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Sovereignty alignment process: strategies of regime survival in Egypt, Libya and Syria

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ABSTRACT

Sovereignty is an ambiguous concept. It is always saturated with multiple meanings, especially as other concepts are either defined in terms of it or depend on it for their own meanings. It gets more ambiguous as scholars, especially those adopting constructivism as a theory of politics and international relations, move onto divergent paths, creating a gap between theory and practice. The article proposes the *sovereignty alignment process* as a two-level approach that can clarify sovereignty and its components, including territoriality. The internal level of the alignment process includes disaggregating meanings into frames before aggregating them into master frames that can identify, group and organise different – even contradictory – facets of sovereignty. The external level traces how these sets of meanings interact with the outside world, having its own meaning and discursive opportunity, which can consolidate the actor's repertoire of meanings on sovereignty. The outside world can also be material, helping to enact or operationalise the articulated meanings by other means, including the use of force or diplomacy. The approach has been devised to analyse the developments of the Arab uprisings, examining how state leaders redefined their identities and interests to survive the sweeping waves of protests against their regimes in 2011 and afterwards.

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Introduction

Despite the growing scholarly interest in sovereignty, the concept has remained ambiguous for a number of reasons, partly related to its meanings. Sovereignty is so central that other concepts such as authority, control or territoriality are 'defined in terms of it, [and] depend on it for their coherent meaning and use within discourse' (Bartelson 1995, 13). The multiple meanings that derive from these linkages leave the concept 'saturated' (Bartelson 1995, 13). As an 'an inherently *social* concept' (Biersteker and Weber 1996, 1, emphasis in original), some scholars have separated meanings from any corresponding 'references' or 'essences' in the surrounding reality (Kratochwil 2008). This problematises the search for 'truth', as sovereignty cannot be as true as its 'assertions' can (Kratochwil 2008, 81). Part of the ambiguity

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arises from a gap between theory and practice in scholarly trends seeking to localise these meanings. This is especially true within constructivist theory, a school of international relations preoccupied with how people 'act on the basis of meanings that objects and other actors have for them' and how these meanings are not inherent but are constructed 'in interaction' (Zehfuss 2002, 14).

On one hand, the concept keeps taking on various meanings, allowing it to acquire a unique specificity and certain characteristics in every practice (eg Menshawy 2019). On the other hand, attempts continue to enclose the concept within monolithic encasements, standardising and generalising sovereignty itself (eg Henderson 2014). The two paths never intersect as the former expands distinct meanings every time sovereignty is in action, and the latter contracts meanings by including some and excluding others. The line of generalisation is problematic, as the 'more general concepts are, the less informative they become' (Kratochwil 2008, 91). Furthermore, this approach creates 'staticism' by treating sovereignty as 'motionless and without evolution' (Elias 2000, xii). This understanding is problematic as it leaves sovereignty inextricably 'united' or 'entangled' with the very functions that its multiple meanings would serve (Lebow 2008; Schmitt 1985, 2). Ambiguity endures as it turns into an *asset* for users hypocritically employing its contradictory and elusive meanings in different contexts without sounding less 'credible' or 'logical' (Pusterla 2016).

This article introduces a *sovereignty alignment process* as an approach to reduce the ambiguity of sovereignty by getting hold of it in action and across two levels. The internal level of alignment is concerned with organising and connecting multiple meanings of sovereignty by disaggregating them into 'frames', thus constituting more aggregated units which I refer to as master frames. Framing can bridge the gap between the general or static conception of sovereignty and the articulation and changing of it. The external level of alignment is based on how these framed meanings interact with the outside world. The outside world can be material, offering physical forces enacting or operationalising the articulated meanings. It can also be discursive, with its own meanings consolidating or challenging the actor's repertoire of meanings on sovereignty. This article shows that the alignment process can be more multi-layered, thus grouping as many meanings as possible in a holistic, organised and clear manner without imbuing sovereignty with 'saturation' or without getting stuck in the agent–structure debate that has dominated constructivist attempts to trace its meanings for decades (eg Wendt 1987; Dessler 1989; Adler 1997). Furthermore, many of these attempts have long been dragged into debates on what comes first: ideas or material interests (Kratochwil 2008, 86), 'socially constructed reality' or the 'non-socially constructed reality' (Seale 1989, 190), 'identities' or 'interests' (Hall 1993, 51). The proposed sovereignty alignment process skips this debate by treating sovereignty as a process whose elements are mutually connected within dynamic relationships governed by alignments, not precedence.

This article tests the sovereignty alignment process by examining how three Arab leaders – Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and Bashar al-Assad of Syria – constructed sovereignty as part of their survival and legitimation during the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. It examines their speeches to understand how they used sovereignty to redefine their identities and interests. The first section conceptualises the sovereignty alignment process, and the section that follows analyses it within three predefined master frames. The paper separately analyses the internal and external levels of alignment without considering them mutually exclusive; they are part of a unified and dynamic process, with complex interactive

relationships. Finally, the article shows how Assad gained an advantage over the other two leaders by adopting more coordinated levels of alignments both internally and externally.

