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Introduction

Eid Mohamed and Ayman A. El-Desouky

By the end of 2010 and into 2011, the eyes of the world were on the public squares in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, as millions of people poured into major city centers and streets. These mass gatherings in public spaces presented unprecedented forms of solidarity to bring about change through sheer determination, an awakening to the power of the collective beyond a simple articulation of demands. The modes of collective expression and action far exceeded the ready interpretations of social and political theories of how mass movements could be constituted via the complicity of many demands. Something more was at stake. A gathering force seemed to hold the key to a dynamic that surpassed the postcolonial idea of a nation or a people. A collectivizing “We” was emerging, almost palpably visible in the communicative force of diverse individuals and groups in public spaces and later in mediated but equally engaged responses.

The “transcultural” as a strategy of nomenclature is not only meant to counter the hegemony of nationalist ideologies or nation-based and region-based analytic frames, current in both area studies and social and political theory. It is also used here as a mode of trans-sociality, one that signals the complexity and historical depth of collective expressions and actions. The implosions of social, cultural, political, and economic realities that have unsettled the power structures of state formations and processes of subjectivation have also strongly accentuated how identity is and always has been a flux of cementing, meaning-giving practices, assumptions of belief, and habits of thought. The historically given and naturalized categories and conditions of ethnicity, religion, governance, citizenship, gender, socioeconomic status, and nationality were subjected to widespread and profound renegotiations that have entailed both the discovery of new cultural forms and the recovery of the force of resonant popular discourses.

In the aftermath of 2011, studies of mass movements, too numerous to list, have sought to identify prior histories and trajectories and to articulate attendant shifts in social and political spheres, modes of acculturation, the self-perception and self-placement of collectivities, and the failings of national traditions, policies, and institutions. Apart from firsthand testimonies and book-length accounts of the uprisings, the first theoretical insights into the unprecedented dimensions of

collective expression and action have been slow to come, initially offered in works by Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Judith Butler; in critical historical readings by Charles Tripp, Gilbert Achcar, Hamid Dabashi, and Caroline Rooney; and, closer to the scene, in analytic studies and edited volumes by Samia Mehrez, Mona Baker, Walid El-Hamamsy and Mounira Ghadeer, Rita Sakr, Andrea Khalil, Ayman A. El-Desouky, and in other studies on revolutionary aesthetics. There have been many more since then, too numerous to list here. These early studies, however, mark the beginnings of reflective thought on the nature of the revolutionary energy unleashed and its embeddedness in local social realities, and, with varying degrees of expression, they all present one fundamental challenge: the need for a new language with which to begin to understand the unique modes of both expression (in word, image, sound, and movement) and action, how resonant movements of bodies and masses of bodies claim public spaces and reveal a hitherto unprecedented collectivizing ethos, rooted in local realities and the collective and cultural memories of the different localities and regions. Fundamentally, the challenges are not sociological, anthropological, or political-theoretical in the older senses; the eruption of the social as being itself the political, most salient in the creative modes of mobilization and artistic expression, hints at a deeper reality: collective modes of expression as modes of knowing, and of knowing collectively, beyond institutional politics, national and postcolonial histories, and the established discursive modes of expert sciences and intellectual discourses.

Several years on, and with all the unfolding events on the ground in the different regions of the Arab world, the idea for this volume—fundamentally comparative in its thrust and seeking to engage local realities in their various modes of expression—has emerged. *Cultural Production and Social Movements after the Arab Spring* offers a range of fresh and incisive studies that identify and examine how new media, as well as literary and artistic forms of expression, inform and echo currents of transformation in the Arab world. Moreover, this volume asks how such forms theorize “transcultural identity” (beyond the transnational) as a form of citizen engagement at the center of transformation politics in the Arab world. Its focus is on the articulation of fresh critical perspectives with which to investigate these forms of cultural production as new modes of knowing that shed light on the nature of social movements, with the aim of expanding the critical reach of the disciplinary methods of political discourse and social theory. In this way, the book responds to the need to address the epistemic ruptures brought about by the Arab Spring, in tandem with the sociopolitical upheavals.

