

GOT A PROBLEM – DESTROY IT! A FRAME-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PROVERB *LĀ YAFULLU AL-ḤADĪD ILLĀ AL-ḤADĪD* IN THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTIONARY DISCOURSE

1. Introduction

It is a common phenomenon for discourses of social confrontation to call the opponent pejorative names, often specifically designed to reflect peculiar circumstances of the current debate. For the discourse of the January 25, 2011 Egyptian revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak's regime, the most salient nametag used in reference to the former officials and clients of the Ancien Régime appears to be *fulūl* (pl. *break, or notch, in the edge of a sword, or of anything*)¹. This particular 'revolutionary' meaning of the word appears to be a local Egyptian coinage, other countries of the Arab Spring have their own equivalent terms with different motivations grounded in the local political contexts: Libyans use the word *ṭahālib* (pl. *moss, floating weed*)², while Tunisians prefer a more generic *baqāyā* (*remnants*)³. Here is a characteristic example of its use in a media text: *fulūl mubārak tas 'ī li-stirdād nufūḍihā bi-ma'rakat al-intihābāt – remnants of Mubarak [regime] strive to regain their influence in the electoral battle*.

The word *fulūl* is a broken plural form of the noun *fall* (notch), which stems from the verb *falla* (to notch)⁴. Derivatives of *falla* do not appear to be part of active vocabulary of the modern standard Arabic, neither of the colloquial Egyptian. The earliest occurrence of *fulūl* to be found on *google.com* dated July 12, 2011, i.e. months after the January 25 revolution, is an article that bears a characteristic title 'Ma'nā al-Fulūl' (Meaning of *fulūl*)⁵. The article goes 'we all hear this word abundantly (*bi-kuṭra*), but we do not know the exact meaning of it'. Lay metalinguistic discussion on the meaning and origins of the word *fulūl* with references to the classical Arabic dictionaries and self-styled interpretations continues at least through late 2013⁶.

Precedent texts featuring *falla* and some of its derivatives available to a modern student of Classical Arab include classical poetry and some Hadith⁷. It is doubtful, however, that these texts are in high circulation even among the most educated speakers, the word also does not feature in the Quran. Aside from the above cited lay discussion on the meaning of *fulūl*, in recent usage the verb *falla* features, exclusively, as part of a proverb *lā yafullu al-ḥadīd illā al-ḥadīd* (*nothing but the iron notches the iron*), which conveys a meaning similar to that of the English proverb *one nail drives out another*. The proverb indeed has a very high circulation in the political media discourse, particularly, since the January 25 revolution. It would, therefore, be safe to assume that it is the abundant use of this proverb that contributed to the formation of the concept of FULŪL. Below we offer a semantic analysis of the proverb, which appears to be an important part of the conceptual structure shaping the discourse of the Arab Spring.

While analyzing the media texts covering the period of the Egyptian revolution and subsequent political events up to the June 2013 anti-Mursi protests, we have discovered a persistent pattern of interplay between the grammatical structure, embedded pragmatics and semantics of the proverb and the larger proverb-containing segments of text. We will begin by analyzing and interpreting some typical examples of what appears to be the proverb's standard usage in the recent political discourse, including cases of ludic transformations of

the proverb, and, finally, try to account for the regularities that we have observed on the basis of Ch. J. Fillmore's frame semantics as represented in the Framenet project⁸.

2. Grammatical structure and core semantics of the proverb

The proverb semantics are two-layer: (1) in its literal sense the proverb describes a situation₁ when an unspecified *iron* object causes damage to another unspecified object made of the same matter; (2) the above simple situation₁ from the world of primitive physical objects is projected on a different, far more complicated situation₂ belonging to the world of human society. By projecting a simple case upon a significantly more complicated one the proverb heuristically simplifies the real world complexity by imposing a narrow set of constraints on its possible readings. But the proverb's role in the text is not limited to the cognitive function of representing a real world situation as a member of a class of situations. Its embedded pragmatic value is more important: the proverb is used in an argument for a specific *manner* of *dealing* with situations.

Although the proverb sounds quite tautological, it has in fact two different elements encoded by one word *ad d*. Grammatically, *ad d*₁ is an object while *ad d*₂ is a subject and they do not refer to one and the same thing. The difference between them comes out very clearly, when we see how *ad d*₁ and *ad d*₂ are projected upon two different, often juxtaposed, things in the target domain.

The pragmatic force of the proverb as an element of argumentative discourse is embedded already in its structure. The role of the constituent element of its structure *l ...ill*, that would perhaps be best described as a discontinuous conjunction, is to amplify the power of the assertion⁹. Without it, the phrase would simply describe a habitual course of event, while with the addition of *l ...ill* it sounds as an answer to an implied question: *is there anything that could damage ad d*₁? The unspoken question in the presupposed background conveys a sense of urgency, implying that some manner of damaging/destroying *ad d*₁ would be deemed imperative. The pair *l ...ill* is also affecting the permutation of the standard VSO word order to a rear VOS one¹⁰, which could also be contrasted to the more usual SVO reversal scheme performed with the help of the particles that the Arab grammarians refer to as '*inna* and its sisters'. The inversion serves the purpose of foregrounding the subject (or the Patient in semantic role terms).

