4 Political Science in Egypt: Talkin' Bout a Revolution

Jan Claudius Völkel

> *"Today Egypt's educational system both reflects and augments the social unrest of its own people – and of those it has influenced. Historic conflicts between religious and secular leaders, between tradition and innovation, and between foreign and national interest, influence contemporary Egyptian education."*
>
> (Cochran 1986: 1)

The job description was promising: the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) was looking for a long-term lecturer in political science in spring 2012 to teach on Cairo University's "Euro-Mediterranean Studies Programme" (EMSP) for the coming five years. "Given the revolutionary changes in the country," stated the call for applications, the successful candidate should offer courses on "societal transformation, development of civil-society structures, democratization, crisis and conflict resolution" (DAAD 2012, translation from German to English by the author).

This sounded like the perfect position to me, as I had been closely following contemporary political and economic developments across the Arab world since my early academic years. I had also been dealing with questions of democratization and transformation for a considerable time. Thus, I submitted my application for this position in summer 2012, and excitedly received an invitation for a job interview at the DAAD headquarters in Bonn, Germany, in September 2012.

The interview took a surprising turn when one of the selection committee members asked whether I might be able to teach more courses on the European Union than originally outlined, and fewer on the issues of transformation and democratization. I confirmed that I was also very familiar with the EU, and that I would be happy to teach classes on that subject too once in Cairo.

Some weeks later I received word that I had been accepted, and on February 1, 2013, I started my new job at Cairo University's well-known Faculty of Economics and Political Science (FEPS). I was excited about working and living in Egypt, the epicenter of the uprisings that had shaken almost the entire Arab world, and about becoming part of this unique pro-

cess that had dominated regional analyses in academic publications and discourses since its outbreak.[1]

Since taking up the position, I have been teaching courses on European studies and the relations between Europe and the MENA region as part of a team of excellent and likeable colleagues, and with students who have been both interested and interesting. Yet I have not taught a single session on transformation and democratization, the original focus of the position advertised in 2012. Hardly a year later, the demand for these issues had all but vanished at Cairo University.

In the following discussion, I will present some personal observations as a political scientist living in Egypt during the last six months under former President Mohammed Morsi (who was ousted on July 3, 2013), and then under the subsequent rule of interim President Adly Mansour and acting President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. I will discuss the consequences of the restoration of the suppression of critical political science at Egypt's most prestigious state university, and use this experience to help illuminate what political science, and academia in general, could achieve in more favorable circumstances. The article will argue that the current developments in Egypt represent a missed chance to develop political science further into a meaningful discipline that would not only prepare students for the job market, but also contribute to improving the overall quality of Egypt's academic landscape.

Political science here and there

Although there are many similarities between the political science *content* taught in Egypt and Europe/North America, there is one important difference. The typical sub-disciplines studied, such as political theory, international relations and comparative politics are similar. Classes in international law and political economy are offered south as well as north of the Mediterranean. One difference, however, is that academic discourses in the Arab world mostly reflect a positivist perspective, with very little openness toward constructivist approaches. The strict belief in norms and

1 See also the contribution of Florian Kohstall on Middle East studies in the region in this volume.

values leaves little room for divergent opinions or critical questioning of "eternal truths".

Another difference derives from *working conditions*. In liberal democracies, despite some dependence on state resources, institutional autonomy is broadly assured within academia (Hage 2013). By contrast, the social sciences across the Arab world "face notable obstacles due to institutional fragmentation, high levels of bureaucracy, and political restrictions" (Amer 2016). In many regards, researchers in the Arab world are not free in what they do. Lengthy administrative procedures are only one obstacle; research restrictions are another. For each research initiative, scholars need to obtain security clearance from the authorities, which usually takes months if not years, and even some innocuous proposals are turned down for security reasons. Conducting empirical research on the Muslim Brotherhood or the military is almost impossible inside Egypt, particularly since Al-Sisi's rise to the presidency and the reinstatement of the security state. Even topics such as irregular migration, public health or civil society engagement can only be studied, if at all, under close surveillance by the security forces. In addition, basic research is often perceived as unwanted competition to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the state's statistical office that imposes additional hurdles on the approval of research applications.[2]

An important difference also exists regarding the *purpose* of the social sciences, including political science. Until 2011, political science education in Egypt, like in many other Arab countries, primarily served the aim of raising and training new experts for the political system. Graduates were keen to obtain jobs primarily in public administration, the state party, the diplomatic corps, the intelligence agencies or in one of the state-owned media outlets. The popularity of political science in the Arab world before 2011 was mainly "based on a fake assumption held by many students that it is the highway to get prestigious jobs in the government" (Hassan 2009: 8). Yet hundreds of thousands of students in fact failed to get such positions after university graduation (Abdel-Moneim 2016: 15ff.), particularly if they lacked privileged family bonds with the elite circles. This led to massive levels of personal despair and frustration, and eventually contributed to the popular uprisings of 2011 (El-Said 2014: 65).

