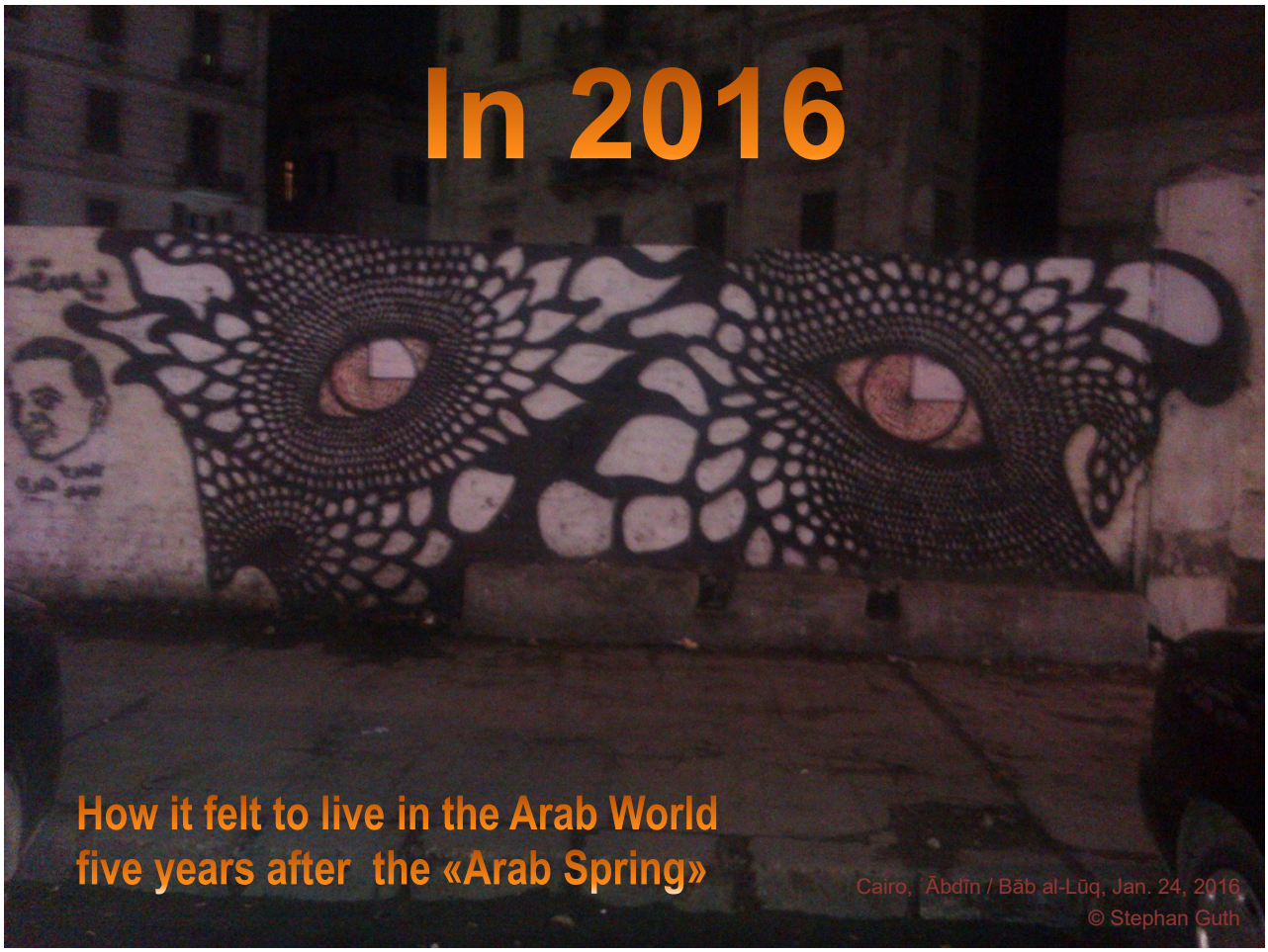

Themed section

edited by

STEPHAN GUTH and ALBRECHT HOFHEINZ

ISSN 0806-198X

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) *In2016*
preliminary pagination: 1–*392 (as of 11 March 2022)

Contents

Introduction • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ and Stephan GUTH 5

Arrays

ʔAlsh • by Mohamed MOHAB *(under review)* 22
Apartment Wanted • by Maren Buvarp AARDAL 23
ʿAshwāʾiyyāt (EG) • by Walter ARMBRUST 26
Baby Milk (EG) • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 31
Celebrities • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 35
Clash
… in Egypt • by Elena CHITI 40
… in Tunisia • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 44
Commemoration / Memorial Days • by Mihaila YORDANOVA 45
Conversions (EG) • by Monika LINDBEKK 59
Court Trials • by Monika LINDBEKK and Teresa PEPE 64
Crowdfunding • by Teresa PEPE 71
Dancing • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 74
Disappearances • by Stephan GUTH 75
Disasters (EG) • by Walter ARMBRUST 86
Dollar Crisis (EG) • by Walter ARMBRUST 93
Downtown/Centre-ville
… in Egypt • by Lucie RYZOVA *(under review)* 99
… in Tunisia • by N.N. *(desideratum)* .....
Dual Identities / Masking • by Stephan GUTH 101
Éveil d'une nation / *Ṣaḥwat umma* • by M'hamed OUALDI 109
Father Figures
… in Egypt • by Mihaila YORDANOVA 111
… in Tunisia • *"Weldek fi darek!"* by Joachim BEN YAKOUB 118
Football • by Carl ROMMEL and Jonas ROELLIN 124

Garbage • by Stephan GUTH 134
Gated Communities / Compounds • by Stephan GUTH 140
Hashish • by Jonas ROELLIN 147
High School Exams • by Maren Buvarp AARDAL 156
The Honourable Citizen (EG) • by Sarah AWAD 159
In Islam, … • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 164
Kamīn • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 166
Language • by M. ACHOUR KALLEL, M. GUELLOUZ, E.M. HÅLAND, and S. GUTH 167
LGBT • by Abir KREFA and Ingvild TOMREN 175
Manīsh msāmiḥ (TN) • by Moutaa AMIN and Sonya BEN YAHMED 182
Migration • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 186
Mobile Phones • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 187
The Policeman Criminal • by Elena CHITI and Jonas ROELLIN 197
Pop Music • by Ingvild TOMREN 206
Prison • by Elena CHITI, Jonas ROELLIN, and Lucie RYZOVA 214
Psychiatrists
… in Egypt • by Maren Buvarp AARDAL 224
… in Tunisia • by Wael GARNAOUI 226
Public Hearings (TN) • by Mariem GUELLOUZ and Sélima KEBAÏLI 230
Red Sea Islands (EG) • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 233
Self-help • by Stephan GUTH 241
Social Media • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 249
Suicide • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 257
The Suspect Foreigner • by Elena CHITI 258
Tourist Resorts • by Charlotte PARDEY 265
Tricking the System / Tricked by the System • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 270
Tuk-tuk • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 271
Uber • by Teresa PEPE 272
Valentine's Day • by Aymon KREIL and Rihab BEN OTHMEN 278
The Voice from Above • by Stephan GUTH and Mihaila YORDANOVA 285
Zaḥma (EG) • by Walter ARMBRUST 291

Codes

Affluence *vs.* Destitution • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 299
Beautiful *vs.* Ugly • by Stephan GUTH 301
Center *vs.* Periphery • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 314
Freedom *vs.* Constraint • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 315
Hope *vs.* Hell • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 317
Inferiority *vs.* Superiority • by Stephan GUTH *(in preparation)* 318
Male *vs.* Female • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 319
Normality *vs.* Heroism • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 339
Past *vs.* Present • by Mihaila YORDANOVA and Stephan GUTH 340
Security *vs.* Fear • by Jacob HØIGILT 353
"The System" *vs.* "The People" • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 358
True *vs.* False • by Stephan GUTH 360
Voice *vs.* Silence • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 374
Young *vs.* Settled • by Albrecht HOFHEINZ 375

Codes Collapsed

Hope = Hell (Dystopia) • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 382
Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) • by Stephan GUTH *(in preparation)* 383
Normality = Heroism (Surviving) • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 384
Present = Past (Stuck) • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 385
Security = Fear (Police State) • by N.N. *(desideratum)* 386
True = False (Life in Limbo) • by Stephan GUTH 387

INTRODUCTION

By ALBRECHT HOFHEINZ and STEPHAN GUTH

What does baby milk have to do with military might?

We are in Egypt, in Tunisia, the year is 2016. Milk powder and military prowess are important facts of life—on what basis would one, could one judge which is *more* important in the everyday? Garbage and gardens, policemen and pop stars, football and father figures, national pride and LGBT activism—all are aspects in a maze that constitutes the 'stage' where people live their everyday lives, trying to orient themselves and make decisions as they move about. What is beautiful, what ugly? How should the young settle down? Is life lived in limbo?

Is there anything that holds all this together?

Yes. These questions, these facets, offer glimpses on what many Egyptians and Tunisians felt and thought about in 2016, to the extent that reflections of their feelings and thoughts appeared and reappeared in public form and in a variety of media that year and may thus be grasped by an outside observer.

That is what the research project *In 2016—How it felt to live in the Arab world five years after the 'Arab Spring'*, the results of which are collected in this volume, tried to do—to provide prisms onto the discursive and emotional realities of contemporary Arab life worlds.[1] As the 'Arab world' is too vast to be covered as a whole, we confined our attention to one country in the Arab East and one in the West: Egypt and Tunisia.[2]

There is a background to our undertaking. Writing as we do for an Anglophone audience, we situate our work in the landscape of English-language writing about the Arab world. This landscape, we feel, is uneven. Outside observers, not least in the media dominating public perception globally (and given the power dynamics in the mediascape, this largely means: Western, predominantly English-language media), have persistently and long focused on the 'military' rather than the 'milk'. The 'milk'—standing for everyday concerns of ordinary people—has not been absent from reporting, but general interest has focused much more on violence, religious extremism, political authoritarianism, military coups, or the discrimination of women. This focus has been most prominent in the journalistic media, but it has also left its traces in academic research and teaching where even attempts at deconstructing

1 The project was based at the University of Oslo and was carried out by an international team of over 20 scholars, with financing from the Norwegian Research Council received 2015-2018.

2 For more on the choice of these two 'anchors' see below, p. 7 with note 6, as well as p. 14.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *5–*20
© Albrecht Hofheinz and Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO

lopsided clichés often inadvertently—by consistently focusing on them to the detriment of other issues—contribute to keeping alive imaginaries of a fundamentally and essentially 'other' Arab, Middle Eastern, or Islamic world, imaginaries that at least border on what has been termed 'neo-Orientalism.'[3]

Our project was devised to take a step back from entrenched ideas about the Arab world and try to listen more closely to what people there express themselves. A study of how it felt to live in Egypt or Tunisia in 2016 could aim to be analytical, to examine structural formations, to uncover hidden causes. This is not our endeavour here. Rather than to *abstract* analytically from the object of our study, "In 2016" provides a snapshot *re-presenting* voices that characterised the atmosphere of how it felt to live in Egypt or Tunisia that year, in order to evoke and *make present* again the *atmosphere* of that year (or better, in German, the "Stimmung/en" evoked and created by the voices, the "Stimmen" of that year).[4]

Why 2016? 2016 was a year as random as any—it was chosen simply because it was the first full year following our research grant. Like any other year, it was evidently connected to its own past, just as it contained elements constitutive of years to come. As we selected it *a priori*, however, we could not and did not wish to regard it as a turning point or threshold year in the course of history.[5] Coincidentally, 2016 marked half a decade after what at the time was referred to, mainly in Western media, as the "Arab Spring," and what participants

3 'Orientalism' is a way of juxtaposing 'the Orient' to 'the Occident' as fundamentally and essentially contrasting entities or 'cultures', embedded in and often justifying uneven power relations (Edward W. SAID, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 2003 [[1]1978]: 1-2). 'Neo-Orientalism' is a perspective that re-capitulates "key elements of Orientalism in a contemporary setting" (Zachary LOCKMAN, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004: 220). The term 'neo-Orientalism' goes back to the mid-1980s (Youssef M. CHOUEIRY, "Neo-Orientalism and Islamic fundamentalism," *Review of Middle East Studies* 4 (1988): 55–68) but has been more prominently used in academic debates caused by al-Qāʿida's attacks on the US on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent US reaction (see <https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph? content=Neo-orientalism>). On the 'unease' that many researchers on the Middle East felt after the 9/11 attacks, being challenged both by the events themselves and by prevailing neo-/Orientalist discourses in politics and the media, see *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft: Ein klassisches Fach im Scheinwerferlicht der Politik und der Medien*, ed. Abbas POYA & Maurus REINKOWSKI (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008); for a recent update, see Stephan GUTH, "A losing battle? 'Islamwissenschaft' in the times of neoliberalism, IS, PEGIDA… and Trump," in *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam: Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Florian ZEMMIN, Johannes STEPHAN & Monica CORRADO, Leiden: Brill, 2018: 496-525.

4 *Stimmung* ("atmosphere, mood, …") is a key word in Gumbrechtian thinking that is difficult to translate, which is why the author himself usually prefers to leave it untranslated. See especially his *Stimmungen lesen: Über eine verdeckte Wirklichkeit der Literatur* (München: Hanser, 2011; translated into English by Erik BUTLER as *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012). Cf. also Gumbrecht's public lecture "The dimension of 'Stimmung' in contemporary popular culture," given on December 13, 2016, in Minsk, available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/t_dajId2BaA>.

5 Such as Jean STAROBINSKI, *1789: Les emblèmes de la raison* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); Florian ILLIES, *1913: Der Sommer des Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2012); Frank BÖSCH, *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann* (München: C.H. Beck, 2019). – On the concept of the "critical moment" in history, cf., e.g., Ingrid GILCHER-HOLTEY, "'Kritische Ereignisse' und 'kritischer Moment': Bourdieus Modell der Vermittlung von Ereignis und Struktur," in Manfred HETTLING & Andreas SUTER (eds.), *Struktur und Ereignis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2001: 120-137.

in the events of 2011 in Arabic called, and often still call, "The Arab Revolutions" (*al-thawrāt al-ʿarabiyya*). Tunisia and Egypt played a leading role in these events, and this was one of the reasons why we chose them as sites for our research.[6] In this research, however, the fifth anniversary of the "Arab uprisings" (a term that has become more common as belief in 'revolution' has faded) was only significant insofar as the voices of 2016 reflected on it—one example illustrating our effort not to pre-impose interpretative frames on the voices and images emerging in the material we collected.

To re-evoke the "Stimmung/en" of 2016 presented the challenge of writing as if one did not know what came after. As best we could, we tried to 'dive into' 2016, to immerse ourselves in the material, the voices made public in 2016, to shut ourselves off from taking note of voices emerging later, to systematically exclude anything published subsequently. Methodological inspiration for this undertaking came from Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT's seminal study *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time*.[7]

The Gumbrechtian model

Gumbrecht (emeritus professor of comparative literature, Romance and German cultural studies at Stanford University) wrote his book to make the reader "feel 'in 1926'" by conjuring "some of the worlds of 1926, to re-present them, in the sense of making them present again." He did this by putting together, in alphabetical order just as in an encyclopaedia, a non-linear and non-argumentative selection of "entries" (= entry points) to the "worlds of 1926 […] meant to bring out dominant surface perceptions as they were offered by certain material phenomena, and dominant world views as they were produced by certain concepts during the year" in question. Refraining "from in-depth interpretations, and from diachronic contextualizations," the entries try as much as possible to be "completely referential"; depending on the material they reference and aim to make 'speak', they therefore may reflect both converging and diverging moods (*Stimmungen*) without trying to produce the illusion of a single "coherent and homogenous picture. Nevertheless, and perhaps paradoxically, [Gumbrecht's book] suggests the existence of a 'web' or 'field' of (not only discursive) realities that strongly shaped the behavior and interactions of 1926." To re-present this web of realities, the 'entries' are connected to each other in a multitude of ways, represented in print by copious cross-references that readers are encouraged to follow to establish their own individual path into and through the worlds of 1926. As a caveat, Gumbrecht notes that the entries used to present the worlds of 1926 do not aim to distil any specificity distinguishing the year in question from the worlds of the years preceding or following it; at least some of what appears in the one-year snapshot may well be found in years prior or subsequent as well, and "the author would not be disappointed if he learned

6 Apart from being the first two cases of the 2010/11 uprisings where popular demonstrations led to the deposition of decades-old Arab autocrats, Tunisia and Egypt stand for the two 'hemispheres' of the Arab World (the Maghrib and the Mashriq), and they were countries where academic fieldwork was possible to undertake for our research.

7 Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT, *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

that the worlds of 1925 or 1927 (and so forth) were not much different from those worlds that he reconstructed for 1926."[8]

Gumbrecht's work provided the model for our project in several respects. Like him, we aimed to take a snapshot of a random year, deemphasizing chronological sequentiality and narrative linearity for the sake of making present the manyfold "everyday-worlds" experienced by and reflected upon by Egyptians and Tunisians in 2016. Like him, we included both fictional and non-fictional material (texts, images and video) dating from the snapshot year, often finding that fictional texts (in the widest sense, including cartoons, graffiti, cinema, etc.) presented a particularly high "density of those concerns and perspectives"[9] that appeared pertinent to that year. Like him, we strove to refrain from imposing an analytical frame upon the material collected, aiming instead for "maximum surface-focus"[10] in re-presenting the voices palpable in our material. We tried to approach, as far as this is possible in a textual genre, the display form that has become common in museums that have "abandoned the taxonomic principle which traditionally structured their exhibits, and now tend to organize them as a reconfiguration of historical environments […] in which visitors can literally become immersed."[11] And like Gumbrecht, we present our findings as a range of alphabetically organized entries connected by numerous cross-references the ensemble of which "mimic[s] the non-systematic character" of what people experience in their everyday-worlds and that constitute "an asymmetrical network, […] a rhizome rather than […] a totality."[12] Since there is no 'beginning' to such a rhizome, readers should not look for one; instead, they are encouraged to jump into whatever entry point catches their particular interest and thence follow the web of cross-references opened up by that entry, thus finding their own individual paths through the worlds described and hopefully approximating how it felt to live in Egypt or Tunisia in 2016.[13]

Evidently, there are some differences between Gumbrecht's work and ours. First, we chose not a year in the past, separated from our own time by several decades, but opted to collect material over the course of a current year during which we also could physically travel to the field. Second, while Gumbrecht worked alone, we operated as a collective. Third, even though Gumbrecht acknowledges that his "pictures of the world in 1926 are de facto confined to Western culture" (circumscribed by the Germanic and Romance languages he reads), he entertains the belief that his pictures contain "suggestions of openings toward non-Western

8 All quotations in this paragraph are taken from the "User's Manual" in GUMBRECHT, *In 1926*, ix-xv. A detailed discussion of his approach can be found in the book's penultimate chapter, "After Learning from History," 411-36.

9 GUMBRECHT, *In 1926*, 429. – For more details on the 'added value' of fiction, see below, p. 11, with note 27.

10 Ibid., x.

11 Ibid., 419-20.

12 Ibid., 435.

13 Parallel to the publication in *JAIS*, the majority of the entries is published as a website which is perhaps even better able than the journal version to mirror the interlacing character of the *In 2016* rhizome (though the *JAIS* version, too, uses hyperlinks, both within the full-text version and, via DOI, among the individual entry-articles, published separately). The website is hosted at <https://folk.universitetetioslo.no/albrech/In2016/> and shows the state of affairs as of October 2018 (no longer updated).

worlds."[14] *In 2016*, on the other hand, makes a deliberately less global claim, limiting itself to two countries from the Arab world.

The most obvious difference is due to the choice of year. Where Gumbrecht wrote to bridge a distance in time, to make present again what has passed, we had to extract, so to speak, a single current year from the flow of time while we were in it. Nevertheless, extracting and abstracting a year from the flow of time is, in fact, common to both projects, and both cases produced a particular and paradoxical dynamic between closeness and distance where the observer/author puts on the role of participant while at the same time abstracting this position from any active involvement, and abstracting the 'atmosphere(s)' captured from the agents experiencing them. What both projects try to 'present'—and this is important to emphasize—is "a stage without actors,"[15] or more precisely, a stage without actors engaged in performing a plot. It is the attempt to describe the stage framing the acts of actors as they come on stage. This is an essential difference between the Gumbrechtian approach and other recent works focusing on a specific year.[16] Gumbrecht calls his essay "an experiment in historical simultaneity,"[17] pointing out that this not only "allows for paradoxical relations among the phenomena re-presented" but also excludes "the possibility of treating subjects as agents, because actions can be credited with agency only in a narrative, and narratives require sequentiality."[18] In order to front the *stage* and abstract from the sequentiality of the acting happening on this stage, both *In 1926* and *In 2016* strip the description of any narrative linearity, emphasizing instead the *presence* of the *Stimmung(en)* and the potentially paradox simultaneity of the multitude of life-worlds portrayed.[19] In doing so, both projects try to approximate, with words alone (i.e., without recourse to illustrations), the possibility of experiencing the 'atmosphere(s)' of worlds not physically present where the reader is.

Gumbrecht himself took inspiration from FLAUBERT's *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, a collection of commonplaces that Flaubert exposes and deconstructs "by strictly limiting himself to their reiteration," with "no authorial voice or discourse to comment on them or put them into historical perspective."[20] Putting together an encyclopaedia- or dictionary-like collection of entries, refraining from imposing on them an overall logic or linearity, presenting them in alphabetical order, regarding them as fragments of a reality and not as a whole, renouncing any authorial comment: these are traits Gumbrecht picked up from Flaubert in his effort to achieve

14 GUMBRECHT, 432.

15 Ibid., 432.

16 Other than the works listed in footnote 5, this also includes Jürgen KUCZYNSKI, *1903: Ein normales Jahr im imperialistischen Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie,1988).

17 GUMBRECHT, 443.

18 Ibid., 432.

19 If precise dates are indicated in our entries, they mostly serve the purpose of concretisation (for example in describing the consecutive events in a court trial) and hence, the surface-focus of our work. In the world of film, a comparison may be made between our approach and a number of well-received TV series where the narrative plot is subordinate to the attempt at rendering a particular year's 'Stimmung': *Babylon Berlin* (2017-; focus on 1929), *Ku'damm 56* (2016; focus on 1956), and its sequels *Ku'damm 59* (2018; focus on 1959) and *Ku'damm 63* (2021; focus on 1963).

20 Gustave FLAUBERT, *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues* (Paris: L. Conard, 1910); GUMBRECHT, 436.

"the greatest possible immediacy."[21] "I don't know," he writes, "of any other text that provides latter-day readers with such a powerful illusion of experiencing a past everyday-world from inside." And even as he conjures up the illusion, he acknowledges its ultimate unattainability, concluding that "the desire for immediacy should not degenerate into the illusion of immediacy."[22] Our project was conducted in the same spirit.

Arrays, codes, and collapsed codes

To describe the year's 'atmosphere', we follow Gumbrecht in identifying three categories of "phenomena and configurations": "arrays", binary "codes", and "collapsed codes." *Arrays* are "ways in which artifacts, roles, and activities influence bodies" because they "require human bodies to enter into specific spatial and functional relations to the everyday-worlds they inhabit."[23] Note the focus on the *physical*, the *bodily* as the starting point for investigating how the relations—ultimately, relations of power, if we acknowledge Foucault—are constituted.[24]

Such arrays coexist, partially overlap and partially conflict "in a space of simultaneity," and "clusters of arrays are often zones of confusing convergence." To "provide principles of order" in this space, discourses emerge that aim to "transform such confusion into the—deparadoxifying—form of alternative options": *binary codes*. Since these codes provide structure and order to the "unstructured simultaneity of everyday-worlds," Gumbrecht suggests that "one might reserve the concept of 'culture' for the ensemble of such codes."[25]

These codes, however, "are not integrated into overall systems, and […] sometimes do not even succeed in maintaining their deparadoxifying function." They thus turn into *collapsed codes* that "are particularly visible because, as areas of malfunction and entropy, they attract specific discursive attention and, often, specific emotional energy." Arising from the interference of several different everyday-worlds in which corresponding binary codes continue to function in providing 'order', collapsed codes represent not only malfunction but may indicate areas of change and emerging new ways of structuring the 'world'.

From "In 1926" to "In 2016"

How did we identify the arrays, codes and collapsed codes that expressed the characteristic *Stimmung(en)* of 2016? This was a process that went through many iterations. First, we had to identify our sources. As we were out to capture how Egyptians and Tunisians felt, thought about and interpreted their 'being in 2016,' we considered a broad variety of *cultural*

21 GUMBRECHT, x.

22 Ibid., 436.

23 Ibid., 434 (as all other quotations in this paragraph). Gumbrecht adapted the term "arrays" from FOUCAULT's "dispositifs."

24 Relations of power are central to understanding Foucault's use of the term *dispositifs*. Since Gumbrecht aims to avoid authorial comment, his *arrays*, though inspired by Foucault, do not explicitly front this focus on power, leaving it to the reader to 'experience' how various arrays create atmospheres marked by power relations.

25 GUMBRECHT, 434.

productions, i.e., works that reflected and interpreted these thoughts and feelings—reflecting the 'atmosphere(s)' of 2016 and, as they were reflecting upon them in public, also forming them. As meaning-making productions, they could and should include both fiction and non-fiction—something that perhaps warrants a brief explanation for readers accustomed to a strict divide between fact and fiction. Fictional writing, cinema, music, and other art forms are often particularly apt at condensing significant sociocultural dynamics,[26] and not least reflections on bodily experiences, emotions and affects tend to be more readily accessible there than in other types of sources.[27]

26 This is especially true for modern Arabic literature where authors tend to conceive of themselves, true to the tradition of the 19th century "Enlightenment" (or "Renaissance", *nahḍa*), as both "scribes *and* writers," as Richard JACQUEMOND had it, i.e., on the one hand, critical observers registering and analysing what is going on around them while, on the other hand, also being authors of fiction: simultaneously writing as historiographers *and* creative authors, they act as "conscience of the nation" (as the title of the English translation of JACQUEMOND's *Entre scribes et écrivains* aptly expresses it).

27 It is beyond the scope of this introduction to attempt to summarise the many views and theories regarding the 'added value' of literature as compared to reality accounts that lack the quality of 'literariness'. Suffice it to mention that already ARISTOTLE held that more 'truth' about reality may be found in a drama (i.e., a piece of fiction, *poíēsis*) than in a non-fictional account. This is due to the drama's way of 'staging' a situation, a problem, or a conflict (lit., 'imitating', *mímēsis*), as opposed to the non-literary mode of describing from the outside, providing facts and data as well as *explicit* explanation and interpretation (*ekphérein*). Obviously, even 'plain' reports or descriptions have a *form*, i.e., something that *shapes* the reality they are talking about, adding 'meaning' to the otherwise meaningless raw data; and since Hayden WHITE (*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 1973) we know that even supposedly 'neutral' historiography is no exception in this respect, since also historiographers always tell stories and in so doing apply certain 'literary' tropes, make use of 'literary' types of emplotment and dramatization, often use 'literary' language, etc. Nevertheless, reality tales in the form of a drama, a poem, or a novel typically display 'literariness' to a much higher degree, and they do so on purpose, as any choice made by an author about content and form of his/her piece generally is a conscious choice informed by the wish to identify and reveal *representative essential elements* and *basic structures*. In that, a literary author may be compared to a mathematician seeking to find a *formula* that condenses his/her many concrete observations about the world into an abstract model, containing the essential variables and operators needed to describe the totality of all similar concrete cases. For example, to describe the area T of any possible 'real' triangle, it suffices to know only two variables—the length of a base b (any of its sides) and its height h—the area can then be calculated using the formula $T = ½\ bh$; or, to calculate the volume V of any given regular sphere, we don't even need to know more than *one* single variable, its radius r, and we will immediately get the volume by putting the concrete value of a given r into the formula $V = 4/3\ \pi r^3$. Of course, the world captured by a literary author is much more complex than these examples, so literary works not only contain many more variables (representative characters, places, events, actions, roles, etc.) but they are also constructed using a more complex 'syntax'—the way everything is put together to express the relations between the representative elements. This syntax also implies the *form* itself, the literary form that conveys many facets *implicitly* rather than *explicitly*, or, as the eminent philosopher of aesthetics Th. W. ADORNO maintained: art can express many things that other, 'normal' discourses are unable to say, but it does so, seemingly paradoxically, "by not saying it" - (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7: *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997 [1970]: 113 / English translation in: ID., *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel ADORNO & Robert Hullot-Kentor, A&C Black, 2004: 94). In principle, however, the 'added value' of a literary work does not, in this respect, differ much from that of a mathematical formula: it lies, to large extent, in the 'beauty' of abstraction. Yet, while literary works share with mathematical formulae their generalizing dimension, their search for comprehensive representation of a totality, a whole, and therefore also a high degree of abstraction, they are at the same time also highly concrete as well as "multivoiced" or "polyphonous" (BAKHTIN). Moreover, unlike

We thus dealt with a large and heterogeneous body of sources, from newspaper articles and editorials to cartoons, novels, self-help books, TV series, feature films and documentaries, YouTube videos, Facebook and Twitter posts, as well as field observations. An obvious basic decision was to consider only material dating from 2016, where 'dating from' meant either published or prominently discussed in 2016.[28] Some exceptions were made for films that came out later if they were filmed in 2016. Compared to Gumbrecht, who "started by concentrating on books, objects, and events that attracted a certain level of public attention during the year in question,"[29] we potentially had to deal with a much larger amount of material, not only because we were dealing with an ongoing year but also because publication of written and audio-visual material has grown exponentially since 1926 and has seen a further explosion after the introduction of the internet and the spread of social media. On the other hand, we could make use of indicators such as best-seller and Goodreads lists,[30] longlists and shortlists of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (the 'Arabic Booker'),[31]

'sober' non-literary discourses, which tend to neglect in their picture the *dynamics* of *dramatic interaction* and the *emotional* responses people show in certain situations, and the way these affect the course of events—and, thus, history—, literature does supply precisely these dynamics and this emotional dimension. It does so in a way that allows us to "relive" the events *as if* they were real and happening *now*. GUMBRECHT speaks of the "concreteness" of literature, adding that literary texts are "particularly good at making the past present," they "manage to make us feel surrounded by and immersed into the atmospheres" of the worlds they describe, give us a "sensual feeling of being part of and inscribed into" these worlds and their "rhythms' transformation" ("Shall We Continue to Write Histories of Literature?," *New Literary History*, 39 (2008): 530). – For concise and engaging introductions to the question of 'literariness' and the added value of fictional representations, see further H. Porter ABBOTT, "Narrative and Truth," = ch. 11 in ID., *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 145-59, and Samia MEHREZ, "Introduction," in EAD., *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994: 1-16 and 147-48 (notes). For a discussion of the 'literariness' also of historical sources and historiography, see, e.g., Martin KREISWIRTH, "Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences," *New Literary History*, 23.3 (1992): 629-57.

28 Mostly, the latter were novels that, although written and published in 2014 or 2015, still were prominent on the book market, or were awarded a prize, or were the focus of notable controversies.

29 GUMBRECHT, 428.

30 In the Arabic world, "best-seller" is a category that must be employed with caution, as several studies have demonstrated (e.g., Richard JACQUEMOND, *Entre Scribes et écrivains*, see above, note 26; and ID., "Satiric Literature and Other 'Popular' Literary Genres in Egypt Today," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 349-67); Tetz ROOKE, "The Emergence of the Arabic Bestseller: Arabic Fiction and World Literature," in *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. II: *Postmodernism and Thereafter*, ed. by Stephan GUTH and Gail RAMSAY, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011: 201-213). Nevertheless, "best-seller" lists issued by large publishing houses or other organisations may be taken as indicators pointing to a certain popularity (or aimed-for popularity) among the reading public, and we triangulated such data with our own observations during visits to the Cairo Book Fair, the books displayed by bookstores and street-vendors, etc. What mattered was that they obviously were deemed significant on the 2016 book market and in public opinion and thus could be regarded as artifacts forming part of those "phenomena and configurations" of a 2016 life-world that had the potential of contributing to the identification of a Gumbrechtian array, code, or collapsed code.

31 Caution is in place also with regard to the literary awards such as the IPAF, as, e.g., Anna Ziajka STANTON has shown ("Eyes on the Prize: The Global Readability of an IPAF-Winning Modern Arabic

titles prominently displayed at book fairs, in bookstores and street kiosks, interviews with booksellers and publishers, and automated tools to harvest what was 'buzzing,' that is, met with particular attention on social media in Egypt and Tunisia during 2016. For online material, we relied on the content analysis platform BuzzSumo.com to find out what Arabic-language content concerning Egypt and Tunisia was most shared on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. Snapshots of the most shared items concerning the search terms 'Miṣr/ī' and 'Tūnis/ī' were taken for every week during the year.[32] Triangulation with other types of sources we drew upon for our project showed that the material collected via BuzzSumo did yield a fair impression of what caught people's interest in 2016.[33] For films, we included the highly popular Ramadan series on TV as well as Tunisian and Egyptian productions screened at Arab film festivals in Berlin, Oslo, and Tübingen.

All in all, we thus combined both quantitative and qualitative elements in collecting our material, and through a process of iterative comparing and discussing this material among project participants, we extended our breadth of view and eventually arrived at a tenable consensus and a reasonable degree of representativeness. Like Gumbrecht, we could not and did not aim for exhaustiveness or comprehensiveness but strove to attain "a level of documentary density at which the analysis of further sources [would] yield no additional insights."[34]

The articles, observations, and other information we gathered were stored in a research notebook in the note-taking application Evernote to which all project participants had access and could contribute. All notes there were supplied with keywords ("tags"), a process in which all participants were able to partake. After collecting data for a few months, researchers from both Norway and abroad gathered for a first workshop in May 2016 to compare initial impressions, discuss theoretical and methodological issues, and review first drafts to establish a model for how to write an entry. Contributions to this workshop were published, including a very preliminary list of 520 keywords/issues/topics that had emerged by then as important enough to be taken into consideration in the work of educing arrays and codes from the multitude of issues.[35] After the collection of material stopped with the cut-off date December 31, 2016, the list of keywords and issues, which had continued to grow over the year, was cleaned up (to remove synonyms, plurals etc.) and assembled into an inventory of 2759 items we called *Iṭārat al-qunūṭ bi-mā huwa fī 'l-Evernote* ('Dispelling despair by what is in Evernote'). This inventory was put on a spreadsheet and divided among Elena Chiti, Stephan Guth and Albrecht Hofheinz (the project's core group) to come up with prioritised

Novel," *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 2022). Still, the IPAF undoubtedly is an important media event, and IPAF-winning novels regularly remained prominent on the book market for some time.

32 The material collected via BuzzSumo consists mostly, though not exclusively, of articles from online newspapers, other news sites, and YouTube videos, but also some Facebook entries or blog posts. This allowed us to catch what aroused particular attention on social media; we did not have the resources to process, in a systematical manner, social media discussions themselves.

33 To forgo misunderstandings, it needs to be emphasised that ours was not a study of what social media users wrote, but of online media material related to their countries that they shared.

34 GUMBRECHT, 430.

35 This preliminary list is reproduced on pp. 229-33 of the "Introduction" to *Living 2016: Cultural Codes and Arrays in Arab Everyday Worlds Five Years After the "Arab Spring,"* themed issue, edited by Stephan GUTH and Elena CHITI, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 221-388.

suggestions for arrays, codes, and collapsed codes under which these issues should best be treated. These suggestions were debated, adapted, and expanded upon in repeated group meetings and further workshops, and gradually, a grid of terms took shape that appeared sound enough to account for "the most frequently observed phenomena and configurations"[36] in Egypt and Tunisia in 2016.

These terms were then shared with potential authors whom we contacted based on their prior experience with the subject matter. Those who were interested and willing to adopt the Gumbrechtian model were assigned one or more entries, occasionally in collaboration with others in order to cover both Tunisian and Egyptian perspectives. Authors' background varied: some were 'purely' academic researchers, while others were themselves at the time 'living in the worlds of 2016' in Tunisia or Egypt, and thus not merely observing these worlds but also participating in them, being shaped by as well as shaping them, turning their writing into a form of autoethnography.[37] Compared to Gumbrecht's book, our work is therefore somewhat more polyphonous, although we strove to maintain the common model and subjected all entries to (often repeated) peer review and revision in the light of comments from fellow participants. Our polyphony parallels, in a way, the polyphony of voices apparent 'in 2016' and may thus be regarded as enriching rather than streamlining the project's perspective.

The multitude and variety of contributors did, however, also pose a number of challenges. A few of those who originally signed up were not ready, in the end, to adopt the "Gumbrechtian" style and to refrain as much as possible from diachronic framing and analytical interpretation. Others were unwilling in their writing to leave their country of fieldwork expertise and include material from the other country, sometimes insisting on what they saw as the specificity of the Tunisian or Egyptian situation where the Gumbrechtian approach would call for an eye to the commonalities appearing in the arrays, codes and collapsed codes we had identified. This caused quite a bit of overhead for the project's core team, providing extra feedback by mail or during workshops, suggesting additional material, rewriting submissions, etc. In some cases, new contributors had to be found; unfortunately, we did not always succeed in doing so. The process of collaborative writing and redacting the entries was thus considerably delayed, and despite our best efforts, we were not able to fill in all the blanks and find authors for all the entries we had identified as significant.

There remains also a certain imbalance in that voices from Egypt appear more frequently than those from Tunisia. Certainly, Egypt as the more populous country also has a larger output of media and other cultural material; we strove as far as possible to reduce this imbalance but could not escape the fact that the members of the core group themselves have more research experience in Egypt, which at times limited our possibilities to provide additional suggestions for material and collaborators. Experts on Tunisia may thus find 'their' country underrepresented and the overall picture too 'Egyptocentric' and biased by the Egyptian perspective. As editors we are aware of this imbalance; however, the reader will notice that we also have been eager to *re*-balance the picture by encouraging co-authored entries or, where this turned out to be too difficult to achieve, to mark Egypt-specific articles

36 GUMBRECHT, 434.

37 See Tony E. ADAMS, Stacy Holman JONES, and Carolyn ELLIS (eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2nd edn., New York: Routledge, 2021).

by the extension "… (EG)" or "… in Egypt," and ditto for entries with an exclusive focus on Tunisia ("… (TN)", "… in Tunisia"). – It goes without saying that even a rich rendering of both the Tunisian and the Egyptian cases taken together still cannot fully do justice to "the Arab World" that the reader may have noticed in our subtitle, *How it felt to live in the Arab World…* Clearly, the Arab World is much larger than our two target countries alone, and after Tunisia and Egypt, many other Arab countries, in turn, witnessed their own versions of the "Arab Spring" with more or less far-reaching consequences for both politics and everyday life. Yet, Tunisia and Egypt are the two states where these developments were set in motion, and in hindsight, they may also serve as representatives of two main directions in which things could evolve after the uprisings and during the process of rebuilding the nation, so that the ensemble of the two cases can claim at least *some* representativeness beyond their own confines.

No hierarchy: a rhizome

As noted above, the entries in this publication are (within the three sections: Arrays, Codes, and Codes Collapsed) arranged purely alphabetically. This has an important conceptual reason, namely, to avoid any impression of hierarchical order among the different components of the *Stimmung(en)* we aim to reconstruct. Instead, we want to highlight the countless ways of entanglement between the various dimensions and components, objects, thoughts and feelings of the 'present' of being in 2016. This is an attempt to approach the feeling of a present as perceived and professed by those living and entangled in it, re-presenting these everyday worlds *from within* or from below rather than looking at them from a systematizing, analytical perspective. Lest we be misunderstood: the alphabetical arrangement does not imply any claim to 'encyclopaedic' comprehensiveness; it is simply the best way we could think of to represent, in the two-dimensional space of a paper or web page, the *rhizome* of arrays, codes, and collapsed codes that informed the 'present' of 2016. It is also a reflection of our focus on the *simultaneity* of these arrays, codes, and collapsed codes as elements constituting the *stage* for 'being in 2016,' the stage where human beings lived, felt, thought, and acted. Obviously, no year is static; development and change did happen also in the course of 2016. True to GUMBRECHT, however, our focus remained firmly on those elements that formed the stage rather than on narrating the play. Therefore, where an entry contains traces of sequentiality, this should merely be understood as an effect of the surface focus of our approach rather than as the reconstruction of any causal or otherwise logical consequence.

One ordering or classificatory choice we had to make was whether to use 'emic' or 'etic' titles for our entries. Given our attempt to approach, as closely as possible, the 'world(s)' as experienced by Egyptians and Tunisians living 'in 2016,' we decided that at least the *array* titles—entries on artifacts, roles, and activities influencing bodies, and thus closest to the *surface* we wished to describe—should, in principle, all be emic. Where a straightforward equivalent exists in English, this was chosen as the lemma, in order not to exoticize the concept in an otherwise English-language publication. In some instances, however (e.g., *'alsh*, *'ashwā'iyyāt*, *centre-ville*, *kamīn*, *manīsh msāmiḥ*, *zaḥma*), such a straightforward equivalent was difficult to come by since possible English terms (e.g., 'slum') generally convey

divergent connotations; in these cases, the entry title was left in the original Arabic or French.[38] Moreover, some arrays (e.g., "Conversions," "Dual Identities / Masking," "Father Figures," "The Policeman-Criminal," "The Suspect Foreigner," "The Voice from Above") are umbrella terms for a range of kindred phenomena that are clearly palpable in our material even though the sources do not use a unified label for them; the English term here is intended as a condensed descriptive designation allowing us to exhibit these in their association. – As for the *codes* and their *collapsed* correlatives, both of which indicate a greater level of abstraction, we chose to render them in our text's running language, English.

Mention must be made of a number of other alphabetically arranged 'inventories' that exhibit certain parallels to our work. Early on and in Arabic, we find an inspiring precedent in Aḥmad AMĪN, *Qāmūs al-ʿādāt wa'l-taqālīd wa'l-taʿābīr al-miṣriyya* (1953)[39]—not only for the alphabetical order but for the way the author explains his focus in the preface. Called a "dictionary" primarily for the sake of its non-hierarchical organisation, this work resembles our perspective in that it aims to give a taste of (then) present-day Egyptian life in its everyday aspects, from costumes to customs to proverbs—aspects that the author found were often neglected by non-native 'experts' writing about Egypt who thus produced a deficient or even flawed image of the country. Another scholarly example for what the authors emphasise "is not a dictionary" but still presented alphabetically is *L'Aventure des mots de la ville*[40]—here, this way of organising was chosen to reflect the lack of hierarchy between the various entries and their multiple entanglements, and to suggest to each reader to find his or her own path into the world(s) described. After the Arab revolutions, the words "inventory" or "archive" appeared more frequently in titles of publications aiming not to analyse but to preserve "raw material" documenting the state of societies or of the 'present' as it appeared to those who lived it at a crucial moment in time. Most of these are online archives, for example *858: Arshīf thawrī*—"raw, unedited footage shot and gathered over the years" by the Egyptian MOSIREEN (*Muṣirrīn*) Collective to "present thousands of histories of revolt told from hundreds of perspectives."[41] In print, we find *L'Égypte au présent: Inventaire d'une société avant révolution*, a book composed of conventionally thematic chapters but that claims to be a register of all aspects of life in Egypt just before they would be upset dramatically.[42] Other titles try to list the most salient revolution-related vocabulary, like *Qāmūs al-thawra* (Dictionary of the Revolution) for the Egyptian case,[43] or the collection *Ces nouveaux mots*

38 Note that "Valentine's Day" and "Compounds" *are* emic terms; the first is commonly referred to as *ʿĪd il-Fālentāyn*; the latter has entered Arabic as *kūmbāwndz*, designating what in English are known as "Gated Communities."

39 Aḥmad AMĪN, *Qāmūs al-ʿādāt wa'l-taqālīd wa'l-taʿābīr al-Miṣriyya* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjama wa'l-Nashr, 1953).

40 Christian TOPALOV & Isabelle AMESTOY (eds.), *L'Aventure des mots de la ville* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010).

41 MUṢIRRĪN / MOSIREEN Collective, *858: Arshīf thawrī: An archive of resistance*, <https://858.ma>. The name derives from the number of hours of video material the archive had assembled at the time it went public in 2017.

42 Vincent BATTESTI & François IRETON (eds.), *L'Égypte au présent: Inventaire d'une société avant révolution* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2011).

43 <www.qamosalthawra.com> (in Egyptian colloquial Arabic and English translation). On the website, the authors do not disclose their identity, but state that the project received support from the Arab Fund for

qui font la Tunisie (Those new words that make Tunisia).[44] These works share with our project an interest in recording the multitude of intertwined elements[45] making up every-day experiences, frequently also with a particular focus on emotions and bodily experiences. What distinguishes our project, on the other hand, is its deliberate abstraction from linearity, event, or an eye for historical 'turning points'; its abstention from explicit analytical comment; its snapshot view, framed by a random year, of pertinent phenomena in their simultaneity; and its Gumbrechtian way of categorising these phenomena as a rhizome of arrays and (potentially broken) codes.[46]

Arts and Culture (*al-Ṣundūq al-ʿarabī lil-thaqāfa wa'l-funūn*, AFAC) as well as private contributions to a 2015 Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign; the digital publication was commissioned by Rhizome. The work is described as "a series of 125 texts woven from the voices of hundreds of people who were asked to define the evolving language of the Egyptian revolution. Material for the dictionary was collected in conversations with around 200 individuals in Egypt from March to August 2014. Participants reacted to vocabulary cards containing 160 words that were frequently used in political conversation [specified in the same "About" text as "public political speech between 2011 and 2013"], talking about what the words meant to them, who they heard using them, and how their meanings had changed since the revolution" – <…/en#about>.

44 Ed. by Hédia BARAKET and Olfa BELHASSINE, Tunis: Cérès édition, 2016.

45 On the website of *Qāmūs al-thawra* (note 43), clickable terms are arranged around a circle. On moving the cursor over a term, a diagram appears "that shows its [*sc.* the term's] relationship to other words in the dictionary. The thicker the line connecting two words, the closer their relationship is. The diagrams are the result of an analysis of the complete text of the dictionary" (<www.qamosalthawra.com/en#about>).

46 To illustrate similarities and differences in approach, compare our entires with those in one of the two 'dictionaries' just mentioned (BARAKET & BELHASSINE's *Ces nouveaux mots qui font la Tunisie*). The latter are:

> *ʿadāla intiqāliyya* 'justice transitionnelle', *ʿafw tashrīʿī ʿāmm* 'amnistie générale', ***ʿalmāniyya*** 'laïcité', *ʿAmmār 404, ʾazlām* 'hommes de l'ancien régime', *« Ben ʿAli hrab »* 'Ben Ali s'est enfui', *būlīs siyāsī* 'police politique', *dawla ʿamīqa* 'l'état profond', *« Dégage! »*, *ḥarga* 'brûlure, i.e., migration clandestine', *hayʾa ʿulyā* 'haute instance', *haybat al-dawla* 'prestige et autorité de l'état', *ḥimār waṭanī* 'âne national', '(*rawābit) ḥimāyat al-thawra* '[ligues de] protection de la révolution', *ḥiwār waṭanī* 'dialogue national', *ḥiyād* 'neutralité', *ḥizb wasaṭī* 'parti centriste', *hudna* 'trêve', *humāni, ḥurriyya* 'liberté', *ḥurriyyat al-ḍamīr* 'liberté de conscience', *huthāla frankofoniyya* 'résidus de la francophonie', *huwiyya* 'identité', *ightiyāl siyāsī* 'assassinat politique', *ʾiʿlām al-ʿār* 'médias de la honte', *infilāt* 'dérapage', *intiqāl dīmuqrāṭī* 'transition démocratique', *ʾirhāb* 'terrorisme', *ʾislām siyāsī* 'islam politique', *istiqṭāb thunāʾī* 'bipolarisation', *iʿtiṣām* 'sit-in', *iʿtiṣām al-raḥīl* 'sit-in du départ', *jihād* 'guerre sainte', *khabīr* 'expert', *kursī* 'siège, chaise', *majlis taʾsīsī* 'assemblée nationale constituante', *mrā tūnsiyya* 'femme tunisienne', *muʾāmara* 'complot', *mujtamaʿ madanī* 'société civile', *nukhba* 'élite', *Persépolis, qannās* 'sniper', *salafī* 'salafiste', *ṣfir fāṣil* 'zéro virgule', *« al-shaʿb yurīd ʾisqāṭ al-niẓām »* 'le peuple veut la chute du régime', *shahīd* 'martyr', *sharīʿa* 'sharia', *sharʿiyya* 'légalité, légitimité', *tajādhubāt* 'tiraillements', *tajfīf al-manābiʿ* 'tarissement des sources', *takfīr* 'accusation d'apostasie', *« al-tashghīl istiḥqāq yā ʿiṣābat al-surrāq! »* 'l'emploi est un droit, bande de voleurs!', *tawāfuqāt* 'consensus/compromis', *taʿwīḍāt* 'indemnisations', *al-thawra 'la Révolution', Troïka, Wahhābiyya* 'wahhabisme', *waraqa bayḍāʾ* 'feuille blanche', *« yarḥmik yā Ben ʿAli »* 'Bénis sois-tu, Ben Ali!', *yasār* 'gauche', *zaʿīm* 'chef politique/leader charismatique', *zawāj ʿurfī* 'mariage coutumier'.

Most of these "new words that make/shape (contemporary) Tunisia" can also be found in our work, without, however, being identified as arrays, codes, or collapsed codes in their own right—either because they were no longer identifiable in our sources as explicitly prominent in the discourses of 2016 (such as

Attempts to 'archive life'—the social life of a people, or a country, at a moment in time, and in its contingent plenitude—appear to have found renewed interest recently, perhaps related to a growing sense of the volatility of the present. As any archive, such attempts need a minimum of structure to be accessible, even if one aims to avoid hierarchy. Our choice was to follow the Gumbrechtian example, and like him, we conducted our project as a tentative "experiment."[47] As any archivist knows, however, an archive is never complete, and our experimental one is a particular case in point. The reader will not fail to notice that a number of entries are left blank in this collection, marked as "in progress" or as "*desideratum*." The first simply were not fully finalised by the deadline for publication of this themed section of the *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (January 31, 2022); they will be added as soon as they are ready. The *desiderata*, on the other hand, are entries that we had agreed upon as significant but for which we in the end failed to find an author willing to tackle them in the Gumbrechtian spirit. They are included in the table of contents precisely to indicate that we have identified them and that they should be considered as important nodes in the rhizome of 2016. To give the reader/user of our collection at least an idea of their significance, the *desiderata* entries each contain (a) a list of the entries in which they are cross-referenced, and (b) a listing of those "issues" from our *Iṭārat al-qunūṭ* list that our team thought would best be treated in the respective Array, Code, or Codes Collapsed article. We wish we could have covered more ground but finally had to accept that the experiment of bringing a large and variegated body of contributors together to compose a work modelled on Gumbrecht's approach proved more challenging than we had expected. As this approach is a fairly unfamiliar one in our field, it required more tutelage and rewriting than usual, and some potential authors withdrew since they were not willing to bend to the model's constraints (past as present, no linearity, no analytical explication, etc.). Others were hampered by needs and obligations imposed by their regular (or irregular) academic lives, something particularly pertinent for those with only temporary employment. The *desiderata* are more obvious among the *codes* and *collapsed codes*, due to the fact that these are conceptualised as *clusters* of arrays and that the entries for arrays therefore were not only tackled first but also were 'simpler' to write. Without financing available for an extension of the project, we had to contend ourselves with publishing those parts of the rhizome that had grown since the beginning of the writing process. Thus, what the following pages contain reflects the open-ended, unbounded nature of the rhizome—and perhaps, in a curious way, our "experiment" in following a Gumbrechtian approach to re-present how it felt to live in the Arab world five years after the 'Arab Spring' yielded a torso that parallels the incomplete, but for some still open-ended, experiment that mushroomed in the 'Arab revolutions' a decade ago.

many of the original slogans of the revolution, e.g., *«Dégage!»*, *«al-Shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām»*, or *«Shughl, ḥurriyya, karāma waṭaniyya!»*, which had had their heyday five years earlier), or because they were too specific to qualify as an array, a code, or a collapsed code. Instead, we treated them as "issues," including them in our *'Iṭārat al-qunūṭ* (see above, p. 13) and thence assigning them to one or more of the arrays, codes, etc. For example, *ḥarga* would be covered in our work under *Migration*; *khabīr*, mostly used for the foreign expert, would be treated under *The Suspect Foreigner* as well as *Inferiority vs. Superiority*; or *mu'āmara* ('conspiracy') would be included in the more general *True vs. False* code entry.

47 "[A]s things now stand, everything is doomed to remain an experiment," GUMBRECHT concludes his introduction (p. xv).

References

Written Sources and Videos

ABBOTT, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 2nd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

ADAMS, Tony E., Stacy HOLMAN JONES, and Carolyn ELLIS (eds.). *Handbook of Autoethnography*. 2nd edn., New York: Routledge, 2021.

ADORNO, Theodor W. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7: *Ästhetische Theorie*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997 [1970]. – English translation: ID., *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel ADORNO & Robert HULLOT-KENTOR. A&C Black (Continuum impacts; Impacts Series), 2004.

AMIN, Aḥmad. *Qāmūs al-ʿādāt wa'l-taqālīd wa'l-taʿābīr al-Miṣriyya*. Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjama wa'l-Nashr, 1953.

BAKHTIN, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [orig. Russian: *Проблемы поэтики Достоевского*, 1929] / translated by Caryl EMERSON. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

BARAKET, Hédia, and Olfa BELHASSINE. *Ces nouveaux mots qui font la Tunisie.* Tunis: Cérès édition, 2016.

BATTESTI, Vincent & François IRETON (eds.). *L'Égypte au présent: Inventaire d'une société avant révolution* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2011).

BÖSCH, Frank. *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann*. München: C.H. Beck, 2019.

CHOUEIRY, Youssef M. "Neo-Orientalism and Islamic fundamentalism." *Review of Middle East Studies*, 4 (1988): 55–68).

FLAUBERT, Gustave. *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues*. Paris: L. Conard, 1910.

GILCHER-HOLTEY, Ingrid. "'Kritische Ereignisse' und 'kritischer Moment': Bourdieus Modell der Vermittlung von Ereignis und Struktur." In Manfred HETTLING and Andreas SUTER (eds.), *Struktur und Ereignis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2001: 120-137.

GUMBRECHT, Hans Ulrich. *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

— . "Shall We Continue to Write Histories of Literature?," *New Literary History*, 39 (2008): 519-532.

— . *Stimmungen lesen: Über eine verdeckte Wirklichkeit der Literatur.* München: Hanser, 2011. – Translated into English by Erik BUTLER as *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012.

— . "The dimension of 'Stimmung' in contemporary popular culture." Public lecture, given on December 13, 2016, in Minsk, available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/t_dajId2BaA>.

GUTH, Stephan. "A Losing Battle? 'Islamwissenschaft' in the Times of Neoliberalism, IS, PEGIDA… and Trump." In *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam: Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Florian ZEMMIN, Johannes STEPHAN, and Monica CORRADO, Leiden: Brill, 2018: 496-525.

— , and Elena CHITI (eds.). *Living 2016: Cultural Codes and Arrays in Arab Everyday Worlds Five Years After the "Arab Spring."* Themed issue, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 221-388.

ILLIES, Florian. *1913: Der Sommer des Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2012.

JACQUEMOND, Richard. *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* / translated by David TRESILIAN. Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press,

2008. (Original French: *Entre scribes et écrivains: le champ littéraire dans l'Égypte contemporaine*, Sindbad, 2003).

— . "Satiric Literature and Other 'Popular' Literary Genres in Egypt Today." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 349-67. <https://doi.org/10.5617/jais.4756>.

KREISWIRTH, Martin. "Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences." *New Literary History*, 23.3 (1992): 629-57, <doi:10.2307/469223>.

KUCZYNSKI, Jürgen. *1903: Ein normales Jahr im imperialistischen Deutschland*. Berlin: Akademie, 1988.

LOCKMAN, Zachary. *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

MEHREZ, Samia. *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994.

MUṢIRRĪN / MOSIREEN Collective. *858: Arshīf thawrī: An archive of resistance*. 2017. <https://858.ma>.

POYA, Abbas, and Maurus REINKOWSKI (eds.). *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft: Ein klassisches Fach im Scheinwerferlicht der Politik und der Medien*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2008.

ROOKE, Tetz. "The Emergence of the Arabic Bestseller: Arabic Fiction and World Literature." In *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. II: *Postmodernism and Thereafter*, ed. by Stephan GUTH and Gail RAMSAY, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011: 201-213.

SAID, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003 [[1]1978].

STANTON, Anna Ziajka. « Eyes on the Prize: The Global Readability of an IPAF-Winning Modern Arabic Novel." *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475262X.2021.2029216>.

STAROBINSKI, Jean. *1789: Les emblèmes de la raison*. Paris: Flammarion, 1979.

TOPALOV, Christian, and Isabelle AMESTOY (eds.). *L'Aventure des mots de la ville.* Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010.

WHITE, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973 (and later editions).

TV series

Babylon Berlin. Written and directed by Tom TYKWER, Achim VON BORRIES, and Hendrik HANDLOEGTEN, based on novels by Volker KUTSCHER. 3 seasons. First released on *Sky TV* / *Das Erste*, 2017-.

Ku'damm 56. Written by Annette HESS, directed by Sven BOHSE. First aired on *ZDF*, March 2016. – The sequels *Ku'damm 59* and *Ku'damm 63* went on air in 2018 and 2021, respectively.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►
◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

ARRAYS

i.e., the ways in which “artefacts, roles, and activities influence bodies” because they “require the human bodies to enter into specific spatial and functional relations to the everyday-worlds they inhabit”

H.ans Ulrich GUMBRECHT, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (1997), p. 443

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021)

Themed Section ***In2016***

ʔAlsh

By Mohab Mohamed

Currently under review.

Entries pointing here

Arrays – Celebrities ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Language
Codes – Male *vs.* Female ♦ True *vs.* False

Cf. also "Satire (in YouTube Channels)," *JAIS* 17 (2017): 502-05, by the same author.

◄ mohab.mohamed@ikos.uio.no ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *22–*22
© Mohab Mohamed, formerly IKOS, University of Oslo, NO

Apartment Wanted

By Maren Buvarp Aardal

It seems like everybody, in fiction and in real life, dreams of having an apartment. At their disposal and that of their loved ones, away from the poor quarters that lack basic services [↗*ʿAshwāʾiyyāt*], isolated from the noise and chaos of the street [↗*Zaḥma*], away from the mother-in-law or neighbour who might interfere in whatever they are doing (*Nawwāra*, YT "Kumbāwnd ajyād Gārdin Sītī") [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. Yet to a majority of the population, the dream of owning an apartment—be it in a compound [↗Gated Communities / Compounds] or in the city—is hardly realizable. In Tunisia, banks require 20 per cent owner's capital in order to grant a mortgage loan, and many people find it difficult to set aside money from an already low salary (*HuffPost Tunisie*). In Egypt, even renting is difficult. In the more expensive neighbourhoods of Cairo, such as Zamalek, Garden City and Maadi, apartments are rented out in dollars; the equivalent value in Egyptian pounds changes every day [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. Young Tunisians often live with their parents until they marry, at the average age of 30 (Zribi) [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. Whereas the economic crisis often prevents people from living on their own, Tunisians do not necessarily rush into marriage. To many, financial autonomy and work and life experience often come before the need of entering wedlock.

As it is illegal for unmarried couples to rent a hotel room or to live together, an alternative market flourishes [↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**]. Young Tunisian couples resort to a "locale," a place for youth to have premarital sex [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. The currency being social capital, you become extremely popular in the group if you can provide your friends with an empty apartment, be it your sick grandmother's vacant house or the apartment of your friend who is studying in France. But stay cautious: neighbours might report on the illegal concubinage to the police, who seem eager to haunt the lovers (Rihab) [↗**The Honourable Citizen**].

Not new in either place, the same phenomenon exists in Egypt, known informally as *mukna* (in the slang word, never heard in official, 'decent' contexts, the standard language words *makān* "place" and *ʾimkāniyya* "opportunity" and/or *mumkin* "possible" seem to have merged, implying "locale, love-nest, place where you can have sex") or, more formally and raising less suspicion, as "furnished apartment" (*shaqqa mafrūsha*) [↗**Language**]. Here you more often get paid in pounds than with social capital, but the concept is the same: the rental of an apartment for a romantic evening or even night. Some people claim that the popularity of these apartments has skyrocketed since the revolutions. The numbers are impossible to verify.

However, what has become more common in recent years is to rent an apartment together with friends. Facebook groups such as Cairo Scholar and websites such as Open Sooq and Craigslist list all kinds of apartment and room options and rules: "Male only," "visitors not allowed," "no *bawwāb*," "24/7 security," "open-minded flatmates," "foreigner females only," "*bawwāb* is cool with visitors," and so on. In general, there seem to be more rules and restrictions for women than for men [↗**Male *vs.* Female**].

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *23–*25
© Maren Buvarp Aardal, formerly IKOS, University of Oslo, NO

Whereas both the Egyptian and Tunisian authorities report high unemployment rates, especially among university graduates, and state their intention to fight these, commentators in both countries point to income inequalities and variations in the quality of life as the main problems standing in the way of decent housing for all. As Mabrouka M'Barek, a former member of Tunisia's elected Constituent Assembly, states:

> Recovering dignity is not contingent on job opportunities [...] Rather, dignity is conditional on decreasing the private debt burden, ensuring access to water, electricity, housing, and health care [...]. (M'BAREK)

It is hard to see that President Sisi's declarations of the "Year of the Youth" (*ʿām al-shabāb*) and his repeated promises of housing projects for the youth are helping in any way. When summarizing the achievements of his two-year-old reign, the first thing he mentions is the building of one million apartments (ʿABD-AL-RAḤMĀN*)*. But where are these apartments? The promise of one million apartments in 13 different cities by 2020 was announced last year, but apparently only two cities, Obour and Badr, are prioritized and the number of units is reduced to 100,000 in this first phase (ESTERMAN). In another speech, Sisi states that every youth who fulfils the relevant criteria and applies for government housing will get it, even if the number of applicants exceeds the planned 100,000 units (*madàMaṣr*). Oh, these promises. Many of the private and state-owned media outlets enthusiastically report on every new speech making new promises or celebrating achievements. But when the army rolls out a several kilometre-long red carpet for Sisi's car on his way to inaugurate a low-income housing project in 6th October (a satellite city in the Western desert, 30 km from Cairo), even pro-Sisi media express disapproval (*Egypt Independent)*. Such extravagance is not exactly in line with the austerity measures Sisi demands from "his" people. Things do not look good either when the President suggests that Egyptians sponsor development projects by giving the change left over in bank transactions to the state and that they should not complain about the increase in bills for water and electricity, now that the state is no longer able to subsidize these. What spare change (MAHFOUZ)?

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Language ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Normality = Heroism (Surviving)

References

Written Sources and Videos

ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN, ʿAmr. "'Iḥmī waṭanak': injāzāt al-Sīsī khilāl ʿāmayn ghayr masbūqa min sinīn." *Al-Ṭalīʿa: shabakat manbar al-kalima al-ḥurra al-ikhbāriyya*, 2016, <https://www.altaly3anews.com/احمي-وطنك-انجازات-السيسى-خلال-عامين-غ/> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

[*Egypt Independent* =] N. N. "Army responds to president's 'red carpet' reception saga." *Egypt Independent*, February 8, 2016, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/army-responds-president-s-red-carpet-reception-saga> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

ESTERMAN, Isabel. "After year-long wait, Arabtec reaches deal with Egypt on mega-housing project". *MadaMasr*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/04/02/feature/economy/after-year-long-wait-arabtec-reaches-deal-with-egypt-on-mega-housing-project/amp/> (last accessed August 6, 2018).

[*HuffPost Tunisie* =] N. N. "L'achat d'un logement, impossible pour une majorité de Tunisiens". *HuffPost Tunisie*, October 7, 2016, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/10/07/logement-tunisie_n_12383686.html> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

[*MadàMaṣr* =] N. N. "Sisi: Don't listen to anyone but me." *MadàMaṣr*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/24/news/u/sisi-dont-listen-to-anyone-but-me/amp/> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

MAHFOUZ, Heba Farouk. "Egyptian president's solution for crumbling economy: Spare change." *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/09/29/egyptian-presidents-solution-for-crumbling-economy-spare-change/> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

M'BAREK, Mabrouka. «Enough with the 'Jasmine Revolution' narrative: Tunisians demand dignity». *Middle East Eye,* April 18, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/enough-jasmine-revolution-narrative-tunisia-faces-many-challenges-1320408507> (last accessed September 2, 2018).

RIHAB. "Tunisie: Quand la chasse aux couples non mariés pratiquée par une frange de la société et permise par l'Etat tue". *HuffPost Tunisie,* August 1, 2016, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/08/01/tunisie-chasse-couple_n_11296512.html> (last accessed August 5, 2018).

[YT "Kumbāwnd ajyād Gārdin Sītī" =] N. N. "Kumbāwnd ajyād Gārdin Sītī". YouTube video, uploaded by Agyad Multi Projects on March 21, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SS27GSskhh8&feature=youtu.be>.

ZRIBI, Sofiane. "Jeunes tunisiens : l'appel du large ou l'appel des cafés". Leaders. November 28, 2016, <http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/21090-jeunes-tunisiens-l-appel-du-large-ou-l-appel-des-cafes> (last accessed August 6, 2018).

Films

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). Egypt 2016.

◄ marenaardal@gmail.com ►

ʿAshwāʾiyyāt

… in Egypt

By Walter Armbrust

> It's a jungle, if nobody has your back in it, the wolves will eat what's rightfully yours (Abū l-Yazīd)

> It's a jungle; you've been a good man and been eaten, so stop being a weakling
> Go into it hard-hearted, live it on your terms
> In our times there's no place for the weak and downtrodden (*YT,* June 5)

The struggle for survival in a harsh urban jungle is the gist of Rīhām ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm's theme song [↗**Pop Music**] for the hit television series "al-Usṭūra" (The Legend). "Jungle" in this case refers to a specific urban phenomenon: the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*—often glossed as "informal housing" in the parlance of urban planners. At the broadest level *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* are housing—ranging from single dwellings to substantial neighborhoods—characterized as unplanned, marginal, and illegal (al-Gindī). Experts in urban planning often bristle at the imprecision of binary definitions used to describe relative deprivation of urban areas routinely referred to as *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, such as "urban-rural," "official-unofficial," or "planned-unplanned" (*10Tooba*, Sept. 29). Yet the term *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* is used all the time in daily conversation. Ordinary people seem to think they know what they mean by it. So does the state, and so do the media.

ʿAshwāʾiyyāt are often described in polite society and by the state as a great national problem in desperate need of a solution. Yet solutions are elusive. A report summarizes the dimensions of this approach to the phenomenon. There are *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* in Egypt: unsafe, unplanned, and hazardous to health. 15.5 million Egyptians live in *ʿashwāʾī* areas. Cairo alone has 81 *ʿashwāʾī* areas, 13 of which require immediate demolition. The Naẓīf government had allocated £E 5 billion to support the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* in 2005, whereas the current government's new budget aims to develop or demolish all the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* by 2025. However, nobody knows where the £E 5 billion from the Naẓīf years went, though it appears that they only started thinking seriously about the problem when a rockslide destroyed the neighbourhood of Duwayqa in 2008. After Duwayqa the government established an "*ʿashwāʾiyyāt* development fund," which was meant to have become a "shining light on development" (Quṭb) [↗The **Voice from Above**]. But by some standards it never got off the ground (ʿAshār). When he took power in 2012 Prime Minister Kamāl al-Ganzūrī recognized the lack of action and managed to find £E 175 million for 4 development projects. President Sīsī himself spoke about the problem when he attended the inauguration of the al-Asmarāt project to house residents of Duwayqa in the Muqaṭṭam Hills. However, the project that Sisi attended was only for two housing projects. Ḥusayn Ḥasan, a journalist who specializes in *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, noted that there were 1200 *ʿashwāʾī* areas in the country. In his opinion there was no piecemeal solution to the problem. "Do we need another Duwayqa before anything else is done?" he asks (Ḥasan).

In fact, the government did not even have accurate statistics on *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*. Some say there are actually 6,000 *ʿashwāʾī* areas in Egypt, not 1,200 as the government claims. Others

© Walter Armbrust, University of Oxford, UK

say that the problem of *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* is quite old—that it began in 1914, when unemployment, poverty and immigration from the countryside overwhelmed a government plan to make habitable areas available for the public good. Others date the problem from the late 1950s. But the use of the actual term "*ʿashwāʾiyyāt*" began in November 1981 in a speech to a joint session of the People's Assembly and the Consultative Assembly one month after assuming power in the wake of Anwar al-Sadat's assassination. In the speech Mubarak declared housing to be one of seven urgent problems confronting the nation. A series of studies funded by the American Agency for International Development ensued, and from them the term *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* emerged.

The urge to empirically describe what is seen as a problem is powerful. There are 351 unsafe *ʿashwāʾī* areas; 66 that are hazardous to health. Somewhere between 800 thousand and a million people live in the unsafe areas. It is said that 14 million Egyptians live in tombs, shacks and mosques in the cemeteries of Basāṭīn, al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī, Bāb al-Wazīr, al-Ghafīr, al-Mugāwirīn, al-Imām al-Laythī, ʿAyn Shams and Madīnat Naṣr. Others say that the total population of Egyptians living in *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* throughout the country is 15.5 million. Such discrepancies can be explained by the fact that there has been no unified study of *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* because of insufficient spending by government agencies to define the size and scope of these areas. Hence there is no true understanding of them.

ʿAshwāʾiyyāt are, however, also the subject of a great deal of popular culture and urban folklore. In the context of how *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* are depicted in media, they are considered "dirty laundry," which should ideally be kept out of view. Yet they are far too big to be concealed—*ʿashwāʾiyyāt* are an elephant in the room. One frustrated writer addresses the elephant by suggesting that a purge of "*ʿashwāʾiyyāt* films" is needed, analogous to the McCarthyist purging of communists from Hollywood in 1950s America (MAḤMŪD). This is particularly appropriate for the sort of *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* films that President Sīsī did not like. Such films depict Egypt as if it was "a big shanty" in which only thugs, dancers and drug dealers [↗**Hashish**] live. And yet filmmakers have been fascinated by *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* for some time. This fascination began with relatively highbrow depiction, namely film director Dāʾūd ʿAbd al-Sayyid's *Sāriq al-faraḥ* (The Wedding Thief), a 1990s film that revolved around the desires and ambitions of the residents of an *ʿashwāʾī* area. This film, however, was no embarrassing troll trough Egypt's dirty laundry, but rather an artistically memorable effort, in which ʿAbd al-Sayyid was said to have faithfully copied "the spirit of Fellini but in the style of Ettore Scola"—heirs of the great tradition of Italian neorealism (ḤABASHĪ). In the first decade of the new millennium other Egyptian directors were eager to explore similar themes, but their efforts are not as well received by critics as *Sāriq al-faraḥ* had been. The characters in *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* films "reek with the smell of sex, drugs, and thuggery" (MAḤMŪD). A Jordanian critic fulminates against *Ḥīna maysira* (When Times Are Better), a film from 2007, which depicts the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* in a decidedly unpoetic way, rubbing the viewer's nose in grinding poverty and social pathology (al-WAR). He sees it as a betrayal of Egypt's noble film history, and a denigration of the entire Arab world. Many Egyptians share his opinion and believe that while filmmakers try to faithfully depict life in poor neighbourhoods, they do more harm than good. They should try to show a better side of Egypt, one that does not suggest everything is about dancers and thuggery.

Yet a film from 2012 titled *al-Almānī* (The German) sets a new and still lower standard for the depiction of thuggery in *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, which still merits commentary in 2016 (ḤĀFIẒ). *Al-Almānī* was a vehicle for a sinewy and intense rising star named Muḥammad Ramaḍān. It was his breakthrough to true popular acclaim, which was subsequently cemented by *ʿAbduh Mawta* (also in 2012), which literally means "ʿAbduh death"—the character's formidable nickname. The film was so violent that some wanted it banned and the filmmakers put on trial (al-HAWĀRĪ). Then *Qalb al-asad* (Lion Heart) in 2013, screened for the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr (feast of breaking the Ramaḍān fast) at just about the moment when ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī, who was also nicknamed "lion heart," ordered the slaughter of a thousand followers of Islamist President Muḥammad Mursī, and so popular that it was still in theatres two months later for the ʿĪd al-Aḍḥà (feast of sacrifice) (ʿĀṬIF). And after that, *Shidd aǧzāʾ* (Pull the Pieces [together]) in 2015, an action film in which he plays a policeman [↗**The Policeman Criminal**] who goes rogue when his wife is killed by a gangster (ZAHIR). In this three-year period—2012 to 2015—Muḥammad Ramaḍān [↗**Celebrities**], king of the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* films, was said to have earned about £E 70 million (ABŪ HUMAYLA).

But in terms of mass mediated *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, the event of 2016 is not a film, but a television series: *al-Usṭūra* (The Legend). It stars Muḥammad Ramaḍān, and *al-Usṭūra* may turn out to be the pinnacle of his meteoric career. Like many of the lurid cinematic depictions of criminality and poverty in the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, the narrative of *al-Usṭūra* conjures with the line between formal legality and lawlessness. One character in the series is a black market weapons merchant operating from within the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*. The other is his twin, separated at birth, a well-educated lawyer who wants to be a judge but is rejected by the judicial system when a security check turns up information on his criminal brother. In the course of the story the criminal brother is killed; the lawyer brother goes rogue to take his revenge. Muḥammad Ramaḍān plays both brothers [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]. Over the 30 episodes afforded by the Egyptian dramatic serial format rather than the comparatively telegraphic film medium, Ramaḍān unfolds an epic depiction of violent masculinity in the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, a vision befitting the series title: a legend. "It's a jungle ... go into it hard-hearted," as the theme song [↗**Pop Music**] puts it. "It" does not have to be named: everyone knows that "it" is the *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*.

The public is transfixed (*Maṣrawī*). For critics the series is a legendary affront:

> One of the worst shows of the year. It pushes youth toward violence and thuggery. – In reality Muḥammad Ramaḍān has taken the millions he made from the series and headed off to his villa in a gated community [↗Gated Communities / Compounds], leaving youths in the street imitating the barbarity that he plays in his works. – Such programs will help to create generations predisposed to thuggery and violence, and will afflict youth with frustration and depression by making viewers compare themselves with the characters. – Ramaḍān exploits the psychological weak points of ʿashwāʾiyyāt youth, which has enabled him to impose himself on every home with his traits that so closely resemble those of poor areas, and which make everyone sympathize with him (ʿAMMĀR).

And so films, state policy, often earnest public opinion, and almost always mass media spectacle are mutually reinforcing. Media spectacle appears to glorify what the other parties

to *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* discourse condemn, but they all agree on the nature of the "problem." Urbanist scholars are the lone dissenting voice in a wilderness of condemnation. For them *ʿashwāʾiyyāt* is not a terribly useful term (YĀSĪN). On a scale of urban deprivation, they are a mixed bag—certainly not the residential location of elites, but otherwise home to a wide variety of Egyptian citizens, and areas characterized by problems that apply in varying degrees to both formal and informal parts of the city. Such nuance has no place for those who may not be able to define *ʿashwāʾiyyāt*, but know them when they see them.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ The Voice from Above

References

[*10Tooba*, Sept. 29] "Al-Muʾashshir al-ʿāmm lil-ḥirmān al-ʿumrānī." *ʿAshara Tūba*, September 29, 2016, <http://10tooba.org/bedi/ar/> (accessed December 27, 2018).

ABŪ L-YAZĪD, Aḥmad. "Nunshur kalimāt titr musalsal 'al-Usṭūra' li-Rīhām ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm." *Al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, June 5, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ydeaxfwd> (accessed December 26, 2018).

ABŪ HUMAYLA, Samāḥ. "Muḥammad Ramaḍān: Riḥlat al-70 Milyūn Ginayh." *Al-Yawm al-Jadīd*, August 16, 2015, <http://www.elyomnew.com/news/celebrities/2015/08/16/31663> (accessed December 26, 2018).

ʿAMMĀR, Fuʾād. "Min taqlīd 'Kābūryā' ilà 'al-Usṭūra': Nāṣir ḥulm shabāb al-ʿashwāʾiyyāt; wa-nuqqād: Ramaḍān ghayr maʿāyīr 'al-balṭaga'." *Al-Ahrām*, July 1, 2016, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/1163781.aspx> (accessed December 26, 2018).

ʿASHĀR, Ṭāriq. "'Alà Ghirār al-Duwaiqa: ʿAshwāʾiyyāt Tantaẓir al-Mawt." *Al-Yawm al-Jadīd*, June 1, 2016, <http://www.elyomnew.com/news/inside/2016/06/01/53870> (accessed December 23, 2018).

ʿĀṬIF, Amīra. "al-Nuqqād wal-muntijīn ʿan najāḥ al-aflām al-shaʿbiyya fī l-ʿīd: al-Gumhūr bi-yḥibb 'il-Tawliya il-Shaʿbī'." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, October 14, 2013, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/328908> (accessed December 26, 2018).

al-GINDĪ, Nahīr. "al-ʿAshwāʾiyyāt: Man yaḍaʿu al-taʿrīf?" *Jarīdat Markaz Ṭāriq Wālī al-ʿImāra wal-Turāth*, February, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y7phq8yd> (accessed December 27, 2018).

ḤABASHĪ, Usāma. "Al-Siḥr, wal-lā-maʿqūl, wal-siyāsa fī rāʾiʿat Ītūrī Skūla: 'qabīḥūn, qadhirūn wa-ashrār'." *Al-Haḍārāt*, February 1, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y6wpfsvo> (accessed December 23, 2018).

ḤĀFIẒ, Aḥmad. "Muḥammad Ramaḍān shābb min al-ʿashwāʾiyyāt muttaham bi-nashr thaqāfat al-balṭağa." *al-ʿArab*, October 9, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9b3lp4o> (accessed December 28, 2018).

ḤASAN, Aḥmad. "Mā lā taʿrafuhu ʿan al-manāṭiq al-ʿashwāʾiyya bi-Miṣr fī 60 maʿlūma." *Al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, September 19, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yalkqpo9> (accessed December 23, 2018).

al-HAWĀRĪ, Īmān. "Dāʿiya islāmī bil-Uqṣur yuṭālib bi-muḥākamat ṣunnāʿ fīlm ''Abduh Mawta'.'' *Al-Ahrām*, November 3, 2012, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/267886.aspx> (accessed December 26, 2018).

MAḤMŪD, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. "Aflām al-ʿashwāʾiyyāt allatī lā yuḥibbuhā al-Sīsī." *Veto*, June 1, 2016, <https://www.vetogate.com/2213526> (accessed December 23, 2018).

[*Maṣrawī* =] "Musalsal ʿal-Usṭūra' al-akthar shaʿbiyya ḥasab Gūgal." *Maṣrawī*, June 16, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y6wtjrhv> (accessed December 26, 2018).

QUṬB, Nirmīn. "Taṭwīr al-ʿashwāʾiyyāt bayna al-ams wal-yawm wa-ghadan: Khaṭwa muḍīʾa fī masīrat al-tanmiya." *Al-Ahrām*, August 13, 2016, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/542588.aspx> (accessed December 23, 2018).

al-WAR, Firās. "Naqd fannī ʿan film *Ḥīna Maysira*." *ʿAmūn*, September 10, 2016, <https://www.ammonnews.net/article/282072> (accessed December 23, 2018).

YĀSĪN, ʿAlāʾ. "Al-Manāṭiq al-lā-rasmiyya (al-ʿashwāʾiyya): Taqdīr al-imkāniyyāt wal-furaṣ." *Jarīdat Markaz Ṭāriq Wālī al-ʿimāra wal-turāth*, February, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y776alth> (accessed December 27, 2018).

[*YT*, June5 =] "Fūq Baqa: Rīhām ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd—Titr Musalsal al-Usṭūra." YouTube video uploaded on 5 June, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrrroSE9K1c> (accessed December 26, 2018).

ZAHIR, Milad. "il-Mushāhid il-maṣrī mayuḍḥaksh ʿalayh." *Elcinema*, February 17, 2016, <https://www.elcinema.com/ar/review/1237385> (accessed December 26, 2018).

◄ walter.armbrust@sant.ox.ac.uk ►

Baby Milk*

By Albrecht Hofheinz

On September 2, the hashtag #*laban_al-ʿaskūr* explodes on social media [↗**Social Media**]. It is tempting to translate this as #cop_milk to reflect the wordplay, in Arabic, on *laban al-ʿaṣfūr* 'crop milk', an Egyptian expression denoting the unimaginable and impossible. Birds are not mammals, after all. Most people are surprised to learn that 'bird's milk' (the literal rendering of *laban al-ʿaṣfūr*) really does exist—both *al-Ahrām* and *Wikipedia* attest to this unheard-of natural phenomenon. And ordinary citizens are just as stunned to learn of the 'arMY milk' (another attempt to translate *laban al-ʿaskūr*) that the Egyptian military is ready to provide in order to defuse citizens' anger when subsidized infant formula suddenly turns all but out of reach for average Egyptian families. The army has 30 million cans of toddler milk stored in their barracks? Why? What for? Apparently, the nation's foremost institution really does want to make sure it can steer its subjects from the cradle to the grave. And "20 years from now," one of the first tweets predicts, they will yell at you, "you dare insult the army that taught you and suckled you? #Badr_International_School #*laban_al-ʿaskūr*." This tweet combines reference to the toddler milk affair with a stab at the school the military established a year ago to attract well-paying youngsters (20,000 EGP for a kindergarten place) away from private international schools, and to provide them "the weapons of education necessary for their future endeavors." Badr School is facing a backlash as it embarks on its second year, with people objecting to the military's engagement in yet another socioeconomic sector. While critical voices question both the motives and the ability of the military to manage what should be civilian affairs, others take less issue with that. "The military is running all of Egypt, why would I be concerned about it running a school?" says a mother of two kids there. Many do believe that the products and services the military delivers really are better than what others have to offer. Yet this belief becomes the object of derision as well. "They say that Badr School is whiter than white," Abla Fāhītā, the wildly popular Egyptian muppet character, tweets on August 29. Why? "They constantly sweep the floor there with the General" detergent. Can anyone object to using General ("Max Clean, Max Fresh") to secure, as the commercial promises, an "Ultimate clean house"? [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. It is not easy to ascertain who at any one moment has the upper hand in this war of words. For many—teachers and parents at Badr School, drivers filling gas at the Waṭaniyya patriotic petrol stations, consumers buying fruit and eggs, noodles and refrigerators produced in military-owned farms and factories, the sick placing their hopes on drugs and medical equipment imported by the military, and for countless others—the military represents a force serving the nation rather than individual private interests. Protests against the military's role are therefore often regarded as being the result of a conspiracy directed from abroad, and thus Badr's school principal reveals in an interview with *MadaMasr* that:

---

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 466-69.

© Albrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

> There's a fortune teller in America whose prophecies all come true. He predicted that in one of the Arab countries there will be a president who pretends to represent Islam, though he is far from it [a reference to deposed president Mursī] and that the president who comes next would unite the Arab region and destroy the American economy. That president will have a name made up of two repeated syllables [he means Sisi]. [↗**True *vs.* False**, ↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**, ↗The **Suspect Foreigner**]

It is in such a climate that the baby milk crisis erupts. When women on August 31 suddenly and without prior warning find they no longer can buy infant formula at the subsidized price of 5-17 EGP but are being referred to the open market where the cost of a can quickly rises to 60-70 EGP, they are shocked and pour their anger into street demonstrations attracting media attention. The women and their families find themselves confronted with a fait accompli as no one has prepared them for the Health Ministry's decree tightening the criteria for being able to obtain subsidized milk [↗**Valentine's Day (EG)**, ↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. The Ministry, for its part, is merely trying to help "stem the subsidy haemorrhage," to contribute to the overall fiscal consolidation that the IMF requires to approve its biggest ever Middle East loan (12bn USD over 3 years, 4 times as much as Sisi's predecessors dared to ask for) [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. This grander order of things is lost, however, on countless women who complain that they now no longer know how to feed their babies [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**]. At this point, the army is there to save them. To counter what it describes as "monopolistic practices by pharmaceutical companies" (and without mentioning that the main company involved is the state-owned Egyptian Pharmaceutical Trading), the Armed Forces promise to deliver 30 million cans of baby milk—half of Egypt's annual demand—to be sold at pharmacies for "no more than 30 EGP" [↗The **Voice from Above**]. A few observers point out that this is twice the expense incurred for importing the milk, meaning a net profit of 450 million EGP "for a tiny crisis created in just one day" (coincidentally, this corresponds exactly to the amount, c. 51 million USD, that the Ministry of Health claims it uses per year for supplying infant formula) [↗**Tricking the System / Tricked by the System**]. But such nit-picking cannot deter the authorities. Soon, fleets of trucks bearing the message "Don't pay more than 30 pounds!" appear on streets and newspaper pages, and "France Lait" cans labelled "Long live Egypt… with regards, The Armed Forces" hit the shelves. A pernickety tweep notes that these army-branded milk canisters bear a production date going back a month before the outbreak of the shortage [↗**True *vs.* False**], but further speculations on who created the emergency are drowned by social media outrage at another scandalous aspect of the issue. For the Ministry of Health follows the army in the attempt to defuse the crisis, softening its decree to give access to the subsidized substitute not only in cases where the mother is completely unable to breastfeed, but also where she does not produce enough mother's milk of her own. To prevent abuse of the system, women now have to undergo a breast examination before being handed out the subsidized formula. While the banned Muslim Brotherhood tries to exploit the issue in their broadcasts from abroad, claiming that the regime is forcing women to undergo breast examinations in public—a claim strongly denied by the authorities—other commentators draw parallels to the army's earlier practice of carrying out 'virginity tests' on female demonstrators. As if to confirm that a patriarchal mindset dominated by a view of woman primarily as reproductive sexual bodies

that need to be contained and controlled, still runs deep, a member of parliament publicly declares, the same day the baby milk affair breaks, his opposition to a legislative amendment harshening the punishment for performing female genital mutilation. Egypt's "men suffer from sexual weakness," he explains. "For the sake of equality between men and women, women should therefore be circumcised to reduce their sexual desire." [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]

Such an 'extreme' formulation is no longer a matter of consensus in Egypt (even though it can still frequently be encountered on social media); neither is the same parliamentarian's call to introduce virginity tests for girls wanting to enter university. Nevertheless: sexual harassment and gendered violence remain rampant and constitute an important framework for how women are treated and have to comport themselves. Just how important is indicated by the way the affair is framed when it becomes a buzz issue on social media, to the extent that it is picked up by the Arabic *HuffPost* under the headline "Medical Examination of the Mothers of Egypt on the Street." Criticism of the political economy of things is drowned out by moral outrage; and this moral outrage is less about the *state* subjecting its citizens' bodies to humiliation, but over the allegedly *public* breast examinations, i.e. the public exposure of women's bodies that are supposed to remain hidden from view [↗**Normality *vs.* Heroism**]. Small wonder that the 'shame' of breastfeeding in public is one of the main reasons for why 60% of Egyptian women rely on infant formula in the first place.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Dollar Crisis ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Normality *vs.* Heroism ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

ABLA FAHITA (@AblaFahita). "Biyqūlūlī Madāris Badr International School dī naḍīfa fulla… ʿalà ṭūl biyimsaḥū 'l-arḍ bi'l-Generāl," Twitter, August 29, 2016, <https://twitter.com/AblaFahita/status/770262197469638656>.

"About BIS." Badr International Schools, 2016, <http://www.bis-eg.com/About%20BIS.aspx?id=2>, accessed November 13, 2017.

ʿAFĪFĪ, Hiba. "'Madā Maṣr' fī ziyāra maydāniyya li-madrasat al-quwwāt al-musallaḥa al-duwaliyya." *MadaMasr*, September 7, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/09/07/feature/مجتمع/مدى-مصر-في-زيارة-ميدانية-لمدرسة-القوا/>.

Ahmed ANWAR (@A7mdAnwar). "*Baʿd 20 sana* […]." Twitter, Sep. 1, 2016, 7:53 p.m., <https://twitter.com/A7mdAnwar/status/771405683422031872>.

Dāliyā ʿUTHMĀN. "al-Ǧaysh yatasallam awwal shaḥna min albān al-aṭfāl: «mā tidfaʿsh aktar min 30 Ǧinēh» (ṣuwar)." *al-Maṣrī al-Yōm*, September 19, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1011013>.

"Egyptian MP Referred to Ethics Committee for Supporting FGM Due to 'Sexually Weak Men'." *Egyptian Streets*, September 9, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/09/09/egyptian-mp-referred-to-ethics-committee-for-supporting-fgm-due-to-sexually-weak-men/>.

"Faḥṣ ṭibbī li-ummahāt Miṣr fī 'l-shāri'… khulūw al-thady min al-laban sharṭ ṣarf ḥalīb al-aṭfāl al-muda"am." *Huffington Post 'Arabī*, September 8, 2016, <http://www.huffpostarabi.com/2016/09/08/story_n_11904302.html>.

FETEHA, Ahmed and Andrew MAYEDA. "IMF Approves Biggest-Ever Mideast Loan to Revive Egypt's Economy." *Bloomberg*, November 11, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/ articles/ 2016-11-11/imf-approves-biggest-ever-mideast-loan-to-revive-egypt-s-economy>.

Ghāda IBRĀHĪM. "Afḍal munaḍḍif lil-sērāmīk." *al-Mirsāl*, April 5, 2015, <https://www.almrsal.com/post/225523>.

El-GIZAWI, M. (@MElGizawi). "Fākrīn azmit #laban_al-aṭfāl wi'l-ẓuhūr il-sarī' li #laban_al-'askūr?! […]." Twitter, September 23, 2016, 4:12 p.m., <https://twitter.com/MElGizawi/status/779322505282588672>.

"Got Milk? Egypt to Check Women's Breasts Before Supplying Baby Formula." *Middle East Eye*, September 7, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/got-milk-egypt-wants-check-women-s-breasts-supplying-baby-formula-1819401048>.

"Ḥalīb al-ḥawṣala." *Wikipedia*, <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/حليب_الحوصلة>, accessed 13 November 2017>.

Huwayda 'ABD AL-ḤAMĪD. "«Laban al-'aṣfūr»" ḥaqīqa am khayāl?!" *al-Ahrām al-Zirā'ī*, 6 April 2016, <http://agri.ahram.org.eg/News/22948.aspx.

"Ilhāmī 'Ağīna yuṭālib bi-kashf ṭibbī li-ithbāt 'udhriyyat al-banāt ka-sharṭ lil-qubūl bi'l-ğāmi'āt." *al-Yawm al-Sābi'*, September 29, 2016, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2016/9/29/2902061/إلهامى-عجينة-يطالب-بكشف-طبى-لإثبات-عذرية-البنات-كشرط-للقبول.

MOGHAZI, Amr (@AmrMoghazi5). "#Laban_al-'askūr waṣal […]." Twitter, September 21, 2016, <https://twitter.com/AmrMoghazy5/status/778520809790930944>.

Muḥammad ṢUBḤĪ. "Riğğālit Maṣr 'andahā ḍu'f ğinsī… Ilhāmī 'Ağīna: lāzim il-sittāt tirḍā bi'l-khitān 'alashān il-'ağala timshī." *Barlamānī*, September 1, 2016, <http://parlmany.youm7.com/News/5/ 119212/رجالة-مصر-عندها-ضعف-جنسى-إلهامى-عجينة-لازم-الستات-ترضى.

"Need Baby Milk? You'll Need a Breast Exam First, Says Egyptian Health Ministry." *Middle East Eye*, September 12, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/need-baby-milk-show-us-your-breasts-says-egyptian-health-ministry-subsidised-women-military-986760374>.

Qanāt al-Sharq. "Haytham Abū Khalīl ba'da kārithat al-kashf 'alà thady al-ummahāt ka-sharṭ li-ṣarf laban al-aṭfāl…āh yā nakhkhāsīn yā ḥuthālā!…." YouTube, Sep. 5, 2016, <https://youtu.be/ 8IPB3-COIPo>.

al-SA'DANĪ, Rabī'. "Ḥaqīqat faḥṣ «athdā' al-ummahāt» fī Marākiz al-Usra… wa'l-Ṣiḥḥa: sharṭ lil-ḥuṣūl 'alà 'l-albān." *al-Taḥrīr*, September 9, 2016, <http://www.tahrirnews.com/Posts/printing/485346/ألبان-والسكان-الصحة-وزير+آي-ايست-ميدل+الأطفال>.

al-Sharika al-Miṣriyya li-Tiğārat al-Adwiya, updated June 30, 2016, <http://www.eptc-egydrug. com>, accessed November 13, 2017.

al-Thawra Tağma'unā. "Infōgrāf || Laban al-'askūr." YouTube, September 5, 2016, <https://youtu.be/F16PYK3dhiI>.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

Celebrities

By Albrecht Hofheinz

Akhbār il-nuǧūm ("Celebrity News") is the head cry of a wildly successful music video Moroccan-Egyptian Samīra Saʿīd, also known as "The Diva," releases in April [↗**Pop Music**]. In a setting fashioned after the 1930s, the ever-young quinquagenarian, whom Egyptians prefer to Lebanese super-star Elissa by 70 to 30 percent according to a cellphone poll, celebrates the freedom of the newly divorced woman, a freedom she has just won in court. "See? I left him, and it hasn't been the end of the world!" is the message the singer performs in a Parisian cabaret scene. "I'm not depressed […], no, on the contrary, I feel relieved and happy. Turned out it wasn't such a bad thing after all to live alone! I'll start my life with an empty white page!" This song, a commentator writes on YouTube, "should be the anthem of all women" or at least "of all divorced, independent-minded, strong women" [↗**Male *vs.* Female**, ↗**Self-help**].

Samīra Saʿīd is not the only female star who promotes the ideal of the strong and self-confident woman. Ghāda ʿAbd al-Rāziq (b. 1965 and three years ago voted "best actress in the Arab world") leads a set of seven women who, in the "daring" thriller *Illī khtashū mātū* ("If you're modest, you're dead") defy a male-dominated society. Ghāda surpasses long-standing glamour icon Yusrā (b. 1951) in Egyptian audiences' expectations for who will be more successful in their respective Ramaḍān TV series. Ghāda stars in *al-Khānka* ("The Asylum") where she confronts sexual harassment to the extent of turning around the traditional gender roles, becoming a woman with superpowers who eventually is "sectioned for the safety of the public" before being released in a happy end. Egypt's legendary prima ballerina Māǧda Ṣāliḥ who ascended to fame in the 1960s, is celebrated in the documentary *A Footnote in Ballet History?* that presents "the early triumphs, collapse and renewed hopes over five decades." Meanwhile, another, younger star, actress and singer Dunyā Samīr Ghānim (b. 1985; 4 million followers on Instagram, and a big fan of Paulo Coelho) sums up Google's "International Women's Day Doodle 2016" proclaiming her hope to see "every girl and every woman in Egypt a star in her field."

Egypt is the Arab world's most populous country, and its media produce many celebrities who can serve as role models and projection screens for people's dreams. This extends to many walks of life; fashion is not the least of them. "Sometimes I get inspired by what some stars that I follow wear, for example if they wear a nice-looking pair of jeans I want to get the same," explains a young girl from Tunisia. The style promoted by these models is decidedly global, as revealed by "21 of Egypt's models to watch for on Instagram in 2016." And the attitude manifested is the same assertiveness embodied by the super-stars. As Miss Egypt 2016 (b. 1998) reveals, when a reporter asks her: "What would you do if your shoe breaks while you're doing the cat walk? […] I would clap for myself and laugh and not let anything sway my self-confidence!"

As people are intimately connected to a globalized fan culture, the national, pan-Arab, and international horizons blend—sometimes quite literally, as when *HuffPost Arabi* asks, "What if Angelina Jolie was from Upper Egypt?," morphing Hollywood stars such as Sandra Bullock, Harrison Ford, Leonardo DiCaprio, Will Smith, Robert De Niro, or George Clooney into rural Egyptians. An MBC feature on 28 foreign (Arab and international) celebrities "who have fallen

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *35–*39
© Albrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

in love with Egypt" is widely shared on social media; it includes singers Brian Adams, Beyoncé, Bono [see also here], Luṭfī Būshnāq, Fayrūz, Enrique Iglesias, Cheb Khaled, Kylie Minogue, Shakira, Hayfā Wahbē [see also here] and the Gypsy Kings; actors Sean Bean, Juliette Binoche, Jackie Chan, Vin Diesel, Morgan Freeman, Liz Hurley, and Roger Moore; soccer stars Zinédine Zidane and the teams of Barcelona and Réal Madrid; as well as the glamour queens Lady Di and Paris Hilton. The greatness of one's country is validated by these illustrious names, revealing the important function celebrity fan culture plays in creating and confirming group identities. Obviously, national icons play an important role as standard bearers for people's pride in their country and heritage. When Dīnā (b. 1965), one of the world's most famous belly dancers, is chosen as a model for the Egyptian version of the global YouTube series "100 Years of Beauty," she is made up in the style of feminist forerunner Hudà Shaʿrāwī (for the 1920s); the musical "Star of the East" Umm Kulthūm (1930s); Princess Fawziyya Fuʾād, the queen consort of Moḥammed Reżà Shāh (1940s); Suʿād Ḥusnī (the "Sweetheart of Egyptian Cinema," 1960s); and the actress and singer Sherīhān (1990s). Between the national and the global, the inter-Arab media and culture sphere is significant. Syrian TV actor Sulāfa Miʿmār (b. 1976) "witnesses the splendor of Tunis through the eyes of Hind Ṣabrī"; Hind (b. 1979) being a Tunisian-Egyptian actress famous for having played the main character in the 2010 TV series *ʿĀyza Atgawwiz* ("I want to marry") and who this year stars in *Zahrat Ḥalab* ("The Flower of Aleppo"); she is chosen to represent Tunis at next year's Oscar ceremony. Syrian George Wasūf (b. 1961; nicknamed *Sulṭān al-Ṭarab*, "The Sultan of Song") exclaims, when bodyguards try to shield him from the crowds welcoming him at Tunis airport, *Anā ʿāwiz ḥabāybī, mā biddī security* ("I want my fans, not security!"). The visit to Tunis of Syrian pop star Nāṣīf Zaytūn (b. 1988), winner of Star Academy Arabia 2010, has Tunisian media cover in detail how he takes selfies with and gives autographs to his fans [see also here: welcomed by fans at Tunis airport (his arrival makes the buzz on YouTube), gives 2 concerts] [↗**Mobile Phones**]. The same excitement reigns when Egyptian superstar and king of romantic pop, Tāmir Ḥusnī (b. 1977) travels to Tunisia accompanied by Basma BuSeyl (b. 1991), his Moroccan wife of repeated Star Academy fame. 5.5 million fans follow them on Instagram, where Tāmir also proudly presents his Murex d'Or 2016 Award for "best Arab male singer & successful singer-actor in the Arab world." The Carthage Film Festival provides another arena where the red carpet is rolled out for the famed and prominent. Tunisian President al-Sibsī awards the Order of Cultural Merit to time-honoured Egyptian-French actor Ǧamīl Rātib (b. 1926) and Egyptian comedy classic ʿĀdil Imām (b. 1940). During the reception, al-Sibsī imitates ʿĀdil Imām in a famous line from his 1976 play *Shāhid mā-Shāfsh Ḥāǧa* ("The witless witness"), and both bond bursting out laughing [↗***ʔAlsh***].

It is curious to note that visits of foreign luminaries make much more headlines in Tunisia than in Egypt this year. Egypt has long regarded herself as *Umm il-dunyā*, "the Mother of the world," and considered Egyptian history and culture as ranking premier in the region. This extends to the world of 'lighter' entertainment as well. This year, the actors of the series of televised stage plays *Masraḥ Maṣr* ("Theater Egypt"), produced in its fourth season, command the public's particular attention. MBC, which holds the television rights for the play, feeds audience expectations by circulating "behind the scenes" shots of the comedy stars ahead of the new season, especially of Muṣṭafà Khāṭir ("ʿAmm Shakshak") (b. 1985); by announcing a "surprise" ahead of the broadcast; and by publishing family pictures and "rare photos of the

stars of *Masraḥ Maṣr* before they became famous—see how they have changed!" The play's stars provide much material for celebrity gossip, for example when former footballer Ibrāhīm Saʿīd (b. 1979) posts pictures of his "engagement" to *Masraḥ Maṣr's* "Wīzū" (i.e. Dīnā Muḥsin, b. 1991). Journalists and fans get all excited before he reveals that this was 'fake news' [↗**True *vs.* False**] and that the pictures were taken during filming for a new TV series (the name of which is withheld, again to increase speculation around it). Other society news is real: pictures of Muḥammad Usāma's ("Ōs Ōs," b. 1988) engagement and wedding (including videos of the stars celebrating in a "hysterical dance") are shared extensively on social media. Well-rounded "Wīzū" is particularly known for her frenzied dancing, and when popular actor Sharīf Munīr (b. 1959) enters the stage to shake a leg with her, they have the crowds cheering. On the whole, show business luminaries like to bathe in *Masraḥ Maṣr* glitz. When the "Enchantress of the South" (*Sāḥirat al-ǧanūb*, after her role in last year's Ramaḍān series of the same name), former Miss Egypt Ḥūriyya Farghalī (b. 1976), returns from pilgrimage to Mecca, she attends a *Masraḥ Maṣr* performance and poses with the team clad in quite revealing clothes; her pictures stimulate obvious social media attention. And just as stars interact with *Masraḥ Maṣr*, *Masraḥ Maṣr* draws on set pieces from current and common media repertoire. Thus, ʿAlī Rabīʿ (b. 1989) imitates blockbuster star Muḥammad Ramaḍān (b. 1988; celebrated by the public as "the new Aḥmad Zakī" and acclaimed by ʿUmar al-Sharīf as his successor) in a scene from this year's MBC Ramaḍān series *al-Usṭūra* ("The Legend"). The superstar, anointed by association with the Arab world's greatest male movie icons, responds kindly: "My wife sent this clip to me on WhatsApp; I respect ʿAlī and I liked it very much!"

↗**Football** is another field feeding high-profile celebrity news. After Tunisian ʿAlī Maʿlūl (b. 1990) has signed a 4-year contract with Egyptian al-Ahlī SC (the most successful soccer club in Africa), his new managers show human understanding: His wife flies in from Tunis to give him "romantic support" before an important African Champions League match, and after the game in Abidjan he is given special leave to travel back directly to Tunisia. The news that Tunisian midfielder Yāsīn al-Shīkhāwī (b. 1986) changed to al-Ahlī causes excitement among the club's fans in Egypt who still mourn the gap left by "El Magico" Muḥammad Abū Trīka (b. 1978) even five years after his retirement. Unfortunately for the Egyptians, al-Shīkhāwī's new contract is with the Qatari Al-Ahlī Sports Club, not the Egyptian one. The rumour mill is also busy around rising al-Ahlī star Ramaḍān Ṣubḥī (b. 1997). While speculations about his age run high (some claim that he was still a minor who falsified his papers to appear older than his real 17 when joining the club's main squad), his manager confirms that he is being marketed among heavyweight European clubs including Réal Madrid, Barcelona, and Bayern München. Arab youth are big fans of international and not least European clubs—but when Barcelona's Lionel Messi donates his shoes "to the poor of Egypt" in a live television show, social media users erupt in indignation at what they perceive as a gesture of contempt. "Why didn't he donate his shirt instead?" Is there a cultural or a social mismatch at play? Commentators need to explain that a football star's shoes always fetch prime prices at international auctions.

It is the media that 'make' celebrities; glamour news, gossip, and human touch stories are sure to sell on conventional media and to buzz on Facebook or Instagram [↗**Social Media**]. People avidly consume reports about the rich and the famous' romantic engagements, weddings, and divorces; they sympathize when their idols suffer illness or accident; they mourn their death and watch their burial on YouTube. The marriage of Egyptian TV star ʿAmr Yūsuf

(b. 1980) to the Syrian actress Kinda ʿAllūsh (b. 1982) is presented as the latest in a long row of Egyptian-Syrian couples. When Egyptian comedian Samīr Ghānim (b. 1937; father of Dunyā Samīr) is hospitalized, or when controversial Tunisian TV producer and presenter Sāmī al-Fahrī (b. 1971) is injured in a motorcycle accident, social media quickly pick up the stories. And obituaries have always been important in the attention economy. Prominent departures this year include body builder champion al-Sayyid al-Mālikī who dies of cancer, merely 39 years old; Egyptian actors Aḥmad Rātib (b. 1949) and Midḥat Qāsim (b. 1959); and Tunisian singer al-Hādī al-Tūnisī. The burial of the most famous Arab movie spy and "God of Egyptian comics," Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (b. 1946), is widely shared on YouTube; and when Nēvīn Rāmiz (b. 1950), the wife of Egyptian actor Muḥammad Ṣubḥī (b. 1948) and herself an actress, is buried, many luminaries follow her bier.

Celebrities are, however, not only adulated models embodying the perfect dream. Just as they serve as larger versions of people's hopes and aspirations, they may also surpass the ordinary mortal in misbehavior [↗**Normality *vs.* Heroism**]. One can point fingers at them when they do not conform to established norms and values, and draw satisfaction from the feeling that one stands morally above them, or at least that they are no better than oneself [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. They may be vainglorious, such as singer Aḥmad Saʿd (b. 1981) who posts a YouTube video of himself leading a handful of men in prayer and is criticized for pretending piety to advertise his beautiful voice. They may be out of touch with the plight of ordinary folk, such as cool and creative "Monkeys in Tuxedos" director Muḥammad Sharīf al-Dīb (a "Global Shaper" alumnus) who poses in the metro to support the case of public transportation but stirs a controversy on Facebook "for taking a photo of himself in an empty metro compartment while talking about community engagement." They may be dealing in narcotics, such as former Tunisian goal keeper Sāmī Hilāl (b. 1988) or Nāṣir ʿĪdī Amīn (b. 1981, son of the infamous former Ugandan dictator) who both are arrested for drug trafficking [↗**Hashish**]. They may disregard traffic rules and quarrel with the police, such as singer Mīrhān Ḥusayn (b. 1982) of Star Academy 2008 fame ("My goals don't stop for anyone") who gets arrested while trying to break through a road block [↗***Kamīn***]. Or they may be journalists who are accused of twisting the truth and serving as mouthpiece of the rulers, such as Lamīs al-Ḥadīdī (b. 1969), Aḥmad Mūsà, and Rīhām Saʿīd (b. 1975), all of whom get a beating by an angry mob when visiting the site of the bombing of the Coptic Cathedral in December. If the rulers, on the other hand, dislike a celebrity, they can simply try to erase them from memory, as when prominent politician Muḥammad al-Barādiʿī (b. 1942), who fell out with Egypt's current regime over the bloody repression of the opposition, is removed from a list of Nobel prize winners in primary school books. After all, celebrities should serve to create social cohesion and legitimize one's importance; if they fail to do so, they are dumped.

Celebrities may also be chided for another reason. Many of those labelled "stars" (*nuǧūm*) are regarded with suspicion by conservative, pietistic, fundamentalist, or *salafī*-minded Muslims, being identified with a foreign, Western, globalized lifestyle and world, and contrasted with 'our' values, with Islam [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. Conversely, many of these celebrities openly identify with anti-Islamist positions [↗**Clash**]. This tension turns into a discursive issue from time to time, for example when veteran Egyptian TV anchor Mufīd Fawzī criticizes late Shaykh al-Shaʿrāwī (1911–1998) over the latter's influence in getting prominent actresses to don the veil. On social media, the hashtag *#al-ḥashara_Mufīd_Fawzī* ("the_vermin_Mufīd_Fawzī") gains popularity; many Islamists, most prominently lawyer

Muntaṣir al-Zayyāt (b. 1956), attack Mufīd as a "scamp" (*ṣuʿlūk*). At the Carthage Film Festival, the outfit of many actresses provokes Tunisian Islamists to condemn what they describe as "an alarming level of immorality":

> At the Marrakech Film Festival, Moroccan women chose traditional attire, while at the Carthage Festival, Tunisian women […] paraded in underwear before the world's cameras, swaggering in their nakedness as if that was the epitome of modernity, development, and sophistication. What a scandal, displaying Tunisia to the world as a prostitute! The Tunisia of Ṭāriq b. Ziyād (c. 670–720, the Muslim conqueror of Spain], ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ [622–683, the first Muslim conqueror of what today is Tunisia] *Imām* Saḥnūn [776–854, who established the Mālikī school of law in North Africa], and the learned Bin ʿĀshūr [1879–1973, Islamic revivalist opposing Bourguiba's policies of secularization}—this is what it has come to in 2016, after [60 years of] secularization and westernization campaigns!

The tension between the lure of global pop culture and one's Islamic identity is tackled in the drama film *Sheikh Jackson* where the protagonist is a young *imām* who in his teens was a big fan of Michael Jackson but under pressure from his father has become a pious Muslim leader. Still haunted by visions of the pop star, however—Jackson even appears in the rows of praying believers—he eventually seeks the help of a psychiatrist [↗**Psychiatrists**]. In the end, he succeeds to overcome his personality split by accepting his enthusiasm for Michael Jackson as being compatible with his current position.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʔAlsh* ♦ Clash ♦ Football ♦ Hashish ♦ *Kamīn* ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media

CODES – Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Normality *vs.* Heroism ♦ True *vs.* False

References

"Bi-mādhā tasabbab Nāṣīf Zaytūn fī maṭār Tūnis?" *bitajarod*, April 7, 2016, <http://www.bitajarod.com/83910/بماذا-تسبّب-ناصيف-زيتون-في-مطار-تونس؟>

"Nāṣīf Zaytūn yuḥyī ḥafl ḍakhm fī Tūnis…wa-kayf istaqbalahu al-jumhūr al-Tūnisī." *Lamasāt*, April 7, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161002082058/http://www.lamasatonline.net/ناصيف-زيتون-يحيي-حفل-ضخم-في-تونس-وكيف-إ./>

"Nāṣīf Zaytūn zuffa bi'l-zaghārīd fī Tūnis – bi'l-ṣuwar", *bitajarod*, April 9, 2016, <http://www.bitajarod.com/84057/ناصيف-زيتون-زُفّ-بالزغاريد-في-تونس-با>.

"Nassif Zeytoun – Tunisia Airport (2016) / Wuṣūl Nāṣīf Zaytūn ilà maṭār Qarṭāj fī Tūnis", *Nassif Zeytoun* channel on YouTube, April 11, 2016, <https://youtu.be/zynn23hUqTU>.

"U2 Lead Singer Bono Spotted in Cairo's Tahrir Square", *Egyptian Streets*, April 3, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/04/03/u2-lead-singer-bono-spotted-in-cairos-tahrir-square/>

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

Clash

… in Egypt*

By Elena Chiti

Al-ʿadāla lil-jamīʿ ("Justice for all") runs the slogan of a huge banner in a cartoon drawn by Andeel (Andeel). However, the Egyptians rallied under it seem to have different views of what "all" should include. Everyone has his or her own exception to the rule. "Except women," an old man says. "Except my stepdad," says a veiled girl. "Except child molesters," a weeping child begs. And the exclusion goes on: "except rich people," "except taxi drivers." On the left, a policeman in uniform adds: "except the terrorist sons of a whore," while stealing a glance at a bearded man wearing a *gallābiyya*. "Except the infidels," replies the latter. The black uniform and the white *gallābiyya*, placed next to one another, attract attention as if pointing to a clash within the clash: while the rest of the society seems to engage in a chaotic battle of everyone against everyone, the policeman and the Islamist fight against each other. [↗**Male *vs.* Female**; ↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**; ↗**Security *vs.* Fear**; ↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**; ↗**In Islam, …**]

In the English translation of the cartoon's captions, the policeman is called a "policeman," while the bearded man is labelled an "extremist." "Extremism (*taṭarruf*) can only be fought through culture," repeatedly say the organizers of the 47th edition of the Cairo Book-Fair (Chiti JanFeb). Its slogan this year is *al-Thaqāfa fī l-muwājaha* ("Culture on the frontline") (*Shurūq News*), where culture stands for the state's secularism and the frontline for the war against extremism (*Akhbār al-Adab*). The meaning is constantly explained during the panel discussions hosted by the Book-Fair. "Culture is the key to democracy," states Nabīl ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ, author of essays on Islamism and former co-director of al-Ahrām Centre for Political and Strategic Studies: "And democracy has to flourish in spite of the people who are convinced that a religious expertise provides the key to hold the truth." The audience applauds. "Culture is the conviction that there is no such thing as absolute truth," confirms Saʿīd Tawfīq, professor at Cairo University and former Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Culture: "Truth is always relative. That is why the Muslim Brotherhood had to be defeated" (Chiti *Round Table*). [↗**In Islam, …**; ↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]

All the Egyptians recall the summer of 2013 when the Muslim Brotherhood was defeated, after massive demonstrations that led to the removal of president Morsi by the army of general Sisi on July 3. Yet, the recollection does not awaken in everyone the same feeling. While institutional voices celebrate it as a victory of democracy and culture, the members of the defeated party see it as an unjust takeover. That summer, they organized a huge sit-in protest in Rabaa al-Adawiya (Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya) Square, in northeastern Cairo, which was violently dispersed by the police on August 14, with at least 817 people killed. "On this day three years ago, my 21-year-old sister was murdered in cold blood. I knew then that I no longer belong here," reads a post by a 28-year-old man (Amin).

---

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 470-73.

© Elena Chiti, Stockholm University, SE

Blogger and activist Alaa Abdel Fattah (ʿAlāʾ ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ) also recalls 2013, saying it was the beginning of "a poisonous polarisation between a rabidly militarised pseudo- secular statism and a viciously sectarian-paranoid form of Islamism" (*The Guardian*). [↗**The Policeman Criminal**]

The movie *Ishtibāk* (*Eshtebak* / Clash), too, is set in the summer of 2013, within a police truck where pro-Morsi and anti-Morsi demonstrators are put together after being arrested [↗**Prison**]. The camera never leaves the truck, which comes to contain a sample of the Egyptian population: men and women of different generations, social classes and political affiliations, who usually oppose each other in daily life. Mutual understanding is only possible within the narrow space of the truck, thanks to the intimacy they are forced to. The director, Mohamed Diab (Muḥammad Diyāb), says *Clash* is a call for mutual understanding, beyond the internal divide of the Egyptian society: "I want people to watch my movie without asking what side I belong to" (*al-Ahrām*). He claims to be neither with the Muslim Brotherhood nor with the army, but with the people who stand against polarisation. He explains how difficult it was to take this stand in Egypt: he could hardly find Egyptian investors, afraid of a political subject, and had to turn to European co-producers (SOTINEL). Europe warmly welcomes *Clash*, the only Egyptian film screened at Festival de Cannes. There, on the red carpet, Egyptian Muslim preacher and TV star Moez Masoud (Muʿizz Masʿūd) poses with the cast, revealing through a tweet his financial participation in the production. His followers thank him, talking about a Muslim commitment for the sake of Egypt. "This is the right path (*il-ṭarīq il-ṣaḥḥ*)!" a lady writes, echoing the title of a successful TV show in which Masoud teaches how to deal with life in the Islamic way (MASOUD) [↗**In Islam, …**; ↗**Self-help**]. On the other side, Egyptian institutional voices manifest their indignation. The TV show *Anā Maṣrī* ("I am Egyptian"), on state-owned Nile TV channel, depicts Diab as follows: "Mohamed Diab is a young man who graduated from a faculty of commerce and worked for foreign banks and, in this period, he presented himself as a political activist (…). In 2005, he suddenly switched to cinema studies at New York Academy," and in 2010, with his movie on sexual harassment, he started "giving a distorted picture (*ṣūra mushawwaha*)" of Egypt (*Anā Maṣrī*).

In Egypt, many cinemas refuse to screen the movie and a Facebook campaign—*Idʿam ḥaqqak innak tshūf Ishtibāk* ("Support your right to watch *Clash*")—is launched in response. Mohamed Diab publishes on his Facebook page the photo of a letter of solidarity, signed by Hollywood star Tom Hanks: "Few Americans see Egypt as being anything more than terrorists and pyramids. Your film CLASH will go great lengths to enlighten many." And he adds in Arabic: "Daniel Craig, hero of James Bond's movies, also sent me a similar letter, which means the opposite of staining the reputation of Egypt" (*Scoop Empire*). The extent of his contacts with foreign institutions is emphasized to make him look like a suspicious individual who favours anti-Egyptian interests. [↗The **Suspect Foreigner**] [↗**Social Media**]. When the movie finally is screened, the Egyptian audience discovers it contains an initial warning that closely recalls institutional propaganda: "After the June 30th revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood provoked bloody clashes to prevent the peaceful transition of power" [↗The **Voice from Above**]. The responsibility for violence is shifted onto the Muslim Brotherhood, while the other side is associated with peace.

An article titled "Mā lā yaʿrifu-hu Tom Hanks" (What Tom Hanks ignores) states that the positive depiction of the policemen, throughout the movie, is a deliberate distortion of reality. It can be mistaken for real by Hollywood, not by an Egyptian eye that saw the police in action (MIDḤAT).

Another article provocatively asks: "Maʿa man nashtabik idhan?" (With whom do we clash then?) It also criticizes the positive representation of the police, exemplified by the officer kindly advising a lady not to join the demonstrations: "Does such a police officer not exist in reality? Of course he does, but when you release a work in which everything becomes a symbol, the presence of a similar model naturally turns into a propagandistic attempt of cleaning up the image of the whole category. Before a cancerous body, do not ask me to notice the whiteness of the teeth!" (FARAJ). For the author of the article there is no such thing as a call to overcome polarisation in the movie, only the recommendation to stop protesting and choose the stability granted by the police: "What does distinguish the narrative of this movie from the narrative of the propaganda?" he ends up asking. And the clash over *Clash* goes on, revealing not only the divide between supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and supporters of the state, but also between the latter and the people who, considering it a police state, would not chant (anymore) the slogan "The police and the people hand in hand." [↗**The Policeman Criminal**; ↗**True *vs.* False**; ↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**; ↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – In Islam, … ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Security = Fear (Police State)

References

[*al-Ahrām* =] "*Ishtibāk:* fīlm miṣrī fī iftitāḥ mahrajān Kān [Cannes]." *al-Ahrām*, May 13, 2016: <http://gate. ahram. org.eg/News/978271.aspx>.

[*Akhbār al-Adab* =] "Tajribatu-hu maʿa 'l-Ikhwān fī ḍayf al-sharaf." *Akhbār al-Adab*, February 14, 2016: 6.

AMIN, Shahira. "Three years on, wounds of Egypt's deadly sit-in dispersals linger." *Al-Monitor*, August 21, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-three-year-anniver sary-rabaa-sit-in-brotherhood.html>.

Anā Maṣrī [TV show]. Ḥalqat "Fīlm Muḥammad Diyāb *Ishtibāk*, bi-nakha siyāsiyya wa-thawriyya", May 15, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiwWQxmP5WQ>; see also: <https://www. youtube. com/watch?v=-lmutjpDCBA>.

ANDEEL. "Al-ʿadāla lil-jamīʿ." *Mada Masr*, February 11, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/ 2016/02/11/cartoon/u/justice-for-all/>.

CHITI, Elena. Fieldwork notes: January-February 2016. Egypt.

— . Fieldwork notes: Round Table *Al-thaqāfa fī l-muwājaha*. Cairo: Book-Fair, Main Hall, January 29, 2016.

FARAJ, Sāmiḥ. "Inṭibāʿāt sarīʿa ʿan fīlm *Ishtibāk*," *Za2ed18*, July 31, 2016, http://www.za2ed18. com/

سامح-فرج-يكتب-مع-من-نشتبك-إذا؟-إنطباعات.

[*Guardian* =] "'I was terribly wrong'—writers look back at the Arab spring five years on." *The Guardian*, January 23, 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>.

MASOUD, Moez [Muʿizz Masʿūd]. <https://twitter.com/moezmasoud/status/730910281442971649>.

MIDḤAT, Aḥmad. "Mā lā yaʿrifu-hu Tom Hanks," *Masralarabia*, July 30, 2016: <http://www.masralarabia. com/المقالات/907-أحمد-مدحت/1180705-ما-لا-يعرفه-توم-هانكس-عن-فيلم-اشتباك/>.

[*Scoop Empire* =] "Tom Hanks and Daniel Craig Express Their Love for Egyptian Movie 'Eshtebak'." *Scoop Empire*, July 26, 2016: <http://scoopempire.com/eshtebak-tom-hanks-daniel-craig/>.

[*Shurūq News* =] "Al-yawm… inṭilāq maʿraḍ al-Qāhira lil-kitāb." *Al-Shurūq News*, January 27, 2016: <http://www. shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=27012016&id=fe442bc5-e180-45fa-afaa-745f748240bf>.

SOTINEL, Thomas. "Clash : après le bus 678, le fourgon de police." *Le Monde*, May 12, 2016: <http://www.lemonde.fr/festival-de-cannes/article/2016/05/12/clash-apres-le-bus-678-le-fourgon-de-police_4917875_ 766360.html>.

al-Thaqāfa fī l-muwājaha. Round Table discussion, Cairo Book-Fair, Main Hall, January 29, 2016.

◄ elena.chiti@su.se ►

… in Tunisia

By N.N.

Desideratum

References

[*al-ʿArabī al-jadīd* =] "Tūnis: taʿyīn ʾawwal imraʾa mudīra ʾamniyya bi-wizārat al-dākhiliyya." *al-ʿArabī al-jadīd*, August 21, 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2016/8/21/تونس-تعيين-أول-امرأة-مديرة-أمنية-بوزارة-الداخلية>

[*Attesia* TV =]. *Hunā al-ʾān.* Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbds7mCGHqU>, posted September 26, 2016.

B. Ch. "Dirāsa ʾalmāniyya: al-Rajul al-tūnisī huwa thālith ʾakthar rijāl al-ʿālam rūmansiyyatan." *MTunisiaTV*, March 30, 2016, <http://mtunisiatv.com/2016/03/30/دراسة-المانية-الرجل-التونسي-هو-ثالث-اك/>.

[*BabNet* =] "Tunisie: Le parti 'Tunisie Zitouna' rejette la décision de fermeture des mosquées en dehors des heures de prière." *BabNet*, March 12, 2014, <https://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-81585.asp>.

Ben Ali, Fawz. "'Demain dès l'aube' de Lotfi Achour: portrait d'une jeunesse écrasée." *Kapitalis*, January 25, 2017, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2017/01/25/demain-des-laube-de-lotfi-achour-portrait-dune-jeunesse-ecrasee/>.

al-Dhawādī, Najwà. "Fī mahrajān Marrākish al-sīnamāʾī ikhtārat mumaththilāt al-Maghrib al-libās al-taqlīdī al-muḥtashim, wa-fī mahrajān Qarṭāj ikhtārat mumaththilāt Tūnis 'al-malābis al-dākhiliyya'." *al-Ṣadà Net*, October 29, 2016, <https://www.essada.net/في-مهرجان-مراكش-السينمائي-إختارت-ممثل.html>

I.B. (avec Tap). "Tunisie: Les suicides par le feu multipliés par 20 depuis 2011." *Kapitalis*, September 11, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/09/11/tunisie-les-suicides-par-le-feu-multiplies-par-20-depuis-2011/>.

Marzouq, Hamza. "Tunisie–2016 : 8661 mouvements sociaux et 792 tentatives de suicide." *L'économiste maghrébin*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2016/12/30/ tunisie-2016-8661-mouvements-sociaux-792-tentative-de-suicides/>.

[RFI-Afrique =] "Droits des femmes: la Tunisie fête les 60 ans du Code du statut personnel." *RFI Afrique*, August 13, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160812-code-statut-personnel-tunisie-droits-femmes-60-ans>.

[*alṢabāḥNews* =] "Fī mashrūʿ qānūn jadīd: al-sijn ʿāman li-man yataʿammad muḍāyaqat imraʾa fī makān ʿumūmī." *alṢabāḥNews*, July 24, 2016, <http://www.assabahnews.tn/article/128739/في-مشروع-قانون-جديد-السجن-عاما-لمن-يتعمد-مضايقة-امرأة-في-مكان-عمومي>.

Y.N. "Marsa: Adel Almi fait la chasse aux fattaras." *Kapitalis*, June 17, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/06/17/marsa-adel-almi-fait-la-chasse-aux-fattaras/>.

Z.A. "Amina Sboui persona non grata à Sidi Bou Säid!" *Kapitalis*, September 27, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/09/27/amina-sboui-persona-non-grata-sidi-bou-said/>.

◄ n.n@yahoo.com ►

© N.N.

Commemoration / Memorial Days

By Mihaila Yordanova

"It's almost like the 7th of November under Ben Ali (Bin ʿAlī)," notes a young informant, describing the atmosphere on Bourguiba avenue on January 14, vividly recreated in the virtual pages of *Nawaat*. Music is blasting from loudspeakers, the Tunisian flag proudly displayed on a massive screen. Thousands of people are slowly making their way through the crowds gathered in the centre of the Tunisian capital [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. Parents are pushing strollers or holding the hands of their toddlers in the periphery of the scene, in an attempt to avoid the small island of greenery situated in the middle of the boulevard. Adolescents are navigating the sea of people, clutching boutique shopping bags in their hands. All the tables in the myriad of cafes and restaurants around the street are taken, no space to spare, yet some are optimistically gathering around the entrances, waiting for a spot to be freed. At the west end a stage is erected, accessorized with a screen and loudspeakers. It is the meeting point for the supporters of the Ennahdha (*al-nahḍa*) movement. "*Al-shaʿb yurīd al-nahḍa min jadīd*" (The people want al-Nahda again), the chant is merging with the last accords of "*Hīlā hīlā yā maṭar*" ("Come down, oh rain," a revolutionary song strongly connected to the image of the singer and leftist activist Amel Hamrouni (ʾAmāl al-Ḥamrūnī), an outspoken critic of al-Nahda). At the opposite site of the street some of the members of the Union of Unemployed Graduates (UDC) are banging spoons against empty metal plates, an allusion to both the ongoing hunger strike protesting the current situation of the political opponents of Ben Ali and the economic situation in the country. "Do you know what they want?," asks one of the policemen protecting the ministry, addressing one of his colleagues, as they observe protesters speaking to their audience while balancing their weight half-way up a couple of tree trunks. The river of bodies is intersected by a tight current. The relatives of the martyrs of the Revolution are walking past determinedly, holding the pictures of their long-lost loved ones. "*Shughl, ḥurriyya, karāma waṭaniyya*" ("Work, freedom, national dignity," one of the slogans of the revolution), shouts someone. In other parts of the boulevard various smaller and bigger associations, political parties and unions are raising their banners, in protest or support of one cause or another. It seems that everyone has something to say. After all, concludes the article, many of the people here do not want to celebrate "but to demonstrate in the name of the unachieved objectives of the Revolution," to attempt to break the "circle of marginalization and oblivion" [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**].

"Celebrating what? The politicians who do nothing but business?" asks the popular cartoon cat Willis on Facebook, the caricature depicting the hero and a friend gathered around a cake with lit candles, angrily listing all the changes from the past five years in Tunisia. "The institutionalized corruption! The thousands of young people rotting in prison for smoking a joint! The continuing torture! The criminalization of homosexuality! The rising living costs!" "There is nothing to celebrate!" comes the conclusion, but at least there is beer.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *45–*58
© Mihaila Yordanova, formerly IKOS, University of Oslo, NO

> Dear friends, I wish you a happy fifth anniversary of the revolution. I am as disgusted as you are with the turn events took. We wonder how all the vibrant social energies have allowed this band of clowns to dominate the political scene. [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]

Thus opens a post published by the blogger _Z_ on the anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution. The middle of the page-long article is occupied by a vivid image, depicting the Sousse conference (an event held by the ruling Nida Tunis just days after top cabinet posts are reassigned amidst criticism of the role of the president's son Hafedh Essebsi (Ḥāfiẓ al-Sibsī), which also includes a seven-minute speech by the leader of the rival Islamist part al-Nahda). Surrounded by a cheering, animal-like crowd, Beji Caid Essebsi (Bājī Qā'id al-Sibsī) is performing fellatio on Rached Ghannouchi (Rāshid al-Ghannūshī). With his mouth full, he turns to his son Hafedh (Ḥāfiẓ), who is scribbling on the constitution and says: "Take a note of what is happening, my son!" The author comments: I know you will excuse the obscenity of this drawing. It is still very far from the vulgarity which contaminates the Tunisian political landscape, which has obviously betrayed the promises of the Revolution. In these sad times, I hope that this January 14 will return to the fundamentals of the revolution and will send a message of support to those who have lost their lives during the revolution, those who still suffer in their flesh and those unable to get out. Understand, my friends, the revolution was never Tunisian, nor was it carried out by the majority. It was a spirit. A breach of the mundane that suddenly opened in an ocean of ever-present bullshit. But it is in this breach that we continue to believe, sums up the article.

But not everybody remembers things like this. "That day was nightmarish," a girl recalls the eve of the 14th January in an article published by the *Huffington Post*, "We were locked in at home with our family, waiting for the situation to stabilize." Another witness of the events adds: "I wasn't happy to see Ben Ali go. My mother spent the night crying over his departure. Things aren't much better now [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Safety and security left along with him." There is an overwhelming feeling that everything has gone downhill since 2011, unemployment is still present, prices are up, the tourists are gone [↗**Tourist Resorts**]. "The revolution did not help me in any way," comment even those gathered to commemorate it.

Not that everyone agrees. The fifth anniversary of the revolution coincides with the release of the first feature-length movie by Layla Bouzid (Laylà Būzīd). "As I open my eyes" (*ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux*) is set in 2010 and tells the story of Faraḥ, a recently graduated strong-minded young woman who decides to concentrate on working with her band, rather than to study medicine, as her family suggests. The news is received particularly badly by the girl's overly-protective mother, Ḥayāt, who is determined to keep her safe at home. The political lyrics of the band, however, soon attract the attention of the police. Faraḥ is taken into custody and her mother is left to navigate the complex political and social landscape of Tunis, in an attempt to find her. Eventually, the girl is returned to the family after enduring torture and sexual assault and sinks into depression, her previously rebellious spirit shattered to pieces, while her mother finds her previously lost desire to challenge the status quo. The film is a moving story of the bond between mother and daughter, of the power of love, but also of the ways authoritarian regimes end up awaking their people, while attempting to break them down. And to some it is more than that. "Like any post-totalitarian society, the Tunisian society is navigating around two pitfalls: amnesia and nostalgia, which are connected to each other," notes one reviewer. "It is the role of the

artist to assist in this navigation, giving their society distant or near images which make them feel and reflect on what is happening. [The young protagonists] are emblematic of a generation which continues on its path. Their minds have begun to be free and now they need to free their bodies and those of their parents. A large building site, which engages all of society and not one particular social class" [↗**Past *vs.* Present**].

January 23. Crowds gather at Cairo's police academy to mark Police Day and *Youm7* (*Yawm Sabʿa*) is there to report on the event in a total of 18 separate articles published on the website the same day. Emotions are running high and the updates are pouring: "The ceremony begins," "Al-Sisi arrives" , "A child recites a poem, entitled "Martyr." With the end of the day approaching, however, more content-heavy articles appear. A summary of the top five moments of the day is published, as well as the full text of the speeches of the president and Magdi Abdel Ghaffar (Magdī ʿAbd al-Ghaffār) both of which give a good idea of the tone and message of the event.

> This is a day which evokes a feeling of pride and honour and willingness to make sacrifices not only in the members of the police department, but also in every Egyptian who belongs to this great homeland and who cherishes it above all [↗The Honourable Citizen],

the interior minister exclaims. It is a day to reflect on the past and present but also to think of the future. The threat to Egypt's stability and security is not gone, terrorists are jeopardizing the country's very existence on a daily basis. Yet, with the help of the authorities, the army, the police and the nation, the country and the "pivotal role that it plays" shall be preserved [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**, ↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. All in good time, of course, and all owing to the wisdom and support of al-Sisi himself.

With the mood being set, it is time for the headliner address. Talking on behalf of all Egyptians, President al-Sisi offers "eternal gratitude to the martyrs of the police force who have sacrificed their life and blood for Egypt and its people," promising that their act of heroism shall not be forgotten [↗**Normality *vs.* Heroism**]. The emotional climax of the speech, however, comes with the president's appeal to the nation. Gesturing towards the families of the fallen policemen standing behind him, he whispers: "We have paid a high price for the stability and security we currently live in. So, I ask all Egyptians, for the sake of the martyrs to protect their homeland." Thrown in the mix is also al-Sisi's strangely out-of-place address to the people of Tunisia, warning them of the dangers of protesting and urging them to keep the country's interest in mind.

The ceremony takes place two days earlier to separate it from the fifth anniversary of the January Revolution, according to *al-ʾAkhbār Lebanon*. Despite that, January 25 also witnesses heavy coverage of Police Day celebrations, with many Egyptian satellite channels placing "the anniversary of the revolution in second place," argues the daily newspaper. It then goes on to describe the partial or altogether non-existent reporting of the event. Instead, claim the authors, the spotlight is on celebrating the fête of the police through emotional stories, such as the imaginary dialogue with a toddler who has lost his father in a terrorist attack, published by *al-ʾAhrām*. "The media performance on that day reflected an implicit intention to fully restore Police Day" [↗**True *vs.* False**], concludes the report, voicing fears that the legacy of the uprising is in danger.

But the celebrations of Police Day are not confined to the media realm. On the 25th itself some supporters of the regime also take to the streets, their faces painted in the colours of the Egyptian flag, offering flowers, hugs and kisses to any policeman they meet. Two young men, however, have a very different gift in mind.

A short video, shot with a mobile phone, shows Ahmad Malik (ʾAḥmad Malik) and Shady Hussain (Šādī Ḥusayn) roaming the streets around Tahrir square, *shaʿbī* music playing in the background [↗**Mobile Phones**]. With smiles on their faces, the two young men hug and pose for a photo with the policemen guarding the square, handing them strangely-looking balloons bearing the message "From the youth of Egypt to the police on the 25th January," written with a black marker. The youths wave the Egyptian flag and kiss the ground, in a seamless, albeit over-exaggerated, imitation of al-Sisi's supporters around them. "Long live Egypt" shouts one of them, barely able to contain his laughter. The public is let in on the joke. The clip starts in a shady apartment and pictures a group of amused young people inflating and decorating a bunch of condoms, the unusual balloons later so graciously received by the unwitting representatives of the police force. The video goes viral, not that much because of its mockery of the behaviour of the proud supporters of the President, but because it is also an attempt to reclaim the space which once served as a stage for the January Revolution and to defend its memory [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**, ↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**], using satire to achieve that [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. Is it any wonder, then, that the regime seems so unappreciative of this particular type of humour, as their reaction to the events in question shows? [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**].

Driven perhaps by similar motives, Egyptians take to Facebook and Twitter in the days leading up to the 25th January, sharing their stories and pictures from five years back under the hashtag *I_participated_in_the_January_Revolution*, which soon is among the most popular on social media. It is created in defence of the lawyer and human rights activist Taher Mokhtar (Ṭāhir Mukhtār), who is reportedly asked by a judge if he participated in "the violent events of 25 January 2011," after being detained by the authorities as part of their crack-down on political activism in the leadup to the anniversary [↗**Social Media**]. "Participating in the Revolution is not a crime," seems to be the initial motto of the campaign. Yet, while its message in support of the political detainees remains prominent throughout, the hashtag soon turns into an *impromptu* memorial wall of the revolution itself, with people sharing their personal experiences, stories, photos. "It was the best thing that has happened in the history of Egypt over the past 100 years," "The most noble thing I have ever participated in," "It is my present for my children and my grandchildren. I am sure that they will never give it up," "It's the greatest event my generation participated in," share Egyptians on social media, alongside pictures of current detainees, the people who lost their lives during the uprising and photos of the joys and sorrows of Tahrir square [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. A perfect storm of nostalgia and defiance.

In response to the campaign, another hashtag is created, rather imaginatively named *I-_did_not_participate_in_the_January_revolution*, often used along with the emblematic *Long_Live_Egypt* or blessings of the souls of the policemen killed in the course of duty. ("Aha!," point out a few activists on Facebook, "so you do admit there was a revolution after all!"). A full-fledged Twitter war is now raging: on the one side the supporters of the revolution, defending its memory; on the other, the backers of the regime, expressing not

only their support for the current government but also their rejection of the revolutionary ideals [↗**Clash**]. Insults are flying on both sides, with people using both hashtags regardless of their views. It is a war of words and a battle over the legacy of the 25th January, which many on social media believe is in danger of being "wiped out by the regime."

And indeed, they are not the only ones. "This wall is the last standing evidence [of the] revolution…if you go to Tahrir now, it is as if nothing happened," the *Guardian* quotes the writer Soraya Morayef (Thurayya Murāyif) referring to the systematic demolition of revolutionary graffiti and the "cleansing" of Downtown Cairo from all evidence that it was once the centre of mass anti-government demonstrations [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. "It's like the revolution never happened," the sentence is repeated, this time by Kamal Mougheeth (Kamāl Mughīth) a researcher at Egypt's National Council for Education, commenting on the recent and last in a long line of changes to the school curriculum, leading to the removal of the name of al-Baradei (Muḥammad al-Barādiʿī, an exiled Egyptian politician and outspoken supporter of the revolution) from the list of Egyptian Nobel laureates. It is an angry cry in defence of the few remaining tangible evidences that Tahrir happened, that it lives beyond the memory and the imagination of the street protesters and against the efforts to rewrite the country's recent history. For some, it is an attempt to recapture the feeling of the revolution, hoping that it would one day return: "I am alone," says Sanaa Seif (Sanāʾ Sayf) embarking on her one-woman march to mark the fifth anniversary of the Revolution, "but I am sure that next year thousands will return to walk again from Mostafa Mahmoud to Tahrir Square." Yet, for others, it is a different story altogether. "We lost the battle over the future so now we fight to save the past," Omar Hamilton sums his experience up, "What else do we have left to fight with? That memory of possibility is all we have. Maybe, for now, it is enough." He depicts a gloomy picture of the past: irrevocably gone, remembered but also lost, the only standing ideal worth fighting for [↗**Past *vs.* Present**].

Who could imagine amidst this revolutionary blues that in a few short months the streets of Egypt would have once again caught the rebellious fever? The decision to transfer the two ↗**Red Sea Islands** of Tiran (Tīrān) and Sanafir (Ṣanāfīr) to Saudi Arabia sparks nationwide protests. On April 15, for the first time since al-Sisi assumed office, mass anti-government demonstrations take place. Larger protests are planned for the 25th, Sinai Liberation Day, marking the final withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula—a public holiday that stands for Egypt's sovereignty and territorial cohesion. The popular hashtag *Go out on the 25 April* unites the opposition, with people denouncing not only the "sale of the land," but the social, economic and moral failures of the regime. The danger is sensed. After raging against "the hellish scheme" to destabilize Egypt from within, al-Sisi warns that "evil forces" are plotting against the country and expresses his belief that the honourable citizens "will not respond to calls for chaos" [↗The Honourable Citizen, ↗The **Suspect Foreigner**, ↗**True *vs.* False**]. Not that they are given much of an opportunity to do so, anyway. Mass arrests, dispersals and the overwhelming presence of the security forces in and around the big cities ensures that the people who gather to oppose the decision are not given the space to do so [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]. "The security forces are all over Cairo. It seems that al-Sisi is marking Sinai Liberation day by occupying the entire country," ironically comments Amr Abd al-Hadi (ʿAmr ʿAbd al-Hādī) on Facebook.

