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The Political Aesthetics of Global Protest : the Arab Spring and Beyond

Pnina Werbner

Editor

Martin Webb

Editor

Kathryn Spellman-Poots

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the political aesthetics of

global protest

Edited by
Prina Werbner,
Martin Webb and
Kathryn Spellman-Poots

the arab spring and beyond



THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

The Arab Spring and Beyond

EDITED BY PNINA WERBNER,
MARTIN WEBB AND
KATHRYN SPELLMAN-POOTS

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Acronyms

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party
BOCCIM	Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower
BOFEPUSU	Botswana Federation of Public Service Unions
DPSM	Director/Directorate of Public Service Management
GSB	Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade
GSS	Gaborone Secondary School
IAC	India Against Corruption
J18	Global Carnival Against Capital movement
NCPRI	National Campaign for the People's Right to Information
NHS	National Health Service
NSM	New Social Movement
NYC	New York City
NYPD	New York Police Department
NYU4OWS	New York University for Occupy Wall Street
Occupy LSX	Occupy London Stock Exchange
OWS	Occupy Wall Street
PNM	People's National Movement, in Trinidad
PSI	Public Service International
RTI	Right to Information
SCAF	Supreme Council of Armed Forces
SMU	Social Movement Unionism
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
TAZ	Temporary Autonomous Zone (manual title)
UfSO	University for Strategic Optimism

Preface

The intellectual grounds for this book were first formulated in a session entitled 'Beyond the Arab Spring: The aesthetics and poetics of popular revolt and protest', convened by Pnina Werbner and Martin Webb for the Association of Social Anthropologists' annual conference, which took place on 3–6 April 2012 at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. The theme of the conference was 'Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalising World'. Several of the contributors to the book participated in the conference. Dimitris Dalakoglou from Sussex University assisted in the initial formulation and planning of the session but could not attend. After Delhi, since many of those we invited could not make it to the conference, we decided to hold a further international conference, this time in London. That London conference, which gathered participants from Egypt, India, the USA, Australia and Europe, took place in mid-March 2013 at Aga Khan University. It was funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. We would like to thank the Foundation for its very generous support. For the London conference Kathryn Spellman-Poots joined Martin and Pnina, and the conference was held under the auspices of Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations. The University provided the premises, the conference back-up and, ultimately, a home for the book with Edinburgh University Press. We would like to say how extremely grateful we are to the University for its generous support.

In addition to contributors we would also like to thank the discussants in the various sessions: Anne Alexander, Emma Tarlo, David Graeber and Marie Gillespie, whose stimulating and insightful comments helped to raise important issues for debate. Additionally, we are grateful to Susan Osman, who presented a paper in London but was unable to contribute to the book. Her photograph

of Tunisian graffiti taken in 2011 does, however, adorn the book's cover. Nabiha Jerad, her co-author, was tragically injured in a car accident in Tunisia and later died. Her participation would have been invaluable.

As the book was almost ready to go to press, the violence in Egypt gave a further tragic twist to what had hitherto been an optimistic, hopeful project. Dalia Wahdan and Hanan Sabea, the two contributors on Egypt, were heroic in trying to forge an understanding of the events as they unfolded.

Timeline of the Global Protests, 2010–13

The Arab Spring: Events in North Africa and the Middle East

Syria

Yemen

Bahrain

Libya

Egypt

Tunisia

2010

December

17 December – Protests arise in Tunisia following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation. There are also significant protests in Algeria.

2011

January

Protests arise in Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Yemen, Syria and Morocco.

Mohamed Bouazizi dies of his injuries; several protesters are killed by snipers in Kasserine and Thalla; President Ben-Ali calls for an end to the use of live ammunition in confronting demonstrations and makes several concessions, including a promise not to run for re-election in 2014. Massive protests took over the streets of Tunis. President Ben-Ali flees, eventually finding sanctuary in Saudi Arabia. The government is overthrown on 14 January.

25 January – Thousands of protesters in Egypt gather in Tahrir Square, in Cairo. They demand the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. On 15 March, protests begin in Syria.

February

- 11 February – The President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, resigns and transfers his powers to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).
- 14 February – ‘Day of Rage’, in Bahrain. One person is killed by police. The next day at a mass funeral a second mourner is killed by police. Protesters, angered by this second death, march to Pearl Roundabout and begin to set up tents, with the number of demonstrators swelling to 10,000 by nightfall. The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions calls for a general strike beginning on 17 February. On 17 February, around 1,000 police are dispatched to clear the Pearl Roundabout of an estimated 1,500 individuals staying overnight in tents, with close to 300 injured, three killed and several missing. The security forces use live ammunition and fire at medics loading the wounded into ambulances. Mass protests continue at Pearl Square.
- 15 February – Protests break out against Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in Benghazi, Libya, starting the uprising that will soon turn into the Libyan civil war. France, Britain and the USA join to support the rebels by creating a no-fly zone, authorised by the UN Security Council. On 27 February, anti-Gaddafi forces establish a ‘National Transitional Council’ (NTC) as a way to coordinate the fight against the regime.

<p>March</p>	<p>Tunisia</p>	<p><i>Egypt</i> 3 March – The former Prime Minister of Egypt, Ahmed Shafiq, also resigns after protests.</p>	<p><i>Libya</i> The regime loses control of the entirety of Cyrenaica (Eastern Libya) and of the major city of Misurata in Tripolitania (Western Libya). In early March, however, regime forces push the rebels back and reach Benghazi. The NTC asks for western intervention in Libya. On 19–23 March, a western alliance of France, Britain and the USA enforces a no-fly zone and naval blockage in Eastern Libya by NATO with UN Security Council approval. The troops of the regime withdraw from Benghazi.</p>	<p><i>Bahrain</i> Protesters demand the resignation of Khalifah ibn Sulman al-Khalifah, the Prime Minister, and abolition of the monarchy. On 14 March, the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) agrees to send troops at the request of the Bahraini government. About 4,000 Saudi Arabian troops arrive, to be followed by 500 United Arab Emirates police. On 15 March, the King of Bahrain declares a three-month state of emergency. Security forces launch a crackdown on protesters at the Pearl Roundabout and elsewhere, and block access to medical facilities. Hundreds are arrested. The Pearl Monument is demolished. On 29 March, eleven parliamentarians resign in protest at the violence against pro-democracy demonstrators.</p>	<p>Yemen</p>	<p>Syria</p>
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April

Twelve Shi'i mosques
demolished in Bahrain.

June

3 June – The
President of Yemen,
Ali Abdullah Saleh,
is injured in a failed
assassination attempt.
He temporarily makes
Vice President Abd
Rabbuh Mansur
Al-Hadi the acting
President of the
nation.

August

20–8 August – The
Battle of Tripoli occurs
in Libya. Rebel forces
capture, and effectively
gain control of, the
capital city of Tripoli,
thereby practically
overthrowing the
government of the
dictator Muammar
Gaddafi. Rebel fighters
enter Tripoli and
occupy the 'Green
Square', changing its
name to the 'Square of
the Martyrs'.

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

Syria

Yemen

Bahrain

Libya

Egypt

Tunisia

October

23 October – Tunisia holds elections for the National Constituent Assembly. The religiously based Ennahda party takes the largest share of the votes, with about 37 per cent.

9–10 October – Coptic Christians in Egypt protest against the destruction of a church. The army responds by attacking the protesters with tanks, killing many.
 20 October – Muammar Gaddafi is captured and killed by rebels in the city of Sirte.
 23 October – The NTC officially declares an end to the 2011 Libyan civil war.

November

19–21 November – Many people once again protest in Cairo's Tahrir Square, demanding that the SCAF speed up the transition to a more civilian government. Clashes between protesters and soldiers occur, and many people are injured or killed.

19 November – Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, is captured, after hiding in Nigeria.

December

20 December – Many women protest in Egypt against human rights violations.

TIMELINE OF THE GLOBAL PROTESTS, 2010–13

2012

January

24 January – The Egyptian Field Marshal and leader of the military, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, announces that the decades-old state of emergency will be partially lifted the following day.

10 January – The President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, gives a speech in which he blames the uprising on foreigners and says that it will require the cooperation of all Syrians to stop the rebels.

February

27 February – The President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, officially resigns and transfers his powers to his Vice President, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al-Hadi.

3 February – The Syrian government begins an attack on the city of Homs.

March

Around 200,000 people in a mass anti-government demonstration are dispersed with teargas.

18 March – National Dialogue Council launched, with the closing ceremony held on 25 January 2014, concluding that Yemen will become a multi-region republic

April

20 April – Many people once again protest in Cairo's Tahrir Square, demanding a quicker transfer of power to a new President.

Tens of thousands of anti-government protesters flood Budaiya highway during the first day of practice for the Formula 1 race in Bahraun.

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

May	<p><i>Tunisia</i></p> <p>13 June – Former Tunisian president Zine al-Abidin Ben-Ali is given a life sentence by a Tunisian court.</p>	<p><i>Egypt</i></p> <p>23-4 May – The Egyptian people vote in the first round of the presidential elections. Ahmed Shafiq and Mohamed Morsi are the two winners of this election.</p>	<p><i>Libya</i></p>	<p><i>Bahrain</i></p> <p>A protest stretches over 5km against union plans with Saudi Arabia. This is repeated in June.</p>	<p><i>Yemen</i></p>	<p><i>Syria</i></p> <p>25 May – The Syrian government carries out a massacre in Houla, killing 108 people, among them 49 children.</p>
June	<p>16-17 June – The Egyptian people vote in the second round of the presidential run-off election, in which Mohamed Morsi receives the most votes.</p> <p>24 June – Egypt's election commission announces that Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi has won Egypt's presidential run-off. Morsi wins by a narrow margin over Ahmed Shafiq, the last Prime Minister under deposed leader Hosni Mubarak. The</p>					

June

commission announces
Morsi took 51.7 per
cent of the vote versus
48.3 per cent for Shafiq.

July

7 July – The NTC
supervises the first
democratic elections
of Libya. Two hundred
members of a General
National Congress
are elected to replace
the Council and to
organise parliamentary
elections in Libya.

12 July – The Syrian
army carries out a
massacre in the village
of Tremseh. As many
as 225 people are
killed.

15 July – The Inter-
national Committee
of the Red Cross offi-
cially declares that the
Syrian uprising is now
a civil war.

18 July – A bombing
in Damascus kills many
members of President
Bashar al-Assad's inner
circle, including his
brother-in-law, Asef
Shawkat.

27 July – Government
forces and rebels begin
fighting a battle to
capture Syria's largest
city, Aleppo.

Syria

Yemen

Bahrain

Protests continue throughout 2012 with many activists arrested and sentenced to life in prison for plotting to overthrow the monarchy.

Libya

Egypt

22 November – Egyptian protests start, with hundreds of thousands of protesters demonstrating against Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi after he granted himself unlimited powers to ‘protect’ the nation and the power to legislate without judicial oversight or review of his acts. Morsi deems the decree necessary to protect the elected constituent assembly from a planned dissolution by judges appointed during the Mubarak era.

Tunisia

August

November

December

8 December – Morsi annuls his temporary decree which had expanded his presidential authority and removed judicial review of his decrees, an Islamist official announces, but adds that the results of the temporary declaration will still stand.

2013

January

25 January – Massive protests against Mohamed Morsi develop all over Egypt on the second anniversary of the 2011 revolution, including in Tahrir Square, where thousands of protesters gather. At least six civilians and one police officer are shot dead in the Egyptian city of Suez, while 456 others are injured nationwide.

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

February	<p><i>Tunisia</i></p> <p>6 February – Leading opposition figure Chokri Belaid is assassinated outside his house, which is followed by massive demonstrations. On 23 February, the first Tunisian Harlem Shake video is posted on YouTube.</p>	<p><i>Egypt</i></p>	<p><i>Libya</i></p>	<p><i>Bahrain</i></p>	<p><i>Yemen</i></p>	<p><i>Syria</i></p> <p>In early February, Syrian rebels begin an offensive on Damascus. 12 February – The United Nations states that the death toll in the Syrian civil war has exceeded 70,000. By July the figure has risen to 100,000.</p>
March						<p>The Syrian National Coalition is granted Syria's membership in the Arab League.</p>
July	<p>Anti-government protests erupt in Tunisia.</p>	<p>3 July – Mohamed Morsi is deposed as President of Egypt in a coup d'état, followed by clashes between security forces and protesters. The draft constitution is suspended and Chief Justice Adli Mansour is named interim President. The Egyptian army cracks down on public media and shuts down several news outlets that it deems pro-Morsi, including</p>	<p>Anti-government protests erupt in Libya.</p>			

July

Al Jazeera. Unknown gunmen open fire on a pro-Morsi rally in Cairo, killing sixteen and wounding 200.

3 July – Just before the deadline approaches, Morsi offers to form a consensus government but this is ignored by General Sisi, commander of the army. Mohammed al Baradei, the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Coptic Pope Tawadros II and youth members of the Tamarod movement support the coup.

The Muslim Brotherhood begins a sit-in at the Rabaa al-Adaweya mosque and near Cairo University that lasts for six weeks

August

14 August – Bahrain Tamarod (also spelled Bahrain Tamarod, literally 'Bahrain

21 August – The Syrian regime bombs a Damascus rebel-held suburb with sarin

The Israeli Social Protest

2011

- June** A Facebook group, formed by Itzik Elrov to protest against the price of cottage cheese and calling to boycott the product, is joined by over 100,000 people. This ‘cottage protest’ stimulates a widespread discussion regarding the rise in food prices and the high cost of living in Israel, and is widely seen as a precursor to the social protest.
- July**
- 1 July – Following eviction from her apartment, twenty-five-year-old film editor Daphni Leef opens a Facebook event announcing an ‘emergency situation’, inviting people to join her in pitching tents on Tel Aviv’s Rothschild Boulevard in response to the housing crisis. She is soon joined by a small group of activists who begin to organise the protest.
 - 14 July – The first tent is pitched on Rothschild Boulevard. Approximately 200 residents spend the night in the encampment, which is visited by the Mayor of Tel Aviv, Ron Huldai. A small number of tents are pitched in Jerusalem too.
 - 16 July – The National Union of Israeli Students joins the protests.
 - 17 July – Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu calls on the protesters to help him lead housing reform.
 - 19 July – Tent encampments are set up in several cities across Israel, including Ashdod, Beer Sheva, Haifa, Holon, peripheral neighbourhoods in Tel Aviv and elsewhere. These encampments (and those established later) galvanise discussion groups and a variety of activities in the afternoons and evenings throughout the summer.
 - 23 July – The protest movement’s first large demonstration takes place, attended by over 20,000.
 - 24 July – Approximately 1,000 protesters march towards the Knesset in Jerusalem, causing major traffic disruptions.
 - 26 July – Representatives of twenty-five encampments meet to decide on the protest movement’s goals, which are defined as a broad demand for social justice. Prime Minister Netanyahu presents his programme to solve the housing crisis, which is rejected by the protesters.
 - 27 July – Israel’s largest organisation of trade unions, the Histadrut, joins the protest. Various local municipalities declare their support for the protest and announce strikes.
 - 28 July – Thousands march with their children as part of the ‘stroller march’, protesting costs of education and childcare.
 - 30 July – Second large demonstration in Tel Aviv, attended by 85,000 to 150,000 people. Several other demonstrations take place across Israel.
- August**
- 1 August – Israeli President Shimon Peres meets the protesters.
 - 2 August – Number of tent encampments continues to increase. Representatives of sixty encampments attend a joint meeting.
 - 3 August – National Housing Committees law is passed in the Knesset, despite the opposition of protest leaders who argue that it is a spin by Prime Minister Netanyahu.
 - 4 August – Public demonstration by Histadrut members in Tel Aviv, attended by 12,000.
 - 6 August – Third mass demonstration, attended by 200,000 to 350,000 people from all over Israel.
 - 7 August – Prime Minister Netanyahu appoints the Trajtenberg Commission, headed by Professor Manuel Trajtenberg, to propose solutions for the socioeconomic problems raised by the protesters. Most protest leaders express discontent with the move, and an alternative committee led by Professors Avia Spivak and Yossi Yonah is established. More ‘stroller marches’ take place across Israel.
 - 13 August – In a strategic attempt to show support for the protest outside of Tel Aviv, mass demonstrations, attended by tens of thousands, are held in Haifa, Beer Sheva, Modi’in, Netanya and Afula.
 - 18 August – As a result of a terrorist attack, protest leaders call off public demonstrations planned for the weekend. A quiet protest march is held in Tel Aviv.
 - 22 August – The first of several organised squatting events takes place, with 150 activists occupying an abandoned building in Tel Aviv to protest housing policies. A few clash with police and are arrested.

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

- August** 24 August – Iconic protest leader Daphni Leef calls on Professor Manuel Trajtenberg to resign from the commission he leads, raising criticism from several other public figures associated with the protest movement, including Chair of the National Union of Israeli Students Itzik Shmuli.
26 August – Second major squatting event takes place in an abandoned building in Tel Aviv.
27 August – Mass demonstrations take place across Israel, attended by tens of thousands.
- September** 3 September – In what is probably the largest demonstration in Israeli history (billed as the ‘March of the Million’), approximately 300,000 demonstrators go out to the streets in Tel Aviv, with another 100,000 demonstrators in other locations across the country. Most of the tent encampments are dismantled following the demonstration, due to the perception that they have reached their limit. The remaining encampments are mostly occupied by the poor and homeless.
7 September – Protests arise against plans by the Tel Aviv municipality to evacuate what remains of the Rothschild tent encampment. There are demonstrations in front of city hall.
10 September – ‘Roundtable events’ take place across Israel, with public discussions about socioeconomic issues.
17 September – The International Day of Action against the Banks includes a demonstration on Rothschild Boulevard in front of Bank Hapoalim.
26 September – The Trajtenberg Commission completes its report, recommending changes in taxation and customs, education, housing and public transportation, among other areas, to be funded mostly by cutting defence budgets. Some of the recommendations are later approved by the government, although actual implementation is uneven.
- October** 3 October – The Rothschild Boulevard tent encampment is evacuated by the municipality.
15 October – A global protest demonstration in Tel Aviv, with roundtables and public gathering, is attended by 1,500.
20 October – Events are staged to celebrate 100 days of protest.
29 October – Demonstrations take place across Israel, with approximately 50,000 attending the one in Tel Aviv.
31 October – The Knesset commences its winter session, with several hundred citizens protesting outside. Virtually all speakers refer to the social protest. ‘The Social Guard’, a new initiative monitoring the Knesset’s work and informing the public, begins its work.
- December** 9 December – National Human Rights march is held in Tel Aviv.
- 2012**
- January** 1 January – Hundreds of protesters demonstrate against the planned evacuation of the tent encampment in Tel Aviv’s Shekhunat Hatikva.
15 January – The Shekhunat Hatikva encampment is evacuated by the Tel Aviv municipality. Demonstrations are held in front of city hall, with several arrests.
- June** 22 June – Several activists attempt to re-establish the Rothschild encampments and are stopped by police, with some injured and detained, including Daphni Leef. During demonstrations against police violence the following day, some bank windows are smashed and major streets blocked.
- July** 14 July – Demonstrations, attended by several thousand, take place across Israel on the first anniversary of the protest. In the largest demonstration, in Tel Aviv, protester Moshe Silman attempts suicide through self-immolation. He dies six days later.
- 2013**
- January** 22 January – Two of the most prominent activists associated with the protest movement, Stav Shaffir and Itzik Shmuli, are elected to the Israeli Knesset as part of the Labour Party.
- May** 11 May – Approximately 12,000 people attend demonstrations across Israel, protesting the new government’s budget that calls for raising taxes and welfare cuts.
- July** 13 July – Several thousand protesters go out to the streets of Tel Aviv to mark the two-year anniversary of the protest.

India's Against Corruption Movement, 2010–12

- 2010** Public protests emerge in response to revelations of large-scale corruption cases, in particular concerning contracts for the preparation of the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, the sale of licences for 2G mobile phone bands and fraudulent land deals. A coalition of established public figures and anti-corruption campaigners, including Anna Hazare, Baba Ramdev, Arvind Kejriwal, Kiran Bedi and Supreme Court advocates Shanti and Prashant Bhushan emerges under the banner of India Against Corruption (IAC), with an inaugural press conference held at the Press Club of India in Delhi on 29 October. A central aim of the group is to campaign for civil society involvement in the drafting of the *Lokpal* bill. At this time legislation is being drafted by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to institute an ombudsman to investigate and adjudicate complaints against parliamentarians, particularly concerning political corruption. The *Lokpal* bill had originally been proposed in 1968 and had been debated, but never passed, by successive parliaments. During this period a social media campaign also emerges, leading to the organisation of a nationwide day of action on 30 January, featuring marches and public protests in cities across India.
- 2011**
- April** In protest at the exclusion of civil society representatives from the drafting committee for the *Lokpal* bill, and concerned about the content of the government's draft, Hazare initiates a 'fast unto death' from 5 April at Jantar Mantar in Central Delhi, demanding stronger legislation against corruption. 8 April – With Hazare still fasting, and amid mounting public pressure and protest, the government and activists come to a compromise in which the drafting committee will be headed by the then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee and the advocate and activist Shanti Bhushan, a former law minister who had been involved, as co-chair, in the first draft of the *Lokpal* bill in the 1960s. Other activist members of the committee include Hazare, Kejriwal, Prashant Bhushan and Justice Santosh Hegde. 9 April – Hazare breaks his fast in response. 16 April – The first meeting of the joint committee to draft the *Lokpal* bill is held.
- June** 4 June – Baba Ramdev, a leading yoga guru with a large international following, begins an indefinite hunger strike in front of massed crowds at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi, demanding the return of 'black money' stored in international tax havens. During the night of 5 June, a police operation is mounted to clear the protest site by force. Baba Ramdev is arrested and returned to his ashram in Haridwar, in the northern state of Uttaranchal, and prohibited from entering Delhi for fifteen days. 9 June – Hazare issues an ultimatum that a strongly worded *Jan Lokpal* (people's ombudsman) bill must be passed by 15 August (Independence Day) otherwise he will start another fast from 16 August. There is, however, insurmountable disagreement between the government and civil society representatives over the content and reach of the bill.
- August** 15 August – With his team's demands unmet, Hazare announces that the fast will go ahead as planned. A government order is imposed which states that public assembly will not be allowed at the planned protest site at JP Park or at other significant sites. 16 August – Anna Hazare is detained by the police before he can start his hunger strike at JP Park. Other leading activists are also taken into custody. After refusing to sign a personal bond to be released on bail, Hazare is sentenced to seven days' imprisonment in Tihar Jail, Delhi. Large-scale protests prompt the government to release Hazare, but he refuses to leave prison until permission is given to protest at JP Park.

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

- August** 17 August – With Hazare still refusing to leave jail, permission is given for a twenty-one-day protest to be held at the Ram Lila grounds.
19 August – Hazare leaves prison and travels to the Ram Lila grounds to begin his fast, via the iconic national sites of India Gate and M. K. Gandhi's death memorial at Raj Ghat. In the following days, huge crowds attend the protest and the government makes appeals to Hazare to end his fast and offers to consider various versions of the *Lokpal* bill which have been prepared by different civil society groups.
26 August – The government asks Hazare to guarantee that he will end his fast once the debate of the bill opens in Parliament.
28 August – His demands met, Hazare breaks his fast at around 10am by drinking a glass of fruit juice in front of a huge crowd of supporters. Large crowds also gather at India Gate following Hazare's call to celebrate victory.
- December** 11 December – Hazare performs a day-long fast at Jantar Mantar in Delhi protesting against amendments to the *Lokpal* bill proposed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee.
22 December – The expected introduction of the *Lokpal* bill in the Lower House of Parliament does not take place and the passage of the bill is slowed by party political and procedural issues. Hazare announces that a hunger strike will take place on 27, 28 and 29 December.
27 December – Hazare begins a fast in Mumbai, but compared with earlier protests the number of supporters is low. The *Lokpal* bill passes through the Lower House of Parliament on this day but is subsequently delayed in the Upper House, the Rajya Sabha.
28 December – Hazare ends the fast a day early, citing ill health and medical advice.
- 2012**
- March** To protest the introduction in Parliament of a *Lokpal* bill perceived as weaker than that demanded by the Hazare protests, a day-long fast is planned for 25 March at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. The event also highlights the lives of a number of activists murdered in the preceding months and years for their attempts to expose corruption. The event receives wide media coverage and is attended by several thousand people.
- June** 3 June – Hazare performs another one-day fast at Jantar Mantar, along with Baba Ramdev.
- July** 25 July – Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Gopal Rai, leading activists from the India Against Corruption group, begin an indefinite fast at Jantar Mantar, joined by Hazare four days later. The fast ends on 3 August 2012.
- November** In November, the IAC group splits when Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Prashant Bhushan and others launch a new political party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and prepare to contest elections on anti-corruption issues, initially in Delhi. Hazare and other activists of the IAC reject this strategy and continue to campaign in a non-party-political manner.

Botswana Strike

2011

- April** 18 April – The Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, representing 93,000 government workers, announces a ten-day strike.
7 April – The strike is extended indefinitely in the light of the government breaking agreed strike rules.
- May** 10 May – The Industrial Court orders all essential workers back to work.
17 May – The government fires all striking essential workers.
- June** 9 June – The strike is ‘suspended’

2012

- May–June** The High Court Appeal Case by the Botswana Federation of Public Sector Unions (BOFEPUSU) against the dismissal and non-reinstatement of workers takes place. Judgment by Chief Justice Dingake in favour of the unions is delivered on 21 June.
- August** 9 August – Judge Dingake at the High Court denies that the government has the right to extend the schedule of essential services.

2013

- January** 21 January – The Court of Appeal overturns BOFEPUSU’s High Court victory, despite the unions employing distinguished South African advocates. Almost 500 workers lose their jobs permanently as a result.
23 January – The Court of Appeal upholds the Industrial Court’s 2011 decision that essential services be prohibited from striking, instructing strikers to go back to work.
- June** 28 June – BOFEPUSU reports Botswana to the International Labour Organisation.

Wisconsin Protest

2011

- February**
- 11 February – Newly elected Republican governor Scott Walker introduces his ‘Budget Repair’ bill that (1) drastically restricts state employees’ right to collectively bargain on wages; (2) removes unions’ ability to negotiate on benefits, sick leave, workplace conditions and grievance procedures; (3) permits employers to discipline or fire workers without cause; and (4) requires public employees to contribute a significantly higher percentage of their pay into pensions and healthcare costs.
 - 14 February – On the first day of large demonstrations, 1,000 University of Wisconsin students march on the Capitol.
 - 15 February – More than 10,000 Wisconsinites march to the Capitol to oppose the Budget Repair bill. Hundreds fill the Capitol to testify at the Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee hearing on the bill, until the official session is ended at 3am. This is despite the fact that hundreds are still waiting for an opportunity to speak.
 - 17 February – In an effort to slow down the breakneck process and facilitate debate, fourteen of Wisconsin’s Democratic senators flee the state, so that Republicans are one vote short of the quorum necessary to vote on the bill.
 - 19 February – Approximately 68,000 people converge on the Capitol to continue the protest against the Budget Repair bill. Tea Party supporters rally 3,000–5,000 people to counter the anti-bill demonstration.
 - 25 February – Without notice, Republican leadership in the State Assembly calls for a vote on Governor Walker’s bill. With seconds to react, many Democrats who try to vote are unable to do so.
 - 26 February – In freezing rain and snow, 70,000–100,000 protesters rally at the Capitol.
- March**
- 1 March – Walker publicly announces a full proposed budget in a speech at the Capitol.
 - 9 March – Despite the fact that no Democrats are present, Republican legislators detach the fiscal provision of Walker’s bill and vote exclusively on union-busting measures. The bill is passed.
 - 11 March – Governor Walker signs the bill into law.
 - 18 March – Governor Walker’s bill is blocked from being implemented by Dane County Circuit Court Judge Maryann Sumi. She rules that the bill was passed in a manner that violated Wisconsin law, which requires twenty-four hours’ notice before a vote.
 - 26 March – Given Wisconsin’s open-meetings law, Judge Sumi voids Governor Walker’s bill.
- June**
- 14 June – Judge Sumi’s ruling is reversed by Wisconsin Supreme Court.
 - 29 June – Governor Walker’s Budget Repair bill becomes law.

Occupy Wall Street

2011

- June** 9 June – Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* registers the domain name Occupy WallStreet.org
- July** 13 July – *Adbusters* calls for a protest on 17 September, where 20,000 people should ‘flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades, and occupy Wall Street for a few months’ and demand ‘democracy not corporatocracy’.
- August** 23 August – ‘Hactivist’ collective Anonymous releases a video pledging its support for the protest and encouraging its members to participate by supporting a Tumblr page blog entitled ‘We Are the 99 Percent’, referring to the beleaguered majority that gets nothing while 1 per cent gets everything.
- September** 9 September – Supporters of Occupy Wall Street start posting their photos and stories to a new ‘We Are the 99 Percent’ Tumblr page.
 17 September – The protest begins, with around 1,000 people gathering in downtown Manhattan and walking up and down Wall Street. The protesters settle into Zuccotti Park, two blocks north of Wall Street.
 20 September – Police start arresting mask-wearing protesters, using an arcane law dating back to 1845 that bans masked gatherings unless part of ‘a masquerade party or like entertainment’.
 24 September – Around eighty people are arrested during a permit-less march uptown, and video footage of the event –especially the use of pepper spray on a group of women – earns Occupy Wall Street its first major media coverage. An Occupy Wall Street-inspired protest starts in Chicago.
 26 September – Filmmaker Michael Moore addresses the crowd at Zuccotti Park. Noam Chomsky sends his regards.
 27 September – Actress Susan Sarandon and Princeton academic Cornel West show up at the protests.
 28 September – Transport Workers Union Local 100 becomes the first big union to support Occupy Wall Street via a member vote.
- October** 1 October – Some 700 protesters are arrested in a march across the Brooklyn Bridge. Some protesters say the police purposefully lured and trapped them on the multi-tiered bridge’s road level; the police say they warned protesters to stay on the walkway level. The mass arrests push the protests to the front page of newspapers and the top of TV news broadcasts. Occupy Wall Street-inspired protests start in Washington, DC and Los Angeles.
 3 October – Protesters dressed as ‘corporate zombies’, in full zombie regalia and clutching fake cash, parade down Wall Street. The protests have spread nationwide, including Boston, Memphis, Minneapolis, St Louis, Hawaii and Portland, Maine.
 5 October – At least thirty-nine organisations, including New York City’s largest labour unions and MoveOn.org, join Occupy Wall Street for a march through New York’s financial district. Organisers say 10,000 to 20,000 people marched; the media puts the number somewhere below 15,000. In the evening, ‘mayhem’ is said to break out when crowds overrun police barriers and officers swat protesters with batons and spray them with mace. Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain weighs in on Occupy Wall Street, stating on CBS News, ‘Don’t blame Wall Street, don’t blame the big banks, if you don’t have a job and you’re not rich, blame yourself!’
 6 October – Around 4,000 protesters march in Portland, Oregon. More demonstrations unfold in Houston, Austin, Tampa and San Francisco. Asked about Occupy Wall Street, President Obama says, ‘I think it expresses the frustrations the American people feel, that we had the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression, huge collateral damage all

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF GLOBAL PROTEST

- October** throughout the country ... and yet you're still seeing some of the same folks who acted irresponsibly trying to fight efforts to crack down on the abusive practices that got us into this in the first place.'
- 7 October – Mayor Michael Bloomberg criticises the protesters in a radio interview, saying they are 'taking the jobs away from people working in this city' and that the protests are 'not good for tourism'.
- 13 October – Brookfield, the company that owns Zuccotti Park, announces that protesters must vacate the park at 7am on 14 October so it can be cleaned. Brookfield promises that demonstrators will be let back in after the four-hour power washing, but says it plans to enforce park rules prohibiting tents, tarps and sleeping in the park. Infuriated protesters view the announcement as Bloomberg's plan to shut down the movement, and begin cleaning the park themselves, also vowing to 'defend the occupation' from police.
- 15 October – The wave of protests spreads worldwide, from Europe to the Americas to Asia. While the demonstrations are generally peaceful, violence erupts in Rome when rioters hijack the protest there. In New York, thousands of people march to the US Armed Forces recruiting station in Times Square to protest spending on foreign wars.
- 18 October – President Obama delivers a mixed message on *Nightline*, saying he 'understands the frustrations' of the protesters, but that the movement is 'not that different from some of the protests we saw coming from the Tea Party'.
- 21 October – The host of an opera radio show aired by National Public Radio affiliates is fired for participating in the Occupy DC movement, sparking controversy.
- 25 October – The Egyptian activists who toppled Hosni Mubarak lend their support to the protesters in the US and Europe, issuing a statement published by *The Guardian*. In Oakland, California, police clear about 170 protesters from their encampment outside city hall and arrest ninety-seven demonstrators. When hundreds of protesters return later in the day, police fire teargas canisters into the crowd.
- November** 5 November – Protesters march on major banks and financial institutions in honour of 'Bank Transfer Day', an attempt to urge Americans to move their money from big corporate banks to smaller community credit unions. In the month leading up to Bank Transfer Day, an estimated 600,000 people pull their cash out of major banks.
- 15 November – In Oakland, police arrest twenty people and clear protesters from the plaza where they had been living; the mayor's legal adviser resigns in protest. At 1 am in New York City, police begin evicting protesters from Zuccotti Park on Mayor Bloomberg's orders, arresting those who refuse to leave and barring reporters from getting close to the scene. A judge rules that although the protesters do not have a First Amendment right to camp out in the park, they are allowed to return to Zuccotti sans tents and tarps.
- 17 November – In honour of the movement's two-month anniversary, and in response to the eviction of demonstrators from Zuccotti Park, hundreds of protesters march towards the New York Stock Exchange and eventually occupy other locations throughout the city. Other occupiers hold similar demonstrations across the country, in Los Angeles, Dallas, Denver and several other cities. Hundreds of people are arrested.
- 19 November – Campus police at the University of California, Davis, pepper spray protesters who are peacefully obstructing a public walkway. Footage of the incident quickly goes viral online, prompting the school's chancellor to place the offending officers on leave and order an investigation.

Student Protests and Occupy London, United Kingdom

2010

October 12 October – The Browne Review, or Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance, is published, suggesting among other things the removal of the £3,290 cap on tuition fees.

November 3 November – The coalition government announces it will put into practice the majority of the proposals put forward by the Browne Review, including major cuts to higher education institutions. Furthermore, the government makes public an intended rise in the cap for tuition fees, from £3,290 to £9,000.

10 November – ‘Demo 2010’, a national student demonstration organised by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the University and College Union (UCU) takes place in central London. The NUS claims that around 52,000 people attended the march, and that it was the largest student demonstration in a generation. Around 200 participants occupy 30 Millbank – headquarters to the Conservative party’s campaign – and clashes with the police occur.

24 November – Student demonstrations take place in central London and in other UK cities, including Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. The University for Strategic Optimism’s inaugural lecture takes place at the Borough branch of Lloyds Bank in London.

30 November – Student demonstrations are held in central London and in other UK cities such as Nottingham, Birmingham and Bristol. Occupations and marches take place. The University for Strategic Optimism holds a lecture at a Tesco Superstore in London.

December 6 December – An occupation and teach-in is held at Tate Britain in London by organisations including Arts Against Cuts.

9 December – Students in London and Edinburgh march on the day when the Houses of Parliament vote on the tuition fees bill. At 5.41 pm protesters hear that the bill has been voted in.

2011

February 15 February – ‘Art Against Cuts’ perform their ‘Orgy of the Rich’ at a Sotheby’s auction house in London, protesting the discrepancies between profits made in the art market and austerity measures in the UK.

March 25 March – The University for Strategic Optimism’s ‘Free Free Market Market’ performance action takes place outside the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Skills in London.

26 March – ‘March for the Alternative’, a demonstration opposing public spending cuts and organised by the Trades Union Congress (TUC), takes place in central London. The protest is described as the largest demonstration in the UK since the protest against the war in Iraq in February 2003.

May 28 May – UK Uncut’s ‘Emergency Operation’ takes place in cities across the UK. Activists dressed as doctors and surgeons occupy branches of four main banks with the intention of opposing the government’s proposed changes to the NHS and highlighting the role that banks had in the nation’s deficit.

October Occupy London sets up camp outside St Paul’s Cathedral. A second camp in Finsbury Square and other smaller camps and occupations follow.

2012

February 28 February – The Occupy London camp at St Paul’s is evicted.

May 1 May – A ‘Flash camp’ at Trafalgar Square and a protest in central London and the West End take place.

Spain's Indignados Movement

2011

- February** 9 February – A new online initiative named NoLesVotes (Don't Vote for Them) is launched by leading internet activists in Spain. The new platform calls on citizens not to vote for any of the country's major parties in response to the passing of the so-called 'Ley Sinde', an anti-digital piracy bill. US diplomatic cables obtained by WikiLeaks had previously confirmed activists' suspicions that the bill was drafted under pressure from the US government and its culture industry lobby.
- March** A 'Platform for the Coordination of Pro-mobilisation Groups' is created around a manifesto calling for mass demonstrations against Spain's political class to be held on 15 May. This platform soon morphs into Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now), joining forces with NoLesVotes, Anonymous, *Juventud Sin Futuro* (Youth Without a Future) and a range of other online and grassroots platforms to form a broad citizens' coalition.
- May** 15 May – Over 100,000 people march in sixty cities across Spain under the slogan '*Democracia Real Ya!*' ('Real democracy now!'). Although the marches are well attended they attract relatively little mainstream media coverage.
16 May – A group of around forty protesters, some of them linked to the world of hacking and free/digital culture, decide to pitch camp at Madrid's main square, Puerta del Sol.
17 May – Early in the morning the police evict the campers from Puerta del Sol. News of the eviction spreads rapidly via social media, including through Twitter hashtags such as #nonosvamos (#wearenotleaving) and #yeswecamp. This leads to some 200 people retaking the square, followed by many thousands more in the coming days.
20 May – By now, close to 30,000 people have taken to the Madrid square in full view of the national and international media. This demographic explosion is mirrored online as countless social media items are hastily produced and shared. Dozens of other cities around Spain follow suit, and the nascent Indignados/15M movement is now a global media event.
- Mid-May to mid-June** Protesters occupy Spain's main squares for a month. The encampments swiftly evolve into 'cities within cities' governed through popular assemblies and committees. Committees are formed around practical needs such as cooking, cleaning, communicating and carrying out actions. Decisions are taken through both majority-rule vote and consensus.
27 May – News of the violent eviction of peaceful campers from Plaça de Catalunya, Barcelona, by the regional police is widely shared on social media and by the mainstream media.
15 June – Indignados' peaceful image is tarnished when irate demonstrators harass Catalan politicians as they enter the regional parliament in Barcelona. This incident provokes a brief crisis within the movement as its spokespersons seek to distance themselves from it. A peaceful counter-demonstration a few days later restores the movement's non-violent credentials.
- Mid-June** Protesters relocate to local neighbourhoods (*barrios*) following arduous consensus-seeking assemblies. The aim is now to take the movement from the central squares and streets to these local neighbourhoods, but not without first warning the authorities that protesters 'know the way back'. Neighbourhood assemblies are created in many localities, albeit with uneven levels of participation.
- October** 15 October – The Indignados align themselves with similar movements elsewhere, such as Occupy in the US or the anti-austerity protests in Greece and Portugal, to launch a wave of protests in more than 1,000 cities around the world.

**Recent
develop-
ments**

In Spain, the Indignados movement has continued to evolve as a loosely articulated constellation of techno-political ideals, practices and actions. For example, in May 2012 a group called 15MpaRato was created to take legal action against Rodrigo Rato, the former IMF managing director and chief executive of Bankia. That same month Bankia had requested a €19 billion bailout from the Spanish government. In less than two weeks, the new platform had built a strong social media profile and raised sufficient money through crowdfunding to initiate the legal process. As a consequence, Rato appeared in court that December to face charges of fraud, embezzlement, falsifying accounts and price manipulation. Other ongoing initiatives include the Mortgage Victims Platform, the Casa Precaria in Madrid (offering advice on self-employment), a Catalan network of cooperatives and the Citizens' Tide, 'a coalition of 350 organisations ... that have mobilised hundreds of thousands against privatisation and austerity'.

Greece's Indignados

2011

- February** 23 February – There is a recurrence of violent protests and strikes involving up to 100,000 people as German Chancellor Angela Merkel calls for a renewal of the loan programme to Greece that had been conditioned on fiscal tightening. The measures adopted by Greece are considered harsh by the protesters.
- May** 25 May – Anti-austerity protesters organised by the Direct Democracy Now! movement, known as the Indignant Citizens Movement (*Kínima Aganaktisménon Politón*), start demonstrating in major cities across Greece.
28 May – Demonstrations continue with at least 7,000 people gathered in front of the Greek Parliament. A number of new flags appear, including those of Tunisia, Argentina, Armenia and Hungary. At least twenty people set up tents in the square. Major demonstrations also take place in Thessaloniki, Patras and Heraklion. In Thessaloniki a cycling race is organised as part of the demonstration.
- June** 5 June – Second day of pan-European demonstrations marking the twelfth continuous day of demonstrations in Greece. An estimated 200,000–500,000 gather at Athens' Syntagma Square, making it the largest demonstration in Athens since the 1980s.
29 June – Violent clashes occur between the riot police and protesters as the Greek Parliament votes to accept the EU's austerity requirements. Accusations of police brutality are reported by international media.
- August** 7 August – A sit-in at Thessaloniki's White Tower Square is held throughout July and early August, until the municipal police evacuate the square of all protesters camped inside.
14 August – The indignants at Heraklion's Eleftherias Square agree to leave the square peacefully.
- October** 5 October – A general strike takes place. During the demonstrations police clash with youth.
- November** 17 November – As part of the ongoing protests that lead to the resignation of the Papandreou government, over 50,000 people march in Athens.

2012

- February** 12 February – As many as 500,000 protesters gather in Athens outside Parliament House to voice opposition to Lucas Papademos' caretaker cabinet's austerity measures being debated in Parliament, a precondition for the next €130 billion lending package from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund to the Greek government, without which the country faces sovereign default by 20 March. Police use large amounts of teargas and flash grenades, while protesters hurl stones and Molotov cocktails. In total forty-five buildings are set ablaze, and twenty-five protesters and forty officers injured. The protests are preceded by a twenty-four-hour nationwide general strike on 7 February, when the two largest labour unions in Greece said the proposed measures would 'drive Greek society to despair'.
- April** 5 April – Demonstrations against the government after a pensioner named Dimitris Christoulas commits suicide by shooting himself, refusing to share the fate of those people who have had to search for food in rubbish bins.
- 2012–13 Anti-austerity opposition is expressed through political parties, which have attempted to appropriate the spirit of the 2011 protest at Syntagma Square. Indignation with austerity, however, remains a central feature of everyday life in Greece.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

PNINA WERBNER, MARTIN WEBB
AND KATHRYN SPELLMAN-POOTS

POLITICAL AESTHETICS

This book is about the political aesthetics of the popular revolts and protests that swept across the world at the turn of 2010, starting from a small country in North Africa. The mass uprisings against authoritarian and dictatorial regimes in the Arab world that followed came to be known as the ‘Arab Spring’, an implicit reference to the Spring of Nations, the mid-nineteenth-century European wave of revolutions that united workers and the middle class across a swathe of countries in demands for democracy, liberalism, republicanism and freedom. Political aesthetics refers to the fact that, as Crispin has argued, ‘not all art is political, but all politics is aesthetic; at their heart political ideologies, systems and constitutions are aesthetic systems, multimedia artistic environments’.¹ As the essays in this book demonstrate, the building materials for an aesthetics of protest and revolt are mined from social, political and national histories, and assembled to subvert the aesthetically embodied, materially constructed edifices of tyrannical, authoritarian or neoliberal regimes. Peaceful political mobilisation and democratic claim-making, lacking the instruments of violence and domination, negate such edifices through counter-aesthetic movements of symbolic and experiential solidarity. Political aesthetics are thus central to all political movements because, as Crispin goes on to propose, not only is some art political, but political aesthetics, whether of regimes or the protest movements seeking to dislodge or radically reform them, concern the very ‘design of political systems’, seen as ‘aesthetic environments’.² Image-making is central to much political aesthetic, as Lila Khatib argues in relation to the Middle East:

The image is at the heart of political struggle, which has become an endless process of images battling, reversing, erasing and replacing other images ... Political struggle, then, is an inherently visually productive process. It is also visual to a large degree: It is a struggle over presence, over visibility.³

As Christopher Pinney proposes in this volume, images of the past continue 'to animate, in complex ways, the political landscape and the repertoire of political possibilities in India'. The political struggles this book aims to describe and analyse have not been just visual, however, but are expressed in song, humour, poetry and bodily participation. Protesters' imaginaries of good and evil embodied in regimes and in their utopian alternatives were manifested and materialised in actors' imaginative creations. In different, widely separated parts of the world they utilised aesthetic popular media, electronic media, shared hand gestures, visual and material discourses, artistic creations, actions and theatrical speeches to convey their message.

There had been other, previous waves of insurrection across countries and even continents. These included the early and late anti-colonial movements and, more recently, the East European and Latin American democratic uprisings.⁴ Of course many protests emerged out of activism against corruption and authoritarianism over many years, as in the case of Egypt and Tunisia which had witnessed earlier activist and trade union mobilisations, or India, in which the campaign against corruption had been fought by activists for many years.⁵ The historical continuities as well as the differences between the 2010-12 popular movements and past popular mobilisations are certainly significant and integral to any analysis. But the point we make collectively in this volume is that the new protests were also 'new' in theoretically significant ways. They were not simply echoes of earlier protest movements, but utilised innovative political aesthetics in an age of global media and social networking; their material, visual, physical and sensual manifestations were a means of mobilising and contesting corruption, inequality, autocracy and neoliberal policies.

TOPOGRAPHIES OF POWER: THE AESTHETICS OF POLITICAL FORM

To further explicate the claim that all politics is aesthetic, we begin by considering the architectural and spatial forms and organisational principles that animate the political. Form articulates moral as well as symbolic meanings. We associate power at one outer extreme with Nazi or Fascist architecture, the massive neoclassical structures – impenetrable, imposing, monumental – built by such regimes.⁶ Authoritarian structures, in their very impenetrability, substantiate the chasm between those who govern and ordinary people by asserting aesthetically their hierarchical domination over their environment. In the modern world,

particularly in authoritarian states, government ministries like the Ministry of Interior in Egypt, where the security files of so-called dissidents were lodged and detainees held illegally, are constitutive of this vertical domination.⁷

In the protest movements and uprisings described here, the counter-image to these formidable structures was, above all, the tent: light, moveable, makeshift. All the various occupy movements – from Tahrir Square in Egypt to the Indignados’ encampments and occupations in Spain, Greece, Israel, the UK and the USA, created over time demotic mini-republics, with kitchens, libraries and dialogue spaces. Caton, Al-Eriyani and Aryani describe the encampment in Change Square in Sana’a as ‘the longest standing tent city in the history of political protest’. In India, it was the *pandal*, a type of temporary cloth marquee deployed at weddings, religious and political gatherings, that shaded Anna Hazare and other activists during their protest fasts, as Martin Webb and Christopher Pinney show in this volume. Paula Serafini argues in her chapter that the ‘tent [became] a dominant symbol of Occupy, often portrayed in photographs by the media as a synecdoche for the movement’. At one politically significant moment, she tells us, the movement decided to

set up a ‘flash camp’ in the middle of Trafalgar Square, signalling the comeback and resistance of the movement with an act and a prop (the tent) which embodied its essence. The intention was clearly not to mark a new settlement site – since setting up tents in Trafalgar Square would guarantee an immediate eviction. The intention was to make a statement, to remind the world that the fight was not over, and that occupations could happen anywhere and anytime.

In another act of protest, this time in New York City, ‘protesters lifted their tents over their heads and held them open in the air, in a symbolically charged act of subversion’. Claire Tancons reports that in a march organised by the interfaith clergy group Occupy Faith NYC, the Council of Elders and various Occupy Wall Street-affiliated arts and culture groups such as Not an Alternative, in addition to candles, ‘marchers carried so-called mili-tents to symbolise occupation’. Tent cities were often targeted by authorities, usually in the form of attacks by the repressive forces of the state in which tents were often raided, set fire to or violently removed from public squares.

In Botswana, Pnina Werbner argues, not a tent but a giant Morula tree became the centre of worker protest, an alternative, ‘traditional’ site for a workers’ forum, countering the image of the magnificently built Botswana state parliament located nearby in the capital. In Wisconsin protesters occupied State House in flamboyant protest, as Garlough shows. Urban public squares, often redolent with the symbolism of prior revolutions, became the centre of many

of the protests. Khatib remarks that Cairo's Tahrir Square, Liberation Square, steeped in a nationalist history commemorating liberation from colonial rule, became a 'mini cosmos of the country's moral order as expressed in spatial order, a space that was controlled by the state and which had seen many protests crushed by the Egyptian police'.⁸ During the uprisings Tahrir Square became a 'complex space' of aesthetic production: Hanan Sabea and Dalia Wahdan describe the music, art and poetry that came to be performed in the square. In Yemen too, Bedouin poets recited or sang their poetry in the huge Taghayyur (Change) Square in Sana'a. Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, an urban space connecting key landmarks of Israel's struggle for independence, Livio and Katriel tell us, became the site of protest against the state and its uncaring government. In all the revolutions, uprisings and protests, monuments of the regime's authoritative domination were adorned with graffiti or protest posters. In all, sacred civic space was reinscribed anew.

Form is also evident in the contrast between vertical and horizontal politics. Whereas the hierarchical nature of autocratic regimes is evident, horizontality has become a trope and practice associated in many of the movements, in which leadership is virtually absent. 'Horizontality', often materialised in discussion 'circles', is understood in terms of dialogical tactics of non-privileged, egalitarian listening to others and allowing speaking in turns. Thus Livio and Katriel tell us that

Citizen-strangers spent many evening hours sitting in 'dialogue circles' ... Broadly modelled after similar 'general assemblies' in Spain and elsewhere ... these discussion forums were an exercise in grassroots participatory democracy characterised by a desire for non-hierarchy, collective and consensual decision making, and public transparency, in an attempt to challenge and contest dominant social and political relations.

Non-leadership in some anarchist-inspired occupations, like Occupy Wall Street, meant new inventive forms of horizontality. In reaction to the police banning of megaphones, supposedly because of noise pollution, the 'People's Mic' or 'human megaphone' was invented. Graeber captures the aesthetics of speaking to large audiences through this relay system in which everyone within earshot repeats what is said to the next circle, and then the next. This, he says, had a 'curious, and profoundly democratic, effect ... since anyone can speak, and everyone must repeat, it forces participants to genuinely listen to everybody else'.⁹

THE AESTHETICS OF LEADERSHIP

The stress on horizontality in many of the protest movements arises, of course, because autocratic leaders everywhere attempt to project their absolute dominance through pervasive images of grandeur and inviolability. In this volume Igor Cherstich examines the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, from ghost-like near-immortality to flesh-and-blood (evil) humanness. Gaddafi cultivated his semi-divine public persona as the father and symbol of the nation through billboards and posters that dominated Libyan urban space. At the same time, Cherstich tells us, Gaddafi the man gradually disappeared from public sight. The revolution reversed the great leader's apotheosis by tearing down the billboards and iconoclastic caricatures, as well as by physically attacking and desecrating the body of the tyrant. This confirmed what many had suspected: that the ghost was just a man. Ironically, perhaps, in the light of the above discussion of tent symbolism, in addition to his huge fortress-like compound in the centre of Tripoli, Gaddafi used a giant Bedouin tent to host foreign dignitaries, and even transported a tent to Italy on a state visit. In Tunisia, the spectacular corruption feeding the lavish lifestyle of President Zine al-Abidin Ben-Ali, Simon Hawkins tells us, was a specific source of anger, fuelling the protests.

Humour, satire, parody and caricature deployed to debase autocratic leaders have been the hallmark of the protest movements in many parts of the world. In Botswana, workers constructed the President as an autocrat by singing songs of rebellion that mocked and satirised him and members of his cabinet, Werbner tells us, while the press caricatured him in satirical cartoons. In Wisconsin, Garlough reports, Governor Walker was satirised in posters and through masquerade in which Krampus, a nineteenth-century mid-European scary folk figure who dispenses moral judgement, appeared at the forefront of several marches around the Capitol, shaking his fist and bearing a sign stating 'Walker, Krampus must talk with you'.

If some leaders are imaged as corrupt and evil by protesters, other leaders are imaged as exemplary persons, embodying the highest values of the nation and, indeed, the world. The image of M. K. Gandhi was a repeated trope in the 2011 protests, worldwide; it was invoked in Tahrir Square and in many other non-violent movements during 2011. In the Indian anti-corruption protests the globally reproduced image of the distinctive ascetic aesthetic which Gandhi himself cultivated during his lifetime was deployed as an inspiration for a new generation of Indian activists fighting present-day corruption. As Pinney and Webb show, Gandhi's image and moral legacy was in turn woven together with images of revolutionary martyrs in the struggle for Indian independence. This included men such as Bhagat Singh who had opposed colonial rule through acts of violent resistance and prison hunger strikes, and was ultimately hanged by

the British colonial government. Unlike some of the ‘horizontal’ movements, the Indian anti-corruption protests were led by charismatic leaders who asserted moral authority through displays of asceticism modelled on the Gandhian practice of *satyagraha* (truth force). In the case of the most prominent activist, Anna Hazare, the soubriquet ‘*dusra* (second) Gandhi’ attached to him by supporters explicitly referenced the earlier struggle against illegitimate colonial power, attaching some of Gandhi’s charisma to a new iconic figure and rebooting the Indian idiom of ‘saintly politics’¹⁰ for a new decade.

If dictators everywhere display their images in giant posters, these became the object of desecration by protesters. Ironically, however, in a tragic reminder of the fragility of democracy, huge photos of Egypt’s army chief General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who was called upon to ‘save’ the 2011 revolution, came to be juxtaposed with former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, in what appeared to be a nostalgic yearning among many Egyptians for a strong man.¹¹ The juxtaposition signalled the possible end of the Arab Spring in Egypt.

WE, THE PEOPLE: POETRY, SONG AND THE POETICS OF PROTEST

It started with the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia as protesters first rose up to chant the slogan that became the hallmark of the Arab Spring: ‘The People Want the Fall of the Regime’. From Tunisia the chant spread to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, the Sudan, Syria and even Jordan and Lebanon. Beyond the Arab world the chant was picked up in the ‘tent protest’ in Israel. Hanan Sabea recalls that on the Friday of Rage in Egypt

as the imam ended the prayer, ‘the people’ arose in unison at the many mosques and squares of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, Port Said, Mansoura, and many other cities and towns in Egypt to chant one slogan, ‘*Ash-sha’b yurid isqat an-nizam*’ (‘The people want to dismantle the system’).

