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Policing January 25: Protest, Tactics, and Territorial Control in Egypt's 2011 Uprising

Dimitris Soudias

On January 25th, 2011 thousands of protesters took to the streets of major cities in Egypt—referred to as the “day of wrath”—to express their grievances and frustration with the ruling regime, ultimately leading to the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak after three decades in power. The street, as a socially constructed space of discontent, had become the central locus of political change. In this paper, I will tackle the question of how and why policing strategies in Cairo failed to contain protesters, eventually leading to the withdrawal of security forces on January 28th. I will analyze the interac-

tions between security forces and protesters in protest events during the uprising, focusing on policing strategies, tactical repertoires, and spaces of resistance. Through this, I hope to offer a way of looking at the politics of territorialization and space production in protest, and by extension, the negotiation of power relations between authority and resistance actors.

Keywords: Protest; Space; Egypt; Tactical Repertoires; Protest Policing; Arab Uprisings; Cairo.

Introduction

Under an authoritarian regime there is no transparent, legitimate set of state institutions through which a citizenry can express demands and discontent. As sociologist Asef Bayat remarks, however, when people are deprived of the electoral power to change the status quo, they “are likely to bring collective pressure to bear on authorities to undertake change” (11). This is particularly evident in the case of Egypt. When thousands of Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo and other cities in the country to contest then-President Hosni Mubarak’s authoritarian rule, the country’s security forces were overwhelmed not only by the sheer number of protesters, but arguably also by their tactics in appropriating and maintaining spaces of resistance.

In this paper, I will shed light on the protest policing of what has come to be known as the “January 25 uprising” in Cairo. Grounded in a sociology of space and social movement research, this paper assumes that the negotiation of power relations during the uprising was expressed in attempts by protesters to gain territorial control through tactical repertoires in order to produce and expand spaces of resistance; whereas the security forces attempted to maintain territoriality through policing strategies to control and contain

these spaces. The data for this endeavor consists in participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and qualitative documentary analysis.

This paper is structured as follows: first, I will conceptualize notions of tactical repertoires and policing strategies in social movement research, before elaborating on the relationship between social space, territoriality and tactics in protest. What follows is a case study of key events¹ during the January 25 uprising, in which I seek to relate the theoretical considerations, mentioned above, to my ethnographic findings. Through this, I hope to offer a way of looking at the politics of territorialization and space production in protest, and by extension, the negotiation of power relations between authority and resistance actors.

Tactical Repertoires and Policing Strategies

Tactical repertoires, or simply tactics, are at the heart of any protest action. They embody the means for gaining territorial control over places and expanding or containing spaces of resistance. As Taylor and Van Dyke note, tactical repertoires are tools of “*contestation* in which bodies, symbols, identities, practices, and discourses are used to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalized power relations” (268 em-

phasis in original). They do not “just exist” in a vacuum, but operate within structural constraints, such as repression, or poverty of resources (Ennis 520).

As social movement research indicates (McAdam; Suh; Tilly), the development of tactical repertoires occurs over time within structural constraints—a process that I call *political learning*. As shown elsewhere (Abdelrahman; El-Mahdi and Korany; Soudias), Egypt’s January 25 uprising can be understood as the culminating episode of five contentious cycles since 2000. Each cycle included a predominant protesting actor, ranging from pro-democracy actors to the labor movement, which introduced particular tactics from which other (involved) actors were able to learn. Here, actors implement those known and available tactics that—through individual and collective experiences and observation of other actors’ experiences—have proven to be successful in order to pursue a goal. In this vein, Tilly rightly points out, “the existing repertoire constrains collective action [...] people tend to act within known limits, to innovate at the margins of the existing forms, and to miss many opportunities available to them in principle” (390).

This is true also for the tactics of security forces. In social movement research, these can broadly be subsumed under the label

of policing strategies. Della Porta and Reiter (33) found out three strategic approaches for policing protest events: coercive strategies (use of force, violent means, or agents provocateurs to control or disperse a protest action in a legal or illegal manner), persuasive strategies (attempt to control protest through contacting activists, organizers and leaders prior to protest event), and informative strategies (gathering widespread information about an event and targeted information to identify law-breakers). Throughout the January 25 uprising, coercive strategies were dominant. As one protester notes, “the state security has an [...] automatic program to counter protests” (protest participant, personal communication, 23 Mar. 2011). The main goal of policing is territorial control and will be discussed in detail below. As I will show, Egyptian security forces regularly resort to coercive strategies in order to suppress dissidents. As far as mobilization is concerned, coercive policing strategies may increase the risk of collective action and make it less attractive for bystanders to join, thus constraining mobilization. However, it is important to note that coercive policing strategies can very well backlash and lead to increased mobilization. As della Porta and Diani note,

