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THE CRITICAL STAGE. YOUNG VOICES ON CRUCIAL TOPICS



No. 6

Amir Heinitz and Marian Reda

**On the Egyptian Revolution:
E-Mail Discussions by Two Former Cairo Flatmates**

With its *The Critical Stage* series, the ZAK aims to provide insights into issues in the context of societal change and revolutionary movements around the world. As the name suggests, the online series is designed as a forum that allows young, critical voices to be heard. The focus is on the realities of individual lives, controversial viewpoints, and personal perspectives usually not accessible to the public. The series aims to foster democratic debate and intercultural dialogue.

When researching potential authors for the series, the ZAK's editorial team was pointed to Amir Heinitz, a German historian and political scientist with an Israeli background. In 2010 he had started working with a legal aid clinic for refugees in Cairo in preparation for a PhD on migration politics in transit countries. Just a few weeks after the outbreak of the Egyptian Revolution on 25 January 2011, he had moved into an apartment in the Bab el Louq neighbourhood, not far from Tahrir Square. The revolution led him to become more involved in both activist and refugee circles, until he decided to leave Egypt after colleagues of his were arrested in the summer of 2011. The ZAK's editorial team asked Heinitz if he would be willing to share some of his impressions of his time in Cairo and some of his thoughts on the revolution in the form of a *The Critical Stage* contribution. Heinitz agreed and introduced Marian Reda, an Egyptian doctor and Heinitz' former Cairo flatmate, into the conversation. The two of them had met when Heinitz was looking for a flatmate, and when Reda was looking for a place close to the hospital where she was to begin a year as a medical intern. In an abstract sent in advance of their *The Critical Stage* contribution, Heinitz and Reda describe their time as flatmates as follows:

In a time of shaky foundations and crushed hopes, we thus came to share a place for half a year, where we would frequently discuss politics, religious practices, and cultural norms. Tanks sometimes rolled down our street at dawn, and demonstrations often flared up. The increasing sense of insecurity was interspersed with peaceful and inspiring days on Tahrir Square, and with new music venues and restaurants popping up across the city. Our conversations took place across dividing lines, but were often surprisingly harmonious. The two of us would sit on our balcony and explain our views and our origins to one another, trying to make sense of our surroundings, and to come up with our direction and purpose in all this. Often we would not agree. More often still, we would eat and watch TV.

Ever since Amir Heinitz left Egypt in the summer of 2011, his friendship with Marian Reda has continued via e-mail. When approached about *The Critical Stage*, Heinitz and Reda offered to make excerpts of their e-mail correspondence available as a contribution to the series. The e-mails chosen for publication were written after Heinitz' return from Cairo, and cover the time span from August 2011 to September 2013. In these e-mail exchanges, Reda writes from Cairo, where she lives, and from Sicily, where she spent two months as part of her medical training; and Heinitz

writes from Brussels, where his mother lived at the time, from Jerusalem, where his father lived until his death in 2013, and lastly from Berlin, where he has been working on a PhD in history since 2013.

The e-mails that follow are a personal and at times very emotional account of the impact the revolution has had on both of the authors' lives: be it in the form of Heinitz' culture shock after his return from Cairo, his impressions of life in Berlin, and his thoughts about establishing his own aid organisation; or in the form of the reality of Reda's life in Cairo and her Christian neighbourhood, as well as her thoughts on the upheaval and on the casualties she treats in the hospital. At the same time, the protagonists are dealing with everyday issues and – like many of their generation – are looking for meaningful perspectives in their lives.

Some changes were made to the contents of the e-mail correspondence. These mainly consist of deletions of passages that were deemed too personal. Some explanations, hyperlinks, and footnotes were added as well. The editing of this text has deliberately been kept to a minimum to retain its authenticity to the greatest extent possible. As an authentic piece of history, the e-mail conversation shifts between American and British English, contains some strong language and heated debates, and reflects the subjective views of the authors rather than those of the editors or of the ZAK. The philosophy of the online series *The Critical Stage* is that such personal testimonies provide valuable insights into circumstances and experiences that rarely reach the public, and offer a basis for the discussion of controversial topics. In keeping with the concept of *The Critical Stage*, the following e-mails let the reader in on private insights, critical views, and constant negotiations of 'difference' that form the basis of a friendship across borders.

2011

18 August 2011

Hi Marian!

I wanted to thank you again for driving me to the airport. After having arrived in Brussels, I collapsed on a couch while waiting for dinner. I've been sleeping a lot and working in bars and painting houses on occasion. It's been all right. I've had quite a culture shock the first week.

I'm going to Spain next week for a few days, to hopefully relax a bit – Brussels is not the place for that, despite the city being completely empty because of the summer holidays. No idea yet if I will come back to Cairo in the fall. In any case, hope Italy works out for you and moving back home is going alright!

All the best!

Amir

18 August 2011

Hi Amir,

Hope you are fine. You have thanked me enough for that ride, stop it, please. I am glad that you recovered from your culture shock, both here and there. I usually call it 'pasteurization'. Hope you enjoy your time in Spain! It is good to relax some. It is disappointing to hear one can't relax in Brussels. If you come back to Cairo, let me know. I will be happy to pick you up at the airport. Except in one case – if you're going to keep thanking me.

About Italy: Can you imagine that I haven't gotten an answer for my visa application yet? When I tried to make an enquiry at the council on why the application's outcome is taking so long, they told me that they prioritise applicants who depart first, not those who apply first. And though this makes sense, one needs enough time to prepare before travelling. Enjoy your time doing what your heart desires.

Marian

20 September 2011

Hi Marian,

So how is it? The countryside, the tranquillity, the wine, work? I'm in Jerusalem. I'm dealing with the remnants of post-traumatic stress disorder, which I think I accumulated during my last months in Cairo, and with a general sense of directionlessness – if that's a word. The PhD topic that I have in mind appears to be very good, and I will travel to England and Germany in October to look further into possibilities of study and financing. However, I am not sure what to do, and where to live, until then. As much as the Spring was chaotic and such, something was happening. A dynamic developed, and at least in my field, things were changing. And struggle here and there seemed to make sense. People in Europe, and by extension here in Jerusalem, seem to be living life as if nothing is going on, despite financial crises, and a fundamental political crisis. The streets are filled with people enjoying themselves; the shops are open; all is here; the prices are high compared to what people make. But that's life, no need to do or say anything.

So I am somewhat caught in between. I've lost my centre, with a bit of PTSD. And so far I have not found a place where I can really calm down. So I'm toying with the idea of returning to Egypt, only working for another organization this time, or possibly even going to Libya. Something is happening, and even if it fails in the end – better to have tried, right? By the way, the demonstrations here in Israel¹ are a joke compared to Cairo.

Take care and enjoy your Sicilian sojourn!

Amir

1 Cf. Israelis Hold Renewed Mass Protest over Living Costs, in: BBC, 03.09.2011; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14777260> [29.09.2016].

24 September 2011

Hi Amir,

Happy to hear your stories again. Miss you as well. As for my Sicilian countryside trip, everything has been going well so far (*tutto a posto*). Every day I have my Italian coffee prepared with a macchinetta, which my neighbor taught me how to do. I have become friends with her, this nice 45-year-old Italian lady who doesn't have any children, who feels the need to give out those feelings to me. I happily let her do it all the time. I can't resist those Italians. I find in them parts of those Egyptians that we lost through the Arabic-Islamic culturalization over the last 60 years, or rather more. Then, I go out into the street to wait for my young neurosurgical colleague to pick me up in her car at the corner of the gas station.

Then I spend another day in the hospital. We make our rounds to see the patients, all in Italian. Everyone speaks very fast, adding the medical terms to the Sicilian dialect, which makes everything difficult. I am used to always discussing things while working. Here, I have lots of questions, lots of objections, but I can't express them all. I am able to understand everything, but my spoken Italian still needs work. After our rounds, I go up to attend the only brain surgery they do during the day. In my hospital at Cairo, five neurosurgical rooms work together on operations every day. When I tell my Italian colleagues this, they say "Mamma mia" in that sexy way of theirs. This is the best part of the day for me. They have even twice allowed me to assist in brain surgery. My first time taking part in an operation – brain surgery – occurred in Italy, can you imagine?!!!! The doctors here are not like in Egypt. They help you, they want to teach you. Maybe it is easier because I am a guest. But still, when they are among themselves things are much more easy-going here than in Egypt. Yes there are problems, but not like ours. Then I finish at 2 pm and find myself with nothing to do. This is a disaster for me, as I am used to working for 12 hours continuously.

A few days ago I found a dancing school. I enrolled in it and am now learning modern jazz in Italy!!!

Two days ago, my only female colleague took me to spend the evening at the house of her friends, who are forming a small band. We drank and ate pizza, they played music for us, they wanted to hear about Egypt. On my way home, I realized that a large portion of my life is missing, that I became old very early. To tell you the truth, I felt self-pity, as I feel pity for you because of your PTSD. And I have gotten myself ready to complete the stressful journey when I return back to Cairo. You are right: concerning the financial and political changes, very few people recognize them. My colleagues here feel them, but the others are in the streets shopping. Or maybe people don't want to pay attention, so as not to ruin their lives with worry.

Then, these Sicilians, everything for them is done in peace, nothing in a hurry. Still they have the same temper that we have in Egypt – I wonder. They love Egyptians very much. Whenever they find out I am Egyptian, they say: “Noooooooooo, Egiziana – noooooooooo, veramente” (no, Egyptian – no, really). I guess the cause is that most of them have visited Egypt, and foreigners usually receive special treatment. They have that lovely memory of Egypt in mind.

