

## *Master Thesis Project*

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University of Southern Denmark  
Middle East Studies

# Enemies of the Regime?

The role of the Egyptian Ultras in the 2011 Revolution

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## Summary

This dissertation studies the Egyptian Ultras and their role in the 2011 Revolution. Based on scholarly articles and international as well as Egyptian newspapers and websites, the politicisation and organisation of the Ultras and Egyptian football are explored. While there are a number of Ultra groups in Egypt, the main focus has been on the Ultras Ahlawy of al-Ahly and the Ultras White Knights of al-Zamalek; the two most prominent Ultra groups. The research question of the thesis is: *How and why were the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights mobilised against the regime during the 2011 Revolution?*

While the Ultras phenomenon long has been a part of the European football scene, it is a rather new phenomenon in Egypt being established in the country in the early 2000s. None-the-less, the Cairo Derby between al-Ahly and al-Zamalek has long been renowned for the clashes between the Ultras Ahlawy of al-Ahly and the Ultras White Knights of al-Zamalek as well as the police and security forces. The Ultras have, therefore, widely been described as violent fans and gangs of thugs. However, this study shows that the Ultras have shown more than just aggressiveness towards rival fans or the authorities, as there have been traces of political aspects in both their chants and actions at the stadiums in Egypt prior to the 2011 Revolution.

On this background, this thesis hypothesises that the Ultras have not been openly political active prior to the 2011 Revolution, but were drawn into the revolution by the mass public support in the fight against the state apparatus. Furthermore, it is argued that the 2011 Revolution created an opportunity for the Ultras to take back the sport of football otherwise used as a political tool by the regimes.

The first three chapters of the thesis consist of an introduction, methodology and the theoretical framework, hereunder methodological reflections and discussion of empirical findings. The methodological approach in this thesis is departing from a qualitative hypothetic-deductive document analysis, structured within the category of a qualitative case study. The theoretical framework is structured through a combination of theoretical studies based on politicisation and social movement. By combining theories of Samuels (1980), Cooper (2018) and Spaaij et al. (2018) with empirical work of Gibril (2015), Jerzak (2013) and Woltering (2013) the aim is to produce a theoretical framework for analysing the politicisation of Egyptian football and the Egyptian Ultras. The theoretical framework on social movement is gathered through the use of theories of Tilly (1978), Tilly and Tarrow (2007), Tilly and Wood (2013) as well as Elsayed (2018) and Variel (2013).

Following the introduction, methodology and theoretical framework, an historical context focusing on the development of Egyptian football as well as the relationship between al-Ahly and al-Zamalek leading to the Cairo Derby and an overview of the Ultras phenomenon, in general, is presented.

Chapter five and its subchapters analyse the Ultras of Egypt as well as the Egyptian football scene. The first subchapter analyses the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights, finding the organisation of the Ultras to

build on a hierarchy based on the love for the club rather than social class, and that the Ultras attracts especially to young and under- or uneducated men. This is followed by an analysis of the politicisation of football, finding that shifting Egyptian regimes have used football as a political tool and as a tool of propaganda. The next subchapter analyses the relations between the Ultras and the authorities, finding that the relationship between the Ultras and the police and security forces have been a catalyst for the mobilisation of the Ultras. Lastly, the politicisation of the Ultras is analysed finding that the Ultras might not have been politicised, but the Port Said Massacre in 2012 can be an explanation for the mobilisation of the Ultras.

Chapter six discusses the view of the Ultras by taking a stance in the scholarly work combined with the media representation of the groups. This chapter actively discusses the role of the Ultras and the image of them as respectable rebellions or troublesome thugs.

By way of conclusion, the findings of the analysis and the discussion are brought together in order to conclude how and why the Ultras mobilised as well as their role in the 2011 Revolution. Based on these findings, this thesis concludes that the Ultras mobilised after being called upon by the already established social movements in Egypt and that the Ultras did play a vital role in protecting these social movements from the police and security forces. However, this thesis shows that there are different views on the Ultras participation in the 2011 Revolution.

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## **List of abbreviations**

**CAF** – Confederation of African Football

**CSF** – Central Security Forces

**EFA** – Egyptian Football Association

**EEFA** – Egyptian-English Football Association

**FIFA** – Fédération de Football Association

**NDP** – National Democratic Party

**SCAF** – Supreme Council of the Armed Forces

**SMT** – Social Movement Theory

**UEFA** – Union of European Football Associations

## 1.0 Introduction

With more than three billion viewers worldwide, football is one of the most popular and followed sports in the world (Reed, 2018). For many, football is just 22 players chasing the same ball on a green pitch. However, football is more than what happens on the pitch. For the many fans of football, the sport is about feelings, culture, history, and in most of the world, also politics. Throughout the history of football, the sport has been used as a political tool for regimes and governments all over the world. In Spain, Real Madrid was granted the title 'Real' (Royal) in 1929 by King Alonso and stands today as the more conservative and nationalist club against FC Barcelona which is rooted in the sense of Catalan identity (Madrid, 2018). In Argentina, where football could easily be considered a religion, the sport has had close ties with politics since the presidency of Juan Peron, but most significantly during the dictatorship and military junta of General Jorge Rafael Vidal in the years between 1976 and 1983 (O'Higgins, 2017). During the rule of the military junta, the World Cup of 1978 held in Argentina was thought to be organised in order to draw the people's attention away from the mass murders being committed (Naboulsi, 2014: 3). The politicisation is also evident in Egypt where President Hosni Mubarak, a fan of the Cairo-based football club al-Ahly, and the National Democratic Party (NDP) took advantage of football as a mean of distraction to assert its political and economic dominance of the state assets (Naboulsi, 2014: 3).

While European football has several rivalries based on location, religion, political ideology and history, one of the world's biggest rivalries is found in Egyptian football; al-Ahly (The Nationals) and al-Zamalek (The Royals) (Montague, 2008). Known for its overt nationalism under President Mubarak, al-Ahly's support traditionally comes from the poor and devout of Cairo's suburbs, while also widely supported throughout Egypt (Montague, 2012b). Meanwhile, their biggest rival, al-Zamalek, previously had close links to the monarchy and the ruling British elite, but today attracts many liberals put off by al-Ahly's nationalism (Montague, 2012b). Each of the two clubs is supported by their respective groups of Ultras; UA-07 or Ultras Ahlawy (al-Ahly) and Ultras White Knights (al-Zamalek) (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 92).

Since the start of the Ultras groups in Egypt, Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights, each representing different clubs and different political views, occasionally engaged in fistfights with rival Ultras over game results, fomenting early hostilities between the groups (Jerzak, 2013: 241). During Mubarak's regime, the Ultras resisted the increasing corporatisation of football and confronted the protecting apparatuses of the larger neoliberal machinery: the Central Security Forces (CSF), also known as 'anti-riot police' (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 95). To protect the regime and its neoliberal interests of business elites, the government through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) directed funding towards the CSF that was frequently deployed against the citizens of Egypt and its political dissidents including the Ultras (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 95).

While Egyptian Ultras are not officially organised along political lines and serve no political purpose, Ultras in Egypt have used banners and chants in the stadiums to protest against Egypt's stance on Gaza and other external and internal issues (Woltering, 2013: 294). While stadiums in Egypt had become spaces for angry displays of resistance against an authoritarian regime, Egypt saw a whole new partnership in the 2011 Revolution that overthrew the dictatorship of President Mubarak (Tharoor, 2015).

## **1.1 Research Question**

While both Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights were true to their non-political profile and principles, none of the two groups actively encouraged their members to join the protests at Tahrir Square in the first days of the 2011 Revolution (Rommel, 2016: 35). However, it is argued that the killing of Ultras White Knights member Shihāb Aḥmed on the third day of the fightings (Rommel, 2016: 37) led to Ultras from Ultras White Knights and arch-rival Ultras Ahlawy to declare a truce and join forces forming the front-ranks of the protesters at Tahrir Square, manning its battle lines and clashing with security forces and pro-Mubarak thugs (Tharoor, 2015). If the football fans were not already, they suddenly became enemies of the Mubarak regime and the regimes that followed.

Nearly one year later, on 1 February 2012, 72 members of Ultras Ahlawy were killed after a football match in Port Said, in an incident that came to be known as the Port Said Massacre (Rommel, 2016: 33). While the massacre gained wide media attention and questioned the role of the authorities, the Ultras gained a reputation as some of the revolutionary struggle's most archetypical rebels (Rommel, 2016: 33). This thesis aims to critically discuss if this reputation was reasonable due to the actions of the Egyptian Ultras. While it is understood that political groups as the Muslim Brotherhood played a vital role in the 2011 Revolution, the focus of this thesis is on the Egyptian regime and the Ultras.

Thus, the topic for this thesis is politics and football in Egypt, aiming to examine the role of the hardcore Egyptian football fan groups, the so-called Ultras, in the 2011 Revolution.

The research question is, therefore, *How and why were the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights mobilised against the regime during the 2011 Revolution?*

In this thesis, the 2011 Revolution is set to the scope of time between the start of the revolution at the end of 2010 and early 2011 and the constitution of Mohamed Morsi as President of Egypt in June 2012. This time scope has been chosen as it can be argued that the constitution of Morsi ended the interim regime and thereby the vacuum after the ousting of President Mubarak (Childres, 2013).

In order to fully answer this research question, this thesis will attempt to answer the following sub-questions.

- a) Who are Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights?

- b) How have the Egyptian regimes politicised and used football?
- c) How was the Ultras relationship with state authorities before the 2011 Revolution?
- d) How are the Ultras politicised in Egypt?

## **1.2 Delimitations**

The study of Egyptian Ultras' role in the 2011 Revolution has been chosen due to genuine interest and curiosity regarding the football scene in the Middle East. Middle Eastern football offers a variety of fan groups and issues related to the football scene to study; i.e. the hateful relationship between Egypt and Tunisia, nationalism within Middle Eastern football and the development of professional football in the Middle East. However, this topic was chosen given the Egyptian Ultras were among the first groups to be created, as well as them being drawn into the 2011 Revolution. Furthermore, the two Cairo-based clubs al-Ahly and al-Zamalek are considered the two biggest clubs in the Middle East why their respective Ultras are also to be considered some of the most famous of the Middle East (Montague, 2008).

## **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters guided by the research frame established in this present chapter. In this present chapter, the topic, research question, and delimitations for this thesis have been presented, followed by a review of the main literature. In chapter two, the approach and methodology of the thesis are presented as departing from a qualitative hypothetic-deductive document analysis. Chapter three presents a theoretical framework of politicisation and social movement with the aim of analysing the role of football in Egypt as well as the Ultras participation in the 2011 Revolution. In chapter four, a historical context of football in Egypt as well as the history of the two biggest Egyptian football clubs, al-Ahly and al-Zamalek is presented. Furthermore, the Cairo Derby and the emergence of Ultras in Egypt is presented. Chapter five and the following subchapters analyse the Ultras Ahlawy and the Ultras White Knights as groups, as well as the politicisation of football and Ultras in Egypt. Furthermore, the relationship between the Ultras and the Egyptian authorities is analysed. The findings of the analysis and the discussion are brought together in chapter six, in order to conclude how and why the Ultras mobilised as well as their role in the 2011 Revolution.

## **1.4 Review of literature**

Understanding the reasons behind the Egyptian Ultras' participation in the 2011 Revolution can be a rather complex enterprise. While there are plenty of both scholarly work and news reports on the actions taken by the Ultras and the counteractions taken by the regime, the following five articles contribute with a view into the world of the Egyptian Ultras. While Suzan Gibril's chapter *Egypt* (2018) in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics* provides an insight into the history of football and the influence of politics on the sport since the First World War, Shawki El-Zatmah's *From Terso into Ultras: The 2011 Egyptian revolution and the radicalization of the Soccer's Ultras* (2012) in *Soccer & Society* maps the development of

the Ultras scene in Egypt. Furthermore, Connor T. Jerzak contributes to the understanding of the Ultras movement prior and during the 2011 Revolution in his article *Ultras in Egypt: state, revolution and the power of public space* (2013) in *A Journal for and about social movement*. The article is supported by Robert Woltering's *Unusual Suspects: "Ultras as political actors in the Egyptian Revolution* (2013) from *Arab Studies Quarterly*. Here, Woltering aims to explain the Ultras as a social movement.

In her chapter, *Egypt* in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics* (2018) Gibril provides a walkthrough of the history of modern football in Egypt, starting with the introduction of the sport by the British occupiers in 1882. Here, Gibril argues that while the British colonial power practised football within the confines of military camps, the game quickly spread to the streets of Egypt and allowed the colonial power to use football as a means of moral education (Gibril, 2018: 348). While the Egyptian elite created a number of clubs, such as al-Ahly in 1907 and al-Mokhtalat which eventually became al-Zamalek in 1911, football in Egypt developed rapidly after the First World War (Gibril, 2018: 348-349). This resulted in the establishment of the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) in 1921, developing local competition in Egypt (Gibril, 2018: 349).

However, with the creation of the EFA and the rapid development of football followed the politicisation of the sport, according to Gibril, in the first half of the twentieth century as a tool of anti-colonial struggle and later as a powerful tool of propaganda for the subsequent dictatorial regimes (Gibril, 2018: 350). Therefore, Gibril argues that since the reign of President Gamal Abdel Nasser (from 1954-1970), the regimes have succeeded in using football both as a distraction but also as an instrument of legitimisation of their grandeur and power (Gibril, 2018: 351-352). Furthermore, Gibril focus on the relation between the different regimes and the two Cairo-rivals al-Ahly and al-Zamalek, which arguably is one of the biggest football derbies in the world. The argument is that the Ahly-Zamalek rivalry is rooted in political and historical opposition between liberal and conservative ideologies with al-Ahly being strongly linked with the regime since the rule of Nasser (Gibril, 2018: 352-355). While Gibril touches upon how the historical ideologies have shaped the Ultras of the respective clubs and how these fan groups express their views on the politicisation of football the mere focus of Gibril's chapter is on the different regimes' effect on football in Egypt.

Instead, El-Zatmah in *From Terso into Ultras: The 2011 Egyptian revolution and the radicalization of the Soccer's Ultras* (2012) take over where Gibril left off. Taking a stance in the early 1990's Egyptian *Terso* fans El-Zatmah provides an in-depth look at the development from passionate fans to the rise of the Ultras (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802-803). According to El-Zatmah the transition from the Terso fans to the Ultras represented a transformation from a non-violent festive celebration of football to the more violent marches and celebrations of their beloved sport (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802). Furthermore, the Ultras developed much more vulgar chants aimed at the opposing team and its fans, as well as lighting torches of fireworks became a cen-

tral element of the Ultras' culture along with the *tifo* – an artistic show inside the stadium (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802-804).

While the Ultras identify themselves with their respective clubs, wearing the colours and the logo of the club, the foundation of the Ultras' ideology is based on “*an anti-police, anti-media, anti-corporate, anti-state and anti-soccer professionalism stance*” (El-Zatmah, 2012: 805). According to El-Zatmah, the Ultras have admitted that their fighting and marching through the streets are aimed at challenging and exhausting the police and the CSF and thereby taking a form of ‘safe resistance’ to the Mubarak regime (El-Zatmah, 2012: 806). The anti-media, anti-corporate and anti-soccer professionalism stance has been expressed through anti-mainstream media and the decline of appearing in the media, as well as putting pressure on the clubs and stars in order to stop the sale of players (El-Zatmah, 2012: 806-808).

Especially the anti-police aspect benefitted the Ultras in the 2011 Revolution, according to El-Zatmah (2012: 808). Time and time again, the skills and techniques of breaking through police forces to get into stadiums were demonstrated by the Ultras at Tahrir Square (El-Zatmah, 2012: 808). Furthermore, after the first weeks of the revolution, the Ultras kept playing an important role in the bloody clashes with the army and police forces culminating in the Port Said Massacre, which claimed the lives of 72 members of the Ultras Ahlawy (El-Zatmah, 2012: 808). A massacre that the Ultras Ahlawy have insisted was orchestrated as an act of revenge for their role in ousting President Mubarak (El-Zatmah, 2012: 808). The Port Said Massacre and the 2011 Revolution were, according to El-Zatmah a turning point for the Ultras, as they suddenly found themselves engaging with politics, but maintained their independence from any political party or coalition (El-Zatmah, 2012: 810). Furthermore, Ultras Ahlawy and the Ultras White Knights of al-Zamalek, two rival Ultras groups, found themselves in coalition to protect to protestors at Tahrir Square (El-Zatmah, 2012: 810).

