transformation of Ennahda from a dominant party, perceived by many as a 'conqueror', into a more accommodating force that had 'learned to lose',²¹ and which resigned from government in late 2013, also had an important impact on its internal coherence. By the end of 2013, Ennahda's

leadership had accepted forgoing Islam-inspired articles in the constitution, such as reference to shariah as a source of legislation and the complementarity, rather than equality, of women, and abandoned its demand for former regime representatives' exclusion and judicial prosecution. These actions, along with joining the national sessions, were seen by many among Ennahda's grassroots as a lack of firmness and coherence.²² Consequently, many members left the party. In November 2013, the members of the party's regional office in Gafsa collectively resigned, accusing Ennahda leaders of having abandoned the revolution's goals and having betrayed promises of social justice. The reluctance of the party to mobilize its bases during the summer 2013 crisis to avoid playing into the hands of the Left and Nidaa Tounes' accusations of support for political violence merely added to their frustration.

In response to their grassroots' dissatisfaction and to adapt to an increasingly uncertain legislative electoral outcome, Islamist leaders encouraged their grassroots to de-politicize their networks or re-direct their mobilization potential into channels where they would not interfere with the leadership's political strategies. As a consequence, Ennahda's youth started to, for example, acquire Qatari funding for civil society initiatives.²³ The crackdown on Salafi associations by the technocratic government in early 2014, the replacement of Salafi imams and Nidaa Tounes' efforts to revive a folkloric Islam with the help of loyal state imams (whose discourse was unsatisfying to young people wanting Islam to play a role in politics) were beneficial to the return of Ennahda's networks within the mosques and its outreach to new conservative circles. Simultaneously managing the pursuit of its Islamic project and institutional representation has been at the core of Ennahda's search for its political identity (Cavatorta & Merone, 2013). During the summer 2013 Bardo protests, Ennahda had opted for a small leadership circle to provide quick decision making in the form of a committee

called Group 21 rather than broad consultations within party ranks.²⁴ It thus separated the party leadership's political work aimed at institutional inclusion from the focus of Ennahda's base on the Islamic aspects of their project.

Disagreement between Ennahda members choosing to bargain and those preferring to compete had intensified since 2011. To overcome it, in mid-2014 the party's Shura Council agreed on a five-year strategic plan.²⁵ Among the priorities identified were the consolidation of the party's institutional position, an increase in its political influence by positioning Ennahda representatives in key posts in regional administrative structures, the media and the banks and countering the perception of potential Islamist dominance by limiting the number of ministerial and public administration positions it would pursue. This pragmatic political turn can also be seen in the kind of candidates Ennahda put forward in the legislative elections. Leaders perceived as uncompromising, like Sadok Chourou and Habib Ellouz, were excluded. While those with advocacy profiles, like lawyers and human rights activists, had been chosen as candidates in the October 2011 ANC elections, in the 2014 competition candidates with technocratic experience and access to media, business and societal interests were put on its lists.²⁶

During the 2014 election campaign, very little remained of Ennahda's alliance with its Troika partners. In 2011 the revolutionary versus former regime polarization served to mobilize voters, and Ennahda's coalition with two secular parties helped to placate fears of an 'Islamist takeover', but in 2014 it was bargaining with Nidaa Tounes that allowed the Islamists to remain central in PRE circles. In July 2014, Rached Ghannouchi proposed the idea of putting forward one consensual candidate for the presidency, in partnership with other parties prepared to join in. Although such an arrangement was rejected by the parties as 'undemocratic', a deal between Ennahda and Nidaa

Tounes still seems to have been struck, as Ennahda decided not to field a presidential candidate. Also, even though Ennahda's base spoke out in favour of Marzouki, Essebsi's main challenger in the presidential elections, Ennahda itself did not officially endorse Marzouki, maintaining its 'neutrality'.

The 2014 election campaign also revealed the challenges stemming from Nidaa Tounes' heterogeneous nature. On the one hand, the composition of the catch-all party was an asset in its representatives' comeback on the political scene and the party's victory in legislative elections. The support of the middle and upper-middle classes – that is, inhabitants of the coastal regions, businessmen, secular leftists, civil servants and unionists – who had experienced upward social mobility under Bourguiba and Ben Ali and considered Ennahda's project anti-democratic, helped the party to impose itself as the country's main political force. To overcome stigmatization as a gathering of pillars of the old regime aimed at the restoration of authoritarian rule, its leaders began publicly reinterpreting their roles in the 2011 revolution. On television, in the press and during popular meetings, they explained that they had chosen to avoid bloodshed as a sign of support for popular demands and that the protesters at the time were actually mainly members of the RCD with social and economic rather than political demands. Essebsi even asserted that Tunisia's real martyrs were Belaid, Brahmi and Bourguiba and that talk of the rest, alluding to the martyrs of the 2011 revolution, was mere blathering.²⁷ As nearly 2 million Tunisians (out of a population of some 10 million) formerly belonged to the RCD (and had often felt forced to enrol), such reinterpretations did not shock the majority of Tunisians.

On the other hand, the cohabitation of leftists, like Nidaa Tounes secretary-general Taieb Baccouche, and old regime figures, like former RCD secretary-general Mohammed Ghariani, proved to be complicated and did not allow for shared vision, for example, in regard to the

reform of state institutions. Also, the dominance of Essebsi and his close circle reflected the lack of pluralism in Nidaa Tounes' leadership. Internal consultation beyond this circle has been non-existent (Wolf, 2014). In fact, the reluctance of Essebsi to let any other Nidaa Tounes figure appear in public during the election campaign or to participate in the bargaining with Ennahda prompted some prominent members, who happened to have had leading roles in the RCD, among them Ghariani, to quit the party.

Essebsi had paved the way for the reintegration of Destourian and RCD networks into PRE politics with policies forgoing transitional justice that he initially introduced when he headed the interim government established on 27 February 2011. His party has since been able to use these networks to garner positive media coverage and mobilize large segments of society. At the same time, the end of Ben Ali's monopoly over rent redistribution and the reintegration of 'economic networks of privilege' (Heydemann, 2004) have favoured the multiplication of RCD-like parties that collaborate but also compete with each other. Riahi's UPL is one example. Having obtained 17 seats in the 2014 elections, the UPL has become the third largest political force in the country, by tapping into Nidaa Tounes' constituency. Some Nidaa Tounes branches in Tunis' popular neighbourhoods even withdrew from the party to join the UPL, which presented itself as a 'young people, non-ideological party' (i.e. above the Islamist–secular divide) with the sole objective of bringing wealth to Tunisia. Still, Riahi supported Essebsi's presidential candidacy in exchange for the opportunity to join the Nidaa Tounes-led parliamentary coalition.

Nidaa Tounes' alliances, born in times of crisis, have proved to be fragile (Maravall, 2010). Those that it had built before and during the 2013 Bardo protests with the Popular Front and the leftist and centrist parties of the NSF were not converted into electoral alliances. The PDP had already left the UFT in December 2013; those

parties that remained in the UFT were marginalized when Nidaa Tounes decided in June 2014 that it would not endorse mixed lists and only present its own party members as candidates, thus violating the UFT agreement. The remaining members of the UFT were not left with many options: quit or accept Nidaa Tounes' offer to be on its list and thus renounce their own party.

The 2014 elections thus seem to have temporarily settled the issue of Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes' competitive reintegration with the latter's dominance of parliament. This will allow Ennahda to become an 'anti-incumbent opposition' (Albrecht, 2010) able to oppose specific government policies without, however, opposing Nidaa Tounes' hegemonic position. As of November 2014, Essebsi had been widely expected to win the presidential elections,²⁸ and because in post-authoritarian contexts people tend to reject governance based on strong ideologies (Xiao, 2003), Nidaa Tounes' hegemonic pluralism held the possibility of being successful as long as fear of the cost of open political conflict restrained Ennahda.

Conclusion

The interactions between Ennahda and old regime forces, reincarnated primarily in Nidaa Tounes, have been influenced by their polarization as well as continuous bargaining over the terms of their competition, which extended over three phases of the transformation period and in the end ensured the two groups a central role in politics as well as the normalization of their participation. This included the post-revolutionary reintegration of both forces during Essebsi's interim government with Ennahda's participation in HIROR; the Islamist-led Troika government with the Nidaa Tounes-led alliance monopolizing opposition politics and the escalation of street protests by both forces; and the neutralization of the conflict through informal bargaining leading to Ennahda's resignation, consensus on a technocratic government and alternation of power through elections.

This cohabitation, however, has not led to a transitional elite pact in favour of structural reform as many observers had thought might happen (Stepan, 2012). A consolidation of the specific mode of governance, which this contribution has described as bargained competition, will depend on the two parties' ability to effectively address problems that have been avoided to date. Some of the transitional institutional bargains struck bear the potential for renewed conflict, such as the reform of the security forces, the law on political exclusion and the establishment of the Dignity and Truth Commission, whose task will be to unveil political crimes committed under the former regime (and the reshuffling of which Nidaa Tounes has already announced). More important, local demands have not been addressed. While slogans like 'La Desstra wala Khwandjia' (neither Destourians nor Islamists) were first limited to the Left, which had hoped to constitute a third voice, the marginalization of regional demands have led to the rejection of both Islamist and secular actors in Tunisia's deprived areas. Slogans such as the 'Revolution is not over' and demands for alternative local representation have emerged. If civil society continues to be ineffectually integrated into the political arrangements (Dakhli, 2013), there can be no guarantee that the demands for stronger economic and political participation will remain confined to peaceful channels.

Tunisia shows that in a process of transformation, the repertoires of polarization and consensus can have various functions and consequences. For example, ideological polarization can help political forces position themselves as alternatives to elements of the former regime without challenging them substantively while at the same time allowing bargaining with them. Bargaining between new and old elites in Tunisia has mainly taken place outside formal, elected institutions, thus damaging the renewal of political culture in terms of transparency, political participation and pluralism. Indeed, informal compromises, volatile alliances and technocratic legitimacy have helped to consolidate post-revolutionary

institutions by depoliticizing transitional social conflicts and preventing overly obvious formal rule breaking.²⁹ If, however, post-electoral pluralism remains limited and the decision-making process remains dominated by hegemonic parties, new forces might emerge to address social cleavages. Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes' bargained competition has certainly brought an end to the former authoritarian order based on single-party hegemony, but it has retained a system of dominance and blocked access to politics for many actors outside PRE circles rather than institutionalizing transparency and effective oversight of the country's institutions. It remains unclear how far the political positions represented in Tunisia's parliament can be translated into a fruitful competition over policy priorities and approaches rather than mere bargaining for offices and spoils under the cover of consensus.

Notes

1. Interviews with former RCD ministers and diplomats, Tunis, February 2011.
2. On the PRE, see Muriel Asseburg & Heiko Wimmen (2016).
3. The term *secular* refers to the political narrative that Tunisian post-colonial regimes used to legitimize their authoritarianism vis-à-vis the alleged threat of Islamism. It does not, however, mean that these forces avoided using Islam as a political resource. In contrast, 'secularist' refers to Tunisian leftist parties that officially demand that religion remain in the personal realm. For historical background on the secular versus Islamist categorization, see Zeghal (2013).
4. Helmke and Levitsky (2006: 5) define informal politics as 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels'.
5. Restraining political competition is rooted in the 'for or against Ben Ali' choice that has shaped the political culture of Tunisia for the last decades.
6. The figure is from the independent elections commission, Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections, <http://www.isie.tn/statistiques> (accessed 9 December 2014).
7. See Manifeste des démocrates progressistes tunisiens (2001), <http://audace.free.fr/n73.htm#manifeste> (accessed 12 July 2015).
8. Chebbi and independent human rights activists were also involved in the group (Haugbølle & Cavatorta, 2011: 326).
9. Interviews with Tunisian Islamists, unionists and foreign affairs officials in Tunisia, London and Paris, February 2009, and Tunis,

February 2011.

10. The CNPR also oversaw the local Committees for the Protection of the Revolution (Comités pour la protection de la révolution). The committees had been spontaneously organized in the aftermath of the revolution to resist attacks by mobs loyal to the RCD and the secret police and then transformed into local representative structures assuming the role of municipalities (Houki, 2011). Originally close to the Left and the UGTT, many of these committees were soon taken over by Ennahda sympathizers, giving the Islamists leverage vis-à-vis the interim government, as it appeared to be the sole political force able to control and calm street protests, which it did through the councils.
11. Interviews with local UGTT activists, Tunis, December 2011.
12. The Neo Destour (New Constitutional) Party (later the Socialist Destourian Party) was co-founded by Bourgiba and led by him for more than five decades, until his ousting in 1987.
13. *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, no. 33, 10 May 2011, p. 624.
14. This was confirmed by Sonia Toumi, an Ennahda member of the ANC, on the television show 'Tounesna lyoum', 12 June 2014.
15. Interview with CPR activists, Tunis, April 2013.
16. The Marsad project provides a chart on ANC members exiting and entering parties after October 2011. It shows that only Ennahda did not suffer from massive defections. See al-Bawsala, 'Mercato des partis politiques de l'Assemblée nationale constituante', <http://majles.marsad.tn/fr/mercato> (accessed 9 December 2014).
17. Interviews with Nidaa Tounes councillors and members, Tunis, April 2013.
18. Interviews with professors of La Manouba University and young Nidaa Tounes activists, Tunis, November 2013 and May 2014.
19. He did so on the El Wataniya 1 show 'Choran Ala Al Houdhour', 11 November 2014.
20. B. Lakani, 'Tunis: Slim Rihahi révèle le deal entre BCE et Ghannouchi', *L'économiste maghrébin*, 22 September 2014, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2014/09/22/tunisie-riahi-deal-bce-ghannouchi> (accessed 9 January 2015).
21. In post-authoritarian systems, dominant parties usually adapt 'in order to survive, to remain competitive or to ultimately re-gain power' (Wong & Friedman, 2008) p. 5.
22. Interviews with Ennahda student activists and Salafi followers, Tunis, April 2013 and May 2014.
23. Interviews with Tunisian civil society activists, Doha, November 2014.
24. Interview with Tunisian activists, Tunis, May 2014 and Dahmani (2013).
25. Interview with Tunisian activists, Tunis, May 2014.
26. Hamza Marzouk, 'Ennahdha – Législatives: dix anciens ministres et neuf hommes d'affaires têtes de liste', *L'économiste maghrébin*, 25 August 2014, <http://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2014/08/25/>

ennahdha-legislatives-anciens-ministres-hommes-affaires-tete-listes (accessed 8 December 2014).

27. 'Essebsi: La Tunisie a donné 5 martyrs ... tous les restes du blabla', TunisMAG, 19 December 2014, <http://www.tunismag.com/essebsi-tunisie-donne-5-martyrs-les-restes-du-blabla> (accessed 19 December 2014).
28. This article was finalized between the first and second rounds of the 2014 presidential elections.
29. Technocratic governance can be considered an informal but legitimate way to suspend official rules of democratic representation. See Helmke and Levitsky (2006).

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Contested transformation: mobilized publics in Tunisia between compliance and protest

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ABSTRACT

A variety of civil society actors played a major role in the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia that ousted President Ben Ali, but its influence waned in the course of the following transformation process. This article looks at different forms of expressions of contentious politics and non-institutionalized movements, framed here as 'mobilized publics', that have intervened in the political process in Tunisia. It proposes that there are significant differences in their respective views on the transformation and the role that they can play in it, and hence the approaches to activism that they chose. Three case studies of mobilized publics – in the field of gender justice, socio-economic justice and transitional justice- are examined according to their different degrees of institutionalization, resources and strategies. The analysis shows how struggles for socio-economic justice and transitional justice have been marginalized and discredited as disruptive by a political elite that wagered on increasing polarization.

With the ousting of Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, new political actors and various forms of participation began to emerge in a society previously restricted by a complex security and censorship system. At the same time, existing civil society organizations and activist networks that had operated in secret or subject to severe restrictions were able to expand their activities. Reform of the association law in September 2011 under the interim government of prime minister Beji Caid Essebsi liberalized civil society and led to a vibrant landscape of initiatives, unions, associations and various types of other organizations.

Researchers and donor organizations have tended to describe civil society as a uniformly supportive actor in the Tunisian transformation process (Deane, 2013). In

particular, the strong Tunisian General Labour Union (Union générale tunisienne du travail, UGTT) has been extolled for its mediating and stabilizing role (Chayes, 2014). Such narratives are generated by research agendas focusing on the institutionalization of revolutionary demands and democratization processes from a normative perspective (Zemni, 2015: 1f). In contrast, this paper looks at a variety of civil society actors, expressions of contentious politics and non-institutionalized movements, framed here as ‘mobilized publics’, that have intervened in the political process in Tunisia, proposing that there are significant differences in their respective views on the transformation and the role that they have played in it (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016). Some of these actors have rejected the use of the terms *transition* and *transformation*, referring instead to the current period as a revolutionary phase, as their demands and needs – defined by unemployment and job insecurity and a lack of health and transport infrastructures – have not been met.

This article looks at different forms of political action and contentious politics as well as mobilized publics’ visibility in the public sphere and their capacity to impose their agendas and demands on political decision makers. Have mobilized publics influenced the political transformation? If so, how, and what has made some of them more influential than others? Three case studies of mobilized publics with different degrees of institutionalization, resources and strategies are examined to answer these questions: the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates, ATFD), the Union of Unemployed Graduates (Union des diplômés chômeurs, UDC) and the protest gatherings for the ‘martyrs’ of the revolution that had attracted attention by April 2014 but remained too informal to even acquire a unifying name. These mobilized publics are part of an ever-growing number of initiatives and associations that have sprung up since 2011. Their selection was geared to represent three different fields or sets of issues in which protest

activities and struggles occur – gender justice, socio-economic justice and transitional justice – as well as different modes of activism, ranging from advocacy through formal non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to labour mobilization to informal activist structures engaging in public protest.

In analysing protest dynamics in Tunisia during the Ben Ali era, Allal (2012: 822f.) distinguishes two types of oppositional forces from 2007 to 2011. On the one hand, collective social protests against the regime increased in the centre of the country, in particular following the 2008–09 Gafsa revolts, sparked by the corrupt employment policies of the Gafsa Phosphate Company and followed by a major crackdown by security forces on the villages in the mining region (Gobe, 2010). On the other hand, what Allal calls the democratic opposition, members of associations and political opposition forces pushing for pluralism and liberalism, were increasingly fed up with the organized plunder of the country by the Ben Ali clan. Following this distinction, the ATFD clearly fits into the second category and the UDC into the first, while the mobilization for the martyrs represents a new type of entirely informal, ephemeral contestation that temporarily coalesces around a specific issue and challenges and resists state authority rather than engaging it. Drawing on resource mobilization theory, the three mobilized publics are here also categorized according to the different types of resources they employ: socio-organizational, cultural and moral (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). In doing so, revolutionary legitimacy is framed as a moral resource on which mobilized publics rely.

Specific turning points for the mobilized publics during the three phases of the transformative process help to identify the changes and constraints that have shaped their strategies. The first phase of the transformation is the constitutive one, during which the Higher Commission for the Fulfilment of Revolutionary Goals, Political Reform, and Democratic Transition (Haute

instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, des réformes politiques et de la transition démocratique, HIROR), an interim government body created through a 17 February 2011 emergency decree issued by interim president Fouad Mebaza and convened on 6 March, took a leading role. The commission was the product of various institutionalization processes that followed Ben Ali's ousting and consisted of the National Council for the Protection of the Revolution (Conseil national de protection de la révolution, CNPR) and the Political Reform Commission (Commission supérieure de la réforme politique). The 14 January Front (Front du 14 Janvier), consisting of leftist opposition forces, was the first attempt at institutionalizing the street protests. The Front, after initially rejecting the idea, eventually joined the CNPR established on 11 February that also included human rights organizations, Ennahda, the UGTT and the lawyers' bar organization (Zemni, 2015).

The legal scholar Yadh ben Achour headed HIROR, which was constituted according to a complex quota system of representation of different political and societal forces. It included representatives from the CNPR, the Committee for Political Reform (established by prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi), representatives of the regions, the political parties, unions, associations, families of the martyrs and nationally well-known personalities (Pickard, 2014: 260). The three mobilized publics under scrutiny here were also represented. The commission's formation marks the first turning point for the analysis here, as it was designed to organize the 'shift from revolution to election' (Zemni, 2015: 6). It laid important ground rules for the next steps in the political process by developing a new electoral code. Yet its composition mirrored the country's struggle over inclusiveness and shaped the dynamics of the subsequent process. The emergency decree establishing HIROR declared its sessions closed to the public. The institution roughly doubled its members, to 155, between March and April 2011 after conflicts from within and outside it (Borsali, 2012: 269). The main

issues were whether and to what extent involvement in the commission afforded the different representatives of mobilized publics tangible influence on the transformation process that they could use in pursuing their respective causes or whether participation in it was merely a discursive form of inclusion that offered little or no discernible leverage.

The second phase is the period following elections for the National Constituent Assembly (Assemblée nationale constituante, ANC) on 23 October 2011, after which Ennahda formed the interim Troika government with two smaller, secular and social democratic parties: the Congress for the Republic (Congrès pour la république) and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés, Ettakatol). From this point onwards, the assembly became the legitimate institutional body shaping the transformation process and drafting a new constitution. Access to deputies consequently became an important resource for mobilized publics trying to influence the transformation process from within, while others used contentious actions or media campaigns on the outside. Demonstrations in central Tunis were banned, and in Siliana, protests and strikes against the government and its local governor (from Ennahda) were violently repressed in November 2012, leaving some 200 protestors injured. Prime minister Hamadi Jebali re-interpreted the famous 'Dégage!' (Get out!) chanted by the protestors as a synonym for 'chaos' (Horchani, 2012).

The Bardo protests in summer 2013 represent a turning point that led to the third phase of the transformation, characterized by a conservative, consensus-oriented culture that paved the way for elections between October and December 2014. In July and August 2013, opposition forces – including Nidaa Tounes (Call of Tunisia), which would later emerge from the elections as the winner – took over the square in front of the parliament in the Bardo quarter of Tunis,

disavowing the legitimacy of the constitutional process, as the deadline for drafting the constitution had long since expired. They also protested against the Troika in the aftermath of the killings of opposition figures Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi. Sixty members of parliament suspended their participation in the ANC and joined the protest, also known as the Errahil (Departure) sit-in. The protests were followed in August 2013 by the formation of the Quartet – composed of the UGTT, the Tunisian League for Human Rights (Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme, LTDH), the employers' union (Union tunisienne de l'industrie, du commerce et de l'artisanat) and the National Bar Association (Ordre national des avocats) – which initiated a national dialogue to overcome the political deadlock. Ennahda eventually took part in the dialogue for the sake of national consensus, after boycotting previous initiatives, citing Nidaa's associations with the old regime as its reason.

Three different strategies of the mobilized publics are emphasized in this article: exerting political influence within institutions and on the politically relevant elite (PRE) by engaging directly with political decision makers (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016); gaining access to and using information and communication channels and media which are linked to different 'discursive legacies', which 'define the questions politics should answer' and can challenge the hegemonic symbolic repertoire of the state (Marx Ferrée, 2012: 4);¹ and addressing the gap between the capital and the rest of the country, as decentralization and the urban–rural divide were among the main drivers of the 2011 uprising and earlier protests and are often neglected in the analysis.²

The first kind of strategy, exerting influence in institutions and on the PRE, demands a high degree of human resources, as networks with the PRE are an important requirement for ensuring access to various political and social gatherings and assemblies, where lobbying commonly occurs. Due to the centralized nature of the system, in which media and political power

networks and institutions are all based in Tunis, this strategy only functions when the mobilized publics have representatives in the capital. The second type of strategy, media strategies, has increasingly become the focus of research.³ The uprisings that swept the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 and 2011 encouraged an interdisciplinary approach between communication theory, social media studies and social movement theory – disciplines that had previously been linked by van de Donk's (2004: xiv) groundbreaking work on cyber protest exploring how 'the internet ... changed the internal and external organization of social movements'. Especially during revolutionary or transformative processes, the visibility of mobilized publics enhances their capacity to put pressure on and bargain with authorities to shape the outcomes of these processes. As Benhabib (1992: 79) puts it, 'The struggle over what gets included in the public agenda is itself a struggle for justice and freedom'. Media access and its use as a strategy are examined here, as they are decisive for the internal organization of the movements and campaigns, in addition to being the main vehicles for shaping and mobilizing public opinion and pushing for responses from political decision makers. The third type of strategy, overcoming the urban–rural divide, is particularly important. While political decision-making centres and the main actors in civil society were all based in Tunis, epicentres of the mobilizations were sometimes elsewhere. Since the 2010–11 uprisings, Tunisians have more openly addressed the socio-economic divide along the geographical partition of the capital and the coastal areas versus the centre, west and south. As the spark of the revolutionary process originated in Sidi Bouzid, a town in the centre of the country, it became mandatory for politicians claiming revolutionary legitimacy and for civil society organizations and international actors to take a stance in favour of decentralization and empowerment of 'formerly neglected regions'. Mobilized publics as well as other actors have had to take into account the

regional–capital divide to generate inclusive support and achieve popular legitimacy and credibility.

