

The Rebel

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SUPPLEMENT 1

EDITORIAL

The Rebel

Felix Lang and Malcolm Théoleyre

Who is the rebel in the Middle East and North Africa? Translating the 'rebel' in the Arab spring context bears lexical and semantic difficulties, but, most of all, it requires to guard oneself from western liberal bias. Discussing different notions of 'the rebel' and related Arabic terms

such as 'thā'ir' and 'mutamarrid', this article introduces META issue #6 on 'The Rebel'.

Keywords: Rebel; Arab Spring; 1848; Terrorists; Translation; Revolution; Islamism

"Arab Spring," "Arab uprisings," "Arabelion"¹—after Ben Ali had boarded the plane to Jeddah on January 14, 2011 and Mubarak resigned from office less than a month later, the European and American public did not have to wait long for a range of labels to mark the historic dimension of the events taking place in the Middle East and North Africa. The "Arab Spring," it seems safe to say, has won out over the other contenders.

Reading the 2011 uprisings from a perspective that keeps in mind the Springtime of the Peoples from 1848 is akin to "comparing the incomparable," as Roger Heacock admits. The Springtime of the Peoples, which inaugurates the adjunction of "Spring" and "revolution," was a wave of political uprisings that swept through Europe in 1848, all of which were suppressed within months by a reactionary backlash. Beyond the semantic legacy that unites the Springtime of the Peoples and the Arab Spring, Heacock believes that the comparison between both revolutionary events has much heuristic value, especially when considering what he calls "Sicilian-Syrian and French-Egyptian dyads," in which the contexts of 1848 and 2011 share structural similarities in terms of the respective causes of the uprisings and how events unfolded (30). Sadik Al-Azm also underlines such structural correspon-

dences, since the “unfolding of the Arab Spring can be connected to classical European revolutionary politics and the intellectual energies expended on the theorization of these politics” (274).

Be that as it may, “Arab Spring” was not conceived simply as a historical analogy: born as a catchphrase (Keating), it nonchalantly integrates events into a European narrative of revolutionary “springtimes,” a narrative whose inner impetus and ultimate trajectory is the idea of “enslaved Europe’s sudden realization of its possible liberation” (Fejtö); moreover, it signifies the burgeoning liberal minds that crafted radical socialism and social democracy: the “forty-eighters” (Aghulon 237). Socialists or liberal democrats, naïve for believing that Democracy is a self-evident horizon (Tocqueville, 827), in European memory the “forty-eighters” have nonetheless remained distinct from conservatism and reaction (Aghulon 237). Thus, the idea of a “springtime” is indissolubly tied to the spirit of progressivism embodied by the 1848 rebels.

In this issue of META, we wish to explore the relevance of the notion of Arab Spring by looking at the actors behind the 2011 uprisings. Beyond the structural similarities pointed out by Roger Heacock or Sadik Al-Azm, we intend to examine the discourse in which the insurgents of the

Arab Spring frame their action and see if it reveals similarities with the “forty-eighters” and their narratives of progress, democracy and revolution.

Our entry point in our study of the 2011 uprising’s actors/narrators is “the rebel,” simply defined as “one who revolts against the government to which s/he owes allegiance.” The (apparent) neutrality of the term enables us not to prejudge the inclinations of the “overthrowers-of-established-order” we are to observe; especially when, following Eric Hobsbawm’s lead, we should not only be looking for the “progressive” rebel but also for those whose aims are less in line with a project of liberal democracy. We therefore want to address the following questions: what notion of the rebel do we find in the Middle East? Who are the 2011 rebels? To what extent can we say that a culturally-specific notion of rebelliousness is projected onto them? Does the Middle Eastern “forty-eighter” exist?

Naming the Rebel in Arabic: *Thā’ir* and *Mutamarrid*

The notion of the rebel has become instrumental in framing a wide array of actors involved in the Arab Spring uprisings and their aftermath. On the one hand, the term has been used widely, in academic discourse and in the media, to refer to armed

groups fighting the regime in Libya and Syria. On the other hand, the rebel has become a template for describing or portraying civil society actors: the rebellious youth of Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, the work of artists, musicians and cyber activists are all frequently viewed through the prism of rebellion.

However, “rebel” is not a neutral word in the European context. It is worth noting that the “rebels” of the German *Vormärz* of 1848 rejected the label and preferred to call themselves “revolutionaries,” a term increasingly associated with progress and a legitimate political project since the late eighteenth century (Koselleck 655, 760). This battle over the choice of words, the tension between meaning and connotation, requires that we pose the question of translation and restate the words of rebellion such as they are employed in the Arab context.

***Thā’ir*?**

Mohammed Harbi, Gilbert Meynier, and Tahar Khalfoune point to the fact that *thawra*, which denotes non-concerted rebellion short of a political program, is particularly suited to describing the 2011 uprisings, since these are not revolutions—the term usually used to translate *thawra* into English—but spontaneous revolts, sparked by despair. In fact, the authors

believe that even the 1848 “revolutions” would be better accounted for by the term *thawra* (13).

In the Middle East the word has acquired a positive glow in association with over 150 years of anti-imperialist struggles, from Urabi's revolt (*al-thawra al-urabiyya*) to the Algerian revolution, or “revolution of Algerian liberation” (*thawra al-tahrīr al-jazā'iriyya*), and came to be invested with connotations inspired from European revolutionary semantics. For instance, the National Liberation Front articulated a “revolutionary doctrine” inspired by western liberal and socialist legacies, drawing analogies with European causes such as Ireland's (Khelifa 124). As such, while *thā'ir* –“he who partakes in *thawra*”–would seem to be a good translation of “rebel,” it also appears to be shrouded in a similar semantic nebulous as that of the “forty-eighther,” with elements of a common inspiration. However, in the Middle East, the leap between *thawra* and *thā'ir* is not self-evident. In the case of Algeria, Gilbert Meynier explains that during the war of independence, the notion of *thawra* was understood as the social and political changes which would follow independence, while the conflict itself was more often referred to as “jihad.” As a consequence, the Algerian rebel combatants were systematically called *mujāhidīn*.

***Mārid* and Islam**

From the point of view of Sunni Islam, the rebel has suffered from his/her association with *'iṣyān* (“disobedience”), discredited by early interpretations of the Quran. Umayyad rulers and men of law established *'iṣyān* as contrary to the Prophet's injunction to “obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you” (4-59), and associated it with Satan, the first of disobeyers. The “rebellion verse” (49-9) gives a definition of the rebel based on factiousness (*ṭā'ifa*) and oppression/excess (*bagha*). Until the tenth century, hadiths conflating rebels and corrupters (*fasād*) flourished (Aillet, Tixier and Valet 478), and jurists linked rebellion to brigandry (*ḥarāba*) and even *fitna*. It would thus seem that the fundamental religious corpus of hadiths and early jurisprudence has bequeathed a negative image of the rebel.

This negative connotation was turned around by Islamism in the mid-twentieth century however (Bianquis). Just as the FLN, under the influence of its pious fringe, phrased revolution in religious terms, so too the followers of Qutb have legitimized their sedition by invoking the war on infidels. The existence of a distinct noun, *baghi*, was in fact what enabled this reversal: rebellion, heresy and brigandry,

woven into a single strain by early interpretations, could now be differentiated and kept separate (Aillet, Tixier and Valet 481); as a result, the legitimacy of sedition became a matter of interpretation. Moreover, Islamists could also count on well-established authorities, such as Ibn Taymiyya, to find the justification for killing an impious president: Anwar El Saddat (Kepel 339).

The notion of the rebel in European languages is of course no less multifaceted and ambivalent. In some respects we find clear parallels with the usage of *mārid* in Arabic: from the days of the Roman Empire until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, “rebellion,” “revolt,” “uprising,” “upheaval,” etymologically related words and their equivalents in other European languages would be used by the ruling powers in “top-down” definitions of violent political unrest (Koselleck 655). The Glorious Revolution as well as the American Revolution were qualified as rebellions by their opponents (Williams 272). In the colonial period we find a similar usage, whereby anti-colonial insurrections, be it against the Ottoman Empire in the 1916-1918 Great Arab Revolt or against the French Mandate in the Great Syrian Revolt (1925-1927), are qualified as illegitimate by the European colo-

nial powers. Arguably, some of this meaning survives in the current definition of rebel groups in political science, while it has shed at least some of its normative weight: as non-state actors engaged in armed struggle, rebel groups are contesting the established—if not necessarily legitimate—order.

The “Good Rebel”: Wired Youth and Blind Spots

This decidedly negative notion of rebels has been supplemented by a positive rebel discourse which began to emerge in the US from the 1950s onwards (Medovoi) and has grown to be an integral part of popular and, in particular, youth culture. The “rebel heroes” of American cinema of the 1950s (e.g. Marlon Brando, James Dean), joined later by the rebels of rock music, established (unarmed) rebellion as socially acceptable behavior. As Medovoi argues, the 1950s rebels of popular culture could be seen as preparing the ground for the more explicitly politicized intergenerational rebellion of the 1968 student movement and the increasing importance of identity politics. While things may look slightly different in Europe, 1968 certainly contributed to consolidating a rebel discourse in which the notion of rebellion, heretofore used to dispute the legitimacy of any uprising against the powers that be,

is appropriated by the rebels. Drawing on images of the bohemian and the outcast who purportedly resist the demands of conformity imposed by bourgeois society, the rebel-label becomes a mark of distinction for authenticity. In the decades following 1968, the appropriation of the rebel identity is maybe most conspicuous in music and the various subcultures associated with it: from reggae (Bob Marley’s “Rebel Music,” 1974), rock and pop (David Bowie’s “Rebel Rebel,” 1974) to punk, the rebel functions as a positive identifier. This figure of the heroic rebel who challenges social and political authority, meanwhile firmly anchored in European and American discourse if not beyond, also informs academic analyses of the Arab Spring.

One dominant figure with which the Arab Spring is associated in recent works is what Juan Cole calls the “New Arabs”: “The young people, from teenager through 34-year-olds, spearheaded the large social and political changes that erupted in 2011 and created cultural and political frameworks that their elders often then joined or allied with” (1). In Cole’s view, the 2011 rebels were born “between 1977 and 2000.” The outstanding feature of this brand of revolutionaries is its connection to social networks; its “struggles for democracy in the digital age” (Herrera

and Sakr 7). Pitched against its parents, the autocratic state and the Brotherhood, “Gen Y showed a new ability to form political coalitions across ideological lines, successfully cooperating across the divide between left-liberal and those devoted to political Islam” (Cole 27). Is this then the emblematic Middle Eastern rebel? In any case, they could certainly fit the positive discourse on “rebel youth” prompted by Western popular culture and which translates into analogies with 1848 and the “soixante-huitards” (the sixty-eighters). The academic gaze on youth counterculture and rebellious postures, which frames youth violence in “adult” political terms (Humphries), percolates in the works on the Arab Spring, with, in some cases, a clear sensitivity for popular culture representations (Wright).

Be that as it may, the 2011 “youth rebel,” presented in these terms is, by and large, a construct. In her contribution to this issue, **Ilka Eickhof** demonstrates how documentaries on the Cairo protests are dominated by Western production networks and narrative codes. They structure an archetypal, European-modelled figure of the rebel youth.

Matt Gordner, in his piece “Blogging Bouazizi,” also casts into question such a romantic notion of the rebel when he

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shows how the Tunisian cyber activists, who were at one time lauded as *the* decisive force behind the removal of Ben Ali from power, use their symbolic and social capital to further their respective entrepreneurial projects.

Giedrė Šabasevičiūtė's article for this issue, "Intellectuals and the People: Portrayals of the Rebel in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising," reveals how differently the "rebel youth" question was framed by Egyptian intellectuals in private newspaper op-eds. Their understanding of the uprisings was dominated by class bias: stressing the thuggishness of certain types of violence harbored by revolution, they expressed their fear of seeing the peaceful process overcome by popular class youth.

The issue of class is also central to **Carl Rommel's** contribution on the role of the football Ultras in the Egyptian Revolution. Tracing the development of a "rebellious subjectivity" among supporters of Ahlawy Football Club, Rommel argues that the Ultras, often framed as prototypical Arab Spring rebels, were actually quite late in espousing an unequivocal political stance in favour of the revolution, fearing that they would be associated with the 'thugs' of the lower classes.

By way of contrast to the Arab Spring rebels, **Sune Haugbolle's** article on the Lebanese activist Bassem Chit shows us a type

of Middle Eastern rebel who is much more closely and self-consciously connected to a European history of rebellion. As a Marxist and leftwing activist, Chit (d. 2015) actively inscribed himself in a political tradition directly connected to the rebels of 1848 and 1968.

The Forgotten "Rebel": Islamists and Jihadi-Salafists

Is it because Islamists only played a part later in the Arab Spring that they are considered another adversary to the "rage and rebellion across the Islamic world" (Wright), rather than rebels in their own way? In any case, the jihadi-Salafists of ISIS appear rebellious in at least two ways: first, in fighting Syrian and Iraqi regimes, ISIS's project reflects its filiation with Qutb's "rebellious" stance against the secular state (Kepel 44); secondly, ISIS is also a rebel faction facing up to al-Qa'ida, not only on the basis of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's opportunistic secession, but because the April 2013 proclamation of the caliphate is in contradiction with the al-Qa'ida *manhaj* ("plan"), according to which a caliphate can only follow the defeat of the '*adū al-ba'īd*, the "far-enemy": the West (Malka 24). Interestingly, even more than al-Qa'ida, ISIS's urge to recreate the caliphate seems to place it alongside the most revolutionary of primitive rebels and

their millenarian craving for The Day (Worlsey).

"Primitive rebels" (Hobsbawm) par excellence, ISIS insurgents are not usually branded as such, not even by themselves. **Thomas Richard** gives a detailed study of ISIS's propaganda films in this issue, and underlines the absence of the notion of *thuwwār*—revolutionaries—in the organization's videos. ISIS prefers terms such as *ikhwān* ("brothers") or *mujāhidīn*. However, if not necessarily in terms of its self-branding, Richard demonstrates however that ISIS is revolutionary in many ways: among other things, for instance, ISIS filmmakers will refer to Régis Debray and deploy an articulate discourse on revolutionary warfare.

We see how Western liberal opinions will find it hard to use the term "rebel," connoted positively, to an organization whose practices are seen as barbaric and, at any rate, contrary to the "forty-eighters'" aspirations for human rights. In line with US strategic semantics, one might prefer to make a distinction between progressive "rebels" and hostile "unlawful combatants" (Scheipers). The "modernist" bias, which Hobsbawm denounced in 1959, impacts on our approach to Islamist militants, especially armed jihadi-Salafists.

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This bias may explain why we speak differently about Tahrir youth's use of the Internet and jihadi use: as **Gilbert Ramsay** shows, the "terrorist use of the Internet" has become a subfield of its own, while the civil society activists' use of the Internet is investigated in a different academic context. Ramsay's cautioning against overstating the role of the Internet for jihadi recruitment and terrorist operations, however, could easily be transferred to the realm of cyber-revolutionaries.

To break with Western subjectivity, **Hyeran Jo**, **Rotem Dvir** and **Yvette Isidori** offer a taxonomy of armed Middle East rebel groups from the perspective of political science, based on categories they use for other rebel groups throughout the world. Their contribution enables us to extract the Middle East rebels from the normative canvas of Western post-revolutionary representations. As consequence, it appears that jihadi-Salafists hold a significant share in the 2011 rebellious context, while claiming that Islamists have ambushed the Arab Spring only underlines how they constituted the more ancient and established revolutionary force of the Arab World.

The various contributions to this issue, we believe, go a long way to problematizing the notion of the rebel as an analytical

concept, as a representational trope and an element of anti-authoritarian identities. It appears that the relevance of the 1848-(1968)-2011 parallel is challenged by the Arab uprisings rebel narratives, which are diverse and ambiguous in the face of progress, democracy, and even revolution. What remains missing from this issue is a reflection on the questions of gender and masculinity. The rebel, be it the armed rebel of the Free Syrian Army, the ISIS jihadi-rebel, the Cairene graffiti-rebel or the socialist rebel-intellectual is by and large identified with the male gender. The female rebel seems to occupy another blind spot in the history of rebellion and revolution in the Middle East and North Africa. Addressing this should be the objective of future research on the figure of the rebel.

Notes

¹ The term "Arabellion" was coined by the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Lerch).

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FOCUS

All That is Banned is Desired¹: ‘Rebel Documentaries’ and the Representation of Egyptian Revolutionaries²

Ilka Eickhof

Related to the increasing attention to so-called Egyptian revolutionary graffiti, one can also observe the appearance of “Rebel-Documentaries”, focusing on a similar group of protagonists: young, mostly male (graffiti) artists and revolutionaries. In this article, I will take a closer look at a selection of these documentaries and their inherent power structures that frame the representational mechanics with a focus on the western notion of ‘the revolutionary rebel.’ The case examples are: *Abdo-Coming of Age in a Revolution* (Jakob Gross, 2015); *Art War* (Marco Wilms, 2014); *Al Midan-The Square* (Jehane Noujaim, 2013); and *The Noise of Cairo-Art, Cairo and Revolution* (Heiko Lange, 2012). All four focus on the role and the supposedly ‘free, rebellious spirit’ of the young generation in Egypt.

Although taking different perspectives, the films sketch out a snap shot of a generation that is caught in an ongoing violent revolutionary process by (re)presenting a specific rebellious Egyptian identity. In discussing the works, I will look at different intertwined representational effects that are related to the composition, realization and commercialization of the films. Finally, the article raises questions about the self-positionality of the protagonists as well as to the localization of the films, and the existence of embedded power structures and symbolic capital complicit with neoliberal and other pressures.

Keywords: Representation; Othering; Revolutionary Art; Symbolic Capital; Egypt

‘Egyptian revolutionary art’ or ‘Egyptian Graffiti art’ has received worldwide attention since 2011. The topic itself has been (critically and uncritically) portrayed, discussed and evaluated in a multitude of articles, books, symposia, talks and exhibitions by researchers, curators, critics, photographers and artists (see for example Abaza, *Tourists and Graffiti*; Antoun; Eickhof; Shalakany). Linked to Egyptian revolutionary or graffiti art is the notion of the revolutionary rebel artist. The focus on young Egyptians and specifically artists also appears in a number of films that have appeared since 2011 and circulated in manifold international film festivals as documentary films, receiving various prizes from within the Western award economy.³ Now some accounts critically scrutinize the sudden hype on revolutionary youth and their specific, one-dimensional Western representation as young, rebellious, educated, modern, and globalized (El-Mahdi; Bennani-Chraïbi and Filieule, et al.) In the following essay, I will take a closer look at the orchestration of four visual accounts of what I will refer to as rebel documentaries in order to examine how a similar one-dimensional representation of the artistic rebel is constructed, which, in the end, (involuntarily) turns both film directors and protagonists into market products: *Abdo - Coming of*

Age in a Revolution (directed by Jakob Gross, 2015), *Art War* (directed by Marco Wilms, 2014), *Al Midan - The Square* (directed by Jehane Noujaim, 2013) and *The Noise of Cairo - Art, Cairo and Revolution* (Heiko Lange, 2012).

Theoretical Framing: Staging a Rebel Documentary

All four films are set within the genre of 'documentary film.' When we hear 'documentary film,' most of us will think that the film will show an objective reality in the sense of 'how things really are,' or, in other words, that the documentary film is based on the ambition to tell a truth, the idea of the "purity of the image," and with it the "assumptions about transparency, immediacy, and singularity of meaning" (Sabea, Westmoreland 2). This truth, however, is constructed through the regulatory means of image selection, camera operation, musical underlining, narrational intentionalities, titles, etc. Other tools are so-called validating devices like camera jiggles, graininess, bad focus or other 'accidents.' These devices, which we encounter in all four films, serve as an indication that the director did not control the event he or she was recording (Ruby, *Image*) and convey proximity.

The problem is that classical documentary filmmaking is a "system of cinematic rep-

resentation that is said to produce sober, unauthored texts through which the world supposedly tells itself, without any ideological intervention from its author" (Godmilow 3). Although I would assume that the aforementioned filmmakers Gross, Wilms, Noujaim and Lange would not claim that their work is neutral, documentary films do act as authorities to the audiences because their images are assumed to be truth, even though they are fiction (Trinh T. Minh-ha). They "claim the pedigree of the real and all the attributes and privileges of the real" (Godmilow 4). In the end it is the surveillance camera which comes closest to the actual common understanding of a documentary (Plantinga 52).

The way documentary films are built and the way they use reflexive elements lead to questions of authorship and representation—what do we see, who do we see, and how does it talk to us? Although all four films differ regarding their means of production, plot line, funding and circulation experiences, they do have in common that they represent their protagonists as rebel heroes in one way or another – smooth, mature and confident as in *Noise of Cairo*, or young, chaotic and adventurous as in *Abdo*. Why does a German director need to catch the Cairene art scene's

voices to make them be heard again, to "bear witness to Cairo's vibrant artistic underbelly, as it raises its voice once again" (website noiseofcairo.com)? Why does another German director make a film about Abdo (Abdel Rahman Zin Eldin), who is "a young man looking for his identity" (website Abdo-film.de)? 'Why not?' one might think, yet this is not a sufficient answer since the history of who makes whose voice not only heard, but also matter is strongly connected to positionalities—and to the genre of documentary. This is tied to another intrinsic power dynamic, namely the ability and the freedom of movement: who makes a documentary about whom and for whom, who has the passport to travel (in this case to Egypt), the cash to stay for an extensive period of time and shoot a film (whether self-financed or with funding), and who has the social and educational capital to do so, plus the cash to pay the fixers—and who does not? Where do these documentaries take place?

Film directors Gross, Wilms and Lange financed their works on their own for a long period of time, sometimes facing precarious periods, motivated maybe for the sake of art, of a political project, of believing in something, of receiving attention, and/or of receiving symbolic capital which might translate into funding for

future film projects. However, it is also the protagonists who gain capital. In *Abdo* as well as in *The Square*, working on the film with the person who later appears as the filmmaker was a shared experience for the protagonists, and often a deep friendship evolved out of it, at least for the time of the filmmaking process. "Documentaries are often regarded as elaborate home movies by the people in them. Subjects become

'documentary pop stars' and realize their 15 minutes of fame rather than critically examine how their images are constructed and the potential impact on audiences." (Ruby, *Speaking* 50). Based on personal conversations, some of the protagonists recounted that they were rather disappointed after the films were out and screened, for private reasons and expectations that were not met, but also because

of structural reasons like not being able to travel, or to suddenly recognize how limited the gained social and symbolic capital was for them in the end.

In "A Thing like You and Me," Hito Steyerl refers to David Bowie's song "Heroes" where he calls for a new brand of hero in the neoliberal times of revolution, his hero no longer being a subject, but an object:



The film posters of three of the four documentaries, visually connecting art/street art with the revolution.⁴

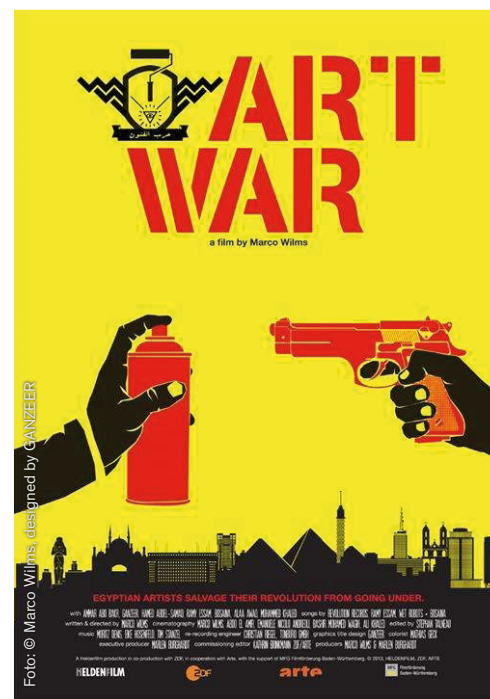


Figure 1: The Noise of Cairo. A Documentary About Cairo, Art and Revolution, 2012.

Figure 2: Art War. Egyptian Artists Salvage the Revolution from Going Under, 2014.

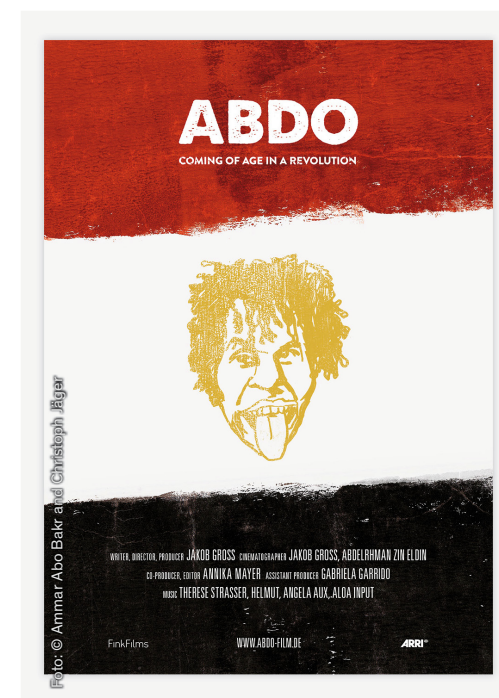


Figure 3: Abdo. Coming of Age in a Revolution, 2015.

“A thing, an image, a splendid fetish,” an image that can be multiplied, copied, looked at as a shiny product (Steyerl 49). This could be a simple critique raised when discussing the Western hype of Cairo’s graffiti in general or the rebel documentaries specifically. But the representation of the rebel in the rebel documentaries is not only objectifying ‘the Other,’ since the protagonists of all films mentioned either filmed themselves or for the most part believed that they genuinely represented themselves. It is the objectification of the subject in between the representation and the represented which is desired on both sides, and in which process agency is being lost—from both the protagonists and the filmmakers. Both cater in one way or the other to a market and become a market product regardless of their personal motivations as film director or protagonist. “I was reminded of the fall of the Wall. I wanted to document an actual revolution, to film people who were the age I had been in 1989,” states Wilms (MacLean). Lange hoped to transport an atmosphere, a “photograph from that time, a snapshot of a moment” (Gad), and Noujaim aimed to “tell the story through the eyes of characters” (npr). “I make films because I’m curious about a story, not because I know the answers,” said Noujaim (Kelsey). The attempt to catch a

unique historic moment, however, is almost impossible. The narratives are contested, memories are aestheticized, and representations are based on intrinsic power structures of who represents whom. Therefore, constructing a narrative that derives out of a moment of sudden hype can be a hazardous undertaking, because it tends to strengthen a singular story only (see Abdallah; Aly; Downey; Harutyunyan). It goes without saying that documentary films present a selective, exiguous point of narration within a contested frame. But why do the rebel documentaries get so much attention in international Western film festivals? Which need does the artist rebel as a product of consumption fulfill, emotionally or financially?

Apocalypse Now! A Rebellious Entertainment Industry

The interview-based documentary *The Noise of Cairo – Art, Cairo, and Revolution* (2012) is the calmest, most static film of the four. It was shot in ten days and without a budget. The atmosphere during the shooting in the summer of 2011 is euphoric and positive. Yet for the audience, it remains unclear how the interviews were structured, who asked the questions, in what language, and what these were. Language and spectatorship in the sense of who is being represented to whom is

crucial in terms of representation. Missing Arabic subtitles in the documentary (Arabic is dubbed to English but not vice versa) suggest an English-speaking audience. The English-only website promotes the documentary as “a cinematic adventure following the interplay between art and revolution,” with artistic expression being considered “nothing but a threat to the status quo.” The film promises us the “flourishing” art scene “as it raises its voice once again”: “The artists of Cairo, who refused to quiet down, come together to be heard.” And so we listen to “[t]welve influencers from Cairo’s cultural scene that lead us on a journey to understand the unique role artists played during the revolution in Cairo” (noiseofcairo.com), though one of the speakers admits that she has not exhibited her work in Cairo since 2004. The twelve narrators vary in age, gender and class, they are given time to speak and to raise and develop their thoughts, and most of them act comfortably on camera. Among the interviewees is a gallery owner from the upper-class neighborhood of Zamalek. Her part is left without musical overtone, followed by an underlying oud melody which later changes to an instrumental *oriental* tune (which reappears). The musical tone shifts to what sounds like simple cello and viola tunes when William Wells (Townhouse Gallery) speaks. The

classic cello/viola/saxophone tune alternates throughout the film with the more traditional Arabic one. We also see Graffiti Artist Keizer represented as the rebel par excellence, hoodie covering most of the face, meeting in the dark at night, blurry lights in the background. His presentation feeds an image of the male rebel, of someone doing something illegal, against a system that shall not know about his existence. Another observation is that some interviewees in *The Noise of Cairo* receive more representational capital as compared to others: for example a man who talks, but is only being referred to as "Osama, Street-Art Project." Both Osama, whose full name is not revealed, and Osama Moneim are not listed as interviewees on the film's website. Although both protagonists appear as speaking to the audience, they are attributed with less significance in regards to representation—a choice of the film director. Shots of city sites and graffiti murals hinting at aspects of urban (imagined Western) modernity and a young, alternative, cool scene interject the narrations, an atmospheric change that is used in all four rebel documentaries. The level of rebel-ness in this specific documentary is subtle; all in all the film seems to be calmly directed, without necessarily chasing the excitement of the revolution—a sharp contrast to the other films.