‘But who are “the people”,’ she asks, ‘and how are they constituted as a collective articulating a revolutionary demand for change?’

In Yemen, a report quoted by Caton et al. described the performance of singers and musicians in Change Square:

In the evenings, singers take their place. One musician, Muhammad Nasser al-Adroei, is rapping his way to revolution. ‘Be wise, the government is poison, the one who annoys it is killed,’ he raps in Yemeni dialect. The crowd joins him for the chorus, chanting that much-repeated slogan of the Arab revolutions: ‘The people want the fall of the regime.’

Not only rappers defined the political aesthetic of the Yemeni revolution, as Caton et al. argue in this volume. In a poetic version of the chant, Bedouin poets who joined the uprising called out in a *zamil* poem performed before a crowd:

Ya ‘Ali [the President], the people have decided/
Don’t delay! There is no way for you to go/except the exit.

In Israel young protesters adapted the slogan ‘The people demand social justice’ (*ha-am doresh tzedek xevrati*). As the staccato, drum-like chant echoed and re-echoed throughout the Middle East it left open the question of who the people were. In her chapter on Egypt Sabea argues that ‘the category “the people” – variously articulated as “*al-shaab*” or “the street” (*al-sharaa*) – emerges as the collective that speaks and acts together, and in the process of speaking and acting defines an emerging political’. It was a poet who first invoked the people against the regime, Sabea tells us, in ‘I dreamed of being a people’ – part of Ahmed Fouad Negm’s poem ‘As if You are Nothing’, composed in October 2010. The poem, she says, ‘embodies glimpses of a different imaginary which has been born of decades of precarity that marked the consolidation of the neoliberal sociopolitical and moral order in Egypt’. Certain historical moments and spaces of confrontation become key nodes, Sabea says, enabling the emergence of a critical imaginary that assembles a different possibility of ‘a people’ and a polis.

A newly constituted people imagines itself and emerges in opposition to tyrannical, autocratic or unjust leaders, from Gaddafi to Governor Walker or Ian Khama in Botswana, all of whom protesters constructed culturally and aesthetically, and it is vis-à-vis these figures of the regime that they enacted a solidary collectivity. In Tunisia, Simon Hawkins describes how Tunisian protesters appropriated the Tunisian flag from national domination. They virtually inscribed the flag on their bodies, painted flags on their faces and draped themselves in the flag – a phenomenon which also characterised the anti-corruption protests in India. The images created travelled worldwide, only to return to Tunisia and ignite huge local protests, in a dialectical process in which the local and the global interacted dynamically. Wherever the rebellion was against financial institutions or corruption, ‘the people’ emerge through horizontal practices and the creation of moral spaces of pure practice, as in many of the Occupy movements.

Around the world emergent collectivities transcended their social heterogeneity through a shared aesthetic, and – as many of the contributors note here – through everyday practices of living together, maintaining hygiene and clinics, clearing rubbish, sharing food, endless talk and joyful celebrations. Everywhere, the uprisings and protests were remarkable not only for their huge mobilisations

but for their inclusivity across divisions of class, religiosity, gender or ethnicity.¹² During the Arab Spring insurrections, men and women, secular democrats and later, Islamists, stood up with their bodies against the might of armed soldiers, police and criminal thugs. Elsewhere, as in Israel, social divisions were sometimes marked spatially, Livio and Katriel report, partly a result of the way the protests had evolved, but they nevertheless displayed greater unity in diversity than had ever been achieved in the past. In New York City, absent initially from Occupy Wall Street were coloured minorities but, as Claire Tancons reports here, ‘Occupy the Hood and Occupy Harlem emerged, urging people of colour to participate in the movement’ and creating ‘Downtown/Uptown alliances’.

In Greece, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos describes the moral self-constitution of the people as epitomised by two opposed rhetorical tropes – indignation (*aganaktisi*) and austerity (*mnimónio*). ‘Used as figures of speech with imaginative, moral, rhetorical force,’ he says, ‘they depict a world of agonistic conflict between Greek citizens and the constraints set by their government and/or the international establishment.’ In India the memory and moral authority of M. K. Gandhi became one of the rallying images of a diverse mass of protesters, mainly from India’s new middle class but encompassing beyond that a wide range from all classes, castes and communities.¹³

Once regimes topple, it is often difficult to sustain the sense of unity and exhilarating communitas generated during the struggle. As in past uprisings, like the Iranian revolution, the ‘collected will’¹⁴ of the revolutionary event often crumbles into pre-existing competing movements and ideological camps. After the revolution in Tunisia achieved its aim of deposing Ben-Ali, the fragmentation was signalled by Islamist waving of the black flag of Salafi Islam to oppose the unifying national flag. Against the Islamists, young secularists then adopted the Harlem Shake, much to the condemnation of the newly elected Islamic regime.¹⁵ By the time of Egypt’s ‘second revolution’, in July 2013, the ‘people’ had also divided into two polarised mass movements, the Islamists and the secularists, and the chasm between them seemed unbridgeable. ‘How is it even conceivable,’ Hanan Sabea asks, ‘that the “summoning of ALL”, as Badiou elaborated in his writings on the political and the event ... has swiftly become “we are a people and you are a people”?’

The boundaries of the ‘people’ are thus ‘fluid and contingent’, she remarks, but for a people to emerge out of their prior differences, they need first to create a sense of equality or equivalence¹⁶ between them. This was evident in the new egalitarianism forged across classes in Botswana, for example, during the public union strike described by Werbner, and which emerged everywhere through shared celebratory practices and shared suffering. Mourning of the dead in the Arab Spring uprisings became key moments of solidarity. In Egypt, Dalia Wahdan tells us, the group We Are All Khaled Saeed was formed immediately

after the young man's brutal killing by the security police was confirmed through satellite TV. 'Members were innovative and non-violent,' she reports. 'They started a weekly ritual of dressing up in black and standing silently on the streets drawing attention and raising the curiosity of passers-by. The group was the first one to announce on their Facebook page the start of the march towards the main squares on 25 January.'

Not only joyfulness, camaraderie and intellectual ferment, but anguish, fear, anger and suffering were experienced in the encampments that arose throughout the Arab world and beyond it. These were deeply felt and shared emotions, beyond the media and beyond spectacle.

SPECTACLE, AESTHETICS AND PERFORMING THE POLITICAL

Participation and embodied presence played a key role in making the protests aesthetic performances on a massive scale. The demonstrations were remarkable for their huge mobilisations of real bodies in space. This was particularly striking in the Arab Spring uprisings. The political aesthetic defining the 2011 uprisings and protests went far beyond the familiar deployment in earlier protest movements of verbal texts, chants or visual placards and slogans. The twenty-first-century revolts invoked a much richer and more inventive archive of evocative signs and bodily gestures, used in participatory performance, and this was true even beyond the Middle East. Indeed, most remarkable was the prominent presence of artistic and pictorial images, songs, poetry, humour, satire and dramatic performances.

The salience of performative aesthetics in constituting a politics of revolt, the spontaneous, experimental, improvisational use of material, visual, auditory, theatrical and sensual expressions, was not simply a matter of creating mass 'spectacles' in the sense theorised by Guy Debord. For Debord late capitalist society was an 'immense accumulation of spectacles',¹⁷ inescapably and intrinsically inauthentic, illusory and 'unreal', 'a *negation* of life',¹⁸ a 'sun that never sets over the empire of modern passivity',¹⁹ 'the opposite of dialogue',²⁰ a 'bad dream'²¹ produced and imposed by the overwhelming hierarchical power of commodity capitalism. Against that negative vision of inauthenticity, we argue here that while the protests may have been interludes that interrupted the flow of time, they were nevertheless moments of intense effervescence in which aesthetic production became an energising force, providing substantive meaning and creative expression to the massive mobilisations of young people, the disaffected, the middle classes and the apolitical silent majority. Aesthetic inventiveness, humour and celebration were the medium enabling solidarities and alliances among democrats, workers, trade unionists, civil rights activists and opposition parties. Thus Livio and Katriel, referring to Victor Turner,²² suggest

that the Israeli protest culture of summer 2011 was ‘a liminoid sphere in which individuals voluntarily and playfully enter[ed] a space where traditional social relationships and hierarchies [were] temporarily suspended and replaced by the unity and heightened emotionality of shared purpose and solidarity’. But the authors, nevertheless, also point to the ‘limits of communitas’, which emerged over time. Postill speaks of the strategic use of humour in media technologies.

The Tunisian ‘Jasmine’ Revolution, which began in December 2010 and sparked the chain of North African and global uprisings that followed it, began with the spectacle of stone-throwing youth against the police, but evolved into a more peaceful, non-violent and inclusive movement, as happened later in Spain.²³ Against mere nationalist spectacle, in the United Kingdom, the anti-capitalist activist groups studied by Serafini attempted to draw on performance art – a live artistic practice which focuses on the body of the performer in action, in time and space, and in active interaction with an audience. In their inventive, dramatic and often carnivalesque stunts, the activists’ aim of drawing audiences into their performance, was often, however, unachievable in practice, partly because the groups were small and passers-by apathetic. This led to the paradox described by Serafini that ‘although their artistic performances were in most cases intended to be participatory, they could only (potentially) reach wider audiences through the media and online, rather than at the site of the performance action’.

Yet the media could not substitute in the final analysis, as Butler has argued,²⁴ for ‘real bodies occupying real spaces’. This is where the truly huge crowds that assembled, from Tahrir Square in Cairo to Change Square in Sana’a, from the Ram Lila grounds in Delhi to Puerta del Sol in Madrid and elsewhere, went beyond mere spectacle, and thus beyond the paradox of activists’ fixing the ephemera of ‘participation’ on YouTube. Indeed, most contributors to this volume agree that nothing substitutes for the huge numbers of bodies that packed into the revolutionary squares during the Arab Spring and other protests worldwide. The spectacular visibility of numbers did, however, also create its own illusory reality, with major political consequences for the outcome of the uprisings in some countries. Invoking twenty and even thirty million-strong crowds of protesters gathered in Egyptian squares in 2012, army generals, opposition politicians and young Egyptian *tamarrud* revolutionaries justified the call to rescue the stolen revolution by removing President Morsi and clamping down on the Muslim Brotherhood. These figures have been challenged, however, by crowd-counting experts who say there were 500,000, or at most a million protesters in Tahrir Square at any one time (possibly even less), a number which may be set against the thirteen million voters, some half of those voting, who voted for Mohamed Morsi in the 2012 presidential election. Voting lacks the spectacular aspects of packed bodies in the square.²⁵ The meaning of ‘democracy’, the ‘will of the people’ and ‘freedom’ was being questioned in more than one sense, then, during

the uprisings, as became evident in Egypt's 'second revolution'.

Dalia Wahdan speaks of the aesthetics of brutality that emerged in Egypt during the periods of army and security service clampdown. These periods, loaded with contradictions and conflicts, generated a tremendous outpouring of artistic responses. Through videoed songs of defiance and martyrdom, protesters exposed acts of brutality and death while celebrating dignity and immortality. Graffiti, street performances and art flourished, Wahdan says, articulating a mocking humour that refuses to submit to brute shows of force.

Within an emergent anthropology of protest movements, the salience of humorous satire, the carnivalesque and embodied performance has been increasingly noted.²⁶ In a vivid description of the earlier Global Justice movement's protest tactics, Juris proposes that these 'image events' communicate to wider audiences by 'hijacking' the global media, while at the same time creating affective solidarity through performance.²⁷ Thus, if carnival and the carnivalesque are without doubt 'spectacular', they go beyond spectacle. We need to recognise, as contributors demonstrate in this volume, their critical impact on genuine, transformative political processes of mobilisation.

CARNIVAL, MASQUERADE, SUBVERSIVE HUMOUR AND HETEROGLOSSIA

Opening her essay, Claire Tancons insists that while some commentators and journalists may have

dismissed Occupy Wall Street as carnival, lawmakers and police officers did not miss the point. They reached back to a mid-nineteenth-century ban on masking to arrest occupiers wearing as little as a folded bandana on the forehead, leaving little doubt about their fear of Carnival as a potent form of political protest.

The heteroglossia of carnival, the multiplicity of voices, images and artistic performances that sprang up in each of the different protest sites analysed here was – as Bakhtin argued for the medieval carnival – an expression of the diversity of participants and their concerns. For Bakhtin, the polyphony of carnival is a counter to the monologic – 'there is no center that dictates meaning, but rather meaning arises only out of the exchanges among all the singularities in dialogue,' as Hardt and Negri comment.²⁸

Tancons proposes that distinctively in the New World, carnival was not merely an anti-feudal, anti-clerical demonstration against official discourse, but an *economic* protest, a 'war' waged against 'the extreme disparity between masters, their subjects, or slaves', or – in its current Occupy Wall Street discourse – against extreme inequalities of wealth, of capitalism run wild. In the

Caribbean and the American South the ‘role reversals’ of carnival ‘alleviated,’ she says, ‘a brutally divisive social system by crowning servants and slaves king for a day’. Thus, in one Occupy Wall Street performance, a purple-and-golden bull-shaped piñata named Wally, ‘the spirit of Wall Street at NYU’, was castrated in front of New York University’s Stern School of Business, bashed open by the student body, aka the 99 per cent. From its bulging belly fell ‘Wall Street Campus Cash’, fake banknotes featuring pictures and financial data about NYU President John Sexton.

Humour, satire, caricature and masquerade are distinctive in drawing on vernacular local figures, events, objects, jokes, puns, images and a shared history, to enact a universal morality that transcends the local. Humour cannot be understood outside its context of production unless it is ‘explained’ to outsiders, yet paradoxically, it transcends its place and the moment of its production. Thus, Haugerud’s Billionaires for Bush imitate well-known American billionaires rarely heard of outside the USA.²⁹ The humorous songs of rebellion that Batswana workers sang, witnessed by Werbner, mocked local politicians and civil servants. Livio and Katriel speak of ‘tactical frivolity’ and the ‘ludic spirit’ that dominated ‘the semiotic landscape’ of the dwelling protest in Israel, dependent on local knowledge, puns and songs. Striking in the protests was the *youthfulness* of many of the participants, who drew on youth culture, playful, ludic elements and humour, as well as the centrality of middle-class participation. In Libya, Igor Cherstich tells us, the caricatures of Gaddafi ‘expressed, affirmed and mocked’ ‘the bodily nature of the Colonel, once only a potential reality’. Depicted as a transvestite, an animal, a rat, Satan and a Mossad agent, he was ‘pure body: a fleshy ensemble of frizzy hair, moles and beard’, the very antithesis of his earlier claimed immortality. In Wisconsin, Raging Grannies sang old labour songs to new lyrics alongside the float of a giant puppet of Governor Walker, tied to strings pulled by two Koch brother puppeteers. These were pitched against the multiple signs and drawings adorning the statue of Wisconsin workers’ eponymous hero, ‘Fighting Bob’ La Follette, who fought a war against big business.

Even if, as Bakhtin showed for the medieval carnival,³⁰ carnivals are contained *moments* of ‘rebellion’, or run the danger of being misinterpreted or trivialised by the media,³¹ conceived of as rituals, the protests generated and amplified powerful feelings of joy and terror, and fashioned new subjectivities in lived moments of mass action that demonstrated the centrality of experience in the constitution of political subjects. They were bodily, earthy, expressive moments of ‘freedom’ and collective effervescence, creating a sense of suspended ‘temporality’, ‘newness’ and ‘becoming’.³² Performance art and spatial occupation have thus become, as Mouffe argues, key tools of protest.³³ Low-tech performance in an age of high-tech media, they nevertheless embody and generate a post-modern self-consciousness of being a political subject, player and agent, not an

individual alone but a member of a solidary collectivity.

In India, 'spectacular' protests have, of course, long been a feature of social movements, from Gandhi's 1930 Salt March, which attracted world media attention, to the women's tree-hugging Chipko movement,³⁴ to violently suppressed protests against the development of Special Economic Zones such as that in Nandigram, West Bengal in 2007, but their impact has been amplified in the twenty-first century by global media and social networking. Anna Hazare's massive campaign staged against corruption in high places was marked, Pinney tells us, by an 'extraordinary profusion of hand-made images and texts', and a complex, 'hot' bricolage of voices, groups, mythic associations and historical invocations: 'a messy zone of citational creativity'. Ironically, however, for more staid Indian activists against corruption, Martin Webb reports, 'the noisy spectacle in which abuse and accusations were hurled back and forth, and slogans chanted ... (was) not *satyagraha* (truth force) or *tapasya* (penance), but *tamasha* (spectacle)'. They rejected the noisy, commercialised, mediated and carnivalesque atmosphere of the protest because 'the aesthetics and poetics of the Anna Hazare fasts did not prefigure a world that (they) wanted to see'.

In many parts of the world the protests thus fabricated, emotionally and bodily, in carnivalesque moments when 'time stands still', a bridge across the differences among participants.³⁵ Jane Collins was led to wonder, in the face of the wide range of social actors with diverse economic and political stakes in Wisconsin – public and private-sector trade unions, community-action, anti-racist and anti-poverty groups, the gay movement, the interfaith coalition for social justice, and 'massive numbers of non-union community members', 'what kind of alliance or amalgamated movement was emerging in this snowy square in the upper Mid-West' to occupy the Wisconsin State Capitol building?³⁶ As Livio and Katriel in their chapter on Israel, Theodossopoulos writing on indignation in Greece or Webb, writing on the 'strange bedfellows' to be found in the anti-corruption scene in India, note, the bringing together of experienced political activists with people who do not consider themselves activists at all and yet take to the streets in protest, is a key feature of many of the movements analysed in this volume. Such diversity highlights the futility of previous singular theoretical approaches to the rise of social movements that stress, for example, 'post-materialist' identity politics,³⁷ resource mobilisation in economic and political protest, or citizen rights mobilisations against the state.³⁸

The aesthetics of revolt that emerged during the protests of 2010–12 in North Africa and beyond are thus *not* concerned with the trivial 'decoration' of serious politics, the 'icing on the cake', so to speak. The critical need is to recognise a radical shift in modes of mobilisation and political activism that the uprisings and protests signalled, one not yet fully incorporated into the scholarly literature; a new embodied and aesthetic way of doing politics worldwide.

CITATIONAL TRAVEL AND VERNACULAR COSMOPOLITANISM:
BEYOND THE ARAB SPRING

Writing about the emergence of the ‘common’ in 2004, Hardt and Negri note that ‘the geographical expansion of movements takes the form of an *international cycle of struggles* in which revolts spread from one local context to another like a contagious disease through the communication of common practices and desires’.³⁹ None of the uprisings discussed in this book, and others that followed them in 2012–13, were isolated events. Even when they began in response to local grievances, as in Botswana, India or Israel, they invariably linked themselves explicitly to protests elsewhere. They ‘spread’ contagiously and infected other protests. They were connected, most saliently through tangible aesthetic allusions and inter-textual citations, despite being locally concerned in each country with a range of specific issues: regime change (the Arab world), corruption (India), the demise of the welfare state, tycoonery (Spain, Israel, Greece), a living wage (Botswana, Wisconsin), the financial crisis and corporate greed (Occupy in the USA, Canada and Britain). Several themes travelled widely, animating protests transnationally, across borders.

It is not simply that social networks have spread transnationally even as they ‘aggregated’ massive numbers of individuals from diverse backgrounds within physical national spaces, using modern means of communication;⁴⁰ it is that non-verbal images, music and bodily gestures too have travelled across borders and been incorporated into local vernaculars. Writing about the Green revolution in Iran in 2009, Manoukian argues perceptively that ‘citation’ is both *geographical*, across borders, and *historical*, across time, recalling earlier protests.⁴¹

The spread of protests across the world since 2011 has infected peoples in many different, widely separated countries. It has, of course, been associated with terrible violence and civil war in some places, most prominently in Syria. But it is equally important to recognise that it inaugurated a new generation into mass forms of peaceful people’s political participation. Undoubtedly, the rebellions of Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt, epitomised in the giant gatherings in Tahrir Square, became a global symbol of protest against the odds and of courage in the face of brute tyranny. They inspired a series of subsequent rebellions – in Bahrain, Libya, Syria and elsewhere in the Arabic world. Khatib speaks of ‘travelling images’ creating a ‘domino effect’ and links these to the rise of the global media and World Wide Web.⁴² She sees this as creating a regional civil society and ‘terrain of resistance’.⁴³ What is equally important to recognise, however, was that huge protests *beyond* the Arab world also followed – in India, Israel, Botswana, Spain, Greece, the USA, Canada, the UK and, more recently, in Russia and, in 2013, spectacularly in Turkey and Brazil. In Spain, the Indignados filled Spanish city squares in a move described here by John Postill. In Botswana,

Werbner witnessed almost 100,000 public service trade unionists singing songs of rebellion as they gathered daily for over two months under giant Morula trees in the capital and in other towns. In Israel, Livio and Katriel describe the thousands of tents filling city boulevards and parks in a 'dwelling' protest against the unbearable economic burden of spiralling prices and the undermining of the welfare state. In Greece, the 2011 Indignados movement described by Theodosopoulos encamped for over a month in Syntagma Square in Athens, with rallies of 500,000 people out of a population of ten million.

General strikes and major protests have taken other European debt-ridden countries by storm since May 2011. In India, mass protests, media attention and public debate about the economic and social direction of the country coalesced around a public fast by the social activist Anna Hazare. Its purpose was to put pressure on the government to institute a 'people's draft' of the *Lokpal* bill, a piece of anti-corruption legislation intended to hold politicians and bureaucrats to account, which had been stalled by successive parliaments for forty-two years. In Chile, students took to the streets against the post-dictatorial state's policies in education, particularly its neoliberalist agenda, and against the police. Protests by the workers of Wisconsin erupted even before Occupy Wall Street, drawing attention to the beleaguered labour movement in the USA.⁴⁴ In Russia, mass protests sparked by the suspicion of fraud in the 2011 election articulated a challenge to the authority and political dominance of Vladimir Putin. Mass protests in Istanbul and Ankara in May 2013 against the autocratic style of a democratically elected leader have been followed by huge protests in Brazil against corruption, mismanagement and poor public services.

Discourses as well as images travelled. From Egypt to India and from Botswana to London, all these countries have witnessed worker, youth and middle-class rebellions against the political and bureaucratic status quo and the privilege of small, wealthy and often corrupt elites at a time when the majority can no longer earn a decent wage. The protests encountered criticism – in the case of India, Israel, Greece, Botswana and the USA, for being apolitical and not attending to the plight of the most underprivileged or excluded groups (the unemployed, Palestinians, and so on). Without depoliticising or undermining the political objectives of the protests, however, we need as comparative cultural and social anthropologists and sociologists to approach the uniqueness of these protest movements as innovative aesthetic and poetic articulations in an age of global media and social networking.⁴⁵

But beyond discourse, a key element central to the spread of the protests worldwide was their use of visual and audio *citation and intertextuality*. This was both historical and spatial, fusing past images, tropes, slogans, musical refrains or images reproduced from events elsewhere with current images in new bricolages and assemblages. These invoked, often as subtext, the past or other places in the

present, as we saw in the spread of ‘the People’ slogan, or in Botswana where the gesture of rolling hands echoed the gestures of the Indignados in Spain, although with a difference.⁴⁶ As critical scholars we need to interrogate the role of such (re)iterative performances,⁴⁷ the use of mimesis,⁴⁸ the ‘doubling up’ of signs⁴⁹ and their displacement, in revitalising and (re)inventing the ‘political’. Such citations spreading globally to different local contexts have led, Werbner argues, to a newly forged ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ – a widely shared invented language across countries and divisions of class, ethnicity, religion, religiosity, race and gender, which is nevertheless also inflected by local forms of popular aesthetics, power relations and politicised understandings of inequality and injustice.

Another key feature of the protests as they travelled from one country to another was their peacefulness, even as they embodied powerfully, through popular culture and performance, new, transcendent solidarities and aspirations. They only became violent in the face of repression, often after months of peaceful protests. Where violence did occur, usually in the form of attacks by the repressive forces of the state, it was followed by the aestheticisation of violence, including of martyrdom. This was true especially in the Middle East as more and more peaceful activists lost their lives, expressed in widely broadcast poetry and songs of martyrdom on social media sites, as Dalia Wahdan shows in this volume. The aestheticisation of sheer courage and heroism in the face of adversity and its impact still needs to be theorised.⁵⁰ As the chapter on India by Webb demonstrates, the iconography of martyrdom also emerged as a means to demonstrate the longevity and continuity of movements, as a means of citing earlier struggles and as evidence of the everyday existence of the movement amongst ordinary people.

The 2010–12 worldwide uprisings and protests thus raise broader questions related to political activism in these social movements. Mass mobilisations were often grounded in years of less visible activism. The protests incorporated histories of anti-colonialism, past civil rights movements and anti-authoritarian ‘rebellions’ anew. Hence, the political aesthetics of citational intertextuality travelled as much in time as across borders.

CITATIONAL TIME: THE VERNACULAR AND HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE PROTESTS

In being imaginative and creative, protesters everywhere drew upon locally shared aesthetic traditions, vernacular popular media, and visual, material and artistic histories, narratives and myths. They wove these intertextually into their protests, reiterating, inverting, reproducing and parodying past national events, performance traditions and filmic or theatrical histories, to convey a contemporary message. They traced local genealogies of protest from here to

elsewhere, at other times and places. Indeed, many protests emerged out of more hidden activism against corruption and authoritarianism over many years, as in the case of Egypt, Tunisia or Yemen which had witnessed earlier activist and trade union mobilisations.⁵¹ In Yemen, historically, ‘throughout it all, tribal poetry was composed to analyse the societal problems facing the country,’ Caton et al. say. In India, the campaign against corruption had been fought by activists for many years, as Martin Webb shows in this volume.⁵²

Aestheticised props were significant. In India protesters wore ‘Anna caps’ mimicking the headwear of the movement figurehead, Anna Hazare, who in turn referenced the ‘Gandhi cap’ worn by activists in the anti-colonial struggle for independence. Place too was significant. In Israel

protesters standing in front of Independence Hall staged a re-reading of Israel’s Declaration of Independence at precisely the same day of the week and time of the day in which it was originally read, delivering the clear message that a renewed contract between the State and its citizens must be established.⁵³

Some months later in New York City, Occupy Wall Street protesters congregated on the steps of the Federal Hall to reflect on the constitutional rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Founding Fathers.⁵⁴ Occupy protesters traced the roots of their tradition of popular General Assemblies and direct action to the Zapatista revolt in Mexico’s Chiapas in 1994, and to the anti-globalisation protests in Seattle in 1999.⁵⁵ But Occupy Wall Street also had its antecedents, Tancons argues, in the Global Carnival Against Capitalism (or ‘J18’), organised by the activist group Reclaim the Streets. At the same time it was a counterpart of the huge ultra-right mobilisations of the Tea Party in the USA.

Theorising the anchoring of present-day mass protests in a past archive of popular visual culture, Christopher Pinney describes the protests in India as an example of ‘recurrent citationality’ in which political events are, perhaps somewhat mystically, always ‘half-seen in advance’. Referring to Deleuze, he describes the process as one of (re)iteration, in which signifier and signified are redoubled into “‘media-folds” of origami-like complexity’. With Anna Hazare fashioned as a present-day Gandhi or Krishna to re-enact a messianic iconography, the Anna Hazare agitation ‘folded’ itself into a past which it remade anew. With ‘a kind of deformative iteration (“second Gandhi” or *aj ke Krishna* – Krishna for today),’ Pinney argues, ‘the campaign also oriented itself around a host of popular media iterations of the national history which empowered the movement’ – drawing on hit Bollywood film musicals about Gandhian activism and the freedom struggle, an ‘echo chamber’ of past and cinematic images as protesters donned Gandhi caps and waistcoats, while carrying a host of flags, banners, humorous posters and maps of India.

In Botswana protesters drew on traditionally licensed ‘songs of rebellion’ against chiefs to mock current politicians. In Wisconsin old labour and folk songs were rewritten and performed. Carnavalesque themes in Occupy Wall Street echoed Caribbean carnivals, while in Greece rhetorical tropes were anchored in Greek traditions of oratory. In all this a clear division emerged between self-declared apolitical (in the sense of anti-government) protests, prefiguring the just society, and the majority of the uprisings with clear political agendas, openly directed against regimes and demanding democratic, legal and economic reform and/or the removal of rulers, even when – as in the anarchist-inspired protests – they also enacted a utopian society.

POLITICS AND ANTI-POLITICS ETHICS

Comic and satirical representations of autocratic, dictatorial, anti-democratic, neoliberal or corrupt governments, along with the mocking and lampooning of corrupt politicians, greedy bankers or so-called ‘tycoons’, were signature features of many of the uprisings. These aesthetically embellished targets of the protests were pitched against countervailing values of ethical governance. At stake was a renewal of the same ethical values that informed anti-colonial freedom movements, the welfare state, the right to a living wage, transparency and the egalitarian ethos of democracy. This was true as much in Botswana, where strikers constructed an authoritarian image of their president, Ian Khama, as it was in Libya, Wisconsin, Egypt, Syria or India. In all these countries, caricatures of politicians and corrupt bureaucrats, some of them scatological and sexually explicit like those of the Indian anti-corruption cartoonist Aseem Trivedi,⁵⁶ were held up for ridicule. His cartoons depicted rapacious, bestial politicians who use parliament as a toilet. The nation-state, by contrast, was represented as a sublime entity⁵⁷ which had been sullied by the profanity of weak and corrupt individuals.

In some cases, as among some protesters in the Occupy movement in New York City, protesters appealed to anarchist values.⁵⁸ Without directing their demands to the state, they dramatised in carnivalesque acts the yawning pay gap and huge wealth differentials between workers and so-called tycoons, oligarchs or bankers, set against the cutbacks and retrenchment of public services. Prefigurations of the just society took different forms. Among some streams in the Occupy movement, ‘Direct democracy’ was a particular philosophy that aimed to claim sovereignty by avoiding directing its demands to the state.⁵⁹

The majority of the uprisings and protest movements seemed, however, more explicitly ‘political’, directed against the state and its rulers, and at the very least seeking to reform the iniquities of present governance. Regime change, freedom and multi-party democracy were the central rallying call of the Arab Spring. The second Egyptian revolution, however, highlighted some commonalities shared

with the Occupy movement: free and fair elections did not alone, in themselves, define democracy. Young protesters in 2013 rejected rule by majority and demanded participation, recognition, a share in governing the nation. In India, a nation feted for its democracy, protesters called for Parliament to institute an anti-corruption ombudsman with sweeping powers, who many, however, feared would be anti-democratic. The unintended consequences of regime change, democracy and radical reform were often unpredictable, as has become evident in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings in some countries. The Occupy movements seem to have fizzled out everywhere, occupiers cleared by the police using force, and many now question what they have achieved.⁶⁰ Reflecting on the protests and uprisings once they were over, what long-term role have they played in the achievement of democracy and social justice? What new forms, political entities and configurations have emerged from these movements?

Both political and anti-political rebellions seem, then, to have fallen short of their aims, at least temporarily. Some protests were simply squashed by the state, as in Botswana or Wisconsin. Against that, however, what has clearly been achieved in all of the mass insurrections worldwide from 2010 onwards has been a profound experiential moment of the 'political'; a moment in which the collective fashioning of political subjects alongside the individual self-fashioning of political subjectivities emerged historically, to massively affect a whole new generation.

MEDIA NETWORKS: TRAVELLING MEMES AND VIRAL INFECTIONS

In the autumn of 2011, John Postill reports, Spain's Indignados aligned themselves with related movements in Portugal, Greece, the USA and other countries, setting off simultaneous demonstrations in over 1,000 cities around the globe on 15 October. For many critics, most salient in the spread of the protests and their escalation was the role of the media, social networking, communication in cyberspace and postings on YouTube. Whether or not social and digital media actually *caused* the uprisings has been a topic of much debate in both popular and academic discourses. The question of what difference, if any, the new media technologies have made to the recent waves of non-violent protest in 2011 and 2013 is addressed here by Postill. In what sense were these media critically central to staging non-violent movements, and how may their impact be weighed against the mass mobilisation on the ground? Arguing against simplistic and monocausal explanations, we propose here that the protests were not just the result of new social media and the impact of the internet. Aouragh and Alexander stress the need to make a distinction between the use of the internet as a *tool* to challenge and topple political elites and the internet's role as a *space* to articulate collective discord.⁶¹

In his chapter on the mediated aesthetics of non-violence, John Postill asks what part, if any, the wide availability of new social and mobile media played in the emergence and stabilisation of a distinctive non-violent aesthetics in Spain. His argument is that this new aesthetics was indeed complexly mediated, both by ‘traditional’ mainstream media and by new platforms and technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and smartphones. He identifies five main characteristics of the new protest aesthetics: an embodied rejection of the ‘diverse tactics’ of earlier mobilisations (which included violence); a strategic use of ‘jocose emotivity’;⁶² sophisticated social and mobile media practices; a transposition of hacker ethics and aesthetics to occupied public spaces; and a perpetually transient, open-ended temporality. This powerful new aesthetic synthesis, he concludes, has positioned Spain – until recently a technological laggard with a dormant civil society – at the global forefront of techno-political innovation and social change.

Reaching the mainstream media is often a challenge, given their preference for reporting on violent confrontations, which push out the messages of mass peaceful protests. Postill shows how the stress on non-violence attracted favourable mass media support. Another example of sophisticated media practice is presented in Haugerud’s study of the media-savvy satirical street theatre group, Billionaires for Bush, in which she shows how the group enticed the mainstream media with their humour and sophistication. Columnists and reporters compared them favourably with grungy, placard-bearing protesters, but the author wonders whether, beyond the entertainment value of their humour, their serious message came across. This is the ‘ambiguous gift’ of successful media visibility, Haugerud suggests.⁶³

Focusing on the Egyptian 2011 uprising, Aouragh and Alexander argue for ‘transcending the debate between utopian and dystopian perspectives on the role of the internet in political change’.⁶⁴ They propose ‘a shift away from perspectives that isolate the internet from other media by examining the powerful synergy between social media and satellite broadcasters during the January 25 uprising’, and call for ‘an understanding of the dialectical relationship between online and offline political *action*’,⁶⁵ much as proposed by Hawkins and several other authors in this volume. Postill, for example, in his analysis of Spain’s #15M movement, argues that media forms must be examined *processually* in relation to the various stages of political protest. He proposes that in the ‘contemporary era when political actors (rulers, politicians, activists, journalists, citizens, and so on) have access to multiple media, it is crucial when analysing a struggle that we establish which media ensembles – or media mixes – came to the fore at which particular stages of the conflict’. Werbner’s chapter describes how the various stages of the Botswana strikers’ rebellion were fuelled and supported by global and private media, and blacked out by the state media,

which was in turn satirised by the private press. The recent protests in Turkey in 2013 were similarly blacked out by state media. Theodossopoulos shows how within the Greek Indignados movement, internet-based social networks, from left to right wing, young and old, played a significant role in the mobilisation of the protests.

Diasporic communities also played a role in creating and disseminating political discourses and aesthetics through wide-ranging media channels. The various revolts in the Middle East and North Africa, for example, inspired a proliferation of online activity taking place on networking sites and media forums. Facebook pages were set up, tweets were exchanged, YouTube postings were circulated, petitions were drafted and signed. The battle of symbols and images at the heart of the political struggles, as well as the visibility of the political struggles, extended to and was transmitted by those living in diasporas. In the Indian anti-corruption protests the online diaspora played an important role in taking the protests to multiple cities around the world through an internationally organised volunteer campaign. Protesters wearing the signature *Anna topi* (Anna hat) with the slogan '*main anna hun*' (I am Anna) were photographed worldwide and pictures and videos shared through social media. As Webb describes in this volume, protest posters and slogans produced by volunteer advertising professionals in India were available for download from a central campaign website, helping to produce a coherent brand across widely dispersed protests. Offline, diasporic networks organised protests at various embassies around the globe and made concerted efforts to raise money and collect food items for those badly affected in the various revolts and the aftermath. Many, however, yearned to be present with their cohorts and participate in the collective experience of the protests in their home countries. Many reported that diasporic activities were not a substitute for actually being there in the flesh.

CONCLUSION: CULTURE, ANTHROPOLOGY, POLITICS

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
 It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
 It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
 It was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,
 It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.⁶⁶

So wrote Charles Dickens, reflecting on the contradictions that emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Beyond genocide, some massacres live on in the public imagination: Sharpeville, Tiananmen Square, Srebrenica. To these must now, perhaps, be added the events of August 2013 in Cairo at Rabaa al-Adaweya which many describe as a massacre, led by the army and security

forces against unarmed Egyptian civilians, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Egypt. These are described poignantly by Hanan Sabea in the song,

We are a people, and you are a people,
 What moved our hearts, never moved yours.
 God is one; but we have our God, and you have your God.

After the massacre and other mass killings that followed it, protesters replaced President Morsi's picture with placards and hand signals of the yellow four-finger hand salute, R4BIA (see Fig. 1.1), signifying the word *rabaa* (fourth), which alluded to the square where the massacre took place.⁶⁷ This newly invented symbol travelled beyond Egypt, to Turkey, where it was used by the Turkish Prime Minister and Turkish national footballers. It has been used 'to turn Facebook yellow'.⁶⁸



Figure 1.1 R4BIA Four Finger Salute (Source: Facebook).

The killings were preceded and followed, Sabea tells us, by a period during the first year of the revolution which was 'checkered with almost monthly "spectacles" of violence that targeted the bodies of men, women, Copts, the poor and unemployed'. It resulted in the current impasse in which Egyptians are 'entrapped by violence, threats, uncertainty, confusion and a deep feeling of disappearing possibilities, materially embodied in the silence and darkness that envelops the city with the onset of curfew

hours'. Nevertheless, although the army and 'deep state' in Egypt appear for the present to have regained total control, the Arab Spring, that 'time of euphoria' of the mass 2011 Egyptian uprisings, as Wahdan calls it, cannot be erased, we suggest. That moment lives on in the collective imagination and in its political aesthetics as a future historical promise of return to a time when the 'people', united, will once again dream of ruling themselves.

The contributors to this book, whether anthropologists or other cultural analysts, witnessed the uprisings and protests first hand. They were 'there'. But did this make them in any sense privileged analysts in an era in which the whole world was 'there', seated in front of TV screens in their living rooms or before computers and tablets? The answer is yes and no. Livio and Katriel argue that being on the ground allows an appreciation of the complex relation between abstractness and specificity, the oneness in the many and, conversely, the many in the oneness; *communitas* and fragmentation. We were witness to the protests' mixture everywhere of reflexivity, deliberation, performance, creativity and emotion: the moments of joyousness, fear and sadness. Perhaps it

is in this very act of witnessing, as in much other anthropology of human rights, that the importance of our contribution will remain. Along with that is our ability, demonstrated in the various chapters included here, to think through the relationship between cultural creativity, morality, politics and the emergence of collective boundaries and identities.

We are also specialists at understanding the power of myth, memory and history. The global financial crisis and revelations about bankers' and CEOs' exorbitant bonuses, alongside neoliberal policies in which governments worldwide are divesting themselves of their responsibilities for vulnerable citizens, have been at the heart of many of the protests, alongside the huge pay gaps and spectacular political corruption in some countries, often associated with unresponsive, undemocratic regimes. The rebellions aimed for change, toppling regimes and increasing pressure on governments to effect reforms, including democratic reforms. But what was left when the protests died out? How can 'failure' in the aims, sometimes utopian, of the protests, be understood and analysed? Who were excluded from the protests? What impact have the protests had? What is their lasting legacy, if any? Centrally important to the debate is the aftermath of protest: the sediments, memory and openings up to the future. There is evidence in the UK of a shareholders' revolt (dubbed by the media the 'Shareholders' Spring'). Conservative governments have toppled in France and Greece. Were these energised and empowered by the popular protests? Can Pussy Riot, in revitalising Russian protests with a spectacular aesthetic demonstration that was screened across the world, make a difference to Russian politics? How will the aftermath of the Indian anti-corruption protests affect the success of anti-corruption candidates and parties standing in forthcoming local and national elections?

While books have already been written on the Arab Spring,⁶⁹ there is still a need to examine the uprisings comparatively, from an anthropological and popular cultural perspective, as they are integrally related to protests elsewhere. A remarkable point of comparison, we have proposed in this volume – one which anthropologists are particularly well equipped to interrogate – has been the performative aesthetics so central to the protests. These, we contend, illuminate the protests from a wide array of anthropological perspectives: political, media, visual, economic and linguistic, the anthropology of work, art, social organisation and social movements, virtual social networking and new media technologies.

The project of documenting and analysing these protests is ongoing. In 2013 large-scale peaceful protests in Turkey against the privatisation of public space were met with violent repression by the government. Centred on an occupation of Taksim Square in Istanbul, the protesters' initial aim was to prevent the conversion of a public park in the square into a retail development, but the

protests took a wider anti-authoritarian stance as battles with the authorities continued and spread. The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdoğan justified violence against the protesters claiming that they were ‘terrorists’ and promised curbs on social media in the country, asserting it is a ‘menace to society’.⁷⁰ Then came the news that protesters had won their case against Gezi Park’s redevelopment in court. In Brazil hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets in 2013 and clashed violently with police in cities across the country after a protest against fare increases in public transport snowballed into mass demonstrations against high taxes, a lack of political accountability and, once again, bureaucratic and political corruption. Again, protesters won concessions from their democratically elected government. In Egypt in 2013, in a ‘second revolution’ against a democratically elected President whose Islamist policies and economic inefficiencies angered Egyptian citizens, millions took to the streets to demand his resignation, only to bring back the army with dire consequences for the fate of Egyptian democracy as matters spiralled out of control. There will be other iterations of these protests, in other places, as the echoes of the Arab Spring and Occupy roll on. As the cosmopolitan character of the protests connects places and people through repetition, mimesis, citation and performance we will continue to focus ethnographically on how these play out in the vernacular through a continuing call for critical, analytical and engaged work on the aesthetics of popular protest and revolt.

NOTES

1. Sartwell, C. (2010), *Political Aesthetics*, Cornell, NJ: Cornell University Press, p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
3. Khatib, L. (2013), *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*, London: I. B. Tauris, p. 1.
4. For example, the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1906, as it came to be known, has been linked to the early Bolshevik and Irish insurrections (see the contributions to Chehabi, H. E. and V. Martin (2010), *Iran’s Constitutional Revolution: Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connections*, London: I. B. Tauris.).
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6. See also Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics*, pp. 15–47.
7. It is worth noting that the Ministry of Interior building in Cairo has been attacked and burnt by protesters on multiple occasions since the start of the Egyptian revolution.
8. Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East*, p. 149.

9. Graeber, D. (2013), *The Democracy Project: A History. A Crisis. A Movement*, London: Allen Lane, p. 51.
10. Morris-Jones, W. H. (1963), 'India's political idioms', in C. H. Philips (ed.), *Politics and Society in India*, London: G. Allen & Unwin, pp. 133–54.
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12. This was true of the 1979 Iranian revolution as well, ironically perhaps in the light of subsequent developments.
13. See Pinney and Webb, this volume.
14. 'Collective will' was a term used by Michel Foucault to describe the Iranian revolution.
15. On 28 September 2013, the moderate Islamist coalition government in Tunisia headed by the Ennahda party agreed to resign, in response to widespread protests spurred by two political assassinations.
16. 'Equivalence' is a term used by Laclau. See Laclau, E. (2005), *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso.
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18. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
22. Turner, V. W. (1982), *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
23. See Postill, this volume.
24. Butler, J. (2011), 'Bodies in alliance and the politics of the street', European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (eipcp), September 2011. Online at www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en (accessed 20 July 2013).
25. On Egyptian voting and anti-Brotherhood petition numbers see www.hurriyetdailynews.com/22-million-sign-anti-morsi-petition-egypt-opposition.aspx?pageID=238&nid=49706. On crowd counting see *The Wall Street Journal* (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB100014224052748704709304576124170146934768.html>) and the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23312656) (all accessed 1 August 2013).
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29. Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*.
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31. Juris, 'Performing politics'.

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38. See Edelman, M. (2001), 'Social movements: Changing paradigms and forms of politics', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 285–317.
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PART ONE

*The Arab Spring Uprisings
and their Aftermaths*

CHAPTER 2

Teargas, Flags and the Harlem Shake: Images of and for Revolution in Tunisia and the Dialectics of the Local in the Global

SIMON HAWKINS

The outlines of the story are well known. On 17 December 2010 Mohamed Bouazizi, a young, underemployed produce merchant in the rural Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, had a run-in with civil authorities, who confiscated his wares. Upset and humiliated, later that day he went to the town square, doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire. That act triggered protests that spread across the nation, the region and the world. But the details are less well known. In hindsight, the events have an appearance of inevitability, which detracts from understanding how the movement spread across the country, unifying a nation with disparate visions and experiences of the nation. Crucial to this spread was the use of powerful imagery that helped define and contextualise the protests themselves and the protesters. Over time an increasingly nationalist aesthetic created an ideological underpinning for the movement that allowed the participation of actors from different ideological backgrounds. The power of the images was bound up in the context and the mediating institutions, and following the revolution they lost their unifying power.

As the revolution grew from the isolated individual Bouazizi to the mass protests that brought down the government, it moved through three roughly recognisable phases that were marked and defined by their own distinctive aesthetics. In the initial phase of the movement, in December 2010, increasingly large protests broke out in primarily rural cities and towns. Although starting as peaceful marches with fairly broad participation, these often devolved into violent clashes between heavily armed security forces and stone-throwing youths. As the state tried to clamp down and prevent these protests from becoming more serious, it used increasingly lethal force, and dozens of protesters were killed. During this initial phase, the images that circulated were essentially

journalistic photographs of stone-throwing youths and the victims of police gunfire. These images were taken by Tunisians, uploaded by news organisations and other websites, and then transmitted back to Tunisia. The reflection and transmission of these locally taken images by global media institutions recontextualised them, visually linking them generally to other protesters who were regarded as freedom fighters, and particularly to Palestinians in the Intifada, rather than riotous thugs. The distribution of images after each event helped prompt subsequent protests, establishing patterns that spread across the nation.

The second phase, beginning in early January, was one of increasing nationalisation of the protests, both in marches and demonstrations, and in social media. Some of the emotional motivation for the increasing participation was outrage at the many killed in the earlier clashes. At this time, there still was no shared sense that this was a revolutionary movement. Even the most ardent organisers thought of themselves as championing reform and did not expect the government to fall. While the journalistic recording of events continued, the aesthetics of the protests began to change as more and more Tunisians began creating (rather than merely recording) images for broader distribution. Tunisian flags featured prominently in these images, as the population reappropriated the image of the flag from state domination. The use of these images on Facebook constituted a form of virtual protest that itself helped generate a sense of unity.

That unity led to the triumphalist third phase, beginning around 12 January 2011, when Tunisians began to realise that the movement was so powerful that it would topple the regime. With the end in sight, there was the rise of a celebratory aesthetic that pointed with pride to the local control over the revolution, but also a clear acknowledgement of the global audience and the various media distribution networks. The flag continued to predominate, but its context shifted from one of shame and outrage to pride and celebration. While the interaction with global media sources and, eventually, a global audience was important to the movement, its ideology was nationalist, and the imagery emphasised unifying themes.

After the revolution, public sentiment fractured. Initial elections resulted in a coalition government led by Ennahda, an Islamist party whose leaders had been exiled and imprisoned by the state, and who thus had great credibility with much of the populace. Increasingly, large divisions grew between those who supported an assertively religious form of government and those who sought to keep religion and politics separated. Extremist groups began flying the black flag of Jihad, while students made Harlem Shake videos that featured the Tunisian flag. The power and meaning of the imagery had become fractured.

There had been large claims made regarding the role social media played in enabling the Tunisian revolution.¹ Like similar claims regarding previous uprisings in other areas, these were shown to be exaggerated at best.² Less

discussed has been the nature of the interactions in which the social media participated. It is easy to conceptualise the internet as a Habermasian public sphere in which reasoned discourse and the dissemination of information plays out for a generic audience. The internet is, however, as Warner notes, 'a space of discourse organised by nothing other than discourse itself'.³ A key component of the circulation of material in the Tunisian case (whatever the means of transmission) was the constitution of a public that considered this information relevant to it. Further, there was a bias towards ignoring the poetic and emotional contents of the material circulated, seeing it instead as part of a rational discussion.⁴ While Tunisian activists did use social media for coordinating their efforts, and the broader Tunisian public did share (sometimes erroneous) information through these same channels, the success of the revolution depended not on rational persuasion, but the unification of large segments of the Tunisian population and the bodily spatial participation of this newly self-conscious group. The spaces of protest became reconfigured as public spaces available to this emerging public.⁵ In order to understand this process, in which Tunisians saw themselves as constituting a coherent and real public, one needs to understand the revolution aesthetically.

While this chapter primarily addresses imagery generated during the Tunisian revolution, it also draws on years of fieldwork in and engagement with Tunisia. I began in 1988, doing volunteer development work with the Peace Corps in rural Tunisia (in a region near Sidi Bouzid), subsequently returning multiple times for anthropological fieldwork, most recently in the summer of 2012. Different aspects of that fieldwork involved a wide range of participants. My most recent project has focused on the male community of salesmen in a plaza of Tunis's old city, the medina, who mainly cater to tourists. Most of my conversations (with the exception of discussions with some Tunisians practising their English) were in Tunisian Arabic.

TEARGAS

While press accounts in the west focused on Bouazizi's humiliation, the touchstone for Tunisian viewers was the implicit corruption of the civil authorities. If they confiscated his wares because of a lack of proper paperwork, the assumption in Tunisia was that this was because he had not paid the proper bribes. Tunisians from all walks of life had complained to me of rampant corruption that made success more dependent on who one knew and what bribes one distributed than on hard work or intelligence. While this corruption was endemic, it was personified in President Zine al-Abidin Ben-Ali and his family. The young men on the streets of Tunis knew quite a bit about the family's lavish lifestyle, describing to me the fancy cars they drove, down to the specific colour of each model.

The anger was not simply that the president's family lived so well, or that their money was ill-gotten, but that the corruption that created this wealth prevented hard-working Tunisians from making a decent living. Bouazizi's predicament, of being thwarted in his attempts to work by a dishonest system, was one that Tunisians of all classes could empathise with.

Late on the day of Bouazizi's self-immolation, his mother led a protest group in front of the municipal hall where he had burned himself. A cousin posted a video of the protest online, where researchers from Al Jazeera, who actively pursue such videos, found it, and broadcast it that same evening.⁶ The next day, spurred on by the video, by rumours spread by word of mouth and with the help of local union officials, a much, much bigger protest was held in the same location. Although some rocks were thrown, it was initially peaceful, until large groups of police tried to break up the demonstration with teargas. At this point it devolved into a riot, leaving two people dead from police bullets. Images and videos from this encounter were again placed online, where they were widely distributed.⁷

Several themes stand out from these first days of the movement. While dissatisfaction with the regime was widespread and deep, images played a crucial role in converting that dissatisfaction to political action. Equally importantly, these were images disseminated online and through global television networks, as well as through other avenues. While the movement was fiercely local, it was plugged into the media stream of a watching world that turned the ephemeral events of protest into concrete texts that could be circulated and read by a global audience. With its origin in the rural hinterland rather than the cosmopolitan city, and the elevation of a victim with a very specific story, the ideology and aesthetics focused on the local 'Tunisianness' of the movement, rather than linking itself to global ideological movements.

The images and videos taken by Tunisians – some with mobile phones – that began to circulate in the first days of the revolution are hardly unusual in themselves (see Fig. 2.1). An observer who pays attention to world news might be excused for finding these images – young men with scarves over their faces throwing stones at well-equipped, black-uniformed riot police amidst billowing teargas – effectively indistinguishable from similar photographs that emerge from time to time from the latest global hot spot. Even the method of transmission of these images heightened this sense of generic unrest, for while many circulated through social media or individualised peer networks, Arab cable news channels, particularly Al Jazeera, were also a prime source. So many urban Tunisians received these photographs through the same means that they received similar images from around the world. The power of photojournalist images lies not in any unconventionality, but in their ability to stimulate public consciousness.⁸ The very generic nature of the images helped contextualise the



Figure 2.1 Tunisian protestors confront police (Photo: Getty Images).

events in the frame of an oppressed population struggling against an authoritarian regime. As Butler has argued,⁹ the globalising media establishes local protests as local events per se, creating the potential for something to ‘really happen there’.

This is an important step, as such a reading of the events is not inevitable. Over the decades, there have been many flashes of populist violence and demonstration in Tunisia, but they never captured the public imagination. As a general rule, the government tried to suppress information about such outbursts, but in a comparatively small country such as Tunisia, these efforts had little success. More significantly, however, the government could control the frame and narrative of the events. For example, an outburst at a football stadium in 1998 was described by the official (and only) media as having been caused by violent hooligans. Given the broad concern in Europe and beyond with football hooligans, and the strong antipathy between the supporters of various teams in Tunisia, this was a plausible explanation. When Tunisian television and newspapers showed images of the destruction caused by the rioting groups, it solidified the narrative frame of unruly and undisciplined mobs, clearly groups that needed to be better controlled by the government. Although counter narratives also circulated – students with family in the area told me that the unrest stemmed from political and economic concerns – these narratives had comparatively little impact. Unlike Egypt, Tunisia did not have a ‘culture of protest’.¹⁰

The images and their forms of transmission in late 2010, however, allowed for the construction of a different narrative. Their aesthetic was that of journalism, asserting the verisimilitude of images captured, amidst streaming chaos, of grainy mobile phone photos of dead bodies. They carry the authenticity and power of global news and its well understood genre of similar images from around the world. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 2006 had focused Tunisian public attention on the genre of international cable news. Its ubiquity arose one day in the summer of 2006, when one of the young salesmen I worked with teased me about my Arabic accent, saying that I sounded just like the US State Department Arabic-speaking spokesman that they saw on al- Jazeera. Upon hearing this, others chimed in, saying that yes, that was exactly who I sounded like. Similarly, I met elderly uneducated Tunisian women who could hold forth at great length about the inadequacies of Condoleezza Rice, then the US Secretary of State. Certainly the amount of close attention that Tunisians paid to the news varied, but the general patterns of news coverage had become a widespread cultural referent. This contextualisation helps explain some of the power of the circulated Tunisian photos. The sight of clashes between rock-throwing youths and well-armed state forces made them more than just generic images. They also invoked the very specific context of the Intifada, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and were broadcast by Al Jazeera, which was one of the first sources that Tunisians turned to in seeking information about the Intifada. While it would be difficult to find strong ideological parallels between the Intifada and the Tunisian revolution, the resemblance of the imagery is inescapable and helped created a moral landscape for evaluating the events in Tunisia.

