

Acts of ignorance: how could Egypt's revolutionaries overlook a state massacre of 1000+ protestors?

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Abstract

Two years after Egypt's uprisings in 2011, a popularly-backed military-coup massacred 1000+ protestors in Rabaa square. Many of the activist groups that mobilised for the earlier uprisings did not condemn this act. Existing social movement literature accounts for the political settings which made this silence structurally, ideologically and strategically viable. Building on these works, this article sheds light on the framing process through which the activists justified and hence reproduced this silence. Merging feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' with(in) a 'collective action framing' framework, the article underlines the importance of 'bottom-up' approaches for understanding the reproduction of hegemonic silences beyond structural, ideological, and strategic determinism.

Keywords: Epistemologies of ignorance, collective action framing, Rabaa Massacre, Egypt

Introduction

In June 2010, an Egyptian citizen, Khaled Saeed, was beaten to death while in police custody. A morgue photo of his mangled corpse went viral and he became a nationwide symbol of state brutality. Massive demonstrations followed in response, mobilised by established activist groups, like the 6th of April Youth Movement (6 April) and the Revolutionary Socialists (RevSoc), activist groups formed in response, like the Facebook-based group *Kolena Khaled Saeed* ['We are all Khaled Saeed'], and various informal groups and public figures who later merged into activist coalitions, like the Revolution Path Front (RPF) and the National Salvation Front (NSF). The collective action organised by those activist groups and others culminated into a protest wave that started in January 2011 and successfully toppled the long-ruling tyrant, President Hosni Mubarak.

On 14 August 2013, following a popularly-backed military-coup, the police massacred 'at least 817 and likely well over 1000 protestors' during their eviction of an anti-coup sit-in in Rabaa square; 'one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history' (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 82, p. 6). Paradoxically, this state massacre was almost entirely ignored by many of the activist groups which mobilised for the earlier uprisings. The Facebook group 'Kolena Khalid Saeed' posted nothing on the eviction. 6 April (2013) posted a very brief consolation note, absent of any denunciation or

indictment. Even the RPF, a coalition of left-wing activists formed avowedly in protest against state violence, did not explicitly mention the violence in Rabaa either in their founding statement (RPF, 2013) or in a later statement dedicated precisely to 'address police violence' (RPF, 2014). The NSF (2013), a 'big-tent' coalition encompassing thirty-five groups, mostly secular conservatives, and many of which were affiliated to the January uprisings, was amongst the few who did attend to the event in detail.¹ Yet their statement did not mention anything about the fact that many protestors were brutally massacred. With the exception of RevSoc (2013), the general tendency, across a wide ideological spectrum, was to ignore the culpability of the state for the atrocity. While the stances of these groups on the massacre varied, they were all, with the exception of RevSoc, characterised by a common ambivalence that suggests a collective inclination across the varied components of the earlier movement.²

How can we explain this ambivalence? Existing literature underlines the structural and ideological grounds which made these groups' silence on the Rabaa massacre a rational decision. What remains unexamined is how these groups could justify this silence to themselves and their followers. How could they frame the event in ways which systematically marginalised their ethical and political duty to condemn it? And how did this framing reinforce – or subvert – the existing structural and ideological conditions underlined in present frameworks?

Studying 'ignorance': theoretical background

After a brief engagement with the structural and ideological conditions that facilitated this silence as underlined in existing literature, the article draws on three bodies of social theory to explore how the activists contributed to this repertoire of silencing and the reproduction of the conditions which facilitate it: literature on 'collective identity', literature on 'collective action framing', and literature on 'epistemologies of ignorance'.

Literature on 'collective identity', pioneered by Alberto Melucci, approaches these silences as acts of identity demarcation. Critiquing the conception of

¹ Some leaders of the NSF were part of the Mubarak regime, which does indeed complicate its position in relation to the January revolution. Yet this presence should not deny the equally strong presence of January revolution cadres and groups in the same front. In fact, the NSF shows the complexity and ambivalence of the lines that distinguish the two sides in post-Mubarak politics.

² Egypt's 2011 uprisings – widely known as the "January movement" – involved a set of ideologically and culturally disconnected social groups, which makes their characterisation as a unified movement – in the traditional sense – controversial. Yet taking Alberto Melucci's complication of collective identity seriously suggests the inherent conceptual and empirical ambiguity of most groups analytically approached as one "movement" (Melucci, 1996, p.30). The classification here should therefore be approached as an analytic rather than an empirical category: it does not reflect an actual social unity but an attempt to conceptualise points of intersection and commonality between empirically distinct groups.

movements as mere embodiments of alternative politics, Melucci (1996, 49) emphasises that movements could also reproduce gaps and silences in the dominant political culture. This dual agency of reproducing and/or resisting dominant political silences makes collective action frames more than mere effects of political opportunity structures; for the former plays an active role in reproducing the regime space which defines the latter.

Literature on 'collective action framing' set the analytic grounds for examining this dual agency (Snow, 2004; Snow and Benford, 2000; Gamson, 1995). However, its engagement with silence is limited on two main levels. First, while it refutes the conception of 'frames' as rigid structures, it remains focused on the tactical negotiation of these frames: the acts activists pursue to expand or rather limit their frame alignments based on their structural situation, ideological emphases, and strategic agendas. Rarely does it explore the interplay of the epistemic standpoints into this repertoire of frame reproduction. While these standpoints are themselves products of structural, ideological, and strategic conditions; they too affect these conditions by reframing and redefining them. It is the latter that is not sufficiently interrogated in current literature and which I aim to highlight in this analysis.

Second, 'collective action framing' literature remains driven by a normative and analytic focus on the progressive, counterhegemonic dimensions of framing: like its subversion of hegemonic political discourse, the centralisation of contentions this discourse overlooks, or the unification of multiple actors under one banner of contention. Rarely does it encounter the hegemonic role this framing might play: its possible reproduction of some aspect of hegemonic discourse, this discourse's structural and ideological division of social subjects, and its silences on some forms of political violence. To address the latter, this article utilises the emerging literature on 'epistemologies of ignorance', particularly as articulated in feminist social thought (Tuana, 2006; Harding, 1991, 2009; Fricker, 2007, Mills, 2007).

Feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' are pertinent to address these two gaps for their emphasis on the interrelation between the social reproduction of epistemic silences and the reproduction of structural and ideological hegemony. Introducing their literature methods to a 'collective action framing' framework enables the study of movement silences as a function of the interaction between opportunity structures, ideological positions, strategic calculations, and the activists' framing of both according to which these structures, positions, and strategies are reinforced and/or resisted. This should facilitate the understanding of the dynamics which prevent a movement from mobilising for causes it would normally mobilise for, without relying on deterministic structural, ideological, and/or strategic paradigms.

It is important, however, to emphasise that the concept of 'ignorance' in this literature is not conceived as lack or unawareness of knowledge. It is rather conceived as an epistemic act of avoiding, marginalizing, repressing, and silencing this knowledge. This act is also different than the mere act of ignoring:

being aware of a set of knowledge but choosing not to attend to it. The act described in feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' is rather the reproduction of cognitive frames which complicate the possibility of both attention to and awareness of this knowledge, in which social attention and cognitive awareness are entangled in the epistemic standpoint of the ignoring/ignorant subject. This standpoint, in turn, is simultaneously constructive of and constructed by the subjects' cognitive frames as well as her structural, ideological, and strategic positions.