The three case studies are presented using the same structure for each: they start with a profile of the mobilized public in question (history, membership and alliances), and then their resources are analysed, with particular emphasis on those listed above. This is followed by identification of the strategies on which they have relied. The analysis is based on interviews with activists and representatives of the mobilized publics, including family members of victims of the revolution active in the martyrs movement as well as journalists who closely followed the mobilizations. The interviews were conducted in several regional capitals in Tunisia between 2012 and 2014. The article also draws on earlier research and participatory observation between 2009 and 2010, official documents and data obtained from the Tunisian National Statistical Institute (Institut national de la statistique, INS). Social media played an important role in obtaining information on events on the ground, as independent bloggers often take over the role typically played by the mass media, informing journalists, researchers and politicians. At the same time, such information was often biased and highly subjective, and thus requires a high degree of contextualization to be used for analysis.

ATFD: women bargaining at the centre

The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women is an independent organization founded in 1989 by a network of feminist activists that emerged around the Tahar Haddad cultural club in the old city of Tunis. In keeping with the club's mission and namesake, the debates conducted in this circle were inspired and guided by socialist thought.⁴ While the ATFD was officially recognized and registered as an association during the Ben Ali era, its members were subjected to surveillance and intimidation, and informers infiltrated their meetings. Until 2012, its activities remained limited to the capital.

While assisting women to defend their rights in cases of gender-based violence, the ATFD also spoke out for human rights in general and the civil rights of all citizens. Only women could become members, but male supporters were recruited through members' networks of family and friends. The feminist struggle was thus linked to the larger struggle for democracy, pluralism and social justice. Close ties were established with other advocacy organizations, such as the LTDH, which operated in secret under Ben Ali, the International Federation for Human Rights and the women's section of the UGTT. In 1989 the ATFD protested against Islamist attempts to challenge the personal status law (Code du statut personnel, CSP), an important codification of women's rights, in the run-up to the elections in which the Islamists participated as independent candidates (Borsali, 2012: 243ff.).

A human rights approach and struggle for the equality of men and women has been at the centre of the ATFD's core values. All members are expected to subscribe to these principles, expressed in the charter of the association, thus guaranteeing a degree of internal consensus. Membership rules require that two members vouch for any new applicant. In autumn 2014, the number of active members stood at around 150 to 200. The selectiveness of the association has enhanced internal cohesion, which served the organization well in negotiations with party officials and deputies, especially in the first and second phases of the transformation. Careful selection of members and internal consensus can be considered a socio-organizational resource. On the other hand, these mechanisms have also encountered criticism for being elitist. The ATFD has been able to rely on an excellent pool of human resources, as most of its active members are highly educated professionals (lawyers, psychologists, etc.), often with work experience in international organizations. Networks that connect them to the intellectual, economic and political elite of Tunisia, often dating back to school and university, serve as another important resource in

the form of social capital. The organization has been able to rely on a variety of funding sources, ranging from the United Nations Development to membership dues.

The ATFD has made an effort to integrate the views of young women and to introduce itself to non-members by setting up a mixed gender youth club, which was part of the Ilhem Marzouki Feminist University,⁵ established in 2009 in Tunis and open to all interested men and women. Even critics who consider the ATFD 'too bourgeois' or out of touch with the economic problems of society acknowledge its integrity under Ben Ali's rule. This history of activism has provided it with a significant degree of credibility as a moral resource, in particular among the liberal camp and in the civil society landscape, which it helped pioneer.

Hence, as well as due to their extensive track record of expertise on women's issues, members of the ATFD have established access to conventional mass media and have been invited as experts to participate in TV discussions and similar public forums. They have also used social media to inform, communicate and mobilize for their goals. Possessing sufficient financial resources, the ATFD has been able to employ a staff member charged with optimizing its social media strategy since 2013. This was an important tool for mobilization during the constitution-drafting process, including for the crucial demonstration for women's rights on 13 August 2012 and providing background on central debates, such as the controversy over gender equality versus the concept of complementarity, pushed by the Islamists.

Saida Ben Garrach represented the ATFD as an organization on HIROR, while Ahlem Belhaj, the ATFD's president at the time, was appointed as a 'national personality' to the same body alongside other respected feminists. Through the commission, they contributed to the decision to introduce the principle of gender parity on electoral lists for the 2011 polls, an initial success in influencing the terms of the transformation process. During subsequent stages of the transformation, the

ATFD continued to rely on its socio-organizational resources to develop strategies and to directly influence the constitutional process. For instance, in 2013 the organization produced its own draft constitution, mainly concerning the issues of rights and liberties (as per the first section of the constitution) and sent it to the deputies and the president of the ANC. This led to an invitation to a hearing at the ANC, where the group was given the opportunity to clarify its suggestions. While one of the articles on gender mainstreaming was integrated into the final text, others were included after being significantly diluted. For instance, instead of criminalizing physical, sexual and moral violence against women in public spaces, article 46 of the 2014 constitution only calls on the state to 'take the necessary measures to eliminate violence against women'. Although the ATFD was thus not successful in pushing for criminalization, its members were important actors in defining boundaries between what is considered private and public, definitions that feminist thought considers 'central to the reproduction of power relationships and the reinforcement of gender inequalities' (Ghannam, 2002: 80).

In addition to these constructive contributions to the policy debate, the ATFD also used street mobilization to pressure decision makers. A turning point for this mobilized public crucial for the outcomes of its engagement was the women's march on 13 August 2012, in which the ATFD linked Tunisia's National Women's Day to a protest against Ennahda's proposition that the constitution declare women 'complementary', instead of equal, to men. A week ahead of the march, the ATFD published a joint communiqué with a number of other civil society organizations and the UGTT, profiting, in this case, from their network resources and extensive circulation on social media.⁶ Three days before the march, it held a press conference with the Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development (Association des femmes tunisiennes pour la recherche sur le développement) and the LTDH. This

assured additional coverage by traditional media ahead of the march (Ghorbani, 2012: 54). Instead of Avenue Bourguiba, the organizers decided to march along Avenue Mohammed V to avoid a confrontation with authorities, as a ban on demonstrations on Avenue Bourguiba was still in place.

The organizers mobilized tens of thousands of people in the capital and across the country, notably in Sfax.⁷ Apart from civil society organizations and activist groups, the coalition, calling for a clear stance on women's rights, also included political parties, prominent among them the newly formed opposition party Nidaa Tounes. The defence of women's rights thus was no longer an exclusively feminist cause. It became an occasion at the social level to unite those opposing the project of an Islamic state and on the political level those opposing the Troika government. While Ennahda professed to recognize the CSP, it stood accused of reintroducing inequalities at the constitutional level through its complementarity clause. Ennahda's opposition was able to take advantage of the rallies,⁸ as chants for gender equality alternated with slogans against the Islamist party. The same identity-based constellations reappeared during the Bardo protests one year later, when the march in celebration of women's day joined the Errahil campaign calling on the Ennahda-led government to resign. Beyond the march, activities mobilizing against the complementarity clause included the organization of debates with women deputies across the country. In the end, the combined public pressure resulted in the idea of complementarity being withdrawn from the second draft of the constitution (Ghorbani, 2012).⁹

To address regional discrepancies in the lives of women in Tunisia after Ben Ali's ousting, the ATFD decided to expand its activities beyond the capital, opening new branches in Bizerte, Kairouan, Sfax and Sousse. For the expansion, the ATFD was able to draw on existing relationships with partners like the UGTT and LTDH to establish new networks and reach out to

women who did not know of the organization or who would have been reluctant to seek help from it due to social barriers and defamation campaigns by the old regime and Islamist groups. To give but one example of its expansion, the ATFD office in Kairouan, the fifth holiest city in Islam, employs the same agenda and strategies as the one in the capital. In addition to practical assistance, documentary work on violence against women that the ATFD had been pursuing (more or less freely) under Ben Ali acquired a new dimension by gathering data from additional regions, painting a more complete and differentiated picture of the issue.

Thanks to the ATFD's human and socio-organizational resources, the organization assumed an important role in preventing reversals in the legal status of women pursued by Islamist actors who had assumed a strong position in the PRE after 2011 (Gray, 2012). To this end, it drew on networks of social relations and on the credibility it had acquired through work under the ancien régime that allowed it to achieve high visibility through social and traditional media alike and hence considerable influence on public opinion. The ATFD's struggle for women's rights turned highly political and became subject to party politics with the growing polarization of the political landscape and the formation of Nidaa Tounes as an opponent of Ennahda. The decision of former ATFD president Bouchra Bel Haj Hamida to run for parliament in the October 2014 elections on the Nidaa Tounes list was declared a personal decision – she had run for Ettakatol in the 2011 elections – yet it nonetheless established associations between the organization and the party in the public's perception. Regardless, Bel Haj Hamida won a parliamentary seat, so the ATFD's access to political and decision-making processes improved even further.

At the same time, feminist organizations and individual ATFD members have been targeted on social media with fierce attacks and abuse. Under Ben Ali, as well as during the period after his ousting, the ATFD faced

defamation campaigns and adopted an aggressive communications strategy to counter them. For example, in 2013 a campaign by the ATFD for Tunisia to adopt the Convention for the Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women drew attacks by the Ennahda-led Ministry of Religious Affairs, claiming that the organization was defending homosexual marriage. The patriarchal, oppressive structures visible in these attacks can be seen as part of a 'soft repression' (Marx Ferrée, 2005: 147) – that is, the exclusion of specific issues and voices from the public sphere by ostensibly free media that nonetheless reproduce structures of oppression, patriarchal and other.

UDC: advocate for unemployed graduates

The Union of Unemployed Graduates was founded in 2006 on the initiative of the very active and influential General Union of Students of Tunisia (Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie, UGET), based on the model of a Moroccan association established two decades earlier. According to the UDC's own definition, it defends the right to work and campaigns for actions to fight unemployment. The academic environment from which it originated only offered its members a small margin of manoeuvre in the highly restrictive context of the Ben Ali era. The link between unemployment and student activism was direct: activists organized in the UGET were often blacklisted and hence ineligible for most positions – one of the strategies by which the Ben Ali regime deterred people from contentious politics. Although local chapters of the UGTT offered support when the UDC was still operating underground, there were nonetheless confrontations between them, for instance during the uprisings in Gafsa in 2008, when slogans against the UGTT were chanted (Allal, 2014).

The union became legal in 2011 and by late 2014 counted some 10,000 members in 24 locations across the country. In addition, the UDC has been able to rely on many more supporters identifying with it, including people without a university degree. In 2013 the union

organized a series of internal elections for the boards of its regional offices to streamline its activities and make better use of members' expertise. The UDC also sought to connect with similar organizations in the region, in particular in Algeria and Morocco. For instance, a first Maghreb-wide forum for unemployed graduates was scheduled for 20 February 2013 in Algiers, but Algerian authorities suspended the meeting at the last minute, arresting and deporting 11 participants. The union has positioned its struggle in a global context and adopted a general critique of the dependencies inherent in the international economic system. Its members have also expressed solidarity with unemployed youth in southern European countries.¹⁰

The main forms of contentious action employed by the UDC have been the organization of sit-ins and blockades of factories, boycotts and demonstrations. Hunger strikes have also been used as a form of ad hoc protest against specific employment policies and have been documented online. The UDC has been a driving force behind such protests nationwide and has remained committed to the demand for work first formulated during the 2008–09 protests in Gafsa, as well as the 2010–11 uprising (Allal, 2012). The changes initiated after Ben Ali's ousting allowed it to operate legally and therefore expand its activism, relying on its socio-organizational resources, mainly consisting of its nationwide network. The union's activities have often focused on local struggles, such as protesting against the employment policies of a specific company or factory, and have thus varied according to location, as have its networks and personal affiliations. There have also been unaffiliated mobilizations, organized independently by unemployed activists and only later backed by the union.

With its advocacy strategy, the UDC has addressed one of the main aspects of unemployment – lack of employment among graduates – and hence of social discontent in the Middle East and North Africa (Achcar, 2013). Between 1989 and 2008, graduate

unemployment rose from around 5 per cent to more than 20 per cent (Achcar, 2013: 34). In Tunisia, according to the INS, the overall unemployment rate stood at 15.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2014. Compared to the rate of 18.3 per cent in 2011, this suggests some improvement. The absolute number of unemployed graduates increased, however, from 202,300 in 2011 to 241,300 in 2014 (Institut national de la statistique, 2014), and the discrepancy between the coastal areas and the interior continued to grow.

The UDC has been able to draw on the moral resources that it attained through its active role in the build-up to the 2011 revolution. It appeared in the spotlight for the first time outside Tunis during the 2008–09 Gafsa revolts, where members organized sit-ins in front of UGTT premises. In 2009, it established a regional branch in Redeyef (Gafsa governorate), where mobilizations against corruption and for dignity and employment had been violently suppressed. The regional branch in Sidi Bouzid was founded in December 2010, again directly linking a new structure to ongoing protests and thus obtaining revolutionary legitimacy.¹¹ Initially, it operated inside a UGTT branch. In Redeyef and Sidi Bouzid, the UDC operated at the epicentre of bottom-up protests by mobilized publics.

Beyond the grass-roots level, the union also engaged in the formal transformation process and entered national coalitions to push its agendas. When HIROR expanded its membership in April 2011, the UDC sent a representative and thus had the opportunity to lobby for unemployed academics among a broad spectrum of organizations in Tunisian society. Unemployment was thus included in the commission's charter as one of the urgent issues to address. On the other hand, the UDC was later excluded from decision-making processes, for example, in the ANC, not unlike other mobilized publics.

Yet, through exposure, the organization emerged as the main and authoritative source on unemployment. The media as well as ANC deputies sought information

from it, enabling it to influence public debate. In this context, its specialized knowledge can be understood as a cultural resource (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004: 126). This was especially important as a lack of material resources limited the UDC's capacity to conduct systematic media work. Social media were used as a low-cost alternative as well as for logistics and organization. Like many other groups, the UDC created Facebook groups for its regional sections, which allowed members to document and co-ordinate their activities and keep in touch with other regions. A lack of resources to develop a media strategy turned out to be a disadvantage, as in 2012 the UDC's national Facebook page was compromised by Islamist 'hacktivists'.¹²

Martyrs' Day (9 April) 2012 became a turning point when the police in Tunis violently repressed a demonstration for the right to decent work that had been called by the UDC and joined by activists from outside the city. The violence triggered further mobilizations, including by human rights groups and independent activists, which were met with more repression. The harsh reaction by the state was interpreted as a message to keep demonstrations by protestors from marginalized regions out of the capital. Since 2011, sit-ins have been organized by the respective sections of the UDC in front of state-owned companies – such as the Tunisian Chemical Group (Groupe chimique tunisien) in Skhira, Sfax, and the Gafsa Phosphate Company in Om Larayees and Redeyef – blocking the export of phosphate products with the intent of pressuring companies for employment. These sit-ins were regularly targeted with tear gas and dispersed by security forces. President Moncef Marzouki condemned the protests as disruptive to the Tunisian economy, describing them as 'anarchic' and representing a 'slow suicide' (Dreistbach, 2013).

Against the backdrop of progress in the political transformation process, the question of how to interact with political parties became pertinent for the UDC. As

Léger (2013) notes, there are clear differences between the regional, action-oriented sections of the UDC, which stress their political independence especially vis-à-vis political parties, and the more strategically minded members of the national office, whose discourse and actions are more inspired by political and party ideology. In fact, the UDC's causes have often been picked up by politicians from left-wing parties for inclusion in speeches and platforms, thus turning these politicians into intermediaries between the UDC, the centres of decision making (Higher Commission, ANC) and the media. Although the UDC has remained formally independent, there have been evident links to the Tunisian Workers Party (Parti des travailleurs tunisiens). Most of the UDC's founding members were and some have continued to be members of the former Worker's Communist Party (Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie), now part of the Popular Front. The Popular Front has addressed unemployment and functioned as the UDC's conduit to the broader public sphere and to political decision makers. During crackdowns and arrests of UDC members by the police, the Front also organized legal support. This strategy of twofold membership in a social movement and a formal political party has offered clear advantages, not least in terms of material resources. On the other hand, UDC members have acknowledged that they have often been perceived as the 'little helpers on the ground' and that different actors have an interest in incorporating and instrumentalizing the anger of unemployed youth.¹³

The 2013 Bardo protests represented another turning point for the UDC. The union was a driving force behind the protests demanding the dissolution of the ANC and the government. The group co-operated initially with the UGTT, but when the labour union formed the Quartet and proposed the road map without dissolution of the ANC, it refused to go along with it. Instead, the UDC and UGET joined forces to launch a Day of Anger on 30 September to impose the original agenda of the protests.

This constituted a clear split within the broader movement that had made such protests possible. Rather than participating in the consensus-building process that prepared the ground for the technocratic caretaker government under Mehdi Jomaa, the UDC continued to call for direct political action against the rising cost of living and the sidelining of social issues, such as the situation of the unemployed. The violent repression the UDC faced mirrors the marginalization of this mobilized public even after Ben Ali's ousting. At the same time, candidates of the two major parties, Nidaa Tounes and Ennahda, appropriated the UDC's themes during the election campaign in October 2014 in an attempt to increase their revolutionary legitimacy.

Support for the martyrs of the uprisings: mobilizations from the margins

The ad hoc mobilizations on the issue of the martyrs have been addressing justice and compensation for those killed or injured by security forces during the uprisings in 2010–11.¹⁴ The victims of state repression themselves as well as their families have been the primary forces behind these mobilized publics. Two representatives of the movement were involved in HIROR, but their participation was not fruitful for the cause and thus cannot be considered a turning point. Mobilizations and pressure increased from outside formal institutions, however, especially after the dissolution of the Essebsi-led government following elections in October 2011. Along with other activists and lawyers, the families created a support committee for the defence of the martyrs. Since there was never a formal structure involved, the number of participants can only be estimated. According to activists, in late 2014 the core group of supporters and organizers included some 150 people in addition to their families. They have also received support from the Group of the 25 Lawyers, or Collective of the 25, a group of human rights lawyers who coalesced immediately after Ben Ali's departure to prosecute those responsible for the abuses of the old

regime.¹⁵ One of the lawyers, Omar Safraoui, took over an important role in public communication and at the same time served as the president of the Independent Body on Transitional Justice (Haute instance indépendante de la justice transitionnelle). Members of the UDC's national organization and local sections also backed the mobilizations.

Since the revolutionary process claimed victims across the country, the organizers did not have to contend with the urban–rural divide (as the ATFD did), finding resonance in small towns as well as the capital.¹⁶ Like the UDC, they have also been in a position to claim revolutionary legitimacy representing an important moral resource, as they or their relatives paid for their participation in the uprising with their health and sometimes their lives. To reach a larger (and international) audience, supporters of the martyrs for the revolution staged protests that addressed the stagnating process of transitional justice and the lack of reform in the police and justice sectors. Because the activists had little direct access to decision makers and decision-making processes, their repertoire has been restricted to contentious action, while the allied Group of the 25 Lawyers has successfully pushed for reform of transitional justice laws.

Hunger strikes, also used by the UDC, have been among the most effective tools for creating visibility, attracting media attention and pressuring decision makers to engage with their demands. The hunger strike that started on 23 April 2014 lasted for two weeks. Despite the efforts of a follow-up body – the Committee for the Follow-up and Coordination of the Hunger Strike of the Families of the Martyrs and Injured of the Revolution (Comité de suivi et de coordination de la grève de la faim des familles des martyrs et des blessés de la révolution) – to co-ordinate the action and communicate demands, the hunger strike largely failed to get the media's attention and to mobilize other publics in solidarity. In general, it has remained a challenge for

the martyrs campaign to mobilize wider publics for their cause. One reason is that the families and victims have at times been stigmatized as opportunists seeking financial compensation, and thus not considered a force working towards a larger political objective within the greater framework of transitional justice. They have, however, received increasing support for protest events from independent activists, lawyers and associations, and on occasion the UGTT, all of them feeling that the authorities' handling of the issue of accountability flagrantly contradicted the principles of the revolution.

The decentralized structure of the protests has made social media the most suitable mode of organization and co-ordination for them. Facebook in particular has been used as a platform for discussion and as infrastructure to organize actions, to call for attendance at trials and the like, with some groups and event sites attracting more than 1,000 virtual supporters. The association's well-known bloggers, who used their media presence and followership to draw attention to the sit-ins and hunger strikes, have helped to increase pressure on the government.

The interactions between the martyrs campaign and the PRE have been highly ambivalent. Before the October 2011 elections, the issue of the revolution's martyrs was a topic that endowed those politicians who adopted it with revolutionary credibility. By the end of 2012, the ANC had decided to compensate persons wounded during the 2010–11 uprisings and to set up a fund for compensation. Subsequently, protests sprang up in Redeyef to demand compensation for the victims of the 2008 uprisings, which arguably had prepared the ground for the 2010–11 events. On the discursive level, the new republic gave credit 'to the blood of our blessed martyrs' in the preamble of the constitution,¹⁷ but decentralized mobilized publics, such as the campaigns for the martyrs of the revolution, have lacked the channels of direct participation or access to formal politics needed to make use of such symbolic

declarations in terms of realizing concrete material benefits or legal proceedings for perpetrators of violence against protestors. The Truth and Dignity Commission, an independent institution created within the legal framework of the 2014 constitution, was charged with investigating cases of torture and killings under the regimes of Ben Ali and his predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, from 1955 until 2013. In an ongoing debate, it has also considered whether all those killed by state actors during this period should be considered martyrs. Yet the mere establishment of the commission, after months spent discussing its precise composition, and the renaming of the Ministry of Human Rights to include 'transitional justice' in its title indicate that institutional actors have felt compelled to appear committed to the issue although concrete outcomes are yet to be achieved.

A turning point that ushered in new dynamics for the campaign occurred on 12 April 2014, when the Military Court of Appeals in Tunis reduced from 20 years to three years in jail the sentences of prominent security officials which had been imposed in 2012 for causing deaths and injuries of protestors during the 2011 uprisings in Greater Tunis, Kasserine, Sfax and Thala. The ruling caused an uproar not only among the families and actual victims of violence by security forces, but also mobilized other organizations, including the International Federation of Human Rights, and independent human rights activists. In a press conference on 14 April, Omar Saфраoui, organizer of the support committee, characterized the verdict as a 'second murder of the martyrs' (Chennaoui, 2014).¹⁸

At the same time, the prominent activist Azyz Amami launched the campaign 'Me Too, I Burnt a Police Station', to attract attention to the plight of scores of citizens – most of them young men, but also a 73-year-old woman – facing criminal charges or having been sentenced for acts of violence against state property, as an expression of their anger at the repressive security

apparatus.¹⁹ According to national news outlets, by April 2014 authorities had indicted more than 130 persons on such charges (Lussato, 2014). Most trials ended in limbo, with court sessions adjourned for bureaucratic reasons, but also because of ad hoc protests by supporters outside courthouses. The protests for the release of prisoners have often been backed and organized by the local UDC and have frequently been followed by arrests.

Although, at first glance, the mobilizations discussed here appear to deal with two different situations – on the one hand, compensation for young men and women injured during the uprising and for the families of those killed, and on the other, ‘criminalization’ of protestors who attacked state property and institutions – they can be treated as two sides of the same coin, as they address the same core issue: the search for accountability and the notion that the authorities have not dealt properly with events.²⁰ It is also important to note that the victims of police violence during the uprisings were mostly from lower-class backgrounds, which means that they had few material resources or channels for participating in politics and pressing their demands, but had to rely on moral and cultural resources instead. As a consequence, their strategies of influence put them in confrontation with the authorities.

Fear of a return of the old regime and of restorative tendencies have driven and united these mobilizations. In combination with their lack of influence at the political and decision-making levels, this has resulted in a confrontational discourse. At the same time, this mobilized public has also strategically kept its distance from the PRE, to avoid being instrumentalized and to preserve its moral resources. On 12 April, the evening before the protests against the release of the former chiefs of security staged in front of the presidential palace, Amami announced on his blog, ‘A war is coming, and this time we will hit first’.²¹ By adopting the terminology of ‘war’, activists were expressing their

fundamental opposition to the trajectory of the transformation process and trying to shake up the repressive consensus that had begun to emerge after the 2013 agreement between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes to establish a technocratic government. The authorities took the bait and, instead of responding to the political challenge, attempted to discredit its authors. After a TV appearance in late April 2014, Amami was arrested on drugs charges. The manoeuvre backfired, however, as the obvious similarity to repressive practices used during the Ben Ali era validated the underlying criticism of the activists against the transitional authorities, creating a wave of solidarity among independent activists that led to Amami's eventual release and also to publicity for the cause he was advocating.²²

On 2 June 2014, the ANC finally passed a law decriminalizing revolutionary acts between 17 December 2010 (marking the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi) and 28 February 2011 (when the prime minister of the provisional government, Ghannouchi, stepped down after protests and was replaced by Essebsi). The law officially recognizes a period of revolution during which violence was acceptable, thus delimiting a period of legitimate uprising. While this shows that the mobilized publics discussed here were able to have a direct impact on institutions' decisions, critics have denounced the law as a measure to contain the revolution by giving it a definite start and, more important, an end point, after which revolutionary activity is considered impermissible. Thus taking part in contentious action, such as the local protests that have continued to be organized throughout the marginalized regions, has again become punishable.

