Final Assessment: Diagnoses, Diseases and Relapses

To conclude the study, it is possible to assess the European and American reaction to the January 25th Revolution from the standpoint of normative power theory by summing up the insights derived through the analysis of all three dimensions. This exercise will entail a final assessment of the extent to which the EU and the US can be viewed as normative powers in the context of the Egyptian revolutionary and transitional period. After this brief review of the study’s results, the findings offered by the three-dimensional normative power analytical framework can be contextualised into a wider regional and global setting by focusing on the different pressures – internal and external – that the actors were found to be subjected to in the context of the January 25th Revolution. This discussion on the ‘side effects’ of the analysis will seek to show that the utilisation of normative power theory as a methodological tool actually brought to the fore insights beyond the three dimensions expressly under scrutiny. Next, in light of the study’s espousal of international legal insights, some remarks will be made on the relationship between the European and American reactions studied, on the one hand, and the fundamental institution of international law, on the other. These musings will be followed by a more theoretical discussion on the link between normative power theory and international law. Then, before concluding, it is also pertinent to propose some wider theoretical ‘rejuvenation’ based on the utilisation of normative power theory, as well as its operationalisation within the context of the present study. This will also warrant suggestions for new and potentially fruitful avenues for research. Finally, a ‘diagnosis’ of the ‘diseases’ found to plague European and American forays into Egypt and the wider region during the course of the preceding investigation will be made to conclude the study.

9.1 Three-Dimensional Vision: A Final Look

To begin with the first analytical dimension of norms and identity, it was found that the EU and the US diffused strikingly similar norms in the context of the January 25th Revolution and its aftermath. When it came to norms classified as cosmopolitan (democracy, human rights, freedom, social justice, equal opportunity, rule of law, good governance, transparency, equality and sustainable development), differences between the actors were found to be mere semantics.
This result lends added credence to the idea that the EU and the US make up what Lindberg (2005b, 228) calls a transnational ethical community. Nevertheless, in spite of the existence of this entwined community of faith, three notable differences within the first analytical dimension bear repeating here. Firstly, the EU, by virtue of its geographical proximity to Egypt and the MENA region, alluded to the phenomenon of immigration within its managed movement of people norm, an issue that appeared irrelevant for the US in this particular context. Another discernible difference was the American tendency to refer directly to the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and the Camp David Accords in conjunction with the norms of (regional) peace and stability. The EU, on the contrary, preferred to stress the importance of the multilaterally grounded MEPP. Lastly, the Union’s mutual accountability norm sought to enshrine – albeit in a very deficient manner – certain responsibilities, not only upon the EU’s Southern Neighbours, but also upon the Union itself. The US did not employ such a norm in its communication, and its democratisation assistance would continue to flow on an ad hoc basis. On the surface, these differences would seem to support Scheipers and Sicurelli’s (2007) view that the EU generally acts as a vanguard for multilateralism. However, it should be recalled from the above discussion that the Union’s managed movement of people norm contained explicitly communitarian undertones, effectively creating an ‘in-group’ and an ‘out-group’ by differentiating between desirable and undesirable immigrants from the EU’s vantage point. In sum, none of these differences within the dimension of norms and identity were found to be sufficient to stake a claim that either actor was unequivocally pursuing a more normative identity than the other.

The situation was found to be different within the dimension of means. As a starting point, the EU enjoyed a less dire approval rating amongst the Egyptian populace than the US when analysed in terms of attraction. This is important because attraction can also be classified as the most normative of the soft power means examined within the remit of this study. However, in the realm of argumentation, it was found that neither actor viewed the Egyptian government or civil society as equal interlocutors, and the common lifeworld condition did not hold in either the communication between Egypt and the EU or the correspondence between the Egypt and the US. On the other hand, the remaining soft power means – namely shaming, the conferral of prestige, framing and agenda-setting – were utilised extensively by both the EU and the US. Nonetheless, two key differences visible between the actors need to be elaborated upon. As part of its strategy of conferring prestige, the American administration stressed the positive role of the Egyptian military even before President Mubarak’s decision to step aside. The EU, on the other hand, only pandered to the army’s vanity at crucial junctures during the post-Mubarak