IJoC Arab Revolutions: Breaking Fear

Mediating Discourse of Democratic Uprising in Egypt: Militarized Language and the "Battles" of Abbasiyya and Maspero

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During the street protests in Egypt following the fall of the Mubarak regime in 2011, the media discourse was rooted in a militarized language used to mediate the unfolding events and a people's struggle against entrenched power structure. We focus on two major conflict events between the security forces and the protesters: the clashes at Maspero (Radio and Television Building) and the march from Tahrir Square to the Ministry of Defense in Abbasiyya. We situate the two events within the trajectory of the uprising.

Keywords: militarized language, Egyptian uprising, Abbasiyya, media discourse, Maspero

When demonstrators in Egypt took to the streets in January 2011 and were met with police brutality, they appealed for help from the Egyptian military: *Wahid itnayn elgaysh elmasri fayn?*[1] (One, two, where is the Egyptian army?). Later, when the police and central security forces were completely withdrawn from the streets on January 28, 2011, army vehicles and personnel were deployed to the streets with a mission to maintain order and protect the people. Demonstrators received the forces, chanting *el-gaysh wel-sha'ab 'id wahda* (the army and the people are one hand). They threw flowers at the armed vehicles and gave food to the soldiers. The media hailed the military role in "protecting the revolution." The state media especially supported the military after deposing Mubarak (Black & Kingsley, 2013). This became the dominant media narrative until March 2011, when the military forcefully ended a peaceful sit-in, arrested protesters, tortured them, and subjected female demonstrators to virginity tests.

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[1] We use the Egyptian pronunciation as the slogans were shouted out in the Egyptian dialect (*'ammiyya*).

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The "protector" role began to be questioned in public discourse (El-naggar & Slachman, 2011; "Mahkama missriyya taqdi," 2011).

Seeing the army implement brutal tactics usually used by the state security apparatus, people were baffled and did not know how to internalize stories of mistreatment. The Egyptian military has enjoyed a sacrosanct place in the national imagination. It is composed mainly of conscripts and hence is seen as an army "of the people." The military also is revered for its role in ridding Egypt of monarchy when the Free Officers of 1952 overthrew King Faruk and established the republic in a coup-turned-revolution. And following the "victory" in the 1973 war in Sinai, the military was a source of national pride, especially after the defeat of the 1967 war. The elevated status of the military as a national institution is perpetuated by laws that criminalize insulting the military ("Misr: Yajib isquaat," 2011)—a fluid charge that is subject to a wide range of interpretations. Thus, the dominant media narrative is cautious in its criticism of the military (Barany, 2011). However, this is perhaps not unique to Egyptian media. In the United States, criticism of the military is rare, and when it occurs, it is limited to controversy among officials (Hallin, 1986). On the civilian front, the military has been running a parallel economy (Abul-Magd, 2012) providing quality consumer goods that have a popular reputation. Egyptians could not comprehend that the military would torture its own people. They associated torture with Amn al-Dawla (state security).

Journalists, social agents, also were unable to make sense of the complexities of the situation on the ground. Especially because in the media realm, in addition to their role as agents of social control, the military and law enforcement institutions function as authoritative sources for news (Reese, 2004). The past frames of patriotism and chivalry normally employed to make sense of the military actions were obviously inappropriate. Journalists needed new interpretive frames to contextualize alleged brutality committed by the army.

Arguably, the journalistic community merely reflects the ambiguity of the moment in the wider society. However, despite the dissonance between public consciousness and the actions of the military, the journalists in Egypt had a professional duty to help their audiences make sense of the bloody events and anchor the meanings in familiar terms. As the Maspero and Abbasiyya events shockingly unfolded on television screens, reporting on violence that involves the military domestically posed a challenge. We suggest that the journalists' job in reporting the confrontation between the protestors and the military pushed reporting toward what some scholars have described as journalistic ambiguity (Broersma, 2010; Dahlgren, 1993). In moments of ambiguity, journalists often dig into familiar shared events from the recent past to do their job and explain the violence (Berkowitz, 1997, 2000; Fish, 1980).

In the absence of readily available frames, journalists had to look elsewhere to make sense of the clashes between protestors and the military in events that unfolded in Maspero and Abbasiyya. We argue that they resorted to militarized language with frames and metaphors from other conflicts in the Middle East, such as the ongoing Palestinian conflict. However, before delving into the role of journalists in witnessing and making sense of the two tragedies, we briefly contextualize the complexities in the two events.

Abbasiyya: A Peaceful Demonstration Turned Bloody

On July 23, 2011, more than 10,000 people began to march from Tahrir Square to the Ministry of Defense in Abbasiyya (Fakhry, Ali, Elnubi, & Abd Al-Ghani, 2011). The march was planned to coincide with the July Revolution Day. The 6th April Youth Movement had called for the demonstration as a means to protest against the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) accusations that the movement was receiving foreign funds.[2] Activists joined the march in solidarity. The march grew as it progressed from Tahrir Square to Abbasiyya.