The trajectory of the martyrs campaign and the fight against the criminalization of protest have escaped the usual logic of transitional phases, as these movements' demands have not been addressed by successive governments. Their media strategy has been weak, and

they have had to constantly fight to establish a presence through traditional media and in the official discourse. Their visibility has thus depended on events such as election campaigns, court trials, campaigns launched by members, and so on. Although establishment of the support committee can be considered an attempt to institutionalize and structure demands, further institutionalization has not taken place. This lack of formal institutions and structures, on the other hand, has allowed activists from other camps to join in, providing resources and including other causes.

Conclusion

Post-2011 Tunisia offered more possibility for political participation, which has also been reflected in a more pluralist media landscape. Both developments have had an important effect on the transformation of public spheres and the political culture (Antonakis & Mahdhaoui, 2014). All the mobilized publics examined here had the 'explicit objective of exerting immediate influence on the political process' (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016), but their success was highly dependent on the resources at their disposal. The concept of mobilized publics is indeed helpful in capturing the different dynamics of the relationship between the politics of contestation and the PRE and includes actors with a small degree of institutionalization. This approach was used in combination with resource mobilization theories to deconstruct the image of civil society as a monolithic block. After a period of decentralized uprisings driven mainly by local impulses, with limited hierarchies and structures, increased institutionalization enhanced the possibility for some mobilized publics to participate in political decision making, as in the case of the ATFD. At the same time, ideology-based activism, used as an identity marker for partisan politics, replaced the action-based mobilizations that dominated during the first revolutionary phase, especially in the capital. Civil society organizations that had established structures before the uprisings and were not perceived as having

been co-opted by the dictatorship had particularly strong credibility, which they drew on as a resource. This also applied to formerly clandestine mobilized publics, such as the UDC, which were able to expand and formalize their structures after 2011.

This contribution also shows that the resources of credibility and revolutionary legitimacy by themselves did not guarantee political influence in Tunisia. Rather, as in other countries of the region, mobilization and demands for economic and transitional justice were sidelined throughout the transformation period (see, e.g., Alwazir, 2016). Their marginalization can be explained by the strategies these mobilized publics used or by their lack of resources, such as access to the PRE and the media. Hunger strikes, sit-ins and blockades were easily framed as disruptive and hence de-legitimized by the PRE.

Mobilized publics pushing for policies based on symbolic identity markers, such as martyrdom or gender, were potentially made vulnerable to co-optation and instrumentalization, especially when they lacked resources and access to decision makers and processes. Polarization along ideological battle lines made sticking to meaningful policy debates a serious challenge. The ATFD handled this challenge by focusing on its area of expertise, fighting a legal battle and refusing to compromise on its issues. The different alliances of the ATFD and UDC shaped their resources and strategies. The networks established by the ATFD with the labour unions, and the affiliations between the UDC and the Workers Communist Party were particularly strong, because they were born in the political context of the authoritarian regime and shared a history of resistance. As becomes clear from the case of the UDC, establishing an alliance with political parties can make an impact when lobbying for a specific issue, but does not have to lead to co-optation, and can actually produce a long-term alliance of ideologically compatible organizations fighting for similar objectives. At the same time, in this instance, little has been

achieved in terms of concrete measures to address unemployment and a soaring cost of living. The difficulty of integrating these demands systematically seems to be symptomatic of an elite whose consensus politics was established on the common ground of a neo-liberal economic program.

It is important to note that mobilizations have overlapped more easily in the marginalized regions (e.g. in the case of relations between the UDC, UGET and support for the martyrs), as a common goal was to enhance visibility in national politics and to demand progress for their respective governorates. This has echoed the structural marginalization of mobilized publics in the regions, even vis-à-vis their representatives in the capital. On the other hand, new types of resources have been emerging for marginalized mobilized publics. While the families of martyrs and victims of state violence operated with next to no resources, they received support from actors who have been positively associated with the 2011 revolution and backed by many different parts of society, especially youth, those from a lower-class background, human rights and civil liberties NGOs, and so on. Another major asset has been the cross-regional approach of the movement. Yet the success they achieved has at best been partial, as the decriminalization of contentious action was restricted to a narrow window of time around the 2011 events, and no satisfactory compensation has been forthcoming for the victims.

Some mobilized publics have moved into Tunisia's PRE. They are an empirical illustration of the overlap between the two categories of mobilized publics and PREs as discussed by Asseburg and Wimmen (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016). The UGTT, for instance, advanced into the circle of the core elite by drafting the road map and leading the way out of the dangerous impasse that the transformation process had reached in August 2013. The ATFD, on the other hand, gained sustained access to and influence on decision-making

processes touching on its specific expertise and agenda, and may thus now be counted among the third and even the second circle of the PRE. The polarization of the political sphere also affected the mobilized publics, which had to position themselves within the dynamics of the (staged) confrontation between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. Yet, while associating itself with the demands of the ATFD helped Nidaa Tounes to emphasize its liberal agenda, the other two mobilized publics discussed here did not easily fit into either camp. As the political sphere turned increasingly bipolar, their demands found little resonance and were thus marginalized and discredited as disruptive.

At the same time, the turnout for the parliamentary and presidential polls in October and November 2014 casts doubt on the assumption that the demands the mobilized publics had been pushing for were channelled effectively through participation in elections. Rather, an abstention rate of 40 per cent of registered voters in the parliamentary elections demonstrated a lack of trust in the established institutions. Significantly, the lowest turnout occurred in Sidi Bouzid, where the abstention rate was 52 per cent according to the INS.²³ These figures mirror the continuing and in some instances deepening disparities between the centre of the country and the coastal areas. Gana et al. (2012), in their study on the 'geography of voting' in Tunisia, note the relatively weak participation in the centre of the country in 2011. While discursively included, these citizens have not begun to identify with the political order established since the uprising. The transformation remains contested.

Notes

1. Marx Ferrée (2012: 4) notes in regard to the study of social change, 'Material legacies of movement mobilizations in the form of institutional resources matter, but so do the *discursive legacies* that define the questions politics should answer, making some seem common sense and others absurdly radical' (emphasis added).

2. Allal (2012: 824) considers this a socio-territorial and generational double cleavage characterizing protest actions in Tunisia.

3. See for example Rodgers (2009); in regard to the regional context, see Lerner (2010).
4. Tahar Haddad is considered the 'father of Tunisian feminism'. A notary public, he was also close to the labour union movement.
5. Named in honour of the feminist writer and sociologist Ilhem Marzouki, who died in 2008. It is not a university in a classical sense, but a space to discuss feminist thought and women's issues and to organize training courses.
6. The communiqué – also signed by representatives of the Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development, the LTDH, Amnesty International and the National Council for Freedoms – was published on organizations' respective Facebook pages. See for instance 'Communiqué commun ATFD, AFTURD, Amnesty International, LTDH, CNLT, UGTT', <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/notes/association-tunisie-tol%C3%A9rance/communiqu%C3%A9-commun-atfd-afturd-amnesty-international-ltdh-cnlt-ugtt/358043447598389> (accessed 4 November 2014).
7. Estimates varied drastically, ranging from 10,000 to 200,000 participants (Ghorbani, 2012: 55).
8. On the dynamics between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes, see Boubekeur (this volume).
9. This was the analysis expressed by most members of ATFD as well as other observers in interviews.
10. For more information, see the interviews with Maher Hamdi, a member of the UCD's National Provisory Bureau, and Sabra Chraifa, a UDC activist: 'La des diplo^més-cho^meurs: Pre´sentation de l'Union des diplo^me´s cho^meurs – UDC (mars 2012)', *Solidaire International*, no. 8 (autumn 2012), http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/docs/2013/09/09/tunesie_la_des_diplomes-chomeurs_udc_mars2012.pdf (accessed 5 November 2014).
11. Mohamed Bouazizi, the street vendor who set himself on fire in December 2010 in Sidi Bouzid, was at first (incorrectly) depicted as an unemployed university graduate. This led to stronger identification with him by young educated protestors during the uprising.
12. For a discussion on hacktivism, see Coleman (2010).
13. The potential to instrumentalize this anger, often stemming from a lack of prospects in the job market for youths, and vulnerability of this group to radical ideas can also be seen in the context of Islamist recruitment. Solving socio-economic issues can be considered a priority in preventing breeding grounds for radicalization.
14. According to the official report published in May 2012 by the Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses Committed from 17 December 2010 until the End of Its Mandate in April 2012 (also called the Bouderbala report, after the commission president), 338 people were killed and more than 2,000 injured during the uprisings between 17 December 2010 and March 2011 (Bouderbala, 2012).
15. See Antonio Galofaro's radio portrait about the group for ir7al.info: 'Nous sommes des vrais avocats!', 25 July 2011, <http://www.ir7al.info/?>

p=2887 (accessed 5 November 2014).

16. For more detailed information, see Bouderbala (2012).
17. The precise meaning of the term *martyr* was left undefined.
18. Henda Chennoui is one of the few journalists extensively covering the issue of the martyrs.
19. See Azyz Amami's blog, 'Message to every revolted soul on this earth', 12 April, <http://azyz405.blogspot.de/2014/04/message-to-every-revolted-soul-on-this.html> (accessed 5 November 2014).
20. It is not unusual to find overlapping involvement. For example, the brothers Khaled and Issam Omri, accused of setting fire to a police station in December 2010, also lost their brother Mohamed Omri, who was shot dead in Kasserine during the same events.
21. See Amami, 'Message to every revolted soul on this earth'.
22. The charges, denied by Amami, were for the use and possession of cannabis. In response to his arrest, the head of the government, Jomaa, referred to Amami as a 'nice guy' and spoke of the need to adapt relevant legislation to the 'realities of our society', but avoided mentioning the selective use of this legislation to target dissenters and the issues that Amami had been promoting.
23. See detailed statistics on the website of the independent election commission, Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Elections en Tunisie, <http://www.isie.tn/statistiques> (accessed 26 December 2014).

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Political bargaining and violent conflict: shifting elite alliances as the decisive factor in Yemen's transformation

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ABSTRACT

This contribution examines the actors involved in the Yemeni transformation and how the evolving dynamics among them affected the emerging political order. Although constrained by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative, which initiated a peaceful transfer of power, the core politically relevant elite (PRE) used its networks in the political parties, military, tribes and media to continue to pursue its own interests. Thus this article analyses the interplay of a conflict over political power among the elite and the implementation of the GCC Initiative – that is, the nexus between power dynamics and the formal transformation process. In this context, it looks at how PRE actors interacted with other actors, including mobilized publics, such as the Hirak movement, which seeks an independent state in southern Yemen; local conflicts, including the battles between the army and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and between Ansarullah (Partisans of God, the Houthi movement) and various tribes and factions of the army; institutions, such as the mechanisms of the NDC; and regional and international powers pursuing their interests in the country by granting or withholding financial or other types of support to various components of the PRE.

Motivated by widespread poverty, unemployment and corruption, a popular protest movement began to gain momentum in Yemen in early 2011. Demanding the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his family from power, the mass popular uprising lasted more than ten months and led to increased political instability and a security vacuum. In April 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), backed by the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the European Union, put forward an initiative to end the political crisis. The agreement's implementation mechanism provided a road map for an institutional reform process intended, at least rhetorically,

to respond to the people's political and economic aspirations. The GCC agreement, signed in November 2011, initiated a transfer of power, with Saleh handing over all constitutional presidential authorities to his vice-president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.¹ Saleh's signature on the document was in exchange for immunity for himself and officials who had served under him. Consequently, he was able to remain active in politics as chairman of his political party, the General People's Congress (GPC).

One of the first measures after the transfer of presidential powers was the establishment in December 2011 of an interim government composed equally of the GPC and the main opposition alliance, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). In February 2012, Hadi's presidential candidacy was endorsed by both parties and adopted in a nationwide referendum. Other principal components of the initiative were the restructuring of the fragmented Yemeni security apparatus and the so-called National Dialogue Conference (NDC). The former had the goal of institutionalizing the security apparatus and unifying the military under a central command structure. The goal of the NDC, held between March 2013 and January 2014, was to resolve the country's internal conflicts and discuss the future structure of the state. On the basis of the NDC outcomes, a committee established by President Hadi in March 2014 was tasked with drafting a new constitution. After a referendum on the constitution, presidential and parliamentary elections were scheduled for February 2015.

The case of Yemen stands out among the countries engulfed by the Arab Spring as the only one in which the transformation process was initiated by a pact – the so-called GCC Initiative – constituting a power-sharing agreement between competing elements of the first and second circles of the politically relevant elite (PRE).² The PRE was motivated to enter the agreement to restore political stability. According to O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 38), pacts have the potential to move a polity

towards democracy, albeit through some undemocratic means, as conflicting or competing groups are forced to compromise due to their interdependence. No single group can do without the other or impose its solution unilaterally. The Yemeni case also partly fulfils the criteria for what Linz and Stepan (1996: 356) call pacted transitions: the GPC and the JMP were organized, nationally known non-violent groups comprised of both hard- and softliners. Yet the GCC Initiative was not supposed to initiate a transition to democracy, nor did it resolve the conflict within the core PRE. The agreement alone thus cannot explain the course of transformation in Yemen and its dynamics.

This contribution examines the actors involved in the transformation and how the evolving dynamics among them affected the emerging political order. Although constrained by the GCC Initiative, the core PRE used its networks in the political parties, military, tribes and media to continue to pursue its own interests. This article analyses the interplay of this elite conflict and the implementation of the GCC Initiative – that is, the nexus between power dynamics and the formal transformation process. In this context, it looks at how PRE actors interacted with other actors, including mobilized publics, such as the Hiraak movement, which seeks an independent state in southern Yemen; local conflicts, including the battles between the army and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and between Ansarullah (Partisans of God, the Houthis movement) and various tribes and factions of the army; institutions, such as the mechanisms of the NDC; and regional and international powers pursuing their interests in the country by granting or withholding financial or other types of support to various components of the PRE.

While the GCC was interested foremost in preventing a spillover of instability and in containing democratic aspirations and movements in the Gulf, its member states also simultaneously pursued their individual interests, in particular Saudi Arabia and Qatar with

regard to repressing or supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, respectively, and containing alleged Iranian influence in Yemen (Haykal, 2013; Terrill, 2014). The United Nations and the GCC Initiative's Western sponsors claimed that their engagement in Yemen was aimed at achieving a democratic transition.³ The GCC agreement, however, merely refers to a 'peaceful transfer of power'. Their engagement in Yemen was, above all, driven by a desire to contain the threat of civil war, the failure of which would have allowed AQAP to further exploit the security vacuum and expand its presence (Carapico, 2014). This article analyses how the PRE managed these constraints and succeeded in manipulating some of these factors as resources to pursue its own interests, thus influencing the course of transformation.

To understand these dynamics, three distinct phases of the transformation are examined: the military restructuring (November 2011–March 2013), the NDC (March 2013–January 2014) and Ansarullah's advance on and takeover of Sanaa (January 2014–September 2014). The analysis is based on field research conducted in April and May 2014, as well as extended stays in Sanaa between 2001 and 2013. In addition to face-to-face interviews and participant observation in qat sessions,⁴ it relies on telephone and electronic conversations with members of the government, political parties, delegates of the NDC, activists, journalists, bloggers with access to the core PRE and representatives of the international community.

Elite conflict and the 2011 uprising

In the two decades preceding the 2011 uprising, an alliance between the Saleh and Ahmar families and their respective networks formed the inner circle of the PRE. At the core of the Saleh network stood the Saleh family (immediate relatives and in-laws of the then-president) and members of Saleh's tribe, the Sanhan. They were mostly high-ranking military officers and until 2012

collectively controlled the security apparatus (Knights, 2013; Phillips, 2011: 87–93), while making vast fortunes through the Yemen Economic Corporation (YECO), a military conglomerate with business interests in many sectors, including imports and land (Phillips, 2011: 71; United States Agency for International Development, 2006: 4). In the second and third circles of the PRE – that is, on the political party level – Saleh’s network extended into the GPC, the main governing party. Established as a non-ideological organization, the GPC primarily served to channel patronage to supporters and co-opt the opposition. Ali Abdullah Saleh, through his patronage network, built support among a vast number of tribes, particularly the two major federations, the Hashid and Bakil (Alley, 2010).

In turn, the Ahmar family derived its influence from its standing within the Hashid federation, the most powerful tribal coalition in Yemen. Shaykh Abdullah bin Hussain al-Ahmar, the Hashid’s highest-ranking tribal leader, was arguably the most powerful man in northern Yemen from the establishment of the republic in 1962 until his death in 2007 (Dresch, 2000: 160). Because of his tribal power, Abdullah played a key political role and headed parliament from 1990 until his death, enabling the family to establish one of the largest business empires in Yemen. The Ahmar Group of Companies has interests in crude oil, telecommunications, import and export and tourism. After Abdullah’s death, Sadeq al-Ahmar, the shaykh’s eldest son, succeeded him as the highest Hashid shaykh. A younger son, Hamid al-Ahmar, became a prominent businessman and politician. Besides its tribal connections, the family’s network in the second and third circles of the PRE is made up of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, commonly referred to as Islah, a party comprised of the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis as well as conservative tribesmen and businessmen. Abdullah al-Ahmar established Islah in co-ordination with Saleh in the context of the unification of southern and northern Yemen in 1990 to serve as an ideological

counterbalance and as a competitor in elections against the southern Yemen Socialist Party (YSP). By virtue of the Ahmars' close alliance with Saleh, Islah likewise remained a close ally of the GPC throughout the 1990s (Schwedler, 2004).

The first fissures began to emerge within the alliance and manifested themselves in the inner circle in the mid-2000s, but had begun to appear even earlier in the second and third circles of the PRE, at the political party level. The root of the fissures was the question of political succession. When President Saleh began to groom his son Ahmed Ali as his successor to the presidency in the early 2000s, some segments of the PRE felt their positions threatened (Phillips, 2011: 93–100). Within the inner circle, Saleh's strategy was to centralize power in the hands of his immediate family. As a result, other allies were neglected and partially cut off from patronage networks. Of particular importance, Saleh alienated his long-time confidant Ali Mohsin, commander of the First Armoured Division (FAD), by restricting US military aid to divisions of the military under the command of his family and by sending the FAD into the northern Houthi conflict to weaken Ali Mohsin militarily (Phillips, 2011: 93–95). Like Saleh, Ali Mohsin also hailed from the Sanhan, and as their relationship deteriorated, a rift developed within the tribe between their respective supporters.

Saleh's alliance with the Ahmars similarly began to deteriorate. Saleh marginalized Hamid economically by allowing more competition in the telecommunications sector. The young shaykh also found it increasingly difficult to gain access to drilling licences in the oil sector (Alley, 2010: 408f.). Just before the 2006 presidential elections, Hamid became the first member of the family to openly defect from Saleh. According to a US embassy cable, Hamid tried to convince Ali Mohsin to defect from Saleh to overthrow the regime in 2009 after both of them had been marginalized (Whitlock, 2011). A common denominator between Ali Mohsin and the Ahmar family

was their connection to Salafi networks and the so-called Afghan Arabs, Yemenis who had fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and were employed as Islamist militias against the southern Yemeni army in the 1994 civil war.

With the onset of the 2011 protests, the inner circle fragmented along the above fault lines. After more than 50 protesters were killed in the capital on 18 March 2011, Ali Mohsin and the Ahmars formally defected to the opposition and formed an alliance with the Islah party. As a result of their defection, the second and third circles of the PRE and their networks in the military and the tribes were also effectively split, with Ali Mohsin's FAD and the Hashid tribes loyal to the Ahmars siding with the protesters on the street.

Rifts in the second and third circles had similarly begun to develop in the late 1990s, particularly between the GPC and Islah. After the YSP boycotted the 1997 parliamentary elections, and because of an electoral system that favoured the GPC, Saleh's party increasingly dominated parliament. As a consequence, the leaders of Islah and the YSP approached each other to explore co-operation. These early meetings gradually led to the formation of the JMP as an oppositional alliance (Durac, 2011; Yadav, 2011). After the presidential elections of 2006, the alliance became a viable opposition to the GPC, and its demands for reform of the electoral system triggered escalating tensions. In 2009 both parties agreed to hold a national dialogue to resolve their differences and address numerous issues, including the secessionist movement in the south and the armed conflict with Ansarullah in the north. Disregarding these initiatives, however, in December 2010 the GPC parliamentary bloc agreed to constitutional amendments put forward by the government that would abolish the presidential term limit, allowing Saleh to remain president for life. In response, the JMP organized street protests that month. In late February 2011, the JMP formally joined the non-partisan 'youth revolution'. Given their capacities and resources,

Islah and the FAD quickly took control of the protest movement after the 18 March killings.

Although the 2009 initiative for a national dialogue never materialized, it brought together individuals from the second circle of the PRE from both the GPC and JMP who later emerged as a new elite faction, as they were willing to co-operate and compromise. These individuals – the secretary-generals of the parties comprising the JMP and Abdulkarim al-Eryani, a leading member of the GPC – participated in and drove the negotiations on the GCC Initiative. Within the second PRE circle, the GCC agreement appeared to have resolved the stalemate between the two sides. Mobilizing around the agreement, the softliners of the JMP and the GPC co-operated during the transformation, increasingly marginalizing Saleh followers within the GPC. Consequently, a rift opened within the GPC between these ‘hawks’, who had no interest in the smooth implementation of the agreement, and the ‘doves’ seeking compromise with the JMP.⁵ This emerging alliance between the GPC doves and the JMP, which was later headed by interim president Hadi, was rather weak however, as the respective actors belonged to different political parties and were constrained by the interests of other factions of their organizations. It was also weak in terms of tribal and military support, but enjoyed the backing of the international community.

During the transformation, a tri-polar configuration of the PRE consolidated involving the faction around the interim president, Hadi; the alliance of the Ahmar family, general Ali Mohsin and Islah; and the faction around former president Saleh (Transfeld, 2014). These elite factions had differing interests with regard to the transformation. Pushing for the implementation of the GCC Initiative was in the interest of Hadi and his loyalists, as it guaranteed the support of the international community and provided his group with formal legitimacy to uproot his predecessor’s patronage networks under the guise of good governance. The Ahmar family and Ali

Mohsin supported the implementation of the GCC Initiative as long as it ensured the establishment of a system that functioned to their advantage and protected their political influence and business interests. Former president Saleh and his supporters preferred that the initiative fail, because such an outcome would reduce Hadi's standing and blunt the thrust of his reform agenda, which they perceived, not without reason, as being crafted to curtail their influence and bar their return to power.

Military restructuring

The first phase of the transformation began with the signing of the GCC Initiative in November 2011 and ended with the opening of the NDC in March 2013. This period was characterized by the restructuring of the security sector, particularly the military, to restore security, which had dramatically deteriorated during the 2011 uprising. Over the course of the ten months of protests, armed forces had been withdrawn from their positions within various governorates to secure the regime in the capital, repress protest movements and confront opposition forces. Consequently, the capital became the staging ground for battles among opposing troops and armed tribes, as both the Saleh camp and the group around the Ahmars and Ali Mohsin sought to boost their bargaining position during negotiations of the GCC agreement.

By the time of the initiative's signing, Sanaa had effectively been divided into two spheres of influence, with the southern parts controlled by troops loyal to Saleh and the north controlled by Ali Mohsin's FAD and Hashid tribal fighters loyal to the Ahmar family. Meanwhile, various groups readily exploited the local security vacuums on the periphery. From the beginning of the confrontation in 2011, AQAP had taken control of entire towns in southern Yemen, while Ansarullah forces fully controlled the northern governorate of Saada. Because of the precarious security situation, one of the main goals of the GCC Initiative was to 'end the division

in the armed forces and address its causes' and to 'integrate the armed forces under unified, national and professional leadership in the context of the rule of law' (GCC Initiative, 2011: para. 15). The agreement's implementation mechanism, however, remained vague about the details and scope of security sector reform. That troops harboured loyalties to individuals rather than the institution was identified as one of the key problems, but the consequences of reforms were not specified for members of the inner circle of the PRE who held positions in the military. In practical terms, however, military restructuring would become increasingly synonymous with purging the Saleh family from the security sector.

