

**Asylum at an impasse:
Refugee protest and
the politics of asylum governance
in Cairo**

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I hereby certify that this thesis is the result of my own work except where otherwise indicated and due acknowledgement is given.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance through the case of a 2005 protest in Egypt. It challenges prevalent views of refugees as victims, of the bodies that host and assist as benevolent, and of the relationships between them as apolitical. In a 2005 sit-in in Cairo, Sudanese demonstrators took collective political action as refugees – but found their action countered and undone by host states and humanitarian institutions. Drawing from this case, the thesis develops existing understandings of the politics of asylum governance, and political activism concerned with it, along three lines. First, it takes an inductive approach to understanding the politics at play, developing concepts that allow for comparison across contexts. Second, it integrates analysis of both protester and institutional accounts of a refugee protest. Third, it explores three hitherto understudied aspects of the politics of asylum governance: the political activity of asylees regarding the rules of asylum within host countries; the effects of political struggles within asylum governance on refugee political participation; and the interactions between refugees and asylum governance in an urban, southern context. This thesis argues that refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance are related in *causal*, *discursive*, and *epistemological* ways: that the politics of asylum governance play a causal role in refugee protest; that protest and governance concerned with asylum share a discursive repertoire, which may be mobilised agonistically; and that the study of refugee protest is a compelling approach through which to gain insight into the politics of asylum governance. Through this study, the thesis opens new dimensions within existing scholarship on the depoliticisation of refugees, and of humanitarianism as a dominating force.

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Glossary

1951 Convention blue card	the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees UNHCR-issued document identifying its holder as a person whose refugee status the agency has recognised, and who is therefore entitled to certain limited rights, protections, and services, and the possibility of being resettled to a third country
closed file <i>midan</i>	an application for recognition as a refugee that UNHCR has rejected square, or open area in the middle of surrounding streets (Arabic)
Mohandiseen	the Cairo neighbourhood home to <i>midan</i> Mustafa Mahmoud. Spelling varies due to transliteration from Arabic. Spelling varies due to transliteration from Arabic.
Mustafa Mahmoud	the name of the park/ <i>midan</i> where the protest was held, across from a mosque of the same name. Spelling varies due to transliteration from Arabic.
OAU Convention	the Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa
Refugees Voice	the organisers of the 2005 sit-in, also known as <i>The Voice of Sudanese Refugees in Cairo</i> or <i>soot el-legein el-sudaniyin bel qahera</i>
resettlement	the relocation of selected refugees to third countries in the global North through programmes run by governments, UNHCR, IOM and other agencies
yellow card	the UNHCR-issued document identifying its holder as a person who has applied for recognition as a refugee with the office, and who is therefore entitled to certain limited rights, protections and services, but whose RSC process is still underway

Acronyms

AUC	the American University in Cairo
CBO	community-based organisation
CMRS	the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (formerly FMRS) at AUC
FMRS	the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme at AUC
GoE	Government of Egypt
GoS	Government of Sudan
IOM	International Organization for Migration
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
MoFA	Government of Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOU	the 1954 memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and Egypt
NGO	non-governmental organisation
RSD	Refugee Status Determination
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
UNHCR	the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also known as the United Nations Refugee Agency
UNHCR-Cairo	the Cairo office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also known as the United Nations Refugee Agency
UNHCR-HQ	the Geneva headquarters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also known as the United Nations Refugee Agency

Note on material previously submitted and published

In accordance with university regulations, I hereby acknowledge that the submitted thesis includes some empirical material and several paragraphs that were submitted previously for my MPhil dissertation at the University of Oxford. I also acknowledge some material that has been published over the course of this doctoral project, some of which is used in the first chapter of this thesis:

1. 2015. 'Demonstrable needs: protest, politics, and refugees in Cairo'. In Koizumi, K. and Hoffstaedter, G. (eds.), *Urban refugees: challenges in protection, services and policy*. Routledge.
2. 2013. 'Channels of protection: communication, technology, and asylum in Cairo, Egypt'. *Refuge* 29(1): 31-42; Special Issue: Technology's role in the refugee experience.
3. 2012. 'Field report: revolution, its aftermath, and access to information for refugees in Cairo'. *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* 2(2): 57-63.
4. 2012. 'Urban refugee protection in Cairo, Egypt: the role of information, communication and technology'. *New Issues in Refugee Research*.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In Cairo, Egypt, in the cold final weeks of December 2005, a large group of around 2,000 Sudanese men, women, and children waited, encamped, in a grassy square surrounded by busy streets. For almost three months they had occupied the park-like space, known as *midan* (square) Mustafa Mahmoud because of its location in front of the large mosque of that name, in the relatively upscale neighbourhood of Mohandiseen.

Within the park's perimeter, protesters cooked food on small gas stoves. Others sat together on blankets folded on the grass, perched along the brick walls that intersected the park, or milled around on foot. Observers commented that the protesters had “transformed Mustafa Mahmoud garden into a refugee camp” (Nour & Rabie 2005).

Hand-lettered fabric banners surrounded the park, hung from its low brick and metal fence. The outward-facing banners, created by protesters using fabric, coloured paper, pens, photographs and cartoons, formed a physical and narrative circle around the sit-in that united and spoke for the protesters camped within its periphery (Appendix C). Banner slogans interrogated passers-by and, through media coverage, wider audiences, with a series of questions in both Arabic and English:

Where is the international media?

Who will restore our rights?

Where has [name] vanished? [name] - refugee - member of [tribal organisation]
- disappeared in unknown reasons. Where is he now?*

[With a photograph] Who killed him? And why was he killed?*

¹ * = translated from the Arabic by Dina Al Shafie Miles

Why do we have to give up on the UNHCR?

Organizations and media: why do you ignore the Sudanese refugees?

The banner's questions suggested not just an absence of information on the part of the protesters, but systemic gaps in the governance of asylum in Cairo, especially regarding the Cairo office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, also known as the United Nations Refugee Agency). This suggestion was made explicit in banners that commented on asylum's management, policies, and politics in Egypt:

We are the victims of mismanagement

For how long will the international organization save us meanwhile we are suffering?

From a Sudanese youth to the Egyptian police station ... [UNHCR] assistant manager to protection: you lied in stating that you will protect us...^{*2}

We object local integration

We are waiting for you ... to discover the corruption of the UNHCR*

We die of hunger is better than getting killed from unfairness and poverty*

No no for the political trading in our problem.*

Alongside such complaints, many of which depicted the protesters as victims of multiple problems, other banners suggested some of the solutions that protesters sought:

We need care for the old people and children*

I want my right[s].*

Solve our problems or send us to another country

² * = translated from the Arabic by Dina Al Shafie Miles.

Overall, the protest banners' slogans called for attention from media and a wider, unnamed audience, to the need for interventions that might help improve the lives of protest participants. Within the sit-in, however, protesters had enacted some such improvements themselves (see Appendix D for photographs). A protester I interviewed the month after the demonstration's end described life within the sit-in setting:

Inside the park was very organized. It became an independent life. There was a school where I was teaching classes. All the people respected the rules and the law inside the park, and participated in cleaning. Everyone did his mission and duty completely. The people tried to reflect civilized behavior, especially because we were portrayed in the Egyptian media as being uncivilized, drinking, etcetera.

We had a time to sleep, a time to wake up. We wanted to deal well with the media coming, with the police outside the park. Even the guards inside the park searched anyone coming into the park to make sure that they didn't have any alcohol with them, and if they did, they would be handed to Egyptian security. Everyone was responsible for his own behavior.

Some of us even had duty to clean the bathrooms inside the mosque after the mosque manager complained about them not being cleaned. In the last days, after pressure from the leaders, they opened the bathrooms every day. The leaders also asked the Christians to respect the mosque when they wanted to use the bathroom inside the mosque, and they respected that.

The internal environment was very respectful, and everyone respected the other, Moslem or Christian, living together in peace. - "Layla" (FMRS25)³

Although life in the sit-in was not without problems – other protest participants spoke of cold, hunger, and illnesses – there is no doubt that protesters had both created what Layla called an “independent life” and also, through their collective presence, provoked powerful institutions and groups involved with asylum in Cairo into dialogue and response. With public space occupied for weeks and then for months, and with many lives at stake, the protesters' charges could not be easily ignored.

³ All protester names used are pseudonyms; see pp. 87-88 for explanation. For tables of primary documents with codes, see Appendices H, I, and J.

Protester press releases and statements to news media heightened this pressure. A particular focal point was a list of demands that protesters distributed to park visitors, by email, and online (see Appendix H for a photograph of this list a protester gave me at the sit-in on 10 October 2005).

Published in an Arabic and an English version, the English list read (verbatim):

1. The Sudanese refugees object the UNHCR programme of compulsory voluntary repatriation.
2. We object the local integration.
3. We object the unfair criteria [sic] the UNHCR applied on the Sudanese refugees
4. We refuse to distinguish between Sudanese refugees according to their ethnic backgrounds and/or geographical zones.
5. We refuse the arbitrary detention for Sudanese refugees without guilty
6. We request the UNHCR to consider Sudanese refugees status determination as individuals not as a group.
7. We request not to apply the four freedom principles between Sudanese government and Egyptian government on Sudanese refugees.
8. We request the UNHCR to protect Sudanese refugees from the Sudan national conference personnels.
9. We request the UNHCR to register Sudanese asylum seekers on arrival.
10. We request the UNHCR to search for the missed Sudanese refugees.
11. We request UNHCR to care about vulnerable categories as elders, minors without family members and women at risk.
12. We request the UNHCR to re-open the closed files of all Sudanese refugees.
13. We request a radical solution for all Sudanese refugees, problems otherwise move them to another country where there is no discrimination.

These demands referred to a range of policies and practices, most of which were particular to the work of UNHCR in Egypt. Over the course of the three months of the sit-in, protest delegates attended a series of negotiating meetings with UNHCR-Cairo staff to try to resolve their complaints. The question of who should and would respond to the protesters, and how, was, however, not at all straightforward. The protest took place in a park that UNHCR-Cairo used as an informal, open-air waiting room, and many protester requests clearly dealt with matters pertaining to UNHCR's Cairo office. Demands about Egyptian and Sudanese government ties, security, disappearances, detention, discrimination, and local integration, however, clearly implicated Egypt's government and society, and the event itself occupied public Egyptian property. And in the protest's end, the Government of Egypt (GoE) unequivocally took charge.

On the evening of 29 December, some 4,000 Egyptian police circled the sit-in (see photographs in Appendix G). After several hours of struggles over the terms under which protesters would vacate the *midan*, police sprayed protesters with water cannons for several prolonged periods, prompting protesters to protect children under blankets and plastic sheeting in the centre of the park. At around 5 a.m., the police surrounding the protest closed in, beating protesters with batons and removing them one by one whilst others were trampled or smothered in the *mêlée*. The violence in the forced removal killed at least eleven children and seventeen adult protesters, and injured many more. Survivors were bussed to detention centres around the city, with some families still separated weeks later.

Protesters later described the brutality of the forced eviction as a surprise: "We didn't think they'd kill us or do all this violence" (FMRS24). Earlier, on 17 December, protest delegates had returned to the encampment with an offer from UNHCR that detailed concessions and plans for the vacating of the square, but the offer was not well-received. Two days later, a

UNHCR official visited the office of Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating that UNHCR could "not do anything more and that matters were out of [their] hands", suggesting that if the protesters had not moved by 22 December, Egypt 'should do whatever appropriate', albeit 'through peaceful means', to put an end to their occupation (UNHCR14).

The protesters, however, were unaware of UNHCR's declaration to Egypt. They experienced, as one participant explained, 'confusion about what to do next': most people 'waited for UNHCR to call us to come for interviews', and 'didn't know what to do' when UN staff didn't appear (FMRS25). In a BBC News interview, eminent refugee studies scholar Barbara Harrell-Bond, then living in Cairo, called the situation in the park a 'terrible stalemate' (BBC News 2005) — terrible not only because it indicated, as Harrell-Bond framed it, 'the total breakdown of communications between the UNHCR and the refugees' (in Nkrumah 2005: 1), but also because of fear of what Egypt, a state notorious for human rights abuses and suppression of protests, would do next. The brutality of Egypt's removal of the protesters was not, in the governmental context of 2005, surprising. But the impasse that preceded it remains puzzling.

Through study of the situation described above, this thesis explores the relationship between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance. It challenges the prevalent view that refugees are primarily victims, that the bodies that host and assist them are primarily benevolent, and that the relationships between them are apolitical. In the 2005 sit-in by Sudanese in Cairo, people took collective political action as refugees – but then found such action countered and undone by their host state and humanitarian institutions.

By exploring the politics of this case, this thesis advances current understandings of three related and increasingly prominent phenomena: political protests on the basis of international norms; the political activity of migrants and refugees; and the politics of global governance.

Since the 1999 demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, USA, the social sciences have increasingly attended to acts of public activism on the basis of international norms and rights. The post-World War Two formation of the United Nations and formal adoption of international norms by its member states has been paralleled by a rise in action by a diverse collection of individuals and groups demonstrating for human rights, environmental protection, and indigenous rights, amongst others, that has been hailed as a transnational or global civil society (Cooley and Ron 2002; Fox and Brown 1998; Oliver-Smith 2002).

Increasingly, people have mobilised through the occupation of public space, from the Occupy Wall Street Movement in the United States (Milkman et al. 2014) to the takeover of Tahrir square in Cairo, Egypt during the Arab Spring (Gunning & Baron 2014). “Protest camps” that claim space on a “global stage” (Feigenbaum et al. 2013; Pritchard & Pakes 2014) have become a growing strategy through which people have sought attention on an international political stage. Although such movements would seem to herald a new kind of power, the 2005 Sudanese protest in Cairo raises the question of how and why such acts sometimes fail to achieve their goals.

Relatedly, in an “age of migration” (Castles & Miller 1993) in which refugees make daily headlines, the political activity of migrants and asylum seekers is a further topic of growing study. While some scholars have researched the political impact of displacement itself,

whether exodus or return (see for example Adekanye 1996; Van Hear 1995, 1998), others have examined the political activity of “refugee warriors” in cross-border disputes (Zolberg et al. 1989; Bariagaber 2006), or the ways in which diasporic actors exercise “long-distance nationalism” in the politics of their home countries (see Anderson 1998; Fuglerud 1999).

From Amman to Berlin, Cairo to Kampala and Tel Aviv, forced migrants have increasingly staged demonstrations calling for improvements *within* their places of asylum (Ntale 2009; Galpin 2014; Oltermann 2014; Pizzi 2014; Danielson Lanier 2015), prompting limited but growing scholarly attention to the politics of such acts (Lowry & Nyers 2003; Sylvan 2006; Guerrero & Vanegas 2010; Tyler & Marciniak 2013): what are their origins, to whom do they appeal, and how are they received?

Questions around the politics of global governance are another pressing contemporary concern. In the context of globalisation, transnational cooperation between states and international institutions increasingly shapes and regulates national law and policy. This phenomenon has prompted research both into the political relationships such cooperation entails (Pagden 1998, Rosenau 2000; Weiss 2000; Avant et al. 2010) and their impact on democracy and public accountability (Held 1995; Scholte 2004; Held & Koenig-Archibugi 2005). Within this field, work that considers the governance of humanitarianism and migration, and their intersection, is of particular relevance to the present study, as are the questions: is there any role for the political participation of beneficiaries or migrants within such governance, and what insights might be shed on it by the study of refugee protests?

This thesis examines a case that arose at the convergence of these three phenomena: the 2005 Sudanese protesters staged their three-month occupation on the basis of refugee rights and in appeal to international norms, in an attempt to participate in the governance of

asylum in Egypt – an event through which the politics of such governance entered into public debate.

By exploring the relationship between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance through this case, the thesis addresses an intersection that has so far been neglected. On the one hand, study of the political power of the refugee role is “very limited” (Cole 2015: 2). The call for attention to “refugee voices” is both a recurring motif and a topic of significant discussion within refugee studies literature (Betts & Loescher 2014: 2; Sigona 2014). Refugees are often conceptualised as people “outside the realm of the political” (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 356) and instead thought of as individual subjects of bureaucratic processes.

A recent volume on the “politics and practice of refugee protection” presents the major forces involved as consisting of “state interests, global politics, and the work of the UNHCR” – a ‘who’s who’ list that lacks refugees themselves. (Betts et al. 2011). This absence raises the need for greater understanding of what it means to be “political as a refugee” (Sigona 2014: 371). Research that acknowledges and attempts to explain the expressions of “refugees and forced migrants themselves as political actors” vis-à-vis the governance of asylum is, so far, limited (Betts 2014: 17). This gap is evident in the 2010 Forced Migration Review article titled simply, “The displaced also protest” (Guerrero and Vanegas 2010) – a title that would not have worked unless attention to refugee protest were a new phenomenon.

On the other hand, research concerning the politics of the governance structures which uphold the international laws of asylum and assist refugees is, as one of its foremost experts has observed, “surprisingly limited,” and the way that power influences global refugee

policy is “poorly understood” (Milner 2015). A growing body of literature has examined the politics of UNHCR’s role within international relations (see for example Barnett 2011; Betts 2013; Betts et al. 2011; Loescher et al. 2001), but the organisation’s relationships with the governments of countries that host refugees have been “relatively neglected” in the literature (Crisp 2017: 96). While the politics of humanitarianism are receiving increased attention, existing scholarship has focused on such politics based on research in either the global north or in southern refugee camps. Little effort has yet been made to investigate the politics of asylum governance in the urban south.

In this thesis, I attend to the ways that these two topics – refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance – connect. This focus arose from the contestations that emerged in the 2005 protest and in responses to it. It also follows Sigona’s insight that understanding the political role of refugees requires simultaneous engagement with the politics of humanitarianism (2014: 371). Refugee protest – that is, protest by people acting *as refugees* – is, of course, a kind of political intervention that happens within the political field of asylum governance.

Taking this embeddedness as a starting point, this thesis examines its implications for understanding both refugee protest as a political strategy, and the political struggles and configurations of asylum governance. I argue for the conceptualisation of the relations between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance *causally, discursively, and epistemologically*: that the politics of asylum governance play a causal role in refugee protest; that protest and governance concerned with asylum share a discursive repertoire, which may be agonistically mobilised; and that the study of refugee protest is a compelling approach to understanding the politics of asylum governance.

I unfold this argument through an empirical study that centres on the “terrible stalemate” described at the beginning of the thesis. The existence of the protest itself calls into question characterisations of refugees as politically ‘voiceless’ and ‘silenced’ that prevail in refugee studies literature: those who have sought asylum are commonly viewed as passive ‘recipients of aid’ (Harrell-Bond 1999) or characterised by “victimhood and vulnerability” (Sigona 2014: 371).

Most of the 2005 protesters had sought asylum in Egypt, with their asylum claims either in process or recognised by UNHCR-Cairo, and explained their participation in the sit-in on the basis of this legal status. What explains this demonstration? How was it motivated, why did its participants raise grievances through a sit-in protest, and why did they protest as refugees?

Furthermore, UNHCR’s renunciation of engagement with the protesters seems quite at odds with the norms of international asylum which UNHCR is mandated to uphold. UNHCR exists, after all, in order to “lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees” (UNHCR 2014). Why did the negotiations its staff initiated with protest delegates end in a ‘terrible stalemate’? To resolve the questions raised by the 2005 ‘stalemate’ requires an understanding of two chief components: the protesters’ occupation, and continued occupation, of Mustafa Mahmoud square, and the actions of the governance bodies which engaged with them, chiefly UNHCR and Egypt.

To understand these events and their conceptual implications, the thesis proceeds as follows. The second chapter reviews relevant literature, and sets out the conceptual approach taken. The third chapter explains the methodology and methods of the research

and analysis. Chapter Four provides an overview of the 2005 event and relevant background and foreground information. The six empirical chapters can be thought of in three parts. Chapters Five and Six set out protester accounts of the reasons for their sit-in: the problems they hoped to address, and what they hoped the protest would accomplish. The seventh and eighth chapters turn to analysis of governance body statements on the protest and its resolution. The final two empirical chapters, Nine and Ten, trace the strategies that were carried out: the protesters' pursuit of international assistance, and protest negotiations as they broke down. In the concluding chapter I summarise these findings and discuss them in conversation with literature on the 2005 protest. I then discuss the contributions of the thesis to current understandings of asylum governance and refugee political capacity and actions. The thesis concludes with an outline of theoretical and methodological implications and the suggestion that conceiving of asylum as a *state* offers a timely and compelling way of theorising its governance and constituency.

CHAPTER 2. REFUGEE PROTEST & GOVERNANCE POLITICS

This chapter investigates literature relevant to understanding refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance, and explains my conceptual approach. First, I review existing research on protests by migrants as well as activism by people acting expressly as refugees, and then on the 2005 protest in particular. Second, I explore studies of institutions and governance, especially research on humanitarianism, to examine how the present work's study of the politics of governance contributes to existing work. Lastly, I outline and explain the concepts chosen to conceptualise the phenomena dealt with in this work.

2.1 Refugee protest

While the refugee studies field has been critiqued for over-attention to the “interface” between governance bodies and people with refugee status (Bakewell 2008: 440), such attention has most often been applied with ‘top-down’ policy interventions in mind – that is, by studying the impacts of certain policies on target populations. The opposite starting point for considering refugee-governance relations – refugee attempts to intervene in policy, beyond prescribed rules – has been rarer. Attention is limited in part because policy institutions, with their copious and “explicit statements of policy” are more straightforward for researchers to access and to try to influence (Bakewell 2008: 435).

Furthermore, refugees have no direct channels through which they may influence the ‘protection regime’ as a whole. While individual humanitarian agencies usually have complaints mechanisms and seek “beneficiary input” in programme evaluations, these are often undermined by being tokenistic and cursory – summed up by one humanitarian evaluation consultant as the wish for “nice neat (apolitical) questions” met with “neat

(apolitical) answers” (Kaiser 2000: 9).

Increasingly, however, such “beneficiaries” are undertaking collective political action. The political activity of refugees, whose mobility is controlled in part by the contemporary management of migration (Johnson 2014), can be considered as part of a wider increase of protest by migrants — indeed, an early scholarly account of refugee protest was framed within a study of ‘global movements for refugee and migrant rights’ (Lowry & Nyers 2003). Though scholarship on migrant protest is limited, it seems to be growing rapidly — a pattern which this summer’s events in Europe are sure to bolster.

Most frequently, and reasonably, migrant protest is approached as part of the study of the changing characters of citizenship and politics, as recent titles attest (McNevin 2011; Nyers & Rygiel 2012; Tyler & Marciniak 2013). Including a ‘wide range of action into a citizen paradigm,’ however, restricts the perimeters of analysis, as Barrett importantly points out, within a citizen/non-citizen binary (2013: 13). The frequent political/non-political analysis of migrant protest creates the same conundrum as it simultaneously perpetuates and attempts to disrupt a binary view of the multiple meanings and motivations of migrant political action (see Rigby & Schlembach 2013: 157, 158).

Beyond study of migrant protests as ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin & Nielsen 2008), other research has relatedly considered both such mobilisation and the solidarity activism of ‘no borders’ movements within a context of border securitisation (Squire 2010; Rygiel 2011; Rigby and Schlembach 2013; Chebel d’Appollonia 2015). In this thesis, I am interested in a case of protest by people acting ‘as refugees’ and speaking to the circumstances they thus face, so the state of knowledge on *asylum*-related protest is particularly pertinent.

The clear separation between forced and voluntary migration is often ‘empirically untenable’ (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015: 72). Some groups of activists including both migrants and local solidarity campaigners have attempted to ‘trouble’ the refugee/migrant distinction, instead ‘emphasising that all humans actively move and remain in order to survive’ (Millner 2011: 321). Yet the rise in global activism and ‘civil society’ concerned with the maintenance of international norms (see Cooley and Ron 2002; Fox and Brown 1998; Oliver-Smith 2002) has included an increase in demonstration specifically made with public appeal to the institutions related to international refugee law and norms, and by people who have claimed asylum basing their appeals in the language of refugee rights.

Such protests have appeared occasionally in refugee-related literature in the 1990s and early 2000s. Lavik et al. documented the results of five psychiatric measures of their symptoms of trauma conducted on 47 Bosnian refugees who had staged a protest at an Oslo train station calling for improvements to conditions at the government reception centre where they had been housed (1996). While the article perpetuated the problematic ‘discourse of trauma’ prevalent in refugee studies (Marlowe 2010), framing the demonstration primarily as a psychological ‘coping strategy,’ the authors did note the agency demonstrated through the protesters’ ‘collective self-assertive action’ (Lavik et al. 1996: 84, 86).

The scope of refugee protest came to my attention in Cairo in December 2005, when, prompted by the Sudanese sit-in, Barbara Harrell-Bond and researcher Leigh Sylvan solicited the Forced Migration email list for instances of ‘protests by refugees taking place outside of UNHCR Offices’ — a phenomenon which, they noted, was ‘not new’ (email on file). Researcher Themba Lewis was instrumental in the refugee protest research, which he documented in a course paper (2005) and presented at a post-graduate conference on forced

migration at the University of East London in March 2006 (2006a). The Forced Migration email list request was met with accounts from around the world of such actions, which Sylvan surveyed in the 2006 issue of *World Refugee Survey*.

Like Harrell-Bond, whose later book chapter on the Cairo protest began by noting the prevalence of protests by displaced people ‘as a way of claiming rights and seeking justice when their rights are violated’ (2008: 223), Sylvan described the protests she collated as a ‘means of drawing attention to the neglected rights of refugees (2006: 31). In both studies of ‘the way refugees are demanding a voice’ (Sylvan 2006: 28), the protesters’ use of refugee rights language and targeting of international bodies is taken at face value, rather than as instrumental — missing the opportunity to consider the multiple motivations at play, and the events’ contextualisation within the wider rise of struggles over international norms (as explored by Oliver-Smith 2002).

The performative aspect of such protests has been treated more explicitly in more recent, more theoretically oriented scholarship on the topic. Geographer Jonathan Darling’s paper on activism concerned with asylum in the UK, for example draws on concepts from Walters (2004) and Rancière to explore processes through which asylum applicants are depoliticised by governmental policies and practices (2014: 72). Nando Sigona’s discussion of the politics of ‘refugee voices’ calls for consideration of acts like the Cairo protest as ‘situational, positional, and relational’, requiring attention to the power relations involved in how they are both produced and consumed (2014: 369).

Several detailed accounts of refugee protest actions have applied such attention to particular cases of refugee protest actions in a camp in Ghana, detention centres in Australia, and the urban setting of Rabat, Morocco. Considering protest in a Ghanaian refugee camp as a case

of ‘political failure’ allows Elizabeth Holzer to consider the structural problem with the politics of the camp that prompted its residents to resort to political action: ‘dynamics of refugee camp organisation, scarce resources, and poor communication’ that had been ‘undercut’ by existing policies and practices (2012: 258). Holzer’s analysis emphasises humanitarian institutions and the camp context in particular, and concludes with suggestions for meeting the challenges of governing a refugee camp (2012: 274-275).

Lucy Fiske takes research in quite a different setting — Australian immigration detention centres — to rethink the sometimes extreme protest acts of detainees as rationally performed claims using the language of human rights, through which detainees may “lay their claims not only at the feet of the state, but also to fellow humans through an appeal to conscience” (2012: 8). Fiske engages extensively with both Arendt’s work on human rights and Foucault’s conceptions of power to make sense of the detainees’ resistance: Foucault’s insight of governments’ concern with ‘power over life’, for example, is used to show how self-harming protest acts like lip-sewing and hunger strikes paradoxically made protesters ‘closer to a place in the world in which [their] actions were meaningful’, given authorities’ desires to avoid deaths in detention (2012: 198).

Analysis of governmental reactions to refugee protest also runs through Stephan Scheel and Philipp Ratfisch’s 2014 reconsideration of UNHCR’s global role, which examines in depth the agency’s involvement in protests at its gates in Rabat, Morocco, in which demonstrators and UNHCR staff struggled publicly over terms such as ‘resettlement’ (935). Scheel and Ratfisch document themes of co-option, negotiation and threats by UNHCR which indicate the agency’s handling of the 2005 Cairo protest was not a local anomaly. As I do with the Cairo case, the authors examine the relations between UNHCR and Moroccan authorities, and UNHCR’s role in migration management, that shape the

agency's reactions to refugee protest, providing compelling insight (Scheel & Ratfisch 2014: 936).

Overall, work studying refugee protest is limited, as evidenced by the absence of articles on political activism by migrants concerning the rules of asylum in a special issue on 'social movement' by the publication *Refugee Review* (New Scholars Network 2013). The *Review*'s articles covered resistance in detention and against deportation in the United Kingdom, primarily by non-migrant asylum rights activists; two cases on 'homeland activism', and legal advocacy, education, funeral rites, and solidarity activism, but lacked exploration of instances of refugee-led protest oriented towards asylum governance.

Forthcoming work like Holzer's book on 'refugee activism and the dilemmas of humanitarian rule' (under review) promises to contribute to greater understanding of the politics of activism in refugee camps. Aside from Scheel & Ratfisch's work, and literature on the 2005 protest, however, scholarship on refugee protest in cities, especially in the global South, is scant.

This deficit matters because the organisation of both governance and refugees in cities differs significantly from that of camps (for a discussion of the specificities of the urban asylum context, see Section 4.4, 'Asylum in context'). Given that more than half of the world's refugees live outside of camps, understanding their attempts to interject into governance in urban settings is not a matter of filling a gap, but expanding — and changing — our frames of reference altogether.

2.2 The 2005 protest

From its start, the 2005 protest became the object of local research by students and affiliates of the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme (FMRS) at the American University in Cairo (AUC). During the protest, students in the FMRS's graduate diploma investigated the views of its participants (Gomez et al. 2005a; Schafer 2005a, 2006) and of other stakeholders (Gomez et al. 2005b; Salih 2006), examined the protest as an instance of political resistance (Lewis 2006a, 2007), and considered issues of masculinity and generation amongst its leadership (Rowe 2006, 2007).

In the event's immediate aftermath, a team of researchers of which I was a part began to study what had gone wrong, and who was responsible. This work was published as an FMRS working paper in June 2006 which provided team-authored overviews of the protest's background, events, end, and aftermath, and concluding analysis and recommendations authored primarily by the report's editor, FMRS director Fateh Azzam (Azzam et al. 2006). Stacy Schafer, Martin Rowe and the FMRS team conducted extensive interviews with protest participants. Rowe's research was published as a refereed monograph (2008), and the other FMRS research remains available through the American University in Cairo's website and library.

In relation to this thesis's aims of explaining the protest's origins and proceedings, it is helpful to think of the contributions of the FMRS research along three lines. First, Lewis and, in his concluding remarks, Azzam explained the protest as a reaction. Lewis's 2007 dissertation views the Cairo event as one of several instances of "resistance to the conditions of life in exile" by Cairo's Sudanese refugees, an approach developed through rigorous engagement with theoretical work on resistance, refugees, and sovereignty (Lewis 2007: 6).

Azzam's more applied analysis is situated closely within the framework of refugee assistance in Cairo. Like Lewis, Azzam takes "conditions in Cairo" as the reason for the protest, framing the background chapter as an explanation of the "frustration" amongst the protesters that had "led to the protest in the first place" (Azzam et al. 2006: 5, 57). In light of problems in Cairo, Azzam argues that the protesters' "demand [of] fundamental changes in their circumstances should have come as no surprise" (Azzam et al. 2006: 17). This conclusion – that the protest was a logical reaction to the situation in Cairo – is repeated throughout the report. Questions about why the protesters should stage their protest in front of UNHCR, or seek public attention rather than target the Egyptian government, for example, or address their problems through different means are not explored.

A second line of inquiry carried out by FMRS researchers considered the protest as an instance of the negotiation of relationships in Cairo. Sudanese graduate diploma student Assad Salih conducted research with protesters, neighbouring residents, police and passers-by during the sit-in. Although his write-up of this work is a quite brief conference paper, Salih's native Arabic and personal networks resulted in valuable insights about both Egypt and Sudan's responses to the protest (Salih 2006). His fellow diploma student Martin Rowe's post-protest research with sit-in organisers and participants was more in-depth, resulting in a Master's thesis (Rowe 2007) that used the protest to explore themes of masculinity and agency in amongst Cairo's young male Sudanese refugees.

Rowe's work provided insights into protest organisers' pursuit of an "ideal" masculinity through their activism, into the "gendered authority structures" at play in Cairo-based refugee organisations, including the protest, and into ways in which the sit-in ultimately both "affirm[ed] and undermine[d] a sense of agency and masculine self-perception" amongst the research participants (Rowe 2007: iv). Both Salih and Rowe's work shed light

on the role of local politics in the protest, while leaving unanswered questions: Why did the protesters stay in the park after the organisers had reached an agreement? In practical terms, what did protesters gain, or hope to gain, from the protest?

These questions were in part addressed in Schafer's research, which outlined a third account of the protest: as a solution in itself. Schafer set out to determine individual protesters' "reasons and motivations" for joining the protest (2006: 4). To do so, she worked with interpreters to carry out a survey of 150 of the demonstrators and held fifteen unstructured group interviews at the sit-in over three weeks starting mid-November 2005, resulting in a view into the park outside of the official narrative of protest organisers. Through her survey research, she provided the only quantitative information on the histories and statuses of the protesters.

Schafer took pains to initiate interviews using open-ended questions, resulting in the only contemporaneous records of protesters' "decision[s] to join the protest and what they thought their presence at the sit-in might achieve" (Schafer 2005: 8) aside from those contained in media reports from the time. Schafer found that alongside protesters' multiple reasons for joining the protest, a sense of "solace and security" prevailed in the decisions of many to remain in the park: the protest alleviated many of the protesters' complaints, and provided many benefits, becoming their "own protected community ... without the assistance of UNHCR" (Schafer 2006: 1, 9). As unpublished postgraduate coursework, it is limited in length and scope, but is an invaluable documentation of the motivations and profiles of the 2005 protesters. The present thesis drew from Schafer's work as one source in a much wider and more detailed study which dealt not only with the protesters' motivations but also their strategies and the protest's wider politics.

In the decade since the 2005 Sudanese protest in Cairo, the event has appeared as a topic of discussion within studies from fields as diverse as law, psychiatry, and anthropology. Taking her title from the 2005 protesters' list of petitions, Lauren Fouda's 2007 law journal article, 'Compulsory voluntary repatriation' argued that, as her title continued, 'temporary protection for Sudanese asylum-seekers in Cairo amounts to *refoulement*'. While the 2005 protest served as a case study for her legal argument, it could, she noted, serve as a greater case, 'exemplifying UNHCR's problems worldwide' (Fouda 2007: 520).

In the psychiatric field, co-authored research by four academics and five Cairo-based refugee organisation members documented 'feelings of betrayal by UNHCR' amongst Sudanese refugees in Cairo. Arising from previous research in which the authors had observed that amongst this population, UNHCR aroused 'particularly strong negative emotions', the researchers conducted a pilot study with twenty-two participants consisting of questionnaires measuring depression, trauma, social problems and feelings, and anger expression.

The research focused on participants' rating of their 'sense of betrayal by the UNHCR', a framing which, the authors acknowledged, may have somewhat skewed results (Meffert et al. 2010: 169). Most participants 'felt 'extremely' betrayed' by UNHCR — results the authors suggested might have been related to the experience of the 2005 protest (Meffert et al. 2010: 166, 169). The study linked a sense of betrayal to the symptoms — PTSD, depression, anger — it had measured, concluding that future psychiatric work in refugee communities ought to attend to the challenges not only of past displacement, but the experiences faced once displaced, including negative encounters with UNHCR (Meffert et al. 2010: 170).

An important foregrounding of the 2005 event has come from anthropologist Aman Hassan Fadlalla, whose study of the mobilisation of narratives of suffering by transnational Sudanese activists takes depictions of the Cairo protest as one of its three case studies, alongside representations of Sudanese migration from Egypt to Israel, and of the ‘lost boys of Sudan’ in the United States (2009). Her work shows that Sudanese activism under ‘the banners of humanitarian solidarity’ occurred not only in the 2005 event, but internationally and thereafter, in diasporic activism ‘replete with humanitarian fantasies of rescue and salvation’ (Fadlalla 2009: 80).

In online media, especially the major, American-based diaspora website, SudaneseOnline, the Cairo protest gained major coverage. Fadlalla’s study of its depictions shows how Sudanese activists used the event to ‘celebrate transnational humanitarian solidarity’ as well denounce the protest’s end as an ‘injury to Sudanese-ness’ (2009: 89). Fadlalla traces actions undertaken in the Sudanese diaspora after the protest’s violent end: activists wrote letters and staged protests at their local UNHCR agencies around the world, condemning the killing of the Cairo protesters (2009: 89).

To continue to contextualise the present research, I will briefly introduce existing scholarship on the 2005 protest in three parts: first, commentary on the protest by two scholars with extensive history of research in Cairo; second, two further empirical studies, of protesters and Egypt’s response, respectively; and third, three considerations of the protest through a more global lens.

Both Katarzyna Grabska and Barbara Harrell-Bond are authorities on asylum in Cairo, and their reflections on the 2005 protest evince both their expert knowledge and their rights-based and UNHCR-focused approach to asylum policy in Egypt. Grabska recorded her

comments both in a 2006 blog post shortly following the protest, and within a 2008 book chapter on 'rights, policies and the well-being of refugees in Egypt', with Harrell-Bond's discussion of the event documented in the same book, in a chapter on 'protests against the UNHCR to achieve rights'. As the chapters' titles show, both authors accounted for the protest firmly within policy frameworks: Grabska explained the event in part as the search for 'meaningful protection' (2008: 71), and Harrell-Bond presented it as an instance of refugees 'claiming rights and seeking justice' (Harrell-Bond 2008: 222).

Grabska's 2006 blog post offers intriguing suggestions of the role of governance in the protest's outcome, highlighting the role of the 'shifting responsibilities', 'diffusion of responsibility', and 'muddling through' approach evident in responses to the event. Calling the protest and its human losses 'the failure of a refugee system or lack of one', Grabska observes that 'lack of clarity about who is responsible means that rights can be neglected with impunity' (Grabska 2006). Harrell-Bond, too, mentions the role of governance, noting UNHCR's 'absence of mechanisms' for assessing its beneficiaries' 'satisfaction', and the lack of advocacy from Northern activists who might 'take up the refugee cause with donor governments' (2008: 231, 237). In both discussions, however, treatment of these issues is brief.

Minal Giri's research offers a more sustained interrogation of the governance politics affecting the course of the protest; her work, along with Hala Mahmoud's doctoral research, are the only original empirical analyses of the protest since 2006 and prior to the present research. Giri's analysis of post-protest statements released by the Egyptian government reveals its framing of the protesters as harbingers of disease and criminality. This framing, Giri argues, provided Egypt with a means through which to 'justify its actions to the international world' (2007: 179). Perhaps more importantly, the government's rhetoric of

contagion emphasised differences between the protesters and Cairenes in order to undermine solidarity and empathy — ‘thereby discouraging the possibility of similar demonstrations being held by Egyptians in the future’ (Giri 2007: 179).

Based on two years of research with Sudanese refugees in Egypt, Mahmoud’s work focuses on issues of identity transformation and psychological coping mechanisms amongst them, written up in a doctoral dissertation for Cambridge’s psychology department and in several journal articles since (2008, 2009, 2011). This approach guides her explanation of the advent of the protest: ‘extreme frustration, suffering, and distress resulting from ‘waiting’ in Egypt motivated [its] initiation’ (Mahmoud 2009: 109).

Within this wider study, Mahmoud’s six-page discussion of the protest is grounded in interviews with its participants, and her consideration of the event as ‘extreme manifestations of the refugees’ identity and life issues’ in exile (2009: 109). One such manifestation she notes was the protesters’ sense of ‘common identity’ as Sudanese, as well as an exaggeration of existing antagonism and ambivalence in relations between protesters and UNHCR-Cairo (Mahmoud 2009: 111-112). Mahmoud’s research also identifies psychological impacts of the protest: a sense of ‘dehumanisation’, of ‘stagnation’, and disillusionment amongst its participants, as well as the wider population of Sudanese in Cairo (2009: 114, 115).

A final grouping of scholarly accounts of the protest considered the event’s significance from a greater distance. The first is by Phil Marfleet, who drew from his repeated fieldwork in Egypt to write an account of ‘predicaments of the urban refugee’ (2007). Marfleet takes the 2005 protest as a negative exemplar of such predicaments, and as an instance of the increasing organised resistance campaigns amongst urban refugees around the world (2007:

42). His long-standing engagement with Cairo prompts him to explain the event in terms of similarly long-term problems, particularly disjointed communication between refugees and governance bodies, and the formers' 'stressful and insecure' living situations (Marfleet 2007: 42, 43).

The most widely read secondary analysis of the protest to date is surely Moulin & Nyers' 2007 article in the *Journal of International Political Sociology*, which presents the event as a manifestation of 'global political society'. The empirical base of their article is the material in the published FMRS report (Azzam et al. 2006) and in the conference papers of FMRS graduates Lewis, Rowe, Salih, and Schafer. The authors' sole reliance on secondary sources results in some factual errors, and their reproduction of policy terminology and focus on UNHCR's role — arguing that the protest 'was fundamentally a disagreement between the refugees and the UNHCR over the politics of protection, care, and mobility' (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 356) — limits their insight into the politics at play. Overall, however, the article offers important discussion of the protest's theoretical and international implications, insightfully developing the concept of 'global political society' to 'make sense of the various disagreements and political paradoxes that took place' in the 2005 event (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 357). Despite its use of policy language, the article also offers the first published analysis of the ways protesters made use of such language themselves.

Drawing from the research reviewed above, Nando Sigona has more recently considered the 2005 sit-in as a landmark case of the 'quest for recognition as political subjects' by refugees (Sigona 2014: 370). His discussion of the protest arises in a wider account of the 'politics of refugee voices', contrasting the protesters' quest with humanitarian representations of refugees as passive recipients (Sigona 2014: 370). Like Moulin and Nyers, Sigona's analysis of the event also identifies the protesters' mobilisation of policy

language, noting its significance as an inversion of, paraphrasing Malkki, ‘the rules of the international (moral) order of things’ (Sigona 2014: 373).

Whereas refugees are often thought of as excluded from political life, Sigona identifies ‘refugee’ as an emerging form of political belonging, prompting pursuit of understanding of ‘what being political *as a refugee* (in a broader sense) means’ (2014: 371). To undertake this pursuit, he argues, requires examination of both the ‘causes and consequences of forced displacement’ itself, but also, following Agier (2008) and Fassin (2011), to ‘the discourses and practices of the ‘humanitarian government’’ (Sigona 2014: 371).

Throughout existing scholarship concerned with the protest run several themes. All, even those who explore the performative aspects of the protesters’ use of humanitarian and rights discourses, themselves use that vocabulary, referring to the protesters interchangeably as ‘the refugees’, and reproducing terms like ‘rights’ and ‘protection’ without further comment. Moulin and Nyers for example, persist in calling the protesters ‘refugees’ despite their summation of the protest as its participants’ quest for refugee status (2007: 356). Cairo-based scholars tend to take the protesters’ references to ‘rights’ as self-evident, presenting the sit-in as a pursuit of those rights; authors dismiss the protesters’ pursuit of things that were not rights, like resettlement, as evidence of their ‘false expectations’ (see for example Grabska 2006).

Aside from condemnation of Egypt’s forcible ending of the sit-in, literature on the protest has accounted for governmental responses to the event with reference solely to UNHCR-Cairo or the ‘humanitarian regime’ (Sigona 2014: 271). With the notable exception of Giri (2007), and Grabska’s brief 2006 blog post, little attention is paid to Egypt’s role, or to the broader politics affecting UNHCR’s handling of the event. The significance of migration

— particularly resettlement, and with it the importance of resettlement countries and their embassies in Cairo — has also been explored only in passing. These approaches, based on partial or secondary empirical evidence, have resulted in varied and incomplete explanations of the protest and its outcome. This thesis is thus indebted to previous literature on the protest, while adding to existing understanding of the event and its implications by undertaking a comprehensive study of the event, approaching the material in new ways, and tackling questions and conflicts not yet examined.

2.3 The politics of governance

While the present work takes as its focus a refugee protest, it also explores the relationship of such acts to the politics of asylum governance. In doing so, the study contributes to the wider body of scholarship concerned with institutions and governance, of which the study of humanitarianism is especially relevant. To understand this field of study and frame the contribution of the present work, the next sections review existing conceptualisations and explorations of the logics, orientations, and politics of humanitarian governance.

2.3.1 Moral authority, expert authority: humanitarianism's logics

As one of “the great stories of globalization”, humanitarian governance is global in its reach but local in practice (Agier 2011: 206), and is guided by principles of universality and humanity. The anthropology of policy asks: “What are the mobilizing metaphors and linguistic devices that cloak policy with the symbols and trappings of political legitimacy?” (Shore & Wright 2003: 3). Scholars of humanitarian policy have been clear that although humanitarianism is “an affective movement drawing humans toward their fellows” who share the human condition (Fassin 2012: 1-2), it is at the same time very much a language or vocabulary used for political purposes. Fassin has called this language “humanitarian

reason”: a logic that is reliant on compassion to articulate its politics (Fassin 2012: 5, 12) and through which we can thus learn about contemporary morality.

The discourse of humanitarianism mobilises affect and moral arguments to justify humanitarian governance in both its national and international manifestations (Fassin 2012: 2). As Fassin puts it, increasingly, the “vocabulary of suffering, compassion, assistance, and responsibility to protect forms part of our political life: it serves to qualify the issues involved and to reason about choices made” (Ibid.). While literature on humanitarianism has focused on how governance institutions have made use of such vocabulary, values, and affect in order to rationalise their actions, the present work suggests the importance of attending to situations in which both governance actors and the so-called ‘beneficiaries’ of humanitarianism instrumentalise such vocabulary, not in concert but at cross- and counter-purposes. When both institutions and beneficiaries mobilise humanitarian language, who does so successfully, in what terms, and why? The present work contributes a study of both such mobilisations and the governance politics that shape their efficacy.

As I explore, humanitarian governance relies not only on moral arguments but also on expert knowledge to justify its authority, just as more broadly, effective governance relies on “the production of authority” (Feldman 2008: 3). Expertise “creates hierarchies of superiority and inferiority” as experts claim greater knowledge than others – “especially those appearing to be illiterate, poor, and backward” (Barnett 2013: 392). Scholars have shown how multiple forms of global governance work through such claims, uncovering “the construction and deployment of categories and attendant governing practices that are justified and attain their meaning as efforts to help others, typically those who “cannot speak for themselves”” (Sending 2015: 10). Through such deployment, institutions claim the authority “to represent and speak on behalf of others, invoking variable configurations

of knowledge claims, normative ideals, or lived experience”, as Sending suggests (Ibid: 10).

Such authority production is particularly relevant in the study of the involvement of a United Nations body in governance, since the United Nations as a whole has been shown to be widely thought of as an authoritative expert on “the victims’ perspective” in humanitarian matters (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012: 468). The coming chapters offer an exploration of the contradictions of such authority in an instance when UNHCR claimed expertise about the rules of asylum against the claims of ‘victims’ themselves, as it did vis-à-vis the 2005 protesters.

2.3.2 The orientation of power: institutional imperatives and their effects

The practice of governance is framed by institutional imperatives: governance institutions, be they focused on humanitarianism or development, work bound by legal and financial frameworks. Within them, staff work accordingly, “in reference to a certain professional ethos, to the training they have received, to an idea they have of their actions, and to a routine they develop” (Fassin et al. 2015: 6). Although this might suggest the primacy of policy in guiding institutional practices, there is also a significant sense in which “practice produces policy” (Mosse 2005: 2), as institutional staff orient their work towards producing a narrative that is pleasing to their bosses, their bosses’ bosses, and their institutional funders.

Mosse’s work in the anthropology of development has shown the significance of such discursive coherence for the effectiveness of governance in practice. Whether or not what is actually happening in practice aligns with policy, Mosse argues, institutional actors “devote their energies to maintaining coherent representations regardless of events” (Mosse

2005: 2). Faced by situations that are often out of the control of development actors, their control over narratives about those situations become key: “What is usually more urgent and more practical is control over the interpretation of events” (Mosse 2005: 8). Interpretations of events that align with institutional imperatives are sought after by development staff because such alignment is rewarded by the institution: “power lies in the narratives that maintain an organisation’s own definition of the problem” (Mosse 2005: 8).

Studying the creation of such narratives reveals a particularity of the politics of governance by international institutions, namely an orientation of power that is always ‘up’: as Mosse explains, “because the emphasis on the preservation of policy models occurs within unequal relations of power, the orientation is always ‘upwards’ in international development” (Mosse 2005: 233). As existing literature has shown, accountability mechanisms in humanitarian governance, too, tend to be “upward and not downward forms of accountability” which exist not to “ensure that humanitarians are accountable to beneficiaries but rather because of the drive of politics and the need to satisfy donors” (Barnett 2013: 390).

The coming chapters demonstrate how, in staging and debating the 2005 protest, both asylum organisations and beneficiaries maintained what Mosse characterises as a pervasive “orientation to the knowledge and narratives of more powerful players” (Mosse 2005: 233). Although Mosse is referring to international development, the present work shows how the institutional imperatives he studies hold similar sway in the realm of international asylum governance. I show, however, that such an orientation is not only a matter of narratives but also actual systems of accountability.

Because of upwards structures of accountability in humanitarian governance, the success of efforts of actors like the 2005 protesters to create more democratic accountability is granted, as it is in other forms of global governance, only at the behest of the institutions involved. Frequently, “unsympathetic officials have ignored, belittled or obstructed civil society efforts to bring greater accountability to global regimes” and “have treated contacts with civil society groups as a public relations exercise” (Scholte 2004: 226) – a reflection of the overriding importance for global governance bodies of maintaining institutional security, first and foremost.

If institutional bodies and their staff are preoccupied with “the upwardly oriented process of preserving themselves as systems of representations” (Mosse 2005: 233), how does this influence how they deal with their beneficiaries? This question takes us from exploration of the logics and orientation of power in humanitarian governance to examination of the consequences of upwardly-oriented governing. While a preoccupation with “rules – bureaucracies, bodies of knowledge, standards, indicators, and other metrics that are designed to standardize response and increase efficiency” (Barnett 2013: 390) may seem benignly apolitical, it has multiple political effects.

Institutional focus on such rules has, however, “the effect of obscuring the politics and power involved” (Barnett 2013: 390). Such obfuscation is what James Ferguson captured in naming the development project an “antipolitics machine” that “depoliticizes everything it touches while performing its own ‘pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic power’” (Ferguson 1994: xv). One of Ferguson’s major contributions to the anthropology of development was his related call for attention not only to the goals and intentions of development projects, but also to their *effects* (1994: 180). Like Ferguson, Mosse has called for attention to the unintended consequences of policy, its “downstream

effects” and “ways in which managerialist policy discourse is far from politically neutral, and can produce social and political effects which fall outside the policy frameworks and the knowledge of agency staff” (Mosse 2005: 239).

A wide range of critical scholarship in anthropology of humanitarianism, too, has become “less concerned with issues of effectiveness and much more concerned with the range of effects resulting from the organised effort to reduce human suffering. Some of these effects might be intended and desirable, but others might be unintended and harmful” (Barnett 2013: 382). Of central interest to the present work is the empirical study and conceptualisation of the effects that humanitarian governance has on the political role of the people who are the beneficiaries or “objects” of such governance (Sending 2015: 10). Such a study joins and contributes to a growing body of work examining humanitarianism’s political effects.

2.3.3 Attending to contestations of power

While much literature on both global and humanitarian governance, especially in the fields of political science and international relations, takes as its focus what Mosse calls the “project of rule”, such a focus has tended to overlook the struggles between the multiple bodies involved in such governance, and the “political contests [and] compromises and contingencies involved in the accomplishment” of rule (Mosse 2005: 7). But contestations of power within fields of governance are increasingly recognised. Recent work on the politics of authority in global governance, indeed, has theorised such governance as “an ongoing process of competition for the authority to define what is to be governed, how, and why” (Sending 2015: 4).

To attend to this process, it is useful to conceptualise authority as relational and based on recognition. This shifts attention from “predefined actors” instead onto the processes of and bases for the exercise of power; that is, onto “the dynamics by which authority is constructed”, and “on what grounds recognition is sought and accorded from others [and] how some actors are able to impose the evaluative criteria in accordance with which others are compelled to seek recognition” (Sending 2015: 4, 7). I apply such an approach in the present study as I investigate the public contestations between UNHCR, the Egyptian government, the 2005 protesters, and local academics over questions of legitimacy, authority, and recognition.

Scholarly attention to the ways power is contested amongst global governance bodies has most often assumed that such competition relies upon the “claim to authority over those who are the objects of governance efforts *but who are not participants* in global governance” (Sending 2015: 10; my italics). The case of the 2005 protest opens a new dimension in this field of inquiry because it is a case in which people normally considered such “objects of governance efforts” made an explicit attempt to become participants in global governance. In particular, I explore how the 2005 protesters attempted to insert their own claims to authority into the realm of global asylum governance, and how such claims were received by governance bodies. This analysis offers insight into the spaces available within asylum governance for the political participation of asylees, what factors constrain those spaces, and how such interjections provoke contestations amongst governance institutions.

Furthermore, this thesis adds insight into the internal dynamics, negotiations, and conflicts amongst multiple actors involved in governance in a single location. Whereas existing literature on the politics of asylum governance is occupied primarily with the efforts of

particular governance bodies to establish authority on a global stage (see for example Betts 2013, 2015), the present work provides an ethnographic account of the politics of governance as they were contested between international, state, and non-state institutions regarding asylum within one country.

Finally, the present work contributes to current understandings of contestations of power within governance by exploring not only ways in which governance institutions struggle to *establish* authority, but also ways in which they may struggle to *avoid* authority. In the Cairo case, I show, when UNHCR and the GoE publicly disputed their respective roles in the governance of asylum in Egypt in response to the 2005 protest, their statements repeatedly constituted a disassociation, rather than consolidation, of authority over the protesters and the responsibilities involved in asylum governance.

2.4 Humanitarian domination, refugee depoliticisation: current understandings

To frame this thesis's discussion of an event through which refugee-governance relations were tested and debated, the next two sections introduce current conceptions of the ways in which humanitarianism can serve to dominate and depoliticise refugees. Existing literature, I show, presents a dichotomous relationship between humanitarian governance and refugees, and focusses on depoliticisation through practices and discourses. It also relies primarily on cases from the global north or refugee camps in the global south.

While rationalised by moral sentiments and expert knowledge, and shaped by institutional imperatives, in practice humanitarian governance functions, it is argued in part as a wider mechanism that controls precarious populations. Humanitarian governance is thus often characterised as a new, global form of authoritarianism consisting of a “relation of domination and a relation of assistance” (Fassin 2012: 3) which can be conceptualised as

neither solely benevolent, nor solely authoritarian, but rather both at once (Duffield 1996). Through this relation, humanitarianism has been thought of as “smoke screen that plays on sentiment in order to impose” the real exercise of power (Fassin 2012: 2). Conceptualised as a contemporary mechanism of global social and political control, humanitarian governance becomes defined by “the domination that it exercises at every turn” (Agier 2011: 208). In this way, the language of humanitarianism is said to function much as Ferguson (1994) characterised that of development policy: “as a rationalising technical discourse concealing hidden purposes of bureaucratic power or dominance” (Mosse 2005: 2).

2.4.1 Humanitarian rule: how care can control

Current literature has suggested that humanitarianism can be conceptualised as a form of governance that dominates through practice and discourse. In practice, humanitarianism is used to perpetuate the restriction of mobility and migration, acting as a separating mechanism which “tightly clos[es] off the protected world from the excluded world” (Agier 2011: 207; Fassin 2012). Humanitarianism acts, put more hyperbolically, as

a political strategy and control technique that closes the gates of the ‘World’ to ... undesirable ‘Remnants’. This takes place behind the wonderful screen of the interventions of rescue, protection, reconstruction and ‘peace building’ conducted by humanitarian organizations and UN agencies (Agier 2011: 4)

Working in concert with state police, humanitarian governance thus functions on behalf of the Western world or the global north “as much for control as for relief” (Agier 2011: 202). Humanitarianism is conceptualised in this way as a tool of the West/global north, which does not directly “own and operate” humanitarian action but nonetheless, as it does for other realms of global governance, “maintains a controlling influence over it” (Barnett 2013: 386).

In studies of state action in the global north, scholars have used epithets such as “armed love” (Ticktin 2011: 5) and “compassionate repression” (Fassin 2012: 135) to capture the way that the logics of humanitarianism can enact domination: as Ticktin points out, “brutal measures may accompany actions in the name of care and rescue—measures that ultimately work to reinforce an oppressive order” (Ticktin 2011: 5). In France, a “revealing moment” of such repression arose when French Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy closed the Red Cross-run Sangatte shelter for migrants on humanitarian grounds, due to the “‘undignified conditions’ to which foreigners were being subjected” in the camp (Fassin 2012: 137, 134).

The present thesis contributes a detailed study from the urban global south of a case in which state violence was similarly justified on humanitarian grounds, namely the 2005 Sudanese protest in Cairo and its forced termination. This case opens inquiry into a new dimension of this phenomenon by exploring how such violence was not only enacted by the state but also mediated by the involvement of an international governance body, UNHCR.

The present case also exemplifies another aspect of the power of humanitarian care in action, namely that sometimes, “those who are not worthy of compassion are not simply ignored but are rather criminalized and condemned” (Ticktin 2011: 23). Through such condemnation, “victims moved all too easily from endangered to dangerous, innocent to delinquent” (Ticktin 2011: 5). By categorising one population as eligible for humanitarian care in contrast to another which is excluded from such care, humanitarian compassion produces, in effect, a population that is thereby criminalised.

I show how UNHCR's response to the 2005 Sudanese protest, in which it defended its institutional imperatives and struggled with the GoE over the division of responsibility, had the effect both of delegitimising the protest and of relegating the protesters to the status of economic migrants and thus law-breaking criminals – that is, a population not of humanitarian concern, but rather a population for the Egyptian government to deal with. Studying the response of governance institutions to the 2005 event, then, contributes an urban, southern case to the growing body of scholarship concerned with the ways in which humanitarian institutions can, through a focus on their institutional imperatives, not only become distanced from their beneficiaries but also *de facto* criminalise them. Through this study, I draw attention to the ways in which this process may be shaped not only by humanitarian logics but also by the orientation of power within international humanitarian institutions, and by struggles over the allocation of duties between such institutions and states.

2.4.2 Victimisation, suffering, and discursive depoliticisation

While unfolding ways in which humanitarianism sometimes serves to dominate refugees and other 'worthy' beneficiaries, existing scholarship has also shown how humanitarian representations of such individuals involve the exercise of a depoliticising discursive power. Malkki's pioneering work, based on research in Tanzanian refugee camps, has shown how aid workers and humanitarian bodies depict refugees as depoliticised, dehistoricised, suffering 'victims' for the purposes of both fundraising and administration (1996: 384). Refugees thus become 'speechless emissaries' for humanitarian institutions and thus blighted with 'structural invisibility' in the ways they are represented (Malkki 1995a: 7, 1996: 379).

Such discourse can be conceptualised as the flip-side of the criminalisation discussed above, and in both cases presents asylum seekers as existing outside the realm of political participation: whether “victims [or] guilty, vulnerable [or] undesirable”, such figures are “all incompatible with those of the subject and citizen” (Agier 2011: 215). While vulnerability “characterizes the target population of humanitarianism and legitimizes its existence”, it is the suffering of such populations which “ultimately justifies their being kept alive by the action of humanitarian intervention.” (Agier 2011: 151; 148-9).

The discourse of humanitarianism is therefore characterised by “the mobilization of empathy rather than the recognition of rights”, and by “suffering and compassion [rather than] interests or justice” (Fassin 2012: x, 3). This depoliticisation is one of humanitarianism’s core contradictions, as Miriam Ticktin has convincingly shown through her study of the politics of ‘humanitarian compassion’ in the management of migration in France (2011). Ticktin shows how this project, which is seemingly benignly “based on care and protection, produced as a moral imperative to relieve suffering”, ultimately functions instead to “displace possibilities for larger forms of collective change, particularly for those most disenfranchised” (Ticktin 2011: 3). This logic works through the privileging of individual suffering, which sidesteps more systemic critiques and change and can “work to preclude responses to and by the suffering (and often angry) masses” (Ticktin 2011: 222; see also Fadlalla 2009: 81).

The 2005 Sudanese protesters recognised the power of the individual narrative of suffering and tried accordingly to harness this power, through pictures and banners of suffering, deceased, incarcerated, or missing individuals, attempting to mobilise humanitarian compassion on their behalf. However, one aspect of the avoidance of political change is humanitarianism’s preoccupation with crisis. As Ticktin explains,

by focusing on the time of emergency, regimes of care render invisible other forms of suffering and violence that extend beyond the immediate present. ... forms of inequality and oppression that are long-term, chronic conditions are not always understood as morally legitimate suffering, worthy of care—and therefore not worthy of political action or redress (2011: 223-24).

In this thesis, I show how such a rendering unfolded in the responses of UNHCR and the Egyptian government to the 2005 protest: rather than addressing the longer-standing problems that underlay the event and the suffering of its participants, the governance institutions framed the event as a problem in itself; in so doing they shifted attention from the protesters' critiques to their own efforts to 'help' find a 'solution' to the protest. The present study of this institutional response thus adds to critical understanding of the limitations of refugee instrumentalisation of humanitarian compassion as a tool for long-term change to the political structures that perpetuate inequality and disenfranchisement.

Scholars concerned with humanitarian discourses rightly condemn their depoliticising effects, but sometimes slip themselves into the reproduction of a binary view of an authoritarian, if humanitarian, regime, on the one hand, and victimised, silenced refugees on the other. States, international bodies, and other institutions are framed as political actors whose power serves as a new, global form of authoritarianism. This framing sometimes extends to humanitarian staff. Elizabeth Holzer's study of political breakdown in a refugee camp in Ghana, for example, focuses blame on the "makeshift authoritarianism" of individuals – "the aid workers, researchers and policymakers" – who work in humanitarian situations (2012: 270).

On the other hand, refugees are framed as the individual subjects of bureaucratic processes, neither powerful nor collectively organised, and so excluded from the political realm. Refugees are said to be "silenced by the very discourses that attempt to provide solutions to their plight" (Nyers 2006: 14) and "victims" of "their political powerlessness in the face

of the power of humanitarian organizations over their lives” (Agier 2011: 157). This conceptualisation of refugees as victims pervades refugee studies, in which the condition of exile is presented as one of loss: refugees are portrayed not just as stateless but as placeless and voiceless. Politically, they are portrayed as being in a state of exception or liminality, as living ‘the bare life,’ existing ‘on the margins’ of cities and ‘hidden’ within societies (Agamben 1998; Grabska 2005; Malkki 1995b; Marfleet 2007; Turner 1999, 2004). Depictions of refugees as silenced, voiceless victims do tend to be part of the project of criticising the bodies and structures responsible for mistreating or failing to uphold the rights of refugees (cf. Malkki 1996; Harrell-Bond 2008: 231; Williams 2012: 66).

Yet such a conceptualisation suggests a powerlessness that could easily concur with the discursive depoliticisation of refugees that Fassin has called ‘humanitarian reason’ (2012), and risks obscuring the experiences and power of refugees themselves. In response to this concern, recent ethnographic enquiries into experiences of uncertainty, temporariness, and waiting in refugee lives have drawn attention to both how state and humanitarian practices may perpetuate a limbo-like situation, and how refugees experience and exercise agency within such situations (see for example Conlon 2011; Griffiths 2010; Cabot 2012; Hyndman & Giles 2011; Mountz 2011; Saltsman 2012).

Such work reflects the reality that exile creates its own new politics; as Agier has noted, “even if the space experienced by the refugees is *a priori* an out-place and a vacuum, on the sociological and political level it is full of relationships” (2011: 155). The call for greater attention to the politics of ‘refugee voices’ is thus both a recurring motif and topic of significant discussion within refugee studies literature (Betts & Loescher 2014: 3; Sigona 2014). The present work takes up this call, and David Mosse’s argument that “we must

look beyond a ‘domination/resistance’ dichotomy that blurs out the experience and agency of those involved” (Mosse 2005: 6).

In so doing, my aim is to add insight to the understanding of the political role of refugees in asylum governance in countries in which UNHCR plays a major role. I show how in Egypt, UNHCR’s multiple functions – as processor of refugee status determination, as referrer of resettlement cases, and as promoter of increased state responsibility for refugees – may compromise its ability to advocate on behalf of refugees, and leave refugees in a very limited position to advocate for themselves politically. By unpacking these dynamics, the present study illuminates the politics of both refugee political participation and asylum governance in an event that was replete with domination and resistance, but also with a complex set of power struggles wrapped up in politics at many scales.

2.4.3 Northern cities, southern camps?

Existing literature on humanitarian governance draws primarily from research from the global north and from refugee camps. This empirical orientation has influenced conceptualisations of such governance that have not yet accounted for the particularities of urban contexts in the global south.

Agier, for example, equates humanitarian governance in the global south with camp governance, stating:

In a way that is very palpable in the case of refugees and displaced persons in the countries of the south, humanitarian government is an entity that constructs, manages and controls camps, everywhere that these are needed. (Agier 2011: 201)

This equation, however, overlooks the southern cities and non-camp settings that host the majority of the world's refugees.

Fassin, too, blurs out the experiences of refugees in urban settings in the global south by setting out a dichotomy between governance of refugees grouped in camps in poor countries, and individual asylum seekers in rich countries:

On the global scale it is obvious that humanitarian government displays a dual model. In poor countries it deals with large and often undifferentiated populations, for whom mass initiatives are set in place. In rich countries, it is faced with individuals, whose narratives it examines and whose bodies it scrutinises. Refugees represent the paradigmatic expression of the former, and asylum seekers the emblematic figure of the latter. For refugees there are the huge camps where thousands are gathered, protected, and assisted. For asylum seekers there is the subtle legal argument through which decisions are parsimoniously made about which of them may be granted protection under the law. (Fassin 2012: 253)

In Cairo, as in other non-camp settings, however, refugees and asylum seekers live amongst a population of citizens, and individual asylum seekers are subjected to the same decision-making processes that Fassin locates as the domain of rich countries, that is, refugee status determination (RSD) interviews that entail the scrutiny of individual narratives under a legal lens. Many urban settings in the global south exhibit further particularities that influence the governance of asylum within them: the sharing and division of the responsibilities of such governance between multiple state and non-state institutions, with often contested politics as a result; the dispersal of refugees throughout the city; the wish of asylees to *leave* (as shown in the 2005 protest) rather than to *stay* (as amongst the *sans-papiers* in France (Ticktin 2011)). To conceptualise the politics of asylum governance in southern cities requires, in other words, accounting not only for humanitarian governance, but also migration management, power sharing, status determination, and often also

relatively impoverished host populations and authoritarian governments. This thesis unfolds and conceptualises one manifestation of the politics that result.

2.5 Analytical categories

In the discussion that follows, I use two analytical categories, *asylee* and *asylum governance*, that are worth explanation. The need for both arose from the particularities of the empirical case, and suggests new approaches for refugee studies scholarship, as the thesis conclusion later discusses.

Firstly, the legal statuses of protest participants were a source of major contention throughout the 2005 sit-in. The protesters identified as *refugees*. Under the legal categorisations of UNHCR-Cairo, the institution that determines the legal statuses of asylum applicants in Cairo, some protesters were “refugees”, others were “asylum seekers” (that is, people who had claimed asylum by registering with the office and whose RSD applications were still in process), others were “new arrivals” who might or might not plan to claim asylum (and may or may not be determined to be “refugees”), and others were “closed files” whose RSD applications were rejected or under appeal. Yet under the terms of international law, someone who has claimed asylum (or plans to do so) may be a refugee whether or not they have received official recognition.