Just blocks away from the original protest site, a very different celebration is taking place. Supporters of al-Sisi gather to mark the public holiday. Images and videos from the gathering soon go viral on social media. Loud music, *raqṣ baladī* performances [↗**Pop Music**], images of the President and chants of *Long Live Egypt* characterize the atmosphere in downtown Cairo. But the day is not to be spared the islands issue references. "If the Saudi king wants the pyramids or the Sphinx, he can have them," comments a fan of the president, waving a massive Saudi flag. One of several to be spotted at the location, much to the amusement of some of the social media commentators. "Well, they did say the islands were sold in the name of Arab unity. An Egyptian woman waving the Saudi flag on Tahrir Square during the celebration of Sinai Liberation Day: Isn't that the epitome of Arab unity?," points out one person. Another adds: "Four generations of honourable citizens! Taḥyā massssr!" (with the 'weak, effeminate' /s/ instead of 'strong, emphatic' /ṣ/), mocking the manner in which the President pronounces the name of the country in the emblematic "Long Live Egypt" slogan.

At the same time, a few kilometres down the road, a curtain is slowly being drawn back. An eerie figure appears on the balcony waving a hand to the small group of people gathered below. The action is set in the courtyard of al-Maadi Military Hospital and the man who has attracted the crowd is former president Hosni Mubarak (Ḥusnī Mubārak). Days before his birthday, supporters of the ousted leader gather to mark Sinai Liberation Day, the greatest achievement of the former regime, according to its proponents. But also, much more than that. It is a statement against the recent political developments in Egypt, starting from the January revolution on. It is perhaps as much a call to remember as it is an invitation to forget [↗**Past *vs.* Present**].

The holiday turns into a battlefield of the past, the present and the future, generating numerous responses to what ought to be happening in Egypt, yet little dialogue. One Facebook comment sums up the event:

> The day is altogether strange! Supporters of al-Sisi dancing to celebrate Sinai Liberation Day. Supporters of Mubarak in front of the hospital … Youths like roses being arrested for protesting the sale of the land. And those in power looking from afar. It's madness, gentlemen, madness.

June 30. It is almost the end of Ramadan. The day is hot and sunny, with temperatures topping out in the thirties. Egypt is settled into the half-awake routine which accompanies the fast, especially in the summer. But today is different. Early in the morning military jets are roaring over Cairo. Al-Sisi's face is beaming from the screens, as he congratulates the nation in a pre-recorded address. The air is thick with anticipation. As the sun goes down over Egypt, people begin to appear after their late nap. Crowds are slowly filling the streets. This time the joys of the *'ifṭār* are multiplied. Across public squares, schools and stadiums, official figures, citizens, poets and artists are gathering to enjoy an evening of entertainment. The scenes are changing rapidly: a folklore ensemble playing flutes and drums, a poet reciting a few uplifting patriotic verses, a politician giving an optimistic speech, students wrestling. The Egyptian flag is proudly displayed on stages, cars, windows, shops and food carts. Fireworks light the skies over towns and cities. Egypt is celebrating for the first time the third anniversary of the protests against former president Mohamed Morsi (Muḥammad Mursī) as an official holiday.

But three years on, the legacy of the event is still a hot topic. The focus of the discourse is being shifted towards the protests of the end of June and the July overthrow of the Morsi regime is rarely mentioned. "The Egyptian people reclaimed their identity during the June Revolution," argues al-Sisi in his speech commemorating the anniversary of the protests. The tone is mimicked by *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*:

> Three years ago a milestone in the history of Egypt was achieved by the millions of people who went out on the street and demanded: give us our country back. They said no to the cheap attempts to divide the Egyptian society and to control the state with repression and terrorism.

Yet others are more careful with their descriptions. *MadàMaṣr (Madà Maṣr)*, for example, invites participants in the June 30 "movement" to discuss the situation in the country then and now. A mistake, the only way out, what was perceived as the right course of action at the time, a trick. These are just some of the ways in which the (mostly) young activists describe the protest. On one thing, however, they agree: "Right now, it is we who have been ousted… Anything that the Brotherhood would have done, the current state is doing. The religious and military regimes are two faces of the same coin" [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. Similar argument is echoed by Amin Iskander (ʼAmīn ʼIskandar), the founder of the Karama (Karāma) party in an article published by *al-Badīl*: "By all accounts the 30th of June was a real revolution, but it failed to empower young people. Just like the January Revolution was hijacked by the Brotherhood, the June Revolution was overtaken by the military."

The debate is not confined to mainstream media. Thus, while many are busy celebrating the revolution by posting glorifying pictures of al-Sisi on Facebook and Twitter, others are attempting to deal with the legacy of the events and the choices they had made. "Was the 30th June a revolution? It was the only possible course of action regardless of what you call it. Do I regret participating? Of course not. It saved us from the dictatorship of political Islam," posts one person. "The 30th June was a counter-revolution. The 3rd July was a coup," adds another. "What happened between the 3rd and the 7th was a full-fledged military coup," writes a Facebook user, four raised fingers decorating his cover photo, "[which the army achieved by] taking advantage of the popularity of the June 30th demonstrations." It is not surprising, then, that a question posed by the Facebook page *Khawāṭir sīnāwiyya* attracts more than 100 comments. A coup or a revolution? The opinions are polarized. While there are more people who perceive it as a coup rather than a revolution, the overwhelming majority is somewhere in the middle. "Both," "neither," "half and half," "*thawqalāb*." Yet for others it matters little. "It is just a public holiday," take it or leave it.

The coup *vs.* revolution question also casts its shadow on another memorial day. "The commemoration of the 64th anniversary of the July coup in Egypt comes amidst many complex issues in the regional and international arena." Only a week ago the Turkish military attempted a coup against president Erdogan and there are many similarities between this and what happened on the 23rd July 1952. Thus begins a report published by *al-Taqrīr*. The article goes on to outline the parallels and differences between the two events. But the final sentence is particularly illuminating. "What is this revolution they speak about? If there ever was one, it failed to achieve its goals. [The 23rd July] is a coup in which the army forces assume power and replace the old leaders with their own men. That is all, nothing else." It goes to the core

of an old debate, rekindled perhaps even more by the events in Turkey. Yet another page in Egypt's history book that is being constantly rewritten.

"Nothing is neutral and objective, unless we call things by their real names. The 23rd July is a coup. The 25th January is a revolution. The 3rd July is a coup," writes Ayman Nour (ʾAyman Nūr) on Twitter. But Ahmed Moussa disagrees. "The 23rd July was a revolution, undertaken by the army and supported by the people. As for the 30th June, it was a revolution undertaken by the people and supported by the army." Or maybe the truth is somewhere in the middle. "A coup turned revolution," as Alaa al-Aswany (ʿAlāʾ al-ʾAswānī) prefers to call it.

Yet, why does it matter 64 years later? Regardless of their opinions, the one thing most commentators agree on is that the July 1952 events profoundly changed Egypt and its people, as a heated discussion on the Official Page of King Faruq suggests. Whether it is "the source of all evil" and "the reason for all of Egypt's current problems" or what saved the people from "poverty and ignorance," there are few who do not link the Free Officers' movement to the fabrics of the modern state. Jihan al-Tahri's (Jihān al-Ṭāhirī) *Egypt's Modern Pharaohs* makes a similar point. The historical documentary looks back at the political developments in the country since 1952. Based on interviews, videos and other primary sources, the work tells the stories of three Egyptian presidents: Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. While different in terms of their personalities and policies, the three have one notable thing in common: they are all heirs and representatives of the political and social system that was created with the July events. The beginning of the never-ending era of the "pharaohs" in Egypt [↗**Father Figures**].

Is it surprising then that the date is also used to understand and qualify the recent developments in Egypt? "We are convinced that the 30th June popular revolution against the injustice and the tyranny of the Muslim Brotherhood gangs is the guardian of the principles of the July 23rd revolution," writes Mustafa Hamdan (Muṣṭafà Hamdān), the leader of the *Movement of the Independent Nasserites* in a letter sent to al-Sisi in commemoration of the 23rd July. "We are always going to stand behind an Egypt which leads our Arab nation in the quest to restore stability, dignity and security." The two "revolutions" are seen as two chapters of the same story, the uninterrupted historical narrative of Egypt.

Is January 25 a revolution against the state of July or is it its legitimate daughter?, asks Ayman al-Sayyad (ʾAyman al-Ṣayyād) from his corner. The hysteria and schizophrenia which characterizes the polarization in Egypt and which are strengthened by the recent developments in Turkey are not likely to give any answers. But it should be remembered that the 1952 revolution had set ambitious goals for the development of Egypt. What is more, continues the author, it had changed society as a whole, providing Egyptians with ideals to inspire to. All the demonstrations from the 1970s and 1980s are linked to this change, they were aimed at correcting the course of the revolution and so was the January uprising. "The January Revolution came to save the 23rd July, which was lost or almost lost," it came to complete the project that had started 51 years ago. And this is the soundest evidence of the importance of the July revolution. It represents the "irreplaceable necessity for a promising future." And this is worth remembering, concludes al-Ṣayyād.

"I am proud. First, it is the culmination of a very long career. On Independence Day, I was here," notes Tunisian president Essebsi on the anniversary of the independence of

Tunisia from France, "I'm thrilled to celebrate this 60th anniversary, and congratulate my people." In one sentence, he manages to both state the importance of the event and portray himself as an essential part of it. The President talks about the achievements of Habib Bourguiba (Ḥabīb Būrqība) and vows to protect his legacy and that of other prominent figures, most notably by moving the statues of Bourguiba back to Tunis. In the spirit of any political speech ever written, Essebsi also reflects on the challenges of the present: terrorism, the economic and social situation, the marginalization of "certain regions." National unity is needed to deal with these major issues and any contrary action "may affect the country's interest," warns the president in lieu of conclusion. The speech is ordinary in many ways, apart from the Essebsi's evident desire to show himself not only as an admirer but as continuation of the post-colonial regime.

An analysis published by *Histoire et culture dans la Tunisie contemporaine* may explain why. Bearing the title *Bourguiba: always present, always current*, the article dissects the layers of the former leader's complicated legacy. For the authors, the powerful image of Tunisia's "Supreme Combatant" still stands as a synonym of modernization, progress, independence, as an embodiment of the true identity of Tunisia. And this explains why politicians from all sides of the spectrum are referring to him in their speeches. It is a way not only to use his popularity to progress their agendas, but also means to hide the "absence of their own political vision" [↗**Father Figures**].

In the height of summer, another anniversary is quietly taking place in Egypt:

> That day, every half an hour, a friend of mine was killed. The news came quicker than I could process. I walked through the roads, roads heavy with smoke, blood and burnt black. All the tents, the people, the shops, the food, everything, everything was burnt, the world had turned to ashes.

This is how those who were at Rabaa al-Adawiya (Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya), the square where hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were killed in a single day three years ago, remember the events. For them, it is a story of horror and anger and despair. "I resent myself for not calling Habiba and hearing her voice," a young girl exclaims, "I resent those who made this possible. I resent the person who pulled the trigger. I resent those who gloated as my sister was dying." The pain of knowing what happened is only matched by the thought that you may never find out. "He went, and never came back. We never found his body, we never found his name in any detention facility, it's almost like he never existed," recalls the grieving mother of a disappeared son, "I miss him so much, and I feel so helpless" [↗**Disappearances**]. It is a day that none of those who were there will be able to forget any time soon: "You can't unsee some things," says a field doctor who was taking care of the injured on the August 14, "you could never forget the stench of charred skin that steeped in and clung to you for days and at times, feels like it never left."

But even those who were nowhere near are still haunted by the memories: "I wasn't there, but I saw the footage. I saw a young girl weeping on her brother's chest, witnessing his last breath," writes Salma Essam (Salmà ʿIṣām),

> I wasn't there, but I saw the rows of corpses laid out in white coffins, awaiting collection by relatives, in a Cairo mosque. I was there watching members of the media

> blessing these acts of murder. I was there when the murdered were called 'terrorists' and the murderers became the 'saviors'.

Stories of trauma, loss and grief are told in foreign outlets, marking the anniversary. But the legacy of Rabaa seems to spread beyond the day itself in Egypt. "The anniversary of the massacre is not a Karbalai event where we weep every year, but we commemorate every day, by working hard to foil the coup," reads a general statement, released by the Muslim Brotherhood on August 14. "We were and we will continue doing so peacefully."

The official narrative, however, tends not to see things this way. On the anniversary of Rabaa, *Youm7* releases for the first time information from the official public prosecutor's report on the case and it tells a very different story, the one maintained by the authorities for three years now. Following the June revolution, supporters of the ousted leader of the Muslim Brotherhood had occupied the Rabaa square, organizing "an armed sit-in." The protesters had not only closed the roads around the square but had harassed the people living in the area. They had prevented them from leaving their apartments and going to work, violently responding to any attempt to pass by the sit-in. The MB supporters had even seized the near-by mosque and hospital, setting up rooms for detention and torture, the report goes on. Responding to complaints by locals, the security forces had tried to disperse the crowds, but the protesters have thrown stones and Molotov cocktails and had used firearms, leaving one policeman dead. After exhausting all peaceful methods, both locally and internationally, of persuading the people to leave, the security forces had begun to clear up the square. The protesters, however, had once again responded with violence, injuring policemen. The state apparatus had had no choice but to adopt equal measures, resulting in "some injuries and casualties" among those gathered at Rabaa. It is clear, the article concludes, that it was the organizers of the protest that are to blame for the violence that took place, even though now they are using the events to portray themselves as victims. The armed forces of the state? They were just doing their job [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**].

But there is another group of people who look back at Rabaa often, as a conversation among representatives of Egypt's pro-democratic forces, recoded by *MadàMaṣr*, shows. "Wasn't there a fascist sentiment that actually wanted to close public space [among those who took to the streets on June 30]?," asks Nael al-Toukhy (Nāʾil al-Ṭūkhī). "That does not mean that people wanted to slaughter the Brotherhood. If 100 were slaughtered instead of 1,000, nobody would have been upset. And, if no one was slaughtered, even better," comes Amr Abdel Rahman's (ʿAmr ʿAbd al-Raḥmān) answer. Elham Eidaros (ʾIlhām ʿAydārūs) disagrees. According to him, people's mood for blood was building up in light of the panic from repeated sexual and sectarian attacks. "The Islamic current bears the responsibility for preparing the masses for higher levels of oppression," argues the activist, bringing elements of the official discourse. All the Brotherhood arrests and even the Rabaa sit-in dispersal were celebrated until very late, adds to the confusion Belal Alaa (Bilāl ʿAlāʾ). The opposition of the democratic forces to "the violent public sentiment" is "coming too late." Justifying, shifting the blame, taking responsibility: just some of the ways in which the participants in the June movement are trying to deal with the implications and memory of their past decisions.

How can a massacre be justified, celebrated, erased from history? These are the questions raised by a *MadàMaṣr* article. The Rabaa massacre, like any mass killing, begins the author,

happened because the perpetrators succeeded in depriving their victims of the right to exist. Its biggest tragedy is not the loss of life but the loss of consciousness. The slaughtered MB supporters ceased to be part of Egypt. They became "an "other," an opposing "other," an "other" that we perceive as different and it perceives us as different, an "other" who we can dress in the devil's mask, incite hatred against as an enemy, and erase from existence." And this is what paved the way to "cheap murder, accompanied with jubilation and cheering for victory" [↗**True *vs.* False**]. Even those from the civilian camp who acknowledge the victims do not see them as their martyrs, but those of the "other." They are merely pitied because all is ill-gotten. Rabaa, thus, is not a tragedy only of the Brotherhood, but of the Revolution as a whole, because the legitimization of the massacre solidifies the discourse of the counter-revolution. It changes the battle from one based on political and social issues to one based on identity. And it turns into something that cannot be won, until one truth is accepted: There are no devils among us, just people with power and those who they deprive of "bread, freedom and social justice," concludes the piece.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Clash ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Disappearances ♦ Father Figures ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System ♦ The Voice from Above.

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Normality *vs.* Heroism ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence.

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck)

References

Written

"30 yūniyū...Thawrat al-shaʿb al-makhṭūfa." *Al-Badīl*, July 1, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2srQESX>.

"Activist Stages Single-Person Demonstration in Tahrir Square." *Ahram Online*, January 25, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/185905/Egypt/Politics-/Activist-stages-singleperson-demonstraction-in-Tahr.aspx>.

"'Asrār 'Faḍḍ Rābiʿa' min 'arshīf al-Niyāba [...]." *Youm7*, August 14, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2LcBvvJ>.

"'Ayman Nūr: 23 Yūliyū 'inqalāb', wa-'Aḥmad Mūsā: al-Jaysh al-miṣrī qāma bi- 'thawra'." *CNN Arabic*, July 24, 2016, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/07/24/egypt-23-july-1952-anniversary>.

"Bada'a l-iḥtifāl bi-'Īd al-Shurṭa." *Youm7*, January 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2LJiQsi>.

BEN FRAJ, Rim. "À Peine j'ouvre les yeux : Un film contre l'amnésie et la nostalgie." *Nawaat*, March 29, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/03/29/a-peine-jouvre-les-yeux-un-film-contre-lamnesie-et-la-nostalgie/>.

BEN HMIDA, Cheima. "Five Years On, Tunisians Share Memories From The Jasmine Revolution." *Huffington Post*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jasmine-revolution-tunisia-anniversary_us_56993211e4b0b4eb759e367c?guccounter=1>.

"Bi'l-fīdiyū: Al-Sīsī yaṣilu 'Akādīmiyyat al-Shurṭa." *Youm7*, January 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2xuftT5>.

"Bi'l-fīdiyū wa-ṣuwar... 5 Mushāhid fī l-iḥtifāl bi-'Īd al-Shurṭa." *Youm7*, January 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2snFA9d>.

"Bi'l-fīdiyū wa-ṣuwar... Naṣṣ kalimat al-Ra'īs al-Sīsī fī l-iḥtifāl bi-'Īd al-Shurṭa." *Youm7*, January 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Jn2oQl>.

"Bi'l-fīdiyū... Mu'ayyidū al-Sīsī: Law malik al-Sa'ūdiyya ṭalaba al-'ahrāmāt 'ha-niddīhā-luh.'" *Rassd*, April 25, 2016, <http://rassd.com/184601.htm>.

"Bourguiba: Always Present, Always Current." *Histoire et Culture Dans La Tunisie Contemporaine*, April 7, 2016, <https://hctc.hypotheses.org/1501>.

DETTMER, Jamie. "Anti-Government Protesters Threaten to Defy Egyptian President." *Voa News*, April 24, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/a/anti-government-protesters-threaten-to-defy-egyptian-president/3300395.html>.

"Egypt: The Mainstream Media Has Forgotten about the 'orphan Revolution." *Al-Akhbar Lebanon*, January 25, 2016, <https://mideastwire.com/page/articleFree.php?id=59592>.

"Egyptian People Reclaimed Identity in 30 June Revolution: Sisi." *Ahram Online*, June 30, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/232208/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-people-reclaimed-identity-in--June-revolu.aspx>.

"Egypt's Military Deploys to Secure 'Sinai Day Celebrations' Ahead of Planned Protest." *Egyptian Streets*, April 24, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/04/24/egypts-military-deploys-to-secure-sinai-day-celebrations-ahead-of-planned-protests/>.

"'Erase and I Will Draw Again': The Struggle behind Cairo's Revolutionary Graffiti Wall." *The Guardian*, March 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/23/struggle-cairo-egypt-revolutionary-graffiti>.

ESSAM, Salma ('IṢĀM, Salmà). "Cairo's Rabaa Massacre: Three Years On, the Smell of Death Still Lingers." *Global Voices*, August 14, 2016, <https://globalvoices.org/2016/08/14/cairos-rabaa-massacre-three-years-on-the-smell-of-death-still-lingers/>.

"Facebook Post." *The Official Page of King Faruq*, February 18, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/king.farouk.faroukmisr/photos/a.116859731748670.14224.102433933191250/819382818163021/?type=3&theater>.

"Facebook Post." April 24, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/amrabdelhadypolitician/posts/1332672896747152>.

"Facebook Post." June 18, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/alhaitham.saad/posts/1249490181736470>.

"Facebook Post." *Khawāṭir Sīnāwiyya*, July 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1029368543826542&id=505737276189674>.

"Facebook Post." July 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/ayman.taha1/posts/10153463387837723>.

"Facebook Post." July 16, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/hatem.saber1/posts/10154109015747745>.

"Facebook Post." November 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/hosameldeen4/posts/10208934894742759>.

"Facebook Post and Comments." April 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Thawrah2Day/videos/10154955914928561/>.

GOMAA, Ahmad, and XINHUA. Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak Waves to His Supporters as They Gather in Front of Maadi Military Hospital Where Mubarak Is House Arrested in Cairo, Egypt on April 25, 2016. April 25, 2016, Photography. <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/ photo/2016-04/26/c_135311395_8.htm>.

HAMILTON, Omar. "The Memory of the Egyptian Revolution Is the Only Weapon We Have Left." *The Guardian*, January 25, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/egypt-revolution-five-years-omar-robert-hamilton>.

Hashtag "'Anā_mashāraktish_fī_thawrat_yanāyir." Twitter, n.d. <https://bit.ly/2stz7J5>.

Hashtag "'Anā_shārakt_fī_thawrat_yanāyir." Twitter, n.d. <https://bit.ly/2skW6XE>.

Hashtag "'Inzil25abril." Facebook, n.d. <https://bit.ly/2st6CLv>.

HENDAWI, Hamza. "Satirical Video of Egyptians Giving Police Condom Balloons Could Land Filmmakers in Jail." *The Independent*, January 27, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/satirical-video-of-egyptians-giving-police-condom-balloons-could-land-filmmakers-in-jail-a6836071.html>.

"'I Still Cry Every Time I Hear Her Name': Rabaa Families Struggle to Move On." *Middle East Eye*, August 14, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/i-still-cry-every-time-i-hear-her-name-rabaa-families-struggle-move-1506359502>.

"June 30, 3 Years on: Protesting Intellectuals Revisit Their Position." *MadàMaṣr*, July 1, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/07/01/feature/culture/june-30-3-years-on-protesting-intellectuals-revisit-their-position/>.

"Li-mādhā najaḥa inqalāb 1952 ḍidd al-malik Fārūq wa-fashala ḍidd 'Ardūghān fī 2016?" *Nūn Būst*, July 23, 2016, <https://www.noonpost.org/content/12990>.

"al-Maṣrī al-Yawm tarṣudu najāḥāt wa-'ikhfāqāt Thawrat 30 Yūniyū." *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, July 2, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/973693>.

"Muḥāfaẓāt Miṣr tashta'ilu iḥtifālan bi-dhikrà 30 Yūniyū." *Youm7*, July 1, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2kE6LZi>.

"al-Nāṣiriyyūn al-Murābiṭūn tuhanni' al-Sīsī bi-munāsabat dhikrà Thawrat Yūliyū." *Al-'Usbū'*, July 22, 2016.

"Naṣṣ kalimat wazīr al-dākhiliyya fī ḥafl 'Īd al-Shurṭa al-64." *Youm7*, January 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2J008z5>.

"Questions about June 30: Who Were We and What Were We Thinking? Part 2." *MadàMaṣr*, July 10, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/07/10/feature/politics/questions-about-june-30-who-were-we-and-what-were-we-thinking-part-2/>.

RAGHAVAN, Sudarsan. "In New Egyptian Textbooks, 'It's like the Revolution Didn't Happen.'" *The Washington Post*, April 23, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-new-egyptian-textbooks-its-like-the-revolution-didnt-happen/2016/04/23/846ab2f0-f82e-11e5-958d-d038dac6e718_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7dba91f1b573>.

"Révolution ?" *DEBATunisie* (blog), January 14, 2016, <http://www.debatunisie.com/archives/2016/01/14/33208125.html>.

ṢAYYĀD, 'Ayman al-. "23 yūliyū – 25 yanāyir: al-Su'āl al-qadīm al-jadīd." *Al-Shurūq*, July 24, 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=24072016&id=2a694f49-c00e-4281-85e8-981f6b560e2b>.

"Sisi: Internal Plots to Destroy Egypt Worry Me More than External Threats." *Ahram Online*, April 15, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/199646.aspx?mc_cid=29789220e0&mc_eid=4dfd03646c>.

SZAKAL, Vanessa. "In Tunis, Demonstrators Are Still Chanting the Slogans of the Revolution." *Nawaat*, January 17, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/01/17/in-tunis-demonstrators-are-still-chanting-the-slogans-of-the-revolution/>.

"al-Ṭifl Haytham Muḥammad yulqī qaṣīdat 'al-Shahīd.'" *Youm7*, January 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2L9WhMk>.

"Tunisia: 60 Years of Independence, the Past." *Tunisia-Tn.Com*, March 20, 2016, <http://tunisia-tn.com/tunisia-60-years-of-independence-the-past/>.

"Tunisia: 60 Years of Independence, the Present Challenges." *Tunisia-Tn.Com*, March 20, 2016, <http://tunisia-tn.com/tunisia-60-years-of-independence-the-present-challenges/>.

"Tunisians Mark Fifth Anniversary of Revolution." *Al-Bawaba*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.albawaba.com/news/tunisians-mark-fifth-anniversary-revolution-793384>.

WAGUIH, Tamer. "Cairo, Massacres and Our History." *MadàMaṣr*, September 1, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/09/01/opinion/politics/cairo-massacres-and-our-history/>.

"Willis fête ses 5 ans! (Facebook Post)." *Willis in Tunis*, January 13, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/145189922203845/photos/a.145209278868576.27277.145189922203845/996826207040208/?type=1&theater>.

YOUSSEF, Adham. "Brotherhood Vows to Remain 'Peaceful', Calls for Unity on Third Rabaa Anniversary." *Daily News Egypt*, August 15, 2016, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/08/15/brotherhood-vows-remain-peaceful-calls-unity-third-rabaa-anniversary/>.

Films

Egypt's Modern Pharaohs. Documentary trilogy by Jīhān al-Ṭāhirī (Jihan El-Tahri). Egypt, France, USA, Qatar 2015/2016.

◄ mly201@yahoo.co.uk ►

Conversions*

… in Egypt

By Monika Lindbekk

On August 4, Muḥammad Ḥigāzī, an Egyptian in his early thirties, appears in a video uploaded to YouTube [↗**Social Media**] looking pale but composed. In a well-rehearsed statement, he publicly blesses the Prophet Muḥammad as "the foremost among God's creation" and also spells out the *shahāda*, the Islamic proclamation of faith. With this, Ḥigāzī—until then Egypt's 'best-known convert *from* Islam' who had become Christian and taken the name Bishōy—reverts *to* Islam. The video ends a nine-year-long, eventually unsuccessful struggle with courts and other authorities to be legally recognized as a Christian. (Back in 2007, he had filed a lawsuit to try to change his religious identity as shown on his ID card from "Muslim" to "Christian"). In the video, a resigned Ḥigāzī apologizes to his family and says he will never again speak to the media:

> I want nothing from this video. I have no desires. I will not appear again in the media. I will not appear again in public. […] I say this out of my complete free will. I am under no pressures from anyone. I am not being held by any agency, nor am I under any pressure of any kind. And that's it. (*al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12) [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]

Muḥammad Ḥigāzī's story sheds light on how the Egyptian state inserts itself into religious life. It recognizes conversion *to* Islam, but not conversion *from* Islam to another religion. While Ḥigāzī's public reversion to Islam in August is not covered extensively in Egyptian newspapers, echoes of the controversy sparked by his act of requesting legal recognition for conversion to Christianity continue to reverberate. In 2008, a court had ruled that Ḥigāzī, born a Muslim, could not have his conversion recognized because this would amount to "apostasy" (*irtidād*) and therefore contradict public order and morals. In a program aired during Ramadan, however, *shaykh al-Azhar* Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib elaborates that apostates should not be punished by death (al-Buḥayrī). Earlier this year, the head of al-Azhar's Committee had declared that

> God acknowledges the freedom of humans to choose a religion or belief without coercion (…). Apostasy (*ridda*), however, is a major sin (*min al-kabā'ir*) as it signals disbelief in God and his Holy Book. (*al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12)

This definition of Islam has the effect of authorizing intervention in the domain of belief [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective); ↗**In Islam, …**]. Individuals such as Muḥammad Ḥigāzī therefore live in fear for their lives. Any attempt to trick the system through forgery of ID documents exposes people to the risk of prosecution [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Tricking the System / Tricked by the System].**

---

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 474-78.

© Monika Lindbekk, University of Bergen, NO

But how to convert *to* Islam? In principle, it suffices to pronounce the *shahāda*. In practice, however, things are not so straightforward. An investigative article titled "Want to convert? Meet me later" offers an account of this process (*al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12). The female journalist's adventure into the labyrinth of Egyptian bureaucracy begins with her entering *Mashyakhat al-Azhar*, a bulky concrete building. On the ground floor, she reaches an office carrying the sign "Announcement of Islam for Egyptians" *(Iẓhār al-Islām lil-Miṣriyyīn)*. There she encounters five employees, four men and one woman, all in their early twenties, with a mandate to ascertain whether potential converts indeed believe in God and his Prophet and freely consent to convert.

According to the young employees, the following documents are required in support of changing one's religion: (1) certificate of approval granted by the Mufti of Egypt to ensure his acceptance of her entrance into Islam, that she is not underage, and the presence of two Muslim witnesses; (2) a written approval from the Ministry of Interior. When the author says that she has difficulties procuring the necessary documents (especially the validation from the Ministry of Interior), she is advised to pay a visit to al-Azhar's Fatwa committee which is situated to the right of the entrance to Azhar mosque. On the wall is a sign saying that pronouncement of fatwas is not conditioned by payment of a fee. In a Kafkaesque twist, an employee at al-Azhar's Fatwa Council gives her the address of a small mosque in the semi-rural area of Shubrā al-Khayma for the sake of speeding up conversion procedures. At the mosque she is welcomed by a husband and wife who volunteer to teach prospective converts about the rituals and obligations of Islam. The wife assures her that they receive no profit for doing this. The author of the article subsequently visits the couple at their home where she is initiated into the Islamic way of life, the characteristics of the Prophet and the angels, along with the ritual of prayer. The initiation ceremony takes place inside a small living room decorated with Qur'ānic verses and is accompanied by low Qur'ānic recitation playing on the radio.

Stories of conversion are also a recurring theme in popular culture. The stories highlight that converts are treated with ambivalence. On the one hand, they are viewed with distrust and suspicion: they are not only viewed as having turned their backs on a set of religious beliefs, but also their families and social conventions. On the other hand, they are viewed as brave pioneers. The former is evident in the Egyptian feature film *Mawlānā* (The Preacher) where an incident of conversion is used to critique the interplay between political power, religious establishment, mass media and Islamist extremism [↗**In Islam, …**, ↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. The protagonist, a highly popular TV preacher [↗**Celebrities**] known for his independent unconventional thinking, is approached by a couple from the highest echelons of society, close to the inner circle of the President. They ask the hero to "revert" their "spoiled" son who has become Christian and started to donate enormous sums of "their" money to the Coptic church. The ruling elites also fear angering the religious establishment upon whom they rely to keep society in check. In the end it turns out that his conversion has been mere camouflage: in reality, the convert is a terrorist. In the movie's dramatic climax, the son detonates a bomb inside a church which kills many. Apart from exploring the origins and effects of tensions between Muslims and Christians, the film engages with tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Ultimately, the story is used to deliver a message about inter-religious tolerance and the importance of independent thinking.

Meanwhile, in the bestselling novel *Fī qalbī unthā ʿibriyya* (A Jewish girl in my heart) by the Tunisian author Khawla Ḥamdī, the conversion of Nadà, a Jewish girl, to Islam is used to make the reader experience the true spirit of Islam. Khawla Ḥamdī's book depicts different stages in the conversion process. These include opening oneself to new options; meeting a person who embodies the religious vision (freedom fighter and exemplary Muslim Aḥmad); finding a home (in Islam, depicted as a home for the homeless, likened to hot tea); and committing oneself to an Islamic way of life, embodied in Nadà's donning of the *hijab* [↗**In Islam, …**]. The process is compelling and transformative, but hardly smooth and seamless. Nadà is expelled from home and disowned by her orthodox Jewish mother due to her wearing the headscarf. Suffering on account of her conversion to Islam, Nadà is portrayed as a "martyr of true belief". While the novel on the surface seeks to advance a vision of religious tolerance, it is marked by power hierarchy. The novel is consistent in portraying Islam as superior compared to other religions, embodied in the adoption of Islamic identity and mode of dress by a young Jewish woman. For the majority of readers—Muslims, of course—such a portrayal of their own religion must have a reassuring effect [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**].

Khawla Ḥamdī's idealized portrayal of Islamic tolerance stands in contrast to the accounts of inter-religious conflict found both in newspapers and fictional representations [↗**Clash**]. The investigative journalist from *al-Ṣabāḥ* sheds further light on the dynamics of conversion when, on another day, she visits a Coptic church in Shubrā al-Khayma. She tells the security guard that she is a Muslim woman who wishes to change her religion to Christianity and is granted a meeting with the priest. Patiently, the latter tells her that

> Only God cares what stirs in people's hearts. You do not have to be a Christian on paper to be one of us. Our church is open to you in case you wish to come here and worship. But I can't help you with more than that. [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]

The investigative journalist also tries her luck with the head of the *Jewish* community. After broaching the subject of her prospective conversion from Islam to Judaism, the journalist's interlocutor on the phone tells her: "You are going to bring about a disaster on me (*inti ḥa-twaddīnī fī dāhya*)!" whereupon the connection is broken. The brusque response has to be seen against the background of the precarious status of the Jewish community in Egypt. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, many Egyptian Jews were expelled or compelled in other ways to leave the country. Once a thriving community, the Jews in Egypt have been reduced to six elderly women, reports *Egypt Independent* in July.

While, historically, conversions to Islam were welcomed, nowadays they seem to be deemed increasingly as a threat to national security as they tend to be associated with sectarian tension and conflict [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. On January 29, *Nujūm miṣriyya* reports that the Ṭura prison administration had to separate Muslim Brotherhood supporters after they forced three Christian prisoners to convert (*NMisr*). The stories that attract most media attention, however, revolve around *female* converts to Islam. On May 7, *Īlāf (Elaph)* newspaper uses the term "sectarian crisis" (*azma ṭā'ifiyya*) to describe a series of incidents in which Coptic girls in Upper Egypt have allegedly converted to Islam. In June, an eighteen-year-old Coptic girl disappears from a village in Upper Egypt after reportedly converting to Islam [↗**Disappearances**]. In another village a rumour spreads that a Christian woman has eloped with a young man named "Islam" (ʿABD AL-ḤAFĪẒ). Demonstrations erupt outside the

local police station where male members of the local Coptic community demand that the girl be returned to her family. On the other side, the local Muslim population accuses the police of colluding with the Coptic Church to prevent such conversions. Subsequently some men are arrested while others are dispersed [↗**Prison**]. In response to these emotional demonstrations, the head of the local security directorate issues a statement that the woman in question is not held in police custody, but is on a train to Cairo to announce her conversion to Islam at al-Azhar. The eighteen-year-old girl appears in a video clip on YouTube (ʿABD AL-ḤAFĪẒ) [↗**Social Media**]. The video shows her wearing a black hijab and giving a furtive smile while announcing her belief in Islam. Her declaration is less rehearsed than that of Muḥammad Ḥigāzī; in the background, the voice of a man can be heard reciting the *shahāda*, which she repeats after him (*YT*, May 4). Shrouded in mystery, this episode, as others like it, gives ample room for speculation: did the woman in question convert willingly or was she in fact kidnapped and forced to adopt Islam? [↗**True *vs.* False**, ↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**]. The fact that women's conversion elicits such anxiety can probably be explained by common assumptions about women's relations with men [↗**Male *vs.* Female**] who are neither their husbands nor belong to their families and religious communities, particularly in the governorates of Upper Egypt. Expressing fear and anxiety over this and other similar incidents, some Copts try to create an association aimed at handling what they view as the growing phenomenon of forced disappearances and kidnapping, but they fail to obtain the official permit required [↗**Disappearances**]. Returning to the article in *al-Ṣabāḥ,* an approval from the Ministry of Interior validating the conversion and change of name in an ID card is noteworthy among the documents required for conversion to Islam. This signals that a closer monitoring of the boundaries between religious identities has come to be viewed as necessary step to prevent further sectarian tension and agonism, as reflected in a statement by the head of al-Azhar's Fatwa Committee:

> According to God, the believer is free to believe and the disbeliever to disbelieve. However, in cases where conversion leads to *fitna* on account of social disapproval, the issue is referred to national security agencies and the judiciary for the sake of protecting the individual and nation (*al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12).

Conversions may put society at risk of *fitna*, "trial, temptation, sedition, civil strife"—the word reminds of the big schism in early Islamic history that led to the Sunni-Shia split and has become almost synonymous with civil war ever since. In light of this and other barriers facing converts attempting to change religious membership religion in ID cards, the author of the article wonders whether the principle of freedom of religion that is found in the 2014 constitution is not just "ink on paper" (*ḥibr ʿalà waraq*), as the popular Egyptian proverb says.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Prison ♦ Social Media ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint / Individual *vs.* Collective ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

al-BUḤAYRĪ, Aḥmad. "Shaykh al-Azhar: Ḥurriyyat al-iʿtiqād shayʾ wa-ḥurriyyat al-irtidād shayʾ ākhar." *al-Miṣrī al-Yawm*, June 16, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/ 965579> (accessed November 1, 2017).

ʿABD AL-ḤAFĪẒ, Ṣabrī. "al-Aqbāṭ yataẓāharūn li-stiʿādatihā wa'l-muslimūn li-tasallumihā: Tawattur ʿalà khalfiyyat iʿtināq masīḥiyya lil-ʾislām." *Īlāf*, May 7, 2016, <http://elaph.com/Web/News/2016/5/1087240.html> (accessed November 1, 2017).

ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD, Rīm. "Bi'l-fīdiyō... *Christian Today*: ṣāḥib awwal daʿwà qaḍā'iyya lil-taḥawwul lil-masīḥiyya yaʿūd lil-Islām." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, August 5, 2016, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2016/8/5/بالفيديو-كريستيان-توداى-صاحب-أول-دعوى-قضائية-للتحول-للمسيحية-يعود> (accessed November 1, 2017).

[*Egypt Independent* =] N. N. "Egypt's Jewish community diminished to 6 women after death of Lucy Saul." *Egypt Independent*, July 30, 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/egypt-s-jewish-community-diminished-6-women-after-death-lucy-saul/> (accessed December 15, 2017).

[*Nmisr* =] N. N. "Quwwāt al-amn taʿzil anṣār al-ikhwān al-muslimīn baʿd tasabbubihim bi-islām thalāth masīḥiyyīn bi-Ṭurah." *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, January 29, 2016, <https://www.nmisr.com/arab-news/egypt-news/قوات-الأمن-تعزل-انصار-الأخوان-المسلمي > (accessed November 1, 2017).

[*al-Ṣabāḥ* =] N. N. "'Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqà qābilnī." *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <http://www. elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416> (accessed November 1, 2017).

[YOUTUBE =] N. N. "Islām fatāt min Sōhāg." 4 May, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gy7RwePxvaY#action=share> (accessed November 1, 2017).

◄ monika.lindbekk@ub.no ►

Court Trials

… in Egypt

By Monika Lindbekk and Teresa Pepe

The court sessions that attract public attention this year in Egypt are of a very different type than those held in Tunisia [↗**Public Hearings**]. Above a court house located next to the criminal court at a busy intersection in Cairo, the following words are inscribed on thick concrete walls above noisy traffic: "God" (*Allāh*), "Right" (*ḥaqq*), "Justice" (*ʿadl*). Lady Justice sits perched on the wall of a house adjacent to another urban court house. We are in the neighbourhood of Būlāq, a busy downtown district that, besides the court houses, hosts a second-hand market, metalworking and machines shops, and a number of street cafes. The entrance to the Criminal Court lies on a side street. There is hardly any control at the door, despite the huge amount of people constantly coming in and out. Once inside, one realizes that the building does not offer any relief from the chaos and dust of the street outside. Hundreds of regular citizens and street vendors roam from one corridor to another, across the floors. There are several trials going on simultaneously in the courtrooms. Most of them include a bench for the judge, lines of old stalls, occupied by the public attending the trial, and a cage in which the defendant is locked while waiting for the verdict. The voices of the jury cross with those of crying women and tea-vendors, to the point that it is almost impossible to hear what is going on.

Egyptians frequently resort to the courts to claim their rights in personal matters, ranging from establishing marriage and paternity to bringing charges of defamation (*MadàMaṣr* [d]). Thus, there is considerable interaction between these state institutions and the people. Since 2011, courts have also been an important locus for the negotiation of the relationship between rulers and citizens, especially in the area of criminal law [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. Egyptians were hypnotized in the beginning of the trial against Ḥusnī Mubārak—known as the "trial of the century"—in which he was charged with killing protestors. But the lengthy court proceedings have led to a sense of apathy. On January 9, the Court of Cassation upholds a conviction of former president Mubarak and his two sons on corruption charges (the only successful prosecution brought against him). Mubarak has already completed his three-year-prison sentence by opting to stay in the Maadi Military Hospital to receive medical treatment (Essam El-Din). He is therefore technically a free man; yet he remains confined at Maadi Military Hospital. At the hospital he is able to receive visits from guests and use personal phones. His wife Suzanne is also allowed to stay with him. On May 5, supporters of the former president gather in front of the hospital. While engaging in traditional dance accompanied by music, they wave pink balloons and pictures of Mubarak to celebrate his 88th birthday. An elderly man laments, "Everyone now fears for the future and is terrified of the present. During his days we had simple lives, yet it was life" [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. Looking pale and wearing a presidential suit, Mubarak appears in a hospital window and waves back. Meanwhile, another deposed president Muḥammad Mursī is detained at a high-security prison near Alexandria. On November 15, the Court of Cassation revokes Mursī's

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *64–*70
© Monika Lindbekk, Univ. of Bergen, NO / Teresa Pepe, IKOS, Univ. of Oslo, NO

death sentence and orders a retrial on the charge of conspiring to commit terrorist acts with foreign groups. One of Mursī's lawyers says: "He already has a final sentence of 20 years in prison. But at least today he gets to take off the red suit." Prisoners awaiting the death penalty in Egypt wear red jumpsuits while others wear blue (HADID).

Mubarak's limbo status at a Cairo hospital and Mursi's incarceration at a high-security ↗**Prison** are reflective of how post-2011 criminal justice has been shaped by changes in the political landscape. An important part of court trials is the production of legal facts which form the basis for evaluation of the disputing parties' claims as legal or illegal. Yet court trials, which frequently dominate the newspapers, have the appearance of being carefully orchestrated spectacles designed to inspire fear and awe of the state [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**] and make important points to the public about the limits of freedom and rights rather than observing sound legal methods. Some also entertain doubts about the impartiality and independence of the judiciary and believe that the judicial system is being controlled by the executive and—by extension—the military: Street art shows a sexualized Lady Justice, depicted as a belly dancer wearing a military beret. Such apathy and scepticism are amplified by statements by judges that testify to a lack of tolerance for dissent and criticism of the government, and limitations on the freedom of opinion and expression. In a statement signaling justice with a vengeance, Minister of Justice Aḥmad al-Zind said in January that he would not be satisfied until "10,000 Brotherhood members were killed for every martyr" from the armed forces and the police [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**; ↗**True *vs.* False**]:

> I swear by God Almighty that, personally, the fire in my heart will not be extinguished unless for each one there's at least 10,000. (*MadàMaṣr* [e])

However, not only members of the Muslim Brotherhood are perceived as a challenge to Egyptian statehood and Egyptianness, but also other sectors of the opposition, intellectuals, and artists. In a series of trials, four Coptic Orthodox teenagers (*MadàMaṣr* [b]), the poet Fatima Naoot (Fāṭima Nāʿūt) and the novelist Ahmed Naji (Aḥmad Nāgī) receive jail sentences in January and February for blasphemy or offending public morals. Fatima Naoot receives a three-year prison sentence and 20,000 EP fine for having published, back in 2014, a Tweet criticizing the ritual sacrifice of animals during ʿĪd al-Aḍḥà. She has to defend herself against the accusation of insulting Abrahamic religion and propagating atheism in words, according to the article 98 of the Constitution (*MadàMaṣr* [a]). Ahmed Naji is given a two-year sentence for publishing an excerpt from his recent novel *Istikhdām al-Ḥayāt* (Using Life, 2014) in the literary magazine *Akhbār al-Adab*, an excerpt that is deemed to have offended public morals. The accusation came, in August 2014, from an Egyptian citizen named Hany Saleh Tawfik (Hānī Ṣāliḥ Tawfīq) who declared that he used to buy the journal regularly for his daughters, but that one time, his wife walked into the room showing him Naji's chapter and ridiculing him for bringing such writing into their home. Tawfīq declared that upon reading the novels' excerpts, "his heartbeat fluctuated, his blood pressure dropped and he became severely ill" (KAREEM). Consequently, he went to court and filed a case against the author of the text, Ahmed Naji, and the magazine's editor-in-chief, Tarek al-Taher (Ṭāriq al-Ṭāhir), for having published a "sexual article" that harmed not only his health and morals, but also the morals of Egypt as a whole [↗The Honourable Citizen]. The public prosecutor

decided to accept Hany Saleh's accusation and press charges against Naji, and so the trial started in December 2015.

The chapter under accusation is narrated from a first person perspective by the main character, Bassām Bahgat. It contains explicit description of a sexual intercourse and hashish smoking—as many works of Arabic literature do—and explicit sexual expressions such as "pussy," "cock," "licking," "sucking." Hany Saleh's accusation assumes that the text published is an article, and not part of a novel, and therefore attributes the harmful thoughts and actions of the novel's protagonist to the author himself. During the first trial, held in December 2015, the well-known novelist Sonallah Ibrahim (Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm) and the Head of the General Egyptian Book Organization, Seif Salmawy (Sayf Salmāwī), had testified that the text in question is a novel, a piece of fiction, not one of journalism. In early January 2016, Naji and his editor are acquitted, according to Article 67 of the Egyptian Constitution, drafted in 2014, which forbids the jailing of artists and writers for publishing their work and explicitly guarantees freedom of artistic and literary creation, freedom of thought and opinion, and freedom of the press. However, the prosecution appeals the case, and on February 20 Naji is condemned to two years imprisonment, according to Article 178 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes content that violates public morals. The court argues that Article 67 of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of artistic and literary creativity, is not intended to protect those who claim to be writers, while in reality they succumb to "corrupt morals with their poisoned pens under the guise of freedom of thought" (*Egypt Art on Trial*). According to the court, the author is driven by the criminal intention "to submerge the youth in an atmosphere of moral depravity in order to inflict moral vices on them and awaken their lust." Tarek el-Taher, *Akhbār al-Adab*'s editor-in-chief, is also accused of neglecting his responsibilities as editor-in-chief of the magazine, "since he did not prohibit the publication which could damage public order or violate public modesty," and forced to pay a fine of 20,000 EP. Egypt's literary and political communities respond by expressing widespread support for Naji. Seven members of the committee that wrote the Egyptian Constitution publish a statement in February condemning Naji's sentencing as unconstitutional, arguing that the conviction contravenes Article 67 of the Constitution (*Ahram Online* [b]). In February, over 600 Egyptian writers and artists in solidarity with Naji sign a statement criticizing the government's "multi-armed attack on a number of writers and journalists because of their opinions" and the "terrible and terrifying path taken by the regime that leads the entire country towards the abyss, through "assassinating" the public space of expression and confiscating the political space" (*Egypt Solidarity*). Naji's lawyers submit a motion to the Prosecutor General arguing that the sentence against Naji should not be implemented since it violates the Egyptian Constitution. On December 18, the appeal is finally accepted. Naji's sentence is suspended, but his freedom is nonetheless restricted by a travel ban which forbids the author from travelling outside Egypt.

By posing as the protector of public order, morality and religious emotions, the courts thus authorize intervention in the domain of belief [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective); ↗**In Islam, …**]. Aside from the spectacle of state power, some court trials have added drama because individual actors do not carry out the roles as expected and produce alternative stories about what happened. During a hearing in the Criminal Court of South Cairo on April 27, activist Sana Seif (Sanā' Sayf) refuses to cooperate with the investing judge and

answer his questions, arguing that the investigation was merely a formality (*ṣūrī*) (ʿABD AL-ʿULÀ & MABRŪK). She has been caught up in a government crackdown on dissenters after calling for protests against president al-Sisi for transferring two uninhabited Red Sea islands, Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr, to Saudi Arabia. Sana Seif elaborates by saying:

> Given that the judicial system has lost its sovereignty, in terms of issuing its own decisions, as it has lost its impartiality, as well as its commitment to the enforcement of justice; and given that executive authorities are the ones running this state – I see that this investigation is merely a guise, and this is why I refuse to deal with it (*MadàMaṣr* [c]). [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]

With this she expresses her belief that the trial was a mere charade and that the judiciary has betrayed the legacy of independence that judges during the pre-2011 era fought long and hard to achieve [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. She is punished for this with a six-month jail sentence on the charge of defaming the judiciary after being freed by a presidential pardon in another case. On February 13, 115 defendants are sentenced all at once in the West Cairo Military Court for participating in a demonstration which took place in 2014. Sixteen of the defendants are tried in their presence while 100 are sentenced in absentia for protesting against the ouster of president Muḥammad Mursī. Among those convicted is 4-year-old Ahmed Mansour (Aḥmad Manṣūr) who has not bothered to appear because he is playing at home. He is subsequently convicted of four counts of murder, eight counts of attempted murder and vandalizing government property. Pervading the story of Ahmed Mansur is an emotion of despair which conveys a profound sense of the opacity and unaccountability of the state toward its citizens, particularly those without legal representation [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. Yet, it also shows that court trials can function as vehicles for the voicing of alternative versions of events, this time outside the courtroom [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]. The spectacle continues outside court as the child's father appears on the '10 o'clock' show of the private channel DreamTV with Ahmed who is fast asleep on his father's lap (*Ahram Online* [a]). During the show, Ahmed Mansour's father explains that it all started in January 2014, when the ↗**The Policeman** Criminal came asking for his son Ahmed at their house. Mansour showed them his child—who was two years old at the time—so they took him instead. The father says he was detained for four months, as the police thought he was Ahmed, his son. He added that he could not afford a lawyer until he appeared in front of the judge, who read his son's birth certificate, realized the mistake in the papers, and released the father without bail. However, two years on and Ahmed Mansour is still sentenced to prison. "I swear I don't want to upset anyone," pleads the father. "Please don't take my son!" (*BBC World*, *BBC Masr*). In an article featured in *al-Ahrām* on February 21, a spokesman of the Ministry of the Interior says there was a mistake in the name of the defendant, and the child's uncle, a man in his fifties, is the one who is wanted by the police (*Ahram Online* [a]). However, Ahmed Mansour's lawyer says they repeatedly called for correcting the mistake or to remove the name of the child from the case but they received no response. According to the defense lawyer, the fact that the court got past the sentencing state of hearing before realizing their mistake "proves that the judge did not read the case" (BBC Masr). He attributes the mix-up to a larger pattern of unaccountability of security forces in the country. The host of the *10 o'clock* program describes the case against Ahmed Mansur as a "mark of shame"

since it is characterized by flagrant and repeated violations of the rights of defense and the right to a fair trial. The programme host points out that such cases tarnish Egypt's image abroad where such miscarriages of justice are viewed as a hallmark of authoritarian regimes. He sounds a warning note by adding that the national project of the president is fast losing support due to such severe and unacceptable mistakes (AYMAN) [↗**True *vs.* False**]. The case is also used by local human rights organizations to draw attention to hasty, legal proceedings in military courts and call for their end. According to Human Rights Watch, most civilians tried in military courts are sentenced after mass trials—like Ahmed Mansur—that violate fundamental due process rights, and some courts rely on confessions extracted under torture (Human Rights Watch, April 13).

Other sources of added drama stem from within the judiciary itself. The Egyptian judiciary has a strong professional identity as protectors of the State and public order. As alluded to by Sana Seif, this has historically been used by Egyptian courts to alternate between deference to the executive and accommodating public opinion. The rhetoric of state sovereignty invoked against dissenters can therefore be wielded both *in favour of* and *against* the interests of the executive. On June 21, the first circuit of the Egyptian State Council's administrative court sides with human rights lawyers contesting the executive's transfer of Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr, the two ↗**Red Sea Islands**, to Saudi Arabia, instead asserting complete Egyptian sovereignty over the islands. The Court's conception of truth resonates with popular perceptions that ownership of the land was earned by the blood shed by Egyptians during the 1967 war (El-GOHARI). In its search for accurate and objective information, the Court also has recourse to several maps submitted by human rights lawyers for the purpose of finding hidden messages pertaining to the constitution of political and military power in this area. Since Egyptian maps stored by the national archive can only be issued to citizens pursuant to a security clearance (*al-Mawqif al-Miṣrī*), it is not incidental that the maps submitted by human rights lawyers to the court include maps issued by a range of non-Egyptian authorities, including copies of pages from the Finnish orientalist George August Wallin's book *Notes Taken During a Journey Through Part of Northern Arabia in 1848*, *Academic Atlas* published by Cambridge University in 1940, and a 2000 issue of the *Historical Atlas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, created and issued by the King Abdulaziz Foundation For Research and Archives. On the other hand, the government contends that Egypt began leasing Ṣanāfīr and Tīrān in 1950 to keep them from being seized by Israel at a time when Saudi Arabia was too weak to defend them. To support the claim, al-Sisi's administration points to a 1990 decree by former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak that demarcated the maritime border between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, placing the islands' control beyond Egyptian territorial waters. According to the government, the court's account of what happened is not a truthful and accurate description of the facts. Hours after the ruling is announced, the State Lawsuits Authority, appeals the verdict and the cabinet says it will submit documents, among them maps and treaties that confirm Saudi sovereignty of the islands [↗**True *vs.* False**]. This shows that the trials continue to be used as a site or battle over the 'truth' about what happened in a specific case as well as express dissent against executive authority, inside and outside the courtroom.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – The Honourable Citizen ♦ In Islam, … ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Red Sea Islands

CODES – Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individual *vs.* Collective) ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence

CODES COLLAPSED – Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

ʿABD AL-ʿULÀ, ʿUmar, and Fāṭima MABRŪK. "'Ūlà jalasāt muḥākamat Sanā' Sayf li-'ihānat al-qaḍā'." *Akhbār al-Yawm*, May 4, 2016, <https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/5768/1/أولى-جلسات-محاكمة-سناء-سيف-لإهانة-القضاء-الأربعاء>.

A7A News Agency / Wikālat ʔ.ḥ.ā lil-'Anbā'. "Qiṣṣa qaṣira." A7A / ʔ.ḥ.ā, March 3, 2016, <https://mobile.twitter.com/hashtag/عواد_باع_أرضك?src=hash&amp%3Bref_src=twsrc%5Etfw>.

[*Ahram Online* (a) =] N. N. "Father of 4-year-old sentenced to life in prison speaks out." *al-Ahram Online*, February 21, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/1/188162/Egypt/Father-of-year-old-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-spe.aspx>.

[*Ahram Online* (b) =] N. N. "'Writer Ahmed Naji's jail verdict unconstitutional,' say 7 authors of Egypt's constitution." *Ahram Online*, February 24, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News Content/1/64/188406/Egypt/Politics-/Writer-Ahmed-Najis-jail-verdict-unconstitutional,-.aspx>.

AYMAN, Sharīf. "Baʿd al-ḥukm al-mu'abbad ʿalà ṭifl dhī 4 sanawāt.. al-Ibrāshī: waṣmat ʿār fī ḥaqq al-niẓām." *Masrawy*, February 21, 2016, <http://www.masrawy.com/News/News_Egypt/details/2016/2/21/756735/بعد-الحكم-المؤبد-على-طفل-ذو-4-سنوات-الإبراشي-وصمة-عار-في-حق-النظام>.

[BBC Masr =] N. N. "al-Ḥukm bi'l-mu'abbad ʿalà ṭifl ''umruh 4 sanawāt'." *BBC Arabic*, February 19, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/arabic/worldnews/2016/02/160219_egypt_child_sentence>.

[BBC World =] N. N. "Egyptian four-year-old's life sentence a mistake, military says." *BBC News*, February 21, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35633314>.

[*Egypt Art on Trial* =] N. N. "Court's Reasoning for #AhmedNaji's Prison Sentence". *Egypt Art on Trial – Ḍidd muḥākamat al-khayāl*, Facebook Page, March 8, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/egypt-art-on-trial-ضد-محاكمة-الخيال/courts-reasoning-for-ahmednajis-prison-sentence/1736188856616584>.

[*Egypt Solidarity* =] N. N. "Open up the public space: Solidarity with Egyptian writers' protest." *Egypt Solidarity: an international initiative against repression in Egypt*, [no date], <https://egyptsolidarityinitiative.org/open-up-the-public-space-solidarity-with-egyptian-writers-protest/>.

ESSAM EL-DIN, Gamal. "Mubarak appeal rejected." *Al-Ahram Weekly*, no. 1278, January 14-20, 2016, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/15231.aspx>.

El-GOHARI, Muhammad. "What Was in the Egyptian Court's Reasoning in the Tiran and Sanafir Case?" *Atlantic Council*, June 24, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/what-was-in-the-egyptian-court-s-reasoning-in-the-tiran-and-sanafir-case>.

HADID, Diaa. "'Court in Egypt Overturns Mohamed Morsi's Death Sentence." *New York Times*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/world/middleeast/egypt-court-morsi-death-sentence.html>.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. "Egypt: 7,400 Civilians Tried In Military Courts: Torture, Disappearances Used to Elicit Confessions." Human Rights Watch, April 13, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/13/egypt-7400-civilians-tried-military-courts>.

KAREEM, Mona. "The Persecuted Novelist of Dystopian Cairo: Mona Kareem interviews Ahmed Naji." *LA Review of Books*, January 11, 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-persecuted-novelist-of-dystopian-cairo>.

[*MadàMaṣr* (a) =] N. N. "Poet Fatima Naoot sentenced to 3 years in prison for contempt of religion." *MadàMaṣr*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/01/26/news/culture/poet-fatima-naoot-sentenced-to-3-years-in-prison-for-contempt-of-religion/>.

[*MadàMaṣr* (b) =] N. N. "al-Ḥukm ʿalà thalāthat ʾaṭfāl ʾaqbāṭ bi-sijn 5 sanawāt bi-tuhmat ʾihānat al-ʾislām.'' *MadàMaṣr*, February 25, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/02/25/feature/سياسة/الحكم-على-ثلاثة-أطفال-أقباط-بالسجن-خمس/>.

[*MadàMaṣr* (c) =] N. N. "Activist Sanaa Seif released, accused of insulting official during investigation." *MadàMaṣr*, April 27, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/27/news/u/activist-sanaa-seif-released-accused-of-insulting-official-during-investigation/>.

[*MadàMaṣr* (d) =] N. N. "Actor Ahmed Ezz sentenced to 3 years in prison for defaming actress Zeina in paternity case." *MadàMaṣr*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/06/19/news/u/actor-ahmed-ezz-sentenced-to-3-years-in-prison-for-defaming-actress-zeina-in-paternity-case/amp/>

[*MadàMaṣr* (e) =] N. N. "HRW lambasts justice minister's incitement to k.ill 10,000 MB for every dead soldier." *MadàMaṣr*, February 9 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/09/news/u/hrw-lambasts-justice-ministers-incitement-to-kill-10000-mb-for-every-dead-soldier/>.

[*al-Mawqif al-Miṣrī* =] N. N. "Ru'yā miṣriyya min farīq ṣafḥat al-Mawqif al-Miṣrī li-'azmat jazīratay Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr." Facebook page, April 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/almawkef.almasry/posts/774705619296004>.

◄ monika.lindbekk@ub.no ►
◄ teresa.pepe@ikos.uio.no ►

… in Tunisia

See ↗**Public Hearings**

Crowdfunding*

By Teresa Pepe

> Meet Rabiha and Hiba, two women artisans working with *Aatik* who together wove this carpet. They, along with six other women, want to keep working together—and they need your help in order to become a self-sustainable cooperative. Thus, for everyone abroad who hasn't donated yet, please visit the page: <link>. For everyone in Tunisia who cannot contribute online, please ask your family and friends abroad to contribute to *Aatik*'s crowdfunding campaign or contact *Aatik*'s team and we will help you make a donation. Hurry, beautiful people, there are only 2 days left to #weavearevolution!

Emma and Sophie, founders of the Tunisian start-up company *Aatik*, share this post on Facebook in mid-December 2016 [↗**Social Media**]. Their objective is to keep alive the weaving tradition of the village of al-ʿArūsa, a few hours from Tunis, by establishing a workshop managed exclusively by women. For this, they ask people living abroad and in Tunisia, to donate a small sum of money. The post includes a picture of Rabiha and Hiba proudly holding a blue-coloured carpet and showing their thumbs up, in a sign of confidence. And in fact, only one week later, they announce in another Facebook post: "We did it! We obtained 111% of the planned budget (3450 Euros). We are ready for a new year endowed with weaving, creativity and women power."

The campaign launched by the women behind *Aatik* is not an isolated case. A significant number of artisans, musicians, writers, social workers and young entrepreneurs from Egypt and Tunisia resort to crowdfunding to realize their professional dreams [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. They have great ambitions and creative ideas; the main obstacle they face is access to funding, particularly when firms are at an early stage. Banks simply do not want to take the risk. Administrative steps for review and approval take a lot of time and are often discouraging. Crowdfunding websites, instead, are easy to access [↗**Tricking the System / Tricked by the System**]. They allow anyone to create a page where they describe the idea of a project, give an estimated budget and schedule for its realization, and ask friends, family, like-minded people and other potential investors to contribute by donating a small amount of money within a fixed deadline. Not only international crowdfunding websites, like *Kickstarter* or *Indiegogo*, which world-renowned artists like the Tunisian singer Emel Mathlouthy (Āmāl al-Mathlūthī) [↗**Celebrities**] resort to, are used; but increasingly also *Arabic* crowdfunding websites appear, and they aim at financing *local* projects, like *zoomal* (*DhūMāl* "The one who has money"), *CoFundy* or *Afrik-Wity*, whose offices are in Tunis, or *Yomken* (*Yumkin* "It *is* possible"), and *Shekra* (from *Shārik fikra* "Share an idea"), based in Egypt.

---

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 479-81.

© Teresa Pepe, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

Different websites have different policies. But usually, if the project is successfully funded, the website keeps a small percentage of the total money donated (5% for *zoomal*, or 10% for *Yomken*, for example). If the planned amount is not reached within the given time, the website may adopt two funding options: "all or nothing" (like *zoomal*), or "keep it all." In the former, pledged money is only collected if the fundraising goal is met, otherwise the money is returned to the backers. In the latter, the funds are collected whether the project goal is met or not.

In exchange for their support, backers can be rewarded in several ways, depending on the sum of money allocated. For example, the ones who "support a Room of Art in Cairo"—a music venue that risks being shut down due to the financial crisis in Egypt [↗**Dollar Crisis**]—will obtain honorary membership access to the venue, discounts on concert tickets and beverages, and a photo on stage with a music band performing there. The ones who support the establishment of a canteen for a primary school located on the Islands of Qarqna (Kerkennah) in Tunisia will get a boat tour of the island, a meal served in the canteen with the school pupils, and their name and picture recorded in the school annals. But more in general, donors are rewarded with the feeling that they can determine which project will be realized, and thus make a difference [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)]. Emel Mathlouthy uses these words to ask her supporters to help her produce her new album:

> If you believe that a woman can be an independent creative and a free artist, please help. If you believe that labels aren't the only ones who should decide what has artistic value, and what you listen to, please come along on this journey... Music is in danger of being silenced.

While the campaign takes place online, the projects advertised on these websites are often conceived and launched in the new cafés or in trendy co-working spaces situated in Cairo and Tunis. For example, *Aatik* was envisioned at *Co-gite*, a shared working environment which consists of a deluxe villa equipped with a swimming pool and garden, located in the posh area of Le Lac in Tunis [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**]. The place is managed by a Tunisian businessman who wants to offer young Tunisian entrepreneurs the possibility of brainstorming, as well as taking a nap or watching a movie together, on the model of American start-up companies. In Cairo, some of these co-working spaces consist of big flats where young entrepreneurs may work shoulder to shoulder with a translator or a graphic designer.

Thanks to crowdfunding, a number of projects in Egypt and Tunisia actually do get financed, among them a dystopic play entitled *First Draft*, set between a static present and a future marked by an environmental catastrophe [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**]; a two-week summer camp gathering more than sixty youngsters from Arab countries on a journey of learning and self-expression [↗**Self-help**]; the production of hundred videos on marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, health and more in both English and Arabic, accessible for free on the Internet [↗**Baby Milk**]; the establishment of a Tunisian company named *Audiolaby* that produces free and paid audiobooks, podcasts and audio stories for children; a project for print on demand allowing emerging authors to decide the number and format of the books they want to publish without having to deal with commercial publishing companies; a movie on high-speed car accidents in Egypt; the restoration of the Rashīdī

Institute for Tunisian Music (originally established in Tunis in 1924), with the aim of devoting part of the building to a co-working space and turning its physical library into a digital open access archive. Among the projects that do not make it: the creation of a 3D Tunisian TV comedy, and an e-commerce site for Egyptian textiles.

Crowdfunding is widespread, but it faces several challenges, the biggest being that e-commerce is not fully established in the Arab world. Many Tunisian and Egyptian citizens do not have access to a credit card in their home country, so fundraisers need to rely mainly on their fellow countrymen living abroad [↗Migration]. Inside the country, however, one can also use money transfer agencies, like Western Union, or organize group meet-ups. The women of *Aatik*, for instance, hold a number of roundtable discussions in December at *Cogito*, where they illustrate their project and invite their "followers" to donate to the project. *The Room* in Cairo publishes a video on their Facebook page to invite people to visit their venue and register as members to the association.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Pop Music ♦ Social Media ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity) ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Normality = Heroism (Surviving) ♦ Hope = Hell (Dystopia)

References

AATIK. "Meet Rabiha and Hiba, two women artisans working with Aatik who together wove this carpet." Facebook Status Update, 13 December 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/aatik.project/?hc_ref=ARQFjgW3UDv9aWDMJWWI2Hh2rdQDw7a1l-vfoSSOS7cb9ZBajWnbtk4RGDLExxMG5GM&fref=nf>.

AATIK. "Friends of Aatik! C'est le grand jour de la table ronde et votre chance de soutenir les femmes artisanes de l'Aroussa." Facebook Status Update, 9 December 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/aatik.project/?hc_ref=ARSC1bf011aG-c3h_ Pva6he7euXHaOVRM1kNjxorYgnCHcOTyr8o8EDoUVJ8ZXezgcs&fref=nf>.

[ARAB CROWDFUNDING=] <http://www.arabcrowdfunding.com>.

[COFUNDY=] Plateforme de Crowdfunding en Dons Pour l'Afrique, <www.cofundy.com>.

"Crowdfunding Campaign to Revive the Art of Egyptian Quilts." *Cairo Scene*, June 17, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/Crowdfunding-Campaign-Aims-to-Revive-the-Art-of-Egyptian-Quilt>.

[INDIEGOGO =] Crowdfund Innovations & Buy Unique Products, <www.indiegogo.com>.

LILIA, Blaise, and Sbouai SANA. "Revolution Has Allowed Young Tunisian Entrepreneurs to Dream Big." *True Africa*, August 19, 2016, <https://trueafrica.co/article/co-working-spaces-in-tunisia/>.

[THE ROOM =] N. N. "روم محتاج دعمكم و مساندتكم Room needs your support." Facebook Video, December 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/roomartspace/videos/1206535712762168/>.

[ZOOMAL =] Crowdfunding Platform of the Arab World, <www.zoomal.com>.

◄ teresa.pepe@ikos.uio.no ►

Dancing

► Desideratum.

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- Aṭfāl Shawāri‘
- belly-dance
- concerts
- El General
- Feel the beat
- music bands
- singers, singing, female singers, singers of the revolution
- street musicians, street style
- underground music/groups/bands
- videos, video clips

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Pop Music

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ True *vs.* False

Cf. also [↗**Pop Music**] and [↗**Beautiful *vs.* Ugly**].

◄ ...@... ►

© N. N.

Disappearances

By Stephan Guth

"Give us our children back!" In a desperate attempt to protest and to do something, a group of parents hold up posters of the sons and daughters they have left to the Islamic State. They have gathered, on their own initiative—the Tunisian authorities could not help them—, in a small provincial town in the south to exchange information and attract public attention so that, perhaps, in some way or another, their call will reach their children or those they have fallen prey to.

The bereaved parents who are "doomed to hope," as the title of a prize-winning short documentary has it, are the iconic symbol of a social tragedy that has lost nothing of its urgency even two years after the screening of *Condamné à l'espoir*. Not only is the documentary still shown on international film festivals as representing the present state of affairs; the topic of the disappearance of young men and women with the aim of joining the ranks of the Islamic State also appears in historical overviews like *Egypt's Modern Pharaohs*, and it reappears in several productions, documentary as well as fictional, of the current year, among them also "The Flower of Aleppo" (*Zahrat Ḥalab*), the moving story of a mother who travels to Syria in an attempt to find her beloved son.

Condamné à l'espoir is concluded, as a kind of background appendix, by a statistic of countries where IS combatants are believed to come from, with the estimated number of fighters following the name of the country. Tunisia tops the list: "3000," followed by Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Jordan. There are much fewer fighters from other countries: 400 from Turkey, 300 from Germany, etc. Egypt is among the latter group: roughly a tenth of the figure given for Tunisia.

Considerable differences notwithstanding, documentaries and fiction alike do not only deplore but also try to understand and explain these disappearances. To this aim they explore the youths' past and their family history. In *Condamné à l'espoir*, the parents spend all their time combing the past, but they do not have a clue at all. Their son had always been a 'normally' religious-minded boy. Were there indications of his mutation into a radical Islamist? Could they have foreseen and prevented his dropping out? They are at a loss, feel powerless, impotent, paralyzed. The family belongs to the less well-off, struggling for survival on the verge of poverty; so, was perhaps the lack of a perspective of a life in dignity or the impossibility to get out of the circle of misery among the reasons that made him leave? [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**] One cannot know. – In the Egyptian documentary "We have never been kids" (*Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan*), Khalīl, the eldest son of a hard-working single mother from one of the Cairo slums [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***], leaves at least a last message from which one can guess that he must have experienced his situation as absolutely desperate. While the screen is black, we hear him tell the author on the phone (in a recorded last call) that he, too, is leaving to join the IS forces because, as he says, he is at a point now where he either has to die himself or kill others. Evidently, he cannot bear any longer what he has borne so far: a life in poverty, without a father (the mother had decided to leave the man because he used to beat her), as the eldest male, sharing with his mother the responsibility for the

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *75–*85
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

family's survival (and therefore having to take all kinds of jobs from early childhood), but also feeling responsible for the family's honour, which, in Khalīl's eyes, has been stained by his younger brother, Nūr, who had made his living as a boy prostitute and become gay [↗**LGBT**]; Khalīl feels that he has to kill his brother, but before he can do so, Nūr, feeling the contempt and sensing the danger, goes into hiding himself, without anybody knowing anything about his whereabouts. – In contrast, 17-year-old Murād in *Zahrat Ḥalab* has a middle-class background—the father an artist, the mother an emergency nurse—and he lives in socially much less precarious conditions, can go to school, play the guitar, and (in the beginning) even has a girlfriend. Yet, what, according to the movie, drives him into the arms of the jihadists nevertheless is the fact that he does not get the orientation that parents, especially the father, should provide to an adolescent: the parents have separated, the father is an intellectual, a—as Murād thinks—"lousy" artist-alcoholic, the mother has to work hard for their living, and neither is present when Murād needs them. It seems that he loves his mother, but does not really recognize her as an authority; and he hates his father because he does not care.

Apart from shedding light on poverty, the psychological disposition of boys and girls in the age of puberty, and difficult family backgrounds as reasons that combine to let the seductive appeal of IS ideology to succeed, the films also focus on how the bereaved parents cope, or fail to cope, with the disappearance of their children. While *Condamné à l'espoir* and *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan* show desperate parents who feel unable to do anything but bear their fate, *Zahrat Ḥalab* imagines Murād's mother as a proactive character, an intelligent and courageous woman [↗**Male *vs.* Female**] who manages to track down her disappeared son and get very close to him in Syria. However, the events then escalate, culminating in the son shooting, and killing, his mother without recognizing her because she is wearing the uniform of a male soldier to camouflage herself—a dramatic ending that underlines the tragedy of such cases.

While this type of disappearance seems to prevail in Tunisia, in Egypt "disappearance" mostly means "*forced* disappearance" (*ikhtifā' qasrī*), that is, state-sanctioned detention and abduction (TRAFFORD & RAMADHANI):

> Security officers kidnap individuals they believe are activists, force them to provide information or testify to wrongdoing, and deny for days, weeks or months that they are keeping them in custody. Some of those kidnapped are then taken to court—or released—while the whereabouts of others remains unknown (MANSOUR).

Advocacy groups like The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF, *al-Mufawwaḍiyyah al-miṣriyyah lil-ḥuqūq wa'l-ḥurriyyāt*), the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, or the El Nadeem Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (*Markaz al-Nadīm li-ta'hīl ḍaḥāyā 'l-ʿunf wa'l-taʿdhīb*) try to keep track of the hundreds of such cases and provide reports. They regularly update the figures on the Internet—202 between December 2015 and March 2016, 86 in April, 93 in May, and so on (ADLY et al., *Markaz al-Nadīm*)—and also put them in perspective, comparing recent developments with previous years' statistics [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. For instance, the ECRF recorded 1,840 cases in 2015 (TRAFFORD & RAMADHANI). Most affected are young people, especially students, suspected to be members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood or the IS,

but also civil society activists, journalists, writers, people allegedly belonging to secret Masonic organizations or spying for a foreign power (ISMAIL & WALSH, MANSOUR). According to a report published by Amnesty International in July, sometimes even children as young as fourteen "vanish without trace at the hands of the state" (AI, MICHAELSON). After the massive crackdown on the opposition in connection with the fifth anniversary of the January 25 uprisings [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**], activist Mona Seif thinks the regime's goal is

> to strike anyone capable of mobilizing protests. The aim is to silence anyone working from the grassroots. [...] Any platform that allows people to organize must be stopped (Interview with ACCONCIA, February 8).

When kidnapping and arresting, security forces aren't particularly choosy:

> There have been periods when every young person between 15 and 30 years walking around Tahrir Square was arrested (Mona SEIF, *ibid.*).

In June, a cartoon in *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm* mocks the State Security's arbitrariness that seems to be governed by the principle 'the more the better':

> *Policeman*: The guy we arrested because he's not fasting in Ramaḍān—turns out he's Christian, sir.
> *His boss*: He deserves it. I am sure he doesn't fast during Lent either.

(Cartoon by ʿAmr SALĪM, *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, reproduced in *Middle East Eye*)
[↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]

People who were arrested themselves or were present when others were, report that they observed "a lot of indecision" on the side of the security forces regarding who actually is the target of their raid and whether or not everyone else present should be arrested (AFIFY). Again, the regime's paranoic fear of falling victim to conspiracies and/or terrorism suggests a 'the more the better' strategy for the detentions—after all, there are enough prisons in the country, "There is room for everybody," as the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) service titles its survey about prisons in Egypt in September [↗**Prison**].

Forced disappearances are all but a new phenomenon, as can be seen, for example, from the fact that Bāsim Yūsuf, the prominent ex-host of the satirical news program *il-Barnāmig* (suspended and ended in 2014), a week before the fifth anniversary of the uprisings in January expects a new wave of arbitrary detentions in connection with the commemoration of the revolution [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**] and therefore launches a campaign on Twitter, #I_participated_in_the_January_revolution, to publish the stories of those unjustly detained, those who were forcibly disappeared and those detained over strange charges. "It's our duty to remember all of them whether they are famous or not." (*EgyptIndependent / Al-Masry Al-Youm*).

Observers, activists, and analysts hold that security forces have increasingly resorted to kidnapping ever since emergency law was lifted in 2012 (Mansour) and that forced disappearances have become "unofficial security policy" as a response to economic instability and an Islamist insurgency in the Sinai (TRAFFORD & RAMADHANI). However,

early in the year, many people still seem to experience these practices as a relatively new phenomenon, something that has increased only during the last few months—many think it began to surge in particular after Magdī ʿAbd al-Ghaffār took office as interior minister in March 2015 (ISMAIL & WALSH). But when the government widens its crackdown on opponents, real or imagined, and hundreds vanish again on the 25th of January and during the following days, among them also Italian student Giulio Regeni whose body is found, on the 3rd of February, with signs of torture on it, a new level seems to be reached, and it soon becomes commonplace that "the risk of being snatched from the street and forcibly disappeared by the country's security forces has never been greater" than now (MICHAELSON).

All arbitrariness notwithstanding, and irrespective also of the great deal of indecision displayed by the security forces during their operations, public opinion nevertheless begins to think of forced disappearances as a *systematic* strategy and "a key instrument of state policy in Egypt" (*ibid.*). For many, it becomes obvious that the regime's main goal is "to establish a state of fear" (MANSOUR). They do not believe what the government always claims in defence of the actions of security bodies, namely that the citizens who were detained "have harmed national security, threatened public order, offended public decency, or insulted religion" (Mansour) [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**, ↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. Rather, the critics are convinced that the main objective of forced disappearances is to demonstrate "that anyone who dares criticize the government will face a similar fate" (Mohamed Elmissiry, in Amnesty International) [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. Some feel reminded of Chile or Argentina of the 1970s "when a military junta [...] kidnapped thousands of dissidents, students and other innocent citizens—most of whom were disappeared forever" (Mansour); others think the Egyptian case, though similar, is different, at least in scale: people are tortured in the police stations, still not in stadiums (two interlocutors in an interview with one of the members of the "In 2016" project core group, February). In reality, it is a sign of the System's weakness and its hysterical obsession and paranoia: because it has no control over its citizens and fears them, it resorts to power and terror (Mona SEIF, interview with ACCONCIA).

What, according to those critics, makes things even worse is that

> this hysterical environment feeds on and breeds theories of conspiracy [↗**True *vs.* False**] and xenophobia [↗The **Suspect Foreigner**], in which all opponents of the government and those calling for reform and accountability have been labeled foreign agents and traitors, or naïve, brainwashed youth (MANSOUR).

Moreover, the regime's way of dealing with opponents and its de facto neglect of civic and human rights reinforces the prevailing conviction that "security forces are above the law," enjoy impunity (Mansour), have a "'carte blanche to discourage dissent' in the struggle for stability" (TRAFFORD & RAMADHANI). In this way, violence becomes normalized.

Nevertheless, there is also a lot of popular support for the regime's measures. "A significant number of Egyptians accept, and even cheer, a wide array of rights violations," especially if they can be convinced that the victim is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Pro-government talk-show hosts and columnists also play a role in forming public opinion when they follow the official discourse and

> describe these violations as isolated incidents that should be treated as misconduct. They claim Egypt is in the midst of a "war on terror," in which security forces should be empowered, not criticized (MANSOUR) [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**].

A forced disappearance usually starts with police or plaincloth security forces breaking into the suspected opponent's home at night, or raiding his or her place of work or studies, or picking him/her on the way (as in Giulio Regeni's case). It also happens that youth are abducted from a football match (to frame an attack on a police officer! – *MadàMaṣr*), and almost 150 arrestations are reported to have taken place during the wave of protests, demonstrations, and agitation on Facebook—the *il-Ṭullāb mish ha-tbīʿ* ("The students will not sell") campaign—in connection with the Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr case (FAHMĪ) [↗**Red Sea Islands**]. People are then brought to, and detained in, one of the more than 500 official/legal prisons or police stations or one of the illegal/secretive "detention centres, run by the security forces" (ISMAIL & WALSH, ANHRI). Arrestations are not made formally, and people are held incommunicado for an average period of two to four weeks, but sometimes also months (MANSOUR), during which their families cannot determine where they are held, or by whom. Typically, the suspected culprits are not told what they are accused of, and they are denied access to a lawyer. During the period of detention, relatives and friends are of course worried that people may be dead—which they sometimes indeed are: they "turn up dead, their bodies dumped in morgues" (the desperate search for disappeared beloved ones in morgues is an impressive event in Muḥammad Rabīʿ's IPAF-shortlisted dystopian novel *ʿUṭārid*!) or along a road in the desert, as not only the Regeni case shows:

> The family of Ahmed Galal received a phone call in January asking them to receive his body 10 days after he had been abducted from his house and held at an unknown location (AFIFY).

Critics of these practices repeatedly underline that all this is against the law [↗**True *vs.* False**]: Article 54 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates,

> Every person whose freedom is restricted shall be immediately notified of the reasons, shall be informed of his/her rights in writing, shall be immediately allowed to contact his/her relatives and lawyer and shall be brought before an investigation authority within 24 hours of the restriction of freedom. Investigations may not start with such individuals unless his/her lawyer is present (MANSOUR).

Those who 'only' are abducted and detained may count themselves lucky. Others have to undergo harsh interrogations in which they are forced, often by way of torture, to mention names of friends and "collaborators." When, and if, they finally emerge, weeks or months after their abduction, somewhere in the country, they look as dirty and emaciated as Islām Khalīl, an electronics sales agent whose case is still well remembered: he was arrested from his house last May and spent four months in detention, accused of joining a terrorist organization. Like him, victim of abduction often report that their interrogators suspended them from their arms and legs, and administered electric shocks to their genitals. When Islām returned, "he didn't look like the Islam I know," his brother remembers. Others, like student Esraa al-Taweel (Isrāʾ al-Ṭawīl) who was arrested accidentally in summer 2015 and whose case has become equally iconic because it received media attention for two weeks (AFIFY),

say interrogating officers threatened to detain their relatives if they didn't cooperate, or they were made to hear the screams of their friends who were "apparently being tortured nearby" (MANSOUR).

For a long time, authorities are eager to deny that forced disappearances actually happen. Still in March, Interior Minister Magdī ʿAbd al-Ghaffār keeps repeating what he has been saying ever since last November, namely that there is "not even a single case" of *ikhtifāʾ qasrī* in Egypt (BARAKĀT, MICHAELSON, *al-Taḥrīr*), adding that "we are 90 million citizens—the disappearance of 200 is normal" (TRAFFORD & RAMADHANI). Consequently, protests and complaints at first simply end up ignored. Even when Egypt's human rights record comes under fresh scrutiny due to heightened international attention after the Regeni affair (ISMAIL & NOURELDIN), the Ministry still issues statements saying that all these cases are false allegations [↗**True *vs.* False**]: most of those missing seem to have left the country to join the ranks of *Dāʿish* (the IS). Such declarations are made despite the fact that many of the alleged IS fighters resurface in prisons of the police or State Security (FAHMĪ).

Gradually, however, with the number of forced disappearances and both external and internal pressure increasing, the silence barrier is broken—at least partly:

> In less than a year, Egypt's Ministry of Interior went from outright denial in the face of accusations that it increasingly carries out forced disappearances to addressing the issue in several statements and engaging with the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) [*al-Majlis al-qawmī li-ḥuqūq al-insān*] to locate those reported as victims,

writes Hibah ʿAfīfī in *madàMaṣr* already in mid-February (AFIFY). Though the Interior Minister himself still prefers to deny, authorities seem to begin, by and by, to publish lists of detained citizens so that at least some of the disappeared can be identified and spotted—now you know *that* they are detained, and *where.* Afify attributes this change to the "ongoing back-and-forth between the Interior Ministry and the NCHR" (*ibid.*). But there are many other factors that contribute to a slow, if reluctant and always unreliable, precarious opening:

- After the disappearance and death of Giulio Regeni, the world's eyes are looking at Egypt and the human rights situation in the country is in the focus of international attention.
- "Detainees have devised a system whereby whoever is released, or gets access to the outside world through lawyers, reports on the other disappeared people they have met" (AFIFY).
- Facebook campaigns like "Freedom for the Brave" or "Stop Forced Disappearance," and Twitter hashtags such as *#il-shabāb_fēn* / #Where_Have_All_the_Young_Ones_Gone, #Remember_them, *#al-Ḥurriyyah lil-muʿtaqalīn* (Freedom for the Arrested) or #Stop_the_torture_in_Alexandria (*MadàMaṣr*, Feb 10) provide important platforms for the parties involved to document, exchange information and experience, publish reports and spread stories, protest, call for action, etc. [↗**Social Media**]. They are particularly effective when they are initiated or backed by celebrities like Bassem Youssef (who launches the Twitter campaigns #I_participated_in_the_January_revolution in mid-January and #Remember_them) (*EgyptIndependent* / *Al-Masry Al-Youm*).

– Very helpful in keeping track of the disappeared is also a series of warning apps such as *I Protect*, created by the Egyptian Council for Rights and Freedoms. It "allows Android phone users to key in a code when they are being detained, which sends three text messages to contacts and an email containing the location of their arrest to the ECRF. The group hopes the messages will aid a quick reaction during the first 24 hours of an arrest, key to stopping people being transferred from a police station to a larger facility, making them harder to find," which in turn "prevents [...] forced disappearance, and therefore reduces the risks of being subjected to torture or other ill treatment" (MICHAELSON).
– More and more, social media campaigns that circulate widely also attract the attention of the mainstream media, so that several forcibly disappeared become quasi-iconic figures via the discussion of their stories by popular TV show hosts like Wael el-Ebrashy (Wā'il al-Ibrāshī) or Amr Adeeb (ʿAmr Adīb). Even TV channels that are normally supportive of the regime start to highlight the plight of people seeking news of missing relatives, and urge the authorities to respond sympathetically to their pleas for help. Eventually even official newspapers start to cover such issues (Ismail & Walsh). In this way, the cases of Islām Khalīl and Isrā' al-Ṭawīl have become "sagas" (Mansour) that are remembered and referred to, time and again, also a year after the two disappeared and resurfaced.

Public awareness and disquiet over forced disappearances also grow steadily after policemen of the Maṭariyya *qism* in northeast Cairo reportedly assaulted two doctors at a nearby hospital in January—they refused to falsify medical reports in favour of the police. The incident becomes a "high-profile case" (*madàMaṣr* Feb. 12) when several thousand doctors solidarize with their colleagues and follow the Doctors Syndicate's call for an extraordinary general assembly, which then declares a partial nationwide strike and demands the sacking of the Health Minister—a really "unprecedented protest" (Mansour).

As a consequence, by February/March there are almost daily reports of new detentions—so many that people start to get used to them. "Like the immune system grows accustomed to drinking tainted water, the mind adapts to and normalizes ever-greater levels of horror—violence, torture, mass killings" (Esterman). When people aren't able to metabolize all this any longer many become "somewhat inured" to it (Ismail & Walsh).

The regime, in its turn, does not really seem to be impressed by the public's increased awareness about forced disappearances, and they are not more than a bit annoyed about international attention in the wake of Regeni's death. To a certain degree, they fulfil NGOs' demands for more transparency; at the same time, however, the NCHR is still frustrated: in summer, its head resigns over what he describes as "a lack of cooperation" from the state (Michaelson). And when the "EU Parliament passes a resolution to suspend military cooperation with Egypt following Regeni's murder" (*madàMaṣr*, March 10), 'Egyptian Regenis' are found to relativize the own Regeni case. In an interview with the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, al-Sīsī points to the disappearance of a young Egyptian citizen named ʿĀdil Muʿawwaḍ Haykal in Italy: he is believed to have 'vanished' five months ago and hasn't been found yet, despite all efforts (Ṣabrī). Another young Egyptian, a student in California, "was reportedly found in custody of the FBI after disappearing without a trace for several days"

(*Egyptian Streets*). The similarity of his fate with that of Egyptian cases of forced disappearance is striking: Allegedly,

> Emad El-Din Ali Mohamed Nasr El Sayed (Emad El Sayed) disappeared on the morning of 12 February 2016 without anyone knowing why [...]. For more than a week, family members and friends were left perplexed and worried about the 23-year-old. However, it was soon revealed by some family members that El Sayed was apprehended by the FBI 'for sharing a post' against U.S. Republican Presidential candidate Donald Trump [...]. [...] the USA's 'paranoia' with terrorism and the fact El Sayed was studying aviation contributed to why he was arrested (*Egyptian Streets*).

These cases are used to demonstrate that in a global perspective, Regeni's disappearance wasn't something that Egypt in particular should be reproached for—the likes of it happen to Egyptian citizens in Italy or the U.S. as well. It doesn't take long until Haykal becomes "the Egyptian Regeni" in the media. But some people wonder: Given that Haykal disappeared already in October 2015 why is it only now that we get to know about him? One may get the impression "that it was not primarily the destiny of Egyptian citizens abroad that mattered, but the possibility to use a citizen's name as an argument to counter attacks," an article in *al-Manaṣṣah* concludes in March (Ṣabrī) [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority** (Maṣr *vs.* Barrah)].

This is not the only time that comments on the regime's almost cynical attitude towards forced disappearances take a sarcastic undertone [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. When *Shaffāf*, the online magazine of the Egyptian Universities Network (*Shabakat al-jāmiʿāt al-miṣriyyah*), publishes a review of the year in December, it does so under a heading that highlights the contrast between 'fact and fiction': What Sisi had solemnly proclaimed the "Year of the Youth" *(ʿām al-shabāb)* on a celebration at the Opera in January, actually turned out to mean, at the Egyptian universities, the "annullation of the elections, arrests, and the forced disappearance of more than 140 students." Is this the way Sisi shows his pride of the youth which he was so eager to underline at the Youth Conference in Sharm al-Shaykh in spring? (FAHMĪ) [↗**True *vs.* False**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ LGBT ♦ Prison ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Freedom *vs.* Security/Stability ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority (Maṣr *vs.* Barrah) ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

Written sources

ACCONCIA, Giuseppe. "Mona Seif: 'They cannot silence people with bloodshed'." *il manifesto – Global edition*, February 8, 2016, <https://global.ilmanifesto.it/mona-seif-they-cannot-silence-people-with-bloodshed/> (as of Feb. 9, 2016). – Originally published in Italian at *il manifesto*, Feb. 7, 2016, <http://ilmanifesto.info/mona-seif-la-verita-per-giulio-va-cercata-nei-crimini-del-regime/>.

ADLY, Farid, Viviana MAZZA, Monica SARGENTINI, and Federica SENEGHINI. "Spariti in Egitto: Giulio e gli altri: "735 sparizioni forzate in Egitto negli ultimi otto mesi; 498 gli scomparsi dei quali non si sa più nulla." *Corriere della sera* (online), no date [2016], <http://www.corriere.it/reportages/esteri/2016/regeni-scomparsi-egitto/?refresh_ce-cp> (as of April 4, 2016).

AFIFY, Heba [Hibah ʿAfīfī]. "How forced disappearance broke the silence barrier." *madàMaṣr*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/16/feature/politics/how-forced-disappearance-broke-the-silence-barrier/> (last accessed March 14, 2018).

ANHRI (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information). "There is Room for Everyone… Egypt's Prisons Before & After January 25 Revolution / Hunāka muttasaʿ lil-jamīʿ: sujūn Miṣr qabl wa-baʿd thawrat yanāyir." *ANHRI* (online), September 5, 2016, <http://anhri.net/there-is-room-for-everyone-egypts-prisons-before-after-the-25-of-january-revolution/?lang=en> (as of Jan. 4, 2017).

BARAKĀT, Muḥammad. "Wazīr al-dākhiliyyah: lā yūjad 'ikhtifā' qasrī' fī Miṣr... wa-nattakhidh ijrā'āt rādiʿah ḍidd al-mukhṭi'īn." *al-Waṭan*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/848267> (last accessed March 21, 2018).

CUNNINGHAM, Erin. "Egyptian writer caught up in government's expanding crackdown." *The Washington Post* (online), February 2, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/egyptian-writer-caught-up-in-governments-expanding-crackdown/2016/02/02/9277f8c4-c5f4-11e5-b933-31c93021392a_story.html?utm_term=.878641d6b186> (as of June 2, 2016).

[*Egyptian Streets* =] N. N. "Egyptian Student Arrested After Facebook Post 'Threatening Donald Trump'." *Egyptian Streets*, February 27, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/27/egyptian-student-arrested-after-facebook-post-attacking-donald-trump/> (as of March 2, 2016).

[*EgyptIndependent* (< *Al-Masry Al-Youm*) =] N. N. "Bassem Youssef launches campaign for detainees, forced disappearance victims" (edited translation from *Al-Masry Al-Youm*). *EgyptIndependent*, January 19, 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/bassem-youssef-launches-campaign-detainees-forced-disappearance-victims/> (as of Jan. 27, 2016).

ESTERMAN, Isabel. "On Giulio and the cost of doing business in Egypt." *madàMaṣr*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/10/opinion/u/on-giulio-and-the-cost-of-doing-business-in-egypt/> (as of Feb. 11, 2016).

FAHIM, Kareem [Karīm Fāhim], Nour YOUSSEF [Nūr Yūsuf], and Declan WALSH. "Death of Student, Giulio Regeni, Highlights Perils for Egyptians, Too." February 12, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/13/world/middleeast/giulio-regeni-egypt-killing.html> (last accessed March 14, 2018). – A print version of this article appeared with the headline "Italian's Death Puts a Spotlight on Perils Facing Egyptians, Too," in *NY Times* (NY edition), February 13, 2016: A4.

FAHMĪ, Hājar. "'Āmm al-shabāb '2016' bi'l-jāmiʿāt: bayn 'ilghā' al-intikhābāt wa-''tiqāl wa-'khtifā' qasrī li-mā yazīd ʿan 140 ṭāliban." *Shaffāf: shabakat al-jāmiʿāt al-miṣriyyah* (online), December 18, 2016, <http://www.shafaff.com/article/53152> (as of Dec. 31, 2016).

HALAWA, Ibrahim. "I'm in an Egyptian prison – being stripped and beaten is normal." *The Guardian* (International edition, online), September 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/02/prison-egypt-stripped-beaten-witness-torture-egypt> (as of March 13, 2017).

ISMAIL, Amina [Amīna Ismāʿīl], and Declan WALSH. "Hundreds Vanishing in Egypt as Crackdown Widens, Activists Say." *The New York Times* (online), January 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/27/world/middleeast/hundreds-vanishing-in-egypt-as-crackdown-widens-activists-say.html> (as of Jan. 27, 2016). – Print version under the title "Government Foes, Real and Imagined, Vanish in Egypt," *NY Times*, Jan. 27, 2016: A4.

ISMAIL, Amina, and Ola NOURELDIN. "Egypt to shut prominent NGO that documents alleged rights abuses—security sources." *Reuters* (online), February 17, 2016, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/ uk-egypt-rights/egypt-to-shut-prominent-ngo-that-documents-alleged-rights-abuses-security-sources-

idUKKCN0VQ23F?irpc=932&utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=New%20Campaign&utm_term=%2AMideast%20Brief> (as of April 30, 2016).

[*madàMaṣr* (a) =] N. N. "At least 20 Alexandrian young people forcibly disappeared in the last week." *madàMaṣr*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/10/news/u/at-least-20-alexandrian-young-people-forcibly-disappeared-in-the-last-week/> (as of Feb. 11, 2016).

[*madàMaṣr* (b) =] N. N. "Update: Doctors mobilize against police violations, vote for dismissal of health minister." *madàMaṣr*, February 12, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/12/news/politics/update-doctors-mobilize-against-police-violations-vote-for-dismissal-of-health-minister/> (accessed March 17, 2018).

[*madàMaṣr* (c) =] N. N. "Update: EU Parliament passes resolution to suspend military cooperation with Egypt following Regeni's murder." *madàMaṣr*, March 10, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/03/10/news/u/update-eu-parliament-passes-resolution-condemning-torture-in-egypt-following-regenis-murder/> (accessed March 18, 2018).

MANSOUR, Khaled [Khālid Manṣūr]. "Behind the sun: Is this the end of the rule of law in Egypt?" *madàMaṣr*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/14/opinion/u/behind-the-sun-is-this-the-end-of-the-rule-of-law-in-egypt/> (as of March 14, 2018).

MARKAZ AL-NADĪM li-ta'hīl ḍaḥāyā 'l-'unf wa'l-ta'dhīb. "Ikhtifā' qasrī." [undated tag, 2016], <https://alnadeem.org/tags/اختفاء-قسرى> (as of March 18, 2018).

MICHAELSON, Ruth. "App launches in Egypt to combat forced disappearances." *The Guardian* (International edition, online), September 6, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/06/app-launches-egypt-combat-forced-disappearances-i-protect> (last accessed March 14, 2018).

[MIDDLE EAST EYE =] N. N. "Egyptian police raid cafes during Ramadan fast." *Middle East Eye*, June 10, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/raids-carried-out-against-cafes-during-ramadan-fast-egypt-524263893>.

RABĪ', Muḥammad. *'Uṭārid* (Otared/Mercury). Cairo: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2015. (Shortlisted for the 2016 IPAF).

ṢABRĪ, Mu'tazz. "Ḥaqqiq: 'Ādil Mu'awwaḍ Haykal.. waraqat ḍaghṭ muntaqāh li-muwājahat 'ma'zaq Rijīnī'." *al-Manaṣṣah*, March 17, 2016, <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/1343> (as of March 22, 2016).

SHAMS EL-DIN, Mai [Mayy Shams al-Dīn]. "AUC remembers Giulio Regeni, protests university's position on his murder." *madàMaṣr*, February 25, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/25/feature/politics/auc-remembers-giulio-regeni-protests-universitys-position-on-his-murder/> (as of March 14, 2018).

STACHER, Joshua. "Egypt Running on Empty." *Middle East Report Online* (mero) 030816, March 8, 2016, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero030816> (as of April 30, 2016).

[*al-Taḥrīr* =] N. N. "'Abd al-Ghaffār yunfī wujūd ikhtifā' qasrī... wa-Khālid 'Alī: il-wazīr khāyif yiṭḥākam." *al-Taḥrīr*, March 16, 2016, <https://www.tahrirnews.com/posts/392197/الوزير+خايف+يتحاكم+%3Aعبد+الغفار+ينفي+وجود+اختفاء+قسري..+وخالد+علي> (last accessed March 21, 2018).

TRAFFORD, Robert, and Mays RAMADHANI. "Ruling by fear: Egyptian government 'disappears' 1,840 people in just 12 months." *Independent* (online), March 10, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/egyptian-government-disappears-1840-people-in-just-12-months-ruling-by-fear-a6923671.html> (as of April 30, 2016).

Movies

'Abadan lam nakun 'aṭfālan (We have never been kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). Egypt, U.A.E., Qatar, Lebanon 2016.

Condamné à l'espoir (Doomed to hope). Short documentary by Youssef Ben Ammar. Tunisia 2014. Among the winners of the short film competition 2016.

Corps étranger (Foreign body). By Raja Amari. Tunisia, France 2016.

Egypt's Modern Pharaohs. Documentary trilogy by Jīhān al-Ṭāhirī (Jihan El-Tahri). Egypt, France, USA, Qatar 2015/2016.

Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi (Hedi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyyah (Mohamed Ben Attia). Tunisia, Belgium, France 2016.

Zahrat Ḥalab (The Flower of Aleppo). By Riḍà Bāhī (Ridha Behi). Tunisia 2016.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Disasters

…in Egypt

By Walter Armbrust

In Egypt, as everywhere else, accidents happen. Whether or not accidents qualify as disasters is an undefinable matter or scale and frequency; one knows them when one sees them. In any event, automobile, train, airplane, and maritime accidents; buildings falling, and floods: all of them occur in 2016. Egypt is in a seismically active area, but thankfully no deadly earthquakes occur, though the popular astrologer Nevin Abū Shāla had predicts at the beginning of the year that a deadly tremor would strike Egypt. Many of the disasters that actually do occur could be called acts of God, and yet quite a few people do not believe that all disasters "just happen." Youtubers continue to upload a video of television presenter Tāmir Amīn warning the public of the awesome power held by something called "al-Majlis al-Aʿlà lil-ʿĀlam"—the supreme council of the world [↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**]:

> In the next few years these countries and their intelligence agencies, and the Supreme Council of the World, have said that they will destroy countries without starting wars with them, for example that they'll send a tsunami like the one that Indonesia had a few years ago, and that these will completely annihilate countries, drown them or cause floods in their cities and kill thousands. They can make earthquakes by manipulating the Earth's crust in a specific city or country. They can produce a destructive earthquake—6, 7 or 8 on the Richter Scale—and flatten an entire city. Or set off volcanoes that had been dormant in some places.

Tāmir Amīn is not everyone's cup of tea. By 2016 his "Supreme Council" monologue is a re-tread from late 2015, when he was a popular target of satire on social media [↗**Social Media**] [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. In 2016 the spirit of Amīn's conspiracy talk retains enough currency that Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣādiq, head of the Egyptian State Information Service, advocates banning the children's cartoon Tom and Jerry on grounds that it promotes violence and terrorism. A newspaper article reports on this development. Its headline proclaims that Tom and Jerry have now joined the Supreme Council of the World. It is safe to say that many people find the idea of weather modification and the inducing of earthquakes and volcanoes—techniques of "Fifth Generation Warfare" according to Amīn's video—to be farfetched. Connecting such powers to the beloved Tom and Jerry strikes many as dubious, to say the least.

However, skepticism toward the most bizarre conspiracy theories is not incompatible with the view that not all disasters are random occurrences or acts of God, unforeseeable by human beings. Some are clearly terrorist acts. Others are more ambiguous. "*Bi-fiʿl fāʿil*"—someone did it—but the agent of such disasters is not always clear. The phrase *bi-fiʿl fāʿil* sounds like a grammatical rule, but in 2016 it is invoked most often in reports on a spectacular fire that occurred in the central Cairo district of al-ʿAtaba. The point is that many people who work and live in the area believe that the *fāʿil*—the agent—of this fire is an arsonist.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *86–*92
© Walter Armbrust, University of Oxford, UK

The reason that suspicion of arson comes so easily in this case is complex. It has to do with ʿAtaba's position in the city, with its reputation, and with its relation to contiguous parts of the city. Generally speaking, an *ʿataba* is a threshold, which is to say a space of transition, like the door of a house, or a gate between two different spaces. The neighbourhood of al-ʿAtaba takes its name from a palace, al-ʿAtaba al-Khaḍrāʾ, which was owned by a relative of Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha, the Ottoman general credited as the founder of modern Egypt. But in modern times al-ʿAtaba has evolved into an actual threshold befitting its name. It is the heart of a broad zone of transition between two districts that are of special concern to the state. One is "Islamic Cairo," stretching from the medieval walled city to the north to the Khalifa district at its southern end. The other is "Khedivial Cairo," the colonial city built between the banks of the Nile and the ancient city that had been inhabited for centuries before Europeans dominated Egypt between the mid-19th century and independence in 1952. "Khedivial Cairo" is conventionally glossed as "downtown" [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. Between downtown to the west and Islamic Cairo to the east lies a zone that had once consisted of lakes, orchards and palaces before the water was drained and all the now-dry land was joined together into the urban configuration that is now Cairo. This central Cairene transition zone includes Bāb al-Shaʿriyya, ʿAtaba and ʿĀbdīn. They are all neighbourhoods just west of Port Saʿīd Street (a gently curving road built over a filled-in canal that runs north-south through central Cairo).

This transition zone between Islamic Cairo and Khedivial Cairo, madly packed with workshops and small factories, is considered the heart of the city's informal commercial sector [↗ ***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***]. It is particularly famous for its intense crowdedness [↗***Zaḥma***]. But for all its frenetic activity, al-ʿAtaba and the whole belt of neighbourhoods in this central zone is relatively expendable in the visions of urban developers compared to its more illustrious districts to the east and west. This is because the neighbourhoods west of Port Said Street are neither historically important like Islamic Cairo, nor tinged with the Belle Epoque cachet of downtown that makes it important to the state, and at the same a desirable acquisition for private developers. Consequently, there are fears that both the state and private sector want to "develop" ʿAtaba into extinction. "Cairo 2050," a discredited "vision" for developing greater Cairo has been circulating for about a decade. The plan had largely ignored the central area between Islamic Cairo and downtown. Two pages in a 104-page slide show address ʿAtaba and its surroundings. A swathe of Cairo in which hundreds of thousands of people live and work was defined by Cairo 2050 as "wholesale centers" which will be "targeted" for displacement "outside of Cairo."

One may discern a model for the future of ʿAtaba in well-publicized plans for a similar district known as the Maspero Triangle. It is a section of Cairo on the Nile Corniche resembling ʿAtaba in terms of its informality, its intense crowdedness, and its proximity to downtown Cairo. The Maspero Triangle is well known to be threatened precisely with "extinction by development." Newspapers report favourably on a long-incubating plan to erase the Maspero Triangle:

> [the project to develop it] is exemplary, a rare opportunity, perhaps the last one, to exploit an enchanting view overlooking the Nile and saving this historic district that suffers from complete chaos and disintegration.

The plan for the Maspero Triangle is more destruction than gentrification. Everything in the existing neighbourhood must go: 14,000 residents, 850 shops, and of course all the buildings. The famous architectural firm Norman Foster and Partners has drawn up a plan to replace the Triangle with something more pleasing. Nominally the residents will be re-housed within their old neighbourhood. A fanciful drawing issued by Foster and Partners imagines a rustic bearded man in a *galabiyya*, presumably a pre-development resident of the area, pouring himself a coffee on a rooftop veranda, with massive skyscrapers in the distance. The authorities say all the right things about consulting Maspero's residents and preserving their rights. Few of the Maspero Triangle residents are convinced. Norman Foster and Partners are not exactly known as populist architects. Most of the people of Maspero believe that expulsion of the area's residents is in the cards, and that their homes and businesses will be replaced with housing for the super-elite [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**].

The anticipated destruction of the Maspero Triangle is a blueprint for a particular kind of urban development—a form of "creative destruction," though its creative benefits are entirely a matter of whether or not one sits in the path of the destruction. Hence a new kind of disaster comes to the fore: disaster capitalism. "Disaster capitalism" is certainly not a term of art in Egypt outside circles of economists and activists. But when ʿAtaba's Ruwayʿi district goes up in flames, vernacular equivalents to disaster capitalism become prominent both in the reactions of those most directly affected by the catastrophe, and in those parts of the media most given to indulge conspiracy theories. The facts that everyone more or less agrees on are these: that the fire began late at night on a Sunday, which is the day off for the vendors and businesses located in the area; that a consequence of this was a relative lack of people present and hence fewer eyes on the street; that the fire began in the Andalus Hotel, most of which is occupied by the offices of businesses that operate in ʿAtaba; that the fires rapidly jumped from building to building; that the city's main fire station, located virtually next door to the buildings that caught fire, mobilized a response, but not before some 200 shops and warehouses were destroyed, at a cost of millions of pounds.

The official cause of the fire was an electrical short that occurred as the electricity came back on with a surge after an outage. The victims of the fire often described their losses in resignation verging on cynicism [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**, ↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**]. As one of the larger businessmen affected by the fire put it,

> they were spraying water on that hotel, while this building on the right was on fire, and also the one on the left. And the one behind them too. How can they work; they've only got one hose. [the person interviewing him says "the government says it will pay £E 5,000 compensation to each individual] [the man being interviewed grimaces in a quasi-laugh] My storeroom had merchandise worth a million pounds. It's all gone.

It was an understatement to say that not everyone accepted negligence or a simple accident as the actual cause of the disaster. One man interviewed in the same video said flatly that,

> you could say something like this was a first-class terrorist operation. The fire didn't start in one place. It was burning here, and here and here [he gestures at the buildings all around him]. … in half an hour all of that was on fire. Half an hour. This was a terrorist operation against the people, against Egypt. [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]

A young man notes that a similar fire broke out nearby just a week ago. "How could that be? And why in particular on our day off, and at night? Not in the day when there are people around who could have stopped it. That's why I'm telling you, it was a deliberate act."

But if there are suspicions that the blaze is an act of a person and not an act of God or a consequence of negligence, then the question "why?" must inevitably be posed. Quite a few journalists and commentators are eager to take up the challenge of answering this question. In doing so they have the nearby example of Maspero in mind. One points to the government's antipathy to itinerant street vendors, many of whom store their goods in ʿAtaba at night and populate busy sidewalks during the day. The state had failed during the Revolution to carry through on a plan to restrict street vendors to certain downtown locations. Now they want to try a similar plan, which is to remove vendors from ʿAtaba and Muski and redesign the entire area. This confirms suspicions of a plan to transfer ownership of the area to big investors. Another journalist puts it more bluntly: the fire was started intentionally "in order to clear the area of itinerant vendors and shop owners in preparation for selling it to Gulf Arab investors so that they can build big new malls." The article supports its claim largely with circumstantial evidence. The blaze spread unevenly, skipping over some buildings and catching on in others; the fire brigade, located only 500 meters from the area, sent a truck that contained no water; a similarly suspicious fire had started in the area just a week ago, on the Shamm al-Nasīm holiday, near the Sednaoui (Ṣidnāwī) department store in the neighbourhood. Sednaoui has been owned by the state since the nationalizations of the Nasser era. Once an icon of middle-class culture, the store is now unprofitable due to its location. A Gulf Arab buyer is said to be interested in purchasing it. Perhaps he wants the land without the old building? Indeed, the article reiterates the story that Gulf investors are interested in the entire area. They want to

> transform it into a commercial area along the lines of Dubai, and the Cairo Governorate has agreed to the sale, except for the stumbling block posed by the itinerant vendors and the owners of the shops in ʿAtaba and Muski.

And so, at least in the public imaginary, the concept if not the actual term of "disaster capitalism" takes an honourable place next to floods, catastrophic car, train and plane accidents, and earthquakes—all the usual suspects in the pantheon of disasters. ʿAtaba may well be the next Maspero Triangle, destroyed in order to save it for the greater good of global capitalism, if not for the good of its current residents. The fire might be part of the plan. Even if it is not, few of those who live or work in central Cairo will feel at ease as the future unfolds.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Social Media ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People"

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

ʿABD AL-LAṬĪF, Aḥmad, and Muḥammad ABŪ ḌAYF. "Al-Ahālī: Al-Ḥarīq muʿtamad wa-«rizq awlādnā» ḍāʿ fī 12 sāʿa." *al-Waṭan*, May 10, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1159805> (accessed October 2, 2018).

ʿABD AL-LAṬĪF, Aḥmad, Muḥammad SAYF and Gihād al-ṬAWĪL. "Kārithat «al-ʿAtaba»: Iḥtirāq 200 maḥall wa-70 makhzanan wa-40 shaqqa." *al-Waṭan*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1159799> (accessed October 2, 2018).

ʿABD AL-RĀḌĪ, Riḥāb. "«Al-Dākhiliyya»: Mās kahrabāʾī warā' «ḥarīq al-ʿAtaba»." *Al-Waṭan*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1158866> (accessed October 2, 2018).

ʿABD AL-WAHHĀB, Sanā'. "Al-Iḥṣā' fī taqrīr «al-Sayyārāt wa'l-qiṭārāt» li-ʿām 2016: Akbar ʿadad al-ḥawādith fī yūnyū." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, December 31, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1065334 > (accessed September 27, 2018).

ʿABD AL-WAHHĀB, Walīd. "Khabīr ʿaskarī: «naqqār al-khashab» wa-ʿhārib' abraz barāmij al-jīl al-khāmis lil-ḥurūb." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/806309> (accessed October 1, 2018).

ʿĀDIL, Iḥsān. "*Bi'l-vīdiyō:* Mamdūḥ Ḥamza: yatimm al-ān tanfīdh mukhaṭṭaṭ al-Qāhira 2050 wa-bayʿihā lil-Yahūd." *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, May 13, 2016, <https://www.nmisr.com/arab-news/egypt-news/-مخطط القاهرة>).

ASHRAF, Nifīn. "Baʿd ittihām «Tūm wa-Jīrī» bi-nashr al-ʿunf bi'l-minṭaqa narṣud abraz taṣrīḥāt āthār istiyā' al-miṣriyyīn, abrazuhā «jāsūsiyyat Abla wa-Fāhītā» wa-«Majlis idārat al-ʿālam»." *Al-Dustūr*, May 9, 2016, <https://www.dostor.org/1060215> (accessed October 1, 2018).

[*AṣwātMiṣriyya*] = "Sabʿat as'ila ʿan ikhtifā' ṭā'irat al-riḥla 804 li-Miṣr lil-Ṭayarān". *Aṣwāt Miṣriyya*, May 19, 2016, <http://www.aswatmasriya.com/news/details/62829> (accessed May 27, 2018).

ʿĀṬIF, Muḥammad. "Al-Kūmīdiyā al-Sawdā': Tūm wa-Jīrī yanḍammān li-majlis idārat al-ʿālam." *Aṣwāṭ Miṣriyya*, May 5, 2016, <http://www.aswatmasriya.com/news/details/62362> (accessed October 1, 2018).

[*Egyptianomics*] = "Ūbir wa'l-siyāsa wa-fashl al-tadmīr al-khallāq fī Miṣr." *Egyptianomics* Blog, March 18, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y7urv9qp> (accessed October 2, 2018).

FARANSĪS, Fādī. "Al-Dhikrā al-ūlā li-ḍaḥāyā al-ṭā'ira al-rūsiyya fi Sīnā' … Al-Safīr Sīrgay Kīrītshīnū: Nantaẓir ta'mīn al-maṭārāt bi-nisbat 100% li-ʿawdat al-siyāḥa." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, September 30, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1032684> (accessed October 2, 2018).

FĀRŪQ, Usāma. "Ḥarīq al-Qāhira 2016: ʿUṣūr al-taḥawwul tabda' min al-ʿAtaba!" *al-Mudun*, May 12, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y8h97mdf> (accessed October 2, 2018).

GAMĀL, Dīnā. "«Ḥurūb al-jīl al-rābiʿ» tuḥāṣir Miṣr." *al-Dustūr*, March 26, 2016, <https://www.dostor.org/1015553> (accessed October 1, 2018).

al-ḤABBĀL, Ayāt. "Ḥawādith inhiyār al-ʿaqārāt fī muḥāfaẓāt Miṣr." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/873750> (accessed September 27, 2018).

al-ḤABBĀL, Ayāt, and Ḥamdī QĀSIM. "Al-Sijn min sanatayn ilā 14 sana li-56 muttahiman fī «Gharq markib Rashīd»." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, March 26, 2016, <https://www. almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1107778> (accessed September 27, 2018).

ḤASAN, Wafā'. "«Fūstir ānd bārtinīrz»: al-Tārīkh al-sirrī lil-sharika al-briṭāniyya allatī tastaʿidd li-tashrīd sukkān «muthallath Māsbīrū»." *Al-Mūjaz*, January 15, 2016, <http://www.elmogaz.com/node/257038> (accessed October 2, 2018).

[el-HEFNAWI, Ayman (?)] "Cairo Vision 2050: The Strategic Urban Development Plan of Greater Cairo Region." [n.d.], <http://mirror.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/8635_42944_AymanElhefnawi.pdf> (accessed October 2, 2018).

HINDĀWĪ, Hāshim. "al-Taʿbiʾa waʾl-iḥṣāʾ: Irtifāʿ ḥawādith al-sayyārāt ʿalà ʾl-ṭuruq ilā 7 ālāf fī 2016." *al-Waṭan*, December 31, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1735121> (accessed September 27, 2018).

[*al-Ḥurra*] = "Suyūl Miṣr al-ʿārima: 22 qatīlan wa-72 jarīḥan." *Al-Ḥurra*, October 30, 2016, <https://www.alhurra.com/a/egypt-rain-/331770.html> (accessed September 27, 2018).

IBRĀHĪM, Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Munʿim. "Aswār al-Qāhira wa-abwābuhā al-qadīma: rawʿat al-taṣmīm wa-shumūkh al-ʿimāra." *Al-Hayʾa al-ʿāmma lil-istiʿlāmāt: Bawwābatuk ilā Miṣr*, November 3, 2016, <http://sis.gov.eg/Story/130937?lang=ar> (accessed October 2, 2018).

IBRĀHĪM, Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Munʿim. "Shawāriʿ al-Qāhira al-Fāṭimiyya: ʿAbiq al-Tārīkh wa-rawʿat al-taṣmīm wa-khulūd al-ʿimāra." *Al-Hayʾa al-ʿāmma lil-istiʿlāmāt: Bawwābatuk ilā Miṣr*, June 15, 2016, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/?lang=ar> (accessed October 2, 2018).

IBRĀHĪM, Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Munʿim. "Shawāriʿ al-Qāhira al-Khidīwiyya: Rawʿa wa-fakhāma." *Al-Hayʾa al-ʿāmma lil-istiʿlāmāt: Bawwābatuk ilā Miṣr*, June 25, 2016, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/123759?lang=ar> (accessed October 2, 2018).

KAMĀL, Aḥmad. "Nakshif al-ḥaqāʾiq kāmila fī muʾāmarat ḥarīq al-ʿAtaba." *Al-Nidāʾ*, May 11, 2016, <http://www.elnedaa.com/t~46386> (accessed October 2, 2018).

KĀMIL, Nifīn. "«Al-Ismāʿīliyya lil-ʿAqārāt»" tistaʾnif anshiṭat «taṭwīr» ʿimārāt wusṭ al-balad." *Al-Shurūq*, May 31, 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=31052016&id=aa1fe6a4-3a3e-44e2-ab9a-372d8e5aabfb> (accessed October 2, 2018).

KHAYR, Muḥammad. "Taṭwīr muthallath Māsbīrū: Hākadhā yumkin istithmār al-Qāhira al-tārīkhiyya." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, February 11, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/ 891254> (accessed October 2, 2018).

al-LABŪDĪ, Rīhām. "Taqrīr li-«Nahār Jadīd» ʿan ḥarīq al-Ruwayʿī: al-Mashhad «kharāb» wa-aḥad al-ḍaḥāyā dakhal li-yunqidh biḍāʿat shaqīqih fa-kharaj juththa." *Al-Bidāya*, May 11, 2016, <http://albedaiah.com/news/2016/05/11/112858> (accessed October 2, 2018).

MĀHIR, Muṣṭafà. "Aqwā 5 zalāzil ḍarabat Miṣr khilāl al-qarn al-māḍī." *YallaFeed*, May 17, 2016, <https://yallafeed.com/aqwa-5-zlazl-dharbat-msr-khlal-alqrn-almadhy-3639> (accessed September 27, 2018).

al-MANSĪ, Rashā. "Akhṭaruhā tataʿallaq bi-ṣiḥḥat al-Sīsī: Aghrab tanabbuʾāt al-falakiyyīn fī 2016; mādhā taḥaqqaq minhā?" *Al-Fajr*, December 7, 2016, <https://www.elfagr.com/2377625> (accessed September 27, 2018).

[*MY* Oct14] = "'Imārāt wusṭ al-balad al-tārīkhiyya: Hākadhā taghayyarat Miṣr fī qarnayn." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, October 14, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1024119> (accessed October 2, 2018).

RĀGHIB, Dīnā. "'alà Khuṭà Tshīlī: Miṣr ka-tajriba jadīda lil-ʿilāj biʾl-ṣadma." *Tibyān*, August 28, 2016, <https://tipyan.com/as-chile-egypt-as-new-trial-for-shock-therapy/> (accessed October 2, 2018).

SAMIH, Mai. "Developing the Triangle." *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue 1301, June 23-29, 2016, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/16688.aspx> (accessed October 2, 2018).

al-SAYYID, Āya. "Sirr tasmiyat al-ʿAtaba al-Khaḍrāʾ waʾl-ism al-awwal lahā." *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, August 30, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y8r3kswl> (accessed October 2, 2018).

SHAKRAN, Khalid. *The Uneven City: Planning Insurgencies in Ramlet Bulaq and Maspero Triangle.* MA Thesis, University of California Irvine, 2016, <https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt2441k3s4/qt2441k3s4.pdf> (accessed October 2, 2018).

SHAMMĀʿ, Muḥammad. "Al-ʿAtaba: «Dawla dākhil dawla»." *Al-Mubtadā*, May 12, 2016, <https://www.mobtada.com/details/468707> (accessed October 2, 2018).

SHAMMĀʿ, Muḥammad. "Al-ʿAtaba: Dawlat al-khamsa milyārāt junayh." *Al-Yawm al-Jadīd*, May 17, 2016, <http://www.elyomnew.com/news/inside/2016/05/17/52910> (accessed October 2, 2018).

al-SHARQĀWĪ, Amīra. "Baʿd izālat manzilayn: Ahālī «muthallath Māsbīrū» yatakhawwafūn min ḍiyāʿ ḥilm mashrūʿ al-taṭwīr wa-yuhaddidūn al-taṣʿīd." *Al-Ahrām*, February 24, 2016, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/861919.aspx> (accessed October 2, 2018).

SZENASY, Susan. "Can we afford to leave locals out of urban regeneration?" *Metropolis*, Feb. 9, 2016, <https://www.metropolismag.com/cities/planning-cities/leaving-locals-out-urban-regeneration/> (accessed October 2, 2018).

[*Taḍāmun* Aug14] = "Al-Khalīfa". *Taḍāmun*, August 14, 2016, <http://www.tadamun.co/?post_type=ity&p=8487> (accessed October 2, 2018).

[*YT* Apr23] = "Tāmir Amīn, Majlis Idārat al-ʿĀlam". *Youtube* video, uploaded on April 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NrMoxQ7C5M> (accessed October 1, 2018).

[*YT* Jan01] = "Tanabbuʾāt ʿālimat al-falak Nīfīn Abū Shāla li-ʿām 2016." *Youtube* video, uploaded on January 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP5gslCKOBU> (accessed September 27, 2018).

[*YT* May05] = "Tūm wa-Jīrī muttahimān biʾl-irhāb". *Youtube* video, uploaded on May 5, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTZy386LhHQ> (accessed October 1, 2018).

[*YT* May10] = "Tujjār al-ʿAtaba ʿan ḥarīq «al-Ruwayʿī»: il-Ḥādith ʿamaliyya ʾirhābiyya, wiʾl-maṭāfī ḏālit mafīsh mayya." Al-Bawwāba Vidyū (*Youtube*), uploaded on May 10, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XidFlO0G4k8> (accessed October 2, 2018).

◄ walter.armbrust@sant.ox.ac.uk ►

Dollar Crisis

By Walter Armbrust

In April three of the four statues of Ramsis from the Abu Simbel Temple depicted on the back of the Egyptian one-Pound (1 £E) bill talk about a rumoured plan to float the Pound (the fourth statue lost his head long ago in an earthquake and remains silent) (YT "Ahmose") [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. The conversation begins with one of the statues asking another to loan him 5 £E. The second statue curtly refuses. The first statue then says, "Guys, what are we going to do? I've heard they're going to float us." The second statue thinks this is nonsense, prompting the first statue to appeal to the third surviving statue. "Say, old guy over there, what do you think about this?" The third statue, looking at a laptop improbably carved into the stone four thousand years ago, becomes alarmed. "It looks like they really are going to float us! … I can't stand being floated again. No, *ḥarām*!" The second statue opines that the £E is actually very strong, and that if they remain patient and wait until the year 2030, as President al-Sisi had recommended, everything will be fine. The first statue is appalled to be told that he has to wait 15 years for an improvement in the situation. "Come on," says the second statue. "You've been sitting here waiting for 4,000 years. What's another 15 years?" But the first statue is fed up. "I've had it. Give me my 5 £E and let's get out of here. Enough nonsense." "If I had some I'd give it to you," says his companion." "Same old same old," retorts the first statue. The second statue replies, "*Mish ʔādir addīk*" (I have nothing to give you), again channelling one of President al-Sisi's most famous utterances.

First Statue:	You, old guy over there. Give me 5 £E so we can get out of this place.
Third Statue:	If only I had even a penny.
First Statue:	Oh shit.
Third Statue:	What?
First Statue:	So what, I should go beg from tourists?
Third Statue:	But where are the tourists?
First Statue:	What?
Third Statue:	Where are they? There aren't any!
Second Statue:	Shut that guy up. He's going to ruin us.
First Statue:	Dude, we're already wrecked.
Second Statue:	What are you saying bro?
First Statue:	Tell you what, let's all go beg by the mosque out back.
Second Statue:	What the hell?
First Statue:	Why not? What, we're going to beg here at the temple?
Second Statue:	God forbid.
First Statue:	Oh shit. What's that? (Water starts rising from the bottom of the panel.)
Second Statue:	Oh no, oh no.
Third Statue:	Mama!

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *93–*98
© Walter Armbrust, University of Oxford, UK

First Statue: There you go. See?
Second Statue: And what did I do to deserve this?
Third Statue: *(sobbing)* Save me!
First Statue: You could see this coming. I told you.
Second Statue: This isn't right.
Third Statue: No, no, I can't swim! Don't float me! No!
First Statue: Who's floating? We're drowning! Drowning!

The conversation of the statues on the back side of the 1 £E bill is prescient. In April, when rumours of a float are everywhere, the official price of a dollar is £E 8.85 compared to £E 10.50 on the black market (Ḥuṣām). By early November, just before the float actually happens, the black market price hovers around £E 18 per dollar against an official rate that remains at £E 8.85 (ʿAbd Allāh).

But what exactly does "floating the Pound" mean? In the most straightforward sense it means a shift from strict regulation of the exchange rate between the Egyptian Pound and foreign currencies by the Central Bank of Egypt to an unfettered market in foreign exchange rates, in which rates are determined purely by supply and demand. The Central Bank can also opt for limited intervention in currency markets by withholding or releasing foreign currency reserves in order to nudge the exchange rate one way or another (CNN). Foreign exchange rates matter because the Egyptian Pound is not considered a "hard currency," which is to say a currency that is likely to retain its value relative to other currencies because its underlying economy is strong, or at least so large that it cannot be ignored by the rest of the world.

Conventionally global trade across national borders takes place through hard currencies, particularly the US dollar or the European Euro. Egypt must therefore purchase what it needs from abroad not in its own currency, but in dollars, Euros, or other currencies considered "hard." The Egyptian government has an interest in keeping the exchange rate between the Pound and hard currencies stable because a depreciation in the value of the Pound relative to other currencies is inflationary—if purchasing goods from abroad requires more Pounds to buy the necessary dollars, then the local price for those imported goods rises.

Normally the price of the Pound should be kept stable through trade; private businesses would bring in hard currency by selling goods or services, and they would then use this currency to purchase what they need abroad. The government also needs hard currency, which it can bring in, for example, by charging fees for using the Suez Canal, or by taxing foreign companies operating in Egypt. This year, all sources of hard currency, private and public, are reduced from their previous levels. Turmoil from the January 25th Revolution and its aftermath has already hit the tourism sector severely, and then a Russian airplane is blown up in the Sinai, resulting in the deaths of 224 tourists. This devastates the tourism sector [↗**Tourist Resorts**]. Tourism brings in only 3.4 billion USD this year, down from a pre-Revolution high of 12.5 billion (ar.wiki). President al-Sisi had promised last year that an expansion of the Suez Canal financed by bonds sold to the public in Egyptian currency would increase Canal revenues from an annual level of 5.3 billion USD in 2015 to 13.2 billion in 2023 (MCD). But Canal revenue actually drops from the level of the previous year (*Bidāya*). Moreover, hard-currency remittances from Egyptian workers abroad are falling, as is foreign investment (ʿAsr).

As all sources of hard currency fall, the Central Bank attempts to prop up the value of the Pound by making foreign reserves available for borrowing by commercial banks. If reserves fall too far then confidence that Egypt's currency is backed by actual assets will be eroded and the exchange value of the Egyptian Pound will fall even further. The Central Bank can only continue pumping hard currency into the Egyptian economy through the kindness of strangers. Or actually, not quite strangers, but rather certain of the oil-rich Gulf Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but conspicuously *not* Qatar, which had played the same role during the 12 months of Muḥammad Mūrsī's rule. By April it is said that the Gulf has provided 23 billion dollars over the past few years to Egypt in the form of grants, investments, fuel supplies and bank transfers, and that 50% of the Central Bank's foreign currency reserves consists of transfers from the Gulf (*Miṣriyyūn*). However, other factors affect the Gulf states' willingness to continue propping up the Egyptian Central Bank. Egypt does not see eye to eye with its Saudi patrons with respect to the ongoing civil war in Syria. Dissension comes into the open in early October when Egypt votes with Russia in the United Nations on a peace plan that would leave the Iran-backed Bashshār al-Asad in power (al-MARKAZ al-ʿArabī lil-Abḥāth). Furious, the Saudis turn off the spigots, for both fuel and money. The price of the Pound slumps from from £E 12.80 to the dollar on the black market in mid-September to around £E 18 to the dollar by the middle of October. The official rate stays at £E 8.88. Nobody can afford to convert Pounds at the official rate. The floating of the Pound is inevitable.

Float the Pound to its "natural" level, or let the Black market decide: either way, as the Pound declines in value the price of everything imported rises. Wages and income in Egyptian Pounds, however, do not rise nearly as much. In the space between stagnant wages and rising prices Egyptians feel pain. In August, before the float, inflation is at the level of 16.4% per year (KASSĀB). In November, after the float, the annual inflation rate reaches 20% (NĀFIʿ). Everyone knows the worst is yet to come. But this year it becomes clear that Egypt lacks self-sufficiency in many crucial fields, and this means that the palpable effect of the dollar crisis is that local demand for a wide range of products must be met through increasingly pricey imports. The dollar crisis manifests itself in a series of other crises—in medicine (*NoonPost*), energy (*YawmSābiʿ*), many types of food (MANĪSĪ)—even baby milk [↗**Baby Milk**]. A Tuk Tuk driver articulates the public's outrage at the hardship imposed by this rampant inflation in a video interview that swiftly goes viral [↗**Tuk-tuk**, ↗**Social Media**]. When asked what he is complaining about he explodes:

> Let me ask you one question: a state that has a parliament, military and security institutions… how can they let a situation like this happen? Before we had presidential elections we had enough sugar for everyone. We had rice, and we exported it. What happened? Where did it all go, we want to understand. When we watch television Egypt looks like Vienna; we go down into the streets and it's Somalia. For God's sake, tell me what happened, and what's the solution? (YT "Sawwāq")

The official response to the crisis is that Egypt's only possible course of action is to arrange a substantial loan, $12 billion to be precise, from the International Monetary Fund. The IMF famously imposes conditions on the recipients of its loans, the most important of which, in this case, is to float the currency of the nation receiving the funds (ḤUSNĪ). Whether the

purpose of these conditions is to ensure that the funds are used for the benefit of the recipient or, alternatively, to ensure that the recipient of the loan can effectively repay the lender (even at the cost of actually damaging the recipient's economy for most people), is a matter of dispute (ṬALAB). President al-Sisi, for his part, emphasizes that the purpose of the loan is to correct economic imbalances that have built up over the past sixty years of military rule [↗The **Voice from Above**], ignoring the fact that he is extending military rule for an indeterminate period. But he asserts that the chaos of the January 25th Revolution and the heavy burden of paying public-sector salaries are particularly to blame for Egypt's economic woes. He emphasizes that the burden of reforming Egypt's economy must be borne by all (YT "Radd"), ignoring the fact that it will be disproportionately carried by the vast majority of Egyptians who have no access to hard currency.

Karam, a Ṣaʿīdi interviewed in a café and subsequently the subject of a viral video [↗**Social Media**], has other ideas about the dollar crisis. He does not believe that the dollar crisis exists:

> There's no problem, no crisis, nothing at all. It's just that the nations of the demons—*duwal al-sufliyyīn*—are coming to get Egyptian Pounds because they can get stuff with them. (YT "Ṣaʿīdī") [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]

The interviewer does not quite comprehend what Karam means by *al-sufliyyīn*, but it finally dawns on him that Karam means literally *al-ʿālam al-suflī*, the underworld. There may not be much demand for Egyptian Pounds by those who possess hard currency in our world, or at least not at the official rate of exchange; but *ʿafārīt wa-shayāṭīn*, demons and devils, value the Pound greatly in the underworld. The interviewer is sceptical, so Karam has to give him a demonstration. He spreads a large pile of Egyptian five Pound notes on the table in front of him and covers them with his wool scarf. Karam then softly sings a patriotic song. After a while he stops singing and removes his scarf from the pile of money on the table. Presto! The five Pound notes have all been transformed into generous piles of dollars! The crowd in the café bursts into applause.

Karam:	Here you go. The dollars that you're saying are in crisis, and you're worried, and afraid of dollars [holding one up to the camera]
Interviewer:	I don't understand how this can be.
Karam:	Here they are. I was right in front of you. I didn't do a thing. Here are your dollars. There's no crisis. That's the value of Egyptian money. I challenge America and whoever is behind America, with the Egyptian Pound.
Interviewer:	Thank you Karam.

And so the dollar crisis is solved. Or perhaps it has been fake news from the beginning [↗**True *vs.* False**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Baby Milk ♦ Social Media ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ Tuk-tuk ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

ʿABD ALLĀH, Aḥmad. "Siʿr al-dūlār al-yawm al-arbiʿāʾ 2 nūfambir 2016 muqābil al-gunayh al-miṣri fī ʾl-sūq al-sawdāʾ." *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.nmisr.com/finance/ dollar2-11-2016> (accessed July 27, 2018).

[ar.wiki] = "Al-Siyāḥa fī Miṣr". 2016. *Wīkībīdiyā*, <https://tinyurl.com/ydxredhv> (accessed July 27, 2018).

ʿASR, Khālid. "Siʿr al-dūlār al-yawm waʾl-asbāb al-ḥaqīqiyya warāʾa azmat al-khaḍrāʾ fī Miṣr wa-tawaqquʿāt al-khubarāʾ lil-fatra al-muqbila." *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, August 27, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9whym6s> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[*Bidāya*] = "Infūgrāf: Inkhifāḍ īrādāt qanāt al-Suways ṭiwāl shuhūr 2016 muqārana bi-2015 bi-nisba 4.5%." *al-Bidāya*, January 2, 2017, <http://albedaiah.com/news/2017/01/02/127837> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[CNN] = "Mādhā yaʿnī taʿwīm al-gunayh al-miṣrī?" *CNN bil-ʿArabī* , November 3, 2016, <https://arabic.cnn.com/business/video/2016/11/03/v11282-buss-031116-egyptian-pound-liberalization-explainer> (accessed July 30, 2018).

ḤUSĀM, Hiba. "Siʿr al-dūlār fī ʾl-bunūk waʾl-sūq al-sawdāʾ al-yawm al- arbiʿāʾ 27-4-2016." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, April 27, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9bfphpd> (accessed on July 27, 2018).

ḤUSNĪ, Khālid. "6 ishtirāṭāt yakhshāhā al-miṣriyyūn fī qarḍ ṣundūq al-naqd al-duwalī." *al-Aswāq al-ʿArabiyya*, July 31, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9tdasce> (accessed July 28, 2018).

KASSĀB, Bīsān. "Al-rukūd ʿalà ʾl-abwāb: Masʾūl ḥukūmī yatawaqqaʿ tarājuʿ al-ṭalab al-maḥallī 2 illā 3% bi-sabab ʿal-qīma al-muḍāfaʾ." *Madā Miṣr*, October 11, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ycs84b8c> (accessed July 28, 2018).

MANĪSĪ, Usāma. 2016. "Farag ʿĀmir: Naqṣ al-sukkar yaḍaʿ al-ṣināʿāt al-ghadhāʾiyya fī azma ṭāḥina." *al-Bursa*, November 17, <https://alborsanews.com/2016/11/17/931248> (accessed July 28, 2018).

al-MARKAZ al-ʿArabī lil-Abḥāth. "al-Khilāfāt al-miṣriyya – al-saʿūdiyya: Azma ʿābira am iftirāq istrātījī?" *al-Mudun*, October 27, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yd5z7bm7> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[MCD] = "Al-Sīsī min ʿalà matn ʿal-Maḥrūsaʾ yaftatiḥ ʿqanāt Suways al-jadīdaʾ." *MCD–Mūnt(i) Kārlū al-Duwaliyya*, August 6, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ych2xk3t> (accessed July 27, 2018).

[*Miṣriyyūn*] = "23 milyār dūlār daʿm al-khalīj li-Miṣr wa-50% min al-iḥtiyāṭī al-ajnabī ʿwadāʿ." *al-Miṣriyyūn*, April 23, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9lxprfz> (accessed July 28, 2018).

NĀFIʿ, Asmāʾ. "Khubarāʾ: Muʿaddalāt al-taḍakhkhum taqūd Miṣr lil-iflās." *Miṣr al-ʿArabiyya*, December 11, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9l4drho> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[*NoonPost*] = "Maqālāt: Kayfa tafāqamat azmat al-dawāʾ fī Miṣr muʾakhkharan?" *N[ūn] Bōst*, December 22, 2016, <https://www.noonpost.org/content/15793> (accessed July 28, 2018.

ṬALAB, Aḥmad. 2016. "Maqālāt: Mā sirr iṣrār Miṣr ʿalà qarḍ ṣundūq al-naqd al-duwalī?" *N[ūn] Bōst*, October 19, <https://www.noonpost.org/content/14601> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[*YawmSābiʿ*] = "D. Muḥammad Gamāl Kafāfī yaktub: Miṣr lā tuʿānī min azmat ṭāqa bal azmat kafāʾat istakhdāmihā." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, September 1, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y94slscd> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[YT "Ahmose"] = "Al-Malik Aḥmus". Youtube Video, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HapX6KW1hJg> (accessed July 27, 2018).

[YT "Radd"] = "Radd al-raʾīs al-Sīsī ʿalà irtifāʿ asʿār al-kahrabāʾ wal-qarḍ min ṣundūq al-naqd al-duwalī". Youtube video, uploaded on August 13, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfFdrUrM-yU> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[YT "Ṣaʿīdī"] = "Ṣaʿīdī yaḥull mushkilat al-dūlār". Youtube video, uploaded on 18 May, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jjDsmuZqIY> (accessed July 28, 2018).

[YT "Sawwāq"] = "Sawwāq tūk-tūk yulakhkhiṣ ḥāl Miṣr fī 3 daqāʾiq, maʿa ʿAmr al-Laythī, barnāmij Wāḥid min al-nās." Youtube video, uploaded on November 10, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbaHv9nUs-E> (accessed July 28, 2018).

◄ walter.armbrust@sant.ox.ac.uk ►

Downtown/Centre-ville

… in Egypt

By Lucie Ryzova

Main entry text under review.

Related Entries

Arrays – Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ *Kamīn* ♦ Prison ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Social Media ♦ *Zaḥma*

Codes – Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

Codes Collapsed – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

[BBC Feb04 =] N. N. "Italian student Giulio Regeni's body found in Egypt." *BBC News*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35490825> (accessed April 14, 2018).

Hemzawi, Hamza. "Video of Egyptians giving police condoms goes viral." *Times of Israel*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/video-of-egyptians-giving-police-condoms-goes-viral/> (accessed April 13, 2018).

Jankowicz, Mia. "Erase and I will draw again: the struggle behind Cairo's revolutionary graffiti wall." *The Guardian*, March 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/23/ struggle-cairo-egypt-revolutionary-graffiti> (accessed April 13, 2018).