Sovereignty alignment process: conceptualisation

The sovereignty alignment process adopts ‘middle-ground’ constructivism. The internal level of alignment is about beliefs held in the shape of individual meanings (Ashley and Walker 1990; Linklater 1996). The external level includes interaction with the outside world, understanding material resources in the classical realist or neorealist sense of physicality (eg Waltz 1979). It also considers discursive resources, including further sets of supportive meanings colluding with, reinforcing or resonating with individual meanings (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

The internal–external division in the alignment process can make sovereignty clearer by disaggregation, as one way of undermining ambiguity (as mentioned above). One way of implementing this disaggregation is separating the use of the term from its functions. We can think of the ‘use’ ahead of the final ‘product’ or the ‘potentiality’ ahead of ‘actuality’, in the words of Agamben (2016, 45). Sovereignty can be framed in a consistent and coherent manner in and across texts regardless of its ability to serve a purpose, which is in our specific case of the Arab Spring the survival of the three leaders, Gaddafi, Mubarak and Assad. The alignment thus stops at the stage of articulation, and sovereignty thus remains a mere potentiality or a ‘condition of possibility’ (Bartelson 1995, 50).

The sovereignty alignment process moves one step further by linking articulation with operationalisation. The linking is based on adopting a synthetic approach, a regular practice within constructivism which stands more as a ‘meta-theory’ (Kratochwil 2008, 88) based on ‘pulling together pieces’ (Adler 1997, 320). As Wendt (1992, 2000) once enhanced his analytic framework by drawing on symbolic interactionist and structurationist sociology (Wendt 1992), this paper combines critical discourse analysis, political opportunity structure and discursive opportunity structure. The combination situates language and text at the core of this synthesis.

For example, critical discourse analysis directs our attention to the ‘thematic structures’ of language and how they carry ‘global meanings’, considering ‘overall meanings of whole texts or large text fragments such as topics, themes and perspectives, as well as schematic forms’ (Van Dijk 1988, 170). More specifically, these themes are organised through the adoption of frame analysis. A frame serves the alignment process since it is a ‘principle of organisation’ (Entman 1993) under which sovereignty and its components are identified and grouped as different units of meaning. I identify a frame in the text as keywords, stock phrases or whole sentences as long as they all provide specific meanings or ‘thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments’ (Entman 1993, 52). Robert Entman (1993) used the criteria of ‘selection’ and ‘salience’ to explain how the framing process is based on emphasising specific meanings while ignoring or hiding others through actions such as repetition. The process relates to power or relations of dominance manifested in language under which selected and salient frames are a product of the ‘actions of powerful agents’ and the ‘resistances’ of others (Biersteker and Weber 1996, 3).

Externally, frames identified in the language of the texts externally align with the surrounding reality via resonance. The reality brings in resonance discursively, providing ‘background understandings of the way things are’ (Woodly 2015, 97), social expectations or

'values' according to which people could accept or resist these frames (Williams 2004, 105). For example, the analysis below shows how Mubarak resonated his territoriality frames with the 'situation models' in memory (Van Dijk 1988, 171) related to the 1973 war and the alleged Egyptian victory built on regaining territory once lost to Israel. Assad also resonated his frames with an established order of 'historical or cultural character' (Walker 1990, 166) set by his father Hafez. The resonance thus depends on 'discursive opportunity structures' adding to the framing 'sensitivity' (making sense), 'realism' and 'legitimacy' (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 228). This can provide challenges as well, as opposition leaders can use similar structures and resources to 'rebut, undermine, or neutralise' dominant frames and the leaders' versions of reality (Benford 1987, 75; see also McCammon et al. 2007, 725). The surrounding reality can be material, especially as the users of sovereignty can impose their meanings through physical violence, especially when it comes to regaining territory.

This article focuses on the speeches of the three leaders. They link knowledge and power entailed in the internal–external interaction of the process (Adler 1991; Finnemore 1996). Speeches are a significant medium as they show the agency or power of leaders as a 'centripetal' force imposing 'unity' and 'centralisation' (Bakhtin 1981, 269; Menshawy 2017) on sovereignty meanings through their speeches. Speeches could be a useful site for this search for regularity, especially if we believe that 'patterns recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly' in politics (Waltz 1979, 66). Combining the speeches of three leaders, as varying in their survival chances with Assad still in power, makes sense as they all use them as 'actors deploying arguments' (Crawford 2018, 233), to achieve the same desired function of staying in power. They also had a 'shared definition' of their situation (Adler 1997, 394) as protests in the three states were unfolding in a domino effect at the same time. Furthermore, speeches are identity-makers through which sovereignty can 'effect subjectivity' by allowing individuals to establish meanings of themselves, for others, and for the state they represent (Weber 1998, 91). The speeches thus fill a gap in the literature on the Arab Spring based on a pre-occupation with 'structural' factors (eg Mabon 2017). They highlight the agency of the rulers, including their creation of meanings they *endogenously* have about their actions and justifications (Kratochwil 2008, 86) in their speeches. I thus follow the same labour of enquiry by other scholars using speeches to explain regime survival in different countries (Hicks 2005; Dawisha 1999).

The sample includes around 19 political speeches delivered by Mubarak, Gaddafi and Assad from the start of the 2011 protests, until their disappearance from power (by resignation for Mubarak and assassination for Gaddafi) or until now (in the case of Assad, who is still in power). The sample includes three of Mubarak's speeches made between 25 January (when the protests began) and his resignation on 11 February. For Gaddafi, the focus is on three main speeches from 6 February (the beginning of protests against his rule) to his assassination on 20 October. For Assad, who has made dozens of speeches during the 10-year-long Syrian conflict, speeches were randomly chosen, one from each year from 2011 until 2021, for the sake of balancing the data on the two other leaders.