Invoking the context of the Intifada and the genre of photos of insurrection also suggests that the pictures of revolution were also pictures *for* revolution. They became a model to be replicated. As much as they defined the actions that had occurred, they also created meaning and expectations for what was going to occur. While this was not as clear a 'citation' as Manoukian's example of the Iranian 2009 protesters chanting '*Allah Akbar*' in invocation of the 1979 revolution¹¹, it still functioned as a citation, insofar as past practices helped define contemporary activities and provided a framework for future actions. The distinction is that in the Iranian case the citation was of an explicit slogan, while in the Tunisian example it was the form of protest itself and the aesthetics of representing it that were being cited. It is important to note that in this context citation is more than an evocative reference, but also, as Werbner puts it (in this volume), a form of contagion, a method for replicating the protests in other places. While a great deal of attention, including in this volume, is paid to the process of transmission across the globe, it is also important to see this process of transmission at work on the local scale.

While the actions of Bouazizi provided the catalyst for the first protests and remained a touchstone throughout the movement, the individual protests created the impetus for the protests that followed. In particular it is the images from those protests that provided the emotional and contextual framework for the later events. The protests provided a format for expressing ideas and emotions that were culturally resonant. However, there is more to the images of protest than that, for while they helped define the form of protest, they also helped generate its emotional power. They did not simply supply an activist vocabulary for a population that had no voice. The emotional power of the images helped create the outrage, which then had to be channelled in the form of protests. It created a self-perpetuating cycle. The common metaphor used by global media in describing the spread of the revolution was that of a spark that ignited a fire that spread across the land (and eventually the world). A difficulty with such a metaphor is that it leaves little room for analysing the paths and means of transmission. The spread of a fire appears inevitable and disconnected from human actions. A more useful model might be that of viral spread, as it draws attention to the mechanisms by which the ideas, attitudes, emotions and behaviours spread and perhaps mutate over time.¹²

The model of a virus also provides a helpful format for understanding the role of channels of media distribution. Many early commentators on the Tunisian uprising labelled it the Facebook revolution, the Twitter revolution or the Al Jazeera revolution, and so on. On reflection, analysts backed away from these overstated claims and the consensus seems to be that none of the media channels caused the revolution; indeed, there is plenty of evidence from earlier eras of revolutionary messages spreading without the benefit of the internet. While it is undoubtedly true that the media did not create the revolution, however, they certainly played a role in how it unfolded. Using a viral epidemiological model, one can view the media as vectors of transmission that play a role in where and how the viral outbreak of protest spreads. By providing the legitimacy of contextual associations, at the same time they provide a medium in which the virus could flourish and grow. As Postill (in this volume) notes, different media forms have different identities that create different possibilities. For example, the broadcast of images and videos by television news channels creates a sense of 'veracity, [of] history-in-the-making', something that Facebook and Twitter lack; but they, in turn, can supply a decentralised mechanism for spontaneously sharing images and information and building connections among potential activists.

One must be very careful in using the viral metaphor, however, as there is the ever-present danger that the revolutionary sentiment will appear as an independent actor with an agency of its own. In the case of Tunisia, this viral model works particularly well for the first stages of the revolution, when the dominant

aesthetic was the verisimilitude between the journalistic images and the protest itself. The images appeared as mere reflections of a reality that was spreading beyond any one group's control.¹³ However, as the uprising continued, a new aesthetic element arose, that of the images consciously created for consumption, both locally and beyond. If the power of the journalistic images partly rested on their generic links to similar images and movements around the world, the new aesthetic emphasised the localness of the uprising. While the early images cast protesters as the objects of a journalistic gaze, the new images featured protesters as creative subjects speaking to other Tunisians and the world directly.

Not surprisingly, the change in aesthetics was linked to a change in the nature of the actual protests. The earliest protests followed the model of young, usually male Tunisians taking to the streets and fighting running battles with security forces. Certainly, other groups also became involved. Most notably male and female secondary school students held demonstrations and were met with teargas, but the images and videos that circulated from these events still fitted the general model. While the state forces had used violence from the very first days of protest, the level of that violence began to escalate over time, and more images of dead Tunisians began to circulate. These disturbing images proved something of a tipping point, as Tunisians who had, whatever their personal thoughts, stayed on the sidelines, began to be pulled into the movement. The movement became more truly national and, not coincidentally, the national flag began to take on a much more prominent position, particularly as Tunisians began to create images for broader distribution.

FLAGS

The use of a flag in protests is not in itself unusual. As with stone-throwing youths, flags are an almost ubiquitous object in the depiction of populist uprisings. They differ, however, in that while stone-throwing youths are generic, and may be found in many different parts of the world, the flag renders a protest far more specific. It locates the movement within a national, or religious, or ideological geography. It is a symbol for the protesters and for those they are in conflict with, but also for a presumed audience. As a symbol it must, by its very nature, represent something, although it may also have a fair degree of ambiguity and is often a polysemic symbol. The use of the Tunisian flag marked the shift of the protest movement from a localised phenomenon to a national one. It also highlighted the nationalist element of the uprising as opposed, for example, to it being a religious uprising.

With the change of aesthetics came an increased prominence for the inclusion of girls and women in the circulated imagery. While women had been involved from the very beginning (Bouazizi's mother had organised the first protest, and

male and female students had protested at their schools together), the journalistic aesthetic epitomised by stone-throwing youths was highly gendered as male. In the new images constructed by participants for mass consumption, there was a much larger role for women. Similarly, as the protests became more massive, they became more focused on demonstrations of popular unity rather than running conflict. The participation of women and girls from different social positions marked the movement's inclusiveness. If stone throwing in Tunisia was the preserve of young men, all could wave the flag.

As banal as flying a flag might seem, using the Tunisian flag in a protest movement was not as obvious as it might appear. In a nation with a minor cult of personality for President Ben-Ali,¹⁴ the Tunisian flag had been deeply linked to the state in general, and Ben-Ali in particular. Flying the flag became an act of reappropriation, claiming the flag – and the moral and political legitimacy that went with it – for the people. As will be shown below, the usages of the flag established a clear connection between it and the people. In so doing, the portrayal of the flag was also a statement about national identity and its relation to global forces.

As the protests became more massive in January 2011, protesters began to carry the flag everywhere, and its presence dominated all other symbols. Most notable, however, were the images of Tunisians embodying the flag. For example, in a set of images taken at a secondary school, students dressed in red and white



Figure 2.2 Tunisian flag projected on child's face (Source: M. Abdelaziz, 'Un tunisien??', *Partager avec l'autre*).

literally became the flag. On Facebook and other social media sites there were many constructed images that merged flags and bodies. To pick two examples from the many available, one popular image featured the flag projected onto the face of young child (see Fig. 2.2). Another was a line drawing of an eye crying a tear that was the flag. Although the messages of these images were different (the child and the tear serve very different purposes, with one suggesting hope for the future and the other sorrow over the past), they both created a correspondence between the people and the flag. This stands in distinction to people who might paint the flag upon their faces or who might drape the flag over their shoulders. Wearing the flag asserts an affiliation with it, becoming the flag asserts the inseparability of the flag from the people. Such an assertion fuses the nation and the people, highlighting the salience of this particular identity, while rendering others less significant.

Displaying a flag must always be a form of citation, but the content can vary, and indeed there can be contestation over its meaning.¹⁵ As will be shown below, the use and understanding of the Tunisian flag changed after the revolution. During the protests the flag invoked the nationalism available, condensing different meanings within an imagined homogeneity.¹⁶ Linking the flag to the people, particularly in the days of populist uprising, invokes an ahistorical, almost timeless nation. In this instance, it roots the nation in the people, rather than in any political or religious ideology or licensing historical moment.¹⁷ A flag is, in Ortner's terms, a 'summarizing symbol' that is more relevant to attitudes, commitment and orientation than to thought and analysis.¹⁸ Clearly this confers legitimacy on the people's actions, but also neatly sidesteps the question of the ideological nature of revolution. All Tunisians, whatever their political or religious perspective, could look to the flag as a symbol of their unified nation. It included them all and excluded none. While such inclusiveness is the hallmark of nationalism, it had added relevance in the Tunisian case, as flying the flag emphasised the localness and indigenous roots of the revolution, and rejected roles for outside actors. The chant heard in the mass rallies, '*Ash-sha'b yurid isqat an-nizam*' ('the people want the fall of the regime'), highlighted the rising sense of the power of popular sovereignty.

Asserting the people's sovereignty in the nation not only drove out the existing political leadership; it also took a stand in relation to the many international and global groups that had taken active roles in trying to define and construct the Arab world in particular images, many of these rooted in stereotypical orientalist constructions. Prior to the revolution, various Tunisians had expressed scepticism to me regarding democracy, not because they had any principled objection to it, but because the United States had taken such a strong stance in promoting democracy in Iraq. It was not that they had any particular sympathy for groups that were perceived to stand in opposition to the United States, such

as the Muslim Brotherhood or al-Qaeda. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that although the images of the early protests invoked broad resistance movements, there were no citations invoking specific connections to earlier revolutions. Nor were there invocations of leaders or events from Tunisia's own history. The emphasis was on the *new and unprecedented* nature of the movement. This freedom from association with other movements gave the Tunisian uprising a sense of purity that was emphasised by its lack of formal leadership. Any leaders would have had ideological associations that would have made the movement just another political grouping, with all the potential corruption associated with that.

At first glance, this intense focus on the unprecedented and local nature of the movement seems to have an uncomfortable fit with the extensive use of global media forms, whether through television or the internet. At one level, the use of these media may have been pragmatic. Facebook and Al Jazeera were important not so much for their global reach, but because they represented a means of transmitting information throughout Tunisia. Certainly there is some truth to this, yet there was also much more to it. As the protests became a revolution, the messages and symbols shifted, invoking both global audiences and global symbols and language. The proud assertion of the indigenous nature of the revolution was accompanied by a conscious engagement with a watching world. Images shifted from attempts to capture the power of populist protests on the street to examples and embodiments of the protest. Rather than recording the protests, the images became the protests, and the audience became all those who had access to digital transmission. While signs or flags displayed at demonstrations have the potential audience of both those physically present and those seeing the digital record, the new class of images could only be viewed via some digital medium.

Not that the images themselves were virtual. There were multiple examples of students forming images with their bodies that only took on meaning when viewed from above. For example, students in a schoolyard spelled out, in Arabic, the phrases 'Tunisia is free' (see Fig. 2.3) and 'No killing'. Similarly, in the example cited previously, students formed a human flag. Those present were aware of what was being generated, but did not constitute the audience. There was a presumption of a waiting audience who would examine these photos and extract meaning from them. In addition to these photographs taken for broad distribution are the many images generated for, and circulated on, Facebook. Facebook and Twitter were conduits for distributing information, but they were also used to construct a representation of united Tunisians.

The use of profile pictures on Facebook exemplified these patterns. Starting in early January, many Tunisians began changing their profile pictures from individualised images to increasingly standardised versions of the Tunisian flag.



Figure 2.3 (left) Protestors spelling out ‘Tunisia is free’ (Source: Facebook);
 Figure 2.4 (right) Facebook profile picture of blood-spattered Tunisian flag
 (Source: B. Whittaker, ‘The fall of President Ben Ali’, al-bab.com).

The progression of images mirrored the changing sentiments as the movement unfolded.¹⁹ Around 10 January, many adopted the photo of a Tunisian flag in which the red field ran like blood down the image and the upper-right corner featured a diagonal black slash (see Fig. 2.4). It was a flag of mourning and outrage at the government’s brutal suppression of the demonstrations. A few days later, as it appeared that the protests might actually drive the regime from power, people replaced the flag of mourning with a simple, unadorned Tunisian flag, reflecting a pride and optimism in what was about to happen. On 15 January, one day after Ben-Ali fled, the final flag in the progression appeared – a Tunisian flag ringed with clasped hands. This celebrated the unity that had prevailed in driving the President from power and the joint effort that would be required to rebuild the nation.

Both the schoolyard photos and the Facebook profile pictures were meant for mediated audiences. The images were meant to be viewed by others and to represent public engagement in the uprising, but the nature of the audience imagined varied. In the schoolyard photos, the choice of Arabic is telling and significant. While Tunisia is an Arabic-speaking nation, the use of Arabic in such instances is not as obvious as that might suggest. French still carries an association with education, social prestige and sophistication. Paradoxically, French also shows up frequently in graffiti (although it does not dominate), marking either the fans of particular football clubs or progressive politics. The use of Arabic, then, is not an unmarked default choice, but one that carries some significance. In this instance, it highlighted the indigenous nature of the group, but more importantly (particularly given that many signs would eventually appear in French and even English), the nature of the imagined audience. Theirs was an Arab audience.

Were the imagined audiences of the Facebook posters any different? This was not entirely clear, in part because the very construction of the audience on

Facebook followed a different pattern. If the schoolyard images were disseminated through digital media, the actual relationship of producer and consumer was still fairly standard. The creators of an original image disseminated it to a viewing audience. Others may then have passed that image on, but it was ultimately traceable to a single, originating creator. Facebook profile pictures are more complicated. While in normal or unmarked times, individuals choose images that are either photographs of themselves or images that express something of their specific individuality, in some marked periods, individuals select images that replicate what others have done. The individual creator of the image is not merely lost, but becomes unimportant, as the emphasis is on the mass adoption of the image.

The pictures of protesters were powerful in themselves. While they may have been bundled with similar images, they were viewed individually. By contrast, the power of the Facebook profile pictures was in their replication. During the revolution, there were periods in which one Tunisian Facebook profile after another used the same image. The power lay not in the individual images, but in their mass replication. While the ideal vision of the internet is of a global, undifferentiated public sphere, in many instances it can be extremely localised.²⁰ The mass duplication of flags transformed Facebook for some members into a Tunisian space. Further, this use of profile pictures did not differentiate between image creator and audience, or even image poster and audience, as those posting the image for themselves were also an audience for the images posted by others. In this regard, the images posted were similar to public demonstrations in which the sight of other demonstrators created a sense of strength and collective effervescence. It allowed for the participation of many who could not otherwise take to the streets, such as Tunisians living abroad, those with responsibilities or obligations that kept them away, or those who were too afraid. It was a visual representation for even the casual observer of the broad unity of the populace. The importance of social media in this instance was not as a debating forum for coordinating, discussing and defining protests that occur in physical space,²¹ but as means of creating a sense of unity and commonality.

If the multiplying images created a sense of Facebook as a Tunisian or Arab space, however, it is also true that Facebook and the other media through which these images were circulated were global, and that this larger sphere was never entirely absent. This sense of a global audience became increasingly important as the movement gathered momentum. The recognition by the global audience helped confer legitimacy on the movement. The images that Tunisians created, or were created of them, were uploaded to global networks, only to be downloaded back into Tunisia from them. The media became a mirror, in which Tunisians saw their movement reflected back at them. They were both local actors and members of the global audience. The engagement with a worldwide

audience helped mark the transition point from general protest to possible revolution. The world's focus on this small nation marked the importance of the events, and as Tunisians, in their signs, began speaking not only to each other and their government but to the much larger audience, the message became not one of mere outrage, but of recognition of what they were about to achieve.

The classic example of this triumphalist invocation of the global audience was the sign held outside the Ministry of the Interior headquarters²² on 14 January that simply read 'Game Over'. Rather than calling for Ben-Ali to leave, it acknowledged to a global audience what was abundantly clear, that the government was effectively finished. However, the significance of 'Game Over' is more than just the fact that it is in English. The phrase is a staple of video and computer games, themselves a form of global media. Its playfulness contrasts with the earlier, brutal imagery, but it also invokes Tunisians as participants in the global discourse of video games. If the revolution began in the remote marginal areas of Tunisia, its end was marked by urban sophisticates invoking phrases shared by young people around the world. The sign was one of many that began to connect the events in Tunisia to other, much larger networks. Another, for example, read 'USA=Yes we can/TN=Yes we did', linking the Tunisian revolution to the historic victory of Barack Obama, and then topping it. In addition to these signs that were internationalist in content there was a wide range of signs in English that echoed the sentiment of the signs in Arabic or French, calling for freedom and for Ben-Ali to leave.

The ideology of the revolution, to the extent that there was one, was nationalist, rejecting the influences of all outside forces and celebrating the fact that the movement was a purely home-grown phenomenon, not beholden to any group. An often-heard comment was that Tunisian democracy, unlike its Iraqi



Figure 2.5 The final day of protests and the famous 'Game Over' sign (Photo: H. Ben Youssef).

counterpart, was not won by foreign forces. It might seem somewhat contradictory, then, that the movement was so engaged with global media and institutions. As has been noted, in part these global media were used as a means of transmitting information among Tunisians, but it was clearly more than that, as the increasing number of signs oriented towards a non-Tunisian audience indicates. The global media's gaze invoked a massive audience that in itself bestowed on the events the mantle of global importance. A joke my daughter told at the time was passed around my Tunisian friends. She said, 'My father



Figure 2.6 A sign for the foreign audience, from the final days of protest (Photo: Christophe Ena/AP/Press Association Images).

studies Tunisia. It used to be that no one had heard of Tunisia. Now everyone knows about Tunisia.' Tunisians knew that the world was watching. As the protests reached their peak and the impossible became possible, the display and invocation of flags was ubiquitous. In some ways the closest analogy to crowds of people ecstatically waving flags, draping themselves in flags, painting flags on their faces and the like, are international sporting events, such as the Olympics or the World Cup. The revolution, at its finale, shared with those events the sense of being on a world stage, a performance that marked the nation's significance and status. This is not to say that, in the main, Tunisians were performing for a global audience (although some, such as the makers of the Obama-oriented sign, may have been). It was a performance for Tunisians, but with the full awareness and appreciation of the world's gaze. The global audience was, in Goffman's terms, 'ratified overhearers'.²³

While 'Game Over' is clearly an allusion to the world of video games, it became a citation in itself. At a reception in Tunis in the summer of 2012, the coffee ran out too quickly, and a young, self-styled sophisticated Tunisian remarked, 'It's "Game Over" for the coffee,' producing a general amused chuckle. The sign had taken on an iconic status, not through direct viewing, but through images taken of it and later widely circulated.²⁴ If his invocation was meant for humour, other imagery has been more serious. At various times of crisis over the past few years, individual Tunisians have changed their Facebook profiles to the image of the flag with clasped hands, trying to invoke the sense of unity and commitment to rebuilding that had marked the revolution. But the unity no longer exists, and the images have comparatively little power when they are no longer ubiquitous. If anything, the sight of such images, popping up in ones and twos from time to time, highlights the changes since the revolution. The aesthetics of protest have changed, becoming more assertively partisan and ideological. While nationalism is invoked it has taken on a narrower meaning. The contrast between the aesthetics of the revolutionary and the post-revolutionary era helps illustrate the significance of each.

While the use of a national flag in a revolutionary movement is hardly unusual, post-revolutionary flag use suggests that the choice is not as unmarked as it might initially appear. To embrace the flag is to embrace the vision of the nation with which it is associated. While the Egyptian flag featured prominently in the Egyptian uprising, both the Syrian and Libyan revolutionary movements adopted flags different from the ones flown by the state prior to the revolution. In those instances, in the eyes of the revolutionaries, the flag no longer represented the nation, but had been corrupted by the regime. In 2004, the Interim Governing Council in Iraq adopted a new flag, but it was rejected by the population as an American imposition. Instead, the previous flag was restored, but modified to eliminate any associations with Saddam Hussein.²⁵ To fly the

existing flag is to accept the basic nature of the nation that has been associated with it. Flying the existing flag does not demand a reimagining of the nation. The nation continues the path that nationalist sentiment had laid out for it. At some level, one might even argue that the government and rebels share a symbolic vocabulary, insofar as the struggle is over which group best represents the flag and the nation, rather than over the nature of the nation.

The use of the flag by the Tunisian state fits Billig's vision of banal nationalism, in which the markers of nationalism, such as flags, are so widespread and taken for granted that they are hardly noticed or acknowledged.²⁶ However the protesters' adoption of the flag suggests different possibilities. As Werbner noted for the Olympics,²⁷ banal nationalism can create the framework for unifying and, indeed, effervescent experiences. While the daily ubiquity of the Tunisian flag rendered it seemingly banal, it clearly had the potential to signify much more than just modern statehood. Indeed, that ubiquity made it a potent symbol for revolution. To the extent that the flag had become a metonym for the nation-state, then seizing the flag represented a seizure of sovereignty. As individuals flew and even embodied the flag, it became the people's flag, rather than the regime's.

DANCE (AND MORE FLAGS)

This shared vocabulary appears more clearly when contrasted with protests that broke out in Tunisia months after the revolution – in particular the adoption of the black flag of Salafi Islam by some religious extremists. This flag carries linkages to other movements around the world that fly the same flag and is anti-nationalist, insofar as it questions both the primacy of the nation-state and its character. An examination of the specific ideology of the Salafi movement is beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice it to say that it imagines an organisation of the world into religious categories that supersede the contemporary global order of nation-states. Further, the movement carries its own aesthetics of dress, which are read by many Tunisians as inherently political. While the west has long focused on the wearing of hijab as a marker of political Islam, in conversation on the streets of Tunis in 2012 people focused on beards. When talking about Salafis, the community in the centre of the medina (which incorporated both middle-class men and struggling working-class youths) referred to them as 'beards', sometimes just pulling their hands down from their chins as a sign that mimed the beards.²⁸

So important was this marker that a rumour circulated in Tunis in 2012 that the police had pulled over a car that was found to have a load of false beards in the trunk. People explained the story to me as demonstrating that many of those who claimed a Salafi identity were not 'real' Salafis and that the movement in

Tunisia was not actually driven by religious faith. The symbol of the movement was a deceit. Following this line, many argued that the Salafis who were stirring up trouble were not really Tunisian. For many, this meant that foreigners were agitating the population. A few, though, argued that the rural regions that were strongholds of the movement had never really been Tunisian, that they just had a different mentality. Not only had the unity of the initial revolution been shattered, but so had the vision of the nation. Instead of a neutral symbol that all could rally behind, the Tunisian flag began to stand in opposition to the Jihadist flag, as they represented conflicting visions of the nation.

The Tunisian flag featured prominently by the group at the other end of the spectrum from the Salafists, the (largely urban) students who generated Harlem Shake videos. While these videos often carried strong nationalist overtones, they also drew on an international symbol to do so. The videos were part of a global internet fad that peaked in February 2013. Their structure was simple and easily replicable, allowing groups around the world to tailor it to their own identities. While a group of people went about their business in the background, a figure in the foreground – often in a helmet or other head covering – danced maniacally. After fifteen seconds, the videos jump-cut to all the people dancing frenetically, usually in outlandish costumes. The dancing did not feature any particular movements or steps. The emphasis was on uncontrolled chaos rather than synchronisation. Many dancers mimed a variety of sexual acts, although not so much in an erotic manner as in a carnivalesque inversion of accepted



Figure 2.7 A screen capture from the first Tunisian Harlem Shake (Source: LifeIsMine7, 'Gangnam style vs Harlem Shake', YouTube).

norms. On the global stage, the videos were not associated with politics. It became a thing for schools, universities or groups to have fun with and to participate in the global craze.

In Tunisia, however, the videos were seen by the creators and conservative Muslims as an attack on the values of political Islam. The first such video that appeared,²⁹ while ostensibly just an attempt to participate in this phenomenon of global youth culture, did feature two students in the background waving a Tunisian flag. On the one hand, it simply signalled that Tunisia had joined the trend, but it also took a stand that such an act was consistent with a Tunisian identity. The Islamist-led government quickly condemned the video, while simultaneously students at secondary schools and universities (there were also versions in apartments, the zoo, on rooftops and in other locations)³⁰ across the country began making their own versions. Some of these videos also featured the Tunisian flag, and the videos were broadly understood as representing the students' vision of a Tunisian – and Muslim – identity that permitted public displays of chaotic exuberance.³¹ Just as the Salafi flag carried a bodily aesthetic of covered women and bearded men, the Harlem Shake and other dance videos had their own aesthetics of the body, the casual jeans and sweaters of global youth during the first, unmarked section, and the flamboyant, exuberant costumes of the dancing section.

Unlike the imagery during the revolution, post-revolutionary symbolism took ideological stances about the nature of the nation itself and its relation to the rest of the world by explicitly invoking symbolism from the global stage. Within this context, the use and understanding of the Tunisian flag has shifted. Its prominence in the dance videos positions it not as a non-ideological symbol for all, but as an assertion against the Salafi flag. It is used to advocate a particular vision of the nation. In so doing, it has become different from the national flags discussed by Billig that contained no particular content other than support for the nation.³² Indeed, as the nature of the nation is debated, history has become prominent. Following the revolution, there has been a rise in public (although not state-sanctioned) prominence and support for Habib Bourguiba, the founding president of Tunisia, who had been replaced in a constitutional putsch by Ben-Ali. His specific history, of championing the Tunisian people while rejecting political Islam, has become a touchstone for many Tunisians who opposed the Islamist-led government.

While the struggles in Tunisia in the years following the revolution caused great distress in Tunisia, with people from all social classes complaining about increased general insecurity and a lack of safety, they also believed that they were doing much better than the other states that had undergone revolution. This comparative success took away some of the sting of being forgotten as the vanguard of the Arab Spring. I had noticed this amnesia in western press

accounts, and Tunisians were also keenly aware of their fall from international attention. While many were insulted by this, many Tunisians also suggested that this neglect may have had benign consequences. A theme I heard often was that Tunisia was doing better because of, not in spite of, the global forgetting. The reasoning, echoing the nationalism of the revolution, asserted that the intervention of outside actors would distort the process and lead to policies not rooted in Tunisian culture. They particularly drew attention to the ongoing violence in Egypt, suggesting that in part this was due to Egypt's longstanding prominence on the global stage, making it attractive to ideologues of all persuasions. It was galling for Tunisians not to be acknowledged as the catalyst of the Arab Spring, but perhaps it was better to reform one's political system outside of the media spotlight.

LOCAL AND GLOBAL PUBLICS

Running through these shifting uses of images and symbols is a tension between global and local forces, between specific and broad forms of identity. The use of global media institutions played an important role in the revolution, not so much as amplifiers or connectors that allowed information to be shared more broadly, but as contextualising mediators that helped define the material that was transmitted and establish emotional connections to it. This revolution, like all others, was mediated and represented. The aesthetic representations of the various stages of the movement both reflected the experiences of participants and guided observers, both in Tunisia and beyond, in their understanding of the movement and their sense of connection to it. These representations turned the active events of protests into texts that generated publics. Certainly much of the aesthetic emphasis focused on nationalism, but it did not merely tap into existing sentiments, drawing on an already cohesive national identity. Rather, the viewing publics constituted through the various entextualised forms of protest became inextricably intertwined with national identity.

The nationality conjured by the images and texts was entirely self-referential. Invoking the nation did not elicit any sense of characteristic traits, beliefs or history. Rather, the members of the nation represented themselves as such to the nation. Tunisia became the creator and audience for these shared images. At the same time, having summoned itself into being and asserted its own existence, this national public created an audience of worldwide observers. The revolution became a performance on the global stage. However, while entextualisation rendered the ephemeral into fixed texts, the reading of those texts itself changed and they created different audiences. The very fact of the general public summoning itself into existence created, then, possibilities for new publics in the future, as the dynamic process continues to play out.

NOTES

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4. *Ibid.*, 49-90.
5. Butler, J. (2011), 'Bodies in alliance and the politics of the street', European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (eipcp), September 2011. Online at www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en (accessed 20 March 2013).
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10. Alexander, A. (2011), 'The gravedigger of dictatorship', *Socialist Review*, March 2011. Online at www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=11580 (accessed 15 March 2013).
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12. See also Postill, this volume.
13. This was somewhat illusory, as local chapters of the national workers' trade union, the UGTT, were active in organising protests from the first days.
14. Chomiak, L. (2011), 'The making of a revolution in Tunisia', *Middle East Law and Governance*, 3, 1: 68-83.
15. In the United States there has been debate over the meaning of a politician's wearing, or not wearing, an American flag lapel pin.
16. Leib, J. and G. Webster (2007), 'Rebel with(out) a cause? The contested meanings of the Confederate battle flag in the American South', in T. Eriksen and R. Jenkins (eds), *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, London: Routledge; Webster, G. (2011), 'American nationalism, the flag, and the invasion of Iraq', *The Geographical Review* 101, 1: 1-18.
17. Contrast the generic display of the flag with nationalist celebrations that invoke history such as Independence Day in the United States or Bastille Day in France.
18. Ortner, S. (1973), 'On key symbols', *American Anthropologist* 75, 5: 1338-46.
19. Individual patterns varied, and not all Tunisian Facebook accounts participated in the trend, but it was remarkably widespread. In conversations after the revolution, several Tunisians reminisced about the images.

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21. Juris, J. (2012), 'Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation', *American Ethnologist* 39, 2: 259-79.
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29. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zP7-etRyYw (accessed 15 March 2013).
30. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sp407PteaA (accessed 15 March 2013).
31. While Harlem Shake garnered a good deal of attention from international press (including *The New York Times*, the BBC and *The Guardian*), there were antecedents. Several Tunisian groups opposed to Salafists released videos of synchronised public dancing by flash mobs even before the Harlem Shake craze.
32. Billig, M. (1995), *Banal Nationalism*, London: Sage Publications.

CHAPTER 3

Singing the Revolt in Tahrir Square: Euphoria, Utopia and Revolution

DALIA WAHDAN

THE UTOPIAN TAHRIR MOMENT!

The uprising for eighteen days in Tahrir Square was a collective act of transcendence by individuals and groups subjected to years of oppression and despair. It was an act of crossing the imaginary thresholds of fear orchestrated and enforced by a brutal security regime that had inflicted a state of emergency for more than thirty years. What started as a march against police brutalities on Police Day (25 January 2011) snowballed into a unified demand for 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice and hu Human Dignity'. The physical presence in space-time, the close interactions and the collective responses to police brutality and state violence glued protesters together to emerge as the concretisation of the sensorial experience of 'We the People'.

Gripped by the euphoria of stepping out of the comfort zones of their homes, their blogospheres and the virtual spaces on Facebook or Twitter, many demonstrators temporarily forgot that Egyptian society was rife with contradictions and strife.¹ They behaved as one and, over time, displayed a sort of political sensibility that transcended the religious-secular binary opposition lurking beneath the surface. The scenes of mass prayers in Tahrir Square reflected this political sensibility, especially when Copts and Muslims of all hues spontaneously protected each other in relay at prayer times during the uprising.² This sensibility became a positive force during the first and subsequent mass demonstrations, defying any attempt to understand it as a mere 'instance of imagined solidarity', which – some scholars argue – results from successive 'protest cycles' and eventually contributes to those cycles.³

This momentary utopian unity was translated by some commentators as one manifestation of 'modernity as crisis'; that is to say, a period that possessed an



Figure 3.1 Prayer in Tahrir Square (Photo: J. Winegar).

equal potential for the emergence and the death of democracy. On the one hand, the uprising was an instance of the release of ‘socially immanent, creative forces of social and political change, and on the other, the reactionary powers of order’.⁴ This crisis situation would continue after the uprising and produce deep changes in how Egyptians conceptualised and re-conceptualised democracy, participation, citizenship and identity. Although the uprising must be seen in light of decades of protracted political and social

activism, during the days in Tahrir Square there was no declared, premeditated, anticipatory substitute for the deposed regime. The absence of formal leaders led some analysts to claim that the situation during and immediately after the uprising possessed the potential for an anarcho-democracy where the state was rejected as a frame of reference and ‘the People’ were able to organise and self-rule, even innovate alternative structures altogether.

The question of whether the uprising was a veritable revolution or not still haunts many social scientists, commentators and politicians.⁵ Nevertheless, one of many palpable references and signs of deep change was the singular manifestation of ‘the Will of the People’. For years analysts stigmatised the Arab and Muslim majority societies as essentially unique⁶ in the sense that ‘their’ politics was either a matter of ‘a culture of rioting’ or a ‘culture of deference’.⁷ So the spectacular scenes of unity and solidarity, and particularly of the masses that refused to budge until the regime stepped down, caught many by surprise.⁸ Equally palpable was people’s readiness to sacrifice their lives and to die for a dignified life, a life beyond oppression. Many protesters left their homes convinced that they might not return. Once in the square, protesters simply forgot about food or meals. They were deliberately seeking satiation through collective hunger – a state of mind that drastically contrasted with the familiar scenes of long obsequious queues of citizens waiting for their daily bread rations under the deposed regime.⁹

One of the most powerful factors that incited and sustained the state of unity, political sensibility and readiness was music, in the form of songs written, composed and performed or recorded before, during and after the eighteen days. Those songs emerged as sites of revolution in at least two senses. Their lyrics, compositions and performances sought to break away from the consumer-driven music industry and, more importantly, they reflected the spirit of revolution and uncertainty as they conveyed messages carrying meanings of how ‘We the People’ could conceive of ourselves and of ‘Our’ capacity to transform statehood, society and citizenship – not only during the days of the uprising but in the long term. The music, lyrics and performances of those songs emerged as the loci of

the seemingly paradoxical phenomena of unity against societal divisions, selfless sensibility against religious divides and sacrifice of life for dignity. By narrating and presenting a selection of these songs here, I propose to show that they were organic to the revolution, and not sheer tactics of revolt. My intention is to analyse these songs in order to reach an expanded understanding of what constitutes a 'revolution' in the anthropological sense.

SONGS OF REVOLT: SONGS THAT REVOLT!

Some of the songs sung during the uprising predated it and had inspired me while I was growing up, like other Egyptians, under consistent structural injustices of emergency and dictatorship over at least forty years. Other songs emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Tunisian revolt, while others sprang out of Tahrir Square while people were being killed and maimed by Mubarak's security forces. I have selected and arranged the songs in chronological order with the intention of drawing inferences about the nature of the revolution and its trajectory.

Anthropologists usually analyse music and songs with regard to three dynamics: (1) the composition of notes, rhythm, syncopation, instruments, orchestration and other constituent elements; (2) the dynamics of the 'people' behind the song or music – that is, musicians, singers or composers as individuals and groups interacting with each other and within larger social and economic ecosystems; and, finally, (3) the audience reception of the music or song and the meanings attached to it.

I will address here the first two dynamics – of composition and composers, and of art form and artists. My intention is to uncover what is 'revolutionary' about these songs and to highlight how art forms that spring up in times of turbulence are not sheer knee-jerk reactions or forms that cannot transcend the function of inciting mass psychologies of trauma, tears and patriotism. Instead, these songs are forms of art that express and invite the audience to question the status quo and to move towards changing it. On a deeper theoretical level, they are art forms that represent a deviation from the salient conception of revolution as premeditated change. They express an 'aesthetic' of uncertainty, death, hunger and dignity. I seek to recover and spell out such an aesthetic not as an end in itself but as a means to understand the deep change underway and to possibly redefine revolution.

Heuristically, I assume that the uprising fell short of becoming a revolution. I thus seek to answer a proverbial 'what if' question. In simple terms, I ask, what if there was no other empirical evidence of deep change in Egyptian society except those songs? What if there were no tangible indicators of deep transformation of the social and the political? Would these songs stand out as manifestations of such change? If lined up chronologically, could they be read as a history of the

transformations underway in Egypt and, as such, would such transformations qualify as revolutionary?

I argue that they do. They are transformative and revolutionary in the messages they carry and the meanings they seek to convey. Both the messages and the meanings are not only associated with emerging events but are also reflective of deeper understandings of the power relations that shape individual, national and regional dynamics. Those are messages and meanings organic to the political, the social and the cultural dimensions of Egyptian society as it transforms itself within structurally uneven power relations.

Similarly, they are revolutionary in form. By way of an example, in the 1990s audiences in Egypt had grown accustomed to the format of a video clip where the artist is omnipresent. During the uprising, the artists associated with these songs were either absent from many of the visuals or blended with other characters and depictions. Similarly, solo performances were freely re-performed and recorded by groups of amateur or professional artists and often by laypersons, then uploaded on YouTube for wider circulation and communication. The videos that were superimposed were usually organic to the aesthetics of those songs, as shown in songs recorded during the interim periods of transition under the Supreme Council of Armed Forces in 2011, in which the identities of the artists were replaced with existentially immediate conditions and events. Many of these songs do not urge the audience to revolt but they seek to highlight, establish and perpetuate a condition of turbulence and rejection of any form of oppression. As such they emerge as media of revolution and change.

The ultimate argument I make is that those songs are not simply reactions to the January uprising or subsequent revolts, but rather the immediate, intentional and articulate expressions of the thoughts, meanings and ideas that emerge during years of living under oppression and violence while simultaneously rejecting both. They are organic manifestations of the coming of age of 'We the People' who understand and carry out deeper, more pervasive change. In Ted Swedenburg's words, 'The protest music at Tahrir was not a soundtrack, not a reflection, not a commentary or a report on events, but something integrally tied to and embedded within the social movement'.¹⁰

As with any art form, the aesthetics of those songs are inseparable from the political; they are not only the products of the 'constellation' of forces that constitute political and societal forces, but also a constituent force of these constellations.¹¹ Some videos attempt to present a concise glimpse of the story of brutalities that forced the masses to gather determination and momentum before and during the early days of the uprising in 2011. *The Egyptian Revolution: The Full Story*¹² is a collage of live footage and snaps of recordings before and during the uprising; the succession of events is presented against a backdrop of rather funerary-like tunes.

I downloaded an earlier version of this video in February 2012. The version downloaded then was not subtitled. A later version was duly subtitled and uploaded some time in the latter part of 2012. The conscious efforts by the producers of this video to collage footage chronologically, to juxtapose the footage with recordings of intimidating speeches delivered by the deposed dictator and his son, and to insert caricature depictions of crony members of Parliament are all signs of change not witnessed during the days under the deposed regime when bloggers and their virtual activities were monitored and tracked.

THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY BEFORE TAHRIR

Although it is not part of this chapter's arguments, poetry was a forceful art form at the junction between the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolution:

If, one day, a people desire to live, then fate will answer their call
And their night will then begin to fade, and their chains break and fall.

The two most famous lines by Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi (1909–34), a twentieth-century Tunisian poet, translated by Reem Saad,¹³ were repeatedly recited in both the Tunisian and Egyptian contexts and inspired protesters and activists alike.

Chronologically, not long before Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor, immolated himself, triggering mass uprisings across Tunisia,¹⁴ a group of young activists (nationality undeclared) had started a Facebook page called 'Sheikh Imam'. Imam Eissa (1918–95) was a blind Egyptian composer and singer who collaborated with another revolutionary Egyptian vernacular poet, Ahmed Fouad Negm (1929–2013), to produce what might be called 'impossibly simple' songs that have inspired generations across the Arab world since the days of independence during the 1950s and 60s. Imam and Negm spent most of their adult lives as political prisoners in the jails of consecutive Egyptian despots. Out of jail, they lived frugal yet vibrant lives.

Because their songs were not allowed the 'benefits' of mainstream, commercial cultural production, they operated mostly underground. Nevertheless, they appealed to the masses for their seemingly simple but incisive lyrics. A cult has always surrounded the works of Imam and Negm and their songs, banned



Figure 3.2 Sheikh Imam with Ahmed Fouad Negm (Source: M. Arawa, *Fragments of Insanity Meant to Guide the Sane*).

from the mainstream under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak and first aired on state-controlled media after 25 January 2011.

While they produced several songs, the one that was repeatedly taken to the streets immediately after the Tunisian revolution was entitled 'Thawra' or 'Revolution':

Tonight is revolution,
Tomorrow is revolution,
The day to follow and victory is ours.
Revolution is our goal,
It is the beginning and Egypt is our aim,
The people of Egypt will have victory.
Revolution is light,
People are roses.
For our children,
The revolution of our country will continue.
People of my country, tie your hands together,
Dawn is rising and the sun brings us hope.
Revolution is a generation, free and beautiful,
There is no 'impossible' when there is life and labour,
Tonight is revolution,
Tomorrow is revolution,
The day to follow and victory is ours,
Long live Egypt!¹⁵

While Sheikh Imam and Negm used traditional tunes and instruments – mainly the *oud* – this version was delivered by a chorus made up of a group of young amateur artists who formed a troupe, an *Iskinderilla*. What is interesting about this group is that Salma Jaheen and Ahmed Hadad, the two initiators, are the daughter and grandson of two late revolutionary vernacular poets of the 1950s and 60s who still hold sway over the non-mainstream cultural scene in Egypt and the Arab world, namely Salah Jaheen (1930–86) and Fouad Haddad (1927–85).

DURING THE EIGHTEEN DAYS

Besides songs, several art forms have been partially responsible for inspiring the masses and their impacts have largely been harnessed by online and on-the-ground activities of young women and men, such as members of the famous Facebook group Kollina Khaled Saeed (We are all Khaled Saeed). Khaled Saeed was a young man in his mid-twenties who ran an internet café and was brutally beaten to death in front of his shop by security police. He was later declared dead



Figure 3.3 'We are all Khaled Saeed' (Photo: Ikhwanweb).

due to asphyxiation caused by swallowing marijuana. To highlight brutalities, the group We are all Khaled Saeed was formed immediately after the case was broadcast through opposition satellite channels. Members were innovative and declared themselves non-violent. They started a weekly ritual of dressing up in black and standing silently on the streets to draw attention and raise the curiosity of passers-by. The group was the first to announce on their Facebook page the start of the march towards main squares on 25 January 2011.

The march to and occupation of Tahrir Square provided moments of euphoria. While indiscriminate violence and brutality by the deposed regime's security forces glued protesters together, singing, stand-up comedy, chanting slogans, and designing and circulating illustrative pamphlets harnessed their energies and sustained their defiant spirits. As confrontations with security forces continued and intimidations from state-run radio and television increased, artistic forms in Tahrir Square transcended their functionality and emerged from being mere expressions of emotion into acts of revolt.

One of the songs was written much before 2011 but was banned by the central censorship authority. It was released during the days of the uprising and set against a backdrop of footage from Tahrir Square. Muhammed Mounir, the singer-songwriter, is another opposition artist who has managed to incorporate his work into the mainstream cultural industry while preserving revolutionary tonalities. Several factors contributed to his success. Principal among them were his fusions and the combinations of ethnic instruments and tunes. Other factors include his Nubian origins,¹⁶ which place him among the marginalised and thus closer to the hearts of the downtrodden.

As seen in the video, the lyrics emotionalise the relationship between protesters/lovers and Egypt/the beloved. The lead singer and the chorus plead with the feminised image of Egypt to heed their love and longing to cleanse

her. They ask, 'How? How does she not see their suffering? How does she accept their oppression and misery?' The lyrics narrate the emotional and metaphorical suffering of the lover who sleeps bare while struggling to cover the body of his beloved, whereas the footage portrays the threat and dangers arising from military and police brutalities. The unanswered and desperate questions intermingle with determination to continue the fight against a backdrop of dwindling hope and increasing uncertainty. Visuals aside, the lyrics touch a state of mind and emotional disposition that is shared among the oppressed peoples of Egypt. It is a state that Anne Bogart succinctly expressed in her words, '[T]he spirit of liberty is the spirit that is not too certain that it is right'.¹⁷ This can partly explain why the song gained popularity and was repeatedly performed in Tahrir Square during the uprising, both on the makeshift stage and on the ground, in front of huge audiences.

POST-UPRISING EUPHORIA

The song below, *Sut al-Hurriyya* (The Sound of Freedom), was recorded immediately after the celebrations that followed the ousting of the regime. It gained worldwide publicity and the band Cairokee were interviewed by news channels such as CNN. It has lively, hopeful lyrics and music, even though it starts off with the same state of mind that characterised many demonstrators –

The Sound of Freedom

I stepped out and said I will not return
Wrote with my blood on every street
For our rights,
Hunger no longer bothers us
In every street in my country
The voice of freedom is calling.¹⁸

The members of the band claim that the words of this song were a product of the moment of euphoria and hope that gripped protesters immediately after the regime stepped down. While some may take this as a reactionary response, if we take a closer look at the lyrics we can immediately see that they are built upon a contradiction of sorts. One of the lines is a declaration that 'hunger is no longer an issue'. However, 'bread' was the first demand of protesters. Within this seeming contradiction lies the power to explain the dynamics of activism in Tahrir and beyond. When 'We the People' seek bread, it is not a reaction to hunger. Ours is not the 'revolt of the hungry' that many neoliberals proclaim. 'We the People' seek dignity in life, even as we remain subdued and humiliated. Hunger and humiliation are turned inside out. I seek to live through martyrdom and seek satiation through starvation and hunger strikes.

THE AESTHETICS OF BRUTALITY

The Tahrir utopia faded beyond the physical space-time of the square, especially as the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), headed by Mubarak's Minister of Defence, General Hussein Tantawi, took over the interim government and preserved the state of emergency. The developments that ensued were largely disappointing to the majority of Egyptians from both pro- and anti-revolutionary camps. The national referendum on amendments of the 1971 Egyptian constitution in March 2011, for instance, divided the electorate and the majority of the population into two camps based on religious identification.¹⁹ Mobilisations for the referendum, and those for the parliamentary elections that followed in November 2012, were drawn along the divisive lines of heaven or hell, metaphorically speaking. Campaigners urged the 'pious' to accept the suggested amendments and get to heaven. Absurdity aside, the results of both rounds of ostensible 'democracy' resulted in the ascendance to power of what is generally known as political Islam. In Egypt in 2011, this consisted of members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, a conservative Islamist party that had operated underground for most of the post-Nassarist period. Its candidate, Mohamed Morsi, who had been incarcerated in jail before the uprising, eventually emerged as the first elected civil president in the history of modern Egypt. Others within the Islamist camp include the Salafis (scripturalists) along with smaller yet even more fundamentalist groups of Jihadi returnees from Afghanistan, as well as the severed militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.

All the while, the trial of the deposed Mubarak and his accomplices continued at a snail's pace, with a ban on broadcasting or publication of court proceedings. Simultaneously, state-run television and radio authorities reorganised along pre-existing ideological divisions and lines of allegiance, some siding with the age-old security apparatuses. The latter seemed to have undergone mere cosmetic changes. For instance, the State Security Authority acquired a new name, the National Security Agency. The military police and security forces, now under the control of ultra-conservative members of Parliament, meted out all sorts of brutalities on protesters, including the deployment of snipers to target activists and protesters' eyes, 'virginity tests' and sexual harassment of female protesters.

The polarised moral discourses that pervaded the period between the first wave of the revolution on 25 January 2011 and the second, post-election, massive wave on 30 June 2013 were consolidated, on the one side, by the new constitution drafted by the Islamic ultra-conservatives in 2012; on the other side, a growing oppositional discourse emerged, articulated by many of the original protesters, now in the opposition, on the streets and in other contexts. A spate of ethnic clashes and mob violence erupted, allegedly incited by reli-

gious sermons and through internet and satellite media. While ‘foreign agendas’ and ‘third parties’ have repeatedly been accused of inciting social division, the SCAF kept the message that the army protected the revolution and ensured freedom of elections and self-expression.

This was a period loaded with contradictions and conflicts, which also generated a tremendous outpouring of artistic responses. Graffiti and street performances and art flourished.²⁰ The Mask of Freedom (see Fig. 3.4) is one example of responses to SCAF brutalities. Art works emerged as at once modes and states of resistance. One of the most powerful renditions of the period was the campaign entitled ‘*Askar Kathibun* (Soldiers are Liars) initiated by a group of activists who travelled across several governorates to screen films and songs that accused the SCAF of untruth and brutality.

In one of the songs, the subtitles and the visuals are powerfully blunt and lack any metaphorical allusions. The footage is of a veiled young woman stripped and kicked by riot police, an act heightened by heavy beats and the voice of an angry rapper delivering the message: ‘We are defiant of SCAF’s authority and aware of the soldiers’ lies.’ The words, the beats and the singers’ voices reflect the willingness of ‘the People’ to face brutal death on the streets in the fight for their freedom and dignity. The message of the song diverts from the ‘traditional, patriarchal’ discourse of honour. Instead, the words refer to the act of stripping ‘our’ bodies.

The same line is repeated, albeit differently, in *Ithbat Makanak* (Stand Your Ground), the song below that was sponsored and distributed for free by the private-owned satellite channel ONtv:

Stand Your Ground
 Stand your ground –
 Here is your address.
 Fear fears you
 And your conscious have never failed you.
 Sunlight is returning,
 Die dignified or live obsequious,
 Your eyes see the sign,
 Keep away from them and leave the wall to crush them,
 The heart of the land is wounded,
 And the sound of freedom has cracked.²¹

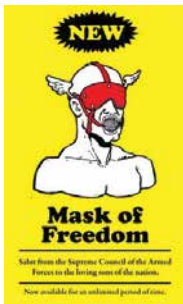


Figure 3.4 Mask of Freedom (distributed and posted on walls in Tahrir Square in May 2011 by a blogger using the pseudonym Ganzeer).

Both songs represent an aesthetic of brutality and death. The latter, *Stand Your Ground*, has a generally soft rhythm with the visuals restricted to in-studio footage of the band members hanging hundreds of photographic stills of martyrs and demonstrators on a wall. The story – in words and visuals – invites hope through the eyes of the daughter of one of Al-Azhar’s scholars who was killed in Tahrir Square. Similarly, it invokes a breakaway from the hegemony of the ‘old’ media regime by showing a number of journalists and media representatives known for their pro-revolution activism. The scene in which Bassem Youssef, the surgeon-turned-satirist, caustically mocks the regime as he breaks an old TV set, is particularly emblematic. The television set represents the ‘old’ paradigm of state-run media, and Youssef the youthful hands of the ‘new’ disillusioned generation.

On the other hand, *‘Askar Kathibun* (Liars), is more explicitly confrontational. The footage of the brutalities committed by special forces and riot police during the SCAF-led interim government leave nothing for mediated analysis. The lyrics are violent and the rappers angry. *‘Askar Kathibun* marks a turning point in the relationship between ‘the army’ and ‘the People’. For a long while, the armed forces represented themselves as organic to Egyptian society, the protectors of the people’s honour and demands. They repeatedly announced that the ‘Egyptian Army was the protector of the People’s Revolution’. It is exactly these and similar patriarchal discourse that the revolutionary artists directly attacked. The lyrics of this song, ‘Death is not to be Mourned’, are a celebration of the path to dignity and immortality. Brutality was the means for their defiance and sense of power over the hollow claims of the army and other institutions of patriarchy.

The above two songs have a lot more in common; they are both cases of ‘the political as antagonism’.²² By uncovering the oppressive nature of paternalistic army ‘care’ and juxtaposing it with the brutal stripping of the ‘veil’ off the young woman by the very police force that claims to be her protector, and by showing how peaceful protesters such as the Al-Azhar scholar were targeted, those songs bring into relief the antagonism inherent in established deference to the army, and expose the brittle connection between the revolutionary tide and the state’s instruments of authority and repression, wielded in turn against different Egyptian ‘people’, construed as ‘the enemy’.

REVOLUTION-AS-SONG!

In conclusion, my selection of songs is by no means comprehensive or objective. Rather, it is intended to highlight certain features of art forms that forcefully depict the spirit of ‘We the People’. As such, the selection is definitively different from examples of nationalistic art forms; that is, forms of art that serve the purposes and programmes of the regime.

In contrast to a nationalism that rests on the nostalgia for and glorification of the past that ‘can easily be converted into a product in itself or ... be used to promote other products’,²³ the songs selected above represent an art form that attempts to reclaim specific historical experiences ‘that may have been lost or suppressed during the period of exploitation and repression’.²⁴ Conjuring the songs of Sheikh Imam was part of raising the phoenix of ‘the People’ from the ashes. Invoking the poetry of Abu al-Qassim al-Shabbi was meant to ignite ‘the spirit of the People’. The exhortations in the songs are from the People to the People.

Similarly, the songs are built around a spirit of defiance. Artists and their performances insist on defying oppression, patriarchy, hierarchy and institutions associated with the old regime. Nevertheless, none of the songs seems sure of an *alternative* to the old regime. And yet they represent a non-hierarchical form of art, expressed especially in how band members organise and share ideas, and in their collective performances through media that do not fit into any form of the commercial art industry. Moreover, the songs exude energy, the kind of energy that is difficult to channel through ‘classical’ marches and protests, yet finds its way out through forms of collective art, music and songs.

The songs are diverse in rhythm and genre. If looked upon as forms of collective action, they would easily constitute a repertoire of experiences. For instance, superimposing new visuals on old music and lyrics, or using old notes with new lyrics are two ways of connecting past forms of defiance to contemporary forms of revolutionary change. The intentional juxtaposition of old and new elements in each song is indicative. They reflect a deeper questioning of the ‘imaginary figures’ that members of the Egyptian society have taken for granted as their reference points for ‘self-understanding’.²⁵

The songs are articulate, specific in their lyrics and sharp in tone, even when no rhythm is discernible. Such articulateness and specificity is what makes them historical. Theodor Adorno stressed how specificity and uniqueness make history by reminding us how focusing on the specific does not dismiss the contexts or eschew the so-called bigger picture. Instead, they allow us to notice ‘the particular forces at work in the abstract unities of “history” and “society”’.²⁶ Even though most songs do not offer a clear trajectory for social transformation, and almost all their messages do not seem to ‘know what they want’, they nonetheless seek direct action in response to and against the tools of corrupt, oppressive institutions.

They are also relentless in their position of ‘No dialogue with oppressors’. None of the songs implores peaceful resolution of conflicts. While there have been satirical works of art and songs which appeared after writing this paper, fatalism and submission were not part of their messages or of their forms of expression. One of the most powerful statements that depicts the spirit of the

times was made by Alaa Abdelfattah, a young activist who wrote a short article in an Opposition newspaper on 24 June 2012. Again I am quoting from the translation in *American Ethnologist*:

Get rid of the experts and listen to the poets – we are in a revolution. Ignore reason and hang on to the dream for we are in a revolution. Beware of caution and embrace the unknown for we are in a revolution. Celebrate your martyrs. In the midst of the ideas, the symbols, the stories, the performances and the dreams; nothing is real except their blood, and nothing is certain except their immortality.²⁷

NOTES

1. The extent to which bloggers have access to internet technologies is not a reliable indicator of their respective class position, or, by extension, the class basis of the revolution. Access to internet technologies has expanded since 2008 after successive government initiatives to make personal computers accessible to every home.
2. Hirschkind, C. (2012), 'Beyond secular and religious: An intellectual genealogy of Tahrir Square', *American Ethnologist* 39, 1: 49–53.
3. McAdam, D., S. Tarrow and C. Tilly (2007), 'Toward an integrated perspective on social movements and revolutions', in M. I. Lichbach and A. S. Zuckerman (eds), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 142–73; Meyer, D. S. and D. C. Minkoff (2004), 'Conceptualizing political opportunity', *Social Forces* 82, 4: 1457–92.
4. Olivier, B. (2011), 'Egypt: The crisis of modernity all over again?' *Thought Leader*, 11 February 2011. Online at www.thoughtleader.co.za/bertolivier/2011/02/11/egypt-the-crisis-of-modernity-all-over-again/ (accessed 23 October 2012).
5. Asad, T. (2012), 'Fear and the ruptured state: Reflections on Egypt after Mubarak', *Social Research* 79, 2: 271–98; Alexander, A. (2012), 'The Egyptian workers' movement and the 25 January Revolution', *International Socialism*, 9 January. Online at www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=778&issue=133 (accessed 20 September 2012); Stacher, J. (2012), 'Ordering Egypt's chaos', Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 29 June. Online at www.merip.org/mero/mero062912 (accessed 23 October 2012).
6. Beinin, J. and F. Vairel (eds) (2011), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Bayat, A. (2007), *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
7. Beinin and Vairel, *Social Movements*.
8. The same, or even larger, number of people would re-emerge in subsequent mass protests and demonstrations throughout 2011 and until the drafting of this chapter in 2013.
9. Fahmy, H. (2012), 'An initial perspective on "the Winter of Discontent": The root causes of the Egyptian Revolution', *Social Research* 29, 2: 349–76.