Loveluck, Louisa. "Egyptian men face chareges after giving police condom balloons as revolution gifts' Egyptian men face charges after giving police condom balloons as revolution gifts." *The Telegraph*, January 27, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/egypt/12124926/Egyptian-men-face-charges-after-giving-police-condom-balloons-as-revolution-gifts.html> (accessed April 13, 2018).

MacBride, Elizabeth. "Believe It: The Arab Spring Even Now Unfolds In Downtown Cairo." *Forbes*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/elizabethmacbride/2016/12/16/believe-it-six-years-later-the-arab-spring-unfolds-in-downtown-cairo/#1965b8fb219c> (accessed April 14, 2018).

Mackey, Robert. "Egyptian Satirist Threatened for Giving Police Condom Balloons." *The New York Times*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/27/world/middleeast/egyptian-satirist-threatened-for-giving-police-condom-balloons.html> (accessed April 13, 2018).

[*madàMaṣr* =] N. N. "State officials warn against participating in 25 January protests." *madàMaṣr*, December 15, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/12/15/news/u/state-officials-warn-against-participating-in-25-january-protests/> (accessed April 14, 2018).

Magid, Pesha. "Downtown: Site of revolts to city of ghosts." *MadàMaṣr*, January 24, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/01/24/feature/politics/downtown-site-of-revolts-to-city-of-ghosts/> (accessed April 14, 2018).

[*Manṭiqti* =] N. N. "28 kamira murāqaba jadīda fī qalb al-ʻāṣima." *Manṭiqtī*, issue 29, March 2016.

© Lucie Ryzova, University of Birmingham, UK

MICHAELSON, Ruth. "Egyptian police raid Cairo homes as country prepares to mark 2011 uprising." *The Guardian*, January 22, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/21/egyptian-police-raid-cairo-homes-2011-uprising> (accessed April 14, 2018).

[*MiddleEastEye* Jan22 =] N. N. "Police raid thousands of homes in Cairo over calls for anniversary protests." *Middle East Eye*, January 22, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/more-5000-cairo-homes-searched-ahead-2011-uprising-anniversary-1877133804 > (accessed April 14, 2018).

NEWTON, Jennifer. "Pranksters facing jail in Cairo after duping police into accepting condom balloons in video which has gone viral in Egypt." *Daily Mail Online*, January 27, 2016, <http:// www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3419343/Pranksters-facing-jail-Cairo-duping-police-accepting-condom-balloons-video-gone-viral-Egypt.html> (accessed April 13, 2018). – NB: this is the only link that still has the full original video, showing the condoms being inflated.

[OHK =] N. N. "OHK Entrusted with Rejuvenating Downtown Cairo." *OHK*, January 6, 2016, <https://ohkconsultants.com/current/2016/5/21/ohk-entrusted-with-rejuvenating-downtown-cairo> (accessed April 13, 2018).

RYZOVA, Lucie. Fieldwork notes and interviews. Egypt, 2016. (unpubl.)

YouTube

[*YT* Jan29] = "Fīdiyū al-balalīn Aḥmad Malik wa-Shādī Ḥusayn mughasil Abla Fāhītā." January 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXnyqSWXafo> (accessed April 14, 2018). Shortcut for online referencing (Fidiu al-balalin).

Websites

[Cluster] = Cluster Mapping Initiative. 2016. "Cairo Downtown Passageways." <https://passageways.clustermappinginitiative.org/en> (accessed 30 September 2018).

<https://www.thegreekcampus.com/>.

<https://riseupsummit.com/#/>.

<https://thinkmarketingmagazine.com/tag/rise-up-summit-cairo/>.

◄ L.Ryzova@bham.ac.uk ►

… Tunisia

By N. N.

► Desideratum

Dual Identities / Masking*

By Stephan Guth

Traditional roles and identities are being challenged, or threatened. Accordingly, much of the year's cultural production features protagonists who (have to) play several roles at one time, or live double lives, and/or are torn between conflicting identities.

This may be due to pure economic necessity which forces the poor into taking multiple jobs [↗**Dollar Crisis** (*azmah*)]. Many documentaries, as well as fictional representations, focus particularly on *women* who are struggling to earn a living for themselves and their families. In doing so, they take over many traditionally male responsibilities [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. In the Tunisian documentary *Les commerçantes* and the Egyptian movie *Nawwāra*, such women are the wives of husbands who cannot find a job or earn too little for the family to survive; in the Egyptian documentary *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan* ("We Have Never Been Kids"), the woman portrayed (Nādiya) has separated from her former husband because he had always beaten her and spent all his money on drugs. Nawwāra and Nādiya both live in slum quarters [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***], while the Tunisian women are lower middle class from the South [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**]. All of them do their utmost to fulfil their double roles as mothers and housewives on the one hand and as working women, and sometimes family heads, on the other. While Nawwāra is so lucky to have found a job as a housemaid with a rich family in one of New Cairo's gated communities [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**, ↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**], Nādiya toils as a knife and scissors grinder, a profession she learned from her father. But she does not earn enough to spare her children the duty of assisting her by taking odd jobs to make ends meet, a fact that forces also the children into double lives: they cannot be just children, but also have to contribute to the family's income by working as drummers in wedding bands, casual workers at construction sites, or parking attendants *(sāyis)* (as Nādiya's eldest son, Khalīl), kitchen hands in *kosharī* restaurants or *tuk-tuk* drivers (as her other son, Nūr) [↗**Tuk-tuk**], or by having to marry at the early age of fifteen (as her daughter). However, although their jobs give Nādiya and Nawwāra roles and positions that resemble traditionally 'male' roles and positions, the women are neither particularly fond, nor proud, of their 'emancipation'—for them, working outside the house is simply an economic imperative. In contrast, the Tunisian tradeswomen we meet in *Les commerçantes* seem to experience their 'second lives' not only as dictated by necessity, but also as an opportunity and an enrichment. The success of their enterprises—a result of their inventiveness and creativity [↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)** / *ibtikār*]—has given them courage and self-confidence and a more positive outlook on life, mirrored not only in their colourful dresses but also in the merry atmosphere on the little van that takes them to their working place. To have two jobs and lead two lives demands a lot of energy, yes; but it is also rewarding: you develop qualities and aspects of your self that otherwise would have remained hidden, and you gain the freedom to actually live this self [↗**Self-help**].

---

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 484-91.

© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

In this, the lower middle class *commerçantes* from the Tunisian south are not much different from the *shabāb*, portrayed in *al-Ḥufra* ("The Pit"), who are theatre enthusiasts and dream of being able, one day, to create a play of their own. However, before this may become possible—if at all—they have to master the challenges of everyday life in a poor Tunisian village and to meet the expectations their families placed in them. Yet, what they *can* do already now is to try to combine, at least partly, business with self-fulfilment: dressing as clowns or jugglers and performing entertaining sketches on the street, or acting as Kitty dancers on children's birthdays, or giving puppet plays, they can earn some money and at the same time 'become themselves', become actors.

Interestingly enough, it is also only in disguise, behind the mask of such costumes, that they dare to express themselves freely and comprehensively: "In pantomime, we play [ultimately] what we are, our own experiences, our lives, our suffering." The mask of a fictional identity provides also others with the precious protection they obviously need to dare to 'be themselves'. The existential crisis experienced by Khālid, the protagonist of *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna* ("The Last Days of the City"), is without doubt to a large extent the author's, Tāmir al-Saʿīd's, own crisis, a crisis that also paralyzes his creativity; but instead of assessing it with the help of an autobiographical documentary, al-Saʿīd creates "Khālid," an *alter ego*, an 'avatar'. Feeling alienated and homeless, like "tramps," *mutasharridīn*—so called in *Ṣawt al-shāriʿ* ("The Voice of the Street") / *Cloch'Art* and *Nihāyāt saʿīda* ("Happily Ever After")—, not knowing in which direction you should go [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**, ↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**], makes you feel weak and vulnerable; in contrast, the mask of fiction empowers and protects you, provides immunity: the alter ego is you, but it is also *not* you, it is somebody else. The whole genre of dystopian fiction that continues to flourish in 2016—a prominent representative, Muḥammad Rabīʿ's *ʿUṭārid* ("Mercury"), even gets shortlisted for the International Prize of Arabic Fiction—profits from this function of fiction: behind the mask of an imagined future, the present situation can be powerfully criticized [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**] while the authors cannot be accused of attacking the regime or portraying the current state of affairs directly or too shamelessly. In many satirical YouTube channels, too, the YouTubers put on a 'mask' when they choose to appear as serious news presenters, scientific consultants, or talk show masters, or when they let cartoon characters or muppets play 'typical' roles, from the policeman to the jealous fiancée, from the poor witty *shābb* to the President himself; in *ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm* ("Ali, the Goat, and Ibrahim"), a key role is played even by a goat! However, to take on another identity also allows you to imagine, if only for a short time, a happier reality: In *Ḥārr jāff ṣayfan* ("Dry Hot Summers"), the old gentleman Shawqī, suffering from incurable cancer, can pose for a few moments in the role of the bridegroom of young pretty Duʿāʾ, vibrant with life; we know that this is only ephemeral—Shawqī's face will soon be replaced, thanks to Adobe Photoshop, by that of the true bridegroom, who just couldn't make it in time to the photo session because of heavy traffic [↗***Zaḥma***]; yet, the pictures of Duʿāʾ and Shawqī, taken on this occasion, imagine the gaps of a fragmented society as bridgeable, all differences, even that of life and death, as reconcilable—a short moment of humanity and happiness in an otherwise all too hectic, inhumane present, full of constraints that force too many roles upon everybody and make it almost impossible to change one's life and identity [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. Another fantastic vision comes with the short movie *Qindīl al-baḥr* / *Kindil* ("The Jellyfish") in which

a young woman, after being harassed and killed by a group of men, metamorphoses into a terrible medusa who takes revenge on a society that made it possible for such a crime to be committed against her. Although an Algerian production, it makes use of a technique that is very similar to forms of 'masking', described above, that also Egyptians and Tunisians often have recourse to, and it also applies it to a similarly sensitive topic that continues to be a hot issue in Egypt as well as Tunisia [↗**Male *vs.* Female**].

Not future visions but representations of a deplorable present reality are the hidden identities and/or double lives that we meet in a number of productions dealing with marginalized, oppressed, or threatened social groups, mostly minorities. Christians and LGBT are the most obvious cases in point. In *Ishtibāk* ("Clash"), a nurse hurries to cover the cross tatoo that identifies the man she treats as a Copt—the atmosphere in the packed police van into which they have been forced together with many others and which symbolizes society in a nutshell, is loaded with tension to such a degree that she fears that the situation might explode, and the Copt's life be in danger, if the religious fanatics with whom they have to share this tight space would learn of their fellow citizen's Christian identity [↗**Clash**]. In *Mawlānā* ("Our Master" / "The Preacher"), the unorthodox, free-minded imam Ḥātim is approached by a rich and influential contractor who is close to the inner circle around the President: his wife's brother Ḥusayn has converted to Christianity, an incident that is classified as top "military secret." Scandal is imminent, and a state affair may erupt if it should become known that Ḥusayn not only is an apostate but also has withdrawn considerable amounts of—public—money and donated it to the Coptic Church; Ḥusayn's conversion and adoption of the Christian name "Buṭrus," and thus his new identity, have to be concealed from the public [↗**Conversions**].

The fact that gay and lesbian people still have to conceal their sexual orientation and are unable to live their true identities in the open but have to resort to a parallel, secret, hidden second life as the only way to 'be themselves', is shown, and in most cases also implicitly criticized, in not a few productions, both documentary and fictional. In the documentary *Travesties*, Tunisian transvestites from Gabès travel to Sousse, and it is only there, masked not only in their cross-dresses but also protected by the 'mask' of anonymity as foreigners, that they can really begin to live. No wonder that after longer periods of suppression, their true identity virtually explodes: their dancing in a club takes on almost ecstatic traits [↗**Dancing**, ↗**Pop Music**]. Yet, compared to little Nūr whom we meet in *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan*, they still appear almost privileged. Growing up in a slum as the second son of single mother Nādiya (whom we met above), Nūr never gets the chance to be just a kid; from an early age, he has to earn money to contribute to the family's income, and he ends up doing this as a child prostitute. In this way he becomes a homosexual himself—which makes life even more difficult for him, given the persistence of society's discrimination of homosexuality as 'abnormal' (*shādhdh*). The psychological pressure upon him becomes all the more difficult to bear as Nādiya and his elder brother, Khalīl, condemn his leanings, Khalīl being beside himself with rage because he thinks Nūr is dragging his and the family's honour through the mud. At the end of the documentary, the boy has disappeared, with nobody knowing anything about his whereabouts [↗**Disappearances**]. As for Khalīl, he tells the film director on the phone that he, too, is leaving now—to join the IS forces—because he has come to a point where "I either have to die myself or kill others."

Like Khalīl, many adolescent men take this step, deciding to become another and leave their old identities behind to start new lives—as true Muslims. Very often, their motivation is similar to Khalīl's, even if their families' situation is less precarious. 17-year-old Murād in *Zahrat Ḥalab* ("The Flower of Aleppo"), for instance, is the son of a middle-class couple who have separated; he despises, and is ashamed of, his "lousy father" who is a "lazy artist," a loser, an intellectual, and a drinker, unable, like his mother, to give the boy/young man the orientation he needs; therefore Murād is easily attracted by salafist ideology and ends up as a jihadist fighter in Syria [↗**Disappearances**]—as thousands of others like him. (The issue has already been dealt with for some years now, for example in the documentary *Comdamné à l'espoir* of 2014, but has lost nothing of its relevance, which is why it is chosen as one of the top five Tunisian documentary shorts to be shown on Arabic film festivals in 2016). Not the parents' separation or divorce, but the experience of having been raped by a brutal policeman during the Revolution [↗The **Policeman Criminal**] is the traumatic experience that turns Ḥusayn in *Ghadwa ḥayy* / *Demain dès l'aube* ("Burning Hope"), about the same age as Khalīl and Murād, into a terrorist. Far away from the Tunisian capital, he tries to forget the humiliation he has suffered, but he cannot. Thus, his mother—like so many other mothers, fathers, friends, in other productions—notices that the boy withdraws from this world, observes him changing, becoming calm and shy, not relating to his familiar surroundings any longer. In all these films, the mutation of the disoriented youth from sensitive boys to desperate killers or suicide bombers is shown as a slow process of transition from one identity to another, with the characters for some time leading two parallel lives. Trauma treatment would perhaps have helped them to come to terms with what they have gone through [↗**Psychiatrists**]. But they are too ashamed of their weakness in a society that expects them to be strong, not "like women" [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority** (Emasculation), ↗**Male *vs.* Female**].

In many respects, however, the reasons why also other youth are living double lives are quite similar to those of the Christians, LGBT, and the traumatized. Most of these others are rebels—against a patriarchal social and political order that they experience as repressive. At a certain point in their lives, they become dropouts, though very often continuing to keep appearances. In *Ṣawt al-shāriʿ / Cloch'Art*, only the mother of one of the rappers portrayed knows that her son has a second identity as a singer of politically critical street music; they have to fear the police, so it is better that the father does not know [↗**Father Figures**]. Old men in a café to whom the group gives a demonstration of their music find it "un-Arabic"—as if the youth were betraying Arab identity (which, according to the old men, is epitomized only by Umm Kulthūm or ʿAbd al-Wahhāb) [↗**Past *vs.* Present**, ↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. The wish to avoid conflict with the family and/or the political regime has been the reason also for the protagonists of *Yallah! Underground* and *ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux* ("As I Open My Eyes"), both produced already in 2015 but shown on film festivals in 2016 as still 'valid' representations of current realities. In her first life, 18-year-old Faraḥ, the heroine of *ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī*, is a high school student whose application for medical school has just been accepted. In her second life, she is a highly gifted interpreter of daring, politically and socially critical lyrics—out of a desire, as the young director puts it in an interview, "to live life to the full," a desire that is opposed to "family pressure and an omnipresent police state" (*VeniceDays*). Faraḥ's wishes, her desires and passions, the whole of her personality clashes

with what is presented as an essentially anti-human system of norms, taboos, and authoritarian claims to power that prevents her from unfolding her personality, her identity [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collectivity)]. She can live her self only in secret, in her second life, behind the mask of her first life.

It is dangerous to be yourself. When the authorities become aware of Faraḥ's oppositional activities she is detained and tortured. This is also what the rappers of *Cloch'Art* are afraid of, while Christians and LGBT mainly (though not only, cf. ↗**Conversions**) fear Islamist aggression and the influence of self-appointed guardians of public morals on the people [↗**In Islam, …**, ↗The **Honourable Citizen**]. Shame and fear of society's contempt or ridicule keep the traumatized and weak from coming out with their traumata and their weakness, while at least some of those who suffer from existential crises or creative 'impotence' seek protection under the mask of fiction.

Yet others seek refuge in emigration and try to build a new second life for themselves abroad, often in the West [↗**Migration**]. But there they either face the problem of how to remain themselves while having to adapt to a foreign culture and integrate into a foreign society (*Zaynab takrah al-thalj* / "Zeineb Hates the Snow"). Or the past they wished to get rid of, or at least forget, catches up and powerfully returns on them. Thus, although Sāmiya in *Corps étranger*, after an adventurous flight, has somehow 'made it' to France and begun to find out how to survive in Lyon as a "sans papiers," a refugee without papers, she receives mysterious phone calls, meets a young man who knew her brother, re-establishes contact with her mother in Tunisia, etc.—and whatever she does, she still feels as if living in a foreign body (as the title has it): the 'mask' of her new (non-)identity can hardly prevent the specters of her former life from reappearing and breaking through.

Even though knowledge about problems of this kind is quite common—it was already in 2009 that Khālid al-Khamīsī organized his novel *Safīnat Nūḥ* ("Noah's Ark") as a survey of migrant trajectories—emigration is nevertheless, and in spite of all odds, still often imagined as a viable solution not only by the many political and economic refugees who keep trying to reach the West, but also by those who probably might survive, somehow, at home without emigrating but who are unwilling to sacrifice their best years to a society they no longer can relate to. But the decision to leave one's former life behind also needs courage and the readiness to make a big effort—qualities none of which the protagonist of *Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi* ("I Love You, Hedi") possesses. Deep inside himself, the 25-year-old Tunisian has already dropped out: neither his job nor the traditions, ideals and values held up by his parents provide him any longer with a feeling of belonging or a meaning in life. But although he is well aware of this, and even though he actually gets a concrete chance to begin a new life—together with beautiful, self-confident, independent Rīm (the name means 'gazelle', associated with freedom in the Arabic tradition), whom he has fallen in love with and with whom he has experienced freedom and his true self—in the end, he does not show up at the airport where the two had agreed to meet to leave the country for good. He decides to stay behind, and with this gives preference to what seems to be safer and easier, less risky, notwithstanding that this means that he will fall back into his former double life: he will follow tradition and marry Khadīja, the girl his parents have selected for him (and who is as conservative as her name—Khadīja was one of the Prophet Mohammed's wives—and whom he neither loves nor has kissed even once), and keep working in a boring job, while he will

without doubt still dream of Rīm (who truly loved him and with whom he had fulfilling sex). Behind the mask of the established, average, 'arrived' married middle-class employee, Hādī will probably go on to live a second life, allowing him to "be himself" only in secret, perhaps for some days in the year at a remote place where nobody knows him, like the tourist resort where he met Rīm. – Re-enacting the old plot of a young man torn between two women, one representing tradition, the other freedom, naturalness and authenticity, the movie presents the powerful parable of a nation at the crossroads, tending to persist in dated patterns while it would with all likelihood benefit from a more courageous approach that dares to take the risk of making steps beyond the paved ways of well-tried Tradition.

As the example of Hādī makes clear, the 'mask' of a double identity not only protects those who wear it, it also can do wrong or harm others, and it may also cover a feeling of guilt. The conditions Hādī lives in certainly *are* difficult, so he actually *is* a victim. However, out of weakness and love of comfort and security, he betrays not only himself but also Rīm, and he is dishonest against his parents and his fiancée. *Corps étranger* and *Ghadwa ḥayy* explore the same ambiguity: the protagonists are not only innocent victims there, but also offenders who have done wrong. In *Corps étranger*, it turns out that Sāmiya had a good reason to flee to France: her brother, who had become an Islamist, had started to impose on her his vision of how girls should behave according to the sharia [↗**In Islam, …**]. But did she have the right to reveal his whereabouts to the police? Her treachery may have been the reason for his sudden disappearance and incarceration, and later, torture and death. The three protagonists of *Ghadwa ḥayy*, too, have become guilty in the past: During the days of the Revolution, they had suffered violence and injustice from the police; however, when Zaynab saved Ḥusayn from the clutches of a policeman who was raping him she used an iron bar and beat the man extremely heavily; Ḥusayn, infuriated, kicked him half-dead; and neither he nor Zaynab nor Elyssa tried to help the wounded man but fled in panic. The policeman survived, but only with severe physical and mental handicaps: he will be a cripple, dependent on aid for the rest of his life. Here, as in *Corps étranger*, the whole story is revealed only gradually, in pieces, after the three revolutionary youth had put on their 'masks' and begun to build new 'post-event' identities for themselves. Five years after the revolution, however, the past returns on them, 'unmasking' them and forcing them to come to terms with the tragic truth: violence had created counter-violence and turned innocent victims into guilty offenders.

However, time seems ripe not only for such re-assessments. In many cases, the use of masks and hiding in new identities is less ambiguous, the fact of their actual abuse uncontroversial. Thus, *al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka* / *La Vallée du Sel* ("Prayer and Battle" / "The Valley of Salt"), a documentary that portrays the life of a Coptic couple who receive death threats from religious fanatics—apparently some *shabāb* from the neighbourhood who call with suppressed caller IDs—leaves little doubt that it is the anonymous callers who commit a crime; the Christians themselves are completely innocent. Football hooligans, too, wearing the notorious Guy Fawkes masks, are mostly seen as mere offenders, and so are the police who put on cruel-looking, terrifying masks not only as a weapon to threaten the people, but also to be able, behind the mask of anonymity, to commit crimes against them [↗The **Policeman Criminal**]. It is this masking that inspired Muḥammad Rabīʿ to make it a characteristic feature of life in Egypt in his dystopian vision of the near future. It is quite significant that his novel *ʿUṭārid* ("Mercury"), in which horrible crimes are committed by

snipers wearing masks and where, moreover, masks have begun to replace the human face in general, is shortlisted for the International Prize of Arabic Fiction in 2016 as a powerful comment on the present. In many respects, 'masking' also seems to be an apt metaphor for what those in power are doing all the time: they disguise their true, criminal identities with the help of an official discourse of benign benefaction and working for the benefit of the nation [↗**True *vs.* False**; ↗**Father Figures**; ↗**The Voice from Above**]. But there are myriad initiatives that make it their task to reveal the 'truth behind' [↗**Social Media**, ↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. Moreover, a number of movies stage the mechanisms of hiding as well as the processes of revealing. In both *Mawlānā* and the *Nile Hilton Incident*, for example, the circles close to the Egyptian President are shown to commit crimes, systematically suppress the truth and fabricate fake versions, while those who investigate and disclose and in this way play the roles of detectives are the films' indisputable heroes.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Clash ♦ Conversions ♦ Dancing ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Father Figures ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Migration ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media ♦ Tuk-tuk ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individual *vs.* Collectivity) ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority (Emasculation) ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Normality = Heroism (Surviving) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck)

References

Movies

Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan (We Have Never Been Kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). Egypt, U.A.E., Qatar, Lebanon 2016.

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the Last Days of the City). By Tāmir al-Saʿīd (Tamer el Said). Egypt, Germany, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux (As I Open My Eyes). By Leyla Bouzid. Tunisia, France, Belgium 2015.

ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm (Ali, the Goat, and Ibrahim). By Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif El Bendary). Egypt, France 2016.

Les commerçantes (The Tradeswomen). Short film by Noussaiba Msallem. Tunisia 2015.

Condamné à l'espoir (Doomed to Hope). Short film by Youssef Ben Ammar. Tunisia 2014.

Corps étranger (Foreign Body). By Raja Amari. Tunisia, France 2016.

Ghadwa ḥayy / Demain dès l'aube (Burning Hope). By Luṭfī Āshūr (Lotfi Achour). Tunisia 2016.

Ḥārr jāff ṣayfan (Dry Hot Summers). Short film by Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif Elbendary). Egypt, Germany 2015.

al-Ḥufra / La fosse) (The Pitch). Short film by Ashraf Ḥammāmī (Achref Hammami). Tunisia 2016.

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). Egypt, Germany, France 2016.

Jeanne d'Arc Masriya / Egyptian Jeanne d'Arc. Documentary by Īmān Kāmil (Iman Kamel). Egypt, Germany, Kuwait, Qatar 2016.

Mawlānā (Our Master) / *The Preacher.* By Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). Egypt, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). Egypt 2016.

Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi (Hedi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyya (Mohamed Ben Attia). Tunisia, Belgium, France 2016.

Nihāyāt saʿīda (Happily Ever After). Documentary by Nadà Riyāḍ (Nadà Riyadh) and Ayman al-Amīr (Ayman El Amir). Egypt 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). Egypt, Germany, Sweden, Denmark 2017.

Qindīl al-baḥr (Kindil). Short film by Damien Ounouri. Algeria, France 2016.

al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka / La Vallée du Sel (Prayer and Battle / The Valley of Salt). Documentary by Christophe Majdī Ṣābir (Magdy Saber). Egypt, Switzerland 2016.

Ṣawt al-shāriʿ (The Voice of the Street) / *Cloch'Art.* Documentary by Manāl Qaṭrī (Manel Katri). Tunisia 2016.

Travesties. Short film by Safoin Ben Abdelali. Tunisia 2015.

Yallah! Underground. Documentary by Farid Eslam. Egypt, Czechia, Germany, UK, Canada, USA 2015.

Zahrat Ḥalab (The Flower of Aleppo). By Riḍà Bāhī (Ridha Behi). Tunisia 2016.

Zaynab takrah al-thalj / Zaineb n'aime pas la neige (Zeineb Hates the Snow). Documentary by Kawthar Bin Haniyya (Kaouther Ben Hania). Tunis, France, Qatar, Lebanon, U.A.E. 2016.

Novels

Khālid al-Khamīsī. *Safīnat Nūḥ* (Noah's Ark). Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009.

Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Nabī. *Fī ghurfat al-ʿankabūt* (In the Spider's Room). Cairo: Dār al-ʿAyn, 2016.

Muḥammad Rabīʿ. *ʿUṭārid* (Mercury). Cairo: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2015.

Other

[*VeniceDays* =] <http://www.venice-days.com/FILM.asp?id=9&id_dettaglio=552&lang=eng> (no longer accessible).

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Éveil d'une nation / *Ṣaḥwat umma*

By M'HAMED OUALDI

Children from schools, families from various parts of Tunisia, articles in the international press, including *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*: the exhibition *L'éveil d'une nation / Ṣaḥwat umma* (The Awakening of a Nation), on display in Tunis from November 27, is a landmark event in Tunisian cultural life (AZIMI; GALL & BLAISE). Over 45,000 visitors become aware of the richness of precolonial times and of the need to reconsider the nineteenth century in Tunisia and other former provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

Opening the doors of the abandoned palace of Ksar Saïd in the western suburbs of the Tunisian capital and uncovering portraits, medals, military and civilian costumes—hitherto stored in the state archives—, the curator of the exhibition, Ridha Moumni (Riḍà Mūminī), and its patron Olfa (Ulfa) Rambourg want to tell the story of the Tunisian state reforms in the second half of the nineteenth century, the story of the "awakening of a nation." In the exhibition, they emphasize this period of reforms as a founding moment, as a first Tunisian "modernization," that connected the country to a European modernity. They highlight the portraits of beys (i.e., rulers of the Ottoman province of Tunis) and their high-ranking officials painted by European artists in a region where, due to Islamic norms, figurative representations had hitherto remained very rare. Each of these portraits shows the dignitaries in European military uniforms, adopted from the 1830s, in complete rupture with former Ottoman outfits. Between these regalia of a new time, original texts of the reforms, written in Arabic, are on display: the beylical decree of 1846 which outlawed the slave trade two years before the abolition of slavery in France; the Fundamental Pact of 1857, which granted rights to Jewish and Christian minorities, including the right to acquire property; excerpts from the Tunisian Constitution (or *qānūn*) of 1861, the first constitution in the Muslim world that established a new legal hierarchy as well as elements of control of beylical rulers, including a civil list for this dynasty [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**].

The rationale for this kind of exhibition and for encouraging such admiration for all the features of this new state culture is explained at the entrance of the exhibition and in interviews given to the press as an "apolitical" act, born out of a pure desire to recover an "unknown" past. But the very beautiful staging of the first tokens of Tunisian political modernity is in many ways very much in line with the way the story of reforming Tunisia has been conceived and been taught in this country for more than sixty years. The main aim of such a way of narrating history after the country's independence in 1956 seems to be to remind us that Tunisia has existed before the French colonial rule and that its leaders were already farsighted: as pioneers, they had begun to shape a nation [↗Father Figures]. The story of a necessary "modernization" of the country from above that national rulers have always stressed has been analyzed and questioned by historians and political scientists ever since then. Advocacy for a European-style modernity also caused disillusionment among the population in the face of the authoritarian excesses of postcolonial regimes.

However, if one goes beyond this storytelling, some of the paintings and historical documents displayed in the exhibition can open up other ways to devise and to understand

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *109–*110
© M'hamed Oualdi, Centre for History, SciencesPo, Paris, FR

the second half of the nineteenth century. On one of the walls are exhibited documents sent from Istanbul that resituate the province of Tunis into its Ottoman context and make the national narrative of a Tunisian exceptionality less absolute. In another room, a painting depicts the violent repression of tribesmen in the holy city of Kairouan. In an exhibition that, by definition, is centered on the elite of the Tunisian government, it is one of the very few representations of the Bey and his troops repressing the great popular uprisings of 1864 against fiscal and legal reforms. This valuable document could inspire a whole new exhibition about popular will [↗"The System" *vs.* "The People"], more than six years after the revolution that overthrew President Ben Ali's dictatorship and gave birth to a democratic regime. It is here that the true contribution of this exhibition resides: it encourages its visitors to participate in the heated debates that are going on today in Tunisia about history and "national identity"; it forces historians who walk through this exhibition to envision other cultural events of a similar magnitude. It forces us to be aware of the great difficulty of realizing and making others understand other stories less centered on the state and the nation [↗Past *vs.* Present].

The exhibition ends in a moving way on an apparently banal object that, however, embodies a traumatic moment in the history of this country: the round table on which was signed—in 1881 and in the very same palace where the exhibition is held, the Ksar Saïd [Qṣar al-Saʿīd]—the treaty leading the way to the occupation of Tunisia by the French army. The establishment of the French Protectorate was the moment when all the insignia of the Tunisian monarchy still displayed in the second half of the nineteenth century lost their real power. But it was only at the independence of Tunisia in 1956 that this table and other objects from the same period were covered with white sheets and left to accumulate dust—the dynasty of the Ḥusaynid beys, regents of Tunisia from 1705 to 1957, now being regarded as an "ancien regime".

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Father Figures

CODES – Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People"

References

AZIMI, Roxana. "A Tunis, une exposition réveille l'histoire précoloniale du pays." *Le Monde*, December 9, 2016.

GALL, Carlotta, and Lilia BLAISE. "Tunis Greets an Ottoman-Era History Long Banished by Its Dictators." *The New York Times*, February 6, 2017.

◄ oualdi.mhamed@gmail.com, mhamed.oualdi@sciencespo.fr ►

Father Figures

… in Egypt*

By Mihaila Yordanova

On January 29, the Facebook group *Ṣuwar Maṣr Zamān* ("Pictures from Egypt in the Old Days") posts a photo of Gamal Abdel Nasser (Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir), in the company of a young bride and a sheikh. The caption tells a moving story: The girl on the photo is an orphan. She was about to get married but did not have a father or an uncle to act as her guardian during the ceremony. Fearing the judgment of her future husband's family, the girl wrote to Nasser in desperation, explaining her situation. The president soon showed up at her doorstep, bringing along the sheikh of al-Azhar to tie the knot. As one commentator points out, the photo is actually depicting the daughter of sheikh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Tāg, on her wedding day. But that does not stop the Facebook crowd from engaging in one of their typical quarrels, which often occur when the name of Abdel Nasser is mentioned. For many, the fictional story captures the essence of the former president. It shows him as a guardian, "a father to all orphans, poor and deprived Egyptian people." Or maybe just a leader who has fulfilled his legal obligations, as one anonymous soul points out, quoting the Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*): "The sultan serves as a guardian to all those who have no guardian" [↗**In Islam, …**]. To the other half, however, Nasser is synonymous with "tyranny," "oppression," "torture," "defeat in the Six-Day War," "an atheist," "an apostate." In the absence of debate, after 246 comments no consensus is reached on the question of who Abdel Nasser really was. It is the complex relationship with the Father Figure, evident in both Egypt and Tunisia; the powerful image of the Patriarch, representing both benevolent guidance and strict authority, which evokes admiration as well as the desire to rebel.

Occasionally both, as ʿAwāṭif ʿAbd al-Raḥmān knows very well. The first part of Jīhān al-Ṭāhirī's trilogy *Egypt's Modern Pharaohs*, screened by BBC Arabic on the anniversary of the 2011 Revolution [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**], shows the scholar and journalist talking about Nasser's death:

> I was chatting with my brother about Abdel Nasser and the repression. We were saying that he had no option but to be patient for at least twenty more years since Abdel Nasser was young. He was only 51. We were criticizing Abdel Nasser's regime, the Party and its corruption and the Security State. Then I went home. Later, my brother called and his voice was very strange. I said: "What's wrong, Mālik?" He answered: "The President is dead." … I threw the receiver and lost it. It was horrible, horrible, horrible. Until today I don't think I have ever mourned anyone, including my

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 492-98.

© Mihaila Yordanova, Brussels (for EG) | Joachim Ben Yacoub, University of Ghent (for TN)

> father and mother, as much as I mourned Abdel Nasser… No one has the right to orphan an entire nation.

Decades after his death, Nasser's legacy is still a hot topic, and there is still an apparent need to talk about the events. In Egypt, his figure, much like that of former president Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, is still casting its long shadow over the country's affairs. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's comments also touch on the love-hate relationship she has with the previous president and the battle between the conscious and the emotional. The Father here, with all his positives and negatives, is the one who gives direction. Without him, Egypt has no clear path forward, is left without guidance and care, orphaned.

Yet, some go out of their way to show that the direction was actually not lost after his death. On August 27, the Facebook page *al-Raʾīs ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī* posts a link to an article entitled "El-Sisi and Abdel Nasser: Two leaders fighting conspiracy" [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. The Americans have a masterplan, aimed at destabilizing Egypt and depriving the country of its independence, the article argues [↗The **Suspect Foreigner**, ↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**]. Under Nasser, they have refused to finance the Aswan High Dam, and have then attacked Egypt after the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Now, Obama's new Middle East plan is again aimed at harming Egyptian sovereignty, making it dependent on aid. And this is just the first part. Once Egypt has fallen, the rest of the Middle East will follow. The only difference, the author concedes, is that in the 1960s, Nasser was only facing external conspiracies. Today, el-Sisi is battling enemies from outside *and* the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters from inside the country. Much like Nasser, however, el-Sisi is going to protect the country, ensuring its stability, security and independence [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. He is ready to step into his predecessor's shoes and safely steer the country as long as the people and the political forces are behind him.

But el-Sisi embodies not just a continuation of Nasser's legacy, he is an upgrade. In December 2016, the following anecdote is posted on *Khayr ajnād al-arḍ* ("The Best Soldiers on Earth"):

> Gamal Abdel Nasser built the High Dam and so he is a leader. Every day, we hear about the projects el-Sisi has completed or is going to complete, but that is normal and no one says a word. These are the words of my mother who is satisfied with you, Mr. President.

The current president does not receive enough praise for his achievements, his accomplishments are merely reported, without elevating el-Sisi to the high status that the ordinary citizen thinks he deserves, as the story suggests, emphasizing on the president's popular appeal. However, it is not just Nasser's legacy that he surpasses. On March 9, the Facebook group *Maṣr lil-gamīʿ wa-bil-gamīʿ* ("Egypt for and through Everybody") changes its status:

> We have a president whose greatness and glory are equal to that of Ahmed ʿUrabi, whose courage equals that of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who is intelligent like Sadat and who has true Muslim morals. His name is Mr. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Next to the text is a photo of the president, looking shyly away from the camera. The post is pointing out the virtues of the leader, presenting him as an embodiment of the best qualities of many of the paternal figures from the recent past—the ultimate Father Figure.

Mere admiration is not enough, however. The Father also requires obedience and faith in Him. He promises stability and security—on the condition that His authority is respected [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. In April, the announcement that the two Read Sea islands of Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr will be transferred to Saudi Arabia immediately prompts a wave of protests [↗**Red Sea Islands**]. But some Facebook users react in a very different way (#al-Sīsī-ṣāyin-arḍoh [#el-Sisi_protects_his_land], #adʿam-qarārāt-al-Sīsī [#I_support_el-Sisi's_decisions], #athiq_fī_al-raʾīs al-Sīsī [#I_trust_in_President_el-Sisi]). And the proclamation of trust goes beyond the usage of the folk taxonomy mark-up. On May 4, 2016, an apparent hardcore fan of el-Sisi (his face is beaming from her cover photo), posts on Facebook in defence of the president, accompanying her display of affection with the hashtag #athiq_fī_al-raʾīs_al-Sīsī [#I_trust_in_President_el-Sisi]). The post is a collage of six images. The upper four show cities devastated by war. Four bright words are written in Arabic above each of them: Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen. The emblematic Taḥyā Maṣr (Long Live Egypt) divides those images from the lower two photos: a picturesque view over Cairo at night and the smiling face of el-Sisi adorned with the caption "We must keep on thanking this hero". The message is clear: Stick with the Father Figure, for he is the only thing standing between Egypt and the devastation and destruction plaguing the region.

Yet, the president is not just a guardian and a leader. He is also caring and compassionate. "How can anyone believe that these eyes can sell the land?" asks a Facebook post from April 2016 rhetorically, showing two mirroring images of el-Sisi in tears, separated by a large red heart. Trust el-Sisi by supporting the hashtag, in recognition of the fact that he has sacrificed his life and peace of mind to protect the country! In the comment section, emotions run high. "I love you, Mr. President. Your tears are precious to us," "We love you because you are an officer, we love you because you are a president, we love you because you are tough, we love you because you are merciful…"

An officer, a president, an army man—he could never betray his country. After all, the army is there to protect the land, not sell it. El-Sisi knows best, The Father has a plan for the future of Egypt, he just needs a bit of trust and support from the Egyptian people and everything will be good again. He is a man of the people, a man of the army, and he has never forgotten his duties to Egypt, suggests a post shared on the Facebook page *Kullunā rijāl al-shurṭa al-miṣriyya* and the comments below it. Proudly carrying the hashtag #adʿam-qarārāt-al-Sīsī ("#I-support-el-Sisi's-decisions"), the post also features a remarkable display of affection. To the right there is a photo of el-Sisi in a full military uniform and sunglasses staring at the horizon, a faint smile on his lips. To the left: a heavily armed group of soldiers, posing in front of the Egyptian flag. The president, in civilian clothes, standing in the middle, embraces the soldier kneeling in from of him. One word, written in large Latin characters, floats over the two images: *Boba* (i.e., Arabic *bābā* 'dad'). A sign of respect and affection, the epithet hints at the president's fatherly appeal, but it also points to another function of his. He is to be obeyed and loved, his authority unquestioned, his fatherly advice always followed [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**].

As the paternal advice often comes in large quantities, that is not always an easy task.

> "What's this rubbish song you put on?," "Don't you have any other clothes?," "Sweat away now, as you did nothing at school," "You are praying five times a day and when I was your age, I was praying seven times a day," "You are now 20. When I was your age, I was more like 22," "Your mom back in the day. Oh, how she chased me" [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**].

These are just a few of the memes featuring in a *Youm7* article. The sarcastic lines imitate the manner in which fathers often talk to their sons, while also mocking their know-it-all attitude and tendency to exaggerate [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. Regardless of time and place, Egyptian fathers have a certain way of talking to their children, which inevitably shows their affinity to overstate the virtues of the past, comparing its style, music and education to that of today. From all memes the same face is staring back: a portrait of a slightly sceptical-looking Ḥusnī Mubārak. The political and the biological paternal figure hand in hand. Is he an embodiment of all Egyptian fathers or a person whose authority was ultimately rejected? It is perhaps a bit of both, with the ousted president representing all members of the Mubārak generation and their complicated, yet standard, relationship with their offspring [↗**Past *vs.* Present**, ↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**].

And complicated this relationship is. *The Atlantic* celebrates the fifth anniversary of the January Revolution with an article bearing the rather gloomy title "A Revolution Devours Its Children," which follows the life of five Egyptian families who have close relatives detained on political charges [↗**Disappearances**]. Heavily appropriated for a foreign audience, the piece delves into the stories of the five families, all trying to cope with the absence of their loved ones. Most of it revolves around the daily struggles: the long queues at the prison, the weekly 20-minutes-long visitations, the pain of (not) knowing what the future holds [↗**Prison**]. Inevitably, some of the conversations move towards the reason for the detention, revealing a generational ↗**Clash**. "This generation wants to live their life, in their own style," "Nūrhān started to feel that she and Aḥmad belong to one team, and that we belong to a different team," "His father told him then that the country's youth were foolish, that the 'deep state' would prevail," recalls the mother of the detained activist Aḥmad Dawma. The past few years have put a rift between the family members who disagree on what the right path for Egypt is, especially after Aḥmad's father publicly supported his son's arrest by the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012. Despite now sharing a common enemy, the family remains divided by a deep sense of mistrust. However, not just politics but also the absence of it could create a gap between family members. Two years ago, in April 2014, 21-year-old Muḥammad Imām, according to his friends a member of the April 6 Youth Movement, had been arrested following a protest at the University of Alexandria. His father, a retired military officer, now has a different story to tell. "We are not allowed to get involved in politics," "Me, I don't have any opinions on all that." He has not visited his son in prison yet. "Nothing is wrong with Egypt," Muḥammad's mother adds, "We're not a politically interested family, we don't like politics, we don't even know what April 6 is." The guidelines for the family's political and social conduct are set. Having failed to follow the advice to respect the authority of the paternal figure, the sons have been punished by both the actual and the figurative fathers.

Not that the relationship is any simpler at the other end:

> When you meet a male friend while you're with your parents somewhere and you guys make that awkward eye contact that means DO NOT DO CHEEK KISSES, DO NOT DO HUGS; only stiff handshakes are allowed. In fact, if you can limit touching altogether, all the better. *Baba* is watching,

states number three on the list of "Fifteen Egyptian girl problems," posted on *Cairoscene*. Today, the life of the Egyptian girls is not easy. Questions about marriage, comments about cooking skills, and constant monitoring of their whereabouts are just part of the things girls have to endure from their parents. All coupled with having to pretend to abide by rules with which they clearly disagree. "The fuck do I care what the *bawwāb* thinks? … Apparently everybody's primary concern in life is to scrutinize yours," bellows the author defiantly [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**, ↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. A showcase of the double lives children often live because of their parents, torn between compliance and rebellion, both respecting and challenging the authority of the Father Figure and the social system it represents [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**, ↗**True *vs.* False**].

And they are questioning the rationale behind the various rules of civility. Blogging for *Madā Maṣr*, Hiba ʿAfīfī gives her take on the issue. Soon it will be Ramadan again, the month of soap-watching marathons and endless awkward social events that are impossible to avoid, *Iftār* meals, for instance, accompanied by painfully long forced conversations with people with whom you have nothing in common. And it is not just Ramadan that brings out the worst of social obligations. Being forced to attend weddings and funerals of distant relatives and acquaintances whom you barely know also creates this feeling of unnecessary intrusion in people's personal space [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity)]. The case, of course, is not against all social gatherings. Rather, the problem is with social obligations that only serve the purpose of maintaining appearances and upholding archaic social rules. Isn't it time to stop clinging to a lifestyle that contradicts its original intention of creating deep and meaningful relationships? Or, to paraphrase the words of Cairo rock band Cairokee:

> There are traditions that become defects and need to be changed. Freedom means change, how to express yourself is your choice and not somebody else's. Things are not going well. The old man is trying to bring the past back, while controlling the present. The whole society is united against change, but they can't take away the voice of the people.

An unruly cry against all those who try to restrict freedom and impose their own ideas on the rest [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity)]. All those who control life, all old men, all Father figures.

"Long live Egypt… Long live Egypt… Long live Egypt," explodes the conference hall as el-Sisi prepares to give the concluding speech of the First National Youth Conference. "I am very happy to be among my sons and daughters, the youth of Egypt," begins the president. The last few days have demonstrated, he elaborates, that the young people of Egypt are capable and enthusiastic and that through receiving proper training, advice and guidance they can become a driving force of Egypt of tomorrow. The country is young, and the youth represents national wealth, which should be developed and invested in. The government will work towards reviewing the status of the detained young people (applause!), developing

training programmes, discussing amendments in the Protest Law and ensuring the continuation of Egypt's cultural and historical identity. The young population, el-Sisi goes on, has been somewhat neglected and marginalized. But Egypt belongs to everyone and only those who want to do harm have no place here. Like his Tunisian counterpart, el-Sisi is concerned about the lack of national unity and he surely has a solution to this problem. He, the President, will work with all young people because a father loves all his children and he hopes that one day one of the young Egyptians will take his place. "Long live Egypt… Long live Egypt… Long live Egypt," concludes the Protector, Provider and Supporter, the Father of the Youth of Egypt.

El-Sisi will work with all young people? But where is this youth he is talking about?, Egyptians ask themselves on Twitter, after the hashtag *Where is the youth?* explodes yet again on the platform. "Behind bars or buried in their graves," the answer comes. "If el-Sisi held his conference in prison, there would have been a larger attendance," jokes one Egyptian, as many others share pictures of the young people detained, sentenced or killed since 2013 [↗**Disappearances**, ↗**Prison**, ↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. "I have a message for you…," says a drawing of an overweight Egyptian official, as he pokes his head through the barred door of a prison cell, with the words "Egyptian youth" next to it, "You are the hope and the future of Egypt" [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. The Egyptian youth, like their coevals in Tunisia, need actions, not words. It is time for real change, not empty promises. The young Egyptians are fed up with the "Father" discourse and the words that fail to deliver in practice. Acting like an almighty figure of authority is no longer enough, the role of the father-leader is becoming obsolete.

"The Egyptian youth are children only to their parents," rails ʿUmar al-Hādī from the virtual pages of *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*. Again, this critiques the notion of the "Father-President" which has been harming Egypt for decades. The youth are not the president's children, they are citizens with rights and obligations. They demand freedom and dignity and el-Sisi addressing them as his sons and daughters is just an insult. Treating them as children who need presidential advice is not going to solve the youth crisis. The country's restraint towards the people has been great during the last few years, states el-Sisi, to avoid the current state of tension. How come? Is he forgetting that the state is the state of the people? Is he forgetting the great self-restraint people had to impose on themselves when dealing with the actions of the regime? [↗**Baby Milk**, ↗**Dollar Crisis**]. The angry monologue continues: The people have not wrecked the Egyptian economy, they have not ignored the problems in the security services until the crimes committed by policemen occupy half of the incident page in *al-Ahrām*, they did not transfer the two islands to Saudi Arabia [↗**The Policeman** Criminal, ↗**Red Sea Islands**, ↗**Tricking the System / Tricked by the System**]. The people did not kill Giulio Regeni and they did not imprison Aḥmad Nāgī for his comics [↗**Court Trials**] and Islam Behery (Islām Buḥayrī) for his ideas [↗**Prison**]. Egypt needs a state that respects the constitution and the rights and the freedom of its people. The Egyptians want a president of a modern secular state and not a father, a leader or a caliph. Al-Hādī's final remark brings the tirade to an abrupt stop, leaving the reader suddenly aware of the emotional charge of the words and the power of the silence that follows. It is not just a rejection of el-Sisi but of the entire notion of the Father Figure, in all its complexity, and the social and political system built around it.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Baby Milk ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Disappearances ♦ In Islam, … ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity) ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

The Atlantic. "A Revolution Devours Its Children." January 23, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/egypt-revolution-arab-spring/426609/>.

Cairokee. "Ākhir ughniyya." March 12, 2016, <https://youtu.be/TZu2euuj2GE>.

Cairoscene. "15 Egyptian girl problems you can probably relate to." April 2, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/15-Egyptian-Girl-Problems-You-Can-Probably-Relate-To>.

Facebook post, May 4, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1620050588319279&set=p.1620050588319279&type=1&opaqueCursor=AbqqKX8_uQwfYeWZ4QNi3qYUXL9vcSrGCNMyuWsxeKpi4k92QFWFfjKCC5rSJMZzklnFCwE-0zx-87V6Wu7z5IwZGCenZAw1m_ 7Tfxd20bU9Z8BSWprE4wUaDeDC_Ts4zNBA79cOA_tNih1gq-SOOhV-1wyhbWfZAjIiFH1lmr2pJ9-kPJwP7ktWxoupAluQ7oskRpKgDwMLZsnNR8AqYPu7x51kWMprZ2JoBBonhJy8JwYdz4lzYG0qW8bptPO1dSduKi6FB5q4gHp1RQwCdtwzAeJkNFMYPssTSn6XttMsE5s8dJSHg2-aH8jj5hAi0I2wMmJidSHaVmDqPJG0VrkkBag88XPq_TWpkLP36r7UYcl7q58Y9zvWepcAztKY15vyq3FIz2o7YH438RPW7mpIafX-PQGasak7l0-d-O62mg&theater.

Jīhān al-Ṭāhirī. *Egypt's Modern Pharaohs*. Available on YouTube, posted 26th January 2016, 2016, <https:// youtu.be/YvZ_ngOvsgk>.

"Khayr agnād al-arḍ." Facebook post, December 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Khair.Agnad.Elard/posts/1649053595110028>.

"Kullunā rijāl al-shurṭa al-maṣriyya." Facebook post, April 11, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/elking.mohamed.89/photos/a.393231024089612.94224.393222587423789/998128573599851>.

Madā Maṣr. "The case against social obligations." July 28, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/06/20/opinion/society/blog-the-case-against-social-obligations/amp/>.

"Maṣr lil-gamīʿ wa-bil-gamīʿ." Facebook post, March 9, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/1Tamer.Asfour/photos/a.363452263709580.90414.152451254809683/953258231395644>.

"Maṣr lil-gamīʿ wa-bil-gamīʿ." Facebook post, April 23, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/1Tamer.Asfour/photos/a.363452263709580.90414.152451254809683/985198328201634>.

"al-Raʾīs ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī." Facebook post, August 27, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/73sisilovers/posts/1753242544926260>.

"#al-Sīsī ṣāyin arḍuh." Facebook post, April 12, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/permalink. php?story_fbid= 10153699358054790&id=529354789>.

al-Sīsī, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ. Speech, given at the First National Youth Conference, October 27, 2016, <https://youtu.be/asIPXP5uI1Y>.

"Ṣuwar Maṣr Zamān." Facebook post, January 29, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/sewarmisr/posts/755518071249270>.

Twitter, "il-shabāb fēn?" Most popular hashtag on October 26, 2016, <https://twitter.com/search?vertical=default&q=%23%فين_الشباب>.

ʿUmar al-Hādī. "al-Shabāb muwāṭinūn … wa-laysū abnāʾak." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, October 27, 2016, <http://www. almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1031314>.

Youm7. "10 gumal taʿkis ṭabīʿat al-ab al-miṣrī al-aṣīl: bi-ṣawt Ḥusnī Mubārak," February 11, 2016, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/11/2579862/بالصور_10_جُمل_تعكس_طبيعة_الأب_المصرى_الأصيل_بصوت_حسنى.>

◄ mly201@yahoo.co.uk ►

… in Tunisia

"Weldek fi darek!" The return of the Supreme Combatant

By Joachim Ben Yakoub

Not long after its official inauguration, two rebellious students tag the marble pedestal of the legendary equine statue of first president of independent Tunisia. Ghassen Bouazzi, head of the syndicalist student movement and Hamza Nasri, activist of the Popular Front, adorn the foot of the presidential sculpture with the phrase *weldek fi dārek* ("Your children should stay in your house") and added *we-nsībek zēda* ("and your brother-in-law too"). #weldekfidarek is only recently going viral after the catchy three word slogan was first thrown in the Parliamentary Assembly for the renewal of trust in the government Habib Essid by one of the deputies of the Popular Front [↗**Social Media**]. It is a direct message to president Beji Caid Essebsi not to favor his son Hafedh's accession in political life as head of 'Nida Tunes'. The complementary phrase referring to the brother-in-law, is meant for Youssef Chahed to question his potential nomination as head of the government of National Unity. The graffiti action echoes the griefs of a growing part of the population, apparently fed up with the seemingly persistent regime nepotism, now hiding behind a veil of historicity [↗***Manīsh msāmiḥ***]. Bouizi an Hasri are eventually arrested for vandalizing the statue and accused of offense against the head of state, but the Court eventually dismisses their case [↗**Court Trials**].

On a regular working Tuesday morning in May, commuters and passers-by on Bourguiba Avenue bump into a new statue in front of Ministry of the Interior in Tunis [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. Still packed in plastic, it shows the contours of a recognizable and familiar form. It surely is not any statue, but thé triumphal equine statue of Habib Bourguiba, once displaced by Ben Ali to the port town in the Northern suburb of Tunis. As promised during the presidential elections and as he already stated seven years before in his visionary memoire "Habib Bourguiba: the wheat and the chaff", Beji Caid Essebsi, the first elected president in post-revolutionary Tunisia, brings back the father of the nation in the center of public attention. The equestrian statue is effectively unbolted and removed from its previous location in La Goulette, where it stood for 29 years. As commuter can see with their

own eyes, the statue now stands in front of the Clock Tower, on exact the same place as once thousands of protesters stood demanding the departure of Ben Ali [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. It is not sure if—with the benefits of hindsight—the masses would converge again to wipe out the autocrat. As *7 views*, a clever documentary by Lilia BLAISE and Amine BOUFAIED convincingly shows, it did not take long for a considerable part of society to publicly express their regret to have ousted their president and to admit their nostalgia for the times before the revolution, when Zine El Abdine was leading the country as a firm but fair leader. Seen from this vantage point, the return of the 'Supreme Combattant' is a strategic move. After all, there can be only one *pater familias*.

The return of the image of Bourguiba does not come as a surprise. Most people notice how, since the presidential elections, the new president of the republic assimilates different features of the "Eternal Leader". He adopts a same form of speech, rich in popular proverbs, altered by sporadic Koranic verses, often time using sharp and applicable allegories, always spiced with a subtle sense of humor. Even his looks, especially the glasses and his body language reminds that of his predecessor, making the same gestures, particularly with his hands. To manage the massive protest in the region of Kasserine and beyond after the cruel death of Ridha Yahyaoui, the president makes a curious appearance on public television [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. Everybody can see that the presidential address is filmed from exact the same decorative setting as Habib Bourguiba speech that contained the bread revolt in 1984. Now, to contain the riots that followed unfulfilled employment promises by the government in Kasserine but spread again all over the country, the president is addressing the people sitting behind the same desk, with the national flag on his left and in front of the same classic brownish map of Tunisia framed in leather with golden stars. Different memes are spreading across social media, mocking "Bajbouj" his unabashed mimicry. The most viral diversion comes from Anour L. who pastes a "Confused Travolta" in the historical setting and created an animated GIF making John Travolta wonder how history could repeat in such literal sense over a period of only 32 years [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**, ↗**Social Media**].

Different politicians, artists and activists are annoyed by the decision to reinstate the Bourguibist imagery, supposedly unbefitting the context of growing marginalization and revolt [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**]. Mohamed Abbou (Ex-CPR and founding member of the "Democratic Current") is one of the first politicians to publicly contest the return of the image of the 'Father of the Nation' and proposes to launch a contest for artist to imagine a monument that would symbolize "the end of dictatorship". Architect Ahmed Zaouche endorses that proposition as it should mobilize the whole city in a democratic way through an extensive consultation. Under the title "One of the most important achievements" a certain Malek Feki uploads a series of digitally altered images of the concerned equestrian statue, so it salutes from atop of a garbage pile in the city center, in the middle of a street blocking the way of a congested bus, on the roof of a concrete container school, somewhere in the South of the country in a desert in the background of a hungry Bedouin family or somewhere in a city as witness to flooding streets [↗**Social Media**, ↗***ʔAlsh***, ↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**]. In Feki's collage, Bourguiba is no longer proudly saluting 'his' people, but real social and environmental issues. The series resonates with the critique by Rym Thairi of the 'Mahaba

Current'. In the 'Assembly of Representatives of the People', Thairi condemns the monumental intervention as unjustifiable, trivial, futile and even counter-revolutionary symbolic politics. Taking into account the precarious socio-economic condition of the country, it would neglect what he considers the real preoccupations of the people [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**].

On the other hand, according to an op-ed written by architect Moncef Kamoun on the Kapitalis website, Bourguiba is today, even without its equine statue, more present and more alive than ever before. Bringing the equestrian monument back to its original place is therefore the least you can do as a recognition to "one of the few true modernist references" in an "Arab world that is looking to the past and haunted by the forces of death". Renown Professor Mohamed Kerrou also writes in the Huffington Post, that the political use and rehabilitation of the charisma of the 'Father of the Nation' can be understood as a form of resistance to the "Islamist and populist threat" engendered by the Troika before the elections. The popular historian Kmar BENDANA joins the debate with a contribution in *Le Quotidien d'Oran* and states that the return of the Bourguibist imagery is the logic consequence of the ubiquitous "present absence" of Tunisia's former leader in the last two decennia. When Ben Ali took power in 1987, Bourguiba was put on house arrest, from the day of the coup until his death April, 6th 2000. The regime not only removed every reference to the legacy of the former president, it also actively silenced Neo-Destourian partisans and Bourguiba loyalists. His 17 yearlong permanent isolation and abandonment passed without public opposition, until the day of his death. His coffin, embellished with a portrait depicting him as an old sick man, was carried from Tunis to Monastir in the belly of a purple plane stamped with a "November 7" logo, referring to the official regime imagery praising "the change" Ben Ali allegedly brought to the country. The funeral was not even broadcasted on national television. In short, the death of "The Father of the Nation" was never properly mourned over. Bendana thus argues that this unchallenged abandonment still carries its repercussions today, enhancing a feeling of guilt, remorse and frustration over the fact the Zaïm never really received a rightful place in national history. In a unexpected post-revolutionary context lacking clear leadership, this discontentment only reinforces the general appeal to Bourguibist symbolism.

Evoking an ounce of the legacy of Bourguiba during "The Era of Change" was indeed unthinkable and nearly considered a form of treason [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. During the autocratic times of the Ben Ali regime, different artist nevertheless engaged with the imagery of the "Father of the Nation" as a form of dissent. The photograph of the de-located statue of Bourguiba in La Goulette, central in Faten Gaddes's series "La Rue" exposed at the Ammar Farhat art gallery in 2009, not only shows the regime's wish to eradicate the historical event of national return in 1955 that the statue represents, it also sensibly illustrates the ongoing process of irreverent demarcation. The image of a bronze Bourguiba sitting on the back of his horse, apparently standing on the dilapidated and nearly collapsing construction site in La Goullette instead of the marble pedestal, is also testimony to the expropriation of some long-time residents of what was once known as Tunisia's Little Sicily for the benefit of lucrative real estate projects closely connected to the regime [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***]. The graffiti stencil of Wassim Ghoslani (2002), the Warholian screenprints of Bassem Jelali, the speed-painting of Selim Tlili (2010) or the painting of Mehdi Bouanani (2010) also show the dissidence engrained in the reproduction of Bourguiba's portrait during the Ben Ali Era. Mehdi Bouanani, for instance,

crossed the border of political sensibility with his painting of different portraits of Bourguiba. When he tried to exhibit his paintings in an art gallery in 2010, he was refused entry by Tunisian customs, and had to submit to a police interrogation. His exhibition was eventually canceled.

The most cutting edge response to the return of the Bourguibis imagery comes from art philosopher Adnen Jdey in an op-ed for the online Nawaat platform, where he compares the second life of the statue of Bourguiba to the figure of Don Quixote, galloping and confusing the order of the real and the symbolic to reinforce the prevailing political consensus. The double exile and the double triumphal return of the Zaïm, once in 1978 and once in 2016, functions as a fiduciary *jouissance* facilitating the real reproducibility of the status quo. For Adnen the two apparent different bodies of Bourguiba, the patriot and the despot, the "supreme combatant" and the "enlightened tyrant" are two different sides of the same coin, that throws a shadow on the still present Novemberist Clock Tower that together with the equestrian statue form the still erect phallus of an entrenched power structure.

Despite all criticism, the great return is inaugurated on "Victory Day", the first of June, for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the mythical return of Bourguiba from exile in 1955 [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. Escorted by security services and covered by a dozen security agents, Beji Caid Essbsi is welcomed by Mariem Bourguiba the grand-daughter of the first "Father of the nation", her husband and a couple of others highly esteemed guests, before opening the red curtains, hiding the golden inscription on the marble pedestal of the equine monument. The famed filmmaker Hicham Ben Ammar is the only one noticing the absence of the sculptor of the original statue, Marzouk Hechmi. He stands there all by himself behind the security fences, humiliated and hurt – nearly crying - during what he imagined would be the apotheosis of his oeuvre. Notwithstanding Marzouk passionately worked for months to restore what he considers his lifetime achievement, he is apparently not invited to the ceremonial inauguration [↗The **Honourable Citizen**, ↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. Inside the security perimeter, surrounded by a horde of journalist, Essebsi explains he choose today as an inauguration date not to re-instate a new personality cult, but to commemorate a day of national cohesion without precedent. For Essebsi, the return of the imagery of Bourguiba answers a shared need for a solid national unity. It is a condition sine qua non to get Tunisia out of the situation it has fallen in since the revolution. The president further reminds the journalists present that the Bourguiba Avenue, used to be named after Jules Ferry and that the statue of Bourguiba replaces the one of the instigator of the French protectorate. Beji Caid Essbsi tries to convince the journalists and their audience that a symbol of colonization is replaced by a symbol of liberty and independence.

The statue of Ferry was indeed the most imposing emblem of the protectorate, embodying the French civilizing mission [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. Placed vertically in height, the monument sculpted by Antonin Mercie faced the city, Feery's back turned to the Mediterranean port, looking down from his pedestal to three subservient bronze figures: a Bedouin statuette offering a bundle of wheat, a settler colonist looking up in full admiration and a schoolboy looking up towards Jules Ferry, in honor of his role in educational development. After being dismantled, the statue of Jules Ferry, was temporarily stocked on an island on the Lake of Tunis. The Municipality of Tunis has however never fulfilled her intention to offer the unbolted statue to the municipality of Saint Dié, the hometown of Ferry. The statue of Jules Ferry is now indeed replaced by the one of Bourguiba, that eternalizes the image of the

historical moment when Bourguiba, the "Mujahid El Akbar" or "Supreme Combattant" returned from exile from Brittany's Groix Island, in the port town of La Goulette, after signing the Franco-Tunisian agreement recognizing the internal autonomy of Tunisia, June 1, 1955 [↗**Prison**]. Reminiscent of the equestrian statue of Louis XV on the Place de la Concorde in Paris, the statue of Bourguiba pursues the French Monarchical trend in equestrian monumentalization [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**, ↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]. The president is monumentalized strongly perched on a galloping horse, confidently and triumphantly saluting the cheering mass, dressed in a modern tailored suite and a fez, the traditional ottoman red hat.

The comeback of Bourguiba in the capital is not the first, nor the last time the government decides to move its historical markers, making the whole effort a national endeavor [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**]. As the wave of protest in Kasserine settles down, a truck deposes a restored bronze equestrian statue in front of the presidential palace of Skanès (Ksar Al Marmar) at the entrance of the city. The statue depicts the Zaïm wearing not a fez but a *mdhalla*, a traditional straw hat [↗**Beautiful *vs.* Ugly**]. It also seems to be from the hand of sculpture Hechmi Marzouk, but was originally erected in the city of Kairouan. It had first to be restored, as it was vandalized in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, but captured by the military who kept it save in the casern of Sidi Saâd. The equestrian statue is unveiled by president Beji Caid Essebsi in person, during the festivities commemorating the 16th anniversary of Bourguiba's death [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. One of the statues symbolizing Bourguiba's triumphant return in 1955, is also resettled in the coastal city of Sousse. The equestrian statue was relocated to its former location as it was installed in 1977 at the intersection of Bab Bhar, [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**] Sousse. The inauguration, planned for the celebrations of 'Republic Day', the date of the establishment of the Republican regime on July 25th is postponed until August 13th for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the promulgation of the personal status code, the historical code that facilitated the emancipation of "La Femme Tunisienne" under Bourguiba [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. The vacant place of the father is indeed eagerly solicited, in contrast to the figure of the mother that remains largely unnoticed and unmentioned [↗**Male *vs.* Female**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʔAlsh* ♦ *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ Prison ♦ Social Media

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity) ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People"

CODES COLLAPSED – Present = Past (Stuck)

References

BENDANA, K. "Bourguiba : la présence de l'absent." *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, April 7, 2016.

BLAISE, L. and A. BOUFAIED. *7 vies*. Tunis: Antworks productions, 2014.

CHAOUCH, R. "Carte interactive : ces statues qui font polémique au Maghreb." *Jeune Afrique*, April 1, 2016, <www.jeuneafrique.com>.

ESSEBSI, B. C. *Habib Bourguiba : Le Bon Grain et l'Ivraie.* Tunis: Sud Éditions, 2009.

JDEY, A. "Bourguiba, la statue et l'érotique du système." *Nawaat.org*, May 28, 2016.
KAMOUN, M. "La Tunisie et l'eternel retour de Bourguiba." *Kapitalis.com*, March 2, 2016.
KERROU, M. "Usages politiques de Bourguiba et du bourguibisme." *Huffpostmaghreb.com*, April 7, 2016.

◄ Joachim.BenYakoub@UGent.be ►

Football

By Carl Rommel and Jonas Roellin

> I really don't know what to say. Football just doesn't bother me the way it used to. I do watch AC Milan's matches, most of them actually, if I don't have anything else that is urgent. I enjoy it, even if the team is really bad these days. But al-Ahly… no, that is gone. It's been a long time now since I watched a whole match. (Rommel, *Notes*)

This is Bassām—a digital marketer, a husband, a father of two, and a devoted Ahly and Milan supporter since childhood. Half a decade ago, Bassām was spending a good portion of his spare time authoring an informative blog about Egyptian sports media. Today, he is instead running an increasingly popular YouTube channel where he reviews recently released movies. The shift is exemplary on multiple levels. Whereas blogs epitomized the late Mubarak era, video clips on social media platforms make the biggest buzz these days [↗**Social Media**]. Similarly, Egyptian football is by no means prioritized the way it used to be six or seven years ago. Indeed, as Bassām explains:

> For people here in Egypt, football is just not what it used to be. I can't talk about everyone of course, but when I look at my friends... It's the same everywhere. People have moved on; they've picked up other interests, I guess. It's almost five years now since the Port Said massacre. You might say that that was the big break. After Port Said, we've not even had a proper league in Egypt. Football died a bit that day, and it has never really come back. (Rommel, *Notes*)

What does Bassām mean when he claims that Egyptian football "has never really come back" after Port Said, the stadium massacre on February 1, 2012, that claimed 72 young al-Ahly fans' lives and interrupted domestic football in Egypt for a full year? At first glimpse, after all, things do look rather normal. The local tournaments are all up and running and the results are as predictable as ever before. Egypt's biggest and most successful club, al-Ahly, is winning its 38th league title seven points ahead of its great Cairo rival, al-Zamalek. When the same two teams face off in the final of the Egyptian Cup, it is al-Zamalek that comes out on top, clinching the club's 25th title in that tournament. Furthermore, as so often in the past, the same two Cairo clubs' economic muscles render them among the very most powerful in Africa. In a spectacular move, al-Ahly buys the Tunisian national team left-back Ali Maâloul (ʿAlī Maʿlūl) from CS Sfaxien (al-Nādī al-ʾAhlī al-Miṣrī). Both al-Ahly and Al-Zamalek also hire (and fire) high-profile coaches from Europe: the Dutchman Martin Jol is in charge of al-Ahly for six months; the Scot Alex McLeish's manages al-Zamalek for three. Consequently, it is fair to say that football continues to split in particular the male part of the Egyptian population into two distinct halves: red *Ahlawiyya* and white *Zamālkawiyya*. In coffee shops, work places and on social media, football rivalries constitute a well of inspiration for discussions, jokes and banter [↗**Social Media**; ↗***ʔAlsh***]. When the film *Ishtibāk* ("Clash") depicts a microcosm of Egyptian society locked into a police van, the

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *124–*133
© Carl Rommel, Univ. of Helsinki/FI (for EG), and Jonas Roellin, Univ. of Bern/CH (for TN)

antagonism between the two Cairo teams is, as one could predict, one part of the narrative [↗**Clash**].

Cairo's inter-city rivalry is similar to the one between the two Tunis clubs Espérance Sportive de Tunis (EST) and Club Africain (CA). Not only in the capital itself but also well beyond, everyone seems to have a preference for one or the other of the two main rivals. Fans on both sides, the *Espérantistes* as well as the *Clubistes,* claim that their club is loved by most Tunisians and thus represents "the people." For instance, a well-known slogan of the *Clubistes* states that "ten million love the Club Africain" (*al-ifrīqī ʿashara mlāyīn ḥabbīnāhā*) which is also the title of one of their most favorite football chants since the revolution (back then, Tunisia had about ten million inhabitants; ROELLIN, *Notes*). While the two Tunis teams, by far, hold the most league titles (26 for EST / 13 for CA) as well as the most cup titles (15 for EST / 11 for CA), they have two serious title contenders from the coastal region of the Sahel: the Club Sportif Sfaxien (CSS) and the Étoile Sportive du Sahel (ESS) from Sousse. In fact, since independence in 1956 Tunisian football has been dominated by these "big four"; together, they have won all but seven national championship titles, as well as 13 African trophies including 4 CAF Champions League titles. This dominance on the football pitch reflects the general economic and political disparity between the privileged coastal areas and the marginalized interior regions of the country [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**]. Furthermore, like their counterparts in Cairo, the two football clubs from Tunis—and to a lesser extent those in the Sahel—possess sufficient financial resources to attract some of the best players of the continent. Thus, in July, Espérance signs the Tunisian FC Metz midfielder Ferjani Sassi (Farjānī Sāsī) for the transfer sum of approximately 3 million euros and a monthly salary of about 40 thousand euros (GHARIANI). That is about the same salary that Club Africain pays its new Tunisian forward Saber Khelifa (Ṣābir Khalīfa), formerly with Olympique Marseille (*ibid.*)—a horrendous amount of money in a country under severe economic hardship, where the average monthly salary stands at around 300 Euros (*African Manager*) [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. Even so, disproportionately high salaries of football players have become business as usual. And so is the fact that this season too, one of the "big four," this time Étoile Sportive du Sahel, wins the national league.

And yet, despite this apparent 'normality,' especially in the case of Egypt, Bassām's point about football not being "what it used to be" *does* resonate. Normal as the game might look, in terms of enthusiasm and buzz, today's situation is a far cry from how football used to encapsulate the country. Especially in the last five years of the Mubārak era, when the Egyptian national team won three consecutive African Cups of Nations in 2006, 2008 and 2010 and al-Ahly dominated the continental club tournaments, the hype around the sport was immense (ROMMEL 2021: 29-58). Bilāl, a thirty-something, recently married man from ʿĀbdīn in central Cairo, puts it this way:

> You can't compare. Back then, football was everything we talked about. The teams were winning, people were happy, the media talked football, football and football. And Mubarak used it, of course. […] What happened was that we began to lose. And then came the revolution. Things have changed. (ROMMEL, *Notes*)

Oh yes, things have changed! In the years that followed January 25, 2011 and the Port Said tragedy in early 2012, no league matches were played, several football television channels

went bust, and the national team failed to even qualify for three consecutive African Cups of Nations. In fact, references to the hype that the victorious national football team *used* to stitch together between 2006 and 2010 are used habitually today to demarcate difference to an era and a structure of feeling that belongs to a by now distant and distinct past. Tamer Said's autobiographical movie *'Ākhir 'ayyām al-madīna*, released only recently, is a good case in point. Portraying a young man struggling to finalize a film in and about Downtown Cairo five, six years ago, one way in which *'Ākhir 'ayyām…* conveys affective tones of the past (and difference to the present) is through radio reports of famous football victories [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Similarly, in the face of a re-established security state [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**], economic misery [↗**Dollar Crisis**] and clampdowns on all kinds of opposition [↗***Kamīn***; ↗**Disappearances**], Egyptians sometimes point to football as proof that everything is *not* back to square one. "Many things are worse today than during Mubarak"—this is Bilāl again—

> but the revolution did change some things. At least among the youth, it changed our mentality (*ʿaqliyya*); we are more critical now. Al-Sisi will never be able to use football the way it was exploited by Mubarak. (ROMMEL, *Notes*)

In Tunisia, results have taken a similar if somewhat less dramatic post-revolutionary tumble. The national team has not participated in a World Cup since 2006 and has failed to pass the quarter-finals of the Africa Cup of Nations since its victory in 2004. Tunisian clubs, for their part, have been less present in the final rounds of continental competitions, notably in the CAF Champions League. While in the period between 2004 and 2007, not one final was played without the participation of a Tunisian club, in the last four years, no Tunisian club has managed to reach the final [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. What is more, local players struggle to assert themselves in European leagues and often end up being relegated to North African or Arab Gulf league teams at an early age. In a provocative article entitled "Tunisie…Thunes easy?," two French football experts argue that most of today's Tunisian exports for several reasons fail to prevail in the top European leagues. They are described as "physically below European standards," "mentally fragile" and, apparently, rather than ambition and achievement, it is "the cash and the fast money that motivates them" (MÜLLER & VINCHON).

Still, everything is not doom and gloom; in both countries there are signs of resurgence. In Tunisia, a new generation of binational players, such as Naïm Sliti (Naʿīm Slītī) and Wahbi Khazri (Wahbī Khazrī), is reinforcing the ranks of the national team. After winning the first crucial qualifiers against Guinea (2:0) and Libya (1:0), the Carthage Eagles are on the road to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. Likewise, as the Egyptian teams are playing better than in many years, a buzz is slowly picking up, if only from historically low levels. Under the new Argentinian Head Coach, Hector Cuper, the national team qualifies for the first African Cup of Nations in seven years. AS Roma's speedy winger Mohamed Salah (Muḥammad Ṣalāḥ) scores four of the team's seven goals during the campaign, among those a crucial last-minute equalizer against the group favorite Nigeria [↗**Celebrities**] (ZAMALEKFANS). What is more, the team's good run of form is sustained during a promising start to the World Cup qualifications. After consecutive wins over Congo, in Brazzaville, and Ghana, at a sold-out Burg el-Arab Stadium in Alexandria, Egypt finishes the year as number 36 of FIFA's World Ranking. It is the country's highest ranking since mid-2011: a 22-position climb compared

to 12 months earlier. Towards the end of the year, al-Zamalek also reaches its first African Champions League final since 2002 after an extraordinarily dramatic semi-final against Wydad from Casablanca (ELASSAL). In the end, the team loses the final to the South African team Mamelodi Sundowns. Nonetheless, thousands of Zamalek fans enjoy a memorable and atmospheric day out at the stadium (MUṢṬAFÀ).

The improving results on the pitch are one component of a quite comprehensive rebuilding. Within Egyptian football media, money is starting to flow again after a few barren years. Several of the country's most famous pundits—Medhat Shalaby (Midḥat Shalabī), Farouk Gaafar (Fārūq Jaʿfar) and Magdi Abdelghani (Majdī ʿAbd al-Ghanī)—are joining forces at the newly launched *ON Sport* [↗**Celebrities**]. As Bassām explains, the sudden rise of this new channel is part of an ongoing reconfiguration of Egypt's television industry.

> *ON TV* used to be owned by [businessman Naguib] Sawiris. They were big on political talk shows and very popular during the revolution. But recently, you can't do political television here […] And the Sawiris family isn't well connected to the new regime. So, this summer, this new guy took over. Abū Hashīma; very well-connected. He made his money in the steel industry or something like that. But he's most famous for being the former husband of Haifa Wehbe [Hayfā' Wahba, a hugely famous Lebanese singer and sex symbol]. He took over the *ON* network just before Ramadan. All politics was thrown out. Instead he re-launched it with really costly and popular Ramadan series. Now he wants to do the same thing with football. Getting all the most famous pundits. Let's see if it will work (ROMMEL, *Notes*).

As Bassām makes clear, the rebirth that football television experiences is part and parcel of the formation of a new generation of crony capitalists: not the Sawirises and the Aḥmed ʿAzz-s, who flourished under Mubarak, but Abū Hashīma and a number of other millionaires, all closely connected to the military establishment. That these are actors in control of impressive resources is beyond question: *ON Sport*'s being able to buy the expensive broadcasting rights to Egypt's world cup qualifiers is one indication (Bassām ABŪ BAKR). In fact, as Aḥmad Saʿīd, the former editor-in-chief at the popular football website *FilGoal.com*, suggests, such monetary muscles might be precisely what is needed to reignite the slumbering national sport. "It will take some time, but I think they will make money eventually," Saʿīd explains when asked about *ON Sport*'s prospects for being profitable.

> It's key that they're part of and backed up by a huge network. This gives them the necessary capital and advertisement. […] In a way, everything is in place. The league is running, television is ready, people want to get distracted from problems and politics, there are millions of fans. The only thing that's missing is supporters at the stadiums. That is the final missing piece of the puzzle. (ROMMEL, *Notes*)

Aḥmad Saʿīd may well be right. Perhaps the Egyptian football puzzle is only missing one single piece. But what a crucial piece that is! Fans have not been allowed to watch domestic football live in Egypt since the Port Said disaster four years earlier, and Egypt's stadiums remain empty this year too. After pressure from the Confederation of African Football (CAF), a limited but increasing number of supporters are allowed at al-Zamalek's (DORSEY [a]) and al-Ahly's (DORSEY [b]) Champions League fixtures as well as the national team's different

qualifying matches (*AhramOnline* [c]). Yet, all plans for reintroducing fans at Egyptian League and Cup matches are either abolished or postponed. It does not matter that club officials are complaining about an ever-deepening economic crisis (ROMMEL, *Notes*), or that the parliament debates the issue during one of its sessions (*AhramOnline* [b]).

In Tunisia, the situation is similarly depressing. After being suspended for a period of three months in the wake of the 2011 revolution, Tunisia's top football league resumed behind closed doors for a full four years. Today, fans are allowed to enter stadiums again at domestic as well as international games but only in limited numbers. Furthermore, other restrictive measures stay in place, like a travel ban on opposing supporters and a prohibition on minors attending games. Without ticket sales, particularly small clubs in the league struggle financially, as they lack other sources of revenue like official fan shops. As a consequence, these clubs' training facilities are often in a deplorable state, they have difficulties ensuring the wages of their players, and they can barely finance trips to play abroad (GHARIANI). All of this obviously has negative effects on staff and player morale and leads to worsening results and subsequent tensions.

So why, then, have stadiums remained closed? The problem, *allegedly*, is "security." The Port Said massacre still haunts Egyptian football, and so does another tragic incident at the Air Defense stadium outside Cairo in February last year. At that time, twenty Zamalek fans were killed in a stampede as they tried to enter a severely undersized security gate and the police incomprehensibly decided to fire tear gas into the panicking crowds. The match that day was meant to be the first league game with supporters since the Port Said tragedy. These days, it is most often framed as a failed test: an awful lesson learned and a sign that supporters cannot watch football safely in Egypt for the time being (ROMMEL, *Notes*).

Similarly, the Tunisian behind-closed-doors policy is *meant* to reduce violence and tensions at the stadiums. In fact, however, it rather adds to them. Not only have confrontations between police and fans, who are frustrated both with the security restrictions and the bad results of their teams, increased in recent years. What is more, players, managers and other staff members engage in violent behaviour too. For instance, on May 23, at an eagerly awaited end-of-season game between the two Tunis suburb rivals Stade Tunisien and AS Marsa, tensions are boiling over during the match when players aggressively tackle each other and furiously protest every decision by the referee. At the end of the game, a mass brawl erupts between the two teams during which the goalkeeper of AS Marsa is violently attacked by three players of Stade Tunisien (*Afrik-Foot*, Ncib) [↗**Clash**].

It is in other words no real surprise that many Tunisians and Egyptians question that genuine care for spectators' safety is the main reason why the supporter bans are kept in place. As Aḥmad Saʿīd puts it, the problem is rather that the current Egyptian military-dominated government is "sadly" guided by an "exaggerated security mentality" (ROMMEL, *Notes*) [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. Their sole purpose, he claims, is to "prevent that what happened in 2011 [i.e., the Revolution] happens again" (*ibid.*). From this perspective, keeping Egypt's stadiums empty makes a whole lot of sense. Not only does it abolish one of very few spaces for spontaneous mass gatherings. More crucially, it helps to control and confine the young and unruly Egyptian Ultras movement [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. The Ultras constituted an important player during Egypt's revolutionary transition in 2011–2013. At the stadiums, as well as in protests and sit-ins elsewhere, Ultras Ahlawy (AU07; supporting al-Ahly) and

Ultras White Knights (UWK; al-Zamalek) were often at the forefront, using its experience of mass organization and street-fighting in clashes with the Egyptian security forces (ROMMEL 2021: 85-164). Being football fans first and foremost, the Ultras organizational base was always the stands at Cairo Stadium. By preventing fans from attending matches, the regime is thus effectively locking out a potentially dangerous antagonist from its traditional habitat.

The same strategy, it seems, lies behind the partial supporter ban that is kept in place in Tunisia. Here, in a country still heavily controlled by the police and lacking recreational opportunities for young people, the stadium has emerged as one of few spaces to gather collectively and express oneself freely. Especially for young people from poorer neighbourhoods who suffer unemployment and hardship, the stadium is a refuge where they can let off steam and feel as part of a strong group that defies power, be it only once a week for a couple of hours (ROELLIN, *Notes*) [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***, ↗**Young *vs.* Settled**, ↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. As is shown in the documentary film *Attitude* by Ines Ben Othman (Īnās Bin ʿUthmān), members of an Ultras group consider themselves united and loyal "brothers" (*akhwā*) who are bound together in a common struggle against "the system" [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. Already their banners, mural paintings and tags contain numerous references to figures embodying resistance like Che Guevara, Yasser Arafat or Emiliano Zapata. In their chants, they do not merely sing about their passion for the club and its titles, but also often criticize and mock "them," by which they mostly mean the political class, the security forces and/or the mainstream media (Roellin, *Notes*). In fact, as Tunisia's Ultras groups consider their clubs as mainly representing the oppressed and disenfranchised, they understand encouraging their team as an act of defiance against the establishment which, as they feel, treats them unjustly and misrepresents them (*ibid.*). In this spirit, the Curva Nord Ultras of the Club Africain sing the following lines in one of their favorite chants of 2016, entitled "*Manifesto*":

> You wanted us to be puppets / Mere merchandise in this country / You want the fans to be naive / Singing only about titles / Never forget the derby match / With closed doors / Our message is very clear / It is the people who rule / It has the power in this country / [...] / I will never live as a slave / Laugh and say "everything is ok" / For me, with independence came freedom / I will never betray the cause / They despised our club / They said "dissolve the fan groups" / The press is happy / They applaud the "freedom" in this country / [...] / Football in Tunisia is destroyed / Theft and bullshit mentality / You want us to be corrupt just like you / With a useless passion / Casablanca, Algeria, from Cairo to Tripoli / We brought them civilization / And made them love freedom / And here in our country we are despised / Forbidden from stadiums / [...] / Everyday, our language is new / We are never outdated / Even when I am in handcuffs / I ask about my club / [...] / Football has become a [legal] case / Shame on you!

Indeed, these *are* difficult days to be an Ultra. Recurring tensions and clashes between police forces and Ultras groups mark the year in Tunisia. The police often accuse the Ultras of being thugs who intend to cause violence and commit crimes and thereby justifying the partially closed stadiums, as members of a Club Africain Ultras group explain at a café in the Tunis neighborhood of Bāb Jadīd—a bastion of the club's supporters (ROELLIN, *Notes*). The young

men claim that, in reality, it is the other way around: the police forces are the ones who regularly provoke violence [↗**True *vs.* False**]. One of the security forces' strategies is to indiscriminately fire tear gas on the Ultras in the stadiums, then leave open only one exit gate in order to attack the fleeing fans there with truncheons and arrest a random group. The Ultras stress that they express their criticism and discontent mainly by non-violent means, with chants, banners, graffiti and tags in the streets. But the police do not even allow them these. Rather, they often confiscate banners and flags, sometimes even shirts and scarves with simple group logos on them [↗The **Policeman Criminal**]. This is why the African Winners, one of the Club Africain Ultras groups, feel that they are deprived of their freedom of expression and that almost six years after the revolution "nothing has changed," as the group states in a sarcastic communiqué in October:

> Soon 6 years, nothing has changed. Still the same unjust and cruel policy of a state that continues to deprive us of our fundamental rights: to support, express ourselves or simply to be free. After the efforts and the time spent preparing 25 flags and 5 giant banners containing various slogans and drawings related to the club, the group, our beliefs and today's match, all the work has been confiscated by the police. From now on, we will glorify the democracy established by the state and salute the great concern of the police forces to preserve our freedoms and rights through our work so that it is present in the stands without the least difficulty…Long live the freedom of oppression! (AFRICAN WINNERS) [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**, ↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**].

And it is by no means any better in Egypt. Here, the groups have found themselves increasingly persecuted in the last few years: many leaders are in jail, all Ultras supporter groups are officially banned, and their social media platforms are heavily monitored [↗**Prison**]. Still, they do keep on fighting. UWK are involved in a prolonged and increasingly acrimonious struggle with al-Zamalek's Club President Murtaḍà Manṣūr. On the first anniversary of the Air Defense massacre, they organize a spectacular commemoration in Fustat Garden in southern Cairo, attended by thousands of Ultras members and the families of the stampede's victims [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. During the event, Ultras members raise a series of banners, accusing Manṣūr of having set up and later covered up the killings in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the media and the doctor responsible for the autopsies (UWK Facebook, February 10). In response, Manṣūr—an influential lawyer and a close regime ally—claims that members of UWK have attempted to murder him, and dozens of Ultras are imprisoned (*AhramOnline* [a]).

Simultaneously, on the other side of the Nile, similar tensions are growing between al-Ahly club and Ultras Ahlawy after a couple of years of relative calm and mutual understanding. During their fourth commemoration of the Port Said massacre—an event that takes place inside the club premises on Gezira Island—UA07 calls for the execution of former Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi (Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭanṭāwī), Egypt's de facto ruler at the time of the tragedy (ULTRASAHLAWY07MEDIA) [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. This, apparently, is more than al-Ahly's President Maḥmūd Ṭāhir can stomach. In a television interview, he condemns the fans' "insults" against "state institutions" and vows that the supporters will not be allowed to enter the club in the future (ABD EL RASOUL [a]).

In summer and early autumn, these troubles between fans, clubs and security escalate: UA07 storm their own team's training session as a protest against a series of poor results (FILGOAL); al-Zamalek's popular playmaker, Shikabala, is suspended after celebrating with the Ultras fans after a Champions League victory (ABD EL RASOUL [b]); at several instances, Ultras members are rounded up and jailed by the police (UA07 Facebook, September 26 and 29; UWK Facebook, October 6) [↗**Prison**].

It is, in other words, no real surprise that non-Ultras fans, like Bassām in Cairo and many fellow football supporters across Egypt and Tunisia, are struggling to stay in touch with the game they used to love (ROMMEL, *Notes*). The reasons for why they claim that the sport "has not come back" after its post-2011 slump are numerous: worsening results, stadium tragedies and constant fights between Ultras supporters, the sporting establishment and the security forces. Most crucial, though, is the absence of spectators at the stadiums, a fact that has rendered Egyptian and (until recently) Tunisian football much less attractive. Not only is a whole generation of young boys growing up in Egypt and Tunisia without having ever seen a match live; matches at eerily empty arenas simply do not make for appealing television broadcasts. Finally, as it is up to the security services to decide where and when matches are played, Egyptian league games are spread out across the week and teams shift home stadiums constantly. For Bassām, this arbitrariness of it all is the single biggest obstacle for re-invigorating his passions for al-Ahly. "It's just impossible to keep up," he complains and shakes his head in despair.

> Football on Fridays used to be an almost religious thing. First the prayer, then a game. But now… Sometimes they play on Wednesday afternoon, then on Sunday night. The next week it's different again. And then there is an interruption due to some troubles. How can you set the rules of home and away if everyone is playing at the same stadium? Things like, al-Ismaily playing al-Muqawilun [a Cairo club] somewhere in Alexandria. How did that happen? Something important gets lost. It's all decided by security (ROMMEL, *Notes*).

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʔAlsh* ♦ *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ *Kamīn* ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Social Media

CODES – Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

Written sources

ABD EL RASOUL, Ahmed [a]. "Egypt's most popular club Ahly condemns anti-state chants by fans." *AhramOnline*, February 1, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/6/0/186512/Sports/0/Egypts-most-popular-club-Ahly-condemns-antistate-c.aspx >.

— [b]. "Zamalek suspends skipper Shikabala for Ultras celebration." *AhramOnline*, August 20, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/239258.aspx>.

Bassām ABŪ BAKR. "ON Sport taḥṣul ʿalà ḥuqūq bathth mubārāt Miṣr wa-Ghānā… wa-Shalabī yuʿalliq ʿalayhā." *FilGoal Ifrīqiyā*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.filgoal.com/articles/278711/ أون- سبورت-تحصل-على-حقوق-بث-مباراة-مصر-وغانا-وشلبي-يعلق-عليها >.

[*African Manager* =] "Tunis: BCE touche un salaire annuel, égal à 4 fois celui du president chinois." *African Manager*, January 5, 2016, <https://africanmanager.com/17_tunis-bce-touche-un-salaire-annuel-egal-a-4-fois- celui-du-president- chinois/>.

[*African Winners* =] "Bientôt 6 ans, rien n'a changé." *African Winners Website,* October 23, 2016, <http://www.africanwinners.net>.

[*AhramOnline* [a]]. "Zamalek fans jailed for attempted murder of Mortada Mansour, storming club grounds." *AhramOnline*, January 9, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/180497.aspx>.

— [b]. "Egypt's parliament to discuss lifting fan ban in league matches." *AhramOnline*, September 15, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/243987.aspx>.

— [c]. "Egypt claim a vital 2-0 victory over Ghana in Sunday's World Cup qualifying clash at Alexandria's Borg El-Arab Stadium." *AhramOnline* Multimedia, November 13, 2016.

DORSEY, James M. [a]. "Recognizing fan power, Egypt's regime boosts calls for security sector reform." *Middle East Soccer*, April 10, 2016, <http://mideastsoccer.blogspot.fi/2016/04/recognizing-fan-power-egypts-regime.html>.

— [b]. "Egypt inches towards return of militant fans to stadium terraces." *Middle East Soccer*, June 23, 2016, <https://mideastsoccer.blogspot.fi/2016/06/egypt-inches-towards-return-of-militant. html>.

ELASSAL, Mahmoud. "Zamalek coach complains of squad shortage after tough Wydad test." *AhramOnline*, September 25, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/6/51/244611/Sports/Egyptian-Football/Zamalek-coach-complains-of-squad-shortage-after-to.aspx>.

[*FilGoal* =] "Kāmīrā fī l-gōl tarṣud laḥẓat hujūm jamāhīr al-ʾAhlī ʿalà l-lāʿibīn...wal-hitāfāt qawiyya." *FilGoal* Miṣr, August 16, 2016, <https://www.filgoal.com/articles/271687/-كاميرا-في-الجول-ترصد-لحظة هجوم-جماهير-الأهلي-على-اللاعبين-والهتافات-القوية >.

GHARIANI, K. "Tunisie: chronique d'un football malade." *beinsports,* July 17, 2016, <http://yourzone.beinsports.fr/football-chronique-tunisie-problemes-clubs-selection-joueurs-107628/>.

MÜLLER, Quentin, and Timothée VINCHON. "Tunisie…Thunes easy?" *Sofoot.com,* January 28, 2016, <http://www.sofoot.com/tunisie-thunes-easy-216122.html>.

Aḥmad MUṢṬAFÀ. "Shāhid mādhā faʿal jumhūr al-Zamālik baʿd ḍiyāʿ al-ḥulm al-ifrīqī wa-bukāʾ hīstīrī li-lāʿibī al-Zamālik." *YouTube* post, October 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbieuqdOWyI&feature=youtu.be>.

al-NĀDĪ al-ʾAHLĪ al-MIṢRĪ. "ʿAlī Maʿlūl yuwaqqiʿ lil-ʾAhlī li-muddat 4 sanawāt." *al-Nādī al-ʾAhlī al-Miṣrī* (al-mawqiʿ al-rasmī), July 25, 2016, <http://alahlyegypt.com/2016/07/25/-علي-معلول-يوقع-للأهلي-لمدة-٤-سنوات/>.

ROMMEL, Carl. *Fieldwork notes* (unpublished).

— . 2021. *Egypt's Football Revolution: Emotion, masculinity and uneasy politics.* Austin: Texas University Press.

ROELLIN, Jonas. *Fieldwork notes* (unpublished).

[ULTRASAHLAWY07MEDIA =] "al-Dhikrà al-rābiʿa li-madhbaḥat Būr Saʿīd." *YouTube* post, February 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdZfl2aLBB0&feature=youtu.be>.

[*ZamalekFans* =] "Miṣr takhṭif nuqṭa ghāliya min Nayjīriyā bi-qadam Muḥammad Ṣalāḥ." *Zamalek Fans.com*, March 25, 2016, <http://zamalekfans.com/zamaleknews/-مصر-تخطف-نقطة-غالية-من-نيجيريا بقدم-محم>.

Films and songs

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the Last Days of the City). By Tāmir al-Saʿīd (Tamer el Said). Egypt, Germany, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

Al-ifrīqī ʿashara mlāyīn ḥabbīnāhā (10 million love the Club Africain). YouTube video, posted by "Tarak Hamdi." May 1, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWFY0WNE2i4>.

Attitude. By Ines Ben Othman. Tunisia 2016.

Best Chant in Tunisia – Testament (LIVE) [Curva Nord Tunis – Club Africain]. YouTube video, posted by "Al-ifriki TV." December 29, 2015. <https://www.youtube. com/watch?v= 7eytgFvUy5I>.

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). Egypt, Germany, France 2016.

J27 ST Tunisien 1 - 1 AS Marsa résumé 22/05/2016, YouTube video, posted by «Omar Ncib». May 22, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OsKEG72rZxM>.

Tunisie : Le gardien de l'AS Marsa attaqué par des joueurs du Stade Tunisien, YouTube video, posted by «Afrik-Foot». May 22, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfah-AANVrY>.

◄ carl.rommel@helsinki.fi ►
◄ jonas.roellin@islam.unibe.ch ►

Garbage

By Stephan Guth

"Revolutionary," "ingenious," "groundbreaking"—these are some of the superlatives used in the online magazine *CairoScene*'s retrospective on the most influential "16 of 2016," to describe *Environ Reform*, an app with which its two young Egyptian initiators, ʿAmr Fatḥī and Muṣṭafà Khayrat, are "making a positive impact on Egypt" and "redesigning the country's human landscape," as *CairoScene* has it. In a situation where litter is everywhere and the notorious garbage problem is felt to have reached its "boiling point," the app "allows people to report accumulated street garbage to *Environ Reform* which then sends someone to clean it up." "Residents simply have to take a photo of the mess, the app then tracks it" and communicates the need for cleaning up to one of the local waste collectors, the *zabbālīn*. In the event that the latter are unable to respond in due course, *Environ Reform* sends out "an emergency truck to deal with the matter." At the same time, the app notifies the authorities about refuse collecting activities in the area and in this way gives them "a much-needed tool for waste management oversight" (Hosny & Primo). After the completion, in September, of a one-year pilot phase during which the app was tested in the ʿUmrāniyya district in Gizeh with great success, a solution to the ugly sight of ubiquitous garbage and its penetrating smell which have become an almost 'natural', normal aspect of life in most parts of the country, finally seems to have been found, and it looks as if everyday life in the megalopolis will regain, with the cleanliness of public space and better air, some of its basic dignity. An advertising poster of *Environ Reform* proudly demonstrates the difference between *qabl* "Before"—garbage bags filling the streets of an average neighbourhood—and *baʿd* "After"—a nice clean bench, inviting to sit down and relax in the shadow of a green tree (Boraie), all this thanks to the inventiveness of two smart compatriots who saw what was needed and how new technologies could easily be utilized to repair a deplorable state of affairs. [↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**]. [Cf. also ↗**Uber**].

Indeed, there is a common feeling that the garbage problem has become considerably aggravated during recent years—and not only in Egypt. Like traffic jams and polluted air [↗***Zaḥma***], litter filling the streets and stinky garbage, irresponsibly thrown away, or burning, have become so commonplace that they figure as quasi-omnipresent default setting in all kinds of assessments of, and comments on, the situation in the country. And that not only in the poor slums (as in *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan* or *ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm*) [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***], but also in other parts of the cities: portrayals especially of the urban landscape, like Tāmir Saʿīd's *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna*, or polit-thrillers that have this cosmos as their background, like *The Nile Hilton Incident*, always show, drastically and unvarnished, heaps of litter and garbage as typical aspects of a world in ruins, of which also car wrecks, decaying houses, and dust and dirt, as well as widespread misery, crippled people and beggars form part. Often these conditions are associated with rampant neoliberal consumerism—all kinds of cheap commodities displayed in the showcases of the big warehouses or by street vendors [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]—, and while the camera is panning over such landscapes, typically during a ride in a taxi or on a motorcycle (*Ākhir ayyām al-madīna*, *The Nile Hilton Incident*, *Nawwāra*), the accompanying sound track almost cynically contrasts

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *134–*139
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

the view of misery and decay with the latest news from the radio, heralding the Government's recent laudable achievements and the President's always beneficial deeds [↗**The Voice from Above**, ↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. In Tāmir Saʿīd's film, close-ups and slow-motion express the high attention the protagonist gives to all the filthy details in this environment, and calm music underlines the contemplative mood with which he registers the data he will need to pursue his project of an overall assessment, which in turn shall help him decide whether he should stay or leave. For Ayman, the boy-friend of the director of the documentary *Nihāyāt saʿīda*, the garbage he spots everywhere in Alexandria is among the many things that eventually let him make up his mind: he will not stay here, but return to Europe where he has been studying in the years following the Revolution [↗Migration]. Of course, if you can afford it [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**], you can also buy yourself out of the waste to live in a clean green compound in one of the new quarters for the rich [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**]: what a contrast between "La vie en vert" (ABAZA), advertised on huge roadside billboards (or shown in various films, like *Nawwāra*, or Ramadan serials, like *Fawq mustawà al-shubuhāt*), and the grey or muddy brown, dusty, filthy and stinky environments in which the billboards are erected! [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**].

The sight and smell of garbage have become so overwhelming that they regularly evoke dystopian, quasi-apocalyptic visions of the future. One of these, Muḥammad RABĪʿ's *ʿUṭārid*, though published already in 2014, is shortlisted in spring for the 2016 International Prize of Arabic Fiction as one of the most authentic, still 'valid' expressions of contemporary sensitivities—"painfully plausible," as an article in *madàMaṣr* in June labels it because it depicts "a world we seem to already partially inhabit" (EL GIBALY). Parts of this novel are set in a not all too distant—2025—nightmarish future, and one of its protagonists is the "garbage man" (*rajul al-zibāla*) who lives on, and from, the garbage that piles up within the "ruins of a shattered Cairo" (IPAF). With his dream of building a spacious home and having a family, he represents, in a way, today's average citizen; in 2025, however, the home that will house this citizen and his family will be carved out from an immense garbage pyramid, like an ancient Pharaoh's burial chamber. In this text, again, garbage goes along with misery, but also with the evanescence of all notions of humanity: While the "garbage man" initially grants two orphaned girls a kind of asylum (though only as workers in his garbage business, and abusing the eldest as his sex slave), he cannot prevent marauding thugs from raping the girls he had taken under his protection; when the thugs are done, he rapes the eldest a last time before killing himself with a rusty knife—evidently out of guilt, shame, and disgust of himself [↗**Suicide**]. – Rabīʿ's vision is not all too far-fetched: as the Tunisian short film *Khalʿa* (2016) shows, there *are* people, already now, living in similar conditions.

Here, as elsewhere, garbage is not only a problem of logistics. It is seen as a marker of the country's backwardness and/or decline, and it serves as an indicator of critical assessment that determines one's confidence in, or rather deep concern about, the country's future [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**, ↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**].

However, garbage is not only ugly and makes public space that could be used for relaxing, gathering and amusement inaccessible, particularly also due to the acrid smell emanating from it; nor is garbage only a source of doubt about one's own society's degree of development and civilization and, hence, a pessimistic look into the future. Garbage is rather also a source of national shame and a feeling of cultural inferiority as soon as Westerners

take notice of and point to it [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. Moreover, the image of a 'dirty' country can have alarming economic consequences: When the German Ambassador to Tunisia in August tells the leading radio station *Mosaique FM* that German tourists have said that "if the garbage is still piled up in Djerba, they will not return" [↗**Tourist Resorts**], this is immediately taken up by *Tunisia Live* and made into an issue, titled "German Tourists Put Off Tunisia by Waste and 'Poor Service'" (BEN TAIEB). Even though both the ambassador and his interviewer agree that also "security concerns had played a role in discouraging German tourists from visiting the country" [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**], the perceived lack of cleanliness still seems to be among the factors that, according to *Tunisia Live*, nevertheless are responsible for the dramatic decrease in the number of foreign visitors—21.5 percent over the previous year, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Tourism in June (BEN TAIEB Aug. 10, 2016).

Apart from such economic aspects, there are also severe health problems caused through garbage, particularly for those who live—and for lack of alternatives *have* to live—close to the enormous landfills that the state operates, especially in Tunisia. "Skin issues are just one of the health hazards that allegedly come with life next to Borj Chakir," *Tunisia Live* reports in August about by far the country's largest garbage dump that receives more than 200 truckloads, over 3,000 tons per day, sometimes—during the cleanliness campaigns—even up to 4,000 tons, of garbage from the Greater Tunis area with its population of ca. 3 million. The landfill has eleven leachate ponds (400,000 m³), all in open air, on which the magazine continues:

> Exposure to the odors of leachate—a liquid of chemically hazardous substances—as well as the daily inhalation of bio-gas can cause severe respiratory issues. Many residents suffer from asthma. Worse developments are said to include lung cancer, which is reported to have already killed one of the town's residents [...], who worked on the landfill for almost a decade. Another resident [...] had his leg amputated after stepping on an infected syringe while working on the site. (*Tunisia Live*)

Like a number of other landfills in which the larger cities dispose of their waste [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**], Borj Chakir, too, is located "in the middle of thousands of hectares of fertile agricultural areas," and poor management and inadequate treatment capacity have resulted in the contamination of the groundwater in a radius of 5 km of the ponds, so that not only more than 50,000 people have to endure the bad odours but also many families were deprived of water for their animals or to irrigate their fields (*ibid.*).

How could the garbage problem reach such critical dimensions?, observers and reporters ask—and come up with a number of explanations. Partly, the problem is not new and has to do with the habits of a society that was catapulted into neoliberal capitalist consumerism without being alerted to the negative consequences of a throwaway mentality. Nowadays, however, most people should know better, and this is why Mona Abāẓa, in her personal report about life in a middle-class Cairo neighbourhood (Dokki), cannot forgive the young women who frequent her building once a month to collect their salaries their carelessness and lack of responsibility in simply dropping litter and chewing-gum in the staircase (ABAZA 244) [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. To a large degree, however, the garbage problems are the result of more recent developments. Partly, they go back to the times of the old, pre-revolutionary

regimes who had negotiated contracts, lucrative also for themselves, with foreign companies, replacing old, organically grown ways of dealing with the country's waste with more 'modern,' but much less effective ones. Thus, while traditional garbage collectors in Egypt, the *zabbālīn*, had over decades managed to effectively dispose of most of the country's organic waste using pigs—the *zabbalīn* are Copts and have no problem with that—, the Mubārak regime had seized, in 2010, the pretext of an allegedly imminent spread of the swine flu to have all pigs in Egypt slaughtered (which pleased the anti-Coptic Muslim Brotherhood) and then "reached out to a foreign company named *Onyx*" to deal with the garbage, after the *zabbalīn* had been deprived of their method to deal with organic waste and were now foregoing its collection. *Onyx*, however, "didn't work" because "there was no structure to this system" and "corruption ran rampant," so that "it became noticeable to many that waste management was better under the '*zabaleen*' than under Onyx" (BORAIE). In Tunisia, too, the *ancien régime* had 'outsourced' waste management to a foreign company, the French *Pizzorno Environnement.* Its association with the dictator was probably among the reasons why "close to 60% of municipal government trash equipment was burned or destroyed during the revolution" (*Tunisia Live*). Faced with the challenge of having to deal with the collapse of the previous system of waste management, the new government, still inexperienced and struggling with many other issues that had to be taken care of in the troubled post-revolutionary period, went for a fast solution and decided to concentrate on only a few landfills, the biggest among them Borj Chakir, without taking the steps that would have been necessary to monitor and control such huge garbage 'monocultures'. In addition, garbage-related legislation had to be renewed, but the process was all too slow and faint-hearted, while efficient regulations about penalties to be fined against offenders or to prevent corruption would have been needed.

Dystopian visions like Rabī'ʿ's garbage landscape notwithstanding, and irrespective also of undeniable stagnation and widespread frustration over ongoing pollution and obstacles on the way to possible solutions [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**], there are also a lot of hope-inspiring, encouraging developments [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. They all are the result of the activity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the initiatives of individuals with a "passion" for a cleaner, healthier and more beautiful environment. Like the Tunisian *SOS Biaa* (Arabic *bīʾa* 'environment'), they work towards the creation of a new awareness, especially among the youth, of the detrimental effects of a negligent, irresponsible attitude towards waste, and they act as critical observers and alerters as well as advocates of the victims of pollution. Sometimes, they also try, as the Egyptian duo behind *Environ Reform*, to step in with own (non-profit) enterprises that bring together parties involved who, until now, have communicated too little with each other, like residents, garbage collectors, and the government, to re-unite individual and collective interests [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)]. Both *SOS Biaa* and *Environ Reform* underline that they even do what otherwise the state might be expected to do: fundraising. Thus, *Environ Reform* is trying to raise some monies for the smartphones that are needed for their garbage management app to function properly (Boraie, SOS Biaa). [cf. ↗**Crowdfunding**]

Art also comes in. With his—again: self-funded—project, *Idrāk* / *Perception*, the Tunisian painter eL Seed (working in Egypt this time) aims to attract people's attention to the importance of the job of the *zabbālīn*, whom many disrespectfully call 'those of the

pigpens (*zarāyib*)' but whose indispensable contribution to society's well-being everybody should be aware of and appreciate [↗**Normality *vs.* Heroism**]. eL Seed tries to achieve such awareness and appreciation with the help of a monumental *calligraffito*, covering more than fifty houses in the Manshiyat Nāṣir district where many *zabbālīn* live, an artwork that contrasts the beauty and colours of his calligraphy with the bleak uniform appearance of the mud brick buildings [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**] and can only be viewed in its entirety from one specific point at the top of the neighboring Mokattam hill (DAWSON, EL SEED at TEDSummit, GALALAH), in this way underlining the idea that the well-being of society as a whole will not be achieved unless all individual groups work together under one perspective; then, however, also the functionality of each individual element within the great whole will be obvious [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)].

With the idea that you are not doomed, as it seems to many, to passively endure what is happening, but rather *can* do something, and that you also *have* to do it *on your own*—don't wait for the government! [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]—the NGOs' and artists' initiatives resemble, in their essence, the spirit that is speaking from the many self-help books [↗**Self-help**], and projects like Fatḥī's Khayrat's *Environ Reform* are announced like the successful enterprises of smart private entrepreneurs, worth taking as a model to follow. NGOs and artists thereby also take the roles of quasi-psychiatrists who diagnose their patients' diseases and critically monitor their development [↗**Psychiatrists**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *'Ashwā'iyyāt* ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Migration ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ Suicide ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ Uber ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individual *vs.* Collective) ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority | Maṣr/Tūnis *vs.* Barrah ♦ Normality *vs.* Heroism ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Normality = Heroism (Surviving) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck)

References

Written sources

ABAZA, Mona. "Cairo: Personal Reflections on Enduring Daily Life." *JAIS*, 16 (2016): 234-252.

BEN TAIEB, Zaineb. "German Tourists Put Off Tunisia by Waste and 'Poor Service'." *Tunisia Live*, August 9, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/09/german-tourists-put-off-tunisia-by-waste-and-poor/> (as of Aug. 10, 2016).

BORAIE, Eihab. "In it Together: Cleaning Cairo." *CairoSCENE*, May 15, 2014, <http://m.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/In-it-Together-Cleaning-Cairo>.

BORAIE, Eihab. "The Environmental App That Could Actually Clean Up Egypt." *CairoSCENE*, October 6, 2016, <http://m.cairoscene.com/Buzz/The-Environmental-App-That-Could-Actually-Clean-Up-Egypt>.

DAWSON, Aimee. "Q&A with eL Seed: Changing perceptions." *madàMaṣr*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/01/feature/culture/qa-with-el-seed-changing-perceptions/> (last accessed March 11, 2018).

EL GIBALY, Lara. "Completely horrific and painfully plausible: Mohamed Rabie's *Otared*." *madàMaṣr*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/06/24/feature/ culture/completely-horrific-and-painfully-plausible-mohamed-rabies-otared/> (as of July 10, 2016).

EL SEED at TEDSummit. "A project of peace painted across 50 buildings." Talk recorded at TEDSummit, June 2016, <https://www.ted.com/talks/el_seed_a_project_of_peace_painted_across_50_ buildings>.

GALALAH, Kurt. 2016. "Tunisian Artist eL Seed Paints Manshiyat Naser With Stunning Graffiti." *Scoop Empire*, March 14, 2016, <https://scoopempire.com/tunisian-artist-el-seed-paints-manshiyat-naser-stunning-graffiti/>.

HOSNY, Farah, and Valentina PRIMO. "16 of 2016: The Egyptian Men and Women Changing the Country." *CairoSCENE*, December 30, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/16-of-2016-Egypt-s-Real-Influencers>.

IPAF. (n.d.). "Mercury: Mohamed Rabie." <http://www.arabicfiction.org/en/Mercury> (as of March 10, 2018).

[FM Jawhara =] N. N. "Khaṭāyā māliyya li-kull man yulqī 'l-faḍalāt 'Ashwā'iyyan aw yuḥriquhā." *FM Jawhara*, March 23, 2016, <http://www.jawharafm.net/ar/article/السجن-وخطايا-مالية-لكل-من-يلقي--الفضلات-عشوائيا-أو-يحرقها-/105/52698> (last accessed March 11, 2018).

RABĪʿ, Muḥammad. (2014). *ʿUṭārid* (Mercury). Cairo: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2015.

SOS BIAA. *SOS Biaa : Save the Environment.* 2016, <http://www.sosbiaa.com/EN/>.

TUNISIA LIVE. "Breaking Point: Life in the Shadow of Tunisia's Largest Landfill." *Tunisia Live*, September 7, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/09/07/breaking-point-life-in-the-shadow-of-tunisias-largest-landfill/> (as of Sept. 12, 2016). – See also the YT video (same title), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaQXj9kct7M>, uploaded the same day.

Movies

Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan (We have never been kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). Egypt, U.A.E., Qatar, Lebanon 2016.

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the last days of the city). By Tāmir al-Saʿīd (Tamer el Said). Egypt, Germany, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm (Ali, the Goat, and Ibrahim). By Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif El Bendary). Egypt, France 2016.

Fawq mustawà al-shubuhāt. TV drama, written by ʿAbd Allāh Ḥasan and Amīn Gamāl, Midḥat al-ʿAdl (ishrāf drāmī) and Muḥammad Rajāʾ (scenario), directed by Hānī Khalīfa. Egypt, Ramaḍān 2016.

Khalʿa (Khalaa). Short film by Māhir Ḥasnāwī (Maher Hasnaoui). Tunisia 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). Egypt 2016.

Nihāyāt saʿīda (Happily Ever After). Documentary by Nadà Riyāḍ (Nada Riyadh) and Ayman al-Amīr (Ayman El Amir). Egypt 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). Egypt, Germany, Sweden, Denmark 2017.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Gated Communities / Compounds

By Stephan Guth[1]

"First Settlement" … "Third Settlement" … "Fifth Settlement" (al-Tagammuʿ al-Awwal, … al-Thālith, … al-Khāmis) … "Road 90"… Neither the names of the quarters nor the street names in the New Cairo district (al-Qāhira al-Jadīda) seem to originate from a particularly creative imagination. One eventually gets to New Cairo after a 25–30 km ride from Cairo's old city centre, through the desert to the southeast of the Egyptian capital, on seemingly endless motorways, as boring and uninspired as the bureaucratic-pragmatic number-names of many of the quarters and streets. There are no architectural landmarks either and it is easy to get lost in this vast monotony that by now covers more than 30,000 hectares of the Greater Cairo area. Yet it is here—and in many other similar places in the country, mostly in the vicinity of the bigger cities—that they are situated, the "paradises on earth," as ubiquitous advertisements praise them: the so-called *compounds*, including numerous gated communities, which in recent years have become the destination of a veritable "exodus" (Abaza *b*, 425) [↗Migration]. The rich and upper middle class people who are settling in these new areas seem to find here—or at least hope to find—what they evidently feel is missing from other places in the city, values and a quality of life that also the billboards all along the roads and TV and Internet ads are eager to promote:

> Enjoy the luxury of a full-service residential community away from the noise and bustle of the capital. Located in the heart of vast green spaces, fresh air and sunshine, the *Agadir Garden City Compound* means calm and peacefulness, in perfect harmony with nature combined with architectural beauty, uniting beauty and creativity with the highest standards of luxury. Special services and security as well as maintenance and cleaning services are provided for every unit separately, ensuring enjoyment, comfort and tranquility. (Agyad Multi Projects)

> In *Palm Hills* we dream of the return of love and beauty… and clear enjoyment… and the return of mercy to our heart... and the dream of the return of culture and the arts…. And enlightened thought…. *Palm Hills* for construction… the return of the Egyptian spirit. (Advertisement on ON TV channel, during Ramaḍān / June – Abaza *a*, 234)

> Grab the last place in heaven… Invest in the clean and beautiful life of the compounds of upscale New Cairo. We provide you with your dream villa and a swimming pool… All you need is to sign a down payment…. Pay a seven year-installment to be in paradise… Choose a worthy life in a gated compound… You deserve a more beautiful life… (unspecified source, said to occur "everywhere" – Abaza *a*, 236)

From these and similar ads it is clear that the "endless merits" (Abaza *b*, 425) with which these compounds try to attract new customers are envisioned as counter-spaces, spaces that are defined by the absence of what characterizes life in two other parts of the city

1 Inspired by Abaza 2018.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *140–*146
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

[↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**]—the old city and the slums. With all their luxury, greenery, cleanliness, sporting facilities, etc., the compounds are presented, on the one hand, as the opposite of the ↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***, the mushrooming slums which are areas of poverty and destitution [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**], where even access to water is often difficult and basic sanitary requirements aren't met, where also prostitution and thuggery are frequent and drugs consumed regularly [↗**Hashish**]. On the other hand, life in the compounds is also constructed as the negation of life in (greater) Downtown Cairo [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]: whereas the old city centre suffers from nightmarish traffic jams [↗***Zaḥma***] and you almost get suffocated from pollution and the smell of ↗**Garbage** lying around, you will find in the compounds the "fresh air" you need to breathe; whereas old Cairo is decaying, everything is new and modern in New Cairo; and while Downtown has been the site of rebellious chaos and violent ↗**Clash**es in the past, compounds are promoted as places of calm, harmony and peace, even dignity, love, mercy, culture and art, places where you can forget about the unpleasant aspects of life and enjoy nothing less than the "return of the Egyptian spirit," as the *Palm Hills* ad has it. In the eyes of some, it is true, Downtown Cairo may have retained some of its previous charm, thanks to its still lively cultural scene, as a movie like "The Last Days of the City" (*Ākhir ayyām al-madīna*) suggests; but those who appreciate this are only a tiny minority—mainly artists and intellectuals. Most others feel repelled, or even "ejected," by the dehumanized "hell" of Downtown, to the new satellite cities in the desert (ABAZA *b*, 425), and

> Gated communities spread vastly in the Egyptian real estate market especially among the rich due to privacy, prestige, quality of life, segregation [...]. Soon their demands became a target model for less economic [*sic*] classes as well. (EL SAYED)

It feels different indeed to live in a compound. Given that a Ramaḍān series (*musalsal*) like "Beyond Suspicion" (*Fawqa mustawà al-shubuhāt*) is shot in a real compound (*Palm Hills*), we have no reason to doubt that we get a rather fair picture of the essentials of compound life from such fictional representations (which are so frequent—apart from the *musalsal* there are also feature films like *Nawwāra*, *Mawlānā*, or *The Nile Hilton Incident*, larger parts of which take place in compounds—that some observers get the impression that compound life itself is the real protagonist of many of them—ABAZA *b*, 429). Moreover, the movies also underline those aspects of compound life that obviously are most striking for spectators who are *not* living there (and probably will never have the means to do so), i.e., the vast majority of the country's population. From the films it appears that the most important markers of difference—and thus also of class difference [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**, ↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]—are:

- kitschy (= ugly?) entrance portals—meaning: as an inhabitant of a gated community, you know who you are and that you have achieved something, so why not give your self-confidence some kind of monumental expression and show off;
- gardens and swimming pools = as an inhabitant of a compound, you have some leisure time and can afford to relax and refresh yourself whenever you like; moreover, you have access to water in abundance although you are in the middle of the desert;
- clean toilets = you can enjoy amenable living conditions and hygiene and are not exposed to unpleasant smells;

– paintings on the walls = you don't have to struggle for survival but have plenty of time and money left to deal with lofty culture and the more sublime things in life;
– black four-wheel-driven Landrovers = you are rich and own this expensive and 'strong' type of car, the car of men of action and adventure…
– … which is always spotlessly clean because it is regularly washed by some servant = you are not only rich but also the 'lord' of some 'slaves'; among these feature also:
– waiters, butlers, and (often Philippine) maids = you don't have to do cumbersome household chores but can pay others to work for you;
– guards and video surveillance = you are so rich and important that you need protection; a gated community like El Amn Elaam (*al-Amn al-ʿĀmm*) even chooses this purpose as its name (EL SAYED) [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**];
– dogs, preferably 'wild' and 'scary' ones = you are civilized enough not to carry a gun but can afford to keep a pit bull, German shepherd, or bulldog as a kind of weapon for your protection, and boast a bit of the animal's strength, symbolically representing your own; unlike the majority of the people who rather detest dogs—they only know those emaciated dirty creatures that are living in the streets—your dog has a health certificate and lives in conditions that many an ordinary citizen can only dream of; moreover, the dog also contributes to mark your western lifestyle, which is also copied in
– recreation facilities like spacious public gardens with a lot of water, greenery and pleasant shade; sporting grounds and gyms, golf courses, jogging courses, clubs, food courts, cineplexes, and so on; it is not surprising therefore to find that even a 'typically Western' profession like the psychiatrist [↗**Psychiatrists**] seems to have become a common, even fashionable phenomenon of everyday life in luxury in the compounds (*Fawqa mustawà al-shubuhāt*);
– the 'anonymity' of the uninspired place and street names and the uniform city landscape do not seem to matter for the inhabitants of the compounds: obviously, for them these are, if at all, only minor flaws that are more than balanced by the 'civilized,' modern and chic forms of social life (bars, discos, skating halls, stylish cafes, children's playgrounds, clubs, sushi bars, …) and many high-end amenities and other pleasant aspects, made possible among other things by a functioning infrastructure, including banks and many other kinds of services that make life so easy here and evidently also let you forget the long distances that have to be covered in a car between home and workplace; once here, you can do great shopping in one of the giant air-conditioned malls, those temples of consumerism that give you the illusion of being somewhere else, in the West or, rather, in the Arab Gulf—to some outsiders, the malls are strong indications of a "Gulfification" (*khaljana*) of life in Egypt (cf. ABAZA *b*, 441).

With all these features, the new cities on the periphery are to a large degree independent and self-sufficient, so that many inhabitants only rarely feel a need to go to the old parts of the city; the younger among them may not even have been there once [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**].

President al-Sīsī is said to detest films about ↗ ***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt*** because, as he sees it, they foul the Egyptian nest, depicting the country as "a big shanty." Would he like the other Egypt then, the Egypt of the compounds and gated communities as it emerges from the many movies

and *musalsalāt*? Probably not either. For although the compounds fit almost ideally into the picture of a modern, developed Egypt that official propaganda is eager to spread [↗**The Voice from Above**], and although the façades of this world probably appear even more beautiful, modern and developed in fiction than in real life, yet the compounds are mostly shown to be populated by dubious, false and criminal inhabitants, often close to the regime and/or involved in politics, who accumulated their wealth through theft, corruption, and even murder. In *The Nile Hilton Incident* (a movie based on real events!), the rich entrepreneur Shafīq Bek whom we meet once on a golf course, once in his luxurious villa with spacious, splendid, ultra-clean toilets at which the hero, a petty policeman-detective, only can marvel, is both a member of parliament, connected to the (Mubārak) regime, and behind the murder of a prostitute; in *Nawwāra*, the owner of the impressive gated palace where the eponymous heroine is employed as a housemaid, belongs to a super-rich family and is eager to transfer his assets to some bank account in the West immediately on hearing that there may be some kind of redistribution of illegally acquired capital shortly after the Revolution; and in the Ramaḍān series "Beyond Suspicion" we meet a devilish psychopath, member of parliament she too, but also a scrupulous murderer, and holder of a fake PhD. The overall message: the dazzling external beauty and perfection of the artificial new desert cities conceals crimes committed by "those on top" against the toiling innocent man in the street [↗**True *vs.* False**, ↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**].

To mark the villainy of the false and criminal compound-inhabiting elite, popular productions can play on widespread misogyny and xenophobia—quite significantly, Raḥma, the arrant villain in "Beyond Suspicion," is a woman [↗**Male *vs.* Female**] and blond, i.e., Westernized [↗The **Suspect Foreigner**]. Less lurid productions refrain from such bluntly stereotypical characterizations. But also, they are eager to underline the enormous divide that is gaping between the rich and the poor in today's society [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**]. Both *Nawwāra* and *The Nile Hilton Incident*, for example, draw their dramatic dynamics from the opposition between representatives of the lower and lowest classes, on the one hand, and exponents of the rich and influential—compound-inhabiting—elite, on the other. In *The Nile Hilton Incident*, a petty policeman-detective becomes the 'attorney' of a murdered prostitute as well as the protector of a Sudanese room-maid, an innocent migrant worker, representing those on the utter margins of society, who happened to see the murderer leave the scene after committing the crime and who, as an eyewitness, is now in danger of being killed by Shafīq Bek's henchman. In *Nawwāra*, the social chasm is underlined through a juxtaposition of scenes from the heroine's life at home, in the popular quarter or slum, and the giant villa to and from which she commutes on a daily basis. As if to make the spectator feel the enormous gap that separates 'those on top' from 'the people,' the movie follows Nawwāra several times on her way from home to the villa and back, each way a trip of up to two hours or more on which she also has to change means of transportation two or three times, from ↗**Tuk-tuk** to microbus to ordinary bus to compound-internal connecting services, etc. Moreover, the social chasm is not only expressed spatially but also with the help of the masters' dog: Nawwāra has to feed "Butch" (!) with five kilos of high-quality meat per day, while for ordinary Egyptians, including her own family, meat is unaffordable, except perhaps on holidays. Thus, the fact that the animal is shown to actually lead a better

life than a subordinate and enjoy more privileges than the vast majority of the population quite literally turns the non-compound-dwellers into 'underdogs.'

There is probably a lot of truth to the picture that popular productions paint of life in the compound districts as compared to other parts of the city. Massive social inequality is an undeniable fact, which is why it is a recurring theme also in cartoons. Similar to its often lachrymose dramatization in cinema or soap operas, the witty, pointed representation in cartoons, too, mostly seeks to reclaim moral superiority while the artist knows all too well that, materially, s/he is on the side of the losers [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. On a few occasions, however, such sketches are used, somehow cynically, by the compound agencies themselves. A cartoon showing half of the city occupied by a dense agglomeration of shanty-like buildings, inhabited by a large amount of desperate-looking people, and the other half taken by only one luxurious villa and its surrounding gardens, with two happily smiling men relaxing on deck-chairs at the side of a swimming pool, one of them praising God "for the grace of living in such a safe, developed and humane place," is used by Beverly Hills Egypt to promote their own compound on Facebook. (After many comments filled with outrage and indignation, this "worst ad at the closing of 2016" is removed from the web the same day—ABBAS).

Although highlighting important aspects of social, economic and political reality, fiction and satire are certainly also partial misrepresentations. For it is not only the uppermost echelons of society who choose, and can afford, to live in New Cairo. There is also a significant group of upper middle-class, for example AUC students. Usually these live in 4–5 storey buildings rather than in large villas, as the super-rich do. And there seems to be a general tendency to attract more and more of these than of the super-rich. Many, if not most Egyptians seem to have given up hope that living conditions may have a real chance to change significantly in the older parts of the cities [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. Therefore, there are only two ways out [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]: either leave the country [↗Migration] or leave the old cities for an essentially different, somehow utopian ground. Who would blame those who choose this option if they have the means to do so? Flowery official propaganda about all kinds of achievements and the nation's progress notwithstanding [↗**The Voice from Above**], even the State seems to share the feeling of having reached a dead end and therefore starts to move out itself: On April 27, President al-Sisi inaugurates the new headquarters of the Ministry of Interior in New Cairo (YOUSSEF), a measure that precipitates the complete removal, planned for 2022, of all ministries to the new administrative city—"Sisity"—that is under construction in the Eastern Desert (AMJAHID). With this, the government follows dozens of factories that already have their headquarters or major plants in New Cairo (General Electrics, Siemens, El Sewedy Electric), as well as prestigious international schools and colleges which have major campuses here: British International College (BIC), The American International School in Egypt (AIS), the New Cairo British International School (NCBIS), the Lycée Français, and many more. Important universities, too, have moved to, or been newly founded in, New Cairo: The American University (AUC), the German University (GUC), the Future University in Egypt (FUE), the Canadian International College (CIC), the New Cairo Academy.

Earlier projects of satellite cities in the Western and Eastern Deserts which have been promoted ever since Sadat but which, with the exception perhaps of 6th of October City, have

never been really successful (due to poor planning—scarcity of water!—remoteness, speculation, corruption). New Cairo, by contrast, seems to have the potential of becoming a success story. Although, it is true, the estimated 1.5 million people who are currently living here are far from the 4–5 million for which New Cairo is designed, the area is still attracting more inhabitants, and apartments and villas are "rented out at faster rate in New Cairo than in 6th of October City" (al-AEES). It is no longer only the super-rich who are living here, the compound community has begun to differentiate: alongside with the very luxurious gated communities there are also "moderate, low high and post-enclosed" ones, "based on residents' economic status" (EL SAYED). The area is not connected to the metro system yet; but there is a vast network of bus lines operating between here and other cities in the country (*Cairo360*), and there are taxis, micro-buses, and even public buses from/to Taḥrīr Sq. (CHITI). It may take some more years for the new districts to further develop their infrastructure, facilities and cultural activities. However, the more people they attract the broader and more varied the spectrum can be expected to become. For the moment, an event like the Book Fair in al-Shaykh Zāyid City (in the Western Desert) is far from able to compete with the traditional big Cairo Book Fair in ʿAbbāsiyya: interesting publishers, yes, but almost no customers, poor infrastructure, everything arranged a bit sloppily and without perceivable commitment, as if the organizers themselves did not believe in the meaningfulness of exhibiting here… (*ibid.*). However, as polls among the compound dwellers show, many are pretty satisfied already now (EL SAYED)—not to speak of the many ↗**Tourist Resorts** that are organized as gated communities and where you can find "everything" you may desire "at the seaside" (*kulluh ʿa l-baḥr*), in immediate vicinity of where you spent your vacation, without having to contact the outside world (*The Shore*). Moreover, "[i]nvesting in properties within a gated community is one of the most profitable investments in Egypt especially in time of unrest" (*ibid.*).

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Clash ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Hashish ♦ Garbage ♦ Migration ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ Tuk-tuk ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck)

References

Written sources

ABAZA, Mona [*a*]. "Cairo: Personal Reflections on Enduring Daily Life." *JAIS*, 16 (2016): 234-252.

ABAZA, Mona [*b*]. "Cairo After the Event: Fiction and Everyday Life." In: *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam: Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Florian Zemmin, Johannes Stephan & Monica Corrado, Leiden: Brill, 2018: 425-50.

ABBAS, Wael (Wāʾil ʿAbbās). Facebook post of December 31, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid= 10158096867675220&set=a.10153039100570220.1073741829.523900219&type=3>.

al-AEES, Shaimaa. "Apartments, villas rented out at faster rate in New Cairo than 6th of October City: JLL." *Daily News Egypt*, July 25, 2016, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/07/25/ apartments-villas-rented-faster-rate-new-cairo-6th-october-city-jll/> (last accessed October 10, 2016).

AGYAD MULTI PROJECTS. "Live the Luxury Life at Agyad Garden City." [2016], https://www.agyadeg.com/, <http://www.agyadeg.com/projects/agyad-garden-city/>, <https://www.agyadeg.com/ar/projects/agyad-garden-city/> (as of April 4, 2016, revisited April 6, 2018).

AMJAHID, Mohamed. "Neue Hauptstadt in der Nähe von Kairo: Ägypten baut Sisity." *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 24, 2016, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/weltspiegel/sonntag/neue-hauptstadt-in-der-naehe-von-kairo-aegypten-baut-sisity/12868660-all.html> (last accessed September 8, 2018).

[*Cairo360* =] N. N. "New Cairo." *Cairo 360*, [n.d.], <http://www.cairo360.com/area/20/new-cairo> (retrieved October 4, 2016).

CAIROSCENE TEAM. "Buseet: Public transportation à la carte." *CairoScene*, September 20, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Travel/Buseet-Public-Transportation-A-La-Carte>.

CHITI, Elena. Fieldwork notes. April 9, 2016. (Unpublished).

EL SAYED, Eslam Nazmy Soliman Fahmi. "Residents' Satisfaction at Gated Communities in Egypt. Case Study: New Cairo city in Greater Cairo Region (GCR)." *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*, 7.4 (April 2016), <https://www.ijser.org/researchpaper/Residents-Satisfaction-at-Gated-Communities-In-Egypt.pdf>.

[NUCA] = Hay'at al-mujtamaʿāt al-ʿumrāniyya al-jadīda / NEW URBAN COMMUNITIES AUTHORITY. "al-Qāhira al-Jadīda." <http://www.newcities.gov.eg/Default.aspx>, [no date], archived from the original on December 18, 2016.

[*The Shore*] = The SHORE NORTH COAST. "Kulluh ʿa l-baḥr." *The Shore*, ad in *al-Ahrām*, June 16, 2016, <http://theshore.abraj-misr.com/> (last accessed 24 June, 2018).

SELIM, Adham. "Slums, gated communities and public space: On global cultural policies and the architectural stalemate in Egypt." *madàMaṣr*, October 19, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/10/19/feature/culture/slums-gated-communities-and-public-space/> (last accessed September 13, 2018).

YOUSSEF, Adham. "Al-Sisi inaugurates new Ministry of Interior headquarters." *Daily News Egypt*, April 27, 2016, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/04/27/422154/> (last accessed September 9, 2018).

Movies

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the Last Days of the City). By Tāmir al-Saʿīd (Tamer el Said). Egypt, Germany, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

Fawq mustawà al-shubuhāt. TV drama, written by ʿAbd Allāh Ḥasan and Amīn Gamāl, Midḥat al-ʿAdl (ishrāf drāmī) and Muḥammad Rajā' (scenario), directed by Hānī Khalīfa. Egypt, Ramaḍān 2016.

Mawlānā (Our Master) / *The Preacher.* By Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). Egypt, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). Egypt 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). Egypt, Germany, Sweden, Denmark 2017. [Published and shown on festivals in 2017 or 2018 but shot in, and thus reflecting the atmosphere of, 2016.]

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Hashish

By Jonas Roellin

The rapper Kafon awakes slowly from a daytime nap on a featureless grey rooftop covered with nothing but a few TV satellite dishes. Still drowsy, but with a clear grin on his face, he starts rocking his afroed head to a beginning reggae-inspired drumbeat. In the next scene, the musician sits on a golden throne-like chair, surrounded by a cloud of smoke and chants: "Enough with getting high / you made me crazy / I lie to myself / tomorrow I will roll [a joint] again" (Kafon).

The video clip of the song "Enough with getting high" (*shīkha yezīnī)* is released on YouTube in May and within months reaches millions of views. While the song describes the downsides of intoxication (*shīkha*) only in ironic terms, it praises the pleasures and funs of it without restraint [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. Kafon's song about "*zaṭla*", the cannabis resin also known as "hashish", is only one further hit song about young people's favourite drug in post-revolutionary Tunisia. In addition to Kafon, several Tunisian rappers are popular for their *zaṭla* anthems [↗**Celebrities**]. Take for example Hamzaoui Med Amine and Klay BBJ whose post-revolutionary song "Bring me a [hashish] bar I love *zākātākā*" is a cult song among cannabis-aficionados this year. Using numerous coded words that refer to the world of cannabis consumption (f.ex. "*zākātākā*" meaning "*zaṭla*"), they rap about the causes for it, how it has become widespread and describe the intimate atmosphere that surrounds their *zaṭla* gatherings. In fact, as the Tunisian blogger Leila Bezzine (Laylā biz-Zayn) writes in her blog on June 20 ironically, "talk of *zaṭla*, women, sex and 'garbage in a trashcan' (*zebla fī pūbelā*) by using curse words, then post them on your Facebook profile or YouTube channel and you will be as famous as Kafon and Balti [another Tunisian rapper]" (Bezzine).

The popularity of rap and reggae music centered around the theme of *zaṭla* – which can also mean intoxication – reflects the spread of drugs and specifically cannabis consumption among young people in Tunisia. This year, cannabis is by far the most frequently used drug among Tunisian youth. The same is true for Egypt. Of the more than one third of young Egyptians who use drugs, more than three-fourths consume, often exclusively, cannabis which is, as in Tunisia, predominantly smoked in the form of hashish (Rabie et al.). Accordingly, there is also a range of Egyptian songs dedicated to hashish. Many of them are composed in the genre of Electro Chaabi (*electro shaʿbī*), also known as Mahraganat (*mahragānāt)* [↗**Pop Music**]. They celebrate hashish gatherings and collective trance with titles such as "Hashish our excess" (*ḥashīsh farṭnā*, FM) or "Whoever smokes hashish shall raise his hand" (*illī yishrab il-ḥashīsh yirfaʿ ʾīduh*, Hossam Music FM). Also, in the Ultra scene of Egyptian and Tunisian football clubs, eulogies for hashish and other drugs are chanted [↗**Football**]. For instance, the Ultra South Warriors who support the football club Espérance Sportive de Tunis, compose a football chant entitled "Hashish and Coke: a rush in my head" (*zaṭla wa-kōkā shīkha fī rāsī*) which they post on YouTube early this year. In the same period, the supporters of the rival football club Club Africain sing together in one of their popular chants entitled "Hey government, set me free":

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *147–*155
© Jonas Roellin, University of Bern, CH

> The boys of the 'virage' are kamikaze / you see them marching on in processions / banners and flags of the team / in my head, I am not okay / bar and *zaṭla* in addition to the mug [alcohol] / I am not aware what is happening to me / hey government, set me free / I know that you adore me / if you want a story, you know where you can find me / waiting for you in the 'virage' / I don't care about you, we fear only God the superior (LEADERS CLUBISTES) [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**].

Not surprisingly, the media regularly report on the dangers of cannabis consumption with such headlines as "This is the impact of cannabis on the health of young people" (*Directinfo*) or "Tunisia: what zatla really contains" (HAD). Protests frequently take place with parents and teachers who are worried about the threat the drug poses to the health and the education of their youngsters. On April 18, the online journal *Webdo* reports that women in Kairouan have organized an "anti-Zatla protest march." According to the radio station *Mosaïque FM*, they call on the Ministry of the Interior to exert greater effort in the fight against this phenomenon noting that a few days ago, a student "committed suicide after using this drug" [↗**Suicide**].

While the issue how potentially harmful the use of cannabis/hashish is to the health of young people is a frequent topic in the media and political discussions of both countries, the question why so many youngsters consume the drug in the first place figures less prominently in the official public debates. However, it is dealt with in various background reports, novels, films or in everyday conversation. For instance, a background report published in the American magazine *The New Yorker*, widely shared on Facebook, suggests that "the Arab Spring has given Tunisians the freedom to act on their unhappiness" and that "there was a boom after the revolution – in religion, in drugs, in everything – because of the new freedom," as a young Tunisian drug addict had it (PACKER). On Facebook, the report is harshly criticized for its apparent simplistic and uninformed views. A young Tunisian academic comments that the American journalist wrote a "hipster-orientalist" piece in a "pseudo-ethnographic style" with "stereotypical characters" [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**]. She and other Facebook users criticize, on the one hand, that young Tunisians know themselves very well that in their generation there is widespread "unhappiness" with the current political and social order and that they do not need a renowned American journalist or any other foreign expert to tell them that. The more pertinent question is rather what leads to their "unhappiness" and why for many consuming hashish alleviates that unhappiness so that life appears more bearable or even enjoyable. On the other hand, as the critics point out, there is precisely no "freedom" to consume hashish these days. In Tunisia as well as in Egypt, even smoking a small joint can lead to severe punishment. So, why do so many young Egyptians and Tunisians consume hashish nevertheless?

