

# Abstract

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**Title:** The Making of Martyrs. Uprising, Cultural Sacralization and Death in Downtown Cairo after 2011

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This dissertation is aimed to better understand the multifaceted and contested narratives of the 2011 Egyptian uprising by exploring the visual and material cultural representations of selected events in the form of unofficial memorials (predominantly graffiti), official monuments, and anniversary commemorations. These narratives were produced and reproduced in the streets and squares of Cairo, principally in the neighborhood of Downtown Cairo, as well as online through the mass and social media. The analysis of graffiti, official monuments, and anniversaries is conducted from the perspective of the cultural sociology of religion, which is overwhelmingly concerned with the boundary between the sacred and the profane, the fundamental dialectic through which humans understand the world. The concept of multiple, shared, but culturally, historically, and socially dependent sacred forms has been used in this thesis to analyze and understand the conflicts over the symbolic meanings of the uprising, especially from the protesters' side of the divide. An introductory chapter (1), where an overview of the events of the uprising most relevant to this thesis and of previous research is provided, is followed by a chapter (2) dedicated to method, theory, and material. Chapter 3 is a spatial introduction to Cairo and in particular Downtown Cairo, while chapter 4 focuses on the hagiography of the martyrs as represented on the walls. Chapter 5 deals with the everchanging uprising narratives painted on the walls of Downtown Cairo, chapter 6 focuses on the reactions to a feminist group painting in a sacred place of the uprising, and chapter 7 focuses on contested collective memories of the events. In the last chapter (8), the themes of death and dying, and conflict and contestation are recognized as the most relevant links sowing the analysis of the material together. Moreover, in the same chapter the relevance of this thesis for the field of religious studies is highlighted, followed by a brief summary of the case-study analytical findings.

**Keywords:** sacred forms, sacred values, cultural sociology of religion, collective memory, space, graffiti, unofficial memorials, official monuments, commemoration, materiality, performativity, sacralization, desecration, anniversary celebration, death, martyrdom.

# The Making of Martyrs

## Uprising, Cultural Sacralization and Death in Downtown Cairo after 2011

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Academic dissertation in religious studies, to be publicly defended, by due permission of the dean of the Faculty of Arts at University of Gothenburg, on 9 November 2018, at 13:15, in T219, Olof Wijksgatan 6, Göteborg