

**The Revolution Paradox in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011**

Károly Gergely

*The University of Manchester*

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*’I left the city, in which the garish flags of the revolution were already flaming and the people were attacking each other like animals, surrounded by his rabble and, as the new day dawned, forced into submission by his order.’[[1]](#footnote-1)*

 Friedrich Dürrenmatt: The Theater Director

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## ****Introduction****

Friderich Dürrenmatt is an acclaimed writer, partly because his fantastic ability to capture crucial historical-political tendencies in a beautifully structured literary way. In the quoted text, taken from his short story, *The Theater Director*, the stark contrast between ‘the flags of the revolution’ and ‘submission by his order’ is striking. This text reflects on the strange nature of revolutions, where the outcome is so far from the promised or expected one. We tend to perceive a revolution as a ’spectacular outburst of energy that overcomes the dark forces of oppression and lifts liberation into a superior state of perpetual triumph.’[[2]](#footnote-2) This sacred status of ’the revolution’ is irrelevant and it prevents one to think critically about a phenomenon of such ’sacredness’.

This paper attempts to reveal the dual nature and inner paradoxes of revolution through the case study of the 2011 Egypt Revolution. The first part clarifies the starting point, which is the so-called ’revolution paradox’. In the second section, the paper is going to evaluate the different divisions within the Egyptian society, which were some of the most important preconditions for the January 25th Revolution. Following this, the paper will question the unifying power of the revolution and how this might have given the Egyptians false hope about future developments. After demonstrating that ’the united people’ during the protests was just a temporary creation of the given situation, it will be shown how the mentality of the Egyptian *ancien régime* influenced the new leaders' responses to certain problems and obstacles during the course of their struggle. The fourth section will show that since the old mentality prevailed, the dual nature of the regime also continued to endure alongside the revolutionary developments. As a result, the mere nature of the revolution may be questioned – based on the previous sections the paper will present the problems of democratic transition and how a revolution may undermine its success. In conclusion it will be argued that the Egyptian revolution followed the path of a ’soft revolution’ and therefore the remnants of the former system prevented her from achieving the revolution's main claims which were chanted by tens of thousands in the Tahrir Square in the beginning of 2011: 'aish (bread), karama (dignity), and hurriya (freedom).’[[3]](#footnote-3)

## ****The revolution paradox****

This section will reveal the internal paradox of revolution and how it demolishes the very essence of itself as far as it is usually understood. Two things are fundamental for revolution: *radical* *change* within a *short time*. The general view of revolutions is that they bring about ‘substantive institutional restructuring’[[4]](#footnote-4) in every aspect of society’s and the state’s nature: economic, political, structural, religious, etc. The other factor is time.[[5]](#footnote-5) Revolution, as opposed to evolution, the slow and steady development of certain things, changes everything in a heartbeat. In the blink of an eye, our whole world can be transformed into something new. Fundamental *and* quick. The paradox reveals itself in the contradiction of these two. A state is a complex construction just as the economic system or the political structure, their reconstruction ‘requires time, but the logic of transition demands that it be done quickly.’[[6]](#footnote-6) Rushing the transition would most likely result in change within only one dimension and not a structural transformation. Therefore, if one prefers the transformative side of the revolution, one instantly loses the speed of the reconstruction. If one emphasizes the time limit on revolution, it most likely results in a superficial change, which is rather a modification than transformation. Either way, transformation and time are mutually exclusive, meaning that one condition is not fulfilled.

Of course, it may be argued that one can bring about drastic change with the use of power. Obviously, this requires the oppression of the former elite and all those who are not in accordance with the revolution’s course because considering the interest of the *ancien regime* would corrupt and slow down the course of the revolution itself. In turn, revolution becomes more and more oppressive and authoritative, which is exactly what they intended to fight against. This is the revolution paradox. This is the view that the slow transformation of a system may result in the continued influence of the old elite and therefore counterrevolution. Meanwhile quick change would rather end up in being seen as a mere modification. The aggressive and violent oppression of the opposing parties would eventually create an oppressive system which is in mostly similar to the old one.

In this section the paper explained the idea of the revolution paradox and in the following it will turn its attention to the specific case study of the 2011 Egypt Revolution.

## ****A divided society****

Egyptian society is immensely divided. This section will provide the reader with a general overview on this division. This part will also show how this fragmentation was the result of dictatorship and how it determined the course of the revolution. It will conclude that as a result of the deep division within society there was no group or charismatic leader who would have been able to truly unite the revolution. Hence, when Mubarak as the central figure of the system fell a power vacuum emerged.