The authors, all scholars grounded in disciplines in the humanities and social sciences but with direct engagement with developments on the ground, were invited to reflect on how the diverse Arab scenes contribute to the understanding of the rise of new social movements worldwide while further exploring the methodological gaps in the dominant Western discourses and theories. Such methodological gaps have become very clear in the failure to understand the unavoidable variations in crowds and social movements, and the subsequent transformations in both the public sphere and modes of social mobilization. The volume’s diversity of thought and views reflect the diversity of local and localized Arab views. The aim of the volume, however,

is not to offer a comprehensive map of such movements and localities, but rather carefully consider a series of instances in which transcultural modes of expression are identified and their resistance to (disciplinarily) ready and at hand modes of explanation and quantification investigated. A different geography may emerge. One perhaps is marked by glaring gaps, such as the Palestinian contributions to the various localities, whether through physical presence or in modes of rallying embedded in the collective Arab consciousness, or in the challenges to inspired action in settler-colonial situations.

The contributions have been structured in four broad sections. Part One investigates how the outbreak of the Arab Spring marked the appearance of a real multiplicity on several levels throughout the Arab world: ideological, cultural, religious, educational, class-based, and gender-oriented. While recent critical scholarship of the so-called Arab Spring, mostly based in Western academies, has tended to focus on the analysis of the “final” result of a complicated political conflict, this part of the book intends to do the opposite. That is, its aim is to read the Arab social movements from within, in order to understand and analyze the internal dynamics of activist discourse, in the pursuit of a differing epistemology. Looking at the mass movements through the micro instead of the macro yields a completely different picture from the one that has been advanced by Western-trained political analysts, observers, and cultural analysts. It is a detour of methodology, answering to the “false normativity” against which the revolutionary process has been measured. In the five chapters included in this part, authors reflect on Egypt’s revolutionary moment and debate what has really changed, if anything.

In the introductory chapter, “Transculturation in a Changing Arab World: Engaging Contexts in Conversation,” Eid Mohamed explores how to define, express, and formulate ourselves and our actions in a changing, globalized, conflictual Arab world. Transcultural identities are multicentered, evaluative, and sometimes contradictory, but they must always be freely chosen, with a willingness to redefine culture—inclusive and shared, as Mohamed argues, no longer entrenched in single imaginaries, states, or groups. Transculturation can help us redefine and re-narrate identity, cultural loyalty, and feelings of belonging; for example, what do citizenship, religious affiliation, and ethnicities mean when these have been denied or called into question by dominant narratives. Mohamed explores how the Egyptian literary and artistic scene requires us to rethink the key idea of shared ethic (which the transcultural literature situates at the core of transcultural initiatives) by better explaining the persistence of conflicts (which tend to be erased by “transculturalists”).

Chapter 9, “Hédi Bouraoui: Transcultural Sense of Belonging,” by Abderrahman Beggar, examines how poet and novelist Hédi Bouraoui—who refers to himself as a “tricontinental” and “transcultural” writer—left his native Tunisia for France to complete high school and undergraduate studies; obtained his PhD in the 1950s in the United States, where he published the first of more than forty books covering a myriad of domains such as literary critique, poetry, novels, short stories, and political essays; and then settled in Toronto in the sixties. Beggar’s intervention explores a procedural question: How and why did this author opt for transculture as a way to identify himself and his work? What are the existential, cultural, ethical, and political reasons behind such a choice? How is this stance translated on an aesthetic level?

Bouraoui's life evolved under more than one model. His creations evince the impact of colonialism, post-colonialism, French "integration," American "melting pot," and Canadian multiculturalism. From a social constructivist perspective, each of these models involves a collective will to construct a world of common experience. In the context of this chapter, the transcultural approach is one that allows a "mobile identity" to deconstruct the world around it in order to change it, inspired by a "nomadic desire." How does change (from the anticolonial fight to the Arab Spring) involve "contact," "flexibility," and "negotiation"? (Hoerder 2012, 55).

In Chapter 7, "Changing Geography: Transcultural Arab Identity in the Age of the EU," Katie Logan investigates the perspective of a "poly-citizen" viewing the formation of Arab transcultural identity in a globalized world. Focusing on Etel Adnan's transcultural *Paris, When It's Naked* (1993), Logan explores the celebratory acceptance of old and new allegiances in the process of developing "multifaceted fluid identities" but without showing complacency toward the colonialism of "imperial" Paris. Interestingly, Adnan's futuristic anxieties offer insights into how the EU's stance on the refugee crisis and the assimilation/alienation dilemma of Arab refugees still inform present world transcultural socioeconomic politics. In a nearly autobiographical tone, Adnan considers the impact of EU formation on a Lebanese woman with multiple identity affiliations. For Adnan, too, the emergent European characteristic of France relegates France's past colonial interventions in North Africa and its present involvement in the Arab migration crisis to the background. Under the EU's shifting categories of belonging and Adnan's persona's quest for a broader and more convenient mode of affiliation, Logan—who argues that Adnan's exploration of citizenship has implications for refugees even though she herself is not a part of that population—explores a transnational mode of citizenship that transcends both the national and the international to avoid manifest marginalization. Through Adnan's *Paris, When It's Naked*, Logan revisits the current Arab refugee crisis in light of the EU's globalized politics and the constant redefinition of belonging, in the hopes of realizing an inclusivist and transculturally underpinned mode or "methodology" of belonging that transcends "binary scenarios."