Yet the images of the graffiti artist at night, the dancing unveiled woman, the young Arabic speaking artist, the middle-age novelist, and the veiled woman on stage cater to a Western imagining of the artistic revolutionary rebel of Cairo, no matter if intended or not by the filmmaker.

The documentary *Art War* (2013) is a different kind of rebel documentary: the music underlining the action-packed visuals is dramatic, regulating the emotional conception. The film marches fleetingly through a chronological order of events announced by staged information boards, such as "June 2011, After the fall of Mubarak the people demand freedom and participation," "January 2012, Graffiti artist paints street fight of Mohamed Mahmoud directly on the wall," "February 2012, Islamists begin propaganda war against revolution," and many more. The documentary ends with "July 2013, The army ousted Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood." The story line is accompanied by explanatory statements from German-Egyptian political scientist Hamed Abdel-Samad, known for his critique of Islam. The main language of the advertisement for all of the films, including *Art War*, is English, not Arabic. This hints at an imagined spectatorship that is not necessarily literate in Arabic, and to a film director who might

not command the language and/or chooses to ignore a certain audience. The use of language counts for the understanding of the context and the social text within which language is embedded. With the translation of Arabic to English subtitles, many nuances for the non-Arabic speaking audience are lost, such as hints in dialect that are indicative of class, the use of certain words, fine humorous nuances, connotations, critique, etc.

Embedded in the timeline of *Art War* is the representation of the characters woven around it, centering on three male artists/graffiti artists with images of them working at night and exposing themselves to danger, in one case urging the filmmaker in direct interpellation to turn off the light on the camera. Next to these images, which support the notion of the rebel as a construct of a young man, are curtailed representations of women as mainly provocative outcasts, perpetuating the focus on their bodies, such as the reduction of the talented artist Bosaina as sexy *agent provocateur* or through Aliaa Elmahdy's naked self-portrait. Also 'the Muslim' in disguise for religious Muslims, aka Brotherhood members, is represented in a pejorative way: for example, Mohamed from the Salafi Al-Nur Party, who has a significant beard, poor com-

mand of English, and voices not very well conceptualized political ideas. This stands in contrast with how the Muslim Brotherhood member Magdy Ashour in *The Square* is portrayed: a complex, intelligent figure who is sometimes doubtful, allows a change of mind, and appears as open and warm-hearted towards his friends. In *Art War*, the religious beliefs of the rebel protagonists are not scrutinized, vocalized, or negatively represented. The areligious rebel in line with Western imaginings is favored over the as obviously religious constructed one.

On the Facebook page of *Art War*, we learn that the documentary shows how “[y]oung Egyptians use graffiti, new music and art to enlighten their fellow citizens and keep the revolutions of the Arab Spring alive against the odds” (Facebook page *Art War*, 21.09.2015). The fact that it is a German film director who chose to represent the artist’s way to ‘enlighten their fellow citizens’ opens up questions of representation and positionality.

The material collected and presented is impressive and often very personal—images of the artists sleeping, in their homes, with their friends, with the director tailing along. Yet the timeline and the emotional regulation through the combination of sound and images blur the quality of the raw material that is accessible,

and the use of regulatory means mirrors the film director’s positionality and his construction of a specific Egyptian young rebel, presented as ‘like us,’ a globalized, secular youth from a similar social field.

The Square presents itself as “a revolutionary film about change and the power of people” (thesquarefilm.com). An “[...] Emmy-winning, street-level view of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution [that] captures the astonishing uprising that led to the collapse of two governments,” advertises Netflix, and this one-hour-and-forty-three-minute epos was also nominated for an Oscar. The film follows several people involved in the revolution and tries to capture different positions and political perspectives on the events. Representing voices from various backgrounds in terms of class, gender, religion and age is one of the big assets of this film.

The film starts with Ahmed Hassan, the main protagonist, telling us that he paid his school tuition by selling lemons in the street. From there he guides us through the events, often contemplative, reflecting on what is happening: “Let me tell you how the story began...”

The image of the protagonists alternates between them being filmed and them speaking directly into the camera. We see them discussing with each other, laugh-

ing, crying, as each one is shortly introduced, then their stories woven together. The timeline that guides us through the events appears more neutral than in *Art War*, and less agitated. The represented events are not only intersected by the English information that appears on the screen, but also by a painting hand (artist Ammar Abou Bakr, whom we also encounter in the films *Art War* and *Abdo*) connecting the revolution with an artistic touch and with the whole complex of the rebel as the artistic activist. The presented images are sometimes extremely graphic: people overrun by cars, mourning, bodies being carried bleeding, wounded and dying. The rebel-ness in this film is subtle again, a smooth repositioning of emotions, igniting empathy with the different characters, be it Ahmed Hassan the narrator and working class rebel, or Magdy Ashour, member of the Muslim Brotherhood, whom we see struggling with trying to find out what is right and what is wrong. The rebel here is represented as a thoughtful person who fights back, theorizes, consults with friends and older members of his family, and is in solidarity well beyond his own borders of belief and ideology. Apart from the protagonists we also hear and see an army spokesperson and a major commenting on the happenings, presenting different opinions and trying to

capture the entangled societal complexities. Due to the course of events that constantly challenged the plot of the film, filmmaker Noujaim and her team tried to mend and adjust the film material, but at some point gave up and let the film be a film, a document of a certain narrative of a certain time. Overall this reflects the diversified approach of the work.

The most recent release of these four rebel documentaries is *Abdo - Coming of Age in a Revolution* (2015). Young Abdo, an "Ultras football fan, atheist and anarchist with a Salafist family background," is "looking for his identity" with "[h]is camera [being] his only certainty in a world that is upside down" while his "life [...] is shaken by the Egyptian revolts and the football massacre of Port Said," and he becomes a rebel without a cause (website abdo-film.de/en/). The documentary starts with Abdo looking straight into the camera—it is evening or dawn—as he speaks in Arabic. The English subtitles read "Who are you who are you | you are nobody | you are nobody | nobody | I am also nobody | Don't laugh... | when it's not funny | and don't cry | when it's not supposed | to make you cry |." Throughout the film Abdo talks in Arabic or broken English, and sometimes we hear questions addressed to him in English. Abdo walks around, spends time with his friends, drinks beer, plays a

game, talks about girls, university, Gaza, plays football, and takes care of his little dog. The film seems put together out of arbitrary puzzle pieces of someone's life, with no commentator, narrator or text, and only disrupted by the aforementioned atmospheric change of scenery: all of a sudden barricades, fights, loud noises, people with gunshot wounds stumbling towards the camera, apocalyptic images, demonstrations, violence, people running. At this point it remains unclear if we are looking at Abdo's material, who is filming as well, or at the director's.

In one sequence we see Abdo dancing and rotating with the camera tight around his head. Another one is located on the wall, pointing at him, and he looks straight into it, aware of being filmed. He is turning in circles, the music is loud, and then we see the film director Gross sleeping in the adjacent room, Abdo filming him. Similar to *The Square*, both the director's and the protagonist's film material is used. The film ends with a close-up of Abdo filming in the metro. He remains silent, thoughtful. The portrait of Abdo as a young man in his 'rebel years' during the revolution is carried out in a careful and loving way. The director, one of the youngest of the four presented here, seems to be a friend of Abdo. What makes this documentary interesting for the market? Is it the repre-

sentation of an energetic Egyptian young man who drinks and smokes and frolics with his friends that seems contradictory to our imaginations of a young Arab? Does the film challenge a set stereotype, or exoticize the young revolutionary rebel who acts in the margins and rebels against societal standards?

According to Caroline Francis in "Slashing the Complacent Eye," film is always ethnography: "[E]thnographic films are inherently always about the filmmaker because film is a medium of construction [...]" (85). The film directors appear visually in *Art War* and *Abdo*, initiating a twist in thought: somehow their appearances remind us of their role, but concurrently they seem to be absent from the film-making and editing process because they themselves appear as an edited, selected image, which confirms the idea of a documentary being something objective, truthful and authentic. At the same time, their appearances construct themselves partly as heroes, as 'I have been here, too,' or as taking a bit of rebel aura from figures like Abdo or Ammar.

In the end it is the film director who is cutting and choosing the material and setting it up in a distinct timeline. His or her interpretation and representation is based on a choice of a plot structure, and/or a

choice of a paradigm of explanation, biased by moral or ideological decisions (White 304). Even forms of collaborative filmmaking can be challenged when asking “[w]ho raised and controlled the funds? Who owns the equipment? Who is professionally concerned with the completion of the film? Who organizes and controls the distribution?” (Ruby, *Speaking* 50). In all four cases, this power lies in the hands of the respective director, although the protagonists might have been involved in the process. In the end the films fail when it comes to sharing the symbolic capital that is being accumulated as film director (however it might have been not intended to share this form of capital in the first place). It remains open for debate whether or not this form of symbolic capital is shareable—whether as film director, author, researcher, etc.

Conclusion: The Way They Are

If you want to know what the undercommons wants [...], what black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people want, what we [...] want, it is this – we cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part; so we refuse to ask for recogni-

tion and instead we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls. (Halberstam 6)

Part of the motivation behind directing these documentaries might have been a sense of solidarity and the wish to support the struggle for the one, truthful narrative of *how things really were*. Yet the underlying message of showing support or solidarity with the revolution or those who were involved through producing a rebel documentary reinscribes an asymmetrical power dynamic. We, the Western middle-class audience who attend film festivals and visit art house cinemas for which these documentaries have been tailored, look at the protagonists in awe, maybe thinking ‘they are just like us.’ Watching a documentary, however, we as an audience tend to forget that documentarians “speak about and never speak for a subject and that films never allow us to see the world through the eyes of [the subject], unless [the subject] is behind the camera” (Ruby, *Speaking* 60). The matter of who represents whom is one that we not only encounter in the directing of the moving image, but also regarding the written word. It is a matter of fieldwork and posi-

tionality, of class, gender, and other intersections that construct subjectivities, and of the question of who gets to speak about whom, and who gets the capital out of speaking about whom.⁵

The young educated male/female artist/revolutionary/rebel is an object of consumption because we ascribe a certain meaning to it: the signification works, telling a story that is widely accepted to manufacture commonality. The interest for ‘the rebellious Other’ was accompanied by a hope for a change from abject representations that were prevalent post 9/11, and indeed these new images of the revolutionary rebel were far from the usual pictures of ‘the Muslim’ (see literature cited in first paragraph). But the non-acknowledgement of epistemological power (who tells the story?) makes it difficult to re-shift the inherent gaze of a privileged audience when the ‘famed subalterns’ of the documentaries persistently remain on a line of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ A contribution that aims at supporting a cause based on serving a hype- and interest-driven attention economy (*Aufmerksamkeitsökonomie*) leaves the signifier of solidarity or support empty. All that is banned is desired, the rebel fighting a cause that we can relate to is celebrated. A deconstruction of social structures and dynamics is needed, espe-

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cially when such structures rely on privileges that prevent and impede the very destruction of them. In that case power remains as part of a normative, unquestioned construction, regulating the image of the rebel we like: a form of Muslim-ness (or any constructed Other-ness) that is in

line with subjectivities that the West imagines as less threatening—and as long as he or she does not rebel against us.

Notes

¹ "All that is banned is desired" is also the title of a world conference on artistic freedom of expression, 25-26.10.2012, held in Oslo, Norway and co-funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

² This article would have not been possible without the comments and critique of my reviewers, whom I would like to refer to as silent co-authors. Whoever you are, I am very grateful for the time you invested in this piece, and the patience you must have had when reading it. Your comments and thoughts will guide me in my further work. Thank you!

³ Alisa Lebow's UK-funded English-only project website 'Filming Revolution' (filmingrevolution.org) gives an interesting yet limited overview of documentary and independent filmmaking in Egypt since the revolution. Not further mentioned in this article because of the difference in approach and genre are the works that the non-profit media collective Mosireen Collective uploaded, or Peter Snowden's carefully composed film *The Uprising* (2013), a film that is entirely based on videos made by citizens and long-term residents of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen, or the film *The Secret Capital* by Samuli Schielke and Mukhtar Saad Shehata (2013).

⁴ The poster of the film *The Square* could not be included as META was unable to obtain permission from the copyright holders. [F.L., editor]

⁵ An article discussing Alice Goffman's sociological analysis of the lives of young black men in West Philadelphia quotes her father Erving Goffman: "The most difficult thing about doing fieldwork is remembering who you are." This case is particularly interesting to me because Goffman tries to negotiate her symbolic capital in and with her work: She shares her royalty checks evenly with the book's characters, and they refer to the book as 'our book'.

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Intellectuals and the People: Portrayals of the Rebel in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising

Giedrė Šabasevičiūtė

Apart from attempts to account for the massive support provided by Egyptian writers to President Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi, the 25th of January uprising was rarely explored from the standpoint of Egyptian intellectuals. Yet, during the uprising, some did take an active part in the events, such as forging an image of the revolution and its actors through opinion columns. However, by promoting what became an iconic image of the Egyptian protester—middle class youth, peacefully seeking liberty and rights—they drew on the same discourses as those adopted by

their counterparts in the semi-official press: the belief that the uprising threatened to unleash the oppressed masses who would embark on the destruction of the State. This article attempts to shed light on the conditions associated with the 25th of January revolution by exploring op-eds published in several Egyptian private dailies during the first years of the uprising.

Keywords: Egypt; 25th January Revolution; Intellectuals; Op-Eds; Violence

In parallel with the demonstrations that filled the streets during Egypt's most recent revolution, an equally important battle was taking place in the columns of the local press. While protesters were demonstrating against Mubarak's regime, opinion writers in private newspapers were busy saving the reputation of those demonstrating. In their articles, they were fighting against the negative framing of protesters in the government-influenced press, which depicted them as vandals, unemployed thugs or foreign conspirators willing to destroy the country. To counter these accusations, pro-revolutionary columnists promoted what became an iconic image of the Egyptian protester: the middle class youth, peacefully seeking liberty and access to rights. Far from being random choices, the images and words selected to depict the protesters reveal the dominant perceptions as to which social group had the right to engage in protest movements and which did not. They also tell us about the type of action that was tolerated in protests, how long it lasted, and the highest price that was acceptable in achieving political change. In short, there were certain conditions and limits associated with the revolution that were set by its normative image. It was informed as much by the local political

culture and history as by the international heritage of previous revolutions.

This article attempts to shed light on the conditions associated with the 25 January revolution by exploring opinion columns published in several private Egyptian newspapers throughout the three years of the uprising, i.e. from January 2011 to January 2014. In total, 50 opinion articles were analyzed (28 from 2011, 9 from 2012 and 14 from 2013) from five Egyptian private daily newspapers (al-Shurūq, al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, al-Taḥrīr, Veto and al-Wafd). There are specific reasons behind the decision to focus on this section of the private Egyptian dailies. While much of the scholarly attention has been devoted to the framing strategies adopted by different Egyptian media outlets during the uprising (Hamdy and Gomaa), the voice of columnists writing in these newspapers has remained unexplored. Yet, during these years, the commentary section of private Egyptian newspapers became a privileged space of intellectual intervention, where various authors shared their views on the events. Furthermore, despite the conflicting stances adopted by both the private and semi-official press towards the uprising, at least during the initial 18 days leading up to the ousting of the president, Hosni Mubarak (Klaus), the commentary section presents a striking rhetorical homogeneity

used to define the revolution and its actors. As the uprising progressed, columnists in both sections of the media increasingly came to share similar concerns, namely how to prevent the uprising from spreading to the popular classes which, according to them, threatened to turn the revolution into uncontrollable chaos. By fighting the negative portrayal of the movement as disseminated through the semi-official press, columnists were in a position to promote a romanticized image of the protester, which drew extensively on the same discourses as the ones adopted by their opponents: the belief that the uprising threatened to unleash the oppressed masses, who would then embark on the destruction of the State. Eventually, the main difference between the writers employed by the semi-official press and those engaged by private newspapers was their perception of the limits they set in relation to the revolution.

I begin by providing some theoretical and historical background which will help to capture the flavor of one particular newspaper section, namely the commentary. This background is crucial if we are to understand the power relations that existed within the Egyptian journalistic field and which were to determine the various stances adopted during the uprising. Following this, I proceed by considering

the issue of the use of violence in the Egyptian revolution. In the light of the stated necessity to adopt peaceful modes of protest, outbursts of violence that accompanied the uprising prompted intellectuals to define the limits between the legitimate and unwelcome protest groups. Finally, in the last section, I examine the most common depictions of the unwelcome rebels, which were informed by the collective fear associated with the hunger revolution and the threats this presented to the survival of the State.

Op-Eds as a Battlefield of the Revolution

Before turning to the various representations of the protester, it is important to provide some theoretical and historical tools in order to map the space in which they were disseminated. The commentary section in a newspaper can be defined as a space for opinion, located at the overlapping intersection of several institutional orders, mainly the fields of journalism, politics and intellectual activity (Jacobs and Townsle 13). Forged in the American context, this definition also seems to correspond well to the Egyptian case, where the political stances adopted by private newspapers, and the increased significance of their op-eds, were largely determined by the position they occupied in the field of Egyptian journalism. After the

emergence of the private press in the 2000s, the protests, strikes and general social criticism that surged during the same decade were to become the main focus of its coverage (Ben Néfissa). Rather than simply being a response to political sympathies, it was actually a strategy aimed at survival in a field dominated by semi-official newspapers and journalists. Deprived of the privileges usually enjoyed by the state-influenced press, such as access to sources, private newspapers had to become innovative in order to establish a new journalistic formula (Benaziz 33-37). Critical, well-informed and eloquent commentaries, written by famous writers, activists, academics, doctors, experts and other members of burgeoning Egyptian civil society, became one of the main ingredients in the successful formula adopted by the private press (41-42). In their study devoted to opinion pages, Ronald N. Jacobs and Eleanor Townsle note that columnists often speak with different voices which are not easy to reconcile. The position from which they speak tends to switch between that of political advisor, addressing the elites, and teacher, providing the readership with the background to understand certain events or situations. Accordingly, the position of columnists is defined by the tension between access to political elites and institutions,

such as the media, and the commitment to detachment, which is more easily aligned with the intellectual claim of autonomy (Jacobs and Townsle 28). The present article suggests that during the Egyptian revolution the commentary section in private newspapers was defined by a similar ambivalence of positions, the one seeking to provide the readers with informed comment on the situation, and the other aiming to promote the interests of the movement. In other words, opinion authors sympathetic to the protests were not only sharing their analysis of the situation but were also consciously seeking to bolster support for the revolution by portraying it in a particular way. The battle of images and words waged between the private and state-influenced press as they sought to define the protests provided the framework for intellectual engagement during the revolution.

The expansion of opinion pages in private newspapers during the revolution is evidence of their increased significance for both readers and writers. Large portions of Egyptian society began to take a fresh interest in politics during the uprising, and naturally turned to op-eds in order to locate themselves within the new political setting. Some newspapers, such as al-Miṣrī al-Yawm, attracted up to half a million new readers in the first months of the uprising,

most of whom were particularly interested in opinion columns (Klaus). The newspaper reacted to this development by promoting its columnists as “those who were painting the image of the Tahrir revolution.”¹ The space allocated to opinion columns in the private press increased proportionally; in the daily al-Shurūq it expanded, for instance, from one page to two. The number of columnists also rose: between February and March 2011, al-Shurūq welcomed thirty-two new writers, some of whom were former contributors who, inspired by the fall of Mubarak, had returned to writing.² For at least the first 18 days of the uprising, to write an op-ed in a reputable newspaper (i.e. one that was not compromised by its previous stances towards the movement) was basically the same as the act of protesting in the streets, as is suggested by the tendency of authors to identify themselves with protesters, to reproduce slogans in their op-eds which were being chanted on the streets, or to portray their articles as being direct reports from Tahrir Square.³ As the intellectual legitimacy was redefined according to the stances adopted towards the movement, op-eds provided the most appropriate space to affirm one's loyalty to the revolution or to salvage one's reputation if it had been soiled by previous links to Mubarak's regime.⁴ The com-

mentary section of private newspapers was also the space where the corruption and prejudices of the semi-official media were unveiled and denounced, and where moves to reform the media institution in the “new Egypt” were presented.⁵ In the context of a pitched battle between various newspapers, opinion columns became an alternative battleground for the struggle taking place on the streets, with columnists seeking to promote particular images of the revolution.

Peaceful Revolution and Violent Rebels

Following Mubarak’s resignation, the air in Egypt was filled with the lyrical depictions of the protesters. Epithets such as “pure,” “selfless,” “noble” and “civilized” were repeatedly used to describe the movement and its actors. However, in addition to these romanticized depictions, there were more down-to-earth accounts which pointed to the level of education, middle-class credentials, cosmopolitan profile and an allegiance to peaceful modes of protest (Ismail, “Urban Subalterns” 865). It was these features of the legitimate protester that commentators invoked when they felt that the uprising was going beyond its predefined limits. In light of its goal of peacefulness, these limits were being set in relation to acts of violence.

Non-violent resistance was the official tactic advocated by the organizers of the initial protests associated with the uprising. The famous manual entitled “How to Revolt Intelligently” that circulated during its first weeks insisted on the need to keep protests peaceful, though it endorsed actions that might be held to be violent by some intellectuals, such as the occupation of official buildings. For example, the advance of the protesters on the Ministry of the Interior, situated in one of the back streets of the Tahrir Square, might be condemned by many columnists as irresponsible. But revolutions rarely follow a planned pathway, and the Egyptian revolution was violent from the very outset. As has already been noted by previous studies, street clashes, the burning down of police stations, armored security cars and official buildings were to be an integral part of the uprising (Ismail, “Urban Subalterns”; A. Ḥusayn). In addition to these acts, there were other less acceptable realities of the revolution, such as sectarian attacks, sexual harassment, looting, street crime and other forms of everyday violence that were feeding the all-pervasive rhetoric of *al-infilāt al-amnī* (“the dissipation of security”). One has to acknowledge, however, that these realities cannot be separated from the overall experience of the revolution. If we depart from its

romantic definition and focus on the sociological one—which understands it as an imbrication of multiple indiscernible motivations, aims and perceptions of opportunity (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule) then limiting the movement to its fragments to which we are sympathetic does not advance our objective of understanding revolutionary situations. As Samuli Schielke has noted, as much as they might seem distant, the rising up of Egyptians against Mubarak’s rule and the increase in street crime were the result of the same phenomena: “the broken fear,” which undermined social hierarchies at their multiple levels.

In line with the activists, columnists in private newspapers strongly advocated peaceful demonstrations, and expressed their concern over the potential for outbursts of violence. Commenting on the call to protest of the 25th January 2011, a columnist in *al-Shurūq*, for instance, invited protesters to offer flowers to the police in order to avoid misunderstandings that might lead to violent confrontations (‘Abdulfattāḥ, “Warda”). The decision to focus on non-violent modes of protest provided the ground for making comparisons between the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions and the wave of uprisings that had swept across Central Europe at the end of the 1980s (“Rasā’il”; El-Choubaki,

"Li-mā-dhā"). In the manner of these historical precedents, the Egyptian uprising was also expected to bring about the change in a swift and inexpensive manner. The considerable success achieved during the initial 18 days seemed to confirm these expectations.

As a result, columnists in private newspapers were keen on limiting the Egyptian uprising solely to its peaceful episodes. The adherence to the slogan *silmiyya* ("peaceful") was identified as the condition for belonging to the revolutionary camp, as revealed in the comment written by a columnist in al-Miṣrī al-Yawm who stated that the act of setting buildings and facilities on fire turned revolutionaries into "attackers, road bandits and thugs" (Ḥusayn, "Al-Qāhira"). Such acts "were not a part of the revolution," asserted the same author on another occasion, "and by no means are related to it" ("Al-Taḥaḍḍur"). The perpetrators "were not Egyptians," chimed in another columnist, thus setting the limits not only on the revolution, but also on Egypt's national community (Jūda). It is important also to highlight the tactical dimension of the portrayal of the Egyptian uprising as being peaceful. Amongst the numerous arguments advanced by opinion writers regarding the need to adhere to the peaceful modes of the movement, two were explicitly strategic in nature. The

first pointed to the efficiency of non-violent modes of protest, attested by the success achieved during the first 18 days. As for the second, it evoked the absolute need to retain the support of public opinion, or *ḥizb al-kanaba* ("the couch party")⁶ as boldly stated by a renowned Egyptian activist in al-Miṣrī al-Yawm (ʿAbdulfattāḥ, Silmiyya). Accordingly, one of the most common and efficient strategies employed to bolster support for the revolution was to attribute acts of violence, crime and lawlessness to the agents of the Mubarak regime. It was maintained that various parties of the former regime were acting behind the scenes with the intention of distorting the image of the revolution. In order to preserve the image of the uprising as peaceful, some columnists openly invited protesters to treat those who engaged in violence as "outsiders" (*dukhalā*) in relation of the revolution (ʿAlī Ḥasan; ʿAbdulfattāḥ).

However, the line between revolution and infiltration was to become blurred, as it was constantly being redefined according to the situation. As the uprising progressed, and street clashes proliferated, it was increasingly difficult to maintain the peaceful image of the movement. The two stormy winters of 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 produced notable shifts in the arguments justifying the advent of violence. The five-

day clashes that erupted in November 2011 in Muhammad Mahmud Street, and the emergence of the Ultras as a powerful political force after the Port Said massacre in February 2012, convinced some intellectuals that violence was deplorable but an inevitable reality of the revolution. The soaring anger against the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood that became widespread the following winter, which led to clashes and the torching of many Brotherhood offices throughout the country, definitely succeeded in burying the dream of a peaceful transition. It was during these months that, in contrast with previous years, violence started to be seen not only as a legitimate, but also as a necessary political solution (Schielke). The gradual adjustments in relation to the use of the slogan *silmiyya* in op-eds serves as a barometer against which to measure the progressive legitimization of violence. Street clashes that marked the end of 2011 led to a redefinition of the principle of the peaceful protest by including in its scope a definition of a defensive application of violence. A columnist in al-Miṣrī al-Yawm explained: "throwing stones against those who shower us with tear-gas is a peaceful act, as well as burning down police stations that unleash on our demonstrations dangerous offenders. Retreat is the opposite of a peaceful act, it's cowardice"

(Samīr). At the end of the following year, which was marked by a series of demonstrations organized by the Muslim Brotherhood in protest against the deposing of President Mohammad Morsi, the slogan *silmiyya* witnessed another shift in meaning: it came to be seen as the opposite of demonstrations that impeded the traffic, or during which posters were raised criticizing the army (Ḥusayn, “Widā’an”). Despite these shifts, the *silmiyya* slogan was not abandoned, as in the eyes of some columnists it embodied the very legitimacy of the Egyptian revolution.

The Spectre of a Hunger Revolution

The fear of violence that emerged in op-eds during the first year of the revolution was supported by certain collective representations of the Egyptian poor. The words used to describe perpetrators of reported or anticipated violence reveal the prevailing belief that the uprising should be prevented from spreading to the popular classes because it might result in chaos. The acts of violence were mostly attributed to forces related to the worlds of crime and poverty, such as “road-bandits” (*qattā’a al-ṭuruq*), “ex-convicts” (*arbāb al-sawābiq*), “individuals with dangerous criminal records” (*musajjalīn khaṭr*), “riff-raff” (*al-ghawghā’*), “the depressed” (*al-muḥbitīn*), “lost youth” (*al-shabāb*

al-dā’ī), street children, and the “proverbial thug” (*balṭajiyya*). In fact, it was mostly representations of the poverty-stricken as being groups naturally prone to violence and crime that were used to promote a positive image of the revolution.