In this first phase of the transformation, Hadi's priorities were to secure his own safety and consolidate his position as president, to ensure the implementation of the GCC Initiative to guarantee continued international support and to stabilize the security situation, especially in the south, where AQAP had dramatically expanded its territorial presence in early 2012. To this end, he positioned individuals loyal to him in strategic positions in the army, attempted to restructure the hierarchy of the armed forces by reorganizing the country's military districts and branches of service and pushed for professionalization and improved performance.⁶ The international community served as a resource to the president in the restructuring process. The splits in the security forces were of special concern to the United States, which was relying on the Yemeni military for implementing its counter-terrorism strategy against AQAP. Thus Washington, along with the other so-called G10 countries, offered its full support for Hadi's restructuring campaign and threatened potential spoilers with sanctions.⁷

By this stage, the camp around the Ahmars, Ali Moshin and Islah had been empowered through mobilized publics, in particular by the popular support they had gained during the course of the protests and

the resulting revolutionary legitimacy. Islah was also emboldened by the electoral successes of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in early and mid-2012. To this alliance, implementation of the GCC Initiative was the equivalent of removing the levers of power from the Saleh family's hands. Its political party representatives thus conditioned Islah's participation in the NDC on a purge of Saleh supporters from the military (International Crisis Group, 2013a: 16). Immediately after the signing of the GCC agreement, what Yemeni media described as a 'parallel revolution' began within state institutions. Troops, civil servants and other employees staged protests and demanded the resignation of superiors related to or loyal to Saleh (Gordon, 2012), thus giving additional momentum to the campaign for purges and simultaneously serving this alliance as a stratagem against Saleh. Islah also attempted to capitalize on the deteriorating security situation by accusing Saleh loyalists of instigating the upsurge of AQAP suicide attacks that targeted armed forces throughout the country. On 21 May 2012, Yemen witnessed its worst terrorist attack to date when a suicide bomber killed 100 soldiers from the Central Security Forces (CSF). With the increase in AQAP attacks during the restructuring process, the international community became more outspoken. In June 2012, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2051, calling for the smooth implementation of the GCC Initiative. Making reference to the increase in terrorist attacks and expressing concern over the country's stability, the resolution threatened spoilers of the transitional process with sanctions. Although the resolution refrained from referring to actors by name, and although there was no evidence linking the Saleh camp to the attacks, the resolution was understood in Yemen as being directed at the former president.

Despite having the most to lose from the restructuring, Saleh and his network officially supported the reform of the military initiated by Hadi. They, however, perceived its implementation as aimed at the gradual and

systematic expulsion of anyone related in any way to the Saleh family, not simply the professionalization and institutionalization of the armed forces.⁸ Hadi, indeed, began removing Saleh loyalists and family members from their positions in the security apparatus in April 2012. In August 2012, a series of presidential decrees removed troops from the command of Ahmed Ali and, to a lesser extent, Ali Mohsin. Only after these measures did Hadi move to replace Ahmed Ali, whom he dispatched as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Saleh network within the military mustered stiff resistance against the strategy of gradually uprooting them. Troops staged mutinies against newly appointed commanders, especially in the Republican Guards. The rebellions at military bases throughout the country underlined the divisions within the armed forces and their weakness.

Having dealt with Ahmed Ali, Hadi then curtailed the direct military responsibilities of Ali Mohsin while retaining him in the inner circle of decision making as 'presidential advisor on military affairs'.⁹ In July 2012, Hadi and Ali Mohsin visited Qatar, the main regional sponsor of the Muslim Brotherhood, indicating increasingly close co-operation between Hadi, nominally still a member of the Salehs' GPC, and the alliance between the Ahmar family, Ali Mohsin and Islah (Al-Muslimi, 2013). Hadi's entering into this alliance demonstrated the strength that the PRE faction had acquired during this phase of the transformation. It is doubtful Hadi could have removed the Salehs from their positions without the backing of Ali Mohsin and the Ahmars.

In sum, as a result of the military restructuring process, the power balance within the PRE shifted. The Saleh faction lost its influence within the inner circle of the PRE, particularly in the upper ranks of the armed forces, but retained its influence among the military's lower ranks. It also maintained its networks in the GPC as well as among the tribes. Tensions between Hadi and

Saleh increased as a result of the military reforms, widening the gap within the GPC, and as a consequence, the group around Hadi and the JMP leaders, who ultimately had a shared interest in removing the Salehs from the armed forces, was strengthened. With the backing of the international community, Hadi and his supporters were able to implement large-scale reforms despite considerable resistance. Hadi also managed to put officers loyal to him and Islah into positions in the military. The group around the Ahmars, Ali Mohsin and Islah was likewise strengthened. Not only did its interest in removing the Salehs from the military keep them close to Hadi, but the two ultimately entered into an alliance because Ali Mohsin and the Ahmars served to counterbalance Saleh loyalists throughout the restructuring process.

The restructuring did not, however, achieve its main objective – to overcome the fragmentation of the military. Both Saleh and Ali Mohsin retained indirect influence within the armed forces, negatively affecting the government's coercive power. The process was also not inclusive, as Hadi decreed the changes according to the proposals of a technical committee appointed by himself and the input of international advisors (International Crisis Group, 2013a: 16). It remained largely limited to an exchange of personnel, stopping short of measures that would have enhanced professionalization and instituted effective civilian oversight.

The National Dialogue Conference

The NDC, the second major component of the GCC Initiative, kicked off in March 2013 and held its final session in January 2014. While the defection of Ali Mohsin and the JMP to the opposition had provided the 2011 uprising with military and political resources to pressure Saleh and ward off violent repression, many activists felt that the 'revolution' had been hijacked by a faction of the PRE. Indeed, as the grass-roots movements were excluded from the power-sharing agreement, they lost their leverage in politics (Durac,

2012). Nonetheless, the GCC Initiative mandated a conference, which was to include all parts of society and to address the various grievances of the population. Specifically, the conference was to grapple with the major conflicts the country had been struggling with throughout the 2000s: demands for independence in the southern governorates, the Saada conflict and terrorism. In addition, delegates to the NDC had been given a mandate to discuss the future political system and structure of the state (GCC Initiative, 2011: para. 21). The results of the NDC were intended to serve as the basis for a new Yemeni constitution.

The NDC represented a major opportunity to provide the reform agenda with domestic and international legitimacy and was thus treated as particularly important by President Hadi and his supporters. In the weeks prior to the conference, they often referred to it as a historic chance to end the country's crisis and build a new state, raising expectations and effectively staking Hadi's legitimacy as transitional president on a successful conclusion of the dialogue. The institutional structure of the NDC and the choice of delegates from the mobilized publics, in particular the so-called independent youth, both served Hadi and his supporters as resources for steering the conference according to their objectives (Alwazir, 2013; Alwazir, 2016).

The international community funded a large portion of the NDC, provided technical assistance to staff and delegates, convinced various groups, particularly Hirak, to participate,¹⁰ ensured the representation of women and threatened potential spoilers with sanctions. Consequently, all groups were forced to adhere to the rules of the game, largely laid down by Hadi. As president, Hadi not only influenced the institutional set-up, but also selected members for important committees, such as the Consensus Committee and the NDC Presidency. Thus he and his supporters dominated the proceedings of the NDC and its outcomes. Furthermore, despite the highly questionable selection process for the

representatives of the mobilized publics, such as those for youth and women, and informal movements like the southern Hiraq,¹¹ these groups' mere participation created a facade of inclusiveness that lent the conference legitimacy. The NDC was supposedly broadly representative of Yemeni society, and with Ahmed bin Mubarak, a representative of independent youth, as secretary-general of the conference, it could claim to represent those who had fought for the revolution.

At the same time, Saleh, the Ahmar family and Ali Mohsin were mostly excluded from the NDC, turning it into an arena where Hadi presided as the dominant political actor. In December 2012, the GPC announced its list of participants to the NDC, with Saleh as head of the delegation. Because the announcement was met with strong opposition, Saleh was ultimately excluded from the final list of delegates announced in March 2013, after negotiations with GPC doves, who were dominant in the NDC. Many other names on the list, however, were known to be supporters of Saleh and remained. During the conference, the Saleh network, headed by Yahia Duweed, an in-law of the former president, worked to prevent the NDC from producing results counter to its desire to re-access or hold on to certain state positions and economic interests. NDC delegates of the independent youth group within the NDC noted that all GPC decisions had to be run by Duweed before official voting within the working groups took place.¹² According to NDC delegates, the Saleh faction focused especially on working groups relevant to their economic and political interests and staffed them with loyal supporters. These included the transitional justice working group, the economic team within the development working group and the southern issue working group.

Hamid and Sadeq al-Ahmar were originally supposed to participate in the NDC as representatives of Islah, but the former ultimately declined over what he considered the monopolization of the representation of the Saada

governorate by Ansarullah, as well as insufficient representation of other groups, including youth groups (Brandt, 2014a: 4; Yemen Post, 2013). Sadeq attended sessions in the first weeks of the conference, but was apparently unable to handle an environment where women, who were much better at representing their political interests, challenged him.¹³ This left the Ahmar family and Ali Mohsin to be represented by Islah.

During the proceedings, the Saleh faction, led by Duweed, actively attempted to prevent favourable outcomes for Islah and the Ahmars' economic interests. According to an NDC delegate to the economic team, this especially applied to the oil and telecommunications sectors. Conflicts also occurred between Islah and Ansarullah. The sharp ideological opposition of Islah to Ansarullah manifested itself in physical fights in the NDC (Brandt, 2014a: 3), while conservative Islah delegates concerned themselves with preventing any improvement in the legal status of women and enshrining shariah in the constitution. Ultimately, despite professing support for the NDC, neither Saleh nor the other parts of the old elite around the Ahmars and Ali Mohsin had anything to gain from the process. Significant changes in state–society relations could have weakened the tribal influence on which the Ahmars and Ali Mohsin relied just as much as Saleh had during his reign, while increased transparency would have threatened their clientelist networks.

Outside the NDC, political violence was on the rise and increasingly targeted politicians involved in the transitional process, prompting both sides to accuse the others of trying to sabotage it (Brandt, 2014a: 5). The impact of the mobilized publics on the NDC was visible in the conference's outcomes, as it produced a list of progressive recommendations on issues of political reform and civil liberties. Ultimately, however, the NDC was unable to establish a national consensus or resolve the country's internal conflicts (Gaston, 2014). A youth delegate to the conference cynically observed that the

only consensus reached was that all delegates should receive jobs in the government.¹⁴

The southern question in particular proved divisive. In 2007, retired army officers from the formerly independent People's Democratic Republic of Yemen had staged protests demanding their pensions. Gradually, these protests evolved into a popular, if fragmented movement demanding the restoration of southern independence. Unresolved land disputes were also a main driver of discontent, especially concerning land claimed by northern elites after the unification of the two states in 1990 and the civil war of 1994. All three elite factions vying for power in Sanaa held the same attitude toward the south: southern independence was a red line. This was not only because of the PRE being overwhelmingly northern, but also because it had business interests in the southern governorates, and because southern independence would put that region's significant oil reserves beyond Sanaa's reach. This view on the southern issue was also shared by regional actors and the international community. Thus the GCC Initiative stipulated that the southern issue should be resolved within the framework of a united Yemeni state. As in the past, federalism was raised as a solution. According to a southern NDC delegate, the GPC and Islah first objected to a federal solution, as devolution to the local level would be likely to deprive the PRE of vital economic resources. The G10 countries, however, thought federalism would be the best solution and convinced the various sides of this.¹⁵ Then the question of how many federal regions should be created became the biggest bone of contention, as it touched directly on the distribution of power and resources.

The southern delegates pushed for a single southern federal region, preferring a five-region (one southern and four northern) or two-region (one southern and one northern) solution. Meanwhile, the northern elites adamantly opposed any federal solution that would leave the south united, fearing that it might pave the way for

gradual secession. The GPC and Islah therefore insisted on a six-region (four northern and two southern) solution. As the stalemate dragged on, with adjournment of the NDC already three months overdue, violence and protests increased in the south (see e.g. Bafana, 2014), prompting President Hadi in December 2013 to push a document through the NDC with the support of the UN special advisor on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, that effectively empowered him to find a 'just solution for the south'. A committee he then established adopted the controversial six-region solution.¹⁶ Thus, to avoid the appearance of the NDC being a complete failure, one of the most pivotal issues that the conference was supposed to resolve in a consensual fashion was instead imposed from above, based on the preferences of the PRE. Unsurprisingly, mobilized publics, particularly the Hirak movement, rejected the outcome, while Ansarullah likewise expressed opposition and criticized the bypassing of the NDC.

The Hadi group used the conclusion of the NDC as legitimation to press on with the transformation process, although on the basis of non-consensual outcomes, while violently repressing popular protests, particularly in the south. By putting his supporters in important positions within the NDC, the president was to a large degree able to determine the conference results. Because international pressure forced all groups to adhere to the mechanisms of the NDC, the process strengthened Hadi and his supporters. Tactical manoeuvring, however, failed to generate consensus, and violence continued. The outcomes of the NDC, such as the federal structure, have not been applied and will remain difficult to implement because of economic constraints, the weakness of the Yemeni state and the deteriorating security situation. Therefore, the strength Hadi gained in the second phase of the transformation process within and through the NDC was not factored into the balance of power on the ground. Rather, it served to stiffen the resolve of those who had the military

means to challenge his government, especially Ansarullah. Meanwhile, the impact the mobilized publics had on the NDC became irrelevant outside of the conference.

Ansarullah's advance on Sanaa

With the NDC failing to resolve Yemen's internal conflicts, violence at the local level increased throughout the country in the third phase of the transformation. In northern Yemen, the conflict pitting Ansarullah against tribes loyal to the Ahmar family as well as against Salafi militias and factions of the army escalated. Ansarullah had emerged in Saada in the 1990s to defend the traditions of Zaidism, a local variation of Shia Islam, against increasing Wahhabi influence from Saudi Arabia and the promotion of Sunni Islam by the central government and the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islah party.¹⁷ Political and economic marginalization of the region and anger at Saleh's co-operation with the United States' so-called War on Terror fuelled resentment against Sanaa in the early 2000s. Between 2004 and 2010, Ansarullah and the central government fought six rounds of war, displacing hundreds of thousands of people. In the course of the confrontation, tribes were dragged into the battles, including the Ahmars, who began to employ Salafi militias against Ansarullah (Brandt, 2014b: 115; Dorlian, 2011). The Houthi conflict also became a tool in the elite conflict over political succession, as Saleh used it to sap the military potential of his potential rival Ali Mohsin, whose FAD bore the brunt of the fighting (Phillips, 2011: 93–95).

While a ceasefire agreement in 2010 had halted the violence, Ansarullah exploited the security vacuum and the divisions that occurred after 2011 to gradually expand its territorial influence beyond its Saada stronghold. It was also able to increase its popularity beyond its traditional base, in part because the movement was outside the PRE and therefore not perceived as tainted by corruption (International Crisis

Group, 2014: 5–9). The rising strength of Islah within the inner circle of the PRE during the first phase of the transformation further pushed many opponents of that party towards Ansarullah, with the two ideological antagonists becoming direct competitors over power. The expansion of the movement led to frequent clashes with factions of the army and tribes loyal to Islah and the Ahmars in the governorates adjacent to Saada (Soudias & Transfeld, 2014: 29–32).

President Hadi saw his efforts to further pursue implementation of the GCC Initiative increasingly frustrated. With the transitional government failing to make progress in implementing the NDC outcomes, the deteriorating security situation, particularly a new offensive against AQAP, increasingly monopolized his attention. In spring 2014, frequent power cuts and a prolonged fuel crisis contributed to Yemenis' growing exasperation with the transitional government. At the same time, the escalating conflict in the north made it clear that the proclaimed success of the NDC was a chimera.

Except for one instance, Hadi refrained from deploying the army to stem the advance of Ansarullah. According to sources close to the president, he believed a military intervention would not solve the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2014: 18). Indeed, given the divisions in the military and the low levels of support for Hadi within the armed forces, it appears highly unlikely that a new campaign would have succeeded where six previous ones had failed. Instead, with the backing of the international community, the president called for a dialogue and disarmament and dispatched mediation teams to Ansarullah (Brandt, 2014a: 12). Although the group reached agreements with the government, clashes between Ansarullah and fighters loyal to Islah continued. Also, as there were no troops strong enough to confront Ansarullah, none of the truces put an end to the fighting.

On the national level, Hadi was caught between Islah and by extension Ali Mohsin and the Ahmars on one side

and the GPC and Saleh on the other. The former feared the advancement of Ansarullah into their strongholds to the north of Sanaa and pressured Hadi to deploy the army. When the president refused, relations between the former allies became increasingly strained. At the same time, Saleh and his supporters exploited the deteriorating security and supply situations to undermine the president. As protests spread in the capital, Hadi shut down the pro-Saleh television channel *Al-Yemen al-Yawm* (Yemen Today), dispatched presidential guards to occupy the Saleh mosque and removed heavy weaponry from the capital, citing an impending coup by Saleh supporters.

On the regional level, the increasingly hostile attitude of Saudi Arabia towards the Muslim Brotherhood after the overthrow of President Mohammed Mursi in Egypt portended a reconsideration by Riyadh of its long-standing support of the Ahmar family and Islah. In March 2014, the Saudi Ministry of Interior designated both Islah and Ansarullah terrorist organizations. Under pressure to realign his alliances, Hadi visited Saudi Arabia on 8 July 2014 and subsequently attempted to reconcile Saleh and Ali Mohsin to instil stability and form a united front against Ansarullah (Al-Muslimi, 2014). While Hadi and Saleh embraced each other in public after Eid prayers, Saleh refused to reconcile with Ali Mohsin.¹⁸ Meanwhile, pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund forced Sanaa to lift subsidies on fuel, causing a new wave of countrywide protests and strikes on which Ansarullah was able to capitalize. The beleaguered president was increasingly running out of options.

For the group around Saleh, Ansarullah's advances represented a huge opportunity, as they were bound to weaken its main opponents – the Ahmar family, Ali Mohsin and Islah – in addition to undermining Hadi. Military sources accused officers loyal to Saleh of having ordered army units not to fight against Ansarullah. While there is no conclusive evidence for direct co-operation,

the interests of both sides clearly converged. Ansarullah's criticism of Hadi not only echoed that of Saleh and his supporters, but also served the former president's interests as it de-legitimized the transitional government. At the local level, tribal leaders close to Saleh refused to join the battle against Ansarullah and thus facilitated the group's advance towards Sanaa and confrontation with the Ahmars, Ali Mohsin and Islah. Already weakened through the loss of Saudi support, the Ahmars increasingly lost the backing of their traditional base among the Hashid tribes. Some Hashid tribes had already joined Ansarullah over the course of the six conflicts between 2004 and 2010; others preferred to remain neutral, having come to view past involvement in the wars against Ansarullah as a mistake they were loath to repeat. To push back Ansarullah, the Ahmars relied instead on their networks in the military and on Salafi fighters, thus alienating even more of their tribal allies.

On 4 February 2014, Shaykh Jeidlan of Bani Suraym, closely affiliated with Saleh, mediated a ceasefire agreement between Ansarullah and the Hashid tribes that ultimately led to the Ahmar family losing its paramount position in the Hashid federation. Within the military, the alliance could still rely on factions belonging to the FAD, formerly under Ali Mohsin's command. Brigade 310, under the leadership of Commander Hamid al-Qubaishi, a known Islah loyalist, resisted Ansarullah's advancement in Amran.¹⁹ Once Ansarullah militias reached Sanaa in September, the fighting became concentrated in areas dominated by the FAD and a university controlled by Islah conservatives, forcing Ali Mohsin to flee the country. An agreement signed between the government and Ansarullah on 21 September 2014 called for the formation of a new government, the appointment of presidential advisors from Ansarullah and Hirak and implementation of the NDC outcomes.²⁰

A combination of local, regional and international factors created the environment that enabled Ansarullah

to advance to Sanaa and swiftly take control of government institutions, thus gaining influence in the political process at the PRE level – the third phase of the transformation. As a result of the conflict, the alliance formed by the Ahmar family, Ali Mohsin and Islah was dramatically weakened and lost its influence among the northern tribes and the military. While the leadership of Islah continued to be included in the government and remained in the second and third circles of the PRE, the Ahmar family and Ali Mohsin were for all practical purposes evicted from the inner circle. The alliance around the Hadi faction was likewise weakened, as Hadi's most important resources – the political process and the backing of the international community – lost relevance. As internal conflicts heated up, the political process was pushed to the sidelines. While international actors could cajole those taking part in the formal process, they had no influence over those who had been excluded from it and had arms to fight back. Furthermore, the fixation of international agencies on standard recipes (e.g. subsidy removal) as well as the increasingly fragmented security apparatus pushed the president into a corner where he had few options left. The Saleh camp watched comfortably from the sidelines as its main rivals were weakened and ousted, leaving the government with little choice but to make amends. Ansarullah, rewarding Saleh's 'neutrality' (bordering on support), did not target its former enemy or his supporters in its bid for control of the capital. As a result, any new political order would inevitably include the former president and his supporters.

Conclusion: the GCC process and emerging political order

By late 2014, the transformation process in Yemen had resulted in significant changes within the PRE. While the elite professed rhetorical support for the transition process, using the GCC Initiative as their frame of reference, factions among them employed their networks in tribes, political parties, state institutions and the media

to pursue or protect their political and economic interests. During the course of the struggle, elites formed alliances and used the presence of mobilized publics, conflict and institutions as well as regional and international support and pressure as resources to further their own agendas.

In the first phase of the transformation, the Saleh camp was weakened as it lost its influence in the upper echelons of the military. To achieve this end, Hadi and his supporters formed an alliance with the group around the Ahmar family, Ali Mohsin and Islah, while seeking the support of Qatar. The military restructuring did not, however, overcome the fragmentation of the armed forces, negatively affecting the coercive power of the government.

In the second phase of the transformation, the Hadi camp successfully dominated the NDC and strengthened its legitimacy, not least in the eyes of the international community, with its strategy of consolidating power by means of institutional reform. The NDC was not, however, able to resolve the conflicts within the country, and the process revealed the PRE as unwilling to compromise with the mobilized publics, above all Hirak. As a consequence, the GCC-initiated process and the transitional government lost legitimacy.

In the third phase, the persistent conflicts on the local level finally derailed the formal transformation process, with Ansarullah taking control of the capital. This conflict caused the significant changes within the PRE, as it pushed the group around the Ahmar family, Ali Mohsin and Islah from their position within the inner circle. Although Islah remained an active political player, the party lost its tribal and military backing, and hence much of its clout. Hadi was likewise weakened by this development, as the conflict revealed the transitional president's weakness, while the camp around Saleh was strengthened. As a result, Ansarullah was able to move into the inner circle, while many Saleh supporters retained their influence within the PRE.

Although the Yemeni transformation was often referred to as a model for a peaceful transition for the region (Friedman, 2013), the implementation of the GCC Initiative led to neither substantial structural reform nor the creation of a more inclusive system. Rather, the grievances of broader parts of the society, specifically the Hirak movement, were neglected, and mobilized publics were prevented from effective participation. These shortcomings of the process, along with regional factors, facilitated the ascendance of Ansarullah and with it a substantial change in the composition of the PRE through force. The efficient provision of security and services, such as electricity, boosted the popularity of the movement, but after the capture of the capital, Ansarullah continued to use violence to expand its territorial control, provoking intense conflicts in southern Yemen with local tribes, popular committees and AQAP. In some areas, local populations even came to look at Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups as their defenders, giving the conflict an increasingly sectarian dimension. In the meantime, the Hirak movement took advantage of this opportunity to further its bid for independence.

Conflicts on the local level and infighting in the PRE on the national level have continued to prevent a stable political order from emerging in Yemen. After the signing of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement in September 2014, a technocratic government was formed after nearly two months of difficult negotiations among the political parties. The new government included reform-minded representatives of the independent youth and civil society, but the security and economic situation continued to present huge challenges for implementing reforms. Although Ansarullah demanded an inclusive process and the implementation of the NDC outcomes, the group was mainly motivated by its drive to occupy positions within the state. Its takeover of the capital derailed the formal transformation process, portending increased conflict, and the group around Saleh continuing to push for a position of power.

Notes

1. The English translation is the Agreement on the Implementation Mechanism for the Transition Process in Yemen in Accordance with the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council.
2. A pact is defined here as an 'explicit, but not always publicly explicated or justified, agreement among a select set of actors which seeks to define (or better, to redefine) rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the "vital interests" of those entering into it' (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 37).
3. See for instance statements made by US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton regarding Yemen's presidential elections in February 2012 (Clinton, 2012) and to Yemeni Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakkol Karman in October 2011 (Clinton, 2011).
4. Qat is a stimulant consumed by large parts of the population. Qat sessions are social gatherings where issues such as politics are discussed.
5. Saleh supporters, attempting to maintain the appearance of the party as a united front, denied a split within the GPC. The conflict between the two wings, however, was conducted in public, including the debate about the party's leadership (Root, 2013).
6. Interview with the head of the security team at the presidential office, Sanaa, April 2014.
7. The G10 countries are those that sponsored the GCC Initiative – the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the European Union and the member states of the GCC.
8. E-mail communication with a Saleh relative and former high-ranking member of the armed forces, October 2014.
9. For a more detailed description of the military restructuring, see International Crisis Group (2013a: 17–25).
10. The United Nations provided extensive assistance to the independent youth at the NDC. Conversation with a member of the NDC, independent youth group, Berlin, December 2013.
11. Concerning women, see Jamal (2013); concerning Hirak, see International Crisis Group (2013b: 3f); concerning youth, see Alwazir (2013: 4).
12. Three NDC delegates of the independent youth group made similar statements regarding Duweed's role in the NDC. Separate interviews conducted in Sanaa, April 2014.
13. Phone interview with a NDC delegate from southern Yemen, good governance working group, October 2014.
14. Interview, NDC delegate, independent youth, transitional justice working group, Sanaa, April 2014.
15. Phone interview, NDC delegate from southern Yemen, good governance working group, October 2014; Facebook conversation with NDC delegate from Ansarullah, October 2014.
16. The committee was told to decide how the regions should be composed, but was not given the authority to decide how many regions

the country should be divided into. Conversation with a member of the regions committee, Bonn, June 2014.