Egypt struggles with its situation as a diglossic community, where two language codes exist: Standard Arabic (SA) and Egyptian colloquial Arabic (ECA).[[7]](#footnote-7) This linguistic division is strongly connected with political participation, as Standard Arabic is used in formal domains while Egyptian colloquial Arabic is the language of the ‘common folk’, used for informal purposes. Taking part in politics therefore inevitably means that one needs to master the use of SA. In a country of 80 million people, the total adult (aged over 15) literacy rate was 73,9% in 2012. But if we consider the whole population, in which nearly 30 million are under 18,[[8]](#footnote-8) this rate is much worse. Regarding the whole population, the illiteracy rate is closer to 40%, which is a shocking figure. This division between SA and ECA and also between literates and illiterates clearly reinforces the problematic concept of the existence of a unified ‘people’ fighting for one goal, and also questions the mere possibility of a quick, radical transformation – it is impossible to suddenly make a 40% illiterate population literate. One should also think about the gender segregation, especially in the Arab world.

There are also serious ideological ruptures among Egyptians. It can either be argued that society is divided between liberal, Marxist and Islamist camps, or a more specific description of ideological trends would find traditionalist, modernist, secularist and statist approaches as prevailing views.[[9]](#footnote-9) Another scholar recognizes three different serious forces in the Arab world: ‘pro-democratic pluralism, secular or semi-secular authoritarianism and Islamism.’[[10]](#footnote-10) Whichever account is accurate one thing is sure: there is serious ideological fragmentation between several groups. The religious differences also need mentioning here, as there is a considerable Christian ‒ predominantly Coptic Christian ‒ minority (10%), alongside the Sunni majority. Furthermore, there are significant Salafist groups that divide the Muslim community.[[11]](#footnote-11) The assertion that the Muslim Brotherhood as the biggest Islamist organization represents every fraction of the Egyptian Muslims is highly questionable. As a result, there are differences between the Brotherhood and the rest of the Muslims who hold different views on certain issues. Therefore the Islamic movement found it hard to fulfil those various pre-existing expectations. As Tarek Osman phrased it, the Brotherhood ‘was everything to everyone: an alternative social provider to the poor masses; an angry platform for the disillusioned young; a loud trumpet-call announcing ‘a return to the pure religion’ to those seeking an identity; a ‘progressive, moderate religious platform’ for the affluent and liberal; an increasingly civic interlocutor with Egyptian Christians and the West – and at the extremes, a violent vehicle for rejectionists and radicals.’[[12]](#footnote-12) Considering all these factors and different worldviews it is plausible to assume that it is hard, if not impossible, to find a common denominator when it comes to a vision for the future of Egypt.

Besides the general segmentation of Egyptian society, there were some serious differences even among different organized groups which participated in the revolution, one way or another. The military had to face its decreasing power and influence. Mubarak tried to transfer some of the military’s power to the police[[13]](#footnote-13) and made sure that ‘former top military officers did not hold the position of Prime Minister.’[[14]](#footnote-14) The regime also produced an education system which was not able to provide the military with suitable personnel and this caused a serious rupture between the military and the regime just as well as within the military. The military’s top leaders, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) also suffered from internal division alongside different interests. First of all, they were deeply embedded in the system and their economic interests strongly correlated with those of the regime. Simultaneously with the rise of a new economic elite, they felt their positions threatened.[[15]](#footnote-15) Before the revolution, they struggled to reconcile these two views: loyalty and economic interests on one hand, possible downfall on the other. The other most important organization in the Egyptian power sphere, the Muslim Brotherhood was also divided. Due to the generation gap among its members and the successful methods of oppression of the state, it was not unified, it had ‘no charismatic and popular leader.’[[16]](#footnote-16)

There was also a vertical distinction between ‘the state’ and ‘the people’. This is a general feature of dictatorships, where the state acquires as much power as it can and distances itself from ‘the people’. The very essence of authoritarianism, the paternalistic approach of the autocrat proves that there is no ‘we’ – there is ‘us’, the ‘everyday people’ and ‘he’, ‘the leader’, who looks after us. Hence, the state is his tool to do so. The people should not interfere with its work, it is not their domain. By 2011 this kind of ‘us-them’, ‘people-state’ distinction became clear and ‘a continuous change in identity on the side of the Egyptian people versus the state […] became increasingly evident throughout the public sphere.’[[17]](#footnote-17)

The very nature of dictatorship nurtures the presented fragmented society. It is easier to ‘govern’ a country with dictatorial measures if it is divided on every possible level. *Divide et impera!* With the restriction of labor organizations[[18]](#footnote-18) and the careful handling of civil groups[[19]](#footnote-19) the regime managed to maintain its position and avert the rise of a powerful alternative power. Mubarak was not afraid of mass demonstrations as far as they were conducted by one segment of society. These kinds of demonstrations did not pose any serious threat to his power since they could not unite more segments – their claims could not get any public support from the other groups. The real threat was in ‘diffusion and linkage.’ [[20]](#footnote-20) But when the main supporter of the regime, the SCAF became alienated from Mubarak due to his possible succession and the implied change in the power structure, a rupture appeared even inside the elite. And authoritarian collapse usually begins with this very rupture.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The question inevitably arises – what if the central power falls? In a situation like this, where no real opposition is actually existing due to the successful measures taken by Mubarak the fall of the ‘strongman’ results in chaotic power struggle between the different groups. ‘A political and organizational power vacuum ensues.’[[22]](#footnote-22) Since there is no strong sense of political identity,[[23]](#footnote-23) the different groups which are unable to control the state unilaterally eventually end up fighting for dominance. Some might argue that the unifying force of revolution is able to nurture such a strong ‘we’ feeling among the revolutionaries that their differences turn out to be subordinated to their common goal.