The proverb could be seen as an instance of a more general two-slot construction *l X ill Y*, where X indicated something highly desirable, a Target, while Y stands for a supposedly unique Instrument of achieving the Target¹¹. The 'general negation' *l*, which means 'X is non-existent, impossible', together with the particle of exclusion *ill* thus form a modality frame meaning *Target X cannot be achieved except with the help of Instrument Y*. In the case of our proverb, the zone of Target is represented by the phrase *yafullu al- ad d*₁, which indicates that damaging the iron is the desired outcome, while the zone of Instrument is represented by another iron object, *ad d*₂. Both the object and subject of damaging action remain unspecified, while being metonymically represented by their characteristic quality – both are made of iron. The tautology here encodes the idea of essential similarity of the subject and object, which is also represented as a necessary condition for the capacity of the Instrument to achieve the Target.

The key substantive element of the proverb, *ad d* (iron), has multiple metaphorical applications of its own conveying the ideas of *power*, *might*, but also *difficulty* in Egyptian Arabic. An article discussing the meaning of the proverb provides a few interesting instances of such usage:

'indam yur d al-mi ri an ya if quwwat ša ya ifuhu bi-qawlihi ad d 'al ad d, wa indam yar ab f wa f latihi a - ank yaq l laka an 'al al- ad da¹²...

when the Egyptian wants to describe strength of a person [he] describes it by his saying iron on iron, and when [he] wishes to describe his status (i.e. *situation he is in*. – A. B.) [as] dire straits [he] says I am on the iron...

While the proverb literally refers to physical objects, the idea of human agency is encoded in the verb of destruction *falla* (notch)¹³, which implies an animate agent. The secondary meaning of *falla* ‘defeat’, although we may assume that in our case this semantic component remains suppressed, invokes the situation of human exchange event more clearly¹⁴.

While we still may say that the manner, in which the proverb is applied in the text, is by projecting the source domain situation belonging to the world of physical objects upon situations in target domain of human relations, it appears that the proverb already has many embedded elements that facilitate its matching with various elements in the target domain. Moreover, it has a strong pragmatic component built into it. Now we propose to review specific examples from recent Egyptian media texts that will demonstrate how the proverb is functioning in the actual texts.

3. Conventional usage

Example 1

nam k nat al-um r bi-yad al-jayš, istaj ba li-š-ša'b wa k na ar-radd 'al an-nid ' t qawiyān wa 'azala mursi bi-kull šuj 'a wa arfiya, wa al- n al-amr bi-yad as-siy siy n wa na nu na'lam m hiyata ha'ul ' as-siy siy n, li- lika atawaqqa' anna ad-dawla sa-ta b wa ta ' al-muktasab t, wa a'taqid anna al-bal aja wa al-irh b sa-yanta ir n 'al ayya mu wal t siy siya, li-annahu bi-bis a l *yafullu al- ad d siw al- ad d*¹⁵

When things were in the hand[s] of the army, [it] responded to the people and the answer to the calls was strong and [it] isolated Mursi with all courage and literality (i.e. unequivocally. – A. B.), and now the case [is] in the hand of politicians and we know the essence of these politicians (i.e. what are those politicians. – A. B.), therefore, I expect that the state will disappear and accomplishments [will] be lost, and I believe that the bullying and terror will win over any political efforts, because simply *nothing but the iron notches the iron*.

The paragraph argues that only a *strong* party, namely the Army, can deal with the current challenges that Egypt faces, while the challenges are presented as *violent* in their nature (terrorists, and *bal agiya* – bullies). Politicians are contrasted with the Army as a weak party, ‘political efforts’ are presented as weak tactic in the face of ‘terror and bullying’. Army has already demonstrated its capacity to act effectively – it isolated the president Mursi (presumably a strong party) and showed strength at doing so (*the answer... was strong*). An adverbial phrase *bi-l-bis a* (simply), points to the source of the illocutionary force of the proverb – its presumed simplicity (and by implication infallibility and universality) of this piece of common wisdom. It merits a special note here that the proverb’s preferred location is at the end paragraph, which underlines its role as a final argument¹⁶.