Knowing about the march, the military blocked roads to the Ministry of Defense, and barricades were fortified with barbed wire. Since the police had abandoned the streets on January 28, 2011, the military had taken over security tasks. They mainly secured government buildings, and when protesters marched to the Ministry of Defense building, gunshots were fired in the air to disperse the demonstrators. Clashes erupted between what was coined "unknown" individuals, thugs, and third parties and the marchers. The demonstration site turned into what could be described as a battlefield, and demonstrators were showered with rocks and Molotov cocktails, resulting in 309 injuries ("al-Sehha," 2011); one victim later died. In Abbasiyya, although the military police claimed that they did not participate in the violence, they did stand behind barbed wire while plain-clothed persons attacked the marchers and threw rocks at them. The military police did not secure the demonstration. Three months later, another bloody event took place, and the military was directly involved.

Maspero: When Citizens Were Urged to "Defend" the Military

In September 2011, clashes erupted between Muslims and Christians in the southern village of Marinab, leaving a church burned. Christians all over Egypt started marches and demonstrations demanding justice. By the end of September, Coptic activists and leaders who had been protesting began considering other actions that they could take to have their demands met.[3]

On October 1, *Aqbaat bilaa quyuud* (Copts without shackles) called for a march to start from Shubra (a mostly Christian Cairo neighborhood) and head toward the Radio and Television Building at Maspero (Khalil, 2011). Another group mobilized for the march as well, the Union of the Youth of Maspero. Parallel marches were organized all over Egypt (and calls were posted on the *Aqbaat bilaa quyuud* and *Haraket ettehaad shabab maspero*, (Union of the Youth of Maspero), Facebook pages). On October 2, the march proceeded from Shubra; when the protestors reached Maspero, *Aqbaat bilaa quyuud* announced they would not sit-in, but other groups decided to. Reporting on the march and sit-in, the official television broadcaster called on "honorable citizens" to come to the rescue of the army as it alleged that Christians

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2 General Hassan al-Rouwainy made the accusation which turned out to be frivolous according to Ministry of Justice reports (Ghali, 2011).

3 The demands included bringing the perpetrators in Marinab to justice and legislating for a universal ordinance on building places of worship (Fawzi, 2011)

were attacking soldiers. By the time calm was restored, 24 people had been killed, some of whom were crushed under armed military vehicles.

In both events, Abbasiyya and Maspero, confrontations did not involve the expected protagonists: enemies of the nation versus the army. In Abbasiyya, it was citizens brutally fighting— "honorable citizens" siding with the military refusing to allow demonstrators to reach the Ministry of Defense. It was alleged that in Maspero the "honorable citizens" ran to rescue the military. In both cases, when clashes erupted, the military were both protectors and the perpetrators of the violence. The story was hard to tell. To understand the challenge that journalists faced in reporting the violent events at Abbasiyya and Maspero, we need to understand journalistic work, how journalists establish credibility through witnessing, and how stories are constructed through the journalistic practice of framing.

Journalism: Establishing Trustworthiness Through Witnessing

As journalists report, they define what is important. They develop interpretive strategies establishing what is of value, affirming authority for "being there" (Zelizer, 2007). Journalists use collective discourse, shared frames, and common interpretations to make sense of events. The audience trusts that a story is true if it appears in a well-known news outlet that adheres to professional routines and conventions and if the information published seems plausible and is congruent with familiar textual conventions (Broersma, 2010). Journalists produce a narrative through which they can communicate what seem to be the facts (Labov & Waletzky, 1967), because they possess information or proximity of "facts" (Peters, 2001). Thus, they establish authority over constructing social reality. Witnessing is important for giving journalists the authority and ability to construct a story that is meaningful for the cultural context in which it is produced.

Orienting the narrative by filling in the main parts of a story—the where, when, how, and who (Labov & Waletzky, 1967)—is also made possible by witnessing. To tell an unfamiliar story, a journalist needs to find the orientation in previous familiar narratives. As an interpretive community, journalists maintain their trustworthiness by constructing stories as they make sense of events based on how they covered similar events in the past (Berkowitz, 2000; Fish, 1980; Zelizer, 1993). And because journalists belong to the same interpretive community, they rely on a compiled "mental catalogue" to typify the event at hand (Berkowitz, 1997, p. 363). They pull out story themes and know how the events would unfold and how the story *should* go (Ismail, Youssef, & Berkowitz, 2009, p. 62, emphasis in original).