[...] many forms of repression, particu-

larly when they are considered illegitimate, could create a sense of injustice that increases the perceived risk of inaction. It is not surprising therefore that these two divergent pressures produce contradictory results, and empirical research indicates a radicalization of those groups most exposed to police violence in some cases and renunciation of unconventional forms of action in others. (200)

As I will illustrate, protesters still widely feared the state's repressive power, predominantly expressed through coercive policing. However, with protesters taking over more and more streets during the uprising, protesters' perception shifted as the perceived strength of the movement increasingly outweighed the fear of state repression (Kurzman).

Territoriality and Spaces of Resistance

Tactical repertoires and policing strategies are the means of gaining territorial control, and for protesters they are the prerequisite for constructing spaces of resistance. I concentrate on Henry Lefebvre's notion of spaces as it underlines that the social and the spatial are inseparably linked and mutually constitutive.²

In Lefebvre's conception, spaces are constructed through social relations and structures. Acknowledging that spaces are

experienced in multiple ways, Lefebvre (33; 38-39; 245) identifies the triad of perceived space (spatial practice), conceived space (representations of space), and lived space (representational spaces); seeing a unity between physical, mental, and social space. An example that incorporates these constructs is Tahrir Square in the heart of Cairo. The Square has been *conceived*, designed and produced through labor, technology and institutions. The meaning of the space, however, is adapted and transformed as it is *perceived* and *lived* by social actors. Tahrir Square, which had been conceived as a traffic junction, may have been perceived as a central and popular meeting spot, and lived as a hub of transportation, consumption and socializing on January 24, 2011. But on January 25, 2011, when the Egyptian uprising began, it has widely been perceived as a space of protesting authority and lived as a heterotopia of resistance despite its initial conception (Schumann and Soudias; Telmissany). Tactical repertoires, then, are a means for inducing and maintaining such a transformation. As people use Tahrir Square in a way other than its initial conception as a traffic junction, it can become something else entirely, appropriated in use. This is true for various streets, squares and buildings during the January 25 uprising,

where their "orderly"³ use changed towards an "exceptional" appropriation with shifting actions, symbols, and discourses that can be subsumed under the banner of resistance.

This experience is not unique to Cairo, but occurred in similar ways in the squares of Taksim, Syntagma, Euromaidan, Puerta del Sol, or Tagheer—to name just a few occupations around that time. But why do protesters take their demands to city centers? Building on Bayat (167-69), I argue that protesters chose to take their dissent to downtown Cairo for a variety of interrelated reasons: (1) mobile crowds can rapidly assemble and disperse at large streets and squares, such as Qasr al-Aini Street and Tahrir Square; (2) downtown Cairo has historical and political significance as most political institutions are located there (symbolizing state-power) and major historical uprisings have occurred in the area (1881 Urabi revolt at Abdeen Square; 1919 Anti-British uprisings, where women protested alongside men for the first time;⁴ 1977 bread riots at Tahrir Square); (3) downtown Cairo serves as the intersection for mass transportation networks, facilitating easier access and escape for potential protesters; (4) downtown Cairo is the center of media attention, which allows protesters to extend their discontent *beyond* their immediate environment.

In line with my argument, security forces attempted to prohibit this change, that is, the construction of spaces of resistance, through territorialization in order to maintain public order. As Herbert notes,

Territorial control is an inherent outcome of the social organization of the police [...] modern policing has meant the development of a capacity to intrude into and control space. [...] officers can, when necessary, secure control of the flow of action in space. The police [...] are expected to be effective agents of territoriality, to be able to control social action by controlling area. (6-10)

Many policing strategies involve enacting boundaries, restricting access and using force in creating and maintaining “public order.” As Sack notes, “social power cannot exist without these territorial rules. Territorial and social rules are mutually constitutive” (327). Complementing Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, the capacity to use force is central to the role of the police. The nation state needs the capacity to exercise systematic control over its population in order to maintain itself. In Egypt, this has been reinforced with the Emergency Law. In place since President Sadat’s assassination in 1982 until 2012, it allowed security forces to arrest people without charge, limit freedom of assembly and expression and effectively

criminalize any kind of protest.⁵ In summary, the state’s authority and existence is dependent on “the capacity of the police to mark and enact meaningful boundaries, to restrict people’s capacity to act by regulating their movements in space” (Herbert 13). Because state power is embedded in a concrete territory and particular spatial routines, contention over space is a direct challenge to state control and authority (Zajko and Béland 721). This is especially true when strategic buildings with an immense political significance, such as the Ministry of Interior (Moi) that usually houses the police, are being besieged or taken over.