Building on this conception, the analysis this article pursues oscillates between the structural, the ideological, the strategic, and the cognitive factors that contributed to the ignorance of the Rabaa massacre by the aforementioned activist groups. The key issue here is not to look for the 'conditions' which motivated the actors' ignorance (of the massacre), but to interrogate how such ignorance, as an act, itself empowered the conditions from which it emerged. That is, to interrogate ignorance as formative action constitutive of strategic aspirations, ideological emphases, and structural dynamics.

The conceptual and methodological frameworks that regard these latter factors as sufficient explanations of ignorance overlook the agency of ignorance acts themselves in reproducing the cognitive conditions for such strategic, ideological and structural influences. To correct for that, and building on feminist social theorists like Sandra Harding (1991), I reject the reduction of the cognitive process of knowing or ignoring to either the mobilisation of already existing knowledge or the mere manipulation of knowledge to serve already existing structures, ideologies, or strategies. Rather, I approach cognition as an act that is itself reproductive of knowledge paradigms and their implied structural, strategic and ideological frameworks; whether it is an act of cognitive inclusion - i.e. knowing - or an act of cognitive omission - i.e. ignoring.

'Top-down' explanations: the ignorance-inviting political situation

To set the scene for this analysis, this section utilises existing literature on the case to contextualise activists' ignorance of the Rabaa massacre within the situational settings that made it structurally, ideologically, and strategically viable. Notwithstanding their variances, I group those works, only for the sake of organisation, into three clusters of argument: repression; polarisation; and bandwagon. The section briefly outlines the main insights each cluster proffers; then underlines the contribution the proposed framing analysis provides to their discussion.

Repression: lack of political opportunity

One prominent explanation of ‘January activists’³ ignorance of the Rabaa massacre is the structural constraints on activism the July 2013 coup imposed. As political opportunity theory suggests, activists are more likely to mobilize against state violations when the surrounding political conditions indicate a potential return on their mobilization: like when there is a noticeable decline in regime popularity, division within elites, or external restraint on repression (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Meyer, 2004).

At the time of Saeed’s murder, this was clearly the case: the octogenarian President was aging, his attempt at inheritance-based transition of power to his son was openly resented by the high command in the military (Kandil, 2014), and the ‘open U.S. support for reforms in the aftermath of 9/11 ... made it temporarily difficult for the ruling elite to practice its typical repressive policies against political activists’ (Selim, 2015, p. 85).

By the time the Rabaa massacre occurred, the situation was entirely upended: Military generals who were young, powerful, and popular took the lead (Abul-Magd, 2017), backed up by a ferocious police institution keen not to re-incur its previous defeat (Kandil, 2014), a conservative judiciary eager to reinstall social order at all costs (Brown, 2016), and the Gulf monarchies pressuring the international community to relax the earlier restraints on repression (Wehrey, 2014). The political space which encouraged the earlier mobilisation was obviously shut down.

Polarisation: intensification of ideological politics

The activists’ limited sympathy towards the victims of Rabaa could also be attributed to ideological politics. Most Rabaa victims were Islamist supporters of the ultra-conservative ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ regime. These were united with secular activists in their opposition to Mubarak. However, as Alan Touraine (1985) emphasise, unities like these are faced with their previously-submerged ideological tensions once their common adversary is perceived to be defeated.

After the fall of Mubarak, ideological divides between the progressive and the conservative camps of the movement came to the fore (Brown, 2013; Abourahme, 2013). The Brotherhood’s rise to power further complicated these divides, not only because it reframed them as a regime – rather than an opposition – actor, but because this actor was significantly ‘torn between its embedded and long-lasting conservatism and the revolutionary momentum’ which brought it to power (Al-Anani, 2015). Their reactionary policies alienated

³ The January movement, like most new social movements, has no objective grounds of affiliation, which makes any use of signifiers like ‘January movement’ or ‘January activists’ inherently contentious. While noting such inherent limitation, those terms are used to indicate figures, groups, organisations and coalitions commonly associated, in academic and popular discourses, to the repertoire of contention which began in January 2011.

a huge portion of the progressive constituencies that supported them in the final elections against Mubarak's last Prime Minister, General Ahmed Shafick. The practices of the Brotherhood regime gave rise to an ideological contention between the progressive front of Mubarak's opposition and the conservative former comrades who led the post-uprisings regime.

'The Brotherhood also alienated those with whom it marched during the uprising — liberals, leftists, and secularists — by allying with Salafis and former jihadis' (ibid). This alliance reconstituted the political landscape into the traditional Islamist-Secular division the January uprisings had temporarily transformed. The pre-revolution *Kulturkampf* ['cultural struggle] between secularists and Islamists was restored (Beck, 2013). This, combined with the growing liberal and leftist opposition to the Brotherhood's reactionary policies, gave rise to a series of protests and strikes which reconstituted the opposition front as a secular national movement against the Islamists' ideological threat. This sense of threat was further exacerbated by incidents of physical violence between the proponents and the opponents of the Brotherhood regime (Vidino, 2013). It was also emphasised and exaggerated by the 'deep state', which used it to 'securitise' the ideological contention and accordingly justify the exceptional measures deployed in overthrowing the Brotherhood and containing their resistance to the popularly-backed military coup (Pratt & Rizk, 2019).

This perception of common threat set an atmosphere of exceptionality which brought together groups who otherwise were most likely to be in conflict. The first embodiment of this coming together was the NSF, under which several influential liberal and leftist activists and politicians joined forces with some powerful cadres of Mubarak's regime to resist the expansion of Brotherhood control. The front was formed in reaction to a constitutional declaration in which the President gave his decisions immunity from the checks of judiciary agencies; an act perceived by NSF members — among many others- as a 'hijack' of the democratic process by the Islamist regime (Taabar, 2013). Nonetheless, this initial mobilisation formulated a secular opposition front which continued and further expanded after the aforementioned declaration was revoked.

An even broader front came together in the Tamarod [Rebel] campaign - a petition and protest campaign which sought to subvert the electoral victories of the Islamist regime through a popular vote of no confidence. Tamarod could effectively garner the support of ideologically variant activist groups, including the liberal 6 April and the leftist RevSoc, together with financially-sponsoring business elites (Elyachar, 2014) and openly endorsing security and military figures (Lesch, 2015). But most importantly, it mobilised the grassroots, through their active inclusion as signatories. As such, it lent a popular agency to the military junta according to which it portrayed its violent measures as protective of the 'will of the people'. Through repressing one side in the name of the other, the military junta grounded and institutionalized the developing ideological fragmentation in the anti-Mubarak front; further normalizing it (Sika, 2019).