17. Zaidi Islam is in its practice more closely related to the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam – which is practised by the majority (60 to 70 per cent) of the Yemeni population – than to the Twelver Shia Islam practised in Iran.
18. Local media reported that Saudi Arabia had pressured Hadi into working towards reconciliation of the political parties in Yemen. See for example Al-Shabiri (2014).
19. For the limits of sectarian explanations to the conflict in Yemen, see Yadav (2014).
20. For the English text, see 'Yemen: The Peace and National Partnership Agreement', *Jadaliyya Reports*, 23 September 2014, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/19341/yemen_the-peace-and-national-partnership-agreement (accessed 16 December 2014).

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Yemen's enduring resistance: youth between politics and informal mobilization

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact mobilized publics have had on Yemen's domestic political environment by examining two case studies initiating collective action, with autonomous agency, yet with distinct differences in access to resources. The first case is the Marib Cause, a semi-organized, non-registered community group that protests corruption and demands basic services, employment opportunities and resource redistribution for the benefit of a marginalized region. The second is al-Watan (Homeland), a registered political party established by youth activists who had been involved in the 2011 movement. Both groups emerged as a result of the transformation period, which resulted in an opening up of the political sphere allowing these actors the opportunity to engage in collective action with the goal of impacting policy. The role of these two mobilized publics is analysed by examining their resources and strategies within the political context and tactical interactions between them and the PRE. The two cases represent levels of popular mobilization specific to an exceptional time. Although they were not able to directly influence Yemen's transformation process, their potential impact on the long-term political, social and cultural environment is significant.

After the start of the 2011 uprising, Yemen experienced a period of contestation, bargaining and violence in trying to redefine its social contract. The independent youth movement, often credited with initiating the revolution (Gordon, 2012), was able to galvanize diverse mobilized publics for a national cause. This celebrated and widely publicized role of youth as agents of change produced narratives describing an awakening of Yemeni society sometimes to the point, it seemed, as if previous contestations had never occurred.¹ In sharp contrast, the overriding narrative after 2011 has almost completely neglected the role of Yemen's youth movement, suggesting that youths were insignificant actors in the power dynamics playing out.

Nevertheless, the term *youth* has gained unprecedented significance since the 2011 uprising, used by all segments of Yemeni society, among them local media, researchers and politicians, for those demanding fundamental change. 'Independent youth' was the moniker that students and unemployed graduates, generally under 30 and not affiliated with any formal political or student organization, gave themselves when they began the protests. By using this term, these men and women distanced themselves from all of Yemen's political forces, including the opposition alliance Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), which they perceived as part of a corrupt political system (Nevens, 2011: 26). This dissatisfaction with the traditional modes of political representation was clearly articulated in the popular slogan of 2011: 'No partisan politics, no political parties, our revolution is a youth revolution' (vom Bruck et al., 2013: 12).

Within a couple of weeks, more experienced activists in their thirties and forties joined the independent youth, because they too were non-partisan and shared the progressive objectives of equal citizenship and a civic state (Haddad & Rogers, 2012). Thus, 'youth' in Yemen, as across the Middle East and North Africa, is not necessarily defined by age alone. According to Emma Murphy, the term *Arab youth* goes beyond age associations to include individuals who share collective experiences of frustration, marginalization and alienation irrespective of age (Murphy, 2012: 12). In the case of Yemen, Philbrick Yadav (2011: 558) speaks of a 'metaphorical social youth' defined by an overwhelming urge for social and political change that only partly overlaps with purely demographic categories.

While Yemen's youth movement enjoyed enormous social prestige and street credibility, it was excluded from the negotiations between members of the politically relevant elite (PRE) and external mediators to resolve the country's crises, and their demands for accountability, inclusion and regime change were mostly

ignored.² Thus, for the large majority of activists, the transfer of power ushered in by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative amounted to a hijacking of the revolution.³ It also caused the large and heterogeneous mobilized public that had united around the shared purpose of bringing down the Saleh regime to fracture into smaller collectives with different and competing objectives. Although this led to tremendous disappointment, numerous members of the independent youth movement continued to engage in contentious politics locally and nationally. Taken together, their actions at times put significant pressure on the PRE. Yet research on the post-uprising environment has mostly failed to incorporate the role of these actors in promoting change. Taking independent youth into account is crucial, however, because this group has remained one of the key repositories of legitimacy due to its distance from intra-elite conflicts (Haddad & Rogers, 2012: 19; International Crisis Group, 2012). Youth have the potential to become strong consensus builders between and among various parts of Yemeni society, such as the highlands of the north (characterized by tribalism) and the former socialist south, as divisions run high and the survival of Yemen as a unified state cannot be taken for granted.

This article investigates the impact mobilized publics – defined as ‘any collective of citizens that becomes active and mobilizes others to do so with the explicit objective of exerting immediate influence on the political process’ (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016) – have had on Yemen’s domestic political environment. It begins with the observation that groups from Yemen’s independent youth movement split from one large mobilized public during the uprising, continuing contentious activities in different forms. The practices these activities took, as well as their sustainability and impact, were determined by the availability of political openings and resources, the cohesion of the groups involved and the strategic choices they made. To illustrate this argument, the article

examines two case studies of mobilized publics initiating collective action by citizens acting with autonomous agency yet with distinct differences in access to resources, internal structures and modes of operation. They are described as publics because of their independent agency and their mode of operation, which is 'predominantly geared towards obtaining broad support, and hence leverage, for their claims and agendas through representation in the public sphere' (Asseburg & Wimmen, 2016). The first case study involves the Marib Cause, a semi-organized, non-registered community group protesting at corruption and demanding basic services, employment opportunities and resource redistribution for the benefit of a marginalized region. The second looks at al-Watan (Homeland), a registered political party established by youth activists who had been involved in the 2011 movement. Both groups emerged as a result of the initial transformation that led to an opening up of the political sphere, allowing these actors the opportunity to engage in collective action with the goal of affecting policy.

The role of these two mobilized publics is analysed by examining their resources and strategies within the political context and tactical interactions between them and the PRE. The approach is guided by applying a fivefold typology of moral, cultural, socio-organizational, human and material resources, stemming from resource mobilization theory (Edwards & Kane, 2014). These are discussed in relation to the strategies used by the two mobilized publics in interacting with the PRE. In analysing their impact on the socio-political process, the intentional and active use of public spaces by these mobilized publics is considered by referencing Asef Bayat's (2013: 26) 'art of presence', which he defines as 'the courage and creativity to assert collective will in spite of all odds, to circumvent constraints, utilizing what is available and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized'.

Data were collected through first-person interviews in Yemen with members of the two mobilized publics between February and May 2014, interviews with independent revolutionaries between February and December 2011 and extensive analysis of documents and virtual resources connected to the mobilized publics as well as social media and traditional media coverage. The analysis begins with a summary of the political dynamics governing the different phases of the transformation period, then moves on to look at the mobilized publics in terms of structure, resources, strategies and their interactions with the PRE and concludes with observations on the impact the mobilized publics have had on the broader public.

Political dynamics and mobilized publics

The diverse forms that the mobilized publics assumed and the tactics and strategies they applied can be linked to four distinct phases of the transformation period, marked by the following events: the coming together at Change Square in Sanaa, the signing of the GCC Initiative, the convening of the National Conference (NDC) and the game-changing military advance of Ansarullah (Partisans of God), commonly known as the Houthi movement.⁴ Each phase had its own distinct dynamics.

In mid-January 2011, Yemeni youth took to the streets, first in the city of Taiz (Gordon, 2012) and then in Sanaa. In the capital, they camped out in front of the university, renaming the area Change (Taghyir) Square, which became the centre of the protest movement (Fattah, 2011: 81). Similar protests took place in cities throughout the country. This phase was characterized by a heightened sense of optimism, hope and initiatives by mobilized publics despite being subjected to severe violence, such as occurred on 18 March 2011, when government snipers fired on unarmed protesters in Change Square, prompting national outrage (Human Rights Watch, 2013). While these youths did not have a uniform ideology, they decided to focus on their shared

goals and collective identity, which was built around demands for justice, a civic state and socio-economic rights (Chatham House, 2012). During the ten-month sit-in at Change Square, the activists camped out there debated, learned and transformed the square into 'a lively political festival' (Bonney, 2012: 9). They proved to be quite creative, developing new means of communication, chanting innovative slogans and using art, music, theatre and poetry as a means of mobilization (Bonney, 2012; Alwazir, 2011). This collective experience created strong bonds, and because activists came from different regions, it facilitated the creation of networks of like-minded individuals across the country.

At the start of the revolution, youths gathered in hundreds of small groups that then formed alliances, eventually creating nationwide youth coalitions (Al-Akhali, 2011). By the end of March 2011, they had established the Coordination Council for Yemeni Revolutionary Youth (CCYRC) to bring their various independent groups under one umbrella (Durac, 2012: 165). One affiliated group, the Nation for All (Al-Watan li-l-Jami'), had decided that it was time to unify all the identifiable political visions, so its members began going from tent to tent to discuss a list of collective demands. With the help of the larger CCYRC network, they eventually began conducting daily meetings with all the independent groups in the square, as well as with some affiliated with the JMP, and assembled a list of demands of the majority of independent youth. They agreed on calls for change and visions for Yemen's future, articulating them as 13 concise points, including the immediate dismantling of the regime, arresting those involved in fraud or corruption and drafting a new constitution to transform the political system from a presidential to a parliamentary system (Issmat, 2011).⁵ This plan, issued in March, was an example of an independent youth-led effort to formalize the demands of different voices and create a shared vision for the country's future (Carapico, 2011). It also demonstrated

their capacity to build consensus between groups with different political and ideological orientations (Alwazir, 2013: 2). Soon afterwards, Yemen's formal opposition parties joined the protesters, stirring concerns that traditional political actors intended to hijack the movement (Nevens, 2011: 25). When the opposition JMP and President Ali Abdullah Saleh signed the GCC Initiative on 23 November 2011 (Tayler, 2011) at a ceremony in Saudi Arabia, effectively excluding all other actors from a post-revolutionary political agreement, these fears were confirmed, ushering in a second phase of contentious politics.

This second phase was characterized by diminished optimism and increased repression of mobilized publics. Nevertheless, it also saw a large number of overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations. Many of those who had participated in protests rejected the terms of the GCC-brokered deal as a 'game of musical chairs' played by the old elites (International Crisis Group, 2012: 13; Nevens, 2011). The deal involved the transfer of Saleh's powers to his vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, in return for immunity from prosecution. A national unity government was to be created, evenly divided between the opposition and Saleh's ruling party, the General People's Congress (GPC). Another phase was to begin with the convening of a six-month-long NDC, culminating in the drafting of a new constitution followed by presidential and parliamentary elections. These concerns deepened when former president Saleh returned to the country in February 2012 (Durac, 2012: 167). Protests, strikes and sit-ins continued well into 2012, targeting symbols of the old regime – in particular the amnesty granted to Saleh and those who served under him (Manea, 2014), which was perceived as a 'smack in the face for justice' (Murray, 2013) – and on-going corruption, which was believed to permeate the entire system (Al Jazeera, 2012).

After the signing of the GCC Initiative, differences arose within the youth movement on how to proceed

during the third phase, the convening of the NDC. While some advocated a strategy of gradual reform, others argued for a continuation of the revolutionary path; still others became apathetic and apolitical. The group backing a reformist path emerged during the NDC. Inaugurated on 18 March 2013, this second part of the road map laid out by the GCC Initiative was supposed to resolve Yemen's various conflicts, including the southern issue and the conflict with Ansarullah in a consensual and broadly inclusive fashion. The NDC gathered representatives from the main political parties, Ansarullah, the Southern Movement (Al-Hirak al-Janubi), civil society, women and youth. Forty representatives of the independent youth were appointed by the NDC technical committee and the UN envoy to Yemen to join the deliberations.⁶ This phase was characterized by alliance building, co-operation, co-optation and media debates between the PRE and mobilized publics over acceptable forms of dissent. For the first time, youth became a political category and directly engaged with the PRE (Alwazir, 2013).

The participation of some youths in a process that others considered flawed or illegitimate, because it was based on the GCC Initiative, caused further fragmentation (Salem, 2012). Those who argued for a revolutionary approach protested outside the site of the NDC. The types and frequency of contentious action increased the longer the conference dragged on, as socio-economic issues continued to be ignored and basic services, security and the rule of law deteriorated (Van Veen, 2014: 35).⁷ With time, both currents in the youth movement began to use similar tactics, as those engaging directly with the PRE at times used more disruptive forms of contentious action, such as conducting protests inside the NDC halls, while those operating outside the NDC framework resorted to lobbying NDC members.

Although marked by a lack of governance, this period also brought a limited political opening in the form of a

general tolerance of protests and sit-ins (combined with ongoing mistrust of traditional political parties, which helped youth movements recruit and operate). The NDC, in turn, enabled youths to promote their own agendas, and by doing so triggered changes in political culture in part due to their sheer presence, but also because of their aggressive push for reforms (Alwazir, 2013: 6). Yet, in the grand scheme of things, although the conclusion of the NDC in January 2014 was hailed as a major success by its international sponsors and the Yemeni government, it yielded no tangible results outside the conference halls, as none of the 's recommendations were implemented.

The rapid military advance of Ansarullah, marking the fourth phase, was fuelled by resentment against the persistence of old power structures, the exclusive character of the transitional government (comprised as it was of many members of the former regime) and the continued socio-economic marginalization of rural and peripheral communities (Amiri, 2010). Ansarullah had begun in the early 1990s, in the northern region of Saada, as a Zaidi revivalist movement in response to the growth of Salafism. Galvanized by the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, it shifted to political activism, issuing public statements against the Yemeni central government, eventually leading to six rounds of war between 2004 and 2010. At that time, the media began referring to its members as Houthis, so-called after their first leader, Hussein al-Houthi, who was killed in 2004. Hussein's brother, Abdulmalik al-Houthi, succeeded him as leader of the group. In 2011, Ansarullah members joined the revolution and set up tents in Change Square. During this time, they also took over Saada governorate. After that, periodic clashes occurred between them and militia linked to the Islah party, even while they both participated in the NDC. With time, Ansarullah militarily extended its territorial control to neighbouring governorates, and in September 2014 consolidated control in Sanaa after days of clashes. On 21 September 2014, Ansarullah signed the Peace and National

Partnership Agreement with the JMP, GPC and President Hadi.

This phase was characterized by a wildfire of social protest against a government that had extended its own tenure, as well as the president's, without an election and even more so against the patent neglect by the government of local communities. On 29 July 2014, the government complied with the demands of the International Monetary Fund and lifted all fuel subsidies, increasing prices by 60 to 90 per cent overnight, without prior notice or measures to absorb the shock (Hagagy, 2013).⁸ Spontaneous protests immediately erupted, and the rhetoric of Ansarullah, with its emphasis on social justice and national sovereignty, resonated strongly with a populace exasperated by a government that appeared to be more concerned with winning the favour of international actors than serving its own citizens. Just as in 2011, economic concerns and action against corruption were at the heart of calls for change.⁹ When Ansarullah's forces captured Sanaa in mid-September, they already had the support of large parts of the disenfranchised population.¹⁰

The marib cause demands for resource redistribution

The Marib Cause (Al-Qadiyya al-Ma'ribiyya) was established as a semi-structured volunteer group in January 2012 with some 400 members from Marib governorate, 172 kilometres to the east of the capital.¹¹ Its founders included well-known activists from the 2011 independent youth movement. The credibility they had attained helped them to recruit members of rival political parties for the overall good of Marib. It attracted participants of diverse ages and political affiliations, including members of the GPC, Islah and independents alike. Hence the group was conceived as action oriented, rather than ideologically driven, and often organized around kinship, tribal identities and

revolutionary ties depending on the specific goals of individual activities.

Contrary to the global trend, Yemen has remained a largely rural society, with an estimated two-thirds of its population of 25 million living in rural, and often peripheral, areas (UN Data, 2014). Hence, life in much of Yemen has continued to unfold in rural communities, which in the north are predominantly structured around tribal affiliation (Dresch, 1993; Weir, 2007). Major discoveries of oil were made in Marib in 1984, but the resulting revenue was appropriated by the state, and played a large role in undergirding President Saleh, without tangible benefit to the local community. While export earnings from the oil and gas extracted in Marib have contributed significantly to the state budget (Salisbury, 2014),¹² the area has lacked basic services, such as electricity, proper schools, hospitals and roads. As in many other regions, instead of serving the population, the Saleh regime cultivated and co-opted tribal shaykhs through material rewards, high-level positions (in parliament, the civil service and the military–security apparatus) and business advantages (Van Veen, 2014: 7). This practice continued after Saleh's ousting through the annual state budget for the Ministry of the Interior's Department for Tribal Affairs (Al-Zwaini, 2012). The co-optation strategies, part of a larger approach of divide-and-rule devised to prevent mobilization against the regime (Wedeen, 2008), increased the dependency of the shaykhs on the government and undermined relations between tribal leaders and their constituents. It was in this context that the Marib Cause was founded.

During the 2011 protests, youths from Marib had joined the sit-in on Change Square in Sanaa, the largest protest camp in the country. They raised tents for 'The Sons of Marib', which housed young protesters from various tribes, some of which were involved in unresolved conflicts (BBC, 2011). Nevertheless, these youths united to demand the end of the regime, equal

citizenship and basic rights. 'We want a state that will protect us. We want a nation that values us as citizens', said young shaykh Ahmed al-Zaydi, a member of the CCYRC who later became the leader of the Marib Cause.¹³ He added, 'How can we be such a rich region, [but] with no basic infrastructure, no schools, no hospitals?' Significantly, their demands for basic services predated the 2011 events, but had remained confined to a localized context and advanced only by local communities to the regime through local shaykhs, who acted as intermediaries. The shaykhs, however, would appropriate much of whatever was eventually granted. Post-2011, these demands were reformulated as rights that citizens claimed from the state without mediation and with cross-tribal and cross-regional support.

The disagreements among youth over the future course of action after the signing of the GCC agreement convinced many members of the Marib Cause to focus on the priorities of their local community. Yet they still framed their demands as part of a larger national struggle for social and economic reforms, the fight against corruption and as part of a narrative of national and civil rights. From their perspective, since the GCC Initiative had preserved the old elite structure, corruption was bound to persist, and so would its impact on their communities. Hence, alongside demanding a share in oil revenues, they also protested against the amnesty law, the GCC Initiative as well as corruption and asked for the expulsion of old regime cronies from the government and a comprehensive approach to resource redistribution on a national scale.

Members of the Marib Cause drew upon the techniques and modes of action that they had acquired in Change Square and applied them at home. They conducted peaceful protests in front of oil companies, held peaceful rallies at the local municipality and discussed and agreed on an advocacy plan. They relied more on their members than on tribal affiliations, marking a significant shift away from the way people in the region

typically formulated demands, through the mediation of tribal leaders submitting their demands to the centre. Adapting the way independent youth had unified the demands of revolutionaries in Change Square, although in a much more constrained time frame, they drafted a ten-page vision document, laying out consensual positions and building cross-tribal alliances. The demands included calls for basic services, such as electricity and educational opportunities for the people of the region, a share of oil revenues, fair political representation and environmental protection from oil companies.¹⁴ They held tribal gatherings, rallies, sit-ins and protests and lobbied government officials to make their demands known. They also blocked oil trucks to raise awareness. Protests were held in al-Sahil, 'a commonly recognized tribal sanctuary and conflict-free zone' (Al-Dawsari, 2014), and at government offices in the capital. Marib Cause's actions were driven by the belief that groups should organize to consolidate control over power and resources with the aim of a redistribution of social goods and opportunities in the form of land, water, education, electricity, roads and so on.

Many of the group's protests were not met with the type of repression seen in 2011 or prior to that, most likely because the PRE wanted to display its newly acquired democratic image, but also because intra-elite fighting absorbed most of its energy (see Transfeld, 2016). Nevertheless, when Marib Cause protests became too controversial, such as when the group touched on the sensitive topic of who in the PRE held shares in the oil companies, violence and repression followed. One of the movement's leaders, Mahdi Buhaibah, was briefly kidnapped and beaten by unknown men. The protests also contributed to growing detachment between some shaykhs and their constituents in the governorate. The younger generation began challenging corrupt shaykhs. Tribal leaders were being held accountable for the region's lack of

development, the grand homes they owned in the capital and the lack of transparency inherent in their dealings.

While the Marib Cause largely worked outside the boundaries of the central state and its bureaucratic institutions, its strategy focused on engaging directly with state institutions in the capital and with members of the NDC. Some Marib activists were also members of the NDC and, to push for their demands, they sometimes set up meetings with groups of NDC members at the hotel where the conference was being held. They also met with parliamentarians and political party members separately in qat sessions and at formal meetings at party headquarters.¹⁵ At every meeting, Marib activists handed the members of the PRE their vision document. Some JMP and GPC members from Marib actually joined the group. At the same time, as more party members joined the movement, independent youth began to fear losing their grip on the group's decision making.

After two years of constant organizing, lobbying and mobilizing – with the PRE continuing to ignore them or lacking the capacity to address their demands – members of the Marib Cause began to feel disillusioned (Murray, 2013). ‘The National Conference failed to incorporate our vision and demands. Despite our effort to reach out to them, they chose to ignore us’, said Hassan al-Zaydi, Marib Cause spokesperson. The perceived failure of the NDC, which had been supported by \$40m (Thiel, 2014) from the international community, in a country with poverty on the rise, stirred anger and furthered distrust in the transitional government. According to Thiel (2014), the conference remained as remote to the Yemeni people as its venue, the Mövenpick Hotel, where daily room rates exceeded the monthly salary of mid-level ministerial employees.

As a result, it became increasingly clear to the Marib Cause that civic and peaceful forms of accessing and influencing decision makers would not yield results. Hence, to force the PRE to take notice, its members

returned to more traditional, disruptive forms of leverage, such as blocking roads and preventing oil tankers from leaving the region. They reached out to the Shiba Movement (Hirak al-Saba'i),¹⁶ and on 25 January 2014 announced a joint escalation plan calling for *al-faz'a al-sha'biyya* (popular uprising) should their demands not be met (Al-Oula, 2014).¹⁷ When the only response from the PRE was a noncommittal presidential statement, they took up arms and closed all roads between Marib and Sanaa, preventing oil tankers from entering or leaving the sites (Al-Oula, 2014). There was disagreement among the group about carrying arms, but they eventually decided that it was the only way to seal off the roads.

Only when the PRE felt that their economic interests were at stake did President Hadi meet with Marib Cause and Shiba Movement representatives, on 21 January 2014 (Saba News, 2014). Shortly afterwards, Hadi announced the formation of a 16-member committee composed of representatives of the GPC, JMP, the Marib Cause and Shiba Movement to address the concerns of the group. At the meeting with Hadi, some of the independent youth members of the Marib Cause felt sidelined by JMP representatives. As of August 2014, the committee had not reached agreement on anything. The PRE was instead focused on clashes between Ansarullah and Islah that had escalated and expanded to reach the Marib and al-Jawf provinces. Yemen's political institutions were then reconfigured after Ansarullah seized Sanaa and on 21 September 2014 signed the Peace and National Partnership Agreement along with the leaderships of the JMP, the GPC and the transitional government.¹⁸ Most of the committees that had been set up by Hadi ceased functioning, including the one concerned with Marib.

The success of Ansarullah's armed takeover of the capital refocused attention on the question of the legitimate use of violence. Ansarullah had been able to expand its territorial control and successfully recruit new

members due to the government's perceived failure to deliver security and basic services. Hence, pressure to join one side or the other of the conflict increased throughout the country, including in Marib. When the Yemeni government announced it would lift fuel subsidies, the Marib Cause threatened another escalation unless subsidies were reinstated. Ansarullah made a similar announcement, creating a common cause for the two groups. Hence some members of the Marib Cause joined Ansarullah simply because of their collective experience of frustration, marginalization and alienation.

Marib Cause members began eventually to split into those taking up arms, those remaining neutral and those attempting to mediate. Those who joined Ansarullah did so because they prioritized socio-economic issues that no other group seemed to be addressing. Those who joined the Islah militias had either already been part of the Islah party or feared Ansarullah's expansion due to the latter's assumed ideological desire to ultimately restore the theocratic system under which Yemen had been governed until the 1962 revolution.

Marib cause resources

The Marib Cause was rich in moral resources, including 'legitimacy, authenticity, solidary support, sympathetic support and celebrity' (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 18). First and foremost, it had earned revolutionary legitimacy for the important role it played in unarmed resistance, despite its access to a significant number of weapons. It consequently received support from a large network of revolutionary comrades. Members of the Marib Cause also had access to cultural resources, including artefacts, specialized knowledge, such as tribal mediation skills, and inspirational poetry. For example, the traditional *zamil*, improvised poetry defined as a personal response to a situation or an issue, worked as an effective recruiting strategy, offering up catchy rhymes that people could sing along to. These poems were also published in national newspapers. Such cultural

resources 'facilitated the recruitment and socialization of new adherents, and helped movements maintain their capacity for collective action' (Edwards & Kane, 2014: 17).