I am glad you found that your idea for the PhD is working. Still can't understand how you will return to Egypt or Libya and at the same time go on for your degree. Just organize it well in your mind. And yes, it is always better to try than to do nothing.

Sorry for talking for so long, but you are the only one who will understand, as you have lived the two lives – in Egypt and here in Europe. The others have lived either here or there.

Waiting to hear from you soon. Or I will e-mail you if there are any updates.

Bye

Marian

1 December 2011

Hey Marian!

It's been some time. I've not been keeping up on my correspondence very well. I think I actually was quite post-traumatic the first two months after leaving Cairo. All kinds of symptoms, things I never had in my life: memory loss, loss of interest, a pretty bad depression, recurring images, and a lot of other uncomfortable stuff. The last few weeks have been better.

I got a couple of articles about Egypt published in German magazines. Nothing earth-shattering, but I enjoyed writing and going through the steps of publishing them.

I'm still in Jerusalem, staying with my father, who is slipping more and more into dementia. He doesn't see very well anymore, his hearing is heavily impaired. At times it's rather depressing, but I try to take it with a sense of humour. Sometimes he is back at full force, and he still very much enjoys the company of young people, so I invite friends to cheer him up.

In October I was on a rather overdone trip in Europe. London-Cambridge-Oxford-Brussels-Cologne-Mainz-Siegen-Duesseldorf-Berlin-Budapest, all in 15 days. But it did me good – seeing my friends, sharing their different life realities for a while, and also to just go back to some sort of other normalcy. I was rather lost after leaving. Connecting to who I was before was good for me.

I have since applied for a few positions. For some of my applications, I got no answer; others didn't get past bureaucratic hurdles. So I continue to look – anywhere: here, Egypt, Libya, Berlin. If I stay here, it's really more for Adin,² as I know that he is happy when I'm here. But really, the place, the politics, the society just depress me at the moment. I'd even rather go back to Germany, have my little life, with a flat that I can fill with accessories, a proper work contract with insurance, and all that stuff.

So for the time being, I'm just meeting some people, trying to get my brain working again. Just to kind of see the widest array of options on the table, to get again what I've rather been missing the last months: 'wanting to do something'.

How is it to be back in Cairo? Did you vote? The last couple of weeks must have been quite reminiscent of the Spring, right?

Take care,

Amir

6 December 2011

Hi Amir,

Know that I ignored answering you, especially concerning your article in the German journal. Honestly, after I – in an overwhelming emotional moment – posted the photo³ on Facebook, I felt guilty. I felt it was not ethical for me to do so, given my work as a doctor, so I removed it and preferred not to reply.

Also, during that week my luck threw me into the ER, and my shifts were night ones. I worked every night during that whole war between the rebels and the police in Mohamed Mahmoud Street. I have seen it all: youth our age and younger with bullets in their heads, bleeding to death; youth who lost their eyes, who came knowing that there is no hope for them to ever see again. Looking at them, trying to know the nature of each – Baltagy,⁴ rebel, formal police member – at the same time I had

2 Amir's father, Adin Talbar, was born in Berlin in 1921. After Adin's father, Felix A. Theilhaber, was imprisoned for several months in 1933 for his involvement in the circles of Magnus Hirschfeld (a Jewish sexologist and advocate for homosexual and transgender rights), the family decided to leave Berlin for Palestine, which is where Amir's father lived most of his life. Adin considered himself Israeli, but Berlin remained his hometown; cf. Adin Talbar, in: Wikipedia, 30.08.2016; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adin_Talbar [29.09.2016].

3 The photo of a dead youth in the hospital.

4 This refers to anonymous plain-clothed thugs who were frequently hired by the Mubarak regime (long before the revolution broke out) to attack opponents of the government, and to break up protests and demonstrations. It was not an uncommon sight in Egypt to see large groups of these thugs attack unarmed protestors with clubs and knives. The use of such violent tactics on the part of the Mubarak regime was one of many factors that led to the outbreak of the revolution; cf. *Murad Batal al-Shishani/Dalia Elsheikh*: How 'Thugs' Became Part of the Arab Spring Lexicon, in: BBC, 05.09.2012; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19467017> [29.09.2016].

to save their lives. From time to time I tried to ask one of them: “What is happening now down in the square? What kind of people are there?” It was messy: doctors shouting here and there, people screaming and crying in pain, blood everywhere.

For me, trying to do my work while feeling anger due to what was happening, I felt so small in front of them. I hoped I had the courage to give my body for the freedom of my country, to announce that it is my right to demonstrate without losing my life or my sight. It added a lot to me, to know what a war is like, a crisis situation. How it is when certain people at any given time in history say “Enough!” and try to change their destiny. I am still recovering from that week.

As you know, we’re going on with the elections. The Islamists are winning the majority so far. I imagine Egypt turning into Iran. The positive point is that I will not have to visit Iran as I have always wanted, because Iran will be coming to us in ten years. Our Islamists are different from those of Tunisia – ours tend to be more like those of Saudi Arabia. With all the fear around, we are thinking of all the possibilities, all the solutions if they come to rule. My heart is burning for what is happening in Egypt. I fear their ignorance will damage our history. Some of them say that monuments are a symbol of atheism and have to be destroyed. I can’t believe that this is being said over this supposedly civilized land.

Sometimes I see a saviour in the army despite my being against their rule. Other times I calm down when some people say this parliament is just going to stay for a year until the new president is elected. Yet the question is: Who will he be?

Anyhow, we will just have to wait and see. Until then, my greetings. Keep yourself safe.

Marian

2012

2 February 2012

Hey Marian,

It has taken me a long time to answer again. The world keeps spinning. I left Jerusalem ten days ago and am now in Berlin. Had an interview yesterday, but I might be overqualified. So I sit in hipster cafes, sip on my cafe latte, eat cupcakes, and listen to Om Kalthoum on my earphones. If you have any other suggestions...

I wanted to wish you happy birthday as well! Hope you’re not going to spend this new year of your life stitching demonstrators back together. And obviously I hope they assigned you to the hospital’s children’s department for these two months.

I’m toying with the idea of creating my own shop. It would be something of a refugee consultancy – essentially helping refugees to set up their own structures, so that

they're not constantly screwed over by 'helpers' of all shapes and colours. Not sure yet if it's going to work. Still doing research and talking with people. Should it move forward, though, I might come to Egypt for a week or two relatively soon, to discuss the idea with people and get started.

Well, I hope you are well – stay sane. And should I come, I hope to see you. And should I – god willing – move back to Egypt, I would be honoured to share a flat with you, Doctor!

Take care!

Amir

7 February 2012

Hi Amir,

Really missing you. Glad you are fine.

So what about that shop? It sounds really interesting. Strange at the same time. Don't hesitate if you really want it. Before you begin, just think twice about how this works with your previous plans, which included your PhD. I know well how it feels to be in a transient stage of life. I am going through the same thing here. The training year is finishing, there's only one month left. Afterwards... I might have to go to Alexandria or the south to work as a general practitioner for some time till I begin my residency program. I have become certain that if I stay here in Egypt, no one will permit me to do neurosurgery. After I came back from Italy, I went to the operating room here and assisted with some brain operations. They were impressed by my skill – I was lucky in Italy. They were nice in Italy, they liked me and taught me a lot. They even wanted me to stay and offered me to come to specialize in that hospital. The head nurse asked me at the moment of my departure: "Why don't you come to work in Italy?" Also when I came back to the emergency room here in Cairo, I learnt a lot with all the head traumas I saw during the fights in Mohamed Mahmoud Street and elsewhere. So here in the neurosurgical department they think I am good, but they give me that advising look: "No... search elsewhere. No one will help you here." Even in Italy, in side talks, they expressed the same thought. It is a hard job for a woman.

Anyhow, now I am continuing my Italian classes at the Italian consulate. I am waiting for this month to come to an end, because I will get my documents from the university then. As soon as I have them, I will be able to present them to the consulate. The consulate will have them translated into Italian, and then I can finally present them to the universities in Italy.⁵ Let's see. It is a hard path, and an uncertain one. I know I will run into lots of difficulties when trying to go to Italy again.

5 Residency in Italy is mainly held in university hospitals, and exams are required to enter a residency programme.

That's all, concerning me. I hope to see you soon. However, sharing a flat is an uncertain matter as I don't know which city I will be working in in a month. Hope it will be Alexandria, want to spend some time there. You know, it is the city of my heart. I'm used to it, so living there would not be as hard as would be the case with other cities. My family wants me to stay in Cairo as usual.

Do you know what I am doing now? Yoga, and to my surprise I love it. Also, I began to study the history of philosophy through a book.

Life is so annoying, Amir, even though we don't realize it – either because we are busy working on something, or because we are experiencing any kind of feeling: either happiness and fun, or sadness and grief. Especially since our presence here is meaningless for us. Maybe because we don't choose to come here, and most of the time we don't choose to leave. We try to do things and create things to make it all worthwhile: we raise pets, we create cars, machines, buildings, streets, charity, hospitals, music, dancing, art, even Disneyland. The only thing that never annoys me is philosophy. Perhaps because it is the only thing that tries to answer the big questions of life, tries to explain if there is anything that can make life worthwhile and not annoying. I know my words sound depressing, and maybe they are – especially with all the depression we are living through here now. But those are the moments when you face your life and yourself, right? There is that moment when you come back home, sit down, maybe eat, then think: Okay, I did well today. Maybe not that good yesterday. I loved, hated, travelled, went through relationships, had friends, studied, worked – then what, and why, and when, and how? And all these questions without an answer.