Bandwagon: selective repression and state manufacture of dissent

In addition, the selective repression the junta deployed encouraged political actors to shift towards the anti-Brotherhood front. The recurrent gestures of alignment between the 'deep state', embodied in the military and security leadership, on one side, and the grassroots' movement against the Brotherhood, embodied in Tamarod and the NSF, on the other, made the winning side of the contention easily recognizable. This created a bandwagon effect (*à la* Mearsheimer, 2001): activists were systematically encouraged to align themselves with the anti-Brotherhood side as it was perceived as winning anyway. Even the Salafist Nour Party, which was a consistent ally of the Brotherhood in electoral, parliamentary, and contentious politics, sought to save the Islamists' presence in politics by aligning with the NSF positions and later endorsing the military leadership's 'road map' of power transfer (Lacroix, 2016). This move not only exacerbated the power of the bandwagon, but also reorganised the political landscape in a way that further cornered and alienated the Brotherhood; now being no longer the Islamist rival of the secular coalition, but rather the loner adversary of everybody else. This positioning of the Brotherhood increased the costs of sympathizing with them or their victims.

More importantly, the reordering of the political landscape to bring the military leadership once again in alliance with a grassroots resistance movement that is inclusive of liberals, leftists, conservatives, and even Islamists echoed the earlier January movement's order of things. The regime being resisted was different on so many levels, but the resistance movement reflected the earlier coalition in which 'the military and the people are one hand'; as the famous January protests' chant, reproduced in the protests against the Brotherhood, descriptively puts it. By carefully selecting their targets of repression, the deep state brought together a fairly representative grassroots movement which reflects the earlier one, not only in its composition but also in its relative acceptance of the military guardianship of their movement.

This acquiescence to guardianship complicated the possibility of dissenting from the military junta's violent measures on two main levels. First, as popular consent was grounded in those measures, the state could deploy its popular backing to depict dissidents from its violent policies as enemies of the people's revolution (De Smet, 2016). Second, by repressing dissidents in the name of other dissidents, the state 'manufactured' the revolutionary space in a way that only allowed compliant 'dissent' to prosper (Ketchley, 2017). The selective repression of some opposition groups in the name of others rendered the agency to speak or act in the name of the opposition movement conditional on the acceptance of, or at least silence about, the state's violent measures against the allegedly 'counterrevolutionary' dissent –itself a condition of acceptance to the 'revolutionary' bandwagon. The ignorance of the Rabaa massacre was, therefore, not only instrumental to preserving the political gains of the anti-Brotherhood movement, but was a condition for the sustenance of the movement and the avoidance of its repression.

Framing and ignorance: 'bottom-up' reorganisation of politics

Combined, the above analyses demonstrate the ignorance-inviting political situation; characterised by repression, polarisation, and a huge power differential. But these factors were arguably also present in the buildup to the earlier uprisings against Mubarak, although indeed with variant degrees. At the time, however, the collective action managed to expose that repression and garner public, institutional, and international resistance that consequentially restrained it, as well as transform the polarised political sphere and disturb the regime bandwagon. That is to say, if repression, polarisation, and power differential contributed to the lack of collective action against state violence in reaction to the Rabaa massacre, they were also themselves consequences of such lack. And, indeed, they were not new conditions to Egyptian politics.

Understanding the influence of these structural conditions, therefore, requires an interrogation of how they were enabled or disabled through the activists' ordering and practicing of them. In particular, it requires an explanation of how the activists' framed the structural constraints in ways that empowered their political significance, how they framed the ideological tensions as overwhelming (even to the massacring of their earlier revolutionary comrades) while they were not at some other point in history, and how they framed their strategic alliance with the brutal military regime in a way that rendered it justifiable within their revolutionary and nonviolent discourses. These questions remain overlooked in existing literature, which focuses on the structural situation at the expense of the activists' recognition of this situation and its effects.

Framing analysis complements this gap by emphasising the role of cognitive agency in mediating the aforementioned structural, ideological, and strategic conditions. Interrogating different framings of the Rabaa incident, this analysis underlines how each framing emphasised strategic aspirations, ideological emphases, and structural categories that either reinforced or subverted the hegemonic structural, ideological, and strategic conditions. This interrogation is necessary not only to understand the variance in the activists' responses to the massacre, but more importantly to recognise how the seemingly inherent ignorance of the event was partially constructed by the activists' own action, and hence was avoidable and contestable.

Frames are not mere cognitive maps of an objective reality, but rather carefully manipulated 'designations' of such reality (Snow, 2004). Framing enables activists to reconstruct the meanings of structural, ideological and strategic contexts by selecting which aspects of them to emphasise, which to marginalise, and which to entirely ignore. Framing acts, therefore, have two converse faces: collectively recognising particular aspects of contention as most significant and collectively ignoring aspects which are systematically silenced, marginalized, repressed, and/or avoided in such 'frame' of collective recognition. The latter is not merely a function of knowledge leftovers, but of the active production of collective ignorance to sustain the cognitive alignment which makes collective action possible.

Although it acknowledges the importance of the (re)production of collective ignorance as well as collective knowledge to frame alignment (Gamson, 1995; Benford, 1997), collective action framing literature has tended to focus mainly on the latter, particularly in its empirical investigations. To correct for that, this article builds on Melucci's (1996, p.9) premise that 'movements exist also in silence' and accordingly approaches collective action as equally productive of silences, marginalisations, repressions, and avoidances. Following from that, it addresses the systematic ignorance (rather than 'circulation') of particular aspects of reality – in this case, the Rabaa massacre- as the core object of framing analysis.

Approaching ignorance: a feminist epistemology

But how can systematic ignorance be empirically studied? To that end, we should abandon the limited conception of ignorance as mere absence, lack of knowledge or will to know. Rather, ignorance should be approached as a dynamic, often strategic, formative act in itself. Perhaps the core contribution of feminist epistemology is its vigorous exposition of the proposition that knowledge is not objectively 'found' but rather socially 'founded': invented, articulated, negotiated, and validated through social interaction; in a way that makes the object of knowledge partially a creation of the collective action of knowing it (Harding, 2009). Inverting such logic, we may envision how this object of knowledge can alternatively be dis-created: denied its very existence by antithetical collective acts of marginalising, avoiding, repressing, and silencing this knowledge. These acts, thus, could be regarded as 'acts of ignorance': social practices reproductive of cognitive exclusions.

Ignorance, therefore, could be conceived as an 'act'. Rather than self-evident (mis)recognition of objective events, it could be an active practice of constituting events within particular paradigms of cognition. This should be distinguished from mere manipulation. Whereas the latter is an entirely strategic response to stimuli arising from the structural, ideological, or strategic fields, an ignorance act is the cognitive reframing of these fields by instigating, revoking and/or normalizing alternative cognitive habits (Mills, 1997). Nevertheless, it is through those cognitive habits that subjects constitute themselves as cognitive actors, and hence acquire both the responsibility and the agency for their action of knowing and unknowing.

In that sense, the framing of an event reproduces cognitive frameworks and their implied structural, strategic, and ideological paradigms. These frameworks have two faces: that of cognitive inclusion - facts, images, arguments, and normative positions emphasised in the cognitive framework; and that of cognitive omission - facts, images, arguments, and positions systematically excluded from this framework. The latter contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic silences, is widely overlooked in empirical studies on framing, and is the focus of the analysis which will follow in this article.

But how can cognitive omission be empirically traced? The classical way of doing so is comparing the given cognition to a more cognitively inclusive benchmark. The problem with this approach, however, is its assumption of the cognitive superiority of the pre-assigned benchmark (Janack, 2002). To avoid that, feminist standpoint theorists trace cognitive gaps not in comparison with an objective 'scientific' benchmark, but rather with other cognitive standpoints. For instance, female standpoints were extensively utilised to underline silences and ignorances in androcentric sciences and histories (Harding, 2009; Hutchings, 2007), whereas black feminist 'intersectional' standpoints were utilised to bear on gaps in white-centric feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008).