In this section the paper encountered the different divisions in Egyptian society and how it is segmented into several fractions. In the next part, it will look at the Revolution of 2011 and then assess how strong its unifying power was.

## ****United in Revolution****

Michael Kimmel argues that ‘revolutions are made by a *coalition of political opposition* which brings together members from various social groups into a common cause against the existing political regime.’[[24]](#footnote-24) This section will show how this coalition was manifest in the Egypt Revolution of 2011 and how the common cause unified people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, it will show that this coalition was inevitably weak and temporary and a power struggle between the different groups participating in the revolution was highly predictable. It will conclude that, although there was a significant fusion between different social groups during the 18 days of the Revolution, the rupture between them was already visible during this period and in the end their goals became too distant to talk about a unified force.

In spite of the huge division between different social groups, the common enemy forged them into an alliance. This kind of alliance ‘against the corruption of Mubarak’s regime and the mistreatment that runs across all layers of society’[[25]](#footnote-25) created the core spirit of the revolution: ‘we’.[[26]](#footnote-26) Recalling the popular image of revolution one might say that this kind of unity is a precondition for something to be called a revolution: a small group wants to take power violently ‒ thy name is a coup. This paper will later discuss whether the Egyptian Revolution was closer to a coup than to a revolution. However, one thing is evident: the façade of events undoubtedly showed a clear unity. Even the military joined the protesters and they were ‘in reality as well as in rhetoric, id wahida (‘one hand’).’[[27]](#footnote-27)

The inner implications of such unity in a spontaneous revolution are much graver than one would imagine. Partly because of the aforementioned division, there was no clear leader in this revolution,[[28]](#footnote-28) who would forge together the different groups after the fall of the common enemy. The protests which were firstly actions by organized groups later ‘attracted large unorganized masses far larger in number than the organized forces that ignited the revolution.’[[29]](#footnote-29) This process in which this protest or uprising became a revolution brought unimaginable[[30]](#footnote-30) results: the protesters achieved their goal and brought down Mubarak.

Success might confuse revolutionaries and this is part of the controversial nature of revolution. Revolutions, in order to unite people, must follow a single agenda – down with the old regime. They also usually identify themselves against something but not clearly for something specific.[[31]](#footnote-31) One can imagine the bizarre image of a revolution which possesses carefully planned economic, social, political plans for the post-revolutionary period.[[32]](#footnote-32) In a society, where every organization and gathering is carefully monitored it is highly implausible that any group is able to present such a vision which unifies ‘the people’ while staying realistic, maintaining popularity among different social layers and at the same time carefully hiding from the vigorous eyes of the dictatorship. Revolutions therefore usually find themselves with one single aim: to conquer the state. Once successful, the former revolutionaries must combat reality and create their own program which mirrors the claims of the uprising and solves the problems of the former regime. But this research will discuss the disillusion in revolutionary government later on. This part showed that there definitely was a sense of unity during the January Revolution. However, the question remains: was this common identity limited to their common aim (‘We are against Mubarak.’), while leaving their primary identities and interests unaltered?

In order to answer this question, one must carefully analyze the composition of the Revolution. It is quite widely accepted[[33]](#footnote-33) that young Egyptians started and organized[[34]](#footnote-34) the revolution from the start. [[35]](#footnote-35) From the very beginning, the members of the Muslim Brotherhood were also present in Tahrir Square,[[36]](#footnote-36) although the Brotherhood as an entity only joined in officially on 28 January, the ‘Friday of rage’. It is also important to mention workers, who were also presented all along the 18 days, one activist even claimed that ‘workers did not join the revolution; the revolution joined the workers’.[[37]](#footnote-37) One scholar encounters the different movements and parties involved in the Revolution and their different means to achieve their ends: ’Kefaya, Mohamed ElBaradei, Ayman Nour, the Democratic Front Party, and the National Society for Change were among those who endorsed the demands of the 25 January Youth Coalition and refused to negotiate with the regime until Mubarak stepped down; the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Wafd Party, the Tagammu‘ Party, and a number of independent public figures who formed the Committee of Wise Men agreed to enter into negotiations with the newly appointed vice president, Omar Suleiman.’[[38]](#footnote-38) Studying the different writings on the walls of Egypt, Samuli Schielke and Jessica Winegar found texts which clearly revealed that the inner division of the society did not disappear during the Revolution. ‘the revolution continues; build unity between Christians and Muslims; make Egypt an Islamic state […] Fuck the Muslim Brothers; I'm a Muslim Brother and proud. Invoke God; the ultras rule Egypt.’[[39]](#footnote-39) The different social classes also arrived to Tahrir Square with different expectations. While the middle class supported the revolution in order to bring down Mubarak and consequently to ‘bring back political stability’[[40]](#footnote-40), the working class focused rather on ‘labour-specific demands’[[41]](#footnote-41) and neglecting political ones.