As I will show in the following section, protesters during the January 25 uprising were aware of the security forces’ coercive policing strategies and carefully considered their tactics accordingly. By attempting to gain territorial control of streets and squares, protesters targeted constructing, maintaining, and expanding spaces of resistance.

January 25: A Diary of Resistance⁶

With the fall of Tunisian President Ben Ali on January 14, 2011, hopes and worries for a similar revolutionary uprising for Egypt were widely discussed in Cairene cafés and elsewhere. Various blogs and Facebook pages were quick to announce a ma-

ajor protest event on January 25 with a catalog of demands, ranging from minimum wage to ending the Emergency Law. Widely labeled as the “Day of Wrath,” the demonstration was scheduled to coincide with National Police Day to protest routine brutality and torture by the state security apparatus. On January 24, I contacted an activist with the April 6 Youth Movement to find out where the protest would be located and he told me there was no specific location. He explained that the absence of protest locations was in part a strategic omission; hinting that protests were intended to be all over the country, predominantly in residential areas. I interpret this as a tactical stance in countering territorial control by security forces. Whereas, previously, protests had taken place in locations symbolizing state power, such as in front of the cabinet building or the parliament, the January 25 protest was intended to mobilize people in residential neighborhoods. The security forces would expect protests in the same old locations as occurred over the previous decade. But demonstrations scattered across the city would soon prove difficult to police.