In Chapter 8, "The Fractured Music of Arab-Jewish Friendships: Waguhi Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* and Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Free Men*," Caroline Rooney further investigates a mode of transcultural affiliation that transcends both nationalism and cosmopolitanism, in a comparative study of Ghali's novel and Ferroukhi's film. Rooney draws attention to the anticipatory tone of Arab Spring collectivism in the works by both as embodied in "the vicissitudes of Arab-Jewish friendship," which introduces a creative redefinition of identity politics. Through the "logic of musical analogies," Rooney reflects on the transnational/transcultural brewing in a cosmopolitan milieu, focusing on the nearly autobiographic depiction of the Coptic-Jewish relationship on a postcolonial stage. The two works feature a mode of transreligious, transcultural solidarity that verges on the utopian and that contests conventional national allegiances, in light of Edward Said's contrapuntal readings of social dynamics. According to Rooney, the transcultural sense of burlesque/festive togetherness represents a site of resistance that is sacred enough to overshadow or predominate the religious, as is manifested in the Egyptian Revolution's harmonious lyricism.

Chapter 10, “Poetics of the Virtual: Technology and Revolution in the Poetry of Sghaier Ouled Ahmed,” by Hager Ben Driss, intervenes in a most timely way to document the poetry of Ahmed as a narrative of the Tunisian Revolution that, because most of Ahmed’s poems were antagonistic to the state, has neither received the attention it deserves among academics nor been acknowledged by official discourse. The strength of this study lies in its determination to historicize the intersection between text and subversive action and capture the poetic imagination and its grammar as an expression of resistance shared and distributed through Facebook. Through an analysis of Ahmed’s texts and position on naming the revolution, the chapter comments on the shifting power discourses that emerged immediately after this historic event. As different registers of truth began to collide, tension over control of media flows increased, and cultural currency was claimed for the development of new technologies, and the opportunities afforded by these technologies—for the articulation and adoption of new identities, and the extent to which global power relations still dictate the confines of identities ascribed to people by others—could no longer be concealed. The chapter explains that although the internet, Facebook, and virtual space have helped facilitate the mobilization of the masses, Ahmed was still extremely cautious about the kind of nomenclature he would use, despite his admiration for the Facebook platform.

Part Two investigates the diversifying and assimilative practices of a culture that help to re-narrate identity after traumas. At stake in this is a rethinking of the idea of inclusiveness. This part shows how reflections on transculturation can help redefine and re-narrate identity, cultural loyalty, and feelings of belonging—for example, what citizenship, religious affiliation, and ethnicities mean, especially for those who have been marginalized or whose identity has been thrown into question by the dominant narrative.

In Chapter 2, “Identity Politics and Digital Space: Adel Abidin’s *Abidin Travels: Welcome to Baghdad*,” Jenna Ann Altomonte explores questions of representation in contemporary artworks and processes of identity formation within digital spaces. The works of Adel Abidin—his multimedia installation *Abidin Travels: Welcome to Baghdad* (2007) in particular—are taken as a case study that challenges several modes of representation of Iraqis in the post-2003 era. Altomonte examines the junctures of satire, diasporic identity, and digital space in Abidin’s Baghdad-based imaginary travel agency, offering brilliant ruses for rethinking spaces of trauma. Using humor and satire to problematize representations of Iraqi identity, Abidin’s artworks are read against mass-media representations of the Iraqi War, the depiction of the Iraqi diaspora via online platforms, and traditional orientalist tropes. The chapter engages two important aspects related to the theme of the transcultural identities. The first is the notion of digital diaspora and the role of digital spaces in constructing/contesting media representations and diasporic articulations of identities, particularly within the context of the Iraqi diaspora. The second is the scope of analysis: the contemporary arts and the visual arts in discussions related to the central questions and theme of transcultural identities.