Following her own time in Cairo, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh laid out this point: the use of the status refugee by a state or UNHCR following the RSD procedure is an “official declaration” that “an individual has been recognised as a refugee according to legally binding conventions” (Fiddian 2006: 298). What legally defines an individual as a refugee is not this recognition, however, but the actual “act of crossing the border for particular

reasons” (Fiddian 2006: 298). Although RSD is a “legal confirmation of this identity,” its absence, or even a negative outcome of the process, do not necessarily mean that someone is “not in fact a refugee” (Fiddian 2006: 298).

In the 2005 protest, UNHCR-Cairo wrongly⁴ claimed that the protesters were not people of concern to the office – that is, that they were not people who the office deemed “refugees” or “asylum seekers.” FMRS researchers, however, tended to refer to the protesters as “refugees”, which UNHCR took issue with (see pp. 177-78). To discuss these debates while referring to the protesters as “refugees” or “refugees and asylum seekers” would necessitate continuous verbal contortion and confusion – or, as in previous research, over-simplification or distortion of the terms of the protest’s negotiations and debates.

Yet I required an analytical category with which to discuss the protesters and the wider population of people who had claimed asylum in Cairo. While refugee is a word that is “susceptible to numerous, simultaneous understandings” (Cole 2015: 1), no category, at least in recent relevant refugee studies scholarship, appropriately points out a category of individuals who do, as this thesis documents, constitute a “sociological relevant group” (Scalettaris 2007: 36). This category of people was empirically distinguished by a common experience of registering their asylum claim with UNHCR.

Whether these claims were successful or rejected, they created important commonalities amongst those who had placed them, including a formal, legal relationship with both UNHCR and Egypt; a change in their relationship with Sudan; the past, present, or future

⁴ After the protest’s end, UNHCR determined the great majority of the protesters to be ‘of concern’ to the office. See p. 90.

experience of involvement with various bureaucratic procedures prompted by an asylum claim (registration with UNHCR; refugee status determination procedures (RSD); ‘durable solutions processing’ for recognised applicants, through which the office assesses eligibility for resettlement); and the carrying of documentation (in Cairo, a blue or yellow card) which affects their domestic and international mobility.

I considered several options to capture this commonality. I sought a category that referred to a current experience, rather than history (*forced, displaced*), and rejected policy terms like “people of concern to UNHCR”. Referring to “asylum seekers” or “self-identified refugees” was problematic because it undermined the possibility that individuals discussed might, under international law or as determined by UNHCR, be refugees. I settled on the term *asylee* to use as a higher-order analytical category that points to present, rather than past, experience, and avoids the conflation of policy and analytical terms.

As well as referring to the group of people who joined the 2005 sit-in simply as *protesters* or *participants* in the event, then, I refer to them and the larger population of which they were a part as made up of asylees, meaning people who are seeking or who have been granted formal recognition of an asylum claim. This term is, thankfully, not a neologism: my basic laptop dictionary has a roughly similar definition. Asylee appears sometimes in asylum-related scholarship in the United States to refer to someone who has sought asylum, whether deemed a refugee or not, but this usage has not, until now, been linked with the broader theoretical debates about categories in refugee studies (Rider 2013: 55, Drachman 1995: 5) – debates that the conclusion of this thesis discusses.

The broad scope of asylee’s definition, subsuming as it does multiple legal statuses, captures the seeking of asylum that encompasses the key experiential, legal, and

bureaucratic commonality missing from existing alternatives. This analytical category thereby allows discussion of those experiences and procedures which acknowledges the contestedness and constructedness of the policy categories therein, without the confusion that arises from use of one of those very policy categories (refugees) to encompass them all. The category also connects the 2005 protesters with other people who are seeking or who have been granted asylum, in Cairo and elsewhere.

This thesis also uses the term *refugee* in the sense recently distinguished by Georgia Cole: to refer to “the refugee as a rhetorical figure” rather than “the refugee as a physical-legal body entitled to certain forms of assistance” (2015: 1). This rhetorical sense of the term informs my use of the phrase refugee protest to denote demonstrations by people protesting as refugees.

Secondly, the 2005 protest brought to light a contested politics concerning the responsibilities related to registration, hosting, and assisting asylees in Egypt. I quickly settled on referring to the management of these responsibilities as *governance*. Existing accounts of the event have focussed on the role of UNHCR in the protest’s politics, but the present research and analysis raised the need for attention to multiple institutions and bodies (including UNHCR-Cairo and HQ, but also the GoE, the Government of Sudan (GoS), Cairo-based embassies, the ‘international community’, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), FMRS) that played a role in the 2005 protest and in the experiences of asylees in Cairo.

Governance has the advantage of being able to encompass multiple activities (legal work, migration management, humanitarian aid) and actors working on and between multiple scales (global, international, regional, national, local). It also avoids privileging the

international scale (or regime or policy), a tendency in refugee studies scholarship that has been well critiqued elsewhere for its obfuscation of regional and national legal practices concerning refugee protection (Jones 2013: 88).

As for the question of what kind of governance was at work, I rejected “refugee governance” because of the problems with “refugee” outlined above, but also because I sought an analytical category that did not presuppose governance’s object. This was especially important because the thesis research revealed governance bodies to be concerned less with control over a population than of the enactment of mandates, services, and institutional imperatives. The concept of *asylum governance* captured this empirical phenomenon, with the benefit of being a more universal concept than existing categories and thus one which may be applied to camp, urban, and other non-camp settings. Like *asylee*, *asylum governance* is increasingly used, if casually and without theoretical discussion, in relevant studies (see Kaunert and Léonard 2012: 1; Garelli & Tazzioli 2013: 1006; Ajana 2013: 581).

Although governance has been critiqued in the past as “a largely antipolitical” concept (Walters 2004: 29), it need not be so. Following geographers Gill (2010: 637), Silvey (2007: 268) and Darling (2014: 484), I argue that the concept of asylum governance might instead open attention to contestation and struggle over asylum’s politics – not only amongst asylees, but amongst the bodies involved in asylum’s governance. By avoiding specification of a single system or form, asylum governance raises questions about the politics of power sharing, and points to the need for greater attention to how asylum is governed in different settings.

2.6 Conceptual framework

2.6.1 Making sense of a struggle for power

The 2005 protest has become a benchmark instance of the rise of political acts undertaken by diverse groupings of people who are legally implicated in international asylum and desirous of changes to the ways it is governed. Scholarship seeking to explain such acts has applied several theoretical frames through which to understand them, most notably drawing from the scholarship of Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Rancière. Aside from the work of Foucault, whose conceptions of power have influenced my analysis of the politics under study, these major theories are largely ‘roads not taken’ in the conceptual framework of this thesis, for reasons I will note in brief introductions of each.

Giorgio Agamben’s theory of the ‘bare life’ existence of people excluded from political membership – figured as a ‘*homo sacer*’ suspended in an exceptional position – has been productively used to examine the politics of contemporary migration (1998). Agamben’s “frequently bleak and occasionally apocalyptic vision” has, however, gained little traction amongst scholars interested in the political struggles of migrants themselves (Walters 2008: 184). The problem, as Walters has aptly observed, is that Agamben offers a “flattened” vision of migrants, in which “things are always done to them, not by them” (2008: 188) – a limited perspective from which to gain insight into instances in which migrants are instead taking action.

Theories offered by two of the last century’s major thinkers, Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault, have been more fruitfully applied to the understanding of political activism by migrants. Although Arendt’s work preceded Agamben’s, her work on politics (1962), statelessness (1973), and human rights (1976) has continued to inform studies of migration

and citizenship, and, most pertinently here, acts of claim-making by non-citizens, from asylum-seekers protesting in Australian immigration detention centres (Fiske 2012) to non-citizen demonstrations in Germany (Barrett 2013).

Although seminal, Arendt's ideas of rights are most apt when discussed in contexts of citizenship and sovereignty, a framing which, though still prevalent in some accounts of migrant protest (see Nyers 2006, Nyers & Rygiel 2012), I have not found helpful to make sense of the 2005 event, in which the protesters demanded more than rights, and constituted themselves as neither citizens or non-citizens. Although political mobilisations by migrants are sometimes subsumed amongst "acts of citizenship" (Isin and Nielsen 2008: 2), their actions also prompt discussions of politics "in terms that are no longer reducible to citizenship as such" (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015: 82).

Use of Foucault's conceptual 'revolutions' (Veyne 1997) is widespread throughout the social sciences, and has been effectively applied to analysis of topics related to this thesis, including the governance of migrants (Agier 2011), of the biopolitics of refugee camps and humanitarian aid (although sometimes problematically; see Scott-Smith 2014), and of the governmentality of migration (Fassin 2011, Millner 2011, Walters 2015).

Foucault's ideas of power are particularly productive for understanding political protest of the kind this thesis studies, as Lucy Fiske's research on the "insider resistance" of people in Australian immigration detention makes evident. From Foucault's reconceptualisation of power not as a fixed object but an agonistic energy, Fiske argues that even detained people are most usefully thought of not "passive subjects" but rather as part of an "unequal power relationship shaped by struggle for dominance and subjugation" (Fiske 2012: 119).

The title of her work draws from Foucault's (1976: 95) argument that we are "always 'inside' power" and engaged with it.

From this perspective, people who seek asylum are "exercising power" through that very act, and in so doing also become "engag[ed] in a power struggle" with the state into which they have entered (Fiske 2012: 119). A Foucauldian reading of power necessarily sees resistance, as the two are mutually produced (Foucault 1976: 95): as Fiske explains, when power is conceived "as a dynamic force created through social relations, it can no longer be spoken of as a monolithic entity to be deployed by one actor upon another" (2012: 120).

Increasingly, the theoretical work of Jacques Rancière has informed accounts of political action by migrants, as attested by Barrett's 2013 study on recent 'non-citizen' activism in Germany, Darling's 2014 research on the depoliticisation of asylum-seekers in the UK, and studies of the politics of activism by and in solidarity with migrants in the "camp spaces" of Calais, France (Milner 2011, 2013; Rigby and Schlembach 2013).

Rather than beginning from a concept like citizenship or the border, Rancière's theory of politics focuses on acts and moments of disruption themselves. This importantly prompts an inductive line of inquiry: as Barrett points out, starting one's analysis with "the act of claim making" prevents the possibility of premature and erroneous assumptions about "the framework and categories within which individuals enact themselves" (Barrett 2013: 15).

Since protest under the banner of "refugee rights" offers many opportunities for such assumptions, Rancière's analytical framework seems a promising starting point for identifying "the production of new forms of authority" which may arise in protests by non-citizens, as Millner (2013: 88) has argued. This observation seems particularly apt in a

world characterised by an increasing “proliferation of forms of authority” beyond the nation-state, be they civil society networks or international governance bodies: this proliferation requires a “redefin[ition of] democratic politics” (Millner 2013: 90), which Rancière offers.

Relevant research has also applied Rancière’s idea of the “count” – captured and focused on by Millner as “moments of political disagreement over who or what is counted” (2011: 321). This concept formed the core framework of the first peer-reviewed study of the 2005 Cairo protest, by Carolina Moulin and Peter Nyers, who studied the event as a “disagreement”, following Rancière, with the hopes that it would sustain and focus their analysis “of the political status of all the interlocutors” in the event (2007: 357).

2.6.2 Refugee power: discourse and action

Conceptualising the protesters as asylees, rather than taking their self-representation as refugees as self-evident, prompts a stepping back from this self-representation. It flags the constructed and contested character of the refugee label, and attention to why the protesters would have mobilised it in a sit-in demonstration in front of a UNHCR office. What kind of power does the refugee role allow, and how does it constrain? If the refugee figure is, as much literature has shown, nearly powerless, why would asylees chose to protest as refugees?

To pursue this line of questioning, I integrate two bodies of scholarship that hold the potential to explain some of the protesters’ strategies. Diverging from accounts of the event that take the protest as the pursuit of rights, I first turn to existing refugee studies work that has examined the performative use of rights, victimhood, and suffering: McConnachie’s

work on “the impact of rights” in refugee camps in Thailand (2014: 149); Ilana Feldman’s research highlighting “the use of the language of humanitarianism” and rights in claim-making by Palestinian refugees in Jordan (Feldman 2015: 268); Simon Turner’s study on the use of policy language in “negotiat[ions of] authority between UNHCR and ‘the people’” in a Tanzanian refugee camp (Turner 2006: 777); and Fadlalla’s analysis of the “mediation of suffering” in the Sudanese diaspora (2009: 79).

Making use of such scholarship both shows how the rhetoric of the 2005 protesters is embedded within a growing use amongst asylees of the language of the norms and policies which define the refugee role, and provides a conceptual framing through which to explain this use.

The protesters’ discursive strategies were one element of their political action, but were bound up also in bodily and material tactics: their occupation of Mustafa Mahmoud park; their continued occupation following the 17 December agreement; and their refusal to leave their sit-in throughout the eve of the forced removal. Thinking of the protesters as *asylees*, in contrast to terms like *forced migrant*, highlights their current agency and active pursuit of refugee status. This frames their 2005 political action within a larger set of strategies, most notably migration, through which they not only responded to past circumstances but also made decisions and took actions to improve their lives.

With this in mind, I have drawn on a second body of scholarship useful for explaining the protest, and in particular the protesters’ sustained collective act of occupation, from recent critical migration studies that have grappled with migrants’ embodied power. Both movement and stasis, scholars have pointed out, entail an exercising of power. Some such exercises are not explicit political acts, but “consist in the mere fact of persisting in a certain

space, irrespective of law, rights and the pace of the politics of mobility” (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015: 82).

At other points, migrants may “asser[t] their autonomy and prerogative through insubordinate acts calling attention to the mere corporeal fact of their deportable presence” (De Genova 2009: 445). The power enacted through the very act of migration has prompted Thomas Nail to call for the recognition of *pedetic force*, that original “motion of autonomous self-transport: the motion of the foot” through which migrants may exercise “autonomy and self-motion” (2015: 125). The increasingly well-developed ‘autonomy of migration’ perspective emerging in recent studies of migration and migrant protest offers a basis from which to consider emerging formations of authority outside the nation-state (Millner 2013-93-94).

This perspective is especially apt for making sense of the 2005 protest because of its “prioriti[sation of] the lived practices, desires, expectations and behaviours of migrants ... over the legal processes of states, as a means to interrogate the new meanings of political belonging which are being established through contention” (Millner 2013: 93-94). Explaining such contention effectively, however, requires the creation of a framework that avoids assumptions not only about asylees’ politics but also the politics of the governance contexts within which actions like the 2005 protest have been staged.

2.6.3 Assemblage: power in governance

The methodology of the study of power in asylum governance is undeveloped (Milner 2015, albeit in reference to his preferred concept “global refugee regime”). As this chapter earlier discussed, and as the very term *regime* suggests, the bodies that govern asylum are

often thought of as authoritarian in character. Despite the violent ending of the 2005 protest, however, frameworks of authoritarianism, repression, and silencing did not fully explain the governance politics I observed in my research. Rather than a unified *rule* over refugees (or, more broadly, asylees), what emerged in my analysis was instead repeated disconnect between, contestation over, and putative enactment of *rules* of asylum.

To explain this empirical observation, I have relied on a framework of legal scholarship, political science, and political theory. Legal scholars like Michael Kagan and Dallal Stevens, who have contributed detailed analysis of law in policy and practice in the Middle East and North Africa, and international law experts like Jean-François Durieux and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill inform my understanding of the application and interpretation of international refugee law.

I have engaged also with the work of international relations and political science scholars like Alexander Betts, Gil Loescher, and James Milner, whose comprehensive studies of the international politics of asylum, and UNHCR in particular, provide insight into the incentives and pressures that influence state and UN governance of asylum. Global governance scholarship, particularly that which considers the potential for its democratisation (as in Kuyper 2014), informs the proposal with which the thesis concludes.

From the more critical spectrum of scholarship, geographers, anthropologists, and political theorists including Heath Cabot, Jonathan Darling, Lucy Fiske, Nick Gill, Philipp Ratfisch, and Stephan Scheel have provided both empirical and conceptual grist for explicating processes and formations of power in asylum governance in comparative relief.

Finally and more specifically, the notion of *assemblage* increasingly employed in global and migration studies is, I argue, an apt concept with which to try to explain how asylum governance manifests and works. Introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and developed by De Landa (2006), assemblages are conceived as "wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts" (De Landa 2006: 4). *Assemblage* captures heterogeneity and interactions between multiple groupings, infrastructures and scales, providing a framework through which to conceptualise how, as "global forms are articulated in specific situations — or territorialized in assemblages — they define new material, collective, and discursive relationships" (Collier & Ong 2005: 4).

Unlike *regime*, *assemblage* points to the variable, contingent character of how governance is enacted, and opens attention from just state and interstate bodies to a wider sphere of influences upon asylum's governance. It also provides a reading of power as an emergent force (De Landa 2006: 4) which is "not a central governing power, nor a power distributed equally, but power as plurality in transformation" (McFarlane 2011: 562). Although this notion may read as sufficiently loose to say everything and nothing at the same time, the work of scholars like Adam Ramadan (2012) have shown the usefulness of starting from *assemblage* in looking at the exercise of power in the governance of asylum.

2.6.4 Impasse: an active struggle

If the study of a single event inherently requires acknowledgement of spatial and temporal dimensions, the 2005 protest calls for it explicitly. Themes of waiting, change, other sites and the possibility of movement ran through negotiations during the sit-in, and in the "stalemate" that resulted. Spatiality and temporality have been repeated objects of anthropological inquiry, but the interdisciplinary study of migration has until recently more

often privileged space as a lens through which to understand the relations and movements through and across sites (Achtnich & Norum 2013). Increasingly, however, scholars have begun to consider the implications of looking also at notions of time in the study of movements and people who move (Achtnich & Norum 2013; Danielson 2012; Griffiths et al. 2013; Griffiths 2010; Anderson 2007; Urry 2000, 2002; Vigh 2008).

Discussions of time and space in refugee studies, focused on this latter population, initially looked towards places, experiences and connections to the past, developing theories around home, memory and exile (see Malkki 1992, 1995a, 1995b). The rise of instances in which people are displaced by war or persecution for long and indefinite periods of time, however, has crucially directed theoretical and empirical scrutiny “back to the future” as well as to present dimensions of asylum (Gottwald 2012).

This attention is particularly appropriate in a legal and policy context in which international practices and concepts are, as Durieux points out, “pervade[d] by “temporal connotations ... from the concept of emergency through *temporary* protection; *first* asylum; *cessation* of status; etc., to *durable* solutions.” (Durieux 2009: 75). To characterise the temporal character of what is now the situation for the majority of displaced people, namely being “trapped” in “long periods of exile, stretching to decades for some groups,” scholars have increasingly employed the notion of “protractedness” (Loescher & Milner 2005a: 153, 2005b; Milner & Loescher 2011; Crisp 2003; Zetter 2012, Long 2010).

Protractedness is a concept rendered especially pointed in the discussion of asylum policy for its flagging of a fissure in the proposed triad of “durable solutions” towards which UNHCR frames its work with displaced people: voluntary return to country of origin, integration in country of asylum, or resettlement to a third country (Crisp 2003b: 1; Collyer

2005; Campbell 2006; Jackson 2002: 82-84; Skran and Daughtry 2007: 15, 16; Chimni 1999; Harrell-Bond 1996). Protractedness signals the absence of such solutions to the many positioned in camps or in hostile urban environments in the global south, where integration is an elusive goal, the opportunities for resettlement are highly restricted, and repatriation remains a dangerous prospect (Long 2010; Jacobsen 2001). Yet conceptualisations of the kinds of temporal and spatial positionalities that protracted asylum situations produce for those living within them remain underdeveloped (Hyndman & Giles 2011: 67).

Most germane to the present study, “limbo” has become a stock refrain with which to describe the positions of those living in protracted, regional asylum, along with its relatives “stuck”, “trapped”, “placeless” and “suspended”. The trope, which characterises such asylum as a state of being that is in-between and liminal, occurs in countless titles of academic literature and policy papers concerned with such contexts, including Cairo (see Bottinick & Sianni 2011; Dowd 2008; Ghazaleh 2002; Jacobsen et al. 2014; Rosi et al. 2011). While the concept of limbo reflects actual uncertainties many refugees face as they wait either for improved conditions in their home countries, or for the lengthy results of resettlement processing (see Yacobi 2011: 66; Mountz 2011: 381, 394; Mahmoud 2008: 12-13, as a concept, limbo makes refugees ‘appear to have no choice to be as they are’ (Jackson 2002: 77), and does little to spur analysis of the processes and construction of such a situation.

Increasingly, however, literature has critiqued and pushed to expand the “durable solutions” model (see Van Hear 2002, Monsutti 2008, Hyndman 2013). In parallel, the broader “mobilities turn” in social science research has prompted insights into relationships between mobility, power, and processes of social and political exclusion (Sheller & Urry 2006; Cass et al. 2005; Urry 2008a, 2008b; Jensen 2011). Most relevantly, it has attended

to *immobility* amongst people who might otherwise wish to migrate. The immobility concept both “incorporates the role of restrictive immigration policies” into conceptualisations of migration and directs attention towards the aspirations and capacities of individuals rendered immobile by such policies, as framed by Carling’s “aspiration/ability model” (2002).

Like “limbo”, however, the conceptualisation “immobility” is too easily taken as a “thin[g] or a propert[y] of things” (Franquesa 2011: 1013). An overly neutral and descriptive concept, it both “relegat[es] immobility to a passive, undertheorized position, and collaps[es] the complex workings of power” within migration (Ibid.). In this thesis, I instead make use of Franquesa’s relational orientation to explicate the temporal and spatial dimensions in the case under study (2011). Such an approach draws attention to the processes and relations that produce and sustain situations of constrained mobility.

Specifically, and in response to my empirical research, I argue that the concept *impasse* more meaningfully and productively captures the temporal and spatial dynamics of contemporary regional asylum. Where the concepts *limbo*, *immobility*, or even *temporariness* suggest an intractable condition, *impasse* points to an actively produced struggle: movement that is not suspended but continuously countered.

The use of the notion of *impasse* in discussion of asylum is not new. UNHCR’s Samuel Cheung has used the phrase “solutions *impasse*” to describe the situation of stateless Rohingyas displaced in South and Southeast Asia. In Cheung’s usage, the concept prompts “recognition of available, intermediate solutions” and the

embrace [of] ambiguities between migration management and refugee

protection, [a] focus on states not obstructing the de facto integration available to refugees and migrants alike, and empower[ing] the local capacities of refugees to carve out their own protection space and find ... intermediate solution[s]. (Cheung 2012: 67)

Although I question the analytical utility of problem/solution framework, the notion of *impasse* seems indeed a productive concept through which to account for a wider scope of ambiguities, roles, and possibilities in the times and spaces under study in this thesis. To move from concepts to the study at hand, the thesis turns now to introduce the methodology and methods on which it is based.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Methodology of the starting point

Anthropological engagement with the rise of urbanisation, migration, globalisation and international development, amongst other phenomena, has demonstrated ethnography's continued merits and relevance, expanding from the discipline's initial focus on small, relatively homogeneous populations into multiple sites of research and more complex fields of relations "that cross-cut dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global.'" (Marcus 1995: 95; see also Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004, Tsing 2011, Lapegna 2009, Gupta & Ferguson 1992). An ethnographic study of urban asylum, a phenomenon intersected by multiple sites and movements, could in turn take place in or across many sites or periods of time. The site of the present ethnography, however, is concentrated, spatially and temporally.

This thesis is an event-based analysis of something that happened ten years ago, so its focus on event is a core methodological point. Since the work of the Manchester School, the "case study" has been a widely adopted anthropological approach, exemplified by Gluckman's description and analysis of the official opening of a newly built bridge in Zululand in 1935,

a particular context in which different sectors of the Zululand population were brought together (cf. Burawoy 1998; Gluckman 1958; Mitchell 1983; Van Doorne 1981; Van Velsen 1967).

More recently, scholars like Veena Das have demonstrated the empirical and conceptual insights possible through the study of ‘critical events’ (Das 1995: 6). In contrast to the approach predominant in refugee studies of beginning with study of a certain site, a certain kind of people or experience, or a certain institution, a micro-sited, time-bound approach begins with a moment of engagement and observes what arises. This strategy side-steps existing categories in favour of inductive analysis, allowing for attention to factors or actors that might otherwise be overlooked.

An “ethnography of incidents” and events is thereby a methodology that focuses on the “open[ing] of spaces where new meanings and possibilities are produced” (Xiang 2015). Events are unanticipated but have their own logics, comprised of “a multiplicity of social contestations and the voicing of competing cultural claims” (Moore 1987: 729). From the anti-globalisation protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s, to the so-called Arab Spring and the ‘Occupy’ movement, amongst others, politics observed at a global scale are increasingly shaped by interruptive events in which “societal forces push for policy changes” (Xiang 2015). Given the rise of refugee protests, study of their politics is, as this thesis proposes and existing scholarship with this focus evinces, an auspicious starting point from which to begin analysis.

Through study of event, cross-cutting issues may be observed; it is necessarily a kind of studying ‘through’. Anthropology has met methodological debates about the role of power in the creation of knowledge with adjustment and expansion of its previously top-down

ethnographic ‘gaze’ (Sigona 2009: 77; Nugent 2002: 73). Following on Nader’s argument for the “perspectives gained from studying up” (1972), the anthropology of policy, especially, has developed methodologies of “studying through” that follow connections and tensions between differently powerful groups, debates and arenas (Sigona 2009: 79; Wright & Reinhold 2011).

My methodological approach reflects Nader’s metaphor: the study of a “vertical slice” that “reconceptualise[s] the field as a site of conflict and process operating beyond the small community — and encompassing the influence of state and international organizations — rather than [only] as a local, bounded geographical entity” (Shore & Wright 1996: 477; Nader 1980). As Das argues, starting from an event “helps form an ethnography which makes an incision upon [many] institutions together, so that their mutual implications in the events are foregrounded during the analysis” (Das 1995: 6).

This orientation allows for not just a comparative study of descriptions of a situation across a range of actors and institutions, but also an empirically situated view into the dynamics of connection and tension between them. The productivity of an approach that attends to “encounters” between institutions and individuals is evident in the growing field of anthropology of humanitarianism (discussed in section 2.3; see also De Waal 2002, Minn 2007; Redfield & Bornstein 2011; Feldman 2015) and the related but more established study of international development (see Ferguson 1994; Loizos 1991; Eyben 2000; Mosse 2011).

To make the findings of an event-based study relevant, however, requires awareness of the disadvantages and advantages of temporal distance from that event. The present distance from the 2005 protest limits the study, as many aspects of the situation it describes have

changed. The time that has passed since the event has, however, allowed a greater sense of perspective, further research, and the observation of multiple further developments which cast new light on the event.

3.1.1 Empirical and ethical imperatives for the study of asylum activism

The event at the heart of this thesis is part of a phenomenon I will refer to in its broadest form as *asylum activism*, meaning the attempts of asylees to influence the governance of asylum (Darling 2014 has also used this concept, in the UK context). Unlike studies of refugee protests that are framed by notions of citizenship or immigration, I propose “ethnography of asylum activism” as a methodology attentive to emerging forms of contention and belonging. This follows Rutvica Andrijasevic’s call for expansion of analysis “beyond the oppression/resistance framework”, in order “to pay greater attention to the multiple and potentially contradictory positions that migrant subjects occupy” (2009: 403).

An asylum activism approach suggests an alternative strategy for learning about the perimeters of engagement available for asylees in global governance. Although a sustained engagement with the philosophy of Alain Badiou is beyond the scope of this thesis, his suggestion that the creation of an event is sometimes the only strategy available to “excluded, disenfranchised or oppressed minorities” to exert political pressure is important: as Norris explains, “it is always at those particular locations or ‘evental sites’ on the margins of the recognised body politic that the dominant order is likeliest to come under strain through a forced encounter with that which exceeds and challenges its sovereign or juridical powers” (Norris 2009: 8). If event or activism is, as it appears, one of the only ways asylees can influence the governance of asylum, research focused on such activity

seems an auspicious methodological basis for the pursuit of understanding the political role of asylees in asylum governance.

The *limbo* trope discussed previously frames asylees as seemingly “stuck” in a “permanent temporariness” which excludes the possibility of aspiration or future (Johnson 2014: 7-8). While this orientation would at first seem to “inhibit [asylee] participation in the politics of migration”, Heather Johnson points out that scholars may nonetheless “engage with the potentially powerful politics” of migration by “readjusting the temporal orientation of how we ourselves encounter” those politics, “by accounting for ‘moments’ rather than permanence” (2014: 7-8).

Attending to what happens when asylees mobilise allows, furthermore, an unusual opportunity for the empirical study of asylum governance, for the unplanned public responses from governance bodies such actions provoke. In a humanitarian context where carefully prepared reporting is the norm (Bakewell 2008: 440), asylum activism is a rare instance in which humanitarian governance bodies are put on the defensive. The relationships, dynamics and processes which connect asylees, governance bodies and assistance providers are usually out of the public eye, particularly in the urban south, but asylum activism prompts public discussion between multiple groups. The fissures and struggles which may emerge in responses to refugee protest are opportunities for increased understanding, not only of asylees’ actions, but also of the politics inherent in the shared and multi-level governance of asylum.

But the most singular feature of asylum activism is its provenance: the 2005 protest and other such acts began at the prompting of asylees themselves. The parameters of discussion were set not by a policy survey or research proposal, but by statements made by asylees on

their own initiatives, and for their own purposes. This feature of asylum activism gives a methodology built around it particular logistical and ethical benefits in refugee studies research.

Urban contexts pose considerable challenges to those who wish to study asylum: in comparison to camps, where populations, service providers, and infrastructure are centralised and separate, cities are diverse and dispersed (see Jacobsen et al. 2012 for an impressive effort to overcome these barriers in Cairo). On a wider scale, urban ‘refugee voices’ are historically marginalised and under-heard (Grabska 2006: 289; Fábos & Kibreab 2007: 9; Morris 2010; Kobia & Cranfield 2009; Sanyal 2012).

Yet not all urban asylee research participants are hard to access. In practice, just as people with direct connections to service provider management are more likely to repeatedly participate in training courses (Moghaieb 2009:27), some individuals, neighbourhoods, or organisation members repeatedly act as ‘fixers’, assistants, and participants in research studies, a phenomenon I witnessed in Cairo (Danielson 2012: 18). Given the ubiquity of snowball methods in urban research, this is likely to have a cumulative effect on our understanding of urban refugee situations.

A wider problem in refugee research is the issue of research fatigue. Sukarieh and Tannock’s study of Shatila Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon begins with the wry observation that “the problem of over-researched communities, ironically, is itself an under-researched topic in the social sciences” (Sukarieh & Tannock 2013: 495). Yet in asylum contexts of all kinds, a growing number of researchers have reported research fatigue to be a source of concern (Cooper 2005; Temple & Moran 2006; Bhui et al. 2006;

Block 2007; Afifi et al. 2011); Temple and Moran's book *Doing Research with Refugees* itself cites five studies discussing the phenomenon (2006: 136).

In Cairo, I witnessed multiple discussions of over-researching amongst refugee communities; other researchers have reported that the recurrence of research “without perception of tangible changes on the ground for refugee stakeholders” was a “dominant line of conversation” in their research workshops (Jacobsen et al. 2012: 42). This prevalence signals the need for attention to multiple aspects of urban asylum, not just the perspectives or psychology of asylees, but also the impacts of groups such as aid workers, academic researchers, and host societies, and phenomena such as obstacles to “changes on the ground” (as Danielson 2012 set out to understand) as well as the wider politics of governance, amongst others.

The ethnography of asylum activism I propose, then, is built on multiple methodological and ethical grounds. There is no doubt that asylum activism offers up a compelling body of evidence to interested researchers, in the form of spontaneous, unprompted public statements, by multiple actors, in conversation about asylum. Anthropologists must usually rely on interviews and other methods to elicit material: “no field-worker can sit around for ever waiting for people to bring up subjects spontaneously and display the contents of their minds before him unasked” (Gombrich 1971: 37-8). Yet in refugee protest, this is just what occurs, albeit with the important caveat that what is on display are public, instrumental narratives.

Predominant amongst the reasons for this methodological approach is that in instances of activism like the 2005 protest, asylees are self-selecting, self-initiating their statements, and above all *asking* to be listened to. For any observer of such a request by a disenfranchised

group, to respond with close attention is an ethical move. In the context of research fatigue, the ethical imperative for paying attention to refugee protest is yet greater: as a way of listening to asylees in their own terms and on their own time, but also because a protest's audience, including academic researchers, is implicated in its initiation. In Cairo, this implication could not have been clearer.

The asylum activism ethnography I have pursued, then, encompasses not only analysis of the explanations of its protagonists – of how a group of people usually spoken for instead “represen[t] themselves” (Krulfeld & MacDonald 1998: 1) – but also study of a wider range of discussion of political action as it emerged from and circulated between multiple actors, scales, and institutions.

Finally, in the multiple cases of refugee protest that end in the event's suppression, the ethical reasons for improved understanding of their politics gain a further ethical dimension. A call for attention that ended in grave injustice raises the need to understand how such an injustice could have come about. My witnessing of the 2005 events prompted a sense of obligation to continue and renew attention to the problems the protesters raised, which I pursued through the course of research this chapter describes.

3.1.2 Researcher positionality

This thesis was developed reflexively, a methodological approach which provides a framework for critical consideration of the anthropologist's role and position both within the research situation and in textual representations (see Clifford 1983, 1999; Marcus & Clifford 1985, Rabinow 1985). As well as the critiquing and undoing of my own assumptions, reflexive attention towards emotional, visceral and other reactions

experienced during and after fieldwork yielded insights into tensions or dynamics I may have otherwise overlooked (Spencer & Davies 2010).

The production of knowledge in the current study is shaped by my changing positionality over the course of the research. My introduction to the topic of research was influenced by my background, from 1998, as a political activist and underground musician. Through these intertwined roles, I identified as a cultural outsider interested in international connections, particularly globalisation and migration. I had grown up in a city shaped by migration (Vancouver, Canada) and was involved with the planning of several protests against neoliberalism in the late 1990s (most notably the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, USA).

My own introduction to the Sudanese demonstration, one month after I had moved to Cairo in 2005, was unplanned. I was in the city for a year to study Arabic at a language institute, while my partner at the time studied in the American University in Cairo's Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme's one-year graduate diploma. On 10 October 2005, while out with friends after Arabic class, I happened to walk into *midan* Mustafa Mahmoud. This turned into an hour-long visit of the – by that time – well-populated Sudanese sit-in, during which protest organisers gave me and a friend a tour of the demonstration site and a printed, English-language list titled 'Requests'. After speaking with several protesters, I hid the list in my clothing and was questioned by police at the protest's perimeter upon leaving.

Through my activist past I felt an immediate affinity for the protesters, having similarly undertaken political occupations of public space (though not for so long as the 2005 protesters), made banners, shared the experience of solidarity in collective action, called

for changes related to international norms, felt compelled to act against injustices, and feared (and experienced) offensive police tactics. My experiences as a newcomer to Cairo also informed my sympathy with the protesters' complaints about the city's challenges.

This feeling of solidarity, however, was tempered with the knowledge that my position as white dual citizen of two wealthy, English-speaking nations (Canada and the USA), with all the privilege and mobility it affords, was very different from those of the protesters. The present work is, in a way, an unfolding of this tension between affinity and inequality: how does international responsibility for the inequalities created by citizenship (and its backdrop of colonial history and economic disparity) work? What is the role of the "international community" (and those who identify as part of it) in addressing injustices? And, as I would come to ask, what role do, may, or should academics play?

My relationship to FMRS, and academia, increased during and after the protest. Although I had a Bachelor's degree, I was not an academic when I moved to Cairo. Prompted by my interest in the situation of the protesters, however, I attended most of the FMRS programme's public Wednesday seminars, which were weekly presentations by AUC-based and visiting academics and, occasionally, refugee organisation and NGO representatives, through which I began to learn about the field of refugee studies. I became interested in disconnects between the academic accounts presented, the events unfolding on the streets across the city, and other local responses to the protest.

At the seminars, and the discussion and informal socialising that followed, I also observed and participated in the social dynamics amongst the seminars' diverse audiences, of which often a majority, at that time, were refugees, and which also included FMRS students and staff, NGO workers, and sometimes UNHCR staff. I made close friends through the

FMRS's cohort, and contacts through its broader community. Over the Sudanese protest's three months, I grappled alone and with others sympathetic to the protesters with how I ought to best relate to the event. Despite my interest, and to my regret, I visited the protest only twice, precluding the possibility of undertaking an ethnography of the event or its participants. This regret, however, became part of my motivation to pursue the present work.

Throughout fall 2005, I followed public statements by protest representatives and by UNHCR Cairo as they were released and discussed by my friends and others, in person, online and by email. I observed extensive debate and disagreement about the protesters' motivations and identities, and how various actors and institutions ought to act in relation to the event. The confusion around me as to what was happening and how best to respond first raised questions I would continue to pursue – particularly the question of why the demonstration was such a contested event. As my understanding of both the academic study of refugees, and of the stakes held by actors in Cairo grew, I began to see how the sit-in shed new light on the politics of refugee studies and asylum governance, and on the role of refugees in both domains.

My affiliation with FMRS became semi-formal when, following the protest's forced eviction, I began volunteer work through the programme.⁵ After we awoke to the news of the forced eviction, my then-partner visited the park; he returned a few hours later with distressing photographs documenting the night's violence: twisted metal structures, bloodied pavements, and abandoned suitcases, identity documents and family portraits (see photographs in Appendix G). We set out for Barbara Harrell-Bond's house, which served

⁵ I also became employed at AUC's library so gained a AUC ID card.

as an informal hub of activity; before long I began taking testimonies of evicted protesters and making prison visits. I soon joined the team led by FMRS head Fateh Azzam to investigate and report on the protest and its break-up.

As part of the FMRS research team, I interviewed several protest participants and researched and co-drafted one of its four main chapters – a 16-page overview of the course of the three-month protest – and one of the appendices, a commentary on different versions of protester demands. I continued to work on the project as one of two editorial assistants who compiled, revised, edited and proofread the manuscript, which was published in English and Arabic in June of that year. My relationship to FMRS continued further through voluntary work with its Student Action for Refugees group to research problems of communication about asylum in Cairo, and to organise musical performances for its 2006 World Refugee Day celebrations.

Finally, my positionality further shifted when, in fall 2006, I left Cairo to begin a two-year MPhil in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford – and thus became a neophyte academic insider. This role deepened as I continued at Oxford, pursuing a DPhil in anthropology and teaching at the university's Refugee Studies Centre. During my 2010-12 period of fieldwork in Cairo, I was an affiliated researcher at AUC, at what, by that time, had become the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, formerly FMRS.

3.1.3 Institutional positionality

Due to my involvement with FMRS in 2005-6, I was privy to both 'backstage' and 'frontstage' (Hare & Blumberg 1988) conversations around academic responses to the protest. This participation and access prompted my interest in the direct connections

between the professional production of knowledge about asylum and the politics of asylum in local contexts. While most refugee studies centres are in the global north, FMRS's location in a major southern refugee host city posed an unusual opportunity for the exploration of the role of asylum-related research and academic knowledge production within such a context.

Many scholars have demonstrated the importance of attention to the responsibilities of researchers and our institutions to recognise the “dual imperative” in refugee studies, namely that our work be both “academically sound and policy relevant” – or, as others might put it, both rigorous and ethical (Jacobsen & Landau 2003: 185; see also Dona 2007, Hyndman 2001, Lammers 2005, 2007, Mackenzie et al. 2007, Voutira & Doná 2007). In the 2005 protest, refugees directly engaged in and took up the language and ideas of refugee rights, as developed in the academic field of refugee studies. Both this engagement and the discursive struggles over knowledge production that took place during and after the 2005 event provide insight into the relationship between asylum policy, academic discourse and advocacy, and the people with whom such activity is concerned. For all of these reasons, the FMRS programme's positionality in Cairo and in the 2005 protest constitutes a significant element of the present work.

Following its inception in the year 2000, the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme at the American University in Cairo became a significant authority on asylum in Cairo: the programme frequently published research reports on the internet and in hard copy in English and Arabic; held the weekly public seminars discussed above; and offered regular short courses.⁶ Through its outreach work, the programme developed formal and

⁶ The programme's public engagement shifted following the AUC campus's move to a new campus in a distant suburb of Cairo, which rendered most seminars largely inaccessible to non-academic audiences.

informal relations with UNHCR, Egyptian state bodies, service providing organisations, and local and refugee communities.

In the five years between the founding of FMRS and the Sudanese protest, programme researchers and affiliates extensively documented problems facing refugees in Cairo. The programme's research work was characterised by advocacy, critique of existing systems (including those of UNHCR-Cairo), and a rights-based approach. A 2001 review of the implementation of UNHCR's 1997 urban refugee policy showed the hardship for Cairo's refugees that had resulted from cuts to UNHCR's budget (Sperl 2001). Several researchers chronicled the difficulties facing refugees living in Cairo slums (Ghazaleh 2002, 2003; Le Houérou 2004). A large study found African refugees in Cairo to need increased assistance with medical services, legal aid, food, shelter, and education (Briant and Kennedy 2004). Further research found narratives of "social and cultural breakdown" amongst Sudanese refugees in Cairo (Coker 2004a, 2004b).

FMRS papers suggested the need for changes with UNHCR's procedures for refugee status determination in Egypt (Kagan 2002), and documented poor nutrition of southern Sudanese migrants in Cairo (Ainsworth 2003), the lack of educational opportunities in Cairo for refugee children (Afifi 2003), and issues with the protection of child refugees in Cairo without their families (Maxwell and El-Hilaly 2004). Affiliated researchers also studied the high hopes in Sudanese refugees' expectations of resettlement (Fanjoy et al. 2005), the marginalization of Sudanese whose applications for asylum had been rejected (Grabska 2005), and refugees' limited access to health care (Eidenier 2006). Other papers noted the limited livelihood pathways for Cairo-based refugees (Sudanese Development Initiative

Public seminars I attended in 2011-12, following a long ride from city centre on a AUC shuttle bus, were attended by a fraction of the audiences I witnessed in 2005-6, and did not include any refugees.

2003; al-Sharmani 2004). The resulting research was influential both locally and internationally.

In the 2005 protest's inception, FMRS played a significant, if unwitting, role, particularly in helping the organisers equip themselves with knowledge of refugee law and concepts from refugee studies and refugee rights advocacy, as the group's chosen name – Refugees Voice – attests. From 19–21 March 2005, FMRS offered a short course in international refugee law at its downtown Cairo campus that aimed to “acquaint non-English speaking human rights activists and lawyers with refugee law” (FMRS 2005: 25).

One of six short courses offered in the 2004–5 academic year, it was the first in FMRS history to be taught in Arabic rather than English – primarily an effort by FMRS to extend its public engagement amongst Egyptians. Amongst its thirty-nine students were several of the men who would start the autumn demonstration. Although not aimed explicitly towards educating refugees about their rights, the short course consolidated the group's intent to stage a sit-in, and prompted their further research (Salih 2006: 4).

At the time of the protest, Barbara Harrell-Bond, the refugee rights advocate and anthropologist who had co-founded the academic field of refugee studies, the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, and several legal aid NGOs, taught at FMRS. Her flat in Garden City, a leafy neighbourhood walking distance from downtown Cairo, was a hub of asylum-related activity as she regularly welcomed refugee, student, and NGO visitors for research and advocacy work and socializing. Over spring 2005, four of the men who would organize the Mustafa Mahmoud protest used her living-room library as a resource in their planning, forming “a reading group to inform themselves and their fellows

of refugee rights” and repeatedly visiting to read from Harrell-Bond’s private refugee studies and law collection (Harrell-Bond 2008: 226).

Although the men “photocopied books and articles from [her] library and kept coming back for more literature”, they did not tell Harrell-Bond of their intent to mobilise (Harrell-Bond 2008: 226). Nonetheless, their “findings” from this research (Salih 2006: 4) would become the basis for their list of requests with which protest organisers canvassed participants and created a petition which they brought to UNHCR on the protest’s first day (Rowe 2007: 57).

FMRS also played a substantial role in responding to the 2005 sit-in. From soon after its start, Harrell-Bond, in meetings at her house, attempted to convince protest organisers to end the demonstration for fear that it would be forcefully ended by Egyptian police; FMRS programme head Fateh Azzam made similar efforts. Other FMRS faculty visited and photographed the protest and grappled with how the institution ought to respond (emails on file). FMRS diploma students made multiple visits to the sit-in, and several chose the protest as the topic of their programme’s independent research assignments, some of the findings of which have been consulted for the present work (Lewis 2007; Schafer 2005 and 2006; Salih 2006; Rowe 2007). The transfer of information in these research visits was not only one-way: on visits from FMRS students, protest organisers themselves “persistently requested we provide them with information regarding human rights, the political situation in Sudan, and media accounts in English and Arabic of what was happening in the park” (Rowe 2006: 7). “Clearly,” Rowe noted, “the equation of knowledge with power was not lost on these men” (Ibid.).

In addition, seven FMRS students co-wrote a two-part series of articles based on interviews first, with protesters, and second, with a UNHCR-Cairo spokesperson, published online in Pambazuka News on 20 and 27 October (Gomez et al. 2006a and 2006b). This work was the earliest call for attention to the protest distributed internationally. The Pambazuka articles were clearly critical of UNHCR-Cairo and sympathetic to the protesters, and FMRS would go on to note in its 2006 annual report that the articles were written at the students' own initiative (FMRS 2006, on file with author).

FMRS programme staff and students sought to use the weekly public seminar series as a forum for discussion of the protest and its resolution. FMRS head Azzam invited UNHCR-Cairo representatives to make a presentation about the protest at an October seminar, but the office declined this invitation

[The text originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it contains sensitive and confidential content.]

On 26 October 2005, FMRS hosted four representatives of the Sudanese sit-in as the panelists for its weekly public seminar, a rare instance of refugees gaining a platform in a public and academic forum in Cairo. The seminar was “standing room only” and “arguably the most attended seminar in its history” (Azzam et al. 2006: 20; Rowe 2006: 8). Its audience was dominated by refugees and by international FMRS affiliates and aid workers; UNHCR-Cairo staff also attended, but did not speak (UNHCR15: 20-21).

At the seminar, protest organisers explained their complaints and demands, and fielded questions that ranged from expressions of solidarity and offers to help, to pleas to the organisers to end the sit-in, citing fear of police intervention. The event suffered from multiple misunderstandings due to problems of language interpretation, as an insightful

analysis by members of the FMRS Cairo Community Interpreters Project suggests (Cairo Community Interpreters Project 2010). These misunderstandings added to a tense atmosphere, and many attendees, including myself, left the seminar frustrated at the event's failure to bring about constructive dialogue as to what could be done to help the protesters.

A final aspect of the FMRS programme's relationship to the protest was its collaborative investigation into the protest, which began in the days after the breakup. This research would result in a public presentation of the research team's initial findings on 8 February 2006, and ultimately in the publication, in English in Arabic, print and online, of the report, which I co-wrote with seven students and one faculty member (Azzam et al. 2006). I discuss the report's production, my role, and its reception at points elsewhere in the present work; for the moment, it is worth stepping back to address a further aspect of my changing positionality over the course of the research.

Following my initial departure from Cairo in 2006, I began to be aware of the biases I had picked up while I lived in Egypt, most notably the survival mechanism of 'working around' and under-attending to the role of the Egyptian state. The FMRS report framed the Mustafa Mahmoud protest's focus on rights and on UNHCR as self-evident (Azzam et al. 2006). In the initial analysis I undertook for my MPhil dissertation, I adopted the same approach, largely neglecting the role of the Egyptian government in the welfare of asylees in Cairo and instead following the gaze of the protesters (and Cairo-based academics) onto UNHCR. This may have been in part for the wish for policy relevance: whereas UNHCR, as an international organisation, seemed to have the potential to be held accountable, Mubarak's Egyptian regime appeared confusing, unaccountable, and untouchable.

Through re-analysis of and subsequent pivotal conversations about this “elephant in the room”, however, I realised the need to deconstruct the assumptions I had developed during my time in Egypt.⁷ I became aware that, like many aid workers, refugees and indeed Egyptians, I had come to see the state as so fearsome, inept, and seemingly impervious to reform that I had internalised an attitude of working around it or in spite of it, rather than pressing for change. Although a necessary coping mechanism, perhaps, for those who must survive in Egypt, to downplay the responsibility of the Egyptian government for the situation of refugees in Cairo – and, relatedly, the responsibilities of other states, including my own, that support the GoE – would be both an ethical and intellectual mistake.

This insight raises the need for further attention to the challenges of public engagement by academics and academic institutions in authoritarian states, and the epistemological effects of the political constraints on knowledge production in refugee studies in such contexts. It also prompts a reconsideration of the protesters’ mobilisation of refugee status and international norms not just as a reflection of the presence of an international community in Cairo, but also the presence of an imposing authoritarian state. From this view, the protesters’ strategic targeting of UNHCR appears in part a matter of survival: both a positive appeal to the ideals of refugee protection, but also a reflection of their awareness and navigation of the authoritarian character of the state in which they lived.

⁷ I am indebted to Anna Lindley and Bruce Henshaw for their insights on this point.

3.2 Research methods and materials

The thesis draws from multiple sources of data, collected through iterative, mixed research methods in Cairo and Oxford between 2005 and 2013. Given my aim of capturing the complexity of the topic and its case while exploring the texture of some of its debates in detail, the thesis foregrounds a selection of key texts and events from a wider fabric of material.

The arguments of the empirical chapters build on in-depth analysis of two central sources: first, a collection of public or semi-public written and photographic texts produced locally during the protest and its immediate aftermath that describe the protest and asylum in Cairo, and second, contemporaneous accounts, including my own, of encounters and events that took place over that period. Further data collected over a total of thirty-one months spent in Cairo supports and situates this analysis, as does relevant media, secondary and ‘grey’ or unpublished literature. The body of data thus integrated reflects the diversity of material produced by those involved in asylum in Cairo, and particularly during the 2005 events.

During my initial stay in Cairo, from September 2005 through August 2006, I was immersed in activities and community around that year’s Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme at the American University in Cairo, responses to the autumn protest at Mustafa Mahmoud, and voluntary work on three refugee-related projects through FMRS and through an Egyptian human rights organization. Over the course of the year, I collated press releases, photographs, reports and published material as they were distributed at the time. Some were given to me in person at the protest or the university, others I accessed online, and many were delivered to me through private or group email exchanges or institutional email lists. I obtained many personal, group and forwarded emails over the

course of the protest, originating mostly from the ‘academic’ camp but also from protesters, embassies and the UN at various levels.

I have also referred to commentaries on the protest posted online by civil society activists – members of a burgeoning blogging community that would later gain credit for its role in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. A key informant who was a central intermediary in the 2005 protest allowed me access to their complete archive of emails over its course, which included private correspondence amongst multiple individuals and institutions concerned with the event. Ethically problematic in terms of confidentiality, I have not used them as direct sources, but their content has nonetheless informed my knowledge of the event.

I draw additionally from direct participation and observation in Cairo over the course of the protest and its aftermath. My observations from this first year in Cairo informed this thesis from two forms: first, notes I took at the time, amounting to around 13,000 words of computer text and a box file of notes, notebooks and diaries, and second, texts I wrote at later stages in which I attempted to capture memories of certain events, and reflect upon them.

In my 2006 work on the FMRS report, I collaborated with a team of 21 AUC-based interviewers, interpreters and writers to design and undertake research on the events. The resulting 32 individual and group interviews (totalling 48 respondents), of which I conducted three, form a substantial part of the material analysed in this thesis, along with interviews of protest survivors undertaken in January 2006 by the Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (see Appendix H for a table of these interviews). All of the documents resulting from this collaborative research project are now publicly available at the American University in Cairo, or at least to those able to venture to and

gain access to its suburban campus: I compiled and deposited them into AUC library's 'grey files' Migration and Refugee Studies Collection in 2006.

Some of the following chapters' descriptions of events draw from these notes and memories, while for others I have relied upon accounts written by others present at the time. I have drawn on several sources of interviews with protesters: the collections mentioned earlier, some shared by FMRS students who conducted research during the event which they shared with me personally or as conference papers (most notably by Lewis, Schafer, and Rowe), and, to a lesser degree, statements published in edited form in English and Arabic news media collected and translated during the collective work on the FMRS report, and thereafter.

Although this thesis focuses on accounts of asylum in Cairo made and gathered contemporaneously to the 2005 protest and its aftermath, it also draws from subsequent research. Over nineteen further months in Cairo and research in Oxford in 2010-12, I accumulated further material and observations which situate the present analysis within a wider view of the topic of asylum, in Cairo and elsewhere.

During this phase, I collected published and unpublished reports and documents related to asylum in Cairo, amongst them annual reports of Cairo-based service providers, web sources including blogs by Sudanese refugees in Cairo and elsewhere and online video and social network commemorations of the Mustafa Mahmoud protest, and documentation and research reports prepared in the development of several collaborative projects involving refugees, service provider staff, and academic affiliates that endeavoured to improve asylum in Cairo. In total, I have selected and consulted accounts from over 1200

contemporaneous documents (around 400 of which are photographs) collected through independent and collaborative research.

Additionally, a series of in-depth informational interviews conducted in Cairo in 2011 and 2012 informed the present work. Seeking to contextualise and expand my study of the 2005 protest and the broader workings and discussions of asylum in the city, I conducted twenty-four formal, recorded interviews with representatives of service providing organisations and refugee community-based organisations from the major national groups in Cairo (Sudanese, Somali, Iraqi, Eritrean, Ethiopian).

Those interviewed were contacted through personal networks and organisation offices, and were selected based on their professional and personal experience in refugee service provision and self-assistance. I was unable to reach representatives from Egyptian government ministries for interview. I was assisted by professionally-trained interpreters for around half of the interviews, and began each after obtaining oral informed consent. Through these I learned about the Mustafa Mahmoud protest's longer-term impacts, about changes affecting asylum in the years since, and particularly the evolution of the communication and relations between those involved with asylum in Cairo.

Another facet of the research has been iterative participant observation of the relationships between and amidst Cairo-based refugee communities, governmental and non-governmental policy organisations, the sociopolitical asylum context, researchers producing and disseminating knowledge about asylum in Cairo and the broader academic field of refugee studies. Although I have become a complete participant in the latter, my participation has remained reflexive as I have observed and reflected on these relationships

at multiple events where knowledge, legitimacy and prestige were exchanged, from 2005 to present⁸.

In summary, through multiple phases of research I gained a rich background of data to support the present analysis – not as a longitudinal study of particular individuals or even institutions, but rather a situated and historical perspective on asylum in Cairo, and ways that it has changed, and not changed, over the sea changes in its context (most notably the 2011 ‘revolution’ and the formation of South Sudan) in the years since.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The analysis and interpretation of fieldwork and textual data for this thesis was an inductive, iterative process conducted over several phases. I first systematically analysed protester interviews and other protester documents in preparation for my MPhil dissertation (Danielson 2008). When in 2007 I launched the dissertation, which aimed to understand the protest and the meanings it held for its participants, I was very familiar with the Cairo sit-in, and had spent considerable time with the set of interviews and protester documents that I and others had gathered immediately following the protest as I consulted them in

⁸ This included attendance at multiple AUC seminars in 2005-6 and 2010-12; a 2006 presentation by four FMRS students on the protest at a University of East London conference; the 2008 International Association for the Study of Forced Migration conference in Cairo; and UNHCR’s 2010 annual consultations with NGOs in Geneva; co-instruction with Barbara Harrell-Bond of a 2010 AUC short course in Cairo titled “Refugee participation in policy and practice: where is the voice of the refugees?” which included many Cairo-based refugee service providers and refugees participants; participation in a day-long training workshop provided by UNHCR about its role in Cairo, and observation of two workshops organised by Egyptian advocacy groups which included speakers from and discussion between Government of Egypt, refugee CBOs, service providers and human rights organizations. During my 2010-12 fieldwork, I lived with refugee service providers and socialised extensively with the mixed-legal-status, mixed-nationality network of friends associated with the organisation for which they worked, and had numerous informal conversations on the themes of this dissertation with contacts from multiple positions within Egyptian and refugee communities and the social world around asylum assistance and activism in Cairo.

preparation for my contribution to FMRS report. The analysis for the report was, however, a rather swift sweep of documents as we gathered them from multiple sources.

Based on the combination of growing awareness of the biases I had picked up while living in Egypt (see discussion on pp. 70-71), and the anthropological training that I undertook during my Migration Studies MPhil degree, I began work on my MPhil dissertation by revisiting the protest materials with fresh eyes. This approach was based on my wish to avoid assumptions about why the protesters had undertaken their collective action. Other Cairo-based scholars had since explained the protest as a logical act of resistance to its participants' problems (including the report I contributed to, Azzam et al. 2006), as the protesters' negotiation of relationships (Salih 2006, Grabska 2006b, Rowe 2007), or as the pursuit of rights (Harrell-Bond 2008, which the author shared with me pre-publication in 2007). While each of these explanations captured aspects of the politics at play, each also left other aspects unexamined.

Seeking an inductive understanding of the event grounded in the accounts of its participants, I undertook analysis of the protest materials from scratch with a view to re-learning how the protesters had represented their actions from their own words. To do so, I sought out major themes that emerged from the protest materials in paper copy. At the broadest level of this analysis, three kinds of explanations for the protest emerged: first, protester accounts of the *problems* that had prompted their involvement in the sit-in; second, the *strategies* the protesters had mobilized; and third, protester representations of individual and collective *goals* or outcomes that they hoped the demonstration would bring about. These three themes became the topics of the three empirical chapters of my MPhil dissertation.

The analysis of the present thesis builds upon this analytical strategy. Following compilation and review of the materials I amassed, I began the doctoral analysis process with the arrangement of relevant texts and notes. I used the writing software Scrivener to organise this material and then began coding of the texts using its keyword feature and, later, an Excel spreadsheet. I also wrote a series of scenes describing my memories of relevant events from 2005-6, sometimes in comparison with other accounts of the events, also coded and reflected on in written notes. Working through the collected documents in the chronological order in which they were produced, I tagged material with keyword codes and organised them thematically in spreadsheets, building categories as they emerged and writing notes that developed conceptual and theoretical thinking around these categories.

As in my MPhil dissertation, three of the coming chapters lay out analysis of protester accounts of problems underlying their sit-in (Chapter 5), analysis of their explanations of the protest's goals (Chapter 6), and analysis of their strategies (Chapter 9). While preparing the current thesis, I became aware that social movement theory, and particularly Collective Action Framing (CAF), had developed a similar approach to understanding how protest participants explain collective action. Whereas I had thought of my analysis in terms of participants' problems, goals, and strategies, CAF's authors lay out three kinds of framings – diagnostic, motivational, and prognostic – that captured similar ideas (Benford and Snow 2000: 615-617). I have mentioned these framings where relevant at points throughout the thesis so as to connect the present analysis with other public struggles. The framework through which I actually conducted analysis of the thesis materials was, however, my own.

The analysis undertaken for the present work was not restricted, as it had largely been for my MPhil thesis, to understanding the explanations of the protesters by only the protesters themselves (and to comparing those explanations to existing accounts of the event). In

expanding the scope of my study, I sought to analyze explanations for the event and its outcome that had been offered also by representatives of the two major governance institutions involved in the protest, namely the Government of Egypt and UNHCR-Cairo, as well as other actors (NGOs, journalists, bloggers). Why did these bodies suggest that the protest had happened, and how did they explain their responses to the sit-in?

Analysis of source material from governance bodies initially took a similar course to that undertaken for the protester materials: again, key themes included their representations of the protesters' problems, goals, and strategies. At the same time, however, I also noticed repeated explanations of the bodies' own strategies and goals, and wider commentary on questions of authority and responsibility in asylum governance in Egypt, so these themes became an additional, integral part of my findings. Analysis of institutional responses attended to new questions: how did governance bodies represent their roles, others' roles, and the organisation of asylum governance as a whole? This approach took institutional accounts of the protest as instances of political communication which reflect wider dynamics of power and governance, an approach similar to Ecker-Ehrhardt's 'authority talk' approach to discourse analysis (2012: 452).

Indeed, as analysis proceeded I became aware that the themes arising from the protest materials were inextricably entangled in the politics of asylum governance. This realisation informed the broader exploration of the relationship between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance with which the present work is concerned.

Through comparative analysis of public and semi-public statements about the protest, interwoven with reflective descriptions of moments of encounter over the course of the event, I aim to allow the case under study "to unfold from the diverse, complex, and

sometimes conflicting stories that people, documents, and other evidence” offer, thereby allowing readers “to make different interpretations and to draw diverse conclusions” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 86). Finally, my analysis is grounded in contextual knowledge of the actions and events of the protest and its aftermath, which situate and help make sense of the explanations of those involved in the event and debates around it.

3.4 Epistemology in the study of public and semi-public statements

The collection of contemporaneous statements and documents at the heart of the present work were analysed both as performative and as sources of information about the protest: here I sketch the epistemological reasoning underlying this approach.

Taking a constructivist approach, I attend to ways in which categories such as ‘refugee’ and ‘rights’, and explanations of power were constructed in a selection of accounts of the protest. The constructivist approach directs the analysis towards, amongst other things, the evidence, justifications and authority that are mustered in explanations of the situation, how ideas of asylum are articulated, and the relationships implicated in each text – in other words, it “offer[s] insight into the logics of actors and the justifications for their actions” (Fassin 2012: 10).

The representations under study are necessarily socially mediated. This is true of statements made in any interview, but particularly pertinent here, for the documents offer compelling evidence of the relationships involved in the situation under study and may provide insight into matters of position and power in asylum in Cairo, “forged at the interface with a variety of external contexts” (Gready 2008: 137). I thus consider interviews, for example, not just as sources of data through their textual content, but also as documents of encounters between interviewer and interviewee, and the performance of both parties for a wider

audience. This is similar to the approach taken in Mosse's study of development, in which he considered interviews "as a record of changes that [his interviewees] wished to convey to outsiders" (Mosse 2005: 205). A protest, like a refugee camp, prompts a certain kind of speech act. In a camp, Agier has noted, an interview becomes a kind of "testimony-event", that is, a "performance whose authors no longer address themselves to a specific audience but to a wider public" (Agier 2011: 174). An interview of a protester about the event in which they demonstrated similarly acts both as a means of learning how they wish to convey their participation, and more broadly as an opportunity to view the ways they represent themselves as part of a polity or public.

This approach also offers key insights in the building up of an understanding of asylum governance in Cairo. Rather than starting from an *a priori* definition of asylum governance, which is the conventional approach to studying power structures (Fassin et al. 2015: ix), I take an ethnographic approach that examines how authority in asylum governance becomes visible through the responses of governance bodies to the protest event. This is a method that has been applied to the study of expertise in global governance, in order to allow "the question of which types of actors are authoritative, or what type of "sources" of authority is prevalent [to] emerg[e] from the empirical analysis rather than being imposed as the analytical framework for this analysis" (Sending 2015: 6). A focus on how power is actually exercised and contested through encounters between institutions and beneficiaries has also been shown to be productive in the study of the state (Gupta 2012: 12), on the basis that "it is through the practices of those who represent it in their various capacities that the state gradually takes form" (Fassin et al. 2015: 255).

The texts analysed were also used more conventionally as sources of data about the events of the time period under study. Using research material to study relationships and

interactions can be both a way of learning about the representations of particular groups, and of learning about the impacts of those groups upon each other. Analysis of the performances and interactions around human rights in Palestine, for example, has not only uncovered “some key things about the discursive and ethical aspects of state-making” but also “how the lines connecting performance and audience crisscross and convince, or not” (Allen 2013: 109). The present work explicates the interactions of multiple performances and audiences that arose in and in response to the 2005 protest, while also aiming to contribute conceptually to existing understandings of refugee protest, asylum governance, and the relations between them.

This points to a tension in my epistemological approach between social constructivism, which emphasises the production of knowledge and impacts of metaphor, and a more realist social ontology. With its stance that social entities “have a reality that is conception-independent”, and therefore “theories, models and classifications we use to study them may be objectively wrong, that is, they may fail to capture the real history and internal dynamics of those entities” (De Landa 2006: 1), a realist approach is helpful because it provides a basis on which to criticise existing conceptions, and develop new ones. On the other hand, a constructivist orientation allows for the acknowledgement that our language “carries with it certain implications” and outcomes, thus also offering a framework through which to explain and learn from the events described the present study (Turton 2003: 2).

The critical realist approach developed by migration studies scholars offers a promising “way around” or “way out” of the constructivist versus realist tension (Bakewell 2010, Iosifides 2012; see also Bakewell 2013; Bakewell et al. 2012; Vargas-Silva 2012). This approach begins with “the conceptualisation of the ‘objects’ to be studied” in order to explore “whether such a concept actually refers to a social structure ... that ‘exists’”

(Bakewell 2010: 1704). This concept is then iteratively "reconceptualise[d] ... in the light of our findings" (Bakewell 2010: 1704) Although related to grounded theory, critical realism does not rely only on the "research categories or coding ... established by respondents", but also addresses structural factors (Bakewell 2010: 1705). Critical realist approaches thus form a significant component of the epistemological basis of this thesis.

3.5 Limitations, delineations, and conventions

Given that the research that resulted in the present work began without any intention to become a thesis, it did not fit into the usual arc of doctoral anthropological study, in which the selection of a research topic is followed by purposive fieldwork, analysis and writing. Instead, the project evolved over an iterative, back-and-forth process over the eleven-year period following my first encounter with the 2005 protest in Cairo. As a result, decisions about data collection, analysis and composition were developed alongside my theoretical and methodological framework. This section acknowledges and explains limitations of the methods used and of the thesis as a whole, delineations I made during the research process, and conventions I follow in the text.

My positionality impacted the research methods and the thesis in several ways. My affiliation with FMRS allowed me insight into academic involvement with the 2005 protest, but given that my research began after the protest ended, I did not conduct in-depth, ethnographic research with protesters, UNHCR staff, or other actors involved during the event. In my subsequent fieldwork (2010-2012), which I carried out during a period of political turmoil in Egypt (as explored in Danielson 2012a, Danielson 2012b), I pursued my interest in understanding the 2005 event's politics and meaning in Cairo by interviewing a range of individuals affiliated with the protest, as well with refugee and refugee-assisting

groups more widely, rather than undertaking in-depth fieldwork with one group or another. Through this research, I investigated the ongoing politics and relationships in asylum governance in Cairo that contextualise the present study.

Language and positionality also shaped my access and interests throughout the research process. While I studied Arabic during the two and a half years I lived in Cairo, I did not attain a level where I could interview without an interpreter. As a result, interviews were done either in the interviewee's second language (i.e. English) or with the assistance of a trained interpreter, and Arabic-language documents were read in translation. My position as an English-speaking, academically-affiliated member of the 'international community' living temporarily in Egypt likely influenced my particular interest in the interplay between local and international dimensions of the event as these related to academia and to the governments of my countries of citizenship (Canada and the United States) as supporters of UNHCR, Egypt, and refugee resettlement.

The focus of this thesis on public representations of and debates around the protest was thus influenced both by my after-the-fact research design and access, and by my research interests. Greater access to the internal politics of the protesters, UNHCR-Cairo staff, GoE decision-makers, or other groups may have given rise to different types of insights – including into the individual motivations of those involved; behind-the-scenes debates; constraints on public statements and behaviour; why certain narratives became prominent publicly; internal tensions and power-struggles; and the management of dissent in each group. Ethnographic studies within UNHCR-Cairo and the Egyptian government would certainly be promising avenues for future research. Stacy Schafer's research in the park (2005, 2006) and Martin Rowe's in-depth research with protest organisers (2007) at the

time of the protest and immediately thereafter are the most in-depth work with protesters so far, and I refer to their findings where appropriate.

My engagement with these and other such studies of the protest reflected my desire to triangulate data from my own research, that of the FMRS team, and others. To account for my partial reliance on interviews conducted by researchers other than myself, I attended carefully to information on their production. Although the FMRS interviewers worked from the same interview schedule and ethical guidelines, the content or approach taken in these interviews emerged between the interviewer and interviewee(s) in each instance. Given these limitations, I have, as much as possible, made comparisons between multiple sources in the reconstructions and descriptions that I provide in the following chapters. I have also engaged critically with other studies of the protest so as to distinguish their contributions from my own. My analysis is also informed by my repeated, long-term engagement with the themes of this thesis, including multiple visits and extended periods of residence in Cairo between 2005 and 2013.