The importance of witnessing extends from establishing authority to sustaining community cohesiveness, especially in times of trauma. Zelizer (2002) explains that groups need to make sense of traumatic events to reinstate the collective shattered boundaries, and this is how photography documenting 9/11 established moral accountability. Here, stories not only explain events, they also help the society restore normalcy. The ability to situate events in a familiar context for its audience is another dimension needed in telling a coherent story. Witnessing establishes the authority of the journalist, and news frames facilitate telling a meaningful story.

News Framing and the Telling of a News Story

Simply reporting an event by presenting factual information does not make a narrative, which is central to storytelling (Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Putting an event into a familiar context transforms a list of facts into a cohesive, meaningful narrative that is news. In the social process of producing news, meaning is put in a familiar context for audiences through selecting and abstracting. Some meanings are established as dominant, and other, competing meanings are weeded out or marginalized (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, 1991; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Thus, the routine work of reporting involves pressing a narrative that not only is presented in familiar terms but privileges a particular meaning over others. This becomes more salient in times of conflict.

In moments of national turmoil, such as following the Egyptian uprising in January 2011, the traditional journalistic role of maintaining social order collapses, and the news media—especially the independent press—become not only central to social change but crucial for making sense of the change and concomitant violence. Finding the "central organizing idea," or frame, facilitates understanding ambiguous events in the news. A frame helps readers make sense of the reality constructed in the news stories (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The social process of framing is central to how journalists organize, structure, and present news. Framing also is at the core of journalism; it makes news media a social institution that legitimizes knowing and not knowing in the social production of a constructed reality (Kumar, 2009).

While witnessing establishes the authority of being there and framing facilitates sense making, it is the form and style that transforms interpretation into "truth" and establishes its trustworthiness (Broersma, 2010). Journalists tell stories that make sense through "linguistic representations" that "have the power to simultaneously describe and produce phenomena" (Broersma, 2010, p. 26). Thus, language is central in the framing process as journalists produce narratives that their audiences can relate to (Berkowitz & TurKeurst, 1999) from a "reservoir of stored cultural meanings and patterns of discourse" (Schudson, 1995, p. 14). These patterns and discourses are shared among journalists on the one hand and with audiences on the other. In the process of producing stories that make sense, journalists use familiar stories—myths that present familiar frames and archetypes that "explain" events (Lule, 2001) and that audiences can understand.

Witnessing and Framing Abbasiyya and Maspero

In the two violent events under discussion, journalists and citizens were baffled. This was not the first time the army was deployed to suppress riots. In 1977, students led demonstrations against commodity price increases, and the army crushed the riots, leaving dozens killed and hundreds injured.

The Sadat media machine dismissed what was known internationally as the "Bread Riots," downgrading it to the "Uprising of the Thieves." Less than a decade later, in 1986, the military was deployed again to the streets. Central Security Forces conscripts (mainly poor, young, uneducated men)

rioted against their conditions.[4] To restore order, a curfew was implemented. The uprising left more than 100 dead and more than 700 injured. Media coverage of the two incidents was limited and served the regime (al-Sahary, 2006). These events involving the army engaging with civilian rioting could have provided a mental catalogue for journalists and informed their reporting of events in Abbasiyya and Maspero. However, the media scene in 2011 was different.

Since the coup-turned-revolution of 1952, political participation in Egypt has been suspended. The military took over and never delivered the revolution's promise of democracy. In addition to militarizing the state and controlling it by state security, the government controlled the media. Until recently, the news media was mostly government owned and aligned with the ruling National Democratic Party. Editors of national newspapers functioned under the patronage of the state and, in effect, were controlled by the party. They were handpicked and appointed for their loyalty to the regime rather than their professionalism or competence. Broadcast journalists are not members of the journalist syndicate, nor are they protected under journalism laws that gave relative freedom to print journalists. The Commission for Investment controls the licensing of independent radio and TV stations, and it revoked licenses when editorial positions did not align with the state (Youssef & Kumar, 2012).

In the last decade, however, satellite channels and social media have challenged the state control, signaling a shift from a monolithic media arena to a pluralistic one (Khamis, 2011, p. 1163). The state media lost audience confidence as it failed to report the uprising, and abrupt shifts happened in state media management. There was pressure at the state level to address the audience confidence crisis. Between February 2011 and December 2011, four different men were assigned responsibility for the government body that manages and regulates mass media in the country.[5] Of the four, two were armed forces generals. The Ministry of Information was abolished altogether at one point (Khamis, 2011), only to be reinstated shortly after. However, criticism of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces was nonexistent in the state media (Iskandar, 2013). In addition, some independent satellite channels started broadcasting in the wake of what Egyptians were calling a revolution. What is important about the media arena here is that quick shifts were happening concerning what it means to be professional, especially after the total blackout practiced by the state media in reporting the uprising. Thus, in terms of their context, the Abbasiyya and Maspero events occurred at a time when journalists had to search their mental catalogues for familiar frames to report the violence. We argue that because the situation was unique and the military was involved, journalists explained the events by drawing from the militarized language used in the reporting on familiar regional conflicts that had garnered news coverage before 2011, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Examples of such language include:

- *laqaa 'aamil filastini hatfuh b'ad itlaaq al-naar 'alyh 'aqb qiyaamih bitta'n israiliyyayin ithnayin fi ishtibaak al-yawm al-khamis* (a worker was shot dead after he stabbed two Israelis in the fifth day of clashes) ("Ishtibaakaat mutafarriqa fi," 2007).