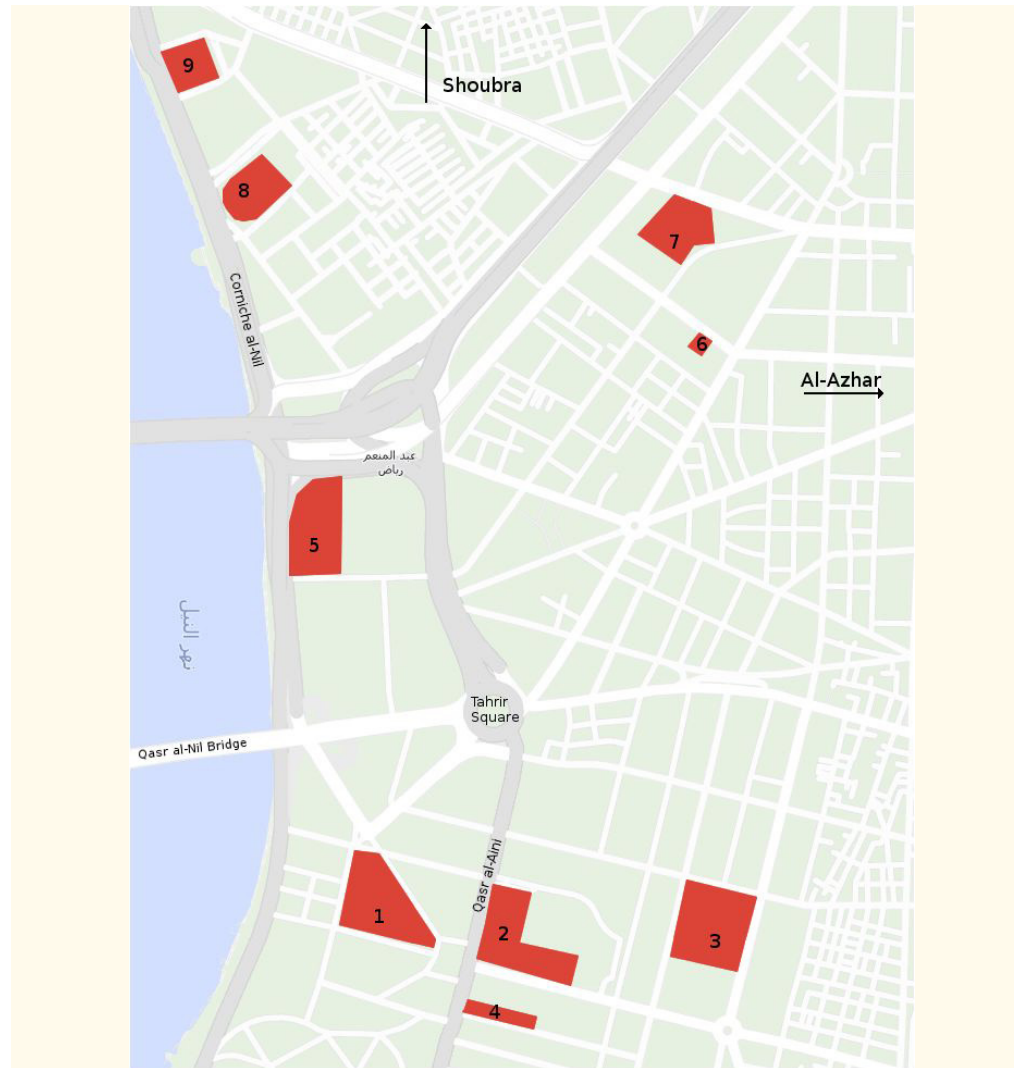


Figure 1: Map of Downtown Cairo

1 US Embassy, 2 Parliament, 3 Ministry of Interior, 4 Ministerial Cabinet, 5 NDP Headquarters, 6 Journalists Syndicate, 7 Supreme Court, 8 Maspero Television Building, 9 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

January 25: To New Beginnings

On the morning of January 25, downtown Cairo was practically deserted. A massive security presence in front of the Mol and on Tahrir Square was intended to intimidate potential protesters. Plainclothes state security agents urged passers-by to keep moving and not stand in the square—attempting to preemptively disrupt protest crowds from gathering and maintaining “public order.” Around noon, a group of some 40 protesters approached the square from Qasr al-Aini Bridge, which leads to the square, but were immediately blocked by riot police. The individuals fled towards Corniche al-Nil (a wide street along the Nile), reassembled and marched away from Tahrir Square towards the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within minutes they joined up with another group of a few hundred people who were already marching on Corniche al-Nil. Behind the marching crowd, a large group of riot police was keeping a constant distance. Only when the protesters attempted to approach Tahrir Square did the riot police violently intervene.

By the time protesters arrived at the state TV building (Maspero), the group numbered in the thousands. As Maspero symbolizes state-power, the demonstrators stopped there and chanted against the regime. Following this, the group attempt-

ed to march to the heavily populated Shoubra neighborhood to link up with another emergent protest group. The security forces blocked off certain streets on the way, but the crowd would always avoid confrontations and continued to shift to more peripheral side streets, while remaining cohesive. As one respondent noted,

If you imagine the protesters were like a body of water, the police would not necessarily try to stop the water, because the water would break through. So what the police would do is channel the protesters. When I was in Shoubra [...] I would see the police block roads, but always keep one road open, so protesters would keep flowing. Instead of trying to block them all [...] the police would block the important routes. They would not want them to go to certain areas, but then they would open insignificant routes and try to keep them circled. (Protest participant, personal communication, 21 Mar. 2011)

The security forces were still following the crowd but did not crack down. This hesitancy was surprising. Usually, as soon as protests emerge, the police would set up cordons and beat protesters down. But this day passers-by joined in, the protesters physically expanded their space as they marched, and soon the demonstra-

tors outnumbered the surrounding security forces. This appropriation amounts to a process of negotiating what is allowed and “orderly,” and what is not. While more research needs to be done as to why the police were so reluctant to use force, many of the participants I talked to interpret this initial hesitancy as a move by the regime to avoid the same mistakes of indiscriminate and brutal protest policing as Ben Ali in Tunisia.

After hours of marching, the demonstrators arrived in Shoubra and were confronted by a massive police cordon on Shoubra street. This time they confronted the blockade and some fighting erupted between police and protesters. The blockade opened due to the sheer number of protesters, and they were allowed to keep marching. The security forces were unable to contain the masses with their usual cordoning tactics. Arguably, the unprecedented experience of breaking through police cordons contributed to the protesters’ perception that they, and by extension the protest movement, have grown stronger than the state’s capacity to repress dissent.

