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Revolution against Revolution, the Street against the People, and Counter–Revolution

Azmi Bishara | September 2013

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I

Egypt's January 25 protests did not start as a revolution but as an angry popular movement against the practices of the Egyptian security agencies. These are the same masses that are claimed to have joined a new revolution: the June 30 Revolution. The protests of January 25, 2011 broke out in response to the momentum created by the Tunisian revolution, but they were also the result of an accumulation of political experience that was contextual to Egypt. The "Egyptian Mohammed Bouazizi" was Khalid Saeed, a young activist who died under torture and whose murder was followed by a statement from the Police and the Interior Ministry—very similar to statements that we are seeing these days—claiming that Khalid Saeed died after having swallowed a cigarette containing drugs. Subsequently, National Police Day was chosen as the date for Egypt's "Day of Rage".

The January 25 demonstrations were a protest against the practices of the Egyptian police and the security services, practices that at the very least resulted in beatings, torture, and arbitrary arrests, and at times ended in murder. Typically, these would be justified and covered-up through a web of lies, for murder and lies are concomitant to the culture of the security agencies that serve despotic regimes. What we are witnessing today are the very same security agencies at work, defiantly unchanged in their behavior, policies, practices, and ploys. This has been proven by these agencies' behaviors on several occasions throughout the transitional period, crowned by the horrific massacre that accompanied the breaking-up of the Rabia al-Adawiya sit-in on August 14, and the practices that followed the massacre.¹

¹ On the morning of Wednesday, August 14, the Egyptian security forces moved to break up the mass sit-ins held by Morsi supporters, in the squares of Rabia al-Adawiya and al-Nahda. According to official

It would be logical to speculate that since the security agencies did not change, and since the first popular movement on January 25 was directed against them, their persistence in desisting reform constitutes an undermining of one of the most important aims of the revolution. Furthermore, if these security agencies were to act, their actions would likely be against the revolution's objectives. The difference between January 25 and today, however, is that the security agencies cannot, in theory, act without mobilizing and rallying the street because the January 25 Revolution has brought about a new entity called "the people's legitimacy".

From the moment popular legitimacy began to translate into elected representative institutions, the opposition forces turned "the people's legitimacy" into "the street's legitimacy". Egypt's official agencies—unchanged and resistant to reform—needed this "street legitimacy" to move against elected authorities that represent the constitutional "people's legitimacy". It is a historical irony that repression devoid of this form of legitimacy tends to be less dangerous than the repression that garbs itself in it. The

government sources, the number of victims reached 740 dead, including 43 police officers. Muslim Brotherhood sources in the field hospital, however, spoke of more than 2,200 dead and thousands of injured. On August 17, the Council of Ministers issued a decision ordering the Ministry of Health not to provide any information or press statements regarding the numbers of the dead and injured in the events, and that only the Council of Ministers should make such statements.

See: "Minister of Health: The Council of Ministers is charged to issue statements regarding the numbers of the dead and injured during the ongoing events," *Aswat Masriya*, August 17, 2013, <http://aswatmasriya.com/news/view.aspx?id=78e82520-a3c7-4540-af0a-3a0070b4c906>.

The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) published a list containing the names of 1,063 individuals, most of whom were civilians, killed throughout Egypt on the day the sit-in was broken up. By August 19, the number had reached 1,360 dead, and the center indicated that it is likely to increase. The center also published the names of more than 1,734 citizens who have been arrested by the Egyptian security forces under charges of murder, attempted murder, joining an armed gang, assault against security officers, and possession of firearms. Given that the entire event took place in a few hours of brutal repression, the numbers of the dead and injured are a veritable precedent, even by Arab standards. For the current numbers of dead, injured, and detained, see the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights' website: <http://ecesr.com.en>.

former is an authoritarian repression, but the latter risks turning into a fascistic form of repression that mobilizes the street in an attempt to place all segments of society in service of the same goal. It does not leave people to their own devices; instead, it attempts to change their views through familiar methods of propaganda, including incitement and the demonization of opponents, methods which are based on the industry of lies, rumors, and defamation. It is also common to provoke patriotic sentiments against "foreign hands" and "conspiracies" in order to present detractors as traitors.

Multiple factors coalesced in the quest to mobilize the "street's legitimacy," such as the Muslim Brotherhood's monopolization of rule, even though they lacked experience in governance, and the mobilization of all segments of the counter-revolution across the country, with the aim of supporting the state apparatus and the remnants of the Mubarak regime in toppling the entire democratic experiment, not only that of the Muslim Brotherhood. Many in the political arena worked to prepare the street for this role, some acted out because they were negatively affected by the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, while others acted out of malice, such as those who were harmed by the January 25 Revolution. These two groups met and created the "street legitimacy" needed by the Egyptian security and its agencies, headed by the army, to carry out the coup. Private media and funding from Gulf countries were fully mobilized in order to create an intense media campaign, the sole aim of which was to spread angst and pessimism, an indispensable tool for such an endeavor. Parties that oppose the Muslim Brotherhood broke the ban against political dealings with the remnants of the Mubarak regime, and allied with them against the Brotherhood because "since today, there are no more *fulul* (remnants)" (i.e., since the Muslim Brotherhood has become the principal enemy).

This political rift has been evident since the referendum on the first constitutional amendments on March 19, 2011, and the Brotherhood's insistence to immediately turn

the revolution into the rule of the largest political party, without paying heed to the many Egyptians who feared their conceited religious discourse,² or making any serious attempt to dissipate these fears beyond public relations' efforts.

At first, the January 25 Revolution included thousands of mature, brave young people—two qualities that rarely come together in political activism. Eventually, the revolution stretched to include millions of protesters in the majority of Egypt's governorates; however, nobody has suggested that the number of protesters was the decisive factor in the revolution. There is no doubt that a "critical mass" of citizens is one of the factors needed for a revolution to be considered popular, and that necessary critical mass was available; counting heads, however, was not a crucial issue. The first important characteristic defining the January 25 Revolution was the fact that it united all segments of Egyptian society, with the exception of the regime's official party and a few opportunistic marginal parties and personalities that lived on the fringes of the National Party, who acted within the margins allowed by the despotic and corrupt state. The second characteristic was that the broad acts of protests were worthy of a revolution because they shifted their objective to changing the regime of rule with unprecedented skill and clarity in the history of revolutions, with the exception of the last days of the Tunisian revolution's phrase: "The people want the overthrow of the regime." Lastly, the entire state apparatus stood against the revolution, worked against it, and even committed murder against its proponents. On the other hand, following a period of hesitation, the Egyptian Army sided with the revolution. Initially, it left its bases and went on to besiege Tahrir Square, pointing the barrels of its tanks toward the protesters under the president's orders, but abstained from firing on protesters for a number of

² The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists insisted on presenting the vote of the Egyptian people in favor of the constitutional amendments as a victory for religion. Mobilization on the base level and centered on the second constitutional article, which is related to the religion of the state, was not included in the amendments despite the fact that the article in question.

reasons, mainly because of its readiness to sacrifice the ruling family if need be in the hope of at least salvaging the regime, and its respect for the US administration's advice against the use of deadly force on protesters. While it is true the army turned the barrels of its guns away from the Square, it still allowed others time to attempt to repress the revolution, including the so-called "Battle of the Camel". When the police and the intelligence agencies were repressing and deploying snipers against protesters, and even torturing some of the participants in the dark corners around the square, and when the goons of the former regime, known as *baltajiya* (thugs), were attacking young men and women who were demonstrating, the army sat idly by and awaited the outcome.