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[4] Ironically, the Central Security Forces were devised in the 1960s as riot control forces.

[5] At one point that government body was called the Ministry of Information at another, it was the Radio and Television Union.

- *al-Shurtta al-Israiliya taqtahim baahat al-masjid al-Aqsa wa indilaa' ishtibakaat ma'a al-mussallin* (Israeli police storm into the courtyard of al-Aqsa Mosque and clashes erupt with worshippers) (al-Rifa'i, 2010).

- *al-sulta al-Filastiniyya tuttalib bi al-tadakhul al-amriki ba'ad muwajahaat fi al-masjid al-Aqsa* (Palestinian Authority urges American intervention after clashes in al-Aqsa Mosque) ("al-Sulta al-Filastiniyya tuttalib," 2010).

- *Muwajahaat 'anifa ba'da maqtal Filastini wa al-shurta taqtahimu bahat al-masjid al-Aqsa* (violent clashes after killing a Palestinian and police break into al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard) ("Muwajahaat 'anifa ba'da," 2010).

The next section describes how journalists drew upon a mental catalogue of these familiar news frames from past conflicts in the region, which were rooted in a militarized language, to produce their narrative of the bloody events of Abbasiyya and Maspero.

Following the News: Abbasiyya and Maspero

The analysis draws on televised news reports and commentary of five privately owned popular TV channels operating in Egypt. Popularity here is based on viewership.[6] The channels included in the data collection process are al-Hurra, al-Hayat, ONTV, Dream2, and al-Tahrir. In addition, news reports on Egyptian state-owned satellite channel al-Massriyya were examined for Maspero events. Although the state television lost all credibility after the uprising in January 2011, we included al-Massriyya in the Maspero analysis because of its proximity to the event. The violence was happening in front of the Radio and Television Building. Al-Tahrir was included in the analysis because it came out as a channel of the revolution, inaugurated with star opposition journalists such as Bilal Fadl and Ibrahim 'Isaa (who was later jailed under Mubarak for criticizing the regime; Kenner, 2010).

The channels in the analysis are not specialized news channels like al-Jazeera or al-'Arabiya. With the exception of al-Tahrir, they were all launched before January 25, 2011. Except for al-Massriyya, news content in the channels teased out cases of political and economic corruption along with human rights violations. On each channel, we chose shows airing during prime time on July 23 and October 9, 2011, when the violent events of Abbasiyya and Maspero occurred, respectively. We chose *al-Yawum* on al-Hurra, *al-Hayat al-Yawum* on al-Hayat, *Aakhir Kalaam* and *Baladnaa bi-l-Massri* from ONTV, *al-'Ashira Masaa'an* on Dream2, and *Fi-l-Maydaan* on al-Tahrir.[7] For Abbasiyya, we analyzed four shows airing on July 23, 25, and August 11 (when a tribute was paid to Mohammed Mohsen, the one person killed in the violent events). For the Maspero event, we analyzed seven shows that aired on October 9, 2011. All the

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[6] For information about viewership, see "'Aakher Kalaam' li-Yosri" (2011), Iskandar (2013), "Istitlaa' ra'y li-jaami'at" (2011), Qadri (2011), and "Tada'uf nisbat mushaahadat" (2011).

7 For Abbasiyya events, we examined shows airing on ONTV, al-Tahrir, and Dream2. Abbasiyya events occurred on a Saturday, and *Baladnaa bi-l-Massri* and *Aakhir Kalaam* did not air that day. Thus, we examined the episode when the shows resumed the following week and discussed the events of the day with eyewitnesses.

shows analyzed are a hybrid format of talk show and live coverage and commentary with heavy viewership; they aired after 8:00 P.M., and some aired for more than 3 hours. Finally, al-Hurra was included in the analysis because its office was stormed by the military as reporters covered the Maspero events live, and it is an American-owned channel.