Comparative standpoints create a 'controversy' that exposes areas of knowledge overlooked at some standpoints but not others, without assuming the cognitive or epistemic superiority of any of these standpoints (Harding, 2009). By positing alternative ways of knowing a subject or an event, alternative standpoints offer subjective social benchmarks through which what could be possibly known in an equivalent social setting is exposed. In social movement studies, this could take the form of comparative framing analysis; in which case the different framings of an event could serve to expose the knowledge gaps in each other's frames.

Categories of ignorance: Tuana's taxonomy

But what precisely should be traced in such analysis? Combining diverse theories of ignorance, Tuana (2006) proffers a taxonomy of ignorance categories, which, although it could never be fully inclusive or reflective of the complexity of ignorance practices, could serve as an organising methodological map for the empirical tracing of ignorance as an object of analysis. In this analysis, I use four main categories from Tuana's taxonomy⁴:

1. **Manufactured ignorance/repression:** ignorance systematically cultivated by people in power by repressing attempts to know; expressed in the lay conspiracy theory: 'they do not want us to know' (Spelman, 2007)
2. **Willful ignorance/avoidance:** when the reluctance to know is not merely an absence of interest in knowledge, but rather a present interest in avoiding such knowledge. Here, ignorance is a strategic investment that is psychologically, politically, and socially functional (Mills, 1997). It is best expressed in the lay phrase: 'I prefer not to know'.
3. **Silencing:** silencing knowledge from particular subjects by denying them cognitive agency. Denying the cognitive agency of the clinically 'insane' is

⁴ This outline does not copy Tuana's exact terminology, but reframes her work as pertinent to the argument of this article. The original taxonomy also includes 'loving ignorance' and 'unknown unknowns', omitted here as they do not apply to this article's conception of relatively deliberate ignorance acts.

a classical case (Foucault, 1961/2001), but there are plenty of other grounds through which particular (non)knowers are denied cognitive agency based on the dominant beliefs of what counts as sources of reliable knowledge in the community which evaluates their claims (Fricker, 2007).

4. Disinterest/marginalisation: the cognitive marginalisation of subjects potential knowers do not really care to know about, not for strategic reasons, but simply because they do not seem important; expressed in the lay term 'I do not care' (Longino, 1990).

These four categories consistently appear in the background of 'collective action framing' literature, although rarely brought to the centre of its analysis.

Manufactured ignorance is part of the policing of social movements, in which elites allow certain political knowledge to be propagated in collective action while repressing others (Della Porta, 1998).

The notion of 'willful ignorance' echoes David Snow's 'frame alignment;' but reversed. 'By frame alignment, we refer to the linkage of individual and social movement organisation interpretive orientations' (Snow et al., 1986, p. 464), an endeavour that could only be sustained through a parallel collective ignorance of areas of cognitive tension. This entails the avoidance of knowledge of contentious subjects whose recognition jeopardizes the coherence of the collective action frame (Snow, 2004), the collective trust in the potential reward from collective mobilisation (Tarrow, 2012), or the sense of unity and continuity of a collective actor (Melucci, 1996). It also entails the silencing of knowers whose recognition implies the aforementioned effects.

Disinterest is the inverse side of centralising collective action frames on particular areas of interest, for this collective centralisation inherently necessitates the marginalization of other areas (Gamson, 1995). In (Gamson's) framing analysis, as in feminist studies of ignorance, areas of disinterest are not mere leftovers of the movement's/society's sphere of interest, but a careful marginalization of particular issues in pursuance of centralizing others –feigned yet normalized omission of potential interest.

Conceived as such, repression, avoidance, silencing, and marginalisation of potential knowledge – and knowers - become part and parcel of collective action framing. Approaching 'framing' from this perspective encourages us to conceive of frame omissions as active and productive aspects of mobilisation, rather than mere gaps or limits in the collective action frame. The following analysis interrogates those acts of omission in the main activist groups' framing of the Rabaa incident.

Methodology

The following analysis compares the framing of the Rabaa incident by five ideologically-diverse activist groups, including the (relatively) conservative NSF,

the leftist RPF and RevSoc, and the liberal 6 April and Kolena Khaled Saeed. This sample also represents diverse responses to the incident of Rabaa sit-ins' violent eviction itself, varying from the NSF fervent endorsement to the RevSoc blatant condemnation and others' spectrum of silences. Here, RevSoc serves as a 'social benchmark' that exposes the structural possibility of acknowledging the state massacre by activists engaged in the same political settings. Comparing RevSoc's framing to such an ideologically and politically diverse sample exposes areas of possible contention which were ignored by other activist groups.

The form/structure of the responses issued by these groups varied significantly; and hence this article's analytic approaches for examining their respective positions. The NSF and the RevSoc issued official statements on the incident, which grants the researcher a coherent source from which these groups' positions could be underlined. April 6 issued a mere consolation note, but one whose analytic reading is fairly sufficient to expose their position on the incident as well as the reasons for their reluctance to issue an official response. The RPF was founded a few weeks following the massacre in response to the violent and counterrevolutionary turn in the January movement's aftermath. This article analyses their founding statement as expressive of their positions on this counterrevolutionary violence and where the Rabaa massacre is situated in relation to it. This statement is augmented by another statement they issued on 'police violence' in particular, which interestingly did not include the Rabaa massacre in its listing of police crimes. Finally, the Kolena Khaled Saeed Facebook page preferred total silence. The reaction of its leaders/admins on the incident is therefore alternatively interrogated to excavate what the incident meant to them.

Thus the analysis draws on seven statements: the statements on the Rabaa eviction by the NSF (2013), 6 April (2013), and RevSoc (2013); the founding statement of the RPF (2013), complemented by a later RPF (2014) statement commemorating incidents of 'police violence'; and finally, two statements by the co-admins of Kolena Khaled Saeed Facebook group: Abdelrahman Mansour (2016) and Wael Ghoneim (2018), where they explain this group's absence of response on the eviction incident. With the exception of the statements by Kolena Khaled Saeed admins, the studied statements are all sourced from social media platforms – particularly Youtube and Facebook- which were used as the main means of communication by the studied groups. One main reason these platforms were relied on by most activist groups was their relative autonomy from government censorship, which is also the main reason I rely on them as sources for statements/positions on this sensitive and otherwise highly censored topic.

An exception was made for Kolena Khaled Saeed admins as they intentionally and avowedly committed to not post about this matter on social media. I therefore used two texts by its two main admins: one written for the international blog, *Medium*, and another narrated in an interview with the Egyptian independent newspaper *AlMasry Alyawm*. Another exception made for this group relates to the time-frame, which, understandably, is fixed to the

Rabaa incident and its immediate aftermath (late 2013 to early 2014). Yet, the fact that this group admins remained silent for too long made their writings several years after the massacre not only significant but also interestingly reflexive of their positions on the said massacre.