When set against the above, there is no doubt that the June 30 movement was a broad protest movement that was calling for early elections and the stepping-down of the elected president under the pretext that millions of signatures were collected in support of that demand. This movement, however, was not directed against the existing regime, nor against the apparatus of the state. In fact, it witnessed the participation of the majority of the state apparatus in the organization, mobilization, and collection of signatures against the elected president. There is little doubt that the Egyptian Army's statements stressing the protection of the protesters were, in fact, a call to demonstrate;³ all of this took place in a political system where the January 25 Revolution had made it possible to change the president and the parliament through elections.

Essential facts have been absent from the debate over the description of the events that took place between June 30 and July 3, 2013, which are grouped together as a

³ On June 23, the Egyptian Army issued a statement giving "all political forces" one week to agree and resolve the crisis. Moreover, hours after the start of the protests on June 30, the army issued a 48-hour warning to "all parties" to respond to the demands of the protest movement.

single event despite the will of many participants in the June 30 movement who do not condone what took place on July 3. Some of them believe that June 30 saw the emergence of a popular movement, while the military coup took place on July 3. At any rate, a futile debate has been raging regarding these two events: do they constitute a revolution or a coup? This debate is futile because its purpose is not to resolve an academic, conceptual, and terminological problem by reaching an agreed-upon conclusion; instead, those speaking of a revolution are, in fact, declaring their position in support of the two events, while those dubbing them a coup tend to oppose them. This is not a disagreement that can be resolved through a consensus on the meaning of the term, but through an agreement over the political position. In this case, the terms used matter little in furthering or blocking agreement.

At this point, it would be useful to examine whether or not this was a coup from an angle that people do not feel the need to conceal their stances vis-à-vis events by changing the terms they use when referring to them since, after all, they are not the ones who carried out these events. From an Israeli perspective, for instance, those who supported deposing the Egyptian president and persecuting the Muslim Brotherhood, use the term "coup," and are supportive of it since "military coup" does not carry a value judgment in their eyes. They refer to it as a "coup" because, from their perspective, it is a coup, and they laud it because it puts a stop to the Islamist and democratic tides. They argue that these developments are beneficial for Israel, regardless of the actors' intentions, and a consensus on this has been reached, supported by Israeli politicians who are pressuring the West to prevent a siege on the new regime.

It is worth mentioning here that it is still common with Arab disputes to confuse Israel's benefiting from an act with accusing the actor of being an agent for Israel, with some speaking of the enemies' mother's Jewishness, or that the enemy allegedly visited Israel. One of the most difficult hurdles facing the victims of despotism is the fact that

their reactionary discourse of defamation and exclusion is, itself, the product of despotism.

Revolution and coup are not academic concepts that have explanatory models for such complex phenomena, as concepts are supposed to in the social sciences. Instead, they are simple terms. In Arabic, *mustalah* (term) comes from *istilah* (agreement or consent), indicating a word that has been agreed-upon to name phenomena and objects. This public debate on terminology in Egypt was lacking all of the elements that are "agreed-upon" regarding the terms "revolution" and "coup". The term "coup" refers to an overthrow of the authority from within the regime; in other words, certain regime elements turning against others in the same regime with the use of unconstitutional means. The crucial factor here is that one of the organs, or constituents, of the regime is turning against the ruler. Most often, the purpose of a coup is to reach power, not to change the regime. It is also natural for the coup to be military in nature since the party that is capable of overthrowing the authority from within the regime is the army or, at least, the security services. Revolution, on the other hand, is usually a broad popular movement emanating from outside the regime that seeks to change the regime of rule. Some coups were termed "revolutions," as with the officers' coup in Egypt in 1952, because the new rulers changed the regime with popular backing. The officers in this case had exerted much effort to garner a popular cover after abolishing political parties, disbanding the parliament, and deposing the head of the Revolutionary Command Council, Brigadier Mohammad Naguib. It was a real irony at the time that demonstrators shouted against "liberties" and called for the fall of political parties.

The discussion here is not about concepts, but about terms. After the notorious Pinochet-led military coup in Chile against the elected regime of Allende, and other similar experiences in the Third World, laws in some Western countries defined a "coup" as a military takeover of an elected government. These laws were designed to prevent governments from offering aid in support of such political acts. With this definition, and

after the wave of democratic transition, the term began to elicit negative connotations. Even the African Union has now established rules to prevent it from recognizing governments that are the result of coups. Some, who still live with the mentality of the 1950s, remain unaware of the extremely negative associations that are triggered by the notion of a military coup against an elected regime, especially in countries that went through similar experiences.

Among the governments that have coined a legal definition for a military coup and prohibit the extension of help to such attempts is the US government, which was implicated in the past in the organization of coups in different countries, especially in Latin America, as with the case in Chile. The new rulers in Egypt are thus attempting to convince the US government that what has taken place in Egypt was not a coup, but a revolution, with June 30 being the proof. If what went on in Egypt was a military coup against an elected government, which it was, the US government could not, legally speaking, provide the new government with aid. This analysis does not exclude the possibility that the American security agencies knew of the coup that accompanied the popular movement before it happened. Had the coup succeeded without a trace, there would have been no political problems because it would not have garnered much of the public's attention. However, the policy of unbounded repression and the wave of political McCarthyism that followed in Egypt, in addition to the unchanged brutal practices of the Egyptian security organs—which did not refrain from persecuting even foreign journalists—were sufficient to cause deep repercussions and draw public attention.

Most importantly, the Egyptian political discourse needed the word "revolution," not only to sway public opinion, but also to convince the participants in the June 30 protests that what the officers did on July 3 was an embrace of the revolution—even if a revolution was not declared by the protesters, and the sole objective of their demonstrations was to call for early elections. It makes sense, in retrospect, for the

military to describe the events from June 30 to July 3, 2013 as a single revolution, rather than speak of a legitimate popular movement carrying political demands that was exploited as a popular cover for a military coup in a state where failed governors can be changed through elections. Thus, the new rulers, politicians, journalists, and intellectuals retrospectively made June 30 into a revolution, despite the fact that many of the participants took to the streets on June 30 to demand early elections, not to obtain a military overthrow of the regime. These people are not responsible for the collusion of other protesters who were not only well aware of the security and military plot, but communicating with these agencies during the collection of signatures campaign.