We mostly relied on YouTube videos to collect the data. The videos were uploaded to YouTube either by the TV channels or by fans of the selected shows. Videos uploaded by fans were authenticated by comparing different versions of the same video uploaded by different YouTube users.[8] We analyzed all the available clips.[9]

We adopted an ethnographic approach to studying media texts that included "extended immersion in the research setting, interaction among members of the research team throughout the project, emergent research design based on theory and inductive ways of developing findings and conclusions" (Berkowitz & Nossek, 2001, p. 45). In this qualitative approach to examining the text (Schiffrin, 1994), the authors individually examined the material through multiple readings and took detailed notes (Altheide, 1996). We regularly discussed our individual findings as a team to contextualize the findings of each team member's analysis both as a separate entity and as cross-checked with other team members' analyses. We deconstructed the different forms and purposes of signifying output through which a number of militarized expressions recur in the media discourse in each of the two events. The term *signifying output* refers to the end-result linguistic output, the message as interpreted by the audience. This might be different from the message transmitted by the media as designed. Signifying outputs refer to rhetorical and discursive structures in which words and catchphrases are used to frame the meaning in familiar terms (Pan & Kosciki, 1993). Although the selected shows vary in their coverage style, they share some common forms when it comes to their signifying output, be it oral or written. They typically combine two or more of the following signifying outputs:

1. Correspondence: The signifying output is oral; a correspondent reports in the field, and the information is delivered orally in the form of question and answer.

2. Narrative of personal experience: Information comes through interviews with eyewitnesses (such as al-Hurra technicians whose office was attacked as they reported on Maspero on air). Narratives of personal experience can take place on the screen through correspondence. In this case, the correspondent conducts interviews on the ground about the protest. The narrative also can be information that is conveyed by protestors describing their experiences or by famous political figures or activists.

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8 Not all shows were examined for both events.

[9] Data collection on media content from non-Western societies is a challenging task, mostly because, unlike in the West, there are no authoritative, large databases such as LexisNexus or the Television News Archive at Vanderbilt University. This required innovation in methodologies without compromising validity and reliability of data, which was topmost in our minds while working on this project.

News commentary: This usually takes place between the segments dedicated to correspondents. The presenter either reads the news or raises rhetorical questions to the audience about the event.

4. News analysis: In-studio or phone-in guests/analysts present their take on events during live coverage of the protest. This often sounds like commentary on a sporting event. Such analysis can be presented the day after the protest as well. Here also the informational output takes the form of question and answer.

Screen captions: Superimposed text that sums up a recent news update or what is being covered at a particular moment of a broadcast. Screen captions did not change frequently.

The language used in oral and written forms of signifying outputs serves various purposes. We identified three purposes that constituted challenges for the presenters:

1. Signifying the news
2. Signifying the participants in the news
3. Signifying the actions initiated or completed by different parties

The revolutionary context was not the challenge. Media, especially independent media, has covered the events of January 25. Rather, it was challenging to cover an unfamiliar event: a peaceful protest—for civil demands—gone wrong. Protests had taken place before January 25; however, media coverage was limited or nonexistent. There was no mental catalogue (Berkowitz, 1997) from which journalists could pull appropriate frames.

The next section describes the recurring vocabularies used in the signifying outputs. These vocabularies were used to explain, report on, and comment on the events. In all the shows, there was no discussion of the nature of the vocabulary or language used.

Frames: Signifying the News

Signifying the news refers to the presenter's attempt to name it. Several militarized vocabularies such as *ishtibaakaat* (clashes), *munaawashaat* (skirmishes), *muwaaghaat 'anifa* (violent confrontation), and *mawqi'a/ma'raka* (battle) were repeatedly used to signify both the Abbasiyya and Maspero events. Other signifiers such as *garima insaaniyya wa khiyaana wattaniyya* (human crime and national treason) and *yawm al-Ahad al-Daami* (Bloody Sunday) were exclusively used by *Baladnaa bi-l-Massri* and *Aakhir Kalaam*, respectively, to describe the Maspero violence.

Ishtibaakaat. In reporting of the Maspero events, the Arabic word *ishtibaakaat* was used to signify what was happening. The word can be translated into English as clashes. It is a plural form of the verbal noun *ishtibaak*, which is derived from the verb *ishtabak* (form VIII). The verb pattern is *ifta'ala*, and its meaning expresses "reflexive or medio-passive" (Ryding 2005, p. 565). In Arabic, the word can be used in a violent or nonviolent context. The root *sh-b-k* means a net. It is mostly used to refer to a

situation in which two objects/subjects are in an inseparable physical position. For example, it is used in the following context: *ishtibaak bi al-aydi* (to fight with hands in a way that makes the two fighters intertwined in the fight like a net). In this case, the verbal noun *ishtibaak* has the same meaning as the verbal noun *ishtijaar* (to engage in a fight where all parties become inseparable like intertwined tree branches).