This is a subject that Jerzak touches upon in his work *Ultras in Egypt: state, revolution and the power public space* (2013). In his studies Jerzak argues that since the start of the Ultra groups in Egypt, Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights each representing different clubs and different political views occasionally engaged in fistfights with rival Ultras over game results, fomenting early hostilities between the groups (Jerzak, 2013: 241). Thereby, Jerzak argues that Ultras do not compromise a homogenous group as seen at Tahrir Square (Jerzak, 2013: 242). However, he also argues that these groups nevertheless have similar attitudes, tactics and motivation (Jerzak, 2013: 242). In his research, Jerzak highlights that after police brutality increased following the demonstrations against President Mubarak at the Tahrir Square, rival Ultra groups came together to act towards the common objective of dismantling Mubarak's repressive regime (Jerzak, 2013: 242). Another important subject of Jerzak's studies is the aspect of the class character of Ultras in relation to their role in the 2011 Revolution. According to Jerzak, it is a complex issue to determine the class characters due to the secrecy of the groups (Jerzak, 2013: 243). However, his findings indicate that Ultras groups are often cross-class organisations unifying the educated and illiterate and the rich and poor (Jerzak, 2013: 243). Non-

the-less, the Ultra leaders generally tend to be well educated and come from upper-middle-class families; better educated than other members (Jerzak, 2013: 243). In other words, the political arena in Egypt during the revolution was dominated by common Egyptians in the form of Ultras (Jerzak, 2013: 243-244).

While Jerzak argues that the Ultras had entered the political arena Woltering, in his article *Unusual Suspects: "Ultras as political actors in the Egyptian Revolution* (2013), argue that the Egyptian Ultras cannot be seen as organised along political lines or serving any political purpose (Woltering, 2013: 294). This is in line with the findings of El-Zatmah. However, Woltering argues that a collective political consciousness has emerged among the Ultras since 2010, while reports suggest that in 2008-2009 the Gaza War drew in the Ultras' political engagement (Woltering, 2013: 294). Meanwhile, Woltering also presents evidence that neither Ultras Ahlawy nor Ultras White Knights were at Tahrir Square as a group but that the Ultras as individuals were free to participate in the revolution (Woltering, 2013:295). Nevertheless, the Ultras were often out in significant numbers several times during the revolution, which is why they are often seen as a social movement (Woltering, 2013: 295).

While there is evidence that the Ultras did not participate in the revolution as a group, Woltering is supporting this evidence by arguing that the Egyptian Ultras do not qualify as a social movement, but informal organisations pressuring the authorities in order to attain certain changes (Woltering, 2013: 297). However, their organisation is based on shared group identity as Ultras of a specific football club with a focus on that particular club and not the problems of the society (Woltering, 2013: 297). While according to Woltering, the Ultras do not qualify as a social movement, he does not offer any other explanation on the participation of the Ultras during the 2011 Revolution.

This thesis aims to cover the participation of the Ultras by taking a stance not only in scholarly work as presented above but also in news reports from the time of the revolution. While news articles and features are not scholarly and as so do not present any theory or conclusion on the subject, they are found useful for this project. Therefore, theory and methodology will be provided through journals and books written by scholars on sports and Middle Eastern studies, while the news articles and features will provide a view into given situations from people who cover Egyptian football and the Egyptian Ultras on a daily basis. On the basis of this, it is believed that the news articles and features will be able to provide views from the football fans and people close to the given situations. Furthermore, James Dorsey's blog, *mideastsoccer.com*, is considered a valuable asset for this thesis. Throughout his blog posts, Dorsey analyses and presents Egyptian football with regards to the use as a tool for the regime as well as in the view of the Ultras. By combining scholarly work and news articles, this will provide a mix of scholarly and empirical material, which in this thesis provides a thorough understanding of the different perspectives on the subject. Furthermore, this mix is argued to be necessary to answer the research question thoroughly.

All of the chosen sources contribute to different views and assets that are valuable for understanding and analysing the subject. However, it is also acknowledged that there might be some of the sources that need support from other sources in order for me to use them in my thesis. How this challenge is faced is elaborated upon in the following Methodology section.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Qualitative Case Study**

Departing from qualitative hypothetic-deductive document analysis, this thesis will be structured within the category of a qualitative case study. The case study will be conducted within a hermeneutical approach, where my understanding of the subject and the finding in scholarly work will be critically discussed in order to fully understand the motivations, acts and reaction by the Egyptian Ultras and the context of the Egyptian society at the given time (Pahuus, 2014: 225-263). The reason for taking a stance in a qualitative case study is that a case study is defined as an intensive study of an individual unit of interest, with a focus on the developmental factors of that unit (Stewart, 2014: 145). According to Bill Gillham, case studies enables a researcher to carry out investigations where other methods are not practical or not ethically justifiable (Gillham, 2000: 11). Furthermore, Gillham argues that qualitative methods enable the researcher to “*get under the skin of a group or organization to find out what really happens*” (Gillham, 2000: 11). Gillham’s arguments fit well to the aims of this thesis, as the limited time frame does not allow much room for any practical research. Instead, the qualitative method of document analysis used here allows an in-depth approach into the subject of Egyptian Ultras. Furthermore, this case study aims to collect data through words and symbols of relevance to the Egyptian Ultras and by going beyond a simple description of events and phenomena to create an understanding for subjective interpretation and critical analysis of the subject (McNabb, 2015: 225). According to David E. McNabb, all qualitative research strategies and approaches involve the collection of data, analysis and interpretation of that data and communicating research findings in, for example, a written report. In this case, this thesis aims to conduct an in-depth study of the Egyptian football Ultras (McNabb, 2015: 232). The primary purpose of the case is to identify what in the case is common to the group, here the Egyptian Ultras, and what is specific to the case under study (McNabb, 2015: 236). According to McNabb, the major methods used to collect qualitative data includes participation in the group setting or activity, personal and group interviews, observations and document and cultural artefact analysis (McNabb, 2015: 232). Furthermore, he mentions historical analysis, recording and analysis of life histories and narratives, films, videos and photographs, as well as surveys and projective techniques as secondary methods of collecting data (McNabb, 2015: 232). According to Allison Stewart, the type of research method used will often dictate the analytical approach, and if time is a major factor, a method that requires less detail should be chosen (Stewart, 2014: 154). In relation to other qualitative research methods, Glenn Bowen argues that document analysis has some advantages; one of them being an efficient method as it is less time-

consuming as it requires data selection instead of data collection (Bowen, 2009: 31-32). Due to the limited time of approximately four months for this thesis, the thesis will rely on document analysis supplemented by findings from fieldwork conducted by scholars.

Gillham argues that a case study is the main method, and that use of different sub-methods, as document analysis and interviews, benefits the case study (Gillham, 2000: 13). This is supported by Bowen, arguing that the qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple sources of evidence to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources and methods (Bowen, 2009: 28). This thesis will, as already mentioned, rely on document analysis. While it would have been fruitful for this thesis to conduct interviews with Egyptian Ultras, it has been decided not to follow this path due to limited time. Furthermore, the Ultras would most likely not participate in interviews regarding their role in the 2011 Revolution or their respective Ultras group.

While a case study seems ideal for this thesis, there are points of criticism to consider. As Rasmus H. Antoft and Heidi H. Salomonson point out, it is not possible to cover and study all aspects of a case, for which reason it is necessary to be specific and find the absolute most interesting elements for the study (Antoft and Salomonson, 2007: 33). While being specific is not necessarily a bad thing, it can result in aspects that are valuable for the thesis being left out of the work. Furthermore, the qualitative case method can be criticised for its objectivity. Here, Gillham touches upon human behaviour, thoughts and feelings and how they have to be analysed and determined by their context (Gillham, 2000: 11-12). Gillham argues that if a researcher wants to understand people in real life, he has to study them in their context and in the way they operate (Gillham, 2000: 11-12). In other words, in order to get the full picture, one has to leave the desk and get into the field. By making a case study without engaging with the people being studied, the thesis will be somewhat objective, which can ignore data important for an adequate understanding (Gillham, 2000: 11-12).

According to Bowen, document analysis can serve a variety of purposes as a part of research undertaking and highlights five specific functions (Bowen, 2009: 29). The first being document analysis as a research method being particularly applicable to qualitative case studies as it can produce rich descriptions of a single phenomenon. Furthermore, documents can provide context and background information as well as a historical insight into the subject (Bowen, 2009: 29-30). Second, according to Bowen, the information contained in documents can add attention to further questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as a part of the research (Bowen, 2009: 30). Furthermore, and third on Bowen's list, documents provide supplementary research data which can be valuable additions to a knowledge base (Bowen, 2009: 30). As his fourth point, Bowen argues that documents can also provide a means of tracking change and development by comparing particular documents to identify the change (Bowen, 2009: 30). Bowen's last point is that documents can be analysed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources (Bowen, 2009: 30). In other words, by using several documents from different sources, this thesis will be

able to verify findings or corroborate evidence and thereby cover different sides of the same subject. In sum, and of great importance for this thesis, documents provide background and context, but can also lead to additional questions to be asked and “*may be the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed or when informations have forgotten the details*” (Bowen, 2009: 30-31).

Furthermore, Bowen highlights several strengths by using document analysis in one’s research. The first being the advantage of availability, as many documents are in the public domain and are obtainable without the authors’ permission (Bowen, 2009: 31-32). Bowen also highlights that document analysis is cost-effective as the data contained in documents have already been gathered, while it is up to the researcher to evaluate the content and quality of the documents (Bowen, 2009: 31-32). In addition, Bowen attributes document analysis with the advantages of stability – the investigator’s presence does not alter what is being studied which is why documents are suitable for repeated reviews – and with exactness, as the inclusion of names, references and details of events makes documents advantageous in the research progress (Bowen, 2009: 31-32). Lastly, documents provide broad coverage as well as coverage of a long span of time (Bowen, 2009: 31-32). All in all, document analysis seems advantageous for this study due to the limit of time as well as the literature on and coverage of the Egyptian football and Ultras environment.

Regarding document analysis, Bowen mentions a number of limitations that are worth mentioning in criticism of this methodology. First of all, one should be aware of insufficient details as some documents are produced for some purpose other than research, and might also be created independent of a research agenda (Bowen, 2009: 31-32). This aspect is especially relevant for this thesis, as other sources of non-scholarly character will play an important role in the analysis. However, the use of non-scholarly work will be carefully chosen in order to be as specific as possible. Another pitfall in using document analysis is what Bowen (2009: 32) calls *biased selectivity*; “*an incomplete collection of document,*” that may only, “*reflect the emphasis of the particular organisational unit that handles record keeping.*” However, this thesis aims to cover this problem by providing data that shows both sides of the relation between the Egyptian regime and the Egyptian football Ultras. Lastly, Bowen emphasises that documents should be looked upon with a critical eye and should not be treated as necessarily precise, accurate or complete recordings of events that have occurred (Bowen, 2009: 33).

### **3.0 Theoretical framework**

In order to answer the research question, this thesis will base the analysis of the Egyptian Ultras on a theoretical framework of *politicisation* and a theoretical framework of *social movement*. The latter will be based on Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow’s concept of contentious politics. Before going into the theoretical framework of Tilly and Tarrow, the theoretical framework of politicisation is presented below. The reason

is that to understand the political significance in social movement fully and within the Egyptian Ultras groups, one has to understand the politicisation of football.

### 3.1 Politicisation

According to Warren J. Samuels, the meaning of the concept politicisation refers to when activities that were not hitherto already in politics are thrust into politics (Samuels, 1980: 67-68). Samuels goes on to explain how it in this meaning is asserted that politics that “*were never hitherto a political or governmental matter*” becomes a political matter through instrumentalisation (Samuels, 1980: 67-68). Another meaning of the concept refers to activities or beliefs which “*ostensibly recognize an original and continuing political element hitherto ignored and now surfaced*” (Samuels, 1980: 68). According to Samuels, the assertion is that because a matter was not a conscious or public political issue, it does not mean it has never been a political matter (Samuels, 1980: 68). In other words, and as presented by Ramón Spaaij et al. the first politicisation process mentioned above can be put in context to the world of football, with the instrumentalisation of the sport by political power at a local, national and international level (Spaij et al., 2018: 7). The second politicisation process is then presented as involving attempts by actors outside the political sphere, trying to get a political dimension by interfering with political matters (Spaij et al., 2018: 7). Here, Spaaij et al. as an example, highlights the football supporters who use the stadium to express a series of political demands (Spaij et al., 2018: 7). Therefore, and as argued by Spaaij et al., football has frequently been a political affair where political actors often have used football as a site for political propaganda, while football has also been used as a site for mobilisation (Spaij et al., 2018: 8). A key dimension of the politicisation of football is the surpassing of limits, allowing actors within the field of football to attempt to give the sport political meanings fitting to their agendas and actions (Spaij et al., 2018: 10). The construction and reproduction of football-related oppositions are an expression of a wider socio-political conflict and division that can be demonstrated through the surpassing of limits (Spaij et al., 2018: 10). According to Spaaij et al., football is politicised in several countries where the sport has become a space that players, administrators, politicians and spectators invest into expressing political demands, assert political identities and challenge or support government actions (Spaij et al., 2018: 9). Meanwhile, in the theoretical framework of sports politics, according to Ørnulf Seippel et al., professional football appears to be successfully framed as entertainment and aspiration rather than political, and while the players are presumed to be performers and to entertain the spectators, it contributes to the silencing of the political potential of the sport (Seippel et al., 2018: 677).

Christopher A. Cooper presents two other meanings of the term politicisation with the first focusing on the behaviour of civil servants and their willingness and capacity to provide the government with loyal and neutrally competent service (Cooper, 2018: 32). The other meaning presented by Cooper focuses on the standards by which personnel are appointed to administrative positions (Cooper, 2018: 32). Around the world, it has been common for politicians to hold seats in football clubs or association committees and thereby align

themselves with particular football clubs or influencing the administration of clubs or associations (Spaaij et al., 2018: 9). Another factor is that politicians see high-profile cases within sport as an opportunity to demonstrate their ideological basis in practice (Seippel et al., 2018: 674).

As a point of critique Spaaij et al. argue that the definition of the concept of politicisation is too narrow and not fulfilling when it comes to the relation between sports and politics (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7-8). Instead, Spaaij et al. argues that in order to fully observe and account for the politicisation process as it applies to football, one needs to integrate a broader definition that goes beyond the mere reference to a specialised political knowledge or to factors that influence electoral choice or collective action (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7-8). Spaaij et al. defines this as football can produce, articulate and communicate feelings, representations and symbols that can influence and guide political ideas and actions (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7-8). Therefore, in the eyes of Spaaij et al., football is a potent source and platform for political distinction, regulation and self-expression (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7-8). This argument fits well with the interpretation of politicisation of football for this thesis.

While the politicisation of football in Egypt can be analysed through the concepts of politicisation presented above, there is a lack of research on politicisation in relation to the Ultras, and so the area is arguably under-theorised. While Cooper, Samuels and Spaaij et al., provides a theoretical framework, this framework merely conceptualises politicisation but does not differentiate between different forms of the term. Rather, Samuels and Spaaij et al. offer a theory of what triggers politicisation on a matter or area but not what brings an actor to become politicised.

With the politicisation of Ultras being an under-theorised subject, the reason for the politicisation of the Ultras can be questioned. Therefore, this thesis will now create an overview of the main authors, used in the analysis, and how they define the term politicisation in relation to the means and causes behind the Ultras as actors' participation in the 2011 Revolution. These definitions can be divided into two groups which this thesis will name; *politicisation by repression* and *politicisation by social protectiveness*. Taking a stance in Gibril's chapter *Contentious Politics and Bottom-Up Mobilization in Revolutionary Egypt: The Case of Egyptian Football Supporters in Cairo* (2015) from the book *Contentious Politics in the Middle East: Popular Resistance and Marginalized Activism beyond the Arab Uprisings*, the politicisation of the Ultras can best be defined as *politicisation by repression*. Gibril presents factors as humiliation and violent state-based repression from the police and security forces as causes for the Ultras' participation in the 2011 Revolution (Gibril, 2015: 313). In other words, the chance for revenge against the police and security forces can have played a role in the politicisation of the Ultras, leading to a fight for political ideas. This cause of politicisation is also represented in the work of Jerzak in *Ultras in Egypt: State, Revolution and the Power of Public Space* (2013). Here Jerzak, in line with Gibril sees the politicisation of the Ultras as being caused by repression and humiliation from the police as well as high levels of unemployment (Jerzak, 2013: 250).

On the other hand, Woltering, in *Usual Suspects: “Ultras” in the Egyptian Revolution* presents the Ultras as not being politically organised, but yet the Gaza War in 2008-2009 made them rather political active (Woltering, 2013: 295). Furthermore, he states that the 2011 Revolution was the Ultras’ first engagement in a political struggle as they went to the streets as individuals to protect the protesters (Woltering, 2013: 295). As a result, this thesis will define Woltering's definition of the politicisation of the Ultras as *politicisation by social protectiveness*, as it in this thesis is assumed that the Ultras went to the streets intending to protect the protestors rather than to be politically active. The last of the main authors used for the analysis in this thesis, El-Zatmah, defines the politicisation of the Ultras as being caused not only to take revenge for the killings of their Ultras brothers but also to fight for social justice (El-Zatmah, 2012: 210). While there is a lack in the research on the politicisation of Ultras, where both Cooper and Samuels only offers conceptualised definitions that most of all explain the politicisation of football and sport, Woltering and El-Zatmah’s definitions are, however, in line with the politicisation process presented by Spaaij et al. involving attempts by actors outside the political sphere trying to get a political dimension by interfering with political matters (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7).