These differences became even more obvious after ‘the post-revolutionary honeymoon period.’[[42]](#footnote-42) After achieving the common goal, the situation was not one of joy and collaboration but rather one of ‘uncertainty’[[43]](#footnote-43) and ‘mutual distrust’[[44]](#footnote-44). The reasons behind this lie at the complete change in the balance of power and the revolutionary forces’ inability to predict ‘how much their political position and abilities have changed after the old regime’s demise.’[[45]](#footnote-45) Therefore, the formerly divided groups which were united for one cause faced problems to resolve the ensuing state-building.

Without further analysis, it is already obvious that closer examination shows the fissures in the texture of unity even before Mubarak stepped down. Accepting and embracing the differences, followed by discussion and compromise would be a democratic solution to these problems. The question inevitably arises: how far the old regime’s mentality influences society and the different political movements? The next part will look at the survival of the old mentality and methods and how they poisoned the revolutionary movement.

## ****Old mentality, old methods****

‘Revolutions require the elimination of old orders.’[[46]](#footnote-46) To elaborate on this statement, if we perceive ‘revolution’ as ‘fundamental change’ it is clear that the elimination of old structures is inevitable. In order a revolution to be successful there must be an overwhelming transformation. Of course, in a world where everything is interconnected this kind of ‘takeover’ of the state and completely reconstructing it may be a utopia.[[47]](#footnote-47) In this section, the paper will look at the different remaining structures of the old regime after the Revolution and assess to what extent it determined the course of the Revolution. It will conclude that since the different economic, political and power structures even the mentality of the system and the people remained mostly unchanged, it is possible to question if the revolution had really happened.

Although the Revolution itself was against the system,[[48]](#footnote-48) they did not succeed in demolishing it. The most significant remnant of the old regime is the very body which claimed to lead the ‘democratic transition’. The SCAF was not an average part of the system – it was among its most significant supporters for thirty years. Therefore, the revolution met with a very serious obstacle as soon as the SCAF claimed their leadership in the transition. Allowing an entity, which is definitely not a ‘neutral body to run the transitional period’[[49]](#footnote-49), allocating the work of eliminating the old order to an organization which is clearly from that old order reveals its inherent flaw instantly. Even though part of the revolutionary movement was able to recognize this issue[[50]](#footnote-50) they could not prevent the SCAF to take over. It was predictable that the SCAF, which power is ‘buttressed by a snaking business empire’[[51]](#footnote-51) is not going to initiate fundamental changes and fight against its own interest. The SCAF’s economic and political power is deeply connected and when grasping one it is obviously not going to let go of the other. Therefore, the remnant-nature of the SCAF deeply affected the later course of the transition.

It is also important to point out that accepting the SCAF into the leadership of the revolution was itself a result of the ‘Armed Forces’ enduring aura as a national, progressive and transformative institution, derived from the Nasserist era.’[[52]](#footnote-52) The public mentality, the public understanding of the military was still one of the old regime’s. To be precise it was rooted as deep as the 1952 military coup. This still prevailing mentality gave the SCAF a huge advantage. Besides this widespread appreciation for the military, they also enjoyed a ‘kind of impunity in Egyptian political life, operating above civilian control.’[[53]](#footnote-53) To sum up, the SCAF itself was a remnant of the old regime, therefore, their enthusiasm about eliminating the old structures could be questioned. The problem of corruption, for example, shows this. Neither the SCAF nor President Morsi took ‘any effective measures to combat the corruption’[[54]](#footnote-54) because their interests dictated them not to do so. If one is a beneficiary of a system, why would one change it? Being a ‘core component of the Egyptian ruling class’[[55]](#footnote-55) defined the SCAF’s interests and therefore the course on which they would set the revolution which they claimed to lead.

Not just the SCAF but the old elite *en géneral* stayed in power. They had not been replaced, only the very top of the economic and political hierarchy.[[56]](#footnote-56) It is important to note that in Egypt political and economic power are deeply interconnected. In order to create a new order, one ought to be able to distinguish between the two and create a new structure in which economic and political interests are not as closely interlinked. Having the SCAF as the leader of the transition meant that besides insignificant personal changes at the very top, the mere nature of the eco-political power has not changed[[57]](#footnote-57) and this heavily affected the future of the revolution.