II

With each of the episodes during the Egyptian revolution, there are opposites in each event, with each extreme presenting itself through two aspects. Mubarak's regime had the face of extreme repression and a political culture of defamation and containment, a culture that included intellectuals who theorized for outright repression and others who embellished the regime, such as Jamal Mubarak's Policy Committee. Among these intellectuals, some became part of the regime's inner clique, while others, who did not gain favor, began to be viewed as "liberals" because they turned critical and against the bequeathing of rule. In great contrast to the political decadence of the late Mubarak era, between January 25 and February 11, 2011, Tahrir Square offered a glowing portrait of Egyptian society. In contrast to this glowing portrait, however, emerged the society's riff-raff and the *baltajiya*. In addition to this dazzling and organized assault against the fortresses of the Mubarak regime in that legendary fortnight came the disorganized withdrawal of protestors from the public squares and the aimless

dispersion of the revolutionaries after Mubarak stepped down. Even though it is true that an elected civilian president, Morsi, reached power for the first time in Egyptian history, no researcher can ignore one glaring fact: he did not actually rule. Furthermore, while five transparent electoral contests have taken place in less than two years, the resulting constitution was not fully "civic," and the Muslim Brotherhood paid no heed to the other's insistence that the constitution should be drafted amid a national consensus. Moreover, a number of the elected parliament were willing to turn against the elections that brought them into position. In turn, the events that culminated in the military coup of July 3 also led to the popular marches of June 30.

No matter how much the parties involved exaggerated the numbers of demonstrators, propagating fantastical figures in the tens of millions through a media discourse intended to plant these figures in the citizens' minds, thereby making them outweigh the democratic majority of the ballots, even though the comparison between the two is not numerical; regardless, these remain immense and massive demonstrations that included the participation of millions. Even if the number of the protesters did not exceed three or four million, it remains a precedent of the sort that Egypt continues to register time after time in the world's history of revolutions. Some have attempted to point out that elements such as the security services and the media prepared and choreographed the June 30 demonstrations, which is correct. Nevertheless, a very large number of demonstrators prompted by just and legitimate motives took to the streets. It is important to indicate that the majority of the private media outlets in Egypt are either owned by businessmen who are financed by the corrupt institution of the Mubarak regime or by Gulf governments (through private companies and businesses) that have opposed all of the Arab revolutions (with the exception of Syria, which they endorsed for the wrong reasons).

At any rate, those who took to the streets were either people who stood to lose from the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood or citizens who believed that they were continuing

on the revolution's path. Without these, the June 30 movement could not have produced what the military and its propagandists later termed "the legitimacy of the street". Without them, the remnants of the former regime could not have regained their legitimacy, even if those who voted for Ahmad Shafiq, the pro-Mubarak candidate in the presidential elections, took to the streets in the millions, which they did on June 30.

Morsi did not possess the legitimacy of a majority support in Egypt on June 30 or in the preceding weeks. However, rather than unseating Morsi through elections, a military coup took place that intended to, firstly, suspend the constitution and implement the rule of force instead of the rule of constitutional and popular legitimacy. The question no longer became one of legitimacy; instead, there was a relapse to the old question of force, which is as ancient as politics. Based on this, the discussion that has been taking place over the details since that day has become futile. Power has become all that matters. The coup supporters did not care what means were used, whether the trampling of human rights or the denial of murders. The current political logic that has suspended the constitution, along with the values and accomplishments of the January 25 Revolution, is a logic that only cares for the outcome, regardless of how much repression, murder, or even extermination it requires, without paying heed to what others will think regarding these violations of human and citizen rights. The law no longer protects those with differing opinions; instead, the judicial authority supposedly protecting those with different stances stabbed them in the back through the manufacturing of criminal charges as a punishment for political difference. The judiciary also began to protect the mobs that assaulted dissidents, instead of shielding them from harm.

We are faced with a state in which the values of democratic culture and religious and ideological fundamentalisms are struggling against each other, as are the culture of submission and that of human dignity, and the culture of liberties and that of repression. Furthermore, we are faced with a state where a strong societal agency that

is able lead to democratic transition has not yet crystallized, a state whose main pillar remains the army. As for political parties in Egypt, the main political currents do not carry a democratic culture, meaning that the monopolization of rule by any of them would not bode well for democracy. At the same time, these factions cannot agree on a pluralistic formula in which each party balances the other and limits its power, thus substituting democratic culture—itsself a guarantee of self-control—with a system of mutual control and supervision, not exclusion. Finally, we are faced with a country whose national army has not yet accepted its role as a guardian of democracy, and is still intent on dictating its will on the system of rule in the country—if it does not govern it directly. Egypt faces a political society with weak parties, with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood; a political society that lacks a liberal culture or a deep democratic one leads to the unwarranted conflation of liberalism with secularism as a substitute for democratic thought. Every secular is now called a “liberal,” even if they are a fascist or a neo-liberal who would not refrain from sacrificing the values of liberties and democracy.

Devoid of an established representative organization, after the scattering of the revolutionaries, the opposition forces failed to understand, in the post-January 25 government, that the process determining the shape of the regime must take place with the participation of all political forces. This process, a task that requires a national unity that imposes itself on the state apparatus, should have occurred through consultations with the revolutionaries, not with the old regime. The parties were incapable of breaking the state’s apparatus—arguably because they did not desire to do so—and were unwilling or unable to uproot the elements of the National Party from the state apparatus. It was, therefore, crucial to reach a national settlement regarding the government, including the army, ensuring that the state apparatus respects the principles of the new government. For this to happen, it would have been necessary to agree on these principles, impose them in the context of national unity, and ensure that elections will not take place prior to a consensus over these principles. The national

unity government would have been able to implement many of the demands of the revolution, beside elections, including: respecting citizen's rights, changing the practices of the security apparatuses through a radical reform of these organs, combating corruption, and reforming the judiciary. These are urgent tasks that may come before electoral competition, and are impossible to achieve in the absence of an atmosphere of national unity of the forces of change. These vital objectives cannot be reached in an atmosphere of unbounded electoral competition in which parties lack a common platform that would allow them to engage in joint national tasks; this common platform is supposed to be the agreed-upon principles of the new government. By contrast, the way the events unfolded—electoral competition among the opposition rather than the dismantling of the former regime—became the primary battle. This state of affairs has made it possible and legitimate for each opposition political party in Egypt to strike an alliance with the remnants and agencies of the former regime against the other, and in this case against Muslim Brotherhood.