2 See the contribution by Sarhan Dhouib in this volume on other hurdles and problems of doing research in authoritarian systems.

Across the Arab world, governing regimes maintained close links to political science faculties, and interfered both directly and indirectly in teaching of the subject. In Egypt, this was particularly strong from the beginning: Legend has it that it was President Gamal Abdel Nasser himself who ordered the establishment of FEPS at Cairo University, as his daughter wanted to study political science. In truth, Hoda Gamal Abdel Nasser did pursue this course of study, and ultimately became a respected professor at FEPS.

However, Nasser's involvement in Cairo University's new teaching programs was motivated by more than just a desire to help his daughter realize her dreams; 1960 was a year in which Nasser sought to bring Egypt as a whole into line with his comprehensive ideology. The press was nationalized (Völkel 2008: 158), and the social sciences were perceived as a useful medium through which to propagate Nasser's version of Arab socialism, which later became known as "Nasserism". In order to give widespread legitimacy to this comprehensive populist ideology, Cairo University had to "spell out, justify and spread the nationalist and socialist goals of the regime" (Reid 2002: 200); higher education "functioned as a tool to train future party leaders, state cadres, and bureaucrats" (Abd Rabou 2016: 55).

This important charge notwithstanding, Cairo University, like the whole educational sector in Egypt, suffered from chronic underfinancing, as state allocations were clearly not enough to equip universities with sufficient resources to conduct their tasks properly. Consequently, Egypt's educational system even today remains among the world's lowest-ranked, placed 135th out of 138 countries in the "Quality of the education system" category of the World Economic Forum's 2016 2017 Global Competitiveness Report.

The FEPS, as one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in Egypt, has been closely connected with Egypt's policy circles and state bureaucracy from its beginnings. Its purpose was never simply to train promising academics, but rather to prepare students for future positions in the country's political system. This "structural interconnectedness" was part and parcel of the FEPS' self-understanding from its inception through to the end of Hosni Mubarak's rule. One political science postgraduate, who wished to remain anonymous, remembered that until 2011 the main content of her research consisted of recapitulating the achievements of the state and the government. When this student was considering writing a paper on the 2005 presidential elections — the first os-

tensibly competitive elections in the country's history, in which Mubarak agreed to allow an official competitor, Ayman Nour, to run — a professor advised her to "simply evaluate the electoral program of President Hosni Mubarak and his development plans for the country" (FEPS postgraduate student, personal communication, May 2016).

This is the opposite of a form of so-called critical academia, that is, one in which academics refuse "to be enslaved" to official politics (Hage 2013). Since 2011, there has certainly been a push for more independent and more professional social sciences throughout the Arab world, illustrated for instance by the creation of the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS) in Beirut in August 2012.[3] However, the social sciences remain "the 'poor cousin' of Arab research" (UNDP 2009: 202). On the eve of the Arab uprisings, Schlumberger (2010: 10) diplomatically identified a "sometimes problematic and less than conducive relationship between the political sphere and the social sciences" across the Arab world. Moreover, the Arab Social Science Monitor published in December 2015 still described Arab social sciences as weak due to "the ever-increasing control and censorship practiced by political authorities over all aspects of civic life in the Arab world in the period preceding the 'Arab Spring'" (Bamyeh 2015: 9). In addition, religious dogmas also impose serious limits on social research; topics such as atheism, existentialism, sexuality or anything that is declared "sensitive" are still widely underrepresented in most curricula. As a consequence, "social science in the Arab world is doubly delegitimized — from above by the political leaders and from below by religious leaders" (Hanafi 2014: 202).

The strong state and pressure group control over the social sciences across the Arab world stands in sharp contrast to the specific German conception of social science, where much still depends on the developments after World War II and the process of denazification undergone by higher education and universities. Before 1945, political science was understood as a theory of the state ("*Staatswissenschaft*"); afterward, the field was particularly strongly influenced by the scholars who had emigrated from Germany during the Nazi period, and who brought back ideas of democracy as a key focus of study when the war was over. Scholars such as Ernst Fraenkel, Franz L. Neumann, Karl Loewenstein, Arnold Bergstraesser and

3 See their website at www.theacss.org. The creation of the ACSS was financially supported by the Ford Foundation and the Canadian International Development Research Center.

Eric Voegelin spent years in exile in the United States, and there developed the idea that political science should share in the obligation to contribute to Germany's liberation from the Nazi ideology (Porsche-Ludwig 2009: 68).

In large part because of this history, political science in Germany is to a substantial extent understood as "democracy science", meaning that it has the particular normative focus that democracy is the best political system possible, and that studies in political science should not only provide the necessary tools and knowledge to analyze relevant problems, but should also contribute to building democratic societies (Alemann 1994: 15 f.). This fundamental character has been stressed even more since reunification in 1990 and the comprehensive replacement of political science chair holders at East German universities, largely advocates of socialist paradigms, with graduates from West German political science departments (the negative consequences this had for the universities' internal dynamics, and the often very negative consequences for individual scholars, are beyond the scope of this article) (Arnhold 2003: 103ff.).