Hope you will have everything you desire, enjoy your life. Despite my job teaching me every day that life is short, I am not able to learn that lesson well.

Let me hear from you soon.

Marian

25 May 2012

Hi Marian,

I woke up this morning and opened Facebook to find the moans and cries of everybody Egyptian I know.⁶ If I was Egyptian, excuse me, but I would vote Morsi in the next round, rather than Shafiq. I would've preferred Baradei. I would've preferred Sabbahi, Fatouh, Moussa, pretty much in that order. But between the old regime

6 Cf. *Sherif Tarek*: Runoffs between Brotherhood's Morsi and Mubarak Regime's Shafiq Have Egypt in a Bind. Electoral Victories by Brotherhood's Morsi, Mubarak-Era PM Shafiq Leave Egypt's Revolutionary Forces Scratching Their Heads as to Who They Will Vote for in Runoff Poll Slated for 16/17 June, in: *Ahram Online*, 25.05.2012; <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/36/122/42896/Presidential-elections-/PResidential-elections-news/MursiShafiq-presidential-showdown-puts-Egypt-revol.aspx> [29.09.2016].

and the MB,⁷ I prefer the MB. In either case, it's not the end of the world. The ancient regime will not last long in historical terms, although it will be an even more painful restoration than what has already happened. And with regards to the MB, I hope for pragmatism. Either case is not good, I believe, as neither appears to have the answers to the revolution's question: Is equitable and dignified socio-economic development possible in a country like Egypt, in our time? It's a sad affair, but it fits the pattern all over the region and beyond.

I saw Tariq Ramadan, grandson of Hassan al-Banna,⁸ speak in Berlin a few weeks ago.⁹ He seems to me to be a lone fighter. Someone who can be disagreed with on a number of matters, but essentially someone who reasons with appeal. There are very few people here who understand the Middle East at least to some degree, and even fewer who don't close their eyes to uncomfortable truths. This is an island. Not long ago there was an article by someone, I don't remember who, about Israel, and how there is not a single Israeli who has an in-depth understanding of the Arab world. I would agree, although there might be a handful under the radar. The same, I think, counts for the other way around. But beyond this almost simple dichotomy, this is what characterizes most of today's affairs. Knowledge is limited and specialized; understanding is truncated – resulting in specialized, limited, and segregated answers.

As gloomy as this may sound, I take pleasure in what for myself is an answer to what I see – not an unquestioned solid answer, but something I can play and live with. Stories and encounters, if we allow them to happen and seek them out, will transcend. This is how I see things from afar, but I have become removed from it all. Not just geographically – I have also removed myself inwardly. I still stay in touch with some of the refugees. I might return to work with them. The situation now – I need to analyse it.

What is new? A friend of mine, who is a Christian from Aleppo, is living through rough times, with everything that is happening in Syria. So, despite all my political considerations, I do hope that this new Egypt will not confirm the sad joke about the three friends Musa, Isa, and Muhammed.¹⁰

All the best,

Amir

7 The Muslim Brotherhood.

8 Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood.

9 Cf. *Wie islamisch ist der Arabische Frühling?* Tariq Ramadan und Ruprecht Polenz MdB im Gespräch mit Jörg Lau, in: *Deutsch-Arabische Freundschaftsgesellschaft*, 26.04.2012; [http://dafg.eu/de/aktivitaeten/archiv/archiv-politik/archiv-politik/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=435&cHash=829d6de5944ae938d6cc601958df076b](http://dafg.eu/de/aktivitaeten/archiv/archiv-politik/archiv-politik/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=435&cHash=829d6de5944ae938d6cc601958df076b) [29.09.2016].

10 There was and still is a constant fear of purges of 'minorities' resulting from the Arab Spring and the subsequent upheavals. There was a story, or rather a sad joke, making the rounds on Facebook among Egyptians about three Egyptian friends named Musa (the Arabic equivalent of Moses), Isa (the Arabic equivalent of Jesus), and Muhammed. The three of them used to go to a café together to talk. But then, at some point, Musa went missing: this represents the time of Nasser, when the Jews were expelled. So then only Isa and Muhammed were left in the café to discuss politics. At some point Isa goes missing too, and now Muhammed is the only one left in the café, and he feels terribly lonely, thinking back to the times when he used to sit there with his friends Musa and Isa. Musa and Isa are common first names in Arabic.

10 June 2012

Hi Marian,

Send me your address please – I have found the perfect postcard for you!

PS: It's far from being a sensitive postcard.

11 June 2012

Hi Amir,

It is not the best way to begin my e-mail, but it is really getting dark here. Foggy is the least that can be said when describing the future of Egypt. The constitution is being manipulated by Islamists, even after several battles. The election is ending with two presidential candidates from hell. No one is satisfied, people in the streets look confused and depressed. Their eyes are asking for an explanation for the delusion surrounding them. The army is busy with its battle with the Islamists, and refusing to take the side of the revolution, insisting on winning and restoring the old regime. So I can say that it is all ending like this: the revolutionaries, civil politicians, leftists and regular people – the society – are sitting in the corner watching the fight between the army and the Islamists. Waiting to see who is going to win. The fight has moved to every house, to every street. People are being fed on curses and hatred instead of bread. I am really depressed, especially since I find myself in the same situation at work. I am now practicing general medicine in a health care center, the thing that I hate, very far from what I want to do. I asked some universities if I could join their residency programs for neurosurgery. The department directors refused, based on the fact that I am not a man, saying, "It is a tough job. You can't handle it." Besides all of that, there is a Muslim Brotherhood colleague at the place where I work. He is not bad, but things always turn to politics, as is happening everywhere right now. So I end every day with a battle that gets on my nerves, and I return home feeling as if I've been beaten up. I tried several times not to respond or engage in a discussion, but in the end I find myself unable to shut up when I am forced to listen to lies. I interfere to defend what should be defended and I come across as an Islamist enemy, especially since I am Christian. Ahhhh, it is worse than hell could be. To the degree that my plans for continuing my studies and my residency in Italy have become so heavy that I have no desire to do anything. As if fear jeopardizes my mind and my life, as well as the lives of others.

Anyway, we are just a few days away from the big bang of the presidential elections.¹¹ Hope you are fine. Tell me, how is life? Tell me more about that postcard. What is the story? Waiting...

11 Cf. *David D. Kirkpatrick*: Named Egypt's Winner, Islamist Makes History, in: *The New York Times*, 24.06.2012; <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/world/middleeast/mohamed-morsi-of-muslim-brotherhood-declared-as-egypts-president.html> [29.09.2016].

12 June 2012

Marian,

I will weep this weekend. The curtain has been drawn, the motives and characters are becoming all too clear. One could make an epic Greek drama out of the last year and a half.

Let me tell you this, though – both with my background and regardless of it, and despite all the times that I bitched and whined – the greatness I saw among the people, the community and action, the passion and compassion, the perseverance amid most severe adversity, the wit and infectious laughter have resuscitated something in me which had died years ago: belief.

Egypt has been through lows before, and it won't break now. And I would say that this is true for you as well. If there is something I learned, it is that we do not break as quickly as those stomping on us would like us to. Even if we may feel and think that we cannot go on, that we must give up and surrender, there is something in us that we cannot see or grasp inside us and around; something that will let us march on and fight. And I think it is at least dignity we are fighting for.

Yours,

Amir

1 July 2012

Hi Amir,

It has arrived now.¹² I had a smile on my face upon opening the envelope. It relieved my heart to look at her face, her eyes. Reminded me of hope in Egypt's future, through the strong history and accumulated cultures. I would like to visit the New Museum in Berlin one day to see her in real life.

I will thank you in the end, but now let me tell you about my concerns: the smell of WWII is getting so strong in my nose due to the MB coming to power in Egypt. America is risking all by buying a new ally in the region. Is this Obama's betrayal or stupidity?! I don't know. Can you figure it out? The world's eagerness for a war is getting bigger every day, but this time it will be between East and West. And this time would be the end, because nuclear weapons can be used. Some people here smell it even in an indirect way, but for the sake of Islam, they won't speak. They think that building a new Islamic empire will be achieved through the MB. So, even when they see the mistakes and betrayal of the MB every day, they act as if nothing is happening. Some even begin defending them. Denial – it's what has killed states and people throughout history. They think like this: "The MB's project for Islam,

¹² A postcard of the bust of Nefertiti.

Iran, America, Israel... mmmmm, why not? Let's try." It all gets on my nerves. Denial is my worst enemy in this world, and I have been facing it every single moment since the beginning of the elections. I don't know why I would study to be a neurosurgeon, so that 15 years from now I can be standing somewhere in the world admitting hundreds of hopeless cases with their brains oozing out of their heads. Now there's a very fine line between this fear and the hope that everything will turn out well again. Even if only a year from now, when people become aware of what is happening, when they are losing hope. After all, what is happening here is the whole world's desire, and Egypt is just a part of the plan. How can you stop it!! It is as if the world wants to end all those small fights here and there with a big one that determines the end of one of the poles and the victory of the other. Every now and then the world gets bored of politics and decides to replace it with war. That time is coming. For me, I am very glad with the democratic change in Egypt, but the MB were not what I had hoped for.

Thanks a lot for the postcard, it really meant a lot and your support is unforgettable. Let me hear from you soon. Enjoy your days.

21 October 2012

Marian,

It has been some time again. It passes without being asked, regardless of dullness or excitement. I was at my friends' place for dinner, a chicken roast, with autumn vegetables. I made apple compote. It was a very domestic setting. One said, "Well, we're approaching thirty."