Thus, since the end of the January 25 Revolution, following its disorganized disintegration after the abdication of Mubarak, the transitional period was characterized by the ability of the state apparatus and the remnants of the former regime to increase their margin of maneuver. This was achieved following the dispersion of the revolutionaries and the divisions among the old political parties that had appointed themselves as the inheritors of the revolution. The revolution became reduced to an appellation: the "revolution's youth". These youth were being contained in certain instances, excluded in others, and were alone left with the task of returning to the public squares to protest in favor of trying the former president, against the persistence of the military rule, and in many instances in defense of one opposition agenda and against another.

When the Muslim Brotherhood acceded to power with an electoral majority, it hastened to behave like any ruling coalition that makes decisions and governs alone, as if it were

in a firmly established democracy. In response to its critics, the ruling party would reiterate, on a daily basis, that it is the opposition's right to oppose, and it is their right to rule. The new ruling party did not in any way understand the importance of partnership in periods of transition, something it sorely needed in the face of the old state apparatus. The opposition, on the other hand, acted as an opposition, not as a partner, in the process of democratic transition. In the end, guaranteeing the failure of its political opponents became its sole mission; helping ensure the success of the democratic experiment, however, was not considered one of its missions. This quickly led to the legitimizing of an alliance with the old regime and its cronies, and the revolution quickly turned on its head—the success of an opposition party became the bounty of the old regime; they became hostages of the old state apparatus which was the main opponent of the elected president, and they were ready to collaborate with it to overthrow him.

III

The January 25 Revolution did not change the regime in place; it only overthrew the ruling family along with Mubarak and his plans for bequeathing rule to his son. The revolutionary atmosphere created by the popular movement, the international consensus over it, and the army's refusal to obey the president's orders made this possible. During this process, a wave of value-laden, rationality, and awareness of justice and freedom was unleashed among many of the revolution's youth, who, it transpired, could not be easily corrupted through the propaganda industry. Once the protests withered in February 2011, it became clear that the security apparatus remained unchanged, as did the army, which held the very same leadership, and the business sector. Moreover, the judiciary remained the same institution that existed

under Mubarak; this was not even the judiciary that rebelled against Mubarak following the 2005 elections, but the loyalist judges who were appointed by Mubarak in place of those who protested against him. The judiciary that remained in place after the January 25 Revolution was the judiciary of Mubarak, though it shielded itself with the reputation of those brave judges who took a stand against electoral fraud and the “not guilty” verdicts that were handed out to corrupt officials. The “Mubarak judiciary” has turned its back on these very judges while exploiting their deeds to cleanse its image with the use of empty clichés like “the venerable Egyptian judiciary” or “the proud judiciary of Egypt”.

For days after the revolution, it seemed that Mubarak’s state media was going to be excluded from the scene. Media outlets spoke of anguish and lamentations amid the ranks of the pro-Mubarak media; however, the revolution quickly fell victim to its premature withdrawal from the street, and fell prisoner to its discourse calling for the independence of the judiciary and the freedom of the press, as if “freedom of the press” is a reference to the freedom of the press of Mubarak’s regime, and the “independence of the judiciary” is a slogan meant to prevent the combating of corruption within the judiciary, despite the fact that the corruption of the judiciary is the most dangerous threat to its independence. Thus, in the absence of organized political forces that are keen to preserve the values of the revolution, the remnants of the Mubarak regime shielded themselves from the revolution by using the very slogans of the revolution and appealing to the sympathy of its inexperienced youth—who rushed in all directions to answer invitations to meet with this officer or that general, a talk show host on one of the TVs owned by the Mubarak “remnants,” or one of the numerous Western politicians who regularly visited Egypt.

Devoid of an organized revolution followed by a revolutionary organization capable of preserving its gains and pursuing its goals, many of the revolution’s supporters were contained, and the fates of its young leaders varied between those who took a radical

stance, those who adapted to the wretchedness of reality with an equally wretched discourse, those who grew desperate, those who promptly and actively attempted to preserve the values of the revolution within their parties, and those who persevered with the struggle by establishing active committees and organizations. Generally speaking, these young Egyptian leaders cannot be blamed for these choices; this is a young generation that met in order to protest, and created a revolution with courage and awareness. A few weeks spent together in Egypt's public squares was not sufficient for establishing trust on the intellectual level or unity on the organizational level, all key ingredients in establishing a revolutionary organization that can reach power or, at least, impose the values of the revolution, which they had in common, on the political parties.

After the disintegration of the revolutionary forces, the word "people" no longer referred to the revolutionaries who confronted the regime with political awareness and faced bullets with their bare chests; the "people" became those who were liberated by the revolution and permitted to politically participate through their own political awareness, not that of the revolutionaries. "The people" now refers to those who were exposed to the media influences both prior to the revolution and after its victory, and who temporarily critiqued its discourse before the dominant media assimilated the same discourse, distorting it for their own ends. Even the enemies of the revolution became its agents and spokespeople in order to garner enough legitimacy to resist and undermine the results of the revolution.

The January 25 Revolution ended amid a revolutionary atmosphere and promises of freedom, welfare, and social justice that were akin to promises of eternal salvation. However, the revolution also ended with Egypt being ruled by the same state apparatus, a military council that governed the country during its transitional phase,

and political parties that did not create the revolution. In fact, some of these parties had publicly opposed the revolution,⁴ viewing dialogue with Omar Suleiman during the revolution as an “achievement,” deeming it a dialogue with “a clean figure” that is fit to inherit Mubarak’s position.⁵ The Muslim Brotherhood was among the parties that were hesitant to participate, while its youth—along with other non-affiliated young people and a few of the other parties’ youth—made the revolution with courage, wisdom, and organizational skill. However, these Brotherhood youth took to the streets on their own.

⁴ The head of the Tajammu Party, Rifaat al-Saeed, issued a statement on January 25 refusing to participate in the protests because the date was “unsuitable for protest” since it was the National Police Day. In a previous statement, al-Saeed called for congratulating the police on their national day. For more information on this, see: Heba Afifi, “Activists hope 25 January protest will be start of ‘something big’” *Egypt Independent*, January 24, 2011, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/activists-hope-25-january-protest-will-be-start-something-big>.

Similarly, the vice-president of the Nasserist Party, Sameh Ashur, issued a statement boycotting the protests, declaring that “the party must take the initiative in such instances of protest, and not march behind calls for protest whose real organizers are not known.” For more information, see: “The Interior Ministry prepares with 20 Central Security vehicles and more than 3,000 soldiers and 1,000 policemen,” *al-Jarida*, January 25, 2011, <http://www.algareda.com/2011/01>.