The political system also struggled with the same problem. Egypt had a ‘set of existing political institutions.’[[58]](#footnote-58) This meant that the new order inherited the system and its flaws as well, instead of creating a completely new structure from scratch, starting from the very bottom. In the Mubarak years ‘little people had no politics’,[[59]](#footnote-59) and as the result of the stagnating level of illiteracy this did not really change. Being able to vote is not the same as using reason to vote and voting about a constitution which one cannot read questions if there was any kind of democratization at all. It is also important to note that a majoritarian electoral system[[60]](#footnote-60) may not be perfect for a newly formed democracy, just as the significant presidential powers, which even with the amendment of the constitution remained dangerously extended.[[61]](#footnote-61) Besides the general depoliticization[[62]](#footnote-62) of the population, ‘several sovereign state agencies remained almost intact’.[[63]](#footnote-63) Having a remaining political structure with its system and the voting base is definitely not the kind of fundamental change which one would expect from a revolution.

The relation of state and media remained unaltered as well. Control over media is one of the most crucial factors in an authoritative regime and Mubarak heavily used the media to propagate his rule.[[64]](#footnote-64) But after the SCAF took over, the expected ‘liberation’ of the media did not come. This media revolution turned out to be similar to the general one – one dimensional, superficial change. ‘They had simply switched from being a mouthpiece for Mubarak to being a mouthpiece for generals.’[[65]](#footnote-65) State media coverage supported the rule of the military, questioning whether the ‘”shaky hands” of civilian leaders can impose law and order in such unstable times.’[[66]](#footnote-66) Of course, the state was not able to control fully the social media, but regarding the state-controlled parts of the media it is plausible to assume that the old system and the considerable control by the state prevailed. And since the Muslim Brotherhood which came into power after the SCAF acquired a great ‘media-centric tenacity’[[67]](#footnote-67) during its time as an underground organization, it is without a doubt that they continued this tendency as well, therefore choking free media which is essential for a working democracy. Having a remaining media structure and media-state relation not just only means that the state has a huge influence on public opinion but also undermines any kind of democratic transformation.

In the following section the paper will look at the way in which the regimes dealt with the opposition and it is going to show that there was no fundamental paradigm shift in this area. Mubarak ‘strengthened the authoritarian system of party-bureaucratic-security governance’ [[68]](#footnote-68) while suppressing any form of political dissent.[[69]](#footnote-69) He was also preoccupied with the elite while neglecting the majority.[[70]](#footnote-70) The main form of dissent under his rule was protesting, and by the end of his rule, demonstrations became quite regular.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Similar to this, the Morsi regime also tried to ‘control the major institutions of the state, delegitimize the opposition, and suppress the revolutionary movements’.[[72]](#footnote-72) They also sought to restrict the civil society groups,[[73]](#footnote-73) similar to Mubarak. During the rule of the SCAF and President Morsi, the ways in which they dealt with the opposition did not change either. ‘Police abuse and impunity’[[74]](#footnote-74), ‘repressive and cumbersome approach to governance’[[75]](#footnote-75), the leaders of opposition ‘faced a campaign of character assassination’[[76]](#footnote-76), and detention of civilians alongside with their trial before military courts.[[77]](#footnote-77) The opposition, in turn, answered with the one action they knew well: protests. After two years of January 25, 2011 ‘millions of protesters demonstrated across Egypt.’[[78]](#footnote-78) Therefore, one must assume that the political mentality has not changed, rather remained the same.

This kind of political culture seems to be so deeply embedded in the political context of Egypt that it is hard to find a way out of this. But if this has not changed then how can one expect democracy to flourish in a political culture which ‘neglects, or defies, conflicting splits, and partisan interests’[[79]](#footnote-79), therefore there is no meaningful dialogue among different political parties? This section proved that in spite of the expectations that the revolution would bring fundamental change, the remaining economic and power structure and the surviving political mentality seriously makes one seriously question if there was a revolution at all or just a change at the very top. The next part will show that the façade of a revolution would perfectly fit into the picture of the Egyptian politics, where the existence of a ‘dual truth’ is obvious.

## ****Dual truth****

The stark differences between façade and reality, rhetoric, and action, surface and depth are presented in every state. However, in authoritarian regimes, these two parts are becoming so distant that it is relevant to talk about a ‘dual truth’. This section will show how this ‘dual truth’ was present during the Mubarak years and how the revolutionaries, neglecting the opportunity to establish a new mentality, carried on with the old one. This part will conclude that since the whole system after the post-Mubarak period was based on a lie – namely that there was a revolution ‒ it is not surprising that the project of democratization got sidetracked.