In an audio documentary about drug use in Cairo, a young hashish consumer explains that he regularly smokes hashish "in the dosage that anyone uses to get by and chill for a bit" (DIRINI). A similar, if more extensive explanation is found in Ahmed Naji's (Aḥmad Nāgī) novel "Using Life" (*Istikhdām al-ḥayāt*). The book was originally released in 2014 but receives renewed attention this year after the author is convicted by an Egyptian court of "violating public morals" in his writing (VOON) [↗**Court Trials**, ↗**The Honourable Citizen**]. In the book, Naji tells the story of Bassem (Bāsim), a filmmaker in his twenties

who lives in Cairo "where life is one long wait, and the smell of trash [↗**Garbage**] and assorted animal dung hangs about all the time and everywhere" (FORD). Day in, day out, Bassem wanders the city in search of a bit of excitement, smoking hashish or drinking vodka with his friends and embarking on all kinds of sexual adventures with different women. In the controversial chapter 6, which leads to the charges made against Naji, Bassem describes a party scene full of music, cigarettes and hashish:

> We stayed up until the morning smoking hash and competing to finish a whole bottle of vodka. I remember seeing the music dissolve into monkeys that clung to the ceiling. There was a blonde German tapping her leg to the beat. Erections popping around the room. A young Palestinian-American, with poor Arabic, talking a lot about racism. Smoke, cigarettes, hashish. And more smoke. (*arablit*)

For young Egyptians and Tunisians likewise, consuming hashish seems to be a means to escape an everyday reality that is experienced at best as monotonous and boring, at worst as oppressive and stifling. By contrast, getting high is experienced as exciting, stimulating and liberating [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. A young Egyptian village dweller who is asked by an anthropologist how he routinely spends his days, how he "kills time," answers:

> The best way is with hashish. When you get high, your worries fly away and are replaced by good thoughts. It's like living in two worlds, one where you have ideas, your thoughts run freely, you laugh and feel good, and this one we live in. (SCHIELKE)

Not only young people who feel bored and stifled smoke hashish. People of all ages, especially those living a life of hardship and deprivation find some relief in hashish, as an American traveler in Cairo observes:

> Cairo, the violent sun can broil the brains of a field worker or tourist, but there is soothing relief in the secret shadows of Cairo's famous hash cafes. The workers who pick produce in the relentless heat, the cab drivers, the engineers, the rootless young men, the slow-moving old men, all who have the half dollar for the cup of strong tea and a pipeful of rich Lebanese hash, men of all ages come to relax in the forbidden comfort of camaraderie and cannabis in the hash cafes of Cairo. (WHITE)

It is a "forbidden comfort" indeed, and there is no "freedom" to smoke hashish without risking severe punishment. In Egypt, cannabis consumers face a minimum of one year in prison and a fine of at least 1,000 £E. Trafficking or possession of cannabis is punished with up to 25 years of prison. As the use of cannabis, like all other drugs, is strictly forbidden in Egypt and, moreover, this year there has been an increase in repression, young people are careful to only smoke in secret places where no one can see them (MARTINEZ, SCHIELKE). In Tunisia, the situation is similarly grim for cannabis users. However, there are signs that things are changing, if only slowly. In a social awareness video posted on YouTube, journalist and activist Thameur Mekki (Tāmir Makkī) criticizes the Tunisian drug law known as 'Law 52' considering it "too repressive towards cannabis consumers because it sentences them to at least one year in prison and a fine of 1000 Tunisian dinars," concluding that "today, this law has a growing negative social impact and worries numerous national and international organizations" (*YT* "Loi 52"). In fact, as Ghazi Mrabet (Ghāzī Murābiṭ), lawyer and founder

of the reform group "The Prisoner 52" (*as-sajīn 52*), which calls for the revision of the law, writes in the collective blog *Nawaat*:

> Tunisian prisons are currently filled with young people because of this law. Do you know, for example, that in the *Mornegiyya* prison, here, a few kilometers from Tunis, practically one in two people has been incarcerated for drug use or possession? Do you know that 60 percent of those sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 1000 dinars are between 18 and 29 years old? What a waste! (MRABET & EL HOUDA BEY) [↗**Prison**]

The Tunisian office of *Human Rights Watch* equally slams the "draconian" drug law that was introduced in 1992 during the rule of the now overthrown dictator Ben ʿAlī. On February 2, it publishes a report entitled "All this for a joint: Tunisia's repressive drug law and a Roadmap for its Reform," in which it specifies that 5,200 people are currently locked up in Tunisia for smoking or possessing cannabis, nearly a third of all people imprisoned in Tunisia. Based on interviews with 47 Tunisians, it describes arbitrary searches of homes, young Tunisians being beaten and forced to humiliating urine tests by police and overcrowded prisons where simple cannabis users share cells with hardened criminals (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH).

As for Egypt, it is not known how many people are imprisoned there for drug-related offenses since the authorities do not grant the public access to this sensitive information (MARTINEZ). However, given the high percentage of cannabis users among the youth, the severe drug law, the increased repression as well as the current state of prisons, one can assume that in Egypt there is also a relatively high number of young cannabis consumers in the overcrowded prisons where they hardly benefit from professional addiction treatment but are rather exposed to potentially violent inmates and arbitrary prison guards.

In Tunisia, most cannabis users who are sent to prison are young people from underprivileged backgrounds, a reporter team claims in a TV reportage (*YT* "One year in prison"). The *France 24 Observers* team visits an unnamed poor neighborhood in Tunis that typically lacks recreational and cultural facilities for young people [↗**ʿAshwāʾiyyāt**]. There, the reporters encounter a group of neighborhood friends at one of their meeting points: a neglected public field strewn with garbage and waste, with plastic bags stuck in ragged bushes [↗**Garbage**], and a few emaciated cats and chickens wandering around. In the background, half-finished brick houses can be seen, the walls of which are covered with crude, scrawled tags. Standing in the dirt with worn-out sneakers, the neighborhood friends openly admit their hashish consumption to the reporters – and use the opportunity to criticize the police: "The police try to stir up trouble for us. If you live in a working-class neighborhood, they automatically assume you take drugs. If the police arrest you for fighting, they do a drugs test." "Is cannabis just an excuse to arrest you?", the journalist wants to know. "Yes, of course. They test you even if you haven't done anything wrong" [↗**The Policeman Criminal**].

However, neither in Tunisia nor in Egypt, the harsh law affects only young people from poor neighborhoods. As is revealed in Victor Castanet's short documentary "Metal Bars for a Hashish Bar," hashish is consumed in all social strata. The film delves into a hip music club in downtown Tunis [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**] where fashionable young people celebrate and enjoy themselves. "When we smoke hash, it's like a peaceful day. It's just for us. We

don't hurt anybody. They don't have the right to just throw us in jail," a young lady at one table says casually. A young man at another table insists: "Everybody smokes hash here in Tunisia. Everybody. But it is a hidden thing. You cannot tell your parents, you cannot tell the police, you cannot tell the government" (*Tunisie: Des barreaux...*) [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. Moreover, as a repressive legacy of Ben ʿAlī's police state [↗**Past vs. Present**], the law would still be used as a pretext to harass and imprison young activists who are critical of the "system", a graffiti artist explains [↗**"The System" vs. "The People"**]. It would also serve as a means for the police to extort money from young people. These would, however, mobilize their friends on social media in such a case in order to raise the sum required by the police and thus avoid their arrest [↗**Crowdfunding**]. While in Egypt, the harsh drug law is also used as a pretext to harass and arrest young activists or generally proponents of the January 25 revolution (MARTINEZ), the public exposure of such abuses is a much riskier and hence hardly occurring undertaking. There also does not seem to be any substantial movements or campaigns calling for the amendment of the severe drug law under which numerous ordinary cannabis consumers and their families suffer.

In Tunisia, however, in the course of the year, pressure by civil society groups and human rights activists to amend Law 52 grows. The reform group "The prisoner 52" (*as-sajīn 52*) regularly organizes protests in front of the National Assembly in the suburb of Le Bardo in Tunis. Activists of the group say that Law 52 is "destroying lives" and hold up signs that read, "Down with Law 52" or "Our children are not criminals." One female member of the group tells *TunisiaLive* that her son had been imprisoned for a year without trial on suspected drug offences and that "whole families live in a state of horror because of this law" (MEE STAFF) [↗**Disappearances**]. In fact, the government has already sent a first draft revision to the law to parliament on December 30, 2015. The proposed changes include abolishing prison terms for first-time drug offenders and reducing the maximum penalty for repeated offenders from five years to one year in prison. But the draft revision remains stalled in parliament (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH).

While most Tunisians support a relaxation of Law 52, a few call for a more radical change, namely the legalization of cannabis in Tunisia. *Nawaat* publishes two contributions in this spirit. One highlights the economic benefits of a legalized cannabis trade through taxation as a way out of indebtedness (MESTIRI) [↗Dollar Crisis]. The other even advocates for Tunisia to become a destination for "cannabis tourism" to solve the tourism crisis: "We could sell combined trips with really evocative names like 'Zatla-desert' or 'Jouino on the beach'," the author writes (FIRASFROMTEXAS) [↗**Tourist Resorts**]. Not surprisingly, these contributions provoke harsh reactions on the part of readers. One of them comments: "Farewell, principles of morality and health of the citizen. Everything becomes a commodity. If the majority of the people is permanently high, it is very easy to colonize the country" [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**].

But even those who support a relaxation of Law 52 are concerned over the impact the relaxation could have on the consumption of drugs in Tunisia. Already on January 15, the *Arab Weekly* estimates that a law revision would increase the number of drug users among young people considering that a third of them are unemployed and most live in urban districts that lack functioning sport and culture facilities. Moreover, apart from one rehabilitation

centre in Sfax that is barely operating due to financial problems, there would be a lack of treatment services for drug addicts (GHANMI) [↗**Self-help**].

Finally, drug use in Tunisia is already on a dangerous rise due to the increase in drug smuggling across porous borders. In September, the magazine *Leaders al-ʿarabiyya* publishes an explosive dossier on this issue entitled "This is how the drug cartels will fall." The dossier reveals that Tunisia is a transit ground for drug traffickers, particularly of hashish destined to Europe. The cannabis resin is typically produced in Morocco and brought in through the long and porous border with Algeria. Some of it is also smuggled through Libya from sub-Saharan Africa. We learn that the volume of the drug market in Tunisia amounts to tens of millions of dinars and that in the first half of the year, already 1,850 kilograms of hashish were confiscated by the police. The dossier also reveals that the number of people who engage in the hashish trade continues to increase and that jihadists collude with drug smugglers to finance their terrorist activities (*Leaders al-ʿarabiyya*) [↗**Security vs. Fear**]. In Egypt, there is also regular media coverage of the issue of border security, smuggling activities of criminal networks and the influx of drugs in the country. In September, during an interview on *Naẓra*, a show airing on the TV channel *Ṣadā al-balad*, Ahmed Omar (Aḥmad ʿUmar), head of the Anti-Narcotics General Administration, reveals that drugs cost the Egyptian national economy "billions" of pounds specifying that since the beginning of the year a total of 12 tons of hashish have been found in Egypt (*YT* "Mudīr al-idāra...").

In light of the high demand for the drug, hashish dealing as a way to make fast cash can be a tempting business for young Tunisians and Egyptians who are stuck in years of unemployment and aspire for a more affluent lifestyle [↗**Young vs. Settled**, ↗**Affluence vs. Destitution**]. For many poor young people especially in the border regions, hashish smuggling even offers a means of livelihood [↗**Center vs. Periphery**].

As for those countless ordinary – regular or occasional – hashish consumers who do not engage in any trafficking activities, their hashish use serves more purpose than mere relief from boredom and distress. Smoking hashish also means protesting, not only directly against the harsh drug laws, but also indirectly against patronizing and oppressive political and social structures. In fact, praising hashish in songs and other artistic mediums like graffiti or fashion wear has become a popular symbolic means for young people to criticize state and patriarchal authority and claim more self-determination. For instance, in the fragile ballad "I will smoke hashish" (*hashrab ḥashīsh*) that has gathered millions of listeners this year, the young Egyptian singer Lūkā sums up the restrictions of growing up as a girl in society, and as a remedy to these she suggests to "smoke hashish":

> My grandma told me girls should wear dresses / my mom told me girls shouldn't play in the mud / and my aunt who wears a veil told me 'sing as you wish but you will go to hell' / as for my dad, he said nothing / so I'll do what's right and smoke hashish (LŪKĀ). [↗**Young vs. Settled**, ↗**Male *vs.* Female**]

In Tunisia, also, songs praising hashish/*zaṭla* are a popular outlet for young people who wish to challenge authoritarian structures and claim more autonomy. In one of the (post-) revolutionary Tunisian cult songs entitled "Living as a Poor" (*zawwelī ʿayyesh*) which *zaṭla* lovers listen and sing along to throughout the year, we hear music stars Bendirman, Hamzaoui Med Amine and Klay BBJ chant together [↗**Pop Music**, ↗**Celebrities**]:

Marijuana please, dear bro' / serve, pass along, puff / do not get stuck in boredom / hey government, stop the control, turn away your stare / a year and a vespa [a metaphor for 1000 Tunisian dinars] are for me just a short film / change the law, old man [president Bājī Qā'id as-Sabsī] / roll, roll, be quick / the love of my heart *zākātākā* / those who are afraid of her are cowards / in our heads, we are always high / hey Mama, stop it / the curtains are too withdrawn / guards know about us, many have pointed to us / informants are watching us / shall we have another one [joint] or is it enough / this product is hot, this product is delicious / not mixed with medicaments like others / the police will rush on us / chains will be put on our hands / we did nothing nor took anything / we only smoked because we are fed up / we are suffocated, I swear / Leave us alone, please (BENDIRMAN, MED AMINE, and KLAY BBJ).

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *'Ashwā'iyyāt* ♦ Celebrities ♦ Court Trials ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Football ♦ Garbage ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ Self-help ♦ Suicide ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts

CODES – Affluence vs. Destitution ♦ Center vs. Periphery ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past vs. Present ♦ Security vs. Fear ♦ "The System" vs. "The People" ♦ Young vs. Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

Written sources

[*Arablit* =] [N. N.]. "'Using Life': A novel excerpt on trial in Egypt". *Arablit*, January 25, 2016, <https://arablit.org/2016/01/25/using-life-a-novel-excerpt-on-trial-in-egypt/> (last accessed May 15, 2019).

BEZZINE, Leila. "Top 10 raisons de ne plus penser à quitter la Tunisie." Blog, June 20, 2016, <http://leilabezzine.blogspot.ch/2016/06/top-10-raisons-de-ne-plus-penser.html> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

[*Directinfo* =] [N. N.]. "Voici l'impact du cannabis sur la santé des jeunes." *Directinfo*, May 11, 2016, <https://directinfo.webmanagercenter.com/2016/05/11/voici-limpact-du-cannabis-sur-la-sante-des-jeunes/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

DIRINI, Alaa el-. "Drugs in Egypt: Between Culture and Crime". Audio documentary Script, December 13, 2016, <http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/4939/DrugsinEgyptBetweenCultureandCrimeAudioDocScript.pdf?sequence=1> (last accessed May 13, 2019).

FIRASFROMTEXAS. "Et si le salut du tourisme tunisien passait par la légalisation de la 'zatla'?" *Nawaat*, January 8, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/01/08/et-si-le-salut-du-tourisme-tunisien-passait-par-la-legalisation-de-la-zatla/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

FORD, Mary Catherine. 2017. "In 'Using Ife', Ahmed Naji imagined a riveting ride across a dystopian Cairo, then he was arrested." *Words Without Borders,* December, 2016, <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/book-review/in-using-life-ahmed-naji-imagined-a-riveting-ride-across-a-dystopian-cairo> (last accessed July 1, 2019).

GHANMI, Lamine. "New law to reduce prison terms for drug offenders in Tunisia." *The Arab Weekly*, January 15, 2016, <https://thearabweekly.com/new-law-reduce-prison-terms-drug-offenders-tunisia> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

HAD, Rym. "Tunisie: Ce qu'il y a vraiment dans la Zatla." *Wepost Magazine*, May 17, 2016, <http://www.wepostmag.com/tunisie-ce-quil-y-a-vraiment-dans-la-zatla/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. "'All this for a Joint': Tunisia's Repressive Drug Law and a Roadmap for its Reform. *Human Rights Watch*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/02/02/all-joint/tunisias-repressive-drug-law-and-roadmap-its-reform> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

[*Leaders al-ʿarabiyya* =] [N. N.]. "*Hakadhā tasquṭ ʿiṣābāt al-mukhaddarāt*." *Leaders al-ʿarabiyya,* issue 9, September/October, 2016, <http://ar.leaders.com.tn/le_mensuel_feuilletez_le?id=13> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

MARTINEZ, Alan. "Marijuana in Egypt." *Pevgrow*, March 17, 2016, <https://pevgrow.com/blog/en/marijuana-in-egypt/> (last accessed May 13, 2019).

[*MEE* STAFF =] [N. N.]. "HRW: Tunisia must reform 'draconian' drug laws." *Middle East Eye*, February 2, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hrw-tunisia-must-reform-draconian-drug-laws-1389279751> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

MESTIRI, Mhamed. "Consommation de Cannabis: l'impact économique de la dépénalisation." *Nawaat,* December 28, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/12/28/consommation-de-cannabis-limpact-economique-de-la-depenalisation/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

MRABET, Ghazi, and Nour EL HOUDA BEY. "Dialogue sur la jeunesse, ce que doit Youssef Chahed à la jeunesse." *Nawaat*, August 19, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/08/19/dialogue-sur-la-jeunesse-ce-que-doit-youssef-chahed-a-la-jeunesse/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

PACKER, George. "Exporting Jihad. The Arab Spring has given Tunisians the freedom to act on their unhappiness." *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/tunisia-and-the-fall-after-the-arab-spring> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

RABIE, Menan, et al. «Sociodemographic indicators for substance use and abuse in Egypt." *Journal of addiction and prevention*, 4.1, 2016, <http://www.avensonline.org/wp-content/uploads/JAP-2330-2178-04-0026.pdf> (last accessed May 10, 2019).

SCHIELKE, Samuli. 2015. *Egypt in the Future Tense. Hope, Frustration, and Ambivalence Before and After 2011*. Bloomington: Indiana.

[*Webdo* =] [N. N.]. "A Kairouan, les femmes protestant contre la 'Zatla'." *Webdo*, April 18, 2016, <http://www.webdo.tn/2016/04/18/a-kairouan-femmes-protestent-contre-zatla/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

WHITE, Frank. "Hash Cafes of Cairo." *Potent*, August 24, 2016, <https://potent.media/hash-cafes-of-cairo> (last accessed May 15, 2019).

VOON, Claire. "Egyptian writer convicted of 'violating public modesty' faces final appeal." *Hyper-allergic*, December 1, 2016, <https://hyperallergic.com/342093/egyptian-writer-convicted-of-violating-public-modesty-faces-final-appeal/> (last accessed May 15, 2019).

Television Broadcasts and Films

[*Tunisie: Des barreaux* =] *Tunisie: Des barreaux pour une barrette.* By Victor CASTANET. Tunisia 2016, <https://www.victorcastanet.com/spicee-1/> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

[*YT* "Loi 52" =] *Loi 52: tout ça pour un joint – Thameur en Tunisie – Les haut-parleurs #drogue.* By Thameur MEKKI (Tāmir Makkī) (Les Haut-Parleurs/TV5). Tunisia 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h1dxQtl63E> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

[*YT* "Mudīr al-idāra..." =] *Mudīr al-idāra al-ʿāmma li-mukāfaḥat al-mukhaddarāt… Ṣadā al-balad.* Egypt 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb4jBtjkptQ> (last accessed May 17, 2019).

[*YT* "*One year in prison*" =] *One year in prison – for smoking marijuana in Tunisia.* By THE FRANCE 24 OBSERVERS. Tunisia 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZIiKdxrat0> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

Novels

NĀĞĪ, Aḥmad. *Istikhdām al-ḥayāt* (Using Life). Egypt 2014.

Songs

BENDIRMAN, Hamzaoui MED AMINE, and KLAY BBJ. *Zawwelī ʿayyesh* (Living as a poor). Tunisia 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sux4OONPUZY&feature=youtu.be> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

FM. *Ḥashīsh farṭnā* (Hashish our excess). Egypt 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kgFp41ajYQ> (last accessed May 10, 2019).

HOSSAM MUSIC FM. *Illī yishrab il-ḥashīsh yirfaʿ ʾīduh* (Whoever smokes hashish shall raise his hand). Egypt 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-fz88a9p4k> (last accessed May 10, 2019).

KAFON. *Shīkha yezīnī* (Enough with getting high). Tunisia 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrvEg0SrY4A> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

KLAY BBJ and Hamzaoui MED AMINE. *Jībūlī blākā nḥebb az-zākātākā* (Bring me a [hashish] bar I love *zākātākā*). Tunisia 2012, *<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsnV2JsAjNI>* (last accessed April 20, 2018).

LEADERS CLUBISTES. *Ya-l-ḥukūma aʿtaqnī* (Hey government, set me free). Tunisia 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVEEntIbsx8&feature=youtu.be> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

LŪKĀ. *Hashrab ḥashīsh* (I will smoke hashish). Egypt 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdVz2AaW4QQ> (last accessed May 20, 2019).

ULTRA SOUTH WARRIORS. *Zaṭla wa-kōkā shīkha fī rāsī* (Hashish and coke, a rush in my head). Tunisia 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5nD73HEjvo> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

◄ jonas.roellin@islam.unibe.ch ►

High School Exams

By Maren Buvarp Aardal

The message from the anonymous admin of the Facebook page "Chao Ming leaks Thanaweya Amma exams" is clear (Wirtschafter): Reform the educational system! The background for Chao Ming's celebrity is that the Facebook site [↗Social Media], the fourth year in a row, is leaking high school exams and the correct answers for the multiple-choice tests. This year the leaking happens even before the exam has started. Some students are happy. When the exams are leaked, one student tells *al-Fanār* media, you do not even need to pay a teacher some 100 £E to give you the results via ↗**Mobile Phones** during the exams [↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**] (Wirtschafter).

"Cheat," "leak," and "high school exam"—whether in Arabic, French or English, the words seem to go together on YouTube, where dozens of videos from this year and before tell you how to cheat, what to avoid when cheating, how parliamentarians and authorities are trying to deal with it, etc. The consequence of the leaking is that several exams are postponed at the last minute. Egyptian students demonstrating in front of the Ministry of Education in Cairo and elsewhere are attacked by the police (Effat; al-*Jazeera Arabic*). Many parents seem to take their children's side—it is not these poor students' fault that the state repeatedly fails to prevent organized cheating. The students, as much as the parents, just want to get done with the exams now after an intensive year of study. The future educational enrolment for these students is exclusively based on the results of the high school exams, a system that is being heavily criticized. Students are also protesting in Tunisia, side by side with their teachers (Benlakehal). Here, the reason for their discontent is the newly introduced reform that does nothing to decrease the number of lessons per day or the number of students in each class. The protesters demand a change to the curricula, a reduction of the amount of homework and an increase in teachers' salaries. A law preventing teachers from giving "l'étude" (private lessons) to students is not applied in practice, and a concerned teacher tells *Nawaat* how the police placed the burden of proof on her when she reported one of her colleagues who did not obey the law (Hali).

In Egypt, president Sisi assures the public that they will catch those leaking the exams, that he is as upset as everybody else about the problem and that everything will hopefully be fixed next year (*Ahram Online*; *Misr Live*). But this does not really help: even after the Ministry of Education publishes photos of the alleged perpetrators, states that twelve of its employees have been arrested for "wilful damage to the interest of the institution they work for, and [for] leaking the exams," and even after it has reported that 105 students will be referred to the Prosecutor General for violating the law, the leaks still continue on the popular website.

Sisi insists that they are prioritizing the youth, that the young are the future. There is a job to do. 24 per cent of Egyptians above the age of 15 do not know how to read and write (Abū l-Ghayṭ). There are indeed signs that this percentage is decreasing, but illiteracy is still a big challenge. Approximately ten per cent of Egyptian children are not enrolled in school at all. In *Nawwāra*, a movie that depicts the stark contrasts between social classes in Egypt, a

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *156–*158
© Maren Buvarp Aardal, formerly IKOS, Univ. of Oslo, NO

working-class woman takes her daughter out of school so that she can help her in serving the upper-class family living in a gated community [↗Gated Communities / Compounds].

Many families struggle hard to afford private tutoring for their children. Articles and reports about the sacrifices people make to enable their family members to succeed in the exams are read with the greatest interest. A two-year-old article about a mother of five who sells her body every Thursday in order to afford private tutoring lessons for her children still ranks among *madàMaṣr*'s most read articles (OMAR). The woman works as a civil servant during the daytime, and a silent agreement with her husband, also a government employee, allows her to earn those extra pennies by the beginning of the weekend.

High school students in both countries, as well as the anonymous admin of the Chao Ming Facebook page, are asking for a reform of the educational system. After all, it is not the cheating that they regard as the main problem. Cheating is neither a new phenomenon nor specific to Egypt. The authorities, on the other hand, focus on quick fixes instead of discussing the structural causes of cheating, such as the quality of teaching, curricula promoting robotic learning, university enrolment procedures and work opportunities following graduation etc. A couple of months after the fiasco of the high school exams, the Egyptian Ministry of Education suggests introducing a new type of paper to be used in the exams in order to fight cheating. Now, students complain that this new paper will only make it more difficult for them to correct mistakes and elaborate their answers.

It does not improve the public's view of the Ministry of Education that the first Egyptian female ever to win a medal in the Olympics, the 18-year-old weightlifter Sara Samir, is not allowed to postpone her high school exams. According to the bronze medal winner, she asked the ministry in advance to postpone her exams to the second round in autumn so as not to lose focus on the Summer Olympics (al SHAYKH). The Ministry denies having received any such request from the ambitious student in advance.

One can only hope it gets better next year [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Social Media

CODES – Hope *vs.* Hell

CODES COLLAPSED – Normality = Heroism (Surviving)

References

Written

ABŪ L-GHAYṬ, Muḥammad. "Yā mujtamaʿ al-15 % nuqaddim lakum: Miṣr." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm* (online), September 28, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1016135> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

[*Ahram Online* =] N. N. "75.7% pass rate for Egypt's Thanaweya Amma exams: Minister." *Al-Ahram*, July 24, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/233899/Egypt/Politics-/-pass-rate-for-Egypts-Thanaweya-Amma-exams-Ministe.aspx> (last accessed May 14, 2018).

BENLAKEHAL, Massinissa. "Students on strike: Why Tunisia's education reforms have run into trouble." *Middle East Eye*, November 30, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/criticized-all-educational-reforms-tunisia-jeopardize-academic-year-613122003> (last accessed May 14, 2018).

Effat, Habiba. "Students across Egypt protest postponement of thanaweya amma exams." *madàMaṣr*, July 28, 2016, <http://www.madamasr.com/news/students-across-egypt-protest-postponement-thanaweya-amma-exams> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

HALI, Abdel Aziz. "Interdiction des cours particuliers : M. Jelloul, votre décret est inapplicable!" *Nawaat*, November 3, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/11/03/interdiction-des-cours-particuliers-m-jelloul-votre-decret-est-inapplicable/> (last accessed May 14, 2018).

[*al-Jazeera Arabic* =] N. N. "Istimrār azmat tasrīb imtiḥanāt al-thānawiyya bi-Miṣr." Published by *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, June 8, 2016, <http://youtu.be/1NxmAHO6QDk> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

[*Misr Live* =] N. N. "Shāhad awwal taʿlīq ʿalà faḍīḥat tasrīb imtiḥanāt al-thānawiyya al-ʿāmma." *Misr Live*, June 29, 2016, <http://youtu.be/ZuCq_sRhHN4> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

OMAR, Said. "Selling pleasure, reaping hardship." *madàMaṣr*, December 2, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2014/11/26/feature/society/selling-pleasure-reaping-hardship/> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

al SHAYKH, Suhayla. "Sara Samir and the Sacrifices that Led to Her Olympic Bronze Medal Win". *What Women Want*, August 11, 2016, <http://whatwomenwant-mag.com/2016/08/11/sara-samir-and-the-sacrifices-that-led-to-her-olympic-bronze-medal-win/> (last accessed May 14, 2018).

WIRTSCHAFTER, Jacob. "Leaked Questions and Answers Disrupt National Exams." *Al-Fanar Media*, June 11, 2016, <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2016/06/leaked-questions-and-answers-disrupt-national-exams/> (last accessed May 15, 2018).

Movies

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). Egypt 2016.

◄ marenaardal@gmail.com ►

The Honourable Citizen

By Sarah Awad

A group of Egyptian journalists protest in front of the journalists' union building in May. Their protest comes as a response to a recent raid by security forces on their building and the arrest of two journalists. They chant "journalists are not terrorists." Another group of people show up at the protest location and start attacking the protestors while cheering "Viva/long live Egypt" (*taḥya Miṣr*) (Associated Press; Ḥusayn; al-Ashwal). They continue to attack journalists and pedestrians passing by, then later attack the delegation of the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights that has just arrived to the location (Badrawy).

Ironically, the group of attackers is typically labelled "honourable citizens" (*muwāṭinūn shurafā'*). An "honourable citizen" *(muwāṭin sharīf)* identifies him/herself as one who is loving and loyal to his/her country and its leader. Honourable citizens glorify the image of the leader and proudly display it in their businesses, homes, and in protests of support. They are generally obedient to authority, defend all government decisions, and have ready justifications for government violations that usually echo the official media narrative [↗**The Voice from Above**]. An honourable citizen does not only practice imposed social norms but also ensures others adherence to those norms. Honourable citizens do not only act and speak as the government would want them to, but also appoint themselves as the government's watchful eye reporting any 'disloyal' citizen, thus acting as guardians of the nation against anyone who poses a threat, whether on the political stability or the public social norms.

Honourable citizens see themselves as the loyal ones to the nation, putting "Egypt above all" (*il-waṭan fōʔ il-gamīʿ*). They think they are well aware of the threat facing Egypt and the conspirers against its prosperity and would do all they can for its protection. In a news report, a loyal citizen is working at a print shop, producing posters and banners for pro-government protests. All prints hold a large portrait of president al-Sīsī with his government's slogan "Viva/Long live Egypt" (*taḥya Miṣr*) and the signature of the loyal person or group in the bottom [↗**Father Figures**]. He expresses in the report how he would confront any person or protest that says a word against al-Sīsī because "this is not a suitable time for opposition" (Gamāl al-Dīn).

Critics of the current regime have a rather different view. For them, an "honourable citizen" is an ironic term to label thugs paid by the government to attack opposition protests, such as those who appear at Egypt's journalists' union protest in May (Fāḍil; *Youtube*, "Ashhar al-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā' fi Miṣr"). As 'honourable citizens' usually do, this group too shows up at anti-government protests, and starts collectively attacking and insulting the protestors. Online posts [↗**Social Media**] following the journalists' union incident use the hashtag *al-Muwāṭinīn al-shurafā'* to mock those 'honourable' citizens and to highlight why they must be paid thugs [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**] who are an integral part of the government's strategy against freedom of expression. In this understanding honourable citizens are not agents with their own ideologies and opinions, but rather ignorant crowds swayed by some leaders, whether government-related or not. Creators of these crowds of 'honourable citizens' use their poverty, ignorance, and obedience to convince them that those

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *159–*163
© Sarah Awad, Dept. of Communication & Psychology, Aalborg University, DK

who they are attacking are the enemies of the nation (*Associated Press*; ḤUSAYN; al-ASHWAL). A self-identified thug in Beni Suef city explains the different networks and roles of thugs. He believes he has a central role in his neighbourhood in fixing problems and family disputes and protecting the youth of the neighbourhood. This, he explains, is quite different from 'honourable citizen' thugs, who for 50 Egyptian pounds or a meal, would be asked to attack a protest or disrupt an election. These thug networks are built often from previous criminals who have become informants for the police and executors of their order, and thus operate as a tool for social monitoring and control in politics as well as economic and sociocultural life (al-RAJJĀL).

The government on the other hand uses the term to refer to patriotic and vigilant citizens. The interior minister is proud of "honourable citizens" and confirms his trust in their awareness and that they would not follow any calls that promote chaos and threatens security (*al-Usbūʿ*). A spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior also appears on a talk show after the disappearance and murder of Italian Cambridge researcher Giulio Regeni in Cairo [↗**Disappearances**], calling onto honourable citizens to report any suspicious activity in their villages and neighbourhoods. Honourable citizens are encouraged to keep an eye on potential enemies of the nation, such as foreign researchers [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**] (ABDEL SALAM; al-ANSARY). This leads in fact to several incidents of Egyptian citizens reporting and attacking foreign researchers (ʿABBĀS & AL-ĞĀRIHĪ).

The moral imperative of protecting the nation is emphasized by president al-Sīsī in his talk at the Egyptian Youth Day celebration in January, where he warns citizens to beware of "the people of evilness" *(ahl al-sharr)* [↗**True *vs.* False**] who do not know how to build a nation, they only know how to kill and destruct, unlike the 'rest of Egyptian citizens' who want to build and prosper. He further emphasizes the threat by positioning it as "an existential battle" [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**] that the nation is facing, that needs a strong will to fight back (*Youtube*, "Ashhar al-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā' fi Miṣr"; DARWISH).

The honourable citizens are the next to be blamed—after the government—by some of those targeted as the threat. Hisham Geneina, the former head of the central auditing organization, is fired in March and put on trial in July for his statements about the magnitude of corruption in Egypt. Geneina believes that intelligence saw his anti-corruption work as a national security threat, and therefore mobilized "al-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā" to file complaints against him with the public prosecutor (ABDEL SALAM). Also, Shady Hussain who is arrested for handing balloons, later on revealed to be inflated condoms, to the policemen guarding the square on 25th January, the fifth anniversary of the revolution [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. Shady denounces how "al-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā" are quick to condemn his act as disrespectful insult to the police, while they would not see the danger or act against the threats communicated through the official facebook page of the Egyptian police stating that they would seek legal action against him, and if he is not criminalized, then they will seek "other ways." Here Shady expresses how the police forces whose job is to protect citizens, is the one threatening retaliation [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**] (SHARAKI).

Honourable citizens' reporting also extends beyond political and foreign threats when a 65-year-old man files a case against the author Ahmed Naji (Aḥmad Nāgī) claiming that his novel *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* (Using Life) contains explicit sexual content that he claims "threatened his sense of morality" (SAID). Consequently, the writer is brought to court

[↗**Court Trials**] and receives a two-year sentence for "violating public modesty" (MICHAELSON). Here the suspect enemy of the state is an internal enemy that could be anywhere, an average person, who looks like me and you, but through his actions could threaten the public norms and family values. The honourable citizen detecting the 'enemy' could be also anywhere watching over your actions. It could be your honourable neighbour or colleague hearing you use the word "military coup," and reporting you to one of the police hotline numbers that have been promoted on TV night shows for that purpose (ASPDEN). It could be also the taxi driver or the person sitting next to you in a metro: an online article titled 'your phone could be a reason for your conviction' warns against using your phone in the metro, where -if you are unlucky- there could be an 'honourable citizen' sitting next to you, intrusively looking into what you are reading, and decides to report you to metro police on the grounds of content they did not approve of on your phone (*Akhbarak*).

Honourable citizens not only demonstrate their unquestionable loyalty to the government but also take upon themselves—with the encouragement of the government—the detective role, and the task to censor and report others. In a way they internalize the surveillance state and act on its behalf as the gatekeepers of public morality [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]—they are the authorities' *bawwāb*. The honourable citizens are the watchful eye of the public morals, whether in relation to religion or to political affiliation to the ruling regime. Though social monitoring and interference in other people's morals and loyalty is not a new phenomenon to Egyptian culture—the "gatekeeper", *bawwāb*, who, as enforcer of the landlord's moral code of conduct, keeps an eye on what is going on in a building, is an old tradition—, yet the 'honourable citizen' becomes a popular statement of pride or shaming this year. .

While social class defines the role and position of *bawwāb,* it is not as clear in relation to the honourable citizen. The honourable citizen could be the business owner who seeks the governent's protection, the upper class family person whose privilege keeps them at a distance from government oppression, or the thug who struggles economically and finds a financial and protection opportunitiy in playing the role of the 'honourable citizen' attacking a protest. One journalist from the journalists' union protests in May comments on how some of the 'honourable citizens' attacking them in the protests are the same people the journalist has previously helped to voice their struggles: "… so this woman decides to come in front of the syndicate to insult the same journalists who have voiced her opinion, some people must have promised her some cash to come here or promised her not to demolish her home… poverty and ignorance can do more than that" (al-ASHWAL). While the honourable citizen gatekeeper role is dependent—at first glance—on political affiliations, it is also for a significant segment of honourable citizens engaging in thug activities dependent on class struggles and oppressive regimes, where they are offered in return government protection and financial rewards (FĀḌIL).

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Father Figures ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Normality = Heroism (Surviving) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

Written

ʿABBĀS, Ṭāriq, and Maḥmūd al-ĞĀRIḤĪ. 2016. "'al-Waṭan' tanshur ṣuwar murāsil danmārkī 'anqadhathū 'l-shurṭa min 'ahālī Nāhiyā." *Akhbārak*, April 25, <http://www.akhbarak.net/articles/ 21805635-صور-تنشر-الوطن-عاجل-المصدر-من-المقال>

ABDEL SALAM, Mohamed. 2016. "Heduud gehoud mokafahet el fasad fi masr." *Carnegie International*, October 13, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64853>.

— . 2016. "Suspects: The Security Harassment of Foreign Researchers in Egypt." *AFTE Egypt*, April 14, <http://afteegypt.org/academic_freedoms/2016/04/14/12083-afteegypt.html?lang=en>.

[*Akhbarak* =]. 2016. "hatefak kad yakoun sabab edana." *Akhbarak*, May 9, <https://akhbarak.net/news/2016/05/09/8584590/articles/21920438/>

al-ANṢĀRĪ, Jihād. 2016. *Masr AlArabia*, February 7, <http://www.masralarabia.com/-917223/توك-شو-بالفيديو-الداخلية-على-المواطنين-الشرفاء-إبلاغنا-عن-المشتبه-بهم>

al-ASHWAL, Ismāʿīl. 2016. "'al-Muwāṭinūn al-shurafā'': ḥīna yakūn 'al-sharaf' waṣmat ''ār'." *al-Shurūq* online, May 5, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=05052016&id= 8edcc4ce-2653-467e-b1a3-921f391893ce>.

ASPDEN, Rachel. 2016. "Generation revolution: How Egypt's militray state betrayed its youth." *The Guardian*, June 2, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/jun/02/generation-revolution-egypt-military-state-youth>.

ASSOCIATED PRESS in Cairo. 2016. "Egyptian journalists protest against arrests after 'raid' on union." *The Guardian*, May 2, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/02/egyptian-journalists-protest-arrests-cairo?CMP=share_btn_link>.

BADRAWY, Ahmed. 2016. "al-Muwāṭinūn al-shurafā'." *Shorouk News*, May 5, <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=05052016&id=0aa205e3-1b64-4551-98db-dc655a67616d>.

CAIRO SCENE. 2016. "Egypt gets its first and only scream room." *Cairo Scene*, October 12, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Egypt-Gets-Its-First-and-Only-Scream-Room>.

DARWISH, Passant. 2016. "Egypt's Sisi celebrates National Youth Day, promises great opportunities for young Egyptians." *Al Ahram Online*, January 9, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/510471.aspx>.

FĀḌIL, Khalīl. 2016. "Saykūlūjiyā 'l-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā'" (The psychology of the Honorable Citizens). *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, May 6, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/942667>.

GAMĀL AL-DĪN, ʿAlī. 2016. "Man hiya majmūʿat al-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā' fī Miṣr?" *BBC Arabic*, June 20, <http://www.bbc.com/arabic/multimedia/2016/06/160618_egypt_honorable_citizens>.

ḤUSAYN, Muḥammad. 2016. "'Inda muftaraq al-ṭuruq; Muwāṭinūn shurafā' jiddan." *Al-Ahram Online*, May 8, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/510471.aspx>.

MICHAELSON, Ruth. 2016. "Egypt jails author Ahmed Naji for sexually explicit book." *The Guardian*, February 20, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/20/egypt-author-ahmed-naji-book-sex-drugs>.

al-RAJJĀL, ʿAlī. 2016. "Al-taḥawwulāt al-siyāsiyya wa'l-ijtimāʿiyya wa-ʿālam al-balṭağa fī Miṣr." *Al-Safīr Al-ʿArabī*, June 29, <http://assafirarabi.com/ar/5128/2016/06/29/التحوّلات-السياسية-والاجتماعية-وعالم/>.

SAID, Omar. "Trial of Ahmed Naji and editor begins for writing sexually explicit text." *Madà Maṣr*, November 14, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/11/14/news/culture/trial-of-ahmed-naji-and-editor-begins-for-writing-sexually-explicit-text/> (last accessed March 27, 2018).

SHARĀQĪ, Ḥasan. 2016 "Al-shurṭa al-miṣriyya bi-muwājahat ḥaraj video 'al-wāqī al-dhakarī'." *'Arabī 21*, January 27, <https://arb.im/883151/الشرطة-المصرية-بمواجهة-حرج-فيديو-الواقي-الذكري-شاهد >.

[*al-Usbū'*]. 2016. "Wazīr al-dākhiliyya: amn al-waṭan wa-salāmat muwāṭinīhi khaṭṭ aḥmar." *Al-Usbū'*, April 24, <http://www.الأسبوع.com/Article/258387/وزير-الداخلية-أمن-الوطن-وسلامة-مواطنيه-خط-أحمر>.

Videos

"Ashhar al-muwāṭinīn al-shurafā' fi Miṣr." Published by iBroadcastMedia, February 12, 2016, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vywpdaWpQg>.

"al-Sīsī: Ahl al-sharr lā ya'rifūn al-binā' wa'l-ta'mīr." Published by Sherro Sherro, January 9, 2016, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlLgLejbpCg>.

◄ awads@hum.aau.dk ►

In Islam, …

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- 4-finger logo
- Acceptable vs. Unacceptable
- al-Azhar
- "beautiful Islam"
- belief
- Blasphemy ↗Piety vs. Blasphemy
- conversion, converts
- extra-marital relationships
- fasting
- *fātiḥa*
- *fatwà*
- fundamentalism
- Ghannūshī
- God's punishment
- good deeds, Good *vs.* Evil
- *ḥajj*
- Ḥasan Ḥanafī
- head scarf, *ḥijāb*; see also ↗veil, veiling
- *ḥisba*
- Hizbollah
- Holy month
- *Ikhwān* ↗Muslim Brotherhood
- immoral, immorality
- infidel (*kāfir*) (*QTh*); see also ↗*takfīr*
- *irshād*; see also ↗Supreme Guide
- IS (ISIL, ISIS, Dāʿish, Daech, Daish), Islam = terror (IS)
- Islamic networks
- Islamism (*QTh*), Islamism and conservatism, Islamism *vs.* secularism, Islamist(s)
- jihad (*jihād*), jihadism, Jihadist, *jihādī* infiltration, *jihādī* training
- Kaʿba
- Khadīja
- *kiswa*
- Milli Görüş
- miracles
- moderate Islam
- mosques
- *Muḥammad* (film)
- *mūlid*
- *musalsalāt Ramaḍān*
- Muslim Brotherhood (*QTh*), MB responsible for creating and managing crises in Egypt since the 1980s, MB's safe haven, internal debate, cornering vs. integration of youth, MBs as citizens
- Muslims *vs.* Mongols
- Nādiya Khiyārī
- *niqāb*
- Ulfa Yūsuf
- Orlando
- piety, pietism, Piety vs. Blasphemy
- pilgrimage
- political Islam
- prayer, prayer mats: Islamists occupying public spaces
- principle vs. application
- prophet, esp. Muḥammad
- public: public piety, Islamists occupying public spaces
- Qaraḍāwī initiative
- Qur'ān schools
- Qur'ān versions
- radicalisation
- rain prayer
- re-enchantment
- religion, religiosity, religion and politics, Religiosity *vs.* Humanity
- religious education, religious feelings, religious intolerance, religious minorities in Egypt,

© N. N.

religious parties, religious symbols, religious thinking, religious-political activism
– reliquiæ
– salafi(s), Salafism, Salafists, Salafi looks
– sectarianism
– secular, secularism, secularists, secularisation (*QTh*), secular-Islamist polarisation
– sermons
– shaving/depilation (whole body)
– state and religion, state religion
– Sufism
– *sunna*, Sunnis *vs.* Salafis
– Supreme Guide (*murshid*) (*QTh*)
– *takfir*; see also ↗infidel
– temptation
– theology, theological debate
– Turkey
– Ulfa Yūsuf (Olfa Youssef)
– veil, veiling, veil issue, unveiling after veiling; see also ↗head scarf
– Wahhabism
– M. Ḥ. Zaqzūq

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Clash ♦ Conversions ♦ Court Trials ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ Language ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Self-help ♦ Tourist Resorts

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ True *vs.* False

◄ …@… ►

Kamīn

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- checkpoints
- concrete buildings, concrete walls

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Football ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ The Suspect Foreigner

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *166–*166
© N. N.

Language*

By MYRIAM ACHOUR KALLEL, MARIEM GUELLOUZ, EVA MARIE HÅLAND, and STEPHAN GUTH

Tunisian *dērja* and Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya*, the languages that traditionally used to be regarded as vernacular varieties of Arabic, can no longer be referred to as solely *spoken* varieties. Several social events mark the spread of Tunisian in the public sphere through different media. Azyz AMAMI, a cyberactivist in his early thirties who had participated in several demonstrations before the Revolution, now commits to supporting the diffusion of *tūnsī* by translating philosophical and literary classics (Gramsci, Barthes, Plato, etc.) into this language. His motivation for doing so seems to be similar to that of the Egyptian scholar, translator and novelist Nārīmān al-Shāmilī (b. 1983) who translates Abū ʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's *Risālat al-ghufrān* ("The Epistle of Forgiveness") into Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya*—and explains his effort as an attempt to

> bridge the big gap that has emerged between our language of today and the essential works (*ummahāt al-kutub*) of literature, the heritage and the language and style they were written in (...) for the language not to be a monopoly for those who studied it and understand it (...) so that it is possible for a twelve or thirteen, or even younger boy or girl, to read one of the essential works and understand what is being said (...) that it is natural and happens in any language (...) personally I think that no awakening/revival/renaissance (*nahḍa*) will take place in the Arab countries unless we know how to understand our forefathers first. (al-SHĀMILĪ, 7-8) [↗**Past vs. Present**].

Risālat al-ghufrān is most likely the only translation published this year from *fuṣḥà* (standard Arabic) to *ʿāmmiyya*, but there are, like in Tunisia, translations from foreign languages into *ʿāmmiyya*. One example is William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, translated by ʿAbd al-Raḥīm YŪSUF. Poetry written in Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* is becoming more and more recognized. In December, Aḥmad Fuʾād Nigm's prize for poetry in Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* is awarded for the third time. This includes prizes both for poetry written in Egyptian as well as literary criticism of poetry composed in this language (SULAYMĀN). Comic books are another genre in which *ʿāmmiyya* is frequently used. *Al-Waraqa 2* ("The paper 2") by Islām ǦĀWĪSH is one such example, but also other types of books are being published that are written fully or partly in *ʿāmmiyya*, or in a mix of *ʿāmmiyya* and *fuṣḥà*. Many of them belong to the *adab sākhir* genre [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**] and are known for their great use of ↗***ʔAlsh***. *Ghayr qābil lil-nashr* ("Unpublishable") by Sharīf Asʿad is apparently published in its 11,000th edition, *Shaklahā sāfrit* ("It looks like she travelled") by Suhā al-Fiqqī and Muṣṭafà Shuhayyib's *Kull al-ṭuruq tuʾaddī li-sittīn dāhiya* ("All roads lead to sixty calamities") are two other examples. Even ↗**Self-help** books in

* This entry merges earlier country-specific versions, published as "ʿĀmmiyya" (Egypt), by Eva Marie HÅLAND, and "Dérja" (Tunisia), by Myriam ACHOUR KALLEL and Mariem GUELLOUZ, in *JAIS* 17 (2017): 463-65 and 482-83, respectively.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *167–*174
© Myriam Achour-Kallel, Mariem Guellouz, Eva Marie Håland (Univ. of Oslo, NO), and Stephan Guth (Univ. of Oslo, NO)

ʿāmmiyya are promoted at the Cairo International Book Fair. *Il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ* ("Out of the Box") by Egyptian psychiatrist Muḥammad Ṭāhā [↗Psychiatrists] and *Il-tagriba il-fikriyya li-rūḥ ʾummuh* ("The Intellectual Experience of Mama's Boy") by Kīrullus Bahgat are both written completely in *ʿāmmiyya*, and both authors express their wish to make scientific thought available to 'everyone'. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm's book *Maṭlūb ḥabīb* ("Sweetheart Wanted") is labelled *iʿtirāfāt* ("confessions"). Like many other writers, he too addresses the dilemma of which language to write in [↗Dual Identities / Masking]:

> I have grown up but I have not really grown up…I have grown up but I still write *ʿāmmiyya* next to *fuṣḥà*...I know that it is better if the book is all in *fuṣḥà*, but I prefer to express myself in *ʿāmmiyya*, I was born and raised in a country which speaks in a variety (*lahga*) which is different from the official variety (*lahga*) that is written in books and in education. I learned in one way and lived in another. I cannot define my identity closer to any of the varieties…both of them represent me…a variety closer to my intellect (*ʿaql*) and a variety closer to my heart and way of life…for this reason I decided to complete the book using both varieties. (IBRĀHĪM, 10)

Ibrāhīm refers to *ʿāmmiyya* as a "*lahga*," a dialect or variety. However, like Tunisian *dērja*, Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* is also seen by many as an independent language, a real "*lugha*." Al-Shāmilī, the translator of *Risālat al-ghufrān*, emphasizes that she sees *il-maṣriyya* as "a language and not a dialect" (*Al-Ittiḥād*). *Al-Lugha al-miṣriyya al-ḥāliyya* ("The current Egyptian language") is the title of a book by the Egyptian scholar ʿIṣām Stātī. It aims at tracing Old Egyptian and Coptic origins of the contemporary Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* vocabulary.

The use of *ʿāmmiyya* in writing is frequent in other written domains: billboards decorating buildings and roadsides are often in this language; it is used frequently in ↗**Social Media**, and Egyptians receive text messages from their telephone companies in *ʿāmmiyya* [↗Mobile Phones]. Although the use of the *ʿāmmiyya* in printed books is more widespread in Egypt than that of the *dērja* in Tunisia, writing in Tunisian on social networks is also thriving. In addition, the newspaper *Medina* starts publishing in Tunisian to better represent the medina of Tunis where its head office is located (*Jdlm*). All of this points to a higher value of what previously was regarded merely as vernacular varieties in the respective countries, and it is not only noticed in writing, but also in TV and movie industry.

For the first time in their history, Tunisian TV stations begin to dub Turkish soap operas in Tunisian this year (al-MĀJIRĪ). Until then, Turkish films used to be broadcast with translations in Lebanese or Syrian Arabic. The first dubbing attempt is now made in the TV series *Qlūb er-Rommān* ("The Pomegranate Seeds"), a melodramatic story about an unmarried lower-class surrogate mother who falls in love with the main hero, the father of the child she is hired to carry to term, with typical soap-opera ingredients, like jealousy, rivalry among women, vengeance, and the gap between the rich and the poor [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**].

The choice of *tūnsī* instead of Levantine Arabic is initially perceived negatively by some in the audience but appreciated thereafter. The series is broadcast on the private television channel *Nessma TV*. Like other television and radio channels, *Nessma TV* relies on the use of Tunisian, even in its news broadcast. Due to Egypt's longstanding history of movie and film production, Egyptians are accustomed to watching TV-series with Egyptian actors speaking *ʿāmmiyya*. Arabs born in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s have grown up hearing Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* from the

tongues of the animated movie characters in Disney movies. However, four years ago, Disney decided to begin dubbing all their movies in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). People from all over the Arab world now mark their disregard for this decision through the twitter hashtag #Dīzney_lāzim_tirgaʿ_maṣrī ("Disney must be in Egyptian again"). YouTube videos are posted showing identical clips from Disney movies: once in *fuṣḥà*, once in Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya*, to emphasize the 'flatness' of the MSA versions of the movies.

The Egyptian president even gives formal speeches in *ʿāmmiyya* [↗Father Figures] and uses several linguistic features that are not associated with the prestige register of *ʿāmmiyya*. On October 6, the Facebook page *Asa7be Sarcasm Society* posts a meme involving an image from a news broadcast showing al-Sīsī commemorating the 43rd anniversary of the October War together with the Sudanese President ʿUmar al-Bashīr [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. The caption reads: *ʾiddīhā wāḥda "taḥyā Masr/Misr"*, which literally means "Give it a 'Long live Egypt'." The word for Egypt is spelled with the letter س *sīn* instead of the correct ص *ṣād*, mocking the president's 'weak' pronunciation. Imitation or mocking of specific pronunciations is often found when *ʿāmmiyya* is written (DURGHAM). On November 1, a meme posted on the same Facebook page targets certain women who speak in a flirty/childish/spoiled manner. This time it is an image from the movie *ʿAsal iswid* ("Black Honey") from 2010. The original scene involves the protagonist, called Maṣrī (i.e., "Egyptian"), who has returned to Egypt after twenty years in the United States, his friend Saʿīd, and Mervat, the woman Saʿīd is in love with. Mervat is a primary school teacher of English, and Maṣrī is provoked by her faulty English: she pronounces [f] for /v/, [b] for /p/ etc. The author of the meme turns the focus over to Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya*, adding the following caption:

> dī hiyya illī bitḥibbắhā?! Dī bitʾūl *māthī* wi-*thaḥlāna* yā Saʿīd ("Is this her that you love?! She says *māthī* and *thaḥlāna*, Saʿīd!"). (ʿĀṬIF)

Māthī is a variant of *māshī* (lit., "it goes," i.e., "o.k."), and *thaḥlāna* of *zaʿlāna* (the feminine form for "sad"). The post generates comments of which some contain new memes treating the same topic. One of these is an image from a different movie, in which a woman is portrayed as saying *shhaʾūllak kita baq̓ā, zaḥlāna minak*. This would, according to the conventions, be written *mish haʾūllak kida baq̓ā, zaʿlāna minak* ("I'm not going to tell you, I am angry with you"). Yet, this particular transcription points to specific linguistic features—those of flirty/childish/spoiled/lower class women—which are immediately recognized as communicating a social meaning. Such meanings are often linked to certain speech groups or strata of society [↗Affluence *vs.* Destitution], or a specific person or character [↗Celebrities]. That there are perceptions of which variants are correct and not, is clear. A post on *Al Tahrir–lāyf*'s Facebook community with the headline "Pronounce incorrectly," featuring twenty-two pictures of items and their "correct" and "incorrect" pronunciations, is shared thousands of times. According to this post, one should, for example, not say "*marākhīr"* for "nose," but "*manākhīr*."

While these attempts at 'standardizing' the spoken language in Egypt concern pronunciation (and its social connotation), lexical choices also trigger discussions. In Tunisia, *Annava*, a Mahraganat band who define themselves as a "group of young Tunisians," release a song titled "Zaboubia" (*zabūbiyya*) which criticizes all kinds of authoritarianism in Tunisian society—in politics, academia, and religion (*Annava*) [↗**Pop Music**]. The song's

lyrics correspond to a poem written in Tunisian by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kāfī, a communist poet who died in the early 1930s. The word he created, *zabūbiyya*, comes from the term *ez-zebb*, literally meaning "penis" and typically used as an interjection or an insult. The bold transgression of boundaries through the use of such an 'indecent, improper' word marks the group's opposition against the normativity of established hierarchies [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**; ↗**Beautiful *vs.* Ugly**].

Due to lack of official recognition and absence from school curricula, both Tunisian *dērja* and Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* are often placed in a marginal or at least ambivalent position. However, in Tunisia, the association DERJA this year asks for an authorization to start its activities to promote the recognition of *tūnsī* as official language through a process of standardization and normalization (*Derja*). Should we take this as an indication of an attitude that is more favourable to the 'people's language' in Tunisia than it is in Egypt?

Perhaps, but in Tunisia, the linguistic landscape is also more complex than in Egypt, due to the long Francophonic tradition and the presence in the country of a rather outspoken/ articulate linguistic minority—the Amazigh. Their language (a Berber dialect), Tunisian, and Standard Arabic coexist side by side. They are used in different spheres, and each has a particular status, often marking its place in a hierarchy. The Amazigh language is one of the oldest languages in the country. Arabic is the language of the State, as stipulated in Article 1 of the Tunisian Constitution. French is taught in schools and represents the second language taught, followed by English. In daily interaction, *dērja* is used. Though not promoted officially, Tunisian is spreading as a written language. The Berber language is not better off than Tunisian, especially because of the limited number of Amazigh speakers—1% of the population according to official national statistics, 10% according to the Amazigh World Congress (Le Congrès Mondial Amazigh, *CMA*). In autumn, meetings take place in Geneva between members of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (*United Nations*), NGOs and Tunisian officials (the Tunisian delegation is represented by Mehdi Ben Gharbia, minister in charge of relations with constitutional bodies, civil society and human rights organizations) and two representatives of the Tunisian Amazigh.

As a reaction to the outcome of this meeting, an "alternative report" is presented by the Amazigh World Congress, entitled "Economic, Social and Cultural Exclusion of the Amazighs of Tunisia" (*CMA*), denouncing the precarious situation in which the Tunisian Amazighs are located from an economic, cultural, linguistic and human point of view. Echoing this report, the UN committee reacts by expressing its concern over the issue of cultural rights of the Amazigh and recommends to the State "to recognize the language and culture of the Amazigh indigenous people," to "take legislative and administrative measures to ensure the teaching of the Amazigh language at all levels," and to "repeal Decree No. 85 of 12 December 1962 and allow the registration of Amazigh first names in the registers of civil status" (*United Nations*).

Where cultural recognition of the Amazigh obviously is a slow process, it comes as a note of hope for some that this year also sees the release of a documentary film (accessible online) by Tunisian director Myriam Bou-Saha, entitled *Tunisia*: *The Art of Berber Tattoo*. It is broadcasted on the French-German channel *Arte* in September (YT, "Tunisie: l'art du tatouage berbère").

In Egypt, a similar tension between dominant Arabic and *maṣrī* and the language of a large minority—Nubian—is hardly observable. Nubian identity does not seem to be something that is felt in need of being underlined, promoted and fought for, neither linguistically nor culturally. The language is still widely spoken, and the Nubians, even when they have migrated from the Upper Egyptian South to Cairo, do stick to their cultural traditions. Evidently, however, their Nubian and Egyptian identities are complementary, not conflicting. Thus, there does not seem to be a movement promoting Nubian in Egypt that would be comparable to the movement promoting the case of the Amazigh language in Tunisia.

Neither Nubian nor the Amazigh language challenge the position Standard Arabic and *dērja* and *ʿāmmiyya* have in both countries. There is, however, in Tunisia, a serious competition between *French* and Arabic.

In November, Tunisia is chosen to host the Francophonie summit to be held in 2020 (BELLAMI). This distinction rehabilitates the country's status among the French-speaking nations. However, a month before this selection, Tunisian Minister of National Education Naji Jalloul announces his will to restore *English* in secondary education and to promote it *instead of* French—a move which is in line with the project "Connecting Classrooms" that intends to connect the United Kingdom with Tunisia by promoting English language skills. Considered as a tool for social promotion, English is presented in a second project, entitled "English for Employability" (DEVELEY).

These initiatives are not well received by the defenders of Francophonie [↗Clash] who highlight the long friendship and cultural alliance between France and Tunisia as well as the bilateral economic interests linking both countries. The Minister's declaration alarms several Francophone Tunisian intellectuals and opens the field of controversy around the position taken up by French in Tunisia. The defenders of Francophonie focus on the historical basis of the early establishment of French in the country [↗**Past vs. Present**], but also on the economic role of France as Tunisia's main economic partner. Other intellectuals express their fear of forgetting the French language which, according to them, is the only guarantor of modernity in Tunisia.

Protests notwithstanding, the Minister also encourages opening schools during the summer holidays and prioritizing Koran courses [↗In Islam, …] in order to re-establish the teaching of Arabic. His proposal triggers strong reactions among the intellectual elite who consider this policy as a return to both Arabization and Islamization of the country. The Minister responds to these polemics by stating that

> there has been confusion on this subject: it is not learning the Koran but chanting the Koran. School has always held competitions of the kind. This was a false controversy: this activity is one of a hundred and it will be provided by teachers and not people outside the ministry. (*Babnet*, *Leaders*, al-ZARQĀṬĪ)

In the end, the Minister's plans did not materialize. But the issue of language learning remains a central element in the reform process announced by the Ministry of National Education. An alarming report concerning the language situation among young people incites those officials to rethink the learning of languages. The Minister announces his willingness to restore Arabic in order to emphasize "the rooting of the Arab-Muslim identity [at the student level], the nationalization of knowledge …" (*ibid.*)

Adding fuel to the discussion, journalist Fawzia Zouari writes an article in *Jeune Afrique* online, entitled "Francophonie or Daesh" (ZOUARI). The journalist defends Francophonie as a necessary weapon against obscurantism, and she links the absence of Francophonie in the South of the country (not supported by statistical or scientific facts) to the presence of terrorists in the region [↗**Center vs. Periphery**]. According to the author, Francophonie can save Tunisia from terrorist threats. With this attitude, Zouari's analysis mirrors the linguistic imagery of a part of Tunisian Francophone elites. For them, to be modern is synonymous with speaking French. They put aside the economic and social issues and the disparity of access to education. In December, Fawzia Zouari is declared winner of the Five Continents prize for Francophonie (*OIF*).

In contrast, the position of English in Egypt seems to be much less controversial than that of French in Tunisia. It is neither rejected as the language of the former colonizer nor promoted as a protector against the spread of religious fanatism, but rather accepted as an essential aspect of living in the world of today and therefore also as an indispensable part of one's educational portfolio [↗**High School Exams**]. What can be heard, however, are voices expressing their disapproval of the use of "Frānkō", i.e., Arabic written with Roman letters and numbers, also referred to as "Arabeasy" or "Arabīzi", which still occurs to some extent in social media and other written domains (BURAYK). In opinion articles and satirical memes, not a few Egyptians express their discontent with the practice which, according to some of them, "corrupts our identity" (ḤUSNĪ & BASHĪR; MIRJĀN; *al-Muwāṭin*; SĀMĪ). A more recent manner of mixing scripts occurs in names and logos, namely the use of both Arabic and Roman letters. Some examples are *Kareem Bookstores*; *Diwan Bookstore*; and the band name Wusṭ el-balad [↗**Pop Music**] which is often found written wusت elبalad, including some diacritics, on for example concert posters.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʔAlsh* ♦ Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ High School Exams ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Center vs. Periphery ♦ Past vs. Present

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

Written

AS'AD, Sharīf. *Ghayr qābil lil-nashr*. al-Qāhira: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

AMAMI, Azyz. Blog *OY TIΣ! OY TIΣ!*, <https://www.azyzamami.tn/members/azyz/> (last accessed December 4, 2018). Cf. in particular <https://www.azyzamami.tn/2016/06/> (Gramsci; accessed November 18, 2016); <https://www.azyzamami.tn/2016/07/11/قراء-ات-الأخوة-كارامازوف،-أو-كيف-بعبص/> (Dostoevskij; last accessed January 5, 2017); and <https://www.azyzamami.tn/2017/01/03/م-الكلام-للكتيبة-،-ترجمة-لرولان-بارط-،-ا/> (R. Barthes, last accessed January 8, 2016).

[*Annava* =] N. N. Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/annavaband/> (last accessed December 4, 2018).

[*Babnet* =] N. N. "Nāǧī Ǧallūl: Taḥfīẓ al-qur'an al-karīm fī 'l-madāris khilāla 'l-'uṭla al-ṣayfiyya sa-yakūn taḥt 'ishrāf mushtarak li-wizāratay al-tarbiya wa'l-shu'ūn al-dīniyya." *Babnet*, April 20, 2016, <https://www.babnet.net/cadredetail-123940.asp>.

BAHGAT, Kīrullus. *Il-tagriba il-fikriyya li-rūḥ 'ummuh.* Al-Qāhira: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

BELLAMINE, Yassine. "La Tunisie choisie pour abriter le 18ème sommet de la Francophonie en 2020." *HuffPost* Tunisie, November 27 (updated November 28), 2016, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/11/28/tunisie-francophonie_n_13264718.html> (last accessed December 9, 2018).

BURAYK, Ghāda. "Lēh il-Maṣriyyīn bi-yiktibū 'Frānkō'?" *Miṣr al-'Arabiyya*, February 18, 2016, <http://www.masralarabia.com/سوشيال-ميديا/933535-ليه-المصريون-بيكتبوا-فرانكو-؟> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

[*CMA* =] Congrès Mondial Amazigh / Agraw Amadlan Amazigh. "Tunisie: Rapport alternatif présenté par le Congrès Mondial Amazigh: Exclusion économique, sociale et culturelle des Amazighs de Tunisie." Report presented to the Comité pour les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels of the United Nation, at their 59th session on "Pacte international relatif aux droits économiques, sociaux et culturels," September 19 – October 7, 2016, Palais des Nations, Genève, available at <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CESCR/Shared%20Documents/TUN/INT_ CESCR _CSS_TUN_24718_F.pdf> (last accessed June 26, 2018).

[*Derja* =] Official website, <http://www.bettounsi.com/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

DEVELEY, Alice. "Tunisie : le français bientôt remplacé par l'anglais à l'école." *Le Figaro* online, October 28 (updated November 8), 2016, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/francophonie/2016/10/28/37006-20161028ARTFIG00242-tunisie-le-francais-bientot-remplace-par-l-anglais-a-l-ecole.php> (last accessed December 9, 2018).

FATḤI, Rabāb. 2016. "684 ṭāliban miṣriyyan yafūzūn bi-minaḥ barnāmij 'Access' li-dirāsat al-lugha al-ingilīziyya." *al-Yawm al-Sābi'*, February 25, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/25/684-طالبًا-مصريًا-يفوزون-بمنح-برنامج-أكسس-لدراسة-اللغة-الإنجليزية/2602078> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

ǦAMAL, Karīm. "Ta'allam mafātīḥ lughat 'al-frānkū' al-'ashhar 'alà mawāqi' al-tawāṣul al-ijtimā'ī." *Ṣadà al-Balad*, May 23, 2016, <http://www.elbalad.news/show.aspx?id=2231283> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

ǦĀWĪSH, Islām. *Al-Waraqa 2.* Al-Qāhira: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

ḤUSNĪ, Dāliyā, and Hiba BASHĪR. "'al-Frānkū-'ārāb' khalal thaqāfī wa-'azmat huwiyya." *al-Ahrām* (online), December 25, 2016, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/News/202124/7/570105/دنيا-الثقافة/«الفرانكو-آرب»-خلل-ثقافى-وأزمة-هوية.aspx> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

IBRĀHĪM. Muḥammad . 2016. *Maṭlūb ḥabīb*. al-Qāhira: Dār Dawwin.

[*al-Ittiḥād* =] N. N. "Nārīmān al-Shāmilī: 'al-miṣriyya' lugha wa-laysat laḥja." *Al-Ittiḥād*, 10 January 2016, <http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=1316&y=2016&article=full> (last accessed May 31, 2018).

[*Jdlm* =] *Jarīdat al-Madīna / Journal de la Medina* [2015 ff.]. See, e.g., issue IV, 2016, <https://issuu.com/journaldelamedina/docs/merged__1> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[*Leaders* =] N. N. "Apprentissage du coran : nos écoles ne se transformeront pas en «Kottab», rassure Jalloul." *Leaders*, April 22, 2016, <https://www.leaders.com.tn/article/19612-apprentissage-du-coran-dans-les-ecoles-en-ete-nos-ecoles-ne-se-transformeront-pas-en-kottab-rassure-jalloul>.

al-MA'ARRĪ, Abū al-'Alā'. *Risālat al-ghufrān* / translated by N. al-Shāmilī. Al-Qāhira: Al-Kutub Khān, 2016.

al-MĀJIRĪ, Sanā'. "Hādhā mā kashafat-hu qanāt Nasma bi-khuṣūs al-musalsal al-turkī bi'l-lahja al-tūnisiyya." *Jumhūriyya*, January 7, 2016, <http://www.jomhouria.com/art46063_ هذا ما كشفته قناة نسمة بخصوص المسلسل التركي باللهجة التونسية> (last accessed December 4, 2018).

MIRJĀN. ʾĪmān. "Lughat al-ḍād bi-ʾaḥruf ʾaʿjamiyya: ʿal-Frānkō li-mādhā?" *al-Waṭan*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1691796> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

[*al-Muwāṭin* =] N. N. "*Infōgrāf:* Lammā ṣāḥbak yikallim bi'l-frānkō." *al-Muwāṭin*, November 12, 2016, <http://www.elmwatin.com/128574> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

[*OIF*]. Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. "Fawzia Zouari, lauréate 2016 du Prix des 5 continents de la Francophonie." <https://www.francophonie.org/Fawzia-Zouari-laureate-2016-Prix-5continents.html> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

SĀMĪ. Dāliyā. "Frānkō!" *Rōz al-Yūsuf*, July 10, 2016, <http://www.rosaelyoussef.com/news/details/225332> (last accessed November 29, 2018).

STĀTĪ. ʿIṣām . 2016. *Al-lugha al-miṣriyya al-ḥāliya.* al-Qāhira: Al-Hay'a al-ʿāmma li-quṣūr al-thaqāfa.

SULAYMĀN. Aḥmad Yūsuf. "Iʿlān jāʾizat Aḥmad Fuʾād Nigm li-shiʿr al-ʿāmmiyya." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, December 12, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1052285> (last accessed May 31, 2018).

ṬĀHĀ. Muḥammad. *Il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ*. al-Qāhira: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

[*Al Tahrir–lāyf* =] N. N. Facebook post published by *Al Tahrir–lāyf* on December 18, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/TahrirLife/photos/pcb.1211947905560933/1211947442227646/?type=3&theater>. (last accessed March 9, 2019).

[*United Nations* =] United Nations – Human Rights – Office of the High Commissioner. "CESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 59 Session, 19 Sept. – 07 Oct. 2016)." <http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1060&Lang=en> (last accessed June 26, 2018).

[YT, "Tunisie: l'art du tatouage berbère" =] *Tunisie: l'art du tatouage berbère / Tunesien: Die Kunst der Berbertattoos.* Documentary by Myriam BOU-SAHA, originally shown on Arte TV (*360°*), in collaboration with GEO, uploaded on YouTube by Myriam Ananda mezclarte on January 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T826u0qBHYU> (last accessed June 26, 2018).

YŪSUF. ʿAbd Al-Raḥīm (translator). *Ḥilm fi lēlit nuṣṣ il-ṣēf.* By William Shakespeare. al-Ǧīza: Dār Ṣafṣāfa, 2016.

al-ZARQĀṬĪ, Firdaws. "Taḥfīẓ al-qurʾān fī 'l-madāris: Ǧallūl yarudd ʿalà wazīr al-shuʾūn al-dīniyya." *Jawhara FM*, April 22, 2016, <https://www.jawharafm.net/ar/article/تحفيظ-القرآن-في-المدارس--جلول-يرد-على-وزير-الشؤون-الدينية--/55161/105>.

ZOUARI. Fawzia. "Tunisie : la francophonie ou Daesh…" *Jeune Afrique* online, April 29, 2016, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/320579/societe/tunisie-francophonie-daesh/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

Memes

ʿĀṬIF, Muḥammad. Posting on *Asa7be Sarcasm Society*, November 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/asa7bess/photos/a.263636427064801.58209.263629920398785/1310753782353055> (retrieved October 27, 2017).

DURGHAM, Muḥammad. 2016. Posting on *Asa7be Sarcasm Society*, October 6, <https://www.facebook.com/asa7bess/photos/a.263636427064801.58209.263629920398785/1285512081543892> (retrieved October 27, 2017).

N. N. Posting on *Asa7be Sarcasm Society*, November 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1171521389596682&set=p.1171521389596682> (retrieved October 27, 2017).

◄ mguellouz@yahoo.fr ► ◄ e.m.haland@ikos.uio.no ►
◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ► ◄ myriamkallel@yahoo.fr ►

LGBT

By Abir Krefa (for TN) and Ingvild Tomren (for EG)

Homosexuality is regularly discussed in mass and virtual media. The year begins with a judiciary battle opposing some members of the Tunisian government and Shams, an association created in 2015 that aims to defend the rights of sexual minorities. On January 4, the first instance tribunal in Tunis notifies the association that the court is suspending its activities for 30 days. This means that the association is threatened by dissolution, because the court can decide to definitively prohibit it after the 30 days. The suspension follows a complaint by the secretary general of the government who justifies this decision by two reasons: first, the association is reproached for having deviated from its declared status. The members of the government hostile to the association argue that "the defence of homosexuals," which is claimed by the association in the media, is illegal since it is not mentioned in its statutes. In the latter, only the expression "sexual minorities" is used. The association is also accused of being illegal and of violating the law on associations. The head of state litigation argues that the association has not completed its legal registration. In fact, this refers to an administrative battle, occurring since May 2015. Even if the association paid the fees required, it has not been notified in the Official Journal (HRW, Jan. 16). Ironically, some members of the government thus try to dissolve a so-called "illegal" association and by doing this, implicitly recognize its legal existence. In this battle, Shams is discretely supported by three other Tunisian LGBT associations created since the revolution: Damj, Chouf and Mawjoudin, as well as by some international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and local associations fighting for "human rights." Members also fear that the dissolution of Shams would constitute an unprecedented decision since the revolution and consequently would threaten the freedom of association. Finally, Shams appeals the Court decision and is authorized to pursue its activities (*Huffpost* Tunisie, Feb. 23)

In the meantime, six persons choose to commemorate the revolution, on the 14th of January, by demonstrating for the rights of homosexuals in the centre of Tunis [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. The activists—men and women aged between 18 and 25 years—are accompanied by the mother of one of them. They carry the rainbow flag and small signs written by themselves, generally in Tunisian [↗**Language**]: "My personal life is not the property of the Tunisian state: § 230 how long?" or, "Open your mouth and take your right. *[In English:]* My body, my rights. My pussy my choice. § 230," or "Article 230. Three years imprisonment. Criminalizing humanity." All the signs denounce the article of the penal code that punishes sexual relationships between persons of the same sex with up to three years imprisonment. Interestingly, the Arabic and the French versions differ. The Arabic one criminalizes sexual practice between men as well as between women (*al-liwāṭ wa'l-musāḥaqa*), whereas the French version criminalizes "sodomy" (Mchirgui).

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *175–*181
© Abir Krefa, University of Lyon, FR (for TN), and Ingvild Tomren, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO (for EG)

Similary to the French version of the Tunisian Article 230, the Egyptian constitution has no law criminalizing homosexuality, but members of the LGBT community are frequently being charged with "habitual debauchery", under a law from 1961 used to prosecute men for homosexuality and women for prostitution (STACK). The charges of debauchery are often vague, as is demonstrated in an ʿAgūza court case on April 24, when eleven individuals get 3-12 years sentences on the ground of "inciting to and facilitating debauchery, habitual debauchery" and "the abuse of a communications medium"— that is, the Internet (*Washington Post*). Arrests and imprisonment continue to increase, now counting more than 250 people in jail since 2013, putting Egypt on top of countries in the world that imprison people for their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (STEWART, NOTARO). Apparently, "public morality", with its vague guidelines, offers a perfect opportunity for Egyptian police to prosecute gays on a wide scale, a strategy that simultaneously takes focus away from their shortcomings in other areas (WIRTSCHAFTER).

In Tunisia, a few minutes after they begin marching on Habib Bourguiba, the principal avenue of the capital, the activists are verbally harassed and abused and then pursued by dozens of men threatening them [↗**Clash**]. Among the activists is Amina SBOUI, the well-known young woman who, several years ago, posted a photo of her own naked torso on which she had written in Arabic: "My body is my property. It is not your honour." Amina is currently in Tunisia: she has come back to the country after her exile in France (ADAMSON).

Even if this action is public, it is not widely debated, and the news remains nearly limited to Facebook. In April, a controversy re-emerges, though with a much larger audience this time, when Tunisian actor Ahmed Landolsi declares on the channel *al-Ḥiwār al-tūnisī* (The Tunisian Dialogue) that "this phenomenon is not ours, it does not belong to our traditions, nor our education, neither our habits, nor our districts," and a few days later on *Mosaïque* radio that "This is a disease." A week later, the same TV channel organizes a debate about homosexuality between a young man activist engaged in the Shams association who took part in the public action, and several other participants, among them an old man of religion, artists, a journalist and a politician leader from Nidaa party. Whereas the religious man and one of the artists violently express their hostility to homosexuality, describing it as against nature and incompatible with "Muslim and Arab values," other participants defend homosexuals' rights; but the diatribe of the religious man nearly monopolizes the debate (*al-Maṣdar*). The different participants do not use the same words. Among the words that rival with "homosexuality" are: *shudhūdh* (deviation, anomaly), *fāḥisha* (adultery, fornication, whoredom), and *al-jins al-thālith* (the third sex). As after each public debate, a violent homophobic campaign follows, on virtual media and public spaces. The gay activist receives messages threatening to kill, torture, and rape him. Moreover, violence against sexual and gender minorities increases in general, especially against non-conforming gender persons: transgender people as well as men who are supposedly lacking "masculinity" or women insufficiently feminine, regarding to dominant norms. LGBT people are more harassed, abused and injured. Images calling to ban homosexuals from public services circulate on Facebook. Some are taken from shop windows. A sign pasted on a shop window of a supermarket says: "Entry forbidden to homosexuals," and another one "Restaurant Soltan—Entry forbidden to homosexuals."

Other violent messages circulate with photos of weapons and signs of the National Guard. They underline that they are "Against homosexuality" and appeal to boycott and close the channel *al-Ḥiwār al-tūnisī*, sometimes mocked as "al-Ḥimār al-tūnisī" (the Tunisian donkey). These messages are published by false profiles which disappear soon afterward. The number of testimonies of violence and abuse received by the LGBT associations increases considerably in the weeks following the TV debate. A gay activist evokes "an unprecedented homophobia wave" (LOUVET).

Facebook and internet represent precious resources for activists and, more generally, for LGBT people in Tunisia. They are used to organize solidarities, to sensitize public opinion on homophobia and transphobia, as a means to communicate and be informed about violence and abuse targeting LGBT people; but they are also infested by hostile individuals and groups who threaten and harass them and their allies [↗**Social Media**].

This is also the case in Egypt, where social media and meeting apps are increasingly infested by state agents, limiting whatever "safe space" there was. The dating app GRINDR now greets its Egyptian users with a warning message about possible police presence, as undercover agents are going online flirting and asking for risky photos that can later on be used in a court trial (STACK). With few gay-friendly spaces left, entrapping people through dating apps and social media is becoming the most effective way to arrest gay people. Pinpointing the location of homosexuals, apps enable police to get within a close range and track down their targets (*Washington Post*, PAYTON), as examplified when a business man is arrested in downtown Cairo after an investigation of his Facebook meeting site for gay men. Upon his arrest, he confesses to "immoral" activities, stressing that it is for pleasure and not money, according to news site *al-Dostor* (*al-Dustūr*).

Whether it is useful or inappropriate to publicize homosexuality deeply divides LGBT activists. The necessity to publicize the question is defended by young activists whose engagement began with the revolution and most of whom are gay men. This position is extremely criticized by the majority of lesbian and bisexual women and elder gay men who consider that this choice is too dangerous because the visibility of some activists puts the life of all LGBT people in peril, especially those who live in the marginalized regions and poor districts and who are not connected to the associations. The choice made by Shams association is consequently constantly debated and creates dissensions between those who agree with it and those who perceive it as highly risky and not adjusted to the context [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**].

Despite these conflicts, the five LGBT associations, supported by several feminists, anti-racist and human rights associations, organize in public the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in El Téatro, a cultural space located in Tunis centre (Journée Internationale Contre l'Homophobie et la Transphobie, May 17, 2017). During the afternoon of May 17, the participants individually or collectively read poetry, mainly in Tunisian Arabic, based on personal experiences and testimonies. A large sign is mounted on the stage, on which the logos of the different associations participating are printed. The young activists also hoist the rainbow flag. Two LGBT associations, mainly of gay men, project spots that summarize their activities since their creation. A debate finally takes place between the organizers and the public, principally about the homophobic campaign and article 230.

Tunisian LGBT activists and their allies continue to demand abolition of article 230. This demand is based on many arguments, the most important is that the article contradicts the Constitution. Adopted in January 2014, the new Constitution constitutes an important resource for the LGBT activists. They rely particularly on three of its articles. Article 23: "The State protects the dignity of the human being and his physical integrity, forbids moral or physical torture"; Article 24: "The state protects the right to privacy and the inviolability of the home, and the confidentiality of correspondence, communications, and personal information," and Article 21: "All citizens, male and female, have equal rights and duties, and are equal before the law without any discrimination [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. The state guarantees freedom and individual and collective rights to all citizens" (CONSTITUTE-PROJECT, "Tunisia's Constitution of 2014"). Other arguments are inspired by feminism: Article 230 violates the principle that a body is a personal property. In such a logic, citizens have the right to use it as they want, when they do not harm anyone.

With regards to LGBT associations and activism, the situation in Egypt is rather different from that in Tunisia, as LGBT organizations in Egypt mostly operate underground these days, unable to do anything in public (NOTARO). *Bedayaa* (Beginning)'s members, for example, are all anonymous. They meet in secret locations in Cairo, Alexandria and Tanta, among others, providing practical advice and guidance for gay people in Egypt and Sudan, for instance which apps to use in order to avoid police surveillance, and instructions of not sharing photos or personal information until a trusted relationship is established (*Arab Foundation*). The group also offers psychological help, and founder "Noor" stresses the importance of gay and transgender people to accept themselves first in order to convince the society at large that they are "normal". On the occasion of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, Bedayaa, together with two other associations, launches a regional campaign to shed light on violence against members of the LGBT community due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Under the slogan "Together our voice is stronger", the campaign publishes a booklet of testimonies from the gay community in Egypt. It tells the tales of gay and transgender people's daily struggle as subjects to social stigma, domestic violence, psychological and verbal harassment. Among their shared experiences, thoughts on suicide are a recurring theme (*Bedayaa*) [↗**Psychiatrists** , ↗**Suicide**].

Apart from organized activism, there are also examples of individuals who courageously express their support to the community in public. At AUC in Cairo earlier this year, the rainbow flag appears among the crowd during a Mashrou' Leila concert. The following day, Lebaneese lead singer Hamed Sinno, who is among few openly gay celebrities in the Middle East, applauds the act on his Instagram with a big shoutout: "A rainbow flag, in public in Cairo [...] Whoever you were, your courage is bloody inspiring" (*Scoop Empire*). The statement sheds light on the danger and controversy connected to being openly gay in Egypt. Another celebrity who is vocal about her support to the LGBT community is Egyptian director Enas El-Deghedy. In the TV show *100 questions* she affirms that most of her male friends are gay, but that they would never expose themselves as such, adding: "naturally, since the society does not protect them [...] the society doesn't look after anyone who is different..." (*al-Yawm al-sābiʿ*) [↗**Celebrities**, ↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**].

A coalition gathering the five LGBT Tunisian associations is created in order to submit a report for the Universal Periodic Review which will take place in May 2017 and during which Tunisia will present the progress it has achieved in respecting and defending "human rights" (HRW, Oct. 6). The activists gather information about the different forms of judicial and social violence and discrimination against LGBT people and supported by a dozen feminist and human rights associations, formulate recommendations, among them the harmonization of the penal code with the new Constitution and the various treaties and conventions ratified by the Tunisian state. It also appeals to prohibit the practice of "anal tests" as evidence of homosexual practices. The "anal test" is practiced by state doctors, ordered by a judge when a man is suspected of having sexual intercourse with men, a procedure which is also frequently used in Egypt. It is not a new practice (DAMJ), but the liberation of media since the revolution has revealed its existence to a wider public. The activists continue to denounce on Facebook this "shameful practice" with the slogan "Anal test—national shame." Since it violates the intimacy of the body, it is denounced as institutionalized rape. Two other arguments are emphasized. First, the activists constantly repeat that the "anal test" has no medical or scientific basis and consequently cannot "prove" the homosexuality of a man. Secondly, that the practice is contradictory to the International Convention Against Torture, which Tunisia has ratified, and that the "anal test" consists of a torture practice. In the report, the associations also claim to allow transsexual and transgender people to be recognized in official documents relating to identity, they urge the Tunisian state to enact a law criminalizing all forms of discrimination as well as incitement to hatred and violence against LGBT people, to recognize hate crimes against LGBT people and consider these crimes as aggravating circumstances for judgments, to establish facilities to provide medical, psychological, sociological and judicial guidance and support for LGBT people victims of violence. The report also deals with socio-economic discriminations and urges the state to guarantee to all citizens access to medical and education services without any discrimination, to grant access to a decent job for LGBT people and to sanction employment discrimination. It recommends the introduction of an inclusive sexual education in a curriculum that promotes diversity.

In June, LGBT activists express their solidarity with the victims of the hate crime in Orlando, by posting messages, photos of signs and candles and slogans on the internet. Meanwhile, in Egypt, the government issues a statement saying that "Egypt stands next to the American people in these difficult times, offering sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wishing the injured a speedy recovery." Three days later, two 18-year olds are arrested on charges of debauchery (WIRTSCHAFTER).

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Language ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Suicide ♦ Social Media

CODES – Male *vs.* Female ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence

References

ADAMSON, Daniel Silas. "100 Women 2015: Return of a topless rebel." *BBC World Service*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34949413> (retrieved Jan. 6, 2022).

[*Arab Foundation* / afemena.org =] N. N. "Underground LGBTQ Group Defies Rough Egyptian Reality." *Arab Foundation*, March 29, 2016, <https://www.afemena.org/underground-lgbtq-group-defies-rough-egyptian-reality/>.

[*Bedayaa* / bedayaa.org =] N. N. "Stories about Homophobia and Transphobia from North-Africa." *Bedayaa Organization*, 2016, <https://www.bedayaa.org/publications>.

CONSTITUTEPROJECT. "Tunisia's Constitution of 2014." Translated by UNDP and reviewed by International IDEA, prepared for distribution on constituteproject.org, <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf> (PDF generated January 17, 2018).

DAMJ – L'Association tunisienne pour la justice et l'égalité. [Report]. September 2014, <https://www.damj.co/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Rapport-UPR-LGBTQI-Tunisie.pdf>.

[al-*Dustūr* / www.dostor.org =] N. N. "al-Qabḍ ʿalà rajul ʾaʿmāl yumāris al-shudhūdh al-jinsī fī wusṭ al-balad." November 23, 2016, <https://www.dostor.org/1240595>.

[HRW, Jan. 16 =] Human Rights Watch. "Tunisia: LGBT Group Suspended. Dangerous Precedent for Freedom of Association." January 16, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/16/tunisia-lgbt-group-suspended>

[HRW, Oct. 6 =] Human Rights Watch. "Universal Periodic Review Submission on Tunisia: Third cycle of the UPR, 27th session." October 6, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/06/universal-periodic-review-submission-tunisia>.

[*Huffpost* Tunisie =] N. N. "La justice tunisienne autorise l'association Shams à poursuivre ses activités." February 23, 2016, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/02/23/tunisie-shams-proces_n_9298632.html>.

JOURNEE Internationale Contre l'Homophobie et la Transphobie. 2017. "Célébration Idahot—Tunisie *al-sabʿaṭāsh al-Ḥayyeh*." May 17, <https://www.facebook.com/events/429639440741086/>.

LOUVET, Simon. 2016. "En Tunisie, l'homophobie tue." *inkyfada*, May 18, <https://inkyfada.com/2016/05/crimes-homophobie-tunisie-droits-lgbt-idahot2016/>.

[al-*Maṣdar* / www.almasdar.tn =] N. N. "Shāhidū fī 'l-mubāshir: Walīd al-Tūnisī yanfajir fī wajh mumaththil min Jamʿiyyat Shams lil-mithliyyīn: Mūsh ʿayb hādhā liwāṭ." April 21, 2016, <https://ar.webmanagercenter.com/2016/04/21/138247/شاهدوا-في-المباشر-وليد-التونسي-ينفجر-ف/>.

MCHIRGUI, Houyam. "Article 230 of the Tunisian criminal code is an outrageous violation of fundamental rights protected by the new constitution and international conventions." *MetaLaw*, November 26, 2016, <http://metalaw.lead.org.tn/2016/11/26/article-230-of-the-tunisian-criminal-code-is-an-outrageous-violation-of-fundamental-rights-protected-by-the-new-constitution-and-international-conventions/>.

NOTARO, Pier Cesare. "From Regeni to LGBT rights: that's what Egypt became." *Il Grande Colibri*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.ilgrandecolibri.com/en/egypt-regeni-rights/>.

PAYTON, Matt. "Egyptian police 'are using Grindr to find and arrest LGBT people'." *Independent*, August 26, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/egyptian-police-grindr-dating-app-arrest-lgbt-gay-anti-gay-lesbian-homophobia-a7211881.html?amp>.

[*Scoop Empire* =] N. N. "Hamed Sinno Applauds Rainbow Flag At Cairo Concert." *Scoop Empire*, March 19, 2016, <https://scoopempire.com/hamed-sinno-applauds-rainbow-flag-cairo-concert/>.

STACK, Liam. "Gay and Transgender Egyptians, Harassed and Entrapped, Are Driven Underground." *New York Times*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.google.no/amp/s/www.nytimes.com/2016/08/11/world/africa/gay-egyptians-surveilled-and-entrapped-are-driven-underground.amp. html>.

STEWART, Colin. "Egypt, 'one of the world's biggest jailers of gay men'." *76 crimes,* September 6, 2016, <https://76crimes.com/2016/09/06/egypt-one-of-the-worlds-biggest-jailers-of-gay-men/>.

[*Washington Post* =] N. N. "Egypt's latest target: Gays." May 5, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/egypts-latest-target-gays/2016/05/05/c2035ac4-1221-11e6-8967-7ac733c56f12_story.html>.

WIRTSCHAFTER, Jacob. "In much of the Middle East, it's getting more dangerous to be gay." *Global Post*, August 30, 2016, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-08-30/much-middle-east-its-getting-more-dangerous-be-gay?amp>.

[al-*Yawm* al-*sābiʿ* / www.youm7.com =] N. N. "Bil-fīdiyū.. ʾĪnās al-Daghaydī : «Muʿẓam ʾaṣdiqāʾī mithliyyīn.. wi-ḥāwalt il-intiḥār bi-sabab ibn il-gīrān»." February 8, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/8/2574933/بالفيديو-إيناس-الدغيدى-معظم-أصدقائى-مثليين-وحاولت-الانتحار-بسبب-ابن>.

◄ abir.krefa@ens-lyon.fr ►
◄ ingvild_tomren@hotmail.com ►

Manīsh msāmiḥ

By Moutaa Amine El Waer and Sonya Ben Yahmed

In May 2016, in a manner that is unusual for Tunisian ↗**Football** fans, supporters of Espérance sportive de Tunis, one of if not the largest sports team in the country, react violently against a political campaign. The campaign involves putting up a series of "Wanted" posters, later shared on ↗**Social Media**. Launched by the Manich Msamah (*mānīsh msāmiḥ*, Tunisian for "I am not going to forgive") campaign, it is aimed at symbols of the former regime [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Its first target was Slim Chiboub (*YT*, May 22), the emblematic former president of Espérance, a FIFA executive and the son-in-law of the deposed president Zin El Abidine Ben Ali (Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Bin ʿAlī), who profited significantly over many years from the impunity and favoritism.

Equating the attack on Slim Chiboub with a condemnation of the team, numerous supporters of Espérance reacted by counter-attacking on Manich Msamah (*mānīsh msāmiḥ*)'s Facebook page, criticizing what they regarded as a politicization and instrumentalization of football.

The "Wanted" campaign had a broad impact: it was discussed lengthily on social media as well as by national and international media (Kottoor), at times to denounce it as an organized lynching, at others to describe it as a movement fighting impunity. Traces of it could be found in numerous Tunisian cities and even abroad.

Founded in August 2015, it is mainly over the past year that *Manich Msamah* has come to national and international prominence as the main umbrella organization of the opposition to the so-called economic and financial reconciliation law. While the campaign critiques the transitional justice process underway since 2011 for failing to meet the demands of the "revolution" [↗**Public Hearings**], it nevertheless also defends it as a minimal gesture that is threatened by the governing coalition, who favour reconciliation based on impunity and dressed up with terms like "national unity" and "tolerance" (Ben Hassine, June 22).

The campaign was formed mainly by young activists after President Béji Caid Essebsi's appeal to "overcome the past and achieve national unity," which was implemented in practice by the president's introduction, in mid-July, of draft legislation for "economic and financial reconciliation." It has grown in scale since, thanks to its success in occupying the spotlight by effectively combining street-level actions with its communications strategy, and employing nimble tactics.

From the outset, Manich Msamah drew on a diverse repertoire. Gatherings, protests, press conferences, art workshops in public space, online campaigns, café discussions, etc, all combined with simple and well-organized communication. For example on July 11 the campaign sent each of the 217 members of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) an open letter accompanied by a brief against the proposed legislation and a request for a hearing at the Assembly, all also published on *Manich Msamah*'s Facebook page. On July 13, it organized a press conference (Chennaoui), attended by numerous prominent figures of the Tunisian opposition [↗**Celebrities**] as well as national and international media (YT *Jazeera Mubasher*), in the course of which it presented itself as combating the

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *182–*185
© Moutaa Amine El Waer and Sonya Ben Yahmed

presidential office (ICTJ) [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**] and called for protests, which in fact did occur, starting in Tunis on July 15 and in no fewer than 16 other Tunisian cities in the days following (OBSERVATOIRESECURITÉ) [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**].

A number of these actions took place during a period of political stagnation, which contributed to the visibility of *Manich Msamah* (BEN HASSINE, June 14) [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**].

The campaign T-Shirt was also an important device for generating visibility, both in person and online. Initially worn by the most active members, requests to have one made or buy one grew over time, exceeding *Manich Msamah*'s capacity to produce them. Several models of T-Shirt with the campaign logo ended up being worn by people who did not go through Manich Msamah to obtain them or who, fed up of waiting, made them themselves. People wearing *Manich Msamah* T-Shirts made declarations against impunity, corruption, and even against the police and certain politicians involved in cover-ups, in front of the stadium or historic monuments emblematic of Tunisia or other countries, then shared them on social networks, often sending their posts to the campaign's Facebook page [↗**Social Media**].

Manich Msamah relied heavily on social media, centralizing and rebroadcasting any information related to the movement. Its Facebook page (MANICHMSAME7) has 50,000 followers this year, mostly youth, and the number is growing constantly.

The campaign's significance can be seen in the way it was treated by the media. Initially ignored completely, it began to appear marginally, couched in a hostile discourse, to finally become an important actor in the debate around the proposed legislation for "economic and financial reconciliation," that media sought out often and less fiercely [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]. As every public appearance by its members was an opportunity to draw attention to its (the) campaign, make its positions known, and distinguish itself from other political actors while avoiding confrontation with those supposed to be on the same side, *Manich Msamah* always insured a careful choice was made as to who would appear, and that the positions they defended were carefully prepared.

This was only possible because of the position it carved out for itself on the political scene through its flexible tactics, which came together in its efforts to unite the struggle against the proposed legislation, while avoiding becoming an actor of secondary importance and allowing itself to be instrumentalized by senior political figures [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**].

Having members with experience in different parties and associations on different sides and with different ideologies was one of *Manich Msamah*'s strengths, although certain parties and associations with aging leadership attempted to co-opt the campaign through their members within its ranks. These organizations encountered criticism within Manich Msamah, but this did not prevent its members from putting the connections to work in order to make their positions heard within these organizations. The activists within the group showed great tactical flexibility in their negotiations with such organizations, which allowed the campaign to become, in the span of several months, the intermediary between several parties and between the parties and several associations. Within one year of its creation, the campaign had made itself politically unavoidable (BLAISE). It also led to an unprecedented practice in street protests. This consisted of convincing (forcing) political parties to

participate without their partisan colours, in other words using the flags, T-Shirts and slogans of the campaign almost exclusively.

This was not achieved without tensions inside of the campaign and critiques from outside. Conflicts erupted over the justness or effectiveness of allying with certain organizations. The members contested certain alliances on ideological and political grounds. However such protests did not get far within the group because of the blurriness of the campaign's political identity, which generally did not allow for clear decisions on non-consensual issues and favoured, in such cases, established activities and alliances, for the sake of the campaign's credibility.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Football ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Social Media

CODES – Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

References

Press

BEN HASSINE, Olfa. "Le groupe de jeunes s'en va en guerre contre 'l'amnestie des corrompus'." *Justice-info*.com, June 14, 2016, <https://www.justiceinfo.net/fr/justice-reconciliation/27841-tunisie-un-groupe-de-jeunes-s%E2%80%99en-va-en-guerre-contre-%C2%AB-l%E2%80%99 amnistie-des-corrompus-%C2%BB-i.html>.

— . "Tunisie : la campagne de Manich Msamah contre les copains et coquins de l'an-cien régime." *Justiceinfo*.net, June 22, 2016, <https://www.justiceinfo.net/fr/justice-reconciliation/ 27952-tunisie-wanted-manich-msamah.html>.

BLAISE, Lilia. "La jeunesse tunisienne, garde-fou d'un retour vers le passé." *middleeasteye*.net, September 4, 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/reportages/la-jeunesse-tunisienne-garde-fou-d-un-retour-vers-le-pass-867088995>.

CHENNAOUI, Henda. "La campagne Manich Msemah appelle à reprendre la rue." *Nawaat*.org, July 12, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/07/13/manich-msamah-appelle-a-reprendre-la-rue/>.

[ICTJ =] N. N. "Tunisian activists oppose Law that would grant amnesty to corruption." *ICTJ*.org, July 22, 2016, <https://www.ictj.org/news/tunisia-reconciliation-protest-amnesty-corruption>.

KOTTOOR, Naveena. "'Wanted' posters are popping up all over Tunisia's capital." *Washington Post*.com, July 25, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/25/wanted-posters-are-popping-up-all-over-tunisias-capital/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.28e6dc7bb663>.

[OBSERVATOIRESECURITÉ =] N. N. "Manich Msameh : mobilisation dans 12 villes contre la loi sur la réconciliation." *Observatoire-securite*.tn, July 26, 2016, <https://www.observatoire-securite.tn/fr/2016/07/26/manich-msameh-mobilisation-dans-12-villes-contre-la-loi-sur-la-reconciliation/>.

Videos

[*YT*, May 22 =] "Ḥamlat «Mānīsh msāmiḥ» ḍidd rumūz al-fasād" [vidéo following a "Manich msamah" group putting up « WANTED » posters showing Slim Chiboub]. YouTube video, uploaded May 22, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN820C9Q7zc>.

[*YT JAZEERA MUBASHER* =] "Ḥamlat «Mānīsh msāmiḥ» rafḍan li-qānūn al-muṣālaḥa al-iqtiṣādiyya fī Tūnis" [couverture d'*al-Jazīra Mubāshir* de la conférence de presse du 13 juillet de la

campagne]. YouTube video, uploaded July 14, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aU1DYxnQEVg>.

Social media

MANICHMSAME7. The campaign's official website, *Mānīsh msāmiḥ*. https://www.facebook.com/manichmsame7/>.

Further sources

BOBIN, Frédéric. "En Tunisie, un pastiche de western contre les caciques de l'ancien régime." *LeMonde*.fr, June 9, 2016, <http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2016/06/09/en-tunisie-un-pastiche-de-western-contre-les-caciques-de-l-ancien-regime_4943988_3210.html>.

[*YT*, Juin 27 =] "Mānīsh msāmiḥ – 1" [video explaining the history of opposition against the Law of Reconciliation, produced by the campaign's official website, #mānīsh_msāmiḥ #mish_msāmiḥīn. YouTube video, uploaded June 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Per7gWteMAk>.

"We shall not forgive': Tunisia's campaign against ex-regime figures." *alaraby*.co.uk, May 31, 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2016/5/31/we-shall-not-forgive-tunisias-campaign-against-ex-regime-figures>.

◄ moutaaelwaer@gmail.com ►
◄ altersonya@gmail.com ►

Migration

By N.N.

► Desideratum

Evernote keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry

- adventurous
- airports
- American dream vs. nightmare
- boat emigrants/refugees to the EU
- border(s)
- cosmopolitanism
- diaspora
- Egyptians abroad, Egyptian workers in the Gulf
- emigration / immigration
- illegal migration, illegal residence
- exile
- exodus, to leave
- flight, escaping
- "get out of here"
- leaving *vs.* staying, leaving everything behind
- migrant labour
- refugee
- return, right of return
- Schengen
- sea
- second generation Arabs
- solidarity in exile
- UAE
- VISA
- young immigrants

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Prison ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *186–*186
© N. N.

Mobile Phones

By Albrecht Hofheinz

Mobile phones are everywhere—or so it seems. 'Everyone' has one (88% of Egyptians, for example). Wherever you look, wherever there are people, you will see them talking into a handheld, gazing at a screen, swiping across a glass plate, taking a selfie, recording a video. Mobile phones are regarded as an essential tool of communication in a region where landlines have always been insufficient. Nowadays, fixed telephony is mostly a residue of the past. Everyone relies on cellphones; running out of battery power is a serious issue; and many people have more than one phone so as to be able to toggle between different providers, depending on which one their friends use. Weak cellphone reception in new housing areas is among the serious issues new residents protest at. And the news that the French-majority owned company Orange threatens to withdraw from the Tunisian market and thereby "leave 3.6 million customers offside" causes a big stir—with some arguing that «Qua[n]d on ne consomme pas tunisien on merite de se trouver en hors jeux». The brouhaha is intended by Orange, however, to put an end to five years of anti-corruption proceedings (51% of Orange Tunisie is controlled by a company owned by deposed president Bin 'Alī's former son-in-law) and to try to increase its shareholder percentage [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. Undoubtedly, mobile telephony is a big market; by the end of the year, Orange is not only growing in Tunisia, but has crowned its takeover of Egypt's Mobinil by rebranding as "Orange Egypt." Social media users mourn the demise of a brand that had endeared itself to the public with advertising campaigns echoing popular culture and patriotic attitudes.

> You can change the Name but u can never wipe the history of 17 y. Mobinil name was inspired by a man who had a Dream to lead telecommunications in Egypt to the worldwide level but he want it with Egyptian spirit so he attached its name to the Nile with a wave of our sun & greenlands, his aim to let everyone use mobilephones even the poor ppl who doesn't know how to dial a simple number, Mobinil ads were touching every Egyptian heart and keeping the bond connected, it encouraged ppl to speak from the heart […] we gained alot of priceless friends & even our spouse.

While the public waxes in nostalgia [↗**Past *vs.* Present**], investors and technocrats work hard to put in place the next, or "Fourth Generation" (4G) network. In Tunisia, first experimental 4G services begin in March; by autumn, 4G is well-established commercially. In Egypt, things take a little longer as state-owned Telecom Egypt (TE) wants a share in a market where hitherto only foreign companies have invested. In the summer, TE is the first to be given a 4G license in the country; the necessary infrastructure is to be built by the Armed Forces Engineering Authority. A few months later, regulatory agreements are in place also with the three foreign-owned companies (Etisalat, Orange, and Vodafone) that are being pressured to pay half of the value of the spectrum in US Dollars [↗**Dollar Crisis**].

Mobile looks like a lucrative market also to the highest echelons of state. Everyone has one, the President reasons, so "if only 10 of the 90 million mobile phone owners in Egypt donated one pound for Egypt every morning, we would have LE10 million every day" in the

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *187–*196
© Albrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

"Long Live Egypt" fund. As such admonitions do not bear fruit, a value-added tax of 22% is being imposed on consumers, prompting the creation of a Facebook campaign to urge its one million followers to refrain from recharging their prepaid cards for a couple of days ("Mish ha-nishḥan") and calling their Facebook event no less than an "Internet Revolution" (*Thawrat al-Internet*).

Every now and then, people toy with such insubordinate ideas. "Does the mobile camera make you tremble?" *(#kāmērā_il-mōbāyl_bit'hizzak?)* asks a hashtag campaign on Twitter after Aṭfāl Shawāriʿ, the "Street Children," are arrested. This band of six young men have achieved notoriety on YouTube for a series of videos highly disrespectful of hollow hegemonic social norms and political taboos, filmed with a selfie stick in the dim light of street lamps [↗**Pop Music**, ↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**, ↗**Social Media**]. When the army boots they made fun of in *ʿAbadat il-Biyāda* ("The boot worshippers") come crushing down on them, thousands of social media users post pictures of themselves behind a mobile camera, tagged with this provocative question. Such photos are taken not only in the secluded space of private homes but also in public and as a group, for example when the collective graduation picture of al-Minūfiyya University's Department of Journalism is posted in this style. "No video, no photo, no drawing will make tremble anyone but the feeble and weak," comments cartoonist Islām Ǧāwīsh. A few months later, Aṭfāl Shawāriʿ are quietly released, and have stayed quiet since.

That the authorities want to keep an eye on what the ubiquitous mobile media are used for is illustrated by the abrupt end of Facebook's "Free Basics" programme in Egypt—a service that provides "access to basic websites for free" on mobile phones and that had been installed by 3 million Egyptians. Insiders report that the service was stopped because Facebook "would not allow the government to circumvent the service's security to conduct surveillance." In Tunisia, the service is not available either. On the other hand, "Tunisia is among the first countries to benefit from the roll-out of Facebook's Messenger Lite," an app that "offers the core features of Messenger for markets with slower-than-average internet speeds and a prevalence of basic Android smartphones." There is a huge demand for tools that deliver mobile internet to those who are unable to afford a fancier phone. In Egypt, "Facebook for Every Phone" (which provides Facebook access for cheaper feature phones) is the second-most popular Facebook page after that of televangelist Muṣṭafà Ḥusnī [↗In Islam, …]. The hunger for such personal and 'private' instruments of communication is enormous and extends far beyond those specifically interested in political matters: everyone likes a good gossip, and the WhatsApp conversations of two lovers, rendered into a 'poetry' book, arouse some attention at the Cairo book fair (though the publication fails to convince readers in the long run). Whatever the motives, however, there is a widespread, stereotype idea that 'everyone has a mobile phone and they are all using it to no good'—be that anti-government conspiracy or simply wasting one's time on chat and distraction. "All Egyptians have bought expensive mobiles just to open Facebook" is one of the myths that a critical blogger and journalist tries to debunk; he may have a point in pointing out the harsh economic realities in a country where the GDP is only 22% of the world average [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**], but his claim that only 22% of the population use a smartphone is likely out of date. A dedicated study puts smartphone usage in Egypt at 61% and in Tunisia at 43% (though

only 31% in both countries have fixed subscriptions to mobile broadband). The younger one is and the more educated, the more likely one is to use a smartphone [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**].

The mobile phone is used as an instrument and regarded as a symbol for an individual's independence—and simultaneously it is a battleground for attempts at surveillance and control [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. This begins long before the state gets involved. One of "15 Egyptian girl problems" is that "if you do not answer your phone in the first seven seconds, your mother WILL call you nonstop and then begin to call each of your friends individually, frantically searching for you. It will be awkward and embarrassing." At least, Egypt has achieved gender equality in regard to mobile phone use; in Tunisia, more men (49%) than women (37%) own smartphones, and on the Arabian Peninsula, the hashtag "Would you marry a girl with a mobile phone?" (#هل_تتزوج_بنت_معها_جوال) is trending for a while (in Egypt, this elicits only a sarcastic response) [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. After the family, the state moves in to control. In the Tunisian film *Zahrat Ḥalab*, jihadis take away the phones of those coming to join the Islamic State. And on Egyptian streets, security forces routinely inspect (also here) or confiscate mobile phones for evidence of compromising, 'unlawful' attitudes, as well as to access suspects' social networks (see this whole article, with pictures of plainclothes security forces searching phones ahead of the demonstrations announced in April re the RS islands, as had happened ahead of 25 Jan; also here searching for evidence in a criminal investigation). "If you are an Egyptian and carry a smartphone, you're all but suspect of being in possession of contraband, and there is a big likelihood that the police will arrest you." Under this slightly exaggerated headline, one can find "10 tips for not getting arrested by the police when they check your phone." "Don't surf while out on the street!" "Don't use your phone in the metro!" "Erase all political conversations" and only keep a few apolitical funny videos. "Use the image of President ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī as your phone's background picture!" "Swap your smartphone for an old one!," but best, "Leave your mobile at home!" The risks are real; the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF) launches an "I Protect" app for Android "through which [users] can send an SOS message with their location to up to three people and to the ECRF in case they are arrested and face potential forced disappearance" [↗**Disappearances**]. The app struggles, however, with technical problems and is not being further developed. Meanwhile, the state imports advanced, British-made telecommunication surveillance equipment "to intercept private phone messages and hack into devices"—apart from resorting to low-tech traps to frame people, such as when the "morality police" messages an obscure actress and sets up a 300 USD/hour date with her so as to arrest her for prostitution (the actress claimed she had "only been joking." Real sex workers use separate phones for their red-light activities in an attempt to protect their privacy, if not from the state so from their families and their ordinary social networks. But phones are not only used to arrange 'illicit' sexual encounters; many a home-made porn video—"typically captured on low-quality cellphone or laptop cameras that are often hidden from view of the women being filmed" ends up on the internet, often "leaked by third parties, such as computer repair shops that accidentally find this content in their customers' devices," or are being shared from phone to phone via Bluetooth. Occasionally, such leaks create a scandal. Usually, the victim is then blamed for immoral behaviour, but in a highly mediatized case, a lower court in Giza sentences a prominent TV host (Rihām Saʿīd) to prison and a fine for "violating [an individual's] personal freedom" (*al-iʿtidāʾ ʿalà ʾl-*

ḥurriyya al-shakhṣiyya) by airing highly private photographs stolen from the phone of the so-called "mall girl" (a woman who had been harassed in a shopping mall) to suggest that "her personal choices warranted the assault" (Rihām wins the case on appeal) [↗**Court Trials**].

Much beyond such scandals, however, the 'privacy' gain made possible by cellphones hugely facilitates, for millions of individuals, their setting up meetings and navigating physical and social labyrinths, avoiding traffic jams or the prying eyes of neighbours. As much as they can be turned into instruments of control, mobile phones are also used as a means of affirming one's auto-determination. This may manifest itself as obstinate withdrawal; in *Clash*, a young man turns to his cellphone to cushion himself from the crazy crowds around, by listening to *mahragānāt* music [↗**Pop Music**]. Or it may result in new forms of enterprise that challenge established ways of doing things by exploiting the affordances of the new mobile technology. A few men with green concerns launch the app 'Environ Reform' that allows people to send pictures of garbage accumulating in the street directly to the local waste management company as well as to an NGO monitoring the situation [↗**Garbage**]. Ride-hailing apps Uber and Careem take the Egyptian market by storm [↗**Uber**]. "Big dreamer" Aḥmad Zakī develops Rakna, "the Uber of parking." If you do not have a car but do not want to risk "rubbing against random sweaty strangers" on public transportation lines, you can turn to Buseet to book your ride on a minibus sharing site. Yumamia, "the Uber of food," "turns Egyptian housewives into entrepreneurs"; it promises "junk-free & clean food delivered in 60 minutes" to any residential area in Cairo and wins "the prestigious Publicis90 Global Startup Competition silver award, out of 3,500 other digital startups from 141 countries worldwide." The concept is so successful that it allows for similar food-delivery startups to flourish, such as Mumm, or Zayt Zaytūn/Zeit Zatoun, a kitchen run by Syrian refugees [↗Migration]. Kids in primary and intermediate school can be provided with the Ketapedia app that offers the official curriculum in an immersive, game-like experience. And everybody can become a pollster using Nis'alak/Nes2alak, an app developed by the Egyptian Centre for Public Opinion Research—Baṣīra/Baseera.

Perhaps it is precisely in reaction to such new social phenomena, to innovative ways of behaving in society and politics, that stereotype images are so frequently repeated of young people not conforming to the traditional demands of society, but getting dragged down by these technologies into becoming superficial, useless kids (*'ayyil tāfih*). Many a young person, this cliché holds, is "only interested in his clothes, his car, his type of mobile"; lazy boys wasting time playing games on their mobiles, they are contrasted with the few who sacrifice themselves to provide for their families. Gaming is certainly popular; 59% of smartphone users in the Arab world play games on their phones, including 45% of young children up to six years of age. Three quarters of that time are spent gaming alone. "Tunisians are the most likely to play games on a phone every day"; Tunisians who do so spend an average 8 hours a week playing games; Egyptians 5 hours. Men are slightly more avid gamers than women, but only slightly so. Gaming decreases with age but increases with education. The Pokémon Go craze hits Egypt just like the rest of the world even before the game is officially released there—and both government and religious authorities immediately express concern over its detrimental effects (in Tunisia, the game is not officially made available). "Will people neglect […] earning their living and devote themselves instead to hunting for

Pokemon?" wonders the Deputy of Shaykh al-Azhar. And the former president of the National Research Centre believes the game "could be used for espionage and information gathering." Consequently, a cabinet spokesman announces that "all apps downloaded on smartphones will be probed and scrutinized […] to find out if they pose a threat to the country's national security."

In all these dimensions, a tension is noticeable between the wish to embrace the opportunities offered by mobile telephony, and the fear that too much uncontrolled individualized communication poses a threat to the dominant social and political order [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. The fact that the ubiquity of mobile phone cameras means that basically everything can and is being filmed and publicly exposed vexes authorities and guardians of morality. Technological and social efforts to police mobile phone usage, in addition to physical threats and clampdowns, have a certain effect, primarily in the political realm; there are no big leaks of human rights' abuses caught on camera phones. The mobile-enabled exposure of the private on public channels, however, attracts the crowds; a girl like Shurūq ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz achieves notoriety for her selfie videos filmed inside her home, her bedroom, her car, or the gym, teasing the viewer with her well-shaped body, displaying female fashion, and presenting, in a girlish manner, satirical comments on various social matters. Such social and moral transgression comes in handy when the authorities want to strike at open criticism. Following the 'condom incident' [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**, ↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**, ↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**], Shurūq in one of her videos publicly shames the police for its transgressions:

> Raping a mentally handicapped girl in a police station is no cause for shame. Killing a doctor […], a child […], a young man […] a demonstrator, in cold blood, is no cause for shame. […] 40000 political prisoners […], jailing journalists, arresting activists, even children, all that is no cause for shame. A clinically dead political life […], no breathing space for the youth, a terrifying security grip, no accountability for killing, all that is no cause for shame. But when two young guys make a mocking video as an outlet for their concern—that is regarded by Sisi's state as a cause for shame.

A police officer responds with a selfie video containing a polite but stern warning to the "wannabe celebrity." Eight months later, Shurūq is arrested and sentenced to a year in ↗**Prison** for alleged prostitution; the police are open about having set her a trap on the social proximity networking app WhosHere [↗**Celebrities**, ↗***Kamīn***, ↗The **Policeman Criminal**, ↗**Social Media**].

Shurūq's videos are but the tip of a wider social phenomenon—the popularity of taking selfies. People take selfies with stars, and stars take selfies with their fans (Egyptian soft pop king Tāmir Ḥusnī while touring Tunisia; beach volleyball player Duʿāʿ al-Ghubāshī after representing Egypt for the first time at an Olympic tournament, wearing a hijab). People take selfies with officers at the empty Taḥrīr Square on 25 January and at the army booth at the Cairo International Book Fair. People take selfies with Sisi himself. Lawmakers take selfies during the opening ceremony of parliament (and are being denounced for disrespect). A Tunisian soldier takes a smiling selfie next to a dead terrorist (and is praised by the Minister of Defence). An app developed to promote the film *Clash* allows you to place your selfie behind the bars of a police van. An Egyptian professional photographer pursues a project

where he takes selfies on Egypt's highest or otherwise highly iconic spots [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**]. People post selfies to support—or to make fun of—a Facebook campaign encouraging public transportation. In this omnipresent possibility of self-taken images, however, there always lurks the danger of disturbing public order and morality. Aṭfāl Shawāriʿ are not the only ones facing punitive measures for such offences. The puppet Abla Fāhītā is taken to court and charged with defying "the values and ethics of Egypt" after presenting sexy selfies in red lingerie and reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* on her hugely popular TV and YouTube show [↗**Court Trials**, ↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**].

The popularity of selfies provides perhaps the most striking illustration of how people use the mobile phone as a tool for the expression and public presentation of 'myself'. This 'self' is always socially embedded, but in it lies a momentum of insubordination and unruliness that may shake authority [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**, ↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)]. The selfie spread on social media and hashtagged #Does_the_mobile_camera_make_you_tremble" aptly sums up this dynamic.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Garbage ♦ In Islam, … ♦ *Kamīn* ♦ Migration ♦ Pop Music ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Social Media ♦ Uber

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

Written

"15 Egyptian Girl Problems You Can Probably Relate to." *CairoScene*, April 2, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/15-Egyptian-Girl-Problems-You-Can-Probably-Relate-To>.

"16 of 2016: The Egyptian Men and Women Changing the Country." *CairoScene*, December 30, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/16-of-2016-Egypt-s-Real-Influencers>.

ABŪ 'L-GHAYṬ, Muḥammad. "Yā muğtamaʿ al-15% nuqaddim lakum: Miṣr." *al-Maṣrī al-Yōm*, September 28, 2016, <http://ww.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1016135>.

ABUTALEB, Yasmeen, and Joseph MENN. "Exclusive: Egypt Blocked Facebook Internet Service over Surveillance – Sources." *Reuters*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-egypt/exclusive-egypt-blocked-facebook-internet-service-over-surveillance-sources-idUSKCN0WY3JZ>.

AḤMAD Muğāhid. "Qiṣṣat muḥağğaba aṣbaḥat ḥadīth al-ʿālam: shağğaʿathā al-sifāra al-almāniyya wa-ṣaffaqa lahā ğumhūr Īṭāliyā." *al-Maṣrī al-Yōm Lāyt*, August 10, 2016, <http://lite.almasryalyoum.org/extra/106335>.

AḤMAD Ṣalāh al-Dīn. "Min ḥafl takharruğ Ādāb al-Minūfiyya Qism Iʿlām." *Twitter*, May 23, 2016, <https://twitter.com/CheSalahElDin/status/734714638533861377>.

AḤMAD Salāma. "Ḥabs al-mumaththila Shurūq ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bi-tuhmat al-taḥrīḍ ʿalà al-fuğūr." *Veto*, September 22, 2016, <http://www.vetogate.com/2421882>.

ʿANĀNĪ, Mayy, and Amānī al-AKHRAS. "Ǧanḥ al-Ǧīza taqḍī bi-ḥabs Rīhām Saʿīd 18 shahran wa-gharāmat 10 ālāf ǧunayh bi-qaḍiyat fatāt al-mōl." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, February 22, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/29/جنح-الجيزة-تقضى-بحبس-ريهام-سعيد-18شهرا-وغرامة-10آلاف-/2607489/جنيه>.

ASHRAF ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. "Ṣūratān li-fatātayn tahuzzān mawāqiʿ al-tawāṣul al-iǧtimāʿī fī Miṣr." *al-ʿArabiyya*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/last-page/2016/11/07/صورتان-لفتاتين-تهزان-مواقع-التواصل-في-مصر-.html>.

BARTON, James. "Facebook Deploying Messenger Lite in Kenya, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Venezuela." *Developing Telecoms*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.developingtelecoms.com/tech/apps-content-ott/6743-facebook-deploying-messenger-lite-in-kenya-malaysia-sri-lanka-tunisia-and-venezuela.html>.

BAṢĪRA—*al-Markaz al-Miṣrī li-Buḥūth al-Raʾy al-ʿĀmm*, <http://www.baseera.com.eg>, accessed April 13, 2018.

BAWWĀBAT Tūnis – Tunigate. "ʿĀjil: 'Orange' tuhaddid bi-mughādarat Tūnis wa-tark akthar min 3 malāyīn min ḥurafāʾihā fī al-tasallul…." *Facebook*, October 20, 2016, <https://fb.com/Tunigate/posts/1779568852295030>.

BORAIE, Eihab. "The Environmental App that Could Actually Clean Up Egypt." *CairoScene*, October 10, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Buzz/The-Environmental-App-That-Could-Actually-Clean-Up-Egypt>.

"BUSEET: Public Transportation à la Carte." *CairoScene*, September 20, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Travel/Buseet-Public-Transportation-A-La-Carte>.

CHARBEL, Jano. "Taxi Drivers Protest against Uber, Other App-based Car Services." *Madà*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/04/feature/politics/taxi-drivers-protest-against-uber-other-app-based-car-services>.

CHITI, Elena. "The Egyptian Army, Always There since the Pharaohs (Photo Feb 6th)." *Evernote*, February 6, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/shard/s612/sh/c8434974-7ebe-49d7-94b0-75b7e90e6ea7/cf347800a9eccff1#>.

DENNIS, Everette E., Justin D. MARTIN, and Robb WOOD, with Marium SAEED. "Media Use in the Middle East, 2016: A Six-Nation Survey." *Northwestern University in Qatar & Doha Film Institute*, n.d., <http://www.mideastmedia.org/survey/2016/uploads/file/NUQ_Media_Use_2016_Final_Full_Demo.pdf>.

DRUGEON, Antony. "La 4G arrive en Tunisie: à quels changements s'attendre?" *HuffPost MG*, March 10, 2016, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/03/10/4g-tunisie-changements_n_9425008. html>.

"EGYPT GDP per Capita 1960-2018." *Trading Economics*, <https://tradingeconomics.com/egypt/gdp-per-capita>, accessed April 12, 2018.

"EGYPTIAN officials say 'Pokémon Go' jeopardizes country's national security." *Al Arabiya Net*, July 14, 2016, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2016/07/14/Egyptian-officials-say-Pok-mon-Go-jeopardizes-country-s-national-security-.html>.

"EGYPT'S Activists Turn to Social Media to Call for Satirists' Release." *The Guardian*, May 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/12/egypts-activists-social-media-facebook-satirists-release-awlad-el-shawarea>.

"FAḌĪḤAT Shurūq ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz tasubb al-shurṭa bi-alfāẓ khārija wa-radd ẓābiṭ shurṭa ʿalà ihānatihā." *Kōmīdiyā Brōdkashn* YouTube Channel, October 21, 2016, <https://youtu.be/S0XGwfgi2pY>.

"FACEBOOK Stats for Fans in Egypt." *Socialbakers*, <https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/local/egypt>, accessed August 8, 2016.

"FOOD Startup Yumamia Wins Silver Award at Publicis90." *CairoScene*, July 14, 2016, <http://-www.cairoscene.com/Eats/Food-Startup-Yumamia-Wins-Silver-Award-at-Publicis9>.

FRENKEL, Sheera, and Maged ATEF. "Facebook's Big Idea for the Internet is Stalling in Egypt." *BuzzFeedNews*, January 20, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/sheerafrenkel/facebook-tried-to-give-everyone-in-egypt-the-internet-it-did?utm_term=.jyw8a8ajP#.yuLXEXERW>.

GRIFFIN, Andrew. "Government Has Been Allowing UK Firms to Sell Invasive Spying Equipment to Countries Including Saudi Arabia, Records Show." *Independent*, January 27, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/government-has-been-allowing-uk-firms-to-sell-invasive-spying-equipment-to-countries-including-saudi-a6836651.html>.

HALAWA, Ibrahim. "App Launches in Egypt to Combat Forced Disappearances." *The Guardian*, September 6, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/06/app-launches-egypt-combat-forced-disappearances-i-protect>.

"HUMAN Rights in Tunisia a Work in Progress." *Fanack*, March 12, 2018, <https://fanack. com/tunisia/human-rights/human-rights-a-work-in-progress>.

ḤUSĀM al-Sukkarī. "Anā khā'if min hādhā al-waṭan… wa-laysa ʻalayh!" *al-Shurūq*, March 5, 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=05032016&id=17e99bc9-7cb6-4d10-975b-f1a59eabdfa6>.

ĪMĀN ʻAlā'. "Hal kāna ʻām 2016 ''Ām al-Shabāb' fiʻlan?" *Wikālat Sōlā Press*, Dec. 27, 2916, <http://www.arabsolaa.com/articles/view/362631>.

"INNAHUM yaqra'ūna Walīd Dīdā." *Akhbār al-Adab*, February 14, 2016, p. 5.

"I Protect." *Google Play Store*, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.asker.zumoapp>, accessed April 13, 2018.

"IʻRAF ārā' al-miṣriyyīn wa-iǧābatahum ʻalà as'ilatik." *Nis'alak*, <http://www.nes2alak.com>, accessed April 13, 2018.

ISLĀM Ǧāwīsh. "Wa'llāhi wa-lā vīdēō wa-lā ṣūra wa-lā rasma bit-hizz illā al-ḍaʻīf al-ʻāǧiz." *Facebook*, May 11, 2016, <https://fb.com/photo.php?fbid=1024323607636148>.

"KETĀPĒDIYĀ." *Facebook* page, <https://www.facebook.com/ketapedia>, accessed April 13, 2018.

MAGED Atef. "Egypt's Police are Raiding Homes to Check Random People's Facebook Accounts." *BuzzFeedNews*, January 20, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/magedatef/egyptian-police-are-performing-random-facebook-checks-ahead?utm_term=.bm2BxBx1d#.uveWmWmJD>.

MALM, Sara. "Puppet is Charged with Defying 'the Values and Ethics of Egypt' after Posing with a Copy of Fifty Shades of Grey in Satirical TV Show." *MailOnline*, April 25, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3557387/Puppet-charged-defying-values-ethics-Egypt-posing-copy-Fifty-Shades-Grey-satirical-TV-show.html>.

"'MAMNŪʻ al-dukhūl'… ʻAn manʻ al-bāḥithīn wa'l-akādēmiyyīn al-ağānib min ziyārat Miṣr." *Mu'assasat Ḥurriyyat al-Fikr wa'l-Taʻbīr*, February 8, 2016, <http://afteegypt.org/publications_org/2016/02/07/11719-afteegypt.html>.

MAYY Muḥammad. "Ḥabs shurṭiyya bi-mabāḥith al-ādāb li'ttihāmihā bi-hatk ʻirḍ ʻāṭil fī ʻAwsīm'." *al-Bawwāba*, April 7, 2016, <http://www.albawabhnews.com/1869862>.

MOHAMED. "ECRF Launches App to Counter Enforced Disappearances in Egypt." *Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms*, September 6, 2016, <http://ecrfeg.org/en/2016/09/06/ ecrf-launches-app-counter-enforced-disappearances-egypt>.

"'MUSHAWWASH' by Walīd Dīdā." *GoodReads*, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/ 24492179>, accessed April 12, 2018.

MUMM. <https://www.getmumm.com>, accessed April 13, 2018.

MUṢṬAFÀ Māhir. "Sīb mōbāylak! 10 naṣā'iḥ li-kull miṣrī kay lā taʻtaqilahu al-shurṭa ʻindamā tufattish hātifahu." *YallaFeed*, May 9, 2016, <https://yallafeed.com/syb-mwbaylk-10-nsaeh-lkl-msry-ky-la-tatqlh-alshrth-andma-tft-sh-hatfh-4277>.

NIRA Al Gammal, [comment on "Ēh? Afashtū lēh?"], Shady H. AbuZaid *Facebook* page, <https://fb.com/shady.h.abuzaid/posts/10156462830755402?comment_id=451851368355000>, January 26, 2016.

OMAR Mohamed. "#Hal_tatazawwaj_bint_maʿahā_jawwāl." *Twitter*, August 29, 2016, <https://twitter.com/OoOmar_Mohamed/status/770129685942534144>.

"ORANGE and Vodafone Officially Launch 4G Services in Egypt." *Egypt Independent*, September 28, 2017, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/orange-vodafone-officially-launch-4g-services-egypt>.

"ORANGE Replaces Mobinil as Rebranding Hits Final Stages." *Digital* Boom, Feb. 28, 2916, <https://adigitalboom.com/orange-replaces-mobinil-as-rebranding-hits-final-stages>.

PESHA Magid. "The Syrian Kitchen: A Refugee Food Business Based on Quality not Empathy." *Madà*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/08/31/feature/lifestyle/the-syrian-kitchen-a-refugee-food-business-based-on-quality-not-empathy>.

PETRILLO, Marina. "Egypt's Protest Selfies: Campaign in Support of Detained Satirical Group." *Reported.ly*, May 13, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160514115358/https://reported.ly/2016/05/13/egypts-protest-selfies-campaign-in-support-of-detained-satirical-group>.

RADCLIFFE, Damian. *Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2016*, <https://damianradcliffe.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/social-media-in-the-middle-east-the-story-of-2016-final.pdf>.

"RAKNA: The Uber of Parking is Almost Here." *CairoScene*, February 23, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Geek/Rakna-The-Uber-of-Parking-Is-Almost-Here>.

RANIA. "il-Raʾīs qāl ha-khlaq ǧīl qādir ʿalà al-hulm ha-khlaq min shabābhā nukhba ǧidīda qādira ʿalà al-taghyīr wa'l-tawǧīh al-salīm wi-biyiḥṣal." *Twitter*, October 22, 2016, <https://twitter.com/raniaahmed122/status/791257325369786369>.

"RAṢD lil-intihākāt allatī tuṣāḥib al-dhikrà al-khāmisa lil-thawra." *Mu'assasat Ḥurriyyat al-Fikr wa'l-Taʿbīr*, n.d., <http://afteegypt.org/25-update>.

RASHAD, Jonathan: "Empty Tahrir." *Jadaliyya*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32936/Empty-Tahrir>.

"RIHAM Saeed Sentenced to Prison for Airing Private Photographs of a Sexual Harassment Victim." *Egyptian Streets*, February 29, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/29/riham-saeed-sentenced-to-prison-for-airing-private-photographs-of-a-sexual-harassment-victim>.

SALMA Islam. "Pokemon Go Craze Sweeps Egypt as Concerns over Security Arise." *Egyptian Streets*, July 15, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/07/15/pokemon-go-craze-sweeps-egypt-as-concerns-over-security-arise>.

SANĀ' ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. "'Thawrat al-Internet' tuwāǧih ziyādat kurūt al-maḥmūl: 'Mish ha-nishḥan'." September 16, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1009751>.

al-ṢĀWĪ, Muḥammad. "Quwwāt al-amn tafḥaṣ hawātif al-muwāṭinīn… wa-tataṣaffaḥ 'al-Facebook'." *al-Mūǧaz*, April 25, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426152826/http://almogaz.com/news/crime/2016/apr/25/2241123>.

al-SHABAKA al-ʿArabiyya li-Maʿlūmāt Ḥuqūq al-Insān / The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. "Hunāka muttasaʿ lil-ǧamīʿ … Suǧūn Miṣr qabla wa-baʿda thawrat Yanāyir." September 5, 2016, <http://anhri.net/هناك-متسع-للجميع>.

El SHIMI, Rowan. "A Hopeful Year for Egypt's Cinema Industry." *Madà*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/28/feature/culture/a-hopeful-year-for-egypts-cinema-industry>.

SHURŪQ ʿAbd al-ʿAziz. "Ightiṣāb muʿāqa dhihniyyan fī Qism Shurṭat Imbāba, lā yakhdish al-ḥiyā'." Shrouk Abdelaziz *Facebook* page, January 27, 2016, <https://fb.com/story.php?story_fbid=534381940055819&id=444942555666425>.

"SISI: Don't listen to anyone but me." *Madà*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/24/news/u/sisi-dont-listen-to-anyone-but-me>.

"ṢUWAR: Miṣrī yaltaqiḍ ṣuwar 'sēlfī' mudhhila min a'là al-amākin fī Miṣr." *MBC Net*, August 30, 2016, <http://www.mbc.net/ar/programs/yahdoth-fe-masr/articles/صور---مصري-يلتقط--صور--سيلفي--مذهلة-من-أعلى-الأماكن-في-مصر-/photos/214882.html>.

"TAṢĀ'UD qalaq mu'ayyidī al-niẓām al-Miṣrī min 'Jumhūriyyat Facebook'." *al-Jazīra Mubāshir*, March 17, 2016, <http://mubasher.aljazeera.net/news/تصاعد-قلق-مؤيدي-النظام-المصري-من-جمهورية-فيسبوك>.

"THE UBER of Food: Yumamia Turns Egyptian Housewives into Entrepreneurs." *CairoScene*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Eats/The-Uber-of-Food-Yumamia-Turns-Egyptian-Housewives-Into-Entrepreneurs>.

'UMAR Sa'īd. "'Āmilāt al-ǧins fī Miṣr: nabī' al-hawā wa-nashtarī qahran." *Madà*, November 5, 2014, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2014/11/05/feature/lifestyle/عاملات-الجنس-في-مصر-نبيع-الهوى-ونشتري-ق>.

"VIRAL Facebook Post Stirs Controversy for Making the Case for Public Transportation in Egypt." *CairoScene*, December 4, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Buzz/Viral-Facebook-Post-Stirs-Controversy-for-Making-the-Case-for-Public-Transportation-in-Egypt>.

WĀ'IL Thābit. "'Baṣīra' li-buḥūth al-ra'y al-'āmm yuṭliq taṭbīq 'Nis'allak' min Maktabat al-Iskandariyya." *al-Būrṣa*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.alborsanews.com/2016/09/06/ 896004>.

WALSH, Declan. "Flamboyant Egyptian Politician Craves Public Eye." *The New York Times*, January 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/world/middleeast/flamboyant-egyptian-politician-craves-public-eye.html>.

YĀRĀ 'Imād. "Bi'l-ṣuwar – Tāmir Ḥusnī yattajih ilà Tūnis bi-ṣuḥbat Basma BūSīl." *Fī al-Fann*, September 1, 2016, <http://www.filfan.com/news/details/56892>.

ZALAṬ, Shādī & Muḥammad Ḥamāma. "'Aṭfāl Shawāri'" bayna khawf al-dawla min al-sukhriyya… wa-khawfihā min al-shāri'." *Madà*, May 11, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/05/11/feature/ثقافة/أطفال-شوارع-بين-خوف-الدولة-من-السخرية>.

Movies

Ḥārr Ǧāff Ṣayfan / Dry Hot Summers. Short film by Sharīf al-Bandārī. Egypt/Germany 2015.

Zahrat Ḥalab / The Flower of Aleppo. Feature film by Riḍà Bāhī. Tunisia 2016.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

The Policeman Criminal

By Elena Chiti and Jonas Roellin

In a cartoon entitled "Contemporary Police," two police officers contemplate the street before them, which displays the reconstruction of a crime scene (Mohab). Sketched in white chalk on the dark asphalt, the scene ironically represents police brutality. Clearly recognizable by their caps, the white profiles of the two officers, drawn on the ground, hold the blackjacks they used against a harmless man. Some red stains point to bloodshed, suggesting they beat him to death. Contemplating the crime scene they actually produced, the two officers are perfectly calm. "You seem to be influenced by Keith Haring," one says to the other, as if appraising a work of art [↗Beautiful *vs.* Ugly]. The calm emerging from the cartoon sarcastically points to a bitter reality: police brutality is not an exception in Egypt, but a trivial routine. Another cartoon, drawn by an Italian, closely parallels this view. Following the abduction and murder in Cairo of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni [↗The Suspect Foreigner], it portrays a huge stack of young men who have died under torture. In front of it, a high officer of the Egyptian police faces a dilemma: how will he distinguish the Italian body from all the Egyptians who suffered the same treatment? (Natangelo). Widely shared on social media in Egypt, this cartoon is used to oppose the propaganda depicting Regeni as a spy [↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**]. According to an anonymous Egyptian source, the chief of Giza Police section, previously accused of having tortured suspects, is behind both the order to abduct Regeni and the narrative portraying him as a threat to Egyptian security (*madàMaṣr* [b]).

Police brutality makes the headlines in connection with the anniversary of the 2011 revolutions in both Egypt and Tunisia, when the comparison between the present and the past emerges with particular strength [↗Past *vs.* Present, ↗Commemoration / Memorial Days]. In Tunisia, the beginning of the new year witnesses the largest wave of social unrest since 2011. While the protests reveal the depth of Tunisia's unresolved socio-economic crisis characterized by widespread unemployment and deepening social inequality [↗**Dollar Crisis**, ↗Tourist Resorts, ↗Affluence *vs.* Destitution], the police's harsh response to it exposes "just how little has changed for the better in the relationship between the police and the general public since the 2011 uprising," as the newspaper *al-Ḥayāt* comments (Ṣāyigh). Within nine days, more than 1000 people and dozens of activists are arrested, most of whom are accused of having participated in acts of looting, vandalism or even violence against the police. Activists lament the "repression of social movements," recalling "the old tendencies of a police state," and even accuse a union of the National Guard of "diffusing fabricated images portraying violent protests" (Chennaoui [a]) [↗Prison, ↗True *vs.* False, ↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**].

Meanwhile, in Cairo, cultural centers are shut down and private flats are systematically searched [↗Downtown/Centre-ville], as the Egyptian authorities seek to prevent the opposition from marking the anniversary of the 2011 revolution on January 25. Arrests keep increasing in number, targeting well-known activists alongside youth who are not politically engaged, but whose activity on social media or gatherings in public places, in a climate of

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *197–*205
© Elena Chiti, Univ. of Stockholm, SE (for EG), and Jonas Roellin, Univ. of Bern, CH (for TN)

paranoia, arouse suspicion. People are taken from their houses or from cafes and they literally "vanish" (ISMAIL & WALSH) [↗Disappearances]. During a speech at a police college, Egyptian president ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī advises the Tunisians to protect their country and "not let it go to ruin." Sīsī's speech is welcomed by a spokesperson for the Tunisian government who says it has "moved the country's leaders and people." However, Tunisian activists on Twitter draw parallels between Sīsī's comments and those of his predecessor Ḥusnī Mubārak who in 2011 similarly dismissed the unrest in Tunisia that would eventually spread to Egypt and lead to his own demise (*Middle East Eye*) [↗Past *vs.* Present].

On the other hand, at least in Tunisia, since the ouster of strongman Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Bin ʿAlī, there are noticeable improvements in police conduct. Rallies and demonstrations without police intervention are a daily scene in the cities, overt police violence in the streets and the use of torture in custody are less frequent (*ACAT*). Since Bin ʿAlī's surveillance and censorship apparatus has largely dissipated, activists enjoy an unprecedented level of freedom of expression. However, old habits die hard and torture, although less visible and frequent, is still used in police stations as a tool of interrogation, intimidation or punishment. In July, journalist and activist Hinda al-Shinnāwī publishes a report on several victims of police torture within only a few weeks. In one case, the police confiscated the goods of an unemployed teacher and father of three who maintained a small tobacco stand to support his family [↗"The System" *vs.* "The People"]. After the police had refused to return his goods and then abused and humiliated him at the police station, the man immolated himself in front of his perpetrators (CHENNAOUI [c]). The case is, of course, reminiscent of the iconic "martyr" Muḥammad al-Būʿazīzī, the young street vendor from Sidi Bouzid who in 2010 sparked the Arab Spring when he set himself on fire after the police seized his goods and humiliated him in public [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. It shows that five years after the revolution, the struggle for a police service that respects human rights has still not produced the desired results. Certainly, important advances have been made on the legal front. Already in 2013, a law was passed that subjects police stations to inspections by human rights monitors. In February, a new law is approved that guarantees the presence of a lawyer during police interrogation and reduces the duration of police custody to 48 hours (CHENNAOUI [b]).

However, according to activists, the Tunisian pre-revolutionary penal code has been amended only gradually and in a piecemeal fashion (ROELLIN, *Notes*). Consequently, journalists and activists who are critical of the political system and, especially, the still powerful security sector, continue to be subjected to intimidation and prosecution. The arrest of 17-year-old high-school student and activist of ↗***Manīsh msāmiḥ***, ʿAfrā Bin ʿAzzā, is a case in point. In late December 2015, she is charged with defaming police officers in her Facebook posts and, despite being a minor, spends one night in a police station where she is subjected to abusive verbal treatment and sexual harassment (BEN TARJEM). After weeks of public outrage at the judiciary and the police's inadequate handling of the case, a children's judge finally dismisses the charge (*Tuniscope*). The police also use other provisions of the penal code as mere pretexts to harass and imprison critics. In the case of young activists and artists, they often invoke provisions related to violating "public morals" (drunkenness in public, not observing the fast during the month of Ramadan, etc.) and, especially, the uncompromising Law 52 which punishes the consumption of cannabis, locally known as *zaṭla* [↗**Hashish**], with one year in prison and a fine of a thousand dinars. ʿAfrā Bin ʿAzzā,

who had already been arrested twice before the above incident, says that when she became engaged in another social movement dubbed *Ḥāsibhum* ("Hold them accountable") against police violence and impunity, she already knew she was targeted by the police and "expected to be arrested again" (BEN TARJEM).

