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List of abbreviations

ECA Egyptian colloquial Arabic
EM Egyptian Military
FJP Freedom and Justice Party
HRW Human Rights Watch
MB Muslim Brotherhood
MSA Modern Standard Arabic
NSF National Salvation Front
SCAF Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SNS Social networking site
WoT War on Terror
Abstract

This thesis develops a theoretical approach grounded in socio-narrative, narratological and new media theory for the analysis of Twitter and explores how such an approach can help us to better understand the processes of narrative production and reception on Twitter in the context of three key events in recent Egyptian history all of which took place in 2013: the 30 June protests, 3 July ouster of President Mohamed Morsi and 14 August clearance of Muslim Brotherhood protests. Combining a constructivist, socio-narrative epistemology and ontology with narratological analytical tools, it analyses the tweets of three prominent Egyptian Twitter users writing in English and Arabic who rejected the hegemonic Muslim Brotherhood- and Military-sponsored narratives of the period: @Sandmonkey, @Zeinobia and @Bassem_Sabry.

It uses the narratological concepts of authorship, readership and narrative structure to identify subtle formal differences between the tweets of each writer, employing socio-narrative theory to identify the implications of such differences for our understanding of the key events that took place in the summer of 2013 in Egypt and of the functioning of narrative on Twitter in general. I argue that Twitter users produce chronicles in their tweets which are developed into loose narratives by readers in the act of interpretation, rendering them highly dynamic. I propose that reader impressions of authors and the implied reader positions offered to them, aspects of storytelling largely ignored in the Twitter literature, greatly influence this process of constructive interpretation. The present study highlights the complexity of multilingual narrative production and reception during the period under study and challenges reductive metanarratives of polarisation promoted by both the Egyptian Military and Muslim Brotherhood.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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The author

I graduated in 2012 with a BA in Arabic and Spanish from the University of Leeds and in 2013 completed an MA in Translation and Interpreting Studies at the University of Manchester. I have presented aspects of my doctoral study at international conferences in Cairo, Tübingen and Manchester.
Dedication

This thesis is for the martyrs of the Egyptian Revolution and those who continue to fight for a better Egypt.

It is dedicated to Bassem Sabry, lost by Egypt when it needed him most.
In August 2016, the Egyptian activist, journalist and cartoonist Andeel wrote:

Egypt’s public sphere is now entirely controlled by the state and the only narrative accepted is the military’s, even though there are millions of narratives, and everybody who witnessed history has the right to see it the way they like (Andeel 2016)

The almost complete hegemony of Military narratives in present-day Egypt is largely due to a sequence of three key events that took place in the summer of 2013. 30 June saw the culmination of a growing protest movement against Islamist President Mohamed Morsi as millions\(^1\) took to the streets calling for fresh presidential elections. On 3 July, the Egyptian Military (EM), having issued an ultimatum to Morsi on 1 July, removed him from office with mass popular support. Finally, 14 August saw the violent clearance of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) protests at al-Nahda and Rabaa al-Adawiya Squares in Cairo, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of predominantly MB protestors.\(^2\)

These events marked the culmination of a series of ruptures that had been growing in Egyptian society since at least the 2011 Revolution (c.f. Brown 2013). These ruptures were manifested in the emergence of two dominant and incompatible accounts of events from 2011 until 14 August 2013 and the future towards which Egypt was heading. Both were institutionally backed: one by the MB and the other by the Egyptian Armed Forces. This created an environment of intense polarisation, supported by metanarratives of a binary and Manichean divide in Egyptian society promoted by both the Armed Forces and MB.

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\(^1\) Although it is impossible to accurately gauge the number of protestors and estimates varied widely, it was widely reported that millions attended the protests (c.f. Kingsley 2013a; Fayed and Saleh 2013).

\(^2\) The exact figure remains unclear and the statistics available differ significantly. The Egyptian Health Ministry estimated that 378 people died during the clearance of the two squares (Mohsen 2013) while the MB has claimed that over 2,500 people were killed (al-Jazeera 2013a). An independent report published by Human Rights Watch (2014) estimated that “at least 817 and likely more than 1,000” were killed.
The following quotations about the clearance of Rabaa and el-Nahda Squares clearly show this narrative division. The first featured on a pro-MB website:

**Wednesday, August 14th 2013** Hundreds of thousands of peaceful protestors at Rabaa Square, Cairo; ending their sixth week of their sit-in protest, asking for the retrieval of democracy after the military coup and the ousting of the first elected civilian president, prior to a renown [sic] civil revolution in January 25th, 2011. (rabaastory.net 2016)

The second is an excerpt from a speech given by interim Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi on 14 August:

As a state, we reached a level in which we cannot accept this method of protesting. Still we gave a chance for reconciliation, even for international mediation, in order to have democracy in the future. But there was no respect for the right of peaceful protest…the state had to intervene in order to restore the security of Egyptians (al-Ahram online 2013)

Both describe the protests, yet by emplotting them into different narratives they imbue them with entirely different meanings. In the first, the continuation of the protests is essential for the “retrieval” of democracy. In the second, putting a stop to the protests was essential for the restoration of democracy. The Military’s ultimate victory in this battle of narratives is a significant factor behind their current dominance in Egyptian politics and society.

Yet, while the polarisation of this period is hard to dispute, to simplistically describe it in terms of two narratives supported by homogenous opposing groups would be to greatly understate the complexity of the period. The narratives around which the opposing groups coalesced were not fixed at the outset but built up gradually, adapting to incorporate new events and fit them into broader narratives of Egyptian history. The dominant narratives did not have a single, canonical form suitable for easy analysis but were constituted through the accretion of countless similar, but not necessarily identical, retellings across diverse media. Moreover, there was a wide range of positions and narratives between, beyond, and otherwise distinct from the dominant accounts, and simple confluences of Islamist/pro-Morsi and secularist/anti-Morsi positions quickly break down upon
With this in mind, the focus of this thesis is not the grand, dominant narratives of the period but micro-level narratives that do not fit neatly within, or even between, those dominant accounts. It explores such stories, highlighting the wide range of factors that influenced their production as evidenced in the form they took, and attempts to push back against simplistic accounts which offer ‘clarity’ at the cost of nuance and depth. Simplifying approaches facilitate easy analysis, but fundamentally misrepresent the complexity of the situation, while supporting the institutional interests of the EM and MB, both of whom stood to gain by presenting the situation in terms of an existential, zero-sum conflict of world views.

The social networking site (SNS) Twitter was an important medium for the articulation of stories resisting hegemonic MB and Military narratives, and the way in which narratives were produced and negotiated on Twitter forms the focus of this study. It analyses the tweets posted, in English and Arabic, by three prominent Egyptian Twitter users during the period of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August 2013: @Zeinobia, @Bassem_Sabry and @Sandmonkey. All three writers rejected the dominant narratives of the period and offered different kinds of resistance. Through an analysis and comparison of their accounts, this thesis contributes to pushing back against reductive and politically expedient metanarratives. These metanarratives homogenise and streamline to promote institutional agendas which benefit from the zero-sum politics of binary polarisation and unipolar narrative hegemony. Narratology is used to identify subtle differences between the three writers’ accounts and begin identifying the distinctive features of storytelling on Twitter, while socio-narrative theory is used to examine the significance of such differences in the context of the period in which these stories were told.

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3 The Islamist al-Nour party, for example, supported the Army’s removal of Morsi. Similarly, many of the protestors clamouring for fresh elections were practising Muslims. See Borge-Holthoefer et al (2015) for further discussion and criticism of reductive equations of secularism with support for the military and Islamism with opposition to the military intervention.
1 Background to the study

1.1 Why 30 June, 3 July and 14 August?

Given the complexity of the events that form the focus of this thesis, some additional background information may be useful. What follows is a narrative and, as discussed in chapter two, it therefore constructs a subjective version of the past, emphasising certain connections and downplaying others. It constitutes a description of the period from my perspective as a white, male, UK citizen and non-native speaker of Arabic, with no direct involvement in the events described.

From 1981 until the January 25 2011 uprising, Egypt was ruled as an effectively one-party state by Hosni Mubarak, a former commander of the Egyptian Air Force. Throughout his presidency, Mubarak continued to expand the “open-door” policies of his predecessor, Anwar Sadat, enacting neo-liberal reforms to open the Egyptian economy to foreign investment and competition, and selling off state owned businesses and assets. This led to “impressive growth” (The Economist 2016) during the 1990s and 2000s but also greatly increased inequality and deteriorating living conditions for many ordinary Egyptians due to, amongst other factors, the erosion of the value of public sector employment and rural dispossession (Abdelrahman 2014), factors which were exacerbated in the late 2000s by the 2008 global financial crisis (Aoudé 2013). These neo-liberal reforms were accompanied by further marginalisation of the previously dominant Armed Forces from political life, in favour of the security forces and new business elites, led by Mubarak’s son, Gamal Mubarak (Kandil 2012). This continued a process that had begun under Sadat but which accelerated rapidly during the late 1990s and 2000s.

The 2000s also witnessed a rapid increase in the regularity of protest by diverse sections of Egyptian society, beginning with mass protests in 2000 in support of the second Palestinian Intifada. These

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4 See Gunning and Baron (2013:5-16) for a detailed discussion of the extent to which the 25 January uprising can be described as a revolution.
protests saw tens of thousands take to the streets for the first time since the 1977 bread riots (provoked by a sudden increase in the price of basic food stuffs as a result of a World Bank- and IMF-mandated removal of subsidies). The demonstrations of 2000 had a lasting impact on public protest in Egypt making it seem possible in a way that it previously had not, contributing to the development of a culture of protest (el-Hamalawy 2011). They were followed by protests against the Iraq war in which around 30,000 Egyptians took to the streets and briefly occupied Tahrir Square (el-Hamalawy 2011) and the establishment of the Kefaya movement for democracy in 2004 which organised pro-democracy protests attended by hundreds (el-Ghobashy 2005). The same period also witnessed strike and protest action from industrial workers and farmers, both of which became increasingly common from the late 1990s and through the 2000s (Beinin 2009). Both the labour and farmer protest movements were oriented primarily towards achieving material improvements, rather than political reform, and were not part of any overarching organisation or project. Nonetheless, they contributed to a “normalization of protest” (Abdelrahman 2014:68; Ali 2012; Faris 2013) and the creation of a climate in which “it became normal to bump into a strike here or there while heading to work” (el-Hamalawy 2011). The mass uprising of 2011 which ultimately forced Mubarak to step down can therefore be viewed as the culmination of a longer process of gradually increasing protest and opposition to the Mubarak regime. They certainly did not appear out of nowhere.

After Mubarak’s resignation on 11 February, leadership of the country passed to the “Supreme Council of the Armed Forces” (SCAF), comprising senior Military figures, including future president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and led by Mubarak’s minister of defence from 1991-2011 Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the country’s de facto leader during this period. One of the SCAF’s first acts was to suspend the 1971 constitution then in force and begin drafting a replacement. The hastily-produced new constitution, describing the division of executive, legislative and judicial powers and nominally enshrining a wide range of personal freedoms, was approved by a popular referendum on 19 March 2011. Much delayed, but largely free (Carter Center 2012), presidential elections were finally held in May 2012 which led to a run-off election the following month between
the two highest-polling candidates, Mohammed Morsi, of the MB-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), and Ahmed Shafik, a long serving minister under Mubarak and his final prime minister. The result in the run-off was extremely close but Morsi emerged victorious with 51.73% of the vote and took office on 30 June 2012 as Egypt’s first democratically elected president. Once in office, however, Morsi soon encountered difficulties and popular support for him quickly fell. Two major factors in this were his inability to effect economic improvements and what many saw as an increasingly autocratic approach, exemplified by increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and the press\textsuperscript{5} and a constitutional declaration in November 2012 which placed Morsi above judicial oversight, albeit temporarily.

Dissatisfaction grew and a mass opposition movement emerged, led by the “Rebel” (تمرد) organisation calling for Morsi to step down as president and for early presidential elections. This culminated in massive protests held in Tahrir and across Egypt on 30 June 2013, the anniversary of Morsi’s ascension to the presidency, calling for his resignation. Morsi refused to resign and on 1 July General Sisi, a former member of the SCAF and Morsi’s minister of defence, issued an ultimatum, with widespread popular support, demanding that Morsi “meet the demands of the people” within 48 hours or the Military would impose their own “road map” out of the crisis (Falk 2013). Morsi continued to refuse to step down, insisting on his “legitimacy” as president, and when the deadline expired on 3 July he was placed under house arrest and removed from the presidency by the Armed Forces. Other leading FJP figures were also arrested and four pro-Islamist television channels were forced off air (al-Jazeera 2013b). The following day, 4 July, an interim government, headed by Adly Mansour, formally the head of Egypt’s constitutional court, was sworn in and supporters of the MB began sit-in protests at the Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares in Cairo in opposition to what they described as a military coup against a legitimate president. Violent clashes between

\textsuperscript{5} The extent to which Morsi was behaving in an autocratic manner was the subject of significant debate. For example, Nafi (2016), Elmasry (2015) and Hamid and Wheeler (2014) argue that, whatever his failings, Morsi was not an autocrat. Al-Anani (2012) and al-Tamimi (2012) take the opposite view.
Brotherhood supporters and state security forces occurred frequently in the weeks that followed, resulting in many deaths. The protests, however, continued. During this period, divisions which had been developing in Egypt since the 2011 Revolution, and especially during the Morsi presidency, continued to grow, particularly between Islamist and non-Islamist visions of Egypt’s future. Although both camps encompassed a wide range of political views, the Islamist trend, represented primarily by the MB and Salafist Nour party, was generally more cohesive than the highly-fragmented opponents of Islamism, represented in the kaleidoscopic range of members in the broadly secular “National Salvation Front” (NSF) which incorporated, amongst others, Nasserist, Leftist and “feloul” ("remnants" of the Mubarak regime) elements.6

MB protestors continued their sit-ins, demanding Morsi’s reinstatement, until 14 August when, following the collapse of negotiations between protestors and government officials, security forces stormed the two squares. Although the protest at el-Nahda was cleared relatively quickly, MB members resisted abandoning control of Rabaa Square and it took many hours for security forces to empty the square, making extensive use of live ammunition. Over 800 people ultimately died in the clearances, predominantly at the Rabaa site (Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2014). Egyptian state representatives have stated that live ammunition was used only in response to the use of firearms by MB protestors but an HRW investigation (2014) claims that the extensive use of violence was premeditated and that insufficient time was provided for protestors to leave the square before security forces opened fire. Although the violence was roundly condemned by international observers, responses from within Egypt were more mixed, with even many Egyptian liberals accepting the violence as undesirable but necessary (Kingsley 2013b, 2014). This reflects the polarisation of the period, promoted by both the MB and Military, with many Egyptians seemingly feeling forced to make a binary choice between supporting the Brotherhood or the Military.

6 See BBC (2012) for further details on the composition of the NSF.
There are two main reasons for focusing on this period. The first is that the events of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August 2013 had, and continue to have, a tremendous influence on Egyptian politics and society and it is likely that this influence will continue to be felt for many years. Scholars dispute the significance of Morsi’s ouster – Brown (2013:45), for example, argues that it “clearly marked the failure of Egypt’s two-year attempt to realize a transition to democracy following 2011’s mass uprising”, while Beck (2013) argues that “it would be too simple to conclude that the transition process has been terminated with the military coup in July 2013”. While el-Sisi’s victory in the 2014 presidential elections with almost 97% of the vote naturally raises suspicions, particularly in the light of concerns raised by organisations such as the Carter Center (2014), there is little doubt that he did enjoy significant popular support. The disastrous Morsi presidency was a significant factor in this. Since coming to power el-Sisi has led a merciless campaign against the MB, greatly reducing their influence on Egyptian society and politics, although the organisation’s history of springing back from previous campaigns of repression, notably that pursued by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954, means that it is too early to declare its long-term disappearance. The brutality of the clearance of Rabaa and el-Nahda showed the lengths to which the new regime was willing to go in order to suppress protest and it is difficult to imagine that new laws which effectively criminalise protest and criticism of the government would be generally accepted, as they seem to have been, were it not for the Morsi period, and the role of the Military, led by el-Sisi, in “saving” Egypt from the MB.7 Developing a better understanding of this period is therefore essential to the broader project of understanding the 2011 Egyptian Revolution as it continues to unfold, as well as the broader sweep of Egyptian history.

The second major reason is that, in contrast to the 2011 uprising, the events of the summer of 2013 have received comparatively little scholarly attention and have “yet to be researched with the

attention and detail that they merit” (Tadros 2016:11). Much of the available literature was published shortly after the intervention from a predominantly international relations or policy perspective, focusing on the likely implications of Morsi’s ouster for Egypt’s transition to democracy.⁸ There is, however, scant research on the way that the events were perceived and conceptualised by Egyptians. There are two obvious reasons why this might be the case. First, the 3 July intervention and massacre at Rabaa, unlike the outpouring of hope produced by Mubarak’s overthrow in 2011, seemed like a depressing return to Egypt’s authoritarian past. This may explain why there has been considerably less interest in this period from non-Egyptian academics. Second, the events of this era, and particularly the massacre at Rabaa, represent a source of deep trauma for many Egyptians due to the violence involved, the deep social divisions of the period, and the extent to which they represented a frustration of the 2011 uprising’s goals. This may explain why Egyptian academics have seemed comparatively hesitant to research the events of 2013.

This project does not attempt to identify the significance of the events in terms of Egypt’s larger historical trajectory, nor does it explore interactions between reified and abstracted groups. It explores how the events of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August were perceived, represented and constructed on Twitter by three individuals participating in them. It provides insights into the complex and competing pressures under which individual Egyptians narrating these events were operating as they sought to negotiate a context in which two institutionally backed narratives competed for hegemony. They had to manage their own positioning with regard to a multiplicity of different groups; and, as they wrote in English and Arabic, navigate multiple audiences in an environment of significant, but uneven, “context collapse” (Marwick and boyd 2010). By focusing on narrative, with its unique capacity for the expression of experientiality (Fludernik 1996), it is hoped

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⁸ e.g. Beck 2013; Bhuiyan (2015); Brown (2013), Carafano and Phillips (2013); Friedman, Albino and Bar-Yam (2013); Housden (2013); Khan (2014); Mietzner (2014); Springborg (2014).
that the project can offer insights into the lived experience of the period neglected in the existing literature.

1.2 Why Twitter

There are several justifications for a focus on social media, and specifically on Twitter. The first is that the role of social media, and particularly Twitter and Facebook, in the 2011 Revolution has been intensely debated within and beyond academia. While this debate will doubtless continue and initial appraisals of social media as essential to, or even causing, the 2011 uprising have since been greatly revised, there is no doubt that a huge amount of social media activity accompanied the uprising. Moreover, it has been convincingly argued in recent years that strongly demarcating the boundaries between online and offline spaces makes little sense (Gerbaudo 2012) as deep integration of technology in our daily lives makes us increasingly approximate “cyborgs” (Clark 2004). To a certain extent, we can say that to understand the way in which the events of the summer of 2013 played out and were represented and constructed online is to understand an important facet of these events in their totality. Yet, despite the importance of social media as a platform for communication in a broad sense, to date very little research has been published on its role or use during the period of Morsi’s ouster. The lack of research on this aspect of the period represents an important gap in the literature and in our understanding of its key events.

The second main reason is that although the theoretical and empirical literature on Twitter is constantly developing and has grown significantly since the start of this project in 2013, it remains in its infancy. An ever-increasing range of theoretical perspectives have been applied to Twitter by scholars working in diverse disciplines. Major studies include: Zappavigna’s linguistics-based

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10 Given Egypt’s somewhat uneven internet access and social media uptake we must be careful not to take this argument too far—in 2013 Twitter had an estimated 500,000 regular users in Egypt, representing less than 0.5% of the population at the time (Arab Social Media Report 2013).

These studies, as well as a growing number of journal articles and book chapters, offer important insights into the way that Twitter works, in what ways it is similar to, and differs from, other modes of communication (including other social media sites), the roles that it plays in modern society and politics, and the theoretical perspectives from which it can be usefully studied. That such a wide range of approaches has been successfully brought to bear on Twitter demonstrates that there can be no single, grand, totalising theory of Twitter able to account for diverse and ever-changing user practices. As in other contexts, different approaches can bring different insights; over time, the accumulation of research and synthesis of approaches can produce a detailed, if never “complete”, understanding of a phenomenon.

This thesis contributes to this process as the first study to explore Twitter principally in terms of narrative and the first extended application of narrative theory in this context. I argue throughout that conceptualising Twitter in terms of narrative provides a useful lens for understanding processes of meaning-making on the platform and for understanding how the stories users tell on Twitter feed into and relate to broader societal narratives, shaping personal, social and political relationships. By proposing that users make sense of Twitter primarily through narrative, and that in doing so they are drawing on a basic and universal capacity for viewing the world in terms of stories (see chapter
three), it pushes back against the notion that Twitter and sites like it herald a fundamental shift away from narrative (Manovich 2001; Meikle 2016). It is, however, intended to compliment rather than supplant the approaches mentioned above. With its focus on the individual, and the interactions between individuals and larger narrative configurations in terms of both production and reception, it aims to counterbalance the literature's prevailing emphasis on the networked and collective aspects of life and communication on the site, without denying that these are important characteristics of communication on Twitter.

1.3 Why narrative?

Since the early 1980s, the story has come to be viewed as a key analytical concept in a wide range of disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. A special issue of Critical Inquiry published in 1980,11 and later expanded into the edited volume On Narrative (Mitchell 1981) came to function as a manifesto of the so-called “narrative turn” (Hyvärinen 2006), arguing for the need to go beyond the “aesthetic” and to “explore the role of narrative in social and psychological formations” (Mitchell 1981:vii). Since then, there has been a general shift from viewing narrative in terms of representation towards seeing it in terms of construction. This has both ontological and epistemological implications. Rather than merely representing experience, narrative has come to be viewed as constitutive of experience, turning material occurrences into coherent and bounded events as we know them as humans (Mink 2001). Similarly, events are not viewed as inherently meaningful, but as deriving their meanings from the stories in which they are emplotted, with the consequence that storytelling is an important method for the production and transmission of both meaning and knowledge. This emphasis on the constructedness of reality and knowledge through storytelling was coupled with a recognition that stories are always told from specific perspectives and with certain goals in mind, and occurred in the context of the growing embrace of

11 The special issue featured contributions by many prominent narrative theorists, including Hayden White, Jacques Derrida, Frank Kermode and Nelson Goodman.
postmodernism. Proponents rejected the notion of a single objective truth in favour of the possibility of multiple, potentially contradictory truths, and emphasised the importance of reflexivity and the positioning of stories, storytellers and analysts (Herman 2009; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Somers and Gibson 1994).

From this perspective, there are three main reasons for studying 30 June, 3 July and 14 August from a narrative perspective. The stories told about these events did not merely describe them but shaped the meanings that they came to hold, both within Egypt and beyond. In trying to promote their own narrativisations of the events, the MB and Armed Forces, as well as other actors, sought to win acceptance for their preferred interpretations. The ultimate victory of the Military’s narrative represented the victory of its accompanying meanings and their imposition as truth. This is, in turn, intimately related with the imposition of a particular vision of reality as “objective” reality. The Military intervention was not inherently legitimate or illegitimate, but became legitimate in the eyes of many Egyptians through the acceptance of a story in which the intervention was both essential, in terms of leading to a future restoration of democracy, and ultimately an exercise of the agency of the people, rather than of the Military as an independent actor. If we accept that events are constructed through narrative, as the narrative approach demands, it can be argued that to understand the 30 June protests, 3 July ouster of Morsi, and 14 August protest clearances requires, and can equate to, studying the stories told about them.

The second key reason is that the narrative approach strongly emphasises the specific over the general. Analysing this period in terms of the narratives involved in creating and contesting it means studying it in its concrete particularity, rather than in terms of abstracted and generalised categories. This approach is particularly useful in the context of the period under study as it allows us to bypass the stale question of whether Morsi’s ouster constituted a coup or not by rendering it

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12 For overviews of the emergence and development of the “narrative turn” see Harding (2009:19-22); Berkenkotter (2008:6-9); and Hyvärinen (2006).
moot: what matters is the impact of the surrounding narratives, rather than where Morsi’s ouster fitted within systems of abstract categorisation. This is not to say that the narrative approach is without abstraction since, as with all theories, it fundamentally relies on abstracted concepts. A narrative analysis, however, not only permits but demands to be grounded in the specific context of the events under study in a way that other approaches do not.

A third reason is that there was a tendency, particularly in the media, to conceptualise the period in terms of polarisation,13 sometimes explicitly in terms of narrative polarisation (e.g. Monier 2013). A more sophisticated approach to narrative can, without denying the existence of these hegemonic narratives, help to develop a more nuanced understanding of the narrative economy of the period and the acts and types of storytelling in which those involved were engaged, while also providing a more satisfying account of why such a narrative conflict was, and continues to be, significant. It is important to remember that reductive metanarratives of polarisation, while convenient, play to the objectives and Manichean worldview of the el-Sisi regime, in which Egypt is presented as locked in an unending and existential struggle with Islamism. Moving past this approach therefore has political as well as scholarly implications.

2 Data

I analyse tweets posted by three influential Egyptian Twitter users, @Sandmonkey, @Zeinobia and @Bassem_Sabry, between the dates of 27/06/2013-10/07/2013 and 11/08/2013-20/08/2013.14 @Sandmonkey, real name Mahmoud Salem, is a social media consultant, blogger and occasional journalist, writing mostly for the English language Egyptian newspaper Egypt Daily News. @Zeinobia, who tweets anonymously, is a citizen journalist and blogger, posting regularly on her site, “Egyptian Chronicles”. Finally, @Bassem_Sabry, who sadly died in April 2014, was a political and media consultant, journalist and blogger. These individuals were chosen for a variety of reasons which are

13 See, for example, Butt (2013), The Telegraph (2013), BBC (2013) and Bayoumy (2013).

14 For full details on why these dates were chosen, see chapter three.
discussed in detail in chapter three. Two issues stand out, however, as particularly significant. First, in terms of their political outlook, none of the three fitted neatly into either of the two main positions made available in the binary split of the period – all three strongly opposed Morsi and the Brotherhood and supported the 30 June protests but had serious doubts about Morsi’s ouster by the Army, specifically expressing unease about viewing the Military as the saviours of democracy. As such, they fit within a section of Egyptian society which has received little attention in both the media and academia. Despite this broad similarity of political outlook, the analytical chapters show that there are also significant differences between them: they position themselves quite differently in social, political and professional terms (chapter four); they had different real readerships and imply quite different relationships with their readers (chapter five); and their accounts of the period were structured in notably different ways (chapter six).

Second, they all had a large number of followers, around 100,000 each. Although there is no simple relationship between follower numbers and influence (Cha et al 2010), we can surmise that they were relatively influential and that there was a sizable audience for their opinions. This fits into the project’s goal of emphasising the complexity and range of positions adopted by Egyptians during the period under study.

3 Research questions, methodology, and organisation of the thesis

The principal research question guiding the thesis is: To what extent a narrative theory combining socio-narrative and narratological principles and tools can provide a useful account of the nature and relevance of storytelling on Twitter, with particular reference to the 30 June protests, 3 July 2013 Military intervention and 14 August clearance of protestors at the Nahda and Rabaa Squares in Egypt? This overarching question can be broken down into a series of more specific sub-questions. First, can formalist narratological tools be used to produce useful descriptions of multilingual and fragmented narratives, such as those seen on Twitter? This question enquires into the applicability of narratological concepts developed predominantly for the study of literary narrative to the diffuse
and loosely structured accounts of events we find on Twitter. It brings a focus onto narrative form that is missing in much of the Twitter and socio-narrative literature (Hyvärinen 2006) and seeks to make maximal use of existing theory and methods rather than assuming that “new” media require entirely new methods.

A second sub-question is “to what extent does socio-narrative theory provide a basis for identifying the social, political and ethical implications of subtle formal differences of narration?” A formal analysis can bring rigour missing if we attempt to directly analyse “content”. Yet a formal description by itself is of limited value. The thesis therefore investigates how far socio-narrative theory can be used to draw significant conclusions from the characteristics identified during formal analysis and to what extent it can be used to connect those formal characteristics with the broader context to produce a critical rather than merely descriptive analysis.

A third sub-question asks specifically “to what extent can the superficially similar accounts of 3 July and 14 August provided by the Twitter users Bassem Sabry, Zeinobia and Sand Monkey be shown to differ and in what ways are these differences significant?”. While the previous two sub-questions focused on the general applicability of the narrative approach proposed in this thesis, this sub-question focuses specifically on the data analysed in chapters four, five and six and how the formal characteristics of their accounts, identified in the analytical chapters, can be related to broader political and social trends within Egypt.

A final sub-question queries whether narratives are language specific. The key motivation for this question is that the issue of language specificity, and even semiotic mediation, is sidestepped in the majority of the socio-narrative literature. Instead, narratives seem to exist on a platonic realm of pure “content”, without the need for mediating “form”. Through a deliberate focus on multilingual narrative production on Twitter, I seek to provide some answers as to the extent to which narratives must be viewed as language specific.
To answer these questions, the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter two lays down the theoretical underpinnings and approach to narrative theory used here, describing the traditions upon which it draws and the conception of narrative used in the analytical chapters. Its key argument is that all narratives are based upon constant interaction between three main elements: a semiotic component (expression in signs); a cognitive component (mental realisation); and a social component (social embeddedness). From this perspective, all narrative analysis must factor in the formal expression of narratives (even in the case of stories lacking an obvious text), the necessary realisation of all narratives in the minds of their interpreters, and the impact on their meaning of their relations to other narratives and previous interpretations. Chapter three is split into two parts. The first focuses on Twitter in a general sense, discussing how the approach to narrative elaborated in chapter two can be used to conceptualise Twitter and, specifically, how it can help us to understand narrative on Twitter and its relation to other contexts of storytelling. The second part discusses methodological issues arising from working with Twitter data and the selection criteria used to choose the tweets analysed in chapters four, five and six.

Each of the subsequent three analytical chapters focuses on a key narratological concept. Chapter four explores authorship, particularly on where and how Sabry, Salem and Zeinobia positioned themselves through both textual and paratextual means, including: their profile images and biographies; use of specific discourses; and statements regarding key groups. Chapter five focuses on readers, examining the concept from two perspectives. The first section uses quantitative data to examine the proportion of common readers shared by the different writers and their geographical locations, allowing for a broad comparison of their readerships. The second section focuses on the implied reader, examining the subject positions they invite their readers to occupy through their writing and the implications of this for how their tweets are interpreted. The third and final analytical chapter focuses on narrative structure, using the concepts of text, sjuzhet and fabula. It examines the extent to which the concept of “text” is applicable to narrative on Twitter and where the boundaries of such texts might be drawn, the use made by each writer of anachrony, and the
extent to which the writers can be viewed as producing separate, individual narrative chronologies.

Chapter seven concludes the thesis, reading across chapters two to six and offering an appraisal of the method employed in terms of the insights that it can and cannot provide and suggestions for future research.

4 Contributions of the study

The thesis sets out to contribute to three main areas of study: the theory of Twitter; studies of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August in Egypt; and narrative theory more broadly.

4.1 The theory of Twitter

This thesis’ main contribution to the theory of Twitter is to argue that Twitter can be usefully conceptualised in terms of narrative and that existing narrative theory can provide a basis for doing this. In the existing literature, there are two main approaches to the relationship between narrative and storytelling. In one, Twitter, and SNSs in general, are posited as part of a general shift away from the narrative mode (Manovich 2001; Meikle 2016). In the other, best represented in Zizi Papacharissi’s field-defining work, narrative and storytelling are assumed to be central to the use of Twitter, particularly in news production, but there is no extended engagement with the concepts. In both approaches, the term “narrative” is used primarily as an everyday rather than a technical concept. There is little reflection on what constitutes a narrative and minimal reference to either the socio-narrative or narratological literatures. This likely reflects the fact that scholars versed in narrative theory have been slow to begin serious study of Twitter and other SNSs. By offering a sustained and rigorous analysis of Twitter communication grounded in narrative theory this study aims to refine our understanding of how narrative functions on Twitter, its importance, and even to what extent it is possible to say that Twitter users are engaged in storytelling.

\[\text{15 Her publications include: Papacharissi & de Oliveira (2012), Meraz & Papacharissi (2013) and Papacharissi (2015a, 2015b).}\]
A narrative approach to Twitter offers several advantages. First, it provides a general theoretical account of communication on Twitter while facilitating analysis grounded in particular contexts and situations. Storytelling and viewing the world in terms of stories appear to be universal but the narratives relevant in any concrete situation are different. Rather than trying to identify the common elements of events occurring in different times and places, the narrative approach facilitates examining them in their unique particularity without needing to fit them into pre-defined categories. Narrative analysis begins with an examination of the stories being told, rather than with statements about the essence of events themselves. Technical questions of whether, for example, the 3 July intervention was or was not a coup in and of itself become less significant – what matters are the stories that were told about it, which tell us about the way in which the event was experienced and known by their tellers. A consideration of factors such as the presentation of authors and reader roles, elements of storytelling considered basic in most narratology, adds further nuance to our understanding of the way in which meaning is dynamically produced on Twitter.

Second, the narrative approach elaborated here offers a theoretical explanation for the process of meaning-making on Twitter, in terms of both production and reception of tweets, an aspect which is almost understudied in the existing literature. As will be demonstrated in chapters two, three and six, it allows for individual tweets to be conceptualised not as isolated fragments of information thrown into the world, but as contributions to larger narrative configurations extending across many tweets and beyond the boundaries of Twitter itself. Tweets are not stories in their own right but are intimately tied up with processes of producing diffuse and many-authored social narratives. It also provides a framework for the process of reception on Twitter: users need not read individual tweets as isolated “database” entries divorced from the linearity of storytelling. They can read them as elements in loose, intertextual narratives assembled during the process of interpretation. These narratives are likely to be configured in significantly different ways by different readers, with the consequence that, since the meaning of tweets depends on their position within such narrative networks, it is impossible to categorically specify the meaning of any tweet in isolation.
Third, it facilitates ready movement between the micro and macro levels and between individuals and larger narrative configurations which produce and are produced by micro-level storytelling. The role of the stories told by individuals in influencing broad social narratives shows why they are worthy of analysis. Similarly, studying the stories told by individuals in terms of larger narrative configurations allows us to see the influence of those narratives as they play out in different ways on the individual level, emphasising their importance in terms of individual lives, as well as broad social and political shifts. This ability to drill down to the individual level is particularly significant with regard to Twitter, where there has been a tendency in the literature, especially with computer-science influenced quantitative approaches, to generalise across large numbers of users, inevitably effacing difference and particularity.

Finally, the narrative approach employed here emphasises the continuities between the systems of meaning-making employed on Twitter and those seen in our everyday lives. A key argument advanced in chapter three is that the process of making sense of Twitter through grouping fragmentary information into loose narrative wholes is broadly similar to the processes of narrative sensemaking involved in the interpretation of literature and of the happenings we perceive in our daily lives. It draws on the same basic human competencies of viewing atomistic occurrences as components of larger wholes and determining their significance in terms of their relationships to such wholes. It therefore pushes back against the idea that new media rely on radically different systems of meaning-making. They may represent a significant break from forms such as the novel, history book and newspaper, but nonetheless draw on the same basic instinct for storytelling and seeing the world in terms of stories that led Macintyre (1984:216) to famously categorise humans as “essentially...story-telling animal[s]”.

4.2 Studies of 3 July and 14 August

In comparison with the 2011 uprising, the events of summer 2013 in Egypt have received little scholarly attention. Most of what has been published was released in the months following the
intervention, and there has been little of the sustained attention attracted by the 2011 uprising. Moreover, most of what has been published focuses on the socio-political implications of the intervention in terms of Egypt’s transition to democracy. The way in which the events of the period were perceived, represented and constructed by Egyptians, in contrast, has received little attention. This study focuses on the construction of events on Twitter but, given that scholars are increasingly arguing that it makes little sense to impose a firm distinction between the online and offline worlds (e.g. Papacharissi 2015:4), the insights it offers are not restricted to activity on Twitter – an analysis of Twitter therefore helps us to understand the period more broadly.

By focusing on the way in which just three Twitter users negotiated their positioning and narratives, this study offers insights into the complexity and uncertainty of the period, as experienced by those participating in it, without seeking to simplify and generalise. It examines not just the events, but the different ways in which individual Egyptians responded to them. It confronts simple understandings of the period as one in which there were just two opposing factions, drawing attention to the delicate balancing act Egyptians were engaged in and emphasising that they had to negotiate their positioning along many more axes than just pro-/anti-Morsi. It celebrates complexity and incoherence in a way that is impossible in quantitative studies with large datasets and stresses that we must be careful not to streamline excessively when seeking to come to terms with the events of the period. As part of this it examines both English and Arabic language sources, rather than assuming that user practices were necessarily the same in both languages, and working against a remarkable tendency in the literature to ignore Arabic language sources (c.f. Borge-Holtoefer et al 2015).

Given narrative’s unique capacity for the expression of experience and by focusing on the way in which events were being presented by Egyptians directly involved in them, this study offers insight into the lived experience of those events. Its aim is not to say what did or did not happen on 30 June, 3 July and 14 August, or what those events mean. Nor is it to compare the account of those events
provided by Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey against any quasi-objective standard. Nor is it to produce general statements on the nature of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August from a generalised “Egyptian” perspective. It is to study the presentation of those events by the three writers in their own right. It investigates what their accounts can tell us about the context of conflicting pressures and political uncertainty in which they were writing. What was the impact of their accounts on the context and how is that context manifested in their writing? It does not, however, presume that Sandmonkey’s, Zeinobia’s and Sabry’s tweets are necessarily “representative” of the attitudes and experiences of Egyptians more broadly.

4.3 Narrative theory

This study makes two main contributions to narrative theory. The first is to offer a conceptualisation of storytelling which synthesises three major traditions in narrative analysis (chapter three). I propose that there are three main elements to all narratives which can be labelled “semiotic”, “cognitive”, and “social”. The semiotic element emphasises the necessary mediation of stories through signs and the idea that it is therefore possible to analyse all narratives in terms of their form. It is based primarily on the formally-oriented narratological tradition which emerged in the late 1960s, and has continued to develop until the present day, but which has remained largely separate from what I have termed here the socio-narrative approach. The cognitive element stresses that narrative is a cognitive mechanism used for sensemaking, and texts must be cognitively realised through the interpretive process if they are to function as meaningful narratives. This idea draws on the approach of cognitive narratologists such as David Herman and Manfred Jahn; narrative psychologists such as Jerome Bruner, Theodore Sarbin and Donald Polkinghorne; reader-response theorists such as Wolfgang Iser and Peter Rabinowitz and the philosophers of history Louis Mink and Hayden White. The social component, finally, argues that all narratives are socially embedded and derive much of their meaning from their position in networks of other narratives. It is based mainly on the work of the sociologists Somers and Gibson and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of language as irreducibly social and deeply involved in the construction of social reality.
Bringing together these traditions aims to produce an ultimately more satisfying and interdisciplinary account of narrative suitable for application in a wide variety of contexts which compensates for some of the deficiencies of existing approaches to narrative. An emphasis on semiotic expression can avoid the “naïve” focus on pure “content” seen in much of the socio-narrative literature (Hyvärinen 2006:37). It brings a powerful formal lens for the description and comparison of different narratives which may appear similar, but nonetheless differ greatly in terms of their form, with significant implications for the meanings that they come to take for readers. A consideration of the necessity of the cognitive realisation of narratives prevents viewing them as static objects amenable to objective or “scientific” study, in the manner dreamed of by the first generation of narratologists.\(^\text{16}\) The signs appearing on a page may be relatively fixed,\(^\text{17}\) but the form and meaning they come to take in the minds of readers when they are realised is highly dynamic and variable, making definitive analysis impossible. Finally, the social embeddedness of narrative emphasises that stories always exist, and develop their meanings, in relation to other stories. This makes it essential that, even when carrying out close textual analysis, stories be considered in terms of the broader narrative context which smaller scale narratives both inform and are informed by. Moreover, the role played by storytelling in shaping lived reality imbues narrative analysis with an import it lacks if narratives are approached solely in terms of their formal characteristics or as individual mental realisations and interpretations of collections of signs. In short, the cognitive approach foregrounds the significance of interpretation, the semiotic approach the significance of form, and the social approach why we should care about storytelling at all.

A further contribution is that this study attempts to open up a significant field for narrative investigations by establishing non-fictional writing, and specifically reporting, on Twitter as a legitimate field of narrative inquiry. Narrative scholars have so far been reluctant to turn their

\(^{\text{16}}\) Todorov, for example (1969:10) pleads for the creation a “science of narrative”.

\(^{\text{17}}\) The discussion of “text” in chapter six shows that on Twitter even this fixity is largely absent.
attention to SNSs in general. Part of the reason for this may be a hesitance as to whether communication on SNSs can be legitimately viewed in terms of narrative or whether to adopt this approach would constitute an example of “narrative imperialism” (Phelan 2005). One of the main aims of this thesis is to demonstrate that tweeting can be reasonably and usefully conceptualised in terms of storytelling and that doing so can bring insights that other approaches cannot. As such, I hope that it will encourage further narrative investigations of Twitter and other SNSs. A final contribution to narrative theory is the legitimation of concepts held to be basic and fundamental to storytelling. The fact that it has been possible to apply conceptualisations of narrative developed in the pre-internet era, such as continuing to view stories in terms of beginnings, middles and ends, and the ongoing importance of causal emplotment, to what I describe as storytelling on Twitter, is a strong argument in favour of the validity of those concepts and that they can reasonably claim to describe fundamental components of narrative. They are not restricted to the contexts, purposes and media for which they were originally developed.
Chapter Two – Analysing fragmented narratives, synthesising traditions

1 Introduction

This chapter develops a general account of narrative, combining approaches from a number of different traditions of narrative inquiry. The first half of the chapter provides a description of the basic functions and roles of narrative based on the argument that all stories, whether written or oral, clearly defined or diffuse, incorporate semiotic, cognitive and social components which must be considered together. I argue that narratives actively shape human experience rather than merely representing it and offer a rigorous definition of narrativity as the term is employed in subsequent chapters. The second half of the chapter examines how narratological concepts can be brought to bear on the type of stories described in the first half and introduces the analytical tools employed in chapters four, five and six. Exploring authorship emphasises that all narratives are created rather than found, as well as the role of individual storytellers. Moreover, I argue that readers produce impressions of the creators of all stories, and these impressions shape their interpretations. The concept of the reader turns our focus to the recipients of narratives, emphasising that stories only exist insofar as they are told and must have an addressee and exploring the impact of the way in which readers are positioned by stories. Finally, analysing narratives in terms of text, fabula and sjuzhet bring focus to the fact that all narratives must exhibit a degree of structure if they are to be handled as narratives, although that structure may be highly diffuse, and emphasises that it is insufficient to simply abstract stories’ underlying event sequences without considering the manner in which those sequences are presented.

2 Basic assumptions of narrative theory

The “narrative”, or the “story”, has been employed as a key concept by scholars working across the humanities and social sciences in a wide range of contexts in the pursuit of many different goals.
Notable narrative scholars include: Hayden White, Walter Gallie and Louis Mink in historiography; Michael Bamberg, Sigmund Freud, Jerome Bruner and Theodore Sarbin in psychology; Charles Taylor, Jean-François Lyotard and Paul Ricoeur in philosophy; Clifford Geertz in anthropology; Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Jacques Derrida in literary theory; Monika Fludernik, David Herman and Marie-Laure Ryan in contemporary narratology; and Mona Baker, Sue-Ann Harding and Jean Boase-Beier in Translation Studies. This range indicates the wide variety of contexts in which the concept of narrative can be applied while also indicating the impossibility of offering a definitive description of what narratives are and what they do. Sarbin, for example, views narratives as primarily existing in the mind, and as functioning principally as a means of making sense of human experience. Barthes, on the other hand, views narratives as essentially semiotic in nature and as a key element of literature and society but makes little reference to the story as an instrument of the mind. For the sociologist Margaret Somers, they are first and foremost a social phenomenon, existing intersubjectively amongst members of societies and communities and acting to shape their collective identities.

Perhaps the most important distinction between different theoretical understandings of narrative relates to the perceived relationship between narrative and reality. Some theorists, most famously William Labov, adopt a representational view, whereby storytelling is understood as “one method of recapitulating past experience” (1972:359). In this approach, narrative is understood simply as one tool available to us as humans for telling others about our pre-existing experience. Other scholars – including Baker (2006), Bruner (1986, 1991) and Goodman (1978) – adopt a constructivist approach,18 arguing that it is through telling stories that the phenomenological, human reality of our experience is created. They propose that “most of what we deal with in the social world could not exist but for a symbolic system that brings that world in existence” (Bruner 1986:88), with narrative

18 Their approach is in some respects similar to the earlier social constructivism of scholars such as Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Blumer (1969).
understood as the primary symbolic means through which this is achieved. Such scholars largely reject the existence, or at least the relevance, of an “aboriginal” reality behind the possible worlds of the mind (ibid.:46) on the basis that, following Kant, there can be “no value neutral mode of emplotment, explanation or even description of any field of events, whether imaginary or real” (White 1978:129). If such an aboriginal world does exist, it is accessible only via the mediation of the mind and, frequently, of narrative (Carr 1997; Crites 1997).

This study adopts the constructivist approach as being particularly relevant to the events of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August 2013 in Egypt where the mutability of human reality was clearly apparent. The material details of the Military’s and MB’s actions were not the central issue. Neither the Brotherhood nor the Military, for example, denied that Morsi had been removed from power by the Military or subsequently placed under house arrest. Rather, the resulting conflict centred around the perceived significance and social meaning of these events. By setting Morsi’s ouster into relationships with different visions of the past and anticipated futures, entirely different meanings were assigned to it. To argue that alternative narratives of events at that time concerned only the issue of representation or description is to understate their importance. The ensuing contests of narration can be more adequately understood as struggles over the right to construct and shape reality on a basic level, to write subjective history rather than to simply influence the reporting of a single objective reality, equally accessible by all.

3 Three aspects of narrative: the cognitive, the social and the semiotic

As David Herman argues, narratives can be viewed from multiple perspectives: “as a form of mental representation, a type of textual or semiotic artefact, and as a resource for communicative interaction” (Herman 2009:2). The approach adopted here emphasises three distinct but interdependent aspects of all narratives: the cognitive, the social and the semiotic.
3.1 The cognitive component

The cognitive element refers to narrative’s function as an instrument of mind. From this perspective narrative is viewed principally as a meaning-making process (Ochs and Capps 2001:15) rather than as an object. Scholars such as Barbara Hardy (1968), Jerome Bruner (1986), Louis Mink (1970; 2001), Donald Polkinghorne (1988) and Theodore Sarbin (1986) regard narrative as a “primary act of mind” (Hardy 1968:5) and as the main form “by which human experience is made meaningful” (Polkinghorne 1988:1) by allowing for isolated occurrences to be “comprehended as elements in a single and concrete complex of relationships” (Mink 1970:551). From a narratological perspective, David Herman argues that “stories are cognitive as well as textual in nature, structures of mind as well as constellations of verbal, cinematic, pictorial or other signs produced and interpreted within particular communicative settings” (Herman 2009:8), while Sternberg (2011:48) similarly argues that “a narrative is a construct of our minds”. The fact that Hosni Mubarak ceased to be president of Egypt on 11 February 2011, for example, means little by itself. It is only when it is considered as an element in a larger narrative of injustices committed by Mubarak in the past and of a better future made possible by his deposal that it becomes significant.  

A cognitive element can also be observed in less obvious situations. The individual events which comprise all stories must still be grouped together into coherent “wholes” in the mind if they are to be meaningful, however the narrative is presented. The semiotic resources drawn upon for narrative expression serve only as a “blueprint” from which the reader can construct a “mental image” of the world depicted (Ryan and Thon 2014:3). Texts guide this process but can never totally control it as the process of “composition, of configuration” is completed not “in the text but in the

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19 Narrative also facilitates the production of meaning by allowing for the discarding of irrelevant information (Heise 1979).
20 This issue is discussed further in the section entitled “wholeness” in the discussion below of the features of narrative.
reader” (Ricoeur 1991:26). This essential process of interpretation makes multiple interpretations possible with all narratives, as readers may cognitively realise them in different ways.²¹

Intersubjective social narratives that seem to transcend an individual consciousness must also be mediated through individual consciousnesses. The narrative of a noble and enlightened West civilising a backward and primitive East underwriting much of the colonialist endeavour, for example, existed not on an abstract plane of pure meaning but intersubjectively, through the mediation of individual minds.

3.2 The social component

The social element refers to two related but distinct aspects of narrative. The first is that all narratives are socially embedded – no narrative exists in isolation from other stories. The stories that are told derive their meaning partly from the way in which they relate to other stories and in turn influence the meaning and significance of other stories.²² Whenever a story is told or interpreted, reference is made to other narratives beyond the boundaries of the story at hand. This is perhaps clearest with personal narratives of identity. In the same way that disparate events can only be rendered meaningful through the creation of narratives, our chaotic experiences are made into a relatively unitary perception of self through the creation of a more or less coherent life story.²³

Following the constructivist approach, we can say that identity is therefore at least partly created by, rather than merely reflected in, the stories we tell about our lives. Yet, such ontological narratives of the self are also “social and interpersonal” and “can only exist interpersonally in the course of social and structural interactions over time” (Somers 1994:618; Davis and Harré 1990). The stories that

²¹ This point has been noted by many narrative theorists including: Todorov (1980); Eco (1979); Herrnstein Smith (1980); Kermode (1979); Danto (1965) and Iser (1976/78).

²² See the section below on “relationality” for more detail.

²³ These life stories are not fixed, however, and are “reconstruction[s] of the past, shaped by the particular context of [their] telling” (Mishler 1990:427).
other people tell about us and our lives play as important a role in determining our identity as do the stories that we tell ourselves.