This paper will pick two aspects during the Mubarak era to show the nature of the ‘dual truth’. Firstly the nature of the whole system. Dictatorship, with the façade of democracy and competitive elections. The latter two only existed so that the regime may receive foreign aid, mostly from the United States.[[80]](#footnote-80) This dual nature of the regime, where elections are held but only the ruling party is able to actually win, poisoned the political culture. In the 2005 elections, numerous Brotherhood candidates ran as independents in order to trick the system and won eighty-eight seats. One might ask: what if the organization which tricked the system controls the system? But regardless of the answer, one thing is clear: the Mubarak regime possessed a duality in which some democratic elements were present but only in order to ensure that the country receives its aid from the United States.

This leads us to the second aspect, the stability, and strength of the Mubarak regime. It was widely accepted that Egypt was one of the most stable states in the region.[[81]](#footnote-81) But behind the external face of the regime, the internal situation was much more complicated. ‘Every day people saw proof that Egypt was a very soft state and at the same time a tough one.’[[82]](#footnote-82) Playing jumping rope on the verge of the two sides of the political spectrum reveals the ‘dual truth’ – a state which cannot decide if its tough or soft, cannot be stable neither externally nor internally. The same goes for the president. His strategy to blame the unpopular decisions on others made him look like a rather ambiguous figure, who is similar to the state in a very important matter. It was questionable whether the ‘president was very strong or very weak.’[[83]](#footnote-83) It is partly a result of his reforms, which were mere spectacular just like the elections.[[84]](#footnote-84) The two realms of rhetoric and reality became distant and the ‘dual truth’ affected every single cell of the society. The problem emerged when the state’s version of reality became questioned and it turned out to be mere rhetorics.[[85]](#footnote-85)

The paper already showed how the self-claimed unity of the revolutionaries was a mere façade under the flags of counter-Mubarak protests, while in fact they ‘did not necessarily agree with one perception of their role or identity as protestors.’[[86]](#footnote-86) This duality later turned out to be fatal, as they could not agree on crucial issues, such as how long should the revolution last and when can it be claimed as finished.

The role of the Muslim Brotherhood can also be brought as an example to the presence of a ‘dual truth’. Despite they pictured themselves later as crucial to the revolution, they did not appear in Tahrir Square at the very beginning as an entity.[[87]](#footnote-87) They also played a dual game, keeping channels open with the Mubarak administration[[88]](#footnote-88) alongside with the Salafist sheiks.[[89]](#footnote-89) This manoeuvring does not fit into the public image of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was the most organized force among the revolutionaries. Although the Brotherhood did not join in from the very beginning, later on, they got an important role in the revolution: they stood at the security checkpoints at Tahrir Square.[[90]](#footnote-90) So although they joined in later to the revolution, kept channels open to negotiate with the administration and when the revolution gained momentum they inevitably took important positions and became the most significant organized group among the protestors.

There was also a ‘dual truth’ on the side of the SCAF. Their very nature as a remnant conducting the transition would be sufficient to prove their duality but there are also other factors which one needs to consider. The Egyptian consciousness pictures the military as the great supporter and protector of the revolution, which fought alongside with the ‘people’ against ‘the dictator’. In spite of this image, it later became clear that despite their rhetoric the SCAF does not perceive itself as a revolutionary actor. In an interview on 17 March 2011, the assistant defense minister for legal affairs made the position of the SCAF clear. ‘Some believe that the armed forces took charge by virtue of revolutionary legitimacy, but what happened was that ... when the armed forces found the country collapsing, they intervened by virtue of being the only power on the ground capable of protecting the country.’[[91]](#footnote-91) During their rule, they also had to face the conflict between the two parts of the ‘dual truth’ – while in rhetoric they were pro-democracy and pro-reform,[[92]](#footnote-92) in action they sought to defend their ‘own particular interests.’[[93]](#footnote-93)

After Morsi was elected, he and the Brotherhood was faced with a similar problem to that of the SCAF, *ergo* they got trapped between their own agenda and the promised economic prosperity. While the Islamist voters expected them to heat up the situation with Israel, it would have inevitably brought an economic catastrophe,[[94]](#footnote-94) which was against the revolutionary claim: aish (bread). They also had to reassure the international community, especially the United States that it had no extremist intentions while it had to maintain its public image which got it elected in the first place.[[95]](#footnote-95)

There is one more recurring pattern which further clarifies the nature of the dual truth. Creating an external enemy and blaming them for everything bad which happened to the country was a common practice during the Mubarak years.[[96]](#footnote-96) These theories construct one part of the ‘dual truth’ while the other part lies at the responsibility of the government and Mubarak. Instead of getting rid of this practice the groups which grasped power continued the building of a parallel reality. The SCAF, in order to justify the continuation of the security state presented itself as the defender of the revolution against every internal and external enemy. The idea of a ‘foreign hand’, which tries to disturb the collaboration of the army and the revolutionaries became commonplace.[[97]](#footnote-97) Once, after being accused of using live ammunition on April 8 against protesters, they blamed it on ‘counterrevolutionary snipers intent on driving a wedge between the people and the army’.[[98]](#footnote-98) They also used this conspiracy theory in order to strengthen the (non-existent) unity of ‘the people’.[[99]](#footnote-99)

In the previous sections, the paper presented different aspects which all question whether there was a revolution at all, or is it relevant to call the events after January 25 2011 a revolution. I believe that it is possible to extend the reign of the ‘dual truth’ into the domains of the revolution itself. In the public imagination, the classic romantic image of the revolution is prevailing, while in fact, a ‘protest-inspired coup’[[100]](#footnote-100) would be a much more precise definition.