For me as a graduate of the Freiburg School of Political Science, with a decisively normative-ontological background in the tradition of Arnold Bergstraesser, Wilhelm Hennis and Dieter Oberndörfer, this has always been a very strong element of my own understanding of political science: political science cannot be apolitical. This became a major challenge when events in Egypt started to unfold as they did from summer 2013 on.

Cairo University in its search for itself

The changes of 2011 threw universities in Egypt into new legal and political waters, resulting in many revised syllabi and newly created courses (Sharobeem 2015: 117ff.). However, this also challenged the institutions' longstanding customs regarding the way they conceived academic subjects and presented them to their students. Suddenly, the universities' raison d'être was no longer to provide support for the regime through the inculcation of ideological compliance and the provision of technical expertise; students and some faculty members now demanded a fundamental reorientation of seminar styles and teaching content. During 2011, universities became sites of open and heated debate over the political process; students became highly motivated to contribute to the push for a better Egypt, and those professors and teaching assistants who wholeheartedly supported the

ongoing transition processes finally felt free and liberated to do what they wanted to do: engage in critical teaching and research instead of training graduates to conform (Abd Rabou 2016: 61; Kohstall in this volume).

Traditionally, Cairo University has been the place where political, economic, societal and diplomatic leaders received their training and their higher education. Much like the institution's Faculty of Law, the FEPS is perceived as a cadre factory that has turned out many important members of Egypt's elite. Since its establishment in 1960, the FEPS has occupied a unique position in Egypt's university landscape, being the only institution that has offered programs in both economics and political science, as well as statistics, from 1963 on. The Department of Public Administration and the Social Science Computing Department were also added to the FEPS in 1990 and 1994 respectively.

Throughout recent decades, many FEPS professors have held high-ranking positions in the country's political or economic system, and former representatives of Egypt's top circles have often taught classes after their tenure as well. The faculty offers study programs in Arabic, English and French, with the first being offered almost free of charge and the latter two requiring relatively high study fees, though still low compared to what particularly the private American University in Cairo (AUC) demands. FEPS's near monopoly on the subject in Egypt (for a long time there was no other place to study political science, except for AUC and some sporadically offered courses at various universities, such as the Faculty of Commerce at Alexandria University) has only recently been broken with the establishment of new political science departments at other public as well as private universities, often with FEPS graduates serving as staff members.

The year 2011 brought an important change to Egypt's law on higher education, namely the introduction of elections for student and university leaders: For the first time, students were allowed to have a say in selecting their own representatives, faculty members, faculty deans and university presidents (Abd Rabou 2016: 62). This was not only perceived as the (overdue) emancipation of universities from state interference, but also brought discussions about candidates' professional and personal merits into university hallways and classrooms (Sharobeem 2015: 119 f.). Instead of simply showing loyalty to the political system, students and professors were suddenly discussing possible solutions to the universities' multiple problems; "competitiveness became a significant principle in the university" (El-Said 2014: 62).

This legal change was just one visible manifestation of a deeper internal challenge: The search for a new raison d'être. The times when universities simply produced valuable new members of the country's elite seemed to be over. Those students and professors who believed in the ideals of the revolution pushed for reorientation of the old curricula, syllabi and teaching styles. In parallel, those who felt close to or who were members of the Muslim Brotherhood lobbied to give Islam more influence over university life. Until the end of Morsi's presidency, public events and panel discussions at Cairo University saw representatives from across the political spectrum openly exchanging their views and frankly criticizing each other's attitudes.

With the advent of summer 2013 and the renewed change in Egypt's polity, this diversity of voices and opinions came to an abrupt end. Those sympathizing with political Islam quickly disappeared from public events. If they were not arrested or banned from teaching, they either silenced themselves — partly out of frustration regarding the Islamists' ignorance and eventual failure during their short period in power — or went into exile. A similar fate befell many of the democratic activists; thousands, including many students and professors, were arrested for participating in unapproved demonstrations, for insulting the judiciary, or for simply expressing their opinion (Accorsi and Siegelbaum 2014).

Euro-Mediterranean studies as a vehicle for discussions about democratization

The increasingly repressive climate had massive effects both outside and inside the universities, which had become focal points of the societal disputes and clashes after 2011. Since 2013, the state's ongoing "violation of academic freedom in Egypt has been institutionalized in an unprecedented way, causing deterioration in university education and creating a great educational recession" (Abd Rabou 2015). A presidential decree revoked universities' newly gained freedom to elect their own leaders in June 2014 (Maher 2014). Ever since, professors have again been hired or promoted on the basis of pro-governmental attitudes rather than their academic merits. In addition, university professors who wish to attend conferences abroad have needed prior security clearance from the Egyptian authorities since January 2015. Hundreds of students have been referred to military trials or have disappeared without further notice (Saleh 2016). The noted

AUC professor Emad Shahin received the death penalty for alleged collaboration with foreign secret services. FEPS professors, such as Amr Hamzawy and Ahmed Abd Rabou, left the country in order to escape rising pressure in response to their liberal and repeated pro-democracy statements.