The analysis focuses on a specific component of sovereignty, territoriality, to achieve a closer grasp of all meanings and interactions across the two levels. This component is a key source in the ambiguity of the whole concept. As Coparoso aptly and astutely put it: 'It is not just that territoriality can mean many things when used by different analysts but rather that it inherently means several things at the same time, even when used carefully by the same person (2000, 5). The paper disaggregates then aggregates meanings into

three predefined master frames: 'Westphalian territoriality', 'domestic territoriality' and 'emotional territoriality'. The classification is partly inspired by Krasner's examination of sovereignty properties. Krasner treated territory as an objective element mainly situated within legalistic logics of 'appropriateness' or 'consequence' (Krasner 1999), thus missing elements such as those related to the politics of emotion, which this paper centralises within the sovereignty-making process.

The Westphalian territoriality

The three Arab leaders used territory in the Westphalian sense, premised on 'states exist[ing] in specific territories within which domestic political authorities are the sole arbiters of legitimate behaviour' and the principle of non-intervention' (Krasner 1999, 20; see also Mabon 2017). A reliance on Westphalia, in reference to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and under which 'the reformation of theology transformed the territorial vassals of the Vatican into the nation states of Europe' (Stacy 2003, 2037), and applying it to a non-Western and non-Christian majority region as the Arab region, is problematic. Nevertheless, I adopt Krasner's position of using the meanings of the term more figuratively as 'common terminology' even if it is 'historically inaccurate' (Krasner 1999, 20). I also use it functionally, as the term has a legitimating power from the early modern period in Europe when 'sovereign rulers and dynasties were preoccupied with territory' (Jackson 2007, 104) and when war was a way of deciding the limits of 'a sovereign's power' (Sheehan 2006, 3).

Mubarak premised his own legitimacy on a long-established status as the guardian of Egypt's territory. During the 1973 war, he was the Air Force Commander of the Egyptian Army who engaged in battles that ultimately led to the restoration of the Sinai territory occupied by Israel as of the 1967 war. Conflating his credentials as state leader, military commander and heroic winner of territory was a common discursive practice Mubarak perfected across his 30-year rule (Menshawy 2017). Even after the end of the war, Mubarak territorialised his legitimacy by rebranding himself as the 'hero of war and peace' on the basis of the 'land for peace' formula drawn from the peace agreements with Israel (Beattie 2000, 135).

In his speeches delivered after the eruption of protests against his rule as of 25 January 2011, Mubarak re-aligned the older frames to face down the present challenge to his rule. 'Here I have lived and fought for its [Egypt's] sake', Mubarak proclaimed in one speech, 'and I defended its land, its sovereignty, and interests' (Mubarak, 1 February 2011). Coherently linking the territory with the 1973 war, he said, 'I had already lived the years of occupation [of Egyptian land]; I lived also the moments of crossing [the land] The best moment of my life was when I put the Egyptian flag on Sinai [ie the land reclaimed after the war]' (Mubarak, 10 February 2011). The frame gains force by repetition across his three speeches delivered during the protests. He reminded protestors of what 'I've offered my country in over 60 years during war and peace' (10 February 2011) and, in another speech, 'what I offered this country in war and peace' (1 February 2011).

Assad also put emphasis on him and his army as 'territory protectors'. The repetition is intensive and consistent. In a single speech, there are five mentions of the term: 'defending territory', 'keeping territory', 'defending territory', 'restoring territory' and 'dividing territory' (Assad, 8 January 2015). Unlike Mubarak's othering of Israel as epitomising the external threat to territoriality and related elements of legitimacy, Assad focussed on the 'coloniser' at the

centre of his frames. He reiterated that the 'the colonialist West is still colonialist; the means may change, but its essence is still the same' (Assad, 16 July 2014); 'colonisation is colonisation' (Assad, 3 June 2011); 'the West is moving from old colonisation into a new colonisation' (Assad, 1 January 2012). This repetition resonates with the background, drawing dominant narratives that Syrian audiences would recognise and have long been exposed to (Bail 2016).

Historically, Syrian borders were defined by European colonialism indifferently to the distinct population groups enclosed and divided by them (Jackson 2007, 107). Some scholars, such as Leïla Vignal (2017, 812), even claimed that the Syrian state was 'invented' with the agreements concluding the First World War. The Baathist Party of Hafez al-Assad, president from 1971 to his death in 2000 (when his son Bashar, in power since, was elected), also reinforced the belief by prioritising 'the consolidation of the territorial state' (Vignal 2017, 812–14; see also Menshawy 2019). As a member of the minority Alawite sect who stood opposed to foreign occupation, and whose legitimacy and authority were questioned by the majority Sunni population, protecting territory served for three decades as his principal justification for holding power (Seale 1989, 120). He also referenced colonialism and used a 'spatial envelope' to legitimate his power (Vignal 2017, 818). As Assad's regime was rapidly losing territory at the beginning of the 2011 conflict, his frames on territoriality could therefore be based on the promise of a return to the same 'imaginary construct of a unified Syria' (Aldoughli 2020), while latching onto an existing 'hegemonic discourse' (Steinberg 1999, 745) built by his father. So runs his message: It is better for Syrians to stick to the 'knowable' Baathist regime keeping Syria territorially and centrally united against the 'uncertainty' presented by opposition dividing it (Aldoughli 2020). Furthermore, territory consolidates the father–son pledge as it has always been a hereditary right of monarchs in a region where leadership is based on 'powerful myths of origin that connected the family' to the 'territory over which it now ruled' (Owen 1992, 41).