The existence of a ‘dual truth’ is a serious threat to any society. It prevents real, precise, adequate solutions to truly existent issues and poisons the whole society. Since the Egyptian revolution, as this section showed, was strongly affected by the principle of a ‘dual truth’ and the post-Mubarak era stayed in this status there is no question that problems occurred during the transition. The following section will look at different obstacles which the revolutionaries came across and the general problems of democratization.

## ****A democratic transition?****

In the previous section, the paper has encountered the different obstacles the revolution came across. In the following, the different problems with democratization will be discussed and key problems which emerged from the previously explained preconditions. After defining democracy, this part will look at the absence of a common vision and the dual nature of those who got to power. Later it will discuss the issues with democratization and how this process is strongly connected with economic performance. After analyzing the idea of ‘social fatigue’, this part will conclude that the possible future trajectory of the revolution seems to be rather dark and full of terrors.

This paper adopts the definition of Diamond, which claims that democracy is ‘a combination of electoral contestation and civil and political rights.’[[101]](#footnote-101) In the years following the January 25 Revolution, both of these were seriously offended by the ones in power. Looking at different statistics, there seems to be no development regarding democracy. In 2015, Egypt gained a status as a ‘Not Free’ country in the Freedom House Democracy Index, scoring only 5,5 on the freedom ranking, 5 on civil liberties and 6 in political rights (1=best, 7=worst).[[102]](#footnote-102) This is mostly the result of the previously discussed issues.

The first problem with revolution is that it is never sure how widely accepted or supported it is. Although millions were on the streets against Mubarak, some scholars still wrote about a ‘hidden majority’[[103]](#footnote-103), which remained at home and could not go to Tahrir Square. Among those, who had been there, under the surface of unity, a deep division was formulating. They faced an incredible challenge of ‘translating a relatively amorphous, spontaneous movement into a new regime that is both organized and sustainable.’[[104]](#footnote-104)

The Muslim Brotherhood faced itself a similar challenge. Their whole nature was based on the precondition that they are a banned entity, which is a force of resistance. [[105]](#footnote-105) But as soon as they got into the limelight, their role changed drastically. As an opposition force, they did not need to care about any specific economic, political, social problems. ‘Islam is the solution’ – stated their motto. But as they got elected, they realized that ‘Islam is not the solution, that is, it does not automatically provide solutions for the country’s problems.’[[106]](#footnote-106)They could not deal with this shift and failed to deliver the revolutionary demands. The Morsi administration was a product of the revolution, therefore, it should have focused on the main revolutionary demands. But they clearly failed, partly because there was no unified revolution and partly because the Brotherhood decided to prioritize its own project of making Egypt an Islamic state over the revolutionary demands.[[107]](#footnote-107)

One must also consider disillusion as a possible outcome. The following part will evaluate how it is possible that ‘successful revolutions often lead to dashed expectations and disillusion’.[[108]](#footnote-108) The nature of revolution brings itself hyped expectations, because if one expect a drastic change in a short time, then one will most certainly be disappointed. This gap between expectation and achievements could lead to mass disillusionment and even counterrevolution.[[109]](#footnote-109) Although it is questionable whether there was a revolution at all in Egypt,[[110]](#footnote-110) but it is clear that only certain groups kept the revolutionary spirit alive and pursued their goals even after the fall of Mubarak.

One of the most important factors a post-revolution system must show is economic growth. Without economic prosperity, democracy is just an fancy idea, and ‘nothing tests democratic commitments like an empty stomach.’[[111]](#footnote-111) This strong link between a newly formed democracy and economic performance[[112]](#footnote-112) seems to be a shared idea among scholars.[[113]](#footnote-113) However, a new paradox emerges from the nature of revolution – namely that revolutions directly result in economic downturn due to ‘disruptions to industrial production, trade, worker remittances, foreign investment, and tourism.’[[114]](#footnote-114) Therefore, people make a revolution in order to achieve a new system which provides a better living standard, yet the mere act of revolution destroys the possibility of economic prosperity.