10. Swedenburg, T. (2012), 'Egypt's music of protest from Sayyid Darwish to DJ Haha', Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), *Middle East Report* 265: 1. Online at www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-music-protest (accessed 2 August 2013).
11. Phelan, S. (1993), 'Interpretation and domination: Adorno and the Habermas-Lyotard debate', *Polity* 25, 4: 597-616.
12. See, for example, 'The Egyptian Revolution: The full story', YouTube. Online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGugfl-s_0o (accessed 1 August 2013).
13. Saad, R. (2012), 'The Egyptian Revolution: A triumph of poetry', *American Ethnologist* 39, 1: 63-6.
14. There were a number of similar cases of self-immolation in Egypt reported in official state-owned newspapers in the late 1990s and early 2000s.
15. Author's translation.
16. 'Nubian' refers to the ethnic groups that occupied the territories between northern Sudan and southern Egypt and were relocated in large numbers during the construction of the High Dam in 1954. Relocation efforts have largely failed, creating a Nubian diaspora throughout the Egyptian territories.
17. Bogart, A. (2007), *And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World*, New York: Routledge, p. 11.
18. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPiAmpOkV-M (accessed 15 May 2011).
19. El-Labbad, M. (2011), 'Egypt after the referendum'. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Egypt. RLF Newsletter, 22 March 2011. Online at http://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/ab_palestine/pdf/RLF_newsletters_EN/RLF_Egypt_after_the_referendum.pdf (accessed 15 May 2011). The 1971 constitution was later annulled and a predominantly Islamist constitution was drafted and passed in 2012, dividing citizens into roughly two opposing camps.
20. See <http://rollingbulb.com> (accessed 13 August 2013).
21. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYoCS7ioSIg (accessed 13 August 2013).
22. Mouffe, C. (2007), 'Artistic activism and agonistic spaces', *Art & Research, A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, 2: 1-5, at p. 2.
23. Leuthold, S. M. (2011), 'Nationalism', in S. M. Leuthold (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Issues in Art Frames for Understanding*, New York: Routledge, pp. 64-93, at p. 74.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
25. Mouffe, 'Artistic activism'.
26. Phelan, 'Interpretation and domination', 610.
27. Abdelfattah (2011) as quoted in Saad, 'The Egyptian Revolution', 65.

CHAPTER 4

'I Dreamed of Being a People': Egypt's Revolution, the People and Critical Imagination

HANAN SABEA

Caught in the thrill and euphoria of the revolution of 25 January, later, in March 2011, Alain Badiou reflected on Egypt, writing:

The People, and only the people, are the creators of universal history ... Once a threshold of determination, obstinacy and courage has been passed, a people can indeed concentrate its existence in one square, one avenue, a few factories, a university ... The whole world will be witness to this courage, and especially to the amazing creations that accompany it. These creations will stand as proof that a people is represented here.¹

Almost two and a half years later, in August 2013, Ali Al-Haggar, a famous Egyptian singer, appeared on several TV stations performing a new song. The lyrics address an unnamed group, interpreted by most people as alluding to Islamists, Muslim Brothers, Salafis and supporters of former president Mohamed Morsi, symbolised by the protesters at the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins.² The song is entitled 'We are a people and you are a people' (*Ihna sha'b wa intu sha'b*).³ Its opening lines embody the distance that Egypt and the 'people' travelled between January 2011 and August 2013:

We are a people, and you are a people.
What moved our hearts never moved yours.
God is one; but we have our God, and you have your God
[...]
And because pious Egypt runs through our blood since the dawn of history
We will never become you, and you will never become us.
Gather your tribe, your kin and your tents.

Amass your shouts and screams, amass your edicts and chains
And go far away from our land because you are not us. You are a people and
we are a people.

Encapsulated in the words above is a long process of struggle over the meaning, experiences and imagination of the category of ‘the people’, articulated in Arabic as *‘al-sha’b*. ‘The people’ was emblematically reflected in the famous chant *‘al-sha’b yurid*’ (‘the people want’) that shook the squares of liberation in Egypt from 25 January 2011 in echoes that reverberated way beyond the physicality of space, demanding freedom, justice and equity. Yet what happened to ‘the people, its imaginations, and its deployments? How is it even conceivable that the ‘summoning of ALL’, as Badiou elaborated in his writings on the political and the event,⁴ has swiftly become ‘we are a people and you are a people’? Who and how are ‘the people’ invoked in such varied and oft contradictory pronouncements, to the extent that a loudspeaker placed on a security forces tank was announcing the legitimacy and the mandate of and by ‘the people’ – and the rule of law – while killing, maiming and dispersing mercilessly the protesters at the Rabaa sit-in on 14 August 2013?⁵ Even corpses, hurriedly wrapped in white cloth, stained with blood and with the names of those killed hand-written on them, did not escape the violence of removal, while the name of ‘the people’ and the sanctity of the law were being relentlessly recited. Are the dead of Rabaa among ‘the people’ or are ‘the people’ dead?

How can one write about ‘the people’ while having been witness (and one



Figure 4.1 Bodies of Morsi supporters killed in clashes with security forces in a makeshift morgue in Cairo, 27 July 2013 (Photo: E. Arrott/VOA).

cannot help but feel an accomplice) to the murder of hundreds of people in the name of the people? In fact, 26 July 2013 witnessed the massing of 'the people' in Tahrir – in response to demands by the army – to confer on the military the mandate and the order to fight terrorism in Egypt, a euphemism signifying members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Since then a small icon stating 'Egypt fighting terrorism' has appeared in the left-hand corner of TV screens during the airing of programmes on many stations, while the whole machinery of state and private media aggressively sell this war against terrorism to the wider audience. How can one write the shift from emancipatory imagination and struggle to a regulatory apparatus – labelled by some as the onset of a fascist order – that justifies all controls and scrapping of rights in the name of the war on terror? The difficulties of writing about the revolution have bewildered scholars since its beginnings, especially those who were witness to and participants in the unfolding events.⁶ But now, more than then, the difficulties are compounded.

Although the revolution was branded as 'non-violent and peaceful', since 25 January 2011 thousands have died in confrontations between the security state apparatus and 'the people', including by the hands of militias of the Muslim Brotherhood during December 2012. In some instances (such as the Abbasiyya events during protests at the Ministry of Defence) residents of the neighbourhoods also had violent skirmishes with protesters. The nomenclature of violence was not foreign to the revolution. In fact, as Bogaert reminds us: 'non-violent political action often only becomes effective when it provokes violence, when it obliges the powerful to expose the violence that underlies the maintenance of a particular political order'.⁷ The interpretation of the January revolution as non-violent fits within a frame of reference and an interpretive paradigm that cannot envisage militant struggle as legitimate within a global world order of neoliberal governance.⁸

Nonetheless, there was something 'different' about the summer of 2013: not only the violence but, more fundamentally, the deep onset of despair. While the violence that occasioned the dispersal of the sit-ins represented one façade of the mayhem that grabbed the city, another was outbursts of killings, the torching of churches, kidnappings and the mutilation of bodies that did not spare many villages and cities in Egypt. Reports of churches being attacked, particularly in the south, dead bodies of police officers and soldiers in Giza and Sinai being mutilated, museums being looted, arbitrary shootings, exhortations to kill in retaliation for lost ones and scenes of people killing people engulfed the landscape. The sounds of screaming, shouting, fighting, gunfire, speeding ambulances, whistles announcing the beginning of attacks and calling on neighbours to gather together to fight back and protect themselves, and helicopters flying over the cities and towns filled the air. The smell of teargas, of shots and, worst of all, according to a friend who was at the Imam Mosque on the night

of 14 August after the dispersal of Rabaa, of burning blood remain engraved in the corporeal experiences that many carry. So how to write while entrapped by violence, threats, uncertainty, confusion and a deep feeling of disappearing possibilities, materially embodied in the silence and darkness that envelops the city with the onset of curfew hours?

I started writing this chapter in March 2013 and presented the first version as a paper at the Wenner-Gren workshop 'Beyond Arab Revolutions', held at the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations in March 2012. Even at that time, the construct of 'the people' had been undergoing radical shifts, a process that I detail below. Yet when the time for revisions came, Egypt and 'the people' were in very different places. What the paper addressed then seems so distant from and at variance with the present, that any attempt to speak about it or analyse it appears not only superfluous and meaningless, but downright banal. Is it possible to make sense? What follows is one attempt that gestures at an exploration of a universe of contradictory meanings and experiences, of uncertainty and contingency. I premise the paper on personal experiences and encounters during the last two and a half years, and the knowledge gained from a collaborative research project, 'Imagining the Political', that started in September 2010,⁹ a few months before the onset of the revolution. I complement my reflections with accounts that appeared mostly in local circuits of knowledge production and exchange, which I read in the light of experiences of what Asef Bayat referred to as 'new global revolutions'.¹⁰ In what follows I thus explore the tumultuous trajectory of the category of 'the people' and the contradictory meanings and experiences thereof. While focusing on 'events' to reveal the contentious universe of meaning associated with 'the people', I also locate these 'visible episodes' within the context of unfolding processes. My aim is to challenge the facility with which events – once named, packaged and rendered significant – become metonyms for more complex processes that remain obscure in relation to the spectacle of events.

THE PUBLIC AND THE PEOPLE: ONCE UPON A TIME A REVOLUTION
HAPPENED HERE

In her 'Bodies in alliance and politics of the street', Judith Butler argued:

Those who are excluded from existing polities ... may be unreal only to those who seek to monopolize the terms of the reality. And yet even when the public sphere is defined through their exclusion, they act. Whether abandoned to precarity or left to die through systematic negligence, concerted action still emerges from such sites. And this is what we see ... when populations amass

without the protection of the law, and without permits to demonstrate, to bring down an unjust or criminal regime of law.¹¹

And this is what we saw in Tahrir and the many other squares in Egypt from 25 January 2011. Within eighteen short days, Tahrir Square became an icon for struggle, freedom and liberation. Tahrir – and the diverse, multi-layered and, more recently, contradictory meanings for which it stands – emerged as a ‘moment in time’ that was spatially grounded in the experiences of the multitudes in and away from the squares and many other public spaces. Within and constituting these public spaces, the category ‘the people’ – *‘al-sha’b* – or ‘the street’ – *al-sharia* – emerges as the collective that speaks and acts together, and in the process of speaking and acting defines an emerging politics. Just before 1 pm on Friday, 28 January – also named and marked in historical imagination as the Friday of Rage – as the imam ended the prayer, ‘the people’ rose in unison at the many mosques and squares of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, Port Said, Mansoura and many other cities and towns in Egypt to chant one slogan: *‘al-sha’b yurid isqat al-nizam*’ (the people want to dismantle the system). But who were ‘the people’ and how are they constituted as a collective articulating a revolutionary demand of change? How can we envisage the meaning of revolution and change? And what is the system to be dismantled?

The ‘system’ and the people who rose to dismantle it are two sides of the same coin; the making of one was premised on the destruction of the other through a process of radical change and transformation. Hence I argue that an inseparable part of the struggle over the meaning of the category ‘the people’ is the struggle on the ground over power, order and the reconfiguration of the political, translated metaphorically in the demand for dismantling the system writ large. The system for many comprised the security apparatus of the state, which has for many years loomed large over even the smallest details of citizens’ everyday lives. This security apparatus is intimately linked to and intersects with the economic order that is premised on what Marx pronounced more than a century ago, namely accumulation by dispossession, now translated into the aggressive machinery of neoliberal practices. These elements shape and define the very constitution of the social, its ethos, practices and categories.

The machinations to reproduce the system with only manicured reforms on its surface – deserving the label of ‘Refo-lutions’, as Bayat called it¹² – underlie the most recent events of violence in the name of ‘the people’. As Colla argued:

There is no political claim that is not made in the name of some image of the people and its revolution. Even counter-revolutionaries – such as the Muslim Brothers, business elites, Salafis and the army – understand this game and play by its rules.¹³

And play they did: the security state apparatus, the Muslim Brothers, Salafis and the remnants of the old Mubarak regime, popularly known as the *Felul*. Hence the radically shifting meanings of ‘the people’ over 2012–13. Most disturbing has been the struggle for power between the security state and the business elite on the one hand, and the Muslim Brothers and Salafis on the other, over the dead bodies of ‘the people’. No matter how tight the grip and how vicious the battle, one wonders: are the people dead, understood in Badiou’s terms as those who have embarked despite all odds and oppression on ‘the organized fidelity to the communism as movement’?¹⁴ The latter, of which the revolution in Egypt has been but one instance among many spreading from Tunisia, to Yemen, Spain, Greece, Chile and the US, among others, is defined as the ‘common creation of a collective destiny’,¹⁵ with two distinctive characteristics.

First, it is generic, representing in one place humanity in its entirety. In this place there are people of all the kinds [that] a population is usually made up of, all words are heard, all propositions examined, all difficulty taken for what it is. Second, it overcomes the great contradictions that the state pretends to be the only one capable of surmounting: between intellectuals and manual workers, between men and women, between rich and poor, between Muslims and Copts, between people living in the province and those living in the capital ...¹⁶

This sense of being ‘a people’ is translated in the words of the poem which I used as a title for this paper. ‘I dreamed of being a people’ is part of Ahmed Fouad Negm’s poem ‘As if You are Nothing’, composed in October 2010 and embodies glimpses of a different imaginary which has been born of decades of precarity that marked the consolidation of the neoliberal sociopolitical and moral order in Egypt. This imaginary has seen its contingent, sometimes contradictory and still emerging enunciation in the processes that unfolded since 25 January as well as the years of struggle that preceded it.¹⁷

I propose that the fluid and contingent boundaries of ‘the people’, and the many contradictory trajectories that they have come to manifest, are related to the disruption of what constituted the politically and socially familiar (i.e. the system writ large, or the *nizam*). The system is not only limited to the state and its organs, but also to structures and social categories (such as gender, religion, ownership, market, communal, neighbourhood) that constitute the very realm of the social. Such disruptions, which at present appear dispersed, ephemeral and scattered, are key nodes, sites or moments in a radical process of change. Such sites and moments of disruption of the political and social familiar – which for instance emerged during the eighteen days in Tahrir – also made an ‘appearance’ at Port Said, Mansoura and Suez during spring 2013, and were ‘present’ at the

train station on the night of 2 February 2012 when the ultras gathered at Cairo Central to meet the fans returning with the bodies of the dead after the Port Said massacre; at Kasr Nil bridge on 25 January 2012 in a confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood; at the Ittihadiya presidential palace in reaction to the constitutional declaration; at the Constitutional Court and the Media Complex on 6 October; as well as at the Mahalla textile workers' strike of 2008, to name only a few. These moments and spaces are key nodes in enabling the emergence of a critical imaginary that assembles a different possibility of 'a people' and a polis. These moments and sites approximate what Butler referred to as 'the interval'. The latter is defined as

the time of the popular will, not a single will, not a unitary will, but one that is characterised by an alliance with the performative power to lay claim to the public in a way that is not codified into law, and that can never be fully codified into law.¹⁸

I would add that they can never be fully codified into law because they are in excess of the system of law as it exists; this excess – that is yet momentary, dispersed and ephemeral – escapes possibilities of ready containment because what it presents is outside of and not yet classifiable within the codes of law and



Figure 4.2 Eighteen short days: The emergence of a people, Tahrir Square, 25 November 2012 (Photo: H. Sabea).

the known rituals and technologies of power. It is precisely this excess that has the potential of effecting cracks in neoliberal governance, which comprises the condition against which a collective notion of 'a people' was rendered possible. And it is also this excess that has come under attack during the struggle for power and over the dead bodies of the people. Finally, while visibility or appearance are important domains in the making of 'the people' (as Arendt has argued, seeing and being seen by others), in the case of Egypt, what is equally important is what happens in the invisible of the everyday, Veena Das's 'recesses'¹⁹ in terms of daily practices, negotiations of meaning, thinking and relating to alternatives, and so on that make the 'public' appearance possible.

What were the eighteen days about and how did they become, in the language of many, a time out of time, excised from the everyday, yet simultaneously constituting the ordinariness of another world that was imagined as possible? It was the ordinariness of Tahrir time (its rhythms and routines, its forms of aesthetics and sociality, and its possibilities and potentials) that became the very basis for the 'extraordinariness' (or the time out of time) of Tahrir.²⁰ This ordinariness/extraordinariness constitutes also the potential for rethinking and reconfiguring the political. Indeed, as Mouffe has argued: 'The frontier between the social and the political is essentially unstable and requires constant displacements and renegotiations between social agents. Things could always be otherwise ...'²¹ And Tahrir's eighteen days were but one moment in a long struggle that is still unfolding and which rendered visible this possibility of the 'otherwise'.

On 26 February 2011 (just fifteen days after the removal of Mubarak), the Choir Project²² performed their 'The People Want the Life of the Square' ('*al-sha'b yurid hayat al-midan*').²³ The performance, composed lyrically from the chants and slogans that echoed all over Egypt during the eighteen days, was an attempt to memorialise and talk about what constituted 'Tahrir'.²⁴ But what were the eighteen days about? How did 'the people' emerge in its context and with what meanings?

Tahrir is marked by the openness, fluidity and contingency of its temporal boundaries (When did it start? What were its beginnings? Where should we locate them? When does it end?). This fluidity relates to the histories of struggle that preceded the revolution and made it possible. Prime among these has been the *Kefaya* movement, which made protesting in the streets again a possibility after the years of containment since the 1970s and 1980s. The 6 April movement and the National Association for Change, among others, contributed significantly to a rethinking and an eventual emergence of 'the people' through the visibility of protest in the 'public'.²⁵ Similarly, there were student and worker protests, most exemplified in the Mehala struggles of 2008 which also witnessed the takeover of the main square and the besieging of the city for forty-five days.²⁶ In addition to these 'visible' protests and contestations, what Bayat called non-movements,

or the daily encroachments and everyday struggles by the marginalised, have been simmering for years.²⁷

Second, the temporal ambiguity of Tahrir relates to the disruption of the political and social familiar, most exemplified in the daily rhythms that were routinised in Tahrir Square after its takeover on the evening of Friday, 28 January 2011. Depending on one's spatial lens, the capture of the square followed the 'battle of the bridges', as some participants named the confrontations at the Galaa and Qasr al-Nil bridges leading to Tahrir. The marching from all corners of Cairo had started right after Friday prayers on 28 January. As images and narratives relay, protesters and those who amassed ultimately at Tahrir represented people from all walks of life: old and young, men and women, rich and poor, Cairenes and people from the governorates, veiled women and bearded men, workers, students, housewives, retirees, the unemployed and many, many others. For those who did not march to the square and fought for 'bread, freedom and justice' within the neighbourhoods, a similar heterogeneity prevailed that reflected more the social make-up of those areas. Their confrontations with the police (mainly at police stations) also reflected this melange of 'the people'. Then the struggle was articulated as 'the people' against the state, more specifically its security apparatus and its alliance with the business elite.

I joined the march from Mohamed Mahmoud Mosque that moved through the affluent neighbourhoods of Mohandeseen and then Dokki. Masses marched down the streets, reciting one slogan after another denouncing the brutality of the police force, demanding the dismantling of the regime, inviting Egyptians to come down and join them (*inzil ya Masri*), and making the three demands of 'bread, freedom and social justice' (*'aish, hurriyya, 'adala ijtema'iyya*). Colla collected a substantial number of slogans that were inextricably linked to the marching and subsequent presence in Tahrir.²⁸

In the streets themselves, there are scores of other verses, ranging from the caustic *Shurtat Masr, yâ shurtat Masr, intû ba'aytû kilâb al-'asr* ('Egypt's Police, Egypt's Police, You've become nothing but Palace dogs'), to the defiant *'Idrab idrab yâ Habîb, mahma tadrab mish hansîb!*' (Hit us, beat us, O Habib [al-Adly, now former Minister of the Interior], hit all you want – we're not going to leave!) ... This poetry is not an ornament to the uprising – it is its soundtrack and also composes a significant part of the action itself.²⁹

Police and security forces surrounded the protesters, and each time the tension of possible violence rose, the speed of the chant '*silmiiyya*' (peaceful) and the intensity of the steps of the march escalated. Violent confrontations then ensued at the first bridge (Galaa), with teargas and water cannons descending from every direction, while police tanks blocked the entry to the bridge. By

5 pm, more and more people were collapsing to the ground with the intensity of the fighting. Then, suddenly, a different sound reverberated through the air: the stomping and chanting of a mass of people approaching at a distance. As they came closer, the figures of more protesters became visible. Turning to the bridge, yet with vision blurred from the teargas, one could barely identify five figures on top of the tank. The first thought that came to mind was: Aha! Now the shooting with live bullets will start. But, alas, it was radically different. The first line of protesters managed to capture the tanks, pushing the security forces to the second bridge and yet another battle. This scene of disappearing security forces – as if they were melting into thin air – was observed at different spots that evening. Ultimately, after much blood had been spilled, Tahrir became the stronghold of the protesters. We captured Tahrir! ‘The people’ made their presence visible in the square.

The takeover of Tahrir has been symbolically critical to many protest movements for decades. Tahrir has historically been the centre of the city, with the Mujamma’ building – iconic of state bureaucratic apparatus – overlooking one of its borders. Entry points to the square are pathways to central locations in the city: from the downtown commercial and entertainment district, to the parliament, one of the main government hospitals, ministries (especially Interior and Social Welfare), Abdeen presidential palace, the Arab League, the Egyptian Museum, Omar Makram Mosque, Kasr el-Dobara Church, the downtown campus of the American University in Cairo, the old Nile Hilton (now renovated as the new Ritz Hotel), the Korniche, and bridges connecting to other parts of the city. Tahrir, therefore, is practically the hub of mobility, power, business and bureaucracy, art and, equally significantly, of protest. More important still, as Roger Owen describes it, ‘Created in the early 1950s out of an old military parade-ground, the square was meant to be the site for an annual celebration of Egypt’s independence’.³⁰ In short, then, Tahrir has been simultaneously the site of spectacles of power and contestations against power. Yet it also bore signs of the times: decaying and old buildings next to flashy tourist hotels and establishments, metro stations and bus stops, shopping areas, cafes, fast-food chains and street vendors on the sidewalks. All of this surrounds the square that barely displays any green grass but which is enveloped in the flow of honking cars, pedestrians, traffic police, and many a time also security forces, all signalling the centrality of the space in the life of the city. Tahrir visually captured the meanings of neoliberal capitalism, of the simultaneity of the precarity and power that have engulfed the lives of Egyptians for years.

The evening of Friday, 28 January, all of this vanished in the presence of ‘the people’ who stormed and took over the square, setting up tents in the circle and at various side islands, and barricading entrances with barbed wire, stones, traffic lights and poles guarded by volunteer men and women.³¹ To enter, one had to

show an ID card and be subjected to searches in long lines that were separated by gender. The intensity of the searches varied according to the possibilities of violent eruptions, the most aggressive and bloody occurring on 2 February, also known as the 'battle of the camel'.

'The Life of the *Midan* [square]', memorialised in the Choir Project performance, encapsulates what observers have documented as integral aspects of the 'revolutions of the commons' or the 'new global revolutions' that spread to many squares around the world.

Much could be said about what these new activisms have in common. They are all about appropriating real places, about a struggle against precarization, against extreme competition and against the drivenness of contemporary production, largely dispensing with representation and weaving a transnational concatenation of social movements. There are, however, three specific vectors, on which these activisms enter new territory: in their search for new forms of living, in their organizational forms of radical inclusion, and in their insistence on re-appropriating time.³²

These three vectors found expression in the everyday practices that constituted the life of Tahrir. Morning hours were filled with the 'normal' practices of cooking, cleaning, making tea and watching over the injured. Field hospitals at various locations in the square were filled with volunteers, donations of medicine and makeshift stations manned by doctors and nurses, each with a name marking their presence. Sites for cooking and tea sprang up, and gradually large numbers of people who sold ready-made foods and beverages began to flock into the square. Newspapers were laid on the ground, with stones on the corners to keep them from flying away, and some gathered at these spots to glance at the recent developments, while others sat in corners reading quietly and then engaging in endless conversations. If anything, talking, listening and debating were one of the most common features that marked the passing of the day, usually starting among two, then slowly developing into circles, marked by the diversity of those present. Those who had access to their laptops and smartphones sat in tents sending and receiving messages, tweeting and posting on social media sites. Spaces for artists, 'revolution radio' (*radio al-thawra*) and compiling live history books appeared at other corners of the square. Cartoons and caricatures, sometimes ending up in the form of posters that were on display on consecutive Fridays (the 'million people days', such as the Friday of Departure on 11 February, when there were calls made for millions to congregate in the squares) or around the walls of the square buildings, evoked laughs as much as they did tears.³³ Many of the entrances were also packed with vendors selling flags and revolution knick-knacks, such as badges, caps and T-shirts bearing the

pictures of martyrs, or calendars and signs with 25 January engraved on them. As people settled into the evenings, poetry and songs, drama performances, satire and joke-telling circles both entertained and mobilised the protesters, and, more practically, reproduced the energy of emotions that filled the space. In some tents, strategising for the next day, the next Friday, the next move, continued until midnight. In short, the everyday of the eighteen days in Tahrir is part of a much larger geography of protest ethics and aesthetics, or what Ruanig referred to as a 'new ethico-aesthetic paradigm'³⁴ that spread from Cairo to Tunis, New York, Seattle and Delhi, to Zuccotti Park, Syntagma Square and Puerta del Sol.

This new art of living together, of experimenting with different forms of politics, sociality and being, exemplifies what Greene termed 'accents of protest' in relation to viewing places themselves as 'rhetorical tactics in movement towards social change'.³⁵ Much as routinisation was setting in to define the sociality of Tahrir, contingency and uncertainty on the one hand and waiting on the other, with time going fast, yet not fast enough, shaped the temporal unfolding of the eighteen days. Though many were already certain, especially after the battle of the camel of the ability to not only sustain presence but also claim victory (although that victory was ambiguously defined), waiting and the tension that ensued after the Mubarak speeches maintained the edginess of the collective. Even more so, the flocking of thousands of residents to watch and take a picture on their mobile phones to prove their presence at 'Tahrir' compounded the carnivalesque feeling that descended on the space, particularly during daylight hours, producing among Tahrir occupiers the new nomenclature of 'tourist participant'. Yet Tahrir was more than a place of tourists, joy, laughter and emerging hope; it was also steeped in fear, rage, trepidation, exhaustion, exuberance and sadness, all at once, all defining a collective or a 'people' that shared the action of struggle, of presence, of defiance and refusal. Indeed, as Juris contends: 'Mass actions, in particular, are shot through with liminoid moments of terror, panic, and play, generating high levels of affective solidarity'.³⁶

This affective solidarity, the reorganisation of time, forms of living and modalities of interaction, the horizontal network, the collective without a leader, in their complex coming together – though not without their own conflicts and contradictions – signal in action rather than words that 'a people is here'. As Badiou reflected:

In the midst of an event, the people is made up of those who know how to solve the problems that the event imposes on them... so that the place where everything is happening, that place that has become a symbol, may stay with the people at all costs.³⁷

The collective invoked in the category 'the people' was not about negating the social constructs that comprised society, such as gender, class, region, religion, age, education and profession, among others. Rather, the presence of an acting mass defining itself and being defined as 'the people' signalled the possibility of transcending the familiar content and performative subtexts that set the contours of how these categories inhabit the public and private. Accounts by many participants of reworked relationships at home – of different modes of negotiating power among parents and children, siblings, of different lines of fissures around political positions, and novel alliances or disconnections among friends and family – attest to how the collective was reworking the very premise and terms of reference of organising social worlds. Temporary as it may have been, the emergence of possibilities enveloped the very making of the category 'the people'. This was not limited to those who made an appearance at Tahrir, but was also the case even for those who never set foot in the square but saluted the demonstrators while they passed through their neighbourhoods or contributed food and medicine to Tahrir and its inhabitants.³⁸

A plethora of new social categories emerged to articulate the large spectrum of sociopolitical relations and positions encountered during the course of the eighteen days. These ranged from '*thumar*' (revolutionaries) and '*shabab al-thawra*' (youth of the revolution), to '*baltajiyya*' (thugs),³⁹ '*hizb al-kanaba*' ('couch party', in reference to those who remained inactive at home watching TV), '*qilla mundassa*' (the 'infiltrating few', in reference to allegations about foreign agendas and perpetrators instigating the revolution), '*al-aydi al-khafiyya*' ('invisible hands' – perpetrators, or those who killed protesters, who were not identified), '*al-muwatin al-sharif*' ('the honourable citizen' who responded to state calls to quell the revolutionaries or report on 'suspicious' acts) and '*al-aghlabiyya al-samita*' ('the silent majority'). These and many others populated the social fields that defined the eighteen days and their aftermath. They speak of attempts to break the power of the collective that demanded the toppling of the regime. That such attempts would gain ground soon after the end of the eighteen days was still unimaginable within the bounds of the space of Tahrir. Rather – and despite many instances that comprised rift, dissonance and conflict within the square – the power of the category had its grip over 'the people'.

As revolutionaries have testified, the feeling of belonging to a collective was regularly instantiated through this language about the people and its demands – it was the collective act of stating that the people wanted something that created the sense there was a social actor by that name. For many Egyptian activists, it was this locutionary event that proved there was an Egyptian people capable of revolutionary action in the first place.⁴⁰

PROCESSES AND MOMENTS: PARADOXES OF THE PEOPLE
IN UNFOLDING PROCESSES

But is 'Tahrir' the revolution and are the eighteen days the manifestation of the people? Certainly there have been several scholarly and popular productions that claimed as much. Yet without undermining either Tahrir or the eighteen days, it is equally critical to remember that what both represented, and their power, lies in the possibilities they created. The latter – namely possibilities for a different kind of politics, a different kind of social living and a different kind of order – are not to be limited or confined to a single place and time. Indeed, the revolution moved way outside of Tahrir and the eighteen days both spatially and temporally. 'The people' also moved with the revolution to signify, as time unfolded, contradictory meanings and trajectories, while reflecting and embodying struggles on the ground over power. It did not take long after the eighteen days for such struggles to make a violent appearance on the scene. On 8 and 9 March, one of the earliest attempts by the ruling elite (then symbolised by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and their alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood and the old business elite) to crack down on protesters in the square took place, as did the first murder after Tahrir in a 'cleansing' effort by the state to 'restore order' and claim the *midan*. Then, too, the familiar construction of gender, magnified in physical assaults on women protesters, and culminating in virginity tests for those held and detained by the army, made its ugly appearance. By then the preparations for the first constitutional referendum, held on 19 March 2011, signalled the re-emergence of religion as a category of signification for dividing 'the people'. The 'yes' and 'no' campaigns that occasioned the propaganda for the referendum reduced the debate about the constitution to a sociopolitical divide between those voting yes articulated as 'for religion' versus those for no, who were collapsed into the figure of the secularist. This binary of religious vs secularist not only reduced religion to Islam, but also subsumed the fundamental sociopolitical debates and demands for change, as pronounced in the squares a few weeks earlier.

Marked by the display of the 'pink finger', connoting the ink used to identify those who had already voted, the highest participation in electoral politics since January 2011 took place on 19 March 2011. The yes vote got the majority (more than 70 per cent – on a turnout of 41.2 per cent of eligible voters), and with it indicated a firmer alliance between those identified as the Islamists (that is, including the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis, *Jama'a Islamiyya* and Jihadis), the military ruling SCAF and the old business elite which continued its attempts to struggle for power and became euphemistically known as *al-felul* (the remnants). With the passing of the constitutional amendments (the final product was quite different from what the electorate voted on), the attempt by those in power

to strengthen their grip over the people, to quell demands for real change and to physically eliminate revolutionaries and the remains of revolutionary spirit escalated, peaking in specific events that also captured the gaze of international and local media. These ranged from the 8 July attacks to the 9 October massacre of twenty-seven Copts, to events taking place in Mohamed Mahmoud Street in November and the cabinet killings in December. In short, the calendar of the first year of the revolution was chequered with almost monthly 'spectacles' of violence that targeted men, women, Copts, the poor and unemployed. The murals and graffiti that enveloped the cities of Egypt created a living museum of events as they unfolded. Graffiti of Mohamed Mahmoud was painted on the walls of the street that witnessed the fierce sniping of protesters attempting to kill or maim, most specifically blind their targets by aiming for the eyes. Renamed by protesters as the 'Eyes of Freedom' (*'uyun al-hurriyya*), Mohamed Mahmoud Street and its graffiti stood as testimony to unfolding struggles for freedom.⁴¹ With the many events and the recurrent creation of new martyrs, the artists at Mohamed Mahmoud, much like those in other cities and towns, refused to preserve their artwork. 'Why would you ever preserve graffiti?' asked Abo Bakr, one of the graffiti artists. He referred to the paintings as 'a product of this moment, anticipating new martyrs and new struggles would be painted in



Figure 4.3 Walls erected by the security forces around Tahrir Square in an attempt to prevent further protests with graffiti that rendered them 'passable' and invisible to viewers (Photo: M. El-Shamy, Al-Akbhar English).

their stead'.⁴² Indeed there were more martyrs, more events and more struggle, in turn producing more paintings and more graffiti.

The year following January 2011 was thus filled with attacks and violence to tame the revolutionary spirit and bodies of 'the people'. Yet no matter how violent and aggressive the attacks (physical and otherwise) were, the more relentless the struggle against containment became. In fact, the more blood was spilled and the more protesters were demonised on TV screens, the more power the revolutionary process acquired. By slicing out *al-thuwar* (the revolutionaries) from the construct of 'the people' the ruling elites hoped not only to demonise the revolutionaries but to contain them. Equally important was dislodging the power of the very category of 'the people', and rendering the bodies of those identified as upholding the principles of revolution analogous to what Calderia referred to as the 'unbounded body'. The latter signifies 'a permeable body, open to intervention, on which manipulations by others are not considered problematic. On the other hand, the unbounded body is unprotected by individual rights, and indeed, results historically from their absence'.⁴³

Demonising the revolution had already started in the square during the eighteen days, through rumours of espionage and alleged foreign funding in instigating instability, both of which crystallised in the figure of the *al-qilla al-mundassa* (the infiltrating few) construct. In the months that followed, this same trope continued, yet it was coupled with the identification of demonstrators who continued to flock the streets as those who aim to destabilise the country, refuse to let the 'wheel of production' move forward or obstruct the 'political roadmap' of the 'transition period'. In this scenario the ballot box, elections and constitutional assemblies represented nodes along the 'political' path that the revolution had to pass through in order to claim 'success', defined primarily in terms set by ruling elites and sanctioned by global powers, keen on maintaining the façade of the efficacy, sanctity and normality of liberal democracy. The latter is constituted in this naturalised frame of reference as the only possibility for political order and its appendage of economic growth. And since the Friday marches and demonstrations rarely ceased, demanding the fulfilment of the revolutionary principles, the attacks on demonstrators also became a routine part of the landscape. Workers, students, the unemployed, women and Copts came to the forefront of the struggle yet also became subject to the most ruthless campaigns of attack. From 'fe'awiyya' allegations (that is, of representing narrow individual interests), to dismissive comments of 'what were they doing there anyway' primarily in reference to women, their being there thus making them deserving of the violence waged against them, to massive removals of street vendors and of residents of slum areas ('*ashwa'iyyat*), and detention and military trials of thousands of protesters and activists. Defaming those who refused to acquiesce with the new order even extended to alleging

they constituted the forces of the *thawra mudadda* (counter-revolution), a term that was initially deployed by revolutionary groups. With this intensity of struggles the very meaning of 'the people' and 'revolution' became more and more contentious, contradictory and ambiguous, deployed with ease by all sorts of groups contending for ownership and control over 'the people' and the revolution.

Struggles were waged over not only categories but also space and squares, producing a shifting geography of protest that extended beyond Tahrir to a more expansive topography that was no longer contained in the singularity of a square. Much as the security apparatus attempted to cleanse Tahrir (literally of protesters, slogans, paintings and graffiti) and wall it off, protesters moved into many more new directions and spaces. And with every new wall that was erected around Tahrir, literally closing off the points of entry into the square through large cement blocks, creative cultural resistance intensified. Painting the blocks that walled off Tahrir, playing soccer in front of security buildings, establishing an open art square on the first Saturday of every month under the slogan of *fan al-midan* (square art) complemented more systematic campaigns demanding justice, freedom and change. These ranged from the *kathibun* (liars) campaign comprising documentary films that recounted episodes of military violence, screened in public spaces in neighbourhoods in major cities and towns, through the 'No to Military Trials' campaign to *Shaifinkum* (We see you), a campaign whose followers aimed to trace, record and render visible public violations by the military. The former *lijan sha'biyya* (neighbourhood watches) that were established on the night of Friday, 28 January to protect and defend localities also participated in the struggle against the sedimentation of old structures of power.⁴⁴ For instance, the Imbaba Neighbourhood Committee initiated the 'garbage campaign', which deposited waste from the neighbourhood every Friday in front of the local council and the governorate buildings, thus confronting the state with its failed obligations towards the people. Others started 'We are not Paying' campaigns, calling on neighbours not to pay their electricity and gas bills because of the poor services they received. At many workplaces, independent syndicates that were inaugurated in May 2011 started popping up at factories, small shops and whole transport and textile sectors, as well as among female daily agrarian workers.

The first year of the revolution thus witnessed fundamental shifts. First, from a more concentrated geography of protest to dispersal over spaces and a variety of sites marking processes of protest and contestation. Second, along with the spatial dispersal, the singular face associated with the mass in Tahrir articulating 'the people want', a multitude of faces made their presence visible. Third, the gap between the formal political process of the 'transition period' and its agents, established in the events leading to 28 January, prevailed at a distance from

what was then also articulated as the collective singular of ‘the people’ or ‘the street’. This not only included members of the ruling elite in power (SCAF, the business elite, the Muslim Brothers and their Islamist allies), but also public opposition figures and emerging political parties. In the name of rule of law and orderly process, the latter also played by the rules of the game rather than challenging and defying them. Violent episodes occasioning the acquittal of security forces in long legal battles regarding the murder of protesters, or the refusal to initiate any plans to address the economic suffering and injustice, widened the distance between the imagination and possibilities that emerged in Tahrir and what was transpiring on the ground in daily struggles. The formal end of SCAF rule with the presidential elections of June 2012 and the onset of what was referred to as the ‘year of the *Ikhwan*’ (Muslim Brothers) if anything produced more confrontations and violence. I emphasise the ‘formal end’ of military rule to underscore the mutuality of the presence of the security apparatus with the elected president of the *Ikhwan*, much as the presence of the *Ikhwan* marked the year of SCAF rule.

The commemoration of the first anniversary of the revolution on 25 January 2012 brought out this mutuality in glaring relief. Supporters of the Muslim Brothers entered Tahrir the night before and fights ensued regarding the placing of the ‘central stage’ and the kind of banners to be hung around the square. *Ikhwan* supporters wanted a centre stage, to the exclusion of all other groups that fought over space in the square. Additionally, they articulated a celebratory agenda (having just won majority seats in parliament and the Shura council in elections that were dubious, to say the least) while other groups insisted on reiterating the demands of the revolution that were yet to be actualised, namely justice (especially for those killed and injured), freedom and socioeconomic restructuring. A map with images of martyrs signifying the different starting points and routes to Tahrir circulated in the days before.

Entering the square from the Qasr al-Nil bridge side, many relived the moments that had occasioned the capture of the square a year earlier, remembering those who had fallen or who were missing due to detention. Everyone stopped for a moment of silence in memory of the dead. Silence literally engulfed the thousands that stood there over the bridge. Seconds later an outburst of celebratory songs broke the silence, coming from the *Ikhwan* stage, sited at the entrance to the square. Those marching towards Tahrir responded in shock and anger with a new slogan: ‘*bi’ bi’ bi’ al-thawra ya Badi*’ (‘sell the revolution, oh Badi’, in reference to the spiritual guide of the Muslim Brothers, Mohammed Badi). As the two groups came closer to each other, each side intensified its chants or raised the volume of the loudspeaker airing the songs higher. Then, in an act to command silence on the part of the protesters, those on the *Ikhwan* stage started playing tapes of Qur’an recitals. A second of silence was followed

by even louder chants against the *Ikhwan* and the betrayal of the revolution. This confrontation continued for a while, with each group standing its ground more firmly, one relying on the sound and power of religion, and the other on the sound and power of the people. The skirmish continued until eventually the *Ikhwan* shut down their speakers and were physically removed from the stage. Cheering erupted all over the square, as the victory of 'the people' was announced. The second capture of Tahrir was over.

This confrontation at the bridge on 25 January 2012 was a spectacular beginning to a long string of clashes between 'a people' and 'another people', each claiming legitimacy and power to speak in the totalising terms of the all. And within another six short months Mohamed Morsi was elected as president with thirteen million votes to his name (out of fifty-two million eligible voters).⁴⁵ These six months and the year that followed his election and which culminated in the events of 30 June 2013, with which I started this chapter, witnessed yet more violence and attacks on 'the people' in the name of 'the people'. Yet they also occasioned the intensity of forms of dispersed struggles against the departure and systematic erasure by those in power of revolutionary principles, ethos and demands. The episodes are many: suffice to mention the Port Said massacre of seventy-four football fans, the killing of protesters at the Ittihadiya presidential palace in the wake of the constitutional amendments decreed by Morsi in December 2012, the second Mohammed Mahmoud massacres while commemorating the killings of the first Mohamed Mohmoud a year earlier, the murder of protesters in Muqattam at the headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood Guidance Bureau, and the killing of thirty people in Port Said who contested the capital punishment sentence that targeted many of their football fans, while acquitting the security forces who made the massacre possible. Many more events dotted the unfolding of the year 2012, thus cementing the feeling that little has changed, though the faces have. Yet in the midst of this crackdown there were also many struggles that made their mark on the scene. Prime among these were in the Suez canal cities of Port Said, Suez and Ismailia, which declared their civil disobedience and later their 'independence' in the wake of the massacres in the city in January 2012 by police forces against protesters who were enraged by the court ruling of capital punishment. For almost three weeks and despite the declaration of a state of emergency and curfew, soccer games were played at 9 pm every evening, in defiance of the onset of curfew, in all the public squares of Port Said city. Police stations were closed down, and in their stead citizens took over a building and announced the ushering in of the 'Popular Police Force' with a large placard placed on top of the building. A car placed in front of the popular police station also carried a large white banner announcing its mission in the service of the people. The independence of Port Said was shortlived, yet it signalled the

resilience of defiance. Equally powerful were more satirical attempts to challenge power. These ranged from the holding of a Harlem Shake Dance at the gates of the Brotherhood Guidance Bureau, to soccer games parodying the figures of the players, political public personas. Cartoons, caricatures and, most popular, the satirical TV programme *Al-Bernameg* (*The Programme*) hosted by Bassem Youssef (similar to the CNN Jon Stewart show that aired live every Friday evening and was watched by millions of viewers).

In the midst of these tumultuous times, the continued hailing of a political process at the expense of socioeconomic justice, or as Abdelrahman has argued, ‘the hierarchy of demands and struggles’,⁴⁶ increased the gap between the then and the now and how a possible future was envisaged. The banality of the discourse of elections, ballot boxes or the ambiguous *Nahda* (Renaissance) project of the *Ikhwan* and the grip of the security apparatus only intensified the desire to defy the system of power, or *al-nizam*. The greater the violence by state security and *Ikhwan* militias – identified by the Brotherhood as ‘the people’ – which filled the streets of cities and towns, the greater the defiance from those also identified as ‘the people’ who were refusing to be contained by the *Ikhwan* and their allies. The aggressive economic monopoly that started to take shape in yet another alliance between the old business elites and Muslim Brotherhood figures, the failures of the regime to effect any modicum of change in the daily lives of residents in cities, towns and villages, the speed with which the constitutional assembly passed the constitution in an exclusionary process and the spate of litigations that were brought against journalists, media members and activists who contested aspects of the regime, all rendered the sustainability of the ‘year of the *Ikhwan*’ practically impossible. Hence the exuberance with which people signed petitions supporting the *tamarrud* campaign (initiated by a group of young men who travelled across different cities, towns and villages in Egypt to collect the signatures of people who objected to the rule of the Brotherhood, demanding early elections) and took to the streets on 30 June 2012. Signing *tamarrud* was another way of rendering oneself, one’s signature and one’s ID card visible, announcing a presence and a refusal to acquiesce. It yet again announced a presence of ‘the people’ against oppressive and exclusionary power.

The line of the story that followed opens this chapter: 30 June protests, 3 July takeover by the army and announcement of the deposing of Morsi, a forty-seven-day-long sit-in at Rabaa and Nahda Squares by Morsi supporters, interrupted by scenes of violence erupting in many parts of Cairo, by *Ikhwan* supporters, by police forces, by residents and by the army, seemingly all against all.⁴⁷ The culmination was the dispersal of the Rabaa and Nahda sit-ins on 14 August, where the number of dead could not be even ascertained, yet the violence by security forces and the collective punishment that ensued was only countered by more violence on the part of Morsi and *Ikhwan* supporters against security

forces and 'the people' at large. Shortly thereafter, the 'war on terror' propaganda took grip of the place, bringing in its wake more dead bodies, blood, torching of buildings and a declaration of a state of emergency, with curfew hours literally confining people to their homes every evening. Cairo, the city that never slept, turned dark, silent and empty, as if abandoned by 'the people'.

As I was writing the conclusion to these reflections, the first administrative court in Cairo disbanded the Muslim Brotherhood and its activities and placed its properties under receivership of the state. Detentions of *Ikhwan* members in the name of securing the country against the reign of terror are reported daily. Yet whose reign of terror is descending on the place and people? Whose bodies are the unfettered bodies of the now and what comes next? We are witness to a 'horror' campaign on TV and radio with mutilated bodies on display every single day, redisplayed morning and evening, lest anyone doubt or forget the prevalence of violence and the urgency of 'security'. We are also witness to bombings, random (or not so random) violent shootings in local neighbourhoods and an intensified feeling of rage and calls for revenge. Police and military campaigns to 'liberate' villages under siege of the *Ikhwan* (such as Kerdasa, Nahya and Delga) erase complex histories of conflict between the people and the security state apparatus, the people and ruthless business elite, the people and the local power brokers. The new demons are the *Ikhwan*; indeed their violence against the people and against the revolutionary processes of radical change are engraved in the memories of many, thus rendering the demonisation effective if not more violent. But which *Ikhwan*, and can we collapse power dynamics and struggles over power into a singular corporeal figure inhabited by the body of so-called *Ikhwani*? Can you even know one if you see one? And does it actually matter; since in the sweep to cleanse the social and political landscape of the so-called *Ikhwan*, what actually is being swept and cleansed away are any traces of contestation or protest against power of an order that is cementing itself aggressively in the recesses of the everyday lives of the people.

The cartoon that appeared on the Facebook page of the 6 April Youth Movement, Democratic Front, Alexandria, on 10 September 2013, captures the paradox of the present. Its caption reads:

They are all liars. The ones who want us to believe it is a war on Islam, and the others who want us to believe it is a war against the nation. But in the end it is only one war: against the POOR.⁴⁸

Is it over? To view the present as anything but yet another episode in a long process of struggle is to deny the possibility that emerged in Tahrir. The one hope is that:

Each revolt, of course, may fail: tyrants may unleash bloody repression, military juntas may try to remain in power; traditional opposition groups may attempt to hijack movements; and religious hierarchies may jockey to take control. But what will not die are the political demands and desires that have been unleashed ... As long as those demands and desires live, the cycle of struggles will continue.⁴⁹

NOTES

1. Badiou, A. (2011), 'Badiou on Egypt and Tunisia', trans. C. Petru-Stefanescu. I Cite, 2 March 2011. Online at http://jdeanicite.typepad.com/i_cite/2011/03/badiou-on-tunisia-and-egypt-translation-circulating-on-nettime.html (accessed 1 September 2013), 2.
2. Rabaa is the name of a mosque in the Medinat Nasr neighbourhood in Cairo, and Nahda is a square opposite Cairo University in Giza. Both of these spaces were key sites in the sit-ins in support of Morsi's presidency and the rule of the Muslim Brothers that lasted for forty-seven days. The sit-ins started on 30 June 2013 and were dispersed by security forces on 14 August.
3. A copy of the performance aired on TV is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJw-miMUoPc. An intense debate ensued in the print media, and on TV and radio about the divisive and provocative words and performance of the song. See, for instance, Gharib, O. (2013), 'A bombshell of a song', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 11 September 2013. Online (in Arabic) at www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2108281 (accessed 11 September 2013); Mahmoud, M. (2013), 'Haggag: The Muslim Brothers divided us into Egyptians and Ikhwan: An interview with Ali Al-Haggag', *Al-Masr Al-Youm*, 8 September 2013. Online (in Arabic) at www.almasryalyoum.com/node/2100301 (accessed 10 September 2013).
4. Badiou, A. (2005), *Metapolitics*, New York: Verso, pp. 141–4.
5. For accounts of the dispersal of the Rabaa sit-in, see Attallah, L. and M. S. Adam (2013), 'First hand account of Rabea dispersal', *Jadaliyya*, 16 August 2013. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13641/first-hand-account-of-rabea-dispersal (accessed 31 August 2013); *Jadaliyya Reports* (2013), 'Massacre in Cairo: S. AbdelKudus, L. Attaclah and C. Toensing on Democracy Now!', *Jadaliyya*, 15 August 2013. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/13622/massacre-in-cairo_sharif-abdel-kouddous-lina-attal (accessed 31 August 2013); Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) (2013), 'Non-peaceful assembly does not justify collective punishment', press release, 15 August 2013. Online at <http://eipr.org/en/print/pressrelease/2013/08/15/1782> (accessed 15 August 2013); WikiThawra (2013), 'An account of the death toll of the sit-in dispersals and their aftermath', 3 September 2013. Online at <http://wikithawra.wordpress.com/2013/09/03/> (accessed 4 September 2013); Mada, M. (2013), 'Police disperse Al-Iman Mosque sit-in', *Mada Masr*, 14 August 2013. Online at www.madamasr.com/content/police-disperse-al-iman-mosque-sit-in (accessed 31 August 2013).
6. See Elyacahr, J. (2012), 'Writing the revolution: Dilemmas of ethnographic writing after the January 25th revolution in Egypt', *Jadaliyya*, 10 February 2012. Online at

- www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4277/writing-the-revolution_dilemmas-of-ethnographic-writing-after-the-January-25th-Revolution-in-Egypt (accessed 27 March 2013).
7. Bogaert, K. (2013), 'A reflection on violence and democracy', *Jadaliyya*, 3 July 2013. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12587/a-reflection-on-violence-and-democracy (accessed 5 July 2013).
 8. See Said, A. (2013), 'Imperialist liberalism and the Egyptian revolution', *Jadaliyya*, 13 April 2013. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11201/imperialist-liberalism-and-the-egyptian-revolution (accessed 21 April 2013); Bogaert, 'A reflection on violence and democracy'.
 9. My colleague Martina Rieker and I serve as the co-principal investigators of the 'Imagining the Political' project, which is funded by the Canadian International Development Research Center. We work closely with a team of young scholars who have all participated in the political and social scene since January 2011; many had political and activist engagements that long preceded the revolution.
 10. Bayat, A. (2013), 'Revolution in bad times', *New Left Review* 80 (March/April): 47–60, at p. 47.
 11. Butler, J. (2011), 'Bodies in alliance and the politics of the street', European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (eipcp), September 2011. Online at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en> (accessed 8 October 2011), 6.
 12. Bayat, 'Revolution in bad times', 53.
 13. Colla, E. (2012), 'The people want', Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) 42, 263. Online at www.merip.org/mer/mer263/people-want (accessed 21 August 2013), 6.
 14. Badiou, 'Badiou on Egypt and Tunisia', 3.
 15. *Ibid.*, 3.
 16. *Ibid.*, 3.
 17. For processes of contestation that preceded the revolution, see Joya, A. (2011), 'The Egyptian revolution: Crisis of neoliberalism and the potential for democratic politics', *Review of African Political Economy* 38, 129: 367–86; Bayat, A. (2013), 'The urban subalterns and the non-movements of the Arab uprisings: An interview with Asef Bayat', *Jadaliyya*, 26 March 2013. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10815/the-urban-subalterns-and-the-non-movements-of-the-Arab-uprisings (accessed 27 March 2013); Asad, T. (2012), 'Fear and the ruptured state: Reflections on Egypt after Mubarak', *Social Research* 79, 2: 271–98; El-Mahdi, R. (2011), 'Labor protests in Egypt: Causes and meaning', *Review of African Political Economy* 38, 129: 387–402; Aouragh, M. and A. Alexander (2011), 'The Egyptian experience: Sense and nonsense of the internet revolution', *International Journal of Communication* 5: 1344–58; Beinin, J. (2012), 'Egyptian workers and January 25th: A social movement in historical context', *Social Research* 79, 2: 323–48; Shenoda, A. (2011), 'Reflections on the (in)visibility of Copts in Egypt', *Jadaliyya*, 18 May 2011. Online at [www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1624/reflections-on-the-\(in\)visibility-of-copts-in-egypt](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1624/reflections-on-the-(in)visibility-of-copts-in-egypt) (accessed 15 April 2012).
 18. Butler, 'Bodies in alliance', 3.
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20. Sabea, H. (2012), 'A time out of time: Tahrir, the political and the imaginary in the context of January 25th revolution in Egypt', *Cultural Anthropology Hot Spots, Virtual Issue*, February 2012. Online at www.culanth.org/?q=node/490 (accessed 29 March 2013).
21. Mouffe, C. (2007), 'Artistic activism and agonistic spaces', *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, 2: 1–5, at p. 2.
22. The Choir Project – initially named Cairo Complaints Choir – started in May 2010. 'It began as an offshoot of the International Complaints Choir, a project initiated by two Finnish artists with the aim of "transforming the huge energy people put into complaining into something else".' See <http://thechoirproject.webs.com/>. The Project invites people for a week-long workshop, during which participants collectively write and compose songs which are then performed before an audience. On such creative protest songs see also Garlough, this volume.
23. A video of the performance is available at <http://thechoirproject.webs.com/apps/videos/videos/show/12772960-life-of-tahrir-the-choir-project>.
24. The Choir performed similarly after key incidents that occurred subsequent to February 2011; see, for instance, *Ya Ana Ya Inta* ('Either Me or You') that followed the *Jum'at al-Hawiyya* ('Friday of Identity') demonstrations in July 2011, and *Eih al-'Ibara* ('What Happened') that followed the Maspero Massacre in October 2011. <http://thechoirproject.webs.com/apps/videos/>
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28. Colla, 'The poetry of revolt'.
29. *Ibid.*, 1.
30. Owen, R. (2013), 'Controlling the Arab street: A brief history of sit-ins and strongmen', *Foreign Affairs*, 6 August 2013. Online at www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139627/roger-owen/controlling-the-arab-street?page=show (accessed 9 August 2013), 2.
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- Revolution*, pp. 25–68; Sabelo Narasimhan presents a photo-essay of the routines of the eighteen days, Narasimhan, S. (2012) [2008], 'A place called Tahrir', in H. Sabea and M. Westmoreland (eds), *Visual Productions of Knowledge: Toward a Different Middle East*, Cairo Papers in Social Science 31, 3/4, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, pp. 12–30; Khalil, K. (ed.) (2011), *Messages from Tahrir: Signs from Egypt's Revolution*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press; and Assaf, S., O. Attia, T. Kaldas, R. Khaled, Z. Mo and M. Al Shazly (2011), *The Road to Tahrir: Front Line Images by Six Young Egyptian Photographers*, Cairo: American University of Cairo Press contribute books of images that visually narrate the eighteen days, while Colla, 'The poetry of revolt' presents another façade of the experiences of the eighteen days through the poetry and chants that reverberated through the square. Alex Nunn and Nadia Idle compiled many of the tweets that documented minute by minute the developments and views of unfolding events in Tahrir, Nunn, A. and N. Idle (2011), *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as it Unfolded, in the Words of the People who Made it*, New York: OR Books.
32. Raunig, G. (2011), 'The molecular strike', European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (eipcp), September 2011. Online at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/raunig/en> (accessed 8 October 2011), 2.
 33. Heba Salem and Kantaro Taira provide a compelling analysis of the humour and jokes of the revolution, while situating it in the long historical span that shaped the relationship between citizens and the regime, Salem, H. and K. Taira (2012), 'Al-Thawra Al-Dahika: The challenges of translating revolutionary humor', in Mehrez, *Translating Egypt's Revolution*, pp. 183–211. Indeed, as Angeliqne Haugerud has argued, parody, humour, satire and other forms of 'cultural resistance' constitute 'valuable first steps in destabilizing political categories, reframing debates, introducing new ideas and norms, rewriting discourse, and building new political community', Haugerud, A. (2012), 'Leave no billionaire behind: Political dissent as performance parody', P-Rok Princeton Report on Knowledge 1, 1. Online at www.princeton.edu/pork/issues/1-1/inventions.xml (accessed 15 June 2013), 7.
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 36. Juris, J. (2008), 'Performing politics: Image, embodiment, and affective solidarity during anti-corporate globalization protests', *Ethnography* 9, 1: 61–97, at p. 66.
 37. Badiou, 'Badiou on Egypt and Tunisia', 2.
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40. Colla, 'The people want', 6.
41. See Abaza, M. (2012), 'An emerging memorial space? In praise of Mohammed Mahmud Street', *Jadaliyya*, 10 March 2012. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4625/an-emerging-memorial-space-in-praise-of-mohammed-m (accessed 22 March 2013); Ali, A. (2013), 'Alexandria re-imagined: The revolution through art', *Jadaliyya*, 25 January 2013. Online at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9760/alexandria-re-imagined_the-revolution-through-art (accessed 9 September 2013).
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44. El-Meehy, A. (2012), 'Egypt's popular committees: From moments of madness to NGO dilemmas', Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) 42, 265. Online at www.merip.org/mer/mer265/egypts-popular-committees (accessed 21 August 2013).
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46. Abdelrahman, M. (2012), 'A hierarchy of struggles? The economic and the political in Egypt's revolution', *Review of African Political Economy* 39, 134: 614–28.
47. For analyses of the Morsi rule and the end of 30 June see Shokr, A. (2013), 'Whither Egypt's democracy?' Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 12 July 2013. Online at www.merip.org/whither-egypts-democracy (accessed 21 August 2013) and Bush, R. (2013), 'Turmoil in North Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 39, 134: 1–8.
48. See www.facebook.com/6april.alex (accessed 7 August 2013).
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CHAPTER 5

The Body of the Colonel: Caricature and Incarnation in the Libyan Revolution

IGOR CHERSTICH

'To murder somebody, bury his body, then grow flowers over the body to conceal it.'