Gaddafi's frames on territoriality similarly linked the present with the past and the internal with the external. The external enemy is constructed as the 'Italian colonisation' of Libya during the first half of the twentieth century. In his speeches, Gaddafi blamed protestors for attacking 'a liberator ... a fighter against Italian occupiers ... a fighter against colonialism', and for attempting to 'bring colonialism back to us ... and destroy our liberation' (Gaddafi, 22 February 2011). 'They want you', he charged, 'to be slaves in the hands of Italian colonialism' (Gaddafi, 21 August 2011), which 'is back after 100 years since its demise' (Gaddafi, 30 April 2011). His invocation of a recolonisation threat coheres with extensive territorial references; in one speech, he mentions 'Tripoli' and 'Libya' 13 and 29 times, respectively (Gaddafi, 21 August 2011). The frame of 'colonisation' had long built up the discourse of legitimacy since Gaddafi highlighted territory as a singular or totalised space, representable by a singular authority as head of state entitled to unify people for the mission of 'eject[ing] him [the colonist] from the picture' (Fanon 1963, 9). Colonialism is a fitting discursive background since it has long been perceived as a threat to territorial integrity, as it was 'by its very structure ... separatist and regionalist' (Fanon 1963, 51). He and the two other leaders thus play on public perceptions among ordinary citizens, described by Fanon as the 'colonised' people, always considering that the 'most essential value ... is first and foremost the land' (Fanon 1963, 9). More specifically, re-territorialisation has long characterised Libyan relations with their former coloniser, ie Italy, during Gaddafi's rule. In 1970, one year after taking power, Gaddafi expelled, and confiscated buildings and other assets of, approximately 20,000 Italians who had settled in Libya (Crocì and Valigi 2013).

The three leaders attempted to employ this master frame as a functional tool within their strategies of survival. First, their framing process was about prioritising territorial integrity at the expense of other frames. Assad directly told his protestors that their 'legitimate' and 'logical' demands (ie frames) have to await the conclusion of 'a war imposing itself on the ground' (Assad, 16 July 2014). Therefore, he added, all efforts should be steered towards 'defending land' and 'supporting the army' leading this mission (Assad, 16 July 2014). Second, the frames of territory, based on a piece of land as an objective entity, can appear 'pre-discursive' (Weber 1998, 91) and can thus allow leaders to counterbalance what is subjective in the Arab Spring marked with protestors' 'personal' demands related to human rights, individual autonomy (Soueif 2011, 10) or the 'rise of the I' as individuals desire to be 'sovereign' of their own actions (Menshawy 2020). Third, the leaders seek to re-construct different 'identities' or 'ways of being' (Fairclough 1995, 7). Other than being 'dictators' or illegitimate usurpers of power, as rallied against by street protestors, the leaders seek to emphasise their 'absolute' and 'legitimate' authority as guardians of 'territory' and bulwarks to 'external enemies' seeking to (re-)occupy it.

Domestic territoriality

Territory is not just a physical bordered space in which leaders protect against external enemies, such as colonisers. Territory is an internal bounded space where the leaders can 'effectively' organise their 'public authority' as part of practising what Krasner (1999) typifies as 'domestic sovereignty'. This 'domestic' territoriality entitles leaders to 'control developments within their own territory' and to 'maintain order' in their capacity as the 'one final and absolute authority' to carry out decisions (Krasner 1999, 11).

Two key words that are frequently repeated along with 'territory' in the speeches of the three leaders are 'sabotage' and 'chaos'. Mubarak said protestors 'blocking roads and attacking vital installations and public and private properties' were engaged in acts of 'sabotage' (1 February 2011). This was an infringement on his authority as they prevented him from carrying out what he called his 'responsibility' to maintain internal order (Mubarak, 28 January 2011). Mubarak (28 January 2011) emphasised that protestors 'loot ... property and destroy what we have built'. Gaddafi also accused protestors of 'sabotaging roads, ports, and airports that I have built' (Gaddafi, 21 August 2011). He vigorously promoted himself as the 'leader who built these places' and thus the one to protect them (Gaddafi, 21 August 2011). The word 'sabotage' coheres and aligns well with other words signifying the above-outlined master frame of Westphalian territoriality. In other words, these leaders constructed themselves as those with a mission to protect the territorial state from internal 'saboteurs' and to protect borders threatened by 'external enemies', like returning colonisers. The alignment was brought into full circle when they accused internal 'saboteurs' of being externally funded or being directed by modern 'colonisers' (Gaddafi, 21 August 2011).

The other key word in the texts, 'chaos', shows the threat to this domestic territoriality. Mubarak (28 January 2011) claimed that the protests against his rule were 'exploited by those who sought to spread chaos ... and to violate the constitutional legitimacy' (Mubarak, 2 February 2011). This speech followed another in which he warned that the protests went 'beyond chaos ... to a larger scheme aimed at shaking stability and an attack on legitimacy' (Mubarak, 28 January 2011). Assad sternly warned protestors demanding his resignation that 'chaos hides in the name of calls for reform'; 'chaos will lead to sectarianism' (Assad, 30

March 2011); and that 'chaos will destroy Syria' (Assad, 11 January 2012) and render Syria 'stateless' (Assad, 7 January 2013). The leaders thus sought to impose collective meaning and function on physical reality, such as territory, in the name of stability.