The portrayal of the poor as being inclined to crime was not new. It was supported by the deep-rooted representations associated with popular areas in Cairo, identifying them as centers of crime, moral degradation and unruly conduct. As the works of Salwa Ismail have shown, since at least the 1980s these representations have been widely used in the official discourse in order to justify the enhanced security controls employed in popular quarters (“Political Life”). The image of these urban areas as sites of a generalized chaos are maintained by means of popular culture; for example by the films of the Egyptian filmmaker Khaled Youssef, who has made the subject of informal neighborhoods his favorite topic, and also as a result of numerous commentaries in the press that have portrayed them as “the belts of dynamite” encircling Cairo’s middle class quarters which have the potential to explode at any moment and invade them (Muntaşir). During the uprising, such predictions and the fears they invoked became particularly prominent. As suggested by the initial interpretations of the protests in Tunisia

that were published in the Egyptian press before they spread to Egypt, the spontaneous reading of the uprising in Egypt was that of a rebellion led by the poor (Kreil and Sabaseviciute). These fears derive from the pervasive rhetoric of “the revolution of the hungry ones” (*thawrat al-jiyā’*), which is deeply embedded in Egyptian social and political discourse. According to the narrative, hunger rebellions are inevitably destructive as they sweep away everything that stands in their way, or “devour the green and the dry” (*ya’kul al-akhḍar wa al-yābis*) as the favored Arab expression has it. These rebellions are portrayed as being driven by the sheer desire for revenge and savagery, drawing on classical literary illustrations of the animalization of the poverty-stricken (Poli). The image of *balṭajiyya*, the term commonly used in Egypt to define hit-men working on the payroll of various groups and replacing the rule of law, is the embodiment of the fear of the poor. Tellingly, during the uprising the figure of the illiterate and hungry thug was used by both sides on the frontline, i.e. those who accused the protesters in Tahrir of being effectively “bought” with meals from Kentucky Fried Chicken, and those who imputed violence to the thugs employed by the former regime.

It should be noted, however, that the poor in general were included in the uprising, and their presence provided it with the legitimacy associated with a “revolution of the entire people.” Nevertheless, the role attributed to them in opinion articles reveal the perceived need to preserve the firmly established social hierarchies, even in times of revolution. The urban poor were recognized as a revolutionary force mainly when they acted in unity with the protesters in Tahrir, helping them to protect neighbourhoods and properties from looters (El-Choubaki, “Thawra”; Farīd). On these occasions, they were also identified by reference to the positively connoted term, *al-busaṭā* (“the poor”). As Lucie Ryzova has argued, the battle in Mohammad Mahmud, led mostly by socially marginalized young men, might have been forgotten if it had not been for their spatial connection to the Square, populated by the predominantly middle-class crowd. In most cases, however, the underprivileged were generally held responsible for turning the revolution into chaos. It was the threat of infiltration on the part of the poor that a commentator in al-Shurūq evoked when arguing against labour and civil servant protests that spread across Egypt after the downfall of Mubarak:

In contrast to the civilized behaviour of the protesters in Tahrir and other

squares, most of the sectorial demonstrations that have appeared lately might lead to unparalleled chaos [...]. Some of these demonstrations have already degenerated as they were infiltrated by frustrated rabble who engage in the random destructions of public facilities [...]. As protests spread, some of them felt that it was their golden hour to regain their lost rights. And then, they tried to snatch for themselves what they saw as their right. (Husayn, “Anta’atī”, transl. by the author)

The fear that the poverty-stricken might be tempted to exact justice through their own actions became constant fodder for the argument that the role of the police and the authority of the State should be urgently restored (Abū al-Ghār “Intikāsa”; Ḥadīdī).

Given the entrenched fear of a hunger revolution, it was in the interest of pro-revolutionary intellectuals to portray the 25th January uprising as something entirely different. This was achieved by stressing the difference between political revolutions, defined as quests for freedom, and social rebellions, driven by the sole desire to fill empty stomachs (al-Ghazzālī; Faḍl; Muntaṣir, “Fāriq”). The difference between these two movements was crucial as it predetermined their outcomes, a fact noted by an academic in al-Shurūq, who stated

that revolts sparked by “the violation of basic needs, such as eating, drinking and reproducing” result in “replacing the dictator with a new one, more capable of responding to basic animal needs, but at the expense of providing for basic human needs” (‘Abdulfattāḥ, “Ḥayawānyya”). Social questions were indeed on the revolutionary agenda, according to the commentators, but they were dependent on political solutions, such as the introduction of free elections and the establishment of democracy (‘Isā). The hierarchy of demands (Abdelrahman) reflected the belief that the uprising should remain in the hands of the youth encamped in Tahrir. Related to that is one of the most common arguments used to promote the 25th January uprising, i.e. the claim that the latter saved Egypt from an impending hunger revolution. According to this argument, those who trembled at the prospect of a rebellion by the poor should have been grateful to the middle class youth who had taken on the responsibility for addressing the disastrous economic situation. They had been responsible for the inclusion of social demands in the slogans chanted in Tahrir, such as the demands for bread and social justice, and this was seen as a promise to save the country from the potential of a destructive class struggle (‘Alawī). “Since 2010 I knew that “chaos” (*fawḍā*)

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was about to come [...] (triggered) by the lost youth without hope or perspectives from informal neighborhoods"; confessed a columnist in al-Shurūq. "But the great revolution has stopped this from happening for the time being" (Abū al-Ghār, "Al-thawra", transl. by the author). The phrase "for the time being" is important here, as the threat of a hunger revolution would be evoked in the future every time the revolution revealed any perceived shortcomings. In contemporary Egypt, the image of an uncontrollable and destructive rebellion led by the poor serves as a barometer to measure the level of discontent against those in power. During the three years of the uprising, it was regularly used to threaten those in power: the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF),⁷ the Muslim Brotherhood⁸ and the current rule of Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.⁹ Not surprisingly, the coup (or the revolution) led by al-Sisi on the 30th July to depose Mohammad Morsi was also popularly credited as having saved the country from a rebellion on the part of the poor.¹⁰ The level of political significance attributed to this image reveals that the representations of the poor as a potentially destructive force were shared across the spectrum of political affiliations.

Conclusion

The ambivalence that surrounds the representations of the rebels reveals one of the most significant dilemmas that faced Egyptian intellectuals during the uprising: How to make a revolution in a world perceived as being Hobbesian? In other words, how to liberate a society without liberating certain classes whose involvement in the revolution might prove to be fatal for the survival of the State? As indicated by the words and images used by columnists to define the legitimate protester, the fears that the uprising might unleash forces leading to chaos proved to be a constant feature of the revolution. The conviction that Egyptian society was being exposed to internal threats reveals the prevalence of a certain political philosophy among Egyptian intellectuals, resting on the view that tends to see the State as a mostly coercive institutional power to which all the citizens are bound to fearfully demonstrate their respect (Goldberg and Zaki). It is revealing to observe how the representation of these forces shifted throughout the revolution. During the first years of the uprising, they were defined in terms of poverty and crime in line with the dominant representations of the poor in Egyptian popular culture. These representations expose inherent conviction that a revolution is a

risky venture in a country where the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants live below the poverty line. There was a fear that the poor would act alone, without waiting until the perceived higher political aims that had been expressed by the youth in Tahrir had been achieved. These arguments echo Hanna Arendt's reflections that maintain that "revolutions for freedom" are impossible in countries which suffer from acute poverty, where the satisfaction of bodily needs is defined by reference to urgency. Since the winter of 2012-2013, when the figure of the unwelcome rebels shifted from the hungry thug to the Muslim Brother, the fears it embodied were expressed less by social than by political vocabulary. The vision of the revolution advocated by columnists sympathetic to the uprising was thus limited from the beginning.

Notes

¹ See *al-Miṣrī al-Yawm* from the 6th February 2011 onwards.

² This observation is based on the study of op-eds published in *al-Shurūq* between the 11th February and the 30th March 2011.

³ See, for instance, a series of articles by Amr Hamzawi entitled "From Tahrir Square", published in *al-Shurūq* between the 4th and the 19th February 2011.

⁴ It was a widespread practice for politicians to start writing in the private press after their resignation from official positions, as well as for columnists who were associated with the semi-official press before the revolution.

⁵ See, for instance, countless op-eds devoted to the criticism of the semi-official media in *al-Miṣrī al-Yawm* in March 2011.

⁶ A derogatory term referring to the "silent majority" of Egyptians who followed the uprising through their television, comfortably seated on couches.

⁷ In July and October 2011, two pages entitled "the revolution of the hungry is approaching" (*thawra al-jiyyā' qādima*) were created on Facebook in order to criticize the repressive measures against protesters adopted by the military council.

⁸ The anti-Muslim Brotherhood newspaper Veto devoted its 29th January 2013 issue to the hunger revolution, maintaining that the living conditions of the poor had worsened during Muhammad Morsi's presidency.

⁹ For example, "Khubarā: 'Ala al-abwāb thawra al-jiyyā'." *al-Miṣrīyūn*, 18 May 2015. See, also, the excerpt entitled "Thawra al-jiyyā': Al-ṭūfān al-qādim 'ala Miṣr" screened on the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated channel *al-Mukkamālīn* and accessible on YouTube. <<https://www.youtube.com/>

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Troublesome Thugs or Respectable Rebels? Class, Martyrdom and Cairo's Revolutionary Ultras

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This ethnographic article explores the politics of Egypt's Ultras football supporters. The Ultras have frequently been heralded as some of the Egyptian Revolution's most prominent rebels, in particular, after the Port Said stadium massacre in February 2012, when 72 Ultras members were killed. However, this essay focuses on an earlier phase of violent clashes in central Cairo when the Ultras were highly ambivalent about the ongoing

protests. As the article shows, the fan groups were hesitant to join the demonstrations, which at the time were heavily associated with "thuggery" (*balṭaga*). Only after the death of one of its members did the Ultras whole-heartedly take on their rebellious subjectivity.

Keywords: Football; Masculinity; Class; Martyrdom; Egypt; Revolutionary Politics

Introduction

The Egyptian Ultras are well-organized groups of young football supporters, first established in 2007. These fans played an important role in protests and street fights at the time of the 25th January 2011 Revolution. Almost exactly one year later, on 1 February 2012, 72 members of Egypt's largest Ultras group, Ultras Ahlawy, were killed after a match at a stadium in Port Said. Particularly after this massacre, the Ultras gained a reputation as some of the revolutionary struggle's most archetypical rebels. The young football fans seemed to embody a combination of ordered masculinity and untamed bravery that the post-revolutionary nation required. In addition, their history of fighting the security state well before 2011 stood out as an epitome of the rebellious Egyptian youth's quest for political rights and freedom.

This ethnographic essay homes in on the development of the Ultras fans' status and reputation during the month of protests and violent clashes that raged in Downtown Cairo in November and December 2011. This was a period when classed and gendered debates about "thuggery" (*balṭaga*)¹ dominated public debates in ways that severely discredited those who were protesting. Through a close examination of the ways in which the leadership of Cairo's Ultras groups reacted and acted during

this short but eventful period, this essay illustrates how and why the death of one Ultras member became a turning point for the fan groups' aspirations and politics. In conclusion, it attempts a more general suggestion regarding the interlocking politics of martyrdom, class and notions of respectability.

The ethnography presented in the essay weaves together a variety of different types of data: media sources, secondary literature, interviews and participant observation. It is part of a larger anthropological research project on Egyptian football, for which I conducted 20 months of fieldwork in Cairo between 2011 and 2013. While the name of one of my interlocutors that appears in the text has been changed to ensure anonymity, I have chosen to keep the real names of journalists and individuals who are mentioned in the media sources that I use.

The Egyptian Ultras Movement, 2007-2011

The Egyptian Ultras movement began to take form in 2007. The two largest and most influential groups were from the outset Ultras Ahlawy (UA) and Ultras White Knights (UWK), supporting the two dominant Cairo clubs, al-Ahly and al-Zamalek, respectively.² Inspired by similar fan groups in Europe and elsewhere in North Africa, the Ultras represented a new type

of fandom that appealed to broad layers of Egyptian youth. The supporter groups hence grew rapidly; already in 2009, UA and UWK occasionally managed to mobilize more than ten thousand young men and teenagers in their respective *curvas*—the curved sections behind the two goals—at Cairo Stadium. Staging spectacular shows, involving songs, dance, powerful fire crackers (*shamarikh*) and grand, choreographed “entrance scenes” (*dakhlāt*, sing. *dakhla*),³ the Ultras dominated Egyptian fan culture numerically, visually and audibly in the last years before 2011 (Sherif Hassan, Personal conversation).

The popularity of the Egyptian Ultras is typically related to their dedication and strict, non-negotiable principles: cheer for 90 minutes no matter the result on the pitch; stand up throughout the entire match; travel to all games, home as well as away (Bashir 78-81). By observing these rules, the Ultras came to self-identify as distinct from more conventional supporters. For instance, the Ultras made a point of supporting their teams irrespective of wins and losses, and their club loyalties were understood to transcend the worship of individual players. Furthermore, the Ultras' insistence on always watching matches live at the stadium set them apart from the great majority of Egyptians who for various reasons opted to watch the

games on television. This oppositional ethos often found expression in catchphrases such as “against the media” and “against modern football,” sententiously summarizing the groups' loathing for the commodified, globalized and mediatized spectacle into which football has turned in recent decades (170-84; Kuhn).

The Egyptian Ultras' rebellious principles and attitudes were not only a key reason behind their appeal among the Egyptian youth. The same oppositional attitude also provided them with many enemies, both within the security state and in the football media establishment. Already in 2008, the police started to monitor and regulate the groups' activities, equipments and messages in the *curvas*, and as the Ultras refused to compromise, violent confrontations ensued between the fans and the security forces on several occasions (Sherif Hassan, Personal conversation). Criticism of the new supporters was also a regular and increasing feature in the sports press, where the Ultras were accused of violence, fanaticism, drug addiction, hatred and insults (Thabet 39-40). The reasons behind the groups' rapid growth were also questioned, as prominent journalists insinuated that the Ultras must be supported by some “political organization hiding behind the curtains” (45-46). In sum, Egypt's Ultras supporters were regularly portrayed as a

serious problem to be dealt with by a broad coalition of older individuals and established institutions in the last years prior to January 2011.

This more or less unified criticism of the Ultras fans' intentions, activities and politics drastically fragmented after the outbreak of the Egyptian Revolution. Contrarily, the Ultras were now increasingly portrayed as a vanguard of the revolutionary struggle. It is important to note the reluctance with which the supporter groups became enmeshed in the accelerating national-political developments. True to their explicitly non-political profile and principles, none of Cairo's Ultras groups actively encouraged their members to join the protests on Tahrir Square. However, many joined in "as individuals," and as a result, the football supporters' characteristic songs, flags and fireworks were very much present throughout the eighteen days of protests (Hassan). Because of their experience of efficient on-the-ground organization and street fights, the groups played an important role as protectors of the sit-in on the square, in particular on 28 January, the so-called Day of Rage (Dorsey; Zirin). Indeed, the Ultras movement's long-time aversion to, and struggle against, the police—summarized in the famous abbreviation A.C.A.B. "All Cops Are Bastards"—became

part of a dominant narrative of the revolution as an anti-authoritarian quest for "freedom," run by the "revolutionary youth" (*shabāb al-thawra*). In the years that followed, many journalists, activists and academics would note how the fan groups' particular history had "prepared" them for street fights and fostered a discipline and organization well suited for the revolutionary moment (Elgohari; Hamzeh and Sykes; Mosbah).

The Balṭagiyya on Muhammad Mahmoud Street

By the end of summer 2011, this narrative of the Ultras' importance in the 25th January Revolution was well established among journalists and activists inside Egypt and abroad (Bilal; Elkayal; Lindsey). However, as winter was approaching, the status of any "revolutionary"—the Ultras very much included—was increasingly facing problematic questions. One term that perhaps more than any other encapsulated the mood in Cairo this first revolutionary autumn was *balṭaga* (approx. "thuggery"), and its derivative *balṭagiyya* ("thugs"; sing. *balṭagī*). This highly contentious problem was discussed most intensely during the bloody protests and street fights that took place on and around Muhammad Mahmoud Street, Tahrir Square and (slightly later) outside the

Cabinet building in November and December 2011. During this month of bloody unrest, I noted how distinctions were frequently drawn between good "revolutionary youth" (*shabāb al-thawra*) and those "thugs" (*balṭagiyya*), who presumably attempted to destabilize the nation and derail what had so far been achieved. Friends of mine, who previously had been largely positive towards Tahrir Square, popular power and demonstrations, began to ask troubling questions about the usefulness of the protests and about the protesters' origins and identities: who were these people who kept on defying the Ministry of Interior's tear gas and bullets? Where did they come from, and what did they really want? Were they really revolutionaries, fighting in the nation's interests? Or were they simply *balṭagiyya*, who had come to destroy and break down?

To understand how and why the problem of *balṭaga* affected the Egypt Ultras movement at this historical moment, a contextualization of the concept's origins, uses and abuses is necessary. As the Egyptian novelist Youssef Ziedan details in an article published in *al-Miṣrī al-Yawm* on 30 November 2011, the *balṭagiyya*'s identity, aims and actions have always been surrounded by ambivalence. Ziedan notes that the term originally derives from the

Turkish word *balta*: a particularly heavy weapon, which it was the task of the *baltagī* to carry in times of war or at public executions in the Ottoman era (see also Ghannam 122). However, as the modern Egyptian state took shape in the nineteenth century, the *baltagī* was gradually disassociated from the state apparatus. Instead, his societal role came to oscillate diffusely between extortion and protection, predominantly in Cairo's popular (*sha'bi*) neighborhoods. In constant tension and dialogue with the similar but more favorably connoted male figure *al-futuwwa*, the history of *al-baltagī* is hence a steadily shifting one (Jacob 225-62). However, the *baltagī* has consistently embodied a somewhat problematic, semi-legal and masculinized subjectivity, associated with physical strength, violence and money.

The *baltagī*'s precarious position at the fringes of legality went through a series of particularly quick perturbations in the last decades of the Mubarak era. Indeed, Salwa Ismail has argued that thuggery effectively replaced Islamist terrorism as the main threat to the nation in Egyptian public imaginations in the late 1990s.⁴ In her ethnography, Ismail details how the focus on poor, young males as threatening *baltagiyya* led to heavily increasing securitization and middle-class moral panics.

For particularly "suspicious" characters—such as street vendors, minibus drivers or just any working-class man in Cairo's informal neighborhood (*al-ashwā'iyya*)—this implied vastly increasing police violence and surveillance (*Political Life* 139-45). Many times, the problematic masculinity of the *baltagiyya* was also associated with the serious and widespread problem of sexual mob violence against women in Egyptian public spaces (Amar, "Turning the Gendered").

As has been shown by Paul Amar (*Security Archipelago*), the Mubarak regime did not as much confront as cynically make use of the *baltagiyya*. Facing increasing numbers of protests in the 1990s and early 2000s, the police gave up their half-hearted attempts at fighting the thugs and instead "appropriated them as a useful tool" (211). More precisely, Amar claims that the

Ministry of Interior recruited these gangs to flood public spaces during times of protest [...] ordered [them] to mix with protestors and shout extremist slogans in order to make the activists look like 'terrorists', or, alternatively, to wreak havoc, beating civilians and doing property damage in the area of the protest (211-2).

The result of this incorporation of the *baltagiyya* into the security apparatus, Amar has termed the "*baltagī* effect": a manufactured depiction of oppositional demonstrations "as crazed mobs of brutal men [...] according to the conventions of nineteenth-century, colonial-orientalist figurations of the savage 'Arab Street'" (212). Moreover, it is also well known that the police employed a network of former prisoners that many would consider as *baltagiyya* to act as informers all across Egypt. In this way, the issue of the *baltagiyya* at the same time crystallized as a discursive construction, a political tool applied by the regime, and as hordes of men of flesh and blood who roamed the Egyptian streets.

Before returning to how the Ultras football fans came to tackle this emerging problem, one final dimension of the distinction between *baltagiyya* and revolutionaries should be made clear. As several commentators have noted, the tendency to separate the country's political actors between good and bad elements came with a bundle of problematic knock-on effects. During a round-table discussion at the conference *Narrating the Arab Spring*, held at Cairo University on 21 March 2012, political scientist and leftist activist Rabab El-Mahdi, for example, pointed to the strong class connotations of the *baltagiyya*

discourse, which in her view created a counterproductive split between “respectable” middle-class “revolutionaries” and the “vulgar” lower classes. Another similar and very timely intervention was an article by historian Lucie Ryzova, published on Al Jazeera’s website on 29 November 2011. Ryzova here noted a distinct division between the lower-class men on the front-line of the Muhammad Mahmoud clashes and the middle-class protesters, who were more likely to be located in the relative safety of Tahrir Square. Coming into central Cairo from the informal neighborhoods on “cheap Chinese motorcycles,” whilst sporting “a particular dress code and hairstyle that often involve copious quantities of gel,” the type of men that Ryzova saw fighting at the frontier had for many years been portrayed as trouble-makers, sexual harassers and a threat to public order in the Egyptian mainstream. Hence, Ryzova argued, the notion of *balṭagiyya* would always come in handy for middle-class Egyptians when speaking about this particular lower-class masculine habitus. And yet, it was precisely these young men—often driven by a deep desire for revenge after years of police harassment (see also Ismail, *Political Life*, “The Egyptian”)—who threw rocks at the police, carried the injured to hospital on their motorbikes, and paid with their blood as

the security forces retaliated with birdshot and sharp ammunition. In a highly ambivalent fashion, the group of men labeled as *balṭagiyya* were hence simultaneously the villains and the unsung heroes of the revolutionary struggle.

Hesitation, Action

The focus on *balṭagiyya* in Egyptian public discourse at the time of the Muhammad Mahmoud Street protests made legible an abject, problematically masculine Other. Simultaneously and dialectically, the trope also carved out a set of revolutionary ideals that connoted non-violent respectability and middle-class normality. This discursive split clearly affected the stance of the Ultras groups towards what was happening. While Ultras I spoke to later confirmed that many members of both groups actively participated in the protests in November and December 2011, neither Ultras Ahlawy nor Ultras White Knights ever directly called upon their members to join the fights via their official Facebook pages.⁵ For UWK, this attitude changed to some extent, when one of their members—a young man called Shihāb Aḥmed from the impoverished, informal (*ashwā’i*) neighborhood Bulaq al-Dakrur—was killed on Muhammad Mahmoud Street on the third day of the fighting. Thereafter, the criticism of

the police and the military became fiercer on UWK’s Facebook page, and all members were instructed to attend the martyr’s funeral (22 Nov. 2011).

However, not even at this point did UWK officially tell its member to join the struggle en masse. Instead, representatives of UWK as well as Shihāb’s family had to face questions about the dead man’s history, morals and motives. In an interview published in the online football magazine *alforsan.net* five days after Shihāb’s death, his mother struck back against those who questioned that her son was a proper revolutionary martyr. Understandably shaken and pressured by the media questioning her son’s role in the street fights, she claimed that “the one who goes to a protest prepared to sacrifice his life (*musta’id li-l-tadḥiyya bi-ruḥī*) cannot possibly be a *balṭagī*, but he is a hero and a man and not a tramp (*mutasharrid*) as some people claim.” The title of the article was indicative of the mood in the country and the protesters being on the defence: “The mother of the martyr: those who die in Tahrir are not *balṭagiyya*” (Diyāb).

The longer the unrest wore on, the more difficult it became to rid the protestors of accusations of *balṭaga*. After a short period of calm during the parliamentary elections in early December, the fighting broke out again on 16 December after a sit-in out-

side the Cabinet building was broken up by military police. The scenes of tear-gas, Molotov cocktails, stone-throwing teenagers and armed police firing rubber bullets, birdshot and live ammunition all seemed a ghastly re-run of an all-too-familiar script. Yet, a distinct change in attitude towards what was going on was at the same time noticeable. One taxi driver told me: "The police must hit them harder, to save the revolution." At the grocer's I was told: "The state must defend itself against those criminals. The people in this country need someone strong, someone like Mubarak." My interlocutor Mahmoud, a gym teacher and Zamalek fan in his early 30s, was one of those who drastically re-conceptualized the political process around him. Only a few weeks earlier, Mahmoud had been firmly against the unacceptable violence committed by the military and the police. Three days into the second wave of violence—and just 24 hours after footage of Egyptian military police dragging and beating a veiled woman across Tahrir Square, famously revealing her bare belly and blue bra, had spread across the world—he instead told me:

Have you seen those who camp in Tahrir Square now? I pass them every day on my way to work, and I can tell you, they are not good people, not respectable (*mish muḥtarama*). Probably they

are paid by [the ousted President's son] Gamal Mubarak to destroy the elections. By the way, that woman [in the blue bra], she was not a real *mu-naqqaba* [woman wearing niqab, full-body veil]. You could see that on the type of underwear she wore. This is a Muslim country, Carl. It cannot be run this way. But *Insha' Allah*, it will be re-built step by step through elections and institutions. All of them are *balṭagiyya*! Honestly, it does not matter to me if they die or not. (Mahmoud, Personal conversation)

In the midst the growing public concern about the disreputable and randomly violent *balṭagiyya* that roamed the vicinities of Tahrir Square, public statements in support for those protesting were rare. The Ultras were very much in line with this general pattern; a couple of days into the second wave of clashes, leaders of both UA (18 Dec. 2011) and UWK (19 Dec. 2011) made statements on their Facebook pages, stressing their non-political stance and disassociating themselves from what was going on. Moreover, the UA *capo* Ahmed Idris came out in the press to vigorously deny the rumors that one of the men who had been killed in the clashes had been a member of his group. Instead, he made clear that UA were against "any action that hurts the interest of the country

and its institutions (*maslaḥat al-balad wa munsha'atiha*)," and that all individuals present at the protests were there as "citizens" only and not as members of any kind of group (*al-Shurūq*, 21 Dec. 2011). In a politico-discursive climate where the protests connoted *balṭaga*—a concept which in turn was singled out as the main threat to the nation—Idris and UA sided with the "respectable" common good against the troublemakers.

When the fighting finally subsided, the Ministry of Health reported that 12 people had died and 815 had been injured. What is crucial for our story is that one of those casualties, a young student called Mohamed Mustafa, who often went under his nickname Karika, was a well-known member of Ultras Ahlawy. When Karika was shot dead on Qasr al-Ainy Street on 21 December, Ultras Ahlawy were abruptly pushed straight back into the political struggle. Suddenly, their leaders' recent statements, ensuring the group's impartiality, seemed alien and out of touch. On the 23rd of the month, al-Ahly played Maqaṣṣa at Cairo Stadium, and the entire match was turned into a tribute to the martyr and a manifestation against the state violence that had killed him. Most Ultras fans present were dressed in black instead of the normal red, the *dakhla* ("entrance scene") before kick-off covered the *curva*

with a huge black and white portrait of their dead friend, and al-Ahly's Portuguese coach Manuel Jose showed his sympathies by wearing a T-shirt under his grey tweed jacket, on which was printed "RIP Mohamed Mustafa." Throughout the game, the fans' chanting against the ruling military council and the Ministry of Interior was also more explicit than before; high up above the *curva*, an enormous banner was hung with a message that read: "The engineer Mohamed, martyr of freedom. The *balṭagiyya* killed him with live ammunition (*Al-muhandis muḥammad shahīd al-ḥurriyya. Qataluh bi-l-rusās al-balṭagiyya*) (Ultras Ahlawy's Facebook, 23 Dec. 2011). The contrast between the dead engineer—Mohamed Mustafa had been an engineering student—and the *balṭagiyya* who killed him—referring not so vaguely to the Ministry of Interior and the military—had an important function. In the days that followed, Mustafa's educational qualifications and the fact that he had been one of the country's best tennis players were constantly reiterated in the media (e.g. Maher). This framing of the dead supporter effectively disrupted the narrative of the ongoing protests as a matter of lawless *balṭaga*, because as most Egyptians would instantly recognize, an engineering student who in addition played an expensive sport like tennis was not just anybody, but a mem-

ber of the country's respectable upper middle classes. If anything, the killing of Karika seemed to prove that the demonstrators were real, honorable *shabāb al-thawra* ("revolutionary youth") after all. At least, this was what Ultras Ahlawy insistently claimed, when they honored Karika at Cairo Stadium. It made perfect sense for them to reflect the discourse of the establishment back onto the police and the military. Singing from the stands their most provocative song about Egypt's policemen as failures in school and corrupt "crows" that destroyed the fun for the youth, the fans returned over and over again to a rhyming chant that was both simple and effective: "*al-dakhiliyya—balṭagiyya* ("The Ministry of Interior—*are balṭagiyya*")" (Ultras Ahlawy 07 Media).