While Cooper and Samuels’ concepts of politicisation along with the thoughts of Spaaij et al., creates a theoretical framework that is useful for analysing the politicisation of football in Egypt, this thesis will rely on the two definitions; *politicisation by repression* and *politicisation by social protectiveness* to analyse the politicisation of the Ultras. To sum up, this thesis considers *politicisation by repression* to be caused by humiliation, police control and violence as well as state repression while *politicisation by social protectiveness* is considered to be caused by a willingness to contribute to and provoke a change in politics and social justice. Therefore, the belief is that not only has football throughout time frequently been a political affair and used as a political tool involving social groups and leading to social actions, the politicisation of the Egyptian people and thereby the Ultras have also contributed to triggering social actions as seen in social movement theory as presented below. Furthermore, this thesis sees football and politics as a relationship that affects the society around it.

<b>Definition</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Example</b>
Politicisation by repression	Suzan Gibril, Connor T. Jerzak	Politicisation caused by humiliation, police control, violence, persecution etc.	Rebellion against years of police brutality and persecution leading
Politicisation by social protectiveness	Robbert Woltering, Shawki El-Zatmah	Politicisation caused by injustice, the act of morality, willingness to do what is considered right etc.	Rebellion against social injustice or simply defending the weak against a stronger opponent

**Table 1: Definitions of politicisation as presented by the main authors used in the analysis**

### 3.2 Social Movement

The emergence of social movements is described by Ann M. Mirabito and Leonard L. Berry as when individuals band together for a common goal aiming to shift external power relationships or promote personal transformation or change cultural values (Mirabito and Berry, 2015: 337). While social movement theory (SMT) is often applied to the analysis of the Western society i.e. the civil rights movement in the American South, the international feminist upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s or the Polish Solidarity trade union of the 1980s it is argued that social movement theory as a tool can be used in the analysis of the Middle East as well (Beinin and Vairel, 2013: 1). On the basis of this, Joel Beinin and Frédéric Variel argue that the Middle East provide “*a complex and fascinating laboratory, not only to confirm the applicability of SMT but also to enrich our theoretical knowledge of social movements and other forms of political contestation*” (Beinin and Vairel, 2013: 2-3).

While a number of scholars have taken different approaches to SMT, Tilly and Tarrow’s revised conceptual model is understood to be far better suited to studying social and political mobilisations and contestations in the Middle East and North Africa than classical social movement theory (Beinin and Vairel, 2013: 7-8). In line with the words of Beinin and Variel, this thesis argues that Tilly and Tarrow’s revised conceptual model is useful as most social movements in the Middle East operates in authoritarian states that only subjects them to varying degrees of coercion and only offer few openings for mobilisation (Beinin and Vairel, 2013: 7-8). Furthermore, many of the social movements in the Middle East only have very limited resources and weak formal organisations, and so they typically rely on informal networks and innovative repertoires to mobilise (Beinin and Vairel, 2013: 7-8). Therefore, this thesis relies on a theoretical framework of Tilly and Tarrow’s ideas of social movement and contentious politics.

In other works, Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood treat social movements as a distinctive form of contentious politics in the sense that social movements involve collective making of claims that, if realised, would conflict with others interests or politics (Tilly and Wood, 2013: 3-4). In other words, and as described by Yomma Elsayed the term “*contentious politics*” moves us away from a dichotomy between movement-centred and institutional-centred analysis to the complex relationship between state and movements in its variety of forms (Elsayed, 2018: 821). While Elsayed defines the term contentious politics, Frédéric Variel adds “*contentious space*” in which actors share the idea that changing politics by mobilisation and political activism is possible (Vairel, 2013: 33). Furthermore, actors in contentious spaces can share political comradeship and friendship, but also have diverse or opposing stances, but share a common goal (Vairel, 2013: 33). This leads to Tilly and Tarrow arguing that the base of a social movement consists of movement organisations, networks, participants and shared cultural artefacts, memories and traditions that contribute to the social movement campaign (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 114). Mirabito and Berry agree with Tilly and Tarrow,

arguing that in order to achieve their goals, social movements require volunteers and resources as well as shared expectations of the common goal (Mirabito and Berry, 2015: 341).

In relation to this, Anton Törnberg argues that social movements are often a sudden mass defiance and open rebellion, which SMTs have difficulties in explaining (Törnberg, 2018: 381). This is also the case for the theoretical framework of Tilly and Tarrow. Instead, Tilly and Tarrow focus on the *social movement campaign*. It is argued that a social movement campaign is a sustained challenge to the power holders, as they face means of concerted public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment, using such means as public meetings, demonstrations and petitions (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 114). According to Tilly and Tarrow's theoretical framework, movement participants make concerted public representations on the part of themselves and their constituencies (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 119-120). The four terms are presented as follows,

**“Worthiness:** Sober demeanor; neat clothing, presence of clergy, dignitaries, mothers with children or, alternatively, sings of militancy such as wearing army uniforms or carrying the tools of a trade.

**Unity:** matching badges, headbands, banners, or costumes; marching in ranks, singing and chanting; symbols of solidarity such as signature color.

**Numbers:** headcounts, signatures on petitions, messages from constituents, filling the streets.

**Commitment:** braving bad weather, visible participation by the old and people with disabilities; resistance to repression; ostentatious sacrifice, subscription and/or benefaction.” (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 119-120)

In a later publication, Tilly and Wood assemble the four terms into “WUNC” adding that WUNC can take the form of statements, slogans or labels that imply the four ideas (Tilly and Wood, 2013: 5).

Elaborating the characteristics of a social movement campaign, it according to Tilly and Tarrow makes collective claims on targeted authorities and always links at least three parties: a group of self-designated claimants, some object(s) of claims and a public of some kind (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 119). Furthermore, movements employ combinations in forms of political action, in what Tilly and Tarrow calls the *social movement repertoire* (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 120). The forms of political actions are presented as follows: “*creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions; public meetings; solemn processions; vigils; rallies; demonstrations; petition drives; statements and in public media; pamphleteering* (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 120). While the social movement repertoire draws from the general repertoire of contention it differs from most forms of collective action in the modularity of its performances as it employs “*similar forms of collective action by a wide variety of social actors around very different goals against similar actions*” (Tilly and

Tarrow, 2007: 120). Therefore, according to Tilly and Tarrow's theoretical framework, a movement develops around a wide range of claims elaborating forms of actions that can be adopted and adapted in a variety of settings against a wide range of objections (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 120).

While a campaign makes collective claims on targeted authorities, the same authorities can reply with the use of repression and threats. According to Vairel, Arab political scenes are profoundly marked by repression (Vairel, 2013: 39-40). This brings some of Tilly's former work into consideration. In *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978) Tilly argues that opportunity is important for the success of a mobilisation (Tilly, 1978: 133). However, mobilisation has two sides as he explains:

“On the opportunity side, we have the extent to which other groups, including governments, are vulnerable to new claims which would, if successful, enhance the contender's realization of its interests. On the threat side, we have the extent to which other groups are threatening to make claims which would, if successful, reduce the contender's realization of its interests” (Tilly, 1978: 133)

In addition, Tilly argues that people mobilise more easily and quickly if they face a threat as opposed to opportunities (Tilly, 1978: 133-136). According to Tilly, a group is more likely to treat a particular interest as a sign of threats to a wide range of its interests (Tilly, 1978: 133-136). In other words, if a social movement faces repression and perceives this repression as a threat to its goal, the social movement is more likely to mobilise faster in order to obtain its goal.

Another factor of a fast mobilising social movement is the communication technology and social media as we see it today (Törnberg, 2018: 381). According to Törnberg, mobilisations are able to take place faster than ever before, and so both scholars and the political elite are often taken by surprise by the radical and sudden shift to mass defiance and open rebellion (Törnberg, 2018: 381).

### **3.3 Application of theory**

Firstly, exploring the Egyptian football scene through the lens of politicisation will allow this thesis to explore the Egyptian regime's influence on the sport, as well as exploring what role football plays for the regime as a political tool. Furthermore, exploring the politicisation of Egyptian football and the Egyptian Ultras will allow this thesis to understand the factors that might have pushed the Ultras into the 2011 Revolution and the protests at Tahrir Square.

In addition, exploring the Egyptian football Ultras will through the lens of a theoretical framework of social movement allow this thesis to explore how the Ultras might be a social movement themselves, but also how they became a part of the social movement against the regime during the 2011 Revolution. It can be argued

that through the lens of social movement, the Egyptian Ultras groups have naturally been placed as opponents to state actors and institutions.

Essentially, this thesis aims to understand the dynamics and repertoires that Ultras groups presented towards the regime and their role in the 2011 Revolution. In addition to understanding what a social movement entails, it is therefore essential to look into the effect of politicisation of football and Ultras and understand the factors that influenced the mobilisation of the Ultras. These concepts will be used to examine and understand the Egyptian Ultras participation in the 2011 Revolution.

### **3.4 Hypothesis**

Based on the above-mentioned research question, literature review and theoretical framework, this thesis assumes that the football Ultras of Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights did mobilise and play a role in the 2011 Revolution. This assumption is based on the Ultras not being openly politically active, but prior to the 2011 Revolution did show their discontent with both the regime and the authorities inside and outside the stadia. In addition, Ultras in Egypt have used banners and chants in the stadiums to protest against Egypt's stance on Gaza and other external issues (Woltering, 2013: 294). Based on a theoretical framework of social movement, it is assumed that the Ultras were drawn into the revolution by the mass public support in the fight against the state apparatus. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the 2011 Revolution created an opportunity for the Ultras to take back the sport of football, otherwise used as a political tool.

### **4.0 Football in Egypt**

“Egyptians are attached to soccer the way the French are to wine. It's well-nigh impossible to find an Egyptian who is not a fan. When major matches are being broadcast, Cairo turns into a quasi ghost town. The only sounds are the shouts of the fans huddled in front of televisions when a goal is scored.” (Al Aswany, 2014)

Football is by far one of the most popular sports in the world, with more than a billion viewers worldwide. It comes as no surprise that Europe and South America are dominating the top 20 of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Ranking of national teams (FIFA, 2019), and that the top European leagues, as well as the Union of European Football Association (UEFA) Champions League, are valued as the greatest football leagues in the world. In comparison, Egypt is currently positioned as number 57 in the world (FIFA, 2019). None-the-less, Egypt is one of the most successful football nations in Africa clinching the African Cup of Nations seven times (Foundation, 2019) – more than any other African country. Furthermore, the two Cairo-based clubs al-Ahly and al-Zamalek are the most popular and decorated clubs in the Middle East and North Africa with the Cairo derby being followed by millions in Egypt, North Africa and the Middle East (Gibril, 2018: 353; Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 99).

## 4.1 Birth of Egyptian football

The game of football might have been played in Egypt since the Greek historian Herodotus, after visiting Egypt in 460 B.C. and again in 448 B.C., described the sight of young men kicking around a ball made of goatskin and straw (Al Aswany, 2014). However, the history of modern Egyptian football began at the end of the nineteenth century through the British occupational forces in 1882 (Gibril, 2018: 348). Practised within the military camps, football quickly spread onto the streets encouraged by local Egyptians as well as the introduction of physical education as a mandatory activity in all Egyptian schools (Gibril, 2018: 348). Football quickly became popular among the lower classes turning the game into a popular festival of drumming, singing, and dancing adopting many of the characteristics of popular *mawlid*, i.e. saint festival, a tradition deeply rooted in Egyptian popular culture (El-Zatmah, 2011: 17). Soon followed the creation of first local football clubs established by private leisure and sporting clubs in Egypt in the late nineteenth century (Gibril, 2018: 348). Only a selected number of Egyptians from the upper classes of the society at the beginning of the twentieth century were granted access to these private clubs, leading to elite Egyptians initiating their own clubs whose purpose was to serve as “*networking grounds for students after graduating as well as to instil the values of health, fitness and nationalism*” (Gibril, 2018: 348).

The first and oldest club in Egypt and the Arab World was founded in 1903 by British and Italian engineers affiliated with the Railway Authority (Gibril, 2018: 348-349). *Al-Sekka al-Hadid* (known as the Railway Club) was closely followed by *al-Ahly* – “National” – in 1907 and *al-Mokhtalat* – “Mixed” (who later became *al-Zamalek*) – in 1911 in Cairo (Gibril, 2018: 348-349). The continuous popularity of football led to the establishment of an Egyptian-English Football Association (EEFA) in 1916 replaced by the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) in 1921 (Gibril, 2018: 348-349). Only two years after its founding, the EFA was officially recognised and allowed to become a member of FIFA as the first Arab and African representative (Gibril, 2018: 349). This led to the development of the first competition at a local level (Gibril, 2018: 349). While the British protectorate ended and Egypt became an independent nation in 1922, the interest in the game of football itself fuelled its growth and revenue (Gibril, 2018: 349). However, it was, for the most part, the two Cairo-clubs *al-Ahly* and *al-Zamalek* that had captured the interest of the Egyptians and the Middle East.

## 4.2 The al-Ahly and al-Zamalek rivalry

The history of al-Ahly Sporting Club has different beginnings according to different scholars and authors. According to Anna Zacharias, Egyptian lawyer and activist Pasha Mustafa Kamil laid the foundation of the al-Ahly in 1905 as a student club for people excluded from social clubs for foreigners and the elite (Zacharias, 2014). Meanwhile, according to both El-Zatmah and Gibril the foundation to the al-Ahly Sporting Club was laid in 1906 by a group of Egyptian pashas and effendis led by Umar Lofti, President of the student union, and Abd al-Khaliq Tharwat with the objective of using it as a backbone of struggle against

colonialism (El-Zatmah, 2011: 45-46; Gibril, 2018: 353). The club was designed to serve the Egyptian effendis, both students and graduates of colleges and high schools, and to be a place where they could meet and spend their free time (El-Zatmah, 2011: 45-46). However, as mentioned above, al-Ahly was more than just a free space for Egyptian students and graduates. Most of the people involved in the founding of the club were avid nationalists, and according to El-Zatmah, the creation of al-Ahly could be understood as an attempt to mobilise and popularise the Egyptian nationalist elites through social and cultural institutions and political parties (El-Zatmah, 2011: 46). Furthermore, the club chose the red and white colours of the pre-colonial flag, as well as the eagle adorning a crown, symbolising strength (Gibril, 2018: 353). Only a few months after the founding of the al-Ahly Sporting Club Egypt's first political national party, the National Party, was founded (El-Zatmah, 2011: 46).

Not surprisingly, al-Ahly quickly became a club associated with the nationalism and pride of disenfranchised Egyptians (Gault, 2014). While al-Ahly was the only leisure club to allow Egyptians to have membership cards at the time of its creation, its steering committee elected British Mitchell Ince as its first president (Gibril, 2018: 353). A move that allowed the club to take advantage of the Briton's influence and relationship with the authorities (Gibril, 2018: 353). None-the-less, in British-administered Egypt, al-Ahly represented the opposition to the British rule symbolising the struggle for independence.

In the other end of Cairo, al-Zamalek was founded in 1911 as *Qasr el-Nil* (referring to the name of the Palace along the Nile that was made available to build the clubhouse) by Georges Merzbach, a Belgian lawyer established in Cairo (Gibril, 2018: 353-354). Being the first club in Cairo to be initiated by non-British foreigners the club changed its name to *al-Nadj al-Mukhtalat* (The Mixed Club) in 1913, as its ambitions and aspiration was to be open to both Egyptians and Europeans (Gibril, 2018: 353-354). The main rivalry between the two Cairo-based clubs started in the 1920s after a national revolt that forced the British to grant Egypt limited independence in 1919 with al-Ahly symbolising the anti-colonial sentiment and struggle for independence facing al-Mukhtalat who had a more open policy regarding membership and earned the reputation of being the club of the bourgeoisie and foreigners (El-Zatmah, 2011: 61; Gibril, 2018: 354-355). By 1922, Egypt's limited independence had taken its form of a constitutional monarchy throwing all of its support behind al-Mukhtalat which in 1941 changed its name to *Farouk al-Awal* (King Farouk Club) following a royal sponsorship and close links with the royal family (El-Zatmah, 2011: 61; Gibril, 2018: 353-354). With al-Ahly and Farouk al-Awal, Cairo saw two clubs opposed by membership and outlook: liberal republicans vs. Royalist conservatives; nationalists vs. the King (Goldblatt, 2007).

A military coup in 1952, headed by Colonel Nasser, saw King Farouk in exile and the end of the monarchy as well as Farouk al-Awal changing name to *al-Zamalek* using the name of its district location (El-Zatmah, 2011: 61; Gibril 2018: 353-354). While Nasser coming to power saw the end of the monarchy, it added to the rivalry between al-Ahly and al-Zamalek. While al-Zamalek under the name of Farouk al-Awal was coined as

“the club of the authorities” and al-Ahly was known as “the club of the people”, this changed following the military coup (Gibril, 2018: 355).

Under the new republic and newly found independence from the British occupation, al-Ahly appointed the now President Nasser as Honorary President of the club while Field Marshal and Head Commander Abdelhakim Amer was named President of EFA (Gibril, 2018: 354). According to Gibril, these appointments changed the scene of Egyptian football:

“The appointment of these revolutionary leaders to strategic and senior positions in sports in symptomatic of the tight political grip of the Nasserite regime and the will to use it as both a means of propaganda and control.” (Gibril, 2018: 354)

However, despite the title as Honorary President in one of the biggest clubs in Egypt, in 1967 Nasser decided to ban the football league following the defeat to Israel in the Six Day War, declaring it as distraction for the Egyptian military and people (Zacharias, 2014; Raspud and Lachheb, 2014: 104). The embargo on football lasted until his death in 1970 when his successor, Anwar Sadat (President from 1970-1981) who was also an al-Ahly fan, restored the league. Like his successor, Hosni Mubarak, who also was an al-Ahly fan, President Sadat attempted to use football to boost his popularity and as a vehicle for strengthening national identity (Zacharias, 2014).