Presenters on al-Hurra, al-Hayaat, and Dream2 used the plural form *ishtibaakaat* to signify the Maspero news. In the case of al-Hurra, the phrase *ishtibaakaat al-Qaahira* was a consistent screen caption during *al-Yawum*. On al-Hayat, the presenter used *ishtibaakaat* repeatedly in correspondence questions and answers and in news commentary. Soliciting details from the correspondent, the two hosts asked: *Aih bidayit tafaggur il-ahdaath wi il-ishtibaakaat?* (What was the starting point at which the events and the clashes exploded?) and used the phrases: *Tagdud al-ishtibaakaat* (The clashes renew), *Hasal ishtibaakaat bayn il gaanibyan* (Clashes happened between the two sides).

Similarly, *ishtibaakaat* was used to describe the violence in Abbasiyya. In a narrative of personal experience on Dream2, Hasanein el-Naggar, an imam in the Ministry of Endowments (al-Awqaaf) who witnessed Abbasiyya violence, described the continuation of violence: *fi ddarb we fi ishtibaakaat*. In another narrative, intellectual and author Ahdaf Souaif described the events she personally witnessed as *fi ishtibaakaat.*

The Arabic word *ishtibaakaat* can be used in various contexts, but when it comes to news coverage, when there is no physical engagement between the fighting parties, it is often used to signify military maneuvers. One of the most famous uses of the term in Egyptian military history is *munawaraat fadd al-ishtibaak* (maneuvers of disengagement)—an Egyptian military operation in the 1973 War. *Ishtibaakaat* is also used to explain oft-reported violent engagement of military or security forces with the civilian inhabitants in Gaza and the West Bank.

Muwaagahaat 'anifa. The adjectival phrase *muwaagahaat 'anifa* (violent confrontations) is another example of militarized language that was used in reporting the violent events. Reporting on Maspero, al-Hurra used *muwaagahaat 'anifa* to signify the news. Like *ishtibaakaat*, the expression *muwaagahaat 'anifa* is often used to describe confrontations between Palestinians and the Israeli army. Using the familiar expressions such as *ishtibaakaat* and *muwagahaat 'anifa* to signify the unfamiliar Maspero protest undermines the genuine demands of the Maspero protestors; it connotes a national struggle against an occupying foreign power instead of introducing and interpreting the complexities that accompany an emerging culture of civil protest that erupted in violence. This is not just inaccurate; it also shifts attention from the demands of the protest and strips protestors of their agency. "Protestors" in pursuit of just civil demands and rights became "victims." Consequently, the spilled blood becomes the main news focus instead of the demands for which the protestors organized their protest.[10]

Munaawashaat. The verbal noun *munaawashaat* (skirmishes) is derived from the verb

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[10] For more on the narrative of victimization in Egyptian news and popular culture, see Colla (2005).

naawasha, which is a form III verb, and the pattern is *faaʿala*. The meaning of form III often "involves another person in the action—'associative'. Related semantic modifications conveyed by this inflectional class include "reciprocal action, repeated action and attempted action" (Ryding, 2005, p. 503). The word is often used in the context of fighting, where one of the parties in conflict initiates an attack on the border regions of the other party. An example of such usage is: *munaawshaat hududiyya*, (skirmishes on the borders). It is imperative here to mention that only a Dream2 presenter used the word to signify the Maspero event in the context of a news commentary: *hadathat baʿdd il-munaawashaat* (some skirmishes occurred).

Using this militarized expression positioned the protest in the context of a war between two countries with fixed borders and with reciprocal military operations taking place on the border regions. Consequently, the constructed polarization between the civilian population and the military was perpetuated. It also equated the violence coming from the protesters' side to the violence coming from the side of the state—specifically the armed forces—shifting attention from the motivating grievances.

Mawqiʿa/maʿraka. Of all the signifiers used to name the Maspero and Abbasiyya event, the words *mawqiʿa* and *maʿraka*—literally, a battle—are the most explicit militarized language. Al-Tahrir and ONTV (*Baladnaa bi-il Massri*) used the word *mawqiʿa*. In a news analysis, the program host described the events as *mawqi ʿat-il-yawm* (today's battle) and *lihaadhhi il-mawqiʿa* (for this battle).

Commenting on the Maspero events, Egyptian journalist and host Ibrahim ʿIsaa, on *Fi-l-Maydaan*, critiqued the media discourse that projected the events as a *maʿraka* between two armies. He explicitly stated that the media discourse reported the protest and the violence as if the protestors were like Napoleon advancing with canons to attack the Egyptian army: *wa kaʾnn al-maʿraka kaanit ghazwa li-Nabulyun Bunabart gaab il-madaafiʿ bitaaʿtuh biyddrab bihaa il-gaish . . . mish maʿul* (It is as if the battle was a conquest by Napoleon Bonaparte, who brought his canons to attack the army . . . incomprehensible).