In preparing for the analysis of the collected material, I selected a particular body of materials for close analysis. I excluded some material for ethical reasons. I did not quote from a large number of emails I was given access to without the consent of their authors. I also excluded the extensive accounts of the protest breakup and aftermath collected by FMRS and Nadim Centre interviewers. Although protest survivors consented to these interviews at the time, this consent was given in the immediate aftermath of an event characterised by extreme violence and distress. Furthermore, while the violent ending of the protest is a core element of the event and therefore the research, I was unsure how the details would add to the present discussion. As it stands, these accounts remain in the AUC Grey Files, and in mine, where they could be consulted for future research.

Ultimately, my theoretical interests coalesced around the relationships between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance, as they unfolded through the 2005 Sudanese protest. To pursue this inquiry, I delineated the scope of the study along three lines: first, on the time and place of the protest event; second, on statements by protesters, UNHCR and state representatives, and academics; and third, on the debates and relationships between these groups.

First, the temporal and spatial focus on event guided my attention to discussions of the protest and its wider politics; I did not delve into the life histories or future aspirations of those involved, except where relevant. I also attended primarily to contemporaneous accounts of the protest, rather than after-the-fact elicited memories of the event. While the impacts, meanings and memorialisation⁹ of the protest that emerged in my research are interesting in themselves, they were not the focus of this project.

Similarly, although the 2005 event resonated internationally, to contain the project within reasonable bounds I attended primarily to actions and words of those based in Cairo at the time, and used my research on wider responses during and after the event to contextualise the present work. The study is also not longitudinal. My observations during repeated and long-term engagement in Cairo have, however, underscored the ongoing relevance and significance of the themes I discuss for the understanding of the politics of asylum governance in Cairo.

Second, the scope of the research was focused on particular actors and institutions. Accounts of the protest by its direct participants are fundamental to the study. Their interest

⁹ Several examples of online memorialisation can be seen in Appendix G.

in UNHCR-Cairo, expressed both through their words and the protest's location, directed my attention to the responses of the office and its staff which were, indeed, extensive, throughout and after the event – offering an unusual view into an office known locally for its 'fortress mentality' (Azzam et al. 2006: 59). My initial study of the protest through the FMRS report focused primarily on these the protesters and UNHCR. Yet as I came to see that state responses too were critical, I also included them in the research – both those of the Egyptian government and of the embassies of resettlement countries. This aspect of the research is important both given Egypt's notorious disinterest in the administration of asylum (Kagan 2011a: 3) and for the opportunity it offered for insight into the political relations between UNHCR and states.

My attention to academic involvement in and accounts of the protest was in part reflexive: it reflected my sense of the importance of acknowledging and interrogating the role of academic actors, institutions, and discourses in the politics of refugee protest and asylum governance. In the 2005 protest, academic knowledge production also resulted in some of the present work's key sources.

While the focus on the protesters, UNHCR, states and academics was shaped by my research interests, it also reflects the access I gained to protest-related materials at the time of the event and after it. Further research could be done on the roles and views of the protest of others involved in the demonstration, including refugee service providers in Cairo, the Sudanese government and its Cairo embassy, Sudanese and other refugee communities in Cairo, people living in the neighbourhood of the protest, police who worked at the park during the sit-in, people connected to the protesters in Sudan and the Sudanese diaspora, formal and informal civil society organisations in Cairo and elsewhere, local and

international media outlets and journalists, those attending and running the Mustafa Mahmoud mosque that neighboured the sit-in.

The third major delineation of the thesis was my focus on public representations, actions, and debates, rather than in-depth ethnographic work with those involved. This focus is both a delineation and a limitation, resulting from matters both in and out of my control. My ongoing interest in how the 2005 protest became a “zone of awkward engagement” (Tsing 2011), indicative of wider debates and relationships, settled my choice to centre attention on verbal and non-verbal statements by those involved in the protest and in responses to it, as given semi-publicly through interviews and publicly through visual material and finished texts like press releases and reports.

My focus on public or semi-public representations means that the statements I analysed are those which were purposely set forth by those involved in the protest and in responses to it. There are differences, however, between the kinds of statements given between the protesters, UNHCR, and the GoE. Whereas the formers’ statements included interviews given by many protest participants, as well as written texts and visual materials, the institutional interviews were provided by only a few representatives (alongside written texts).

These divergent strategies provided greater insight into the explanations of a variety of individuals involved in the protest than it did into those of individual UNHCR or GoE staff. Although this is a limitation that risks presenting each institution as somewhat monolithic, it also reflects the empirical reality, namely the decisions of UNHCR and GoE leadership to strictly channel and limit their communication about the protest, and the protesters’ strategies of widely seeking public attention to their accounts.

In this respect, I consider interviews with protesters as performative, semi-public encounters between them and their desired audiences, which included academic researchers. It should also be noted that protesters interviewed by me and other FMRS interviewers were not approached by random sample, but rather through FMRS and Nadim Centre intermediaries and the snowball technique. Schafer's and Rowe's research did include quantitative elements, which I have referred to where relevant. Overall, however, statements by protest participants should not be taken as representative of all protesters.

In the text, I have sometimes for reasons of legibility referred to 'protester accounts' and the protest's 'public narrative', by which I mean those themes that emerged repeatedly in protester interviews and texts. It is important, however, to keep in mind the multiplicity of individuals who spoke through the protest's platform. The several thousand people who participated in the sit-in were not a homogeneous body with a single message, and the statements of those who spoke out encompassed a multiplicity of views and issues. There thus remains a tension in the text between individual and collective narratives.

Finally, when preparing the current text, I settled on naming conventions as follows. Although some protesters spoke publicly with their real names and/or consented for their real names to be used, most did not. Given the risk of state persecution, for security reasons, when quoting any protest participant, I have anonymised their identities with pseudonyms. For employees of UNHCR or the Egyptian government who gave their names in public statements, I use those names, although since they are speaking as representatives of their organisations rather than off the record, I sometimes also use their titles so as to keep the focus on their institutional positions.

The methods outlined in this chapter have equipped me to explore the politics of the 2005 protest that this thesis will unfold. Before proceeding further, the basic outline of the event itself as well as its historical context are worth introducing.

CHAPTER 4. THE 2005 PROTEST, BACKGROUND, AND FOREGROUND

4.1 The 2005 Sudanese demonstration at Mustafa Mahmoud

The protest on which this thesis focuses began on 29 September 2005 in Mustafa Mahmoud park, the large, green-gardened traffic circle that served as waiting room and screening grounds for nearby UNHCR and was named after Mustafa Mahmoud mosque across the street. A group of 12 Sudanese refugees – mostly young men, who had initially come together as “a reading group to inform themselves and their fellows of refugee rights” (Harrell-Bond 2008: 226) and called themselves *suut al-ajeen al-sudaniyeen bil qahira*, in English *The Voice of Sudanese Refugees in Cairo* (sometimes referred to in their documents as simply *Refugee’s Voice* (Rowe 2007: 4) – had created a petition, email address, and public statements. On 29 September they delivered their petition, signed by others, to UNHCR and, with some already waiting in the park, began their protest. The group disseminated a list of requests to local and international media, including postings on the website *Sudanese Online*.

As word spread amongst the Sudanese refugee community in Cairo, the occupation grew into a mass sit-in. Estimates of the number of participants vary, from 800 to 4,000. Fewer people were in the park during the day as many worked and returned in the evenings, and numbers continually increased over the course of the protest, with some moving completely into the park, together with all of their belongings (Azzam et al. 2006a: 15).

Given that the protesters’ legal statuses became a central topic of debates around the event, it is important to keep in mind that the only two existing sets of statistics on the protesters confirm that the great majority of protest participants were either asylum seekers or

recognised refugees. The only quantitative survey of the park's population, a non-random survey of 149 of its participants (Schafer 2005a), found that a quarter held recognised refugee status, almost half held asylum seeker status, and thirteen percent had recently arrived in Cairo and had not yet applied for or received status from UNHCR (Schafer 2006: 5). UNHCR's own statistics following Egypt's forced removal of the protesters suggests that Schafer's findings may have under-represented the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the protest: of the 2,174 protesters removed to detention, UNHCR identified all but 169 of them as people "of concern" to the office, that is, people whose applications for asylum were either in process or approved (Azzam et al. 2006: 43).

Schafer's survey of protest participants also found that a majority of those surveyed were men, mostly between 20 and 35 years of age, of whom 60 per cent were unmarried. Eighty per cent of women surveyed were married, and many had their children with them at the protest. The sample population was half Muslim and half Christian, and originated from across regions and tribes of Sudan. Thirty-six tribes were represented, the most common of which were Dinka, Nuba, and Nuer (Schafer 2005a: 9).

Through the distributed list of demands, banners hung around the park, statements to media and visitors, and meetings with UNHCR and other stakeholders, protesters explained their problems and their hope that they might be solved in various ways, as this section will examine closely. Formal negotiations between protest leaders and UNHCR started on 3 October, and ran more than 40 hours over eight subsequent meetings (UNHCR Regional Office Cairo 2006: 14–15). However, the goals of each party were at odds, and those in the park were largely distrustful of the office. Although protest representatives and UNHCR came to an agreement on 17 December that was supposed both to address the protesters' problems and result in the protest's end, it was rejected by the majority in the park.

The sit-in continued until the evening of 29 December 2005, when approximately 4,000 police circled the park. Authorities and protesters negotiated for several hours on the terms under which protesters would leave the park – protesters wanted guarantees that they would be taken to safe camps and not deported (Azzam et al. 2006: 35). Over the course of the night police sprayed protesters with water cannons for prolonged periods on several occasions. Protesters sent children into the centre of the park where they could be protected from the sprays by blankets and sheeting.

After several hours, at 5 o'clock in the morning, police encircling the protesters pressed in on the group, beat them, and forcibly removed protesters one at a time. At least 28 people, including eleven children under twelve years old, were killed, some smothered or tramped during the forced eviction (Azzam et al. 2006: 35). Many more were injured, and survivors were bussed to detention centres around the city, with some families still remaining separated weeks later. Relatives of protesters killed in the protest break-up were blocked from transporting their bodies to Sudan for burial. Most protesters also endured significant loss of personal belongings, including identity cards, education records and family photographs. (See photographs in Appendix G).

4.2 The protest lists

A list of points produced by Refugees Voice delivered an 'official' collection of messages to interested parties, and publicly articulated the reasons for the occupation of the park in greater detail than did the banners hung around its periphery. The contents of this list, which underwent several revisions, became the points around which much discussion of the protest would revolve, and the focus of negotiations between UNHCR and protest leaders. At least six different versions of lists were publicly distributed, in English and Arabic,

throughout the course of the protest, so in order to avoid confusion they warrant a brief introduction.

Of the six versions of lists, four originated from Refugees Voice. The first was printed in Arabic and English on paper and handed out to visitors to the sit-in from its start, including to me on my 10 October visit (as photographed in Appendix H), and to blogger Elijah Zarwan that November (Zarwan 2006a). This sheet listed thirteen points, and, in English, was titled ‘Requests’. It will hereafter be referred to as the ‘Paper list’. In late November 2005, Refugees Voice members released a list of demands via email in English and Arabic that had been revised in response to negotiations with UNHCR. Titled ‘the demands’, it included eleven points (and will be referred to as the ‘Revised list’).

Protest organisers distributed at least two versions of their demands through online outreach efforts. On 13 October, Damanga Coalition for Freedom and Democracy, a small Darfur advocacy group started by Sudanese resettled in the United States, posted on their website an English translation of an Arabic copy of the Paper list sent to them by a Refugees Voice member (Damanga 2005; hereafter referred to as the ‘Damanga list’). A 24 October web post on the now defunct website Drum Beat Sudan included an interview with an unnamed ‘Voice of Refugees Spoke person’ and a list of 20 ‘demands’ (the ‘Drum Beat list’). Although these versions of the Paper list contained the same number of points, their wording and order varied beyond differences of translation, including two differing points.

Two further versions of the list were distributed publicly. At the 26 October public seminar hosted by FMRS at the American University in Cairo where four protest organisers spoke, seminar organisers handed out a list in English (the ‘FMRS list’) which an FMRS student had revised from the original Paper list. And in a 30 October press release, UNHCR-Cairo

disseminated a 19-point version of the list that an office report later explained had been translated from an Arabic-language version of the list provided by police; this list (the ‘UNHCR list’) revised the tone and content of the points.

The substance of the lists is discussed in subsequent chapters, and their original wording is laid out in the table in Appendix H. Each list dealt with problems with return to Sudan, integration in Egypt, and resettlement to third countries, and were strongly critical of UNHCR’s processes. The final point of each suggested that if solutions in Egypt were not possible, that Sudanese refugees should be allowed to move elsewhere.

4.3 Empirical background

Egypt has long hosted citizens of its southern neighbour, especially those from the Arab north. Of the more than seventeen million inhabitants of Cairo in the year of the protest, up to four million were Sudanese (Grabska 2006a: 288). Due to war in Darfur and the long-simmering conflict in the south of Sudan, however, a new kind of Sudanese migrant began to arrive. Beginning in the early 1990s, increasing numbers of Sudanese sought asylum in Cairo from the conflict in the west and south. In 1998, UNHCR Cairo interviewed 1,000 Sudanese asylum seekers; by 2005, nearly 24,000 had arrived (Azzam et al. 2006).

Until 1994, Sudanese in Egypt had not been screened by UNHCR for refugee status, due to a specific bi-lateral ‘free-movement’ agreement based in the close relationship between Sudan and Egypt, providing near-citizen protections for Sudanese in Egypt. In October 1994, however, around four hundred women from southern Sudan “demand[ed] recognition as refugees” at the organisation’s offices (Moro 2004: 429). Their demonstration gained the attention of both human rights activists and an unnamed US congressman, who “demand[ed] explanations from the Egyptian government and UNHCR”

(Moro 2004: 429). After this protest, the Egyptian government asked UNHCR to process and assist Sudanese seeking asylum in Egypt to avoid further political action. The government worried that without recognition, newcomers might “engage in activities incompatible with law and order or get mobilised by organisations advocating violence” in Cairo (Sperl 2001: 20).

In 1995, recognition by UNHCR became all the more crucial for Sudanese who had fled to Egypt, and pressure on the office increased. In response to the attempted assassination of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in July of that year, the government shut down previously-granted privileges for all Sudanese in the country, imposing “visa and residence permit requirements [and] increased security checks” on Sudanese nationals (Sperl 2001: 20). The case-load for UNHCR became considerable, and as back-logs built up, so did resentment towards the office. Indeed, a heightened probability of “demonstrations and open protests’ against UNHCR Cairo” was foreseen within five years of this change (Sperl 2001: 26).

A second demonstration at the UNHCR office took place on 25 August 2004, a decade after the first. Demonstrators protested the office’s decision to stop interviews of newly arrived Sudanese in June of that year (Gomez et al. 2005: 3). The decision itself was precipitated by a peace agreement reached at the beginning of 2004 in Sudan, which prompted the office to suspend refugee status determination procedures and instead encourage return to Sudan, offering just temporary protection for all applicants, in the form of yellow cards (UNHCR15: 11) In response, a group of Sudanese refugees gathered in front of the UNHCR Cairo office for a meeting organised by SOUTH, an Egyptian NGO. The office’s representative attempted to appease the crowd, but police intervened with force to disperse the protesters, and violence ensued (Harrell-Bond 2007; Moro and Adam 2005: 6-7).

UNHCR reports that seventeen vehicles were vandalised by the protesters; following the protest, at least twenty people were detained (UNHCR15: 8). The 2004 protest signalled increased strain in the relationship between UNHCR and Sudanese refugees in Cairo (Salih 2006: 8).

Between 1998 and 2004, UNHCR worked with the embassies of receiving countries and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which provides administrative support in resettlement processes, to facilitate the resettlement of thousands of Sudanese refugees from Cairo (Kagan 2011b: 27), resulting in what has been called “one of the largest resettlement operations in the world” (Azzam et al. 2006: 8). Nearly all who were recognised as refugees in Cairo were resettled to the United States, Canada, Australia, and Nordic countries. However, as the numbers of asylum-seekers rose, the resettlement numbers stayed static, leaving most Sudanese newcomers to stay in Cairo (Grabska 2006a: 295), although many were connected to family or friends in a wide-reaching Sudanese diaspora (Fadlalla 2009).

Egypt is signatory to the 1951 Convention, the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and has ratified other human rights conventions. However, refugee protection in the country is limited by its reservations on the 1951 Convention and a Memorandum of Understanding it signed with UNHCR in 1954 which further restricted refugee rights (UNHCR 1954; see also Kagan 2011a: 15). UNHCR carries out all refugee status determination procedures and registration of asylum seekers, and works in partnership with other organizations to support local services, resettlement and voluntary return to countries of origin. Services for refugees and asylum seekers in Cairo include limited education, financial, material, legal and health support. These are provided by some Egyptian government agencies, UNHCR,

community-based organizations and local, international and sometimes religiously-affiliated non-governmental organizations, all of which have differing eligibility requirements, target populations and fees for services.

The city of Cairo is an uneasy refuge: a troubled host, a place literally not easy to live in, and a source of anxiety for those who seek asylum in it. Cairo is the largest city in Africa and tenth largest urban area in the world in terms of both population and area (Demographia 2012), and is known for its overcrowded streets and traffic jams. Refugees and asylum seekers live throughout greater Cairo, and the city's refugee service providers are similarly dispersed. Travel by minibus, bus, taxi or the metro rail system involves considerable cost, time and hassle.

Cairo's poverty, authoritarian governmental legacy, global position and current (2012) state of political upheaval significantly curtail the parameters for refugees and those who work with them. The government's position and policies on refugees has precluded local integration and places responsibilities on UNHCR beyond its mandate, resulting in the creation of parallel systems and a cycle of dependency (Grabska 2005, 2006a; Gozdziaik and Walter 2012: 5). Refugees are not in practice permitted to work, so must enter the tenuous and potentially exploitative informal market (Kagan 2011a: 18–19; Jureidini 2009).

Visible minorities, especially sub-Saharan Africans, face discrimination, harassment and abuse in streets, workplaces, hospitals, government institutions and police stations (Azzam et al. 2006a: 15–16; Grabska 2006b: 296). This creates mistrust amongst refugees, both of Egyptians and of institutions in Egypt. Cairo-based embassies of refugee-producing countries, most notably Eritrea, reportedly harass co-national refugees. During an

interview, when I stated in passing that “many refugees find life here hard”, the refugee I was speaking with interrupted me: “It’s not some of them, it’s all of them.”

Framing this hardship is the precarious state of Egypt itself: refugees live, as a service provider research participant stated, “in a developing country with chronic problems where the nationals themselves struggle to live with dignity”. The outcome of the overthrow of the Mubarak regime has yet to be seen, and the bigger socioeconomic picture remains bleak, especially for refugees. Livelihood difficulties are compounded by security problems. Legal recourse is frequently undermined by discriminatory police responses. Insecurity has risen since the 2011 revolution. Increased street crime disproportionately disrupted the lives of minorities in poor areas, and civil unrest resulted in frequent and unpredictable closures of service provider offices.

In theory, refugees who are neither able to return to their home countries nor to integrate in their present location are eligible to be resettled to a safe third country. Until 2004, a large proportion of refugees recognised by UNHCR in Cairo were resettled (Azzam et al. 2006a: 8). However, following the 2004 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in southern Sudan, UNHCR began to give asylum seeker status rather than refugee status to new arrivals from Sudan, while waiting to see how the situation in southern Sudan would develop. As a result, southern Sudanese seeking asylum in Cairo were ineligible for resettlement except in exceptional cases (Kagan 2011a: 13).

The history of resettlement has created wide-reaching transnational social networks that contribute to the perpetuation of cycles of hope for resettlement (Crisp 1999; Fanjoy et al. 2005; Koser and Pinkerton 2002; Van Hear 2003). In light of continued instability in countries of origin – new South Sudan included – and increased insecurity in Egypt,

resettlement remains most Cairo refugees' best hope. However, resettlement countries and UNHCR allot limited resettlement spots for refugees from Cairo – in recent years, fewer than 1,000 a year, with a low of 200 refugees resettled from Egypt in 2008 (Kagan 2011a: 27; Jacobsen et al. 2012: 15).

Refugees who hope for, expect, or have been selected for resettlement are unable effectively to plan their lives, due to not knowing if or when they will leave Egypt (see Mahmoud 2009). The processing of applications for refugee status and resettlement places is lengthy and undefined, entailing coordination between multiple local and international bodies, all of which have their own sets of checks, processes and screenings. An Iraqi refugee research participant described this experience as “truly a slow death, because you are waiting and waiting and waiting, and a lot of people, if they didn't get psychological problems from being threatened or kidnapped [in their home countries], they got psychological problems here in Egypt, because of waiting, and the pressure about it.”

4.4 Asylum in context

Urban asylum in regions of origin is characterised by particular features that differentiate it from asylum in the global north or in camps in the global south. Whereas in camps basic services are usually provided by international humanitarian organisations to all who live within them, in cities services are dispersed amongst multiple sites and kinds of organisations, and provided with varying guidelines as to who may access them. In urban setting, legal recognition of refugee status may take longer and be more difficult to obtain (Danielson 2012: 5). Asylees live amongst the population of the host state and throughout the city, where they may experience many of the same difficulties as the urban poor. The host state government often has historical and ongoing relations with their home state that

may increase the insecurity of their asylum. Where the problems of people recognised as refugees and living in camps are "easier to essentialize" as "solely created by factors related to exile", asylum in urban, regional contexts is shaped by many intersecting factors, spaces and relationships (Coker 2004: 402).

Conceptualisation of the politics of asylum in this complex setting thus demands the consideration of multiple elements. Elizabeth Coker's work on asylum in Cairo explains an important aspect of this complexity, namely the need for asylees in cities to "continually interact with a host population [with distinct] cultural and social features" (2004: 402). Asylum is, as a result, the "unique product of cultural and historical interactions between two or more societies" (Coker 2004: 402). For Sudanese who have sought asylum in Egypt, these interactions are shaped by a political ideal of Sudanese-Egyptian unity that glosses over differences impacting the experiences of Sudanese asylees in Egypt, who: "black of skin, Christian, and culturally African as opposed to Arab[,] have little in common with the Sudanese political elite who have laid claim to brotherhood with Egypt" (Coker 2004: 402).

Given this constellation of differences, understanding the politics of asylum in Cairo is thus well served by an intersectional approach, which draws attention to the "simultaneous and interacting effects of systems of oppression on the basis of gender, 'race', religion, class, sexual orientation and national origin as categories of difference" (Bassel 2010: 158). Intersectionality prompts a wider view of the politics of asylum and thus provides a basis upon which to question, rather than take for granted, the framing of the 2005 demonstration. This is significant because Sudanese asylees in Cairo experience asylum not only in relation to their histories of forced migration, but also by a range of pertinent differences and relationships in the city, including – to add to Bassel's list – their statuses as asylees.

In Cairo, the act of seeking asylum, whatever its outcome, entails various degrees of interaction with parties not accounted for in Coker's percipient explanation of the complex relations of urban asylum. Following the gaze of the organisers of the 2005 protest reveals also the significance of the institution and staff of the Cairo office of UNHCR; an 'international community' of Egyptian and non-Egyptian individuals and organisations concerned with asylees, including academic researchers, in Cairo and beyond; and transnational advocacy networks amongst the Sudanese diaspora. An intersectional, situated, and reflexive analysis of the relationships involved in asylum in Cairo opens the view of its politics to include presences that might be overlooked in a more universal, state-centred approach.

A situated approach is significant also because asylum, though frequently discussed in terms of the absence of support for those who seek it, is also characterised by distinct presences. This point has been made with regard to refugee camps, where, Turner reminds us, "refugees are not merely secluded [from the host and sending] nation. They are also exposed to the 'international community' whose presence in the camp is strongly felt" (2004: 231). Similarly, although a state-focused study of asylum in the Middle East would suggest a general lack of policy or support for asylees, those who seek asylum in Cairo do not, in fact, arrive into "a total vacuum", as Kagan points out: some limited services do exist for asylees (2011: 9).

This configuration of asylum is, however, "essentially off the radar screen of conventional thinking in the field of international law" because of a pattern in which states in the region have transferred responsibility for asylum to UNHCR and its partners (Kagan 2011a: 9). So extreme is this transfer that UNHCR has been characterised as acting as a "surrogate state" in the Middle East, a phenomenon captured in a statement made to researcher

Katarzyna Grabska by a Sudanese asylee in Cairo: "We live in a country of UNHCR" (Kagan 2011a: 1; Grabska 2008: 87). Most significantly, the 1954 memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the GoE handed responsibility for RSD processing from the state to UNHCR-Cairo, a responsibility which stretched the office's resources and placed it in the dual role of protector and determiner of refugee status (Kagan 2011a: 15, UNHCR 1954).

4.5 Foreground

Following the forced eviction, the GoE advised UNHCR-Cairo to find new premises "as soon as possible" and "in a non-residential area" (UNHCR15: 26). Within the year, the office moved from its central location in Cairo to the satellite called 6th of October City (see map in Appendix A). The relocation made accessing the office more difficult for most asylees, and was widely perceived as a move to prevent further refugee protest, although protests continued (Jensen 2011, Danielson 2012).

Not long after the 2005 forced eviction came a sharp rise in migration from Cairo across the Sinai into Israel by Sudanese, both asylum seekers and recognised refugees. This movement, often seen as a direct outcome of the protest, grew from less than ten Sudanese arriving in Israel yearly from 2000–2005, to 270 in 2006, to 5,502 in 2009 (Human Rights Watch 2008; Afeef 2009: 9; Yacobi 2011: 52; UNHCR 2011a). From 2007 such migration started to grow amongst Eritreans – fewer than ten Eritreans arrived in Israel yearly from 2000–2007, but 4,426 arrived in 2008, and 11,852 arrived in 2009 (UNHCR 2011a) – although research has found this flow largely comes not from Cairo but through the south of Egypt from Sudan and Ethiopia (Afeef 2009: 10). Indeed, as Eritrean migration to Israel rose, it declined amongst refugees from Cairo – perhaps due to Egypt's practice of shooting migrants crossing its border into Israel, rising kidnappings and extortion of refugees in the

Sinai itself, or reports of difficult conditions from those who did make it to Israel (Furst-Nichols and Jacobsen 2011; Greenwood 2012; Human Rights Watch 2008, 2010).

In Cairo, the end of the Mustafa Mahmoud protest also marked the rise in collective organizing by some Sudanese youth into groups, sometimes identified as ‘gangs’, united by social solidarity and the cultural practices of American hip-hop style (Lewis 2009, 2011; Forcier 2009). This activity, by several hundred youth, attracted attention not only for its visible affiliation with global, rather than Sudanese or Egyptian, youth culture, but also for a rise in violence between its members, including the stabbing to death of one young man outside the 2007 World Refugee Day celebration in Cairo (Forcier 2009: 6). However, due in part to peacemaking efforts by group members and service providers, such violence has largely subsided in the years since.

A more major shift in the population of refugees in Cairo came with a large arrival of Iraqis, starting in 2006 (Pascucci 2012; Yoshikawa 2007). By 2011 Iraqis made up almost 20 per cent of those of concern to UNHCR in Egypt, and were largely recognised as refugees by the office (UNHCR 2011b). The new arrivals, although more affluent than many refugees in Cairo, brought particular psychosocial needs, a new challenge for service providers (Pascucci 2012: 50). Although some have since been resettled or have returned to Iraq, most remain living in Egypt, albeit in a state of uncertainty about their futures (Minnick 2009; El-Shaarawi 2012).

The 2011 formation of South Sudan, following decades of civil war and a referendum for independence in which many Cairo-based refugees participated, signalled a renewed possibility to return for many Sudanese refugees, who make up more than half of Cairo’s refugee and asylum seekers (UNHCR Egypt 2012). In light of limited infrastructure and

violence and conflicts in multiple areas, however, many Sudanese refugees who originated from the south continue to stay in Cairo, waiting until the situation in their new country is less volatile (IRIN 2008; Ahmed 2009; King 2012; UNHCR 2012).

Certainly the most well-known recent change to the situation in Cairo is the 2011 revolution that, starting on 25 January, brought to a world stage some of the very problems raised by the Sudanese protesters in 2005 – arbitrary arrests and detention, lack of legal recourse, poverty – and ultimately brought down the Mubarak government. After a period of instability and army rule, the election of new president Mohamed Morsi represents the possibility of a more democratic future for Egypt and those who live in it.

In the short term, however, the revolution meant a host of new or worsened problems for refugees living in Cairo: immediately, loss of jobs and violence in the streets, and heightened insecurity and xenophobia in the months that followed (IRIN 2011; Lammers 2011; Jones 2012; Sadek 2012; Danielson 2012b). After Mubarak's deposing, refugees of multiple nationalities staged demonstrations at UNHCR Cairo, protesting what they felt was their abandonment due to the office's closure during the revolution (Viney 2011; Farag 2011; Jones 2012; Danielson 2012b).

The problem of legal recourse raised by the protesters at Mustafa Mahmoud continues; as the 2011 survey reports, refugees in Cairo continue to face difficulty or are reluctant to report incidents, and non-Arabic speaking refugees such as Eritreans and Ethiopians are less able to defend themselves against accusations or to report crimes or harassment. Refugees report that the police in post-revolution Egypt are less helpful than before (Jacobsen et al. 2012: 39).

Insecurity at work has also continued to be a problem, due to exploitation amongst employers, corruption in police forces, and refugees' precarious legal positions. Many participants in the 2011 survey of Sudanese “spoke of their livelihood vulnerability, i.e. that they feared being raided by the police and having to pay bribes to keep their businesses and stay out of jail” (Jacobsen et al. 2012: 28). The many who find employment as domestic workers face more insidious dangers, with “little recourse”: in a 2009 survey of 633 foreign-born Cairo-based domestic workers, 35 per cent of Sudanese respondents said that their employers physically abused them, and 15 per cent of Sudanese respondents reported “sexual harassment” which ranged from verbal harassment and unwanted touching to attempted and actual rape (Jureidini 2009: 87).

The allegations of organ trafficking raised by some protesters at Mustafa Mahmoud have also since been documented: a 2011 study estimated the existence of “at least hundreds of Sudanese victims of organ trafficking in Egypt” as well as “numerous others” of survivors originating from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan – cases in which organs have been removed “either by inducing consent, coercion, or outright theft” (COFS 2011: 1, 2).

There have been renewed protests at the offices of UNHCR in 2011 and 2012 by refugees and asylum-seekers asking for resettlement or secure segregated housing. That self-settled, urban refugees should be essentially requesting encampment has been called “a sign of the fear felt” in refugee communities in post-revolution Cairo (Jones 2012: 17).

The need for improvements in the bureaucracy around refugee status and resettlement – as documented in earlier research and demanded by the 2005 protesters – has received attention and effort. However, it remains constrained by institutional funding priorities and

practices, and especially by the Egyptian government's restrictions on refugee rights and increasing use of refoulement and detention against refugees (Kagan 2011a: 4). Since the 2005 protest, changes to refugee services and organising have helped improve the meeting of refugee needs. Service providers have increased inter-agency coordination and communication, as well as greater provision of information for refugees about available services and legal processes. A new organisation provides psychosocial support and outreach to refugees in Cairo. Recent years have also seen the growth of community-based organizations in refugee communities, through which refugees may help themselves and each other (Danielson 2012b: 18-19; Jones 2012: 16).

Recent research has shown, however, that “refugees and asylum seekers lack information about most of the vocational training programs targeting them” (Moghaieb 2009: 30) as well as more generally about rights, services, protection, and legal processes (Danielson 2012b: 11). An over-reliance on site-specific information provision, requiring refugees and asylum seekers to make often frustrating journeys across the city, tends to be the norm amongst service providers (Danielson 2012b: 36). Information, updates, and time estimates regarding resettlement opportunities are especially lacking, to considerable psychological effect (Mahmoud 2009: 3, 95; Danielson 2012b: 11).

Despite the change in leadership, Egypt's policy towards refugees continues to be characterised as one of “benign neglect” (Kagan 2011b: 3; Jones 2012: 16), with both “restrictive legal framework and lack of widespread implementation of existing rights” increasing refugees' reliance on humanitarian assistance (Gozdziak and Walter 2012: 10). This problem is not just structural but is common amongst Egypt's major political parties, whose “ignorance and indifference” towards refugees has been called “the biggest danger to refugees in Egypt”, both presently and for the future (Jones 2012: 17).

Despite the recent boom in civil society activity, its actors, too, have tended to overlook the rights and needs of refugees in Egypt (Sadek 2012: 2, Samy 2009). Civil society's post-revolutionary growth has also created staffing problems for refugee service providers, who must increasingly "compet[e] for staff with mainstream civil society organizations with higher political profiles and often offering higher salaries" (Jones 2012: 17). NGOs have also been put on alert by recent government raids on foreign-funded organizations and increased xenophobia (Jones 2012: 16). In the absence of possibilities for inclusion into Egyptian institutions and regulated employment sectors, refugees continue to rely largely on a system of parallel services provided only to refugees, which "inadvertently contribute[s] to refugees' separation from mainstream Egyptian society" (Gozdziak and Walter 2012: 5).

CHAPTER 5. ‘VICTIMS OF MISMANAGEMENT’: PROTESTER ACCOUNTS OF ASYLUM WITHOUT RECOURSE

In pursuit of understanding the reasons for the protesters’ collective action, this chapter lays out analysis of protester explanations of the problems that gave rise to the 2005 sit-in. These explanations, based on analysis of protester interviews, public statements, and propaganda, can be thought of as the protesters’ ‘diagnostic framing’ which describes a “problematic condition or situation [that protesters] define[d] as in need of change” (Benford & Snow 2000: 615).

Foremost amongst the statements by protest organisers and participants, and thus an issue critical to the resolution of the event, was the topic of recourse. To the extent that the 2005 protest had a central message, this was it: a critique characterised access to help and justice, through both local and international channels, as elusive. Participants described a situation not only rife with problems, but also devoid of accountability: nowhere to safely turn to when things went wrong in Cairo, nobody who would listen, take their complaints seriously, or provide meaningful restitution or help. The government of their host country not only failed to provide recourse, but sometimes perpetrated such abuses. And the government of the country from which they had fled remained a threat even as they sought refuge.

The chapter’s three sections reflect three major sites and channels of recourse or its absence that protesters discussed: Sudan, Egypt, and UNHCR-Cairo. These dovetail roughly with two of UNHCR’s three ‘durable solutions’ for refugees: Egypt as local integration, and Sudan as voluntary return – with the addition of the ‘protracted refugee situation’, via extended dependence on humanitarian assistance in Cairo to describe their

contemporaneous reality (Crisp 2003; Loescher & Milner 2005). But more importantly, protest participants identified these three bodies as loci for their complaints about problems they faced and opportunities they held in exile.

5.1 ‘If we go back we will die’: Sudan and the prospect of return

When people claim asylum in another country, they become dependent on unfamiliar systems of policing, justice, and other governmental complaints mechanisms for recourse for any problems they may face. When they have fled hostile governments, this dependence is heavy, for they are vulnerable to the activities of home government agents in their country of asylum, as well as reliant on host governments for the legal recognition of their asylum claims. But ideally their dependence is temporary, as conflicts resolve and return to home states becomes possible. The people who protested at Mustafa Mahmoud did so at a point in time at which the possibility of return to Sudan had, through recent events, received a boost. Yet those who made statements to media and researchers did not embrace this prospect. They also called for attention to the activities of the Sudanese embassy in Cairo, which they felt were un-checked.

Sudan was thus a key site in protesters’ explanations of their participation in the sit-in, because it was, as they characterised it, not a place to which they could return, but rather the source of ongoing danger. The 2005 protesters had all come to Cairo from Sudan, and most had formally claimed asylum when they arrived in Egypt. The difficulties that had caused their exile, however, were not a central component of the complaints that they raised, nor were the ongoing struggles in their home country. Not one of the points on the organisers’ petition were directed towards Bashir’s regime.¹⁰ One protester did recount the

¹⁰ This approach was in marked contrast to protests by Sudanese asylees in Cairo in subsequent years which would take direct target at the crimes of the Sudanese government. Those that I attended – including the

experiences that had prompted her decision to leave her home in Sudan — the killing of her father and grave injury of her mother by Sudanese forces in a village, then her own beating by police and civilians in Khartoum (FMRS24) – but cited these as evidence of her sense of nearly universal insecurity, rather than as the focus of her complaints. Instead, protester descriptions of their collective action expressed concern with what had happened or was happening in Sudan insofar as it impacted the possibility of return. A man who participated in a post-protest group interview with a FMRS researcher stated,

If we go back we will die. It is a lie that the Sudanese government will take care of us. If there are internally displaced Sudanese in the country itself who are still in tents without any solutions to their problems, how does anyone expect us to believe that the Sudanese government will be able to solve the problems of Sudanese refugees outside Sudan? (FMRS7)

With this question, he rejected the possibility of safe return to Sudan outright. In the year before the protest, however, this possibility had become a more tangible prospect.

5.1.1 'Compulsory voluntary repatriation' and fear of return

Following an April 2004 ceasefire agreement between the Sudan Liberation Movement, the Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement, and the government of Sudan, UNHCR-Cairo ceased its Refugee Status Determination (RSD) processing for all Sudanese asylum applicants, whether from southern Sudan, Darfur, or elsewhere. Instead, the office provided both newly arrived applicants and those who had started the process with a yellow identity card that entitled them to the limited, temporary status of “asylum seeker” (UNHCR15: 11).

World Refugee Day celebrations at the American University in Cairo in June 2006 and, in 2011, at the Sudanese embassy, in Tahrir square, and at the Cairo World Trade Center building – all either challenged Sudanese government actions directly, or called for greater attention to ongoing injustices and aggressions in Sudan.

Within a year of the ceasefire – 9 January 2005 – the twenty-two year long civil war between northern and southern Sudan was formally ended through a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Nairobi. Despite the CPA, however, instability and human rights violations in Darfur and southern regions of Sudan continued, and the prospects of repatriation were less than promising. Nonetheless, UNHCR-Cairo increased emphasis on the prospect of return for Sudanese asylees in Cairo. As well as suspending RSD, the office began a concerted “dialogue and dissemination of information” amongst Sudanese communities in Cairo about return to Sudan, and offered funds to cover travel to Khartoum for those who wished to go (Gomez et al. 2005b).

Rejection of UNHCR’s vision of recourse through return was a central tenet of the protest at Mustafa Mahmoud. In explaining this rejection, protest organisers suggested that the office was exerting undue pressure in this direction. The issue was important enough to be the first point mentioned on the protest lists. In a play on UNHCR’s phrase, “voluntary repatriation”, the Paper list characterised UNHCR’s programme as sufficiently forceful as to be “compulsory”: “the Sudanese refugees object the UNHCR programme of compulsory voluntary repatriation”. Spelling out the form of this pressure in greater detail, the Revised list charged that UNHCR had been “withholding assistance and services from recognised refugees or those receiving temporary protection or group protection with the aim of forcing them to voluntarily repatriate”. The Damanga list similarly suggested that the office was “emphasizing the return of Sudanese refugees *rather than* providing them protection” (emphasis added).

Protest lists denounced also UNHCR’s suspension of RSD interviews, requesting their resumption, and asked that the agency reconsider the cases of those Sudanese it had previously determined not to qualify for refugee status – a status that ensured protection

from *refoulement* – the forcible return of refugees to their countries of origin – to Sudan amongst those who held it. Given *refoulement*'s illegality under the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the protesters' allegations that UNHCR's programme of repatriation seemed more compulsory than voluntary no small charge, as Lauren Fouda has explored (2007).

5.1.2 Too close for comfort: Sudan's presence in Egypt

Protesters placed emphasis on Sudan not just as a place to which they could not safely return, but also as a source of insecurity in their lives in Cairo. Many expressed concern that Sudan's close relationship with the Egyptian government might increase their risk of getting sent back to Sudan. Worse still, some said, this relationship allowed intimidating activities of staff of the Sudanese embassy in Cairo to go unchecked.

The connection between Egypt and Sudan was cited in two versions of the protest lists as a basis for Refugees Voice's rejection of the possibility of local integration for Sudanese asylees in Egypt. A 2004 agreement between Sudan and Egypt to enable greater privileges and freedoms for citizens moving between the two countries, the 'Four Freedoms' agreement, was cited as a particular concern: Refugee Voices asked that UNHCR not refer to the agreement as justification for either the repatriation or local integration of Sudanese refugees in Egypt.

One demonstrator's post-protest explanation of the event's forced eviction expressed similar uneasiness with perceived inter-governmental closeness:

For sure it's [the breakup was] a conspiracy between the Sudanese government and the Egyptian government since they both want us sent to Sudan. The Egyptian government wants refugees out of their country and the Sudanese

government doesn't want to look bad by the people who fled their regime.
(FMRS6)

In this characterisation, government interests had colluded against the safety of Sudanese in Egypt, with fatal results for some of the protesters. On protest lists, the threat posed to asylees by Sudanese government agents within Egypt was a point unto its own. It appeared on the Paper list as a request that UNHCR "protect Sudanese refugees from the Sudan national conference personnel." The Damanga list suggested more specifically that Sudanese refugees in Egypt were in danger of assault by embassy and National Congress Party staff, and that such staff were "working against the interests of the Sudanese refugee community" in Egypt.

A 36-year-old woman, Betty, who I interviewed on 28 January 2006, illustrated a fear of Sudanese embassy activity that extended out of Africa. She recounted the experience of her nephew, who had moved to Moscow, Russia, to study. Upon arrival there, however, he was "detained for 10 days" before being returned to Sudan, where he faced further persecution by Sudanese police (FMRS24). In describing her nephew's ordeal, Betty emphasised the "strong relationship" between Sudan and Russia (FMRS24). She then concluded with the point of her account of her nephew's experience: "And so, we don't feel safe anywhere, in Moscow or Khartoum or here in Cairo" (FMRS24). Represented thus, the activities of the Sudanese government abroad created danger for Betty and her family on a global scale. After flight from multiple locations, they sought refuge in Cairo, but in exile, the Sudanese government remained a source of fear.

In light of this vulnerability, joining the 2005 protest was, in Betty's words, the only option that remained to them: "we didn't feel safe anywhere except in the park" (FMRS24). This sense of insecurity was not the sole product of Sudan's activities abroad, however. The

spectre of their government's Cairo embassy aside, why did the Sudanese protesters characterise Egypt as such an unsafe refuge?

5.2 'We don't feel secure in Egypt here': Egypt in the protesters' words

In Egypt, as throughout the MENA region, hospitality is a widely valued social and cultural practice (Chatty 2013). As one of the original signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Egyptian state affirmed its commitment to offering asylum to those who seek it within its borders. The peoples of the countries now known as Egypt and Sudan are ancient neighbours, with mutual traditions of hospitality that go back millennia. In narratives of interviewed Mustafa Mahmoud protesters, however, worries about the Sudanese government were eclipsed by greater difficulties of life in Cairo. Daily survival raised not just challenges but insecurity; the city in which protesters hoped for shelter harboured new dangers instead. Egypt's systems for security and justice were themselves feared, or at best inept. Rather than a place of hospitality or asylum, the Egypt of protester accounts was largely unwelcoming, unsafe, and unjust.

5.2.1 'We object the local integration'

Although local integration is one of UNHCR's three intended "durable solutions" for refugees, alongside voluntary repatriation and resettlement, Egypt's reservations on the 1951 Convention and practices towards refugees mean that local integration is, in practice, "nearly always impossible" (Kagan 2011b: 5) in Egypt. The second point on the Paper list rejected UNHCR's suggestion that the local solution was one that Sudanese refugees

should consider, stating: “we object the local integration.” This slogan was also painted on a banner hung at the park.¹¹

In statements to researchers during and after the sit-in, multiple protesters stated plainly that poverty had, one way or another (or more often, in many ways), made their lives in Cairo untenable and prompted their participation in the demonstration. Whereas the problem of poverty was shared by Egypt’s urban poor, other problems they cited were unique to other intersecting aspects of their lives in Cairo: their statuses as asylees, which restricted their access to education and jobs; as foreigners, which barred their access to the cheap, rent-controlled housing available to Egyptians; and as visible minorities, which heightened their risk of being targeted in racist or xenophobic discrimination, harassment, deportation, or attacks.

These differences compounded protester insecurity and struggle for survival in the city, which they described in multiple ways. Education for children was not only beneficial for the future but for the present, relieving parents of childcare during class hours and allowing them to work during this time – but private education takes a financial toll that many asylees are hard-pressed to meet. Reliance on private, unregulated housing and the informal job market both increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse by landlords and employers. And discrimination in workplaces and public, including by authorities, had wide-ranging impacts., from psychosocial problems (Mahmoud 2009) to the prevalence of rickets in Sudanese children whose parents forbid them to play outside for fear of harassment, resulting in vitamin D deficiencies (Harrell-Bond 2006, Giri 2007).

¹¹ Not surprisingly, this point was not well-received locally; see for example Nrumah 2005.

The lack of educational opportunities for young asylees in Cairo had been well documented in the years before the protest (Afifi 2003; Briant & Kennedy 2004). Although Egypt has public schools, asylees were rarely able to attend them, both at the time of the protest and thereafter, due to over-enrolment and fees. Private schooling varied in cost and quality, but was generally out of reach of most asylees (Azzam et al. 2006: 10-11, 13-14). Amongst protesters, parents repeatedly raised the issue of access to education for their children (Schafer 2005a: 11). Adam, a middle-aged father who had lived in Cairo, holding a blue card, since 1992, stated of his children: “I try to educate some of them in cheap private school because we are not allowed to put our children in public schools” but explained that, given his family’s livelihood problems, this effort was difficult (Nadim09).

Housing was a further major obstacle to integration in Cairo raised by protesters. As with education, asylee experiences of housing in Cairo differed from those of poor locals. Egyptian rents were rent-controlled, but foreigners living in Egypt depended on an unregulated private housing market, with rent prices set at each landlord’s discretion, resulting in massive differences in housing costs between the two groups. In the absence of a standardised or regulated system, foreigners could also be “subjected to arbitrary increases in monthly payments and may be evicted without just cause” (Azzam et al. 2006: 15).

As a result, protesters reported sharing flats with multiple families so as to manage monthly rental payments, and many complained of “unscrupulous landlords” (Schafer 2005: 16). In an interview after the protest, a 58-year-old Sudanese woman who had recently arrived in Cairo explained that she joined the protest because she “wanted to join to solve [her] problems”, specifying: “I don’t have means for the rent” (FMRS20; for further examples

see Schafer 2006: 8). Regular rent required regular income, however, which many Sudanese asylees struggled to gain.

Sudanese asylees in Cairo faced employment prospects that also differed, to their detriment, from those of many Egyptian nationals. Egypt's restrictions on the 1951 Convention effectively barred work for asylees, making their position on the job market the same as undocumented immigrants (but also, indeed, many undocumented Egyptians). Lacking work permits, they had to find work in the unregulated job market, and manage the insecurity, vulnerability, and difficulties which such work created (Azzam et al. 2006: 13; Sudanese Development Initiative 2003; al-Sharmani 2004). Protesters speaking with FMRS researcher Schafer about the reasons for their participation in the sit-in described multiple aspects of work problems in Cairo. These problems include

factories [where] they were working in 15 hours a day for 10 LE [around 1 GBP] per day, or poor treatment by employers who pay them less than their Egyptian counterparts and force them to work longer. Many quit their quasi-jobs in the weeks or months before the protest citing problems with employers. [...] One man explained that after working 20-hour shifts, his employer would only pay him half his earnings; the refugee was warned that if he quit he would be turned over to the police for working illegally and "stealing" from the employer. However, most of the people I talked to had no job to complain about. Some could occasionally find work cleaning houses or doing manual labor, but a number insisted they could not get any job (Schafer 2005a: 8–9).

Employers were thus described as exploiting the vulnerable status of asylee workers in many respects, from low wages and long hours, to mistreatment and withheld pay. The shortage of jobs exacerbated the need to put up with such treatment, however, and many protesters had difficulty finding regular work, if any at all. As Schafer reported following her interviews there, in the "long string of problems that people listed when asked why they

were here, lack of employment was often the first” (2005a: 8–9). Economic hardship, in its many dimensions, was paramount in protester lives and their collective efforts in the park.

One protest banner went so far as to declare that, for the protesters, dying of hunger in the park would be preferable to “getting killed from unfairness and poverty” (translated from Arabic by Dina al Shafie). Despite the significance of poverty in the demonstrators’ messages, however, theirs were not simply stories about being poor in the city, nor about the systemic barriers – to education, housing work – that they faced in Cairo as Sudanese asylees. Multiple elements of urban security were described as elusive to them in ways different from Egyptians, making the “unfairness” that the banner decried a further key factor in their problems in asylum in Cairo, imbuing difficulties of poverty with a sense of grave insecurity, as the next section explains.

5.2.2 ‘There is no safety for me here’

In contemporary times, asylum governance exists to ensure the security of those who have crossed borders due to violence or persecution. Yet repeatedly, Mustafa Mahmoud protesters told those who asked about their sit-in that they did not feel safe in Egypt. Betty, for example, told me she had joined the sit-in because she was “afraid of Egyptians in general, especially after my troubles with the police in Maadi, afraid for me and for my children, my family” (FMRS24). The troubles to which she referred followed a street assault in the Cairo neighbourhood of Maadi, in which she was injured and robbed. The attack did not impact her alone, as she noted: “When I had my accident in Maadi, all my other family members were afraid too” (FMRS24) – family members who included her mother, husband, eight children, and other relatives in Cairo.

Other protesters spoke of a sense of insecurity in more general terms. In a speech recorded in the park late in December of 2005, Moses, a man who by then had taken a leadership role in the park, asserted that this feeling was the primary reason why protesters had come to and stayed in Mustafa Mahmoud park: “The first thing is that we don’t feel secure in Egypt here. There is no security in our lives” (FMRS32). A banner hung at the park in which Moses spoke served as a visual representation of bodily insecurity, in this case of children. The banner, written in English, read, “Save our children from Sexual Abuse.” Specifying no further details, the banner suggested that Sudanese children had suffered sexual abuse while in Egypt, a generalised but compelling alarm.

This alarm would fit into the findings of pre-protest research which documented a prevalence of stories, rumours, and metaphors about “the perceived threat to the integrity of the Sudanese body” in Sudanese accounts of the experience of asylum in Cairo (Coker 2004: 401). Perceived threats were mentioned repeatedly in post-protest interviews of people who had participated in the 2005 sit-in as well.

Samir, a thirty-three year old man, who by 2005 had spent twelve years in Cairo, spoke about security in Egypt in the context of his decision to join the sit-in in an interview with three other protesters and a FMRS researcher two weeks after the protest break-up. Samir and the other men discussed stories they had heard of discrimination and abuse of Sudanese in Egypt. Eliding these stories with the violent break-up of the protest, Samir said of Egypt: “I feel afraid, I don’t feel safe. I left my home where there was a lot of killing and there was no safety. Now there is no safety for me here” (FMRS19). Between these sentences lay hope and loss: hope that in leaving Sudan for Cairo, he would find a safe asylum, and hope lost in the Egypt that he discovered instead.

Layla, a single woman who I interviewed after the protest, on 29 January 2006, similarly characterised a fearful feeling of life in her three years in Egypt, while reflecting on the costs and benefits of life in the park. In the sit-in, she said, it was “good to be with so many Sudanese together, especially because the feeling from being in Egypt wasn’t good; Egyptians weren’t treating anyone well” (FMRS25). Like Moses and Samir, Layla spoke of a negative feeling, but her comment was more specific: its source, Egyptians, and their treatment of Sudanese in their midst. This charge seems over-broad, given the range of hospitality found in any group of people, Egyptians included – raising the question of what experiences informed it.

In statements throughout and after the protest, protesters who sat at Mustafa Mahmoud detailed the kinds of treatment underlying a feeling of insecurity pervasive amongst them — from discrimination and harassment to more serious violations (Schafer 2005: 17). At multiple levels, governmental restrictions on asylee rights and social prejudices created insecurities for the 2005 protesters. Sudanese asylees interviewed in 2005 prior to the protest reported feeling “detained and constrained within their own apartments” due to fear of facing the Cairo streets (Grabska 2005: 56).

In a BBC News interview, protester named Nizar conveyed a sense of public threat, stating of Sudanese in Cairo that “we are harassed by the Egyptians even on public transit. They do not want us here” (Sabry 2005). The BBC report followed his statement with that of another person at the park, who said that competition for jobs in a context of high unemployment only worsened relations between Egyptians and Sudanese (Ibid.). Another complaint about street harassment was recounted by a southern Sudanese woman for an IRIN report on the protest, published also in Egypt’s Daily Star. This protester told the

reporter: “You can walk on the street, minding your own business, when someone will suddenly swear at you or beat you for no reason” (IRIN/Daily Star 2005, Nov 21).

A news article for Al Ahram quoted a demonstrator who similarly stated, “We are called names and children make faces with us ... [people] hur[l] racist remarks at us” (Al Ahram 2005, 23 November). In these tellings, individual acts of harassment converged in a general sense of distrust, and a narrative of ongoing persecution of “us” (Sudanese, refugees) by “them”, the people of Egypt.

Beyond discrimination and harassment, some sit-in participants spoke of more critical incidents as evidence of their insecurity as asylees in Cairo. Like Betty, who was beaten and robbed in Maadi, Zara, a married woman who had been in Cairo for three years, and participated in a FMRS group interview following the protest, was attacked while walking in the street one day. When asked why she joined the protest, Zara replied, “A group of Egyptians beat me and broke my leg and stole my money when I was on my way home from work” (FMRS06). A theft and assault sufficient to break a leg would have been a fear-inducing event indeed.

When I first heard such stories, I was naïvely surprised. Upon moving to the city, I had heard that Cairo was one of the safest cities of its size in the world in terms of street crime, despite a prevalence of verbal sexual harassment. After a year in the city this reputation seemed, to me, well-founded – but then my privileged position could not have been more different than that of the protesting Sudanese. A UN report on Egypt the year of the protest stated the country then had a “reputation as being safe from crime”, but adds a crucial caveat noting the commonality of crimes against certain groups, including female domestic

workers (Louise 2005: 13, 52). Sub-Saharan asylees were, unfortunately, one of those groups, and their work sometimes further heightened their exposure to risk.

Indeed, in addition to street dangers, Sudanese protesters employed in a variety of settings reported exploitation and abuse in their workplaces. Of the protest participants who spoke with Schafer about their employment experiences in Cairo, “nearly all”, and especially women who did domestic labour, “spoke of the harassment and ill treatment they encountered daily” on the job (2006: 9). Demonstrators told journalists, too, that “the few [Sudanese] who find jobs end up being abused by their employers” (METimes 2005, 13 Oct). Such abuse might entail the withholding of pay: a protester, Mohamed, who worked for an optician in Cairo, told an FMRS interviewer that when he confronted his employer for not giving him his wages, the employer took him to the police. Mohamed attributed this result to prejudice, saying: “there is too much racism and no respect of humanity in Egypt” (FMRS15).

Some workplace threats described by protesters, however, were considerably more dire. One woman who participated in the sit-in had suffered the loss of her daughter Sara in the summer of 2005. Sara had gone to Alexandria to work in the home of an Egyptian family. After Sara’s mother received word that her daughter was dead, she tried to investigate what had happened. Eventually, she recounted to Schafer, she “found [Sara’s] body in a hospital (morgue), where her organs had allegedly been removed” (Schafer 2005: 17). The mother was unable to determine how or why her daughter had died.

This story hung over the protest, and was literally hung around it; Sara’s photograph appeared on several of the banners surrounding Mustafa Mahmoud in fall 2005 (and is

depicted in the first photo in Appendix D). A 28-year-old Nuba man named Hunud who had then been in Cairo for three years told an FMRS interviewer:

I know friends and neighbours who were slaughtered and we don't know who did this. I know this Sudanese woman who worked for an Egyptian family in the North coast. She died. Her employer claimed that she died in an accident in the swimming pool, but the autopsy showed that she was hit in the head. (FMRS19)

Like Sara's mother's, Hunud's account of a covered-up death suggests an unsafe Egypt, where just going to work could be a dangerous act. Not only the deaths themselves were cause for alarm, grief, and fear: the questions surrounding their deaths suggest an insecurity that extended from individual incidents to the wider functioning and availability of systems of recourse and justice for Sudanese in Egypt.

Disappearances were a matter that protest lists also addressed: all versions of the publicly-distributed protest points requested a search for Sudanese asylees who had, it was said, gone missing since their arrival in Egypt. The Damanga list placed the number of missing people at five hundred, citing Red Cross Figures (Damanga 2005). In addition to the image of Sara, banners circling Mustafa Mahmoud during the 2005 protest showed pictures of three Sudanese men, who were said to have been killed, detained, and disappeared, respectively (pictured on the fourth page of Appendix C). Their photographs were accompanied by questions about what had happened to each of them:

[With photograph] Who killed him? And why was he killed?

Running away from Sudanese detentions to the Egyptian prison.

Where has [name] vanished!? [name] - Refugee- member of the [tribal organization] – disappeared for unknown reasons- where is he now??? (translation of Arabic text by Dina al Shafie.)

The second banner, picturing a detained man, made sardonic comment on the state of asylum in Cairo, raising the irony that he had fled detention in Sudan only to be arrested in Egypt. In asking where people were, why they disappeared, and what had happened, the banners conveyed a message not just of dismay at the respective losses of each of the men, but also frustration at a lack of knowledge or control in the search for legal recourse. Detention and other problems with police and judicial systems in Egypt were a further key dimension of the protesters' description of a state of failed asylum, elevating a situation fraught with host-asylee tension and discrimination into a perilous domain of crime without punishment and punishment without crime.

5.2.3 'Frequently mistreated by authorities'

With the Arab Spring now recent history, the reader will not be surprised to read that Mubarak's Egypt, as described by the 2005 protesters, was a state in which police and judicial practices were at best problematic. Demonstrators described Egypt not only as an unsafe host environment in terms of everyday interactions, but a place in which police, government, and legal channels were also feared. All versions of the lists points circulated by Refugees Voice addressed the practices of the police in Egypt, charging that Sudanese refugees had been subject to arbitrary or unjust arrest, imprisonment, and mistreatment by Egyptian police. The Damanga list argued: "refugees are now frequently mistreated by authorities in their host country." The paper list stated: "we refuse the arbitrary detention for Sudanese refugees without guilty" – in other words, the unjust punishment of people who had committed no crime – and the Damanga and Drum Beat lists both suggested that Egyptian police and security staff ought to receive training about the rights of refugees in the country.

During the protest, participants interviewed by journalists and researchers raised the issue of police mistreatment repeatedly. A Middle East Times story from early in the protest provides an indicative example, reporting that protesters at Mustafa Mahmoud “accused police of routinely harassing them, including arrest and detention for days” (METimes 2005, 13 Oct). This kind of harassment were not just of undocumented Sudanese, but also of those who held the official UNHCR documentation identifying its holder as a recognised refugee or as someone whose application for asylum was in process. The article quotes a protester named Khalid, who claimed: in encounters between asylees and Egyptian police, “police tell us that they do not recognise the UN cards” (METimes 2005, 13 Oct).

Two young protesters who spoke with Stacy Schafer recounted such instances. One, twenty-one years old, had been jailed for three months without charge, eight months before the Mustafa Mahmoud protest. The man’s imprisonment had occurred after “he and a group of friends were rounded up by police” in Cairo (Schafer 2005: 11). He had his UNHCR-issued refugee identity card on his person, and he showed it to the police, but it offered him no protection. The police simply took the card from him, arrested him, and held him in jail (Schafer 2005: 11). When they released him three months later, they did not return his identity documents (Schafer 2005: 11).

The second man, nineteen years of age, was stopped by police several months before the protest in the suburban Cairo neighbourhood of Arba wa Nus, where he had been living for six years after he and his grandmother fled the Sudan to Egypt. The police requested his identity documents and then “proceeded to tear up his card in front of him and taunt him” (Schafer 2005: 11-12). Such stories circulated widely in refugee communities and at the protest at Mustafa Mahmoud. Rather than viewed as the source and enforcers of security in their lives, the Cairo police described by protesters were to be feared, and when possible,

avoided. Protester Mohamed, mentioned above, recounted that when his employer, a Cairo optician, withheld Mohamed's wages and took Mohamed to the police when confronted for payment, this resulted in a court case against not the employer but Mohamed himself – eventually overturned, but an ordeal nonetheless (FMRS15).

Protester accounts of their attempts to get help in the face of street attacks describe similarly unsettling encounters with Egypt's justice systems. Betty, who told of being beaten and robbed of all her documents in the Cairo neighbourhood of Maadi, struggled to gain legal recognition for the crime. She initially "tried to file a report at the police station, but they wouldn't let me" (FMRS24). She persisted in trying to report the attack nonetheless, less in hopes of bringing her attackers to justice than of obtaining official documentation that the crime had occurred: without a police report, UNHCR would not issue her a replacement identity card. Ultimately, Betty was successful: as she stated, "finally, after several tries, they [the police] agreed and I got a police report" (FMRS24). But gaining the report had cost her money, time, and anxiety. Her problems in attempting to gain a new identity card would continue, as this chapter will later pick up.

The unfolding of Sara's mother's attempts to seek recourse was more harrowing yet. As we have heard, Sara's mother explained that she searched for and finally found her daughter's body in a morgue, divested of its organs. Sara's mother continued to probe into what had happened by visiting the Egyptian family who had been employing Sara in their house in Alexandria, but, as she would tell Schafer, the family "only offered her money in exchange for her silence" (Schafer 2005: 17). The mother, suspicious of the circumstances surrounding her daughter's death, refused the offer. Instead, she sought assistance from Egyptian police, as well as from UNHCR-Cairo. Staff at both offices, however, "said they

could not help her” (Schafer 2005: 17). Her attempts to solve and gain justice for the death of her daughter were thus thwarted at every turn.

Worsening Sara’s mother’s anxiety was her belief that the Egyptian family that had employed her daughter would go to any length to cover up her death. At the time of the protest, she told Schafer that she thought the family was “now trying to kill her” (2005: 17), and that the protest at Mustafa Mahmoud was the only place where she could be safe. She therefore hoped for “UNHCR to protect her and to investigate her daughter’s death” (Ibid.). Her participation in the protest was driven both by the great insecurity she felt, and by her continued aspiration that she might yet gain recourse for Sara, whose photographic presence at the park attested to the power of her story amongst sit-in participants.

5.3 ‘Why do we have to give up on the UNHCR?’

Given that protest participants described return to Sudan as an impossibility, and asylum in Egypt as fraught with danger and difficulty, what, then, of that international body that existed in Cairo expressly for the benefit of people who had sought asylum? On present reading as well as at the time of their expression, protester representations of both Sudan and Egypt as places of insecurity and elusive justice align with our knowledge of the countries’ recent histories and governments. At the time of the protest, Sudan’s president, Omar al-Bashir, had not yet been indicted by the International Criminal Court, but his campaigns in Darfur had by then received wide recognition as acts of genocide. At the time of the 2005 protest, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak still exercised relatively unchallenged authority, his fall from power still just over a half-decade in the future. His regime, however, received regular criticism for its violations of human rights and restrictions on political freedoms.

UNHCR, in contrast, is and was mandated specifically to assist those who have survived genocidal campaigns, human rights violations, and political persecutions. It might be expected that its Cairo office would be a haven of advice, support, and respect in an otherwise troubled refuge, helping to mitigate, advocate, and if necessary relocate asylees in need. In an analysis of the complaints of a group of people composed chiefly of asylees, one would thus not expect a majority of their charges to be against the agency created to assist them — especially in comparison to criticisms of Sudan and Egypt. But when demonstrators spoke about their reasons for taking part in the sit-in, their arguably most cutting and surprising critiques concerned UNHCR-Cairo's staff, policies, and practices.

Protester accounts of Cairo's hardships did not just describe difficulties inherent in life in exile in Egypt. Rather, their interactions with the UNHCR office were, as they explained it, making their lives in Cairo harder: worsening suspension and limbo due to opaque, lengthy procedures; heightening frustration due to inaccessibility and staff mistreatment; and increasing a sense of vulnerability by failing to provide needed help.

These critiques of UNHCR should be considered with their context in mind. In a situation where both return and local remedies were viewed with fear, where government policies and socioeconomic conditions placed asylees at risk, and where the national government leaned heavily on UNHCR for the fulfilment of its obligations on asylum under international law, UNHCR's stature in Cairo's refugee communities was significant. The Egyptian government's transfer of responsibility for the majority of the administration of asylum governance to UNHCR meant that UNHCR acted as the primary governing institution for asylees in Egypt at the time of the protest. Furthermore, in light of the protesters' well-founded fear of Egyptian authorities, UNHCR was a sensible target: for all the problems with the office that protesters described, UNHCR-Cairo was a less dangerous

interlocutor than the Egyptian government, and potentially more accountable to international pressure.

But the protesters' criticisms of the office cannot be simply characterised – or dismissed – as strategic. Statements made by protesters during and after the event certainly document their instrumentalisation of humanitarian and legal norms in seeking out wider help. But their accounts first and foremost constitute a substantial body of self-initiated representations of asylees' experiences in attempting to access assistance and recourse in a challenging urban environment. On banners, in protest lists, and in statements by individual protesters, critiques of UNHCR-Cairo's policies and practices formed the core refrain of protester explanations their protest in the park. Asylee status was described not as a source of refuge but, in a context of intersecting dangers, a compounding factor in their insecurity in the city.

5.3.1 'The international organization save us meanwhile we are suffering'

At best, the picture of UNHCR emerging from protester sources is of an office failing in its fundamental purpose, namely the provision of recourse for people who have registered as asylees because they are “unable or unwilling” to avail themselves of the “protection” of their home countries (1951 Convention). At a basic level, at least as arranged in Egypt,¹² this recourse involves the registration and issuing of documents that signify a legal status in the host state, thus protecting asylees from forcible return to their home states. It also entails assisting asylees who have been detained or encountered legal difficulties,

¹² For discussion of the division of governance responsibilities between Egypt and UNHCR, see p. 100.

coordinating and providing humanitarian assistance and services; and, when necessary and possible, identifying and facilitating onward migration.

Of the thirteen points on the paper list of requests distributed at the protest, ten were concerned with UNHCR. Requests on protest lists asked for multiple concessions already in UNHCR's purview, implying thereby that the Cairo office was negligent in its most quotidian tasks. One banner hung at the park asked the seemingly paradoxical question: "For how long will the international organization save us meanwhile we are suffering?"

A point common to the lists was the request that UNHCR immediately register all newly arrived Sudanese people who were seeking asylum. The Damanga list asked UNHCR to do so that the asylum seekers "can begin their application for refugee status"; the November list specified that this would "ensure that they are not deported or returned" to Sudan. Given that the registration of newly arrived asylum seekers was a cornerstone of UNHCR's RSD responsibilities (whether or not they would proceed past the asylum seeker stage of the RSD process), the appearance of this point on the protest lists suggested a fundamental shortcoming in the office's daily practices.

Other list points addressed similarly basic requests, including requests that UNHCR provide protection from Sudanese government agents, help in searching for Sudanese people who had gone missing in Egypt, and special assistance for elderly, disabled, widowed, vulnerable women and unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers. As a public statement by UNHCR-Cairo itself declared— in a press response to the protest, released 30 October 2005 — "some of the demands of the Sudanese demonstrators" were "actually priority areas of concern to UNHCR" (UNHCR04).