Example 2

fa-i k nat al-i w n tuk lib 'al as-sul a wa mu walatuhum a wanat an-ni m huwa a ar 'al al-umma fa-inna h al- a ar sawfa yazd d ma lam yakun hun ka quwwa tuj bihuhu wa ta add min ta awwul afr dihi¹⁷ wa say aratihim 'al kull man al-hay , na nu f ja il jubha wa aniya dimuqr iya, kutla qawiya nabda' f i'd dih min al- n wa att maw'id al-inti b t al-q dima, fa-t-ta y r al-q dim yajib an yabda' min a - und q wa h ihi qan 'a l budda an tas d, wa man yaqif f wajh al-asad l budda an yak n asadan mi luhu aw ašadd, fa-l *yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d*¹⁸

...for if the Brotherhood (lit. *brothers*. – A. B.) is assaulting (lit. *attacking like dogs*. – A. B.) the authorities and their effort to *Brotherhoodize* the regime is a danger for the nation, this danger will increase unless there is a force that confronts it and limits the transfiguration (lit. *turning into demon*. – A. B.) of its members and their control over all aspects of life, we need a national democratic front, a strong block [that] will begin preparing from now and until the date of the next elections, and the upcoming change must begin from the [ballot] box and this conviction should dominate, and anyone who stands in the face of a lion should be a lion like him or stronger, for *nothing but the iron notches the iron*.

While the critical point of the paragraph is directed against specific political organization, the paragraph also contains explicit reference to a formidable and urgent problem greater in scale (*a danger for the nation, and this danger will increase*), associated (presumably through cause – effect relationship) with actions of the target of criticism.

Example 3

h huwa Obama alla tur hin na ‘alayhi wa h ihi hiya amr ka allat tur hin na ‘alayh ,
yajib ‘alayn an nastayqi kaf n haw nan wa l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d¹⁹

This is Obama that you are betting on, and this is America that you are betting on, we need to wake up enough for us the disgrace *nothing but the iron notches the iron*.

The passage implies that there exists some overarching problem (such as could be described as ‘we all are in trouble’, or ‘the whole country is in trouble’), although there is hardly any explicit reference to this problem in the text. The implication of *trouble* hinges on at least two frames (Gambling and Disgrace) that enter the semantic scope of the paragraph through two repetitive noun phrases ...*tur hin n ‘alayhi*; ... *tur hin n ‘alayh* (you are betting on him, ... her) and another one *kaf n haw nan* (enough for us the disgrace). The Gambling frame implies that there is a Prize that one is betting for, which is assumed to be commensurate with what or who one is betting on (in this case Obama, the US). The frame also presupposes that the Gambler will be waiting for unspecified period of time for a positive outcome of betting, and it also presupposes Risk, the higher the bet the greater the Risk. The Disgrace frame presupposes a Cause in the form of some negative action or non-action of considerable social impact. In combination these two frames lead the reader to infer that there is some ongoing large scale process, whose affect has already been detrimental (if only morally), and putting an end to it would be a highly desirable outcome. The presupposed background includes an idea that only a strong party is able to overcome the problem. The author advances an idea that instead of reliance on an external strength (the US is commonly seen as a strong party), it would be preferable to rely on one’s own. Pragmatically, it is a call for action addressed to the fellow countrymen (*we need to wake up enough for us the disgrace*), which draws on yet another presupposition that *it is humiliating to be weak*²⁰.

Our collection of media texts contains instances when the proverb is used in an explicitly argument for the use of force:

Example 4

lan yanja bi-i ni-llah, li-anna e na s iyn lahum jiddan, wa na‘mal bi-mabda’ anna jam ‘al-i tim l t mawj da att as-sayyi’a, wa lan nasma lahum bi-isq aš-šar‘ ya fa-l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d, law ista dam al-quwwa sa-nasta damuh, ka- aq q šar‘ y li-d-dif ‘an in-nafs, wa ‘an ar-ra’is alla j ‘at (sic!²¹) bi-inti b t hiya al-a‘dal f t r mi r, wa min w jib aš-ša‘b an ya m hi²²

they will not succeed, God willing, as we are vigilant to them very much, and we work upon the principle that there are all possibilities even the bad ones, we will never allow them to overthrow the legality as *nothing but the iron notches the iron*, if they use force we will use it, as a legal right to defend ourselves, and the President which came by elections the most just ones in the history of Egypt, and [it is] the duty of the people to protect him.

Yet, strength is not always conceived of as a physical force, the proverb may also be used in an argument for less overtly violent means of coercion:

Example 5

bayna-ma al-muta arriš min mu ma’inn li-i s sihi bi-annah aqw min ad-dawla, min al-qan n, min al-amn al-munša il bi-hir sat kar s as-sul a, min al-qiyam wa al-‘ad t wa at-taq l d, min al-mujtama’ kullihi, wa law ta awwara marratan annahu sa-yu sab i a a’a fa-lan yajru’ ‘al irtik b al- a’, wa law ya’raf anna li-d-dawla hayba fa-sa-yah b ad-dawla. inna quwwat al-muta arriš f ihs sihi li- u’f al- ar n, wa ‘inda-ma k n an-n s

aqwiyy f al- aqq lam yakun li-h ihī a - abaqa wuj d, wa l sab l li-waqf hirāt at-
ta arruṣ wa al-muta arriṣ n ill i adrakn ann jam ‘an ‘ur a (target, object) li-l- a ar, wa
l sab l li-mu sibat ha’ul ill bi-l-qan n, li-annahū l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d²³