The 'chaos' frame legitimates leaders as 'territory guardians' of what is anathematic to it: order or stability. Assad made this link as he set his mission to 'bring back stability' and hence 'restore sovereignty' (Assad, 7 January 2013). Mubarak declared that as long as he remained president, 'I will never allow it [chaos] to happen' (28 January 2011). Another function of 'chaos' is counter-framing. The leaders can use it to rebut protestors' calls for democracy or a rotation in positions of power. This is the typical rhetorical equation common in the vocabulary of authoritarian rulers in the region: democracy equals 'chaos'; authoritarianism equals 'stability' (Slater 2010, 14). This simple equation has long proved effective for their authoritarian durability as it has given them the 'license to purify their domain of opposition, silence alternative voices, and eliminate dissent' (Inayatullah 1996, 50) in the name of stabilising internal order and preventing 'chaos'. Again, this is another tactic of framing by re-prioritisation as the leaders counterposed territorialised integrity, stability and 'security' to 'democracy' (Youmans 2016) as they synonymised the demands of the protestors for the latter option with 'chaos' and 'sabotage'. Gaddafi (21 August 2011) identified democracy as a threat to his powers of domestic territoriality when he said '[The protestors] blew out electricity ... burn out houses This is democracy'.

The leaders' version of democracy is thus territorialised in the sense that it should serve non-intervention, their full internal authority, and help to avoid 'chaos' or 'sabotage'. It is more like a 'sovereign democracy', a term coined by Russian President Vladimir Putin to assert that if a government is democratic in its basis, its authority cannot (and so may not) be questioned (Lipman 2006). Mubarak (10 February 2011) proudly mentions the rule of law and alleged independence of the legislature and judiciary as the only outlets for dealing with the grievances of protestors. Relatedly, these frames building the leaders' claim for 'sovereign democracy' can also legitimate the use of violence, as protestors, qua 'saboteurs', were stripped of their right to assemble and speak let alone their use of force against the regime. The framing of territoriality thus serves as the 'threshold on which violence passes into law and law passes over into violence' (Agamben 1998, 25). Territoriality is thus not just about a piece of land to be protected by internal or external threats; it is also about the emotions that it will trigger, including emotions of fear by situating the protests within a 'conflict frame' in which citizens 'have to choose between chaos and stability' (Mubarak, 2 February 2011) as binary alternatives. Indeed, authoritarian leaders have long used the same tactic of fear-mongering by constructing their absence of power as a recipe for the rise of violent Islamic radicals (Pearlman 2013, 393).

Emotional territoriality

The aforementioned master frames constructed territory by *objectifying* it as a piece of land that the three Arab leaders guarded against external bodies, such as colonisers, or internal bodies who had the capacity to cause 'chaos' or 'sabotage'. This objectification aligns with more subjective meanings included in this master frame. The three leaders thoroughly centralised emotions within their framing process, intended to justify their survival in power. As Mubarak told US President Barak Obama while rejecting the latter's pressures for his resignation amidst increasing protests: 'I know my people They are emotional people'

(Obama 2020, 643). Accordingly, academic scholars attribute the fall of Mubarak to his failure to shift emotions in his favour. Wendy Pearlman (2013), for one, argued from a 'micro-foundational perspective' that emotions that 'set the agenda', such as 'anger' and 'sadness', encouraged individuals to overcome the emotions of 'fear' long induced by Arab dictators. The master frame complements an expanding trend in the literature on regional politics, which brings a human face or an emotional angle to the frames of more violent leaders (eg Aldoughli (2020) on Assad; and Dawisha (1999) on Saddam Hussein). Studying the behaviour of state leaders via emotions offers a 'less-complicated method' in analysis (Sasley 2013, 1) and a valid tool to rationalise decision-making in politics in general (Mercer 2006). Still, I approach emotions more interactively by treating them as intersubjective meanings evolving within the relationship between each of the three leaders and their respective people and as part of the alignments in the sovereignty-making process.

One dominant emotion in the speeches of the three leaders is imbuing their territoriality frames with emotions on sacrifice. Mubarak directly cloaked his duties pertaining to Westphalian or domestic territoriality with this emotion via such sentences as 'here I have lived and fought for its sake and I defended its land, its sovereignty and interests, and on this land I will die' (1 February 2011). This speech was followed by another, 10 days later, in which he amplified the direct connection between his different meanings of territoriality: 'I faced death many times as a pilot [during the 1973 war in which he was an Air Force Commander], in Addis Ababa [an assassination attempt during his presidency], and numerous other times. I never succumbed to foreign pressure or dictations' (10 February 2011). The sequentially adopted order of the two sentences shows the risks of death that came as a result of his position, ready to sacrifice his life to safeguard the Westphalian non-intervention principle.