Assistance to asylees in detention was one such task characterised by protesters as unforthcoming from the Cairo office. This charge was provocatively illustrated on a protest banner that showcased a newspaper article, photocopied and affixed to a larger sign. The headline of the article, which pictured a young man, read: “From a Sudanese youth to the Egyptian police station: I want my right” (Appendix C). The hand-written poster placed responsibility for the detention of the youth pictured upon UNHCR, charging one of the Cairo office’s senior staff by name: “[Name of staff]- the assistant manager to protection, UNHCR, you lied in stating that you will protect us...” (translations by Dina al Shafie.) Personalising a critique of UNHCR through the case of the young man pictured, the banner suggested UNHCR was responsible for both a failure to assist and a betrayal in promising recourse, with detention in Egyptian prison as the result.

Protesters also cited an absence of help from UNHCR when seeking recourse for experiences of crime. Zara, the woman mentioned above, whose assailants, as she walked home from work, robbed her and broke her leg, then sought assistance at the UNHCR-Cairo office (FMRS06). She had held a blue card from UNHCR for more than two years; however, she explained,

When I complained to UNHCR, they told me to bring the abusers. How am I to bring them?! This kind of treatment is intolerable. I was at the protest (FMRS06).

Through this explanation, Zara directly linked her frustration with this response from UNHCR and resulting lack of legal recourse for her assault with her decision to join the sit-in.

5.3.2 *'I could not get them to help me and my children'*

In addition to not freely offering help, the UNHCR-Cairo described in protester statements was also unresponsive and inaccessible when approached directly. Repeated visits to the office entailed the loss of time to work, transport costs, and travel across a potentially risk-filled urban environment (see also Danielson 2012: 21-22, Anderson 2012). According to protester statements, however, the UNHCR office engaged in passive rebuttal of asylee requests for assistance, wasting asylee time and resources, and increasing their sense of vulnerability, frustration, and mistrust of the office.

A FMRS interviewer's notes on a group interview recorded its participants as having stated that "no one answers their requests at the UNHCR" (FMRS06). Though this generalisation may seem extreme, such views were repeated through protester interviews. When asked why she had protested, one woman answered: "I wanted to join to solve my problems. The UNHCR still did not see my case" (FMRS20). Demonstrators spoke of UNHCR's inaccessibility with regards to multiple situations in which they approached the office: in the case of loss of documents; in general inquiries; in the RSD process; and in resettlement processing.

Betty told an account of the first kind of situation. She had, as discussed previously, finally obtained a police report after being assaulted and robbed in Maadi. She then travelled to UNHCR's Cairo office to apply for a new identity document, with her police report in hand. On arrival at the office, however, security staff posted outside did not allow her to enter or make an appointment.

When she returned the next day, she was again refused entry and unable to make an appointment. She continued to return to the office, as she explained in her interview, with no luck, for more than a week.

All together I went to the offices every day for eight days trying to get an appointment; I also wrote a written request but nobody responded (FMRS24).

Speaking with others waiting at the office, Betty heard that UNHCR “only let in a limited number of people a day” and that early arrivals would be at an advantage (FMRS24). She decided to sleep in Mustafa Mahmoud park so she could be there when the doors opened the following morning. This strategy worked and finally, after eight trips to the office and a written request, she was successful in gaining an appointment time.

Betty’s disillusionment with the office while attempting to redress the theft of her yellow card increased each of the eight times she returned. The day of her appointment happened to coincide with the beginning of the sit-in at Mustafa Mahmoud park. When she arrived at UNHCR for her appointment, she

saw that there was a group of people in the park, including two women with their children. I asked them what they were doing there, and they told me they were protesting. I was already having problems with my flat, so that night I came back with my eight children and husband and mother, and went and joined the protest and stayed at the park. (FMRS24)

Betty and her family thus joined the sit-in, and would stay for its duration. Although in her interview Betty stated that the “major, most important reason for [her] being there” was her general fear of Egyptians (FMRS24), her narrative account of the circumstances preceding her participation in the protest illustrate a manifold sense of insecurity: not just a physical assault, but also housing difficulties, trouble with police when she tried to file a report, mistreatment outside the UNHCR office, and lack of access to the office when she needed

a replacement copy of the card that would prove her identity and ensure her legal status in Egypt.

5.3.3 *'We refuse the unfair procedures used by the UN office'*

At best, protesters charged, UNHCR-Cairo represented an absence of recourse; worse yet, the office avoided and rebutted direct and repeated requests for help. And at worst, demonstrators accused the office of active mistreatment of Sudanese asylees, through disrespectful treatment, corruption, and unfair practices and policies.

Two versions of the protest lists included points about the ways that staff of UNHCR-Cairo, and security staff posted outside the entry, treated asylees seeking help at the office. First, they asked that “the UN withdraw the security personnel at the UN office” – staff who, the Drumbeat list specified, were “blocking our entries into premises” (Damanga and Drumbeat lists).

Secondly, the lists called for better treatment from UNHCR staff. The Drumbeat list argued that the UNHCR “should stop using provocative word and bad attitudes and start treating us with respect that every human being expect from others”. On the Damanga site, this point called on higher levels of the United Nations to correct the behaviour of its Cairo staff: “We ask that UN instruct the personnel of its Cairo office to treat the refugees humanely and with basic respect”.

These suggestions were reflected in demonstrator interviews during and after the 2005 event. In her conversations with protesters in the park, Schafer reported that a “general mistrust of the organisation [wa]s made abundantly clear. That UNHCR staff are rude to refugees and unresponsive to their inquiries and needs is an opinion everyone shares”

(2005: 13). Although this generalisation reads as extreme, amongst sit-in participants, the characterisation of the attitudes of UNHCR staff as problematic was widely held.¹³ Betty spoke of the ubiquity of this view while tying it into her own experience approaching the office.

I have only been in Cairo six months, but I heard stories from everyone about problems with UNHCR, and then I went eight times to the office, and found the officers yelling at me. (FMRS24)

Her comment referred to another aspect of her frustration with the office. In her eight attempts to access UNHCR-Cairo to request a replacement for her stolen identity card, security staff had repeatedly shouted at her. She explained:

There was one officer who was nicer; he was short. The one who was tall was very bad, his name was [name]. One of the times I went, the tall one, [name], shouted "Go, go, stay away" at me and the other people who were trying to get appointments, and the police shouted at us. (FMRS24)

Office staff, she charged, had not just failed to provide recourse and protection in the face of her assault, but had themselves verbally mistreated her – and had furthermore colluded with nearby Egyptian police to drive away those attempting to approach the office.

Alongside staff mistreatment, allegations of corruption in UNHCR arose from 2005 protesters. One protester, a thirty-four year old man who had been in Cairo since the year 2000, made this charge in a 4 January 2006 interview. According to him, some protesters at Mustafa Mahmoud held “evidence of files which had been copied inside the UNHCR and then later sold to other Sudanese refugee claimants” (FMRS13). He believed that

¹³ A former UNHCR staff member who I interviewed in 2011 characterised two of the security guards who worked outside the office at the time of the protest as “real jerks”.

protest leadership had brought this evidence to UNHCR in their negotiation meetings with office representatives during the protest.

Such evidence did not surface elsewhere in sources consulted for this thesis, but the man's charge was not the only protester suggestion of shady handling by UNHCR-Cairo. The Damanga list inferred that the office was holding onto and unfairly distributing assistance amongst asylees, and asked "that the UN distribute aid from other organizations to the refugees in need, promptly and without discrimination". Vaguer yet was an allegation emblazoned on one of the park banners which stated: "We are waiting for you ... to discover the corruption of the UNHCR" (translated from Arabic by Dina al Shafie).

As this section has laid out, protesters represented not only Sudan and Egypt but also international humanitarian assistance as having failed in multiple respects to offer them recourse for their problems. In looking "forward to the refugees solution", as one protest banner read, the prospect of onward migration from Cairo was, therefore, paramount.

5.4 Conclusion

Drawing from texts, interviews, media statements, and visual material created by the Mustafa Mahmoud protesters, this chapter studied the overall arc of the protest's critiques. Taken together, the protesters' strongly-stated accounts of harassment, discrimination, disappearances, deaths, abuses, unfair treatment, waiting, and injustice converged as a narrative of victimhood and insecurity, and of contexts devoid of safety and justice. These accounts of recourse's absence in their lives as Sudanese asylees in Cairo were considered in three sections, which aligned with three spheres central to protester statements: Sudan, Egypt, and UNHCR-Cairo.

Sudan was not the focus of protester narratives, but was nonetheless, for two reasons, an important spectre in their description of asylum in Cairo. First, protesters described Sudan as a place to which they could not and would not return, and thus characterised perceived pressure from UNHCR to repatriate as a threat to their security. Second, protesters invoked Egypt's friendliness to Sudan as undermining their sense of Cairo as a safe place of refuge. Many more aspects of life in Cairo contributed to this disillusionment. The protesters' wide rejection of the prospect of local integration was founded in a multiplex sense of insecurity: in housing, education, employment, and in the streets of Cairo, demonstrators represented asylum in Cairo as unfair, difficult, and unsafe. In protester narratives, Cairo's local authorities, when not themselves a source of harassment or danger, offered little recourse for crimes. The one other major institution on which they relied, the UN Refugee Agency, however, was depicted as an inaccessible and unhelpful office which subjected asylees to lengthy and confounding processes, unfair policies, and sometimes ill-treatment.

The cumulative message of protester statements was therefore not simply an attack on UNHCR-Cairo, as some literature has suggested, but a deeper critique, encompassing multiple facets of asylum governance as it was configured and practiced in Cairo at the time; above all, calling attention to the absence of recourse and accountability within it. These problems, protesters said, prompted their sit-in – but would also plague their efforts to seek a remedy through the protest. The very expression of these critiques through a public protest, however, challenges popular views of refugees as silent victims, as the next chapter will further evince.

CHAPTER 6. ‘FORWARD TO THE REFUGEES’ SOLUTION’: PROTESTER EXPLANATIONS OF COLLECTIVE GOALS

To explain the 2005 sit-in protest requires attending not only the problems that prompted protesters to act, but also their ultimate aims. This pursuit of what collective action framing calls ‘motivational framing’ – analysis of the outcomes that motivated protesters to take action (Benford & Snow 2000: 617) – links the situation discussed in the last chapter with the protesters’ collective goals. Ultimately misunderstood, these aims drove both the protest and the eventual decisions of protesters to continue to occupy Mustafa Mahmoud park until forcibly removed.

In protester accounts, asylum in Cairo offered little recourse for the protesters’ problems, with one exception: the possibility of migration elsewhere, for which the most promising channel was resettlement, the selective migration of individual refugees, which was managed by UNHCR, the IOM, and foreign embassies. The hope for resettlement was widely cited by protesters as a motivation for their sit-in, although not simply as an easy ticket to wealthier countries, as UNHCR-Cairo suggested at the time. Instead, protesters sought relocation to “anywhere in the world” that would offer qualities of asylum that had been elusive in Cairo: respectful treatment, recourse, and safety.

Protesters also sought input into the governance of asylum, in order to improve their treatment and the decision-making therein. Yet as the protest proceeded, the sit-in itself provided some of the outcomes protesters had hoped to gain. The chapter proceeds in three parts, presenting analysis of protester discussion of resettlement, of improvements to their role in asylum governance, and of the benefits of protest participation itself.

6.1 Recourse via resettlement

For many Sudanese who viewed both return to Sudan and continued residence in Cairo as unviable, the possibility of moving elsewhere was a highest hope (Fanjoy et al. 2005). Unlike return to Sudan or integration in Egypt, onward migration was a future possibility protesters had not yet experienced, and one many spoke of with optimism. Regional migration, however, was dangerous and uncommon. The situation in Libya was little better than in Egypt, and passage to it treacherous. Israel, which viewed Sudanese nationals as enemy aliens, was not yet viewed as a possible refuge (although, following the protest, that would change). Sea travel to Europe from Egypt or Libya was, at the time of the protest, rare (Hamood 2006: 26-28; for more recent such migration, see Andersson 2014; Lucht 2011).

Programs of resettlement, on the other hand, had for some years offered Sudanese refugees safe passage to other countries, from which they delivered remittances and success stories to their compatriot friends and family in Cairo, Sudan, and refugee camps in the region (see Fanjoy et al. 2005; Riak Akuei 2005; Eggers 2007). Over the first half of the 2000s, however, resettlement from Egypt remained static despite growing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers there (Grabska 2006a: 295).

Resettlement quotas are regularly set by the governments of resettlement countries in the global North, which notify UNHCR of the number of people (often of certain nationalities) it will accept for resettlement from a given country; UNHCR then puts forward resettlement candidates accordingly. Surprisingly, however, given the number of people wanting resettlement, the office does not always meet quotas set by resettlement country

embassies¹⁴. In fact, an American embassy memo, released by WikiLeaks, documenting a 2009 UNHCR-Cairo briefing meeting with donor country representatives noted that “UNHCR staff in Egypt do not view resettlement as a good option because, like the Government of Egypt, they fear resettlement could attract African refugees to Egypt. This leaves repatriation as the only durable solution for most refugees” (United States Embassy Cairo 2011). Although the logic behind this fear is flawed, as Michael Kagan has explained (2011b: 30-31), the leaked memo suggests the reasoning behind UNHCR-Cairo’s decreasing emphasis on resettlement from Cairo.

For Sudanese refugees in Egypt, however, resettlement offered the only safe channel for onward migration, except for those few with the wealth or personal connections to migrate through education, work visas, or private sponsorship. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of resettlement in the rise and fall of the 2005 demonstration at Mustafa Mahmoud. Protester statements on resettlement provide insight into its role in the protest as a possible but problematic alternative to local asylum, and into the characteristics and qualities of refuge and recourse which they hoped, through their sit-in, to gain.

6.1.1 An airlift to the West?

The hope for resettlement was sometimes used to discredit protesters, however. Contemporaneous responses to the event insinuated that, rather than based in legitimate complaints about problems with asylum in Cairo at the time, the protest was motivated primarily by its participants’ wishes to move to wealthier, Western/northern countries. Early in the protest, a UNHCR-Cairo press release charged that Sudanese in Egypt sought refugee status primarily as a “corridor to a new life in America, Australia or Canada”

¹⁴ Interview with service provider in Cairo, 2011.

(UNHCR04). This three-fold suggestion – that Sudanese asylees were chiefly economically motivated, that they thus desired resettlement to the global north, and therefore “misused” the refugee system as a way of accessing such migration (UNHCR04) — was not entirely groundless, but was nonetheless a source of some frustration amongst sit-in participants.

This suggestion was repeated in many reports of the protest during and after the event, though they lacked quotations from protesters in support of the claim. A brief BBC report at the end of December 2005, for example, summarised the protesters’ demonstration as entirely concerned with relocation. Titled “Sudanese seek Western refuge”, the report opens by encapsulating protester motives as “hope to be resettled to other countries.” The caption to the article’s lead photograph, picturing several protesters, reads: “some of the protesters have been waiting years to go to the West” (Plaut 2005). Documents and images from the 2005 protest, and interviews with its participants offer, however, a more complex view of the protesters’ hoped-for goals. Through statements and text, protesters conveyed a range of representations of resettlement’s probability, locations, and potentialities.

Some protesters referred to resettlement directly as their primary goal and motivation for joining the sit-in. An unnamed man interviewed following the protest, for example, said that his wife had taken part in the demonstration “because she hoped to be resettled” (FMRS23). On the basis of this hope, she spent the greater part of two months in the park, sometimes away from their two infant children.

A man named Abdul who had come to Cairo from the Blue Nile region in 2002, interviewed on 4 January 2006, revealed his hope that participation in the sit-in would prompt resettlement procedures while describing his reaction to the build-up of police around

Mustafa Mahmoud park on the night of its eviction. Abdul had participated in the protest along with his wife, brother, and two cousins. He explained:

When I saw all the police surrounding us I thought, as other Sudanese around me, that they came to help with the resettlement process. People usually get resettled during the night, don't they? I thought that the buses would bring us either directly to the airport or to a camp where they would do all necessary procedures before finally bringing us to the airport. (FMRS11)

In this description, Abdul and the protesters he was with thought that the preparations for eviction were in fact preparations for resettlement screening, and that participation in the protest and presence in the park would result in migration out of Cairo, and possibly out of Egypt altogether.

Many protesters moved out of their flats entirely to join the protest, shedding or moving their possessions to the park, both due to existing problems with landlords and accommodation, and the hope that the protest might result in relocation (Danielson 2008: 95-98). One woman protester explained that she had joined the protest on the assumption that it would result in migration, stating: “we sold all of our belongings and we were expecting that the doors would open for us, and that's why we joined the sit-in from the start” (Mahmoud 2009: 109). That the woman had gone to such lengths is indicative of a strong conviction indeed (see also photographs of protester suitcases and belongings in Appendices D and G).

Although some demonstrators plainly stated – enacted, through their relocation to the park, enacted – the expectation that their sit-in would result in resettlement, this hope was not ubiquitous. The statement of a fifteen-year old girl named Abok, recorded by FMRS researcher Laura Maxwell after the eviction, reveals disagreements about the possibility of

movement, in her description of discussions between her and her mother in the protest's final days:

I and my family were there in Mustafa Mahmoud garden for 3 months. I used to spend my time there but sometimes I went back again to our flat to wash my clothes then back to the garden. Before the Egyptian police attack the garden by one day, it was Wednesday, my Mum was there the whole day and she came back to our flat very tired.

At 1.00 am someone came to our flat and said that there is some thing going on in Mohandeseen, may be there is traveling. My Mum phoned by her mobile phone a lady who is a relative of us was there in the garden. She confirmed for her that there is something going on in Mohandeseen.

My Mum said may be there is traveling. My Mum decided to go there; I told her don't believe this news, there is no traveling but she didn't listen to me. We collected our clothes in the bags and went to Mohandeseen (FMRS01).

As a result of the promise of possible movement – of ‘travelling’– Abok and her mother gathered their clothing in bags and returned to the park in the middle of the night, in spite of Abok's scepticism whether such movement would actually occur.

Indeed, not all protesters saw resettlement as a realistic possibility. Participant responses to Schafer's questions about resettlement suggest that many were less than certain whether their collective actions would result in such migration access. Recounting a conversation with a woman protester at the park, one of a group of women Schafer was meeting with, about her reasons for joining the sit-in, Schafer wrote:

I ask her if she, too, wants to be resettled. ‘Of course (taba'n)’, she acknowledges, but adds that she knows this will never happen. She and others in the group laugh and shake their heads when I follow up with a question as to whether any of them were told they would be resettled if they came to the demonstration; apparently it was silly of me to even think that they would be naïve enough to believe such a rumor. I would get a similar response from each group that I broached this question with. (2005: 15)

Despite variance in agreement about the likelihood of resettlement amongst protesters, protest banners and lists were consistent in their evocation of migration as an ultimate solution to the problems of asylees in Cairo. In such a hypothetical relocation, where would protesters wish to go, and in search of what?

6.1.2 'We did not insist on going to Western countries'

UNHCR and media accounts offered an easy explanation of the protesters' goals: relocation to the West, for a better life. Protester statements, in contrast, offered commentaries on prospective migration that were at once more varied and reflected more critically on the governance of asylum, in Cairo and beyond. None of the different versions of the protest lists specified where in the world an alternate country of asylum might be located. Individual protesters suggested that any number of countries would be preferable destinations over Sudan or Egypt. Particularly remarkable in light of European discourses about the desirability of EU countries for sub-Saharan migrants, I found only a single record in which a protester specifically mentioned Europe or a European country as a sought-after destination.

Abdullah, who took part in a FMRS group interview, argued that the protesters' desire for relocation from Cairo was logical in the light of the circumstances there, and were more modest than many reports had made out. In his 14 January 2005 interview, he stated:

The reason why we refused local integration, because the basis does not exist. We can never become citizens in Egypt and we face racism. We were ready to be resettled to Benin and South Africa, anywhere that had safety. We did not insist on going to Western countries. (FMRS20)

“Anywhere that had safety” and in which Sudanese people would not endure racist treatment could, in Abdullah’s explanation, include other countries in Africa, especially those who had signed the Organisation of African Unity Convention (FMRS20).

In discussing possible alternatives to Cairo, some protest participants compared their situation in the city unfavourably to that of Sudanese living in refugee camps:

a number of [protesters] expressed interest in refugee camps in other African countries and lamented how unfair it was that UNHCR did not give them the same attention as their fellow refugees in Uganda or Kenya. (Schafer 2005: 12-13)

Not only did these protesters characterise asylum in countries neighbouring Sudan below the Sahara as more desirable than asylum in Egypt, they also suggested that they would rather live in a refugee camp than in urban Cairo. In their depiction, camp life offered a different quality of attention from UNHCR than that they had found as urban asylees. Given the extensive critical research documenting the difficulties of life in refugee camps, this suggestion seems less than realistic. However it is remarkable that not only did these urban refugees suggest they would have preferred to live in a refugee camp than in Cairo, they also created a self-governing camp as part of their protest.

UNHCR-Cairo’s own tally of stories circulating around the protest also discredited the “airlift to the West” explanation for the protest’s appeal. The office’s post-protest report devoted several of its 35 pages to documenting reports about rumours circulating within the Sudanese community in Cairo. UNHCR-Cairo staff recorded 21 rumours concerning “what people in the park were being told or believed” that staff had heard in meetings with Sudanese and NGO workers over the course of the protest and through which, the staff worried, people were being “induced” to participate in the protest (UNHCR15: 19, 18-21).

Amidst this compilation of the protest's wildest rumours, UNHCR's Cairo staff did not find evidence to support their charge, made during the protest, that the protesters joined the sit-in primarily to gain "‘relocation’ to a western country" (UNHCR05). Many of the rumours recorded by office staff did concern resettlement: on 20 October 2005, NGO staff reported to UNHCR having heard stories that "a plane would be coming at the end of the month" to relocate the protesters, and that "only people in the park could be resettled" (UNHCR15: 19). On 24 October, NGO staff told RO-Cairo staff they had heard rumours that "persons scheduled for resettlement must wait in the park" (Ibid.).

These stories were echoed in report to UNHCR on 16 November of rumours "of planes coming to take people" and rumours "people were currently being resettled by IOM because of the sit in", and then again on 23 November in reports that leaders had told protesters that "planes were coming in a week" (UNHCR15: 20). Although the prospect of a plane landing amidst the high-rises that surrounded Mustafa Mahmoud Park was unrealistic in the extreme, the few destination countries mentioned amidst the rumours in UNHCR's report were not far-flung. The closest the rumours came to Europe was a story reported on 24 October that "persons in the park will be resettled to Turkey" (Ibid.: 19).

Another rumour recorded was simply that "there would be resettlement to an African country" (UNHCR15: 20). Most intriguingly, one church reported having heard that as a result of the protest, "ships were coming to take people to Guatemala and Nicaragua" (Ibid.). Despite the office's public imputations that protesters aimed for wealthy states, the round-up of rumours in its post-protest report included no promises of impending resettlement to Europe – or, for that matter, elsewhere in the global north.

6.1.3 Resettlement as recourse: anywhere in the world where ...

Rather than a destination in the global North, protesters repeatedly stated that *any* country in which they could live safely would be preferable to asylum in Cairo or return to Sudan. On protest banners, migration was represented as a last resort, barring local improvements to the conditions of asylum for Sudanese in Cairo. One banner hung at Mustafa Mahmoud in autumn 2005 demanded: “Solve our problem or send us to another country.” Another called for “an urgent solution for the Sudanese refugees or move them to another country.” The protest lists made the same point, similarly not mentioning particular regions or countries as destinations but calling for the “transfer” of Sudanese asylees from Cairo if no local remedy for their problems could be found.

Protester explanations of this wish for migration illuminated qualities they sought in a hoped-for, imagined future space accessed through resettlement. The Paper list specified a country “where there is no discrimination”. The Damanga list suggested the relocation of Sudanese asylees to a place “where they will be more effectively handled”. This suggestion was made to a finer point on the Revised list, which suggested that Sudanese asylees be moved to a place “where their refugee status would be determined in a more clear and transparent way”. The lists echoed protester complaints about discrimination in Cairo as well as about the existing governance of asylees in Egypt, suggesting in no uncertain terms that the refuge and assistance that protesters had found in Egypt, and the way that it was managed, was wanting.

Individual protesters’ descriptions of an imagined alternate country correspondingly stressed their treatment, societally and bureaucratically. Not surprisingly, the qualities they sought mirrored those with which the protest had raised complaint. In light of Egypt and Sudan being “impossible” for the protesters, one woman protester stated: “We just want to

move to a third country, where we can be treated as humans” (Mahmoud 2011: 282-283).

This treatment was a problem for which resettlement could offer recourse – a way out.

Some protesters offered explanations which referred not just to respectful treatment but also to basic safety. Mustafa, for example, who had been in Egypt since early 2004 and was still awaiting the outcome of his asylum application, and participated in a group interview with Zara stated: “We want to go anywhere in the world where we will be protected” (FMRS06). In his post-protest interview, Samir, the protester who explained “I feel afraid”, stated at the same time: “We hope the international community to take us to any place except here and Sudan” (FMRS19). In these accounts, protesters did not specify a specific destination, but rather the qualities of safety and protection that they sought through the protest, and in migration’s prospect.

Other protesters expressed hope for relocation with critical reference to Egypt’s limits as a host country. Leigh Sylvan, a FMRS researcher who visited the protest on several occasions, wrote that demonstrators she spoke to argued that “it made no sense for Egypt, with limited resources for its own population, to accept refugees” (fieldnotes, on file). The protesters who mentioned to Schafer their wish to move to a refugee camp said also that they hoped to go to “any country that would respect their human rights or where UNHCR would provide entirely for their needs” (Schafer 2005: 12). In this latter point – help through humanitarian assistance – the economic aspects of security are pronounced.

Yet as the statements above demonstrate, both the protesters’ openness to a range of relocation alternatives, not simply wealthy countries, and their own statements about asylum in Cairo and its alternatives suggest that their visions of resettlement had multiple

dimensions. In particular, protester discussions of what they hoped to gain from the sit-in invoked notions of safety and respect in their treatment, both socially and governmentally.

6.2 Recourse via political recognition and political participation

Through their appeals and their occupation, the 2005 protesters demanded to be acknowledged and respected as a political force within the governance of asylum in Cairo. Protesters also explicitly argued that they should be allowed a greater say within asylum governance. The demonstrators' public messages addressed four major governance areas in particular: local integration, UNHCR's RSD practices, its decision to suspend RSD and encourage return for southern Sudanese, and resettlement practices. Not surprisingly, these policies and practices corresponded to the major groups of problems discussed as reasons for the protest in the last chapter. Through their demands and statements, protesters thus attempted to both directly influence, and to expand their *ability* to influence, asylum policy and practice.

The first asylum policy which protesters attempted to influence was that of local integration, mentioned earlier. Two versions of the protest lists took this policy to task with specific arguments for why it was not a feasible prospect: Egypt's lack of national legislation on asylum; the country's lack of political freedoms as well as social services; its economic conditions; and cultural, ethnic, and religious discrimination faced by Sudanese in Egypt.

Individual protesters, too, argued against the local integration policy. One man explained its impossibility because in Cairo, he said, "the Egyptians exploit us. There is no sense of humanity. They believe we don't deserve work" (FMRS7). Adam, who discussed the difficulty of accessing education for his children above, asked:

How can they talk of local integration if we have no place to live? We are not allowed to work. There are no work opportunities in the first place. We cannot even secure the food. I have 7 children. ... Sometimes I receive irregular aid from Caritas [a charity]. This stopped totally since June 2004. They said we have no money. I decided to join the protest. Maybe this would help. (Nadim09)

Protest participation was, as he described it, a political act: a public criticism of governance actors whose “talk of local integration” seems to foreclose the inclusion of the perspective of those with lived experience of asylum in Cairo.

Protesters sought also to register their input into the way that UNHCR-Cairo conducted refugee status determination processing. One woman who participated in the sit-in said that one of her goals in doing so was to “protes[t] the illegal ways in which UNHCR processed the applications” (FMRS25). The public protest lists, with their many points critical of UNHCR, detailed multiple aspects of the office’s RSD processes with which they took issue, as discussed in section 5.3. They characterised UNHCR’s status determination criteria as “unfair” (Paper List, Damanga List) and “condemn[ed] the way the UNHCR process Sudanese Refugee status” (Drumbeat List).

The Revised List called for “abiding by international standards in the refugee status determination process and that it be carried out in honesty and transparency.” Most lists also denounced what they characterised as discrimination towards Sudanese refugees: two stated that UNHCR practiced such discrimination *amongst* Sudanese ‘by ethnicity and region’, rather than considering each RSD application on its own merit, and another list referred to discrimination and segregation *between* Sudanese and other nationalities.

Protesters relatedly raised complaint about UNHCR’s rejection of some applications, and the difficulty of appeal in these instances. Those who felt their applications had been erroneously turned down “spoke passionately about the need to have their cases revisited”

(Schafer 2005:11). Some protesters with “closed files” told Schafer that their cases had been mishandled because the office had changed its standards over time, suggesting that others who had fled “the same regions with the same problems [but] who arrived after them were at least given yellow cards” (Schafer 2005: 12).

In such cases, protesters called for a fairer appeals process. One protester whose application for asylum had been rejected stated that he had “pleaded [with UNHCR] to open his file many times with no response whatsoever” (FMRS06). All versions of the protest lists requested that UNHCR review and re-open the cases of Sudanese asylees whose asylum claims had been rejected, and to allow people to appeal their rejections.

A third policy area which protesters sought to influence regarded UNHCR-Cairo’s encouragement of voluntary repatriation and 2004 suspension of RSD processing for all Sudanese in Egypt. Protesters disputed both the office’s estimation of the proximity of peace in Sudan and the possibility of return. The Revised list rejected repatriation on the basis that the 2005 CPA was unsound due to Sudan’s “ruling party’s manipulati[on of] the national party in implementing the peace agreement with transparency.” The Damanga list argued that return was unviable due to “lack of security” in Sudan, “rising violence in Darfur”, and the “still precarious” situation in southern Sudan, noting: “even the UN is warning that the government of Sudan is not ready to deal with large numbers of returnees.”

A Refugees Voice member interviewed in December by an Egyptian English-language newspaper stated of the CPA that there is a “widespread conviction among the Sudanese that this is just a political peace forced by the United States” (Mazza 2005 - Egypt Today December). Another protester told a journalist: “What the UNHCR fails to understand is that peace isn’t just about the agreement [because] there are more factions involved than

just the government and the SPLM/A [the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army]" (IRIN/Daily Star 2005, 21 November). People who had recently arrived in Cairo from Sudan, he said, reported that return was simply an impossible option, until or unless "the criminals are tried, the mines are removed and the infrastructure is rebuilt" (Ibid.).

Relatedly, protesters renounced UNHCR-Cairo's 2004 RSD suspension and called for the office to resume RSD interviews for all. The suspension still allotted yellow cards and asylum seeker status to new applicants and those whose applications were in process, which made them eligible for limited services and protection against deportation, but it also rendered them ineligible to be referred for resettlement. Given the importance of resettlement in light of the poor prospects for local integration or return, this change was significant. Hence the Drumbeat list requested that "UNHCR resume processing refugee status and *immigration* for all Sudanese refugees" (italics added), a phrasing in which RSD and the prospect of migration out of Egypt are summarily linked.

Such migration was the fourth governance issue in which protesters sought political influence. As discussed earlier, protest lists referred to resettlement as an alternative to improvements to asylum in Cairo; one version also called for reform of the way that resettlement was processed. The Damanga called on UNHCR to "quickly restart refugee processing and expedite resettlement procedures for those who have been accepted as refugees." Many protesters expressed hope that their sit-in might result in an increase in the number of resettlement places by countries which offered them. And some protesters who *had* been recognised as refugees and were in the resettlement pipeline – by all accounts the "lucky ones" – suggested that the resettlement process was so exclusionary and opaque as to have prompted their participation in the sit-in.

A protester from southern Sudan interviewed 2 February 2005 described repeated and considerable efforts to gain information about the progress of his resettlement case:

In May 2003 they [UNHCR] gave me a resettlement appointment for January 2004. When I went for my interview they took my appointment slip and my blue card. Then they came back and said "Go home, we will call you." Until now they didn't call me .(UNHCR14)

Between this perfunctory interview and the time of his statement to FMRS, the man had been waiting for a year to hear any further information from UNHCR-Cairo. During this time he pursued updates on his case in person, by email, and by paper letter delivered into the mailbox that UNHCR had set up at Sakakini church on the Nile island of Zamalek.

I wrote many letters of complaint. I emailed them and put them in the UN box in the Zamalek church. Nobody answered me. I emailed them and went there by myself two times. No one would talk to me. The security would not let me in. (UNHCR14)

Through the protest (and the attention it afforded, which ended up including that of FMRS), the man sought attention to the Cairo office's silence and rebuttals during his resettlement processing.

Adam, the father quoted earlier who had arrived in Cairo in 1992, similarly described unsuccessful attempts to gain information from UNHCR-Cairo about his resettlement case. In the year 2000, the office told him he was due to be resettled to the United States, and that they would thus pass his file on to the Cairo office of IOM, and post the outcome of his case on a UNHCR information board which was updated weekly. This meant that to be sure of the outcome, he would have to travel repeatedly across Cairo to see if his name was on the list. However, Adam said,

my file never found its way to IOM. Until today. Every time I asked they would

tell me: “Look for your name on the board. We publish the names every Thursday. If you do not find your name, submit an appeal.” I went dozens of times and submitted dozens of appeals and did not receive one reply. (Nadim09)

In the meanwhile, Adam struggled to survive and provide for his family in Cairo, increasingly frustrated with UNHCR. When asked why he joined the sit-in he told of these attempts to reach the office, and stated, with bafflement and frustration: “I don’t know what to say. I don’t know why I am here. This is unforgivable” (Nadim09).

Layla, the woman I interviewed on 29 January 2006, joined the protest due to her own problems in the resettlement pipeline. She had a disability that restricted her mobility, and within three months of her 2003 arrival, UNHCR issued her a blue card signifying her status as a refugee. In light of medical needs, UNHCR also told her she was in the pipeline for resettlement to a third country (FMRS25).

However, over the year and nine months after she received her blue card, she was unable to access any further assistance or information about her case. When she visited UNHCR-Cairo, Layla explained, she “could not even find an officer to talk to, just a security man, and I couldn’t even talk to him for five minutes” (FMRS25). In exasperation, she joined with others to try to make it easier to register questions with the office:

We tried to suggest that they put a suggestion box in the [Mustafa Mahmoud] garden where we could write down our inquiries and give it to them, but they never did. (FMRS25)

Despite her restricted mobility, Layla continued to make trips across Cairo to pursue information from UNHCR weekly for over a year. By fall 2005, however, she had become “disappointed in the office, because I had gone repeatedly for the year, putting in inquiries into my situation, and they never helped me” (FMRS25).

She nonetheless continued her weekly visits in hopes of a change. On one such visit, in early October 2005, things did change, although not as she had expected:

Three days of [after] the start of the demonstration, I went to the office and saw all the people there in the park. I asked what everyone was doing there and they said they all have a lot of problems, and so I went there and joined the protest. I was upset with UNHCR and decided to stay. I stayed until it was broken up. [...] At the protest I asked the people, “Is this legal?” and they told me that they had asked the police that and that it was legal. And so I joined the protest, because I felt I had lost my rights with UNCHR. (FMRS25)

Seeing the protest, and finding problems in common with other protesters, Layla decided to participate herself; she stayed at the sit-in until its eviction. As she explained, her participation was the direct result of the problems she had experienced in the resettlement process. Despite initial recognition by UNHCR-Cairo, her inability to gain further help or audience with its staff, and the start of the protest, prompted her attempts to access the office to take more radical form. Through collective political action, perhaps, UNHCR might change its ways.

6.3 Protest as prefiguration

While seeking out recourse, safety, respect, accountability, and political participation in the ways described above, the protest functioned on multiple levels as what Schafer aptly called “a solution in itself” (2006: 7). Social movement theory has increasingly developed the notion of ‘prefiguration’ to describe “scenarios where protesters express the political ‘ends’ of their actions through their ‘means’” – or in other words, how collective political organisation itself “anticipates or partially actualises goals sought by movements” (Yates 2015: 1).

Over three months, demonstrators camped out at Mustafa Mahmoud park staked out a claim to their own autonomy over space and time, self-organising education, cooking, healthcare,

security, and prayer, and making 'home' for several thousand people in a park in the middle of a traffic circle. They also collectively enacted an idealised 'home' of a Sudan unified across regional and religious lines, and created a system of representation and collective decision-making amongst them. The photographs in Appendix D illustrate their considerable, and in context remarkable, successes in these endeavours.

The extended quote from Layla that begins this thesis (p. 3) describes the high level of self-organisation that protesters achieved. Schafer's sit-in research during the sit-in also documented multiple ways in which the protest itself prefigured the protesters' goals. Despite the diversity of regional origins, ethnic affiliations and religions of the protest, the possibility of living together in the sit-in "in the company of fellow Sudanese with shared hardships is exactly the kind of situation many had hoped to achieve by being transferred to refugee camps" (Schafer 2006: 8). One interviewee stated that the park was like a "miniature Sudan without all the war" (in Schafer 2006: 7).

Another benefit of presence in the park was a sense of safety; living in the park was presented as "far better than previous accommodations in Cairo" (Schafer 2006: 8). Relatedly, the alleviation of pressure to pay rent lifted the pressure for constant work, allowing mothers relief from often difficult working conditions and facilitating more time spent with children (Ibid.: 9). Protesters reported that remarkably, police stationed at the protest's perimeter actually increased the feeling of safety amongst mothers in the park. Betty explained:

The relationship with the police was very good; we respected them and they respect us and they were guarding us; it was very good. That's why we brought our bags and clothes and money to the park; we knew the police were around the park and it was a safe place. If they found children wandering outside they would direct them back in the park, with no problem. (FMRS24)

Furthermore, the protest's cooperative organisation offered distinct social benefits: "for women in particular, the demonstration provided an opportunity for many to develop friendships with other refugees and allowed their children a safe environment in which to play. For many, this was also the first time they learned about the services and resources available to them" (Schafer 2006: 8).

Finally, the provision of medical treatment at the protest – "they bought their own medications and IVs and a Sudanese doctor came frequently to check on the group" – served as a further benefit of park life, given widespread mistrust of the Egyptian healthcare system (Schafer 2006: 9). At the sit-in site, the protesters'

children played together, the women cooked and socialized. Full meals were cooked at the demonstration, some of the children were taught English and Arabic inside the garden in the afternoons. They brought in their own doctor and even their own artists to entertain and teach the children to paint. (Schafer 2006: 9)

The park thus became the protesters' "own protected community ... without the assistance of UNHCR" (Ibid.). In many respects, the protest became a collective act of prefiguration, enacting their goals through the event itself.

6.4 Conclusion

In seeking to explain the protest and its eventual outcome, this chapter has presented analysis of the aspirations that protesters described and enacted through the protest. Barring major improvements to asylum in Cairo, protesters expressed hope for resettlement, and called for increased participation and accountability in asylum governance. The list of petitions and individual protesters detailed procedural matters through which these outcomes could be realised: cessation of pressure to return; acknowledgement of the impossibility of local integration in Egypt, and help with dangers faced in the country;

improvements to RSD processes; more respectful treatment of asylees by UNHCR; and, barring a “radical solution” for Sudanese refugees in Egypt, relocation to another country (Paper list).

These requests were not outrageous; they could indeed be viewed as “legitimate aspirations for a durable solution” within the principles of asylum set out in international refugee law (Kagan 2011b: 35). Egypt, after all, disallows local integration for refugees. UNHCR’s “most common criterion for resettlement referral is lack of local integration prospects” (UNHCR-Australia fact sheet 2004). UNHCR’s RSD suspension had “effectively block[ed] access to resettlement” for Sudanese asylees in Egypt (Kagan 2011b: 27). The protesters’ scepticism of the prospects of peace in southern Sudan was, as it turned out, well-founded, as continued conflict there attests.

Neither resettlement nor governance input, however, are rights. In protest negotiations, government bodies frequently took the protesters’ petitions for both issues as evidence of their confusion, ignorance, and intransigence, rather than legitimate requests. In discussion of the topic of resettlement this response was particularly clear: protesters could not ask for onward migration, governance bodies argued, because it was neither a right nor a possible goal. Instead of attempting to understand and take seriously, UNHCR, and to some extent, Egypt – institutionally preoccupied by deflecting and contesting responsibility for the event – became focused on pointing out what they framed as the irrationality and impossibility of the changes the protesters had requested, as the following chapters unfold.

CHAPTER 7. ON THE DEFENSIVE: GOVERNANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN RESPONSES TO ASYLUM ACTIVISM

The previous chapters presented the protesters' complaints and goals. By identifying or refusing to recognise the protesters in certain ways, governing bodies not only resisted claims for participation, but more broadly distanced themselves from responsibility for the group and their futures. The present chapter turns to examine the responses to the protest by asylum governance institutions, attending to the relations of power into which the protesters attempted to enter, and the ways in which such power was exercised and contested in debates around the event. To do so, I analyse governing bodies' explanations of the protest as instances of political communication through which relationships of authority may be illuminated, a method similar to Ecker-Ehrhardt's 'authority talk' approach (2012: 452).

In this analysis, two sources are particularly important. First, minutes of a 2 January 2006 meeting of the People's Assembly (Egypt's lower house of parliament, which in 2005 had 454 members) record the efforts of thirty-five of its members to submit an "urgent statement" to its head requesting discussion of the 30 December 2005 "evacuation" of the Sudanese protesters (GoE02). The assembly's head attempted to suppress these efforts by restricting statements to no more than two minutes each, noting that these should not be "repetitive" so that "the assembly can discuss other matters" (Ibid.). The transcription of the meeting reveals the internal dialogue of Egyptian officials grappling with their government's response to the protest. It is dominated by an extended statement by the Minister of Legal Affairs which is illustrative of the efforts by higher levels of the Egyptian government to control the state's narrative about the protest within its own leadership.

The second source of particular significance is UNHCR-Cairo's 35-page narrative response

to the FMRS report, which I received as co-author of the latter after UNHCR sent it to FMRS's director at the time (UNHCR15). Though privately distributed, and archived amongst the research materials I submitted to the FMRS Grey Files collection, no publication to date has analysed the document, which sheds new light on the events of the protest, and on the office's attempt to influence public perception of its work and its handling of the event. The sources for the chapter also include UNHCR and GoE press releases, television and print media interviews, transcribed speeches, and meeting minutes; when translations have been used, details, when available, are noted in the text.

Two Cairo-based governance bodies, UNHCR-Cairo and the GoE, took charge of the protest's resolution. Although they were by no means the only participants, UNHCR-Cairo's press statements and leading of protest negotiations positioned the office as the primary authority in public accounts of the protest, while Egypt's positioning of security forces at Mustafa Mahmoud Park, its violent forced eviction of the protesters, and its post-protest explanations left no doubt as to the state's dominant role in the outcome of the sit-in.

The chapter is organised in two sections which reflect the two angles of debate emphasised in initial governance responses to the protest. The first part presents UNHCR-Cairo and the GoE's public characterisations of the protest and its participants, in which struggles over lines of authority and responsibility are evident. The second part attends to discussion – dominated by UNHCR-Cairo – during the protest of where responsibility for the protester's problems lay. The chapter thus sets out initial discussion of governance efforts to establish authoritative narratives about the 2005 protest in the public sphere.

7.1 The Egyptian government: deflection and denial of the protesters' claims

Until the day of its brutal eviction of the 2005 sit-in, the Egyptian government's response to the protest was muted. The Refugee Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicated with UNHCR about the event; a committee comprised of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of International Cooperation members held internal discussions and participated in some of the protest's negotiation meetings; and Egyptian security officers policed the sit-in for its duration (UNHCR15: 23; GoE02). Yet not only did the government uncharacteristically allow the protest to continue un-checked, but during the event, state officials refrained from public condemnation of the event, or even commentary upon it. Instead, in the months until the protest breakup, the government's strategy was largely to "wait and watch" (Salih 2006: 9).

Only after the violent eviction, when international and local outcry forced GoE officials into defensive explanations, did the reasoning behind the state's seemingly disinterested strategy publicly emerge. Through multiple statements emphasising the protesters' legal classification as asylees and the character of their protest, Egyptian government officials repeatedly suggested that the protesters' politics lay outside the state's governance domain. At the same time, state spokesmen pushed protest participants away from the realm of domestic politics by casting largely spurious aspersions on them, limiting the protest's broader sociopolitical impact. In government narratives, the protesters' statuses as asylees and as social outsiders were used like shields, through which their claims to political recognition and participation could be avoided and averted.

The question of whether or not the protesters had been legally recognised as refugees by UNHCR did not appear as a central concern in the GoE's post-protest public statements –

except insofar as their claims affiliated them *with* UNHCR. Officials referred to the protesters as belonging to various legal categories: as “a group of Sudanese refugees” (GoE01); as “refugees” (GoE02); as “Sudanese, some of them with closed files” (GoE06); and as “Sudanese who were rejected a refugee status or who were not registered with the UNHCR” (GoE07). One statement referred to the protesters as “refugees” in its title, and, within its text, as people with “no valid papers” in one sentence, and as “asylum seekers” in the next (GoE04). What government statements did emphasise, however, was the commonality amongst these classifications, namely that they denoted people whose legal recognition, successful or not, depended on UNHCR.

This emphasis on the protester’s asylee status extended into the ways that GoE officials characterised the sit-in itself, and relatedly, the protesters’ motivations and aims. Whether calling the event a “refugee crisis” or simply a “problem”, officials spoke of it as a matter between the protesters and UNHCR, and sometimes also resettlement countries. In each instance, whether implicitly or explicitly, statements suggested that the protesters’ claims were thus not the government’s concern. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release issued the day after the forced eviction, for example, described the protesters’ sit-in as “an attempt to make their voice heard by UN officials” (GoE01).

Some officials suggested that the protesters aimed for removal from Egypt, or more help – from UNHCR – within it. A transcribed speech in the Egyptian People’s Assembly said that the protest had arisen due to “UNHCR[’s] inability to meet some of the refugees’ demands particularly their demand to be resettled to a European country as well as the inability of the UNHCR to provide them with financial and medical assistance.” (GoE02) The framing of UNHCR as the protesters’ target was echoed by Nasr Hamzaouy of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Refugee Department several weeks later; he explained:

“The problem started when 20 Sudanese, some of them with closed files, went to the UNHCR asking resettlement to another country” (GoE06).

Other statements depicted the protesters’ demands as targeting not resettlement or assistance, but RSD itself. A letter from the Egyptian embassy in London to the UK parliament gave this explanation of the situation:

A number of [Sudanese in Egypt] have no valid papers and these include Sudanese nationals whose refugee request had been denied by the UNHCR, and those categorized by the UNHCR as "asylum seekers" who consider Egypt to be a transit country while and until a third country accepts their asylum request. When their requests are declined, the asylum seekers are at a limbo: they do not want to go back to Sudan, yet they are unhappy about their stay in Egypt; their transit country. They do their utmost, including through exerting public and media pressure, in order to bring positive responses to their initial requests. (GoE04)

The protest, the letter claims, is “a clear example of such a predicament”, in which asylees attempted to fulfil their “initial requests” for recognition as refugees by UNHCR (Ibid). In an interview broadcast on Egyptian television, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abou el Geit, presented the drivers of the protest in the same UNHCR-centric light:

The problem is that some Sudanese came to Egypt with visa and overstayed during which they approached the UNHCR demanding refugee status. On the other hand, the UNHCR has recently announced that it will not register many of the Sudanese in Egypt, as the areas from which they came are not war areas. In September 2005 those Sudanese who were rejected a refugee status or who were not registered with the UNHCR started the protest in the park of Moustafa Mahmoud mosque. (GoE07).

The protesters’ motivation for their sit-in, the minister explained, was their desire for recognition by UNHCR as refugees, spurred by the office’s recent decision to suspend RSD in light of prospective peace in Sudan.

Consistent through government officials’ accounts of the occupation of the streets of their capital city was the insistence that, whether refugees or not, the protesters were asylees, and that their efforts at legal and political recognition and participation were thus UNHCR’s

responsibility, thus falling in the international domain and strictly outside the realm of national politics. As a MoFA official stated: “it is totally a matter that concern[s] the Sudanese and the UNHCR and not us” (GoE06). Notably absent from these characterisations of the protesters’ grievances and targets was acknowledgement or discussion of the multiple complaints in which the Egyptian state was complicit – such as police harassment and arbitrary detention – that protesters also had raised.

The government’s narrative responses to the protest not only deflected any possibility that the protesters might be entitled to a say in Egypt’s governance of asylum, but also attempted to limit the domestic influence of their remarkable event. As “a marginalized group assembled in public, despite laws forbidding public gathering of five or more people” and gaining international attention as a result, the protesters provoked UNHCR but “posed an even larger threat to the government’s authority” (Giri 2007: 194).

Despite important differences, poor, unregistered Cairenes had much in common with the Sudanese demonstrators, from their poverty and illegality to widespread experiences of police violence. To obstruct comparisons and connections between these disadvantaged groups, government officials exploited a social context in which misunderstandings about HIV/AIDs and its provenance intersected with currents of xenophobia and racism, as Minal Giri has importantly explored (2007).

The marginalisation of the protesters through the suggestion that they were morally and physically impure both rationalised the eviction’s violence and transformed it into a strategy of governance over disparate groups living in Cairo – a not-uncommon strategy through which states may attempt to “contain[and] disempower minority populations” (Douglas 1991: 725 in Giri 2007: 179). Following the protest’s break-up, statements by multiple government officials justified the violent eviction of the protesters by framing the

event as a “health hazard” and the protesters as bearers of contagious diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, who threatened Egypt’s social order with alleged drunkenness and criminal behaviour (GoE04; Giri 2007: 179, 184).

By accusing the protesters of immorality and the spreading of disease, the government attempted to dampen any solidarity that might have arisen, thus “isolating the protesters, preventing Egyptians from identifying with them, and thereby discouraging the possibility of similar demonstrations being held by Egyptians in the future” (Giri 2007: 179). With this explanation, the government not only skillfully circumvented the protesters’ claims on the basis of their status as refugees, but also called on racist and xenophobic tropes to discredit them, painting the government’s actions as the upholding of the public health and security of its citizens. Most significantly for the present discussion, the government’s denigration of the protesters mitigated their potential influence on Egyptian society and politics.¹⁵

In sum, through statements which emphasised the protesters’ role as asylees and framed their protest as a call for legal and political recognition concerned entirely with international bodies, especially UNHCR, Egyptian government officials both deflected and defused the protesters’ power. Egypt’s designations of the protesters thus served to deny their right to make claims upon Egypt, remove them from the sphere of domestic politics, and deflect the impact of their collective actions.

7.2 UNHCR-Cairo: disavowal and dismissal

In contrast to the Egyptian government’s response throughout the protest, UNHCR-Cairo’s

¹⁵ This was not altogether successful, however, as many Egyptian activists, bloggers, and citizens nonetheless sympathised with and advocated for the Sudanese protesters. In my 2010-12 fieldwork, multiple Egyptian activists reported that their experiences with Egyptian state responses to political mobilisation made them view the 2005 sit-in in a new light.

reactions were in no way muted. From the event's first month, office staff engaged in an active campaign of public relations whilst undertaking negotiation meetings with protest delegates, Egyptian government officials, NGO staff, and Sudanese community organisation members. This campaign mobilised a seemingly global tendency to mistrust refugees, reminiscent of UK media dismissals of "bogus refugees" (Daniel & Knudsen 1995; Fassin 2012: 110).

In a series of press releases through which the office publicly grappled with the implications of the event at its door, UNHCR-Cairo offered a fascinating, if troubling, view into the relationship between legal recognition and political recognition and participation in asylum. The office's discussion illuminates particularly the polarity between its view of the protesters' claims and their own, the importance of the office as a mediator between asylees and the wider parties to whom protesters appealed, and relatedly the limited space available for the meaningful participation of asylees within asylum governance.

UNHCR-Cairo statements both dismissed the protesters' demands and refuted their requests for political recognition. Although the office's public reaction focused on the protesters' legal classifications, this reaction was one of disavowal rather than recognition. Like the GoE, UNHCR-Cairo focused on the protesters' legal classifications as a way of disassociating from their claims. Dismissing the feasibility of the protesters' wider aims, the office responded as though recognition by UNHCR was the most crucial kind of recognition the protesters sought. Its statements focused discussion of the protest on the question of legal status, thus shaping and containing the parameters of debate. This public campaign steered attention away from the more systemic critiques the protesters had raised and instead towards the processes of recognition — registration, RSD, resettlement processing — over which UNHCR could claim firm authority. Importantly, it also diverted

attention from the role and responsibility of UNHCR's more powerful state partners.

The office repeatedly (and largely wrongly) invalidated the protesters' claims to be refugees, and emphasised that their desired outcomes were outside UNHCR's control. Until the final weeks of the protest, UNHCR-Cairo held very little information about the identities of the protesters, and certainly not enough to establish clear facts. UNHCR-Cairo's own minutes, from a 24 October meeting between office staff and NGO and church representatives about the protest, noted, "Identity of persons involved in the protest largely unknown" (UNHCR02). Office statements later acknowledged that their public statements to the contrary had been a mistake: "Any comments that refugees were not of the majority were not of concern were based on inadequate knowledge and regrettable [sic; I presume the authors meant to write "that refugees were not the majority" or "that the majority were not of concern" (i.e. to UNHCR)]" (UNHCR15: 28). A UNHCR official interviewed after the protest stated:

The assumptions we made were proven to be wrong with time as it was indicated that many of them were under our protection. And what we knew in November and December was different than what we knew in October. In the first statement, we did not know who those people were. (UNHCR14)

Yet in UNHCR's first extended public comment on the protest, an interview by FMRS students published in the online *Pambazuka News* in late October, UNHCR's Senior External Relations Officer, Leila Nassif, disavowed the protesters's claim to be refugees in no uncertain terms: "UNHCR does not recognise the demonstrators as refugees" (Gomez et al. 2005b). The office's first press release, issued 30 October, opened with similarly unequivocal assertions about the protesters' legal statuses:

Firstly, the vast majority of the Sudanese demonstrators are southern Sudanese. Secondly, a great many of them are unsuccessful asylum-seekers (the so-called "closed files") who are not of concern to UNHCR and new arrivals who have registered themselves as refugee applicants with the hope of immigration to

America or Australia.” (UNHCR04)

This depiction of the protesters placed them in three categories which would recur in UNHCR’s discussions of who the protesters were and what they wanted throughout the protest. In its depictions of each group, UNHCR called into question the legitimacy of the protesters’ claims to be refugees and their ability to participate in asylum governance, and instead asserted UNHCR’s authority to name and decide.

7.2.1 Southern Sudanese: controlling decisions about legal recognition

The UN agency’s first press release of the protest charged that “the vast majority” of the protesters were from southern Sudan (UNHCR04). Despite the office’s 2004 suspension of RSD processing in light of the prospect of peace in the region, UNHCR-Cairo continued to recognise south Sudanese as “asylum seekers”, issuing them yellow cards which signified a protected status as persons “of concern” to the office due to the possibility that return to Sudan might turn out to be impossible, should its tentative peace fail to hold (UNHCR15: 33).

Yet in further discussion of the southern Sudanese in Egypt, UNHCR’s first press release of the protest suggested in no uncertain terms that the people in this category were generally not really refugees:

While many of the reasons why southern Sudanese refugees originally left their home no longer apply, substantial numbers of southern Sudanese continue to come to Egypt on a three-month tourist visa and subsequently approach UNHCR to register as asylum-seekers. Objective factors in south Sudan indicate that these people are generally not fleeing persecution or even generalized violence, but economic deprivation. (UNHCR04)

Here again the press release stressed UNHCR’s ability to establish *objective* knowledge, both about the motivations of southern Sudanese asylees and about the situation in southern Sudan. In so doing, the statement both asserted UNHCR’s control of decisions about RSD, and refuted the protesters’ claims to have better information with which to judge the

possibility of return. UNHCR's judgement on the latter is unambiguous: "fortunately, most Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt do not have to endure any longer the difficulties of exile" (UNHCR04).

The reasoning behind UNHCR's argument that most protesters were southern Sudanese had been elaborated by its External Relation Officer a few days previously. Nassif, the officer interviewed, explained the office's position that southern Sudanese protesters' fear of return was one of the major reasons for the protest, stating: "Most refugees are from the South and the situation there appears to be changing. ... Many are unhappy because of the implications of return for their expectations." The sit-in, Nassif clarified, "reflect[ed] the changing situation" in southern Sudan (Gomez et al. 2005b). Her account defended the office's promotion of voluntary return and gently asserted UNHCR's informed expertise on the situation in southern Sudan, noting that "UN reports [on the situation in the south] are circulated on a regular basis and information is continually updated" (Gomez et al. 2005b).

The result of improvements in southern Sudan would mean, Nassif argued, that decreasing numbers of southern Sudanese would be eligible for either RSD or resettlement: "the number seeking resettlement will naturally diminish as fewer and fewer people will meet the requirements" (Gomez et al. 2005b).

UNHCR-Cairo's press releases later in the protest would repeat this emphasis on return. The final sentence of its 17 November statement, for example, a public update on the progress of protest negotiation meetings, concluded that, with the recent CPA in place, "there are now real prospects for the return home of millions of Southern Sudanese refugees and internally displaced persons." (UNHCR07). Through these statements the office implied that even if many of the protesters held the yellow cards that signified protected

‘asylum seeker’ status, they were not likely to do so for long.

7.2.2 ‘Closed files’: rejecting protester criticisms of UNHCR’s RSD procedures

The second categorization UNHCR attributed to the protesters was that of “unsuccessful asylum-seekers” or “closed files”; people who had applied to UNHCR for recognition as refugees but were determined by the office to be ineligible for refugee status, and who had subsequently remained in Egypt without protected legal status. Protesters with closed files told interviewers during and after the event that they felt their RSD cases had been mishandled and should be reviewed, but in UNHCR-Cairo’s determination, these protesters were simply closed cases and thus “not of concern” to the office.

In discussing the protesters’ legal classifications, UNHCR not only stated that most were not refugees, but also repeatedly reminded protesters and those reading its press releases of the office’s sole hegemony, underpinned by law, over the determination of refugee status. A second press release issued by UNHCR-Cairo on 30 October, for example, made point by point refutations of a series of rumours the office had heard about the protests. Both in its structure and its content, this listing exhibited the office’s power to identify falsehoods and establish facts in their place:

Rumour: All yellow cards will be replaced by blue cards.

False. Blue cards are issued only to persons determined to be refugees by UNHCR in accordance with established international standards. (UNHCR05; bolded and italicised emphasis in the original.)

In rebutting this rumoured change in policy, the press release reasserted UNHCR’s control over decisions about who could and could not receive a blue card (and who was or was not thereby recognised as a refugee); it buttressed this control with reference to guidelines that were both “established” and “international”.

In the protest’s aftermath, UNHCR-Cairo further chastised both protesters and others for

disrespecting what Moulin & Nyers have called the office's "monopoly" (2007: 359) on the determination of whether and how the term "refugee" could be applied – indicative of wider tensions between policy, academic, and vernacular uses of the term (Van Hear 2011). The office's Deputy Regional Representative suggested that a misperception that "all Sudanese in Egypt were refugees" had unfortunately "created a feeling among the Sudanese themselves that everyone considers them refugees except the UNHCR" when "in reality, no one can make such decision except the UNHCR. The UNHCR is the only entity that can decide who is and who is not a refugee" (in the interview UNHCR14). The protesters' suggestion that they should be able to give input into UNHCR's RSD procedures, processes, and decisions was, in this framing, impossible: UNHCR, and only UNHCR, was the decider.

Sudanese in Cairo, however, had widely misappropriated the label, the office charged; its post-protest report explained that it was this misappropriation that had prompted UNHCR's initial dismissal of the protesters' claim to be refugees.

Although the demonstrators themselves called themselves 'refugees', UNHCR could not have taken the word as indicative of their status since persons with closed files and persons who have not even approached UNHCR define themselves this way." (UNHCR15: 27-28)

"Where terminology is blurred," the office wrote, "persons see themselves as refugees...and as such have unrealistic expectations of refugee recognition, assistance, and resettlement by UNHCR" (UNHCR15: 4). The result, UNHCR suggested, was that asylees were liable to expect more than they were allowed — or, as in the case of the protest, to ask for rights to which they were not entitled. People with 'closed files' were, in this formulation, neither legally nor politically recognised. Regardless of protester claims that UNHCR had unfairly assessed their applications, the office rejected criticism of its status determination procedures.

7.2.3 “New arrivals”: equating aspirations with deception

Together with southern Sudanese and people with closed files, UNHCR publicly asserted that a third category of “new arrivals” formed “a great many” of the protesters. These new arrivals, UNHCR stated, had undergone registration at the office, the initial step in the RSD process. As such, they would not have yet undergone interviewing to assess their eligibility for refugee status. Yet the office’s first press release during the protest suggested that UNHCR nonetheless knew the reason for their claims: these new arrivals had “registered themselves as refugee applicants with the hope of immigration [sic] to America or Australia” (UNHCR04).

This mention of hope of onward migration was underscored in UNHCR’s statements, providing an interesting view into the office’s framing of the relationship between aspiration and legal recognition. The fact that a migrant might indeed hope, in moving, to find a better life does not in itself nullify the possibility that they might also be eligible for refugee status. Economic concerns are one factor that shapes the trajectories of forced migration (Van Hear 2004: 32). Indeed, many recognised refugees amongst the protesters expressed desire for resettlement out of Egypt, and this aspiration existed alongside their legal recognition without undermining it.

UNHCR’s explanations of the sit-in, however, repeatedly suggested that the event was driven by its participants’ migration in search of economic improvement, and that they were therefore largely not *bona fide* refugees. As if migrants could not both be refugees and want to improve their lives, the office referred to the protesters as “Sudanese refugee applicants, many of whom are in reality migrants seeking economic and social betterment.” (UNHCR04) — asserting UNHCR’s objective command over legal recognition despite its limited knowledge of the protesters’ statuses at the time.

Many of the protest's participants, the office alleged, had applied for refugee status in hopes that it would lead them to gain improved economic conditions and ultimately resettlement. Such a course of action was, the office stated, "obviously a misuse of the international refugee protection regime" (UNHCR04). The suggestion that most protesters were disingenuously exploiting the asylum system cast collective doubt over the credibility of their claims to be refugees and, in light of the dishonesty such exploitation exhibits, over their claims for political participation.

The final paragraphs of UNHCR-Cairo's first press release reiterated its polar presentation of aspiration and refugee status, alluding to the office's experience and comparative knowledge of migration to reinforce its account:

Experience shows that so long as certain basic necessities of life are not met in one's country of origin, the imperative of survival will continue to prompt migration to another country irrespective of the barriers placed in its way or the risks or uncertainties involved. Many of those people who find themselves in such predicament do not fit within UNHCR's mandate of international protection.

However in Egypt, as in many other countries, UNHCR's very presence makes it attractive to label such economic migrants as refugees so that they may get some assistance that is otherwise unavailable from the Government or any other source. (UNHCR04)

The statement then concluded by linking this situation to the demonstration at Mustafa Mahmoud: "It is this often deliberate blurring of the distinction between refugees fleeing persecution and migrants in search of economic opportunities that for the most part characterizes the Sudanese 'protest' against UNHCR office in Cairo" (UNHCR04). The protesters, UNHCR suggested, were not only deceptively referring to themselves as refugees for economic benefit, but this deceptive practice formed the very basis for their demonstration.

The protesters' depiction as dishonest by the very authority charged with assessing their

legal classification threw doubt not only upon the validity of their claims for political recognition but also on the message from which they drew the power of their collective appeal – the message, as stated by one protester, that “We are not migrants. We are refugees” (FMRS19).

For UNHCR, renouncing the protesters as largely people not ‘of concern’ had a crucial effect: it placed them outside the agency’s remit and thus with no basis for demanding input into the office. However, a statement by UNHCR’s Deputy Regional Representative the month after the protest’s breakup tempered the office’s initial disavowal of the protesters and explained:

We did not actually say that all of them were not under our protection; we rather said that they are mixed population. We said also that some of them were not eligible for resettlement and that they are looking for migration. If they are migrants and not refugees, then they are not under our mandate. (UNHCR14)

This explanation illuminates why the office had been initially so forceful in proclaiming knowledge of the protesters’ legal identities and aspirations, even though this was knowledge it did not actually, at that time, possess. The point underlying the office’s statements had been one of mandate: the question of whether or not the protesters were ‘of concern’ to the office. UNHCR-Cairo’s first press release made this point clearly as it summarised its assertions about the legal status of the protesters:

To conclude, the situation of the demonstrating Sudanese nationals, many of whom are not refugees as defined by the 1951 Convention or the 1969 OAU Convention, demands national legislation and/or policy measures outside the frame of refugee protection and indeed of UNHCR’s mandate. (UNHCR04)

If the protesters were not refugees, the statement asserted, then the political, legal, and policy solutions to their problems were not UNHCR’s to find. Protesters had therefore no basis upon which to seek political recognition or participation from the office. UNHCR’s discussion of the protesters’ demands over the course of the protest would similarly stress

that the protesters' claims lay outside the office's control (Chapter Five).

7.2.4 UNHCR on the protest: questioning the need for political recognition

Whether or not the protesters were 'of concern' to the office, its public statements undermined their claims for political participation from an additional angle. By focusing attention on living conditions in Egypt and restrictions on resettlement, the office side-stepped and diverted attention from the protesters' substantive appeals for a greater say in the decisions and policies governing asylum, including their calls for more respectful treatment by the office, while arguing that neither issue was sufficient grounds for political protest.

From its first public statement, UNHCR-Cairo described the protest as centred on the protesters' discontent not just with the possibility of return to Sudan, but also with life in Egypt and their desire to move elsewhere. The first press release's opening line foregrounded three protest banners that related particularly to Sudan, Egypt, and migration — "No to voluntary repatriation to Sudan," "We want resettlement" and "No to local integration in Egypt" (UNHCR04) — rather than any of the many banners critical of UNHCR and calling for wider attention.

After listing the protesters' requests, the statement identified "'relocation' to a western country on grounds that Sudanese in Egypt 'are faced daily with discrimination, violence and violations of their human rights'" as the "the key demand of the Sudanese demonstrators" (Ibid.) The lists of demands distributed by protesters themselves, however, had not framed relocation as a key demand, but as a last resort if their other demands, many of which concerned their treatment by UNHCR-Cairo, could not be met. UNHCR's description of the demand for relocation instead emphasised its basis in problems — discrimination, violence, human rights violations — of life in Egypt.

While in both its first press release and in further public statements the office focused its discussion of the protesters' appeals on their treatment by Egypt as a host country, however, it simultaneously argued that this treatment was not actually so bad. Introducing what would become a trope in UNHCR's explanation of the protest, Leila Nassif called on her UN experience to establish her ability to comparatively assess the protesters' situations: "From my experience as a Protection Officer, Sudanese in Egypt do not face the sort of extreme treatment others experience elsewhere" (Gomez et al. 2005b).

The office's second press release made a similar comparison, stating that "UNHCR is aware that life is difficult for many of these refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, but their situation is not any different from that of refugees in any developing country" (UNHCR05). By suggesting that the protesters' experiences in Egypt were, in a global perspective on asylum, par for the course, the office undercut the power of their complaints and suggested that this reason for protesting was unjustified.

This message was repeated later in the protest from a higher level of UNHCR, when on 24 November, Radhouane Nouicer, Deputy Director of UNHCR's Geneva-based Bureau for Central Asia, South West Asia, Northern Africa and the Middle East, made a statement to protesters in the park. Nouicer stated that UNHCR had both knowledge and sympathy with the protesters: "UNHCR has great understanding for the difficult circumstances in which many of the Sudanese are living in Egypt" but noted that these circumstances were in fact "similar to many Egyptian nationals" (UNHCR08).

Furthermore, Nouicer stated, "refugees in Egypt are guaranteed basic protection, which is not always the case in other countries" (UNHCR08). While the situation of Sudanese in Egypt was similar to that of many Egyptians, he advised, refugees in Egypt were also actually in a relatively good position globally. Nouicer's argument to the protesters

appeared also in a 24 November press release that noted that “Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt continue to benefit from protection and assistance” (UNHCR08).