While the provocateur [is] safe and calm in his feelings (i.e. *sure*. – A. B.) that he is stronger than the state, than the law, than the security [which] is busy guarding the seats of power, than values and customs and traditions, than all of the society, and if [he] imagines once that he will be hold accountable if [he] has mistaken, [he] will not dare commit the mistake, and if [he] knows that the state has prestige [he] will revere the state. The provocateur’s strength is in his feeling of weakness of the others, and when the people were strong in the their right (*possible reference to the days of the revolution*. – A. B.) this [social] class had no existence, and there is no way to stop the phenomenon of provocation²⁴ and the provocateurs except if [we] realize that we all are the object of danger, and there is no way to make accountable those [people] but through law, for *nothing but the iron can notch the iron*.

The paragraph advocates for what could be described as the *rule of law*, it implies that state has lost prestige (*hayba*), and the way to make the provocateurs to revere²⁵ the state is by calling them to account through law. The paragraph still explicitly refers to Strength as both the [dangerous] quality of the opponent (*provocateur’s strength is in his feeling of weakness of the others*) and a [positive] quality expected of a friendly party (*people were strong in the their right*). The paragraph explicitly refers to an overwhelming Threat (*we all are the object of danger*).

Example 6

As the statements of common wisdom, proverbs’ illocutionary force is directed toward the exclusion of any further discussion, let alone an outward negation of what is being stated²⁶. Even a conscious transformation of the idiom doesn’t seem to be able to overcome the pull of its core semantic structure and the entailments it implies. Here is an interesting example of a ludic transformation of the proverb in an article promoting Egypt’s soft power:

fa-l-quwwa an-n ‘ima laysat fun nan wa d ban wa qaw n nan madaniya faqa , innah m
yaf ‘an il jam ‘ h ihī al-anši a wa huwa ar-r , li-anna r ‘i at al-warda qad l tajid
lah mak nan f taṣr ih wa i‘ datih il mukawwin tih . wa h al-f ‘i ar-r y wa al-
ma‘nawiy lahu al-qudra ‘al ‘ub r al- f q wa al- ud d wa la yasta’ in a adan f nuf ihī
as-silmīy an-n ‘im, fa-l- ar r qad yafullu al- ad d wa laysa al-‘aks kam yuq l, wa li-h
k nat uy uhu tusta dam f aš-šanq f ba’ al-‘u r²⁷

As soft power is not only arts and ethics (i.e. *moral norms*. – A. B.) and civil laws, it is what exceeds (overflows) the sum of these activities, and it is the spirit, for the odor of the rose may not find for itself a place in its anatomy and its return (reduction) to its components. And this spiritual and incorporeal surplus has the capacity to transcend the horizons and boundaries, and it asks no one for excuse (spares no one) from its peaceful and soft influence, for *the silk may notch the iron* and not the other way round as they say (lit. *as it is said*. – A. B.), and, that is why, its threads were used for hanging in some eras.

While contrasting *soft* power to the conventional *hard* one as *silk* to the proverbial *iron*²⁸, the author spares no epithet to underline its non-material, intangible nature (*spiritual, incorporeal, transcending horizons and boundaries*, notably, *peaceful*). Yet in arguing that soft power is still a type of power, the author follows the metaphorical entailments of the original proverb, which leads to the idea of presumed utility of silk in acts of violence.

Example 7

The above examples, which are more common in our collection, may be contrasted to a few other cases that appear to be semantically somewhat poorer, cf.:

rafa‘at wiz rat al-isk n ši‘ r l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d f muw jahat šarik t taqs m
al-ar allat tab ‘ al-wahm li-l-muw in n min il l i’l n t k iba li-bay‘ ar ad-dawla
bi-as‘ r 50 junayhan li-l-mitr f al-mudun al-jad da wa yaqa‘ a iyatah al f al-muw in n

al-bus ' . al-wiz r t qarrarat ta b q al-usl b tahu wa tak f amal tah al-i'l niya li-
ta r al-muw in n min at-ta' mul ma'a šarik t taqs m al-ar ay tataw l i'l n t
hay'at al-mujtama' t al-'imraniya bi- u uf li-ta r al-muw in n min šir ' ar f al-mu-
dun al-jad da²⁹...

The Ministry of Construction has raised the slogan '*nothing but the iron notches the iron*' in confronting land distribution companies which sell the dream to the citizens by way of mendacious announcements about the sale of state [owned] land for prices of 50 [Egyptian] pounds for meter in the new cities, and thousands of ordinary citizens fall victim of it. The ministries decided to practice the same approach and intensify their advertising campaigns in order to warn the citizens against dealing with land distribution companies as [there] follow announcements of the housing communities' organization in the press in order to warn the citizens against buying land in the new cities.