Class, Martyrdom, and the Production of Rebels

In the beginning of 2012, Ultras Ahlawy cranked up the pressure against the interim regime yet another notch. In the stadium and outside, the group continued its blatant accusations of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces for Karika's death; they mocked the police more explicitly than ever before; and they turned more directly political in both words and deeds.⁶ Tragically, this period of mobilization would soon come to a

very bloody end. On 1 February 2012, 72 Ultras Ahlawy members were killed at the stadium in Port Said in a massacre that the Ultras themselves interpret as the security state's revenge for the supporters' oppositional activities. As I elaborate on elsewhere ("Revolution, Play and Feeling"), the tragedy in Port Said further politicized the Egyptian Ultras movement. In the months that followed, Ultras Ahlawy especially came out in a spectacular campaign for justice and revolutionary reforms that, at least for a while, turned them into some of the revolutionary struggles most heralded rebels. While the Ultras had been widely celebrated for their political participation already in 2011, the tragedy in Port Said further added to their revolutionary credentials. For many, the death of the 72 young men seemed to have confirmed once and for all that the Ultras' cause had been a just one, and it certainly made much broader segments of the Egyptian public aware of their history of struggle against the state and the police.⁷ As this essay has shown, the Ultras' uncontested position as revolutionary rebels in 2012 and 2013 was, however, preluded by a period in which the supporters' stances vis-à-vis politics, the state and the revolutionary struggle were characterized by hesitancy and ambivalence. In retrospect, the death of Mohamed Mustafa aka Karika

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comes across as a crucial turning point within this decisive phase of late 2011: a particularly ‘generative event’ (Kapferer) through which the Ultras groups managed to dispose of their hesitation and unequivocally assume their rebellious ethos. It is particularly intriguing to compare the ease and confidence with which UA acknowledged and publically honored Karika as the group’s revolutionary martyr, and how this narrative came into circulation in the Egyptian press, with the much less extensive and more ambiguous coverage of Shihāb Aḥmed’s death a couple of weeks earlier. Clearly, Shihāb’s humbler origin as a son of Bulaq al-Dakrur (an informal neighborhood stereotypically associated with *balṭaga*) bestowed on his martyrdom a very different positionality within the discursive field of respectability, class and thuggery that dominated Egypt at the time. The contrast is all the more striking in light of the changing general opinion vis-à-vis the protests. In fact, and as I have shown, at the time when Shihāb was killed on Muhammad Mahmoud Street, the attitude toward the protests was more *positive* than a month later when Karika died a few hundred meters further south on Qasr al-Ainy Street.

In order to understand the powerful emotional and political “work” (Gibbon) and “productivity” (Armbrust) of Mohamed

Mustafa’s martyrdom—in contrast to that of Shihāb Aḥmed’s—the former’s respectable middle-class status must hence be taken into account. In a period ridden by “hyper-visibility” (Amar, *Security Archipelago*) of low-class *balṭagiyya* as the urgent challenge of the nation, it would have been difficult for Egypt’s Ultras groups to partake in the struggle on Muhammad Mahmoud Street without tarnishing their newly gained popularity. Mustafa’s death provided UA (and to a lesser degree UWK) with a way out of the deadlock. Not only did it push the tentatively non-political Ultras Ahlawy back into the fight against the police and the military, but through grand stadium spectacles, graffiti portraying Karika’s face on the walls of Cairo and extensive coverage in the traditional press and on social media, his life was also “mattering” to the idea and memory of the struggle itself (Paul). After the death of a middle-class member, Ultras activities could not as readily be dismissed as *balṭaga*. Indeed, in course of time, the entire month of violence—including the earlier clashes that the groups had refrained from joining as well as the death of Shihāb Aḥmed—would be folded into a more linear narrative of the Ultras group’s long revolutionary struggle against the Egyptian security forces (e.g. Mosbah). This particular historical moment, and its

conflation of class, martyrdom and respectability, is thus crucial to bear in mind if we are to fully understand how and why the Egyptian Ultras steered clear of the looming accusations of *balṭaga* and surfaced as one of the Egyptian Revolution’s most celebrated groups of rebels.

Notes

¹ Since most of the discourses that I explore in this essay occurred in spoken Egyptian Arabic, I have chosen to use the Egyptian colloquial transliteration *balṭaga* instead of the Standard Arabic variant *balṭaja* throughout this essay.

² Famous examples elsewhere in the country are Yellow Dragons (supporting al-Isma'ili from Ismailiya), Green Eagles (al-Masry from Port Said) and Green Magic (al-Ittihad, Alexandria).

³ Most European Ultras groups use the Italian word tifo when they talk about these entrance scenes.

⁴ An indicative event that Ismail identifies as the beginning of a new era is the passing of the "thuggery law" (*qānūn al-balṭaga*) in 1998 (Political Life 121-22). Perhaps, it could be argued that the period when the *balṭagiyya* were assumed to have been the main threat to the nation ended in summer 2013. Since the 3rd of July coup, and President al-Sisi's war on terror, Islamist terrorism once again seems to have taken the place as the most acute issue to be dealt with.

⁵ The two Facebook pages <<https://www.facebook.com/UltrasAhlawyCom?fref=ts>> (UA) and <<https://www.facebook.com/whiteknights2007?fref=ts>> (UWK) were at the time the standard medium through which the leadership of the Ultras groups communicated with their members.

⁶ See e.g. the photo album from the match al-Ahly vs. Al-Shurta 18 January 2012 on Ultras Ahlawy's Facebook.

⁷ Hamzeh and Sykes have described this process as a transformation of the Ultras' masculinity. After the 2011 Revolution and the Port Said tragedy in early 2012, layers of "anti-militarist" masculinity and "martyrdom" masculinity were added to the "anti-corporate" masculinity that the fans had embodied already prior to 2011.

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Daech rebelle et révolutionnaire : Narrations hybrides d'un groupe hors-la-loi

Thomas Richard

The article aims at understanding how ISIS presents itself through videos in relation to the notions of revolution and rebellion. While exposing a jihadi narrative, it appears that the group's discourse is more complex than a simple nihilism, and that its construction relies heavily on

the narratives of the revolutionary war and the myths of rebellion, allowing it to offer a hybrid and particularly coherent discourse.

Keywords: Daech; ISIS; Video; Narration; Revolution; Rebel

Introduction

L'objectif de cette étude est de cerner le rapport aux notions de rébellion et de révolution qu'entretient Daech, et ce en prenant appui sur les narrations qui apparaissent au sein de sa production audiovisuelle. Le choix fait ici a été de nous concentrer sur les vidéos émanant du groupe en tant que tel, et de privilégier les vidéos les plus longues ou formant séries, au sein desquelles le système narratif se déploie le plus largement, telles les quatre « Clanging of the Swords » (Al-Furqan) ou l'ensemble des « Inside » (Al-Furqan and Al-Hayat). A l'exception de celles faisant intervenir spécifiquement des étrangers s'exprimant dans leurs langues, ces vidéos sont toutes en arabe, et, sauf les plus anciennes, sont dotées de sous-titres pour la diffusion à l'international. A partir de leur diffusion première (Nissen; Farwell), elles sont consultables sur *archive.org*, et sur les blogs de Pieter Van Ostaeyen et Aaron Zelin sur le sujet. Si la très grande violence de certaines de ces vidéos a largement contribué à l'aura médiatique du groupe (Shane et Hubbard), et à sa qualification de terroriste, il serait erroné de se réfugier derrière cette disqualification qui ne permet pas de comprendre l'économie discursive derrière elles. De la même façon, la recherche de l'effet visuel de ces productions (Tos-

cer) ne doit pas dissimuler leur cohérence. Pour saisir ce qui est en jeu, nous aurons recours à une dimension comparative avec d'autres narrations sur les mêmes terrains, de façon à mieux saisir ce qui fait la spécificité et la force de celles de l'Etat Islamique.

Au sein des différentes productions de Daech, soutenant la narration djihadiste (Kapel; El Difraoui), on peut repérer deux tendances, qui lui permettent de proposer une narration hybride, qui tient à la fois à une méthodologie révolutionnaire et à un discours de rébellion. Par révolution, nous entendons une tentative organisée, souvent marquée par l'idée de progrès, visant à établir un nouveau régime à la place d'un ordre ancien, puisant dans le récit et les pratiques des mouvements anti-impérialistes et, plus loin, de 1789-1793 en France, y compris dans leur dimension mythique (Aron; Chaliand, *Mythes* ; Guevara). La rébellion, pour sa part, est comprise ici comme mouvement de révolte armée contre une injustice, et comprenant souvent une dimension religieuse et mystique (Bercé). Dans les deux cas, ces systèmes de références irriguent souterrainement le discours et le structurent. Ce faisant, en les rechargeant de sens dans son propre contexte, Daech peut proposer une narration d'autant plus efficace en développant un contenu qui apparaît ori-

ginal, et gardant un caractère adaptatif, qui lui permet une résilience particulièrement importante.

Nous allons donc procéder en deux temps, d'abord en voyant de quelle façon Daech expose son rapport à la révolution, avant de nous pencher sur l'aspect de rébellion.

I. Daech et la révolution

Guerre révolutionnaire

A priori, l'Etat Islamique n'a dans son récit guère de place pour la révolution, à la différence du Jabhat al-Nuṣra, lequel dans sa vidéo « Heirs to Their Glory » (Al-Manara al-Bayda') se revendique directement de la révolution syrienne de 2011, qui, dans sa lecture se place comme un nouveau sursaut du monde musulman contre les agressions extérieures, après la contre-croisade saladinienne, les conquêtes ottomanes, et le 11 Septembre 2001, tandis que le porte parole du groupe Abu Firas al-Suri cite les théories révolutionnaires de Régis Debray comme une des sources théoriques du mouvement, bien que n'en partageant évidemment pas les positionnements politiques (Chaliand, *Mythes*; *Les Guerres*; Charnay).

Même si l'Etat Islamique partage une proximité intellectuelle et, durant une période, une fraternité de combat avec

le Jabhat al-Nuṣra, ce type de référence ne fait pas partie de son arsenal apparent. Les combattants de l'Etat Islamique ne se désignent, tout au long de leurs vidéos, jamais comme des *thuwār*, des « révolutionnaires ». Leurs principales appellations sont *ikhwān* (« frères »), *mujahidīn* (« combattants du djihad »), *murābiṭūn* (« combattants des ribâts »), par référence aux premières conquêtes de l'Islam, ou *muwaḥḥidūn* (« unicistes »), par oppositions aux apostats, mécréants, associationnistes, qualificatifs de leurs ennemis, et revendiquent suivre la méthodologie du Prophète (« Upon the prophetic methodology » (Al-Furqan)). Cependant, si le mot de « révolution » est banni, ce n'est pas le cas de la pratique. Quand le Jabhat al-Nusra évoque le compagnon de Che Guevara pour revendiquer l'inspiration qu'il représente après islamisation du discours, Daech prend un chemin parallèle avec sa méthodologie prophétique et suit les théories et pratiques de la guerre révolutionnaire anti-impérialiste, reprises par la suite par la guerre d'indépendance algérienne (Fanon) et les mouvements de gauche palestiniens (Wakamatsu) pour profondément marquer le Moyen-Orient (Charnay) y compris après l'abandon de la référence marxiste avec l'apparition d'un nouveau

réfèrent religieux (Bozarslan, *Une Histoire; Révolution*).

Dans cet ordre d'idées, en bénéficiant de l'armature théorique offerte par le Jabhat al-Nusra, Daech s'est attaché à mettre en place une narration qui puise dans les théories de la guerre révolutionnaire (Chaliand, *Mythes*), tout en islamisant le langage dont elle est habillée. Aussi, le spectateur des vidéos est amené à suivre les combattants dans des tâches issues de ces théories, appliquées selon une méthodologie bien construite. On assiste ainsi au début des deux premiers « Clanging of the swords » (Al-Furqan) aux séances d'éducation et d'explication aux combattants de l'enjeu de leur lutte, comme le faisaient les révolutionnaires palestiniens (Wakamatsu), avant de partir en mission. De la même façon, ces combattants sont présentés, surtout dans ces premiers opus de la série, en train de se livrer à une *da'wa* (« prédication ») d'un genre particulier, qui prend la forme du porte-à-porte dans les régions où ils sont implantés pour distribuer des DVD et quelques tracts présentant le programme et les actions du groupe. Dans la forme, c'est une actualisation des méthodes de propagande du Viêt-Cong dans sa lutte contre les Américains. Les disques ont remplacé le cinéma en plein air, mais la méthode est fondamentalement la même, jusque dans la

mise en scène de ses lieux (Lembcke) : au long de ces séquences, les combattants sont suivis de nuit, caméra à l'épaule, les bras chargés de cartons de DVD qu'ils distribuent un à un aux habitants sans que jamais les forces gouvernementales ne les inquiètent. Ce faisant, ils affirment une pleine liberté de circulation dans des zones qu'ils considèrent comme leur appartenant, au moins pendant la nuit, et où ils reçoivent bon accueil.

Et logiquement à cette époque, la suite du « Clanging of the Swords » consiste en des attaques nocturnes, en particulier les assauts de prisons, pourtant moins spectaculaires de nuit que de jour. Mais, hors les nécessités militaires qui imposent une action par surprise, cette mise en scène de la nuit obéit également à une logique de guerre révolutionnaire, calquée sur les souvenirs des guérillas : le jour appartient à l'armée régulière, lorsque la guérilla est encore faible, tandis que cette dernière peut prendre l'ascendant de nuit, comme l'ont fait les combattants afghans et les révolutionnaires du Tiers-Monde (Coll; Chaliand, *Mythes*). A ce moment de son action, la mise en scène est celle d'une nuit qui appartient à Daech, en attendant de passer à l'étape suivante, celle de la constitution de zones libérées.

Zones libérées

Et c'est exactement ce que montrent ces vidéos : après les embuscades, après la distribution de la propagande, les vidéos mettent en scène la vie dans de telles zones, tombées sous la coupe de l'organisation et désormais hors de portée des gouvernements, ce dont le journaliste britannique John Cantlie est témoin après sa capture : dans la série « Inside », il est filmé accompagnant la police de Daech, et visite les marchés, les hôpitaux et les tribunaux. La scène clé du changement est le défilé des combattants dans les rues de la ville qu'ils viennent de prendre : Mossoul, Haditha, Raqqa, dans « Flames of War » (Al-Hayat), ou dans les derniers épisodes de « Clanging of the Swords ». Ce défilé lui-même est intéressant dans sa mise en scène : il s'agit d'un des rares moments où les combattants montrent leur puissance en matériel lourd, toujours conquis sur l'ennemi, alors que la plupart du temps ils privilégient la mise en scène des armes légères et le combat de l'homme contre les machines gouvernementales, « Flames of War » en multipliant les exemples, avec des combattants à pieds en train de détruire chars et véhicules adverses. Ce défilé, lourdement chargé de ses prises de guerre, correspond au dernier acte des théories de la guerre révolutionnaire, avec l'encercle-

ment puis la prise des villes (Guevara; Chaliand, *Mythes*).

Dans ces zones, Daech installe alors son ordre, et ce avec une grande rigueur, y compris pour lui-même. Les combattants présentés dans les vidéos apparaissent modestes (Al-Furqan, « Il est parmi les croyants des hommes [There are believers among men] »), filmés partageant un repas frugal, là également, un récit densément référencé dans la guérilla révolutionnaire. Des gens qui trouvent leur accomplissement dans le combat de libération, et, dans ces vidéos officielles, sans prétention, volontiers conviviaux et à l'occasion joyeux. L'organisation se présente comme punissant sévèrement le racket, ou les abus de ses hommes, faisant régner un ordre strict, et partant, parfaitement à même de gérer les territoires qu'elle contrôle : elle consacre ainsi des moyens conséquents (film en haute définition) à mettre en scène des vidéos de l'action de ses tribunaux, avec témoignages de plaignants, à qui, contre la corruption des anciens régimes, contre la violence anormale des autres combattants syriens, Daech sait faire droit (Al-Furqan, « Le Pouvoir n'appartient qu'à Allah [Power only belongs to Allah] » ; « The Best Nation »). On retrouve ici l'organisation des régions libérées, et la mise en place d'une administration juste, ce qui avait été un des

arguments essentiels de légitimation des révolutionnaires chinois (Bianco). Surtout l'impôt, la *zakat* en l'occurrence (Al-Furqan, « And They Give Zakat »), est scrupuleusement présentée comme équitable, la séquence finale de la mort d'un combattant dans la vidéo concernée justifiant directement le fait que, en tant que *muja-hidin*, les hommes de Daech bénéficient de cette *zakat* réclamée aux habitants des zones concernées avec un luxe de détails et d'explications. Dans le même ordre d'idées, l'organisation insiste, avant et après la prise des villes, sur la mansuétude de ses combattants envers ceux qui sont susceptible d'être ralliés : mot d'ordre de compréhension envers les sunnites dont il faut se faire des alliés, et, au moins lors des premiers avertissements, attitude amicale de la *hisba* (police religieuse de Daech) pour faire respecter l'ordre islamique. Conséquence de cette narration, ces vidéos peuvent ainsi mettre en scène des ralliements et des scènes de liesse des habitants accueillant volontiers Daech, parfois avec une grande émotion, le groupe les ayant « libérés » des oppressions et les protégeant, dans « The End of Sykes-Picot » (Al-Hayat) ou « The Clanging of the Swords 4 ».

Ce faisant, ces dernières vidéos présentent des combattants parfaitement à l'aise sur le terrain, s'exprimant sans la moindre

difficulté en arabe, et surtout pas, comme le dénoncent leurs opposants, comme un groupe surimposé sur ces régions, ce que veulent montrer les images volées par une jeune fille de Raqqa dans cette optique (Renard and Saleh). Avec « And They Give Zakat » ou « The Best Nation », Daech tient au contraire à montrer sa police à l'œuvre, dans la justice, et une vie se déroulant de façon parfaitement normale sous son égide, mieux même que sous les anciens régimes, ce sur quoi insistent les vidéos mettant en scène John Cantlie (« Inside »), qui y joue un rôle de témoin-clé et de commentateur.

Le rôle des étrangers, outre leur intérêt pour le recrutement vers le reste du monde et leur rôle de combattants, tient, dans cette narration révolutionnaire, à cela. Ils ont un rôle de témoins (Al-Furqan, « The State from Their Mouths », montage d'archives de journalistes et analystes), et attestent de la dynamique universaliste du mouvement et de sa puissance. Dans les vidéos « Lend me your ears », comme dans « Inside », avec une liberté de ton apparente, John Cantlie joue ce rôle, parce que, journaliste, il permet de qualifier l'action du groupe, reprenant à son corps défendant le rôle de ceux qui couvrirent les printemps arabes en y identifiant les révolutions selon ce qu'ils voyaient (Khatib).

Si le groupe est profondément lié aux problématiques locales, il peut à partir de là mettre en scène son accueil des partisans venus le rejoindre. Il se veut universel, patrie d'un califat sans frontière, et refuge pour les musulmans persécutés, qui pourront ensuite porter son message dans leurs pays d'origine : c'est le sens des appels répétés à émigrer pour rejoindre le territoire de Daech (« Message of a mujahid »). Par milliers, les combattants étrangers viennent pour éventuellement repartir plus tard, attestent de la dimension universelle du combat, avant d'ouvrir de nouveaux foyers ailleurs, comme les Kazakhs de « Those Who Were Truthful with Allah » (Al-Hayat), qui se présentent comme l'avant-garde de Daech vers leur pays d'origine. Ce faisant, ils retrouvent à travers les générations de violence étudiées dans la région par Hamit Bozarslan (Bozarslan, *Revolution*) et leurs filiations, les théories foquistes de la guerre révolutionnaire réactualisée (Chaliand *Mythes, Les Guerres*).

Révolution djihadiste

Révolutionnaire, Daech l'est également par ses choix modernistes de narration. Par rapport aux vidéos d'al-Qa'ida des années 2000, Daech a introduit une forme de rupture. Si certaines scènes demeurent classiques (entraînement, sourire des mar-

tyrs par exemple dans « The Muhajirun in Islam Army » (GII Media Brigade), ou « The Racers to Paradise » by the IS Media Office of Wilayat al-Raqqa), le groupe, outre l'habillage spectaculaire de ses séquences, présente aussi une narration beaucoup plus actuelle de son combat, tendu vers l'avenir. En établissant un califat, Daech se veut aussi en rupture avec des narrations passéistes dans son propre camp, et renverser non seulement des régimes, mais aussi une représentation : comparative-ment à al-Qa'ida et au Jabhat al-Nusra (« Heirs to Their Glory »), qui exposent longuement leur théorie, font largement appel au souvenir du passé, et à une nature idéalisée (cascades, chevaux, verdure), Daech utilise assez peu ce romantisme islamiste (El Difraoui). Au contraire, lorsqu'il montre sa prise de contrôle, plutôt que des paysans et une nature bucolique, Daech filme significativement des rangs de moissonneuses-batteuses, tout en adoptant un montage vidéo nerveux, évitant les longs discours en plan fixe qui étaient caractéristiques des interventions des chefs d'al-Qa'ida, et renverse la perspective narrative vers l'avenir.

Révolution et violence

Enfin, l'aspect révolutionnaire de Daech tient également à la violence qu'il semble filmer avec complaisance. Cette mise en

scène de la violence obéit à une économie narrative en résonance avec la dynamique révolutionnaire. S'il y a là une dimension de concurrence dans un paysage vidéo moyen-oriental et djihadiste saturé de vidéos extrêmement violentes (Gruber et Haugbolle; Harb et Matar), cette présence récurrente participe de la narration révolutionnaire. Les exécutions tiennent à la volonté de pureté révolutionnaire illustrée, outre par la terreur des mouvements révolutionnaires (Courtois and Kramer), en France par la Grande Terreur de 1793 (Wahnich), avec des méthodes et un caractère visuel comparables. Dans les deux cas, les exécutions doivent être publiques, pour manifester l'épuration du territoire : les cadavres chiites jetés dans les fleuves répondent aux noyades de Carrier à Nantes avec la même idée d'extirpation par la violence des ennemis (Gueniffey). Dans la logique de la révolution syrienne, les hommes de Daech, dénie toute forme de salut aux ennemis de la libération qu'ils apportent, exécutés puis crucifiés. Aller au bout de la logique révolutionnaire entraîne cette dimension assumée par les vidéos, contrepartie de l'attitude bienveillante du groupe envers ceux qui se rallient. Pour que le combat vaille, il doit être sans pitié, et totalement rompre avec l'ordre ancien (Sémelin).

II. Daech groupe rebelle

Discours de rébellion

Toutefois, suivre cette adéquation de Daech à une méthodologie révolutionnaire ne résume pas le message de ses vidéos. Le groupe se situe en même temps dans une lignée de narration de rébellion, y compris en luttant contre d'autres rebelles. Daech plonge, du côté irakien, ses racines revendiquées dans le monde des insurgés sunnites en lutte contre les Américains et dans la filiation d'Abu Musab al-Zarkawi (Luizard; Isakhan). Mais c'est également un groupe rebelle par son engagement en Syrie. Une rébellion différente de celle des opposants qui se sont placés dans une perspective démocratique et tolérante, plus orientée sur une narration victimaire (Chaumont). Cette fraction des opposants à Assad se retrouve dans la narration d'*Eau argentée*, film des réalisateurs reconnus, Ossama Mohammed et Wiam Simav Bedirxan, pouvant citer Marguerite Duras et rappeler les moqueries poétiques de 2011, tout en opposant sa propre culture à la barbarie et à la brutalité à la fois du régime et de Daech.

Bien entendu, Daech est très loin d'une telle narration, mais pourtant se filme comme un groupe de rebelles. Son discours est fortement marqué par l'humilia-

tion, la violence subie (« There Is only Humiliation in Life » ou « The Resolve of the Defiant » de Al-Furqan), la trahison des gouvernements et des milices, c'est, avant tout, un discours de révolte (Moïsi). Un discours fonctionnant autour de termes-clés, parce qu'il est de révolte : ce qui importe avant tout est de dire l'indignation, et ce avec des mots simples, sur l'honneur bafoué, sur les femmes violentées, et de nourrir la révolte.

Cette rébellion est à dimensions multiples : tout d'abord il s'agit de se séparer, de briser les ponts, ce que manifestent les combattants étrangers brûlant leurs papiers publiquement via la vidéo, brisant ainsi le lien avec leurs anciennes patries (Al-Hayat, « What Are You Waiting For? »). Plus profondément, ces papiers brûlés et la mise en scène répétée de la destruction des symboles de pouvoir (commissariats, postes-frontières, tribunaux) retrouvent certains des codes des rébellions, où ce sont ces symboles, ces lieux qui sont détruits (Bercé).

La Cité de Dieu

Ensuite, la narration de Daech, saturée de références religieuses, avec des intervenants multipliant les citations coraniques permet de retrouver la narration d'un modèle fondamental des rébellions : faire advenir la Cité de Dieu ici et maintenant

(Bercé). Le prêche d'Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi lui-même dans la mosquée de Mosul est sur ce modèle : presque rien de programmatique, et un large répertoire de citations coraniques autour de la foi et de l'épée. Outre l'indignation, la construction du discours est importante ici aussi : ce qui importe avant tout est la vision du Verbe divin, dans une diction qui puisse apparaître d'évidence. Dans la vidéo qui lui est consacrée, Abu Suhayb al-Faransi (Al-Hayat, « Stories from the Land of the Living - Abu Suhayb al-Faransi ») le répète comme un leitmotiv : « il n'y a pas de doute ». Sur ce modèle, la narration est proche du millénarisme des rébellions sébastianistes, ou de la guerre menée par les anabaptistes, lorsque au Brésil et en Allemagne, ils tentèrent de construire une société idéale en opposition à des pouvoirs considérés comme illégitimes et impies (Levine; Stayer; Bercé).

A cet égard, l'attention portée à l'administration des zones libérées prend un second sens : non seulement garantir la prise des zones libérées, mais bâtir dans le même temps cette cité idéale : il est significatif que le groupe, par exemple avec « The Best Nation », ait choisi de faire porter l'accent sur les tribunaux islamiques. Il met ainsi en scène une vie dans laquelle les principes d'équité selon le droit divin sont effectivement mis en

œuvre, le combat étant mené à l'extérieur et à l'intérieur contre les ennemis de Dieu. Dans cette logique de rébellion, le groupe veille ainsi à ce que les actes qui lui sont reprochés apparaissent dans sa narration, légaux, ou au moins légitime. Légaux selon la charia telle qu'appliquée, comme les crucifixions, ou légitime, effet d'une juste colère et de la loi du talion dans l'exécution du pilote jordanien capturé : plus que seulement brûlé vif, il est brûlé et enseveli sous des gravats, ce qui reproduit le sort de ses victimes, tout en faisant le lien avec le sort des enfants de Gaza bombardés que rappelle la vidéo.

Rébellion et violence

Ce qui nous amène au dernier aspect de cette rébellion : sa violence. Si celle-ci entre dans une narration de pureté révolutionnaire, elle se combine alors avec la recherche de la pureté de la rébellion religieuse. Outre l'importance que cela revêt du point de vue de la communication, la frénésie iconoclaste de Daech se veut absolue, plus que symbolique. Les destructions publicisées des vestiges antiques dissimulent quelque peu (« Suppression des vestiges de chirk dans la région de Tablous » [Suppression of the remains of chirk in the Tarablus area]) la multitude de lieux saints détruits à la chaîne, façon de faire table réellement rase, sur laquelle se

construit cette Cité de Dieu. Une violence qui répond avec des logiques et une narrations parallèles, à celle des affrontements de la Réforme, y compris dans la grammaire visuelle : dans les deux cas, le discours est d'éliminer les signes d'idolâtrie par la destruction physique et la démonstration de cette élimination, en se comportant en « guerriers de Dieu » et en imposant un nouveau sentiment d'appartenance (Crouzet; Harmanşah; Wanegffelen). Une volonté de purification et d'éradication manifeste également lorsque les combattants semblent occupés à des tâches hors de propos comme brûler des cigarettes en pleine bataille de Kobané (« The Resolve of the Defiant »), ou se livrer à une chasse dramatisée contre des sorciers (« The Best Nation »). Ces tâches sont intimement liées au reste des vidéos et participent à l'économie du récit de fondation divine.

A partir de ce précédent, on touche le dernier point de cette narration de la violence, purificatrice et éradicatrice, mais aussi largement démonstrative. C'est ce qui a le plus marqué dans les vidéos de Daech, avec leur mise en scènes de décapitations collectives, de personnes obligées de creuser leurs propres tombes, ou de cadavres jetés dans les fleuves. Derrière le scandale recherché, il y a aussi cette logique de montrer une violence qui

recourt à des images très ancrées, et à une grammaire qui a été celle des Guerres de Religions (Sémelin; Crouzet). Ce que fait Daech, y compris dans la publicisation de ses atrocités, et de celles que ses partisans ont subies avant d'être libérés, suit le schéma des affrontements européens, jusque dans les raffinements dans l'horreur des exécutions et mutilations fortement significatives. Ce qui importe est que la violence soit complète, mais aussi qu'elle se voit.