⁵ The Wafd and Tajammu parties and the Muslim Brotherhood decided to participate in the dialogue sessions with the Egyptian vice-president Omar Suleiman on February 2, 2011, before withdrawing later under the weight of public pressure, even though the only one of these forces that had forcefully participated in the revolution was the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood leader, who later became vice-president of the Justice and Development Party, Mohammad al-Katatni, appeared on the Egyptian al-Mihwar channel (on February 4) expressing his satisfaction with the proceedings of the dialogue with Omar Suleiman. Al-Katatni noted: “if the Egyptian people were extended some of its rights, it will be patient,” though he acknowledged the possibility that some “interested parties” in Tahrir Square could be attempting to sabotage dialogue. He expressed joy at being called by the government-run Nile TV to issue media statements without referring to the Muslim Brotherhood as a banned organization, and said that he was happy to receive calls from government newspapers like *al-Akhbar* and *al-Ahram*, because these publications used to boycott the Muslim Brotherhood, calling it “the banned organization”. Al-Katatni viewed those developments as an achievement, see the following link: YouTube Video, “An Interview with Al-Katatni,” [in Arabic] posted by “ibn masr,” 1:01, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1S-9JLWD1o>.

The Brotherhood itself joined later with all its forces and capacities, and played a crucial role.

The January 25 Revolution ended with high expectations and demonstrations sprouting everywhere. Protests became a “fashion” and an act that did not carry a risk or a cost; every person with a demand became a protester. New parties emerged, the vast majority of which were part and parcel of the old regime. It is true that most of those parties were referred to as “opposition parties,” but they had, in fact, coexisted with the regime, and the regime had coexisted with them. The relationship between the Mubarak regime and these parties was one of love and hate. Egyptian security opened the way for political parties to be active up to a certain limit, with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood, who had a long-running animosity with the regime. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, was never a revolutionary party, and hoped that the Mubarak regime would end its enmity toward them, enabling them to conduct their political and religious activities and granting them acknowledgment and legitimacy. Rather than being a revolutionary organization, the Brotherhood is a movement of preaching and reformation in society and in politics. This is all well-known; it is also known that, for years, the Muslim Brotherhood has been preparing society and themselves for an awaited “Islamic rule”. Regardless of the implications behind such a broad term, it is a fact that the Muslim Brotherhood was not seeking to reach power by threatening the political and social system, and they did not—unlike other, more radical, Islamist factions—accuse the Muslim ruler of infidelity or adultery.

IV

One other aspect relating to the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood and its organizational culture has not been given its fair share of attention and study. The

Brotherhood is one of the organizations born during the 1920s, a period when totalitarian parties emerged. The structure of the Brotherhood resembles that of a communist party: it is a centralist, totalitarian organization that expects its members to devote themselves fully to the party. The Brotherhood also has an approach to political and worldly matters that overlaps with its vision on how to serve religion. It is not merely a space for political activism and expressing political views; it is also the social environment of its members, their cultural hub, their intellectual compass, and their political party. With the Muslim Brotherhood moving from one "ordeal" to the next, the organization turned into something akin to a religious sect, particularly in terms of the political culture and the sense of being persecuted.

A party's influence is measured not only by the size of its membership, but also the societal sectors that support it; there is no doubt that populist parties require a large mass of active members, but their purpose is to constitute a vanguard for a larger popular movement, one that is much broader than the party itself. This is why members of a political party are usually active in their communities and the institutions of their communities, such as unions and syndicates, and do not constitute a self-enclosed society that is separate from the wider national society because that would turn them from a political party into a cult. The Brotherhood was closed to outsiders in terms of values and organization, but it was open when it came to mass activism. This duality existed for a long time prior to January 25. The Brotherhood is an activist party whose members are active in syndicates and charity work, an organization that surrounds itself with a network of social support for the poorer sections of society; in fact, they have excelled in this regard, though at the heart of these extensive networks lies an iron-clad internal organization that is not open or transparent to the people, trusting only its members. In time, the organization has calcified and become a deep-seated social phenomenon that is inherited within the family, with its own symbols and tradition and

stories transmitted from one generation to the next, just as people are assimilated into sectarian affiliations.⁶

In the last generation, the Brotherhood's youth broke with the traditional organization, engaging in political actions that were almost "adventurous," joining hands with other youth from all sides of the Egyptian political spectrum, linking their own fate to theirs. The organization was not pleased with these acts, but they let their youth participate at their own risk and peril. The youth's strategy achieved glowing results on January 25 and the protests that followed, and the organization began to heap praise upon them. However, once their role in the protests came to an end, they returned to their party status as inexperienced young people who are unworthy of leadership. Instead of the organization following in the footsteps of its youth, it marginalized them. Following February 11 and the resignation of Mubarak, the youth's work came to an end, paving the way for the phase of the councils of the "adults". At that point, the Brotherhood joined the political parties that wished to inherit the January 25 Revolution. There is no doubt that among all the parties that were on the scene prior to the revolution—some of which opposed the revolution, or offered a symbolic, invisible participation—the Brotherhood was the group that participated the most, and the organization that was most qualified to win any elections due to the its legacy of struggle, organizational capacity, and large popular base of support. Therefore, the Brotherhood's leaders' main concern was to determine a date for elections. When they disagreed with the military, and when they struck an understanding with the military, they had in their mind a

⁶ The stories written by Zainab al-Ghazali and Jabir Abd al-Razik about the persecution and massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood members in Abdel-Nasser's prisons became famous among the members of the Brotherhood, as with the memoirs of Abbas al-Sisi and others, which recount the history of the group and its main figures. These texts are still widely read within families belonging to the Brotherhood as a "tradition" that is proper to the Brotherhood. A website devoted to the history of the group and its leaders was created along the model of Wikipedia—<http://www.ikhwanwiki.com>.

single objective: holding elections so that the representatives of the popular majority could rule instead of the military and the majority parties could decide upon the issues when they differed with the other parties. The Brotherhood leaders knew that they were capable of obtaining a majority in any parliamentary election, which is what eventually took place.

In the meantime, the Brotherhood turned a blind eye to the crimes that the security forces committed during events, such as those of Maspero⁷ and Mohammad Mahmoud Streets. During the recent times of political enmity, the Brotherhood's opponents forgot that those responsible for the repression and murders in the above instances were the security apparatus of Mubarak regime. Instead, they solely blamed the Brotherhood. More importantly, these critics became allied with those same security agencies that committed the murders against the Brotherhood. The image of "protesters" raising policemen on their shoulders on June 30 was expressive in that sense; the police saw

⁷ The Maspero events reference the violent breaking of a protest held by Coptic citizens who had gathered outside the Radio and Television building on October 9, 2011. The police assault resulted in 25 dead citizens, some of whom were crushed under the tracks of armored vehicles, as videos that spread in the media have shown. This protest was preceded by many others, the majority of which were responded to with violence; most of these protests were in response to assaults against churches or the burning of churches in the villages of Upper Egypt. The sit-in that began on October 4 was a response to the demolishing of a church in the village of al-Mreenbab in Aswan by locals who claimed that the church was not licensed; the sit-in was also a response to statements made by the Aswan governor that were perceived as offensive to Copts, and ultimately turned into clashes between the protesters and the military police and Central Security forces. The government media also participated in bashing Copts and inciting sectarian hatred. The revolutionary forces accused the military council and the "remnants" of the former regime of being responsible for provoking the incident without presenting proof. On the other hand, official and independent investigations conducted by rights' groups have shown that the soldiers' motives to trample Copts with tanks and fire live ammunition at them was "sectarian".