Here the proverb is used to justify, or perhaps simply rhetorically emphasize, an instance of *similia similibus* approach: a fraudulent information campaign is countered by another information campaign to warn citizens against fraud. The paragraph contains no implicit references to Strength, Power, Violence, neither there is any hint of some overwhelming disaster. Yet, a sense of confrontation is certainly there (government confronting the dishonest companies). Within this confrontation the text foregrounds the Instruments used by the two parties. It is the tactic used by the company and the counter tactic applied by the ministries that are matched with the X and Y elements of the proverb. What makes Example 7 different from the preceding ones (1–6) is its communicative goal. It merely *describes* a situation, while Examples 1–6 *argue* for a certain idea, soliciting the addressee's support for a specific action. We may conclude that in Example 7 the usual pragmatic focus of the original proverb appears to be suppressed.

Example 8

The display of strength that the proverb usually is meant to justify could explicitly be juxtaposed to verbal acts (such as negotiations)³⁰:

ni m yur d al-baq ' bi-kull al-was 'il al-jahannamiya wa bi-t li m al-'amal: hal tuw jihuhu
bi-nafs al-as l b wa ak ar 'al mabda' l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d am tuf wi uhu³¹

regime wants to stay by all the hellish means and consequently what to do: confront it with the same methods or more according³² to principle *nothing but the iron notches the iron* or negotiate with it

4. Ludic transformations

To conclude the review of our material, we now propose to look into an unconventional case, which helps bring out some semantic characteristics of the proverb that in the common usage appear to be not so obvious. Transformed versions of the proverb occur frequently in the ludic language of the Arab media, particularly, in the headings, which could be seen as yet another evidence of the popularity of the idiom. The ludic transformations effectively represent an abridged version of the operation that the reader is expected to perform while decoding the text with the proverb left intact. Instead of projecting elements of the proverb upon specific semantic structures located elsewhere in the text, the former have been simply substituted for the latter saving the reader the effort of finding a good match. Let us consider a few examples:

- 1) *wa la yafullu al-i'l m ill al-i'l m* – and does not notch the media but the media³³
- 2) *la yafullu al-mu' mara al- ab a ill at-ta' mur al- all q* – does not notch the vicious conspiracy but the creative conspiracy³⁴
- 3) *la yafullu al-adib ill al-adib* – does not notch the author but the author³⁵
- 4) *la yafullu al-i w n ill an-n r* – does not notch the [Muslim] Brotherhood but an-Nur (an Egyptian Salafi party. – A. B.)³⁶

5) *l yafullu an-ni m ill an-ni m al-anfa‘ minnuh* – does not notch the regime but the more useful (efficient) regime³⁷

6) *l yafullu al-jam ‘a al- ‘ina wa ma ra ayr izb mu li li-wa anihi* – does not notch the treacherous and banned community (religious group – in reference to the Muslim Brotherhood. – A. B.) but a party loyal to its homeland³⁸

7) *l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d, la yufallu an-ni m ill fi-dimašq* – nothing but the iron notches the iron, and nowhere but in Damascus [may] the regime be notched³⁹

It is the word *ad d* in either part of the proverb that is substituted by another noun or even a noun phrase in the transformed versions, while the syntactic structure of the verbal phrase and the predicate remain intact. The ludic transformations once again point to the unequal status of its right-hand and left-hand parts of the proverb. While both the left-hand and right-hand parts of the cliché may be substantially augmented, as in (7), it is more likely for the right-hand part to show greater structural variability⁴⁰. A relatively greater variability in the right-hand part of the cliché highlights it as a zone of greater semantic elaboration. It is this part that introduces the important *new* information and holds the pragmatic focus of the utterance. In all but one of the transformed cases the Agent is explicitly represented as a conscious entity. In all transformed cases the Patient also represents a conscious entity. The presupposed background suggests a situation of Confrontation between the two.

5. Frame analysis

The texts containing the proverb include the following set of semantic role elements that may be either explicitly represented with varying levels of detailization or appear as part of presupposed background:

- 1) An overwhelming problem of some sort (P) – (often an imminent threat);
- 2) Agent₁, a conscious entity (A₁) (e.g. Muslim Brotherhood, provocateurs, etc.) – a target zone upon which element X (*ad d*) of the proverb is projected;
- 3) Agent₂, another conscious entity (A₂)⁴¹ – a target zone upon which element Y (*ad d*) of the proverb is projected;
- 4) Action taken by A₂ against A₁, which is presumed to affect the solution of P.