The appropriation of space continued that day, as thousands gathered in front of the Supreme Court, the headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), Maspero and the Ministry of Foreign Af-

fairs and outside Cairo in Alexandria, Tanta, Mansoura, Aswan and Asyut (“Egypt Warns Protesters”). While neither of the “organizing” movements explicitly and publicly called for it, at around 5 pm, thousands marched into Tahrir Square. One respondent reported:

Everybody knows: ‘When in doubt, go to Tahrir.’ [...] I don’t know if protesters organized it together to go to Tahrir or if they knew instinctively—because in 2003 [anti-Iraq war protest] that was where everyone met up in the end. (Protest participant, personal communication, 17 Mar. 2011)

This underlines the political learning process I outlined earlier. In this case, and in other interview situations, the protesters recalled the success of occupying Tahrir in the 2003 anti-war protest, and chose to assemble there again for January 25. Protesters approached the square from different directions, making it impossible for a significantly outnumbered security force to contain them. The protesters were able to converge in the square. The only street off Tahrir with an overwhelming security presence was Qasr al-Aini—the street near which many ministries as well as the parliament are situated. Qasr al-Aini was off limits. When the protesters attempted to appropriate this street, riot police responded with water hoses, massive amounts of tear-

gas, and rocks thrown by what appeared to be paid thugs (baltagy). Protesters responded by breaking street pavement and hurling it at riot police. Whenever the protesters retreated, the battle would stop. This process of negotiating space lasted several hours. Later, additional riot police positioned themselves on all streets leading to Tahrir Square. Yet protesters were free to enter and exit. One protester on January 25 asked me to spread the word to stay at the square because the crackdown might occur at midnight, when the number of protesters had decreased, as had happened in the 2003 anti-war protests. This protester had learned from his experiences in 2003 that police might try to violently disperse the demonstration at night, after many of the protesters had left. Another protester reported:

Around 10:30 pm, I met a correspondent for Al Jazeera and he told us they [police] are going to sweep it [Tahrir Square] around midnight. It was pretty known, even to media. We knew that they would attack us at 1:00 am and the objective was not to keep the [square]—because of the amount of riot police we saw getting prepared outside. The objective was to get them on camera, beating [...] us and firing at us. That was the actual objective. And an organizer [of the protest], [...] came and told me:

“Stay strong at 1:00 am. Make sure that you uphold it to the point they [police] get very violent, so we can get it on camera.” (Protest participant, personal communication, 17 Mar. 2011)

The security forces marched on the square around 3:00 am with massive force, arresting hundreds, including the protester quoted above. The protesters had learned the police tactic from previous confrontations, and applied the counter tactics they believed to be most suited for maintaining their protest. Activists used the media as a platform for spreading their dissent beyond Tahrir Square, arguably by appropriating the space of news coverage, in order to attract other Egyptians to join and prompt an international response to police brutality. The Mol issued a statement blaming the Muslim Brotherhood for initiating the protests, a claim the Brotherhood denied. This move was intended to delegitimize the protests while legitimizing repressive policing; suggesting the regime was only fighting the “Islamist threat”. January 25 marked the beginning of a seemingly horizontal uprising, in which protesters increasingly gained territorial control over Cairo’s streets and squares.

January 26: New Situation, Old Policing Strategies

As policing did not manage to contain protesters, which is certainly related to the unusual hesitancy in cracking down on the appropriation of space by protesters, interior minister Habib al-‘Adly issued orders to “arrest any persons expressing their views illegally,” thus trying to legitimate coercive policing by a narrative of upholding ‘public order’ (“Timeline: Egypt’s Revolution”). That day, with mobile communication cut off, I went to the journalists syndicate—then a stronghold of opposition to the regime—assuming protests would be staged there. As with previous protests at this location, protesters stood on the steps in front of the syndicate and were surrounded and contained by a police cordon twice their size. Some 80 protesters chanted “leave, leave [Mubarak]” and “down, down, Hosni Mubarak.” The protests were more energetic and vocal than I had witnessed on other occasions. Thousands of riot policemen were on standby, spanning the entire distance from the Supreme Court’s main entrance to the lawyers and the journalists syndicate, as hundreds of protesters approached the area and attempted to join the many small, scattered protests in the area. The protesters seemed angry, confronting police by yelling, pushing, and at-

tempting to break through the cordon. When they did, the riot police hit them with batons and plainclothes agents would drag some of them behind the cordon and severely beat them. Despite the presence of international reporters, often associated with police restraint, the police did not hesitate to beat protesters.⁷ After some hesitancy during January 25, the policing strategies returned to the same coercive and brutal ones the protesters were demonstrating against in the first place. The coercive policing that day was intended to reestablish the norms of what protesters are and are not allowed to do.