The same phenomena can be observed with all stories. As an individual observer I can, for example, produce any narrative I choose of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Yet in so doing, I cannot avoid being influenced, and the meaning of the story I tell cannot avoid being affected, by the stories that others have told before me, and crucially, by accounts of events widely held to be true. This is true of other accounts of the “same” set of events, which influence the way in which different elements are interpreted and perceptions of how the story might fit together as a whole, as well as accounts of other revolutions, which influence understandings of what constitutes a revolution more generally in terms of the culturally specific “masterplots” that provide basic structures of interpretation onto which specific details can be grafted (Abbott 2002; Gould 2002; Schank 1990).

The second social aspect of narrative is that in addition to functioning on an individual level to shape individual realities, narratives also function above the level of the individual to create and shape intersubjective social realities. This process can be observed at the micro level of a single family, whereby the family’s collective identity is a product of the communal story told and negotiated by various members of the family, as well as at the macro level of whole societies and cultures, where so-called metanarratives or “grand narratives” (Somers and Gibson 1994; Lyotard 1979/84) inform a vast array of human activity. Narratives of this kind do not belong to any single individual but are “attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks of institutions, however local or grand” (Somers 1994:619). Examples of this type of narrative include that of the “blitz spirit” during the Second World War, according to which the

24 Following the argument that narratives construct reality, it is difficult to maintain that two different narratives may refer to the “same” events (c.f. Mink 2001:220 and 1970:546).
citizens of London remained upbeat and stoic in the face of a barbarous and unjustifiable attack by Nazi Germany. This narrative is not specific to any one person but is common to many.

Such intersubjective narratives played a major role during the period of the 2013 Military intervention in Egypt. In addition to the countless individual accounts of Morsi’s removal, two dominant and loosely defined social narratives emerged: that of a “military coup” and that of a “rescue of the 2011 Revolution”. These narratives pertained not to specific individuals, although they were produced and reproduced by individuals, but to broadly conceived social groupings which were partly constituted by the narratives themselves. As was seen on the individual level, these social narratives not only represented a pre-existing social reality, but actively created it and thus had major political, cultural and ethical implications.

3.3 The semiotic component

Finally, the semiotic aspect refers to the idea that all narratives must be embodied in some way; a narrative cannot have “content” without also having a “form” of some kind (c.f. Haas 1968; Qian Hu 1993). It is the essential embodiment of narratives in signs that leads Hayden White to argue that “stories, like factual statements, are linguistic entities and belong to the order of discourse” (2001:375). Semiotic mediation is obvious in the case of written narratives such as novels, newspaper articles, and oral narratives but also important with more ephemeral narratives that lack obvious semiotic mediation. With metanarratives such as the “War on Terror”, for example, no single “text” can be identified as comprising the semiotic component of the story. Such narratives emerge from large numbers of different semiotic sources and are only drawn together into relatively coherent wholes in the minds of interpreters. On the basis that “we think only in signs” (Derrida
This has a number of implications. First, it implies that all narratives can at least in principle be subjected to formal analysis. While formal analysis of overtly semiotic narratives, and literature in particular, is both common and highly developed, the formal features of narratives are given less attention in more sociologically informed approaches, where greater focus is placed on the content and functions of narratives. The second implication is that all narratives are subject to the complex relationships between signifier and signified that is the basis of semiosis. This means, for example, that the meaning of the constituent signs of narratives is endlessly deferred and never finalised, since the signified of any sign can only ever be another sign (Derrida 1967/1976). It also means that all narratives are implicated in the complexities of intertextuality and can be viewed as “tissue[s] of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (Barthes 1977:146), since the signs employed are always embedded in intertextual relations with other instances of the same signs in different contexts with different meanings. Similarly, the abstract system of relations largely responsible for determining the meaning of signs, “langue” in Saussure’s terms, is always in a state of flux, preventing the signs which compose narratives from acquiring a stable meaning. As a consequence, coupled with the role of shifting relational networks of other narratives, the meanings of all narratives are dynamic. While narratives may produce meanings, there are limits to the extent to which narrative can reduce the flux of possible interpretations. It is important to emphasise that this is equally true of ephemeral and loosely textual metanarratives as it is of literature.

Although the three elements (cognitive, social and semiotic) can be separated for the purposes of exposition, it is important to remember that they do not, and cannot, exist independently of each other. Stories can only be experienced as mediated through an individual consciousness yet also

25 The extent to which narratives on social media can be described as “textual” is discussed in chapters three and six.
exist intersubjectively. Signs can exist independently of their interpretation but it is only when considered in relation to other signs that they become meaningful. Stories can exist solely in the mind of one individual but can never be free of the influence of other stories or separated from the inherently social system of signs used to encode them. One or more of these elements may be more dominant in certain stories than others, for example the semiotic element in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the social element in folk histories or the cognitive element in a story I produce to explain how a single shoe I find on the floor might have got there. Yet crucial to the approach employed here is that all three elements are common to all narratives and that stories are irreducibly complex phenomena incorporating interrelated elements of the individual, the social and the semiotic.

4 Features of narrative

The goal of the previous section was to explore the nature and functions of narrative, to analyse what narratives are and what narratives do. This section focuses more specifically on the features that distinguish narratives from other discursive forms. The following are a list of features common to all narratives, regardless of the context in which they appear, the medium used to express them, and whether they are presented as factual or fictional. The objectives here are to explain more clearly what it is that makes a story a story, further demonstrate the interaction between the three elements discussed above, and elaborate the way in which narratives function (in contrast to the functions of narrative which were discussed above). Many similar lists have been produced in the past with varying numbers of features – Bruner (1991), for example, cites ten features, Somers and Gibson (1994) four, and Fludernik (1996) just one. Due to limitations of space it is not possible to discuss all these features here. Instead, I have chosen to focus on those defining elements of

26 In Fludernik’s account narrativity is constituted by what she terms “experientiality, namely by the quasi-mimetic evocation of ‘real-life experience’” (Fludernik 1996:12), an issue that does not feature in either Bruner’s or Somers and Gibson’s accounts.
narrative which are of particular relevance to the data analysed here and the post-2011 Egyptian context.

4.1 Relationality

The term “Relationality” refers to the idea that meaning in narratives is the product of the way in which stories and parts of stories relate to each other, rather than an intrinsic property of individual events or happenings. Changes to any part of a story therefore have implications for the meaning of all other parts of the story. For example, the significance of a person’s decision to drive while inebriated is quite different in the event of their getting home safely and in the event of their accidentally injuring a pedestrian. In each case, the decision to drive while drunk is the same. Yet the different consequences result in the significance of that decision being interpreted quite differently in each case. In these kinds of fabricated examples with very simple narratives comprised of few elements and viewed in isolation, the relational networks that determine meaning are easy to track. The stories we come across in our daily lives, however, are frequently more complex, and it is more challenging to comprehend and describe the networks that define them. Historical narratives, such as those of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and its aftermath, often include large numbers of elements, resulting in complex internal relational networks. Changing any single part will invariably have an impact on the significance of all the other elements as well as subtly changing the way in which those elements are understood to exist on an ontological level. Definitively stating such changes with any precision is difficult if not impossible, however, owing to the variation between different interpretations.

27 See Thomas Nagel’s ‘Moral Luck’ (1979) for further discussion of this issue in the context of ethics. Nagel explores in some detail the extent to which the consequences of an action can legitimately be considered relevant to the ethical assessment of that action, concluding that the fact that as humans we always do consider the consequences of actions when appraising makes it misguided to attempt to assess actions purely in isolation, i.e. not in the context of the broader sequences of events (narratives) in which they are embedded.
These relational networks appear more complex still when we consider that relationality extends beyond the limits of individual narratives. This affects both the significance of elements within narratives, as well as the meaning of whole narratives. The story of the clearing of the Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares in August 2013 promoted by the EM, for example, sets a series of events into a particular set of relations which shapes the meaning of those events. Yet the significance of the clearing of the protests within the Military’s account is also powerfully affected by seemingly distinct narratives of the aftermath of popular uprisings in other Arab countries, notably Syria, where peaceful protests were ultimately replaced by violence and a collapse of law and order. In this case relationships beyond this particular account of the clearing of the protests have as significant an impact on its meaning as do the relationships internal to the narrative. These networks of relationships within and across narratives are so complex, and dependent on individual and collective interpretation, that they can never be described “objectively” or definitively. The concept of relationality is however vital for understanding how meaning is produced through narratives on a basic level and how narratives shape the way in which we experience the world as humans, even if it raises significant analytical challenges.

4.2 Narrative emplotment

A second key feature of narratives is that they are created, rather than discovered, to set events into relationships with each other. The basic assumption is that the world does not come to us in coherent narrative form but must be actively given such a form as we seek to make sense of it. Narratives do not inhere in events – rather, a “narrative is a structure imposed upon events, grouping some of them together with others, and ruling some out” (Danto 1965:132). Through an examination of attempts to represent the Nazi holocaust in narrative form, Hayden White demonstrates that there can be no events which permit only a single manner of telling, arguing that

28 The process of setting events into relationships with each other is viewed by Dray (1971), Brooks (1984) and Somers (1994) as the defining characteristic of narrative.
“we can only suggest that the number of stories that can reasonably be told about the final solution, for example, is limited if we suppose that the events themselves have a “story” kind of form and a “plot” kind of meaning” (White 2001:377). The idea that narratives inhere in events, or at least that certain narratives inhere within certain events, is however a recurring one, especially in situations of political or social conflict. In the case of the narrative conflict between the MB and the EM preceding and following 3 July 2013, for example, each side did not simply argue in favour of a different story of what had happened. Rather, both sides attempted to portray their own accounts as unmediated representations of “reality”, based on unquestionable “facts” about which only one explanatory story could reasonably be told.

If we accept that stories do not inhere in events, the constructedness of narratives that explain “raw” perceptions of the world is apparent. An active process of emplotment is also required, however, when cognitively realising stories where the process of narrative construction is already apparently complete, for example when we read or are told a story. A key reason for this is the ubiquitous presence of “gaps” (Iser 1972/74) since no story presented through a semiotic medium can be “whole” in the sense of containing all the information required for it to be realised in the minds of its receivers. The concept of the gap is often exploited for rhetorical or poetic effect in literature, where seemingly important information may be deliberately withheld, but is unavoidable even where authors seek to minimise the presence of gaps, for example in academic historical works. Since no stories are “whole” in this sense, “all [stories] require some interpretative action from the auditor; they call for completion” (Kermode 1979:24) as readers fill in “spots of indeterminacy” (Ingarden 1931/73) by “overreading” and attempting to fill any “narrative vacuums” (Abbott 2002). Moreover, the complexities of the signifier-signified relationship mean that our understanding of the events and relationships directly expressed in stories is also greatly unstable.

29 As phenomenologists including Husserl (1964) and Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) argue this process of gap filling is common to all perception as that which can be perceived must be constantly reconciled with what cannot be directly perceived.
Interpretive action is thus required from readers, not only to determine the relationships between the constituent events of stories where such information is not provided, but also to determine what events are on an ontological level. No narratives can therefore be simply passively consumed, and interpreters cannot avoid an active, creative role even when presented with a seemingly complete story.

4.3 Causal emplotment

Of the types of relationship found in stories, causal relationships\(^{30}\) are frequently regarded the most important.\(^{31}\) The reason for this is that it is causal relationships\(^{32}\) that give narratives their great explanatory power by allowing us to understand the “contribution and influence on a specified outcome” of given events (Polkinghorne 1995:5). Knowing, for example, that strike action by textile workers in el-Mahalla el-Kubra in 2008 was preceded by the launch of the Cairo based *Kefaya* democracy in 2004 and protests across Egypt in support of the Palestinian Intifada in 2000 tells us little about either the significance of each event in its own right, nor about how the events relate to each other, despite setting them in clear temporal and spatial relationships. It is only when causal relationships are specified or implied, and lists of events\(^{33}\) become narratives, that it becomes possible to interpret their significance in this context. In his attempt to understand the evolution of the protest movement in Egypt during the 2000s, for example, Joel Beinin argues the following:

> Workers’ struggles which followed the apparent demise of the pro-democracy movement have an organic connection with the latter [...] Though not fully

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\(^{30}\) Bevir highlights that the concept of “causality” employed in this context is quite different to that employed in the hard sciences, with narrative causality being based on a “folk psychology using criteria of rationality” rather than the scientific concept of causation which “ascribe[s] properties to physical objects without reference to criteria of rationality” (Bevir 2000:12).

\(^{31}\) Scholars adopting this perspective include Dray (1971), Todorov (1980), Somers & Gibson (1994), Cronon (1992), Gould (1992), Abbott (2002), and Richardson (1997). Others argue that causality is not necessary, (e.g. Sternberg 2011), or strongly emphasise, for example, spatial relations as equally significant (de Certeau 1984).

\(^{32}\) Gallie refines this point, arguing that events in a story need not be directly causally linked provided that they constitute necessary conditions for other events (Gallie 1964 cited in Dray 1971:167).

\(^{33}\) Such lists of events are termed “chronicles” by philosophers of history (White 1980; Walsh 1958; Danto 1985; Croce 1959). The issue of chronicles and narratives is discussed in more detail in specific relation to Twitter in chapter three.
successful, [Kifaya] deepened collaboration amongst oppositional actors and strengthened politics from below, introducing tactics that have been taken up by others to great effect (Beinin 2009:101).

Beinin suggests that the significance of the apparently unsuccessful pro-democracy movement of the early 2000s lies not in what it achieved at the time, but in its relationship to the more successful labour protest movement of the latter end of the decade which it is presented as facilitating.

It should be noted that the nature of causal relationships in narratives is often left implicit. As Fleischman (1990:132) argues, “we are willing to fill in the temporal—and causal—gaps on the assumption that there is cohesion, even when it has not been explicitly (formally) demonstrated”. In many cases, this seems to reflect a general preference for economy in language, perhaps reflecting Grice’s famous “maxim of manner” (Grice 1975). In most storytelling environments it would be cumbersome, unnecessary and ultimately impossible, to explicitly state the causal links between all the events that form the stories we tell. In certain cases, however, the relationships between different elements of narratives are deliberately left implicit. Where the motive is rhetorical, storytellers may choose to leave causal relationships implicit, and thus require that the receiver “fills in” the missing details to actively engage the reader in the co-construction of the story. This may be to avoid making contentious claims directly, while also potentially increasing the rhetorical impact on the receiver in the manner of an Aristotelian enthymeme (Hauser 1986:76).

Alternatively, the nature of relationships between different elements of narratives may be left deliberately ambiguous, resulting in uncertainty as to whether the producer of the narrative intends the receiver to interpret a causal or simply temporal relationship. In an article published in The Guardian on 16 March 2014, Yahia Hamed, a former minister in the FJP government that ruled Egypt from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013, made the following argument:

34 Stories told in courtrooms may represent a partial exception to this, where a far greater degree of explicitness may be demanded than is seen in other environments, although true “completeness” remains impossible.
Many Egyptians have been demonstrating peacefully for the restoration of legitimate rule. Government employees have been in open revolt for weeks over the government’s failure to fulfil its promise for 6 million workers to have the minimum wage. Textile workers have been on strike, and in Cairo, public transport came to a complete halt recently when 38,000 bus drivers went on strike. (Hamed 2014)

This passage involves a blend of explicitly and implicitly stated causal emplotment. On the one hand, it is overtly stated that government employees have been protesting as a result of “the government’s failure to fulfil its promise for 6 million workers to have the minimum wage”. On the other hand, although the temporal relationship between the Military’s coming to power and the strikes by textile workers and Cairo’s bus drivers is clear, the causal relationship between these events is left unspecified. This may reflect the motives of economy and enthnymeme-like audience involvement, but may also reflect an active choice by Mr Hamed to stop short of explicitly blaming the Military government for the strikes. This example demonstrates that although causal relationships are central to the creation of meaning in stories, and one of the key criteria of narrativity, ambiguous causal relations are also one of the main sources of dynamism in terms of the significance of stories.

4.4 Selective appropriation

Human experience is so vast and varied that it is impossible to include all the details of a given experience in any story.35 Baker (2006:71) argues that “to elaborate a coherent narrative, it is inevitable that some elements of experience are excluded and others privileged” while Brooks (1984:13) similarly asserts that “any narrative presents a selection and an ordering of material”. This makes a process of “selective appropriation”, selecting what will and will not feature in the stories we tell ourselves and others, a central and unavoidable part of narrative production. Clearly, the process of selective appropriation has a significant impact on the shape and meanings of narratives.

35 Gould (2002:57) argues that this process is strongly influenced by “canonical stories”, culturally specific story skeletons which can be used to structure specific accounts of events
when considered along with the other principles discussed here. The basic content of a narrative, in terms of which events or details are included or excluded, has a substantial impact on the relational networks that ultimately determine the meaning of those events in the context of the narrative.

For example, on 25 February 2014 an article was published on the MB’s English language website entitled “Military Trials Against Journalists Continue in Egypt” (Ikhwanweb 2014). It criticised, amongst other things, the practice of trying civilians in military courts and emphasising loss of press freedom since the 3 July “coup”. The “World Report 2014: Egypt” published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), on the other hand, similarly criticises the prevalence of military trials under the post 3 June government but also criticises the prevalence of military trials for civilians during the Morsi presidency. In both these narratives, military trials for civilians under the Military regime are presented in a negative light. But, differences in the relational networks in which the trials are embedded in each narrative, resulting largely from differences in patterns of selective appropriation, produce quite different meanings in each case. In the MB account, the implication is that the Military regime’s actions represent a return to Mubarak-era policies which had temporarily halted under the Brotherhood regime. In the HRW account, military trials are presented as a constant of Egyptian political life that changed little under the Brotherhood government.

The process of selective appropriation is guided by a complex range of conscious and apparently subconscious factors. On one level, selective appropriation is always governed to a certain extent by a conscious desire to tell a specific story. In the examples cited above, it seems likely that the MB writer did not wish to include details of human rights abuses under the Morsi regime so as to emphasise the difference between that regime and the one that followed. Similarly, the HRW writer may have chosen to emphasise problems under both Morsi and the Military leadership to demonstrate that the human rights situation changed little for ordinary Egyptians in the period following the 2011 Revolution, despite change in the governing regime. On another level, selective appropriation is guided by more subconscious schema determining what should and should not be
considered as “tellable” (Ochs and Capps 2002) and “relevant” (Dray 1971). White, referring to the decision of a medieval annalist to record the battle of Poitiers but not the battle of Tours “which, as every schoolboy knows, was one of the ‘ten great battles of world history’”, argues that modern historians have a “tendency to rank events in the record hierarchically from within a perspective that is culture-specific, not universal at all” (White 1980:11). White’s argument shows that it is impossible to identify a universal system determining appropriate selective appropriation in narratives, as all such systems are temporally and culturally specific. Yet neither can we suggest that selective appropriation is always a conscious, goal oriented process owing to the influence of “culture-specific schemes” which operate above the level of the individual.

4.5 Temporal and spatial specificity

There are two key components to temporal and spatial specificity in narrative. First, narratives deal with occurrences taking place in specific times and places. Narrative can therefore be contrasted with what has been variously termed the “logico-mathematical” (Polkinghorne 1988), “theoretical” (Mink 1970) or “paradigmatic” (Bruner 1986) mode which “searches for universal truth conditions” (Polkinghorne 1988:17). As Mink explains:

> On the one hand we have all the occurrences of the world in their concrete particularity, on the other we have an ideally theoretical understanding of those occurrences that would treat each as nothing other than a replicable instance of a systematically interconnected set of generalisations. (Mink 2001:213/214)

The MB account of human rights abuses under the post 3 July Military government cited above, for example, can be recognised as a narrative in part because it expresses temporal and spatial specificity. We see for example the following: “violations inside places of detention – especially assaults on and rapes of minors in detention – were clearly systematic, using the same identical methods and mechanisms” (Ikhwanweb 2014). In this extract brutal treatment during detention is positioned within the abstract category of “violations” but readers are called upon to comprehend specific violations happening in specific places. Although temporal and spatial details need not be
explicitly provided in stories, a story cannot be a story without at least implying that its constituent events took place in a particular order and in specific locations. As Brooks, following Genette, notes “one cannot tell a story without indications of the time of telling in relation to the told: the use of verb tenses, and their relation to one another, necessarily gives us a certain temporal place in relation to the story” (Brooks 1984:21).

The second major element of temporal and spatial specificity in narrative is that stories are also always told and received within “particular historical, institutional, and interactional contexts” (Ewick and Silbey 1995:206). These contexts greatly influence the way that stories are produced and received, and the meanings that they come to adopt for their interpreters. Interpretation involves establishing connections with other stories, but also producing interpretations of the goals and intentions of storytellers. Our understanding of such objectives allows us to account for the specific characteristics of the story told and make an appraisal of their meaning within the context of its telling (Herman 2009).36 This situatedness is crucial to any study of storytelling in the context of the 30 June protests, 3 July ouster and 14 August clearance of protestors in Egypt given the huge influence of the social and political conditions within which such stories were told.

4.6 Narrative wholeness

A final criterion of narrativity is “wholeness”, that is to say that it must always be possible to view a narrative as constituting some kind of “whole” to which reference can be made when interpreting its parts.37 Although related to the notion of relationality, the criterion of narrative wholeness goes further by demanding that the constituent elements of stories together constitute a bounded and

36 The embrace of the importance of the contexts in which stories are told and received by later narratologists such as Herman represents a strong break with the strict New Criticism inspired textualism of the early narratologists.

37 This does not mean that narratives must offer decisive “closure”, which Carroll describes as “recurring, though scarcely invariant” (2007:1)
limited unit. By enabling at least a loose appreciation of what does and does not belong within a particular narrative, this facilitates interpretation. Charles Taylor makes the following argument:

We are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; and yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others, and ultimately of the whole. (Taylor cited in Bruner 1991:8)

White similarly describes a narrative as “a structure of relationships by which the events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole” (White 1980:13). This whole “governs” its individual expressions (Ricoeur 1980:171). The “whole” in question, however, need not be clearly defined and the resulting integration may remain provisional (Ochs and Capps 2002); as Bruner argues, “the accounts of protagonists and events that constitute a narrative are selected and shaped in terms of a putative story or plot that ‘contains’ and contextualises them” (Bruner 1991:8).

Although, following Aristotle in the Poetics, we can say that “a whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end”, not all these elements need to be explicitly stated in the stories that we hear and present to others. The technique of beginning stories in medias res, which Kermode (1966) argues to be the norm for the stories we tell to make sense of our lives, for example, omits the “beginning” of the narrative. This requires receivers to fill in the missing information so as to construct a functional whole in their mental realisation of the story as a whole, from which they can interpret the significance of the other elements presented in the story. This suggests that wholeness is a product of the interpretive process, imposed by readers rather than a property of texts themselves (Abbott 2002:94). The ends imposed by readers are particularly significant in this regard, due to the impact of conclusions in shaping the overall meanings of stories. The MB account

38 Aristotle, Benjamin (2006), Kermode (1966) and Burke (1950) have all argued that “ends” play a particularly important role in shaping the ultimate meaning of narratives.
discussed above could be seen as omitting the “end” of the story it tells in that it does not explicitly
discuss what kind of country Egypt will become in the future. The “end” furnished by the reader will
have a great impact on the meaning that other events in the story come to take.

If we accept that the “whole” of a narrative can extend far beyond the boundaries of the physically
manifested semiotic aspect of a narrative, it becomes impossible to define the boundaries of any
narrative. This is particularly true in the case of diffuse narratives, such as those of the 2011 Egyptian
Revolution. The edges of stories are porous and fluid, differing according to individual
interpretations and social contexts. Barthes’ notion of viewing narratives as a loosely bounded
“texture” is useful here as it presents stories as the coming together and blending of diverse
elements without obvious boundaries rather than as clearly unified wholes. Abbott similarly
describes narratives as “part of an immense, unfolding (and hence ever changing) tapestry”
(2002:94). While intertextuality means that there is “nothing outside the text” and there is “never a
whole of the text” (Barthes 1973/74:6), it is necessary to impose a degree of “synthetic unity” (Dray
1971:169)\(^{39}\) for interpretation to be possible, even if that unity is only ever partial and temporary,
creating a constant tension between openness and fluidity on the one hand and closure and fixity on
the other. Readers must have a (putative) whole to which they can make reference during
interpretation, but that whole need not remain the same from one moment to the next.

5 Analysing narrative form

In the preceding section I elaborated the understanding of narrative to be employed in this thesis,
focusing on the nature and functions of narrative and the conditions for narrativity, as the concept is
being used here. In this section, the focus is shifted to formal analytical tools, principally developed
within literary narratology, and on how these tools can be brought to bear on the broad conception
of narrative advanced in the first section. There are three main justifications for introducing these

\[^{39}\text{Dray emphasises that this unity is “the conclusion of a narrative inquiry, not its precondition” (1971:170).}\]
additional concepts. First, the semiotic element of a narrative is the only part that can be directly studied. As Genette has argued, speaking about the analysis of literature, “it is evident ... [that] the level of narrative discourse is the only one directly available to textual analysis, which is itself the only instrument of examination at our disposal in the field of literary narrative” (Genette 1972/80:27). The significance of the semiotic component, however, is visible principally on the cognitive and social levels, since it is here that meaning is produced. The semiotic component is thus the most amenable to study, but it is on the semiotic and social levels that the significance of semiotic differences is to be found.

The second justification is that many of the established tools developed by narratologists for the analysis of literary narrative can be usefully applied to other types of narrative to offer nuanced analyses and deliver detailed insights into the structural similarities and differences between types of narrative. It seems clear that both the socio-narrative and narratological strands of narrative analysis can be enriched by an approach combining elements of both traditions (c.f. Harding 2009:58). The third is that, if the previous sections have emphasised the mutability and dynamism of narratives as they come to exist in the minds of readers, it is the way in which stories are told, their formal presentation, that acts most strongly to constrain such dynamism, promoting particular interpretations as more valid than others. It is these formal factors that allow narratives to facilitate communication, rather than merely acting as prompts for free interpretation since “if communication between text and reader is to be successful, clearly the reader’s activity must also be controlled in some way by the text” (Iser 1980:110). Analysing the features which control

40 The other major constraining factor is the influence of intersubjective codes and conventions upon which readers draw during the process of interpretation (Eco 1979; Culler 1975; Rabinowitz 1987; Barthes 1973/74; Genette 1987/97). Such codes and conventions are highly significant, especially in multilingual contexts where different readers belong to very different interpretive communities (Fish 1980) and may thus draw on very different sets of intersubjective codes. A detailed consideration of this element is however beyond the scope of the present study.
interpretation allows for a focus on the elements of interpretation likely to be common to many interpretations, without denying narrative’s intrinsic dynamism.

Three sets of key concepts are discussed in the following section and subsequently deployed in the analytical chapters: authorship; readership and the distinction between text, fabula and sjuzhet. If the concepts discussed in the first section were held to be common to all narratives, the goal in this section is to demonstrate the importance of form in all narratives and the value of a focus on formal characteristics. I argue that considering the related concepts of authorship and the implied author, in relation to stories that have no clear “author”, provides insights into the origins of narrative and into the anchor points that restrict the flow of meaning in such narratives. I also argue that the reader has a central role in realising the textual narratives with which they are presented and an influence on the form that they come to take. Finally, I argue that the structural concepts of “text”, “fabula” and “sjuzhet” provide a useful structure for studying the presentation of events in all narratives, including those on Twitter, and mitigates the problems with attempting to reduce stories to abstracted event sequences.

5.1 Factual and fictional narratives

Before continuing, it is necessary to briefly consider the differences between “factual” and “fictional” narratives. For the purposes of this study, these two types of narrative are considered as largely analogous and as similar in significant ways, notably in that both factual and fictional narratives exhibit all the features of narrativity discussed above. Additionally, as argued above, “factual” narratives do not transparently reflect reality any more than fictional ones. According to the constructivist narrative ontology adopted here, both “factual” and “fictional” narratives are involved in a process of world creation, that is to say that they create diegetic “storyworlds”. As Herman argues, the “storyworld” is:

The world evoked implicitly as well as explicitly by a narrative, whether that narrative takes the form of a printed text, film, graphic novel, sign language, everyday conversation, or even a tale that is projected but never actualized as a concrete
artefact – for example, stories about ourselves that we contemplate telling to friends but then do not (Herman 2009:106)

Moreover, the process of narrative construction is broadly similar, whether the referents of the story are “real” or “fictional”, as many of the same poetic, rhetorical and storytelling techniques are employed for storytelling in both cases (c.f. Genette 1990). As White argues:

Novelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process... historians must utilize precisely the same tropological strategies, the same modalities of representing relationships in words, that the poet or novelist uses (White 1978:125)

Following the cognitive approach adopted in this thesis, the key distinction between “factual” and “fictional” narratives relates to the way in which they are received, rather than to the intrinsic properties of the narratives themselves (c.f. Herman 2013:46). In early 2011, for example, a blog entitled “Gay Girl in Damascus” supposedly describing the daily struggles of a lesbian girl living in Damascus during the early stages of the Syrian uprising, gained a significant amount of attention in the western media (e.g. The Guardian 2011; Feministing.com 2011; thewire.com 2011). On 12 June of the same year, it was revealed that this blog was in fact written by a heterosexual, male, American PhD student based in Edinburgh (BBC 2011). Nothing about the story told on the blog changed between the revelation that it was “fictional” rather than “real”, only the attitude of readers towards it. The storyworld evoked by the narrative was the same before and after, however for readers, it ceased to be a mimetic representation of “reality” and became a diegetic creation of an alternative reality when its origin was revealed, although the signs actually appearing on the page

41 The presence of the poetic within apparently purely rhetorical discourses has been demonstrated by Burke (1950) while the importance of rhetoric within the poetic is explored by Booth in his seminal *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).

42 This is not to suggest that the nature of reference is exactly the same with “factual” and “fictional” narratives, nor that there is no difference between fact and fiction (see Ryan 2013 for an overview on the principle of reference in fictional writing from a possible worlds perspective).

43 e.g. *The Guardian* (Marsh 2011); *Feministing.com* (Truitt 2011) and *The Wire* (Friedman 2011).
remained the same. As Genette argues, “what counts here is the official status of the text and its reading horizon” (1990:757) rather than the intrinsic properties of the narrative itself.

5.2 The author

This section explores two main issues: the extent to which the concept of authorship retains utility with reference to the broad conception of narrative elaborated above and the importance of distinguishing between real and implied authors. Chapter three offers a discussion of authorship on Twitter, and chapter four an analysis of authorship in the dataset.

5.2.1 Narrative and authorship

The signs, chosen by the author to be spoken aloud, appear on a page or be expressed in any visual, musical or other form, represent only part of the semiotic element of a story, itself only one of the three main aspects of a narrative. An author may select the signs that will be presented to a receiver, but cannot totally control how the story they are supposed to embody will be constituted in the mind of the receiver, how that receiver will fill in the “gaps”, or how the interpretation of those signs in the mind of the reader, listener or viewer will interact with other narratives. Moreover, authors do not control the meaning of the signs they choose to include in the stories they tell. As was argued above, the meaning of signs derives to a great extent from their positions within the ever-shifting system of language and from how they connect intertextually to past, present and future uses of language in other contexts (Bakhtin and Volosinov 1931/94). Although authors can exploit knowledge of these systems to produce particular effects, both are beyond their control. This again has implications for multilingual contexts involving translation where words with broadly similar histories of use may fit into very different positions in language-specific systems or may have similar structural positions but very different histories of actual use. The authors of narratives as understood here, then, are far from the omnipotent “author-gods” famously decried by Barthes (1977).
Yet authors do exert significant influence over the narratives that are elaborated by readers in response to the texts that they produce. As Genette has argued, “story [a meaningful narrative in the mind of the receiver]…exist[s] … only by means of the intermediary of the narrative [signs]” (Genette 1972/80:29). These signs, chosen by authors, are therefore extremely important. Although receivers retain freedom in the interpretation of the stories with which they come into contact, they are always guided and constrained by the signs presented to them as the semiotic manifestation of the story and the intersubjective codes, conventions and intertextual networks that guide their interpretations (Rabinowitz 1987:23/4). There can be no completely “open” (Eco 1979) or “writerly” (Barthes 1973/74) text in which readers retain complete freedom of interpretation. Even complex literary narratives which seem to make few concessions to clarity cannot simply be interpreted however readers desire. In Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, for example, different readers might contest the symbolism of Kurtz’s shadowy existence in the Congo, but few would argue that the novel had nothing to do with the issues of colonialism and the continent of Africa. The author’s role is therefore not to fill the text with meaning, but to make it possible for readers to produce meaning (Culler 1975:117), using storytelling techniques to influence what meaning is produced (Bruner 1991).

The second important point is that although authors do not fill texts with meaning, the concept of the author has a powerful influence on textual interpretation due to a “basic human propensity to read for intentions” (Herman 2013:25). Terming this the “author function”, Foucault argues that the concept of the author allows for “a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations” (Foucault 1969/2003:390), functioning as one method for “creating order out of

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44 This is particularly true with narratives on social media, as discussed in chapter three.
chaos” in narrative (Abbott 2002:95) through the ascription of intentions to authors. This allows readers to discard interpretations which contradict their perceptions of the author’s intentions, cutting down the range of possible interpretations. As Foucault argues:

the author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not precede the work; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction (Foucault 1969/2003:390)

Foucault’s argument is that although authors do not fill the stories they tell with meaning, the concept of the author constrains the interpretation of narratives by implying that there is ultimately a correct interpretation, that of the author. Foucault considers that this concept is culturally, temporally and discursively specific, arguing that “the author function does not affect all discourses in a universal and constant way” (Foucault 1969/2003:383). The concept of the author, for example, might be considered crucial by some for understanding literary texts, and comparatively unimportant when interpreting a scientific article. It is important to emphasise that the “author” to which the author function refers is the reader’s impression of the author, termed the “implied author” in narratology (Booth 1961), rather than the real, flesh-and-blood author. This conception of the author is produced by readers in response to narratives and to paratextual material (Genette 1987/97). It is therefore the hypothetical intentions ascribed to authors by readers that are significant in interpretation, rather than the genuine intentions of writers which may or may not coincide with the impression received by the reader.

Consideration of the author, authorial control and the implied author can enrich the analysis of almost all narratives. With regard to narratives where the semiotic element is physically manifested, 45

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45 For the author-function to be operational, interpreters must read “intentionally”, in the sense of allowing their interpretation to be guided by a sense of authorial intent. Although they need not necessarily do this, they are likely to do so on the basis that this is “the way we usually behave when we interpret: that is, we usually assume that a narrative, like a sentence, comes from someone bent on communicating” (Abbott 2002:95)
i.e. written, spoken aloud, expressed with images, etc., the concepts discussed above can be applied almost directly. When making sense of the MB article about human rights abuses discussed above, for example, reader perceptions of the author are likely to play a significant role in shaping interpretation. Readers with pre-existing impressions of the MB as rejecting responsibility for Egypt’s problems during the Morsi era, for example, would begin the interpretive process with an idea of the likely objectives of the writer and therefore also of the article. This might lead them to reject any interpretation of the story acknowledging MB culpability for Egypt’s difficulties at the time as contrary to the intentions of the author. That reader perceptions of authorial intent, which may or may not accord with the author’s real intentions, play a role in the interpretation of such narratives testifies to the importance of the author function in such cases.

The same principles can also be usefully applied to more diffuse narratives, such as those which primarily exist intersubjectively. Unlike stories with obvious semiotic manifestations, authorship with such narratives is often only vaguely specified, if at all. The influential “war on terror” (WoT) narrative, for example, has no clearly specified author; as with other metanarratives, its supporters imply that the narrative was never constructed and is simply a transparent representation of reality. Emphasising its authored-ness, and narrative nature, on the other hand, has been an important tool for its opponents (e.g. Shabi 2013; Zalman and Clarke 2009; Ahmed 2015). This highlights the extent to which the question of authorship is tied into political concerns where a common strategy for challenging the legitimacy of narratives is to emphasise their authorship by an individual or group. “True” narratives, on the other hand, are frequently promoted as transparent representations of “facts” and as existing independently of their having been authored.46 The process of authoring such narratives is however complex. The narrative of the WoT, for example, does not consist of only one clearly defined set of signs, chosen by an individual but is, rather, comprised of a more loosely

46 This is closely related to the notion of stories inhering within events, discussed in the section “narrative emplotment”.

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defined discourse with many different authors, from which a relatively structured, if somewhat nebulous, narrative can be drawn through the process of interpretation. Authorial control is thus weaker with such narratives, and they are subsequently more “open” than many other non-fiction narratives, leaving readers greater freedom of interpretation. The resulting flexibility and elasticity may be one reason why metanarratives frequently prove so durable and capable of transforming to adapt to changing circumstances and contexts.

Despite the fact that it is frequently impossible to identify the specific author(s) of social narratives, the concepts of the author function and implied author retain utility. When hearing a narrative such as that of the Egyptian Army saving the Jan 25 Revolution by removing Morsi, our interpretations continue to be shaped by our perceptions of the producers of the narrative, and our understanding of their goals and relations to other actors. In other words, the author function continues to influence interpretation; interpretation continues to be guided by a perception of authorial intention, even if it is impossible to specify who the author is. In such contexts, where real authors are difficult or impossible to identify, the implied author, produced from the narrative itself, becomes even more important, even if different readers are likely to produce quite different understandings of authors due to differing interpretations of texts themselves. As Chatman argues:

There is always an implied author, though there might not be a single real author in the ordinary sense: the narrative may have been composed by committee (Hollywood films), by a disparate group of people over a long period of time (many folk ballads), by random-number generation by a computer, or whatever (Chatman 1978:179)

5.3 The reader

Whether a story is used to persuade, provoke an aesthetic reaction, create or reinforce social bonds, or relate personal experience, there must always be an audience for this to be possible, even if, in the case of purely mental narratives, the author and audience coincide. When reading or hearing
stories, we often have minimal extratextual information as to who the real or intended readers of the text are. This results in a reliance on the image of the intended reader presented within texts themselves – the “implied reader”. While the real reader of a text is the person who actually reads it, the implied reader is the version of the reader implied by the text itself (Chatman 1978:150), the persona or subject position to which real readers are “invited to conform” (Davis and Harré 1990:46) in order to interpret the text:

It is not, after all, only an image of himself that the author creates. Every stroke implying his second self will help to mould the reader into the kind of person suited to appreciate such a character and the book he is writing (Booth 1961/1983:89)

Iser similarly contends that “no matter who or what he may be, the real reader is always offered a particular role to play, and it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader” (Iser 1976/78:35), echoing similar arguments by Gibson (1980:1) and Ong (1975:17). The implied reader is thus a subject position implied by the text which the reader is invited to, and must, occupy in order to understand and make sense of it (Booth 1961:137/8; Chatman 1978:150). When reading, “we assume, for the sake of the experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away” (Gibson 1980:1).

Readers’ impressions of the identity and characteristics of implied readers strongly influence interpretation, legitimising certain interpretations and delegitimising others (Todorov 1980:77; Davis and Harré 1990:51; Rabinowitz 1987; Lotman 1982:81; Phelan 1996). It is significant that readers need not wholly surrender themselves to the role implied in the texts that they read (Booth 1961:138). Yet, even if as readers we do not, even temporarily, wholly adopt the attitudes implied by texts, we continue to refer to this implied position during the process of interpretation (Iser

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47 This issue has also been extensively discussed in rhetorical theory. See Black (1970) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969).
48 Abbott (2002) highlights the possibility of entirely rejecting the offered subject position and engaging in “oppositional” reading from an entirely different perspective. Similar ideas are discussed in Richardson (1997), Fetterley (1978) and Peterson (1987)
The implied reader therefore represents a major element in the configuration of factors controlling the meanings readers produce from texts and determining which texts readers find acceptable, convincing and believable, regardless of the logic or facts of the stories they tell and the arguments they make.

The concept of the implied reader is equally applicable to overtly fictional and non-fictional narratives. The same reader, for example, might read Cervantes’ *Don Quijote* and Santos’ *Los Bravos* (1967) yet the reader implied in each novel is quite different – *Don Quijote* implies a 17th century Spanish reader with extensive cultural knowledge through its frequent jokes and allusions to fashions and movements of the time of its writing while *Los Bravos* implies a reader firmly embedded in the traumatic experience of post-civil-war Spain. The same reader can adopt the implicit positions offered in each novel in order to facilitate their reading in both works. Similarly, although a single reader might read articles on inequality in both *The New Statesman* and *The Economist*, in each case the reader implied would likely differ substantially in terms of personal outlook and ideology, requiring the reader to position themselves quite differently in each case. This is equally applicable to less clearly bounded and more abstract social narratives. Narratives of a united Egypt working together to fight terrorism, for example, imply a nationalist and militarist reader even though the real readership will almost certainly also include the “terrorists” themselves, as well as other Egyptians who oppose terrorism while rejecting the reader role offered to them in the narrative. In such narratives, diverse real readers are still cast into specific roles offered to them by the texts themselves, which influence the way in which they interpret them.

5.4 Text, sjuzhet and fabula

Central to much narratological discussion, although largely absent in socio-narrative theory, is a distinction between the story as it is told, and the chronological sequence of events upon which this story is based, abstracted from the manner of their expression. Many terms have been employed to refer to these concepts, including “mythos” and “logos” (Aristotle in the *Poetics*), “récit” and
“histoire” (Genette 1972/1980), “story” and “discourse” (Chatman 1978) and “sjuzhet” and “fabula” (Propp 1928/1968), resulting in considerable terminological confusion. To avoid overloading existing terms with multiple meanings, the final pair are used in this study. Following Mieke Bal, a third term, “text”, is also used to refer to the narrative’s constituent signs prior to their interpretation (Bal 1997:5), resulting in a three-layer model. Although these layers can be distinguished for analytical purposes, as with the cognitive, social and semiotic aspects of narrative discussed through this chapter, “this does not mean that these layers “exist” independently of one another” (Bal 1997:78).

To be comprehensible a fabula must be embodied in a sjuzhet, which may or may not present events in the order in which they are implied to have occurred, which must in turn be manifested in a text consisting of signs of some sort.49

The differences between the levels are best illustrated with an example. On 26 September 2014, an article was published in The Guardian with the headline “Tony Abbott and Barack Obama raise Peter Greste case with Egypt’s president” (The Guardian 2014). The text of this narrative consists of the linguistic signs appearing on the page in addition to the photograph accompanying it, prior to their interpretation. The sjuzhet consists of the signs which comprised the text after their interpretation. As the sjuzhet is the product of an interpretive process, unlike the text, it is impossible to definitively describe the sjuzhet of any narrative. The sjuzhet of this narrative presents a series of events in the following order: Tony Abbott and Barack Obama have spoken to President el-Sisi about the imprisoned journalist Peter Greste; earlier in the week Greste’s parents called on Obama to discuss the issue with el-Sisi; Greste and two of his al-Jazeera colleagues have been in prison in Egypt since December 2013; all three journalists received long prison sentences; Obama told el-Sisi that the journalists should be freed; Obama’s deputy national security advisor provided details about the conversation after the meeting to reporters. Although this sjuzhet does not present events in

49 A “text” can be comprised of any kind of signs. They need not be linguistic (c.f. Bal 1997:4).
chronological order, it is possible to produce a chronological account (the fabula) based on the
sjuzhet. The fabula, then, which cannot be definitively stated for the same reasons as the sjuzhet, is
something like: in December 2013 three al-Jazeera journalists were imprisoned in Egypt; they have
been in prison since then; Peter Greste’s family called on Obama to discuss the issue with el-Sisi;
Obama and Tony Abbott discussed the issue with el-Sisi; Obama’s deputy national security advisor
provided details about the conversation.

Central to some theories of text, fabula and sjuzhet has been the idea that it is possible for two
sjuzhets, embodied using different signs, to refer to the ‘same’ fabula. In his influential Story and
Discourse, Chatman makes the following argument:

> Narrative discourse [the sjuzhet] consists of a connected sequence of narrative
> statements, where “statement” is quite independent of the particular expressive
> medium. It includes dance statement, linguistic statement, graphic statement, and
> so on... “Narrative statement” and “to state narratively” are used here as technical
> terms for any expression of a narrative element viewed independently of its
> manifesting substance (Chatman 1978:31).

This suggests that narrative can almost function as a (universal) language in its own right, an
argument that breaks down because “narrative appears always to depend on some other language
code in the creation of its meanings” (Brooks 1984:4). No story can be abstracted to a level that is
“independent of the particular expressive medium” since it is impossible to comprehend or discuss a
fabula without employing signs of some kind.

The impossibility of medium-independent fabulae is most apparent in cases of interlingual
translation. Following Chatman’s approach, a novel such as Naguib Mahfouz’s اولاد حرتنا (1959) and
its English translation Children of Gebelawi (trans. Stewart 1981) use two different sign systems to
convey the same fabula. Yet to describe or even think about the “common” fabula, it is necessary to
employ a language. It is impossible to produce a description that transcends its inscription in English,
Arabic or some other expressive medium. Additionally, given that fabulae are produced by readers
on the basis of texts, differences in the sign systems used in those texts, in terms of the relationships
between different signs and language specific patterns of connotative meaning, will inevitably result in different reader interpretations of the underlying fabulae. As Brooks describes, “the fabula...is in fact a mental construction that the reader derives from the [language specific] sjuzhet, which is all that he ever directly knows” (Brooks 1984:13). This does not mean that the concept of the fabula cannot be used in the manner described by Chatman, but emphasises that fabulae can exist independently of their manifestation in signs only as a theoretical abstraction as it is impossible to actually conceive of specific fabulae or analyse them without resorting to semiotic mediation.

4.4.1 Applying text, sjuzhet and fabula to narratives that lack an obvious “text”

As was shown with the example from *The Guardian* at the start of this section, the text, fabula and sjuzhet model can be easily applied to narratives that have a physical manifestation. Although developed for the analysis of fiction, regarding this aspect of narrative form there is no significant difference between factual and fictional narratives. Both involve signs, which once interpreted result in a sjuzhet that presents a series of events not necessarily in chronological order, but from which a chronological sequence of events can be extracted. Applying the same model to more fragmented narratives that lack a clearly defined text is more challenging but useful in that it demonstrates the extent to which such narratives are structurally similar to narratives as traditionally conceived, despite the seemingly great differences between them.

In one sense, a narrative such as the WoT seems to consist only of a fabula, of a sequence of events linked together by a particular set of temporal and causal relationships. There is no obvious text that can be found whole and complete in one place as there would be, for example, with a newspaper article or a novel. Yet if fabulae can only come into being via text, in the same way that there can be no signified without a signifier, there must be a text of some sort. In contrast to the relatively unified and bounded texts of the type seen in novels, historical works and newspaper articles, the texts of narratives such as this are more fragmented. The text of WoT, from which the fabula, as it exists in individual minds, is ultimately created, is spread across diverse writings and statements. This seems
to contradict Bal’s argument that a text is “a finite, structured whole composed of language signs” (1997:5). Yet the unity of texts is never an inherent property and must always be imposed by the receiver, as discussed above in the section on narrative wholeness. As Barthes has argued, “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 1977:148). The process of producing a “structured” and “whole” text with a narrative such as that of the WoT is essentially the same as that with a novel: a set of signs must be made to function as a meaningful whole through the process of interpretation. The difference is that readers are called upon to construct texts\(^{50}\) from which interpretation can proceed to a far greater extent with such fragmented narratives than they are with more clearly bounded stories.

Despite the similarity between the way receivers must collect and unify the texts of both types of narrative, i.e. narratives where the whole text can be found in one place and narratives where it is dispersed, the fact that receivers are called on to play a much more active role with dispersed narratives has significant implications for sjuzhets and fabulae. With traditional bounded narratives, the limits of the core text\(^{51}\) are relatively clear in terms of which signs should be understood as forming the semiotic component of the story and where it begins and ends. This text will no doubt be structured and brought together differently by different people, but the “text” from which readers work is unlikely to vary significantly. With a dispersed narrative, such as that of “the rise of Islamic terror in the Middle East”, interpreters must collect together the text from across a much wider range of basic semiotic material. Which signs should and should not be considered as constituting part of the text is far less clear, and readers are therefore called upon to selectively appropriate during interpretation to a greater extent than is seen in other contexts.

\(^{50}\) The form that these texts takes is itself dependent on the way in which readers interpret them, highlighting that there is constant dialectic interaction between the levels of text, sjuzhet and fabula rather than a linear progression from text, through sjuzhet to fabula.

\(^{51}\) As contrasted with paratextual material and other material with which the core text is connected through intertextual relations
When multiple individuals have different understandings of the “same” dispersed narratives, it is the fabula that is held to be common between them. Two individuals might offer different versions of the metanarrative of “jihadist terrorism”. Yet by viewing the different tellings as variant expressions of the “same” basic fabula, it is possible to view them as the same narrative and to set aside any differences as pertaining merely to form, rather than content. Yet if different interpreters are working from different textual material, it follows that they will produce different sjuzhets (i.e. interpreted texts), and from them different fabulae. Once again, this is clearest where more than one language is involved. In the same way as it was not possible to discuss the fabula of Mahfouz’s أولاد حرتنا without employing a particular linguistic system, it is not possible to describe the fabula of a narrative such as “the rise of Islamic terror” without doing the same. It is therefore impossible to posit that the English and Arabic versions of the “rise of Islamic terror” narrative are ultimately relatable to the same fabula, even if similarities obtain between them.

That different individuals are able to view their interpretations of social narratives as relating to the same fabula, despite differences between them, may be attributable to a “reality-function” similar to Foucault’s author function. The assumption that reality is fixed may give the impression that if two people are telling similar but not identical stories, they must be telling the same story, i.e. their stories must relate to the same fabula, since there is, in “non-fiction”, ultimately only one reality, i.e. one “true” fabula. As has been argued throughout, the narrative construction of reality makes this position ultimately unsustainable, suggesting that a potentially culturally-specific reality-function is at work here, rather than the unifying effect of an objective reality which would prevent the otherwise inevitable proliferation of variant readings and meanings. If the requirement that we all share the same reality is dropped, there is no longer any reason to believe that different interpretations of the “same” narrative must be the same story at all. Therefore, although it is convenient to refer to different interpretations as different instantiations of the same fabula we must always bear in mind that this cannot ultimately be the case.
6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to introduce a set of theoretical and conceptual tools adequate for both understanding and analysing narrative. I have argued that all narratives involve a semiotic, cognitive and social aspect and that these aspects are in constant interaction. Narratives can only exist through their manifestation in signs and the mediation of individual minds but are also irreducibly social, both in terms of the signs they employ, and the interconnectedness of all narratives. I then discussed the conditions of narrativity, the features that distinguish stories from other discursive forms and allow narratives to produce meaning. The second part of the chapter introduced the concepts of the author; the reader; and text, sjuzhet and fabula. I have attempted to show that these concepts can be brought to bear on all narratives, and that doing so brings useful insights into the way that narrative works more broadly, while also providing tools for the analysis and comparison of the stories we come across in the world.