I have come to function quite well again in this settled setting. One of my favourite reads from when I was an adolescent – I do not remember who, perhaps it was Hermann Hesse – spoke of grey days, black days, and white days; and that the worst and most common ones are the grey days. The days that leave no mark, no mark on yourself, on the grey matter in your brain, or on anybody else.

As I was standing there at the party, talking with a French guy about the air and light in the south of France, I felt quite out of place. Despite all the struggles, heartbreaks, headaches, and setbacks, I have been more at home in both Cairo and Jerusalem. On a level that is hard to fathom for people here, I believe. On a level of feeling. Of emotion. But to get back to the party: I was talking there with someone I had met before, and then again last year, when I had just left Cairo. Back then we had talked quite animatedly about Egypt, and about his experiences in Jordan. When I returned from Jerusalem to Berlin in January, he would not answer the couple of messages I sent him. At the party then, we talked a bit. I said life in Germany bores me. It's too orderly, too procedural. He responded: "Don't throw away all the discipline we have created over the centuries."

He is right. Yet, this doesn't increase my comfort. It is macabre of me to cry after a life that is, in all rational terms, as tough and unhealthy and often as outright ugly and despicable as in Cairo and Jerusalem. Yet, it is also one in which I have lived through greatness, depth, shaking laughter, beauty, and personal closeness.

This is where it stands. I started moving again, in an anonymous mass, in which I feel alone with these 18 days of upheaval – Egyptian, political, social, personal; in which I feel alone with why I left, despite wanting to stay; and in which people readily dump their own predispositions on one's story, to incorporate an individual into a grand narrative, no matter how twisted and far from any small, individual reality.

Take care and hope to hear from you soon, despite my interrupted e-mailing.

15 November 2012

Amir – Apple compote, as usual. You are hiding your cooking flaws by preparing fruits. I needed to begin with this, just to give a hint on how difficult it is for a person to change.

So, I miss you. I guess a conversation needed to be fulfilled – a wide-angled, big one. I guess that your emotional level tells the fact that you were enjoying what you were doing here and in Jerusalem. You felt fulfilled. I don't know if it is the worst or the best timing to reply. It may be both. What is happening in Gaza now¹³ is what I mean by 'timing'. So they are poor and they don't like their life and they risked sailing days and nights to reach a peaceful shore in Europe. That's good – as long as they will not be troublemakers and kill for money; as long as they will work and be productive.

Take care and enjoy

6 December 2012

Hey Marian – Just a short e-mail, will reply to yours another time. Just briefly: Say, is it really bad?¹⁴ It looks pretty bad, and not like it's calming down soon. Bit worried, hope you're fine.

Yours,

Amir

13 Cf. *Crispian Balmer*: Analysis: Relief at Gaza Ceasefire Can't Mask Its Frailty, in: Reuters, 21.11.2012; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/21/us-palestinians-israel-winners-idUSBRE8AK1IM20121121> [29.09.2016].

14 Cf. *Abdel-Rahman Hussein*: Egypt Violence Worsens as Five Die in Cairo Clashes. Supporters of Mohamed Morsi and Opposition Activists Engage in Street Battles outside the Presidential Palace, in: The Guardian, 06.12.2012; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/06/egypt-violence-worsens-five-die> [29.09.2016].

2013

25 February 2013

Hey Amir,

I will write this e-mail not only for you, but for me as well – a kind of documentation for some thoughts of mine. I am thinking: Is it better to have a state that is controlling to a great extent like in Europe, controlling the services with the side effect of citizens being treated like babies, a mother state? Or is it better to leave it all uncontrolled like in America, leaving citizens to be abused and to abuse one another, all under the cover and the name of law and freedom? Frustrating, but you know for me, with my left-wing background, I go with the mother state, I believe in the state.

I think of it like this: I hate control, and being free is a way of practicing intelligence. But isn't it intelligent to decide not to abuse your freedom? It is hard, it requires a strong personality, but it is the right thing to do. I told you before on the balcony, if you remember – I know that all of you in Europe are much more intelligent than the Americans. And it is a loss to be followers. Where is the problem, Amir? Are you busy thinking and not working? Is it the price of being intelligent and not obeying? Is it the price of being conscious? Speaking of your intelligence, it is intelligent not to accept Turkey in the EU. My dad had a medical conference in Turkey and my mom insisted that I go with them. I went, and bottom line: I hated it. Stupidity and coldness and aggression all came together there. I couldn't wait to get to Egypt. Seeing and talking to – yes – suffering people, but nice, smiling, and intelligent people. I am watching the world with a sigh, a big one. I have a lot to say about Turkey, Egypt, Iran, the Gulf, Europe, Israel, and America. But I will save it for later, because the game is still on.

Recently, my female colleague was curious to know about my experience living out of the family home, and especially with a guy. In Egypt this stupid simple thing is considered an experience. I haven't told her yet that it turned into living with two guys. She will be astonished.

There was a night a month or two ago when I was looking outside the window at the dark sky, speaking to a God I don't believe in, telling him in a serious and spontaneous way: I am finished. It is too much now. I have reached a devastating point, and I am entering into a phase of release. The problem is that it's not time yet. And the other problem is my strength – even if I have none. It is true: I am not ruining myself or falling into a depression. Do you know the phenomenon where your hand muscles contract for a long time when you are clutching a big thing or carrying something heavy? They begin to relax involuntarily out of fatigue. Try it. It is a scientific phenomenon by the way. It is hard, but I am reaching a point where I have to admit my

weakness. I need someone to take care of me. I need to be weak. But now while writing, I realize that I am surviving, that I've been surviving ever since that night. With much less efficacy, yes, but I am. That's all.

Write me about German Orientalism. I have been reading about the German Reformation, and it would be perfect to get the continuation. Enjoy your life as much as you can. Work hard. It is the secret of life. And keep in touch.

Greetings,

Marian

25 February 2013

Marian – I am really happy that we can continue our conversation in person soon, because I am coming to Egypt in late March or early April. I will be observing those wonderfully democratic parliamentary elections you are going to have,¹⁵ and I will stay for some three months.

So we will have plenty of occasions to meet. Very much looking forward to it, and to seeing you again!!!

25 February 2013

Amir – You are very welcome as the Amir that I know, but not as the one who will share directly or indirectly in the elections that I and all the revolutionary associations will boycott. This election will be done for the sake of the Muslim Brotherhood and America. Nothing for Egypt, nothing for Egyptians. It will be against our will. Signs will be made – not on paper, but on the bodies of martyrs. Sorry to say this, but you will come to observe a play, a dance of monsters over the bodies of dead people, Egyptians; either martyrs or the ones still alive, we are all dead bugs for those who will run and supervise the coming elections. I said all this to warn you. But come, looking forward to see you. Waiting for you. I told you, you will come again. It is the beautiful disease named Egypt.

26 February 2013

Marian, I am under no illusions with regard to the elections, for me it's mostly a way to return to Egypt and meet some friends, make some money and try to deal with my psychosis en place – but in a bit more distanced way, if that makes any sense?

15 Cf. *Ayman Mohyeldin*: Egypt's Morsi Calls Parliamentary Elections, in: NBC News, 21.02.2013; http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/02/21/17048115-egypts-morsi-calls-parliamentary-elections [29.09.2016].

I still feel like I escaped the last time, and I don't want to think of Egypt like this. Another part that is good about the elections for me is that I will be 'observing' in different governorates, so I will finally get the chance to see some of the places people told me about outside of Cairo and Alexandria.

Well, we can talk when I come. Very much looking forward to it!

10 March 2013

Amir, elections are postponed till... nobody knows – after a court's verdict against Morsi's call for elections. Hope you understand now what I have been trying to tell you. Let me know your plans in time.

Marian

11 March 2013

Marian,

Yeah, I saw last week. The organisation I'm supposed to be coming with has been in touch with us, and is basically waiting for what is going to happen next. Just in case elections will actually not happen at all, which I guess is a possibility, let me write you a few lines.

There is a duality of what Egypt was and is for me: because of the revolution at some point I started feeling at home, which for me is a sensation that does not occur often. Where does Egypt figure? It figures in the way that people actually gave me something which I did not get before, or not in this way. A sense of being appreciated, taken care of, and of belonging. Also with the refugees, me being somewhat of a migrant myself, I felt at ease. Then there was a purpose, an accurate purpose after having decided to stay, in dealing with refugee issues, and in my tiny role with this magnificent revolution. A rather one-dimensional purpose, but a concrete purpose. Putting all of this on its head, there is my background, which essentially makes it impossible for me to do any of those things that I actually did, without putting myself and the people I love in danger. The inability to talk openly about who I am – not even what my beliefs are, or what I want to do, just who I am. I have been grappling with this for a long time. For me, as much as it pained me, it has actually been good to see the revolution go to shreds. Every outburst of violence, every rigged election, every schism in the opposition was like a painful surgery removing one element after the other of that revolutionary purpose. A revolution, which in the end I felt I abandoned, ran away from, even though it was that revolution that has given me so, so much. In the end, what stayed were the friends I made, the friends I still miss.

And what also stayed is a general sense of insecurity, which I have been trying to deal with during the last few months – a sense of insecurity which still permeates my entire life.