In Chapter 4, “Transcultural Identity Formation among Canadian-Arab Youth: Nurturing Self-Knowledge through Metissage and Blunting Canadianness as an Alterity,” Bessma Momani and Melissa Finn draw upon structured focus groups

and the survey results of over one thousand Canadian-Arab youth to examine how Arab youth negotiate and conceptualize their place in Arab and Canadian societies. This impressively researched study of the opinions of Arab-background youth in Canada mobilizes transnationalism as a category of analysis in a field that is still often dominated by immigration narratives.

In Chapter 3, “Reshaping Social Practice in Post-Arab Spring Egypt: Expression of Identity and Affiliation in New Media,” Mohamed Hassan moves from ways of negotiating and conceiving space to localized languages of emplacement. He draws key ideas from discourse theory and sociolinguistics—particularly from Fairclough, Van Leeuwen, and Rampton—to understand the deep meanings of an online Facebook group organized by Egyptians, *Al-Mawkef Al-Masry* “the Egyptian Stance.” The analysis operates at an impressive theoretical and conceptual depth. The author consults a number of seminal texts and successfully weaves together frameworks useful for examining the deep meanings of texts and identity, and deftly melds theory and method to produce a theoretically driven analysis; the analysis of Facebook posts using Van Leeuwen’s notions of social actors, social action, and social circumstances is especially noteworthy. In the analysis of utterances of two participants (40 and 41), the author follows Fairclough and Van Leeuwen and unpacks the social action and social circumstances present in the exchange. Hassan finds that members of the Egyptian Stance group employ “code-switching,” as they easily and efficiently alternate between standard Arabic and the Egyptian dialect. This enables them to localize their action while simultaneously reaching beyond the Egyptian context and speaking to their brethren in non-Egyptian Arab communities. The chapter explains how, in particular, unique features of the Arabic language and its various derivatives may be employed online to ground ideas in a local context while also transcending specific local boundaries.

Part Three highlights the role of migration as illustrative of internal forces of sociopolitical collision around issues of cultural identity, political sovereignty, and community. The role of intellectuals and the media as narrators of the revolution is discussed in two of the section’s chapters. Claiming citizenship in multiple states gives rise to “impossible citizens,” as they are not linked to the state apparatus public sphere, as opposed to nation state.

Chapter 6, “Syrian Refugees as a Hybridizing Force in the Jordanian Society,” by Barkuzar Dubbati, investigates the sociocultural impact of the influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan, which has received relatively little attention. Dubbati traces it back to a geo-cultural proximity that breeds a sense of near homogeneity of both the refugees’ native country and their host country, in a way that does not warrant investigation into any cultural consequences. Arguing the opposite, Dubbati premises her piece on the political element of cultures and its role in shaping perception, especially under the exigency of sociocultural realities. Drawing on the Bhaban (1994) notion of nuanced in-betweenness of the hybrid and its impact in blurring the binary line between two different cultures, Dubbati handles the case of the hybrids’ (here, Syrian refugees in Jordan) hybridizing role, not in the Bhaban sense but rather in the sense of highlighting and underpinning the binaries, perhaps as natives (Jordanian mechanism) defending

their own selves against the socioeconomic threat represented by that potential Other. She also addresses the hybrids' own conceptualization of difference. Dubbati focuses on the changing Jordanian perception of Syrians in the wake of their arrival into Jordan, with the escalating view of these refugees as a potential threat and who are then met with a sense of othering or alienation.

In a similar vein and regarding border-crossing and identity formation, Saeed Khan engages a retracing of the problematics of split/fused cultures of a migrant community on both individual and collective levels, as a case in the study of migration and transnationalism in the twenty-first century. In Chapter 5, "Ontological Citizenship: A Realignment of Rights and Responsibilities between the Individual and the State(s) in Twenty-First-Century Migration and Transnationalism," Khan explores the evolving morphology and sociocultural potentials inherent in emigrational/transnational encounters. He examines how displacement triggers a sense of "poly-citizenship," underlying which is an unconventional sense of a citizen's rights/duties reciprocity that transcends single-state boundaries. He investigates the multiple transnational spaces that poly-citizenship allows and potential interaction of rights/responsibilities, consequent redefinition of citizenship, and shifts in the perceptions of national allegiance and national identity. For him, this "asymmetrical exercise of citizenship" involves a global/transnational perspective of migration in which a citizen's relationship with the state undergoes a constant process of redefinition. Khan's chapter thus involves an attempt at a functional definition of the new mode of ontological citizenship that induces the formation of unconventional "models of sociocultural engagement, inclusion, and integration" in transnational contexts that go beyond the national into the post- and even super-national and where the (poly)citizenship/identity interplay is in full force.