The Euro-Mediterranean Studies Programme (EMSP), created in 2002 with the initial support of an EU Tempus grant, experienced all these ups and downs as well. In 2007, a long-term DAAD lecturer position was established within the program with the aim of enriching its study programs through the perspective of a visiting European lecturer. Additionally, it draws its instructors from the existing professors working in the faculty's different departments.[4]

The EMSP follows the model of the foreign language instructed programs (FLIP) that became possible and popular in Egypt after a legal change in 1990 allowed public universities to offer privately paid study programs (Gamal Eldin 2016: 59ff.). For about EGP 12,000 (€1,200; $1,350 as of October 2016) or EGP 16,000 (€1,600; $1,800),[5] students can enroll in master's or Ph.D. study programs offered completely in English. Studying in English is widely believed to be advantageous for competing in the labor market after graduation (Gamal Eldin 2016: 72), or for achieving a prestigious position within the country or abroad, including in international academic circles (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2014: 725).

These fees, still moderate in comparison to private universities in Egypt, enable advanced study conditions: master's classes rarely have more than 30 students, while Ph.D. classes have no more than 10 students. Up-to-date literature is available in the program's own library, the "documentation center". The multidisciplinary character of EMSP has led to the acceptance of a range of students with different backgrounds, such as economics, law, languages and literature. This diversity of knowledge is a positive in the classroom setting, although some students need to make extra effort to understand theories of European integration or of international relations, since they have never previously studied them.

The EMSP's master's and doctorate programs follow very similar patterns: After two semesters of mandatory classes (four or five per week),

4 See the program's website at www.euromedstudies.net.

5 The fees are not lump sum amounts, but depend on the number of courses the student takes and the length of his/her studies; see http://euromedstudies.net/en/masteruromed/fees.php and http://euromedstudies.net/en/doceuromed/fees.php.

students start writing their thesis under the supervision of a full professor from the faculty. The academic content of thesis proposals has to be approved by department councils (for FEPS: political science, economics, statistics, public administration, or computer science). After receiving a positive evaluation, the thesis can be registered with the faculty, leading to an administrative process involving the faculty council and the university council, both of which need to approve the proposal. There is at least one year between the registration of the thesis and its defense.

Once theses have been registered in this way, the wording of their titles can be changed only after undergoing the same administrative process, which again requires approval from the faculty council and the university council. This strict rule reflects the traditional understanding of political science in the country; students are not expected to develop their own critical thinking skills, but rather to fulfil the job assigned to them by their supervisor. This fundamentally conflicts with the alternative understanding that the content of research and students' attitudes on certain phenomena might (or even should) change the deeper they dig into the topic. The Humboldtian model of academic freedom, though admittedly never more than an unachieved ideal (Karran 2009), clearly finds its limits if even titles cannot be changed after students have started their research. This policy also stands in fundamental contrast to international practices, in which the use of preliminary working titles is a standard procedure.

A second controversial, and in my view counterproductive rule derived from Egypt's strict higher education law is the requirement that exams make up 70 percent of students' final grade, both at M.A. and Ph.D. level. The remaining coursework, which in my case included an oral presentation, in-class participation and an essay of around eight pages, may account for only 30 percent of the grade.[6] In my view, this reduces students' motivation to engage in activities that do not require as much memorization of facts as exams do. This means that creativity and critical thinking remain underdeveloped.

6 Indeed, with the winter term 2016/2017, this strict rule has been slightly relaxed: exams now count for 50 percent of the final grade, while essays, presentations and participation constitute the remaining 50 percent.

Focusing teaching and university activities on student development

A relatively small number of professors, mainly among the younger generation, conceive their job not simply as feeding students knowledge, but as encouraging them to develop their own skills and interests. The concept of "learning facilitator" (Hmelo-Silver & Barrows 2006) has only slowly started to gain ground at Cairo University. To this end, the "Euro-Mediterranean Studies Programme" set up a three-year cooperation project with Freie Universität Berlin from 2012 until 2015, initiating an exchange of faculty and students through workshops and conferences that helped trigger fresh ideas about modern teaching methodologies at the FEPS.