Regarding the events accompanying the breaking up of the sit-in and other violations of the rights of Coptic citizens, see: Ishaq Ibrahim (editor), "The Copts under Military Rule: The facts of a year and a half of the crimes of 'the transitional phase',"

<http://www.amnestymena.org/ar/Magazine/CoptsUnderMilitaryRule.aspx?articleID=1084>.

the gesture as an apology to the unreformed police institution, and the Interior Ministry took this image as a green light—an “authorization”—to persist with its same practices and escalation against the Brotherhood, the Islamists, and all those opposing the coup or standing in its way.

In their public statements, the Muslim Brotherhood initially abstained from running in the presidential elections, but later changed course, based on a slight majority in the Brotherhood’s Consultative Council, and decided to present a candidate in the elections.⁸ This was a dangerous decision that indicated a desire to rule the state by themselves. In a presidential system, controlling the presidency is completely different from controlling the parliamentary majority, whose role is to legislate and limit the power of the president. The Brotherhood decided to govern the state alone in the most critical phase of Egypt’s history. Furthermore, they prevented the possibility of a moderate Islamic candidate, Abd al-Munim Abu al-Futuh, reaching power. The main

⁸ It took three meetings of the Consultative Council to pass the decision to participate with a Brotherhood candidate in the presidential election. The first option that was considered was to support a candidate who does not belong to the Brotherhood, Judge Tariq al-Bishri was a possibility, though he rejected the offer; then the council decided, by a narrow margin, on April 1, 2012, to have Khairat al-Shater run as a candidate for president. See: Yolande Knell, “Egypt candidate: Muslim Brotherhood’s Khairat al-Shater,” *BBC News Online: Middle East*, April 2, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17583661>.

The decision to backtrack from not running in the presidential elections came on the heels of a decision by the Supreme Administrative Court confirming the dissolution of the parliament under the pretext that it was unconstitutional, despite the fact that the parliament’s law was issued through a constitutional decree on September 25, 2011. The Brotherhood’s decision also came after the withdrawal of the majority of political parties from the first Constitutive Assembly, and after mutual media attacks between the Brotherhood and the Military Council, which reminded the Brotherhood of history’s lessons: “We ask everyone to be aware of the lessons of history to avoid mistakes from a past we do not want to return to, and to look towards the future”. For more information, see: MENA, “In Sunday Statement, SCAF Hits Back at Brotherhood Criticisms,” *Ahram Online*, March 25, 2012, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/37691/Egypt/0/In-Sunday-statement,-SCAF-hits-back-at-Brotherhood.aspx>.

reason to place a candidate in the elections may have been the desire to preserve the organization and prevent its members from following outside figures, such as Abu al-Futuh; additionally, this organizational, rather than religious, *esprit de corps* is capable of explaining many of the practices of the Muslim Brotherhood.

At that historical juncture, three other crucial factors came into play. Firstly, President Mohammad Morsi was placed in charge of a state over which he had no actual power and a state apparatus that did not cooperate with him, but was actively resisting his policies and initiatives. In fact, "bureaucracy" and "state apparatus" refer to the executive apparatus of the Egyptian state, which is often called "the deep state" in Egypt, in addition to the judiciary and the security organs. At every turn, when one of these organizations would fail in hampering the president, another would come to the fore in order to continue the battle until the judiciary became the last line of defense, annulling the legislations of the elected parliament and the decrees of the elected president.

Secondly, the Brotherhood was, at that stage, in dire need for the "revolution" (i.e., the masses of the revolution, its youth, mood, and spirit). However, this was the last thing on the leadership's mind, which is why I stated earlier that they were not a revolutionary party. The Brotherhood wanted the state, but the state was firmly opposed to them. If they had decided not to appeal to the youth and the spirit of the Egyptian revolution, they were, at the very least, in need of national unity with the other political parties, no matter how small. Such a move would have provided the Brotherhood a cover that could turn them from a party, regardless of size, into a broad national front, no matter how miniscule the other parties, in order to struggle against old state organs that claim to be politically impartial, such as the judiciary and security. The Brotherhood's leadership was similarly unenthusiastic about such a scenario; they perceived the political arena, at first, as a split between a governing party and an opposition. When they desired to form such a coalition, the conditions set by the other

parties were nearly impossible to fulfill, or they were faced by parties who were set to assure their failure. As for the independent figures who supported the Brotherhood's candidate in the second electoral round, the most that the Brotherhood leadership was willing to offer them were posts as aides and advisers, rather than partners in political decision making. As a result, the Muslim Brotherhood found it easy to break the promises they offered to their previous supporters, and, though they easily could have, they did not offer these supporters political positions to satisfy the political ambitions.⁹

The third crucial occurrence was the accession of the Muslim Brotherhood to power, with its entire ideological and intellectual baggage and Islamist rhetoric. It was sometimes difficult to understand what President Morsi referred to when he would say "we" in his speeches; was he referring to "we, the Muslims" or "we, the Egyptians"? His rhetoric was so Islamist that such questions were warranted, but he did not pay attention to this matter until too late. Among the parties the Brotherhood was

⁹ The Fairmont Agreement, named after the hotel in which it was signed, was made on June 22, 2012 between the presidential candidate Mohammad Morsi and "the National Front for the Protection of the Revolution," which included representatives of civil society groups and revolutionary and political forces. The agreement was made before the results of the second round of the presidential elections were announced. The delay in announcing the results stirred fears among the Muslim Brotherhood of a plan to falsify the results in favor of Morsi's opponent, Ahmad Shafiq. The agreement spoke of reaffirming the national partnership among all the sectors and constituents of society, including women, Copts, and the youth. The agreement also stated that a presidential team is to be formed along with a national unity government where all national currents are represented, and to be headed by an independent national figure. Moreover, it was decided that a crisis management cell should be formed and should include trusted national figures in order to manage the current situation and oversee the completion of the full handover of authority to the elected president and his presidential team and government. The agreement stated that the signatories firmly reject the constitutional decree, which places the foundations for a military state, robbing the president of his authorities, and subjugating the legislative authority to approval. The signatories also rejected the Military Council's decision to dissolve the parliament, which represented the popular will, as well as the decision to form the National Defense Council. Finally, the parties to the agreement asserted the need to recreate the Constituent Assembly in a manner that guarantees the drafting of a constitution that represents all Egyptians. See: Amal Mukhtar and Patrycja Sasnal, "Democratic Opposition Alone Will Not Bring Democracy to Egypt," Policy Paper, *The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, 59, no. 11 (April 2013), <http://tinyurl.com/ncdjgu7>.

competing against in the parliament and in the “street” were the Salafist parties. Fearing the Salafists, they mimicked them with an extreme and austere religious rhetoric; in order to avoid being one-upped by the Salafists in terms of religion and Islamic legitimacy, the Brotherhood introduced a heavy dose of religious discourse into the committee drafting the constitution. These religious sections that were proposed in the new constitution made no real political difference, but they succeeded in gaining the aversion of many figures of the January 25 Revolution, its masses, and its allies around the world.