Daech pratique un théâtre de la violence qui lui permet certes de provoquer la terreur, mais cette violence trouve une réelle logique dans son pouvoir de démonstration, face à l'ennemi, tout en concluant un pacte de sang entre les perpétrateurs. Loin d'être anomique, cette théâtralisation est une pratique profondément logique dans l'atmosphère prophétique qui est celle de la Cité Divine, de la construction du califat et d'une époque de splendeur. On retrouve là une violence mystique qui se fait mystique de la violence et rejoint certains aspects millénaristes étudiés par Jean-Pierre Filiu. Mais des textes qu'il étudie, Daech passe à la mise en œuvre. Montrer la violence tient alors à une économie narrative très dense, et qui dépasse largement la recherche d'effets, ces exécutions étant inscrites dans la grammaire narrative du groupe : elles y sont nécessaires.

Thomas Richard

A former student of the Paris Institute of Political Sciences (Sciences-Po), Thomas Richard received his PhD from the Université d'Auvergne Clermont I. He wrote his dissertation on political and identity mythologies in the Middle East in the age of globalization, and was awarded the 2014 *Michel de l'Hospital Prize* and will soon be published. He has presented and published papers on issues such as war memories, identities as seen through cinema and monuments, and Middle Eastern cinema, in France and abroad. He was also a contributor to three manuals for Sciences-Po students on identities and history.

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Conclusion

Du point de vue des narrations, Daech apparaît donc comme un groupe proposant une lecture de soulèvement originale à travers sa production, plus complexe et s'appuyant sur un soubassement intellectuel beaucoup plus solide qu'il n'y paraît au premier abord. En s'intégrant profondément dans les problématiques syriennes et irakiennes, tout en puisant dans le très profond terreau des narrations révolutionnaires et de rébellion, Daech a pu imposer sa propre grammaire de lecture des conflits en cours, et est largement devenu ce par rapport à quoi ses adversaires et ses éventuels partenaires doivent définir leur propre diction. Une

organisation aussi proche que le Jabhat al-Nusra, avec « The Path to Salvation », a repris largement les codes et les façons de mettre en forme le récit de Daech, se plaçant à la remorque du récit de l'Etat Islamique.

Derrière son apparente accumulation d'horreurs, Daech propose une lecture de sa guerre profondément cohérente, organisée, et ancrée dans des représentations plus profondes que de simples effets de style, même si ceux-ci sont bien présents. Mais ils ne permettraient pas seuls la constitution d'un tel récit, à la fois très englobant et très souple, qui permet au groupe de proposer une forme de récit total de son action, logique, et tendue vers

le futur tout en plongeant ses racines dans des réalités et des représentations familiales aussi bien localement qu'au niveau mondial. Hybride djihadiste de Che Guevara et de Jean de Leyde, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi dispose ainsi d'un outil de qualification de sa propre action extrêmement efficace. Radicale et violente, ce n'est pas la narration que l'on pouvait mettre en valeur à l'orée des printemps arabes, ses références sont moins immédiates et plus mortifères que celles des libéraux, mais c'est une narration qui a pris racine et qui a su capter ce que ses adversaires modérés n'ont pas su ou pu exposer.

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Blogging Bouazizi: The Role of Tunisian Cyberactivists Before and After the Jasmine Revolution

Matt Gordner

This article examines the changing role of cyberactivists before and after the Jasmine Revolution through case studies of three prominent figures: Housseem Aoudi (Cogite, Wasaibi), Sami Ben Gharbia (Nawaat.org), and Haythem el Mekki (MosaiqueFM, Attessia TV). The main argument presented here is that the attainment of freedom of the Internet and the success of the revolt created new opportunities for formal political involvement for the cyberactivists as they transitioned from dissidents under the Ben Ali regime to citizen-participants of a

nascent democratic order. A subsidiary argument is that a new generation of Tunisian leadership came to the fore of Tunisia's private and public spheres to advance the stated aims of the revolution, including *inter alia* combating unemployment, securing civil liberties, stemming corruption, and the ever deepening of pro-democracy reforms.

Keywords: Tunisia; Democracy; Revolution; Activism; Social Movement Theory; Bouazizi

Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution was brought about through the conjuncture of two social movements. Cyberactivists, bloggers, and journalists—many of whom were active in the freedom of the Internet movement—disseminated news of protest cycles in the interior regions of the country to national and international actors ultimately leading to mass protests that resulted in the ouster of long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Years on, many of these cyberactivists occupy positions of leadership in Tunisia's changing social, political, and economic milieu. This article builds upon a growing literature on the importance of the freedom of the Internet movement in Tunisia by examining the changing role of cyberactivists before and after the Jasmine Revolution through case studies of three of its prominent figures: Housseem Aoudi (Cogite, Wasaibi), Sami Ben Gharbia (Nawaat.org), and Haythem el Mekki (MosaiqueFM, Attessia TV). The main argument presented here is that attaining freedom of the Internet following the Jasmine Revolution created new opportunities for success, as well as new obstacles, for the attainment of many of the goals of the revolution. While, prior to the Jasmine Revolution, activists united against the regime and for freedom of the Internet, the ouster of Ben Ali led to the disaggregation of this movement. Both

structural and agentive factors are responsible for keeping the movement entrepreneurs from reconstituting themselves against the current Tunisian government, a coalition between old-guard secular and Islamist factions that appears to prioritize “stability” over “democracy” as a trope to re-consolidate power among the political and business elites in what some analysts call a “rotten compromise” (Marzouki) or “neoliberal consensus” (Mulling and Roubaha).

From the Blogosphere, to Bouazizi, and Beyond Ben Ali

Five years after the “Arab Spring” revolts, only Tunisia appears to be embarking upon procedural democratic governance.¹ Despite the contentious episodes and “social non-movements” (Bayat) that preceded it, the Jasmine Revolution appeared “spontaneous” or “surprising” (Kraiem 219; Lynch 7) in part because Tunisia was a “least likely” case for the mobilization of protests, with high social and economic indicators and the provision of “tactical concessions” granted to its population in order to suppress growing social unrest throughout the 1980s (Cammatt, et al. 5; Breuer, Landman, and Farquhar 766). The Ben Ali regime was one of the most oppressive throughout the region, with

strict controls on freedoms of speech and assembly (Wagner 2).

Social movement theorists have long noted that the Internet vastly expands the repertoire of collective action available to social movements (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly). In 2010, 36.8% of the Tunisian population used the Internet (World Bank); and one-fifth of the youth demographic subscribed to Facebook (Shacker et al.). In the lead up to the uprising, the Internet and Internet activists were significant in a number of ways. First, the Internet was used as a platform for visual images of regime brutality (Breuer, Todman, and Farquhar; Lim). This, in turn, united cross sections of the population through what Breuer, Todman, and Farquhar call “emotional mobilization,” or, in Lim’s words, successful “frame alignment.” Social media also facilitated collective action by bringing together disparate geographic, social, and economic forces (Breuer, Todman, and Farquhar; Lim; Valeriani). A “digital elite” (Breuer, Todman, and Farquhar) thus acted as “brokers” (Valeriani) of these diverse networks, bringing to the fore a new youth leadership class in the wake of the ouster of Ben Ali.

Tunisian cyberactivism began from as early on as 1998, when “Fetus” and “Waterman” founded Takriz (“The Anger”)—a “cyber think and street resistance network”

(Breuer, Landman, and Faquhar 771-2). Blocked in August 2000, other dissident sites followed suit to pepper Tunisian social media in what amounted to a cat-and-mouse game between the regime and the cyberactivists. In November 2005, Ben Ali hosted the UN World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). In response, Nawaat launched a *Yezzi Fock* (“Enough”) protest, calling for pro-democracy reforms on 3 October (Hachicha, Yezzi). A one-month hunger strike which began on 18 October brought together disparate leaderships among the Tunisian political elite, closing the divide between Islamists and secularists over freedom of association, freedom of the press, and a release of political prisoners (Hachicha, Tunisia). The hunger strike culminated in a series of talks inscribed in the “October 18 Committee for Rights and Freedoms” (Jourchi 361-4), drawing the attention of major international media outlets, and leading to a further tightening of Internet freedoms (Zuckerman).

Following the 2009 Presidential elections in which Ben Ali secured nearly 90% of the vote, police arrested Fatma Riahi (Fatma Arabica) for believing that she was, or was connected to, “-z-” (debatunisie.com), a cyberactivist renowned for satirical commentaries about the regime. Bloggers and cyberactivists rallied around her cause,

informing traditional media outlets of the arrest and engaging in wide debate over Internet freedoms in Tunisia (Lutz). Online mobilization and exposure rapidly intensified: a petition to gather 10,000 signatures for Internet freedom far exceeded its target; a Google Documents form was made public to list blocked websites, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter accounts; cyberactivist sites like Nawaat published circumvention tools, and mainstream Tunisian artists, TV (Nessma), and Radio stations (MosaïqueFM) began speaking publicly, whether directly or indirectly, about censorship and activism (Ben Gharbia, Anti-Censorship).

The Facebook page *Sayeb Salah* ("leave me in peace") capitalised on the already popular "Ammar404" slogan loosely depicting an "imaginary person invented by Tunisia as a metaphor for the invisible censor blocking their access to many websites" (Ben Gharbia, Anti-Censorship). Created in May of 2010, by April *Salah* amassed 20,000 members and thousands of pictures (Gana 151). On 17 May 2010, Slim Amamou and Yassin Ayari created the Facebook page *Nhar Ala Ammar* ("Day Against Ammar"). The page drew 5,000 supporters in the lead-up to a nonviolent anti-censorship protest on 22 May dubbed *Tunisie en Blanc* ("Tunisia in White"), or "The White Tee Shirt Protest," calling for

two actions: a protest by the Ministry of Technology, and dressing in white while having a coffee on the main avenue in down town Tunis. The Tunisian diaspora also joined the movement from Paris, Montreal, Bonn, and New York (Chomiak, Revolution 73).

News of the event went public: "Only seven months later, Tunisie en Blanc activists were able to help propel the Jasmine Revolution by encouraging similar debates on the thousands of Facebook pages of Tunisians involved in the January 2011 protests" (Chomiak, Revolution 74). Over the course of the summer, Houssem Aoudi organized the first TedxTalk—a set of global conferences raising important issues on social, political and economic issues—in September 2010. Both the protest and TedxCartage pushed many beyond "the traditional circle of activists online that [were] not politically engaged against Ben Ali. So there was a kind of opening." (Ben Gharbia).

Following Bouazizi's self-immolation, a wave of protests swept the interior. Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) locals began organizing contrary to the directives from the central bureau to remain loyal to the regime, and a loose coalition of protesters emerged to call for greater economic opportunities, an end to corruption, and basic political and social

rights. Despite regime efforts to stymie the free flow of information, images of Ben Ali's brutal repression percolated through government filters. A "bitter cyberwar" broke out (Ryan), but journalists and bloggers were ultimately successful in disseminating videos and blogs to international news outlets through the Internet and smuggled USB keys.

As knowledge of the protests spread across the country, Tunisians in the coastal regions flooded the streets en masse and refused to disperse until Ben Ali heeded their calls to *Degage!* ("Get Out!"). After ad hoc attempts to address and quell the protesters, and in the face of unrelenting demonstrations, Ben Ali sought refuge in Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011.

The Disaggregation of a Decentralized Movement: From Freedom of the Internet to Democratic Freedoms in the Post Ben-Ali Period

Through a largely youth-led contingent that drew upon the Internet as a medium by which individuals made their grievances known—among them anti-corruption, youth empowerment, media objectivity, freedom of speech, civil liberties and democratic participation—a social movement emerged to confront one of the most censorship-heavy regimes in the Arab world. Bloggers, journalists, and

cyberactivists thus drew upon the Internet as form of social capital; the Internet as a “social glue that produces cohesion” through a “set of cognitive aptitudes and predispositions.” (Stiglitz, Institutions 60). Housseem Aoudi describes the transition from the pre- to post-Ben Ali epochs in the following terms:

We all had a common enemy even if we had different fights. We were fighting different battles and it happened that all these battles were part of the same war with a common enemy. Right now that enemy went but the battles stayed the same: freedom of expression, civil society... And those battles stayed, and each one of us focused on the battles that were closest to his heart. (Interview. 18 Mar.).

Examining the use of web 2.0 by “tech-savvies” during the Jasmine Revolution, Valeriani posits that “if the decentralized and networked structure of movements implies segmentation in the functions of leadership, developing and cultivating the network is possibly the most important among such functions” (2). Upon attaining their goal of freedom of the Internet the movement—its participants and its leadership—disbanded. However, so-called movement entrepreneurs maintained their networks and drew upon them to

advance the issues that each actor pursued through single-issue NGOs, private organizations and associations.

Housseem Aoudi (TedX, Cogite, Wasabi)

Housseem Aoudi was one of the organizers of the White Tee Shirt Protests as well as the founder of TedxCarthage prior to the onset of the Jasmine Revolution. Through TedX, Aoudi provided a platform for activists and analysts to publicly address the subject of political and economic reform towards the end of Ben Ali’s reign. Following the uprising, Aoudi brought the TedxTalks nation-wide, and there have been more than sixty talks held to date. The latest TedX talks, slotted for 1,000 live viewers, were held in April 2015. The event took just over thirty seconds to sell out, with over 56,000 applicants attempting to register for seats (Interview. 22 Sept.). In 2013, Aoudi founded Cogite: the first Tunisian co-working space that doubles as a facility providing workshops on entrepreneurship, social innovation, and civil society building. He founded Wasabi, a social business and production company that *inter alia* promotes youth empowerment, democratic citizenship, and human rights in partnership with organizations across MENA, Europe, and the US, including USAID, the National Endowment for

Democracy, and the World Bank, among others, was founded in the same year. In 2014, Aoudi became Director of the Media Center for the Independent High Authority for Elections, and he is the current President of Tunisian American Young Professionals.

Cogite offers Tunisians two co-working spaces in the greater Tunis area that house both individual members as well as organizations, with plans for three additional spaces in Karouain, Gafsa, and Djerba. The “Founders Forward” in Cogite’s 2014 annual report reads: “At Cogite, we believe that the government cannot do it alone, and that everyone should pick up a brush and start painting a better collective future.” Cogite targets youth in particular, offering “a home, and a community where they can make a difference through entrepreneurship, creative expression, and civil society engagement.”

Under the Ben Ali regime, the barriers to becoming an entrepreneur were extremely high. Small to medium enterprises comprised over 97% of Tunisian businesses, consisting mostly of small shops and local services (Hibou 29). Transitioning to a large company ran the risk of co-optation, leaving Tunisians today with relatively little knowledge of business development and social innovation in the face of a competitive global marketplace.

Aoudi regards entrepreneurship as “a glitch in the matrix... I think about entrepreneurship and civil society as entry points into the matrix. Two Trojan Horses” (Interview. 22 Sept.).

Wasabi was founded to provide services and training in areas where the government has been slow or altogether negligent to advance substantive forms of democratic participation: to

work in parallel with the government in ways that we would never have worked together before. With 3000 dinars I’m doing things that the government should have done 5, 10 years ago... It’s not my job to do it. It’s the government’s job. (Interview. 22 Sept.).

Kevin Coyne, one of Wasabi’s project managers states likewise, that: “pretty much everything we do is to acknowledge that the government should do it but we’re doing it instead.” (Interview. 8 Sept.) Perhaps Wasabi’s most successful project thus far was the 14 April 2015 pilot program called *Afkar* (“ideas”), which centered on “Sustainable Civil Society: Towards Effective Local Governance.” Initially remarking on the impressive strides undertaken by Tunisian civil society as a whole, *Afkar*’s First Edition Report continues: “However, the evolution [of civil society] has suffered from a general lack of

coordination among different actors due to a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders.” The pilot project studies civil society through two “prisms:” the development and role of civil society since the Jasmine Revolution, as well as upcoming targets, including the government’s decentralization plan, local elections, and issues of accountability.

Among the panelists were Mondher Bousnina (President of the Government’s Office), Rafik Halouani (Mourakiboun), Chafik Sarsar of ISIE (Instance Supérieure Indépendante des Elections), Salsabil Klibi and Chawki Gueddass (Association Tunisienne de Droit Constitutionnel), Amine Ghali (Kawakibi Center) and Mokhtar Hammami (Ministry of the Interior). Around sixty participants took part in the round tables, including members of the government and major Tunisian and international civil society organizations. The report, written by all participants, concludes that Tunisian civil society needs to retain its independence and partisan neutrality in the face of government and factional interventions; the need to focus more on including women, youth, and marginalized communities; and the threat to civil society in the ways in which the government attempts to combat terrorism. While these are indeed critical issues, and are frequently discussed among Tunisian and

international stakeholders, whether or not the government agencies represented in the round table will exert pressure on the current leadership to follow through with their commitments remains to be seen. Nonetheless, Aoudi regards the talks as successful inasmuch as it was a conversation-starter between the government and civil society that represents, in itself, democratic procedural mechanisms:

Getting 60 people around that table was an achievement. That table was indicative in and of itself. It was only used twice before: once for the Arab League and once for the African Union. So only dictators sat around that table.... You had the government, some ministries, some MP’s, HAICA, the professional civil society and some international donors and NGOs sitting around the same table, speaking their minds completely freely and bouncing ideas to each other and coming up with a paper at the end of the day.... So if I had to describe democracy, I would say this is the picture of democracy, around that table. (Interview. 18 Mar.).

While Aoudi’s *Afkar* project brought together a number of formal partnerships in conjunction with Wasabi, coordination across organizations and government agencies is the exception. For Aoudi, “it’s

difficult to coordinate all the factions, especially when you don't have a common enemy. It's easier to rally against a common enemy than to rally against a common cause." The coordination problems, he continues, involve not only organizational constraints: "When we sit around with other people and there are formalities about making decisions... it makes it difficult." As a movement, "[w]e are not coordinated any more. We became citizens. And we are playing our role as citizens of civil society." Rather, Aoudi regards his organizations as ideally placed to be "part of the conversation with the government" as it stands. (Interview. 18 Mar.).

Sami Ben Gharbia (Nawaat.org)

Sami Ben Gharbia, an avowed "info-activist," spent thirteen years in exile before returning to Tunisia in 2011 to continue his work as Director of Nawaat.org, now a registered NGO in Tunisia. He was given the *Yahoo! Person of the Year* award in 2010; named one of Foreign Policy's *Top 100 Global Thinkers* in 2011; and was the recipient of the Price Claus Award in 2012, for Nawaat's work covering anti-censorship, freedom of information, and its role in mobilizing and informing activists, journalists, and bloggers during the Jasmine Revolution. Nawaat maintains its position as a central platform for political analysis and

public opinion on Tunisian politics following the Tunisian revolts, for which it, too, has received multiple accolades. Through Nawaat, Ben Gharbia aims to "influence laws and the process of access to information and Internet, the right to publish information, defend citizenship, participatory democracy, and building strong citizen media" (Interview. 22 Sept.). Ben Gharbia's dissidence vis-à-vis Tunisia's post-authoritarian government is equally hardened, but he places equal if not greater onus on the public to hold the state and mainstream media accountable:

The state by nature has a police mentality around the world, to control everything and shape public opinion to push for certain laws and positions and strategies. So the state by nature is a body that wants to control everything. Even if it goes to censor the information or threaten journalists, the threat is the public opinion and devolution of public opinion. How far can public opinion tolerate the state and how much can the state convince public opinion to give up liberty? The space that guarantees our moves is public opinion. And this is the work of propaganda and discourse and mainstream media to make public opinion give up certain freedoms. (Ibid.).

This position regarding state and citizen participation is evident in Nawaat's platform: a fluid and inclusive digital space for open criticism and commentary on the state of Tunisian politics and governance. Vanessa Szakal, one of Nawaat's resident researchers, views Nawaat's role as supplanting, in many ways, Tunisia's traditional media in "press[ing] individuals and entities to improve communication with the media and the public" through "securing interviews and entering into dialogue with representatives of government and State institutions" (Interview. 2 Oct.). Nawaat thus acts as a parallel news source to perform the function of independent journalists and spawn public debate, since "it became clear that the mainstream media in both private and public sectors don't have an interest in being a watchdog for what the government is doing." By doing so, "Nawaat tries to fill that gap by uncovering stories, 'giving voices to the voiceless'" (Sami Ben Gharbia. Interview. 22 Sept. 2015).

Ben Gharbia measures Nawaat's impact in a number of ways. His first metric is to assess whether the content that Nawaat publishes leads to coverage in the mainstream media, as was the case with the anti-reconciliation bill seeking to provide near amnesty for former regime figures and businesspeople complicit in embez-

zlement and corruption during the Ben Ali era:

the anti- reconciliation bill [debate] started on Nawaat. We were the main media outlet to follow that from the beginning until the end.... And when the TV channels start to talk about the issue they were late compared to us. So they didn't have any video footage of the demonstrations and they used the footage of Nawaat. (Ibid.).

Ben Gharbia's second metric is to be in a position to reform the legal framework through videos and publications. He credits Nawaat with being influential during the drafting of the constitution over two issues in particular. The first is Article 13, which states that natural resources are the property of the Tunisian people, and that all contracts dealing with oil and gas should be transparent and taken up through parliament. The second is access to the Internet as a human right in Tunisia. "That's part of our mandate. Many debates in parliament were opened through Nawaat. Many MP's referenced Nawaat as the source where they found out" (Interview. 23 Feb.).

Presently, Ben Gharbia (and Nawaat) work informally with the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights (FTDES) over the anti-reconciliation plan. Through this

"ad hoc" consultation, the FTDES provides Nawaat with analysis to deconstruct some of the legal arguments that demonstrate that the bill will benefit only the economic elite so that Nawaat is in a better position to counter the bill "through the legal framework": "We didn't really work with them. We stood on the same platform. We both oppose the bill and followed the sit-ins and demonstrations." With the exception of Nawaat's partnership with The National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists, with whom Nawaat collaborates to publish a monthly video on their monitoring of media outlets and newspapers, Ben Gharbia notes that formal partnerships are rare:

We did it in the past but we always find out that consumes energy, finances and resources. And since our resources are very limited we don't want to get into any partnerships with any organizations that will maybe deviate us from the projects we are doing. So we come up with organizations to work on documents or data and then turn that data into an investigation or documentary and things go on but we don't have close partners. (Interview. 23 Feb.).

Haythem El Mekki (MosaïqueFM, AtteSSia TV)

Like Aoudi, Haythem El Mekki also self-identifies as a "witness" to the early phases of Tunisian cyberactivism, but it was not until the Gafsa mining protests in 2008 (wherein the Ben Ali regime is alleged to have handed out work appointments to individuals close to the regime) that El Mekki became more involved in the freedom of the Internet campaign. Just prior to the Jasmine Revolution, El Mekki was among a coterie of individuals who met in person to discuss the state of Internet and information freedoms in Tunisia, which led to El Mekki's role as an administrator of the online "Sayeb Saleh" campaign. At the time he was also a well-known blogger (@ByLasko), and an associate editor for Tunivisions, a print and online magazine (Tunivisions.net) "of the Tunisian people." Aoudi and El Mekki worked together at Tunivisions.net under the leadership of Nizar Chaari, a former RCD member, who encouraged Aoudi and El Mekki to publish the dissident el-General's song "Rais Lebled" that was critical of the Ben Ali regime. The publication of that song led to the censorship of Tunivisions.net and forced El Mekki briefly into hiding. In February 2011 he moved to Nessma TV. Disagreements over his outspoken position on the direction of the revolts led El Mekki

to take positions as a radio host at MosaiqueFM, Tunisia's first private radio station, and at Attessia TV, as an analyst, satirist, and polemicist. El Mekki is an outspoken public figure popular for his incisive and scathing commentaries on the state of Tunisian politics and society.

Like Ben Gharbia, El Mekki maintains an overtly oppositional stance to the direction of the post-Ben Ali Tunisian transition. Unlike Ben Gharbia, however, who views Nawaat as a countervailing force to a deficient mainstream media, El Mekki works purposively through mainstream media. The decision was a strategic one inasmuch as it allows him to position himself alongside what he views as an uncritical traditional media apparatus:

Now things have changed. Now demonstrations are covered by major TV journalist at 8 p.m., so what could we bring to people if we do the same thing? So we had to change our operating ways and our vocation and our way of participating in the public scene. For me for example it was clear. I was recruited as a chronicler, so I continued covering in the field and publishing videos but for a very short time. After that I understood that that's not what the country needs from me. So I started working as a journalist in the mainstream media. I was in a dilemma: shall

I join the classic media and risk being swallowed or contained by the system or to stay between the rebels and the dissidents? But I was thinking that things have changed again and if we don't integrate the traditional media it will be only a few months before they go back to their old habits. (Interview. 14 Sept.).

For El Mekki, attempts at formal and coordinated campaigns to confront the current Tunisian government face a number of organizational and ideological problems.

We do not agree with each other in every case. Some are sectarian and they don't want to work with everyone. I'm refusing these initiatives because I'll be better doing my job [alone] than being part of some coalition. I think that you can't be a journalist and a political militant at the same time. Each has his independence. I will be much more effective if I help from continuing my work independently. (Interview. 7 Mar.).

Despite prior attempts to establish such coalitions, El Mekki cites a lack of discipline and structure: "With the Economic Reconciliation, there is no civic coalition that is set up." Internal conflicts between leaderships of various organizations and

movements are also an obstacle to collective mobilization:

We have big egos to try to understand each other. There were many attempts to unify... there is a problem of internal conflicts between activists who don't want to work with each other who want to take profit from the cause. (Interview. 1 Mar.).

Conclusion: From Social Movement Entrepreneurs to Citizens of a Nascent Democratic Polity

The three case studies examined above take up the roles and achievements of the movement entrepreneurs of the freedom of the Internet campaign throughout and following the success of the respective campaigns. By unifying against Ben Ali and for freedom of the Internet, a decentralized movement was born. Upon the dissolution of the movement, many within its leadership individually pursued the aims and goals of the Jasmine Revolution. Aoudi, El Mekki, and Ben Gharbia each continued in large part to work for and within organizations and industries with which they were involved prior to the Jasmine Revolution. This kind of "path dependence" has, on the one hand, enabled each of these entrepreneurs to achieve notable strides forward in their civil society and pro-democracy work. Despite initial

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attempts to mobilize with other organizations, however, individual pursuits are regarded by these leading figures as more efficacious than collective action in the post-Ben Ali period.

Notes

¹ It appeared for some time as if Egypt was making similar strides. Following the democratic elections of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), however, the Egyptian army stepped in as a response to "Tamarod," a mass movement calling for the FJP to step down. Headed by General Fatah El Sissi, the military used this opportunity to enact a military coup to 'save the revolution.' El Sissi won the Presidency in the following round of unfree and unfair elections, thus returning the country to authoritarian rule. In terms of the Tunisian case, it is important to note that despite Tunisia's successive rounds of free and fair elections, the achievement of substantive democratic rights and practices is by no means a foregone conclusion. Indeed, as discussed later in the article, the Tunisian

government's denial of human rights and civil liberties in the name of "stability" following terrorist activity and legitimate and illegitimate forms of protest in response to unemployment and lack of opportunities constitute a direct threat to the advancement of substantive forms of democratic practice.