As a result, al-Zamalek fans coined al-Ahly as the “club of the regime” during the Sadat and Mubarak years while al-Zamalek came to symbolise the struggle against the almighty and corrupt EFA and the government (Gibril, 2018: 355). As former al-Zamalek board member Hassan Ibrahim states in David Goldblatt's documentary *The Secret Policeman's Football*:

“Zamalek fans actually consists the biggest political party in Egypt. We see the injustice by the Egyptian federation, by the government against whatever used to belong to the king. They consider Zamalek as the enemy to them. Zamalek fans are the people who suppress their anger against the system because the government supports al-Ahly all the time. So we see the al-Ahly club as the presenter of the corruption in Egypt.” (Goldblatt, 2010)

Today, there is no doubt about the importance of al-Ahly and al-Zamalek in Middle Eastern and North African football. In Cairo, as in Egypt, about 30 per cent of the population follow al-Zamalek while a staggering 70 per cent supports al-Ahly (Raspud and Lachheb, 2014: 106). Furthermore, al-Ahly is sometimes referred to as the Real Madrid of Africa due to their reach of their following and their profile in Egyptian life (Raspud and Lachheb, 2014: 106). Due to the wide support and following of the two Cairo-based clubs, the Cairo Derby is a significant event in the world of football.

### 4.3 The Cairo Derby

The world of football is renowned for its many football derbies; Real Madrid vs. Atletico Madrid in Spain, Inter Milan vs. AC Milan in Italy, Boca Juniors vs. River Plate in Argentina or Celtic vs. Rangers in Scotland. Shared for these derbies is the representation of underlying mechanisms. Various European and South American rivalries are based on socio-economic, political or religious cleavages. Take for example the Old Firm in Scotland, a fiery derby between Celtic and Glasgow Rangers bound in a political and religious rivalry. With the founding of Celtic in 1888, the Irish community in Glasgow unified around the club, making the club a symbol of sporting and political pride for the Irish population in Scotland (Kenny, 2019). While Celtic became a symbol of Irish nationalism and the political movement against the British rule in Ireland, their rivals took the opposite stance (Kenny, 2019). Glasgow Rangers came to stand for Unionism; a united British Isle with Ireland under direct rule from London (Kenny, 2019). This aspect of underlying mechanisms is important to take further in the understanding of the so-called Cairo Derby.

While the Cairo Derby is mainly anchored in a historical and regional division, nationalism and independence play a vital role in the relationship between al-Ahly and al-Zamalek (Gibril, 2018: 532). With the two most decorated football clubs in Egypt, the Cairo Derby has considerable importance not only for the fans but also for the country (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 99). Therefore, the Cairo Derby can be considered one of the most important derbies in the world, dividing not only the city's population but also all Egyptians (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 99). This division structures the entire Egyptian society, as Gibril highlights by quoting an unknown fan: *"In this country, you are Ahlawy or Zamalkawy. The rest can change [...] your wife, your religion, but never your club!"* (Gibril, 2018: 353). In other words, either you are with the regime, or you are against it. It is simply a clash between two clubs anchored history, politics and economy. In the words of James Montague, the Cairo Derby is not just about football; it is *"about nationalism, class and escapism"* (Montague, 2008). The importance of the Cairo Derby is well captured in an interview conducted by Montague in an article for the Guardian, stating that, *"The two biggest political parties in Egypt are Ahly and Zamalek. It's bigger than politics"* (Montague, 2008).

In Egypt, the Cairo Derby is of such a major event, that Cairo grinds into a standstill on derby day (Bloomfield, 2010: 19-20). Alaa Al Aswany describes the city of Cairo as a quasi-ghost town, where only the shouts of the fans are heard (Al Aswany, 2014). However, it is not only in Egypt that the Cairo Derby is followed with passion. Being televised across the Arab world, it has been reported that *'When Hamas and Fatah fought each other over control of Gaza in 2007, the only day the guns fell silent was when al-Ahly took on Zamalek'* (Bloomfield, 2010: 19-20).

With the home stadiums of both al-Ahly and al-Zamalek being too small to host the derby match between the two clubs, the match is moved to the neutral Cairo International Stadium (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 105;

Montague, 2012b). In fact, according to Dorsey, the Ahly-Zamalek rivalry is so deep-seated that the Mubarak government insisted that the matches had to be played on neutral ground (Dorsey, 2014: 56). However, the match is not only played on neutral ground, but the referees are also brought in from abroad to officiate the match (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 105). Furthermore, hundreds of black-clad riot police, soldiers, and plainclothes security personnel surround the stadium on match days in an attempt to keep the fan groups apart and preventing Ultras from claiming the stadium as a space of their own beyond the reach of the regime (Dorsey, 2014: 56). The routes to and from stadiums are strictly managed in order to keep the opposing fans from coming into contact with one another before and after the match (Dorsey, 2014: 56). Never-the-less, the violence among fans of the two clubs has escalated since the 1960s when supporters of al-Ahly furious about a disputed goal scored by al-Zamalek, set fire to the stands in the stadium (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 109-110). In 1971, al-Ahly's goalkeeper was involved in a melee with fans who invaded the field, and since then there has been no sympathy between the two clubs or their fans (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 109-110). Since the emergence of the Ultras in Egypt in the early 2000s, violence involving the two clubs' supporters has been commonplace (Montague, 2012b). In his article *The Chaotic World of Al Ahly and their Ahlawy Ultras*, Matt Gault sums up the derby very well:

“It is a derby, contested over the course of century, which represents a clash of nationalism, class, and to an extent, escapism from the politics and upheaval of their country. It has been called the world's most violent derby and there is little wonder as to why it accredits such a title.” (Gault, 2014)

Therefore, the Cairo Derby is not only a football match between two opposing teams. It is a match that through time, have divided Egypt politically and ideologically. It is an arena for football supporters to come out with their opposing views through chants, songs and fights, becoming a problem for the authorities.

#### **4.4 Football Ultras**

While the Ultras became an issue for the authorities in Egypt in the early 2000s, the history of this particular form of football supporters is far longer. The Ultras, as they are known in Europe and South America, emerged from football teams in the Mediterranean European countries, namely France and Italy (Ibraheem, 2015: 16-17). The name “Ultras” came from a radical leftist group in the late sixties when the first Ultras groups emerged (Ibraheem, 2015: 16-17). More precisely the term can be traced back to “*supports of the French kings, or post 1968 left wing groups which were politically active*” (Naboulsi, 2014: 12). According to Ziad Assem Naboulsi, the Ultras phenomenon started in Italy after the Second World War, when the political conflict found its way to the football grounds, dividing football clubs and fans in left and right-wing political ideologies and social class (Naboulsi, 2014: 12). Furthermore, an Ultra group is typically made up of young males aged between 16 and 25 years (Woltering, 2013: 291).

Shared across borders and football leagues is the set of norms that Ultras follow; the non-stop singing, drumming and chanting along with huge banners, flags, pyrotechnics and “terrace choreography” (Woltering, 2013: 291). Especially the “terrace choreography” or in Italian the “tifo” is an important part of the Ultras society. The word “tifo” literally means, ‘be a fan’, and refers to an artistic show that the Ultras put on right before the beginning of a match or right before the start of the second half (El-Zatmah, 2012: 803-804). In his paper, El-Zatmah explains the tifo as choreographed movements carried out by Ultras holding coloured pieces of plastic or fabric in their hands (El-Zatmah, 2012: 803-804). The movement and the plastic pieces create a large picture which often highlights an image or written slogan aimed either at supporting their club or humiliating the opposing club (El-Zatmah, 2012: 830-804).

Furthermore, Ultras across the world have that in common that they are against modern football. Here, Woltering argues that Ultras seek a traditional atmosphere, which points to the Ultras’ nostalgia for football matches as they were before the excessive marketing of football and its commercialisation (Woltering, 2013: 291). The anti-commercialisation can also be seen in the Ultras’ emotional attachment to their teams, their colleagues, and the part of the stadium they occupy (Naboulsi, 2014: 15). The preferred place for the Ultras in the stadium is the *Curva*, the area directly behind to goal (Naboulsi, 2014: 15). According to Naboulsi, the Ultras chose this specific area when the ticket prices began to rise and a lot of fans could not afford to come to the stadium and sit in the middle (Naboulsi, 2014: 15). Instead, the fanatic fans started to concentrate on the cheap ticket behind the goal, from where they organise and perform their choreography during the matches (Naboulsi, 2014: 15).

In addition, the *Curva* is considered the Ultras’ territory, which they will defend against police or rivalling supporters (Woltering, 2013: 292). Therefore, the use of violence is not uncommon when Ultras feel they are being challenged (Woltering, 2013: 292). For many Ultras the police are considered an enemy (Woltering, 2013: 292) which is why it is not uncommon to see the words ‘*ACAB – All Cops Are Bastards*’ pictured in banners or graffiti made by Ultras (El-Zatmah, 2012: 805).

In Egypt, the Ultras emerged from the so-called *Terso* fans, derived from the Italian word *Terzo*, which means the number three (El-Zatmah, 2012: 801). The *Terso* fans were considered the most passionate fans of the lower and poor classes who could only afford to buy third class tickets for the matches (El-Zatmah, 2012: 801). While the *Terso* fans maintained a largely non-violent football culture, they were known for their chants, songs and celebrations rooted in other spheres of Egyptian culture (El-Zatmah, 2012: 801-802).

The demise of the *Terso* fans and the emergence of the Ultras was a direct result of worsening economic conditions of the lower classes, as the economic distress became so great that a third class ticket to the stadium became a burden for the masses (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802). At the same time, Egypt went through a conservative Islamic ideology in the late 1970s that enforced greater measures of gender segregation and limited

women's participation on the stands of the football ground (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802). As a result, according to El-Zatmah, the third-class seats in the stadiums around Egypt became almost completely dominated by young males of the lower-middle class who later came to form the Ultra groups (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802). According to El-Zatmah, this period of time also represented the transformation from the non-violent festive celebrations to the more violent marches and celebrations seen among Egyptian Ultras (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802). By the early 2000s, Egypt saw their first Ultra groups emerge especially in Cairo with the Ultras Ahlawy and the Ultras White Knights. The two groups will be further analysed in the following chapter.

## **5.0 Ultras' participation in the 2011 Revolution**

The Ultras scene in Egypt emerged in the early 2000s with the transformation from Tersos to Ultras introducing a more violent supporter phenomenon. Taking a stance in the Ahlawy Ultras and Ultras White Knights, the two largest and most influential groups in Egypt (Rommel, 2016: 34), this chapter seeks to analyse who makes out the Ultra groups in Egypt as well as their participation in the 2011 Revolution.

### **5.1 Ahlawy Ultras and Ultras White Knights**

A characteristic that is mentioned time and time again when describing the identity of the Egyptian Ultras is dedication. According to Carl Rommel, the Egyptian Ultras are known for their dedication and strict, non-negotiable principles of cheering for 90 minutes no matter the result on the pitch, stand up throughout the entire match as well as travel to all games – home and away (Rommel, 2016: 34). This is supported by Dalia Abdelhameed Ibraheem who, through her fieldwork with Ultras Ahlawy, describes the Ultras' love of the club as an absolute and uncompromising value (Ibraheem, 2015: 21). According to Ibraheem, for the Ultras, the club is the highest and most precious for the group – the club for them is something to die for (Ibraheem, 2015: 21). Therefore, the hierarchy within the Ultras' group is based primarily on the individual's commitment and love of the club (Ibraheem, 2015: 21). From a psychological perspective Gerry Finn argues that for football supporters in general, the club becomes such a great part of their social identities, which means that there is an emotional and cognitive identification with the club (Finn, 1994: 101). In the stadium, this identification and dedication to the club is demonstrated throughout the Ultras' songs and chants supporting their team and demeaning the opponent (El-Zatmah, 2012: 805). As Ibraheem explains in Allesandro Accorsi and Max Spiegelbaums article *Banning fandom: Football and revolution in Egypt* (2015) brought in the *Middle East Eye*:

“The Ultras is a mentality [...] You can be an Ultra if you go to each match and you support the team and dedicate yourself and your efforts to supporting the team and cheering: this is the mentality of the Ultras. It's a very complicated thing.” (Accorsi and Siegelbaum, 2015)

While the Ultras' clearly identify themselves and obtains a life-and-death dedication with their respective football club, it can also be argued that they can be a threat to the football club they love and support. Here, Finn argues that the fans see themselves as the real supporters of the club and believe themselves to uphold the traditions of the club:

“[...] fans are self-perceived moral custodians of the club, albeit custodians who feel exploited and frustrated at their lack of access to most club decision-making.” (Finn, 1994: 101)

El-Zatmah argues that the Egyptian Ultras deliberately caused damage to clubs' stadiums and caused problems by the use of fireworks in order to make the Confederation of African Football (CAF), EFA and FIFA to impose heavy fines on the clubs (El-Zatmah, 2012: 803). On the basis of this, the Ultras' have used fireworks in order to cause financial damage and to force the administration of the clubs to meet their demands (El-Zatmah, 2012: 803).

Furthermore, the Ultras have developed a critical stance regarding the management of the football clubs (Raspud and Lachheb, 2014: 109). As mentioned above, the Ultras see themselves as the real supporters of the football club, which is why they take a critical stance against other fan organisations linked to the respective football club. Jerzak describes how Ultras find other fan organisations more concerned about gaining prestige from talking with players or the media than supporting their teams (Jerzak, 2013: 242). In the eyes of the Ultras, they are the real fans while others are average fans who have betrayed the original spirit of football (Jerzak, 2013: 243). The tensions with the management of the respective clubs are a far bigger problem for the Ultras. According to Jerzak, al-Ahly has retained a distance towards the Ultras Ahlawy and refused them access to Cairo International Stadium to prepare for choreography displays (Jerzak, 2013: 243). The other way around, Ultras have several times opposed increases in ticket prices and the monopolisation and commercialisation of football (Jerzak, 2013: 243). In other words, and shared among Ultras groups internationally, the Egyptian Ultras have time and time again displayed their stance against modern football, the instrumentalisation and commercialisation of the sport.

One thing is the Ultras' relation to the club. Another is the relation within the Ultras' group and their appeal to the Egyptians. As mentioned above, there is a hierarchy within the Ultras', but a hierarchy that is built around the love to the club. Thus, the hierarchy is not built on class or social position. Jerzak argues that the class character of Ultras is a complex issue, especially given the secrecy of Ultra groups (Jerzak, 2013: 243). However, according to his findings, class distinctions within Ultra groups are often downplayed and can be seen as cross-class organisations (Jerzak, 2013: 243). According to Jerzak, Ultra leaders tend to be well educated and come from upper middle classes and thereby have organisational skills from their years of education (Jerzak, 2013: 243). None-the-less, Jerzak argues that Ultra groups bring together young and underprivi-

leged men into a disciplined organisation offering an opportunity to form community ties through football (Jerzak, 2013: 243). In an interview, Ibraheem argues that being an Ultra is age bound, as it mainly attracts young men who have not yet joined the work market or gotten married, for which reason they have the time to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the group (Ibraheem, 2019).

However, the Ultras not only attract young and underprivileged Egyptians. According to Michel Raspaud and Monia Lachheb, the Ultras gather “*rich and poor, secularists and Islamists, leftists, Salafists, liberals and the Muslim Brotherhood*” (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 108-109). However, it can be argued that the Ultras share a form of responsibility for the less privileged in the Egyptian society. This is supported in an interview conducted by Hamza Hendawi for *Arab News* in 2012. In the article, Hamza speaks to Ahmed Adel, a leader of the Ultras White Knights of al-Zamalek:

“We have members who come from areas so poor, so densely populated it is difficult to breathe there, let alone walk or exercise [...] We can cope with poverty, but we cannot tolerate oppression. We know what social justice is and we want it.” (Hendawi, 2012)

The quote above is interesting when taking the history of al-Zamalek and al-Ahly into account. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, al-Ahly is pictured as the “*people’s club*” due to the years opposing the monarchy and al-Zamalek. While al-Ahly still is known as the “*people’s club*” they became the club benefitting from the power of the regime. Therefore, it can be argued that the two clubs have shifted position in relation to one another. Even so, both Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights appeal to different layers of the society. Finn argues that for the football supporters their respective club has become “*the most substantial embodiment of the local community, with the affairs of the local club seen as a crucial determinant of the vibrancy of the local community itself*” (Finn, 1994: 100-101). While there is no doubt that both al-Ahly and al-Zamalek plays a vital role in the identity of their respective Ultras, neither Ultras Ahlawy nor Ultras White Knights seem to appeal to the social classes that their clubs, on paper, should appeal to. This is supported by Gibril, referring to the Ultras’ obligation to treat everyone equally and always stand for what is right (Gibril, 2018: 357-358). According to Rommel the attitude towards helping the less privileged social groups and rebelling against the regime and the elite may have appealed to the youth, but at the same time made them enemies of the state (Rommel, 2016: 34). As El-Zatmah argues:

“The Ultras found in soccer a way to express their disenchantment with politics, one which was largely viewed to be a ‘safe’ venue from which to challenge the security forces of the regime.” (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802-803)

Despite what seems a political stance on social matters, the Ultras deny being politically active. Gibril describes how the Ultras have an obligation not to get politically involved (Gibril, 2018: 357-358). The obligation not to get politically involved stands in stark contrast to the Ultras in Europe and especially Italy, where

several Ultra groups have rightist or leftist tendencies (Jerzak, 2013: 241). That the European Ultras are receptive to political influence is especially evident in Italy where the leftist Ultra group of Bologna became hostile to the Verona rightist Ultra group, while becoming ‘twinned’ with the Ultra group of Milan who shared their left-wing tendency (Naboulsi, 2014: 8).