The two other leaders also brought sacrifice to the fore, making references to other relevant words such as 'blood'. Blood, along with words such as death, adds 'force' to the framing process by serving the same purpose already relayed in different ways of framing territoriality (Fairclough 1995). The word 'blood' is salient in all of Assad's speeches, being mentioned 15 times in one speech, and often being directly associated with the objective of 'restoring territory' (Assad, 1 July 2016). Constructivists argue that meanings of concepts are 'intersubjective' in that they are always based on the 'agreement' and 'collective assignment' of these meanings to physical objects such as territory (Adler 1997, 337). The leaders thus used the emotionality of territory to tie them to their peoples through a 'blood contract', whereby they equally sacrifice for the sake of protecting territory. It is a shared emotional 'interest' (Charteris-Black 2011, 8), best exemplified by Assad's continued references linking his sacrifice, a potentiality, with the actuality where many other Syrians were killed or, as he expressed it more causally: 'Without blood of families and martyrs, we could not have protected the sovereignty of Syria' (Assad speech, 16 July 2014). Gaddafi also intensively combined the consistent use of the word with possessive determiners, such as 'my blood' or 'our blood'. This strategy of group orientation or 'inclusion' (Hicks 2005) is evidenced in the consistent and coherent use of the pronoun 'we'. This is what Gaddafi said in one speech: 'We are brothers', 'we are defiant', 'we know each other', 'we sacrificed our selves', and 'we will remain steadfast' (22 February 2011). The two other leaders adopted the same linguistic intensity of the pronoun; for example, 'we are all in the same tunnel ... we share painful days' (Mubarak, 10 February 2011). The first-person plural pronoun, we, is an assembling force and symbol of national unity by being a 'metonymic chain in which he [the leader] stands for the people and the people stand for nation' (Charteris-Black 2011, 62).

The leaders speak of an 'inclusive we', thus establishing themselves as speakers and their people as addressees (Yule 1996, 11). The semantic shift of the word 'we' is indeed a shift in the power relations drawn on it. The 'we', which the leaders construct, is more of a 'solidarity semantic' drawn on a 'symmetrical' relationship based on equal reciprocity of power (Brown and Gilman 1960). It thus replaces the 'we' that would denote a 'power semantic' drawn on authoritarian control to endow those leaders with 'superior power'. Obligations of a member in the 'we' of solidarity requires cooperation and mutual support, while the other 'we' requires subordination to the group's leaders who are the 'people above'. The pronoun is well aligned with meanings of sacrifice, as the salience of the 'we' makes leaders claim to be giving up their 'l-ness' and integrating with other members of their societies as all of them now identify as a group sharing the *sacrifice-for-land* emotion. Individuals are less important than the group, which is now 'bigger than the sum of its parts' (Sasley 2013; see also Sasley 2011). Mubarak claimed that he only lived 'for the sake of this country' and that 'this critical juncture is not about Hosni Mubarak It is about Egypt' (Mubarak, 10 February 2011). Assad repeated on multiple occasions that 'it is not about me. It is about Syria' (YouTube 2016a; and 'it is not about me ... it is about Syria': MSNBC 2016). Therefore, territory is not a piece of land; is instead elevated and idealised as a 'value' that is 'worthy of protection' or even dying for (Snow et al. 1986). Gaddafi even pledged 'fighting until the final drop of my blood ... for the sake of Libya' (22 October 2011).

Emotional territoriality is a key tool of legitimation and survival in a number of ways. Within the battle between the protestors and their leaders, partly based on 'discursive struggles' (McCammon et al. 2007), the emotional assertions in this master frame can 'arouse empathy' for the leaders by imbuing them with heroic human tendencies, such as courage and acts of self-sacrifice (Charteris-Black 2011). Furthermore, the leaders benefit from their bodies as practical 'instruments of use' (Agamben 2016, 10) in their strategies for survival. They are redefining their own identities not as personal authoritarian leaders or as an 'owner of himself' but as 'the human being who is not of himself but of another' (Agamben 2015, 11), as the meanings of self-sacrifice would imply.

This process of de-subjection and re-subjection, based on constructing and reconstructing their identities (Mabon 2017, 1785), is legitimating since it designates the leaders as part of 'a functional whole' of the state and its territory. Sharing emotional reactions such as sacrifice make them not just members of a group but an 'integral, even organic, part of it' (Sasley 2013, 2). The body of individuals is thus a 'point of indifference' (Agamben 2015, 14) between the subjective and objective dimensions enmeshed within this body-territory relationship. The language could be meant to bring the rulers closer to their disgruntled people, as they all drew from the same 'sentiment pools' related to blood-sharing practices of martyrdom and sacrifice (Snow et al. 1986, 469), especially as many protestors were being killed or injured during the street protests as the time. The territorialised blood contract can now merge identities (the ruler, the ruled and the state) within all these 'bonds of love and loyalty' (Aldoughli 2020) and set them against what appears as a generalised catch-all identity of the 'outsider' marked by alterity and difference as the 'external enemy' plotting intervention, 'chaos' or acts of 'sabotage'. In this vein, emotions of collective sacrifice and solidarity are also supported by other emotions of closure and fear long used by other politicians for the same purpose, identified by Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, to 'manipulate the population in a manner that served their particular interests' (Bleiker and Hutchison 2008, 119; see also Crawford 2000, 119). Assad combined his descriptions of the 'West' as both

'territory usurper' and 'blood shedder' (7 July 2016). Emotional territoriality can thus hinder regime change or even a transition to democracy given the 'emotional attachments to the nation and the leader as a form of identity and belonging in the Syrian state construct' (Aldoughli 2020).