In the same way, Egyptian authorities do not lack legal tools to pressure young activists and artists. The so-called Blasphemy Law, which punishes offenses against religion, and Article 178 of the Criminal Code, which punishes "violations of public morals" (*munāfiyat al-ādāb al-ʿāmma*), are vague enough to be applied in a vast range of situations. This gives the authorities room to maneuver against their targets, as the famous case against novelist Aḥmad Nājī, accused of "offending public morals," incisively illustrates [↗Court Trials]. Nevertheless, the most striking aspect is the frequency of arrests that are not framed within the law, in which no charges are exhibited, and no mention is made of the duration of detention. These arrests, which may also involve teenagers, contribute to blurring the boundaries between police and criminals. In one instance, at least fifteen students whose ages range from 15 to 20 are abducted from their houses in the governorate of Alexandria, some of them along with their younger brothers. The police do not notify any charge, nor give any information on where to find them. In the face of the insistence of the parents, the reply is "you will recover your children in the morgue" (*madàMaṣr* [a]) [↗Disappearances].

Arrests do not only target artists, political opponents or people perceived as such. They can hit anyone, generating fear among citizens who fail to understand the logic behind them. The constant feeling of being under surveillance, followed, and suspect even though one has not committed any crime can also lead to a state of exhaustion and suffocation. The everyday harassments and humiliations practiced by the police in public, especially against young people from marginalized areas, also remain an issue of concern. When young men from the poorer neighborhoods of Tunis or Cairo come to visit the downtown areas of the cities, they are often stopped at certain junctions [↗Kamīn; ↗Downtown/Centre-ville; ↗Center *vs.* Periphery]. The police target them on account of their physical appearance, clothing, and dialect, as well as the direction from which they are coming. After rounding up the young men and checking their IDs, which reveal their place of residence and family background, the police decide whether they let them "move along" or proceed to further control measures, often related to alleged drugs or alcohol consumption. Another common scenario for residents of modest or poor neighborhoods is described in a blog published in *Nawaat*:

> You may be sitting in peace, sipping coffee, playing cards with some friends or following a sports event. [Suddenly] three or four police cars surround the scene and a group of policemen is determined to harass everyone because of their need to check IDs and search for an amount [of money]. In the vast majority of times […] it ends with slapping indiscriminately whoever does not appreciate disgruntled agents [↗Inferiority *vs.* Superiority].

The blogger proceeds citing Egyptian writer Aḥmad Khālid Tawfīq: "Who invented the slap? The genius who knew that the center of dignity is anatomically located under the cheek?" (GUESMI) [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. In marginalized neighborhoods [↗*ʿAshwāʾiyyāt*] where unemployment and poverty are high, petty crimes and misdemeanors often result in abuse and humiliation of the persons involved. Typically, smoking a joint or

drinking alcohol in public gets young men in trouble. Sometimes, an alleged case of theft, a violent argument between neighbors or the incapability or refusal of a street peddler to give a bribe to the police leads to a conflict with the latter. The ubiquity of seemingly all-powerful policemen—in uniform or without, in cars, on motorcycles or on foot, whether in a coffee shop, in a park or at the stadium—takes a heavy toll on young people who already live under intense economic and social pressure [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**; ↗Affluence *vs.* Destitution; ↗Apartment Wanted]. Sometimes, the policeman is described as a cruel elder brother who does not protect his siblings, but rather constantly follows, controls and terrorizes them. This is why, in Tunisian youth slang, the policeman is called *al-ḥākim*, which also means "the ruler" or "the authority" as well as, specifically, "the judge" (ROELLIN, *Notes*). Similarly, Egyptians refer to every manifestation of security forces in their daily life as *al-ḥukūma*, which literally means "the government." Thus, when the police come to search an apartment, the neighbors may say that *al-ḥukūma* came by (CHITI, *Notes*) [↗"The System" *vs.* "The People"].

But not only ordinary citizens live in constant fear of the police. Even ↗Celebrities can become victims of police brutality. Actress and singer Mīrīhān Ḥusayn, arrested for drunk-driving in Cairo, accuses the police of having sexually assaulted her (al-QUMĀSH). "I was going home after a long working day," she recalls, "and was surprised by six men who tried to stop me by force late at night. I thought they were thieves (*ḥaramiyya*)" (ḤUSAYN) [↗Male *vs.* Female]. The pictures she posts on her Facebook page show signs of beating on her face, lips and legs. Some Twitter users comment the incident with the slogan *al-dākhiliyya balṭagiyya*, widely spread during the 2011 protests to accuse the police, under the orders of the Ministry of Interior (*al-dākhiliyya*), of being nothing but thugs (*balṭagiyya*), common criminals acting on behalf of corrupt institutions (al-QĀḌĪ) [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. "Please tag my pictures and share them," Mīrīhān Ḥusayn writes, "so the truth will come out." In this way, she treats Facebook users as the ultimate protectors of justice, which the police jeopardized through both the physical violence of the assault and the moral violence of its denial [↗Social Media; ↗Voice *vs.* Silence; ↗True *vs.* False]. The everyday abuses people are subjected to or that they witness are sometimes recorded with their ↗Mobile Phones. The images or videos are then usually posted on Facebook in the hope of generating mobilization and prompting the authorities to react (*Observateurs* [b]). One such video shows the violent arrest of a man who apparently has had an altercation with a female car driver over a traffic violation in a Tunis suburb. In the video, the woman punches the man and spits on him while plainclothes policemen prevent the man from defending himself instead of stopping her (*Ḥāsibhum*). Another Facebook video shows a traffic police officer who extorts a bribe from a man and his mother in a car near Gabès (*Asslema FM*). We notice that the mother secretly films the scene while she complains: "Why pay forty dinars? That's too much!" The policeman does not want to negotiate and insists, "Forty dinars, not a cent less, it's not you who decides." While the content of the video does not reveal why the car driver was stopped, it is evident that the forty dinars are a bribe since they are demanded immediately, whereas traffic tickets can be paid with a delay. In Tunisia, such widely shared videos revealing police abuse often prompt the Interior Ministry to open an investigation and sometimes even to suspend the perpetrators, as in the latter case (*Observateurs* [a]).

In Egypt, more serious cases of police misconduct come to public attention and create controversy. In late 2015, the police enter a pharmacy in Ismailia and beat up doctor Ḥasan ʿAfīfī, who subsequently dies of his wounds. The pharmacy camera records the beginning of the aggression and the case attracts broad attention, leading to local street demonstrations. A TV troupe interviews a crowd of angry citizens from the victim's neighborhood. "The law states that nobody can search a pharmacy except the Ministry of Health!" a man protests, "This is common knowledge!" One after the other, men and women repeat that the pharmacist was a respectable man, whom they have known as such for many years. "If something like that happened to him," a man yells, "it means that it could happen to anyone of us!" (*Dream TV*) [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. Later on, the court of first instance condemns the responsible police officer to eight years in jail (GHĀNIM), yet similar incidents follow. In the Cairo popular neighborhood of Darb al-Aḥmar, a police officer shoots dead a 24-year-old driver who was transporting furniture for him. According to eyewitnesses, the officer refused to pay the fare he agreed upon and this led to an argument, which he terminated with his gun. A video and several photos document the killing, prompting the authorities to take a stand. On a TV show, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Karīm says "the officer fired a warning shot in the air, which unfortunately hit the driver leading to his death" (YT "Stūdiyū al-nuwwāb"). Minister of Interior Magdī ʿAbd al-Ghaffār receives the father of the young driver to express his condolences. The picture of the encounter is published on the Ministry's official Facebook page and disseminated by several media (*MoI-EG on FB*). It portrays the mourning father slightly bowing to the Minister, who holds his head and kisses it in a paternal gesture. Acting as the father of the victim's father, the Minister reaffirms his role of father of all citizens [↗Father Figures]. As such, he releases an official statement ensuring that "he and all those in the police force condemn this disgraceful act and the irresponsible behavior of one policeman, which does not reflect the true nature of the patriotic work that policemen do" (*Egyptian Streets*; *MoI-EG on FB*). The Cairo Criminal Court sentences the police officer to 25 years in prison (RAMAḌĀN). However, the exemplary punishment does not seem to put an end to such "disgraceful acts", as the authorities call them. Some weeks later, in a Cairo suburb, a number of eyewitnesses report that "an individual wearing a police uniform shot dead a civilian and when other civilians tried to seize him, he started shooting at random and injured two more people" (ḤASAN & al-DĪN). The video of the scene is posted on Twitter, and it is proved that the "individual in uniform" is effectively a police officer. President al-Sīsī also reacts on Twitter, taking the side of the civilians to reassure them that police brutality is nothing but a marginal phenomenon. Yet news outlets seem to take it almost for granted, as if it were a banal trend, concluding that "recent incidents among low ranking policemen, who do not have to undergo the same training and study as police officers, have included sexual harassment, beating of a doctor in a hospital, and the assault of a woman at a Cairo metro" (*Rehab City*).

In a highly polarized society [↗Commemoration / Memorial Days], where the state presents itself as the entity that holds the only truth, people may turn to social media to contest the police's version of the facts, condemning their manipulation of the reality. The same condemnation appears in some novels that are visible in the public space, whether in the bestsellers' section of bookstores or on the publishers' stands at the Cairo Book Fair. Set in 2020, *Mithla Ikārūs* ("Like Icarus") by Aḥmad Khālid Tawfīq is the story of an Egyptian

man labelled as mad because gifted with the power of foreseeing the future [↗Hope = Hell (Dystopia)]. "The state holds him as a strategic treasure" (TAWFĪQ) and even shares him with American experts working for the Pentagon. Both Egypt and the United States are interested in exploiting his skill but fail to understand his predictions that come in an obscure, metaphoric language. "The man who knows more than he ought to" is heavily tortured to deliver a truth that nobody is capable of understanding. Another major novel, *ʿUṭārid*, seems to offer a positive vision of the police, yet in a paradoxical way. In 2023, Egypt is invaded by the Knights of Malta, becoming a portion of their Republic. While the vast majority of Egyptians adjust to the foreign occupation, some police officers join the resistance. They decide to put their expertise with weapons and combat in the service of the Egyptian nation but have to quit the Egyptian police to achieve this goal. From national agents collaborating with a foreign power, they turn into outlaws serving their homeland, a twist that makes the reader question the image of the police as a force protecting the country [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. A similar pattern is at the core of a successful TV series, *al-Khurūg* ("The Exit"), shot in Egypt and starring renowned Tunisian actors such as Ẓāfir al-ʿĀbidīn and Durra. The former plays the role of a police officer who eventually leaves the police to be able to pursue a criminal, while the same criminal claims to punish the official police for having betrayed its mission and no longer being the "sword of justice" (*sayf al-ʿadāla*) (*Khurūg*).

A writer, in his thirties, thinks the image of the good cop has taken a battering from both ordinary people and cultural productions:

> When I was a child, heroism (*al-buṭūla*) was connected with the state (*al-dawla*). The hero was the Egyptian spy working for the secret services (*al-mukhābarāt*) against Israel [↗Security *vs.* Fear; ↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**]. Even in literature and movies. You can easily find it in the best-sellers for teenagers we used to read, as the ones written by Nabīl Fārūq around the figure of the "man of the impossible" (*rajul al-mustaḥīl*), the brave agent who defies any risk and thwarts any attack with the help of state technology. This figure had a huge impact on our generation. These were my dreams as a child! Now it's the opposite: the criminal (*al-mugrim*) is connected with the state and the hero is against it [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. I think it's a change resulting from the 2011 revolution. Even popular literature and movies follow the path because it sells (*huwa tugārī*). (CHITI, *Notes*)

Indeed, the audience seems to prefer realism to fantasy these days and, in reality, the distinction between security intervention and arbitrary oppression is far from being clear. Crackdowns on protest movements, collective identity controls and police raids in public places, torture in custody, arrests of journalists and activists—such police actions are still widespread in Egypt and, to a lesser extent, in Tunisia. But however brutal or unjust they may seem, the authorities often legitimate them with heightened security concerns and with the struggle against terrorism [↗Security *vs.* Fear]. In both Tunisia and Egypt, a state of emergency is in place that gives the police exceptional powers, allowing them, for instance, to suspend strikes or demonstrations likely to provoke "disorder," to place under house arrest anyone whose activities they deem a "danger for security" or to place control on media output. "Fighting terrorism and respecting human rights are two sides of the same coin,"

forty-six national and international human rights organizations say in an open letter addressed to all Tunisians and entitled "No to Terrorism, Yes to Human Rights." The letter acknowledges the need to prosecute perpetrators and instigators of terrorist acts while at the same time stressing that abusing human rights will not defeat terrorism but nurture it (*Nawaat*). This view is affirmed in a social awareness video in which five Tunisian ↗Celebrities, including a well-known filmmaker, a rapper and an Olympic champion, alternately speak to the public, arguing,

> yes, policemen are our brothers, but they shouldn't beat or abuse people. No one should be tortured, even in the name of fighting terrorism. This type of abuse is dangerous for everyone […]. Many say police can do whatever they want, as long as they crush terrorism. What does that mean, 'Whatever they want?' Does it mean humiliating you, breaking into your house? Policemen deal with citizens directly. They should respect us. Otherwise, let's just bring back Ben Ali and the police state, if that's what they want. Injustice is an awful thing, whether it comes from terrorists or from the police. A policeman who commits abuses in the name of fighting terrorism must be held accountable. In short, no to terrorism, yes to human rights.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ *'Ashwā'iyyāt* ♦ Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Father Figures ♦ Hashish ♦ Kamīn ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Prison ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Normality *vs.* Heroism ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

Written Sources and Videos

[*ACAT*]. N. N. "Alternative report by ACAT and Freedom without Borders on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in Tunisia." *Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture and Freedom without Borders*, April 18, 2016, <https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/ CAT/ Shared%20Documents/TUN/INT_CAT_CSS_TUN_23565_E.pdf> (accessed September 6, 2018).

[*Asslema FM*]. N. N. "Fīdiyū jadīd li-'awn amn fī shahr ramaḍān...." *Asslema FM*, June 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Asslema/videos/1568505203444191/?fb_dtsg_ag=AdwnhwdSmznaE4nshZ-23Gn9ekD35frc_uTK5r9H0-BktA%3AAdzx6Kj5xa5knQjUEUKc3XGvVuEjfg_I45pyNOUGYY4frA> (accessed September 6, 2018).

BEN TARJEM, Khansa. "Tunisie : une adolescente de 17 ans risque la prison pour des statuts Facebook." *Le Monde*, December 31, 2015, <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/12/31/tunisie-une-adolescente-de-17-ans-risque-la-prison-pour-des-statuts-facebook_4840473_3212.html> (accessed August 30, 2018).

CHENNAOUI, Henda [a]. "Repression of social movements: on the streets, in the media." *Nawaat*,

February 1, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/02/01/repression-of-social-movements-on-the-streets-in-the-media/> (accessed August 30, 2018).

CHENNAOUI, Henda [b]. "Tout sur les nouvelles réformes du Code de procédure pénale." *Nawaat*, February 4, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/02/04/tout-sur-les-nouvelles-reformes-du-code-de-procedure-penale/> (accessed August 30, 2018).

CHENNAOUI, Henda [c]. "Violence policière : Imed Ghanmi et les autres », *Nawaat*, July 10, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/07/10/violence-policiere-imed-ghanmi-et-les-autres/> (accessed September 6, 2018).

CHITI, Elena. Fieldwork notes and interviews. January-December 2016. (Unpublished).

[*Egyptian Streets* =] N. N. "Egypt's Interior Minister Meets With Father of 24-Year-Old Driver Killed in Al Darb Al Ahmar." *Egyptian Streets*, February 22, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/22/egypts-interior-minister-meets-with-father-of-24-year-old-driver-killed-in-al-darb-al-ahmar/> (accessed August 31, 2018).

[*Dream TV* =] N. N. "Ghaḍab ahālī al-Ismāʿīliyya baʿda maqtal al-duktūr ʿAfīfī ʿalà yad ḍābiṭ shurṭa." *Dream TV Egypt*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ueZkU45dQg> (accessed August 31, 2018).

GHĀNIM, Ṣabrī. "Al-sijn 8 sanawāt li-muʿāwin mabāḥith al-Ismāʿīliyya al-muttaham bi'l-tasabbub fī wafāt ṭabīb bayṭarī." *Al-Youm 7*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/9/السجن-8-سنوات-لمعاون-مباحث-الإسماعيلية-المتهم-بالتسبب-فى-وفاة/2577504> (accessed August 31, 2018).

GUESMI, Haythem. "Shakhṣiyyat sana 2016: ʿawn al-amn." *Nawaat*, December 19, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/12/19/شخصية-سنة-2016-عون-الأمن/> (accessed September 6, 2018).

ḤASAN, Bāhī, and al-Dīn, Muḥammad ʿAlī. "Shuhūd ʿiyān: shurṭī aṭlaqa al-raṣāṣ ʿalà muwāṭin bi'l-Riḥāb." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, March 19, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/932401> (accessed August 31, 2018).

[*Ḥāsibhum* =] N. N. "Fī Ibn Sīnā al-Kabbariyyā rājul kabīr mutaʿaddī...." *Ḥāsibhum*, March 29, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Hasebhom/videos/1723213741227423/> (accessed September 6, 2018).

ḤUSAYN, Mīrīhān. Facebook post, March 1,<https://www.facebook.com/MirhanHussein/photos/a.624781624268948.1073741828.624748237605620/963763047037469/?type=3&theater> (accessed August 31, 2018).

ISMAIL, Amina, and Declan WALSH. "Hundreds Vanishing in Egypt as Crackdown Widens, Activists Say." *The New York Times*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/27/world/middleeast/hundreds-vanishing-in-egypt-as-crackdown-widens-activists-say.html> (accessed August 30, 2018).

[*madàMaṣr* (a) =] N. N. "At least 20 Alexandrian young people forcibly disappeared in the last week." *MadàMaṣr*, February 10, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/10/news/u/at-least-20-alexandrian-young-people-forcibly-disappeared-in-the-last-week/> (accessed August 30, 2018).

[*madàMaṣr* (b) =] N. N. "Ṣaḥīfa īṭāliyya: maṣdar amnī yaddaʿī tawarruṭ al-ri'āsa wa'l-mukhābarāt al-ḥarbiyya fī qaḍiyyat Rījīnī." *MadàMaṣr*, 6 April 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/04/06/news/u/صحيفة-إيطالية-مصدر-أمني-يدّعي-تورط-ال/> (accessed September 2, 2018).

[*Middle East Eye* =] N. N. "More than 1,000 arrested during Tunisia unrest." *Middle East Eye*, January 25, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/over-1000-people-arrested-during-tunisia-unrest-578785967> (accessed August 30, 2018).

MOHAB. "Contemporary Police." *MadaMasr*, September 2, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/09/02/cartoon/u/contemporary-police> (accessed August 30, 2018).

[*MoI-EG on FB* =] N. N. "Istaqbala al-sayyid Magdī ʿAbd al-Ghaffār wazīr al-dākhiliyya…." *Al-Ṣafḥa al-rasmiyya li-wizārat al-dākhiliyya*, February 21, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/MoiEgy/posts/1034090093301320> (accessed September 1, 2018).

NATANGELO. "Meanwhile in Democratic Egypt… ." *Natangelo.org*, February 5, 2016, <https://natangelo.org/2016/02/05/meanwhile-in-democratic-egypt/> (accessed August 30, 2018).

[*Nawaat* =] N. N. "Tunisia: Uphold Rights While Fighting Terrorism." *Nawaat*, April 28, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/04/28/tunisia-uphold-rights-while-fighting-terrorism/> (accessed August 30, 2018).

[*Observateurs* (a) =] N. N. "'40 dinars, pas moins !' : un policier tunisien en flagrant délit de pot-de-vin." *France 24-Les Observateurs*, June 7, 2016, <http://observers.france24.com/fr/20160607-video-tunisie-corruption-bakchich-police> (accessed August 30, 2018).

[*Observateurs* (b) =] N. N. "Les Tunisiens traquent l'injustice, smartphone au poing." *France 24-Les Observateurs*, April 7, 2016, <http://observers.france24.com/fr/20160407-video-tunisie-abus-derapage-absenteisme-smartphone> (accessed September 6, 2018).

al-QADI, ʿAbīr. "Raddan ʿalà wāqiʿat Mīrīhān Ḥusayn... Al-Ṣāwī: al-dākhiliyya balṭagiyya wa-mugharridūn bayna al-ta'yīd wa'l-rafḍ." *Maṣrāwī*, March 3, 2016, <http://www.masrawy.com/News/News_Egypt/details/2016/3/3/762594/رد-ا-على-واقعة-ميريهان-حسين-الصاوي-الداخلية-بلطجية-ومغردون-بين-التأييد-والرفض> (accessed August 30, 2018).

al-QUMASH, Muḥammad. "Iḥtijāz Mirhān Ḥusayn 24 sāʿa wa-tarḥīlu-hā ilā qism al-Haram." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/902522> (accessed August 30, 2018).

RABIʿ, Muḥammad. 2014. *ʿUṭārid*. al-Qāhira, Bayrūt, Tūnis: Dār al-Tanwīr.

RABIE, Mohammad. *Otared*, transl. Robin Moger. Cairo & New York: AUC Press.

RAMAḌĀN, Bassām. "Wālid 'Darbaka' baʿda ḥukm ʿalà qātil najli-hi bi'l-mu'abbad: kunt ʿāwz-uh yākhud iʿdām." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, April 2, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/921632> (accessed August 31, 2018).

[*Rehab City* =] N. N. "Egyptian Policeman Arrested After Shooting Dead Civilian Near Rehab City." *Egyptian Streets*, 16 April 2016, <http://egyptianstreets.com/2016/04/19/egyptian-policeman-arrested-after-shooting-dead-civilian-near-rehab-city/> (accessed August 31, 2018).

ROELLIN, Jonas. Fieldwork notes and interviews. January-December 2016. (Unpublished).

ṢĀYIGH, Yazīd. "Al-amn al-tūnisī wa-ʿamaliyyat al-intiqāl al-dīmūqrāṭī." *al-Ḥayāt*, Feb. 4, 2016, <http://www.alhayat.com/article/837891/الأمن-التونسي-وعملية-الانتقال-الديموقراطي> (accessed Sept. 6, 2018).

[YT "Stūdiyū al-nuwwāb" =] N. N. "Al-mutaḥaddith bi-ism wizārat al-dākhiliyya yuwaḍḍiḥ tafāṣīl maqtal muwāṭin bi-raṣāṣ amīn al-shurṭa." *Stūdiyū al-nuwwāb*, YouTube video uploaded on February 8, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQE_51Byhmg> (accessed September 1, 2018).

TAWFĪQ, Aḥmad Khālid. *Mithla Īkārūs*. al-Qāhira: Dār al-Shurūq, 2015.

[*Tuniscope* =] N. N. "Kef: Non lieu pour la jeune militante Afraa Ben Azza." *Tuniscope*, January 29, 2016, <https://www.tuniscope.com/article/87581/actualites/tunisie/afraa-nonlieu-201712> (accessed September 6, 2018).

TV series

Al-Khurūg. Directed by Muḥammad al-ʿAdl, starring Ẓāfir al-ʿĀbidīn, Sharīf Salāma, Durra, Aḥmad Rātib. al-ʿAdl productions, 2016.

◄ elena.chiti@su.se ►
◄ jonas.roellin@islam.unibe.ch ►

Pop Music

By Ingvild Tomren

On February 1, pop star legend Amr Diab (ʿAmr Diyāb) releases the music video of his latest song on his YouTube channel. *Al-Qāhira* ("Cairo"), a collaboration between himself and another beloved Egyptian artist, Mohamed Mounir (Muḥammad Munīr), is to no one's surprise an instant hit. The video's opening scene shows Diab standing on the rooftop of the Nile Hilton, a five-star hotel located in the heart of Cairo [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. He is gazing over the Nile, soaking in the city view as the sun is about to set, seemingly in awe of its beauty. Then he turns towards the camera and the song starts:

> It is like a beautiful girl calling for you. It has a secret that makes it always beautiful in your eyes. How magical she is! I adore her. I love her. (*YT* "Al-Qāhira")

The band accompanying him includes many traditional Arabic instruments as well as an electric guitar, mixing traditional music with western sound elements, a proven Diab-recipe for a successful pop song. In the middle of the video a smiling Mounir enters as he joins in on the chorus. The pair of them look as if they are sitting at a café discussing a beautiful girl, a scenery that matches the lyrics perfectly as they go on singing about Cairo's secret stories, her beauty and long nights (*YT* "Al-Qāhira").

The song is essentially a love declaration to Egypt's capital and generates lots of enthusiastic greetings in the commentary field, from all over the Middle East. However, there is a split in public opinion as many seem to disagree with this romanticized depiction of Cairo, especially during these challenging times [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**]. In her article "This is NOT Egypt," published two weeks after the video is released, Sonia Farid writes:

> While the song scored thousands of views immediately after its release and was the most shared and trending on the day it was posted online, it did not receive a warm welcome from a sizeable segment of Egyptians, who wondered whose Cairo the song featured. (Farid)

Farid compares the critical reactions to *Al-Qāhira* to the negative response of the "This is Egypt" campaign, launched by the Egyptian Tourism Authority three months earlier (*YT* "This Is Egypt") [↗The Voice from Above]. Both videos present a picture-perfect Egypt: carefree people enjoying themselves on sandy beaches under blue skies, or on top of fancy buildings in a perfect sunset, with no pollution, poverty or garbage in sight [↗Garbage]. Some describe the *Al-Qāhira* video as "classist", asking why they didn't shoot it by the Nile in a more working-class neighbourhood, rather than from above in one of Cairo's most luxurious hotels. Journalist Liza Dunham comments on the *#This is Egypt* video, wondering how many hours it took the producers to Photoshop the pollution out of the colours. Yet others strike back against the critics asking them if they would rather prefer to show only the negative aspects of Egypt, such as the slums and garbage (Farid) [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**, ↗Affluence *vs.* Destitution].

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *206–*213
© Ingvild Tomren, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

Either way, there is probably no one better to promote a glossy image of Cairo than Amr Diab, still going strong in 2016 as the biggest Egyptian pop idol for more than three decades. Well into his fifties now, judging by his recent album covers, he arguably looks closer to thirty. His musical career continues to bring highlights and later this year he finally receives a Guinness World Record for winning the most World Music Awards for 'Best Selling Middle Eastern Artist' (*cairoSCENE* [a]). (Some also claim he should win an additional award for "the least aging man.") His response on Twitter is: "I am very proud to be the first Arab singer to achieve a #guinessworldrecord title. Thank you @GWR" (*@amrdiab*).

On the flip side, the industry is also taking its toll on some of the most prominent artists. In the end of February, number one female voice in Egypt, Sherine Abdel Wahab (Shīrīn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb), announces her retirement after sixteen years in the limelight (*HotArabic Music*). The news causes a fuss in the Arab music and entertainment scene, and her huge fan base as well as music industry colleagues are in shock. Lebanese singer Elissa immediately responds to the news on twitter calling for Sherine to reverse her decision:

> In case what we heard is true we can't accept this decision@sherineawahab U are an addition to the industry and we need you in these times. (*HotArabicMusic*) [↗**Social Media**]

In addition to her music, Sherine has had a successful year filled with career highs in many arenas. This includes starring in her own Ramadan TV show *Ṭarīqī* (My Road) last summer, joining the judge's panel in season 3 of the Arabic *The Voice* and finally becoming the mentor for the winning contestant, Jordanian Nedaa Shrara (Nidāʾ Sharāra)—all of which makes the announcement even more upsetting. Speculations run high in the press and many possible reasons are discussed, from a personal crisis due to her recent divorce, to issues regarding her political comments and the critique she has been facing for voicing them (*HotArabicMusic*). After a couple of months Sherine comments on her own decision, speaking at the Mawazine Festival in Morocco [↗Celebrities]. She explains openly how exhaustion and depression got the best of her:

> "It got to such an extent that I thought about committing suicide—I actually thought about that more than once," says Abdel Wahhab, "(...) The stress of the work got to me. I had some panic attacks. Then that led to some deep depression. I was sad, I was concerned for my children, I was concerned for myself—it was a such a difficult time that I still find it hard to explain..." (SAEED) [↗Psychiatrists, ↗Suicide]

Luckily for her fans, Sherine soon recovers. In addition to the Mawazine Festival, she performs this summer at the Baalbek International Festival in Lebanon. By August she climbs to the top of the charts yet again with her newest release, *Kull mughannī* (Every singer), a duet with Hossam Habib (Ḥusām Ḥabīb, *Vimeo* "Kull mughannī"). The song becomes a huge hit, and a sign that the diva is fully back in business.

Aside from long time industry troupers like Diab, Mounir and Sherine, Egypt these days is also blooming with new, young alternative voices [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. In contrast to more typical pop songs, mostly restricted to romance and clichés, the younger generation seems to represent a broader definition of what is considered popular music. As a result, what used to be strictly underground genres are becoming increasingly more mainstream, and in

some cases even producing new pop stars. A good example of this phenomenon is the relatively newborn genre *mahragānāt*. Emanating from the ghettos of Egypt's biggest cities [↗*ʿAshwāʾiyyāt*], *mahragānāt* has since the days of the Revolution been rapidly spreading all across Egypt, and further throughout the Arab World. The genre is rooted in traditional *shaʿbī* music, mixed with foreign elements such as rap, hip hop and electronica. Its popularity has been growing ever since its emergence and the genre is now connected to a steady audience. There are multiple YouTube channels, videos and hundreds of songs to be found online. By now it has also become an obvious part of the city soundscape, and walking in the streets of Cairo these days you are very likely, if not guaranteed, to hear *mahragānāt* being played around you somewhere. It seems to be hard to avoid:

> Whether you take a microbus, youngsters pass you by on a Vespa, or you go for a fun evening Nile trip on a boat, Mahraganat is everywhere. The music style has earned a spot during Saturday afternoons on Nile FM, there is an exclusive, privately owned Mahraganat channel on TV, and it has been embraced by alternative organizations such as Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, 100Copies, and the Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF). (*Freemuse*)

The latest *mahragānāt* hit sweeping the nation is *Mafīsh ṣāḥib yitṣāḥib* (No friend acts as a friend) by group Shobek Lobek (Shubīk Lubīk). Six months after it was first published, the music video clip has already reached more than 30 million hits on YouTube. In March, the number increases to 50 million (*al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*). The song is also popular outside Egypt and comments on the video include greetings from people all across the Arab world:

> This song is so nice!! (…) Love to our Egyptian brothers, from Algeria. – Love to darling Egypt from Iraq. – Egyptians are great people (…) Long live Egypt. Greetings from Saudi Arabia (*YT* "Mafīsh ṣāḥib yitṣāḥib")—

to quote only a few examples. In contrast to its wide popularity the song is also facing a lot of critique, especially concerning its lyrical content. A good example is an episode from the talk show *ʾĀkhir an-Nahār* published on the show's YouTube page on February 10 (*YT* "ʾĀkhir al-Nahār"). The young members of Shobek Lobek have been invited to talk about their hit. With them in the studio is the renowned Egyptian artist Helmy Bakr (Ḥilmī Bakr) who is criticizing the group claiming that their music has no meaning or purpose [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. The artists' response to the criticism is simply that their song talks about what's going on in the streets and that people are affected by their lyrics. In another interview, singer Nasser Gandhi explains:

> Our lyrics are the words we hear on the street. When someone attacks you, you can't be patient and call the police. You must defend yourself to survive. That's the reality that we're facing now and we have to deal with it. (GAMAL)

The biggest arena for *mahragānāt* music is the wedding party scene, and *mahragānāt* performances are now the norm in any Egyptian wedding. If you attend a street wedding these days, it is very likely that you'll find a *mahragānāt* artist performing in front of an enthusiastic crowd. It has become a flourishing industry, employing many young Egyptians, with thousands more trying to find their way into the scene (*Freemuse*). This popularity is

also mirrored in the movie *Ishtibāk* ("Clash") where a group of people, representing different parts of Egyptian society, are trapped in a police van, with tension running high. Among them is a *shābb* who calls himself "DJ Mans." He uses the opportunity while the group is circulating in front of the van's backdoor, gasping for fresh air, to pass out his card and promote his DJ business [↗Clash]—an allusion to the fact that the *mahragānāt* genre is in the process of professionalizing and some actors in the scene have a strong wish to make it in the business.

Dancing is also a vital element of *mahragānāt* music and the genre has created a particular dancing style, mixing traditional moves with influence from western styles such as trance dance [↗Dancing]. The result is a series of intense and fast beat, freestyle moves. On YouTube there are various videos showing people from all ages dancing to *mahragānāt*—from youth at a local wedding to old men dancing in the street (*YT* "Egyptian dancing on the popular song 2016"). The dance factor is huge and has even brought the music to the Egyptian elite. Occasionally, and mainly at wedding celebrations, they too enjoy the "poor man's music," a phenomenon long-time researcher of the genre, Ferida Jawad, refers to as "the upper class going gangsta for an evening." However, their choice of *mahragānāt* performers is quite exclusive and includes only the most popular artists, such as Oka and Ortega or El Madfaagiya, who is performing at the Vodaphone IN Tour Cairo this year (*YT* "IN Tour Cairo"). Even though these few selected artists are more or less embraced by the elite and considered pop stars by now, the public is still generally sceptical towards *mahragānāt* music and the artists behind it. Thus the gap between well established artists and new young independent artists is very evident [↗**Young vs. Settled**].

Apart from mere preference and public opinion, new genres within popular music, such as *mahragānāt,* seem to be further impacted by politics. The newly appointed committee for "the development of morals and conscience and the promotion of work ethics and values of belonging" plays an important role in this matter (*MadaMasr*). The Musicians Association now provides a *carnet* to approved artists and their songs. This grants the artists legal consent to perform in public places, such as hotels, festivals, etc., and their lyrics and songs automatically receive copyrights. These days licensed *mahragānāt* artists include most of the pioneers from the early days of *mahragānāt*. The "carnet" is, as Ferida Jawad thinks, a double-edged sword, leading to censorship [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]. In her opinion the system is made with the intention to control the musical scene [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]:

> Because the mahraganat became so popular, the government must have decided it needed to be supervised in a way. Listening to the songs produced by the registered artists over the course of the past year, I have noticed they don't contain as many topics that can be called social criticism anymore (…) There's not a lot left of the spirit of the first songs, which talked about how they were a part of society that was spit out, and how they had had enough of that. (*Freemuse*)

Despite initiatives to regulate the music scene, there are still voices of protest to be found among Egyptian artists—such as the group Sharmoofers (Shārmūfarz) and their hit *Zūmbī* (Zombie) that makes fun of the robotic and self-involved people living in ignorance while taking selfies all day long (*YT* "Zūmbī"*)*. The popular song is a warning against a new breed of social media zombies and influencers, indeed a relevant topic these days [↗**Social Media**].

Also warning the listener, however in a much more serious tone, is rock band Cairokee's (Kāyrūkī) popular song *'Ākhir 'ughniyya* (The last song). Published on their YouTube channel in March, the music video opens with the message "No freedom with fear" (*YT* "'Ākhir 'ughniyya") [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. The rest of the song's lyrics are daring as they pinpoint some of the challenges of Egyptian society and the political climate, as well as expressing a wish to break with the old:

> They've imprisoned you inside your mind, your fear is the prison bars. You dare not think freely for fear of being caught. My speech is not only against the regime, but is also against slavery. Even if thousands of systems are destroyed (...) a conflict of generations, blindly obvious (...) they want you to walk their path instead of your own. (*YT Ākhir 'ughniyya*) [↗"The System" *vs.* "The People"]

Many of the new alternative voices of Egypt's music scene are also represented by women. In November, *cairoSCENE* lists a chosen selection of the best female alternative vocalists of 2016. They make music within a multitude of genres, ranging from folklore, jazz, soul, hip-hop, rock, punk, opera and pop music (*cairoSCENE* [b]). Judging by this myriad, it is not only the music scene itself that is evolving, but also the female aspect of it. Included in the *cairoSCENE* list is artist and known actress Amina Khalil (Amīna Khalīl). She is recently featured on the big hit *Nūr* (Nour) together with post-revolutionary rapper Zap Tharwat, described by some as the voice of young Egyptians. *Nūr* tells the story of the elder brother of three siblings, a hard worker who becomes the head of the family as his dad suddenly falls ill. With the new responsibility, Nour takes on a job in the father's car shop, while still continuing his studies. He finally graduates, and when the time comes to apply for a job the surprise element in the song is revealed: Nour is not the responsible big *brother* of a family, but the elder *sister* of three girls. The music video shows the employer who is obviously shocked to see a female Nour entering with a bright smile. After battling the prejudices racing in his mind, he finally realizes how influenced he is by society's limiting gender perceptions and offers Nour the position after all. The chorus accompanies shots of an unmasked Nour as Amina Khalil sings: "His role will never be completed without her role" (*YT* "Nūr") [↗**Male *vs.* Female**, ↗Dual Identities / Masking]. The song's theme is significant as it covers several pressing issues: the economic challenges faced by the majority of Egyptians mixed with very high unemployment rates, especially among the younger generation, and finally the social issue regarding gender stereotypes and restrictions on women's role in society.

In Tunisia, artists like 'Medusa' Boutheina El Aloudi (Mīdūzā Buthayna al-'Aluwwadī) are also challenging societal norms, representing women in hip hop with a feminist perspective: a role that according to El Aloudi herself has not always been easy: "[As a female rapper], I was frequently faced with sexual harassment at shows, events [et cetera]. But I don't want to generalize, out of respect for those who don't do it." In the same interview she also explains how there used to be more girls in the Tunisian hip hop scene, but they are now silencing themselves (DJILALI). Most female artists are working abroad these days, and El-Aloudi hopes to see new girls following her lead. Luckily, there are still a few, such as Nour Ben Soltan (Nūr Bin Sulṭān), a seventeen-year-old B-girl who started her career dancing in community centres and poor neighbourhoods. Since then she has moved on to participate and compete in multiple events and festivals in Tunisia, like the *Beat the Beat* Festival in Sousse

where she won in her category (B-girl). Facing the controversy of being a female break-dancer, Ben Soltan's secret lies in her attitude:

> How I am perceived by society is my least concern, so long as I can pursue my passion and excel at what I do. It's a question of knowing what you want and at the same time [not succumbing to] the pressure of others. (DJILALI) [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]

Whether it is pulsating electronic beats at festive occasions, provoking lyrical content or female hip hoppers challenging gender stereotypes, music and dancing arguably take on an essential role as a means of expression. In the movie *Sheikh Jackson*, for example, protagonist Khaled (Khālid)'s love for Michael Jackson is what wakes him up and saves him from a state of depression and zombie-like behaviour (*Sheikh Jackson*). While trying his best to be pious and stay focused on his role as an Islamic cleric, Khaled starts to remember glimpses of his youth [↗In Islam, …]. Painful memories occur of a troubled upbringing and a strict and violent father, mixed with the longing for his high school crush. The movie depicts how music was his greatest passion and the only means of opposition, however implicit, to his authoritarian father [↗Father Figures]. Later in life, the news of his pop idol's death triggers repressed feelings, kick-starting an emotional process that makes him able to let go, as he eventually makes peace with his father and his past. In this context music works as an antidote to piety and authority, and thereby serves an important role as a counterpart to the gloomy and grave circumstances Khaled finds himself in. Here, pop music is not seen merely as a shallow form of entertainment 'ignoring' more serious problems, but rather as a sweet and soothing remedy for these very same issues. A parallel can be drawn to musical representation in the movie Clash. In one of the most intense scenes, DJ Mans sits down pressing his phone to his ear with the *mahragānāt* song *Hātī būsa yā bitt* ("Give me a kiss, girl") playing, while desperately trying to block out the chaos surrounding him [↗Mobile Phones]. The music seems to offer DJ Mans some comfort or relief, however small, to the very serious and suffocating situation he is in [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. The lively and playful atmosphere of the music is portrayed as a protecting shield against the harsh reality out there.

Pop music's role appears to be multifaceted. One aspect concerns the need for a reality check and a demand for more alternative music tackling social issues, such as gender equality and everyday struggles of poor urban youth. Another one concerns the craving for catchy and dancy music as a remedy during challenging times. Popular songs express both joy and frustration, mirroring different versions of Egyptian reality: *Al-Qāhira* celebrates Cairo and its beauty while *Mafīsh ṣāḥib yitṣāḥib* addresses the hardship in its slums. Both perspectives are arguably relevant in today's climate. Commenting on *Al-Qāhira* (whose lyrics he wrote) in the aftermath of the debate it triggered, Tamer Hussein (Tāmir Ḥusayn) says:

> The fact that the video was praised by some and criticized by others proves how rich and diverse Cairo is, for it can be seen in a thousand different ways. (FARID)

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Dancing ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Social Media ♦ Suicide ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Young vs. Settled

References

Written Sources and videos

[*cairoSCENE* (a) =] N. N. "Amr Diab is Officially a Guinness World Record Winner." *cairoSCENE*, September 29, 2016, <http://cairoscene.com/Buzz/Amr-Diab-is-Officially-a-Guinness-World-Record-Winner>.

[*cairoSCENE* (b) =] N. N. "17 of Egypt's Best Alternative Female Vocalists." *cairoSCENE*, November 25, 2016, <http://cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/16-of-Egypt-s-Best-Alternative-Female-Vocalists>.

DJILALI, Emma. "Women in hip hop: Making space for Tunisia's unseen queens." *Middle East Eye*, August 11, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/women-hip-hop-making-space-tunisias-unseen-queens>.

[*@amrdiab*] = DIYĀB, ʿAmr. Twitter post, posted on September 28, 2016, <https://twitter.com/amrdiab?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E781097910545121280&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fcairoscene.com%2FBuzz%2FAmr-Diab-is-Officially-a-Guinness-World-Record-Winner>.

FARID, Sonia. "'This is NOT Egypt': Pop song and tourism advert angers many." *Al Arabiya*, February 15, 2016, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/2016/02/15/-Thisis-NOT-Egypt-Tourism-campaign-and-song-angers-many.html>.

[*Freemuse* =] N. N. "Egypt: Mahraganat artists challenge limits." *Freemuse*, February 23, 2016, <https://freemuse.org/news/egypt-mahraganat-artists-challenge-limits/>.

GAMAL, Ali. "The Mahraganat craze with a dark side splitting opinion in Egypt." *BBC Arabic*, January 13, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35135699>.

[*HotArabicMusic*]. N. N. "Report: Diva Sherine Abdel-Wahab To Retire And Quit The Mahraganat Biz!" *HotArabicMusic*, February 29, 2016, <http://hotarabicMusic.com/2016/02/report-diva-sherine-to-retire-and-quit-the-Music-biz/>.

[*MadaMasr* =] N. N. "Sisi approves committee for development of morals and values." *MadàMaṣr*, November 26, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/11/26/news/u/sisi-approves-committee-for-development-of-morals-and-values/>.

SAEED, Saeed. "Mawazine 2016: I felt I couldn't go on, says Egyptian singer Sherine Abdel-Wahhab." *The National*, May 29, 2016, <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/mawazine-2016-i-felt-i-couldn-t-go-on-says-egyptian-singer-sherine-abdel-wahhab-1.184652>.

[*Vimeo* "Kull mghannī" =] N. N. Vimeo video, uploaded 2016, <https://vimeo.com/ 179558547>.

[*al-Yawm al-sābiʿ* =] N. N. "Mahragān 'Mafīsh ṣāḥib yitṣāḥib' yatakhaṭṭà al-50 milyūn mushāhada ʿalà yūtyūb." *al-Yawm al-sābiʿ*, March 8, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/3/8/ 261929/مهرجان-مفيش-صاحب-يتصاحب-يتخطى-ال50-مليون-مشاهدة-على-يوتيوب>.

[YT "Ākhir al-Nahār" =] N. N. "Ākhir al-Nahār" episode. YouTube video, uploaded February 10, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQh0FLe7JSc>.

[YT "'Ākhir 'ughniyya" =] N. N. "'Ākhir 'ughniyya." YouTube video, uploaded March 12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZu2euuj2GE>.

[YT "Egyptian dancing on the popular song 2016" =] N. N. "Egyptian dancing on the popular song 2016." YouTube video, uploaded April 28, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnPDpT-Qri4>.

[YT "IN Tour Cairo" =] N. N. "IN Tour Cairo." YouTube video, uploaded March 22, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XR63CqM2Nc>.

[YT "Mafīsh ṣāḥib yitṣāḥib" =] N. N. "Mafīsh ṣāḥib yitṣāḥib." YouTube video, uploaded August 19, 2015, <https://www.Youtube.com/watch?v=pMx5DU2fsp8>.

[YT "Nūr" =] N. N. "Nūr." YouTube video, uploaded November 25, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3megGZrFMI>.

[YT "Al-Qāhira" =] N. N. "Al-Qāhira". YouTube video, uploaded February 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lixPaFt3VV0>.

[YT "This is Egypt" =] N. N. "This is Egypt". YouTube video, uploaded December 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3KqP69xuPc>.

[YT "Zūmbī" =] N. N. "Zūmbī." YouTube video, uploaded April 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aA0BXDOq7_M>.

Movies

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). Egypt, Germany, France 2016.

Shaykh Jackson (Sheikh Jackson). By ʿAmr Salāma. Egypt 2017.

◄ ingvild_tomren@hotmail.com, ingvild.tomren@ikos.uio.no ►

Prison

By Elena Chiti, Jonas Roellin, and Lucie Ryzova

According to a report by the Euro-Med Monitor for Human Rights, Tunisia counts 27 prisons with a total capacity of 16.000 prisoners. However, this year's number of inmates stands at around 25.000, which means an average prison occupancy level of about 150% (*Euromed Monitor*). According to the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, in Egypt there are 504 detention centres, of which 43 are prisons and 461 "police stations, centres, or departments, as well as the Criminal Investigation Administrations and their sections". Military prisons used for civilians and secret prisons are not included in this estimate (ANRHI). The number of detainees in Egypt, by mid-August, is estimated at around 106.000, of whom 60.000 are believed to be political prisoners. It is not possible to determine more precisely these rates due to the lack of reliable official data and the large number of arrests which are not framed within the law [↗Disappearances]. A high proportion of prisoners are still awaiting trial, yet they are held in prison and not in appropriate facilities, as prescribed by the law. In Tunisia, pre-trial detention is also common, there it concerns up to 60% of prisoners (*Kapitalis*). This policy results in a steady increase in prisoners' numbers, which makes overcrowding a major issue in both Egypt and Tunisia. Prison cells hold more prisoners than they were designed to hold and inmates are sometimes forced to share beds. The limited space available leads to unhealthy living conditions that cause not only diseases, but also tensions and violence, as well as psychological suffering. In Tunisia, 53% of prisoners are drug users (*Euromed Monitor*). Drug consumption is equally widespread in Egyptian jails [↗Hashish].

There are substantial internal differences among the various prison facilities in Egypt. The most notorious institutions are the Tora Maximum Security Prison—colloquially known as al-ʿAqrab ('Scorpion') to differentiate it from the other 6 prisons that together form the vast Tora prison complex South-East of Cairo—and Burj al-ʿArab prison in the desert west of Alexandria. Constructed in the 1990s to house political prisoners and those connected to political violence, both al-ʿAqrab and Burj al-ʿArab are known for particularly harsh treatment of inmates. As a former warden puts, al-ʿAqrab was built as a prison where there is no exit except death, and where "neither sun nor air enter, with air barely enough to breathe" (EIPR). Currently both of these prisons hold the bulk of Muslim Brotherhood members as well as suspected ISIS combatants. On the other end of this carceral geography are 'soft' prisons, such as Tora Farm (Mazraʿa Tora), also part of the Tora complex, where the novelist Aḥmad Nāji is held [↗Court Trials]. Here it is not uncommon for inmates to have access to refrigerators and to be able to cook their own food. Given the current overpopulation of prisons, detainees are held in various locations such as the notorious *Kilo 10,5* ("10,5 kilometre"), a compound of the Police Academy partially turned into a carceral facility. A large part of the 'Islands case' detainees are held here [↗**Red Sea Islands**]. Detainees in pre-trial detention are generally held in police stations, though sometimes—especially in major political cases that drag on for years, like those of the Muslim Brotherhood after the mass

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *214–*223
© Elena Chiti, Univ. of Stockholm, SE | Jonas Roellin, Univ. of Bern, CH |
Lucie Ryzova, Univ. of Birmingham, UK

arrests of 2013-14—they spend their time waiting in actual prisons in the company of convicts. Police stations—which often hold substantial numbers of detainees, either in pre-trial detention or awaiting release—are transitional zones, often ruled by their own internal hierarchy on top of which are senior criminal convicts, who assume the role of bosses; they can make one's life easy or hell, all for a price. Moreover, prisoners (especially those in pre-trial detention) are frequently moved from one place to another apparently at whim. This is largely part of an overall strategy of psychological torment through the dehumanisation of prisoners and their families whereby the frequent moves disrupt whatever sense of normalcy and importantly, of community, one may have been able to construct inside, and whatever kind of routine families were able to establish in terms of visits and the flow of supplies. Not to mention the angst and strain thrown on families, who are typically not informed about the move in advance and, upon finding out that their loved one has been transferred, have to spend time locating them anew across prisons and detention centres far and wide. Another form of punishment deployed especially towards secular or leftist detainees consists of putting them in cells with ISIS members. These are known for their rigid demeanour and are universally feared. For a secular detainee this means being subjected to further pressure and discipline, being forced to pray regularly and often forbidden to read books. In such a situation, one also lives under constant threat of being beaten up or even killed if he becomes perceived as a *kāfir*, such as, if they learn that he engaged in drinking, free relationships, or lax religious habits or beliefs [↗In Islam, …].

The state spends next to nothing on the actual care of inmates. Their maintenance (in Arabic known as *iʿāsha*), including food, clothing and, if needed, medicine, is outsourced to their families and social networks [↗"The System" *vs.* "The People"]. How regularly or smoothly this happens depends largely on where the inmate is held and on his or her overall status in the complicated web of incarceration. According to the law, pre-trial detainees are entitled to one visit a week, and those serving a sentence to one every fortnight; this, however, rarely happens (EIPR). The life of whole families and friends then becomes paced through weekly visits to their loved ones inside in order to deliver basic necessities. This weekly visit (*ziyāra*) does not mean that they actually get to meet the detainee; more often, these visits are merely about the delivery of basic necessities (a delivery visit is known as *ṭabliyya*), which pass through several hands of guards and gatekeepers before they reach their destination, the cell. This process of delivery is itself very costly, as each of these 'hands' takes its cut along the way. The more fortunate ones, those whose families can afford both the cost of goods and the proportionate cost of delivery, can have books, games and even ↗Mobile Phones smuggled into their cells. Minutes on the mobile can then be traded with others in exchange for cigarettes, which work as a prison currency. The burden of maintenance gets significantly worse with the floating of the pound and its consequent inflation [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. This system is a way of keeping a much larger pool of people—families and networks of friends and dedicated volunteers—symbolically incarcerated and in a constant state of deprivation, as their lives turns around providing for the ever more expensive basic necessities of their incarcerated relatives [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**; ↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**].

Food provided free of charge—as per the law—is insufficient and often unfit for human consumption. Living conditions in the infamous *Scorpion* prison (also dubbed 'the Tombs of Scorpion') get so bad this year that three dozens of prisoners go on hunger strike to protest

inhuman living conditions, lack of food and medicine, and the flat-out ban on visits; in some cases including physical assault not just on inmates but also on visiting family members (EIPR; *AJE*). Last year, 6 prisoners died here; their deaths have been attributed to the inhuman living conditions and lack of medical care. In March, the already irregular and humiliating process of visits becomes markedly worse in Scorpion when the authorities limit daily visits first to 50, and then to 15 visits per day—in a prison housing 1000–1,500 prisoners (HRW). Families cope with such restrictions by feeding a whole cell from a single detainee's visit; but these deliveries are often sabotaged when guards refuse to allow food into the cells, change the rules of what is allowed and what not at a whim, or force families to queue outside for long hours, during which time the food spoils. Sometimes food that is allowed in, or that is purchased at the prison cafeteria is confiscated in raids (known as *tajrīda* or 'stripping'). In April, families of detainees stage a small protest in front of the Journalists Syndicate in Downtown Cairo [↗Downtown/Centre-ville] to protest these conditions. Others present complaints to the High Administrative Court who rules in their favour regarding their visit rights, but this court ruling has no effect on the ground. Instead, a new 'reservation system' is introduced in Scorpion, whereby families are only allowed visits after having made a 'reservation' in person two weeks in advance (EIPR). Family members often have to camp outside the prison over night in order to be let in for a visit the next morning. It is not unusual to be refused a visit at the last minute, after a family has waited for hours and undergone extensive security checks. To further torment both detainees and their kin, the authorities are in the process of installing glass windows in spaces dedicated to visits, thus preventing even the simple act of touching or hugging (EIPR) [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**].

Not only does the state outsource to families the provision of basic necessities that it is required by law to provide, but there is also a significant move towards actual profit-making through prisoners. The extent of these practices varies from one facility to another, but the principle remains the same. Prison cafeterias or canteens sell foodstuffs and other necessities (underwear or sanitary items for example) to inmates for exploitative prices, typically between twice to four times their cost outside of prison [↗"The System" *vs.* "The People"]. This new, official market system operates parallel to the older informal system of prison economy in which prisoners exchange their provisions among themselves, using cigarettes as prison currency. The already inflated canteen prices are subject to a further jump following the floating of the pound [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. In order to enforce this form of exchange, prison authorities prohibit families from bringing items now available for purchase in the cafeteria or canteen during visits or as part of the regular *iʿāsha*. A new system of canteen coupons is instituted whereby families provide their detainees with coupons, which the latter use to purchase their necessities from the prison cafeteria. The products available, including pasta or a local version of Coke, are mostly those produced in military factories. Families are also forced to rely on coupons when their loved one is located in a faraway prison. The coupon system is new and not yet fully operational. This means that while money is traditionally strictly prohibited inside prison walls, it is currently tolerated in some facilities in order to make sure that inmates purchase goods from the cafeteria. The new regime of 'canteen credit' also shifts the flow of profit away from the guards (who may then have fewer incentives to treat detainees decently) and directly to the coffers of the carceral state, or more likely, one military subcontractor or another.

Seen from inside, prison is a place of torture and impunity. A letter written by an Egyptian detainee, and smuggled out from Scorpion, describes its chief guard as the "chief tormentor" [↗**The Policeman Criminal**]. It reports his awareness of enjoying unlimited power over "his" detainees, which leads the man to call himself "immortal" (*New Arab*). The letter goes on emphasising the systematic humiliation of prisoners' religious sentiments. The "chief tormentor" apparently constantly insults the Quran, replaces Islamic formulas with vows to pagan gods and also names himself "Ḥasan al-Bannā," the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. The anti-Muslim Brotherhood discourse and policies of the government emerge in the prison environment with particular brutality. Abuse and torture especially hit prisoners with Islamist leanings, which reminds of the abuses suffered by Islamist detainees under the former Ben Ali regime in Tunisia. Five years after the Tunisian revolution, these abuses come to public attention during the hearings before the *Hay'at al-ḥaqīqa wa'l-karāma* / *Instance vérité et dignité.* The independent tribunal opens the way to coming to terms with the past and allowing victims of the Ben Ali regime to be rehabilitated and rendered justice (BOBIN) [↗**Public Hearings**; ↗**Past vs. Present**]. In Egypt, torture is regularly practised not only against political prisoners, particularly those accused of terrorism, but also against people jailed on charges of "offending public morals" or even common offenders. In fact, it seems to be a "normal" practice behind bars:

> There are two types of abuse in prison in Egypt: mental and physical. Verbal abuse doesn't even count (…) It's normal to be cursed, stripped naked, beaten with a bar, or put in solitary confinement or the "tank" (a pitch-black 3.5m x 5.5m cell). They might also torture another prisoner in front of you. Of course you never forget. Ever. (HALAWA)

Egyptian prison slang clearly reveals the routine character of such abuses. For instance, prisoners call the "beating session" that is performed by security forces when receiving new inmates "the welcome party" (*al-tashrīfa*) (KHALĀF). This highly ritualised and age-old practice includes name-calling ("dog," "pig" etc.) and stripping the prisoner naked, in an act intended to humiliate the inmate by striping him of his human attributes, ushering him into a de-individuated and dehumanised state of limbo. No wonder the prison experience, with its routine humiliation and varied forms of torture, is also colloquially known as [a place, an existence] "behind the sun" (*warā' al-shams*).

Seen from outside, the prison is a spectre, around which fears and concerns materialize. This often comes out in private conversations. Of course, it is a highly politicized matter. "There is no alternative to Sisi in Egypt," a foreigner claims, emphasising the necessity of political stability to fight terrorism. "The alternative is in jail! (*il-badīl fī 'l-sign*)," yells an Egyptian in response, referring to the incarceration of the youth who participated in the 2011 revolution [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. "They finally jailed them, all of them," says an Egyptian who supports the government, pointing to the imprisonment of prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood, "I felt so unsafe in 2013 and now we've got stability" (CHITI) [↗**Security vs. Fear**]. Both the proportion of jailed people and the renown of some of them make the prison a reality that cannot be neglected. Unlike his Tunisian counterpart, who found refuge in Saudi Arabia, former president Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt for thirty years, is sentenced to prison (ʿABD AL-RĀZIQ & NAṢR). The images of him behind bars,

during the trial, or in the Maadi military hospital, where he is confined, periodically leak to the public and are well familiar to Egyptians (*Reuters*; *Bayān*). They suggest that Mubarak benefits from good treatment and constant medical care, in a single room which looks wide and clean, and can receive visits. Muḥammad Mursī, Egypt's first elected president, is also in jail, but his detention is much harsher. His relatives lament that they had to wait for three years, before being allowed to visit him. Whereas Morsi does not face a death sentence anymore, he continues to serve long-term imprisonment. His face striped with bars appears in the media, in front of everyone's eyes. A considerable number of his supporters, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, are also in jail. They are predominantly housed in the faraway Burj al-ʿArab prison, which shares a very bad reputation with Scorpion. Most of them are detained more or less indefinitely, with no trial in sight. Pre-trial detention, which the Egyptian constitution limits to two years, may last up to five in their cases. Mubarak's and Morsi's supporters follow the developments of their leaders' trials as parallel, yet dissimilar cases as the two factions are diametrically opposed and seemingly irreconcilable [↗Clash].

The omnipresence of prison in the political and media realm affects cultural life. One of the "best books of the year," according to *al-Ahram Weekly*, is *Al-Thaqāfa ka-siyāsa* ("Culture as Politics") by Syrian former political prisoner Yāsīn al-Ḥājj Ṣāliḥ, which describes the abuses endured in Syrian prisons under the rule of Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad (SAAD). However, the mention of similar abuses occurred in Egyptian prisons remains uneasy, especially if it is linked to actual cases and not to fictional representations. The prison may be widely present in mainstream cultural productions, yet its image is often softened up. The successful TV series *Fawqa mustawà 'l-shubuhāt* ("Beyond Reproach"), starring renowned actress and singer Yusra, offers several scenes of the prison. Some of its female characters are jailed at different times and the camera follows them in captivity. The setting consists of a room shared by several women, yet its huge size fails to give the impression of overcrowding. The few graffiti orderly displayed on the walls convey an artificial cleanness and clarity of the space. The female characters, still made up and in good shape after weeks of detention, complete the picture. The ensemble results in a sort of caricature of the prison that, paradoxically enough, evokes the "golden imprisonment" in the rich compounds where the characters used to live as free women [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**]. The TV series *Suqūṭ ḥurr* ("Freefall") conveys a deeper sense of constriction, but it stems from the plot rather than the setting itself. Charged with the murder of her own husband yet incapable of discernment, the protagonist, played by popular actress Nelly Karim, is jailed at Abbasiyya psychiatric hospital. Since the first scenes, the audience feels that her life space is becoming narrower. During the police interrogation, the woman pees on herself. When she enters the hospital, still beautifully dressed, she does not manage to stand upright on her high heels and almost dislocates her ankles. With every step, she seems to lose more of her freedom, dignity and femininity [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**]. In the following episodes, she appears to be nothing but an empty doll in the hands of doctors [↗Psychiatrists]. The prison is also present in the realm of literature. In the novel *Fī mamarr al-fi'rān* ("In the mice corridor"), by prominent Egyptian writer Aḥmad Khālid Tawfīq, the prison is both a reality and a metaphor. It is physically present, with its lack of fresh air and daylight, its narrowness and darkness, its smells, and its harsh monotony that drives humans into madness. At the same time, as the author emphasises in the foreword, it is a representation of present-day Middle East, where

authoritarian regimes seem to be more stable than ever and freedoms more and more limited. Narrowness and darkness are seen as characteristics of societies that constrain human expression and free will, whether by physical bars or social restrictions [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**].

While Tunisians enjoy unprecedented political freedom, political expression is threatened by a politicized and repressive security and justice system inherited from the Ben Ali era. Moreover, many of the public morality and order-based laws of the pre-revolutionary period remain in force. Thus, "morally reprehensible" acts such as "cohabitation outside marriage," "indecent exposure" or "adultery" are still treated as criminal offenses and, more often than not, punished with harsh prison sentences. Hence, social pressure continues to be a major challenge in Tunisia as well, in particular for the youth of whom many denounce the "moral control imposed by the state" (CHENNAOUI) and police forces who act as "morality police" (BOUKHAYATIA). Particularly sharp criticism is levelled at Law 52, which punishes the consumption or possession of drugs, including cannabis, with at least one year of prison. As a result, about 5200 people are in jail on charges of using or possessing cannabis [↗**Hashish**]. A mother of a convicted young cannabis user testifies before the camera: "I went to see him last Thursday, he told me he'd been put with convicted murderers. When he was in another prison, he was put with Salafists. What's wrong with our prisons? How can they put minor offenders with people convicted of murder and Salafists?" (*Observers*).

Activists lament that, in jail, drug users become drug dealers and petty lawbreakers embrace illegal activities as a permanent source of income. Indeed, the chances of reoffending are very high, especially for prisoners "with a history of drug use and trafficking, prostitution and debt related offenses" (*Life Foundation*). In Tunisia, 45% of prisoners who are released are later jailed again (*EuroMed Monitor*). The belief that the state deliberately seeks to turn people into criminals and drug victims is quite common among the youth, especially in marginalized areas [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. It is revealed, for example, in the Tunisian song *Zinzāna* ("Prison cell") by rapper El Général, posted on YouTube:

> In our country, we do not have any value / we are thrown in a prison cell / the district is very angry / everyday, there is a sad event / pigeons [*secret police or informants*] are around / go find where to spend the night / wherever you look, you see those faces / what a bad situation, what a frightening situation / fill, fill, to prison! / they don't know: his head [*of a young man*] is like a stone with despair / he spent his entire life bending his head / his anger grows more and more because they have always walked on him / the law is twisted / what can you do? / accept and live below / they want you to betray, mug and steal / we live in a prison cell, thanks for the invitation (EL GÉNÉRAL).

In both Tunisia and Egypt, young and underprivileged men are particularly worried of the authorities' seeming power to arrest and imprison at will. This is why Tunisian blogger ʿAzīz ʿAmāmī provocatively suggests Tunisians to "directly go to prison out of our own free will. This way, at least, we can stop worrying whether we will or we will not be unfairly arrested" [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. This sentiment is shared in Egypt and sometimes publicly voiced:

> I came to fear the whole country. Its airports, streets and squares, its men and women. A momentary disagreement or a misunderstanding with the wrong person at a checkpoint, at a bus stop, from within the car, in a discussion with your neighbour and this is how you may end up behind the bars. Then, you will find someone who says you were carrying drug pills in the back seat, and a scale weighing heroin powder in your glass of wine, and while listening to a recording invoking Sayyeda Aisha and calling for communion you will be redirected to an obscene website promoting atheism. (…) I am scared. Scared because I do not understand why Aḥmad Nājī was jailed, or Shawkān. And Hishām Jaʿfar, Āya Ḥijāzī, Maḥmūd Muḥammad and many others. Young and old, women and children. I am scared, scared, scared (al-SUKKARĪ) [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**].

Both Tunisians and Egyptians may describe their country as "an open-air prison," condensing in this expression the fear of being unfairly arrested, but also the social pressure they face and the feeling of suffocation it provokes. "I can't stay in Egypt anymore," a young man says, "I feel I die inside everyday". "I only speak Arabic, but I want my children to learn a foreign language," explains another, "so they won't be trapped here". People are ready to pay high fees, and huge bribes, to send their children to a foreign school in the hope they will one day live elsewhere (CHITI; RYZOVA) [↗**Migration**]. Prominent cartoonist Islām Jāwīsh visually represents this sentiment in his best-selling comics book *Al-Waraqa 2* ("The paper 2"). One of its cartoons represents a courtroom at the moment when the verdict is pronounced and the defendant is "sentenced to Egypt". The poor man cries out in tears, begging the judge to execute him instead, but the judge is not moved: evidently, an "Egypt sentence" is considered harsher than a death sentence [↗Court Trials].

Indeed, life proves particularly harsh for ordinary citizens who are suffering under inflation, low wages and high unemployment [↗**Dollar Crisis**], aggravated by the decline of the tourism sector [↗**Tourist Resorts**]. However, in both Egypt and Tunisia it is the security sector that receives the lion's share of the national budget. In Tunisia, about 20% of the budget is devoted to security, twice as much as in 2011 (*Crisis Group*). In Egypt, the increase of the number of prisons since 2011 is spectacular. It has risen from 43 to 62, not including the 442 detention facilities. Nineteen new prisons have been built in the years following the 2011 revolution, while this year alone more than ten new prisons are constructed in different governorates (ANHRI, *Egypt Independent*). Egyptians sometimes make fun of the bitter contradiction between the reality of the country and the state propaganda: "This is how the government solved the problem of housing: building more prisons!," comments someone. Social media users parody the initiatives organised in the framework of the «Year of the Youth» and widely advertised through official media. A Twitter campaign protesting the incarceration and enforced disappearance of many young Egyptians provocatively asks: "Where is the youth?" (*il-shabāb fēn?*) [↗**Young vs. Settled**]. Cartoons are posted which represent scenes of detention under the hashtag "Youth inclusion" (*iḥtiwā al-shabāb*). One of them is drawn by cartoonist Islām Gāwīsh, who is arrested himself and held in police custody for one day on charges of using unlicensed web tools (MARZIBĀN). The cartoon "Youth," by Muḥammad Anwar, depicts a fat state official addressing young inmates through the bars of a prison cell: "We want to give you a message: you are the hope… you are the future. And thank you" (ANWAR). Meanwhile, in a poor Tunis suburb, a young "*hittiste*"—

an idle person "standing by the wall" (originally derived from the Algerian word for "wall," *ḥīṭ*)—claims that instead of providing new jobs the state rather builds more prisons. He concludes that the only hope for him is leaving his country (ROELLIN):

> What kind of shit life is this? You have to work your ass off for every dinar and then you go to prison for a joint. Barely out of prison, they arrest you again. Some quarrel, some fight, some small mistake. Prison, hood, prison, hood, prison, hood. I swear, there is nothing else here. This is why I want to get to Europe. [↗**Migration**]

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Clash ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Migration ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Tourist Resorts

CODES – Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Freedom vs. Constraint ♦ Hope vs. Hell ♦ Past vs. Present ♦ Security vs. Fear ♦ "The System" vs. "The People" ♦ Young vs. Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Normality = Heroism (Surviving) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

Written references and Videos

ʿABD AL-RĀZIQ, Muḥammad and Maḥmūd NAṢR. "Awwal ḥukm nihāʾī bi-sijn Mubārak wa-najlayhi 3 sanāwāt fī qaḍiyyat al-quṣūr al-riʾāsiyya." *al-Youm 7*, January 9, 2016, <https:// www.youm7.com/story/2016/1/9/2530065//أول-حكم-نهائى-بسجن-مبارك-ونجليه-3-سنوات-فى-قضية> (accessed September 2, 2018).

[*AJE* =] N. N. "Mass hunger strike at Egypt's infamous Scorpion prison." *al-Jazeera English*, March 5, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/mass-hunger-strike-egypt-infamous-scorpion-prison-160303175227631.html> (retrieved 25 September 2018).

[ANHRI =] N. N. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. "There is Room for Everyone… Egypt's Prisons Before and after January 25 Revolution." ANHRI, September 5, 2016, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:c6Ph7f8FhNQJ:anhri.net/there-is-room-for-everyone-egypts-prisons-before-after-the-25-of-january-revolution/%3Flang%3Den+&cd=7&hl=it&ct=clnk&gl=no#.W46JQ84zbIU> (accessed August 27, 2018). – Arabic version: "Hunāk muttasaʿ lil-jamīʿ: sujūn Miṣr qabla wa-baʿda thawrat yanāʾir." *al-Shabaka al-ʿarabiyya li-maʿlūmāt ḥuqūq al-insān* (ANHRI), 2016, <http://anhri.net/هناك-متسع-للجميع/#.W2lYudUzbIU> (accessed September 2, 2018).

ANWAR, Muḥammad. "ʿĀyzīn niqūl lakum risāla." *Wakālat A7A lil-anbāʾ*, May 13, 2016, <https://twitter.com/A7A_NewsAgency/status/731200737422790658> (accessed September 10, 2018).

[*Bayān* =] N. N. "Asrār al-ziyāda al-mufriṭa fī wazn Ḥusnī Mubārak." *al-Bayān*, April 24, 2016, <https://www.albayan.ae/five-senses/east-and-west/2016-04-24-1.2625313> (accessed September 2, 2018). – The same pictures were published by *al-Youm 7* https://www.youm7. com/story/2016/4/24/بالصور-أسرار-الزيادة-المفرطة-فى-وزن-الرئيس-الأسبق-حسنى-مبارك (accessed April 25, 2016).

BOBIN, Frédéric. "À Tunis, l'audition bouleversante d'une victime de la torture sous Ben Ali." *Le Monde*, November 18, 2016, <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/11/18/a-tunis-l-

audition-bouleversante-d-une-victime-de-la-torture-sous-ben-ali_5033766_3212.html> (accessed September 4, 2018).

BOUKHAYATIA, Rihab. "Tunisie: Abus, excès de zèle des policiers…la police tunisienne est-elle une police des moeurs?" *Huffpost Maghreb*, January 21, 2016, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/01/19/tunisie-abus-policiers_n_9009674.html> (accessed September 18, 2018).

CHENNAOUI, Henda. "La loi, la police et la liberté de disposer de son corps." *Nawaat*, August 3, 2016, <http://nawaat.org/portail/2016/08/03/la-loi-la-police-et-la-liberte-de-disposer-de-son-corps/> (accessed September 18, 2018).

CHITI, Elena. Fieldwork notes and interviews. Egypt, January-December 2016. (Unpublished.)

[*Crisis Group* =] N. N. "Jihadist violence in Tunisia: the urgent need for a national strategy." *International Crisis Group*, 22 June 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/jihadist-violence-tunisia-urgent-need-national-strategy> (accessed September 18, 2018).

[EIPR =] N. N. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. "Aqrab Prison: a prison for collective punishment. Violation of visitation rights threatens prisoners' safety." (April 2016).

[*Euromed Monitor* =] Euromediterranean Human Rights Monitor. "Tunisia guilty of medieval practices in prisons, detention centers." *Euromed Monitor*, October 6, 2016, <http:// euromedmonitor.org/en/article/1465/Tunisia-guilty-of-medieval-practices-in-prisons--detention-centers>, and video "Tunisia, reality of prisons 2016," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbVw8FQLfj8> (accessed August 27, 2018).

GĀWĪSH, Islām. *Al-Waraqa 2*. Cairo: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

EL GÉNÉRAL. *Zinzāna*. YouTube video uploaded January 30, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcUmiD0d3BQ> (accessed November 10, 2018).

HALAWA, Ibrahim. "I'm in an Egyptian prison – being stripped and beaten is normal." *The Guardian*, September 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/02/prison-egypt-stripped-beaten-witness-torture-egypt>.

KHALĀF, Abū Bakr. "Taʿarrafū ʿalà ahamm mufradāt lughat al-sujūn al-miṣriyya." August 5, 2016, <https://raseef22.com/life/2016/08/05/تعرّفوا-على-أهم-مفردات-لغة-السجون-المص/> (accessed Sept. 2, 2018).

[*Kapitalis* =] N. N. "Sujūn Tūnis: awḍāʿ marīra wa-marākiz ʿiqāb muṭlaq." *Kapitalis*, October 6, 2016, <http://www.kapitalis.com/anbaa-tounes/2016/10/06/سجون-تونس-أوضاع-مريرة-ومراكز-عقاب-مطلق/>, (accessed September 2, 2018).

[*Life Foundation* =] Life Foundation for Development and Community Reintegration. "Life Foundation & the Egyptian Prison System." February 20, 2016, <http://lfdci.org/en/life-foundation-egypt-prison-system/> (accessed August 27, 2018).

MARZIBĀN, Samar. "Islām Gāwīsh yarwī tafāṣīl al-qabḍ ʿalayhi wa-ikhlāʾ sabīlih." *Al-Youm 7*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/2/266848/إسلام-جاويش-يروى-تفاصيل-القبض-عليه-وإخلاء-سبيله-رسام-الكاريكاتير> (accessed August 27, 2018).

[*Observers* =] N. N. "One year in prison – for smoking marijuana in Tunisia." *The France 24 Observers*, February 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZIiKdxrat0> (accessed August 27, 2018).

[*Reuters* =] N. N. "Egypt's court of appeals rejects Mubarak and sons' appeal of jail sentence." *Reuters*, January 9, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-mubarak-trial/egypts-court-of-appeals-rejects-mubarak-and-sons-appeal-of-jail-sentence-idUSKCN0UN0EU20160109> (accessed September 2, 2018).

ROELLIN, Jonas. Fieldwork notes and interviews. Tunisia, March-October 2016.

RYZOVA, Lucie. Fieldwork notes and interviews. Egypt, March-October 2016.

SAAD, Mohammed."Ahram Online's top ten books in 2016." *Ahram Online*, December 31, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/254076.aspx> (accessed September 11, 2018).

al-SUKKARĪ, Ḥusām. "Anā khā'if min hādhā al-waṭan… wa-laysa ʿalayhi!" *Al-Shurūq*, March 5, 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=05032016&id=17e99bc9-7cb6-4d10-975b-f1a59eabdfa6> (accessed September 2, 2018).

TAWFĪQ, Aḥmad Khālid. *Fī mamarr al-fi'rān.* Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2016.

TV series

Suqūṭ ḥurr. TV series. 2016.

Fawqa mustawà 'l-shubūhāt. TV series. 2016.

◄ elena.chiti@su.se ►
◄ jonas.roellin@islam.unibe.ch ►
◄ L.Ryzova@bham.ac.uk ►

Psychiatrists

… in Egypt*

By Maren Burvarp Aardal

"Hi, welcome to *Shezlong*. We are the support team; how can we help you?" The question pops up directly when you enter the website *Shezlong.com*. On the other side of the screen, professional psychiatrists are ready to help those who seek help online to handle their mental illness. Only one year after the launch of the online psychiatry platform, 14,000 people all across the Arab world get treatment in sessions conducted via chat or video calls. Half of these clients are from Egypt.

Millions of Egyptians—an estimated sixth of the whole population of over 90 million—suffer from mental disorder without searching or receiving treatment for their psychological problems, neither from the 6.000 psychiatrists that are there in the country there (1 per 15,000!), nor through digital platforms. The huge discrepancy between psychological suffering and actual treatment is often explained by the societal taboos regarding mental health disorders. The founder of *Shezlong* tells journalists that he believes the guaranteed anonymity and decreased risk of being socially stigmatized are key to the success of his website.

But it is not only online that psychiatrists appear, they also play a role in various forms of popular culture. In the literature scene, several psychological self-help books gain popularity [↗**Self-help**]. A little stand at the Cairo International Book Fair of February is dedicated to the General Secretariat of Mental Health, a governmental organ that has recently launched a campaign to raise awareness about mental diseases. On the book fair, psychiatrists distribute pamphlets to passers-by who dare to stop by their stand. On a more grass-root level, a psychiatrist and professor from al-Minyā's Faculty of Medicine gains popularity among Egyptians. Through the regular postings on his Facebook page and in his bestselling self-help books written in colloquial Egyptian [↗**Language**], Muḥammad Ṭāhā encourages his readers to analyze their relationships with other people. Only then will they be able to see what role they play in these relationships themselves, and only then will they discover their true and false selves [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]. His book *il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ* (Out of the Box) becomes one of the bestselling "social books" of the year, and he also attracts large numbers of people to the dozens of lectures he gives in the country's biggest cities. The book signing sessions after each of these lectures are thoroughly documented with pictures on the Facebook pages of these events, revealing a majority of female attendees.

One topic often repeated by the popular psychiatrist is the view that oppression of a child's psychological needs will, in a later stage of life, inevitably affect the grown-up person's mental health in a negative way. A worst-case scenario in which the mentally ill person commits crimes is portrayed in several Ramadan series. In one of them, *Suqūṭ ḥurr*

---

* Re-published (with minor modifications, mainly in the cross-references) from *JAIS* 17 (2017): 499-501.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *224–*229
© Maren Buvarp Aardal, Oslo, NO (for EG) | Wael Garnaoui,
Université Paris Diderot, FR / University of Leipzig, DE (for TN)

(Free Fall), several of the main characters' psychological suffocation is caused by neglecting themselves or others.

The characters' sessions with the psychiatrist shed light on the internal conflicts within the series' storylines and enable both internal and personal conflicts to develop. The positive development of characters is often in line with the psychiatrist's advices. The character Sihām, a woman in her late fifties, approaches her daughter Malak's psychiatrist in order to understand why Malak killed her own sister and husband. Sihām's problems with Malak and other family members have become apparent for the spectators, since this scene is in the ninth episode of the 30-episode series. She is skeptical and suspicious towards the psychiatrist and only visits him to learn what her daughter has told him, but not her. The psychiatrist tells her that he is not allowed to reveal any of Malak's secrets, but he assures her that he had not been informed about Malak's plans to kill her husband. He invites Sihām to come back if she wants someone to talk to. Later in the series, Sihām regularly goes to see the psychiatrist, complaining about how difficult it was to raise two children on her own. Using thought experiments, the psychiatrist challenges her perception of a society that puts her in a box and defines how she should behave towards her children, namely like a tough father. He tells her that it was she herself who chose to fit into this miserable box that she thought society put her in: first as a strict and lone, then a strict and widowed mother. He claims that she has been tough on herself and her daughters in vain and rhetorically asks Sihām if Malak's illness could be the result of being neglected in her childhood. Sihām's self-diagnosis is that her anxiety prevented her from feeling anything at all, and from feeling like a woman in particular. She tells the psychiatrist that when a woman does not feel safe anymore, she stops feeling like a woman. She furthermore asserts that society would have condemned her if she spent her time, as a widowed mother, to look for a new man. The psychiatrist, while acknowledging that Sihām's choice of not looking for a new man is well-respected in society, claims that the widowed women who choose to remarry could raise their children in a likewise proper manner as the ones who remain alone.

Although societal constraints are acknowledged in *Suqūṭ ḥurr*, it is up to the individual to choose whether to obey them or not. The personal does not become political as the struggle against societal structures is reduced to a fight with oneself, maybe with the guidance of a psychiatrist. If Sihām chose to take the easy way and adapt to what she thought was her role in society, it was all her fault. By the use of the psychiatrist as a moral compass in this particular Ramadan series, not turning crazy is seen as each and every individual's own responsibility.

However, the portrayal of the psychiatrist is not always positive. In *Suqūṭ ḥurr*, as in *Fawqa mustawà al-shubuhāt* (Above Reproach), another series in 2016 that uses the psychiatrist and a mentally disturbed person as points of departure, psychiatrists are repeatedly violating the duty of confidentiality as they are discussing their clients with friends and family or even believed to record the sessions. Whether this lack of work ethics is a portrayal of reality or believed reality, the audience might in the end feel more tempted to checking out the more anonymous online alternative to the psychiatrist's chair.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Language ♦ Self-help

References

[*Iqra'-lī*] = "Ashhar 10 kutub li-ʿām 2016" (The 10 most popular books of the year 2016). *Iqraaly*, [n.d.], 2016, retrieved from <http://iqraaly.com/blog/post/5> (as of January 6, 2018).

NAʿŪM, M., and W. ḤAMDĪ. *Suqūṭ Ḥurr* (Free Fall). El-Adl Group, 2016, retrieved from <https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLk7aOjrbxuopKM6YtvnoCme4MQNmmi0Zz> (as of January 7, 2018).

QUWAYSĪ, Sāra. "Taʿarraf ʿalà qāʾimat al-kutub al-akthar mabīʿan fī Miṣr ʿām 2016" (Get to know the list of the best-selling books of 2016 in Egypt). *Iḍāʾāt*, December 23, 2016, <https://www.ida2at.com/best-selling-books-in-egypt-2016/> (as of January 6, 2018).

TALAAT, N. "Egyptian Startup Fights Depression Online." *Al-Monitor*, December 19, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/12/egypt-online-startup-fight-depression-shezlong.html> (as of January 6, 2018).

[*TEDx Talks*] = "The Four Steps Model towards Psychological Health | Dr. Mohamed Taha | TEDxWadiElrayan." *YouTube* video, November 15, 2016, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=GmV_9BBNIj0> (as of January 6, 2018).

◄ marenaardal@gmail.com ►

… in Tunisia

By WAEL GARNAOUI

Une vulgarisation par un biais médiatique

La figure du psychiatre en Tunisie a été marquée par la série tunisienne *Choufli hall* (شوفلي حل – *Trouve-moi une solution*). Une série télévisée humoristique, en dialecte tunisien [↗**Language**], contenant six saisons et diffusée du 4 octobre 2005 au 19 septembre 2009 sur la chaine Tunisie 7 durant le mois de ramadan.

Ce sitcom articulé autour d'un psychothérapeute, Slimen Labyadh, et d'une voyante, Jannet, aborde les problèmes courants au sein de la société tunisienne : adolescence, chômage, corruption, célibat, crise du logement dont souffrent les jeunes [↗**Apartment Wanted**, ↗**Young *vs.* Settled**].

La célébrité de cette série a atteint des proportions considérables dans la société tunisienne. Cette série est rediffusée jusqu'à nos jours sur les chaines tunisiennes et continue à bénéficier d'un taux d'audimat considérable. Plusieurs générations, notamment les enfants, fussent marqués par la figure de ce psychiatre, Slimen Labyedh, et de son demi frère, Sbouii, qui joue le rôle du secrétaire du cabinet de psychiatre dans la série. L'humour atteint son paroxysme dans les scènes exposant le renversement des rôles entre le secrétaire et le psychiatre [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**] ou encore les scènes insistant sur les continuités et les amalgames entre la fonction du psychiatre dans la société et celle de la voyante [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Hormis ces amalgames, la série continue à vulgariser le métier du psy dans la société Tunisie. A titre d'exemple, quand vous faites des études au sein des départements de psychologie ou de psychiatrie des universités tunisiennes, vous ne pouvez échapper à une remarque diffuse dans les sphères populaires: « vous souhaitez devenir un Slimen Labyedh sans doute! » Ce personnage de « psy » a réussi à briser le tabou des « psys

pour les fous » [↗**Celebrities**] et c'est à partir de cette médiatisation que les tunisiens commencent à consulter sans avoir honte.

Deux discours de vérité en confrontation

Des controverses portant sur le discours de vérité ont surgi dans l'espace public confrontant les deux métiers, celui du psychiatre et celui des voyants (*ʿarrāf*). Quel discours serait légitime dans une société post-révolutionnaire partagée entre modernité et tradition? Telle est la question qui structure ces débats donnant lieu à un véritable déclassement des *ʿarrāf*s taxés de superstition et de non-scientificité.

Un jeune psychiatre tunisien établi dans les régions populaires au centre du pays nous explique que les familles ont tendance à ramener leurs enfants psychotiques et les délirants au traditherapeute. Ce dernier terme désigne les Wagaât (*al-wiqāʿa*)—la voyante qui reçoit dans sa demeure modeste, souvent située dans le milieux ruraux, des personnes afin d'extraire le mauvais œil (*al-siḥr*), la magie noire, ou le mauvais sort. C'est un passage obligatoire avant le psychiatre. Beaucoup de médecins généralistes évitent d'orienter leurs patients vers des psychiatres parce que ces même-patients prennent mal cette orientation. Selon un psychiatre qui nous a accordé un entretien: les patients font le tour des médecins généralistes et ce n'est qu'après plusieurs mois d'hésitation devant une maladie qui peine à être diagnostiquée qu'ils se rendent compte de la nécessité d'une consultation psychiatrique.

Une autre confusion qui court jusqu'à nos jours est celle entre qui confond les métiers du psychologue (*'akhiṣṣā'ī nafsī*)—qui soigne l'âme par la parole—et celui du psychiatre (*ṭabīb nafsī*)—mandaté et autorisé à prescrire des psychotropes (*ʿiṣāb dawā'*). L'appellation péjorative (*ṭbīb lim-habla* 'médecin des fous') se maintient dans le langage courant malgré le fait que l'énoncé « Aller voir un psy » soit entré dans le vocabulaire quotidien de différentes couches sociales en Tunisie.

Des défis du métier

L'attitude des tunisiens envers le psy a beaucoup changé et le psy a gagné en termes de reconnaissance au sein de la société tunisienne par rapport à sa position antérieure [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Selon le psychiatre Dr. Koubaa dans un article publié dans le journal *Alsabah*

> les parents ne vont plus juste pour consulter chez un psy mais ils vont pour demander des conseils concernant le comportement de leurs enfants dans le cadre de l'école ou pour demander d'autres conseils qui touchent aux problèmes affectifs ou ceux du couple. (*al-Ṣabāḥ News*)

Il ajoute que

> le nombre des psychiatres a été multiplié 20 fois pendant les 25 dernières années, ce qui a attiré plus de patients ces dernières années. Par contre le coût des soins en psychiatrie est devenu très élevé. Il atteint parfois 3000 dinars pour 3 mois de soin. (*ibid.*).

A ces chiffres, il faut rajouter une situation psychosociale critique. Le pays a connu une augmentation des cas de ↗**Suicide** : 500 cas de suicide cette année, ç'est-à-dire, 135 cas de

plus par rapport à l'année dernière. Ainsi, des comités préventifs ont été créés appelant à la nécessité de sensibiliser à l'importance de la psychiatrie (al-NAṢIRI).

Or, devant cet état des lieux critiques, il y a un grand manque de formation en psychothérapie. Les patients se plaignent du fait que les psychiatres passent leurs temps à prescrire des psychotropes. Un témoignage d'un pharmacien affirme cette observation:

> Les patients n'aiment plus les psychiatres parce qu'ils prescrivent beaucoup de médicaments forts, ce qui les rendent accro aux psychotropes ; la plupart des patients demandent une consultation chez un psychologue.

Et un patient que nous avons rencontré ajoute :

> je suis allé consulter chez un psy et j'ai trouvé un psy plus fou que moi. Les psychiatres sont très matérialistes, ils ne nous respectent pas et ils ne nous écoutent pas.

La figure du psychiatre est devenue présente dans différentes émissions télévisées et radiophoniques. Le 28 novembre, la chaîne tunisienne al-Ḥiwār lance un nouveau programme intitulé « Tunisian Tales » (*ḥkēyēt tūnsiyya*), animé par Sami Elfehri. C'est un programme social traitant des situations sociales en présence de spécialistes, des psys, des juges et des personnes qui témoignent de leurs expériences de souffrance en société [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity)]. Le premier épisode est intitulé « Le pervers narcissique » (المنحرف النرجسي *al-Munḥarif al-narǧisī*) et fait beaucoup de polémiques dans l'espace public à la suite des témoignages très violents des femmes victimes de la perversion [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. Après la diffusion de ces émissions des critiques ont submergé les réseaux sociaux [↗**Social Media**]. Des observateurs et des intervenants qui ont participé à ce programme critiquent le fait que Sami Elfehri interviendrait souvent à la place des psychiatres et essaie d'analyser et de diagnostiquer les participants à sa façon.

En plus des médias, le débat sur la psychiatrie en Tunisie s'est ouvert au sein de l'espace public à partir des publications et des témoignages de psychiatres témoins de l'évolution de ce métier. Après une expérience de six ans à l'hôpital psychiatrique Razi à Manouba, Aymen Daboussi, un psychothérapeute et un écrivain tunisien, démissionne de son poste de psychologue des consultations externes en manifestation contre l'ordre psychiatrique en Tunisie. Il a rédigé un recueil de nouvelles s'inspirant de son expérience pratique qu'il intitule (أخبار الرازي *Akhbār ar-Rāzī*) « Chroniques de Razi ». Dans une dernières nouvelle, il note : « Avant l'invention des antipsychotiques, la psychiatrie fut presque rien. Après cette invention, la psychiatrie est devenue moins que rien » (al-DABBUSI). Une pétition a été rédigée par les psychiatres de l'hôpital Al-Razi exprimant leur colère contre ses propos injurieux à l'encontre de l'hôpital Al-Razi et contre la pratique des psychiatres. La pétition n'a pas fait plier la critique contre les pratiques psychiatriques au sein de cet hôpital. En recension du livre d'Aymen Daboussi, un écrivain et philosophe écrit un article où il affirme:

> Il suffit de lire la nouvelle « عودة فرانز فانون *Le retour de Franz Fanon* » contenue dans « *Chroniques de Razi* » pour voir l'auteur délester son personnage d'un minimum de vraisemblable et faire sauter les coutures de la norme institutionnelle. Daboussi fait revenir ce psychiatre anticolonialiste à l'hôpital Râzi, où il a déjà exercé dès son arrivée à Tunis en avril 1957. (JDEY)

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ Celebrities ♦ Language ♦ Social Media ♦ Suicide

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity) ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Young vs. Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

al-DABBŪSĪ, Ayman. *Akhbār al-Rāzī: qiṣaṣ.* Baghdad / Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal | Freiberg: al-Kamel Verlag, 2017.

JDEY, Adnen. « *Chroniques du Râzi* d'Aymen Daboussi : l'ordre psychiatrique mis à nu. » *nawaat*, February 11, 2017, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2017/02/11/chroniques-du-razi-daymen-daboussi-lordre-psychiatrique-mis-a-nu/>.

al-NAṢIRI, Maryam. "Amrāḍ nafsiyya fī Tūnis." *al-ʿArabī al-ǧadīd*, July 2, 2017, <www.alaraby.co.uk/society/أمراض-نفسية-في-تونس>.

[*al-Ṣabāḥ News* =] N. N. "Lam yaslam minhā 'l-aṭfāl… wa'l-nisā' al-akthar ʿarḍatan: Tūnisiyyūn amāma ḥaqīqat amrāḍihim al-nafsiyya." *al-Ṣabāḥ News*, April 17, 2016, archived by <https://www.turess.com/assabahnews/122982>.

◄ garnaoui-wael@live.fr ►

Public Hearings

By Mariem Guellouz and Selima Kebaili

The court sessions that attract public attention this year in Tunisia are of a very different type than those held in Egypt [↗**Court Trials**]. In November, the first public hearings of the victims of Ben Ali's dictatorship in Tunisia take place. They are expected to unveil the political repression committed under the authoritarian regimes [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Prison**]. This moment of truth-revealing is one of the pillars of the process of transitional justice, constitutionally endorsed by Tunisia in 2013. Transitional justice means a set of judicial mechanisms and conflict resolution procedures set up in the aftermath of conflict or dictatorship. Truth revealing, reparations to victims, guarantees of non-recurrence and, ultimately, reconciliation, are expected to lead to the pacification and democratization of societies. In this context, in Tunisia, the victims are asked to submit a file attesting to the violations committed against them to the Truth and Dignity Commission (Instance Vérité et Dignité, IVD / Hay'at al-Ḥaqīqa wa'l-Karāma). Created in 2013 for a five-year term, this committee is the central body of the transitional justice process. Its members, including its particularly controversial [↗**Clash**] President Sihem Bensedrine (Sihām Bin Sidrīn), are appointed by the Constituent Assembly, which is composed of a majority of the Nahḍa Party. The prerogatives of the institution are broad—its members are in charge of assessing the bases of compensation for victims and defining the criteria of this compensation. Accordingly, expectations and hopes are high [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**].

In particular, the IVD is responsible for holding hearings with victims, "collecting information as well as locating, identifying, recording, confirming and archiving violations in order to build a database and develop a unified register of victims of violations" (MDHJTT). The period of abuses that shall be dealt with in the hearings is long, ranging from July 1, 1955, to December 25, 2013, covering the regimes of Bourguiba (1956-1987), Ben Ali (1987-2011) [↗**Father Figures**], and the first post-revolutionary governments (2011-2013). It is therefore a question of retracing and documenting, through the testimonies of 55,000 victims, more than fifty years of state-sanctioned violence and all kinds of other repression.

On November 17, at 8:30 pm, Tunisian men and women are able to follow the first public hearings on their television screens. They are taking place at Club Alyssa, a place of social receptions formerly reserved for the executives of the Ben Ali regime. In a packed auditorium, political leaders, journalists, researchers, members of Tunisian and international NGOs and members of the victims' families have come to listen to the testimonies. Women sitting in the front row are bearing on their knees portraits of their sons. One of the mothers, Ourida Kadousi, is the first to speak. She tells how her son, Raouf Kadoussi, 27 years old, was shot and killed on January 8, 2011, by the police while demonstrating [↗The **Policeman Criminal**]. She claims her right to live the "head up" (Omri).

Mehrezia El-Abed, another victim, says:

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *230–*232
© Mariem Guellouz, Univ. Paris Descartes, FR, and Sélima Kebaïli, Univ. de Lausanne, CH

> They made me go into a room and beatings began, kicking, slapping, clothes torn off so I put my hand on my belly and one of them asked what was going on? I replied that I was three months pregnant and at that time a torturer known to excel in the torture of women started punching me on the stomach until I bleed and lose the baby.

Later in the evening, it is the turn of writer and political opponent Gilbert Naccache to speak. He begins his testimony with a tribute to the martyrs of the revolution before retracing several significant and violent events of his career as a political opponent (BASTAYEKFI).

This and the following public hearings depict the strong repression committed by the regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Several political groups had been targeted, including those of the Marxist Perspectives movement and al-ʻĀmil al-Tūnisī (The Tunisian Worker), the Movement of the Islamic tendency (MTI) (precursor of Ennahdha), or the relatives of the opponent leader Salah ben Youssef (Ṣalāḥ Bin Yūsuf).

From the evening of the first hearing, the testimonies cause ambivalent reactions among the audience [↗**Clash**]. The victims' reports leave their imprint on the Tunisian viewers, who react immediately, also in social networks [↗**Social Media**]. Despite the inevitable emotion of this exercise of narrating the acts of physical and moral violations, the victims have largely kept calm and shown great modesty in their intimate reports about tragic facts. Several reactions of compassion and empathy with the victims are immediately posted on the Dignity and Truth Commission's Facebook page while the public hearings are still being transmitted. Many Internet users express their indignation about torture and the violations of human rights. On his Facebook page, Omar Fassatoui, a prominent actor in Tunisian civil society, writes:

> Whether we like it or not, whether we criticize it or not, whether we say that it could have been better, whether we are more interested in the dress and the haircut of Mrs. Ben Sedrine than the testimonies of the victims and of their families, one fact remains. Yesterday we had a historic moment. We have started a huge work on the Tunisian collective memory and I hope for national reconciliation. [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]

However, reception is not unanimously positive. There are also negative reactions to the hearings. Some reveal a total denial of the relevance of the transitional justice procedures:

> Transitional justice was created when there was no listening support; at the moment there is Facebook which carries far our voices (reference).

Other critics question the truthfulness of the victims' statements, described as lies or theatrical enactments aimed at separating the country and threatening social peace:

> But who said that these testimonies are true and that the majority of the witnesses are not exaggerating (reference).

Sihem Ben Sedrine, the president of the Commission, is also criticized. She is accused of having politicized the process by giving priority to the testimonies of the victims of anti-Islamist repression (BEN SAFA, GALTIER).

The polemics are characteristic of this year's public discourse about political and social issues, particularly also those related to the economic reconciliation act, an initiative of the

Nidaa Tounes (Nidāʾ Tūnis) party that aims to grant amnesty to several people who have committed economic and financial crimes and offenses [↗*Manīsh msāmiḥ*].

Related entries

ARRAYS – Clash ♦ Court Trials ♦ Father Figures ♦ In Islam, … ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Social Media

CODES – Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People"

References

[BASTAYEKFI =] N. N. « "La vérité, quoi qu'on fasse, est révolutionnaire": témoignage de Gilbert Naccache devant l'Instance Vérité et Dignité tunisienne. » *Bastayekfi*, December 3, 2016, <https://bastayekfi.wordpress.com/2016/12/03/la-verite-quoi-quon-fasse-est-revolutionnaire"-temoignage-de-gilbert-naccache-devant-linstance-verite-et-dignite-tunisienne/>

BEN SAID, Safa. "Tunisia faces up to dark history with first public hearings." *TRT World*, November 21, 2016, <https://www.trtworld.com/in-depth/tunisia-faces-legacy-of-dictatorship-in-first-public-hearing-of-victim-234641>.

GALTIER, Mathieu. « Tunisie: Sihem Bensedrine, militante contestée : La présidente se voit reprocher une gestion à poigne. » *Libération*, November 16, 2016, <https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2016/11/16/sihem-bensedrine-militante-contestee_1528881/>.

MDHJTT: Ministère des Droits de l'Homme et de la Justice transitionnelle tunisienne. *Loi organique relative à l'instauration de la justice transitionnelle et à son organisation*. Décembre 2013.

OMRI, Mohamed-Salah. "Tunisia's moment of truth: process, outcomes, expectations." *openDemocracy*, November 24, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/tunisia-s-moment-of-truth-process-outcomes-expectations/>.

◄ mguellouz@yahoo.fr ►
◄ selima.kebaili@gmail.com ►

Red Sea Islands

By Albrecht Hofheinz

"We're back to the Square" (*Rāǧiʿīn il-Mīdān*), activists proclaim when the news breaks in April that Egypt is ceding sovereignty over two strategically important islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia. Back to the iconic Tahrir Square, back to the days of glory when the people stood up to a despotic ruler: to take back our dignity, that is the wish, the hope that many would like to rekindle when they call for demonstrations on the "Friday of Dignity" (*Ǧumʿat al-Karāma*) under the slogan "Our Land is Our Honour" (*al-Arḍ hiya 'l-ʿirḍ*).

> Let today be a new beginning […] Those going out to demonstrate today are asserting 'I'm here! I'm still here, and I have an opinion, a voice, a value. Together we are stronger. There are many who still hold on to the embers of our dream, our hope. The January Revolution is still alive; it has left its mark in us despite everything that has happened. The blood of thousands of martyrs, the tribulations of thousands of detainees have not been in vain and will not be in vain. Today we can build the first brick in the wall of hope, and tear down the wall of fear.

Such sentiments are shared not only by those who sympathize with the outlawed 6 April Movement but also by the Islamically-oriented political opposition [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. "This is a golden opportunity to transcend the Army/Brotherhood dichotomy sown by the counter-revolution," tweets Ṭāriq al-Zumar, exiled head of the Building and Development Party, the political arm of the formerly jihadist group *al-Ǧamāʿa al-Islāmiyya*. Somewhat cautiously given the power structures in place he asks, "Will we succeed?" The Twitter hashtag *#Ǧumʿat al-Arḍ* (#Land_Friday) is used over 100,000 times, but street demonstrations on 15 and again on 25 April (Sinai Liberation Day) meet with limited response in view of heavy state security presence at public rallying points. Even so, protest marches take place throughout the country, and several thousand demonstrators turn out at the Press Syndicate, making this the largest such rally since the introduction of the protest law made any demonstration consisting of more than ten people subject to prior police approval. The police act with relative restraint; no-one is killed, and 'only' hundreds, not thousands of people are arrested. Clearly, the authorities sense the depth of public fury over what many regard as a "sell-out of Egyptian land". The deal with Saudi Arabia is part of a package of 14 protocols that include a 16 billion dollar investment package, soft loans, and a bridge to facilitate trade between the two countries. Egypt is to receive 2 billion USD yearly, plus a 25% share in the proceeds from oil and gas extracted from the area. The financial benefits are conditional on Egypt signing the maritime border agreement that settles the century-old uncertainty regarding sovereignty over the islands Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr in Saudi Arabia's favor. This linkage is not lost on critical observers. 'Here is the army that is supposed to defend our country's territorial integrity—and what do they do? They sell it piecemeal to the rich (and unbeloved) neighbor, for a few breadcrumbs in the hope of prolonging their rule.' *Maṣr mish lil-bīʿ* ("Egypt is not for sale") is one of the earliest slogans demonstrators hold up on the street, and it quickly spreads to social media. The rallying cry strikes a chord among wide sections of the public, and criticism

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *233–*240
© Alrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

is voiced even on pro-government media such as ON TV, Dream, CBC, and al-ʿĀṣima. Feeling the fire, President Sisi is quick to explain that he is "not squandering a grain of sand" of Egyptian soil. The semi-official al-Ahrām runs an editorial affirming that "Egypt has not surrendered a single square inch of its territory under any condition. But it will be unreasonable to deny our brothers their right to hold on to their own territory when all documents prove their ownership." Both the government and the opposition proceed to publish maps and refer to select events and agreements in the past to support their position, but a dispassionate discussion of the mutual claims in the light of a balanced account of historical and geographical facts is not on the agenda. Rather, declarations of confidence in the President and the Army meet an outraged feeling of having been duped. Under the hashtag *#kullinā_īd_wāḥda_maʿ_al-Sīsī* ("We're all one hand with Sisi"), people affirm their trust in the President "who has done more for our country than what has been achieved in previous decades," and they explain the wisdom behind his decision:

> There's no selling of any island! The ball is now in the Saudi camp […] Egypt is now freeing itself from Camp David […] When the bridge is built, Egypt will have military bases on the two islands […] meaning a blockade of the Zionists. But don't waste your time trying to explain; people won't listen except to what they want to hear.

The other side is equally passionate. 'We have defended these islands with our blood; we shall not abandon them!' goes the narrative, for example on Facebook where people mobilize for demonstrations under the heading "Over our dead bodies". Reference is to the role the islands played in the 1956 and 1967 wars with Israel. "When the two islands needed to be defended and blood had to be shed in the struggle with the Zionist entity that was founded through rape and survives through aggression, it was only Egypt and its soldiers who paid with their lives in defence of these islands, confirming with their blood that they belong to Egypt" writes Aḥmad al-Naǧǧār, Chairman of the Board of Directors of al-Ahrām in an article that he puts out on Facebook after having been prevented from publishing it in his own paper. Have not generations of Egyptian schoolchildren learned that these islands are part of the land of Egypt, and sung patriotic songs glorifying the army's defence of them? Stunned, they now discover that they have been quietly removed from the new school atlas. Why this sudden change? Part of the public reaction is anger about not having been informed, about the consultative and legislative bodies not having been consulted, about not having been given a voice in deciding the fate of the country [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]. "I am an Egyptian citizen, and I did not grant Sisi and his regime any mandate to sell or give up any piece of Egyptian land", tweets prominent human rights lawyer Ǧamāl ʿĪd, in line with countless similar statements on social media. The revelation that Israel—still the arch-enemy for the great majority of Egyptians—has been consulted, but not the Egyptian parliament, does not help calm the waters. Government officials and the President himself find it necessary to address this feeling of having been presented, all of a sudden, with a fait accompli. "The maritime border agreement", they explain "was not a sudden decision taken during the visit of King Salmān to Egypt. It is the result of six years of studies" by a dedicated committee. "Had I announced this eight months ago, we would have had the same controversy, and it would have weakened our negotiating position", Sisi lectures the nation. None of these explanations, however, help to defuse the resentment among those who are not convinced to

begin with that whatever Sisi does is good for the country ("because I love him and have to stand by his side just as he stood with us against the people of evil"). Even police officers have qualms; the news that 150 of them are publicly calling for mass protest demonstrations is eagerly shared on social media, as is the dissenting voice of a former army officer. The thousands who do turn out on 15 April, defying the protest law, braving tear gas and the danger of being arrested, are trying to revive the spirit of 2011, and eventually, the old slogans "Leave!" and "The people want the fall of the regime" are being heard again. To the other side, this merely proves that

> the enemy and consorts are playing their last card. For them, this is not really about Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr. This is about destroying the state once again. It's the same scenario. The slogan 'Down with military rule' and 'the fall of the regime'—whom do they really serve??????? May God protect Egypt and its people and its army from every evil!

In fact, public outcry over the islands serves to vent anger over broader issues. "It's not just about the islands," explains Khālid Dāwūd, spokesman for a coalition of social-liberal parties. "It's about the overall performance of President Sisi, the way he treats us, the unilateral decisions, the arrests of young men and women." Ten days after the initial demonstrations, Sinai Liberation Day (25 April) provides a fitting occasion for new protest calls. The turnout is more limited, however, given that the security forces warn that they "will not again permit any illegal demonstrations" since these "aim at destroying the country," and set up "fixed and movable checkpoints" they themselves refer to as "ambush" [↗***Kamīn***]. At the official celebration, Sisi leans on nationalist geographer Ǧamāl Ḥamdān to conjure up the image of Sinai as "Egypt's holiest of holies" and reassures his audience that "the Egyptian armed forces, which are of the people and for the people, and all the Egyptian national institutions are aware of and appreciate the importance of preserving the national soil, and they have not and will not squander one grain of sand belonging to the land of Egypt". He calls on all Egyptians to "stand as one block" to defend these institutions against the "forces of evil" since "their survival is essential for the survival of the Egyptian State […] We will not allow anyone to meddle with Egypt's security, stability and institutions." Hundreds of demonstrators who defy the official narrative that the two islands have merely been under Egyptian trusteeship are arrested and join the crowd of previous protesters facing trial for sedition. An editorial in the daily *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ* uses what it calls "unimpassioned analysis" to explain the reasons behind this clampdown: "We are good and you are evil"—this is the message of the hard-working, simple and honest citizens to the "self-appointed elite who set themselves up as exclusive spokespersons for the people" while "calling for chaos and destruction". On the one hand, thus, "we see the salt of the earth, the simple and poor Egyptians, rising early in the morning to celebrate the liberation of Sinai […] confirming that they are the real shields protecting the security and safety of this nation". On the other, we find

> conspirators and traitors, secretly launching plans to throw Egypt in the mire of chaos, using all the tools of mischief and depravity, trying to obtain huge sums of money in exchange for their treason, in the form of funds from abroad, and traveling to the world

> centre of treason, the United States of America, and Britain, to stay there and get scholarships.

These "mercenary activists" attempt

> to launch a new episode in the series of plots aimed at bringing down Egypt through calls for demonstrations demanding to overthrow the army and the police and to topple the current regime, in full coordination with the Terrorist Brotherhood, repeating the vile and despicable scenario of handing over the country to the Brotherhood, nay to ISIS, choosing national holidays cherished by every honourable patriot, as if to take revenge on Egypt for the benefit of its enemies: Israel, Qatar, Turkey and the United States of America.

"Good Lord!" exclaims eminent journalist Ibrāhīm ʿĪsā. "Those who stand up for the integrity of Egyptian territory are accused of being traitors, foreign agents, and conspirators! This is mind-boggling!" He is not the only one stupefied over this inversion of meaning: that the surrender of territory is dressed as "an act of patriotism that the masses have to celebrate," while any "refusal to dance along to this tune" is denounced as treason. Such an abuse of patriotic feelings to prop up a "militaristic regime" will lead to a "breakdown of the notion of patriotism," warns a human rights blogger.

> People are being blackmailed emotionally through the phrase 'Long live Egypt' that is supposed to express love for one's country. Its automatic, hollow repetition strips it of all value and meaning, and it becomes a dictatorial slogan just like 'Heil Hitler', a slogan that everyone mindlessly has to repeat, or else they get to be traitors.

Others, however, criticize the prevailing public focus on land, honour and nation, trying to draw attention to more "real" concerns. "I believe the primary motto used by protesters on April 25, 'Land is Honour,' is isolated from the reality on the ground, to say the least," writes human rights activist Muḥammad Naʿīm:

> The essence of any real democratic movement in Egypt must be based on a call for freedom, not a dispute over land, especially uninhabited islands like Tiran and Sanafir […] The real land is the streets where we have become afraid to walk, the football fields that we are denied entry into, the land illegally acquired and divided up among the bureaucratic elite to accumulate ever more real estate […] The land, in short, is not the dust and the mud that we stand on, but the suffering we face in our daily lives.

While the significance and meaning of the "land" question continues to be debated on the streets and in the media, left-wing former presidential candidate Khālid ʿAlī takes the matter to court on the grounds that the constitution forbids the sale of Egyptian soil. It turns out that the judiciary is as divided on the issue as the rest of the country. After two months of deliberations, a lower administrative court declares the transfer illegal, a decision that is overturned on appeal another three months later, only to be reinstated again by yet another administrative injunction, whereupon the matter is referred to the Supreme Administrative Court [↗**Court Trials**]. Every time, supporters of the respective ruling erupt in small manifestations of public jubilation, but larger street demonstrations return to what they have been: a thing of the past. Only social media flare up again, reviving the hashtag *#Tīrān_wi-*

Ṣanāfīr_Maṣriyya ("Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr are Egyptian") when, at the end of the year, the government decides not to wait for the outcome of the judicial process and starts preparing the transfer of the two islands to Egypt's big brotherly neighbor.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Court Trials ♦ Kamīn

CODES – Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence

CODES COLLAPSED – Present = Past (Stuck)

References

ʿABD AL-GHANĪ, Sūzān. "Wathā'iq ǧadīda: 22 kharīṭa min muqtanayāt Ǧāmiʿat Stānfōrd tuthbit milkiyyat Miṣr li-'Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr." *Al-Bidāya*, April 14, 2016, <http://albedaiah.com/news/2016/04/14/111075>.

ʿABD AL-RĀZIQ, Muṣṭafà, and Thābit ʿABD AL-GHAFFĀR. "Masīrat al-Misāḥa tattaǧih li-muḥīṭ Maḥaṭṭat al-Buḥūth baʿda iṭlāq al-shurṭa qanābil al-ghāz." *Dōt Maṣr*, April 25, 2016, <http://www.dotmsr.com/News/196/506934/مسيرة-المساحة-تتجه-لمحيط-محطة-البحوث-بعد-إطلاق-الشرطة-قنابل>.

ABŪ 'L-MAKĀRIM, Ḥusām, and Shaymā' ḤILMĪ. "Ǧisr Sulaymān… Sharayān ḥayāt ǧadīda li-Miṣr wa-ḍarba qāḍiya li-Isrā'il." *Al-Wafd*, April 8, 2016, <https://alwafd.news/أخبار-وتقارير/1118196-جسر-سلمان-شريان-حياة-جديد-لمصر-وضربة-قاضية-لإسرائيل>.https://www.facebook.com/الارض-هي-العرض-25ابريل/

ʿĀDIL, Ḥāzim. "Nanshur ḥaythiyyāt ḥukm al-Qaḍā' al-Idārī bi-buṭlān ittifāqiyyat tarsīm al-ḥudūd maʿ al-Saʿūdiyya." *Al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, June 21, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/6/21/ننشر-حيثيات-حكم-القضاء-الإدارى-ببطلان-اتفاقية-ترسيم-الحدود-مع/2770779>.

[*al-Ahrām* =] N. N. "Ta'ǧīl ṭa'n 'Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr' ilā 3 yūliyū bi-sabab 'radd al-maḥkama.'" *Al-Ahrām*, June 27, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmRghotTi_NCrpq1sFx4BBB-unOBOKFTgDc>.

[*Ahram Canada* =] N. N. "Miṣr tatanāzal ʿan ǧazīratay Tirān wa-Ṣanāfīr lil-Saʿūdiyya muqābil 2 milyār dōlār sanawīyan wa-25% min al-ghāz wa'l-bitrūl." *Ahram Canada*, April 8, 2016, <http://www.ahram-canada.com/100676/>.

ALI, Khaled. "Facebook Post," June 15, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/khaled.ali.72/posts/859664817512211>.

AMW770. "Twitter Post @amw770." *Twitter*, April 17, 2016, <https://twitter.com/amw770/status/721776048279535620>.

ʿĀZIR, Sharīf. "'An inhiyār mafhūm al-waṭaniyya," April 26, 2016, <https://is.gd/1eyYtX>.

BINSʿAYYID, ʿImād. "Haaretz: Miṣr aʿlamat Isrā'īl musbaqan bi-anna-hā sa-tatanāzal ʿan al-jazīratayn lil-Saʿūdiyya." *France24*, April 12, 2016, <https://www.france24.com/ar/20160412--مصر-إسرائيل-السعودية-جزر-تيران-صنافير-اتفاق-معبر-قوات-دولية-سيناء-سلام>.

[*CNN Arabic* =] N. N. "Ǧumʿat "al-Arḍ hiya 'l-ʿirḍ"… tawāǧud amnī mukaththaf bi-mayādīn ra'īsiyya [...]." *CNN Arabic*, April 15, 2016, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/04/15/egypt-demonstration-friday-islands>.

DABASH, Ḥamdī. "'Amn al-Ǧīza': Taʿlīmāt bi'l-qabḍ ʿalà 'l-mutaẓāhirīn [...]." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, April 24, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/935682>.

[Daily Motion "Liwā' sābiq yuhaddid al-Sīsī" =] N. N. "Liwā' sābiq bi'l-Ṣāʿiqa yuhaddid al-Sīsī li-bayʿihī ǧuzur Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr." *Daily Motion*, n.d. [2016], <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x45hxzy>.

[Facebook "al-Arḍ hiya 'l-ʿirḍ" =] N. N. "al-Arḍ hiya 'l-ʿirḍ 25 Abrīl." *Facebook Group*, n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/1566180717008446-84-الارض-هي-العرض-25ابريل>. "Facebook Post."

6th of April Movement, April 15, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/shabab6april/posts/-خللوا-النهارده-بداية-جديدة/>.

[Facebook "Maṣr mish lil-bīʿ" =] *Facebook Page*, n.d. [2016], <https://www.facebook.com/Egyptisnotforsale/>.

FAHIM, Kareem. "Egyptians Denounce President Sisi in Biggest Rally in 2 Years." *New York Times*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/16/world/middleeast/cairo-protesters-denounce-egyptian-president-sisi.html>.

[#Ǧumʿat al-Arḍ =] "Ǧumʿat al-Arḍ." *Twitter Hashtag*, 1 January – 31 December 2016, <https://twitter.com/search?l=&q=%2320%جمعة_الارضsince%3A2016-01-01%20until%3A2016-12-31&src=typd>.

al-ḤANAFĪ, Hiba. "Ghaḍab baʿda muwāfaqat al-ḥukūma ʿalà 'Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr.'" *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1064937>.

al-ḤANAFĪ, Hiba and Nēvīn al-ʿĪYĀDĪ. "Khiṭāb al-Sīsī fī 'Liqā' al-usra al-miṣriyya.'" *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/928512>.

[*Ḥarakat Shabāb 6 Ibrīl* =] N. N. Facebook post, posted on April 15, 2016, <Ḥarakat Shabāb 6 Ibrīl>.

al-HAWĀRĪ, Dandrāwī. "Al-Busaṭā' li-"Ṣabāḥī wa-Abū al-Futūḥ wa'l-Barādiʿī": naḥnu al-khayr wa-antum al-sharr." *Yawm Al-Sābiʿ*, April 26, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/4/26/2692261/البسطاء-لـ-صباحى-وأبو-الفتوح-والبرادعى-نحن-الخير-وأنتم-الشر>.

[*al-Ḥurriyya lil-ǧadʿān* =] N. N. "Facebook Post." *al-Ḥurriyya lil-ǧadʿān*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/Al7oriallgd3an/posts/848751205236740>.

ʿĪD, Ǧamāl. "Twitter Status @gamaleid." December 29, 2016, <https://twitter.com/gamaleid/status/814502085895094273>.

[*#Kullinā īd wāḥda maʿ al-Sīsī* =] "Kullinā īd wāḥda maʿ al-Sīsī." Twitter Hashtag. 1 January – 31 December 2016, <https://twitter.com/search?l20sinc=&q=%23كلنا_يد_واحدة_مع_السيسي%e%3A2016-01-01%20until%3A2016-12-31&src=typd>.

[*Mada Masr* (a) =] N. N. "Police Arrest Dozens in Late Night Raids across the Country." *Mada Masr*, April 22, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/04/22/news/u/police-arrest-dozens-in-late-night-raids-across-the-country-2/>.

[*Mada Masr* (b) =] N. N. "Update: More Members of Online Satirical Troupe Arrested." *Mada Masr*, May 9, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/05/09/news/culture/update-more-members-of-online-satirical-troupe-arrested/>.

[IDSC =] N. N. "Ǧazīratay Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr tābiʿān li-l-Milkiyya al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿūdiyya." *Markaz al-Maʿlūmāt wa-Daʿm Ittikhādh al-Qarār, Maǧlis al-Wuzarā' al-Miṣrī*, April 12, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160418122133/http:/www.idsc.gov.eg/IDSC/News/View.aspx?ID=4269>.

MARWA. "Twitter Post @MarwaOkasha," April 15, 2016, <https://twitter.com/MarwaOkasha/status/720872135279779840>.

[*Maṣr mish lil-bīʿ* =] N. N. "Maṣr mish lil-bīʿ: shiʿār masīra layliyya li-Thuwwār al-Maṭariyya." *Alamat Online*, April 11, 2016, <http://alamatonline.com/archives/39658>.

MIRA MOHAMED. "Twitter Post @Mira_MOha," April 15, 2016, <https://twitter.com/Mira_MOha/status/720968468959465473>.

MOHAB. "Twitter Post @mohabart," April 12, 2016, <https://twitter.com/mohabart/status/719999407295492096>.

MONY GAMAL. "Twitter Post @Monygam26611642." *Twitter*, April 14, 2016, <https://twitter.com/monygam26611642/status/720850205256515584>.

[*Al-Mūǧaz* =] N. N. "Lil-tārīkh wa-qabla tabdīl al-mawāqif: mā qālahū 'l-iʿlāmiyyūn ʿan qaḍiyyat Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr." *al-Mūǧaz*, April 13, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/*/http://almogaz.com/news/politics/2016/apr/13/2235597>.

[MUḤAMMAD AL-ʻUMDA =] al-ʻUMDA, Muḥammad. "Twitter Post @mohamedelomda77." *Twitter*, April 14, 2016, <https://twitter.com/mohamedelomda77/status/720797318841286656>.

MUḤYĪ, Muṣṭafà. "Bi'l-ṣuwar... Wathā'iq ğadīda tuthbit miṣriyyat Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr." *Mada Masr*, December 5, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/12/05/feature/سياسة/بالصور-وثائق-جديدة-تثبت-مصرية-تيران-وص>.

[*Nabḍ Al-Ḥurriyya* =] N. N. "150 ḍābiṭ miṣrī yuʻlinū rafḍahum bayʻ al-Sīsī lil-ğuzur." *Nabḍ al-Ḥurriyya*, April 17, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160419200723/http:/nabdalhoria.com/archives/14486>.

NĀBULIYŪN, Muḥammad. "al-Qaḍā' al-idārī yulzim al-ra'īs wa'l-ḥukūma bi-tanfīdh ḥukm miṣriyyat 'Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr.'" *Al-Shurūq*, November 8, 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=08112016&id=b0ec7be4-6f51-46ef-b70d-83acdbd87216>.

al-NAĞĞĀR, Aḥmad. "Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr wa-qawāʻid ta'sīs al-awṭān wa'l-duwal." *Facebook Post*, April 17, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10154196545389884&id=611234883>.

NAEEM, Mohamed. "April 25: A crack in the wall of fear?" *Mada Masr*, April 28, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/04/28/opinion/u/april-25-a-crack-in-the-wall-of-fear/>, orig. Arabic: Muḥammad NAʻĪM, "Marḥalat shaqq al-ğidār: as'ila hawla 'l-ʻawda lil-shāriʻ," *Mada Masr*, April 26, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/04/26/opinion/politics/مرحلة-شق-الجدار-أسئلة-حول-العودة-للشار/>.

["Over our dead bodies" =] N. N. "ʻAlà ğuththatnā." *Facebook Event, Created by Ḥarakat Shabāb 6 Ibrīl*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1586440928333688/>.

al-QARANSHĀWĪ, Shaymā'. "Khālid ʻAlī: 'al-Taʻlīm' ḥadhafat ğuz' 'miṣriyyat Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr' min kitāb ğughrāfiyā." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1036581>.

al-QAYʻĪ, Maḥmūd. "Ilghā' 'Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr' min aṭlas wizārat al-taʻlīm [...]." *Ra'y al-Yawm*, September 26, 2016, <https://www.raialyoum.com/?p=529705>.

RAVID, Barak, Jack KHOURY, Gili COHEN, and The Associated Press. "Egypt Informed Israel in Advance of Plan to Hand Over Red Sea Islands to Saudis." *Haaretz*, April 11, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/egypt-informed-israel-in-advance-of-handover-of-red-sea-islands-to-saudis-1.5429897>.

SAMĪKA, Muḥsin. "Kalimat al-Sīsī fī dhikrà taḥrīr Sīnā'." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, April 24, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/935678>.

[*Taḥrīr* =] N. N. "Ghadan… Masīrāt Ğumʻat 'al-Arḍ hiya 'l-ʻirḍ' li-rafḍ al-tanāzul ʻan 'Tirān wa-Ṣanāfīr.'" *Taḥrīr*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.tahrirnews.com/Story/408775/غدا-مسيرات-جمعة-الأرض-هي-العرض-لرفض-التنازل-عن-تيران-وصنافير/مصر>.

al-TALĀWĪ, Aḥmad. "Tarsīm al-ḥudūd al-miṣriyya - al-Saʻūdiyya: qaḍāyā wa-ishkāliyyāt." *Al-Maʻhad al-Miṣrī lil-Dirāsāt*, March 29, 2016, <https://eipss-eg.org/ترسيم-الحدود-المصرية-السعودية-قضايا-وإشكاليات>.

THE TRAVELLER. "Twitter Post @Nassefovic," April 15, 2016, <https://twitter.com/Nassefovic/status/720982874351104000>.

[#Tīrān_wi-Ṣanāfīr_Maṣriyya =] "Tīrān_wi-Ṣanāfīr_Maṣriyya." *Twitter Hashtag*, 1 January – 31 December 2016, <https://twitter.com/search?l=&q=%2320%تيران_و_صنافير_مصرية%3Asince%3A2016-01-01%20until%3A2016-12-31&src=typd>.

WALSH, Declan. "Lawyer's Arrest in Egypt Signals Determination to Quell Criticism." *The New York Times*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/07/world/middleeast/egypt-malek-adly-abdel-fattah-el-sisi.html>.

[YT "Hāydī Fārūq" =] N. N. *Hāydī Fārūq ğazīratay* [sic] *Tīrān wa-Ṣanāfīr miṣriyyatān ON Sabāḥ*. YouTube video, uploaded May 12, 2016, <https://youtu.be/mz26NmcChd8>.

ZALṬA, Shādī ʿAbd Allāh. "Lam wa-lan nufriṭ ḥabbat turāb min arḍ Miṣr." *Al-Ahrām*, n.d [2016], <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/503955.aspx>.

al-ZUMAR, Ṭarīq. "Twitter Post @drtarekelzomor," April 14, 2016, <https://twitter.com/drtarekelzomor/status/720857515710218240>.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

Self-help

By STEPHAN GUTH[1]

The book that the young fully veiled woman in front of the Cairo Book Fair booth of Alef Publications is interested in is *al-Marǧaʿ al-ʾakīd fī lughat al-ǧasad*, an Arabic translation of *The Definitive Book of Body Language* by Barbara and Allan PEASE (Bārbārā wa-Ālān Bīys). Evidently, she wants to learn more about "The Hidden Meaning Behind People's Gestures and Expressions," as the subtitle has it. As in bookshops or at street vendors in town, the book is displayed together with others authored by American self-help and personal development gurus like Zig ZIGLAR, John C. MAXWELL, Anthony 'Tony' ROBBINS, Malcolm GLADWELL, Marie KONDŌ, or Steven R. COVEY. In addition to body language, they promise to enlighten the reader about "How to Develop Excellence in Yourself and Others" (ZIGLAR, *Top Performance*) and "How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical and Financial Destiny" (ROBBINS, *Awaken the Giant Within*); they want to develop in him or her "The Power of Thinking Without Thinking" (GLADWELL, *Blink*) or to teach him/her "Powerful Lessons in Personal Change" (COVEY, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*); others aspire to build "Your Foundation for Successful Leadership" (MAXWELL, *Good Leaders Ask Great Questions*) or suggest that "The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing" will change your life (KONDŌ, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*). Although a look into the front matter shows that the English originals of many of these titles date as far back as to the mid-1980s or early 1990s (ZIGLAR 1986, COVEY 1989, ROBBINS 1992) and that also several of the Arabic translations have been on the market since the mid-2000s, obviously they continue to appeal to a wide public and therefore are reprinted again and again.

The unbroken success of such publications seems to be due to the optimism they spread: whereas the overall situation in post-revolutionary Egypt and Tunisia is rather depressing [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**, ↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**, ↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**], they promise that prosperity and happiness still *are* achievable—if not for the country as a whole so at least on a personal level [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)]. Yes, you *can* solve all your problems, regain control of your life [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**] and realize most of the dreams everybody has—under one condition however: you have to do something *yourself*, have to *work on* yourself: "Now [after having read the book] the question is… Do you want to go ahead???!!... Do you want to develop yourself?? […] So, why not start with yourself […]???" (Haytham MUṢṬAFÀ 146). And a premise of this is of course that you defy pessimism—don't allow depression (*ikti'āb*) to take over, it is a negative thought that prevents you from being a winner instead of a loser, a leader instead of a powerless victim. Like an entrepreneur, you should regard your life and your self as a project to be developed:

> It is very important in the [life] trajectory of any of us that you stand a while in front of the mirror... the mirror of your self... through which you can see and know it [*sc.*

1 Inspired by KENNEY 2015.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *241–*248
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

> the self], and learn from it... in order to [...] start to accept your self and love it, and change it for the better. It is a journey that is worth the fatigue, patience, and pain [that it demands],

claims an advertisement for the year's most popular self-help book, Dr Muḥammad ṬĀHĀ's *il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ* (Out of the Box). Apart from its contents, it owes its vast popularity to the fact that it is not translated from a foreign work but written by a local, an assistant professor of Psychiatry at Minya University [↗**Psychiatrists**], and even in the Egyptian vernacular, using easy vocabulary [↗**Language**], "to simplify (*tabsīṭ*), facilitate (*taysīr*) and communicate (*tawṣīl*) the deep—and at times complex—psychological ideas and information" (ṬĀHĀ 9). In an almost Calvinistic manner, and with the attitude of teaching a science, these books as well as corresponding TV programs and YouTube videos do not blame the political, economic and social system for people's unhappiness and failure—the general situation is taken as a given fact—but instead put all responsibility on the individual that has not yet discovered its potential, not yet begun to study itself, or its self, not yet understood that this self can be formed and that you can learn how to be happy and successful.

The underlying concept of a "technology of the self" (KENNEY 664) comes in several variations, often overlapping, and obviously all equally popular. There is the one designed for the (would-be) entrepreneur, manager, business leader who wants to have a top performance, be effective, efficient, rich, afford himself all the luxury goods and follow the fashions that the global market has to offer. The neoliberal spirit that drives this group is however not restricted to them alone: at the end of the year, also a magazine like *CairoScene* crowns their "16 of 2016"—Egypt's "real influencers" (as the URL condenses the article's contents), "groundbreakers making a positive impact" (as the header paragraph specifies), "re-design[ers of] the country's human landscape" (HOSNY & PRIMO). It has become fashionable to show such examples of success—look here, the present situation is not as hopeless as you may think, everything can be improved and be fine if only you think "out of the box" and follow these examples.

Critical voices doubt this optimism very much. A cartoon in *MadàMaṣr*, titled "Destiny" (*al-Maṣīr*), tells a pointed story. Scene 1: a sinking ship. Scene 2: a man who has survived the catastrophe and is now desperately clinging to a plank, drifting in the agitated sea, cries: "Aaaargh! Is this the end?" In this moment, he has a vision (scene 3): the late Ibrāhīm al-Fiqī, a well-known self-help lecturer, smiles at him and assures him: "No! Be optimistic!" (*tafāʾal!*). In the next moment, however (scene 4), al-Fiqī himself is devoured by a shark: "Aaaaaaa!"—the drowning man desperately looking on (Aly GALAL).

Al-Fiqī's books sell well nevertheless, even posthumously. Their topics range from sales techniques to efficient business management, from self-development to overall success. Like his "Pathway to Excellence" (*al-Ṭārīq ilà ʾl-imtiyāz*), also ṬĀHĀ's *il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ* comes as a manual in which the reader is introduced into the "science of happiness" (KENNEY 670) in short, easily digestible chapters, each focussing on one aspect, or step, and giving you very practical advice, taken from everyday life, on what you can and should do. Typically the authors draw their authority from the fact that they are academics—doctors of psychology, ↗**Psychiatrists** (as al-FIQĪ and ṬĀHĀ), or surgeons (as Kīrillus BAHGAT).

Those for whom becoming a successful entrepreneur seems to be too high and unrealistic a goal, have their own gurus. Some are not interested in career and success but feel stressed

nevertheless by the demands and constraints of their daily lives. They are looking for methods to fulfil the many expectations that they feel are put on them: it is not enough these days, for instance, to just be a caring mother, no, you have to be a "super mummy" (al-ĞUNDĪ). Others are looking for orientation and advice about "how to control your feelings after a divorce" and are happy to find a booklet that promises to tell them how "to grow wings" again after such an event in one's life (Raḍwà 'USĀMA). Yet others seek to reach some peace of mind or to balance the materialism of their hectic consumerist present with contemplation, love, and spiritual values (CHAMS). Still others have their—little or big—projects and dreams and know that in order to achieve these, they can and have to do something themselves: to a large degree, they are responsible for their own happiness or failures, they are themselves the architects of their lives. "My dream is that you don't wait […] for someone to make your dreams come true," concludes a booklet that invites you, via exemplary stories, to try to think of "100 Dreams Before You Die" and start to work for their realization (Muḥammad GALĀL 175). Readers welcome the self-helpers' experience, their expertise and guidance. They are eager to read, for instance, that according to Muḥammad Ṭāhā there are two main things most people have to learn: to know themselves and to live themselves. Therefore, the "doctor" advises, or admonishes, you to "get up [and] check your limits" (ṬĀHĀ, chapter 1), learn to discern "your real self [from] your false self" (ch. 2) [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**] and your true, authentic feelings from those that "are not really your feelings" (chapter 5); be aware that your feelings often simply conform to conventions or to what others expect of you, so always try to think "Out of the box" (chapter 8) and beware of "Dangerous relationships" (chapter 6), especially those that impede the sound development and free unfolding of a strong, self-conscious, self-confident personality by threatening you with "the strongest weapon in the history of mankind"—guilt (chapter 13), guilt that is felt, often excessively, due to your upbringing [↗**Father Figures**] and the norms that society or religion—may it speak through a Muslim *shaykh* [↗**In Islam, …**] or a Christian *kāhin* (priest)—want you to obey to; you have to learn to overcome this because the feeling of guilt "will stop you, imprison you, paralyze you, and it will make you repeat the same mistake again" (*ibid.*).

Easily comprehensible language, illustration with concrete situations from everyday life, and examples of successfully completed personal development and mastered challenges are as important here as they are in the books on business management and leadership. Although some readers feel disappointed to a certain degree—for them, Dr. Ṭāhā's approach is too simplistic, too popular; an academic should go deeper, be less repetitive, elaborate more on details—, most agree nevertheless that the psychologist addresses

> important psychological needs and problems that everybody has, and it makes you face these things, and suggests solutions; the author shows you aspects of your personality that you haven't known about so far; you have to read it slowly, for although it is small in size you can benefit a lot,

writes for instance a certain "zahraa esmaile" in her comment on *il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ* on GOODREADS (March 05). As to the question whether or not the vernacular is the adequate language to convey such messages and popularize psychological-psychiatric knowledge, the readership is divided: some find it strange (SHAIMAA, *ibid.*, Feb. 07), some surprising, or are

even "put off" (HALA, *ibid.*, March 12), some would have preferred a mixed style [↗**Language**].

The majority of those who comment on Ṭāhā's book on GoodReads and those who attend the many book signing events of self-helpers seem to be women [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]—perhaps because the pressure on women in general is higher than on men, suggests Dīnā Ibrāhīm SHAʿBĀN, author of *Mudhakkirāt Ǧamīla Saʿīd* (The Memoirs of J.S.—the name translates as "Beauty," the surname as "Happy"), a novel that narrates the story of the successful fight of the female protagonist to live her own self. As if to underline the heroine's difficult starting position, "Beauty" is described as very ugly...

The obstacles Shaʿbān, Ṭāhā and others show as working against self-exploration, self-finding, and self-fulfilment are many. One of the most powerful and difficult to resist under the present circumstances is the temptation to give oneself to passive despair or depression [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. Those who manage to overcome *ikti'āb* often become the heroes and heroines not only of self-help books but also of documentaries about dealing with trauma (like *Jeanne d'Arc Masriya*) or even, in satirical exaggeration, of comedies: Ibrāhīm, one of the protagonists of *ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm*, who suffers from a specific imagined noise haunting him every now and then, succeeds in healing himself by constantly searching for the one sound that was responsible for his trauma; in the end, he can even transform into a superman who turns this terrible sound into a weapon to fight his and his friends' enemy.

Next to *ikti'āb* comes self-delusion. This is to be fought by minute self-exploration and absolute truthfulness to yourself—and perhaps also a good portion of self-irony, as Kīrillus BAHGAT's "The Intellectual Experience of Mama's Boy" (*il-Tagriba il-fikriyya li-rūḥ 'ummuh*), Haytham MUṢṬAFÀ'S *Ikbis-hā bunn* ("Press ground coffee on it [sc. the wound (to stop it from bleeding)]") or 'Īhāb MĀĞID's "For the Losers and Good-for-Nothings" (*Lil-Mawkūs wi-khāyib il-ragā*) show, self-help books that clothe their messages in the garments of the popular *sākhir* style [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. Most self-help books also warn against a lack of steadfastness and suggest as a remedy a sober, realistic analysis not only of yourself but also of your immediate environment—family, friends, colleagues, all may work against you because they represent the demands of society and put the individual under all kinds of constraint and moral pressure [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)]:

> The problem […] is that your life is a collective property (*milk al-ǧamīʿ*). People decide about it as if it were their own life. They decide about your destiny. Your happiness... your marriage... your work... the number of your children. (SHAʿBĀN 88)

> There are people who want to suck all blood out of you, take as much out of you as they can get. And you will always be the giving one. Give, give, give—and lose your blood: you love, accept, allow, listen and understand, pardon, bear... and day by day cut a piece from yourself, offering it as a sacrifice to these people. Every day you pay a high price to please them. And they can't get enough. Never. (GOODREADS, Most popular quotes from ṬĀHĀ's *Khurūg*).

Therefore, you have to learn to say "no":

> Against whom are you allowed to put up limits? Where would these be? When? What is important that your limits are clear, and your territory remains safe. And it is important that you defend it and protect it. Against any harm whatsoever. To define the distance between you and any other person is a basic right you have, and which also others have. Your own psychological home is your property, not anybody else's. (*ibid.*)

And novels that aspire to tell exemplary stories of successful emancipation, like *The Memoirs of Ǧamīla Saʿīd*, indulge in enacting scenes of resistance: after having described how everybody tries to force Ǧamīla into an arranged marriage, the protagonist asserts herself by repeating, over almost three pages, her no, "I will not get married through a traditional marriage, not even if…," culminating in "… not even if I were the last hope for the survival of the human race" (SHAʿBĀN 96).

In its demanding and exhausting fight for and defense of itself, the emancipating self-developing individual will not only welcome guidance from the self-help gurus, but also any serious emotional support from others. The best way to get this support, according to Muḥammad Ṭāhā, is—a relationship!

> Yes, a relationship. A truly human relationship, one that sends out messages that are different from all those false messages that reached you before via education and learning [...] A relationship in which you will experience unconditional love, a deep and stable, lasting love that does not change irrespective of the changes you go through. […] A relationship in which you will feel accepted as a whole, as you are, with all your parts: your weak and impotent moments, sometimes failures […]. A relationship in which there is space for freedom and motion, not constraint, suffocation, distortion, fake feelings. This relationship can be a friendship, or it can be love/marriage, but it may also be a relationship of (professional) caring in the framework of a psychological treatment. […] Is there such a relationship in your life? [No?] So search for it and keep hold of it. Quickly! And until the end of your life. Because this is the way. This is the solution. This is the answer.

With this advice, Ṭāhā sends out a message that is similar to that of *Hībtā* (Hepta), one of the year's blockbusters that encourages people to fall in love, against all odds [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**]. Reactions, too, are similar: While many readers of *il-Khurūg* find Ṭāhā convincing and Andeel holds that *Hepta*'s romantic optimism, on the one hand, serves an important task in a depressing world, on the other hand he warns from falling prey to one's longing for emotional support and fulfilment (ANDEEL, Arabic version), and a number of comments on *il-Khurūg* doubt very much that love can "do miracles" (GOODREADS, comment section).

Critical voices do not stop at this point. They notice that the self-helpers, while inviting to think "out of the box" and act "against all odds," actually are much less individualistic and unconventional than the majority of their readers and viewers obviously believe. "I think it's a superficial book, deserves only 1 star," writes a certain Hala in her comment on *il-Khurūg* (GOODREADS, March 12), and a Samar Muḥammad confesses to be disappointed because, in reality, for her, nothing in the book is genuinely "out of the box" at all—rather, the texts come close to "Facebook postings" (*ibid.*, May 28), void formula that can be filled with whatever the individual reader may find to make sense for him/her, and while the advice

offered in the books may help to develop a certain self-confidence, all blame is put on the individual and his/her assumed adversaries; there is no questioning of the general misery and crisis and who might be responsible for *that*. Yet, the books are widely read and the TV programs eagerly watched: the commonplaces are taken for wisdom and broad experience, and the fact that most self-helpers draw on all kinds of sources to support their argument—Islamic, Christian, Buddhistic, Gandhi, Bo Derek, Charlie Chaplin, Saʿd Zaghlūl… "I believe it is possible to learn anything, from anyone, anywhere," the late Dr. al-Fiqī used to say (al-Fiqī 2008: 66)—, is not taken as illegitimate randomness but as proof of general validity.