One final thing which may distract the revolution from continuing its path: the so-called ‘social fatigue’. Constant protests distract the everyday life[[115]](#footnote-115), and it became widely accepted that the longer the transition lasted the more likely it was to lead to chaos and economic disaster.[[116]](#footnote-116) The lack of fundamental change, which was presented above resulted in an atmosphere of ‘cynical pessimism’[[117]](#footnote-117), which would, in turn, led to demobilization.[[118]](#footnote-118) But if the nation is not able to pursue its revolutionary goals for a longer period, then the transition would most likely be stopped by those whose interest lie in the old system.

Looking at the wider context, one must also consider what Rex Bryan called the ‘paradox of democracy in the Middle East’.[[119]](#footnote-119) After analyzing the political culture of the region,[[120]](#footnote-120) he concludes that there is a ‘fear that democratic elections might bring to power an anti-democratic regime.’[[121]](#footnote-121) As the example of President Morsi had shown, this is a relevant fear and makes one contemplate if democracy is the most suitable system for each and every country. A general problem with democratization is the high level of illiteracy, to which the former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros-Ghali reacted that ‘in a country in which the illiteracy level is so high, democracy does not work.’[[122]](#footnote-122)

This section listed some factors which discouraged and limited democratization in Egypt after the 2011 Revolution. Considering the current situation in Egypt it is plausible to assert that there was no major democratization and that the ‘dual truth’ is still prevailing. After the dismissal of President Morsi by the military, the Egyptian society polarized into two groups, pro-Morsi and anti-Morsi.[[123]](#footnote-123) Since there seems to be no constructive dialogue between the two camps, there is possibly one which this could go: the authoritarian oppression of one group by the other. But in this case, there seems to be no change related to the Mubarak-era.

## ****Conclusion****

This paper looked at the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 and analyzed it from the perspective of what I call the ‘revolution paradox’. This framework states that revolutions cannot perform their two essential features at the same time. If it focuses on radical, fundamental change, it must take longer. If it focuses on a quick transformation it will lose its depth and remain a one-dimensional, superficial action.

Taking the Revolution of 2011 as a case study, the paper looked at different features which explained how the revolution paradox occurred in this specific case. Looking at the internal division of the state we have seen that the country is divided by language, literacy, ideology, religion and even the organized groups, such as the SCAF or the Muslim Brotherhood struggle with creating a unified body. The growing distinction between ‘the state’ and ‘the people’ was together with the aforementioned features the result of the dictatorial system. This multi-layered nature of the nation pointed in the direction of a quick change which might be impossible since collaboration between all these groups requires time.

In the second section, the paper analyzed the unifying force of the revolution and whether it was possible to bridge the differences between the various groups which composed it. It found that although there was a unity in a common goal, namely ousting Mubarak but this unity did not overwrite their specific identities and interests. Analyzing the composition of the revolutionary mass I found that there were nearly irresolvable differences between the different groups and this raised another obstacle in the way of unity and fundamental change.

The third part enlisted the different remaining structures of the system, which endured the revolution. With the SCAF taking over power from the president, a remnant became the conductor of the transition, therefore, a fundamental change was impossible. Other remnants included the economic-political elite, the political institutions, the electoral system, the state-media relations and the way how the power dealt with its opposition. It showed that the political mentality remained mostly intact and the fundamental change was completely erased from the revolutionary equation.

The fourth section analyzed the endurance of the so-called ‘dual truth’, which means the creation of a parallel reality and the denial of real problems. The paper traced back its origins to the Mubarak era, and got to the conclusion, that it was prevailing during the revolution and the rule of the SCAF and Morsi as well. Demolishing the ‘dual truth’ about the revolution, based on the previously found reasons the paper argued that the revolution ‘has not yet occurred.’[[124]](#footnote-124)

In the last section, the paper questioned the notion of a democratic transition. Encountering the different issues which may occur in a case of democracy-building it looked at the problem of a hidden majority, the hardship of the transition from opposition to the state to being part of the state, the possible disillusion from democracy, and the notion of social fatigue. In the end, it concluded that it is highly implausible that in the current situation a working democracy can be established in Egypt, and the recreation of the autocratic system is a possible scenario.

In the framework of the ‘revolution paradox’, the Egypt Revolution proved that without fundamental change, it is doubtful to talk about revolution at all. With all the remaining and still existent parts of the *ancien régime*, it is hard to believe that the January 25 Revolution brought change at all. It is also hard to determine what exactly is to be referred to as a revolution. What was the difference between the January 25 Revolution, the election of President Morsi and his ouster? They all brought little change to the fundamental nature of the Egyptian society, only the very top of the hierarchy seems to have shifted from one fraction to another. In the lights of all these, this study suggests that there ought not to be a single definition for revolutions.

Revolution is therefore something that is claimed to be one.

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69. Ibid, p. 531. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid, p. 533. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
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73. Ibid., p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Bhuiyan, “Can Democratic”, p. 505. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
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93. De Smet, “Revolution”, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Frisch, “The Egyptian Army”, p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
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98. Ibid., p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Albrecht, “Authoritarian Transformation”, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
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