Persian proverb¹

'The people who say Hitler is Antichrist, or alternatively, the Holy Ghost, are nearer an understanding of the truth than the intellectuals who for ten dreadful years have kept it up that he is merely a figure out of comic opera, not worth taking seriously.'

George Orwell²

OF GHOSTS, MEN AND THINGS

Regardless of what some cunning posthumous analysts might say, the truth is that the Arab Spring caught everyone by surprise. Until two years ago the chance that the pluri-decennial dictatorial regimes of North Africa might crumble seemed to be most unlikely. Many observers felt this way, and so did – I believe – even some of those who took part in the uprisings. Impossible events, however, are not necessarily unimaginable. 'Unrealistic' is not synonymous with 'inconceivable', and even though tracing a difference between the two might seem pedantic, it is necessary if one wants to understand the dynamics of popular revolt in Libya. In this chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that the seeds of revolution were somehow present as a possibility – unrealistic, but a possibility nevertheless – in the perception of Libyans even before the Arab Spring. In particular, I concentrate on one specific aspect of the revolt: the understanding (and, consequently, the representation) of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi as a political figure that could be openly criticised, ridiculed and physically removed from power. A superficial

analysis of pre-revolutionary Libya might suggest that Gaddafi was perceived by Libyans as a sort of powerful supernatural figure, an ‘unremovable ghost’ rather than a flesh-and-blood dictator who could potentially be dethroned. It is my contention, however, that prior to the Arab Spring, the Colonel was seen as both ‘man’ and ‘ghost’ (with people often oscillating between the two options, occasionally jokingly), and that the Libyan revolution has ‘actualised’ one of the two possibilities.³ Libyans related to the mortality of the Colonel as a potentiality, and the uprising gave them the chance to verify this potentiality. If, before the revolution, Gaddafi *might have had* a body, after the revolution he *gained* a body: one that could be represented, touched and eventually destroyed.

In order to better explain my argument, let me start with a brief clarification: according to some commentators of the Libyan case, prior to the uprising Gaddafi was a ‘super-human’, and after the revolution he became a ‘thing’. Lina Khatib, in particular, has argued that during the years of the regime Gaddafi had built up a sophisticated propaganda machine aimed at transcending his own humanity, and that the opponents of the regime had ‘reversed’ this process carrying out an objectification of him. Khatib explains that when Gaddafi was in power he depicted himself in posters and pictures as having a divine status ‘not attainable by others’.⁴ The Colonel portrayed himself as an omnipresent spirit watching over his people, as a sun-god and as an intangible father of the nation. He fashioned himself into a disembodied symbol of Libya – or to be more precise, of the *Jamahiriyah*⁵ – blurring the line between himself and the state so that, according to Khatib, ‘the popular equation in Libya was “Gaddafi is Libya, and Libya is Gaddafi”’.⁶ Gaddafi was able to achieve this apotheosis through ‘total control of visual representation in public space’⁷ but, Khatib goes on to say, with the Arab Spring a ‘visual reversal’ took place.⁸

Right from the beginning of the uprising, the anti-Gaddafi forces made use of caricatures and graffiti in order to undo the ultra-human image of the Colonel. By distorting and ridiculing the figure of Gaddafi on the walls of their cities, Libyans transformed the Colonel ‘from superior being into a literal object, from someone who imbued himself with supernatural qualities to a non-human’.⁹ The culmination of this process was, in Khatib’s view, the killing of Gaddafi. When, in October 2011, the ‘*qaid athawra*’¹⁰ was found hiding in a sewer in the city of Sirte, he was surrounded by a multitude of people, subjected to violence by his captors, sexually abused and killed.¹¹ Eventually, as reported by the world’s press, his body was exposed in a warehouse freezer in the city of Misurata with people queuing to take pictures with the dead Colonel,¹² and then buried in an unmarked location in the desert.¹³ According to Khatib, this process ‘erased the subjectivity of Gaddafi’.¹⁴ The Colonel was transubstantiated: he turned from omnipresent ghost into an inanimate object of violence.

I believe Khatib is right when she says that the Libyan revolution has involved

a change in the perception of Gaddafi and a ‘reversal’ in terms of visual representation. Based on my own research in Libya,¹⁵ however, I also believe that this change has not been one from ‘spirit’ to ‘thing’. Gaddafi has not been transformed, as Khatib suggests, from *supernatural being without body* into *object without subjectivity*. Instead, I would argue, he was turned from *potentially man, maybe a ghost* into *just a man* (or *just a subject*, one might say). Contrary to what Khatib implies, Libyans harboured the notion of the ‘humanity’ (and therefore the mortality) of Gaddafi even before the uprising, though this notion was present only as an unverified possibility. If, in Khatib’s description, the dictator went straight from *super-man* to *less than man*, I found that he passed from *potential body/potential person* into *tangible body/definitively a person*. The Colonel, one might say, did not lose his subjectivity; he actually gained one – particularly, as I will show, through his death. The implications of this argument are quite important: Libyans did not passively accept the view of Gaddafi as a ‘disembodied symbol’ put forward by the propaganda of the regime, but critically engaged with it by questioning it and by creating their own narratives around it (*‘is he actually a ghost or is he just a man?’*).

BELIEVING, KNOWING AND PRETENDING

The key question one has to answer when faced with Khatib’s argument is this: did Libyans actually believe in the supernatural nature of Gaddafi put forward by the propaganda? Analysts of the relationship between the people and the state have often shown a tendency to examine propaganda as something which is uncritically received by the subjects of power. Within the Marxist tradition, for instance, scholars have emphasised a view of state ideology as ‘false consciousness’ which is forced, often in a subtle way, on people in order to justify exploitation.¹⁶ Others, however, inspired by a Gramscian reading of Marx, have put more emphasis on consent than on coercion. According to these scholars, power is underpinned by hegemonic processes aimed at presenting ideology as ‘the natural state of things’. By accepting ideology as ‘common sense’ people unconsciously become collaborators with state and elite power,¹⁷ often because they are ‘charmed’ by the supposed ‘sacrality’ of the state as an institution.¹⁸ Some scholars have further developed this approach, arguing that ideology is simply the ‘preferred reading of things’ which is not automatically adopted by the subjects of power, but rather negotiated, re-interpreted and re-articulated.¹⁹ Propaganda, therefore, allows for different readings and for personal re-elaboration. More importantly, propaganda allows for pretence to be displayed by its intended subjects, and this is particularly relevant for an analysis of the perception Libyans had of their leader.

In a study of public life in Turkey, Yael Navaro-Yashin argues that often people know full well that ‘state ideology’ is a false construction aimed at propagandistic

purposes, but they still behave as though they accepted it to be true.²⁰ Navaro-Yashin draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis as interpreted by Slavoj Žižek to argue that a person might be made aware of the reasons behind the symptoms of his psychological distress, but that does not necessarily mean that the symptoms will disappear. The neurotic might relate to the neurosis as a fundamental part of his identity: knowing the root of his problems might therefore not be enough for him to ‘let go’ of his symptoms and be healed.²¹ Similarly, Žižek proposes that while state subjects may be aware of the farce of propaganda, they still behave in everyday life *as if* they believed it to be true.²² To use a Lacanian metaphor, they hold on to their symptoms out of fear of the unknown (‘what would we do without the state?’). Eventually, according to Žižek, by doing one starts to believe: ‘in the process of pretending, one ultimately (consciously but irrationally) ends up actually believing in the ideology’.²³ Navaro-Yashin agrees with Žižek’s premises, but she also qualifies this view, arguing, contrary to Žižek, that ‘pretenders’ do not necessarily turn into ‘believers’.²⁴ Sometimes the subjects of power simply pretend, she says, to accept propaganda while in fact being critical of it ‘in order to survive within the limits of the constraints upon them’,²⁵ thus becoming ‘accomplices’ of the state. And if it is true that in time this ‘pretence’ might generate actual belief, it is also true that often it remains as it is.²⁶

I find this point particularly significant for my argument in reflecting critically on Khatib’s account of Gaddafi’s transformation during the revolution. Navaro-Yashin argues that ‘knowledge of the farce’ is not necessarily ‘belief in the farce’, but she also concedes that in some cases the first might generate the second (that is, by pretending some people might start to believe). She therefore implies that the line that separates sceptical ‘knowing’ from ‘believing’ is sometimes blurred²⁷ – some might believe, others might not, and others in turn might only ‘half-believe’. Bearing this in mind, I argue that Gaddafi’s Libya was characterised precisely by this ‘blurriness’ between knowledge of reality and belief in the façade, and that the Libyan revolution provided a way to dissipate the ambiguity between the two. Doubtlessly, under the regime Libyans behaved as if they accepted the super-human nature of Gaddafi, while in fact they knew that he was just a man.²⁸ Libyans, however, also retained an ambiguous approach towards Gaddafi. They engaged in everyday actions aimed at stressing the mere humanity of the Colonel – jokes aimed at ridiculing him, for instance²⁹ – but at the same time, they also genuinely referred to him as ‘a disembodied dark power’. In other words, far from simply believing in the supernatural status of their leader, as Khatib seems to imply, Libyans kept a certain precautionary distance, uncertain as to whether the Colonel was a man or a ghost. Then, when they finally had the chance to ‘prove’ one of the two possibilities, they operated a sophisticated process of incarnation. By visually caricaturing the body of the Colonel through graffiti (and eventually by ‘touching’ him, killing him and

'hiding' his body) they 'gave him a body', though a distorted, disfigured and eventually 'missing' one. In short, they touched the intangible, they realised that it was – as they hypothesised – tangible and then precisely because of this tangibility, they were able to remove it.

This dynamic is extremely interesting, particularly when it comes to understanding why Khatib's account does not do justice to the 'aesthetics'³⁰ of the Libyan revolution. Significantly, my interpretation disputes some aspects of Navaro-Yashin's argument too. In her analysis of 'pretence' Navaro-Yashin says that the 'accomplices' of the state, those who know but pretend they do not, ultimately help to reproduce the structure of power.³¹ Even when these subjects might be critical of state propaganda, by pretending to accept it they reinforce it: there is a compliance with the state even in their 'resistance' against it. This is certainly true, but when it comes to the 'double' perception that Libyans had of Gaddafi, there is a further issue to be considered. As I will show, Libyans were stuck indecisively between 'knowledge of the farce' and 'belief in the farce', but it is precisely because of this 'unresolved' perception that they could conceive the potential humanity, and thus mortality, of the Colonel. Pretence, as opposed to full acceptance, leaves space for a certain openness to different possibilities of the truth. Being 'pretenders', as opposed to full believers, Libyans (or at least some of them) could conceive of the Colonel's body, and thus also of his potential removal from power, as a 'potential truth'. Therefore, reversing Navaro-Yashin's position, one might argue that there was resistance, or at least potential resistance, in their compliance.

Libyans related to Gaddafi as a *man/ghost*, and eventually 'confirmed' his humanity. In order to shed light on this process I will present a visual analysis of Gaddafi's propaganda – mainly the way in which he presented himself publicly – and an examination of the perception Libyans had of their leader based on ethnographic material collected in my fieldwork.³² Obviously, the process I analyse is not representative of the entirety of the Libyan experience under the regime or during the uprising. Indeed, when Gaddafi was in power Libyans actively interacted with the regime, some working for it, some negotiating with it, some fighting against it, without any concern for the bodily (or ghostly) nature of the Colonel. By concentrating on Gaddafi's body and non-body, however, I will try to illuminate some of the complexities that have characterised the fall of the *Jamahiriyah*. In particular, I will show that some pre-existing factors 'prepared' the revolution in the people's perception. By demonstrating that Libyans had the revolution in mind as a potentiality. I will also demonstrate that the regime's state propaganda ultimately failed in its intent to deify Gaddafi as a symbol of the nation. Though uncertain with regard to the superhuman nature of the Colonel during the years of his ascendancy, Libyans still tended to identify him as a *dark ghost* rather than as a *disembodied father of the nation*.

THE 'DISEMBODIED CAREER' OF THE COLONEL

Before I look at the 'incarnation' of Gaddafi operated by the revolution it is important to present some aspects of the Colonel's visual propaganda during the years of the regime. As suggested by Thomas Csordas, charisma, understood in Weberian terms as a quality by which one is 'set apart from ordinary men',³³ is always the result of specific rhetorical operations.³⁴ The person who claims to transcend the realm of common human experience has to persuade the commoners of his special gifts,³⁵ and the method to do so is to eliminate from his public persona whatever is not godlike.³⁶ In the end, charisma is rhetorical self-transformation.³⁷ An analysis of charismatic leadership requires, therefore, a study of the performance of charisma.³⁸ During his four decades in power, Muammar Gaddafi adopted different rhetorical devices in order to 'perform' his superior status. Above all, he constantly changed his appearance through clothes, accessories and paraphernalia, and eventually through plastic surgery. This continual change of outfits should be looked at as a way to prove that the Colonel's body was more than a mere body. It is therefore important to trace a brief history of this attempt at disembodiment.

Muammar Gaddafi came to power in 1969, when, as a junior military officer, he staged a coup d'état, together with a small group of fellow soldiers. Libya was a monarchy at the time. In colonial times, during the Italian occupation, the powerful Sufi order of the Sanusiya had guided the Libyans in the struggle against the occupiers, and at the end of the war the head of the order, Idris al-Sanusi, had become king with the help of the British.³⁹ King Idris, more a Sufi mystic than a politician, had reluctantly accepted the crown.⁴⁰ Libya had become independent but westerners were effectively still free to operate in the country to their advantage. Muammar Gaddafi, then an unknown twenty-seven year old born into a Bedouin family in Sirte, felt that it was time for a change. Following the example of the Egyptian 'free officers' whose socialist revolution led by Jamal Abdul Nasser had overthrown the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, Gaddafi and his 'free officers' seized power and abolished the monarchy. Their intent – as explained in what was going to be known as 'communiqué number one' (the first public declaration of the officers) – was to 'remove all past hindrances to solving the various social and economic problems of the Libyan nation'.⁴¹

Gaddafi, the 'free officer', a short-haired, clean-shaven man in plain military outfit, presented himself as a young and sober guide for an old and corrupt country: a fresh force whose aim was to create a new, modern Libya free from the 'hindrances' of the past. Right from this initial phase one can detect the seed of what was going to become a 'disembodied status'. Gaddafi showed himself both to Libyans and to the western media as a man but also, at the same time, as more

than a man. In a 1976 BBC documentary shot in Libya, a commentator tells us that Gaddafi lived in a 'soldier's house, furnished right out of the local store, and identical to the other officers' homes in the Tripoli barracks'.⁴² Gaddafi ate like everyone else: his breakfast consisted of 'a glass of milk, coffee and a piece of bread'. He did not have bodyguards, and he presented himself as a tangible leader driving his car in the streets of Tripoli. The same commentator, however, goes on to say that 'this is no ordinary soldier; this is the mercurial strongman who is dragging Libya from the poverty of the Middle Ages into the oil technology of the twentieth century'. With time, this seed of super-humanity started to flourish.

The coup of 1969 had been an 'empty revolution'. At the time, the 'free officers' did not really know what they wanted, but soon came the time to organise the principles of the new Libya.⁴³ Between 1975 and 1979 Gaddafi published his ideas in the 'Green Book'. Slowly but steadily he started to preach his own understanding of revolution, of society, of socialism and of Islam (in essence his idea of the *Jamahiriyah*). The preacher felt the need to strengthen his looks. Gaddafi gradually abandoned the image of the Spartan soldier and embraced a more fitting one, that of the reformer from the desert, the great revolutionary warrior. The transfiguration had begun. Medals, badges and all sorts of military paraphernalia started to appear on the Colonel's uniform. With his longish hair, 'exaggerated' military outfit and strong features, he adopted the archetypal physical image of the revolutionary messenger. Sunglasses of all shapes and forms became his trademark and a baton his companion in many parades. In 1975 the Italian journalist Mirella Bianco proposed a highly blasphemous but nevertheless significant comparison: Gaddafi, the 'voice from the desert' resembled the prophet Mohammad, 'the messenger of God'.⁴⁴

Through the 1980s and 90s Gaddafi presented himself more and more as a symbol. One might argue that this transfiguration was partly a reaction to a series of internal threats to his political project.⁴⁵ Perhaps for this reason he felt the need to visually stress that he was Libya and that Libya was him. In order to portray himself as authentically Libyan, he appeared in traditional clothes, and emphasised his Bedouin roots. With a tendency to exoticise his own culture, he famously slept in tents⁴⁶ (even during diplomatic visits to other countries), professed the goodness of the Bedouin ethos and wrote on the corruption of urban life.⁴⁷ Though critical of tribalism – in his mind a threat to national identity – he often publicly praised the tribal values of traditional Libya.⁴⁸ The Colonel wanted to be more Libyan than the Libyans; however, he also wanted to symbolise through his public persona the policies adopted by the *Jamahiriyah*.

As part of his propagandistic project Gaddafi called for an improvement of the condition of Libyan women, traditionally excluded from work and from literacy, and he repeatedly stressed the importance of engaging them in the

revolution. His attempts were only partially effective, but to symbolise his policies he surrounded himself with female bodyguards, ‘amazons’ committed to the protection of their leader.⁴⁹ In the late 1990s Gaddafi expressed his solidarity with sub-Saharan Africa, rejecting his initial Arab nationalism and launching, instead, a new pan-African approach in foreign affairs.⁵⁰ Extremely large African-style tunics, colourful clothes and hats became the order. His body became a canvas, a simulacrum of changing symbols. In July 2003 he participated in the African Heads of State summit wearing a shirt decorated with the map of Africa overlaid with photos of African freedom fighters.⁵¹ In 2008 he received the title of ‘King of Kings’ by a gathering of 200 traditional African rulers. He never forgot, however, that his symbolic roots were those of the Arab struggle. In the same year, at a press conference, he wore a uniform imprinted with the pictures of famous Arab leaders, among them his chief inspiration, Jamal Abdul Nasser.⁵² On a 2009 visit to Italy, the old colonial oppressors, the Colonel descended from his aeroplane having pinned a photo of Omar al Mukhtar on his chest. Mukhtar was a guerrilla leader who had played a fundamental role in the struggle against the Italians in colonial times.⁵³ By displaying Mukhtar’s picture, the Colonel wanted to ensure the symbolic meaning of his visit would not be lost on his hosts.

Gaddafi seemed to age very slowly but, then again, symbols do not age. In the last years of his life, he resorted to plastic surgery and, as became clear after his death, to wigs. According to his personal plastic surgeon, interviewed after Gaddafi’s death, ‘he did not want the young people of his nation to see him as an old man’.⁵⁴ The Colonel began to sport a beard, the last change in his visual odyssey, but he kept it trimmed, in the style of a younger man, perhaps in an attempt to show that revolutionaries age, but not quite like everyone else. Even at the very end of his career the Colonel stressed that he was a symbol. Right at the start of the Arab Spring he stated that none could ask him to surrender his powers to the people because he did not have any political power. His position, he said, was rather a symbolic one, very similar to that of the Queen of England.⁵⁵ Gaddafi’s project of transition from body to symbol, however, involved more than a careful manoeuvring of looks and appearances: it was also based on a ‘colonisation’ of the visual space of Libya itself.

At the time of my fieldwork Gaddafi was literally everywhere. In 2008 the city of Tripoli was filled with posters and billboards portraying him in different phases of his life and highlighting different aspects of his symbolic persona. The main square of the capital, the Green Square, later to be renamed the Square of the Martyrs following the fall of the regime, stood as an important urban meeting point: people would cross it more than once a day in order to access the main roads of the city centre. The Green Square was decorated with a large green poster showing the Colonel in traditional Libyan clothes against

a blue sky: hands held high in a sign of victory, the number thirty-eight on one side commemorating the thirty-eighth anniversary of the revolution, with rays of light emanating from it. Opposite this, on the other side of the square, was another large poster portraying a much younger Gaddafi in the act of planning the revolution with his fellow officers. Pictures of the Colonel could be found in all public offices, in hospitals and in Tripoli airport. Mosques displayed photographs of the Colonel praying, his head on the ground, dressed in pious garments, and Tripoli museum had a permanent exhibition showing his old blue Volkswagen Beetle, the ‘mythical’ car driven by the Colonel at the time of the 1969 coup. Gaddafi was there as an omnipresent symbol, while his actual body seemed to have completely disappeared. Many of my Libyan friends told me that they had not witnessed a public speech by the Colonel in years. Gaddafi’s residence in the centre of Tripoli, Bab el Aziziya (The Magnificent Gate), a compound covering six square kilometres and surrounded by three sets of high concrete walls, soldiers and tanks, stood as a mausoleum rather than as a house. Often I heard stories of people being shot just because they stopped their cars close to the building: Aziziya seemed impenetrable. The Colonel’s body was hidden behind this fortress, his presence survived in posters and pictures and he seemed to have succeeded in transubstantiating into a symbol. A closer look, however, suggested otherwise.

GADDAFI, MUAMMAR, DOG OR SATAN?

Talking to my Libyan friends, I realised that Gaddafi’s pluri-decennial attempt to disembody himself into a superhuman symbol did not have the effects he wanted. My friends showed a certain ‘blurriness’ in assessing the nature of their leader, the same ‘blurriness’ between knowledge of false representation and belief in it that I previously mentioned when discussing the arguments of Khatib, Navaro-Yashin and Žižek. They knew the Colonel was, in actual fact, only a man, but they also referred to him as a dark, devilish non-body. Scholars have suggested that kings and rulers are often believed to have two bodies, one made of flesh and one symbolic and disembodied ‘through which the dignity of kingship survives all human frailty’.⁵⁶ Perhaps this applies to colonels too. The disembodied dimension of Gaddafi, however, was articulated as ‘dark and evil’ rather than as patriotically transcendent as in the nationalist images promoted by the propaganda.

During the years of the *Jamahiriya* the presence of the regime was very ‘physical’. Libyans suffered violence and nepotism in their everyday lives, and the secret service was omnipresent. As I was told – and as I witnessed myself – people would constantly be stopped in the streets by the police, interrogated and spied upon. Often the line separating the monitoring system and the monitored

was blurred. I was told, for example, that anyone could easily sell a piece of information to the secret police, and I still remember a friend in Tripoli telling me how he wanted to become a government informer because he could not find any other job. According to a popular joke, every Libyan was constantly spying on other Libyans (if you are a spy you are simply doing your job; if you are not one then you spy on people in order to learn whether they are spies). The regime was a fleshy entity made of real people, often known people. With the person of Gaddafi, however, things were more complicated. In conversations Libyans oscillated between referring to the Colonel as a physical being and treating him as a ghost: they held the notion of the Colonel's humanity as a potentiality.

People in Tripoli lived in a space saturated with the symbolic and visual presence of Gaddafi, and sometimes they 'contributed' to this space by putting up pictures of the Colonel in their workplaces, mainly because they were forced to. Often, however, Tripolitans would refer to the leader simply by his first name, 'Muammar'. This, I was told, was a precautionary measure – if asked by the police they could have said they were talking about a different Muammar, quite a common name in the country. But there was also something 'familiar' about the use of Muammar. 'Gaddafi' was the cruel, intangible tyrant, while 'Muammar' was the volatile person who had been around for forty years. Commenting jokingly on the ever-changing rules of the *Jamahiriyah*, Ahmed, a taxi driver in his forties, once told me: 'You never know with that Muammar, he might wake up tomorrow and decide to ban smoking, and then we will all have to quit cigarettes.' Some referred to the Colonel using well-known insults drawn from the animal world: the same swear words one would use in everyday life as terms of abuse or affectionately among friends. Showing a tendency to verbally merge 'animal' and 'human',⁵⁷ Libyans would regularly use *kelb* (dog) or *tes* (goat) to refer to people they met in the flesh every day, both enemies and friends, as much as they used the terms to refer to Gaddafi. To quote a friend, 'I cannot go abroad and find a job because the goat has locked up Libyans in their own country.' Interestingly, however, the same people would also refer to the Colonel as an untouchable dark entity, one that transcended normal physical interaction.

Ludvy, for instance, a young IT worker in his twenties, was very fond of referring to Gaddafi as '*zamil*' ('companion', 'passive homosexual'), a very 'fleshy' term used, again, both as an insult and jokingly among friends. Ludvy was very critical of the regime and often offered me explanations of the political agenda lying behind the Colonel's actions, unveiling the falsity of propaganda for my sake. In one of our conversations, however, he also told me: 'You know, the *zamil* (homosexual) has survived so many assassination attempts that we all think there is something magical about him.' My friend's tone hovered significantly between joke and statement, between 'knowing' and 'believing'. He tentatively described Gaddafi both as a politician who could be ridiculed and as an intangible, dark

entity. Ludvy also told me a story he heard from some elderly people. Once, right before the rise to power of the free officers, the citizens of Benghazi were demonstrating in the streets in protest at King Idris, accused of being a servant of the West. The protesters were shouting 'Even *Iblis* [the Devil] is better than Idris!' According to the story, the pious Sufi king heard the shouting and peacefully replied '*Amin*' ('So be it'), and so the devil, Gaddafi, took power. Tripolitans would often alternate between calling the Colonel some colourful familiar swearword and referring to him as the much more meaningful *Shaytan* (Satan).⁵⁸ My friend Abdallah, a university teacher in his twenties, often ridiculed Gaddafi in our conversations, but he also told me that, according to many, the Colonel had dealings with the dark powers. Abdallah told me that many Libyans believed Gaddafi was an expert sorcerer and that through witchcraft he could transcend the limits of the physical world. In Libya *sahar* (sorcery) is understood as the art of manipulating *jnun*,⁵⁹ the genies, in order to harm people, to see the invisible and to gain knowledge of the future. According to Abdallah, Gaddafi was able to survive many assassination attempts because the genies kept him informed about the thoughts of those around him. Abdallah told me that once, during a meeting with Gaddafi, a soldier felt the temptation to shoot him and free Libya from its tyrant. The Colonel read the soldier's mind with the help of the genies; he turned towards him and said, 'You are too young for this, son, forget about it.' Abdallah told me that once Gaddafi refused to board an aeroplane because his genies revealed to him that there was a bomb onboard.⁶⁰

Some of my friends told me that they had personally met a distant relative of Gaddafi, an indirect proof of his 'corporality', but they seemed to be less sure when they came to assessing the actual humanity of the leader himself. I spoke to only a few Libyans who had personally met the Colonel, but these meetings were often described to me with a degree of uncertainty. These people knew they had met a man, but at the same time, they were also inclined to believe that there was more than a body there. Ali, a travel agent in his late thirties, told me that once, when he was much younger, he had met the Colonel at a very important wedding to which Gaddafi had been invited. As often happens with Libyan weddings, and quite befittingly for the Colonel, the meeting had taken place in a tent. The occasion seemed to indicate the materiality of the Colonel. Nevertheless, Ali described the leader to me in 'transcendental' terms: Gaddafi, who was surrounded by bodyguards, was an 'exceptionally tall person, the tallest I have ever met'. Ali told me that his complexion was unbelievably 'white', something that cannot be found 'amongst common Libyans or common men in general'.

Sometimes my informants would reconcile the tangible and the intangible by deciding that the Colonel was just a man, though not the man he wanted people to believe he was. Mahmud, for instance, a young student I used to chat

with, offered an explanation which was also reported to me by other people of different ages and status. According to Mahmud, Gaddafi was actually a Jew, an agent of Israel sent to damage the Libyans. 'How else would you explain his insane policies?' he asked me once. More frequently, however, the diagnoses of the Colonel's nature were a strange mixture of realism and metaphysics. When the people I spoke with tried to imagine a possible post-Gaddafi scenario they often started with: 'When he dies ...' and finished by saying, 'Is he actually ever going to die?'

Libyans described the humanity of Gaddafi as an uncertainty, and therefore as a potential truth. The prospects of violating the borders between 'ghost' and 'man' in order to reveal this humanity were also presented to me as a potentiality: something impossible but not inconceivable. At the time of my fieldwork, a number of Tripolitans had become particularly close to the figure of Mohammed Kasherma, an extremely famous Sufi saint from the city of Zlitan, in Tripolitania, who died only five years before my arrival in Libya. Stories of Kasherma's supernatural deeds were circulating widely among my Libyan friends and if some accepted them with disbelief, others took them as proof of Kasherma's spiritual powers. According to one of these stories, which was reported to me by a large number of Tripolitans, Kasherma was able to walk into Bab el Aziziya (the Colonel's inexpugnable fortress-residence) at will; he miraculously eluded surveillance passing through the high walls. In one version of the story, Kasherma even convinced Gaddafi to accept him as his spiritual master.

On the one hand, one might interpret this narrative as a symbolic victory of the saint over the devilish Colonel. On the other hand, however, the story reveals the possible humanity of Gaddafi. God revealed that the Colonel was just a man: theoretically, his distant presence could be breached, his rules violated. During the months of fieldwork, the 'probable tangibility' of Gaddafi ended up influencing even me, a non-Libyan. Once, perhaps influenced by tales of abuse my friends suffered under the regime, I had a dream in which, to my surprise, I punched Gaddafi in the face. In my dreams the symbol I witnessed every day on posters and other images had become tangible. It felt to me as though my Libyan friends were living in a world where Gaddafi's humanity was an unverified fantasy. With the advent of the Libyan revolution of 2011, however, this unverified truth – the body and the humanity of the Colonel – became not only verifiable but also representable.

FROM DISEMBODIED 'GHOST' TO 'FRIZZY HAIR'

When I came back to Libya in early 2012 the regime had fallen and Gaddafi had been killed. Walking through the streets of Tripoli and Benghazi I immediately noticed that the revolution had involved a massive reappropriation



Figure 5.1 Image of Che Guevara versus Gaddafi (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.2 Image of Bob Marley versus Gaddafi (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.3 Martyrs of the revolution and caricature of Gaddafi
(Photo: I. Cherstich).

of visual space. Libyans had started to go back to normal everyday activities, but the signs of war were still visible. The two cities were crowded as usual, the shops were open and if some of my friends were excited about the future, others were mourning their dead or crying over their broken houses. They all moved, however, in a new visual space made of crumbling walls, bullet holes and – significantly – graffiti. Some inhabitants of Tripoli and Benghazi had chosen to write pro-revolution slogans: ‘Down with Gaddafi’ or ‘Thank you, Tunisia’ (referring to the country where the Arab Spring had started). Others preferred to express their hate for the regime through drawings and pictures. In some cases these images featured ‘generic’ symbols of revolt: Che Guevara and Bob Marley, with Che standing out almost as a specular but opposite image of Gaddafi: longish hair, beard, military hat (see Figs 5.1 and 5.2). For the greater part, however, Libyans had put up pictures of the martyrs of the revolution and caricatures of the Colonel (see Fig. 5.3).

In both cases, with the martyrs and with Gaddafi, one could detect a certain will to embody: a desire to give flesh both to those who had lost their lives and to the enemy, whose body had been only a mere potentiality before the revolution. At the time of my visit, a little controversy had been sparked in Benghazi. The city had been freed from the forces of the regime during the first half of the war,



Figure 5.4 The municipal court: an improvised museum of the revolution (Photo: I. Cherstich).

and during the conflict people had transformed the municipal court, a large old building not far from the city centre, into an improvised museum of the revolution (see Fig. 5.4). Posters of the martyrs with their names and dates of death had been displayed inside the main hall, but the National Transitional Council – the national body that had emerged in leading the revolution – was pushing for the place to return to its original purpose.

Meanwhile, the people of Benghazi seemed to relate to the court building as a cemetery rather than as a museum. Mothers would come to ‘visit’ their dead sons, eager to talk about them with fellow visitors, kissing the pictures and crying over them, as did brothers, fathers and friends of the martyrs. Obviously the museum had symbolic value, but it seemed to me that putting up the posters of the dead, whose bodies were often missing, was a way to preserve or reconstruct the tangibility and corporality of the deceased – a process that can also be found in other contexts of martyrdom, imagery and loss.⁶¹ A less obvious process of incarnation was also taking place, however. The volunteers who kept the museum had decided to put up a number of drawings by schoolchildren of different ages, and many of them featured caricatural renditions of Gaddafi. In these drawings, the bodily nature of the Colonel, once only a potential reality,



Figure 5.5 Effeminising and corporalising Gaddafi (Photo: I. Cherstich).

was expressed, affirmed and mocked. In some, Gaddafi was dressed like a woman, with lipstick, bushy eyebrows and other fleshy details, perhaps a comic take on the Colonel's habit of dressing eccentrically, here translated into transvestitism (see Fig. 5.5).

Gaddafi, whom my friend Ludvy had only tentatively described as a 'homosexual', was now 'effeminised' but also 'corporalised'.⁶² In other caricatures, the body of the Colonel had been distorted and shaped into that of an animal: his prominent nose had become the sting of a mosquito, his curly hair the fur of a rat, an obvious reference to Gaddafi insulting the rebels as 'rats' during the war (see Fig. 5.6).⁶³ The 'animal swearwords' that people had been using to mark the potential humanity of the Colonel were now somehow translated graphically. In one of the drawings a particularly talented child had drawn a realistic caricature highlighting the details of Gaddafi's face: the nose, the teeth and the wrinkles (see Fig. 5.7). This drawing was surrounded by photographs of the martyrs, and someone, perhaps the artist himself, had crossed out the caricature with a red mark, almost in a desire to show that the Colonel's body, now a certified reality, was no more, while the bodies of the martyrs remained, preserved in memory and possibly alive in heaven.

In some of the graffiti in the streets, Gaddafi was portrayed as Satan, with horns, devilish dark eyes and fangs (Figs 5.8 and 5.9). In others the Colonel sported a swastika or Star of David, signs of his dictatorial status and his supposed secret Israeli identity (see Figs 5.9 and 5.10). For the greater part, however, the



Figure 5.6 Martyr of the revolution and Gaddafi the rat (Photo: I. Cherstich).

graffiti simply featured Gaddafi's face with exaggerated features: his curly hair, his fleshy lips, his prominent jawline, the mole close to his nose (a slight imperfection that could be seen in some early Gaddafi portraits but that the Colonel must have decided to remove) (see Figs 5.3 and 5.11–5.14).

If it is true, as it has been argued, that drawing a spiritual being means injecting the spirit into a tangible form,⁶⁴ it is also true that caricatures, more than any other form of representation, affirm flesh and identity. Caricatures are both



Figure 5.7 Gaddafi no more (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.8 Gaddafi the devil (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.9 Gaddafi the devil, with swastika (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.10 Gaddafi the devil, the Mossad agent (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.11 Gaddafi with a scar and with stitches (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.12 Graffiti of Gaddafi with exaggerated facial traits (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.13 Graffiti of Gaddafi (Photo: I. Cherstich).



Figure 5.14 Further graffiti of Gaddafi (Photo: I. Cherstich).

a naturalistic and a conceptual form of art: they aim ‘at the greatest likeness of the whole of a physiognomy while all the component parts are changed’.⁶⁵ Caricatures exaggerate – and therefore assert – a person’s physical idiosyncrasies.⁶⁶ I was witnessing a visual affirmation of the potential (and now definitive) humanity of the Colonel, of his ‘real’ physical traits. Through visual reappropriation Gaddafi had gained a tangible subjectivity which was once only latent. While I was taking pictures of the graffiti some people commented, ‘Look, he is photographing *Bu Shafshufa* (the one with the frizzy hair), a new nickname that had become popular all over the country during the uprising. Before the revolution Gaddafi had been both ‘ghost’ and ‘body’, but now he was pure body: a fleshy ensemble of frizzy hair, moles and beard. In one piece of graffiti the author had portrayed Gaddafi with a scar and with stitches on his face: the ghost could be touched, hurt, killed (see Fig. 5.9).

The body of Gaddafi was present not only in drawings but also, in a sense, in the slogans accompanying them. On a large broken wall in Benghazi someone had written in English: ‘He fucked us for forty-two years.’ The actions of the Colonel had been physicalised. More remarkably, the body of Gaddafi was also present in photographs. As part of this affirmation of the corporality of the Colonel, many in Tripoli had gone to see the corpse of the dictator, ‘seizing’ the bodily nature of Gaddafi by photographing his battered body in the nearby city of Misurata. They kept the photographs on their mobile phones: the final proof that the ghost was just a man, as many had suspected. I did not have a chance to interview any of those who had been present at the time of the actual killing. However, bearing in mind the perception of Gaddafi prior to the war and considering the dynamics of visual revolt, I suspect that it must have been a ‘physical moment of revelation’.

Undoubtedly, the brutal killing and rape of Gaddafi raises a set of extremely important moral and political questions, questions that need to be faced and discussed. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that abusing and destroying the Colonel’s body was not simply an exhilarating act of rage; nor it was merely the expression of a will to objectify, desecrate and demasculinise. The killing of the Colonel was not the ritual slaughter and sacrifice of the god/spirit described in some anthropological literature,⁶⁷ nor was it a Freudian assassination of the symbolic father (of the nation, in this case) aimed at freeing oneself from the shackles of a castrating domination.⁶⁸ The killing was, among other things, the verification of a hypothesis. The body of the Colonel stopped being a possibility and became truly a body through graffiti, but much more so through his very death, when people realised that he could be touched, mocked, humiliated and torn apart. If it is true, as Lacan claimed, that human existence encompasses the ‘symbolic’ dimension, the ‘imaginary’ and the ‘real’,⁶⁹ then the killing of the Colonel could be defined (no doubt to the irritation of some Lacanian purists) as

an 'explosion of the real'. If the 'real' is the impossible truth that we, as creatures of symbols and imagination, fail to encounter in normal life but which is always there, lurking at the back of our consciousness,⁷⁰ then the killing of Gaddafi was precisely this: a revelatory (but in truth very much expected) meeting with flesh and blood now expunged from any attempt to conceptualise the tyrant as a 'ghost'. Paradoxically, Gaddafi became truly a man only when he was no more. Even more paradoxically, the Colonel gained full 'fleshness' when the anti-Gaddafi forces decided to hide his body.

One of the consequences of being a tangible, embodied human being is that one can be mourned. The act of mourning, one could say, begins by localising the dead, by tracking down the body⁷¹ or by creating a substitute for it in case the body cannot be found.⁷² Mourning entails a danger: the capacity to 'manoeuvre, to speculate, to try to profit or derive some benefit ... to draw from the dead a supplementary force to be turned against the living'.⁷³ Hiding the body of the Colonel was not the final exorcism of a ghost, but a political manoeuvre aimed at damaging the man and his supporters. Once the Libyans realised – or, to be more precise, proved – that Gaddafi was just a human being, they drew the only logical conclusion. They suspected that the phantom was a man; they traced the ghost, found that he was made of flesh and hid the body, because flesh can be mourned. Through concealment, they completed the process of incarnation, a process whose seeds, as I have shown, preceded the revolution. In the months following Gaddafi's burial in the desert, Libyans started to refer to the Colonel as *al Maqbur* (the buried one). The half-man, half-spectre had become an un-named body, his fleshness confirmed by its own un-mournability.

A WALK THROUGH BAB EL AZIZIYA

Through a study of the perception of the Colonel before and after the revolution one realises that Gaddafi's Libya was a much more complex place than some analysts have suggested. Contrary to what scholars like Lina Khatib have argued, Libyans were not passive recipients of a visual propaganda aimed at transforming Gaddafi into a symbol, who suddenly woke up and discovered the lie. On the contrary, Libyans lived as people entangled in constant speculation and analysis, questioning the nature of their leader. Though influenced by the 'symbolisation' of Gaddafi propagated by the regime, they articulated the figure of the Colonel as a disembodied spectre, not as the disembodied hero. Though inclined to believe that Gaddafi was a ghost, they also knew that he was most probably human. They were stuck between pretence and belief, but this situation gave them a degree of freedom, the freedom to distance themselves from propaganda and to conceive the potential humanity and mortality of the Colonel. By understanding that Gaddafi was perceived as a 'potential man', one

realises that the idea that the regime would come to an end was present as a potentiality before the uprising, and this is particularly important for a comprehension of the political aesthetics of the Libyan Revolt. Mainly, it shows that Libyans had the revolution ‘somewhere in their perception’ even before the actual revolution. More importantly, in analysing this process one realises that today Libyans inhabit a space filled with proof of Gaddafi’s humanity, proof that was once hidden and is now being discovered.

One of the first things I did when I arrived in Tripoli after the war in 2012 was to visit Bab el Aziziya. At the time of my fieldwork, it was a scary and impenetrable castle that everyone avoided. Now, however, the gigantic walls of the fortress had been bulldozed down by tanks, and I decided to venture through the ruins with a Libyan friend. My friend had already explored the place, and he wanted to show me what had been hidden for so long. Inside the stronghold there was, quite simply, nothing special. Beyond the walls there was a cluster of demolished houses, some of which had already been occupied by homeless people, living where the ghost had once lived. My friend told me that when the revolutionaries had stormed the place they found a vast quantity of weapons and secret escape tunnels. However, he also told me that they were surprised to find simple apartments with beds, furniture, kitchens and clothes: ‘We thought it was going to be an imperial residence, but there is nothing in here.’ The ‘Magnificent Gate’ was not that magnificent. It was, after all, a house inhabited by men. The trick had been revealed, but Libyans, one might say, already sort of knew. My friend seemed very happy. He told me that people were slowly entering all those spaces that were once forbidden, including the other houses belonging to Gaddafi and his family. Libyans were discovering more and more proof of what they once only suspected.

NOTES

1. Žižek, S. (2012), *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, London: Verso, p. 1.
2. Orwell, G. (2009), ‘Wells, Hitler and the World State’, in G. Orwell, *Essays*, London: Harvill Secker, pp. 148–54, at p. 150.
3. When referring to the idea of dead people haunting the world of the living, Libyans use the term *ghula*, or *ghoul*. The majority of my Libyan friends, however, did not believe in the existence of the undead, and in order to describe supernatural beings they used the ‘more Islamic’ category of *Jinn* (plural *Jnun*) as attested in the Qur’an. *Jnun* (the genies) are invisible supernatural creatures that inhabit the world and live a parallel existence to that of human beings. They are understood to be creatures of God who will account for their actions on the Day of Judgment. In the chapter I use ‘ghost’ (understood as personified non-corporeal being – see Boyer, P. (2001), *Religion Explained – the Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, London: Basic Books, pp. 84–5) instead of *Jinn*. The reason for this is that for the greater part

- Libyans referred to the alleged supernatural aspects of Gaddafi as ‘generally’ ghostly, supernatural and devilish without resorting to the specific *Jinn* category.
4. Khatib, L. (2013), *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle*, London: I. B. Tauris, p. 188.
 5. ‘State of the masses’, a unique political system based on a mixture of socialist and ‘Islamic’ elements introduced by Gaddafi. Theoretically, the *Jamahiriyah* was founded on the principle of direct participation, with citizens expressing their opinions in popular assemblies without requiring political representatives or parties. See Vandewalle, D. (2006), *A History of Modern Libya*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Bruce St. John, R. (2012), *Libya, from Colony to Revolution* (revised edition), Oxford: Oneworld. In my experience (and according to many of my Libyan friends) in its actual application the system was neither functional nor participatory.
 6. Khatib, *Image Politics*, p. 185; Ronen, Y. (2008), *Qaddafi’s Libya in World Politics*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner, p. 201.
 7. Khatib, *Image Politics*, p. 187.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
 10. ‘Guide of the revolution’, with reference to the revolution (or, to be more precise, the coup) that brought Gaddafi into power in 1969. On 7 April 1974 Gaddafi resigned as head of state, assuming this symbolic title but keeping control of the armed forces (see Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, pp. 97–136). Needless to say, Gaddafi remained the unchallenged leader of Libya even after this resignation.
 11. Chulov, M. (2012), ‘Gaddafi’s last moments: “I saw the hand holding the gun and I saw it fire”’, *The Guardian*, 20 October 2012. Online at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/20/muammar-gaddafi-killing-witnesses (accessed 8 March 2013).
 12. Chulov, M. (2011), ‘Gaddafi’s corpse continues to attract impatient Misurata hordes’, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2011. Online at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/23/gaddafi-corpse-attracts-misurata-hordes (accessed 8 May 2013).
 13. Black, I. (2011), ‘Gaddafi buried in secret desert location’, *The Guardian*, 25 October 2011. Online at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/25/gaddafi-buried-libya-desert (accessed 12 May 2013).
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. I first visited Libya during three excursions to Cyrenaica (the eastern province) between 2002 and 2003. Subsequently I carried out an extensive fifteen months of fieldwork in Tripolitania (western Libya) as part of my PhD in social anthropology, between 2006 and 2008. I also returned for a short visit in February 2012, after the revolution, spending my time in Tripoli and Benghazi, Libya’s two largest cities.
 16. Habermas, J. (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge: Polity; Anderson, B. (1991), *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso; Althusser, L. (2012), ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in S. Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London: Verso, pp. 100–41.
 17. Marcuse, H. (1964), *One Dimensional Man – Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Bourdieu, P. (1980), *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Gramsci, A. (1988), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, New York: Schocken Books; Comaroff, J. and J. Comaroff (1991), *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol. 1: Christianity, Colonialism and*

- Consciousness in South Africa*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Eagleton, T. (2012), 'Ideology and its vicissitudes in western Marxism', in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, pp. 179–226; Abercrombie, N., S. Hill and B. Turner (2012), 'Determinacy and indeterminacy in the theory of ideology', in Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, pp. 152–66.
18. Taussig, M. (1992), 'Maleficium: State fetishism', in M. Taussig, *The Nervous System*, London: Routledge, pp. 217–47.
 19. Hall, S. (1980), 'Encoding/Decoding', in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, London: Routledge, pp.107–16; Scott, J. (1990), *Weapons of the Weak*, Delhi: Oxford University Press; Scott, J. (1990), *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, London: Yale University Press.
 20. Navaro-Yashin, Y. (2002), *Faces of the State – Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
 21. Žižek, S. (1995), *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, pp. 74–5.
 22. *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 36; see Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, p. 159.
 23. On Žižek see Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*, p. 163.
 24. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–16; 162–71; 179.
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
 28. A similar state of pretence also characterises other dictatorial contexts. Lisa Weeden, for instance, shows how in the 1990s Syrians often behaved 'as if' they accepted Asad as the spiritual father of the nation, while in fact they were aware of the false claims of the Syrian propaganda, Wedeen, L. (1999), *Ambiguities of Domination – Politics, Rhetorics, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 67–86.
 29. Borrowing from James Scott, one might call these actions 'everyday acts of resistance' (Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*), or 'hidden transcripts', understood as the critique of power that goes on off stage, far from the eyes and ears of the power holders (Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*).
 30. I use 'aesthetics' here – from the Greek *aisthanomai*, 'to perceive' – to indicate both the 'style' of the revolt and the dynamics of 'perception' involved in it.
 31. Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*.
 32. In typical ethnographic fashion, whenever I refer to people I have met in the field, I use pseudonyms.
 33. Weber, M. (1964), *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, London: Collier Macmillan, p. 358.
 34. Csordas, T. (1997), *Language, Charisma and Creativity – The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 151–3.
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 151–3.
 36. Weber, M. (1963), *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, pp. 158–9.
 37. Csordas, *Language, Charisma and Creativity*, p. 135.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
 39. Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1949), *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Wright, J. (1969), *Libya*, London: Ernest Benn Limited; Candole de, E. A. V. (1988), *The Life and Times of King Idris of Libya*, London: privately published; Vandewalle,

- History of Modern Libya*, pp. 43–73; Baldinetti, A. (2010), *The Origins of the Libyan Nation – Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New State*, London: Routledge.
40. Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, p. 46.
 41. Davis, J. (1987), *Libyan Politics – Tribe and Revolution*, London: I. B. Tauris, p. 30.
 42. ‘Young Muammar al Qaddafi in 1976’, BBC. Online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JYRbMEv4tw (accessed 27 April 2013).
 43. Davis, *Libyan Politics*, pp. 70–136.
 44. Bianco, M. (1975), *Gadafi – Voice from the Desert*, Chatham: W. & J. Mackay Limited, p. 169.
 45. Vandewalle, D. (2008), ‘Libya’s Revolution in perspective 1969–2000’, in D. Vandewalle (ed.), *Libya since 1969 Qadhafi’s Revolution Revisited*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 9–53, at p. 29; Bruce St. John, *Libya*, pp. 194–5; Pargeter, A. (2012), *Libya – the Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 147.
 46. ‘Gheddafi a Roma, tenda nella villa, polemica: Tripoli viola i diritti umani’, *La Repubblica*, 9 June 2009. Online at www.repubblica.it/2009/06/sezioni/esteri/gheddafi-italia/gheddafi-italia/gheddafi-italia.html (accessed 6 June 2013).
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 48. Davis, *Libyan Politics*.
 49. Davis, *Libyan Politics*, 271–3; Obeidi, A. (2001), *Political Culture in Libya*, Richmond: Curzon Press, pp. 168–97.
 50. Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, pp. 196–8.
 51. Khatib, *Image Politics*, p. 186.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
 53. Rochat, G. and L. Goglia (1986), *Omar al Mukhtar – the Italian Reconquest of Libya*, London: Darf Publishers Ltd.
 54. ‘Gaddafi wig: Libyan dictator was wearing hairpiece when he died’, *The Huffington Post*, 20 October 2011. Online at www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/20/gaddafi-wig-libya_n_1022992.html (accessed 13 May 2013).
 55. Wintour, P. and N. Watt (2011), ‘How David Cameron swept aside sceptics over Libya campaign’, *The Guardian*, 2 October 2011. Online at www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/oct/02/pm-libya-sceptics-gadafi-queen (accessed 9 May 2013); ‘Gaddafi blames unrest on al Qaeda’, *Al Jazeera*, 24 February 2011. Online at www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/02/2011224143054988104.html (accessed 12 May 2013).
 56. Merquior, J. G. (1985), *Foucault*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 88; see also Foucault, M. (1977), ‘The body of the condemned’, in M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish – the Birth of the Prison*, Harmondsworth: Penguin; Kantorowicz, E. H. (1997), *The King’s Two Bodies – a Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
 57. Leach, E. (1964), ‘Anthropological aspects of language: Animal categories and verbal abuse’, in E. H. Lenneberg (ed.), *New Directions in the Study of Language*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 23–64; Derrida, J. (2008), *The Animal that therefore I am*, New York: Fordham University Press.
 58. In Libya *shaytan* can be used to indicate the devil, *Iblis*, or to describe a particularly evil person or *Jinn* (see note 1 above). Often the term is used ‘vaguely’, without specifying the exact connotation that is intended. Even when used metaphorically,

however, *Shaytan* retains a degree of literal identification (an evil man is under the influence of Satan and maybe he is possessed by him). Metaphors, it has been argued, are both symbolic and literal statements because far from being simple rhetorical figures that link two different semantic domains, they actually influence the experience people have of these domains. See Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson (1980), *Metaphors We Live by*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Fernandez, J. W. (1972), 'Persuasions and performances: of the beast in every body ... and the metaphors of everymen', *Daedalus*, 101, 1: 39–60; Comaroff, J. (1985), *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance – the Culture and History of a South African People*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; West, H. (2007), *Ethnographic Magic*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

59. See note 1 above.
60. Interesting reflections on the relationship between sorcery and politics, though in a context very different from Libya, can be found in West, H. (2005), *Kupilikula, Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
61. Varzi, R. (2002), 'A ghost in the machine: The cinema of the Iranian Sacred Defence', in R. Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema – Politics, Representation and Identity*, London: I. B. Tauris, pp. 154–66.
62. Here I focus more on the 'incarnation' than on the 'effeminisation' of Gaddafi. Nonetheless, the attempt to ridicule Gaddafi by turning him into a woman is quite telling in relation to an understanding of the perception of gender relationships in Libya. Some reflections on the topic can be found in Davis, *Libyan Politics*, pp. 271–7 and in Obeidi, *Political Culture*, pp. 168–97.
63. 'Gaddafi's death – Who pulled the trigger?', *Reuters*, 20 October 2011. Online at www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/20/us-libya-gaddafi-finalhours-idUSTRE79J5Q720111020 (accessed 9 May 2013).
64. Freedberg, D. (1989), *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
65. Gombrich, E. H. (1982), *The Image and the Eye, Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London: Phaidon, p. 105.
66. Hutcheon, L. (2000), *A Theory of Parody – The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, pp. 50–68.
67. Bell, C. (1992), *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 172–5; Girard, R. (1977), *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press; Frazer, J. G. (1998), *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
68. Freud, S. (1983), *Totem and Taboo*, London: Ark Paperbacks.
69. Lacan, J. (1989), *Écrits: A Selection*. London: Routledge.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Derrida, J. (2001), *The Work of Mourning*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
72. Varzi, 'A ghost in the machine'.
73. Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, p. 51.