Furthermore, in Italy, matches have become political platforms to the extent that football was forgotten in the chants (Naboulsi, 2014: 8). Therefore, the Ultras of Egypt seem apolitical or more conservative compared to most European Ultras. As Zacharias writes in her piece *Only a Game? Not in Egypt* for the Middle Eastern media *The National*:

“The Ultras might have been inspired by European football fans, but they did not adopt their right-wing ideology or nihilistic violence. Groups such as Zamalek’s Ultras White Knights and Al Ahly’s Ultras Ahlawy were anti-authoritarian and anti-commercial. They stood for collectivism and resistance.” (Zacharias, 2014)

While European Ultras often are taking root in an either left or right wing ideology, Ali Mustafi, an Egyptian journalist based in Canada, in an interview with Tyler Shipley reasons the apolitical Egyptian Ultras by Egypt's history of being far less polarised than most European countries (Shipley, 2013).

While the politicisation of the Egyptian Ultras will be analysed further in this thesis, it is worth mentioning the organisation of the Ultras. According to El-Zatmah, the Ultras phenomena in Egypt can be seen as a direct result of the despair and disenchantment with politics for which reason their organisations and culture have come to resemble the ultranationalist youth groups that spread worldwide during the inter-war period (El-Zatmah, 2012: 805). There are indeed some resemblances between the Ultras and the ultra-nationalist youth groups of the inter-war period. Both groups share the characteristics as street marches, chants, uniforms and street fights (El-Zatmah, 2012: 805). However, the Ultras, in line with their apolitical stand, also distinguish themselves from the ultra-nationalist groups as their organisational structure is elaborate but loose, leaving the individuals the freedom of choosing whatever political and religious belief as long as their love for the club supersedes every other personal sentiment (Naboulsi, 2014: 41). During her fieldwork in Egypt, Ibraheem spoke with Ramez, an Ultra who describes the above very neat:

“Those who join the Ultras do so to support Al-Ahly, it is none of my business if one of them belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood or the other is supporting Mubarak.” (Ibraheem, 2015: 71-72)

While the organisational structure might be elaborate but loose, Gibril argues that the structure of the Ultras within the group is at a high level with the leadership being centralised and subdivided into regional structures, with local meetings being organised when important decisions have been needed to be made (Gibril,

2015: 317). Gibril moves on to presenting the organisation as both centralised and decentralised, and that the predominance of a horizontal structure helps reinforce group attitudes and moderate issues between members with different ideological opinions or convictions (Gibril, 2015: 317). Furthermore, the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights organisation are not limited to Cairo since both groups have multiple sections in other major cities and governorate around Egypt (Gibril, 2018: 357-358).

It is argued that it was these organisational skills and moderating-mechanisms that made the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights play a role in the 2011 Revolution. Here it is important to recall Tilly and Wood's treatment of social movements as a distinctive form of contentious politics in the sense that social movements involve collective making of claims that potentially could conflict with others interest or politics (Tilly and Wood, 2013: 3-4). Relating this to the Ultras, it can be argued that the Ultras' resistance against the clubs, the commercialisation and politicisation of football and the so-called average fans, is qualifying them as a social movement within the football environment in Egypt. On the basis of this, the Egyptian football Ultras ticks a number of boxes in Variel's definition of contentious space; sharing political (or in the case of the Ultras rather apolitical) comradeship and friendship and having diverse or opposing stances, but sharing a common goal (Variel, 2013: 33). Furthermore, it can be argued that two of Tilly and Tarrow's four terms for movement participants to make concerted public representations can be applied to the Ultras of Egypt even before the 2011 Revolution (Tilly and Tarrow, 2017: 119-120). Here, the Ultras displayed unity through their matching football shirts, banners and songs; numbers by filling the streets before and after matches and during clashes with the security police and lastly; commitment through their obligation to travel to home and away matches, standing up for 90 minutes and never stop singing, and their resistance to the modern football and the politicisation of their beloved sport.

## **5.2 Politicisation of the Egyptian football scene**

The Egyptian regime has actively tried to frame, limit and control the politicisation of its population (Gibril, 2018: 361). The same can be said about the Egyptian football scene, which, as mentioned earlier in the thesis, has been more or less entangled in politics since the British occupational forces brought the game to the country.

According to Samuels' concept of politicisation, football was not political but became a political and governmental matter through instrumentalisation of the sport (Samuel, 1980: 68-69). This fits the presentation by Gibril arguing that since the reign of Nasser, the authoritarian regimes have been interested in promoting mass and elite sport, as a tool of national construction strategy and as a means to maintain legitimacy on the national stage (Gibril, 2018: 350-351). Here, football has and continues to be used as a tool for political advantage by the ruling regime of Egypt (Gibril, 2018: 351). This, however, is not only the case in Egypt but in authoritarian states across the Middle East in general. According to Dorsey, states in the Middle East have

long sought to control the stadium, both symbolically and physically (Dorsey, 2012a: 412). Naboulsi adds that that dictatorship and authoritarian regimes try to use football as a way to contain and co-opt the people by taking advantage of the huge fandom and exposure of the sport to the populous (Naboulsi, 2014: 3). In the case of Egypt, the absolute control of the footballing arena has been crucial for different leaders power as it has been the only space where the ruler and the public share the same kind of passion that is only paralleled by religion (Gibril, 2018: 351-352).

Furthermore, football is considered to be a platform for political activity, both on the level of the governing elite as well as the grassroots level (Naboulsi, 2014: 5-6). According to Naboulsi, football can be altered into fit the purpose of the regime, as the sport can be used to spread the message of unity and nationalism but also to upsurge the division between societal communities to weaken the social fabric (Naboulsi, 2014: 5-6). In other words, the ability to manipulate and influence crowds through football is appealing to authoritarian regimes and their leaders.

While the politicisation of football has been a part of the Egyptian football scene since the British soldiers brought it with them from the British Isles, the Egyptians have become more or less accustomed to the political undertones imposed on the sport (Quisay, 2017). Ever since Nasser football has been a hidden weapon in the political arsenal of the Egyptian regime (Quisay, 2017) and especially President Mubarak has mastered the politicisation of football. According to Rommel, Mubarak knew that the stadium was the place to be seen, and how to ride the waves of the hype around football (Rommel, 2014: 158). Along with his two sons, Gamal and Alaa, Mubarak celebrated the Egypt national teams' victories at Cairo Stadium and put himself in a place where the popularity of the national team shined on the president (Rommel, 2014: 158). This is supported by Naboulsi arguing that Mubarak and his sons tried to associate their image to the success of the Egyptian National team in Africa and claiming that the NDP gained advantage of football as a mean of distraction to assert its political and economical dominance of the state assets (Naboulsi, 2014: 3). This is exemplified by Gehad Quisay, arguing that shifting regimes have managed to pass decrees quietly in the shadows of the Egyptian national football team's success (Quisay, 2017). For example, the law that transferred all cases pertaining to the nation's protest laws to emergency tribunals prior to the 2011 Revolution (Quisay, 2017).

Another great example is from 2006, when food prices – controlled by the government – rocketed after Egypt won the 2006 Africa Cup of Nations (Bloomfield, 2010: 38). Taking advantage of the success of the national team, the government got away with their plans without facing severe resistance. In the words of Quisay, *“football became Egypt's drug of choice – soothing political strife, calming secretarian discord and sedating brewing bread riots”* (Quisay, 2017). This is supported by Gibril arguing that football has long been used as a distraction by the Egyptian regime:

“[...] Through football, Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak and also Sisi have all succeeded in shifting the attention of the Egyptian people, using it both as a distraction and as an instrument of legitimisation of their grandeur power.” (Gibril, 2018: 351)

Furthermore, according to Gibril, the regime has managed to use football to distract the people of the high level of corruption within the administration and the centralisation of power in the hands of a small and faithful political, economic and social elite (Gibril, 2018: 351).

Here it is relevant to recall Cooper's politicisation term regarding the standards by which personnel are appointed to administrative positions in relation to the EFA (Cooper, 2018: 32). As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the EFA has long been administrated by persons close to the regime and appears to have direct links with the business elites and the security and military interests in Egypt's so-called deep state (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 95). Furthermore, the EFA has been used as a tool of security for the power holders, as the organisation allowed the changing regimes to promise career advancement among other things, and thereby setting up a complex institutional mechanism to regulate access to the public service (Gibril, 2018: 350). Cooper's meaning of the term politicisation is also shown in the link between the regime and the elite of Egypt, which have been strengthened through football. Manal Hamzeh and Heather Sykes describe how the EFA's neoliberal interests are surface manifestations of the alignment of business elites with security and military interests in what they call Egypt's deep state (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 95). It is argued that the EFA and the military industry of Egypt are entangled in a web of military-owned stadia and clubs, indicating how deeply involved the military and the industry around it have been involved in professional football (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 95). Cooper's other meaning of the term politicisation - focusing on the behaviour of civil servants and their willingness and capacity to provide the government with loyal and neutrally competent service (Cooper, 2018: 32) – is also highlighted by Hamzeh and Sykes. According to the two authors, the EFA administration and owners have been complicit and supportive of the Mubarak regime, SCAF and post-revolution president Mursi's regime (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 95). However, it is not only the military and the military industry that have strong links with football and the EFA. In his BBC documentary podcast, *The Power and The Passion: The Secret Policeman's Football*, David Goldblatt concludes through his interviews that half of the top league in Egypt is made up of clubs run by three of the big government ministries (Goldblatt, 2010).

From the theoretical perspective of Spaaij et al., where politicians hold seats in football clubs or associations committees and thereby align themselves with particular football clubs or influence the administration of clubs or associations, this also avoid the other way around in Egyptian football (Spaaij et al., 2018: 9). Ishaan Tharoor argues that the top executives of al-Ahly and al-Zamalek are often linked with the country's governing status quo (Tharoor, 2015). An example of this is the naming of President Nasser as Honour President of al-Ahly while Mubarak was also a declared fan of the club.

Another important element to bring in is the effects of propaganda. Here, Tharoor argues that the politicisation of football in Egypt started as a tool of struggle and control during the British occupation, developed to a tool of propaganda and is now used as a tool of distraction (Tharoor, 2015: 349-351). Especially under the reign of President Mubarak, football was a tool of propaganda. According to Al Aswany, Mubarak's propaganda machine treated supporters to patriotic songs and sloganeering before football matches involving the Egyptian national team (Al Aswany, 2014). These songs and slogans were useful for deflecting dissatisfaction with the regime, but at the same time, they fuelled chauvinism (Al Aswany, 2014). This is evident in the fact that Mubarak attended matches at Cairo Stadium when Egypt was playing. No other Egyptian president has, according to Al Aswany, been as attached to the game as Mubarak was (Al Aswany, 2014). It can be argued that Mubarak, by attending national matches, used football to show that he was a part of the people. In other words, Mubarak used football to become popular among the masses.

Exploiting this further, Mubarak and his sons were often pictured attending the Egyptian national team's training greeting the players, in the same way, that Mubarak greeted the players when returning victorious from Africa Cup of Nations. As a result, the constant fraternising with the players by Mubarak and his sons, led to most Egyptian football stars, owning their wealth and fame to the masses, declared their support for Mubarak during the 2011 Revolution (Al Aswany, 2014). According to Dorsey, the players' hence adopted a neo-patriarchal acceptance of their autocratic leader as a father figure, which led them to keep a distance to mass expressions of political discontent (Dorsey, 2013). The other way around, it strengthens the autocratic leader to control football and exploit the sport's popularity (Dorsey, 2013). The player's role in the politicisation of football in Egypt is also touched upon by El-Zatmah. According to him, the relationship of Mubarak's regime to soccer functions on two levels (El-Zatmah, 2011: 133-134). The first level being soccer providing the masses with a safe venue to voice their resistance to the regime (El-Zatmah, 2011: 133-134). The second level is the support that the regime gives publicly to football stars, coaches and administrators (El-Zatmah, 2011: 199-134). According to El-Zatmah, the support from the regime turns the players into public supporters and advocates for the regime and thereby President Mubarak (El-Zatmah, 2011: 133-134). Given the player's position as popular cultural symbols, they grant the regime a measure of public support and legitimacy (El-Zatmah, 2011: 133-134).

While the players can be seen as instruments of the regime, it can be argued that the football stadiums have been an instrument for the Ultras. In relation to this, it is relevant recalling, Variel's term "*contentious space*" in which actors can share political comradeship as well as mobilise for a common goal (Variel, 2013: 33). Fitting into this, El-Zatmah describes football as a safe venue for Egyptians to voice their resistance to the regime (El-Zatmah, 2011: 133-134). This is supported by Dag Tuastad who argue that football has remained one of the few arenas open for exposure of social and political identities, and the football arenas are where political messages are first communicated and struggle with authorities initiated (Tuastad, 2014: 376).

In other words, football and especially football stadiums can be seen as a “*contentious space*” for the Egyptians. Dorsey, on the other hand, argues that in Arab nations like Egypt, the stadiums have been under political control, especially after the 2011 Revolution (Dorsey, 2013). In North Africa and thereby Egypt, football is a “*high-stakes cat-and-mouse contest*” between fans and autocrats for the control of the pitch (Dorsey, 2014: 50; Dorsey, 2012b: 287). This perhaps explains why President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi (President from 2014), following the 2011 Revolution, decided to ban Ultras from entering the pitches around Egypt (Dorsey, 2017). According to Dorsey, President al-Sisi feared the Ultras political influence following the ousting of Mubarak (Dorsey, 2017).

As already mentioned, football has been used as a means of distraction in Egypt. However, the propaganda machine can also use football as a means of rallying patriotism among the people. While both President Nasser and President Sadat had a war with Israel to rally patriotism, this was not the case for Mubarak (Quisay, 2017). Instead, Mubarak managed to create an arch-nemesis in Algeria and their national football team (Quisay, 2017). According to Quisay, Mubarak invested heavily in advertising the national team’s upcoming battle with Algeria over qualification for the 1990 World Cup (Quisay, 2017). Quisay adds that the state-sponsored media was designed to distract the people from sales taxes and privatisation measures and instead focus on the upcoming match against the football rival (Quisay, 2017). A match that, despite on-field brawls between Egyptian and Algerian players, secured Egypt a place at the 1990 World Cup in Italy.

While it can be argued that Egyptian football has benefitted from various regimes and perhaps especially the one of Mubarak, the regime has also been dependent on the team’s performances. In a period when national pride was at a low under President Sadat’s reign, qualification for the 1978 World Cup would serve as an extraordinary boost for the country (Bloomfield, 2010: 23). Unfortunately for President Sadat, the National team lost against Tunisia and did not qualify for the World Cup, despite the government chartered several planes to take the fans and promised large bonuses for the players (Bloomfield, 2010: 23). Meanwhile, in 1986 President Mubarak had more luck with the Egyptian National team. President Mubarak’s security forces had just finished suppressing a failed revolt by police conscripts prior to the 1986 African Cup of Nations, and so the tournament opened against a background of political insecurity (Goldblatt, 2007: 668-669). Mubarak needed a good African Cup of Nations to remove the attention from the political situation, and luckily for the President, the national team delivered just that bringing home the trophy. On the other hand, when Egypt lost 6-1 in a meaningless friendly match against Greece in 1990, politicians in Mubarak’s NDP saw the defeat to have damaged the image of Egypt, and the parliament launched an investigation calling for the coach to be sacked (Bloomfield, 2010: 26-27).

However, the various regimes have not only politicised football in order to divert the attention of the public or to rally nationalism. Mubarak also used the national team to counter political opponents. According to Dorsey, Mubarak used the national team’s success as a symbol of his nationalist leadership, counting the

growing popularity of the Muslim Brotherhood (Dorsey, 2014: 53-54). While the Muslim Brotherhood was winning the election and the streets in 2005, Mubarak once again turned to football attending the African Champions League finals and going to the national team's training camps in a try to show himself as a man of the people (Bloomfield, 2010: 28-29). According to Bloomfield, the pro-government media helped to highlight it by presenting it as a boost to the national team (Bloomfield, 2010: 28-29). This, however, is a rather traditional move by Egyptian presidents using the media for their own advantage. Here, Dorsey draws parallels between the Nasserite government and the Mubarak government:

“Like sports pages that during the anti-British fervor of the 1920s reported on British-Egyptian matches using military terms, Mubarak employed soccer to rally the public around the flag and his regime, particularly in the final decade of his rule. In doing so, he built on a media tradition dating back to the early days of Egypt's embrace of soccer that politicized the beautiful game.” (Dorsey, 2014: 55)

In the theory of Spaaij et al. football has frequently been a political affair where political actors have used football as a site for political propaganda, while football has also been used as a site for mobilisation (Spaaij et al., 2018: 8). In many ways, Gibril sums this chapter and the theory of politicisation of football in relation to Egypt in a brilliant way by stating that football “*acted as a substitute to mainstream politics under the Mubarak era. But it also served as a powerful instrument of propaganda, mobilised by the regime to ensure its preservation – even partially*” (Gibril, 2018: 362).