External sovereignty alignments

The three master frames identified above are all based on internal movement of alignments where meanings are amplified and extended through consistence, coherence or resonance. This level of textualised articulation still awaits operationalisation through interaction with the outside world, providing resources or opportunities to consolidate the internally aligned frames. For example, Assad's frames benefitted from Russian support which provided master frames drawn on 'international legal territoriality'. The latter is Krasner's conceptualisation of another model of sovereignty based on equality and recognition among states. More significantly, the model fits within strategies of survival as it provides the 'possibility for rulers to secure external resources' and 'enhance their ability to stay in power' (Krasner 1999, 17–18). The statements of Russian President Vladimir Putin resonate well with Assad's statements, with the former defending the latter's Westphalian and domestic claims on sovereignty by couching them within the 'grammar of international law'. Putin reiterated the need to respect 'the principles and norms of the international law and the current world order' (Russia Today 2013). He and his officials stressed that the Russian military intervention in Syria as of September 2015 was based on full respect for the 'non-intervention' principle of Westphalian sovereignty. The Kremlin made it clear that it was an intervention by invitation and in accordance with the international law and the UN United Nations] Charter, and contrasted it with what the Russian considered as illegal intervention by coercion adopted by other states militarily involved in Syria (see Kremlin 2013; Kremlin 2016; Nicholas 2016).

Other allies provided further opportunities for supporting the three master frames adopted by Assad. Iran urged the need for 'Syria's territorial integrity to be maintained' in accordance with 'the norms and principles of international law' (MSNBC 2016). Additionally, China opposed an October 2016 French UN draft resolution as it neglected 'the sovereignty, independence, unification, and territorial integrity of Syria' (YouTube 2016b). The framing processes of these allies helped Assad's master frames by normalising them at the international level of diplomacy. The norms were employed with decisive authority as some of the allies enjoyed a permanent status at the UN Security Council, meaning they thus blocked draft resolutions against Assad or his 'sovereignty' claims. Norms are also enunciated through 'repeated but varied performative acts' (Weber 1998, 81) including the mention of meanings of sovereignty as articulated in Assad's master frames. Russia and China blocked different UN draft resolutions in the name of protecting Syria's territorial integrity or blocking 'interference into internal affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic' (Nicholas 2016). The Syrian president also benefitted from the global geopolitical 'distribution of power' (Krasner 1999, 15), as he began to recapture much of the country's lost territory after the Russian military intervention. The gains aligned with his Westphalian sovereignty master frame, by consolidating his centralised authority through re-territorialisation (Yakovenko 2016). Moscow's actions augmented Assad's domestic territoriality through means such as sending freshly printed Syrian banknotes after sanctions prevented Assad from printing money abroad. Symbolically, the banknotes carry the image of Assad in combination with other territoriality signifiers in Syria,

such as rivers. The Western powers failed to counterbalance the Russian support given their hesitant rhetoric on whether Assad should leave or stay. They also failed to turn their articulations, including Obama's threat in August 2014 that military action would be taken against Syria if Assad crossed a 'red line' by using chemical weapons, into actuality. Ironically, Obama gave resonance to the master frames of Assad and Putin when he admitted in December 2016 that a military strike would be an 'uninvited' intervention that cannot be justified on humanitarian imperatives alone (Associated Press 2016).

The master frames of the other two leaders, Mubarak and Gaddafi, lost this external support. For example, Gaddafi's frames on Westphalian territoriality were countered by other master frames also justifying the US/North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) military intervention in March 2011, leading six months later to his downfall. The intervention was justified under the master frame of the Responsibility to Protect principle (R2P), endorsed unanimously by UN member states at the 2005 World Summit. The frame is based on the premise that sovereignty and territoriality entail responsibility to protect all populations within the nation's territory, and allows for the use of force by external actors if that obligation is not kept. Diplomatically, Gaddafi's discourse lost any external alignments as the Security Council approved the 1973 resolution authorising the international community to establish a no-fly zone, call for a ceasefire and place a ban on all Libyan-designated flights – challenging the leader's claims to territorial integrity. Unlike the case of Syria, China and Russia abstained in the voting. Militarily, the discourse of Gaddafi, drawn on his claims of territoriality, weakened as the UN imposed an arms embargo while states supplied much-needed weapons to the 'revolutionaries', including modern Belgian-made FN assault rifles and MILAN anti-tank rockets (Beaumont 2011). The US also pushed heavily for Gaddafi to 'relinquish power' as 'he lost his legitimacy to govern' (Obama 2020, 650).

Gaddafi's claims to Westphalian or domestic levels of territoriality were rebutted by his loss of territory and control of key oil facilities to rebels in the early days of the 2011 protests. From the perspective of 'spatiality of contention' (Said 2015, 351), these territorial losses undermined the Libyan leader's legitimacy. He lost any apparatus that had allowed him to use legitimately authorised force as implied in the domestic sovereignty. The army weakened and was divided as it faced a wave of defections, including senior officers (BBC 2011, May 30).