Thus, the approaches of these—mainly secularist—self-helpers are hardly more individualistic and unconventional than their Islamic counterparts which mostly (though not exclusively) refer to Islamic sources for textual support and, though often coming with fresh and "daring," unorthodox, out-of-the-box interpretations, usually do not preach opposition to tradition but rather methods of smooth accommodation to it. A prototype of such young and smart Islamic self-help gurus is the dynamic TV imam Ḥātim al-Shinnāwī, called *"Mawlānā"* (Our Master), in Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī's movie with the same title. Good-looking (and therefore especially liked by women), always smiling, always witty, the protagonist of the TV show *Ifham dīnak* (Understand your religion!) has no problems to justify, on a question from the audience, his own "effeminate" make-up with a reference to the Prophet's *sunna* or to declare that the Prophet, had he lived today, would without doubt have allowed himself and his companions to drive a Mercedes. Imam Ḥātim may have been modelled after the "real" 37-year-old Muṣṭafà Ḥusnī who in many respects seems to have taken the late Ibrāhīm al-Fiqī's place. Muṣṭafà Ḥusnī is a well-known preacher who delivers weekly sermons and lessons at several big mosques in Greater Cairo, has made himself a name as an energetic member of charitable organizations combating drug addiction and propagating blood donation for children, and is also remembered for his "A Life Without Smoking" campaign. Mostly, however, his fame rests on the many highly popular books he has written, as well as on dozens of "young Islamic" radio and TV programs that combine televangelism with personality building. Their titles show not only an orientation towards God (*Nidāʾ al-raḥmān* "The Call of the Most Gracious," *ʾUḥibbuka rabbī* "I love you, my Lord"), but also—and perhaps even more—to life in This world: "The Best (most beautiful) Life" (*Aḥlà ḥayāt*), "The School of Love" (*Madrasat al-ḥubb*), "The Charm of This World" (*Siḥr al-dunyā*), "A New Human Being" (*Insān ǧadīd*). The same combination is repeated also in Ramaḍān: While a program on Radio 90.90 FM is called *ʿĀʾid ʾilà llāh* "Returning to God," another one, on TV, is dedicated to "The Art of Life" (*Fann al-ḥayāt*). His books are on display everywhere, in new printings, at the Cairo Book Fair, particularly *ʿĪsh il-laḥẓa* (Live the Moment), a reprint from last year's edition, which in its turn was made from a successful TV program with the same title, broadcast in 2014. "Our life is nothing but a number of moments that keep changing us day by day. So, always be with God and live the moment as God wants you to live it," is the frame under which moments of "Love between husband and wife" are treated as well as instants of "Sadness," "Despair," or "Longing for Disobedience/Sin (*maʿṣiya*)."

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Language ♦ Psychiatrists

CODES – Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individual *vs.* Collective) ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck)

References

Written sources

Du'ā' 'ABD AL-RAḤMĀN. *Iktashaftu zawǧī fī 'l-'utūbīs*, 13th reprint. Cairo: 'Aṣīr al-kutub, 2015..

ANDEEL (Andīl). "Hepta: Do you need to learn how to love?" *MadàMaṣr*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/29/feature/culture/hepta-do-you-need-to-learn-how-to-love/> (as of Apr. 29, 2016) / "Hībtā: ¸Muḥāḍarat 'al-muḥn'." *Ibid.*, May 3, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/05/03/feature/ثقافة/هيبتا-محاضرة-المحن/> (as of Apr. 11, 2018).

Kīrillus BAHGAT. *Il-tagriba il-fikriyya li-rūḥ 'ummuh*. Cairo: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

BĪYS, Ālān + Bārbārā [Barbara & Allan PEASE]. *al-Marǧa' al-'akīd fī Lughat al-ǧasad.* Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, 2004, and xth [2016?] edition. [Translation of *The Definitive Book of Body Language: The Hidden Meaning Behind People's Gestures and Expressions*, 2004].

CHAMS, Dalia. "Le soufisme New Age des salles de yoga." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 18 (2018): 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.5617/jais.6520>.

al-FIQĪ, Ibrāhīm. *al-Mafātīḥ al-'ashara lil-naǧāḥ*. Cairo: Dār Aǧyāl, 2008 and later [posthum] editions.

— . *al-Ṭarīq ilà 'l-imtiyāz* [The Pathway to Excellence]. Cairo: Samā lil-nashr wal-tawzī', 2014 and later [posthum] editions.

Aly GALAL ['Alī Galāl]. "Destiny." [cartoon] February 26, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/26/cartoon/u/destiny/> and <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/02/26/cartoon/u/المصير/>.

Muḥammad GALĀL. *100 [Mi'at] ḥulm qabl al-mawt.* Gizah: Nūn lil-nashr wal-tawzī', 2016.

GLĀDWĪL, Mālkūlm [Malcolm Gladwell]. *Ṭarfat 'ayn: quwwat al-tafkīr bi-dūn tafkīr*, xth edition. Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, [n.d.; 2016?]. [Translation of *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, 2005].

GOODREADS. Presentation of Ṭāhā, *il-Khurūg*, with most popular quotes and comments on the book, 2016, <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/28952411> and <https://www.goodreads.com/work/ quotes/49177441> (as of May 16, 2018).

al-ǦUNDĪ [Gindī], Riḥāb. *Sūbir māmīz: yawmiyyāt zawǧa 'ādiyya.* [Subtitle on the cover: *Mudhakkirāt kūmīdiyya ḥilmannatīshiyya iftikāsiyya min ḥayāt zawǧa wa-'umm miṣriyya*]. Cairo: Mu'assasat 'Ibdā', 2016.

Nirmīn ḤILMĪ. *'Aḥyā' walākin...* Cairo: Mu'assasat 'Ibdā', 2015 [publ. 2016].

HOSNY, Farah, and Valentina PRIMO. "16 of 2016: The Egyptian Men and Women Changing the Country." *CairoSCENE*, December 30, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/16-of-2016-Egypt-s-Real-Influencers>.

Muṣṭafà ḤUSNĪ. *'Īsh il-laḥẓa / Live the moment*, 5th reprint. Giza: 'Aṭlas, 2016 [[1]2015]. (Silsilat Binā' al-'abd al-rabbānī).

KENNEY, Jeffrey T. "Selling success, nurturing the self: Self-help literature, capitalist values, and the sacralization of subjective life in Egypt." *IJMES*, 47 (2015): 663-80, <doi:10.1017/S0020743815000926>.

KŪFĪ, Stīfin Ār. [Steven R. Covey]. *al-'Ādāt al-sab' lil-nās al-'akthar fa"āliyya: Durūs fa"āla fī 'l-taghyīr al-shakhṣī*, xth reprint. Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, [n.d., 2016?; [1]2004]. [Translation of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, 1989].

KŪNDŪ, Mārī [Marie Kondō]. *Siḥr al-tartīb: al-Fann al-yābānī fī 'l-tanẓīm wa-'izālat al-fawḍà*, x[th] reprint. Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, [n.d., 2016?]. [Translation of *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*, 2014?].

'Īhāb MĀǦID. *Lil-Mawkūs wi-khāyib il-ragā: sikka lil-nagāḥ.* Cairo: al-Sirāǧ, 2016.

MĀKSWĪL, Ǧūn Sī. [John C. Maxwell]. *al-Qāda al-ǧayyidūn yaṭraḥūn 'as'ila ǧayyida*. Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, [n.d., 2016?; [1]2015]. [Translation of *Good Leaders Ask Great Questions: Your Foundation for Successful Leadership*, 2014].

— . *Qā'id al-360 darağa*, x[th] reprint. Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, [n.d., 2016?; [1]2012]. [Translation of *The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization*, 2005, 2011].

Haytham MUṢṬAFÀ. *Ikbis-hā bunn: kitāb sākhir.* Cairo: Mu'assasat 'Ibdā', 2016.

NOGOUMFM. "Kalām khafīf: Liqā' ma' il-garrāh wil-kātib Kīrullus Bahgat." *YouTube*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bscXzgYXHDA> (last accessed May 28, 2018).

RŪBĪNZ, Antūnī [Anthony (Tony) Robbins]. *'Ayqiẓ quwwāk al-khafiyya: kayfa tataḥakkam fawran bi-mustaqbalika al-dhihnī wa'l-'āṭifī wa'l-ǧismānī wa'l-mālī*. Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, 2017 (and earlier editions). [Translation of *Awaken the Giant Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical and Financial Destiny!*, 1992].

Dīnā Ibrāhīm SHA'BĀN. *Mudhakkirāt Ǧamīla Sa'īd*. Cairo: Dār al-Ibdā', 2016.

Muḥammad ṬĀHĀ. *il-Khurūg 'an il-naṣṣ*. Cairo: Dār Tūyā, 2016.

Raḍwà 'USĀMA. *'An tanbut laki 'ağniḥat: 'idārat mashā'ir al-ṭalāq.* Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2016.

ZĪGLĀR, Zīg [Zig Ziglar]. *Qimmat al-'adā': kayfa tunmī al-tamayyuz fī nafsika wa'l-'ākharīn?* x[th] reprint Cairo: Maktabat Ǧarīr, [n.d., 2016?; [1]2015]. [Translation of *Top Performance: How to Develop Excellence in Yourself and Others*, 1986].

Movies

'Alī Mi'zah wa-Ibrāhīm (Ali, the Goat, and Ibrahim). By Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif El Bendary). Egypt, France 2016.

Hībtā: al-Muḥāḍara al-'akhīra (Hepta: The Last Lecture). By Hādī al-Bāǧūrī (Hadi El Bagoury, dir.) and Wā'il Ḥamdī (Wael Hamdy, screenplay), based on the novel by Muḥammad Ṣādiq (Mohamed Sadeq). Egypt 2016.

Jeanne d'Arc Masriya | Egyptian Jeanne d'Arc. Documentary by Īmān Kāmil / Iman Kamel. Egypt, Germany, Kuwait, Qatar 2016.

Mawlānā (The Preacher). By Magdī Aḥmad 'Alī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). Egypt, U.A.E. 2016.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Social Media

By Albrecht Hofheinz

"If a single story surfaces on a new torture case inside an Egyptian prison, it is quickly buried under piles of entries and clicks on the new shapes of Kim Kardashian's butt." This is how writer Aḥmad Nāǧī sums up his view on the effects of social media as Egypt is about to enter the "Year of Youth". The virtual space that could have been the last bastion of freedom for hard-pressed young people, he argues, has been turned into a mega shopping mall. What is trending there is the product of social media companies liberally funded by Gulf shaykhs who act as agents of their "Western gods", supporting the coalition of the military and forces of the old regime that had crushed the revolution on the streets and deprived "the young of all spaces, even virtual reality. The internet has been subjected to surveillance, and a single tweet can get you in jail" (Naji) [↗**Voice vs. Silence**].

As if to confirm this picture, the administrators of 23 Facebook pages are arrested the same day Aḥmad Nāǧī's text is published to an international audience (Naji); simultaneously, Facebook's "Free Basics" service, which offers rudimentary mobile internet for free to lower-income people, is being terminated by the authorities since the company, according to insider sources, "would not allow the government to circumvent the service's security to conduct surveillance" (Abutaleb & Menn) [↗**Mobile Phones**]. Commentators generally see this in the context of a wider crackdown on potentially oppositional voices ahead of the fifth anniversary of the 25 January uprising [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. On the streets, police continue to randomly check people's Facebook accounts, arresting anyone suspected of having pro-revolutionary sympathies (Atef).

Voices of dissent, however, persevere. When a leading member of the Doctors' Syndicate is detained and the prosecutor asks him if he had taken part in "the violent events of 25 January 2011", there is a backlash as the hashtag *#Anā_shārakt_fī_thawrit_yanāyir* ("I participated in the January Revolution") is launched on Twitter. Hours later, it has been used over 10000 times, "with public persons, political figures and average pro-revolution citizens expressing pride" in their involvement (El-Gundy). Soon, the hashtag spreads also to Facebook where a dedicated page is created under this title. The following day, a new hashtag, *#Awqifū_Nāǧī_Shaḥḥāta* ("Stop Nāǧī Shaḥḥāta"), attempts to rally support for the removal of the regime's most notorious judge, nicknamed "The Butcher" for issuing mass death sentences and other extremely harsh verdicts against political opponents, often after only a few minutes of hearing (*Mada Masr* [a]) [↗**Court Trials**].

Given the persistence of critical voices and their repeated success in raising issues of concern to the public eye—sometimes to the point where they influence decision making (such as when Justice Minister Aḥmad al-Zind is dismissed from office over his remark, widely lambasted on social media, that he would arrest the Prophet himself were he to agitate against the state)—regime supporters are increasingly concerned that they no longer live in a "state where law and justice reign and where real work is appreciated", but in a "Facebook state" directed by "social media brigades" spreading false rumours and extremist propaganda (*al-Jazīra Mubāshir*). This is described as "a real burden" to progress, destroying society

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *249–*256
© Albrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, NO

from within by keeping users "mentally retarded" and busy with gossip and trivialities, unable to develop proper thinking. Even ageing pop star Muḥammad Munīr chimes in, lecturing a concert audience on how Americans and Europeans "used to be infatuated with social media, but […] have now overcome this" [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**], and urging young people to go "read and study" instead (*ibid.*).

The view that social media (usually identified with Facebook and Twitter) are a major factor threatening public order is widespread in Egypt and not uncommon in Tunisia either. "Some of the young circulate information of unknown origin, most often completely devoid of any truth, and this can cause crises and problems in the street and in public opinion" and "incite people to violence and terrorism" (ʿABD AL-MAĞĪD). In Tunisia, such anxieties are linked not only to general concerns regarding the uncontrolled spread of jihadist propaganda but are also due to the fact that the use of Facebook by groups and individuals fighting to change the status and improve the rights of marginalised members of society (LGBT, racial and religious minorities, atheists, etc.) is attracting particular public attention (BILʿĪD; *Shams*; YASMINE; *Freedom House*; *AsTuSoMi*). While the Tunisian government, however, at least occasionally takes a progressive stance on such matters, Egyptian authorities react with a much heavier hand (*Tekiano*). President Sisi himself has the problem high on the agenda when he gives a widely televised speech to the nation in April (*al-Waṭan News*). Of the sixteen issues he addresses, three have to do with social media. As calls rise there for street demonstrations denouncing Egypt's ceding of two ↗**Red Sea Islands** to Saudi Arabia, and against the backdrop of continued media interest in the murder of Giulio Regeni [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**], Sisi sounds the alarm against organised campaigns on the internet ("electronic brigades") aiming at undermining the security and stability of the state (*Mada Masr* [b]; RASHWĀN); rebukes journalists and the public in general for uncritically relying on social media sources; and warns citizens to be careful in what they post (YT "Lā taʿtamid ʿalà shabakāt al-tawāṣul al-iğtimāʿī"). "You don't know the harm of disclosing everything without limits. […] There are evil people among us doing this work and questioning the state in everything it does. […] There have been attempts to shake confidence in everything good, which may lead us to national suicide" (*Mada Masr* [b]). This cannot be tolerated, he thunders. "I can go on the net with two web brigades […], take over those pages and turn them into my own" (*Infirād*; ELHADIDI).

"Electronic brigades" is a label cast about by both sides of the political divide against their respective ideological opponents. News one does not like is "false news", disseminated by organised 'brigades' taking orders, depending on your stance, either from the regime or from the Muslim Brotherhood and their Qatari backers (ABDEL SALAM) [↗**True vs. False**]. In November, Facebook posts are leaked by insiders confirming that there indeed are coordinated efforts to engineer public opinion through targeted campaigns on social media, campaigns that are then taken up by pro-government newspapers such as *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ* (SALEH). "They have sold their conscience", scoff critics (al-MAGHRIBĪ). No—"no one should be surprised that I'm a supporter of this regime", retorts prominent journalist and social media star Ibrāhīm al-Ǧārḥī who is identified as the leading voice of the closed Facebook group *Ittiḥād Muʾayyidī ʾl-Dawla* ("Union of Supporters of the State") that attempts to coordinate such social media campaigns.

> "I work for the sake of my country. […] Put simply, I'm a 'part' of this regime. I participated in rallying support for the June 30 Revolution, and I continue to work for what I believe in with all the means at my disposal. What I do to support this regime publicly is the same as what I am doing clandestinely." (al-HINDĪ)

The debate about the nature and real influence of such 'electronic committees' rages throughout the year but remains inconclusive (*ibid*.). "Egyptian satirist Muhammad Zugshbi said he does not believe that the satirical social media pages were shut down because of the 'web brigades,' indicating that Sisi has a large number of supporters who can pressure and block the pages without receiving any direction from the regime" (ELHADIDI). Certainly, pro-regime voices supporting the State (*Dawlağī Dawlağiyya bi-kulli fakhr* "State minion and proud" is the slogan of one such page), the Army, the Police, My Country and the Great Egyptian People abound on social media. A page such as *Ḍidd al-Ikhwān* ("Against the Brotherhood"), which holds that nothing is as bad for Egypt as the Muslim Brotherhood: not the inflation, not the dollar crisis, not corruption, has over a million followers on Facebook (*Ḍidd al-Ikhwān*).

Such figures, however, are not enough to unsettle the entrenched opinion that social media are dominated by negative critique. Right after a ↗**Tuk-tuk** driver's rant about the failure of the state to secure a decent living for its citizens turns into the year's most viral video, pro-regime voices are therefore eager to grasp the opportunity to dress down the clamorous criticasters. "'The son of the skilled plumber' eclipses social media 'pessimists'", headlines *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ* when the following Facebook post by a 12-year old appears on the net (al-MAṢRĪ):

> "Dad's a highly skilled plumber. He has accrediting certificates in his field. Dad is not expensive. Dad really loves his job and can do all the new stuff. Dad gives you a guarantee on what he does, so no maintenance worries! Dad travels wherever in Egypt, any province. This is dad's number 01003697189. Dad's the best!"

Over several months, the boy publishes numerous copies of this post to a wide variety of Facebook groups where he receives a number of heartfelt likes and shares in the double-digit range. The post spreads beyond his immediate network, however, and allegedly reaches over 50 000 people. At any rate, to those who want to see a more 'positive' internet, the significance of this example exceeds simple statistics, so the boy does not only get a newspaper article but is invited to the country's leading talk-show "10 P.M." on prime time TV where he is held up as a shining example of filial affection and sense of responsibility, in contrast to all those "who we are used to see throwing Molotov cocktails, exchanging insults, cheating in school […], spreading false rumours, and using social media in a bad way." "We'd hope to see such purity (*naqāʾ*) and decorum (*adab*) in everyone!" (AL-DEMIRDĀSH; YT "Bi-barāʾat al-aṭfāl ashaʿla mawāqiʿ al-tawāṣul al-iğtimāʿī") [↗**Father Figures**, ↗**High School Exams**].

Pending a change in people's conduct, meanwhile, lawmakers in Egypt try to curb the "Facebook chaos" by pushing forward the longstanding parliamentary debate on a cybercrime bill. Social media, so the rationale, "need to be subject to some regulation", and "the affiliations of every Facebook page admin and his political orientation should be made known". The bill is passed in September but by the end of the year is still awaiting Cabinet

approval (HAMAMA). In Tunisia, on the other hand, efforts to introduce a new cybercrime law to replace provisions from the Ben Ali-era face criticism from rights groups for not going far enough to protect the constitutionally enshrined freedom of expression (*Freedom House*).

Their controversial evaluation notwithstanding, Facebook and Twitter are constantly used by print and broadcast media in both countries as sources for what is being debated, what is buzzing, what is 'hot' in the public sphere. Trending hashtags as well as journalists' own impressions from following social media serve as indicators. The expression *tadāwala / ʿallaqa ruwwād (ṣafaḥāt) mawāqiʿ al-tawāṣul al-ijtimāʿī* ("social media leaders circulated / commented on") appears very commonly in the media. These *ruwwād* are thereby stylised as a force of their own, an impression strengthened by the fact that they often remain anonymous in the reports. For all his criticism, President Sisi himself admits that social media do provide a means to gauge the mood of the population and that he is following them closely (*Ṣawt al-Masīḥī al-Ḥurr*). And like many other prominent people and institutions who regularly choose their social media accounts as the first channel to publish statements, comments and opinions, Sisi uses Facebook in the same way: his announcement that he plans to run for a second term "if the will of the Egyptian people requires me to do so" is first made known on his official Facebook page. Pro-regime TV host Aḥmad Mūsā then launches a Twitter poll "Do you support the candidacy of President Sisi for a second term?" To his consternation, the poll quickly reaches 81% for a no, so he shuts it down after 48 hours and blames Muslim Brotherhood supporters residing in Qatar and Turkey ("traitors and foreign agents") for this "deceptive" result. "Elections in Egypt are not run from Facebook or Twitter", he grumbles. "The typical Egyptian citizen and the large majority of Egyptians are those who cast their votes at ballot boxes. Social media users only represent 1% of those who actually go to the ballot, and the 97% of voters are a broad base that really loves the Egyptian flag" (AL-ṬAWĀNISĪ; HASSAN).

The climate of mutual suspicion between supporters and opponents of the regime is conducive to people assuming the worst of their opponents, suspecting them of all kinds of misdeeds, and easily judging news and reports according to whether they conform to this preconceived image. The architecture and the dynamics of social media help to entrench this tendency. Thus, when a medical student is reported to have died jumping out of the window of a brothel (masked as a 'health studio') to escape a morality police raid, social media are abuzz with treating the story as a cover-up for the police having murdered a suspected member of the Muslim Brotherhood (QURĀʿA) [↗**Clash**, ↗**The Policeman Criminal**].

Social media are thus both *denounced* and *embraced* with equal fervour according to one's own interest and perspective—sometimes, as Aḥmad Mūsā demonstrates, almost simultaneously. They are denounced as a "new nuclear bomb" eroding the fabric of society and undermining the state; as being ineffective in bringing about a revolution or at least real political change; as mere entertainment and a waste of time; as a luring temptation corrupting morality; as a big shopping mall steered by commercial interests (*al-Jazīra Mubāshir*). And they are *embraced* as the prime outlet for spreading information, used by the weak and the powerful alike; as an important source of news for both journalists and the networked public; and as the last bastion of free expression valiantly defended by the few.

Do social media deserve such an accolade? Is Facebook really "the main motor of public opinion in Egypt", as many seem to believe (ʿABD al-MAĞĪD)? "Most Egyptians now no

longer follow the huge number of satellite channels (over 400 now) but keep up with news and important updates through Facebook only", a parliamentarian sighs. This is at odds with statistical research showing that "63% of Arab youth claim they get their news from television", 45% from curated online news-channels, and only 32% from social media—on a par with "family and friends" (30%), but ahead of the really old media, newspapers and radio (17% each) (*ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller*; RADCLIFFE). It is, however, certain that social media have a large user base: overall internet penetration in Egypt has reached 60%, in Tunisia 50%, and almost all of them are on social media, primarily Facebook and YouTube, but also WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter (DENNIS et al.). The main purposes for using social media remain, however, communication with others and entertainment. News and sports trail behind. Many people refrain from engaging in political issues on the social web; 75% of Egyptians and 63% of Tunisians admit to having modified their internet behaviour due to concerns over privacy and government monitoring (RADCLIFFE). Any quantitative conclusions based on social media trends must therefore be regarded with caution. When the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera) unveils *Nes'alak*, an app "to allow smartphone users to ask questions, respond to polls or solicit responses", it makes sure to caution that online polls cannot be regarded as representative but that they may be "an indicator of the citizen's feelings about some of the questions he is asked" (MOSTAFA).

Even when staying aloof from big politics, however, social media users risk running afoul of ruling sensitivities. Tunisians may have come to enjoy the highest degree of freedom of expression among all Arab countries, but conservative sectors of civil society often try to whip up public indignation against what they consider promulgation of immorality (*Réalités Online*) [↗**LGBT**]. In Egypt, authorities regularly claim that freedom of expression is a guaranteed right and that surveillance measures only aim at stopping terrorism; in practice, however, any criticism of authorities, at any level, may run one into trouble. Repeatedly, "people working in various state-owned and private institutions have been penalized for expressing their personal views on Facebook". Ḥilwān University warns students and staff not to write negatively about the university on Facebook, threatening them with exclusion from the exams and other disciplinary measures. At the University of al-Manṣūra, a professor faces interrogation for criticising the quality of education. "I didn't use insulting words and never incited violence. The problem is that my post got thousands of likes and shares, and was viewed mostly by the student community, which angered the administration." A student at the same university falls victim to a Facebook prank and has to apologize to the disciplinary committee "for something I didn't do" before being readmitted to the exams (El DIN). An Egyptian poet is jailed for three years over a tweet criticising the cruel methods of slaughtering sheep on the highest of Islamic holidays (FRENKEL & ATEF). These are just a few examples for how social media postings are getting people in trouble. "If you live in Egypt, anything you post can get you arrested", a twenty-year-old university student describes the situation. NGOs have lost count of the number of people arrested and often disappeared based on statements they made on social media (*ibid.*) [↗**Disappearances**]. Is the authorities' memory of the 2011 "Facebook revolution" to blame? The cybercrime law proposed by parliament would make "a call for protests on Facebook punishable by immediate imprisonment". And "if you accuse anyone in a post without solid proof of that accusation, you can also be sent to jail". Facebook is regarded as a "conspiracy from the

West", allowing "any loser" to rally support for a protest against the rightful authorities, thus sowing strife and "damaging the country". Families often concur. "Damn Facebook and Twitter and all these social media sites that bring us nothing but trouble," explodes a relative of the admin of one of these contested pages. "I hope that the government just closes it all down." So while the twenty-year-old student believes that "it just feels out of touch for a government to say that they want people […] not [to] have discussions on Facebook or whatever. It's become part of our culture", she is under family pressure after having published a post criticising careless renovation measures at a local historical building. "My aunt saw the post and called my mom and told her, 'You better get your daughter to take it down right away. People might get the wrong idea. […] Welcome to today's Egypt."

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Father Figures ♦ High School Exams ♦ LGBT ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Tuk-tuk

CODES – Inferiority vs. Superiority ♦ True vs. False ♦ Voice vs. Silence

References

ʿABD AL-MAĞĪD, Muḥammed. "Thawrat al-nuwwāb ʿalà 'FaceBook.'" *Parlamany*, April 6, 2016, <http://parlmany.youm7.com/News/7/61798/#ثورة-النواب-على-قانون-فيس-بوك>.

ABDEL SALAM, Mohamed. "Hisham Geneina's Trial Is a Tool to Deter Sharing Information about Corruption within State Institutions." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 13, 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/index.cfm?fa=64852&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTVROaVptTTJNMlprTXpFMSIsInQiOiJ6M0x2YXQ2Wk5uWGhOT2UwVFhlaFVkMzAwTDhlQXljZXZWOW9EQ3ZwelNONTlGMmo3bjFxZ1JRTzRHRGtlNm5kZnIwaXdKeThQWjZkUnRsWW4wc3NCbWR5MlVvamwwK05VY01UN3VOTURiZz0ifQ==>.

ABUTALEB, Yasmeen, and Joseph MENN. "Exclusive: Egypt Blocked Facebook Internet Service over Surveillance – Sources." *Reuters*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-egypt-idUSKCN0WY3JZ>.

[*ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller* =] N. N. "Inside the Hearts and Minds of Arab Youth." *Arab Youth Survey 2016 Presentation*, published by ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, April 11, 2016, <https://www.slideshare.net/BMGlobalNews/arab-youth-survey-2016-presentation>.

[*AsTuSoMi* =] L'Association Tunisienne de Soutien Des Minorités. Facebook Page, n.d. [2016], <https://www.facebook.com/AsTuSoMi/>.

ATEF, Maged. "Egypt's Police Are Raiding Homes to Check Random People's Facebook Accounts." *BuzzFeed News*, January 20, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/magedatef/egyptian-police-are-performing-random-facebook-checks-ahead>.

BILʿĪD, Nuhà. "Hal najaḥ al-ʿilām al-Tūnīsī fī ikhtibār al-ḥurriyya?" *Ajo*, May 25, 2016, <http://ajo-ar.org/الإعلام-السياسة/هل-نجح-الإعلام-التونسي-في-إختبار-الحري>.

AL-DEMIRDĀSH, Muḥammad. "Bi'l-fīdiyō: ṣāḥib ashhar bōst ʿalà 'FaceBook': 'Mā-kuntish mutawaqqiʿ radd al-fiʿl.'" *Vetogate*, October 24, 2016, <https://www.vetogate.com/2423802>.

DENNIS, Everette, Justin MARTIN, Robb WOOD, and Marium SAEED. "Media Use in the Middle East 2016: A Six-Nation Survey." Northwestern University in Qatar, 2017, <http://www.mideastmedia.org/survey/2016/uploads/file/NUQ_Media_Use_2016_Final_Full_Demo.pdf>.

[*Ḍidd al-Ikhwān* =] N. N. "Facebook Post." *Ḍidd al-Ikhwān*, n.d., <https://www.evernote.com/shard/s612/nl/121224666/42cd5907-2a7c-44ed-8deb-66ca05f25255?title=%E2%80%8E%D8%B6%D8%AF%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%E2%80%8E%20-%20Facebook>.

El Din, Mai. "From Students to Judges, No One's Facebook Is Safe." *Mada Masr*, April 7, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/04/07/feature/politics/from-students-to-judges-no-ones-facebook-is-safe/>.

Elhadidi, Sayed."Egyptian Authorities Ban Social Media Satire Pages." *Al-Monitor*, August 21, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-government-close-facebook-satire-pages-sisi.html>.

[*Freedom House* =] N. N. "Tunisia 2016 Country Profile." *Freedom House*, n.d., <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2016/tunisia>.

Frenkel, Sheera, and Maged Atef. "This Is Why Facebook Has Egyptians Terrified." *BuzzFeed News*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/sheerafrenkel/this-is-how-egypts-love-affair-with-facebook-turned-into-all>.

El-Gundy, Zeinab. "'I Participated in January Revolution' Tops Twitter Trends in Egypt." *al-Ahrām*, January 17, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/181235.aspx>.

Hamama, Mohamed. "Egypt's New Cybercrime Bill Could Send You to Prison." *Mada Masr*, October 12, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/10/12/feature/u/egypts-new-cybercrime-bill-could-send-you-to-prison/>.

Hassan, Khalid. "Twitter Poll Spells Rejection for Second Sisi Term." *Al-Monitor*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/egypt-poll-moussa-twitter-sisi-second-term.html>.

[Ḥilwān University =] N. N. Facebook Post. *Helwan University*, March 31, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/shard/s612/nl/121224666/0218eb41-7609-4e41-b7ce-d8e1b8691e87?title=Comments%20re%20Helwan%20University%20warning%20students%20not%20to%20write%20negatively%20about%20the%20university%20on%20Facebook>.

al-Hindī, Ḥusām. "Suqūṭ ūlà katā'ib 'taqfīl al-internet' [...]." *Sāsa Post*, February 7, 2016, <http://www.sasapost.com/ibrahim-elgarhi-and-electronic-committees/>.

Ibrāhīm al-Ǧārḥī = Ibrahim Elgarhi. Facebook Profile, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/GarhiOfficialPage/posts/10154528473298046>.

[*Infirād* =] N. N. "Al-Sīsī: Anā mumkin bi-'katībatayn' adkhul 'alà 'l-net wa-a'milhā dāyra maḳfūla." *Infirād*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.innfrad.com/News/15/163750/السيسى-أنا-ممكن-بـــكتيبتين-أدخل-على-النت-وأعملها-دايرة-مقفولة->.

[*Ittiḥād Mu'ayyidī 'l-Dawla* =] Ittiḥād Mu'ayyidī 'l-Dawla. Facebook Group, n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/groups/183695988747963/>.

[*Al-Jazīra Mubāshir* =] N. N. "Taṣā'ud qalaq mu'ayyidī al-niẓām al-Miṣrī min 'Jumhūriyyat Facebook.'" *Al-Jazīra Mubāshir*, March 17, 2016, <http://mubasher.aljazeera.net/news/تصاعد-قلق-مؤيدي-النظام-المصري-من-جمهورية-فيسبوك>.

[*Mada Masr* (a) =] N. N. "Social Media Users Rally to 'Stop' Infamous Judge Nagy Shehata." *Mada Masr*, January 18, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/01/18/news/u/social-media-users-rally-to-stop-infamous-judge-nagy-shehata/>.

[*Mada Masr* (b) =] N. N. "Sisi to Egyptians: I Haven't Let You down or Deserted You." *Mada Masr*, April 13, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/04/13/news/u/sisi-to-egyptians-i-havent-let-you-down-or-deserted-you/>.

al-Maghribī, Muṣṭafà. "Khālid Abū al-Naǧā: "Katā'ib al-Sīsī al-elektrōniyya bā'ū ḍamā'irahum." *Maṣr al-'Arabiyya*, May 13, 2016, <http://www.masralarabia.com/سوشيال-ميديا/1058717-خالد-أبو-النجا-كتائب-السيسي-الإلكترونية-باعوا-ضمائرهم>.

al-MAṢRĪ, Rāmī. "Ibn 'al-sabbāk al-shāṭir ʔawī' yatafawwaq 'alà 'mutashā'imī' mawāqi' al-tawāṣul […]." *al-Yawm al-Sābi'*, October 23, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/10/23/ابن-السباك-الشاطر-أوى-يتفوق-على-متشائمى-مواقع-التواصل-الطفل/>.

MOSTAFA, Amr. "How Credible Are Egypt's Online Polls?" *al-Monitor*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/egypt-online-polls-credible-sisi.html>.

NAJI, Ahmed. "Farewell to the Youth." *Mada Masr*, January 2, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/01/02/opinion/u/farewell-to-the-youth/>, orig. Arabic: Aḥmad NĀǦĪ. "Wadā'an lil-shabāb." *MadaMasr*, December 18, 2015, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2015/12/18/opinion/u/وداعاً-للشباب>.

QURĀ'A, Ibrāhīm. "'Al-Niyāba': 'Ṭālib ṭibb 'Ayn Shams alqà bi-nafsihī min shubbāk nādī (da'āra) ba'da mudāhamat al-shurṭa.'" *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, August 31, 2016.

RADCLIFFE, Damian. "Social Media in the Middle East: The Story of 2016." December, 2016, <https://damianradcliffe.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/social-media-in-the-middle-east-the-story-of-2016-final.pdf>.

RASHWĀN, Nūr. "'al-Sīsī' yuḥadhdhir min ḥurūb al-ǧīl al-rābi' wa'l-khāmis: 'Fī katā'ib elektrōniyya wi-qiṣṣa kibīra bi-tit'imil.'" *Shurūq News*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=13042016&id=21da29a8-0ec4-4b75-8a90-fcdefa406ff9>.

[*Réalités Online* =] N. N. "Liberté d'expression : où en est la Tunisie ?" *Réalités Online*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.realites.com.tn/2016/04/liberte-dexpression-ou-en-est-la-tunisie/>.

SALEH, Khaled Refat. Facebook Post. November 5, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/khaledrefatofficial/posts/10209253331264318>.

[*Ṣawt al-Masīḥī al-Ḥurr* =] N. N. "Awwal radd min al-Sīsī 'alà ḥālat 'sukhṭ al-shāri' al-Miṣrī.'" *Ṣawt al-Masīḥī al-Ḥurr*, October 14, 2016, <https://www.light-dark.net/t848123>.

[*Shams* =] Facebook Post. *Shams – Pour la dépénalisation de l'homosexualité en Tunisie*. May 21, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/lgbtrightstunisia/posts/ahmed-ben-amor-est-lun-des-vice-pr%C3%A9sidents-de-lorganisation-shams-pour-la-d%C3%A9p%C3%A9na/491824044334580/>.

AL-ṬAWANISI, Islām. "Ta'līq Aḥmad Mūsà 'alà istiftā' 'Twītter' 'an sha'biyyat al-Ra'īs al-Sīsī." *al-Balad*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.elbalad.news/2381116>.

[*Tekiano* =] N. N. "Mehdi Ben Gharbia présente des excuses à Sabrine Ngoy." *Tekiano*, October 10, 2016, <https://www.tekiano.com/2016/10/10/mehdi-ben-gharbia-presente-des-excuses-a-sabrine-ngoy/>.

[*al-Waṭan News* =] N. N. "16 Risāla li-'al-Sīsī.'" *al-Waṭan News*, 14 April 2016, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1094375>.

YASMINE, Samar. Facebook Post, October 5, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10206340601868913&set=a.1044027915947&type=3&theater>.

[YT "Bi-barā'at al-aṭfāl ash'ala mawāqi' al-tawāṣul al-iǧtimā'ī" =] "Bi-barā'at al-aṭfāl asha'la mawāqi' al-tawāṣul al-iǧtimā'ī da'man li-wālid al-sabbāk". YouTube video, uploaded by *Dream TV Egypt* on October 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3N1q6VO5_-4&feature=youtu.be>.

[YT "Lā ta'tamid 'alà shabakāt al-tawāṣul al-iǧtimā'ī" =] N. N. "'al-Ra'īs al-Sīsī lil-i'lāmiyyīn: lā ta'tamid 'alà shabakāt al-tawāṣul al-iǧtimā'ī ka-maṣādir lakum." YouTube video uploaded by *Al Nahar AlYoum* on April 13, 2016, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW5soq9AtwE>.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

Suicide

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- dead end
- depression, *ikti'āb*
- desolation
- existential and creativity crisis
- Generation "Stuck"
- melancholy, melancholic
- mood
- resignation (*QTh*)
- self-delusion
- sleeping pills, sleeping problems

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Garbage ♦ Hashish ♦ LGBT ♦ Pop Music ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – True *vs.* False ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *257–*257
© N. N.

The Suspect Foreigner

By Elena Chiti

"Suspect" and "foreigner" may appear as synonyms in Egypt this year. A spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior, Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Karīm, invites the "respectable citizens" to report to the security forces all the "suspect elements" (*al-ʿanāṣir al-mushtabah bi-him*) they encounter in their villages or neighbourhoods (al-ʾAnṣārī) [↗The Honourable Citizen]. Informing the state apparatus of their presence is a civic duty for everyone who is concerned "with the security of the country and its people" [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. This duty is to be accomplished as soon as possible: promptness (*al-musāraʿa*) is a key factor in these cases, for it enables security forces to effectively perform their task of protecting citizens.

No doubt, "reporting suspect elements" is a mission. But how does one recognize them? The indications given by the Ministry representative are vague enough to cover a wide range of situations, yet precise enough to apply to foreigners as a category. In fact, the "suspect elements" are the ones who do not fit in the ordinary routine of an Egyptian environment, because they look different, out of place, such as "individuals who are seen in a neighbourhood where they do not belong". As a result, an American student who is trying to practice his Egyptian dialect in Downtown Cairo is taken to the nearest police station, and similar cases occur when foreigners try to make contact with Egyptians. Passing by a café where a supposed foreigner sits together with Egyptians, a taxi driver says to his Egyptian customer, "Look, here they are again, these foreigners, brainwashing our youth!" (Chiti_FebMar).

While state-run media continue to associate foreigners with threats to national security, the fear of them grows in the public space. This increasing sense of distrust may push some "honourable citizens" to act directly as public defenders, instead of limiting themselves to warn the authorities. According to newspaper *al-Waṭan*, a young Danish journalist is "rescued by the police from the hands of the inhabitants" of Nāhiyā suburb "who tried to harm him because they were suspicious of him" (*ḥāwala l-iʿtidāʾ ʿalayh lil-shakk fī ʾamrih*), because of "his presence during a march" (Chiti_Feb). In this framework, the police is portrayed as the protector of the foreigner who was in the weakest position, surrounded by a hostile crowd. However, the protection seems to encompass exclusively his physical safety. Not only the journalist's name, but also his picture and the pictures of all his documents appear on the newspaper, which seems less concerned with guaranteeing his anonymity than with the duty of reporting a potentially "suspect element".

All these cases follow a major incident, which marks the year. On January 25, Giulio Regeni, an Italian PhD student of Cambridge University and visiting scholar at the American University in Cairo, disappears [↗**Disappearances**]. He is heading to Downtown Cairo to meet a friend, but he never arrives to the appointment. He goes missing on the fifth anniversary of the 2011 revolution [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**], in a climate of fear that oppresses Cairo and in particular the city centre, where the police is carrying out a massive wave of arrests to prevent demonstrations [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]. For ten

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *258–*264
© Elena Chiti, Stockholm University, SE

days, nobody is able to locate Regeni or his mobile phone. His dead body, found on February 3 on the Cairo-Alexandria desert road, bears clear signs of torture.

Egyptian authorities circulate all kinds of narratives around his death: Giulio Regeni shall have died in a car accident (ABŪ ḌAYF & MUḤAMMAD); or have been murdered in connection with a homosexual affair; or punished in an honour killing, by the husband, or the father, or the brother of one of his female conquests (TADROS; CHITI, *Fieldwork notes*, February-April 2016). Yet none of these versions explains the marks of torture, initially denied by the Egyptian justice (QARĀʿA), but confirmed by the results of both the Egyptian and Italian autopsies [↗**True *vs.* False**]:

> Both document extensive torture — on the body, on the face. A broken neck. A broken skull. Slit ears; cigarette burn marks on the body. But the interesting discrepancy is the one that is included in the Italian autopsy report and omitted in the Egyptian one. And it has to do with fingernails. All his finger and toenails have been extracted. Now, this is a sign not only of torture; but torture to extract a confession. This is something that an intelligence service would do; not a terrorist organization. And it's interesting that this was omitted in the Egyptian report. (*CBC Radio*)

The only credible scenario is that Giulio Regeni was abducted by the Egyptian security forces and held for days in a secret place while being tortured to death, before someone decided to get rid of his body. Egyptian authorities spread other versions, according to which Regeni was a spy collaborating with British and/or American secret services that killed him once his mission was over (YOUTUBE, TAHRIRNEWS). His research about Egyptian unions is portrayed as either a tool for gathering sensitive information about Egypt, or a way of covering up more sensitive topics. His connections with both Cambridge University and the American University in Cairo are highlighted as a further confirmation of his dubious international contacts. In parallel, some Egyptian officials say Regeni was the victim of a conspiracy orchestrated by the Muslim Brotherhood to discredit Egypt in the eyes of its Western allies (*WAṬANSIRB*) [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**].

The divide between supporters and detractors of the Egyptian regime crystallizes around the case [↗**Clash**]. The latter, Egyptians and foreigners, gather in front of the Italian Consulate in Cairo to show solidarity towards Regeni and his family, while calling for respect of human rights. They emphasize that Regeni's fate, although extraordinary for a foreigner, is the ordinary lot of thousands of Egyptians. One of the banners reads, "Giulio, one of us, killed like us". On the same tone, a commemoration is organized on February 24 at the American University in Cairo. A huge banner is hung which reproduces a famous cartoon by Italian artist Natangelo, portraying an Egyptian police officer trying to distinguish Regeni's body from all the Egyptians who were also tortured to death [↗**The Policeman** Criminal]. An English sign reads, "Giulio's murder is not an isolated case" and then, addressing the murderers: "The AUC bubble will not protect you" (SHAMS EL-DIN). In fact, students and employees are revolting against the euphemistic tone of a first communiqué released by their institution, according to which "Giulio passed away". "Giulio didn't pass away, he was murdered," they repeat in private conversations as in official statements (*EGYPTIANSTREETS*) [↗**Voice *vs.* Silence**]. At the same time, both the Egyptian academia and the foreign community in Egypt point to the strong economic and diplomatic bonds between Italy and

Egypt, which ended up strengthening the Egyptian regime (ESTERMAN). Not only have the two countries always had flourishing commercial relationships, Egypt has also been able to buy Italian weapons that improved its military apparatus.

"Trade, business, geography, geopolitics, and wars. Since Caesar's time, it has been hard to find two countries on the shores of the Mediterranean as connected as Egypt and Italy," writes an Italian journalist (TRAMBALLI). Many Egyptians seem to share this feeling. Saʿd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm, president of the Ibn Khaldun Center for development studies, states that "the relationship between Italy and Egypt is one of the strongest in the Northern Mediterranean and we should not forget that Egypt is Italy's second partner in the economic field" (*al-BAWWĀBA*). A writer says Italy has always been Egypt's first commercial partner and this resulted in a solid connection that goes beyond the economic sphere. "My daughter grew up with Chicco products, in a Chicco stroller: it does mean something!" a woman declares (CHITI_March). Yet Regeni's case casts a shadow over both the cultural and the economic cooperation between the two countries. On February 3, a "delegation of important Italian businessmen" (*wafd min kibār rijāl al-aʿmāl al-ʾīṭālīyyīn*), led by Minister of Economic Development Federica Guidi, is visiting Egypt. The Ministry interrupts the visit after Regeni's body is found (*al-SHARQ*). At the beginning of April, Italy recalls its ambassador judging the Egyptian investigations unsatisfying (al-ZANĀTĪ). In June, it blocks the military deal with Egypt to protest over the lack of cooperation of Egyptian authorities (CNN, REUTERS, AL-JAZEERA). The spectre of a commercial boycott haunts Egyptian politics and Egypt desperately seeks to normalize ties with Italy and Europe. In one of his speeches, president Sisi claims that Egypt has also its own "Regeni": "a son who disappeared there", in Italy, and the Italian investigators have not elucidated the case yet (al-SĪSĪ). Initially presented as a young man, the disappeared Egyptian is in fact a middle-aged man, whose son is a University student that cannot go to Italy to look for his father because of the exams (ʿAZZĀM). Other parallels are found outside of Italy. For months on end, newspapers report news of young Egyptians who disappeared outside of Egypt. One after the other, these "Egyptian Regenis," as they are called, give the impression that what happened to Regeni was nothing but a terrible incident, something that may occur in every country to people who, coming from abroad, find themselves in a rather unsafe position [↗Migration]. Titles emphasize the unclear circumstances of their death and the doubtful injuries they show:

> *An Egyptian Regeni in London. Mystery surrounds Sharīf Ḥabīb's killing…* (FATḤĪ)
>
> *A new Egyptian Regeni in America. His body, found in a dumpster, bears signs of torture* (*al-YAWM al-SĀBIʿ*)

Sometimes, Giulio Regeni's picture is published alongside the one of an "Egyptian Regeni." The physical resemblance between the two provokes an emotional reaction, which is meant to reveal the lack of interest for the Egyptian citizen, compared to the international attention on the Italian. A hashtag is created on Twitter that openly asks the question: "What if Regeni were Egyptian?" (*#Law_Rījīnī_maṣrī*) The answer is that nobody would have cared (YOUM7) [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**].

This bitter feeling is widely shared. In the months that follow Regeni's murder, with the devaluation of the Egyptian pound accompanying a series of shortages of food, medicines, and basic products [↗**Dollar Crisis**], many people are exhausted of hearing about Regeni.

They see the diplomatic pressure on Egypt as an unfair punishment on the part of the West, which still uses imperialist methods to pursue its goals. The media coverage of the case has a lasting impact on the reputation of Egypt, which appears to be an unsafe country at a time when it is most in need of attracting tourists [↗**Tourist Resorts**]. Looking at the hotel's reservation log, almost empty, an employee complains:

> This Regeni's thing... all these problems for just one person (*ʿashān fard*)? And not just with Italy, now even with Europe in general! I'm really astonished when I see that this story isn't over. We also have a young Egyptian disappeared there [*in Italy*] and we don't make all this fuss. We have so many Egyptians who died abroad, in Jordan, in Saudi Arabia. I do remember in the past I read newspapers with fake reports saying they died out of brain strokes or heart strokes. All these young men?! Then I asked a Jordanian guest at the hotel and he told me they all got killed. In honour crimes. And the governments covered things up. (CHITI_Apr-Jun)

While this view seems to be largely spread, it is not universally shared. Along with the comparison between Europe and Egypt, Regeni's case sparks reflections about the present state of the country and the hopes aroused by the 2011 revolution [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]:

> In a coffee shop across the Alexandrian Corniche, a man asked why Italy is still making a fuss about Regeni. A patron stood up in the corner and yelled, "Because that's what it looks like when a country actually cares for its own citizens." An eerie silence followed. An evocative reminder why, some 50 metres away from the same coffee shop, Khaled Saeed was killed by two police officers almost six years ago, and his death mattered then — surely mattered enough for a revolution to be sparked. The same revolution's fifth anniversary that saw Regeni go missing. (ALI)

Since the very beginning, Egyptian authorities strive to avoid parallels with the Mubarak era. They want to show that Egypt has changed since then, ruled by an elite that is both concerned with human rights and trustworthy for its Western allies. They need to prove they are handling the case rapidly and efficiently. Some three days after the discovery of Regeni's body, they announce the arrest of two people, reported to be responsible for his death, yet not linked to the Egyptian security apparatus or to any terrorist organization (ʿABD AL-RĀḌĪ, ELYOMNEW). Even if the two are proven extraneous to the facts, the authorities maintain the narrative of common criminals who would have kidnapped Regeni for money. This version is sealed in blood when, two months later, the police open fire on five men within a car: Ṣalāḥ ʿAlī, Ṭāriq ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ, Saʿd Ṭāriq, Muṣṭafà Bakr, and Ibrāhīm Fārūq. None survives, while officials rush to say they were all involved in Regeni's murder. Pictures are released of Regeni's passport, university ID, and credit card supposedly found at the apartment of one of the five, along with stolen phones – yet there are no traces of Regeni's one. A red bag bearing the Italian flag and some forged police IDs complete the setting. The authorities claim the gang of five was specialized in kidnapping foreigners for a ransom, sometimes disguised as police officers to approach them without raising suspicion. The families of the five victims immediately contest this version. Rashā Ṭāriq, who lost in the car husband, father and son, says her relatives could not speak any foreign language in order to approach foreigners. She

thinks the police deliberately placed Regeni's belongings in the flat (EL SIRGANY), while Regeni's relatives assert the bag was not Regeni's [↗**True *vs.* False**].

On social media, some people protest against what appears as a plot of the Egyptian state against five of its citizens [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. A campaign is launched to contrast the propaganda narrative, under the hashtag "*Ḥaqq al-khamsa qabla ḥaqq Rījīnī*" ("The right of the five before the right of Regeni") [TWITTER] [↗**Social Media**]. Twitter users speak up against the official discourse, showing distrust towards the regime and solidarity towards the five: "None of them are criminals. Egypt regime killed them to accuse them of killing," "Egyptian thug regime kidnapped five people randomly and killed them. Later they accused them of killing Regeni." Sometimes, statements are explicitly in line with the hashtag slogan, as they seem to prioritize the rights of the Egyptians over those of a single foreigner. Other people react to this competition over human rights, putting the Egyptians and the foreigner in the same boat: "*Ḥaqq al-khamsa wa-ḥaqq Rījīnī wa-ḥaqq al-shuhadā*" ("The right of the five, the right of Regeni and the right of the martyrs"). However, a confrontation continues to be seen between Italy and Egypt. Symbolically, it takes on the proportion of a clash between ruthless West and underprivileged Arab world: "Italy Gov. will compromise by receiving $ billions of the food and butter budget of poor Egyptians" [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**].

Although Westerners in general look suspect, Italians find themselves in the most delicate position: "Regeni's murder undermined the relative safety Italians have long enjoyed in Egypt. No one is off-limits in an insecure security state" (ALI). Indeed, while Italians were once perceived as a brother people, united to Egyptians by a common belonging to the Mediterranean space, an Italian passport arouses now particular suspicion. "So you're Italian," says a police officer checking IDs in Downtown Cairo [↗***Kamīn***], "Should I be afraid of you?" "Where are you from?" asks a man in plain clothes in the middle of the street and leaves as he obtains the information. "One shouldn't say 'I'm Italian' in the middle of the street these days," an Egyptian woman advises, "Pick an Arab nationality, dear, say you're Lebanese" (CHITI_Feb) [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**].

The topic is no less sensitive in the literary field. At the Sheikh Zayed Book Fair, a publisher refuses to be interviewed by "another Italian researcher" with quite an ambiguous formula: "We won't have time for an interview anyhow." When asked for the reason, since the Book Fair does not close until late at night, he makes his point clearer: "Italian researchers don't live that long in our country, you see." On the same day at the same place, an interview with another publisher risks turning into a series of diplomatic statements:

> Our government did not want this. The two countries are friends, united by commercial and cultural bonds. We are sorry for what happened. Please tell Italy not to stop buying from us and not to boycott our country…
>
> We were talking about best-sellers...
>
> Since we are here, I would like to take the opportunity to tell that we are sorry and ask you to tell Italy not to stop… (CHITI_Apr)

The relationship between Egyptians and foreigners, this year, may sometimes resemble a vicious circle [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ *Kamīn* ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Migration ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Social Media ♦ Tourist Resorts

CODES – Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Voice *vs.* Silence

CODES COLLAPSED – Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

ʿABD AL-RĀḌĪ, Maḥmūd. "Bi-l-ṣuwar: Baʿda murūr 50 yawman… al-Dākhiliyya tafukk ṭalāsim ḥādith al-shābb al-ʾīṭālī… Quwwāt al-ʾamn taqtul al-muttahamīn bi-sariqat Rīǧīnī wa-taʿthur ʿalà jawāz safarih… al-Tashkīl takhaṣṣaṣ fī ʾntiḥāl ṣifat al-ḍubbāt wa-sariqat al-ʾajānib… wa-Rūmā tashkur al-Qāhira." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, March 25, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/3/25/ بالصور-بعد-مرور-50-يوما-الداخلية-تفك-طلاسم-حادث-الشاب/2645129>;

ABŪ ḌAYF, B., and W. MUḤAMMAD. "Amn al-Jīza: al-īṭālī al-mukhtafī tawaffà bi-ḥādith sayr wa-ikhṭār al-sifāra li-tasallum al-juththa." *Al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, February 4, 2016 (no longer available online).

ALI, Amro. "Giulio and the Italians of Egypt." *MadàMaṣr*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/04/opinion/u/giulio-and-the-italians-of-egypt/>.

al-ʾANṢĀRĪ, Ǧihād. "Bil-fīdiyū... al-Dākhiliyya: «ʿAlà ʿal-muwāṭinīn al-shurarā'' ʾiblāghunā ʿan al-mushtabah bihim»." *Miṣr al-ʿArabiyya*, Media, February 7, 2016, <https://m.masralarabia.net/ميديا/917223-بالفيديو-الداخلية-على-المواطنين-الشرفاء-إبلاغنا-عن-المشتبه-بهم>.

ʿAZZĀM, ʾAmānī. "Nijl al-miṣrī al-mukhtafī fī ʾĪṭāliyā lil-Sīsī: 'Buṣṣī-lnā yā rayyis, maḥaddish mihtamm bīnā'." *al-Waṭan*, March 16, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews. com/news/ details/ 1027825>.

[*al-BAWWĀBA* =] N. N. "Saʿd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm: Taṣrīḥāt al-ḥukūma ḥawla maqtal Rīǧīnī mutaḍāriba." *al-Bawwāba*, April 9, 2016, <http://www.albawabhnews.com/1871238>.

[*CBC Radio* =] N. N. "Day 6: Were Egyptian security forces responsible for Italian grad student Giulio Regeni's death?" *CBC Radio*, Feb 12, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/episode-272-jian-ghomeshi-trial-pope-francis-in-former-murder-capital-lebron-james-tattoos-and-more-1.3444087/were-egyptian-security-forces-responsible-for-italian-grad-student-giulio-regeni-s-death-1.3444217>.

CHITI, Elena. *Fieldwork notes*. Egypt 2016. (Unpublished).

[*CNN* =] N. N. "Miṣr tarudd ʿalà qarār ʾĪṭālīyā bi-taʿlīq tawrīd qiṭaʿ ghiyār ṭāʾirāt F-16 lahā baʿda qaḍiyyat Rīǧīnī: taṣʿīd ghayr mubarrar wa-yajib murāʿāt al-maṣāliḥ." *CNN bil-ʿarabiyya*, July 12, 2016, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/07/12/egypt-italy-tensions-f-16-spare-parts-regini>.

[*EGYPTIANSTREETS* =] N. N. "AUC Students, Professors Mourn Death of Giulio Regeni Amid Concerns Over Academic Freedom." *Egyptian Streets*, Feb. 18, 2016, <http://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/18/auc-students-professors-mourn-death-of-giulio-regeni-amid-concerns-over-academic-freedom/>.

EL SIRGANY, Sarah. "Italian student's killing pulls Egyptian family into web of deaths, dead ends." *CNN*, April 21, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/21/middleeast/egypt-italy-giulio-regeni-mystery/index.html>.

[ELYOMNEW =] N. N., *al-Yawm al-Jadīd*, February 2, 2016, <http://www.elyomnew.com/news/24 hours/2016/02/06/44364> (no longer available online).

ESTERMAN, Isabel. "On Giulio and the cost of doing business in Egypt." *MadàMaṣr*, Feb. 10, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/10/opinion/u/on-giulio-and-the-cost-of-doing-business-in-egypt/>.

FATḤĪ, Naǧlā'. "Mabāḥith tamwīn al-Minyā taḍbuṭ maṣnaʿ ʿasal maghshūsh wa-yuḍbaṭ 18 ṭunn." *al-Dustūr*, November 29, 2012, <https://www.dostor.org/1049393>.

ḤAMDĪ, Muṣṭafà, and Walīd NĀGĪ. "al-Niyāba: āthār taʿdhīb bi-juththat al-shābb al-īṭālī… wa'l-mabāḥith: 'ḥādith sayr' wa-lā shubha jinā'iyya." *al-Shurūq* online, February 5, 2016, <https://www. shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=05022016&id=054379af-383d-4d43-a5df-c93a9339f451>.

[al-JAZEERA =] N. N. "Tashrīʿ 'īṭālī yamnaʿ tazwīd Miṣr bi-mawaddāt 'askariyya." *al-Jazeera*, June 30, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/international/2016/6/30/تشريع-إيطالي-يمنع-تزويد-مصر-بمعدات>.

QARĀʿA, Ibrāhīm. "'al-'Adl' tunfī ṣīḥḥat shihādat ra'īs al-ṭibb al-sharʿī 'an Ǧūliyū Rīǧīnī." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm* (online), March 1, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/902178>.

REUTERS Staff. "Italy votes to halt aviation supplies to Egypt over student death." *Reuters*, June 29, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-italy-regeni/italy-votes-to-halt-aviation-supplies-to-egypt-over-student-death-idUSKCN0ZF2EH>.

SHAMS EL-DIN, Mai. "AUC remembers Giulio Regeni, protests university's position on his murder." *MadàMaṣr*, Feb. 25, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/25/feature/politics/auc-remembers-giulio-regeni-protests-universitys-position-on-his-murder/>.

[*al-SHARQ* =] N. N. "Gārdiyān [*The Guardian*]: Warā'a maqtal Rīǧīnī fī Miṣr 'faḍīḥa'." *al-Sharq*, Feb. 24, 2016, <https://www.al-sharq.com/article/24/02/2016/مصر-في-ريجيني-مقتل-وراء-الفضيحة-جارديان>.

al-SĪSĪ, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ. Speech, April 13, 2016.

TADROS, Sherine. "Egypt Defies Italy Over Regeni Murder Probe: Italy recalls its ambassador over a 'lack of co-operation' from Egypt in a murder probe into the death of a Cambridge student." *sky news*, April 10, 2016, <https://news.sky.com/story/egypt-defies-italy-over-regeni-murder-probe-10238116>.

[TAHRIRNEWS =] N. N. "ʿAzmī Muǧāhid: Rījīnī ʿamīl lil-mukhābarāt al-inkilīziyya wa-qatalat-hu baʿdamā anhà mahammatahū." *TahrirNews*, [2016], <https://www.tahrirnews.com/posts/406755/> (no longer available online).

TRAMBALLI, Ugo. "Italy and Egypt no more business as usual." ISPI [Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale], Commentary, May 30, 2016, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/italy-and-egypt-no-more-business-usual-15153>.

[TWITTER =] #Ḥaqq_al-khamsa_qabla_ḥaqq_Rīǧīnī, <https://twitter.com/hashtag/حق_الخمسه_قبل_حق_ريجيني> (no longer available).

[*WAṬANSIRB* =] N. N. "Fīdiyō Mas'ūl 'amnī miṣrī: «'al-'Ikhwān' tasabbabū fī qatl Rīǧīnī»'." *Waṭan* (US), April 9, 2016, <https://www.watanserb.com/2016/04/09/فيديو-مسؤول-أمني-مصري-الإخوان-تسببوا/>.

[*al-YAWM al-SĀBIʿ* =] N. N. "'Rīǧīnī' miṣrī jadīd fī 'Amrīka ʿatharū ʿalà juththatih bi-ṣundūq qumāma wa-ʿalayhā 'āthār taʿdhīb." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/4/28/قامة-بصندوق-جثته-على-عثروا-أمريكا-فى-جديد-مصرى-ريجينى/2696184>.

[YOUM7 =] N.N. "Law Rīǧīnī maṣrī [...]." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, [2016] <http://parlmany.youm7.com/News/5/64280/لو-ريجينى-مصرى-ترند-يشعل-تويتر-ومغردون-كان-مات-ومحدش> (no longer available online).

[YOUTUBE =] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ociynMzACoI> (no longer available online).

(no longer available online) <عزمي+مجاهد+3A%ريجيني+عميل+للمخابرات+الإنجليزية+..وقتلته+بعدما+أنهى+مهمته>

al-ZANĀTĪ, Ḥusayn. "Safīr 'Īṭāliyā ʿāda 'ilà Rūmā baʿda 'stidʿā' ḥukūmatih." *Al-Ahrām*, April 11, 2016.

◄ elena.chiti@su.se ►

Tourist Resorts

By Charlotte Pardey

Arriving at a Tunisian tourist resort in early spring this year feels a little like being too early (or too late) for a party: there are hardly any guests but plenty of free space everywhere, from the dining room to outdoor areas. Some services are permanently cancelled and one has the impression of disturbing the employees in their boredom.

Tourist resorts both in Tunisia and in Egypt used to be sources of foreign currency and employment and traditionally formed cornerstones of the countries' economies. Low occupancy gives reason to worry—also because it indicates that, from abroad, the countries are perceived as insecure [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**].

Travel and tourism directly contribute around 6.5 percent to Tunisia's gross domestic product (GDP) this year while in the past the percentage was considerably higher (more than 10% in 2007, still close to 9% in 2014). In Egypt, statistics register an all-time low of less than 3.5 percent (as compared to ca. 8% in 2010) (WTTC-TN, WTTC-EG). Tourism and tourism-related sectors used to provide work opportunities for several hundred thousand people. Now, however, tourism is at a low—in Tunisia due to the terrorist attacks last year that targeted tourists in the Bardo Museum and at the beach of Sousse; in Egypt, the downing of a Russian airliner through IS last October made thousands of Russians cancel their flights to the country, and the disappearance and murder of Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni in February also has a negative impact on tourism [↗**Disappearances**, ↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. Tourists are waiting for security standards to return to a reassuring level. Until then, tourist resorts remain half empty, staff are few, and those still in work are depressed, given the low number of visitors.

In August, i.e., at the height of summer vacations in Germany, German ambassador to Tunisia, Andreas Reinicke, expresses yet another concern: not only the fear of violence may keep tourists away from the country but also a lack of cleanliness [↗**Garbage**] and the poor state of the resorts (Ben Taieb a).

A further consequence of the decrease in tourism is that traffic at the airports goes down. In the first six months of the year the decrease is about 9.4 percent in Tunisia. In August, this leads state-owned Tunisair to announce the need to make 1000 of its staff redundant, amounting to 12 percent of its permanent employees (Ben Taieb d).

Moreover, due to the lack of visitors, tensions increase between the workers' union UGTT and the association of hotel owners who refuse to grant their employees a pay raise in September. There are also many redundancies, and seasonal contracts are discontinued (Ben Salah).

What is more, the absence of tourists also means a lack of foreign currency, which makes the value of the local currency against the US dollar drop considerably [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. In Egypt, authorities embark on an IMF-backed economic reform that is meant to meet the challenges and restore the stability of the country's finances by liberalizing the foreign exchange market and adopting flexible exchange rates—with little success. The Tunisian central bank, too, proves unable to stabilize the dinar against the dollar. In both countries, the

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *265–*269
© Charlotte Pardey, University of Marburg, DE

government's failure to deal with the crisis not only makes all kinds of imports more expensive, it is also the cause of aggravated living conditions for a majority of the population because prices are constantly increasing (AFIFY).

No wonder then that the tourism sector desperately attempts to attract visitors to the empty resorts. In Tunisia, the main strategy is to approach new customer groups—tourists from countries that had previously not played a major role, as well as domestic tourists—in an effort to outbalance the loss in visitors from traditional countries of origin like France or the UK. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office actually advises their citizens against all but essential travel to Tunisia, and warns especially against visiting the border regions (in response to last year's terrorist attack in Sousse, the Tunisian government has imposed a State of Emergency). In addition to these governmental warnings, travel companies, such as the British Thomas Cook, discourage tourists from traveling to Tunisia, for reasons of security. As a result, the number of British tourists decreases significantly: the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics observes a reduction from over 424 000 in 2014 to 207 900 in 2015 and only 23 400 in 2016 (INS 142). For those who travel nevertheless, the experience must be somewhat spoilt—the atmosphere at the resorts does in no way resemble that of the past [↗**Past *vs.* Present**].

New customers for Tunisia's resorts are found, among other countries, in Russia and Algeria. Russians are no longer willing to travel to Egypt since the destruction of the airplane with Russian tourists last year. Thus, the number of Russian guests more than doubles in Tunisia (as compared to 2012: *ibid.*). To encourage them even more, Tunisair opens its first direct flight Moscow–Tunis in June. In a similar vein, Air Algérie in November considers opening a direct flight Annaba–Tunis. There are also efforts to facilitate border-crossing between Tunisia and Algeria (al-RIZQĪ, Nessma TV).

However, the increasing number of Russian and Algerian tourists notwithstanding, they cannot make up for the loss of European customers. To uphold the country's appeal for Russians and Algerians, prices have to be kept down to meet the new groups' low purchasing power—which makes life again harder for hotel owners and the tourism-related branches.

In addition to foreign tourists, domestic tourism creates some buzz in Tunisia. In June and July, a story about tourism in Mahdia makes the round: it seems that the coastal city has reached 100 percent occupancy thanks to domestic tourism (Ben Taieb b). If this is true, it must be the result of marketing strategies that attracted more visitors than usual.

But domestic tourism also is problematic: it does not bring the foreign currency that the countries need to finance their commercial operations and pay their supply bills from abroad. It also means that another type of tourists frequent the resorts: women who wish to swim in a burkini, for instance (BEN TAIEB c). Most Tunisian hotels accept this. Others follow the example of French coastal towns where full-body swimsuits are prohibited in the swimming pools—for alleged health reasons. In Egypt, domestic tourism is not advertised to the same extent as it is in Tunisia and plays an even lesser role than there… also because society is more conservative: The one tourism-related issue that is discussed in the media relates to the difficulties unmarried or unaccompanied women face when they try to check in at hotels alone. In many cases they are refused accommodation for fear of illicit relations they might have with men during their stay [↗In Islam, …]. The hotel owners fear to be made responsible for allowing and encouraging prostitution.

The situation in the tourist sector and the lack of visitors is so prominent in public discourse in Tunisia that it finds entrance into cultural production, for example in Mohammed Ben Attia's feature film *Nḥibbik, Hādī* ("Hédi," literally: I love you, Hedi). The movie follows the young car salesman Hédi around the country and to a holiday resort in Mahdia where he can forget about his impending wedding arranged by his all-influential mother. In Mahdia, Hédi meets Rim, an independent, liberally-minded woman who works in the resort as an entertainer. The two begin a passionate love affair which would not have been possible outside this domain of freedom [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. The resort appears as a melancholic place outside of time, not the bustling tourist attraction it might have been several years ago. However, it allows the lovers to dream about the lives they would like to but cannot lead inside the country due to the constraints prevailing in a conservative society [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. The prize-winning film captures the simultaneity of hope and despair that is not only characteristic of the half-deserted holiday resorts and the tourist sector but also of the entire country [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**].

Yet, in the midst of a generally pessimistic climate, there are also instances of hope. In October, Hapag Lloyd-owned *Europa* lands in La Goulette—the first cruise ship to return to Tunisia since March 2015 and the Bardo attacks, after which international lines suspended their visits. Tunisian officials express the hope that this return is symbolic and will be followed by more of its kind (AFP).

Egypt, in its turn, is happy that the United Nations' World Tourism Organization names the Upper Egyptian city of Luxor the current year's "Capital of International Tourism" (UNWTO). The nomination seems to be the fruit of the country's heightened efforts to sell its assets by highlighting its famous cultural heritage. Compared to Egypt's ancient history, Tunisia's is much less advertised and, hence, also much less known [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**].

Moreover, in the *Sinai Trail* project, a walking route between the Gulf of Aqaba and St. Catherine, Egypt also promotes its wilderness and the traditional knowledge of its Bedouin population. The country's first long-distance hiking trail is the result of the union of three different Bedouin tribes, each taking care of a part of the land; it provides jobs in the area and raises interest in the local Bedouins' way of life. The project is awarded the British Guild and Travel Writers' (BGTW) Award in November as "Best Wider World project" (Cairo Scene).

All in all, however, the state of affairs in Egyptian tourism is still rather depressing. As in Tunisia, this is reflected also in cultural expression. Khālid Marʿī's comedy *Laff wa-dawarān* ("Back and forth"), for example—a box office hit—puts the blame for the deplorable situation within the sector not only on the precarious security situation in the country, but mainly on "nepotism and near-sightedness in the industry itself" (AYSHA). By a mistake, two unmarried Egyptians—tour guide Nūr and businesswoman Laylà—are booked on the same apartment in a hotel in Sharm El Sheikh. To prevent trouble, they have to pretend that they are husband and wife [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. The situation becomes still more complicated when Nūr sets his eyes on an Italian girl, and his family (who is also present) urges Laylà to distract him from the foreigner. A certain Ḥamāda is assigned by the hotel management to make sure that Laylà and Nūr are happy customers, but in fact he pesters them constantly. The reviewer's verdict is that this is "[h]ardly a recipe for a healthy tourist sector" (AYSHA).

Clearly, there is a stark difference between the melancholic mood of *Nḥibbik, Hādī* and the slapstick din of *Laff wa-dawarān*, a difference that is telling of the general climate in the two countries: While melancholy is still allowed in Tunis, there is only black humour left in the Egyptian case [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Garbage ♦ In Islam, …

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

Written

AFIFY, Heba. "In the Year oft he Economy, Egyptians kept Their Eyes on the Dollar." *Madamasr*, December 29, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/29/feature/economy/in-the-year-of-the-economy-egyptians-kept-their-eyes-on-the-dollar/>.

AFP. "Tunisie: première escale d'un navire de croisière depuis l'attentat du Bardo." *L'express*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/monde/tunisie-premiere-escale-d-un-navire-de-croisiere-depuis-l-attentat-du-bardo_1838120.html>.

AYSHA, Emad El-Din. "Laf wa dawaran: Ibn Khaldun's Cycle of Touristic Despair." *Cairo Scene*, November 10, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Laf-Wa-Dawaran-Ibn-Khaldun-s-Cycle-of-Touristic-Despair> (last access: 08/06/2018).

BEN SALAH, Radhouane. "Les hôteliers sont fermes: Pas d'augmentation des salaires au titre de 2015." *Kapitalis*, September 14, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/09/14/les-hoteliers-sont-fermes-pas-daugmentation-des-salaires-au-titre-de-2015/>.

BEN TAIEB, Zaineb [a]. "German Tourists put off Tunisia by Waste and 'Poor Service'." *Tunisia Live*, August 9, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/09/german-tourists-put-off-tunisia-by-waste-and-poor/>.

— [b]. "Domestic Tourism pushes Mahdia Hotels to Full Occupancy." *Tunisia Live*, August 17, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/17/domestic-tourism-pushes-mahdia-hotels-to-full-occupancy/>.

— [c]. "Hotels in Tunisia Prohibit Burkinis on Grounds of 'Hygiene'." *Tunisia Live*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/25/hotels-in-tunisia-prohibit-burkinis-on-grounds-of-hygiene/>.

— [d]. "Tunisair Announce Job Losses of 1,000." *Tunisia Live*, August 30, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/30/tunisair-announce-job-losses-of-1000/>.

Cairo Scene Team. "16 of 2016: The Egyptian Men and Women Changing the Country." *Cairo Scene*, December 30, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/16-of-2016-Egypt-s-Real-Influencers>.

[CAPMAS =] Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. *Statistical Yearbook 2017*, Issue 108, 2017, <http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/StaticPages.aspx?page_id=5034> (last access: 08/06/2018).

Institut National de la statistique (INS). *Annuaire Statistique de la Tunisie 2012-2016*, 2017, <http://www.ins.tn/en/publication/statistical-yearbook-tunisia-2016> (last access: 08/06/2018).

Nessma TV. "Tanẓīm riḥalāt barriyya mubāshira bayn al-Jazā'ir wa-Tūnis." *Nessma TV*, July 31, 2016, <http://www.nessma.tv/article/تنظيم-رحلات-برية-مباشرة-بين-الجزائر-و-تونس-7279>.

al-Rizqī, Muḥsin. "al-Khuṭūt al-jazā'iriyya tabḥath fī fatḥ khaṭṭ Tūnis-ʿAnnāba." *al-Maghrib*, November 14, 2016, <http://ar.lemaghreb.tn/إقتصاد/item/12433->.

[UNWTO =] United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). "Egypt: Country-specific: Basic indicators (2012–2016)." In: *Compendium of Tourism Statistics dataset* [Electronic], UNWTO, Madrid, data updated on December 18, 2017, <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/abs/10.5555/unwtotfb0818010020122016201712> (last access: 08/06/2018).

[WTTC-EG =] World Travel and Tourism Council. *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017—Egypt*. 2017, <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2017/egypt2017.pdf> (last access: 08/06/2018).

[WTTC-TN =] World Travel and Tourism Council. *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017—Tunisia*. 2017, <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2017/tunisia2017.pdf> (last access: 08/06/2018).

Movies

Laff wa-dawarān (Back and forth). By Khālid Marʿī (Khaled Marei). Egypt 2016.

Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi (Hedi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyya (Mohamed Ben Attia). Tunisia, Belgium, France 2016.

◄ pardeyc@staff.uni-marburg.de ►

Tricking the System / Tricked by the System

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- fraud
- scandal (after the tests were diffused online)
- school exams
- school teacher *vs.* students

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Baby Milk ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Conversions ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Father Figures

CODES – True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *270–*270
© N. N.

Tuk-tuk

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

– getting around

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Dollar Crisis ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Social Media ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ *Zaḥma*

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *271–*271
© N. N.

Uber

By Teresa Pepe

> Join Us and Work with Uber or Careem with your private car and your driving licence and reach a monthly pay of 12000 EP, we accept cars from 2010, and [driver's] age from 21 to 60, for inquiries call *01014041999 01118866023* if the lines are busy you can contact us on Whats[app] on *01014041999* or *01118866023*. (*Mubawwaba Maṣrī*)

With this advertisement, the San Francisco-based company Uber and its Dubai-based counterpart Careem are hiring new drivers in Egypt.

Uber is an app-based car service that allows citizens to use their private car, driving licence and smartphones to offer fellow citizens a private car-ride. Likewise, riders can order the service, pay and rate their trip experience directly through their ↗**Mobile Phones**]. Uber was originally launched in the USA in 2010 (Hartmans & McAlone). The company applies a new economic model, the so-called "sharing economy," that implies that private citizens exchange services with each other via an online platform [↗**Crowdfunding**]. In 2011, the company Careem adjusted the same idea for the Middle Eastern market. Since 2015, Uber and Careem have become widely used in Egypt as well, especially among upper-middle class youth who can afford a smartphone and a credit card. The service is mostly available in the central neighbourhoods of Cairo and Alexandria, and in the suburban gated communities of Cairo, where public transportation is not provided by the State [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**]. In Tunisia, as in many other world countries, the company is banned, as the national labour union strives to protect their members from competition with unlicensed drivers working for Uber and similar companies.

In Egypt, the app-based car service co-exists with the regular "white taxis." Those are still available for the majority of the population who cannot afford a credit card and a smartphone [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**]. But unlike regular taxis, Uber and Careem offer a different mode of booking the service, navigating the city and interacting with the driver. The young, upper-middle class digital-savvy section of the Egyptian population, and especially women, perceive this difference as a significant improvement in the quality of the taxi service.

First of all, with Uber and Careem, one does not need to wave to a taxi, while standing on the side of a busy street. More importantly, there is no need to engage in tiring negotiations over the route and the fare that very often end in yelling and cursing—the arrangement takes place through the app. The customer/user enters the destination into the box labelled "where to?" near the top of the screen and confirms destination and exact pickup point by dropping a blue pin on the map. The app automatically finds an available driver nearby, showing his name and picture, and previous customers' ratings. It also gives an estimate of how long it takes to get there and how much it will cost. With Uber, the cost of a ride depends on the distance and time of the ride. The more people who request an Uber ride at the same time, the more expensive a fare gets[↗***Zaḥma***]. With Careem, the cost of a ride depends on the route and the type of car ordered. Once the customer has booked the ride, the driver heads to

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *272–*277
© Teresa Pepe, Dept. of Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo

the pick-up point, and gives the customer a phone call once he has reached the agreed location.

There is a certain difference in terms of comfort and security between Uber and white taxis. The white Cairene taxis are usually old and very often saturated with smoke and dust. Many taxi drivers smoke heavily while sitting for hours in the car because of the traffic jam. In addition, taxi rides in Egypt tend to be accompanied by loud Quran recitation or Arabic pop music played on the radio [↗**Pop Music**]. In contrast, Uber cars are clean, new and perfumed. Smoking is forbidden for both the rider and the driver. Noisy music and radio are not allowed, and the rider is asked beforehand whether he/she would like music or radio on.

Most importantly, the Uber ride implies a different interaction between the rider and the driver. Egyptian taxi drivers are known for their inclination to exchange funny anecdotes and more serious stories, as Khālid al-Khamīsī has portrayed in his book *Taxi* in 2007. Taxi drivers tend to ask nosy questions about the rider's marriage status, religion, and political views [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity)]. A Facebook user denounces that some taxi drivers have even taken the initiative to take customers to the police after they have expressed anti-governmental views (ANDEEL) [↗The Honourable Citizen]. In contrast, Uber drivers are asked to speak only to reply to the customers' questions.

For Egyptian women, Uber seems to be a safer option in a country where sexual harassment is "epidemic" (PIVOVARCHUK & SOLIMAN). Indeed, verbal harassment, as well as asking a female passenger whether she is married and staring at her suggestively through the mirror, seems to be a common taxi etiquette in Egypt. Uber, instead, seems to be more women-friendly. Female riders feel safer about the idea of being able to check the driver's name and picture and being able to report him to the company in case of sexual harassment. Unlike white taxi drivers, who are predominantly men, 10% of Uber drivers are women and the company has committed to hire more (BERGER). Besides, since October 2015, Uber Egypt partners with Harassmap, one of the country's pioneering anti-harassment organizations, to offer drivers a 5-minute training on what constitutes sexual harassment and how to avoid it (*ibid.*). Uber drivers are also encouraged to put a sticker on their car to affirm positive action against sexual harassment. Critics argue that the course should last longer, considering that Uber women drivers are obliged to take a 3-additional-minute course in which they are trained on how to defend themselves from sexual harassment. In the meanwhile, another taxi company named Pink has emerged on the streets of Cairo (VESELINOVIS). It is a company that offers a taxi service driven by women for women, as an attempt to provide a more secure means of transportation for women in Cairo. Their cars are decorated in pink and equipped with GPS, a camera, and an SOS button. All the drivers wear bright pink T-shirts. Critics complain about the fact that their rates are very high and that gender segregation is not a solution against sexual harassment [↗**Male *vs.* Female**].

Moreover, Uber offers a different way of navigating the city. Egyptian professional taxi drivers traverse the city by using certain streets and signposts for orientation. They usually drive confidently around the city of Cairo and remember streets by heart. As a consequence, riders usually rely on the driver's knowledge and ability to find the place. The Uber driver navigates the city using GPS. GPS provides riders with a higher sense of security and control on the route, as they can check their location in real time and they can make sure that the driver is not taking a longer route to ask for a higher fare. However, sometimes GPS is not

able to identify every street in Cairo. Besides, being new to the business, some drivers are not used to driving by looking at the map displayed on their mobile. In this case, the rider may help the driver by directing him/her. In other words, in theory, GPS should be a precious tool to navigate the city; for some Uber drivers, however, it still represents a challenge.

Uber is preferred by many also for its method of payment. With white taxis, riders often complain that drivers intentionally break or rig the meters to cheat on the price. Very often, they pretend not to have change on them to gain some additional money on the ride. With Uber, the service is paid directly by the credit card that the customer registers on the website. However, given that in Egypt only 7% of the population can afford a credit card, the company has started a trial programme that allows customers to pay in cash by paying an additional fee for the service (BERGER).

As typical of the shared economy model, once the service has been delivered, Uber customers are asked to rate the driver and the car for other members of the Uber community, with 1 to 5 stars. The review is a way of empowering the customers, as they can denounce poor service or any possible inconvenience during the trip. But it is even more important for the driver: if he/she does not maintain a good score (4.3 over 5) in the riders' reviews, he/she is automatically fired by the company. That is why Egyptian Uber drivers sometimes try to bribe the customer by offering perfumed tissues, sweets, or a cold drink.

It seems to be particularly young Egyptians who are satisfied with the service [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. A young man quoted in *MadàMaṣr*, for example, expresses his preference for Uber in these terms:

> I prefer to use Uber rather than the white taxis. It's always on call, with a fixed rate for their fares, and they don't try to overcharge me. Their drivers take me wherever I want. Unlike some cab drivers, they agree to pick me up and drop me off right at my doorstep. (CHARBEL)

Not surprisingly, professional taxi drivers are far less enthusiastic about the service. In March, they hold a series of demonstrations in Muṣṭafà Maḥmūd square in Muhandisīn and block traffic in the neighbourhood to protest against the spread of Uber and Careem and similar private taxi companies. Their main count of indictment is that unlike them, Uber drivers are not licensed, and therefore they do not need to pay taxes for their cars and licenses, as regular taxi drivers have to. Besides, they are able to offer a cheaper rate per km.

ʿĀdil Anwar, the driver quoted in *MadàMaṣr*, says that the competition with the foreign companies has driven him into debt. Indeed, this occurs in a period in which Egypt is undergoing a strong economic crisis and fuel prices are rising [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. He affirms that

> we want these private car companies to register their vehicles as licensed cabs, and to pay the same expenses that we professional drivers are obliged to pay. Or they can register themselves as private limousine companies, with extra fees for passengers. Otherwise, it's just unfair competition" (CHARBEL).

Shākir, the driver quoted in *Egypt Independent*, blames the government for launching the white taxi project in 2007 as an alternative to traditional black taxis, and handing it to corrupt businessmen and finance ministers who, Shākir claims,

> manufactured taxis that were off-specification, overpriced and had low-quality spare parts, therefore exacerbating the problem" (ELBEHARY [b]).

According to Shākir, taxi drivers are squeezed by monthly tariffs and taxes, and this affects the treatment of the passengers. It is because of this bad service that people resort to private companies like Uber and Careem. Another white taxi driver interviewed by *Egypt Independent* argues that Uber and Careem contribute to the deterioration of the current national economy, which is already a disaster. That is why people should avoid them.

> The money I currently earn goes to supermarkets, butchers and greengrocers, meaning it will circulate within the Egyptian market, but when passengers pay their bills through Visa to Uber or Careem, the money is being channelled to foreign economies instead,

he maintains (*ibid.*). In response, an Uber Egypt press release issued on December 2, 2015, claimed that in the course of one year, the company facilitated 1 million rides in Egypt, and created work opportunities for more than 1,000 drivers per month. But taxi drivers are convinced that these job opportunities come at the expense of licensed taxi drivers (CHARBEL).

Egyptian taxi driver protests follow the outburst of similar protests by fellow taxi drivers all over the world. However, while in some countries like Tunisia, labour unions have managed to impede the spread of Uber, the Egyptian General Union for Land Transport Workers—an affiliate of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation—has done nothing to protect the drivers.

Therefore, some taxi drivers choose to take justice into their own hands. In March, a taxi driver orders a private car using Uber, with a view to drawing the driver into a trap. The cab driver takes the Uber driver to the police station, demanding to see his license for providing such a service [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**]. However, the police cannot take action. Uber is regularly registered in Egypt as a technological company and it pays taxes on its revenues (ELBEHARY [a]). This unsuccessful attempt notwithstanding, Uber drivers *have* been victims of violent intimidations by professional taxi drivers. In addition, white taxi drivers have launched a new campaign aimed at raising the standard of their service to resist the competition. One of these campaigns is called "Take a ride, start afresh," aiming to improve the image of taxi drivers by promising passengers better service and a guarantee against bad practices like sexual harassment, smoking and meter fraud. Another campaign encourages drivers to put a sticker on their taxis saying, "A new beginning, kindly step on board," as a sign that the driver is a respectable one (ELBEHARY [b]).

The Uber model has inspired similar marketing models in other service areas. Belal El Borno (Bilāl al-Burnū) and Mahmoud El Maghraby (Maḥmūd al-Maghribī) have launched Yumamia (Yumāmiyya), the 'Uber of food.' The company gives Egyptian women the opportunity to sell home-made food through the website. El Borno explains:

> You order your food and the request is dispatched to cooks around your area; when someone accepts the request, it informs you and sends you a notification with the cook#s name and picture so you can get to know the person a little bit. (*CairoScene* [a])

Yumamia not only gives Egyptian housewives the opportunity to become entrepreneurs by utilizing their skills in the kitchen, it also invests in its cooks by offering them cooking and food hygiene classes (with a certificate). Therefore, it might be used by women as a tool to start a career in the catering service. Likewise, the app Rakna which offers a parking-valet service on demand is soon to be released (*CairoScene* [b]). That means that the driver can indicate his destination shortly before arrival, and he/she will find a valet waiting for him/her to park the car. Whenever the customer is ready to leave, he will inform the valet through the app, and will get the car back. The app institutionalizes a service that so far has been provided by the so-called *sāyis*, who improvise themselves illegally as parking valets. No wonder then that the app developers are still thinking about ways to prevent the *suyyās*' revenge, just like the taxi drivers' vindication in the case of Uber. However, they point out that while Uber is harming a category of workers who are fully licensed and unionized, Rakna is dealing with the *suyyās* who are doing the same activity without any permission and have no right to claim their ownership of the city space.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Crowdfunding ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individuality *vs.* Collectivity) ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – ♦ Security = Fear (Police State)

References

ANDEEL, Mohammed. Facebook Statement, February 11, 2016, <https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10156521793905224&id=777560223>, accessed July 7, 2018.

ELBEHARY Hend [a]. "Cairo White Cabs Reap the Harvest of Bad Service." *Egypt Independent*, February 15, 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/cairo-white-cabs-reap-harvest-bad-service/>, accessed July 7, 2018.

— [b]. "Taxi Drivers Launch Campaigns to Win Back Customers." *Egypt Independent*, March 15, 2016, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/taxi-drivers-launch-campaigns-win-back-customers/>, accessed July 7, 2018.

BERGER, Miriam. "Uber Says It is Fighting Sexual Harrassment in Egypt, but the Causes Aren't Going Away." *BuzzFeed News*, January 17, 2016, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/miriamberger/ uber-says-its-fighting-sexual-harassment-in-egypt-but-the-ca?utm_term=.wylx6owZEN#.srPJokxLrn>, accessed July 7, 2018.

Cairo Scene Team [a]. "The Uber of Food Turns Egyptian Housewives into Entrepeneurs." *Cairo Scene*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Eats/The-Uber-of-Food-Yumamia-Turns-Egyptian-Housewives-Into-Entrepreneurs> , accessed July 7, 2018.

— [b]. "Rakna: the Uber of Parking, Is Almost There." *Cairo Scene*, February 23, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/Geek/Rakna-The-Uber-of-Parking-Is-Almost-Here>, accessed July 7, 2018.

CHARBEL, Jano. "Taxi Drivers Protest Against Uber and Other App-Based Car Services." *MadàMaṣr*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/04/feature/politics/taxi-drivers-protest-against-uber-other-app-based-car-services/>, accessed July 7, 2018.

HARTMANS, Avery, and Nathan McAlone. "The Story of How Travis Kalanick Built Uber into the Most Feared and Valuable Startup in the World." *Business Insider*, August 1, 2016, <http://www.businessinsider.com/ubers-history?IR=T/#june-2010-uber-launches-in-san-francisco-at-the-time-it-

cost-about-15-times-as-much-as-a-cab-but-you-could-request-a-car-in-san-francisco-by-sending-a-text-or-pressing-a-button-it-quickly-became-a-hit-7>, accessed July 7, 2018.

al-KHAMĪSĪ, Khālid. *Taxi: Ḥawādīt al-mashāwīr*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009.

Mubawwaba Maṣrāwī. "Ishtaghal bi-ʿarabiyyitak maʿa ʾŪbir aw Karīm alf maskan." *Mubawwaba Maṣrāwī*, June 16, 2016, <http://mobawaba.masrawy.com/jobs/other-fields/details/1625200/اشتغل%20بعربيتك%20مع%20اوبر%20او%20كريم%20الف%20مسكن.

PIVOVARCHUK, Anna, and Alia SOLIMAN. "Fighting Back Against Sexual Harassment in Egypt." *Fair Observer*, December 7, 2016, <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/sexual-harassment-egypt-endemic-99212/>, accessed July 7, 2018.

VESELINOVIS, Milena. "Tired of catcalls? Pink Taxi promises to drive women around Cairo peacefully." *CNN*, April 7, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/09/africa/pink-taxi-cairo/index. html>, accessed July 7, 2018.

◄ teresa.pepe@ikos.uio.no ►

Valentine's Day

By AYMON KREIL and RIHAB BEN OTHMEN

In Egypt, January marks the beginning of the yearly appearance of Valentine's Day or the "Feast of Love" (*ʿīd al-ḥubb*) on television and in the press. As for all evergreen content, discussions on this feast hardly change year in year out, and they always follow a similar progression. In January, there are the announcements for the newest concerts, films and songs about the upcoming Valentine's Day [↗**Pop Music**; ↗**Celebrities**]. Then, around the 14th of February itself, articles discussing the incomes of florists and teddy bear vendors, debates on the relevance of Valentine's Day celebrations, compilations of statements on the benefits of love, and vox pops carried out on the streets of Cairo, in which anonymous Egyptians are given the chance to express their opinion on the celebration, pour out in succession (ʿABD AL-FAḌĪL; MUṢṬAFĀ ḤASAN; IBRĀHĪM; SAʿD AL-DĪN; *MBC Miṣr*; *Al Jazeera Mubasher*; *Al-Ghad TV*; *Akhbārak*). Later on, the newspaper publish reports on famous people celebrating Valentine's Day (ʿALAWĪ; ṢUBḤĪ) The same pattern repeats itself on the 4th of November, the date of "the Egyptian feast of love". The journalist Muṣṭafā Amīn invented this event in 1978. Yet, this celebration enjoys less success than its February equivalent (SHIHĀB; *Dream TV Egypt*).

Similarly, in Tunisia, as the 14th of February approaches, numerous shops, shopping centres, hotels, and restaurants are all ornated with the colours of love. In preparation for the feast, they are draped in red, and decorated with hearts or winged cupids. Notwithstanding some individuals' critiques and sometimes bitter condemnations, Valentine's Day is a profitable business. Whether engaged or married, many await this day to express the strength of their feelings through gift-giving. According to a survey conducted by Nadia Dejaoui for *L'Économiste maghrébin*, the profits are mostly distributed amongst florists, chocolatiers, perfume-makers, cosmetics shops, restaurants and even jewellers. In the same article, Sabrine, a salesgirl for a famous chocolatier, states that "it is during this time that we have more orders than any other day. It's Valentine's Day, the feast of love. (…) In business terms, it's even better than New Year's Day". Fatma, an advisor for a beauty parlour, confirms that "regardless of their age, the Tunisians have changed their habits. They love offering gifts" (DEJOUI). According to shopkeepers, Valentine's Day has become a timely opportunity to revive their business figures which stagnate outside the holiday season. In order to increase their sales, some of them offer special discounts and make payments easier to carry out especially for the holiday. Travel agencies, airline companies, and hotels also try to take advantage of the moment to increase their profits by selling romantic escapades at a low price, and by organising special soirees featuring stars of Arabic chanson, such as Rāghib ʿAllāma (Ragheb Alama) at the Golden Tulip Hotel Gammarth, and Ṣābir al-Ribāʿī (Sabir Rebaï) at the El Mouradi Hotel Club Kantaoui Sousse (*Tunisie Co Tourisme Culture*; *Weekend Tunisie.com*). Public service organisations also profit from the feast. For instance, an article on *Business News* published on the 13th of February by an anonymous journalist discusses the SNCFT (Société nationale des Chemins de fer tunisiens—Tunisian Nation Railway Company) and the Tunisian Post's initiatives for the feast of love: the SNCFT set up a stand selling flowers and gifts in Tunis Station, whereas the Tunisian Post announced a

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *278–*284
© Aymon Kreil and Rihab Ben Othmen, Ghent University, BE

special service for Sunday 14th February that would ensure the delivery of any bouquets of flowers ordered via Rapid-Poste agencies. The journalist welcomes these initiatives. For them, during this "morose economic period, it is good to take advantage of any and all opportunities" (I.N.; see also Y.N.).

Nevertheless, some people outright reject the feast of love, citing religious reasons. They argue that there are but two Eids in Islam; that which marks the conclusion of Ramadan; and the celebration of sacrifice, in remembrance of Abraham's sacrifice (*ʿīd al-aḍḥā*). Celebrating love on the 14th of February, a celebration which even encourages illicit relationships, is seen as an imitation of an infidel (*al-kuffār*) custom [↗**In Islam, …**]. Activists associated with the Daʿwā salafiyya and to the al-Nūr party tried to popularise the hashtag "I am Muslim, I do not celebrate Valentine's Day". Representatives of Al-Azhar opposed this approach in the Egyptian press, labelling these opinions as extremist, because the Islamic corpus does not implicitly condemn this feast (BELHATEM; ʿABD AL-HAFĪẒ; GHARĪB, ANĪS and MAHRĀN). The former Mufti of the Republic ʿAlī Ǧumʿa praises love on February 13 on TV quoting a hadith from the Prophet Muḥammad stating that "Who loved and abstained died as a martyr" to argue that Islam praises love. His critics mock him, presenting ironically the famous singer ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ as his source, while other denounce the hadith he quoted as weak (*ʿArabī Būst*). Finally, others promote the idea that Egyptians were already celebrating love early in the year during the Pharaonic era (FĀRŪQ; BELHATEM) [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Past *vs.* Present**, ↗**Clash**].

In Tunisia, on the other hand, according to numerous media-cited sociologists in 2016, the celebration of Valentine's Day reflects broader social developments, especially amongst the youth. University professor Ulfa Yūsuf (Olfa Youssef), for example, explains on Jawhara FM that the celebration of Valentine's Day in Tunisia is more widely celebrated than it was ten years ago. She adds that this celebration, in spite of all controversies, has gained a certain place in the habits and collective imaginations of Tunisians (*Jawhara FM*). This evolution could be an indicator of the role that the intergenerational gap has played in the success of Valentine's Day. Indeed, for many youths, this celebration appears to be an important occasion to express their feelings, as well as a way of displaying their modernity and fashion taste. On the other hand, for the majority of older people, this celebration is judged as "foreign to local customs (*mūsh min ʿādātna*)". Additionally, for many of them, love should be celebrated every day. Therefore, this emotion should not be reduced to a single day, nor be limited simply to romantic love. However, even among those who support Valentine's Day, many call for a celebration of love in its broadest sense, including for instance parental love, or patriotic love (*Capfm Tunisie*; *Jawhara FM*; see also *RTCI*).

In Egypt too, many encourage people to broaden their scope regarding the type of love that this feast should honour, without necessarily opposing its celebration outright. It doesn't only concern couples, but also the family, the nation and even the president. Parliamentary representative for Egyptians abroad, Ghāda Gharīb ʿAǧamī, elected on the political alliance "For the Love of Egypt" (*Fī ḥubb Miṣr*), dedicates Valentine's Day "to President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, to Egypt, and to its great people" [↗**Father Figures**]. Newspaper *Al-Ahram Hebdo* also reports on the initiative of the National Centre for Child Culture, which has decided to centre its festive activities around love for the country, with children being invited to paint a fresco expressing their attachment to Egypt, whilst also

learning patriotic songs (BELHATEM). In an article from *al-Maṣrī al-yawm* on the "Valentine's Day," portfolios by the Béla photography studio, which housed the photographers of the Egyptian Royal Court, Ashraf Muḥyī al-Dīn, heir to the owners of the studio, stresses the importance of celebrating family during the celebration in the past. Nowadays, however, it seems to him that young people centre it on themselves, and on consumerist desires (MUṢṬAFĀ) [↗**Past *vs.* Present**; ↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. Yet, in the vox pops too, the gifts given to one's family come often to the fore (*Al Jazeera Mubasher*; *Al-Ghad TV*, NADER). Likewise, *albawaba* relates of a man who spent Valentine's Day with his daughter (*albawaba* a).

The comparisons between Valentine's Day and the Egyptian Celebration of Love specifically highlight the difference between the global celebration, which focusses on those in love (*al-ʿushshāq)*, and the Egyptian one, which makes families the central focus, or at least it was intended as such. As Muṣṭafà Amīn's daughter explains in *al-Waṭan*, her father's initiative was

> to encourage people to love the homeland, to love one another, and to love [one's] family. It was a general invitation to love… It had nothing to do with the strongly intimate American sense of love, nor of its "Valentine's Day" which only celebrates the love between a man and a woman.

She sees it as a way of "reconstructing the Egyptian human being", distinct by its "chivalric (*murū'a*) character, its sense of fraternity, and sacrifice" (AMĪN) [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**].

On the day of this same celebration, psychologist Muḥammad Rağā'ī explains in *Al-Ahrām* that "the feeling of belonging, faithfulness and the dedication to one's work are the most important tools in building and pushing nations forward, and are the most beautiful gifts for the Egyptian Feast of Love. For love is not a feeling between a man and a woman, but is something deeper, more general, and more comprehensive. Someone who is a traitor to his country is a felon and is insincere in his feelings for others" (SHĀKIR) [↗**Psychiatrists**].

During vox pops in Egypt, many respondents cited their being single as the driving reason behind why they do not celebrate Valentine's Day, oftentimes using the anglicism "single" or its derivative neologism in the Egyptian dialect "*sangala*" (*Al Jazeera Mubasher*; *Dream TV Egypt*; *Al-Ghad TV*; see also ʿIMĀD; ḤAMDĪ). Both of these factors demonstrate the importance being in a relationship has for the respondents, who would otherwise celebrate the holiday, as well as the American influence on romantic fantasies. English words are therefore used to label one's own relationship status. On Twitter, the hashtag that dominates during Valentine's Day in Egypt is "to make the girl love you (*ʿashān il-bint tiḥibbak*), an indication of the pervasiveness of love in an era deemed loveless (ṢALĀḤ) [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**]. One of the respondents to a vox pop even explains when asked if he supports of opposes Valentine's Day: "When I am in a relation, I am for it, and when I am not, I am against it" (NADER). Egyptian newspapers also refer the spectacular expressions of love that Valentine's Day brings. One paper reported on the case of a man from Tanta who unveiled a huge banner on his street on which he had written "my beloved wife" and "I adore your mother", without a doubt his way of counteracting the proverbial clash between sons-in-law

and their mothers-in-law (SHIBL). Similarly, a police chief in Kafr al-Shaykh put up a banner upon which was written "I love you Samar, and I don't hold a grudge against you" (BELHATEM; *albawaba* b). Finally, the website *Zaḥma* translated an article from the *Washington Post* reporting that the husband of Āya Ḥiǧāzī, an activist and the founder of the NGO *Bilādī* which takes care of children whose parents are in prison, presented a red bouquet of flowers to his wife who sat in the defendants' chair during the trial against the organisation they were leading (*Zaḥma*) [↗**Prison**, ↗**Court Trials**].

Indeed, it is often repeated that love is flawed in Egypt. For instance, in an article in the Cairene weekly newspaper *Yawm al-sābiʿ* from the 1st of November relates the words of psychologist Shaymāʾ ʿArafa, lamenting that an education teaching that love between a boy and a girl is forbidden results in

> love [losing] its sense, and it is transformed into a crime. (…) Either we hide it, or we subconsciously try to imitate the West, as a result, [love is seen as] teddy bears, wearing red, and harassment on the streets. (AL-DĪNĀRĪ)

Similarly, newspapers report on a discussion on social media regarding a post a wife addressed to her husband, in which she gives "twenty reasons why I no longer love you" [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. She lists them on rolls of pink paper, the colour associated with Valentine's Day, complaining of his negligence towards her, which led her to stop loving him (*DūtMṣr*). The blame for the lack of love, or at least the lack of enthusiasm for celebrating Valentine's Day, is also attributed to the difficult material conditions faced by Egyptians, which echoes the economic concerns reported by Tunisian media. As stated above, in the media coverage of the event in Tunisia, it is indeed that a general economic crisis dominates the country, and that Valentine's Day appears as an important commercial opportunity to generate income [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. Facebook jokes—which are also shown in newspapers—circulate Egypt, portraying men offering jerrycans of petrol or gas canisters to their beloved, bearing in mind just how precious they have become (ʿIMĀD; ḤAMDĪ). These are echoed by articles giving advice on how to make your own cheap gifts (ʿĀRIF).

There are various differences between Egypt and Tunisia, especially when it comes to the general political context, gender relations, and history. However, Valentine's Day has a similar aspect in these two countries. This is a sign of transnational circulation of celebratory models promoted by commerce, and by the ubiquity of fantasies tying happiness to romantic love, which are further brought out by the important vectors of cinematic fictions and song. Resistance to Valentine's Day therefore seems to be an essential part of the challenge in preserving religious and national exceptionalism for many people. Nevertheless, the promoters of Valentine's Day have succeeded in instilling a desire to a large number of Egyptians and Tunisians to celebrate the event, and, in so doing, have made the inability to participate an indicator of the economic crisis in both countries. There remains a certain ambivalence, though, about the main addressees of Valentine's Day, with a focus on couples on the one hand, and gifts to other members of the family and friends on the other. However, it is perhaps precisely this ambiguity which allows so many people to find a connection to the celebration.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Court Trials ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Father Figures ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ Psychiatrists

CODES – Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

References

ʿABD AL-FAḌĪL, Marwa. "Hādhihī kharīṭat ḥafalāt ʿīd al-ḥubb fī Miṣr." *al-ʿArabī al-ǧadīd*, January 19, 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/Print/ffd8e974-4b6a-4ac3-9a34-3f91e49d60> (accessed April 15, 2018).

ʿABD AL-HAFIẒ, Ṣabrī. "Fī Miṣr… al-ward 'rasūl al-ḥubb'." *'Īlāf*, February 14, 2016, <https://elaph.com/Web/News/2016/2/1072467.html> (accessed October 19, 2019).

[*Akhbārak* =] "'Al-shafā'if' tataṣaddar hadāyā ʿīd al-ḥubb fī 'l-Sharqiyya." *Akhbārak*, February, 2016 <https://akhbarak.net/news/8058101/articles/21103723/صور-الشفايف-تتصدر-هدايا-عيد-الحب-في-الشرقية> (accessed May 18, 2019).

ʿALAWĪ, Rānyā. "Bāsim Yūsuf maʿa ibnatih fīh ʿīd al-ḥubb… wa-Rashā Mahdī tulfit al-'anẓār." *Al-Yawm al-sābiʿ*, February 15, 2016.

[*albawaba* a =] "Ṣūra: 'ab yuqarrir al-iḥtifāl bi-ʿīd al-ḥubb maʿa ibnatih!" *albawaba*, February 15, 2016 <https://www.albawaba.com/ar/805604-اختيار-المحرر/الاحتفال-بعيد-الحب> (accessed April 16, 2018)

[*albawaba* b =] "Bi-l-ṣuwar: ʿīd al-ḥubb ʿind al-Miṣriyyīn lahū ṭuqūsuh al-khāṣṣa." *albawaba*, February 17, 2016, <https://www.albawaba.com/ar805996-اختيار-المحرر/لافتات-مصرية-في-عيد-الحب> (accessed April 15, 2018).

[*Alghad TV* =] "'Īd al-ḥub fī Miṣr bayna mā bayn al-iḥtifāl wa-l-sukhriyya." *YouTube*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3oCTmDxVpM> (accessed April 12, 2018).

[*Al Jazeera Mubasher* =] "Sa'alnā ʿayyina min al-shaʿb al-miṣrī: 'ēh ra'yak fī ʿīd il-ḥubb?? Wi-hatgīb hadāyā li-mīn??" *YouTube*, February 14, 2016 <https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=_LQlTNiL1Hc> (Accessed April 10, 2018).

AMĪN, Ṣafiyya Muṣṭafā. "Ahlan bi-ʿīd al-ḥubb." *Al-Waṭan*, November 4, 2016.

[*ʿArabī Būst* =] "Muftī Miṣr al-sābiq fī ʿīd al-ḥubb: man māt dūn ḥabībatih fa-huwa shahīd!" *ʿArabī Būst*, Februrary 14, 2016, <https://arabicpost.net/archive/2016/02/14/مفتي-مصر-السابق-في-عيد-الحب-من-مات-دون-ح/> (accessed October 5, 2019).

ʿĀRIF, Nūrān. "15 fikra rakhīṣa li-ʿīd al-ḥubb." *Mubtadā*, November 4, 2016.

BELHATEM, Najet. "Les ingrédients égyptiens de la Saint-Valentin." *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, February 17, 2016.

[*Capfm Tunisie* =] "Al-Ṭunsī huwa 'l-awwal fī 'l-ḥubb wa-l-rūmānsiyya wa-fī 'l-kalām al-ḥilw al-shukūlāṭa." *YouTube*, February 15, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1HxSHzVsyA> (accessed November 17, 2020).

DEJOUI, Nadia. "La Saint-Valentin, à tout prix!" *L'Économiste maghrébin*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2016/02/14/la-saint-valentin-a-tout-prix/> (accessed December 12, 2021).

al-DĪNĀRĪ, Ǧihād. "Al-Falāntayn al-miṣrī *vs* al-'aǧnābī.. ʿīd al-ḥubb al-miṣrī 'aṭlaqahū 'Muṣṭafā 'Amīn' fī ǧināza.. wal-'aǧnābī bi-sabab 'iʿdām al-qiss 'Falāntayn'.. al-ḥubb yusayṭir ʿalà 'aʿyād al-'aǧānib wa-l-taḥarrush min 'abraz maẓāhirih fī Miṣr." *Al-Yawm al-sābiʿ*, November 1, 2016.

[*Dream TV Egypt* =] "Ṣabāḥ Drīm: shāhid ra'y al-shāriʿ al-miṣrī fī ʿīd al-ḥubb... 'al-Falāntayn' al-miṣrī." *YouTube*, November 4, 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MC2qmeFGmps> (accessed June 3, 2018).

[*DūtMṣr* =] "'Aghrab hadiyyat Falāntayn.. Lēh baṭṭalt 'aḥibbak." *DūtMṣr*, 2016 <http://www.dotmsr.com/details/صور-أغرب-هدية-فلانتين-ليه-بطلت-أحبك/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

FĀRŪQ, Sanā'. "Bāḥith 'atharī: al-Miṣriyyīn al-qudamā' 'awwal man iḥtafalū bi-'īd al-ḥubb wa-tabādalū 'l-wurūd." *Al-Waṭan*, February 11, 2016.

GHARĪB, Maḥmūd, Wahba 'ANĪS, and Du'ā' MAHRĀN. "'Īd al-ḥubb' fī Miṣr.. rūmānsiyya wa-ǧadal dīnī wa-takhfīḍāt tiǧāriyya." *EREM News*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.eremnews.com/entertainment/society/433683> (accessed April 30, 2019).

ḤAMDĪ, Balīgh. "Taǧmī' li-'aẓraf ṣuwar sākhira min 'īd al-ḥubb 'alà mawāqi' al-tawāṣul." *klma.org*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.klma.org/egypt-news/تجميع-لأطرف-صور-ساخرة-من-عيد-الحب-على-مو> (accessed April 30, 2019).

'IBRĀHĪM, 'Udayy. "Miṣr fī 'īd al-ḥubb… maḥāl al-wurūd wa-l-hadāyā tanta'ish.. wa-l-bā'a: 'il-shughl 'ālī'.. wa-l-ẓurūf al-iqtiṣādiyya lā tu'aththir 'alaynā.. wa-iḥṣā'iyyāt: 73% min al-mushtarīn fī hādhā 'l-yawm riǧāl.. wa-khubarā': shirā' al-hadāyā 'āda lā tata'aththar bi-l-ẓurūf." *albawaba*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.albawabhnews.com/1771660> (accessed April 15, 2018)

'IMĀD, Sārā. "'Hadiyya ǧirkan binzīn'.. ruwwād al-faysbūk yaskhurūn min 'īd al-ḥubb al-miṣrī." *Tahrir News*, November 4, 2016.

I.N. "La Poste et la SNCFT fêtent la Saint-Valentin." *Business News*, February 13, 2016, <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/La-Poste-et-la-SNCFT-f%EAtent-la-Saint-Valentin,520,62447,3> (accessed December 12, 2021).

[*Jawhara FM* =] "Ulfa Yūsuf: 'Īd al-ḥubb fī Tūnis bayn al-rafḍ wa-l-qabūl." *Jawhara FM*, February 12, 2016, <https://www.jawharafm.net/ar/article/ألفة-يوسف--عيد-الحب-في-تونس-بين-الرفض-والقبول> (accessed December 12, 2021).

[*MBC Miṣr* =] "Ḥaṣriyyan 'ughniyyat Ḥamāda Hilāl al-ǧadīda 'mitghayyara' bi-munāsabat 'īd al-ḥubb." *YouTube*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9m3v0O8m9I> (accessed May 14, 2019) .

MUṢṬAFĀ, Nūrhān. "120 'āman min al-'ishq fī 'ṣūra': 'kān 'īd al-ḥubb mawsim taṣwīr al-'ā'ilāt mish dabādīb ḥamrā'." *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/892287>.

MUṢṬAFĀ ḤASAN, Muḥammad. "Ughniyyāt ǧadīda 'alà 'l-qanawāt iḥtifālan bi-'īd al-ḥubb." *Al-Ahrām*, February 2016 <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/daily/News/131817/9/476674/إذاعة-وتليفزيون/أغنيات-جديدة-على-القنوات-احتفالاً-بعيد-الحب.aspx> (accessed April 10, 2018).

NADER, Eslam. "Qanāt Miṣr al-faḍā'iyya – taqrīr 'an 'īd al-ḥubb." *YouTube*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irzGDGImtVE> (accessed December 7, 2020).

[*Radio Tunis Chaîne Internationale (RTCI)* =] "Les Tunisiens et la Saint Valentin!" *RTCI*, February 14, 2016 <http://www.rtci.tn/fete-saint-valentin-bonne-habitude-mauvaise-imitation/> (accessed December 12, 2021).

SA'D AL-DĪN, Rāndā. "Balāsh 'Dabādīb wi-wurūd 'aḥmar il-sana dī.. wi-hāt-ĭ-lhā 'aksiswārāt'." *Al-Yawm al-sābi'*, February 13, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/13/بلاش-دباديب-وورد-أحمر-السنة-ديه-وهات-لها-اكسسوارات/>

ṢALĀḤ, Sāra. "Law qaḍayt al-Falāntayn singal ista'idd.. al-ihtimām fī muqaddimat hāshtāǧ ''ashān il-bint tiḥibbak'." *Al-Yawm al-sābi'*, February 15, 2016.

SHĀKIR, 'Amal. "'Īd al-ḥubb al-miṣrī laysa 'Falāntayn.'" *Al-Ahrām*, November 3, 2016.

SHIBL, 'Alā'. "Bi-munāsabat ''īd al-ḥubb'.. zawǧ yu'alliq lāfita li-zawǧatih fī shawāri' Ṭanṭā: 'B-amūt fī 'ummik.'" *Al-Shurūq*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=14022016&id=1c8d2f49-0f16-441b-bce0-0786a009d022> (accessed December 12, 2021).

SHIHĀB, ʾĪmān. "'Īd al-ḥubb 'al-miṣrī'.. khurūǧ wa-ʾakla ''alà ʾaddī liḥāfak.. midd iḥtifālak'." *Al-Waṭan*, November 4, 2016.

SUBḤĪ, 'Abd Allāh. "Khālid al-Ṣāwī wa-l-Subkī wa-ʾabṭāl masraḥ Miṣr yaḥtafilūn maʿan bi-ʿīd al-ḥubb." *Fī ʾl-fann*, February 15, 2016, <https://www.filfan.com/galleries/18844?page=2> (accessed April 18, 2019).

[*Tunisie Co Tourisme Culture* =] "Soirée Saint Valentin avec Ragheb Alama au Golden Tulip Gammarth le 13 février." *Tunisie Co Tourisme Culture*, February 2, 2016, <https://tunisie.co/article/5198/actus/actus/soiree-234915> (accessed December 12, 2021).

[*Weekend Tunisie.com* =] "La star Saber Rebai à l'Hôtel El Mouradi Club Kantaoui Sousse." *Weekend Tunisie.com*, 2016, <http://www.weekend-tunisie.com/hotels/hotels-3-etoiles-et-plus/la-star-saber-rebai-a-lhotel-el-mouradi-club-kantaoui-sousse.html> (accessed December 12, 2021).

Y.N. "St Valentin: La Poste Tunisienne au rendez-vous." *Kapitalis*, February 12, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/02/12/st-valentin-la-poste-tunisienne-au-rendez-vous/> (accessed December 12, 2021).

[*Zaḥma* =] "Wāshinṭun Pūst: Fī Miṣr.. ʿīd al-ḥubb fī 'qafaṣ' al-maḥkama." *Zaḥma*, February 14, 2016 <https://zahma.cairolive.com/واشنطن-بوسن-في-مصر-عيد-الحب-في-قفص/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

◄ aymon.kreil@ugent.be ►
◄ rihab.benothmen@ugent.be ►

The Voice from Above

By Stephan Guth and Mihaila Yordanova

Things certainly do not look rosy in Tunisia, and even 10-11-year old Zaynab in *Zaynab takrah al-thalj / Zaineb n'aime pas la neige* (Zeineb Hates the Snow), a documentary about emigration [↗**Migration**], is tired of having to sing, every morning at school, the 'meaningless' national anthem and cheer so much "Tunisie, Tunisie!" Yet, the forced patriotism of the morning muster, preserved at Tunisian schools as a ritual even five years after the Revolution, seems to be nothing more than a faint remnant of the omnipresent hegemonic official discourse of earlier times—times when the ancient regime was still in place, and times also that are still very well remembered and the memory of which is consciously kept alive in assessments of the despotic past, like *ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux* (As I Open My Eyes), as a warning for the present and future [↗**Past vs. Present**]. Now, however, and thanks to the Revolution and a belief, shared by most, that information in contemporary Tunisia should no longer be monopolized by the state, the voice of a 'Big Brother,' so present before the Revolution, has disappeared almost completely. Announcements made by the new government are constantly relativized by information from other channels and deconstructed by a watchful opposition and an ever-growing civil society, and there is lively public discussion of any step taken, or words uttered, by those in power. When, for instance, President Beji Caid Essebsi makes an attempt to stage himself as an heir of the almost uncontested 'father,' Habib Bourguiba, his recourse to positively-laden imagery is immediately debunked as a weak politician's helpless attempt to gain broad popular support—a ridiculous move that social media activists just seem to have been waiting for to make fun of [↗Father Figures, ↗**Social Media**]. The times when the heroic self-staging of the President would have become the official narrative definitely belong to the past.

Not at all so in Egypt—which, with all probability, is the reason why translations of Orwell's *1984* are still among the year's best-sellers (Orwell). And this is also why the 'Voice from Above'—the official narrative of the state of affairs in the country, broadcast on radio and TV and spread in newspapers as well as on the Internet—forms part of any critical assessment of the present, be it documentary or dressed in fiction. When Tāmir al-Saʿīd portrays 'his' Cairo [↗Downtown/Centre-ville] on the eve of the Revolution (*Ākhir ayyām al-madīna* / In the Last Days of the City), he depicts it as a space filled with official radio and TV programs hailing the President's latest achievements. Of course, this is Mubārak's voice, not Sīsī's—but has this changed substantially? [↗**Past vs. Present**, ↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. Obviously, it still does make sense also for the authors of *Nawwāra*, *Mawlānā*, and *The Nile Hilton Incident* to recall conditions as they were under Mubārak or the intermediate SCAF government: When the housemaid Nawwāra commutes between her home in a Cairo slum and the luxurious gated community where she works [↗*ʿAshwā'iyyāt*, ↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**], the SCAF's statements and promises come over the radio on the bus, the microbus, or the ↗**Tuk-tuk**; when the petty policeman Nūr al-Dīn in *The Nile Hilton Incident* returns home and opens his shabby black-and-white TV, there is nothing but official propaganda: Mubārak having achieved yet another success, Mubārak opening yet

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *285–*290
© Stephan Guth, IKOS, Univ. of Oslo, NO, and Mihaila Yordanova, Brussels

another new chapter in Egypt's glorious history, Mubārak steadfastly facing all challenges, Mubārak providing for his beloved "children," and so on; and the producers of *Mawlānā* do not only show, in similar scenes, that the 'Voice from Above' is everywhere, permeating public as well as private space, but they also take us to one of the studios that contribute to producing this voice, granting us insight into the information politics of the regime and the fear of those responsible of touching upon sensitive issues or perhaps even criticizing the ruler. Compared to such settings, the present situation as portrayed in assessments of the more recent state of affairs does not seem to be much different: successes of the Sīsī government are heralded also from the taxi driver's or hairdresser's radios in the short feature film *Ḥārr jāff ṣayfan* (Dry Hot Summers), and the radio's voice proclaiming newly created job opportunities or important initiatives taken to improve the educational system fills also the place in the slum where Nādiya and her children are struggling hard to survive (*Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan* / We Have Never Been Kids).

However, proclamations of successes and state-decreed optimism are not the only tones in which the 'Voice from Above' speaks to the people. And it does not remain unchallenged either, although this is certainly more difficult and dangerous in Egypt than it is in Tunisia. The Voice comes in many different forms, an Orwellian creature with a modern twist, argues journalist 'Amr Khalīfa. It is a combination of criminalizing independent writing and somehow managing to pass off "the true crime of state propaganda" as journalism, all in the name of "brainwashing a fatigued and willing public" (KHALIFA). The author describes the Voice's modus operandi as a mixture of repression and recruitment, the carrot and the stick of Egypt's propaganda machine. The trend, he claims, started in the 1950s with Nasser employing army officers as in-house censors in all major media outlets. And it has continued ever since [↗**Past vs. Present**, ↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. Through a combination of silencing the voice of dissent and defining a clear message to be delivered by charismatic state-supporting popular personalities, the Sisi regime has always been eager, and to a large extent successful in its efforts, to make sure that its voice is the only one people at large really listen to. For Khalīfa, the public dialogue has turned into an endless monologue. "Without an alternative narrative, Egyptians will continue to be the clay in the government's moulding hands, watching TV as the days pass by," concludes the piece, evoking stark dystopian images [↗**The Voice from Above**].

The journalist's impression is telling in itself. But it is also not the full picture. Generally speaking, on the surface many things *can* be said—and *are* in fact being said quite frankly. Thus, many contributions in the thick end-of-the-year review of the semi-official magazine *al-Muṣawwar* talk openly about food shortages [↗**Baby Milk**], the economic crisis [↗**Dollar Crisis**, ↗**Tourist Resources**] and inflation, and many other shortcomings or drawbacks, such as deplorable hygiene and poor medical services in hospitals, or the underdevelopment of the provinces [↗**Center vs. Periphery**], or the fact that "the State does not have a comprehensive plan to appreciate the youth's creative potential," as a professor of engineering and energy has it in one of the review's many interviews with experts in their respective fields (*al-Muṣawwar*, 106); even the difficulties that the security apparatus has in coping with terrorism (or what is declared as such) are not taboo or denied, nor are social fragmentation, the collapse of national unity, and the waning sense of patriotism—all in all a rather gloomy picture.

Yet, addressing such issues is only one thing. There should also be deep and critical analysis—which, however, is mostly lacking from these reports. And those whom they blame for the shortcomings and drawbacks—if they blame someone at all—are never those in power, but at best a collective and very general "we". And this is also why "*we*"—not those in power—"have to work hard in order to compensate for five years of chaos" (*ibid.*, 144). The regime itself favours yet another variant. It does not deny obvious shortages, failures, difficulties, crises either—after all, nobody should say that it ignores facts or tries to sweep problems under the carpet; rather, it is eager to show that it is well aware of that all and takes up the challenges with determination (*muwājaha*, "facing," is a keyword not only at the Cairo Bookfair where "Culture is *fī 'l-muwājaha,"* i.e., courageously facing all kinds of challenges). But when it comes to explaining what has gone wrong, it does not blame "us", but the numerous enemies of Egypt, whether external or internal [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**, ↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**], those

> enviers (*al-ḥāsidūn*) and evil people (*ahl al-sharr*) [who] dislike the fact that we are close to realizing our hopes. Therefore, they do everything to throw us in the pits and force us to pluck the blossoms before the plant can bear fruits (*ibid.*, 51).

Many public persons echo this narrative. When, for instance, Ḥarb al-Dahshūrī, a former president of the National Football Association, is asked about the many defeats Egypt has suffered this year, he answers that one of the main reasons is that Egypt these days is "exposed to the biggest defamation campaign (*ḥamlat tashwīh*) in its history" (*ibid.*, 204), blaming foreign and native elements who allegedly seek to distort the country's picture in the media and abroad and in this way sow pessimism and despair in people's hearts.

Therefore, and although the problems are undeniable, one should not let the "forces of the evil" gain the upper hand [↗**Inferiority vs. Superiority**]. Rather, one should turn one's attention to the many successes that have been achieved so far and give good reason to be optimistic: giant development projects like the Serapeion culvert (*saḥḥāra*) that brings Nile water to Sinai and will turn thousands of *feddān*s into agricultural lands, are already bringing progress to every corner of Egypt [↗**Center vs. Periphery**], and "the building of the country continues" (as the Minister of Planning assures us); the huge investments put in the new administrative Capital ("Sisity") promise to generate "extraordinary revenues"; the modernisation of the Armed Forces is advancing, enabling "the best soldiers on Earth" to continue to proudly fulfil their meritorious duties and protect the dear beloved homeland's well-being (*salāma*); the Stock Exchange is on the best way to "rejuvenation" (*intiʿāsh*); the World Health Organisation has congratulated Egypt on its successful fight against all kinds of diseases and viruses; the dream of complete self-sufficiency in food "can definitely come true," one can be "very optimistic for Egypt's future"—even when it comes to getting a grip on the problem of widespread sexual harassment: towards the end of the year, Māyā Mursī, the president of the National Council for Women is proud to state that "the girls [in our country] have raised the slogan 'I'll report harassment to the police station'" and that, taken together with the proclaimed success of several official campaigns encouraging and supporting all kinds of women's initiatives, there even seems to be good reason to think bigger now: "Leadership positions are waiting for us," she declares (*ibid.*, 166-7) [↗**Male *vs.* Female**].

And one should of course also remember that the most characteristic trait of the "Egyptian personality" is its "unbreakable will" anyway (*ibid.*, 140)—a quick look into history [↗**Past vs. Present**] suffices to show that Egypt has seen many crises but always been able to rise again and that Egyptians are masters of the "art of turning trials into benefits" (*fann taḥwīl al-miḥna ilà minḥa*) (*ibid.*, 160) [↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**]. Given that "our people does not know brokenheartedness" and "our will is bigger than any trial" (as for example Hānī Ramzī, the former captain of the Egyptian national football team, thinks—*ibid.*, 206 [↗**Football**]), it should be a matter of course and of honour to follow al-Sīsī's and others' appeals to "rise" and "stand shoulder to shoulder (*takātuf*)" to "bear the burden," "endure" and "face the great challenges" (as ʿIṣām ʿAbd al-Munʿim, another former football association president, formulates the recipe for the *makhraj*, the "way out" of the crisis—*ibid.*, 207). "Yes, Egypt can!" (*ibid.*, 114), especially so because it is guided by President al-Sīsī, the leader in whom one can trust because this man is capable of helping the country up after it has stumbled (*ʿathara*); "under al-Sisi's rule, Egypt will never break/collapse (*tankasir*)" (*ibid.*, 104). So, do not believe the "enviers," defamers, slanderers, and other "forces of the Evil" who only work

> to deprive the people of their trust in their Leader who has chosen them. [...] one has to stand up against weak belief. If you do not resist, He [the Leader] may not choose you again, and then the hands of the clock will go back to where they were before the herald of a good future [*lit.*, the glad tidings, good omens, propitious signs: *al-bishāra*] had arrived. (*Ibid.*, 51)

All-pervasive as this type of official narrative is, many believe in it and echo it faithfully. But there are also many attempts to disclose its logic as deceitful. Mostly these operate via juxtaposition. When the voice from above is heard heralding glorious successes in *Abadan lam nakun atfālan*, *Nawwāra*, or *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna*, the spectators see Nādiya toiling to scrub the floor around the cramped toilet in her slum flat, or Nawwāra's minibus crossing a densely crowded, dusty and loud megalopolis with striking class differences [↗Affluence *vs.* Destitution], or a shabby old city centre with rotten elevators, decaying flats, a lot of beggars, and obtrusively roaring mosque loudspeakers [↗Downtown/Centre-ville]. Satire uses similar techniques. The opening page of Islām Gāwīsh's *il-Waraqa 2* shows a man (= the average Egyptian) sitting on the back of a motorcycle, driven at high speed by a woman in black (= Egypt), looking determined to drive on. With fear speaking from his face, the man asks, "Where are you taking us, Egypt?" And Mme Egypt only answers, "Yalla, just on with it!" (GĀWĪSH, 5). The ridiculing *effet* of many satirical Youtube channels, too, builds on the evident contrast, say: contradiction, between an obvious frightening, dangerous, and not at all hope- or trust-inspiring reality and the optimism of the voice from above [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**, ↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**, ↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**].

Having a long experience of controlling the press, radio and TV, it is not really difficult for the regime to contain critical voices uttered in these media. The main challenge for it to ensure the hegemony of the official discourse today, however, is probably ↗**Social Media**. Yet, although it is hard, it is not impossible either—with the help of "digital armies," as journalist ʿAmr Khalīfa calls the state's digital anti-"subversion" forces. According to Khalīfa, the use of these "armies" spans back to the days of Mubārak, and it has expanded

particularly after 2015. An online row, however, brings these online groups into the spotlight once again. In November, Khālid Rifʿat, a professor at Suez Canal University and "a supporter of the regime," publishes screenshots of posts from the closed Facebook group "Union of the Supporters of the State,", after being himself attacked by the digital soldiers. The pictures appear to show the members of the group, allegedly run by the journalist Ibrāhīm al-Garḥī, strategizing over how best to promote different state policies through attacking critics of the regime, spreading rumours and expressing their explicit support, while warning each other not to post identical content to avoid being accused of taking organized actions (al-HINDĪ; ʿALĪ).

The new information is soon picked up by a number of Arabic media outlets outside of Egypt, leaving many wondering about the depth and breadth of the state's online propaganda activities. Some speculate about the cost of maintaining an online army (ʿALĪ), others look for evidence of coordination between the social media trolls and online news sites, most notably *Youm7* (al-HINDĪ). But the mechanisms of operating the apparatus are also of interest. Reports emerge on the thousands of profiles (ʿALĪ), a mixture of public figures, fake accounts and private individuals who constantly engage in monitoring online activity, harassing the opposition, spreading false information and influencing public opinion. Regardless of the facts behind the accusations, one thing is clear. The fear of the ever-open eyes and mouth of the administration is very real.

Not least because the pro-Sisi journalist and social media users seem particularly good at defusing potential political tension by providing alternative narrative on controversial events. Al-Sisi sold the land? Not at all. It was just the first step in a greater plan to get Egypt out of the Camp David agreement and defeat Israel (ʿALĀʾ AL-DĪN) [↗**Red Sea Islands**]. The downing of Metrojet Flight 9268, the murder of Giulio Regeni and the crash of Egyptian Air flight 804 – could the country have security issues? Think again! It is all part of a grand US and UK conspiracy, aimed at harming Egypt's international image and bringing the Muslim Brotherhood back to power (MEMRI). All pieces of the puzzle are constantly being rearranged to fit neatly into the official public discourse, the unified voice blasting loudly from radio transmitters, newspaper pages, TV screens and social media, blurring the line between reality and fiction and building a world of alternative facts [↗**True vs. False**, ↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Baby Milk ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Migration ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ Tuk-tuk

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Center vs. Periphery ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority vs. Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past vs. Present ♦ True vs. False ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Normality = Heroism (Surviving) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

Written

ʿALĀʾ AL-DĪN, Muḥammad . 2016.“Lijān al-Sīsī al-ʾiliktrūniyya: hayyā ʾilà ʾl-kidhb.” *UltraṢawt*, April 16, <https://www.ultrasawt.com/لجان-السيسي-الإلكترونية-هيا-إلى-الكذب/محمد-علاء-الدين/قول> (last accessed November 25, 2018).

ʿALĪ, Tāmir. 2016. “Faḍīḥat al-lijān al-ʾiliktrūniyya takshif taḍlīl al-Sīsī lil-Miṣriyyīn.” *ʿArabī21*, November 10, <https://arabi21.com/story/959429/فضيحة-اللجان-الإلكترونية-تكشف-تضليل-السيسي-للمصريين> (last accessed November 25, 2018).

GĀWĪSH, Islām. 2016. *il-Waraqa 2*. Cairo: Dār Ṭūya.

al-HINDĪ, Ḥusām. 2016. “Suqūṭ ʾūlà katāʾib ‘taqfīl al-internet’: mādhā taʿrif ʿan ‘subūbat’ al-lijān al-ʾiliktrūniyya fī Miṣr?” *SāsāPost*, November 7, <https://www.sasapost.com/ibrahim-elgarhi-and-electronic-committees/> (last accessed November 25, 2018).

KHALIFA, Amr. 2016. “In Egypt, journalism is a crime.” *Middle East Eye*, December 2, 2016, rev. Dec. 6, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/actually-egypt-journalism-crime-1337317191> (last accessed November 25, 2018).

[MEMRI =] The Middle East Media Research Institute. “Conspiracy Theories in Egypt Surrounding Crash of EgyptAir Flight 804: Accusations against U.S., U.K., Israel, Turkey; Claims of Western Plot against Egypt.” *MEMRI*, 6 June 2016, <https://www.memri.org/reports/conspiracy-theories-egypt-surrounding-crash-egyptair-flight-804-accusations-against-us-uk> (last accessed November 25, 2018)

[*al-Muṣawwar* =] N. N. “2017—ʿām al-bināʾ al-ṣaʿb waʾl-muʾlim.” *al-Muṣawwar*, no. 4812 (special issue), December 28, 2016.

[ORWELL =] ŪRWĪL, Jūrj. *1984: riwāya* / tarjamat Shafīq Asʿad FARĪD. Cairo: Dār Āfāq, 2017 [©2016]. – Earlier translations, like the one by Anwar al-SHĀMĪ (al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2014) were still prominently on display in bookshops, at street vendors, or at the Bookfair.

Movies

Abadan lam nakun atfālan (We Have Never Been Kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). EG, U.A.E., Qatar, RL 2016.

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the Last Days of the City). By Tāmir al-Saʿīd (Tamer el Said). EG, DE, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j’ouvre les yeux (As I Open My Eyes). By Leyla Bouzid. TN, F, B 2015.

Ḥārr jāff ṣayfan (Dry Hot Summers). Short film by Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif Elbendary). EG, DE 2015.

Mawlānā (Our Master) / *The Preacher.* By Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). EG, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). EG 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). EG, DE, SE, DK 2017.

Zaynab takrah al-thalj / Zaineb n’aime pas la neige (Zeineb Hates the Snow). Documentary by Kawthar Bin Haniyya (Kaouther Ben Hania). TN, F, Qatar, RL, U.A.E. 2016.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►
◄ mly201@yahoo.co.uk ►

Zaḥma

… in Egypt

By Walter Armbrust

In *Qabla Zaḥmat al-Ṣayf* (Before the Summer Crowds), the last film of the celebrated director Muḥammad Khān (*MY*, Jul26), four urbanites flee the crowds of Cairo to a vacation village on the northern *sāḥil*—the Mediterranean coast west of Alexandria, which is undergoing rapid development as one luxury compound after another sprouts up in the increasingly rare unoccupied spaces where the desert meets the beach (al-Dīnārī) [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**, ↗**Tourist Resorts**]. Contrary to the film's title, the four characters are not actually fleeing *Zaḥma* (crowds, or crowding) per se. One is a poor *ṣaʿīdī* desperate for work and eager to please; one a prominent doctor fleeing court proceedings accusing his hospital of negligence, plus his wife, an heiress with a share in both their villa on the *sāḥil* and the legally beleaguered hospital; the fourth is a divorced translator from a good family with two teenaged children. The film wins prizes, but also notoriety due to the scandalous bathing suit worn by the divorcée (*Fil-Fann*).

Zaḥma is only an excuse for the movie characters; their real problems are personal. Yet their flight to the desert and coastal margins, whatever their motivations, effectively symbolizes the actual myopic response to real *Zaḥma*. Egypt is, to be sure, densely populated—the 14th most densely populated country in the world if one counts only the inhabited Nile Valley and Delta, and leaves out the vast empty desert on either side of the Nile (Osman). But there are many ways to calculate the effects of population density, and by most objective standards neither Egypt nor Cairo are desperately overpopulated (Shawkat & Hendawy). Properly managed, Cairo's *Zaḥma* would not be particularly exceptional on a global level. Nonetheless successive regimes going all the way back to the Nasser era have used the spectre of overpopulation as a means to legitimate costly megaprojects predicated on the need to move out of the crowded cities and Nile Valley for agricultural, industrial and urban development. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī continues the tradition of his predecessors, talking up the necessity of desert development. His supporters tout the President's plan to increase the arable territory of Egypt by 1.5 million *feddān*s by digging thousands of wells costing billions of Egyptian pounds (Ṭanṭāwī). Yet Egypt's history of desert megaprojects is a grim one; not a single project has come remotely close to achieving its avowed developmental goals, or resulted in significant movement of population out of the Nile Valley (*Taḍāmun*, May16).

But if *Zaḥma* is a dubious pretext for megaprojects, the concept nonetheless has a grip on the public imaginary. The word is indelibly linked to a song from the 1970s by Aḥmad ʿAdawiyya: "Zaḥma yā Dunyā" which one can translate literally as "it's crowded, o world," or just "the world is crowded" (Adawiyya). A less literal gloss is simply "it's really crowded." *Zaḥma yā Dunyā* is a fast-paced popular song emblematic of the big city. In one sense "Zaḥma" evokes the exhilaration of exuberant anarchy afforded by anonymity—for male youth a form of freedom from the watchful eyes of elders; for women of all ages a

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *291–*297
© Walter Armbrust, University of Oxford, UK

decidedly more ambivalent form of anarchy. *Mūlid wi-ṣaḥbuh ghāyib*, as the song says: a saint's carnival with the saint absent. Or, you might say, an opportunity for fun, and nobody to tell you to stop. But in a different sense *Zaḥma* denotes the unsettling confusion of being lost in large crowds. Too much fun becomes no fun at all. In 2016 the song "Zaḥma" is old, but media often cite its signature line, *Zaḥma yā dunyā* [↗**Pop Music**]. However, such citations rarely refer to the joyous anarchic sense of the word evoked (or half-evoked) by the original song. An insipid Orange mobile phone network advertisement does give it a try with a 2016 Ramadan advertisement patterned on ʿAdawiyya's hit: *Zaḥma yā shahr Zaḥma* (what a crowded month) (*YT*, Jun12). The re-engineered lyrics play over a visual montage of happy wealthy Cairenes striving to put opulent food on the table for *iftār*. Cash-strapped Egyptians suffering the inflationary effects of a dollar crisis [↗**Dollar Crisis**] get just the *Zaḥma* and none of the opulence. But aside from the ʿAdawiyya-inspired Orange advertisement, far more often in 2016 ʿAdawiyya's signature song is invoked as a comment on neither the exuberance of the crowd nor on its unsettling and threatening nature—roiling masses; the "scary crowd" of certain modernist visions. *Zaḥma* in 2016 most often is straightforwardly about mobility, or to be more precise, a lack thereof. Adawiyya's 1970s *Zaḥma*, exuberant or unsettling, was dynamic. In 2016 *Zaḥma* evokes a sense of frustrating stasis.

Zaḥma is a regular human-interest story in Egyptian media. One finds, for example, attempts to enumerate the causes of *Zaḥma* (MĀHIR): itinerant vendors selling their wares on sidewalks and in streets; microbuses; artificial humps in the road designed to slow traffic around schools or hospitals; a lack of public garages; depressed pedestrians saddened at overcrowding and lack of greenery; the fact that Cairo is the eleventh largest city in the world in terms of its population, and the largest in the Arab world; the construction of new schools and hospitals for the rapidly expanding population. But the actual reason that Cairo *feels* crowded is rarely salient in attempts to explain the causes of *Zaḥma*: there are simply too many private automobiles.

In Cairo there is roughly one privately owned car for every ten inhabitants (FAKHR EL-DIN). This accounts for about half the vehicles in the city; the rest are busses, tūk tūks (motorized rickshaws) [↗**Tuk-tuk**], motorcycles, taxis, microbuses, delivery vehicles, and service vehicles of various types. Everyone who walks in Cairo, or who uses any of the surface modes of transport, finds that the single greatest obstacle to movement is private automobiles, both those that are parked and therefore stationary, as well as those in motion at any given time. Since the *infitāḥ* starting in the 1970s (the "open door," a shift away from state-led development toward private-sector development under the rule of Anwar al-Sadat) the state has sought to encourage surface mobility in private automobiles at the expense of collective modes of mobility (El-KHATEEB). One study claims that the number of vehicles in Cairo increases by a multiple of 14 every 30 years (El ATTAR). The same study observes that already in 2016 four million vehicles move every day in a city that has a capacity for only about half a million. Cairo suffers from one of the worst records in traffic accidents and fatalities in the world (*Taḍāmun*, Feb9), and Egypt as a whole suffers an annual road fatality rate of 43 per 100 kilometres of road compared to 0.7 in the United Kingdom (El ATTAR).

An underground Metro, drastically behind schedule and heavily subsidized (though estimates of the size of the subsidy vary dramatically), is the nearest thing to a practical counter-trend against the automobile apocalypse (BERGER *a*, RĀGHIB). Aside from the Metro,

officials, most prominently President al-Sīsī himself, encourage greater use of bicycles (*EremNews*). Al-Sīsī gets some cheers when he shows up in humble neighbourhoods unexpectedly riding his bike (*YT*, Jul7), always at the front of the pack (who would dare pass the President?). However, his bicycle campaign has absolutely no effect on traffic. An old Facebook debate [↗**Social Media**] over the possibly exorbitant cost of the President's bicycle (*Shurūq* 2014) has been forgotten in 2016, replaced by a Twitter campaign to get people to ride bicycles as a response to the increase in fuel prices caused by floating the Egyptian Pound and reducing energy subsidies (ʿAZZĀM). But the campaign brings no discernible change to actual transportation habits.

