The anniversary of the 1973 war with Israel and the breakdown in Egyptian national memory

Abstract:

This paper explores the reconfiguration of the history and memory of the Egyptian-Israeli 6 October 1973 war. It examines how the war’s anniversary was commemorated in 2012, when the Muslim Brotherhood was in power, and 2013, following the army coup against the Brotherhood in July. In 2012, then President Mohammad Morsi hosted a grand spectacle in Cairo’s sports stadium to commemorate the war—honoring military leaders but controversially inviting members of an Islamist party accused of assassinating former president Anwar al-Sadat, who was killed on the same day of 6 October in 1981 in the commemoration ceremony.

In 2013, army supporters used the 40th anniversary of the war to voice support for the army in its current confrontation against the Muslim Brotherhood. On the other hand, the Brotherhood called for protests on the anniversary day in a direct challenge to the army and its narrative of national history. Thus, the army used the anniversary to ‘remind’ Egyptians of its nationalist role and push for the forgetting of how it is now fighting an internal enemy. The Brotherhood sought to resist that army-centric temporal arrangement. Each side sought to symbolically oust the other from Egyptian history and memory—showing how fragile the difference between making history and commemorating it can be.