A few meters away from the journalists syndicate, passers-by were stopping to watch and condemn the violent interactions. In less than half an hour, some three dozen by-standers gathered and started chanting against police brutality. In response, the police opened traffic on the street to disperse the bystanders and protesters, who increasingly started to surround the very police cordon surrounding the protesters on the steps of the journalists syndicate. Opening traffic worked to an extent and the crowd scattered, but soon by-standers turned protesters started marching away from the police presence and further into downtown Cairo.

As protests and marches were taking place all over town, the standard police

tactic of cordoning became impossible. Instead, they reverted to chasing protesters and beating them up. Yet the protesters would reassemble and keep marching. I suggest that on January 26 the protesters continued to recognize and fear the state's coercive powers but to a lesser extent than in the past. At this point, relative to the state security presence in and around downtown, they felt these powers were hardly comparable to the strength of the protest movement. The perceived strength of the movement became a decisive factor in people's decision to participate (Kurzman).

January 28: Policing Breakdown

Protests continued on January 27 across several cities, including Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and Ismailia, and hundreds were arrested. Yet by upholding spaces of resistance through their continuing engagement in street protests, protesters made it clear that they would not give up until their demands were met. On January 28, Internet and mobile telephone services were entirely cut off. This tactic was intended to weaken demonstrations but it backfired instead: as the protesters were unable to communicate and coordinate protest locations, they were scattered all over Cairo, making it all the more difficult for the

already weakened police to contain and cordon them.

For the first time since January 25, the Muslim Brotherhood announced it would "allow" individual members to participate in protests, but not join as an organization. One protest participant recalled, "on the 28th, when we started from the mosque it was extremely apparent there were people of the Brotherhood that made a huge impact on the amount of people [protesting]" (protest participant, personal communication, 17 Mar. 2011). After Friday prayer in mosques, which had also been appropriated by protesters, tens of thousands of people took to the Egyptian streets. The main places of contention in Cairo were the Sixth of October Bridge, Qasr al-Nil Bridge, Al-Azhar Mosque, the Presidential Palace and Tahrir Square. That day protesters set fire to the NDP headquarters. Setting this building on fire not only contributed to the protesters' perception that power structures were negotiable, but went further and set a concrete example of abolishing authoritarian structures as the regime was slowly "burning down." Not merely metaphorical, the burning down of the headquarters had concrete logistic and strategic consequences, as it disturbed the inner cohesion and organization of the regime.

Downtown Cairo was filled with teargas. Residents who chose not to actively participate in protests would throw supplies, such as water and vinegar against the clouds of teargas, from their balconies as an act of solidarity and sympathy. Some would even throw water from their windows and balconies on police forces as a means of attacking them. To me, and as I assume to other participants, these efforts were extraordinarily touching emotionally, as they solidified affective bonds between protesters and helped them sustain their efforts in the battle over protest spaces. As Cairo's streets were filled with masses of protesters, security forces retreated from most places in order to defend key ministries and government buildings. As a result, the bridges leading to downtown Cairo were marked by a huge security presence. Qasr al-Nil Bridge, which leads to Tahrir Square, was a center of conflict on January 28. Thousands of protesters attempted to cross the bridge while masses of riot policemen countered with water trucks and armored vehicles in an attempt to quell the (re-)appropriation of space by the protesters. One participant notes:

Protesters marched towards the police with their arms up in the air, chanting "peaceful, peaceful." They really tried not to make it violent. These were peaceful protesters marching towards

security services who were responding with violence; who were beating them, shooting with teargas [and] rubber bullets at them. In the face of such provocation, the restraint on the site of the protesters was incredible. (Protest participant, personal communication, 21 Mar. 2011)

The protesters chanting "peaceful" were negotiating the terms of their space expansion through discursive practices in a Foucauldian sense. The chant can also be understood as a moral exhortation to delegitimize police violence. Most communication with security forces would take place through chants that reflected the protesters' intentions and goals. Some chants even asked for the police to join them. Still, the police generally responded using massive force, making January 28 the bloodiest day since protests started. The riot police attacked protesters with large-scale use of teargas and with water hoses. The protesters used trashcans and previously occupied police outposts as shields and barricades and some threw the teargas grenades back at the police. Policemen seemed unable to cope with the situation, as their trucks ran over other policemen, teargas was thrown into the Nile and some riot policemen threw teargas grenades at protesters without considering the wind direction, effectively

gassing themselves. After several hours of battle and ineffective policing, the security forces retreated and thousands of protesters were able to march into Tahrir Square, starting an occupation that would last for weeks. As one participant noted,