On a more practical level, efforts to control the endless proliferation of space-hogging private automobiles appear to be even less effective than the President's bicycle theatre. Earnest studies emphasize the importance of sidewalks to pedestrian movement (HĀMID ET AL.). For years the government has attempted to keep cars off the sidewalks by building up curbs to a level 12 or more inches above the street level. This is necessary because wherever curbs are low, sidewalks simply become narrow parking lots. In the relatively rare instances in which a high-curb-protected sidewalk remains unencumbered by parked automobiles, actually walking on these theoretically open spaces turns out to be like entering a steeplechase—a race-course deliberately pocked with ditches and hedges, designed to make the experience of mobility as vertical as it is horizontal. In Cairo walking on the sidewalk is exhausting; the point of a steeplechase, after all, is to make movement more challenging. A case study (ḤĀMID et al.) ignores everyday reality and recommends that the height of the curb separating traffic from the sidewalk should be 15 cm (the actual height on the street in question is the usual 12 inches or more). If the 15 cm standard were implemented cars would instantly eat up all the space allocated to pedestrians. However, another fact never mentioned in academic studies or in the media is that high curbs, where they exist, simply move the de facto parking lots on the sidewalks further out into the street, where cars park bumper-to-bumper, so close together that pedestrians often find no opening onto the raised sidewalk. Practically speaking, sidewalks are non-existent in most of the city, and where they do exist they are often unusable. Hence pedestrians walk in the street, dodging cars as best they can. Pedestrians make up a fifth of the annual death toll from traffic accidents (WHO-EMRO). More abstractly, the tyranny of the private automobile undoubtedly contributes to the feeling of *Zaḥma* in cities (MANṢŪR).

However, the private automobile rarely plays the villain in Egypt's *Zaḥma* discourse. On the contrary, private automobiles and their drivers are more likely to be portrayed as the victim in an Egyptian *Zaḥma* drama. A google image search using the terms "*Zaḥma*" and either "*miṣr*" or "*al-Qāhira*" yields almost entirely pictures of vast traffic jams—seas of tragically immobile automobiles. More precisely, in news features "*Zaḥma*" usually means primarily the crowdedness endured by the 10-11% who own private automobiles, those who create 75% of the traffic and occupy an incalculable proportion of parking space (BERGER *b*). Hence the primary agents of *Zaḥma*—understood as immobility, as opposed to the *Zaḥma* of the surging crowd, or the *Zaḥma* of liberating youthful anarchy—are also depicted as its primary victims. This is because news media (as opposed to academic studies) are mostly pro-automobile. They devote considerable energy to discussing not how cars make life miserable for the 90 percent of the population who cannot afford them, but to how to make

them work better, or how to alleviate the travails of private automobile users. For example, an article (NIGM & NIGM) touts mobile phone apps designed to facilitate the movement and efficiency of automobiles [↗**Mobile Phones**]. "Rāyiḥ" is a ride-sharing app; "Rakna" allows drivers to alert valet services so that they can be ready and waiting when your car reaches its destination; "Bi-yʔūl-lak" alerts the driver on the location of traffic jams so that he or she can choose the most efficient route. By contrast the microbus, a vastly more efficient means of transportation that provides 30% of the city's daily trips (MANṢŪR), catering to those who are not among the lucky 10% who own private automobiles, is "a cancer," and condemned, in the media if not necessarily in reality, as the main source of *Zaḥma* in the city (AḤMAD).

ʿAdawiyya's song foreshadowed the public's response to the immobilizing *Zaḥma* of 2016: flight to ever more automobile-dependent suburbs. *Kitīr al-nās kitīr wi-anā ʿāyiz arkib wi-aṭīr*—so many people, I want to fly away—as a line in ʿAdawiyya's song put it. And truly the signs of flight were everywhere in 2016. Billboards all over the city flog gated communities [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**]. So does television and the internet. Uptown Cairo, a suburban housing development advertised as lying "in the heart of Cairo," marketed itself in a typical manner: through videos showing blissfully empty roads leading into a private compound (*YT*, Mar20). No *Zaḥma* here! The good life beckons. One scene in the video shows the nose of a white Jeep poking coyly into the frame, on an otherwise empty street. Other scenes show one car in an ocean of empty asphalt. Uptown markets itself as a verdant ghost town. Other developments employ the same conventions. Moon Valley in al-Tagammuʿ al-Khāmis adds a few animated European-looking figures to its ghost town (*YT*, Oct23). The gated Kenz Compound, on the other hand, takes a more direct approach. Its advertisement tells a little story, of a man and his car in a hot congested urban street, smelling exhaust, watching rude motorcyclists flit by in the interstices between the stationary automobiles. A little songlet plays over the video: *ihrab al-madīna, Zaḥma sayyiʾa*—"escape the city, it's awful *Zaḥma* …" He finds the Good Life in Kenz, depicted as a slightly less ghostly town than Moon Valley or Uptown Cairo. He and his European-looking family frolic on green lawns, swim in luxuriously deserted swimming pools, and shop in an almost empty mall (*YT*, Jan17).

The *Zaḥma* of immobility that makes Moon Valley, Uptown Cairo, Kenz, and innumerable other flashy real estate developments so attractive has a history. ʿAdawiyya's *Zaḥma yā Dunyā* was popular in the late 1970s, when *Zaḥma* meant surging crowds of people. It was exactly at that point that an *infitāḥ*-fuelled consumption boom initiated the the endless rise of the automobile, rather like the rise of the machines in Arnold *Schwarzenegger*'s Terminator films. But they lacked sufficient open road; *Zaḥma* became worse. Foreign "experts" tried to help Egypt solve its congestion problem through counterproductive efforts to facilitate still more automobility (*Taḍāmun*, Feb9). Their solution was to construct a network of raised highways and ring roads in Cairo, and to invest massively in "new cities" throughout the country. It did not work. In the country as a whole some of the New Cities have been moderately successful in providing housing and an infrastructure for industry (al-*Ḥurra*, Mar12). But the goal of moving massive numbers of people out of the Nile Valley and away from the *Zaḥma* has been utterly unsuccessful. A 20-year plan announced in 1997 to move 12 million people to New Cities has, by 2016, achieved only a tenth of its target (SHAWKAT & HENDAWY). The most conspicuous success of the

whole four-decade history of New Cities has been to create opportunities for private real estate developers, who flourish as the state foots the bill for extending infrastructure out to their previously worthless desert land, which successive regimes give to their cronies for pennies. Paradoxically, the *Zaḥma*-free lifestyle touted by Kenz and other developers depends on continued failure of the New City megaprojects. To live in a gated compound is to be committed to automobility exclusively. The ring roads that circle the city and the raised highways that cut violently across it must be used to move drivers from city to suburb and from gated compound to gated compound. Already the *dāʾirī*—the ring road—suffers from standing traffic, inevitably reported in the media as exceptional occurrences due to accidents (al-MAḤLĀWĪ). But the exception will become the rule in time. The planned population of New Cairo, the massive developing suburb to the east of "old Cairo," otherwise known as actually existing Cairo where people live and suffer its *Zaḥma*, is 4.9 million souls. New Cairo includes Moon Valley and Uptown Cairo (Kenz is on the west-of-the-Nile suburb of New Giza). Ominously, only the planned population of New Cairo is easily available in public discourse (al-*Maʿrifa*). The private developers and the government presumably know the actual population. Given that all of these gated compounds are "third generation New City" developments, and that not a single one of the *first* generation developments has achieved even 50% of its population targets (*Taḍāmun*, Feb7) it is very safe to assume that the *Zaḥma*-free lifestyle touted by gated community promotional videos will be temporary at best, or potentially nothing more than advertising hyperbole even now. More roads only stoke the cruel optimism that escape is possible, even as the act of trying to escape only increases the problems that make it seem so desirable. Privileging "vehicle mobility" over "people mobility" is a sure recipe for creating more congestion (*Taḍāmun*, Jun2). *Zaḥma yā dunyā*!

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Dollar Crisis ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Migration ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ Social Media ♦ Suicide ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ Tuk-tuk

References

ʿADAWIYYA, Aḥmad. *Zaḥma yā Dunyā* [1979]. Youtube, uploaded August 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=29cSpn4fBEw&vl=ar> (accessed on August 14, 2018).

AḤMAD, Fikriyya. "al-Maykrūbās: saraṭān fī shawāriʿ al-Qāhira." *al-Wafd*, March 10, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yaukwpd9> (accessed August 15, 2018).

el ATTAR, Karim Alaa El Din Mohamed Soliman. "Bicylcing Suitability in Downtown, Cairo, Egypt." MA Thesis, Lund University, 2016, <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=8895101&fileOId=8895104> (accessed August 14, 2018).

ʿAZZĀM, Amānī. "'Ha-nirkab ʿajal wi-nisīb-lu-hum il-Banzīn': Mubādara shabābiyya lil-radd ʿalà irtifāʿ asʿār al-waqūd wa'l-muwāṣalāt." *al-Fajr*, November 8, 2016, <http://www.elfagr.com/ 2342523> (accessed August 14, 2018).

BERGER, Miriam [a]. "Riding Public Transit in Cairo after the Revolution." *Citylab*, September 27, 2016, <https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2016/09/riding-public-transit-in-cairo-after-the-revolution/501713/> (accessed August 14, 2018).

BERGER, Miriam [b]. "The Politics Clogging Transportation Reform in Egypt." Citylab, February 16, 2017, <https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2017/02/the-politics-clogging-transportation-reform-in-egypt/516519/> (accessed August 15, 2018).

al-DĪNĀRĪ, Gihād. "Bilāhā Sāḥil: Ihrab min al-Zaḥma fī wāḥid min 5 maṣāyif fī Miṣr." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, July 22, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ydau4stp (accessed August 13, 2018).

[*Erem News* =] N. N. "Al-Sīsī yatajawwal ʿalà darrāja fī Sharm al-Shaykh." *Erem News*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.eremnews.com/news/arab-world/egypt/588427> (accessed August 14, 2018).

FAKHR EL DIN, Passant Ehab. "The Experience of Passenger Transport Start-Ups in Greater Cairo: An Analysis." MA Thesis, American University in Cairo, 2016, <http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/4737/Passant%20E.%20Fakhr%20El-Din%20-%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed August 14, 2018).

[*Fil-Fann* =] N. N. "'Asharat as'ila yujībuhā ṣunnāʿ *Qabla Zaḥmat al-Ṣayf* qabla ṭarḥihi lil-jumhūr." *Fil-Fann*, March 31, 2016, <https://www.filfan.com/news/details/52475> (accessed August 13, 2018).

ḤĀMID, Ḥāmid Salāma, Khālid Muṣṭafà FU'ĀD, Hudà Magdī MUḤAMMAD, and Munà Ṭalʿat ʿABD AL-ʿAZĪZ. "Taṭwīr al-bī'a al-khārijiyya li-masārāt al-mushāt fī muḥāwir al-ḥaraka al-ra'īsiyya: dirāsat ḥālat Shāriʿ al-Taḥrīr – Duqqī." Wizārat al-Iskān wal-Marāfiq wal-Mujtamaʿāt al-ʿUmrāniyya, Jumhūriyyat Miṣr al-ʿArabiyya, August 13, 2016, <http://www.cpas-egypt.com/pdf/Huda-Magdy/R1.pdf> (accessed August 15, 2018).

[al-*Ḥurra*, Mar12 =] N. N. "Nabaḍ al-shāriʿ: al-mudun al-jadīda fi Miṣr: al-ḥalqa al-kāmila." *al-Ḥurra*, uploaded March 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LPCNTHZpj4> (accessed August 15, 2018).

el-KHATEEB, Mohamed. "Urban Mobility in Greater Cairo: A History of Patchwork Solutions." *Taḍāmun*, March 28, 2017, <https://www.google.com/search?q=Urban+Mobility+in+Greater+Cairo%3A+A+history+of+patchwork+solutions.&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab> (accessed August 14, 2018).

MĀHIR, Muṣṭafà. "7 ḥaqā'iq ʿan al-Zaḥma wal-kathāfa al-sukkāniyya fī al-Qāhira." *YallaFeed*, July 31, 2016, <https://yallafeed.com/7-hqaeq-an-alzhmh-walkthafh-alskanyh-fy-alqahrh-2110> (accessed August 14, 2018).

al-MAḤLĀWĪ, Shaymā'. "Izdiḥām bil-ṭarīq al-dā'irī lil-Munīb bi-sabab ḥādith taṣādum." *Vetogate*, September 20, 2016, <https://www.vetogate.com/2373653> (accessed August 15, 2018).

MANṢŪR, Nādiya. "Al-Ikhtināqāt al-murūriyya: ḥāla muzmina." *Al-Ahrām*, no. 47462, November 16, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y9rg3a9y> (accessed August 15, 2018).

[*Maʿrifa* =] N. N. "Al-Qāhira al-Jadīda." *al-Maʿrifa*, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ybotr5ya> (accessed August 15, 2018).

[*MY*, Jul26 =] N. N. "Wafāt al-Mukhrij Muḥammad Khān." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, July 26, 2016, <https://www. almasryalyoum.com/news/details/984311> (accessed August 13, 2018).

NIGM, Samīra, and Aḥmad NIGM. "Zaḥma yā Dunyā: Taṭbīqāt li-ḥall azmat al-sayr fī Miṣr." *BBC News*, March 2, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/arabic/blogs/2016/03/160302_egypt_traffic_apps> (accessed August 15, 2018).

OSMAN, Magued [et al.]. *Population Analysis: Egypt 2016*. Cairo: Baseera, UNFPA and National population Council, 2016, <https://egypt.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/PSA%20Final.pdf> (accessed August 13, 2018).

RĀGHIB, Khayr. "Dirāsa li-wizārat al-naql: 25 Gunayhan al-siʿr al-fiʿlī li-tadhkarat mitrū al-anfāq." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, August 14, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/993890> (accessed August 14, 2018).

SHAWKAT, Yahia, and MennatuAllah HENDAWY. "Myths and Facts of Urban Planning in Egypt." *The Built Environment Observatory*, November 20, 2016, <http://marsadomran.info/en/policy_analysis/2016/11/501/> (accessed August 13, 2018).

[*Shurūq*, Mar30] "Ruwwād Fays Būk yakhtalifūna ʿalà siʿr ʿajalat al-Sīsī: 38 Alf Ginayh, am 2800?" *al-Shurūq*, March 30, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/ycxyjn8c > (accessed August 14, 2018).

[*Taḍāmun*, Feb7 =] N. N. "Egypt's New Cities: Neither Just nor Efficient". Taḍāmun, February 7, <https://www.slideshare.net/tadamun/egypts-new-cities-neither-just-nor-efficient> (last accessed September 3, 2018).

[*Taḍāmun*, Feb9 =] N. N. "al-Tanaqqul fī 'l-manāṭiq al-ḥaḍariyya: akthar min mujarrad inshā' ṭuruq." *Taḍāmun*, February 9, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/yaxm2oyg> (accessed August 14, 2018).

[*Taḍāmun*, May16 =] N. N. "Siyāsat al-mudun al-jadīda fī Miṣr: Athar mutawāḍiʿ wa-ʿadāla ghā'iba." *Taḍāmun*, May 16, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/yd2vwdrl> (accessed August 13, 2018).

[*Taḍāmun*, Jun2 =] N. N. "Urban Mobility: Is It Time to Discuss the Right to Adequate Urban Transport in Egypt." *Taḍāmun*, June 2, 2016, <http://www.tadamun.co/?post_type=voice&p= 7900&lang =en&lang=en> (accessed August 15, 2018).

ṬANṬĀWĪ, Muḥammad Aḥmad. "Injāzāt al-Ra'īs: ʿĀmān min al-binā' wal-tanmiya fi ʿahd al-Sīsī." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, June 27, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/y8bs476b> (accessed August 13, 2018).

[WHO-EMRO =] Munaẓẓamat al-Ṣiḥḥa al-ʿĀlamiyya, al-Maktab al-Iqlīmī lil-Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ. "Al-Salāma ʿalà al-ṭarīq." April 19, 2016, <http://www.emro.who.int/ar/egy/programmes/road-safety.html> (accessed August 15, 2018).

[*YT*, Jan17 =] N. N. "Kinz Kūmbaund / Kenz Compound." Youtube video, uploaded January 17, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WFmPCyeRp8c> (accessed August 15, 2018).

[*YT*, Mar20 =] N. N. "Uptown Cairo." Youtube video, uploaded March 20, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJsDCVyCI1s> (accessed August 15, 2018).

[*YT*, Jun12 =] N. N. "Iʿlān Ūrinj [Orange] Ramaḍān 2016. "Zaḥma yā Shahr." Youtube video, uploaded on June 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMPfxQunIRw> (accessed August 14, 2018).

[*YT*, July 7 =] N. N. "Al-Sīsī yaẓhar fī shawāriʿ al-Maʿmūra rākiban darrāja." Youtube video, uploaded on July 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1XbTHPE6B8> (accessed August 14, 2018).

[*YT*, Oct23 =] N. N. "Galīriyyā Mūn Fālī al-Tagammuʿ al-Khāmis." Youtube video, uploaded October 23, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvFlOdybbYs> (accessed August 15, 2018).

◄ walter.armbrust@sant.ox.ac.uk ►

CODES

i.e., clusters of arrays that coexist and overlap in a space of simultaneity and "tend to generate discourses which transform their confusion into ... alternative options," "provide principles of order within the unstructured simultaneity of everyday-worlds", one might "reserve the concept of 'culture'" for the ensemble of these binary codes

Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (1997), p. 443.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021)

Themed Section ***In2016***

Affluence *vs.* Destitution

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- academic unemployment
- basic needs azmah / survival
- bread (*QTh*)
- children
- credit cards
- déclassement social
- deprivation
- dire living conditions
- drinking water
- freedom of access to culture
- gas (*QTh*), gasoline
- gated communities
- gold
- golf
- hard currency manipulation
- health Minister, health problems/risk
- heart diseases, heart surgery
- high prices
- hospitals (*QTh*)
- housing projects, social housing program
- IMF
- imports, import of cars, imported, import-export
- industry
- *infitāḥ* (Open Door politics)
- inflation, increase of inflation, prices of daily needs raising, increase of lemon prices (during Ramaḍān), of electricity prices
- informal economy
- investment
- irrigation
- job losses, job market
- Kuwait
- Labour Day
- lack of development
- lack of savings
- layoffs
- the less well-off
- loans
- luxury
- malls
- al-Maḥalla al-Kubrà
- Manshiyat Naṣr
- market, marketing
- meat crisis
- middle class
- money
- money cartoon
- monetary crisis
- nouveaux riches, parvenus
- Panama leak, Panama papers
- panic
- pashas
- pensions
- Philip Rizq
- poison
- popular unrest
- population growth
- poverty
- privileges
- production, productivity
- proprietors
- prostitution
- public office
- Pyramids
- quality of education
- real estate
- revenge
- rich people, Rich vs. Poor
- salaries
- Sayyidnā al-Ḥusayn
- shouting
- slums
- small shops

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *299–*300
© N. N.

- soap operas (*musalsalāt*)
- social classes
- social effects
- social conditions/poverty, inequality
- social indignation, social unrest
- social (in)justice (*QTh*), inequality
- visitors
- water supply

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Baby Milk ♦ Clash ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ Language ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ ...@... ►

Beautiful *vs.* Ugly

By Stephan Guth

"How can you talk about a 'culture of beauty' *(thaqāfat al-jamāl)* while everything around us is ugliness (*qubḥ*)?" The elderly lady who raises her voice in the Q&A session following one of the "Culture at the Frontline" *(al-Thaqāfa fī 'l-muwājaha)* panel discussions at the Cairo International Book Fair in January/February after some distinguished gentlemen have made their learned statements about their view of the task of culture in present-day Egypt, is very upset. Full of anger, she reproaches the panelists, whom she obviously regards as representatives of the cultural (and political) establishment, blaming them of discussing lofty issues while neglecting people's basic needs [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**] and of continuing to let cultural institutions such as public libraries decay: windows broken and not repaired, so that it is noisy and dust comes in and settles on everything; no proper catalogues; few holdings; the condition of the books deplorable… How can an average citizen make use of his right to education and get access to learning and culture under such circumstances?

Like the committed lady, most people perceive lived everyday realities as something rather ugly. And it is only natural that most of them also long for its corresponding opposite. Especially in the big cities [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**] with their noise, permanent traffic jams [↗***Zaḥma***], high levels of dirt and pollution [↗**Garbage**], the chaotic mushrooming of informal housing [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***], the tristesse of uniform concrete or mud-brick architecture and the lack of parks or other areas set aside for public recreation, life is often experienced as a dehumanized "hell" (Abaza 236). The longing for spaces where one could lead a life in dignity is exploited by big construction companies who invite those who can afford it [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**] to buy themselves a new, beautiful home in a compound in one of the new desert cities that huge billboards along the roads or seductive TV spots and websites portray as the equivalent of "paradise" on Earth [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**].

The—artificial—beauty of the gated communities is real—large parts of the big cities have come to consist of vast areas covered by luxurious compounds and chic trendy malls—, and the 'paradisiacal' life in these places is regularly contrasted, in documentaries and fictional representations alike, with the chaos and dirt of the old city centres [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**] as well as the miserable conditions in the poor slums [↗***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***] (*Nawwāra*, *The Nile Hilton Incident*, *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan*). Very often, however, these comments also are eager to underline that this beauty betrays; it is a false beauty, a surface only, behind which the truth of moral ugliness is concealed [↗**True *vs.* False**]: the inhabitants of the beautiful villas are typically portrayed as criminals (corrupt, murderers), often closely associated with the regime (*Nawwāra*, *The Nile Hilton Incident*, *Mawlānā*, *Fawqa mustawà al-shubuhāt*). On the last day of the year, Wāʾil ʿAbbās posts a cartoon on Facebook that shows, in a bird's eye panoramic view, a section of life in a metropolis: the city is divided into two parts by a high wall, with barbed wire on top; to the left, we see a crowded slum area, held in uniform grey, with houses like Nissen huts, covered by corrugated sheet roofs, some people standing on tiny balconies which they have to share

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *301–*313
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

with laundry and water barrels (obviously, the area is not connected to the communal water supply); in contrast, on the right half, covered by lush green meadow and trees, we see only one building, a villa with a swimming-pool, in front of which two people are relaxing on deck-chairs; one of them is saying to the other: "Praise to you, Lord, for the grace of living in such a safe, developed and humane place!" The cartoon had been part of the official advertising of the *Beverly Hills Egypt* compound in the new al-Shaykh Zāyid quarter. ʿAbbās thinks that this sarcasm "tops the shit (*il-kharā*)" and deserves the prize for "the ugliest/worst ad *(ʾaswaʾ ʾiʿlān)* at the closing of 2016," and gets many supporting comments: "This is disgusting and would be illegal in most decent countries!!!," "What a dirty [*lit.*, garbage-like] ad!," "That's pure filth *(qadhāra)*!" (The photo was removed from the website the same evening!) (ABBAS).

Yet, people are longing for beauty, and wherever they have not come to terms with, or resigned to, the ugliness of their surroundings they are eager to counter it in some way or another. Flowers and colours play an important role. Munà Abāẓa tries to resist the declining sense for a nice environment (which she observes especially in the younger generation [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]) by cultivating flowers in the staircase of the multi-storey building she lives in in a Dokki neighbourhood (ABAZA 247). Village or suburb inhabitants welcome graffiti artists who paint the monotonous walls of their concrete or brick houses, shops, metro stations, or bus stops with colourful calligraphies, tags, vivid portraits or even wild "jolies fresques"—"Les stations de la banlieue sud de Tunis reprennent des couleurs," *Kapitalis* enthusiastically titles a report on the *BeArt* initiative (the name not only contains *art* but also plays on the Arabic word for 'environment', *bīʾa*) (*Kapitalis*, Aug.), and the tone is very similar when Egyptian media describe the activities of the *Gedary* (Arabic *jidārī* 'my walls') group who "teamed up with a group of Egyptian graffiti artists [to] give the village of Kafr El Ghab in Damietta [district] an indelible Eid present" by "adorn[ing it]s walls with 25 stunning pieces of graffiti" (*CAIROSCENE*, July); the rural commune embraces street art: "We wanted to beautify the town—to give it a certain feel, a certain flavour," explains a member of the municipal council; and it worked out, people were very responsive: "Something about its uncontrived language of colours and lines resonated with their pure unadulterated love for life when renowned graffiti artist Ahmed Gaber (alias A.K.A. Nemo) and his merry band of muralists adorned every street corner and every alley with graffiti." In the title of her article, the author of the report goes as far as praising "Graffiti as a Means of Development Across Egyptian Towns" (GHONEIM). The inhabitants of the Manshiyat Nāṣir district in Cairo, too, welcome the monumental, colourful *calligraffito* that Tunisian artist eL Seed paints over more than fifty of their houses, thus making aesthetics and colours triumph over the quarter's bleak mud brick architecture (DAWSON, EL SEED at TEDSummit, GALALAH).

Colours symbolize liveliness, vitality, and evidently they can give people back some of the dignity that tends to be lost in the uniformity, colourlessness and ugliness of everyday life. When the eleven-year-old daughter who grows up with a single mother in a Cairo slum and, though still a child, will soon have to marry an elderly man, puts on red nail polish *(Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan)*; when the young cross-dressers in the documentary *Travesties* take great pains in dressing chic and colourful and making themselves up; or when the lower middle-class women from southern Tunisia who are portrayed in *Les commerçantes* dress in colourful clothes, all of them affirm for themselves their dignity as human beings, in spite of

difficult living conditions (poverty, social marginalization, oppression, etc.). The longing for beauty within an otherwise ugly world is also behind the insistence, even in poor neighbourhoods *(Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan)*, on extravagant furnishings for weddings and a brilliant appearance especially of the bride *(Ḥārr jāff ṣayfan)*, where the whiteness of her dress also symbolizes immaculacy and purity, an aspect that often goes together with beauty.

A longing for beauty is obviously also behind the success of Egyptian photographer al-Manādīlī who is eager to "tell the Egyptian[s] about the beauty of their city, which they (usually) do not see" (al-MANĀDĪLĪ, in *Taḥrīr/Tahrirnews*), due to all its apparent ugliness. And he does so in an almost alienating manner: it is hard, for instance, to recognize the real, genuine Cairo in his photos of a clean, colourful, magically glittering Ṭalʿat Ḥarb square an early evening of a bright day with a clear, blue sky, immaculately white clouds, clean—recently rain-washed?—and unusually empty streets, leading in geometric accuracy towards the square, where the statue of the 'father of Egyptian economy' [↗**Father Figures**] is dominated by the famous Yaʿqūbiyān building, as if by a cathedral (*ibid.*).

Al-Manādīlī's success goes hand in hand with that of romance and romantic genres in general (JACQUEMOND), a success that is paralleled, on the other side of the spectrum, by the continued popularity of horror fiction—as if indulging in an even more ugly and terrifying imagined world could erase the ugliness and the fears of lived everyday reality—, and satire (where some kind of relief, if temporary, is brought about by laughing) [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. The widespread longing for romance is fulfilled not only by all kinds of secular novels and soap operas, including a number of highly popular Ramaḍān series, but also by the Islamized varieties—cf., e.g., the continuing success of the 'Islamic' melodrama *Fī qalbī unthà ʿibriyya* (There is a Hebrew woman in my heart = ḤAMDĪ)—, in which the idea of the beauty of the well-arranged harmonious divine order of the world and the message of the Prophet find their expression in colourful book covers, often inspired by Nature (dawn, rainbows, landscapes, …) and the physical and moral beauty of the protagonists [see also ↗**In Islam, …**]. The same aesthetics can be observed in some of the Islamic pop singers' videos and the representation of televangelists like Muṣṭafà ḤUSNĪ. Romance often also conveys optimism [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**], which, in ANDEEL's eyes, explains the striking success of the filmatization of Muḥammad ṢĀDIQ's *Hepta*, a novel that, according to the critic, many classify as a piece of "teenage literature." Yet, although Andeel warns against the dangers of widespread unrealistic romanticizing tendencies, he still justifies the movie's success: in a world in which *muḥn*, the distressing desire born out of sexual deprivation and non-fulfilment, can become a metaphor of everybody's desperate condition and longing for emotional fulfilment in life, a film that 'proves' that, indeed, "life *is* beautiful (lit., sweet, *il-ḥayāh ḥilwa*)" and encourages people to dare to fall in love, against all odds, serves an important task (ANDEEL, Arabic version).

In a similar vein, graffiti artist Nemo and his colleagues from the *Gedary* (Arabic *jidārī* 'my wall') initiative do not tire of underlining how essential it is already to surround children with beauty of all kinds: it will produce better human beings and thus also a better society and future (GHONEIM). With its humanist educational motivation, this initiative is closely related to many others that are driven by a wish to counter the squalors of 'barbarism' and the many dehumanizing aspects met in everyday life, including 'ugly' politics, by a more of culture in general. In their end-of-the-year review, the *madàMaṣr* team, for instance, reports

that they tried, in the bygone year, to expand their culture section by including more contributions on design, literature, architecture, cinema, etc. (*MADÀMAṢR*).

They are not alone. In spite of, or perhaps also because of, the depressing, often dystopia-inspiring political and economic situation [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**] and the many obstacles and constraints that all work against a free unfolding of cultural activity [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**], the year sees an unprecedented flourishing of promising fresh initiatives in many fields, all driven by a vision of maintaining culture, with all its facets, as a long-term necessity. In Egypt, Dalia CHAMS thinks the new activism that she observes in the cultural scene can be explained as a reaction of the alternative scene to the severe crackdown that this scene suffered after the regime had choked off promising post-revolutionary projects like *al-Fann maydān* (Art is a scene/place/square, ended 2014) and come down on highly productive, but also expressly or potentially oppositional institutions like the Cairo *Townhouse* or the adjacent Rawabet (Arabic *rawābiṭ* 'links, connections') theatre, or on street art, where all kinds of experimental cultural expression had for some time found a space to unfold and develop and test out new concepts and approaches and give voice to alternative visions of a future political and social order (CHAMS) [↗**The Voice from Above**]. True, the alternative scene has suffered heavy blows; but it could not be silenced: those active in it are now trying, perhaps more eagerly than ever, to maintain their activity and/or to establish new forms that, while still serving a re-humanizing purpose or the aim of upholding humanity in an increasingly 'barbarian' environment, are less susceptible to the regime's interference. In Cairo, the Zawya (Arabic *zāwiya* 'corner, angle') centre is able to organize a number of very popular events. Especially cinema can, it seems, to a certain degree serve as a "shelter from predominant thought" (CHAMS), if not even provide some "solace" (*MADÀMAṢR*) for the cultural activists who in many cases still live in a kind of limbo, in doubt whether they should dare to start a new project, or not knowing whether they will be able to continue an on-going one, always in danger of being attacked, arrested, detained, accused of offending public morals, or facing some other charge [↗**Disappearances**, ↗The Honourable Citizen, ↗**Court Trials**, ↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**], and the projects into which they put much blood, sweat and tears may be stopped, forbidden, closed. Many consider emigration [↗Migration] because culture—the beautiful, colourful, pluralistic—is always also political, and if an initiative does not serve the regime's interests (as, for instance, beauty contests would do in Egypt) or the cause of 'our/true' Islam (in Tunisia) [↗**In Islam, …**], all energy and emotional commitment that have gone into it run a high risk of having been invested in vain.

What makes the activists and advocates of beauty and culture take these risks and continue nevertheless, despite all obstacles, dangers, drawbacks, and constraints, are the many additional functions by which their projects surpass the purely aesthetical: *A Footnote on Ballet History*, an homage to the pioneering "Bolshoy Five" ballet dancers and the Egyptian prima ballerina, Magda Saleh (Mājda Ṣāliḥ), links the promotion of ballet dancing, once initiated by the great Gamal Abdel Nasser [↗**Father Figures**], to national development and progress and to Egypt's forming part of the modern, civilized world in general. A good taste in the choice of the colours with which to paint the notorious barrels marking informal checkpoints [↗***Kamīn***] in a touristic region may help to make visitors feel more comfortable than the standard Red-White-Black of the Egyptian flag, locals claim in trying to convince the officials coming from the capital that the barrels should rather be painted in colours that

are in harmony with the surrounding nature and the cultural character of the respective province (Sulaymān) [↗**Center *vs.* Periphery**]. Moreover, many cultural activists believe that promoting the beautiful and supporting art, literature, architecture, music, design, cinema, etc. helps develop that sense of creativity and inventiveness that is so much needed, if it is not indispensable for survival, under the present difficult economic circumstances—therefore the invention of a 'beautifully simple', "ingenious" app that looks as if it has the potential to solve a city's garbage problems [↗**Garbage**, ↗**Mobile Phones**] is nominated in *CairoScene*'s retrospective on the year among the "16 of 2016," their shortlist of initiatives that have the potential of leaving a long-lasting imprint on Egypt and of "redesigning the country's human landscape" (Hosny & Primo). In a similar vein, the transformation of old car tires into colourful garden chairs, tables and other furniture by a smart Egyptian from Mansoura receives enthusiastic acclaim and admiration in the press (*Cairoscene*, Feb.): here, beauty, made of something ugly—waste, garbage—, is instrumental in advancing techniques of ↗**Self-help**. A photographer's fresh look on 'canonical' architectural highlights from several periods of history in the Tunisian capital not only underlines the beauty of the buildings themselves but also draws attention to the differences between historical epochs and their tastes, which can open one's eyes for the historical relativity and plurality of beauty (Younes) as well as for a continuity of fine taste that obviously could be maintained over the centuries and thus testifies to the high standing of Tunisian civilization that is on a par with other countries on an international level [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. The idea that, in essence, beauty remains the same while outward appearance may vary across time and changing tastes is also present in the "100 Years of Egyptian Beauty" WatchCut video. "The looks we have chosen are very diverse in nature. Each represents various political struggles in each decade," explains Jacinthe Assaad, the researcher behind the video that shows one and the same woman in ten different attires, from the 1920s to the 2010s, inspired by 'typical' representatives of each decade, like the pioneer of women's emancipation, Hudà Shaʿrāwī (1879–1947) for the 1920s, Princess Fawziyya Fu'ād (1921–2013) for the 1940s, a veiled woman for the 1980s (symbolizing beginning Islamist resistance against Sadat's Open Door politics and the influence of labour migration to the conservative Gulf states) (N. N.–*EgyptianStreets*, Feb. 10). The video thus shows the historical relativity of varying expressions of beauty in close connection with political shifts and social change [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Similar to *A Footnote on Ballet History*, the Tunisian documentary *Tahar Cheriaa: À l'ombre du baobab* (In the baobab's shadow) is an homage to a pioneer of cultural activism: the 'father' of the Carthage Film Festival, Tahar Cheriaa (al-Ṭāhir Sharīʿa, 1927–2010) [↗**Father Figures**]. It underlines the leading role Tunisian cultural activity once played for the whole so-called Third World, and the underlying message is: perhaps it can become such a pioneer again—*if only* politicians and society at large pay sufficient attention to the cultural sector and become more supportive again of the fine arts. The documentary *We are Egyptian Armenians* is eager to show how important an ethnic-religious minority like the Armenians has been for the development of the country. A sense of beauty and culture in general is mentioned here on an equal footing with smart entrepreneurship or a leading role in politics, so that singing ("Anouchka," born Wartanoush Garbis Slim, *1960), photography ("Van Leo," born Levon Alexander Boyadjian, 1921–2002), cartoon art ("Riḍà," creator of the well-known figure of the fat "Rufayyaʿa Hānim"), fine jewellery or sculpture are listed alongside

the influential Armenian Nūbār Pasha (1825–99, the first Egyptian Prime Minister), tobacco merchants, or the producers of high-quality shoes or clocks, as equally relevant contributions to Egyptian cultural identity.

The organizers of the *Festival de la lumière de Tunis* in which parts of the Tunisian capital are illuminated in different colours during early autumn, emphasize that their project not only draws attention to architectural beauty tending to be overlooked in daily routine, but also that it casts new light, both literally and metaphorically, on known objects and thereby encourages the spectators, i.e., the people, to revalue their surroundings. With the help of "images fantastiques, réelles ou surréelles et d'une étrangeté tout aussi fascinante que troublante," they say, the project invites to re-explore old paths, question the seemingly given, and reflect on alternative ways of looking at the world—the first step to a culture of participation, tolerance, and democracy (*La PRESSE*).

The most important function of the aesthetic, however, seems to lie in the key role it can play both in searching and/or asserting (or re-asserting) one's identity. When the Tunisian cross-dressers of *Travesties* make up their faces, put on their party dresses and start dancing, the beauty of their make-up and attire and the elegance of their dancing also shows the beauty of their true self [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]. In *ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī*, the young female protagonist's music is not only a means of authentic self-expression while outside this world of music the girl leads another life, assimilated to what is expected of her, but it also serves the purpose of overcoming the trauma of detention and torture and helps her to reassert her identity: the first sounds Faraḥ is capable of uttering after a long period of muteness consist of the melody of the patriotic but regime-critical song that she dared to sing in the bars before the secret police arrested her. – For the young theatre enthusiasts in the Tunisian documentary *al-Ḥufra*, pantomime fulfils, mutatis mutandis, a similar function: as long as they cannot afford to run their own theatre, the only way they can live in truth, as their true selves, is to live as pantomimes. – In contrast, both *Jeanne d'Arc Masriya* and *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna* do not so much describe art—particularly dancing and film-making—as a way of self-expression or self-assertion; rather, they accompany the protagonists during their tentative searches for a true, authentic style. All the young women portrayed in *Jeanne d'Arc* have suffered trauma during the Revolution; now, they try to find a way back into normal life via an exploration of their selves [↗**Self-help**, ↗**Psychiatrists**] through dancing, sculpture, painting, metalwork, jewellery. In the documentary (which is interspersed with fictional elements), harmonious body movements and beautiful products of the women's art and handicraft are markers of the intricate beauty of their vulnerable souls, and the free human being in general, in all its delicate fragility. *Ākhir ayyām* follows a slightly different approach: It shows a protagonist who does not know yet where to go, whether to stay or to leave; Khālid is undecided whether he should find the Downtown Cairo surroundings with all its dirt and filth and poverty [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**, ↗**Garbage**] ugly and repulsive, or whether there lies some—emotional, spiritual—beauty hidden in all this, some inner qualities that he could/should love and that would be beautiful enough to make him stay. In a similar vein, the "Iconic City" exhibition *Cairo NOW! City Incomplete*, shown at the Dubai Design Week, makes an attempt at a positive reassessment of what usually is regarded as ugly: taking the many incomplete buildings as its point of departure, it asks if there is not also an "aesthetics of incompletion." Rather than regarding the incomplete houses as ugly torsos, should we not

acknowledge in them the 'beauty' of a realistic approach to the givens of difficult living conditions, economic crisis, etc., and is there not also an "unrealized potential" in these buildings that symbolizes something very positive: a strong belief in a future full of "possibilities waiting to be materialized"? (DUBAI DESIGN WEEK). – An extreme case of revaluation is the *madàMaṣr* team's appraisal of a 15-second video that goes viral in November, "spawning various spin-offs and," in the team's view, "somehow reflecting the year as a whole" (*MADÀMAṢR*, Dec.). The main 'event' in the video is a youngster's uttering the words for "fuck you" (*kuss ummak*) and "shit" (*aḥā*) in front of the camera. While many comments on the YouTube page where the video is published (*Kussummak kussummak*), agree that this is absolutely disgusting, the *madàMaṣr* team regards it as one of "only a few shining moments" that "punctuated the gloom in Egypt's arts this year." They justify their vote by a 'thick description' that shows the fascination with a realism that comes close to the indulgence of dystopian fiction in cruelty, filth and decay as part of an 'aesthetics of the ugly' [**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**]:

> In it, two young kids whisper in front of a camera on a balcony on a quiet afternoon. A tired grumpy father might be napping before a night shift, and a serious mother may be cooking with zero tolerance for kids' funny business. The kids do look like trouble even before they start doing anything. The smaller one is awed by the fact that the camera is recording a video. It's a life-changing moment. He asks twice: "Is that video!?" Then his expression shifts from innocent astonishment to pure lustful evil as he realizes the unlimited power he has just acquired by being able to freeze time and record whatever he can say. The energy leaks out of him to infect his brother/friend/partner-in-crime who stands behind and, knowing who his companion is, can already sense what's building. The friend starts dancing to an unheard beat, his body like a warrior filling with the ecstasy of imminent destruction, and the kid in the front, his eyes directly staring into the soul of whoever is watching, hisses (probably to make sure that the mother doesn't hear): "Fuck you… fuck you … shit… shit…" (*MADÀMAṢR*, Dec.)

The search for new authentic ways of expression and adequate aesthetics that matches changed and still changing identities and attitudes towards a world that is one's own but in which one also feels increasingly alienated, is all the more complicated as it does not happen in a vacuum: beauty and culture are a highly contested terrain where free experimentation and (re-)interpretation of concepts and values is constantly impeded/obstructed by two powerful agents: the establishment (including the regime) and the neoliberal market which, especially if it aspires to be part of an international scene, "often reduces artists to stereotypical images of the country" (BOSKOVITCH). To find one's own, authentic style within the limits of what the regime allows, what the self-proclaimed defenders of public morality find acceptable, and what the market demands, on the one hand, and truthfulness to oneself is tantamount to walking a tightrope where you constantly are in danger of crashing. All forms of youth and popular culture, like rap or the so-called *mahragānāt* [↗**Pop Music**], are easily discredited as 'low, inferior' forms of expression, too vulgar to compete with the 'timeless', classical music of Umm Kulthūm or 'Abd al-Wahhāb (*al-Ḥufra*) [↗**Young vs. Settled**, ↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. Literature written in the vernacular, which has

been booming ever since the Revolution [↗**Language**] and is appreciated by many as being uncontrived, is considered 'ugly' by others who adhere to a traditional literary taste that would demand, for written and printed texts, the high register of Arabic, the *fuṣḥà*.

The discussion that flares up in the media among literary critics in reaction to the Stockholm committee's granting Bob Dylan this year's Nobel Prize in Literature reveals that opinion is divided between supporters who praise the Committee's decision to include such forms of popular culture as is Dylan's music and lyrics, into their concept of 'literature' and, on the other side, voices that are highly critical of this decision, arguing that Dylan's texts lack that "effort on language" (*jahd al-lugha*) that is, and should remain, an indispensable criterion of good, high-quality literature and literary beauty (PEPE). In contrast, the supporters of a new, more inclusive aesthetics find it laudable and praiseworthy when books are written, or film stories told, "in a language they [i.e., the people] can grasp," as El Shimi has it in her comment on the success of this year's cinema blockbusters. – In contrast, the continued impact of traditional aesthetics makes it difficult for Muḥammad Gābir, the inventor of a new Arabic type font, to convince sceptics of the advantages of his invention: practical utility and commercial potential notwithstanding, they regard this font as ugly, offending the beauty and quasi-"sanctity" of the traditional styles which, unlike the new one, all are capable of serving ornamental functions and have a longstanding calligraphy tradition (EL GIBALY). – However, being too commercial, sales-oriented, and perhaps also over-Westernized, is only one offence that products breaking with established aesthetics have to face. *Adab*, the Arabic term that usually translates the Western notion of 'literature, belles-lettres', is a word with a long conceptual history and can still also mean 'good manners, social graces, decency,' and a lack of it, *qillat adab* (vernacular: *ʔillit adab*) denotes 'shamelessness, impudence, insolence, impertinence', sometimes even 'obscenity'. This is why an ↗'**The Honourable** Citizen' who thought that some passages in Ahmed Nagi (Aḥmad Nājī)'s novel *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* with a rather explicit sexual content maliciously violated "the sanctity of morals and good manners (*ḥurmat al-ādāb al-ʿāmma wa-ḥusn al-akhlāq*)" and departed "from emotional modesty (*khurūjan ʿalà ʿāṭifat al-ḥayāʾ*)," could file a case against the author last year, and this is also why a North Cairo appeal court now can take up the earlier accusation of "the publication of written work that references transient lust and fleeting pleasure (*shahwa fāniya wa-ladhdha zāʾila*)" (SAID) and sentence the 'culprit' to two years in prison although he had been acquitted in January (JACQUEMOND; *MADÀMAṢR*, Feb.; the sentence is again suspended in December, pending review; *MADÀMAṢR*, Dec.) [↗**Court Trials**]. The establishment's—the "zombies-'," as Nagi himself calls them in his "Farewell to the youth" (*Wadāʿan lil-shabāb*) message (JACQUEMOND)—verdict on any attempt that in their view has the potential of undermining the existing order, even if it stems from the pen of a representative of a narrow intellectual elite, here complements the Egyptian regime's crackdown on potentially subversive cultural institutions and its efforts to eradicate revolutionary graffiti in downtown Cairo [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**]—the murals, however beautiful they are, are too reminiscent of a "revolution of the people" (*"Graffiti thawrat al-shaʿb"*) that incited chaos. Jacquemond, a well-informed observer, thinks that the current powers' first enemy is not terrorism, as they usually claim, "but this rebellious youth that took to the streets in 2011, to whom Naji and his peers belong and give voice" [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. Challenging established aesthetic norms and with them the hegemonic claims of the "paternalist,

patriarchal and puritan" (Jacquemond), self-proclaimed "guardians of morality" (NAGI, apud SAID) is tantamount to questioning the legitimacy of the regime and, thus, rebellious insurrection [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**].

Yet, while aesthetics often is highly contested, physical beauty as such, and female beauty in particular, seems to be more or less uncontroversial. Although beautiful celebrities, actresses of popular TV programs or protagonists of movies still look rather different from what a poll made by Superdrug finds out to be, for the Egyptians, the ideal bodies—"the ideal male Egyptian will have a six pack, slightly dark skin, and thick dark hair" while for the ideal woman, "the results appeared to focus on the hips, legs and hair" (*EGYPTIANSTREETS*, Feb. 19)—, beautiful women regularly are made the bearers of beautiful ideas, particularly in cinematic fiction. For the filmatization of *Hepta*, Andeel observes (and criticizes) that the internal logic of the movie is still very much based on a male-dominated aesthetics [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. But he also thinks that this can be tolerated as long as the overall message is beautiful—which, he thinks, is the case in *Hepta* because it encourages people to fall in love (ANDEEL). In other movies, fair, mostly young, women may embody a virtue like humanitarian self-sacrifice (the teen-age Muslim sister in *Ishtibāk* who suppresses all feelings of shame and guilt to offend the prescriptions of Islamic law when she unveils to lend the needles of her *niqāb* to a nurse who needs to fix a wound); or the unconditional love of a courageous mother who travels undercover to Syria, exposing herself to the danger of being killed, to find and rescue her son who has joined the ranks of jihadist fighters there (*Zahrat Ḥalab*); or freedom, independence, true love and truthfulness (as represented by Rīm, the "Gazelle," in *Hédi*); or sensibility, empathy, understanding, openness towards the Other (as the two beautiful women protagonists in *Corps étranger*). Very often, however, this beauty is combined with trauma, fragility, or vulnerability: there is the beautiful singer-entertainer and high-class prostitute Gina who has suffered a lot from men and, in singing a song by Fayrūz, lets "her tears speak," her beauty and that of the music underlining her noble character (*The Nile Hilton Incident*; later in the film, she will be found dead, a victim of the criminal regime); there is 18-year-old singer Faraḥ who becomes a veritable martyr of the freedom of expression when she is detained and tortured for nothing else but singing critical songs and who, towards the end of the movie, emerges from the experience as a broken person (*ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī*; it is only in the very last scene that she is able to produce some sound again) (she is very much reminiscent of the *ḥūriyyat al-taʿbīr*, an icon of the days of the Revolution in which female beauty—a *ḥūriyya* is one of the legendary virgins of Paradise, mentioned in the Qur'an—is combined, in a pun, with the Arabic term for 'freedom of expression', *ḥurriyyat al-taʿbīr*); and there are the two protagonists of *Ghadwa ḥayy* who have suffered a traumatic experience during the days of the Revolution: when the boy together with whom they were hiding on the roof of a house was caught by two policemen, one of whom started to rape him [↗The **Policeman Criminal**], they beat the rapist with an iron bar and left him almost dead; in this way, the initially innocent became guilty—veritable tragic heroines who, in the years following the Revolution, have tried hard, but never succeeded, to get past their trauma and guilt. In a move, it seems, of self-critical irony [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**] and an attempt to avoid the clichés of mainstream cinema, the beautiful idea that a movie wants to convey may also be represented in the beauty of—a goat! In *ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm*, ʿAlī's unconditional love for Nadà the Goat, with her

snow-white fur that, like a bride's wedding dress, underlines her purity and innocence, seems to transcend human love due to the actual impossibility of the match, its 'madness'. Is a reference to the legendary lover Majnūn Laylà, the 'Madman of Layla', intended? We cannot know; but for ʿAlī, Nadà-the-Goat is, as he declares to his friend, the spiritual experience of a pure soul ("Nadà bi'l-nisba lī rūḥ").

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ In Islam, … ♦ *Kamīn* ♦ Language ♦ Migration ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music (*mahragānāt*) ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Center *vs.* Periphery ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

Written sources

ABAZA, Mona (Munà Abāẓa). "Cairo: Personal Reflections on Enduring Daily Life." *JAIS*, 16 (2016): 234-252.

ABBAS, Wael (Wāʾil ʿAbbās). Facebook post of December 31, 2016, <https://www. facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158096867675220&set=a.10153039100570220.1073741829.523900219&type=3>.

ABID, Zohra (Zuhra ʿAbd). "Le Prix Comar du roman tunisien fête son 20e anniversaire." *Kapitalis*, March 24, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/03/24/le-prix-comar-du-roman-tunisien-fete-son-20e-anniversaire/> (as of April 24, 2016).

AGYAD MULTI PROJECTS. "Live the Luxury Life at Agyad Garden City." [2016], <https:// www.agyadeg.com/> <http://www.agyadeg.com/projects/agyad-garden-city/>, <https://www.agyadeg.com/ar/projects/agyad-garden-city/> (as of April 4, 2016, revisited April 6, 2018)

ALI, Amro. "Little by little, the dark seeds of the future Alexandria dystopia are planted in the present." Photo posted on Facebook, September 13, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=740878588255&set=a.535912621695.2054993.204400427&type=3&theater> (last accessed March 27, 2018).

ANDEEL (Andīl). "Hepta: Do you need to learn how to love?" *madàMaṣr*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/29/feature/culture/hepta-do-you-need-to-learn-how-to-love/> (as of Apr. 29, 2016) / "Ḥībtā: Muḥāḍarat 'al-muḥn'." *Ibid.*, May 3, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/05/03/feature/ثقافة/هيبتا-محاضرة-المحن/>, (as of Apr. 11, 2018).

ATTALAH, Lina (Līnā ʿAṭā Allāh). "While a bad year for civil society all vow to find ways to continue." *madàMaṣr*, December 26, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/26/ feature/politics/while-a-bad-year-for-civil-society-all-vow-to-find-ways-to-continue/> (accessed March 25, 2018).

BOSKOVITCH, Angela. "Artists imagine something else for Egypt (PHOTOS)." *Your Middle East*, February 18, 2016, <http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/culture/artists-imagine-something-else-for-egypts-art-scene-photos_38988> (last updated Feb. 18, 2016).

CAIROSCENE TEAM [Feb.]. "Creative Mansoura Man Transforms Used Tires Into Eclectic Art." *CairoScene*, February 15, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Creative-Mansoura-Man-Transforms-Used-Tires-Into-Eclectic-Art> (as of Feb. 15, 2016).

CAIROSCENE TEAM [Jul]. "Egyptian Art Initiative Adorns Damietta's Walls with 25 Stunning Pieces of Graffiti." *Cairo Scene*, July 10, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Egyptian-Art-Initiative-Adorns-Damietta-s-Walls-with-25-Stunning-Pieces-of-Graffiti> (accessed March 25, 2018).

CHAMS, Dalia. "Backed into a corner: Egypt's Independent Culture Five Years After the Revolution." *ahramonline*, January 26, 2016, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/185941.aspx> (as of Jan. 26, 2016).

DAWSON, Aimee. "Q&A with eL Seed: Changing perceptions." *MadaMasr*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/04/01/feature/culture/qa-with-el-seed-changing-perceptions/> (last accessed March 11, 2018).

DUBAI DESIGN WEEK. "Iconic City: Cairo Now! City Incomplete, curated by Mohamed Elshahed." *Dubai Design Week*, [n.d., 2016], <http://www.dubaidesignweek.ae/projects/iconic-city-cairo-now-city-incomplete/> (as of Oct. 24, 2016).

[*EgyptianStreets*, Feb. 10 =] N. N. "100 Years of Egyptian Beauty." *EgyptianStreets*, February 10, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/10/100-years-of-egyptian-beauty/> (as of Feb. 10, 2016).

[*EgyptianStreets*, Feb. 19 =] N. N. "This Is What the 'Ideal' Man and Woman Looks Like in Egypt." *EgyptianStreets—ES Buzz*, February 19, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/19/this-is-what-the-ideal-man-and-woman-looks-like-in-egypt/> (as of Feb. 19, 2016)

EL GIBALY, Lara. "Completely horrific and painfully plausible: Mohamed Rabie's *Otared*." *madàMaṣr*, June 24, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/06/24/feature/culture/completely-horrific-and-painfully-plausible-mohamed-rabies-otared/> (as of July 10, 2016).

EL SEED at TEDSummit. "A project of peace painted across 50 buildings." Talk recorded June 2016 at TEDSummit, <https://www.ted.com/talks/el_seed_a_project_of_peace_painted_ across_ 50_ buildings>.

[*Freemuse* =] N. N. "Egypt: Mahraganat artists challenge limits." *Freemuse*, February 23, 2016, <https://freemuse.org/news/egypt-mahraganat-artists-challenge-limits/> (as of Feb. 23, 2016).

GALALAH, Kurt. "Tunisian Artist eL Seed Paints Manshiyat Naser With Stunning Graffiti." *Scoop Empire*, March 14, 2016, <https://scoopempire.com/tunisian-artist-el-seed-paints-manshiyat-naser-stunning-graffiti/>.

GHONEIM, Niveen (Nīvīn Ghunaym). "Gedary: Graffiti as a Means of Development Across Egyptian Towns." *CairoScene*, November 24, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Gedary-Graffiti-as-a-Means-of-Development-Across-Egyptian-Towns> (accessed March 25, 2018).

El GIBALY, Lara (Lārā al-Jibālī). "Hopes for an Arabic type boom: Breaking the rules but not too far." *madàMaṣr*, November 2, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/11/02/feature/culture/hopes-for-an-arabic-type-boom-breaking-the-rules-but-not-too-far/> (as of March 26, 2018).

"Graffiti thawrat al-shaʿb." Round-table discussion at the Cairo Book Fair (Qāʿat al-mawāʾid al-mustadīra), January 28, 2016.

HOSNY, Farah, and Valentina PRIMO. "16 of 2016: The Egyptian Men and Women Changing the Country." *CairoScene*, December 30, 2016, <http://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/16-of-2016-Egypt-s-Real-Influencers>.

JACQUEMOND, Richard. "Ahmed Naji, the Use of Life and the zombies." *madàMaṣr*, February 23, 2016, <http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/culture/ahmed-naji-use-life-and-zombies> (as of Feb. 23, 2016).

[*Kapitalis* =] N. N. "Les stations de la banlieue sud de Tunis reprennent des couleurs." *Kapitalis*, August 22, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/08/22/les-stations-de-la-banlieue-sud-de-tunis-reprennent-des-couleurs/> (as of Aug. 22, 2016).

[*madàMaṣr*, Feb. =] N. N. "Appeals court sentences novelist Ahmed Naji to 2 years prison." *Madà Maṣr*, February 20, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/20/news/culture/appeals-court-sentences-novelist-ahmed-naji-to-2-years-prison/> (last accessed March 27, 2018).

[*madàMaṣr*, Dec. =] N. N. "Culture A-Z: Only a few shining moments punctuated the gloom in Egypt's arts this year." *madàMaṣr*, December 21, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/21/feature/culture/a-sad-dangerous-and-somewhat-dull-year-for-arts-in-egypt/> (last accessed March 26, 2018).

[*madàMaṣr*, Jan. =] N. N. "2016 in critical culture writing." *madàMaṣr*, January 1, 2017, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/01/01/feature/culture/2016-in-critical-culture-writing/> (as of Jan. 1, 2017).

METWALI, Ati. "When the Going Gets Tough: On Challenges that 2016 Brought on Egypt's Cultural Scene." Ahram Online, December 25, 2016. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/253846.aspx> (accessed June 22, 2018).

PEPE, Teresa. "Dylan and the a-changing times of literature, in the Arab world and elsewhere." *madàMaṣr*, October 27, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/10/27/feature/culture/dylan-and-the-a-changing-times-of-literature-in-the-arab-world-and-elsewhere-2/> (as of Oct. 27, 2016).

[*La Presse* =] N. N. "Une édition attractive." 2016. *La Presse* (online), September 2, 2016, <http://www.lapresse.tn/02092016/119420/une-edition-attractive.html> (as of Sept. 2, 2016).

RABĪʿ, Muḥammad. *ʿUṭārid* (Mercury). Cairo: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2015.

SAID, Omar (ʿUmar Saʿīd). "Trial of Ahmed Naji and editor begins for writing sexually explicit text." *Madà Maṣr*, November 14, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2015/11/14/news/culture/trial-of-ahmed-naji-and-editor-begins-for-writing-sexually-explicit-text/> (last accessed March 27, 2018).

El SHIMI, Rowan (Rawān al-Shīmī). "A hopeful year for Egypt's cinema industry." *madàMaṣr*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/28/feature/culture/a-hopeful-year-for-egypts-cinema-industry/> (as of Dec. 28, 2016).

SULAYMĀN, Muḥammad al-Sayyid. "Taṭwīr madākhil al-Baḥr al-Aḥmar bi-dihān 'al-barāmīl' bi-alwān ʿalam Miṣr." *al-Maṣrī al-yawm*, October 13, 2016, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1024085> (as of Oct. 13, 2016).

[*al-Taḥrīr/Tahrirnews* =] N. N. "Shawāriʿ Miṣr bi-ʿadasat Ḥusām: qiṣṣa yuwaththiquhā 'al-Manādīlī' fī ṣuwar." *al-Taḥrīr / Tahrirnews*, March 25, 2016, <https://www.tahrirnews.com/posts/400839/>

"al-Thaqāfa fī 'l-muwājaha." Podium discussion at Cairo Book Fair, Main Hall, January 29, 2016.

YOUNES, Najwa (Najwà Yūnus). "Tunis: Living History." *Tunisia Live*, February 26, 2016, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/02/26/tunis-living-history/> (as of Feb. 26, 2016).

Movies

Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan (We have never been kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). Egypt, U.A.E., Qatar, Lebanon 2016.

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the last days of the city). By Tāmir al-Saʿīd (Tamer el Said). Egypt, Germany, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux (As I open my eyes). By Leyla Bouzid. Tunisia, France, Belgium 2015*.

ʿAlī Miʿza wa-Ibrāhīm (Ali, the Goat, and Ibrahim). By Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif El Bendary). Egypt, France 2016.

Un cercle autour d'une danse (A circle round a dance). Short film by Mouna Louhichi. Tunisia 2015*.

Les commerçantes (The tradeswomen). Short film by Noussaiba Msallem. Tunisia 2015*.

Corps étranger (Foreign body). By Raja Amari. Tunisia, France 2016.

Fawqa mustawà al-shubuhāt. TV drama, written by ʿAbd Allāh Ḥasan and Amīn Gamāl, Midḥat al-ʿAdl (ishrāf drāmī) and Muḥammad Rajāʾ (scenario), directed by Hānī Khalīfa. Egypt, Ramaḍān 2016.

A Footnote on Ballet History. Documentary by Hisham Abdel Khalek. Egypt, USA, France 2016.

Ghadwa ḥayy / *Demain dès l'aube* (Burning hope). By Luṭfī Āshūr (Lotfi Achour). Tunisia 2016.

Ḥārr jāff ṣayfan (Dry hot summers). Short film by Sharīf al-Bandarī (Sherif Elbendary). Egypt, Germany 2015*.

al-Ḥufra | *La fosse* (The ditch). Short film by Achref Hammami. Tunisia 2016.

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). Egypt, Germany, France 2016.

Jeanne d'Arc Masriya | *Egyptian Jeanne d'Arc*. Documentary Iman Kamel. Egypt, Germany, Kuwait, Qatar 2016.

Kussummak kussummak (Fuck your mother). YouTube video, posted by "Aḥā Kānsir." October 26, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zo57B4ivgVc> (last watched Apr. 12, 2018).

Mawlānā (The Preacher). By Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). Egypt, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). Egypt 2016.

Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi (Hedi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyya (Mohamed Ben Attia). Tunisia, Belgium, France 2016.

Nihāyāt saʿīda (Happily Ever After). Documentary by Nadà Riyāḍ (Nada Riyadh) and Ayman al-Amīr (Ayman El Amir). Egypt 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). Egypt, Germany, Sweden, Denmark 2017**.

Shbābik al-janna / Les frontiers du ciel (Borders of heaven). By Fāris Naʿnāʿ (Farès Naanaa). Tunisia, U.A.E. 2015*.

Tahar Cheriaa: Taḥt ẓilāl al-bāwbāb/ A l'ombre du baobab (At the baobab's shadow). Documentary by Muḥammad Shallūf (Mohamed Challouf). Tunisia 2015*.

Travesties. Short film by Safoin Ben Abdelali. Tunisia 2015*.

Zahrat Ḥalab (The Flower of Aleppo). By Riḍà Bāhī (Ridha Behi). Tunisia 2016.

We are Egyptian Armenians. Documentary by Waheed Sobhi and Hanan Ezzat. Egypt 2016.

Yallah! Underground. Documentary by Farid Eslam. Egypt, Czechia, Germany, UK, Canada, USA 2015*.

* Produced in 2015 but shown in 2016 on national and international film festivals as still representative of the current situation and attitudes towards life.

** Published and shown on festivals in 2017 but shot in 2016.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Center *vs.* Periphery

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- 6th October
- Alexandria
- Capital vs. Provinces
- countryside, city vs. countryside, rural areas, villages
- empowerment (*tamkīn*)
- geography
- marginal, marginalized groups, marginality and exclusion processess
- metropolis
- Nubian language and culture, Nubian revival, Nubians, first Nubian deputy in Egyptian parliament
- Port Said
- provinces, regions, cultural emancipation of "the South"
- Sfax
- Sohag
- Sousse
- Ṭanṭā
- the Ṣaʿīd (Upper Egypt)
- Upper Beni Sueif
- Upper Minya
- voices from the Delta

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ Language ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *314–*314
© N. N.

Freedom *vs.* Constraint

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- altruism ↗egotism
- anonymity, masking, veiling
- arranged marriages
- art(s), artistic freedom, artist as enemy
- Article 230
- auto-documentary
- censorship, self-sensorship
- challenging the givens/stereotype, provocation
- chewing gum
- clubs
- collective ↗Individuality vs. Collectivity
- commitment / *iltizām*
- common destiny
- conscience
- duty, sense of duty/responsibility, Freedom vs. Duty/Responsibility
- ego, selfishness, Egotism *vs.* Altruism
- family: constraints imposed by family, familiy honour, family pressure, family values, familial solidarity
- forced social gatherings
- formation of the Self, individual trajectories, individualisation, individuation
- freedom (*QTh*), lack of freedom, lack of freedom of expression, lack of dignity
- Freedom *vs.* Duty/Responsibility ↗duty
- guards, guardians
- hackers, hacking
- helplessness
- homosexuality: see ↗prosecution
- impotence, feeling of powerlessness
- individual appropriation
- individual happiness
- individual *vs.* state
- individual trajectories, individualisation, individuation ↗formation of the Self
- limits
- "loose morals"
- narrow spaces, closed rooms
- "offending public morals"
- personal = national dignity
- Personal *vs.* Collective
- potentials
- premarital sex
- pressure
- printers as censors
- private, privacy
- project(s)
- prosecution of homosexuality
- prosecutor's speech in front of CairoAppeal Court
- public
- Public = Private
- public condemnation
- public image
- public insults
- public morals / morality, public shaming
- public space, Public vs. Private, Public space vs. Private space
- public unrest
- puritanism
- *qillit adab*
- quest for one's self
- questions
- reaction
- reaction vs. lack of reaction
- reactions to al-Sīsī's speech 13 August
- "red lines"

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *315–*316
© N. N.

- relatives
- relativism
- religious police
- respect
- respectable citizens
- responsibility ↗duty
- responsible citizens *vs.* distrustful authorities
- ritual(s)
- rules
- self
- self-assurance (via apologetics), self-confidence
- self-awareness, ~ and reflection
- self-censorship
- sense of duty / responsibility ↗duty
- sexual frustration
- shame
- singles
- social and culture choices
- social mores, norms, rules, trends, values
- social control, obligations, social pressure
- stagnation
- stereotypes ↗challenging
- strong will
- submission
- subversion, subversive, subversive energy of music
- suffering and discomfort
- suffocation
- suicide, suicide rates
- taboos
- *ta'dīb*
- *tamkīn* > empowerment
- timidity
- "torn between two women"
- tradition, tradition's pressure, Tradition vs. Freedom
- transfiguration
- translocate
- trap
- true identity/self
- uncertainty
- undecided
- unmarried women living alone
- values
- vulnerability
- What to do?
- women's liberation

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Conversions ♦ Court Trials ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Hashish ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ Tourist Resources ♦ Uber

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ ...@... ►

Hope *vs.* Hell

By Mihaila Yordanova

Under review.

Evernote keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry

- Aḥmad Murād
- anticipation
- apocalypse, apocalyptic, dystopia
- end of Cairo
- end of love
- *fasād*, fighting *fasād*
- fatigue, weariness, *taʿab*
- fiction = reality
- frustration
- horror, horror fiction
- horrific = realistic / plausible
- Muḥammad Rabīʿ
- near-earth asteroid QA2 2016
- nightmare
- past, past as treasure box, recent past, Past *vs.* Future, Past *vs.* Present
- perception of development: where the country is going
- pessimism
- posthuman
- predictable *vs.* unpredictable
- present, present tragedy, Future = Present (Dystopia)
- progress
- randomness
- slogan "al-ya's khiyāna"
- slow-motion
- social change
- space agency
- surveillance, Big Brother
- threatened by extinction
- thriller
- tsunami
- UFO
- unhuman
- upholding humanity
- urban wars
- *ʿUṭārid* (novel by M. Rabīʿ)
- utopia
- vicious circle of violence and counter-violence
- victim = potential criminal
- weather
- whale

Entries pointing here

Arrays – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disasters ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ High School Exams ♦ Pop Music ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Self-help ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ The Voice from Above

Codes – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Past *vs.* Present

Codes collapsed – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ mly201@yahoo.co.uk ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *317–*317
© Mihaila Yordanova, Brussels, BE

Inferiority *vs.* Superiority

By Stephan Guth

In preparation.

Evernote keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry

- Abla Fahita
- absurdity, tragedy = comedy
- *adab sākhir*
- Aḥmad Ragab
- ʿAlī Galāl (Alycature)
- Almanawihly
- Anā Ḥalūma
- Andeel (Qandīl)
- April Fools
- Bassem Youssef (Bāsim Yūsuf)
- Batman
- black humour
- breaking taboos
- caricature
- cartoon(s), cartoon soap opera
- challenging the givens, challenging stereotypes
- comedy, comedy and drama production
- Comic Con
- condoms, condom video
- converse shoes
- dark comedy
- dark present
- derision
- exceptions
- government policy as satire
- humo(u)r
- irony
- Islām Ǧāwīsh
- joke(s)
- making fun
- most shared cartoon on asa7bess in the period 25 June to 8 July 2016
- obey vs. defy elder
- Oum el Dounya (*Umm il-dunyā*)
- playfulness
- provocation
- Qandīl > Andeel
- Reality = Joke (Satire), Reality = Satire
- sarcasm
- satire, *adab sākhir*, unintentional satire
- sense of humour
- social media satire
- stand-up comedy
- stupidity of Ministers
- Tawfīq ʿUkāsha
- tickling the mighty
- TV show Allo Jeddah
- unintentional satire
- vulgarity
- *al-Waraqah 2*
- What about the first Oscar?
- WillisFromTunis, Willis from Tunis

Entries pointing here

Arrays – Baby Milk ♦ Celebrities ♦ Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Conversions ♦ Disappearances ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Valentine's Day ♦ The Voice from Above

Codes – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ True *vs.* False

Codes collapsed – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO

Male *vs.* Female

By Albrecht Hofheinz

"An unveiled woman is a threat to the social order" in the traditional, male-dominated "Muslim imaginary," states Tunisian psychoanalyst and women's rights activist Nādira Bin Ismāʿīl (Nédra Ben Smaïl), known as the founder of Tunisia's first women's refuge, *Baytī* ("My Home"), and as the author of a study analysing how increased premarital sexual activity has led to a renewed focus of the male gaze on female virginity ("Is she still a virgin? A real one? Or a fake one, broken and surgically fixed?") (M.Ṣ.ʿ; Y.N.) [↗**True *vs.* False**]. Nādira presents her research at a podium debate on "The Feminine: identities and sexualities" during a colloquium held in Tunis to take stock of the fate of the "Arab Spring." There, she highlights the psycho-social tensions caused by accelerating change in actual sexual behaviour while cultural norms and to a large extent state policies still reflect a traditional moral code that restricts sexual relations to married heterosexual couples.

Male-female dynamics overall, not only sexual relations, are shaped in this interface between conservative value systems and changing practices and attitudes. Time and again, one finds people struggling with the pull of traditional norms, individual aspirations, moralist reactions, defiant rebellion, and social constraints. Both analytical voices and media testimonies clearly reflect this ambiguity and the tension between archetypal mental moulds and the variegated expressions of real-life actuality.

In primordial paradigm, it is the male gaze that defines 'woman'—a gaze, notably, that precedes seeing. "Close your eyes; look through your eyelids. Deep inside us, this is what a voice suggests us to do when faced with a woman's body." What you see is what you *imagine*: "Even when not undressed, a woman is always naked, she is '*awra'*—this Arabic term for what must be hidden is what defines 'woman.' […] When you look at a woman, the creature that appears emerges somewhere between your eye and her body… She is the sacred, […] she is the limit" demarcating the sphere of taboo (*ḥarām*) and possible transgression. This is how Tunisian artist and writer Lilia Bacha characterises what she calls "the sinful gaze": the gaze typically directed at the female body.

Like the two Tunisian women, Egyptian philosophy professor Ḥasan Ḥammād presents a sweeping critique of what he regards as a "male-dominated culture" (*thaqāfa dhukūriyya*). In his best-selling book *Dawā'ir al-taḥrīm: al-sulṭa, al-ǧasad, al-muqaddas* ("Circles of Taboos: Authority, the Body, the Sacred"), he analyses the three big taboo areas that in many societies delimit what is deemed acceptable thought and practice: political power, sexual morality, and religion. In the author's view, these three taboos are intertwined; autocratic rulers and misogynist theologians work together to subject the body, through external coercion and internalised norms, to a regime ultimately serving one-man rule. Man, in this patriarchal socio-political order, represents reason; woman pure physicality that must be controlled by man—a system that Ḥasan Ḥammād traces back to ancient religion and Greek philosophy. Anyone criticising any aspect of this system is quickly labelled an immoral, atheist rebel calling for chaos. Today, religious extremists and fundamentalists are the most vocal advocates of this line of thought, but beyond that, it remains deeply entrenched in

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *319–*338
© Albrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO

society and in often unconscious structures of behaviour. "Therefore, to kill the father, symbolically, is a necessary precondition to break these circles of taboos," writes Ḥasan ḤAMMĀD, so that all human beings can achieve their rights, their freedom, their self-realisation (AL-SHARĪF).

Whatever the concrete and complex social realities, these analysts attribute a decisive formative impact to the age-old archetypal polarity 'man is reason, woman is body and emotion; reason has to rule, for uncontrolled emotion is a threat to measured order.' Translated into social expectations, the fundamental idea is that a man must be strong to stand on his own feet, provide a home for a family, and protect himself and his kin against any threat; if he is unable to live up to this ideal, he quickly feels emasculated (as does the husband of the central character in the film *Nawwāra*) [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. A woman's main task, on the other hand, is to take care of the home, and her noblest role is that of the mother of the heroic man who, the moment of his death in duty, embraces his mother in his mind. How powerful this idea remains is demonstrated in a statue erected in the city of Sōhāǧ that seeks to portray the army protecting Mother Egypt through the image of a soldier clasping a woman. Then again, reactions to this statue show that at least the most rapacious aspect of the male gaze is up for criticism not only in academic circles: there is an outcry on social media as the statue evokes bitter memories of harassment and rape that many women have suffered at the hands of army soldiers and police officers (AL-BIDEYWĪ).

Such mistreatment of women is anathema to most, but underlying gender stereotypes stand strong in society and shape the way children are brought up, bodies are displayed, celebrities are advertised, work is distributed. Thus, the fashion industry transports a fairly conventional ideal of male and female beauty: men are typically physically strong and muscular, often sporting a cool, determined, defiant facial expression; women generally have a softer look, long wavy hair, and dark smoky eyes (CAIROSCENE TEAM [2]). At home and in school, boys and girls are formed to conform to traditional gender roles and are scolded for any deviation from the norm. A boy doing something as girlish as weaving is being yelled at in *al-Nuṣūr al-ṣaghīra* (*Little Eagles*); in *Sheikh Jackson*, a teenager must hide his fascination for the King of Pop's dancing from his father who is disgusted by such an effeminate creature (*mukhannath*) [↗**Dancing**]. In the Tunisian city al-Ḥammāmāt, men wearing female clothing on their way to a Halloween party get beaten and locked up by police for "violating public decency." In Egypt, cross-dressing in public is unthinkable, and transvestites are repeatedly trapped and arrested even in private spaces (BACKHAUS; QUILLEN). Even a progressive pop band famous for their songs criticising the social and political status quo is not free from such stereotypes, although their lead singer later excuses himself for a line contrasting "real men" with those "putting on lipstick" (HOFHEINZ 341; MAY AḤMAD). Tunisian female rappers suffer from the macho attitudes that pervade hip hop culture—while other artists, such as Egyptian *mahragānāt* group Shobīk Lobīk in their most famous song "*Māfīsh sāḥib yitṣāḥib*" ("No friend to befriend"), criticise the traditional association of masculinity with violent strength (DJILALI; FREEMUSE) [↗**Pop Music**].

Just how firm a hold conventional ideas about gender have is apparent where the roles are turned around. The photo of a working-class woman dragging a heavy load past lazy young men wasting their time in a café goes viral on Twitter under the heading "Some girls in Egypt are tougher (*aǧdaʿ*) than 100 men" (ASHRAF ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD; NŪR HĀNIM). Having

gained fame as the *Fatāt al-ʿAraba*, the "Handcart Girl," she is invited by President al-Sīsī to honour those who sacrifice themselves for the sake of their family and who thereby demonstrate that "hard work is the only magic key to solve all economic problems" (SAMĪKA; ḤUSAYN YŪSUF). Not only is the Handcart Girl celebrated as a model of the self-sacrificing woman, but by being presented as an out-of-the-ordinary case, she serves to confirm the general idea that it should be the man who provides for the family [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**] while the women first and foremost should take care of the home. This idea is tenacious; it runs through the discourse of many well-meaning men who, whether from an Islamic or a less religiously oriented persuasion, try to sing the praise of women. "In Islam, woman is a treasure," writes a pious commentator [↗**In Islam, …**]. "In our tradition, She is the affectionate mother and the dedicated wife […] As the Prophet said, 'Paradise lies under the feet of mothers'" (Didou Mohamed in BĀSIL NAWFAL). Without any need to refer to religious tradition, a relatively open-minded intellectual opens the film *Hepta* by saying "something along the lines of: 'We all need a tender woman to help endure life's blah blah blah.'" The film critic—*MadaMasr*'s candid cartoonist ANDEEL—dissects this mindset:

> Despite thinking of itself as a good-intentioned delicate flirtation, this sentence carries inside it the seed of the problematic relationship between men and women the world over, when romantic relationships are seen in isolation (as they are in this film) from the unjust distribution of rights and privileges among men and women.

Women are, however, not only self-sacrificing mothers and spouses offering love and care. In man's mind, also the 'insatiable' woman looms large as a threat to man's abilities and man's authority. Women are beings that are difficult to understand and hard to argue with rationally since they are so emotional. Women arouse men physically and sexually and therefore disturb man's sobriety and focus. In marriage, women are constantly demanding attention and material support to the extent of draining man of his energy and power. Variations of this image can be found in many representations of male-female dynamics. ISLĀM ǦĀWĪSH's *al-Waraqa*, generally popular for its juvenile irreverence towards established ways of doing and perceiving things, often reflects a rather partial view of what women want. It sums up "the relationship in 3 lines": At the outset, the girl holds her fiancé's hands and makes him promise to never change. Next, a while into their marriage, she sternly demands: "You need to change." And finally, she turns away leaving her husband bewildered, her last words being, "I'm sorry, but you've changed." The satirical Facebook page "Diary of a crushed husband" (*Yawmiyyāt Zawǧ Maṭḥūn*) [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**] has attracted over a million followers for its posts that live on and strengthen the idea that in today's society, men's rights are more and more eroded and that they get walked over by women (RAḤMA ḌIYĀʾ). How can men defend themselves against these insatiable women? An Egyptian parliamentarian—an outlier perhaps, but one known for populist statements not mincing matters—justifies the necessity of female circumcision as follows: "Egypt's men suffer from sexual weakness, as is evident from the fact that Egypt is among the countries with the highest consumption of sexual stimulants. Only the weak take those. If we stop circumcising women, we need strong men, and we don't have men of that kind." So "for the sake of equality between men and women, women should be circumcised to reduce their sexual desire" (MUḤAMMAD ṢUBḤĪ). "No!" a feminist retorts on TV:

> We must treat the men instead of butchering the women! Should every guy who has some sort of deficiency, mentally or culturally or physically, go and cut off a piece of a woman's body?? That way women will simply vanish. Instead of circumcising women, solve the problem by giving men free Viagra or sweetmeat sandwiches with cream!" (BASSĀM RAMAḌĀN).

This attempt at a sardonic critique of dominant stereotypes is met with vociferous protest, however. Quite a few comments accuse the feminist of vulgarity (*ʔillit adab*) and claim that female circumcision has been practiced in many cultures for thousands of years without causing any harm, that it is based on Prophetic Tradition, and that the country anyhow has bigger problems to solve. Despite longstanding official efforts to fight female genital mutilation (FGM), the practice remains firmly rooted in Egyptian customary culture. As around 60% of young girls are still affected, in defiance of a law prohibiting the practice, parliament in September increases prison terms for FGM from a few months to at least five years (ṢAFIYYA MUNĪR, "Mishraṭ").

Keeping the sexes apart is a fairly common solution to the troubles caused by uninhibited mingling. Schools in Egypt generally have gender-segregated classes; in Tunisia, boys and girls are often divided into separate rows. The Cairo metro runs women-only cars, and when a private regional railway company in the German province of Saxony introduces train compartments for women travelling alone or with children, Tunisian Islamist *al-Ṣadà* titles excitedly: "In a slap in the face to the extremist left elite in Tunisia and the Arab World, Germany applies the principle of gender segregation in trains" (SZ; AL-ṢADÀ). Social media users eagerly forward this headline, which appears to confirm that the superiority of 'Islamic' gender rules has now also been recognised in the West, thus giving it the added stamp of credibility by the technologically advanced world [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**].

In real life, however, segregation of the sexes is threatened not only by "left elites;" it is being undermined (where it existed in the first place) by much more extensive economic and socio-cultural developments. It is against this background that Islamist movements endeavour to re-assert the notion that the male and the female must be shielded from each other. In their view, women are a huge temptation (*fitna*) for men, threatening men's commitment to focusing on piety and on leading a life according to the norms of religion. In a symbolic scene in *Zahrat Ḥalab / Fleur d'Alep*, Islamist militants have young men practice shooting at naked female mannequin dummies. Everyday interaction demands that women must be veiled (for their pretty faces distract men), and the free mingling of the sexes must be reduced and regulated as much as possible. Dancing (as a form of mingling of the sexes that serves no other purpose than entertainment and sensual stimulation) is particularly dangerous; one must not engage in it and not watch it, not on YouTube and not in real life. Music, being conducive to dancing, is also dangerous (*Sheikh Jackson*) [↗**Dancing**; ↗**Pop Music**]. Through emphasising such rules, Islamic fundamentalist moralists try to uphold traditional gender norms against significant tendencies that work to erode them. People who do not conform to these standards must therefore not only watch out for society at large ("What will people think?" "What will the *bawwāb* [the 'gatekeeper' guarding access to buildings in Egypt's apartment blocks] think?" (CAIROSCENE TEAM [1]) [↗The **Honourable Citizen**]. They are also being bothered by sometimes militantly aggressive moral custodians. In the documentary *Nihāyāt saʿīda* ("Happily Ever After"), a couple can be seen walking by

the beach in Alexandria, against a backdrop of slogans written on the breakwaters that condemn illicit premarital relations. Somebody shouts at them, reprimanding them for hanging out together. "What can you do in a country where people don't even let you walk along the beach without getting molested?" the film asks. Cairo is "a city where police and society do not allow for a kiss by the Nile River, while turning their backs at the daily incidents of harassment," decries writer AḤMAD NĀĞĪ this state of affairs, adding that desire—"rough and flaming, or still and quiet"—is always present, but acknowledging it and expressing it is strictly regularised and made taboo (*ḥarām*). "This repressed desire creates a deep sense of dullness that reflects on experiencing the city and its current tragic moment."

Desire may be ever-present—but who has a right to desire? And what can, what should one desire? Sex? Love? Self-realisation? Young Tunisians interviewed by the pan-Arab daily *al-Ḥayāt* assert that young men primarily want a girl friend to satisfy their sexual desire, while women typically seek marriage "to escape society's disrespect for unmarried women" and hope to "find love, warmth, and protection in a man" (AL-ʿASHIYY). In other words, traditional gender stereotypes still stand strong: Men want sex, women want love and protection. If society is to survive, with the family as its reproductive nucleus, these non-matching desires need to be channelled and controlled. Men must be protected against temptation, and women against their own rapaciousness. However, this traditional imaginary is increasingly problematised, which is why "sexual harassment" (*taḥarrush*) has become a *concept* and is increasingly addressed as a *problem*, widespread on the streets and in the workplace, whereas before it used to be a *taboo* not talked about (NAJWA YOUNES). Traditional victim-blaming is still frequent; even a prominent, and glamorous, female TV presenter such as Rīhām Saʿīd thinks that "inappropriate clothing" may give a "man the impression that you're not a 'good girl'" and thus provoke harassment (EGYPTIAN STREETS). Such attitudes, dismissing as unnatural a woman's desire to move around naturally and unfold herself freely, seeking to contain and restrain her to curb temptation threatening men, are increasingly questioned, however, and society's often indifferent reaction is coming under attack and is slowly changing, as DĀLIYĀ ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD writes in *Madà* on 8 May, on the occasion of International Women's Day:

> The revolutionary feminist movement in Egypt has been able to bring about positive change in people's knowledge and perceptions of sexual violence and sexual rights. One of the major achievements of the feminist movement is related to the issue of sexual violence against women in the public sphere. It is no longer out of the ordinary today for girls and women to report verbal and physical harassment to the police. They have also exposed and confronted police officers who refuse to file such reports. This was not the case 10 years ago.

Mediatized stories of more and more female survivors of sexual attacks who have overcome the hurdle of 'shame' traditionally preventing them from daring to speak out in public have "contributed to changing the mainstream victim-blaming attitude." Tellingly, in a high-profile paternity suit by actress Zeyna against prominent actor Aḥmad ʿIzz, the public is largely on Zeyna's side. Traditionally, out-of-wedlock pregnancies would have been a social disaster for the woman (DĀLIĀ ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD; MAY SHAMS AL-DĪN).

New initiatives try to enlist and raise awareness not least among men, such as the Cairo campaign "Men and women together are fighting violence against women" that targets opinion leaders in local communities, schools, universities, and the media (ṢAFIYYA MUNĪR, "Maʿan"). Other campaigns focus specifically on sexual harassment and gender discrimination at the workplace (CBC; MAY SHAMS AL-DĪN; MUNÀ ʿIZZAT). "Harassment is now a bad word that everyone fears inside corporates," activist groups such as Harassmap affirm. Commercial advertising responds promptly. Where five years ago, Carlsberg Group's "Birell" ran an ad saying "Grow your moustache and it will teach her manners" (*Rabbī-l-hā 'l-shanab yiʿallimhā 'l-adab*; HANI ELAGAMY), the new campaign is

> tagged, 'Manhood is about good morals.' The series presents characteristics of a 'real man' as one who combats harassment and helps with household chores. This change definitely reflects a shift in the perceptions of the campaign's target audience, namely young men, regarding what is deemed to be acceptable male behavior. In other words, the advertising company had to replace their initial chauvinistic message—which correlated manhood with harassment—with an alternative motto that identifies combating harassment as an attribute of manhood. (DĀLIYĀ ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD)

While activists report some success in their struggle to change people's view of the problem, it remains an uphill struggle both on the streets and inside the home. Statistics show that a third of married women in Egypt have been "subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence at the hands of their husbands" (ṢAFIYYA MUNĪR, "Maʿan"). Many victims still hesitate to take action as they face pressure from their families and reprisals from their employers. In Tunisia, where every other woman reports to have "suffered some form of street violence," a draft law increasing the punishments for sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and sexual intercourse with minors, again falls victim to haggling over the formation of a new government (BEN TAIEB [1]; WIKĀLAT TŪNIS; TARFA).

To increase the pace of change in the face of social and institutional impediments, activists and artists make their mark in popular media. The destructive aspects of patriarchal norms are taken up prominently in more than one Ramadan series this year, such as in *al-Khānka* ("Mental Hospital") or *Suqūṭ ḥurr* ("Free Fall"). In *al-Khānka*, the female protagonist, fighting off harassment, turns into a dangerous being herself—just like in the Algerian short film *Qindīl al-Baḥr* ("Medusa"), where a rape victim literally is transformed into a sea monster seeking revenge on men and on patriarchal society in general. In *Suqūṭ ḥurr*—apart from the main protagonist, a woman who had killed her husband—, we meet a woman who has been "forced by family and church representatives to stay with her abusive husband;" another one who "attempted suicide after her family refuse a marriage proposal from the man she loves;" and a third one who "was gang raped on a train." They all end up in a mental asylum. While the film critic lauds the focus on gendered violence and women's health, she thinks it is "frustrating when most depictions of mental health focus on women because this is already a stigma embedded in patriarchal society —that being irrational and mad is something that women do. This feminizes mental health, making it a women's issue when it isn't."

Gendered violence may impact male-female relations in important ways, but critical questions are being asked regarding the system that produces such a skewed situation.

"Egyptian youth come to learn about sexuality primarily through pornography" as neither school nor parents provide much help (CHARBEL). Established morality discourages the free mingling of boys and girls from a young age and thus makes it difficult to learn to develop free and equal relations with the opposite sex, relations that regard the other as a person and a partner, relations where intimacy can grow out of mutual understanding. The sexual frustration that this system produces is frequently regarded as a prime reason for why men often look at women first and foremost as *objects* of sexual desire and treat them as such (HILLAUER). On the other hand, not only women but also many men are dissatisfied with this regimen and dream of the possibility of having a love-based relationship with a girlfriend even before marriage (most, however, admit that they would not marry a girl who is no longer a virgin). Many young people try their luck through Facebook and dedicated dating sites, but while some do find a suitable partner (NAJI), many others are disappointed when they discover that the polished virtual image they had been chatting with turns out less than perfect at the first off-line encounter.

However that may be, many unmarried couples do have sex before marriage. To do so they need to find a place; this is preferably arranged via a network of friends. People make insinuating remarks and tell jokes about how one "can" or "cannot," depending on access to such a "locality" (*mukna* in Egypt, "locale" in Tunisia) [↗*ʔAlsh*]. Where a gratuitous place is not available, one needs to rent a furnished flat (*shaqqa mafrūsha*) for the purpose, often also shared between friends. Hotels, in particular mid-range ones, are not an option as they deny visits to guest rooms by non-family members of the opposite sex and generally do not rent out rooms to single women (and sometimes to single men) unless they produce "a letter from a family member or place of work or study to be her 'sponsor.'" "Imagine what would happen if a girl is staying on her own and the devil plays with her head? Imagine a guy staying on his own, sees a family with a pretty girl and whistles at her?" (ʿAFĪFĪ)

In Tunisia, it is not illegal for an unmarried couple to be together, but still, social norms tend to stigmatise women who spend time with men other than their husbands as 'prostitutes.' The death of a young man who wanted to spare his girlfriend such a disgrace creates a stir on social media (RIHAB). He had invited her to his apartment but forgotten the key outside. When a neighbour locked the door to call the police, the young man tried to climb down the façade of the house to open the door from the outside but fell to his death. Commentators on social media are divided between disapproval of the girl and critique of a "retrograde" moral code that can have deadly consequences, a "hypocritical conservatism" where "everybody tries to demonstrate their good morality in order to hide their real immorality" (BOUZOUITA).

Sex workers—often driven into this profession out of a combination of child abuse and economic destitution—bear the brunt of the tension many men experience between their own desire and dominant social mores. In Tunis' only state-regulated brothel, workers note the "increasing disrespect younger men show to the women" (VASWANI). Customers out to obtain relief from their sexual frustration may project their anger at the frustrating conditions (the node of moral taboos in combination with the economic hurdles forcing them to postpone marriage) onto the prostitutes: "Sometimes I feel an overpowering desire to hit her. I feel as though she forced me into committing sin," a client in Egypt says (ʿUMAR SAʿĪD).

After all, it is love relationships what many—both men and women—dream of. Love stories are believed to be sure winners on the book market and on screen. The romantic

comedy *Laff wa-Dawarān* (starring Dunyā Samīr Ghānim and Aḥmad Ḥilmī [↗**Celebrities**]) is being leaked to millions on YouTube, denting the revenue of the blockbuster's producers (ADHAM ʿĀṬIF). Meanwhile, "Titanic — the Arabic version" (comedian SHĀDĪ SURŪR's and Bushrà's satirical remake of the classic movie and the first Middle Eastern feature film professionally produced for YouTube) becomes an instant hit, reaching over a million viewers the first day alone (AL-BASHĀYIR). It seems the public realises that all-too crude clichés of romance are rather remote from their own lived reality [↗**True *vs.* False**]. When young author Walīd Dīdā decides to publish his amorous WhatsApp conversations with his fiancée Maryam Ṣaqr in book form, their romantic musings largely fall through with readers (AL-NIMR) [↗**Social Media**]. Instead of clichés, it seems that many young people are increasingly outspoken in their insistence to "discover their own feelings" (*Jeanne d'Arc Maṣriyya*) and to determine themselves whom they want to spend their life with. They struggle with pre-ordained trajectories, stereotype roles, the secrecy hemming in emotions and passions, the double standards that such a life entails. A film such as *Shaykh Jackson* suggests a solution: to make room to trust one another. Societal expectations, however, still often prevent the full realisation of this dream, as is for example shown in the Tunisian film *Nḥibbik Hādī* (*Hédi*) that shows a man who is attracted to an unconventional woman representing the promise of freedom and of finding oneself; in the end, however, he bows to established tradition.

Also ↗**Valentine's Day**, the focus of much commercial and discursive attention, reflects not only the universal longing for tender love but opens up opportunities for posing critical questions regarding common male-female dynamics. A cartoon in *al-Ahrām* makes it appear as if men are inundated with female love to the extent that they wish this lovey-dovey romanticism would stop (AL-DĪB). Social media, however, reveal another picture. On Twitter, the hashtag "*ʿashān_il-bint_tiḥibbak*" is trending to share tips for "how to make the girl love you" with those who spend Valentine's Day alone (SĀRA ṢALĀḤ). Buzzing is also the Facebook post "*lēh baṭṭalt aḥibbak*" where a 26-year old woman explains "why I stopped loving you": since their wedding three years ago, an imbalance has developed between the two spouses. While Mr. husband is "always sure that I love you to the extent of being a slave to this love for you," he himself is paying far less attention to her and her emotional needs:

> I want to save my marriage. I don't give up easily. I tried, again and again, to make him change. I tried a million times, but nothing worked until [I wrote this Facebook post] the day before yesterday. That made him wake up and realise what he has done to me. Any man reading this should wake up and realise that his wife is his gem and not a piece of furniture!

There is nothing strange in that "my post was spread all over the web and [Facebook] groups," she explains. "After all, this is a common thing."—Subsequently, when the post spread "all over the internet," her husband gave her a box of chocolates the picture of which she published under the title "The idea succeeded!" (HIBA AL-MAHDĪ [1], [2]).

Marriage remains the imagined final solution to the dynamics of male-female relations and the associated tribulations of young adulthood. Although this puts a burden of expectation on both young men and women, men may have legitimate goals much beyond establishing a family, while tradition regards marriage and childcare as a woman's main and

foremost destiny [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**]. A girl is under constant parental control until marriage; her family, and society at large, put a lot of pressure on her to abide by this expectation. In *Mudhakkirāt Ǧamīla Saʿīd* ("Memoirs of Ms Beautiful & Happy"), DĪNA IBRĀHĪM SHAʿBĀN (pp. 87-88) has her hero rebel against this pressure. "You're 30 already! Aren't we going to celebrate your wedding?" her mother prods. Or: "Congratulations on your exam results! Hope you're soon tying the knot!" "Marry!" is the standard solution to every problem. "You're upset? Marry! Nervous? Marry! Fatigued? Marry! Got a pimple? Marry! A slight cold? Marry!" The "spectre of spinsterhood" is hanging over every girl of marriageable age who doesn't accept the first promising suitor. "People start talking… you really must marry!!" "Arghhh! Enough! I'm not going to marry! Why can't you get that into your head? It's super easy! I'll only marry the person I love—and the one I love isn't going to marry me, so: I'm not going to marry!" The young girl insists that "this is *my* life, *my* life only! But the problem in Egypt is that your life belongs to all and everyone. It is they who decide on it as if it were *their* life. […] They never leave you in peace!"

The traditional trajectory is thus being called into question at least by a section of young people. This is also obvious in films such as the documentaries *Nihāyāt saʿīda* ("Happily Ever After") and *Jeanne d'Arc Maṣriyya* ("Egyptian Jeanne d'Arc") that explore women's dreams to find themselves, to realise their own dreams, to cast off the shackles imposed on them by a patriarchal society, to rebel against their "inner enslavement." Tellingly, *Jeanne d'Arc*'s central character, a bedouin girl who had fled to the city to become a dancer, fears her own tribe with its rigid social norms more than the military and the police who had tortured and raped her in jail. When and whom to marry, if and when to have children, these women want to decide for themselves. In "a society that imagines motherhood as a woman's only 'natural' path," they express the wish to have a choice, "to be able to command their bodies to make life, when and if they so pleased" (DĪNĀ ḤUSAYN).

"Personal freedom" is also invoked by those who defend the veil, presenting it as a right that women should be free to choose. When the marketing research firm Sigma Conseil publishes an opinion poll suggesting that 93% of Tunisians are in favour of outlawing the full-face veil (*niqāb*), the Islamist web site Essada.net launches a counter-campaign on Facebook ("Are you for permitting the *niqāb* in Tunisia, considering it a matter of personal freedom?") that elicits many responses doubting the representativity of Sigma's poll. The comment that gathers most likes is, however, not using the 'freedom' argument:

> Here's what a man has to say to this—and only real men will understand: If you're against the *niqāb* and the *ḥijāb*, get out your wife and your sister in panties for us to see! The one who'll bad-mouth me for this is a cuckold… or a member of the Association Shams for gays… [↗**LGBT**]. If the cap fits, you wear it! A cuckold will not enter paradise. When God's Messenger was asked, 'Who is a cuckold?' he said, 'The one who is not jealous of his womenfolk (*maḥārimih*)' (BADRO).

Such a blunt statement may, however, be regarded as a defensive reaction to what media describe as a growing tendency for young women to take off the veil they had been bearing previously (BĀSIL NAWFAL): "I don't understand why the *ḥijāb* should be obligatory," a 24-year old justifies her decision. "Why should it be a problem if a girl makes a beautiful appearance? Men are also beautiful, and they don't wear a *ḥijāb*! [When I took it off,] I

simply became… myself." Since this is a relatively new trend, turning around a decades-old development, it does not come smoothly. A woman in her thirties points out that "the chances for a girl to find a marriage partner are clearly decreasing if she is not veiled. This is even more so if she has taken off the veil since many Oriental men are scared of a girl who is able to make a decision of her own." While becoming less 'suitable' for marriage, women who take off the veil report being regarded as being more willing to enter into "free and unrestricted" relationships. "But give it some time, and Egyptian society will return to a more normal state of affairs where the *ḥijāb* no longer is used as a measure to judge women." After all, society's view on veiling is not unified, and while a "narrow-minded" conservative attitude still dominates in places, women also tell of fiancés, male relatives and colleagues who share their view that the veil is not a religious obligation but a matter of personal choice. In Tunisia, it seems, women are even more frequently and openly declaring that "what women wear is none of your business" than what is the case in Egypt (SBOUI).

The principle of personal choice is also invoked when the 'burkini' becomes a focus of public attention. Some hotels in Tunisia forbid women wearing such full-body swimming garments to enter their pools, ostensibly for 'reasons of hygiene'—a decision criticised by the Tunisian Association for Supporting Minorities, an organisation that has made a name for itself for most outspokenly denouncing all forms of discrimination, be they religious, racial, sexual, physical, or cultural. "Wearing a burkini or a bikini is a personal choice," the association declares (BEN TAIEB [2]). And when the news spreads that French officers have started to fine women for wearing burkinis at the beach, social media expose the irony of public authorities stripping women of their liberties—in the name of freedom just as in the name of religion. Celebrated cartoonist Khālid al-Bayh juxtaposes the image of two French policemen asking a woman to uncover herself with that of two of their Saudi counterparts asking a woman to cover up (KHALIDALBAIH). The image goes viral, and users add further pictures of women in the West being policed, not so long ago, for wearing too revealing clothing at the beach (GONZO).

Some young women (mostly from an upper-middle-class background) take their wish for self-determination to a new 'extreme': they want to live by themselves. "The issue of women's rights is no longer only one of legal problems. Nowadays, some are calling for women's independence from their families, in search of 'freedom,' as they say" (DĪNĀ ʿABD AL-KHĀLIQ). "Women today are fighting for their financial independence, and for their right to live outside their family homes" (DĀLIYĀ ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD) (Mada). "'*Eysh—beyt—ḥurriyya*" ("Bread—a home—freedom") is FEMI-HUB's version of the revolutionary slogan "Bread—Freedom—Social Justice" of 2011. The organisation tries to help unmarried girls to find work and a place to live. Calling themselves *mustaqillāt*, "independents," these girls are willing to face considerable social adversity and to be called harlots and sluts (FEMI-HUB). "Arab societies do not allow a girl to be an independent person, standing on her own feet economically and living by herself," a girl in her twenties sums up the reasons for why it is almost unimaginable for an unmarried girl to move out of her family's home. Such an idea "is all but impossible to carry out in practice and to see through since it is completely unacceptable to the family" (DĪNĀ ʿABD AL-KHĀLIQ). Society tends to suspect that any girl living by herself is a potential prostitute (HUFFPOST TUNISIE), and families, eager to protect their reputation, will go a long way to thwart any such attempt to 'break free': moral pressure,

physical constriction, asking employers to dismiss the recalcitrant girl. Horror stories are told as a warning: "Remember the case of the daughter of Layla Ghufrān the singer?" When she moved from home to share an apartment with another girl, "their so-called independence made them easy prey for thieves and criminals, and they paid with their lives." Therefore, another young woman concludes, this idea of living by yourself "may appear as a way out to a girl going through a difficult time, but she will soon realise how mistaken she was (*sa-tudrik madà sū'ihā*) […], come to her senses, and return to the family fold" and the protection of her male relatives. "Independence doesn't necessarily mean to leave your family. A girl needs to develop her independent personality even within her family". A (female) professor of psychology at the Egyptian National Center for Social and Criminological Research concurs:

> Girls moving out from their families, that's bound to undermine the idea of the family and cause chaos in society. It's fully possible for girls to enjoy an independence of culture and thought within their family home. This idea will not succeed in our society since it conflicts with many of our traditions and customs and religious norms. (DĪNĀ ʿABD AL-KHĀLIQ)

Such adamant defence of social customs and religious norms appears to indicate, however, that the 'traditional' family home does feel threatened by such calls for girls' "independence" and no longer is as stable as its custodians would like it to be. The divorce rate in Egypt has risen to 40%, the highest in the world according to UN statistics, claims a report by the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Center (ʿABD AL-NĀṢIR SALĀMA; MAḤMŪD BAKRĪ). Facebook and WhatsApp are often blamed for this: they make it much easier both to enter into and maintain extramarital relationships. "The percentage of women cheating on their husbands is now almost half that of men cheating on their wives," claims the admin of the *Yawmiyyāt Zawǧ Maṭḥūn* Facebook page—a statement for which he is dragged to court for "contempt of the women of Egypt" (*ihānat sayyidāt Miṣr*) (AṢWĀT MAṢRIYYA; SHARĪF ABŪ 'L-FAḌL). Social media also make it easier to discover marital infidelity—and according to psychologists, it is much more frequent for the wife to come across incriminating evidence against her husband than the other way around, which reportedly leads to a huge rise in the number of women seeking a divorce in court (*khulʿ*) [↗**Court Trials**; ↗**Social Media**]. "Spinster" (*ʿānis*) and "divorcee" (*muṭallaqa*) are still used as an insult (MAḤMŪD BAKRĪ), but as divorced women become more common, society's view of them grows more lenient, which in turn makes it easier for women to take the initiative in seeking a divorce. Other factors play a role, too: in addition to reasons acceptable traditionally—childlessness, for example—many marriages do not survive the first year since husband and wife find out that they do not go well together—an expectation that a couple increasingly has of each other. The phenomenon of premarital affairs also nurtures distrust, which can ruin a relationship.

Cultural production reflects this trend. *ʿĀyza aṭṭaliq* ("I [fem.] Want a Divorce"), a new collection of short stories "based in real life" arouses interest at the Cairo book fair; its title deliberately challenges the best-selling blog-turned-novel-turned-TV-series *ʿĀyza atǧawwiz* ("I [fem.] Want to Marry") of the late 2000s (DUʿĀ' ḤILMĪ; MAṢR AL-ʿARABIYYA; GHĀDA ʿABD AL-ʿĀL). And in one of the year's big hits on YouTube, Moroccan-Egyptian pop star

Samīra Saʿīd does away with old stereotypes of divorced women as pitiable creatures befallen by disaster:

> "See? I left him, and nothing's happened," she sings in "*Māḥaṣalsh ḥāga*." "I'm still eating, laughing, working… doing everything. I'm not at all distressed or depressed. I don't clasp his picture and feel miserable like an idiot. […] On the contrary, I feel at ease and happy. It turned out to be not such a bad thing after all to live alone. I'll start my life with a clean white page.

And in a sideswipe at her ex, she exclaims: "I know he's going around now telling people what a mean and wicked girl I am: 'Look what she's done to me!' Oh, I can smell your lies from afar!" (SAMĪRA SAʿĪD). "This song," one of the top comments reads, "should be the anthem of all divorced women and all free minds!" Another one adds, "Had it not been for this song, I'd still be at the mercy of the treacherous guy I used to really love. It made me strong after I had thought I couldn't live without him and without hearing his voice."

Still, there are many who have misgivings about the growing tendency for women to initiate divorce (MAḤMŪD BAKRĪ): Why is the divorce rate so low in China? Because women there still understand that "a wife's duty is to take care of her husband and her parents." But here?

> Look at what they have managed to bring about!! A woman has no right to rise up against her man, for God has said, 'Men are the managers of women' [Q 4:34]. A woman must not interfere in her husband's privacy and private affairs since she could cause damage to his private interests, both security-wise and politically. But unfortunately, our society has lost its mind […] Man is belittled in the eyes of most wives; this pushes women to file for divorce, due to Suzy Mubārak's law [disparagingly called thus after deposed President Mubārak's wife who had headed a reform to the Personal Status Law making it easier for women to seek divorce]. And this has destroyed a large section of society.

Nowadays, another man chimes in, women "believe that these unfair laws provide them with power and with a knife to put at men's necks and help them to rebel against their husbands. And when the man gets fed up with this rebellion (*nushūz*), she resorts to protracted ↗**Court Trials** and […] to file for divorce (*khulʿ*)."—"'Wifely rebellion'?!?," a woman retorts:

> This is utter nonsense! Divorce is a right God has given to both husband and wife if one of them cheats on the other or if they otherwise fear that continuing in wedlock will make them unfaithful to the precepts of religion. […] What do you mean—if a woman finds out that her husband is a lecher, should she leave him to mess around with honest girls? If she believes he's unfaithful, should she not try to find proof that would justify her separation from him and put an end to him hurting her? And what 'security and political interests' are you talking about, you retarded imbecile?? What you mean are 'physical' interests and mental sickness, you mean instincts and desires and moral degeneracy! Take your rotten Wahhābī thinking and get lost!

The men thus lashed out at bang back, however; a commentator in the same thread claims that

> one of the most important reasons for divorce […] is that many women no longer are circumcised. And that alone, by the way, is reason enough for divorce… it's like the man feels he's sleeping with Aḥmad ʿAdawiyya [an elderly star of raucous pop music]… Yuck! Just imagine, you reach out and find this guy waiting for you down there…!

At the legal level, reformists and conservatives in Egypt struggle over a proposed revision of the Personal Status Law that would split assets acquired by husband or wife during their marriage equally in case of divorce, in line with international trends. While some religious scholars support this suggestion, it is opposed by others since it "would eliminate the 'family-friendly nature' of Middle Eastern society, transforming Egyptian family life into a materialistic replica of Western families." A "proper marriage contract in Islam specifies the woman's rights, including the right to have custody of the children and obliging the father to support them," they argue [↗**In Islam, …**]. Reformists demur: "religious men must realize society has changed […] there are now women who work outside the home and serve as breadwinners for the family, men who abandon their families without providing support and women who face ongoing domestic violence because they have nowhere to go if they leave their husbands" (HIDJI [1]).

The struggle for equality, in legal rights and social practice, is being led on many fronts. Old ideas, and the power of the male gaze, are powerfully entrenched but are also being vociferously challenged. The old notion that parents wish for male children more than for girls still stands strong enough to be effective in a cartoon showing a pregnant woman who has just been told by her doctor that she will give birth to a girl. In her despair, she calls upon the police for help: "Give him a proper beating, so he'll tell me it's a boy!" (ʿABD ALLĀH) [↗**The Policeman** Criminal; ↗**True *vs.* False**]. When eight female presenters are suspended by Egyptian State TV for being obese and given a month to achieve "a decent appearance," rights activists protest: "We've yet to hear about a male presenter being relieved of his job for being overweight" (HIDJI [2]). Many men, these activists claim, still regard women as inferior when it comes to public functions; they recall that the state, for example, has never entrusted women with what they call "sovereign ministries," only with soft ones such as environment or social solidarity. Tunisia has often portrayed itself as having come further than its neighbours regarding women's rights. Thanks to a legal quota, 35% of the members of parliament there are women—more than anywhere else in the Arab world (ʿ.ʿ.M.). This year, the country congratulates itself on the appointment of the first woman as a high-ranking security officer at the national level (AL-ʿARABĪ AL-JADĪD; RT ARABIC). Still, the unemployment rate for women (40%) is twice as high as that for men in Tunisia (AL-SAʿĪDĀNĪ). Therefore, while celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the 1956 Personal Status Law that was revolutionary in its time, Tunisian women warn that full gender equality is far from achieved (RFI). The law still regards the husband as the head of the family, while in neighbouring Algeria and Morocco, the couple is now conceived of as a pair of equal partners. Equality in inheritance is also a goal that remains to be achieved; a draft law is being debated in parliament but faces considerable resistance from conservative Islamists. Women

also criticise that parenting and domestic chores are largely left to them: "You just have to walk past the cafés to see how many men are hanging out there, while women often only go out for shopping, and are lining up at the bus stops early in the morning to go to work" (KEFI).

While activists fight against continuing forms of discrimination, many researchers also note that profound changes are in fact underway and that power relations between the sexes are being questioned and reconstructed. Control over women's bodies, these analysts argue, is patriarchy's last bastion; it is precisely because the patriarchal system faces significant challenges that the struggle over who has the right to control a woman's body at present is particularly acute (BELHADJ).

In Ramadan—traditionally a month for awareness-raising—an Egyptian TV campaign backed by the National Council for Women, the UN and various other international donors airs a series of videos aiming to reach an audience as large as possible with the message that women are not inherently weaker than men. Through depicting women defying common daily challenges, the *Taa Marbouta* campaign "changes the rhetoric and addresses microagressions, the implications of gender roles, and showcases the social constructs and how they affect women's psyche, and limit their potential and ability to dream big and actualise those dreams" (CAIROSCENE TEAM [3]). The most widely shared product of the campaign (hashtagged *#Sirr_quwwitik* "The secret of your (f.) strength") is released on YouTube a few months later. Rap icon ZĀP THARWAT and emerging film star Amīna Khalīl [↗**Celebrities**; ↗**Pop Music**] join forces to tell the story of Nūr, a mechanical engineer who bends over backwards to become a successful professional. Impressed with the resume Nūr has submitted, a middle-aged employer is surprised to find out that the person arriving for the job interview is a woman ('Nūr' is a gender-neutral name). "Should I hire a girl? Can she be a boss respected by the other workers?" But he turns around and blames himself for his antiquated stereotypes: "I owe her an apology for just the thought!" "'His' role will never be complete without 'Her' role," Amīna concludes this attempt to advance Egyptians' recognition of the advantages of gender equality (CAIROSCENE TEAM [4]).

Will this message fall on fertile ground? Is the glass half-full or half-empty? The Arab Youth Survey 2016 reports that "[r]egardless of gender, two in three young Arabs believe their leaders should do more to advance the rights and personal freedom of women" (ASDA'A BURSON-MARSTELLER). The leaders? When "Egypt's state-affiliated National Council for Women [the same one that is behind the *Taa Marbouta* campaign] is calling on President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to name 2017 'the year of the woman,' after having dubbed 2016 'the year of the youth' [… s]ocial media users joke that this can only be an omen" [MEE CORRESPONDENT].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʔAlsh* ♦ Celebrities ♦ Court Trials ♦ Dancing ♦ In Islam, … ♦ LGBT ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ Social Media ♦ Valentine's Day

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ True *vs.* False ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

References

Written Sources and Videos

ʿABD ALLĀH. "Iʿtidā' umanā' al-shurṭa ʿalà al-aṭibbā'." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, February 12, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/caricatures/details/10154>.

ʿABD AL-NĀṢIR SALĀMA. "al-Ṭalāq… Miṣr al-ūlà ʿālamiyyan." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, April 20, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/933463>.

ADHAM ʿĀṬIF. "Tasrīb fīlm 'Laff wa-dawarān' li-'Aḥmad Ḥilmī' ʿalà 'Yūtyūb'." *Vetogate*, September 17, 2016, <https://www.vetogate.com/2369736/تسريب-فيلم-لف-ودوران-لـأحمد-حلمي-على-يوتيوب>.

'.'.M.. "al-Nisā' sa-yumatthilna 35 bi'l-mi'a fī majlis nuwwāb al-shaʿb." *Kapitalis*, August 25, 2016, <http://www.kapitalis.com/anbaa-tounes/2016/08/25/النساء-سيمثلن-35بالمائة-في-مجلس-نواب-الش>.

ʿAFĪFĪ, Hiba. "Lā nisā' fī fanādiq hādhihi 'l-madīna." *Madà*, August 26, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/08/26/feature/مجتمع/لا-نساء-في-فنادق-هذه-المدينة/>.

AḤMAD NĀĞĪ. "Ḥaythiyyāt ḥukm barā'at riwāyat 'Istikhdām al-ḥayāt': #ḍidd_muḥākamat_al-khayāl." *Wassiʿ khayālak*, February 16, 2016, <http://archive.li/gQHQm>.

AHMED NAJI. "Farewell to the youth." *Madà*, January 2, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/01/02/opinion/u/farewell-to-the-youth>.

ANDEEL. "Hepta: Do you need to learn how to love?" *Mada*, April 29, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/04/29/feature/culture/hepta-do-you-need-to-learn-how-to-love>.

[al-ʿARABĪ al-JADĪD =] N. N. "Tūnis: Taʿyīn awwal imra'a mudīra amniyya bi-wizārat al-dākhiliyya." *al-ʿArabī al-Jadīd*, August 21, 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2016/8/ 21/تونس-تعيين-أول-امرأة-مديرة-أمنية-بوزارة-الداخلية>.

[ASDA'A BURSON-MARSTELLER =] N. N. *Arab Youth Survey 2016: Inside the hearts and minds of Arab youth*. [Dubai]: ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2016, <http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/whitepaper/en/2016-AYS-White-Paper.pdf>.

al-ʿASHIYY, Khawla. "Tūnisiyyūn yashkūn: al-ʿalāqāt al-elektrōniyya maghshūsha." *al-Ḥayāt*, Nov. 21, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmQo8vqno_hDFIjZukQ57 cvjXm9Bk7aJsYI>.

ASHRAF ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD. "Ṣūratān li-fatātayn tahuzzān mawāqiʿ al-tawāṣul fī Miṣr." *al-ʿArabiyya*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/last-page/2016/11/07/صورتان-لفتاتين-تهزان-مواقع-التواصل-في-مصر-.html>.

[AṢWĀT MAṢRIYYA =] N. N. "al-Nā'ib al-ʿāmm ya'mur bi-ḍabṭ wa-iḥḍār Taymūr al-Subkī bi-tuhmat 'ihānat sayyidāt Miṣr'." *Aṣwāt Maṣriyya*, February 16, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160220101811/http://aswatmasriya.com/news/view.aspx?id=02b2c1b2-fed9-49fa-8d0d-dfab18fbd1e9>.

BACHA, Lilia, *Le regard en péché : réflexion sur le regard porté sur le corps féminin*, Paris : Harmattan, 2015.

BACHA, Lilia & Ghaleb BENCHEIKH, « Le regard en péché », émission « Cultures d'islam », *Radio France Culture*, January 31, 2016, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/cultures-dislam/le-regard-en-peche>.

BACKHAUS, Andrea, „Ägypten: Der Polizeistaat ist zurück," *Die Zeit*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-12/aegypten-militaer-polizeistaat-revolution-rueckblick/komplettansicht>.

BADRO, Magnom. "K'lām r'jāl w-mā yifhamū kān 'l-rājil" [comment on "#Istiftā'_al-Ṣadà_net"], *Mawqiʿ al-Ṣadà al-Ṣafḥa al-Rasmiyya*, Facebook, March 25, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmR9pqy2r2FKDK38LOX6U811i2SySUrq1A4>.

[al-BASHĀYIR =] N. N. "Taitānīc al-ʿarabī yuḥaqqiq milyūn mushāhada khilāl awwal ayyām ʿarḍihi ʿalà 'l-internet… shāhid al-fīlm." *al-Bashāyir*, September 13, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmS5BR9dZexJgawJise8XHZcELCKoM9Rahc>.

BĀSIL NAWFAL. "Li-mādhā izdādat ẓāhirat khalʿ al-ḥijāb fī Miṣr?" *Raṣīf22*, April 2, 2016, <https://raseef22.com/article/53328-لماذا-ازدادت-ظاهرة-خلع-الحجاب-في-مصر؟>; comments archived at <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmRPTtyg3M5FarT3fsBETWPyaMbr9vNgAys>.

BASSĀM RAMAḌĀN. "Nāshiṭa nisā'iyya: 'Badal mā tikhtinū 'l-banāt aṣrifū li'l-riğğāla vīāğrā wi-ḥalāwa bi'l-ʔishṭa'." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, September 9, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/ l/AmTeFOMEeOdByYsHV7ipWaB-gH-SSacJ3Z4>.

BELHADJ, Ahlem, presentation to the session « Le féminin : identités et sexualités », conference on *Les « printemps arabes » entre effacement et inscription. Regards croisés franco-tunisiens entre psychanalystes, artistes et chercheurs en sciences sociales*. Tunis : Revue Passage & Comité Freud, April 24, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmSJMMFNbP9JlK6Xn_qze7VqIIo UuXdIGoY>.

BEN SMAÏL, Nédra, *Vierges ? la nouvelle sexualité des tunisiennes*. Tunis : cérès, 2012.

BEN TAIEB, Zaineb [1]. "Government minister : Half of all Tunisian women subjected to public violence." *Tunisia Live*, August 4, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160805183654/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/04/government-minister-half-of-all-tunisian-women-subjected-to-public-violence>.

BEN TAIEB, Zaineb [2]. "Hotels in Tunisia Prohibit Burkinis on Grounds of 'Hygiene, '" *Tunisia Live*, August 25, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171102094440/http://www.tunisia-live.net:80/2016/08/25/hotels-in-tunisia-prohibit-burkinis-on-grounds-of-hygiene>.

AL-BIDEYWĪ, Muḥsin. "Muṣammim timthāl 'Umm al-Baṭal' al-mushawwah bi-Sōhāğ: 'Ha-ʿaddiloh wi-ha-yibʔà tamām'." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, September 3, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/9/3/2870252/مصمم-تمثال-أم-البطل-المشوه-بسوهاج-هعدله-وهيبقى-تمام>.

BOUZOUITA, Kerim, « Notre société tunisienne est rétrograde », *Facebook*, August 1, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/kerimbouzouita/posts/10154988818944041>.

[CAIROSCENE TEAM, 1 =] N. N. "15 Egyptian girl problems you can probably relate to." *CairoScene*, April 2, 2016, <https://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/15-Egyptian-Girl-Problems-You-Can-Probably-Relate-To>.

[CAIROSCENE TEAM, 2 =] N. N. "21 of Egypt's models to watch for on Instagram in 2016", *CairoScene*, May 26, 2016, <https://www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/21-of-Egypt-s-Models-To-Watch-For-On-Instagram-In-2016>.

[CAIROSCENE TEAM, 3 =] N. N. "Taa Marbouta: A 360 approach to women's rights advocacy." *CairoScene*, July 30, 2016, <https://cairoscene.com/ArtsAndCulture/Taa-Marbouta-A-360-Approach-to-Women-s-Rights-Advocacy>.

[CAIROSCENE TEAM, 4 =] N. N. "Video: Zap Tharwat and Amina Khalil's chilling new song on life in Egypt." *CairoScene*, November 26, 2016, <https://cairoscene.com/Buzz/VIDEO-Zap-Tharwat-and-Amina-Khalil-s-Chilling-New-Song-on-Life-in-Egypt>.

[CBC =] N. N. "'Aswira elektrōniyya tusağğil al-ṣawt'… aḥdath ṭuruq al-ḥadd min al-taḥarrush al-ğinsī." *CBC*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmTA8Z_xPp9FwaNuqbjWewUt8KuynTymECg>.

CHARBEL, Juno. "Egypt's shady world of sex videos." *Madà*, March 11, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/03/11/feature/society/egypts-shady-world-of-sex-videos/>.

DĀLIYĀ ʿABD AL-ḤAMĪD. "Lā tashbah al-laylatu al-bāriḥāta : ʿan taghayyur manẓūmat al-qiyam al-muğtamaʿiyya al-mutaʿalliqa bi-ḥuqūq al-nisā'" | "For the women of Egypt, today is not like yesterday." *Madà*, March 8, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/03/08/opinion/مجتمع/لا-تشبه-الليلة-البارحة-عن-تغير-منظومة-ا>.

al-DĪB, Anas. "Arğūkī yā ḥabībtī kifāya Valāntain." *al-Ahrām*, February 16, 2016, <https://is.gd/4SFpRr>.

DĪNĀ ʿABD AL-KHĀLIQ. "'Femi-Hub' hāribāt min al-ahl bi'sm al-ḥurriyya." *al-Waṭan*, January 1, 2016, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/891202>.

DĪNĀ IBRĀHĪM SHAʿBĀN. *Mudhakkirāt Ğamīla Saʿīd*. Cairo: *Ibdāʿ*, 2016.

DĪNĀ ḤUSAYN. "Ikhtiyār al-umūma." *MadàMaṣr*, March 21, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/03/21/feature/lifestyle/اختيار-الأمومة>.

DJILALI, Emma. "Women in hip hop: Making space for Tunisia's unseen queens." August 17, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/women-hip-hop-making-space-tunisias-unseen-queens>.

DUʿĀ' ḤILMĪ, *ʿĀyza aṭṭaliq*. Giza: Aṭlas, 2016.

[EGYPTIAN STREETS =] N. N. "Riham Saeed sentenced to prison for airing private photographs of a sexual harassment victim." *Egyptian Streets*, February 29, 2016, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/02/29/riham-saeed-sentenced-to-prison-for-airing-private-photographs-of-a-sexual-harassment-victim>.

FEMI-HUB, Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/Femi-Hub-780813025375003>.

[FEMI-HUB =] N. N. "Masā masā." *Facebook*, March 25, 2016, <https://fb.com/story.php?story_fbid=832314643558174&id=780813025375003>.

[FREEMUSE =] N. N. "Egypt: Mahraganat artists challenge limits." *Freemuse*, February 23, 2016, <https://freemuse.org/news/egypt-mahraganat-artists-challenge-limits>.

GHĀDA ʿABD AL-ʿĀL, *ʿĀyza atğawwiz*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2008.

GONZO, [no title]. "*seenthis*", August 24, 2016, <https://seenthis.net/messages/518492>.

HANI ELAGAMY. "Iʿlān Bīrēll – Ḥamza —Rabbī-l-hā 'l-shanab yiʿallimhā 'l-adab gp3." *YouTube*, August 30, 2011, <https://youtu.be/Nx14arUfv-4>.

ḤASAN ḤAMMĀD, *Dawā'ir al-taḥrīm: al-sulṭa, al-ğasad, al-muqaddas*. Cairo: Dār Miṣr al-ʿArabiyya, 2016.

HIBA AL-MAHDĪ [1]. "Ṣuwar | Aghrab hadiyyat Falāntain… Lēh baṭṭalt aḥibbak." *DōtMaṣr*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmSAv1bQ-dhAma1fizjkHv9Mc-jFxNyZz1Q>.

HIBA AL-MAHDĪ [2]. "Ṣuwar | Radd fiʿl zawğ ṣāḥibat rasā'il 'Lēh baṭṭalt aḥibbak'." *DōtMaṣr*, Feb. 16, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmQuUgrb1aNL6J-SFH7Gq3BtzaifG3A-WLA>.

HIDJI, Ahmed [1]. "Egypt's divorced women demand their fair share of assets." *al-Monitor*, September 18, 1016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/egypt-divorce-laws-women-rights-societal-change.html>.

HIDJI, Ahmed [2]. "Egypt's state TV under fire after suspending anchorwomen until they shed pounds." *al-Monitor*, August 19, 1016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/ egypt-female-tv-presenters-suspended-overweight-controversy.html>.

HILLAUER, Rebecca. „Sexuelle Frustration junger Muslime." *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, April 11, 2016, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/muslimische-gesellschaft-sexuelle-frustration-junger-muslime.976.de.html?dram:article_id=350994>.

HOFHEINZ, Albrecht. "#Sisi_vs_Youth: Who has a voice in Egypt?" *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 327-348.

[HUFFPOST TUNISIE =] N. N. "Tunisie-Affaire Amina Sboui: 'Des orgies sont organisées à Sidi Bou Saïd et personne ne s'en offusque!'" *HuffPost Tunisie*, Oct. 14, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161015012454/https:/www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/10/14/tunisie-amina-sboui-sidi-_n_12486576.html>.

ḤUSAYN YUSUF. "'Ṣūra' khayrun min alf kitāb… al-Ra'īs yaftaḥ bāb sayyāratihi bi-nafsihi li-muwāṭina miṣriyya… Munà al-Sayyid aʿlanat sha'an al-ʿamal fa-aʿlà al-Ra'īs sha'nahā… al-Ra'īs yudrik anna

al-ʻamal miftāḥ al-khurūj min al-ḍā'iqa al-iqtiṣādiyya fa-kānat risālatuhu li'l-miṣriyyīn." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʻ*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/11/13/ صورة-خير-من-ألف-كتاب-الرئيس-يفتح-باب-السيارة-بنفسه/2966188>.

ISLĀM ĞĀWĪSH. "al-ʻAlāqa fī 3 suṭūr", *al-Waraqa*, December 30, 2016, <https://fb.com/Gawish.Elwarka/photos/a.112485845441785/1777707815586238/?type=1&theater>.

KEFI, Chiraz. « Tunisie : 60 ans après, une relecture critique du CSP s'impose. » *GnetNews*, August 12, 2016, <https://news.gnet.tn/archives/temps-fort/tunisie-60-ans-apres-une-relecture-critique-du-csp-simpose/id-menu-325.html>.

KHALIDALBAIH. "#Khartoon - Laws - To cover or uncover?" *Khartoon! by KhalidAlbaih*, Facebook, August 24, 2016, <https://fb.com/KhalidAlbaih/photos/a.234762049873663/ 1476060055743850>.

M.Ṣ.ʻ.. "50 bi'l-mi'a min al-Tūnisiyyāt aqamna ʻalāqāt jinsiyya khārij iṭār al-zawāj." *Kapitalis*, August 29, 2016, <http://www.kapitalis.com/anbaa-tounes/2016/08/29/50--بالمائة-من-التونسيات-أقمن-علاقة-جنسية>.

MAḤMŪD BAKRĪ. "Miṣr al-ūlà ʻālamiyyan fī ḥālāt al-ṭalāq." *RTOnline*, December 6, 2016, <https://arabic.rt.com/news/853074-مصر-الأولى-عالميا-في-حالات-الطلاق>; comments preserved at <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmR6kFuoioBDf7zBsH_bvz0HvkFpzeVYLy8>.

[MAṢR AL-ʻARABIYYA =] N. N. "'An kitāb ʻĀyza aṭṭaliq… Fatayāt: 'Iḥna mish ha-nitğawwiz aṣlan'." *Maṣr al-ʻArabiyya*, February 11, 2017, <https://youtu.be/QofUDz5TS5Y>.

MAY AḤMAD. "Fīdēō… aḥad aʻḍā' 'Cāirōkee' yaʻtadhir ʻan 'Ḥuṭṭ aḥmar shafāyif' fī ughniyatihim al-akhīra: mumkin titfihim taqlīl min il-mar'a…āsif." *al-Bidāya*, March 13, 2016, <http://albedaiah.com/news/2016/03/13/108856>.

MAY SHAMS AL-DĪN. "Ḥikāyāt al-taḥarrush al-ğinsī al-maskūt ʻanhu fī 'l-mu'assasāt al-ṣaḥafiyya" | "Untold stories of sexual harassment in Egyptian newsrooms." *MadàMaṣr*, August 23, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/08/23/feature/مجتمع/حكايات-التحرش-الجنسي-المسكوت-عنه-في-ال>.

[MEE CORRESPONDENT =] N. N.. "Need baby milk? You'll need a breast exam first, says Egyptian health ministry." *Middle East Eye*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/need-baby-milk-youll-need-breast-exam-first-says-egyptian-health-ministry>.

MUḤAMMAD ṢUBḤĪ. "Riggālit Maṣr ʻandahā ḍuʻf ginsī… Ilhāmī ʻAgība: lāzim il-sittāt tirḍà bi'l-khitān ʻalashān il-ʻagala timshī." *Barlamānī*, September 1, 2016, <http://parlmany.youm7.com/News/5/119212/رجالة-مصر-عندها-ضعف-جنسى-إلهامى-عجينة-لازم-الستات-ترضى>.

MUNÀ ʻIZZAT. "Marṣad al-ḥuqūq al-iqtiṣādiyya wa'l-igtimāʻiyya li'l-nisā' fī 'l-ʻamal. Al-Taqrīr al-thānī: Al-Taḥarrush al-ğinsī fī amākin al-ʻamal." [Cairo: New Woman Foundation, June 2016], <http://nwrcegypt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Observatory-of-the-Economic-and-Social-Rights-of-Women-at-Work-15x21-AR.pdf>.

NAJWA YOUNES. "Video: Street harassment is 'part of our daily lives' as Tunisian women." *Tunisia Live*, April 5, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171102195041/http://www.tunisia-live.net:80/2016/04/05/video-street-harassment-part-of-the-daily-experience-of-tunisian-women>.

AL-NIMR, Isrā'. "Innahum yaqra'ūn Walīd Dīdā." *Akhbār al-Adab*, February 12, 2016, <https://esraaelnemr.wordpress.com/2016/02/12/إنهم-يقرأون-وليد-ديدا/>.

NŪR HĀNIM. "Fīh banāt fī Maṣr shaqyāna wi-ağdaʻ min 100 rāğil qāʻid ʻa-l-qahwa." *Twitter @Humanityyvoice (sic)*, November 7, 2016, <https://twitter.com/Humanityyvoice/status/795618356355284992>.

QUILLEN, Stephen. "Cross dressed Halloween teens allegedly beaten and charged by police." *Tunisia Live*, November 3, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161106035606/http://www.tunisia-live.net:80/2016/11/03/hammamet-police-accused-of-beating-and-jailing-transgender-teen>.

RAḤMA ḌIYĀ'. "Taymūr al-Subkī: bağīb ḥaʔʔ il-riğğāla… wa-lam atalaqqa ayy istidʻā' li'l-taḥqīq." *Aṣwāṭ Maṣriyya*, February 15, 2016, <http://www.aswatmasriya.com/news/details/59630>.

[RFI =] N. N. « Droits des femmes: la Tunisie fête les 60 ans du Code du statut personnel, » *RFI*, August 13, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20160812-code-statut-personnel-tunisie-droits-femmes-60-ans>.

RIHAB, « Tunisie: Quand la chasse aux couples non mariés pratiquée par une frange de la société et permise par l'Etat tue », *Al Huffington Post Maghreb – Tunisie*, August 3, 2016, <https:// web.archive.org/web/20160802221452/http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/08/01/tunisie-chasse-couple_n_11296512.html>.

[RT ARABIC =] N. N. "Tūnis… Imra'a fī manṣib amnī muhimm li-awwal marra." *RTOnline*, August 21, 2016, <https://arabic.rt.com/news/837594-تونس-امرأة-في-منصب-أمني-مهم-لأول-مرة>.

[al-ṢADÀ =] N. N. "Fī ṣafʿa li'l-nukhba al-yasāriyya al-mutaṭarrifa fī Tūnis wa [*sic*] al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī, Almāniyā tuṭabbiq mabda' al-faṣl bayn al-jinsayn ʿalà qiṭārātihā." *al-Ṣadà*, March 31, 2016, <https://essada.net/في-صفعة-للنخبة-اليساريّة-المتطرّفة-في.html>.

AL-SAʿIDANI, AL-MANJI. "Irtifāʿ nisbat al-baṭāla fī Tūnis khilāl al-niṣf al-awwal min 2016." *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, August 21, 2016, <https://aawsat.com/home/article/718936/ارتفاع-نسبة-البطالة-في-تونس-خلال-النصف-الأول-من-2016>.

ṢAFIYYA MUNIR. "'Maʿan riǧālan wa-nisā'an fī muwāǧahat al-ʿunf ḍidd al-mar'a' mubādara li'l-ḥadd min al-ʿunf ḍidd al-mar'a." *al-Monitor*, June 2, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/originals/2016/06/egypt-men-women-initiative-counter-violence-against-women.html>.

ṢAFIYYA MUNIR. "Mishraṭ al-khitān aqwà min al-qānūn." *al-Monitor*, September 27, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/originals/2016/09/egypt-fgm-prison-terms-female-genital-mutlilation-women.html>.

SAMĪKA, Muḥsin. "al-Sīsī yaltaqī 'Fatāt al-ʿaraba' fī Qaṣr al-Ittiḥādiyya." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1039734>.

SAMĪRA SAʿĪD. "Ma-ḥaṣal-sh ḥāǧa – fīdēō klīb." *Rotana*, May 13, 2016, <https://youtu.be/VFs296Tfzn0>.

SĀRA ṢALĀḤ. "Law qaḍayt al-Falāntain sinǧel istaʿidd… al-ihtimām fī muqaddimat hāshtāǧ ''Ashān il-bint tiḥibbak'.'" *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, February 15, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/15/2586049/لو-قضيت-الفلانتين-سنجل-استعد-الاهتمام-فى-مقدمة-هاشتاج-عشان>.

SBOUI, Amina. "Opinion: What women wear is none of your business." *Tunisia Live*, April 25, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171001215223/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/04/25/opinion-what-women-wear-is-none-of-your-business>.

SHĀDĪ SURŪR. "Taitānīc: al-nuskha al-ʿarabiyya." *Shadi Srour* Youtube Channel, September 11, 2016, <https://youtu.be/iXn-eECUi2g>.

AL-SHARĪF, Ḥamdī. "'al-Sulṭa – al-ǧasad' – al-muqaddas-… ʿarḍ wa-taḥlīl kitab 'Dawā'ir al-taḥrīm' li'l-doktōr Ḥasan Ḥammād." *al-Ḥiwār al-Mutamaddin*, March 3, 2016, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=511301>.

SHARĪF ABŪ 'L-FAḌL. "al-Nā'ib al-ʿāmm ya'mur bi-ḍabṭ wa-iḥḍār Taymūr al-Subkī bi-tuhmat ihānat sayyidāt Miṣr." *Bawwābat al-Ahrām*, February 16, 2016, <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/858646.aspx>.

[SZ =] N. N. „Kontroverse um Frauenabteile in der Regionalbahn," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/reise/mitteldeutsche-regiobahn-kontroverse-um-frauenabteile-in-der-regionalbahn-1.2921856>.

TARFA, Inel. "Challenging the norm: Street harassment and plus size clothing." *Tunisia Live*, August 31, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160901143416/http:/www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/31/challenging-the-norm-street-harassment-and-plus-size-clothing>.

ʿUMAR SAʿĪD. "ʿĀmilāt al-ǧins fī Miṣr: nabīʿ al-hawà wa-nashtarī qahran." *Madà*, November 5, 2014 <https://madamasr.com/ar/2014/11/05/feature/lifestyle/عاملات-الجنس-في-مصر-نبيع-الهوى-ونشتري-ق/> [NB: Though from 2014, this remained one of the most popular articles on *Madà* in 2016].

VASWANI, Miriam. "Secrets of the Medina: Bureaucracy and the bordello." *Tunisia Live*, August 10, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160811152124/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/08/10/secrets-of-the-medina-bureaucracy>.

WIKĀLAT TŪNIS IFRĪQIYĀ LIL-ANBĀʾ (Agence Tunis Afrique Presse). "Mashrūʿ qānūn ṣādaqa ʿalayhi Majlis Wuzarāʾ: al-sijn ʿām li-kull man yaʿmid ilà muḍāyat imraʾa fī makān ʿumūmī." *Shams FM*, July 24, 2016, <https://www.shemsfm.net/ar/الأخبار_تونس_الأخبار-الوطنية/145965/مشروع-قانون-صادق-عليه-مجلس-وزراء-السجن-عام-لكل-من-يعمد-إلى-مضايقة-امرأة-في-مكان-عمومي-145965>.

Y.N. « Sexualité : La vérité sur les relations extraconjugales des couples tunisiens. » *Kapitalis*, August 30, 2016, <http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2016/08/30/sexualite-verite-sur-les-relations-extraconjugales-des-couples-tunisiens/>.

ZAP THARWAT ft. AMINA KHALIL. "Nūr." *Axeer* YouTube channel, November 25, 2016, <https://youtu.be/7N5oVNo-oUI>.

Films

Jeanne d'Arc Maṣriyya (Egyptian Jeanne d'Arc). By Īmān Kāmil. Egypt 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl. Egypt 2016.

Nḥibbik Hādī (Hédi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyya. Tunisia 2016.

Al-Nuṣūr al-ṣaghīra (Little Eagles). By Muḥammad Rashād. Egypt/Lebanon 2016.

Nihāyāt saʿīda (Happily Ever After). By Nadà Riyāḍ and Ayman al-Amīr. Egypt 2016.

Sheikh Jackson. By ʿAmr Salāma. Egypt 2017.

Zahrat Ḥalab (The Flower of Aleppo). By Riḍà al-Bāhī (Rida Behi). Tunisia 2016.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

Normality *vs.* Heroism

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- average apolitical co-citizen
- exemplary story: provide exemplary stories, role models
- know one's place
- powerlessness, impotence
- resistance
- resoluteness
- resources, resourcefulness
- retreat from politics
- routine
- school(s)
- silent resistance
- smoking
- smuggling
- steadfastness
- stealing
- street booksellers
- street cafés
- subsidies, subsidized housing
- survival, surviving in dignity
- tea and cigarettes
- theft
- time pressure, hectic rush
- tricks, tricking
- unemployment
- unhealthy food
- victim = hero?

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ Baby Milk ♦ Celebrities ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Garbage ♦ High School Exams ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Young *vs.* Settled

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *339–*339
© N. N.

Past *vs.* Present

By Mihaila Yordanova and Stephan Guth

Assessments of the present that do without looking back to the past are rare, both in Egypt and Tunisia. Typically, people compare, either explicitly or implicitly; often, they go back to the more recent past, but there are also attempts at a long-term perspective. The comparison may come as an immediate reaction to, or comment on, a recent event or the present situation; however, five years after the revolutions, a more reflexive pondering over the achievements and drawbacks of the past few troubled years is also very common. In any case, the comparison serves certain purposes, depending on who is speaking.

In February Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi makes a passionate plea for help. The country's economy is in trouble, but if only the ten million Egyptians with mobile phones would send one pound per day to the *Taḥyā Miṣr* (Long Live Egypt) fund, then Egypt would prosper once again (*EG Independent*). Although el-Sisi's words are widely ridiculed on social media [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**] and criticised by economists doubting the campaign's viability (Aggour), by the beginning of March, the fund has collected 3.75 million Egyptian pounds. Moreover, a poll conducted by the Egyptian Centre for Public Opinion Research (Baseera) and published in March shows that 6% of the respondents have been donating daily, while 33% have donated at least once (el-Behary). The campaign, dubbed bizarre by many, seems to have resonated with Egyptians on some level. This is perhaps partly because the idea of bringing the country back on track through shared efforts fits neatly into the narrative of past and present embraced by the president and his supporters.

The relationship between "the then" and "the now" in this case is not a novelty. Its purpose is to define the common values of the present and contrast them with the recent past. It creates a sense of a common identity, which at the same time is distinct and separated from the beliefs of other groups within and outside Egyptian society. However, the past is not a homogeneous entity. The time of Mubarak or that of Nasser, for example, are not necessarily so different from the present. To many of the regime's supporters those days embody the system, the true character of the country, with el-Sisi as the natural next step (*Egypt's Modern Pharaohs*) [↗Father Figures]. But there is one particular period of time that is often evoked to define the current state, namely the years between the January 2011 protests and the ousting of former President Muḥammad Mursī or "the catastrophic chaos" of the so-called 'Arab Spring', as a person commenting on *The Economist*'s article entitled "The ruining of Egypt" calls it (*Economist*). Whether it was just naïve activism or a foreign plot [↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**, ↗**The Suspect Foreigner**], one thing is certain, the January protests toppled a regime and brought violence and insecurity. They destabilised the country to the point of near-destruction. What is worse, they brought to power "the fascist Muslim Brotherhood and their terrorist president Morsi," a bunch of radicals on a quest to destroy all order and transform Egypt into a copy of late-Taliban-era Afghanistan. But eventually "the Egyptian people and the army intervened to impose the will of the Egyptians," el-Sisi was elected, and order was restored. A major battle was won, and the Egyptian identity was saved to prosper throughout the ages [↗**True vs. False**].