About the elections: I saw a few things. The first was quite simply, I get to return to Egypt. Why? I want to deal with the insecurity, a sense of insecurity I have never had this strongly before. In the framework of the organisation, I hope that I can do that. They know what they are doing, and there shouldn't be much reason to be afraid of eventualities. I also wanted to look at that revolution again, a revolution that is ongoing. And while, if inside, I can only fathom how heart-wrenching it may be – as a political scientist and historian, I see processes occurring that are necessary for a revolution to be really that: a revolution that reconfigures a society, a polity, an economy. Even if that means that everything is falling apart at the moment.

Should you find the time, I would recommend a movie by Lutz Dammbeck to you: *Das Netz*.¹⁶ It is about things being broken, and the dynamics that follow.

For me, to be back in Egypt would thus be to deal with this, from a removed position, with distance. Because in the end, I am European. My identity will not allow me to ever become an Egyptian or an Arab or to live a relatively normal life there (if I actually wanted to). And in the end, I also love Egypt very much. I have steered my career in that direction, so I need to find a way to make this work for me, without losing myself.

And then finally – and this I only realized when I said, after a few days of thinking very hard about it and talking with close friends about if I really wanted to do it (I was really traumatized) – so when I said, “Yes, I will go”, that's when I realized what my crucial reason was: my friends. It gave me such pleasure to write to you and to others, “Hey, I will come to Egypt, I want to see you.” I started thinking about how great it will be to see everybody, and about what kind of presents I can get for everyone.

So in sum, I am under no illusions – I think – of the elections, even if I am a bit further away now and cannot properly understand what's going on simply from reading Egyptian news. But there are personal reasons why I want to come, and the elections are just an occasion for me.

I truly hope that things will not devolve into true civil war. I am still anxious about what is happening, but it seems all news has been bad news for the last few months.

Take care,

Amir

16 *Dammbeck, Lutz: Das Netz (The Net)*, documentary, Germany 2003.

20 April 2013

Amir,

“So I need to find a way to make this work for me, without losing myself”, you wrote before. Believe me, dude – this phrase can be quoted :) – and don’t worry: we Egyptians have a heavy mind, loaded with thousands of years of experience and cultural accumulation with a creamy rich recent history of how to deal with catastrophes, the way of moving on through others, either intelligent foreigners or stupid locals. So there will be no civil war, we know how it works. We know where the fire is, we may approach it from time to time to let it reform and reshape us, but cautious enough to know when to pull ourselves away.

Amir, as for the personal psychological fights we get through all the time: they will never end. Even if you were the only living person without any problems or issues, you would find yourself some here or there to excite your days. Needless to say that in this mad world you will find plenty of them all around you. It becomes worse and worse when you have a damn thinking mind. The conflict turns more vicious and exhausting. Just be patient and the storm will end one day to be replaced with another. Concentrate on what you want from your life and everything else will take care of itself.

I myself have my storms, lots of them – in my memory, in the present moment, and who knows what the future will bring. These storms make me lose my balance, and that’s how I was taught to resist and to fix my feet wherever I am standing. You may lose opportunities, things, people. But as you said above and as Jesus is believed to have said (but who knows who said it for real): “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”

Take care and enjoy.

Marian

26 May 2013

Marian,

I hear you have been having power cuts. I only rarely read the news anymore – sometimes the headlines. Mostly bored, I read three sentences, and I know what the rest of the article is going to look like: a bit of that, a bit of the other, a personal story so that I can relate, some expert, and then a conclusion – and all of that mostly about topics that aren’t really new. In a way that makes me feel like I’ve finally arrived in Germany.

PhD stuff is advancing handsomely. I have three offers: two for Berlin, one for Florence. And I am going to Frankfurt, London, and Oxford next month, and may yet get another couple of offers. After that I will decide where to pursue my studies for the next four years. Who knows – I am very rationally weighing options.

And you, how are you?

Yours,

Amir

26 May 2013

Amir,

I am glad you are okay and proceeding with your projects. Here, we do not just have power cuts – we suffer cuts in reasonable thoughts and awareness. Ignorance is the real poverty, not any other. And I have to say: when you are poor, it is so easy to be abused.

Have been reading some words from some activists, some of those who initiated the revolution. They were saying that Islam is going to spread throughout Europe in the next decades according to the number of Muslims that will be there. And that people should learn from history. While answering questions like, how things will be in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood in the next years, they said Europe tried Christianity once, and maybe now it is time to try Islam – exactly as it is time for Egyptians to be responsible for their choices. I see the same, but in another way: it is time for Islam and Judaism (religions that turned believers to tribes) to confront one another again. Things here are bad. We are rebelling against the president and his tribe (the MB) again, and we are signing petitions to remove him. Many people are expecting clashes in the next few months. Copts¹⁷ on the other hand were afraid in the beginning and many are planning to leave for Georgia and other places. Now they feel a bit safer finding that all of us (real Egyptians) are starting to see through the whole American trick and are rebelling. (When you find that it is your destiny to resist and suffer all the time through history, you are as important as Egypt is.)

For me, my situation is not that much better than that of my country. Low energy and tiredness, rapid shifts and changes in my mood are bad. I am revising my life searching for bright spots and I can't find many. Until then, listen to the song "Daret el Ayam"¹⁸ by Om Kalthoum if you get a chance. It is one of my favourites.

Marian

17 Christian Egyptians.

18 The Days Go By.

27 June 2013

Marian,

I have been super busy the last weeks, so forgive me for my silence. Just got back from the UK – I was accepted by a professor at Oxford for a PhD programme! More on that another time though, since I have to go to bed – going to visit a friend in France for a few days tomorrow.

I am writing to you because I want to wish you and those close to you, and essentially the Egyptian people, the best of luck, courage, dexterity, humour, and bravery for the 30th.¹⁹ There is little else I can do, apart from trying to correct the picture that people have of Egypt and the revolution, and from telling you that I am very impressed and lucky to have once been a part of it.

Yours,

Amir

27 June 2013

Amir, hope you are fine. Thanks for your spirit and for your contribution. Wish us luck, it won't be easy or clear.

Enjoy your time,

Marian

4 July 2013

Dear Amir,

Egyptians are cheering for the fall of yet another dictatorship, only this time it's an armed one. Army intervention was inevitable. My next few words are going to be harsh. If you prefer not to know the truth or defend the people's rights, stop reading now.

Egypt was on the verge of a civil war with the support of the bloody Americans and the Muslim Brotherhood gang with their armed wing, Palestinian Hamas. When more than 30 million angry people are in the streets, you know what the meaning of a nation's safety and security is.

It was our decision as a people to protect ourselves and correct our path, and it is your decision as an individual and as a nation to be hypocrites or not. You call for

¹⁹ Cf. *Shaimaa Fayed/Yasmine Saleh*: Millions Flood Egypt's Streets to Demand Mursi Quit, in: Reuters, 30.06.2013; <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCABRE95Q0NO20130630> [29.09.2016].

freedom and real independence and on the other hand you call it a military coup. You know the damn Americans and how they think, yet you keep repeating evil words after them in a blind way. It is your decision to continue honouring your rich European history or go to hell.

A proverb we have describes it all: "One whose hand is in the water is not like one whose hand is in fire." You know nothing, and if you care enough to know, search well. Open your eyes. Here is the civilized Egypt – the experienced one, the one who can detect conspiracy, the one with grey hair who knew history more than any other. Our revolution was kidnapped and we exploded in the streets to get it back. Our dream was stolen and we decided to die again to guard it. Be human, be civilized, be honest, or just be American.

New Egypt free of gangs and implanted cancer is waiting for your visit.

4 July 2013

Oooooohhhh...

Marian, what I understand when you say 'you' is that you mean Western media etc., not me personally. As this is not what I think and say. I see how Al Jazeera and a host of Western media are framing a picture of a military coup, and how people in the West are readily buying into it after just a day, while having ignored the people's struggle from the beginning. I see it. In my little capacity as a citizen and friend here, I speak against it. And so far, my having been in Egypt in 2011 and the fact that my understanding of the situation is better than that of many self-ascribed Middle East experts holds enough authority to dispel idiotic analyses – if one can call them analyses at all.

I am not optimistic that in Europe this revolution will have any real effects. I hoped for it back in 2011, but people are too apathetic, too involved in the rat race, too preoccupied with their own little daily struggles, and quite frankly too arrogant to be inspired by 'Orientals'. This doesn't count for everyone, and there are pockets of people who think fresh. But in the end, this is an old continent, and by that I mean a demographically old continent. What the young say doesn't count much, as the old are in the majority. The old have the resources, and are unwilling to share these with the young – unless the young do what they are told to do by the old. Unless they play by the rules of the old. And for as long as a significant majority is economically well-off, nothing will change drastically.

With regard to the Americans, they are driven by two key factors: oil and Israel. Oil is going to become less important, but Israel continues to be one of the main issues. They are then driven by maintaining influence in the Middle East, and also by trying to keep everything as stable as possible. For America and Europe the Spring came as a horrific surprise. The government does not like to be surprised. So they went for

stabilization as quickly as possible. The Muslim Brotherhood offered itself as a collaborator, and as the only one with control structures at that, and even better, across national borders. So instead of having to deal with Ben Ali, Mubarak, Gaddafi, etc., separately as before, they could now talk with the Supreme Guide²⁰ and have three countries or more sorted. The US is no longer capable of pursuing proactive politics as it did during the Cold War or in the 90s and 00s. They react, and try to maintain influence, not increase it. I don't agree with their politics of soft words and heavy-handed action in the background, but they will probably continue to do so, as a mere continuation of influence politics.

Finally, I am not there, so I cannot say much. But I hope that this will infuse people with the hope, energy, and positivism they/you will need to build a strong, independent, and functioning country. From what I see, it's all far from over and settled. There will be setbacks. But let the last two years be a warning that just good will and hope are not enough to build something new.