I think that what January 28th really demonstrated [...] was how completely rotten to the core the police state had become. [...] Honestly, how hard should it be for a police state to hold a bridge? That should be one of the easiest tasks for a police state that is able to deploy hundreds of thousands of security personnel. Instead what you saw was the incompetence of their security forces, lack of coordination between them and their total unpreparedness for an [...] outpouring of political discontent. (Protest participant, personal communication, 20 Mar. 2011)

Even in trying to perform the usual functions of territorialization as a means of policing areas through massive security deployment and violent crackdowns, it became apparent that the police were unable to perform their fundamental tasks. The training most riot policemen had been given was simply not enough to cope with such massive protests and the coercive policing strategies that they used generally failed to suppress dissent.⁸ According to a journalist respondent who

was able to interview security forces, riot policemen were ordered to work 16 to 18 hours a day beginning on January 25, which was likely detrimental to their performance. The respondent further claimed that policemen were threatened with jail and sexualized torture by their supervisors, if they refused to confront protesters (protest participant, personal communication, 21 Mar. 2011). When I was observing police movement in my apartment right across the Mol on January 27, I witnessed how police officers slapped lower-ranking riot policemen and hit them with their guns if they refused to return to the front-lines of battle on the opposite side of the ministry.⁹ Additionally, scale and determination of the protests overwhelmed security forces, forcing the police to surrender certain areas and congregate at perceived critical locations key to the regime's survival. After Tahrir Square, university campuses, the bridges leading into downtown Cairo, and virtually all mosques that served as starting locations for protests had been "lost," the police shifted their presence to the fortress-like Mol all the way up to nearby Qasr al-Aini street, as well as to Maspero. The regime would by no means allow these two buildings to "fall" as this could have severe implications for the protesters' perception and fear of the regime, but also the regime's organizational

performance. Clearly, losing control of these buildings could have induced a complete collapse of the regime. The Mol represents domestic state-power and houses the planning of police activity, while Maspero houses propagandistic state-broadcasting that reaches almost every Egyptian household and represents the interface of communication and information production, and distribution. It became apparent that the protesters' appropriation of spaces put the regime's survival at stake as the streets slowly changed ownership.

A curfew starting at 6 pm was announced on January 28 to intimidate protesters and keep them off the streets. Yet thousands defied it and some attempted to approach the parliamentary assembly and the Mol, turning adjoining Qasr al-Aini street into a battlefield. The protesters set cars on fire, which then served as burning barricades against the police, and hundreds of protesters continuously advanced towards the parliament equipped with sticks and stones. Pick-up trucks transported desks, chairs and wood laths to the front line to sustain the barricades, while cars and mopeds transported the wounded from the front lines to hospitals. Different protesters had different tasks ranging from physical fighting to efficient supply chain management. The usual coercive police tactics of

throwing teargas, beating with batons and shooting rubber bullets could not stop the protesters from expanding their space of protest to the parliamentary assembly.¹⁰ Protester numbers, tactical considerations and implementation, as well as their perception of state-power compared to their own were superior to the police's. After hours of fighting, hundreds wounded and some killed, the protesters were able to appropriate the area around the parliamentary assembly and Qasr al-Aini street, and forced the police to retreat to the Mol. Although it was heavily contested, protesters did not manage to occupy the premises of the Mol as police were prepared to use lethal means in order to defend their "last frontier." Yet the act of besieging the Mol, had a considerable impact on the organization and internal cohesion of the police. The next day, after severe and bloody fighting, riot gear and many police uniforms were found in the streets surrounding the ministry, as policemen reportedly changed into plainclothes and fled the scene. Since the police had been unable to control territory, contain protesters, or even keep its own men in line, military forces took over on late January 28, after which the police virtually disappeared from the streets. The police's withdrawal facilitated the occupation of Tahrir Square, which quickly became the sym-

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bolic epicenter and a heterotopia of the Egyptian uprising (Schumann and Soudias; Telmissany). The streets at that time, it appears, no longer belonged to the country's autocrats, but to the people.