### **5.3 Ultras and the Authorities prior to the 2011 Revolution**

While the rivalry between Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights led to scenes of fighting and riots outside the stadiums, the two Ultra groups not only fought each other prior to the 2011 Revolution. The relationship between the authorities, especially the police and security forces, and the Ultras was full of tensions.

The humiliation, along with the constant violence towards the Ultras, goes long back in the history of Egyptian Ultras and the police. As Youssef Hamza argues, many Ultras were detained, tortured and intimidated by the police under the reign of President Mubarak (Hamza, 2012). This police brutality towards the Ultras dates back to 2009 when both Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights were chanting in solidarity with Gaza, as a protest against the Israeli blockade of Gaza (Tuastad, 2014: 377), resulting in a police crackdown on the supporters in a campaign of large-scale arrests and unjustified brutality (Naboulsi, 2014: 43). According to Naboulsi, the campaign hurled the police and the Ultras into a more violent relationship (Naboulsi, 2014: 43). An Ultras Ahlawy member supports this argument in an interview with Tom Dale, in the article *Ultra Violence in Egypt* (2012) published by *Vice*, about what turned the Ultras from fighting each other and turn against the police:

“There were two turning points. One was after a fight in 2008 with fans of Zamalek where one of their guys got set on fire. He got covered in petrol thrown by one of his own side, and then someone threw a flare. The security services tortured some of us. The other was when they tried to stop us sending a message of support before a game for Palestinians during the massacre in Gaza in 2009. After that, we printed T-shirts saying “all cops are bastards”.” (Dale, 2012)

When examining the police brutality and humiliation further, it becomes clear that the Ultras were but a small segment exposed to the effects of living in a police state. Under the authoritarian regime of President Mubarak, and in many ways under President al-Sisi today, Egypt was a police state (Sayigh, 2013). According to Salwa Ismail, a key object under the police project of government is the management of population in time and space (Ismail, 2011: 849). Citizens of a police state will experience state power in both the operation of spatial and temporal techniques of surveillance and discipline as well as management of mobility from the authorities (Ismail, 2011: 849). The management of population in space is, in Egypt, carried out through the technique of suspicion and investigation, involving police operations of *stop, question and arrest* (Ismail, 2011: 849). According to Ismail, this practice is labelled at a category of subjects labelled ‘suspicious individuals’ and is often targeted at young men from poorer neighbourhoods (Ismail, 2011: 849). As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the Ultras appealed to this specific social group, as well as felt an obligation to protect people of the poorer neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, the police forces in Egypt should not only be considered as an organisation in charge of public security but as an agency of the government in the broad sense (Ismail, 2012: 436). In other words, the police are seen as representative of the Ministry of Interior and the regime’s administrative arm serving the interest of the ruling elite, and developing their own corrupt culture (Gibril, 2018: 360). According to Ismail, the police apparatus in Egypt is by its very design intrusive and represents a military-like organisation (Ismail, 2012: 436). Ordinary citizens’ encounters with this authoritarian body very often involve violence and humiliation (Ismail, 2012: 437). As mentioned above, the police are perceived as having developed their own corrupt culture. A perception shared among the vast majority of the Egyptians and especially by the Ultras. According to Gibril, Egyptians view the police as people who are corrupting the society and that the security forces have become the instigators of corruption and unrest (Gibril, 2015: 312). This view is shared by Ismail adding that the police are seen as the breakdown of morality in Egypt while the government they represent is seen as undermining the people’s efforts to make a living (Ismail, 2012: 441). Furthermore, police falsification of drug charges has been a common procedure and mechanism of control of young men (Ismail, 2012: 441-442).

Another factor of the police state of Egypt is, according to Gibril that the police forces usually resolve to “routine” forms of repression such as surveillance, threats, harassment and detention to restrict and discour-

age any kind of dissident behaviour (Gibril, 2015: 311). Recalling Tilly's argument that a social movement will mobilise faster if people face a threat or repression (Tilly, 1978: 133-136), it is perhaps the police's "routines" of repression that contributed to making the police forces an enemy of the Ultras in Egypt. Jerzak argues that the Ultras were repressed by the police forces even before they grew in numbers, as state forces reacted violently against these groups in an effort to limit their visibility and notoriety (Jerzak, 2013: 246). The repression further increased as Ultras gained popularity with the police forces beginning to confiscate the Ultras' banners, megaphones and flares at stadium entrances (Jerzak, 2013: 249). This was followed by arrests of Ultra members the day before or after notable matches (Jerzak, 2013: 249). Rommel supports this argument, as he describes how the police in 2008 began to monitor and regulate the Ultra groups while the sports press started criticising this new form of supporters accusing them of violence, fanaticism, drug addiction, hatred and insults (Rommel, 2006: 34). It can be argued that the repression of the general public and the Ultras during the tenure of Mubarak played a role in the development of a mobilisation. The argument here is that the years of repression through surveillance, threats, harassment, detention and legal persecution and the starting activism among the Ultras formed a self-reinforcing cycle and allowed the development of a large-scale mobilisation (Jerzak, 2013: 249; Gibril, 2015: 311). The development is well described in an interview conducted by Montague for his article *How Al Ahly and Zamalek buried enmity to topple Hosni Mubarak*. Here Montague interviews Assad, an urban professional in his mid-20s, about the relationship towards the police and the state:

"The more they tried to put pressure on us, the more we grew in cult status. The ministry and the media, they would call us a gang, as violent." (Montague, 2011)

As shown above, the repression from the police played a role in the Ultras' relationship towards the authorities and the police forces, especially the humiliation of the public and the Ultras seems to have played a significant role. This can be explained by Mirabito and Berry's theory of individuals banding together for a common goal aiming to shift external power relations (Mirabito and Berry, 2015: 337). It can, therefore, be argued that the Ultras banded together to fight the humiliation they faced from the police and the authorities. Here, the anger and feeling of humiliation has been an important feature, Gibril argues, of the relationship between the Ultras and the police as it contributed to the development of a sense of injustice (Gibril, 2015: 313-315; Gibril, 2018: 358-359).

Considering the reaction from the Ultras towards these police-state conditions, a politicisation process seems to be identified. Departing from Spaaij et al. (2018: 7) and their argument that, a politicisation process is presented as involving attempts by actors outside the political sphere trying to get a political dimension by interfering with political matters, the Ultras' feeling of injustice, Gibril (2015: 313-315; 2018: 358-359) argues, encouraged an upsurge against the police and shaped the identity of the Ultras as being against any kind of authority. Thereby they displayed the anti-establishment if not anarchist leanings among the leaders

of the Ultra groups, as well as structured the motives for mobilisation (Dorsey, 2014: 58; Jerzak, 2013: 250; Tharoor, 2015). Gibril's argument is confirmed in the article *Egypt's Ultras: Politically involved but not politically driven*, where Sherif Tarek interviews Ahmed Gafaar, one of the White Knights' founders about the relationship to the police:

“If you went to a stadium and saw how some policeman riding a horse could lash Ultras members with a whip for no apparent reason, you would understand the nature of the relationship between the police and Ultras groups.” (Tarek, 2012)

In relation to this, it is worth noticing that according to El-Zatmah both the football experts, journalists and the security forces understood the violence of the Ultras to be essentially normal football hooliganism as seen in Europe and South America (El-Zatmah, 2012: 807). This image only changed during the 2011 Revolution. Prior to the revolution, the police and forces and the CSF were ordered to deal with the Ultras with a ‘soft hand’ (El-Zatmah, 2012: 807). In other words, the regime did not see the Ultras as a threat to the political elite, which it can be argued the Ultras knew and exploited to the fullest which will become visible in the following.

While El-Zatmah describes how the police and CSF were ordered to go easy on the Ultras, he at the same time argues that the Ultras understood that they could challenge the security forces in the football stadiums without risking torture or jail (El-Zatmah, 2012: 806). The Ultras based this belief on the fact that the security forces viewed them as harmless football hooligans and not as a threat to the regime (El-Zatmah, 2012: 806). Naboulsi even argues that the derby's between al-Zamalek and al-Ahly with its violent clashes between the Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights, and the police, was the first training ground for the Ultras in opposing the police forces (Naboulsi, 2014: 47-48). A training ground, which gave them the skills needed to defend Tahrir Square during the 2011 Revolution. According to Naboulsi, the Ultras had gained important experience in street fights, extraordinary partisanship sentiments and extreme hatred towards the law enforcement through their numerous battles at the stadiums (Naboulsi, 2014: 47-48). Naboulsi's argument is supported by Rabab El-Mahdi, assistant professor of political science at the American University in Cairo, in an interview with Malika Bilal in an article for *Al Jazeera*:

“(...) So they [Ultras] developed skills that none of the middle class was forced to develop. Plus they come from backgrounds where such skills are needed on a daily basis just as a survival mechanism (...) The skills they developed in dealing with police came in very handy and it comes in handy every time there is a direct confrontation.” (Bilal, 2011)

Interestingly, it is argued that in many countries with an authoritarian rule, groups such as the Ultras are allowed to exist and thrive as it is understood to be better for frustrated young men to take out their anger on themselves and the police rather than on the government (Zirin, 2013: 34). Dave Zirin continues arguing that

under President Mubarak, the Ultras were essentially allowed to train themselves as effective street revolutionaries as long as their actions were void of any political content (Zirin, 2013: 35). Social movements are often a sudden mass defiance and open rebellion that takes the authorities by surprise (Törnberg, 2018: 381-382), and the Mubarak regime's strategy was only sustainable for so long, according to Zirin, as the police treated the Ultras like "punching bags" (Zirin, 2013: 35).

As previously mentioned, the relationship with the police has played a significant role in the creation of an identity among the Ultras. Therefore, it can be argued that the hostility towards the authorities has united the Ultras through their battle for their stadium. In relation to the theoretical framework of social movement presented in this thesis, Vairel presents the term *contentious spaces* in which actors share the idea that changing politics by mobilisation and political activism is possible (Vairel, 2013: 33). The football stadiums of Egypt came to represent these contentious spaces where the football supporters came together for a common goal. This is supported by Dorsey arguing that the stadiums became a meeting point for a variety of social conflicts, hostilities and prejudices (Dorsey, 2014: 61). However, the Ultras not only used the stadiums to display their resistance against the regime, but the Ultras also transformed the stadiums and streets into stages of ridicule and mockery of the police officers who for so long had humiliated them (Ismail, 2012: 456). Therefore, the weekly battles with the police were a zero-sum game for ownership of a space they Ultras saw as theirs (Dorsey, 2014: 60-61). Rather than being just a hooligan phenomenon as seen in Europe and South America, the Ultras developed to be a problem for the authoritarian regime and the political elite of Egypt through their battles in the stands and outside Egyptian football stadiums. In other words, the Egyptian Ultras fought back against the repressive regime and their minions. As Montague puts it in an article for *The National*:

"Ahly's matches provided a microcosm of the heavy-handedness that the rest of the country felt on a daily basis in Mubarak's Egypt. But unlike the activists and the other opposition groups that had been quickly neutered, the Ultras fought back." (Montague, 2011)

Prior to the 2011 Revolution, the Egyptian Ultras resisted the Mubarak regime by challenging his repressive apparatus; the EFA, satellite TV football media, the security forces and police as well as the courts (Hamzeh and Sykes, 2014: 94). By resisting the commercialisation of football and the militarism of the regime, the Ultras could no longer be ignored by Mubarak. Tilly and Tarrow (2007: 114) presents a social movement campaign as a sustained challenge to the power holders, and according to Dorsey (2012a: 411), the Ultras could be seen as a militant group creating a challenge for the regime's monopoly on the means of coercion and a potential threat to their authority. This is supported by Sulome Anderson, stating that the Ultras became the first organisation to take on the Egyptian police and thereby becoming irresistible to young men looking for a cause (Anderson, 2013). Both Dorsey and Anderson's arguments apply to Tilly and Tarrow's four terms making a social movement a sustained challenge to the power holders (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:

114). On the basis of this, by considering the Ultras as a militant group appealing to young men, the Ultras presents worthiness through their signs of militancy, unity, through their singing and chanting and symbols of solidarity, numbers through their headcounts and ability to fill the streets and stands, and last commitment through their resistance to repression.

Furthermore, it can be argued that through the lens of Samuels' (1980: 68) and Spaaij's (2018: 7) theoretical framework of politicisation, football should not be a political issue, but that does not mean it cannot be a political matter and that the instrumentalisation of football by political powers have forced the Ultras into politicisation. According to Jerzak, sport and politics coalesced through the Ultras contesting police control over civic expression (Jerzak, 2013: 240). In early 2011, the Mubarak regime was dealing with a different civic society that was emboldened and less intimidated (Dorsey, 2014: 61).

#### **5.4 Politicisation of the Egyptian Ultras**

While it is argued that the Egyptian Ultras were forced into politicisation, most of the Ultras have and always will deny any political relations. According to Woltering, there is no evidence to prove that the Ultras were politicised prior to the 2011 Revolution (Woltering, 2013: 296). However, there is evidence of Ultras taking a political stance as well as indications of a beginning politicisation. This will be elaborated in the following.

As already mentioned, the police made a crackdown on the Ultras for their support to Gaza in 2009. This suggests that the Ultras might not have been politicised prior to the 2011 Revolution, but they were politically involved (Woltering, 2013: 294). Furthermore, Jerzak adds that while the Ultras made relatively few political statements prior to 2011, the social character of the Ultra organisations made them inherently political (Jerzak, 2013: 245). Jerzak builds his statement on the politically charged graffiti and choreographies, as well as performances and demonstrations (Jerzak, 2013: 245). Another view is presented by Dorsey, who argue that many Ultras retained widely accepted conservative mores despite being politically anchored in anarchism (Dorsey, 2014: 51). According to Dorsey, the fault line between being progressive political and conservative social was reinforced as the ranks of the Ultras swelled between 2007 and 2011 with thousands of young men who were less educated than the groups' founders (Dorsey, 2014: 51). Furthermore, most of the members were under- or unemployed (Dorsey, 214: 51). In addition to Dorsey, Raspaud and Lachheb present the Ultra groups as being structured along strong democratic lines, as they had regular meetings and discussions on social network forums (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 109). It can, therefore, be argued that the crackdown on the Ultras in 2009 was about more than just the support to Gaza. In an interview conducted by Montague for *Al Jazeera*, an Ultra under the name Assad argues that the authorities feared the Ultras for their unity:

“The whole concept of any independent organisation didn't exist, not unions, not political parties (...) Then we started to organise football Ultras ... to them it was the youth, in big

numbers – very smart people – who could mobilise themselves quickly. They feared us.”  
(Montague, 2012a)

While there are indications of a form of politicisation prior to the 2011 Revolution, Mohamed Gamal Beshit, an author and expert on the Ultras movement, has a whole other view. In an interview with Tarek Beshit express how “*80 per cent of the Egyptian population doesn’t know anything about politics*”, and ensures that the same goes for the Ultras (Tarek, 2012). In other words, he believes that the motives for the Ultras groups cannot be deemed political:

“The Ultras only stand out because they are a sizeable group, but they are not really unified when it comes to politics. Some members might be from all across the political spectrum, others are completely apathetic. Some participate in demos, others don’t.” (Tarek, 2012)

Instead, it is argued that, just like any other Ultra groups around the world, the Egyptian Ultras’ political expressions aimed at provoking, disqualifying the opponent and distinguishing themselves from other groups as well as constructing identity (Spaaij et al., 2018: 5).

Meanwhile, Spaaij et al. highlight that a promising field of research examines how football fandom can lead to the mobilisation of its members and thereby participate in large-scale events, hinting at the existence of a politicisation process among its members (Spaaij et al., 2018: 5-6). Here, authors have shown that football supporters are able to mobilise for general issues as the commercialisation of football but also the protection of civil liberties (Spaaij et al., 2018: 5-6). In addition, the fanaticism that an Ultra has for his team and the sense of solidarity he shares with his fellow fans lends itself well to political mobilisation (Tharoor, 2015). At the same time, it is argued that football supporters in Egypt do not wish to be seen as political or politicised, as being “political”, to them relates to “party politics” and being “politicised” implies that they are being used by political forces (Gibril, 2015: 319).