A₁ and P are bound through cause and effect relationship; A₁ and A₂ – similarity, confrontation. The frame presupposes a scenario: A₂ imminently destroys A₁, which is presumed to be the cause of P, consequently P is resolved. Action performed by A₂ against A₁ merits a special remark. Although the verb *falla* (notch) literally could be interpreted as signifying damage inflicted upon part of the object (edge of a bladed weapon or instrument) it is rather the Destroying frame than the Damaging frame that best matches the proverb. The way the proverb is applied in the text⁴² clearly implies that whatever action A₂ is expected to perform toward A₁, it will eliminate the latter or permanently put it out of order as the cause of trouble⁴³. The convenience of the Destroying frame for our case is that it allows for a non-core element Containing event⁴⁴, which corresponds to the variable P in our description in the semantic structure of proverb-containing texts. The proverb is applied with a clear pragmatic purpose: mark out an A₂ according to a set of presupposed qualities that are seen as sufficient for an effective action against A₁: *similarity* with A₁ and *strength* (A₁ is as strong as or stronger than A₂). The latter quality may be specified as the *capacity to apply physical force or violence*. The semantic structure of the proverb-containing segments of text may have some other non-core elements, e.g. specific actions and qualities ascribed to A₁ and A₂, providing greater detail, and thus making the argument more convincing.

In Framenet terms, the overall semantic structure of the proverb-containing segments may be described as superimposition of several frames upon each other. These include Resolve_problem, Destroying, Similarity frames as described in Framenet terms. The two former frames combine into something very similar to Hostile_encounter frame⁴⁵. Similarity is encoded

in the very structure of the proverb and cannot be eliminated even in the extreme contexts such as the descriptive usage (Example 7) and the ludic transformations of the proverb. Destroying frame, which seems to be essential for most reviewed examples, is linked to specific pragmatic purpose and correlates with the presence of Resolve_problem frame on the background. Other frames may be incorporated into the semantic structure of the proverb-containing segments, but these appear to be facultative and their function is confined to substantiating the core frames. The case in point are the Gambling and Disgrace frames (Example 3), which reinforce the Resolve_problem frame. The frames are connected to each other, making a coherent argumentative structure, through matching of their core elements across different frames. For instance, core element Problem of the Resolve_problem frame is matched with the Containing event of the Destroying frame, Entity 1 and Entity 2 of the Similarity frame are matched with Destroyer and Undergoer of the Destroying frame and Side_1 and Side_2 of the Hostile_encounter frame. Meanwhile, the Destroyer matched with Side_1 element of Hostile_encounter frame, ultimately, matches with the frame element Agent of the Resolve_problem frame⁴⁶ to conclude the argumentation.

As a narrative, the line of argument could be presented as follows. Whenever there is some big problem there is a strong party that causes it, this party has to be destroyed for the problem to be ultimately resolved, whoever a friendly party is who will destroy the wrong doer, it needs to be equally strong enough to be able to destroy it and, ultimately, bring about the resolution of the problem. Pragmatically, the argument is used to point to a specific conscious entity or to emphasize the need for it to appear urgently, or even to special conditions of its success⁴⁷.

* * *

The proverb *l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d*, whether in its conventional form or in the form of a cliché constructed on its base and used for ludic purposes, is more than simply a rhetorical tool, but a powerful text generator. The proverb's core semantic frames (Similarity, Destroying) as well as its specific grammatical structure (VOS word order, particle of exclusion) and the illocutionary force embedded in it may only be associated with a very narrow set of other frames. The proverb's core semantic structure hence provides for a very specific description of social reality.

From the foregoing analysis we may perhaps also draw some conclusions regarding the Egyptian political culture as represented in language. The abundant use of the proverb *l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d* in the discourse of the Egyptian revolution attests to a commonly shared belief in the efficacy of forceful (even violent) solutions, the preference given to strong agencies (men and institutions) over the 'talkative' politicians. Given the strength of such beliefs, it does not appear accidental that a revolution that was described as 'democratic' and toppled an autocratic regime, has ultimately led to yet another autocracy and did so with the help of violent means.

¹ Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane (London: Willams & Norgate 1863).

² Moss, as a low form of life of green color, is used in a pejorative reference to the Qaddafi's green flag.

³ See Arabic Wikipedia for the word *ful l*: <http://goo.gl/GWTKQp>

⁴ Cf. '*falla* – he broke it, or notched it, in its edge namely, [a sword or the like, or] anything' (Ed. W. Lane. An Arabic-English Lexicon. Beirut, 1968 [1863–1893]). All classical Arabic dictionaries, starting from the oldest available one, Kit b al-'Ayn, also cite a metaphorical meaning 'to defeat' for *falla* and 'defeated [one]' for *fall* sing. – *ful l* pl.