CHAPTER 6

Poetry of Protest: Tribes in Yemen's 'Change Revolution'

STEVEN C. CATON, HAZIM AL-ERYANI
AND RAYMAN ARYANI

INTRODUCTION

In mid-January 2011, a day or so after Tunisia erupted in protest against the regime of President Ben-Ali, thousands of Yemenis took to the streets of Sana'a in a protest which then spread to cities and towns throughout the country (see Fig. 6.1). They were demanding a change in their government, headed by Ali Abdullah Saleh who had been in power for thirty-three years.

His government was charged with corruption, violation of human rights, economic mismanagement and attempting to modify the republican constitution in order to lift the presidential term-limit. After the ousting of Tunisia's Ben-Ali, Yemeni protesters widened the scope of their demands to include the withdrawal of Ali Abdullah Saleh from power.

Though the number of protesters was relatively modest in the beginning (around 1,500 at each protest), by mid-February it grew to well over 100,000 people in cities such as Sana'a and Taiz.¹ The western press was so focused on the drama of Cairo's Tahrir Square, however, that these images that resembled the 1964 Civil Rights March on Washington are unknown to us. To properly appreciate the scale of those numbers one has to bear in mind that the protests took place in cities whose total population is about two million each; thus they were far larger a proportion of the total urban population than the protests in Cairo, say, or Tunis were.

There were two other exceptional facts about the Yemeni protests: they were often led by women activists and organisers, one of whom, Tawakkul Karman, was to win the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. Heavily veiled women by the tens of thousands also vigorously participated in them, albeit surrounded and protected by their male kinsmen, holding placards and banners, shouting slogans, pumping



Figure 6.1 Protesters in Change Square (Photo: Email4Mobile/Wikimedia).

their fists and waving the Yemeni flag (see Figs 6.2 and 6.3).

Though embedded within a patriarchal order (and perhaps because of it), these women risked, and sometimes lost, their lives to join mass-organised public demonstrations. That is to say, they were not on the sidelines, provisioning the men with food and administering first aid (though they did that too) but at the frontlines, where they were eventually fired upon by national security forces (see Fig. 6.4).

The other outstanding fact was how peaceful the demonstrations were, even though the Yemeni population overall is well armed. To some, this latter fact was all the more remarkable when one bears in mind that tens of thousands of tribesmen joined the protests by laying down their arms at the gates of Sana'a University and congregating in the square outside the university which was dubbed Taghayyur (Change) Square, before marching with their fellow citizens down the main thoroughfares to Freedom Square in downtown Sana'a. The stereotypical view of tribesmen, Yemeni and otherwise, is that they almost always resort to arms when entering into political conflict, that they are not much interested in public dialogue and that they are incapable of setting aside their own partisan bickering in order to work toward a larger, collective good. Yet not only did tribesmen from across Yemen join the protests peacefully, they



Figure 6.2 Yemeni woman in traditional dress in Change Square with the Yemeni flag drawn on her hand and 'no immunity for traitors' written on her palm (Photo: Z. Alkulaibi).



Figure 6.3 A Yemeni woman drawing the Yemeni and Syrian flags and writing 'punishment is our demand' on her hands (Photo: Z. Alkulaibi).



Figure 6.4 Thousands of women protesting against the regime (Photo: Al Jazeera English).

agitated for a common political and economic agenda, and did so in such large numbers that they arguably were decisive in forcing the president – whose power depended heavily on their support – to step down. In a country where tribesmen, who are sedentary and concentrated in the country's agricultural highlands, represent roughly 35 per cent of the total population (and some would argue that this figure is as high as 50 per cent or more), their role – whether active or passive – would have to be important for any mass movement within the country (see Fig. 6.5).

Of course, the involvement of the tribes in the Yemeni Arab Spring would prove to be more complicated than we can possibly sketch here, with some supporting the protesters, some the regime and others standing on the sidelines to await the outcome before deciding whom they would throw their support behind. It has sometimes been said that tribesmen were 'following the orders of their sheikhs', suggesting that they were falling into step with their own leaders rather than the revolutionary youth – and this is often noted in order to cast aspersions, rather than validate their political commitment. Of course, many non-tribal youths who took to the streets were also led by their party leaders – be they Islamis, such as Tawakkul Karman, or Socialists – while others were acting under the supervision of their fathers and brothers or their bosses, yet



Figure 6.5 Protesters including tribesmen ask Saleh to 'leave' (Photo: S. Qaid).

their fervour and revolutionary credentials were seldom called into question. Moreover, it is somewhat of a fantasy to suppose that tribal sheikhs in Yemen commonly have the power to command their constituents to do their bidding or, conversely, need to bribe or otherwise incentivise them to join them in political action. One works through consensus or one works alone.

More interesting questions are what sort of political subject a Yemeni tribesman might be, insofar as it is possible to generalise across such a large section of the population: how does such a subject act politically, and in which contexts? It is well known that Yemeni tribesmen have acted as political subjects not only in their own tribes but also in the Yemeni urban and national public spheres for decades,² but what this chapter argues is that aspects of their localised practices and rhetoric were in fact quite easily adaptable to mass urban demonstration and protest in the Arab Spring, where their actions were also front and centre.

Among the more startling features of such a tribal subject is the poetry he or she produced in the course of conflict mediation, arguably the most avidly listened to and widely circulated of all the expressive protest forms that emerged in the Yemeni uprising. To be sure, there was also rap music, graffiti, poster art, religious hymns and verse written in Classical Arabic – among other genres and registers – but it is astonishing how little attention has been paid to tribal poetry as a key art performed in the protests. It is not altogether obvious to us why that is the case. Is it that western media have a hard time fathoming Arabic, let alone Arabic poetry, which is why they fasten on more intelligible or more familiar visual art forms? Is it the assumption that 'true' revolutionary protest can only come in forms introduced from outside the Arab world such as rap rather than genres more 'indigenous' to the region, as it would appear many western analysts assume? Swedenburg raises a similar question regarding the prominence western journalists give to rap music in Arab popular protest.³ For example

As Gulf leaders try to broker an exit for the embattled Yemeni president, the protest camp in Sana'a Change Square has become a flourishing political and cultural space. The streets leading into the square are lined with tents, full of protesters who say they will not leave until President Ali Abdullah Saleh does too. In the heart of the square, street vendors sell grilled corn and fresh juices. A large stage dominates the space. It's where political leaders, preachers and activists stand up and address the crowds during the day. In the evenings, singers take their place. One musician, Muhammad Nasser al-Adroei, is rapping his way to revolution. 'Be wise, the government is poison, the one who annoys it is killed,' he raps in Yemeni dialect. The crowd joins him for the chorus, chanting that much-repeated slogan of the Arab revolutions: 'The people want the fall of the regime.'⁴

But the importance of tribal poetry even escaped the Arab media like Al Jazeera. Are observers of the Yemeni Arab spring, Arab and non-Arab alike, faced with a kind of 'cognitive dissonance' that cannot place the figure of the 'troublesome' tribal Arab in the ground of progressive political protest? The tribes belong in the rural setting, not the urban one. The tribes are backward, not modern. Tribal poetry is colloquial and not prestigious like Classical verse, and therefore cannot express the lofty sentiments of a unified nation. It was as though tribal poetry and mass urban mobilisation for the common good was a huge contradiction, an A and not-A, that could not be reconciled in the minds of many non-tribal Yemenis as well as most media (including Arab ones).

To explain why tribal poetry played such a key role, let us present an abridged ethnography of it in Yemen. We will then be able to better appreciate the power of the poetry that was performed, and why and how it circulated so widely. But before that, we need to say a brief word about the protests leading up to the events that would be called the Yemeni 'Arab Spring', events which tribal poetry was already representing and contesting.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO JANUARY 2011

It is often said in the reporting of the Arab Spring that street protests erupted 'spontaneously' (a way of talking about them which has its own politics that cannot be explored in depth here). Revolutionaries rarely like to admit that their call to action has historical roots in prior mobilisation and protest that drew attention to a problem and began a movement to correct it – a time before the revolution declared itself a revolution.⁵ This was perhaps even more so the case for the Arab Spring revolutionaries who were invariably described (by themselves and others) as 'youthful' and had hardly come to adulthood, let alone revolutionary consciousness, when these prior protests began. There was

a need for them to feel that they are the authors or originators of revolutionary action.

In fact, anger against and extreme discontentment with the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh had been there a decade before 2011. The signs became unmistakable in 2002 when retired army personnel, including former officers, protested in the southern governorates of the country against cutbacks in their pensions. This was followed in Sana'a by large teacher strikes and demonstrations, many of which involved women – the backbone of Yemen's public education system – also protesting cutbacks in their salaries. But these economic grievances were only the tip of the iceberg of public discontent. In southern Yemen in particular, a growing resentment against the Sana'a regime was based on a well-founded perception that the south's resources (its oil, water, port facilities and commercial investment possibilities) were being exploited by northerners without fair compensation or return to the south. Even the promise to include southerners in the regime's central government rang hollow to many southerners who complained that the unification of the former Yemen Arab Republic (northern Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (southern Yemen) that came about in 1990 and led to the creation of the Republic of Yemen – a union that was almost dissolved by a bitterly fought civil war in 1994 that the north won – was in the end less a unification than a colonisation. Challenges to the regime's legitimacy were compounded in 2005 by Zaydi Shi'a protests in the northern part of the country around the city of Sa'da against religious discrimination of their sect, but also economic and political marginalisation of the sa'dah religious elite (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) within Yemeni society ever since the 1962 revolution overthrew the thousand-year-old imamate in which they held sway. This 'Houthi Rebellion' (so named after the sa'dah family that began this protest and subsequently led a successful military resistance against the central government) couched its grievances less in the language of class *ressentiment* than in that of popular protest against regime corruption and attempted presidential usurpation of power. They cloaked their own partisan demands in populist sentiments, and thus stoked the flames of rebellion against the Sana'a regime.

Throughout it all, tribal poetry was composed to analyse the societal problems facing the country and to suggest solutions to them; poetry that was taped and then sold and circulated in Yemen's stereo stores and markets as well as to diasporic Yemeni communities in the Gulf, Europe and the US. Unfortunately, no empirical research has been done on this production and circulation of tribal poetry in the years from 2002 to 2011 specific to the protests against the regime, and so this assertion is based more on the experiences and anecdotal evidence of the authors than on systematic study. However, a sense of what we mean can be gleaned from a remarkable documentary film, *Men of Words* (2009) by Johanna

Ihle, which was shot in the tribal region of Yafi'a just north of the port of Aden. It focuses on only one of the poetic genres discussed in the ethnography below, the *qasidah*, but it is the most important one in the system of tribal poetic genres, and explains why it is a favourite for political commentary and criticism by tribal poets. In one of a number of telling scenes, shot in a Yemeni sitting room where poets, their friends and admirers – not to mention political agents of one kind or another from the local state authority, different local political factions and different tribes – are assembled to listen to poets recite their poetry or to listen to cassette tapes of such poetry, we learn of grievances mounting against the regime, including a state encroachment upon what is perceived as local sovereignty. A warning is issued – all in wonderful metre and rhyme – that if these grievances are not adequately addressed, the country will split into a 'thousand fragments'. In hindsight, with regard to events since the 2011 revolution, this prediction has been proven to be eerily prescient. The country is in danger of splintering into three semi-autonomous entities (north, centre and south), not to mention the dozens of different interest groups within those. This movie was probably shot in 2008, three years before the protests in Change Square, but already the key themes that would become the platform of the Arab Spring are enunciated. We do not wish to suggest that the Yafa'is were revolutionaries in the making, only that tribal poetry was already being wielded to frame the problems and the solutions to them. In other words, tribal poetry was already a central part of a decade-long (at least) national discourse on the need for governmental reform. It is time now to examine that poetry in more detail.

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRIBAL POETRY

Tribal poetry is composed in several genres, and only the *qasidah* (mentioned above) is done so in writing; in other words, only this genre's written and printed text – the finished product – is actually the focus of aesthetic attention. The *qasidah* poem is never composed in the course of a performance, though after the text is finished, it may be recited by the poet, or set to music and chanted by a professional musician and recorded on audiocassette tape. In the case of the greatest of these odes, the text may be printed for publication and in books. The poem is composed by an individual poet who, whether literate or not, can take his time to work on the poem until he is satisfied with it. Sometimes the *qasidah* is completed in one sitting, sometimes the process may take days or, in rare instances, years. The poet is often identified by name in a line leading up to the poem, such as 'The poet Yahya Al-Anasi said ...', followed by what he said in the rest of the text. More often than not the poem is a single text, but it need not be, if it is a 'challenge' (*da'wah*) to another poet with whose views Yahya Al-Anasi disagrees, that poet then being required by the honour code to

utter his poem (in the same metre and rhyme scheme no less) as a 'reply' (*ijabah*). The dialogue between the greatest duelling poets may not end with that simple exchange but can extend over several challenge/riposte pairs, the series forming a fascinating commentary on whatever issue of the day has preoccupied the poets and their public.

As for the art of improvisational composition, it is reserved for the other two genres – the *zamil*, a two-line poem, and the *balah*, a poem of many lines whose words are composed in an oral performance (also involving music and dance) and are never the same from one performance to the next. This is even more so the case for the *balah*, whose text is never memorised or recited, than for the *zamil*, whose text enjoys enough fixity as to transcend the moment or immediacy of composition. Many *zamil* poems deemed great are memorised and orally transmitted across several generations (though the tradition is relatively shallow in historical terms by comparison, say, to the Homeric epic) or in modern times are written down and printed. But the point is that the text of these two genres of poetry is composed in an oral performance and thus has to emerge in public and on the spur of the moment.

The aesthetic attention in the *balah* is on the performative process more than on the product or the text that emerges in that process. (In that sense the artistry resembles rap or jazz.) As for the 'author' of these poems, it is always a lone individual endeavour for the *zamil*, and always a collective one for the *balah*. Both genres entail a poet and a chorus (who are also dancing while carrying the poetic line), but in the case of the *zamil* the poet 'gives' the two-line text for the chorus to chant, whereas in the case of the *balah* the entire poem is composed by a number of poets taking turns building the text line by line and is never the same from performance to performance. When the next poet is ready to offer a line, the chorus picks it and the performance proceeds in this fashion until it is deemed complete (which usually means that an older poet draws the performance to a close with the speech act that initiated it, an invocation of Allah and a call for prayers and blessings upon the Prophet and his family).

Just as with linked *qasidah* poems, so too with *zamil* poems there may be challenge-and-response pairs, with several such pairs comprising a dialogical series that comments on local events. The *balah* poem too has its challenge-and-response pairs, but they differ from the others in that the routine is built into the performance itself. Because of this, the *balah* poem is often referred to as a 'game' (the reference is spoken of within the poem itself) – a game of duelling poets. Several such paired duels of challenge-and-response might occur within a single poetic performance, requiring the audience to track them polyvocally much as a listener might the themes of a Bach fugue.

The final noteworthy characteristic of the *zamil* and *balah* performances is that they are always carried out in the context of a specific ritual; indeed, they

are such an important component of such rituals that the latter can seem incomplete without them. The *balah* is performed indoors in the wedding host's sitting room on the occasion of his *samrah*, the evening spent entertaining and relaxing with him before he meets the bride and consummates the marriage. The game of the *balah* is indeed spoken of as a 'gift' from the wedding assembly to the groom, a gift of diversion and fun. To fulfil his obligations, a wedding guest is expected to participate in a *balah* performance – best of all as a poet, but failing that as a chorister – by way of honouring the groom and his family. If one agrees to attend a wedding, one can expect to participate in a *balah* performance, and if none is forthcoming everyone feels a little disappointed, if not uncomfortable. Whereas the *balah* performance is not found outside this specific ritual context, the *zamil* is always performed outdoors, and on many more ritual occasions in addition to the wedding. The poet and the chorus chanting his line walk (or more accurately, march in a dance step) in rows along a dry stream bed (the bottom of a wadi) towards some destination, be it a mosque in which they will pray or a house in which they will celebrate the groom's wedding.

This location and spatial configuration will be very important in understanding how tribal poetry is inserted into the mass protests of the Yemeni Arab Spring. The poem is chanted to someone, an audience that listens carefully to its words and judges the intention of the arrivals. And what are the ritual occasions? The eid, or holiday that comes after Ramadan, the month of fasting, and after the month of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, is often marked by *zamil* performances commemorating the religious meaning of the occasion. This is done by formulae invoking the Names of God (such as The Merciful, The Compassionate, The All-Knowing) and calling on the people to pray to God and ask for blessings on His Prophet and his family: all in a strict metre-and-rhyme scheme, of course. As they approach the village in which the wedding is to take place, the guests announce their arrival with a *zamil* poem honouring the occasion, while their hosts await them at the village entrance, savouring the words of greeting and praise.

The most important ritual occasion in which *zamil* poetry is composed is that of conflict mediation. It is an important moral obligation in tribal society to try to solve conflicts peacefully: the use of arms is almost always a last (and desperate) resort. That means not only that the contestants must submit to arbitration but that bystanders must volunteer to be arbitrators and put forth a goodwill effort to resolve the conflict justly according to *'urf* (tribal law). This applies across a broad spectrum from the most banal or everyday altercations (a dispute over debt, for example) to the most serious and heinous crimes such as homicide, rape or property theft: that is, everyone must become involved to resolve the conflict. The disputants will hand over to the arbitrator their ceremonial daggers as guarantees of a truce, and he dare not refuse to receive them, being obliged

to mediate their disagreement peacefully. There is no excuse like 'I am busy' or 'I have no experience in such things'. In the most serious conflicts, the sheikhs will arrive with their tribal entourage at the stage (*masrah*), at which they will hear the plaintiff and defendant in the case and conduct a public proceeding or trial, chanting a *zamil* poem expressing their moral point of view in the case. They do this while marching up the wadi to the *masrah* in full hearing of the assembled crowd.

Not all tribes produce all three genres, though all three will appear across the entire tribal spectrum, with the *qasidah* and the *zamil* being ubiquitous but the *balah* not, along with some others not mentioned in this paper. It is important to understand how these genres form a system, in the sense that a set ensemble of compositional and performative practices lies behind them. This is really the key: that a tribal poet knows how to compose in all three genres, not because he has to master an entirely different repertoire of skills for each one, but because he must master the requisite skills that cut across all of them in order to produce a text recognisable as a *qasidah*, *balah* or *zamil*. The difference is the intensity with which one or more of these skills is developed, or the combination of skills needed, in any given genre. In the *qasidah*, it is the verse-text that is fetishised, hence structures such as metre, rhyme and other forms of what Roman Jakobson called parallelism abound.⁶ These skills are also present in the other genres but to a lesser degree, leaving collective improvisation to be foregrounded (along with dance and music) combined in a single performance. The *balah* text is often referred to as the '*qasidah* of the *balah*' and in strictly textual terms the two are nearly indistinguishable in terms of length and verse structures, though the *qasidah*'s is much richer or varied and the *balah* text is indexically tied to a specific ritual occasion – the wedding *samrah* – in which it is doing crucial cultural work such as entertaining the groom. The *zamil* employs many of the same metre-and-rhyme schemes to be found in the *qasidah*, but it is much shorter. As with the case of the *balah*, it is seen to have crucial structural features in common with the *qasidah*; for example, a poet will sometimes take a text which he composed as a *zamil* and then expand it into a *qasidah*, reifying, in effect, the words of the *zamil* from both the performance and the situation to which it was tied by focusing entirely on the text. Thus it would be a mistake to see these genres in isolation from each other and concatenated into a simple assemblage: they form a system in which one genre has structural relations to the other.

The reason to emphasise this aspect of the tribal poetic tradition has to do with what we are calling the tribal male political subject. To be such a subject one must be able to perform in all three genres. This may not be obvious, based on what we have said so far of the poetic genres, but it will be when it is pointed out that commentary on what are said to be political topics are not reserved for

the *qasidah* or the *zamil*, for example, but may also take place in the *balah*. Major political events such as the uprising against the Sana'a regime in 2011 were commented on in all three genres and on a myriad of different occasions, with different views expressed in the challenge-and-retort routines. For example, a critic of the regime might challenge a defender, requiring the latter to reply in the same metre and rhyme. In other words the entire poetic system is mobilised as a rhetorical apparatus.⁷ If one is to have one's views heard in the tribal public sphere, one must be able to compose in all three genres. On the one hand, this appears harder than one might suppose: a great *qasidah* poet is not necessarily quick-witted enough in the cut-and-thrust that characterises the *balah*; and, conversely, the 'balahteer' may not have the patience or dexterity to write a structurally intricate ode. On the other hand, as long as one keeps practising by composing poetry on ritual occasions, it is easier than one might think because of the structural relations among the genres. If it is important to be able to participate in a public rhetorical system that exists at a very deep level in tribal society, then mastery of the system is essential for the tribal political subject's potency. Without such a mastery one might be heard, but only in one genre and only on specific and limited occasions.

SOUND REPRODUCTION OF TRIBAL POETRY: BENJAMIN REVISITED

One last thing needs to be mentioned before we return to tribal poetry in the Yemeni uprisings, and that is the circulation of this poetry within the national public sphere. In pre-modern days, before the advent of sound recording, poems were spread by word of mouth, and there were specialists in tribal society, known as *mulahhin* (composer of song), who learned the poem by heart and then sang it before audiences. This tradition still exists, but face-to-face transmission has been almost entirely replaced by the cassette player. With the advent of sound recording, first through the cylinder-based and then the disk-based gramophone from the 1920s through the 1940s, and then the magnetic tape recording from the 1950s until the present day, the transmission of poetry has been mediated by mechanical means, allowing poems to circulate over a much larger social sphere and even to distant diasporas. 'Sound studios' began to flourish in the 1960s where tapes of poetry, some many decades old and from far-flung parts of Yemen, were sold to patrons within the country and abroad. One such studio, called 'A Part of my Land', located in Aden, is featured in the film *Men of Words* and more fully analysed in Flagg Miller's *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*,⁸ an ethnography of the tribal *qasidah* and the soundscapes in which it has flourished in southern Yemen and the Yemeni diaspora in Brooklyn, New York. Another such studio is 'The World of Happiness' in Sana'a, described by Steven Caton.⁹ One could go into the store and ask what were the latest or hottest poetic hits

and be shown a shelf full of tapes in their plastic containers. Some had a big X on them, indicating that the tape was banned by central government because of its politically sensitive criticisms of the state, but could be purchased nonetheless under the counter and with no questions asked.

Of course, these sound studios are more than purveyors of poetry, clandestine or otherwise, for Hindi, western and Arab pop music are sold in them as well, not to mention Qur'anic chanting and religious hymns associated with various sects or with martyrdom stories of revolutionary figures; and so tribal poetry has by virtue of this eclectic juxtaposition been transformed in value as part of a new soundscape and sensibility. Video too has made its way into these shops, with films sold next to poetry and music. Taking advantage of the possibilities of sound-splicing and image-editing allowed by the computer, sound studios refashion tribal poetry's performance by making it sound like something 'other than' tribal poetry – such as a pop song or a religious hymn – though remaining faithful to the verbal text. We discuss some examples of this below. This makes the identity of the tribal poem ambiguous: is it a tribal poem or is it a religious chant? And is its message consequently reframed as something else and adapted for a different political aim?

To return to tribal poetics, it is important to note that the *qasidah* is the sole work of art, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin,¹⁰ that can circulate in the age of mechanical reproduction, whereas the *balah* and the *zamil* do not and, arguably, cannot. This fact raises a question about the work of art in modern mass reproduction that Benjamin does not entertain in his essay. Can all traditional works of art be removed from their original ritual contexts, shed their aura and circulate by being reproduced in mechanical forms, or are some more recalcitrant to this move than others? I would argue the latter. So tied to the ritual context are *balah* and *zamil* poetry and, even more, so tied is their aesthetics to a presumed origination in an immediate performance that mechanical mediation and circulation may be possible but entirely beside the point. Yemenis listen to taped *qasidah* poetry but almost never to taped *balah* or *zamil* performances except for nostalgic reasons (for example, as a record of all the nice things that were said in the groom's wedding *balah*). When asked why they wouldn't they might respond, 'Why would we? The point is to compose the poem in the moment of its performance, not to listen to that performance over and over again. Once the moment has passed, one composes a new poem.' In other words, there is no fetishisation of the performance or the text, no reification of it beyond the immediate context in which it emerged. But the *qasidah* is another matter. Precisely because the aesthetic orientation is towards the text per se rather than the latter's indexical relation to a ritual or its performance as is the case for the *balah* and the *zamil*, the text of the *qasidah* can be reified and, as it were, commodified without destroying its aesthetic force.

The fact that the tribal *qasidah* can be mechanically reproduced and then circulated through the public sphere means that the tribal political subject qua poet can be heard in the national public sphere that is wider than the tribal one, and in turn can listen to the debates within it. And for this reason, the value of the *qasidah*, which was always seen as the 'queen' of poetry, has gained a renewed value because of its 'fungibility' within the nation's communicative currency. But that also makes it vulnerable, as suggested above in the discussion of the stereo studio, to being morphed into something quite unlike what the original poet may have intended. The Yemeni public sphere is almost entirely unregulated when it comes to copyright protection, although laws are in place against copyright infringement; even so, tribal poetry is inherently ambiguous when it comes to who 'owns' it or has the right to circulate it. Even in the past, the poem, though attributed to an author, was altered to suit the whims or political views of the person passing it along, the difference being that such remaking did not go beyond a tribal sphere of control and therefore could be monitored and challenged by the original poet, if need be. In the modern world of mechanically mediated reproduction, where the possibilities of circulation are nearly limitless, this control is all but illusory. And so, if the poet wants to launch his poem in the public sphere, he has to swallow his distaste at what happens to it on the waves of electronically transmitted sound.

TRIBAL POETRY IN THE YEMENI ARAB SPRING

When the tents were set up in Change Square (they are still there – the longest-standing tent city in the history of political protest – though they are largely unoccupied now), poets would go from tent to tent delivering their poetry.



Figure 6.6 Poet performing inside a tent in Change Square (Source: AhrarYemen, YouTube)



Figure 6.7 Protesters listen to poet performing a poem (Source: Ahraryemen, YouTube).

This is the sort of face-to-face transmission of tribal poetry characteristic of the pre-modern era. Here is an example captured, ironically enough, through the mediation of the iPhone.¹¹ The audience is clearly made up of tribesmen, judging from their outfits (see Fig. 6.7). They are seated in the tent chewing qat, a usual pastime. The poet, also in tribal clothes, gives the following chant:

The Land of Yemen, Its People Revolted (poet unknown)

Tell our government I have a new one
 Injustice has crossed the line, and the land of Yemen, it's a nation revolting
 We are here to tell you to leave, we are here to say Saleh leave
 Listen to me, don't be stupid, and dialogue will not work with us
 Listen to my advice and obey, no we will not fear your bombs
 even if machine guns rain
 This is an order you must obey, your people command and you must obey.¹²

A popular poet who emerged from the uprising was Mujib Al-Rahman Al-Khowlani, probably from the region of Khawlan east of the capital, Sana'a. He first caught the attention of devotees of tribal poetry with his poem questioning the motivation of the government in the Sa'dah wars, which began long before the 2011 uprising. Al-Rahman was able to capture the sense of confusion Yemenis felt over the Sa'dah conflict, and the on and off nature of the war. Since 2006, the Saleh regime had fought six wars against the Houthis, and in his poem, Al-Rahman asks, 'For God's sake, have you heard of a war that lasted

six years, and with a phone call it ends?' This poem made Al-Rahman a popular poet beyond tribal audiences, and his poetry readings became celebrated events during the uprising. Another example of his poetry is a poem about a soccer match, which serves as a metaphor for the 'game' the Saleh regime is playing which, the poet tells us, is 'a game of one, sabotaged unity, and considers its oneness democracy'. Al-Rahman describes how, in this soccer match, Saleh assigned himself the role of player, referee and spectator.

What is interesting about the soccer metaphor is that, as Thomas Stevenson and Abdul Karim Alaug have noted,¹³ soccer in Yemen became a form of sport diplomacy, opening contacts between governments before unity in 1990 and as a means of conveying important political messages. Thus, the metaphor is not just fanciful but on some fundamental level quite literal. During the Yemeni revolution, Al-Rahman travelled around Yemen delivering poems in different city squares, raising peoples' consciousness about the demands of the people in Change Square.

In late February 2011, a little over a month after the protests began in Change Square, the tribes joined the uprising. The relatively young Sheikh Al-Ahmar, paramount sheikh of the Hashid Confederation, the most influential if not the largest tribal confederation in Yemen, threw its support behind the revolution. This was significant because the Al-Ahmar brothers – sons of the late and redoubtable Sheikh Abdullah Hussein Al-Ahmar, one of Yemen's most powerful figures – and their tribal followers had been historic, if also erstwhile, allies of the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime. Tribes from another powerful confederation, the Bakil, however, also came to Sana'a to join the protesters, some from the region of Khawlan al-Tiyal where one of the authors did his fieldwork back in the late 1970s.¹⁴ They had long-standing grievances against the regime, stemming from a perceived neglect of their region's economic development. The fact that support for the President was eroding among all the tribes was telling of his weakening grip on power. However, he still seemed to have the support of the army.

To many in Change Square the Ahmar clan's decision to side with the revolution was a mixed blessing, however. The Ahmars were infamous for their corruption and ruthlessness; indeed, they were hardly noteworthy for expressing democratic sentiments. Anxiety mounted among the protesters that the Al-Ahmars would eventually hijack the revolution. As one of the revolution's self-assigned press secretaries said to one of the authors in Change Square's tent city, 'Someone like Hamid Al-Ahmar wants to get rid of Saleh so he can have a larger piece of the pie'.¹⁵ On the other hand, they were heavily armed and capable of protecting the protesters from violent suppression by the army and, if need be, other government forces, so their presence was also welcomed.

On 18 March 2011, an event occurred that might well have been the tipping point in what led to the ousting of President Ali Abdullah Saleh a year later.

It became known as the ‘Friday Massacre’ or the ‘Friday of Dignity’. On the previous weekend, riot police had killed seven protesters, and a march of around 100,000 Yemenis filled a mile-long road leading to Sana’a University to mourn their deaths. Journalist Tom Finn was at the scene and filed a report:

As the prayers came to an end ... the sight of billowing black smoke from a burning car caught the attention of the protesters who began surging en masse towards it. Witnesses say security forces fired six shots into the air before turning their weapons on those charging towards them. As violence flared, plainclothes men appeared on the roofs of nearby houses and began firing on the demonstrators with Kalashnikovs.¹⁶

Over fifty people were killed and over 300 injured in what was later described as a massacre. Among the dead and injured were dozens of tribesmen.

There is obviously much more to say about the Yemeni revolution, but we need now to focus on the role of Yemeni tribal poetry in it. A great deal of the poetry composed during the protests that took place in Change Square was filmed and posted on YouTube.¹⁷

One example shows a scene taking place at night. The camera is focused on the Sana’a University monument, a triangular, needle-shaped structure that is brightly lit and at the base of which a stage has been built. Decorative strings with pictures attached stretch across it (see Fig. 6.8). Someone on the stage introduces the poet Majli Al-Qubaisi, who appears in tribal garb. He is greeted exuberantly by the crowd. Holding a piece of paper in his left hand, he reads



Figure 6.8 Majli Al-Qubaisi performing a *zamil*
(Source: Ghaleb Al-Hamdani, YouTube).

the lines of what appears to be a long *zamil* poem over the microphone to the huge crowd assembled below. The text may well have begun as a two-line *zamil* which he then expanded, thinking to turn it into a *qasidah* one day. Rather than recite the lines, he chants them in a strong, high tenor voice. This kind of vocal delivery is characteristic of *zamil* poetry, and the tune is one of the traditional ones used for the genre. After the poet chants a line, the audience picks it up and repeats it in the same melody. Undoubtedly, Al-Qubaisi composed the *zamil* before this occasion and audience members were already familiar with it, which is probably why they were able to repeat the lines so readily. This antiphonal structure of poet and chorus is also characteristic of *zamil* poetry. The parallel is not perfect, of course. Ordinarily the poem would have been composed on a march, and we will see other instances of that later, but for now one has to imagine the stage as a kind of *masrah*, or meeting place, where the parties in a conflict convene to try to settle their differences peacefully. The tribesmen have laid down their arms at the entrance of the University to arbitrate a transfer of power for the government.

Notwithstanding speculation on our part (there has not been a chance to return to Yemen to interview the poet), it is likely that this performance took place in late March, after the 'Friday Massacre', for it refers obliquely to it. Yahya and Ahmed are mentioned, the former of whom was the President's nephew, the latter his son, both of whom were held responsible by the revolutionaries for ordering security forces to fire on demonstrators indiscriminately that day. The president is described as a leader of mafia and thugs and told to inform Yahya and Ahmed that 'We will not be intimidated by your military with live bullets or with sticks.' The rest of the poem attests to the determination of the people to seek justice and hold the persons who committed these crimes responsible. The poem ends with the clarion lines: 'In God's name we will not be ruled by a dictator/He led us with division and racism/His accomplishments are killing and murder/Thuggery. Thuggery. Thuggery.'

Ma Nebaly (poet Majli Al-Qubaisi)

We don't care, we don't care, we don't care.
 O leader of the mafia and thugs
 To our nation, we will sacrifice our soul and our money
 Welcome death, life is a struggle
 Hit us with your bombs and guns
 Hit us with your planes and tanks
 Tell Yahya, and your son Ahmed
 We will not be intimidated by your military
 With live bullets or with sticks
 With all your power and more

For our revolution we will do anything
 You will not deter our proud people's revolution
 With our honest intentions, our heads held high
 Our determination and vigour will remain strong
 And justice will be brought by days and nights
 We will hold you responsible for this and that
 For the patient, bitter and sweet taste the same
 I will drink it especially on this issue
 And solidarity is best against arrogance
 In God's name, we will not be ruled by a dictator
 He led us with division and racism
 His accomplishments are killing and murder
 Thuggery, thuggery, thuggery.¹⁸

This poem became immensely popular and was circulated widely in the Yemeni public sphere, including the internet, but not necessarily in the version that was filmed in Change Square. There are several variants.¹⁹ Some were clearly produced in a stereo studio or by someone using a computer editing system. The image is taken from a video (probably from an iPhone) showing a large demonstration, and though it is not clear which one it may be, the assumption is that it is the demonstration in Change Square on the 'Friday Massacre'. An Arabic caption identifies the text as a *zamil* composed during the revolution, though no author is given attribution. Though not word for word identical with the *zamil* poem read by the poet Majli Al-Qubaisi in Change Square, it certainly bears enough resemblance to it in rhyme, metre and content as to be the 'same' poem. Of course, we have learned that this is what tribal poets have to put up with, the circulation of their poems in forms that are not necessarily sanctioned or controlled by themselves. What is more interesting is that the musical form of this version does not resemble a *zamil* performance so much as it does a religious hymn (*nashid*), and this because of the melody and the more Qur'anic-sounding diction. This makes sense, of course, in the wake of the massacre in which many tribesmen were killed along with other marchers. As we have seen, much *zamil* poetry performed in the Yemeni Arab Spring has been captured on video and posted on YouTube, possibly for the delectation of the Yemeni diaspora community as well as local Yemenis. This is not surprising. As Yemeni tribesmen marched to protest the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh they would perform the *zamil* in a traditional dance step, with their ceremonial daggers held aloft, dancing along the streets on their way to Change Square. Although they were in the city, not the rural wadi, the spatial organisation of the performance is nonetheless exactly the same: a thoroughfare (this time a street rather than a stream bed in a wadi) leading to a *masrah* at which the hoped-for peaceful



Figure 6.9 Murad tribe entering Change Square (Source: Ahmed Ali, YouTube).

conflict resolution is to take place. The picture shows a delegation of the Murad tribe (from far eastern Yemen) entering Change Square performing their *zamil*, although unfortunately, the sound quality is not good enough to catch the words (see Fig. 6.9).²⁰

Another *zamil* performance, this time of the Bani Jabr tribe of Khawlan Al-Tiyal from eastern Yemen, shows tribesmen entering Change Square (the needle-shaped monument is visible behind them) (see Fig. 6.10). The *zamil* salutes Yemen and the revolutionaries who have announced a new Yemen.²¹ And finally, a *zamil* from Marib in eastern Yemen shown on YouTube was performed before a crowd that repeats the poet's lines just as they would in a regular poetic performance.

Ya 'Ali [the President], the people have decided
 Don't delay! There is no way for you to go
 except the exit.²²

The tribes marched in Change Square to express their views in poetry, and just as it is clear at conflict mediation what the consensus is regarding who is at fault and what the resolution is, so it was on this occasion: Ali Abdullah Saleh had to go.



Figure 6.10 Members of the Bani Jabr tribe performing a *zamil* in Change Square (Source: A. Hamza, YouTube).



Figure 6.11 Protesters marching down one of Sana'a's main streets (Photo: Al Jazeera English).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the potency of what we call a tribal political subject in the Yemeni Arab revolution, as demonstrated in 'his' poetry performances during the events that spanned January to March 2011.

This poetry, understood as a system of genres that is circulated through various media in the public sphere, has a long and complex tradition, in which the discussion of politics plays a central role, be it a criticism of local goings-on, regional affairs, the central state's shortcomings or international affairs. It used to be that only a genre like the *qasidah* was amenable to sound recording and circulation via the cassette tape, but with the advent of the mobile phone and smartphones, oral performances nowadays can be filmed in situ or as they are happening, with the sound and images then circulated via the net. This means that the full range of tribal poetry, from *qasidah* to *zamil* to *balah*, is now widely available to both a national and transnational public that in the past would have only heard the *qasidah* on the cassette tape. We have learned that a topic may be debated in the tribe in all three genres, and so this broader exposure is consequential.

At the same time that this exposure to tribal poetry has broadened, the performance of that poetry has been introduced into urban settings, the street and urban mass mobilisation (the demonstration) where it did not exist before, making it a valuable protest practice. And the remarkable thing is that the poetry has not had to undergo any major transformation for this to happen: the march down the wadi is seamlessly interpolated into the march down the street.

But this is not to say that tribal poetry has not been transformed. The text of the tribal poem can be sung as a hymn and be interpolated into discourses, mainly religious ones, with which the poem had no original connection, thus changing the political interpretation of its message. Suddenly tribesmen have become religious martyrs of the sort memorialised by the conservative religious party, for example.

Because of orientalist views of the tribesman as a troublesome citizen, there is a danger that his contribution to the revolution will be overlooked or downplayed. In reality, when historians look back on the voices of the Yemeni revolution, it will be his and the youth in general that in all likelihood will stand out.

NOTES

1. See <http://tinyurl.com/blpd3n5> (accessed 9 December 2013).
2. Caton, S. C. (1990), *'Peaks of Yemen I Summon': Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Miller, F. (2007), *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

3. Swedenburg, T. (2012), 'Egypt's music of protest: From Sayyid Darwish to DJ Haha', *Middle East Report* 265 (winter): 39-43.
4. Sinjab, L. (2011), 'Yemen: Artists urge President Saleh to go', BBC News. Online at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13273488 (accessed 9 December 2013).
5. Indeed, even when a 'revolution' becomes a revolution is never quite clear or obvious, the protests of the past bleeding into the uprising of the present and future. In the documentary *Uprising* (2012) by Fredrik Stanton, a young woman reflects on the moment she realised a demonstration in which she was participating was no longer a call for reform but one for revolution.
6. Jakobson, R. (1960), 'Closing statement: Linguistics and poetics', in T. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
7. For an illustration based on an event that occurred in 1979, see Caton, S. C. (2005), *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation*, New York: Hill & Wang.
8. Miller, *Moral Resonance*.
9. Caton, *Yemen Chronicle*.
10. Benjamin, W. (2007) [1936], 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, pp. 217-51.
11. www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Uuk5H-dzGs&feature=player_embedded (accessed 9 December 2013).
12. Note that this is a translation of the poem from its original, and thus may not reflect the precise language of the poet. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Uuk5H-dzGs&feature=player_embedded (accessed 15 December 2013).
13. Stevenson, T. and A. K. Alaug (2008), 'Sports diplomacy and emergent nationalism: Football links between the two Yemens, 1970-1990', *Anthropology of the Middle East* 3, 2: 1-19.
14. Caton, *Yemen Chronicle*.
15. Aryani, R. (2012), 'Timeline of Yemen's uprising'. PowerPoint presentation. Conference on Yemen in Transition: Challenges & Opportunities. Harvard University, Center for Middle East Studies, 19-20 October 2012.
16. Finn, T. (2011), '45 protesters killed in Yemen', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2011. Online at www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/18/yemen-police-massacre-45-protesters?CMP=tw_t_gu (accessed 19 December 2013).
17. For an example, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXRKB_ysViM (accessed 14 January 2014).
18. Note that this is a translation of the poem from its original, and thus may not reflect the precise language of the poet. This is an abridged version of the poem. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXRKB_ysViM (accessed 14 January 2014).
19. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZo4RG2v5NA> (accessed 14 January 2014).
20. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNmIluoj51c> (accessed 14 January 2014).
21. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrFgBPXQ8ac> (accessed 14 January 2014).
22. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VR_ho3Blzek (accessed 14 January 2014).

PART TWO

*Beyond the Arab Spring –
Asia and Africa*

CHAPTER 7

A Fractured Solidarity: Communitas and Structure in the Israeli 2011 Social Protest

OREN LIVIO AND TAMAR KATRIEL

INTRODUCTION

In the late spring of 2011, following the widespread social and political protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Spain and Greece, several Israeli academics and political commentators went on record to suggest that no similar events could occur in Israel in the near future. As reasons for this assessment they cited the country's perceived security situation, which dissuades citizens from protesting what are believed to be lesser ills, as well as the fact that the Israeli economy was generally considered to have withstood the global economic crisis fairly well.¹ Shortly thereafter, however, and despite these predictions, on 14 July 2011 the largest social protest in Israel's history broke out.

It started with a small number of makeshift tents pitched on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard, a move initiated by a young college graduate, who had been evicted from her home, and her friends, and soon grew into a nationwide protest involving a plethora of tent encampments around the country. The inhabitants of these encampments represented a variety of social groups and socioeconomic concerns, all expressing a general sense of discontent and outrage associated with Israel's increasingly neoliberal policies. These feelings were captured by what emerged as the protest movement's most visible slogan and chant, 'The people demand social justice' (*ha'am doresh tzedek xevrati*).²

As the unprecedented scale of the protest became clear, activists, politicians, media professionals and the public at large began to debate its meaning and outcomes. Was it a turning point in Israeli social history as some commentators declared, or was it, as others claimed, just a loosely orchestrated, large-scale and multi-sited 'gripping party'³ that invited people to vent steam, yet remained ineffectual? These polar assessments, and many others in between, had one important

thing in common – all recognised that this protest transformed the heart of Tel Aviv, and with it many other locations around the country during the summer of 2011, into a uniquely experienced juncture in the country's history, one that has already become etched in Israeli collective memory as a fleeting moment of empowerment and possibility.

Based on a combination of ethnographic observations at protest sites and an examination of the discourse produced within and about the protest movement at the time, our main interest in this chapter is to reach a better understanding of this moment by interrogating its semiotic landscape and experiential texture. Clearly, the protest movement was not only temporally demarcated in the summer of 2011, but, like similar movements around the world, it was also spatially demarcated through the visible and embodied 'occupation' of public spaces, providing yet another contemporary example of 'the emplaced character of collective action, the fact that it requires physical locations as stages for its performances'.⁴

As the protest spread, the 'protest space' became space-on-the-move, ranging from tent encampments to other identifiable protest sites that inhabited anything from small vigils to televised mass demonstrations. While clearly oriented towards real-world issues, including pressing social problems and policy considerations, and while clearly involving a great deal of strategising, organising, mobilising, coordinating and coalition building, the activism that found its home in this tent protest was not conceptualised by either activists or their target audiences as 'doing politics'. Conjuring a time-out-of-time and a place-out-of-place, the protest movement became both a real and an imaginary site of possibility, and a repository for playfully constructed symbols and meanings through which its politics of 'anti-politics' emerged. We leave the question of the protest's outcomes aside for the time being, noting only that these 'outcomes' are usually considered within a political frame, and will return to them in the conclusion.

In trying to understand the nature and dynamics of contemporary protest movements, Gerbaudo points out that 'in the absence of a formal organisational structure, collective action is always structured by the forms of communication responsible for "setting the scene" of its display'.⁵ This scene serves as 'the point of departure for a complex process of social re-composition and symbolic articulation, facilitating the "fusion" of individuals into a new collective agent'.⁶ This conceptualisation, with its focus on embodied experience, place and emotional effervescence, resonates with Victor Turner's dialectical conceptualisation of structure and *communitas*.⁷ We therefore revisit Turner's notions by proposing to explore the Israeli protest culture of summer 2011 as a liminoid sphere in which individuals voluntarily and playfully enter a space where traditional social relationships and hierarchies are temporarily suspended and replaced by

the unity and heightened emotionality of shared purpose and solidarity.⁸ We attend to what Turner termed the ‘subjunctive mood’ of culture – the potentialities and possibilities as envisioned within the rhetoric and practices of protest.⁹ At the same time, we also focus on moments of structural/anti-structural unrest, addressing the ways in which these possibilities were constrained by a variety of structural impulses.

LIMINALITY, SPATIALITY AND PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

It has become commonplace to discuss many of the international 2011 protests, as well as contemporary social movements more generally, in terms associated with the affordances enabled by new media for organisation, mobilisation and networking across geographical and social divides.¹⁰ Without disregarding the significance of these developments in social movement practices, however, the Israeli protest – much like others around the world¹¹ – demonstrates the continued importance of physical public space for political resistance and social activism.

Throughout the summer of 2011, the tent encampments laid out in public spaces in urban centres across Israel came to both house and symbolise the protest against rising housing costs, the mounting cost of living and the neoliberal socioeconomic regime that was responsible for the break-up of the Israeli welfare state. These liminal enclaves, and the many people swarming to them to engage in dialogue, debate and joint protest activities, charted new possibilities for both reasoned discussion and heightened expressivity in Israeli public life. At least for a while, portions of the Israeli urban landscape, the contours of Israeli public discourse and patterns of sociability were simultaneously transformed, as Israeli citizens from all walks of life reclaimed and appropriated public space, asserting their ‘right to the city’.¹² In so doing, they transformed both the physical landscape and its associated meanings through their embodied presence.

At the height of summer, Tel Aviv’s main protest site on Rothschild Boulevard spanned almost its entire length, a distance of approximately 1.6 kilometres. Positioning their tents within what is today one of Tel Aviv’s priciest real estate locations, and centre to many of the city’s high-end restaurants, the protesters mischievously subverted the street’s bourgeois environment by constructing a carnivalesque jumble composed of improvised tents, shabby furniture, self-managed kitchen facilities and medical services, impromptu musical and theatrical performances, spontaneous marketplaces for the free exchange of clothes, books and other paraphernalia (ironically called ‘free markets’), and bodies in varying states of dress and undress (see Figs 7.1 and 7.2).

At the same time, this laid-back atmosphere was complemented by a seemingly unprecedented engagement with ‘serious’ political issues. Citizen-strangers



Figure 7.1 The Rothschild kitchen facilities (Photo: O. Livio).

spent many evening hours sitting in ‘dialogue circles’ that emulated domestic living rooms and listening to lectures dealing with macro-level socioeconomic issues they had never dwelt on before (see Figs 7.3 and 7.4), which helped them make sense of the personal economic difficulties that gave rise to the protest in the first place. Broadly modelled on similar ‘general assemblies’ in Spain and elsewhere,¹³ these discussion forums were an exercise in grassroots participatory democracy characterised by a desire for non-hierarchy, collective and consensual decision making, and public transparency, in an attempt to challenge and contest dominant social and political relations.¹⁴ The tent encampments thus became powerful ‘terrains of resistance’¹⁵ and turned into ‘physical sites of contention involving myriad embodied spatial struggles ... and symbolic sites of contention over the meaning of space’.¹⁶

As in other spaces of protest around the world,¹⁷ the Rothschild Boulevard protesters’ reclamation of space made use of the cultural-historical associations of the street in order to invest it with new meanings. Originally named ‘Street of the People’ (*Rexov Ha’am*), Rothschild Boulevard is bookended by the city’s main cultural institutions at one end and the original site of one of Tel-Aviv’s oldest houses, established by one of the city’s founding families in 1909, and Independence Hall, where Israel’s independence was declared in 1948, at the



Figure 7.2 A 'free market' for the exchange of books and clothes (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.3 Domestic 'living rooms' on Rothschild Boulevard (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.4 Public lectures on Rothschild Boulevard (Photo: O. Livio).

other. Protesters could thus situate themselves explicitly against the city's and the nation's historical and cultural background, constructing the space of protest as both local-contemporary and national-historical.¹⁸ In one of the protest's most iconic moments (see Fig. 7.5), protesters standing in front of Independence Hall staged a re-reading of Israel's Declaration of Independence at precisely the same day of the week and time of day in which it was originally read, delivering the clear message that a renewed contract between the state and its citizens must be established. Rothschild Boulevard's name, reworked on many street signs as 'If I Were a Rothschild Avenue' (see Fig. 7.6), after a famous line from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, added an ironic dimension to the protesters' economic grievances.

As liminal spaces, the tent dwellings were dominated by an idyllic spirit of *communitas* – inclusive, non-hierarchical and reflective of affective, immediate relations between participants,¹⁹ including the many visitors who came to the site to experience a new-found sense of democratic promise. While the demographic profile of the protesters was certainly not proportionally representative of the Israeli population at large, and overrepresented young, middle-class urbanites (much like the composition of tent sites across the Western world),²⁰ one could nevertheless experience an unusual co-mingling of strangers transcending, at least to some extent, conventional barriers of class, gender, ethnicity, religiosity and geographic location. This bringing together of individuals from different social spheres embodied not only the quest for socioeconomic change, but also the desire to practise alternative values of 'affective solidarity'²¹ such as egalitarianism, mutuality and the free exchange of ideas. It was also seen as a means of combating feelings of alienation and atomisation associated with living in the contemporary metropolitan city.

The spatial organisation and participation structures within the tent encampment, at least as initially devised, also encouraged a sense of togetherness and *communitas*. Tents were, for the most part, spaced evenly across sites, with no immediately visible distinctions of class or social position. Throughout the first few weeks of protest, the main activities carried out within tent encampments were local assemblies and forums, in which participants were encouraged to talk freely and share their concerns. Talk itself was viewed as a social equaliser, connecting people and leading to mutual recognition of shared viewpoints and interests. Participation structures followed many of the patterns established by the Indignados movement in Spain.²² Participants were introduced (and introduced themselves) only by their first names, thus minimising distinctions based on public recognition, levels of expertise, age, experience and even degrees of involvement within the protest movement itself. All participants were also encouraged to sit on the ground, with speakers only standing up while they talked. Perhaps most importantly, the floor was open to anyone



Figure 7.5 Re-reading Israel's Declaration of Independence (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.6 A reworked street sign: If I Were a Rothschild (Photo: O. Livio).

wishing to speak – whether an active participant in the local encampment or a visitor from outside.

Many (although not all) discussions were carried out in ‘dialogue circles’, an arrangement that has a long history and considerable resonance in Israeli youth movement culture. As explained by the prominent Israeli poet Haim Gouri, the ‘culture of the circle’ represents

the connection between equals and partners, [...] not a brilliant speaker in front of an enchanted, excited, cheering crowd. [...] It strove toward democracy in its exalted sense. It understood that every revolution wishes to provide its members with recognition of their own worth and their human dignity. It had leaders, but they rose from within it and came back to it.²³

Dialogue circles were modelled on these early Zionist spatial arrangements of inclusive sociability and belonging, with their equalising and democratising potential, epitomised by the ritualised ‘soul talks’ conducted by early pioneering groups.²⁴ The circle as an embodied cultural metaphor is yet another example of the use made of national-Zionist symbols within the protest movement. Indeed, this movement largely constructed itself as a *return* to the foundational tenets of Zionism – tenets that had allegedly been deserted by modern-day Israeli leaders. By recreating foundational tropes and invoking legendary moments of the nation’s history, the protest was thus constructed as a movement back to an authentic past (which was itself dominated by the Zionist rhetoric of biblical return). In a sharp critical analysis of the protest movement, Uri Gordon identified this strategy and the ideology it served, noting that the movement’s messages ‘were presented not as a matter of social conflict along class lines, but instead through appeals to social unity as an expression of “true Zionism” – rhetoric that panders to Israelis’ nostalgia for the collectivism and republicanism of the early state’.²⁵

THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITAS

Indeed, while the spirit of *communitas* was certainly felt within protest sites, suspending traditional divisions of class, ethnicity, age, gender and so forth – manifestations of Israeli society’s most crucial structural cleavages continuously impinging upon this utopian spirit, thereby setting limits to the experience of togetherness. In many respects, this simultaneous co-presence of anti-structural *communitas* and the re-inscription of structure may have been the defining characteristic of the protest movement.