Despite the restrictive external conditions, in-class discussions in my seminars have to date been able to be conducted in a very open and confidential manner. Though it usually takes some time at the beginning of each academic year before students are able to build trust with each other and their instructor, lively discussions start to take place after four to six weeks. In our case at EMSP, it is a real blessing that Europe's history is full of discontinuities: the fact that postwar (Western) Germany successfully embarked on the path of democracy despite being a "democracy without democrats" (Lepsius 1990: 64); the importance of the economic upswing in the achievement of political stability in Western Europe after World War II; the role of external superpowers such as the United States and the Soviet Union in Europe; the end of the military juntas in Greece, Spain and Portugal and the subsequent process of democratization in the 1970 s and 1980 s; the overthrow of autocratic regimes after yearlong demonstrations in Poland, Czechoslovakia and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe; and the failure of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of civil war on European soil in the 1990 s, to name but a few.[7] All these topics can be discussed without explicit reference to Egypt and the Arab countries, but everybody is aware of the parallels and potential lessons for Egypt's own future. The active involvement of students in the preparation and conduct of seminars is not yet very common in Egypt, but students quickly appreciate that their opinions are not only tolerated in class, but even requested.

7 See also the contribution by Fatima Kastner in this volume on a global discussion of the transitional justice model.

Teaching is currently also undergoing a fundamental change in Egypt (at least at master's and doctorate levels), from the traditional style in which professors stand in front of the class talking and students try to keep pace as they take notes to be memorized later, to a more interactive format with the teacher engaging with the students in a less hierarchical manner. Formats in which students give presentations and their fellow students react to them through discussions, group work or other forms of interactive learning are somewhat new to Egypt.[8] However, many professors, particularly among the younger generations, have embarked on this new way of teaching.

A similar change is happening in the way papers and essays are written. Many of my students were not used to developing their own research questions or thinking about an appropriate structure for their paper themselves, as they were used to being told what to do and how to do it. This has been a difficult learning process for some, even at the master's and sometimes doctorate levels. Yet it is an indispensable practice if students are to be brought to a position in which they no longer simply repeat existing knowledge, but also create new expertise and perspectives by engaging in critical thinking and crafting alternative approaches. A fundamental problem is that the habit of giving feedback on papers remains underdeveloped. More than once, after I returned M.A. student essays with detailed comments and invited them to discuss their papers with me if they had questions, the students said they had never previously received comments of this kind.

Of particular relevance in this regard was a student conference called "Euro-Mediterranean Relations: A View From Egypt" organized by our program in December 2015 in cooperation with three professors from the University of Dundee, Scotland. Rather than targeting experienced scholars, this conference exclusively sought out current and former EMSP students. The aim was to make students familiar with the proceedings of typical political science conferences. Therefore, a call for papers first invited students to submit abstracts, and then, upon positive evaluation, to write full papers, which they then presented on panels during the full-day conference. A total of 15 students participated in this conference and presented their papers; the international professors, including Christian

8 For a discussion of changing teaching methods, see also the contribution by Bilal Orfali, Rana Siblini and Maha Houssami in this volume.

Kaunert, Bert Schweitzer and Patricia Bauer from the University of Dundee, as well as Kevin Köhler from the American University in Cairo, discussed each paper and gave thorough feedback on each student's performance. Certainly, this practical hands-on experience is what students in the social sciences in Egypt tend to be missing.

Fear as a factor at Egyptian universities

Without a doubt, making students' intellectual development a focus of teaching has been an important contribution to improving academia in Egypt. However, active participation in class discussions or during university events cannot be taken for granted, since the state security services are once again fiercely engaged in monitoring the universities (Kirkpatrick 2014). The current government sees students as a potential source of unrest, and has thus imposed particularly strict controls on campuses (for a historical account of student–state relations in Egypt, see Abd Rabou 2016: 59ff.; Pratt 2008: 59ff.). Already, the entrance to the university resembles access to a high-security sector, with heavily armed policemen at each campus gate, and thorough controls of individuals and bags using x-ray machines and metal detectors have been in place since the clashes of the summer of 2013. Admittedly, the fatal attacks at universities in Garissa (Kenya, April 2, 2015) and Bacha Khan (Pakistan, January 20, 2016) have created good arguments for those who support heavy security measures; but at the same time, the measures offer a clear illustration of the restrictions under which academia in the country has to operate.

Fear has become a dominant driver in Egypt's society, including in academic settings. Professors risk being professionally blackballed if they offer critical opinions about the government's actions too openly; some have even received personal threats intended to bring them back into line with the regime, sometimes simply for discussing texts critical of recent national developments. Some students have been banned from the university, and thousands have been arrested (Abaza 2016; Abdelrahman 2017).[9]

The situation between summer 2013 and summer 2014, when various places in Cairo, among them Nahda Square just in front of Cairo Universi-

9 See also the contribution by Ammar Abdulrahman in this volume on the implications of the Arab uprisings on student mobility.

ty, became the sites of violent clashes between supporters of former President Morsi and his opponents, was particularly difficult. For a period of months, Nahda Square witnessed frequent mass demonstrations by thousands of individuals, particularly on Wednesday afternoons; these often turned violent, with participants throwing stones, and security forces using tear gas or firearms. Several times these clashes also spread to the campus, with police storming the university in order to dissolve student demonstrations (Rahim 2013). More than once our faculty building had to be evacuated. I myself was exposed to tear gas twice, and we frequently heard the use of rubber bullets and even live ammunition while in class. Classes often had to be cancelled on short notice, as students were unable to come to university, and the semesters started late and ended early. The external conditions for studying and concentrating were thus extremely harsh at that time, and it was an extraordinary achievement by Cairo University as an institution, as well as on the part of its faculty, staff members and of course students, that these semesters were brought to a successful end, with exams taken and assignments handed in, so that students could at least get their certificates and celebrate their graduation.