⁵ An article by an Egyptian author Abdu-r-Ra m n Yusuf on Al-Yawm as-S bi' website: <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=453044#.U4DAw3KSy6I>

⁶ Google.com search engine provides at least 2,090 instances for '*ma'n al-ful l*' (an obvious, but not the only tag for locating instances of metalinguistic lay discussion on the word *ful l*), the latest dated late

2013, the earliest Dec 2011. See: <https://www.facebook.com/elshortaelmsrya/posts/376695402367969> for an interesting impromptu competition announced by a Facebook user under the heading ‘Does anyone know the right meaning of the word *ful l*?’; the page features as many as 103 responses ranging from the quotations of the classical Arabic dictionaries to more or less adequate descriptions of the current usage; the final comment captures the egocentric nature of the term: *hiya kalima ma’n h tabi’ li-man k n* (it is the world whose meaning belongs to whoever it is [i.e. who uses it]).

⁷ Lis n al-‘Arab appears to be the only classical Arabic dictionary that quotes a hadith for a derivative of *fall* (2 per. pl. imperfect *tafull*), while Kit b al-‘Ayn quotes a verse pre-Islamic poet an-N bi a.

⁸ See: <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/index.php?q=frameIndex>

⁹ The evidence of the illocutionary force of statements with *l ...ill* is its presence in key religious formulas *l ilaha ill all h* (there is no deity but God) and *l awla wa l quwwat ill bi-llah* (there is no power and no strength but with Allah), *l ‘ilma lan ill m ‘allamtan* (there is no knowledge for us but what you have made us know) (Quran, al-Baqara 32), as well as a host of modern slogans such as *l ‘izza lan ill bi-l-isl m* (no power for us but through Islam). In Fillmore’s terms, *l ...ill* could be described as a *formal or lexically open idiom*, i.e. one of ‘syntactic patterns dedicated to semantic and pragmatic purposes not knowable from their form alone’, in contrast to what is described as *substantive or lexically filled idioms*, cf. Charles J. Fillmore et al. Regularity and Idiomaticity in Grammatical Constructions: The Case of Let Alone. *Language*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Sep., 1988), p. 505–506.

¹⁰ The discontinues conjunction *l ... ill* seems to be the only construction affecting such scheme of reversal in standard Arabic.

¹¹ Consider the phrases cited in footnote above, particularly, *l ‘ilma lan ill m ‘allamtan* (there is no knowledge for us but what you have made us know) and *l ‘izza lan ill bi-l-isl m*, other examples of this usage, including occasional ones, could also be easily found. The formula *l X ill Y* may also be generalized to cover a whole universe of more complex cases built on the model *l X ill wa huwa/hiya Y* where *Y* may be represented both as a noun or verbal phrases; the letter pattern convers many popular aphorisms, such as *al-‘aql al-ins niy ka-mi alla l ya‘mal ill wa huwa maft* (the human intellect is like an umbrella – [it] doesn’t work except [when it] is open).

¹² The article contains some more examples of metaphorical phrases with the same key word used in reference to situations that could be interpreted as various types of difficulties, cf. <http://www.masress.com/elwatan/22087>

¹³ This group includes the verb *kasara* (to break), which is often used in both lay discussion and classical dictionaries to explain the meaning of *falla*, notably, the form *ful l* is structured on the model of a derivative of *kasara – kus r* (crumbs, smithereens) – i.e. semantically the Result of the act of *breaking*.

¹⁴ We may add that the very fact that the verb *falla* has acquired the secondary meaning ‘defeat’ attests to the long history of its use in conceptual metaphoric projections: why it came to signify *defeat* is quite obvious from the material of the classical dictionaries – they all refer to a situation when swords get notched in a fight, the destruction of weapon is projected upon the plight of the warring party on a *pars pro toto* principle.

¹⁵ The article goes under a characteristic title ‘*ad-dawla allat tataf wa ma’a irh biy n f šila*’ (the state that negotiates with the terrorists [is] a failed [one]) and is dated 8 May 2013, i.e. the period when president Mursi had been already ousted while the Army still had not fully established its grip on power – <http://www.masress.com/elwatan/241493>

¹⁶ The proverb also often functions as a lead in a media piece, featuring in the headlines.

¹⁷ It appears that the author here is misusing the enclitic pronoun *-hi* (masc. sing. oblique case) attached to the word *afr d* (members), which grammatically could refer only to *a ar*, as the only masculine singular noun in the preceding part of the sentence – the phrase *members of danger* would hardly make sense; logically *afr d* (members) could only combine with *i w n* (brothers, masc. pl., meaning *Muslim Brotherhood*) and the pronoun should have been *-him* (masc. pl. oblique case).