Part Four investigates identity as a false problematic. That is, the real issue to be determined is being assigned the position of an insider or outsider. This part engages with how the art of protest, the narration of a new revolutionary era, and the accumulation of material direct us to ask how a dramatic experience of a nation can start to be universal. Part Four offers a critique of the museumization of the revolution and emphasizes how the different spaces of revolutionary action, revolutionary exposure, and staging of the radical act matter (where it happened and where it is exposed, the staging of the act matters). A third space opens up between closed spaces where we can begin to identify and articulate the artistic impulse and to counter its hijacked and fetishistic representations by theorizing the relation between art, activism, and localized realities.

Eying this third space, in Chapter 12, "Interstitial Space of the Art of Protest," Hamid Dabashi offers a series of sharp reflections on space as a differential of power where "things can mean even more," the locus of both the artist and the work of art. "The space of the art of protest," Dabashi argues, "perforce yields to the sphere of public art of protest: and thus we move from ... the space of political protest ... to the narrative sphere of politics." But there is more than meets the revolutionary eye here. Dabashi, through multiple theoretical detours, effects a turn to the emergent art of protest as offering the model of the work of art (also in fiction) as itself an "interstitial space,"

defying the established boundaries of genres and media. For him, interstitial space, a term coming from art and architecture, affords the ability “to think of it as a location for urban guerilla artfare.” The work is site-specific and moment-specific, and as such, its seeming transitoriness is a radically subversive spacio-temporal experience that turns our own world itself into an interstitial space.

In Chapter 11, “Echoes of a Scream: US Drones and Articulations of the Houthi *Sarkha* Slogan in Yemen,” Waleed F. Mahdi maps the evolutionary process of the Houthi *sarkha* (“scream”) slogan, which roughly translates as “God is great. Death to America. Death to Israel. Damn the Jews. Victory to Islam.” The *sarkha*, he argues, underlines the Houthis’ investment in aligning their movement with a growing public search for agency from implications of the US drone program in Yemen. Rather than simply reading the *sarkha* as a mere indicator of Iran’s influence on Houthis, Mahdi argues that the slogan is a reflection of a transcultural search for anti-imperial resistance rhetoric inspired by the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Houthi *sarkha*, according to Mahdi, is “emurgent” (emergent and urgent) because of its ability to simultaneously capture the public pulse of anxiety around US interventions in Yemen and forge a space for a growing consciousness that legitimizes violence as a necessary revolutionary means toward independence and sovereignty. The chapter concludes that although the *sarkha* may have failed in rallying Yemeni social and cultural politics behind its resistance implications, it nonetheless remains a strong identity marker of Houthis’ sociopolitical and religious community in northern Yemen, which continues vying for power at the cost of the country’s own stability, and ironically, sovereignty.

Throughout the diverse contributions included in this volume, literary, cultural, media, and postcolonial scholars reflect on the nationwide moment of transformation and present a critical and timely study in three key ways. To begin with, the volume seeks to broaden the range and scope of the academic study of the so-called Arab Spring movements. It also contributes to a growing global interest in discussing issues pertaining to the Arab uprising through a unique reading of current new forms of expression in Arab-uprising states. Moreover, the volume forms part of an international discussion on the Arab Spring, and more specifically, on views of change and continuity and how these challenge Western perspectives of Arab culture and politics. In doing so, it adopts a critical standpoint with respect to the concept of identity, recognizing that the multiple constructions, uses, and interpretations of the term invoke complex responses that are fraught with contradictions tied to geographical, historical/political, and cultural realities and perspectives. Together, the critical contributions in this work fill a niche in examining how the interplay of politics, culture, and media has shaped emergent Arab realities and how the resultant collective ethics stands to inform the search for a revolutionary model for generations to come.

Unleashed revolutionary energies have served to enhance a new dynamism in artistic expression that has come to dominate the cultural scene. The first years following the uprisings witnessed a threefold reconstruction of the art scene: reconstructing

the relationship of the artist to the public space, as in the case of thriving street art; reconstructing the identity of the artist as an activist and artist; and reconstructing the subject of artistic creation to place political and social issues at the focal center.

References

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