While tempering the protesters’ complaints about life in Egypt, the office implied that it was these complaints in particular that had motivated the protest’s call for resettlement. In UNHCR-Cairo’s framing, many of the protesters had initially migrated to Egypt for economic reasons, and there, difficult conditions had prompted their pursuit of further migration, via resettlement, to a wealthier country. Many of the protesters, the office stated, had travelled to Cairo

with the hope to find better living conditions, but the economic realities they find in Egypt will surprise many leading them to seek refugee status with UNHCR in the hope that this is the corridor to a new life in America, Australia or Canada. (UNHCR04)

This kind of pursuit of resettlement by people who had no rights as refugees, UNHCR argued, amounted to an outright exploitation of the asylum system.

Office staff suggested that, instead of resorting to protest, even recognised refugees should accept Egypt’s disappointments and simply do the best they could: “I am afraid in Egypt the situation will not get better because the government cannot provide for its own citizens. The Sudanese people should take matters in their own hand and think about coping mechanism” (UNHCR14). UNHCR statements during the protest insisted, however, that such coping mechanisms should *not* include political rallying and collective action that pushed for resettlement.

Overall, the office’s public reaction to the protest selectively responded to the protesters’ calls for participation by focusing on UNHCR-led processes of naming and selection which, it argued, asylees had and could have no authority to influence. The agency’s voluminous public statements refuted the protesters’ requests to be listened to and to be

recognised as a political force in asylum governance. Dismissing the validity of the protesters' claims, the office asserted instead the superiority of its institutional knowledge and established procedures for the management and governance of asylum.

Whether protesters held blue cards, yellow cards, or no cards at all, the office suggested that they ought not complain. In press releases, interviews and reports during and after the protest, in which it discussed the protesters' expansive criticisms of asylum governance in much narrower terms, UNHCR-Cairo directed public attention towards questioning the very legitimacy of the protest. UNHCR's "most explicit authority", as mandated by the UN General Assembly, is to "promote, facilitate, and assist refugee protection by others, principally by governments" (as summarised in Kagan 2006: 13). Given UNHCR's role as official "recogniser" and promoter of the interests of asylees in Egypt, UNHCR-Cairo's reaction to the protest would have a significant effect on the protesters' wider calls for help, and the responses of resettlement country embassies to the protest in particular.

7.3 Locating responsibility for the protesters' problems

As the protest's length stretched from days to weeks, journalists sought explanations for the demonstration at Mustafa Mahmoud: who was to blame for the problems that had prompted Sudanese in Cairo to stage a sit-in? Who was responsible for addressing the problems raised? For answers, journalists turned to a variety of sources, with a notable exception.

Of the twenty Arabic-language and fourteen English-language media accounts I reviewed of the protest before its final day – published mostly in Egyptian but occasionally in international news sources – those which included references to authorities on the event repeatedly included quotes from protesters and UNHCR staff, and several consulted staff

of local NGOs or FRMS.

One article included notes from a discussion with a security officer posted at the park, but otherwise not one article sought comment from Egyptian government officials – perhaps because Cairo-based staff, like local researchers and rights advocates, had (and have) good reason to avoid questioning government strategies. Their authors’ focus on UNHCR fit also into an observed media preference for the United Nations as an authoritative representative of “the victims’ perspective” in humanitarian matters (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012: 468). Still, journalists did not turn to government authorities to ask about the occupation of a public Cairo square, or the state’s aberrational response.

Instead, UNHCR-Cairo was the governance body asked to answer for the protest. From this defensive position, the office responded with extensive attention to public relations, providing multiple interviews and releasing repeated press statements over the course of the event. Accordingly, alongside protesters’ explanations, UNHCR-Cairo’s descriptions of the protest’s provenance and prospects were the main authority cited in public accounts as the event progressed. Its accounts of who was responsible for the protesters’ problems presented a particular and predominant narrative, both of the protest in particular and of the governance of asylum in Egypt more broadly.

This section thus focusses on analyzing how UNHCR-Cairo explained its own role in Cairo, the work of its international partners, and the responsibilities of Egypt and Sudan. The analysis illuminates UNHCR’s emphasis on its institutional legitimacy and limits, as well as the management of its relationships with resettlement countries and, in particular, with Egypt as a host state. Whereas the office’s anti-provocative approach to its institutional superiors was evident its explanations of the protest both during and after the event, its public discussion of Egypt’s role in asylum governance shifted over time, shedding light

on a previously backstage contestation between UNHCR and the state over where responsibility for the protesters – and for asylees in Egypt – ought to lie.

7.3.1 UNHCR and its patrons: tremendous generosity, tremendously limited

UNHCR-Cairo's early press comments countered the protesters' UNHCR-critical comments with assertions of the office's successes, stressing its observation of global guidelines and mandated responsibilities in its work. In an October 2005 interview, UNHCR-Cairo's external relations officer enumerated the people assisted by the office and its partners, noting that its "guidelines to assist recognised refugees are based on worldwide HCR guidelines for refugee assistance in urban areas" (Gomez et al 2005b-UN).

A press release later that month similarly noted that UNHCR-Cairo had had "for many years a sizeable assistance programme for refugees in Egypt to help them meet their basic human needs" of which Sudanese had been the "main beneficiaries" of programming "ranging from income support and health care to education for children, counselling services and skills development projects" (UNHCR04).

In response to the protesters' aversion to the suggestion to return to Sudan, UNHCR-Cairo asserted that "ensur[ing] that the fundamental prohibitions against expulsion and refoulement of refugees are fully respected" was "UNHCR's mandate responsibility" (UNHCR04). The office's authority, such comments implied, was buttressed by the international, humanitarian principles which drove its work.

UNHCR-Cairo repeatedly commented on the office's reduction of its provision of financial assistance to asylees in Cairo except to "extremely vulnerable groups among the needy refugees" (UNHCR05). Its explanations of this reduction illustrate a striking set of themes recurring in its response to the protest. First, the office emphasised the limits to its responsibility to assist refugees in Cairo, on the basis that its assistance programme was

“under tremendous pressure” due to limited funding (UNHCR05).

Secondly, whereas in other respects pointing to global policies, with regard to financial assistance the office did not mention its own explicit, institution-wide efforts to reduce subsistence assistance amongst Cairo’s refugees. These efforts followed from UNHCR’s international Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees (1997), the “central thrust” of which aimed to promote “self-reliance” for urban refugees, despite high-level criticisms of this pursuit (Obi & Crisp 2001: 5).

Rather than acknowledge institutional decisions to limit assistance to refugees in Cairo, UNHCR-Cairo’s statements attributed the reduced assistance to two forces: growth in the numbers of refugees in Egypt, which had indeed more than tripled in the five years prior, and the limits of its funding, which had only grown by fifty-one percent in that time (UNHCR 2000 Global Report: 249; UNHCR 2005 Global Report, 30 June 2006: 278).

Third, office statements thus located responsibility for its financial limits primarily with ‘upward authorities’, namely the donors whose funds had not kept pace with the growing numbers of asylees in Egypt, stating: “the funds UNHCR receives from its donors are simply not enough to provide financial assistance to all refugees” (UNHCR05).

Finally, despite the opportunity the protest would seem to have presented as a basis from which to appeal to those donors for increased funds, the press releases’ statements instead, and in contrast to protester critiques, simply alluded to UNHCR’s budget restraints as evidence of its success in providing programming even under difficult circumstances. Sudanese asylees in Cairo, as the office pointed out repeatedly, “continue[d] to benefit from protection and assistance, despite UNHCR’s serious budget restraints” (UNHCR08, UNHCR12). By emphasising its funding limits, UNHCR-Cairo set out its governance position as constrained but competent, deflecting the protesters’ critiques of its practices.

Despite stated reliance on donated funding and acknowledgement that its funds were critically low, the office did not take the problems raised by the protesters as grounds upon which to call upon donors for help. Early in the protest, UNHCR's Senior External Relations Officer was pressed on this point by FMRS interviewers who asked: "Do you think this demonstration will help UNHCR to convince donors of the need to provide more funds, especially for new arrivals in Egypt?" (Gomez et al. 2005b).

Their question aptly suggested that the protest provided an opportunity for UNHCR to take up the protester's needs to donors who might be convinced of the need for more help for UNHCR's programming. The officer's answer, however, rebuffed this suggestion: "UNHCR always needs/relies on donor funding and countries are tremendously generous. But in my personal opinion, this is not the biggest need. There is greater urgency elsewhere" (Gomez et al. 2005b). With regard to the possibility of seeking more funds, she added, "the answer is 'no' because UNHCR does not recognise the demonstrators as refugees" (Gomez et al. 2005b).

As in the office's initial press releases, this statement used both UNHCR's doubt about the protesters' legal statuses, and comparison of their need to that of other asylees globally, to discredit their claims and complaints. The officer used these grounds to dismiss the suggestion that UNHCR ought to mediate on the protesters' behalf, while gratefully acknowledging UNHCR's reliance on its donors. This passivity is particularly notable in comparison to UNHCR-Cairo's active efforts to involve Egypt and Egypt-based assistance organisations in resolving the protest.

UNHCR-Cairo's discussions of resettlement similarly presented the limits faced by refugees in Cairo as a given. Commenting at length on resettlement in its first press release of the protest, the office stated that it had been "actively promoting refugee resettlement

not only because it serves an important humanitarian function, but also because it is a tangible measure of international solidarity and burden-sharing” (UNHCR04), again noting the legitimacy of its undertakings in terms of global principles.

Instead of suggesting that the resettlement countries it named – USA, Australia, Canada and Finland – take in greater numbers, however, or calling on more countries to run such programmes, the statement praised existing resettlement countries (“thanks to the generosity of...”) (Ibid.). Stating that it was “not possible, though, to resettle all refugees from Egypt”, UNHCR-Cairo explained:

Resettlement places are limited and refugees must meet strict criteria for admission, including recognition under the 1951 Convention. There are therefore some 14,000 Sudanese refugees remaining in Egypt. (UNHCR04)

The office’s explanation of resettlement thus established the limits of managed migration opportunities as fixed, while suggesting that many Sudanese refugees were ineligible for a place. Rather than problematic, as some protesters charged, the office’s programme of resettlement, run in concert with resettlement countries, was, it noted, “a significant achievement by any standard” (Ibid.).

These statements, like UNHCR-Cairo’s comments on its funding, both rationalised and promoted the status quo of its operations in Egypt without concurrent efforts to advocate to wealthier countries to reduce restrictions or improve the assistance and possibilities for refugees in Egypt. Instead, the office’s early public press releases suggest the maintenance of relationships with donor and resettlement countries, as they then were, to be of highest priority.

7.3.2 UNHCR on Egypt: generous but beleaguered

The protest also tested UNHCR-Cairo’s relationship with the Egyptian government.

Initially and publicly, the office's statements offered tentative praise and sympathetic suggestions for its host state. UNHCR-Cairo's first press release of the protest both commended the state's hospitality – "Egypt's response to the protection needs of refugees, whatever their nationalities, has traditionally been generous" – and noted that in terms of the legal perimeters of asylum governance, Egypt was "clearly meeting its non-*refoulement* obligation" (UNHCR04).

Egypt's reservations on the 1951 Convention, which restrict refugees' economic and social rights, were briefly noted – but then dismissed as less important than contextual issues:

The problem is though more a practical one: the economic and social situation prevailing in Egypt, where the demographic pressure is demanding substantial Government investments in public services (including basic education and health care), urban infrastructure, living facilities and employment opportunities. (UNHCR04)

This explanation attributed the challenges of refugees in Egypt to economic and demographic pressures, and Egypt's obligation to prioritise the needs of its citizens – a justification that let Egypt somewhat off the legal hook. Rather than perpetrator of economic mismanagement and corruption that perpetuated its country's economic difficulties, and perpetrator of what has been called a policy of "benign neglect" (Kagan 2011a: 3) which defines the bulk of responsibility for asylum governance outside the state's remit, UNHCR presented the government as the beleaguered subject of popular pressure.

UNHCR-Cairo's Senior External Relations Officer similarly attributed the limits to Egypt's responsibilities in asylum governance to the state's economic position, explaining that "Egypt has tried very hard to fulfill its role, but this may not be appreciated because of its lack of resources" (Gomez et al. 2005b). Repeating her note of Egypt's efforts, she then did acknowledge room for change: "Egypt tries hard, but of course more can be done in terms of receiving, registering and processing" (Ibid.) – a tentatively-worded suggestion that

these processes could be improved.

Another UNHCR-Cairo representative's statement, this time to an Egyptian newspaper, commented more directly on Egypt's approach, stating that since the time of President Nasser, the government had left responsibility for asylum governance with UNHCR – and that UNHCR intended to take up this issue with the government, with the hopes that within two years, responsibility for refugees in Egypt would shift to the state (paraphrased from a translation from the Arabic by Omar Idriss, Al Naba 13 October 2005).

7.3.3 In lieu of local or international responsibility: return to Sudan

While commenting on burden-sharing in asylum governance, UNHCR-Cairo's public discussion of Egypt during the protest rationalised the office's position on what the protesters – and most Sudanese asylees in Cairo – ought to do, namely return to Sudan. The External Relations Officer quoted above argued that Egypt's "economic situation ... excludes the possibility of local integration on a large scale. This leaves voluntary repatriation as the main solution" (Gomez et al. 2005b).

While this conclusion did not address the possibility of resettlement as a (or the) solution in light of barriers to local integration, it did again justify Egypt's negligent role in asylum governance in light of economic difficulties, and emphasise a southern-oriented solution for the protester's problems.

The office's first press-release located responsibility somewhat more directly on this bilateral scale. While praising Egypt's generous hospitality – and undermining the protesters' critiques of that hospitality along the way – UNHCR-Cairo raised the importance of the close governmental relationship between Egypt and Sudan, noting "Sudanese in Egypt have for long enjoyed a status close to nationals on account of a number

of bilateral agreements” (UNHCR04).

On the basis of these agreements and on its assumption of the legal statuses of most of the protesters, the office suggested that

the situation of most Sudanese present in or coming to Egypt today should be approached primarily as an economic migration and development challenge and responses need to be located within bilateral relations between the two countries as established by, for instance, the “Four Freedoms” Agreement. (UNHCR04)

Aside from the “refugee and protection dimension” presented by asylees from Darfur – which UNHCR-Cairo noted that it was willing to address “as necessary and required” – the office identified the protesters’ problems, and responsibility for solving them, as falling outside of UNHCR’s ambit (Ibid.). Instead, it recommended that the protesters’ problems be understood in terms of economics rather than asylum, with their claims thus addressed by Egypt and Sudan.

7.3.4 Neighbouring critics: proximate relationships of accountability

Analysis of UNHCR’s discussions of these relationships shows an asylum governance assemblage influenced not only by UNHCR and host, donor, and resettlement states, but also by the host state’s neighbours – in this case, also the protesters’ country of origin, Sudan – and by civil society and academic advocates whose activities, while locally based, have international reach. The Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme’s research and outreach work on asylum in Cairo was influential both locally and internationally.

UNHCR-Cairo’s public statements have been read as “claiming” of authority over refugees (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 368). Moulin and Nyers, for instance, mistakenly attribute the office’s refusal to appear at an FMRS-hosted seminar where protest delegates would be speaking to the agency’s having been “confounded” by the protesters’ cooption of asylum

policy language (Ibid.).

[The text originally presented here cannot be made freely available because it contains sensitive and confidential content.]

If the office aimed to establish its authority “as the one able to define who and who cannot speak” and the holder of “expert knowledge” (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 370) primarily over any one body, that body was FMRS.

The agency laid out its frustration with the activities originating from FMRS in its post-protest response to the FMRS report, of which, as noted earlier, it was highly critical. UNHCR’s counter-report repeatedly shows the office’s attempts to restate itself as an “authoritative voice” over, or at least alongside, the programme. When emailing the counter-report to FMRS, UNHCR requested that FMRS publish UNHCR’s response on the FMRS website, alongside FMRS’s own report.¹⁶ UNHCR’s report also criticised FMRS for not offering office staff a draft of the FMRS report prior to its publication (UNHCR15: 3).

UNHCR-Cairo’s counter-report not only defended itself in light of the criticisms laid out in FMRS’s report, but asked the university programme to acknowledge its own measure of responsibility for the protest:

UNHCR would like to respectfully suggest that FMRS could also look at its own role (if any) in these events, both good work and failings (UNHCR15: 28)

In particular, UNHCR-Cairo held FMRS responsible for the promotion of the “false expectations” that both reports agreed had contributed to the protest. The programme, the

¹⁶ FMRS’s acting director declined this suggestion, but said that FMRS would publish a link to UNHCR’s report on the FMRS website, should UNHCR publish it on its own website. The agency, however, never did so.

agency charged, had done “little to explain what persons in the Sudanese community could have legitimately expected from UNHCR and what was beyond UNHCR’s abilities or mandate” (UNHCR15: 3).

Furthermore, UNHCR wrote, FMRS had irresponsibly promulgated a “loose” interpretation of refugee law in Cairo:

It is also important to note that many refugees and asylum seekers turn to FMRS as a source of information about their rights. FMRS often uses the term refugee in a very loose sense, which can have dangerous results. For example, persons who do not fit the legal definition of a refugee are not able to access UNHCR protection and assistance; however they may believe themselves to be refugees based on these kinds of comments and therefore have unrealistic expectations and feel their rights are being denied. This use of language should be examined closely, to ensure the refugee and asylum seeker community and the community at large have a more realistic expectation of what they can receive from UNHCR. (UNHCR15: 28-29)

Colloquial use of the term ‘refugee’ effectively threw into doubt the validity of UNHCR’s judgements and processes, threatening the office’s epistemic authority. FMRS’s activities, the office suggested, had overstepped the bounds of its role in asylum governance in Cairo, for “as an academic institution [it] was expected to take a neutral and academic approach rather than an advocacy [approach]” (UNHCR15: 29).

UNHCR-Cairo’s responses to FMRS throughout the protest thus indicate that, as an academic institution undertaking advocacy activities, FMRS played a significant role as part of the wider assemblage of asylum governance in Cairo. While this role was contentious, the extent to which FMRS’s actions – especially its post-protest report – provoked response from UNHCR is evidence of the importance placed by UNHCR-Cairo on defending its authority and institutional legitimacy within multiple relationships of accountability.

7.4 Conclusion

Asylum activism offers a unique opportunity to look at power in asylum governance empirically, for the unplanned public responses from governance bodies it provokes. In a humanitarian context where carefully prepared reporting is the norm (Bakewell 2008: 440), asylum activism is a rare instance in which governance bodies are put on the defensive. The Cairo protest was significant as a major public contestation not only of the political role of refugees, but also of the governance of asylum. This insight, and the opportunity for inquiry it opens up, has been until now mostly neglected.

This chapter explored the politics of asylum governance that emerged in responses to the protest by UNHCR-Cairo and by the Egyptian state. I undertook empirical study of this topic by analysing the political themes evident in the two institutions' accounts of the protest and their activities: what relationships of accountability did they cite? On what basis did they justify their responses? Stepping back, whose authority mattered in these accounts? How was power exercised, and where was it located? The first part of the chapter focused on UNHCR-Cairo and the GoE's public comments about the protesters and their complaints. The second section looked more broadly at UNHCR statements about responsibility in asylum governance.

In describing the roles and duties of itself, of its international partners, and of Egypt and Sudan, UNHCR office statements emphasised its institutional legitimacy and limitations, took a non-provocative approach to its donors and resettlement partners and, while publicly praising Egypt's generosity as host government, pressured the state to take greater responsibility for both the protest and for asylum governance in Egypt in general. This analysis further illustrates UNHCR-Cairo's prioritising of upward authority and maintenance of relationships with donor and resettlement countries, and its attempt to

deflect responsibility.

Consideration of the governance context in which the protest was staged shows that responses to the event comprised not only interactions between UNHCR and refugees, but also between governance institutions, and with other influential bodies. Given the configurations and logics which guided both Egypt and UNHCR-Cairo's governance of asylum, and the struggles between them, the protest's violent end may have been inevitable, but was nonetheless a matter of some debate, as the next chapter shows.

CHAPTER 8. RATIONALISING ‘A SATISFACTORY RESOLUTION’: THE FORCED REMOVAL IN FORESIGHT AND HINDSIGHT

The previous chapter showed how, during the protest, UNHCR-Cairo’s public depiction of Egypt’s responsibility towards the protesters, and in asylum governance more widely, was sympathetic, making relatively oblique critiques of the state’s practices towards the asylees in its borders. Following the protest, however, the office’s report on the event set out an alternate narrative in which blame for the protesters’ problems, and responsibility for their resolution, lay primarily with Egypt. “Many of the demands of the demonstrators,” the report stated clearly, “relate to items which are the responsibility of the government of Egypt and over which UNHCR has no control” (UNHCR15: 3).

Taking the protest as an opportunity to advocate to the state to increase its role in asylum governance, UNHCR, its report stated, had not only requested assistance in handling the protest but had “also asked the Government to indicate what more they can do to help refugees in Egypt and Sudanese in general” (UNHCR15: 16). This question became publicly – and vigorously – debated following the protest’s violent conclusion. On the question of whether the protest ought to be ended, however, UNHCR-Cairo and Egypt government staff spoke in increasing harmony.

The present chapter presents analysis of GoE and UNHCR statements about how to resolve the protest. The first two sections focus on how the two bodies first debated and then rationalised the ending of the protest, and the third explores ways in which official accounts of their handling of the event were set out. To conclude, I summarise the chapter’s findings and consider their significance for advancing existing understandings of the politics of asylum governance.

8.1 Responding to the protest: initial debates

UNHCR-Cairo and GoE discussions of the protest, which occurred during and after the protest with varying degrees of publicity, centred around three interrelated questions: who should deal with the protesters, how to do so, and when the protest should be forcibly terminated. The answers to these questions comprised a curious inversion of expected roles. In Mubarak-governed Egypt, violent and immediate suppression of protests was the norm. In response to the 2005 protest, however, the Egyptian government favoured non-interference and resolution through negotiation. It was the humanitarian agency – UNHCR-Cairo – that pushed for an immediate end to the protest through state intervention.

While UNHCR's reaction to the protest did not elicit surprise amongst Cairo-based academics – the agency's relations to asylees being a frequent focus of critique (Kagan 2011b: 4) – Egypt's unusually beneficent response was a puzzle to those who observed it. Barbara Harrell-Bond noted that the fact that the protest was not promptly ended by Egypt security "was a complete surprise to all observers; it was in such a total contrast to the usual reaction of police to Egyptian demonstrations" (Harrell-Bond 2008: 229). The FMRS report made the more understated observation that Egypt had "show[n] remarkable restraint", noting that, at the time of writing, it was "unclear, and subject to much speculation, why the government of Egypt was uncharacteristically lenient toward the protesters for such a long period" (Azzam et al. 2006: 52, 22).

Despite the curiosity of the government's initial lenience towards the Sudanese demonstrators, however, this puzzle has not yet been empirically explored. UNHCR's extensive post-protest account of its response to the protest, too, has until now remained unexamined. Drawing from new and previously unstudied material, and attending to new questions, the present chapter illuminates the politics underlying the surprising responses

the protest provoked. How did UNHCR justify its repeated and forceful attempts to persuade Egypt to end the sit-in? How did Egypt's officials explain their government's uncharacteristic restraint? After conceding to undertake negotiations with protest delegates, whose help did UNHCR pursue?

8.1.1 'As soon as possible': UNHCR-Cairo's call for state intervention

Although UNHCR-Cairo ultimately undertook a series of negotiation meetings with protest delegates, the office's statements both during and after the protest made clear that negotiations were not its preferred course of action. Rather, and "from the outset", the office officially pursued state intervention: as its first public press release stated, from the protest's start, UNHCR-Cairo "appealed to the [Egyptian] authorities for a peaceful resolution to the situation" (UNHCR05). Given Egypt's consistently violent response to peaceful protesters, this appeal may strike the reader as either overly optimistic about Egypt's capacity for nonviolent crowd control, or an untoward jeopardising of asylee safety by a humanitarian agency.

UNHCR-Cairo's post-protest report, however, both demonstrated no naïvety about the danger police may have posed to the protesters, and underlined unreservedly its attempts to bring about state action to end the sit-in. The office cited concern about the effects of police involvement as it explained its staff's limited contact with protesters in the park: UNHCR staff feared the protesters, and were "concerned that if there was any incident [were UNHCR to visit the park,] the police would intervene to assist and that violence might ensue" (UNHCR15: 16).

The office, however, framed its calls for state intervention as calls for *peaceful* intervention, and projected confidence that this distinction would be heeded by the government. As the office's post-protest report explained, UNHCR-Cairo had

called on government to resolve the demonstration quickly and without violence. ... Several written communications were sent to the Government of Egypt requesting them to act to end the demonstration peacefully as soon as possible. (UNHCR15: 23)

Quoting its memos to the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNHCR-Cairo's report stressed that it had requested the government to "bring to an end the demonstration 'peacefully' and through 'appropriate means'" (UNHCR15: 3). An Egyptian official stated that UNHCR had "left it to us to decide on the procedure, however they asked us to undertake a procedure that respect human dignity and freedom" (GoE06), confirming the office's emphasis on nonviolent but 'appropriate' measures in its multiple initial requests for Egypt to end the protest.

As these requests for intervention were rebuffed in turn, UNHCR-Cairo faced mounting inquiries about the unusual spectacle in front of its office. Its public explanations in response were characterised by an uneasy tension between its wish for the government to end the protest, and the need to congratulate Egypt for its pacific response. As explained after the demonstration, while simultaneously "UNHCR praised the Government's restraint, in that there had been no violence against demonstrators, [the office] sought a non-violent end as soon as possible" (UNHCR15: 23).

An early interview of UNHCR's Senior External Relations Officer serves as an example of the tension in this stance. The interviewer expressed amazement at Egypt's tolerance of the protest, and asked if this could be credited to successful advocacy by UNHCR on behalf of the protesters: "Has UNHCR interceded on their behalf?" (Gomez et al 2005-b UNHCR). In her answer, the officer interviewed did not go so far as to detail the extent of the office's efforts to persuade Egypt to break up the protest. Her answer, however, admitted that UNHCR could not be credited for the government's hands-off response, noting that state officials had "shown remarkable restraint and should be commended", and that "they have

had no prompting from UNHCR” (Gomez et al 2005b - UN).

While noting the government’s understated response, the office’s earliest press releases on the protest reminded both the protesters and the public that the ultimate power over the sit-in’s outcome lay with the state. Such statements combined simultaneous praise for extant nonviolence with reminders of the possibility of future state intervention:

UNHCR applauds the patience and restraint of the Egyptian Government in dealing with these demonstrations, which are illegal under Egyptian law and may not be allowed, therefore, to continue indefinitely. (UNHCR05)

Predicting what might happen as the protest continued, the office continued to underline the legal authority held by the Egyptian state:

The authorities will decide to take the necessary action in accordance with their standard operating procedures for law enforcement and UNHCR will have little power to influence their actions. (UNHCR05)

Referring to the state’s ‘standard operating procedures for law enforcement’ (despite the state’s apparent overturn of such standards with regard to the protest to that point), UNHCR’s public communication thus emphasised the limits of its own ability to control the protest’s outcome.

Out of the public eye, office staff made continued efforts to influence government action, as documents released upon and after the protest’s end reveal. UNHCR-Cairo’s appeals to the GoE argued for state intervention on three bases. First, echoing its wider emphasis on bilateral, local solutions to the protesters’ problems, the office argued that Egypt should help resolve the protest because it had the advantage of being able to mobilise its “excellent relations with the Sudanese political parties and civil society groups” (UNHCR15: 3).

Second, the office threatened to shut (and did subsequently close) its doors, stating in a mid-October letter to Egypt’s Minister of Foreign Affairs that the sit-in was “constraining

[its] ability to meet other refugees” (UNHCR14). As the Minister of Foreign Affairs later reported, in this letter UNHCR told him that due to the increase in protesters they would “close down their office” (GoE06). Third, UNHCR called for state intervention on the basis of the office’s desire for protection *from* the protesters, due to its stated “concer[n] about security of its staff” (UNHCR15: 16).

The government took up this third theme enthusiastically in both its defence of the forced eviction and rebuttals to UNHCR’s call for intervention, as the MoFA’s press release the night after the protest’s end stressed, stating that,

as the number of protesters increased, the UNHCR requested the Egyptian Authorities to intervene and protect the Commission's office. The UNHCR office sent several notes (the last letter was dated 22 December 2005) to the Egyptian government asking for protection. (GoE01)

After the protest, too, the Minister of Foreign Affairs recounted on Egyptian television that in early October, UNHCR had said that there were “1500 Sudanese protesting in the park and we do not know how to deal with them and that their staff is under threat” (GoE07).

8.1.2 ‘We told them that they must deal with them’: Egypt’s response

Rather than break up the protest, whether on the basis of its own law or due to UNHCR pressure, Egypt permitted it to continue. Due to this inaction, some have interpreted the state’s role prior to the breakup as that of “protector” of the protesters as it “guard[ed] the park for three months” (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 359). High-ranking security officers told journalists that their presence at Mustafa Mahmoud was due to the Interior Minister’s directive to protect those in the park and to treat them well (October Magazine 2005: 79; Azzam et al. 2006: 21; Salih 2005: 3).

Not all observers, however, took this “protector” role at face value. A month into the protest,

a low-ranked security officer stationed at Mustafa Mahmoud park commented: “They are here because our government is getting benefit from them, or then why it is allowing them to stay??” (Salih 2005: 3). His question reflects a cynicism towards the state that I heard repeatedly in Cairo in 2005-7 (and is reminiscent of that of Palestinians described in Allen 2013): Mubarak’s government was not known for acting altruistically. In allowing the protest to continue for so long, who was the state really protecting?

Analysis of Egyptian officials’ justifications for its response to the protest renders intelligible the protest’s length as part of a wider governance strategy through which the state deflected protester claims, and pressured UNHCR to take greater responsibility for asylees in Egypt. While emphasising its protection of both the protesters and UNHCR, Egypt deferred responsibility for the protest to UNHCR, thus protecting its own political realm from claims upon it.

Egyptian government statements about the sit-in side-stepped the protesters’ domestic criticisms, depicting them as asylees demonstrating against UNHCR, whether due to disputes about their legal statuses or the desire for resettlement (Chapter 4). This emphasis served not only to rebuff the possibility of protester influence on state policy, but put forward a conception of asylum governance in Egypt in which the state bore little responsibility for asylees, nor, by extension, for resolving the protest.

Given the state’s depiction of the protesters, it is not surprising that, to UNHCR’s requests for state intervention in the protest’s first month, Egypt’s response was resolutely negative. Egypt’s answer to UNHCR’s call was less a counter-offer than an order: Egypt would not intervene, and UNHCR must take on responsibility for the protest. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs later recalled: “We told them that they must deal with them and so they

started the negotiations” (GoE06).

During the demonstration, Egypt’s rebuttal to UNHCR was justified on one of the very bases upon which UNHCR had asked the state to end the protest: concern for the office’s security. Whereas some observers, including police and protesters, viewed Egypt as protecting the *protesters*, Egypt’s Foreign Minister framed his government’s actions during the protest as the provision of security to *UNHCR* (Azzam et al. 2006: 48). Government officials’ accounts of their dismissal of UNHCR’s pressure during the protest read similarly. When UNHCR officers told the Minister of Foreign Affairs they would shut the office, his office “advised them not to do so and assured them that they have full protection from the police” (GoE06). When the office continued to ask for state intervention, the Minister said, “the Ministry of Interior refused and argued that they will provide them with all needed police to protect them.” (GoE06).

These statements again curiously re-arranged asylum governance’s expected roles: rather than UNHCR and the state cooperating to provide protection to asylees, here the government proposed to provide protection to UNHCR *from* asylees. UNHCR’s attempts to bring state authority to bear on the protest on the grounds of security were thus thwarted by this reassurance. By emphasising its authority as provider of security, Egypt avoided both the protesters’ and UNHCR’s claims and critiques for at least the first months of the protest.

8.1.3 UNHCR’s (limited) pursuit of external help

Having conceded to Egypt’s refusal to end the protest, UNHCR sought wider involvement to help in negotiation meetings with protest delegates: from the government and from local assistance organisations, but not from its donors nor from states in a position to provide

resettlement, that most promising and sought-after ‘durable solution’. On the one hand, the office’s efforts attest to its limited sway on the state and to the tensions between Egypt and UNHCR-Cairo. The limitation of its advocacy to locally-based institutions, on the other hand, is indicative of the office’s efforts to control the protest’s reach, prioritising the protection of its own relations with that “international community” whose involvement the protesters so strongly requested.

First and foremost, the office pursued state involvement in protest negotiations, arguing that the government had to “take a role and to work with us to solve the problem rather than just say it is the UNHCR’s problem” (UNHCR14). After protest delegates asked for representatives from multiple bodies, including the state, to participate in negotiations, UNHCR “tried to bring the Government to the discussion table” (UNHCR15: 3). This attempt initially “proved difficult”, but by 17 November, government officials had agreed to participate in a meeting between UNHCR and protest delegates (Ibid.; UNHCR07).

UNHCR and Egyptian officials volleyed back and forth the job of determining the protesters’ identities: whereas UNHCR asked Egypt to help “in screening and identifying those in the park” (UNHCR15: 16), Egypt instead “advised [UNHCR] to conduct RSD with those in the park” (GoE06). UNHCR also tried unsuccessfully to persuade Egyptian officials to join “working groups” which would “address the issues raised by the demonstrators as per the request of the demonstrators”. According to UNHCR’s post-protest report, Egypt “declined” its formal request on this point; a UNHCR official interviewed described the refusal more casually: the government said “okay, establish working groups, but then we did not hear from them again” (UNHCR15: 16; UNHCR14).

Perhaps the most remarkable way in which UNHCR called for Egypt to deal with the protest was its mid-December call for help in setting up a camp for the protesting asylees.

UNHCR appealed by letter to Egypt “to do whatever it can to move” the protesters, suggesting that the office could “hel[p] the government to set a facility and move the protesters” (UNHCR14), “establishing a temporary camp in which to house and process” the demonstrators (UNHCR15: 16).

The appeal for a camp, however, also failed, and was not commented upon in any government statements about the protest. Until 2011, when UNHCR set up a camp on the Libyan border (Danielson 2013: 32), Egypt had no refugee camps, and the presence of a sit-in protest in its capital did not change this policy.

As well as seeking government assistance with negotiations, UNHCR sought help from local religious, legal, human rights, academic, UN, and charitable organisations that worked with Cairo-based asylees in various capacities. In contrast to Egypt, these bodies were largely responsive; many sent representatives to attend meetings with UNHCR to “discuss what could be done to address th[e protesters’] concerns as a group”, as well as attend the actual negotiation meetings with protest delegates, where they were invited by UNHCR to “monitor the process” and “to provide alternate input where they deemed appropriate” (UNHCR15: 14).

In light of the closure of UNHCR-Cairo during the protest, office staff were also successful in securing the help of Cairo-based NGOs in the provision of off-site assistance, registration and RSD interviews over the course of the event to non-protesting asylees deemed to have particularly pressing needs (UNHCR15: 15).

Of the bodies to whom the office staff appealed for assistance in dealing with the protest – to the Egyptian government, mostly unsuccessfully, and to local asylee assistance organisations – there was a remarkable absence. The office did not attempt to involve the staff of embassies of countries that resettled refugees from Cairo or fund UNHCR’s work.

Instead, UNHCR-Cairo's advocacy was locally oriented. As its eventual agreement with protest delegates would state, in responding to the protest UNHCR-Cairo sought "a satisfactory resolution to the demonstration *within the requirements of the law of the host country and the abilities of UNHCR*" (UNHCR RO-Cairo 2005 17 Dec; italics added for emphasis), focusing on the pursuit of solutions at a local rather than global scale, and thus containing the protest's wider impact.

8.2 Rationalising the protest's end

From the protest's start, UNHCR-Cairo had called on Egypt to shut it down. Egypt instead charged UNHCR-Cairo with the slower process of negotiating with protest delegates. As negotiations faltered and failed, and once the park was cleared, both state and agency delivered public statements rationalising the protest's eviction.

While relations between UNHCR-Cairo and Egypt were in some ways conflicted, including on the question of who was to blame for the protest's end, on the necessity of intervening to conclude the protest they became increasingly, if not entirely, harmonized. Analysis of the reasons their officials set forth for this need makes visible the sources of legitimacy and authority called upon by each institution respectively, falling under three sets of themes that this section analyses in turn: political process and pressure, humanitarianism and civilisation, and sovereignty, security, and law.

8.2.1 Reputation: political procedure, pressure, and parity

A major justification for the protest break-up followed a logic of political procedure: UNHCR had undertaken a political process of negotiation to the best of its abilities; when this proved unsuccessful, responsibility for a different set of "appropriate procedures" to end the protest shifted to the state. Both UNHCR-Cairo and Egypt agreed that the protest

should be ended because of the termination of UNHCR-Cairo's negotiations with protest delegations that followed the 17 December agreement, but government staff emphasised UNHCR's pressure for state intervention. Both institutions also expressed concern for their international images in light of the 2005 events.

A UNHCR official explained that he visited the MoFA's office two days after the agreement, asking if its staff did not now think that UNHCR had done "all it can" and arguing that now, "the Egyptian government should do its part", for

from now on, the solution is with you not with us. The minister told me that the Egyptian government believe that UNHCR did all it can do and he asked what I want them to do. I told him that we should wait till the 22nd of December, if nothing happen, the Egyptian government should do whatever appropriate, and I told him I can not tell a government how to handle a matter ... UNHCR cannot do anything more and that matters were out of our hands. (UNHCR14)

As for the question of how to end the protest, the UNHCR official added, he had asked Egypt to undertake "an appropriate procedure through peaceful means" (UNHCR14).

Egypt similarly communicated that its decision to break up the demonstration had followed on this request and the breakdown of UNHCR's negotiations, if in starker terms. On 2 January 2006, Egypt's Minister for Legal Affairs' summary of the protest said that UNHCR had "undertaken all possible procedure in accordance with UNHCR law and regulation to end the protest and failed to do so" (GoE02) – a statement emphasising UNHCR's failure but also the due process that had been applied, if unsuccessfully.

In January 2006, the Minister of Foreign Affairs described the breakup as a matter of political coercion, telling Al Ahram newspaper that the eviction was "not done on the government's initiative" but under "continued pressure" from UNHCR, which had said that it would hold Egypt "responsible for any possible harm on its staff and offices" should the protest continue (in Azzam et al. 2006: 48, 21).

As a letter by the Egyptian Embassy in London set out to the UK parliament, UNHCR-Cairo had asked Egypt to “take all appropriate measures to bring the situation to an end” (GoE04). An official from the Refugee Department of the MoFA similarly stated that UNHCR had declared to the government that it had “done all that can be done” and “asked us finally in the end of December to intervene and end the protest” (GoE06).

UNHCR-Cairo and Egypt’s discussions about ending the protest also cited a wider source of political pressure. UNHCR’s final letter to MoFA, the latter reported, identified this pressure explicitly: the protest must be ended because it was “attracting media attention, and thus that it was affecting the image of the Egyptian government and UNHCR internationally” (Azzam et al. 2006: 48).

In discussing the protest in a televised interview, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said he was “not defending what happened” the night of the breakup, but that the government had felt pressured to intervene due to “the accusation we faced for allowing such matter to continue” (GoE07). The ongoing demonstration appeared to be threatening both institutions’ reputations at an international level – reputations which both governance bodies wished to uphold and protect as a matter of priority.

Egypt’s defence of the protest’s end brought the issue of international reputation into particular prominence. Explaining their government’s first *laissez-faire* and then decisive response to the protest, officials made explicit international comparisons, arguing for the parity of its actions with other countries’ handling of both protests and migrants.

The Minister for Legal Affairs, for example, spoke to international criticism in his speech to Egypt’s People’s Assembly: “Would you accept to have a central park in your country to deteriorate like the one in Mustafa Mahmoud? And would you wait on them for three months?” (GoE02). In Al Ahram newspaper, the Minister of Foreign Affairs similarly

argued that “no other country in the world would allow refugees to protest in one of its most prominent squares for three months” (in Azzam et al. 2006: 48).

The MoFA compared the forced removal of the protesters to Australia’s detention of Kurdish migrants found at sea, arguing that since Egyptians (whom he called “our sons”) were regularly deported from Europe, Egypt should not face international disapproval for considering the deportation of the detained protesters (GoE07). The Legal Affairs Minister drew the same parallel arguing against international criticism of Egypt: other countries “do not in the first place accept someone with incorrect visa and everyday we hear that thousands, including Egyptians, are deported from such countries” (GoE02).

The prevalence of state oppression of protesters and migrants around the world was thus instrumentalised as a means through which Egypt defended its reputation on a global stage. The state’s defence illuminated its sensitivity to international censure, suggesting that UNHCR’s reminder to Egypt that the protest was “affecting the image” of both institutions had not gone unheeded in the decision to forcibly evict the asylees camped out at Mustafa Mahmoud.

8.2.2 Rescue: humanitarianism and civilisation

While UNHCR-Cairo and Egypt’s accounts of the political reasons for ending the protest evinced issues of conflict between them, both institutions were united in rationalising the protest’s end in terms of international norms particular to their respective governance roles: humanitarianism and civilisation.

At first glance, this reasoning was quite opposite to the pursuit of upward approval described above: rather than emphasising political reasons for the end of the protest, both institutions spoke in terms of the best interests of the protesters. Consideration of the wider

actions of both, however, recasts their “rescue mission” talk instead as a further instance of the prioritisation and reinforcement of institutional legitimacy and authority.

UNHCR-Cairo’s explanations on this theme show a shift in the office’s public stance over time: by late November 2005, its public statements focused less on dismissing the protesters and their demands, and distancing the office from responsibility, and more on UNHCR’s desire to resolve the protest, which it now referred to as a “serious humanitarian issue” due to its care for the protesters’ well-being (UNHCR07). The protest, UNHCR-Cairo explained, needed to end because it had “negatively affected the health of vulnerable men, women and children” (UNHCR08).

On its response to this vulnerability, UNHCR-Cairo presented the office and the Egyptian state as a united front. UNHCR’s November press statements, issued twelve days apart, commented on this shared position, using nearly identical wording each time: “UNHCR and the Government of Egypt are extremely concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation of those persons in the park, in particular the women and children.” (UNHCR07 and UNHCR09).

The office similarly stressed its care for the conditions of the protesters and its particular concern for those who were women and children, in the preamble to the 17 December letter which outlined its final offer to the protesters:

UNHCR, considering the *best interests* of an estimated 2000-2500 Sudanese demonstrators in Mostapha Mahmoud park, mindful of the hardship that the current demonstration is causing to many persons, especially to women and children, and desirous of finding a satisfactory resolution to the demonstration *within the requirements of the law of the host country and the abilities of UNHCR*, makes the following offer to those persons taking part in the demonstration as a means of resolving the issue... (UNHCR RO-Cairo 2005 17 Dec; italics added for emphasis.)

UNHCR-Cairo’s actions following the publication of this letter, however, called into

question the extent to which the office had actually prioritised humanitarian consideration for the protesters – and indeed the extent to which it was able to do so within the confines of the relationships of accountability, national and international, which defined its “ability” to meaningfully negotiate with the people in the park. As the office’s representative later explained, after waiting five days for the protesters to respond to the 17 December offer, UNHCR-Cairo washed its hands of responsibility for the protest’s outcome, passing it over to the Egyptian state (UNHCR14).

While UNHCR publicly laid the foundation for the protest’s end in humanitarian terms in its final six weeks, Egypt set out quite a remarkable series of descriptions of its forced relocation of the protesters after the fact. The state’s rescue narrative began with the 2 January Legal Affairs Minister’s extended statement to the Egyptian People’s Assembly, which, like UNHCR’s explanations, presented the eviction as having been undertaken for the protesters’ own good. Egypt had simply “transferred the protesters to livable camps instead of living their lives in the street”, which, in a reference again to Egypt’s actions in comparative scope, was “a situation that cannot be tolerated by any state in the world” (GoE02).

Rather than attack the protesters, he stated, Egypt had sought to “transfer them to a more civilized place”, namely “boarding sites where health care and food are provided”, which he also referred to as “shelter centers in which emergency aid will be provided” (GoE02). The government’s actions were justified, in other words, because they offered the surviving protesters a more orderly location and the provision of care and assistance.

On 7 January, this account was repeated on Egyptian television by the Minister of Interior, who emphasised that the “camps” offered the protesters “full medical care” (GoE03). While

human rights organisations reported that protest survivors, many of whom were injured, were transported to security camps, prisons, police facilities, and detention centres (EOHR 2006; Azzam et al. 2006: 39), Egyptian officials thus presented their removal as a rescue mission, repeatedly referring to it as an “evacuation” of the park (GoE06, GoE02).

The Egyptian Embassy in London’s 17 January letter similarly described the relocation in humanitarian terms. The protesters, it said, had been “safely driven to empty housing units in a suburb of Cairo under the custody of the judicial authority” on “buses prepared by the Egyptian authorities to transport them to camps equipped with adequate humanitarian facilities in a suburb of Cairo” (GoE04). Such accounts represented Egypt’s forced removal as a benefaction of safety and care for the improvement of the protesters’ conditions. They also summoned Egypt’s authority to enact such a move, a theme the next section explores.

8.2.3 Restoration of order: sovereignty, security, and law

Minal Giri’s analysis of the government’s use of a rhetoric of contagion shows how Egypt attempted, in presenting the protesters as a health threat, to preclude Egyptian affinity with the protest and thus defend the “political status quo” (2007: 185). Government statements, as Giri notes, alleged a wide swath of damning but largely unfounded charges against the protesters – from ‘moral corruption’ and ‘indecent practices’ to criminality, material pollution, and the spread of HIV/AIDS (Ibid.)

The state’s rhetoric also exhibited concern with a further aspect not yet considered, namely its role as sovereign responsible for the upholding of security, order, and law within its territory. Analysis of this aspect of Egypt’s rationalisation of the forced eviction shows its representatives’ efforts to present the state as protector, not only of UNHCR, as above, but of the protesters, the protest’s neighbours, and of ‘national security’ – and, through its legal

self-defence, the state as protector of its own sovereign, lawful power. UNHCR-Cairo similarly presented the protest's end as a necessary condition for the restoration of the orderly functioning of asylum governance in Cairo.

While after the protest Egyptian state representatives did publicly defend Egypt's eviction of the protest in terms of disease and immorality, their condemnations of the protest were simultaneously interwoven with allusions to 'security': the protest had been, as Egypt's Embassy in London wrote, both "an increasing security and health hazard that had to be resolved soon" (GoE04). In the People's Assembly, the Legal Affairs Minister stated that multiple "environmental, health, and security reasons" had prompted Egypt's forced removal of the demonstrators (GoE02).

But security for whom? Whereas UNHCR had repeatedly called for Egypt to deal with the protest on the basis of wanting security for office staff, Egypt's post-protest statements mentioned not the agency's security but that of three others. First, they characterised the protest as a danger to its participants, albeit with questionable evidence.

In explaining this danger, the Legal Affairs Minister's speech, for example, referred to the construction of the protesters' make-shift tents, to "their use of gas pipes to cook their food [which might cause fire that would] reach their blankets and the plastic covers that they use to surround the park", and to the "possibility that car[s] could hit any of the protesters" (GoE02). Those who observed the protest, he explained,

witnessed many dangers that threatened the protesters themselves as well as the surrounding areas but luckily they were controlled. The reason behind that is that they led a full life in the street, which is definitely very dangerous" (GoE02).

Depicting life lived in public as dangerous furthered Egypt's case for the eviction as a humanitarian eviction, and represented the government as the providential insurer of

control and protection.

Secondly, however, GoE accounts presented the protesters themselves as a security threat.

While alleging that the state had protected the protesters, the Legal Affairs Minister justified their forced removal by bus to detention centres by saying that

it was necessary to control them to prevent dangerous outcomes so that they won't despair [disperse] in the area which may cause traffic problems and affect general safety especially that the area is full of embassies, ambassador's houses besides a number of banks [and] commercial stores. (GoE02)

Had the protesters been free to leave the area, the Minister suggested, they might have disrupted traffic – although even Cairo's notorious traffic is scant in the early hours of the morning when the eviction took place. His allusion to valuable properties nearby further framed the protesters as potential perpetrators of property damage. By this logic, through control of the protesters the state restored order and protected the neighbourhood, its buildings, and even drivers in its streets.

Third, the protest was described in more general terms as a threat to the "national security" which was the state's duty to preserve (GoE02). As the Legal Affairs Minister argued, "Egypt[']s responsibility towards its people is to impose discipline on its territory, which made them intervene after they felt that ... there would be danger in terms of security if the sit-in lasts more than the three months" (GoE02).

Making further comment defining Egypt's responsibility and authority *qua* state, he explained that "one of the main duties of the state is to maintain stability and law on its land and to intervene in case the safety of its citizens and the general social order is disturbed" and so "*as a state* it has all right to end such protest because of its possible dangerous outcomes in terms of health and security" (GoE02; italics added). As an anomalous island of temporary self-governance on Egyptian territory, the sit-in indeed

posed a challenge, if a limited one, to state sovereignty.

The Egyptian Embassy in London made this suggestion vividly by speaking of the formation of the protest as an invasive micro-migration. Its letter to the UK parliament alluded to the class dynamics of impoverished foreigners occupying an affluent neighbourhood, and used water-based migration metaphors which would have been familiar to UK politicians (see Charteris-Black 2006).

The letter stated that in October, “scores of Sudanese nationals [had] beg[un] *pouring* on a small public garden facing the UNHCR regional office and a *prominent* mosque in one of the most densely populated *upscale* neighborhoods in Cairo”, and that as the protest proceeded, “hundreds more of Sudanese nationals kept *pouring* in the garden” (2006; italics added). Egypt was thus presented as justified in attempting to control this tide – just as the UK does at its borders.

In addition to representing the state as protector – of the protesters, of the nearby streets, and of Egypt – Egyptian officials defended the forced eviction in legal terms, at multiple scales. The Legal Affairs Minister stated that the eviction had not “violat[ed] the rules and regulations of the international law nor any of the conventions governing refugees’ rights” (GoE02).

The Minister of Interior, in a 7 January televised interview, assured the public that the government’s handling of the protest was in full accordance with the Geneva Convention, that the government’s actions had been humanitarian and legal, and that the government had the right to clear the demonstration under Egyptian law (GoE03).

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the protesters had, in contrast, “violated Egyptian law, as well as the refugee convention by breaking domestic law” (Azzam et al.

2006: 48). Whether international or domestic, these accounts suggested, the demonstrators had broken the law, which Egypt had merely and justly restored.

Mohamed Youssef Ibrahim, the security director who had overseen the forced eviction, in 2011 became Egypt's Minister of Interior. A full five years after the fact, he maintained this claim to legality, saying that "he did not violate the law in dispersing the sit-in" (GoE08). His account contains an interesting twist, for he stated that not only was the dispersal lawful, but it was Egypt's right to undertake it, as bestowed by *UNHCR-Cairo*, whose staff, he told journalists, "gave us the right to deal with the demonstrators" (GoE08).

Finally, UNHCR-Cairo, too, made its case for the end of the protest in part on the basis of the restoration of order, arguing that the protest had disrupted its jurisdiction over processes essential to the governance of asylum. The office closed its doors on 9 October 2005, in the protest's second week, reopening 15 January 2006.

Later that year, UNHCR-Cairo's report on the protest defended this closure in terms of international institutional standards, stating that the "decision to temporarily suspend the office's operation was a standard UN security measure taken in close consultation with UN Staff Security Advisory in accordance to established rules and procedures" (UNHCR15: 28).

During the protest, however, the agency's press releases linked its closure directly to the protesters, whose sit-in had, it said, "limited UNHCR's capacity to assist other refugees needing support" (UNHCR08). The protest was thus "penalising the hundreds" of asylees who "daily approach UNHCR office", as two press releases repeated (UNHCR05, UNHCR09). Ending the protest was, the office implied, a necessary measure in order for UNHCR-Cairo to resume its normal operations.

8.3 After the fact: limiting damage, relocating responsibility

Egypt hoped to ‘deal quietly with the situation’ at Mustafa Mahmoud park, and forcibly evicted the sit-in overnight so as not to disturb the park’s neighbours. With its great violence and loss of life, however, the 30 December 2005 protest break-up gained immediate wider attention, and the Egyptian government, UNHCR-Cairo, and UNHCR headquarters set out explanations of the eviction in multiple fora. The following analysis of the governance politics evident in Egypt’s and UNHCR’s post-protest public statements shows both continuity and change from this chapter’s findings so far.

Most notable amongst the latter was the involvement of Egyptian officials in public discussion of the protest: in contrast to their public silence on the event as it unfolded, in January 2006 the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued two public statements on the sit-in and its ending; the Ministers of both Foreign Affairs and Interior appeared on local television statements for interviews on the protest; the head of the MoFA’s Refugee Department submitted for an interview by the head of FMRS; the Egyptian Embassy in London sent – and published online – a letter to a UK Parliamentary Group about the protest; and the eviction was the topic of discussion at a meeting of the People’s Assembly. That the first of Egypt’s post-protest statements was issued in direct response to a UNHCR press release is indicative of the struggle of – and between – both bodies to redirect censure for the eviction’s human losses.

After the protest’s eviction, UNHCR’s public strategy also shifted: whereas during the protest most press statements were released by UNHCR-Cairo, UNHCR headquarters took initial charge of public commentary on the situation – distributing online press releases, briefing notes, and news stories from Geneva – while UNHCR-Cairo staff worked to interview and secure the release of surviving protesters from detention, privately releasing

just one update to Cairo-based NGOs on 10 January (UNHCR13). In mid-February, however, UNHCR-Cairo's Deputy Regional Representative gave an interview with FMRS, and in mid-July the office responded to the FMRS report with its own definitive account of the protest's events. UNHCR's 2005 global fundraising report, issued 30 June 2006, also contained significant mention of the Cairo protest.

The content of this extensive body of public statements dealt in part with the new question of who was to blame for the fatalities of 30 December. With its violent incursion into occupied Mustafa Mahmoud, Egypt's *laissez-faire* approach to the protest had come to an abrupt end. After removing the protesters from public space, disposing of their possessions – which the Giza Health Affairs Division declared “not suitable for human use” (GoE02) – and “washing the blood from the streets” (Lewis 2006b), Egypt attempted also to clear its name. This attempt was characterised by attention to UNHCR's role in the protest, the initiation of bureaucratic procedures documenting Egypt's account of the protest, and praise for state actions, especially in light of international critique.

The day of the eviction, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees condemned the violence that had ensued, prompting Egypt's first public attempt to account for its actions. In a 31 December response, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed “surprise” at UNHCR's statement, arguing that the Commissioner's judgements were “illogical” in light of his admitted lack of information on what had happened the previous night (GoE01). Later in January, the chief of the Ministry's Refugee Department attributed its surprise to the fact that UNHCR-Cairo had “clearly asked more than once to evacuate the protesters”, and claimed that the office had “apologized” for its condemnation of the forced eviction, and had “declared that we did the right thing” (GoE06).

Whereas this account described UNHCR-Cairo as both involved in and supportive of

Egypt's intervention, a televised Minister of Foreign Affairs interview laid blame with the office more boldly, stating that UNHCR-Cairo was "responsible for their killing especially because they asked the Egyptian security for protection" (GoE07). The Minister's statement at once framed the forced eviction as an act of protection of UNHCR by the state, and emphasised UNHCR's culpability for the subsequent violence, shifting criticism back to the office.

While retaliating against UNHCR's critiques of the evacuation's violence, Egyptian government members worked to establish official records of the government's actions. The State Minister for Legal Affairs assured the 454 members of Egypt's People's Assembly on 2 January 2006 that the explanation of the protest he would provide them was based on internal memoranda by the MoFA, the Interior Minister, and the General Prosecutor. The latter official, he said, was "investigating the event", as were the prosecution offices in the protest's vicinity (North Giza and Dokki), in order to ensure that proper "legal measures" would be followed (GoE02).

The Egyptian Embassy in London similarly recounted that the General Prosecutor had begun formal investigations into the event. The MoFA's 18 January press release, too, emphasised the significance of the investigations, and of a report by the "Forensic Medicine Authority [which would] identify the exact reasons of death" for the deceased protesters, who, it claimed, numbered twenty-seven rather than the rumoured hundreds (GoE05). The day after the eviction, one state security official went so far as to register charges *against* the protesters for violence towards police officers – a charge then formally counteracted by a coalition of Egyptian human rights groups (EOHR 2006).

As well as setting out formal records inscribing the state's actions as institutionally and legally legitimate, government officials attempted to control public perceptions of its

response to the protest with glowing self-assessments. In a 7 January interview on local television, the Interior Minister said that, overall, he was satisfied with how the government had dealt with the protest, from start to end (GoE03), while on 15 January, the director of the MoFA's Sudan department "praised the patience of the government" (in Azzam et al. 2006: 50). The MoFA's 18 January press release claimed that Egyptian authorities had "handled the crisis with wisdom and patience for over than [sic] three months" (GoE05).

Such public relations efforts were both national and international. That Egypt's reputation on a world stage had come into question was a source of some concern, as the London embassy letter shows. Alongside the international comparisons discussed earlier in this chapter, the Minister of Foreign Affairs noted that the mode of eviction initially used against the protesters – water pumps – was "widely used in Germany" and "the best method used to end protest", and attributed protester deaths to overcrowding, rather than to police aggression (GoE07). In the 2 January People's Assembly meeting when thirty-five members submitted a statement requesting discussion of the eviction, "all", its minutes note, "expressed concern of the criticism of the western media" (GoE02).

International criticism remained a source of worry also for UNHCR-Cairo. The day following the forced removal of the protesters, the High Commissioner released a press statement expressing "shock and sadness", and stating that "there [wa]s no justification for such violence and loss of life" (UNHCR 2005). Once more deflecting attention away from the protesters' critiques of UNHCR, the statement framed their demonstration as having aimed "primarily to protest living conditions and to demand that they be resettled", and praised UNHCR's handling of the sit-in, stating that throughout, UNHCR was "always emphasising that such situations needed to be resolved peacefully" (Ibid.)

Over the course of the protest, UNHCR-Cairo's stance on the protesters had shifted

considerably, from initial dismissal, to frustrated engagement, to disengagement in late December. With the eviction and detention of the surviving protesters, UNHCR-Cairo shifted again, this time returning to its more familiar role as humanitarian rescuer, as its staff negotiated with Egyptian officials to secure the release of the detained protesters. Over the first month of 2006, UNHCR headquarters issued eight further public reports on the progress of its Cairo officers in this successful project. Despite these successes, however, the Cairo office's 10 January update to local NGOs noted that the wider "UN community" was "very concerned about the overall image of the UN following this incident" (UNHCR13).

UNHCR-Cairo also expressed concern about the protest's impact on its local relations. Its 10 January note acknowledged "much anger in the community" as well as "anger in Sudan, among the Sudanese in Egypt and around the world" against both the office and the GoE, emotion which it described as being "inflamed" by allegedly inflated reports of the number of people who died in the forced removal (UNHCR13). The office also alluded to its tensions with the GoE, stating that Egypt had "endeavored to put responsibility for the events of 29 [sic: 30 December] on UNHCR" (Ibid.).

Some months later, office staff attempted to set the record straight, in a definitive account of its handling of the demonstration. After FMRS's June 2006 report on the protest was "widely" shared at UNHCR headquarters and read by the High Commissioner (recorded in personal communications with UNHCR staff), the office's regional representative told IRIN News that UNHCR-Cairo planned to respond with "detailed observations" to correct what he called "striking omissions" from the FMRS report and present "UNHCR's views" (IRIN 2006). On 16 July 2006, he emailed the FMRS director's office UNHCR-Cairo's 35-page narrative response to the FMRS report, the most extensive account by a governance

body of the 2005 events.

UNHCR-Cairo's report was highly critical of how its actions regarding the protest had been presented by FMRS. With its reply, the office aimed, it explained, at "correcting records and addressing issues which were overlooked by the [FMRS] report" (UNHCR15: 3). With regard to its own reputation, UNHCR-Cairo's report made three points. First, the document highlighted its staff's backstage efforts, coordinated with local NGOs, to assist the demonstrators during the event's three months, arguing that FMRS's report had neglected these efforts and thus made it "loo[k] as though both UNHCR and the NGOs were doing nothing and didn't care when in fact the outcome is the exact opposite" (UNHCR15: 14).

Secondly, the report admitted that it had requested that Egypt end the sit-in, but stressed that decisions regarding how the break-up was carried out had been entirely Egypt's responsibility:

UNHCR did not however tell the government what it should do or how to do this as UNHCR cannot tell a government what to do nor does UNHCR have experience in regards to policing and law enforcement to be able to give such advice. (UNHCR15: 23)

By arguing that UNHCR-Cairo had been structurally constrained by its governance role, host-state relations, and the limitations of its institutional capacity for evicting sit-in protests, the office redirected blame for the violence of the forced removal onto Egypt.

UNHCR-Cairo's report's third image-related comment contained a two-fold message. By repeatedly attributing the advent of the protest, and the failure of its negotiations, to the protesters' 'false expectations' of UNHCR-Cairo, the office both located blame for the protest's outcome on forces external to it, and underlined the limitations of its institutional responsibilities.

The report suggested that protesters had been enticed to participate by rumours which were

“simply a misunderstanding of UNHCR’s ability and mandate” – a misunderstanding it identified as “symptomatic of poor understanding of UNHCR’s role and refugee law in general in Cairo” (Ibid: 20). Elsewhere the report attributed the protest and its failure to resulting “false expectations” of the protesters (UNHCR15: 6). This message suggested that the protest had occurred (and failed) primarily due to its participants’ ignorance and misunderstanding, rather than due to legitimate complaints, legitimately raised.

The FMRS report, UNHCR-Cairo’s response argued, failed to explain what asylees “could have legitimately expected from UNHCR and what was beyond UNHCR’s abilities or mandate” (UNHCR15: 3). A few pages later this message of the importance of understanding UNHCR’s restricted abilities was restated:

to properly address the issue of expectations and what UNHCR could and should have done more it is important to explore and explain UNHCR mandate and limitations (Ibid: 6).

In these multiple citations of its institutional perimeters, the office deflected responsibility for its negotiation’s failures, attempted to untarnish its reputation, and demonstrated prioritisation of its institutional prerogative over requests for wider advocacy originating from people of concern to the office.

In a report released concurrently to a wider audience, this prioritisation was made particularly clear. UNHCR’s annual Global Report is a visually arresting, internationally circulated presentation of the agency’s activities, “aimed at governments, private donors and UNHCR’s partners”. Its 2005 Report, released June 2006, acknowledged the Cairo protest on the front page of its Middle East section, under the heading “Major developments.” But the report’s summary of the protest presented it with a particular spin:

Violent demonstrations by Sudanese demanding increased assistance and resettlement opportunities by UNHCR led to the tragedy of 30 December 2005, where 28 protesters died following confrontations with the police in Cairo.

(UNHCR 2006)

This presentation of the protest is problematic in multiple respects:

- it suggested there were a series of demonstrations, rather than the single sit-in;
- it framed the protest as a “demand” for aid and resettlement, rather than acknowledging the protesters’ criticisms of UNHCR’s practices;
- it called the Sudanese political action “violent” when it was, in fact, non-violent for three full months, prior to the violence initiated by police in its eviction;
- it did not mention that the protesters were mostly people of concern to the agency;
- it suggested that the deaths followed “confrontations with police” when in fact police turned upon the protesters and instigated the violent forced removal;
- it did not acknowledge UNHCR’s role in handling protest negotiations or criticise Egypt’s management of the protest’s eviction;
- it suggested a direct causal relationship between the instigation of the protest and the tragedy that occurred (“demonstrations by Sudanese ... led to the tragedy”), as if the violent outcome had been inevitable.

UNHCR’s brief summation of the protest for its donors thus presented the 2005 protest primarily as “violent” acts of the “demanding” Sudanese – a skewing of the facts in favour of an explanation that presented the agency as not culpable and as, at worst, beleaguered. Rather than affirm its responsibility for the promotion of the interests and safety of refugees, UNHCR’s account of the protest demonstrated the overriding importance of its image in the eyes of its most powerful audiences.

While a large part of Egypt’s and UNHCR’s post-protest statements concerned the deflection of blame for the 30 December fatalities and the limiting of damage to the bodies’ reputations internationally, they also publicised the significance of Sudan’s relationship

with Egypt. Analysis of UNHCR's and the GoE's discussions of these relationships shows an asylum governance assemblage influenced not only by UNHCR and host, donor, and resettlement states, but also by the host state's neighbours – in this case, also the protesters' country of origin – and by civil society and academic advocates whose activities, while locally based, have international reach.

Egypt's discussion of Sudan in its statements on the protest illuminate the bilateral relationship's importance in several respects: Egypt both considered Sudan during its decisions about handling the protest, and emphasised the closeness of its bilateral relationship following the breakup, using its ties with Sudan alternately to reframe its provision of asylum and to bolster the legitimacy of its handling of the protest.

Egypt's relationship with its southern neighbour was sufficiently important to play a role in the latter's decision to allow a public protest – albeit one easily framed as “against UNHCR” rather than against the state – to continue undisturbed in a major public square for three months. Although Egyptian officials justified the state's initial non-interventionism towards the protest after the fact partly in terms of its ability and desire to protect both UNHCR and the protesters, they also referenced the importance of positive relations with Sudan. Egypt, its Foreign Affairs Minister explained, had “not want[ed] to interfere because of the sensitive relationship between Egypt and Sudan” (GoE06).

The Legal Affairs Minister presented the nature of this bilateral relationship as familial, claiming that Egyptian government members had “dealt with the crisis with patience and wisdom, taking into consideration that the crisis' parties are the Sudanese brothers” (GoE02). Egypt's decision to end the protest was made, the Foreign Minister explained, “in spite of the friendship and brotherhood felt towards Sudanese” (paraphrased in Salih 2005: 10-11). Part of the reason Egypt left the handling of the protest to UNHCR was due, in

other words, to concern that Sudan's leaders would disapprove of violence undertaken against its citizens, although the protesters had sought asylum in Egypt.

In the month following the forced removal, public laments by Egyptian authorities over the deaths that had occurred were abundant in references to Sudan, framing the bilateral relations as deeply rooted, historic, and familial. In one interview televised in Egypt, the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed sorrow and offered condolences for the deceased protesters, whom he referred to as "our sons", explaining:

Those who were killed are our children; Sudan and Egypt are neighboring countries with shared history. We feel sorry for the killing of the Sudanese, as we would have felt if they were Egyptians. (GoE07)

Bilateral closeness was also underlined in the Egyptian Embassy in London's letter on the protest, which stated that the "historic, brotherly and strategic ties between Egypt and Sudan are much too strong to be affected negatively" by what had occurred (GoE04).

The letter interestingly went on to describe Egypt's hospitality to Sudanese asylees not in terms of the state's international legal obligations, but as an expression of this familial bond: the protesters, the letter read, would "ultimately find the open arms of their Egyptian brothers and sisters", because

Egyptians, who understand well the problems and challenges of the situation in Sudan, always embrace their Sudanese brothers with open arms, even while available resources are limited (GoE04).

A description of Egypt and its society as welcoming Sudanese with "open arms" is necessarily rendered suspect by Egypt's reservations on the 1951 Convention and the extensively documented social and security problems described by the protesters.

Yet the wider political importance of the Sudan-Egypt relationship within Egypt is attested by how governmental statements referred to Sudan in addressing Egyptian audiences after

the protest. The Legal Affairs minister “assured” the People’s Assembly that “the Sudanese government and all Sudanese governmental and non-governmental institutions have announced that Egypt has done all it can to help the protesters” (GoE02). Sudan’s leaders, he suggested, supported Egypt and understood why it had to end the protest.