I am so, so very much looking forward to come and visit again and see how it will continue. I'm proud to have shared a few months of new Egypt's struggle. It has a special place in my heart, and I will always speak out against those who are clueless and arrogant.

Much love,

Amir

10 July 2013

Hey Amir,

How are you? Things here are settling down. Baradei is now vice president with a wide range of power and control. Another economist – good, but old – is the prime minister. Islamists of the Nour Party are betraying the revolution, working for America, and they are the ones responsible for this retardation. Anyhow, you have known me for a while now and know a large part of my personality. I need to ask you a question: What else can you see me as, besides a doctor? I mean, what to do? What job? What else?!! And don't tell me an activist, because I really hate drama. I am much more practical and mind-directed.

I have no explanation why I am asking this question. I just need an answer.

Thanks

²⁰ Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood.

10 July 2013

Hey Marian,

I'm in the middle of writing a paper on migration and security in the Eastern Mediterranean, and on EU policy – and my head is shifting between explosion and shutdown.

I have taken a step back and only follow a bit of what's happening. Was too preoccupied and couldn't do my work anymore. I am curious to see how things will play out. I hope that Ramadan will bring calm, and that all factions will sit down and talk, although I am doubtful that will happen.

I find it really hard to answer your question. I don't see you as an activist. I am saddened to think of you not pursuing your career as a doctor, as I think you would be great at that. What if you just opened a small clinic somewhere outside of Cairo? Or worked with Médecins Sans Frontières? Or the International Red Cross? What else? Do you want to write? It's a hard path, although I could imagine that you would swing a pen quite forcefully. Or take up a trade? Or teach? About health issues or something else? I guess my question is, do you want to leave your field altogether, or do you just need to adjust your path? And for both alternatives, why? External circumstances, or have you lost interest?

I think it's good to think about a plan B, and then to go out and create plans B, C, D, E, F, G, and H, take up some tasks that keep you busy and stimulate your brain, until any of those plans move you to finding a new plan A. At least that's what I've been kind of doing during the last year. I got a job in a restaurant to pay the bills and increase my mobility, and I just started working on something. In some ways it is easier in Europe, I would assume, in other ways it is probably easier in Egypt. But by now I am looking at the luxury problem of having seven options for what to do from here on. Drastically different from having no clue last year.

I've got to continue with my work, hope that helps somehow. All the very best, and I wish you calm days!

Amir

10 July 2013

Hi Amir,

Ramadan is making things better, in particular after the massacre that happened two nights ago.²¹ I have been calming some of my friends via calls or analyzing the whole thing on Facebook. I feel that I can't wear the white coat anymore. I feel I have

21 Cf. *Paul Owen/Tom McCarthy*: Egypt: 51 Morsi Supporters Killed in Shooting at Republican Guard Compound – As It Happened, in: *The Guardian*, 08.07.2013; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/middle-east-live/2013/jul/08/all> [29.09.2016].

outgrown it. I know that I am frustrated and I shouldn't judge now. Yet, this feeling has been there since those days you were here in Egypt. I am exhausted more than anyone can imagine. Pain has been the main theme in my life till now with overdoses for the last five years. Being away from direct contact with patients for a year may be the cause, but I think it is much more than this. I am longing for another life, another role. Let's see.

Marian

11 July 2013

Hi Marian,

The battle of interpretation is raging everywhere, I see. I understand how it is important for the path forward. But to be quite honest, I think I will not further engage in this debate. I am as convinced as ever that a large portion of the Egyptian people wants to build a new Egypt along the original demands 'dignity, bread, and justice'. This is what counts for me. The machinations of the MB, Feloul,²² army, Salafis and anyone else are important, but only as representing an old order that needs to be replaced. It has become as much a battle over mindset as it has of power, and when it comes to mindset, there are too many similarities between the conflict lines. Does the US play an important role? Without doubt. The Saudis? Surely. Qatar? Of course. Are there foreign interests at large? Yes. However, new forms of government and society will only arise if the people can form a new narrative that will dominate the narratives of any of the conflicting factions. These groups need to be forced to become followers of the revolution, and they need to be forced to decide: either adapt to the revolution, internally and externally, and become a real part of it; or be disbanded. So far, it looks to me as if too many of them are playing games for their own purposes, and then claiming the revolution as a mantle of justification.

I might be mistaken – I hope so – but while I can understand that people would rather have easy access to gasoline and food, the systemic stranglehold that a few inscrutable, intransparent, and self-interested individuals, networks, and institutions hold over society should in my view be the real target for toppling. Islamist hijackers and other representatives of an antiquated, closed order need to be forcefully repelled, but I hope for new forms of productive and accountable government for Egypt, and for the success of the revolution. So much for my two pence this morning...

If you ever want to come to Berlin for a week, to relax and meet some different people, let me know. I'd sponsor you.

Amir

²² 'Feloul' generally refers to the 'remnants' of a defeated army, and in Egyptian slang it is now a pejorative term denoting the remnants of Mubarak's regime.

11 July 2013

Amir – Or be disbanded. This is exactly what happened to the MB and this is what is going to be done to whoever thinks out of the box of the revolution demands. And yes, games are still on the table and under the table. All that we do as youth is use each of them to kill the other, and this all will end in favour of whoever is patient enough. But you are mistaken and hugely mistaken regarding the tone I hear in your voice defending a fake democracy we have been going through for a year. Had you been here, you would have been the first in the streets to do the same as we did. I wish you had something to relate to – something in your own culture’s memory that could make you understand how Egyptians feel right now. Insecurity, bombs are everywhere, armed crazy irrational people around, land that had been planned to be sold as a part of American, MB, and Israeli plans. You may have lived in this land, but you don’t know its history and you don’t know the history that has shaped our personalities. And it seems you will never know as you still see things like your government, through papers and pens and statistics. And again: “One whose hand is in the water is not like one whose hand is in fire.” Sorry that the year you spent here gave you nothing. You still need lots of time. And thanks for your invitation, but in my opinion, Berlin is just another American territory like many now. Sorry for your history; sorry for Europe that I seem to be mistaken about. We are all in the same boat, the boat of slavery – slavery to human nature, the evil side, unfortunately. Sorry for our weakness. Sorry for being cowards. And thanks for your hopes for Egypt. I have nothing to say but that we are trying. Maybe we will fail, maybe we will succeed, but at least Egyptians are trying.

With love,

Marian

14 July 2013

Hey Marian – Was working a lot the last days, and I have a lot of family business to attend to right now. Not the most pleasant. My 91-year-old father, who suffers from dementia, has – from what I can hear over the phone – given up on life.

So, let me tell you this: I am dealing with my family trappings; I am trying to go forward in my life, and get a PhD, for all of which I need money. So I work whenever I can, and I try to become sane again. Because when I left Egypt, I wasn’t. And when I went to my father and saw him withering, I lost it.

One day, maybe I can actually say what this one year in Egypt was for me. I am under no illusion that I am Egyptian, or have a full understanding, or know what it all feels like. I don’t. I would’ve liked to stay longer – I couldn’t. At the same time, I think at least I saw a bit of your country, and I was as involved in something as I have ever

been involved in anything else before. And, even if it isn't your joy and your despair, I am jubilant when I see good things happen, and it saddens me when things go wrong.

Make no mistake, I do not agree with nor do I endorse the governments here or in Israel. I do believe that the level of democracy that exists here, if not as much as it did in the past, is something to cherish. Merkel will go, if not this fall, in four years she is done. The democracy that exists here is not for sure and never for granted. Neither is wealth or law and order. People do not realize this, but they are drunk by it all.

I very vividly remember when MB control first became palpable to me, when I was on Tahrir and MB people controlled one of the checkpoints, and it drove me nuts. For a number of reasons, because I studied them, and because I know people from Gaza, who told me what the MB does to opponents there (though it's not like Fatah²³ doesn't do the same). It is the mix though that disgusts me, the brutality and the fascist ideology, and the presentation skills – essentially, its neo-liberal core, which panders to those in the West, who couldn't care less – apart from the money. I talked to someone I know and value, and she said, well, perhaps that's just what it's going to be: the MB for five years, and then after that let's see. So, I am glad that the MB is out. I am glad that there is a measure of stability in parts of the country again, electricity, fuel, what have you.

Yet, as with Fatah, I am not a big fan of military institutions, even if they prop up a secular alternative. Remember the day when the army sent a marching band all in white down the roads of downtown? I thought I was watching *Battle of Algiers*.²⁴ Military propaganda frightens me. The attempt to instill some sort of unquestioned authority, which is always, always what military is about, frightens me. I also don't like the police. I saw with my own eyes what they did. I saw the marks on people of what the state security did. It makes me sick.

Does that mean there should be no military, no police? No. But I would hope that it would come under civilian control. And not play the civil state. And I hope what you say will happen. I think this we can agree on: this revolution – and probably none of the players have realized it yet – will slowly dismantle any of the old forces, because they will in alternating alliances weaken themselves, until everybody is so exhausted that only the people persist and will determine what will happen with the country. As a historian, I see two models (and they are nothing more than models really): the revolutions throughout Europe in 1848, and the French Revolution of 1789. 1848 seems unlikely at this point, because the old system appears to be too weakened already to be able to re-establish control relatively rapidly. 1789 is of a grand nature, but it also took time, and more time, and saw blood, and dictator-

²³ Palestinian organization.