The analysis seeks to underline the aspects overlooked in some activist group narratives but not others, and expose the interrelation between these narrative omissions and the structural, ideological, and strategic positions of these respective groups. Discourse analysis of public statements serves that end on two levels. On one hand, public statements are expressive of the discursive strategies the issuing agent wishes to publicly convey. On the other, they are products of attentive backstage deliberations in which those strategies were deliberately framed – and hence partially control for randomness, spontaneity, and individual anomaly. Approached with these two dimensions in mind, the statements are conceived as neither passive reflection of a pre-acknowledged narrative nor mere strategic manipulation of narrative to reproduce particular knowledge, but as a discursive field of negotiation in which power and knowledge intertwine. In other words, the statements are conceived as cognitive frames that encompass, but also negotiate, contest, or possibly reproduce, the structural, ideological, and strategic fields within which they are produced and into which they are deployed.

Accordingly, the statements are interrogated as speech acts: spoken invocations of cognitive themes with strategic effects (Huysmans, 2011). Particularly, this analysis is concerned with how each activist group's invocation of particular themes facilitated its evasion of the question of the Rabaa massacre. The analysis proceeds in two steps: First, it briefly fleshes out the main themes centralised in each of the aforementioned activist groups' frame of the event, underlining how the centralisation of these themes facilitated evading the problem of the state massacre in all cases except the RevSoc. Second, it utilises Tuana's taxonomy to make sense of such evasions as acts of ignorance which reproduce existent structural constraints, ideological emphases, and strategic aspirations that reinforce the viability of such ignorance.

Ignorance acts: evading the massacre question

NSF: 'achieves the objectives of the revolution'

The NSF statement on the evacuation opens with an assertion that 'the Egyptian people and their nation's institutions are writing a significant chapter in its historical national battle for democracy.' Tying the 'democratic' battle with the 'national', the statement renders logical the involvement of the state's coercive apparatus, here referred to as the 'nation's institutions', in pursuing democratic aspirations. As such, it also renders it as 'normal to see the Egyptian people united with and supporting of police and army forces ... to achieve the objectives of the Egyptian revolution.'

Hence, rather than a crackdown on dissent, the NSF framed the eviction as a victory for the 'true' revolutionary dissent. To achieve that, the NSF framed Rabaa protestors as mere representations of the overthrown regime, the Muslim Brotherhood, referring throughout the statement to Rabaa protestors as 'the Brotherhood.' While it is logical to assume that many of Rabaa protestors were Brotherhood supporters⁵, as the protests were originally mobilised to resist the grassroots' uprisings, then the coup, against the Brotherhood regime, treating them as mere extensions of the Brotherhood regime denied them their agency as civil dissidents. As such, the statement reversed the logic of contention: the anti-coup protestors became a force of regime repression whereas the evicting troops became a force of 'revolution'.

Moreover, the statement invoked a discourse of international conspiracy, which dragged attention away from the domestic conflict altogether. Here, the protests were framed as mere extensions of 'the attempts of the Brotherhood with the help of foreign nations to force Egyptians to retract' from their 'quest for democracy'. Framed as such, 'the present conflict' became 'not one between two political factions, but one between the Egyptian people and their institutions on one side' and a repressive 'international cult' on the other.

Furthermore, the statement emphasised what it named 'the terrorist nature' of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is worth noting that the statement made no effort to give proof for such accusation of terrorism. It was rather assumed by proxy, on the basis of a concurrent terrorist attack by 'Islamic militants' in Al-Areish, 200 miles away from the Rabaa protests. Here, the presumed identity between the Brotherhood and Rabaa protestors was extended to an assumed identity between all elements of Islamist politics; one which justifies punishing peaceful protestors for crimes committed by an entirely different group.

Overall, these thematic emphases framed the event of eviction in terms of international 'war on terror', rendering it an issue of 'national security' rather than civil right of dissent. By extension, it based the assessment of state violence on the exceptional benchmarks of war practices rather than the conventional ethics of protest evictions.

RPF: an irrelevant inter-regime conflict

RPF is a left-wing coalition formed weeks after the Rabaa eviction avowedly to '[simultaneously] resist the suppression of military rule, and the

⁵ It is always hard to make accurate estimations about the demographics of crowds. Evidently, not all of the Rabaa crowds were Muslim Brotherhood members. Evidently, too, Coptic Christian minorities were not represented in these protests in any significant way. In relevance to this research, it suffices to indicate that it is inaccurate as well as disempowering to reduce Rabaa crowds to mere reflections of an alienated political group which they, or many of them, support.

authoritarianism, violence and sectarianism of the Brotherhood' (RPF, 2013). Echoing the NSF's unqualified presumption of the Brotherhood violence, as well as their reduction of Rabaa protests as the Brotherhood's popular arm, the RPF (2013) founding statement equated Rabaa protestors and the evacuating troops as correspondent 'violent ... counterrevolutionary forces.' This assumed correspondence rendered the violence in Rabaa seemingly proportionate on one hand and irrelevant to the revolutionary discourse on the other. As such, it made justifiable the statement's omission of any condemnation of the state's disproportionate use of violence against Rabaa protestors.

Even when the RPF (2014) held a press conference dedicated precisely to commemorate police brutality, of all the violations their opening statement reviewed, from Khaled Saeed murder to the recent crackdown on labour strikes, the Rabaa massacre was never mentioned. The omission of the 'gravest incident of mass protestor killings' (Human Rights Watch, 2014, 5) from this review remains unexplained; but could be partially rationalised in terms of the disclaimer the statement opens with: 'we insist ... [that] there is no any degree of coordination, and will never be any degree of coordination, between us and either the ... Muslim Brotherhood or any agency associated to the current regime.' The comparability reiterated between the Brotherhood and the military regime framed the violence in Rabaa as an irrelevant combat between counterrevolutionary forces, rather than an incident of police violence against civil dissidents; making its omission from their account of condemned police brutality plausible.

6 April: a depoliticised catastrophe

The statement issued by 6 April is exceptionally brief: a consolation note addressed particularly to one of 6 April's 'former' members who was killed in the Rabaa evacuation. The statement emphasised that this member was no longer a member of the 6 April group and also that his presence in Rabaa was for professional journalistic purposes. This double distancing of their mourned victim demonstrates a desperate attempt to avoid any possible political affiliation between 6 April and the Rabaa protests, particularly as evidence suggests the continued affiliation of this member to both groups simultaneously (Yaqeen News Network, 2013).

The statement closes with an extension of this consolation to 'anonymous people who fell as victims [in Rabaa] without doing a sin or being affiliated to any of the sides in the conflict.' The utterance of the phrase '[without] being affiliated' following the phrase 'without doing a sin' as conditions for the accustomed consolation suggests an implicit comparability between sinfulness on one hand and political affiliation on the other. Comparing political affiliation to sinfulness, the statement conditioned the mourning-deserving victimhood to apolitical subjects. In such case, all sides of the political conflict were conceived as equally problematic, the victims and the assailants alike; as expressed in the generic phrase 'any of the sides'.

