


## Contested Legitimacies: Repression and Revolt in Post-Revolutionary Egypt

Jannis Grimm (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022).  
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The Arab Spring revolutions of 2011 were a watershed political event and understandably spawned an outpouring of research on the causes, dynamics, and trajectories of mass mobilization in the Middle East, which dominated the social science scholarship on the region for the better part of a decade. But as many of these hopeful experiments in people power collapsed or gave way to violent and reactionary alternatives, a new current of scholarship has begun to take shape. These studies are less interested in the dynamics of revolution than they are with its insidious antipode: counterrevolution. What explains the triumph of counterrevolutionary forces across the region in the aftermath of 2011?

Jannis Grimm's *Contested Legitimacies* is a landmark contribution to this emerging scholarship. The book focuses on Egypt, perhaps the most clear-cut example among the Arab Spring cases of a revolutionary success being reversed by a counterrevolutionary restoration. Grimm's study, notably, barely mentions the uprising that led to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Instead, he examines the role of mass mobilization in the 2013 counterrevolutionary coup, which cut short the country's democratic transition and installed the military dictatorship of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The focal point of the book is a single, decisive event on the path to this counterrevolutionary restoration: the Raba'a massacre of 14 August 2013. In this brutal crackdown, the Egyptian security forces violently cleared a mass sit-in of citizens who had gathered in Raba'a al-Adawiyya Square in Cairo to oppose Sisi's military coup of 3 July 2013 and express their support for the ousted Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohamed Morsi. The number of dead is still a matter of dispute, but almost certainly exceeds a thousand, making it one of the bloodiest acts of state repression since the end of the Cold War. After introducing the book and laying out the conceptual and theoretical framework in Chapters 1 and 2, Grimm turns to analyzing the periods surrounding this tragic event. The focus of Chapters 3 and 4 is the buildup to the massacre, including the final year of Morsi's presidency and the weeks immediately following the coup. Chapter 5 deals with the massacre itself, and Chapters 6 through 8 focus on its aftermath and the institutionalization of Sisi's regime.

Methodologically, the book is highly innovative. Grimm brings together two empirical approaches—protest event analysis and discourse analysis—in what he calls a mixed-methods “nested research design” (296). The basic idea is to trace the relationship between discourses and protest events, compiled in a quantitative data set from Arabic news sources, over the arc of a contentious cycle. Grimm examines how discursive constructions constrain and shape the interactions between protesters and state actors, but also how major transformative events, such as the Raba'a massacre, reconfigure those very same discourses. It is a creative approach to demonstrating what many social scientists recognize, but often struggle to show empirically: that symbols, discourses, and affect can exert powerful constraints on collective action, even when countervailing forces would seem to push that action in other directions.

There are two main puzzles about the Raba'a massacre that Grimm effectively untangles with this approach. The first is why such a brutal massacre of almost entirely peaceful demonstrators did not trigger a broad-based backlash in Egyptian society. The second is why the

massacre did not push the National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy (NASL), the movement behind the sit-in, to take up arms and organize a violent response. Both of these are collective responses that existing scholarship suggests are common following extreme repression events. Why, then, did they not ensue following the Raba'a massacre?

Grimm resolves these two puzzles by turning to discourse. In Chapters 4 and 5, the longest and most empirically rich in the book, he unpacks how the NASL constructed its response to the 3 July coup and then the 14 August massacre. At first, the NASL strategically crafted this discourse to make room for potential alliance-building with rank-and-file soldiers and those who might have been critical of Morsi's government but also opposed the coup. However, over the ensuing weeks Grimm shows how a strong "antagonist frontier" emerged separating those who supported the coup—including the entire military establishment, the police, the Tamarod movement, other secularist political parties and movements, the Coptic Church, and al-Azhar—from the pure and righteous forces that opposed it (95). This extreme polarization in discourse meant that outrage in response to Raba'a was limited to those who had originally opposed the coup. Instead of a broad-based backlash that might have drawn together a range of political and societal actors, the backlash emerged only from one side of the antagonist frontier.

But polarization was not the only feature of the NASL's discourse that shaped post-Raba'a mobilization. Grimm also compellingly shows that peaceful resistance was always at the center of this discourse, so much so that it became part of the movement's very identity. Although immediately after Raba'a there was a convulsion of bloody sectarian violence, with Morsi supporters attacking Coptic churches and individuals, Grimm's protest data show that within a matter of days the mobilization had reverted to largely peaceful modes. In other words, this intense, but sporadic, post-repression violence did not translate into an organized armed campaign against the Sisi regime. Instead, the NASL waged five months of unarmed resistance, creatively adapting their tactics and repertoires in response to the increasingly oppressive political environment.