¹⁸ An article titled simply ‘*l yafullu al- ad d ill al- ad d*’ dated 28 Aug 2012, two months after the Muslim Brotherhood member Muhammad Mursi had been elected as president: <http://www.masraway.com/ketabat/ArticlesDetails.aspx?AID=179168>

¹⁹ A private comment dated 24 Sept 2011 to an article on the US decision to supply anti-bunker bombs to Israel – <http://www.masress.com/alshaab/36307>

²⁰ Note also the reference to the January 25 Egyptian revolution as *awrat al-kar ma* (the revolution of dignity) – cf. an account of the official commemoration ceremony – <http://www.albawabhnews.com/349016>

²¹ Probably a mistake – masc. form *jā'a* would be more appropriate here, unless the whole sequence should be re-written as – *allādī jā'at bihi al- intihābāt ...* (who was brought [to power] by the elections. – A. B.).

²² The paragraph has been borrowed from an article published on 2 Feb 2012 – four months before the coup that brought down the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated president Mursi – the article argues for the establishment of a ‘Revolutionary Guard’ to protect the ‘legality and the Sharia’ – an euphemism widely used henceforth for the Mursi regime itself: <http://www.masress.com/elwatan/124672>

²³ An article in al-Misri, whose title reiterates the proverb under review *lā yafullu al-ḥadīd illā al-ḥadīd* dated 25.09.2010 – <http://www.masress.com/almasryalyoum/160280>

²⁴ The word *taḥarruṣ* has no good match in English – it broadly refers to all types of provocative and mainly violent activities undermining public order and directed against authorities; the active participle of the same stem *mutaḥarriṣ* is translated here as *provocateur*; cf. Hans Wehr, J.M.Cowan Arabic-English Dictionary for the source verb *taḥarraṣa* – *to pick up a quarrel, start a brawl, provoke*.

²⁵ *Hayba* (prestige) and the verb *hāba* that we have translated here as *revere* refer to a feeling of respect that is built on fear, such as the respect demonstrated by a weaker party in the face of an overwhelming strength.

²⁶ A counter argument to a statement supported by a proverb may rather come in the form of another proverb or precedent text reflecting an alternative belief or perspective; we, however, haven't been able to locate material to illustrate this point for the proverb under review.

²⁷ An article titled ‘*ḥadīd miṣr wa ḥarīruhā*’ (The Iron of Egypt and its Silk) published on 2 Mar 2013 in al-Maṣhad: <http://www.masress.com/almashhad/184124>

²⁸ The metaphoric projection *soft power* → *silk* is lucid enough: *soft* power > *soft* fabric, while the contrast of the latter with *iron* is reinforced by alliteration: *ḥadīd* (iron) – *ḥarīr* (silk).

²⁹ <http://www.masress.com/elwatan/13303>

³⁰ Cp. also Example 1. The opposition between ‘words’ and ‘deeds’ appears to be a political discourse universal, cf. G.Yavorska. Do kharakterystyky parlaments'koho dyskursu v Ukraini (na prykladī debativ pro migratsiu). Ekologia movy is movna politika v suchasnomy suspilstvi. (Toward a characteristic of the parliamentary discourse in Ukraine (the case of debates on migration)). B. M. Azhniuk (red.). Kyiv, Dmytro Buraho Publishing House, 2012. – P. 224–237.

³¹ <http://www.masress.com/almesryoon/148872>

³² Note a very accurate description of a key meaning component of the proverb.

³³ <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=149515>

³⁴ <http://www1.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=1273583#.U1LZiVWSxc4>

³⁵ <http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/autres/makal/286987.html>

³⁶ <http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/396411>

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/elbatalnabilshokry/posts/485687191453354>

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/elbatalnabilshokry/posts/485687191453354>

³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/hraaralgeashalhoor/posts/309625709129439>

⁴⁰ It even may include adverbial modifiers such as in case (8), which hardly could occur in the left-hand side position. The phrase is meant to call on the opposition to fight for Damascus as the only way to destroy the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

⁴¹ In some cases (Example 1) the Instrument is foregrounded instead of Agent.

⁴² Except descriptive cases, such as Example 7, where the proverb's usual pragmatic force appears to be suppressed.

⁴³ Which matches the definition ‘affects the Undergoer negatively so that the Undergoer no longer exists’ rather than ‘non-canonical’ and ‘undesirable’ state defined as the outcome of Damaging – cf. <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/index.php?q=frameIndex>

⁴⁴ Cf. the description of the Containing Event element of the Destroying frame on the Framenet: “[t]his FE denotes an event that occurs or state of affairs that holds at a time that includes the time during which the event or state of affairs reported by the target occurs and of which it is taken to be a part (emphasis added. – A. B.)” – <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/index.php?q=frameIndex>

⁴⁵ The frame core elements include two Sides, with Side 1 foregrounded, who are confronted ‘over a disputed Issue and/or in order to reach a specific Purpose’, which appears to match the semantic structure of the proverb-containing segments under review. For Framenet reference see: <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/index.php?q=frameIndex>

⁴⁶ Described as ‘sentient entity’ that ‘finds the solution or explanation to the outstanding mystery or Problem’ – cf. <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/index.php?q=frameIndex>

⁴⁷ Transformed proverbs, case (7).