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CLOSE UP

Bassem Chit and Revolutionary Socialism in Lebanon

Sune Haugbolle

This article discusses the Lebanese activist and writer Bassem Chit as an example of the intellectual rebel in Lebanon and the Arab world. It analyses the ideological tradition of revolutionary socialism and the Arab left. Through an analysis of interviews and articles, Haugbolle attempts to locate the place and nature of intellectual production in the organisation of revolutionary activity, and the particular role rebel intellectuals play in bringing about social change. It

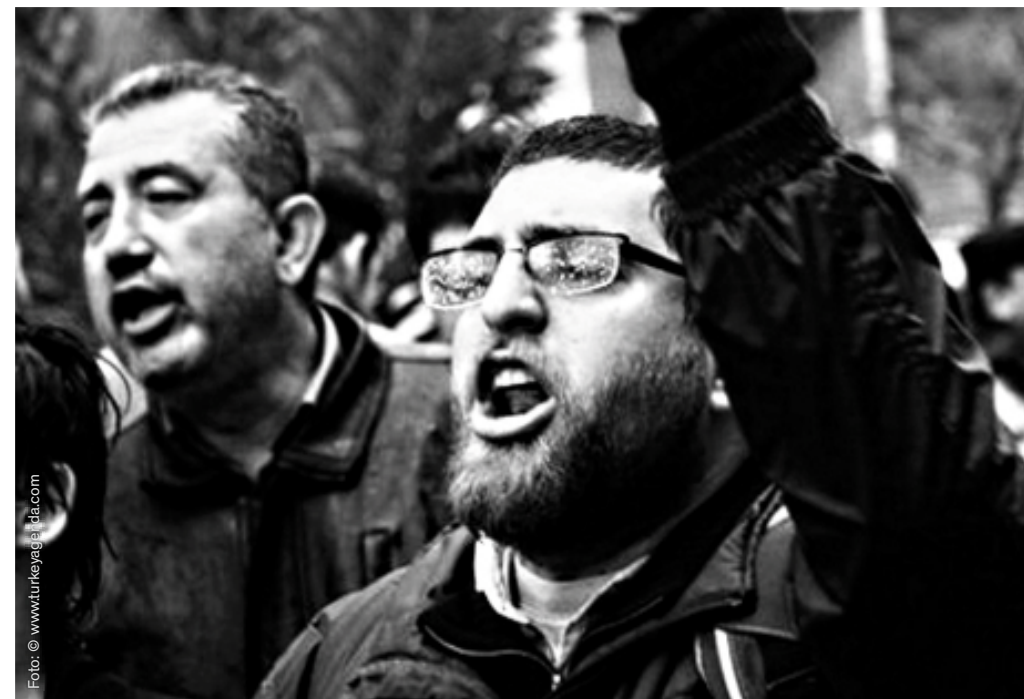


Figure 1 : Turkey Agenda. "Interview with the Late Bassem Chit on Politics and and Culture in Lebanon and the Middle East." www.turkeyagenda.com Web. 16. Oct. 2014

draws on the sociology of intellectuals, in particular Gramsci, in the analysis of Bassam Chit's work and his post mortem veneration.

Keywords: Socialism; Arab Left; Intellectual History

During the 2015 social protests against Lebanon's political elite, I have often read on Facebook threads laments such as, "what would Bassem have said?" and "we

miss your voice, Bassem." They refer to Bassem Chit, the Lebanese revolutionary socialist, writer and activist who died from a heart attack on October 1, 2014. For a limited circle of Lebanese, Arab and international revolutionary socialists, Bassem Chit is a rebel martyr, whose life and work continue to inspire. He died at the tender age of 34 after a life devoted to renewing Marxism and revolutionary socialism. His friends and comrades now miss his voice and his sharp analysis more than ever, at a

time when they feel that a chink in the armour of the social system in Lebanon may have opened. They also miss his company and particularly his presence in the protests and in the organisation of the *ḥirāk* ("movement").

The life and death of Bassem Chit accentuate the challenges of organising dissent and formulating alternative ideological directions, which have come to the fore in Lebanon's trash protests. In this brief article, I discuss Bassem Chit as an example of the intellectual rebel in Lebanon and the Arab world. I analyse the ideological tradition of revolutionary socialism and the tradition of the Arab left in which his work inscribes itself. I am interested in understanding the place and nature of intellectual production in the organisation of revolutionary activity, and the particular role rebel intellectuals play in bringing about social change. I draw on sociology of intellectuals, in particular Gramsci, in my analysis of Bassem Chit's work and the veneration of him postmortem.

In order to place myself firmly in this analysis, I should make it clear that I was a friend of Bassem's. In 2012 and 2013 I recorded several interviews with him in Beirut, which I use here in addition to his writings to place him in the leftist land-

scape of thought and action. Finally, I analyse his significance for Lebanese, Arab and international revolutionary socialism through a reading of obituaries as well as the fifth issue of the journal he helped founding, *al-thawra al-dā'ima*, which is dedicated to his memory.

Rebel Intellectuals and Arab Marxism

The "rebel intellectual" is somewhat of a tautology, as many sociologists see intellectuals as inherently rebellious agents of social change in the modern era. Moreover, many intellectuals themselves define rebellious change as their credo. The intellectual, Vaclav Havel (167) has written,

should constantly disturb, should bear witness to the misery of the world, should be provocative by being independent, should rebel against all hidden and open pressure and manipulations, should be the chief doubter of systems, of power and its incantations, should be a witness to their mendacity.

An intellectual who is not rebellious isn't a true intellectual. This ideal certainly excludes many self-styled intellectuals, who uphold the powers that be. It also runs counter to Gramsci's (97n) broad definition of an intellectual as "the entire social stratum, which exercises an organisational function in the wide sense – whether in the field of production, or in

that of culture, or in that of political administration." Conversely, Havel's definition would seem to celebrate the critical intellectual who writes against the grain and speaks, as Edward Said would have it, truth to power. Power, of course, can be located not just in the State but in all hegemonic structures, including institutions that pride themselves on being anti-hegemonic, such as the Eastern European communist parties, which Havel had in mind when he wrote his text in 1986, or the self-styled *mumāna'a* ("rejectionism") of the Syrian regime today. For the same reason, Karl Mannheim thought that critical intellectuals together must form a free-floating intelligentsia, a relatively classless stratum of thinkers, able to see beyond the ideological blinders imposed by the left and the right, and thus uphold a democratic, critical conversation.

Bassem Chit was rooted in a different intellectual tradition, that of international and Arab Marxism. The Lebanese Marxists that he read and knew generally hold dear the Gramscian ideal of the organic intellectual, the *ibn al-balad* ('son of the soil') who speaks for the subjugated classes. According to Gramsci (5), every social group creates organically 'one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in

the social and political fields.' The trouble in the Middle East is that in reality, very few of the coryphées of, for example, Lebanese Marxism, including the founders of the Lebanese Communist Party, have hailed from a working-class or peasant-class background. Despite their middle-class pedigree (or perhaps because of it), they hold on to the idea that they represent the perspective of the poor and the needy. Therefore, instead of taking their claims to organic status at face value, we must locate intellectuals in their social setting. In order to do that, grand theory must be complemented by careful, local histories. As Gramsci (18-20) himself was well aware, intellectuals serve different functions in different political economies and cultural contexts. The nature of hegemony must be located before a successful analysis of intellectuals can be made. In this article, I seek to do so by outlining the intellectual tradition and the social milieu that Bassem was a product of and in which he inscribed his work.

Bassem certainly loved Gramsci, but not as much as he loved—and had read—Marx. He would pepper his speech and writings with citations from Marx, and he was well versed in the Arab Marxist tradition. This tradition arguably stretches back to the debate between Islamic reformers and so-called materialists in the Nahda period

(Rodinson 337-48; Tibi 7-17). Historical materialism laid the ground for socialist visions of development and independence. Within the larger spectrum of socialism, which also included Salama Musa's Fabianism, Arab Marxism was from the beginning a strictly intellectual tradition of writers and publishers who became enthralled with the Bolshevik revolution and in the early 1920s established communist parties in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Iraq and Palestine. The path of revolution in the age of the Comintern was set and defined by the rigours of Marxist-Leninist dogma as imposed by Stalin, as the Arab communist peers discovered when they became enrolled in training and ideological regimentation. For decades, the overall ideological and political authority of the Soviet Communist Party meant that Arab communists struggled to develop the Marxist system of thought into a flexible methodology that might help them understand the realities and differing conditions of their own countries (Sharif).

In reaction to Stalinism and the domination of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon by Khaled Bakdash, a group of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian intellectuals inspired by the British 'new left' of the late 1950s wrote critically against the party, against Moscow, and against the Arab

socialism of Nasser and the Baath Party. This group included people who were influenced by Trotsky and the so-called Fourth International. Traces of Trotskyism can be found in the work of Yassin Hafez, George Tarabishi and others who clustered around the group Arab Socialism in the early 1960s, which later developed into what Tareq Ismael, writing in 1976, called a New Arab Left (Ismael). This current is the intellectual foundation on which Bassem Chit built his own commitment. It also provided the methodological and organisational inspiration for his re-reading of the revolutionary situation in Lebanon and the Arab world after 2011.

Importantly, the New Left was not just an intellectual current but also a political current, albeit far from a unified one. Despite their different strategic approaches to the Palestinian issue, and different accents of Marxism, they shared a sentiment that it was necessary to break with the past leadership of Arab regimes. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the formation of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in Palestine, the Communist Party-Political Bureau in Syria, and the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon. The Arab Marxist tradition—at least in the Levant—is strongly influenced by the political affiliation of

many writers with these groups, and their political and military struggles in the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian freedom struggle, and the confrontation with the Syrian state. This embattled recent history has certainly lent credence to the image of the intellectual as a rebel. For the New Arab Left, Marxism was for a time being practiced gun-in-hand.

After the end of the Lebanese civil war, the ideological project of Marxism was in a global crisis as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union, confounded in Lebanon by the defeat of the National Movement in the civil war. This led to intense soul-searching in Marxist milieus in Lebanon as well as other Arab countries. While some maintained a dogmatic Marxism (mostly represented by currents around the Lebanese Communist Party), many drifted towards liberal positions. Faleh Jaber (1997) has termed this new landscape post-Marxism, meaning social theory that draws on the broad family of Marxist thought but goes beyond Marxist dogmas. Some post-Marxists dismiss the claim that Marxism is an infallible scientific theory, and some have moved on to theoretical pluralism. Thus, some post-Marxists maintain class analysis, while others only apply selected elements of the Marxian heritage. In an Arab context, moving on to theoretical pluralism after the end of

the Cold War meant critiquing the lack of internal democracy in Arab communism, and accommodation with liberalism. This accommodation also had the practical implication that by the mid-1990s a significant proportion of Arab Marxists left their party and had become free-floating intellectuals (Sing).

Left Melancholia

The soul-searching post-Marxists that Jaber and other scholars like Manfred Sing (2015) and Suzanne Kassab (2009) discuss largely belong to the generation of thinkers and activists born in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Bassem Chit's generation of Marxists have grown up with a different outlook. They are at once more globalized and more confused than the previous generation, whose struggle was firmly rooted in the great questions of liberation and modernization, national independence and structural improvement of living conditions of the poor. This struggle ended in defeat, manifested by neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s as well as the breakdown of Arab unity. On the level of social mobilization, Arab Marxists lost momentum to Islamist groups, which was mirrored on the philosophical level by the primacy that Arab Marxists put, from the 1980s onwards, on the notion of *'aṣāla* ("cultural rootedness") as opposed to

international class identity (Browsers). As Bassem told me, this experience of double or triple defeat "came with the genes" for those who grew up in the 1990s. Their parents' generation had run up against external enemies and had been divided by internal splits, leaving them with severe ideological confusion and no immediate sense of direction. It was clear to Bassem and his leftist peers, therefore, that they had to struggle, both in order to assert their influence on the national political and social scene, and to fight what Jody Dean has called the global 'left melancholia' that followed from 1989 (Dean).

Dean's argument, in short, is that the exhaustion of global Marxism was emotional, physical and generational, but also a more temporary phenomenon than it seemed in the 1990s. The much-trumpeted triumph of liberalism had been premature, in other words. The new revolutions and mobilization of the 2010s combined with the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis have engendered a revival of communist organisation and Marxist theory. Left melancholia, for Dean, was not just the result of triumphant ideas and actors opposing socialism and Marxism, but just as much the outcome of the way in which socialists adopted single-issue politics and identity politics, which abandoned the vision of total social trans-

formation. The strength of the 'new new left' of the 2010s is that it embraces multiplicity (and aspects of liberalism), but ties them together in a socialist vision for change. Bassem shared this view and this optimism, but was also, at the time of his death, becoming overwhelmed with fear that the counter-revolution unleashed by revolutionary fervor in the Arab Uprisings threatened to destroy the social fabric of Arab countries. He struggled with bouts of exhaustion and melancholia, the combination of which probably eventually killed him. But he also stressed that the purported 'failure of the left' was not simply a failure of socialist ideas and Marxist theory, but resulted from tactical mistakes made by certain people. In his final interview, given just weeks before he died, he underlined the need for an end to what Fawwaz Traboulsi (Revolution) has called "the lacerating self-criticism" of the left. The uprisings, Bassem (and Trabloulsi) believed, provided an opportunity to realize that

History doesn't make mistakes, it just happens. There have been loads of mistakes in the traditional left. But saying that the new revolutionary left could have organized the working class, to organize itself in the past twenty years, this is absurdity. In the

last twenty years, we are talking about a revolutionary left rising in different countries, in Egypt, in Lebanon, and these groups are effective in a small degree but still more effective than traditional left organizations. So it's a very important development.¹

The 'new new left'

Bassem came to this conviction, that the renewal of Arab socialism was possible from the bottom-up, through his own personal trajectory. Like all intellectuals Bassem Chit was shaped by the concerns of the recent past as much as by the present. Born in 1979, he was part of the "war generation," who witnessed the Lebanese civil war as children and came of age with debates about post-war reconstruction in the 1990s. On Lebanon's university campuses in the mid-1990s, leftist organisations such as *bi-lā ḥudūd* ("No Frontiers", AUB), Pablo Neruda (LAU), *al-'amal al-mubāshar* ("Direct Action", Balamand), and Tanios Chahine (USJ), provided spaces for rethinking leftist engagement in an age dominated by the neoliberal policies of the Hariri governments. It involved, as one of its participants remembers, 'un mélange de sociaux-démocrates, de militants laics ["secularists"], d'écologistes, d'internationalistes, de nationalistes arabes, de marxistes, de trotskistes, et de

militants des droits de l'homme.' (Abi Yaghi 41). Seeking to bypass the bureaucratic language and institutions of their older communist peers, this budding 'new new left' worked in networks rather than parties, and preferred public action over engagement with official institutions of the state, which they viewed as corrupt.

At the beginning of the 2000s, this 'new new left' increasingly transformed their student engagement and intellectual debates into activism. Bassem became part of this motley crew of new leftists who protested the WTO meeting in Doha in 2001, organised anti-war demonstrations against US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, published journals such as *al-yasārī* ("the leftist") and organised activism on many different levels. He was thus an integral figure in the creation of the Socialist Forum (*al-muntada al-ishtirākī*) in 2010, its journal *al-manshour*, and from 2012 the journal *al-thawra al-dā'ima* ("The Permanent Revolution"), which revolved, and still revolves, around a network of revolutionary socialist groups in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco.

Al-thawra al-dā'ima contains Chit's most elaborate intellectual production, not just his own articles but also his editorship and his efforts to create a network for the renewal of revolutionary socialism in the region. He wrote insightfully about racism,

the Syrian refugee question, and particularly nationalism and sectarianism. Drawing on Ussama Makdisi's seminal work on the modern roots of the sectarian system, Chit believed that sectarianism is a product of capitalist relations in Lebanon. He believed that the sectarian system was linked to hegemony of the ruling class established under imperialism and perpetuated by the liberal institutions of the state. In this way, he took Makdisi's constructivist argument further by stressing the internal contradictions in the capitalist system and the class structure of Lebanon (Chit 2009, 2014). From a scholarly point of view there is nothing novel in this argument. It has been elaborated based on original research by other historical materialists such as Fawwaz Traboulsi, Carolyn Gates, and Salim Nasr. But then, Bassem Chit was not primarily a scholar. For him, the important task was to understand the conditions of Arab societies and devise a plan for revolutionary change. He insisted on a class analysis of Lebanese politics and society, because he believed that a clear, historically founded analysis of the complex structures of Lebanese society was a necessary starting point for the inculcation of revolutionary consciousness. In doing so, he placed himself in a long tradition of critiquing sectarianism

and linking social justice to the formation of a secular political order (Haugbolle).

A Nineteenth-Century Rebel in the Twenty-First Century

Bassem's writings and manner of speech were deeply influenced by Marx and Trotsky. Talking to Bassem could sometimes feel like talking to a nineteenth-century revolutionary in London, ready to organize and theorise all the way to kingdom come. He earned the respect of fellow revolutionaries from his willingness to engage in conversation and debate with all sorts of people, from refugees in methodological workshops that he organised in some of Beirut's poorest neighborhoods, to Lebanese and foreign academics. In all of this, he stuck to his belief in the necessity of revolutionary change.

Just like the first socialists in the mid-nineteenth century, Arab revolutionary socialists today depend on solidarity and comradeship in order to maintain the momentum of their project to change the social order against all odds. Therefore, Bassem was very aware of the need to unify the ideological line in the Marxist-socialist milieu. At the time of his death, deep splits had occurred that existed prior to 2011 but had been accentuated by the uprisings and in particular by the war in Syria. The splits were already visible in

2006, when a group of leftist intellectuals in Lebanon published an open letter denouncing the Democratic Left Movement and the March 14 alliance for their failure to protect and support Hizbullah in its war with Israel. In 2011, some leftists continued to support the Syrian regime in the name of the struggle against Israel and resistance to imperialism, but this position was challenged by the evident and growing violence against civilians. Others stood with the Free Syrian Army, the Syrian National Council and the peaceful uprising, in the name of revolution and the defense of democratic rights. Some supported a middle way between solidarity with the protestors' demands for freedom and rejecting foreign interference, and instead advocated national reconciliation (Dot-Pouillard).

As the Syrian crisis intensified and became an outright war in 2012, the splits on the left in Lebanon and in the region worsened. In May 2013 I asked Bassem to explain how he viewed the chances of a unified left in the region, to which he replied that he thought it was crystalizing, but that the war in Syria showed that unity would necessitate a complete rupture with "the old left," which to him was only a left in name. The old left, for him, meant the Stalinism of many Arab communist parties, and the authoritarian legacy of

Arab socialism in the form of Baathism and Nasserism. Their support for the Syrian regime and for Hizbullah was not surprising, as they put collective struggle before individual freedom, and anti-imperialism—the notion of *mumāna'a* (“rejectionism”)—before popular mobilization (Traboulsi, *Crisis*). Bassem had great belief in the ability of his generation to distance themselves collectively from the old left in a way that the ‘old new left’ in the 1960s and 1970s perhaps failed to do. The Arab revolutions were to be the tool of this unification, which would lead to a revolutionary culture that could set the Arab countries on the path of regional redistribution of wealth, resistance to foreign interference, and socialist states. For the revolutions to become such as tool, the new left of the 2000s, he believed, had to join forces with the hundreds of thousands of Arabs involved in the revolutions. The aim of *al-thawra al-dā'ima* was to theorize revolution with the people involved in the uprisings. Tracing the birth of a new left, he told me that,

In Lebanon it started in the late 1990s, early 2000s. It started with the movement against the war in Iraq. In 2002, the movement here in Lebanon adopted the slogan “no war, no dictator.” Ironically this is the same position we take today on Syria. We

are against any military intervention, even of Hizbullah, and against dictatorship. This position started in 2002.

Others became involved already around the Palestinian Intifada of 2000-2001. But as Bassem said, “that was an easy question compared to the Iraqi war.”

In the question of Iraq, some of the left, for example what became the Democratic Left Movement, aligned themselves with the imperialists, saying imperialism will bring democracy to Iraq. Our group started off from the position between those who supported Saddam against imperialism and the coalition against tyranny. We came together over this position. And so there was a fragmentation, and that fragmentation has continued... Today [in 2013] the DLM is deteriorating. The Lebanese Communist Party is deteriorating. This is because they have chosen sides. And what we see is that our position—of being in-between, of double-rejection if you want—is gaining more momentum.

The position of double-rejection has proven to be difficult, if not impossible, in the context of continuous civil war as in Syria, or authoritarian military rule as in Egypt, where the revolutionary socialists

have been imprisoned and persecuted since 2013. For Bassem, the rejection was necessary to maintain against all odds. He did not see it merely as a practical position against particular political forces, but equally as the only tenable ideological position for any democratic Arab left worthy of its name. Ideologically, he linked this stance to the rejection of stagist theory, the Marxist theory that underdeveloped countries must first pass through a stage of capitalism before moving to a socialist stage. This necessitates alliances with the national bourgeoisie. What might seem like a detached abstract discussion was in fact the central bone of contention between the Arab nationalist movement and new left Marxists in the 1960s. Thus, Khaled Bakdash, on returning from Moscow in 1951, had suddenly learned the Stalinist line of a stagist approach (Tibi 24). Today, Bassem stressed, Communist parties and other leftist currents maintain stagist theory “as a justification for their support for regimes such as the Syrian.”

And this is the same stagist theory that led the left in Lebanon to be destroyed! That led the left to be destroyed by Nasser in Egypt. By Khomeini in Iran. All over the region. Can you believe it? They are readopting the theory and creating illusions about a certain alli-

ance with the national bourgeoisie. In an era when you have a hugely globalized economy. And the national bourgeoisie is linked to the international bourgeoisie. This is absurd because the line of separation between national and international bourgeoisie, which may have existed in the nationalist era, does not exist anymore. For example, when we look at banking, construction, et cetera, in Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, they are directly linked to international capital. And they are linked to the moneyed ties of Saudi Arabia extending everywhere. This is why we think that it is a destructive theory.

Remembering Bassem

The last time I spoke with Bassem we talked about the sense of living in revolutionary times, where history was replayed as farce—both the deep history of international socialism and that of the Arab left. “It’s like the old ghosts are coming back, the good and the ugly but mostly the ugly,” he said. We talked about how we should all work to improve conditions here and now and build networks of solidarity. We talked about the importance of focusing on local struggles, even if revolution has to be international. Sadly, it was probably his failure to live up to this sound advice—his constant engagement in a mil-

lion things at the same time—that got the better of his heart. Somebody should have said to him, “take it easy, you’re doing too much.” Somebody probably did, but Bassem wouldn’t have listened. He lived the struggle.

The many obituaries published by Lebanese, Arab, and international socialists are a testimony to his impact on this current. He was one of the few people who could coordinate and develop regional branches of revolutionary socialists. In *al-manshour*, his close colleagues from the Socialist Forum wrote that he “dedicated his life to the liberation of humanity from all forms of hegemony, occupation and oppression. With his sudden departure, we lost more than a rare revolutionary activist. We also lost a unique leader with very creative initiatives. It will not be easy at all to fill the huge vacuum of his absence.”² The revolutionary socialists in Egypt asserted that he “was a towering figure on the Arab revolutionary Left” with a

“unique ability to coordinate the issuing of a statement on behalf of revolutionary organizations in different countries and complete all the necessary discussions and corrections in half a day (...) We have lost a tremendous fighting spirit. We have lost a keen revolutionary intelligence. We have lost the theoretical and political contribu-

tions we were expecting from him in the long term.”³

Beyond the region as well, the legacy of Bassem was celebrated and the lost potential mourned. “It’s hard to overstate the political loss the revolutionary left in the Middle East has suffered,” wrote Alex Callinicos in the UK-based Socialist Worker. Remembering Bassem as someone who added crucial nuance to international socialists’ understanding of the complexities of the Middle East, Callinicos stressed that a sympathetic “cultural translator” such as Bassem is highly needed for international socialists to make sense of it for them.⁴ Summarising reactions to Bassem’s death, the Moroccan researcher and member of the international group RS21 Miriyam Aouragh further wrote, “we have lost one of the very few principled voices in what is becoming a quagmire.”⁵

The Middle East, the left, and popular mobilization have landed in a quagmire indeed. Perhaps it is worth remembering that for every generation of leftists, the challenges have been huge and the odds stacked against them. The attempt to carve out a path towards socialist change has always necessitated iconic figures, rebel intellectuals, whose words and deeds provided guidance. The most touching indication that Bassem Chit could become such a figurehead for

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activists in the Middle East is the fifth issue of *al-thawra al-dā'ima*, where his peers from around the Arab world, old and young, pay tribute to his thoughts and life. These short texts are often quite poetic and deeply personal, and show the extent to which his death was a collective emotional event, a turning point after which no one was the same. As his friend Walid Daou wrote, Bassem was not quite Christ the Saviour, but his comrades now almost feel like the disciples who must be reminded by the example of the

dead to stand against "the attacks that are being waged today. Will we be able to stand on our feet? The answer is certain, it is that we will not accept anything less than a sweeping revolution to lead us towards the other side."⁶

Bassem himself formed his ideas in a conversation with all of the living people on these pages and many more, and with his intellectual heroes, as he grew up in the 1990s, staring down left melancholia with his Trotsky, his Mahdi 'Amil and his Marx in hand. Ideological formation is a

cumulative process, in which the words and deeds of rebels who went before provide guidance for new generations. It was unexpected that Bassem should join their ranks so soon.

Notes

¹ <<http://www.turkeyagenda.com/interview-with-the-late-bassem-chit-on-the-politics-and-culture-in-lebanon-and-the-middle-east-1302.html>>

² <<http://www.al-manshour.org/node/5923>>

³ <<http://global.rev soc.me/2014/10/farewell-bassem-chit-farewell-comrade/>>

⁴ <<https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/39121/>>

⁵ <<http://rs21.org.uk/2014/10/03/bassem-chit/>>

⁶ Walid Daou, "Bāsim, ka'annak dakhalt fi al-naṣṣ" ("Bassem, as if you entered into the text"). Permanent Revolution 5, 181-83. <<http://permanentrevolution-journal.org/ar/node/106>>

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META

Who Is a Rebel? Typology and Rebel Groups in the Contemporary Middle East¹

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This article provides a typology of rebel groups in the Middle East from the perspective of political science and situates them in a broader context of rebellion around the world.

Keywords: Rebel groups; Civil conflicts; Middle East

Defining a Rebel

We define a rebel as a member of rebel groups that oppose existing national governments militarily and have political goals. This definition of armed political opposition will exclude members of some armed groups such as government militias or criminal groups with purely profit motives. In our discussion, a rebel will be an individual, embedded in a collective group, with political goals such as taking over the central government or achieving political autonomy or territorial independence. He or she is the person who decided to take up arms to achieve that goal, in opposition to the status quo provided by the government. This will also exclude some peace movements and unarmed rebellions.

In this article, we will focus on a rebel "group" as our key analytical unit. Why choose to study a group rather than an individual rebel as a key unit of analysis? Rebel groups are cohesive units with a certain political goal. We think studying those groups with definitive characteristics will be a profitable approach in understanding political, social and economic behaviors surrounding rebels. Our emphasis on "group" might sacrifice the individualities, but will simplify the characteristics of rebel elements in the world. The analytical leverage gained from looking at rebel groups

and organizations will be helpful in understanding rebellion, as rebel groups are producers of political strategies, social networks, and military tactics.

Our conceptual definition coincides with the ordinary definition of rebels, but with a focus on the group-dimension. The dictionary definitions of a rebel contain the ideas of progressivism and unorthodoxy. The word, rebel, is associated with a challenge to the traditions of an existing authority. Rebels usually desire independence and autonomy, seeking to establish their own social, political, and sometimes religious order. The associated adjectives included are dissident, subversive, and rebutting—highlighting the nature of a rebel to defy the status quo. In our conceptual, definitional boundary, rebel groups resist the political status quo collectively and with military means.

Beyond such conceptual boundaries, the empirical boundaries of a rebel have never been certain. The meaning, connotation, and classification of aliases—freedom fighters or terrorists, for instance—have varied over time and between regions. On one hand, freedom fighters (or liberation movements) was often used during the de-colonization periods in the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, terrorist groups have substantial overlap with rebel groups: some domestic indi-

vidual terrorists are not classified as organized rebels, and terrorist groups with global aims are not easily classified as rebels (Jo). But, many rebel groups use terrorist tactics and are thus identified as terrorists (Fortna).

With this empirical backdrop, we will use the following operational definition of rebel groups: armed organizations that engaged in actual battle against national government forces, generating at least 25 battle deaths in a civil conflict. This will include some terrorist groups as well as liberation movements, but exclude some armed groups such as government militias or criminal gangs. The empirical definition will also exclude some small rebel groups that may have had little military impact, such as initiators of peaceful, social movements.

With this conceptual and operational definition of rebels, the goal of this article is to provide a typology of rebel groups from a political science perspective, with application to the Middle Eastern (ME) rebel groups. Our focus is to uncover the commonalities and differences between the rebel groups in the Middle East vs. those of the rest of the world.

Specifically, we will argue that ME rebel groups are unique in two aspects: 1) religious divides run deep in many rebel movements, and 2) global aims of some

groups are not easily found in other parts of the world. We will also argue that ME rebel groups share many traits with rebel groups in other parts of the world, in particular, with respect to the relationship with their core constituencies/supporters or rebellion tactics.

In our analysis, we will take a fairly expansive definition of the Middle East region—spanning from Northern Africa (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia), the Persian Gulf countries (e.g. Iran, Iraq, Yemen), as well as neighboring countries in the east (e.g. Afghanistan). The temporal focus of this article is contemporary, mainly covering the post-Cold War period, from 1990 to the present day.

Classification of Rebels

Before we provide our typology of ME rebel groups, we review the literature in political science on the classification of rebels in the context of internal armed conflicts. Three subfields of political science—international relations, comparative politics, and political economy—all deal with the issues of civil conflicts. We identify five major classifications in those strands of literature.