Covering Abbasiyya, the word *mawqiʿa* was used to describe the violence. Describing the developments of the evening, *al-ʿAashira Masaaʾan*'s host, el-Shazly, characterized the violence as *mawqiʿa haamiyat alwatis* (a heated battle) and characterized the escalations as *rahaa al-maʿraka* (the battle millstone), which are terms used to describe heavy fighting in war. Similarly, *Fi-l-Maydaan*'s host, Mahmoud Saad, explained: *yaʿani maʿraka gamda* (this means it is a serious battle). The use of military terms was not limited to the hosts and journalists. Activists who witnessed the events also used military language in their testimonies. For example, *Akhir Kalaam* hosted activist Alaa Abdelfattah, who participated in the Abbasiyya demonstration. He updated the number of injured to over 150 and described what happened as *maʿraka*.

Ahdaath al-ahad al-daami (Bloody Sunday). In an exclusive departure from the other signifiers, *Aakhir Kalaam*'s Yosri Fouda chose to signify the news as *ahdaath al-ahad al-daami* (events of the Bloody Sunday). Bloody Sunday is an expression used originally in Irish, *Domhnach na Fola*, to describe a massacre on January 30, 1972, in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland, in which British

soldiers shot 26 unarmed civil-rights protesters and bystanders. Interestingly, Fouda worked in the United Kingdom, and this is a moment when he reverted to his mental catalogue to make sense. Although imported, the metaphor is quite expressive in a time of total professional ambiguity. As a journalist, Fouda assigned and imported a journalistic label from a different culture to facilitate sense-making.

Signifying the Subjects and Objects of Violence

The media discourse employed various signifiers in reference to the perpetrators and victims of violence during the Maspero and Abbasiyya protests. On the one hand are expressions used to signify state apparatus agents such as soldiers in police or army uniform. On the other hand are expressions used to signify protestors. In Maspero, the perpetrators were signified as security forces, persons from the army, Egyptian security, army troops, the security forces, some angry soldiers, the armed forces, and army soldiers. In signifying involved parties perpetrating violence in Abbasiyya, media discourses employed central security forces, the army, military police, thugs, and locals.

It is imperative to remember that, in both Maspero and Abbasiyya, the SCAF was running the country, and troops were deployed to the streets. However, the close and violent encounter with the troops in both cases shifted the narrative from the political role of the SCAF to a state of national ambiguity where the program presenters and the participants in demonstrations and programs did not know how to describe the violence perpetrators in fear of tarnishing the patriotic institution that is the army. The presenters and the guests tried to navigate the situations' complexities. When there was a slight implication of the military as responsible for the violence, both the presenters and the guests tried to distinguish and hold the SCAF—not the army—responsible for the violence. What they called the national and patriotic army was not responsible for the violence; it is only tasked with defending the people and the land. This was evident on *Fi-l-Maydaan*. When a caller expressed his dismay about the violence and said that he doubted that the slogan "the army and the people are one hand" still stands true, host Mahmoud Saad rebutted: *laa khalli balak ya Muhammed* [the caller's name] *el-gaysh el-gaysh wel-sha'ab 'id wahda, el-maglis el-'askari mawdou' taani . . . yeshtaghal bi-el-siyasa min ha'ina nantaqidoh* (no Mohammed, mind you, the army and the people are one hand but the SCAF is a different issue . . . it does politics then we have the right to criticize it). The attempt to differentiate the SCAF from the army shifted the discourse from the legitimate demands of the demonstrations, turning it into an arena for national conciliation between what were labeled ambiguously army and people.

Signifying the protestors varied in the two cases mainly because of the difference in the nature of the two demonstrations: Abbasiyya was a demonstration that did not have a majority of Copts—a national minority. Hence, in signifying the receivers/victims of violent acts in Abbasiyya, they were mainly described as *mutzaahrin* (demonstrators) and *il-masira* (march).

Signifying the Actions of Different Parties

While trying to signifying the actions of each of the parties during the protests or once violence erupted, the media resorted to familiar expressions deeply rooted in a militarized language. Trying to

describe events, two main terms were used. In the Maspero case, troops stormed into the office of al-Hurra, and that invited language that reflects such action. To answer the question of who did what, two main terms were employed: *iqtihaam* and *faggara*.