In terms of spatial arrangements, we observed that beneath the veneer of visual chaos and homogeneity that initially met the visitor’s eye at the

Rothschild tent encampment, there simmered significant social stratifications. As the encampment gradually spread out, individual tents representing many of Israel's peripheral cities and towns were erected towards the south-west end of the boulevard. As a result, the attempt to demonstrate the inclusiveness of the protest movement in fact reproduced real-world sociospatial divisions between centre and periphery. The establishment of alternative encampments across Tel Aviv – and the accompanying battle over the perceived 'authenticity' of each site – was another indication of these divisions. Similarly, in the city of Haifa, the four tent encampments, while working in tandem, were clearly differentiated in terms of class and race (Arabs/Jews, middle class/working class), and this found expression in the focal concerns voiced by those who participated in their activities. With time, spatial-structural divisions became so pronounced that several newspapers covering the protest produced a map of the Rothschild Boulevard tent dwellings indicating the social stratification of tent enclaves within the site.

Furthermore, the purportedly non-hierarchical structure of the protest movement, which in its early stages resembled the rhizomatic organisation of the anti-globalisation movement,²⁶ and consisted of a loosely aligned 'network of networks'²⁷ that represented shifting coalitions of interest with variable entry and exit points, quickly devolved into a traditional political power struggle between individuals and groups competing for resources, visibility and influence.²⁸ This power struggle, too, reflected structural differences rooted in class and ethnic identifications. Of particular resonance was the gulf between those identified as protest 'leaders' by the media and the general public – the initial group of protesters who had pitched the first few tents, virtually all of whom were young student activists from a largely middle-class Ashkenazi-Jewish background – and the organisers who were more attendant to the day-to-day operation of the encampments themselves.²⁹

As the more publicly visible 'leaders' retreated from the tent encampments and shifted their core activities to the political realm, local grievances were quick to surface, and the different interests and agendas held by protesters of different backgrounds came to the fore. As one lower-class activist cited by Asher Schechter explained, referring to the protest movement's most iconic leader, Daphni Leef:

[She] is a good girl, but she doesn't know life. She didn't come from the bottom. She came and somehow made some move, but does she understand housing? Does she understand social distress? She's a young woman. She's never had a cheque bounce. She hasn't been to these places of social distress. We're not up to the measure of Rothschild. They're in a different place.³⁰

Support for the protest among Israel's Palestinian citizens was also often ambivalent.³¹ Levels of support, while high, remained much lower than among the Jewish population, where it reached 90 per cent, fluctuating at around 60 per cent.³² As one prominent Palestinian activist noted: 'At first it was perceived as a struggle that did not speak to the Arab population in terms of language and content. People asked me what "people" they were talking about when they demand social justice – the Jewish people?'³³ In this respect, it is significant to note that only a few mixed Jewish-Arab tent encampments were established throughout Israel (in Jaffa, Lod and Haifa), and most encampments remained segregated in terms of nationality, thus replicating the dominant Israeli mode of spatial existence. Within mixed encampments, too, tensions sometimes surfaced as a result of differences of opinion involving Jewish-Palestinian relations both within Israel and in the Occupied Territories.³⁴

Reactions to the protest among the national-religious population – in particular that associated with the right-wing settler movement and the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community – were also rather cautious. While the protest addressed socioeconomic concerns that were often very relevant for these populations (the ultra-Orthodox population is among Israel's poorest, and the West Bank settlers' disproportionate public funding is a source of political controversy), the common perception of the protest as targeted against the (right-wing) government, as well as its call to shift the focus of public discourse and policy from security-related issues to issues of social equality and justice, were often at odds with the agendas and central concerns of these religious groups. Several political figures associated with the national-religious and ultra-Orthodox communities in fact argued that the protest had been 'hijacked' by the left, which was hiding its real goal of toppling the government under the façade of all-inclusiveness.

The tension between the spirit of *communitas* and underlying structural divisions animated the protest's unfolding and was a constant topic of discussion and debate both within the movement and in the discourse surrounding it. In the end, this was probably the most significant cause of the protest's demise as a widespread cultural phenomenon. This same tension was evident in protest culture semiotics, to which we will now turn.

INTERTEXTUALITY, PLAY AND PERFORMANCE

Probably the most visible element of the tent protest culture involved the words, images and multimodal signs strewn all over the protest sites, as the tents' surfaces and the spaces between them became the pages upon which the story of the protest was constantly being reinscribed and regenerated in a variety of playfully constructed home-made signs, slogans and symbols, mostly based upon

a (presupposed) shared culture. This playfulness has become characteristic of the globalised ‘protest culture’ in both international and local social movements in recent years,³⁵ giving rise to a subjunctive mood or imaginary that is reflective of a postmodern, self-conscious generation of activists who attempt to combat political cynicism and the accompanying sense of inefficacy that is associated with more traditional political activism.³⁶

We found many examples of such ‘tactical frivolity’³⁷ in our observations, perhaps best exemplified by a sign spotted on a tent in Rothschild Boulevard (see Fig. 7.7), which read ‘We are the creative class’ (*anaxnu hama’amad hayetzirati*). This particular sign was not only an expression of this tent owner’s self-reflexive stance, but also itself a play of words – replacing the term ‘productive’ (*yatzrani*), which is part of the commonly used Hebrew collocation ‘productive class’, with the term ‘creative’ (*yetsirati*). This linguistic play was a self-defining social statement that identified the tent dwellers as a new ‘class’ whose particular qualities involved agency, humour and a free, creative spirit. As such, it captured a central feature of the Israeli protest movement – the marked creative and ludic spirit that animated its expressive culture. This spirit dominated the semiotic landscape of the tent dwellings and the large demonstrations that punctuated the protest routine with moments of heightened affective solidarity.



Figure 7.7 ‘We are the creative class’ (Photo: O. Livio).

For our purposes here, perhaps the most significant element in considering the rhetoric of protest is the ways in which the spirit of *communitas* was conjured through the invocation of its core characteristics. This is of particular importance within a protest culture that attempted – with varying degrees of success, and occasionally drawing criticism precisely because of this attempt³⁸ – to sustain an all-inclusive, all-encompassing category of ‘the people’, through which movement solidarity and the sense of vital, affective, non-hierarchical relations could be maintained, if only in the short term.³⁹ As Laclau has demonstrated,⁴⁰ this discursive constitution of ‘the people’ as a political subject stands at the heart of political operation, and as such requires three simultaneous conditions, all of which were present in the Israeli case: (1) an equivalential logic positing the equality of individuals and their demands, with a particularised social demand coming to stand in for all other social demands and thus to speak ‘universally’; (2) a discursive simplification of the political terrain into a binary opposition in which ‘the people’ stand in opposition to ‘power’, with the enemy constructed as ‘the oligarchy, the establishment, big money, capitalism, [or] globalization’;⁴¹ (3) the emergence of a new identity founded upon constitutive heterogeneity, in which ‘a new agency [is created] out of a plurality of heterogeneous elements’.⁴²

Indeed, the category of ‘the people’, named as such, has animated several of the recent protests around the world, most notably in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions.⁴³ In Israel, too, this category was used in multiple ways in an attempt to author unity both in public proclamation and through the public intimacy of face-to-face encounters. It served to transcend structural distinctions of age, class and ethnic background, and thus became a powerful political tool through which the protest was largely depoliticised. Indeed, the protest’s most prominent slogan, enunciated rhythmically like the beat of a drum – ‘The *people, demand, social justice*’ – itself became a verbal emblem of this utopian quest for social solidarity that harked back to the spirit of ideological *communitas* of early Zionist days.

One means of expressing the revival of this spirit was via signs, slogans and images that often performed their rhetorical work through intertextuality and citation, involving audiences in a game of innuendo and gap-filling that made them active participants in the construction of the protest messages, and thus of an imagined community of shared reference. The ability to decipher this linguistic play, and thereby participate fully in the protest culture, was thus predicated upon belonging to the same speech community⁴⁴ – a group sharing a cultural-textual background, norms of communication and patterns of linguistic behaviour. While speech communities are of course never homogeneous, and significant differences exist even between individuals who consider themselves members of the same communities,⁴⁵ in this case it appears that in using cultural



Figure 7.8 The staging of *Dira Lehaskir*, a popular children's book (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.9 Transformation of the popular song *The Winter of '73* (Photo: O. Livio).

expressions largely associated with mainstream, middle-class Jewish culture, the protest movement attempted to project a sense of national unity, albeit one that still excluded the non-Jewish population as well as non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups.

Among the main building blocks of this protest culture were elements of mainstream Israeli education and culture such as biblical verses, proverbs, idiomatic and formulaic expressions, and well-known children's songs and rhymes. These were joined by elements of contemporary media-based culture such as TV icons. Utilising and reworking the texts and imagery of the local 'recursive archive',⁴⁶ protesters creatively drew upon shared cultural tropes to simultaneously comment on current issues and imagine future possibilities. Linguistic manifestations of this shared culture included, for example, the circulation of biblical coinages such as 'tzedek, tzedek tirdof' ('Seek justice and pursue it') and the use of sound play for poetic effect in slogans such as 'tzedek, lo tzdaka' ('Justice, not charity').

At the same time, many performances were carried out in a lighter vein. Thus, for example, a frequent occurrence was the chanting of 'labibi sheli shalosh dirot' ('My Bibi has three apartments') – a jab at Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's affluence involving play on a well-known children's verse that says, 'My hat has three corners'. Similarly, public, parodic stagings of the classic Israeli children's book by poet Leah Goldberg, *Dira Lehaskir* ('An Apartment for Rent'), were performed on one street corner (see Fig. 7.8), with the original text playfully manipulated to reflect current rent issues and mock contemporary housing policies and government ideologies.⁴⁷

Signs and slogans posted on tents similarly transformed, often through irony, a variety of iconic cultural texts broadly associated with young middle-class Israelis. A sign posted on one tent (see Fig. 7.9) rewrote the lyrics to the popular song *The Winter of '73*, an unofficial anthem of the so-called 'peace generation' that grew up during the time of the (failed) peace process of the 1990s; but whereas in the original song the younger generation address their parents, claiming that 'You promised a dove, an olive branch/You promised peace at home' – the current sign waxed poetic about more material concerns: 'You promised an apartment, a parquet or marble floor/You promised a living room at home/You promised a window and doors.' What had originally been an abstract, rather depoliticised call for peace was now detached completely from external sociopolitical realities, focusing – literally as well as politically – on the domestic front. Indeed, it was the relative prevalence of calls of this type that led many critics to accuse protest activists of ignoring political realities and of failing to address the continued occupation of Palestinian territories or engage with the Israeli-Arab conflict in ways that might be divisive for the protest's new, all-embracing class of 'the people'.⁴⁸

In line with the movement's origins in protesting the lack of affordable housing, the themes of house and home were among the most prominent within the localised array of symbols that filled the protest arena. The tents themselves symbolised the housing crisis as a state of homelessness – and contributed to the creation of the liminal space of protest by blurring taken-for-granted spatial notions of private and public within urban space. This was epitomised clearly in what was probably the protest movement's most visible sign (see Fig. 7.10), a yellow tent icon enclosing the Hebrew letter *bet*, which formed the beginning of the slogan '*bet ze ohel*' ('bet is for tent'). This was a playful linguistic disruption based on another popular song intended to teach children the Hebrew alphabet. In this song, which follows the general pattern 'A is for ..., B is for ...', the first Hebrew letter, *aleph*, stands for *ohel* (tent), and the second, *bet*, stands for *bayit* (house/home). These lexical markers were switched in the protest slogan to form the playfully discordant *bet ze ohel*, thus punctuating the perceived impossibility of home attainment through linguistic disjointedness, by intentionally pairing the wrong word with the wrong letter. The non-attainable 'house/home' became, in the protest, a tent.

Similar effects were achieved through visual means, often playing in one way or another on the 'house' theme. Thus, a small-scale model of a windowless white house with a red roof (see Fig. 7.11) – the ultimate symbol of the desired Israeli home, the cottage – was constructed on a boulevard corner and claimed to symbolise the government's impenetrability: a condition of being closed on all sides, disconnected from one's environment. Not far from there, a reconstruction of the well-known image of the pre-state Tower and Stockade model of Jewish settlement was perched in the middle of Rothschild Boulevard amidst a sea of tents (see Fig. 7.12), symbolising the national Zionist heritage of home-building and place-making,⁴⁹ which protesters felt contemporary housing policies had eroded. Once more, this forged a temporal link between contemporary protesters and Israel's original Zionist settlers – simultaneously invoking the spirit of timelessness associated with *communitas* and situating the protest within the confines of mainstream Zionist ideology. As demonstrated by Christopher Pinney (this volume) in his analysis of the 2011 protests in India, such imagery mobilises local history in complex processes of cultural citation and reiteration targeted at both the present and the future – critiquing the present while imagining the political possibilities of the future, which are themselves rooted in the achievements of the local past.

Within the tent encampments, the tents themselves were often designed to emulate most closely – albeit playfully – the characteristics of young urbanites' everyday dwellings, thus creating fluid and flexible borders between private and public realms. Signs posted on tent entrances were often ironic variations on signs posted on the doors of rented apartments – '*kan moxim bekef*' ('It's fun



Figure 7.10 'Bet ze ohel' (Logo design and slogan: Y. Kellner). (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.11 An impenetrable 'house' on Rothschild Boulevard (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.12 The 'Tower and Stockade' construction on Rothschild Boulevard (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.13 'I have fun protesting here' (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.14 A tent expressing solidarity inside a real home (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.15 Theodor Herzl on a balcony (Photo: N. Vieman).



Figure 7.16 ‘Fighting for home’ on the Israeli flag (Photo: O. Livio).

protesting here’) replacing the clichéd *‘kan garim bekef’* (‘It’s fun living here’; see Fig. 7.13); humorous signs about inflated tent rents, prime tent locations and unique accessories available in specific tents were plentiful; and various symbols of urban domesticity were creatively deployed, from coloured mailboxes to improvised ‘patios’ and ‘balconies’ on which dwellers attempted to flee from the summer heat. Likewise, some street residents found creative ways to express their solidarity with the protesters; one resident pitched a tent on his own (real) balcony (see Fig. 7.14), and another participated in the nostalgic atmosphere by constructing an image of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, with a placard bearing Herzl’s signature quote, ‘If you will it, it is not a dream’ (*‘im tirtzu, ein zo agada’*; see Fig. 7.15).

In a widely circulated image that adorned T-shirts created especially for the protest, a blue house icon was placed over the Israeli flag so that its triangular ‘roof’ completed the image of the Star of David (see Fig. 7.16), with the caption ‘Fighting for home’ (also ‘Fighting for a house’, since in Hebrew there is one term for both ‘home’ and ‘house’) affixed at the bottom. Likewise, the national emblem of the state, the Menorah flanked by olive branches, was coloured in red and drawn with a crack in it, with the warning ‘fragile’ attached (see Fig. 7.17). In this way, the physical materiality associated with the protest movement’s



Figure 7.17 A reworking of the national emblem of Israel (Photo: O. Livio).



Figure 7.18 ‘All Israel are tents to one another’ – a playful variation on a religious proverb (Photo: O. Livio).

focus on housing was extended to symbolically encompass the state itself, whose precarious condition was constructed as analogous to the lack of housing security experienced by the protesters. By equating the protesters’ wellbeing with that of the state, the protest was constituted as representative of the entire ‘people’, rather than of specific political, class or ethnic interests. Illustrating this claim, a large placard at the Rothschild site proclaimed ‘*kol Israel ohalim ze laze*’ (see Fig. 7.18) – a play on the Jewish proverb maintaining that all Jewish people are responsible for each other’s wellbeing, with the word for ‘responsible’ (*arevim*) being replaced by the word for ‘tents’ (*ohalim*). In this way a rhetorical claim for complete inclusiveness was made, albeit through the use of a religious proverb that applies solely to Jews.

TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF PROTEST CULTURES

In more than one way, then, the landscape of protest was a tug-of-war between order and chaos, structure and anti-structure, uplifting moments and ongoing strategising. At times, this tension yielded a welding of categories, such as the hybrid construction of the private-public spaces of the tent-dwelling enclaves; on other occasions, it created double-layered configurations whose interpretation was grounded in intertextual invocation; on yet other occasions, irony became the trope through which order in the guise of respectability and official

power was playfully challenged by dissident voices. This often took the form of word play anchored in a shared knowledge of language or allusion to a shared fund of cultural texts.

As has been the case in protest sites around the world,⁵⁰ the Israeli protest terrain also harboured a fruitful tension between the abstractness of general proclamation and the specificity of down-to-earth policy discussions. This was reflected in the use of broad and abstract terms such as ‘the people’, ‘the protest’ or ‘justice’, on the one hand, and the requirement to translate these broad categories into the specifics of actual policies and allocation of public resources on the other. While the social and economic policy discussions that dominated the scene of dialogue circles were mainly conducted through reasoned argument and debate, the protest’s abstract ‘umbrella terms’ animated these discussions by serving as inspirational tools of identification and mobilisation. Thus, the same questions kept returning in different guises: Was it one or many protests? How inclusive could references to ‘the people’ claim to be? Was it serious political action or just a utopian diversion? What counts as social justice? While answers were diverse, their very posing as a common concern signalled the distinctive flavour of the summer protest – a self-reflexive critical stance that blended a seriously committed activist spirit with the liminal playfulness of carnival.

More than two years after the protest’s demise (at the very least, as a large-scale social phenomenon), many of the questions posed throughout its lifecycle remain unresolved. Its legacy remains controversial and open to different interpretations, and while on the one hand it was argued that it is ‘the only protest movement in the Middle East ... which has not achieved any of its aims’,⁵¹ it was also pronounced successful in changing the contours of Israeli discourse and shifting the political agenda so as to place engagement with socioeconomic issues on a par with political security-oriented ones.⁵² But it has also solidified the separation between these two domains. Thus, the results of the 2013 elections have been interpreted both as a symbol of the protest’s success (particularly in the meteoric rise of the *Yesh Atid* party, with its nostalgic, middle-class appeal) and as evidence of its failure, due to its ‘inability to create a new political language that links the question of social justice to the regime that discriminates against various groups because of their identity’.⁵³

In considering the implications of these competing interpretations, and more generally the protest’s complex and often internally contradictory arena, some themes emerge that appear to complicate Turner’s conceptualisation of structure, *communitas* and the relationship between them. Clearly, some features of *communitas* were easily recognisable in this form of protest – its existential spirit, its emergence within liminal spaces at the interstices of structure, its constant generation and regeneration of playful symbols and metaphors, its challenge to hierarchical social relations, its abstract philosophical stance

and subjunctive mood, and its lived experience as an out-of-time, out-of-place phenomenon with a distinctly sacred aura – which turned protest sites into cultural attractions for ‘pilgrimage’ tours.

In terms of its developmental process, too, the 2011 protest appears to follow some of Victor Turner’s proposed trajectory, including the emergence of bureaucratic structures and the gradual imposition of norm-governed practices and activities – as well as the transition by several protest leaders into the institutionalised political arena.⁵⁴ At the same time, some characteristics appear to be more ambiguous. In particular, *communitas* and structure are for the most part interimplicated in terms of both space and time, and, perhaps more importantly, the ‘end result’ of the liminal moment does not appear to map neatly onto either of Turner’s classificatory schemes of schism or re-integration. In some ways, traditional structural arrangements appear to have reasserted their dominance – particularly with regard to divisions between social groups within Israeli society and the primacy of a republican ethos of differential rights for different citizens based upon different perceptions of relative ‘contribution’ to the Israeli collective (itself considered as primarily Jewish). In other ways, the protest movement appears, at the very least, to have invigorated citizens who had formerly experienced a sense of powerlessness, providing them with ‘rhetorical and operational openings’⁵⁵ for imagining newfound civic and democratic possibilities.

In his later work,⁵⁶ Turner attempted to clarify some of the ambiguities arising from the possibilities inherent in liminal moments. Considering the potential effects of these moments, he wrote that:

I sometimes talk about the liminal phase being dominantly in the ‘subjunctive mood’ of culture, the mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire – depending on which of the trinity of cognition, affect and connotation is situationally dominant. Ordinary life is in the indicative mood, where we expect the invariant operation of cause and effect, of rationality and commonsense. Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures.⁵⁷

It is perhaps this conceptualisation of liminality as a ‘storehouse of possibilities’ that is of most theoretical relevance here for thinking about the sociopolitical implications of moments of *communitas*. There is a tendency, among commentators as well as academics, to consider the consequences of ritual and liminality as dichotomous entities: either celebrating their anti-structural achievements or lamenting their failure to achieve revolutionary ends and constructing them as futile exercises of self-congratulatory pseudo-resistance.⁵⁸ Our analysis of

the 2011 protest movement suggests that neither of these evaluations captures the contradictory nature of such moments. Protest may be both structural and anti-structural, frivolous and serious, reformist and conservative. Evaluating its meanings and effects requires close attention to both temporality and scale, and assessing its long-term consequences in real time, or shortly thereafter, is a risky endeavour indeed.

In work closely related to Turner, but not directly aligned with his own publications, a variety of scholars have addressed the fascinating phenomenon of key moments and/or spaces in which dominant societal norms and conventions are temporarily suspended, and which give rise to a sense of *communitas* and a belief in people's power to liberate their thought and/or effect considerable social change.⁵⁹ One of the most consistent observations of such research has been that such moments and spaces are, for the most part, evanescent. Fundamental structural change is possible, but rare. In most cases, when the prophecies associated with the subjunctive moment fail, 'structure return[s] and the movement becomes institutionalised, or the movement disintegrates and its members merge into the enviroing structured order'.⁶⁰ Another common characteristic of these moments and spaces is that they tend to operate outside of the realm of that which is considered explicitly 'political' – in theatre and play, in performance and in various forms of popular and alternative culture. In fact, translating the achievements of the spirit of *communitas* arising in phenomena such as tent encampments and demonstrations into the realm of everyday politics appears to be extremely difficult.⁶¹

It would appear, therefore, that any theorising arising from the analysis of protest movements such as that which occurred in Israel in 2011 requires addressing these problematics; first, by considering the potentials and limitations of evanescent moments and spaces, as well as perhaps the more implicit long-term implications that current theory tends to underestimate. What are the conditions under which the 'storehouse of possibilities' envisioned by Turner and others may retain some residual impact, influencing future structural relations in ways that may not be immediately identifiable? Jill Dolan's notion of 'utopian performatives' may be helpful here.⁶² Whereas moments of *communitas* generally appear to be fleeting, perhaps the shared cultural imaginings, the destabilisation of categories formerly taken for granted, the experience of unexplored possibilities and the sense of political efficacy they inspire, may eventually be realised to at least some extent by those whose imaginations have been thus transformed. *Communitas*, in this sense, may be conceptualised as an ongoing, fluctuating process rather than as a specific moment bound in time. Some evidence from the Israeli protest – including the explicit politicisation of a formerly excluded and indifferent generation of youngsters, as well as a noticeable shift in the topics raised in public discourse towards issues of class and social justice – suggests that

this possibility is perhaps not too far-fetched. At least some work on the long-term effects of cultural resistance seems to support this view.⁶³

Second, theorising *communitas* requires close scrutiny of the relation between performance, ritual, play and politics. In Turner's scheme,⁶⁴ social drama is fundamentally conceived as arising from a momentary disruption of the prevailing social order, which unfolds in sequential stages of breach, crisis and redress, resulting in schism or reintegration. We have already seen that this classification is perhaps too tidy – as these stages may in fact be co-present rather than sequential, at least under some circumstances.⁶⁵ As Turner gradually shifted his attention from more 'compulsory' rituals and dramas to the realm of voluntary performance and play,⁶⁶ proposing the somewhat ambiguous distinction between 'liminal' and 'liminoid' phenomena (the former associated with obligatory ritual, the latter with voluntary leisure and play), the relation between the 'realm of primitive hypothesis'⁶⁷ and real-world processes of social transformation remained underdeveloped.

Analysis of the Israeli protest offers some rudimentary paths to further theorising. It would appear that performance, ritual and play need to be closely examined for the variety of differential potentialities and possibilities they afford. Thus, for example, it appears that they are not always transgressive. Some possibilities may indeed challenge the prevailing order, but some may be more nostalgic and conservative. Potentially transgressive performances and subversions such as those we witnessed at protest sites may function as 'rehearsals' for real-world changes, but they may also operate as a ludic diversion that is decidedly anti-confrontational and avoids addressing real-world inequalities and injustices. The voluntary nature of such liminoid phenomena is to some extent a privilege enjoyed by the middle class, and this play may sometimes function as an escapist fantasy or safety valve rather than as a fundamentally anti-structural practice.⁶⁸ Roger Caillois' view of play as a continuum ranging from *paidia* (unstructured, spontaneous, anarchic) to *ludus* (structured, rule-governed) may be helpful here;⁶⁹ while many of the performances we witnessed strove to project an image of *paidia*, their reliance on mainstream culture, their accommodation to well-established theatrical norms and their nostalgic spirit may situate them more in the realm of *ludus*, and thus help explain the ultimately traditionalist spirit of much of Israeli protest culture.

Finally, it is clear that the relationship between *communitas* and physical space must continue to be examined, particularly at a time when social movements are increasingly using the opportunities provided by new media to extend their activities into the virtual sphere. If there is one common finding to all research investigating the social protest movements of 2011 across the globe, it is that physical space and embodied presence still matter; that it is the reclamation and appropriation of real, quotidian public space by real flesh-and-blood

individuals that enables the crucial, if limited, opening of new imaginaries of democratic possibility. This does not, of course, guarantee positive consequences, nor does it mean that cyberspace is irrelevant. And while it appears to be clear that physical public space is required for the emergence of *communitas*, the space of new social media may enhance the possibilities for this public space to maximise its effect through a new ‘logic of aggregation’⁷⁰ that encourages masses of individuals from diverse backgrounds to assemble within emotionally infused physical spaces.

As the protest moves farther away from the present time and towards the realm of memory and (sometimes) nostalgia, it appears that a significant portion of social discourse continues to address its measurable effects and legacy. These discussions tend to focus on issues of practical efficacy, which, while certainly important, are not the only way to consider what the protest has achieved. From an anthropological standpoint, no less important are those questions that relate to the post-liminal phase, which in this case, as we have seen, fits neither a schism nor a re-integration model neatly. Addressing such questions at this point may be premature. We believe that a closer look at the actual play of symbols and practices associated with liminal times and their structural and anti-structural impulses may help us move from questions of practical efficacy to questions of cultural meanings, that is, to an anthropology of protest cultures.

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 54. Turner, *The Ritual Process*.
 55. Sassen, 'The global street comes to Wall Street'.
 56. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*; Turner, 'Dewey, Dilthey, and drama'.
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CHAPTER 8

Gandhi, Camera, Action! *India's 'August Spring'*

CHRISTOPHER PINNEY

The Arab Spring has leaked into India, albeit in a humid late-monsoon incarnation: 'Anna's August Spring' was one prominent television slogan which sought to link the neo-Gandhian at the heart of the movement described here to events in Egypt and North Africa. However, if events in (what is usually referred to, sensibly, in India as) 'West Asia' were truly seismic, articulating aspirations so long-suppressed that they acquired a quality of newness, in South Asia the 'August Spring' was incarnated as a repetition. Not so much an earthquake as a burp or belch from the past.

Popular visual culture in India, and the politics it mobilises, continues to play out a set of political concerns and 'media tactics' whose basic infrastructure and parameters have been established over the last century. This chapter explores how these constraints have operated within the context of the recent mass anti-corruption movement focused initially on Anna Hazare and subsequently the Right to Information activist Arvind Kejriwal. These parameters involve a recurrent citationality, which following the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss we might conceive of as a kind of bricolage, a logic, or science, of the concrete, involving the recirculation of a ready to hand syllabary through which the bricoleur speaks through the 'medium of things'.¹ Lévi-Strauss drew a contrast between the 'engineer' who mobilised 'raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purposes of the project' and the bricoleur whose 'universe of instruments is closed' and whose tools are 'the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions'.² This bricolage involves the circulation of signs rather than concepts, an increasing velocity of previously available meaning which (to deliberately corrupt Frederick Jameson) demands

that what is potentially politically efficacious is always ‘half-seen in advance’³ and which (to develop a Deleuzian metaphor) folds inside and outside, signifier and signified into ‘media-folds’ of origami-like complexity.⁴ This examination of political discontent in contemporary India will take us across the country through a travel narrative that progresses from Delhi in the north, proceeds to Madhya Pradesh in central India (and the town and village where I have been conducting anthropological fieldwork and visual research intermittently since 1982) and finishes in Mumbai on *Anand Chaudas* (blissful fourteenth) when tens of thousands of images of the god Ganesh are immersed in the Arabian Sea.

In late August of 2011 much of India was transfixed by the actions of the septuagenarian neo-Gandhian Anna Hazare. Fasting, possibly until death (he would curtail his hunger strike on the thirteenth day), he sat on a stage in Delhi’s Ramlila grounds underneath a large photographic image of M. K. Gandhi. The events at the Ramlila grounds received ever-increasing media coverage: dozens of Indian news channel crews erected their own stages on the edge of the ground, numerous cameras mounted on cranes documented every moment and the visual image of Anna Hazare as a ‘second Gandhi’ or ‘come-again Gandhi’ was beamed across the country twenty-four hours a day.

The relationship between Anna Hazare and M. K. Gandhi powerfully demonstrates the continuing vitality of figures associated with anti-colonial nationalism, not simply as empty points of visual reference but as forces that continue to animate, in complex ways, the political landscape and the repertoire of political possibilities in India. If, as is often claimed, Hazare is in some sense ‘repeating’ Gandhi, can we also detect a more widespread repetition and citation at work which embeds contemporary Indian politics in something akin to what Jameson termed a ‘Third World allegory’?⁵ It is this (I use the term advisedly) ‘burden’ of India’s colonial history which I hope to illuminate in this chapter, together with Gayatri Spivak’s Derridean notion of the ‘graphic of iterability’⁶ and a Deleuzian ‘texturology’ which tangles the inside in the ‘pleats of matter’⁷ and what he elsewhere describes as ‘moving, living folds’.⁸

The Indian political ‘archive’ is highly dynamic, an unstable location which has certain authorising functions but is continually spewing the past into the future. Aspects of this idiom were described as the ‘recursive archive’ in an earlier book, *Photos of the Gods*,⁹ in relation to commercial artists’ often extensive collections of earlier image production. These were used as storehouses of future potential visualisation and were commonly drawn upon to solve issues relating to present-day commissions. None of these images were sedimented: they all remained ‘live’, ready to fall into a future which was yet to be.

In a similar manner, the recent Anna Hazare agitation ‘folded’ itself into a past which it remade anew. Centrally conceived as a kind of deformative iteration (‘second Gandhi’ or *aj ke Krishna* – ‘Krishna for today’), the campaign

also oriented itself around a host of popular media iterations of the history which empowered the movement. These included Gandhi updated via the Hindi film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Carry On Munna Brother) and a script already partly written by *Rang de Basanti* (Colour of Spring), the film which perhaps more than any other spectacularly negotiates the role of the archive in the popular.

The image and media-saturated nature of the Hazare political movement was immediately apparent as I approached the Ramlila grounds in Delhi in August 2011: numerous commercial vendors were selling merchandise of various kinds. Firstly the ubiquitous Gandhi caps (*topis*) on which are printed *main anna hun* (I am Anna) and which had become the almost universally worn uniform of his supporters. This was a reference to the Tunisian protesters' identification with the self-immolating stallholder Mohamed Bouazizi and helps us make sense of some of the media parallels made between the Arab Spring and Hazare's anti-corruption movement. In addition to the caps, Indian flags in various sizes were available; also on sale were tricolour scarves that allowed followers to literally drape themselves in the national colours, plastic waistcoats with various anti-corruption slogans and badges adorned with Hazare's smiling face.

On entering the Ramlila ground one was immediately confronted with the tension between the de-individuating possibility of the *topi* which allowed everyone to fuse their identity with the leader and the desire to leave one's



Figure 8.1 A Hazare supporter adds his signature to a banner near the entrance to the Ramlila Maidan. August 2011 (Photo: C. Pinney).



Figure 8.2 *Aj ke Dhritarashtra* (Today's Dhritarashtra). A Photoshopped placard displayed at the Ramlila Maidan protest. Mother India is shown being disrobed in the centre of the image, Anna Hazare appears incarnated as Krishna on the left and a blind Manmohan Singh (the Prime Minister) appears on the right above Suresh Kalmadi and A. Raja (Photo C. Pinney).

individual marks: large printed banners near the inside of the entrance were being energetically overlaid with thousands of signatures by those for whom simply *also* being Anna Hazare was insufficient (see Fig. 8.1). The individualism of those at the Ramlila ground was also apparent in the extraordinary profusion of hand-made images and texts which many protesters brought with them. These ranged from small photocopies – some advocating the hanging of members of the current government or depicting Hazare as a wrestler – to elaborate collaged spreads, to complex cartoons and paintings (often dependent on the pun that Anna was not *andhi* [blind] but was Gandhi) to Photoshopped visual allegories (*Aj ke Dhritarashtra*) that depicted Hazare as a modern-day Krishna, fighting (in a reanimation of the Mahabharata struggle) corrupt figures such as the disgraced head of the Commonwealth Games Committee (Suresh Kalmadi) and a politician implicated in a \$40 billion 2G telecom spectrum sales scam (A. Raja), these being presided over by the 'blind' Manmohan Singh who echoes the blind Dhritarashtra (see Fig. 8.2).

Dhritarashtra, described in the Mahabharata, was blind from birth, was the father of the Kauravas and uncle to the five Pandavas with whom his sons fought the Kurukshetra war. He was present when Yudhisthira lost the dice game, and



Figure 8.3 *Ye hai hamari andhi sarkar* (This is our blind government). Placard displayed at India Gate. A distinctively attired Manmohan Singh is shown blindfolded in the centre of the image (Photo: C. Pinney).

remained silent when Dushasana tried to disrobe Draupadi (the Pandavas' wife) in front of the court. The disrobing of Draupadi, an episode endlessly visualised in early lithography, then film and subsequently television¹⁰ became perhaps the archetypal trope of a subjugated India whose chastity was threatened by colonisers.

Other imagery on display mobilised maps of India with Mother India at the centre flanked by images of Gandhi and Anna Hazare with slogans such as *Bhrashtachar Bharat Choro!* (Corruption Quit India!), or maps of India in front of which were depicted three monkeys illustrating the (originally Japanese) visual proverb 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. Gandhi was very attached to a small wooden carving of three monkeys gifted to him by Chinese devotees. These seem to creatively deform the original East Asian motif into a warning about the dangers of a government which chooses not to see what is occurring in front of it: the images served as demands to *look at* and confront evil in the form of corruption. One protester at the post-fast 'victory' celebrations at Indian Gate brought his own placard which depicted a blindfolded Manmohan Singh unable to see his ministers scurrying away with briefcases filled with cash under the slogan *Yeh hai hamari andhi sarkar: puri bhrast* (This is our blind government: completely corrupt) (see Fig. 8.3).

Across this incredible range of visual creativity a common theme emerged: Anna Hazare was an echo of something or someone else: usually Gandhi, but sometimes also Krishna. It was this secondary identity (*dusra Gandhi*, or ‘second Gandhi’, see Fig. 8.4) that was foregrounded far more insistently than any ‘self-present’ claim he might be able to make (as an ex-army sergeant turned village disciplinarian who has spent many decades campaigning against alcohol and meat consumption in his Maharashtrian village). His campaign, indeed, mobilised several of the tropes that feature in late-twentieth-century printed images of punishments in hell. Usually known as *karni bharni* (roughly, reap as you sow) or *karma ke phal* (the fruits of karma), these images pair deeds and consequences, showing misdemeanours and their punishment. Most illustrate the taking of bribes (*rishvat lene*) through images of smoky backrooms in which sinister men smoke, drink and play cards. The black marketeer and the tax defaulter are also frequently depicted. These are part of a popular visual culture and moral conservatism which seems to directly inform Anna Hazare’s worldview.

The Hazare campaign’s own website (www.annahazare.org) celebrates his achievements over many years in his natal Maharashtrian village of Ralegan Siddhi, noting that ‘Today the villagers have completely given up brewing of liquor. Nobody sells liquor in the village. Further, the shopkeepers [have not sold] cigarettes, beedies and tobacco ... for the last 13 years.’



Figure 8.4 A painted banner displayed at India Gate showing Anna Hazare as a ‘second Gandhi’ (Photo: C. Pinney).

Press reports indicate that this transformation was built upon the public thrashing of alcoholics by Hazare himself (they are tied to a pole and he thrashes them with his army belt). Indeed, he has frequently asserted the desirability of hanging corrupt politicians and 'cutting off the hands' of thieves. *India Today* suggested that 'Anyone who drinks [in Ralegan Siddhi] gets a lashing more reminiscent of Pakistan in the reactionary age of General Zia-ul-Haq',¹¹ but we might also add that it is reminiscent of the moral codes of *karni bharni*. Hazare was quoted as saying that compulsive drinkers are taken to the

temple and he has to swear by God that he won't drink in future. And [if] even after all this he drinks then we will tie him up to the electric pole in front of the temple and then beat him up so that he gets scared.¹²

Alongside the 'secondary' echoes in which Anna was a come-again Gandhi re-enacting the messianic iconography of *karni bharni* imagery, there was also a set of three-way refractions through which Anna Hazare was imagined through the already mediated image of commercial cinema's depiction of Gandhi and other anti-colonial nationalists of the early twentieth century. Most of this was presented in ways which were immediately graspable to the audience co-present at the Ramlila ground but which, nevertheless, for our purposes here requires some careful unpacking and analysis.



Figure 8.5 A Hazare supporter displays images including Lage Raho Anna Bhai (Photo: C. Pinney).

In this spirit let us focus on one young man who wandered around the Ramlila grounds bearing a complex tableau of photocopied cartoons and collages (see Fig. 8.5). One of these showed Anna Hazare, wearing his trademark *topi*, riding a motorbike along with two key aides in what became known by the media as ‘Team Anna’: the former policewoman Kiran Bedi and the Right to Information activist Arvind Kejriwal whose *Aam Aadmi* (Common Man) party, at the time of writing in mid-2013, spearheads the movement. Beneath this scene is the legend ‘*Lage Raho Anna Bhai*’ (‘Carry On Anna Brother’), a reference to the very popular film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (‘Carry On Munna Brother’) directed by Rajkumar Hirani in 2006, which made Gandhi the hallucinatory moral conscience of a small time Mumbai hoodlum.

It was through this film that Gandhi acquired a new potency in the form of *Gandhigiri* (Gandhi-coercion). Munnabhai, played by Sanjay Dutt, is infatuated with the voice of Jahnvi, a radio jockey on a Mumbai radio station. Hoping to meet her in person, he forces five experts at gunpoint to help him win a phone-in quiz on the Mahatma to commemorate *Gandhi Jayanti* (Gandhi’s birthday). This successful *dadagiri* (that is, the bullying behaviour associated with a *dada* or hoodlum) soon gives way to an equally efficacious *Gandhigiri* as Munna protects an old people’s home from an avaricious realtor (to whom the radio station’s listeners are urged to send flowers) who finds a hallucinatory Gandhi advising him on a new selfless mode of efficacy: moral power, rather than muscle power. The website www.Gandhigiri.org subsequently sanctified the interchangeability of *dadagiri* and *Gandhigiri*, noting that Sanjay Dutt, the film star, following his conviction for the possession of semi-automatic weapons, would be housed in the very same jail (Yerawada in Pune) that Gandhi had formerly occupied. This was grotesque irony translated into destiny. Cinema and televisual media once again prophesise the new world. This is a process with a venerable history in India as elsewhere: one thinks of Anuradha Kapur’s argument about the way in which early chromolithography, Parsi theatre and cinema helped make the Gods ‘more real’: ‘representationally the past and the present almost look the same: the time of the Gods appears to be “our” historical contemporary time’.¹³ Anna Hazare’s time – which was also Gandhi’s time – was the beneficiary of this historical echo chamber.

The film (*Lage Raho Munna Bhai*) brilliantly demolishes the empty ‘statist’ Gandhi. In one scene Munna, prompted by Gandhi himself, urges the removal of all Gandhi statues and the erasure of his name from all public thoroughfares, and the subsequent internalisation in each person’s heart of Gandhi as a moral force, divorced from his hollow and used up state-approved manifestation. Writing at the time of the film’s release, Arunabha Ghosh and Tapan Basu observed that the film shrinks from embracing any thoroughgoing radical re-envisionment of Gandhi’s politics: it continually edges towards and

then retreats from the possibility of 'being mired in Gandhi's socioeconomic thoughts – a complete no-no for today's consumer economy driven India'.¹⁴ This 're-purposing' of Gandhian thought for a neoliberal context perhaps helps explain the easy mobilisation of *Lage Raho* in the context of the Anna Hazare campaign.

Hazare's campaign came to a climax on the final Saturday in August 2011 when the Indian Parliament was forced to debate – against the background of Anna's deteriorating health – the campaign's demands for a *Jan Lokpal* (people's ombudsman) bill, which would counter corrupt practices. Parliament voted in principle to proceed with the investigation of the possibility of such a bill and Hazare announced that he would terminate his fast the following morning. This announcement was made while Hazare sat on stage with two media figures who are of relevance to the narrative advanced here. One was Rajkumar Hirani, the director of *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, the movie which had established much of the cinematic infrastructure for Anna Hazare's own incarnation of 'Gandhi, Camera, Action!' The other was Aamir Khan, who had been directed in a later movie by Hirani (*3 Idiots*) but who is perhaps best known for his role in Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra's *Rang de Basanti* (2006), a film about the revolutionary freedom fighter Bhagat Singh, the biggest grossing Hindi film of that year, with Bafta and Academy Award nominations.

Bhagat, a revolutionary Marxist executed by the British in 1931, remains prominent in many South Asians' consciousness, and *Rang de Basanti* was a sustained exercise in the 'folding' of the past into the present, an exemplary instance of 'texturology'. The film pushed cinema's temporal involutory potential to its furthest limit through its juxtaposition of different, co-present, histories which gave it the status of a kind of meta-text of the possibilities of historical repetition and bricolage. Mehra's own website gives the following synopsis:

A young London-based filmmaker chances upon the diaries of her grandfather who served in the British police force in India during the freedom struggle ... She comes down to Delhi, and casts a group of five friends to play the pivotal roles of these revolutionaries. However, products of modern India, the five youngsters initially refuse to be part of the project as they don't identify with these characters from the past. Not surprising, since they're part of a generation of Indians that believes in consumerism. To them patriotism and giving one's life for one's beliefs are the stuff stuffy text-books are made of. They would rather party than be patriots. In the film both the 1930s British India and the India of today run parallel and intersect at crucial points. As the film reaches its resolution the lines between past and present [blur] as they become one in spirit.

This blurring is precipitated by the death of a friend, Ajay, a pilot in the Indian Air Force. His crash is ascribed by the authorities to pilot error, but the friends know that he was killed as the result of faulty parts that a corrupt defence minister acquired through a kickback deal. So the friends have to avenge themselves, just as Bhagat and friends had to avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai (who died as the result of injuries inflicted by the colonial police during the visit of the Simon Commission in 1928). Initially, they hold a candlelit protest at India Gate in Delhi, a gesture subsequently imitated by numerous other campaigns including Anna Hazare's, who gathered at India Gate on the evening of the day on which Anna finally broke his fast. In *Rang de Basanti* past and present blur, and they murder the corrupt defence minister, a plot line deemed so incendiary that the film was screened privately for the Congress alliance, then Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee, for prior approval. The same Pranab Mukherjee would, five years later, broker the rapprochement between the Congress Government and 'Team Anna'. At the Hazare India Gate event there was much evidence of the complexity of the historical echo chamber – for instance, the placard made by one protester which demanded that 'Black Englishmen Quit India' (*Kale Angrezo Bharat Choro*) and drew explicit parallels between the Quit India Movement of August 1942 and Anna's movement of August 2011 (see Fig. 8.6).

Rang de Basanti offers a variety of conflicting positions: at the beginning we see Bhagat in sepia flashback reading Lenin in prison prior to his execution and



Figure 8.6 *Kale Angrezo Bharat Choro* (Black Englishmen Quit India). Placard displayed at India Gate (Photo: C. Pinney).

lamenting to McKinley who takes him to be hanged that he has interrupted the meeting of 'one revolutionary with another'. Bhagat also tells McKinley that 'this isn't the end, this is just the beginning'. But in the *Rang de Basanti* version one has to wonder – the beginning of what? Towards the end of the film, after the friends have stormed a radio station they tell Indian youth that they must 'get involved', and here their revolutionary logic fails them since one of their suggestions to their disaffected countrymen is to 'join the police'.

Although the film upset many on the right (and was reportedly pulled from all Gujarati cinema halls), many on the left saw it as an appropriation of a collective struggle for justice into a practice of statist proceduralism in which ideology was of no account, merely, participation – 'doing something'. Many on the left complained that *Rang de Basanti* transformed Bhagat into a fashion accessory for Delhi's disaffected young bourgeoisie in the same way that *Lage Raho* transformed Gandhi into a funky grandfather.

In the autumn of 2012 Arvind Kejriwal struck out on his own, forming a political party (Aam Aadmi Party) and seemingly alienating himself from Hazare. He continues to struggle to establish an organisational base for the party but he has clearly signalled a trajectory that steers him away from the Gandhian 'belch'. He now wears a *topi* with the slogan '*Main hun aam aadmi*' ('I am the common man') and announced on 5 March 2013 that he would start an indefinite fast from 23 March which he hoped would become the focus of a new civil disobedience movement in which people would 'stop paying their bills.' Kejriwal points out that 23 March is no arbitrary date: it is, as he pointed out, 'the anniversary of Shaheed Bhagat Singh's martyrdom'.¹⁵

Leaving Delhi and heading ten hours by train south to the town and village in Madhya Pradesh, which I have been visiting since 1982, I found myself speaking with Kailash 'Haathi', a commercial photographer and old friend. It turned out that he had travelled to the Ramlila grounds a week earlier in order to express his political support for the Hazare campaign. A friend had commented that there was no evidence of anyone from Malwa (this area of Madhya Pradesh) at the protests and that someone should go. Hence Kailash decided to paint himself in Indian national colours and, having affixed a spindly tail, incarnate himself as Hanuman (see Fig. 8.7). Being a photographer and having a son engaged in the family business ensured that his departure for Delhi was extensively documented photographically, and it was also covered by a local cable news network. But this was as nothing compared to what he termed (using the English phrase) the 'total media coverage' that awaited him in Delhi. Here he was interviewed by dozens of journalists and asked to dance continuously in a roped-off area in front of the main stage upon which Hazare sat. Kailash excitedly told me about his appearance on the



Figure 8.7 Kailash leaves Nadga Jn for Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, dressed as the god Hanuman (Photo: Courtesy of K. Haathi).

Urdu channel, English channel, your Gujarati channel. Channels in the south. Wherever there is in the world, in all those channels. I went through the whole world. Also in China. A friend who works there in a factory rang his relative in Delhi and told him that he'd seen me [Hanuman] walking in Delhi.

Back in Madhya Pradesh his son used his mobile to film his father's numerous appearances on national television and I was shown mp4 footage on the computer in their photostudio in another display of 'folded' media.

As I headed further south, after two weeks in Madhya Pradesh en route to Mumbai, Anna Hazare's presence continued to remain inescapable. I attended the Ganesh *visarjan* or immersion on Girgaum beach on a rainswept day throughout the course of which numerous small and massive Ganesh images were 'cooled' in the Arabian Sea. Many of these had been extracted from tableaux in which the anti-corruption movement had featured prominently: in one case Ganesh was paired with Anna Hazare holding a placard demanding 'Stop Corruption Now!' In several other tableaux a *topi*-wearing Ganesh had himself become a recumbent Anna Hazare, just as the recumbent Anna Hazare at Ramlila Maidan had become Gandhi. Second Gandhi and second Ganesh: everything was already 'half-seen-in-advance' and in its familiarity seemed

inevitable. This 'involution' is what Deleuze describes as the 'fold' – that kind of origami procedure that folds the inside and outside, past and future into each other in complex new 'texturologies' in which old surfaces and historicities no longer have fixed identities.

The crowds at Girgaum, and elsewhere throughout western India on *anand chaudas*, have been gathering since the 1890s when the premier political theorist and nationalist of his epoch – Bal Gangadhar Tilak – decided that a collective occupation of public spaces by Hindus in the name of a colonially authorised 'religion' was one way of circumventing the colonial state's prohibition of potentially 'seditious' political activity. This is one example of what elsewhere I have analysed as 'iatrogenic' politics and religion, a 'contaminated' and new hybrid form of activity precipitated by attempts to escape constraints imposed by the colonial state.¹⁶

Derrida was no doubt correct to observe (in a prefiguration of Latour) that the engineer is simply a myth invented by the bricoleur.¹⁷ (To put it in Latourian-speak we might say that 'We Have Never Been Engineers'). We are all bricoleurs destined to fantasise about the possibility of becoming heroic engineers. Spivak points to a corresponding (i.e. symmetrical and inverted) danger of essentialising the stability of bricolage as a self-contained and self-present order

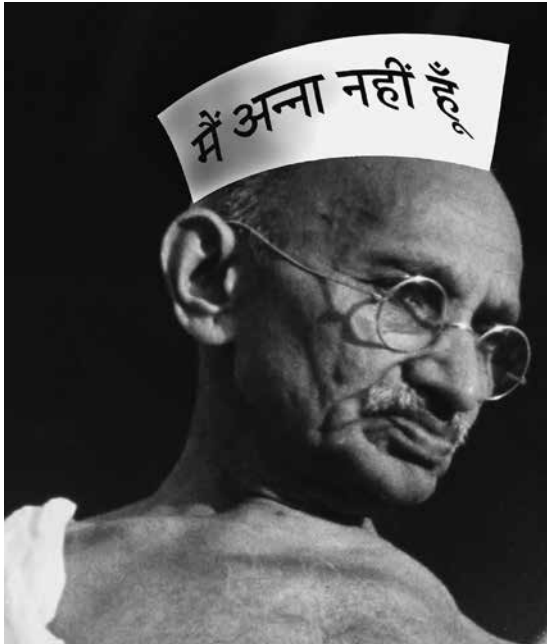


Figure 8.8 *Main anna nahin hun* (I am not Anna) (Photographic montage by R. Rahman. Courtesy of R. Rahman).

in which all possible terms are known in advance and are stable (i.e. 'repetition without difference' – the spurious certainty of speech). She points to a 'graphic of iterability' (we might think of this also as the logic of the concrete and of the mimetic) which introduces a slippage – a fundamental feature of iteration in which the self-sameness of the bricoleur transforms itself into its other.¹⁸ Bricolage thus ceases to be a closed system and becomes instead a messy zone of citational creativity.

The 'graphic of iterability' may be obscure, expressed in this Derridean language. However, as part of the science of the concrete – speaking through the medium of things, through visual citation – it may be more easily graspable. Hence the artist Ram Rahman turns *main anna hun* into something iterably different – a *topi* worn by M. K. Gandhi declaring *main anna nahin hun* (I am not Anna) (see Fig. 8.8). Here Gandhi himself, ostensibly the ground zero authorisation of repetition without difference, insists on its impossibility – 'We Have Never Been Engineers', but equally, bricolage has always been performatively and deformatively 'hot' in being politically charged, and citation will always be creative and unpredictable.

To emphasise 'hot' bricolage is to stress the political potentiality of the citational practices which surround the anti-corruption movement in India. In a global frame, dissent continues to take sustenance from Gandhi as a symbol, perhaps in recognition of his early mastery of spectacle. He articulated his own 'science of the concrete' through somatic experiments with his own body, and through the political mobilisation of material forms such as salt and *khadi* or homespun cloth.¹⁹ Gandhi was a presence in Tahrir Square through placards quoting him, and the Indian Ambassador to Egypt, Navdeep Suri, saw in Egyptian protesters' chants of '*silmayyia*' ('peaceful' or 'peacefully') further proof of his impact.²⁰

But it is also important to record the sense of impossibility and frustration that also characterises many village engagements with the movement, expressed perhaps most succinctly in the description of corruption being like '*gajar ghas*' ('carrot grass'). Carrot grass (*Parthenium hysterophorus*) is an invasive weed accidentally introduced into India in the 1970s in imports of US red wheat, which once present in a field is impossible to eradicate. Another commonly invoked metaphor likens corruption to a bamboo splinter, once inserted impossible to extricate.

Since the heady days of August 2011 the anti-corruption movement has split. Anna Hazare has retreated back to the security of Ralegan Siddhi, his Maharashtra village, and Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party, after dominating the headlines in late 2012 with a series of exposés of leading politicians, has struggled to build a political base, so far with little success.²¹ Indeed, one could argue that Anna Hazare movement's chief legacy is mass public support for the

Aadhaar, or the Unique Identification Scheme currently being trialled in various states including Madhya Pradesh. I was able to get myself enrolled, temporarily, in November 2012 and experienced the procedure at first hand. This system will eventually attach a twelve-digit number to a facial photograph, retinal scans and finger and thumb prints of every Indian citizen. Once 'all residents are enrolled' it will be impossible, it is claimed, to activate a mobile phone SIM card, open a bank account or travel in any reserved category on the railways without this twelve-digit number. Aadhaar is an astonishingly ambitious database with huge potential for state misuse, and yet every village and small-town resident with whom I have spoken embraces this project warmly. Their self-willed interpellation into the state appears to promise a freedom through visibility. As one low-paid labourer (in whom I had hoped to find evidence of subaltern resistance) told me, once he has his number he will be able to travel the whole length of India without *rok-tok* (obstacles or obstructions). Others stress the manner in which the *namber* (number) will prevent those without entitlement from claiming Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards that give them access to subsidised rations. State surveillance, in other words, promises to regulate petty corruption.

The perhaps surprising enthusiasm for Aadhaar by those who see in it the utopian possibility of finally achieving a citizenship of proper entitlement and free passage expresses a desire for a new form of contract between citizen and state of the kind that the Anna Hazare campaign foregrounded. This willing embrace of the necessity of making oneself visible to the state can be seen as one response to the persistent discourses around state 'blindness' that have emerged in recent anti-corruption agitations. Citizen-produced imagery, as we have already seen, repeatedly conjured a state blind to the injustices suffered by its citizens. Manmohan Singh was depicted as the blind king Dhritarashtra, and as head of an '*andhi sarkar*' ('blind government'). In choosing to see only the benefits of Aadhaar, rather than its potentially huge disciplinary capability, Indians might be understood to be seeking the rectification of an imbalance in the distribution of the visible in ways that would not surprise Jacques Rancière.²² In India, as elsewhere, a movement of dissent seems to be laying the foundations for a future regime which will better be able to regulate dissent.