According to El-Zatmah, the Ultras phenomenon in Egypt can be seen as being part and parcel in the youth-oriented political movement that came to challenge the Mubarak regime (El-Zatmah, 2012: 802-803). However, neither Ultras Ahlawy nor Ultras White Knights actively encouraged their members to join the revolution against President Mubarak (Rommel, 2016: 35). On the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 the Ultras Ahlawy Facebook page said:

“Ultras Ahlawy declares that it is a sports group only, which has no political inclinations or affiliations of whatever kind. Therefore the group is not participating in the demonstrations planned to take place on this Tuesday 25 of January.” (Woltering, 2013: 295)

Likewise, Ultras White Knights declared on their Facebook page that:

“[The report saying that the Ultras White Knights are participating in the January 25 demonstrations] are without any truthful basis and are lacking in consideration of the role of the group and the fundamental reason for its establishment.” (Woltering, 2013: 295)

Meanwhile, both statements proceeded to clarify that as individuals, all Ultras were free to do as they pleased and that all members had free political choices (Dorsey, 2012a: 413). However, it has to be taken into account that these Facebook posts could be an attempt to create a distance to the revolution, and thereby avoid retaliation from the police and security forces. That said, it can be argued that the Ultras did not participate in the 2011 Revolution as a collective organisation, but as individuals. At the same time, the Ultra groups stressed how they are non-political and how the ideology of the Ultra group comes before the political ideology of the individual.

Contrary to this, El-Zatmah states that despite the two Ultra groups refused to be a part of the coalition of the political youth groups that called for demonstrations on 25 January 2011; the Ultras did join the demonstrations at Tahrir Square (El-Zatmah, 2012: 807). Here, El-Zatmah argues that the radical political nature of the Ultras was revealed and brought to the surface (El-Zatmah, 2012: 807). However, Gibril believes that unlike what is commonly circulated among the population of Egypt, and perhaps in the Western media, the Ultras were not one of the driving forces of the movement (Gibril, 2018: 359). Instead, they responded to a call from organising social movements such as the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Movement, turning to the football fans for their capability of resisting the police forces (Gibril, 2018: 359). In other words, it can be argued that a *politicisation by social protectiveness* was taking place.

While there are aspects of politics in the Ultras' actions prior to the 2011 Revolution despite the Ultra groups constantly stressing their anti-political stance, joining the revolution as individuals makes it rather difficult to establish their true intentions in the early days of the revolution (Gibril, 2018: 359). Meanwhile, Rommel argues that the attitude of the Ultras White Knights changed to some extent when one of their members, Shihāb Ahmed, was killed on Muhammad Mahmoud Street on the third day of the fighting (Rommel, 2016: 37). After the killing of the Ultra White Knight member, the Ultra group's criticism of the police and military become fiercer, but the group did not officially tell its members to join the demonstrations (Rommel, 2016: 37).

None-the-less, it is argued that the 2011 Revolution was a turning point for the Ultras groups, as their disenchantment with politics was transformed into a sudden engagement with politics right from the start of the January revolution (El-Zatmah, 2012: 810). In line with the theoretical framework of Samuels' concept of politicisation, the Ultras found themselves thrust into politicisation (Samuels, 1980: 67-68). This politicisation can be seen as *politicisation by repression*, as Ismail argues that the Ultras' political subjectivity was

formed in opposition to the police, much in common with fellow citizens against the police and the police government (Ismail, 2012: 457-458).

In the same breath, the football Ultras of Egypt has served as a kind of weapon of the weak allowing suppressed political identities and opinions to be openly expressed against the regime and the police (Tuastad, 2014: 384). According to Tuastad, a massive suppressed political energy of youth was released by the 2011 Revolution, with the football Ultras' resistance being transcended into active, street fighting political participation (Tuastad, 2014: 385). This can be explained by Spaaij et al., and their understanding of politicisation where the term is presented as actors outside the political sphere, trying to get a political dimension (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7). At the same time, there are traces of politicisation by social protectiveness as it can be argued that the Ultras implicated themselves in a political struggle as they in their own opinion was doing "what was right" fighting the police brutality and defending the "normal" citizen (Gibril, 2015: 321-322). Gibril argues that the Ultras turned to violence against the police during the 2011 Revolution as members of the Ultras believes in the "code" – to act on behalf of "morality" and "righteousness" (Gibril, 2015: 321-322). Therefore, it can be argued that the Ultras' moral obligations and the belief that they must do "what is right" led to the mobilisation during the Revolution.

However, there are also signs that one reason for mobilisation might not exclude the other. Jerzak argues that the Ultras' political nature was not only against Mubarak but just as much against the brutality and injustice of the police (Jerzak, 2013: 249-250). Here, Jerzak highlights a popular chant as an example of the politicisation of the Ultras:

"He [the police officer] was always a loser, a jest/he barely got 50% on his high-school test/with a bribe the rich kid's a fool no more/got 100 diplomas hanging on his door/You crows nesting in our house/what are you ruining all our fun?/We won't do as you tell us/Spare us your face/Cook up your case/That's what the Interior does/I'm arrested and charged as a terrorist/Just for holding a flare and singing Ahly [sic]" (Jerzak, 2013: 249)

According to Jerzak, the chant shows that the Ultra groups became increasingly politicised in reaction to police brutality and their perception of injustice (Jerzak, 2013: 249-50). The first politicisation process presented by Spaaij et al., suggests that football can be seen as politicised by the Egyptian regime by instrumentalising the sport (Spaaij et al., 2018: 7). An aspect of the politicisation of the Ultras could arguably be the regime's use of football and the Ultras as a political tool. According to Spaaij et al., football supporter groups can constitute a major wager for radical currents or political parties that see the stadium as an arena allowing to acquire the visibility they struggle to achieve in the public debate (Spaaij et al., 2018: 5). Furthermore, in the early 2000s, the Mubarak regime gave up fighting the Ultras and instead "*appropriated them as a useful tool*" (Rommel, 2016: 36). Therefore, it is argued that not only did the police brutality towards the public

and the Ultras – *politicisation by repression* – play a role in rival Ultra groups coming together to act towards a common objective of dismantling Mubarak’s regime (Jerzak, 2013: 247), so did the Ultras’ wish to take back their beloved sport and stadiums from the hands of the Mubarak regime but also the wish to change the social justice of the country – *politicisation by social protectiveness* – to make a better living for the Egyptians in general. In other words, the more direct political approach from the Ultras undermined the legitimacy Mubarak’s repressive regime sought to dominate the public space by the use of violence. While it can be argued that the politicisation and the thereby mobilising of Ultras played a role in the ousting of President Mubarak after just about three weeks of the revolution, a number of scholars argue that the politicisation of the Ultras took place nearly a year later. Here, they turn to a specific event when trying to explain the politicisation and mobilisation of the Ultras, i.e. the so-called Port Said Massacre, why it is relevant to analyse the significance of this event in the following.

#### **5.4.1 The Port Said Massacre and its influence on the Ultras**

While the 2011 Revolution emerged late 2010-early 2011, the actions of the Ultras are well researched in relation to the first 18 days of the revolution. However, following the first 18 days, a gap in the research leaves not much information about the Ultras and their role until the start of 2012. According to Rommel by the beginning of 2012, the Ultras Ahlawy added pressure against the interim regime, turning more directly political in both words and deeds (Rommel, 2016: 39). Almost exactly one year after the beginning of the 2011 Revolution, on 1 February 2012, 72 members of Ultras Ahlawy were killed after a match between al-Ahly and al-Masri in Port Said Stadium (Rommel, 2016: 33). At the end of the match, chaos erupted as thugs armed with knives and batons attacked Ultras Ahlawy members, throwing them off bleachers and beating them in the stands and on the pitch with no interruption from the security officials present at the stadium (Mousa, 2013). As Ultras Ahlawy members had been the most active and vocal opponents of the SCAF, it was believed that the incident at Port Said was a message from SCAF and the interim regime that resistance would not be tolerated (Mousa, 2013). Gibril supports this argument stating that many of the Ultras, as well as the protesters, believe that Port Said was a way for security forces and the government to take revenge on the supporters for their participation in the uprisings at Tahrir Square a year earlier (Gibril, 2015: 315). On the other hand, from the official Egyptian channels, the massacre was blamed on al-Masry supporters, or Port Said locals (Mousa, 2013). While the official statement is doubted by many, the history between Ultras Ahlawy and the football supporters of al-Masri could support the authorities view. Research shows that Ultras Ahlawy allied with the pro-democratisation forces while the al-Masri supporters appeared to be counter-revolutionaries supporting the previous regime and thereby the, by now, ousted Hosni Mubarak (Tuastad, 2014: 380-381). Taking a stance in the argument that the Port Said Massacre was an act of revenge from the security forces and the regime, it can be argued that the incident did not have the outcome the authorities had hoped for as the massacre did not stop the Ultras from participating in the demonstrations.

Rather, as Gibril argue the events at Port Said mark a breaking point in the Ultras' involvement and mobilisation, as they went from a passive engagement centred on defence to fighting for a cause (Gibril, 2018: 360). Taking a stance in the concept of politicisation, the Ultras suddenly found themselves victims of the politicisation process taking place at Tahrir Square among the protesters a year before. The argument is, that the attack in Port Said was interpreted by the Ultras as a personal attack on the group and its ideals (Gibril, 2018: 360) leading to the Ultras Ahlawy and the Ultras White Knights calling a truce between them and thereby epitomizing the politicisation process (Gibril, 2015: 316). That a politicisation process started after the Port Said Massacre can also be seen in the reaction from non-Ultras. According to Dorsey, the Ultras got public support from several political parties for their demand for an investigation into the incident (Dorsey, 2011b). In other words, not only are there signs of politicisation within the Ultra groups – but the groups are also being put in a position where they are politicised from the outside. However, as mentioned above, according to El-Zatmah, there is no evidence that the Ultras were politicised prior to the 2011 Revolution or if they became politicised after Port Said (El-Zatmah, 2011: 297-298). Instead, El-Zatmah argues that the Ultras started speaking out in a more politically partisan matter after the massacre (El-Zatmah, 2011: 297-298).

In the frame of Tilly's argument that a social movement can mobilise faster as a result of a given threat, it can, therefore, be argued that the massacre at Port Said was the threat that started a social movement among the Ultras (Tilly, 1978: 133-136). According to Montague the appalling scenes in Port Said did have one positive effect as the football fans, and not only Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights, united for answers to the massacre (Montague, 2012b). This fits with the theory that a social movement can take place despite opposing stances among the participants as long as there is a shared common goal (Vairel, 2013: 33). According to Gibril the, in the eyes of the Ultras, direct attempt from the Ministry of Interior and the SCAF to single out and harm the Ultras resulted in a nationwide mobilisation as the incident raised too many questions to be dismissed as a violent act of hooliganism (Gibril, 2015: 316). Therefore, the Ultras mobilised to voice their discontent, shifting their energy and activities from the stadium to civil society (Gibril, 2015: 316). In addition, Gibril suggests that Ultras share many common characteristics such as high organisational skills and their will to congregate, which may suggest the development of a social movement (Gibril, 2015: 323). In the same breath, Gibril argues that the mobilisation of the Ultras has evolved within the "supporter activities", but also been reinvested in their "civic" mobilisation following the Port Said Massacre. Following the views of Gibril, this thesis argues that the Ultras might have been politicised; however, at first, focusing this politicisation on football turning to the civil society. This is supported in an interview with an Ultras Ahlawy member conducted by Tarek:

"In Egypt it's the other way around; youths become Ultras then their political views start to emerge. Most people are not into politics, thanks to years of oppres-

sion under the old administration, and that's a main reason why folks join fan firms in the first place." (Tarek, 2011)

In other words, the Ultras as individuals might have been politically active during the first weeks of the 2011 Revolution. However, in line with the theoretical framework of Tilly and Tarrow (2007: 120), the massacre of the 72 Ultras Ahlawy members not only politicised the Ultras but also made them join the social actors of the 2011 Revolution and becoming a part of the social movement. In other words, the Port Said Massacre ignited the politicisation and social movement of the Ultra groups of Egypt as they became an integrated part of the conflict rather than just defenders of the protesters. The argument, therefore, is that the Ultras might not have wanted to become political or politicised, but their actions and effort to get justice for the killing of the 72 Ultras Ahlawy members pushed them straight into politicisation. Furthermore, Gibril argues that the events of Port Said not only affected the Ultras but the whole society as the killed members were also sons, brothers, cousins, friends, and students in a bigger social milieu which can have affected the will of rival groups to make peace with each other and walk in the same direction as the rest of the nation (Gibril, 2015: 322-323). According to the framework of social movement presented by Tilly and Tarrow, a social movement campaign is a sustained challenge to the power holders (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 114). It can, therefore, be argued that the Ultras were part of a social movement, as well as a politicised, as Dorsey revealed that the current President of Egypt al-Sisi only would allow football fans back into the stadiums if they are depoliticised (Dorsey, 2019). Here, it is argued that the Ultras are still perceived as a sustained challenge to the regime, despite the Ultras claiming not to have played a role in the 2011 Revolution.

## **6.0 The role of the Egyptian Ultras in the 2011 Revolution**

While it is evident that the Ultras of Egypt participated in the 2011 Revolution, it is rather unclear what role they played. As indicated in the analysis, the media and a number of scholars have argued the Ultras have played an important role in the ousting of President Mubarak and the demonstrations against the following regimes. Meanwhile, the Ultras have not officially acknowledged their role in the 2011 Revolution. This can be explained by the political environment surrounding the Ultras and the threats of retaliation. Throughout the analysis presented in this thesis, the engagement from the Ultras has been questioned in the form of participation as individuals or as Ultras as a group. Furthermore, the reason for participation in the revolution has been presented with different views. This indicates that it is widely contested how to perceive the Ultras, why this thesis will now move on to discuss whether the Ultras were, in the words of Rommel (2016), "*troublesome thugs*" or "*respectable rebels*"?

With several of the Egyptian media picturing the Ultras as nothing less than a troublesome youth determined to use their fists at any given chance, the 2011 Revolution came as a pleasant excuse to start yet another fight. While this might be a rather radical statement, it has to be mentioned that the regime controlled most of

the press expressing a critical stance towards the Ultras. None-the-less, and as noted earlier, humiliation by and anger towards especially the police and the security forces have played a vital part in the politicisation and mobilising of the Ultras (Ismail, 2012: 455). With both the battle of Mohammed Mahmoud Street and of Mansour Street in 2011 and 2012, which according to Ismail took form of what can best be described as street wars between the Ultras and the police, the Ultras lived up to the media's image of a group of troublesome thugs who used to face the police in the stadiums, but now took the fights to the streets (Ismail, 2012: 456). Based on the history of the Ultras and their relations to the authorities, it is easy to take the stance that these young men were just thugs looking for a reason to fight the police. As Naboulsi argues the football derby between al-Zamalek and al-Ahly, with all its violence and clashes between the two Ultra groups, and with the police, has been a training ground for the Ultras in opposing the police (Naboulsi, 2014: 47-48).

Furthermore, Naboulsi argues that *"the uprisings came to provide the perfect scenario for thousands of young, undereducated and unemployed 'militant' fans to settle their score with the state"* (Naboulsi, 2014: 47-48). With author and expert on the Ultras movement, Mohamed Gamal Beshir, mention earlier in this thesis, regarding the lack of political knowledge among 80 per cent of the Egyptian population, in mind, one could argue that the Ultras did not join the protests with the aim of changing the politics of Egypt (Tarek, 2012). Mohamed Gamal Beshir supports his statement by claiming that the Ultras only stood out because of their sizeable group and that they did not unite through politics or even participated in the demonstrations with a political aim (Tarek, 2012).

In other words, one can argue that politics did not play a role for the Ultras participation in the revolution, but the Ultras joined on non-political agendas. Instead, it was the impulse to lock horns with the police and avenge abuses they had previously suffered that enthused the Ultras (Tarek, 2012). This argument is supported by Abdel Fattah, analyst at *al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies* in an article for *Ahram Online*:

"I believe the first and foremost reason why they took part in the January 25 Revolution is their terrible relationship with the police; vendetta was their motive (...) A lot of them were imprisoned and abused while no one cared to understand the phenomenon of the ultras [sic] in Egypt. The police were simply their enemies and they had absolutely no political awareness." (Tarek, 2011)

While there are indications that the Ultras were nothing more than a group of young men looking for a fight with the police, the research supporting these indications is rather limited. However, it can be argued that it is an external view of the Ultras that depict them as either thugs or rebels. Therefore, the pro-regime media and the course of the revolution must have played a role in the view of the Ultras during the 2011 Revolution. According to Rommel by the end of summer 2011 the narrative of the Ultras important role in the revolution

was well established among journalists and activists inside Egypt, but as winter approached the Ultras were facing problematic questions (Rommel, 2016: 35). After bloody protests and fights took place at Muhammad Mahmoud Street and Tahrir Square in November and December 2011, the Ultras and the revolutionary youth were frequently drawn as thugs who presumably attempted to destabilise the nation and derail what had been achieved by the public (Rommel, 2016: 35). In other words, the view of Ultras as a group of troublesome thugs must have been shared among some parts of the Egyptian public and not only the regime and pro-regime media.

While Rommel argues that the view on the Ultras role changed throughout the revolution, he describes how the Ultras played an important role as protectors of the protesters at Tahrir Square in the start of the 2011 Revolution (Rommel, 2016: 35). This view of the Ultras' role is shared among a vast majority of the scholars working with the 2011 Revolution in Egypt, and so these scholars have contributed to painting a picture of the Ultras as "*respectable rebels*".