²⁴ *Pontecorvo, Gillo: La battaglia di Algeri*, war movie, Italy/Algeria 1966.

ships, and war. None of this needs to happen, as history does not ever repeat itself. But I think for power structures to be broken, institutions need to fall. And some can fall peacefully, and others will not. Let me stay odious like that. I do worry, and I also worry for the country that my father is from, for the people I love there. Since a large determinant, whether you like it or not, is Camp David, the US alliance, the military, and Sinai. And I truly, truly hope that whatever happens, there will always be enough people with sound minds and the necessary restraint to not let things get out of hand there, because that will cause *orbicide*.²⁵ And I never wanted to think about *orbicide*, but when I was in Egypt, I did – and it's not gone. But here, I can think more about buying strawberries and mixing them with mint and lime to make a tasty juice out of them – and I would like to invite you to have a self-made strawberry-lime-mint juice with me in Berlin.

Have a good night Marian,

Amir

14 July 2013

Hey Amir,

I have to apologize for behaving badly while talking. I have three points to answer to be specific. And I am going to be straightforward as usual with no compliments.

First, democracy in Europe and in Germany: the day before yesterday something happened that kept me laughing while telling it to others. Will tell you the sequence and then I will give you a picture of how I see it. The sequence was:

Germany (its foreign minister) suggested to Egypt to let an international organization see Morsi and talk to him.

A few hours later, America asked Egypt to release Morsi from detention.

Another few hours later, Germany announced that it agrees with the American demand regarding Morsi.

They did so in spite of the fact that he is a criminal, and that lots of charges have been presented against him by regular people, and that he is awaiting trial for being a traitor, for having asked foreign armed organizations – such as Hamas – to work for him. Yesterday the questions began anyway. But when America and also Germany ask Egypt to set free a man who is being held by law, that just makes him a spy in our eyes. So now my imagination of how the sequence happened:

²⁵ The threat of the destruction of all humankind.

America to Germany: We need to set the man free, this is causing us trouble. He knows a lot and may talk. He is ours at last.

Germany: But how to ignore the law (law-oriented Europe)? He is a man who has been revolted against by his people. Also, we didn't ask for Mubarak. No, we don't think this is the best idea.

America: So let's do it like this: You ask it (in a humanitarian way). And then when we ask for him to be released, just confirm it.

Germany: Mmmmm okay. This is more reasonable. Let's go.

I know it is funny to portray it like this, but this is exactly how I see the relationship between America and Europe. And of course it ranges between the puppet England and the much more, let's say, independent Germany, speaking for the rest of Europe. I have been watching a video of European history and the man talking was American, explaining to American students. So he is saying, "And this is what Europe will be as we know it today, and with which we have lots of issues." And in another video he continues explaining some of the issues, such as the fact that Europe doesn't have to spend a lot of money for weapons and armies, because it depends on America. You use the money for the well-being of the citizens, meanwhile an American citizen can't find health insurance. So yes, maybe I am here, but I can see it all. Actually, watching it from outside is amusing. :)

The second issue is my beloved Egypt. I have to explain why you didn't understand the Egyptian personality: maybe from afar, you see us as Arabs, which went well for the Israeli plans in the last years. But the reality is, under all those tons of dust covering us through years, our geography has formed our personality. We are patient like the Nile. But avoid our rage, it will be like a flood. And that is exactly what happened with Mubarak. We have waited for 30 years and raged like a flood. We can bear a corrupted Egyptian for 30 years, but a traitor not for more than a year. Also, we love foreigners. Egypt has always been open to and for others. Armenians and Jews (except for the political era of Nasser), Italians and Greeks, Syrians today, and many others. You may be thinking, "Yes, but you treat them badly." My answer is, "No." Maybe in the last years, because all were treated badly. Poverty, injustice, hatred began, and these were the main reasons why we revolted. We were fed up. But see, in the past – I have a documentary called *The Italians of Egypt*²⁶ – see how they owned hotels and companies, see how they talk, see how some of them refused to leave and are still living here. Another documentary, called *Jews of Egypt*,²⁷ was just released a few months ago. I saw it at the cinema. In one part of the documentary, the MB burned down the entire Jewish neighbourhood, where all their shops were. All these people are very welcome, but traitors are not, and it is the members of the MB who are betraying Egypt (and not the youth but the heads, the

26 *Salem, Sherif Fathy: The Italians of Egypt, documentary, Egypt 2011.*

27 *Ramses, Amir: Jews of Egypt, documentary, Egypt 2013.*

youth are just tools, and we are planning to attract them back), they worked for their own interest. I didn't tell you how Morsi appointed his very own prosecutor so he could put in jail whomever he wanted (long story). And lots of activists went to jail throughout that year. None of the cases presented against any member of the MB were investigated. So if you kill law, if you damage and besiege courts, how will you build a country?!! How will you obtain justice and dignity?

Another thing I have to mention is the terrorism we have seen since they were ousted. Their capacity for violence is amazing, really, I will not tell you stories, but I know you can imagine. The last way in which geography shapes our personality is present in the army. We are a paradise surrounded by desert and by desert-oriented countries right and left. So it is not new for us – from the time of the pharaohs to this very moment – to be attacked. So Americans and Israel wanted to damage our country, and our army said: No, we are sorry, just back off. We are the first who shaped armies. It is our invention and in our blood. We, the youth, know all about the corruption that is going on. We want a reformation, a real change. We want our problems to be solved internally with our army, our people. Even if we have issues and are angry with one another, and with our institutions, we will solve them. But there is no place for traitors here, sorry.

Let me give you an example: If your apartment was messy, and you decided to clean it with your family, and suddenly a thief or a killer attacked from the door – would you keep cleaning, saying to be clean is more important than it is to be safe and defend the house? This is exactly what we have been through since 11 Feb. 2011, since Mubarak and the MB with Mubarak's military and America robbed our revolution, our dream, forced us to die again and offer martyrs again. We accepted the challenge and we decided to protect our revolution all those two and a half years. We insisted to get it back through different waves. Now we can go back to cleaning, which is also difficult and challenging and all the sides have to be helpful. We have no other way and it will take years.

The third point is you and your family. I can imagine. And for Camp David, we are not a nation that was born yesterday. Military and international agreements have been sculptured on temples for thousands of years. We know them well and know when to respect them, when to use them, refuse them, revise them.

About your father: I am sorry for him. He seems a great man. This is life Amir. At some point we have to accept our weakness, unfortunately. This is all.

Take care and enjoy your juice. Pray for us.

With love,

Marian

3 August 2013

Amir,

In the middle of media yelling here and there, hope this here has reached you:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2013/08/egypt-evidence-points-torture-carried-out-morsi-supporters>.²⁸

11 August 2013

Hey Amir,

How are you? Hope all is fine. I have a question, and some details would be helpful. Did any of the media in Germany or any other of those you follow mention the torture cases happening in an MB sit-in in which about eleven tortured bodies were found dead? The journalists that are caught and tortured every day there? The children taken from an orphanage, forced by the MB to sing songs and to walk around dressed in funeral shrouds (with the shrouds meant to represent their willingness to die for the MB)? The cars that are caught entering their sit-in full of weapons? What is happening in the south, in Minya and Assiut, to Copts by MB allies these days; the movie of Ayman al-Zawahiri asking Islamists to attack Egypt and accusing Christians (the same person who caused the Americans to close their embassies after they found a suspicious message); the priest they killed in Sinai or the man whose head they severed from his body; or the one kidnapped who, after the ransom was paid, was sent home with a message for all Christians to leave Sinai? The terrorism there – about 35 police and army officers and personnel were killed since 30 June alone. The video of the one MB leader named Beltagy saying: In the same second that Morsi comes back to power, everything that is happening in Sinai will stop.

Despite it not being official, despite it being exceptional to let politicians and representatives see prisoners, despite the fact that it angered us, and despite no one asking to see Mubarak, we silenced ourselves hoping this would save one person – in case the MB were ready to accept negotiations and dismiss their people from their sit-in. They even refused the calls from Al-Azhar²⁹ to talk. So it seems that they are seeking another massacre, that they are seeking to trade in blood all over the world. So now, and especially after their acts of violence, their sit-in is becoming a threat for all of Cairo.

28 *Amnesty International*: Egypt: Evidence Points to Torture Carried out by Morsi Supporters, press release, 02.08.2013; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2013/08/egypt-evidence-points-torture-carried-out-morsi-supporters> [29.09.2016].

29 A reference to al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, which is a very influential Islamic institution.

Do you know that I need to finish some documents in Cairo University and for a month I haven't been able to?³⁰ I can't tell you how the life of the people living there is. Women don't go out. One friend of mine lives there. They can only take one direction – the other would lead to the sit-in, and she fears going there with her two-year-old daughter. Would any country permit this violation and these threats?! People are fed up.

Good night,

Marian

14 August 2013

Marian,

Sorry for replying so late. I am in Jerusalem, and things are quite messy with my family.

As you know, what happens in Egypt and what reaches the Western media are two different things. I think at this point quite a lot of people have given up on even trying to understand, and this is reflected in a lot of the articles I have been reading. People are concerned, but too often it just feeds into an image of chaos, perhaps 'Oriental chaos', and the picture that emerges is one of the military against the MB, blinding out whatever else might be going on (I don't really know, I try to read some Egyptian news, but I am too far removed).

I can tell you three things: I tell people here in Jerusalem that despite the bloodshed and everything that is happening, I am optimistic that over time, things will improve drastically in Egypt, and with no harm to here. That is what is most important for people here. I try to go against the stereotypes people here have of 'the Arabs', their mentality, etc., by saying that the revolution is changing a lot, and that there are a lot of very creative, courageous, and engaged people, and that as a society things are changing. Then I see, as always, that most people here don't have a clue about what is happening.