Governing requires making decisions, and in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, the decisions are made within its organization and not outside of it, not even in consultation with the closest friends. There are moments where the closest allies of any totalitarian organization feel that they are treated as strangers, and feel alien to that closed group. At the same time, the media was busy slandering the president, defaming his image, inciting against him, unearthing his mistakes, exaggerating existing ones, and spreading rumors that no one would later apologize for when it would appear that they were false and baseless.

As a result of the conniving relationship between the Interior Ministry and the security apparatuses to remain silent on the absence of security, the existing social and economic problems persisted and increased, particularly in light of the Gulf countries’ boycott of Egypt, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, neither of which were happy with the January 25 revolution or its outcome.

Thus, the Brotherhood, and President Morsi in particular, became a target for incitement, and the opposing forces’ main task was to assure the failure of the Brotherhood’s rule, even if it meant a failure for Egypt as a whole. During the Brotherhood’s rule, if any country dared to invest in Egypt or help the Egyptian government, it would be accused of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and taking sides in Egypt. Political parties that are not mature in a democratic and patriotic sense

do not act as if there is a national interest that unites them with the other parties; instead, they respect no red lines in their battle to defeat the adversary, even at the expense of the country's foreign relations, its economy, and national security. Ironically, these often tend to be the same parties that speak the most about the so-called "national security," without ever defining its meaning, and have been spreading chauvinist nationalism as an ideology of the military coup since July 3rd.

Domestically, the Brotherhood took the Coptic question lightly and were insensitive to the discrimination that the Egyptian Copts were subjected to as a religious minority that views itself as indigenous to the country. The Brotherhood leaders viewed the question as one of religious tolerance and good relations between different religions, simultaneously ignoring the racist incitement against the Copts within the very base of the Brotherhood and other Egyptian movements. There is no doubt that the negative stance on the question of equality with the Copts originates in the state apparatus, the security agencies, and in many political parties. On the other hand, the Brotherhood could have engaged in resolving the Coptic question since they were most qualified for such a task because nobody can question their Islamic legitimacy. Had they actually waged this battle against the Salafists, the outcome would have been in their favor, especially among the middle classes. However, it was as if the Brotherhood forgot, or neglected, the fact that they did not garner an electoral majority in the large cities or among the middle class, even during the second round of the presidential elections. How can a party rule democratically without having, on its side, the majority of the middle class and the urban population, especially with the state bureaucracy standing against it? There are social sectors whose political value exceeds their numerical size. This is, however, difficult to fathom for a party that spent its long political life in the trenches of the opposition.

Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood found itself isolated among the other parties; the weaker they grew, the easier it became to deal with them as a sect rather than a party. As a

result, this social rift continued to plague them; through incitement, borders could easily be drawn between the Brotherhood and the rest of society. Furthermore, old populist methods are capable of inflaming these borders and turning people against the Brotherhood.

Did the Muslim Brotherhood rule Egypt between June 2012 and July 2013?

The reality is that the Muslim Brotherhood did not govern Egypt during that year because the state bureaucracy was either uncooperative or attempting to sabotage the president's policies. However, the majority of Egyptians believe that the Brotherhood did, in fact, rule during that year. Even though this period represents less than a third of the length of the transitional phase so far, the majority of Egyptians expected the Brotherhood government to deliver all the promises of the revolution, including a dignified life, freedom, social justice, and all the other demands that were not expected of the Military Council, which ruled for a longer period than the Brotherhood. This was precisely the trap that the Muslim Brotherhood fell into.

Could a different party have reached power and imposed itself on the state bureaucracy?

No, in fact, the very reverse would have taken place had another party reached power through elections. In other words, the state bureaucracy would have imposed itself upon any other candidate without much of a struggle not because the president would not attempt to assert himself, but because the bureaucracy always prevails over a president who does not have the backing of a powerful party. One of the reasons for the clash between the state apparatus and the Brotherhood is precisely what is mentioned above—the Brotherhood possessed a party and an alternative network of relations that was capable of undertaking some of the tasks of the state apparatus whenever it would not cooperate.

V

On the third day of July 2013, it appeared as if a long and rich chapter of the Egyptian revolution, and perhaps of revolutions around the world, had just witnessed a tragic ending that was staged in a farcical manner. In reality, these tragic events were staged in a nearly comical theatrical manner, especially considering the scene when the general made his speech announcing the military coup. Military figures, religious figures—including the Azhar sheikh and the pope of the Coptic Church—the youth, the elderly, and opposition leaders were all arrayed on a platform around the general, looking like the décor in the last scene of a tacky Western play that claims to understand and speak to the oriental mentality. The staging was blatantly melodramatic, and it could very well be that the organizer of the event had consulted a theatrical director, as some political leaders often do these days.

The “legitimacy of the street,” which should actually be termed “the legitimacy of the people,” was an invention of the January 25 Revolution used to counter the argument of the Mubarak regime, which claimed to possess “the legitimacy of the people” while the regime was, in fact, based on brute force, corruption, terrorism and terrorization, old customs, and fear and acquiescence. During revolutionary times, the “legitimacy of the people” takes the place of the constitution because revolution, by definition, is a popular act outside the bounds of the constitution in order to change the regime of rule. During that short period that separates the rejection of the existing constitution and revolution against it from the drafting of a new constitution, the people’s legitimacy has the decisive voice. In this case, the “people’s legitimacy” overlaps with popular movement taking to the street and public spaces in order to protest and demonstrate; this could also be expressed in other forms in different circumstances, especially if the army uses force, as the Egyptian Army did against protesters following July 3.