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *340–*352
© Mihaila Yordanova, Bruxelles, BE, and Stephan Guth, IKOS, Univ. of Oslo, NO

This upbeat story sets the background against which the current is defined. In many respects, it can only exist in opposition to the thrilling narrative of the past. Now is the time for Egyptians to "put their heads down" and work towards a brighter future. It is the time to bring Egypt back to "where it was before," i.e., before 2011. Things may not be ideal at the moment—the economy is struggling and the tourists are gone [↗**Tourist Resorts**]. But this is nothing in comparison to the violence of the Arab Spring. Besides, because of the partnership between the army and the people, the situation is improving little by little. Just look at the New Suez Canal or the projects for the poor! [↗The Voice from Above]

The emphasis on the shared efforts (and responsibility) also perhaps has another function. "I didn't get out in 2011 but I participated in the other revolution," a taxi driver exclaims in August. According to him, as long as everyone continues to contribute with what they can, the future surely will be bright. "Make sure to tell your friends that there is security in Egypt," he finally remarks, as if to prove that he is playing his part (YORDANOVA). The driver's previous passivity has at some point turned into action and he is willing to spend energy and time defending a system he believes in, which was once on the verge of perishing. In this sense, there is something post-revolutionary about his demeanour, which might be part of the reason why so much attention is being paid to not calling July 3rd a coup. The now is feverishly and patiently rebuilding a world that has been damaged. And that entails not only putting up with the pitfalls of the present, but also an unshakable belief that the path Egypt is on is a choice and it is a cause worth fighting for. It is almost like a near-death experience which has reinvigorated the will to live.

The future is also instrumental to maintaining this belief. Part of it is optimism. The new projects el-Sisi is undertaking which will soon substantially improve the quality of life [↗The Voice from Above] are quoted by many as a proof that the country is going forward and that the authorities are doing their job. But part of it is fear that the past will return and that this will be the end of it all. "Do you want Egypt to turn into another Syria or Libya?" ask the regime supporters commenting on *The Economist* article (*Economist*). And this is a common refrain. One wrong move can bring Egypt back and this time, the country might not be as lucky [↗Security *vs.* Fear]. Moreover, what makes the situation even more dangerous is the fact that there are some people in this country who *want* this to happen. On April 23, the Facebook group *Miṣr lil-gamīʿ wa-bil-gamīʿ* (Egypt for and through Everybody) illustrates the hashtag *#al-Sīsī ṣāyin arḍuh* ("#el-Sisi protects his land") [↗**Red Sea Islands**] with an image, presumably showing scenes from the 2011 Revolution—a building and a truck in flames—with a caption reading, "They… want *this* Egypt." Immediately below, another picture shows a recently renovated motorway and a photo of a newly built residential block in New Ismailia City [↗*ʿAshwāʾiyyāt*] subtly branded with "And we, who are with President el-Sisi, are building *this* Egypt" (*FB* [a]). The message is clear: stick and work with the Father who will guide Egypt to greatness and prosperity… or follow "them" on the path to disaster and devastation that we have already lived through [↗Father Figures].

Commemorating the anniversary of the 25th of January [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**], the Facebook page *Alexandria* re-posts an updated version of its album dedicated to the revolution (*FB* Alexandria). Many of the images depict violence and destruction: tear gas covering the skies over Alexandria, burning trucks and governmental buildings, injured

protesters walking through thick fog, pressing handkerchiefs against their faces. The comments are pouring in:

> I swear it's like it was a lifetime ago. – These were the sweetest days and [they gave me] the best feeling ever! – I was covered in dust and rubble. Now I regret I ever complained about it. – I wish every day was the 25th January. (*Ibid.*)

The same period of time is again being contrasted to the present, but this time it is a very different past, telling a very different story.

For it is not the destruction *per se* that is making people fondly remember the protests. It is the feeling of absolute freedom and the power to diminish a system which was once believed to be invincible [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. It is the sudden realisation that the "barrier of fear is broken" and that a new future is being born, one in which "Impossible is nothing" is not merely an Adidas commercial slogan. This powerful feeling of grassroots change even in the little things is captured in Ahmed Salah (Aḥmad Ṣalāḥ)'s recollection of the events:

> Tahrir felt like a utopia. Businessmen talked with beggars. Women in designer clothes picked up garbage. People shared sandwiches with strangers and left their cell phones to charge unguarded. When Muslims gathered to pray, Coptic Christians surrounded and protected them. When the square was attacked, we ran toward the danger to help. Everyone was equal and generous and brave. (SALAH)

> It was beautiful. It is hard to describe, but the energy in Tahrir felt like the opposite of mob rule. Everyone in Tahrir knew tanks could roll in and kill us. We were prepared to die for a cause, so why would we argue or act dishonestly or be anything other than the best we could be? [↗Downtown/Centre-ville] (*ibid.*)

Both the Egyptian and the Tunisian people were ready to reclaim what was rightfully theirs. And that has many different aspects, as Samia Jaheen (Sāmiya Ǧāhīn) explains, talking about protesters singing the infamous "Yā bilādī, yā bilādī":

> Of course, we sang it then. Every day. Many times, [...] And when we sang it, it actually meant something, for the first time, I think. I used to sing it all the time in school and it never meant anything, but singing it then when people were sacrificing their lives for the country—getting killed by the police [↗**The Policeman Criminal**]—it felt different.

> [Reporter:] Didn't you feel like you were singing the anthem of the very government you were protesting against?

> [Sāmiya:] Yes, of course. But we were singing it to re-own it—to say, "This is our country; not yours." We didn't sing it the gentle way they sing it. We sang it like "BILADY, BILADY, BILADY." (*Republic or Death*)

Perhaps most important of all, the January Revolution also created a sense of belonging. It brought the emotional ecstasy that could only be achieved through collective action and through the realisation that a person's deepest fears and wildest dreams are shared by many others. It is the type of ecstasy that creates an unshakable belief in one's abilities and in the inevitability of real change. This is how Walid Akef (Walīd ʿĀkif) recalls this period:

> After the prayer, we saw an enormous demonstration heading to the beginning of al-Haram Street, where I prayed. Thousands of protesters chanted these three words, together, one after the other: Bread, freedom and human dignity. It was an amazingly indescribable scene. It was the first time in my whole life to see something like this. I had goosebumps all over my body. I had tears falling from my eyes. And I joined them. (AKEF)

The transformational power of what took place five years ago is such that those who have spent the crucial days abroad lack the essential experience that unites those who shared it—to the degree that a young couple like Nadà and Ayman cannot find themselves together again when Ayman returns from a stay in Europe where he had left to study while Nadà had lived those events that were to reshape her personality once and for all. The documentary *Nihāyāt saʿīda* (Happily Ever After) that follows the couple's failure to renegotiate their relationship has been interpreted as a powerful metaphor of the decisiveness of the revolutionary experience. The one who has not lived it, not formed part of the revolutionary masses, cannot reconnect and eventually decides to leave the country again, partly perhaps because the Revolution not only changed Egypt and its people but also continues to capture their imagination. It is difficult nowadays to avoid glorified accounts of the early days of 2011. The 25th of January is constantly being dissected, every aspect of the protests is being described in detail and length, day by day and hour by hour. It is being commemorated in books and movies. Its emotional power is being recreated in numerous documentaries, such as *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan*, *Jeanne d'Arc Masriya*, *Amal*, *A Revolution in Four Seasons*. Unlike the regime's supporters, who only mention the past to contrast it to the present, for the supporters of the 2011 events the past is the king. It is the centre of their discourse.

This might be partly because the present has little to offer. It is "hell after paradise" (AKEF), "the worst moments Egypt has ever lived" (*ibid.*), "worse than square one" (BOHN) [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**]. People now disappear from their apartments [↗Disappearances], the youth are being killed, imprisoned, repressed [↗**Prison**]. Somewhere along the way, a cosmic error has occurred, and Egypt now is like Egypt under Mubarak, only worse, more violent and less free. People have now lost their voice. "I have nothing to say: no hopes, no dreams, no fears, no warnings, no insights; nothing, absolutely nothing," writes Alla Abd al-Fattah (ʿAlāʾ ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ) for *The Guardian* (*Guardian*) [↗**The Voice from Above**]. He cannot remember what it was like when "tomorrow seemed so full of possibility." For "now tomorrow will be exactly like today and yesterday and all the days preceding and all the days following" (*ibid.*), an endless cycle of despair and repression that is also shared by non-intellectuals like the slum-dwelling mother-of-four, Nādiya, in Maḥmūd Sulaymān's documentary *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan:* reviewing her life from before the revolution until now, she describes it as an itinerary that led her from destitution to hope to disappointment to despair [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. Is it that surprising that in this atmosphere, the dystopian novel genre seems to flourish [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**]?

For many, the only way to make the present bearable is to indulge in remembering the past. These memories are the only anchor in a world which is rapidly spinning out of control, as painful as evoking them might be.

> Part of me didn't want to tweet to the hashtag [#Jan25]—writes Rasha Abdulla (Rashā ʿAbd Allāh)—I wanted it to remain intact with the beauty of the 18 days of the revolution. With its romance, and anger, and humour, and emergencies, and cries of freedom, and dreams of a better tomorrow. I didn't want the hashtag to carry the painful scars of today, the disappointment, the cries of the dead and the detained and the disappeared (ABDULLA). [↗Disappearances, ↗**Prison**]

But the memories are also a way to protect the past—which many perceived as being gradually erased by the regime or post-revolutionary everyday routine and negotiations—and to remind oneself that there was a time when the country was different [↗**Commemoration / Memorial Days**]. Many fictional evocations, or re-stagings, of the days that led up to or immediately followed the uprisings seem to serve this purpose of preserving the legacy of the revolution. Implicitly, without mentioning the present, productions like *ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux* (As I Open My Eyes), *Nawwāra*, *Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi*, *Mawlānā / The Preacher*, or *The Nile Hilton Incident* reconfirm how timely and necessary the revolution was... and, obviously, still is—in many respects, the evils shown in these films have survived into the present, so the revolution is not completed yet. All the more important it is now to make sure that people will not forget they once had the power to topple a regime and were willing to pay a high price to do so.

> Writing is one of the weapons I rely on to confront the ongoing and expected betrayals to memory—writes Sabah Hamamou (Ṣabāḥ Ḥamāmū) on the so-called Camel Battle. – I don't want its memory to be betrayed. I want it to stay alive, I want the emotions I felt that night—and that I experience anew as I type these words—to resist disappearing as the years pass by… To fight forgetting, write what must not be forgotten! (HAMAMOU)

The memories are also a way to continue the revolution in a way. As Rasha Abdullah puts it, it is a way to "get your head above what's happening for a breath of fresh air" (ABDULLAH) [↗**Inferiority vs. Superiority**]. She describes realising that it is precisely the spirit of the revolution that the regime is most afraid of and constantly reminding them that the fire continues to burn is the only way to bear the present and even change the future:

> Is the revolution over? I don't think so. The revolution goes on in the hearts of those who believe in the values of bread, freedom, and social justice. Has the revolution failed? I don't think so. It certainly depends on your definition of revolution, and for me, it's a long-term process that starts with the individual. I have my own revolution to carry on inside. (*ibid.*)

Here the past is not used to justify and explain the present, but rather to fight its normalisation. And while in the regime's discourse, the present cannot exist without the threat of the past, here the message seems to be that a person cannot exist in *this* present without the memory of the past. The restaging of the violent clashes during the Mursī period between Muslim Brothers and secularists in the dramatic movie *Ishtibāk* [↗Clash] serves a similar function: How will society ever be able to overcome social fragmentation and find a way to reconciliation if it does not face the events of the past and grasp the chance to learn from history?

To do that, however, a cool, detached approach seems to work best. There is a difference between remembrance, preservation and documentation and idealisation. For Ahmed Naji the greatest obstacle to bringing the revolution back on track are not the "beasts" and "zombies" intent on sucking out the last bit of free space left to the youth. It is nostalgia: the perilous belief that a perfect past once existed, coupled with the unfulfillable desire to bring that past back. The sorrows and ghosts that lurk in the shadows of the bittersweet semi-reality in which the nostalgic prefers to exist, are impairing the youths' vision, preventing them from finding "a new path and revolution". "Any form of reverence—for the revolution or the martyrs or higher ideologies—is enough to turn you into a zombie without even noticing it", Naji's final advice rings from his "Farewell to the Youth". It is the last, but most treacherous trap laid on the path to change and it seems to have already claimed some victims…

And then there are those narratives that oscillate between the pros and cons of the revolution. Maḥmūd Sulaymān's movie *We Have Never Been Kids* documents Nādiya's and her children's lives from before the revolution until 2015 where Nādiya, who had participated in the demonstrations and later elections, now no longer sees a point in going to the polls. "We are back to the situation as it was under Mubarak: we are no longer part of the game," she explains her decision. There is not that much of an opposition between past and present here. For many Egyptians struggling to keep their families and lives afloat, the hopes and dreams only end up in disappointment, the past is the same as the present and the future, and nothing will ever change. At some point, continuing to expect something becomes meaningless [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**] or even painful. The fundamentally sober insight that "hope is hell," which is the central message of Muḥammad Rabīʿ's IPAF 2016-shortlisted dystopian novel *ʿUṭārid* still proves to be true although the author's vision is older than a year now.

Somewhere in-between are also the many narratives that combine an essentially positive attitude towards the uprisings of 2010/2011 with the description of severe traumata suffered during the events. *Jeanne d'Arc Misriya* is such a cautious attempt to document the impact of violence a number of young Egyptian women became victims of during the revolution: what they have been through, for the sake of freedom from despotism and human dignity, has left deep imprints on their lives, wounds that almost do not cicatrise, a burden from the past that these women are still carrying in the present. – The Tunisian feature film *Ghadwa ḥayy / Demain dès l'aube* addresses another such aspect. As the result of a tragic course of events, young innocent demonstrators have become themselves guilty of brutal violence and an ensuing human tragedy: when a police-officer had started to rape a young demonstrator [↗**The Policeman Criminal**] they had beaten him so severely that he will be dependent on a wheelchair for the rest of his life. – *Shaykh Jackson*, on the other hand, starts out as the accusation of a despotic father who destroys the youth of his son only because the boy is a fan of Michael Jackson; the son is so traumatized that he seeks professional help [↗Psychiatrists]. However, the healing process is not accomplished until the son, after many years of separation, goes to see his father, starts to understand that the latter also suffered deeply, and a process of reconciliation can be initiated. – Facing the traumatic past as personified in a dominant father seems to be the key for a turn to improvement and a solution to cope with what has happened also in the Tunisian *Shbābik al-janna / Les frontières du ciel* (Borders of Heaven). Here, a young couple (= the Tunisian youth) had a 5-year-old child

called "Yāsmīn" (= the "Jasmine" Revolution) whom they adored but who one day was taken by the sea in a moment of its parents' inattention. How to deal with the traumatic loss of little Jasmine who was the source of all the young couple's pride, their identity and dreams for the future? While the woman after a while finds a way to put the sweet memories of an irretrievably lost past aside and gradually regain the present, the image of Jasmine that is constantly appearing before the man's eyes ceases to haunt him only after he has paid a visit to his dying father [↗Father Figures] with whom he had broken years ago—a moment of reconciliation, also here, as a precondition to find a way back to life in a completely disenchanted present.

The parental adoration of little Yāsmīn does reflect to an extent the way many Tunisians perceive the past and particularly the Jasmine revolution. For some, like Lilia Ben Messaoud and Hajer Korbi, the revolution was mostly a success story. Behind the façade of prosperity in Ben Ali's Tunisia lurked the shadow of a corrupt and unscrupulous government, an authoritarian and repressive regime, in which no freedom of expression, press or assembly could ever exist. Fed up with its failures, Tunisians finally took to the streets, demanding their dignity, freedom and bread back and ultimately succeeded in ousting the dictator. While many challenges remain, the civil society will continue pushing for change, making sure that the police state never again returns (BEN MASSAOUD & KOBRI). A similar, while not as upbeat, point is made in Leyla Bouzid's *As I Open My Eyes*, released on the anniversary of the Revolution. While not directly dealing with the 2010-2011 events, the movie nevertheless shows why the protests happened and, indeed, why it was inevitable for them to happen, by exploring the influence the Ben Ali regime exercised over the lives of ordinary Tunisians and the way it attempted to suppress any dissent. As Rim Ben Fraj notes, the movie is actually an artistic cry against the nostalgia and amnesia so prominent in Tunisian society these days (BEN FRAJ). Like *Nḥibbik Hādī / Hédi*, but also Egyptian productions that restage the situation on the eve of the revolution in a similar way, like *Mawlānā* or *The Nile Hilton Incident*, not a few feature films try to keep the memory of the revolution alive, evidently because they think that tasks like working towards more social justice, or against the power structures of the old regimes, or for the formation of a sense of individual responsibility for one's own future are still waiting to be fulfilled.

These voices work against a deeply entrenched feeling, widespread not only in Egypt but also among many Tunisians, that the Revolution should not have happened. For Laryssa Chomiak, this is connected to the idea that something fundamental is lacking in the present and rapid reform is needed to address the issue. What is even more troubling, this "reform-focused emphasis based on absence and inadequacy" has shifted popular perception, leading many to believe that it would be better if things went back to where they were (CHOMIAK). After all, as the proponents of this idea will say, most people had "a comfortable life under Ben Ali," the country was safe and secure and the economy was doing better (LAGEMAN). And all this "left with him" (BEN HMIDA).

Then there are also those who, while not seeing much change in their lives now, still do not think that the uprising was a mistake. For many of the young Tunisians who participated in it, for example, the revolt, while justified, just did not meet its goals. Looking at the aging representatives of the government, many believe that the revolution, which was largely provoked by the grievances of the youth, was hijacked by the political elites. "There was a

revolution in Tunisia and Kasserine, and it got stolen by political parties that didn't know what they were doing—first Ennahdha, then Nidaa Tounes," government worker Chokri Slougui is quoted as saying in a *New Yorker* article (PACKER). The same sentence is repeated once more in the article by civil activist Ons Ben Abdelkarim (Uns Bin ʿAbd al-Karīm), talking about young Tunisians leaving their country to fight in Syria. Feeling marginalised and cheated, the revolutionary youth feel "stuck" in a present which has failed to live up to their earlier expectations [↗**Present = Past (Stuck)**]. However, the past seems to affect youth radicalisation in other ways, as well. In the movie *Zahrat Ḥalab* (The Flower of Aleppo), the youth's readiness to join Islamist militants in Syria is linked to a problematic father figure (here, it is not the patriarch-despot but its 'contrary', the drinking artist-intellectual whom the son cannot respect as an authority.) Some, like the blogger_Z, try to escape the situation by reliving the days of the revolution, calling for a return to the true ideals of the uprising (DEBATunisie). Others find a different way out [↗**Hashish**, ↗**Migration**]: *Ākhir wāḥid fīnā* (The Last of Us) enacts the story of a young man who cuts all bonds with the past to be free to start into a completely new future; after a painful period of transition, learning and adaptation to a fundamentally different, savage and hostile world, the film—a story of formation of the self—ends with the youth's 'rebirth' as a free and independent, mature and self-confident strong man.

A similar relationship is present in Egyptians' and Tunisians' daily lives on a different level. These days a wave of nostalgia is spreading around the two countries. People like to remember the good old days. For some in Egypt, those are the days of Nasser, when the country was a regional stronghold (*FB* [b]) and the poor were cared for and treated with respect (*FB* [c]), when real movies were made, literature and culture were flourishing (*MadàMaṣr*) and Egypt had the "Bolshoy Five," a pioneering group of ballet dancers (*A Footnote on Ballet History*) and the Arabic music was authentic. For others, the glorious days of the Egyptian monarchy, with its lavish parties, liberal outlook and beautifully maintained gardens, streets and public spaces, were the golden ages (*FB* [d]; *FB* [e]; *FB* [f]). In Tunisia, many long for the times when Bourguiba was in office, working tirelessly to modernise Tunisia and eradicate social and gender inequality (*ArabWeekly*). This was also the time when Tunisia took the lead in the Third World cinema movement and the great Tahar Cheriaa initiated the famous Carthage Film Festival (*Tahar Chariaa: Taḥt ẓilāl al-bāwbāb / A l'ombre du baobab*). It seems that all kinds of minorities—religious, ethnic, social, artistic, intellectual—are especially prone to this type of nostalgia. *We are Egyptian Armenians*, for instance, is an extensive documentation about the Armenian community's longstanding contribution to the history and culture of the country on the Nile. The compatibility of Armenian and Egyptian identity is underlined all along the film, as if to prevent, in anticipation, any attempt on the side of post-revolutionary society to try to exclude the marginal group from further participation in national life, or to appeal to any government not to neglect protecting them if so needed (and the need may easily arise, as not only the documentary *al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka / La Vallée du Sel* about a Christian couple who is receiving death threats from some Jihadist youth during the Mursī years makes clear). But also, the more recent past is admired, and not only by minorities. For example, many yearn for the times when the streets of Cairo and the coastal towns of Tunisia were still filled with thousands of happy tourists [↗**Tourist Resorts**].

Now? Now there is none of this. The streets of Egypt are filthy and full of ↗Garbage, people live in poverty and no one gives a damn, the tourists are gone, the economy is struggling, art is either pretentious or lacks any merit [↗**Beautiful vs. Ugly**] and the politicians have no clear plan for the future and do not really care about making the situation better. These days, even music is difficult to enjoy [↗**Pop Music**].

The nostalgics on all sides of the aisle have this in common. They all inevitably contrast their idealised view of the past to the pitfalls of the present. The picture does not have to be accurate. Stories and pictures could be fabricated, as long as they fit with the imagined reality of the days gone by, like the fake story of Nasser serving as a guardian to a desperate young bride [↗Father Figures]. For in many ways, nostalgia is as much an admiration of the past as it is a critique of the present. It might be just a person mourning their lost youth or parents sensing that they are losing their connection to the younger generation (*YS*, Feb. 11). But in many cases, nostalgia can take a political turn.

In April, protests erupt in Egypt over the transfer of the two Red Sea Islands of Tīrān and Ṣanāfīr to Saudi Arabia [↗**Red Sea Islands**]. Egyptians are furious with the government's decision and the Facebook admirers of the monarchy and Nasser are no exception. On April 13, *The Official Page of King Fārūq* posts a 1950 letter, supposedly a response from the Foreign Ministry to the Ministry of War, stating that the ownership of the two Red Sea islands is Egyptian (*FB* [g]). On April 16, a Facebook page dedicated to Nasser posts a video in which the former president states that Tīrān is Egyptian (*FB* [h]). Both pages attempt to prove that what is happening is wrong and to justify their discontent with the decision. But in order to do that with absolute certainty, they rely on contrasting the current actions of the Egyptian government with the realities of their respective pasts. Many of the black-and-white photos, historical anecdotes and documents posted online, depict a beautiful and flawless picture of a perfect past, which stood for certain values, such as social justice, dignity or liberalism. This image is then contrasted to the present, perceived as lacking these values. It is simultaneously a proof that a better yesterday once existed and an implicit critique of the political elites, which have allowed this past to vanish. In many respects, nostalgia justifies people's discontent with the present and serves as a vehicle of expressing it.

But the past can serve the opposite function as well. Talking about street harassment in Egypt, that problems persist. The government is taking steps to contain the feminist movement and is discriminating against the LGBT community [↗**LGBT**]. Yet, so many things have improved, compared to the situation ten years ago. People's perception of sexual violence is changing, women are starting to complain to the police *en masse* and the advertisement business, once dominated by sexism, is taking some decidedly positive steps forward (ABDELHAMEED) [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. Similarly, in Tunisia, amid criticism of the current government, Facebook users acknowledge that the work of the Truth and Justice Committee, charged with gathering information about the victims of the Ben Ali regime, is after all a good thing. Civil activist Omar Fassatoui, for example, notes:

> Whether we say that it could have been better … one fact remains ... We have started a huge work on the Tunisian collective memory, and I hope for national reconciliation. [↗**Public Hearings**]

In both cases, the current situation is perceived as unsatisfactory. But a "bad" present is contrasted to an inferior past, to emphasise a positive development. Things are far from ideal, but some steps in the right direction are being taken. Yet, as always, the only way to fully grasp what the present has to offer is to have a good, long look at the past.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *'Ashwā'iyyāt* ♦ Clash ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Disappearances ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Hashish ♦ LGBT ♦ Migration ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Beautiful vs. Ugly ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority vs. Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True vs. False ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ Present = Past (Stuck) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

Written

ABDELHAMEED, Dalia. "For the Women of Egypt, Today Is Not like Yesterday." *MadàMaṣr*, March 8, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/03/08/opinion/society/for-the-women-of-egypt-today-is-not-like-yesterday/>.

ABDULLAH, Rasha. "The Egyptian Regime Is Afraid Because the Revolution Isn't Over." *Public Radio International (PRI)*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-01-26/egyptian-regime-afraid-because-revolution-isnt-over>.

AGGOUR, Sara. "Different Names, Same Purpose: The Long History of Patriotic Donations." *Daily News Egypt*, March 8, 2016, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/03/08/different-names-purpose-long-history-patriotic-donations/>.

AKEF, Walid. "5 Years After the Revolution, Egypt's a Hell After a Paradise." *Huffington Post*, January 26, 2016, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/walid-akef-/egypt-revolution-anniversary_b_9081840.html>.

[*ArabWeekly* =] N. N. "Fear of Islamism behind Nostalgia for Bourguiba." *The Arab Weekly*, 8 April 2016, <https://thearabweekly.com/fear-islamism-behind-nostalgia-bourguiba>.

el-BEHARY, Hend. "Only 6% of Egyptians Donated LE 1 Daily to Tahya Masr Fund: Baseera." *Egypt Independent*, March 20, 2016, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/only-6-egyptians-donated-le-1-daily-tahya-masr-fund-baseera/>.

BEN FRAJ, Rim. "À Peine j'ouvre les yeux : Un film contre l'amnesie et la nostalgie." *Nawaat*, March 29, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/03/29/a-peine-jouvre-les-yeux-un-film-contre-lamnesie-et-la-nostalgie/>.

BEN HMIDA, Cheima. "Five Years On, Tunisians Share Memories from the Jasmine Revolution." *Huffington Post*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/jasmine-revolution-tunisia-anniversary_us_56993211e4b0b4eb759e367c?guccounter=1>.

BEN MASSAOUD, Lilia and Hajer KOBRI. "Voices: Tunisia's 'Arab Spring' Revolution Remains Incomplete." *USA Today*, August 29, 2016, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2016/08/29/tunisia-arab-spring-revolution-free-speech/89394910/>.

BOHN, Lauren. "A Revolution Devours Its Children." *The Atlantic*, January 23, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/01/egypt-revolution-arab-spring/426609/>.

CHOMIAK, Laryssa. "Five Years after the Tunisian Revolution, Political Frustration Doesn't Diminish Progress," January 14, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/14/five-years-after-the-tunisian-revolution/?utm_term=.ca269a9435a0>.

[*DEBATunisie* =] N. N. "Révolution ?" *DEBATunisie*, January 14, 2016, <http://www.debatunisie.com/archives/2016/01/14/33208125.html>.

[*Economist* =] N. N. "After the Arab Spring: The Ruining of Egypt." *The Economist*, August 6, 2016, sec. Readers' Comments. <https://www.economist.com/comment/3213235#comment-3213235>.

[*EG Independent* =] N. N. "Sisi's 'Egypt Vision 2030' Speech Garners Positive, Negative Reactions." *Egypt Independent*, February 25, 2016, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/sisi-s-egypt-vision-2030-speech-garners-positive-negative-reactions/>.

[*FB* (a) =] N. N. *Miṣr lil-ǧamīʿ wa-bil-ǧamīʿ*. Facebook post, April 23, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/1Tamer.Asfour/photos/a.363452263709580.90414.152451254809683/985198328201634/?type=3>.

[*FB* (b) =] N. N. *Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir*. Facebook post, March 20, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/naseer56/posts/10154896828124368:0>.

[*FB* (c) =] N. N. *Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir*. Facebook post, February 7, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/naseer56/posts/10154777433924368:0>.

[*FB* (d) =] N. N. *Al-Ṣafḥa al-rasmiyya li-mawqiʿ al-malik Fārūq al-awwal, Fārūq Miṣr*. Facebook post, December 30, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/king.farouk.faroukmisr/photos/a.116859731748670.14224.102433933191250/1034585216642779/?type=3&theater>.

[*FB* (e) =] N. N. *Al-Ṣafḥa al-rasmiyya li-mawqiʿ al-malik Fārūq al-ʾawwal, Fārūq Miṣr*. Facebook post, January 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/king.farouk.faroukmisr/photos/a.116859731748670.14224.102433933191250/809033145864655/?type=3&theater>.

[*FB* (f) =] N. N. *Al-Ṣafḥa al-rasmiyya li-mawqiʿ al-malik Fārūq al-awwal, Fārūq Miṣr*. Facebook post, October 14, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/king.farouk.faroukmisr/photos/a.116859731748670.14224.102433933191250/965994060168562/?type=3&theater>.

[*FB* (g) =] N. N. *Al-Ṣafḥa al-rasmiyya li-mawqiʿ al-malik Fārūq al-ʾawwal, Fārūq Miṣr*. Facebook post, April 13, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/king.farouk.faroukmisr/photos/a.116859731748670.14224.102433933191250/850145965086706/?type=3&theater>.

[*FB* (h) =] N. N. *Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir*. Facebook post, April 6, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/g.abdalnasr56/posts/794927797308275>.

[*FB* Alexandria =] N. N. Facebook Group Alexandria. "25 January Revolution (Album)." Facebook page, [n.d.], 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Alexandria.EgyptOfficial/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10152190240003516>.

[*Guardian* =] N. N. "I Was Terribly Wrong'—Writers Look Back at the Arab Spring Five Years On." *The Guardian*, January 23, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>.

HAMAMOU, Sabah. "The Only Weapon We Have Is Memory: Remembering The Camel Battle." *Huffington Post*, May 2, 2016, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sabah-hamamo/the-only-weapon-we-have-i_b_9167332.html>.

LAGEMAN, Thessa. "Nostalgia for Ben Ali and Hopes for New Revolution in Riot-Stricken Tunis Suburb." *Middle East Eye*, January 25, 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nostalgia-ben-ali-and-hopes-new-revolution-riot-stricken-tunis-suburb-2045183542>.

[*MadàMaṣr* =] N. N. "The Fantasy of the Past: A Conversation with Graphic Novelist Lamia Ziade." MadàMaṣr, May 30, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/05/30/feature/culture/the-fantasy-of-the-past-a-conversation-with-graphic-novelist-lamia-ziade/>.

PACKER, George. "Exploring Jihad: The Arab Spring Has given Tunisians the Freedom to Act on Their Unhappiness." *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/tunisia-and-the-fall-after-the-arab-spring>.

RABĪʿ, Muḥammad. *ʿUṭārid.* Al-Qāhira-Bayrūt-Tūnis: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2014. – Translated as Mohammed RABIE, *Otared*, tr. by Robin MOGER, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2016. (Shortlisted for the 2016 IPAF).

[*Republic or Death* =] N. N. "Memories of a Revolution That Failed: The Fifth Anniversary of Tahrir Square." *Republic or Death*, January 25, 2016, <https://republicordeath.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/memories-of-a-revolution-that-failed-the-fifth-anniversary-of-tahrir-square/>.

SALAH, Ahmed. "How I Went From Leading the Egyptian Revolution to Making Minimum Wage in San Francisco." *Priceonomics*, April 4, 2016, <https://priceonomics.com/how-i-went-from-leading-the-egyptian-revolution-to/>.

[*YS*, Feb. 11 =] N. N. "10 gumal taʿkis ṭabīʿat al-ab al-miṣrī al-aṣīl: bi-ṣawt Ḥusnī Mubārak." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, February 11, 2016, <http://www.youm7.com/story/2016/2/11/2579862/ بالصور_10_جمل_تعكس_طبيعة_الأب_المصرى_الأصيل_بصوت_حسنى>.

YORDANOVA, Mihaila. *Fieldwork Notes* (unpublished). August 2016.

Movies

Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan (We Have Never Been Kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). EG, U.A.E., Qatar, RL 2016.

Ākhir wāḥid fīnā ("The Last of Us"). By ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Salīm (Ala Eddine Slim). TN, Qatar, U.A.E., RL 2016.

ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux (As I Open My Eyes). By Leyla Bouzid. TN, F, B 2015.

Amal. Documentary by Muḥammad Ṣiyām (Mohamed Siam). EG, RL, DE, F, NO 2017.

Egypt's Modern Pharaohs. Documentary trilogy by Jīhān al-Ṭāhirī (Jihan El-Tahri). EG, F, USA, Qatar 2015/2016.

A Footnote on Ballet History. Documentary by Hisham Abdel Khalek. EG, USA, F 2016.

Ghadwa ḥayy / Demain dès l'aube (Burning Hope). By Luṭfī Āshūr (Lotfi Achour). TN 2016.

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). EG, DE, F 2016.

Jeanne d'Arc Masriya / Egyptian Jeanne d'Arc. Documentary by Īmān Kāmil (Iman Kamel). EG, DE, Kuwait, Qatar 2016.

Mawlānā (Our Master) / *The Preacher.* By Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). EG, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). EG 2016.

Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi (Hedi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyya (Mohamed Ben Attia). TN, B, F 2016.

Nihāyāt saʿīda (Happily Ever After). Documentary by Nadà Riyāḍ (Nadà Riyadh) and Ayman al-Amīr (Ayman El Amir). EG 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). EG, DE, SE, DK 2017.

A Revolution in Four Seasons. Documentary by Jessie Deeter. TN, USA 2016.

al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka / La Vallée du Sel (Prayer and Battle / The Valley of Salt). Documentary by Christophe Majdī Ṣābir (Magdy Saber). EG, CH 2016.

Shbābik al-janna / Les frontiers du ciel (Borders of heaven). By Fāris Naʿnāʿ (Farès Naanaa). TN, U.A.E. 2015.

Sheikh Jackson. By ʿAmr Salāma (Amr Salama). EG 2017.

Tahar Cheriaa: Taḥt ẓilāl al-bāwbāb/ A l'ombre du baobab (At the baobab's shadow). Documentary by Muḥammad Shallūf (Mohamed Challouf). TN 2015.

We are Egyptian Armenians. Documentary by Waheed Sobhi and Hanan Ezzat. EG 2016.

Zahrat Ḥalab (The Flower of Aleppo). By Riḍà Bāhī (Ridha Behi). TN 2016.

◄ mly201@yahoo.co.uk ►
◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Security *vs.* Fear

By Jacob Høigilt

"But what's the alternative to the current regime? Aren't we at least better than Syria and Iraq?" (Naʿīm) The op-ed in one of Egypt's few remaining independent media outlets captures the general political mood well: the atmosphere is characterized by fear on the one hand and a sense that the regime is the guarantor for security on the other.

There is plenty of fear among ordinary people. The biggest is perhaps the fear of the Other in its many guises. Egypt's Copts feel very insecure, but mostly suffer in silence, afraid that speaking out will only lead to a backlash. However, after several violent incidents in the Upper Egyptian municipality of al-Minyā, including one where an elderly woman is stripped naked and dragged through the streets, some raise their voices and demonstrate on August 13 with banners saying:

> "Christians are being persecuted," "Christians are Egyptians," "No to pressuring victims to reconcile," and "No to state institutions' collusion in sectarian violence." (*MY*)

At the other end of the religious divide, some Egyptian Muslims regard ↗**Conversions** as an existential threat to Egypt's social fabric, and the Copts are sometimes cast as would-be traitors conspiring with sinister Western powers to weaken Egypt [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**, ↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**]. The religious tension and the system of fear that underlies it are treated in the movie *Mawlānā* (The Preacher), which is screened at the Dubai International Film Festival and creates a stir in Egypt because of its liberal message about cross-religious tolerance. The well-known analyst of religious politics, Rafīq Ḥabīb, offers a bleak view in an interview with *Counterpunch* in December:

> The most worrying problem in Egypt is the prejudice on both sides which has grown over the last 25 years and is still growing… The Copts are the ones who feel it, because they're the minority; and the government is unable to deal with it. (Kristianasen)

Fear of the Other is also on prominent display in the continuing polarization between those who support the now outlawed Muslim Brothers and those who mistrust or even hate the organization, believing it to aim for the establishment of an Iranian-like Islamic state. When the movie *Ishtibāk* (Clash) is released, its message of tolerance across the secularist-Islamist divide prompts several movie theaters to refuse to screen it. Director Muḥammad Diyāb is accused of wanting to hurt Egyptian interests to the benefit of foreigners [↗Clash].

↗**The Suspect Foreigner** is also a factor in the atmosphere of fear. Egypt is supported economically by Western countries, but those same countries' criticism of human rights breaches and authoritarian policies is construed by the authorities and loyalist media as "threats" against Egypt. This narrative finds resonance in parts of the Egyptian populace, already exhausted by too many crises and too much poverty. Foreign students and journalists find themselves in a very suspicious environment where their physical safety is sometimes threatened—the prime example being the murder of the Italian PhD student Giulio Regeni.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *353–*357
© Jacob Høigilt, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO

Fear is to a great extent produced by fear-mongering, and it is not only Christians, Islamists and foreigners who are cast as threats, but any Egyptian opposed to the policies of the authorities. The media contributes to a sense of imminent threat against "simple" and "noble" Egyptian citizens who do their best to contribute to the country's economic and social well-being [↗**The Honourable Citizen**]. On the celebration of the return of Sinai to Egypt on April 25, a columnist in one of the leading newspapers accuses various Egyptian opposition figures of wanting to destroy the country (al-HAWĀRĪ). One-time Muslim Brother ʿAbd al-Munʿim Abū l-Futūḥ, former director of the IAEA Muḥammad al-Barādiʿī, and leftist leader Ḥamdīn Ṣabāḥī have called for protests against the current regime and are therefore in cahoots with Egypt's enemies, "from Israel and Qatar, via Turkey, to the United States". The enemy is everywhere.

Even ordinary people and their pastimes awake fear among those who support Egypt's post-2013 political order: coffee shops are a threat to order and stability, according to one news report (al-SARRĀǦ). There are too many of them, they are not regulated, and they serve as gathering points for youth who have nothing to do. The young men who sit there day after day, brandishing their shisha mouthpieces, are a symbol of too little public regulation and monitoring, some think.

Against all these threats al-Sisi and the military cast themselves as protectors of Egyptians' security and well-being, and most of the media join in. Thus, when the Brothers call for demonstrations against the regime on November 11, a senior security official in Sohag tells people that the military is in full control, so they should just go about their business as usual and need not "fear" the demonstrations (A.SH.A.). President al-Sīsī nurtures an image as the protector of the nation, a vigilant guard against internal threats (Muslim Brothers and revolutionaries) as well as external ones (sinister foreign plots). It is not only political security al-Sisi and the military purportedly supply; social security is also an important field of official discourse [↗Father Figures]. The pro-Sisi campaign "Protect your country" publishes a list in November of al-Sisi's achievements, and among the 39 items on the list are things like "solving the lack of gasoline" and "a million new apartments" (ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN) [↗**Apartment Wanted**]. The military brands itself as the nation's provider of food security and childcare [↗**Baby Milk**].

The irony is that for many, the regime is exactly what they fear the most. Even as al-Sisi is busy building his one million apartments, stories surface about how the police acts as a mafia, confiscating rice and other goods belonging to shop owners (SAID). Personal security is also threatened—not just for opposition figures, but for anyone with bad luck, it seems: A wife and mother recounts her harrowing experience with the security apparatus when visiting Egypt after having lived abroad for some time: *Miṣr laysat 'ummī* (Egypt isn't my mother) (*Huffpost*).

The April 6th movement talks about a "wall of fear" that needs to be breached and replaced by a wall of hope (*ArabicCNN*). In a society as divided as Egypt's at this time, security becomes a zero-sum game. The regime fears criticism and unrest and clamps down on expressions of dissent or criticism that may raise public debate. For the revolutionaries who led the 2011 uprising, times are "bleaker than they have ever been," as one of them says in an interview with *Die Zeit* in December (BACKHAUS). The phenomenon of forced disappearances, widely mediatized this year (TRAFFORD & RAMADHANI, MANSOUR),

underscores the state's willingness to induce fear in people to retain political stability [↗Disappearances]. The zero-sum logic is not only about politics, but also about social conditions. The starkest illustration of the tension in social security is an ad posted on the official Facebook page of the upscale housing compound Beverly Hills outside Cairo (*Beverly Hills Egypt*). The ad consists of a picture of a couple lounging on the terrace by the swimming pool, surrounded by a lush lawn and decorative trees. A barbed-wire wall separates them from a slum area full of people looking enviously toward the other side [↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**]. The caption reads: "Oh Lord be praised for the blessing of living in a sophisticated, civilized and safe way." The ad draws intense criticism on social media and is removed toward the end of the year.

In Tunisia, the fear of Islamist terrorism still lingers, after the attacks at the Bardo museum and in the tourist resort Sousse a year ago (TARFA). In January, the prosecution starts its case against a terrorist cell in the town of Chabbaou that facilitated the travel to Syria of young Tunisian jihadists (al-SHĀBBĪ). The large number of women in this cell attracts attention [↗Male *vs.* Female]. In March, yet another violent confrontation with Islamist terrorists takes place in the border town of Ben Guerdane, leaving scores of people dead—most of them militants and Tunisian soldiers. A poll conducted in December shows that security issues and terrorism are on the top three list of worries for Tunisians (unemployment and economic crisis top the list) (IRI).

Not surprisingly, the threat of terrorism is an important theme in the public sphere. April 18 marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of Tunisia's security forces, and the occasion is used to launch the campaign "Together, we defeat terrorism" (*ZoomTunisia*).

The fear of Islamist terrorism has led several intellectuals to prioritize security before human rights, and those liberal activists who see themselves as defenders of the democratic gains of the revolution are increasingly worried (*Fanack*). As former Prime Minister Moncef al-Marzouki (Munṣif al-Marzūqī) notes in an op-ed for *Foreignpolicy.com:* "The current political elite has instead exploited the premise that security can only be achieved at the expense of human rights" (MARZOUKI).

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ Baby Milk ♦ Clash ♦ Conversions ♦ Disappearances ♦ Father Figures ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ The Suspect Foreigner

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Male *vs.* Female

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

Written

ʿABD AL-RAḤMĀN, ʿAmr. "'Iḥmī [sic!] waṭanak': 'injāzāt al-Sīsī khilāl ʿāmayn ghayr masbūqa min sinīn." *al-Ṭalīʿa*, [n.d.], 2016, <https://www.altaly3anews.com/?p=126579> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[*ArabicCNN* =] N.N. "Bi-jumʿat 'al-'Arḍ hiya l-'irḍ'... al-Zumur: Furṣa dhahabiyya, wa-6 'Abrīl: al-Yawm naqdir nabnī 'awwal ṭūba fī jidār al-'amal wa-nahdim jidār al-khawf." *ArabicCNN*, April 15,

2016, <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/04/15/egypt-6-april-movement-zumor> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[A.SH.A.]. "Istiʿdādāt ʾamniyya mukaththafa li-muwājahat ʾayy ṭāriʾ bil-muḥāfaẓāt qabl sāʿāt min 11/11." *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, November 10, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1038435> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

BACKHAUS, Andrea. "Der Polizeistaat ist zurück." *Zeit Online*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2016-12/aegypten-militaer-polizeistaat-revolution-rueckblick> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[*Beverly Hills Egypt* =] N. N. "Yā rabb, laka l-ḥamd ʿalà niʿmat al-sakan al-ʾāmin al-rāqī al-ʾādamī." *Facebook* post, [n.d.], 2016, <https://m.facebook.com/Beverly.hills/photos/a.440387959421270.1073741827.439977742795625/1059990480794345/?type=3&theater> (post was removed by 19h15 on December 31, 2016).

[*Fanack* =] N. N. "Human Rights in Tunisia a Work in Progress." *Fanack.com*, August 17, 2016, <https://fanack.com/tunisia/human-rights/human-rights-a-work-in-progress/> (updated March 12, 2018; last accessed December 20, 2018).

al-HAWĀRĪ, Dindrāwī. "al-Busaṭāʾ li-Ṣabāḥī wa-ʾAbū l-Futūḥ wal-Barādiʿī: 'Naḥnu al-khayr wa-ʾantum al-sharr'." *al-Yawm al-Sābiʿ*, April 26, 2016, <https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/ 4/26/البسطاء-لـ-صباحى-وأبو-الفتوح-والبرادعى-نحن-الخير-وأنتم-الشر/2692261> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[*Huffpost* =] N. N. "Miṣr laysat ʾummī!" *Huffington Post*, [n.d.], 2016, <http://www.huffpostarabi.com/sara-gamal-/story_b_10942598.html> (updated January 1, 2017; no longer active).

[IRI =] N. N. at Centre for Insights in Survey Research. "Sondage d'opinion publique auprès des Tunisiens 6 Décembre – 13 Décembre 2016." *iri.org*, [n.d.], 2016, <http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_francais_final_public.pdf> (updated November 30, 2018; last accessed December 20, 2018).

KRISTIANASEN, Wendy. "Christians of the Orient: Egypt and the Future of the Copts." *CounterPunch*, December 26, 2016, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/12/26/christians-of-the-orient-egypt-and-the-future-of-the-copts/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

MANSOUR, Khaled. "Behind the sun: Is this the end of the rule of law in Egypt?" *MadàMaṣr*, February 14, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/02/14/opinion/u/behind-the-sun-is-this-the-end-of-the-rule-of-law-in-egypt/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

MARZOUKI, Mohamed Moncef. "The Grim Reality Behind Tunisia's Fairy Tale." *ForeignPolicy.com*, September 22, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/22/the-grim-reality-behind-tunisias-fairy-tale-mohamed-moncef-marzouki/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[*MY* =] N. N. "Activists protest sectarian violence in Minya." *EgyptIndependent*, from *Al-Masry al-Youm*, August 14, 2016, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/activists-protest-sectarian-violence-minya/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

NAʿĪM, Muḥammad. "Marḥalat shaqq al-jidār: ʾas'ila ḥawla l-ʿawda lil-shāriʿ." *MadàMaṣr*, April 26, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2016/04/26/opinion/politics/مرحلة-شق-الجدار-أسئلة-حول-العودة-للشار/> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

SAID, Nirvana. "State security 'crackdown on black market' = mafia-style confiscation of legal property." Facebook post, updated October 24, 2016, <https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=347648148907925&id=100009882273086&refid=28> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

al-SARRĀĞ, Aḥmad. 2016. "1.5 milyūn maqhan fī Miṣr dūn tarkhīṣ." *al-Wafd*, January 11, <http://alwafd.org/تحقيقات-وحوارات/1014109-1-5-مليون-مقهى-في-مصر-دون-ترخيص> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

al-SHĀBBĪ, Ṣabāḥ. "Qaḍiyyat ʾaḥdāth Shabbāw takshif: Hākadhā taḥawwala ḍābiṭ al-jaysh ʾilà ʾirhābī wa-hākadhā kānat al-ʾamwāl tursal min Turkiyā." *al-Ṣabāḥ News*, February 1, 2016, <http://www.

قضية-أحداث-شّباو-تكشف-هكذا-تحول-ضابط-الجيش-الى-ارهابي-وهكذا-كانت-assabahnews.tn/article/117907/الأموال-ترسل-من> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

TARFA, Inel. 2016. "Witness: Bardo Tour Guide Remembers Attack." *Tunisia-live*, March 18, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/03/18/witness-bardo-tour-guide-recalls-attack/> (no longer active; last accessed in Evernote archive on December 20, 2018).

TRAFFORD, Robert and Mays RAMADHANI. 2016. "Ruled by fear: Egyptian government 'disappears' 1,840 people in just 12 months." *Independent*, March 10, <https://www.independent.co.uk/ news/world/africa/egyptian-government-disappears-1840-people-in-just-12-months-ruling-by-fear-a6923671.html> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

[*ZoomTunisia* =] N. N. "Wazīr al-khārijiyya: shiʿār 'Maʿan naqḍī ʿalà l-'irhāb' huwa daʿwa mutajaddida li-takāthuf al-majhūdāt lil-qaḍā' ʿalà l-'irhāb." *ZūūmTūnīziyā*, 18 April 2016, <http://www.zoomtunisia.tn/article/top/33671.html> (last accessed December 20, 2018).

Movies

Condamné à l'espoir (Doomed to Hope). Short film by Youssef Ben Ammar. TN 2014.

Fawq mustawà al-shubuhāt. TV drama, written by ʿAbd Allāh Ḥasan and Amīn Gamāl, Midḥat al-ʿAdl (ishrāf drāmī) and Muḥammad Rajā' (scenario), directed by Hānī Khalīfa. EG, Ramaḍān 2016.

Ghadwa ḥayy / *Demain dès l'aube* (Burning Hope). By Luṭfī Āshūr (Lotfi Achour). TN 2016.

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). EG, DE, F 2016.

Mawlānā (Our Master) / *The Preacher.* By Magdī Aḥmad ʿAlī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). EG, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). EG 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). EG, DE, SE, DK 2017.

al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka / La Vallée du Sel (Prayer and Battle / The Valley of Salt). Documentary by Christophe Majdī Ṣābir (Magdy Saber). EG, CH 2016.

Zahrat Ḥalab (The Flower of Aleppo). By Riḍà Bāhī (Ridha Behi). TN 2016.

◄ jacob.hoigilt@ikos.uio.no ►

“The System” *vs.* “The People”

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- *1984*
- Abu Hashima (business man), relations with the regime, deep state
- academic freedom
- Aḥmad al-Mujāhid
- anti-elite, People vs. Elite
- Armed Forces land projects agency
- authorities, authorities = criminals, authorities = unmannered filth, authorities despising people
- campaigns, campaign *Burn your creative work*, campaign *Akhlāqunā*
- citizen journalism (*QTh:* citizen)
- civil disobedience, civil society
- counter-revolution (*QTh*)
- democracy (*QTh*), democracy vs. dictatorship/oppression
- demonisation of the Revolution
- demonstration(s) (*QTh*), demonstration restriction
- deportation
- dictator, dictatorship
- disciplining
- “divide and rule”
- doctors’ strike
- freedom of expression
- glorious army
- government hypocrisy, government’s plan to reduce fertility, government surveillance
- grassroots vs. authorities
- human rights (*QTh*), human rights activism, human rights situation, humanity, upholding humanity, humanity vs. politics, human togetherness
- humiliation
- Hush!
- Idi Amin
- independence, independence of judges, independent organisations, independent unions
- indoctrination
- institutions, institutional crisis, institutional profile, institutional vs. anti-institutional
- intellectuals, intellectuals and political power, intellectuals unwanted by the State
- interior authority
- internet surveillance
- intransigence
- invented charges/legal offenses
- *ʿishsh al-dabbūr*
- killing the tyrant
- law(s), Law 52 1992 (Prohibition of Drugs), Law: letter vs. practice, lawlessness, lawlessness = law, lawyer(s), legal
- legitimacy (*QTh*)
- Long Live Egypt Fund
- loyal opposition
- march (*masīra*) (*QTh*)
- #Maṣr bit2ulkum
- massacre (*QTh*) of Rābʿa and Nahḍa
- *Mugammaʿ*
- *mukhābarāt*
- Munā Sayf
- Nāgī Shiḥāta
- nation building, nation state, national pride, national hero, nation-rebuilding, Nation = Government, Nation = President, Nation = Regime, national effort, national imaginary
- new building for police
- no accountability
- no development, no progress

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *358–*359
© N. N.

- no to second term
- organized crime(s)
- patriotism
- piaster, Piasters campaign
- political game
- politically stuck
- politicisation of educational flosses
- power distribution and practice
- president (*QTh*), presidency
- price control
- public funds
- public projects
- public sector
- Red Carpet gate
- regain billion dollars revolution (TN)
- regime (*QTh*), despotic system, regime change, regime's propoganda, the regime striking back like a wounded tiger, regime supporters' discourse, regime vs. the people
- repression
- ruin (*fasād*)
- Sīsī vs. the people
- al-Sīsī's failure, criticism of al-Sīsī, al-Sīsī on detained youth, al-Sīsī's speeches (Feb. 24 , Aug. 13), al-Sīsī visiting New York
- sit-in (*iʿtiṣām*) (*QTh*), clearing the sit-in (*faḍḍ al-iʿtiṣām*) (*QTh*)
- sports and politics
- state doesn't want intellectuals
- state negligence
- state support
- state takes from the poor
- state *vs.* workers
- state, state's intervention, state's interference in religious affairs
- stirring upt the *ʿishsh al-dabbūr* (hornet's nest)
- Suez, Suez Canal
- *al-Thaqāfa fī 'l-muwājaha* (Culture at the Frontlines)
- underdevelopment
- weak state, having to over-control citizens
- wealthy
- Who owns Egypt?
- zero tolerance for criticism

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Baby Milk ♦ Clash ♦ Conversions ♦ Court Trials ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Dancing ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ Éveil d'une nation / *Ṣaḥwat umma* ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Pop Music ♦ Prison ♦ Public Hearings ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Valentine's Day

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ True *vs.* False

◄ ...@... ►

True *vs.* False

By Stephan Guth

In November, the Tunisian committee for "Truth and Dignity" (*Hay'at al-ḥaqīqa wa'l-karāma*, Institution Vérité et Dignité, IVD) starts its first ↗**Public Hearings** of the victims of Ben Ali's dictatorship. Stipulated already three years ago by the new, post-revolutionary Constitution as a pillar of the envisaged process of a "transitional justice," the hearings are expected to unveil the political repression committed under the authoritarian regime and pave the way for some kind of national reconciliation. As the name of the committee makes clear, access to "the truth" (*al-ḥaqīqa*) is considered a matter of human "dignity" (*karāma*), and both are regarded essential for the envisaged re-building of Tunisian society on a sound and enduring basis. The uprisings of 2010/11 had shown that larger parts of the Arab population were fed up with the lies of their old regimes. Too often had people experienced the discrepancy between what the regimes told them and what they actually were seeing, hearing, feeling, going through, and too often had those who dared to ask for the truth or unveiled it suffered persecution, torture, death. In their revolt they had shown that they were longing for a new beginning based on truth, reliability, honesty, justice and, thus, dignity, rather than on humiliation and oppression and on what everybody anyway knew were fabrications, institutionalized fake representations of reality.

Five years after the "Arab Spring," many things *can* be said openly—and *are* in fact being said quite frankly now, especially in Tunisia where there is a common understanding that true justice is indispensible and a lively culture of—often heated—discussion has developed. An exhibition like ↗**Éveil d'une nation / *Ṣaḥwat umma*** even *encourages* public debate on history, historical truth, and, thus, national identity, as these issues have to be negotiated on a broad, democratic basis, without taboos. In a similar vein, the public hearings themselves and the president of the IVD, Mrs Sihem Ben Sedrine, are heavily criticized, as is also the Economic Reconciliation Act, against which a whole opposition movement forms, reproaching it as a false, hypocritical measure, a lie in itself, not really aiming at lifting the veil from silenced truths, which, critics hold, actually do not need to be uncovered as they are known to everybody and obvious anyway; rather, they say, the Act is meant simply to find a pretext to release unpunished those who have done wrong. Instead of dressing the gesture up as a contribution to "national unity" and "tolerance" in society, the culprits should not be forgiven but pay back their guilt [↗***Manīsh msāmiḥ***].

While debates like this are possible now it has also become more difficult for those in power to conceal the truth and to fabricate narratives that people would buy. Announcements made and information given by ↗**The Voice from Above** or other mighty ones are constantly checked, critically scrutinized and commented on, contested, countered by an ever-growing civil society—too deep is the imprint that the pre-revolutionary era has left on almost everybody. Five years after the "Arab Spring," doubt is still common and suspicion very widespread, not only concerning 'trivialities' one would simply gossip about, such as news circulating about ↗**Football** or TV stars, much of which may be fake [↗**Celebrities**], but also with regard to much more serious issues, like, for instance, the Coptic girl who first

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *360–*373
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO

mysteriously disappears [↗**Disappearances**], then, some weeks later, in a YouTube video, declares her conversion to, and sincere belief in, Islam [↗**Conversions**]. The story provides ample material for speculation: Was she kidnapped or went into hiding herself? Did she convert willingly or was she forced to do so and then also publish the clip?

Awareness of the possible falseness of all kinds of narratives, especially when issued from the authorities [↗The **Voice from Above**], has remained strong, as reality is still widely distorted, especially in Egypt, mostly by those in power (and their collaborators), to deny responsibility in anything that has gone wrong and isn't as it should or could be. When there is a shortage in Egypt in ↗**Baby Milk** and the army is able to remedy the problem by miraculously providing milk from their own holdings (!); when the ↗**Red Sea Islands** quietly disappear from the new school atlas after the regime has "sold" them to Saudi Arabia to get some foreign currency; when the authorities stubbornly deny forced ↗**Disappearances** (Minister of the Interior, Magdī ʿAbd al-Ghaffār: "not even a single case" (BARAKĀT, MICHAELSON, *al-Taḥrīr*), continuing to issue such statements even during the Regeni affair, saying that all these cases are false allegations [↗The **Suspect Foreigner**]; when all kinds of reasons are put forward for the notorious traffic constipation instead of pointing to the real cause, the many private automobiles [↗***Zaḥma***]; when president al-Sīsī blames earlier governments for having failed to correct economic imbalances so that everything could build up and result in the current ↗**Dollar Crisis**; when a simple electrical short is said to have caused the big ʿAtaba fire [↗**Disasters**]…—in all these cases, many voices make themselves heard that call the official narratives in question, sometimes producing hard counter-evidence, sometimes digressing into conspiracy theories. It is clear to almost everybody that the regime has inherited from its predecessors [↗**Past *vs.* Present**] various techniques of presenting its own doings, re-interpreting facts and blaming others, camouflaging and white-washing, techniques of producing false evidence that are used even in the more liberal Tunisia as pretexts with the aim of containing or silencing opposition, see, e.g., the—invented—accusation of possessing drugs that regularly serves to harass and imprison "rebellious" activists [↗**Hashish**]—clearly a legacy of Ben ʿAlī's repressive police state.

Especially in Egypt, hardly anybody believes in the regime's 'success stories' anymore, although they continue to be spread in the media as the 'truth' about official great projects. From state-controlled *Radio Maṣr*'s end-of-year review, for instance, one can get the impression that 2016 was a year of amazing achievements and Egypt is striding strong towards a shining future (cf., e.g., also ʿABD AL-ḤĀFIẒ). However, comments in social media on such boasting reflect deep disbelief and disillusionment. Suspicion and doubt are also recurrent motifs in many movies. Significantly, those who are shown there to be sceptical about official narratives and/or reveal the truth behind them, are not limited to intellectuals, like the smart, unorthodox popular TV preacher, imam Ḥātim (*Mawlānā*), who not only supports a fresh, modern and humane interpretation of Islam instead of a blind belief in old rules that may be based on forged *ḥadīth*s, but also finds out that acts of cruel terrorism, like blowing a bomb in a mosque, densely populated during prayer, in reality aren't the work of fanatic radicals or collaborators of foreign powers seeking to destabilize glorious Egypt [↗The **Suspect Foreigner**], as official media would present it, but plotted by state security (*amn al-dawla*) itself with the aim of having a pretext to come down on all kinds of opposition and critics. Less intellectual, but gifted with an equally unflinching sense for the truth behind

false narratives and façades is the clever police officer Nūr al-Dīn in *The Nile Hilton Incident* who cannot but follow his detective instinct and in this way discovers, bit by bit, the truth about a murdered prostitute and the unholy alliance between the rich businessmen Shafīq Bey—dressed in immaculate white, as though innocent—and the President who is protecting him, the killer, from behind the scenes, always remaining invisible. Nūr al-Dīn's boss, instead of instructing him to seriously investigate the case, orders him to register the woman's death as a suicide and, *khalāṣ*, close the file: "The case is too big for us, it will only bring us in trouble." – Even less educated than imam Ḥātim and police officer Nūr al-Dīn are the protagonists of *Nawwāra* and *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan*, the first 'pure' fiction, the second a documentary, both about women from slum areas [↗ ***ʿAshwāʾiyyāt***] who are struggling hard to survive in the absence of a man providing for them. Neither Nawwāra nor Nādiya belong to that watchful, mostly intellectual opposition that forms the basis of regime-critical activists. And yet, the movies make clear that also those representatives of the broad masses, "the people," who are toiling to get along in difficult times, experience that the state's promises cannot be trusted in [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**]. In Nawwāra's case, the SCAF's announcements to redistribute the enormous wealth accumulated by the pre-revolutionary regime turn out to be elusive, and false evidence produced by a rich intrigant will bring the innocent heroine behind the bars of ↗**Prison**. As for the single mother of three, Nādiya, it is the experience of the discrepancy between the colourful descriptions coming from the radio and the harsh reality of everyday life that has taken away from her any illusion that there could be some truth in official discourses—every moment of lived reality proves these discourses to be deceptive. – Most lies seem to be produced by the regime and its representatives, especially also the police [↗The **Policeman Criminal**]. Quite often, however, also religious authorities are shown as producers of lies, luring people into the illusion that there could be another, better world. Normative Islam is shown as all-pervasive for instance in *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna* where downtown Cairo [↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**] is flooded by the roaring of ubiquitous loudspeakers and much public space is covered by prayer mats on Fridays; those who prostrate themselves in devotion seem to think that religion could be a remedy; in fact, however, they simply add to the picture of overall decay, they contribute to producing this decay. *Mawlānā* offers an enlightened version of Islam as an alternative that may save the true spirit of Islam from its unhealthy interpretation by the religious establishment who does not question the reliability of the sources it argues from (authentic *ḥadīth*s or forged ones?). In the end, however, also this rationalist—"Muʿtazili"—, ↗'**Self-help**' alternative is shown to have little chance to win over, as the hero, imam Ḥātim, falls prey to a plot designed by state security in alliance with 'orthodox' Islam.

There is widespread awareness also about the standard *techniques* that the authorities as well as the rich and mighty use to disguise the truth and their true—criminal—identities [↗**Dual Identities /** Masking]: it is, as a critical voice has it, a combination of somehow managing to pass off "the true crime of state propaganda" as journalism where the elites can appear as benign benefactors working for the benefit of the people [↗**Father Figures**] and, on the other side, blaming and criminalizing as "forces of the Evil" the numerous alleged enemies of the country (KHALIFA), both external [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**] and internal, those "enviers" (*al-ḥāsidūn*) who conspire to deprive the people of the trust in their leadership. 'Evidence' of their activities is easily found or produced to have a pretext to sack

potentially troublesome elements, and in this way often the true, faithful patriots are accused of being traitors, foreign agents, or conspirators handing the country to the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, Israel, Qatar, the US, …

Thus, "those on top" are able to create bubbles of faked facts, nets of false information that are as difficult to penetrate as the thick walls of the ↗**Gated Communities / Compounds**, which look beautiful from outside but conceal very different truths [↗**Beautiful *vs.* Ugly**]. The more there is concealed, however, and the more you feal that something is wrong behind those façades, the greater the suspicion and the desire to know the truth. This desire is still widely unbroken in many citizens ever since the uprisings, has perhaps even been assured by the successful toppling of the old mendacious regimes, and so has the courage to search for the truth and protest any attempt to obscure or hide it.

This includes, in Tunisia, unflinching resistance against heavy political-social, and moral, pressure to approve of the work of the Committee for Truth and Dignity, installed by a democratic government. To its critics, reconciliation is not the *Hay'a*'s true aim, and the public hearings aren't a fair deal—a fact that one has to say clearly and openly [↗***Manīsh msāmiḥ***]. In Egypt, too, honesty and frankness are underlined as good character traits, in social media as well as in movies. In *The Nile Hilton Incident*, for instance, Nūr al-Dīn's old father earns the spectators' sympathy by admonishing his son not to lie about his own petty crimes. In *Mawlānā*, TV imam Ḥātim's 'heroism' is based on the fact that he doesn't mince matters, always calls things names, and dares to challenge the political as well as religious establishment. Significantly, honesty is always with the representatives of the people or those siding with them, while falseness, deviousness, and artful deception typically are ascribed to those belonging to the upper classes [↗**"The System" *vs.* "The People"**, ↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**]. Human rights activists who draw attention to hasty legal proceedings, the evident suppression of truth and flagrant violations of the right to a fair trial, both in civil and military courts [↗**Court Trials**], operate in this same 'heroic', idealist spirit, as do commentors on ↗**Social Media** platforms, like the numerous Twitter hashtags and warning apps, or all those who aim to serve Truth and Justice by documenting lived reality with the help of their ↗**Mobile Phones** as evident proof of the falseness of official narratives.

It is important to remain attentive and help the Truth to be heard. In general, its advocates strive to achieve this with non-violent means. In some cases, however, even a feature film like *Mawlānā* shows some understanding for less moderate explosions of indignation. For instance, when the regime-friendly producers of the popular TV show *Ifham dīnak* ("Get to know your religion") set up a highly sensitive topic—Shia—for live discussion, with the aim of driving imam Ḥātim into a trap so they may get rid of the popular celebrity's provocative analyses, and when they then suddenly interrupt the program when Ḥātim says that God is there for *everybody* and that also Shia is Islam [↗**In Islam, …**], the spectators are fully on Ḥātim's side when he cannot see another way-out as to strike back against "the System" with his fists, knocking his interlocutor down to prevent the intriguers from silencing *himself*. He has to do so, for giving up resistance would mean to let the regime's intrigues, brainwashing and criminalizing strategies win the battle. Remaining silent would mean to give up one's dignity also when, on the day of the Rābʿa massacre, official discourse denounces the Muslim Brotherhood, again, as the dangerous devil seeking to destabilize the Egyptian nation, while the truth is: "There are no devils among us" (WAGUIH). Steadfast resistance against such

demonization is not only important in dealing with the state, however. Rather, the authorities' practices are replicated by many others, for instance the rich and mighty who manage to trick the eponymous heroine of *Nawwāra* and let her, the innocent and honest, hard-working woman, go to prison, or the anonymous—obviously Islamist—callers in the documentary *al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿrakah / La vallée du sel* who come up with allegedly true evidence for a Coptic family's guilt (they shall have forced Muslims into ↗**Conversions** to Christendom), and this false accusation serves them to blackmail the family and to self-authorize death sentences.

Enlightening one's fellow citizens about the truth and alerting them to all kinds of lies and techniques of painting fake pictures of reality—lies and techniques that many evidently still are unaware of—is a major incentive in much of cultural production. Here, the authors frequently rely on satire and/or fiction to highlight the contrast between false appearances and the reality behind them, often by simply juxtaposing or paralleling evidently contradictory impressions. For example, when the protagonists of *Nawwāra*, *The Nile Hilton Incident* or the semi-autobiographical *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna* traverse the city in a taxi or on a motorcycle, the camera typically zooms in on filthy details and shows ubiquitous misery and decay [↗**Garbage**]; at the same time, the accompanying sound track reproduces the latest news from the radio, almost cynically heralding the Government's recent laudable achievements and the President's always beneficial deeds [↗**The Voice from Above**].

The beautiful, modern 'paradises' of the ↗**Gated Communities** / Compounds are shown to be home to evil characters, often close to the regime and/or involved in politics, whose records are not at all as clean as the compounds they inhabit, as they turn out, in the course of the events, to be involved in theft, corruption, murder, … (*The Nile Hilton Incident*, *Nawwāra*, *Fawqa mustawà 'l-shubuhāt*). When these people speak, their language sounds convincing, smooth, generous, benign—but beware of them, they are clever hypocrites, as cunning and vicious and false as also many 'show-off' Muslims (in *Nawwāra*, for instance, a nurse in a hospital bears the promising name Mu'mina, i.e., the "believer", but her behaviour is far from being an example of Islamic humanism), and, of course, representatives of the government: in *Nawwāra*, the SCAF makes promises to the people (to gain popularity and support) but does not keep these promises; and when, in Tunisia, president Sebsi orders the return of a Bourguiba statue and imitates the popular leader by sitting behind the same desk as the public idol, etc. [↗**Father Figures**], social media are quick to mock such feigned reverence as transpicuous hypocrisy, seeking to ingratiate himself with the people without really working for their well-being.

Satire is practiced particularly in YouTube channels, where official narratives and their lofty language, but also many other established discourses, like that of commercials, or TV dramas and the popular Ramadan series, are constantly played with and exposed to humorous questioning through ironic parody [↗***ʔAlsh***]. They are sites of claiming back the word from those who tend to monopolize it and thus dominate everyday life with *their* versions of reality [↗**Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)**]. YouTube channels like Aḥmad Buḥayrī's *Il-Usbūʿ fī kīs* ("The Week in a Bag") offer witty comments on the top news of the week, including the ↗**Baby Milk** affair or the ↗**Dollar Crisis** in Egypt. Hishām ʿAfīfī's YouTube show *al-Taḥlīl al-istrātīǧī* ("Strategic Analysis") comes with hilarious parodies of advertisements and video clips that replace the original texts with unrelated content, alerting the audience to the difference between appearance and meaning and disclosing the logic of discourses one tends

to become used to, as potentially deceitful, illusionary, contradictory, absurd. A few even dare to oppose the propaganda depicting Giulio Regeni as a spy [↗**The Suspect Foreigner**]. YouTube channels typically also mock Tunisian president Sebsi's attempts to assume the role of the 'father of the nation,' or Egyptian president al-Sīsī's way of addressing the people like a gracious, benevolent patriarch talking to his children [↗**Father Figures**]. But the people are not the president's children, they are citizens with rights and obligations! And would such a father put his sons and daughters into jail?! [↗**Prison**]. YouTubers also target paternalism in general, and when they imitate and exaggerate they often do so also to inspire self-criticism on the side of the 'children' who often accept such relations as a given and continue to live their double lives [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**, ↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]. The channels serve as showcases that seek to enlighten and increase transparency—*Shaffāf* "transparent", the title of the online magazine of the Egyptian Universities Network (FAHMĪ), could be the name of many YouTube channels, too.

Accordingly, the tone in these productions typically tends to be very daring and outspoken. When the government claims to have solved the housing problem, one comment agrees: "Yes, by building more prisons!" Similarly, when Sisi, applauded by masses of "Long live Egypt" shouters, provocatively asks: "Where is the youth?", the answer in an *#al-shabāb fēn* Twitter message is: "Behind bars or buried in their graves!" (TWITTER) [↗**Disappearances**, ↗**Prison**]. In Tunisia, a corresponding audacity is possible now even outside the Internet in the non-virtual public. In Egypt, however, it can unfold only on YT channels that are operated from abroad so that their producers can feel safe.

Those who stay in the country have to resort to more subtle satire or to protect themselves behind the masks of fiction. In fiction, it is right, you use 'avatars' and therefore somehow hide yourself behind a 'false' identity. Nevertheless, you can tell what you think is the truth, as the truth of fiction may even be 'truer' than that of real life. It is for this reason that the young theatre enthusiasts from a poor Tunisian village, portrayed in *al-Ḥufra* ("The Pit"), do not feel they betray themselves or lie to their audiences when they dress as clowns or jugglers or give puppet plays; on the contrary, "In pantomime, we play [ultimately] what we are, our own experiences, our lives, our suffering" [↗**Dual Identities / Masking**]. It is probably for the same reason, the 'truth of fiction', that YouTubers, too, irrespective of whether they are acting from inside the country or from abroad, choose to appear as serious news presenters, scientific consultants, or talk show masters, or use muppets to play 'typical' roles, from the policeman to the jealous fiancée, from the poor witty *shābb* to the President himself. The 'falseness' of fiction allows the agents to address sensitive topics, it empowers the weak and provides immunity for the vulnerable. No wonder, then, that critics of a political system that is experienced as false and criminal frequently resort to *crime fiction* to express their views, and that polit-thrillers like *The Nile Hilton Incident* are flourishing: the detective-hero who takes upon himself the task of investigating and revealing the truth against all attempts of "the system" to conceal it, provides an ideal role model for everyone who is convinced that s/he is being cheated.

With the aim of self-protection, the creative invention of fictional 'alter egos' and fictive plots comes close to what other, less political groups—LGBT, Christians, converts [↗**LGBT**, ↗**Conversions**]—have been practicing for a long time already, and continue to practice in real, everyday life: in order to protect themselves against a society that is hostile

to their true identities, many conceal, and have to conceal, their true sexual identity or religious orientation so that their everyday life often is a 'false' life, a life lived in travesty in which they practice self-censoring, while their 'real' life is their second life, lived out in remote places and/or in hiding, at night, and often only for a short time (*Travesties*).

Reality and fiction both show that there are good reasons to be on one's guard. It can be extremely dangerous to be too outspoken about one's political conviction, sexual leanings, religious belonging, and fear is in place indeed. In Egypt, examples of political opposition in prison, disappeared without trace, and/or killed, abound [↗**Disappearances**, ↗**Prison**], a situation that is also reflected in a movie like *The Nile Hilton Incident*: the closer detective-hero Nūr al-Dīn comes to the truth the more his life is in danger; luckily, he survives several attempts to assassinate him, but he learns about witnesses who were killed, and finds a colleague tortured because he did not obey his superior's instructions to close the case. Even in Tunisia where people enjoy unprecedented freedom, political expression is threatened by a politicized and repressive security and juridical system inherited from the Ben Ali era. Moreover, "morally reprehensible" acts such as "cohabitation outside marriage," "indecent exposure" or "adultery" are still treated as criminal offenses and punished with harsh prison sentences, applying pre-revolutionary law that has remained unchanged. The rappers of *Ṣawt al-shāriʿ / Cloch'Art* are well aware, and afraid, of this, and the story, told in Leyla Bouzid's *ʿAlà ḥallat ʿaynī* (As I Open My Eyes), of the young rebellious singer Faraḥ who simply wants to be herself and "live life to the full," but then gets detained and tortured, emerging as a broken person, is all but unrealistic, as police forces in Tunisia still regularly act as "morality police" (BOUKHAYATIA) [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**] and interpreting alternative life-styles as potential threat to national security [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**]. It is in the same spirit that civilians in Egypt act as self-appointed guardians of public morality and, hence, supporters of state authorities [↗The **Honourable Citizen**], denouncing 'offenses' and providing 'evidence' that allows the state to put the 'culprits' on trial [↗**Court Trials**]. Social pressure and state repression are paralleled by acts of aggression from Islamist groups, as documented in *al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka / La Vallée du Sel* (Prayer and Battle / The Valley of Salt), where anonymous callers try to blackmail the owner of a Christian guesthouse, or when converts are forced to 'repent' [↗**Conversions**].

So, it makes sense, in many respects, to continue to hide, live one's true self in secret, behind a mask that conforms to the norms—political, religious, sexual—of society, the state, religious authorities or violent groups, and to remain silent, practice self-censorship, and think of ways of "tricking the system" [↗**Tricking the System / Tricked by the System**]. On the other hand, while self-protection is necessary and legitimate, many think that it is still equally important, or even more so, to insist on the truth and making it visible and heard—how else will it be possible to prevent that larger parts of the people believe in the all-pervasive official narratives and echo them faithfully? And how else can normative society and religion be changed so as to allow the truth to unfold in freedom?

Insisting on the truth is imperative however also for historical reasons. Isn't authenticity a precondition of national and cultural self-determination, and wouldn't tacit acceptance of lies and taboos be tantamount to betraying the old ideals of a sovereign nation and those pioneers who made enormous efforts to enhance *real* independence? The great Tahar Cheriaa, for example, incessantly worked to "free the screens" of Tunisian (and Arab)

cinema; for him, romantic and unrealistic movies meant a continuation of unhealthy lying while the countries needed authentic approaches, observing the truths and needs of real life (*Tahar Cheriaa: Taḥt ẓilāl al-bāwbāb/ A l'ombre du baobab*). The cineastic homage to the 'father' of Tunisian cinema comes as a strong reminder of a great tradition that should not be betrayed in the present [↗**Past *vs.* Present**].

As Tunisia and Egypt are struggling again now, in the post-Arab Spring years, for a new beginning, the historical perspective is at the same time relevant for the future. For the new, post-revolutionary societies, too, should be built on truth, not on lies; the new nations will have to rest on reliable, trustworthy foundations. It is in this spirit that the Committee for Truth and Dignity, in spite of its critics, starts the public hearings in Tunisia, and it is with the similar project of a realistic assessment of the present in mind that Egyptian movies like *Abadan lam nakun atfālan* or *Ākhir ayyām al-madīna* contrast official narrative [↗**The Voice from Above**] with visual evidence, weighing the latter against the former: in order to meet the future we have to know, reliably, where we are now. In the same vein, numerous productions give proof of the wish, on the part of their authors, of knowing yourself and being authentic. Thus, the young men in the Tunisian quasi-documentary *al-Ḥufra / La fosse* underline that playing theater may be difficult, yes; but in order to follow your talent and passion, i.e., truly be yourself, you have to do it, irrespective of all obstacles. ↗**Language**, too, is discussed as a matter of authenticity. For many writers, the local varieties of Arabic—Egyptian *ʿāmmiyya* and Tunisian *dāriǧa*—or even Berber (Tamazight) appear as the more natural language and can, therefore, help to live one's true self. In general, to find out who you really are and to learn to discern "your real self [from] your false self," Egyptian Muḥammad ṬĀHĀ advises *il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ*, i.e., to think "out of the box" and look at things, and yourself, not through others' normative lenses but your own, and always be aware that your feelings may simply conform to conventions or to what others expect of you. In contrast, but with the similar aim of helping his fellow citizens to be truly themselves [↗**Self-help**], Muṣṭafà ḤUSNĪ suggests an "Islamic way," given that Islam, as a religion from the East, can certainly claim to be more authentic than imported, Western forms of life. For the same reason, the celebration of ↗**Valentine's Day** is rejected by some as a kind of self-denial, the donning of a false, unauthentic identity. It is, without doubt, also a major reason for the continued success of Tunisian author Khawla ḤAMDĪ's novel *Fī qalbī ʾunthà ʿibriyya* ("A Hebrew Woman in My Heart"). Readers do not mind that the role models offered in the melodramatic text—conversion to Islam, clinging to Islam even in a non-Islamic environment, fighting for the Palestinian cause—testify to a rather traditional understanding of Islam, quite different from the unconventional interpretation of Islam propagated by Muṣṭafà Ḥusnī (and also his fictional counterpart, popular TV imam Ḥātim in *Mawlānā*). However, all three share the fact that they go for Islam rather than some Western philosophy or ideology [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**], and all three also are eager to stimulate in their audience a *conscious*, rationally well-reflected adoption of their suggestions [↗**In Islam, …**]: they offer concrete and positive examples of 'lived' authenticity, and they all *explain* why their suggestions are good, and better than others. In this way the audiences are also assured of the correctness and superior moral value of 'true, genuine' Islam. Unlike the normative political system and the religious establishment (but also Islamist ideology), who demand unquestioned loyalty and obedience and prescribe specific ways of thinking and

acting, these versions of Islam opt for a smooth, enlightened way, counting on open-minded discussion and insight into the verifiable truth of their arguments—very different from the falseness of the Voice from Above and the blind submission demanded by the ubiquitous roaring loudspeakers.

The need to find and live one's true identity is emphasized together with pointing out the negative consequences of not being able to do so. The Egyptian documentary *Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan* tells, among others, the story of a boy from a slum area who, when still a child, earned some money as a prostitute, then continued as a gay when reaching puberty. His elder brother, having internalized conservative society's contempt for homosexuals, feels he must restore the family's honour and suffers twice: because of the 'shame' brought about on the family by his gay brother and because he thinks he will have to kill this brother—*his* brother. The gay brother himself, already addicted to drugs, goes into hiding and, perhaps, commits ↗**Suicide**. Many ↗**LGBT** people who, due to social pressure, cannot 'come out' experience similar challenges. And so does young Khālid in *Sheikh Jackson.* He has to conceal his fervent admiration for Michael Jackson because his father calls the pop icon an "effeminate" (*mukhannath*) and forbids the son to dress, sing and dance like the idol he is so fond of. In order to 'cure' the son from his 'aberrance' the father entrusts him to a friend, a devoted shaykh, who instructs him in Islam, and he becomes an imam. The movie stages the psychological trauma arising from the incompatibility of a conservative Islam and Khālid's enduring admiration for Michael Jackson, an unhealthy and painful conflict that is only solved, in the end, with the help of a ↗**Psychiatrists**. The solution consists, for the son as well as for the father, in accepting the possibility, and moral innocuousness, of a 'merged' identity—Muslim imam *and* pop enthusiast—, a solution very much in the spirit of Muḥammad ṬĀHĀ's advice to think "out of the box" (*il-Khurūg ʿan il-naṣṣ*): norms of all kind can be harmful and cause a lot of psychological damage because they are artificial and may prevent you from discovering and living your true self.

The reconciliation between father and son at the end of *Sheikh Jackson* shows: In the same way as movies dramatize the negative consequences of social pressure, they also can offer positive examples of how the conflicts between true and false identities can be overcome. The Tunisian movie *Corps étranger* has a ↗**Dancing** scene in which the three dancers—a male and two women—all give in, for a moment, to the natural impulses they feel (and thus allow for the truth of sexual and emotional attraction between them to unfold). For a short moment of freedom from the constraints of society's false norms, an atmosphere of happiness and fulfilment dominates. (But then, the male [!] protagonist the "experiment"/ testing out (where are the limits?) is soon interrupted: finds the tension between internalized sexual role models and his actual experience too difficult to bear—and leaves the dancing floor) [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. Similarly, the 25-year-old Tunisian protagonist of *Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi* ("I Love You, Hedi") who, in his 'official' life, is a "lie" because he conceals his true nature, is able to live his true identity and moments of hitherto unknown happiness with a liberal woman in a ↗**Tourist Resorts** ; but in the end he, too, the male, does not find the courage to break with his normal, false life and leave the country for France (he is married to a conservative woman, who was his mother's choice, not his own, and has the poorly-paid and little-giving job of a traveling sales representative). The conflict is symbolic of the whole of Tunisia at the crossroads: should one prefer the 'safe' way of tradition or dare to find and

live one's true self? The film shows some understanding for Hédi's decision (especially because a rupture with his previous life would cause much harm to his loving wife); at the same time, however, it insinuates that, in the long run, ignoring one's true feelings and continuing as ever will not pay out and, perhaps, cause even greater harm. And, as also the documentary *Travesties* demonstrates (following cross-dressers into a disco): the act of liberating oneself from the constraints of everyday masking can be truly ecstatic…

Thus, while finding the truth is necessary for several reasons, and can be rewarding in many respects, it may not only be difficult to discover and reveal it, but sometimes also almost impossible. The polit-thriller *The Nile Hilton Incident*, for instance, ends on a pessimistic note: when the detective-policeman Nūr al-Dīn (his name translates as "Light of the World"!) has successfully gathered all he needed to find out who was the murderer of the woman in the Nile Hilton, and in this way brought light into the details of the whole network of "the system," his superior (who collaborated with the Ancien Régime) uses the revolutionary turmoils to set fire on the car of the killer (a member of the *amn al-dawla*, the security police), so that it burns down together with the latter's body. Other evidence, too, is destroyed in the fire the angry revolting masses set on Nūr al-Dīn's police station. So, how to prove the crimes committed by the old régime? — The truth is controlled by the régime, and thus lost for the common people, also in Aḥmad Khālid TAWFĪQ 's vision *Mithla Ikārūs* ("Like Icarus"). The novel tells the story of a man who can foresee the future. His knowledge about how things will develop due to the mismanagement of affairs by the régime in the present [↗**Hope = Hell (Dystopia)**] is too dangerous for the regime. So the Cassandra-like prophet is kept under custody ("as a strategic treasure") and declared as "mad"—but the intelligence is shared with the Pentagon...

Also, when counter-evidence becomes too overwhelming, the régime may choose to confess that something is not as it should be—but only partially. This makes it difficult for critics to accuse them of denying or distorting the truth, as they may seem transparent, not concealing anything. The Egyptian TV series *Fawqa mustawà 'l-shubuhāt* ("Beyond Doubt"), for example, does have some scenes in a women's prison. The message to the audience: look, Egypt is a liberal country where censorship allows to show such scenes and where women prisoners are treated quite well. What is not said, in the meantime, is that actual prison cells are overcrowded and dirty and that actual inmates definitively aren't in good shape after weeks of detention. — On other occasions, too, the régime is eager to demonstrate that they do not deny obvious shortages, failures, difficulties, crises; rather, they are well aware of that all and take up the challenges with determination. At the Cairo book fair, for example, a series of round-table discussions is arranged under the heading *al-Thaqāfa fī muwājaha* ("Facing the challenges of culture" or "Culture under scrutiny"). It's like stealing potential critics' thunder: nobody will be able to accuse the state (as the fair's organizer) of trying to sweep problems under the carpet. On the podium, however, only selected guests deliver their—long and harmless—speeches, and there are security forces present to prevent any voice from the public (if any) from becoming too critical…

In Tunisia, things look quite different from how they are in Egypt. There are the ↗**Public Hearings** of the victims of Ben Ali's dictatorship, and there is much public discussion also about what is going on in the country right now, about current politics and the developments in post-revolutionary society. Yet the first impression of a—comparatively—open battlefield

may also be deceptive, as the fighters on this battlefield are aware that the battleground is also a minefield: the freer you may feel to raise a topic and/or to accuse someone, the more you become aware of the explosiveness of the issue and the damages your intervention may cause. Thus, there is much self-censorship, as many shy away from becoming the one who may be held responsible for the eruption of a social conflict in a situation where national unity and social harmony are at stake. Nevertheless, many others think that the truth about past injustice and present ills *has* to be confessed, even if this may mean risking to lose things or persons who are dear to you.

The Revolutionaries themselves are no exemption—they, too, may have committed wrong, and if they have done so, this should be confessed, to make discussion about it possible and avoid another form of injustice—the injustice of self-righteousness winners. *Ghadwa ḥayy* | *Demain dès l'aube* (Burning Hope) makes this point. Its plot re-enacts key scenes from the Revolution and their moral-ethical consequences. During the uprisings, an adolescent activist was trapped by a policeman and subsequently raped. Two young women intervened and prevented the worst. However, in defense of the boy, one of them used an iron bar and, in her turn, almost beat the policeman to death. When the humiliated angry boy wanted to finish him, the other woman activist stopped him, and they left. The policeman survived, but only as a cripple. The movie stages the impact of the past on the present most impressively: the woman who used the iron bar discovers that the man she is in love with, is the son of the policeman she made into a cripple. She feels full of guilt and finally dares to confess the truth to her beloved, knowing that this probably will mean the end of their relationship. Leaving, she kisses the man in a way reminding of the way her friend, the other activist, kissed the infuriated boy to stop him from kicking and finishing the policeman after the rape. Earlier on, the two women had found out about the boy's death: unable to overcome the trauma of the rape, he had first radicalized himself (he considered leaving for the IS in Syria) and was then killed by a mine when training in the desert. – The truth is cruel and hard to deal with, because it reveals responsibilities and raises myriad ethical questions…

But it *has* to be told, nonetheless. And, as, for instance, the Tunisian documentary *Ṣawt al-shāriʿ* | *Cloch'Art* makes clear, the younger generation can be an inspiring example for their parents. The film shows that the young rappers whose texts address current issues in a daring, direct manner, meet many obstacles, among which also one of their fathers' strict opposition against the sons' activities. One of the mothers, however, supports her son; she has even composed some lyrics for him. When she sings the corresponding songs she breaks into tears, concluding: "one should be honest, say openly what one thinks and believes in."

Thus, in the youth's fight for the truth, fathers arguing that too much frankness and disrespect for taboos may be harmful to society and corrupt public morals, often become allies, consciously or inadvertently, of those who have an interest in hiding the truth [↗**Young *vs.* Settled**] and demonize them as "devils" and a danger for the country's security and national-social unity [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**], just as they are used to do with critics from the religious camp (like the Brotherhood), or the unruly Ultras whom the police regularly accuses of being thugs causing violence and committing crimes [↗**Football**].

In the battle for discourse hegemony, powers are clearly unbalanced [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**]. Receiving the lion's share of the national budget, the security sectors in Egypt as well as in Tunisia are very mighty and have powerful means to keep opposition and

unwanted leakage of uncomfortable facts or the revelation of compromising truths under control—not complete control, though, but often nearly complete. Judging from the martial terminology used in the context of fighting the "Facebook state" (an allusion, used in Egypt, to the loathsome "Islamic State"?), the internet and social media seem to be the hardest enemy to fight [↗**Social Media**]. Accordingly, state security entertains "digital armies" or "electronic brigades" to meet the challenges of the "attacks" directed at them by the other side's "social media brigades." These "combat forces" are there to monitor and undermine regime-critical online activity, to deny accusations, to label Facebook a subversive "conspiracy from the West," to disseminate false rumours via fake accounts and fake profiles, to criminalize the "enemies of the people," and to spread all kinds of propaganda. Much of this seems banal and hard to believe for the experienced observer. But many narratives are not easily seen through either, and reliable facts impossible to obtain, so that the search for the truth definitively reaches its limits. In a desperate attempt to save the logic of True and False and find one's way through the labyrinths of seemingly contradictory data, numerous conspiracy theories seek to reconstruct a plausible truth from the facts that are available and seem reliable (KOERBER). In reality, however, in many cases the truth cannot be distinguished from the lie, and the thicket of fabricated news, rumours, and conspiracy theories turns out to be impenetrable. Slowly, one starts to accept that a decision will have to remain pending, or even is impossible… [↗**True = False (Life in Limbo)**].

Related Entries

ARRAYS – *ʔAlsh* ♦ *ʿAshwāʾiyyāt* ♦ Baby Milk ♦ Celebrities ♦ Conversions ♦ Court Trials ♦ Dancing ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Éveil d'une nation / *Ṣaḥwat umma* ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ In Islam, … ♦ Language ♦ LGBT ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Self-help ♦ Social Media ♦ Suicide ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System ♦ Valentine's Day ♦ The Voice from Above ♦ *Zaḥma*

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ "The System" *vs.* "The People" ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ Young *vs.* Settled

CODES COLLAPSED – Hope = Hell (Dystopia) ♦ Inferiority = Superiority (Satire) ♦ True = False (Life in Limbo)

References

Written sources

Aḥmad ʿABD AL-ḤĀFIẒ. "Ḥaṣād 2016 | fīdiyū wa-ṣuwar… ʿām al-ʿāṣima al-ʾidāriyya al-jadīda." *Mubtadā News*, December 31, 2016, <https://www.mobtada.com/cases/551717/حصاد-2016-فيديو-وصور-عام-العاصمة-الإدارية-الجديدة> (last accessed Jan. 15, 2022).

Muḥammad BARAKĀT. "Wazīr al-dākhiliyyah: lā jūjad 'ikhtifāʾ qasrī' fī Miṣr... wa-nattakhidh ijrāʾāt rādiʿah ḍidd al-mukhṭiʾīn." *al-Waṭan*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/848267> (last accessed March 21, 2018).

Rihab BOUKHAYATIA. 2016."Tunisie: Abus, excès de zèle des policiers…la police tunisienne est-elle une police des moeurs?" *Huffpost Maghreb*, January 21, <https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/01/19/tunisie-abus-policiers_n_9009674.html> (accessed September 18, 2018).

Hājar FAHMĪ. "'Āmm al-shabāb '2016' bi'l-jāmi'āt: bayn 'ilghā' al-intikhābāt wa-''tiqāl wa-'khtifā' qasrī li-mā yazīd 'an 140 ṭāliban." *Shaffāf: shabakat al-jāmi'āt al-miṣriyyah* (online), December 18, 2016, <http://www.shafaff.com/article/53152> (as of Dec. 31, 2016).

Khawla ḤAMDĪ. *Fī qalbī 'unthà 'ibriyya.* Gīzah: Kayān, 2012 (and later editions).

Mustafa HOSNY [Muṣṭafà ḤUSNĪ]. *Fann al-ḥayāh* and *'Ā'id 'ilà 'llāh*. Soundcloud, Ramadan 2016, <https://soundcloud.com/mustafahosny/sets/2016-1> and <https://soundcloud.com/mustafahosny/sets/2016-2>.

Amr KHALIFA. "In Egypt, journalism is a crime." *Middle East Eye*, December 2, 2016, rev. December 6, 2016, <http://www. middleeasteye.net/columns/actually-egypt-journalism-crime-1337317191> (last accessed November 25, 2018).

KOERBER, Benjamin. *Conspiracy in Modern Egyptian Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. (Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature)

MICHAELSON, Ruth. "App launches in Egypt to combat forced disappearances." *The Guardian* (International edition, online), September 6, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/06/app-launches-egypt-combat-forced-disappearances-i-protect> (last accessed March 14, 2018).

Muḥammad ṬĀHĀ. 2016. *il-Khurūg 'an il-naṣṣ*. Cairo: Dār Tūyā.*al-Taḥrīr*. "'Abd al-Ghaffār yunfī wujūd ikhtifā' qasrī... wa-Khālid 'Alī: il-wazīr khāyif yitḥākam." *al-Taḥrīr*, March 16, 2016, < https://www.tahrirnews.com/posts/392197/ عبد+الغفار+ينفي+وجود+اختفاء+قسري..+وخالد+علي: الوزير+خايف+يتحاكم> (last accessed March 21, 2018).

Aḥmad Khālid TAWFĪQ. *Mithla Īkārūs*. al-Qāhira: Dār al-Shurūq, 2015 (and later editions).

[TWITTER =] Hashtag "il-shabāb fēn?" Most popular hashtag on October 26, 2016, <https://twitter.com/search?vertical= default&q=فين_الشباب>.

Tamer WAGUIH. "Cairo, Massacres and Our History." *MadàMaṣr*, September 1, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/ 2016/09/01/opinion/politics/cairo-massacres-and-our-history/>.

Movies

Abadan lam nakun aṭfālan (We Have Never Been Kids). Documentary by Maḥmūd Sulaymān (Mahmood Soliman). EG, U.A.E., Qatar, RL 2016.

Ākhir ayyām al-madīna (In the Last Days of the City). By Tāmir al-Sa'īd (Tamer el Said). EG, DE, UK, U.A.E. 2016.

'Alà ḥallat 'aynī / À peine j'ouvre les yeux (As I Open My Eyes). By Leyla Bouzid. TN, F, B 2015*.

Corps étranger (Foreign Body). By Raja Amari. TN, F 2016.

Fawq mustawà al-shubuhāt (Beyond Suspicion) TV drama, written by 'Abd Allāh Ḥasan and Amīn Gamāl, Midḥat al-'Adl (ishrāf drāmī) and Muḥammad Rajā' (scenario), directed by Hānī Khalīfa. EG, Ramaḍān 2016.

Ghadwa ḥayy / *Demain dès l'aube* (Burning Hope). By Luṭfī Āshūr (Lotfi Achour). TN 2016.

al-Ḥufra / La fosse) (The Pitch). Short film by Ashraf Ḥammāmī (Achref Hammami). TN 2016.

Mawlānā (Our Master) / *The Preacher.* By Magdī Aḥmad 'Alī (Magdy Ahmed Ali). EG, U.A.E. 2016.

Nawwāra (Nawara). By Hāla Khalīl (Hala Khalil). EG 2016.

Nḥibbik, Hādī / Hédi (Hedi). By Muḥammad Bin 'Aṭiyya (Mohamed Ben Attia). TN, B, F 2016.

The Nile Hilton Incident. By Ṭāriq Ṣāliḥ (Tarik Saleh). EG, DE, SE, DK 2017**.

al-Ṣalāt wa'l-maʿraka / La Vallée du Sel (Prayer and Battle / The Valley of Salt). Documentary by Christophe Majdī Ṣābir (Magdy Saber). EG, CH 2016.

Ṣawt al-shāriʿ (The Voice of the Street) / *Cloch'Art.* Documentary by Manāl Qaṭrī (Manel Katri). TN 2016.

Sheikh Jackson. By ʿAmr Salāma (Amr Salama). EG 2017**.

Tahar Cheriaa: Taḥt ẓilāl al-bāwbāb/ A l'ombre du baobab (At the baobab's shadow). Documentary by Muḥammad Shallūf (Mohamed Challouf). TN 2015*.

Travesties. Short film (documentary) by Safoin Ben Abdelali. TN 2015*.

* Produced in 2014 or 2015 but shown in 2016 on national and international film festivals as still representative of the current situation and attitudes towards life.

** Published and shown on festivals in 2017 or 2018 but shot in 2016.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

Voice *vs.* Silence

By N.N.

► Desideratum

Evernote keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry

- activism, activist(s) (*QTh*)
- Avaaz
- ʿAzza Ḥinnāwī (Henawy)
- book covers
- calm *vs.* noise
- courage *vs.* fear/timidity
- critics
- cultural cleansing
- cultural spaces
- cultural struggle
- emotion(s), emotional mobilisation, emotionalism
- *Ǧumʿat al-Ghaḍab*, the Day of Rage (*QTh*)
- my voice
- Omar Hayek
- political activism
- political advertising
- polls, ~ing
- press
- protest(s), protest marches
- public arguing, public criticism/critique
- public discourse
- public opinion = Chaos
- public sphere
- publishers, publishing houses
- raise criticism, speak up to power, speaking up
- right to speak
- scandal(s)
- secret
- social criticism
- social mobilisation
- special issue for Aḥmad Nāgī
- summary of all scandals
- Ṭanṭā University Faculty of Medicine (9/4/2016)
- theatre
- voice (*QTh*), to have a voice, listen to me!
- vote
- wall slogans
- whistle-blowing
- who can speak/decide in the name of the Brotherhood?
- women in parliament
- words
- writers
- al-Zāwiya

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Father Figures ♦ LGBT ♦ *Manīsh msāmiḥ* ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Social Media ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Past *vs.* Present

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *374–*374
© N. N.

Young *vs.* Settled

By ALBRECHT HOFHEINZ

"How old are you? 29!? What have you achieved? What do you plan to build your life on?", a concerned middle-aged man from Alexandria upbraids his son in *Little Eagles*, a documentary about the filmmaker's problematic relationship with his father. Dad wants to see his son in a proper job feeding a family, and hopes that going to the mosque and memorising passages from the Qur'an might help—while the son is afraid of merely repeating the same old pattern as his father. The son wants to *experience* life *emotionally*, to *taste* it, to take part in improving it, to feel friendship and love. He is *dreaming* of a world open to many possibilities, a world where one can try out many roles and gain self-confidence through one's own achievements combined with the trust granted by the older generation, a world where one does not have to sacrifice this dream of personal fulfilment for a stale stability. The father, however, displays utter incomprehension for this dream. He wants his son to *settle down* [*yastaqirr*]. To be settled means to have a stable income and a suitable place to house a family [↗**Apartment Wanted**], to marry, beget children, and pay for their upbringing, enduring all hardship along the way, suffering silently if one must. Emotional relations, emotional development, personal fulfilment, are all subdued to this goal. The emblem of this settling-down is the father quitting school at age 10 to get the first safe job he was offered—as a state-employed clothing presser—and remain in this safety for the rest of his life, flattening all ups and downs that come his way. Growing up in such a world, the son is left gazing out the window, melancholically longing for a positive father-figure he could look up to and aspire to imitate [↗**Father Figures**], an engaged father, a father with ideals, ideals that he would want his children to carry on: a father who would want his children to fly. Alas, in the society he finds himself in, only a minority of parents try to help their children to become "Little Eagles". So most, eventually, end up settling down, visiting "the drowned continent of their youth" (HANDAL) only in occasional daydreams [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**; ↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. Writer AḤMAD NĀĞĪ uses strong words when he denounces this demand to "live like your parents have lived." He calls the representatives of the old established order "zombies" and decries "the magnitude of the authority the zombie fathers possess and the immense pressure young people are under […] to assume a single path in life, a future that includes nothing but marriage and bearing children in a cycle of reproducing more zombies."

Social reproduction is, indeed, what the young are expected to accomplish. In principle, the young are allowed to dream of a bright future—but they should use this dreaming drive to establish themselves as responsible adults. In theory, a period of *youth*—of dreaming, growing, and preparing—is followed by a period of *achievement*: of established adulthood. *Establishing* oneself (another way of translating *yastaqirr*) is thus the goal that drives the actions of most men. This norm is socially and morally so firmly rooted that it is seldom questioned, and whatever the inner doubts and struggles that individuals may experience, the majority strives hard to conform in realising "full conventional adulthood" (SCHIELKE). Tension—also inner tension—arises first and foremost from the economic impossibility for

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *375–*380
© Albrecht Hofheinz, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, NO

many to achieve this goal by the time men (for the economic burden is conventionally placed on them) turn thirty [↗**Male *vs.* Female**]. Youth unemployment (around 35% in both Egypt and Tunisia according to official figures [WORLD BANK]) is a major problem. "32 and not able to marry," *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm* titles its outlook onto the new year (IBTIHĀL USĀMA). Men often have to postpone marrying until they are 35–40 or even 45, ten years later than what used to be normal (SCHIELKE; in Tunisia, recent statistics reveal that over 80% of men aged 25–29 are single [N. N., JUMHŪRIYYA]). The normal reality, therefore, is to abnormally postpone 'real' adulthood. And in order to settle down, many need to move, to the city, to the Gulf [↗**Migration**], where they lead a life in suspense, "not for its own sake […], but for something to come in the future" (SCHIELKE, also for the rest of this paragraph). When they finally do settle down as 'established' adults, "this adulthood is often more precarious than what is supposed to be 'normal,' what they had hoped and worked for." Stability remains elusive: it is precarious due to economic pressures [↗**Dollar Crisis**], and insufficient due to the steady desire to make possible, for oneself and one's offspring, "a life as we know it, only better." *Istiqrār*, stability, is "an ideal that you never reach." The attempt to establish oneself and one's family on a higher material and social level than where one came from creates a dynamic of hopes and expectations and steady frustration with the status quo. As a middle-aged man from the countryside who has finally managed to establish a home and a family sums up: You work your butt off to achieve it, and then you die. Establishing oneself is therefore a goal regarded with mixed feelings by those pursuing it.

The authorities, the pillars of society, display an equally ambiguous attitude toward the youth (*al-shabāb*, "a fluid marker that can be used to describe people anywhere between the ages of 15 and 40 years old" [BIRD]). On the one hand, young people's energy and vitality are necessary to maintain the vitality of society and economy, to reproduce itself and thus live on. On the other, their unbridled energy is a potential threat to the existing order of things; combined with the economic pressure they are exposed to, it may turn them into a ticking "time bomb" (AL-SAYYĀD). On the one hand, therefore, both state officials, international consultants, political parties, or grand assemblies such as "The First National Conference for the Youth" (MITWALLĪ & ZALAṬA) regularly call for a greater involvement of "the youth" in order to defuse this threat and to harvest their creative potential—a creativity that the young otherwise amply demonstrate surviving in the informal economy [↗**Normality = Heroism (Surviving)**]. Psychiatrist ʿĀyida Sayf al-Dawla analyses the exhortative rhetoric of glorifying young people as entrepreneurs and persons "willing to work for the sake of the country, with very little in return" as fitting "the notion of a neoliberal contract between governments and citizens that has been globally normalized: the idea that young people will grow up, contribute productively to society and raise families that will in turn do likewise" (BIRD) [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint** (Individual *vs.* Collective)]. But while individual achievements are being celebrated (PRIMO) and presented as models to imitate—from internationally successful professionals to the *Fatāt al-ʿAraba*, the "Handcart Girl" whose picture, tirelessly pulling her load past the proverbial *shabāb il-ʔahwa*, the lazybones wasting their time in a coffee shop, goes viral on Facebook and earns her an invitation to the Presidential Palace—possibilities for real participation in decision-making and in creating real alternatives to the way things are remain severely restricted (PRIMO; FARAH HOSNY & PRIMO; SUMAYKA; THE ECONOMIST; AMĪRA FIKRĪ; WAAD AHMED; HONA AL-3ASEMA). Not

only are they not yet established as responsible adults; novelist Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm notes that there is an "overall perception of the youth as a threat […] the term 'youth' is used as a substitute for 'revolutionary tendencies' by politicians" (BIRD). Outspokenly anti-revolutionary politician Murtaḍà Manṣūr gives voice to a crass moralising disdain shared by some in the establishment: "This is the youth that are wearing tight pants and taking money from their fathers and taking 15 years to graduate from college […]. They smoke pot. They insult their girlfriends on Facebook. They have no value in this country" (AMINA ISMAIL) [↗**The Honourable Citizen**; ↗**Social Media**]. Such contempt provokes anger and frustration. Some try to find creative solutions to this: a Cairo bookshop has set up a special dark room equipped with a full drum kit to allow young Egyptians to "scream their stress away" (ADELA SULIMAN). More normal options, however, are drugs [↗**Hashish**], "poverty, emigration or, for a minority, *jihad*" (THE ECONOMIST). The main reason driving many into the arms of radical Islamists, a young Tunisian believes, is the fact that the young are "continuously excluded from any decision-making process" (NOURJAHEN JEMAA). And the son of the Alexandrian clothing presser remembers why he joined the Muslim Brotherhood as a teenager: "My recruiter Khālid gave me a sense of importance and of self-assurance"—an appreciation he sorely misses receiving from his own father (AL-NUṢŪR AL-ṢAGHĪRA).

For most, however, it is not radicalization but more subtle forms of insubordination that mark their mood in the face of elders. A cartoon in the semi-official daily *al-Ahrām* shows a youngster finger-pointing at his private tutor: "You're late today! Next time, you'll need to bring your guardian!" (ḤASAN) The perception that the young generation 'no longer' unquestioningly submits to the authority of their seniors is widespread, and while this is portrayed as a threat to the stability of the social order by more conservative forces, it is celebrated by activists as the main and lasting achievement of the revolution.

> "Almost all films from the region screened at this year's Berlinale festival have a common theme: the narrowness of the traditional social norms that literally deprive the young generation of breathing space. The Arab Spring had the young questioning the old political order, but it was not overcome. While most now believe that the Arab Spring has failed, in the films of Arab directors in their thirties, it is still alive" (WILDANGEL).

The tension between such aspirations and the dominant trend to settle into conventional social norms remains unresolved and a constant source of irritation as well as a creative challenge to strive for change. The 'clash' of 'Young *vs.* Settled' comes to the fore perhaps most strikingly in the (relatively isolated) cases where unmarried women in their twenties move out of their paternal home to live by themselves or with female friends. A Facebook group ("Femi-Hub") established to help these women in finding a job and a new home attracts some attention. The founders of this group defiantly assert that "this is a very natural step for anyone who has grown capable of choosing a path of self-reliance to achieve one's goals." Most commentators, however, are adamant in that "Arab societies do not allow girls to be independent persons" and that such thoughts lead to "a breakdown of the idea of the family and to social disarray." "This idea will not succeed in our society since it contradicts many norms and customs as well as religious tenets" (DĪNĀ ʿABD AL-KHĀLIQ).

Quite a few cultural productions illustrate this contrast between the dreams and aspirations of young people and the harsh realities that make it all but impossible to realize these dreams. In the Tunisian short film *al-Ḥufra* ("The Pit"), two young men aspire to realize themselves on stage, to perform what they 'really' are, but it proves difficult to get out of the 'pit' they find themselves in. Where is life? Here and now, where I experience it? Or in a beyond where my dreams point to? Or is it out there, where inevitable fate demands me to survive? "I'm afraid of life, it's so hard," confesses one of the two as they must settle for much less than they had hoped for. ↗**Suicide** rates are rising in Tunisia, particularly among the young (HAMZA MARZOUK; LA PRESSE). The strength of traditional social mores in shaping what people settle for is also shown in the Tunisian film *Nḥibbak yā Hādī* (*Hédi*), where the protagonist forsakes following the dream of a newly appearing, emotionally exciting, yet insecure future with a spirited, unconventional woman, resigning himself instead to marrying the girl his family has chosen for him, although he feels nothing for her. Beneath a calm and dispassionate surface, inwardly Hādī is boiling and for a while, he leads a double life, but in the end, he gives in to trading risky self-realization and freedom for conventional social safety. The Egyptian writer DĪNĀ IBRĀHĪM SHAʿBĀN's new novel *Mudhakkirāt Ǧamīla Saʿīd* ("Memoirs of Ms Beautiful & Happy") has a similar theme: a woman's trajectory, between the ages of 15 and 45, from ambition to turmoil to resigned submission. Such a trajectory where self-realization has to be sacrificed for conformity with established norms has its price, and people are aware of it. It may leave one with an inner void, as in MUḤAMMAD ʿABD AL-NABĪ's coming-of-age novel *Fī ghurfat al-ʿankabūt* ("In the Spider's Room"). Growing up grappling with confusions, uncertainties, and troubling questions, the protagonist there "barely learns anything from his journey. We see him from childhood through to his forties going through various—but not many—experiences that only add to his uncertainty, barely providing answers to any of the questions that trouble his existence" (SHĀFIʿĪ). Toward the end, in a dream, he looks at himself as a new-born baby which he proceeds to uncover, but he

> finds nothing underneath, absolutely nothing […]: this is an almost void person, who only recognizes himself in comparison to others, a person who has something to say about others but not much about himself, a person who stands facing the mirror when he finds out about his mother's informal marriage, unsure how he should feel. (*ibid.*)

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Hashish ♦ Father Figures ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Migration ♦ Social Media ♦ Suicide

CODES – Freedom *vs.* Constraint (Individual *vs.* Collective) ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present

CODES COLLAPSED – Normality = Heroism (Surviving)

References

Written Sources and Videos

[The ECONOMIST =] N. N. "The ruining of Egypt: Repression and the incompetence of Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi are stoking the next uprising", *The Economist*, August 6, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2016/08/06/the-ruining-of-egypt>.

[HONA AL-3ASEMA =] N. N. "Hal 2016 kān ʿĀm al-Shabāb al-Miṣrī?", *C[apital] B[roadcast] C[enter]*, December 25, 2016, <https://youtu.be/3Xa9hrljvQk>.

[JUMHŪRIYYA =]. N. N. "Irtifāʿ nisbat al-ʿunūsa fī Tūnis ilà aqṣà muʿaddalātihā: akthar min milyūnayn wa-rubʿ milyūn imraʾa", November 3, 2016, <https://www.jomhouria.com/art60420 ارتفاعنسبةالعنوسةفيتونسالىأقصىمعدلاتها:أكثرمنمليونينوربعمليونامرأة_>.

[La PRESSE =] N. N. « Voilà pourquoi les suicides ont augmenté ! », *La Presse*, September 10, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmTzgdRC6H9Et6sZixcFMzCijypn8OLzzQ4>.

ADELA SULIMAN. "Young Egyptians scream their stress away in Cairo bookshop", *Reuters*, October 25, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-scream-room-idUSKCN12P1GH>.

AḤMAD NĀĞĪ. "Wadāʿan li'l-shabāb", *Madà*, December 18, 2015, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2015/12/18/opinion/u/وداعاً-للشباب/>.

AMINA ISMAIL. "Flamboyant Egyptian politician craves public eye", *The New York Times*, January 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/world/middleeast/flamboyant-egyptian-politician-craves-public-eye.html>.

AMĪRA FIKRĪ. "Faysbūk yughayyir ḥayāt 'Fatāt il-ʿArabʾ ilà al-abad", *al-ʿArab*, November 14, 2016, <https://www.evernote.com/l/AmSF_d-MRUVPba9zabR9VB9hQP6z-Oj201I>.

BIRD, Laura. "Loyal youth, model citizens", *Madà*, February 14, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/14/feature/politics/loyal-youth-model-citizens/>.

DĪNĀ ʿABD AL-KHĀLIQ. "«Femi-Hub» hāribāt min al-ahl bi-sm «al-ḥurriyya»", *al-Waṭan*, January 1, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170309062538/http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/891202>.

DĪNĀ IBRĀHĪM SHAʿBĀN. *Mudhakkirāt Ǧamīla Saʿīd*, Cairo: Ibdāʿ, 2016.

HAMZA MARZOUK. « Tunisie-2016 : 8661 mouvements sociaux et 792 tentatives de suicide », *L'Économiste Maghrébin*, December 30, 2016, <https://www.leconomistemaghrebin.com/2016/12/30/tunisie-2016-8661-mouvements-sociaux-792-tentative-de-suicides/>.

HANDAL, Nathalie. " The City and the writer: In Cairo with Yahia Lababidi", *Words without Borders*, August 8, 2016, <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/the-city-and-the-writer-in-cairo-with-yahia-lababidi-nathalie-handal>.

ḤASAN, F.G. "Karīkātēr al-Ahrām al-Yawmī", *al-Ahrām*, October 16, 2016, <https://is.gd/f2JKGg>.

HOSNY, Farah, and Valentina PRIMO. "16 of 2016: Egypt's real influencers", *CairoScene*, December 30, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161231035133/http:// www.cairoscene.com/LifeStyle/16-of -2016-Egypt-s-Real-Influencers>.

IBTIHĀL USĀMA. "Vīdeō… mādhā qāl al-miṣriyūn ʿan 2015… Sāʾiq tāksī: '32 sana wi-mish ʿārif atǧawwiz', *Shārik*, January 1, 2016, <https://sharek.almasryalyoum.com/cities/cairo/470586/>.

MITWALLĪ, Aḥmad Sāmī, and Shādī ʿAbdallāh ZALAṬA. "al-Sīsī yuṭliq al-Muʾtamar al-Waṭanī al-Awwal li'l-Shabāb al-yawm bi-Sharm al-Shaykh", al-Ahrām, October 25, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161027101913/https:/www.ahram.org.eg/News/192064/135/557609/السيسى-يطلق-المؤتمر-الوطنى-الأول-للشباب-اليوم-بشرم-ملف-خاص/.aspx>.

MUḤAMMAD ʿABD AL-NABĪ. *Fī ghurfat al-ʿankabūt*, Cairo: Dār al-ʿAyn, 2016.

NOURJAHEN JEMAA. "An alternative to radicalization", *Tunisia Live*, October 20, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170426105352/http://www.tunisia-live.net/2016/10/20/an-alternative-to-radicalization/>.

PRIMO, Valentina. "4 Mindblowing Egyptian teenage entrepreneurs changing the world at Spark Entrepreneurship Camp", *CairoScene*, July 21, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160722122654/http://www.cairoscene.com/Geek/4-Mindblowing-Egyptian-Teenage-Entrepreneurs-Changing-the-World-at-Spark-Entrepreneurship-Camp>.

AL-SAYYĀD, Ayman. "Wa-lākinnahū…«ʿĀm al-Shabāb»", *al-Shurūq*, February 7, 2016, <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=06022016&id=ef9bdbe9-66da-42f8-a797-fcb10f86e3d5>.

SCHIELKE, Samuli. "Stability as a utopia: Revisiting Egyptian youth as they grow older, and the future tense as time passes", Academic hour, School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, September 21, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160922155308/http://cas.au.dk/aktuel/arrangementer/arrangement/artikel/-5383421b52/>, recording available at <https://soundcloud.com/ustaz-sabry/stability-as-a-utopia>.

SHĀFIʿĪ, Aḥmad. "Riwāyat al-qamʿ al-muḍādd", *Madà*, June 2, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2016/06/02/feature/culture/رواية-القمع-المضاد/>.

SUMAYKA, Muḥsin. "al-Sīsī yaltaqī 'Fatāt il-ʿAraba' fī Qaṣr al-Ittiḥādiyya", *al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1039734>.

WAAD AHMED. "Whatever happened in the year of the youth?", *Madà*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/12/28/feature/politics/whatever-happened-in-the-year-of-the-youth/>.

WILDANGEL, René. „Arabische Filme auf der Berlinale 2016. Im Krieg filmt man anders", *Qantara*, February 18, 2016, <https://de.qantara.de/inhalt/arabische-filme-auf-der-berlinale-2016-im-krieg-filmt-man-anders>.

WORLD BANK. "Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) – Egypt, Arab Rep., Tunisia", June 15, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=EG-TN>.

Films

al-Ḥufra (The Pit). By Achref Hammami. Tunisia 2016.

Nḥibbik Hādī (Hédi). By Muḥammad Bin ʿAṭiyya (Mohamed Ben Attia). Tunisia 2016.

Al-Nuṣūr al-ṣaghīra (Little Eagles). By Muḥammad Rashād. Egypt/Lebanon 2016.

◄ albrecht.hofheinz@ikos.uio.no ►

CODES COLLAPSED

i.e., codes that have lost their de-paradoxifying function, "are particularly visible because, as areas of malfunction and entropy, they attract specific discursive attention and, often, specific emotional energy"

Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (1997), p. 443.

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021)

Themed Section *In2016*

Hope = Hell (Dystopia)

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- Aḥmad Murād
- anticipation
- apocalypse, apocalyptic, dystopia
- end of Cairo
- end of love
- *fasād*, fighting *fasād*
- fatigue, weariness, *taʿab*
- fiction = reality
- frustration
- horror, horror fiction
- horrific = realistic / plausible
- Muḥammad Rabīʿ
- near-earth asteroid QA2 2016
- nightmare
- past, past as treasure box, recent past, Past *vs.* Future, Past *vs.* Present
- perception of development: where the country is going
- pessimism
- posthuman
- predictable *vs.* unpredictable
- present, present tragedy, Future = Present (Dystopia)
- progress
- randomness
- slogan "al-ya's khiyāna"
- slow-motion
- social change
- space agency
- surveillance, Big Brother
- threatened by extinction
- thriller
- tsunami
- UFO
- unhuman
- upholding humanity
- urban wars
- *ʿUṭārid* (novel by M. Rabīʿ)
- utopia
- vicious circle of violence and counter-violence
- victim = potential criminal
- weather
- whale

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Crowdfunding ♦ Disasters ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Garbage ♦ Hashish ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Self-help ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ True *vs.* False

◄ ...@... ►

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section *In2016*: *382–*382
© N. N.

Inferiority = Superiority (Satire)

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- Abla Fahita
- absurdity, tragedy = comedy
- *adab sākhir*
- Aḥmad Ragab
- ʿAlī Galāl (Alycature)
- Almanawihly
- Anā Ḥalūma
- Andeel (Qandīl)
- April Fools
- Bassem Youssef (Bāsim Yūsuf)
- Batman
- black humour
- breaking taboos
- caricature
- cartoon(s), cartoon soap opera
- challenging the givens, challenging stereotypes
- comedy, comedy and drama production
- Comic Con
- condoms, condom video
- converse shoes
- dark comedy
- dark present
- derision
- exceptions
- government policy as satire
- humo(u)r
- irony
- Islām Ǧāwīsh
- joke(s)
- making fun
- most shared cartoon on asa7bess in the period 25 June to 8 July 2016
- obey vs. defy elder
- Oum el Dounya (*Umm il-dunyā*)
- playfulness
- provocation
- Qandīl > Andeel
- Reality = Joke (Satire), Reality = Satire
- sarcasm
- satire, *adab sākhir*, unintentional satire
- sense of humour
- social media satire
- stand-up comedy
- stupidity of Ministers
- Tawfīq ʿUkāsha
- tickling the mighty
- TV show Allo Jeddah
- unintentional satire
- vulgarity
- *al-Waraqah 2*
- What about the first Oscar?
- WillisFromTunis, Willis from Tunis

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Baby Milk ♦ Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Éveil d'une nation / *Ṣaḥwat umma* ♦ Father Figures ♦ Football ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ Hashish ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Language ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Psychiatrists ♦ Self-help ♦ Tourist Resorts ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Beautiful *vs.* Ugly ♦ Male *vs.* Female ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ True *vs.* False

See also "Satire (in YouTube Channels)," by Mohab Mohamed, *JAIS* 17 (2017): 502-05.

◄ ...@... ►

© N. N.

Normality = Heroism (Surviving)

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- average citizen not insignificant
- *azma* (and survival in times of economic crisis)
- brave behaviour, courage
- creativity, creative recycling see also ↗*ibtikār*
- endurance, enduring everyday life
- hectic pace and routine of modern life
- heroes, heroism, heroization, heroic memories *vs.* frustrating present
- How to avoid politics
- How to be successful
- humour, sense of ~
- *ibtikār*; see also ↗creativity, ↗inventiveness
- ideology *vs.* pragmatism
- ignored heroes
- innocent average citizen
- inventiveness and creativity; see also ↗*ibtikār*
- lives may be rebuilt
- "il-Maṣrī byiṭṣarraf" (the Egyptian finds a way to deal with the matter…)
- ordinary citizens, ordinary people, nobodies
- positive attitude
- psychology
- removal of subsidies
- self-determination
- self-finding, self-formation, formation of the self, individuation, find/be yourself
- self-help, self-help literature, self-help literature for women
- state interference in religious affairs
- surviving *azma*
- *taʿab*
- taking the challenge
- trauma treatment
- waste, garbage
- will to life

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Apartment Wanted ♦ Crowdfunding ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Garbage ♦ High School Exams ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Young *vs.* Settled

◄ ...@... ►

© N. N.

Present = Past (Stuck)

By N.N.

► Desideratum

Evernote keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry

- American D.A. (about Mubārak and his money)
- anti-climactic
- beer (Stella)
- From Mubārak to Sīsī
- *fulūl* (*QTh*)
- incompleteness of the revolution
- lack of change
- modern Pharaohs
- Mubārak, Mubārak family, Mubārak regime
- NDP
- re-collecting pre-revolutionary atmosphere
- re-installation of Mubārak regime
- remains from the colonial past
- remake
- reproductions of old ideas
- dashed hopes
- paralysis
- depression
- desolation
- existential and creativity crisis
- Generation stuck
- melancholy, melancholic
- sleeping pills, sleeping problems

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Court Trials ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Father Figures ♦ Garbage ♦ Gated Communities / Compounds ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Red Sea Islands ♦ Self-help ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Past *vs.* Present

◄ ...@... ►

© N. N.

Security = Fear (Police State)

By N.N.

► Desideratum

***Evernote* keywords: issues tagged for first-priority treatment in this entry**

- armoured vehicle (*mudarraʿa*) (*QTh*)
- campus security
- chaos (*QTh*): chaos of coffee shops, Order *vs.* Chaos
- crimes
- home security
- hostages in police car
- *ʿĪd al-shurṭa*
- machine guns (*rashshāsh ālī*) (*QTh*)
- militant, militancy
- military (*QTh:* military trial), militarisation of daily urban life
- Mistral
- Order = Chaos
- paramilitary
- police vans ↗armoured vehicles
- public order
- Rābiʿah al-ʿAdawiyyah massacre (*QTh*)
- raids
- regime striking back like a wounded tiger
- right(s) violations
- safety (*QTh*), safe haven, Safety as Happiness?
- secret services
- security (*QTh*), security forces, security procedures, security state
- social order
- soldier heroes
- state control, state orders, state violence
- state fear, state panic
- state of emergency
- tanks (*dabbāba*) (*QTh*)
- terror, "war on terror", terrorism, terrorists, terrorist attacks (*QTh*)
- uniforms
- vendetta masks
- victims
- violence
- virginity tests (March 9th) (*QTh*)
- weapons, weapons cache

Entries pointing here

ARRAYS – Commemoration / Memorial Days ♦ Conversions ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ The Suspect Foreigner ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – True = False (Life in Limbo)

◄ ...@... ►

© N. N.

True = False (Life in Limbo)

By Stephan Guth

The name of the Tunisian *Hay'at al-ḥaqīqa wa'l-karāma* / Institution Vérité et Dignité ("Committee for Truth and Dignity") that starts the first ↗**Public Hearings** of the victims of Ben Ali's dictatorship in November, makes clear: access to the truth about injustice and crimes committed by the pre-revolutionary régime and its entourage against the people, and the possibility to talk openly about it and get it recognized as truth, is a matter of human dignity. To achieve this had been one of the major incentives and goals of the uprisings five years ago, and the successful removal of the former oppressors had brought the freedom—for some time, at least—to restore that dignity; moreover, it had consolidated "truth" as an essential principle, indispensable for the future. Five years into the post-revolutionary period, the pride to have dethroned the dictators and to have secured for oneself the right to know the truth, and the freedom to tell it in public, and with all that a fundamental aspect of one's dignity, is still there, inside, has taken seat in the minds and given people a new self-confidence. As a consequence, the desire to know the truth from the lie and the sensibility for attempts, by whomsoever, to conceal the truth, are still virulent [↗**True *vs.* False**].

Yet, five years into the period of post-revolutionary efforts to rebuild society have also shown that access to the truth is a matter of power and that truth not only can liberate and restore dignity but also do harm and be very painful and that it therefore is as desired as it is highly contested. In Egypt, it has become a major battleground in the confrontation between the new—again dictatorial—Sisi régime and the opposition. In Tunisia, although there are many institutional remnants of the Ben Ali era, especially among the police and state security, it is probably more a fragmented and highly vulnerable society than the political régime that is responsible for the obscuration of facts and the subsequent concealment and/ or extinction of the truth.

Unprecedented freedom, especially on the Internet, and continuing or newly emerged tensions between political, social, and religious groups have produced an almost impenetrable jungle of evidently or seemingly contradictory data and opinions and made reality, again, inscrutable to a very large degree. Gossip and online chatting disseminate myriad shreds of information or elements of what might be true or false; they come as rumours about what "probably" or "supposedly," "certainly" or "allegedly," "perhaps" or "without any doubt" has happened or is the case but what one, actually, never can be sure about; sometimes, the scattered bits and pieces are put together to narratives that claim logical plausibility and coherence and take the form of conspiracy theories. But, as they are built on non-verifiable data and assumptions, they always compete with other, conflicting, contradictory versions, originating from other camps, each maintaining to represent the truth; at the end of the day, all remain undecidable, uncertain, arguable, precarious. The thousands of people who have disappeared: were they kidnapped/ abducted? If so, by whom? And why? Or have they simply left the country, clandestinely, to flee from persecution, or the economic malaise? Or gone into hiding, for which reason

Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies • 21 (2021) – Themed Section ***In2016***: *387-392*
© Stephan Guth, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), Univ. of Oslo, NO

whatsoever? Or defected to the Islamic State? [↗**Disappearances**, ↗**Migration**]. And what about the many reported cases of conversion, from Islam to Christendom, and vice versa: Are these reports genuine and authentic, or are they fake news? If the latter, who fabricated them, and why, to which end? If the former, did conversion happen voluntarily or under pressure? If forced, by whom, and when and where and how? [↗**Conversions**]. Similarly, should one believe those who maintain that the economic crisis is the result of foreign sabotage, or rather those who have strong arguments for that it is due to the régime's mismanagement? [↗**Dollar Crisis**]. Should one go for the official explanation of the shortage of ↗**Baby Milk** or rather trust in those who are convinced that the crisis was produced on purpose? Was the ʿAtaba fire a mere accident, due to an electrical short (as official statements have it) or, rather, the work of—perhaps even state-hired—arsonists (version discussed by critics who think there is good reason to remain sceptical about the evidence put forward in state-controlled media)? [↗**Disasters**, ↗**Downtown/Centre-ville**, ↗The **Voice from Above**]… And so on, and so on—hundreds of incidents shrouded in mystery that give ample room for discussion and speculation, especially on the Internet. In none of these cases one can decide with certainty whose version of the story is true and whose explanation is wrong and/or fabricated. So what is the truth that one should build on? What kind of world is it we are living in?

Paradoxically, the suspense of truth is enhanced by ↗**Social Media**, that is, the tool that, on the one hand, is most powerful in questioning doubtful information and countering suspected official narratives and/or commonly accepted readings of reality [↗**True *vs.* False**]. On the other hand, counter-narratives lanced with the intention to put right what seems false contribute to enlarging the labyrinth of conflicting data. As Egyptian writer Aḥmad Nāǧī puts it: the Internet, and with it social media, is a virtual space that has been turned into a huge shopping mall (NAJI/NĀǦĪ). Others would call it a jungle, an almost impenetrable thicket of rumours, competing conspiracy theories, and propaganda. How to decide whether a source can be trusted and may be truly enlightening, or whether it seeks to keep users "mentally retarded," as Aḥmad al-Musulmānī, a former information consultant, diagnosed it (quoted by *Al-JAZĪRA Mubāshir*), busy with gossip and trivialities, or whether it forms part of a giant masterplan, elaborated by a network of professional or semi-professional agents of "social media brigades" working to create bubbles of fake news and to influence public opinion in one direction or another?

Where everyday life is permeated by so many rumours, doubts, and conspiracy theories; where it is so difficult to penetrate the thicket of contradictory narratives; and where a majority, for reasons of poverty, simply does not have the time and means to scrutinize the episodes offered to them [↗**Affluence *vs.* Destitution**] and to speculate about their degree of authenticity and plausibility or falseness; in such a situation, reality remains, to a large extent, suspended in a limbo, and with it life in such an ambiguous reality. A follow-up to Egyptian writer Basma ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's scary vision, unfolded three years ago in a Kafkaesque novel, of the people waiting in a queue to be let in into the fortress-like giant "Portal," al-Bawwāba, the seat of state power (*al-Ṭābūr*, "The Queue"), is now film director Muḥammad Diyāb's metaphor, or rather metonymy, of representatives of various social groups caught in an armoured police van, i.e., "the people" caught in the police state of

contemporary Egypt, with almost no possibility to know what is happening outside the world of their nutshell prison (*Ishtibāk*, "Clash").

Many of those locked up in the police van still try to catch a glimpse of reality outside the narrow world they are confined to—with the help of a phone that somebody managed to smuggle in [↗**Mobile Phones**], or by observing what is visible through the bars of the tiny windows, or by asking questions to some of the policemen when the door is opened for some seconds to add yet another captive. But the tiny bits of information that make it into the cage they are caught in cannot change significantly the general state of suspended truth and the overall atmosphere of frightening uncertainty, not-knowing, inscrutability, the feeling of being trapped and kept in ignorance. Even among the inmates themselves, who, in principle, all are in the same situation, interaction is characterized by mutual suspicion and mistrust, favouring violent "clash", as they belong to different social strata and religious groups and are of different political orientation [↗**Clash**].

The situation inside Diyāb's van or ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's queue, meant as representations of the state of affairs in Egypt, is similar to that described in *Condamné à l'espoir* for Tunisian parents whose sons (and daughters) have disappeared and who are ignorant of the latters' whereabouts. The children seem to have left for Syria to join the Islamic State. The bereaved parents are "doomed to hope" (as the title of the documentary translates)—a rather desperate hope, though [↗**Hope *vs.* Hell**], because there is little they can build their hope on. As the end titles of the documentary tell us, Tunisia scores highest among all Arab countries in the number of citizens—ca. 3000 until now—who left the country to become members of the IS. This fact seems to be too embarrassing for the new government to confirm and to assist the relatives in their attempts to gather intelligence and deal with the situation. So, being "doomed to hope" also means, to a large degree, being doomed to passivity, to paralysis, to accepting that rumours about the destiny of the sons may be true, or may not be true—*if* there are rumours at all… And normal life is suspended, due to the lack of certainty. Prisoners in Egypt, especially those in pre-trial detention, are exposed to a similarly dehumanising torment when the security forces let them wait in their detention camps without further explanation, then suddenly move them from one place to another without informing them about their transfer in advance, and holding back corresponding information also from the relatives [↗**Prison**].

Not receiving any information, or living in constant doubt about whether an information can be trusted or should rather not be relied on, gives rise to a variety of reactions—and attitudes and ways of life. Indignation and angry protest are one. Intensifying one's efforts to obtain the truth, or at least bits of it, against all odds, is another. However, confusion due to lack of knowledge or contradictory evidence may also result in a more general, *existential* uncertainty and angst, stemming from a *fundamental* doubt in the (onto)logical status of major anchors, or points of orientation, in one's life (if this should still be called 'life' at all). What and whom can you trust in? Who is your friend, who your enemy? Your friend, your relative, your neighbour, the *bawwāb* in your building [↗The **Honourable Citizen**], or the president in whom you had trusted and put your hope—are they telling you the truth, or are they lying to you? You have been told too many lies in the past and are still seeing, with your own eyes, too much that contradicts the many stories you've heard and are still exposed to, as to *not* be suspicious. No wonder then that, in a climate of overall suspicion and mistrust,

and resulting angst, people readily accept severe security measures [↗**Security *vs.* Fear**], even though this turns the state into a police state that regularly suppresses the truth, tragically-ironically perpetuating the uncertainty and the suspense of truth and using fake data to legitimize violence, even death sentences [↗**Security = Fear (Police State)**, ↗**The Policeman Criminal**, ↗**Court Trials**].

Yet another reaction to the flood of competing narratives, and/or the impossibility of obtaining reliable knowledge due to its systematic and purposeful erasure from the records, is accepting this as a fact that one cannot do anything about. You will have to live with the fact that the truth cannot be known and is undistinguishable from the lie. Giving in to a feeling of paralysis and resigning oneself to passivity may be one way of dealing with this fact. It comes in addition to a general feeling of powerlessness [↗**Inferiority *vs.* Superiority**] from which many, especially young people, seek refuge by taking drugs [↗**Hashish**]. Tunisian rapper Kafon, for instance, says that, although he knows that he is lying to himself when getting high, he is sure that "tomorrow, I will roll [a joint] again" (KAFON). Also in Egypt, the consumption of drugs is so widespread that novelist Muḥammad Rabīʿ, in his dystopian vision *ʿUṭārid* ("Mercury"), imagines, for the year 2021, i.e., only five years from now, a third of the population of Egypt using "*karbūn*", a new drug made from cockroaches, to enter the "darkness," "nothingness" or "night" of forgetting, and in this way escape from reality, not bothering any longer whether you are told the truth or kept in constant ignorance. Other forms of 'drugs', likewise 'turning off' the truth of present reality (and with it its ambiguity) and instead luring oneself into a fake (but less ambiguous) world, are romance and horror fiction, both very popular genres also this year. With romance, readers can indulge, for some time at least, in an ideal better world; in horror fiction, you enter a cruel other world in order to find your own world better than the fictional one. Muḥammad Rabīʿ also criticizes as "dreamy romance" the "endless nostalgia" with which many activists look back to the days of the Revolution, in the hope that something like it may become possible again or that its spirit might stay alive; in his view, romantic glorification of the Revolution is understandable, as sweet collective memories are the only "weapon" left, the only anchor in a world that is rapidly spinning out of control. Nevertheless, he thinks, nostalgia and hope are diseases, they are "blind" because they "obscure the facts" [↗**Past *vs.* Present**]. A very similar view is expressed in the Tunisian movie *Shbābik al-janna / Les frontières du ciel* ("Borders of Heaven"). It describes how a young couple tries to come to terms with the traumatic loss of their 5-year-old daughter, Yasmīn (= the "Jasmine" Revolution). As long as the phantom of the dead daughter keeps appearing to the male protagonist as if she were real and still alive, he is paralyzed, falls into apathy, starts drinking, and is unable to go on with life.

Of course, luring yourself into a false reality is something else than being lied to. And ignoring that one is being lied to, in full awareness of this being the case, is again different, in principle, from taking the world around you as an unquestionably true given, including the official versions of it, with all their propaganda, whitewashing, gaps, and faked news—which, perhaps, is the most common attitude of all. Taken together, however, all adds up to an absurd *routine* of suspended truth, where false is or may be true and true is or may be false, both merging into a whole of inseparable, or no longer distinguished and distinguishable, components.

Those who still think there *is* a 'true' truth and that they are lied to and/or left in the dark on purpose, often feel "tricked by the system" and conclude with deriving from this the right, and the need, to trick the system themselves [↗**Tricking the System / Tricked by the System**], i.e., to slip into a false identity and present it as truth to their environment [↗**Dual Identities /** Masking]. Hiding behind a mask has become so 'normal' and widespread that the routine of everyday mimicry adds to the disturbing overall blurring of true and false and the corresponding existential confusion. Muḥammad RABĪʿ's price-winning novel *ʿUṭārid* develops this confusion into the dystopic vision of a world in which almost everybody is wearing a mask and people with strange anatomic traits appear: they begin to lose their hair, ears, eyes, noses and mouths, leaving behind disabled—still human?—beings, bodies of flesh covered with skin, lacking any individual characteristics; they are still alive, yes—but should that still be called life?

Of course, lying is a strategy of survival here, as masking usually helps to protect oneself against attacks from outside and the normativity of social constraints [↗**Freedom *vs.* Constraint**]. But it also creates, or adds to, the vicious circle of arranging oneself with existential confusion and fear, in this way contributing to the normality of the false, making the falseness of reality even more complex and systematic, and keeping truth pending and authentic life 'hanging in the air'.

Related Entries

ARRAYS – Baby Milk ♦ Clash ♦ Conversions ♦ Court Trials ♦ Disappearances ♦ Disasters ♦ Dollar Crisis ♦ Downtown/Centre-ville ♦ Dual Identities / Masking ♦ Hashish ♦ The Honourable Citizen ♦ Migration ♦ Mobile Phones ♦ The Policeman Criminal ♦ Prison ♦ Public Hearings ♦ Social Media ♦ Tricking the System / Tricked by the System ♦ The Voice from Above

CODES – Affluence *vs.* Destitution ♦ Freedom *vs.* Constraint ♦ Hope *vs.* Hell ♦ Inferiority *vs.* Superiority ♦ Past *vs.* Present ♦ Security *vs.* Fear ♦ True *vs.* False

CODES COLLAPSED – Security = Fear (Police State)

References

Written

Basma ʿABD AL-ʿAZĪZ. *al-Ṭābūr*. al-Qāhira: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2013 (and later editions). – English translation: *The Queue* / tr. Elisabeth JAQUETTE. Brooklyn & London: Melville House Publ., 2016.

[*Al-JAZĪRA Mubāshir* =]. N. N. "Taṣāʿud qalaq mu'ayyidī al-niẓām al-Miṣrī min 'Jumhūriyyat Facebook.'" *Al-Jazīra Mubāshir*, March 17, 2016, <http://mubasher.aljazeera.net/news/-تصاعد-قلق-مؤيدي-النظام-المصري-من-جمهورية-فيسبوك>.

KAFON. *Shīkha yezīnī* (Enough with getting high). Tunisia 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=nrvEg0SrY4A> (last accessed April 20, 2018).

NAJI, Ahmed. "Farewell to the Youth." *Mada Masr*, January 2, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/ 2016/01/02/opinion/u/farewell-to-the-youth/>; original Arabic: Aḥmad NĀǦĪ, "Wadāʿan lil-shabāb," *MadàMaṣr*, December 18, 2015, <https://madamasr.com/ar/2015/12/18/opinion/u/وداعاً-للشباب>.

Muḥammad RABĪʿ. *ʿUṭārid* (Mercury). al-Qāhira, Bayrūt, Tūnis: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2014 (and later editions). – English translation: Mohammad RABIE, *Otared* / transl. Robin MOGER, Cairo & New York: AUC Press, 2016.

Movies

Condamné à l'espoir (Doomed to Hope). Short film by Youssef Ben Ammar. TN 2014*.

Ishtibāk (Clash). By Muḥammad Diyāb (Mohamed Diab). EG, DE, F 2016.

Shbābik al-janna / Les frontiers du ciel (Borders of Heaven). By Fāris Naʿnāʿ (Farès Naanaa). TN, U.A.E. 2015*.

◄ stephan.guth@ikos.uio.no ►

* Produced in 2014 or 2015 but shown in 2016 on national and international film festivals as still representative of the current situation and attitudes towards life.