The first dominant theme in the civil war literature has been the dichotomy between greed-based rebels versus grievance-based rebels (Collier and Hoeffler). Rebels based on “greed” usually have

profit seeking motives, consequently dealing with lootable resources, such as diamonds or drugs. The Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone is usually classified in this greed category for their sales of diamonds in funding their rebellion. Rebels with “grievances” focus more on political solutions rather than economic profits. These usually include conflicts involving ethnic minorities or secessionism. The rebellion waged by the Karen National Union in Myanmar can be an example of grievance-based rebellion, as the group, based on Karen ethnicity, aims at their own Karen state.

The second classification involves what rebel groups aim at (Sobek and Payne). Some have aims to capture the central government (center aim) while others want to retain autonomy in their own region (peripheral aim). For example, Naxalites in India have a center aim while the rebels in Nagaland have a peripheral aim. The Naxalite-Maoist insurgency was not confined to a region but extended to subverting the ideology and operation of the central Indian Government. This national aim is in contrast to that of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland which focuses on the Naga territory in the north-east India. The distinction between secessionist and non-secessionist rebels also has its roots in rebel goals (Fazal).

The third classification hinges on how rebel groups evolve. In his study on African politics, Reno identified five sets of rebel groups: 1) “anti-colonial” rebels that fought against colonial rulers, 2) “majority-rule” rebels that were against minorities in South Africa, 3) “reform” rebels that worked to build a state, 4) “warlord” rebels that remained as destabilizing forces, and 5) “parochial” rebels with local concerns. This classification is based on a historical trajectory of rebel groups in Africa.

The fourth and most recent classification hinges on rebels’ institutional features. Weinstein studies rebel organizations and provides classification of opportunistic rebels vs. activist rebels. Opportunistic rebels are often resource-dependent and violence-prone. Activist rebels are usually committed to social ideals and are embedded within their society. More recently, Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan suggest many institutional features of rebel groups, such as political wings, external funding bases, as well as command and control structures. The work by Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan does not necessarily produce different categories for classification, but provides the basis for understanding diverse dimensions of rebel groups. These developments are additions to the studies of civil conflicts that contributed to the clas-

sification of rebel groups and our disaggregated understanding of their nature and operation.

Compared to twenty years ago, our understanding of rebel groups has improved over time. With the classifications mentioned above, the study on rebel groups has become more objective, beyond political connotations in normal parlance. Recent studies are beginning to recognize the deep links between terrorism studies and civil war studies (Findley and Young). This cross-fertilization will be an ongoing trend for the study of rebel groups.

The classification of a rebel is important because it brings with it profound social, legal, and political consequences.

Social consequences include “naming and shaming.” If rebels are branded as freedom fighters, social acceptance is implicitly present. But if rebels are branded as outlaw actors, they are often regarded as criminals.

Legal consequences include whether a rebel can sustain the effort for its movement. The Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list designated by the United States is one example. Once designated as a FTO, the group is unable to get material support from humanitarian organizations, diaspora populations, and other private entities.

The political consequences of being branded a rebel include the loss of political legitimacy in mainstream politics. Many national governments use this strategy of branding certain oppositions as rebels, in order to de-legitimize their activities—mainly to re-assert their own political authority and legitimacy. This delineation of the “ruler” and the “ruled” prompts political conflicts—from accusations to downright military confrontations.

Charting the Map of Middle East Rebel Groups

To provide a systematic and comprehensive study of ME rebel groups, we have collected the data on ME rebel groups following our conceptual and operational definition. The result is Table 1 (see supplement 1). The table lists the rebel groups operating in the Middle East between 1946 and 2015.

In creating the list of Middle Eastern rebel groups, the operational definition in the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan) was followed and expanded to include recent Middle Eastern groups. The NSA dataset follows the definition of armed conflicts from the UCDP (Uppsala Conflict Data Program) project and defines a conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the

use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.” This definition excludes some small or weak groups that failed to generate a count of 25 battle-deaths and groups that did not directly engage in military confrontations.

Rebels in the Middle East are not typical rebels but have political, religious, and social layers. There are several, important points in Table 1 that highlight the similarities and differences of Middle Eastern rebel groups compared to other rebel groups worldwide. Some features highlight the uniqueness of the rebel groups of the Middle East versus other regions.

The first prominent feature we can observe is the religious dimension of many rebel movements. The groups described are mostly Islamic, with 29 out of 35 groups (83%). The affiliation of Islam is largely determined by the group's professed identity and the creed of the majority of its members, and we identified the religion based on the previous studies of each group relying on the key sources such as the narratives from the START dataset, the Non-State Actor dataset, and other secondary sources. A substantial majority of groups adhere to the Sunni sect of Islam in this list: i.e. 23 groups (66%). Groups adhering to the Shia sect

of Islam are the second largest religious group, totaling 4 groups (11%). The rest of the groups are categorized as mixed Islamic sects, like the Northern Alliance and KDPI (6%); Maronite Christian groups (6%); or secular groups that avoid religious affiliation (11%).

The second unique feature of ME rebel groups is the stark contrast in the scope of the groups' aims. Some ME rebel groups have strictly domestic goals while others wage a globally-oriented struggle. This division defines the scope of the group's reach, levels of exposure to international audiences, and the perceived salience of their struggle. The global aim of some rebel groups is simply not present in the rebel organizations of other parts of the world.

The domestic struggle of ME rebel groups usually involves minorities in a conflict against authorities over their political rights. One such example is Jundallah in Iran, an ethnically Baluch group, which has been engaged in a long standing conflict with the government. Another example of domestic struggle is the uprising of rebel groups related to the Kurdish ethnic minority. The Kurds are a very large ethnic group spread over several Middle Eastern countries, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Within those countries, the Kurds are a minority fighting to achieve a certain

degree of political freedom or independence. In Turkey, the Revolutionary People's Liberation Army (DHKP/C) and the Maoist Communist Party of Turkey and North Kurdistan (MKP) are the main Kurdish rebel groups. In Iran, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) have waged wars against the Iranian regime. In Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) has been active (Van Bruinessen). For its part, the conflict in Yemen presents a slightly different version of domestic struggle, where the Huthis exert strong opposition to the central government which attempted to extend its authority to the semi-autonomous region of Sa'da in the north (Salmoni et al.).

The opposite end of the spectrum involves groups with a more global orientation of their goals. In the case of ME rebel groups, the aims are mostly spreading their religious beliefs with the plan of establishing an Islamic Caliphate. Al-Qa'ida and its affiliations, such as Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) which is active in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, have led this quest for over 20 years. These groups fight to expel all external, specifically Western and American, presences from the Middle East and to establish Islamic governments. Over the last two years, ISIS, an Islamic, extremist rebel group was established by

former Al-Qa'ida members, with the global aim of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East. This Islamic empire could stretch over to other regions, such as Europe or Africa.

The third feature of ME rebel groups concerns the groups' interaction with foreign interventionists. Examples of rebel groups fighting domestic forces, such as Jundallah or Huthis, were discussed earlier in the domestic struggle context. Those conflicts sometimes suffer from a limited number of paths to resolution and may last for many years, such as the Kurdish struggle for autonomy. On the other hand, rebel groups fighting external intervention generally face two types of adversaries: 1) external actors controlling their territory on a permanent basis or 2) external actors controlling a territory on a temporary basis.

The former type can be described as rebel groups fighting to expel foreign authorities which, they believe, control their territory and negate political rights, preventing independence. The Palestinian rebel groups belong to this category. Israel has partial control over disputed territories. Palestinian groups, such as Fatah or AMB, promote a struggle for Israel's withdrawal and Palestine's independence. A more extreme version of this struggle is conducted by Hamas and the Palestinian

Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Those groups believe all of present-day Israel is occupied Palestinian territories. Their goal is to liberate all Israeli and Israeli-occupied lands to create the nation of Palestine. PIJ and Hamas add a religious dimension to their struggle, specifically an Islamic affiliation.

The latter type involves groups fighting for the removal of outside intervention forces which control a territory on a temporary basis, such as the US presence in Afghanistan and Iraq. Another effect in this category is that when the local government is influenced by a foreign entity, often the US, those rebel groups refuse to accept its legitimacy. This pattern is exemplified by the insurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq over the last 12-15 years and the activities of rebel groups like Al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, Jam'iyat-i-Islami, ISIS, Ansar al-Islam, and the Al-Mahdi Army. Those groups have fought for the removal of outside intervention forces and local governments influenced by foreign entities. Most of these groups fight with the aim of installing a government based on Islamic law.

Finally, governance functions of the ME rebel groups are worth mentioning. Some groups are strictly of a military nature and have no political representation or governance functions. Examples of this are extreme ideological groups, like PIJ in Palestine or Al-Qa'ida. Other rebel groups

exhibit some governance functions, maintaining military and political wings. As a subset of these governing rebels, the political wing is responsible for local representation or representation in the national or regional councils. Some of the Afghani groups fit this description. Jam'iyat-i-Islami has political representation in the government and the parliament in Afghanistan. Hizb-i Islami has both general representations in the Afghan cabinet and local positions of governance (Katzman). The Iraqi group, Jammat al Sadr al Tahni is the political wing of the Al Mahdi Army and is a member of the Iraqi Parliament (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism Dataset). Groups like Hamas, Fatah, and PNA have governance functions in their respective areas (see Table 1 (see supplement 1)). The PNA is the recognized Palestinian authority, while Fatah is the main party in this body. Hamas became the governing body in the Gaza strip following the 2006 elections. Hizbullah, a Lebanese based Shia rebel group, has a large military wing, but from the governance angle it participates in the general elections and is a large member in parliament (Lob). A significant part of this representation is a function of its social operations within the Shia population. Hizbullah works in government to

provide basic social services, but to also contribute to larger projects, like the reconstruction of Shia neighborhoods in Beirut and elsewhere following the civil war and confrontations with Israel (Cammatt).

The last group in this discussion may be a type in and of itself. ISIS aims to occupy all Islamic territories and establish a caliphate. In order to accomplish this, ISIS employs a different model of organization from that which is common for rebel and terrorist groups.

First, ISIS uses extensive military power to conquer territory and erase any possible opposition using extreme measures. The famous beheadings and other violent attacks on its adversaries exemplify this tactic by the ISIS.

The second aspect is a governance model of multiple offices and bureaus handling different issues such as finance, civilian life, and more. This governance feature is easily observed in some rebel groups with deep connections to domestic populations, but is not easily observed among groups branded as terrorists, making the case of ISIS a bit unique. This governance function of ISIS features two prime categories. The first category is an administrative one which handles religious outreach and enforcement, the judicial system, the educational system, and public relations. The

other is a service-oriented office which manages humanitarian aid and key infrastructures, like electricity and the water supply. This office has taken on even larger scale projects which provide services, such as dams and a thermal power plant in the Aleppo province of Syria (Cronin; Caris and Reynolds).

Many ME rebel groups are branded as terrorists. The most common offences are child soldiering; suicide bombings; killings; and violent acts committed against civilians. Most groups show negligent or intentional disregard for civilian safety and life, as most commit varying forms of attacks that endanger civilians. This negligent or intentional disregard for civilian safety is exemplified through practices of indiscriminate fire, indiscriminate attacks, the use of IEDs and anti-personnel mines, forced displacement, civilian killings, suicide bombings, and ethnic cleansing. Suicide bombings are a common practice used by ME groups, but are not limited to Islamic groups. For example, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Devrimci Sol have a history of using suicide bombings, despite being secular groups desiring political autonomy. These examples demonstrate that rebel groups add suicide bombing to the repertoire of their tactics of rebellion when they need it, not necessarily due to religious reasons. In

the past few decades suicide bombings have become widespread in the region. They have been committed most often in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria. From 1982-2015, suicide bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan totaled more than all worldwide suicide attacks combined (The Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism).

Typology of Rebels in the Middle East

In this section, we propose a typology of rebel groups in the Middle East. The types are based on previous literature on rebel groups and civil wars, as well as our research on ME rebel groups in Table 1 (see supplement 1). Our primary goal is to illuminate the distinct features of the Middle Eastern groups as well as the commonalities they share with other groups in other parts of the world. The comparisons are mostly drawn from the main author's works (Jo). The typology is based on rebel groups' relationships with their political audiences as well as rebel tactics and strategies. Therefore, in future studies it can be used as an analytical framework to investigate rebel group behaviors and to understand their political and social environments.

We identify five sets of rebel groups in the Middle East: 1) "ruler" rebels that have public good provision functions

(e.g. Hizbullah), 2) recognition-seeking "diplomat" rebels (e.g. PLO), 3) "terrorist" rebels (e.g. ISIS), 4) "warlord" rebels (e.g. Afghanistan rebels), and 5) "exile" rebels (e.g. Jundallah, MEK).

The first set is "ruler" rebels. Cammett's work on Hizbullah running public programs and social services, including health-care provisions or protection functions, is now well-known. Governance functions also include the activities of political parties to build local constituencies, as Table 1 (see supplement 1) indicates. These "governor" rebel groups are found in other parts of the world. For example, Maoists in Nepal exhibited extensive governing functions, such as running schools or political programs (Huang). M23 in the Democratic Republic of Congo attempted to "protect" civilians and taxed civilians in the territory they controlled (Gorur). Given that these features appear in other regions, this ruler-feature is not a distinct characteristic of the ME rebel groups. But the comparison tells us that ME groups are not that different in some aspects from those in other parts of the world. Rebels' core functions are in their attempts to fill the void by establishing their own rules and order where government control is lacking.

The second set is "diplomat" rebels. Some rebel groups actively conduct diplomacy

to seek recognition from other states. The PLO is a prime example for a diplomat rebel, with extensive diplomacy networks within the United Nations and obtaining observer status. MEK has an effective lobbying machine in the United States—it was taken off of the Foreign Terrorist Organization list by building political networks in the US Congress. Other groups engage transnational actors such as international non-governmental organizations to build their own social networks in the international system. For example, the Huthis in Yemen engaged in negotiations with the United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to reduce the use of child soldiers in their ranks. There are ten other rebel groups that have signed the UN action plans to ban the child soldiering in other parts of the world, so this diplomatic effort is not unique to the ME rebels, but it is informative to note that this rebel diplomatic activity is also present in the Middle East.

The third set is "terrorist" rebels. Being branded as terrorists always carries political connotations depending on who designates a group as terrorists. But some rebel groups do engage in terrorist acts that generate physical and psychological terror against their enemies or innocent civilians. Human rights violations listed in Table 1 (see supplement 1) are an indica-

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tion that rebel groups engage in the acts that could violate the principles of human dignity in pursuit of their political goals. One prominent example is the Islamic State. ISIS is not commonly thought of as a rebel because of its prominence in global aims for spreading and imposing Islamic order and its regional aim of creating a caliphate. However, the group exhibits its rebel elements in fighting against the Asad government in Syria and fighting against the Iraqi government. ISIS is rather categorized as a terrorist organization than a rebel organization due to its so-called terror tactics, as exemplified in the group's treatment of Yazidis.

The fourth set is "warlord" rebels. Warlords are characterized by personal authority, commercial activity, and factional struggles, not aiming for the reconstruction of national politics (Reno). Afghanistan is a prime example of warlord politics. The Taliban still control many parts of Afghanistan, commandeering the drug fields in the Helmand region. Many warlords ceased fighting against Soviet rule and took positions in the government, holding local powers and commandeering commercial activities. For example, Ahmad Shah Mas'ud was dubbed the "Lion of the Panjshir" (local rule); Ismail Kahn, previously the Governor of Herat Province and a key member of the Jam'iyat-i-Islami,

became the minister of water and energy (government position) (Kaphle). Warlord politics are not confined to Afghanistan. We discover such dynamics in some African states and eastern Myanmar as well. In Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zaire, and Nigeria, in particular, have experienced warlord politics, with many rebel leaders behaving like warlords (Reno). In Myanmar, the opium warlord, Khun Sa, made or broke rebel groups such as the Shan United Army and the Mong Tai Army, engaged in factional politics and the drug trade, sometimes even co-opting the government (Staniland).

The fifth set is "exile" rebels. Jundallah is located in Iraq but fights for the Sunni Muslims in Iran, a predominantly Shia nation. Mujahidin-i Khalq (MEK) was based in Iraq but also fought against the Iranian regime. Although some rebel leadership circles reside in Europe as many African rebel group leaders do, the key purpose has been to connect to the western world for lobbying (in the case of MEK) or to garner support from diaspora populations (in the case of PKK). The exile rebels have exhibited some overlapping qualities with diplomat rebels, as they expand their activities beyond their motherlands.

Note that these categories are not mutually exclusive categories. Many rebel groups take on multiple titles. ISIS for

example exhibited "ruler" functions in the al-Raqqa region but is also branded as "terrorist" due to its acts toward the Yazidis. The remaining puzzle which current scholarship has not quite solved is the overlapping qualities of rebel groups. Why do some ME rebel groups exhibit the qualities of "governors" while they are branded as terrorists? Are these in-group vs. out-group behaviors where rebel groups play governors vis-à-vis their supporters while terrorizing "others"? Are the seemingly contrasting behaviors the result of strategic calculations of rebels at different time periods? Is it plausible to think that rebel groups violate the rules of the game when they get desperate, following the logic laid out in the work of Downes? Alternatively, do the rebels fill the void in the provision of public goods where state service is not simply available?

There are some additional notable features of ME groups vis-à-vis other parts of the world. Religion runs deep in the case of Middle Eastern rebel groups. The division between Sunnis and Shias is unparalleled. The resource war is less pronounced in the case of ME groups. Even though control of oil fields by ISIS highlights that resources, particularly oil, can play a role in rebel activity, it is less pronounced than that of gems in Africa or drugs in Latin America, which have been

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used to advance the economic interests of rebel groups.

Typologies usually involve multiple underlying dimensions (Skaaning and Møller). The key dimensions of this typology are the relationships with other political actors—the relationships with domestic populations, the relationships with the outside world, and the relationship with the opposing state. “Ruler” rebels and “warlord” rebels are concerned with their relationship with the domestic population. “Diplomat” rebels and “terrorist” rebels are characterized by relationships with the outside world. While “diplomat” rebels reach out to powerful international actors seeking recognition, “terrorist” rebels are often branded as criminals by the outside world. For their part, “ruler” rebels and “exile” rebels form special relationships with the opposing states: “ruler” rebels are in competition for governance functions and “exile” rebels try to exert influence from outside the state.

The second dimension is the rebels' tactics and strategies. In achieving their political goals, rebel groups pick and choose which strategies best suit them. “Ruler” rebel groups decide to provide governance functions in civilian areas they hope to rule one day. “Diplomat” rebel groups, usually secessionist groups (Huang), make international political strategies a priority,

in order to advance their goals of building an independent state. International political strategies are important for “exile” groups as well, because they have to survive outside of their key domain. MEK's fight to acquire a base in Iraq illustrates this point. As an Iranian dissent group, MEK has struggled to find a base of operations (Masters). Lastly, the tactics employed by “terrorist” and “warlord” rebel groups are well known. Terrorism involves violence against civilians with the political intention of creating physical and psychological damage (Gaibulloev and Sandler), whereas warlord rebel groups are often grounded economically and politically with local networks and shifting alliances (Christia). The two dimensions of rebel typology are summarized in Table 2 (see supplement 1).

The suggested typology is useful for several purposes. First, the types can be used for descriptive purposes. The typology is not unique to ME groups, so the types can be used for describing and classifying rebel groups in other parts of the world. Second, the types can also be used for analytical purposes. Since the typology's key dimension is about how rebel groups forge relations within and outside their society, we can study how each type is different in terms of behaviors in political violence. For example, future studies can test

the hypothesis that “diplomat” rebels reduce violence over time. Or, using the typology, future studies can focus on different propensities of rebel types to negotiate or co-opt. For instance, we could test whether warlord rebels are easier to co-opt compared to terrorist groups.

Conclusion

This article demonstrated that the classification of a rebel carries a complex issue that is laden with political, social, and legal consequences. The question of who a rebel is will have to be answered before we act on certain policies, and before we forge responses to a potential rebellion. Our analysis that examines ME rebels and compares them to rebel groups in other parts of the world shows that ME rebels are not anomalies. They share governance qualities and conduct diplomacy vis-à-vis the outside world. The differences, however, stand out with deep religious divides and occasional global aims.

We are left with a tangled web of religion, ideology, military strategies, and political motivations. The typology provided here is an attempt at clarifying the situation, but other classifications and different levels of understanding should be forthcoming in order to see how rebellion is waged and in what ways it evolves in the context of both local and global arenas.

Notes

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ANTI/THESIS

ANTI-THESIS

'Terrorist' Use of the Internet: An Overblown Issue

Gilbert Ramsay

The role of the Internet in promoting transnational recruitment for armed groups, particularly "terrorist" organisations, is often taken for granted. In reality, the evidence is far from clear-cut. Research on how contemporary armed groups use the Internet suggests that they themselves view the Internet with considerable suspicion. Such accounts, however, fail to take account of an argu-

ably more important question: whether those groups which make extensive use of the Internet have actually been more effective in causing violence than groups which have either chosen not to use it, or which were operating before it came into existence.

Keywords: Terrorism; Internet; Social Media; Political Violence

By virtue of inhabiting the same planet as the rest of us, some insurgents, guerrillas, political radicals and "terrorists" use the Internet. Since they use it for business as well as pleasure, their uses of the Internet are naturally of interest to the states against which their activities are directed. This would be nothing more than a statement of the obvious, were it not for the fact that, for many years—and to some extent even today—the mere fact of terrorists using the Internet has been presented as something remarkable, shocking, alarming and inherently transformative. Merely by using email, for example, or browsing publicly accessible websites, terrorists are, in the policy jargon, engaging in "misuse" or "abuse" of the Internet—as if the Internet were inherently reserved for morally sanctioned or legal practices, or as if escaping from a bank robbery in a getaway car represents a "misuse" or "abuse" of the roads.

In reality, while there is now some interesting research available exploring the specific online practices of "terrorists" (almost always Sunni jihadists and, at a distant second, far-right movements), there is very little systematic discussion of how much Internet use has fundamentally changed the nature of terrorism and political vio-

lence, let alone whether it has tilted things in the terrorists' favour.

In this article, I shall argue, both on the basis of what research *does* tell us, and what research has by and large failed to consider that there is little justification at present for believing that the Internet has profoundly reshaped the landscape of conflict in favour of insurgents and "terrorists." While terrorist groups undoubtedly use and therefore presumably gain some perceived advantage from using the Internet, it is by no means obvious that terrorist groups or terrorism more generally actually benefit from using the Internet, relatively or even absolutely.

For many years, armed rebels were seen more as a threat to information technology than as its potential beneficiaries. Steven Levy (132) records how bombproof plexiglass windows were installed to protect programmers at MIT's AI lab from possible attacks by the militant leftist splinter group, the Weather Underground. Nonetheless, as computer networks gradually became available to the general public, concerns quickly started to be raised about, for example, the use of early electronic bulletin boards to bring together American neo-Nazis (Hoffman).

By the end of the 1990s, it was beginning to be observed that some groups that appeared in some national lists of terrorist organisations were maintaining their own websites. This observation quickly fed into a broader discussion going on in Western and particularly American strategic thought about asymmetric threats and "information warfare." It also provided a new avenue for scholars of terrorism, who had long maintained that the phenomenon was best understood as "violence as communication" (Schmid and de Graaf). Early publications on the phenomenon of terrorist use of the Internet, as it tended to be called, to distinguish it from the more sensationalistic notion of cyberterrorism, were not immune to some hyperbole themselves. A typical discussion went something like this: First, based on examples of online content, or (usually anecdotal) reports of terrorists who had used the Internet in some way, it would be deduced that terrorists were systematically "exploiting" the Internet as a "tool" in order to achieve some quite clearly defined organisational outcome. For example, content identified as being produced either by terrorist organisations or by their apparent sympathizers would be taken to amount to a systematic propaganda strategy. Materials such as bomb-making recipes or small arms instruction

manuals were presented as evidence for the existence of a "virtual training camp" (Weimann). Online calls for involvement would be treated as equivalent to recruitment and mobilization, and so on.

Second, the mere fact that apparent terrorists were apparently achieving such things online would be assumed—at least implicitly—to constitute a new and greater threat than had existed previously. Just as the Internet made everything more efficient, so the argument seemed to run, it would necessarily make terrorists more efficient. And furthermore, making terrorists more efficient necessarily must mean making them more efficient at causing carnage and mayhem—not, for example, at achieving political goals which might not be, in and of themselves, unjust or objectionable.

For substantive, relatively early work in this area we may look to scholars such as Gabriel Weimann, Maura Conway or Martin C. Libicki. But perhaps the clearest and most eloquent statement of the overall thrust of research in this area can be seen in Audrey Kurth Cronin's attempt to see deep historical parallels between "cybermobilisation" and the French revolutionary experience of *levée en masse*. As she argued:

The means and ends of mass mobilization are changing, bypassing the traditional state-centered approach that was the hallmark of the French Revolution and leaving advanced Western democracies merely to react to the results. Today's dynamic social, economic, and political transitions are as important to war as were the changes at the end of the 18th century that Clausewitz observed. Most important is the twenty-first-century's *levée en masse*, a mass networked mobilization that emerges from cyber-space with a direct impact on physical reality. Individually accessible, ordinary networked communications such as personal computers, DVDs, videotapes, and cell phones are altering the nature of human social interaction, thus also affecting the shape and outcome of domestic and international conflict. (77)

At the heart of Cronin's argument lies an important paradox which seems at least to hover around what is now a generation's worth of attempts to understand the post-Cold War order and, in particular, the rise of militant Islamism: the question of whether we are witnessing, in essence, a postmodern or a modern phenomenon.

On the one hand, Cronin's article seeks to observe, in the ideological mobilisation of insurgents to battle the occupation of Iraq, a phenomenon closely akin to the raising of French citizens to defend and extend their revolution. (On this note, it is difficult to resist the temptation to compare the bloody, self-sacrificial ethic of a song like *Ummati Qad Lāh Fajr*, the informal anthem of IS, although of course this specific example postdates Cronin's article).

On the other hand, she seeks to present cyber-mobilization as something fundamentally alien to the centralized, hierarchical spirit of nationalism as it emerged in Hobsbawm's *Age of Revolution*—as something “individually accessible,” spatially fragmented, “networked.”

Behind this seeming tension in Cronin's argument lies another tension in another argument: the thesis that networked forms of organisation would increasingly dominate the landscape of conflict in the 21st century. Probably the leading exponents of this idea have been John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, two analysts with RAND Corporation, who, through the 1990s, developed a theory of what they called “netwar.” For Ronfeldt, the network represents the dominant organisational principle of the emerging epoch of human his-

tory, distinct from tribal, hierarchical, and market-based forms of organisation. Arquilla and Ronfeldt assumed that the US, in particular, would in future find its hierarchically organised institutions increasingly in conflict with networks which, by virtue of their greater adaptability and fluidity, would tend to outmaneuver conventionally organised forces. This in turn would require US forces to become more networked, on the grounds that “it takes a network to beat a network.”

The central ambiguity in Arquilla and Ronfeldt's argument is this: On the one hand, they are keen to emphasize that networks obey a different logic than hierarchies, and therefore must be talked about in a new way. And yet, as military-strategic thinkers, they remain eager to retain at least one concept which seems quintessential to the old hierarchical order: the notion of war. To be sure, “netwar” is a mercurial kind of war. Many of its attributes more closely resemble what at first glance one might be tempted to call “peace.” For example, the decision by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, to lay down arms in favor of transnational advocacy is closely analysed by Ronfeldt et al. in *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*, as a case of the adoption of a “netwar” strategy.

But the “war” in netwar is not, it seems, merely metaphorical. If nothing else, it invokes binary notions of us and them, of blue teams and red, where “red” may be a network but is still unmistakably an “adversary,” and where “us” is usually taken to mean not an equivalent network (such as the network of influential individuals underpinning a regime or a ruling class or a military-industrial complex or even a whole “civilisation”), but rather a set of clear institutions, such as a national military. In short, it conflates, in the helpful terminology of Internet governance expert Milton Mueller, two very different things: the “associative cluster” and the “network organisation.” The “network organisation” is what strategic thinkers like Arquilla and Ronfeldt presumably mean when they recommend more decentralization in the US military. The networks they see as the new enemies are sometimes presented as the same thing: for example, when groups like al-Qā’ida are presented as adopting a deliberate, top-down plan to reorganise into a “franchise” system. But often what is in fact being referred to—particularly online—looks more like the unbounded “associative cluster” consisting essentially of like-minded individuals who sometimes turn out to work in concert.

The issue of network organisations versus associative clusters is specifically important when we come to consider what we now know about how terrorist (for which we can usually read jihadi-Salafist) groups have used the Internet. Here, the broad lesson that seems to have been learned by terrorists and counter-terrorists alike is that the Internet is viewed as a boon to the extent that the online insurgents are prepared to use it as an open medium, and becomes a liability the moment there is any attempt to treat it as a secure environment appropriate for serious organisational activity.