However, one thing I have learned — something that certainly cannot be learned by reading books alone — is what it means to live and work under conditions of repression. Although I never experienced personal interference with my work, I felt how fear paralyzed me when demonstrations again turned violent, when attacks against state targets intensified in terms of numbers and casualties, when activists were arrested in increasingly frequent security raids, and when hundreds of detainees received collective death sentences.

One of my colleagues disappeared from the public eye for days, with even his Facebook page being taken down, leading other colleagues and I to fear the worst. Indeed, he had been told by the security services that he should reduce his public presence, and in order to stay safe, he elected to take himself completely offline for a while so that nobody could find out about him. In a workshop in Cairo on March 6, 2016, several colleagues admitted that their reaction after publishing every new piece of work was now one of fear, as they were worried about the potential consequences instead of being happy about the achievement.

It is no wonder there is high demand among professors and students for fellowships and scholarships abroad. Famous political scientists, such as Amr Hamzawy, have left Egypt indefinitely for reasons of personal safety. Two of my closest colleagues from Cairo University are now in Germany

and the USA, and it is unclear when they will come back to Cairo. The problem of "researchers who publish globally but perish locally" (Hanafi 2011; Hanafi & Arvanitis 2014) due to the language dichotomy between Arabic and English has been drastically elevated: If researchers stay local, they are at risk of disappearing — not necessarily because of imprisonment, but at least because of blocked career opportunities or the complete loss of the ability to work (Mostafa & Shaban 2016). The resulting exodus of researchers is leading to a loss of knowledge and expertise in the country, as well as a loss of important teachers at Cairo University. It is bringing massive hardships for those in exile and their families, as spouses and children are often unable to follow, and parents, siblings and other close relatives typically stay in Egypt. This forced separation creates significant emotional challenges for the individuals affected, and should not be forgotten when discussing conditions within academia in today's Egypt.

For students, the emotional situation is often different, as those between the ages of 20 and 25 often associate the idea of going abroad with feelings of "adventure", or regard it as a "once-in-a-lifetime chance". Students often have a desire to escape societal and cultural repression, if not outright abuse (FEPS postgraduate student, personal communication, May 2016). However, overall student activities have become broadly apolitical, and in some cases have been completely silenced (Abd Rabou 2016: 65). As a DAAD lecturer, I have provided students with information about scholarship opportunities in Germany, and I have also supported those who wish to apply for offers from the Fulbright Commission, the Chevening awards program, and other similar institutions. Many are interested in studying abroad not only because of the potential opportunities, but also simply to escape the repressive situation in Egypt.

Conclusion

The years since 2013 have brought considerable challenges to Egypt's academic sphere in general, and in political science and related disciplines in particular. Even as the country struggles to achieve internal stability, universities are struggling to find a stable position in post-2011 Egypt.

Many students and professors alike have lost their original enthusiasm for the changes initiated in 2011. For them, going "back to business" is the order of the day — that is, concentrating on their studies and teaching without being overly involved in sensitive debates or suspicious activities.

One colleague told me in 2014: "I will stop being engaged in TV talk shows and newspaper columns, and just concentrate on my academic activities" (FEPS professor, personal communication, fall 2014).

From the universities' perspective, many ambiguities have resulted from the strict legal framework and the government's unclear expectations. On the one hand, Article 21 of Egypt's constitution guarantees academic freedom and the independence of academics from state interference. On the other hand, President Al-Sisi's decrees have made free teaching and research impossible, as everything that might be understood as criticism of the government or one of its policies can be labelled as relevant for the state's security, thus exposing scholars to the serious risk of their actions having negative consequences. There "is an attempt to indirectly prohibit politics on the university campuses" (Sharobeem 2015: 120).

The murder of Italian Ph.D. researcher Giulio Regeni in January 2016 brought another fundamental problem of free research to light: the mistrust of state authorities toward researchers. Particularly when coming from abroad, researchers often encounter a great deal of suspicion. The typical imputation is that researchers might work as spies for foreign secret services, one of the many conspiracy theories flourishing in Egypt (Kirkpatrick 2015); as a consequence, foreign researchers' homes are occasionally searched by the authorities — that is, if they are not banned from entry at Cairo Airport at the outset. However, I should clearly stress that I personally have never experienced any negative responses from either my students or my colleagues.