In terms of human resources, the Marib Cause benefited from strong leadership, but lacked manpower, experience, skills and expertise. Its unelected and unofficial leadership has tended to be charismatic, educated and socially engaged. For example, two of the co-founders, Ahmed al-Zaydi and Intisar al-Qadhi, were well known and respected. Zaydi is a poet and general-secretary of the Arab Youth Forum, a regional network of Arab writers and poets. Qadhi, a prominent activist, had been a member of the NDC. In addition, both of them hail from privileged, affluent backgrounds and therefore have had access to large networks of influential contacts. Being the offspring of well-known tribal shaykhs has offered them physical protection.

A lack of socio-organizational resources has been a great disadvantage for the Marib Cause, stemming from its being based in a rural area with few basic services and without access to electricity except from generators. The Marib Cause has, however, had access to a large informal network of independent youths across the country. This provided it with solidarity and technical support beyond the region. In addition, some of its members or supporters have held notable positions in government, such as Hassan Dakhnan, former advisor to the Ministry of Information, which helped facilitate its ability to connect to the PRE. The movement has never had a financial plan or collected membership dues, instead relying heavily on donations by wealthy members, a situation likely to prove problematic with regard to internal democratic procedures. While having managed to sustain momentum in the short run, it is unclear how long the group can last without a stable financial plan.

The Marib region has had at least two online newspapers, but they were linked to political parties and

reflected party politics rather than a community perspective. The Marib Cause has had no media outlet and has lacked an advocacy or media strategy. It has used social media, but failed to strategically take advantage of the platform. For example, there have been five different Facebook groups under the name Marib Cause, and the group's logo has changed several times. In addition, differentiation between the Shiba Movement and the Marib Cause, while mainly a matter of local versus regional focus, has been difficult, as many members have engaged in both groups. Still, the availability of electronic media helped the activists spread their messages nationally and garner support from individuals who normally would not have had much interest in their issues.

It appears, then, that while the Marib Cause has had material resources problems, it has been able to compensate for these through alternative assets, such as pre-existing networks and family and tribal links. These, as well as advocacy and organizational skills learned in Change Square, influenced its strategy of preferring advocacy and diplomacy at the outset of its mobilization. In addition, the Marib Cause compensated for the disadvantages of being far from the urban centre by relying on its networks when it sought to conduct activities in Sanaa. This is why it was possible for many of the sit-ins and protests it called to be held in the capital. During these street actions, protesters connected through weekly gatherings and shared slogans that became part of their identity and by so doing 'inscribe[d] their active presence in the configuration and governance of urban life, asserting their "right to city"' (Bayat, 2013: 15).

The courage it takes to act collectively in spite of possible crackdowns and to continue taking ownership of new spaces (such as holding protests in front of oil companies' production sites) to 'make oneself heard, seen, felt and realized' is part of Bayat's (2013: 40) concept of the art of presence. These spaces have

continued to serve as the key theatres of contention. The mere presence of Marib Cause protesters in these spaces, without authorization, re-appropriated public spaces and has in the process ultimately questioned who holds power over these locations. When these actions proved unfruitful in getting the attention of the PRE, however, Marib Cause protesters resorted to more traditional modes of operation, relying on such resources as arms as well as alliances.

These adaptations in strategies and modes of action enabled the Marib Cause and the Shiba Movement to sustain contentious activities continuously, beginning in 2011. The diversity of action may also have helped them avoid protest fatigue. As Tripp (2013: 17) points out, 'repetition can make an action recognizable, but it can also engender boredom'. Yet the lack of a uniform ideology and disagreements over the use of violence have divided the groups, calling their sustainability into question. It is unlikely that the Marib Cause will continue operating as a collective, but many of its activists as individuals will probably remain politically involved and possibly found new groups. In any case, the impact these activists have had at the local level in terms of relations between tribes and shaykhs and normalization of contestation will surely influence the socio-political environment for years to come.

Al-watan reviving hope in political parties?

Al-Watan officially registered as a political party in January 2014 and has described itself as a 'civil (in the sense of rejecting influence of military and organized religion in politics and advocating equal citizenship) and centrist party built on civic activism and social responsibility that believes in limited state intervention in economy and society'.¹⁹ It has an open membership policy and a straightforward procedure for affiliation through a simple, one-page application form. In autumn 2014, membership stood at 4,500 nationwide,²⁰ with 95 per cent of members under 40 years of age and 30 per

cent of them women. The party's primary objective has been to promote active political participation and transform the public's negative perception of political parties. It has aspired to become a model for how political parties should operate – by being inclusive, transparent and internally democratic. In the long run, al-Watan aims at directly engaging in politics. To date, the party's focus has been on building its internal structures and the skills of its members before attempting to field candidates for elections.

Al-Watan's origins date back to Change Square in 2011. Many of the independent youth activists and leaders were involved in day-to-day awareness-raising in the square by way of organizing lectures and seminars, in addition to mobilizing and lobbying decision makers locally and internationally against the Saleh regime. Towards the end of April 2011, many of these activists began discussing next steps, including their roles in post-revolutionary Yemen (Al-Akhali, 2012: 1). Some felt that to retain influence, youths needed to be more formally organized, either as a political party or in watchdog or advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The signing of the GCC Initiative pushed some towards the creation of a new political party. Whereas the political sphere had typically been dominated by traditional parties, whose leadership consisted primarily of older men, the openings that occurred after 2011 enabled younger men and women with autonomous agency to enter the political arena.

Al-Watan co-founder Husam al-Sharjabi had at the time headed an independent youth group. He attributed the exclusion of independent youth from the GCC-mediated transfer of power to their not being organized as a political party, as only political parties got a share in the deal. He concluded that the next step for the revolutionaries should be to directly engage in politics: 'Protests and civil disobedience could end a regime but cannot build a nation. Building a nation requires mobilization, a political platform and discipline, and this

is difficult to do if there is no organization'.²¹ Consequently, Sharjabi and other co-founders researched online, consulting lectures and seminars on forming a party, studied relevant literature, familiarized themselves with the process of party registration and attended workshops and training sessions on creating party structures and platforms offered by international organizations, such as the National Democratic Institute, which helped them to draft a preliminary vision for the party. Based on this document, they recruited more co-founders, most of whom had been nominated by members due to their technical skills, educational background or record of political activism. A university degree and a reputation untarnished by violence or corruption were further criteria. The 130 founders varied in background, but many were representatives of civil society and technocrats, including scientists, engineers, lawyers and technical professionals in addition to former leading members of other political parties. The project of creating a new political party was initially rejected by some parts of the PRE. For months, the process of registration was marred by delays, and the party founders faced threats and intimidation. Sharjabi's two children were kidnapped (and later released), and al-Watan's headquarters became the target of a bombing, though fortunately the device did not explode.²²

Undeterred, the founders of al-Watan made significant strides towards organizing the party. At the same time, its members engaged in politics through the NDC. In mid-2012, Sharjabi was appointed, along with two other independent youth members, to the NDC technical committee, the body tasked with defining the scope of the, internal rules of deliberation, time frames and, most crucially, the number of representatives of the social groups to be involved and the mechanism for selecting delegates. After numerous disagreements among committee members over the allocation of seats, in November 2012 JMP and GPC representatives agreed to make Jamal Benomar, special advisor to the UN

secretary-general on Yemen, responsible for selecting independent representatives (Alwazir, 2013: 3). This created the first row between independent youth and other representatives, as two of the independent youth members resigned in protest at Benomar being put in charge (Al-Samei, 2013). While Sharjabi shared their misgivings, he did not follow their lead, reasoning that it was a time to be pragmatic, thus reflecting the youth movement's division into revolutionary and reformist streams.

Eight people associated with al-Watan were among the 40 youth representatives appointed to the NDC, which had 565 participants in total.²³ Not all the youth representatives were formally independent, and some, while not party members, were committed to certain party lines. The al-Watan delegates co-operated closely with the other 32 youth representatives. They had a visible presence at the conference and managed to push for many of the recommendations due to their professionalism and meticulous preparation. Prior to crucial votes in the working groups, al-Watan and other youth actors prepared joint position papers and draft resolutions. They were often the only ones to do so and thus steered the discussion and injected their ideas into the NDC recommendations.

This direct involvement in politics, however, made al-Watan members targets for co-optation. Traditional political parties took note of their performance in the NDC and attempted to recruit them to support their side. Hence, they were invited to attend qat sessions with top government officials and former opposition figures, giving them access to new avenues for lobbying. While eluding formal recruitment by other parties, the al-Watan activists nevertheless decided to form alliances to promote the reforms they wanted. They allied with different groups depending on the topic, most notably with President Hadi's circle, and this relationship with Hadi compromised their image as non-partisan mediators. Some accused them of having succumbed to

co-optation and refraining from criticizing the president for violations of the transformation process. They also remained largely silent when activists were targeted, foreign journalists deported and local journalists detained. There thus emerged a sense among the public that al-Watan's leadership had become disconnected from the streets – in fact, disconnected from the reality of activists, who faced coercion, threats and prosecution. Still, Sharjabi was the only one of 565 NDC members to decline the daily allowance, an important gesture to emphasize that he considered his participation a civic duty rather than a paid job. Some members of al-Watan, such as Mubarak al-Bahhar, continued to engage in street protests even while serving as NDC delegates, demanding transitional justice and the scrapping of immunity for past crimes, which the PRE had obtained for itself through the GCC Initiative's immunity clause.

The assumption among many of the youths outside the was that NDC members were simply waiting to be given important jobs.²⁴ This perception was heightened when some former NDC youth representatives actually were given positions on committees affiliated with the NDC, such as the NDC media and outreach committee and Benomar's UN team. The secretary-general of the NDC, an independent youth member known to be close to al-Watan, later became secretary of the president's office. In addition, Hadi appointed Sharjabi as deputy finance minister in a June 2014 cabinet reshuffle. While affording Hadi revolutionary legitimacy, this move weakened al-Watan's legitimacy, as the public associated it with a government seen as weak and unable to deliver basic services. Members of al-Watan dismissed the notion of co-optation, reasoning that sometimes reform from the inside is the only way to move forward. They realized that their class background made them susceptible to charges of elitism, but, as one member explained, 'Being a group of elites is not a problem. What would be a problem is if we only promote the interests of the elite rather than the needs of the

people'. On the other hand, al-Watan members have had the advantage of direct engagement with members of the PRE and managed to directly negotiate with the elite and thus gain negotiation skills and experience.

Al-Watan resources

Al-Watan gained legitimacy in the eyes of the international community because it followed mainstream expectations of the need for institutionalization. On numerous occasions, international NGOs, donors and members of the so-called G10 – the diplomatic group sponsoring the GCC Initiative consisting of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, GCC states and the European Union – urged youth parties to register and become part of the official political process. The participation of al-Watan founders in the 2011 protests initially propelled the party and provided it with the revolutionary legitimacy of a new force challenging traditional political actors. Yet co-operation with the transitional government gradually eroded this resource. Unlike the Marib Cause, al-Watan was not able to rely on pre-existing networks of local, tribal and family relations and instead invested a good deal of effort into attracting members who would provide them with a rich pool of human resources in terms of education and professional experience. Thus, the founders intentionally sought access to lawyers, dynamic speakers, web designers, organizers and businessmen. That al-Watan publicly listed its founders was not only a move towards transparency, but also a marketing tool to highlight the long list of respected individuals who endorsed the group or had become part of it.

The party also built a robust organizational structure. It created eight departments, each with specialized roles and responsibilities. So far, decisions have been taken democratically. Al-Watan also has had good access to social networks, especially to local and international civil society organizations, businessmen, local regional leaders and diplomats. There is no doubt that al-Watan's solid and meticulous organization has made it unique

and rendered it the only successful new political party. Its focus on building its capacity and long-term vision have been matchless and might help sustain the organization in the long run, if the temptation of co-optation can be overcome. Collection of a membership fee, \$28 annually, with reduced rates on a needs basis, has provided al-Watan with a sustained source of income. Although significantly less than the revenues of other parties, which often receive support from abroad, this income allowed the party to rent a large office in a central location in the capital and employ a full-time staff member. Al-Watan became the only party in Yemen with bylaws prohibiting foreign funding; government-allocated party financing would be acceptable, however, if ever implemented. Private donations from wealthy individuals were made subject to extensive rules and must come without political conditions. The party has also offered its members basic training in such things as time management and public speaking. Al-Watan's consistent bylaws and well-grounded positions and policies on various topics have helped the party maintain its unity even during political upheavals.

It is unclear where the party will head given Ansarullah's rise to power and the overhaul of the transitional government through the signing of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement. Its perceived affiliation with Hadi may prove problematic, but its reputation for moderation and technocratic competence and equidistance to Islah and Ansarullah might permit it room to operate as a centrist, compromise-oriented force between two hostile blocs. One al-Watan member, Gabool al-Mutawakkel, was nominated by President Hadi in the November 2014 government reshuffle for the position of minister of social affairs. Although Ansarullah had reservations about the new government, it did not reject Mutawakkel's nomination. She, however, declined the position.

Key conclusions

Although the Marib Cause and al-Watan were not able to directly influence Yemen's transformation process, their potential impact on the long-term political, social and cultural environment is significant. Through their sustained alteration between disruptive and peaceful actions, these mobilized publics pushed for concrete demands, pointed to neglected policy areas and initiated socio-cultural changes, such as in power relations between tribal leaders and their constituencies, and advanced the introduction of youth as new political actors. They also insisted on the need to focus on socio-economic priorities. These mobilizations occurred in an environment where direct intervention by the GCC, notably Saudi Arabia, and the United States had been prevalent (Durac, 2012: 168) and by so doing, they challenged the political processes and institutions perceived to have been imposed rather than home-grown and called into question attempts to control and channel bottom-up pressure for change.

The two cases represent levels of popular mobilization specific to an exceptional time. The Marib Cause may not be sustainable over the long term and will remain subject to elite dynamics. Still, the urge for self-realization and the vision of a just social order that defined the spirit of the 2011 and the original Marib Cause protests have been preserved through contentious action that sustained a collective identity by shaping a new political environment in which contention was normalized, engraved in the culture and communicated socially. As this collective experience pushes on, and as the model of a new kind of political party develops, epitomized by al-Watan, ideals of transparency, inclusion and justice will be shared and further spread and hence embedded in the memories of those calling for change. This will create a permanent repository of resistance and repertoires of contention with which political elites will have to reckon.

The rise of Ansarullah through armed struggle has led to questioning of the effectiveness of peaceful resistance

and a larger debate on the legitimate use of violence, but the toll of the armed conflict on individual citizens, families and their livelihoods will lead many to hold on to peaceful struggle as the only means of long-term sustainable transformation. In the end, the possibility of genuine transformation through structural reform and social pacts will depend on sustained pressure by mobilized publics on political elites.

Notes

1. Contentious activities did not start with the uprising of 2011, but many years before. See for example Yadav (2011).
2. For the concept of the PRE, see Asseburg and Wimmen (2016).
3. For the GCC Initiative, see Transfeld (this volume).
4. On the advance of Ansarullah, see vom Bruck (2014).
5. The text is available on the CCYRC's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/CCYRC/posts/249658758426589> (accessed 27 October 2014).
6. See below for details of the contentious process of appointing independent youth representatives.
7. In a particularly notorious example of the state of law and order, on 15 May 2013 a tribal leader linked to Islah, one of the former opposition parties but at the time included in the government, shot and killed two teenagers but was never arrested.
8. The price of gasoline rose from YR 125 (\$0.58) to YR 200 (\$0.93), while diesel increased from YR 100 (\$0.47) to YR 190 (\$0.88) (Al Jazeera, 2014).
9. This is similar to other countries that experienced uprisings. See Pace and Cavatorta (2012). For Tunisia, see Antonakis-Nashif (this volume).
10. For more information on elite dynamics and the rise of Ansarullah, see Transfeld (this volume).
11. Interview with Sheikh Ahmed al-Zaydi, co-founder of Marib Cause, Sanaa, 6 May 2014.
12. While exact figures are not available, estimates from industry experts put the share of Marib between half and two-thirds of overall oil and gas revenues.
13. Interview with Shaykh Ahmed al-Zaydi, member of the CCYRC, Sanaa, 6 May 2011.
14. The list of demands can be found on the blog *Notes by Noon*, 2 September 2011, <http://notesbynoon.blogspot.com/2011/09/demands-of-yemens-peaceful-youth.html> (accessed 21 July 2015).
15. As Wedeen (2007: 60) has argued, qat (popular plant chewed in Yemen, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda. In other countries, it is illegal and considered as a mild narcotic) sessions can be considered

analogous to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European salons and coffee houses, described by Habermas (1997) as the initial manifestations of the public sphere, in that they provide platforms for critical debate and involvement in public affairs. Qat sessions are also where the favours of the powerful are sought and dispensed, and networks of clientelism and uneven exchange are formed and maintained.

16. The Shiba Movement demands social and economic rights for the people of three regions in the area: al-Jawf, al-Baydha and Marib. Many of its leading members are affiliated with Islah.
17. Al-faz'a al-sha'biyya is a traditional, tribal concept of armed community solidarity in resistance.
18. For the English text, see 'Yemen: The Peace and National Partnership Agreement', *Jadaliyya Reports*, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/19341/yemen_the-peace-and-national-partnership-agreement (accessed 27 December 2014).
19. See al-Watan's Facebook page, <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/watanparty.org> (accessed 21 July 2015).
20. There is no data on the number of members per governorate or city.
21. Interview with Husam al-Sharjabi, president of al-Watan, Sanaa, 17 May 2014.
22. Ibid.
23. Due to bureaucratic delays, by that time the party had still not completed its official registration.
24. Interview with Ammar Ahmed, activist and former member of the CCYRC, Sanaa, 15 May 2014.

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Explaining the Arab Uprisings: transformations in Comparative Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the research presented by contributors to this special issue, this article assesses the analytic opportunities that emerge when the Arab uprisings are conceptualized as moments of transformation rather than as incipient, flawed or failed transitions to democracy. Highlighting critical issues that cut across and link the experiences of political relevant elites (PREs) and mobilized publics in the cases of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, it identifies three sets of issues that warrant further comparative research: the effects of stateness and patterns of state-society relations on the trajectory of Arab uprisings; the role of identity politics and non-state forms of solidarity as drivers of political mobilization and collective action, and the impact of these forms of collective action on possibilities for establishing stable, legitimate forms of governance; and the limits of civil societies and civic sectors in influencing transformational processes.

From transitions to transformations

For a brief moment in early 2011, the Middle East seemed poised to slip free of its authoritarian moorings. The mass uprisings that swept across the region in late 2010 and early 2011 created unprecedented possibilities for political openings of a kind the Middle East had never previously experienced. Less than a year before the uprisings began, Larry Diamond, a prominent scholar of democratic transitions, characterized the Middle East as 'a striking anomaly – the principal exception to the globalization of democracy' (Diamond, 2010: 93). By early 2011, as protests gathered momentum, and demands for voice, dignity and justice spread from Tunisia to Egypt and onwards across Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria, an end to the Arab world's exceptionalism appeared to be at hand. Within a matter of weeks, presidents-for-life Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of

Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt had been forced from office. By year's end, they would be joined by Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen and Muammar Qadhafi of Libya.

In all four countries, the removal of entrenched incumbents initiated transitions similar to those that occurred in other cases of authoritarian breakdown and democratization. Political parties that had previously been repressed, Islamist parties in particular, now entered the political arena, joined by dozens of other newly formed political groupings. Civil society organizations proliferated. Interim authorities organized competitive multi-party elections, oversaw processes of constitutional reform and, in Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, implemented or prepared for national dialogues to underscore the commitment of new post-authoritarian regimes to inclusion and participation as they redefined the political 'rules of the game'. Even as the scope for political participation expanded, regime elites and their opposition counterparts in all four cases engaged in backroom negotiations to define the terms of transitional pacts, informal manoeuvring that would prove more consequential than developments in the electoral arena in determining the trajectory of Arab uprisings.

Yet very early on it was apparent that events unfolding in the Middle East differed from earlier experiences of democratization (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986), perhaps best exemplified by the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As Lucan Way argued in October 2011, 'The similarities and differences with 1989 suggest that more autocrats [in the Middle East] will hang on in 2011, and that those countries which do witness authoritarian collapse will be less likely to democratize than their European counterparts were' (Way, 2011: 17). To the distress of democracy advocates across the region, Way's pessimism has been borne out. Democratic possibilities faded almost as rapidly as they had appeared. By mid-2013, Egypt's first democratically elected president was ousted in a military coup.

Transformations in Libya and Yemen sparked violent conflict that soon escalated into full-scale civil war and the breakdown of state institutions. Only in Tunisia did mass protests pave the way for a process of democratization. Barring the Tunisian case, the Arab uprisings have led in only two directions: state collapse in the midst of violent conflict, as in Libya, Yemen and Syria, or an 'Arab Thermidor' and the reassertion of authoritarianism, as in Egypt, Bahrain and a majority of Arab cases in which protest movements initially arose (POMEPS & LSE, 2015).

These experiences raise important questions. Does the reassertion of authoritarianism in some cases reinforce or undermine arguments about Arab exceptionalism and the structural, institutional and economic obstacles to democratization in the Arab world (Anderson, 1995; Stepan & Robertson, 2004; Waterbury, 1994)? Can the transitology literature inform our understanding of the uprisings and their effects on states, regimes and societies in the Middle East given the differences between the Arab uprisings and other experiences of authoritarian breakdown and democratization? How do we account for the astonishing divergence evidenced in the trajectories of Yemen and Libya (state collapse and violent conflict), Tunisia (democratization) and Egypt (authoritarian reassertion)?

Even if the uprisings did not destabilize the regional political landscape to the extent that some observers initially suggested (Dabashi, 2012), questions remain concerning how to account for their impact and the dynamics they unleashed. Seen solely through the lens of authoritarian persistence or failures of democratization, much of what changed as a result of the uprisings is all too easily overlooked, including the emergence of new forms of political mobilization from below (Sadiki et al., 2013; Langohr, 2015; Salime, 2015; Harders, 2015); the rise, collapse and reconfiguration of new political coalitions; and fundamental shifts in conceptions of political legitimacy, citizenship and state—

society relations. Why, in some cases, did uprisings disrupt existing structures of power and bring new actors to the fore, including previously marginalized civil society actors, while in others they seemed to reinforce established elites? How can one explain new patterns of mobilization and contestation that have shaped political arenas in very different ways across the region? What accounts, in particular, for the inability of newly mobilized civil society actors to sustain effective patterns of political engagement as uprisings move from mass protests to more formal modes of political struggle?

This 2016 issue of *Mediterranean Politics* represents a significant step forward in developing a coherent and empirically rich analytical framework for addressing such questions. It improves our understanding of the very complex local dynamics that have driven uprisings towards such diverse outcomes across the four cases in which protesters successfully forced authoritarian incumbents from office. Yet the specifics of each case also provide the foundations for useful generalizations about patterns that have emerged in how the uprisings have unfolded thus far. The individual case studies are nuanced and strongly grounded in keen and sober assessments of local dynamics. When read together, the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. In the aggregate, the articles in this special issue offer critical starting points for understanding both the micro-dynamics and the macro-level trends that are driving political change in the post-2011 Middle East.

Updating and extending an earlier project of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) on elites and political change in the Middle East (Perthes, 2004), the editors of this special issue (and organizers of a multi-year project that sponsored the research presented here) have made significant adjustments in the analytical framework to account for the emergence, or re-emergence, of mass politics in the Arab world and the appearance of newly empowered political actors from outside the ranks of established elites. While retaining

the focus of SWP's earlier project on politically relevant elites (PREs), the editors expanded the scope of their work to include an additional category, mobilized publics, recognizing that the boundaries between the two are fluid and that how either set of actors is defined is heavily context dependent. To identify and assess major trends at both levels and capture interactions between them, the special issue includes paired studies for each case, with one focusing on the PRE and the other on mobilized publics. They are organized around a common set of questions but approached by the authors with sufficient flexibility to accommodate the specifics of each case and their differently configured cohorts of PREs and mobilized publics.

In 2004 a central concern of SWP's Arab elites project was leadership transition in the context of consolidated authoritarian regimes. A decade later conceptualizing the political context of the Arab uprisings is a more demanding task. If the analytical vocabulary associated with the study of democratic transitions (Sadiki et al., 2013) is inappropriate, and the lens of authoritarian regression too narrow, how can one more effectively frame an assessment of the uprisings and their aftermath? For the editors and authors of this special issue, the challenge is how to capture the dynamism of the uprisings and their effects without implying either that Arab states are moving in a linear if bumpy transition towards a visible if dimly perceived outcome or that the uprisings were a moment of sound and fury signifying relatively little. Their response to this challenge, in part, is to frame the uprisings as moments of transformation rather than transition.