Conclusion

During the January 25 uprising in Cairo, protesters constituted spaces of resistance and expanded them through the employment of tactical repertoires. The security forces on the other hand attempted to maintain control over spaces through policing strategies, trying to keep the streets contained and “orderly.” The struggle over protest spaces is a key expression of the negotiation of extant power structures between protesters, on the one hand, and the regime represented by their security forces, on the other.

The battle over spaces by these actors underlies strategies of spatial control. A premise of the modern nation state is its control over territory. The police are given a set of legal and coercive powers to implement this control in terms of Foucauldian disciplinary power. This is an inherent outcome of the social organization of the

police as modern policing has meant the development of a capacity to intrude into and control space. Social power hence does not exist without territorial rules. The protesters' attempt to constitute spaces of resistance is an act of a) resisting dictated modes of territoriality, and hence b) renegotiating existing power structures by “liberating” places, redefining symbols and meanings, expressing demands, grievances and desires.

In my case study, the capacity of the police to mark and enact meaningful boundaries, to restrict people's capacity to act by regulating their movements in space has proven insufficient and jeopardized existing power relations in favor of the protesters. The police were not only unable to contain protesters, but barely managed to defend key state institutions. The latter in turn severely restricted the regime's capacity to organize and act, which temporarily led to the breakdown of state security services and their monopoly of force.

As suggested here, the modes of thinking the concepts of territorialization, space production, and tactical repertoires together can serve as a helpful analytical

looking glass well beyond Egypt's January 25 uprising. To name just one example: following the coup d'état against Mursi in 2013; the occupation of Raba'a al-Adawiya Square by Mursi-supporters; the rallies in Tahrir Square by his opponents, as well as supporters of the armed forces; and the establishment of “The Third Square” on Sphinx Square were an embodiment of power relations at that time.

This too is the case outside of Cairo, in the occupations of major squares, parks, and streets like in Athens, Istanbul, Madrid, New York, or Sanaa. These are all cases in point for how protesters produce spaces of resistance in order to challenge extant power relations. The coercive policing strategies through which security forces in each of these occupations cracked down on protesters not only show their attempts at social control through territoriality. They also show that when the status quo is seriously under threat and authorities in jeopardy, violence appears to be the primary policing choice – regardless whether the political systems are labeled authoritarian or democratic.

Notes

¹ A detailed ethnography of the entirety of the uprising is impossible, and due to lack of space, I will focus on those protest events in which I have participated in, and that provide fruitful examples of police-protester interactions in relation to my argument. Data has been gathered through participant observation throughout the 18 days, qualitative documentary research, as well as semi-structured interviews in March and April 2011 with participants, i.e. self-described first-time protesters, activists, and journalists. During my participation in the January 25 uprising, I framed my role as a researcher, but strongly sympathized with the protesters' cause and even became friends with many of the people I have met during the uprising or while conducting interviews. Albeit I did not participate in chants and direct action against police, I too was part of the research situation: I too marched and maintained solidarity with protesters in the face of continuous police attacks. Whether or not I was successful in maintaining critical distance to my research subject, I leave up to the reader to decide.

² For a review of space conceptions and their relation to protest, see Soudias 28-44.

³ According to the United States Institute of Peace, public order describes the "absence of widespread criminal and political violence, such as riots and intimidation against targeted groups or individuals" (73). One needs to keep in mind the problematic nature of the constitution of the term: The police are the agent of enforcing public order. As they usually hold the monopoly of the 'legitimate' use of force, they too can exert massive amounts of violence, therefore disrupting what is considered 'public order'. I need to stress the very political, rather than normative connotation of the term as it is the authorities who usually decide upon the definition of order and disorder.

⁴ For a gender-focused perspective on the Egyptian revolutionary process, see Amar; al-Ali; Sholkamy.

⁵ Though the emergency law in Egypt was formally suspended in 2012, a new protest law introduced in late 2013 perpetuates the widespread criminalization of protest.

⁶ Where not marked differently, the following is based on personal observations in protest events in Cairo between January 25 and February 11 2011.

⁷ Multiple respondents noted that journalists, particularly international reporters, have a restraining effect on violent policing, as regime and security forces have no interest in police brutality being reported abroad.

⁸ For more detailed information regarding the organization of security forces in Egypt prior to the January 25 uprising, see Soudias 61-65.

⁹ These observations indicate struggles within the security force during that time. While further research is required, it is fair to say the police did not act and function as a monolithic unit during these 18 days.

¹⁰ Unverified sources even reported police use of live ammunition on Qasr al-Aini.

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