For their part, researchers increasingly mistrust the authorities. Statements by governmental representatives are usually treated with considerable skepticism, whether they deal with the high number of activists that have been arrested without proper legal procedures being followed ("There are no forced disappearances in Egypt", Essam El-Din 2016), the crash of the Russian airliner over Sinai in October 2015 ("Terrorism was not responsible", Calamur 2015), or the reasons for the devastating floods in Alexandria in the spring and fall of 2015 ("Interior Ministry blames Brotherhood for Alexandria floods", Mada Masr 2015). All these statements come from a regime that once insisted it had found a "complete cure" for Hepatitis C and HIV (Loveluck 2014), and which imposed strict rules on media coverage during its anti-terror operations on the Sinai and after the army's fatal shootings of Mexican tourists in the Western Desert in September 2015 (O'Grady & Dreazen 2015). This mutual mistrust is

certainly one of the biggest obstacles for Egypt at the moment. If it persists, the chances of establishing fruitful coexistence between state officials and critical social scientists will become vanishingly small.

In their struggle for independence from governmental interference, university representatives often act on a razor's edge, as they cannot risk angering the authorities. This is even more urgent given that universities' budgets are regulated by the Supreme Council of Universities, and not by the universities themselves. This council, chaired by the minister of higher education, is responsible for "[d]elineating and planning the general policy and guidelines for higher education and scientific research in universities, with a strong commitment to realizing the state's needs and meeting its national, social, economic and scientific objectives" (El-Said 2014: 60). Many defenders of university independence see the Supreme Council's dominant position as the biggest obstacle to improved university performance, and have called for a fundamental redesign of its purpose and role,[10] or even its complete dissolution (El-Said 2014: 66).

Aside from these external constraints, universities are struggling to find their core reason to exist. As yet, it remains unclear whether Egyptian universities are today primarily responsible for training good academics, educating qualified candidates for the labor market or producing conforming members of the existing political system. This debate is not held openly, but particularly the younger generations of professors and lecturers still try to come closer to achieving the first potential goal. This remains at odds with the current rigorous university laws and rules, and with the preferences of those professors who benefited from the old regime, and who have nothing against the restoration of the former situation. However, this struggle will continue, and it might well be that Egyptian universities ultimately experience another revolution, this time from within.

References

Abaza, Jihad (2016): 3,462 Student Detainees in Egypt Sit Their Exams in Prison. In Aswat Masriya, January 29: http://egyptianstreets.com/2016/01/29/3642-student-detainees-in-egypt-sit-their-exams-in-prison/

10 Prof. John Adams, British University in Egypt, in his keynote speech at the "The University and Social Transition" conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, organized by Mansoura University, 17 April 2016.

Abdel-Moneim, Mohamed Alaa (2016): A Political Economy of Arab Education: Policies and Comparative Perspectives. Abingdon: Routledge.

Abdelrahman, Maha (2017): Policing neoliberalism in Egypt: the continuing rise of the 'securocratic' state. In Third World Quarterly 38(1), 185–202.

Abd Rabou, Ahmed (2016): Democracy as Student Mobilization: How Student Unions Struggle for Change in Egypt. In Mohamed, Eid & Gerber, Hannah R. & Aboulkacem, Slimane (eds.): Education and the Arab Spring: Resistance, Reform, and Democracy. Rotterdam: Sense, 51–67.

Abd Rabou, Ahmed (2015): The Institutionalization of Academic Freedom Violations in Egypt. In Al-Fanar, July 3: http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2015/07/the-institutionalization-of-academic-freedom-violations-in-egypt/

Accorsi, Alessandro & Siegelbaum, Max (2014): War in Egypt's Universities. In Middle East Eye, April 26: http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-egypts-universities-919752704

Alemann, Ulrich von (1994): Grundlagen der Politikwissenschaft: ein Wegweiser. Opladen: Leske & Budrich.

Amer, Nehal (2016): Social Sciences in the Arab Region: Five Years after the Arab Uprising. In Carnegie Foundation, March 24: https://www.carnegie.org/news/articles/social-sciences-arab-region-five-years-after-arab-uprisings

Arnhold, Nina (2003): Educational Transition in East Germany: Between Emancipation and Adjustment. In Polyzoi, Eleoussa & Fullan, Michael & Anchan, John P. (eds.): Change Forces in Post-Communist Eastern Europe: Education in Transition. London: Routledge-Falmer, 94–107.

Bamyeh, Mohammed (2015): Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence. In Arab Social Science Monitor. Beirut: Arab Council for the Social Sciences: http://www.theacss.org/uploads/English-ASSR-2016.pdf

Calamur, Krishnadev (2015): Metrojet Crash: Egypt's Preliminary Assessment. In The Atlantic, December 14: http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/russia-plane-crash-egypt/420222

Cochran, Judith (1986): Education in Egypt. Abingdon: Routledge.

El-Said, Hala (2014): Faculty Governance: Opportunities and Challenges after the Egyptian Revolution — The case of the FEPS, Cairo University. In Journal of Higher Education in Africa 12(1), 53–68.