The motivation for introducing the two sets of concepts (drawing on socio-narrative and narratological theory) was that the ideas discussed in the first part explain not only how narratives work, in terms of their defining features and what it is that makes narratives meaningful, but also why the study of narratives is important. It was argued that narratives shape individual and social realities and do not transparently represent a pre-existing material reality. The narratological concepts, on the other hand, were introduced to account for the formal features of stories, and to provide a set of conceptual tools for analysing the semiotic component of narratives which, of the above concepts, is the most amenable to direct analysis. On the basis that “form” and “content” are ultimately inseparable (Qian Hu 1993; Haas 1968), formal differences between narratives inevitably reflect differences on the deeper level discussed in the first half of the chapter. Grounding an analysis in the formal characteristics of narratives helps to ensure that these subtle differences in the way in which stories are produced (authorship), structured (text, fabula and sjuzhet) and told and perceived (reading) are not lost or ignored.
Chapter three applies the concepts introduced in this chapter to Twitter, exploring the characteristics of storytelling on Twitter and how it is similar to, and differs from, storytelling in other contexts. I argue that large groups of tweets can be viewed as Barthesian “writerly” texts, that can be interpreted as narratives, and feature semiotic, cognitive and social components, but that significant creative input from readers is required for this to be possible. The second part of the chapter introduces the data studied in the analytical chapters, describing the challenges of working with Twitter data and the criteria employed to select the tweets under analysis.
Chapter Three – Twitter, narrative and data

Twitter and other SNSs have emerged in recent years as important storytelling media. The opportunities offered by Twitter for speaking relatively freely about political issues in countries with restricted political rights and freedom of expression have proven particularly significant. Under the approach to narrative theory adopted in this thesis, the narratives we find on Twitter are important because they play a role in the construction of knowledge and of reality as we experience it and do not simply reflect an objective material world. The stories told on Twitter must thus be viewed not only as reinforcing or contesting dominant modes of understanding, but as engaged in the more fundamental task of negotiating lived political and social reality. Challenging hegemonic narratives is tantamount to challenging the realities upon which dominant groups depend and establishing new narratives can be a first step towards effecting broad societal change. Narrative as it is found on Twitter, however, is poorly understood, and scholars have yet to study stories as found on Twitter in detail. This chapter seeks to partially fill this gap, working from the premise that although the stories told on Twitter share many basic characteristics with other types of narrative, there are also important differences. Consequently, existing narrative theory, from both the socio-narrative and narratological traditions, has much to offer, but cannot simply be grafted onto narrative on Twitter.

The final part of the chapter focuses on data, exploring the challenges and opportunities of using Twitter as a data source as well as the selection procedures followed to choose the dataset examined in the analytical chapters.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the mechanics of Twitter and how it works as a social network. This is followed by a discussion of the nature of storytelling and narrative on Twitter from the perspectives of socio-narrative and narratological theory. It begins with an exploration of the extent to which we can say that we find narratives on Twitter, in terms of the degree to which they exhibit the elements of narrativity discussed in the previous chapter. I argue that despite the apparent lack of key elements of narrativity, tweets are still likely to be interpreted using the
narrative mode and thus reward narrative analysis. This is followed by an application of the narratological concepts discussed in the second half of the previous chapter to storytelling on Twitter. I argue that although tweets can be read as narratives, Twitter exhibits formal idiosyncrasies in terms of authorial control, the role of readers and narrative structure which lead to a different process of narrative production and reception than is seen in most other contexts. The remainder of the chapter provides a statement of data, detailing exactly which tweets will be analysed and the criteria used to select them.

1 The mechanics of Twitter

Twitter is a social networking site (SNS) that allows its users to communicate via the internet. In December 2014 the “New User FAQs” provided on the Twitter website defined Twitter as:

a service for friends, family, and coworkers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. People post Tweets, which may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text. These messages are posted to your profile, sent to your followers, and are searchable on Twitter search (Twitter 2016a)

Users create a profile with a short biography, a profile image (“avatar”) of their choice and also, if they wish, a “banner” image appearing across the top of their profile and a background image for their entire profile. Users’ profiles also show the year and month that they joined Twitter, their location, and, if desired, a link to another website of their choice (see fig. 1).

Users can post messages, or “tweets” which consist of a maximum of 140 characters of text (including spaces) and may also include one or more images. These tweets appear on the poster’s “timeline” in chronological order with newer tweets appearing at the top and pushing older tweets

52 Changes are frequently made to elements like this definition on the Twitter site.
53 Location information is provided by users themselves who can describe their location however they wish. This leads to varying descriptions which can create challenges for quantitative approaches.
down the page (see fig.1 for a sample profile page). In addition to appearing on the poster’s
timeline, tweets are also delivered to the “home timelines” of all the poster’s “followers”, that is to
say the timelines of other users that have elected to “follow”,⁵⁴ i.e. receive the tweets of that
person. Each user’s home timeline therefore consists of all the tweets posted by all the people that
user has chosen to follow, listed in chronological order starting with the most recent (see fig. 2 for
an example of a home timeline). As each user’s home timeline consists only of the tweets of the
users they have chosen to follow, its contents vary significantly from user to user. Two users
following exactly the same set of other users would have identical timelines containing exactly the
same tweets whereas two users following none of the same users would have completely different
timelines with no tweets in common.⁵⁵

![Figure 1 - A sample user’s home timeline as seen by other users](image)

⁵⁴ Following need not be reciprocal. During the period under study this represented a major difference from
Facebook, the dominant social network of the period where unreciprocated relationships were not possible.
⁵⁵ One possible exception to this is that home timelines can also include “promoted tweets”, whereby
companies can pay for an advertising tweet to appear on users’ timelines. Such tweets are not discussed in this
study.
Beyond the “following” mechanism, there are a number of other ways of interacting with other users built-in to the Twitter platform. These include “Mentions”, “retweets”, “replies” and “favourites”. When a user “Mentions” another by including the formula “@username” in a tweet, that tweet is delivered to the user mentioned and viewable under the “Mentions” tab on their home timeline whether they are following the original poster or not. Tweets including Mentions are

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56 Twitter’s evolution has been marked by a constructive role played by readers in the “co-development of its meanings, users and affordances” ([Havala](#) 2014:29) whereby communicative techniques, such as hashtags or @replies, are developed by users and then later formalised within Twitter’s architecture.

57 Where the word “Mention” appears with a capital letter, this refers specifically to the Twitter mechanism of Following other users.
publicly visible and appear on the timelines of all the poster’s followers in the same way as any other tweet\(^{58}\) (see fig. 3 for an example of a “Mention”). Twitter users may also “reply” to tweets posted by others by using the “@username” formula at the beginning of a tweet. In this case, that tweet will appear in the Mentions tab of the person replied to, but will only appear on the home timelines of users following both the person posting the reply, and the person being replied to. Although similar, the difference between replies and Mentions is explained as follows in the Twitter “Help center”:

- People will only see others’ @replies in their home timeline if they are following both the sender and recipient of the @reply
- People will see any mentions posted by someone they follow (all mentions are treated like regular Tweets) (Twitter 2014)

When a user “retweets” another user’s tweet, the original tweet is published as if it were a tweet posted by the retweeting user, but is clearly marked as a retweet and shows the original time of publication along with the original poster’s name and profile picture (see fig. 4 for an example of a retweet). Finally, users may also “favourite” tweets, allowing them to signal approval without writing a reply. When a user favourites a tweet, the original poster is notified and the number of favourites is displayed alongside the tweet (visible at the bottom of fig. 3). Any user can Mention, retweet, reply to or favourite any tweet, regardless of whether it was posted by a user that they follow or not.

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\(^{58}\) Twitter also includes a “private messaging” feature allowing users to contact each other privately. As these messages are not publicly available they are not discussed in this study.
The basic assumption underlying this thesis is that collections of tweets can be, and are, interpreted as narratives, albeit fragmented ones. It is insufficient, however, to simply assert that using Twitter means telling stories. Although, for example, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013:2) take it for granted that “Twitter is developing into a platform for news storytelling, enabling collaborative story writing”
they do not offer any detailed consideration of what they mean by “storytelling”. Moreover, at first glance, Twitter seems to provide only some of the aspects of narrativity described in the previous chapter. In answering the question “what’s happening?”, many tweets, although not all, relate events occurring in specific places and times. Users must selectively appropriate content, choosing what they will and will not tweet about or share. Yet other key elements of narrative are seemingly missing. Perhaps as a result of the 140-character limit, many tweets relating happenings do not explicitly relate those events to other occurrences, causally or otherwise. Twitter also presents challenges in terms of wholeness: many tweets appear suspended in a kind of perpetual present, a sequence of “nows”, rather than functioning as constituent elements of whole narratives with beginnings, middles and ends. Sequences of tweets can appear closer to “chronicles” (c.f. White 1987; Danto 1985; Croce 1959), mere lists of chronologically ordered events, than to true narratives, which establish meanings for occurrences by emplotting them in relational and causal networks.

On a more profound level, Twitter challenges the linearity seemingly inherent to narrative, with Hermida (2014:365) arguing that this causes a breakdown in the “classic, narrative structure of journalism”. Manovich (2001), Miller (2008) and Wittel (2001) propose that in the social media age we are witnessing a basic shift away from narrative and towards “database”-like forms of organisation. Meikle contrasts narrative and database forms as follows:

Stories are organized around cause-and-effect, and develop from beginning to end; databases, in contrast, are structured collections of separate, discrete items. No item is necessarily any more important than the others, so none is necessarily the ‘beginning’ or the ‘end’; rather, the user determines the connections as they make them, through these processes of navigation and search. Choose your own adventure. (Meikle 2016:70)

59 Al-Ani et al (2012) imply that the character limit makes storytelling impossible when they claim that “unlike micro-blogs, which impose length limitations, blogs allow for the construction of narratives”.
60 Using alternative terminology, sequences of tweets can seem closer to “plain” narratives restricted to a “straightforward statement of what occurred” than to “significant” narratives which “[bring] out their connections” (Walsh 1958:480).
This suggests that rather than simply failing to provide all the elements of narrativity, Twitter may be essentially anti-narrative, presenting a fundamentally different mode for interacting with, and making sense of, information based around non-linearity and searching rather than the presentation of sequences of related events in narrative wholes. Beginnings and ends are not simply hard to find, but rather not there to be found at all.

To respond to these challenges, it is necessary to return to the idea of narrative as a process and as a basic method for “coming to terms with time, process, and change” (Herman 2009:2), and of narratives as “first and foremost, texts that are read narratively, whatever their formal make-up” (Fludernik 1996:313, emphasis in original). Carr (1997), Crites (1997) and Ricoeur (1984) speak of an incipient narrativity in human experience of the world that can provoke a “genuine demand for narrative” (Ricoeur 1983/84:74). I propose that this “demand for narrative” is equally strong on Twitter where the evident human mediation of events predisposes us to look for narrative, given the human proclivity for storytelling and for seeing the world in terms of stories (Bruner 1986; Sarbin 1986; Mink 2001; Polkinghorne 1988). Dealing with individual tweets as isolated fragments of information or entries in a chronicle, moreover, is extremely difficult; as Cronon (1992:1351) argues: “in a chronicle we easily lose the thread of what was going on at any particular moment. Without some plot to organize the flow of events, everything becomes much harder—even impossible—to understand”. Danto (1985:122) similarly argues that “in an important sense, we cannot really make historical sense of whatever bits and pieces we may possess of ‘history-as-record’ until we are able to find a narrative for them to support”. The fact that causal relations are typically not explicitly stated between the occurrences reported in different tweets does not prevent readers from making the presumption of post hoc ergo propter hoc which serves as the “mainspring of narrative” (Barthes

61 This also suggests that Twitter could be read using methods other than narrative, supporting van Dijk’s argument (1975:275) that “the same text may function as a narrative in one context and as another discourse type in another context”.

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1975:148) in the same way that readers are always tempted to read causal links between events (Abbott 2002:41; Chatman 1978:47-49).

Reading tweets relationally, as nodes in relational narrative networks provides a means to overcome this difficulty while also drawing on a basic human tendency to comprehend the world in terms of stories, to read in causality where none is explicitly expressed (Barthes 1975), and fill in gaps and omissions due to a “powerful myth of coherence” (Freund 1987:81). Setting tweets into such relational networks consists not only of reading different tweets together, but of setting individual tweets into relations with other fragments of narrative, and whole narratives found both on and off Twitter. Series of tweets therefore are not narratives in their own right, but can function as semiotic prompts facilitating a wide range of possible narrative interpretations when cognitively realised and embedded in social intertextual networks by readers. In this sense they closely approximate what Barthes (1973/74) describes as “writerly” and Eco (1979) as “open” texts, with users sending tweets out to readers “more or less like the components of a construction kit” (Eco 1979:49) accompanied with only vague instructions for assembly. That this process is likely to be completed in different ways by different readers means that the narratives readers produce in response to Twitter vary greatly.65

62 This does not preclude, however, the possibility of adopting other approaches to reading tweets since “the same text may function as a narrative in one context and as another discourse type in another context” (Van Dijk 1975:275). Nor does it ignore the potential of using Twitter in such a way as to make narrative responses highly difficult. This possibility strengthens Barton and Lee’s (2013:29) designation of formats like Twitter as “designed space[s]” rather than as “coherent genre[s].”

63 My approach therefore differs from that of Peys (2012) who argues that whole Twitter streams can be read as continuous unfolding narratives, situating narrativity within the textual matter itself and suggesting, in my view erroneously, that it is the timeline, rather than the interpretive action of readers, which “supports, unifies, and structures one’s tweets into a readable stream of narrative” (Peys 2012:8).

64 In this quotation Eco is discussing experimental musical compositions where their producers appear “unconcerned about the manner of their eventual deployment”. It is much more doubtful whether politically active Twitter users’ attitudes towards their tweets could be similarly described.

65 See Murthy (2013:26/7) for a discussion of this issue in terms of viewing tweets as dynamic “digital objects”.

In terms of narrative wholeness, as Crites (1997:12), following Husserl, argues, it is questionable whether it is possible to “experience anything as happening, as present, except against the background of what it succeeds and what we anticipate will succeed it”. Therefore, although Twitter users only infrequently present their readers with conclusive narrative beginnings or ends, readers must constantly project back to origins and forward to conclusions as they seek to comprehend successive “nows”, even as they know that such beginnings and ends are only “provisional” (Barthes 1975) or “artificial” (Brooks 1984:23). They must set individual elements into larger, and bounded, causal narrative sequences since “a narrative without at least a minimal plot would be incomprehensible” (Brooks 1984:5). The presence of extensive gaps on Twitter by no means impedes a narrative response since “we do not stop constructing because of insufficient or erroneous information. On the contrary, defects such as these only intensify the construction process” (Todorov 1980:80). Narrative on Twitter therefore presents a relatively extreme example of wholeness being imposed as part of a retrospective process of sensemaking (Fleischman 1990:147) by readers through the act of interpretation (Abbott 2002:94) as they “introduce intelligibility into the account of what happened” by “connecting facts or events at different times” (Dray 1971:159). As with all narrative, “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 1977:148).

I propose that the process of making sense of Twitter through narrative is therefore similar to the process of interpreting literature and making sense of the world through narrative more broadly.67

66 Carroll (2007:1/2) argues that several types of narrative, such as “soap operas and national histories” make no attempt to offer closure yet can still be considered as narratives. I argue that even if stories such as soap operas and national histories do not offer conclusions, they at least offer the promise of conclusions and readers are still able to interpret their constituent elements in relation to provisional conclusions. That narratives are finite, at least in principle, is key to what renders them comprehensible (Brooks 1984:4)

67 This raises the question of whether specific competences are needed to read Twitter in the same way as specific knowledge is needed to read poetry “as literature”, whether the reader must internalise “the ‘grammar’ which would permit them “to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings” (Culler 1975:114). If the process of reading tweets in terms of their positions within larger fragmented narratives is similar to that of making sense of the world through narrative, that may explain why new users seem to have little difficulty in reading individual tweets as meaningful, even if they find some of Twitter’s communicative conventions, in the sense of abbreviations and so forth, baffling.
As scholars, including Kermode (1979), Iser (1976/78), Eco (1979) and Ingarden (1931/73), have argued, all stories require interpretive input from readers. The major difference between the stories produced by readers in response to Twitter and those seen elsewhere thus appears to lie in the scale of completive action demanded from readers, rather than in requiring a fundamentally different approach to interpretation. Making sense of Twitter draws on the same creative techniques of explaining occurrences in terms of their causes and consequences as we use to make sense of the world around us on a daily basis (Schank 1990:7). Reading Twitter is close to our experience of the world which “present[s] itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude” (White 1980:27).

As with human experience of the world, Twitter users are often presented with vast amounts of information which is chronologically ordered but lacking structure and global coherence. They must then engage in a process of selective appropriation as they attempt to reduce the volume of inputs to a manageable level, and organise that information into comprehensible configurations. Although this process is common to all narratives, even when reading fictional or non-fictional stories presented as stories, it is particularly overt on Twitter where, as in life, there is no expectation that everything is equally important, that everything is significant at all, or that it should be possible to read every tweet as part of a unified, pre-determined whole. In both cases interpreters are left to assemble disparate events into meaningful wholes specifying the meaning of individual occurrences and the significance of sequences of events in terms of their relationships with other happenings. As with our experience of the world, we do not find beginnings and ends but feel compelled to impose

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68 Rabinowitz (1987:43) argues that “despite repeated claims by critics that everything counts in literature (especially poetry) we know from experience that there are always more details in a text...than we can ever hope to keep track of, much less account for”, echoing Todorov’s (1980:73) claim that “we always abbreviate as we read” suggesting this process to be universal.
them to produce meaning. The experience of reading Twitter narratively is close to Kermode’s description of using narrative to make sense of our lives:

> men, like poets, rush ‘into the middest,’ in medias res, when they are born; they also die in medias rebus, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as to give meaning to lives and to poems” (Kermode 1966:7)

My argument is therefore ultimately one of continuity – Twitter seems to draw on the same fundamental narrative competencies used in both literature and daily life, even if the act of communication itself is somewhat different to that seen in other contexts due to Twitter’s enforced fragmentation.

A final important point is that, despite the seemingly limitless number of possible interpretations of a given occurrence or individual tweet, a small number of narrativisations of events tends to be accepted by large numbers of people. Clearly the content of tweets themselves is significant in that it frames information in ways which invite specific interpretations. But we should not ignore the influence of socially, culturally and historically specific “rules” (Rabinowitz 1987:43) or “conventions” (Culler 1975) of reading followed by distinct groups of readers or “interpretive communities” (Fish 1980) which pre-exist and influence interpretation. Similarly, “grand-” or “metanarratives” (Somers 1994:619), which constitute an important part of the backdrop against which individual events, tweets and narratives are interpreted, continue to exert significant influence. In the context of the 2013 Military intervention, for example, the importance of metanarratives of “the Arab Spring” and of “Arab Exceptionalism”, the notion that the Arab world is somehow uniquely resistant to democracy cannot be overstated. These factors are not the main focus of this study, but should not be ignored.

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69 This is most clearly expressed where we see multiple responses to individual tweets suggesting similar interpretations of the original tweet.
2.1 Twitter and socio-narrative theory

The principal value of socio-narrative theory is that it demonstrates that the stories that are told on SNSs have implications for social and political realities. The relationships between social media, protest and social change remain contested (e.g. Dencik and Leistert 2015; Gerbaudo 2012, 2015; Gladwell 2011; Ingram 2011; Morozov 2011). There is little doubt, however, that digital communication platforms are playing an increasingly significant role in broad debates and conflicts, as we have seen, for example, with protests in Iran in 2009, the Arab uprisings of 2010/11, the ‘Indignados’ movement in Spain beginning in 2011 and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the USA also beginning in 2011. Challenging dominant narratives, and proposing alternative narratives, has been at the heart of all these movements. Rather than merely reflecting “real-world” issues, the distinction between the online and offline worlds is increasingly blurred, with both serving as extensions to the other. The stories that are told and gain currency on Twitter have an impact on the narratives that gain currency, and come to be accepted as true, offline. They play a role in the complex narrative production of social and political reality by shaping and mediating human experience of the material world. Social media can provide an avenue for the articulation of stories which run counter to dominant narratives, providing an important space for “marginalized voices” and “alternative narratives of dissention” (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013:2; Hamdy and Gomaa 2012; Lim 2012). SNSs can provide a potentially emancipatory platform for challenging prevailing realities, which may otherwise be difficult, particularly in politically repressive societies. At the same time, however, social media provides a further venue for dominant narratives to be repeated and rearticulated (Weber, Garimella and Batayneh 2013), strengthening hegemonic and potentially

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70 The much-disputed role of social media in the 2011 Egyptian revolution is a major focus of this debate.
71 An offline attempt to do this during the period under study was the so-called “third square” movement (Finn 2013; Nelson 2013; Amin 2013).
repressive visions of reality through the process of “narrative accrual” whereby, through retelling, narratives come to be accepted as transparent representations of reality (Bruner 1991:18-20).

In addition to shaping lived social and political realities, social media also represents a powerful mechanism for the representation of places and events to geographically distant onlookers. Social media plays a comparatively more significant role in shaping realities for distant onlookers than it does for local citizens due to the more restricted information sources available to such audiences. In this sense, it continues an evolutionary process beginning with the telegraph in which it has become ever faster and easier to transmit information across large distances. Traditionally dominated by media institutions (Sundin 2015), SNSs have democratised this capacity for representation to a significant extent by “breaking the bottlenecks of print on paper” (Bruns 2005:22) which prevented more than a very small proportion of individuals having their ideas published and made accessible to distant audiences (Hartley 2000). They allow non-affiliated citizens to participate in the representation and construction of their localities for distant audiences in ways previously largely inaccessible to ordinary citizens. Again, however, this must not be viewed in too utopian a light.

Access to social media, for both writers and audiences, is far from universal and is not equal across all demographic sectors. In 2014, for example, the internet penetration rate in Egypt was estimated at 54.6% (internetworldstats.com 2016). Skills at reading and producing English are also important, since English continues to function as “the common language for intercultural communication” on the internet (Barton and Lee 2011:42). Social media therefore widens the range of people able to participate in the representation of their environments to distant audiences, but by no means makes it a universal capability.

Third, Twitter, and other social media sites, provide a vast archive of material which would, in previous eras, have almost certainly been lost. Everyday, “quasi-oral” communications on Twitter (Postill and Pink 2012), are recorded as posted in a searchable format and will presumably remain available into the future. Social media sites including Twitter are therefore likely to constitute an
important resource for future historians, in a similar fashion to the role played by journals and
diaries in the past. The information archived on Twitter is frequently banal, but as Bourdieu
(1979/84) argues, such details are a rich source of data on social life. Archived tweets will provide
factual information which might otherwise have been lost, but perhaps more importantly, by
archiving contemporary accounts of events Twitter will provide a window into the world views of
those perceiving them. It will also provide insights into what was deemed “tellable” on the basis that
“events become tellable precisely because they have started to mean something to the narrator on
an emotional level” (Fludernik 2003:245). The very fact that tweeters chose to write about certain
issues rather than others is an important source of information. The stories told on Twitter and
other social media sites therefore contribute, not only to shaping local political and social realities
and constructing places and events as they are perceived by distant onlookers, but also to shaping
the writing of the past. Social media provides a mechanism for ordinary citizens to participate to a
greater extent than in previous eras in the creation of the material future historians will use, and
thus play a greater role in shaping the narrative construction of history itself (White 1973, 1978,
1987; Cronon 1992; Dray 1971). This is particularly significant in contexts where official histories are
frequently rewritten to control understandings of the past (Shenker 2011; Fayek 2014). An
important area for future study will be the extent to which tweeters’ awareness that they are setting
a historical record influences their tweeting practices, in the same way that knowledge of the
possibility of future publication came to influence diary writing practices in previous eras (Steinitz
2011; Hewitt 2006; Broughton 1999).

2.2 Twitter and narratology

Socio-narrative theory provides a useful framework for understanding the importance and functions
of narrative. Narratological theory, on the other hand, provides a nuanced toolkit for the analysis of
narratives and their features. With its origins in formalism, it facilitates the contrasting of different
narratives and the identification of differences of structure and presentation. Returning to socio-
narrative theory then, facilitates consideration of the significance of those differences. The structural
aspects of storytelling that form the focus of narratological inquiry are also important in terms of their role in shaping the range of potential interpretations and eliciting certain responses rather than others. This demonstrates that, although Twitter seems to “elicit free and arbitrary response” (Eco 1979:62) from readers, authors are still able to make use of rhetorical strategies to shape those responses. Three main foci of narratological inquiry are explored in the analytical chapters: authors, readers, and narrative structure. There follows a preliminary discussion of the salient issues which arise when applying these concepts, developed for the analysis of literary fiction, to non-fictional writing on Twitter.

2.2.1 Authors

An important question is to what extent Twitter users should be viewed as authors at all. According to a 2014 study, approximately 25-30% of all tweets posted on Twitter are retweets (Liu, Kliman-Silver and Mislove 2014). To this figure can also be added tweets which repeat or paraphrase information previously published elsewhere, either on or off Twitter. This indicates that a significant part of the role of many Twitter users, including the three that are the focus of this thesis, is “redaction”, that is to say filtering and sorting content produced by others rather than producing original material. Redactors engage in “journalistic sifting and sorting of all the available material” (Hartley 2000:43) with such users acting as “search engines who provide editorial services for other users”.

In my view, even users who engage in a significant amount of redaction can be usefully considered as authors for two main reasons. The first is that most such users, including the three whose tweets are considered here, also produce original content and there appears to be comparatively few individual, i.e. non-organisational, accounts that engage solely in redaction-type activities. The

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72 As Pratt (1977) argues, the traditional distinction between “poetic”, or literary, language and “ordinary” language is difficult to sustain. This offers support for employing tools developed for use with “poetic” language in the analysis of “ordinary” language.
73 “Retweets” in this study were tweets posted either using the official retweet function, or marked with “RT”.
second and more important reason is that “redaction” is far from a new activity. Both journalism and academic writing, for example, rely heavily on filtering, organising and employing the writings of others for new ends. Moreover, if we accept the argument that all texts are “mosaic[s] of quotations” (Kristeva 1980:66) comprised of “citations” which are “already read” (déjà lu) fragments of other texts, recombined and repurposed with new meanings (Barthes 1977:160), although still bearing the imprint of their previous uses (Bakhtin and Volosinov, cited in Todorov 1984:49), then all textual production can be viewed as a process of redaction. Finally, as Hartley himself later argued (2003:83), redaction is itself “a creative practice in its own right”. All this suggests that “redaction” is, in fact, far closer to what would traditionally have been termed “authorship” than it might first appear.

As discussed above there appears to be a general preference on Twitter for chronicle over narrative proper. This may partly be a conscious choice, perhaps indicative of a broader shift to a more “open” (in Eco’s sense) form of reporting where the goal is less to “make sense of the world for us by providing ready-made, packaged, universally acceptable, and “complete” interpretations” and more to enable us “to make sense of the world for ourselves by offering an appropriate (but necessarily incomplete and continually updated) selection of relevant information” (Bruns 2005:58). Rather than trying and failing to tightly constrain the possible interpretations of their tweets, some users may be specifically trying to grant a greater interpretive role to readers. It may also be a consequence of Twitter’s characteristics as a medium; the 140-character limit leaves little space for linking tweets together and the emphasis on reporting what is happening now de-emphasises the idea of setting current events into relationships with past and future ones. Either way, authorial power is weaker in chronicle than it is in narrative as far more of the meaning-producing relationships must be established by readers rather than being provided by the writers of tweets. Similarly, where information from other users is shared, “the onus of evaluating [that] information frequently remains with the user” (Bruns 2005) and authors themselves frequently take less responsibility for the validity of that content. Second, narratives or chronicles produced by individual tweeters are not
typically received as bounded wholes by readers. Readers’ timelines are filled with fragments from many different authors, jumbled together. My timeline included, for example, the following tweets on 21/11/2014:

Figure 5 - A sample of tweets posted on 21/11/2014

This jumbling greatly undermines the capacity for even the most skilful authors to produce stories whose “telling pre-empts momentarily the possibility of any but a single interpretation—however bizarre it may be” (Bruner 1991:9) by fracturing the stories they tell. Each tweet must vie for readers’ attention with others, which may be discussing wholly different issues or similar issues but from a very different perspective.
This is compounded by the lack of authorial control over the order in which tweets are read. Although tweets are delivered to users’ timelines sequentially, users may choose not to use the narrative mode at all, instead treating social media sites as non-linear “structured collections of separate, discrete items” (Meikle 2016:70). In this case they are using Twitter as a “database” characterised by searching and navigation rather than linear progression (Meikle 2016; Manovich 2001). As Bal argues, “playing with sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasise, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event” (Bal 1997:82). On Twitter this control of sequencing is largely out of the hands of authors. As Barton and Lee explain:

Readers have more control over a text in the online world. For a book, say a novel, the original author of the content decides how we read it, with a clear table of contents assuming the linear order of different parts of the book; for a website, although the site developer may decide how we will view a site, the user has relatively higher control over their reading path...this leads to different users seeing a text quite differently, which is something they may or may not be aware of (Barton and Lee 2013:27)

Given that readers are aware of the limited control over the order in which tweets are read, they are also likely to read less into sequential ordering than in other contexts where a reading approach following the principle of “Chekov’s gun” may make them feel a need to incorporate every element into a total reading of the story as a whole. Nonetheless, this still represents a loss of authorial control and a ceding of greater creative input to readers.

A third factor undermining authorial control on Twitter is the fact that any user can respond to a tweet posted by any other user at any time, making additions which are incorporated into the developing chronicle (Alexander and Levine 2008:47). This means that every element of all the stories told on Twitter can be directly challenged, or endorsed, at any time. All narratives, of course, can be challenged. Much journalistic and academic work, for example, consists of presenting counter-narratives to contest stories produced by others. In these environments, however, authors are generally able to tell a complete story before an opportunity is provided to others for criticism or
response. Wael Ghonim, for example, describes in detail his view of the role of social media in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution in his book *Revolution 2.0* (2012). This version of events only became open for criticism and comment once it was completed and the book released. As already discussed, Twitter’s character limit makes it impossible to do the same within individual tweets, with the result that complex narratives must be elaborated over the course of multiple tweets. Each of these tweets, however, can be criticised or contested as they are published, during the process of telling.

Consider the following tweet from the MB spokesman Gehad el-Haddad, posted on 11 September 2013:

![Tweet from Gehad el-Haddad](image_url)
This tweet is one of many posted from el-Haddad’s account implying a narrative of 3 July 2013 in which the rightful and legitimate president of Egypt was illegally forced from power by the Armed Forces. Yet, readers’ responses to el-Haddad’s tweets may also be influenced by the previous responses of other users. Of the nine responses to this particular tweet, two were supportive of the MB while seven were critical:

Hafez Kayali @hafez666 · 11 Sep 2013
@gelhaddad why do u guys always have square heads?!

Khaled El-Bahaie @Khaled_ElBahai · 11 Sep 2013
@gelhaddad it is interesting how EGYPT FLAG never show in any of ur events

El Barbadoesa @barbadoesa · 11 Sep 2013
@gelhaddad and what did you accomplish by standing peacefully, besides wasting your time and energy (and somtimes get killed) since then?

ahmed fathi dahshan @ahmedfathiyalish · 11 Sep 2013
@gelhaddad I think you are blind and idiot

Mohammad Feroze @witeto_feroze · 12 Sep 2013
@gelhaddad First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win - Ganchi #AntiCoup #Egypt

Ayman A. Moussa @S_EldenElshazy · 12 Sep 2013
القتالة تسير والكلاب تتوى @gelhaddad

dr.Meraj Siddiqui @drmeraj · 12 Sep 2013
Rt@gelhaddad: 80 days since #military_coup & counting. V r more determined, resolved & defiant than when it started.
Responses to tweets can both strengthen and undermine the narratives of which they form a part. In both cases, however, the power of authors is undermined as other figures adopt a greater role in the shaping of narratives than is seen with traditional publications.

A final important issue is that the fragmented narratives to which individual tweets contribute in many cases have many authors. Narratives emerge as a result of a “kind of collective authorship, in which producers contribute from their own vantage point” (Siapera 2014:552). This does not reduce the importance of authorship in itself, although it is significant that there is no author shaping the narrative as a whole, on a global level. Nor does it deny the significance of influential users who may have a proportionally greater influence on the narratives that ultimately come to be understood by readers. Significantly, however, it reduces the ability of individual authors to shape the stories realised by readers, as large parts of the narrative “text” may be produced by other authors, with different goals and agendas.

2.2.2 Readers

As Bruns (2005:23) argued a decade ago, “the divisions between producers and consumers online are increasingly blurred”. This blurring has given rise to neologisms such as “produser” (Bruns 2005) and “prosumer” (Toffler 1980/81). Schmidt (2013), meanwhile, argues that communication on Twitter is conducted mainly in a “conversational mode (rather than in the one-way mode of “publishing”)”. Yet we must be careful not to take this argument too far. Although the rise of the internet and social media sites has democratised the production and, more importantly the distribution, of content, there are many internet users who appear to produce little content. As Romero et al (2010) explain, echoing Manovich (2009), “the majority of users act as passive information consumers”. In June 2016, for example, the English Wikipedia had 28,563,690 registered users, yet only 114,228 (less than 0.4% of users) had made an edit within the past 30 days. Similarly,

74 This issue is discussed further in the “fabula” section of chapter six.
in 2014, 44% of registered Twitter users had never posted a tweet (Smith 2016). Figures such as these reaffirm the presence of large numbers of “lurkers” who primarily consume rather than produce content.\textsuperscript{75} Such users who either produce no content or consume far more content than they produce may be more usefully conceptualised as readers than as produsers.\textsuperscript{76} Even in the case of genuine produsers, of which the users focused on in this study are examples, the production and reception of content do not occur simultaneously and even these users are frequently cast into the role of the reader.\textsuperscript{77} Since almost all users are frequently called upon to fulfil the role of reader, even if they also produce content, existing scholarship on reading and reader response retains applicability.

A second point is that the potential audiences of content published on social media sites are larger and more diverse than with print media. While published material has always spread across national boundaries and not been restricted to its site of publication, content can be accessed by geographically distant and dispersed audiences far more easily via the internet than was possible with physically printed material. On Twitter, as discussed in the previous section, users with limited material resources, and potentially against the wishes of repressive governments which have had only limited success in restricting internet access (Engel 2014), can access audiences far larger than were imaginable in previous eras. The users studied in the analytical chapters, for example, amassed readerships of tens of thousands of registered users, many of whom were located outside Egypt, without needing institutional backing or support. Such reach, and influence, would have been unthinkable for unaffiliated citizens in the pre-internet age. Again, however, this increased reach

\textsuperscript{75} See the following for discussion of the issue of “lurking”:\ Ridings, Gefen and Arinze (2006); Nonnecke and Preece (2000); Takahashi, Fujimoto and Yamasaki (2003).

\textsuperscript{76} One solution might be to conceptualise such users as “audiences” similar to those at public speeches who are able to respond to the statements made by a speaker rather than “readers” who are typically separated from authors in both time and space (Ong 1975). Ede and Lunsford (1984), following Simons (1976) propose a cline of levels of potential interaction. A detailed consideration of such an approach might bring useful insights to the study of readership on Twitter, but is beyond the scope of the present study.

\textsuperscript{77} Passive in the sense of not directly producing content. All readers are active in the sense of being required to “complete” texts, as discussed above.
must not lead to uncritical utopianism. As previously discussed, uneven internet access and linguistic competence restrict access to distant readerships. Additionally, the existence of so-called “filter bubbles” (Pariser 2011), within which users exhibit “homophily” (Wu et al 2011) with the users they follow, with the consequence that they tend to receive information reinforcing rather than challenging existing opinions, means that readerships on social media sites can lack diversity of political and social outlook, even if they are geographically dispersed. This potential lack of diversity has been clearly shown in work by Lotan (2014) which demonstrated the lack of interaction between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian Twitter accounts in the context of the 2014 conflict in Gaza. This demonstrates the important point that even where Twitter users have large numbers of followers, they may represent only a narrow band of political and social attitudes.

A third important point is that although platforms like Twitter allow unaffiliated citizens to reach large readerships, traditional media institutions often have large numbers of followers and continue to fulfil a gatekeeping role and exert influence over access to audiences. Moreover, journalists associated with traditional media outlets are often able to quickly gain large numbers of followers supported by their professional affiliation. A final factor is the influence of institutional endorsement of unaffiliated content producers. With regard to Egypt’s 2011 Revolution and 2013 protests, media outlets including al-Jazeera (2014), Foreign Policy (Hounshell 2011), The Washington Post (Fisher 2013a, 2013b), UN Dispatch (Albon 2011) and The Daily Beast (Krantz 2013) published “who to follow” lists, endorsing particular blogs and Twitter accounts as valuable sources of information and effectively canonising them. Although it is impossible to directly measure the impact of this kind of endorsement, it is difficult to imagine that it had no effect. This affirms that media institutions continue to exert significant influence over access to readers, not as in the past through controlling access to the technological means of production, but through “gatewatching” (Bruns 2005), identifying and drawing attention to important information and acting as “endorser[s] rather than door dragon[s]” (Levinson 1999:130).
2.2.3 Text, fabula and sjuzhet

Applying the concept of text to Twitter is complex. As shown in the analysis in chapter six, finding “texts” on Twitter, understood as finite collections of signs constituting one element of narratives, is frequently difficult. Twitter’s 140-character limit means that it is only rarely possible to view individual tweets as textual wholes in their own right. In the same way as the chunks of information expressed in tweets must be combined into meaningful wholes, the chunks of linguistic material contained in individual tweets must be combined into larger units if they are to function as textual wholes. To view entire streams, which frequently comprise thousands of tweets, as narrative wholes, as Peys (2012) suggests, on the other hand, is also problematic as streams typically lack global coherence and structure. While it is possible to view tweets as constituent nodes within cognitively realised texts, as argued above and discussed further in chapter six, the lack of obvious beginnings and ends and of clear internal structure means that readers must play a significant role in determining the form that texts come to adopt for them as readers, a process Meikle (2016:70) describes as “choose your own adventure”. This pushes the role of the reader beyond what is common in most non-digital narrative texts where, although the concept of intertextuality shows that textual boundaries are always porous, it is usually possible to identify which signs pertain to a particular text and which do not. As Bal argues, “this finite ensemble of signs does not mean that the text itself is finite, for its meanings, effects, functions, and background are not. It only means that there is a first and a last word to be identified; a first and a last image of a film; a frame of a painting, even if those boundaries...are not watertight” (Bal 1997:5). On Twitter, where not only meaning but the structure and content of texts themselves result from interpretation, even this limited fixity is largely missing.

This textual fluidity has significant implications for sjuzhet – the potential for different readers realising the same text into different sjuzhets is greatly amplified when the text itself exhibits the degree of instability seen on Twitter. In other ways, though, sjuzhet functions in a similar way on Twitter as in other contexts. Many of the elements of sjuzhet identified by Genette (1972/80), for
example, such as “speed”, “frequency”, “mood” and “distance” can be controlled in storytelling on Twitter much as they can elsewhere. Twitter’s characteristics do seem to have an influence on the presentation of narratives on Twitter, beyond their enforced fragmentation. Most obviously, the 140-character limit fosters economy of writing and a tendency towards ellipsis. More significantly, Twitter’s emphasis on speaking about events in the present\textsuperscript{78} seems to produce a preference for the presentation of events in chronological sequence, as users answer the question of “what’s happening?” in a series of successive “news”. In terms of news reporting on Twitter, this represents a move away from the “inverted pyramid structure” (Pöttker 2003) dominant in offline news reporting in both print and broadcast news, where events are presented in order of their perceived importance, in favour of the presentation of events in stricter chronological order. This is the pattern seen in my analysis in chapter six although more research is needed to explore to what extent this is a general feature of Twitter.

A third important factor is the impact of the development of “ambient” and “always-on” news environments on Twitter (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012; Hermida 2010)\textsuperscript{79} where maintaining momentum and a continuous flow of information is seen as vital.\textsuperscript{80} Connected to this is a need on Twitter to post frequently in order to sustain visibility and presence (Miller 2008:396), necessitating posting even in the absence of new information.\textsuperscript{81} This can have a significant impact on the way in which elements of the fabula are presented. Techniques such as repetition and “slow down”, used to draw attention to specific elements in traditional storytelling, may instead function as filler, plugging gaps in the action with material to maintain an ambient news environment rather

\textsuperscript{78} This is emphasised in the question of “what’s happening?” posed to all Twitter users in the box used for writing new tweets.
\textsuperscript{79} This concept is partly a development of Wajcman’s (2008) arguments about mobile technology facilitating “always on” interpersonal connections.
\textsuperscript{80} This also connects to so-called “phatic culture” whereby users also feel compelled to frequently post in order to reaffirm their presence (Miller 2008:396).
\textsuperscript{81} Miller (2008:396) argues that this process of maintaining “connected presence” is “the point of Twitter”, a stance I reject given what I have proposed is Twitter’s potential for storytelling and the broader implications of those stories for politics and society.
than reflecting their perceived importance. This highlights that although many of the same mechanisms are available to Twitter users for the presentation of narratives as in offline storytelling, the specific affordances of Twitter and the attributes of Twitter cultures may lead to differences in the way in which stories are presented and read. This means that although reading Twitter may draw on the same basic narrative competencies required for other types of storytelling, Twitter users must still develop new “literacies” (Barton and Lee 2013) in order to read and write effectively on this platform. Again, much more work is needed to explore the extent to which the phenomena described in chapter six are specific to the context under study here, or common to communication on Twitter more broadly.

Finally, there are two distinctive features of fabula construction on Twitter. The first is that the inherent sociality of Twitter, and the emphasis placed on interaction, means that fabulae are constructed and negotiated collaboratively (Papacharissi 2015:8). As discussed in detail in chapter six, individual users do not present their own distinct chronologies but are involved in larger processes of negotiating collaboratively produced chronologies. This also ties into the weakening of individual authors and the decentring of narrative production away from individuals and towards collective processes. While individual users have only ever been able to influence, rather than control, collaboratively produced fabulae, which in non-fictional narrative may be understood to simply coincide with reality, the influence of individuals is further weakened on Twitter. The second is that fabulae on Twitter, owing to the instability of texts and sjuzhets, tend to remain open to a far greater extent than in other contexts. “Openness” here does not refer to Eco’s notion of the “open” text, although I have argued that texts on Twitter tend to be “open” in this way, but to the fact that new elements can be added, or the chronology revised, at any time. At no point are stories published as completed wholes, with the degree of closure that this entails. As Bruns (2005:53), drawing on comments made by the musician Brian Eno, explains “news stories are no longer fixed and completed at the time of publication, stamped as it were with the originating journalist’s or publisher’s seal of professional approval, but remain open for addition and engagement by user-
produsers”. Snyder (1996:60) offers a description of the internet as a text which can equally be applied to narratives on Twitter: “an electronic text that is always changing and becoming... is associative, cumulative, multi-linear and unstable”. Readers are unlikely to ever reach “completed interpretations” (Rabinowitz 1987:1) as they might do with more traditional texts. Narrative closure may always be provisional, but it seems that some cases are more provisional than others and fabulae on Twitter demonstrate a capacity for change and addition that goes beyond the familiar ambiguity seen in many non-digital narratives.

3 Using Twitter as a data source

Twitter offers a volume of data that would have until recently been scarcely imaginable for most researchers. As of the time of writing, around 500 million tweets are posted to Twitter every day by around 313 million active users tweeting in over 40 languages (Twitter 2016b). These tweets reference almost every aspect of social life in countries across the world and provide a colossal archive of recent history from an enormous range of perspectives. What is more, since late 2014, every tweet ever posted on Twitter has been indexed for searching and can be accessed through the Twitter website, by anybody, for free (Zhuang 2014). Finally, a project by the US Library of Congress to archive every tweet ever published on the site, including both historical and new tweets, means that the data currently archived on Twitter will be available for many years to come (c.f. Library of Congress 2013).

It is possible that Twitter will one day lose popularity as quickly as it gained it. The SNS MySpace, for example, suffered a rapid loss of users and market share towards the end of the 2000s and some have recently predicted a similar fate for Facebook (Cannarella and Spechler 2014). Twitter would remain a useful resource for researchers, even if this were to happen, for two reasons. First, many of the most important social, cultural and political events of the late 2000s and early 2010s, including major moments of upheaval such as protest movements in Turkey in 2013, Iran in 2009 and across the Arab world from 2010, as well as countless episodes from daily life, have already been described
in minute detail on Twitter. Events are described on Twitter that would have been unlikely to have been recorded in previous eras, from many more perspectives, and the site may provide the most detailed archive of the lived experience of these events that will ever be available to researchers.

Second, the volume of tweets posted means that analysing even the tweets that have been posted up until the present day will take decades. Bettering our understanding of how communication, and storytelling in particular, work on Twitter is therefore vital if we are to make effective use of this resource, both now and into the future, regardless of what happens to Twitter and its popularity.

This does not mean, however, that studying Twitter data is easy. One of the most significant problems is how to make sense of the vast quantities of data it makes available. Much of the academic work published in recent years working with Twitter data has focused on so-called “big data” or “data mining” approaches, employing quantitative, algorithm based analytical methods to study large bodies of tweets in terms of concepts such as “sentiment”. Such methods allow for far larger numbers of tweets to be studied than would be possible with human analysis – Kwak et al (2010), for example, analysed 106 million tweets. While large scale analyses can greatly help in understanding the broad structures of interaction and the flow of information on Twitter, they suffer from the same deficiencies as all large scale quantitative analyses and unavoidably streamline and flatten out subtle variation and individuality. Recurring features of communication on Twitter such as the use of non-Latin scripts, non-standard spelling, rapidly shifting and highly variable conventions, irony and wordplay and the inclusion of images alongside text further complicate automated analysis and limit its usefulness.

Qualitative approaches to studying Twitter have so far appeared less frequently. Although the volumes of data studied are far smaller, and generalisability therefore more limited, interpretive, 

83 For examples of this approach see: Go, Bhayani and Huang (2009); Diakopoulos and Shamma (2010); Jiang et al (2011); Pak and Paroubek (2010)
researcher led approaches can be far more sensitive and nuanced than is possible with automated analysis of very large datasets. It is insufficient, however, to simply apply methods developed for other contexts on social media. While it is true that communication on Twitter shares many characteristics with other media, as was argued in the first half of this chapter, and is shown throughout the analysis chapters, Twitter discourse is more fragmented, more networked and less focused on the individual than most other discursive contexts. As a consequence, although existing theoretical concepts can inform analysis of Twitter data, they cannot be uncritically transferred without considering Twitter’s distinctive characteristics.

3.1 The data to be analysed

The dataset is comprised of tweets published on Twitter at the time of the 30 June 2013 protests, 3 July intervention, and 14 August clearing of the Rabaa and el-Nahda Squares. As it would have been impossible to study anything approaching all the tweets from this period, the analysis focuses on tweets from three prominent Twitter users: @Bassem_Sabry, @Zeinobia and @Sandmonkey. To produce a dataset of manageable size, tweets from two periods were studied: 28 June – 10 July and 12 – 21 August. The first covers the 30 June protests and 3 July intervention, and the second the clearance of the Rabaa and el-Nahda Squares. The remainder of this section discusses in detail why these individuals and time periods were chosen.

3.1.1 Specific tweeters rather than hashtags or keywords

The dataset employed here consists of tweets from just three of the thousands of people tweeting about 30 June, 3 July and 14 August. This approach raises important issues of ecological validity since it seems likely that relatively few Twitter users use Twitter in this highly-focused way. Two main alternatives presented themselves: collecting tweets based on specific hashtags; or collecting tweets based on their use of specific search terms. These approaches are widely employed by both
commercial Twitter analysis providers\textsuperscript{84} and academics\textsuperscript{85} but were deemed unsatisfactory here for a number of reasons.

Hashtags

Hashtags are one of the main mechanisms used by Twitter users to link individual tweets into larger conversations and debates and represent a type of “folksonomy” (Potts 2009a, 2009b; Potts et al 2011), a method for organising tweets in terms of their relations to larger themes, processes and identities. Basing data selection for a qualitative study around hashtags, however, presents difficulties. First, major events are not always accompanied by a single, dominant hashtag. This can reflect political issues – the hashtag “#June30”, for example was very widely used by supporters of the anti-Brotherhood protests but infrequently used by Brotherhood supporters. Similarly, “#military_coup” was widely employed by figures from the Brotherhood in tweets about 3 July but not by opponents of the Brotherhood. Differences of usage can also simply be the consequence of variations in spelling and phrasing. Potts et al (2011:235) report, for example, that hashtag usage in the context of natural disasters is characterised by “inconsistent formats, spellings and word orderings”. This makes the selection of hashtags more complex than it might first appear. A second issue is that popular hashtags may be used in very large numbers of tweets. The digital archive R-Shief for example collected 15,272,042 tweets featuring “#Jan25” between 25/01/2011 and 11/06/2013, too many for qualitative analysis. Even taking tweets from single days with popular tags can quickly produce unworkably large datasets.

\textsuperscript{84} At the time of writing companies offering hashtag or searchterm based analysis included: “tweetreach.com”, “followthehashtag.com”, “keyhole.co”, “hashtracking.com” and “tweetchup.com”.