To bolster Egypt’s contention that its actions against the protesters were valid, the Minister cited the approval of Mahgoub Fadl, a senior advisor to Sudanese President Omar el-Bashir, whose comments on the protest had been published by the government-run Middle East News Agency. Fadl, he reminded the Assembly, had “declared that the Egyptian government has the right to maintain social order and it is her right to intervene to end the protest” and that Egyptian government officials had “done all they can to convince the protesters to leave the park peacefully” (GoE02). The Minister concluded his address by again

assuring the members that all of Egypt, its president, its cabinet and its people are mourning the deceased Sudanese and all of us feel sorry and never wished that one Sudanese would die or get injured

– an assurance that ended with a prayer for divine protection for the two countries (Ibid.).

The Interior Minister similarly bolstered public confidence that Egypt’s relationship with Sudan was unharmed by the 30 December violence, telling television viewers that the two governments remained fully cooperative (GoE03). On 18 January, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the government was making sure to “eliminate any reasons of tension or misunderstanding” between Egypt and Sudan concerning the protest (GoE05).

By citing Sudanese officials as authorities in arguing for the legitimacy of Egypt’s violent dismantling of the Sudanese sit-in, and in their repeated assurances that bilateral relations remained unharmed, Egyptian officials demonstrated the socio-political significance of the preservation a positive relationship between the two states. The state from which the

protesters had fled must, then, be understood as a significant force in the governance of asylum in Egypt.

This significance was evident not only in Egypt's words but also in its actions in the days after the protest. Discussing the fate of the detained protesters on 2 January, the Legal Affairs Minister stated that Egypt was working in "coordination with the Sudanese authorities to repatriate illegal residents back to Sudan" (GoE02). Egyptian detention centre staff initially allowed Sudanese embassy officials access to and furnished personal information about the detained protesters, at least two of whom were interviewed by Sudanese officials while detained (FMRS9; FMRS16; GoE06; UNHCR13; Azzam et al. 2006: 44).

Sudan's access, however, was cut off after pressure from UNHCR-Cairo, who warned Egypt's MoFA about legal repercussions (UNHCR15: 25). Egypt's plan to deport the surviving protesters was also scuttled by international influence: as the MoFA's Refugee Department head stated, "after all the criticism we have been receiving from the rest of the world we decided that no one would be deported" (GoE06).

Egypt's relationship with Sudan, though close, was indeed not its sole source of accountability. Although at one point presenting Egyptian provision of asylum for Sudanese as a family embrace, the state remained subject to its international legal obligations, and to its aspiration to preserve at least some appearance of legitimacy in the eyes of "the rest of the world".

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented ways in which the GoE and UNHCR-Cairo debated and rationalised the conclusion of the protest, both before the forced removal, and after the fact.

Initially, UNHCR-Cairo called on Egypt to end the protest, peacefully, as soon as possible, emphasising its own limited ability to control the protest's outcome, closing its office, and arguing for bilateral resolution of the protest and the need for staff security. In doing so, the office emphasised local, regional solutions, attempted to exert political pressure on Egypt, and did not hesitate to frame the protesters as a threat in pursuing the greater goal of ending the demonstration.

Egypt presented its negative response to the UN – allowing the sit-in to continue – as the enactment of the state's 'protector' role towards both the protesters and the UN, and the encouragement of positive relationships with Sudan's and Egypt's citizens. The state's inaction, however, served also to deflect the protesters' political claims, and to pressure UNHCR to take greater responsibility for asylum in Egypt. Whether 'protecting' the protesters or UNHCR staff, the state's response was characterised and enforced by its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence – violence it would ultimately wield on the protest's final night. UNHCR-Cairo's subsequent pursuit of help was limited to local and national bodies; advocacy for international assistance was conspicuously absent.

The chapter's first part thus illuminated the contestations that occurred over lines of responsibility and authority in asylum governance. It also showed Egypt's successful exercise of power through the avoidance of responsibility for the protesters, and UNHCR's attempts to avoid political claims, emphasise its limited power, and contain the scope of the protesters' claims.

The chapter's second part explored reasons UNHCR-Cairo and Egypt gave for state intervention to end the protest: first, political procedure and pressure; second, humanitarianism and "civilisation"; and third, sovereignty, security, and law. Both bodies, especially Egypt, attempted to preserve their international reputations, comparing their

actions to that of other states. These rationalisations show the ways in which not only the 2005 protesters but also governance bodies mobilized humanitarian discourse to justify their actions. State violence was justified on humanitarian grounds.

Although both UNHCR and the GoE spoke in terms of the protesters' best interests, their actions recast their 'rescue mission' talk as a further instance of their prioritisation and reinforcement of institutional legitimacy and authority. Egyptian statements presented the forced eviction as an act of protection in various respects: of the protesters, of UNHCR, of the protest's neighbours, and of 'national security' – showing, overall, the state as protector of its own sovereign, lawful power, on the basis of its duties as a state. UNHCR also presented the protest's end as a step necessary for the restoration of order. The statements provided by both institutions made visible the ways in which each body cited institutional procedures, international standing, international norms in order to justify the protest's end.

The third and final section of this chapter analysed Egypt and UNHCR's post-protest efforts to set out official accounts of the protest. Statements by both bodies deflected blame for the loss of lives and externally apportioned responsibility for the protest's end and the ongoing problems it represented. Both placed increased emphasis on deterritorialised responsibility for asylum in Cairo, although UNHCR remained neutral in discussing limited resettlement places, continuing its emphasis on voluntary repatriation. Egypt's statements attended to its political relationship with Sudan, and UNHCR-Cairo sought to draw attention to the role of academic advocates in both the protest and in the workings of asylum in Egypt.

Overall, both bodies' accounts of their duties and limitations in the governance of asylum limited their own role and called for others to take on greater responsibility. This in turn illustrates the uncertainty and contestedness of the governance context in which the protest took place: in the absence of a clear authority to answer to the protesters' claims, UNHCR

and GoE repeatedly struggled over lines of responsibility and authority. In the meanwhile, however, protest participants were working to reach a different audience altogether, as the next chapter explores.

CHAPTER 9. ‘WE ARE REFUGEES’: FROM A CALL FOR RECOGNITION TO POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

I believe what is happening at the park is a kind of drama. Our wise government is the director and UNHCR is the assistant director. The refugees are the actors and the international community is the audience, the happy audience.

- Farcical statement by “Abdel-Rahman”, fictional Egyptian television host in “27 Dead”, a May 2006 theatre performance about the 2005 Mustafa Mahmoud protest created and performed at the American University in Cairo by Sudanese asylees in Cairo and directed by an AUC theatre instructor, May 2006 (Campbell et al. 2006: 8)

Although protest banners, lists, and interviews all decried an absence of help, their existence simultaneously signalled the presence of an audience. Protesters sought particular publics with whom to communicate. Some banners named parties that had, they charged, failed to provide recourse when needed — UNHCR, “the international organization”, an individual UNHCR employee, Egyptian police — whereas others named broader publics from whom they asked for attention: the “international media” and “organizations and media”. The protesters’ complaints were thus at first glance paradoxical: through their content, protester communications described systems of governance that offered no recourse for wrongdoing, while in their utterance, they sought and expressed hope in remedy, after all, from greater sources of authority.

This chapter explores this strategy. It traces how protesters mobilised the refugee role as the foundation for their call for political recognition and participation, aiming primarily not at UNHCR but at the ‘international community.’ This “happy audience,” as the play quoted

above put it, protesters hoped, would leverage change in Cairo, and would include the embassies of resettlement countries. The analysis can be thought of as the protesters' "prognostic framing" of the sit-in, which captures the articulations of strategies or "plan[s] of attack" that arise in social activism (Benford and Snow 2000: 616).

The first part of the chapter focuses on the protesters' strategy of occupation, the second on their named audiences, and the third on the ways protesters' appeals drew on the refugee role. The chapter's final part introduces key aspects of how this call for recognition transformed into political engagement, through protest negotiations which resulted in a failed offer from UNHCR and ultimately Egypt's forceful ending of the protest.

9.1 Occupation as strategy, Mustafa Mahmoud square as stage

For just over a year before the protest began, Mustafa Mahmoud park had served as UNHCR-Cairo's informal waiting room. People wishing to speak with someone at UNHCR were required by the office "to queue in the park" where reception staff would distribute paperwork, make interview appointments, and screen asylum applicants (UNHCR15: 8). Staff carried out these screenings in the park in order to, in the office's words,

identify [applicants'] needs and accordingly decide the proper form of action that might warrant them accessing UNHCR premises or directing them to an implementing partner or another form of assistance. (UNHCR15: 8)

Mustafa Mahmoud thus had some of the features of a border checkpoint, through which people could gain or lose access to the office, and the potential opportunities or assistance therein. If UNHCR-Cairo was, as it has been described, "a beleaguered gatekeeper" (Kagan 2006), the park at Mustafa Mahmoud could be considered its gates.

The site's temporal features are rendered particularly pointed with this information. Many protesters cited problems of time and waiting with regard to their asylum in Cairo, and the

processes of UNHCR in particular, as a motivation for their involvement in the demonstration. In a context of great uncertainty, the transformation of the park from a waiting room into a place of occupation was a remarkable, if dangerous, move, inverting in a matter of days the relations of who waited for whom, and turning the table on the relations of scrutiny between UNHCR and asylees.

The use of Mustafa Mahmoud park as a site of protest was significant also because of the reason the park had become UNHCR's waiting room in the first place. After the 2004 protest at UNHCR-Cairo (described on p. 94), UNHCR and the GoE elected to keep asylees at arm's length from the office due to what UNHCR-Cairo later characterised as "overriding security considerations after the August 2004 demonstration, as well as concerns regarding the limited space available for the number of persons approaching the office" (UNHCR15: 8). The decision to use Mustafa Mahmoud park was at the bidding of the GoE, who had "decided to limit access to UNHCR by allowing refugees and asylum seekers to assemble in the park where by they can be escorted in small groups to UNHCR premises. This [wa]s in order to prevent large group of refugees assembl[ing] in the area opposite to UNHCR office" (UNHCR15: 8).

The 2005 protesters' use of the newly designated reception area – itself created to prevent a large assembly and control asylee access to UNHCR-Cairo – for a further demonstration was thus both apt and defiant, and indicative of ongoing tensions between the office and asylees at that time. More important yet was the park's function for the protesters. By occupying the park, protesters co-opted the space where they had waited to speak with UNHCR into a platform from which they could speak to the world.

At first glance, the way that the 2005 protesters called for recognition – that is, by occupying Mustafa Mahmoud park – suggests that their appeals were targeted entirely at

UNHCR-Cairo. Considering the protest within its historical context, however, shows that although the protesters certainly hoped to summon pressure upon UNHCR Cairo through their sit-in, their protest was more widely targeted. The park was not simply an “obvious choice” for the protest, as I first described it (in Azzam et al. 2006: 18). It was a politically significant site within Cairo’s history of asylum governance, and one which protesters leveraged to extend the scope and scale of their recognition as far as possible.

The sit-in, positioned as it was amidst traffic and in front of the mosque, was very much in public view. Demonstrators would be continuously seen by passers-by, on foot and in traffic. Through their occupation, Refugees Voice and the protesters leveraged this visibility, placed themselves into public space and knowledge and thus, in a sense, interposed themselves into asylum governance. By claiming a site which was sure to attract wider attention, the occupiers rendered their presence impossible to ignore. Organisers and those who had joined them then worked to ensure this act of inter-positioning would reach increasingly wider scales – a strategy reminiscent of the tactics adopted by Chinese migrants overseas (Xiang 2013: 295).

Protesters quickly organised themselves to manage site-based publicity, with an emphasis on international visitors and journalists, and kept records of park visitors. I experienced this outreach during my own 10 October visit to the park, when an English-speaking organiser greeted me, showed me around the park, and gave me and explained the list of demands. This was a pattern that others would document. Rowe, for example, wrote that several men speaking

competent English met with journalists and other outsiders to explain refugee problems and reasons for the protest. One had also served as a translator when outsiders wished to speak directly to protestors. ... Another man characterized his role as that of a facilitator of meetings between organizers and others who wished to visit the park. (Rowe 2007: 65)

Although the English-language aspect of this facilitation work might seem at odds with the protest's Egyptian location, it illuminates the organisers' emphasis on outreach at an international scale, including via interested academics, and tensions in their relations with their Egyptian host society (as I wrote in Azzam et al. 2006:20).

Through this strategy, protesters aimed also to harness media attention as a source of power and safety; organisers continuously monitored media coverage of the sit-in. One protester I spoke with explained: "I just hoped that the media would come and attract the attention of the world" (FMRS25). Another protester, interviewed January 2006, described how her nephew had joined a group of men negotiating with police on the night of the breakup: "The men told them if you get physical with us, everybody in the world will see what they are doing with refugees" (FMRS20). That same evening, however, the "global eye" as a protector of refugees turned out to be a limited source of safety indeed.

During the protest, on the other hand, the protesters' visibility in the park still seemed promising. A demonstrator told AUC student researcher Themba Lewis that "the protest is being allowed to continue because it is internationally known. We sent emails to all international media... . To see this and keep silent is shameful to all human rights organizations in the world" (Lewis 2005). This statement conveyed hope that knowledge of the protest via the media might result in international outcry; it also highlights how international media bodies were specifically targeted by the protesters, with the internet's help.

On the walls of the park, the banners' most basic communication technology called for the international eye: in English, "Where is the international media?" and in Arabic, "Organizations and media: why do you ignore the Sudanese refugees?" (translation by Dina al Shafie). Refugees Voice also established a dedicated email account,

Refugees_voice_in_Egypt@[], which they used to distribute protest lists, also publicising the lists in both Arabic and English on websites including Sudanese Online, Damanga, and Drumbeat Sudan, reaching members of the wider Sudanese diaspora. Just five years earlier, UN High Commissioner Sadako Ogata had characterised the internet as “as real as science fiction” for most refugees (Ogata 2000). The 2005 protesters’ coordinated efforts, in contrast, made use of multiple forms of media to extend the range of their outreach.

The protesters’ transformation of Mustafa Mahmoud park into what to observers appeared like a refugee camp (Nour & Rabie 2005), and their call for movement to a refugee camp, points also to the ways in which protesters appropriated the vocabulary of humanitarianism. With the “refugee camp” an archetypal part of humanitarianism’s repertoire, the 2005 protester’s creation of a temporary refugee camp in the middle of the city became an embodiment of humanitarian discourse through which the protesters were finally visible – and legible – on a local and global stage.¹⁷

9.2 Pursuing “the attention of the world” to leverage change

Acting through their occupation of Mustafa Mahmoud and its galvanisation of media attention, protesters delivered statements to journalists, researchers, passers-by, and local organizations which they hope would garner wider support from an international community who they hoped would put external pressure on UNHCR to reform its policies and practices – or who could help them to escape Cairo altogether.

One protest participant explained: “I call upon the international community to interfere and address the problems of the Sudanese refugees here” (FMRS19). A similar call for was made in a 21 December speech in the park, when a protester, speaking in English,

¹⁷ I am grateful to Nando Sigona and Zuzanna Olszewska for their comments on this point.

rhetorically asked: “What is the responsibility of the UNHCR? This is the question that I’m asking the globalization and the international community” (FMRS32). Another protester stated simply: “We protested to put pressure on UNHCR to act” (FMRS07).

Layla’s explanation of the sit-in underscored the dual intention of the protest:

We hoped to attract the attention of the office, because there were so many cases with problems that didn’t have individual causes. We also hoped that maybe we would attract the attention of the media, of the world, that then they would see our problems. (FMRS25)

International attention, prompted by this collective act, might, she hoped, result in UNHCR’s attention too. Another woman stated similarly that she was in the park because "she thought that UNHCR would be forced to finally listen to her requests if they all joined together to protest" (Schafer 2005: 16).

Refugees Voice postings to the website Drumbeat Sudan in October 2005 illustrate the range of parties the group sought to reach. A post titled “urgent appeal to support Sudanese refugees in Egypt” and written like a press release was addressed to “UNHCR Geneva, UNHCR Cairo, Human rights Organizations, Egypt and Canada and USA and Australia Governtmants [sic]”, and copied to “The UNHCR Regional Office (Cairo), The Sudanese Refugees in Egypt, Sudan Tribune, Sudanese Groups in the International Internet” — showing the group’s wish to engage not only with UNHCR-Cairo and Geneva, and the GoE, but also with the governments of resettlement countries, human rights organisations, and the wider Sudanese population in Egypt, Sudan, and internationally. Their second letter on Drumbeat, titled “The Situation of Sudanese Refugees in Egypt”, was addressed to the High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva; it called the attention of UNHCR’s international headquarters to the event at its Cairo office. That these documents were posted online is in itself indicative of the protesters’ efforts to galvanise allies and call international attention to their demonstration, and their belief that UNHCR-Cairo would not change

without external intervention.

After the protesters' statuses as refugees became a matter of public debate due to UNHCR press releases, television journalists elicited a performance of legal status which protesters gladly offered. A camera team from a local station asked groups of protesters in the park to hold their UNHCR-issued identity cards up for display, which they filmed. Researcher Stacy Schafer, who was present and photographed the incident, reported that "an overwhelming majority of the refugees immediately produced blue and yellow UNHCR cards" (Schafer 2005: 7; see also photographs in Appendix E).

Following the protest, Layla explained the significance of this display: whereas UNHCR-Cairo had disseminated statements saying that "these people aren't real refugees; this is illegal", when the television team came, the protesters were able to show a wider audience the opposite: "that we aren't illegal, that we are refugees" (FMRS25). Another protester similarly framed the event as a response to UNHCR-Cairo's claims that the protesters were not refugees, stating: "We brought out our cards as proof that we are" (FMRS6).

9.3 Protesting as refugees: voice, rights, suffering

Throughout their outreach, protesters called for recognition as political actors on the basis of their claim to be a group of refugees. This instrumentalisation of legal status stressed the *rights* of refugees, on the one hand, and their *suffering* on the other.

At first glance remarkably for people often described as "speechless", "hidden" and partial to anonymity (Malkki 1996, Marfleet 2007, Pantuliano et al. 2012: 53), the group organising the 2005 protest selected a name (in English, *Voice of the Sudanese Refugees of Cairo*) which foregrounded their legal status. Unlike several other Sudanese organisations in Cairo at the time, the group's name did not refer to tribal affiliation. Instead, the name

unmistakably signalled the group's intention to speak on behalf of all Sudanese refugees in Cairo. In some press releases, 'Sudanese' or 'Cairo' were dropped from the name, suggesting that in the protest organisers' outreach strategies, the category *refugee* and concept *voice* took precedence.

While self-presenting as refugees, protesters used what Turner, in a description of refugee politics in a different setting, calls "the language of international agencies" (Turner 2006: 777, discussing a Tanzanian camp). Protesters' explanations of their participation in the sit-in particularly and frequently referred to rights. When asked why she joined the protest, one woman answered simply: "I wanted to ask about my rights" (FMRS16). Another woman explained that protest participants "felt they could get their rights by staying in the park" (FMRS24).

An emphasis on rights often made itself evident to visitors to the the sit-in, as Schafer recounted:

an outsider could not enter the sit-in without having at least one very vocal refugee lecture him on refugees' rights, human rights, and even international refugee conventions. Many of these refugees knew their "rights" and vehemently demanded that UNHCR and international community fulfill their obligations immediately. (Schafer 2006: 7–8)

The logic of the protest's public message, as this account lays out, was an equation of refugee legal status, international legal rights, and the ability to call for accountability on this basis. In other words, if the protesters were a group of refugees, as they claimed to be, they thus held rights under international law, and thus were entitled to exert political pressure on UNHCR via the international community. Refugee rights were, in the protesters' equation, a crucial link between their legal recognition and their political recognition and participation.

A second link stressed by the 2005 protesters was their suffering. The protesters' self-representations would seem, in one way, to confirm the stereotype of refugees as helpless victims. Interviewed protesters, during and after the protest, spoke of continuous difficulties. Protest banners conveyed individual stories of bodily and legal insecurity, and called on outside help to "solve our problems". Fadlalla, describing advocacy efforts amongst the wider Sudanese diaspora, characterises this phenomenon as "mediated narratives of suffering Sudanese refugees", which, through horrific depictions of abuse and mistreatment, emphasise "refugees's subordinate position" and are "replete with humanitarian fantasies of rescue and salvation" (2009: 80-81).

By emphasising the suffering and neediness of Sudanese asylees in Cairo, protest leaders exerted a pressure particular to their position as asylees. Although at first view weak, in the context of the humanitarian-asylee relationship in Egypt, this tactic was both strong and political, "forcing the issue" upon the international assemblage concerned with asylum, and UNHCR in particular (Van Hear 2011).

In framings like "we are victims of mismanagement" and "for how long will the international organization save us meanwhile we are suffering", protest organisers operationalised their victimhood as a strategy of a critique, identifying UNHCR-Cairo and its staff as the perpetrators of their victimisation. The protesters' problems were redefined as not of simply being displaced and in a state of exile, but as a set of problems related specifically to the management of asylum.

In setting out this case, protest organisers emphasised the constraining pressures related to their status as asylees: pressure to either return to an unsafe place, or stay in a place they described as unsafe, and being prevented from moving to safe countries. Protest banners criticised the processes and systems of asylum, and lists detailed multiple problems with

UNHCR and its RSD and resettlement procedures. This reframing positioned the protesters not as victims of the war but as victims of asylum itself, shifting temporal emphasis from the persecution of their pasts to constraints on both their present and future experiences.

Some protesters highlighted and even heightened the suffering they endured during the protest itself as a way of communicating the seriousness of their intents and eliciting recognition of and response to their acts. In a September 2005 interview, protester participants told AUC student researchers that “the desperation that brought them here will keep them here. ‘We will wait here, we will die here,’ declared one woman. ‘We have no other place to go’ (Gomez et al. 2005a: 1). At several points through the three months of the sit-in, protesters staged hunger strikes. One such strike in mid-November was reported to have 800 participants, one of whom told an *Al-Ahram* journalist, “I will not eat until our demands are met” because, he said, “We want justice” (Nkrumah 2005: 1). Such acts not only drew upon the suffering protesters had already experienced in Cairo, but created further suffering, in the public eye, as a strategy for heightening attention as the protest lengthened.

This strategy was expressed with particular pathos and clarity in a post on the SudaneseOnline website on 2 November in both English and Arabic. Titled, in the English, “from sudanese refuges voice in cairo”, the post opened with the phrase, “we are the sudanese refugees who gather in Cairo”, and continued:

our number is 3000 men and women and 300 children in small area of not more than 300sqm, and we are sleeping on the ground with our eyes facing to the sky without blankets in the hard coldness with no food and water our health got detorerate [deteriorated] and the conditions are so bad we demonestrate as a result of the discrimination and luck [lack] of human rights we are subjected to from the side of UNHCR stuffs [staff] in Cairo.... We are the voice of the sudanese refugees in Cairo, appeal to your kind hearts and your human concious [conscience] in which we do trusth on to come and see by your eyes and find out the truth so that our may reach to the out world through you exellency.

(SRVIC 2005; spelling unchanged from the original)

The protesters, the post stated, demanded either a “comprehensive solution for the sudanese refugees problems” or a “tra[n]sfer” to “other countries” or, it warned, “this demonstration will continue until we achi[e]ve our rights” (Ibid.). The post then detailed difficulties the sit-in participants had faced in the park: deaths, births, malnutrition amongst children, amoebic dysentery, exposure to “hot sun rays during the days and very cold weather during the nights as no[t] enough blankets”. It also reported instances of provocation and abduction from the sit-in by Sudanese embassy staff (Ibid.).

The appeal, ending with a request to contact Refugees Voice members via a phone number and two email addresses, cited both discrimination, rights, treatment by UNHCR and the protesters’ present suffering. Through the post, Refugees Voice expressed trust in their international audience’s hearts and consciences, and above all in their “eyes” as instruments through which the “truth” of the protesters’ distress might be seen and disseminated throughout the world. The suffering of thousands of refugees should, the statement implied, be cause for outcry and action.

During the protest, participants expressed also fear that Sudanese government might be using their public exposure for its own means, reporting to researchers that they “routinely saw embassy vehicles circling the sit-in during the day” (Gomez et al. 2005a: 1). Protesters screened park visitors and investigate unknown participants in case they “were acting as informers” or agents provocateurs for the embassy (Rowe 2007: 66).

Four Sudanese men driving a vehicle with diplomatic number plates visited Mustafa Mahmoud park in the middle of the night on 15 October, two weeks into the protest, passed around alcohol, and allegedly “attempted to start a fight” amongst protesters (Azzam et al. 2006: 25). Sudanese embassy staff later stated that the men were known but not employed

by their office. Protesters, however, took the event as proof that “the Sudanese embassy was conspiring to undermine the demonstration” (Rowe 2007: 66), raising the issue in a negotiation meeting on 26 October (UNHCR03). As proof of the car’s presence, protesters removed its license plate, which Stacy Schafer photographed with a daily newspaper as evidence of the timing (see photos in Appendix F). Through this incident, protesters further called for attention to their vulnerability to Sudanese government harassment in Cairo.

9.4 Protest negotiations: a reluctant undertaking with a mistrusted party

While the protest began with Refugees Voice’s delivery of a petition to UNHCR-Cairo, and the protest was certainly concerned with UNHCR-Cairo in many respects, both protest organisers and the wider body of protest participants aimed for a more global hearing. On 2 October 2005, however, when the protesters numbered in the early hundreds, UNHCR asked to meet with five protest delegates (UNHCR15: 17). In the next day’s meeting, however, as UNHCR would report in a later press release, the delegates

made it clear that they were not interested in discussing with UNHCR whatever grievances the demonstrators may have. They insisted that any discussions with UNHCR concerning their demands would only take place in the presence of representatives of the Egyptian government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and State Security), human rights NGOs, and the media. (UNHCR04)

When UNHCR-Cairo staff refused, “explain[ing] to them that this was unrealistic”, the delegates in turn “refused UNHCR’s offer and any further contact with the Office” (Ibid.).

The protesters’ discomfort with undertaking negotiations with UNHCR-Cairo was so acute that it is a wonder that the meetings occurred at all, and, in retrospect, not surprising that they should have failed. Initial refusals by protesters to meet with office staff, calls for different audiences, the withholding of identifying information from UNHCR-Cairo,

outright threats against the office, and descriptions of past and growing mistrust of the course of the protest illustrate the extent of protester misgivings about the office purported to act as their advocate.

Throughout the first month of the protest, protesters continued to rebuff UNHCR's invitations, delivered by Egyptian security staff, to meet (UNHCR01 and UNHCR02). Protest delegates finally agreed to a meeting which would be attended by representatives from both UNHCR-Cairo and five NGO and religious service providing organisations. In this meeting too, protest delegates stated that the present audience was insufficient, and that they "did not want further dialogue" (UNHCR02) unless meetings included a greater range of "relevant organizations – government, media, human rights NGOs, state security and MoFA" (UNHCR03).

Delegates themselves withheld their names from office staff, fearing that UNHCR, as the body in charge of RSD and resettlement referrals, might take punitive action against them (Gomez et al. 2005a, UNHCR04). Until late November, delegates also withheld the identities of protest participants from UNHCR (UNHCR15: 28) – evidence of the problematic effect of UNHCR's bureaucratic role in Egypt, especially its RSD permit, on its ability to maintain effective, two-way communication with asylees.

UNHCR-Cairo even alleged that protesters made threats against the office – not only through the banners that, as its first press release noted, contained "abusive and threatening messages directed at UNHCR" (UNHCR04)", but through physical threats of detention in the park (UNHCR15: 19-22). The office cited reports that NGO staff sympathetic to UNHCR had been "[t]ied] to trees in the park overnight" (Ibid.: 15). While protesters explained their vigilance as a necessary precaution against *agents provocateurs* (Rowe 2006: 67), UNHCR staff were thus "advised not to approach the park" (Ibid.: 28) and

repeatedly appealed for government intervention on the basis of the need for “protection” from the protesters (see pp. 184-85).

Protester misgivings with the office were evident from their sit-in’s very existence: the protest began in part because its participants were, in the words of one of them, “having problems at UNHCR, saw the protest, and joined” (FMRS24). In discussing the negotiations, another protester explained that “the history of our relationship with the office”¹⁸ had led to the feeling that it was “not to be trusted”, linking past treatment to scepticism about UNHCR’s commitment to meaningful negotiations with the protesters:

We felt that if you had reached a position with the office one day and the next day went there to continue discussions you could be send away just like we as individual refugees were used to be sent away by the security guards whenever we went to the office. (FMRS19)

UNHCR-Cairo’s public press releases, which chastised the protesters and their delegates and undermined their claims to be refugees, were, as negotiation meeting minutes recorded, “oil on fire” for the delegates’ distrust of the office (UNHCR03). Layla explained to me that given the UNHCR staff’s avoidance of the park, and spreading of public statements against the protesters, she “didn’t really think that the office would do anything” or that “the office policy would change at all (FMRS25).

A speech to the protesters by an outspoken man amongst them in the protest’s final month captured the result of such misgivings: “the dialogue committee, they talk much, much with the UNHCR, but in the first months the UNHCR is not believable that we are refugees, and we keep on staying” (FMRS32).

¹⁸ As researchers have documented, the “general mistrust” of UNHCR amongst asylees in Cairo (Schafer 2005: 15) and the “problematic relationship” between asylees and the office had been “longstanding” (Mahmoud 2009: 111).

9.4.1 Protester responses to UNHCR's final offer

Although hampered in multiple ways, as the next chapter explores, negotiations between protest delegates and UNHCR-Cairo did result in an offer by UNHCR to the protesters, signed by the delegates on 17 December. In a meeting in the park, protest delegates presented the offer as the best they could have managed in negotiations in which UNHCR-Cairo was their primary intermediary. One protester recounts delegates telling the group that “the office can’t offer more than this” (FMRS24); in the words of another, the proposal was “the limit of what UNHCR can give” (FMRS25).

The offer, if accepted, would result in expedited review of the protesters’ RSD and resettlement processes, assistance for those who wished to return to Sudan, and the promise of future monthly meetings between UNHCR staff and protest participants (UNHCR10). UNHCR aimed to initially screen protesters who, in groups of 20, would leave the park, with a view to total vacating of the park between 18 and 22 December (UNHCR10).

Although protesters understood the terms of the agreement, to which many agreed, they did not end their occupation. That the agreement was with the “wrong people” was a major factor in their continued presence: as protesters explained, they did not trust UNHCR, and sought the agreement to be guaranteed by higher powers who might hold the office to its word.

Betty cited collective accounts of history with the office as a direct influence on her rejection of UNHCR’s proposal:

I have only been in Cairo six months, but I heard stories from everyone about problems with UNHCR, and then I went eight times to the office, and found the officers yelling at me. I thought the agreement was not true, that it was just a trick from UNHCR to clear the park, so I didn't believe it. (FMRS24)

The idea that the proposal was but a ploy resurfaced repeatedly in post-protest interviews. As two protesters explained, UNHCR-Cairo's actions during the event had stoked suspicion of the office. Referring to the office's "statement that we are not refugees," he explained, "We didn't trust anyone anymore. We believed that they wanted to do anything to break our protest apart" (FMRS6).

Layla similarly emphasised protester distrust of UNHCR-Cairo regarding the 17 December offer, contrasting the office's actions during the protest with those of AUC students and journalists:

The offer was not because the UNHCR sympathized with the problems of the refugees, but to solve the problem of pressure, from the Egyptian government and public, to clean up the park. The media and the press and AUC students had been coming to the park throughout the three months and always stayed for more than fifteen minutes, and cared about people, much more than UNCHR staff. (FMRS25)

She stated that even once the office had "realized we were mostly really refugees" it had not offered to help protesters; as a result, she said, "we thought that the office didn't really care ... We thought they just wanted to clear the park, and after that they would go back to their old ways" (FMRS25).

Yet many protesters agreed, in theory, to UNHCR's offer. Reiterating the damaging impact of the office's public statements on the protesters, Layla recounted why, nonetheless, they hesitated to accept it:

Most of the refugees agreed, but the problem was that when the protest started, the office said that we weren't refugees, and now they agreed that we were, so that resulted in a lot of mistrust from us within the park of UNHCR. And so the problem with the agreement was that it didn't have any guarantees, and we wanted to know what guarantees we would have, that if we left the park, what would happen, because we didn't trust UNHCR. (FMRS25)

To counter the prevalent fear that UNHCR-Cairo would renege on the offer, protesters countered by requesting assurances – in writing, from other UNHCR staff, or from foreign

embassies – that the office would abide by its terms. As one protester explained, although “the Sudanese agreed” to the proposal,

we refused to leave the park because we were not given any guarantees. So the Sudanese said they would stay in the park and interviews could be done there. Too many people were afraid that the UNHCR would not give them anything. (FMRS8)

This apprehension, another protester said, led protesters to request guarantees to back up UNHCR’s proposal: “Because of this lack of trust we just wanted strong assurances before leaving the park” (FMRS13).

As to what form of assurance would be acceptable, Betty suggested that a written guarantee would have sufficed:

We, the refugees replied: okay, but let them write us a guarantee, a document, promising that this will happen. But the leaders said, "This is the UN, they won't give a written guarantee to refugees, we are just refugees." (FMRS24)

Yet, as this explanation indicates, both delegates and protesters exhibited a sense of depoliticisation through their role as refugees: that despite having undertaken negotiations with the protesters, UNHCR did not regard them as political equals (an observation also noted in Moulin & Nyers 2007: 369).

Other protesters proposed not a signed document but verbal guarantees from different staff within UNHCR, signalling the damage that had resulted from the office’s handling of the protest. Layla stated that she and others in the park simply “wanted to hear the agreement from the staff of UNHCR directly”, listing four staff by name – “to have the staff talk to us refugees in the park and tell us, ‘This is the agreement’, to confirm it to us” (FMRS25).

Another man similarly explained that “in theory this [agreement] was acceptable to us, but we had a huge credibility problem with the UNHCR staff” (FMRS19). Also naming a particular UNHCR official, he stated that “for us, the guarantee would have been “if there

was a different group of staff that we could feel would be objective and fair” (FMRS19).

In late December, Refugee Voices members sought assurances from the most senior United Nations official of them all: then-Secretary General Kofi Annan. In a letter to Annan distributed also in Cairo, they wrote that protesters were ready to accept UNHCR-Cairo’s proposal, with one caveat which they hoped Annan might fill. The protesters, they wrote, were “ready to settle”,

provided they have guarantees that the agreement will be taken seriously and is not only used as a negotiation card to put an end to their sit in. Your Excellency we urge you to interfere to secure those guarantees. We are sure that a commitment by the Secretary General of the United Nations would be a major support for the refugees and a guarantee that their suffering would not be forgotten as soon as they leave the park.

Somewhat closer at hand than Annan were representatives of those powerful bodies from whom protesters most often mentioned wanting help: the Cairo-based embassies of resettlement countries. Since UNHCR’s offer included the revisiting of “durable solutions” (i.e. resettlement) processing for protesters recognised as refugees, those in the park who “wanted to see proof rather than empty promises” asked specifically to see “documents as proof from embassies”, as one protester explained (FMRS6). The protesters’ hope of hearing from these embassies underlines the significance of resettlement as an ultimate hoped-for form of recourse.

One protester laid out this significance explicitly, stating: “We demanded that representatives from the embassies guarantee us that the resettlement of Sudanese was open as an option” (FMRS13). UNHCR-Cairo, however, he said, “said that it would be unable to do that” (Ibid.) The same man referred to the press conference organised by Sadiq el Mahdi, which “personnel from the Australian, American and Canadian embassies were also supposed to attend” but ultimately did not, an absence he said Sadiq attributed to “security problems” (FMRS13).

UNHCR-Cairo itself avoided affiliation with Sadiq's intervention because, a UNHCR official said, of his status as a politician – “we did not want to politicize the issue” – and similarly noted that despite his invitations to embassies, none appeared (UNHCR14). The absence of foreign government staff to underline UNHCR's proposal was, in the opinion of the protester just cited, the chief reason for its failure: “If any representative of the embassies would have turned up, I am sure that the demonstrators would have left the park” (FMRS13).

Instead, on 19 December a UNHCR-Cairo official made a speech in the park repeatedly insisting that widespread knowledge of the offer should be guarantee enough. He stated to protesters that he knew that “your preoccupation is the guarantee that we will respect what we have agreed”, but that, given media attention to the protest, “everyone knows what we are agreeing to” and so

the governments and the international media will be scrutinizing us to make sure we keep our word. This is the guarantee that you have, and you can have no better guarantee in those terms. (UNHCR11)

This assurance, however, was not sufficient, as a protester explained a month after the forced removal:

We thought that UNHCR would hold a media conference with representatives from embassies, and that would be a good guarantee for us, but UNHCR said no because UNHCR has higher power than embassies. So no embassies came to witness the signing of the agreement, which made us depressed and suspicious of the agreement. It became a complicated situation in the last few days. We didn't know what to do, the position of the office was unclear, the staff were absent in the last few days, and there was confusion about what to do next. (FMRS25)

Although, according to this account, UNHCR claimed to be more powerful than embassies, the suspicion and impasse that followed the absence of embassy representatives indicates that the protesters thought quite the opposite. Despite requests for substantive assurances and the involvement of resettlement country embassies, UNHCR-Cairo (in the words of a

protester) “did not accept our conditions, so the talks collapsed” (FMRS19).

9.4.2 From impasse to forced removal

On 29 December, the numbers of police in the streets around the protest steadily increased. Most protesters did not leave the park, however, in part because of the appearance of apparently Muslim Brotherhood protesters, who had arrived to stage protests in front of Mustafa Mahmoud Mosque previously. The belief that police were present because of the Brotherhood protesters was encouraged by outright trickery from security officials:

When we asked the regular police about this, they said that they were getting ready for the Ikwan [Muslim Brotherhood] who were going to demonstrate against the election the following day. We believed it because this has happened before. (FMRS19)

At four o'clock the police started to arrive near the park. When we asked what they were doing, they told us that there was going to be a demonstration and they needed to protect us. (FMRS8)

The delegation asked an officer that they are worried because of the presence of many police officers. The police repeated their initial reasoning saying that everything was being done to prepare for the demonstration that was being organized for the following day. (FMRS13)

A state security official came towards us dressed in civil clothes. He said the Moslem Brotherhood is organizing a demonstration and the police is here to protect us. We were confident that the police will protect us. (Nadim7)

Similar statements, including the sighting of actual Islamist-looking demonstrators, appear in almost all post-protest interviews with protesters, who repeatedly said that because of their statuses and relationship with UNHCR, they never expected police intervention:

I didn't think it was for us — all these troops doing something for us? We are just refugees. (FMRS24)

We are refugees. Our problems are humanitarian problems, so we did not think that it would turn violent. ... Our problems were with UNHCR and we never thought that they would resort to the police to remove us instead of addressing our problems. (FMRS19)

Yet these expectations – that by protesting as refugees, and directing criticism towards UNHCR, the demonstrators had a certain amount of immunity – changed as police started to move more clearly to surround the park. Initially police faced away from the Sudanese protesters, separating them from the group of purported Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators who had appeared. At a certain point, however, around 1 o'clock in the morning, their direction changed. As two protesters recounted:

After a while they turned towards us (Nadim8)

... and as they turned towards us I understood that they were not there to protect us. (FMRS13)

Following this about-face, security officials in civilian clothes set up a microphone and announced to the protesters that they must vacate the park onto busses that would take them to camps where, as one protester recalled, they would receive “food, blankets and even TV” (FMRS13). The Egyptian official addressing the group referred explicitly to the state’s authority to enforce the removal of the protesters: one woman recounted him stating that “UNHCR office today is on holiday” (FMRS25) whereas another said:

He told us that UNHCR had given up, had given up their responsibility for us. He said, “Take your children and belongings and get on busses and we will take you to camps.” (FMRS24)

Protesters, individually and in small groups, including some of the delegates who had negotiated with UNHCR, attempted to negotiate with security officials directly.

As with the 17 December offer, protesters in theory were prepared to vacate the park, but first sought assurances from outside authorities that what was promised to them would be realised. Suspicious of where they might be taken, they sought assurances that the camps existed. This time, however, they called for UNHCR-Cairo to act as guarantor: “One of the negotiating committee said: we are ready to come out of the camp but will not enter into the busses except in the presence of somebody from UNHCR” (Nadim5). Protesters report

attempting to reach UNHCR staff directly through their mobile phones, but were unsuccessful (Nadim8, FMRS27).

Protest delegates thus asked government officials to call for

an officer from the UNHCR who would address us over the microphone saying that we should leave the park and that the UNHCR would take responsibility over our well-being. (FMRS13)

The Egyptian officials present refused, however, stating that “they would not be able to reach anyone from the UNHCR”, as a protester recalled (Ibid). Instead, they “insisted that [the protesters] get onto the busses” (Ibid.).

Following this refusal to contact UNHCR, protesters suggested instead that a small group of them, ideally accompanied by some of the journalists who had by then assembled at the park, “visit these camps and see what was there” (FMRS8). If some of the protesters could only see the camps, they could then “reassure the rest” of the protesters, who would then leave as ordered (FMRS19). This request, too, was refused; Egyptian officers “responded that the camps were 20km away from Cairo” and look-see visits would take too long (FMRS13).

At the same time, protesters attempted to reason with government officials in terms of the division of responsibility of asylum governance. One woman present recounted that a group of protesters, including her nephew, approached police, telling them that the protesters

did not have political demands from the government and we did not want problems with the Egyptian people ... We have a problem with UNHCR not with you. We cannot leave here until our problems are addressed, otherwise the UNHCR should just say that they will not fulfill their mandate. (FMRS20)

A protest delegate similarly argued that Egypt ought not intervene in the protest: “We don't belong to the Egyptian authority, we are under the mandate of UNHCR” (FMRS22).

Betty's longer account of protester arguments to state security the night of the forced removal spelled out the nuances of this argument, framing the police presence as an abdication of responsibility by UNHCR:

We said to him, 'If UNHCR has given up their responsibility, we will leave this place immediately, because you are hosting us, this is your country; we just want to see a letter from UNHCR saying they've given up their responsibility. We will leave the park and we will clean it tonight.... We have no problems with you. Our problem is with UNHCR; we respect the Egyptian government and Egyptians.' I repeated for him my problems with UNHCR, and told him, 'If the UNHCR really can't solve my problems, let them give me a letter saying that, and I will leave, I will leave Cairo. Let the UNHCR staff come here now. If they don't want us here in Cairo, give us a chance to get a letter from them saying that, and we will leave; otherwise, death is better than this situation.' I also said to him, "What's the guarantee that we will be safe? We're here and we're just refugees. Where's UNHCR? I just see soldiers everywhere. Are they all here to escort us to the camps?" (FMRS24)

Egyptian officials, however, rebuffed the protesters' attempts, over nearly two hours, to negotiate for guarantees or look-see visits. Starting at close to three o'clock in the morning, police began repeated rounds of extended water-sprays, with ten to fifteen minutes of water spraying interjected with brief negotiations. A representative of the Sudanese opposition party, SPLF, attempted to mediate between protesters and police, who allowed him "15 minutes to persuade them to leave" (FMRS23). Sudanese embassy staff also appeared for similar negotiations. At approximately five o'clock, riot police surrounding the park began the forced removal (see photographs in Appendix G and Azzam et al. 2006: 32-33 for a summary of the incursion).

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how protesters called for international attention to the need for greater accountability and asylee participation in asylum governance — attention which they hoped would result in tangible support from bodies outside Egypt, especially resettlement country embassies, in pressuring UNHCR-Cairo to reform its practices and

helping Sudanese asylees leave Cairo to safer locations. The strategies described in this chapter evince the ways in which the 2005 protesters appropriated and enacted humanitarian language through the sit-in.

Capturing attention through their occupation of Mustafa Mahmoud park, protesters pursued political recognition from an international audience by instrumentalising the refugee role, its characteristic suffering, and its associated rights. On these grounds, they argued for a greater say within asylum governance: recognition as political actors; input into policy decisions concerning legal recognition and migration; and the ability to hold UNHCR accountable.

As the last section of the conclusion introduced, however, these strategies were undone when protest delegates began negotiations with UNHCR-Cairo. While protesters and their delegates sought to speak with representatives from the ‘international community’ and the embassies of resettlement countries, negotiations were driven instead first by UNHCR and then by Egypt and Sudanese figures.

The protesters failed, in other words, to reach their desired audiences. This failure, and protester suspicion of those governance representatives with whom they did manage direct dialogue, contributed to the undoing of both the negotiations and the protest as a whole. In the absence of guarantees, protesters remained in the park after UNHCR’s final offer, until the night when Egypt took action. The next and final empirical chapter of the thesis sets out what happened in the interim.

CHAPTER 10. BETWEEN PROTEST, NEGOTIATIONS, AND IMPASSE: MOVES TOWARDS A ‘TERRIBLE STALEMATE’

The purpose of this final empirical chapter is to examine more closely the interactions between the protesters and governance bodies that led to the protest’s ultimate end. The chapter starts by examining declarations by UNHCR-Cairo staff directed towards the protesters as to the legitimacy of their collective strategies and petitions. The second section discusses the significant absence of foreign embassies from involvement in the protest negotiations. The third section analyses the problems that shaped the negotiation meetings between UNHCR-Cairo and protest delegates, while the final section discusses the transfer of power over the protest’s resolution between UNHCR and the GoE. Overall, I suggest, protest negotiations were undermined by questions of representation, disagreements about acceptable topics of discussion, and the manner in which they were carried out. They failed, in short, because they were undertaken by *the wrong people talking to the wrong people about the wrong things in the wrong way*, a mnemonic I will spell out in the thesis’s conclusions.

10.1 UNHCR-Cairo’s suggestions for the protesters

Chapter 7 outlined the ways in which UNHCR-Cairo framed the protest to a wider public. The present section focusses on the office’s communication to the protesters themselves. From the protest’s start, UNHCR-Cairo’s public statements suggested that political action was not a legitimate strategy for a group of asylees to pursue. Rather, its statements explained, asylees, including refugees even recognised as such by the office, were participants in a pre-existing system of governance in which their choices and desires were not considered factors.

Instead of protesting, the office contended, protesters who had been accepted into the lengthy resettlement pipeline should go home; participation in the protest could, in fact, jeopardise their place in the queue:

Any refugee who has been accepted by a resettlement country should follow the normal procedures advised by IOM and the resettlement country. There is no reason to go to the park; indeed it will be harder for representatives of the resettlement country and IOM to find you. (UNHCR05)

The office thus asserted the functioning of procedures as usual, implying that refugees' proper role within this order was not to protest but to wait and to follow predefined procedures. Although protesters might think that they had good reasons to demonstrate, UNHCR stated that in fact they did not: there was "no reason to go to the park".

UNHCR's public relations campaign directly disparaged the protesters' political mobilisation. The office's first press release referred to the sit-in as "the Sudanese 'protest' against UNHCR" – dismissive quotation marks casting doubt on whether the protesters' sit-in could be labelled a political act at all.

Instead, the office was resolute that its policies were not to be influenced by public political pressure from asylees. Evoking the power of UNHCR's international authority, an early press release stated that

No protest will force UNHCR to change its policies on refugee status determination, resettlement, assistance or any other matter. UNHCR's decisions on refugee status are based on internationally applied criteria. (UNHCR05).

UNHCR would not, in other words, be pressured by asylees, through protest or otherwise, into reconsidering its practices. Instead, the statement implied, the protester's appeals were impractical and ought to be given up.

UNHCR also delivered this message in protest negotiation meetings. According to meeting minutes, protest delegates argued that UNHCR staff "were not open to criticism and would

not accept advice”, detailing the difficulties they had encountered in attempting to contact the office prior to the protest. In response, a UNHCR representative “stressed that there was a complaints mechanism” in place through which the office received asylee feedback (although an NGO representative present also noted that “the issue of the effectiveness of the UNHCR complaints mechanism could be worked on” (UNHCR03).

This message was repeated as the protest continued. A later press release quoted the message that Nouicer delivered in a speech to those in the park in late November 2005: that the protesters “have to” admit that their petitions were over-ambitious and that their protest ought, therefore, be abandoned:

You have to realize however, that hoping for the impossible is unrealistic and that solutions cannot be reached through a sit-in strike. Now the time has come to bring this situation to an end, through peaceful means. (UNHCR08)

In this summing-up, Nouicer framed the protesters’ collective political act as a “situation” that needed to be resolved — not through the realisation of the protesters’ unrealistic, “impossible” wishes, but through their concession to reality and peaceful departure from the park. “For those issues within UNHCR’s ability to influence,” the Cairo office wrote later that week, “change can only be achieved through constructive dialogue, not through sit-ins and protests” (UNHCR09).

This tension between the protesters’ hopes and “those issues within UNHCR’s ability to influence” became a further sticking point in protest negotiations: not only were the protesters, according to UNHCR, the “wrong people” to make claims and UNHCR, according to protest delegates, the “wrong people” to deliver on protester demands, but the *content* focused on in negotiation meetings also contributed to discord and deadlock.

This thesis earlier set out how the protesters based their claims for political participation and calls for outside assistance on their collective legal identification as refugees, and the

suffering and rights associated with this status. After some dispute over the legal statuses of the protesters, both Egypt and UNHCR-Cairo's public statements presented the ending of the protest as an act "rescuing" sit-in participants from their suffering. This representation was, I argued, an assertion of both bodies' institutional authority in humanitarian terms.

But the use of this humanitarian discourse was also a means through which UNHCR tried directly to convince the protesters to quit their sit-in – a transformation of suffering from the protesters' political tool into a reason for the abandonment of their political action. As a group composed mostly of people registered with the office, the protesters's position as not political actors but people in need of "rescue" was one that UNHCR-Cairo repeatedly brought to bear in its representative's final speech to the park, on 18 December 2005.

Emphasising the office staff's "concern for the children and the women and those who are in a difficult situation here", the speaker framed the necessity of the protest's end in terms of the protesters' neediness, saying: "Some of you are very vulnerable. This is why we need to end this here" (UNHCR11).

UNHCR's desire, the speaker stressed, was to help the protesters by undertaking the processes its 17 December proposal had offered:

What we want to do is process you as quickly as possible to get you out of this hardship ... Our office here, the UNHCR office, has pooled all its resources only for you, and this is because we want to help you end this hardship that you are living in the park. (UNHCR11)

UNHCR-Cairo's representative framed the office as under obligation to carry out the proposal's concessions because of the protesters' public suffering, and, in an acknowledgment of the protesters' calls for guarantees, under the watch of the "global eye":

the international community also understands that we cannot put people at risk

in this park, we cannot have people's physical situation deteriorating, especially the children, and the women, and the elderly. So, it is our responsibility to work with you to avoid further bad situations." (UNHCR11)

In the sit-in's final weeks, the office's emphasis of this role thus re-cast the protesters as depoliticised "victims" in need of intervention. Whereas protesters heralded their suffering as a reason for international help and for attention to their complaints, the protesters were, as asylees in a bad situation, necessarily subjects of UNHCR's responsibility.

This framing emerged in UNHCR's communications with Egypt, as well as in public statements and in the speech to the protesters: alongside the protest having affected the office's "operations", the agency told Egypt that "UNHCR wants to end the protest" because of the "wellbeing of the people in the park" (UNHCR14).

10.1.1 Resettlement as neither a right, nor an acceptable want

UNHCR-Cairo's earliest press releases of the protest emphasised that resettlement was neither a right, nor a privilege refugees could ask for. It was, instead, a process overseen by existing rules, and would not be influenced by refugees' political action:

Refugees do not have the right to choose their country of asylum. Persons in the park will not be resettled to the US, Australia, Turkey or any other country just because they complain of difficult living conditions in Egypt. UNHCR continues to resettle to third countries Sudanese and other refugees who meet the strict criteria for resettlement and are accepted by the resettlement countries on the basis of their national legislation. (UNHCR05)

Both protesters and public were thus reminded that resettlement was determined by UNHCR's criteria and resettlement countries' laws, and was not a matter that even recognised refugees could have a say in, regardless of the conditions in their host country.

UNHCR-Cairo's post-protest report repeated this message, alleging that the idea that resettlement is a right was widespread: "Resettlement is not a right which UNHCR is

denying persons as many unfortunately believe” (UNHCR15: 4). The report went on to locate this belief – or the desire for this belief – amongst the protesters:

a number of persons involved in the demonstration wanted to believe that resettlement was the only option and that they were entitled to it. They believed it was a right irrespective of their refugee status and irrespective of whether they qualify for resettlement under UNHCR resettlement Guidelines and meet the admission criteria used by concerned resettlement countries. (UNHCR15: 10)

This passage ended by reiterating once more: “Resettlement is not a right” (Ibid.). Not only, it suggested, was resettlement not a right, but in thinking that resettlement was something they could ask for, protesters had revealed their ignorance, and a mistaken sense of entitlement.

During the protest, UNHCR used the topic of resettlement to question the basis for the participants’ petitions. UNHCR cited the the protesters’ desires for resettlement as evidence that they were not actually refugees: seeking onward migration, the (incorrect) logic went, showed a desire for “economic and social betterment” (UNHCR04), signalling that the protesters were not refugees but economic migrants. On this basis, UNHCR-Cairo’s early press releases suggested that not only were protesters demonstrating under false pretences, but “misus[ing] the international refugee protection regime” (Ibid.).

By raising migration as a topic of discussion, protesters thus opened themselves to criticism on the basis that resettlement was neither a right nor, in UNHCR’s view, a privilege that refugees were allowed to admit to want. Such an admission, by the agency’s logic, undermined an asylee’s very claim to be a refugee.

10.1.2 “Impossible”, “unrealistic”: resettlement as an illegitimate goal

Nouicer, the UNHCR-Geneva official quoted earlier asking protesters to admit that “hoping

for the impossible is unrealistic”, went on to tell protesters that what he meant by “the impossible” was resettlement. Nouicer did concede that “some of the demands are realistic and could be discussed and dealt with within UNHCR’s ability and through constructive dialogue” (UNHCR08). He explained, for example,

We can talk about assistance for the most vulnerable, or the re-opening of files if there are new and valid arguments. (Ibid.)

These topics were, in other words, the “right things” to bring to the negotiations – things that UNHCR was willing to “talk about” with the protesters. “Some other demands however,” he stated, were “not realistically feasible, such as massive resettlement to third countries” (Ibid).

A protester describing protest negotiations captured this message in similar terms:

The delegation wanted to pressure UNHCR to get the procedures for Sudanese refugees restarted. The UNHCR said however, that the resettlement of all Sudanese would be impossible (FMRS13).

In some instances, the office’s argument that the protesters’ requests to be involved in discussions about resettlement were unreasonable cited the limited number of resettlement places available, and relatedly, the strict criteria for those places. An early agency press release stated that resettlement “is a solution that only applies to few refugees in very specific circumstances” (UNHCR05). An early interview of a UNHCR-Cairo spokesperson recorded similar reasoning: “There are 22 million refugees and others of concern around the world and resettlement cannot be a solution except for the few since the resettlement quota is a few thousand per year” (Gomez et al. 2005b).

While the numbers of places made available by resettlement countries were (and are) certainly limited, other arguments made by the office were based on shakier grounds. First,

UNHCR-Cairo initially rebuffed petitions for resettlement on the basis that it was not a matter they could influence:

UNHCR has no decision-making authority on resettlement cases. Decisions are made by the governments of the resettlement countries. (UNHCR05)

In the 26 October negotiation meeting attended by UNHCR-Cairo, protest delegates, and staff of several NGOs, one of the latter similarly “stressed that resettlement was not in the hands of UNHCR”, a statement that, if the detailed meeting minutes are accurate, UNHCR staff did not correct (UNHCR03).

After the protest, too, UNHCR-Cairo explained that the negotiations had failed because the protesters had asked for things that were out of UNHCR’s control, given

the nature of the demands made by the demonstrators on one hand and on the other hand the office’s internal Operational Guidelines Procedures, mandate and available resources (UNHCR15).

Yet the office’s role in resettlement was greater than these statements indicate. Although responsibility for the management of resettlement is, as in asylum governance in Egypt as a whole, “diffuse” (Kagan 2011b: 36), the process involves both UNHCR and resettlement countries: UNHCR-Cairo is the initial ‘filter’, referring refugees for resettlement to embassies, and resettlement countries conduct further screenings, deciding whom amongst these candidates to resettle based on their own criteria and quotas.

Oral comments by the office’s own staff disclosed the significance of its role in resettlement: following the protest, for instance, a representative stated of UNHCR-Cairo that “until 2003, we resettled nearly all of those recognised” (UNHCR14). When interviewed about the protest, representatives of resettlement country embassies confirmed the importance of UNHCR-Cairo in their resettlement decisions.

The American embassy, for example, stated that it would slightly reduce the number of

Sudanese it had previously planned to resettle from Cairo in the 2006 fiscal year “because of the downturn in Sudanese referrals from UNHCR” (2005-10-13 email, on file). It stated elsewhere that the embassy would “continue to consider for resettlement any Sudanese for whom repatriation is not possible and for whom resettlement is believed to be the best durable solution—as determined by the UNHCR” (in Gomez et al. 2005b).

While this managed migration ultimately relied on the cooperation and quotas of resettlement countries, UNHCR had its own criteria and institutional policies, and at the time of the protest, the Cairo office’s stance on resettlement was avoidant. “UNHCR,” explained a Cairo representative, “seeks resettlement as appropriate, but repatriation is most preferred” (Gomez et al. 2005b). In light of the changing situation in Sudan, she argued, “it is just a statement of fact that the number of people seeking resettlement will naturally diminish” (Ibid.).

While UNHCR-Cairo’s reasons for not wanting resettlement on the negotiation table, then, had to do both with the office’s dependence on resettlement countries and its policies, the overriding message to protesters was that resettlement was not a goal they should pursue.

10.1.3 Asking for resettlement will “naturally always lead to disappointment”

UNHCR staff were not the only people to dismiss the possibility that protester requests for increased resettlement might be acted upon. The protesters’ expressions of hope for resettlement were roundly dismissed also by Cairo-based scholars at the time. In an email late October 2005, Barbara Harrell-Bond called the situation of the protesters “overwhelmingly sad because they are asking for mostly impossible outcomes and there seems no way for them to come to terms with reality,” namely: “the bottom line is resettlement and that is not going to happen” (on file).

She repeated this message in interviews in December 2005 (“the bottom line is that

UNHCR isn't going to resettle the refugees" (BBC 2005 12-22 Talks fail to resolve)) and in early 2006, saying "the refugees' demands were impossible to achieve!" (in LeHouerou 2006). Amongst those familiar with how asylum governance worked in Cairo at the time, even its critics, resettlement was viewed as an untouchable, non-negotiable issue.

The FMRS report signalled this view in its title, "A tragedy of failures and false *expectations*" [italics added]. The protest had failed, the report concluded, in part because the protesters' expectations that their collective act might result in their resettlement was unfounded. UNHCR-Cairo's post-protest report applauded this conclusion, arguing that the protest's downfall lay in large part in the protesters' ignorance of how asylum governance actually worked. The office argued that a "lack of information and as a result, false expectations" amongst protesters had been "one of the predominant reasons for the demonstration" (UNHCR15: 15).

That the protesters had expected that UNHCR might increase resettlement places, or might advocate that resettlement countries increase their own quotas, was, in the agency's view, a profound mistake. In its post-protest report, the Cairo office detailed the topics which it viewed as legitimate topics of discussion:

It is entirely legitimate to expect UNHCR to undertake [its work] in accordance to the mandate and procedural guidelines. It is also entirely legitimate to demand that the government comply with its international obligations under refugee law, as well as its bilateral obligations under the Four Freedoms Agreement signed with Sudan in 2004. (UNHCR15: 14)

But, the report explained, the protesters should have known that asking for more than rights would not have a happy ending: "To expect UNHCR to do more than it is legally permitted to do, or more than available funds will permit, will naturally always lead to disappointment" (Ibid.)

The protesters had thus not only overstepped the bounds of their role as refugees by asking for more than rights, but also asked for the “wrong things” by petitioning for more than asylum governance bodies were ultimately willing to concede.

10.2 Foreign embassies: non-involvement

The response of Cairo embassies of resettlement countries to the protest was not as the protesters hoped; in fact, it was hardly a response at all. Cairo embassies continued processing the resettlement cases of Sudanese refugees through established procedures, and, aside from regular contact with UNHCR-Cairo, stayed uninvolved from the protest. Although aware of the protest, they did not participate in negotiation meetings, or endorse the 17 December agreement. Explanations by embassy staff demonstrate, furthermore, the extent to which their reaction to the event was mediated by UNHCR.

A United States embassy official visited the protest in early October in an unofficial capacity, and noted in a subsequent email that UNHCR had informed him that the protesters were “mainly new arrivals — not registered and not recognised — straight up from Khartoum” (14 October 2005 email, on file.) When asked whether the US embassy resettlement policy would change in response to the protest, an official responded in the negative, emphasising that the embassy would follow the lead of UNHCR:

We will work with UNHCR in Cairo and elsewhere in the region to encourage the Sudanese to return to Sudan. ... At the same time we will continue to consider for resettlement any Sudanese for whom repatriation is not possible and for whom resettlement is believed to be the best durable solution—as determined by the UNHCR. (Gomez et al. 2005b)

When asked about its stance on 16 October 2005, an Australian embassy representative stated that “it is business as usual for us, no changes” (on file). In an email later that week, responding to being asked about Australia’s response to the protest, the representative

simply stated: “Our large refugee resettlement programs in Africa - which includes significant numbers of Sudanese from Cairo and Nairobi, as well as refugees from across the continent, are continuing” (on file).

The Canadian embassy in Cairo held regular meetings with UNHCR during the protest, conveying the office’s updates on the event to government branches in Ottawa. However, the embassy held no meetings with Egyptian authorities about the protest, and had no involvement in protest negotiations. When I asked a Canadian embassy representative about the protesters’ request that UNHCR invite embassy staff to guarantee the 17 December agreement, he replied that this was “the first time we hear of this request” (23 February 2006 email, on file). UNHCR had not passed on the protesters’ invitation.

Former Sudanese prime minister and opposition figure Sadiq al Mahdi, who tried to support a peaceful resolution to the protest through lobbying and speeches at the park in its final month, invited multiple embassies of resettlement countries to a 22 December press conference at Mustafa Mahmoud park. In a continuation of their business-as-usual response to the protest, however, no embassies attended (an absence noted by both Egyptian and UNHCR officials, in GoE06 and UNHCR14). Resettlement state embassies left the resolution of the protest in UNHCR’s and Egypt’s hands, while UNHCR did not press them for further involvement.

10.3 Protest negotiation meetings and the continuation of the occupation

Despite initial protester reluctance (as discussed in section 9.40), five protest delegates and UNHCR-Cairo staff over nine meetings in autumn 2005 held negotiation discussions totalling more than forty hours, some of which were attended by NGOs and, later in the protest, by Egyptian and Sudanese government officials (UNHCR15: 15). UNHCR’s 17

December offer, signed by the protest delegates, did not succeed in ending the protest. On the night of 29 December and into the early morning of 30 December, after demonstrator attempts to negotiate with Egyptian authorities and a violent incursion, police forcibly removed all surviving protesters. Each of these three major processes – the UNHCR-led negotiations, the 17 December offer, the dialogues of the forced removal – failed to result in a peaceful or (by any definition) successful resolution to the protest. The following sections explore the reasons for these failures.

10.3.1 Delegation and representation

While both protest participants and UNHCR tried to ensure a fair system of representation amongst the protesters, UNHCR's apprehensions about its validity, and subsequent attempts to circumvent it, eroded good faith between the two parties. While the protest itself showed asylee pursuit of greater participation, the problems of representation that unfolded through its negotiations indicated an absence of effective and mutually trusted mechanisms for representation by asylees within asylum governance in Egypt.

The first protesters began their occupation of the waiting area near Mustafa Mahmoud mosque on Thursday 29 September 2005. By the resumption of the work-week on Sunday 2 October more than 100 demonstrators had joined them. The twelve members of Refugees Voice, the organising committee formed in early 2005, took charge of organising the sit-in.

According to UNHCR-Cairo's own report on the protest, office staff set out to delineate a small group of protesters with and through whom to communicate with the larger group, asking those assembled to "elect 5 leaders, including women, to meet with UNHCR protection staff in the UNHCR office and discuss their concerns" (UNHCR15: 17). The protesters agreed, electing five men and one woman to attend negotiation meetings.

Protesters described their self-governance and representation in positive terms, stating that the delegates had been “chosen by all refugees” (FMRS20) and that the “committee of refugees” who negotiated with UNHCR “represented all of us” (FMRS19), sometimes referring to them as “leaders” or as “our Sudanese delegation” (FMRS9). At the same time, protesters created committees to oversee different aspects of life at the sit-in.

When I asked Betty and Layla to describe how protesters had organised themselves, Betty stated:

We as refugees chose people to negotiate with the office and we gave them the authority to talk. If we wanted to talk with the leaders, we could discuss with them. (FMRS24)

The delegates, she said, were “very strict and frank and we trusted in them After every negotiation that they did with the office, they came back to the park and told us about it through the megaphone and asked us what we thought” (FMRS24). Layla, interviewed separately, described a daily process of collective decision-making:

Every day, there was a big meeting, whether there were negotiations with UNHCR or not, and the leaders would talk to us by megaphone directly. If they had had UNCHR negotiations, they would say, “If you agree, put your hand up; if not, don’t” so we would make decisions like this. They would count the hands up, and we would say, “We want it, or we don’t want it in this way.” Inside the park was very organized. It became an independent life. (FMRS25)

Initially, office staff “accepted the decision of those in the park at the time, not seeing any objections from the crowd” (UNHCR15: 17). Furthermore, office staff believed that the delegates were not only elected representatives but held leadership roles amongst the protesters, being founding members of Refugee Voices who organised the protest (Ibid.). While this system of representation was spoken about “at length and with pride” by protest participants (Azzam et al. 2006: 25), UNHCR-Cairo’s initial wish for an elected delegation was quickly supplanted by publicly-expressed apprehensions.

Rather than stating that the negotiating delegation had been chosen in an election that the office itself had requested, UNHCR-Cairo's first public statements referred to the delegates as "self-appointed leaders" and "self-appointed organisers" who, by having "turned down all the offers made by UNHCR" in initial negotiation meetings, were forcing "many innocent men, women and children" to "pa[y] the price" (UNHCR RO-Cairo 2005- 30 Oct #1 & #2). The office alleged, furthermore, that most people had joined the protest due to the "spreading [of] false and misleading information" (30 Oct #2).

A month later, UNHCR attributed this alleged inducement directly to protest leaders, stating: "a great many of [the protesters] joined the demonstration as a result of a very active campaign of misinformation, manipulation and false promises made by the organizers" (UNHCR09). Not surprisingly, these public statements undermined the sense amongst protesters and delegates that the office was undertaking the negotiations in good faith.

At the same time, UNHCR's reports of rumours were indicative of mistrust inside the agency of those with whom they had begun negotiations. Office staff suspected that protest delegates "were not passing on accurate information back to those demonstrators they claimed to represent" (UNHCR15: 18). In meetings with UNHCR-Cairo, representatives of churches, schools, and organisations that worked with Sudanese asylees in Cairo questioned "how representative the representatives really were" and raised concern over the probability that the protest would "have ramifications for the entire Sudanese community" living in Cairo (Ibid.).

As the sit-in proceeded, office staff nonetheless continued talks with the delegates who had been initially elected, while both publicly questioning the delegates' authority and representativeness, and attempting to circumvent the negotiation process and communicate

with those in the park in several alternative ways. One way was by communicating through the staff of partner NGOs, some of whom did talk to people they knew in the park and report back to the office (UNHCR02).

A second method through which UNHCR-Cairo tried to reach past the elected delegates was written communication. The 30 October press releases, released in English and Arabic, were the first manifestation of this effort, and followed an agreement in discussion with local service providers of the need for a “flyer which would list rumours and respond to them” in order to “reach [protesters] directly” (UNHCR02). The tone of these fliers was bombastic rather than diplomatic, however, with content suggesting that protesters were either deceptive or duped.