The distinction between these terms is important. The term *transformation* captures the notion of systemic change yet without implying directionality or some form of democratic teleology. It emphasizes the fluidity and unpredictability of transformational settings, a point the editors stress in their introduction. Like much of the early transitions literature, it provides considerable scope for

contingency and agency. It acknowledges 'the high degree of indeterminacy embedded in situations where unexpected events ... insufficient information, hurried and audacious choices, confusion about motives and interests, plasticity, and even indefinability of political identities, as well as the talents of specific individuals' all have an effect in shaping outcomes (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986: 5). As in the transitions literature, the uncertainty and fluidity expressed by the concept of transformation must be conditioned by attention to the constraints that narrow choice, attenuate agency and impose outer limits on contingency.

However dynamic and fluid they might be, transformational spaces are nonetheless structured and shaped by their contexts. In this special issue, context affects transformational processes in a number of ways. One is through the effect of authoritarian legacies on the course of post-uprising politics, including the legacies of de-institutionalization, as in Libya and Yemen, as well as the social and political legacies of deeply institutionalized authoritarian systems of rule, as in Egypt. In all four cases, the shadow of the past looms large over transformational processes. A second is the effect of the various actors' identities – including sectarian, tribal, class, urban–rural and geographic – and how these intersect with and complicate efforts to establish stable, legitimate forms of government. In addition, the editors and authors for this special issue place particular emphasis on the resources that actors can mobilize as they struggle to advance their interests, including material, institutional, symbolic, coercive, reputational and relational resources.

Approaching transformation processes as indeterminate and opening new space for contestation and agency, yet nonetheless bounded by resource constraints and the institutional, structural and social endowments of PREs and mobilized publics, has significant implications for the case studies presented here. To unpack and impose a measure of analytical

clarity on transformational processes that were often dizzyingly complex, fast-moving and volatile, the authors emphasize thick description, process tracing (sometimes more implicit than explicit) and within-case comparisons between elements of the PRE and mobilized publics to test hypotheses (also sometimes more implicit than explicit) that account for variation in the capacity of specific PREs or mobilized publics to advance their interests. As Muriel Asseburg and Heiko Wimmen highlight in their introduction, the case studies were designed to identify configurations of both PREs and mobilized publics with several goals in mind: to map out how they interact as transformations unfold; identify what resources they bring to bear as they navigate the uncertainties of transformational moments; and assess their capacity to influence the course of transformational processes.

The critical advantage of this approach lies in the rich and fine-grained empirical data concerning specific groups of PREs and mobilized publics on which the authors base their analyses, giving them exceptional insight into micro-level dynamics. Moreover, when read as a whole, the articles offer insight into broader patterns that suggest a number of generalizable features of the Arab uprisings and the transformations they set in motion. They provide the necessary empirical and analytical foundations for moving from within-case comparisons of segments of PREs and mobilized publics to cross-case and even cross-regional research that further advances understanding of the Arab uprisings as transformational processes.

Patterns of protest

The case studies presented here provide abundant material for a comparative research agenda. Three issue areas in particular stand out as warranting attention: the effects of stateness and patterns of state–society relations on the trajectory of Arab uprisings; the role of identity politics and non-state forms of solidarity as drivers of political mobilization and collective action and

the impact of these forms of mobilization on possibilities for establishing stable, legitimate governing coalitions; and the limits of civil societies and civic sectors in influencing transformational processes.

Weak states and strong societies?

In his now classic work on state–society relations in the developing world, Migdal (1988) used Egypt among other cases to argue that societies in many seemingly strong states had highly developed capacities to resist centralizing projects designed to secure the compliance of citizens through imposed, top-down rules of the game. Challenging then current theories of state autonomy, Migdal developed a ‘state *in* society’ approach to underscore the social embeddedness of state actors and the extent to which state elites and social actors engaged in contestation over the boundaries and limits of state power (Migdal et al., 1994). The Arab uprisings suggest the value of returning to and revisiting Migdal’s framework. The case studies presented here make clear that stateness matters in understanding variations in the strategies of PREs and mobilized publics and in the larger trajectories of the Arab uprisings. Both the degree of stateness and the specific forms through which stateness manifests itself are important in ways that Migdal did not fully anticipate.

In Libya, the Qadhafi regime rejected the formation of a large, formal, consolidated state apparatus. With the exception of the security apparatus (al-Mukhabarat) and petroleum sectors, Qadhafi pursued an explicitly anti-institutional, dispersed strategy of governance based on the use of clientelist networks linked to favoured tribes and regions to shore up his regime (Vandewalle, 2008). In Yemen, President Saleh used stateness as a bargaining chip in his negotiations with key elites who viewed state institutions as a desirable resource (Alley, 2010). By withholding or granting the expansion of state institutions and programmes into areas in which potential rivals held sway, Saleh preserved his pre-eminence as power broker, mediator and bestower of privilege. In both

cases, state weakness was an intentional result of regime-building strategies that relied on empowering and enriching select cohorts of social actors, marginalizing others and preventing the emergence of strong states around which opposition actors might coalesce.

As the articles by Wolfram Lacher and Mareike Transfeld on Libya and Yemen, respectively, make clear, under these conditions it is not surprising that once uprisings began, patterns of political mobilization among the PRE quickly became organized around existing, principally tribal, social cleavages. It is also unsurprising that state elites (itself a problematic category) would lack the institutional capacity to check the escalation of social conflicts or, indeed, to hold underdeveloped and weakly consolidated states together in the face of rising violence – not least because states themselves have been captured for the political and material benefit of predatory elements of the PRE. Migdal views strong societies as a valuable check on the grandiose ambitions of state elites. Yet where states are too weak to prevent or regulate violent social conflicts, where states have been captured by social groups and where societies mobilize around multiple, competing non-state, non-citizen-based identities and solidarities, moments of transformation seem all too likely to produce state collapse and violent conflict. Defining and then institutionalizing an appropriate balance between state and social power – the elusive ‘participatory social contract’ that national dialogues were intended to generate – seems beyond the political will or capacity of super-empowered non-state actors in both Libya and Yemen.

Despite such conditions, however, Lacher and Transfeld also show that it would be a mistake to conclude that non-state actors have no use for the state. Indeed, in both Yemen and Libya, control of the state remains a focal point of social conflict. In both cases, conflicts among PREs and mobilized publics alike are driven by differences over whose interests will prevail in

shaping or reforming state institutions and defining new rules of the game. The Libyan case is perhaps most striking in this regard. Despite the de-institutionalized legacy of Qadhafi's rule, the state remains a ghostly presence throughout Lacher's account. In the midst of state collapse and civil war, for example, fighters continue to receive state salaries, the sale of oil continues through nominally sovereign entities, and factions compete for international recognition as legitimate state authorities.

Egypt and Tunisia provide sharp contrasts to the Libyan and Yemeni cases and differ with each other in important ways. In both, transformational outcomes are contingent on struggles among competing elements of the PRE for control of consolidated states. In both, non-state identities and solidarities are present yet play a subordinate role in transformational processes. Amel Boubekour highlights the role of elite 'pact making' as a critical feature of Tunisia's transformation. She views the effectiveness with which PREs manoeuvred behind the scenes to negotiate a division of power within the state apparatus and political institutions as corrosive of Tunisia's emerging democracy. Yet as Stephan Roll's account of Egypt highlights, the alternatives could be worse.

In Tunisia, no single element of the PRE possessed the coercive or bureaucratic resources to govern on its own. All elements of the PRE preferred compromise that preserved the state and the potential for further democratization instead of defection, conflict and potential state collapse. In Egypt, on the other hand, a pacted transition broke down under the strain of elite conflict, leading to the reassertion of authoritarianism. Competition between the ruling Muslim Brotherhood and the military ended in the July 2013 coup led by the then-minister of defence and head of the armed forces, and now president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. Commanding the coercive and bureaucratic resources to govern on its own (Kandil, 2012), and confronting the imposition of an

illiberal democracy (at best) by Muslim Brotherhood leader and Egyptian president Mohammed Mursi, the military preferred to defect from a ruling coalition with the Brotherhood and bring Egypt's democratic transition to a close. One set of state actors, the military, was sufficiently strong to impose rules of the game on both PREs and mobilized publics.

In all four cases, questions about the effects of stateness on transformational processes and how the degree of consolidation of state institutions, the structure of state–society relations, the extent to which shared conceptions of citizenship and legitimacy organize mobilization and collective action among PREs and mobilized publics offer important opportunities for more broadly framed comparative research.

Identity politics and the challenge of governance

Egypt and Tunisia also stand apart from Yemen and Libya in the role that non-state identities and solidarities have played in transformational processes. In neither case have non-state, non-citizenship-based political identities become a dominant axis around which political conflicts among the PRE or mobilized publics organized. Such identities are certainly present in both, as are conflicts over competing conceptions of citizenship, legitimacy and the sources of political authority. Yet relative to Libya and Yemen, identity-based conflicts have been secondary to struggles over control of the state.

In Libya and Yemen, non-state identities and solidarities – whether sectarian, ethnic, tribal, regional or combinations of these – have emerged as central fault lines, as they have in Syria and Bahrain. For PREs and mobilized publics in Libya and Yemen, these identities and solidarities have long been consequential in shaping political dynamics: with the Arab uprisings they became core 'pivots' anchoring and organizing transformational spaces, largely determining patterns of political mobilization and social conflict. In some respects, such

developments challenge the notion of transformations developed in this special issue as moments of uncertainty and contingency. To the extent that the Libyan and Yemeni uprisings have merely amplified long-standing political divisions among established tribal PREs by weakening the capacity of (already weak) states to regulate conflict, the scope for either agency or contingency would seem to be highly constrained.

In regard to the politics of alliance formation and coalition building, however, it is clear that agency, contingency and uncertainty remain defining features of transformational processes, including in cases where non-state identities exert a powerful influence on the strategic calculus of PREs and mobilized publics. The essays by Lacher and Transfeld on PREs in Libya and Yemen and by Nadine Abdalla and Rafaa Tabib on mobilized publics in these two cases provide sophisticated and fine-grained analyses of bargaining dynamics among competing tribal, ethnic, regional and class interests. Their accounts underscore the challenge of building stable, legitimate, cross-cutting political coalitions in the absence of broadly accepted rules of the game and viable state institutions and where non-state identities impede efforts to build political communities around widely shared conceptions of legitimacy and citizenship. They also pose an additional challenge to Migdal: in the absence of viable states, struggles over rules of the game are less likely to develop as expressions of resilience and pluralism than of fragility and potential conflict. Despite variation in the resources that different elements of the PRE command, the ease with which weaker groups can destabilize attempts to reach consensus – especially when every element of the PRE is heavily armed – makes transformational moments under such conditions particularly fraught. Yet these essays also make clear that the conflicts now tearing Yemen and Libya apart were not in any sense preordained. In every respect, they are the product of specific decisions by identifiable actors who had meaningful scope for deciding how they might respond

to the challenges of managing a post-Saleh or post-Qadhafi transformational process. Both cases provide ample support for the agent-centred and choice-based model of transformational processes presented in the introduction to the special issue.

Libya and Yemen are not doomed to futures as failed states. Neither is unique in wrestling with the challenges of governance in a divided society or in confronting obstacles to the formation of a shared conception of political community, however constructed and imagined such communities might be. Both issues have been the subject of voluminous research literatures. Understanding how similar conflicts have unfolded in other cases, in particular how other sharply divided societies have found pathways out of civil war and towards processes of social repair and state reconstruction, is an area in which broader cross-case and cross-regional comparisons would be both eminently feasible and especially helpful.

The limits of mobilized publics

Among the most striking features of the Arab uprisings is the failure of the mobilized publics that played such an important role in launching protest movements to sustain their influence once the focus of transformations shifted from streets and public squares into formal political arenas. The case studies presented here on mobilized publics in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya tell remarkably similar stories. They also confirm the experiences of other, non-Middle Eastern cases in which activists struggled to transform social movements into political structures able to compete effectively after the street-level protests gave way to electoral competition. Each author profiles civil society groups and ad hoc movements that vary in their goals and objectives and in their relationships with established and newly empowered, more oppositional segments of the PRE. Each case highlights at least one element of the mobilized publics that benefited from longstanding ties to some segment of the PRE, including Anna Antonakis-

Nashif's discussion of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, Atiaf Z. Alwazir's description of Yemen's al-Watan (Homeland) Party and Nadine Abdalla's account of Egypt's Future of the Nation Party. In each case, mobilized publics have struggled to leverage the credibility and legitimacy they acquired through their leadership of protest movements into influence over the trajectory of subsequent political transformations. In each case, revolutionary elements of the mobilized publics wrestled with the choice of remaining outside formal politics, and thus losing influence, or entering the political arena at the expense of their revolutionary credibility. In each, these struggles were internally divisive. In each, group members made different choices, with some opting to remain outside formal politics, others choosing collaboration with PREs or, in the case of the Future of the Nation and al-Watan parties, to register as formal political parties and compete in parliamentary elections.

Despite differences in the social backgrounds and resources of the participants in these movements, in their relationships to PREs, in their choice of exit, voice or loyalty (Hirschman, 1970), virtually none of the elements of the mobilized publics profiled in these case studies succeeded in acquiring meaningful, sustained influence over the course of transformational processes. To be sure, there are some exceptions to this characterization of mobilized publics. Across the board, those individuals and groups among the mobilized publics that fared best in terms of influence were those most closely aligned with and those most willing to collaborate with and be co-opted by powerful elements of the PRE. In contrast, the more committed a civil society group or social movement was to revolutionary transformations of one form or another (economic, political, social), the more likely it was to find itself marginalized by the PRE. For most elements of the mobilized publics, participation in social movements seems to have led to frustration, cynicism, exclusion and eventual disengagement. As Boubekour points out in this

volume, some 70 per cent of Tunisian youth between the ages of 18 and 30 abstained from voting in the 2014 legislative and presidential elections. By early 2015, as the Arab uprisings entered their fifth year, it is difficult to identify any segments of the mobilized publics in the four cases covered in this special issue that can be said to have played a decisive role in shaping the trajectories of transformational processes.

This broad-based failure of mobilized publics to sustain their influence has been noted by scholars and analysts of the Arab uprisings. How to explain this outcome, however, has received less attention. Most accounts focus on shortcomings among elements of these mobilized publics, including a lack of experience and the stubborn, ultimately self-defeating refusal of leading activists to leverage their revolutionary credentials for political gain. Broader comparisons, however, might shift attention to other factors. Marc Howard's (2003) work on civil society in Russia and East Germany highlights the impact of authoritarian legacies and the challenges they pose for civil society organizations in environments in which civic engagement has long been suppressed. Amaney Jamal's (2009) work on civil society in Palestine makes similar arguments concerning the relationship between an authoritarian political environment and the lack of internal democracy within Palestinian civil society organizations. The within-case approach of the case studies presented here leans towards case-specific explanations of the limits of mobilized publics to effect change. Yet it seems very likely that these limits result from deeper structural and institutional factors that cross-case comparisons might be better equipped to identify and explore.

Conclusion: transformations in comparative perspective

The three issue areas highlighted above represent only a small sample of the rich comparative possibilities the Arab uprisings have created, none of which would be possible to exploit without the detailed empirical

foundations provided by the contributors to this special issue. They also point to the value of approaching such comparisons through the analytical framework applied by the contributors. Conceptualizing the Arab uprisings as transformational processes without imposing on them either the expectation that they will take the form of democratic transitions or that they can be adequately explained simply as cases of failed democratization is important for avoiding deterministic or essentialist traps. Acknowledging the uprisings as having opened up political space, created new political possibilities and empowered new political actors is a more productive starting point for understanding what is actually happening on the ground than research weighed down by the conceptual baggage of theoretical constructs that do not fit the cases at hand. The essays included here provide compelling narratives of political struggles the outcomes of which could not be predicted in advance, not least by those who took part in them.

The uprisings have been described as a political earthquake. If they left a recognizable landscape in their wake, they have nonetheless marked it in indelible ways. Acknowledging that conditions made a democratic wave unlikely in the Middle East does not relieve analysts of the challenge of explaining how the uprisings unfolded or of accounting for the variation in both their trajectories and their outcomes. The essays in this special issue mark a significant advance towards these goals.

Similarly, the focus on PREs and mobilized publics and the interactions between them provides a useful analytical starting point in several ways. It requires a detailed mapping of relevant actors that is evident in the work of the contributors to this special issue. Consistent with the editors' conceptualization of transitional processes as moments of uncertainty, it draws attention to agency and contingency in accounting for outcomes. It also provides analytical categories sufficiently broad and flexible to accommodate analysis of relevant actors however they might be situated within a transformational

space. As this suggests, the concepts of PRE and mobilized publics must be used with care. Assigning actors to one category or another tells us relatively little in and of itself about how any specific actor or group will behave. The boundaries between them will not always be easy to discern. All of the case studies presented here include examples of individuals who move from one category to the other. Yet used appropriately, they hold considerable promise as a starting point for unpacking the micro-dynamics of complex contexts like the Arab uprisings and for effective within-case and cross-case comparisons.

A useful next step for a research on PREs and mobilized publics in the Middle East is to build on the case studies presented here to advance a broader comparative agenda aimed at understanding transformational processes as a category of events that exhibit any number of shared features. Such a step would shift the focus from who matters and what happened in particular cases to questions on how particular categories of PREs, such as military elites, behave during transformational processes and how to account for patterns and variation in their behaviour. It would permit assessment of the conditions under which mobilized publics can influence the trajectories of transformations. It would also provide a stronger basis for addressing questions about why Tunisia, alone among Arab states that experienced uprisings, has begun a meaningful process of democratization. As yet, answers to these questions remain a work in progress for scholars of the Middle East. The contributions to this special issue leave these scholars better positioned to pursue them.

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Index

Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes

Abdalla, N. 44–63, 199, 200

Abdel Rahman, M. 45

Abdullah, Shaykh 153

Abul Futuh, A.-M. 52

accountability 58, 70, 141, 142

action: collective 11, 170, 172, 198; contentious 86, 137, 143, 145, 175, 186; political 129, 139

activated citizens 9

activism 16, 18, 128, 129, 134; civic 92–4, 182; grass-roots 87; ideology-based 144; issue-based 16; political 87; students 137; youth 45

actors: transformation 10

advocacy 129, 137, 181

Afghanistan 154

agency 202; autonomous 170, 172

agenda setting 11

Ahmed, A.: and Capoccia, G. 5

aid 13

Akakus Oil Operations (AOO) 98, 99, 104n19

al-Qaeda 15

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) 150, 152, 156–7, 162, 165

Albrecht, H. 122

Algeria 136

Ali, A. 157

alienation 179

alliances 7, 10, 11, 16, 184, 199; building 64–85; cross-tribal 178; Egypt 15, 32–4; Politically Relevant Elite 14–15

Alsisi, A.F. 36

Alwazir, A.: Vom Bruck, G. and Wiacek, B. 171

Alwazir, A.Z. 170–91, 200

Amami, A. 142, 143, 147n22

Annan, S. 30
Antonakis-Nashif, A. 128–49, 200
Arab exceptionalism 193
Arab Spring 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 151
Arab uprisings 192–204
Arab youth 45, 171
Arab Youth Forum 180
Arabtec 34
armed struggle 9, 10
armies 87, 96, 150
arms: Libya 70
art of presence 172, 181
al-Assar, M. 30
Asseburg, M.: and Wimmen, H. 1–22, 144, 172
authoritarianism 3, 4, 6, 48, 193, 198
authority 64; state 15, 129
autonomous agency 170, 172
autonomy: regional 82
Bahrain 17, 193, 199
Bani Walid 64, 66, 68, 70, 71, 73–6, 80, 81, 93; Social Council 74, 75, 76, 83n22
Bardo protests (2013) 120, 122, 131, 135, 139
bargain: elite 19n12
bargained competition 107, 108, 109, 111, 119–22, 123–4
bargaining 199; women 133–6
Bayat, A. 46, 172
Bel Haj Hamida, B. 136
Belaid, C. 131
Ben Ali, Z.A. 11, 107–8, 110, 112, 113, 115, 122, 128, 136, 140
Ben Rebah, M.: Gana, A. and Van Hamme, G. 146
Benghazi 68, 69, 83n28
Benhabib, S. 132
Bonney, L. 173
Boubekeur, A. 107–27, 198, 201
Bourguiba, H. 141
Bouziane, M.: Harders, C. and Hoffman, A. 4
boycotts 137
Brahmi, M. 117, 131

Bukraa, U. 73
business elite 6, 26, 36
capital: political 55; symbolic 81
Cappocia, G.: and Ahmed, A. 5
Cavatorta, F. 9; and Pace, M. 3, 5
Chad 101
Challand, B. 7
change: gradual 54; management 23–43; political 44, 51
Chebbi, A.N. 116, 117
Chennaoui, H. 142
citizens: activated 9; campaigns 55; participation 8
citizenship 87, 199; Libya 95, 96, 97, 101, 102; rights 86
civic activism 92–4, 182
civic engagement 201
civil coups: Egypt 30–1
civil rights 133
civil society 4, 7–10, 92, 93, 103, 123, 144; Palestine 201; Tunisia 120;
Yemen 166
civil society actors 194; Tunisia 128, 129, 132
civil society organizations (CSOs) 7, 8, 11, 132, 193, 200, 201; Tunisia 112,
135, 144
civil war 1, 2, 3, 152, 198; Libya 13, 65, 67, 72
clans 88, 99, 100
clientelism 97, 102, 103
clientelist networks 160, 197
co-operation 5, 15; Yemen 154–5
co-optation 58, 184, 185
Coalition of the Revolutionary Youth 47
coalitions 7, 12, 15, 199; youth 173
collective action 11, 170, 172, 198
collective empowerment 8
collective identity 46
communism: Eastern Europe 8
compensation 141, 142
complementarity 17
conflict: elite (Yemen) 152–5; resolution 3
consensus politics 119–22
constitutions 5; Egypt 26–7, 28, 30, 31–2, 33, 34, 35, 47, 53, 56; new 13;
Tunisia 14, 17, 113, 114, 115, 116, 119, 120, 131, 134–5; Yemen 151,

154, 158, 160, 174
 contentious action 15, 86, 137, 143, 175, 186; decriminalization 145
 contentious politics 18n2, 129, 137, 174
 contestation 10–11
 contested transformations 2–3, 128–49
 contingency 202
 core elite: Egypt 24–6, 37
 corruption 48, 107, 138; Egypt 31; Libya 70; oil 78; Yemen 170, 171, 172, 174, 176, 177
 counter-revolution: Libya 73–6
 counter-terrorism: USA 156
 coups 2, 12; civil 30–1, *see also* military coups
 courts: military 27
 cross-tribal alliances 178
 cultural resources 138, 180
 culture: Egypt 53; Islamic 4; political 109, 123, 144
 currency reserves: Egypt 33
 cyber protest 132
 cyberactivism 45
 Dahl, R.A. 3
 Dakhnan, H. 180
 al-Dawsari, N. 178
de facto partition 3
 de-institutionalization 195
 decentralization 132
 decision-making 7, 55, 58, 59, 145; Libya 70, 80; political 11, 24, 37, 102, 131, 132, 144; Tunisia 140
 Demmelhuber, T. 33
 democracy 192; and Islamic culture 4; participatory 48–9, 52; Tunisia 108; Western 92
 democratization 8, 13, 108, 110, 129, 193; failed 202; theory 3–4; Tunisia 193, 203
 demonstrations 137; Egypt 49, 53, 54; Libya 91, 97, 104n9; rights 48; Tunisia 115, 131, 138
 Diamond, L. 192
 dictatorial politics 92
 discrimination: ethnic 102
 discursive legacies 146n1
 diversity 53

Donk, W. van de 132

Durac, V. 16

East Germany 201

Eastern Europe 8, 193

economic justice 128, 129, 136–40

economic marginalization 95

economic order 53

economic policy 16; Egypt 38

economic power 7

economic reform 115

economy: Egypt 32, 34

education 107; political 57

Edwards, B.: and Kane, M. 180

Egypt 193, 195, 199; alliances 15, 32–4; business elite 26, 36; change management 23–43; civil coups 30–1; Committee of 50 53, 56; Constituent Assembly 32, 47; constitution 26–7, 28, 30, 31–2, 33, 34, 35, 47, 53, 56; Constitution Party 45, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59; core elite 24–6, 37; corruption 31; culture 53; currency reserves 33; demonstrations 49, 53, 54; economic policy 38; economy 32, 34; elections 24, 28–9, 30, 34–5, 37, 39n8&9, 46, 54, 57; Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) 28; Front of the Egyptian Youth 55, 58; Future of the Nation Party 45, 55–6, 57–8, 200; gradual change 26–8; Hay?at al-Raqaba al-Idariyya 31; identity 52; institutionalists 34–6, 38; judiciary 29, 31; Justice Party 51; legitimacy 15; military 7, 12, 48, 198; military coups 13, 14, 24, 26, 32–4, 35; military courts 27; military leadership 23–43; military regime 14, 48, 49, 50, 56; Muslim Brotherhood 7, 14, 16–17, 23–4, 27–34, 37, 46–8, 51, 55–6, 118, 156, 198; National Defence Council (NDC) 32; National Democratic Party (NDP) 25; National Salvation Front 53; national security 37; non-Islamist parties 31; Nour Party 7, 14, 47; political decision-making 24, 37; political violence 2; Politically Relevant Elite 25, 27, 31, 37, 38, 44; power struggles 38; power-sharing 30; protests 23, 24, 25, 33, 36–7; Revolutionary Front 45, 48–50, 59; security forces 49, 54; Square groups 53; state of emergency 27; state institutions 27, 31, 32; state repression 33; state violence 33; Strong Egypt Party 45, 48, 51, 52, 54, 55, 57, 59; student movement 52; Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) 23–34, 48, 49, 51; Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission (SPEC) 29; Tamarod 17, 19n14, 33, 34, 39n21, 48, 55, 56, 58; The Revolution Continues 51; youth movements 34, 44–63