Perhaps for this reason, the statement referred to the murdered as ‘victims’, a term rarely used in reference to activists murdered in confrontations with police forces. In earlier events, those were referred to as ‘martyrs’ (Youssef & Kumar, 2012). The reluctance to use this term this time reflects a reluctance to frame the event in the revolution’s political terms. Also, the use of the passive tense ‘fell as victims’ portrayed the victimisation as an action done by the victimized (who ‘fell’) rather than done to them (as in expressions like ‘were murdered’, ‘were victimized’, etc.). As such, it discursively omitted the political subjects who committed this crime from the expression of mourning. By focusing on the politically-emptied news that victims ‘fell’, the statement marginalised the political details that brought about this victimisation. Overall, the systematic avoidance of the language commonly used in the context of Egypt’s recent contentious repertoire – like the mention of intended murder or the description of the murdered as martyrs – served to distance the event from the narrative of January movement.

Combined, these discursive maneuvers framed the massacre as an apolitical catastrophe with no agency to be held accountable for. Therefore, although the atrocity was admitted in this narrative, it was framed not as a violation attributed to a particular agency but as a catastrophic incident whose victims are mourned but not politicised. In this framing, mourning the victims was the central theme, but the whole question of the state responsibility for their victimisation was entirely evaded.

Kolena Khaled Saeed: everyone to blame = no one to blame

Kolena Khaled Saeed had no response whatsoever to the Rabaa incident. Later, the group’s co-administrators, Mansour (2016) and Ghoneim (2018), justified that in terms of depression. Depressed, they separately explained, they decided to give up any political activity whatsoever.

But while hinting at this depressive situation, neither Ghoneim nor Mansour associated it with a particular accountable agent. Rather, in directing the blame, they used generic terms like ‘political powers’, ‘involved actors’, and sometimes ‘everyone’. Mansour condemned the Rabaa eviction as a ‘harsh violation’ and blamed ‘the corrupt performance of all civic leaders’ who failed to control the conflict, but never the police troops that concluded the conflict violently. Ghoneim took a softer approach, contending that we should not ‘point fingers’ but rather appreciate the conflicting ‘struggles, fears, and hopes’ of all sides involved. Regardless of the approach, be it blaming everyone or blaming no one, the conclusion in both cases was the same: the accountability for the massacre was diffused along a very broad spectrum that no agency could be directly blamed for it.

Such diffusion of blame allowed Ghoneim to conclude his statement with a subversive note: ‘Cops are not bastards. Activists are not saints’. This note is subversive of an earlier popular graffiti used to mobilise against the police in the

aftermath of Saeed's murder, which states 'all cops are bastards' (Sharaf, 2015). Compared to the earlier graffiti, Ghoneim's suggestion of the cops' innocence after such a massive massacre is telling of a profound alteration in his conception of police violence. With a philosophical twist, Ghoneim reframes this violence as a social product more 'complex' than the 'good and evil' division which marked their earlier framing of Khaled Saeed's murder.

Mansour reiterates this distinction between the two incidents of violence, the Saeed murder versus the Rabaa massacre; stressing the exceptionality of the former as 'someone like us': 'when you look at his photo or know about his life, you feel as if he is your neighbour or brother'. The fact that Saeed was not 'politicised' (meaning not politically active), Mansour avers, made his murder an alarming signal that 'no one was safe'. Underlining Saeed's apoliticality, Mansour implicitly hints that the dangers inherent to political activism are partially a 'choice' the activists make by being politically active. In such context, the fate of Rabaa protestors could be conceived as a choice which could have been possibly avoided (by not protesting, protesting on the right side, and so on.); giving them a portion of the blame for their own victimisation.

Diffusing the blame for the atrocity, to encompass 'everyone' including the victims themselves, Ghoneim's and Mansour's framings decentered the state accountability for the massacre.

RevSoc: 'can only be considered deliberate massacres'

The RevSoc (2013) was the only group in this sample to attend to the state responsibility for the atrocity at Rabaa. Although their statement denigrated the Muslim Brotherhood as a 'criminal regime that failed and betrayed the objectives of the Egyptian revolution', it differentiated between the Brotherhood regime and the Brotherhood-endorsing sit-in. Hence, while standing firmly against the demands of the sit-in to reinstall the Brotherhood regime, RevSoc was still able to condemn the use of excessive force to evict it.

Also, the statement urged audience to put such violent eviction 'in the context of [...] a road map openly hostile to the aims and demands of the Egyptian revolution.' This framing subverted the NSF's framing of the evacuation as a revolutionary force, to contextualise it instead as 'a bloody rehearsal on the path of liquidation of the Egyptian revolution.'

The statement concludes by lamenting 'those who describe themselves as liberals and leftists [but] betrayed the Egyptian revolution' by not having a firm stance on such a brutal massacre. Invoking the 'revolution' as a guiding concept, the statement replaced the widely-propagated identity discourse, which takes for granted contention between seculars and Islamists, with a revolutionary discourse in which the sides of contention are determined not by the identity the group 'describe themselves as' but the positions they take *vis-à-vis* the repressive state.

Invoking conceptual differentiations between the Brotherhood regime and the Brotherhood-supporting protestors, between anti-Islamist politics and anti-Islamist violence, and between liberal-leftist as identity and liberal-leftist as (revolutionary) practices, RevSoc were able to frame their position through a dualistic balance between their radical rivalry with the counterrevolutionary politics of the Brotherhood regime and their revolutionary position against state violence regardless of the ideological affiliation of its victims.

Ignorance in context: structure, ideology, strategy, and cognition

The abovementioned statements exemplify how the invocation of particular framing themes had direct implications for the acknowledgement or the ignorance of the state massacre. Ignorance here, as aforementioned, is more and different than either unintentional misrecognition or intentional manipulation. It is rather an epistemic standpoint influenced by, but also constitutive and reproductive of, active cognitive biases, as well as ideological emphases, strategic aspirations, and structural dynamics. It is at the intersection between these four dimensions (cognition, ideology, strategy, and structure) that ignorance is reproduced as a marginalised, avoided, repressed, and/or silenced epistemic space. This final section utilises Tuana's aforementioned taxonomy to examine how each of these four aspects of ignorance (marginalisation, avoidance, repression, and silencing) were reproduced at the intersection between the ideological, strategic, and structural conditions which facilitated the ignorance of the Rabaa massacre and the reinforcement or mitigation of these conditions by the activists' cognitive framing acts.

Dis-interest/marginalisation:

To begin with, most of the abovementioned frames reveal a systematic marginalisation of the state violations committed in the eviction of Rabaa sit-in, a deliberate construction of disinterest. This was most evident in Kolena Khaled Saeed group's utter silence and 6 April's selective mourning of a 'former' member and 'anonymous' others. In the cases of the NSF and RPF, disinterest took a more complicated form. The NSF was interested in the event, but not the police brutality it entailed. The RPF was interested in the problem of police brutality writ large, but not in this particular event. With the exception of RevSoc, no activist groups in this sample demonstrated genuine interest in the 'state massacre' problem. Why so?

Literature on genocide suggests that mass murder, in general, might be less attractive to public sympathy than individual murders, as it converts the personal stories of the murdered into de-personified 'numbers' (Feierstein, 2012; Jones, 2017). According to this argument, the anonymity of most of the Rabaa victims, firmly enforced by state censorship, complicated personal

sympathy with them; at least when compared to the widely-distributed stories of Khaled Saeed's life and death and the renowned photo of his mangled corpse.