\textsuperscript{85} Examples of hashtag-based studies include: Efron (2010); Tsur and Rappoport (2012); Small 2011; and Blaszka et al (2012)
A third major problem is that hashtags are used inconsistently. Estimates vary significantly on this issue, perhaps reflecting changing practices over time; Hong et al (2011:519), for example, claim that just 11% of tweets include hashtags while Mullane (2015) suggests that 44.2% of tweets include them. It is nonetheless clear that a significant proportion of tweets do not feature any hashtags at all. There are also significant variations between different users in terms of how frequently they employ hashtags. This means that the primary foci of large numbers of tweets cannot be identified through hashtags. The figure of over 15 million tweets tagged with #Jan25 cited above, for example, is certainly far lower than the total number of tweets posted about the topic. Twitter’s 140 character limit, towards which hashtags count, is clearly significant in this regard, with users frequently opting to include additional content rather than hashtags. Selecting tweets on the basis of hashtags would therefore lead to excluding large numbers of relevant tweets on the arbitrary basis that they do not include specific hashtags, regardless of the topics that they discuss.

Search terms

There were three main reasons that a search term based approach was not employed. The first is that search terms are a somewhat blunt instrument. Collecting tweets based on the search term “3 July”, for example, would have produced a dataset including any and all tweets featuring this string of characters, regardless of whether they had anything to do with Egypt and would likely have resulted in the inclusion of large numbers of irrelevant tweets. Second, as described above, tweeters often do not use straightforward denotative language. Choosing tweets on the basis that they include specific strings of characters would lead to the same problems of the arbitrary exclusion of tweets that refer to the events under study using more oblique or creative means, for no good reason. Third, as with hashtags, selecting tweets through their inclusion of particular strings of characters can quickly produce unworkably large datasets for qualitative analysis.

86 See the discussion of “text” in chapter six for more on this issue in the dataset.
Focusing on individuals

There are a number of positive reasons for basing the study around specific individuals. The first is that in discussion of Twitter, there is a justifiable tendency to focus on the collective and dialogic aspects of communication practices found there, as these represent perhaps the most significant ways in which Twitter-based communication differs from other forms. As a consequence, individual voices can be lost and the specificities of Twitter communication as practised by the individual users who ultimately constitute the multitude are minimised. This approach may also downplay the importance of widely followed “micro-celebrity” users (Marwick and boyd 2011) who act as “key storytellers” (Fisher 1987:67), influencing the attitudes and communication practices of other users. Focusing on a small number of individual users re-emphasises the importance of individual voices while also facilitating an investigation into the way in which such users elaborate narratives on Twitter, in terms of how they structure their tweets, present themselves as writers and position their readers. This provides insights into an aspect of communication on Twitter which has thus far received very little attention.

3.1.2 Selection of tweeters

Three Twitter users were chosen as the focus of the analytical chapters: @Bassem_Sabry, @Zeinobia, and @Sandmonkey. Seven main criteria were used to make this selection.

The first was that the chosen tweeters must tweet in both English and Arabic. This was to ensure that the project remained firmly grounded in translation and intercultural studies and to foreground the role of linguistic mediation and the interactions between different languages. The second was that they must tweet regularly. This was to ensure that the dataset featured sufficient information to sustain extended study and analysis and to avoid significant gaps87 in coverage. The third was that

87 Gaps in the sense of periods in which major events occurred but no accompanying tweets were posted.
their tweets must be focused in large part on the events in question to maximise the volume of relevant material.\textsuperscript{88} Developing methods suitable for studying Twitter feeds that cover a wide range of topics will be an important area for future research but is beyond the scope of this project. To meet these three criteria, the chosen tweeters are all professional or semi-professional journalists. None of them is directly employed by, or exclusively affiliated with, any single news outlet although Sabry and Sandmonkey have strong links with specific news providers, \textit{Al-Monitor} and \textit{Daily News Egypt} respectively.

A fourth criterion was that the tweeters chosen must engage in both narration of, and commentary on, events. Narration was obviously necessary for a narrative analysis to be possible while the incorporation of non-explicitly narrative commentary adds depth and richness, especially with regard to the way in which they present themselves as authors and position their readers. This allows for a more satisfying analysis and comparison between explicitly stated positions and implicit positions communicated through narrative techniques. Fifth, tweeters simply reproducing the dominant institutional narratives of the period were avoided. Instead, tweeters taking a more nuanced and flexible approach, allowing space for the story to shift and change, were preferred. This was to draw attention to the existence and circulation of alternative narratives during the period of the military intervention and to avoid an approach which might have reinforced reductive characterisations of the period as “polarised” along binary lines.

A sixth criterion was that the tweeters belong to the same broad political current and provide superficially similar accounts of the studied events. Each of the chosen tweeters belonged to the

\textsuperscript{88} Determining what constitutes “relevant” material is a complex issue. Wu, Zhang and Ostendorf (2010:690), for example, characterise “emoticons, internet slang words, abbreviations, and misspelled words” as examples of “noise” on Twitter. In this study, by contrast, such phenomena are viewed as core to communication on Twitter. Moreover, many tweets which have little obvious bearing on the events under study nonetheless contribute to reader interpretations more broadly through their influence on reader perceptions of authors and implicit reader positions.
somewhat nebulous “liberal”, “pro-democracy” movement and, crucially, rejected uncritical support for either the Brotherhood or the Armed Forces. This again was to focus on exploring the ground between the dominant poles and studying subtle rather than obvious differences between accounts of the period.

The seventh criterion was that the tweeters be influential to maximise the generalisability of the study’s conclusions on the basis that influential users “have a more advantageous positional and reputational stance to suggest community-wide framing of an event” (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013:7, see also Wasserman and Faust 1994). Measuring influence is, however, as difficult on Twitter as it is elsewhere. Perhaps most importantly, as Cha et al (2010) argue, follower numbers are a poor measure of influence as having a large number of followers does not necessarily correlate with exerting influence over those followers. A number of commercial services attempt to measure influence, typically using algorithms which incorporate factors such as follower numbers, number of tweets posted, and interactions generated. While there are clear limitations to such computational approaches, they do provide at least a rough measure of influence. Two of the best-known tools at the time of writing, “Klout” and “Kred”, were thus employed, with the three chosen writers scoring highly using both metrics. This indicates at least that large numbers of users were reading and interacting with the chosen tweeters during the period studied, suggesting them to be significantly more influential than the “average” user.

The three chosen tweeters, @BassemSabry, @Zeinobia and @Sandmonkey, meet all these criteria. They tweet in both English and Arabic, albeit in differing proportions of English to Arabic. They tweeted in high volume, particularly during the period under study, and their tweets from the chosen period were strongly, but not exclusively, focused on Egyptian politics. They all engaged in a mixture of direct reporting of events, with the implicit evaluation that implies, alongside more overt

89 See Quin (2015) for a discussion of six of the most popular influence-measuring services available at the time of writing.
commentary. This included posting links to longer pieces they have written and published on other websites, including blogs, Facebook and news sites. None of them showed an ideological commitment to either the Egyptian Armed Forces or the MB and all rejected simplistic and streamlined accounts of what had happened in Egypt since 25 January 2011, showing a willingness to reassess and re-interpret their accounts of events in a manner not seen with subscribers to the dominant narratives of the time. While the stories they tell differ in important ways as shown in the analytical chapters, all supported: democracy as a system of government, popular support as a necessary basis to rule, individual freedoms and freedom of expression and the separation of religion and state. Finally, they can all be considered “influential” on the basis of each having over 100,000 followers and scoring highly with both “Kred” and “Klout”, putting them into the category of “elite” (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013:5) or “power users” (Wilson and Dunn 2011:1269).90

Sandmonkey, Zeinobia and Sabry were by no means the only Twitter users to meet the criteria described above. There was therefore an element of arbitrary choice in the final selection. Nor can, nor should, these individuals be viewed as “representative” of any particular movement or group. The study offers an analysis of the way in which three key narrators of the Military intervention told their stories, negotiated their positioning and situated their readers during a moment of great upheaval in Egypt. This can provide insights into broader patterns and trends, but not form the basis of definitive, broad statements.

3.1.3 The time period studied

The analytical chapters examine tweets posted between 28 June - 10 July and 12 - 21 August 2013. The first period covers two of the most significant events of recent Egyptian history: the 30 June protests, in which millions took to the streets to demand early presidential elections; and 3 July, when the Egyptian Armed Forces removed Morsi from power. The more significant of these events

90 As there are by definition relatively few such users, this may limit the extent to which the findings of the present study are applicable to more “ordinary” users.
for the present analysis is 3 July, as it was characterised by a stark and intense narrative conflict. Although supporters of the Brotherhood and Armed Forces did not dispute the basic facts of the Military’s actions, that they had removed a democratically elected president, by producing radically different narratives they interpreted the significance of those actions in diametrically opposed ways. In simple terms, the pro-Military narrative contended that Morsi had been fairly elected but had failed to adequately lead Egypt and had lost the support of the people. This meant that he had lost his mandate to rule, justifying his removal at the hands of the Military who were merely exercising the will of the people. The pro-Brotherhood narrative, on the other hand, contended that having won the 2012 elections, Morsi had gained legitimacy for the full four years of his presidential term regardless of his actions in power, and that the Armed Forces’ decision to remove him constituted a coup against a legitimate president.

The second period covers the eviction and massacre of protestors at the MB sit-in protests at al-Nahda and Rabaa al-Adawiya Squares in Cairo. This was a decisive event in the aftermath of 3 July, establishing the lengths to which the Military-sponsored post-Morsi regime was prepared to go to suppress the MB affiliated pro-Morsi protest movement. The clearances were also the focus of an intense narrative conflict, albeit a more fragmented one than was seen with 3 July. The pro-Military narrative stated that the protestors had been given ample opportunity to abandon the sit-ins peacefully, leaving no choice but forceful clearance. The death of protestors was regrettable, but ultimately necessary and attributable to the Brotherhood’s decision to continue with the protest despite warnings that clearance was imminent. The Brotherhood narrative on the other hand argued that the protests were an expression of free speech in the wake of a coup, and that they were defending Egyptian democracy. The clearing of the protestors was presented as a major step taken by the Military in reasserting its control over Egypt’s politics and society. Given the centrality and conflicts of narrative during both these periods, they are well suited to a narrative analysis.
Tweets from before and after the key events were studied in order for the dynamism of the narratives told by the studied tweeters to become apparent. It has been argued throughout that narratives are not static phenomena and are subject to constant reworking and reconfiguration, which subsequently influences their meaning. Studying tweets from a slightly longer period, rather than just from 30 June, 3 July and 14 August for example, allows more time for this dynamism to become apparent and for shifts to be described and studied diachronically. Ideally tweets covering the whole period before 30 June until after 14 August would have been studied, however the huge number of tweets posted in this period made it impractical. Two separate periods were therefore chosen as a compromise. A particular goal was to examine the extent to which the events of 14 August led to a re-interpretation of the events of 30 June and 3 July. Studying this would have been impossible with tweets from just one period, and detail would undoubtedly have been lost if tweets from a longer period were to have been studied in less detail.

3.1.4 Content to be analysed

Even limiting the dataset to only three tweeters and studying tweets from just 22 days the number of tweets to be analysed remains substantial. Systematically describing and analysing each tweet in turn was therefore impractical. Moreover, the tweets relevant in each part of the analysis were not necessarily the same. Non-narrative tweets for example have little to do with sjuzhet, yet are undoubtedly significant in shaping the reader’s perception of the implied author. Similarly, many tweets simply reporting events tell us little about the role readers are expected to fill but play a part in creating the narrative fabula. Bearing this in mind, no tweets from the selected period were peremptorily excluded from the analysis, and specific tweets were chosen for more detailed analysis based upon their relevance to the foci of analysis in each chapter rather than a rigid set of pre-defined criteria. In order to prevent the boundaries of the dataset from becoming unworkably porous, tweets from users other than Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey were only studied when necessary for contextualisation. Unfortunately, it was not possible to study retweets by the chosen writers as they are not indexed for searching and cannot be accessed retrospectively. Rather than
having their own web address (URL), as individual tweets do, retweets, made using the official retweet function, are attached to the original tweet in the manner of a favourite, and thus have no independent, searchable existence of their own (c.f. Beckerman 2013). This was regrettable as retweets constitute an important aspect of communication and narration on Twitter, and it would have been preferable to have included them. This limits rather than negates the value of the analysis, however, and was not deemed sufficiently problematic for the analysis to be significantly redesigned.

Finally, in addition to the tweets, material published by the chosen writers on other sites, and to which they provided links on Twitter, was also examined where appropriate. Such material constitutes an important counterpoint to information included in the tweets, particularly in the case of Bassem Sabry and Zeinobia, discussed further below. To exclude it would have impoverished the analysis and given an imbalanced view of how the studied writers employ Twitter to communicate. Considering it also highlights the extent to which the writers studied used Twitter as one of a broader arsenal of narrative tools. Material written by others to which links were provided by the studied writers was not examined, however. This again was to prevent the boundaries of the dataset from becoming excessively porous as well as to ensure that the volume of data to be studied remained manageable.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the specifics of applying the theoretical concepts of the previous chapter to Twitter-based communication. It began with an introduction to the mechanics of Twitter and an explanation of the main types of interaction that are possible on the platform. This was followed with a broad discussion of the main issues arising when the socio-narrative and narratological concepts discussed in the previous chapter are brought to bear on Twitter. I argued that the primary value of socio-narrative theory lies in the insights it provides into the significance of storytelling on Twitter and into the relationship between what is posted on Twitter and social and
political realities. This was followed with a broad-sweep discussion of the key questions arising when the issues of authors, readers and narrative structure are considered in relation to Twitter. I argued in each case that such narratological concepts can provide insights into the nature of narrative and storytelling on Twitter but that in each case they cannot be mechanically transposed from literary theory to non-fictional storytelling on Twitter.

The following three chapters take up these issues in more detail with an extended analysis of the dataset. The first, focusing on authorship explores how and where Zeinobia, Sandmonkey and Sabry positioned themselves as authors during the two periods, examining how they attempted to maintain their positions between the dominant poles yet also differed from each other. The second focuses on readers, exploring the characteristics of real readers along with how and where the three authors position their readers through the construction of an implicit position for them to occupy. The final analytical chapter focuses on narrative structure, where the most profound differences between Twitter-based narratives and those seen in other environments are to be found.
Chapter Four – Authorship

The projection of a particular image of themselves by authors on Twitter has at least three major functions. First, it is part of a continuous process of self-branding and promotion (Murthy 2013; Marwick and boyd 2010) tied into a “commodification of information” (Miller 2008:390) and an ensuing need to make one’s own tweets appealing in a crowded market place. Second, it is one element of the continuous process of producing the self (boyd 2008; Tagg and Seargeant 2014; Hogan 2010; Page 2012; Tsiplakou 2009; Murthy 2013). Third, and most importantly for this study, projecting a particular image allows users to constrain the ways in which their tweets can be interpreted through the manipulation of reader perceptions of authorial intent.

This chapter concentrates on where and how Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey position themselves in social, political and professional terms. The emphasis throughout is on them as implied authors, with the implied author understood as the impression of the author to which readers make reference when interpreting texts. This impression is typically produced through the act of reading and interpretation, but may also incorporate extratextual knowledge. Readers’ perceptions of authors are significant to the extent that they read “intentionally” (Abbott 2002; Herman 2013), seeking to make sense of written material through reference to their impression of the author’s communicative and rhetorical intentions. This facilitates the operation of Foucault’s “author function”, whereby a reader’s impression of a writer’s values (Herman 2009) and intentions (Davis and Harré 1990; Ryan 2011) allow them to limit the range of possible interpretations. The concept of the implied author is a controversial one within literary studies and there is insufficient space

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91 Similar concepts in other disciplines include the “discoursal self” (Ivanic 1998; Ivanic and Weldon 1999); Campbell’s (1975:394) “created personality put forth in the act of communicating” and Goffman’s (1976:298) notion that "we learn about the author from his books".

92 Ryan (2011) highlights that many influential concepts of the implied author, such as Chatman (1978), disregard the value of such extra-textually derived knowledge of authors for no good reason.

93 See, for example, the discussion in Kindt and Muller (2006) and the 2011 special edition of Style edited by Brian Richardson “Implied Author: Back from the Grave or Simply Dead Again”. 
available here to go into this debate in detail. The term is employed here to emphasise that it is the image of the author that readers produce in response to texts that guides their interpretation, rather than the characteristics of the “real”, i.e. extratextual, author, which may or may not accord with the impression produced by the reader. It is important to note that although many aspects of writing function to position implied authors in one way or another (five relevant to Twitter are discussed in this chapter), it should not be presumed that this positioning is always consciously intended by authors (Davis and Harré 1990).

The extent to which reader construction of authors is important varies significantly from text to text (Richardson 2006), and from context to context (Foucault 1969/2003). As proposed in chapter three, I argue that the author function is particularly strong on Twitter, where the shape and meanings of narratives are so profoundly in flux. Intentional approaches to interpretation provide readers with a relatively solid foothold on which to base their interpretations, in the absence of clear narrative boundaries and structure (see chapter six) and of contextual factors which typically aid interpretation. There are, of course, other ways of reading. Abbott (2002:98-101), for example, also describes “symptomatic” and “adaptive” approaches, where authorial intent is backgrounded. Yet the central importance of intentional approaches in everyday communication (Tomasello 1999, 2003), and the need to close down some of the narrative variables on Twitter in order to make interpretation possible, suggest that a significant proportion of readers are likely to adopt intentional approaches. Readers’ perceptions of authors’ political, social and professional positioning strongly influence the way in which they interpret their writings, in terms of their assessments of factors such as reliability, underlying rhetorical objectives and “authenticity”. Since implied authors are dynamically constructed by readers in response to texts, it is impossible to talk about the implied author of any text. Since individual Twitter users typically do not read the same tweets, the “text” from which they produce their impression of the author will also vary, introducing further instability and dynamism.
The emphasis in this chapter is on the ways in which the writers under study positioned themselves in political, social, and professional terms. This allows for more nuanced comparisons between the tweets of each writer, as well as providing broader insights into the range of subject positions adopted by Twitter users during the period under study. Examining the positions adopted by each writer helps us to better understand and interpret the stories they tell while emphasising that the issue of positioning was far more complex than simply choosing a side in a binary conflict between supporters and opponents of the MB. In addition to negotiating their positioning with regard to the hegemonic narratives of the period, storytellers operating within Egypt had to negotiate their positioning with regard to a wide range of different social and political groups and institutions. The subtle differences revealed in this chapter’s analysis demonstrates the complexity of this environment and the competing pressures with which writers were faced. Although an obvious point, it is worth emphasising the possibility of such subtle acts of positioning, due to the dominance of large scale quantitative studies which tend to flatten and homogenise such differences. Additionally, the fact that the writers studied here were all widely read, respected and influential means that the specific ways in which they positioned themselves had wider significance. In the same way as the stories they told were likely to have a proportionately greater impact on collectively produced and negotiated narratives, as leaders of opinion the positions they adopted were likely to have influenced those adopted by their readers, on and offline, although this is difficult to measure.

Five ways of marking positioning are analysed: 1) paratextual material, including Twitter handles, usernames, biographies and profile images; 2) linguistic features within the selected authors’ tweets associated with particular discourses and groups; 3) explicit statements about major social and political groups; 4) use of the first person plural pronoun “we”; and 5) use of politically charged hashtags. The first and last of these are to a certain extent specific to SNSs, relying on their

94 A sixth major method for showing positioning and identity is through interactions with others (Goffman 1959). This issue is discussed in chapter five.
technological affordances, while the others are common to all communication. Exploring the issue from multiple perspectives makes it possible to draw a detailed picture of both where the writers positioned themselves as well as precisely how they did so at the same time as examining implicit, discursive acts of positioning. This helps to move beyond a tendency in the literature to focus excessively on user profiles (Vásquez 2014) and offers empirical insights into the positions adopted by three influential narrators of the events under study, while advancing our understanding of the process of marking positioning on Twitter. It is argued throughout that beyond the simple observation that all three writers project a version of themselves that resists absorption into the dominant groups of supporters of either the MB or the Armed Forces, they position themselves in significantly different ways with important implications for the way in which their tweets are likely to be read. Additionally, it is shown that there are major differences in the extent to which each writer explicitly signals different aspects of their positioning. Sabry, for example, clearly indicates his professional positioning using both paratextual information and a writing style incorporating many of the discursive features of professional journalism, yet marks his political and social positioning far less explicitly. Sandmonkey, on the other hand, makes his attitudes towards political groups and major events explicit throughout, making few attempts to appear “unbiased”.

1 Paratextual material

1.1 Account names and @usernames

Twitter users’ account names and @usernames appear next to every tweet they post or retweet and are a powerful resource for quickly and easily staking a claim to a sense of self and cultural identity (Barton and Lee 2011). Account names and @usernames can consist simply of users’ real names, as seen with Sabry, or alternative names can be used for rhetorical, poetic or political purposes, as seen

95 The issue of the presentation of self on social networking sites is the focus of a growing literature in its own right. See Papacharissi (2011), Hogan (2010), Mendelson & Papacharissi (2011), Seidman (2012), Wilson, Gosling & Graham (2012).
with both Zeinobia and Sandmonkey. Sabry is the most conservative of the three, employing a close variation of his real name as both his account name, “Bassem_Sabry”, and @username, “Bassem Sabry باسم”. Most significant here is Sabry’s inclusion of his first name, “باسم”, in Arabic in his account name in addition to the English “Bassem Sabry”. Given that the overwhelming majority of, if not all, Arabic-speaking computer users can read Latin script, it is unlikely that Sabry’s intention here is to inform readers of his name. Rather, it acts as a signal of his Arab identity and as a marker of his knowledge of Arabic. As a consequence, readers may be inclined to view Sabry as a more credible and “authentic” voice about Middle Eastern politics than other, non-Arabic-speaking, analysts. Both Zeinobia and Sandmonkey, on the other hand, tweet under pseudonyms. “Zeinobia” is presumably a reference to “Zenobia”, the name of a 3rd century queen of the Palmyrene Empire best known for leading a rebellion against the Roman Empire and conquering and briefly ruling Egypt from 269-271CE. Adopting a handle referencing Zenobia as a historical figure, known within Egypt as a nationalist fighter of foreign invaders, is a clear act of political positioning by Zeinobia the tweeter. Yet the relative obscurity of the reference outside Egypt means that, unlike Sabry’s simple declaration of Arab identity, comparatively few non-Egyptian readers are likely to be strongly influenced by it when interpreting her tweets.

The term “sandmonkey”, on the other hand, is, as Salem described it in an interview in 2012, “a racial slur used by racist Americans and Europeans against Arabs” (Younis 2012). Sandmonkey’s appropriation of the term provides an indication of his subversive approach and the dark humour that characterises his tweets, as well as a keen awareness of, and a desire to challenge, stereotypes about Arabs. Sandmonkey himself emphasised this approach in comments in the same 2012 interview in which he stated that he uses the name “because it makes white people uncomfortable”. Since this term is principally used in the UK and the USA, but is not widely known in Egypt, it also

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96 Barton and Lee (2013) and Lee (2016) made a similar observation with Chinese users of the photosharing site “Flickr”, with users employing usernames written in Chinese characters as a statement of identity rather than because Chinese speakers would otherwise struggle to identify them.
suggests an orientation towards these audiences. As with Sabry, the inclusion of Arabic script in his account name suggests an affirmation of Arab identity, with similar potential effects in terms of positioning him as speaking from within the Arab context about which he primarily writes. For bilingual readers his use of “السيد مانكي” as his account name also further emphasises his playful and subversive approach, turning an anti-Arab slur into a title by changing “sand” into the Arabic honorific “سيد”, presumably due to the phonological similarity between the two, but simply transliterating the English word “monkey” to produce “مانكي”, which has no direct meaning in Arabic. For those able to understand the wordplay in his name, that it requires knowledge of both English and Arabic will strongly suggest that Sandmonkey belongs to Egypt’s bilingual elite. For readers unable to understand both languages, this implication will be lost. The wordplay therefore also conveys elitism, but only to those able to understand the humour and who are likely to belong to that elite. Although only a small proportion of Egyptians are bilingual in English and Arabic, a disproportionate number of Egyptian internet users fall into this category (Warschauer, el-Said and Zohry 2007).

The account names and @usernames that they chose produce quite different impressions of each writer. Sabry’s names say little about his political and social positioning, yet his inclusion of Arabic, as well as his own Arab name, positions him within the Arab world in a broad sense, giving an impression of proximity to, and credibility to talk about, events in the Middle East. Sandmonkey’s use of Arabic may also convey this, yet his choice of names also suggests a subversive and confrontational stance, coupled with a willingness, and desire, to break taboos. This is likely to lead readers to expect anti-establishment sentiment in his tweets and gives an indication of his political orientation. Zeinobia’s names, on the other hand, may also engender expectations of opposition to the prevailing order, through their evocation of historical resistance, although the fact that

97 The Arabic word “قرد” (monkey), is however commonly used in Egyptian Arabic to describe someone who is good at something.
“Zenobia” is not a widely known historical figure beyond Egypt will limit this effect with non-
Egyptian readers. Finally, Sandmonkey’s use of bilingual wordplay positions him socially within
Egypt’s bilingual elite in a way not seen with either Sabry or Zeinobia, whose names give little
indication of their positioning in this sense. Bilingual readers of Sandmonkey are therefore likely to
understand him as speaking from within Egypt, but hardly as a voice from the street able to
articulate the struggles of “ordinary” Egyptians from first-hand experience. Monolingual readers, on
the other hand, are unable to draw this conclusion from his name alone.

1.2 Profile images

Profile images are an additional, powerful tool available to Twitter users to present a sense of their
identity and engage in acts of collective identity (Gerbaudo 2015). As with users’ account names and
@usernames, profile images appear next to every tweet posted, and as such are one of the most
consistently recurring markers of both identity and, potentially, positioning. Unfortunately,
recovering Sandmonkey’s profile image from the period under study has not been possible. The
profile images used by both Sabry and Zeinobia, however, remain available for analysis:

Figure 6 - Profile images used by Bassem Sabry and Zeinobia during the period under study
Sabry’s profile image tells readers comparatively little about him. That he is clean-shaven, lacking either the long beard commonly worn by Salafists or the short beard typical of MB supporters (Khalil 2013), suggests that he is not an Islamist. His clothing is western in style, but entirely typical of middle class urban Egyptian men. It is not clear where the photo was taken and there is little about the setting which specifically connotes either Egypt or the Arab world. His profile image is a fairly nondescript headshot, and there is nothing that might be conceived as threatening, alien or confrontational to a western audience. This makes it possible for western readers to perceive Sabry as both one of “us” as well as one of “them”, an Egyptian able to speak authentically about Egypt but with the credibility of a western journalist.

Zeinobia’s avatar, on the other hand, is both explicitly grounded in Egypt, and overtly signals her political beliefs. In contrast to Sabry, there is no image of Zeinobia’s face, reflecting her commitment to anonymity across all her social media channels. Instead, the most prominent aspect of her profile image is the hashtag “#JAN25” which trended repeatedly during the 25 January Revolution and is closely associated with the overthrow of Mubarak. Prominently featuring this hashtag, more than two years after the Revolution, affirms her continued support for the narrative of 25 January, and the meanings it carries, while positioning her as opposed to both the former regime and status quo. The second major element of her profile image is the Arabic text “ادعم مستشفى 25 يناير الخيري” (Support the 25 January Charitable Hospital). This hospital was established by “a group of young Egyptians who love their country” (25hospital.com), a week after the fall of Mubarak, as a charitable enterprise. By overtly signalling her support for it, Zeinobia aligns herself with the idea of “youthful patriotism” that underwrote its establishment and was a key element of the narrative of the 25 January uprising. Although this utopian vision of a unified youth working together to build a new Egypt had largely disintegrated by the time of the period under study, through her inclusion of this text Zeinobia reaffirms her ongoing commitment to the idealistic, collaborative and constructive
aspects of the 25 Jan uprising. Consequently, readers are likely to engage with Zeinobia’s tweets and narratives as oriented towards the rhetorical objective of supporting the Revolution and its underlying goal of creating a new Egypt. As with Sabry and Sandmonkey’s account names and @usernames, the presence of Arabic in her profile image affirms that she is an Arabic speaker, and thus privy to insights that are not available to non-Arabic speakers. That the text makes specific reference to a hospital in Cairo reaffirms her embedding within Egypt specifically, although since this information is provided only in Arabic it would not be accessible to monolingual readers of English. This contrasts markedly with Sabry’s avatar in which his Arab and Egyptian identities are essentially invisible.

1.3 Biographies

In contrast to profile images, @user names and account names, it is necessary to visit a user’s profile page to read their biography. As such, it is possible for users to read tweets from a given user without ever seeing their biography. Nonetheless, these biographies allow users to make more developed statements about themselves than are possible with either their avatars or names. As such, they constitute one of the most important paratextual means for authors to position themselves. The biographies used by Sabry and Zeinobia during the period under study were as follows:

![Figure 7 - Biographical information provided by Zeinobia and Bassem Sabry during the period under study](image)

98 It does not strongly imply a specific ideology, however, supporting Gerbaudo’s (2015) observation that “protest avatars” tend to be somewhat vague in their meaning, emphasising inclusivity over specificity.
Sandmonkey, on the other hand, had changed his biography by the time this analysis was conducted. It was however possible to recover his biographical statement, if not the other details seen above, using the website “bioischanged.com”:

Extremely secular, Blogger, activist, writer, author of two books, New Media douchebag, Pain in the ass! I wasn’t born with enough middle fingers

A first area of interest is the way in which they geographically locate themselves. Both Sabry and Zeinobia cite their location as “Egypt” but the extent to which the three authors emphasise an Egyptian identity varies between their biographies. Zeinobia is the most forthright of the three, describing herself as an “Egyptian Blogger/ Journalist / Photographer”, and a “talkative Egyptian”. Moreover, her blog, to which she provides a link, is entitled “Egyptian Chronicles”, further emphasising her Egyptian identity. Readers of Zeinobia’s biography are therefore likely to feel little doubt as to the fact that Zeinobia demands to be read not only as speaking about Egypt from Egypt, but as an Egyptian. This strengthens the idea that she is speaking from “inside”, potentially strengthening her authenticity, crucial to success on SNSs (Marwick and boyd 2011; Seargeant and Tagg 2014), through the creation of a sense of immediacy with regard to the events she reports (Frosh 2009).

Neither Sabry nor Sandmonkey, in contrast, make this claim. Sabry describes himself as writing about Egypt but does not explicitly state that he is an Egyptian and signals a broader focus by saying that he also writes on “Arab/Current affairs”. Additionally, the title of his blog, to which he also provides a link, is “An Arab Citizen”, and he provides a translation of his bio in Standard, rather than

99 It was not possible to recover Sandmonkey’s stated location.

100 That Egyptians are talkative is a common stereotype across the Arab world. As such being “talkative” (رَغِيَّةٌ (عَشْرَيْةٌ عَشْرَيْةً) might be understood as a demonstration of being a “typical” Egyptian. As there is no similar stereotype about Egyptians in Europe or the USA, this connotation would probably go unnoticed by readers lacking extensive familiarity with the Arab world.
Egyptian, Arabic. Both elements suggest a broader Arab identity and focus rather than the strong focus on Egypt seen with Zeinobia. This gives readers the impression that Sabry is writing mainly as a regional specialist, rather than as an ordinary citizen talking about his own country. Finally, Sandmonkey’s Egyptian identity is even less evident as he makes no references to being either Egyptian or Arab in his bio.

A second interesting aspect of the biographies is the differing ways that the three authors position themselves professionally. The following table shows the stated occupations of each writer, in the order in which they are presented in their bios:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zeinobia</th>
<th>Bassem Sabry</th>
<th>Sandmonkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogger</td>
<td>Political &amp; Media Consultant</td>
<td>Blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Egyptian</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>New Media douchebag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pain in the ass!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 - Zeinobia, Bassem Sabry and Sandmonkey’s stated occupations*

Describing themselves in these ways creates different reader expectations, and frames each writer’s tweets in different ways. It is striking that Zeinobia is the only one of the three to explicitly describe herself as a journalist, despite the fact that both Sandmonkey and Sabry routinely contribute to online news websites and Zeinobia does not. Describing herself as a journalist creates reader expectations in terms of the content of her tweets (journalists generally report events), as well as in terms of the attributes of her writing, such as honesty, “objectivity”, and balance, which are traditionally viewed as central to the practice of journalism (e.g. Ethical Journalism Network 2016).

By avoiding this label, Sandmonkey and Sabry downplay the extent to which readers can expect them to act as reporters. It is also likely to have an effect on the way in which readers evaluate their tweets; if neither Sandmonkey nor Sabry make any claims to journalistic “neutrality” or “balance”, they are less likely to be criticised for not providing them.
Both Zeinobia and Sandmonkey, on the other hand, describe themselves first as bloggers. This frames their tweets in important ways: in contrast to Egypt’s largely acquiescent journalistic establishment, during the mid-2000s blogging emerged as a major venue for critiquing and challenging the Mubarak regime, particularly following the appearance of the 2004 “Kefaya” movement. This association between blogging and opposition activism against the ruling regime continued during the Morsi era and beyond. By describing themselves as bloggers, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey align themselves with this critical movement and in opposition to the Mubarak-era political and social settlement, an identity Sandmonkey reinforces by explicitly describing himself as an “activist”. Readers are likely to read their tweets with this in mind, understanding an oppositional politics to underlie them and expecting them to be oriented towards a liberal transformation of Egyptian society. This creates something of a tension in terms of the reader’s impression of Zeinobia, creating a potential conflict between the idealised impartiality of journalism and the commitment to particular activist causes. With Sandmonkey, on the other hand, who makes no claims to neutrality or impartiality, it frames his tweets as oriented towards particular, if at this point unstated, goals. It is noteworthy that Sabry, despite regularly posting on his blog “An Arab Citizen”, does not describe himself as a blogger. This is perhaps due to the associations between blogging and opposition activism in Egypt mentioned above. Finally, conspicuous by its absence is any reference to Sabry’s affiliation with the liberal ‘al-dostour’ party, led by Mohamed Baradei. Sabry’s role as a former coordinator with the party is widely known in Egypt, but not beyond.

These professional descriptions also have implications for how readers perceive the class background of each writer. Labels such as “consultant”, “writer”, and to a lesser extent also “journalist” and “blogger”, place them amongst Egypt’s socio-economic elite. This is likely to lead readers, both within Egypt and abroad, to perceive all three as speaking from a position somewhat

102 He also makes few references to his blog in his tweets.
removed from that of the protesting masses of the 25 January Revolution. Zeinobia, however, makes some effort to counteract this by also describing herself as “just another... Egyptian”, thereby positioning herself alongside “ordinary” Egyptians. Sandmonkey and Sabry, on the other hand, make no such attempt. This may influence the degree of credibility enjoyed by each writer when representing the opinions of the Egyptian street. Sandmonkey and Sabry, speaking from Egypt, may be closer to ordinary Egyptians than commentators in London or Washington, but they are still positioned as outsiders looking in.

2 Use of specific discourses/narratives

Using a personal idiolect characterised by features associated with what have been variously described as “speech communities” (Labov 1972; Bolinger 1968/75), “discourse communities” (Swales 1990; Nystrand 1982) and “communities of practice” (Wenger 1998; Meyerhoff 2008) is a powerful means for claiming an identity and social position through implicit “invocation” rather than explicit “inscription” (Zappavigna 2012:69). Halliday (1978) similarly describes the “interpersonal” function of language, used to create and manage bonds between people, as one of its fundamental “metafunctions”. As Ivanic (1998:39) argues, “every discoursal decision positions the writer doubly: as a thinker of such things and as a user of such words and structures” acting to structure the way that speakers are perceived by those around them. The discourses that writers employ, regardless of the ideational content of their communication, therefore affect who we understand the authors to be. Equally important as the discourses adopted by writers are those which they avoid using, signalling identities with which they do not feel comfortable or wish to avoid (Ivanic 1998). Todorov (1980:75) argues that construction of authors constitutes a second stage of interpretation begun once “we have constructed the events that compose a story”. The movement between event and author construction is not monodirectional, however, as the identities writers present then influence the way in which we interpret what they say in a complex dialectic. This section examines prominent features of the idiolects of each writer and analyses their implications for the impression of themselves presented in their tweets.
2.1 Language choice

Before selecting from available discourses, Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey first had to constantly choose when to use English and when to use Arabic, although this decision may not have always been made consciously (Beaujour 1989:38). Given that many of their readers are likely to have also been bilingual (see chapter five), this decision has more significant implications than merely enabling one audience or another to understand what is said, influencing the identity presented in their tweets in a similar way to adopting one discourse rather than another since "the negotiation of language choice and alternation between linguistic codes serves as an important resource for self-presentation and identity performance" (Lee 2016:123). This fact is also explicitly acknowledged in the following tweet from Zeinobia, demonstrating the politicisation of language choice during the period under study:

![Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 8 Jul 2013
And I have been called a traitor for tweeting in English](image)

It is therefore significant that all three writers choose to write in both English and Arabic, frequently switching between the two as well as, less frequently, codeswitching. Even for monolingual readers, the clear presence of multiple languages affects the positioning of the writers: their use of Arabic grounding them firmly in the Middle East, which can serve as a source of local knowledge and authority, and their use of English signalling an orientation towards readers beyond Egypt. For readers familiar with the linguistic situation in Egypt, codeswitching can serve as a marker of elite status (Gumperz 1971) while also reflecting what may be their normal way of communicating with other multilingual friends (Lee 2016).

103 Black (2009) describes a similar phenomenon in fanfiction writing, where knowledge of another language is used as a signal of authenticity and authority.
While the choice between English and Arabic clearly has implications in terms of possible audience, the consequences of choosing between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) are subtler since most readers of MSA are also able to read ECA. It is therefore noteworthy that all three writers predominantly use ECA and only rarely employ MSA. There could be several reasons for this. First, the vast majority of Egyptians find it considerably easier to communicate in ECA than in MSA. Since ECA is widely understood across the Arabic-speaking world, they may therefore see little reason to go to the extra effort of using MSA when they can write both more easily and more expressively in ECA. Second, while MSA has traditionally been used in written forms of Arabic, writing in the various Arabic vernaculars is widespread on Twitter. Using ECA is therefore in accordance with Twitter norms of Arabic language use. Third, it may serve to signal an orientation towards Egyptian audiences in their Arabic language tweets. While their English language tweets may be directed to a broadly conceived international audience, writing in Egyptian Arabic in their Arabic tweets may imply a narrower focus. Fourth, using ECA strongly and unambiguously grounds all three writers as Egyptians, functioning as an identity marker. This may strengthen their credibility to speak about events in Egypt both with other Egyptians and with Arabs from other countries. Of course, monolingual English readers are unlikely to be aware that Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia typically write in ECA rather than MSA, restricting these effects to readers of Arabic.

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104 As recently as 1997, Haeri described seeing written colloquial Arabic as “quite rare” (1997:797). That colloquial Arabic is at least as widespread as Standard Arabic amongst Egyptian twitter users demonstrates the extent to which digitally mediated communication has challenged the once standard assumption that dialect is used almost exclusively in speech, and blurred the distinction between written and oral communication.
2.2 Sandmonkey: Swearing, evaluation, humour

Four main aspects of Sandmonkey’s writing stand out in terms of the way in which they position him: his use of language commonly regarded as taboo, overt evaluation and dark and sarcastic humour.

2.2.1 Swearing

Sandmonkey’s extensive use of words and expressions often viewed as profane, in English and Arabic, is a distinctive aspect of his writing style. See, for example, the following tweets:

105 Both Wittmeyer (2013) and Nasr (2013:78) specifically describe Sandmonkey as “foul-mouthed”.
Sandmonkey’s use of foul language constitutes more than just personal style since, as Gee argues, “language is always ‘political’ in a deep sense” (Gee 2010:7). His frequent use of foul language has two main implications. First, through its contrast with the formal language typical of journalism, it clearly sets him apart from the professional identities of “journalist” and “analyst” and indicates that his tweets should not be read as “journalism” or “analysis” in their institutional forms. This frees Sandmonkey of the expectation of upholding the “objectivity”, “seriousness” and “professionalism” associated with these professions. Second, the use of foul language has specific political connotations in Egypt due to its association with the revolutionary youth movement that spearheaded the 2011 protests. The use of “foul” language by young revolutionaries has constituted one of the main approaches employed by Egyptian state media since 2011 to criticise them and justify descriptions of them as vulgar and ill-mannered. Through employing this discourse Sandmonkey aligns himself with this revolutionary group – aligning himself not only with the Revolution in broad terms, but also with the dedicated core of revolutionaries whose demands encompassed a far-reaching transformation of Egyptian society beyond the basic calls for Gamal Mubarak not to succeed his father as president and for “bread, freedom and social justice”.

2.2.3 Overt subjectivity

A second salient feature is that Sandmonkey is frequently and unapologetically subjective. At issue here is not whether he is subjective or objective – objectivity is viewed as impossible within the socio-narrative approach – but rather that his subjectivity is strongly foregrounded. Consider, for example, the following:

106 This does not prevent him from engaging in analysis or reporting, however.

107 See, for example, the tweets of the activist Alaa abd el-Fattah, the journalist/activist Sarah Carr, or the human rights campaigner Mahienour el-Massry.

108 An important distinction with classical narratology which strove towards becoming an objective “science” of narrative.
In each example Sandmonkey reports an event but also adds a distinctly personal view on the event reported. By openly declaring his opinions of events in this way he reaffirms that he is not speaking as an “objective” reporter and emphasises the centrality of opinions in his writing. This supports a general shift in reporting on social media away from the ideal of objectivity and towards an embrace of subjectivity which can function as a source of credibility (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013). It may also form part of his self-promotion on Twitter, using frequently humorous subjective commentary on events as a way to “add value” and differentiate his feed from more purely informative alternatives. It further distances him from professional journalism where such evaluation is generally frowned upon beyond opinion pieces and it also provides a way for Sandmonkey to frequently and explicitly state his positioning regarding events, giving the reader insights into his beliefs and attitudes which help them to interpret his tweets more generally. Describing the possible deployment of tanks in Tahrir as “the dumbest thing I have ever heard”, for example, re-asserts his willingness to criticise the Armed Forces and their approach as well as signalling his disapproval of that particular act. Finally, by frequently offering his own interpretations of events, Sandmonkey reinforces the idea that his tweets should be read primarily as a source of his opinions and
judgments rather than of factual information. This further influences the way in which audiences are likely to interact with his tweets, treating them as representing one perspective, rather than a single, common reality.

2.2.4 Humour

A third defining feature of Sandmonkey’s style is frequent use of humour. Consider, for example, the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>@Sandmonkey @esinefe @Doylich @BBCNewssnight</th>
<th>Imagine living in the middle of all of this Fun Times. Revolutions r so much fun. 3 years of nonstop fun!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@Sandmonkey @السيد ملكي</td>
<td>All of this without a military curfew...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these tweets and others like them, Sandmonkey employs dark, gallows humour featuring heavy sarcasm. Again, this approach has political implications: sarcastic humour and satire provided one of the few relatively free venues for criticism of government during the Sadat and Mubarak years and, consequently, this style of humour has come to be associated in Egypt with anti-establishment sentiment. Moreover, the 2011 Revolution has been described as the “humour revolution” (el-
Mahdawy 2014) and was accompanied with an explosion in the popularity of this kind of sarcastic humour. Sandmonkey’s style of humour, rarely used by supporters of the MB or the former regime, links in with a broader discourse of sarcastic criticism associated with both opposition to the former regime and support of the Revolution.

2.3 Sabry: Objectivity, attribution, measured language

2.3.1 Objectivity

There are two main elements to Sabry’s apparent “objectivity”. First, following journalistic norms, Sabry provides comparatively little explicit evaluation and generally avoids overt subjectivity, although, as the following tweets show, he never claims to be neutral:

In the majority of his tweets, Sabry simply reports that events have occurred without expressing an opinion about them:

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109 See, for example, the Facebook pages “Asa7be Sarcasm Society”, with over 10 million followers as of the time of writing, and “Egypt’s Sarcasm Society”, which has over 3.5 million followers.
This is not to say that he is purely “objective”, something he never claims to be. The following tweets, for example, offer explicit evaluation:

Yet Sabry’s perspective on events, and his role in mediating events, is generally not foregrounded in the manner seen with Sandmonkey. One major consequence of this is that his stance aligns him

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110 Sabry’s ongoing commitment to the ideal of objectivity suggests that, while social networking sites may have engendered a shift towards a more overtly subjective style of reporting, Meraz and Papacharissi (2013:20) stray into hyperbole in claiming that social media has led to “the (fragile) premise of objectivity, foundational to Western dogmas of journalism” being “abandoned in favour of more subjective...thematic accounts”.

with journalists external to events, rather than as a participant speaking from within events.\textsuperscript{111} This means that readers are likely to read his tweets as issuing from someone close to the events he narrates, yet still somewhat more distant from them than the participants themselves, able to perceive the feelings of participants without feeling them himself. Distancing himself from the events he discusses may lead some, particularly western, audiences to view him as more, rather than less, credible (Anden-Papadopoulos 2013).

The comparative scarcity of evaluation in Sabry’s writing style helps to signal his professional positioning, but makes his positioning regarding events and groups less clear. As important as his adoption of the discourse of journalism is his avoidance of discourses associated with other major political or social groups in Egypt. For example, there is none of the foul language or slang seen with Sandmonkey that might have implied alignment with the revolutionaries, significant use of religious language and expressions which might have suggested affiliation with the MB or other Islamist organisations, or references to “stability” or the threat of “terrorism” which might have suggested alignment with the Military and its supporters. All this further distances Sabry from any of the main groups operating within Egypt, suggesting to the reader that both he as a writer, and the stories he tells, should be viewed as distinct from all these groups. This may lead some readers to view Sabry’s tweets as offering a transparent account of events, free of the filters and biases of the major groups, despite the impossibility of this being the case and his own claims to the contrary.

2.3.2 Attribution and using the voices of others

Two additional important, and closely related, aspects of Sabry’s discursive style are the frequency with which he employs quotations, and the fact that he almost always attributes quotations to their sources. Consider, the following as examples of the first of both:

\footnotesize
\begin{quote}
One major exception to this are tweets from 30 June when Sabry speaks as a protestor rather than a journalist.
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
This contrasts strongly with Sandmonkey, who rarely cites his sources, and Zeinobia who occasionally cites her sources, but far less consistently than Sabry. That Sabry does state his sources has two main implications for his implied positioning. First, it aligns him yet more strongly with journalism and analysis, two activities in which clear attribution of sources is typically viewed as fundamental. This may strengthen the reader’s impression that Sabry’s tweets should be read as a balanced, impartial account of the kind that serious journalists and analysts are purported to produce rather than a representation of his own perspective. It strengthens the idea that he is situated between the dominant social groups, rather than belonging to any one of them, as this kind of writing is typical of relatively apolitical descriptive narrative, rather than the overtly politicised and rhetoricised narratives produced by groups with explicit agendas.

By constantly reminding readers that he is citing reports of events from others, rather than relaying eye-witness testimony, Sabry implies greater distance from the events themselves than is seen with either Sandmonkey or Zeinobia. Significantly, there is little evidence of a notable difference between the amount of reporting based on direct experience in each of the three writers’ tweets. Yet, through the distance created by his attributing reporting to others, Sabry appears less directly involved in the events that he reports. This could have two main consequences. First, the greater distance may imply greater authority, with his embedding in Egypt continuing to suggest authenticity. It presents Sabry as offering a digest of reports, rather than just his own observations.
Second, his frequent references to potentially unreliable Egyptian state media emphasises that it was very often not possible to be entirely sure that reported events had indeed occurred. Sabry’s demonstrated unwillingness to simply state that an event had occurred without being absolutely certain may reinforce the idea that he is a writer of integrity, committed to the “truth”, rather than specific political objectives. This may further strengthen the impression that Sabry’s version of events is “neutral”, a transparent rendering of the facts rather than a constructed narrative.

As Ivanic explains, “even if a writer’s discourse is explicitly or obviously a tissue of others, the writer has a presence in the decision to write in this way, in the selection and arrangement of these other voices” (Ivanic 1998:216). Sabry uses quotations to tell the story he wants to tell, through the voices of others. It is Sabry, rather than those that he quotes, that retains authorial control over selective appropriation, as well as the patterns of causal emplotment that are implied. It also provides a mechanism for evaluation without requiring Sabry to do so in his own voice, for example in the following tweet:

The impression that Sabry’s narratives are less “constructed” however may well influence the way in which they are interpreted by readers. Using large numbers of other voices allows Sabry to imbue his account with credibility, giving the impression that it accords with those presented by others rather than simply representing his personal interpretation, and downplays his own prominence in the narrative, making his own positioning seem less significant.

2.3.3 Measured language

Sabry avoids using slang and favours a very measured writing style in both English and Arabic. This is true even in relation to highly emotive issues about which he feels strongly:
Even when he is offering evaluation and expressing emotions, his language is restrained. It remains close to that seen in newspaper opinion pieces and lacks the orality often seen with Sandmonkey and Zeinobia. This same trend is visible in his Arabic tweeting; although Sabry tweets much more frequently in Egyptian than MSA, he continues to avoid slang and other forms of marked informality.\(^{112}\)

Although still clearly Egyptian, Sabry’s style in Arabic can generally be described as “Educated Colloquial Arabic” (Badawi 1973) and remains somewhat distant from more informal styles.

Particularly noticeable is the absence of terms associated with young Egyptians. Moreover, unlike

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\(^{112}\) Sabry makes a self-deprecating reference to his avoidance of foul language, stating in a tweet posted on 18 Aug that “my account if PG or PG13 :’)”.
the other two, Sabry does make occasional use of MSA. Unlike Zeinobia, who occasionally incorporates elements of MSA blended with Egyptian Arabic, seemingly to elevate her register, with Sabry there is a clear distinction between MSA and ECA; tweets are wholly written either in one or the other.\textsuperscript{113} Consider, for example, the following:

In these tweets and others like them, Sabry demonstrates his ability to produce accurate MSA, something which many Egyptian Arabic speakers find very difficult or impossible (Parkinson 1996)\textsuperscript{114}.

\textsuperscript{113} This is somewhat unusual, away from situations where only MSA would be considered socially permissible since it is “difficult to find examples of the pure literary language, \textit{fusha}, uninfluenced by the spoken language” (Parkinson 1996:93).