In a democratic state, however, the “people’s legitimacy” takes the form of regular elections that are held according to agreed-upon constitutional principles or an agreed-upon written constitution. The people’s legitimacy turns into “street legitimacy” when elections are no longer possible, as in authoritarian regimes. Employing the legitimacy of the street against elections would signify using the “street legitimacy” against the “people’s legitimacy”. The latter is a form of legitimacy that is constitutionally regulated, with a structure and a deep legal meaning that cannot be broken down into numbers and figures because the legitimacy of the people is a legal and regulated concept, resulting from a legal and regulated process of elections. Moreover, the law permits this electoral process to be repeated at specific, periodic intervals so that a different process can emerge when the people, or a part thereof, changes its stance toward the rule, such as when the ruler fails to fulfill his promises or proves incapable of doing so. In elections, the people are not expected to explain why they changed their minds, and after the results are announced, there is no use to complain or contest the outcome. Results are counted in an impartial manner, and votes are anonymous unless a legal challenge is made regarding the transparency of the elections. As for street legitimacy, as an expression of popular legitimacy, it is only valid when the people are repressed and not permitted to express themselves through their opinions or their electoral vote. Thus, any attempt to legitimize popular action in a democratic regime as an alternative legitimacy to constitutional legitimacy is a populist act, not a popular one. Popular street actions are a legitimate tool of struggle in a democracy, but not as an alternative legitimacy to the existing constitutional, democratic one. However, this does not take away from the specific and limited legitimacy of such acts as demand-based struggles that pressure the system in order to achieve specific demands that cannot be achieved through the established lobbies, protest against hegemonial interest, or the expression of anger, or popular displeasure, with a specific policy or a political program.

In this sense, if one were to take its discourse literally, the June 30 movement was, like the January 25 Revolution, a broad and legitimate protest movement. In fact, the

numbers of those participating on June 30 may have exceeded those of January 25; still, the June 30 movement is authentic as a popular movement demanding early elections—a clear and legitimate material demand that a majority may agree upon. Such a movement, however, is not an alternative to elections or to legitimacy because there are legal means to hold early elections. The form of legitimacy borne out of the June 30 movement was an alternative, “virtual” legitimacy because it carried a demand supported by a large popular movement; however, as an alternative legitimacy, it cannot become concrete except through elections—if, that is, we understand the rhetoric of the June 30 movement in a literal manner. There is no doubt that the majority of protestors on that day believed in that demand, but they were unaware that a coup was being prepared under the pretext that the very act of making the demand for early elections was a substitute to realizing it, and inadvertently authorized a military takeover of power.

In such an instance, despite the vastness of its crowd and the legitimacy of its initial demand, the June 30 movement becomes a popular cover for a military coup against a regime that permits regular elections, the date of which was approaching. Insisting, as some do, on making June 30 into a “revolution” that was later joined by the army, or, as is often said in Egypt: “the army sided with the just demands (of the revolution),” would signify that June 30 was a counter-revolution, for a revolution supported by the remnants of the old regime and the anti-revolutionary state organs can only be a counter-revolution or a revolution aiming to annul the results of the January 25 Revolution and restore the privileges of the components, figures, and elements of the old regime.

VI

While some democratic intellectuals have emerged and worked along with the youth for the sake of democratic change, many among the secular and liberal forces in the Arab world have opposed the changing of the authoritarian Arab regimes. These forces were horrified by the prospect of the Islamists reaching power. Many “laic” intellectuals¹⁰ from the Left and the Right, who are often erroneously referred to as “liberals,” stood openly with despotism under the pretext that military despotism is better than religious totalitarianism, because the latter enslaves countries and minds, making it very difficult to uproot later on. These intellectuals were largely overtaken by the “Algeria syndrome,” where the Islamists almost won the elections. It did not occur to most that the only way to break this cycle is through democracy itself; it is not possible to change the political culture of society into a democratic one under the shadow of despotism. The duality that limits our political options to despotism or Islamism is the very duality that was created and exploited by the despotic regimes. When these regimes fall and the path for political and social forces to express themselves is opened, a diversity emerges that is much richer than the despotism/Islamism duality. Islamist movements must be tested in their governing; at that point, they will discover that the simplistic slogan, such as “Islam is the solution,” does not represent a real political project. At that point, they will have to choose between change and failure.

While this argument has been reiterated by the author, this cycle was not broken on the theoretical plane, but through the Arab revolutions, even before the regimes’ allies

¹⁰ We used the French term “laic” instead of “secular” in order to refer to the form of secularism that opposes religion in general, and in the public sphere specifically, in a contradistinction to our notion of “secular” which merely means the neutralization of the state in religious matters.

were convinced of the necessity of democracy. Some of those, in fact, have partaken reaped the benefits of the revolutions without being persuaded by them.

Arab societies have shown surprising political and ideological diversity, and the margin to criticize the Islamists has expanded to well beyond what was permitted even under despotic regimes, when the Islamists were still the opposition because the street was sympathetic to them, religiously and politically. Indeed, the Islamists did reach power, and were confronted with a choice: change or fail in managing the country, and in the subsequent elections. Nevertheless, there were some who did not want to achieve their goals, or at least harvest the fruit of the presumed Islamist failure, through elections, so they reverted to their old ally—the despotic regime and its state agencies. It is undeniable that the sabotaging of the Islamist experience with democracy, after decades of gradual evolution in that direction, will leave a grave impact on the culture of the youth and their political outlook in the future.

One can still not judge whether what took place on July 3 represented a mere setback to the process of democratic transition, or whether it was an all-out counter-revolution. If it is true that the old regime actually remained, what follows is that it doesn't need a counter-revolution. This confirms only that the January 25 Revolution has met complete failure, which means that the path ahead for the forces that created the revolution remains long and thorny. However, a revolution took place, and it needed a military coup to counter its ongoing implications and dynamics.

The counter-revolution against democracy can be resisted by adamantly holding on to the democratic principles and ferociously defending every democratic detail. The persistence of the old regime is evident in the return of the old alliances and their waging of a relentless war against the new forces, a war they call their "war on terrorism". This tactic is used in order to appease the West, on the one hand, and terrorize the opposition, on the other. As usual, the repressive state tends to sow the

seeds of the terrorism it claims to combat through its employment of all-out humiliation, violence, and repression in its practices.

Future events may show us that this entire episode was merely a temporary setback in the ascending curve of the revolution, which includes pitfalls that may appear at the time as dangerous reversals; in reality, history cannot be turned back. It would be difficult to reinstate the old way of ruling Egypt even if its figures returned to the scene. These rules, however, cannot be affirmed due to mere "historical necessity"; they are affirmed when the actors on the ground ascertain that repressing the freedom of expression, inciting against dissident views, dissolving political parties, and labeling political enemies as "terrorists" in order to justify their liquidation (in an attempt to appeal to the political culture of the West) cannot be viewed as "the correction of the course of the revolution," nor can it be understood that the democratic forces are those that can correct the course of the revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood is not a democratic force, nor is the military or those diminutive politicians who are currently staking on the military in a historic display of baseness and malice, urging them to eliminate their political adversaries, such as the Brotherhood. Instead, the democratic forces of Egypt are those forces that were bred on the values of the January 25 Revolution and were not contained or assimilated. These forces will be the defenders of the democratic revolution that fell under attack from the enemies of freedom and the anti-democratic reactionary forces in Egypt and the wider Arab region.