ElBaradei, M. 53, 54

elections 12; Egypt 24, 28–9, 30, 34–5, 39n9, 46, 54, 57, 37, 39n8; Libya 69, 72, 76, 86, 87, 88, 90, 94, 102, 103n1; Tunisia 107, 108, 109, 111–14, 117, 118, 119, 121, 122, 131, 140, 145–6; Yemen 151, 154, 201

electoral participation 87

elite 194; core 24–6, 37; secondary 6; tertiary 6, *see also* Politically Relevant Elite (PRE)

employment: access 97, 102; Libya 99; policy 137; Yemen 170, 172

empowerment: collective 8

equality: gender 134

Essebsi, B.C. 111, 112, 113, 114, 116, 117, 118, 121–2, 123, 128

Essid, H. 115

ethnic cleavages: Libya 101–2, 103

ethnic discrimination 102

European Union (EU) 150, 185

exceptionalism: Arab 193

exclusion 45, 102

federalism 160, 161

Fezzan 95, 101, 102

foreign policy 6, 52

Freedom for the Brave 49–50

fuel: crisis 162; subsidies 163, 176, 179

G10 countries 156, 160–1, 166n7, 185

Gafsa Phosphate Company 129, 139

Gafsa revolts (2008–9) 129, 137, 138

Gana, A.: Van Hamme, G. and Ben Rebah, M. 146

al-Ganzouri, K. 27

gender: equality 134; inequality 135; justice 128, 129, 133–6; violence 133, 134–5

Ghannam, F. 135

Ghannouchi, M. 111

Ghannouchi, R. 118, 121

Gharghour massacre (2013) 90, 94

Ghat 98

Ghazala, A.H.A. 38

governance 2, 3, 4–5, 109, 199–200

government institutions: Yemen 164

gradual change 54; Egypt 26–8

graduates: unemployed 136–40, 171

grass-roots activism 88

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) 3, 13, 15, 151, 152, 154–8, 160, 164–6, 171, 174, 177, 182, 185

Hadi, R.M. 151, 155, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 174, 179, 184

Haftar, K. 79, 81, 91

Haiba, M. 31

Harak La li-I-Tamdid (No to the Extension Movement) 87, 89–94, 103

Harders, C.: Hoffman, A. and Bouziane, M. 4

Hashid tribes 163, 164

health 107, 129

Hegazy, M. 36

hegemony: ideological 14

Herrera, L. 45

Heydemann, S. 122, 192–204

Hoffman, A.: Bouziane, M. and Harders, C. 4

Houthi movement 173

Howard, M. 201

human resources 132, 134, 180

human rights 49, 50, 110, 133

Human Rights Watch 27, 33

hunger strikes 50, 110, 137, 141

hybrid regimes 4

hydrocarbon 100

identity: collective 46; Egypt 52; politics 9, 196, 199–200

ideology-based activism 144

imams 91, 120

inclusion 130, 186, 193

inequality: gender 135; social 99

infrastructure 55, 67, 69

institutionalists: Egypt 34–6, 38

institutions 4, 6; design 13; government 164; new 5; oil 78; political 87, 89, 111, 179, 198; security 87, *see also* state institutions

intellectuals 93

interest groups 9

International Monetary Fund (IMF) 34, 163, 176

Iran 34

Iraq: US invasion 175

Islam 52; culture and democracy 4; political 12, 14; *shariah* 120, 160, *see also* Muslim Brotherhood; Salafi entries

Islamic legitimacy 7

Islamic state 82

Islamist groups 8, 12, 96; Libya 68, 69, 71, 73

Islamists: parties 4, 193; state institutions 91; Tunisia 108

Islamization 113

issue-based activism 16

Jadran, I. 78, 79
 Jamal, A. 201
 Jebali, H. 114, 116, 131
 jihadi groups 69, 96
 jobseekers: Libya 98
 journalists 132–3
 judiciary: Egypt 29, 31
 justice 48, 186; economic 128, 129, 136–40; gender 128, 129, 133–6; social 49, 52, 53, 107, 176; transitional 15, 28, 49, 128, 129, 140–3, 184; Tunisia 140
 Kane, M.: and Edwards, B. 180
 Kasbah 1 and 2 protests (2011) 111
 Khatib, L. 8
 Kuwait 33, 34
 Laarayedh, A. 116
 labour mobilization 129
 Lacher, W. 64–85, 197, 198, 199
 land disputes 160
 legitimacy 2–3, 56, 64, 199, 200; Egypt 15; Islamic 7; Libya 69, 80; political 18n1; revolutionary 90, 130, 138, 140, 144, 180, 184
 liberalism 129
 liberalization 108; political 110
 liberty 8
 Libya 193, 195, 197, 198, 199, 200; arms 70; army 96; Army of Tribes 76; Authority of 17 72, 73; autonomy movement 79; central authority 64, 65, 67; citizenship 95, 96, 97, 101, 102; civil war 13, 65, 67, 72; corruption 70; counter-revolution 73–6; decision-making 70, 80; demonstrations 91, 97, 104n9; elections 69, 72, 76, 86, 87, 88, 90, 94, 102, 103n1; employment 99; ethnic cleavages 101–2, 103; General National Congress (GNC) 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 78, 79, 81, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91; infrastructure 67, 69; Integrity Commission 75; Islamist groups 68, 69, 71, 73; jobseekers 98; Justice and Construction Party 88, 89, 90, 91; legitimacy 69, 80; local elite 64–85, 87, 103; local power centres 67, 68; migrants 95–6; Misrata 64, 66, 69–73, 77, 80, 81, 93; mobilized publics 86–106; National Forces Alliance (NFA) 68, 88, 89, 90, 93, 94; nationality code 101–2; oil 67, 78, 89, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102; political decision-making 102; political elite 64; political institutions 87, 89; Political Isolation Law (2013) 68, 71, 88; political process 87, 88, 92; Politically Relevant Elite 15, 65; popular protest 86–106; Popular Social Leaderships 67; power struggles 64, 65, 68, 69; protests 69, 71, 74, 99; security 13; security sector 68, 70, 73; Shura Council 70, 71; state institutions 67, 69, 86, 87, 92, 100; transformation 88–9; tribal chiefs 99, 100; tribes 67; 28 May Brigade 74, 75; violence 88, 90; Warfalla 73, 74, 76, 93; youth 103, *see also* Tobruk; Tripoli
 Libya Dawn 68, 69, 72, 76, 82n2, 89, 92, 94

Libya Shield Force 71

Linz, J.J.: and Stepan, A. 8

lobbying 132, 178, 184

local elite 65, 66, 87, 96, 100, 103; Libya 64–85

Lynch, M. 4

al-Mabri, F.Y. 77

Mahmoudi, B. 114

Maitig, A. 102

Mansour, A. 33, 35, 48, 49

marginalization 2, 45, 97, 114, 179; economic 95; social 95–102; youth 98

Marib Cause 170, 172, 176–82, 186

martyrs 130, 132, 140–3, 145; and Politically Relevant Elite 141

Marx Ferrée, M. 131, 136, 146n1

Marzouki, M. 114, 115, 121, 139

mass media 134

mass mobilization 7, 90

material resources 181

Matuq, M.M. 73

Mawafi, M. 30

media 131, 132, 138, 143, 172; mass 134; social 16, 45, 50, 90, 91, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138, 141, 172, 181

mediation 2

Middle East 192, 193, 202

Migdal, J. 6, 196–7

migrants: Libya 95–6

military: courts 27; Egypt 7, 12, 23–43, 198; elite 93, 202–3; intervention 2, 48; power 80; states 26; Yemen 151, 152, 155–8, 162, 164, 165

military coups 193; Egypt 13, 14, 24, 26, 32–4, 35

militias 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 98, 101, 102, 103, 118; Salafi 162

Misrata 64, 66, 69–73, 77, 80, 81, 93

mobilization 8, 198; labour 129; mass 7, 90; political 194; popular 17; social 5, 103; street 14, 135

mobilized publics 1, 5, 7–10, 11, 15, 17, 44, 58, 198, 199; definition 172; Libya 86–106; limits 200–1; and political dynamics 173–6; and Politically Relevant Elite 172–3, 175, 194–5, 196, 201, 202; Tunisia 128–49; Yemen 156, 158–9, 160, 165, 170–91

Mohsin, A. 153, 154, 155, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 163, 164, 165

Morocco 137

Mubarak, G. 24, 25, 26, 28

Mubarak, H. 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, 37, 38, 47

Murphy, E. 171

Murphy, E.C. 45

Murray, R. 174

Mursi, M. 17, 29, 30–1, 33, 45, 46, 48, 51, 56, 163, 198

Muslim Brotherhood 91, 92, 152, 153, 163; Egypt 7, 14, 16–17, 23–4, 27–34, 37, 46–8, 51, 55–6, 118, 156, 198; Yemen 162

Mutawakkel, G. 186

Naggar, A.S. 40n29
nation-building 182–3
nationality code: Libya 101–2
networks 16, 134, 136, 151, 173; clientelist 160, 197; elite 70; patronage 15, 67, 107, 153; of privilege 15; social 57, 185; transnational 50
non-governmental organizations (NGOs) 52, 129, 182
normative power 7
norms 5, 89
O'Donnell, G.: and Schmitter, P. 8, 44, 151, 166n2, 195
oil 86, 160, 177, 179; corruption 78; institutions 78; Libya 67, 78, 89, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102; Yemen 176
Operation Dignity 68, 69, 78–9, 89
Ouled Slimane 98
Pace, M.: and Cavatorta, F. 3, 5
pacted transitions 108, 151
pacts 151, 166n2, 198
Palestine 201
participation 11, 15, 58; bottom-up 1, 5; citizen 8; electoral 87; formal politics 51–5; non-formalized 15; political 44–63, 92, 102, 108, 123, 142, 143, 182, 193
participatory democracy 48–9, 52
participatory social contract 197
partisanship 16
patron-client relations 100
patronage networks 15, 67, 107, 153
pensions 160
Perthes, V. 6
Philbrick Yadav, S. 171
pluralism 109, 123, 129
polarization 3, 9, 12, 16, 17
police 115, 140, 142; states 26, 48
policy 2, 7, 172; economic 16, 38; employment 137; foreign 6, 52; social 16
political action 129, 139
political activism 87
political actors 2, 4, 12–13
political bargaining: Yemen 150–69
Political Bureau of Cyrenaica 78
political capital 55
political change 44, 51

political contestation 3, 5
 political culture 109, 123, 144
 political decision-making 11, 24, 37, 102, 131, 132, 144
 political dynamics: and mobilized publics 173–6
 political education 57
 political elite 64, 93, 128, 186
 political institutions 198; Libya 87, 89; Tunisia 111; Yemen 179
 political Islam 12, 14
 political legitimacy 18n1
 political liberalization 110
 political mobilization 194
 political order 5, 10, 11, 23, 29
 political participation 44–63, 51–5, 92, 102, 108, 123, 142, 143, 182, 193
 political parties 9, 11, 139, 144, 193; Yemen 182–6
 political power 6, 7
 political process 9, 16, 144; Libya 87, 88, 92
 political resources 5, 13, 18n5, 107, 108
 political sphere 7, 86
 political violence 13, 17, 120; Egypt 2; Tunisia 2
 Politically Relevant Elite (PRE) 1, 5–7, 9, 10, 11, 17, 197, 198; alliances 14–15; definition 6; Egypt 25, 27, 31, 37, 38, 44; Libya 15, 65; and martyrs 141; and mobilized publics 172–3, 175, 194–5, 196, 201, 202; new arrivals 12; Tunisia 108, 112, 131, 132, 145; Yemen 12, 15, 150–5, 158, 160, 164, 165, 171, 172, 178, 179, 181; and youth movements 46, 50, 55–8, 59
 politics: consensus 119–22; contentious 18n2, 129, 137, 174; dictatorial 92; identity 9, 196, 199–200; and religion 14, 89; street 47–50, 59
 popular mobilization 17
 popular movements 2
 popular protest: Libya 86–106
 post-democratization 4
 poverty 179
 power: accumulation 64; balance 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 79; bargaining 10; distribution 6; economic 7; military 80; nominal positions 5; normative 7; political 6, 7; relations 10, 135; state 197; transfer 8
 power struggles 2, 13; Egypt 38; Libya 64, 65, 68, 69
 power-sharing 107, 108, 109, 151; Egypt 30; Yemen 12, 158
 principled revolutionary approach 54
 protests 182; criminalization 143; cyber 132; Egypt 23, 24, 25, 33, 36–7; Libya 69, 71, 74, 99; public 129; social 3; street 117, 123; tolerance of

175; Tunisia 129; violence 138, 141, 142, 154; Yemen 173, 174, 176, 177, 178, 181
 public sphere 9, 11, 16, 144
 publics *see* mobilized publics
 Qadhafi, M. 66, 67, 73, 95, 101, 114, 197, 198
 Qadhi, I. 180
 Qatar 152, 165
 radicalization 8
 regime collapse 65
 religion: and politics 14, 89
 repression 55, 114, 178; state 140
 resource mobilization theory 144, 172
 resources 6, 46, 80, 102, 130, 195; access 86–7, 97, 170; accumulation 65; cultural 138, 180; human 132, 134, 180; local elites 65; material 181; political 5, 13, 18n5, 107, 108; redistribution 95, 107, 170, 172, 176–80; socio-organizational 180
 revolutionaries 15–16, 45
 revolutionary actions 49
 revolutionary legitimacy 90, 130, 138, 140, 144, 180, 184
 revolutions: outlawing 143
 rights: citizenship 86; civil 133; demonstrations 48; human 49, 50, 110, 133; social 89; socio-economic 173; women 135, 136
 Roll, S. 23–43, 198
 Russia 201
 Sadat, A. 26
 Safi, A.-T. 77
 Safroui, O. 140
 Salafi groups 118, 120
 Salafi militias 162
 Salafism 16, 175
 Salafist parties 14
 Saleh, A.A. 150–9, 162, 163, 164, 165, 171, 174, 176, 177, 182, 197
 Sanaa 155, 161–4, 175; Change Square 173, 175, 177, 181, 182
 sanctions 2, 13, 72, 159
 Saudi Arabia 33, 34, 152, 163, 186
 Sayigh, Y. 31
 Schmitter, P.: and O'Donnell, G. 8, 44, 151, 166n2, 195
 secondary elite 6
 secularism: state-enforced 12

security 6; Egypt 37, 49; institutions 87; Libya 13; national 37; Tobruk 77
security forces 2, 15, 48, 107; Egypt 54; Libya 68, 70, 73; Tunisia 129, 140,
142; violence 142; Yemen 151, 155, 156
al-Selmi, A. 28–9
Selmi Principles (2011) 29, 39n11
Sfax 139
Shaaban, U. 75
Shahin, M. 32
Shanduli, M. 93–4
Sharaf, E. 27
shariah 120, 160
Sharjabi, H. 182, 183, 184
Shiba Movement 179, 181, 187n16
Sisi, A.F. 24, 30, 34, 35–6, 38, 50, 56, 58, 79, 198
sit-ins 139, 174, 175, 181
smuggling 76, 77
Sobhi, S. 30
social cleavages 197
social inequality 99
social justice 49, 52, 53, 107, 176
social marginalization 95–102
social media 16, 45, 50, 90, 91, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138, 141, 172, 181
social mobilization 5, 103
social movements 9, 10, 11, 200, 201
social networks 57, 185
social norms 89
social order 15
social policy 16
social protests 3
social responsibility 182
social rights 89
social services 55, 57
societies: strong 196–8
socio-economic rights 173
socio-organizational resources 180
solidarity 143, 196, 199
sovereignty: national 176
Soviet Union 193

state: authority 15, 129; and citizens 53; collapse 193, 198; control 2; elites 197; failure 1, 3, 45; Islamic 82; military 26; police 26, 48; power 197; in society 197; weak 196–8

state institutions 2, 15, 198, 199; Egypt 27, 31, 32; Islamists 91; Libya 67, 69, 86, 87, 92, 100; Tunisia 121; Yemen 13, 156, 178, 197

state repression 140; Egypt 33

state violence 145; Egypt 33

state–society relations 196, 198

stateness 196–7, 198

Stepan, A.: and Linz, J.J. 8

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) 194, 195

strategic groups 18n10

street mobilization 14, 135

street politics 47–50, 59

street protests: Tunisia 117, 123

strikes 174

students 52, 55, 57, 58, 137, 171

subsidies: fuel 163, 176, 179

Suez Canal 36, 57

Suleiman, O. 24, 25, 26, 29

surveillance 133

symbolic capital 81

Syria 193, 199

Tabib, R. 86–106, 199

Tamarod 17, 19n14, 33, 34, 39n21, 48, 55, 56, 58

Tansiqiyyat Huquq (Co-ordination Committee for Rights) 87, 95, 98, 99, 100–2, 103

Tantawi, M.H. 25, 27, 30, 38

Taureg: youth 98–101

taxation 53, 74

telecommunications 160

terror: war on 16, 162

terrorism 92, 119, 157, 158

tertiary elite 6

al-Thinni, A. 101

Tobruk 64, 66, 72, 73, 76–9, 80, 81–2

Tobruk Popular Social Leadership 77

torture 117, 141

trade unions 52, 54

Transfeld, M. 150–69, 197, 198, 199

transformation 1, 7, 46, 129, 130, 131, 195–6; actor-centred approach 3–5; comparative perspective 201–3; contested 2–3, 128–49; formal 13; objectives 2; turning points 11

transition 129, 202; pacted 108, 151; to transformation 192–6

transitional justice 15, 28, 49, 128, 129, 140–3, 184

transnational networks 50

transparency 15, 58, 123, 160, 185, 186

transport 129

tribalism 80, 81, 171

tribes 67; authority 92–4; elders 97; leaders 57, 95, 99, 100, 163, 177, 178; politicians 77; Yemen 157, 161–2, 162, 164, 165

Tripoli 69–72, 74–5, 77, 79, 83n28, 88–9, 91–2, 94, 96–7, 100–2

Tripp, C. 181

Troika of Ennahda 114–19

Tuareg 95, 96, 97, 98, 101

Tubu 95, 96, 97, 98, 101

Tuhami, F. 31, 36

Tunisia 107–27, 198, 199; civil society actors 128, 129, 132; civil society initiatives 120; civil society organizations 112, 135, 144; Committee for Political Reform 130; constitution 14, 17, 113, 114, 115, 116, 119, 120, 131, 134–5; Day of Anger 139; decision-making 140; democracy 108; democratization 193, 203; demonstrations 115, 131, 138; Dignity and Truth Commission 123; 18 October Collective 110; elections 107, 108, 109, 111–14, 117, 118, 119, 121, 122, 131, 140, 145–6; Ennahda 7, 14, 17, 107–19, 120–3, 131, 135, 136, 140, 143, 145; Errahil sit-in 118, 131; Ettakatol 115, 116; Free Patriotic Union (UPL) 122; General Labour Union (UGTT) 17, 128, 135, 137, 138, 139, 141, 145; Group of the 25 Lawyers 140; HIROR 109, 111–12, 113, 116, 123, 130, 134, 138, 140; Islamist-secular polarization 114–19; Islamists 108; Martyr's Day 138; mobilized publics 128–49; National Constituent Assembly (ANC) 108, 113, 114, 116, 117, 118, 131, 134, 138, 139, 141; National Council for the Protection of the Revolution (CNPR) 111, 130; National Salvation Front (NSF) 117; networks of privilege 15; Nidaa Tounes 7, 12, 14, 17, 107–10, 114, 116–23, 131, 135, 136, 140, 143, 145; personal status law 133; police 140; political culture 109, 123; political institutions 111; Political Reform Committee 111; political violence 2; Politically Relevant Elite 108, 112, 131, 132, 145; Popular Front 118, 139; post-revolutionary integration 110–14; Quartet 131, 139; Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD) 107, 110, 111, 112, 115, 121, 122; Salafi associations 120; security forces 129, 140, 142; Shura Council 120; state institutions 121; street protests 117, 123; Troika government 131, 135; Truth and Dignity Commission 141–2; Tunisian Workers Party 139; Union for Tunisia (UFT) 116, 117, 122; Union of Unemployed Graduates (UDC) 129, 136–40, 144, 145; urban–rural divide 132; Worker's Communist Party 139, 144; youth 201

Tunisia General Union (UGTT) 110, 111–12, 116, 117, 118

Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) 129, 133–6, 144, 145, 200

Tunisian Chemical Group 139

Ubari 87, 95, 96, 97, 98, 102

unemployed graduates 136–40, 171

unemployment 129, 145; youth 87, 139

United Arab Emirates (UAE) 33, 34, 157

United Nations (UN) 152; Security Council 72, 150, 157, 185

United States of America (USA) 156, 186

uprisings 17–18

Van Hamme, G.: Ben Rebah, M. and Gana, A. 146

violence 9, 10, 48, 143, 178, 179, 181; gender 133, 134–5; Libya 88, 90; police 142; political 2, 13, 17, 120; protests 138, 141, 142, 147n14, 154; security forces 142; state 33, 145; state property 142; Yemen 150–69

Vom Bruck, G.: Wiacek, B. and Alwazir, A. 171

Wadi al-Hayat 96–7, 101

war: civil 1, 2, 3, 13, 65, 67, 72, 152, 198

War on Terror 16, 162

Wasfi, A. 35–6

Way, L. 193

wealth 49, 64

Wendy, H. 93

Wiacek, B.: Alwazir, A. and Vom Bruck, G. 171

Wiktorowicz, Q. 8

Wimmen, H.: and Asseburg, M. 1–22, 172

women: bargaining 133–6; legal status 16, 136; rights 135, 136; Yemen 159–60

The Word is Ours 52, 53

World Bank 163

Yemen 193, 195, 197, 198, 199, 200; Ahmar family 152–3, 154, 155, 157–60, 162–5; Al-Watan (Homeland) 172, 182–6, 200; Ansarullah 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 152, 154, 156, 159, 160–6, 173–6, 179, 180, 185, 186; Central Security Forces (CSF) 157; civil society 166; co-operation 154–5; constitution 151, 154, 158, 160, 174; Coordination Council for Yemeni Revolutionary Youth (CCYRC) 173, 177; corruption 170, 171, 172, 174, 176, 177; elections 151, 154, 201; elite conflict 152–5; emerging political order 164–6; employment 170, 172; First Armoured Division (FAD) 153, 155, 162, 164; General People's Congress (GPC) 151, 153, 154, 155, 157, 159, 161, 174, 179, 183; government institutions 164; Hiraq movement 150, 151–2, 159, 161, 164, 165; Houthi conflict 162; Independent Youth 158–9, 166, 170, 171; Islah 14, 153, 154, 156, 157, 160, 161, 162, 163, 165, 175, 179; Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) 151, 154, 155, 157, 158, 171, 179, 183; military 151, 152, 155–8, 162, 164, 165;

mobilized publics 156, 158–9, 160, 165, 170–91; Muslim Brotherhood 162; Nation for All 173–4; National Democratic Institute 183; National Dialogue Conference (NDC) 16, 150, 151, 152, 155, 158–61, 173, 174–5, 178, 180, 183, 184; oil 176; Peace and National Partnership Agreement (2014) 165–6, 176, 179, 186; political bargaining 150–69; political institutions 179; political parties 182–6; Politically Relevant Elite 12, 15, 150–5, 158, 160, 164, 165, 171, 172, 178, 179, 181; power-sharing 12, 158; protests 173, 174, 176, 177, 178, 181; resource redistribution 170, 172, 176–80; Saleh family 152–3, 154, 156, 157, 165; security sector 151, 155, 156; state institutions 13, 156, 178, 197; students 171; terrorism 157, 158; tribal leaders 163, 177, 178; tribes 157, 161–2, 162, 164, 165; unemployed graduates 171; uprising (2011) 152–5; violent conflict 150–69; women 159–60; youth 154, 170–91, *see also* Sanaa

Yemen Economic Corporation (YECO) 152

Yemen Socialist Party (YSP) 153, 154

youth 56, 154; activism 45; Arab 45, 171; coalitions 173; Egypt 34, 44–63; habitus 46; Libya 103; marginalization 98; metaphorical social 171; and Politically Relevant Elite 46, 50, 55–8, 59; Taureg 98–101; Tunisia 201; unemployment 87, 139; Yemen 170–91

Zaidism 162, 167n17

zamil 180

Zaydi, A. 177, 180

Zaydi, H. 178

Zemni, S. 130

Zintan 68, 69, 71, 72, 77, 88, 89, 92, 93, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 103n5