Thirdly, UNHCR-Cairo sought to involve members of the multiple community-based organisations (CBOs) with whom the office usually consulted. These “traditional community leadership structures” (UNHCR15: 19) were an important part of the asylum governance assemblage in Cairo. The CBOs, often organised along tribal lines, provided advice and assistance amongst asylees in the city, and alongside individual office visits served as UNHCR’s primary channel of communication with asylees in Cairo at the time. Their absence was a source of alarm for UNHCR-Cairo: October meeting minutes ask: “Where are the traditional leaders?” (UNHCR02). The office would later report of protest delegates that, throughout the protest,

UNHCR was concerned that these representatives were not the traditional community leaders, indeed they appeared to have little respect for existing community leaders, nor had attempted to involve them in planning or discussion. (UNHCR15: 17)

The office organised meetings with CBO leaders in the hope that, by “reach[ing] out to elders, chiefs etc”, the UNHCR might enlist these figures as mediators (UNHCR02) and that “the wisdom, experience and respect that the traditional leaders possess would have a

positive influence in ending the demonstration” (UNHCR15: 15-16). While some CBO members did attend several meetings with office staff, including some of the negotiation meetings, UNHCR-Cairo reported that their “presence was not welcomed” by protest delegates, who stated that the CBOs with whom UNHCR had consulted were not “representative” (Ibid. & UNHCR03).

UNHCR’s final effort to reach protesters directly came on 18 December, when a senior official from the Cairo office addressed the sit-in. His speech presented the 17 December agreement, which had been distributed in print in English and Arabic, and which protest delegates had also introduced to the protesters in the park. In this speech, the speaker called on protesters to accept UNHCR’s offer on the basis of the validity of the negotiation process, stating: “We have had extensive discussion regarding your situation and your demands with people that have been representing you” (UNHCR11). He then asked protesters to begin the screening procedure outlined in the agreement, referring to it as “the process that we have agreed with *your representatives*” (Ibid.; italics added) – again emphasising that protest delegates had acted on behalf of the assembled group. This effort, however, did not succeed in overcoming protester misgivings about the office.

Although protesters and UNHCR-Cairo initially collaborated to set up a system of representation through which sit-in participants could delegate authority to communicate with UNHCR on their behalf, this system faltered under mutual mistrust. UNHCR’s unsuccessful attempts to persuade protesters to vacate the park both through and outside of the negotiation process – through other organisations, written statements, and a speech in the park – show how the agency grappled to organise effective means of communicating with the group.

Following the protest, the UNHCR-Cairo’s report on the event offered reflections on the

challenge of representation it had faced. First and foremost, the office acknowledged that “lack of direct communication with people in the park was a problem and that greater efforts should have been made in this respect” (UNHCR15: 16-17).

The report also addressed the incongruity that office staff had both questioned and yet relied upon the protest delegation. UNHCR-Cairo’s apprehensions had been driven in part, it said, by the timing of their election: the delegates had been “decided upon long before the majority of demonstrators came to the park and therefore, may not represent them” (UNHCR15: 21).

While the office’s continued negotiations with the delegates despite publicly-aired doubts appeared a decision “of convenience” (Azzam et al. 2006: 25), the agency’s own post-protest justification of the decision to do so presented dialogue with the delegates as a matter of necessity, stating simply: “there was no one else to negotiate with as representative” (UNHCR15: 21).

To have organised a new delegation would also have been, in the agency’s explanation, a less than promising prospect:

In the context of the demonstration it would of course have been difficult to have elections and everyone consulted on who would represent them and for everyone to be 100% satisfied. (UNHCR15: 17-18)

While this rationalisation paints an all-or-nothing picture of the choices at hand, it also points to an absence – both in the 2005 protest and in asylum governance more widely – of mutually trusted systems through which asylees may have a say, and to which asylum governance bodies must listen. Absent such mechanisms, UNHCR struggled to assess whether it was speaking with ‘the right people’, and protesters endured public denigration of the substantial, if imperfect, governance mechanisms they had created in quite extraordinary circumstances.

10.3.2 The list as an unhelpful tool

A further sticking point in negotiations was the delegates' focus on their list of petitions: meetings repeatedly met deadlock over this focus, while the petitions became a focal point for UNHCR's public criticisms of the protest. In meetings, UNHCR would explain at length why the office could not attend to most of the petitions, and the delegates would insist that the protesters wanted the petitions addressed. Minutes from the 26 October negotiation meeting showed the intractability of both parties:

UNHCR response to demands: HCR responded at meeting on 3rd [October], and answer no different. Went through what could and could not do. Had already made clear UNHCR proposal to address needs that UNHCR could address Despite the previous meeting and [staff] explanation of why UNHCR was not able to meet their demands, they still sought a response to their 20 demands. (UNHCR03)

In press releases, UNHCR-Cairo similarly complained of the delegates' persistent pursuit of attention to their demands, stating that they had shown "little willingness" to "work towards solution" in negotiations (UNHCR08). A 29 November press statement said that although a recent meeting had "reached a positive solution",

it now seems that the leaders of the demonstration have once again changed their mind about ending the sit-in unless all their original demands are met immediately. (UNHCR RO-Cairo 29 Nov)

UNHCR, in turn, railed against the list of petitions, taking them as a basis on which to discredit the delegates as not just uninterested in a positive outcome to the negotiations, but also unrealistic in their requests. The office's first press release presented the petitions in turn as "priority areas of concern to UNHCR" and therefore redundant, as "self-serving" and as "allegations unsupported by any piece of evidence" (as I noted in Azzam et al. 2006: 19; quoted statements from UNHCR04).

The office's first press release also revised and reproduced the petition list in extremely strident terms, framing the protesters' goals as unreasonable and beyond UNHCR's ability to meet: the protesters, according to UNHCR's version of the list, "rejected *any* notion of voluntary repatriation", and demanded, amongst other things, that:

UNHCR *must* find solutions to *all* the problems facing Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt;

UNHCR should register *all* newly arriving Sudanese would-be asylum-seekers "on the spot," without appointment;

UNHCR should stop holding meetings with Sudanese community leaders and community-based organizations;

There should be *no* police officers guarding UNHCR premises;

UNHCR should provide assistance to *all* Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR04; italics added for emphasis. See the table in Appendix H for the full text of UNHCR's version of the list).

In meetings, while delegates insisted that negotiations address a wide-ranging list of petitions, UNHCR would repeatedly answer with iterations of the office's limits. From the first negotiation meeting, UNHCR "made it clear that almost all of the demands of the demonstrators are beyond UNHCR's control" (UNHCR05). The office repeated this argument publicly, stating in its first press release that "most of the demands of the Sudanese demonstrators are beyond UNHCR's control" (UNHCR04).

This stalemate over the demands rested also in part on the way that UNHCR's engagement with the protesters served to contain the protest's wider impact: while the protesters sought changes from the highest scales of asylum governance, UNHCR would discuss only matters over which it had direct control. The office sought to "engage the demonstrators in constructive dialogue to address the few areas within UNHCR's ability to influence" (UNHCR05), rather than representing the protesters' petitions to the higher levels of asylum governance. The demands became a straw man *and* red herring that distracted, perhaps

conveniently, from the fundamental issues of democracy and migration underlying the protest in the park.

10.3.3 Like “doctors treating patients”: condescension, dismissiveness, disconnect

Negotiations were undermined, secondly, by the tone and manner in which they were conducted: UNHCR was repeatedly patronising toward and apparently uninterested in the protesters and their wishes, a stance that inhibited both the office’s capacity for understanding the protesters’ aims, and for building the mutual trust necessary for bringing the negotiation to a mutually satisfactory and honoured agreement.

UNHCR-Cairo’s office repeatedly censured the protesters for their lack of understanding, especially regarding the belief that the protest might result in resettlement, and regarding expectations of UNHCR-Cairo. Its first press release, for example, alleged that many protesters had been “induced” into joining the protest by “false and misleading information” (UNHCR04). The protesters’ false expectations, the office later argued, had arisen “due to the lack of understanding of what UNHCR can and cannot do, based on the UNHCR mandate and resources (UNHCR15: 6).

The office suggested that protest organisers had used rumours of resettlement as an instrument with which to attack UNHCR, commenting: “It is difficult to tell the real motives behind such deception and manipulation to rally protests against the United Nations refugee agency” (UNHCR04). As a result, the office undertook a continuous campaign, reflected in its multiple press releases over the course of the protest, of “many efforts” to “correct misperceptions and to put forward the reality of UNHCR’s mandate” (UNHCR15: 27).

In undertaking such vigorous self-defence, however, the office revealed its own limited

understanding of the protesters' "real motives". As Adel Imam, the UN Goodwill Ambassador for Refugee Affairs, noted, in negotiation meetings, "we never understood what they wanted" (in Azzam et al. 2006: 49). UNHCR-Cairo's post-protest report stated similarly, "It is unclear why the discussions with UNHCR were so unsuccessful" (UNHCR15: 18).

While focused on refuting protesters' misunderstandings, rumours, and "false expectations" of the office, and on the protesters' list of petitions – and by neglecting to attempt to "understand what [the protesters] wanted" beyond problematic, demands-focused meetings with protest delegates – UNHCR-Cairo had overlooked a crucial point: that the Cairo office was not the protesters' chief target, and that their expectations were not just of UNHCR.

Despite certainly fuzzy understandings amongst some protesters about the rules governing asylum, the fact that they were protesting was itself evidence that they wished to be listened to, and the fact that UNHCR-Cairo was aware of the widespread desire for resettlement was evinced by its first press release. While UNHCR-Cairo may not have approved of or sought to fulfil either of these goals, its continuous efforts to "correct misperceptions" worked at cross-purposes with the need, if any negotiations with protesters were to succeed, for it to listen and to understand.

This problem manifested directly in meetings between office staff and protest delegates. UNHCR-Cairo's meeting minutes attest to the office's repeated efforts to narrow the parameters of discussion to matters pertaining to UNHCR and to educate delegates as to those limits. During the first meeting, UNHCR staff focused on "explain[ing] what could and could not be done, and what matters UNHCR had some control over so could meet to discuss." (UNHCR RO-Cairo 2005 - 20 Oct). The second meeting involved further explanation: staff again "explained UNHCR assistance policy and limitations" to protest

delegates (UNHCR03).

Negotiation meetings sounded, by the office's description, like extensive lectures on policy and law. A November press release stated that

UNHCR Cairo management has met with the organizers of the sit-in four times ... Each time UNHCR discussed their demands at great length and in great detail and explained what UNHCR can and cannot do, what matters are within UNHCR responsibility and what are the responsibility of the Government of Egypt, as well as the rights and obligations of refugees and asylum-seekers. (UNHCR09)

When the delegates requested that negotiation meetings include a wider audience, UNHCR redirected them back to the office's limited offerings: "UNHCR explained to them that this was unrealistic but that the Office was happy to discuss with them matters that are within its mandate and capacities" (UNHCR04).

Unsurprisingly, this approach did not build good faith. Protest delegates complained to researcher Martin Rowe that the agency cared "more about legalities than human needs" and "likened UNHCR to 'doctors treating patients' except that their 'medicine is [refugee] law'" (Rowe 2006: 59). They reported similarly in an early interview that UNHCR had "patronizingly lectured them on the 1951 UN Convention and 1969 OAU Convention" (Gomez et al. 2005a: 1).

UNHCR's top-down emphasis – its apparent preference for talking over listening – also manifested in the 18 December speech by an office representative to the protesters in the park, which was received very badly: towards the end of the talk, the speaker noted seeing people "sticking their tongues out" in his direction (UNHCR11). Layla, who commented on the visit, said that it had been unexpectedly brief:

We felt that the staff weren't interested in actually entering the park, and we thought that they would discuss the agreement points with us but they didn't; they just came to the park, read the offer, and turned back to the office, nothing

more. (FMRS25)

The transcription of the speech, given in English and interpreted into Arabic by a UNHCR staff member, begins with the speaker stating: “Okay, I have come here to explain to you what the situation is” (UNHCR11). The speaker then repeatedly speaks over the protesters, interrupting them and asking them, over and over again, to listen. The transcription notes that the speaker’s presentation of UNHCR’s 17 December offer, once interpreted, was met with “widespread objection”, over which the UNHCR speaker asked to finish:

I would just like to maybe finish with this now. I would just give you how we feel the process should work. ... [Widespread objections voiced.] UN: [Over continued objections.] Please, please, listen to me, listen to me. It’s up to you. I am just telling you what the situation [inaudible]. It is up to you to make the choice. I’m just telling you what the situation is. You make your decision as you wish. ... based on what I have already said, please listen. ... Anyway, listen, I think enough has been said..... I don’t want to take this any further because it’s just repeating what I have already said. (Ibid.)

Over continued discussion and attempts at interjection by protesters, the speaker asked:

Can I please have your attention? I don’t want to participate in this political rally. I do not want to participate in this political rally. I am only here to clarify some issues for you. (Ibid.)

The speaker, as he stated, was not prepared to accept the protesters taking political action. He dismissed their wishes to be heard with the assertion that his sole purpose was to deliver some information and elucidate their understanding. As he later recounted, however, his speech was met instead with “unhappy frustrated faces” (UNHCR14), as well as the aforementioned tongues with which, in response to his delivery, some of the protesters had replaced their words.

The speaker’s later explanation of why the protesters had decided not to leave the park after the agreement is indicative of a profound disconnect from the people behind those “frustrated faces”: they stayed in the park, he stated, because “they wanted more publicity. They thought they are already suffering so let people get killed and we get more publicity”

(UNHCR14). This conclusion suggests that behind UNHCR's dismissive and condescending communications lay cynicism as well as disrespect. In any case, the manner in which the negotiations were conducted greatly worked against the agency's stated wishes to "do all it could to end the demonstration peacefully" (UNHCR15: 27)

10.3.4 UNHCR's offer and the problem of mutable, multiple statuses

From the very name of the group that initiated the protest – Refugees' Voice – to statements by its participants emphasising their rights and suffering, protesters sought political recognition as refugees. Yet in Cairo, the legal process through which asylees gain official certification of this status was contested: overseen by UNHCR, the Refugee Status Determination process in Egypt was subject to legal critique as well as criticism by those who had experienced it themselves (Sperl 2001; Kagan 2002). UNHCR's 2004 suspension of RSD interviews for southern Sudanese added to the multiple gradations of status existing amongst people considered "of concern" to the Cairo office, all of which were reflected amongst the protest's participants.

Refugee status is mutable: it is liable to change. Changing circumstances in refugees' home country may have profound effects on their futures, opening or closing the possibility of their return. Importantly for the case at hand, such changes may also impact the legal categorization of people whose asylum cases are still pending. In Cairo, a backlog in RSD processing was the norm: in the early 2000s, the average asylee who applied to UNHCR-Cairo waited around two years until their first RSD interview with the office (Kagan 2002: 39), protected by "asylum seeker" status while awaiting RSD.

The prospect of peace in southern Sudan signalled by the 2004 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement prompted UNHCR-Cairo's cessation of RSD interviews

for southern Sudanese in Cairo. Those awaiting RSD would retain their “asylum seeker” status, which would also be given to new arrivals from southern Sudan, but, pending further changes in their country of origin, they would not progress on to RSD processing.

This suspension was decried by many of the 2005 protesters as unfair and unwarranted, in light of their views of the danger that return would present, and was one of the protest’s core complaints. When protest negotiations resulted in the 17 December offer from UNHCR, these shifting conditions, and the provenance of protesters from multiple regions of Sudan, contributed to a stalemate response amongst them to UNHCR’s offer.

Protesters described the organized society they formed at Mustafa Mahmoud park as a source of pride. One aspect of this satisfaction concerned the protesters’ internal governance: with daily speeches, decision-making, and committees overseeing, one protester said park life was “run like a state” (Rowe 2007: 66).

But the unity of the protesters as *Sudanese co-nationals* was also a major source of solidarity in the polity they had formed. The protesters, as one man stated, “represented all sectors of the Sudanese people” (Nadim9), coming from “all different tribes and parts of Sudan” (FMRS25). Whereas public communications by protesters stressed the group’s *refugee-ness*, within the park, *Sudanese-ness* was an important socio-cultural bond.

Refugees Voice organisers, who had multiple tribal affiliations amongst them, emphasised this aspect of the protesters’ commonality in motivational talks to the group. Researcher Hala Mahmoud’s notes on one of the sit-in’s daily speeches recorded the words of one organiser:

We have all gathered here, from all tribes and regions of Sudan. We have found that we all suffer from the same problems and that it would be impossible to solve these problems when we are not united. . . . There is no difference between Arab and African; we are all here Sudanese. We love our country, Sudan. (Mahmoud 2011: 283)

Across tribal affiliations, cultural differences, and religions, unity amongst the protesters contributed to a sense of connectivity and safety within the park.

One woman said that, in the sit-in, it was “good to be with so many Sudanese together” because “the internal environment was very respectful, and everyone respected the other, Moslem or Christian, living together in peace” (FMRS25). Another woman stated: “I felt that all the Sudanese were my relatives, and I felt safe inside the park, because we were together” (FMRS24). This sense of unity and safety together became a factor contributing to the protesters’ tolerance of the physical inconveniences of life in the park. In a post-protest interview, a UNHCR official summarised this phenomenon in negative terms: “The problem is that the park for them was a form of solidarity” (UNHCR14).

The 17 December offer by UNHCR to protesters included certain concessions to demonstrators “named on a definitive list” by protest delegates, all of whom would receive a one-time financial grant and have their eligibility for financial, medical, and education assistance re-assessed. All named on the list would, the offer detailed, then be processed by UNHCR according to their existing legal statuses: the office would register those not yet registered as yellow-card holding “asylum seekers”, while they waited for full RSD interviews, and would reconsider the cases of people with “closed files” whose applications for recognition had been rejected (UNHCR06).

The office would also review the statuses of blue and yellow card holders, who were already registered as ‘of concern’ to UNHCR. Those already holding blue cards and thus

recognised by the office as refugees would have their “durable solutions reviewed according to standard UNHCR criteria relating to durable solutions”– that is, be reconsidered for resettlement eligibility (UNHCR06).

As for people holding yellow cards – including, since the CPA, many southern Sudanese – UNHCR would review their files to see if they might be eligible for the re-opening of their RSD process. Protesters with yellow cards could, if they chose, “demand” an RSD interview, in which case UNHCR would conduct it. If, however, UNHCR then determined that they were not eligible for refugee status, they would lose all status with the office, including their yellow cards, and any associated assistance. While processing these various groups, UNHCR-Cairo would prioritise people from Darfur, and people meeting the agency’s “assistance needs criteria”: the “aged and infirmed, sick or disabled, single women, single parents, unaccompanied children” (UNHCR06).

Specifying particular processes based in multiple gradations of priority and status, the agreement thus offered different things to different people. Few of these had concrete outcomes, and many were accompanied with restricting caveats that reserved for UNHCR full discretion over their results. The offer included no guarantees that resettlement countries were on board with the plan (as discussed earlier in the chapter) and no “mechanism for feedback to those remaining in the park” about the process, an omission which became a major aspect of the agreement’s “undoing” (Azzam et al. 2006: 28).

The differential treatment of different populations proposed in the offer, however, was a further reason that protesters viewed it with scepticism, and as the source of some confusion. To some, it appeared that UNHCR was attempting to divide the protesters: one

protester charged that the office was “discriminating along geographical and tribal lines saying that Southerners could not be resettled” (FMRS23).

Following the protest, UNHCR-Cairo blamed “ethnic conflicts” for the failure of the protest agreement: the office representative who had given the 18 December park speech explained after the fact that “ethnic conflicts were starting to emerge in the park as they felt the agreement was generous to people from Darfour in contrast to Southern Sudanese” (UNHCR14).

Office staff decided, he explained, that it would not proceed with the agreement without unanimous agreement from those in the park, and attributed the less-than-unanimous response to divisions amongst the protesters:

The fear of the start of ethnic conflict is what made us decided to put the agreement on hold even if 50% of the people accepted it, we decided that either everybody or nobody. So it was less of an issue of guarantee and more of ethnic conflicts. (UNHCR14)

Hala Mahmoud’s otherwise insightful work similarly attributed the agreement’s failure to “deeply embedded ethnic and religious divisions within the group” (2011: 285), but provides no evidence to this claim; in fact, her data repeatedly shows the protesters’ unity within the park. While essentialised “ethnic” divisions are an oft-repeated explanation for conflicts in Africa in particular, protester accounts show that in the protest, as often in the continent, plain politics prevailed: some groups were to gain more than others from UNHCR’s offer, while many were distrustful of its lack of assurances or feedback mechanisms.

Furthermore, rather than splinter the group, UNHCR’s differentiating proposal actually resulted in a show of solidarity amongst protest participants. Three protesters discussing the

protesters' reception of UNHCR's offer explained what happened:

80% of the refugees at the sit-in approved of this agreement. They were made up of mostly Northerners, Westerners and Easterners. The remaining 20% were made up of South Sudanese who would probably be deported since the war is over in their area. All the refugees of the park remained there for this 20%. They felt that it would split up the Sudanese community if not everyone got what they wanted. (FMRS15)

They gave the people of Darfur something and people in the South were supposed to come back. The Southern did not want this, so we did not want this agreement, so after that everybody stayed to save all our problems together. (FMRS16)

Most of the Southerners were very nervous about the agreement. Most of the people who agreed with it wanted to go to the office in organized way. They were waiting to calm down the Southerners so they could do it peacefully, all together; because they had been together so long, they wanted to stay unified. (FMRS25)

Whereas the proposal offered varying concessions to groups amongst the protesters, dividing their polity along regional lines, protesters rejected these divisions for a display of unity with their co-nationals. The agreement's stalling resulted in part, then, from the unstated decision, both in UNHCR and in the park, not to proceed without unanimous support from all protesters, regardless of their provenance.

The mutability of their statuses, however, shows the instability of protesting as refugees, even within a single national group: given the link between refugee status and the conditions in an asylee's place of origin, changes at home can result in changing and differential prospects for people from different regions. When the 2005 protesters persisted in staying together despite these divisions, their solidarity entailed a rejection of UNHCR's 17 December offer, undoing the final step in the protest's negotiations.

10.4 A handover of power

In November, with UNHCR's negotiations with delegates still underway, Egypt began

simultaneous efforts to convince the protesters to quit their occupation. The head of the Sudan department of the MoFA, Sudanese opposition leader Farouk Abou Aisa, Egyptian film star and UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Adel Imam, Sudanese embassy staff, former Sudanese prime minister and opposition figure Sadiq al Mahdi were amongst those who joined Egypt's efforts to intervene in resolving the sit-in.

While some of these figures were undeniably respected, none were the audience protesters sought to underwrite UNHCR's offer. As Adel Imam recounted, although he "tried to mediate between UNHCR in Cairo and the refugees", he felt that "protesters never wanted to reach an agreement" with the office or Egypt (as we summarised in Azzam (2006: 49). Rather, he realised that instead the protesters actually sought "international agreements" and the involvement of resettlement countries, but this was "not a simple matter" nor, he claimed within Egypt's capacity to arrange (Adel Imam in "UNHCR Did Not Ask for Investigations for the Eviction and Is Not Blaming Anyone," Al-Ahram, 4 January 2006 (Azzam et al. 2006: 49).

His attempts to convince the protesters to leave, as with those of the figures listed above, did not succeed. The terms and reception of the 17 December agreement, and lack of requested guarantees, resulted in the uneasy impasse described above. Meanwhile, UNHCR-Cairo told the MoFA by letter that if nothing had changed by 22 December, Egypt should "do whatever appropriate" to end the protest (UNHCR14). The drafter of the letter, a senior UNHCR-Cairo official, summarised its content:

that the UNHCR cannot do anything more and that matters were out of our hands. We asked the government to take an appropriate procedure through peaceful means. We informed them that the UNHCR wants to end the protest for two reasons: First, the wellbeing of the people in the park. Second, our operations have been affected. (UNHCR14)

Crucially, UNHCR-Cairo did not inform those in the park that the office had requested that

the government end the protest.

The forced removal nonetheless came as a surprise to UNHCR, in terms of both violence and scale. UNHCR requested advance notification of any breakup action, but was not informed. In fact, the letter drafter was called to a meeting with the head of state security early in the afternoon of Thursday 29 December, the day of the breakup, to discuss the 22 December letter, but despite using “every possible trick to understand when they were going to take action” could not ascertain Egypt’s plans (UNHCR14). Later that evening he heard second-hand of the large police presence at the park – by midnight, approximately 4000 police were present (Azzam et al. 2006: 31) – but, like many protesters themselves, he said that he and his colleagues thought they were likely there to police one of the Muslim Brotherhood protests that were held regularly in front of the mosque each Friday.

The letter drafter stated that he “never expected it would end up like that” (UNHCR14). He was not surprised at the violence per se (saying, “I expected violence”) but rather that the protesters had stayed in the park: “I thought they will leave when they feel they are forced to leave. I did not believe they will resist” (Ibid.).

10.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has traced the moves that contributed to the failure of protest negotiations, and the violent removal of the protesters by Egyptian police: first, statements by UNHCR to protesters that dismissed their strategies and aims; second, a lack of involvement by the embassies whose participation the protesters repeatedly sought; third, the multifaceted failure of protest negotiations; and finally, UNHCR’s ‘handover’ of responsibility for the protest’s outcome to the Egyptian state.

Although protesters called for their political participation as a group of refugees, this call

was undermined by UNHCR-Cairo's disavowal of their legal statuses. Instead of advocating for the protesters, taking seriously their complaints about the office's practices, and attempting to connect their wider claims to those in a position to help, UNHCR's first reaction was defensive, which not only rebutted the protesters' appeals but also cut them off from wider resonance. The international audience sought by the 2005 protesters heeded UNHCR-Cairo's explanations of the protest, its participants, and its claims.

Given its need to preserve its funding and institutional relationships, it is in some ways no surprise that UNHCR-Cairo should have reacted defensively to criticisms which endangered its image, and that it prioritised this defence over the promotion of the protesters' interests. The office's response was constricted by the lack of existing mechanisms for meaningful accountability and input from asylees at an institutional and international level. UNHCR's 1997 policy on urban refugees provided little guidance, beyond warnings, on how a country office might respond to asylee protests (UNHCR 1997; Obi & Crisp 2001: 8).

To some extent it was the larger organisation of asylum governance that undermined the protesters' efforts: their 'proxy' was an organisation (the UNHCR) viewed amongst them with great distrust and which contained rather than delivered their petitions, while the problematic coordination of authority as negotiations failed paved the way for their violent subjugation.

Although protest negotiations failed in part because they were undertaken by the 'wrong people' on the asylum governance side – in particular, by distrusted UNHCR-Cairo and feared Egypt, instead of by the international powers protesters hoped to reach – their failures were also wrapped up in problems related to who the protesters were, and who spoke for them. That they protested as refugees hindered their success in three ways: first,

because amongst them they held mixed status with UNHCR, their credibility was undermined; second, even within one nationality, refugee status may change over time, resulting in differences of status amongst co-nationals; and third, refugees occupy a structurally disenfranchised position within asylum governance.

From slogans like “Attention please: who will restore our rights?” to “Solve our problems or send us to another country”, the topics of rights and resettlement were recurring themes in protest discussions. But this chapter has evinced ways in which these two topics were ultimately the “wrong things” for protesters to have talked about in order for a mutual agreement between UNHCR and the protest delegates to be reached, and in order for the protesters to achieve their aims.

Protest negotiations failed also because they were, from all sides, mishandled – carried out, in other words, in the “wrong way”. This problem ran throughout protest negotiations: from UNHCR’s public denigration of the protesters and their delegates, to the delegates’ agreement to UNHCR’s 17 December offer without prior approval from those in the park, to Egypt’s gross deception, intimidation, stonewalling, and ultimately violent subjugation of the protesters, over the course of a night which itself could be the subject of a book. For now, though, the time has come to step back from empirical analysis to discuss conclusions, contributions, and implications.

CHAPTER 11. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the connections between a political event initiated by people acting as refugees and the wider politics of asylum governance in an urban, southern context. It has highlighted a case in which asylees organised to undertake collective political action, in which a host state and humanitarian institution responded to that action in ways that undermined and ultimately extinguished the event, and which illuminated multiple political struggles amongst those involved.

The study was conceptualised as an ethnography of event, an approach that attended to connections, tensions, and debates between the 2005 protesters, UNHCR-Cairo, the Egyptian government, the embassies of resettlement countries, the Sudanese embassy, and local academics. I have taken an inductive approach to understanding the event and its politics by using analytical rather than policy concepts in the analysis. This avoided presupposition of the categories, relationships, motivations, and politics involved, and instead allowed them to emerge from the case study itself. The category asylee facilitated discussion of the multiple legal statuses debated around the protest; the concept of asylum governance focused attention to multiple institutions, relations and politics, promoting an inductive exploration of the object of governance and the production of authority; and the concept of impasse was used to trace the struggles for power that arose through the event under study.

The thesis's analytical approach integrated the words and actions of those who participated in the 2005 sit-in, as well as of representatives of institutions that responded to the event. This process of analysis has resulted in attention to three aspects of the event described by its participants: of problems protesters described as having motivated their participation in

the sit-in, of their strategies, and of the goals they hoped the protest would achieve. At the same time, the analysis has attended to the ways in which governing institutions represented both the protest and protesters, and also the politics of asylum governance and their roles within it. By integrating analysis of public statements offered by protesters and governance bodies, the thesis has explored the politics of the protest itself as well as their relation to the wider politics of asylum governance.

Through this study, the thesis has contributed to three areas of limited research. First, it has investigated a case of asylee political action that was concerned with the governing of asylum within the country where its participants sought refuge. Second, the thesis has illuminated ways in which refugee political action was affected by political struggles between institutions involved in asylum governance. Third, the study has drawn attention to the politics of asylum governance in a city in the global south. Existing scholarship has focused on cross-border or long-distance diasporic activism concerned with the politics of migrants' countries of origin, has allotted little attention to the ways that politics within asylum governance shape refugees' political participation, and has disproportionately centred on refugee camps or countries in the global north. I have addressed these gaps using an asylum-centred conceptual approach that has accounted for the specificities of the urban, southern context, but could be more broadly applied in future research.

Following an introduction to the protest and the thesis, Chapter Two reviewed the initial state of relevant scholarship on refugee protest (including the 2005 demonstration), the politics of humanitarian governance, and refugee depoliticisation. It also introduced the conceptual framework and analytical categories used. Chapter Three discussed the methodology and methods of the research, including discussion of positionality, reflexivity, epistemology, and limitations. Chapter Four provided relevant information on the 2005

protest and asylum in Cairo before and after the event. I then presented empirical findings. Chapter Five laid out analysis of how protesters articulated the problems that had prompted their demonstration, whilst Chapter Six set out the rationale through which protesters explained their decision to participate in the sit-in. Chapter Seven presented the Egyptian government and UNHCR-Cairo's public statements concerning the protesters and the issues they raised. Outcomes were also the topic of Chapter Eight, this time regarding how Egypt and UNHCR debated when, how, and why the protest should be finished. In the final two empirical chapters, the words and actions of protesters and governance bodies were brought together, as in Chapter Nine I attended to the strategies protesters undertook throughout the demonstration, and in Chapter Ten I discussed governance responses to these strategies and the breakdown of protest negotiations.

Based on this study, this thesis serves as an exploration of the relationships between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance. These relations, I suggest, can be conceptualised *causally*, *discursively*, and *epistemologically*: the politics of asylum governance play a causal role in refugee protest; protest and governance concerned with asylum share a discursive repertoire, which may be agonistically mobilised; and the study of refugee protest is a compelling method through which to gain insight into the politics of asylum governance. To conclude the thesis, I lay out this argument in more detail. I then review the study's empirical findings and discuss how these move forward existing understandings of the reasons for both the 2005 protest and the impasse that came about. The conclusion next summarises the contributions of the present analysis to scholarship on the depoliticisation of refugees and humanitarian domination. Finally, I suggest some theoretical and methodological implications of the work, and areas for future research.

11.1 Refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance

Overall, this thesis has explored the relationships between a certain kind of event – a protest by people acting as refugees – and the context of power relationships within which it was enacted.

One way in which the relationship between this phenomenon and the wider political field can be conceptualised, I argue, is as a *causal* one. This thesis has raised multiple reasons for the 2005 protest, from individual motivations to particular events (like UNHCR-Cairo's cessation of RSD) to broader circumstances (including historical migration patterns and the multiple factors that made Egypt a challenging place of asylum). Others have framed the protest as the pursuit of rights and protection. More broadly, though, the 2005 protest and the politics of asylum governance in Egypt were connected causally in several ways.

The protest began in part because of the appearance of a locus of power – an 'international community' – that protesters aimed to access via public protest, media outreach, and academic advocates on the basis of refugee rights and suffering. This community, protesters hoped, could hold UNHCR-Cairo accountable and pressure the office to change. This connection underlines the necessity of attention to the role of academics and advocates within local politics of asylum governance. Aside from this locus of power, however, the politics and configuration of asylum governance in Egypt at the time of the demonstration left asylees few avenues other than protest through which to call for change.

The politics of asylum governance in Egypt also impacted responses to the protest and its ultimate forced eviction. Although protesters aimed to reach the international community, their access was mediated by UNHCR, whose dismissal and disavowal of the protesters undermined their efforts. The problems of representation that contributed to the breakdown

of protest negotiations were shaped by a political configuration that precluded refugees from connecting to those in power except through UNHCR-Cairo. The office struggled to deal with protesters in part because of its historical reliance on communicating through community elders. A preoccupation with power struggles between the office and the GoE pervaded the public statements of both, to the detriment of the protest's peaceful resolution.

The protest in turn prompted developments in the politics of asylum governance in Egypt. The event prompted the GoE to order the relocation of UNHCR's office to a non-residential area where waiting asylees would be out of the public eye, suggesting the government's wish to avoid the further appearance of asylee political activity in Egyptian public debate. The forced eviction also prompted an increase in attempts by Cairo-based asylees to cross into Israel, where Egyptian security colluded with the Israeli government to prevent border-crossing, resulting in many deaths (see section 4.5). Section 11.2 of this conclusion recapitulates the causes of the protest and resulting impasse.

The relationship between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance can also be conceptualised as *discursive* – a similarity that can result in agonistic debate and undermine refugee protest as a political strategy. Both the political act and its wider political field share a repertoire of humanitarian and legal language. Through this similarity, both mobilise the same discourse, point to the same rules, and similarly claim authority (Danielson 2008, Sigona 2014: 370, 378). This is reminiscent of Mosse's point that developmental discourse is "sustained by [both] the powerful and the subordinate," though in the service of different interests (2005: 231). By protesting as refugees, creating a temporary urban 'refugee camp,' enacting suffering through the sit-in and hunger strikes therein, and calling for rights and help for suffering, protesters appropriated humanitarian discourse.

However, UNHCR and the GoE responded with the same language, used differently, stating that the protesters weren't refugees, that the things they wanted were not rights, and that their suffering was grounds for intervention and rescue from the protest itself. UNHCR and FMRS affiliates debated publicly over definitions of this language. Overall, these struggles to claim authority over the discourse of humanitarianism and refugee law raised an open question: who is the authoritative voice of refugees? UNHCR's success in undermining the protesters' claims suggests that the agency retained control as the primary public authority on asylum in Egypt. Section 11.4 of the conclusion discusses both the discursive and other aspects of the depoliticisation of the refugee role.

Finally, I suggest that there is an epistemological relationship between refugee protest and the politics of asylum governance: that the study of protest by people acting as refugees may serve as a source of understanding not only of asylum activism, but also of the politics of asylum governance into which it unfolds. Existing studies of asylum governance and the institutions of the international refugee regime tend to focus on policy and legal analysis, especially at an international level, and in general the topics are not well understood. I have shown how refugee protest adds to our understanding of asylum governance through the 2005 Cairo demonstration, which I contribute as a case that suggests the value of further research into instances in which people acting as refugees attempt to participate in the governance of asylum.

This insight involves three parts. First, refugee protest is an explicit intervention in the politics of asylum governance, in which protest participants expressly attempt to disseminate information about those politics and that governance. In the 2005 event, the protesters' commentary offered a revelatory view of the relations, struggles, decision-making processes, and configurations involved in governing asylum in Egypt from a

population that is normally unheard, but also the population best positioned to comment on the experience of asylum in Cairo.

Second, refugee protest prompts commentary from those involved in asylum governance about the politics therein. In 2005, UNHCR, the GoE, and others responded to the protest through press releases, interviews, and reports that attempted to shape public opinion about the protest and about the rules and allocation of responsibility in asylum governance in Egypt. These debates provide further material for understanding the workings of asylum governance.

Third, regardless of the intentions of those involved, refugee protest provokes actions and reactions from governance bodies that may be revelatory in themselves. The multiple debates that centred around the 2005 protest are evidence of multiple struggles for power and authority, and the actions of involved institutions – the ways in which UNHCR and the GoE attempted to resolve the protest through public statements, negotiations, the involvement of public figures and community elders, and finally force; the GoE’s statements regarding Sudan; the tensions and cooperations between UNHCR and the GoE throughout the event – illuminate multiple aspects of asylum governance’s politics. Section 11.4.1 of the conclusion reviews these politics, and section 11.5 argues for further research on asylum activism and asylum governance.

11.2 Summary of findings

Both the demonstration and its resolution call into question prevalent views of refugees as “recipients of aid” and of the bodies that assist them as benevolent hosts and advocates. Before discussion of the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions this thesis offers, it is worth establishing clearly my explanation of the core dilemmas with which the

thesis began. First, what explains the protesters' demonstration? Second, why did its negotiations devolve into a "terrible stalemate"?

11.2.1 'We are refugees': explaining a collective political action

To understand the protest inductively, I analysed protester interviews and documents for dominant themes, and found these to reflect problems that protesters identified as the reasons for their participation; solutions they pursued through the event; and strategies they undertook. While this analysis was applied in particular to statements and actions by protesters themselves, I also integrated observation, commentary by governance bodies, and secondary literature to make sense of the event.

Fear of return to Sudan and Sudan's influence in Egypt, an insecure environment in Cairo, and difficulties with UNHCR-Cairo, including the office's recent cessation of RSD processing for southern Sudanese asylees, were shown to have contributed to a shared understanding amongst the protesters of a problematic, recourse-elusive situation.

To address these circumstances, as chapter five set out, protesters called for migration to a safer country, or improvements to their experiences of asylum in Cairo, and in particular that governance bodies be subject to greater accountability and input from asylees; the cessation of pressure to return to Sudan; and improved treatment of asylees in registration, RSD, and resettlement processing.

Bolstered by knowledge of refugee law and support from advocates locally and in the Sudanese diaspora, protesters targeted their protest towards the 'international community', using websites, local academic connections, email, media outreach, and the spectacle of the sit-in itself to try to bypass the local governance assemblage and gain broader international attention to their petitions and global pressure on UNHCR-Cairo to change its practices. To

mobilise this help, they emphasised their suffering and their collective status as refugees entitled to rights, and sought international participants in protest negotiations with UNHCR as well as in the standoff with Egyptian police, in the protest's final hours.

11.2.2 "A terrible stalemate": accounting for failed negotiations

This thesis aimed also to explain the impasse that set in, late in December 2005 amongst and between those involved with the protest at Mustafa Mahmoud. This prompted my study of both the protesters' occupation, the responses of governance bodies, and their interactions, most notably the negotiation meetings undertaken chiefly between UNHCR-Cairo and protest delegates over the three-month course of the sit-in.

The protest's negotiations failed, I suggest, because they were, in sum carried out by 'the wrong people, talking to the wrong people, about the wrong things, in the wrong way'. While this over-simple summary serves as a mnemonic and organising device, it also points to the major difficulties that scuttled the protest and attempts to bring it to a peaceful end.

Part of what undermined the negotiation meetings was that they involved the *wrong people* acting as representatives for asylum governance. Protesters pursued engagement with the international governance bodies best positioned to either pressure or support changes to asylum in Cairo, or remove them from Egypt altogether. But protest negotiations were instead launched and led by UNHCR-Cairo staff, who rebuffed the delegates' pursuit of the involvement of higher-level bodies.

Following an offer from UNHCR designed to end the protest on 17 December, protesters again sought guarantees from international bodies, the embassies of resettlement countries in particular, for which UNHCR did not advocate. Instead, throughout and after the protest, embassies remained uninvolved in the event's resolution. Protesters distrusted UNHCR's

offer, absent guarantees, and remained in the park awaiting further contact from office staff, a senior member of whom had, in the meanwhile, turned responsibility for the protest's resolution over to Egypt.

Negotiations failed also because of who was involved on the protester side: in two primary respects, protesters and their delegates were *the wrong people* to successfully negotiate with UNHCR. First, although protesters and UNHCR attempted to ensure negotiating delegates were democratically chosen, this was a 'making do' approach unsupported by existing practices or mechanisms for effective, mutually agreed-upon asylee representation, both amongst protesters and the wider asylee population. UNHCR-Cairo staff did not trust that protest delegates were representative of sit-in participants; the office's public denigration of protest delegates, and limited attempts to seek other input, both evinced and accelerated mutual bad faith.

Secondly, the collective identification of the protesters as refugees troubled negotiations. This was due in part because of the multiplicity of statuses of the protesters, although the large majority were registered as 'of concern' to UNHCR. Office press releases distanced UNHCR from the protest by denouncing the protesters as largely *not bona fide* refugees, publicly undermining the protesters' credibility and the legitimacy of their petitions. The 17 December offer proposed differential treatment of people with different statuses, which challenged the protesters' unity and increased protester scepticism of the offer. UNHCR responded to the resulting conflicts amongst protesters by deciding to suspend the offer altogether, although this decision was not communicated to those in the park.

Furthermore, the protesters' collective role as refugees was co-opted over the course of the protest: while UNHCR argued that the protesters should quit their sit-in in favour of resuming their place in the queues of asylum's bureaucratic processes – registration, RSD,

resettlement – both Egypt and UNHCR-Cairo used the protesters’ public suffering to rationalise the ending of the protest. The protesters’ group identity became transformed into a means through which governance bodies bypassed the negotiation process altogether.

Protest negotiations also faltered due to having focused on the *wrong things*. Both UNHCR and protest delegates focused on the protesters’ complex list of petitions, which, using policy language, both failed to capture the core issues through which interviewed protesters explained their sit-in, and was used by UNHCR to discredit the protesters and deflect responsibility for the problems raised.

On the basis of the protesters’ discussion of ‘rights’ within a broader pursuit of ‘wants’, and in attempts to contain and redirect the protesters’ petitions, UNHCR’s focused its communications with delegates and protesters upon explanation of the limitations of the office’s mandate and capacities, rather than upon the protesters’ more systemic critiques. In particular, office staff censured the topic of resettlement as outside the bounds of the concessions for which protesters could ask, which the office could facilitate, or for which it would advocate. This left a key aspiration amongst the protesters unaddressed.

Finally, protest negotiations failed because they were carried out in *the wrong way*. While aspects of this have been touched on in previous analysis – the absence of a system for asylee or protest representation, UNHCR’s public denigrations of protesters and protest delegates, its emphasis on its institutional limitations – the manners in which the protest was addressed, and on which its negotiations proceeded, were damaging in multiple respects. From the start, UNHCR-Cairo attended to persuading Egypt to end the protest, a goal at odds with good faith discussions of the protesters’ aims.

Egypt, however, allowed the protest to continue, pressuring UNHCR to deal with the protest, and framing the protesters as outside the realm of the state’s responsibility. The two

bodies deflected the protesters' claims in a struggle over lines of authority and responsibility with regard to both the protesters and to asylum governance more widely, as the middle two empirical chapters set out. Though these struggles evinced the management of reputations and relationships internationally, they also displayed a lack of interest in attending to the protesters' complaints, goals, or target audiences.

UNHCR's treatment of the protesters can be fairly characterised as paternalistic, from its insistence on protesters' ignorance, to its lecturing of protest delegates, its talking over protesters at the sit-in site, to its public representation of the protesters as subjects of pre-existing governance processes and decisions that were impervious to asylee (or refugee) input. Had the office sought to understand the protesters or advocate on their behalf, such efforts would have undermined its aims, which in fact appeared to be governed by other priorities.

The ways in which the 17 December offer was dealt with – and dropped – was the culmination of these problems, and worsened by a cessation of communication between UNHCR and protesters thereafter. Protest delegates signed their approval of the offer before gaining consensus from those in the park. UNHCR took resulting arguments amongst protesters as evidence of the offer's rejection, and handed responsibility for the resolution of the protest over to Egypt – without telling the protesters it had done so. The state's forced removal of the protesters was preceded by sparse and deceptive communications by Egypt about its intent to end the sit-in, and the removal itself involved intimidation, stonewalling and rebuttal of the protesters' requests for UNHCR presence and look-see visits, and ultimately, violent suppression.

11.2.3 A further facet: asylum at an impasse

The argument I have set out above – examining in turn major factors eroding the prospect of protest negotiations that might lead to the sit-in’s peaceful resolution – does not account fully for the protesters’ continued occupation of *midan Mustafa Mahmoud* in the almost two weeks between UNHCR’s offer and Egypt’s intervention. While the impasse in the park was due in large part to the failure of the negotiations, it was also due to the *success* of the protest itself.

While protesters remained in the park in part due to confusion over how the 17 December offer was to be implemented, through their sit-in they had also galvanised considerable power amongst them. Despite the difficulties of life in the sit-in, protesters described a sense of safety in the park due to togetherness, public visibility, and apparent police protection, as section 6.3 discussed.

Through their occupation and outreach, protesters had also gained significant and international attention to their petitions and aspirations. At a practical level, the movement of some out of problematic flats and workplaces and into the park had alleviated longstanding struggles. Through self-organisation, the protesters had also developed meaningful roles, cooperation, and a sense of solidarity and unity amongst the diverse group.

Although UNHCR’s response to the protest eroded already low levels of trust in the office amongst the protesters, when explaining why they did not immediately vacate the park on Egypt’s orders, protesters cited their statuses as people of concern to UNHCR, which they thought would preclude the levels of violence that ensued, and expectations that office staff or others would intervene. Even at this impasse, in other words – at this point that has been called a ‘terrible stalemate’ – these ‘refugee protesters’ described, and indeed counted on,

a sense of asylum.

11.3 Rereading a refugee protest

This thesis has set out explanations of both the protest and the impasse that ensued. Pursuing this line of research was not solely a matter of filling an empirical gap: the 2005 protest had already been the topic of some scholarly interest. The following discussion connects my analysis with past research, demonstrating how this thesis has contributed to existing knowledge of the event.

Throughout this section, two cross-cutting themes are evident. First, existing accounts of the protest reproduce contested and policy terminology without interrogation of that terminology. Across literature on the protest, for example, scholars refer to its participants interchangeably as “the protesters” and “the refugees”, and frame the protest as a quest for ‘rights’ or ‘protection’. This thesis has in contrast undertaken an empirical study using analytic categories, opening up a different understanding of the event than would have emerged had it taken legal and policy terms at face value.

Secondly, aside from contemporaneous research (Schafer 2005a, 2006; Azzam et al 2006), previous literature has used the protest as a case study for the discussion of one theme or another: as a study of masculinity and generation in exile (Rowe 2006, 2007); a case of refugees “claiming rights and seeking justice” (Harrell-Bond 2008: 222), of refugee mobilization around the need for “meaningful protection” (Grabska 2008: 71), as “an act of global political society” (Moulin and Nyers 2007: 356), as a way of understanding the rhetorical machinations of the Egyptian government (Giri 2007: 179) or the “politics of refugee voices” (Sigona 2014: 369).

Each of these papers were in themselves interesting and significant, and stand together as

evidence of the event's significance and complexity. Yet the case study approach tends to guide focus onto the themes of interest, rather than inductive analysis. The wider approach of 'starting from event', as this thesis has done, sets aside existing conceptions and themes in favour of a fresh look at the politics, formations, and struggles therein. The resulting conclusions can then be brought back into conversation with previous literature, acknowledging debts and connections, and identifying what contributions have been made. The following section does so in two parts, discussing first, new light shed on the reasons for the protest, and second, how understanding of the resulting impasse has also been advanced.

11.3.1 Explanations for the 2005 sit-in, revisited

Several empirical studies of the 2005 event began shortly after the advent of the protest itself, of which two – by Stacy Schafer, and by the FMRS team of which I was a part – explicitly undertook to offer explanations of the demonstration based on original research. Both explained the protest as a logical reaction to the problems facing the protesters in Cairo, and highlighted the ways in which the sit-in addressed some of those problems. In these explanations, that fact the people in the park should manifest their discontents in the particular way that they did is taken as a given. In research for this thesis, in contrast, I attended also to the strategies protesters developed and practiced through the demonstration. By stepping outside of the contexts in which we completed the FMRS report – an urgent time-frame, an authoritarian government, an institutional advocacy imperative – I became free to reflect upon how those contexts shaped our conclusions, and to place the politics of the events into wider scholarly discussion and comparative view.

In the years since Schafer and the FMRS team's empirical studies of the protest, such discussion has been undertaken by several other scholars: in the case of some (Grabska

2006, 2008; Harrell-Bond 2008; Marfleet 2007), this work has been based on their own contact with protest participants and research in Cairo, while others (Moulin & Nyers 2007, Sigona 2014) have based their analysis on the FMRS-based research. In comparison to this scholarship, the present thesis has offered original explanations for the protest in two respects: first, with regard to the protesters' legal statuses, and second, in terms of what motivated their actions.

Recognition and participation: undoing an assumed connection

This thesis offered an account of the relationship between legal recognition and political participation in the protest that differed significantly from Carolina Moulin and Peter Nyers's 2007 analysis of FMRS research findings. The authors suggest the 2005 protest was started by protesters whose applications for refugee status had been rejected (2007: 357, 361), and who protested as refugees because they thought refugee status would prompt UNHCR to allow them a say in their governance. This starting point shapes the authors' analysis, "a central point" of which was the protesters' "acts of naming ... in disagreement with the UNHCR's own accounting of the refugee population", since the protesters did not, they write, "necessarily subscribe to the conventional definition, of who is or can be a refugee" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 363, 366).

This thesis provided a different explanation: the protesters held multiple legal statuses but were largely people 'of concern' to UNHCR-Cairo whose RSD applications had been approved or were still in process (see pp. 89-90), and held very low expectations of UNHCR, so protested as refugees in hopes that this role would prompt international intervention that might either pressure UNHCR to allow their participation and improve their treatment, or remove them from Egypt altogether. Protesters holding either partial or full legal recognition argued that their statuses afforded them insufficient respect and

recourse. The recognition they sought, then, was recognition as political actors whose opinions on the governance of asylum would be taken into account.

Moulin and Nyers' discussion of the protesters' statuses has a second important aspect: the authors presume the relationship between refugee status and political influence to be positive. The protesters, they suggest, "appropriated themselves of the right of defining who they were and, as a consequence, of how they should be treated in the political mediations that would follow" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 365) – a statement implying that the protesters expected that if they presented themselves as refugees, UNHCR would treat them positively. The authors suggest that by "refus[ing] to acknowledge the claim made by the Sudanese that they were in fact refugees", the agency denied the protesters "the possibilities of being considered as 'legitimate' interlocutors in discussions about their protection, care, and futures" and "any status in debates about asylum" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 364). This suggestion implies that the holding of refugee status would have positioned the protesters as 'legitimate' interlocutors" and offered them "status" in conversation with UNHCR.

While UNHCR's press releases indeed discredited the protesters, this thesis has shown instead that even if the protesters' legal statuses had been correctly acknowledged by the office, it is doubtful this would have significantly changed the extent to which the protesters could have had a say. The protesters' mobilisation of the refugee role was, I have argued, not an attempt to woo UNHCR. When explaining their reasons for protesting, demonstrators repeatedly described how the Cairo office had rebuffed their attempts to seek information or make suggestions. Protesters, including those with refugee status, described very low, if not hostile, expectations of UNHCR. Instead, that the protesters acted 'as refugees' was significant with regard to a wider set of relationships: the 'international community' to whom protesters appealed. While UNHCR was part of this equation –

protesters hoped their sit-in would prompt external pressure on the office to change its policies and practices, and to become ultimately more receptive to their input; and protest delegates did negotiate with UNHCR, if reluctantly – protesters engaged with and sought recognition from a global audience, whose sympathy and support they hoped would change – or remove them from – the difficult Cairo context.

From rights and protection to wants and recourse

As well as troubling the equation between refugee status and political participation, this thesis has used empirical research to tackle the question of why the protesters demonstrated. Previous accounts of the protest that have explained the event as a quest for rights, calling the protest a case of refugees “demanding their rights” (Grabska 2006), a “struggle for refugee rights” (Harrell-Bond 2008: 238) or an act of “claiming rights” (Sigona 2014: 372, section heading). Sometimes this explanation is elided with other motivations, as when Grabska describes the protest as “refugees mobilising *to take control over their lives*, to demand and realise their rights” (Grabska 2006, emphasis added), or when Harrell-Bond characterises the event as a “way of claiming rights *and seeking justice* when [refugee] rights are violated” (Harrell-Bond 2008: 222, emphasis added).

Alongside rights, the protest has also been framed, again with use of policy terminology, as the protesters’ pursuit of ‘protection’ (Grabska 2006; Moulin & Nyers 2007: 356). Moulin and Nyers identify amongst the protesters’ “key demands” the ability to influence “the terms of their care and protection”, and repeatedly refer to ‘protection’ and ‘care’ as issues “at the heart” of the protest (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 357), but do not provide evidence that these were things the protesters sought, or believed UNHCR would provide them.

Grabska defines ‘protection’ broadly, stating that without the possibility of “economic self-sustenance and social development ... legal protection becomes void of meaning and effectiveness” (2006). Even a broad, “multi-layered” definition of protection such as that Grabska offers (2006), however, contains the protesters’ motivations within policy terminology.

There are ethical benefits to this approach. By presenting the 2005 protest in terms of rights or protection, authors may link the protesters’ claims-making to internationally recognised norms and values. Framing the protesters’ diverse motivations within a rights narrative thus allows for straightforward advocacy on their behalf, supported by a sound legal and normative foundation; asking for the implementation of existing rights is a legitimate action for any individual to pursue.

The problem, however, as this thesis has shown, is that constraining attention of the protesters’ explanations of their actions to claims for rights or protection undermines empirical understanding of the event. First, it either forecloses or confuses analysis of the protesters’ strategies, which must “address the specific narrative and power configurations” in which they were carried out, as Sigona aptly observed (2014: 378). As this thesis has shown, protesters mobilised rights and asylum discourses in an attempt to prompt international intervention. Although calls for ‘rights’ recurred throughout protester statements, the explanations of what these rights might be did not necessarily mesh with those legally inscribed in international law.

Second, a rights focus obscures multiple aspects of the protesters’ claims. ‘Rights’ do not account for the kinds of solutions protesters actually described, as earlier chapters laid out: the protesters’ pursuit of resettlement, of changes to RSD and resettlement processing, or of increased input into asylum governance decision-making. By attending to the ways in

which the protest entailed a pursuit of *wants* – or, in CAF terms, by considering both diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing of the protest – this thesis has been free to explore multiple facets of the protesters’ explanations.

This thesis, instead, started from protester accounts of the event and considered a wide range of supplementary material through which to make sense of the sit-in. Although the research drew on existing literature on the event, the decision to avoid assumptions or policy-based explanations of the protesters’ rationales – that they were protesting for ‘rights’, or ‘protection’ – prompted an original analysis of how protesters represented their actions that has added nuance and new dimensions to previous accounts.

While my acknowledgement of the protesters’ ‘wants’ and agency reflects the empirical complexity and wide remit of the protesters’ claims, it also complicates refugee advocacy, including academic advocacy, that is built on the foundations of rights and policy. The protesters’ calls which this thesis identified – calls for political participation, for improved treatment by asylum governance bodies, for greater recourse than that available in Egypt, and, perhaps most uncomfortably, for migration – encompassed opportunities beyond those inscribed in law or policy.

By laying out these calls in all their contradiction, this thesis has shown that protesters not only lacked these ‘wants’, but also had little legal or policy basis upon which to call for their provision. This adds a further and perhaps more radical critique of how asylum is governed than do those previously set forth, namely the argument that asylum governance structurally excludes the input of refugees. It also reflects directly the protesters’ attempts to open parameters of debate beyond those existing in asylum governance at the time. Understanding the failure of this attempt was a further important aspect of the protest, to which this discussion now turns.

11.3.2 Rethinking accounts of an impasse

Previous literature on the protest negotiations' failure to result in the protesters' peaceful departure from the park, or indeed in the realisation of their petitions, has accounted for these failures along three lines: to the protesters' 'false expectations'; to their 'disagreements' with UNHCR-Cairo; and to the protesters' domination by UNHCR and Egypt. To set out the ways in which this thesis has enhanced understanding of why the protest resulted in a 'terrible stalemate', I discuss these three theories in turn.

Thinking beyond 'false expectations'

The protesters' decisions to collectively remain in the park in the last weeks of December 2005 have been widely attributed to 'false expectations'. The FMRS report was titled, in part, "a tragedy of false expectations" (Azzam et al. 2006). Moulin and Nyers, referring to this title, concurred that it was an appropriate summation (2007: 357), and Grabska attributed the protest's outcome to "false expectations by refugees that they could instead obtain their rights through international organizations and resettlement abroad" (2006). Perhaps not surprisingly, UNHCR-Cairo's own report on the tragedy also echoed and approved of the term (UNHCR15: 4, 6, 15).

Thinking of the protest as a quest for rights raised an incongruity: protesters also clearly sought resettlement, which is not a right. Grabska's account, for example, states that when trying to decide how to respond to UNHCR's 17 December offer, the protesters "could not choose effectively" when confronted with mistaken beliefs: "Because refugees see the obstacles to effective protection in Egypt, they see resettlement as their right and the duty of UNHCR. But international refugee policy provides no such right to resettlement" (Grabska 2006).

“At the end of the day,” Grabska concludes, “they are not citizens, and hence not entitled to the same level of treatment and attention” (2006). While Grabska’s conclusion is surely a critique of the reduced entitlement of refugees, it also suggests that the protesters failed to reach their goals because they had misunderstood their rights, and expected too much.

The ‘false expectations’ thesis offers a way to reconcile this incongruity, by explaining the protesters’ contemporaneous pursuit of rights and ‘wants’ as evidence that they were misinformed and mistaken about what their rights were, or in thinking they could ask for things beyond rights. The alternative explanation offered in this thesis – that the protesters attempted an international call for fundamental changes to their prospects, and to their role in asylum governance – began by considering the protesters’ claims inductively (and, though they were radical, seriously).

By trying to understand why these claims did not gain purchase while thinking outside of the terms of existing policy and practice, this thesis has shifted attention from the question of whether or not the protesters were realistic in their goals, to their strategies, and to the ways in which and reasons why those strategies broke down. While acknowledging the protesters’ expectations of help and change – the hope that organising collectively as refugees would prompt international sympathy and advocacy on their behalf – I have set out research showing that these expectations are better understood not as ‘false’ but as misplaced, thwarted, or undermined.

As this thesis has explained, the advocacy protesters hoped for did not manifest; their organisation as refugees was thwarted by UNHCR’s (mistaken) claims that they were not refugees; and their petitions overall were undermined by the limits of the political role of refugees within asylum governance. The protesters’ hope for recourse through resettlement was particularly problematic because of resettlement’s tight and distantiated control by

resettlement countries, and because of initial screening by UNHCR-Cairo, which restricted access to resettlement due to the mistaken fear of it acting as a ‘pull factor’ for migration to Egypt.

While in each of these respects, the protesters’ expectations were indeed not realised, to sum up the protest as a fool’s errand forecloses the opportunity to identify the reasons why its negotiations failed, and why the protesters failed to achieve their collective goals. Such a study, which this thesis has undertaken, contributes not only a fresh look at the protest, but also the more widely relevant study of the political role of asylees, and of the challenges they may face in attempts to participate in asylum’s governance.

Seeing beyond the UN: attending to the politics of asylum governance

This thesis has offered extensive evidence of disconnect in the relationship between Cairo-based asylees and UNHCR. So important were these relations that some existing accounts of the 2005 protest have narrowed their focus to them alone, without discussing Egypt’s role prior to the breakup, or the wider political relationships shaping asylum governance.

Although the over-statement of UNHCR’s dominance in Egypt has received criticism from researchers who have done fieldwork in Cairo (Kagan 2011a: 4; Grabska 2006; Marfleet 2007, footnote 22), UNHCR can indeed appear more powerful even than the state, resulting in disproportionate emphasis on the “humanitarian regime” (Sigona 2014: 271) and UNHCR-Cairo, which Moulin and Nyers present as “the principal governmental agency for refugees in Cairo” (2007: 361).

Previous literature on the 2005 protest has carried forth this emphasis in explaining the event, characterising it as a demonstration “against UNHCR as a means of achieving refugee rights” (Harrell-Bond 2008: 223) in which protesters “targeted the UNHCR as the

object of their grievances" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 358) and made "demands directed towards the office exclusively" (Grabska 2006). In protests like the 2005 sit-in, Harrell-Bond explains, "refugees are demonstrating against the UNHCR, not the governments that are hosting them" (Harrell-Bond 2008: 222).

The research for this thesis has prompted me to argue for a third possibility: that neither UNHCR nor Egypt were the ultimate audiences to whom the protesters appealed. Although opposition to and disagreement with UNHCR-Cairo were certainly part of the picture, protesters appealed primarily to an audience they represented as the 'international community', which crucially included states which resettle refugees.

While previous literature has acknowledged the protesters' "global orientation", this orientation has sometimes elided the 'international community' and UNHCR into a single "international audience: UNHCR, NGOs, Western states, the global media, etc" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 361). I have shown, instead, that the protesters' strategies are better understood when these categories of audience are considered separately.

The complexity of the protesters' undertaking is demonstrated in the empirical chapters of this thesis that traced the protesters' goals and strategies: protesters called on the global media and NGOs, as part of the 'international community', to pressure UNHCR-Cairo to allow them a greater say in their governance and to better advocate for their resettlement, while calling also on Western states – both via the 'international community' and through direct attempts to involve resettlement country embassies in protest negotiations – for resettlement and help.

The role of UNHCR is particularly dominant in Moulin and Nyers's explanation of the breakdown of protest negotiations. With reference to the rejection of the 17 December agreement, they write, "due to the fundamental disagreement over who was a refugee and

therefore under the 'care' and 'protection' of UNHCR, the possibility of common understanding and mediation tended to collapse" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 369). As previously noted, the authors, following Rancière, take 'disagreement' between UNHCR-Cairo and the 2005 protesters as the starting point for their analysis.

Rather than understand the impasse as a 'disagreement' between two parties, I have shown that it encompassed multiple bodies and factors. The thesis has highlighted further key factors in the protesters' refusal to leave the park following the 17 December offer: the role of the embassies of resettlement countries; of protester requests for 'guarantees' witnessed by international institutions; and, on the night of the breakup, of their request for 'look-see' visits to the sites to which they would be removed. In particular, this thesis has demonstrated that UNHCR was not the protesters' primary target due precisely to longstanding problems that precluded the 'possibility of common understanding' between asylees and the office in Cairo. I have also shown how UNHCR's accounts of 'who was a refugee' amounted to a strategic deflection of responsibility onto the Egyptian government.

While Moulin and Nyers suggest that conceptualising the protest as a disagreement "allows for more sustained and focused analysis of the political status of all the interlocutors in this debate" (2007: 357), I have found that opening up attention beyond UNHCR to the multi-faceted politics of asylum governance provides greater insight into the political status, roles, and pressures of both the protesters and the bodies with whom they engaged.

The politics of asylum governance that so shaped the protest and its outcome have been noted briefly by both Grabska, who discussed a "system of diffuse responsibility" (2006), and Azzam, who explained that protesters "could turn to no other agency" than the UN (Azzam et al. 2006: 8), but the present thesis has studied them at length.

In doing so, I have shown that states were significant but overlooked forces in how the

protest unfolded – both because of UNHCR-Cairo’s significant reliance and accountability incentives concerning states, and because the actions and inactions of Egypt and resettlement state embassies concretely impacted the protest’s outcome.

In particular, I have attended to the government of Egypt, the role of which has tended to be neglected in literature on the protest, beyond its actions in ending the sit-in. Minal Giri’s article on Egypt’s attempts to limit solidarity by framing the protesters as bearers of contagious disease is an exception to this gap (2007); her work, however, focuses closely on Egypt’s statements vis-à-vis the protesters. The present thesis has built on her analysis to study how Egypt accounted for its handling of the protest in statements targeting not only its citizens, but a wider audience which included, at times, the Sudanese government and the British government.

This approach has provided insight into the previously unattempted puzzle of why Egypt allowed the protest to go on for so long; into the politics between UNHCR and Egypt, Egypt and Sudan, and both bodies with the international public; the crucial if distantiated role of resettlement and donor countries; the influence of local academics and refugee studies more broadly; the workings of power that shaped governance responses to the protest; and, perhaps equally significantly, the ways in which these politics left protesters ‘out in the cold’.

Reconsidering the orientation of power in asylum governance

In studies of governance responses to the protest, UNHCR and Egypt’s activities have tended, understandably, to be interpreted primarily as acts of domination over the protesters. My research into the breakdown of protest negotiations left little doubt as to the agency’s paternalistic manner towards protesters, and the forced removal by Egyptian

police was clear enactment of oppression and control. Both of these observations confirm rather than alter existing views.

Research into the politics of asylum governance that I analysed in the middle empirical chapters of the thesis, however, prompted me to rethink the orientation of power and configuration of relations that had shaped the protest's outcomes. This analysis revealed considerable political activity by and between UNHCR-Cairo and the Egyptian government throughout and after the event, struggles in which both bodies attempted not to dominate but to *avoid* responsibility for the protesters, and for asylees in Egypt more generally. Other than this grappling for avoidance, the chief preoccupation of both bodies vis-à-vis the protest was shown to be the public defence of their institutional reputations and relationships.

The protest's outcome has been called "an expression of official intolerance towards desperate people who dared to challenge their lowly status: when they mobilized as social/political actors the state took punitive measures" (Marfleet 2007: 43). Yet in 2005, immediate and violent state suppression of all protests was the norm: Egypt regularly punished those who mobilised politically. The protest's violent end, although reprehensible, was not a great surprise to observers in Cairo at the time, nor does it offer much insight into Egypt's approach to asylees within its borders.

What is more curious is why Egypt allowed the protest to go on for three months, and on what basis it then justified its decision to end the protest after all – a matter that had until now received only speculative attention (Azzam et al. 2006: 22). Attending to the politics of asylum governance has brought to light the power struggles and political priorities that prompted Egypt to alter its usual course: leaving the protest in the hands of UNHCR contained the event politically from claims upon Egypt, preserved its relations with Sudan,

and pressured UNHCR, its donors, and resettlement states to take on greater responsibility for asylees in the country.

Exploration of governance responses to the protest has also illuminated the ambiguities of the UN Refugee Agency's role in the protest, and the wider relationships of accountability to which it answered. UNHCR-Cairo's efforts to end the sit-in have been framed as a "reclaiming for itself an authoritative voice" and an affirmation of "'sovereign' authority over anyone who claims the status of refugee" (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 370). "The protesters' demands," Moulin & Nyers write, "were all but ignored by UNHCR" (2007: 357).

This thesis has argued, instead, that UNHCR rather over-attended to the protesters' official demands, particularly the written list of them. This attention was not generally positive: it comprised a deferral and deflection of the demands, at times point by point. The office did not ignore the list of demands, however: it focused on it like a straw man, while at the same time failing to seek out or listen to the views of the wider group of protesters. This focus reflects the office's pattern of aversion in responding to the event: the refutation of the protesters' collective presentation as refugees; its attempts to educate the public and protest delegates about the restrictions of UNHCR's mandate; its calls for Egypt's intervention; and its limiting of the scope and reach of the protest's negotiations.