And lastly, a lot of the problems the youth faces in Germany are the same here in Israel. But because of this idiotic security discourse, they are too frightened to do anything about the religiousification of the society, or about the capitalist bloodsuckers who are destroying the country from the inside. I have already seen this a few years ago. But now it's more pertinent, and more people are also telling me about it – whether they be friends from the university here, artists in the beach city,³¹ taxi

30 The smaller of the Muslim Brotherhood's two sit-ins was located near Cairo University.

31 Tel Aviv.

drivers, or shopkeepers. It's subjective, but I think there is a realization process taking place here, which can change things in the long term. It can, but it can also lead to those people – the educated, young, and mobile, who have just moved to Berlin – increasing the proportion of fascistic elements here.

This is my update. I hope you and your family are safe, and I hope that out of the struggles of today and the blood that is being shed, no more violence will arise, but that it is the necessary evil for making your country blossom again. I am in no position to tell.

Yours,

Amir

16 August 2013

Marian – Are you ok?³²

Amir

17 August 2013

Amir,

My area was on fire and under fire for hours. My area is full of Christians and churches.

But the army has come now and things are better. One day a few months ago during the time of Morsi, when people were burning the offices of the MB party all over the country, in my area they stood in front of the MB party office, protecting it. We didn't allow people to burn it. Now they want to burn us. The MB's real face is now revealed.

What Europe has done yesterday is shameful and unacceptable.³³ Why is France allowed to fight terrorism in another country, i.e. Mali? Yet we are not allowed to fight terrorism on our own land!

Pray for us. It is terrorism officially now. Thanks for asking.

32 Cf. Egypt Crisis: Deaths as Cairo Violence Resumes, in: BBC, 16.08.2013; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23721584> [29.09.2016].

33 Cf. UN Calls for Maximum Restraint in Egypt amid Violence, in: CBS News, 15.08.2013; <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/un-calls-for-maximum-restraint-in-egypt-amid-violence> [29.09.2016]; Egypt Crisis: UN Security Council Demands 'Restraint', in: BBC, 16.08.2013; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23717419> [29.09.2016].

21 September 2013

Dear Marian,

My father died two weeks ago. I am coping, as it were. He was almost 92 years old, and the last two years of his life were filled with too little joy. Now he is gone. In a grave near the Mediterranean, a beautiful little graveyard for the privileged, or perhaps for the successful. I was there a couple of weeks before. I saw him a last time, kissed his cheeks, held his hand. I have a hard time pointing my finger to any one thing that made him so special. I think he was. I held a wake in Berlin, when I had returned after the funeral. Some fifteen people came, most around our age. I think it was his curiosity, his curiosity that still at the age of 90 attracted young people to him. To me he was just the father, a father he became during a short time, and a father I only had for a few years. And I miss him. Eating dinner and drinking wine with him, talking about life, going to the barber, to a concert, a lecture or the cinema, and I am really sad that he didn't make it to Berlin, his native Berlin, one last time. I miss our trips, the people we met on the road, the simple foods, the simple accommodation, and his smile, I really miss his smile and his laughter. The last time I saw him, I put him into a taxi, kissed him, he laughed, and off rushed the taxi.

Where are you? Are you back in Italy?

Much love,

Amir

23 September 2013

Dear Amir,

I won't say those stupid words like "Sorry for hearing that", and I think you expect it from me, don't you? What I am going to say is that I am happy you have seen him and spent some time with him. And I am even happier that you had the chance to get to know him before he died. And it seems to me that he felt the same. After all it is life. We have to accept it, otherwise we should stop having kids and end this whole story. And you know, living for ninety years is a wow. I guess he lived a fulfilled life and that he was a lucky man. I don't think that I will challenge him for that with my strong family history of cancer. Now you should start a family and find the right person to live with and try to correct your parents' mistakes and commit others and then your children will try to correct yours one day. That's for this story, I will not say much more.

I am in Italy. I took an exam to get my degree recognized in Italy, but am not sure if I passed. The results will be announced tomorrow.

So for politics, I am beginning to pull myself out gradually to reach a reasonable level in which I can live my life, study, and work, and still follow up what happens on

our planet by groups of insane people called politicians. As you see, things are deteriorating worldwide. Syria for which I am with Al Assad totally now examined the world's honesty and strategy and Egypt did so as well. Now the world is naked in front of its inhabitants. Here in Italy I talk to people and I admire their intelligence and wisdom. Sorry for saying that, but I don't think I would find it in lots of other parts in Europe. People here understand everything, the only minister in Europe who said that Europe has to support Egypt in its war against terrorism was the Italian minister of defence. Maybe because they are threatened. But still, when I speak with people in shops, I find that melancholy in the European personality. People here are waking up. And let's see. I hope the rest of Europe will wake up as well.

America is literally finished. What happened today in Kenya³⁴ and Pakistan³⁵ means that things are getting out of control. If you ask me, I will tell you that the best thing to be done to help the other now is to shut your door, concentrate on your own business. Every one of us is the best judge of his own case. If every one of us did this for now, we could save the planet. Otherwise it will be hard.

Egypt is preparing the constitution. We have a very well-balanced commission and we will have elections in about two to three months. Ashton³⁶ apologized a few days ago. She said, "At first, we didn't realize the fact of what was happening in Egypt and I am ready to come back to give my advice. Egyptians are partners and important to us." I think the world in those moments was witnessing a moment of truth, a moment of realization, a moment of shock.

Merkel seems on her way to winning – for me I can add: unfortunately. I had hoped for German policy to change a bit, especially after reading an article about Russian-German relations, which can't move forward with her presence and the presence of the current Russian president.

That's all for now. Seems I will be back in Egypt soon to decide on my next steps. What they will be, and where, after finishing this hard and tough period of my life, a period that taught me everything, consumed everything as well. But as you know, we always find the strength to go on. Tell me about your plans.

My sincere condolences,

Marian

34 Cf. *Edmund Blair/Richard Lough*: Islamists Claim Gun Attack on Nairobi Mall, At Least 39 Dead, in: Reuters, 26.09.2013; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-attack-idUSBRE98K03V20130921> [29.09.2016].

35 Cf. Is There a Link Between Attacks in Kenya and Pakistan?, audio file, in: BBC, 24.09.2013; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01gv5p1> [29.09.2016]; cf. *Khaled Wassef*: Al Qaeda Boss Ayman Al-Zawahri Marks 9/11 with Call for More Attacks on U.S. Soil, in: CBS News, 13.09.2013; <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/al-qaeda-boss-ayman-al-zawahri-marks-9-11-with-call-for-more-attacks-on-us-soil> [29.09.2016].

36 Catherine Ashton, who at the time was the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

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About the Authors

Amir Heinitz, born in 1985 in Cologne, grew up in Germany and spent his final high school years in Toronto. He pursued undergraduate studies in International Affairs in Brussels, graduate studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies in Jerusalem, and started working with a legal aid clinic in Cairo in preparation for a PhD on migration politics in transit countries in 2010. In the summer of 2011 he decided to leave Egypt after colleagues of his were arrested. In the following year, Heinitz came across the work of Friedrich Rosen (1856-1935), a German diplomat and Orientalist who was German foreign minister in 1921. Currently, Heinitz is a PhD student at the Technische Universität Berlin and at Birkbeck, University of London, researching diplomatic history in the Orient and Orientalist scholarship during the German Kaiserreich.

Marian Reda, born in Egypt in 1988, studied medicine in Cairo. In the early morning of the New Year's Day of 2011, while driving to one of her final year exams, she was struck by the news on the radio of a church bombing in Alexandria. During the following three years (coinciding with the period covered by the published e-mails), she graduated, completed a one-year medical internship at Cairo University hospitals, went to Italy for training in neurosurgery and neurology, and then practised general medicine in a health care centre on her return to Egypt. She then decided to take a break from medicine and, out of a long-dated interest in philosophy, she joined the American University in Cairo in September 2015 as a postgraduate student. Reda is currently studying for her Masters degree in neuroscience in London.

About the Editors

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THE CRITICAL STAGE. YOUNG VOICES ON CRUCIAL TOPICS

Ever since the outbreak of the revolutionary movements that in Europe have come to be known as the “Arab Spring”, diverse forms of protest seem to be on the increase worldwide. At their core, these protests are driven by citizens’ calls for more social participation, more democracy, and – above all – more transparency in individual states. Young people in particular are at the forefront of these protests, as has been exemplified by the Occupy movements in New York, Frankfurt, and elsewhere. A further defining feature is that most of the protesters belong to a well-educated middle class – a middle class that refuses to accept the prevailing social imbalances and the resulting lack of opportunities, most notably with regard to employment.

The international series “The Critical Stage. Young Voices on Crucial Topics” deals with these developments and poses questions such as: Can this growing level of resistance be defined as a homogeneous global phenomenon? Or are these protest movements more regional in nature, and determined by the respective state systems within which they are located? What specific demands can be identified, and how could these demands be incorporated into political decision-making processes? Does the underlying reasoning extend beyond the political sphere to other areas as well?

Designed as an ongoing online publication, “The Critical Stage” aims to bring together the various standpoints of protest movements from around the world. The series gives a voice to representatives from a wide variety of individual movements. Young journalists, film directors, artists, researchers, and members of diverse protest groups share their views on the inequities in many of the world’s political systems, and on the various modes of resistance that are being formed in response to these conditions.