Mubarak's territoriality frames failed to successfully align externally, from the start of the protests onwards. For example, the Egyptian president was unable to secure support from his traditional Western allies at the same articulatory level at which Putin and Assad had built on each other's meanings of territoriality (Inozemtsev 2015). Amidst protests against Mubarak's rule, Washington called for a swift 'transition of power', including his immediate departure. The US, the key pillar of external support for Mubarak's authoritarianism, asked him to 'step down' (Obama 2020, 643). Obama even rejected the calls from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to territorialise Mubarak's rule in the Westphalian and domestic sense by warning his disappearance would result in the USA 'see[ing] Iran in two seconds' (Obama 2020, 642). The repeated external calls for Mubarak to resign de-actualised his articulations on territoriality, becoming a mere potentiality 'giving itself to itself' (Agamben 1998, 46).

Mubarak's master frames were weakened as the outside world offered resources and opportunities for his opponents, especially materialistically. On 28 January 2011, protestors targeted government buildings in Cairo, battled successfully with riot police and occupied a space they renamed 'Tahrir Square Republic'. They then undertook governmental measures including

electing ministers, enforcing security and setting up a radio station. These developments contested Mubarak's traditionally rendered territoriality claims, symbolically evidenced in protestors' slogans such as 'This is our land; this is our square'. The Square gains significance if we judge it by the role of space in 'mobilisation politics' (as the October War legitimacy always portrayed Mubarak as the one who returned the once occupied 'Sinai' to Egypt). Tracing contentious politics as a matter of 'claim making, and control of places as stakes of contention' (Tilly 2000, 135), Tahrir Square became the 'real source of legitimacy' (Said 2015, 349).

The 'domestic territoriality' master frame in Mubarak's discourse, built on his alleged ability to maintain 'stability' against 'chaos' and 'sabotage' adopted by protestors, became hollow. Protestors 'deflated the regime's strategy and narrative' by emphasising that theirs was 'peaceful' and 'nationalistic', and had no support from 'external' or 'western intervention' as Mubarak had claimed (Saouli 2015, 732). They also replaced the formal politics they distrusted with 'street' politics where streets were the only political space available to them, thus symbolically a source of collective sentiments of a nation or a community' (Bayat 2010, 212). Mubarak's claims on territoriality, which related to an event that had occurred 40 years prior, gave way to 'spatialities of discontent' where new spaces such as the street are the ones that 'shape, galvanise, and accommodate insurgent sentiments and solidarities' (Bayat 2010, 162). Furthermore, Mubarak's articulations lost their 'coercive' power when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) replaced him as the 'guardian' of Egypt's territory. When Mubarak gave his speech on 10 February and asserted himself as the 'centralised authority' of the Egyptian territory; SCAF, which he officially headed, convened without him and issued a communiqué asserting its own authority independent of Mubarak, using terms that included 'protect', 'properties', 'homeland', 'security', and 'meeting the demands of people' (REF) (No author 2011). His hold on power was thus uncertain, with the disappearance of his security forces from the streets. These developments detracted from the alignment of his master frames, which had always been built on the actions of 'coercive bodies' such as the army and police.

The difference between Assad and Mubarak perhaps reached its zenith when Assad dedicated a space in his framing process to repeatedly express gratitude to states such as Russia, China and Iran for 'respecting the sovereignty of Syria' (Assad, 7 January 2013), 'for supporting the right to self-independence (Assad, 7 July 2016) and for 'defending the UN conventions' (Assad, 16 July 2014). Mubarak and Gaddafi made no mentions in regard to the 'international legal' territoriality.

Conclusion

The proposed *sovereignty alignment process* can undermine the ambiguity of sovereignty. It allows multiple different meanings to be organised through clear 'interpretive schemata' and 'organising principles' drawn on frame analysis (Entman 1993, 52; see also Krasner 1999). Krasnite models such as 'Westphalian', 'domestic' and 'international legal' sovereignty relate to each other not by a dichotomy (Krasner 1999) but by alignment based on active processes of interaction and interpretation. We can thus avoid falling into a pick-and-choose 'dilemma' (eg Guzman 2011; Sheehan 2006). No meanings or typologies would end up in the wastebasket or get pushed to the edges as sovereignty appears more like Xenophon's *Ktēma*, 'everything of which one can make use' (Agamben 2016, 11). Even more importantly, this approach led to the rise of new models long under-explored in the literature, such as 'emotional territoriality'.

The article adds clarity by tracing the multi-layered interactions between meanings and the outside world. The latter is not only material in the sense of physical forces or hegemonic entities imposing and regulating specific meanings. The outside world can be also discursive as it can consolidate or falsify meanings of sovereignty by specific agents in specific situations. This interaction is best exemplified by the alliance of frames between Assad and Putin.

Frames are identified by patterns drawn on repetition and frequency of meanings in texts. This means that the three Arab leaders did not react to the protests that threatened their rule as of 2011 in a random or arbitrary manner. They behaved in a fairly regular and well-manufactured way to construct sovereignty to their use. Some frames are more an extension of others long used as part of their legitimation and survival strategies: Mubarak depended on territoriality attached to the 1973 war, Assad used his father's territoriality attached to uniting Syria, and Gaddafi evoked his typical anti-coloniser rhetoric. This again builds on the constructivist understanding that sovereignty is a standing reserve awaiting the call of its users. Perhaps similarities in the use of sovereignty among the three leaders would lead to further comparative analyses on how far they borrowed from the same authoritarian 'toolbox', including instructions on the instrumentality of sovereignty. I did not mean to judge the success or failure of meanings, as my purpose was rather to situate sovereignty within a dynamic, flexible and continuous process of alignments and misalignments.

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