This discrepancy, however, is not an inherent implication of the scale of murder. It is rather a product of the structural reproduction of one story of victimisation but not the other. Rabaa sympathisers did try to personalise their victims' stories, producing a plethora of moving documentaries that described their experience of victimisation in depth and detail (e.g. AlJazeera, 2013; Tha'er ElNahhas, 2013). But these efforts were blocked by the coup's systematic censorship of narratives sympathetic to Rabaa victims, which denied the population access to all media channels that did not openly endorse the coup as well as to 513 websites belonging to independent media and human rights agencies (Freedom of Thought and Expression, 2019).

As such, activists knew, mainly through state reports, that violence was committed against some victims in Rabaa; but they did not get the chance to 'know' these victims and relate to them on the personal level. The implication of this was particularly apparent in the contrast between Mansour's romantic description of Saeed - 'when you look at his photo or know about his life, you feel as if he is your neighbour or brother' - and 6 April's rigid mourning of 'anonymous others'. The fact that these activists did not get the chance to know the Rabaa victims as they knew Khaled Saeed made their responses to the death of the former far colder. In turn, this coldness in presenting and framing the later event of mass murder limited the possibility of relating to its victims on a personal level. That is to say, the distant and disinterested framing of the massacre reproduced the structural conditions which gave rise to this disinterest.

The NSF and RPF's disinterest could be understood in terms of strategic and ideological prioritisation. As evident in its statement, the NSF was overwhelmed by the concurrent 'national threats' of 'terrorism' and 'international interference'. Whether or not those concerns were evidentially grounded is irrelevant to their reaction, as long as they preoccupied the activist group both cognitively and strategically. As for the RPF, their (leftist) ideological priorities were more revolutionary than nationalistic. Yet, their peculiar cognition of the revolutionary discourse, marked by secular essentialism, distanced the problem of the Rabaa eviction, as it rendered the predominantly Islamist Rabaa protests inherently irrelevant to revolutionary dissent. In both cases, the problem of violence in Rabaa was marginalised, whether as strategically insignificant or ideologically irrelevant.

The discrepancy between the RPF's response to the massacre and that of another leftist group, RevSoc, is a function of their different framings of what Rabaa protests represent. Although both groups were explicit in their ideological and strategic position against the Islamist regime, it was only the former that regarded Rabaa protests as mere representation of such regime. RevSoc did not conflate Rabaa protestors with the Islamist regime they supported. Their lack of sympathy with the agenda of the dissidents did not,

therefore, overwhelm their concern with the state crackdown on the civic right of dissent itself.

Willful ignorance/avoidance

Willful ignorance is evident in the inverse correspondence between the extent of attention given to the massacre by each group and the extent of privilege this group enjoys in the post-coup political regime.

At the time the massacre occurred, the NSF was strongly represented in the ruling regime – occupying the positions of Vice-President, political adviser to the president, and five ministers. In such context, the NSF evasion of the massacre question not only evaded a confrontation with their patron regime, but also with its own self as the core civic component of such regime.

At the other end of the spectrum, RevSoc's exceptional attentiveness to the junta's violations could be understood in terms of its exceptionally antagonistic relationship with the ruling junta. Of the five activist groups analysed, RevSoc was the only group which, at the time of the massacre, was legally criminalised, had members incarcerated and strikes violently repressed, and explicitly opposed the coup. These antagonistic factors made their recognition of the state massacre more structurally and strategically, but also cognitively and psychologically, viable.

RPF, 6 April, and Kolena Khaled Saeed did not have any significant privilege in the new regime. Nonetheless, they recognised, from the experience of RevSoc and others, that their relative privilege of merely being left unrepressed is conditioned by their silence towards state violations. This recognition was explicitly expressed in Mansour's (2016) lamentation that the military regime was ready to turn against its most zealous allies to wipe away the least glimpse of opposition. The RPF's (2013) statement also recognised those limits and explicitly demanded their expansion. Paying attention to the state violations was thus clearly understood as politically suicidal.

However, it was also burdensome, not only strategically, but also ideologically and psychologically, to conceive such violations but not attend to them. Ignoring the problematic violations altogether, avoiding this 'dusty chaos' – as Ghoneim (2018) puts it, was thus the most strategic act for these activist groups. This avoidance was particularly encouraged by the fact that all these groups cumulatively contributed, in their earlier contentions with the Brotherhood regime (mainly Tamarod), to the grassroots' agency the military deployed in their justifications of the coup and its violent measures; which meant that these activist groups' recognition of the massacre would have been a recognition of their own culpability.

Manufactured ignorance/repression

The state manufacture of ignorance around the Rabaa massacre by means of selective repression was covered in De Smet's and Ketchley's respective analyses discussed in the bandwagon section above. These works underlined the ways in which the state sought to portray its crackdown on Rabaa protests as protective of the revolution from a popularly-ousted counterrevolutionary regime. This was executed through forcefully blurring the distinction between the Brotherhood regime and its endorsing protestors. The state main civil ally, the NSF, reproduced this conflation fully, the RevSoc fully challenged it, whereas the other three activist groups problematised the state narrative but failed to provide an alternative one. The variation in the activists' (re)cognition of such propaganda demonstrates their agency in reproducing, mitigating, or entirely contesting it; challenging its common conception as a one-way imposition 'from above'. But what explains this variation?

For the NSF, the state manufactured ignorance of the 'civility' of Rabaa activists was strategically rewarding. Being part of the ruling regime, the NSF would have been obliged, as simultaneously a democracy-advocating group, to confront and hold accountable their own members who became senior state officials, if the state offensive on the Rabaa sit-in was framed as a crackdown on civil dissent. To avoid that confrontation, the NSF reframed the conflict as an international war. This framing not only overwhelmed the domestic political conflict but also rendered 'exceptional' violence used against civilians – now conceived as rather combatants- more acceptable, particularly within the NSF's relatively conservative discourse.

The RevSoc was on the opposite side of this spectrum. The group's distrust of the ruling junta (expressed most evidently in its earlier popular campaign - '*Askar Kazebon*' [army liars] - aimed particularly to challenge the growing public trust in the military leadership by exposing their lies) rendered their refutation of the military-state conception of the Rabaa sit-in a logical development. Mobilising their distrust further, the RevSoc accused those who accept this narrative as 'betrayers' of the revolution; subverting the state propaganda which framed contentions to the state narrative as counterrevolutionary. But this subversion could only be made possible through their distinction between the arguably counterrevolutionary Brotherhood regime and the Brotherhood-endorsing civilians in Rabaa. This framing act of distinction allowed them to posit an alternative narrative of the incident which decisively emphasised the Rabaa protestors' right to dissent and the state violation of this civil right.

For the other three activist groups, their distrust of all sides of the conflict made them end up 'unsure' about, rather than oppositional to, the state narrative – as expressed explicitly in Mansour's (2016) statement. Although he emphasised that this confusion was state architected, Mansour's equal distrust of the victims' narrative impeded him from proposing an alternative narrative. The same applies to 6 April (2013), which equation between all sides of the conflict

made them conceive as culpable everyone who is affiliate to 'any of the sides'. Perturbed by the event and its two conflicting sides, their reaction to it was mere condolence. The same applies, as well, to the RPF, which critique of state narrative, in the absence of a more profound alternative, only produced 'questions and confusions' (RPF, 2014).