Iqtihaam. This word was mainly used to describe events occurring in Maspero; it can be translated as an aggressive, impulsive break-in. It also means to enter a place by means of force. ONTV, al-Massriyya, and al-Hurra, in slightly different contexts, used *iqtihaam* to signify various actions of different parties. While evaluating the coverage of the state TV, a media expert guest on ONTV used the expression *muhaawalaat lil-iqtihaam* in reference to an attempt (by unidentified actors) to break into the Maspero building. The presenter on *Aakhir Kalaam* repeatedly used the word *iqtihaam* in narrative of personal experience questions and answers: *Kunt fain lamma hassal iqtihaam li maqarr il-qana*? (Where were you when the channel headquarters was stormed into?); *fi waqt il-'iqtihaam* (in the time of the storming in); *il-'iqtihaam kaan fi huduud il-saa'a tamanya wi nuss* (the storming in was around 8:30). An Al-Hayaat presenter used the word *iqtihaam* to specifically signify the actions on the part of the protestors describing their action: *Magmuu'aat il-mutzaahrin bitaqtahim* (groups of demonstrators storming in). Al-Massriyya used the word to describe precautionary measures taken by the SCAF to prevent a break-in to the Maspero building: *liddamaan 'adam iqtihaamuh* (to guarantee that there will be no storming in).

Like *ishtibak*, the word *iqtiham* is a familiar signifier used in news coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle. One of the most famous incidents in which the word was used is during the famous visit of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon to al-Aqsa Mosque, a visit after which the second Palestinian Intifada broke out. While conducting research for this article, we Googled the word *iqtihaam,* and the first 10 search suggestions were news headlines on this incident: *iqtihaam al-masjid al-Aqsa*.

Faggara. An al-Hayaat presenter used the verb *faggar* (to cause something to explode/to bomb) and its derivatives repeatedly to elicit information from a correspondent in Alexandria, where another protest was said to have taken place in support of the Maspero protest. In a correspondence question, the presenter asked: *Aih illi faggar il-awdda'?* (What caused the situation to explode?).

Apart from the highly suggestive militarized connotation and denotation of the word, it constructed the Maspero solidarity demonstrations in Alexandria as an out-of-control situation. Of course, the verb and its derivatives such as *tafgiraat*, *tatafaggar*, and *mutafaggiraat* are often used in news about the Middle East in general and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular. The al-Hayaat presenter's use of the verb and its derivatives shows not only how the media discourse intentionally or unintentionally established continuity between discontinuous struggles but how she resorted to using familiar news language to describe unfamiliar news. Similar use of the word appeared in covering Abbasiyya. In a phone-in interview with an eyewitness and a participant in the Abbasiyya demonstration, host el-Shazly of *al-'Aashira Masaa'an* inquired: *Fag'a hasal ayh*? *Elmawaaqif fag'a betanfagir* (What suddenly happened? Situations suddenly explode and we end up not knowing what had happened). 'Amr Gharbiyya, an activist and participant in the Abbasiyya march who was abducted and then released, describes his abduction and its circumstances as *elwad' kaan mutafaggir* (the situation was explosive).

Conclusion

In times of nationalistic ambiguity, when a nation faces challenges to its cohesion, the media become a site for national negotiation. In Egypt, when the national army engaged in a "fight" with its own people, the events were described in military terms, and the language was militarized, drawing on familiar military conflicts. In all the programs we examined, the presenters seemed to try to reduce ambiguity by reporting the violence in a way that is similar to reporting wars in the region. Reporters who were expected to have the facts because they "witnessed" the events resorted to military vocabularies because they have a reservoir of reporting war violence in their mental catalogues. What was essentially a civil protest was reported as a military battle, and in an attempt to restore national normalcy, there was a negotiation to redefine the army as an institution divorced from the SCAF. Because of the sensitivity of reporting the military, which is an important source for journalists, and the might that could censor them, the program presenters seemed to be walking on eggshells and at one point one even had to justify covering the events altogether. It was most evident in *al-'Aashira Masaa'an*'s host covering Maspero and reminding the audience of the authority her show established because it had a correspondent on the ground. She appealed to the trustworthiness the show earns from witnessing the events as they happen and then moved to urge for national conciliation and calm in such a charged moment. She even vowed that her show would never withhold information in exchange for "all" to "resort to wisdom" and not to alienate either the army or the Copts. It seemed as if the social agents—both the citizens and media workers—were trying to sort out the tangled administrative and defense roles of the military; the former is a pragmatic one, and the latter is a perception and an expectation in the national imaginary.

As the media tried to negotiate and reduce the nationalistic ambiguity, it framed the narrative as less about the substantive issues behind the protest and more about the violence. In a way, this silenced the protestors, because little attention was given to the demands and the grievances that motivated the demonstrations to begin with. Furthermore, although demonstrations are a means of peaceful expression and political participation, they were unfamiliar events to report. Attempting to report them when gone wrong, the unfamiliar events were reported as a familiar one: a military battle. However, media workers and citizens alike found themselves faced with a challenge they did not think of: how to explain the violence perpetrated by the army? In a moment when the media had no mental catalogues from which to pull to report the demonstrations gone wrong, they resorted to the regional wars and armed conflicts catalogue to create metaphors and expressions to explain what was happening. In this case, it was at the cost of the civil side of the events.

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