\textsuperscript{114} While Parkinson’s statement is now somewhat dated, there is little to suggest that it is no longer valid. He attributes many Egyptians’ inability to produce accurate Fusha to ever-larger class sizes and minimal teacher attentions, a trend which has continued since then and into the present.
By writing in MSA, Sabry further implies that he received a high standard of education. Yet as Haeri argues (1997), knowledge of MSA cannot be simply equated with “elite” status, and the relationships between MSA, social class, and power in Egypt are extremely complex. Critically, for upper and upper-middle class Egyptians who receive an international education, it is their knowledge of European languages, rather than MSA, that determines the opportunities available to them. Consequently, there is little pressure for this social class to acquire advanced skills in MSA. Moreover, in the context of post-revolutionary Egypt, MSA has been used by almost all the groups involved and is not uniquely associated with any one of them. Sabry’s use of MSA therefore tells the reader comparatively little about his socio-economic positioning, beyond implying that he writes in MSA regularly as a journalist might. It may be that the similarity of his MSA writing style to that found in Egyptian newspapers means that the most significant consequence of his use of it is to align him yet more strongly with journalism, as this is one of the few contexts in which MSA is regularly encountered by ordinary Egyptians. We should note, however, that aligning himself with the officially sanctioned Egyptian journalistic establishment may connote at least acceptance of the ruling regime more strongly than notions of “objectivity”. This effect may be somewhat countered, however, by the fact that the main outlet for Sabry’s writing is the news site “al-monitor”, which is based outside Egypt and emphasises its independence and critical approach.

The motivating factor for Sabry’s use of MSA appears to be its historical prestige, and the perception that a statement made in accurate MSA carries more weight than an equivalent statement in ECA. That Sabry employs MSA in this way suggests an at least partial acceptance and desire to uphold the traditional distinction and hierarchy between colloquial and Standard Arabic. This in turn implies acceptance of at least some pre-revolutionary ideals\textsuperscript{115} and suggests that Sabry is somewhat less radical in his outlook than Sandmonkey, for example.

\textsuperscript{115}We see something similar with Zeinobia’s use of aspects of MSA when she expressed her sadness at the death of Princess Fawzia, a member of Egypt’s pre-1952 royal family.
2.4 Zeinobia: Non-standard English, evaluative and emotive language

In Zeinobia’s writing there are two salient factors likely to strongly influence reader perceptions of who she is and of her social and political positioning. These are: lexical and grammatical irregularities in her English and MSA; and her heavy use of evaluative and emotive language.

2.4.1 Non-standard English

Although Zeinobia principally writes in English, her writing lacks the grammatical and idiomatic “accuracy” seen with both Sandmonkey and Sabry. Consider, for example, the following:

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The first and second tweets do not accurately follow the rules of standard English lexico-grammar while the third is not fully idiomatic, although it should be noted that such errors rarely impede communication. Their presence in Zeinobia’s English suggests that she did not receive an elite English language education.\(^{116}\) This implies, whether true or not, that she did not grow up as a

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\(^{116}\) She may have been educated in another European language but the lack of references to material written in languages other than English and Arabic in her tweets and blog suggests otherwise.
member of Egypt’s bilingual socio-economic elite. This implication will be strongest for readers familiar with Egypt’s two-tier education system, but will likely also be felt to a lesser degree by readers generally. Rather than undermining the credibility of her statements, however, the presence of “errors” in Zeinobia’s English tweets may simply strengthen her claim to be “just another talkative Egyptian”, boosting her claim to “ordinariness”. The presence of errors in her English makes this claim credible in a way that it simply would not be with either Sabry or Sandmonkey, whose almost flawless English strongly implies their membership of the elite. This in turn may make Zeinobia come across as closer to, and better able to understand, the experience of “ordinary” Egyptians than writers such as Sabry and Sandmonkey. It suggests that even when she is in agreement with the other two writers in political terms, she is writing from a different social vantage point.

Something similar can be observed with Zeinobia’s use of MSA. While Sabry makes a clear distinction between MSA and ECA, and Sandmonkey makes no use of MSA at all, Zeinobia sometimes blends elements of MSA and ECA. Consider the following:

These tweets incorporate elements of MSA, notably the negative particles “لم” and “لن” which are rarely used in Egyptian dialect, in addition to distinctly Egyptian elements, for example replicating Egyptian pronunciation in her spelling of “الجزء الثاني” as “الجزء الثاني” in the first and using distinctly Egyptian vocabulary such as “علشان” and “امبارح” in the second. As was discussed with reference to Sabry, this communicates comparatively little about her socio-economic background, as many
Egyptians regardless of background have difficulty in producing grammatically accurate and “pure” MSA. It does, however, suggest that she is not a professional writer. This weakens her claim to be a “journalist”, in the professional sense, but strengthens her alignment with “ordinary” citizens, and the idea that she is separate from the various groups of professional analysts and reporters writing about Egypt. In this sense, the relative lack of “professional” polish to her writing, in English and Arabic, serves to both position her differently to Sabry and Sandmonkey socially and professionally, while also imbuing her writing with a kind of legitimacy and authenticity largely absent from the tweets of the other two.

2.4.2 Evaluation and emotive language

A second defining feature of Zeinobia’s writing is her frequent use of evaluative and emotional language:

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117 It is noteworthy that in many tweets, although none during the period under study, Zeinobia employs the tag #citizenjournalism, further separating herself from institutionalised journalism.
In these tweets and others like them, she employs punctuation and overt statements to offer clear evaluation. This shifts her tweeting away from “objective” reporting, bringing her writing style closer to Sandmonkey’s overt subjectivity. Moreover, the openly emotional language she uses to express her opinions also positions her as distinct from professional journalists and analysts who, like Sabry, tend to avoid such emotional language when expressing opinions. That she describes herself as a “journalist”, and also posts a large number of simple reporting tweets, gives the impression that tweets such as the above should be read as spontaneous outbursts of emotion. If they are read in this way by audiences, this may strengthen their impression of Zeinobia as a “genuine” and “authentic” voice (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013), expressing her emotions directly with little of the self-conscious “professionalism” and filtering seen with Sabry.

3 Positioning with regard to key groups

All three writers use and appropriate aspects of discourses associated with particular groups, helping to position them with regard to those groups. This constitutes a key aspect of identity performance (Seargeant and Tagg 2014). An analysis of the propositional content of their explicit statements about various key groups reveals further details as to where readers are likely to situate them.

3.1 Rejecting binaries

Despite their shared opposition to Morsi, Zeinobia, Sandmonkey and Sabry also, with varying regularity, explicitly rejected the predominant anti/pro-Brotherhood binary in Egypt during the period under study, situating themselves outside these two positions. Consider the following tweets:

@Sandmonkey السيد مانكي · 14 Aug 2013
I am getting attacked by both sides, pro and anti MB. I bet i am not alone in this. Fun times on Twitter for everyone!
In reply to Steven A. Cook

Mahmoud Salem @Sandmonkey · 3 Jul 2013
@stevenacook @RawyaRageh and given that we know each other for quite a while now, would i get in bed with the military?

@Sandmonkey · 19 Aug 2013
السيد مانكي واحد لسه قابللي ان واحد صاحبه كتب بوست على الفيس إني شغل لحساب الإخوان أنا... طلب يا تري ده كان قبل ولا بعد ما كنت كلب ساويرس؟

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 29 Jun 2013
group thinking أهم الأسباب لا صوت فرق صوت المعركة خاصة صوت العقل ونور في العقل هبتي

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 3 Jul 2013
You are either a traitor or infidel if you say something the masses do not like and disapprove

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 6 Jul 2013
Morsi supporters: ElBaradei and El Sisi are U.S puppets !! Morsi opponents: MB is U.S puppet

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 6 Jul 2013
And the U.S has become the villain for both Morsi supporters and opponents for real !!

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 22 Jul 2013
Pro Morsi tweeps always claim MB was peaceful and was attacked. Anti Morsi tweeps always claim MB was armed and started attack. Go figure...
That they felt compelled to defend their positioning in this manner demonstrates the extent to which positioning is a negotiation between all the participants in a given interaction as they “make (or attempt to make) their own and each other’s actions socially determinate” (Davies and Harré 1990:45). By putting themselves outside the two dominant positions, they implicitly challenge reductive narratives of polarisation that divided Egypt into supporters and opponents of the MB. This reinforces for readers that the stories each writer tells should not be understood as supporting one side in a simple battle between “the people” and the MB, that they did not perceive what was happening in simple binary terms, and that the numerous groups involved should not be reduced to just two homogenous camps. The influence of the writers under study means that positioning themselves in this way has greater implications than merely affecting the way in which their own tweets are read, possibly also destabilising the institutionally backed binary representations of events promoted by both MB and Military supporters.

3.2 Muhammed Morsi and the MB

Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey all make it clear that they strongly opposed Morsi as president of Egypt, not least by signalling their support for, and participation in, the protests against his continued rule on 30 June. Their positioning regarding the MB as a mass movement with millions of affiliates and supporters, however, is more complex and warrants more detailed discussion. Sandmonkey largely conflates Morsi, the MB, and Islamists more broadly and rarely misses a chance to criticise them:
@Sandmonkey 3 Jul 2013
Farouk, Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, neither could destroy the MB or their popularity for 80 years. The Revolution did this in 2.

@Sandmonkey 5 Jul 2013
If this is a coup like @gelhaddad says, why are his MB protesters attacking and killing innocent civilians in the street?

@Sandmonkey 5 Jul 2013
Give the MB leeway, have their leaders issue speeches of incitement, ignore their protests, then arrest them all with popular support.

@Sandmonkey 5 Jul 2013
The MB are going down in their demo carrying sticks.. RT @nevine_zaki
"@KhaledMostafa: التفترر العام "
"@KhaledMostafa: التفترر العام "

@Sandmonkey 14 Aug 2013
MB supporters and affiliates are now threatening "full chaos" in Egypt. Unadvisable. The majority of the population completely against MB
These tweets, and other similar tweets, portray the Brotherhood as an essentially violent organisation, responsible for much of the bloodshed and chaos in Egypt during the period under study. Tweets from 14 August that describe the security forces as preventing “MB reinforcements” from reaching protest sites present the MB as a combatant in an armed conflict rather than as victims of state brutality. Such tweets clarify Sandmonkey’s positioning vis-à-vis the Brotherhood: he stands in direct opposition to them, holds them responsible for many of the country’s problems and considers that they can have no role in Egypt’s future. Talk of reconciliation, or the need to involve the MB in the political process, as seen in Zeinobia’s and Sabry’s tweets, is entirely absent. Sandmonkey consequently gives an impression of considering state violence against the Brotherhood as, if not specifically desirable, at least somewhat justified and unavoidable.

While Zeinobia and Sabry make their dislike of Morsi clear, their position regarding the MB as an organisation is more ambivalent. They generally maintain a distinction between Morsi (and his supporters) and the MB more generally, as for example in the following tweet:
Here Sabry avoids directly blaming the MB for his friend’s uncle’s death, attributing responsibility instead to the much smaller group of “pro Morsi armed men”, who may or may not be members of the Brotherhood.

The only direct expression of Sabry’s feelings towards the MB as a whole appears in this humorous tweet:

Elsewhere Sabry implies a need to create an Egypt that can accommodate the MB:
Sabry’s stance towards ordinary MB members and affiliates is thus far more conciliatory than Sandmonkey’s. The primary consequence of this for readers interpreting his tweets is that they do not receive the impression that undermining the Brotherhood is one of his primary objectives, as they are likely to do with Sandmonkey. This may in turn afford his statements on the MB more credibility than Sandmonkey’s. It recasts the characters in the sequence of events leading to and requiring Morsi’s removal, attributing Egypt’s political problems during the Morsi era primarily to Morsi himself, rather than to the MB as a whole. This allows Sabry to recommend a possible future sequence of events where the MB is involved in the political process, albeit without Morsi. The differences of attitude towards the MB implied in Sabry’s and Sandmonkey’s tweets thus suggest significant differences between their narratives of both the past and the future, and between their positioning with regard to key groups in the then present.

Zeinobia’s position is, typically, somewhere between that of Sabry and Sandmonkey. She posted far more overtly critical tweets about the MB than Sabry, but is less damning than Sandmonkey. She is frequently less careful than Sabry in distinguishing between the Morsi presidency and the MB in general. Consider the following, where the MB and Morsi presidency appear to be conflated:

Crucially, however, we also see calls to reconciliation involving the MB:
Therefore, although she stands in opposition to the MB, like Sabry but not Sandmonkey, she promotes a vision of Egypt’s future which includes them. This suggests that although her narrative of the past may be closer to Sandmonkey’s than Sabry’s in the sense of blaming the MB as a whole for the problems of the Morsi era, her preferred future is closer to that of Sabry, featuring reconciliation with the MB, if not Morsi, rather than their exclusion from politics and society.

To conclude, Zeinobia, Sabry and Sandmonkey show significantly different attitudes towards the MB. More than anything, this may reflect the uncertainty of the political moment under study. While they all agreed that Morsi must not continue as president, they were less sure about the extent to which Morsi and the MB should be viewed as distinct and about the MB’s role in a post-Morsi Egypt. This reflects wider uncertainty regarding the Brotherhood’s future in Egyptian society and the absence of a single, coherent narrative of the future about which Morsi’s opponents could agree. Sandmonkey’s overt dislike of the Brotherhood may partially undermine the force of his comments about this with audiences that do not already share his viewpoint. Sabry and Zeinobia’s more measured attitudes towards them, on the other hand, may give their criticism of the Brotherhood greater credibility, as they are less likely to be read in the context of a personal vendetta against the organisation. These differences may shape the narratives readers produce, encouraging them to interpret Sabry’s tweets as projecting towards a future reconciliation and Sandmonkey’s as suggesting future conflict.

3.3 The Armed Forces

It is striking that all three writers offer minimal direct evaluation of the Armed Forces as an institution during the period under study. Sandmonkey, for example, presents a detailed analysis of
the complex interplay between various influential groups in an article entitled “The Dark Tunnel” (Salem 2013) in which he refers to the Military repeatedly yet manages to avoid expressing an opinion about it as an institution. One reason for this may be that criticising the Armed Forces, one of the most powerful institutions in Egypt, engendered personal risk. Yet the fact that all three writers were willing to openly criticise Morsi during the period of his rule, despite the attendant risk of imprisonment or harassment, makes fear of reprisals an unsatisfying explanation. A second possibility is that all three writers were unsure during the period under study of the Armed Forces’ intentions, and in particular whether they intended to pursue political power. This can be contrasted with attitudes to the Muslim Brotherhood as a political organisation which were based on their experiences during the preceding year which left little doubt as to the kind of Egypt a MB government would create. A third possible factor is that the Military continues to be a revered institution within Egypt (Mostafa 2016). As Khalil argues, the system of conscription in Egypt means that almost all Egyptians, either directly or through their families, have connections with the Armed Forces:

Inherited from Muhammad Ali’s conscription is today’s draft system, which obliges every household with multiple male children to enlist their sons for service. In turn, a lineage with the army is created, making it difficult not to identify with its soldiers on a familial and social level (Khalil 2012:253)

This “lineage”, coupled with the marked difference between ordinary soldiers and senior ranks, may partly explain a reluctance to criticise the Military as a whole. A fourth possibility is that the Armed Forces remained a broadly popular and trusted institution in Egypt. Openly criticising them could therefore have had an adverse impact on the writers’ popularity. On Twitter this is an especially important concern where the intense competition that users constantly face for attention and followers may make them hesitant to potentially alienate readers for little gain. Sandmonkey’s case is particularly interesting, as although he seems willing to criticise anyone, the military establishment escapes almost entirely untouched. Given his often-outspoken approach, a desire to avoid upsetting
his followers, to thus maintain the value of his personal brand, seems more credible than a lack of having anything critical to say.

3.4 Tamarrod

“Tamarrod” ("rebellion") is a pressure group founded in 2013 to campaign for early presidential elections which played a prominent role in coordinating the 30 June protests and popular campaign against Morsi.\(^{118}\) Given this apparently central role, and its visibility in the Egyptian media, it is perhaps surprising that references to it are relatively infrequent from both Sandmonkey and Zeinobia, with neither offering significant positive or negative evaluation. Sabry, on the other hand, reproduced or summarised Tamarrod statements on several occasions during the period under study. He also offered the following explicit evaluation of Tamarrod on 30 June, declaring his support and admiration:

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**Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry** 30 Jun 2013

The **Tamarrod** campaign has proven that a small group of noble and determined youth could inspire a nation against any odds. #Egypt #June30

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Sabry did however also explicitly state that he is not affiliated with Tamarrod:

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\(^{118}\) Evidence of Tamarrod receiving support from, and colluding with, the Egyptian armed forces in order to overthrow Morsi was subsequently revealed (Giglio 2013; Nepstad 2015; Chenoweth 2013; Frenkel and Atef 2014).
Zeinobia, on the other hand declares in a tweet also posted on 30 June that Tamarrod are “not important”:

In this tweet, one of only five references to Tamarrod during the period under study, Zeinobia argues that it is “these people” rather than Tamarrod who are important, although there is little indication as to who exactly is meant by this reference. Sandmonkey, meanwhile, made just one reference to Tamarrod during the period under study:

That Sandmonkey merely credits Tamarrod with revealing electoral irregularities in his only direct reference to them suggests that he did not view them as a significant player. References to their role in organising the 30 June protests are notably absent.

The differences between Zeinobia, Sandmonkey and Sabry’s stances towards Tamarrod point towards different underlying narratives and patterns of causal emplotment. By downplaying Tamarrod’s significance both through implicit evaluation and a lack of references to them, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey suggest that its influence on Morsi’s removal was minimal, relegating them to
supporting character status. Rather than criticising them, they suggest that they were simply unimportant. By arguing that Tamarrod managed to “inspire the nation” on the other hand, Sabry suggests that the Tamarrod campaign played an important, causal role in producing the mass protests that ultimately led to Morsi’s downfall. This promotes Tamarrod to central character status, suggesting a different pattern of causal emplotment.

4 Indirect statements of positioning

One of the principal means available for writers to show their positioning is through their use of first person pronouns, and in particular the plural “we” since it allows them to signal their collective identity against an implicit other (Bamberg 2010). Hyland (2002:1093) argues that by using the first person, readers are left “in no doubt where they stand and how their statements should be interpreted”. However, in the data under study here matters are less clear cut. The referent of the pronoun “we” frequently shifts, making it difficult to be sure who the speaker is including.119

It is noteworthy that, despite the differences of positioning noted throughout this chapter, Zeinobia, Sabry and Sandmonkey use “we” predominantly to signal their affiliation with “the Egyptian people” in a broad sense. Consider the following from Zeinobia:

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**Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 6 Aug 2013**

I think we should prepare ourselves for the worse, it seems that the sit ins will be dispersed by force by eid time

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**Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 3 Jul 2013**

Let the people be happy dear world, two years we have been through a lot, we will survive either ways as we have done for 7000 years

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119 This issue is further complicated by the tendency of native speakers of Arabic to use the third person plural pronoun even where the intended reference is first person singular.
In each of these tweets, she makes sweeping references to the Egyptian people without any obvious exclusions. Even when she does make references which exclude certain people, she contrasts “we the people” with Muhammad Morsi as an aberrant individual, rather than making a distinction between “we”, the Egyptian people, and MB members:

In this regard, Zeinobia positions herself clearly as an “Egyptian”, rather than as a member of any particular subgroup.

Sabry is similar, almost invariably using the term “we” in reference to the entire Egyptian people. He does, however, make much more sparing use of the pronoun than either Zeinobia or Sandmonkey. This is unsurprising given his use of a self-effacing journalistic writing style. Consider the following:
Here again reference is seemingly made to a broad understanding of “the Egyptian people”. This ties in with Sabry’s calls that Egypt’s future must involve all groups within Egyptian society, and cannot exclude the Islamists:

In this tweet Sabry includes Islamists within the same “people” to which he also belongs.

One notable exception to this pattern appears in the following tweet:
Here, Sabry narrows his reference significantly, referring solely to political analysts and writers. In contrast to the other tweets cited here, where Sabry uses “we” to make a statement of a broad Egyptian identity, in this tweet Sabry uses it to show his membership of a small group of professional writers and uses his authority as a member of this group to call on his peers to show restraint in their interpretations of the consequences of 3 July for political Islam in Egypt. The reader is reminded of Sabry’s professional positioning, but there is little impact on the inclusive reference of “we” seen in other tweets. As with Zeinobia, at no point does Sabry use the pronoun “we” to signal his membership of any specific political group or trend, avoiding language which might cast the situation in oppositional terms.

With Sandmonkey the pattern is more complex. As with Sabry and Zeinobia, he frequently uses “we” to refer to and signal membership within the entire Egyptian people:
Yet in other tweets Sandmonkey’s reference narrows to exclude the MB:

In both tweets “we the people” is defined partially through the exclusion of the MB who are implied to be separate and distinct from both the group to which Sandmonkey is claiming membership and the Egyptian people in general. Sandmonkey in effect denies the right of MB supporters to be considered as part of the Egyptian people at all.

The picture is more complex still in this tweet:
Here, the Egyptian people are distinguished from both the Military and “islamists”. Yet his reference to a “mini civil war”, rather than a “mini war” emphasises that the conflict remains within Egypt and between Egyptians. Sandmonkey effectively makes a distinction, therefore, between being an Egyptian and being one of “the people”, suggesting that there is a clear “us” and “them” within Egypt. Rather than referring to all Egyptians, “the people” denotes just one group (character) in an ongoing power struggle (unfolding narrative). Whether the pronoun “we” should be understood as referring to all Egyptians or just “the people”, and the positioning Sandmonkey is claiming in this tweet, remains unclear.

In the following tweet the reference narrows yet further to refer specifically to non-Brotherhood protestors during an unspecified period:

Here Sandmonkey identifies as a revolutionary activist, one of those actively protesting against Morsi, rather than merely opposing him in principle. In this tweet not only are the Brotherhood excluded but also the vast majority of Egyptians who did not attend protests. Sandmonkey therefore signals membership of a small and very specific political group in a way not seen with either Sabry or Zeinobia.

The principal consequence of the shifting reference of the pronoun “we” in Sandmonkey’s tweets is that his positioning is more ambivalent than that seen with Zeinobia and Sabry. Rather than
occupying a single, consistent position, Sandmonkey identifies as a member of different groups in different tweets – as an Egyptian, as an Egyptian opposed to the MB and as a revolutionary activist distinguished, not only from the MB and previous regime, but also from the vast majority of Egyptians who did not attend protests. This ambivalence contradicts Marwick and boyd’s contention that Twitter users must “present a verifiable, singular identity” (2010:122). Sandmonkey’s writing, by contrast, and the multiple positions evoked, seems to reflect tensions and uncertainties in his own allegiances and positioning (Ivanic 1998:237). Rather than attempting to mask these and provide an impression of coherence, Sandmonkey allows them to remain visible. By doing so, he points up the personal conflicts likely felt by many Egyptians during the period under study. Although in many ways this may be more “authentic” than presenting a single, consistent position, it could be read as a marker of inauthenticity if readers come to his tweets with an expectation of consistency.

5 Hashtags

The final aspect of positioning to be discussed in this chapter is the use of hashtags by Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey. Weber, Garimella and Batayneh (2013) have shown that hashtag use in Egypt during the period of the 25 Jan Revolution was highly polarised, reflecting and reinforcing the social divisions of the time. They identified a number of hashtags used almost exclusively by Islamists and others used almost exclusively by secularists, in addition to a third group used by both Islamists and secularists and whose meaning was contested. Conover et al (2011), on the other hand, observe, with reference to political tweeting in the USA, that “users frequently produce tweets containing hashtags that target multiple politically opposed audiences” (Conover et al 2011:94). This suggests that even in situations of political polarisation, there is no simple relationship between hashtag use and political identification or affiliation as users may use hashtags both to demonstrate their own affiliation, as well as to target tweets to political opponents.
Hashtags are used in at least three major ways on Twitter. First, they are used to categorise tweets to make them easier to find in searches\(^{120}\) by indexing their content.\(^{121}\) This is the primary purpose of hashtags as described by Twitter’s developers:\(^{122}\) “the # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages” (Twitter 2015). An example of this kind of hashtag in the dataset is “#Egypt”, frequently employed by users across the political spectrum, and seemingly oriented primarily towards other users searching for the tag. Using hashtags to categorise tweets in this way can include linking individual tweets into broader narratives, signalling to readers which stories and debates the events referred to in specific tweets should be understood as relating to.

Second, hashtags are used to show affiliation;\(^{123}\) using hashtags associated with particular groups is a way of showing alignment and identity. As Farman (2012:1) notes, hashtags are “not just slogans. They signal solidarity, and reclaim a sense of belonging and commonality. In other words they communicate and create identity”. That hashtags are used in this way partly explains the extent to which hashtag usage in relation to political contexts can become polarised even when different groups are ostensibly discussing the same events.\(^{124}\) Two of the most obvious examples of this type of tweet during the period under study are the hashtags “#June30”, used almost exclusively by opponents of Morsi, and “#egypticoup”, used almost exclusively by supporters of Morsi and the FJP government. Others are less overwhelmingly associated with one particular group, yet continue to

\(^{120}\) Zappavigna (2012:95) describes this as part of a move towards “searchable talk” whereby “people render their talk more findable and thus more affiliative”.

\(^{121}\) The notion that hashtags function as part of user created systems of categorisation and naming, described by some as “folksonomies”, has become widely accepted in the Twitter literature. E.g.: Kehoe and Gee (2011); Laniado and Mika (2010); Potts et al (2011); Panke and Geiser (2009); Zappavigna (2015); Page (2012); and Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev (2011).

\(^{122}\) The developers acknowledge that hashtags were devised by Twitter users, rather than by themselves.

\(^{123}\) Zappavigna (2012) argues that the affiliation produced is “ambient”, since it is not based on direct interaction or personal relationships.

correlate strongly. For example “#Rabaa” is used predominantly, but not exclusively, by MB supporters. These hashtags also demonstrate affiliation through connecting individual tweets to broader narratives which are themselves associated with particular groups and meanings. Marking a tweet with “#June30”, for example, suggests to readers that that tweet should be read as a contribution to, and in the context of, a collectively produced narrative in which Morsi had lost popular legitimacy, and his removal was essential. As such, hashtags provide a quick way for tweeters to signal their political affiliations and contextualise individual tweets within the character constraints imposed by Twitter. This does demand, however, that readers be familiar with the contexts and narratives implied by specific hashtags. Readers with minimal background knowledge on Egypt, for example, would likely gain little from the inclusion of a hashtag such as #June30, despite the fact that this hashtag is loaded with meaning for those familiar with its history of use.

Third, hashtags are employed for rhetorical or poetic purposes, apparently without necessarily aiding searchability or marking affiliation. When hashtags are used in this way, they may be unique, potentially used only in a single tweet or a small number of tweets, and never intended for indexing or searching purposes. Hashtags used in this manner are employed as a rhetorical/poetic device functioning as a kind of “expressive punctuation” (Page 2012:184) on the level of sjuzhet and as an often playful (Zappavigna 2015:285) technique for representing aspects of the fabula:
Often, however, these purposes overlap. The hashtag #Rabaa, for example, serves to categorise tweets at the same time as demonstrating positioning.

It is the second of these uses that is most important here: using hashtags to show positioning. The most notable aspect of this is that all three writers made heavy use of the hashtag “#June30” during the days around 30 June. This hashtag was used almost exclusively by supporters of the protests and very rarely by supporters of the Morsi government. Using it is therefore a clear statement of positioning in terms of their opposition to the Morsi government, supported by each writer’s explicit comments on the 30 June protests. It also aligns them with a loosely defined, but broadly coherent, narrative of the events leading up to the 30 June protests that necessitated Morsi’s removal. As such
It positions the writers narratively as much as politically. Equally striking is their complete avoidance of any hashtags associated with the Brotherhood.

It is significant that the kind of clear political and narrative positioning seen with their use of “#June30” fades quickly after 30 June and is almost entirely absent in the second set of tweets. All three authors continued to almost entirely avoid hashtags associated with the MB and its supporters, and attendant narratives. Moreover, both Sandmonkey and Zeinobia made frequent use of #MB, used predominantly by opponents of the MB. Yet no hashtag evoking a positive commitment to a common narrative similar to #June30 emerged for the events of either 3 July or 14 August. The lack of common or recurring hashtags, coupled with differences in the way in which each author presented these events, suggests a fragmentation of narrative. While they broadly agreed on the sequence of events that led to the need to remove Morsi, there was no such consensus about how to understand and emplot events following his ouster. This implies a lack of a common position regarding those events, in contrast to the unity seen with the 30 June protests. This narrative fragmentation implies broader political fragmentation and uncertainty which contrasts sharply with the period following Mubarak’s resignation in 2011, when “#Jan25” was used for months and even years after his departure to signal support of a common, if vaguely defined, narrative of revolution.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey positioned themselves in subtly, but significantly, different ways during the period under study and that they used a wide range of techniques to do so. That different information was revealed through different aspects of the analysis demonstrates the importance of taking a broad and multi-directional approach. The analysis

125 Zeinobia makes sparse use of the hashtag #Rabaa, strongly associated with the MB, and despite their discussing the issue and that using it might have helpfully categorised their tweets, Sandmonkey and Sabry do not use it at all.
126 One exception to this is #Egypt which remained popular.
presented here highlights that there are important similarities between the positions adopted by the three writers. For example, all show support for the narrative of 30 June through repeated use of the hashtag #June30, and all signal clear opposition to Morsi as president. It also, however, shows important differences between them. Each adopts elements of very different discourses in their writing, for example, with significant implications for their implied positioning. Through explicit and implicit evaluation they also position themselves in substantially different ways with regard to different groups and events. These differences highlight that, despite broad similarities, their positions cannot and should not be conflated. All three position themselves within the seemingly narrow space between the two dominant poles, yet the differences highlighted here demonstrate the scope for significant variation even within this restricted space. All three reject the coup/revolution binary yet signal different attitudes towards 3 July, and position themselves differently in social and political terms. All three opposed Morsi yet demonstrate different attitudes towards the relationship between Morsi and the MB and towards the MB as an organisation, indicating substantially different understandings of Egypt’s likely, and desirable, future.

These differences are noteworthy for two main reasons. First, the different ways in which the three authors position themselves have implications for how their tweets are read and interpreted, with implications for the narratives that readers construct from their tweets, and the way in which they understand those accounts as relating to other narratives. By showing overt support for 3 July, for example, Sandmonkey’s account can be interpreted as directly opposed to and designed to counter that promoted by the Brotherhood, as well as the “coup” narratives put forward by western analysts. By making his stance on 3 July comparatively opaque, on the other hand, Sabry’s own account is more likely to be read as “impartial”, simply reporting on reality rather than confronting or opposing other versions of events. Second, the differences of positioning further highlight the inadequacy of viewing the period under study from the perspective of binary polarisation. By adopting positions not only distinct from the dominant poles, but also different from each other, the writers under study demonstrate that, although difficult, it was possible to adopt alternative
positions. The importance of these subtle differences between individuals must not be ignored simply due to the presence of larger and more obvious social and narrative divisions. An excessive focus on political affiliation also risks ignoring equally important differences of social, class and professional positioning.

Phelan (2005) argues that the implied author represents “a streamlined version of the real author”. The intricate, and at times contradictory, vision of the author implied in the tweets of Sandmonkey, Zeinobia and Bassem Sabry suggests that implied authors on Twitter can be equally complex as their biological counterparts and there is little evidence of simplification or streamlining. This further demonstrates the heavy interpretive load placed upon readers when making sense of tweets. As Marwick and boyd argue, “Twitter affords dynamic, interactive identity presentation” (2010:116). Partly as a consequence of this, rather than being presented with a simplified version of the author with a clearly stated position to which to make reference when interpreting tweets, readers are faced with complex and shifting impressions of authors that do little to provide a simple guide to interpretation. In seeking to make greater use of Twitter as a data source, it is imperative that these subtle differences of positioning, many of which resist automated detection but play a significant role in guiding interpretation, are not ignored as researchers are tempted to streamline in order to capitalise on the vast quantities of data that Twitter makes available. Despite the partial collapse of notions of individual authorship that Twitter engenders, it is imperative that the individuality of specific authors is neither lost nor ignored.
Chapter Five – Readers: Real and Implied

This chapter analyses Sabry’s, Zeinobia’s and Sandmonkey’s real and implied readers.\(^{127}\) It has been convincingly argued in recent years that SNSs force a re-assessment of the concept of passive “readers”, as users increasingly engage in “produsage”, both producing and consuming content (Bruns 2005, 2007, 2010; Toffler 1980/81; Jenkins 2006; Rosen 2006; Carpentier 2007). Yet this idea can also be taken too far as the relatively equal relationship that “produsage” implies is not necessarily what we always see, particularly when users have large numbers of followers (Meikle 2016:76). Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey have sufficient followers that their tweets take on something of the broadcast quality seen with traditional media, characterised by a largely one-way flow of communication. Other users can interact with them, but Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey cannot reciprocally follow everyone that follows them, nor respond to more than a small proportion of tweets directed to them. It therefore remains possible to speak about their “readers”.\(^{128}\)

It has been considered axiomatic since at least Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* that a consideration of audience is essential to effective communication.\(^{129}\) This holds true on Twitter, as users must effectively manage their audiences to attract and retain followers (Marwick and boyd 2010). The fact that readers are able to directly respond to writers on Twitter further strengthens the significance of the audience, as writers are frequently directly confronted with the way in which their tweets have been received. Authors’ impressions of their audiences thus have a significant impact on the stories that they tell as they produce them in ways which they believe will appeal to their eventual readers. Additionally, readers’ impressions of the intended readers of textual material greatly influence their

\(^{127}\) See chapter three for justification of my use of the term “reader”.

\(^{128}\) The term “reader” also usefully reinforces that all communication takes place via writing with the result that many of the affordances of oral dialogue are not available, despite the fact that written communication on SNSs features many characteristics of oral communication (Postill and Pink 2012).

\(^{129}\) In their seminal work *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958/69) make audience the centre of their account of argumentation.
interpretations. An English reader following the events of 30 June, for example, might interpret tweets they understood to be directed to an Egyptian audience differently to tweets seemingly intended for an international audience. Similarly, an Egyptian reader would likely interpret tweets they believed to be directed to MB members differently to tweets directed to opponents of the MB, regardless of their propositional content. Such variations connote differences of intention and reconfigure the implicit relationship between speaker and listener. This influences the way in which readers understand individual tweets to relate to other tweets and broader discourses and narratives. The issue of readers as readers, rather than solely as interactants, and particularly their (implicit) relationship with writers, therefore remains centrally important on Twitter.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first is based on quantitative data concerning Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey’s followers. It argues that there is surprisingly little overlap, with a majority of their followers following only one of the three. This suggests that the group of people interested in reading tweets espousing a political position away from the dominant poles of the period was heterogeneous, rather than an inward-looking liberal elite speaking to itself in a closed echo-chamber. Additionally, I argue that a significant proportion of their followers are native Arabic speakers, mostly located in Egypt itself. This contrasts with the largely non-Arabic-reading audience implied by their tweeting predominantly in English.

The second part focuses on the readers implied in each writer’s tweets. The readers implied may differ significantly from real readers, but strongly influence the way in which tweets are interpreted by affecting how real readers interact with the stories told, and what they understand their relationship with the implied author to be. It is argued that both Sabry and Zeinobia imply three distinct audiences, albeit with broadly similar political outlooks: an Arabic-reading expert audience with extensive background knowledge, an English-reading expert audience with extensive background knowledge, and an English-reading inexpert audience with little background knowledge. Sandmonkey, meanwhile, implies just two: an expert English-reading audience and an expert Arabic-
reading audience. I question whether these differences reflect real variations in the levels of expertise of each writer’s readers and to what extent the expert Arabic-reading and expert English-reading audiences are genuinely separate. Finally, I argue that despite the similarities of their implied audiences, each writer implies a different relationship between themselves as implied authors and their implied readers, with consequences for the way in which their tweets are likely to be received.

1 Real readers

It is impossible to precisely specify who has read any given tweet.\textsuperscript{130} Users with large numbers of followers have only a broad idea of their followership as a whole, since it is practically impossible to keep track of the profiles of tens of thousands of other users. Nonetheless, publicly accessible follower lists on Twitter make it possible to broadly characterise readerships more easily than in other environments, notwithstanding some notable limitations. Firstly, users need not be followers to read the tweets of other users.\textsuperscript{131} This means that readers finding tweets via searches, potentially a large group in the context of globally significant events such as the 30 June protests, do not necessarily appear in follower lists. Second, Twitter receives approximately 500 million unique monthly visitors that are not signed into Twitter (Smith 2016). While some of these may be accounted for by people who have accounts but do not always sign in, it suggests that Twitter is used by many people who do not have accounts, and thus do not appear in follower statistics. Third, users need not read all the tweets of every user they follow. Such users might appear in follower

\textsuperscript{130} Schmidt (2013:11), following boyd (2008), identifies four properties which make it “almost impossible to constrain the potential audience of those who might, in the near or distant future, have access to [content posted on SNSs]”: persistence (automatic archiving), replicability (content can be duplicated and reposted elsewhere), scalability (the size of potential audiences), and searchability (there are many possible routes to individual tweets).

\textsuperscript{131} Twitter users may “protect” their tweets, in which case only approved followers can view what they post, but only a small proportion of users do this (Beevolve 2012).
statistics, but not be actual readers of specific tweets. On the other hand, users may have followers who have ceased to use Twitter altogether yet have not deactivated their accounts and so continue to appear in follower statistics. Finally, historical data on followers is not available, with the consequence that the quantitative data upon which this section is based was extracted from Twitter in January 2016, two and a half years after the period under study. During this time Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey have undoubtedly gained and lost followers, although it seems likely that the general composition of their readerships may have remained broadly similar to the period under study.

Despite these limitations, comparisons can be drawn through an analysis of the three writers’ followers. The following table shows the extent to which they share the same followers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweeters</th>
<th>Proportion of followers in common</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandmonkey &amp; Bassem Sabry</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeinobia &amp; Bassem Sabry</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandmonkey &amp; Zeinobia</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandmonkey, Zeinobia &amp; Bassem Sabry</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey’s common followers

These figures suggest that, despite the broad similarity of their political positioning, only a relatively small group of readers follows more than one of them and under 10% of their combined followers follow all three. The table below shows the proportion of each tweeter’s followers who follow neither of the other two writers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweeter</th>
<th>Proportion of followers who follow neither of the other two writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandmonkey</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassem Sabry</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeinobia</td>
<td>59.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

132 A 2014 report suggested that almost half of all Twitter accounts from which a tweet had ever been posted, had not published a tweet for at least 12 months (Murphy 2014), implying a large number of inactive Twitter “users”.

133 This is supported by fact that the broad composition of Sabry’s followers appears similar to that of Sandmonkey and Zeinobia, despite Sabry’s death in April 2014, which presumably led to his gaining and losing comparatively few followers since that time.

134 The statistics in this section were generated using ‘FollowerWonk’.
These two tables suggest that there is comparatively little overlap in their readership, with readers being slightly more likely to follow just one of them than two or more. It is significant, however, that their common followers include several highly influential Twitter users writing about Egypt, such as: the politicians @ABZayed and @AymanNour; the human rights activists and aid organisations @hrw and @UNICEF; and the journalists, commentators and analysts @monaeltahawy, @BowenBBC, @tomgara, @Beltrew, @evanchill, @belalfadland, @hahellyer, @DrBassemYoussef, @KarirreMarks, @iyad_elbaghdadi and @sharifikouddous.

Despite this common core, they appear to have a relatively heterogenous “outer circle” (Tagg and Seargeant 2014) of followers, suggesting that their tweets were not being read by a single, homogenous audience. It is more difficult to assess to what extent these outer circles included readers with significantly different views and outlooks. However, given the tendency on SNSs towards “homophily”, with users tending to follow like-minded people (Murthy 2013; Halberstam and Knight 2014; Bakshy et al 2012; Wu et al 2011; Yardi and boyd 2010) there is a strong possibility that they do not represent a wide range of political and social attitudes. As such, this variation of readership does not categorically show the absence of a “filter bubble” (Pariser 2011), in which users predominantly receive information supporting views they already hold. It does, however, give the impression that, even if we are dealing with a bubble, its membership is more varied, and its boundaries more porous, than might otherwise be presumed. Rather than a clearly defined “third square” (Nelson 2013; Finn 2013), Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia appear to have been addressing a relatively loosely bounded and diverse audience. This suggests that the audience rejecting both dominant poles may have been much larger than it appears in reductive narratives of polarisation.

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135 Siapera (2014:546) found a similar pyramidal structure in communication patterns on Twitter, with a significant minority of messages passing through a small number of central “nodes” but many more being conveyed through a wide base of users.
A second major issue is the language breakdown and geographic distribution of readers. Drawing on illustrative maps of follower location produced by FollowerWonk, it is clear that all three writers have followers across the world:

**Figure 8 - Map showing geographical distribution of Zeinobia’s followers**

**Figure 9 - Map showing geographical distribution of Sandmonkey's followers**
We see broadly the same pattern in each case: readers scattered across the globe, with concentrations in the USA, Western Europe (especially the UK) and the Arabian Peninsula. These concentrations, however, shrink in comparison to the proportion of each writer’s followers in Egypt itself, where by far the highest numbers are to be found.

The breakdown of languages used by each writer’s followers, according to Twitter metadata, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zeinobia</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandmonkey</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassem Sabry</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures show that a large minority of all three writers’ followers have their official Twitter language set to Arabic and are thus almost certainly native Arabic speakers. Moreover, many users

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136 These regions are home to significant numbers of expatriate Egyptians, many of whom closely followed events in Egypt during this period.
have English set as their official language on Twitter despite predominantly tweeting in another language. Given the large Egyptian diaspora located in English-speaking countries, this may cause the number of Arabic-speakers amongst their followers to be understated. Arabic-speakers may even represent a majority of Sabry’s, Sandmonkey’s and Zeinobia’s followers. This finding is surprising, given that all three tweet primarily in English, seemingly using Twitter “like a megaphone broadcasting information...to the outside world” (Brym et al 2014:270). On the contrary, a significant proportion of the three authors’ audience appears to be domestic. This, coupled with the maps above, points to a disconnect between their real, highly heterogeneous readerships encompassing large numbers of Egyptian readers and their relatively homogenous implied “international” readerships. That native Arabic speakers would have little need to follow Sabry, Sandmonkey or Zeinobia to access information suggests alternative motivations for following, perhaps to show support for a particular individual or position, or to “check” the way in which Egypt is being presented abroad.

2 Implied readers

As Iser notes, the implied reader:

> Embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself...the concept of the implied reader is therefore a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him: this concept prestructures the role to be assumed by each recipient (Iser 1976/78:35)

The implied reader plays a role roughly mirroring that of the implied author (Chatman 1978:151): a guide to interpretation arising from the interaction between the text and the real reader, who, nonetheless, remains separate and distinct from the real reader and their own beliefs and attitudes. Although this is true of all textual material, it is particularly relevant on Twitter where readers must do much ordering and contextualising given that writers typically provide little guidance to interpretation. It therefore represents a valuable tool for limiting and pinning down meanings which are otherwise elusively fluid. The contextual meaning of a tweet reporting the arrest of a figure such
as Khairat el-Shater, for example, is much clearer if the reader has an impression of the intended audience.

In contrast to real readers who can only be identified through empirical investigation, an examination of implied readers proceeds through textual analysis and no extratextual knowledge of real readers is necessary. That implied readers are produced by real readers in response to texts means that it is impossible to categorically state the characteristics of the implied reader since interpretations vary. Different real readers may well imagine different implied readers, depending on the way in which they interpret the stories, their impressions of the implied author, and extratextual knowledge. One situation where this is extremely likely is in the case of what House (1997) describes as “covert” translations where the translated text is awarded the status of, and treated as, an original text. A Spanish reader of a Spanish advert for wine, for example, and an English reader reading a covert translation of the same advert would likely imagine very different implied readers, of different nationalities at the very least. This can be contrasted with what House terms “overt” translations, where the translated status of texts is openly announced. In these cases the implied reader may remain broadly similar, allowing for differences of interpretation, even where the real readers of source texts and target texts are very different. Both Russian readers of Tolstoy’s War and Peace and English readers of its various translations, for example, could be expected to picture a broadly similar (Russian) implied reader.

As Gibson (1980) suggests, a position supported by Booth (1961:138), the extent to which we are willing to assume the attitudes implied to be held by the readers of particular texts strongly influences the extent to which we are willing to read, let alone accept the ideas of, particular texts. Although subjects may take up the subject positions offered to them “in the normal course of events” (Davis and Harré 1990:48), not all readers will be willing to adopt all implied reader

137 Different readers, however, fulfil the roles set out by texts in different ways depending on the knowledge and experience that they bring to the act of reading (Iser 1976/78:37; Rabinowitz 1987).
positions. This is equally, or perhaps more strongly, true in the case of non-fiction where real readers may be less prepared to suspend their beliefs than in fiction (Minot 1981:337; Ong 1975:17). While a reader may be able to temporarily adopt the persona of a reader sympathetic to the psychotic Alex in Burgess’s (1962) A Clockwork Orange, they might find themselves unable to read xenophobic propaganda because it presents a role they consider unacceptable even for temporary adoption. Given the deep divisions in Egyptian society during the period under study, this factor was particularly salient: presenting readers with positions they were prepared and able to adopt was essential to maintain and develop an Egyptian readership. The size of this Egyptian readership, shown above, made it impossible to simply disregard them. Yet the fact that the international audience was less strongly polarised in its understanding of the Military intervention presented the writers with a dilemma, as they sought to offer roles acceptable to different segments of their diverse real readerships.

The remainder of the chapter examines the readers implied in Zeinobia’s, Sandmonkey’s and Sabry’s tweets. As before, the focus throughout is on comparing and exploring the implications of similarities and differences in the readers which they imply. Implied readers are particularly important on Twitter since, as with most written discourse, real readers remain generally invisible. Two assumptions undergird the discussion: 1) a consideration of audience and readership, whether conscious or not, informs Sabry’s, Zeinobia’s and Sandmonkey’s tweeting to their large numbers of followers, on the basis that such a sensitivity is essential for successful communication on this scale138 (Marwick and boyd 2010; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). 2) Neither the writer’s implied stance towards the reader, termed “footing” by Goffman (1981), nor the nature of the relationship

138 The extent to which audience design is pre-meditated and intentional, however, varies from tweet to tweet. As Zappavigna argues: “in some cases...there is a self-consciousness and self-reflection when deciding what to share...and in others the post may be hurried, embedded in ongoing activity” (2012:28).
between the discourse participants, termed the “tenor” of the discourse by Halliday (1978, 2004), are static; multiple audiences can be implied simultaneously and the implicit relationships between these audiences and writers can shift (Richardson 1997). In the existing literature on the implied reader, which focuses heavily on fiction, there is comparatively little discussion of the techniques used by writers to imply specific readers.\textsuperscript{139} Three main techniques are explored here, which map closely onto those developed by Tagg and Sargeant (2014), drawing on Bell (1984), in their study of audience design on Facebook. The first is direct address, when users explicitly address messages to other users; the second is implicit assumptions of readers’ background knowledge, attitudes and interests; the third is through their choices of language, style and register. These linguistic choices not only influence the characteristics of the readers implied but also the tenor of the relationship between readers and writers.

2.1 Direct address

The vast majority of tweets posted on Twitter are not explicitly addressed to a specific reader. Some, however, are addressed to a named recipient.\textsuperscript{140} Although users can simply name other users in tweets, Twitter also provides two built-in mechanisms for doing this: @replies and Mentions. In an @reply, users start a tweet with the handle of the user to be addressed:

![Screen shot of a Twitter conversation](image)

To Mention another user, a user need only include their Twitter handle preceded by the @ sign at any other point in a tweet:

\textsuperscript{139} Within narratology, Prince (1980) is a notable exception to this.

\textsuperscript{140} Address functions somewhat differently on SNSs than in face-to-face interaction, with a much weaker expectation that users must respond to everything addressed to them (Oulasvirta et al 2010:244; Zappavigna 2012:31). See Honeycutt & Herring (2009) for further discussion of addressivity on Twitter.
Both @replies and Mentions result in a notification of the tweet being sent to the user referenced in the Mention/@reply. They differ, however, in that @replies are only delivered to the home timelines of users following both the sender and addressed recipient. An @reply from Zeinobia to Sandmonkey, for example, would only appear in the live streams of the roughly 20% of their total followers who follow both of them. Mentions, on the other hand, are treated as normal tweets and sent to all the sending user’s followers. @replies therefore specify an audience more tightly than Mentions at the same time as restricting the number of readers likely to see tweets in which they are used.

Mentions and @replies influence reader perceptions of the implied reader on Twitter by making visible discourse participants who are otherwise invisible. Users typically have little idea who else might read a given tweet or for whom they are intended. @replying to other users explicitly introduces specific users as participants in interactions, shifting their status from that of a “bystander” to that of a “ratified participant” (Goffman 1981). Consider the following from Sabry:

141 They also make other users “navigable”, in the sense that other users can then follow @-links to see their profiles and the background to conversations (Schmidt 2013:5).
Mentioning @ASE\textsuperscript{142} and @HuffPostLive signals not only that they are the recipients of Sabry’s appreciation, but also introduces them as participants in the conversation, clearly visible to all readers. In addition to making two of the intended recipients of this tweet apparent to all real readers,\textsuperscript{143} using Mentions in this way is also an act of positioning through the indication of social connections (Seargeant and Tagg 2014:5) and of claiming capital. By claiming to have been speaking with an organisation such as the Huffington Post, Sabry both shows an orientation towards the international media and emphasises his own authority, by highlighting his interaction with such an organisation in his capacity as a specialist. Using Mentions emphasises this effect by drawing the attention of those referred to, providing them with an opportunity to dispute his claim of having spoken to them if they wish. Tweets like this also have an impact on the implied reader of other tweets which do not include @replies or Mentions by suggesting to real readers the kind of people that Sabry interacts with; it makes part of a normally invisible (real) audience clearly, if temporarily, visible to other readers. This aids real readers in the selection of appropriate frames for the interpretation of Sabry’s tweets more generally (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013:7). In contrast to most tweets in which readers must infer the intended audience purely from the text of the tweets themselves, tweets with @replies and Mentions, explicitly state at least part of their intended audience, although the fact that they are publicly posted shows that those directly addressed are not the only intended recipients.