In short, the power of state propaganda was not merely a function of accepting or rejecting the state narrative, but also of being capable of finding an alternative narrative that contests it. The muddled and unclear information environment at that time rendered most activists equally suspicious about alternative narratives, giving way to confining confusions. Nonetheless, this suspicion was itself a function of framing civil dissidents in Rabaa as mere extensions of the Brotherhood regime; a discourse manufactured by the state and reproduced by most of the aforementioned activist groups' framings.

Silencing

Significantly, there were contentious voices that were silenced in the collective framing of the incident. These were not merely voices of individuals with less influence, but sometimes of high profile individuals who only lost their influence by their very act of contesting the dominant narrative.

The most prominent example of these voices is Mohamed El-Baradei, the founding leader of the NSF. Being one of the main leaders of both the anti-Mubarak and the anti-Brotherhood movements, El-Baradei was appointed as Vice-President after the overthrow of the Brotherhood regime. Following Rabaa violence, El-Baradei resigned in protest, urging public contention against the violent eviction. However, his resignation only invoked contention against him. As his former campaign manager and NSF founding member, Mostafa El-Naggar (2013), himself puts it, El-Baradei's 'bizarre understanding of the political situation ... [rendered him] a disruptive and divisive loner ... [rather than] the unifying leader he used to be'. As expressed in El-Naggar's statement, El-Baradei's leadership was conditioned by a certain mode of cognition that is aligned with the conventional. Suggesting a different perspective, thus, became itself a reason to deny him the leadership agency.

A less prominent, but equally interesting, subversive voice silenced is the mourned ('former'?) member of 6 April murdered in the Rabaa massacre. His death as a liberal activist in Rabaa strikingly serves a counter-narrative to the conception of Rabaa victims as purely 'Islamists', which subverts the identity grounds that distance Rabaa victims from liberal activists' discourses. By rendering him former, denying him martyrdom, and cataloguing his presence in Rabaa sit-in as journalistic/professional rather than political, the 6 April leadership denied him the agency not only to speak but even to die in the name of their liberal movement; alleviating the subversive agency of his (possible) martyrdom.

Both cases are strikingly reminiscent of Fricker's (2007) 'paradox' of epistemic injustice. Simply put, her paradox entails that since knowing injustices is partially a function of experiencing them, those who practically know about injustices are usually the socially oppressed who do not have an agency to express the knowledge they know. As such, ignorance about injustices remains socially intact through the systematic exclusion of knowers. But the above cases suggest that such exclusion is not only a structural function of the knowers' social position, but also a function of what they know. If a particular cognition defines the epistemically dominant group, knowing 'otherwise' could itself become a ground for socially and cognitively stigmatising – and thus silencing – the knower.

Perhaps the aversion of such stigmatisation was one reason behind the silence of many individuals and groups at the time of the massacre, a time when particular narratives of the event were allowed to dominate and others were readily and often violently suppressed. It is here important to emphasize the junta's fierce punishment of those who contested their narrative of contentious events, usually executed through judicial prosecution under the allegations of 'spreading rumors' (Brown, 2016). Such legal and social stigmatisation silenced counter-conventional perspectives.

Conclusion

The analysis above underlines three main political conditions that encouraged most of the studied activist groups to approach the Rabaa contentions with a degree of ambivalence; particularly ignoring the state culpability in it: the relative closure of the political opportunity to mobilise, the intensified ideological tension, and the reconfiguration of both the regime space and the opposition front. The analysis also highlights the ways in which the activists' framing of the event and its involved actors usually empowered these conditions. It closes with a discussion of the interaction between the structural elements and the activists' framing acts and how it contributed to the discursive marginalisation, avoidance, repression, and silencing of the issue of state culpability in the Rabaa massacre.

As such, this analysis contests the ubiquitous presumption that the silence on the Rabaa massacre was structurally inevitable given the peculiar restructuring of regime space in the aftermath of Mubarak; marked by the reinvigoration of the deep state, the polarisation of the opposition front, and the (deep) state cooptation of the secular elements of this front. While it acknowledges the influence of these structural elements, this analysis emphasised how the framing acts executed by the involved activists played into the reproduction of these influences, or, as in the case of RevSoc, their mitigation. By shedding light on the role the activists' selective framing of what the Rabaa massacre politically represented played into the (re)production – or rather resistance- of the hegemonic silence on the event, the analysis re-centers the overlooked agency of

activists in the epistemic-political field: the field where the limits of knowledge about political events is contested.

By doing this, the article makes two main theoretical contributions: First, it brings 'ignorance' as a conceptual tool to the centre of 'collective action framing' analysis. This centering enhances the latter analysis on three main levels. First, it allows for an understanding of ignored subjects of contention not as mere gaps in collective action frames, but as often deliberate products of marginalising, avoiding, repressing, and silencing potential knowledge and knowers of these particular subjects. Second, as such, it transcends the pathology-logical conception of ignorance in social movements as an epistemic deficiency that could be cured simply through exposure to knowledge. Rather, it urges social movement analysts to approach ignorance as an integral part of mobilisation and hence as a useful analytic category through which the limits of this mobilisation could be interrogated and negotiated. Third, overall, it demonstrates the possibility that framing becomes restrictive to -rather than productive of- collective cognition and action.

Second, it contributes to the study of ignorance more generally, by bringing in feminist methods of ignorance analysis from the realm of abstract political philosophy to bear on concrete practices of ignorance in collective action. This move builds on an earlier foundation in literature on critical pedagogy, which drew on those methods to study the reproduction of racial and gendered ignorance in classroom settings (Applebaum, 2010; Mueller, 2017). Expanding those methods to social movement studies enables the study of ignorance within settings generally characterised (at least in comparison to classrooms) by relative instability, looseness, and horizontality. Those characteristics make agency more visible, and hence highlight the works of acts – rather than structures - of ignorance. This facilitates not only a 'bottom-up' account of societal ignorance, but one which highlights the relative power of the ordinary in reproducing, or alternatively revoking, such ignorance through her own action.

As Erving Goffman (1974) avers, reality cannot be fully conceived all at once. Ignoring, like knowing, is a social act of organising such reality towards a particular mode of selective cognition. This article builds on Goffman's dual conception of framing, but uses feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' to complicate his conception of 'selective cognition.' It demonstrates that this cognition is not 'selective' in the traditional sense of the term. While the activists do consciously play into selecting the themes they wish to emphasise in their frames and the ones they wish to ignore, this selection is conditioned by various structural, ideological, and strategic conditions within which they have to maneuver. However, their maneuvers are 'selective' inasmuch as they emphasise particular elements of the aforementioned conditions and marginalise, avoid, repress, and/or silence others. It is at this complex intersection between the cognitive and the structural/ideological/strategic that reality is organised, contested, and reproduced or rejected.

This complexity notwithstanding, the emphasis on the twin-faceted nature of collective cognition paves the way for a more profound analysis of the works of knowledge and ignorance in collective action. Particularly, it enables a more politically and ethically reflexive approach to and practice of collective action framing. This article underlines one situation in which framing contributed to the reproduction of an ignorance that is analytically, but also politically and ethically, problematic. Feminist literature on 'intersectionality' already touched base with such problematic acts of collective ignorance in their analysis of feminist movements' frames (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). Invoking feminist epistemologies of ignorance, this article postulates a revival of feminist critique on collective action frames; a critique especially attentive to the duality and possible downside of the framing process.

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