Contrary to the idea of a “virtual safe haven” in which terrorists could freely plan, train, recruit, fundraise and case new operations, it has turned out that terrorists themselves view the Internet as a deeply problematic, often hostile medium to be treated with great caution (Torres Soriano; Hegghammer: ‘Interpersonal trust on jihadi forums’). Bomb-making instructions are often unreliable, and where good quality, vetted versions are to be found, it is difficult to translate theoretical learning into reality (Stenersen; Kenney). Trying to form conspiracies online to do illegal things in communities where the members have never met in person is an intelligence officer’s dream come true. Indeed,

we now know that possibly al-Qā’ida’s single most important and trusted online forum in 2009 was a joint creation of Saudi intelligence and the CIA (Hegghammer). Even the authenticity of propaganda content can’t always be trusted. The website *tawhed.ws*, run by the most influential jihadist clerics in the worlds (Brachman and McCants; Wagemakers), was for a long time the single most trusted online resource for jihadi-Salafi literature on the web. Eventually, however, rumours began to circulate as to how the esteemed clerics were able to continue to produce authentic content while in jail, or under constant intelligence supervision. Jihadist advice for staying safe online—even in Western countries—has moved beyond the once universal advice not to try to “join the jihad” online, or to plot operations, to admonitions to not even publish or disseminate content which might openly violate anti-terrorism speech codes.

Moreover, the issue is not just one of operational security. It is also about the difficulty of message control. al-Qā’ida’s leadership turns out to have been deeply concerned about the risk of its message being distorted by its critics and its over-enthusiastic supporters online, striving instead, with little success, to get respectable mass media coverage on the anniver-

sary of 9/11 ("Letters from Abbottabad"). Islamic State—widely hailed as an unassailable paragon of Internet "savviness"—would seem, in reality, to be little different. A leaked internal IS document called "Principles for the Management of the Islamic State" (*mubādā' fī idārat al-dawlat al-islamiyya*) reveals a rigidly hierarchical system for the administration of media activities based on a system of "foundations" (*mu'asasāt*), each of which is directly answerable to the governors of each province and, ultimately, to the caliphal *diwan*.

Despite all this, IS seems to be conflicted about its own message. The group is of course notorious for its "slick," "sophisticated" propaganda videos which prominently feature the gory executions of the group's many enemies. Off the bat, one might imagine that this approach would be a poor way to sell the group to idealistic young Muslims, either deeply affected by the human suffering of co-religionists, or aspiring to a utopian new society. But one also might imagine that IS had nonetheless thought through these problems and come to the conclusion that such gore was, in fact, effective. And yet, as turns out, it hadn't. A report from ARA News Agency (Nasro) reveals internal concerns about image management as a result of execution videos, apparently coming from the

very top of the organisation, which has since toned down its violent output and re-focused on presenting itself as administratively competent. By contrast, in its official English language magazine (al-Muhājira, "Slave Girls, or Prostitutes?"), IS picked a fight with its own online supporters for misleadingly trying to suggest that the group did not practice sex-slavery. Ultimately, the "netwar" lens through which so much analysis of "terrorist use of the Internet" is, explicitly or otherwise, presented misleads, because where informally bounded networks are in conflict, the size of the conflicting parties is in the eye of the beholder. For example, in the BBC World Service documentary "The Islamic State's Social Media Machine," the United States' *Think Again, Turn Away*¹ counter-narrative program presents itself as "a rag tag guerrilla organisation waging a hit and run campaign [...] the David against the ISIS Goliath." This obviously absurd demarcation of the conflict illustrates how failing to think reflexively about the boundaries of competing networks can confuse. The centralized media apparatus of IS may indeed dwarf the resources of a tiny, experimental niche outfit within the Department of State. But for IS or al-Qā'ida, or indeed any insurgent group, violent or otherwise, the battle is not against some particular state "counter-nar-

rative" program. It is against the massed influence of every satellite channel, every ISP, every cinematic film. In this case it is against Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, the BBC, CNN, Buzzfeed, Rotana, Uturn Entertainment, Al-Manar, and Anonymous. It is against nearly every opinion leader in society. It is against countless individual Twitter, Facebook or YouTube users determined to expose or lampoon.

In sum, the idea that terrorist groups are formidable masters of the Internet is certainly overblown, and probably a myth. Terrorist groups (and terrorist sympathizers) use the Internet, to be sure. But they use it ambivalently, against opponents who, for all their complaints to the contrary, hold most of the cards. In using the Internet, terrorists are, at best, running faster to stay in the same place.

But are they even doing that? A major problem with research into terrorist use of the Internet is that there is very little systematic comparison between the outcomes for cases where the Internet was not used and cases where it was. And yet, *prima facie*, at least, it is by no means obvious that terrorist groups and other militants who have not had access to the Internet, or have made limited use of it, have been less effective on that account.

al-Qā'ida managed to simultaneously hijack four aircraft in an operation which made occasional and sometimes incidental use of email and web searches. But the absence of such things didn't prevent the PFLP from accomplishing much the same (albeit without the gory intent) in the 1970 Dawson's Field hijackings (Snow and Philips).

Measured solely by number and lethality of attacks, the Lord's Resistance Army managed to become one of the most notoriously lethal and persistent armed groups without apparently ever registering a single website. Much the same holds true for the Naxalites in India (Global Terrorism Database).² Even narrower comparisons seem possible, too. Consider, for example, two Iraqi groups: the Naqshbandi Army and the Islamic Army in Iraq. Both were Sunni insurgent militias incorporating significant numbers of former Baathists and of apparently roughly similar significance. But while the Naqshbandi Army has produced a clutch of videos and maintained a website, its material is distinctly pedestrian compared with the extraordinarily innovative campaigns of the Islamic Army in Iraq, as represented by multimedia campaigns such as the "Baghdad Sniper" videos or "Lee's Life for Lies." More research would be extremely valu-

able here, but it is far from obvious that this media imbalance was in any way replicated in the field.

Perhaps even more remarkably, it is not obvious that the Internet has made a significant difference even in the areas where it would seem almost impossible that it wouldn't—that is, in its ability to transnationalise conflict and radicalise a small but significant number of dispersed, marginal individuals into carrying out acts of violence at home. Media reports abound with tales of IS recruits (in particular) who underwent a mysterious transformation from ordinary sons or daughters to fanatical militants after forming relationships with online recruiters online, and no doubt online interactions have played a larger or smaller role in the recruitment of some of the 5,000 citizens of Western states to fight for jihadist groups in the Syrian civil war, as well as convincing a much smaller number to attempt bombings, stabbings or shootings at home (The Soufan Group). But Anarchist terrorism in the late 19th century, as chronicled by historians such as Richard Jensen (36), produced massacres and assassinations across Europe and North America which look strikingly similar in many ways (lethality, frequency, apparent lack of central organisation) to jihadist terrorism today.

Another obvious point of comparison for contemporary concerns about "foreign fighter" recruitment is the Spanish Civil War. What is striking here is not just that the patterns look similar, but that the numbers also look similar. Beevor (468, quoting Lefebvre and Skoutlsky) reports that the International Brigades recruited around 32,000 fighters over the three-year course of the war—almost exactly the same number as the upper estimate of the number of international fighters who have travelled to Syria and Iraq over the (so far) four-year duration of the Syrian Civil War, which The Soufan Group's most recent report puts at between 27,000 and 31,000.

But a still more focused comparison can be made. Proportionately, the two largest contributors of recruits to the Spanish Civil War were France and Belgium, each of which contributed just over 0.02% of their respective national populations as of 1933 to fight in the conflict.³ Today these two countries are also Europe's most proportionately important recruitment grounds for the Syrian-Iraqi civil war. Taking into account only the *Muslim* populations of these two countries (which between them account for nearly two-fifths of all recruitment from Europe according to The Soufan Group), reasoning arithmetically, France's level of mobilization today stands

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at 0.03% of its Muslim population (based on Pew Research's estimate for the French Muslim population, 2015), Belgium's, at 0.08% of its Muslim population (also using the Pew figures). Even in the most extreme case, the proportion of the population mobilized remains firmly at the same order of magnitude. And this is without taking into account that presumably the entire population of France and Belgium was not realistically available to foreign fighter recruitment to the International Brigades, whereas some of the foreign fighter recruits to jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq are recent converts, meaning that the non-Muslim population of these countries is arguably a relevant recruitment reservoir in this case as well. It also overlooks the different timescales.

Indeed, the genuinely interesting question about "terrorist" use of the Internet is arguably not how or whether the Internet has transformed militancy, but why (so far) it apparently hasn't. Cronin was right to observe that the Internet has fundamentally changed the way that ordinary people communicate, across the entire world. Internet uptake statistics show that the age of the "digital divide" is rapidly coming to an end ("Internet Users in the World by Regions - 2015"). And yet the forms and

methods of political violence we see today have not moved on. The basic practices of sub-state violence are the same as they were in the 1950s, and in many ways are closely reminiscent of what was happening (albeit in one small corner of the world) even in the 1890s. This may mean that what essentially causes political violence has little to do with how people communicate, but rather the fundamental nature of the relationships that this communication sustains. Or it may simply mean that, much as the political consequences of printing took a good century and a half to bear fruit in Europe, the implications of the Internet for how conflict happens, and what conflict is about, simply haven't borne fruit yet. But either way, it seems doubtful that the beneficiaries will be the "terrorists" of today who, while they may be drawing on transnational sentiment as a means, are still apparently trying, albeit not in conditions of their own choosing, to set up the orderly, hierarchical, territorially limited, and patriotic polities of yesterday.

Notes

¹ <<http://thinkagainturnaway.tumblr.com>>.

² Global Terrorism Database, <www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>. Search terms: "Lord's Resistance Army"; "Communist Party of India: Maoist". The Communist Party of India (Maoist), often (not wholly accurately) identified with "Naxalite" insurgents in India has now apparently established a Facebook page (<www.facebook.com/maoistindia>), and a collection of its press releases is available from <www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/>. But its online presence apparently remains limited.

³ Absolute numbers of recruits from Beevor, population figures from <<http://www.populstat.info/Europe/>>.

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REVIEW

Hisham Aidi: “Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture.”

Igor Johannsen

Book Reviewed

New York: Pantheon Books; 2014; pp. 432; ISBN 978-0375424908 (hardcover).

Hisham Aidi is a lecturer at the School of International and Public Affairs of Columbia University in New York. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the same institution and has contributed to several publications, including *Black Routes to Islam* with Manning Marable and *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Culture, Politics and Society*. In addition to his academic endeavors, he has worked as a reporter for *The New Yorker*, *Foreign Affairs* and *The Atlantic*. His most recent book, *Rebel Music*, earned him the American Book Award, an award administered by the Before Columbus Foundation for excellence in American literature without restriction regarding race, gender, creed, cultural origin or genre. He shares this honor with previous recipients like Edward Said (together with Joe Sacco), Isabell Allende, Cornel West and Robin D. G. Kelley. His research focuses on cultural globalization and the political economy of race and social movements, fields which are at the core of the work under review here.

The book *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture* takes the reader across the twentieth and early twenty-first century in tracing the connections between music, race, and the religion of Islam from the jazz clubs and

street corners in the urban centers of the US to Brazil, Europe and the Middle East, from the *banlieues* of France to downtown Antwerp, the tea houses in Rabat and the embattled squares of Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. In doing so Aidi manages to unravel a kaleidoscope of musical practices and cultural appropriation and re-appropriation that connects the struggle of the black population of the USA with the socioeconomic and historical conditions of Muslim immigrants in Europe and the legacy of colonialism in South America and North Africa. One learns that as early as the First World War, the racially segregated black US regiments stationed in France were engaged in processes of cultural exchange involving music that proved to have far-reaching consequences, being the foundation of the popularity of jazz and the subsequent emanation of a plethora of other musical styles in Europe. Additionally, the experiences of the black soldiers in France, being fundamentally different in respect to the policies and public opinion regarding the issue of race, were significant for the discourses on race in the United States after their return. Besides this and other intriguing and surprising historical anecdotes (like the historical relationship between the spread of the Islamic creed and the availability of sugar)

the main objective of Aidi's book is to trace the relationship between cultural practices and Islam in its different and contradicting realizations as well as the political relevance and the politicization of this relationship and its history. As he states in the prologue, he aims to describe how different Muslim social movements challenge the "physical borders, ethno-spatial boundaries, [and] discursive frontiers" between the religion of Islam and the "American imperium" (xv). As a precondition for the relevance of these issues, he observes that the globalization of Islam in the considered time span happened concomitantly to the global spread of American culture, responsible for the myriad interrelationships he describes in his book.

Beginning his journey through time and space in a rather unexpected locale, Aidi traces the influences of Islamic belief and aesthetics in Brazil back to Muslim slaves brought to South America after its colonization, who represented about seven to nine percent of all slaves (26). This rather unattended circumstance regained prominence through the import of Africa-centrist and Islam-inspired hip hop during the 1990s and gained additional thrust after the emergence of the Islamophobic discourses developing in Western states after the attacks of 9/11. With the left turn in pol-

itics in South America, the South-South discourse of the 1960s was revived and manifested itself not only through political and strategic means, but increasingly through the incorporation of aesthetic and cultural features. In some cities of Brazil today, notes the author, the central national festivity, the carnival, employs signs, symbols, rituals and chants reminiscent of the Islamic history of the country as well as underwriting the solidarity between states of the Southern hemisphere with a history of exploitation by the North so prominent in the 1960s. Additionally, many instruments used in Brazil are derived forms of originally Arab instruments brought to the continent centuries earlier. The irony inherent in the fact that a form of popular culture perceived as originally American—hip hop—forms a decisive part of this celebration of Islamic culture in Brazil is not lost on the author. This historical irony is expounded time and again in the following chapters relating to different aspects of the book and reminds the reader constantly of the lack of clear partisanship of history and culture.

One example for this is the initially predictive narration of the prominence of the Nation of Islam and its most prominent speaker, Malcolm X, as one point of amalgamation of the struggle of the black population in the United States with the

struggle for independence and equal rights of postcolonial states and societies in Africa and the Middle East, a relationship repeatedly invoked by artists, musicians and activists. While this remains a defining feature of the global spread and prevalence of hip hop culture to this day, it also became a part of the official cultural diplomacy of the US government to improve the image of the United States, especially in Muslim-majority countries. Hip hop, according to Aidi, became the music of choice for "perception management" and "strategic communication" (225) in Africa and the Middle East and came to be seen as a "natural connector to the Muslim world" (226). Not only the relationship between Islam and hip hop is stressed; the figure of Malcolm X, deemed an extremist in his lifetime, is also invoked in this endeavor to highlight and exploit the historical relationship between Islam and the United States. The congruence of the efforts of cultural diplomats using hip hop and the history of the black Islamic experience in the US with the global spread of hip hop and rap decidedly critical about the foreign policy of the US in the region on the one hand, and the phenomenon of rapper-turned-Salafis, either as entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia or as fighters for the so called "Islamic State", on the other, strikes the reader as almost gro-

tesque and reminds one of the hybrid character and fluidity of cultural practices. It is not that one could perceive certain practices, personalities or images as being endowed with unalterable qualities—quite the contrary. Cultural practices and music remain highly ambiguous and can be used for varying and even opposing ends, always depending on different perspectives, narratives and identities. In this respect, *Rebel Music* is much more cautious than another book on the relationship between the black population of the US, hip hop and the “Muslim third world”: *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America* by Sohail Daulatzai, Associate Professor for Film and Media Studies at the University of California, Irvine. While Daulatzai is specifically concerned with the heterodox forms of Islamic belief in the black community in the United States and its decisive role in the genesis and history of hip hop culture, delving into his topic in detail, Aidi’s treatment of the issue embeds this history in a broader spectrum encompassing a much greater geographical scope and historical perspective. Although Daulatzai also acknowledges the role of hip hop in the diplomatic strategy of the US State Department, he stays much more optimistic about the effects of the close relation-

ship between hip hop and Islam than Aidi’s cautious observations suggest. This ambivalent stance is felt when Aidi acknowledges the role rappers played in the uprisings and rebellions often labeled the “Arab Spring.” Beginning with the Tunisian *El General*, whose song “Rais LeBled” (“Head of State”) became an anthem of the revolution, different artists in the region seemed to express the demands of the people in ways reminiscent of the sound and aesthetic commissioned by the cultural diplomacy efforts of the US State Department. The US embassies in the region had repeatedly invited rap artists from the States to perform for local audiences. This strategy, inspired by the tours of jazz musicians in the Soviet Union half a century earlier (which had its own ironic feats with Dizzie Gillespie, a former member of the Communist Party with sympathies towards Islam being the first “jazz ambassador” (104) to the Soviet bloc), nonetheless missed its objective in some respects, because artists that are admired the most by hip hop enthusiasts in Middle Eastern societies were not excited about these efforts due to their critical stance regarding the foreign policy of the United States. Consequently, while Aidi quotes Hillary Clinton saying that hip hop can be a piece on the diplomatic chess board (221), he simultaneously warns against

perceiving the popularity of hip hop as a diplomatic success. Additionally, he reminds us that the role of hip hop in the Uprisings of 2011 in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, or Bahrain should not be overrated, as the biggest hip hop markets in the region, Algeria and Morocco, did not have large-scale rebellions, and even before the advent of hip hop oppositional and rebellious poetry and music was far from uncommon or in need of foreign inspiration. This perspective stands in stark contrast to the book *Rock the Casbah* by journalist Robin Wright, which celebrates hip hop as American culture without which the Uprisings of 2011 probably would never have happened. Globally and historically, on the other hand, Aidi acknowledges that “[t]hrough hip hop, Muslim youth were exposed to black history, and non-Muslims were exposed to Islam” (58). In this, hip hop can be perceived as the most recent actualization of a classic scheme which has its roots in the prevalence of Muslim converts among jazz musicians and was followed by the era of South-South solidarity in the 1960s, which the book repeatedly turns to. One might then ask why the author perceives that “[m]usic has *emerged* as a weapon in the ongoing debate about national identity and memory in North Africa” (329, my emphasis) and is tempted to assume that, after read-

ing his book, Aidi might as well generalize this statement to include a much broader time frame).

While treating the connections between US foreign policy, music and Islam in the section on the role and image of hip hop among the young Muslim population in European cities, Aidi identifies “the great game of the twenty-first century” –i.e. the geopolitical and ideological “tussles” (197) around the postcolonial states in Africa and the Middle East–increasingly manifested in exactly this environment. While different institutions in European cities, from city halls to grassroots initiatives, rely on music (especially hip hop) to provide a “positive” means of stress management and identification, other former artists, like the German ex-rapper Deso Dogg or Napoleon of the Outlawz, the crew of the late 2Pac, rally against hip hop and music in general, warning enthusiasts that they should not confuse the relevance of rappers with that of the prophet. Others argue that the poetry inherent in the art form of rap links the activity of those artists to great Arab poets, revered by the prophet himself for their eloquence and style. Realizing that “hip hop resonates with marginalized Muslim youth worldwide” (226) and can provide means to counter Islamist and Salafi ideology elevates these cultural practices to a state of significant social and

political relevance for a range of actors, including the US administration. But again Aidi can convincingly argue that “the marshalling of black cultural protest–whether hip hop or the words of Malcolm X–to counter Islamist militancy is [...] deeply ironic” (224). He reminds the reader that during the 1960s the US was alarmed over possible alliances between black militants and “Third World nationalism” and supported Sunni movements in an effort to counter this danger, while “today, as various interstate and intra-Muslim rivalries play out in the West, African-American Islam is again part of the ideological competition–except today, American officials are deploying black history to counter Islamism” (224).

One of the central virtues of Aidi’s book is the international scope, realizing that the importance and relevance as well as quality of musical practices and religious identities are being negotiated in a global setting. In this, *Rebel Music* stands out as exceptional. Most books treating similar issues, among others those already mentioned, observe the issues from a clear American perspective, implicitly accepting the statement of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that “hip hop is America” (221). And while such an assumption would lead to the rather self-defeating perspective that the popularity of hip hop can auto-

matically be perceived as an improvement of the image of the US abroad, Aidi is far too aware of the multidimensional and contradictory role of music and culture in politics and identity to support such a simplifying impression.

Aidi’s claim to be concerned with a “new Muslim Youth Culture” on the other hand seems conceptually incoherent. Narrating the rise of Gnawa music beginning in the 1970s and exemplifying with it the “complex–often mimetic–relations between America and the Islamic world” (123), Aidi does not stress the fact that the respective musicians and many of their listeners are not part of some “youth” anymore, a fact that has to be extended to hip hop-enthusiasts as well. The book does not propose any coherent definition of the category of youth nor does it circumscribe its treatment of the subjects belonging to a somehow specified spectrum of age. This becomes especially problematic when he describes “hip hop [as] the lingua franca of the youth” (xxi), whereas fans as well as artists in their forties are no exception, neither in the US nor internationally. Also, it is inconceivable to claim that music has been used by “youth to protest, proclaim identity, build community, and interpret the world” (xxvi) while this obviously is not limited to age or social environment and is a common and recurrent theme in all

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spheres of societies across time and space. This—along with some minor issues like the claim that the rise of Salafism in the US was linked to the decline of the Nation of Islam, an observation that lacks the necessary references or argumentation, or the description of the Muslim-punk movement *Taqwacore* without mentioning the author and scholar Michael Muhammad Knight, who effectively founded the movement through his novel of the same title—is not sufficient to dis-

credit the overall achievement of Aidi with this book. It presents extraordinary insights and surprising connections and proposes a perspective on the issues it treats that is based on a deep understanding of their complexity. *Rebel Music* is a significant contribution to a number of fields and discourses, displaying in a concise way the possibility of uniting historical, conceptual, and artistic analysis without surrendering to a simplified and homogenous definition of key terms.

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**Steffen Wippel,
Katrin Bromber,
Christian Steiner
& Birgit Krawietz:
“Under
Construction:
Logics of
Urbanism in the
Gulf Region”**

Andrea Fischer-Tahir

Book Reviewed
Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate; 2014; 336
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Since the 1970s, the small Arab states in the Gulf region have managed to transform themselves from semi-nomadic Bedouin societies into giants of economic growth and urban architecture. Representations of today's urbanism in the region are as manifold as they are seemingly contradictory:

“[The] (momentarily) tallest building in the world; the (probably) highest density of construction cranes worldwide; the transition from fishermen's ports to megacities; the highest percentage of migrants in the world; the record gross domestic product (GDP) per capita; the contrasts and simultaneity of veils and miniskirts, of Bedouins and chief executive officers (CEO's), of camel races and prime quality airlines ...” (1)

This edited volume offers valuable insights into urban development of the states at the southern shore of the Gulf region. Going beyond “matter-of-fact descriptions and popular praise,” the volume seeks to understand the internal logics of urbanism in that part of the globalized world. The editors start from the assumption that the elites of these “neo-traditional authoritarian (...) Arab Gulf states”(3) leave only very strictly limited opportunities for public debates on urban development. As a result, it is the “urban sphere” itself that “constitutes an essential arena”

for negotiating ideas in the present age of the oil-based societies, and more relevant: for negotiating ideas about the post-oil future of these states (3). Therefore, the book turns its attention to the built environment of the urban landscape as “materially translated (...) *Weltanschauung*” (7). The book is an outcome of the conference “Under Construction. The Material and Symbolic Meaning of Architecture and Infrastructure in the Gulf Region,” held in 2010 at the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin. It takes an interdisciplinary approach that involves perspectives from “economics, cultural geography, urban studies, history, Islamic studies, architecture, culture and museum management and art.” The aim of the book is to identify “the symbolic, political and economic value, iconicity, aesthetics, language and performative characteristics of the built environment, the design and the evoked imagery of the region” (3) as well as the power of the Dubai-metaphor in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. The structure of the book, to which altogether twenty-four authors contributed, comprises four chapters: 1. The Politics and Economy of Infrastructure and Architecture, 2. Images and Iconic Brands: Constructing Markets and Identity, 3. Art Production and Exhibitions: A Critical Engagement with Urban Developments,

and 4. Dubai-Style Elsewhere: Plagiarizing or Transforming the Gulf Model. The book includes a wide range of photographs representing the urban landscapes and visions inscribed in miniature planning models; some pictures have been provided by the authors, others by artists. These pictures not only serve as illustrations but are sometimes an integral part of the arguments brought forward in the individual contributions.

Cultural analysis not only seeks to describe and to interpret what people are doing. It is among the pleasures of being a researcher to signify the various manifestations of human practice, be it acts of the moment, the ideas behind them and meanings attached, patterns, or processes. What I find very valuable in the introduction, as authored by Katrin Bromber, Birgit Krawietz, Christian Steiner and Steffen Wippel, is the suggestion to understand what happens in the Gulf region not as any “part of a modernization project” (4) or even—as critically argued about current development in the contribution by Martin Hivdt on the political economy and hyperrealization of urban spaces in Gulf cities—in terms of “late-late development” (31-43). Instead, the authors suggest conceptualizing the dynamic processes of the previous decades and present day as “search

movements” (4). The authors argue that the construction of artificial islands, iconic buildings, globally renowned museums, theme parks or prestige sport facilities do not simply serve in strategies of the ruling elites of the Gulf states to prepare for a post-oil era and future economic and political survival. These representations should also be interpreted as the materialized manifestations in a search for identity. In this sense, not only the urban space is “in the making” or “under construction.” In motion are also the collective identities in these societies, with their stark contrasts between wealthy and poor, citizens with rights or fewer rights, and non-citizens without rights. The Arab Gulf societies are undergoing “exploratory processes of orientation,” (ibid.) which are characterized more by tentative solutions and inconsistencies than by coherent answers to the new challenges of the neo-liberalized world.

These complex search movements could be analytically deconstructed into driving forces, interests, and power relations at work. The editors particularly highlight the “struggle for recognition,” which is behind the “overwhelming addiction to iconic buildings and manmade islands” (6). On various levels, “states, rulers and elites in power, (international) companies, Gulf citizens, migrants, architects and artists” bar-

gain for different ideas of how the future of the Gulf states should look. In doing so, they want to be visible, they want to be seen, and they want to be distinguishably recognized by locally, regionally or globally defined audiences. As a result, the transformed “urban landscapes, as socially produced spaces, are inscribed with acts of loyalty to global capital” (7).

Interestingly, the rapid change and radical reconfigurations of the space are often connected to “visions” (*ru'ya*) of the ruling elites or the neo-patriarchic rulers of the particular emirates and states. The editors say that in recent years the rhetoric of “visions” even seems to have replaced the (modernist) technocratic master plan as a tool of catch-up development. In contrast to the science-based rhetoric of development, visions appear as transcendental, and as such they are more difficult to call into question by competitors, opponents or—in case it would exist—a parliamentary opposition. When “applying the visionary discourse of big enterprises to the management and the marketing of the state,” “visions” of the male rulers are not only useful to push and justify particular practices of urbanism and urban change, but also very powerful means “to legitimate the dominant role of the ruler” (7).

A foreign tourist guide book praises “1,001 places to see before you die” (contribu-

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tion by Nikolai Scherle and Mikael Jonasson, 147-59). These places include skyscrapers, theme parks, museums, or Oriental ski-malls, all of them “manmade” things representing political power and economic capital as well as the ambitions and visions of the Gulf monarchies. Animals have also become part of the representation economy, and above all the falcon. Birgit Krawietz introduces us to the realm of falconry with the central figure of the falcon “as a cultural icon of the Arab Gulf region” (131-46). In former times an animal friend of “men” serving the Bedouin in practices of trapping and hunting and as a “means” to learn and exercise patience and endurance and to initiate boys, the falcon was transformed into a commodity. The production of falcons is mainly outsourced (to Germany, England, and the US), and so is the preservation of their hunting skills (Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Sudan, etc.), whereas the Souq Waqif Falcon Hospital, with “9,000 patients a year,” is in charge of keeping

alive the hybrid and illness-prone creatures of the Lord mainly for the purpose of luxury sport. But Krawietz also explains the “spiritual reward people may gain from practising what could be called neo-falconry.” As a “meaningful other,” she argues, “falcon iconicity can be perceived as a forceful statement of Gulf Arab hegemony” (141). In addition, the falcon is appreciated due to its “high velocity” and represents the dream of flying, as well as the “fusion of living beings and flight technology,” which renders it a contribution of the Islamic world to the global heritage and human progress (143). And finally, the falcon “embodies certain social values,” (ibid.) above all patience, endurance and strength, mobility and independency. However, Krawietz reminds us that the falcon is still a bird of prey, a beast of prey. Therefore we could also say that he perfectly symbolizes the “carnivore capitalism” (ibid.), and thus the matrix in which “1,001 dreams” are spun.

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