2.2.1 Direct address for rhetorical purposes

Addressing other users and Mentions can also imply wholly different readers to those named therein. Consider the following tweets from Sandmonkey Mentioning the MB spokesman Gehad el-Haddad:

\textsuperscript{142} @ASE is the Twitter handle of the journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, who interviewed Sabry for the Huffington Post.
\textsuperscript{143} If they were the only intended readers, Sabry would presumably have sent a private message.
@Sandmonkey · 31 Aug 2013
Had a dream in which @gelhaddad came to my house to hide and we ended up having tea and talking. #what??

@Sandmonkey · 14 Aug 2013
Sensationism abounds, very different numbers of dead & injured on all front, 1 thing is for certain: Don't believe @gelhaddad . HE LIES!

@Sandmonkey · 5 Jul 2013
To be @gelhaddad : Child of nepotism, executive director of an imaginary project he isn’t qualified to run, shameless inciter of death #tbc

Mohamed ElGohary Retweeted
@Sandmonkey · 5 Jul 2013
If this is a coup like @gelhaddad says, why are his MB protesters attacking and killing innocent civilians in the street?

@Sandmonkey · 3 Jul 2013
@gelhaddad You are mine....

@Sandmonkey · 3 Jul 2013
@gelhaddad how are you this morning? Feeling safe and sound? Making any long term plans? Summer Travel? I wouldn’t if I were you.
All these tweets employ Mentions rather than @replies, ensuring that they are sent to all of Sandmonkey’s followers.\textsuperscript{144} Although @gelhaddad is nominally the implied reader and addressee of all these tweets, Sandmonkey’s open disdain for el-Haddad,\textsuperscript{145} coupled with his use of a public forum, makes it clear that their intended audience is far broader than just el-Haddad himself, and there is little suggestion that he has Mentioned el-Haddad with the goal of initiating a genuine exchange.\textsuperscript{146} He uses addressing el-Haddad as a technique for expressing his negative attitude towards the Brotherhood in general. Sarcastically asking “how are you this morning?” while alluding to el-Haddad’s imminent downfall implies a reader who would find this amusing and shares Sandmonkey’s attitude towards the MB. Sandmonkey therefore uses direct address here to imply a reader almost entirely opposite to the person to whom his tweets are ostensibly directed. Sandmonkey could have achieved a similar rhetorical effect by simply referencing el-Haddad’s name without using a Mention. Adopting this approach forces el-Haddad to become a, (potentially unwilling), participant in the interaction. This shows that the specific affordances of Twitter can be used to aggressive ends, bordering on cyber bullying, in addition to being used for collaboration and co-operation.

The effect is somewhat different when tweeters address tweets to individuals or groups using their name but not a Mention. In such cases the effect is more simply rhetorical, the aggressive and confrontational element of Sandmonkey’s tweets to @gelhaddad is largely absent, and the users named are not compelled to become discourse participants in the same way. Consider the following examples from Zeinobia and Sandmonkey:

\textsuperscript{144} Note the inclusion of a full stop before “@gelhaddad” in the fifth and sixth tweets to ensure that they are treated as Mentions by Twitter rather than as @replies.

\textsuperscript{145} That Sandmonkey seemingly reserves this practice for el-Haddad, a figure he clearly loathes, supports Zappavigna’s claim that “there seems to be a tendency in social media to avoid directing negative judgment at another user, in contrast to the kind of ‘flaming’ seen in forums and chat rooms earlier in internet history” (2012:61).

\textsuperscript{146} For discussion of this issue see Conover et al (2011), Yardi and boyd (2010); Miller (2015).
Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 28 Jun 2013
Dear World this is not a Peaceful revolution anymore that inspired the whole world, this is a wave of violence leading to a civil war

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 30 Jun 2013
We are on the Huffington Post front Page once again dear #Egyptians :) #June30 #Tahrir #Egypt ow.ly/i/2upWI

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 30 Jun 2013
Dear #MB you are speaking about felol and Mubarak 's loyalists what about Mubarak's businessmen you reconcile with !?

@Sandmonkey · 1 Jul 2013
غزي الشعلة بعد خطاب السيسي، إيه رأيك؟حصل التي آتى كنت حاوزه؟ استعيني طب الحد لله...خليلي بالك من مصر بقى...

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 1 Jul 2013
I just woke up to find lots of actions I missed dear Egypt I can not be awake 24 hours per day

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 2 Jul 2013
Dear world you are witnessing the gradual end of Muslim brotherhood in its cradle
Even where Zeinobia begins tweets with “Dear MB”, the sense of confrontation seen in the tweets from Sandmonkey discussed above is significantly weakened. No other user is forced to join the interaction and no response is directly invited as MB are unlikely to ever be aware that these tweets were sent. Readers are left with little doubt that the intended effect is rhetorical and that the intended audience in these cases is no different to the one in Sandmonkey’s and Zeinobia’s other tweets.

2.2 Implied characteristics of readers

Implications about the characteristics of readers constitute one of the most powerful means for writers to imply a specific reader through their tweets and to craft a role for readers to occupy. These implications can be broken down into three main categories: interests, knowledge and attitudes.

2.2.1 Implied interests

At a broad level, the topic of posts implies a particular readership which, presumably, is interested in that topic (Tagg and Seargeant 2014:167). By writing predominantly about political events in Egypt, in both English and Arabic, all three writers imply a reader with an interest in Egypt. This is true on a basic level before more nuanced issues such as variation in readers’ background knowledge, political attitudes or the implied relationship between speakers and listeners are considered. Topic choice thus acts as an initial filter regarding for whom their tweets are, and are not, intended. Although
similar, the interests of the readers implied in each writer’s tweets are not identical. Through his emphasis on reporting and analysis, Sabry implies a reader interested primarily in factual information and “expert” opinion. Zeinobia, in often giving her own opinions and expressing her feelings, in addition to reporting, implies a reader who also has a strong interest in the affective elements of the events taking place. Finally, Sandmonkey, by writing in an openly partisan manner and reporting comparatively few “facts”, implies a reader interested more in the lived experience of events from a revolutionary perspective than in “neutral” information.

2.2.2 Implied background knowledge

An analysis of the levels of background knowledge implied in tweets by the three authors allows for a more nuanced comparison since, as Eco argues, “many texts make evident their Model Readers [Eco’s term for the implied reader] by implicitly presupposing a specific encyclopaedic competence” (Eco 1979:7), echoing similar arguments offered, amongst others, by Booth (1983:423) and Lotman (1982:83). Readers’ implicit background knowledge is thus one of the most powerful tools available to writers for implying the characteristics of their readers.

2.2.2.1 Zeinobia

In her English tweets, Zeinobia generally avoids references likely to seem opaque to readers with limited knowledge of Egypt’s politics, culture and society. On 14 August, she posted the following:

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 14 Aug 2013
People are happy on twitter for the murder and death of the other, they are gloating for the death of #MB leader’s daughter !!!!!!!!!!!!

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 14 Aug 2013
The Egyptian interim president announced the state of emergency for the next month and to order the army to help the police #Egypt
In the first two she avoids using the names of well-known political figures while in the third she specifies that Sohag is located in Upper Egypt. The additional, explanatory information supplied in each tweet would not be required by readers with more than a passing familiarity with Egypt but might be by a broader and less specialised audience. Whether all her English-reading audience needed these clarifications or not, offering them strongly implies a general, rather than an expert, audience.

Yet some of Zeinobia’s English tweets do require more extensive familiarity with Egyptian culture:
The first assumes that readers will know that the “Azan” is the Muslim call to prayer, the second that the Grand Emam of al-Azhar is one of the most senior figures at Egypt’s pre-eminent Islamic institution, the third that 28 Jan 2011 was a major date in the 2011 Revolution,¹⁴⁷ and the fourth that “Beblawi” refers to Hazem el-Beblawi, Egypt’s interim prime minister from 9 July 2013 until 1 March 2014. They require a mixture of general knowledge about Egyptian culture and politics (the Adhan and role of the Grand Imam of al-Azhar) and of post-2011 Egyptian history. These tweets would presumably not be comprehensible to a reader unaware that Sohag is in Upper Egypt, for example.

Two distinct audiences are thus implied in Zeinobia’s English tweets: one inexpert and one comparatively expert. Tweets implying significantly different levels of background knowledge may be genuinely directed to different audiences, designating different segments of her real audience as either “addressees” or “auditors” at different times (Bell 1984). Yet “context collapse” (Wesch 2008; boyd 2008; Marwick and boyd 2010, 2011), whereby the distinctions between separate audiences seen in the offline world disintegrate online, means that sending tweets to one audience and not others is effectively impossible on Twitter. All tweets are sent to all followers and the real audience remains the same, but changes in the background knowledge required to interpret different tweets cast readers into different roles in different tweets. Of the above examples, this is clearest in the following:

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 14 Aug 2013
The Egyptian interim president announced the state of emergency for the next month and to order the army to help the police #Egypt

¹⁴⁷ 28 January was the first “day of rage”, considered by Zeinobia to have been the “true” date of the Egyptian Revolution (Zeinobia 2016).
Both refer to well-known political figures in Egypt, Adly Mansour and Hazem Beblawi respectively. While the first merely uses a title, the second assumes that the reader knows who Beblawi is, knows about the speech in question, and might be able to provide a link to it. These two tweets therefore imply that Zeinobia’s readership contains, at least, two distinct groups with different levels of background knowledge, and that there is no single “ideal reader” (Frye 1957) to which all her tweets are directed. Where the implied reader has minimal background knowledge, her more expert audience is relegated to auditor status. Where the implied reader has substantial background knowledge, the positions are reversed. This complicates the interpretive process as it makes it impossible for real readers to produce a single impression of the implied reader which can guide interpretation of all her tweets.

Implying a readership which also includes experts may, however, give her statements credibility by suggesting that her tweets are being read and implicitly vetted by them. That this more expert audience is implied in at least some of her tweets gives an impression to all her readers that she is choosing to write in a deliberately accessible way, rather than that her own knowledge is superficial. Generally writing for an audience with minimal background knowledge, on the other hand, contributes to crafting a role for the reader “able to accommodate all kinds of different readers” (Iser 1976/78:35) since minimising the barriers to adopting the role implied in her tweets ensures that the implied reader position can be adopted by a wide range of readers. The information

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148 She also posted a tweet making the same request in Arabic, approximately three minutes after posting this tweet in English.
provided is not inherently uninteresting to more knowledgeable readers, but is also accessible to less experienced readers.

Zeinobia’s Arabic tweets, on the other hand, are frequently highly demanding in terms of background knowledge. As discussed in previous chapters, Zeinobia rarely posts tweets reporting events in Arabic. This, in itself, implies a reader already aware of events from other sources and who does not need to be informed about them. Her Arabic tweets include many requests for information:

![Image 1](image1)

![Image 2](image2)

They imply not only a reader familiar with the 15 May Bridge and Alf Maskan Cairo and Smouha in Alexandria, but also a reader who might know what is happening in them, that is to say a reader with access to information unlikely to be available in English or beyond Egypt’s borders.

Many of her other Arabic tweets also demand a high level of background knowledge:

![Image 3](image3)

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149 This effect is particularly strong for those also able to read her English tweets and to note the contrast in presumed background knowledge.
The first assumes not only that readers are familiar with President Hazem Beblawi, but also with the Egyptian children’s television presenter “Baba Maged”, an obscure reference for readers without an in-depth knowledge of Egyptian culture. The second, meanwhile, presumes knowledge of the system of “popular” checkpoints which were found across Cairo during the period under study and which were a highly local phenomenon. References like this abound in Zeinobia’s Arabic tweets and we see none of the explanations included in her English tweets. There is, therefore, a clear distinction between the expert audience implied in her Arabic tweets and the inexpert audience implied in most of her English tweets. Yet, the presence of English language tweets implying a level of background knowledge that few non-Egyptians would have, suggests that the boundaries between these audiences are somewhat porous. Zeinobia’s knowledge that her English tweets are being read by a local, Egyptian audience is clear in tweets which draw attention to this more expert readership such as the following:

Here, she asks a question in Arabic but thanks those who answered it using a mixture of English and Arabic, written using Latin script. This shows not only that the audiences of her English and Arabic
tweets are not wholly separate, but also suggests that language choices are not always made particularly strategically.

These differences of background knowledge also influence the tenor (the implicit relationship between discourse participants), a basic element of positioning (Bamberg 1997:336). The implied relationship between Zeinobia and her inexpert audience is highly unequal: Zeinobia is positioned as a provider of knowledge and the reader as the dependent receiver. In her Arabic tweets, however, and English tweets implying an expert audience, the implied relationship is more equal. The preponderance of questions, for example, suggests a more equal relationship, based upon bidirectional exchange of information. Given that in many cases it is the same readers being cast into these very different positions, the basic nature of the relationship between them and Zeinobia is unlikely to change. Shifts in tenor here thus reflect Zeinobia's discursive choices, rather than external changes.

2.2.2.2 Bassem Sabry

In his English tweets, the picture with Sabry is broadly similar: minimal background knowledge is generally required for them to be comprehensible. In the following, for example, Sabry avoids simply using names without further explanation:

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry  ⬆  4 Jul 2013
Profile: Egypt's new president, judge Adly Mansour

dvr.it/3cDXc2

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry  ⬆  4 Jul 2013
Alhurri Salafi party spokesman Nader Bakkar tweeted saying they participated in setting the transitional road map for Egypt.

번역결과
자발적으로 분리되어 있지 않고 언어 선택이 항상 전략적으로 만들어지지 않는 것으로도 나타납니다.

이런 주부의 지식적 배경 차이도 세발의 테너 (디스크로프의 쉽게 공여될 관계)에 영향을 미칩니다. 이것은 자발의 의사결정, 즉 dialogic 교환의 기본 요소가 됩니다. 기본적으로 서로 다른 위치로 동일한 독자가 배치되는 경우, 이는 관계의 기본적 변화가 아닙니다. 이러한 테너의 변화는 자발의 발언의 선택에 의한 것입니다.

2.2.2.2 박세민 사브리

영어 트위터에서 사브리의 경우 대체로 유사하다: 적은 배경 지식은 이해할 수 있게 해준다. 예를 들어, 사브리는 이름을 단순히 사용하지 않고 추가 설명을 피한다.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry  ⬆  4 Jul 2013
Profile: Egypt's new president, judge Adly Mansour

dvr.it/3cDXc2

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry  ⬆  4 Jul 2013
Alhurri Salafi party spokesman Nader Bakkar tweeted saying they participated in setting the transitional road map for Egypt.
All the individuals referred to in these tweets were widely known in Egypt at the time or to Egyptians living abroad, as well as possibly in the Arab world, but not beyond. Sabry also describes the al-Nour party as Salafist,\textsuperscript{150} information that few close followers of Egypt would need. In one sense this is similar to Zeinobia’s tweets in that these additional descriptions ensure that Sabry’s tweets are comprehensible to readers with only a limited knowledge of Egyptian politics. Yet it is noteworthy that, unlike Zeinobia, Sabry almost always also includes the name of the person referred to. So, while in Zeinobia it is common to see references simply to “Egypt’s interim president”, with Sabry the reader is also often provided with the actual name. This more explicitly suggests that Sabry’s tweets are directed both to readers with minimal background knowledge as well as to more knowledgeable readers. By offering alternative reader positions within individual tweets, Sabry ensures that they are acceptable to as wide an audience as possible, by more overtly signalling that they are intended and suitable for an expert as well as an inexpert audience.

As with Zeinobia, we also see tweets by Sabry that are more demanding in terms of the background knowledge that they require. Consider the following:

\textsuperscript{150} As shown below, this contrasts markedly with Sandmonkey’s tweets.
The first assumes knowledge of the coup/revolution debate that dominated political discussion in Egypt in the days immediately following 3 July. Yet this is not a major assumption, given that this tweet was posted on 4 July, just one day after the intervention which received extensive coverage in the international press. The second and third, on the other hand, are more demanding. The second requires knowledge of the European Union’s aid programmes in Egypt and the effect that the Military intervention, if deemed a coup, might have on them. The third presumes an awareness of Qatar’s extensive financial and political support for the Morsi government during his brief rule, if the irony Sabry mentions is to be understood. The fourth, finally, implies a reader that is closely following events in Egypt by referring to a relatively minor event (a press conference held by the Egyptian Army and Ministry of the Interior) without any accompanying explanation. These tweets imply a more knowledgeable reader than many of his others, which appear specifically designed to require minimal prior knowledge. As with Zeinobia, Sabry’s English tweets thus imply at least two relatively distinct readerships, one with much deeper knowledge than the other. In contrast to Zeinobia, however, Sabry seems to make a greater effort to write tweets that will appeal to both
groups simultaneously, as shown by his habit of including politicians’ names in addition to their posts. This suggests a slightly different approach to managing his distinct audiences, producing tweets implying both readerships simultaneously rather than relying on separate tweets for separate audiences. As with Zeinobia, the inclusion of tweets in English requiring deeper background knowledge may serve to cement Sabry’s authority as a highly knowledgeable speaker, credible with an expert as well as a general audience, while also broadening his appeal with more knowledgeable readers who might find tweets implying an inexpert readership irritating.\(^{151}\)

As we might expect, Sabry’s Arabic tweets often demand greater background knowledge than in those he writes in English:

![Twitter screenshot](image)

Similar information is presented in each case, yet Sabry specifies that protestors are pro- or anti-Morsi in English, while merely describing them as “for” or “against” in Arabic, despite having sufficient characters available for a direct translation. The difference is subtle, yet by providing additional information that would not be needed by an audience closely following events in Egypt, Sabry implies a more general audience in his English tweet. This distinction is more acute for readers able to read both the English and Arabic tweet and note the difference in required knowledge between the two.

\(^{151}\) Ong argues that readers may feel “confusion” when presented with information which they consider that any reasonable reader would already know (Ong 1975:19).
In other tweets the implication of greater background knowledge is more pronounced. In the following, for example, Sabry, writing in Arabic, presumes that the reader knows who Adly Mansour is and that they will know enough about his public persona to find the idea of him creating a Twitter account improbable:

Similarly in the following tweet Sabry presumes knowledge of the Egyptian TV channel ONTV, the widespread occurrence of arrests, the imposition of a curfew, and the widespread practice of careful staging in favour of the state on Egyptian television:

Finally, in the following tweet Sabry defends human rights advocates from what he considered to be unfair accusations of bias in favour of the MB. Although this tweet also tells the reader that human rights advocates were receiving such criticism, its phrasing implies prior knowledge of this fact, and thus a reader closely following events in Egypt:

To summarise, Sabry is similar to Zeinobia in his pattern of reader implication through implied background knowledge. Again, three relatively distinct audiences are implied: an expert English-reading audience, an inexpert English-reading audience and an expert Arabic-reading audience. As
before, the distinction between the expert Arabic- and English-reading audiences is not entirely clear. One difference, however, is that Sabry’s Arabic tweets imply a specifically Egyptian reader physically located in Egypt less strongly than Zeinobia’s Arabic tweets. There are no requests for information about what is happening in specific locations, for example, nor do we see the same highly specific references to Egyptian popular culture. As a result, Sabry’s Arabic tweets tend to imply a reader knowledgeable about Egyptian affairs (and able to read Arabic), but not necessarily an Egyptian. This contrast mirrors differences in the ways in which Zeinobia and Sabry present themselves more generally (discussed in chapter four), with Zeinobia strongly emphasising Egypt and Sabry signalling a broader orientation to the Arab world.

2.2.2.3 Sandmonkey

The pattern with Sandmonkey differs somewhat from what was seen with Zeinobia and Sabry. His tweets are frequently highly demanding in terms of the background knowledge needed to understand them in both English and Arabic:

- @Sandmonkey 6 Jul 2013
  Baradei as a PM. He took on the worst job in the world. I am impressed :)  
- @Sandmonkey 6 Jul 2013
  And the now the battle for Eldostoor party’s presidency begins in full. #OhBoy  
- @Sandmonkey 7 Jul 2013
  All of this has happened before, all of this will happen again… #Egypt
All these imply a reader with a detailed knowledge of events in Egypt. The first presumes knowledge of who Baradei is and the difficulties that he would have been likely to face, as referenced in the description of being prime minister of Egypt as “the worst job in the world”. In the second, the liberal party “Eldostoor” is referred to without any accompanying explanation. The idea that their “presidency” was beginning presumes not only knowledge of what the el-Dostour party was, but also of the link between Mohammed el-Baradei, then in contention for the role of prime minister, and the party. The third, highly elliptical, tweet, on the other hand, could refer to a wide range of different events and configurations of events: Egypt’s struggles following the 2011 Revolution; the Armed Forces’ direct intervention in politics, the “threat” from the MB amongst others. Despite the myriad possible readings, it is likely that this tweet would mean almost nothing to readers who had not been closely following events in Egypt. The fourth, finally, like Zeinobia’s requests for information, implies a reader physically located in Egypt and familiar with the then current state of roadblocks in Cairo. These tweets, and others like them, imply a reader with a detailed knowledge of Egypt. As such, Sandmonkey’s tweets come across far more clearly as intended for readers with significant prior knowledge of Egypt and we see few concessions to readers who may lack this information. The general, inexpert readership implied in many of Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s English tweets is notably absent.

Similar levels of background knowledge are implied in Sandmonkey’s Arabic tweets as in his English tweets. Consider the following:
The first presumes that the reader will know that Morsi is due to give a speech in addition to being aware of Morsi’s previous statements and habits when speaking in public: that he had declared that he would not stand down, and his habit of repeating the same argument (often in the same words) over and over again. The second assumes that the reader is aware that on 2 July, the day before the end of the ultimatum issued by the Egyptian Army to Morsi on 1 July, a major development is likely to be imminent. The third, finally, assumes that the reader is familiar with the Egyptian film production company ‘el-Sobky’, known for producing low budget films in the wake of the 2011 Revolution that often received poor reviews from critics yet were widely popular (Ibrahim 2015). The implicit assumption that his reader will have this background knowledge strongly implies a reader with a high level of familiarity with Egypt, in terms of both its recent history and popular culture.

Significant here is the consistency of implied reader across Sandmonkey’s tweets in both English and Arabic. Zeinobia and Sabry, by presupposing significantly different levels of background knowledge, imply a range of different readers. By implying different readers in different tweets, they imply a varied readership of their tweets taken as a whole, encompassing a range of different levels of involvement and knowledge about Egypt. By consistently presupposing that his reader has significant background knowledge about Egypt, coupled with the continuity of narrative across both languages (discussed in chapter six), Sandmonkey’s tweets in both English and Arabic imply readers with a detailed knowledge of Egyptian culture. This group would include many non-Egyptian Arabs,
due to the ubiquity of Egyptian cultural production across the Arab world, but comparatively few non-Arab readers.

The consistency of implied reader in Sandmonkey’s tweets, coupled with the presumed diversity of his real audience, at first glance suggests that he may not be orienting his tweets to specific audiences. Given the size of Sandmonkey’s following, however, this seems unlikely. It may instead form part of Sandmonkey’s strategy for creating authenticity with his audience, and especially his bilingual audience, on account of the fact that “consciously speaking to an audience [on Twitter] is perceived as unauthentic” (Marwick and boyd 2010:119). Presenting a single face to all readers in both English and Arabic may support this, especially in a context in which a significant minority of readers are able to read both English and Arabic and thus notice any differences of presentation.

The consistency of implied reader, which implies a single ideal reader with comparable background knowledge to Sandmonkey himself, common to the vast majority of his tweets, contrasts sharply with Sabry and Zeinobia where different tweets are oriented to different audiences using fairly overt audience design strategies. The difference in approach seen between Sandmonkey on the one hand and Zeinobia and Sabry on the other may thus reflect a difference of strategy, rather wildly different understandings of the importance of audience design, with Sandmonkey appealing to his audience on the basis of a cultivated impression of “authenticity”, rather than through posting tweets overtly targeted to particular, more limited audiences. In other words, he seemingly writes for an “ideal reader”, possibly conceptualised as writing for himself (c.f. Marwick and boyd 2010:120/121), rather than to a segmented imagined audience with different levels of background

152 The importance of “authenticity” has received significant attention in the literature, for example Pronschinske et al (2012), Walther et al (2008), Marwick and boyd (2011).

153 Seargeant and Tagg (2014) argue that “the extent to which an online persona is seen by interlocutors to relate to the person behind it” is crucial for the creation of authenticity on social media.

154 Marwick and boyd found this strategy to be common to many Twitter users with large numbers of followers (2010:120).
knowledge. His real audience may be as diverse as that of Sabry or Zeinobia, but he does not re-cast different segments into different roles in different tweets.

By implying a reader with a similar level of background knowledge as himself, Sandmonkey presents a more consistent relationship between himself as implied speaker and the implied listener than is seen with Zeinobia and Sabry. Many of their English tweets cast the reader into the role of the recipient of information. The frequent inclusion of explanations of fairly basic information, such as the names of leading political figures in Egypt, implies a significant discrepancy of knowledge between writer and reader and a power imbalance. This discrepancy is still present with Sandmonkey’s tweets, yet the implication that the reader shares his background knowledge changes the dynamic of the relationship between the implied speaker and listener, to one in which the communicative interaction is between two relative experts, rather than an expert and an inexpert. This may make Sandmonkey come across as elitist, but it also implies a more equal power relation between him and his implied readers than is seen with either Sabry or Zeinobia, despite their more inclusive approaches. This does not mean that readers need share Sandmonkey’s background knowledge in order to successfully read his tweets or that his readers need understand every reference he makes (Gibson 1980:3; Ong 1975:13), but it may increase the appeal of his tweets to readers that consider, or wish to consider, themselves knowledgeable (Lotman 1982), and find being cast into the role of an expert peer more appealing than the inexpert role they are asked to adopt in many of Zeinobia’s and Sabry’s tweets.

155 An impression also given by his habit of apparently telling a single narrative using both languages.
156 This contradicts Tagg and Seargeant’s claim that readers must have “the necessary background knowledge to understand a particular post” in order to be “ratified” (i.e. understand themselves as the implied reader) (2014:176). Readers can act as if they have this background knowledge when reading whether they really have it or not (Gibson 1980:3). On the contrary, implying shared knowledge, even artificially, may strengthen the implicit relationship between writer and reader by implying a degree of Burkean “identification” (Ewald 1988; Burke 1950).
157 This mirrors Gibson’s argument that the key consideration of a magazine editor, for example, is to identify an implied reader role that real readers will want to occupy (Gibson 1980:3).
2.2.3 Implied reader attitudes

Three main themes emerge regarding the implicit attitudes of all three writers’ readers: pacifism, opposition to the former Mubarak regime, and relative ambivalence towards the MB.

2.2.3.1 Reader pacifism

The readers of all three writers’ tweets implicitly oppose violence. With Sabry and Zeinobia tweets, this is expressed most clearly through frequent condemnation of violent acts perpetrated by both the MB and others. From Zeinobia:
Similarly from Sabry:

Nearby 600 Egyptians have been killed yesterday!! May their blood be a curse over those who are responsible for their murder.

Similarly from Sabry:

Too many lives lost and ruined in Egypt today. Too much spilled blood.

Much like excessive violence yesterday damaged image of govt, violence and actions of pro Morsi side today damaged cause, ruined sympathies.
Tweets such as these imply that readers agree with this opposition to violence and stand on the same side as the writers in a “them/us dichotomy” relying on a “sense of implied reader approval” (Ewald 1988:170).

Sandmonkey, on the other hand, expresses a more ambivalent attitude towards violence, claiming on 7 July, for example, to be “not opposed to violence”:

Similarly, in this tweet from 6 July, Sandmonkey expresses support for “revolutionary trials”, an expression evoking historical trials leading to large numbers of executions in countries such as the former Soviet Union, Cuba and Iran:

Yet the reader is not implied to share this view as he also posted a significant number of tweets, in both English and Arabic, in which the reader’s opposition to violence and bloodshed is implicit:
These tweets criticise Morsi and the MB on the basis of violence and bloodshed for which Sandmonkey holds them responsible. Unless we accuse Sandmonkey of gross double standards, this criticism would make little sense if the reader were to share Sandmonkey’s espoused acceptance of violence. In this context, Sandmonkey’s tweet stating that he is “not against violence” reads as directed to an implicitly pacifist reader who would consider the Morsi regime’s history of violence as evidence enough to entirely discredit it, and who it would be necessary to convince that violence is not necessarily a bad thing. Consequently, despite the differences between the attitudes towards violence expressed by the writers themselves, all three imply an audience that is opposed to violence and which does not need to be persuaded of the merits of pacifism. The disconnection

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158 This can be contrasted with Egyptian state media portraying violence against Brotherhood members as an unavoidable and reasonable response to aggression (e.g. al-Ahram 2013a, 2013b).
between the attitudes of the implied author and reader allows Sandmonkey to maintain his
ccontrarian approach without requiring his readers to share these views, thus ensuring that his
tweets remain palatable to a wide spread of readers.

2.2.3.2 The former Mubarak regime

Readers are presumed to have favoured the fall of the Mubarak regime. Consider the following:
Each tweet expresses either support for the 25 January Revolution or criticises the return of elements of the Mubarak regime. These positions are not presented as needing justification or support, but as self-evidently correct.

2.2.3.3 The Muslim Brotherhood

The implicit attitudes of readers towards the MB, on the other hand are more complex. It was shown in the previous chapter that Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey position themselves as opposed to the MB to varying degrees. They do not appear, however, to position their readers in the same way. With Sabry, who expresses his own opposition to the MB comparatively weakly, this is unsurprising. Given his pursuit of journalistic neutrality, it is unsurprising to see him reject positioning his reader as strongly leaning towards one side or the other. His role as a journalist is to provide information, it is up to the reader to decide what to do with it. This is despite the fact that we can presume that comparatively few of his real Egyptian readers would have held uncertain views about the MB during the period under study. With Zeinobia, the picture is similar: although she expressed her own opposition to the Brotherhood more strongly than Sabry, readers are generally not implied to necessarily share that viewpoint:
The first of these laments violence between pro-Morsi protestors and the Army without attributing responsibility to the pro-Morsi supporters. The second emphasises that people no longer trust the MB in Egypt and also specifies why. Neither the assertion nor justification would be necessary for a reader that was already firmly opposed to the MB. In the third, Zeinobia implicitly positions both herself and the reader as distinct from those who are gloating over the death of Asma al-Beltagi on account of her being the daughter of Mohammed al-Beltagi, Secretary General of the Egyptian MB. While opposing gloating over Beltagi’s death does not preclude opposing the MB, it does imply that the reader does not hold hard-line anti-MB views of the kind which had become fairly mainstream at the time. Instead it calls for a re-alignment of focus on the human rather than the political, as emphasised in the first tweet, which stresses the human cost of clashes rather than their underlying politics.

This is, however, not always the case. In the tweet below, for example, the reader’s agreement that the MB is ultimately responsible for the death of an Egyptian in Iraq is seemingly taken for granted.

This highlights that there is some movement in the implicit political views of readers, as they are required at different times to play the role of opposing the Brotherhood or of being as yet undecided.
Given Sandmonkey’s own fierce opposition to the MB, it is perhaps surprising that he also implies a reader who is somewhat undecided in their attitude towards them:

These tweets strongly convey Sandmonkey’s own attitude towards the Brotherhood, but imply a reader that needs to be convinced. In particular, the first and third do not report specific events and seem specifically focused on convincing the reader that the MB are a terrible organisation in general terms. If it were simply understood that the reader already opposed the Brotherhood, there would be no reason to do this.

If we were to only see this pattern in their English tweets, we might presume that it reflects the direction of their tweets towards an international audience without a strong affiliation to either the MB or EM. There is a similar pattern in their Arabic tweets. Consider the following from Sandmonkey:
The first two tweets focus on demonstrating to the reader that the MB are a corrupt organisation while the third actively implies a reader sympathetic with the MB sit-in in Rabaa in Cairo who must be shown why such sympathy is misplaced. Consider the following from Zeinobia:
The picture here is mixed. The second and third take for granted the reader’s agreement that the MB have caused division in Egypt and that they have led many Egyptians to hate democracy. Yet, the first and fourth both return to implying a reader that must be persuaded that the Brotherhood are a malign influence. This reflects the degree of ambivalence seen in her English tweets regarding the reader’s attitude towards the MB.

The earlier discussion of implicit background knowledge suggests that at least Sabry and Zeinobia generally treat their audiences separately in their English and Arabic tweets. This highlights that it would have been possible to imply readers with quite different political views in English and Arabic, reflecting what are likely to be genuine differences in political views between local and international audiences, without necessarily implying inconsistency in their own views. Yet, all three writers chose to address their tweets in both Arabic and English to an implied reader sitting at neither end of the spectrum of polarisation dominating Egyptian politics and society at the time. An attempt to maintain credibility through neutrality might have some explanatory force with Sabry and Zeinobia, yet the fact that Sandmonkey also implies a reader positioned some distance from either dominant pole suggests that there are more factors at play, given that he makes few obvious attempts at “neutrality” elsewhere.

One possibility is that the decision to imply a reader away from the poles of the debate may constitute an attempt to appeal to as large an audience as possible. As Gibson (1980), Booth (1961) and others have argued, readers are likely to refuse to continue reading texts that ask them to take on a role which they are unwilling to adopt, even temporarily. Implying a reader who strongly
favoured neither the MB nor the Armed Forces required readers situated at other points on the political spectrum to shift their position proportionally less. This may have made the role they were asked to play palatable to a wider spread of readers, making them less likely to reject it out of hand. In terms of appealing to an international audience, this approach made sense. Many international readers would probably have dismissed their tweets as propaganda had they been asked to adopt a clearly partisan role, even if they had no issues with the tweeters themselves expressing partisan views. Given the almost endless variety of alternative perspectives available on Twitter, asking readers to take on a role they are unwilling to adopt is likely to be a quick route to losing followers. This approach, however, would have been unlikely to win mass appeal from the Egyptian mainstream at the time, given that, with polarisation so severe, it seems likely that many people holding hard to either pole would have found any alternative position unacceptable. There is evidence for this in the accusations received by all three writers of being stooges or apologists for both the MB and Armed Forces (discussed in chapter four). Implying a comparatively undecided reader may reflect a broader rejection of the politics of polarisation, with Sabry and Zeinobia, and to a lesser extent Sandmonkey, seeking to write in a manner which would not exclude significant groups in Egyptian politics or exacerbate existing divisions.

Additionally, implying a reader who is still in a position to be persuaded one way or the other demands that real readers at least partially adopt such a position during the process of interpretation. A central theoretical premise underlying this thesis is that narratives not only reflect but also construct reality. Casting readers into particular roles similarly constructs an audience in addition to reflecting pre-existing groupings, acting to “imagine an audience into being” (Tagg and Seargeant 2014:181; see also Davis and Harré 1990:46; Bamberg 1997:336). Temporarily stepping into a proffered role, and genuinely adopting such a role, are of course quite different since “nonbelievers do not become Christians just to read The Inferno or Paradise Lost” (Chatman 1978:150). Nonetheless, even temporarily accepting an offered position means accepting at least partially the affective states associated with that position (Ahmed 2004/2014:1). It affirms that such
positions were available and provided an opportunity, at least temporarily, for readers to step beyond the binary opposition dividing Egyptian society at the time.\textsuperscript{159} The fact that all three writers enjoyed widespread respect and significant numbers of followers is noteworthy since the impact of individual users with few followers implying such an audience would be minimal. Fewer readers would come across the tweets, and a smaller proportion of those who did would be likely to adopt challenging positions offered by less influential writers. The impact with widely read users such as Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia, on the other hand, was likely to be comparatively great. This gives the implication of a comparatively undecided audience political significance, challenging not merely the dominant positions of the period, but also the binary opposition itself. This effect may have been a purely accidental consequence of seeking to appeal to a broad international audience, yet may have had real political implications for the large, local Egyptian audience also reading their tweets, influencing political realities.

2.3 Language choice

That a stream features more than one language suggests that users imagine their tweets to be read by multiple language communities and that not all their readers will be able to read all their tweets (Tagg and Seargeant 2014). As bilingual writers, Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey were faced with a constant choice between English and Arabic, with implications for “identity and belonging, intention and audience” (Underhill 2015:49). The choice between English and Arabic, and use of different registers, has a structuring effect on the implied reader, mirroring its impact on the implied author (discussed in chapter four). Writing in English and Arabic makes it clear to all readers that at least a section of their readership is able to read Arabic and that they are also writing for an Arabic-reading...

\textsuperscript{159} This division of attitudes was reflected in the geographical separation of pro-Brotherhood protestors located in al-Rabaa and al-Nahda squares and pro-Army protestors in Tahrir and other locations. Physically drawing members of each camp away from these spaces and into non-conflictive interaction would have been extremely difficult. Creating an online space in which readers could occupy alternative subject positions away from the dominant poles, without being visibly seen to do so, was a way of challenging the division in comparatively safe way.
audience. Conversely, that all three writers tweet predominantly in English suggests to Arabic-readers that, although Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey may be tweeting about Egypt, their tweets are intended for an audience which extends beyond the Arab world. These effects are equally strong for monolingual readers as for bilingual readers. Showing non-Arabic-reading readers that they are also being read by Arabic speakers may bolster their credibility when writing about Egypt by stressing that, not only are they able to access Arabic language materials, but they are also being read, and held to account, by a local, and presumably more expert, audience.

Given that Sandmonkey, Sabry and Zeinobia predominantly tweet in English, and acknowledging the large number of purely Arabic language alternatives, it seems likely that a significant proportion of their Egyptian readers can read English. Such bilingual readers would not, therefore, need Sabry, Zeinobia or Sandmonkey to write in English for them to understand their tweets. Much of the factual information conveyed in their English tweets would also be superfluous to bilingual readers, able to access Arabic language media. Writing in both English and Arabic, rather than just English, does, however, provide a mechanism for dividing and segmenting their audiences.\(^{160}\) Nonetheless, the effect is not the same in both directions. The implied reader in their English tweets is likely to be perceived as non-Egyptian, but this effect is mitigated by the fact that English is widely spoken in Egypt, often to a high standard and continues to serve as a lingua franca on the internet (Crystal 1997/2003:117). It therefore implies an international audience but presents a reader position that does not exclude Egyptian readers.\(^{161}\) Writing in Arabic, by contrast, strongly implies an Arabic-reading audience as few non-native speakers can read Arabic. This means that, not only is the reader implied to be Arabic-reading in such cases, but non-Arabic speakers are actively excluded. Choosing to write in a language understood only by a sub-set of a post’s potential audience rather than that understood by the majority “can divide the audience into an ingroup that can read a post and an

\(^{160}\) Kong et al (2015) argue that this practice is commonly found amongst multilingual SNS users.

\(^{161}\) This is emphasised in English language tweets seemingly directed to an Arabic-speaking, Egyptian audience.
outgroup that cannot” (Kong et al 2015:13). Writing in Arabic, therefore, strongly marks off the content of those tweets as specifically intended for Arabic-readers, regardless of whether there is anything else to suggest that the content would be of particular interest to such an audience.

That language choice is used to segment audiences is seen in the broad difference of implied knowledge and interests seen between Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s English and Arabic tweets. The picture with Sandmonkey, on the other hand, is more complex. As was argued above, there is little difference in the readers implied in Sandmonkey’s English and Arabic tweets. In chapter six, which focuses on narrative structure, moreover, I argue that Sandmonkey often gives an impression of telling a single narrative comprised of both English and Arabic. Language choice is typically the only factor which strongly marks tweets from Sandmonkey as “intended” for one audience or another and there is little sense that Sandmonkey is consciously using language to segment his audiences.

Yet Sandmonkey’s background as a social media consultant, and success in building a large following on Twitter, make it difficult to believe that he is genuinely ignoring differences within his audience in this way. Moreover, the fact that language choice is often used to segment audiences on social media by marking content as intended for one audience rather than another (Kong et al 2015), coupled with the fact that many readers are not bilingual, means that language choice has a segmenting effect whether writers want it to or not. Sandmonkey’s approach may, instead, be indicative of a sophisticated take on audience management which is not built upon overt segmentation of audiences, but rather casts diverse readers into a narrower range of positions and roles than that seen with Zeinobia and Sabry, creating a single implied reader role which can be filled by a diverse range of readers. Tweets are directed to either an Arabic or English-reading audience.

There is little sense that Sandmonkey’s language choices were governed by “respect for the imagined audience” (Kong et al 2015:5), nor is there obvious evidence of him, or Zeinobia or Sabry, preferring Arabic for the expression of strong emotions, as argued by Kong et al (2015:10).
through the language used, but bilingual readers are not left with a sense that some of his tweets are either intended or not intended for them.

Finally, in addition to highlighting the presence of Arabic-readers to non-Arabic-readers readers, tweeting in Arabic also serves as an acknowledgement of that audience to the Arabic-reading audience itself. As such it may serve as an important aspect of audience management, helping to prevent the alienation of that group by marking its presence. This is particularly significant on Twitter where follower numbers serve as a crude metric of influence, importance and credibility, giving the maintenance of follower numbers a special importance. Given that a large minority of Sabry’s, Zeinobia’s and Sandmonkey’s audiences are seemingly Arabic speakers, it is clearly important for the three authors to maintain and appeal to this audience in addition to the “international” audience generally, but not always, implied in their English tweets.

2.4 Register and style

In the same way as register and style shape the implied author, they also influence constructions of implied reader positions, albeit more weakly. Two main issues are discussed in this section: use of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic vs Modern Standard Arabic, and salient features of their writing styles.

2.4.1 Egyptian dialect vs Modern Standard Arabic

I argued in the previous chapter that writing in Egyptian dialect strongly implies the Egyptian identity of the writer. Its effect on the implied reader is weaker. Egyptian Arabic, unlike some other Arabic dialects, is widely understood across the Arab world owing to the historical dominance of Egyptian cultural production. Tweets written in Egyptian Arabic can thus be easily understood by most Arabic speakers, regardless of their country of origin. Egyptians typically need not make significant

163 North African dialects, for example, are not widely understood outside the Maghreb region. Tunisian tweeters tweeting about the 2010 Tunisian revolution in Tunisian Arabic, for example, strongly implied local readers since few Arabic speakers from outside the region could easily understanding their writing (Poell and Darmoni 2012).
adjustments to their language, from the perspective of being understood, whether they are
addressing an exclusively Egyptian audience or one including people from other parts of the Arab
world. Consequently, Egyptians can use ECA as a marker of in-group identity to enact solidarity with
other Egyptian readers (Zappavigna 2012:62) without impeding their accessibility to speakers of
other Arabic dialects. As a consequence, using Egyptian dialect does not automatically imply an
Egyptian audience. Conversely, MSA does not strongly imply an international audience since MSA is
used in all official documents and most journalism within Egypt, as well as to convey gravitas and
education more broadly. That a text is written in MSA does not therefore necessarily signify that it is
intended for an international rather than domestic audience. The three authors’ use of Egyptian and
Standard Arabic therefore does not strongly position their readers.

2.4.2 Writing Style: Sabry’s neutrality, Sandmonkey’s informality, Zeinobia’s evaluation

These features also have a comparatively weaker effect on implied audiences than they do on
implied authors (discussed in chapter four). They do, however, influence the implied relationship
between speakers and listeners, described in systemic functional linguistics as tenor (Halliday 1978).
Tenor is traditionally viewed as reflecting pre-existing social relationships encompassing elements
such as power relations, frequency of contact, and affective involvement between participants
(Eggins 1994/2004:100). The writing style adopted by the writers therefore, says something about
the implied identity of readers but more about the nature of the implied relationship between
reader and writer. In traditional systemic functional linguistics, tenor is understood as an element of
the “situation in its generative aspect” (Halliday 1978:61) and thus a determinant rather than a
component of speech (Halliday 1978:62). Here, on the other hand, where discourse participants are
largely unknown and invisible, the situation is reversed, with the relationship between reader and
writer being created through the language used.164 Salient aspects of the writing style of each writer

164 This constructivist position is of course not new and common to much work in the Foucauldian and Critical
Discourse Analysis traditions.
have a significant impact on the implied relationship between speakers and listeners: Sabry’s formality, Sandmonkey’s informality and Zeinobia’s evaluation. Although they suggest a different tenor in each case, they can all be understood as contributing to a sense of credibility in different ways.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Sabry’s use of relatively neutral and formal language positions him in political and social terms. It also shapes the implicit relationship between him and his reader by establishing a degree of “social distance” between them (Steiner 2001:165). In terms of “agentive roles”, it positions Sabry and his reader within an expert/learner type relationship, establishing a hierarchical relationship (Halliday 2004:636). Engaging in the “symbolic management of distance” between speaker and listener also acts to produce a sense of distance between Sabry and the events he is describing, which may in turn bolster his credibility with international audiences (Anden-Papadopoulos 2013). Yet the implicit distance between Sabry and his readers is not static, and we also see tweets in both English and Arabic implying a highly familiar relationship with his readers, showing that the implicit relationship is fluid.

As noted in the previous chapter, Zeinobia’s tweets contain a blend of journalistic reporting and overtly emotive evaluation. These two distinct approaches position readers in seemingly contradictory ways: as the somewhat distant recipients of formally expressed reporting, and as intimate interlocutors with which Zeinobia openly shares her feelings and emotions. Both factors may contribute to Zeinobia’s believability, popularity and appeal. As with Sabry, when giving neutral reporting her seemingly objective style produces a sense of distance from the events about which she is speaking. Yet her strongly affective evaluative tweets provide readers with a powerful sense of her “being there” and of being embedded in the place where things are happening (Geertz 1988; Selim 2015), itself a potent source of authority. There is little sense that tweets falling into these two categories are directed to different or separate audiences, showing that even within a relatively
homogeneous implied audience, Twitter’s discursive norms\textsuperscript{165} permit frequent shifts of tenor without the need for prior change in the extra-linguistic relationship between the participants.

Finally, as previously noted, Sandmonkey’s tweets are characterised by a broadly informal writing style featuring, amongst other things, frequent use of “foul” language, which implies a distinct lack of social distance between speaker and listener and a familiar relationship. Although this sacrifices much of the sense of “objectivity” cultivated by Sabry and to a lesser extent Zeinobia, the increased sense of intimacy between speaker and listener promotes an implied relationship of trust.\textsuperscript{166} His “unfiltered” style promotes a sense of “telling it like it is” without fear of offending others. This sense of authenticity is emphasised by also tweeting about more personal information, a technique adopted to varying degrees by all three writers. This suggests that although Sandmonkey makes no claim to be providing a “neutral” account of events, he provides an honest and genuine account of his lived experience of them. Even Sandmonkey, however, is not entirely consistent in his approach, for example occasionally distancing himself from his reader through the use of Standard Arabic and a more elevated style.

Aspects of the writing styles of all three writers, then, act to manipulate the tenor of the relationship between the implied author and reader in ways which boost the perceived credibility of the writers themselves. It is notable that although all three are writing about the same topic using the same medium,\textsuperscript{167} and it is unlikely that there are significant pre-existing differences in the tenor of the relationship between the real authors and speakers, they are able to manipulate tenor in this way so as to promote their tweets as a reliable and readable source of information, managing distance

\textsuperscript{165} See Schmidt (2013:6) for a discussion of norms on Twitter, understood as “shared routines and expectations about ‘how to do things’”.

\textsuperscript{166} This is not to say that the reader necessarily trusts Sandmonkey, but they are cast into the position of doing so.

\textsuperscript{167} In Halliday’s (1978) terms we could say that they are writing in the same “field” using the same “mode”.
between themselves and their readers and enacting seemingly different social roles (Halliday 2004:636).

3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined readers in the tweets of the writers under study from two perspectives: real readers based on quantitative analysis and the characteristics implied in each writer’s tweets. In terms of real readers, there were two main findings: 1) there is surprisingly little overlap between each writer’s followers, although the followers they do have in common appear to include many influential Twitter users. This suggests that, despite the superficial similarities in terms of their own political positioning, their tweets are being read by rather different real audiences. To what extent these differences reflect social or political variation is more difficult to ascertain, but it suggests that the loosely defined middle ground represented by these writers may have been somewhat wider and less tightly bounded than it might appear. 2) all three writers have large numbers of readers located within Egypt, presumably able to read Arabic. This shows that audience design for these writers was highly complex, as they were compelled to write in a way which would appeal simultaneously to international and local audiences located in very different social, cultural and linguistic contexts.

The second part of the chapter focused on implied readers and argued that in both Zeinobia and Sabry’s tweets, multiple, distinct audiences are implied: an expert English-reading audience, a general English-reading audience and an expert Arabic-reading audience. Given that many Egyptians are also able to read English, and the size of their Egyptian audiences, this leaves a major question as to what extent the expert English-reading audience and the expert Arabic-reading audience are, in fact, the same group. Nonetheless, writing in both English and Arabic has a filtering effect, designating readers able to understand Arabic as the addressees in some tweets and as mere auditors in others. Sandmonkey, on the other hand, implies a more homogenous expert audience. There is little to suggest that his readers are genuinely any more expert than those of Zeinobia or
Sabry, but this nonetheless alters the dynamic of the relationship between Sandmonkey as implied author and his implied reader. This demonstrates that although all three tweeters were writing on the same platform, about broadly the same topic, they were able to configure the relationship between themselves and their readers in different ways, influencing the interpretation of their tweets by real readers. This highlights the diversity of approaches possible on Twitter, and the difficulty of drawing general conclusions about communication that takes place there. Finally, all three writers, in both their Arabic and English tweets, imply a reader positioned away from the dominant political poles. Although this may have been intended to appeal to an international audience with relatively fluid views on the 3 July intervention, casting Egyptian readers into this position had political implications by, at least temporarily, moving readers beyond the binary positions dominant at the time.
Chapter Six – Narrative structure: Text, sjuzhet and fabula

This chapter focuses on the stories themselves, rather than their producers (chapter four) or recipients (chapter five). It is divided into three parts, focused on the traditional narratological concepts of text, sjuzhet and fabula. Separating these aspects of narratives for the purposes of analysis is useful, but it is important to emphasise that they cannot exist independently of each other and it is frequently impossible to focus solely on a single layer. Considering them separately, however, provides a useful mechanism for focusing on different aspects of the narratives at different times. In terms of text, I argue that groups of tweets are frequently cohesive but generally lack the overall coherence of obviously narrative texts, with the consequence that texts on Twitter are particularly extreme examples of Barthesian “writerly” texts. Nonetheless, I argue that there are exceptions to this where texts are more clearly defined and the range of possible interpretations is narrower. Discussing sjuzhet, I focus on the presentation of events out of chronological sequence, showing that all three writers make use of anachrony to influence interpretations of the key events of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August to produce narratives which do not necessarily contradict each other, but imply different meanings all the same. Finally, in terms of fabula I argue that each writer is contributing to a collectively produced fabula rather than creating an independent account but that this should not be viewed uncritically as an example of an ideal, democratic polyphony.