A few of the points Grimm makes in Chapters 4 and 5 are slightly overstated. For example, Grimm describes the NASL as a broad and heterogeneous coalition of groups with shared antipathy for the coup. Although it is true that the movement included a range of actors, it was always dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and its Freedom and Justice Party, with other members far smaller and weaker. The main cleavage between pro-coup and anti-coup forces was also not as new as Grimm makes it out to be. Indeed, one way to interpret the entire post-2011 transition was as a tense standoff between three rival blocs: agents of the old regime, including the military; the various secularist parties and movements; and the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies. Each of these political forces strategically partnered with each of the other ones at some point during the transition. The cleavage between pro- and anti-coup forces emerged when secularists finally and decisively sided with the old regime against the Muslim Brotherhood, essentially reifying a division that had existed in a less acute form since the start of the transition.

In the final two chapters of the book, Grimm explains how, in the aftermath of the Raba'a massacre, Sisi went about constructing a counterrevolutionary regime. He argues that nationalism was the hegemonic ideology behind the regime, and that it allowed Sisi to cement his alliance with the various political forces that ushered him into power. But, in the final chapter, Grimm also suggests that this nationalist discourse has opened up certain opportunities for resistance. He hones in on the crisis surrounding Sisi's decision to transfer the unpopulated Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. The decision triggered the first major popular backlash to Sisi, with seventy-nine protest events against the regime, according to Grimm's data. Grimm argues that this incident shows the potential for the regime's nationalist tropes to be inverted and re-signified by its opponents, and points to possibilities for more concerted resistance to Sisi in the future.


It is an uplifting end to a book that does not otherwise leave much room for optimism. But is Grimm's conclusion too rosy? Although it is true that the Tiran and Sanafir protests

dented the armor of the Sisi regime, most of the movements and groups that endorsed the campaign ultimately fell back in line. And beyond this one episode of mobilization, the overwhelming oppressiveness of Sisi's regime has been highly effective at stamping out even limited grassroots opposition. Still, perhaps Grimm is right, and events like the Tiran and Sanafir protests might one day become the basis for another truly revolutionary mass movement, much in the way that early opposition to Mubarak, like the Kefaya movement of 2005 and the Intifada protests of 2002, turned out to be precursors to the 2011 uprising. As Grimm puts it: "what makes historical events meaningful—and what they signify for the course of history—is mostly visible only when attention is turned to it with hindsight" (15).

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## Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality

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In *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality*, Iain Lustick adeptly explains and analyzes the failure of the two-state solution (TSS), or what he refers to as the two-state paradigm that has guided successive efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His argument is as straightforward as it is compelling: The two-state paradigm has failed and it can no longer emerge from negotiations, and partly by design, and partly by accident, there is today a one-state reality (OSR) between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and its name is Israel. Any future solution should be guided by the OSR that exists; recognition of this reality is necessary because as long as the two-state paradigm pervades, the necessary systematic work to secure Palestinian rights is avoided, or at best delayed. The book is timely, clearly written, meticulously researched, and the argument is carefully developed and supported by a trove of evidence.

The failure of the TSS is hardly a new idea; the novelty, however, lies in the cogent articulation of why the TSS has failed and what actually exists today—the OSR. Departing from many works that advocate for a one-state solution, the focus of Lustick's analysis is the "what is" rather than "what should be." Lustick dismantles a consensus empirically and theoretically, and this deconstruction is not guided by preferred outcomes, but rather by exacting reflections of realities on the ground and the incoherence between that reality and the "paradigmatic" policy consensus. The first three chapters examine why the TSS has failed. Lustick attributes this failure to three interconnected factors: Israel's maximalism and the flaw in Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" strategy; what he refers to as "Holocaustia"; and the impact of the US pro-Israel lobby on successive US administrations.

Chapter 1 argues that the TSS failure is an outcome of unintended consequences related to how Zionism's strategic logic institutionalized an inability to determine and heed Arab willingness to compromise. In line with Jabotinsky's Iron Wall strategy, once Arab opposition was crushed, Arab rejectionists would moderate and become amenable to a negotiated settlement based on Zionism's limited concessions. Israel's successive military victories, however, only served to push "Jewish psychology and politics toward more extreme