Essam El-Din, Gamal (2016): 'There are no forced disappearances in Egypt,' says deputy interior minister. In Al-Ahram, May 17: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/217044/Egypt/Politics-/There-are-no-forced-disappearances-in-Egypt,-says-.aspx

Gamal Eldin, Engi Mohammed Mostafa (2016): The Impact of Cost Sharing on Quality of Education in Egypt's Public Universities. In Nuninger, Walter & Châtelet, Jean-Marie (eds.): Handbook of Research on Quality Assurance and Value Management in Higher Education. Hershey: IGI Global, 58–82.

Hage, Ghassan (2013): Towards a Critical Arab Social Science. Keynote presented to the inaugural conference of the Arab Council of Social Sciences, Beirut, March 2013: http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/04/08/towards-a-critical-arab-social-science/

Hanafi, Sari (2014): Complex entanglements: Moving from policy to public sociology in the Arab world. In Current Sociological Monograph 62(2), 197–208.

Hanafi, Sari (2011): University systems in the Arab East: Publish globally and perish locally vs. publish locally and perish globally. In Current Sociology 59(3), 291–309.

Hanafi, Sari & Arvanitis, Rigas (2014): The marginalization of the Arab language in social science: Structural constraints and dependency by choice. In Current Sociology 62(5), 723–742.

Hassan, Hamdy A. (2009): The Development of Political Science in the Arab World: A Narrative. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Political Science Association (IPSA): http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1697469

Hmelo-Silver, Cindy E. & Barrows, Howard S. (2006): Goals and Strategies of a Problem-based Learning Facilitator. In Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning 1(1), 21-39: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=ijpbl.

Karran, Terence (2009): Academic Freedom: In Justification of a Universal Ideal. In Studies in Higher Education 34(3), 263–283.

Kirkpatrick, David D. (2015): Egyptian Leaders Blame a Familiar Foe, Conspiracy, but Citizens Are Dubious. New York Times, November 14: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/15/world/middleeast/egyptian-leaders-blame-a-familiar-foe-conspiracy-but-citizens-are-dubious.html

Kirkpatrick, David D. (2014): Crackdown on Student Protesters in Egypt. New York Times, October 13: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/world/middleeast/egypt-cracks-down-on-new-student-protests-arresting-scores.html?_r=0

Lepsius, Mario Rainer (1990): Interessen, Ideen und Institutionen. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Loveluck, Louisa (2014): Egyptian military backtracks on Aids cure claims. In The Guardian, June 28: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/28/egypt-military-aids-cure-device-backtrack

Maher, Marwa (2014): Jaber Nassar issued a decree to stop the elections and abolish the appointment of deans of the colleges. In Al-Balad, June: http://www.el-balad.com/1018572

Masr, Mada (2015): Interior Ministry blames Brotherhood for Alexandria floods. In Mada Masr, November 7: http://www.madamasr.com/news/interior-ministry-blames-brotherhood-alexandria-floods

Mostafa, Mohamed & Shaban, Ahmed (2016): Academic freedom and scientific research freedom in Egypt. Cairo: Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms: http://www.ec-rf.org/?p=1307

O'Grady, Siobhán & Dreazen, Yochi (2015): Egypt Has a Creative Way of Hiding Bad News: Banning Journalists From Reporting on It. In Foreign Policy, September 17: http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/17/egypt-has-a-creative-way-of-hiding-bad-news-banning-journalists-from-reporting-on-it

Porsche-Ludwig, Markus (2009): Wegmarken normativer Politik(wissenschaft). Münster: Lit.

Pratt, Nicola (2008): Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Rahim, Ahmad (2013): Egypt's political instability pervades university campuses. In Al-Monitor, April 30: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2013/04/political-conflict-spreads-egypt-universities.html

Reid, Donald Malcolm (2002): Cairo University and the Making of Modern Egypt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saleh, Heba (2016): Hundreds disappear into secret detention in Egypt. In Financial Times, January 1: http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/a95ddeac-ae14-11e5-b46e-3ef837cafba3.html#axzz48tiYcEe5

Schlumberger, Oliver (2010): The Social Sciences and the Arab World: Challenges and Perspectives for an International and Autonomous Social Science. Keynote Speech opening the Regional Conference 'The Current State of Social Science Research in the Arab World' organized by the DAAD. Cairo, May 30.

Sharobeem, Heba M. (2015): The Impact of the Arab Spring at an Egyptian University: A Personal Experience. In META Middle East — Topics & Arguments 4, 110–121: http://meta-journal.net/article/view/2786/3470

UNDP (2009): Arab Knowledge Report 2009: Towards Productive Intercommunication for Knowledge. Dubai: Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/report/AKR2009-Eng-Full-Report.pdf

Völkel, Jan Claudius (2008): Die Vereinten Nationen im Spiegel führender arabischer Tageszeitungen. Wiesbaden: VS.