1 Text

1.1 Textual structure

Text is the most resoundingly formal of the concepts discussed in this chapter and is concerned with the way that groups of signs are grouped together into larger units for interpretation. I have taken as a starting point Mieke Bal’s definition of a text as “a finite, structured whole composed of language
Understood in this light, an analysis of text in the context of Twitter consists of two main elements: a search for boundaries and a search for internal structure. Such boundaries are crucial because, as argued in chapters two and three, the meaning of individual narrative fragments can only be identified through their relationships to wholes which must be, at least provisionally, bounded. Such boundaries act in the service of “demarcating and diagramming that which was previously undifferentiated” (Brooks 1984:12). Most striking about the data under consideration is that both these elements are only very rarely marked clearly at either a macro or a micro level. All three writers provide no indication in the vast majority of their tweets as to where the events reported fit into narrative wholes, nor do they provide any explicit signals of where such overarching narratives would begin or end. Similarly, on a micro level, there is generally little attempt to explicitly demarcate groups of tweets as discrete “texts” telling the story of individual episodes or sequences of events, although as discussed below, there are exceptions to this. The three authors’ tweets do not, however appear unrelated to each other and do exhibit “texture” (Halliday and Hasan 1976), that is to say there are implicit connections between different elements that provide a sense of continuity and tie them together into some kind of whole. This texture is largely the result of cohesion produced by networks of repeated lexical items (Hoey 1991), “logical relations of succession in time” (Halliday and Hasan 1976:228), and thematic cohesion (Toolan 2013) deriving from Sandmonkey’s, Zeinobia’s and Sabry’s consistency of focus. Consider the following tweets from Sabry:

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168 This relatively narrow definition should not be viewed as ignoring the unity and boundedness of the narrative text offered by poststructuralist scholars, including Barthes, Kristeva and Derrida and, indeed, also recognised by Bal herself. The focus here is on the fact that textual boundaries are so loosely defined on Twitter that even the limited boundaries seen in print literature, unsustainable as they ultimately may be, are almost entirely absent.

169 As Halliday and Hasan (1976:294) recognise, identifying the boundaries of texts is often challenging and we cannot “always make clear decisions about what constitutes a single text and what does not”.

170 As discussed in chapters three and four, this is what makes implied authors and readers so important on Twitter, since they provide real readers with guidance to the process of narrative production.

171 The word “Egypt”, for example appeared over 300 times in Zeinobia’s tweets between 27 June and 10 July.
No explicit links are described between the events reported, nor is there any indication to which broader narratives these events might be connected, or where within broader narratives they might fit. The lack of even provisional endings is particularly significant here given the central role of endings in determining global narrative meaning\(^{172}\) (Benjamin 2006; Kermode 1966; Burke 1950:17; Ricoeur 1984:67). Yet their sequential presentation, repetition of key lexical items (in this case “Egypt”) and thematic consistency\(^{173}\) gives a strong impression that they are linked. In other words, they lack overall coherence as a unit, but are highly cohesive. The pattern seen here is common in the tweets studied where readers are typically given little guidance as to the boundaries of

\(^{172}\) The notion that meaning is heavily end determined has been proposed by eminent scholars including: Benjamin (2006); Kermode (1966); Cronon (1992) and Burke (1950:17), who finds in it a parallel to the Aristotelian notion of “entelechy”, in which that which is potential is made actual.

\(^{173}\) Dray (1971) argues that the presence of a “central theme” alone can “impose a degree of [narrative] unity, a kind of structure, upon what would otherwise be just a miscellaneous collection of facts”.

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narratives or how their components fit together. Nonetheless, groups of tweets exhibit texture, appearing connected and not like groups of “isolated sentences with no relationship to one another” (Crane 1994:131). Identifying discrete texts on Twitter is difficult, yet we cannot say that writing on Twitter is not textual.

There are a number of possible explanations for this pattern of narrative cohesion without global coherence. First, the immediacy and emphasis of speed in reporting on Twitter (Meikle 2016:74) means that it is often impossible for tweeters to draw even preliminary conclusions about the place of individual events within larger wholes at the time of writing about them. In contrast to the traditional retrospective act of storytelling using past-tense narrative, narration on Twitter is frequently “simultaneous”, i.e. “contemporaneous with the action”, or “interpolated”, i.e. “between the moments of the action” (Genette 1972/80:216/7). This greatly impedes the imposition of clear narrative structure by writers. This kind of narration is common to all journalism to a certain extent but taken much further on Twitter where reports can be published every minute or every second rather than merely every day. Second, the lack of time to digest events and the strong affective component of experiencing this highly stressful period as an Egyptian, made fitting events into clearly structured wholes more difficult still. Third, discursive norms on Twitter do not require writers to signal global narrative structure. A degree of coherence may be required on the level of the individual tweet, but does not seem to be expected across multiple tweets where cohesion appears to be adequate.

This is not to say that structure is not needed for narratives to be comprehensible on Twitter since, as Iser argues, “if we cannot find (or impose) this consistency [coherence], sooner or later we will put the text down” (Iser 1972/74:285). On Twitter, however, the task of producing coherence is largely left to readers. Although readers must always collaborate in the meaning-making process, discursive norms on Twitter allow writers to leave the task of imposing structure and coherence to readers to a much greater extent than in most other contexts. This makes narratives on Twitter
archetypal examples of Barthesian “writerly” texts, forcing the reader to be “no longer a consumer, but a producer of text” (Barthes 1973/74:4). Given the central importance of conventions to meaning-making (Culler 1975; Rabinowitz 1987), this may imply that learning to use Twitter means developing new literacies, “new ways of reading...to meet what is the fundamental demand of the system: the demand for sense” (Culler 1975:123). Yet, as argued in chapter three, in other ways reading Twitter seems to draw on the same narrative competencies we employ when we narrativise the world of our experience to make sense of it. This may explain why new Twitter users seem to have little difficulty in adapting to Twitter, despite the superficial break it represents from traditional storytelling – it means learning to apply conventions used elsewhere, rather than learning wholly new ones.

Third, the lack of clearly bounded and structured texts may reflect a partial rejection of narrative itself. Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey may not have been aiming, consciously or not, at producing coherent stories with transparent meanings at all, favouring “chronicles” which merely list events, lack the “wholeness” of narratives, and leave the relationships between elements unspecified. Producing “chronicles” reduces the interpretive load placed upon writers, shifting it more decisively to readers. This may have been influenced by a desire to report events in a manner different in form as well as content from the prevailing Brotherhood/Military narratives circulating at the time. In contrast to the clear structure, and meanings, of these narratives, Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia, finding themselves caught between the two extremes, may have consciously or unconsciously opted to tweet in a way that rejects immediately assigning meaning to events. This potentially reflects a desire to disrupt the apparent certainty of prevailing narratives rather than simply adding further alternatives, embodying a rejection of, or at least resistance to, the clarity of the dominant institutionally backed narratives circulating at the time. As argued in chapter three, however, I propose that tweets can still be interpreted as narratives on the basis that narrative texts are “first and foremost, texts that are read narratively, whatever their formal make-up” (Fludernik 1996:313). The fact that they are not presented to readers as fully formed narratives does not mean that they
cannot be read in this way, especially since this appearance of wholeness is only ever illusory given the creative input demanded by all narrative texts.

Fourth, it is possible that they make so few attempts to structure their individual tweets into larger narratives because they did not see themselves as telling individual stories. Rather than attempting to fence off their own versions of events, they appear to have focused on contributing to broader narratives, bigger than any individual writer.\textsuperscript{174} There is little sense that Sabry, Sandmonkey or Zeinobia imagined that their tweets would be read in isolation from other information sources, on and off Twitter. There are also practical reasons for this approach. As shown in the section on “subtexts” below, it is perfectly feasible to mark off relatively small groups of tweets as belonging to a discrete “text”, using a variety of techniques. With such small groups, readers are comparatively likely to see all the relevant tweets on their feeds and can reconstruct wholes fairly easily by visiting the profiles of the posting users. This would not be practical with larger groups of tweets where Twitter’s inherent fragmentation would make reconstruction much more difficult. One response to this seems to have been a partial rejection of narrative construction in the first place, leaving this task largely to readers.\textsuperscript{175} Discursive norms are again relevant here: stories found in other environments are often intended to contribute to and influence broader social narratives, yet discursive norms typically demand that they must also be able to function independently, exhibiting structure and boundaries. The absence of similar norms on Twitter may again help to explain why writers do not feel obliged to provide clear indications of structure.\textsuperscript{176}

Fifth, this shift may be part of a wider shift in storytelling practices as the power of a small number of media institutions to offer their narratives as authoritative wanes. As Hermida (2014:365) argues,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{174} This argument is supported by the lack of overlap discussed in the section on “fabula”.
\textsuperscript{175} Although it is influenced through some explicit narrativising (see “sjuzhet” section) and through implications about authorial (see chapter four) and reader positioning (see chapter five).
\textsuperscript{176} More research is needed to ascertain to what extent the patterns of textual organisation observed here are common to storytelling on Twitter generally.
\end{flushright}
“Twitter breaks with the classic, narrative structure of journalism, and instead creates multifaceted, fragmented, and fluid news experiences”. This may be part of a shift in journalistic practices away from packaging news in discrete bundles (Meikle and Young 2012) and clearly defined narratives and towards “collaborative filtering and curating of news” (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013:2). Heikkilä and Kunelius (cited in Bruns 2005:58) argued as early as 2003 that: “journalism must openly encourage different readings (and search for new modes of stories that do so) and it must commit itself to [the] task of making these different readings and interpretations public”. Twitter, with its openness to very loosely structured narratives which privilege the interpretive action of readers may be an example of such a mode. In this context writers on Twitter may be shifting their approach to storytelling much as experimental musicians began to explore new modes of composition in the mid-20th century. As Eco describes:

rather than submit to the ‘openness’ as an inescapable element of artistic interpretation, [the writer] subsumes it into a positive aspect of his production, recasting the work so as to expose it to the maximum possible ‘opening’ (Eco 1979:50)

1.2 Subtexts

In addition to a broadly conceived narrative text of the events of the period taken as a whole, the dataset also includes a number of more clearly defined subtexts. The most significant of these concerns the 30 June protests. It is possible to identify a relatively discrete subtext of the protests, marked primarily with the hashtag #June30 in the tweets of all three writers. Consider the following:
@Sandmonkey · 16 Jun 2013
This is the way the world ends...not with a whimper, but with a bang. #June30

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 29 Jun 2013
Muslim brotherhood declares public mobilization for its youth all over the country
#Egypt #MB #Morsi #June30

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 30 Jun 2013
Reports going around of cases of poisoning suffered by protesters who were allegedly handed water bottles by strangers. #June30

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 30 Jun 2013
Old people young people rich people poor people middle class people you name it in Mostafa Mahmoud rally #June30

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 30 Jun 2013
Presidency to hold a press conference at 6 PM #Egypt #June30

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 30 Jun 2013
Tahrir is already packed as I'm told, and most marches haven't even moved yet! #June30

@Sandmonkey · 30 Jun 2013
Heliopolis is ready for everything: water, supplies, security, even coverings for the sun to provide shade. #June30
Consistently using #June30 not only creates strong cohesive networks between these tweets, but also separates them somewhat from the main text, giving the impression of a “close texture which serves to signal that the meanings of the parts are strongly interdependent and that the whole forms a single unity” (Halliday and Hasan 1976:296). We still do not see, however, strong coherence as there is no decisive beginning or ending which would transform this group of tweets into a clearly narrative text.

Although all three authors chose to use pre-existing hashtags to link tweets together in the case of #June30, they made comparatively little use of this strategy elsewhere. The most striking comparison is with their coverage of the clearance of MB protests in the Rabaa and el-Nahda squares on 14 August. All three writers tweeted about the clearances, yet no hashtag equivalent to “#June30” was used and, significantly, the seemingly obvious “#Rabaa”, for example, is almost entirely absent from the dataset. Zeinobia only used “#Rabaa” in tweets linking to her liveblog of the day’s events; Sabry only used the hashtag when quoting others; and Sandmonkey, as of the time of

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177 This is an example of a hashtag being used to “aggregate voices, information and commentary around a common theme” (Meikle 2016:76).
writing, has never used the hashtag even in quotations. As a consequence, their tweets on the clearance of Rabaa and al-Nahda lack the strong cohesion generated by #June 30.

Two possible explanations present themselves. The first is that although fairly widely used, #Rabaa enjoyed less currency and recognition than #June30. As such there was less to be gained in promotional terms from employing it. The second is that “#Rabaa” was, and continues to be, strongly associated with the MB and “Anti-Coup” movement that emerged in the wake of 3 July. That all three authors avoid using “#Rabaa”, despite the fact that doing so might have helped readers in interpreting their tweets, may reflect the fact that they all staunchly oppose the Brotherhood’s version of the coup narrative. To employ #Rabaa, even for the seemingly apolitical reason of producing textual cohesion, might have been perceived as aligning themselves with the Brotherhood narrative.¹⁷⁸ #June30, on the other hand, was not only used by tweeters across much of the political spectrum, but also favoured by opponents to the Morsi regime. This suggests that political and marketing concerns may tend to trump narratological ones in terms of textual organisation. The fact that hashtags are rarely used in the corpus in the manner seen with #June30 suggests that their use is governed more by political allegiance and the popularity of hashtags than by a desire to produce clear narrative structure. The textual clarity and cohesion resulting from their use of #June30 may therefore be better understood as an incidental consequence of other decisions, rather than a deliberate strategy.

There are also a number of examples of subtexts exhibiting a relatively high degree of narrative coherence in addition to the cohesion seen in the previous examples. They can be grouped into two main categories: 1) stories told in real time as events were taking place; 2) retrospectively narrated stories. In the first category Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey appear to have relied on an anticipation of overall narrative structure where, although they did not know what would happen, ¹⁷⁸ The politicisation of hashtags is discussed further in the “fabula” section.
they were able to anticipate the broad structure of events to come. In the second category they enjoyed the retrospective perspective traditionally viewed as central to narrative, dealing with events entirely in the past.

1.2.1 Anticipated textual structure

The dataset includes several examples of more coherent narratives of this kind. Due to limitations of space, only two are discussed here, one from Sabry and another from Sandmonkey. The following are a selection of tweets posted by Sabry on 30 June which together constitute a sub-narrative detailing his experiences of joining a march starting from the Journalists’ Syndicate on that day, which fits within the sub-narrative of #June 30 taken as a whole:
Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry 30 Jun 2013
Chants by the journalists syndicate: people want the downfall of the regime.
#June30 #Egypt

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry 30 Jun 2013
الهتاف يدوي من نقابة الصحفيين. الشعب يريد إسقاط النظام.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry 30 Jun 2013
I've been given a red card. It says "down with the Morshid's rule." #June30
Here we see a narrative structure similar to that described by Labov and Waletzky (1967) as typical of oral storytelling: there is a kind of introduction (preparations for the march), a climax (visiting a packed Tahrir) and a kind of coda (Sabry walking away from Tahrir amid huge crowds). The consistency of theme, clear chronological structure, use of the present tense and focus on events happening in a particular location over a specific period of time give this string of tweets a degree of text-like coherence missing in the vast majority of tweets studied. Yet even here, narrative structure remains somewhat hazy and the beginning and end of the “text” are still not unambiguously marked. That the marchers’ preparations for the march can be considered as the beginning of a story is only identifiable in the context of tweets posted subsequently; although Sabry walking away from Tahrir gives something of a “sense of an ending” (Kermode 1966), it falls far short of offering a decisive conclusion. Moreover, Sabry provides little guidance as to what the relationships between the different events reported are.

The following are tweets from a similar example from Sandmonkey, from 18 August:
As with the previous example from Sabry, these tweets display a much greater degree of local coherence than most of the tweets in the dataset and can be read as a narrative account of one MB protest taking place close to Sandmonkey’s home near the Ettihadeyya Presidential Palace. As
before, the beginning of this account is only recognisable as such when viewed in the context of later tweets. In contrast to the above example from Sabry, however, Sandmonkey does mark the end of his account of the rally somewhat decisively with an evaluative comment summing up the protest as a whole: “#mostBoringProtestEver”. This functions as a “coda” in Labov’s scheme, acting to “close off the sequence of complicating actions and indicate that none of the events that followed were important to the narrative” (Labov 1972:366). We might also argue that Sandmonkey’s tweets here are more strongly narrative than those of Sabry due to their greater emphasis on experientiality, and the “quasi-mimetic evocation of ‘real-life experience’ (Fludernik 1996:12)”. In neither of these examples are hashtags used in the way we see with coverage of the 30 June protests and the only way to identify tweets as pertaining to the same “text” is through their thematic consistency and positioning within a sequence. Both sequences show clearer boundaries than is the norm in the dataset but, significantly, still provide scant detail on how their constituent events relate to each other. Readers are still left with considerable room for interpretation and the production of different meanings. This further highlights that the narrative/non-narrative distinction is not a binary one\(^{179}\) and that clearer structure does not necessarily mean that meaning is transparent.

1.2.2 Retrospective narration

Finally, the dataset also includes a number of examples of strings of tweets delivering more traditional, retrospective narration. Consider the following from Zeinobia, from 17 August:

\(^{179}\) Wolf (2003) Herman (2009:16) describe narrativity as a cline, with some texts exhibiting it more strongly than others.
Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 17 Aug 2013

أحلى أمس عزلت السبب لامباردة و و فلنا في أكثر من لجنة شعبية علشان مش معجبين خلوا بدأ أباجز

إبراهيم ايض كأنه اللاعب الرئيسي 😟

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 17 Aug 2013

كسما الأسلحة البيضاء التي شوقتها أباجز في رحلة الهروب الكبير ذى أكثر من اي مره

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 17 Aug 2013

كان في خرف و قلق و في جنده في السببية منظر عريب لناس تبغا مسلحة بالسلاح البيضاء من الإهدائي قادرين

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 17 Aug 2013

طيبا ولا واحد قادر يسل إيه ده في لجنة شعبية نانية ولونوا اثنين منتفضين

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 17 Aug 2013

الوضع في إباجزة كان صعب تقلتش لعربات و شارع الكورنيش كان مفتوح

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 17 Aug 2013

وصلنا للفلكس و هده كان في مدرعت حيش كمان و كان في مولد اخوان مانين في اتجاه احد عرابي بعد ما مشينا الشباهاك هدا حصلت
Rather than the “simultaneous” and “interpolated” narration, defined as narration occurring “between the moments of the action” (Genette 1972/80:217) seen in the above examples from Sabry and Sandmonkey, here “subsequent” past-tense narration is employed. In this case the narrative structure is rather clearer, with a clear beginning and end. A strong sense of closure is expressed in her comment “شباب ده اللي حصل أمبارح” (guys, that’s what happened yesterday).

A similarly clear structure is visible in the following tweets from Sabry on 2 July:

1. @Bassem_Sabry 2 Jul 2013
   1- Was just in the Qubba anti Morsi protests. The tv images aren't describing things fairly.
   ![](image)

2. @Bassem_Sabry 2 Jul 2013
   2- Unlike the pro Morsi protests, the anti Morsi protests are fully spontaneous and diverse, families are there and quite celebratory >>>
   ![](image)

3. @Bassem_Sabry 2 Jul 2013
   3- Unlike pro Morsi protests, anti Morsi protesters typically spend some time or so & leave while others get in. The squares aren't static.
   ![](image)

4. @Bassem_Sabry 2 Jul 2013
   4- There are also many groupings of anti Morsi protesters around Cairo, protesting in the streets in front of shops and clubs and so forth.
   ![](image)
This text is one of the most clearly demarcated in the corpus, marked as it is with numbers as well as strong coherence throughout the sequence. In these tweets Sabry tells a neat and self-contained story of the Qubba protests, contrasting them to MB protests and fitting the events of the period within the broad sweep of Egyptian history, before offering a concluding statement about popular attitudes towards Morsi.

The following from Sandmonkey are again similar:

@Sandmonkey 3 Jul 2013
The following tweets are targeted towards US analysts to end the "this is a military coup" talking point they keep making.

@Sandmonkey 3 Jul 2013
The military has time and time again announced its desire to stay out of this conflict, & wud'n't if it wasn't for #june30 huge protests.

@Sandmonkey 3 Jul 2013
Also, so far we didn't see the military involvement on ground anywhere; all they issued were 2 statements. The People are doing everything.
In this series of eight tweets, Sandmonkey offers a summary narrative account of the events that led to and justified the Military intervention as well as the evidence suggesting, in his view, that the Army had no intention of seeking direct rule. Sandmonkey begins this series of tweets with a metanarrative indication framing his subsequent tweets as a story (c.f. Wolf 2014) and also clearly signals the end of the story with the comment “I am done”. That the tweets posted between these two bookends should be understood as pertaining to the same, self-contained “text”, is indicated by the fact that they were posted in quick succession and discuss the same themes and topics, although no hashtag or similar device is used. As with the previous example, readers are left with little doubt
as to the start and end of the text, or which tweets do and do not pertain to it, although different methods are used in each case.\textsuperscript{180}

These examples highlight that it is entirely possible to produce clearly marked narrative texts on Twitter in which intended meanings are largely transparent. Far more so than the texts discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, these texts are “closed” (Eco 1979) in the sense that they permit only a more limited range of interpretations. They provide a degree of closure and explicitness rarely seen elsewhere in the dataset and are also much more obviously positioned on the narrative side of the narrative/chronicle split. The choice to opt for traditional narratives in the two examples above appears to be grounded in a desire for clarity and to close down the range of possible interpretations. Both series also appear to have been written specifically to counteract narratives promoted by others. This suggests an awareness that meaning and interpretation is typically highly open on Twitter and may reflect a belief that narratives are more effectively challenged with well-formed counter-narratives.

That all three writers only rarely adopt this approach suggests a general preference for the more open chronicle format, where readers are left to draw their own conclusions to a far greater extent. This may in turn indicate a preference for the production of “writerly” texts over “readerly” texts (Barthes 1973/74), and for “open” texts, where the reader must impose their “judgment on the form [of the text]” (Eco 1979:47) and where “the author seems to hand them on to the [reader] more or less like the components of a construction kit”, with authors being comparatively “unconcerned about the manner of their eventual deployment” (Eco 1979:49). The general absence of “ends” is particularly significant in this regard, due to their special role in determining (Kermode 1966:6) and defining the “essence” of narratives (Burke 1950:13-15). That closed, retrospective narration is

\textsuperscript{180} Sabry and Sandmonkey present events out of chronological sequence in both examples, against Labov’s (1972) claim that chronological sequence is the norm. This raises questions as to the extent to which storytelling on Twitter approximates oral versus written storytelling.
comparatively rare in the dataset suggests that narrative on Twitter is generally not being used as a mechanism for making sense of experience in the sense of producing “retrospective accounts whose function is to provide a sense of coherence and continuity” (Mishler 1990:427/8). Rather, it seems that Twitter users are more commonly providing elements which will eventually make this possible in the future.

A final reason for this may be that Twitter constitutes only one communication channel used by all three writers. The fact that Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey all provide coherent narratives in blogposts and newspaper articles may partly explain why they generally did not feel compelled to tell such stories on Twitter. During the period under study, Zeinobia published 29 posts on her blog “Egyptian Chronicles”; Sabry published eight articles and Sandmonkey one article. Viewing Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s tweets in the broader context of their writing, it may be that they saw tweeting as a complimentary activity to the more coherent accounts they offered elsewhere. Yet this is challenged by the fact that Sandmonkey did little to group his tweets together into more coherent texts, despite providing few whole narratives elsewhere. This suggests that while the presence of more strongly textual narratives published off Twitter may be a factor in the lack of textual coherence seen on Twitter, it is not the only factor.

1.3 Language and text

The final aspect of text to be discussed is the relationship between language and textual boundaries and the extent to which a change of language indicates a change of text. Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey all tweet predominantly in English and these tweets can be read together as monolingual English texts. Given the geographical distribution of their readers, many of whom are located outside Egypt (see chapter five) and presumably cannot read Arabic, it is reasonable to assume that many of their readers are interpreting their tweets in this way. The extent to which we can say the same about their Arabic tweets, on the other hand, is less clear. There are clearly cases in which strings of Arabic tweets can be read together as monolingual Arabic texts. Zeinobia’s
account of her experience on the Sabtiyya-Imbaba road, discussed above, is a good example of this. Sabry’s account of the Journalists’ Syndicate march, and Sandmonkey’s account of the Alf Maskan MB march, also feature strings of Arabic tweets which can be read monolingually. The use of translation in the latter two examples strengthens this division between languages and texts, suggesting that tweets in Arabic and English pertain to different, “parallel” texts (Sebba 2012:14/5). In many cases, however, their Arabic tweets taken in isolation provide little basis for the construction of a narrative by readers. Of 15 events reported by Sabry as occurring on 4 July, for example, 14 are reported only in English and just one in Arabic. Similarly, Sandmonkey describes a total of 14 events as occurring on 5 July, 13 of which are only described in English. In such cases it is difficult to view the Arabic tweets as constituting texts in their own right.

It may be more appropriate in such cases to view Arabic tweets as “complimentary” (Sebba 2012:15), providing supplementary information to that given in English, on the assumption that a large proportion of readers able to understand Arabic will also be able to understand English. English tweets can therefore be understood as constituting a standalone text in their own right, as well as one component in a bilingual text comprised of English and Arabic tweets intended for a bilingual audience. The idea that they may have seen themselves as producing a monolingual English text at the same time as a bilingual English-Arabic text is strengthened by the lack of overlap between the information provided in each language, with it being rare for either Zeinobia or Sandmonkey to report the same occurrence in both English and Arabic. For a bilingual reader, there is therefore often little to suggest that they should read English and Arabic tweets as pertaining to distinct texts, although the English tweets are capable of standing alone for monolingual readers. There is also some blurring of the distinction between monolingual English and Arabic texts in the examples cited in the previous paragraph. In Sabry’s account of the Journalists’ Syndicate march, for example, not all information is provided in both languages. Even in this case, then, where translation acts to divide the texts, there is potential for tweets in both languages to be read together as a single bilingual text, albeit one with some repetition and redundancy.
This highlights the complexity of interactions between language and text on Twitter and that tweets produced in either English or Arabic cannot be simply interpreted as pertaining to separate texts and distinct authorships (see chapter five). Readers’ varying degrees of linguistic competency, which may enable them to read some tweets in another language but not all of them, complicates the matter further. Perhaps most significant here, however, is that not only are both monolingual and bilingual readings possible, but that all three authors seem to have factored this into consideration when tweeting. The way in which texts on Twitter shift from monolingual, to multilingual at different times constitutes an important area for future research.

2 Sjuzhet – analepsis

Studying the sjuzhet of a narrative means examining the way in which the elements of the fabula are presented. Sjuzhet can be further broken down into numerous, discrete elements. Genette (1972/80), for example, distinguishes five major elements: order, duration, frequency, mood and voice, while Bal (1997) would add character, rhythm and focalisation. In principle, an analysis of almost all these elements as seen in the present dataset would be rewarding, offering useful insights both into the nature of storytelling on Twitter generally and the way in which the events of the period under study were construed and represented at the time. Limitations of space, however, preclude this possibility. I therefore focus on the element which I consider to be the most important: anachrony. Two main types of anachrony are seen in the data under study. The first consists of unintentional deviations from strict chronology. Such, typically minor, examples of anachrony abound in the dataset\(^{181}\) but are of comparatively little interest to the present study\(^{182}\) and seem most likely to result from receiving information about events out of strict chronological sequence.

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\(^{181}\) Rather than a feature specific to Twitter, such deviations are the norm with narrative generally and as Smith argues, “to the extent that perfect chronological order may be said to occur at all, it is likely to be found only in acutely self-conscious, “artful,” or “literary” texts” (1980:227, cited in Genette 1990:758).

\(^{182}\) They would, on the other hand, be of significant interest to scholars examining information flows and the precise order in which key writers became aware of important events.
More interesting are cases where writers deviate from “iconic chronology” (Fleischman 1990) deliberately by mentioning events that have happened in the past or that they anticipate happening in the future. The purpose of such intentional deviations is to influence the way in which present events are interpreted. As Bal argues “playing with sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasise, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects” (Bal 1997:82). In terms of narrative theory, one of its most significant effects is to imply causal, temporal, logical or other relations between distinct events separated in time, acting to tie them together into meaningful relational networks. As Bal also describes, “if deviations in sequential ordering correspond with conventions, they will not stand out” (1997:82). The fact that “iconic chronology” (Fleischman 1990) is the norm on Twitter,\(^{183}\) means that deviations have a more pronounced impact than in literature, for example, where “a strict linear chronology is more the exception than the rule” (Fleishman 1990:132, see also Sternberg 1990). A number of major themes arise from deviations from strict chronology in the dataset: historicising and contextualising the 30 June/3 July protests and removal of Morsi; ominous projections for what was to come following 3 July; links between Morsi’s deposition and the failings of the MB when in power; and historicising of the 14 August Rabaa Massacre. Deliberate deviations from strict chronology used in this way are one of the main ways in which Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia move away from “plain narrative” (Walsh 1958) or chronicle and towards a more readerly narrative proper where readers are given greater guidance as to how to interpret the links between different events. They can be viewed as examples of framing, leading readers towards particular interpretations rather than others (Goffman 1974, 1981; Entman 1993).

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\(^{183}\) Fleischman (1990:132) and others including Labov (1972:359) and Comrie (1985:28) have proposed that chronological sequence is the norm for “naturally” occurring narratives although interestingly Ong (1982) suggests that this may not be the case in “oral literature”.
2.1 #June30 and the past

The 30 June protests are strongly narrativised by Zeinobia and Sandmonkey but only weakly by Sabry. Both Zeinobia and Sandmonkey clearly link the 30 June protests with those that toppled Mubarak in 2011 albeit in subtly different ways. Zeinobia makes an unambiguous link between the 30 June protests and 2011 protests in a significant number of tweets posted on 30 June. Consider the following:

In these and other tweets Zeinobia leaves little doubt that, in her version of events, the 30 June protests and 3 July removal of Morsi should be understood as a continuation and integral part of the 25 January Revolution which led to Mubarak’s removal. Protestors’ actions in 2013 are legitimised by associating them with the widely lauded popular uprising of 2011 while also emphasising that the Revolution is a long-term process, rather than a single event.
In a single tweet posted on 3 July, Zeinobia establishes a link between the Military intervention of 2013 and the suppression of the MB by the Nasser regime in 1954:

The tweet would be somewhat opaque for readers without a fairly detailed knowledge of Egypt’s post 1952 history but very powerfully narrativises the intervention of 2013 by comparing it to a major clampdown on the MB during the early Nasser era. This single tweet re-configures the intervention of 2013 as a strike by the EM against the MB, in the context of a decades-old struggle, rather than as the execution of the will of the people for Morsi’s removal or even as part of the Revolution.

However, Zeinobia makes no further references to 3 July as a continuation of the 2011 Revolution after 3 July itself. She began to narrativise it differently, drawing parallels between it and the 1952 Military coup:
This offers a profoundly different interpretation of the 3 July intervention, emphasising the role of the Military and hinting at an ominous future of Military rule and a return to the repression of the Nasser era. The role of “the people”, on the other hand, is backgrounded. She also posted two tweets suggesting that Egypt was returning to a situation similar to that before the 2011 Revolution:

![Tweet 1]

![Tweet 2]

This characterises the intervention differently again, positing it as a return to the system of the late Mubarak era, rather than that of Nasser. These two periods were characterised by very different systems of government and balances of power, particularly with regard to the political influence of the Military and economic elites (c.f. Kandil 2012). These tweets demonstrate the important point that individual events can be conceptualised and configured in entirely different narratives and be imbued with entirely different, and potentially contradictory, meanings simultaneously.\(^{184}\) As Mink argues, it emphasises that “narrative history borrows from fictional narrative the convention by which a story generates its own imaginative space, within which it neither depends on nor can displace other stories” (Mink 2001:218). Different meanings can overlap without requiring that any single meaning or interpretation emerges as dominant. This issue is especially important in this

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\(^{184}\) Mink (2001:218) questions whether in such circumstances we can really say that we are dealing with a single event as we are, ultimately, dealing with “descriptions of events” rather than events themselves, concluding that events are produced through narrative, rather than the basic stuff from which narratives are constructed.
context where observers were unsure about how the 3 July intervention should be narrativised, and, thus, what meanings should be attributed to it, highlighting the confusion of the period.

Sandmonkey similarly posted a number of tweets drawing direct links between the 30 June and 2011 protests:

- @Sandmonkey - 29 Jun 2013
  Its like the population saw the revolutionaries do insane things for the past two and a half years & suddenly they want to play too. :D

- @Sandmonkey - 30 Jun 2013
  In 2011, Egypt rose against Autocracy, in 2013 It is rising against Theocracy... History, either way, is getting made today...

- @Sandmonkey - 30 Jun 2013
  In 2011, Tunisia started it, then Egypt followed suit. In 2013, Egypt is starting it, and Tunisia will follow suit. Even Steven ya me3allem!

- @Sandmonkey - 3 Jul 2013
  Farouk, Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, neither could destroy the MB or their popularity for 80 years. The Revolution did this in 2.

- @Sandmonkey - 5 Jul 2013
  ستتفاقس 30 يوليو 25 يناير الاكبر والأحسن والاسرع من غير موقفة جمل. ولا إيه؟

- @Sandmonkey - 7 Jul 2013
  اعتراض الاكس كتبة, بما إن اتمنى فلتم تورجية وينتموا نفس الحاجات التي كنا نعملها أنا قررت إبل معكم وأيقث كتابة من هنا وراح.. فشطة?
Although Sandmonkey also draws parallels between the 30 June and the 2011 protests, the implicit relationship between them is not of identity. Rather than a single event unfolding slowly over an extended period of time, as we saw with Zeinobia, the 2013 uprising is contrasted and compared with the 2011 revolt. This is expressed most clearly in the first, fifth and sixth tweets proposing that the “revolutionaries” driving the 2013 protests are different from those behind the 2011 uprising. Similarly, in the second tweet, the uprisings are presented as two separate revolts in response to separate issues, rather than as a continuous process in the pursuit of a single set of goals. In the third tweet, on the other hand, it is implied that a distinct wave of protests, this time started by Egypt rather than Tunisia, has erupted, rather than that a single wave is ongoing. This presents a significantly different account of recent Egyptian history to that seen in Zeinobia’s tweets in terms of the nature of the 2011 Revolution and of the relation of the 2013 uprising to it. The picture is, however, complicated by the fourth tweet which suggests a degree of ambivalence in the implied relationship between the 2011 and 2013 protest movements, with Sandmonkey suggesting that there is a single, ongoing revolution, presumably the 2011 Revolution, which succeeded in defeating the MB. This is indicative of the fluidity of the narratives of the period and of the meanings which they produce. A shift from treating 2011 and 2013 as two separate revolutions to treating them as an ongoing process radically recasts and reinterprets their meanings.
Finally, Sabry largely avoids making references to 25 January in his reporting of 30 June. We do not see the direct comparisons made by Zeinobia or Sandmonkey. He does, nonetheless, emphasise the importance of the 30 June protests in terms of modern Egyptian history more broadly:

The second, explicitly, and the third, implicitly, draw comparisons with the 2011 protests, but do so purely in terms of the numbers of people protesting. There is no comparison of the goals of the two sets of protests, nor of their respective legitimacy. Sabry neither denies a link between the two events, nor draws favourable or unfavourable comparisons of their nature or importance. His approach is to avoid foregrounding the 2011 events, focusing instead on the 2013 protests in their concrete particularity and avoiding clearly positioning them within a broader relational narrative network. Nonetheless, he is seemingly unable to avoid drawing parallels with the 2011 protests entirely:
Neither of these tweets suggests a direct causal link but both draw attention to the similarities and differences between this set of protests and the previous ones. Sabry’s apparent reluctance to connect the 2013 uprising with earlier events may reflect his journalistic commitment to leaving a great deal of interpretive space to his readers, in addition to an unsurprising degree of uncertainty as to what the position of 30 June/3 July is within the broader sweep of Egyptian modern history. He rejects the urge to narrativise, thus leaving the meaning of the events he reports open to variant interpretations to a far greater extent than seen with Zeinobia and Sandmonkey. Although it seems likely that most readers will have positioned the 2013 events within a larger narrative encompassing those of 2011, Sabry avoids telling the reader how to do this.185

All three writers also establish firm links between the protests of 30 June, the 3 July intervention and the behaviour of the Morsi regime when in power:

185 As Kermode (1966:21) argues, although readers often “unreasonably” expect novels to “connect, diversify, explain, make concords, facilitate extrapolations” they frequently do not do this. There is, therefore, great precedent for Sabry’s approach in fiction.
Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 30 Jun 2013
the #MB is complaining about the military that wants to return back where as they gave the military more powers in constitution than 1971

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 3 Jul 2013
Politically speaking Morsi turned against democracy with his constitutional declaration last November

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 4 Jul 2013
Egyptians4months have been asking for early presidential elections, we were begging for early presidential elections Morsi did not listen

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 8 Jul 2013
طب شهادة مفروض انقلها صديق للعائلة سكن عند الحرس الجمهوري كلا ميرنا قلبي بايي صحيح و ان الهجوم كان من الاخوان الأول

@Sandmonkey - السيد مانكي · 1 Jul 2013
Theocracy failed here. #Egypt

@Sandmonkey - السيد مانكي · 7 Jul 2013
سالت السؤال ده ميت مرة قبل كده: فين اصوات محمد مرسي؟ فين العشرة مليون اللي صوتوا على الدستور؟ ليه اختركم ماعلايتكم ماوصلتنو مليون؟

@Sandmonkey - السيد مانكي · 7 Jul 2013
قولت النظام السابق معتصمين في رابعة و بيدخلوا بعملوا ثورة مضادة.
Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 30 Jun 2013
Staggering and stunning how Morsi and the MB obliterated and destroyed all the goodwill many had for them or were willing to give them.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 30 Jun 2013
All that Morsi and the MB had to do to slowly win over the entire country were to be open, transparent, inclusive, mediating. They didn't...

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 3 Jul 2013
Morsi deserved to leave, but what's happening isn't the best thing for Egypt. I wish he had just stepped down and ordered elections.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 4 Jul 2013
How Morsi And The Brotherhood Lost Egypt - my article.

How Morsi, Brotherhood Lost Egypt
Inclusion and civil cohesion must become the cornerstone of Egypt’s transition.
al-monitor.com
Emphasising the failings of the Morsi regime while in power, and his autocratic approach, serves two main functions: it at least partially explains, in causal terms, why the streets were filled with protestors while also offering justification for their actions, presenting them as an inevitable consequence of Morsi’s behaviour in government. It stresses that the protests must be seen in the context of Morsi’s failings and that the protests and Military intervention cannot be understood unless their relationship with Morsi’s behaviour is recognised. These differences do not directly contradict each other or create necessarily “distinct and incompatible versions of reality” (Davis and Harré 1990:45) but do at least emphasise different connections and encourage differing, if not incompatible, interpretations.

2.2 #June30 and the future

There are also important differences in the way in which Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey relate 30 June and 3 July to prospective future events. Anticipating future events is vital to making sense through narrative by allowing us to “project ourselves…past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle” (Kermode 1966:8).

All three writers posted tweets suggesting uncertainty as to what would happen next:
However, they also posted tweets making predictions, with varying degrees of precision and apparent certainty:

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 8 Jul 2013
This is not good by all measures. #egypt

@Sandmonkey السيد مانكي · 1 Jul 2013
The one thing I can say with certainty is this: I have no idea of how any of this will play out. I am as in the dark as you are.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 3 Jul 2013
Of course, next logical step in this Egypt mess is an alien invasion, followed by a warp in spacetime that mixes up the past and the future.

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 2 Jul 2013
#JAN25
Dear world you are witnessing the gradual end of Muslim brotherhood in its cradle

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 3 Jul 2013
#JAN25
And no one will win in this, everybody will lose whether on the short term or medium term or long term

Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 4 Jul 2013
#JAN25
Now I think international backlash will force Cairo to have fast political reforms otherwise all economic aids and loans will stop
Zeinobia @Zeinobia · 8 Jul 2013
ون الدم اللي نزله هنتم استخدامه في التفاوض في الآخر :(( ملونون ده كرمسي يا آخ

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 3 Jul 2013
Next question will be the new constitution: army, opposition and wide movement in favour of suspending it, Islamists want it. #Egypt

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 3 Jul 2013
Coming weeks will not be a glittering & ideal time for Egypt. A lot of people will find themselves questioning their morals and principles.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 6 Jul 2013
ElBaradei's taking position of PM might be good for Egypt's image globally and for support, but might exacerbate things with the MB locally.

Bassem Sabry @Bassem_Sabry · 8 Jul 2013
And can we all wait a bit longer before we write magnanmious articles about the sudden alleged "End Of Political Islam"?

@Sandmonkey · السيد مانكي · 1 Jul 2013
The Military will not be on the forefront this time. I am betting they will have a poli front of whatever shape that will run civili affairs

@Sandmonkey · السيد مانكي · 2 Jul 2013
There is no big fight ahead between the President and the military...This will all end tomorrow.
There are differences in the futures presented in the tweets of each writer which impact on the implicit meaning of 3 July. Potentially more interesting than the differences of content, however, are the differences in terms of the certainty with which they are presented. Almost all of both Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s predictions are either somewhat vague or hedged. Sandmonkey’s predictions, on the other hand, despite his assertion of the impossibility of knowing what will happen next, are often both highly specific and delivered with a tone suggesting a high degree of certainty. Such certainty suggests that Egypt is “progressing” linearly, towards a set telos, and closes down to a large extent the degree of uncertainty emphasised by Sabry and to a lesser extent Zeinobia. This has the consequence of giving his narrativisations an impression of being less provisional and more solid, imbuing events within the narrative with more tightly defined meanings. It is consequently all the more jarring to see contradictions in his forward projections, for example when he claims “it” will all
be over on 3 July before going on to say that “this” is “all far from over” on 4 July. He presents events in Egypt at the time in a fundamentally different way, moving away from flux and the anticipation of a large number of possible futures, with the uncertainty of the meaning of earlier events that that entails, and towards a shifting, but at any single moment solid, narrative of events imbuing individual constituent events with much more firmly defined meanings and downplaying the notion that the future was in flux more generally.

2.3 The Rabaa Massacre

The other major event of the period under study was the massacre at Rabaa, which was emplotted quite differently by each of the three writers.

Zeinobia strongly links the Rabaa attacks to the 2011 Revolution. Yet, in stark contrast to her coverage of the June protests and July intervention, she argues that the Rabaa massacre represents the death of the Revolution:

186 He similarly claims on 2 July that there will be no violence before changing tack abruptly following 3 July.
By foregrounding the contrast between the massacre of MB protestors with the January Revolution, she emphasises that the consequences of the clearance of Rabaa are far reaching, going beyond the tragic death of protestors to also signal the death of the 2011 Revolution itself. The massacre is presented as the conclusion of the story of the Revolution, the end which reveals its essence and meaning (Burke 1950:13/14). That the massacre is to be viewed as an ending of sorts is further emphasised by her publication of a blogpost on 17 August entitled “And it has started but I fear we do not know that yet”, stressing that, at the least, one major episode has ended and another is beginning. It is striking that Zeinobia’s only forward projection comes in the following tweet:

This strengthens the idea that the Rabaa massacre is to be viewed as a conclusion, to be understood primarily in terms of what came before and led up to it rather than what happened as a result of it. Sandmonkey, by contrast, says little about the significance of the massacre in terms of the overall trajectory of the Revolution, choosing to focus instead on the MB’s ultimate responsibility for it:

It is noteworthy that the relationship between Rabaa and 25 January implied in Zeinobia’s tweets is not a causal one, emphasising that significant relationships in narrative need not be causal.
While he stops short of justifying the killings, his tweets attempt to explain why they happened and how they can be attributed first and foremost to the actions of the MB, and particularly Morsi’s refusal to hold fresh presidential elections. In contrast to Zeinobia, his narrativisation appears less focused on explaining the significance of the massacre, than its causes, using narrative as a tool for understanding rather than for the production of knowledge.

Most striking in Sabry’s tweets, finally, is that he largely avoids overt narrativisation altogether. He posted no tweets discussing either the significance of the clearance or why it happened, suggesting a hesitance to specify its meaning. Even in an article for al-Monitor posted on 17 August, to which Sabry provided a link in his tweets, Sabry describes some of the potential consequences of the massacre, but does not go into detail regarding its significance in the sweep of Egypt’s recent history until the final paragraph in which he states: “Again, the one thing that is certain about Egypt is that
nothing is ever certain. As things stand, it is now clear that January 25, as it once stood, is virtually beyond restoration” (Sabry 2013). He offers no concrete prediction for the future other than to make the negative statement that the future envisioned during the 2011 Revolution is highly unlikely to materialise. 188

3 Fabula

As discussed in previous chapters, the fabula of a narrative consists of its underlying chronology, abstracted from the specific manner of its telling. As was discussed in chapters two and three, this understanding of fabula, in which events appear suspended in a quasi-platonic realm where they exist independently of their semiotic expression, is theoretically problematic (c.f. Herman 2004) but analytically useful. Studying fabulae is, however, more complex than sjuzhets. Fabulae are the result of an interpretation of sjuzhets, which are themselves the product of readers’ interpretations of texts. As such, there is an additional interpretive stage, with the additional instability that this implies. There are also further complicating factors. Fabulae are not produced all at once. Rather than waiting until the end of a narrative, the process of reading involves constantly reconfiguring what we understand the underlying chronology to be. As Eco (1979:31) argues: “the fabula is not produced once the text has been definitely read: the fabula is the result of a continuous series of abductions made during the course of the reading”. Even in the course of a single reading fabulae undergo potentially substantial change. This is especially true on Twitter where readings are only ever provisionally “completed”.

Second, I explored the idea in the first section of this chapter that different readers are likely to produce different “texts” in the course of reading, on account of producing different interpretations of how tweets should be grouped together, and of starting their interpretations from different basic

188 Fleischman discusses the extent to which “negative predictions can constitute narrative events inasmuch as they refer to unrealized happenings” and concludes, following Van Dijk (1975) that they can be viewed as events when they are “essential to plot development” (Fleischman 1990:158/9).
material due to not having read the same tweets. Since texts are the basic stuff from which fabulae are constructed, this has a concurrent effect on the fabulae readers ultimately derive from the narratives they read on Twitter. Language is again significant since, although fabulae are in principle not-language specific, different readers construct texts, and ultimately fabulae, from different stimuli depending on what languages they are able to read. The following table details the events reported on 2 July by Sandmonkey in English and Arabic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisors, ministers and spokespeople resign from Morsi government</td>
<td>Hesham Qandil resigns as prime minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Army denies that there will be a joint statement with the Morsi government</td>
<td>Official government spokesmen resign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB TV channel Masr 25 broadcasts the home addresses of TV hosts working for anti-Morsi TV channels</td>
<td>Baradei chosen to negotiate on behalf of the NSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB gangs shoot at opposing protestors</td>
<td>Morsi declares war, Baradei leads tamarroud, El-Sisi makes threat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5 - Events reported by Sandmonkey as occurring on 2/07/2013*
This table shows the same information for Zeinobia on the same day:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President Obama speaks to Morsi, urges him to listen to protestors</td>
<td>Morsi protestors storm Orman Gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidency spokesperson, Omar Afar, resigns</td>
<td>Funeral service for Princess Fawzia to be held on 3 July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Embassy releases statement</td>
<td>According to Sky News, Saudi Arabia denies reports that it has stopped working with Morsi regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess Fawzia of Iran dies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special forces training in Suez shown on al-Jazeera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military deployed in Cairo and Giza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clashes in several areas between pro- and anti-Morsi protestors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US urges Morsi to hold early elections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Hayat al-Youm reports leaks about new cabinet being formed and preparations for early parliamentary elections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 reported killed in clashes in Dokki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 injured in clashes in Menaya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clashes in October area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morsi demands Armed Forces withdraw ultimatum and refuses foreign orders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morsi addresses the nation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widespread panic that Egypt heading towards civil war</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 - Events reported by Zeinobia as occurring on 2/06/2013

Clearly, a reader able only to understand English or Arabic would produce a very different fabula on the basis of the information presented in each language, if they were to read the tweets of just one tweeter.

Third, in contrast to what we see with fictional narrative, there are many “windows” into the storyworld to which these fabulae relate. From the perspective of many, the storyworld evoked through these narratives is conflated with reality. Since reality is typically regarded as equally accessible to all (incompatible as this idea is from the socio-narrative perspective), “factual” accounts of events must ultimately relate to the same “fabula”, i.e. the “real” chronology. Different writers may tell different stories (sjuzhets) but there is ultimately only one “true” fabula which “factual” writers cannot create from scratch in the manner of an author of fiction. The process of
fabula construction in this instance does not begin with a *tabula rasa* but in the context of a complex web of existing narratives and historical “facts” which function as true.