First of all, a various selection of scholars praises the Ultras for their role as protectors of the demonstrators from the police and thugs paid by Mubarak to dissolve the demonstrations. Gibril argues that the Ultras first and foremost were protectors of the protestors against police brutality and not as circulated among the press one of the driving forces of the movement (Gibril, 2018: 359). The argument is supported by Ismail, who argues that the Ultras occupied the front-lines of defence against the security forces and provided organisational and technical skills to repel security advances (Ismail, 2012: 454-455). Especially Dorsey praises the Ultras for their role as protectors, patrolling the perimeters and controlling entry to Tahrir Square, and for contributing with battle experience as well as the organisation and establishing social services at Tahrir Square (Dorsey, 2012a: 414). However, it is worth taking into consideration that throughout both his scholarly work and his blog on Middle Eastern football, Dorsey tends to be overenthusiastic about the Ultras and their impact on the 2011 Revolution. Never-the-less, it is of the impression of the author of this thesis, that there seems to be a clear image among a vast majority of the scholars as well as the international and Egyptian media of the Ultras as guardians of the protesters.

Both Dorsey and Ismail emphasise how the Ultras contributed with organisational skills and fighting experience. While especially the fighting experience applies to the image of troublesome thugs, it can be argued that it was perhaps these skills that made them stand out as rebels against the regime. El-Zatmah discusses how the Ultras came to play a central role in the success of the revolution during the first 18 days, being especially active during the clashes on the Qasr al-Nile Bridge and at the Camel Battle (El-Zatmah, 2012: 807-808). Especially the latter was an important turning point for the revolution, according to El-Zatmah. Moreover, several other scholars focus on the Ultras role as warriors fighting for the demonstrators. Gibril is in line with El-Zatmah when she describes the Ultras' role in the revolution as to bring all of their experience in fighting with the police to the protests, thus playing a key role in breaking down the riot police, and stating

that their involvement in the above-mentioned clashes was crucial as they marked the first big victory against the oppressive system (Gibril, 2018: 359-360). Jerzak supports the two arguments above by stating that the Ultras helped immobilise the police and the security forces, and even goes as far as arguing that the Ultras were the leaders of the so-called Friday of Rage demonstrations on January 28<sup>th</sup> 2011 (Jerzak, 2013: 248). Therefore, by being able to break through the lines of police and thugs paid by Mubarak, it can be argued that the Ultras fighting skills contributed to the view of revolutionary rebels and even put them in a role as leaders of the revolution. This argument is partly supported by an Ultra named Assad, who according to Zacharias (2014) was the leader of the Ultras Ahlawy in 2011:

“Our role started earlier than the revolution. During the revolution there was the Muslim Brotherhood, the activists and the Ultras. That’s it.” (Zacharias, 2014)

One should be cautious about putting the Ultras in a role as leaders of the revolution. However, it is evident that they were an important player in the resistance against the police and security forces. From the perspective of this thesis, there is no doubt that the Ultras’ experience of fighting the police helped the protestors in seizing Tahrir Square. This is also supported by Tuastad stating that a year after the “Battle of Camels” at Tahrir Square the protest organisers thanked Ultras Ahlawy for their role in forcing back the mobs of Mubarak supporters and the police (Tuastad, 2014: 376). Another factor worth mentioning in the discussion of the Ultras’ role as protectors of the demonstrations and the protestors is what could be called military discipline. While the Ultras cannot be seen as a military unit in the same way as the Egyptian army, El-Zatmah presents the culture of the Ultras as characterised by a militant spirit and radicalism (El-Zatmah, 2012: 804). Furthermore, the Ultras White Knights and Ultras Ahlawy along with Ultras Blue Dragons of Ismaily alone accounted for up to 20,000 members while the Ultras White Knights alone could get 25,000 people ready to fight in the streets in a few minutes (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 108). In addition, one should not forget about the organisational skills mentioned by Dorsey and Ismail above. Especially Dorsey praises the Ultras for this particular aspect of their involvement, stating that the organisational skills of the Ultras determined the fate of Mubarak and that their influence is evident through their setting up of social services for the mass of protestors (Dorsey, 2011a).

While it is hard to neglect the Ultras role as a fighting force protecting the protestors, as well as their organisational skills, one could question their political role in the revolution despite some scholars pointing towards such a role. Woltering argues that the Ultras played a role that can be seen as an example of how political agency in Egypt was transformed in the early months of 2011 (Woltering, 2013: 290). According to Woltering, the belief that the Egyptian population was politically apathetic was put to shame during the first 18 days of the revolution as common Egyptians, among them, the Ultras invaded the public realm (Woltering, 2013: 290). Furthermore, Raspaud and Lachheb indicate political aspects within the Ultras as they are structured along strong democratic lines, which were expressed through the unity among rival Ultra

groups during the revolution (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014: 109). According to Rommel, the Ultras were, in fact, widely celebrated for their political participation already in 2011 (Rommel, 2016: 39).

Meanwhile, as mentioned in the analysis, the Ultras themselves claim to be politically neutral and nothing else than supporters of a sports club (Gibril, 2015: 315-316). Jerzak even presents how Ultras with anarchist leanings would claim that their participation in the revolution was purely non-political (Jerzak, 2013: 250). Rather the Ultras were, according to Gibril, called upon by established social movements such as 6<sup>th</sup> of April Movement and Kefaya (Gibril, 2015: 305). However, even this argument can be questioned along with whether or not the Ultras did play a political role in the revolution. An Ultra only known as Ahmed insists that the Ultras maintained a distance from all too-direct involvement in politics:

“We have our free will (...) We do everything when we need to do it, not when someone needs us to do it. That’s why nobody can use us from the political side. A lot of people tried to use us and convince us to join political parties, but we still maintain that we are a football group and we’re not concerned with politics.” (Anderson, 2013)

The statement above is supported in Ibraheems’ Master’s Thesis about the Ultras Ahlawy (Ibraheem, 2015: 30). In her thesis, Ibraheem interviews the two Ultras Adel and Amir about the Ultras participation in the revolution. Their response was as follows:

“Ultras is not a political group, we don’t belong to the streets. We are a national group and we belong to the terrace. We just believe in the principles of the revolution like everyone else who participated. We are football people.” (Ibraheem, 2015)

While there are several arguments that point toward the fact that the Ultras were involved politically in the revolution, this thesis is most invested in the counter-arguments. Hence, it can be argued that by not being politically involved in what can be seen as a political struggle, the Ultras were, in fact, nothing else than troublesome thugs.

On the other hand, it can also be argued that the Ultras’ solidarity with Gaza in 2009, presented in the analysis, and the following display of T-shirts with the text “*all cops are bastards*” display political aspects. However, by not taking an official political stand in the revolution, the Ultras could fully commit to simply protect the demonstrators and thereby their own norms and ideals. After all, an important aspect of being an Ultra is to protect those attacked by a stronger opponent (Gibril, 2015: 322). Here, Gibril argues that by following their own moral obligations, the Ultras implicated themselves in a political struggle alongside political activists and normal citizens without adhering to the ideals they were defending (Gibril, 2015: 321-322). In the words of Gibril, the Ultras became a central actor but maintained political neutral (Gibril, 2015: 320).

This thesis would, therefore, argue that the above discussion contributes to the image of the Ultras as respectable rebellions rather than as troublesome thugs.

Another factor that contributes to the aspect of the Ultras as respectable rebellions rather than troublesome thugs, and that is painted widely among both scholars and the media, is the encouragement that the Ultras supposedly infused into the revolution. Gault argues that the Ultras Ahlawy provided fuel for the revolution with their presence at the demonstrations (Gault, 2014). The argument is supported by Jerzak who not only argues that the Ultras contributed with their group unity and experience of fighting the police (Jerzak, 2013: 248-249), but also points to Ashraf El-Sherif and his six characteristics the Ultras added to the 2011 Revolution; *“dynamism, flexibility, positivity, a refusal of traditionalism, a group mentality and a rebellious attitude to the Revolution”* (El-Sherif, 2012). According to Jerzak, these characteristics, *“helped infuse protesters with the motivation and enthusiasm necessary to participate in dangerous police clashes”* (Jerzak, 2013: 248-249). Furthermore, El-Zatmah mentions the Ultras as the most passionate revolutionary force committing themselves to the original slogan of the Revolution; *“Iish, Huriya, ‘Adala ‘jtima’iya, Bread, Freedom, and social Justice”* (El-Zatmah, 2012: 810). While there is not much research published that can question the arguments above, Tuastad presents how the Ultras participation in the revolution may have contributed to filling the streets. According to the scholar, the Ultras Ahlawy allied with homeless youth and children, from 9 to 15 years of age, living outside and under the bridges at Tahrir Square (Tuastad, 2014: 379). In other words, by participating in the revolution, the Ultras can be seen as a catalyst for uniting social marginalised young men and the youth.

Furthermore, El-Sherif believes that the chaos of the Ultras may have played a role of waking up Egypt’s middle class, which continued to adhere to the myth of stability under Mubarak (El-Sherif, 2012). While there is no doubt that the scholars and journalists are contributing to painting a picture of the Ultras portraying them as responsible for not only securing the protestors but also encourage the participation of the “common” Egyptian, there is little to no literature to prove it wrong. Rather, an Ultra Ahlawy only known as Assad, confirms the above arguments in an interview with Zacharias (2014):

“I don’t want to say we were solely responsible for bringing down Mubarak (...) Our role was to make people dream, letting them know if a cop hits you, you can hit them back, not just run away.” (Zacharias, 2014)

As Tuastad argues, the 2011 Revolution released a massive suppressed political energy of youth, and so this thesis argues that the Ultras played a role in releasing this political energy by encouraging the youth of Egypt to enter the streets and speak out (Tuastad, 2014: 385). This is supported in an interview with an unknown Egyptian Ultra. The interview is conducted by Montague (2011) for an article for *The National*:

“The government did what they want. And the Ultras taught us to speak our mind.”  
(Montague, 2011)

However, there is another interesting aspect of the participation of the Ultras that this discussion is yet to touch upon; the Port Said Massacre. There is no doubt that the Port Said Massacre had a massive impact, not only on the Ultras but on the revolution as well. As argued in the analysis, the Port Said Massacre pushed the Ultras further into the conflict. Further, this thesis argues that Port Said confirmed the Ultras’ role as respectable rebels. First of all, in the words of Ismail, the attack on the Ultras led to the Ultras Ahlawy and their supporters to seek retribution for the police’s conduct during the Port Said Massacre (Ismail, 2012: 457). Furthermore, the massacre shocked and angered the demonstrators benefitting from the Ultras fighting skills during the early period of the revolution (Ismail, 2012: 457). Ismail continues by arguing that in their pursuit for retribution, the Ultras organised street processions and held sit-ins demanding “the rights of the martyrs”, pointing the Ultras towards a greater role in the continuation of the revolution and the achievement of its goals (Ismail, 2012: 457). While it can still be debated whether the Ultras were respectable rebels or troublesome thugs, the reaction from the protestors as well as the Ultras pursuit for retribution through street processions and sit-ins, in the view of this thesis pushed the Ultras towards the first rather than the latter. This debate is contested by different scientific research, and due to the lack of time and access to sources, this thesis is not in a position to take a deeper stance on this issue. None-the-less, Rommel states that the Port Said tragedy added to the revolutionary credentials of the Ultras and made much broader segments of the Egyptian public aware of their history of struggle against the state and police (Rommel, 2016: 39).

While there are numerous stories implying that the Ultras did play a vital role in the revolution and that they can be seen as respectable rebels rather than troublesome thugs, it is necessary to take some sorts of precautions to the findings. First of all, the Ultras have time and time again denied they played a vital role in the revolution. This can be explained by the fear of retaliation from the regime. Furthermore, prior to the 2011 Revolution, the Ultras were considered to be football fans designated to supporting their team. It can be argued that during the 2011 Revolution, being an Ultra or identifying yourself with the Ultras became a trend among the youth of Egypt. In other words, the Ultras became victims of their own popularity. Taking distance to the role as heroes of the revolution might be an attempt to take the Ultras back to what they really are – football fans – as well as distancing themselves from the spotlight of the regime. In addition, as Woltering argues we must be careful when collecting stories about the role of the Ultras in the revolution as the stories might be part of a secular discourse that seeks to counter the narrative that says that the Muslim Brotherhood played a key role in the street fighting (Woltering, 2013: 295). Therefore, the Ultras role can have been downplayed as well as exaggerated both by the media but also by the political parts involved in the 2011 Revolution. One thing is certain; the media and scholars have indeed had an impact on the view of

the Ultras. This is exemplified in work by El-Zatmah (2012: 811) arguing that the active and heroic participation of the Ultras and its aftermath, in fact, has enforced their identity, or Dorsey arguing that:

“The Ultras constituted the only group that was willing to not only challenge government control of public space but also to put their lives on the line in staking their claim.”  
(Dorsey, 2019)

Departing from this discussion, this thesis takes a rather sceptical stance in the scholars and the media’s depiction of the Ultras role in the 2011 Revolution. While there is little to no doubt that the Ultras were, in fact, an important part of the resistance towards the regime and a factor in the ousting of Mubarak, this thesis is of the belief that their participation has been exaggerated by some scholars and especially by the Egyptian media. This thesis would argue that the Egyptian media and a vast majority of the scholars have used the Ultras as a symbol of the 2011 Revolution, rather than emphasising the impact of political groups or parties. Especially the media has by focusing on the Ultras, avoided choosing sides with the Muslim Brotherhood and the protestors or the regime, simply by presenting the Ultras as the heroes of the revolution. At the same time, this thesis argues that the Ultras did not wish to be seen in this role. None-the-less, this thesis argues that the Ultras should be seen as respectable rebels rather than troublesome thugs, as they played a role as defenders of the protestors and by doing so stood by their own ideals of defending the weak against a stronger opponent.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

This thesis concludes that the Egyptian Ultras mobilised and played a role in the ousting of President Mubarak and the 2011 Revolution. While it is concluded that the Ultras already showed forms of mobilisation prior to the 2011 Revolution, and can be seen as part of the mobilisation from the start of the revolution, the massacre of 72 Ultras Ahlawy members in Port Said fully integrated the Ultras in the social movement against the regime.

Furthermore, this thesis contends and concludes that while the Ultras deny any political stands, their beloved sport became politicised and used as a tool by the regime. This led to the Ultras, in a reaction to the politicisation of football, becoming politicised themselves. In addition, this thesis concludes that the organisations of the Ultras are built around a political democratic structure that allows each member to have their own political stance as long as it does not collide with their love for the club. Furthermore, it can be argued that the Ultras can be compared to a democratic political party, as it is concluded that an Ultra group as Ultras Ahlawy or Ultras White Knights have sections not only in Cairo but throughout Egypt. Furthermore, the Ultra groups are organised along democratic lines with regular meetings and discussions on social network forums. Moreover, while there might not be evidence of the politicisation of the Ultras prior to the 2011 Revolution, there is evidence of political aspects in their actions in the stadiums. As argued in this thesis, the

stadiums in Egypt became a safe place for the Ultras to voice their resistance towards the authorities and the politicisation of football. Also, the Ultras in 2009 took a stance against the Gaza War and thereby engaged in a political issue (Woltering, 2013: 294).

While this thesis concludes that the Ultras of Egypt were mobilised during the 2011 Revolution, it also finds evidence towards different explanations to why the Ultras did mobilise. The reason for this mobilisation can be seen in two contexts. The first being years of repression and humiliation from the police and the authorities leading to the mobilisation during the 2011 Revolution. Therefore, this thesis argues that the Ultras participated in the revolution in a vendetta against the police brutality and repression by the Ultras in the stadiums and streets of Egypt prior to the 2011 Revolution. The mobilisation of the Ultras was even further strengthened after the Port Said Massacre killing 72 Ultras Ahlawy members resulting in a truce between Ultras Ahlawy and Ultras White Knights. The second being the Ultras joining the revolution against the regime after being called upon by the already established social movements in order to protect the protestors. This thesis argues that the Ultras felt an urge to defend the protestors against the authorities and pro-Mubarak thugs as the Ultras have vowed to defend the weak against a stronger opponent. Furthermore, it is concluded that the Ultras did participate because they had the fighting skills and the organisation that the already established social movement was lacking.

Additionally, this thesis concludes that there are different views on the Ultras role in the 2011 Revolution. While the view of the Ultras as simple hooligans looking for an excuse to fight the police is legit, the most common view and the one painted by most media and scholars is that of Ultras playing a role as active participants protecting the protestors against the police and pro-Mubarak thugs. This view is especially evident following the Port Said Massacre. Furthermore, it is concluded that the Ultras are trying to maintain a distance to the picture of them playing an active role as a part of the social movement. This thesis concludes that this can come down to the Ultras fearing retaliation from the authorities.

In other words, it is concluded that the Ultras responded to a call from the established social movements, as they felt obligated to step in. However, it took the Port Said accident to make the Ultras an integrated part of the social movement. While this thesis takes the scholars' and media's view into account as rather biased, it is concluded that the Ultras did play a vital role in the 2011 Revolution as rebellions fighting the authorities in order to protect the protestors of already established social movements.

## 8.0 Literature

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