Instead of governing *over* asylees, the picture that emerges from the research is of a *governing up* in which UNHCR prioritised the protection of its institutional imperatives and relationships. UNHCR's 'authoritative voice' did largely refute the protesters' input. But more predominant in the Cairo office's statements during the protest were the ways in which it attended extensively to public relations, the management of its relationship with Egypt, the chastisement of the FMRS programme for having overstepped its authority, and

the channelling of protest negotiations away from claims on its donors and resettlement partners, including seeking out their involvement as guarantors of the 17 December offer.

Relatedly, and as I will soon discuss, while responses to the protest may seem emblematic of domination and control over asylees, the content of UNHCR's public statements on the event evinced an overriding preoccupation with the *rules* of asylum, rather than presiding over the *rule* of refugees.

11.4 Summary of contributions to knowledge

Opening out from discussion of the connections between this thesis and literature on the 2005 protest itself, I now summarise the contributions of this thesis to current scholarly conceptions of humanitarian domination and the depoliticisation of refugees, as discussed in section 2.4. Themes of domination and depoliticisation were inherent to the 2005 event, but are also topics of ongoing international research and debate. Empirical chapters drew upon this existing literature to make sense of the protest's contradictions. What, in return, do the findings of the thesis offer to existing understandings of how asylum is governed and how refugee political action is undone? The following sections reconsider the themes in turn.

11.4.1 "Humanitarian domination", in empirical relief

While empirical study of asylum governance is limited, refugee protest offers an unusual opportunity to undertake it, raising questions about the roles and responsibilities of asylum governance into public debate, and throwing usually hidden or glossed-over politics into sharp relief. On this topic, this thesis complements Holzer's study, which touches upon the question of "what drives the host or humanitarian response to refugee protests" (2012: 260). Like her, I have demonstrated ways in which "institutional arrangements" and "durable

solutions policymaking” contributed to the Cairo protest’s outcome (Holzer 2012: 272, 258), but in an urban rather than camp context, and in greater length and depth than existing studies of refugee protest.

The introduction of this thesis set out existing conceptualisations of humanitarian governance which attend especially to the ways in which it serves to dominate refugees through practices and discourse. This thesis has augmented current understandings of asylum governance and its politics both by contributing a case from the urban south, and by drawing attention not only to the dominating practices and discourses of governance, but also to the ways that its configurations, power struggles, and imperatives also can have depoliticising effects.

In doing so, I have sought to advance theoretical understandings of the workings of power with regard to asylum by thinking broadly about its governance: thinking in terms of *asylum governance* so as to inductively learn about who is involved, and how; and using the concept of *assemblage*, as Adam Ramadan has in his research on camps in Lebanon, to capture the ways in which multiple “people, institutions, organisations, the built environment and the relations between them ... produce particular values and practices” (2012: 65).

Unlike ‘regime’, ‘governance’ and ‘assemblage’ both draw attention to the variable, contingent character of how governance is enacted in different places (while horizontally, internationally linked), where it may take “multidirectional, indeterminate forms,” as Heath Cabot, writing about asylum in Greece, describes (2012: 13). A governance assemblage also potentially included a wider sphere of influence, including, reflexively, ‘epistemic communities’. Through this framework I have observed relations of accountability that might not have been visible had I focused on one governance body or another: the role of

UNHCR's relations with donors, resettlement countries, and Egypt; the influence of academics; the significance of Egypt's bilateral relationship with Sudan.

To advance conceptualisations of the politics of asylum governance, four features that this thesis has explored are particularly salient. First, I suggest, following Milner (2009), that to understand asylum governance requires researchers to "bring the state back in" (Long 2011: 209). While a focus on humanitarian agencies makes sense in many camp settings, asylum, there and elsewhere, is also shaped by states. While the politics between states and UNHCR are complex and contested, and UNHCR certainly has "independent interests and capabilities" (Meffert et al. 2010: 161), this thesis has shown the significance of the role of states: host states, neighbouring states, donor states, and resettlement states all impacted the course of the 2005 protest, as did relations and contestations between them, and between them and UNHCR. Even if UNHCR-Cairo had advocated for the protesters, the protest's most significant demands would still have depended on the concessions of states.

Secondly, I have drawn attention to the surprising ways in which power in asylum governance may be exercised: not through the consolidation of authority, but through its *avoidance*. Whereas accounts of the 2005 protest have interpreted governance responses to the event as acts of domination, I suggest that instead, power was exercised through the avoidance of responsibility for the protest's outcome, the protesters' claims, and the governance of asylum more widely. Throughout the protest, Egypt and UNHCR-Cairo persistently attempted to evade responsibility, passing the protesters' charges as if they were proverbial hot potatoes.

As Foucault has stated, power comprises a "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation," which works through "ceaseless struggle and confrontations" (Foucault 1976: 92). Although power is

often thought of as arising from close coordination and concentrated authority, this chapter has shown that a diffuse assemblage can be equally powerful.

Third and relatedly, in 2005, the power to avoid claims was most successfully exercised by donor and resettlement countries. Protesters sought influence and participation in asylum governance, external pressure on UNHCR-Cairo to change its ways, and resettlement. It was donor and resettlement countries, and more widely the ‘international community’, that protesters called upon for help and intervention, but these same sources of power were the ones most inaccessible to the protesters. The locus of power in asylum governance appears thus, I suggest, *distantiated* from asylees – perhaps a flip-side of the increasingly discussed extraterritorialisation of borders and migration management (see Wolff 2008: 253): whereas northern countries have pushed the policing of their borders outside of their physical territories, their agents within other countries also act at a remove from potential migrants.

In the 2005 event, Egypt self-distantiated, framing itself as removed from the need to address refugees’ claims. Resettlement and donor states are accountable to their own prerogatives, citizens, and concerns, so are distant from the interests of asylees in that respect. Relying on UNHCR as an intermediary, the embassies of resettlement countries in Egypt deal only with individual cases referred by UNHCR and other agencies. UNHCR, in turn, is constrained by its relations with these states. Holzer has shown this constraining to be the case in the Ghana refugee camp where the protest she discusses took place: UNHCR there was, as in Cairo, “severely circumscribed by the willingness of receiving countries to offer resettlement” (2012: 270).

A fourth significant point to note concerning the politics of asylum governance is a specifying of the ways in which UNHCR’s proxy role depoliticises refugees. UNHCR is,

as this thesis has elaborated, “stuck in the middle” of its own relationships of accountability (Kagan 2011b: 35). The agency’s position within asylum governance – in which it is upwardly and institutionally accountable in terms of its mandate, activities, and funding – compromises its ability and prerogative to advocate for refugees. It is structurally encouraged to preserve and promote its institutional reputation and legitimacy so as to maintain good relations with its donors and institutional superiors, while towards refugees, no comprehensive structures of accountability exist.

Furthermore, and as Scheel and Ratfisch have shown to be the case in Morocco, UNHCR’s political position in relation to host states further limits the agency’s interest in prioritising the well-being of refugees (2014: 936). In accordance with its mandate to promote state responsibility for refugee protection, it needs to continually defend the limits of its activities vis-à-vis the host state and push the host state to take a greater role.

UNHCR’s role as representative of the interests of refugees is yet further compromised, I have shown, by its expanding role in the international management of migration. This is the case with regards its role in resettlement, and especially so in states where it has taken on the job of overseeing refugee status determination, as it has in Egypt. This role as a “beleaguered gatekeeper” (Kagan 2006: 1) deeply compromises its capacity and ability to act simultaneously as an advocate on behalf of refugees.

11.4.2 The depoliticisation of refugees: lessons from an experiment in action

Earlier in this thesis I introduced the refugee role as one that is thought of as apolitical and depoliticised. Yet in increasing acts of political agency directed towards the governance of asylum, people protesting as refugees have overturned some of the most prevalent stereotypes of this role. This thesis has contributed a study of one such instance: the 2005

protesters attempted to be included and recognised as legitimate participants in the decisions of asylum governance. In discussing their actions, and governance responses, I aimed to contribute to the development of existing conceptualisations of the political role of refugees within asylum governance – addressing the question of what, as Sigona has asked, does “being political as a refugee (in a broader sense) mean?” (2014: 371).

Existing literature has explained the depoliticisation of refugees through a focus on humanitarianism’s dominating practices and discourses that “neglec[t] and/or den[y] the importance of the political in their experience of exile” (Sigona 2014: 372). This thesis has offered a detailed study of an instance in which refugee political action was undone by institutions invoking humanitarianism language. Like Darling, I have contributed an empirical account of the “situated practices of depoliticisation” (Darling 2014: 72). But the 2005 protest reveals that not only practices and discourses serve to depoliticise. Rather, this thesis has shown, refugee depoliticisation may also come about because of inherent limitations to the refugee role as a basis for political action, and because of structural factors in asylum governance that render asylees disenfranchised as well as depoliticised. These insights illuminate the precariousness of refugee status as a basis for the making and realisation of political claims.

Refugee status as a basis for political participation: inherent limitations

In the 2005 sit-in, protesters argued explicitly and implicitly for a greater say within asylum governance, leveraging the refugee role in a collective occupation. Most protesters were legally recognised by UNHCR as refugees or ‘asylum-seekers’, and those who were not thought that they ought to be. In discussing this, Moulin and Nyers suggest that the protesters thus overturned the usual political order: “for ‘closed file’ and other ‘non-status’ refugees to have a say in the ‘solution’ to their plight destabilizes the entire architecture of

how international mobility is governed” and “ben[t] the ‘normal’ condition of political debate” (2007: 370).

While agreeing that ‘closed file’ and ‘non-status’ asylees are not allowed a say, this thesis has made the wider and perhaps more troubling observation that not only they but also people whose asylum claims *had* been recognised by the office were, in multiple ways, shut out of participation in asylum governance. The history of UNHCR-refugee relations in Cairo, the protesters’ descriptions of their problems with the office, and indeed the protest negotiations themselves all demonstrate that debates about asylum in Cairo were not conducted in ways that allowed the meaningful participation of any asylee, regardless of legal status.

UNHCR-Cairo acknowledged gaining information of the protesters’ legal status on 17 December, via Schafer’s quantitative survey suggesting that the majority of protest participants were people of concern to the office (UNHCR15: 28; for Schafer’s findings, see pp. 89-90 of this thesis) but this information did not stop the office from writing to Egypt the next day and washing its hands of responsibility for resolution of the protest. This disconnect between refugee status and political participation is crucial for understanding both the 2005 protest, and the limitations of “being political as a refugee”.

For *any* asylee to have had a say in the asylum governance discussed ‘destabilise[d]’ its architecture, because the “‘normal’ condition of political debate” (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 370) into which the protesters attempted to enter simply did not meaningfully and directly include ‘refugee voices’. Undoing the assumed connection between refugee status and a political role in asylum governance offers a starting point for further analysis of the politics of the refugee role, which shows instead that those who seek to wield the refugee role politically are rendered susceptible to ‘re-depoliticisation’ by characteristics of that role

itself.

First, the refugee role is wrapped up in legal recognition and status. Because of the length of processing times and institutional criteria (such as ‘vulnerability’), a group of asylees from the same country or even region may include people with multiple different legal statuses. The *mutability* of statuses – the reality that even within one nationality, legal recognition may change over time – and the multiplicity of statuses challenge political unity and credibility.

With shifts in circumstances in home countries, eligibility guidelines may change in ways entirely out of the control or influence of asylees. As a result, governance bodies may suggest differential treatment of different populations within a protesting group, as UNHCR’s 17 December offer showed, and groups united as refugees, even within one nationality, may face internal divisions. In Cairo, UNHCR’s aspersions on the protesters based on their mixed statuses were echoed in international media and by resettlement country embassies, two of the protesters’ most sought audiences.

Secondly, the role of refugees as suffering objects of rescue means that protesters’ instrumentalisation of public suffering can be co-opted as a basis to end their political action. With this observation, I add to a growing body of scholarship concerned with the paradoxes of such performance, such as the work of Ilana Feldman, who has pointed out that “being named as a victim can provide access to crucial assistance and recognition, but the need to retain that label can also serve to limit people’s options for acting in the world” (2015: 267; see also Wilson & Brown 2009; Ticktin 2011). The 2005 protest demonstrates these limits in an urban situation, and in particular in a case of the performance of the *refugee* role, study of the power of which remains “very limited” (Cole 2015: 2).

When there are no meaningful systems of accountability in place, furthermore, the making

of “claims of injustices” on humanitarian grounds can in fact undermine more radical efforts to push for an “accountable public sphere” (Fadlalla 2009: 81; Ticktin 2011: 222) – a point for which this thesis has provided evidence, showing how UNHCR and the Egyptian government used the protesters’ suffering to rationalise the ending of the protest as an act of rescue.

Thirdly, I have demonstrated the limitations of rights as a political tool in refugee protests. While the refugee role has associated rights, rights-claiming may also render refugee protesters susceptible to depoliticisation. Kirsten McConnachie has noted that “people engaged in claims-making are, by definition, in pursuit of a particular outcome”; in such a pursuit, “strategic deployment of rights language” (2014: 150) is a logical approach. But it is, I have shown (and others have shown elsewhere – see for example Allen 2013), an approach with limits.

Although it has been argued that the 2005 protesters “were able to” mobilise rights discourses to persuade “international and domestic authorities and audiences to seriously consider their point of view” (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 363), I have demonstrated this endeavour was less than successful, in part because of two rights-related problems. First, speaking of rights to refer to a range of petitions, not all of which are rights, whether “deliberately or accidentally” (McConnachie 2014: 150), may provide a basis for accusations of dishonesty or ignorance, such as those made by UNHCR-Cairo in 2005. Second, and particularly for those acting as refugees, whose role is wrapped up in past persecution, the very admission of aspirations that rights-claiming entails can similarly be used to discredit not only their political actions but also the credibility of their claims to be refugees (for discussion of this point, see section 7.2.3).

Disenfranchised by proxy: structural limitations of refugee political action

Alongside inherent aspects of the refugee role that renders it vulnerable to depoliticisation, this thesis has demonstrated structural factors in asylum governance that may limit the political role of refugees. While some of these factors may have been particular to the 2005 Cairo context, comparison to the small body of studies of refugee protests in different situation suggests some commonalities exist. The mnemonic introduced earlier (‘the wrong people, talking to the wrong people about the wrong things in the wrong way’) structured my explanation of the 2005 protest’s ‘terrible impasse’ but also made a greater point: that the configuration of asylum governance may foreclose the opportunity for refugee influence. Two aspects of this configuration are worth emphasis: first, the absence of mechanisms for the consequential participation of asylees in asylum governance as a whole, and secondly, UNHCR’s advocacy role.

The refugee role is limited as a basis for political participation because asylum governance concerns the enforcement of a set of rights (or sometimes needs – see Stevens 2015: 20), but does not include provision for attending to the aspirations or opinions of refugees. While entitled to rights, refugees are not entitled to register their ‘wants’ beyond individual complaints to individual governance bodies, or sporadic participation in participatory exercises designed by governance bodies (Calhoun 2010: 5). Instead, refugees are positioned as the subjects of bureaucratic processes and as “recipients of aid” (Harrell-Bond 1999).

For accountability and representation to be meaningful requires organisation not only on the asylee side, but also on the governance side. In both respects, the asylum governance in which the 2005 protesters attempted to participate was deficient, as shown by the trial-and-error running of protest negotiations. Formal, meaningful mechanisms for refugee

participation did not exist. Beyond the tenuous attempts of the protest itself, there were no channels through which asylees could register and receive attention to complaints about asylum governance as a whole. This was in part because of characteristics of asylum governance: it was fraught with conflict between governing bodies, and donor and resettlement countries work at a remove, out of reach of direct influence by asylees.

Holzer's study of protest in a refugee camp revealed similar difficulties. A camp population of refugees would in theory be simpler to organise than in a city, which citizens and asylees coinhabit. The Ghana camp that Holzer researched, however, lacked a system of political representation amongst its residents, which made it "difficult for camp authorities to recognise new refugee groups as legitimate or to determine which in the face of multiple viewpoints represented the interests of camp inhabitants" (2012: 272).

As in Cairo, the problem of representation was not only a matter of organising camp residents: on the governance side too, Holzer found, "diffuse multi-level institutional arrangements leave no locus of change accessible to the people whose lives they influence so profoundly" (2012: 270-271). This commonality suggests that the lack of effective feedback and participation channels in asylum governance which this thesis has documented is an issue of wider relevance.

A further structural aspect of asylum governance that may depoliticise those who act as refugees is the role of UNHCR. The agency is, globally, the political voice of refugees: it advocates on behalf of refugees to donors, host and resettlement countries, and the public, raises funds in the name of their interests, and draws "authority as their advocate" (Scheel & Ratfisch 2014: 936). I have shown, however, that while UNHCR serves as refugees' proxy for distantiated state power, this may frustrate and undermine efforts by asylees to advocate for themselves. In Cairo, UNHCR was viewed amongst protesters with great

distrust, and contained and disparaged rather than delivered their petitions to the bodies best in a position to address them.

11.4.3 In lieu of formal participation: is asylum activism the only 'way'?

This thesis contributes to a limited but expanding body of research concerned with “developing a critical politics of asylum activism” that considers how, even in the restrictive, depoliticising roles and governance politics outlined above, “politics might be forged” by asylees (Darling 2014: 86). In the political context described above, asylum activism is a bold but dangerous strategy through which to seek political influence. Holzer has rightly pointed out that protests like the 2005 sit-in are indicative of democratic deficiencies: “people do not choose protest when they can see other more effective and safe channels of communication” (Holzer 2012: 272).

Despite the political limitations evinced by the Cairo event, however, this thesis has also called attention to means through which asylees have and may gain power. While the protest itself ended with violence, its participants described and enacted a strong, if temporary, sense of political belonging through their collective action – that “simultaneous production of other forms of authority over social life, besides that of sovereign jurisdiction” which ‘autonomy of migration’ scholars seek to acknowledge (Millner 2013: 93-94).

Although the 2005 protest was unsuccessful, it nonetheless evinces asylum activism’s power. Temporarily, the placeless emplaced themselves, the voiceless spoke out, the invisible were seen, and the stateless self-governed. The protesters’ self-organisation and collective act of civil disobedience politicised asylum governance, and rendered its tensions public and open to debate.

This thesis thus raises the need to reconceptualise refugees not as suspended in a state of limbo, but as participants engaged in an *impasse* – a more agonistic term that better captures the struggles and counter-struggles at play. Where *limbo* suggests an intractable condition, I propose the use of *impasse* as a concept that points to an actively produced stand-off: movement that is not suspended but continuously countered.

In lieu of political power, asylees still retain, barring disproportionate use of violence, the power of presence, as the continued occupation of Mustafa Mahmoud park demonstrated. Occupation is “a palpably corporeal and spatial form of subjectivity” (De Genova 2009: 445) through which asylees exercise a kind of ‘staying power’. The act of staying – a “refusal to move” – is a strategy through which asylees may “creat[e] a blockage” and “buil[d] a social pressure” in the absence of other forms of political participation (Nail 2015: 128-9).

In the 2005 protest, the irony of this exercise was particularly pronounced in the demonstrators’ choice of location: they occupied the space that had served as their waiting room, reclaiming the space as a stage for political action, and then told journalists: “we’ll wait here, we’ll die here” (Gomez et al. 2006a). They thus reclaimed the waiting that often characterises state domination (Auyero 2012: 158) for their own purposes. Yet while acting as refugees, the protesters were bound by asylum’s rules and their roles as subjects of its processes of legal recognition and migration: they were, to some extent, *bound to wait*.

Following their forced removal, however, many rejected this role altogether, stepping out of the resettlement queue and the rules of asylum to migrate, perilously, to Israel. Although undertaken at great personal risk, this ‘autonomous migration’ speaks to a further source of power asylees have, and continue to wield: their power to move, or their “pedetic force” (Nail 2015: 125), which has emerged as “a contemporary form of escape that challenges

and betrays the present-day domination of postliberal power” (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 203).

11.5 Methodological implications

In the discussions above, I have submitted ways in which this thesis has contributed to existing understandings of the 2005 protest itself, and to guiding themes that emerged through the study. Thinking more widely, I would also like to suggest several implications of the research for current theoretical and methodological debates in asylum-related scholarship in multiple disciplines. Overall, these suggestions encompass an approach to research centred on the study of asylum, which I will outline in four sections: increased usage of concepts to discuss asylum that can handle both camp and non-camp settings; the recognition of the category of person created by the asylum claim; empirical study of the governance of asylum; and the methodological value of focusing ethnography on acts of asylum activism.

11.5.1 Widening from camps

Much research on the political activity of asylees – and indeed on asylum as a whole – has been conducted in camps. This focus has shaped many of the categories and concepts which have developed. With increased recognition of the significance of non-camp, and especially urban, contexts as places where most of the world’s refugees live, asylum-focused research on such settings is on the rise. This shift gives rise to conceptual problems, however, which have, so far, received limited attention.

Though refugee camps house diverse populations, the category ‘refugee’ can be, for the most part, taken at face value. Although camp governance may be controlled by the state or by humanitarian organisations, the lines of responsibility, like the camp’s physical

boundaries, are, in comparison to non-camp settings, easier to identify. Of course, many camps have become increasingly urbanised; while this itself “poses” as Sanyal has noted, “dilemmas for theorization and policy-making”, the particularities of an urban context only “adds further complications” (Sanyal 2012: 637). In my research, the use of categories from camp-based research – like “humanitarian governance” and even “refugee” – confused or obscured rather than assisted in analysis.

Rather than develop one set of theories for camp contexts and another for non-camp settings, this incongruity prompts me to propose increased use of concepts that can be applied to all contexts where asylees live. In conducting research which seeks to understand how international phenomena, such as asylum governance and asylum activism, manifest in situated practices and struggles, such an expansion of our conceptual frames of reference would increase the extent to which research findings and theoretical arguments can be compared and connected, across multiple sites and scales.

11.5.2 Acknowledging asylees

One such frame of reference set forth in this thesis is the use of *asylee* as an analytical category. With this suggestion I have entered into a long-standing refugee studies debate about the ‘polysemic nature’ of the term ‘refugee’ (Marlowe 2013: 12), and what category or categories to use in its place. Being a ‘refugee’, Scalettaris has argued, is “not necessarily a natural characteristic, nor is it a condition that deeply affects identity or collective behaviours and strategies” (2007: 40). Instead, being a refugee entails “having a specific official status, which is attributed and recognised by governmental and international institutions” and so, she suggests the term is “therefore more appropriately understood as a bureaucratic label” than a “sociological category” (Scalettaris 2007: 40-41).

This thesis has argued that the act of claiming asylum itself *does*, however, have real meaning and implications for peoples' lives and experiences, even if the category "refugee" is not the most appropriate term with which to capture the commonalities of the act. People who have claimed asylum may have any number of legal statuses, as this thesis has shown, but have in common a bureaucratic relationship with the bodies that govern asylum. This commonality is important because it creates and mediates a legal and bureaucratic relationship with at least two if not more states: their home country; the country in which they have claimed asylum; and perhaps one or more countries of resettlement.

The asylum claim is significant also because of its effects on multiple aspects of the lives of people who entered the asylum-seeking process, regardless of the outcome of their claims: through it, they at the very least engage in registration and RSD processes; it also affects their documentation and ability to cross borders legally; their eligibility and access to various levels of assistance; and their prospects for the future, through legal affiliation to one or more country. As Anderson's 2012 study of "the time and money spent by refugees accessing services in Nairobi" has shown, and as this thesis also has demonstrated, these interactions have real effects.

In lieu of an existing category that captures this population, which included the 2005 protesters and many people who have applied for asylum in cities, I have suggested the use of *asylee*. Using an analytical category rather than a policy category allows consideration of the latter at a remove. This is particularly important given that the political role of asylees is shaped in part by refugee research and scholarship.

Although the 2005 protest may have been an extreme instance of this – given that prior to the event, its organisers undertook a study of the literature of refugee studies from the library of the field's founder – the research fatigue which I discussed in the methodology

section and the growth of the field suggest that reflexivity remains apt (see Chimni 1998, Landau 2012, Lammers 2007). Attending to tensions and exchanges between what Van Hear calls “the policy/governmental, the vernacular/popular/everyday, and the social science spheres” (Van Hear 2011: 19) is much assisted by ‘policy irrelevant’ analytical categories (Bakewell 2007).

Asylee signals an emerging form of political belonging that cuts also through the citizen/non-citizen and political/non-political binaries recurring in scholarship concerned with migrant and refugee political action. Acknowledgement of the common experiences of asylees thus offers one contribution to the call for recognition of what Millner has termed “new articulations of collective belonging” (2013: 88) that emerge as people continue to reproduce, contest, and produce authority in different sites and movements.

11.5.3 Researching asylum governance

It is my hope that this thesis also serves as evidence of the potentiality of conceptualising asylum governance broadly, and undertaking empirical research therein. The thesis’ explication of the governance context in which the Cairo protest was staged illuminated how responses to the event comprised interactions not only between UNHCR and refugees, but also between multiple bodies. The event is thus significant as a major public contestation of the political role of refugees, but also of the governance of asylum.

Such instances of contestation are an auspicious opportunity for understanding asylum governance as a form of global governance practiced and configured differently in different contexts. The importance of having a way to discuss this across sites and global divides is evident in the stark differences between them. In this thesis, I have argued for the necessity of attention to the state due to what I have identified as an over-focus on UNHCR and

humanitarianism in existing literature on refugee protest. Recent literature on the politics of asylum in the United Kingdom has identified quite an opposite problem, that of an over-foregrounding of the state's primacy (Gill 2010: 626).

Both tendencies show the need for broad-based conceptions that account for “connection and disconnection between different sites, practices and assemblages through which asylum and refugee governance is achieved” (Gill 2010: 638), and that attend to “local, situated decision-making and the struggles that occur around these” (Silvey, 2007: 268). My proposal for the study of *asylum governance* offers one such conception.

In contrast to a prevailing focus on the ‘refugee regime’ or ‘refugee governance’, this thesis has suggested thinking of asylum governance as the governance not of a population but of a set of rules, in which asylees may only participate in as much as they restrict their requests to the possibilities laid out by those rules, and to the governance processes in place. Although asylum governance may have authoritarian effects, empirical attention to its politics shows how these are in practice the byproducts of a kind of *anti-governance* or *governing up* concerned primarily with populations, institutions, and publics other than refugees.

A focus on the governance of asylum, rather than the governance of refugees, highlights the political character of *access* to refugee status and resettlement. Rather than taking the existence of a population of refugees as a given, an asylum governance approach foregrounds those processes of decision-making, and workings of power, that determine who may be called a “refugee” and who may access asylum. This way of thinking about governance, in other words, places emphasis on the processes of *bordering* asylum. This is significant because asylum governance affects not only those who have been granted refugee status, but all people who have claimed asylum (Ticktin 2011: 5).

Because it prompts an inductive study of its actors and politics, an asylum governance approach also draws attention to the ways in which the configuration of governing bodies particular to differing locations can impact upon what asylum looks like or how it is realised in those locations.

Furthermore, a focus on the governance of an outcome — asylum — rather than a population elevates the importance of asylees, because it is on the basis of their experience, rather than on reports on particular applications of law or policy, that this outcome may be assessed and measured.

Finally, framing what is usually called ‘the global governance of refugees’ instead as global asylum governance aligns it more closely with other forms of global governance, which focus on processes or phenomena (migration, trade) rather than a population, thereby better allowing for comparison and cross-pollination across fields of study.

11.5.4 Ethnographies of asylum activism

Lisa Malkki has envisioned the position of refugees as that of a “floating world either beyond or above politics, and beyond or above history – a world in which they are simply ‘victims’” – a floating world that may be “a deeply dehumanizing environment for refugees, even as it shelters” (Malkki 2005: 518). The study of asylum activism offers one way of grounding this ‘floating world’, attending to ways in which asylees are not simply ‘victims’ but actively pursue improvements to their circumstances and accountability for injustices.

While there has been tentative recent acknowledgement of problems of accountability and participation in humanitarian aid, particularly within individual institutions, this thesis has revealed the presence of considerable systemic obstacles to a political role for asylees in

asylum governance more broadly. Elizabeth Holzer's analysis of the factors that undermined "the development of procedural justice for durable solutions" in Buduburam refugee camp (2012: 270) revealed close parallels to the limitations of refugee political participation this thesis has documented.

While Holzer considers these in terms of the challenges of governing a *refugee camp*, the similarities of her findings with the ones I have uncovered in researching a refugee protest in an urban setting suggest that commonalities may cross-cut asylum governance and asylee political actions across multiple settings. Research that starts with asylum activism would test the extent to which the conclusions we both have reached about refugee protest and about asylum's governance might apply elsewhere – and to what extent (if at all) and in what ways, such governance might be democratised (Kuyper 2014: 621). These are questions which research by Holzer, myself, and, in recent doctoral theses, Emily Barry-Murphy (2015), and Judy-Ann Cilliers (2014), demonstrates are matters of burgeoning interest in anthropology and beyond.

11.6 Conclusion: seeing asylum like a state to think beyond the 'impasse'

The preceding discussion has suggested several theoretical, methodological, and empirical avenues for future study, any of which could be applied to site-specific research. Given the ongoing changes in Egypt, continued research into the governance of asylum there is both challenging and important; the latest news, both in headlines and in my email account, is that the decisions of some Cairo-based asylees to 'vote with their feet' and board Europe-bound rafts or boats continue.

As well as site-specific research, study of political activity amongst the Sudanese and South Sudanese diaspora could explore the politics between asylees and asylum governance at

multiple sites, opening up a comparative field; through almost two decades of ongoing displacement, asylees from Sudan/South Sudan constitute a diverse, widely dispersed international population with a history of political activity in its places of asylum.

Comparative study seems particularly important at the present juncture, in order to identify how factors such as location (camp or urban; neighbouring or resettlement country), legal and institutional frameworks (national policies and practices; divisions of responsibility) or solidarity networks (diaspora activists; local civil society) impact political tensions between forced migrants and asylum-related organisations, and what continuities exist. The present research also suggests the potential for future reflexive explorations of the situated politics of refugee studies research.

The relationships between asylees and asylum governance on which this thesis has focused raises the need to reconsider about how we think about asylum as a whole. As Franke, discussing Arendt, points out, states “hold political responsibility for [refugees’] existence” (2009: 309); refugees are, in other words, a category of people distinctly created through their positions vis-a-vis nation-states. Viewed the other way around, we see also a “mutually constitutive relationship between the figure of the refugee and modern state system” (Betts 2014 in the Oxford Handbook: 63).

In a world “normatively reduced to nation-states due to the political and ideological dominance of the nation-state model” (Eliassi 2015: 32), political action that, like refugee protest, targets not a specific nation-state but a form of global governance would seem at first to suggest that activists like the 2005 protesters were “speak[ing] ‘out of place’” and “stretching the norms of acceptable behavior” (Moulin & Nyers 2007: 370, 364). Yet the Sudanese protesters at Mustafa Mahmoud repeatedly evinced and enacted the shared belief that their protest had a basis in international law, and that by raising attention to injustices

on this basis, their voices would be heard at an international scale – that their collective behaviour was not just acceptable, but a righteous expression of international norms.

Given that asylum was created and is governed by laws, policies, and institutions ostensibly for the benefit of refugees, the protesters' requests for the consideration of their interests in asylum governance do not, in this light, seem 'out of place'. Sudanese in Cairo had in fact famously said to researcher Katarzyna Grabska that they 'live in a country of UNHCR' (originally in Grabska 2006: 49; reproduced in the titles of Kagan 2011a, Moulin and Nyers 2007). In the 2005 protest, they acted as global citizens, calling for international accountability in the global governance of asylum.

After the violent conclusion of the 2005 protest, however, Grabska noted that, "at the end of the day, [refugees] are not citizens, and hence not entitled to the same level of treatment and attention", citing a donor country representative in Egypt who had told her that "nobody will burn their fingers for refugees" (2006). The outcome of the protest and impasse on which this thesis has focused suggest that, at least in Cairo in 2006, these observations were apt.

Yet they need not be enduring truths. To conclude the thesis, I propose a questioning of how we think about asylum as a global good. The recent 'refugee crisis' has brought widespread attention to refugees, including efforts by a California businessman, Jason Buzi, to create a 'Refugee Nation' where all people whose original countries have failed to protect them, or have persecuted them, could go to live in peace and relative safety. While in some ways quite problematic (see discussion of Buzi's proposal in Cohen 2015 and Betts 2015), this is not such a leap from the current reality, as Van Hear's and Cohen's ongoing discussions of 'Refugia' have developed (Van Hear 2016; Cohen & Van Hear 2017).

Consideration of asylum as such a nation already in existence, albeit in deterritorialised

form, prompts comparison between asylum governance and the governance of states: how is asylum governed? How does it relate to its refugee polity and vice versa? Is it the kind of state people would like to live in? If not, why not? I propose that thinking of ‘a state of asylum’ would provide a way to reconsider how our world is organised, contributing to wider debates about justice and belonging in contemporary global governance.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. MAPS



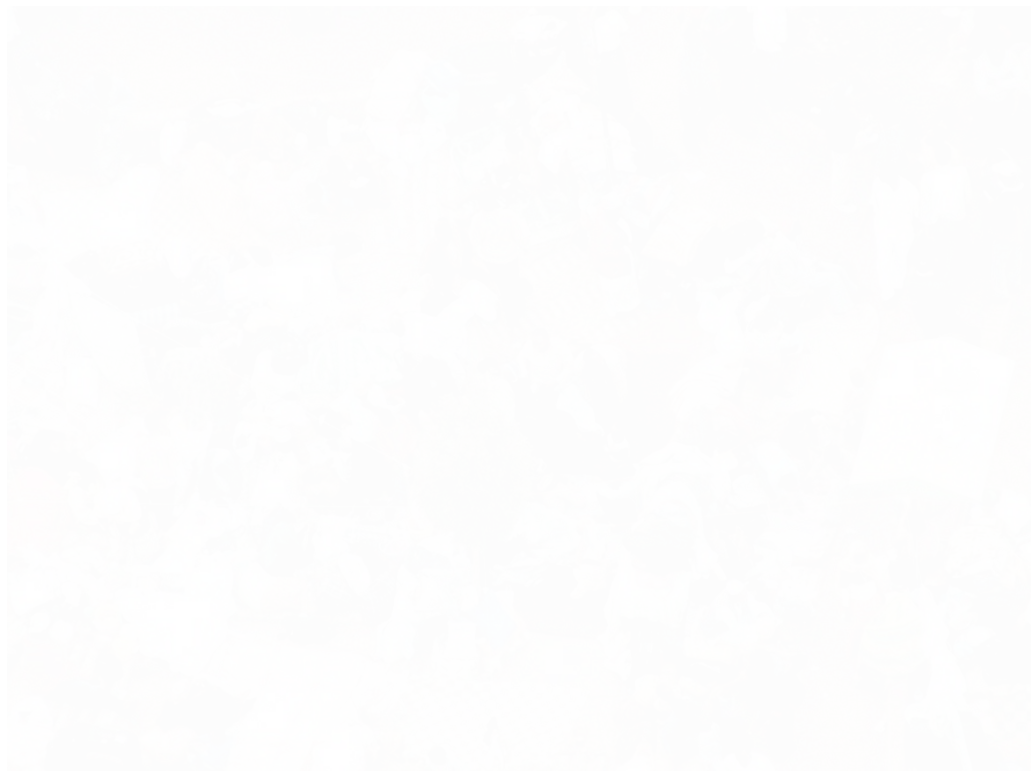
Cairo. The red pin marks the 2005 protest site near UNHCR-Cairo's then-office. The blue line shows directions to UNHCR's current office, in the Cairo satellite called "6th of October City".

Source: Google Maps

A closer aerial view of the 2005 protest site, *midan Mustafa Mahmoud* in Cairo's Mohandiseen neighbourhood. UNHCR-Cairo used the site, near the large Mustafa Mahmoud mosque, as an informal waiting room. Source: Google Maps



APPENDIX B. THE PROTEST SITE



The images originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The images were sourced at October Magazine, a state-owned Egyptian political magazine, in 2005.

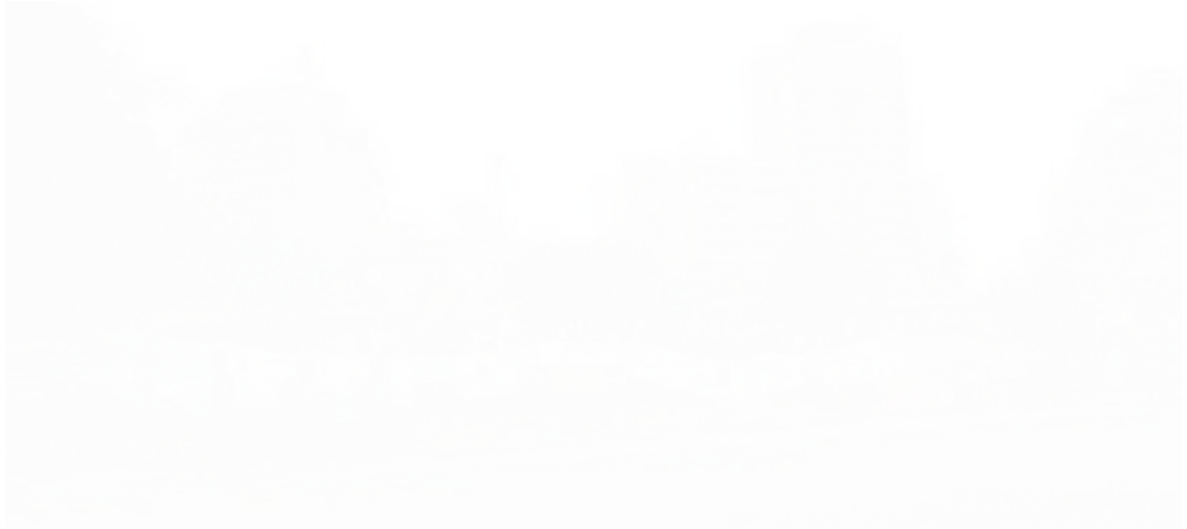


The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced at Al-Ahram Weekly in 2005.



Source: Youssef Assad

APPENDIX C. BANNERS



The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image is not publicly available.



“For how long will the international organization save us meanwhile we are suffering” *Source: Youssef Assad*



“Where is the international media” | “We are victims of mismanagement.” *Source: Stacy Schafer*



“... an urgent solution for the Sudanese refugees of [sic: or] move them to another country”

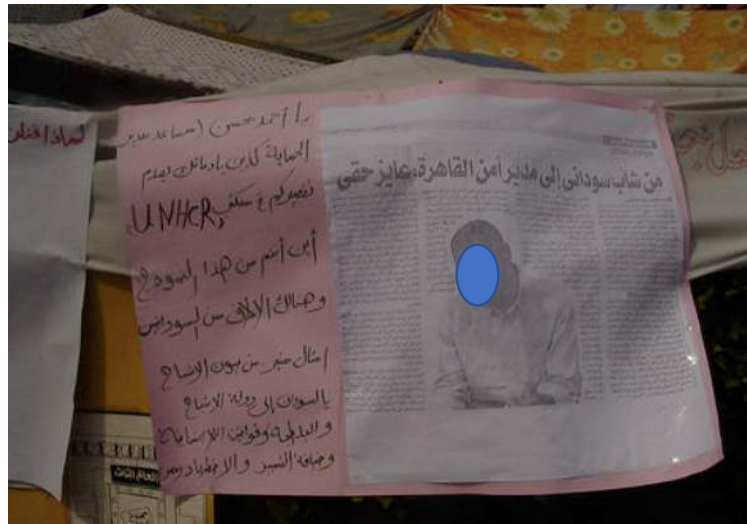
Source: Viviana Salama



“... Cultural Association Cairo Branch, asking United Nation High Commissionare for Refugees and the civil society institutes in Egypt for solution to the problems of the Sudanese refugees in Egypt. Forward to the refugees solution.” *Source: Stacy Schafer*



“Solve our problem or send us to another country” | Cartoons Source: Stacy Schafer (both photos)



Missing or incarcerated men.

Source: Stacy Schafer
(all photos; faces have been concealed because they are identifiable.)



“Save our children from sexual Abuse” Source: Stacy Schafer



“We object local integration” Source: Youssef Assad

APPENDIX D. LIFE IN THE SIT-IN



Two of the sit-in's internal security guards. Pictured on the banner is Sara, the late daughter of a protest participant, who died while working for an Egyptian family on the North Coast. *Source: Stacy Schafer*



Children's lessons in the sit-in site. *Source: Stacy Schafer. [Faces have been concealed because they are identifiable.]*



Women embroider under the shelter of sheets. *Source: Stacy Schafer. [Their faces have been concealed because they are identifiable.]*



The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image is not publicly available.



A man washes serving plates next to gas canisters used for cooking. Behind him, protester belongings are stacked against the park fence. *Source: Youssef Ahmed [Faces have been concealed because they are identifiable.]*



Police laugh and lounge at the sit-in's periphery. *Source: Youssef Ahmed*



The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image is not publicly available.



The image originally presented here has not been made freely available because it contains multiple identifiable people.



The images originally presented here have not been made freely available because they contain multiple identifiable people.

APPENDIX E. IDENTITY CARDS DISPLAY



Protesters hold up their UNHCR-issued identity cards for a visiting television crew, 13 November 2005. *Source: Stacy Schafer (all photos). Two of the images originally presented here have not been made freely available because they contain multiple identifiable people.*

APPENDIX F. SUDANESE EMBASSY LICENSE PLATE



A car that protesters said belonged to the Sudanese embassy in Cairo, parked near the sit-in site, 16 October 2005. *Source: Stacy Schafer*



The car's front license plate. Protesters removed it as evidence of the car's presence, to be photographed by FMRS student Schafer, along with the day's *Al Gomhuria* newspaper showing the date. *Source: Stacy Schafer*

APPENDIX G. 30 DECEMBER 2005 FORCED EVICTION



The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced from a Facebook group called “Sudanese Refugee Voices”, in an album memorializing the protest break-up, in 2010.



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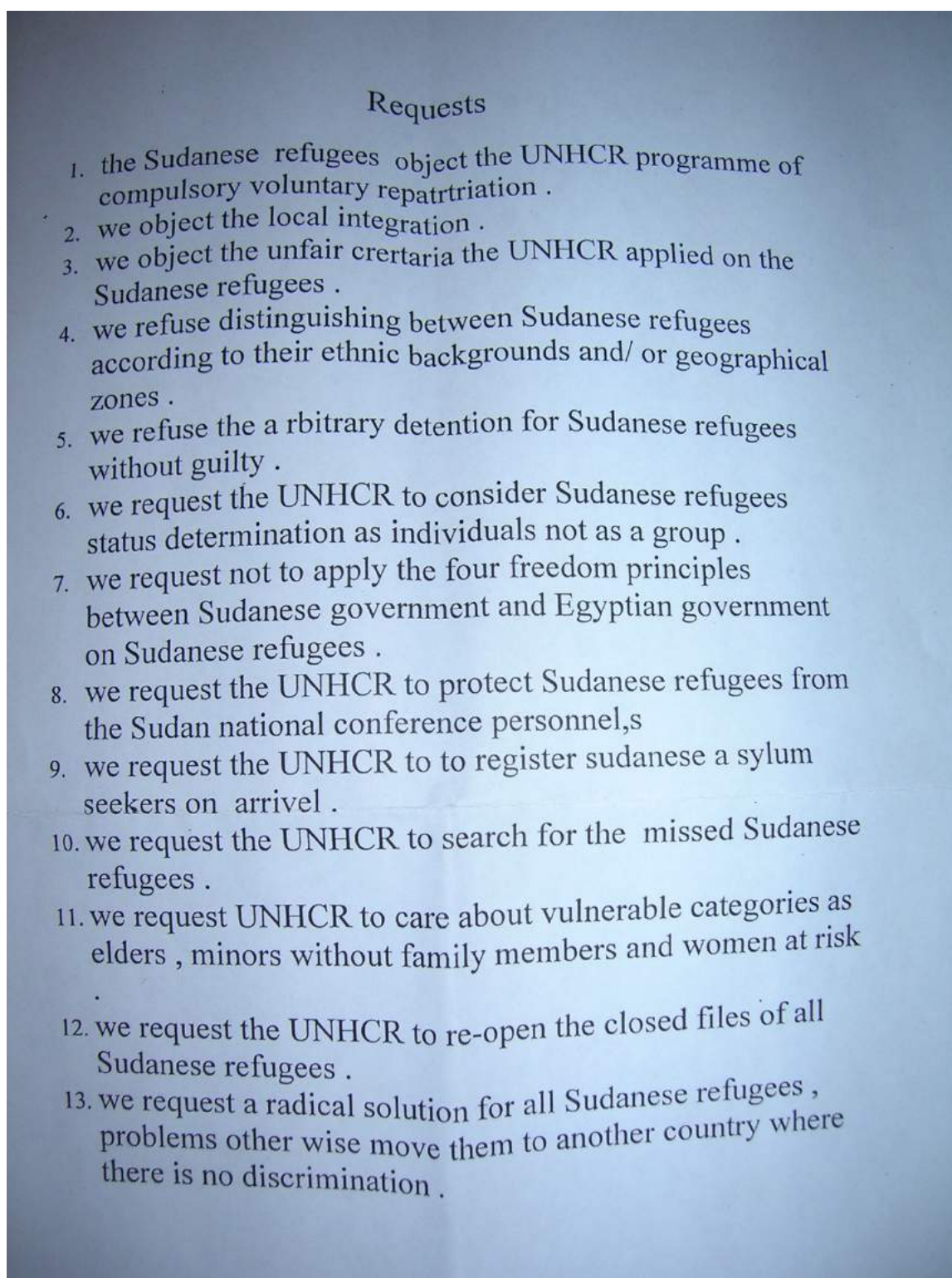


The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available because of copyright. The image was sourced from a Facebook group called “Sudanese Refugee Voices”, in an album memorializing the protest break-up, in 2010.



The sit-in site in *midan* Mustafa Mahmoud in the spring following the forced eviction. *Source:*
Stacy Schafer

APPENDIX H. PROTESTER LISTS OF DEMANDS/REQUESTS



A photograph I took of the list given to me by a protest organiser when I visited the sit-in on 10 October 2005. This photograph was also reproduced in Moulin & Nyers 2007: 365.

Comparison of English-language versions of lists of protest points						
Code	Paper list	Damanga List	Drumbeat list	FMRS list	UNHCR list	Revised list
Date published	10 October 2005 or earlier	13 October 2005	24 October 2005	26 October 2005	30 October 2005	After 17 November 2005
List title	Requests	Petition statements	The Voice of Refugees Demands from the UNHCR	List of protester demands	What are the demands of the Sudanese demonstrators?	The demands
List information	Protest organisers printed this list in Arabic and English and distributed it to sit-in visitors, including me on 10 October and blogger Elijah Zarwan in November 2005.	Damanga Coalition for Freedom and Democracy, a small Darfur advocacy group started by Sudanese resettled in the United States, posted this list to their website. It is an English translation of an Arabic-language list sent to them by a Refugees Voice member. The preamble to the list introduced it as a petition that “details numerous problems [protesters] have faced while waiting to be processed by the UN.”	Drum Beat Sudan, a now defunct website, posted this list as a postlude to its transcription of an interview with an unnamed Refugees Voice spokesperson.	FMRS staff printed and distributed this at the 26 October FMRS seminar at which four protest organisers spoke. A FMRS student who helped organise the seminar prepared it based on the Paper list, and sent it to FMRS faculty with the introduction, “here is a cleaned-up of version of the demands. I don't think it makes any substantive changes – just more readable in english.”	UNHCR-Cairo included this list in a 30 October press release. It was based on a printed, 20-point Arabic language list that police gave UNHCR on 2 October, which, for the press release, UNHCR-Cairo staff “translated into English (and slightly simplified in the process)”. A report by the office later noted that “some of the 20 statements overlapped or were not demands per/se so were not included” (UNHCR15: 22). Beneath the list, the press release read: “Most of the demands of the Sudanese demonstrators are beyond UNHCR’s control” (UNHCR05).	Protest organisers distributed this list via email in English and Arabic in response to UNHCR-Cairo’s 17 November statement, stating, “Since UNHCR office in Cairo sees that the demands submitted by Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers are illogical and that most of the demands do not fall within the mandate of UNHCR, it is therefore logical to omit some of the 20 demands despite their legitimacy and importance so that we can reach a point of understanding and a meeting point through which UNHCR can respond to the demands of the Sudanese refugees based on the rules and regulations of asylum.”
Points included	13	20	20	13	19	11

Topic	Paper list	Damanga List	Drumbeat list	FMRS list	UNHCR list	Revised list
Return to Sudan	The Sudanese refugees object the UNHCR programme of compulsory voluntary repatriation.	We refuse to return voluntarily to Darfur because of the lack of security that the region is still experiencing.	We reject repatriation to Sudan.	The Sudanese Refugees object to the UNHCR programme of compulsory involuntary repatriation.	Sudanese refugees reject any notion of voluntary repatriation.	We call on not withholding assistance and services from recognized refugees or those receiving temporary protection or group protection with the aim of forcing them to voluntarily repatriate during this time where Sudan is suffering from security instability and the ruling party's manipulating the national party in implementing the peace agreement with transparency.
Local integration	We object the local integration.	We also refuse to resettle permanently in Egypt because cooperation between the governments of Egypt and Sudan has made our lives here difficult.	We reject the integrations into the Egyptian Society	We object to local integration.	Sudanese refugees reject local integration in Egypt.	We reject local integration based on the fact that there are no national legislations in the host country for refugees to enjoy nationalism starting from citizenship, freedom of expression, political participation and others, limited job opportunities and access to social services are hardly adequate for the nationals, dense population is met with opposite in the economic reality, the country's policy with regards to foreigners as well as the cultural and ethnic difference and sometimes the religious difference has all led to the rejection of refugees and discrimination which has significantly minimized the chances of integration and dissolving into the host community.

Topic	Paper list	Damanga List	Drumbeat list	FMRS list	UNHCR list	Revised list
UNHCR's Refugee Status Determination process	We object the unfair criteria [sic] the UNHCR applied on the Sudanese refugees.	We refuse the unfair procedures used by the UN office in dealing with refugees. [New point:] We ask that UN quickly restart refugee processing and expedite resettlement procedures for those who have been accepted as refugees.	We Condemn the way the UNHCR process Sudanese Refugee status.	We object to the unfair criteria UNHCR applies to Sudanese refugees.	UNHCR should have fast-track procedures for refugee status determination and resettlement.	We call on abiding by international standards in the refugee status determination process and that it be carried out in honesty and transparency.
UNHCR's RSD criteria, especially its 2005 suspension of RSD for all southern Sudanese	We refuse to distinguish between Sudanese refugees according to their ethnic backgrounds and/or geographical zones. [New point:] We request the UNHCR to consider Sudanese refugees status determination as individuals not as a group.	We refuse the UN's practice of discriminating between Sudanese refugees by ethnicity and region. The Sudanese refugees need to be considered as one group and not treated differently.	We Condemn any form of discrimination or segregation of Sudanese from refugees of other nationals. [New point:] We ask UNHCR to deal with Sudanese refugees individually, case by case, other than as a group. [New point:] We want UNHCR resume processing refugee status and immigration for all Sudanese refugees.	We object to the making of distinctions between Sudanese refugees according to their ethnic/geographical background. [New point:] We request UNHCR to consider Sudanese refugees as individuals not as a group.	UNHCR must not apply any new policy to Sudanese relating to the peace agreement in South Sudan (e.g. suspension of RSD). [New point:] All Sudanese asylum-seekers should receive the same treatment regardless of whether they originate from the south, Darfur or the north.	We call for resuming refugee status determination interviews for Sudanese asylum seekers on an individual basis due to the variation in the reasons for seeking asylum.
Arrest and detention	We refuse the arbitrary detention for Sudanese refugees without guilty.	We refuse the random, unjustified arrest of Sudanese refugees in Egypt, many of whom are detained without charges filed or access to legal protection. [New point:] We ask that the UN respond to numerous complaints filed by Sudanese refugees about mistreatment by security personnel and others while in Egypt	We condemn the rests [sic] and imprisonment of Sudanese Refugees without charges.	We object to the arbitrary detention of innocent Sudanese who have not been proven guilty of any crime.	The demonstrators condemn the frequent arrest and detention of Sudanese in Egypt without charges.	We reject the unjustified arrest of Sudanese refugees without them committing any legal crime or them standing before a just court.

Topic	Paper list	Damanga List	Drumbeat list	FMRS list	UNHCR list	Revised list
The ‘Four Freedoms’ agreement between Egypt and Sudan	We request not to apply the four freedom principles between Sudanese government and Egyptian government on Sudanese refugees.	We ask that the UN not allow the “four freedoms” shared between Egyptians and Sudanese (freedom of movement, ownership, residence, and work) to be applied against us, for example in forcing us to either return to Sudan or resettle permanently in Egypt.	We asking UNHCR stop using Sudanese – Egyptian governments ⁴ points agreements (No travel visa, no residence permits required, Ownership of property, and free trade) as a reference in the refugees situations.	We object to the application of the Four Freedoms Act, signed between the Egyptian and Sudanese government, to Sudanese refugees.	The demonstrators reject the “Four Freedoms” Agreement signed between Sudan and Egypt - a reciprocal agreement on freedom of movement, residence, employment and property ownership.	[Not mentioned]
Sudanese embassy in Cairo staff	We request the UNHCR to protect Sudanese refugees from the Sudan national conference personnels [sic].	We ask that the UN protect refugees from assault by representatives of the Sudanese government living here in Egypt (including National Congress Party/ NIF members and the Embassy of Sudan) and working against the interests of the Sudanese refugee community.	We demand protection of Sudanese Refugee in Egypt from the NCP [National Congress Party.	We request UNHCR to protect Sudanese refugees from Sudanese national conference personnel.	The demonstrators call for UNHCR protection against Sudanese officials whom they believe to be operating in Egypt.	[Not mentioned]
Registration of newly-arrived asylum seekers	We request the UNHCR to register Sudanese asylum seekers on arrival.	We ask that the UN promptly register newly arrived Sudanese so that they can begin their application for refugee status.	We ask for registration of all new arrivals as soon as they arrive. [New point:] We need help to reach to reach all the Refugees without exception.	We request UNHCR to register Sudanese asylum seekers upon arrival.	UNHCR should register all newly arriving Sudanese would-be asylum-seekers “on the spot,” without appointment.	We call for the immediate registration of the new comers of asylum seekers to ensure that they are not deported or returned the country of origin from which they escaped out of fear and to seek protection.
Missing Sudanese refugees	We request the UNHCR to search for the missed Sudanese refugees.	We ask that the UN help locate the approximately 500 Sudanese refugees who, according to the Red Cross, have “disappeared” since arriving in Egypt	A lot of Sudanese Refugees are missing their where about are not known	We request UNHCR to locate the missing the Sudanese refugees.	UNHCR must investigate the alleged disappearance of Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers	We call for a search for the missing Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers who disappeared in the country of asylum so that the Sudanese National Party in Cairo is not accused as the ones going after refugees and asylum seekers or any other organization.

Topic	Paper list	Damanga List	Drumbeat list	FMRS list	UNHCR list	Revised list
Assistance for elderly, disabled, widowed and child refugees	We request UNHCR to care about vulnerable categories as elders, minors without family members and women at risk.	We ask the UN to take particular care of the most vulnerable refugees, including the disabled, the elderly, children, and widows.	We are asking the UNHCR to take care of our children (non accompanied minor), women and the elders especially those without family member to cater for them.	We request UNHCR to pay greater attention to vulnerable refugees, in particular elders, unaccompanied minors and women.	UNHCR should take care of the minors, the elderly and women.	We call for a refugee status determination for all asylum seekers especially the elderly, unaccompanied minors, widowed women and single mothers and providing them with the necessary assistance.
Sudanese asylum seekers whose cases have been rejected by UNHCR	We request the UNHCR to re-open the closed files of all Sudanese refugees.	We request that the UN reopen refugee files that have been closed so that denied applicants can exercise their right to appeal.	We demand reopening of all the cases of close files of Sudanese refugees. [New point:] We want to see the results of all the appeal cases.	We request UNHCR to re-open the closed files of all Sudanese refugees.	UNHCR must reopen the “closed files” of all Sudanese failed asylum-seekers (i.e., those cases who have been finally determined <u>not</u> to be refugees under either the 1951 Convention or the OAU Convention. There are about 20,000 unsuccessful asylum-seekers believed to be in Egypt illegally).	We call for all Sudanese closed files to be looked into once again and to review reasons of closing these files taking into consideration the period in which they were closed and finding a just solution to these files based on the rules of asylum.
Local solutions or relocation	We request a radical solution for all Sudanese refugees, problems otherwise move them to another country where there is no discrimination.	We ask that the UN take whatever steps are necessary to either solve the serious problems we have listed, or to transfer the refugees to another country where they will be more effectively handled.	We want solutions to all our problems or transfer us to other countries.	We ask for a radical solution for all Sudanese refugees. Absent such a solution, we ask to be allowed to move to a country where we will not face discrimination.	UNHCR must find solutions to all the problems facing Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt or, failing that, resettle all of them to third countries.	We call on finding a solution to the problems of Sudanese refugees, asylum seekers and new comers or that they be moved to another country where their refugee status would be determined with a more clear and transparent way.
Representation	[Not mentioned]	We ask that the UN deal directly with individual Sudanese refugees and not through third parties. [New point:] We ask that the UN office not allow any organizations the right to speak on behalf of the refugee community.	We don’t want UNHCR scheduling meeting with community leaders, community base organizations or institutions on behalf of refugees in order to enforce the idea of repatriation and Integration.	[Not mentioned]	UNHCR should stop holding meetings with Sudanese community leaders and community-based organizations to discuss about voluntary repatriation or local integration.	We call that no social or Sudanese ethnic associations be authorized to speak on behalf of Sudanese refugees since these organizations do not properly represent refugees.

Topic	Paper list	Damanga List	Drumbeat list	FMRS list	UNHCR list	Revised list
Security staff at UNHCR-Cairo office	[Not mentioned]	We ask that the UN withdraw the security personnel at the UN office who are seeking to prevent peaceful demonstrations.	We don't want security personnel hanging around the UNHCR office blocking our entries into premises.	[Not mentioned]	There should be no police officers guarding UNHCR premises.	[Not mentioned]
Training for Egyptian police and security	[Not mentioned]	We ask that the Egyptian police and other security personnel be trained to treat refugees according to their legal human rights, as the refugees are now frequently mistreated by authorities in their host country.	We ask that Egyptian police and security personnel are made aware of our rights as refugees in this country.	[Not mentioned]	UNHCR should inform the Egyptian authorities (especially the police) about the rights of refugees and the treatment they should receive.	[Not mentioned]
Treatment by UNHCR-Cairo	[Not mentioned]	We ask that UN instruct the personnel of its Cairo office to treat the refugees humanely and with basic respect. [New point:] We ask that the UN distribute aid from other organizations to the refugees in need, promptly and without discrimination.	UN should stop using provocative word and bad attitudes and start treating us with respect that every human being expect from others.	[Not mentioned]	UNHCR should reply individually to all enquiries and correspondence from Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers.	[Not mentioned]
New assistance organisation	[Not mentioned]	[Not mentioned]	[Not mentioned]	[Not mentioned]	The demonstrators want a new organization/ association to assist Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers.	[Not mentioned]
UNHCR assistance criteria	[Not mentioned]	[Not mentioned]	[Not mentioned]	[Not mentioned]	UNHCR should provide assistance to all Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers.	[Not mentioned]

APPENDIX I. JANUARY 2006 PROTESTER INTERVIEWS

	Code	Sex	Age	Pseudonym	Place	Date	Interviewer	Notes
01	FMRS01	F	15	Abok	NS	NSJan06	Laura Maxwell	
02	FMRS02	F	10	Nancy	NS	NSJan06	Laura Maxwell	
03	FMRS03	M	9		NS	NSJan06	Laura Maxwell	
04	FMRS04	M	child		NS	NSJan06	Laura Maxwell	
05	FMRS05	M	13		NS	NSJan06	Laura Maxwell	
06	FMRS06	M	adult	Mustafa	Home	12Jan06	Nada Hamdan	Group interview
07		M	adult					
08		M	adult					
09		M	adult					
10		M	adult					
11		F	adult					
12		F	adult	Zara				
13	FMRS07	M	adult		Hospital	03Jan06	Judith Nischan	
14	FMRS08	M	adult		Hospital	03Jan06	Judith Nischan	
15	FMRS09	M	33		NS	08Jan06	Judith Nischan	
16	FMRS10	F	adult		NS	08Jan06	Judith Nischan	
17	FMRS11	M	adult	Abdul	NS	04Jan06	Judith Nischan	
18	FMRS12	M	adult		NS	04Jan06	Judith Nischan	
19	FMRS13	M	adult		NS	NSJan06	Judith Nischan	
20	FMRS14	M	adult		NS	NSJan06	Judith Nischan	
21	FMRS15	M	adult		Home	03Jan06	Nada Hamdan	Group interview
22		M	adult	Mohamed				
23	FMRS16	F	adult		Home	13Jan06	Mulki al-Sharmani, Gudrun Kroner	
24	FMRS19	M	28		CBO	14Jan06	Mulki al-Sharmani, Gudrun Kroner	Group interview
25		M	33	Samir	office			
26		M	28	Hunud				
27	FMRS20	M	adult	Abdullah	Home	08Jan06	Mulki al-Sharmani, Gudrun Kroner	Group interview
28		M	15					
29		F	adult					
30		F	58					
31	FMRS21	F	40		Home	13Jan06	Mulki al-Sharmani, Gudrun Kroner	Group interview
32	FMRS22	M	29		NS	NSJan06	Lucretzia (surname NS)	
33		M	23					
34		F	38					
35		F	24					
36		M	33					
37		F	20					
38		M	28					
39		M	28					
40		F	45					
41	FMRS23	M	adult				Peroline Ainsworth	
42	FMRS24	F	36	Betty	Home	28Jan06	Nora Danielson Lanier	
43	FMRS25	F	adult	Layla	Home	29Jan06	Nora Danielson Lanier	
44	FMRS26	F	adult		Home	NSJan06	Naaz Khan	
45	FMRS27	M	adult		Home	NSJan06	Naaz Khan	
46	FMRS28	F	adult		Home	31Dec05	Nora Danielson Lanier	
47	FMRS31	M	adult		NS	06Feb06	Laura Maxwell	
48	FMRS32	M	adult	Moses		21Dec05	Leigh Sylvan recorded/transcribed	Speech at sit-in
49	Nadim05	NS	adult		NS	NSJan06	see Notes	
50	Nadim07	M	33		NS	NSJan06	see Notes	
51	Nadim08	M	adult		NS	NSJan06	see Notes	
52	Nadim09	M	48	Adam	NS	NSJan06	see Notes	
53	Nadim10	M	33		NS	NSJan06	see Notes	
54	Nadim11	F	adult		NS	NSJan06	see Notes	

Notes: 1. NS = not specified in interview notes. 2. Discontinuity in numbering indicates interviewer notes or non-protester interviews. 3. FMRS = Conducted for the FMRS programme's report on the protest, (Azzam et al. 2006). Yaser Mustafa (FMRS24 & FMRS25) and Talha Usman (FMRS28) provided English/Arabic interpretation for my interviews; otherwise, FMRS interviewers did not note interpretation or interview language. 4. Nadim = Conducted and translated from Arabic by Dr. Aida Seif el Dawla and/or affiliate of El-Nadim Center for the Management & Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, an Egyptian NGO.

APPENDIX J. OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES CITED

	Citation	Author/source	Date	Type	Title	Repository
01	Campbell 2006	Stancil Campbell	09May06	Theatre programme notes	“27 Dead: Director’s notes”	AUC CMRS Grey Files archive: KE/LSU-62.63 SADC
02	GoE01	Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	31Dec05	Press release	“The Ministry of Foreign Affairs comments on the statement issued by UNHCR”	Online: http://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/egypt-ministry-foreign-affairs-comments-statement-issued-unhcr [accessed 5 Jan 2008]
03	GoE02	Egyptian People's Assembly	02Jan06	Meeting minutes	Minutes of People’s Assembly meeting	AUC CMRS Grey Files archive: KE/LSU-66MF
04	GoE03	Yaser Mustafa	07Jan06	Notes	Notes on televised interview Egyptian Interior Minister	On file with author
05	GoE04	Egyptian Embassy in London	17Jan06	Letter	“Letter of Egyptian Embassy in London to the Parliamentary Group concerning the Sudanese Refugees”	Online: http://www.mfa.gov.eg/MFA_Portal/en-GB/MFA_News/Statements/Letter+of+Egyptian+Embassy+in+London+to+the+Parliamentary+Group+concerning+the+Sudanese+Refugees.htm [accessed 17 Nov 2014]
06	GoE05	Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	18Jan06	Press release	“Statement on the Sudanese Refugees Crisis”	Online: http://www.mfa.gov.eg/MFA_Portal/en-GB/MFA_News/Statements/sud.htm [accessed 3 Jan 2007]
07	GoE06	Fateh Azzam	25Jan06	Translated transcription	Interview with Nasr Hamzaouy, Refugee Department of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	AUC CMRS Grey Files archive: KE/LSU-66 M Azz
08	GoE07	FMRS files	NSJan06	Translated transcription	Interview with Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, El A'ashra television program, Dream Channel.	AUC CMRS Grey Files archive: KE/LSU-66 M Azz
09	GoE08	Egypt Independent	10Dec11	Newspaper article	“Interior Minister denies responsibility for refugee killings in 2005”	Online: http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/interior-minister-denies-responsibility-refugee-killings-2005 [accessed 8 Jun 2012]
10	UNHCR01	UNHCR-Cairo	20Oct05	Meeting minutes	“Note for the file: meeting with NGOs and churches regarding demonstrations”	On file with author
11	UNHCR02	UNHCR-Cairo	24Oct05	Meeting minutes	“Note for the file: meeting with NGOs and churches regarding demonstrations”	On file with author
12	UNHCR03	UNHCR-Cairo	26Oct05	Meeting minutes	“Note for the file: meeting with demonstrators and NGOs”	On file with author
13	UNHCR04	UNHCR-Cairo	30Oct05	Press release	“Sudanese demonstrations in Cairo”	On file with author
14	UNHCR05	UNHCR-Cairo	30Oct05	Press release	“Rumours, myths and speculations behind the Sudanese demonstrations”	On file with author
15	UNHCR06	UNHCR-Cairo	17Nov05	Press release	“UNHCR announcement”	On file with author

16	UNHCR07	UNHCR-Cairo	17Nov05	Press release	“Goodwill Ambassador Adel Imam works with UNHCR and the Government of Egypt to resolve the Sudanese sit-in”	On file with author
17	UNHCR08	UNHCR-HQ	24Nov05	Press release	“UNHCR and Adel Imam address Sudanese in the park and appeal for the end of the sit-in”	On file with author
18	UNHCR09	UNHCR-Cairo	29Nov05	Press release	“Sudanese demonstrations at UNHCR Cairo”	On file with author
19	UNHCR10	UNHCR-Cairo	17Dec05	Press release	“The December 17 Agreement signed by five leaders of the demonstration”	On file with author
20	UNHCR11	UNHCR-Cairo representative	19Dec05	Press release	Speech to Sudanese demonstrators, Mustafa Mahmoud park (recorded/transcribed by Leigh Sylvan)	On file with author
21	UNHCR12	UNHCR-HQ	20Dec05	Briefing notes	“Concern over protest casualties in Yemen, Egypt”	Online: http://www.unhcr.org/print/43a7e5dl114.html [accessed 10 Mar 2011]
22	UNHCR13	UNHCR-Cairo	10Jan06	Note	“UNHCR Cairo Update to NGOs”	On file with author
23	UNHCR14	Fateh Azzam	16Feb06	Translated transcription	Interview with Damtew Dessalegne, Deputy Regional Representative, UNHCR-Cairo	On file with author
24	UNHCR15	UNHCR-Cairo	16Jul06	Report	“Response to FMRS Report: ‘A Tragedy of Failures and False Expectations’”	AUC CMRS Grey Files archive: KE/LSU-66 M UNHCR