These factors make it impossible to make categorical statements about fabulae on Twitter. Although the following discussion is based on analysis of all the tweets posted by Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia during the period under study, it is difficult to imagine that many real readers would have read all their tweets. Fewer, if any, would have read them all sequentially as I did for this study. Despite this degree of artificiality, a number of interesting observations can be made from an analysis and comparison of the chronologies presented by each writer: 1) there is very little overlap in the events explicitly reported by each writer and 2) despite this lack of overlap, the fabulae largely do not contradict each other. This suggests that fabulae may be produced collectively on Twitter. 3) The bulk of all three fabulae consists of the kind of political events likely to be covered in mainstream journalism but more marginal events are also reported that would be unlikely to receive coverage in traditional media. This points to a complex system governing the “tellability” (Ryan 1986) of events in quasi-journalistic reporting on Twitter shaping what counts as worth telling,¹⁸⁹ where the news values¹⁹⁰ of traditional reporting are influential but not totally dominant.

3.1 Collaborative storytelling

In terms of the events explicitly reported as happening by Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia, there is remarkably little overlap. The following table details the events referred to by each writer as occurring on 28 June:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sandmonkey</th>
<th>Bassem Sabry</th>
<th>Zeinobia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MB demonstration takes place with almost no women present</td>
<td>Protestor shot dead in Alexandria</td>
<td>June 30 movement turns into a wave of violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandmonkey bought MB memorabilia at the demonstration</td>
<td>Anti-Morsi protest takes place in Mahalla</td>
<td>Small protest led by April 6 Movement calling for new government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁸⁹ In Labov’s terms, the ability of a story to fend off the question “so what?” (Labov 1972).
Cars being stopped and searched in Ittihadiya | Anti-Morsi protest takes place in Beheira | Someone on Twitter says that MB deserve treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany

Shutdown of independent TV channels reported as imminent | Anti-Morsi protest takes place in Tahrir, Port Said, Kafr el-Dawar, Damanhour, Alexandria, Kafr el-Sheikh | @noornoor being threatened because of his father

Major anti-Morsi protest takes place in Tahrir | Reported that three dead in clashes | Clashes in Alexandria between MB and opposition protestors

Bassem Yousef’s “Al-Bernameg” being broadcast | Government informs TV channels that they can be shut down without court order | People holding photos of Mubarak in Tahrir

Solitary pro-Morsi march takes place in Nasr City |  | 

Anti-Morsi protest takes place in Tahrir, Port Said, Kafr el-Dawar, Damanhour, Alexandria, Kafr el-Sheikh |  | 

In Tahrir anyone with a beard being accused of spying |  | 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sandmonkey</th>
<th>Bassem Sabry</th>
<th>Zeinobia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morsi refuses to step down</td>
<td>Baradei meets with Military</td>
<td>Morsi refuses to stand down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major demonstration takes place at the headquarters of the Presidential Guard</td>
<td>Former deputy guide of MB tweets support for uprising</td>
<td>Mubarak-era media figures stress importance of Revolution and freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army tanks deployed in Giza</td>
<td>Adly Mansour made interim president</td>
<td>Al-Ahram reports that the Army is meeting political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Additional Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-MB TV channel Masr25 disappears</td>
<td>Jamaa Islamiyya spokesman supports call for early elections</td>
<td>Rumoured that Russia offering support to Army in response to US threat of aid cut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestors gather in front of presidential palace</td>
<td>Another Jamaa Islamiyya spokesman denies support for early elections</td>
<td>El Hayat showing protestors with pictures of el-Sisi in Tahrir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Military removes Morsi at the behest of the people</td>
<td>Previously detained religious TV figures released</td>
<td>TV filled with nationalistic songs praising Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morsi placed under house arrest</td>
<td>Announcement that head of constitutional court will take oath as president the following day</td>
<td>Morsi removed from power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement made that Baradei, Tawadros and Sheikh of al-Azhar will announce the transitional roadmap</td>
<td>Army officers present in state news room</td>
<td>Essam el-Haddad publishes image of Egyptian flag on Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The “real” rebellion campaign begins</td>
<td>Thirty members of Shura Council resign</td>
<td>Army deployed across Cairo and Giza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morsi moved to Ministry of Defence</td>
<td>Announced that Baradei, Tawadros and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayyeb will read Army statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations take place in Tahrir</td>
<td>El-Sisi addresses the nation about removing Morsi and installing caretaker government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large number of protestors in Ittihadeya</td>
<td>Mona el Shazly crying on TV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giza governor resigns</td>
<td>People celebrate across Cairo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of Tamarrod, FJP and al-Nour parties meet with the Military</td>
<td>Islamist TV channels closed and employees arrested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clashes in Minya and Marsa Matrouh</td>
<td>Reports that four dead in Marsa Matrouh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King of Saudi congratulates interim president</td>
<td>Police stations burned in Marsa Matrouh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FJP leader Saad El Katanani arrested as well as MB supreme guide Rashad Baiomy</td>
<td>Morsi placed under house arrest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huffington post declares Military intervention a coup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 - Events reported as occurring on 3/07/13 by Sandmonkey, Bassem Sabry and Zeinobia
As before there is remarkably little overlap between the events mentioned and the basic chronology which can be inferred from each writer’s tweets, if read in isolation, is substantially different. The lack of repetition observed here contradicts Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira’s finding, based on an analysis of the use of the #Egypt hashtag in the period of the 25 January Revolution, that “frequently, the same news was repeated over and over again, with little or no new cognitive input” (2012:13). To some extent, these differences can be attributed to differences of focus, values and objectives, all of which influence selective appropriation. Sandmonkey’s frequent emphasis on violence perpetrated by the MB, for example, may reflect his opposition to the group and seeming commitment to demonstrating why they needed to be removed. The lack of overlap, even between writers who are politically and ideologically close, however may also imply that they did not see themselves as each producing independent fabulae. Rather than telling a story with a comprehensive chronology, it appears that they were contributing to a broader narrative being collectively written and negotiated. This is similar to Siapera’s argument regarding tweets featuring #Palestine that there is a:

   collective or distributed way of producing #Palestine: the contents and emerging narrative of #Palestine are the result of a kind of collective authorship, in which producers contribute from their own vantage point or to which they contribute through retweeting or disseminating information (Siapera 2014:552)

Viewed in this way, there is no need for each writer to report every event as there is no assumption that their account will be read in isolation. This is especially true with relatively closely linked writers such as Zeinobia, Sabry and Sandmonkey, who share a significant minority of followers (see chapter five) and are likely to be aware of what others have already reported. This leaves individual writers freer to selectively appropriate their contributions to such collectively produced narratives, using strategic contributions to influence it according to their goals and objectives.

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191 It is important to reiterate that I am only considering original tweets here. If retweets were also considered, there would almost certainly be significantly more overlap.
This is a significant way in which storytelling on Twitter appears to differ from that of traditional journalism. In traditional print journalism, different publications produce parallel narratives of major events. These narratives are designed to be self-sufficient and, although they rely on their position within wider networks of relations to a certain extent, there is less of an assumption that readers must read additional accounts in order to avoid unacceptable gaps in their understanding of event chronologies. On Twitter, on the other hand, this assumption seems to be frequently absent. This is perhaps best expressed by the fact that Sabry does not explicitly report Morsi’s ouster—it is simply understood to feature in the fabulae without Sabry having to directly report it. The idea that fabulae are constructed collectively on Twitter can, however, give a false impression that narrative production on Twitter proceeds along utopian, collaborative lines. Lotan (2014) and Lotan et al (2011) show how dense networks of interaction existed on Twitter between supporters of similar viewpoints during major political events such as the 2014 Israeli incursion into Gaza or Egypt’s 2011 Revolution, but that interaction between proponents of opposing viewpoints was much more limited. Although no studies have been published examining interaction networks for the period studied here, the polarised political environment makes it seem highly likely that interaction between opposing groups would be similarly limited. Fabulae may be constructed and negotiated collectively on Twitter, but broader social divisions remain as influential as ever.

As a final point, market concerns may also partially explain the lack of overlap in terms of fabula between the writers. While repeating the same news may increase “affective input”, reporting events that are already “known” to have occurred, and potentially clogging readers’ already crowded feeds with information that adds “little or no cognitive input” (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012:13), may only serve to irritate readers. This is particularly relevant in a crowded space like Twitter where users must constantly fight to have their voice heard and to maintain the interest

192 Yardi and boyd (2010) observe that interaction does not necessarily reduce conflict and can serve to exacerbate polarisation. Similarly, Meikle (2016:76) argues that the fact that voices are “speaking to shared concerns” does not mean that they are “in dialogue with other voices exactly”.

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of readers. It is also especially important for writers such as Zeinobia, Sabry and Sandmonkey who rely on their popularity on Twitter as a major pillar of their professional survival. The fact that there is some overlap is however unsurprising. First, as Paracharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) argue, users may report events already reported elsewhere for affective purposes, to add “weight” (c.f. Goodman 1978:10-12) to a particular occurrence in the emerging narrative or to show solidarity with other users. Second, a writer may not know that another tweeter has already tweeted about an event, and thus believe that they are adding something original to the collectively produced narrative. Third, a writer may be aware that someone else has already tweeted about an event but wish to spread awareness of it to a wider audience. Alternatively, in the case of writers with significant social capital, in retweeting tweets from less influential users they may wish to imbue statements made by others with greater authority. In such cases they are acting as “gate-watchers” (Bruns 2005), identifying and drawing attention to information rather than controlling its dissemination as such.

3.2 Minimal contradiction

In addition to the lack of overlap in the events reported by Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey, it is also rare for the fabulae they present to directly contradict each other, with the information each provides generally complementing content published by the others. One possible exception to this is the extent to which responsibility is attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood for the violence following the 3 July intervention, with Sandmonkey suggesting greater MB responsibility than either Zeinobia or Sabry. This difference is explicitly communicated primarily using the “internal evaluation” strategy of “evaluative action: telling what people did rather than what they said”, allowing events to “speak for themselves” (Fleishman 1990:148). Whereas Sandmonkey populates his chronology with events such as MB members “attacking protestors in the street”, “attending rallies armed with sticks”, and MB “gangs shooting at opposition protestors”, Sabry and Zeinobia favour references to “clashes” between pro- and anti-MB protestors, attributing responsibility more evenly. Whether this difference should be viewed as obtaining on the level of fabula or sjuzhet is not totally clear, yet it
emphasises that subtle differences of presentation influence the fabulae that readers produce through the course of reading, in this case by reconfiguring the patterns of causal emplotment resulting in the clashes following 3 July.

Given the argument made above that the writers were not attempting to produce standalone narratives, it follows that this difference should not be perceived as an attempt to produce alternative, competing narratives. Rather, it constitutes an attempt to shift the broader narrative in specific directions, emphasising certain elements, in this case the violent conduct of the MB, and downplaying others, such as state orchestrated violence against the MB. This also helps to explain the emphasis placed on different aspects of the period by different writers more generally.

Zeinobia’s repeated tweets about the continued issue of sexual assaults during protests, for example, are more usefully viewed as an attempt to guarantee the presence, and importance, of sexual violence in the emerging, collaboratively produced, fabula of the period, rather than to articulate a standalone narrative of the period with an emphasis on sexual violence. The presence of different voices, which may be driven by, and reflect, differing values (c.f. Fisher 1987), highlights the extent to which collective narratives on Twitter are dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense, characterised by genuine interaction and potential contradiction between different viewpoints and voices. This, again, however, must not be viewed in too utopian a light. There may be a degree of productive tension arising from the different views and goals of writers such as Sandmonkey, Zeinobia and Sabry, but the resultant dialogism is limited. Rather than a single collectively produced narrative, it may be more accurate to speak of multiple collectively produced narratives, each involving varying degrees of dialogism but with important, and variable, limits on the extent of variation found within them.\(^{193}\)

\(^{193}\) Weber et al (2013), for example, found the Egyptian Islamists were more likely to tweet in “unison” than secular activists, suggesting a lesser degree of dialogism in the collective narratives of Islamists than in those articulated by secularists.
3.3 Dominance of political events

A third observation is that the vast majority of the events included in the fabulae produced by all three writers are the kinds of political events that form the mainstay of traditional journalism. In addition to this, however, all three writers occasionally mention events that would probably not be considered news-worthy according to traditional news values. Sabry, for example, reports that Military jets drew an Egyptian flag in the sky on 7 July, and Zeinobia describes reading a tweet from another user asserting on 28 June that the MB in Egypt “deserve the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany”. Events like these, although relevant to prevailing feelings of nationalism and rancour respectively, would be likely to be deemed too minor to appear in traditional news reporting. A similar trend within Sandmonkey’s tweets is the inclusion of events occurring in Etihadeya, the area in which he lives, presumably based upon his own observations of what was happening there, such as celebrations in Roxy Square on 1 July and the fact that helicopters were circling the area on 5 July. The fact that all three writers focus predominantly on major events supports Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira’s argument that the tendency of “traditional media” to emphasise the news value of “large scale of events” (2012:7) is mimicked on Twitter. The inclusion of tweets reporting more minor events suggests that these writers also attributed news-worthiness to information which would be unlikely to receive coverage in the traditional media.

In traditional news outlets this kind of additional information would likely be viewed as unworthy of reporting. Yet on Twitter, the lack of editorial control and limits on volume of text\textsuperscript{194} users post provides space for the inclusion of minor details typically omitted from traditional journalism where column inches are at a premium.\textsuperscript{195} Posting content about more minor events contributes to maintaining what Hermida (2010:301) describes as an “always-on” environment, providing a means

\textsuperscript{194} Although any individual tweet may not exceed 140 characters there are no limits on how many tweets a given user may post.

\textsuperscript{195} This may, however, change due to the growth of digital journalism where the practical limitations of how much material can be published are greatly mitigated.
to maintain momentum and reader interest during lulls in the action. More broadly, it contributes to the process described by Siapera (2014) and Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) whereby highly detailed narratives, featuring many different perspectives, are gradually built up on Twitter over the course of large numbers of tweets, posted by many different users. Over time, narratives of events and periods can be produced by readers which are far more detailed and multivocal than those typically seen in journalism or history.

3.4 Events and reports of events

A final observation is that the writers present the events which populate the fabulae of the stories they tell in different ways. A large proportion of the “events” in Sabry’s fabula are reports of events, with accompanying attributions, rather than events themselves. The following are typical:

Sandmonkey, on the other hand, generally cites events directly, as in the following:
Zeinobia sits somewhere between the two, employing both techniques frequently. Although this seems principally an issue of presentation, and thus of sjuzhet, it has significant implications for fabula by influencing the implicit degree of certainty. By frequently emphasising that his reports of events are usually based on second hand information, rather than direct observation, Sabry stresses the possibility of discrepancies between the fabula he presents and the “real” chronology. It reaffirms that the story he was telling was, to a significant extent, provisional and liable to be modified. Sandmonkey’s preference for reporting events directly, on the other hand, gives a stronger impression of solidity and fixity, and closes the possibility of his account and the real chronology of events differing, eliding the potential for discrepancies between the storyworld evoked by his tweets and the “real” world. This pattern is similar to that seen in their use of analepsis, with Sabry tending to emphasise the fluidity and instability of the emerging narrative through hedging and qualifications, and Sandmonkey giving a stronger sense of stability and certainty through a more assertive presentation style. This has implications for the way in which the events as a whole are understood on a basic level: Sandmonkey presents a relatively linear progression through time, Sabry a far less certain movement, characterised by different possible forks and uncertain relations between previous events. As a consequence, meaning also remains much more strongly in flux in Sabry’s account than in Sandmonkey’s, due to the uncertainty of meaning giving relational networks.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on narrative structure, exploring the three basic aspects of text, sjuzhet, and fabula. With regard to text, I argued that groups of tweets often demonstrate high levels of cohesion and “texture” through lexical repetition, thematic continuity, and temporal progression but that they typically lack the overall coherence and beginning, middle and end structure typical of more clearly narrative texts. The imposition of even provisional textual boundaries is left largely to readers, who must find ways of reading tweets together with other fragments if they are to move beyond the atomistic pieces of information expressed in individual tweets. I proposed that there are
examples of subtexts within each writer’s tweets characterised by stronger cohesive links and that some of these also exhibit a degree of coherence rarely seen in the dataset as a whole. This suggests that texts on Twitter are often “open”, in Eco’s sense (1979), but can also be relatively “closed”, presenting a comparatively narrow range of possible meanings. The inevitable fragmentation resulting from the 140-character limit does not prevent this, implying that the typically “open” nature of texts on Twitter is to a large extent a result of writers’ choices and norms rather than an inevitable consequence of writing on Twitter. I suggested that in the specific context of the period under study, there may have been political motivations underlying this, in particular a desire to challenge the rigidity of meaning seen with the dominant institutional narratives of the period.

In terms of sjuzhet, my analysis focused on the presentation of events out of chronological sequence for the purpose of influencing interpretation. I argued that Sabry largely avoided doing this with regard to 30 June, 3 July and 14 August, suggesting a commitment to maintaining a wide range of possible meanings. Zeinobia and Sandmonkey, on the other hand, made greater use of selective appropriation to establish and reinforce links between events taking place during the period under study and those occurring either before it or in an anticipated future. Both strongly linked the 30 June protests to the 25 January Revolution, although did so in different ways, with Zeinobia presenting 30 June as a continuation of 25 January and Sandmonkey contrasting them as largely separate events, thus contextualising them rather differently in the scheme of modern Egyptian history. I show that each approached the 14 August massacre in a different way: Sabry avoided historicising it; Zeinobia presented it as the death of the 2011 Revolution; and Sandmonkey argued that responsibility ultimately lay with the MB. Although not contradictory, by selectively appropriating in different ways they constructed very different meanings for 14 August.

Finally, I explored fabula, attempting to abstract the constituent events of the accounts provided by each writer from the specific manner of their telling. I argued that there is very little overlap in the events presented by each writer, suggesting that they were engaged in a collaborative storytelling
process, with different writers furnishing different details, rather than each producing their own standalone narrative. I proposed that, despite Twitter’s 140-character limit and the lack of clear textual structure, this allows writers on Twitter to collaboratively produce highly detailed and multi-perspective narratives of events. I argued, however, that this should not be viewed as an example of utopian dialogism as social divisions are replicated online and there is evidence of attempts to steer the collaborative fabula in different, potentially contradictory, directions. I also discussed the type of events with which the fabulae produced by these three writers are filled, arguing that there is an unsurprising focus on major political events but that more personal events are also included which would be unlikely to receive coverage in the traditional media. Finally, I discussed Sabry’s preference for reporting reports of events from others rather than events themselves, arguing that this profoundly affects the appearance of the story as a whole, emphasising the provisional and uncertain nature of the events being reported.
Conclusions

Here, I revisit the research questions, assessing what conclusions can be drawn and what contributions the thesis makes, and provide indications for further research.

1 Revisiting the research questions: conclusions, contributions

The main research question guiding this study was: To what extent can a narrative theory combining socio-narrative and narratological principles and tools provide a useful account of the nature and relevance of storytelling on Twitter, with particular reference to the 3 July 2013 Military intervention and 14 August clearing of protestors at the Nahda and Rabaa Squares in Egypt?

To answer this question, it was necessary to develop an understanding of narrative suitable for the analysis of Twitter. I first attempted in chapter two to combine elements of socio-narrative theory with aspects of narratological theory, a task for which there are surprisingly few precedents. My goal in so doing was to develop an approach to narrative able to incorporate the specific affordances and socio-political implications of telling stories using Twitter, while avoiding the strong formalist emphasis of much classical and post-classical narratology. The resulting conception of narrative drew heavily on socio-narrative theory in terms of its epistemology and ontology, resting on the assumption that narration is a universal human activity and key method for interacting and making sense of the world, constructing both knowledge and the phenomenological world of our experience. I have argued that all narrative analysis can benefit from a consideration of the formal and structural aspects of storytelling emphasised in narratology, even, and perhaps especially, in cases where narratives lack an obvious “text”. Stories cannot exist outside their creation and reception by human agents. Our perceptions of who these agents are, how they relate to other agents and what motivates them, inevitably shapes our understanding of the meaning of the stories

196 Baldo (2008) and Harding (2009), both working within Translation Studies, are two notable exceptions to this.
we encounter. Similarly, all stories create a more or less clearly defined position for their recipients to occupy, implying a set of background knowledge and attitudes to which real readers inevitably make reference during the process of interpretation, shaping the meanings they derive and the extent to which they are prepared to engage with stories and texts.

The key theoretical assumption underpinning the understanding of narrative adopted here is that all narratives involve a constant interaction between three main elements: a semiotic component, a cognitive component, and a social component. Narratives cannot exist independently of their realisation in the minds of storytellers and hearers, but nor can they escape semiotic mediation. However they are expressed, signs can never simply “be” a narrative: they can only act as the stimulus for the creation of a narrative once they have been interpreted. This emphasises that stories are profoundly human, in the sense that there are no narratives that have not been created by humans. The world is not inherently storied but becomes so through human interactions with it. The third key element is that all stories are socially embedded. Narratives do not exist in vacuums but are enmeshed in complex relational networks with other stories and fragments of stories and are thus irreducibly social. This approach represents a synthesis of elements of (textually focused) classical narratology, (cognitively focused) narrative psychology and cognitive narratology, and (socially focused) narrative sociology and historiography. Rather than producing a specific narrative theory of Twitter, I have sought to produce a general account of narrative able to accommodate Twitter, emphasising the continuities between the uses and functioning of storytelling on Twitter, in literature and in our daily lives. My investigation of Twitter therefore facilitated reflection on and refinement of existing general theories of narrative.

In chapter three I applied the approach to narrative elaborated in chapter two to Twitter in a broad sense. I argued that although tweets are not presented to users in an obviously narrative format, it is not possible, or at least very difficult, to meaningfully engage with individual tweets as random chunks of information without fitting them within larger structures, in the same way as it is difficult
to make sense of occurrences in the world without viewing them in terms of their positions within larger configurations. I proposed that the narrative mode offers a means for doing this and that employing narrative to comprehend Twitter draws on the same capacities used for using narrative to comprehend the world in general, relying on processes of selective appropriation, identifying causal sequences and imposing beginnings, middles and ends which do not inhere in events themselves. In the same way as the world does not come to us pre-made in narrative form, despite being heavily shaped by human agency, users do not typically find complete stories on Twitter which they can passively receive. Both Twitter and the world at large function as radical examples of “open” (Eco 1979) or “writerly” (Barthes 1973/74) texts that have their form and meaning greatly shaped by the interpretive action of their interpreters. Hints are given of beginnings, ends and internal structure but they remain fluid and provisional, preventing a closing down of the flux of meaning. This similarity between the act of interpreting the world through narrative and making sense of fragmentary information on Twitter may explain why new users seem to have little difficulty in adapting to interpreting Twitter, since it draws on existing narrative literacies for coping with open texts. I argued in chapter three that this may reinforce an existing tendency for intentional reading, imbuing implied author and reader positions with a special importance as guides to interpretation through the facilitation of Foucault’s (1969/2003) “author function”. A sense of authorial intent and expectations from their readers provide real readers with a semblance of solid ground from which to make their interpretations. This account of the process of making meaning on Twitter constitutes a contribution to the theory of Twitter, exploring an aspect of the social network which has so far received little attention.

The narrative approach also provides a scheme for understanding the act of tweeting itself, a further contribution to the theory of Twitter. As I argue in chapter six, users in this dataset do not appear to be telling standalone stories, supporting arguments made by Papacharissi (2015) and Siapera (2014) regarding the collaborative process of narrative production on Twitter. The reduced importance of individual authors in larger networked configurations and the impact of Twitter’s fragmentation on
the ability of any individual user to tell a compelling story make it seem futile for any user to attempt to tell their own, standalone narrative, although there is some evidence of this still happening on a more micro level. Yet this by no means signifies that narrative is unimportant. Instead, the users studied here appear to be attempting to influence larger narrative configurations. This is radically different from the kind of storytelling we traditionally see in fiction where writers have the freedom to create a storyworld of their choice, but is less far removed from academic and journalistic storytelling which always exist as contributions to broader narrative eco-systems. Even though it is possible to tell seemingly full and complete stories in these contexts, the goal is typically to influence broader narrative configurations and systems of understanding. The primary difference is that on Twitter writers must use fragments of narrative to do this, rather than whole stories.

This approach also represents a contribution to the theory of narrative. First, it offers another plea for greater integration of narratological and socio-narrative approaches. The divide between narratology with its primary emphasis on fiction, albeit in diverse forms, and the socio-narrative tradition which takes a much wider view is as alive as ever, and the enormous potential for fruitful cross fertilisation continues to be largely missed. I have attempted to show in this study that the two approaches can be successfully combined and that to do so can bring clear benefits to both traditions, with narratology providing a detailed toolkit for nuanced and subtle analysis and socio-narrative theory providing an epistemology and ontology to answer the question, constantly posed to narratologists, of “why do these details matter?”. Second, it represents an argument that narrative theory can be usefully brought to bear on Twitter, arguing against those, such as Manovich (2001, 2009), who suggest that media like Twitter represent a broad shift away from narrative and towards “database” modes of organisation. I propose that while the methods of storytelling differ on Twitter to those seen in other contexts, narrative itself remains as vital as ever and is central to the meaning-making process. This supports the idea that Twitter, and social media more broadly, represent a legitimate and necessary venue for narrative inquiry. Third, the fact that it was possible to apply theories of narrative from the pre-internet era to storytelling on Twitter, with comparatively
little adaptation, offers support for the robustness of existing theory. This suggests that, different as SNSs seem to other venues for storytelling, they do not demand a basic reappraisal of what narratives are and what roles they play. Future narrative investigations in this area, however, will no doubt raise new challenges and bring further refinement.

To what extent can formalist narratological tools be used to produce useful descriptions of multilingual and fragmented narratives, such as those found on Twitter?

Chapters two and three provide a theoretical basis for the application of formalist narratological tools to narratives which lack an obvious “text”, arguing that there are strong similarities between diffuse socio-narratives and the kinds of stories that readers interpret on Twitter. The emphasis on reader interpretation, and the extent to which these interpretations may vary, in this approach means that it is impossible to offer a definitive description of any story – readers can always produce different impressions of authors, interpret differently the reader positions offered to them, and construe textual boundaries and structure in different ways. They may then respond in different ways to all these factors, enabling significantly varying interpretations. This is especially true with Twitter, where the texts we encounter demand so much completion from readers, in order to turn proto-narrative chronicles into well-formed stories. Nonetheless, they do present stimuli to readers likely to encourage certain interpretations and discourage others. Readers might produce different impressions of Bassem Sabry, but it seems unlikely that many would dispute that he was an Egyptian journalist striving to maintain impartiality. They would thus be unlikely, for example, to produce an interpretation of his tweets as a highly partisan anti-MB narrative regardless of the events he reports. Readers might fit the events described in Zeinobia’s tweets into different relational networks, but few would dispute that she sets the clearance of Rabaa into a relationship with the repressive policies of the early Nasser era. Presumably few readers would therefore interpret her tweets as telling a story of the Military intervention as a non-politically motivated execution of the
will of the people. It is these “readerly” elements of collections of tweets that formalist narratological tools can describe, as I attempted to do in chapters three, four and five.

A more profound question is whether the descriptions thus produced are useful, which depends on how we define utility. I consider that they offer two main advantages. First, such descriptions offer similar insights to classical structuralist analyses: they develop our understanding of the functioning of narrative in this environment, therefore bringing insights into narrative itself and the specificities of storytelling on Twitter. That it is possible to produce descriptions using formal tools developed for the study of literature highlights the continuities between storytelling practices on Twitter and those found elsewhere, on a formal as well as more abstract level. They do not merely share basic elements of narrativity such as situatedness and causal emplotment but can also be studied in terms of concepts such as implied authors and readers. That it was possible to draw up subtle, yet significant, differences between the tweets of Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey emphasises the versatility of Twitter as a medium. Despite the 140-character limit, skilled users are able to tell detailed stories and position themselves and their readers in precise ways over large numbers of tweets, using a mixture of explicit and implicit textual and paratextual means. Tweets go far beyond mere “phatic” reaffirmation of presence (Miller 2008, 2015) and can contain far more than random fragments of information, also encoding detailed information about their writers, expectations from their readers, and hints, if not precise instructions, as to how individual tweets might be fitted into larger wholes. Although the presentation of self on Twitter and other SNSs has received some attention in the literature, the positioning of readers has received almost none and there has been almost no discussion of the impact that such acts of positioning have on the way that tweets are interpreted and the role that it plays in broader systems of meaning on Twitter. This represents a significant contribution of this study to the theory of Twitter, if factors such as authorial and reader positioning are significant in the way that I have argued them to be.
The second utility of such descriptions is that they can then be used as the basis for further investigation, analysing how they relate to the contexts in which they were produced and their influence on the contexts of production. This move away from the strict textualism of the first generation of narratologists is well underway in contemporary narratology, where, for example, there is a growing body of politically engaged feminist and postcolonial narratology. I have argued here that socio-narrative theory provides a valuable framework for conducting further investigation in this area. This brings us to the next research question which specifically asks: to what extent does socio-narrative theory provide a basis for identifying the social, political and ethical implications of subtle formal differences of narration? Perhaps the greatest strength of socio-narrative theory is the way in which it integrates micro and macro levels of analysis (Harding 2009), moving easily between stories that may only exist in the mind of one user and grand narratives that shape the trajectories of whole nations. The principle of relationality demands this movement, on the basis that the meaning of all narratives derives largely from their position within relational narrative networks. That these networks are multi-directional, with grand narratives influenced by micro narratives as well as the reverse, imbues the stories told by individuals with far more significance than they would otherwise have. Ascertaining what this significance is in specific cases is more difficult. Assessing the broader implications of formal differences is always challenging as there is no one-to-one correspondence between the use of a particular form and the production of a given effect, the so-called “proteus principle” (Sternberg 1982). It is therefore impossible to offer any kind of mechanistic equation of the kind “change $a$ to micro narrative $y$ will result in change $b$ to macro narrative $z$”.

Looking at the formal differences observed in specific narratives in their unique contexts of production from a socio-narrative perspective, however, does facilitate drawing conclusions about their significance. This brings us onto the next research question: “to what extent can the superficially similar accounts of 3 July and 14 August provided by the Twitter users Bassem Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey be shown to differ and in what ways are these differences significant?”
Due to restrictions of space, it is not possible to recapitulate all the findings of the analytical chapters and so only the most significant are discussed here. With regard to authorship, my analysis showed that all three imply, through textual and paratextual means, subtly different, and complex positions. As a consequence, support for their truth claims rests on different sources of authority, although all derive credibility from writing as Egyptians. Sabry derives credibility from his self-presentation as a relatively impartial and professional writer at least attempting to remain unbiased. Zeinobia, on the other hand, presents herself as an “ordinary” Egyptian, rather than as a representative of elites, able to provide insights into the lived experience of the events described in ways that the others cannot. Sandmonkey, finally, positions himself as a member of the revolutionary elite vehemently opposed to the MB.

These differences affect how readers are likely to interpret the reliability and significance of individual tweets. Tweets from Sandmonkey on the wrongdoings of the MB, for example, might be treated as comparatively unreliable owing to his overt hatred of the MB while comments on the plans and activities of the revolutionaries may be regarded as more authoritative on account of his alignment and identification with that group. Sabry, on the other hand, might be viewed as able to neutrally report MB statements and actions, but unable to offer lived insights into the experience of ordinary protestors owing to his implied elite status. Zeinobia, by contrast, may be interpreted as able to speak with more authority about the lived experience of ordinary Egyptians but as lacking the trained impartiality of a professional journalist. Constant hedging is necessary here because reader responses are impossible to accurately predict. Yet there is little doubt that reader appraisals of authorial positioning affect their interpretation of individual tweets, which in turn influences how they fit tweets into larger configurations. Tweets’ positions within such configurations reciprocally affects the meaning they are understood to hold as well as the perceived significance of all the other elements to which they are related.
Such differences also offer insights into the context in which Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia were writing, showing that positioning was highly complex during this period, requiring people to negotiate their identities and positions with regard to issues including national identity, class and affiliation with numerous political and social groups, including the 2011 revolutionaries, Tamarrod, the Egyptian Army, the MB, other Islamist groups. This situation was complicated further in the case of Twitter users like Zeinobia, Sabry and Sandmonkey, who acted as “bridge” users (Bruns, Highfield and Burgess 2013), connecting linguistically and culturally distinct groups. They were effectively “translating” events as they happened for diverse international audiences, all the while under intense scrutiny from Egyptians able to read English. An awareness of these overlapping and at times contradictory pressures can help us to make sense of the behaviour of many Egyptians at the time. This brings insights into the period of 3 July in particular, and helps to further discredit reductive metanarratives of binary polarisation supported by the Egyptian MB and Armed Forces. Seeing this complex process of positioning provides insights into the lived experience of the period and the many pressures under which all Egyptians were operating.

In terms of readers, the analysis in chapter five showed that the positions offered for readers to occupy again differed from writer to writer. All three writers implied readers who supported the 2011 overthrow of Mubarak. In other ways, however, the situation is more complex and it is difficult, and undesirable, to generalise. Zeinobia in her English tweets implies a reader not already convinced that the MB are a malign influence but shifts in Arabic between implying this position and that of a reader with little doubt of the problems with the MB; Sandmonkey, implies a reader who needs to be shown that the MB are an evil organisation; and Sabry avoids making any significant implications at all about the attitude of his reader towards the MB. The situation is also complex with regard to their readers’ implicit levels of background knowledge. In both Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s tweets we see a predictable split in implicit reader knowledge between their English and Arabic tweets. But in both cases there are also English tweets which imply a very high level of contextual knowledge likely to be held only by Egyptians or specialists on the country. This hints at a porous boundary between the
audiences, indicating an awareness and assumption that their tweets are also being read by a more expert audience, including many Egyptians. Sandmonkey, on the other hand, implies little difference in implicit background knowledge between his English and Arabic tweets, resulting in a weaker sense that his English and Arabic tweets are directed to two, distinct readerships, further muddying the boundaries between audiences. Beyond these differences, Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey all imply different tenors of relationship to obtain between themselves and their readers, although those again are not constant, with Sabry tending to imply more social distance and a more hierarchical relationship between him and his readers than Zeinobia and Sandmonkey.

All these factors, again, are likely to influence interpretation, and, perhaps more profoundly, the readers that each writer could attract and retain. A user interested in Egypt, but without extensive background knowledge, might find the reader position implied in Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s tweets more appealing and less intimidating than that offered in Sandmonkey’s tweets. A more expert reader, on the other hand, or a reader that likes to consider him- or herself expert, might find Zeinobia’s tendency to explain patronising and be more attracted by Sandmonkey’s more elitist approach. Such details are particularly significant on Twitter where users have such a wide range of other users they could follow, allowing them to be as selective as they like. This may explain the significant differences of readership identified in the first section of chapter four. That aspects of writing style can have such a profound influence on potential readership, even with superficially similar accounts such as those of the writers studied here, highlights the dangers of simply analysing the propositional content of tweets, even from a narrative perspective, without a consideration of implied reader and author positions.

Chapter six, finally, explored narrative structure using the concepts of text, sjuzhet and fabula. In terms of text, although my analysis showed that all three writers posted fairly small groups of tweets which can be viewed as micro-level texts, they generally avoid organising their tweets into larger scale texts with clear boundaries and internal structure. This is likely partly due to the nature of
communication on Twitter, where the lack of author control over which of their tweets individual readers will find and in which order they will be read makes the production of large scale traditional texts impractical. It may also be indicative, however, of a broader rejection of narrative arising from the dominance of two hegemonic narratives in the period in which they were writing. Rather than writing narratives, this suggests that they were producing chronicles: lists of events that can form the basis of narrative interpretations but which, in themselves, lack key elements of narrativity. My analysis of sjuzhet focused on the use of anachrony. I found that all three writers generally adhered to a chronological presentation of events, using anachrony relatively infrequently, but strategically, to contextualise events in the then present in terms of past or prospective future events. Zeinobia, for example, strongly connected the 3 July ouster of Morsi with the 2011 overthrow of Mubarak; Sabry, on the other hand, emphasises the significance of the 30 June protests in the broad sweep of Egyptian history. Such use of anachrony suggests that, while their own tweets are closer to chronicles than true narratives, they retained a strong focus on narrative and were attempting to influence the meaning producing relational networks of larger, collaboratively produced narratives. This perspective is supported by my findings with regard to fabula where, strikingly, there is almost no overlap of content in terms of the events reported by each writer. If an event is reported by one tweeter, it is unlikely to have been reported by another. This, again, suggests an orientation towards larger collectively produced narratives, rather than a desire to produce independent and standalone accounts.

The differences between Sabry’s, Zeinobia’s and Sandmonkey’s tweets identified in the three analytical chapters have been subtle but are, I contend, significant. There is an understandable focus in the literature on the collective and interactive aspects of Twitter, but this does not mean that the writing practices of individual users are irrelevant. I have argued throughout that we do not read tweets in isolation, but must assemble them into larger configurations if they are to be rendered meaningful. The fact that this typically involves reading tweets from many different writers means that individuals can fade into the background. Yet our impressions of who these people are, what
they are trying to do, how they are interacting with us as their readers, and the stories they are trying to tell inevitably influence the interpretations we ultimately form of individual tweets. Where we fit them into larger configurations derives partially from our perceptions of these practices.

Understanding how Twitter users go about doing this is therefore important to understanding Twitter, from the perspectives of both writing and reading tweets.

The existence of such differences between three writers rejecting the hegemonic narratives of the period shows that the space between, or beyond, pro-MB and pro-Military narratives was perhaps wider than it might have appeared. Their relatively large number of combined followers suggests that there was a sizable audience for their ideas. Attempts to create a digital “third square”, based around the promotion of alternative narratives, therefore seem to have been more successful than attempts to achieve the same goal physically in Agouza’s Sphinx Square, which petered out relatively quickly under intense social pressure (Finn 2013; Nelson 2013). This does not mean, however, that there was a single narrative which Sabry, Sandmonkey and Zeinobia supported. As the analytical chapters argue, they positioned themselves differently and appeared to attempt to steer collaborative narratives in different directions. That it was possible to observe such differences highlights the danger of simplifying and streamlining metanarratives. Perhaps the most pernicious story of the period is not that of the MB or the Armed Forces, but the overarching metanarrative of binary polarisation promoted by institutions on both sides to present a situation of “you are with us or against us”, which worked in both their favour. The reality is that the divisions of the period were never as simple as the metanarrative presented and my findings support those of Weber, Garimella and Batayneh (2013) who argue that those opposing the MB were far from a monolithic group acting in unison. This emphasises that, as usual, the situation was much more complex than it appeared in the mainstream media. It was easy and tempting to see it in binary terms, but to do so is to understate its complexity and to support the interests of institutions with highly questionable motives.
The final research question was *To what extent are narratives language specific?* The answer to this question clearly depends on context. To a multilingual audience it is obviously possible to tell a multilingual narrative that can be interpreted as such by the audience. The answer in the context of the period under study is, however, complex. In terms of narrative production, there is some evidence that Sandmonkey, Sabry and Zeinobia were tweeting to produce two parallel chronicles, one in English and one in Arabic. The use of translation, seen to varying degrees in each of their streams, is strong evidence for this, implying that a tweet in Arabic is intended only as a contribution to an Arabic language narrative and likewise with tweets in English. Similarly, it was noted in chapter five that there are differences in the implied reader in Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s English and Arabic tweets, working to imply (and construct) two distinct audiences shaped by the languages they understand, in turn implying language specific narratives.

Yet elsewhere there is evidence for bilingual narrative production. In chapter five, there was little evidence of any of the three writers presenting different selves in each language. If they were to have done so, it would not necessarily be an indication of their being disingenuous or false, since presenting different “faces” or versions of ourselves according to context is a universal behaviour (Goffman 1959). That they do not do so suggests, to bilingual readers able to notice it, that they are speaking within the same context in both English and Arabic. Furthermore, although there is some translation in all writers’ streams, many events are also only reported in either English or Arabic. Finally, there are also clear similarities between the implied readers in all three writers’ tweets: very little difference can be seen in Sandmonkey’s tweets while in important respects, such as readers’ implicit political views, there is little obvious difference between Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s English and Arabic tweets. There are examples in the tweets of all three writers of the distinctions between English- and Arabic-reading implied reader positions blurring together. Taken together, this may indicate an awareness from all three writers that their readerships are comprised of a mix of monolingual and bilingual readers and of the complexity of the linguistic situation in which they are embedded. In principle, translating everything they post in English or Arabic would give maximum
coverage, but would also mean significantly increasing the number of tweets that they post which might have a detrimental effect on follower numbers. It would also likely seem deeply tedious to bilingual readers, faced with a huge amount of duplication.

What we see, then, looks like a compromise and an attempt to tweet in such a way that their tweets can be constructed into both monolingual and bilingual narratives. The differences of implied reader position, for example, are clear enough in Sabry’s and Zeinobia’s tweets to be appealing to the presumed characteristics of the majority of monolingual English and Arabic readers, but not so different that individual bilingual readers could not occupy both positions. By offering occasional translation they ensure that key points are available to monolingual audiences but by eschewing translation in other cases they avoid making their streams excessively dull and repetitive for bilingual readers. Where translation is not provided, the resulting gaps are less significant than in other contexts since it is highly unlikely that their streams are the only sources used by readers. They do not need to be able to standalone in the same way as, for example, a newspaper article – they know that they can rely, to a large extent, on others to fill in gaps that they leave in terms of factual information, emphasising the collaborative nature of storytelling on Twitter. Presenting different selves to monolingual English and Arabic-reading audiences might make their tweets more appealing to those audiences, but might make them appear inauthentic to bilingual audiences, necessitating further compromise. All this highlights the additional complexities that arise when tweeting in more than one language to audiences characterised by differing levels of linguistic and cultural knowledge – difficulties that were not shared by the vast majority of commentators in Britain and America, for example, writing only in English.

2 Suggestions for future research

2.1 The study of Twitter

This thesis represents a first step in exploring Twitter in terms of narrative and many important avenues for future research present themselves. First and perhaps most importantly, work is needed
to analyse the extent to which the theoretical claims made here about the narrative process of reception on Twitter can be empirically sustained. To date, no work of this kind has been conducted and what discussion has taken place has been based solely in theory. Important as such empirical work is, the methodological challenges to conducting it are substantial. Not only are there huge numbers of Twitter users (estimated at around 313,000,000 in 2016 (Statista 2016)), but there is no reason to assume that users of different cultural backgrounds will necessarily make sense of Twitter in the same way. With such a large and diverse user base, producing meaningfully representative samples which do not efface almost all individuality is undoubtedly difficult. That the need for narrative appears to be a human attribute that transcends culture suggests that it might be common to most if not all Twitter users, but this undeniably needs verification. Second, if I am correct that politically engaged tweeting can be conceptualised as making fragmentary contributions and attempting to steer large narrative configurations with many contributors, further empirical work is needed to identify the form that those larger configurations take in the minds of readers. Similarly, empirical work is needed to explore the way in which users perceive their own storytelling activities on Twitter. In both cases, studies which go beyond textual analysis, perhaps using interviews, are needed.

Third, almost all the traditional foci of narratology could likely offer interesting and productive inquiries into Twitter. These include structural elements such as focalisation, repetition and character. The relationship between narrative and time, famously argued by Ricoeur to be at the core of all storytelling, also offers intriguing possibilities for further research. As argued in chapter six, we see a broad preference for chronological progression on Twitter, yet Twitter’s searchable nature also means that tweets must be comprehensible (i.e. it must be possible to put them into narratives) when they are presented out of their original chronological sequence. Broad temporal relationships appear as important as ever but more micro-level sequencing becomes much more hazy, raising questions as to the extent to which this is a crucial element of narrative production, even as it remains key to reception. Beyond such structural concerns, more abstract narratological
notions such as Sternberg’s (2011) “universals” of narrative (“curiosity”, “suspense” and “surprise”) may also constitute interesting directions for future research, particularly with regard to identifying the methods available to Twitter users for constructing them given the loss of a degree of control of temporal ordering, previously so crucial to it.

Looking at Twitter and social media more broadly, existing research is fragmented. Fuchs (2014), for example, offers an interesting critique of Twitter and social media in terms of the concept of “digital labour”, examining how users are exploited in the creation of content without accompanying economic reward. This could be supplemented in interesting ways using the Bourdeusian notion of capital, exploring how users are rewarded for the creation of content through other forms of capital. It might even be possible to propose an entirely new form of social media capital, as the cachet, recognition and celebrity we see on SNSs appear to be somewhat specific to this field. As the literature matures, synthetic work will be needed to combine the strengths of currently separate approaches, integrating their distinct insights into more sophisticated and comprehensive theoretical accounts. Only then will we be able to say that we have something approaching a theory of Twitter. A second major issue for future research is the nexus between the citizen and the institutional. Baker and Blaagaard (2016), for example, attempt to establish a relatively clear distinction between institutional and citizen media practices. The status of the individuals whose tweets were analysed in this study presents difficulties for such distinctions due to their somewhat ambivalent status: they are not employed by any institution but are engaged in a symbiotic relationship with major media institutions, both supplying content to them and receiving content for redistribution in return. They are not paid, but are legitimised through their recognition by the institutional media; in turn they convey legitimacy on institutional media through their own “authenticity”.

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2.2 Narrative theory

Narrative theorists have been slow to turn their attention to SNSs. From the perspective of narratology, this can be attributed to their ongoing focus on fiction. This explains why growing debates around “transmedial storytelling” focus almost exclusively on the creation of fictional storyworlds using multiple media, rather than on the transmedial mediation of political and social narratives. The concept of the “storyworld”, central to much contemporary narratology, is similar but not identical to the constructivist ontology of the socio-narrative theory I have made reference to throughout this thesis. Although it has drawn narratology closer to the socio-narrative approach, serious work is needed to develop a narrative ontology that can form the basis of future integrations of socio-narrative and narratological approaches. Crucially, yet more work is needed on the differences and similarities between the processes of world creation seen in both fictional and factual writing. The issue of authenticity and the difficulty of fact-checking on SNSs is particularly significant in this regard as we seem to be witnessing an erosion of the firm distinction between “fact” and “fiction”, dominant in Anglo-European culture for the past several centuries. Narrative theorists can also refine the ideas I have presented here, exploring in more detail how acts of diffuse and ambient storytelling on SNSs feed into, and relate to, broader processes of narrative world making. The question of the extent to which SNSs are democratising and emancipatory in terms of their facilitation of storytelling is vexed but remains pertinent. Analysts must be careful not to focus excessively on niche social media practices which “do not represent more typical usage by hundreds of millions of people” (Manovich 2009:321). Does Twitter represent a fundamental challenge to the imposition of hegemonic narratives or, on the contrary, does it facilitate their dominance? Further exploration of SNSs can also bring powerful insights into evolving practices of storytelling more broadly. How is increasing use of SNSs influencing storytelling practices in other environments? In daily oral narrative? In fiction?
2.3 30 June, 3 July and 14 August

Finally, the project raises questions for further research on the period of 30 June, 3 July and 14 August. Clearly, the period demands far more research than it has so far received. As I argued in the introduction, it has played a vital role in the creation of today’s Egypt, and its influence will be felt for many years to come. It is therefore vital that we develop our understanding of it, to get a better grip on how Egypt got to where it is now, and how it might yet find a path out of its current difficulties. Further textual analysis of the kind conducted here could bring insights into whether the generally weak narrativisation observed in this study is a general feature of Twitter use during this period or specific to the writers whose tweets were studied. More work is also needed to explore the influence of Twitter users such as Sabry, Zeinobia and Sandmonkey. What impact did their tweets have on the narratives circulating at the time and since? Broader work is also needed to explore whether the practices observed here are specific to this period, or more general features of writing on Twitter. More directly empirical work would also be rewarding. My analysis aimed to show that the period was highly complex and demanded detailed, qualitative analysis. Further work in this vein, but using different methods, could help to greatly refine our understanding of the period. Finally, an exploration of how the MB and Military were able to win hegemonic status for their respective narratives will provide important lessons for the future. What techniques and resources did they draw upon to do so? What, if any, was the role of social media?

3 Closing remarks

A story is never just a story: narratives produce both knowledge and social and political realities. The Egyptian Military ultimately emerged victorious after the fall of the Morsi government not merely through its use of coercive force, but because it won widespread acceptance for its favoured narrative: one that presented and continues to present it as the guarantor of order in Egypt and its saviour from the Islamist, terrorist threat. The brutal massacre of MB protestors on 14 August was only possible because the Military’s battle to impose their narrative of events, their version of
reality, had already been largely won. The long-term implications of this period are yet to be seen. Although Egypt is no longer experiencing the kind of obvious upheaval it witnessed during the summer of 2013, the country is far from stable. The ongoing Jihadist insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula shows little sign of defeat, the wounds and divisions of the summer of 2013 continue to fester and many of the economic and political grievances that produced the 2011 uprising either remain much as they were or have worsened. In the face of its failure to deliver the security, stability and economic growth that it promised, the legitimacy of the el-Sisi regime rests increasingly on the continued acceptance of its favoured narratives, if it is to avoid falling into total dependence on coercion and repression. If and when this happens, the regime’s days are likely to be numbered. As I have argued throughout, stories are not ossified but are in a constant process of change and renegotiation. The Military must therefore constantly fight to maintain the hegemony of its favoured narratives. Its reliance on what Danto (1985) would describe as “conceptual” rather than “documentary” evidence to do this emphasises the fragility of these stories.

This thesis is in many ways a plea for complexity. My goal throughout has been to show that, divided as the country was at the time, the summer of 2013 was never just a battle between two narratives. The presentation of the situation in this way was itself a reductive meta narrative that suited the interests of both the Military and the MB, allowing them to pit ordinary Egyptians against each other in a Manichean “us vs them” battle. We must be careful to fight the tendency to efface complexity in the pursuit of easy analysis and understanding (Gould 2002:68), especially since, as Baker (2010:217) argues, such “streamlined, homogenizing” narratives are the basic fuel of conflict. Despite the differences between them, this metanarrative suited and was supported by both the Military and the MB. I have shown here that the writers I studied did not produce clearly articulated counter-narratives to those of either the MB or the Military. Yet by positioning themselves and their readers, and through the material they chose to report, outside that binary, they raised a challenge against the overarching metanarrative. They did not merely claim to reject polarisation from a position on one side of a binary divide, but put themselves outside both groups and attempted to show that the
reality of the situation was much more complex than either the MB or Military claimed. This was a deeply political and courageous act which should be recognised and celebrated.
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