NOTES

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21. Since the time of writing this main text, the Aam Aadmi Party achieved spectacular success in the Delhi Assembly Election in December 2013. Arvind Kejriwal, now a nationally recognisable political figure, stood in the Lok Sabha constituency of Varanasi against the BJP Prime Minister in waiting, Narendra Modi, in the current national elections (April–May 2014). The Aam Aadmi Party's national base remains patchy, however. See also Martin Webb's paper in this volume.
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CHAPTER 9

Short Circuits: The Aesthetics of Protest, Media and Martyrdom in Indian Anti-corruption Activism

MARTIN WEBB

INTRODUCTION

Protest movements do not just emerge out of nothing, however sudden their spectacular mobilisation might seem. They often have a hidden archaeology of sustained, less visible activism. In this chapter I develop two interwoven narratives that explore this in the context of India. One provides background and historical context to complement the chapter by Christopher Pinney for this volume, outlining a before and after to his rich visual analysis of the huge Indian anti-corruption protests during August 2011. I do this by looking at the emergence and organisation of some of the activist networks which gathered around the campaign for a *Jan Lokpal* (people's ombudsman) bill, figureheaded by the activist and social reformer Anna Hazare. I go back to a period before the events of 2011 to sketch out the shape of the well-established anti-corruption activist 'scene' from which the initial mobilisation for the protests developed. Drawing on fieldwork carried out in Delhi before and after the height of the protests of 2011, I explore how the relatively settled and stable connections and everyday practices of the anti-corruption scene were overlaid with a more dynamic and confrontational mode of engagement drawing on earlier repertoires of protest promoted in part through the use of social media and the development of a strong movement brand.

A second ethnographic narrative traces earlier iterations of protests in support of a *Jan Lokpal* bill through to an anti-corruption rally in Delhi in 2012, a rally held during a period in which the movement was widely seen to be waning. Here we see how the visual metaphors and narratives employed by anti-corruption activists show a shift in relation to themes of sacrifice, citizenship, the nation and, in particular, martyrdom. This shift is illuminating. When leading activists

undertake spectacular fasts, as in 2011, the potential for sacrifice and martyrdom is presented as a pregnant possibility. This possibility plays a central part in the rhetoric of the protest as the vital signs, the weight, blood sugar and pressure, heart rate and liver function of the person fasting are monitored and relayed to the expectant crowd and media. The monitoring of the suffering body of the person fasting creates a liminal moment, a collective holding of breath, which forestalls other potential modes of protest, in particular violence. The fasting body of the movement leader provides a centre around which other strategies and events are organised, both for and against the cause.

But the risks inherent in these highly monitored 'fasts unto death' might be contrasted to the risks faced by ordinary anti-corruption activists from around India. In recent years a number of activists have been murdered for attempting to expose corrupt or illegal practices in their local areas. The use in the 2012 protest described here of narratives and iconic imagery of these (extra)ordinary activists tells us something else about the anti-corruption movement which goes beyond a focus on the hot and spectacular phase of protest. It shows us how the anti-corruption scene celebrates itself through these icons of everyday struggle and in doing so creates a self-sustaining narrative that highlights continuity. In demonstrating how the 'second freedom struggle' can literally be a matter of life and death, anti-corruption activists present their work as a meaningful ongoing process rather than as subject to externally applied categories of success or failure.

In thinking about activism in this processual way I would argue that it is important to look beyond the hot phase of the protests in order to contextualise these political movements; to look around their edges and behind the scenes to better understand not just their novelty, but also something of their histories and social lives. In doing so we might learn something about how activists imagine the worlds that their actions prefigure, and the role that this plays in the style and practice of the action. We might also think, in this case, about how corruption and anti-corruption are such 'fecund signifiers'¹ that they allow short circuits to be made between the different levels through which people understand and experience their citizenship, between the micro interpersonal/local and the national and transnational. These discursive short circuits allow people to connect everyday struggles to larger themes, producing not just imaginations of the state,² but understandings of why things are as they are and what might be done to effect change.

In this respect the politics of anti-corruption, by connecting everyday local events to a sense of national malaise, allows the incorporation of disparate social and political subjectivities – strange bedfellows – and the projection of an uncritical politics focused on the formal citizenship of an imagined *Aam Aadmi* (common man). Like that of the 'unknown soldier', the experience and struggle

of the *Aam Aadmi* is a singularity through which threats to the nation might be rhetorically expressed, but also, through action in the form of individual active citizenship, and sacrifice in the form of abstinence (from food or bribery), or even martyrdom, a means by which national renewal is presented as a possibility.

MOVEMENTS AND SCENES: A PARTIAL HISTORY OF ANTI-CORRUPTION
ACTIVISM IN INDIA

Since independence in 1947, corruption has been a recurring public concern in India and movements against corruption have played a significant role in the political landscape that can be traced through to the present day. The first Five Year Plan for the nation declared 'a continuous war against every species of corruption within the administration as well as in public life generally'.³ Subsequent reports into the reform of public administration identified a need to simultaneously promote public virtue and put mechanisms in place that would mitigate opportunities for patronage,⁴ a policy narrative which has remained fundamentally unchanged.⁵ In the 1950s and 60s the voices and moral authority of veteran Gandhian, *Sarvodaya* (progress for all), and socialist activists such as J. B. Kripalani and Jayaprakash (JP) Narayan were significant in developing a political narrative which attributed bureaucratic and political corruption to an incomplete revolution at independence. Systems, privileges and personnel had been carried over from the colonial administration into the new civil services in the haste to start the country on the course of national development, they argued, and national renewal was required to set the country back on course.⁶ This narrative and the actions which flowed from it provide the antecedents of the 'second freedom struggle' discourse prevalent today in contemporary Indian anti-corruption activism.⁷

The first iteration of this 'second freedom struggle' was the emergence in the early 1970s of a non-violent mass movement for bureaucratic and political reform in the northern state of Bihar, led by JP Narayan. What became known as the 'JP movement' took on national significance and posed a direct challenge to the government of Indira Gandhi,⁸ accusing her of corruption and misrule. A simultaneous legal challenge in the Uttar Pradesh High Court to the legitimacy of Indira Gandhi's election to parliament by her electoral opponent Raj Narain, citing corruption, malpractice and a lack of transparency in her constituency campaign,⁹ also put pressure on the Prime Minister. Gandhi lost the case, invalidating her election, but managed to persuade the President that the threat of political disorder required the suspension of democratic government. Emergency rule was declared in June 1975, remaining in force until 1977. JP Narayan and a great many other activists were arrested and jailed. Arguably the most significant political event and challenge to India's democracy since independence had

been precipitated by an anti-corruption movement framed as a second freedom struggle, and by a legal case focused on issues of corruption, accountability and the abuse of power.

Corruption stayed very much within the public consciousness through the post-emergency era and across the partial dismantling of the 'License-Permit Raj'¹⁰ that took place with the liberalisation of the Indian economy after 1991. Although there was some reform and a reduction in the commanding role of the state, in line with the policy logic of good governance, economic liberalisation offered opportunities for new arrangements between state and private sector actors,¹¹ and significant corruption 'scams' continued to dominate the news. With liberalisation came the emergence of a 'new middle class', a class less often employed as state bureaucrats but instead in newly developed sectors such as information technology and outsourced international business processes. Fear of, and dissatisfaction with, bureaucratic and political corruption became part of a new middle-class political subjectivity. Discourses of corruption became wrapped into new middle-class moralities and perceptions of the nation and of electoral representation, and into everyday social distinctions and spatial politics, particularly in urban India.¹²

These political and economic events and social processes echo in the politics of the contemporary Indian anti-corruption activism scene¹³ which has coalesced since the mid-1990s through the intersection of campaigns and activist networks gathered around specific issues: for example, the institution and implementation of the Right to Information (known colloquially as the 'RTI'); the declaration of assets and criminal records of political candidates; campaigns for judicial accountability; and most recently the campaign for a *Jan Lokpal*. Across the 1990s and early 2000s, a number of organisations emerged to engage with concerns about corruption, aiming to encourage Indian citizens to take a more active role in auditing and monitoring the public sector. Rural organisations, such as Anna Hazare's *Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Andolan* (People's Movement Against Corruption) (BVJA) in Maharashtra, or the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (Labourers and Farmers Power Organisation) (MKSS) in Rajasthan, deploying a 'movement' style of pro-poor, non-party, voluntary political action at the 'grass-roots',¹⁴ and associating broadly with the secular left in Indian politics, gained prominence for their work in accessing official documents through which the implementation of the government's pro-poor development projects could be audited.¹⁵ In southern India, metropolitan middle-class NGOs such as Loksatta in Hyderabad and the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore took on corruption and governance as a central theme in their work, developing local constituencies and gaining prominence in national and international policy circles.

Urban grassroots groups such as the East Delhi based *Parivartan* gained prominence in the early 2000s, taking the tactic of social audit backed up by legal

mechanisms for transparency and accountability into impoverished working-class neighbourhoods and developing links between well-connected middle-class activists and the urban poor.¹⁶ The success of Parivartan in particular lifted the putative leader of the group, Arvind Kejriwal, at the time a senior Internal Revenue Service Officer, to national prominence, even before he took his leading role in the anti-corruption protests of 2011. This period also saw the emergence of the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information (NCPRI) and the related Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Both groups were oriented to lobbying central government and using legal provisions such as public interest litigation (PIL) to institute legal measures to combat bureaucratic and political corruption. Significant milestones were the success of the ADR campaign in 2002 to require election candidates to file affidavits detailing their criminal, financial and educational backgrounds, and the central role which leading NCPRI activists¹⁷ played in the drafting process for the Right to Information Act of 2005.¹⁸

The period which saw the opening-up of the Indian state and economy under liberalisation also saw the mainstreaming of 'rights-based approaches' to development in the language of donors, governments and development practitioners,¹⁹ and the penetration of international good governance policy norms focused on transparency and accountability into state planning.²⁰ This shift helped to open up the administrative reform processes to accommodate roles for civil society organisations and advisors, an environment which allowed the activist scene to mature to the point that individual activists, CBOs or NGOs took up subcontracting roles providing expertise, training and media support to government, business and development agencies, as well as to other NGO networks. In turn some of this advocacy activity was funded through links maintained with international social entrepreneurship foundations, NGOs based in the Indian Diaspora, and through agencies such as the Ford Foundation.²¹ In these respects by the mid-2000s significant parts of the anti-corruption activism scene had been effectively 'projectised'²² in that considerable material, organisational, human and symbolic resources had gathered around particular issues, activist networks and prominent individuals.

Transparency and accountability mechanisms, such as the Right to Information, have become emblematic of everyday struggles against corruption, presented as the tools through which the 'common man' might raise a voice and interrogate bureaucratic and political rule at both local and national levels. These are mechanisms provided for the use of Indian citizens whatever their class, status or political affiliation, although it is class, status and political affiliation that often determines the uses to which they are put.²³ As well as playing a role in the 'movement' politics and actions of pro-poor CBOs, mechanisms such as the Right to Information Act 2005 were eagerly taken up by the 'new middle

classes²⁴ of the ‘metro’ cities in local campaigns against corruption. In Delhi this happened particularly through Residents’ Welfare Association (RWA) activism oriented towards issues such as infrastructure maintenance, cleanliness, land use and the removal of slums, key features around which the reordering of urban spaces in India’s cities, highlighted in the recent work of a number of scholars, has taken place.²⁵

As internet usage expanded in India, metropolitan middle-class activists and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), particularly in the US, were also connecting with each other through busy message boards and forums with titles such as *Hum Janenge* (We will know) on which anti-corruption ‘crusaders’ would share experiences and discuss strategies and issues concerning the implementation of transparency mechanisms and legislation. Enmities as well as friendships are played out on message boards, especially through the participation of iconoclastic individuals interested in questioning government policy and spending, but who are also highly suspicious of the politics of the more organised and institutionalised ‘activist’ scene and its leaders. Perhaps because of some activists’ and groups’ connections to secular left politics (since some groups support the rights of slum-dwellers and other marginalised groups in India’s cities), but often because of the suspicion that some activists were benefiting from funding that flowed from foreign sources and thus were involved in ‘anti-nation’ activities.²⁶

Considering all this, we can appreciate why most of my earlier research into anti-corruption activism in Delhi took place not in situations of emotional street protest but in homes, workspaces and meeting rooms in which activists gathered to discuss the fine detail of strategy or the nuances of the law, to help clients with paperwork problems or to intercede in cases of bureaucratic delay.²⁷ The aesthetic of the scene I researched in Delhi was a workaday one, the issues mostly personal to the clients that came to organisations for help. In the quotidian work of activists, ‘Corruption’ (*Bhrashtachar*) acted as a meta-concept to which other issues were linked. The term did not have the central significance that it would take on during the protests of 2011. This is not particularly surprising; the hot phase of protests requires strong words around which people can gather. The everyday work of activism and advocacy employs a subtler and less confrontational use of language.

Within the anti-corruption scene prior to 2011 instances of spectacular protest, the emotionally charged *dharna* (sit-in) or the making of demands through public fasting, were exceptional. During my earlier fieldwork in Delhi I encountered two significant instances, and to connect the themes of active citizenship and sacrifice raised in the introduction with the more quotidian existence of the anti-corruption scene, it is to one of these that I will now turn.²⁸

SYSTEM RATIONALISTS AND SATYAGRAHIS
– AN EARLIER CAMPAIGN FOR A *LOKPAL*

On a Sunday afternoon in late August 2007 I was sitting with a group of activists of the Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade (GSB) at a protest outside the gates of the Gandhi memorial garden at Raj Ghat in central Delhi. The group were gathering to protest at the government's failure to introduce a bill to institute a parliamentary ombudsman, the *Lokpal*, who would have the power to hold members of parliament accountable and provide a mechanism through which complaints against them might be investigated. Although the agitation for a *Jan Lokpal* bill led by Anna Hazare in 2011 is perhaps the most prominent campaign to date, the issue is an old one. Versions of the *Lokpal* bill had been introduced to parliament on eight occasions since the 1960s, but all had failed to pass through both houses. When the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had come to power in 2004, it had included a promise to enact the bill as part of an administrative reforms agenda in the document setting out its aims, the 'Common Minimum Programme'.²⁹ By 2007 there had still been no movement on this issue and the GSB, after a long campaign of letter writing, had decided to move to a programme of outdoor protests, on every other Sunday, until the *Lokpal* bill was passed.

The GSB is an offshoot of the Delhi chapter of the *Lok Sevak Sangh* (LSS), an NGO established in the late 1970s by activists imprisoned by the emergency-era regime of Indira Gandhi. The LSS is in turn a wing of one of India's oldest NGOs, the Servants of the People Society, founded in 1921 by the independence movement leader Lala Lajpat Rai. The group is oriented to Gandhian social service and community development, but also has a long-held focus on corruption issues and on political corruption in particular. The Delhi chapter of the Lok Sevak Sangh is also notable because in the late 1990s it had taken on the responsibility of being the Indian franchise, for want of a better word, of Transparency International (TI), arguably the world's best known and most influential anti-corruption NGO.

By the mid-2000s the LSS was largely an organisation of older 'grey' activists led by the then octogenarian Shambhu Dutt,³⁰ a lawyer and freedom fighter involved in Gandhian social service since his participation in the Quit India movement. Many LSS/TI activists have held high rank in the civil and defence services, or in the judiciary, and as such the group has some influence and reach even if it does not have a great deal in the way of funds. This influence, the ability to gain the ear of high ranking contacts within the state, was central to the group's strategy for promoting its aims and for encouraging government-owned Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) involved in industries such as oil, gas and steel production to adopt Transparency International branded anti-corruption products such as the 'Integrity Pact'.³¹

Thus the LSS draws together vernacular forms of Indian anti-corruption activism based on Gandhian principles of nation building and moral authority, the class and bureaucratic hierarchies of the Indian establishment and the brand name of an extremely influential international anti-corruption NGO. Taken together, these factors provide sufficient social and cultural capital to allow the LSS to send representatives to high-level forums such as the government of India's Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), which in its final reports had recommended the institution of the *Lokpal* and the forfeiture of illegally held assets, two of the LSS's main aims.³²

The intended style of the Sunday protests had been set out in the minutes of a meeting earlier in the year. They stipulated that there be no eating and drinking at the protest, 'no obstruction to traffic, no shouting of slogans'. The protest, in the form of a performance of *satyagraha* (truth force), was to be organised to:

scrupulously observe the following basic postulates laid down by the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi: a) Satyagraha is a *tapasya* (penance) for the truth; there is no place in it for untruth or violence. b) In Satyagraha there is no enemy, and no hatred or ill-will for the opponent; and c) A satyagrahi knows no defeat.³³



Figure 9.1 The Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade protest in 2007 close to the gate of Raj Ghat, the memorial to and cremation site of M. K. Gandhi in Delhi (Photo: M. Webb).

This aim produced a quiet and sober event. A white *pandal* (cloth tent), of the type used for outdoor social gatherings, had been hired and erected on a stretch of pavement across the busy road from the gate of the memorial garden. Inside the *pandal* a low dais covered in white cloth and with a few bolster cushions was erected, and at its foot were a small number of cloth-covered chairs for those attending in support. The dais was reserved for activists who had volunteered to fast for the day, identified by black armbands. Around the neck of one of the volunteers on red ribbon hung a simple black-on-white printed sign, ‘Condemn corruption – bring Lokpal’, providing legal detail to the simple white banner declaring ‘Satyagraha Against Political Corruption’ in blue lettering hung across the front of the *pandal*. The atmosphere inside was quite jovial. The activists, all middle-class men of retirement age, were very personable. They were here to support Shambhu Dutt, and were enjoying their Sunday out together (see Figs 9.1 and 9.2).

Although Dutt was not fasting on this occasion, it was very much his moral authority that brought the men together. Through his life history Shambhu Dutt connected the protest to two significant events in the history of the Indian



Figure 9.2 ‘Condemn Corruption: Bring Lokpal’ – sign around the neck of a fasting volunteer at the Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade protest at Raj Ghat 2007 (Photo: M. Webb).

nation. The original anti-colonial freedom movement in which Dutt had marched with M. K. Gandhi, and had been imprisoned by the British, and the emergency period from 1975 to 1977 during which he had been imprisoned again by the Indian government for his connection to the JP movement. Through the person of Shambhu Dutt the Sunday protests referenced both struggles, an idea reflected in the discourse of those present that the nation was undergoing a second freedom struggle, a struggle against the rule of corrupt politicians.

The conversation of the activists followed familiar registers of corruption talk in Delhi. They reflected the concerns and everyday complaints of upper-middle-class residents of the city's 'garden colonies'³⁴ that the city, and by extension the nation, was dysfunctional because of corruption. 'Why were there so many unauthorised buildings in the city?' 'Because municipal engineers have been bribed to turn a blind eye to their construction.' 'Why were the private buses in the city involved in so many accidents?' 'Because their rich and influential owners pay off the police and government inspectors to ignore the flouting of safety regulations and speed limits.' 'Why were the streets not cleaned properly?' 'Because the municipal sweepers were paying off their bosses to allow them to moonlight at other jobs.' To paraphrase Evans-Pritchard on witchcraft amongst the Azande,³⁵ corruption was presented as a means of explaining any 'unfortunate events'. In turn these narratives were interspersed with stories of visits to relatives abroad, most often in the US or Canada, and descriptions of encounters with order and civility, civic pride, bureaucratic courtesy and efficiency beyond India. Another register dealt more specifically with the criminalisation of politics and the abuse of power by elected officials. Again this register is connected to the understanding of both the city and the nation and intersects with the middle-class concerns about 'dirty politics' so often expressed in the forums, both face to face and online, in which members of Delhi's Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) meet to discuss ways in which the city might be reordered.³⁶

From these conversations a focus on fixing systems emerged. As one activist, a retired military officer who also acted as a consultant on governance issues, suggested, *Babus* (civil servants) had become so used to not being questioned that it is no surprise that they are confused when suddenly, through mechanisms such as the Right to Information, they are told that they should 'entertain' public grievances. But, he added, at the same time the officials can also reasonably claim, and often do, that they themselves are victims of an inflexible system. Thus, he argued, better systems, and a great deal of training, needed to be put in place that would allow people inside the government to stop pulling in different directions and start working for the public. Reproducing the development 'project speak' prevalent in global efforts to promote governance,³⁷ people like himself, he said, could have a role 'training the trainers'.

The quiet nature of the protest allowed plenty of space for these conversations and also for other leisurely activities such as the breaking up and passing round of the Sunday paper, the ritual perusal of the matrimonial sections and the discussion of current affairs. My presence at the protests also provided some light relief and an opportunity to question a foreigner about my experience of India. Passers-by entering the gate of the Gandhi memorial garden opposite would look across at the protest but the lack of spectacle, the road that lay between the gate and the *pandal* and perhaps the sign being in English did not encourage many to make a closer inspection.

Catching a lift back to south Delhi with four of the *satyagrahis* one Sunday after the protest, there was talk in the car of taking stronger action. One man in particular thought that the protest was too quiet and should take a more confrontational stance, but there seemed little chance at the time that this would happen. The protests produced a couple of columns in the Delhi papers, but no further media splash.³⁸

2011 – MOVING TO THE CENTRE

The GSB continued their letter-writing campaigns and occasional fasts between 2007 and 2010, but by January 2011 they had decided to move their protest to the central Delhi site known as ‘Jantar Mantar’. The Jantar Mantar itself is an historical monument, a Mughal-era astronomical observatory sited a few hundred metres from the central New Delhi shopping area of Connaught Place. But behind the monument and running south towards the central government ministries, Parliament and the national monuments of India Gate and the President’s residence, is Jantar Mantar Road, Delhi’s authorised protest site for over two decades. The wide road allows space for thousands of people to gather and easy access for the outside broadcasting trucks of Delhi’s rolling news networks. It is often the site of long-term protests and fasts, with representatives of protest movements from all over India coming to the ‘centre’ to highlight their cause and petition the government.

From the beginning of January 2011 the GSB organised a month-long ‘rolling fast’ at Jantar Mantar. An online petition started by the group set out the plan:

Members and supporters of GSB are sitting on a relay fast since Jan 01, 2011 at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi [...] A few members of GSB sit on hunger strike from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM every day. This will continue till Jan 28, 2011. If the government does not do anything by Jan 29, then seven (7) Gandhians will go on a fast-unto-death from Jan 30 (Martyrs Day, the day Mahatma Gandhi died), 2011. The seven Gandhians who will go on the fast-unto-death include six freedom fighters who took part in the Quit India Movement

and later struggles [...] The ever-increasing corruption is destroying, nay, has destroyed, the moral fibre of the Nation. Corruption is not an issue limited to any one or a few political parties. Who will set this right, where shall a common citizen go, for the elimination of political corruption, except pressure from all, or a significant proportion of concerned citizens?³⁹

The GSB's decision to move to a 'fast-unto-death' could have serious consequences: the youngest of the six *satyagrahis* was seventy-eight years old. But the wider context in which the fast was taking place had also changed. Revelations of massive corruption scandals relating to the preparations for the Commonwealth Games and the selling-off of bandwidth licences for the next generation of 2G mobile phones had surfaced, and the *Lokpal* had gained attention as a possible campaigning issue. Responding to these scandals in the latter part of 2010, prominent anti-corruption campaigners had come together under the banner India Against Corruption (IAC) and formed an alliance with two new players in the anti-corruption scene, both with access to considerable support and resources: the yoga guru Baba Ramdev and the leader of the Art of Living Foundation, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.⁴⁰ The period had also seen the emergence of social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, as campaigning tools.⁴¹ Further afield the Arab Spring was gaining momentum and mass protests in Egypt at the end of January were threatening the power of the Mubarak regime.

In a 2013 interview with Shivendra Singh Chauhan, an influential figure in the development of the IAC social media campaign, he described to me how it was 30 January 2011 that marked a profound shift in the campaign for the *Lokpal* bill. This was the day in which large numbers of people emerged onto the street in cities around India in response to a call which had been broadcast across social media, particularly Facebook, since late the previous year. It was also the day on which leading members of the IAC went to visit the GSB *satyagrahis* at the site of their fast at Jantar Mantar and persuaded them that they should give up their sacrifice and let the higher-profile, better connected to media and better organised IAC campaign take over the fight. In its monthly bulletin of February 2011 the LSS noted that:

We are coordinating with India Against Corruption in this crusade [...] Shri Arvind Kejriwal asked us to request the *satyagrahis* to postpone their fast, which started from Jan 30th, since it clashed with their rally, to which we expressed our reservation and told them that the *satyagrahi's* resolve would in fact support their cause.⁴²

However, confronted with the possibility that the leaders of the IAC would visit the *dharna* site with 'hundreds of their supporters', and after consultations with

their own supporters and working committee, the GSB activists decided that it would be 'unwise' not to agree with the request, and that they should present a joint front with other organisations pursuing the same cause.⁴³ The fast-unto-death was abandoned.

SHIFTING A GEAR: SOCIAL MEDIA, MARKETING AND MARTYRDOM

I am not going to deal with the protests of 2011 in detail; Christopher Pinney's chapter in this volume provides insight into the aesthetics of these events and the citational folding into the protests of the freedom struggle, popular film, and nationalist and religious iconography. However, it is worth noting briefly once again the importance of the 2006 films *Rang de Basanti*⁴⁴ and *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*,⁴⁵ with their narratives of national renewal and the possibility of a second freedom struggle, to the anti-corruption scene. *Rang de Basanti* had already been woven into the repertoire of earlier anti-corruption protests and what Ritesh Mehta calls 'flash activism' engendered by news media-led SMS campaigns aimed at the middle classes. This effect was most obviously manifested in Delhi in 2006 through a series of protests, including *Rang de Basanti*-inspired candlelit vigils at India Gate, over the acquittal of the accused in the sensational murder of the model Jessica Lal.⁴⁶

Some commentators were sceptical about the extent of *Rang de Basanti*-inspired middle-class mobilisation, particularly beyond urban north India.⁴⁷ However, what is not in doubt is the effect that the film had on the repertoire of middle-class protest in Delhi after its release in 2006. At the time my activist informants were focused on organising a national anti-corruption campaign, the 'Drive Against Bribe', anchored from Delhi and headed by figures who would later become prominent members of the IAC movement in 2011, including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia.⁴⁸ The campaign aimed to help people solve bureaucratic problems and delays by using the Right to Information.⁴⁹ It was organised through tie-ups with newspapers and TV news networks, particularly NDTV, and drew on the potential, articulated by *Rang de Basanti*, for political engagement by middle-class people beyond a politics based on struggles over urban space and caste.⁵⁰ My activist informants noted the way that the film affected the willingness of people, particularly young students from Delhi University, to volunteer for the campaign. The influence of *Rang de Basanti*'s patriotic narrative of radicalised middle-class youth and martyrdom was borne out by the enthusiasm for the film among young student volunteers at the Delhi 'Drive Against Bribe' camp I attended in the summer of 2006.⁵¹ I was asked again and again by young volunteers if I had seen the film, and was told by many that they had been to see it multiple times. Candlelit vigils became a familiar part of the repertoire at activist events such as these, with informants identifying



Figure 9.3 The Delhi Drive Against Bribe camp – Indira Gandhi Stadium, 2 July 2006 (Photo: M. Webb).



Figure 9.4 Drive Against Bribe banner, Delhi, 2006 (Photo: M. Webb).

them specifically as a post-*Rang de Basanti* phenomenon.⁵² The character of the Drive Against Bribe camp itself was not one of protest, however. The volunteers were there to help people with everyday bureaucratic problems, and the national colours of saffron, white and green, so much in evidence in the 2011 anti-corruption protests, were not present either in the logo or at the regional camps (see Figs 9.3 and 9.4).

In the 2011 *Jan Lokpal* bill protests, activists were attempting to reforge the instrument of collective action by the middle classes through the medium of social media. While talking to Shivendra Singh Chauhan in a Skype interview in February 2013, he sent me a number of links to different Facebook pages and YouTube videos relating to the 30 January 2011 protests. In a YouTube compilation of photographs of protest marches from cities around the country,⁵³ the song ‘*Khalabali*’ (‘upheaval’ or ‘turmoil’) from *Rang de Basanti* provides the soundtrack to a slide show of marchers carrying banners, many showing the increasingly ubiquitous India Against Corruption logo.

Shivendra told me the story of how the logo was developed. At an anti-corruption rally in Delhi on 14 November 2010, at which movement leaders had gathered to speak out and organise action against a number of recent corruption scandals, Shivendra had taken a photograph of one of the posters at the event (see Fig. 9.5).

Liking the design of the image, Shivendra sent it to his friend Akash, a graphic designer, and asked him to work it up into a logo for the IAC campaign. Akash sent back five variations of which one was chosen (see Fig. 9.6). The saffron and green represent two of the colours of the Indian *tiranga* (tricolour), but here the pure white band of the national flag is turned to the black of corruption.

In the use of these national colours, in contrast to the visual representations used in the Drive Against Bribe campaign, which focused on individuals acting against corruption on behalf of themselves, we see the emergence of an aesthetic short circuit that connects the idea of corruption directly to the idea of the nation. If the Drive Against Bribe campaign was about finding solutions to personal grievances with the state,⁵⁴ then this new campaign instead signifies the threat to the nation engendered by corruption.

The logo was uploaded to the IAC Facebook page and also circulated through an email campaign calling people to march on 30 January, and in which Shivendra asked people to:



Figure 9.5 *Janyuddh Bhrashtachar ke virodh* – People’s War Against Corruption (Photo: S. Singh Chauhan).



Figure 9.6 The India Against Corruption campaign logo, a ubiquitous symbol during the protests of 2011 and 2012 (Photo: S. Singh Chauhan).

Please forward this email to everyone you know. This won't get you free laptops or mobiles, nor will it bring you bad luck and misfortune. This is how you can spread the word and do your bit in India's decisive war against corruption.⁵⁵

In these actions we see the emergence of a brand for the 2011 campaign, and a means of dissemination which is focused on internet users, the majority of whom will be from the metropolitan middle classes. Shivendra told me that the IAC Facebook page started to gain 'traction' after the email campaign and that up to 30 January he had worked hard with activist networks and also with workers from the Art of Living Foundation to try to spread marches to as many cities as possible. In the end there was interest in organising marches from sixty cities in India, and internationally. Shivendra noted how the possibility of organising such a large event through social media caught many activists and the mainstream media by surprise. He also stressed that because of the medium many who attended, and who also later attended the fast by Anna Hazare at Ramlila Maidan in north central Delhi, were 'not activists', but 'office goers', and he included himself in this.

Social media played a further role in the branding of the IAC campaign with the creation of a central site from which to download digital images relating to



Figure 9.7 Protestors in Pune, Maharashtra with IAC branding banners picket an MP's residence (Photo: Courtesy IAC Branding).



Figure 9.8 Protestors in Israel with IAC branding images. The banner in the centre reads 'India's Second Freedom Movement' and uses images of revolutionaries and martyrs for independence, including Bhagat Singh (Photo: Courtesy S. Lal – IAC Branding).

the campaign. Developed by marketing executives and web developers dispersed around the country and working as volunteers, the *iacbranding.org* website offered a number of different images to be used for different purposes as banners, posters or T-shirt prints. The banners were secular in theme, except where the iconic figure of Anna Hazare with fist raised was paired with an image of Baba Ramdev and the slogan ‘Anna Baba *saath saath*’ (‘Anna and Baba together’). Many images grouped Anna Hazare with national icons of the freedom struggle such as Gandhi or the revolutionary martyr Bhagat Singh, citing the struggle for independence and reiterating its themes.

Utilising social media, the branding of the campaign was fast paced. Sunil Lal, a key figure in the IAC branding team, told me how the team was not directed from the IAC campaign office but rather kept track of the campaign and responded to events. He recalled:

In [a] wartime like situation we kept ourselves glued to the TV and followed each and every word of Anna Hazare very carefully. Between that we picked up ideas and created slogans and designs at a lightning speed and posted them on the website and Facebook to spread it immediately. One instance I would like to narrate [...] It was on 20th August 2011 at Ramlila Grounds, when Anna gave a call to *gherao* [surround/picket] homes of MPs in their native cities all across India, as they were not paying any heed to our demands. It was around 2pm. We immediately sat down to create banners for the protest. Within an hour we had posted 4 banners on the site. And in evening by around 5pm onwards we saw that those banners were used across the nation.

Sunil provided a number of photographs of people using *iacbranding.com* materials which he had collected on the group’s Facebook page (see Fig. 9.7). Locations included Israel, Chicago and Geneva (see Fig. 9.8).

The potential for feedback between the digital production of the banners and their digital reproduction in photographs of protests became a powerful driver for Facebook pages related to the campaign. The images – encouraging ‘likes’ and other comments – were in turn monitored by IAC activists reviewing Facebook site usage statistics in order to gauge the popularity of images, actions and events.⁵⁶

SHAHID DIWAS: COMMON MEN AND MARTYRS

In 2012 I returned to India. Through attending and viewing news coverage of public protests against corruption, I was struck once again by the dynamic nature of the Indian political archive and the way in which images from the past are ‘spewed into the future’,⁵⁷ not just through the referencing of images of martyrs from the original freedom struggle, iconic figures nationally recognised,

but also through the use of images of martyrs from the modern anti-corruption scene itself. By this I mean that the activist scene I saw in 2012 reflects on and celebrates its own continuing existence, aesthetically connecting the struggles of ordinary citizens and the threat that corruption poses to the nation.

I arrived at the 25 March protest at Jantar Mantar to be greeted by a scene very different from the *Lokpal* bill protests of the Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade in 2006. Hawkers lined the pavement next to the Jantar Mantar monument, selling Indian flag wristbands, face paints, T-shirts and badges, and the ubiquitous *Anna topi* (hat), a white nylon replica of Anna Hazare's own headgear with 'Main Anna Hun' on one side and the English translation 'I am Anna' on the other (see Fig. 9.9). Instead of the quiet white *pandal* of the Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade there was a large and very loud sound system linked to a covered stage. Big screens placed in the crowd showed pictures of the stage as well as short films to engage the crowds when there was no action to look at. Across the width of Jantar Mantar Road, stretching from the stage, was a rank of media crews sitting in elevated positions with boom cameras ready to swing out over the crowd. At the other end of the street a pack of outside broadcast vans had gathered with snaking cables and generators (see Fig. 9.10).

There were other *dharnas* on at Jantar Mantar Road that day, one a large group of people who had been the victims of a collapsed marketing scheme and



Figure 9.9 Hawkers with Anna T-shirts and caps – Jantar Mantar, Delhi, 25 March 2012 (Photo: M. Webb).



Figure 9.10 Looking down Jantar Mantar Road across the crowd at the 25 March 2012 protest (Photo: M. Webb).

were asking the government for compensation, and two others campaigning for reservations for government jobs. But it was clear that this one-day fast by Anna Hazare was going to be the main event. When I arrived at about 9am there were already hundreds there. As the morning progressed the crowd swelled to several thousand as people filtered through the barriers at the top of the road, were searched perfunctorily by policemen with metal detectors and were then released into what had become an arena. It was a mixed crowd of the middle classes, in the broader sense. Along with the Delhi RWA activists carrying the banners of their organisations and the groups of students from colleges such as the elite Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), there were also substantial numbers of people who had come into the city from the surrounding states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. The crowd appeared predominantly male and over 30. To complement the hawkers outside, the IAC also had an official merchandise stall selling T-shirts and hats and providing information. One of the items on offer was the latest plan to allow people to connect with each other and to try to keep the momentum going. The ‘Anna Card’, also available in Hindi and costing twenty rupees, was a further attempt to reach out to those without easy access to internet connections, building on earlier phases of the campaign in which supporters had been invited to send a missed call to the IAC



Figure 9.11 An ‘Anna Card’ bought by the author at the 25 March 2012 event in Delhi (Photo: M. Webb).

as a means of ‘liking’ the movement (see Fig. 9.11).

When Anna Hazare arrived in a two-car convoy, the crowd mobbed the vehicles and then escorted him to the stage. As he emerged out of the crowd onto the stage the prominent IAC activist Kumar Vishwas, who later went on to become a leading member of the Aam Aadmi Party, started a call-and-response with the crowd: ‘*Bharat Mata Ki,*’ called the MC, to which the crowd responded, finishing the sentence with a resounding ‘*Jai!*’ (together the phrase makes ‘Long Live Mother India’); ‘*Vande,*’ called the MC, ‘*Mataram,*’ replied the crowd (‘I bow to you mother’ – from a poem by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, now the national song of India); ‘*Inqilab!*’ (‘Revolution!’) called the MC, ‘*Zindabad!*’ (‘Long live!’) replied the crowd. Throughout the day the speeches of leading IAC activists would be introduced with these calls-and-responses, references not just to the nation, but also directly to the freedom struggle, and thus to the IAC ‘movement’ as the second freedom struggle. Looking across the crowd the overwhelming impression was of an event such as a national cricket match, the Tiranga being the most visible symbol by far (see Fig. 9.12).

The stage was dressed in white with two national flags crossed at the back. To the left of these was a large banner bearing the image seen in Fig. 9.13.

The text might be translated as ‘How many more martyrs in the war against corruption? If we had the *Jan Lokpal* bill then perhaps these lives would have been saved!’ The special theme of the day was one of martyrdom and remembrance. Although the banner bears the totemic image of M. K. Gandhi, 23 March is



Figure 9.12 Anna Hazare taking the stage at Jantar Mantar, 25 March 2012 (Photo: M. Webb).

भ्रष्टाचार के खिलाफ जंग, कितने और शहीद?



अगर जनलोकपाल बिल होता तो शायद ये ज़िंदा होते!

www.indiaagainstcorruption.org 09718 500 606

Figure 9.13 How many more martyrs in the war against corruption? (Photo: indiaagainstcorruption.org).

actually the anniversary of the death of independence revolutionaries Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru, hanged by the British colonial government in 1931, and is celebrated as a *shahid diwas* (martyr's day).⁵⁸ The smaller images on the banner were the faces of activists from around the country who had challenged corruption and had been murdered as a result. Many of these cases involved people who had used the Right to Information, often with great persistence, to attempt to uncover connections between state officials and practices such as illegal mining.⁵⁹ Joining Anna Hazare on stage were the families of some of those who had been killed. They gave speeches about their relatives, and short films were shown detailing the cases in a dramatic news style. Other displays relating to martyrs were more homemade such as the one commemorating Narendra Kumar, an Indian Police Service officer who had been murdered in March 2012 for his work to expose illegal stone mining in Maharashtra (see Fig. 9.14).

Through the use of these images of anti-corruption martyrs, we see how the protest creates a space in which short-circuit connections can be made between local issues in which anti-corruption activists are involved and what is perceived as the national malaise of corruption. The connection between the first and



Figure 9.14 'Imandar IPS afsar shahid Narendra Kumar amar rahe' ('Upright/correct IPS officer martyr Narendra Kumar, immortal/undying') (Photo: M. Webb).

'second' freedom struggles is manifested in the aesthetics and poetics of the protest. At the same moment the nation, and the common man's possible relationship with the nation as an active citizen, is made immanent through the cropped family photographs of the martyrs and the authenticity of the speeches made by their family members. By these means the movement, broadly represented as a waning force in the media, reinforces its continuity and the serious realities of its work. Here, assembled around the symbolic suffering through the fasting of a leading activist, Anna Hazare, we see the everyday dangers of blowing the whistle on corrupt practices.

CONCLUSION

In a 2012 interview with Shambhu Dutt of the GSB he talked of his regret that the GSB had ended their fast in January 2011. He appreciated how the India Against Corruption campaign had managed to cause a stir, but ultimately was disappointed in the style in which it did. The GSB's quiet protest, intended to demonstrate unflinching resolve, but also love and sympathy for their opponents, had been replaced by a noisy spectacle in which slogans were chanted and accusations were hurled back and forth. For Dutt the events were not examples of *satyagraha* (truth force) or *tapasya* (penance), but rather *tamasha* (spectacle). His attitude referenced the aphorism printed on the front page of the LSS bulletin from February 2011 in which the group announced the reasons for giving up their fast. In a box on the top right-hand corner of the page were the words 'Be the change you want to see in the world – Mahatma Gandhi'. For Shambhu Dutt the aesthetic and poetic presentation of the India Against Corruption protests of 2011 and 2012 did not prefigure a world that he wanted to see.⁶⁰ Despite his misgivings, what is evident is that these spectacular protests using citation and reiteration of the imagery making up the Indian political archive did create a powerful connection between the idea of the everyday struggles of the *aam aadmi* (common man), the notional Indian citizen unmarked by caste, class or religion, and a sense of threat to the nation engendered by the abuse of political and bureaucratic power. Through this continuously manufactured and updated short circuitry, and particularly through the use of iconic images of martyrs, the anti-corruption protests celebrated not only the history of the nation but also, beyond success or failure, its own continuity.

NOTES

1. Gupta, A. (2005), 'Narrating the state of corruption', in C. Shore and D. Haller (eds), *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 172–93, at p. 175.

2. Gupta, A. (1995), 'Blurred boundaries: The discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state', *American Ethnologist* 22, 2: 375–402; Hansen, T. B. and F. Stepputat (2001), 'Introduction: States of imagination', in T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat (eds), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 1–41.
3. Government of India, Planning Commission (1952), *The First Five Year Plan*, Chapter 6, 'Reform of Public Administration', Government of India. Online at www.planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html (accessed 15 July 2013).
4. Gorwala, A. D. (1951), *Report on Public Administration*, New Delhi: Government of India, Planning Commission; Government of India (1964), *Report of the Committee on the Prevention of Corruption* (The Santhanam Committee), New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs.
5. Government of India (2007), *Ethics in Governance : Fourth Report of the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission*, Government of India. Online at <http://arc.gov.in/4threport.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2013).
6. See Kripalani, J. B. (1960), 'Deep roots', *Seminar* 8: 24–6.
7. See also Pinney in this volume.
8. It should be noted that Indira Gandhi was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. She took the name Gandhi through marriage and is not related to M. K. Gandhi (the 'Mahatma'). The influence of the Nehru-Gandhi family in Indian politics continues to the present day. Indira, assassinated in 1984, was the mother of Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister who began the process of liberalising the Indian economy. Rajiv was assassinated in 1991 and his widow, Sonia, and son, Rahul, are key figures in contemporary Congress Party and national politics.
9. See Sinha (1975), 'State of Uttar Pradesh vs Raj Narain', (3) 333 Supreme Court Reporter. *Supreme Court of India*.
10. The License-Permit-Raj refers to the system of bureaucratic oversight through which the Indian state maintained control of the economy, pricing and planned development.
11. Harriss-White, B. and G. White (1996), 'Corruption, liberalization and democracy: Editorial introduction', *IDS Bulletin* 27, 2: 1–5.
12. See Deshpande, S. (2003), *Contemporary India: a Sociological View*, New Delhi: Viking, p. 131; Fernandes, L. (2006), *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press; Fernandes, L. (2004), 'The politics of forgetting: class politics, state power and the restructuring of urban space in India', *Urban Studies* 41, 12: 2415–30. Fernandes, L. (2000), 'Nationalizing "the global": media images, cultural politics and the middle class in India', *Media Culture Society* 22, 5: 611–28; Fernandes, L. and P. Heller (2006), 'Hegemonic aspirations: New middle class politics and India's democracy in comparative perspective', *Critical Asian Studies* 38, 4: 495–522; Fuller, C. J. and H. Narasimhan (2007), 'Information technology professionals and the new-rich middle class in Chennai (Madras)', *Modern Asian Studies* 41, 121–50.
13. I use the term 'scene' to provide space for the disparate groups and individuals that meet each other on the terrain of anti-corruption activism. The term 'movement' is

- used by some groups to reflect their style of engagement, but the term is politically charged and contested and so cannot easily be applied to the scene as a whole.
14. Kamat, S. (2002), *Development Hegemony: NGOs and the State in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 19; Omvedt, G. (1993), *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, pp. 190–1; Kothari, R. (1990), *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India*, London and New Delhi: Aspect Publications, vol. 2, p. 402; Baviskar, A. (2010), ‘Winning the right to information in India: Is knowledge power?’, in *Citizen Action and National Policy Reform*, ed. J. Gaventa and R. McGee, London and New York: Zed Books, pp. 130–52, at p. 134.
 15. See Jenkins, R. (2004), ‘In varying states of decay: Anti-corruption politics in Maharashtra and Rajasthan’, in R. Jenkins (ed.), *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across India’s States*, New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 219–52, at p. 222.
 16. Pande, S. (2008), ‘The right to information and societal accountability: The case of the Delhi PDS campaign’, *IDS Bulletin* 38, 6: 47–55; Jenkins, R. (2007), ‘Civil society versus corruption’, *Journal of Democracy* 18, 2: 55–69; Webb, M. (2012), ‘Activating citizens, remaking brokerage: Transparency activism, ethical scenes, and the urban poor in Delhi’, *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35, 2: 206–22.
 17. Including Arvind Kejriwal and the supreme court advocate Prashant Bhushan, both later members of what became known as ‘Team Anna’, the group of prominent anti-corruption activists orchestrating the campaign for a *Jan Lokpal* bill led by Anna Hazare, which Pinney describes in this volume. Kejriwal and Bhushan have gone on to become leading figures in the *Aam Aadmi* (Common Man) Party (AAP) which was set up in late 2012 to contest elections on an anti-corruption platform. The party made a spectacular debut in the Delhi Assembly elections of December 2013, winning twenty-eight seats out of seventy and going on to form a coalition government with the formerly incumbent Congress Party. Kejriwal served as Chief Minister for forty-nine days until the AAP government resigned over the blocking of their proposed *Jan Lokpal* bill in the Delhi Assembly. The party has gone on to contest the national parliamentary elections of April–May 2014 in hundreds of seats, ultimately winning four seats in Punjab.
 18. Singh, S. (2011), ‘The genesis and evolution of the Right to Information regime in India’, in S. Singh, P. Sharma, V. K. Chand, S. de Chassey, M. Mendiburu, V. Nayak, P. Banerji, U. M. Munshi and S. Dutt (eds), *Transparent Governance in South Asia*, New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration; Baviskar, ‘Winning the right to information in India’.
 19. Joshi, A. (2010), ‘Do rights work? Law, activism, and the employment guarantee scheme’, *World Development* 38, 4: 620–30.
 20. Government of India, Planning Commission (2002), *10th Five Year Plan. 5 Year Plans*. Online at <http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html> (accessed 15 July 2013).
 21. It was these types of connections which produced the accusation from Arundhati Roy that leading activists in the India Against Corruption Movement, in particular Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, had received US\$400,000 from the Ford

- Foundation in relation to an NGO directed by Sisodia. See First Post Politics (2011), 'Kejriwal asks Roy, "where is the proof?"' Online at www.firstpost.com/politics/annas-movement-a-copy-of-world-bank-agenda-arundhati-roy-72824.html (accessed 15 July 2013).
22. Sampson, S. (2010), 'The anti-corruption industry: From movement to institution', *Global Crime* 11, 2: 261–78.
 23. Baviskar, 'Winning the right to information in India', 147; Jenkins, 'Civil society'; Webb, 'Activating citizens'.
 24. Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class*.
 25. Baviskar, A. and R. Ray (eds) (2011), *Elite and Everyman: The Cultural Politics of the Indian Middle Classes*, New Delhi: Routledge; Ghertner, D. A. (2011), 'Gentrifying the state, gentrifying participation: Elite governance programs in Delhi', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, 3: 504–32; Anjaria, J. S. (2009), 'Guardians of the bourgeois city: Citizenship, public space, and middle-class activism in Mumbai', *City & Community* 8, 4: 391–406; Ellis, R. (2012), "'A world class city of your own!": Civic governmentality in Chennai, India', *Antipode* 44, 4: 1143–60.
 26. See Rajan, R. and K. Kak (eds) (2006), *NGOs, Activists & Foreign Funds: Anti-Nation Industry*, Chennai: Vigil Public Opinion Forum.
 27. See Webb, 'Activating citizens'.
 28. A significant protest that I do not feel I have room to include here is the campaign in 2006 to prevent the amendment of the 2005 Right to Information Act. Part of the protest against the amendments involved simultaneous indefinite fasts by Anna Hazare, in Alandi village near Pune, Maharashtra, and by the Uttar Pradesh-based social activist Sandeep Pandey at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. I have not included it here as the details surrounding the issue that the protest concerned are quite convoluted and do not shed much light on the protests for the *Jan Lokpal* bill in 2011 and 2012.
 29. Government of India (2004), *National Common Minimum Programme of the Government of India*, Government of India. Online at <http://pminindia.nic.in/cmp.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2013), p. 16.
 30. When I first met Shambhu Dutt in 2006 he used his full name, Shambhu Dutt Sharma, and the other Lok Sevak Sangh activists referred to him as 'Sharmaji'. By 2012 he had decided to stop using his last name as it had high caste connotations and he did not wish to be associated with the language or politics of caste.
 31. See Transparency International India (2008), 'Integrity Pact (IP) – governance in public procurement & Contracting', *Transparency International India*. Online at www.transparencyindia.org/projects.php?id=36 (accessed 15 July 2013).
 32. Government of India, *Ethics in Governance*.
 33. Quotation taken from an open letter by the Lok Sevak Sangh dated 29 March 2007 outlining the aims of the Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade and calling for volunteers for a *satyagraha* against political corruption.
 34. Srivastava, S. (2009), 'Urban spaces, Disney-divinity and moral middle classes', *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, 26 & 27: 338–45.
 35. Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1937), *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 63.
 36. For example, at a United Residents Joint Action (URJA) meeting that I attended in Delhi, 14 April 2007. See Harriss, J. (2006), 'Middle-class activism and the politics

- of the informal working class: A perspective on class relations and civil society in Indian cities', *Critical Asian Studies* 38, 4: 445–65, at p. 461; Harriss, J. (2007), 'Antinomies of empowerment: Observations on civil society, politics and urban governance in India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, 26: 2716–24, at p. 2722.
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 38. See, for example, 'A satyagraha to fight corruption', *Hindustan Times*, 18 August 2007.
 39. Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade (2011), 'Fast-unto-death against corruption by Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade'. Online at www.petitiononline.com/gsb2011/petition.html (accessed 15 July 2013).
 40. Baba Ramdev is a yoga guru with a considerable following both in India and internationally. He became involved in the anti-corruption protests early in 2011 and organised a protest fast in central Delhi in June 2011 that was violently broken up by the Delhi police. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is the founder and spiritual head of the international 'Art of Living Foundation' and lent his support to the Anna Hazare campaign. Both are leaders of large organisations with considerable resources, including television channels.
 41. See, for example, www.facebook.com/Indiacor
 42. Lok Sevak Sangh (2011), Monthly Bulletin of the Lok Sevak Sangh, February 2011: Satyagraha at Jantar Mantar. Lok Sevak Samng, 1.
 43. *Ibid.*, 1.
 44. *Rang de Basanti*, film, directed by R. O. Mehra. India: UTV Motion Pictures, 2006.
 45. *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, film, directed by R. Hirani. India: Eros Entertainment, 2006.
 46. See Mehta, R. (2011), 'Flash activism: How a Bollywood film catalyzed civic justice toward a murder trial', *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10. Online at <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/345/271> (accessed 15 July 2013); Chaudhury, S. (2006), 'Sleeping idealists', *Tehelka*, 18 March 2006. Online at http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main23.asp?filename=hubo31806Sleeping_idealists1.asp (accessed 7 January 2014).
 47. Raghavendra, M. K. (2006), 'Globalism and Indian nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, 16: 1503–5; Rao, S. (2007), 'The globalization of Bollywood: An ethnography of non-elite audiences in India', *The Communication Review* 10, 1: 57–76; Singhvi, V. (2006), 'Redirecting middle class anger', *Sunday Hindustan Times*, 24 December 2006. Online at www.hindustantimes.com/news-feed/nm21/redirecting-middle-class-anger/article1-195523.aspx (accessed 7 January 2014).
 48. The campaign in the city of Pune in Maharashtra was inaugurated by Anna Hazare, further evidence of the long standing links between activists in the anti-corruption scene (see <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/skdubeyFoundation/message/6178>).
 49. Webb, 'Activating citizens'; Webb, M. (2013), 'Disciplining the everyday state and society? Anti-corruption and Right to Information activism in Delhi', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47, 3: 363–93.
 50. Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class*, pp. 144–5; Corbridge, S. and J. Harriss (2003), *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism, and Popular Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 125; Baviskar, A. (2003), 'Between violence and desire: Space, power, and identity in the making of metropolitan Delhi', *International*

- Social Science Journal* 55, 1: 89–98; Baviskar, A. (2011), 'Cows, cars and rickshaws: Bourgeois environmentalists and the battle for Delhi's streets', in A. Baviskar and R. Ray (eds), *Elite and Everyman: The Cultural Politics of the Indian Middle Classes*, New Delhi: Routledge, pp. 391–418.
51. Webb, 'Disciplining the everyday state'.
 52. It is worth noting that protests in late December 2012 sparked by the gang rape of a young woman in the city reproduced the *Rang de Basanti* trope. Protesters holding a candlelit vigil at India Gate were violently evicted by police in scenes which gained international media attention. There is a YouTube video introducing the national scope of the Drive Against Bribe campaign that includes scenes in which campaigners hold candles to indicate solidarity and also to echo TV advertisements accompanying the campaign in which the flame was used to symbolise the light of the Right to Information illuminating and revealing corruption. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqNeF7_VtL8 (accessed 14 July 2013).
 53. Bhartiya, R. (2011), 'India against corruption all india rally, pics.wmv'. 22 March. Online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmWYv9OrBCw&feature=youtube_gdata_player (accessed 15 July 2013).
 54. See Webb, 'Disciplining the everyday state'.
 55. Copy of original 2011 email provided to the author by Shivendra Singh Chauhan, 18 February 2013.
 56. I saw this monitoring in action during a visit to the IAC office in Delhi. One interesting facet of the way these statistics are presented is that they are broken down by city. To what extent the numbers for Mumbai or Delhi reflect usage across the states that the cities are the capitals of, I am not yet sure. This certainly comes out in the conversations of activists who talk about reaching a particular number of 'cities' to organise marches, for example.
 57. See Pinney, this volume.
 58. In another fold between media representations of the independence movement and the anti-corruption activist scene, these men are also the central players in the plot of the film *Rang de Basanti*.
 59. See India Human Rights Report (2011), 'Sitting ducks of India'. Online at www.achrweb.org/ihrq/issue3-4/ihrq-jan-june-2011.pdf (accessed 15 July 2013).
 60. This opinion had drawn the attention of the news media to Shambhu Dutt. At the height of the *Jan Lokpal* bill protests in August he had been discovered by the media and had spoken critically of the Hazare approach. See *Rediff News* (2011), 'Anna's battle: Why Shambhu Dutt feels betrayed', *Rediff News*, 19 August 2011. Online at www.rediff.com/news/report/anna-battle-why-shambhu-dutt-feels-betrayed/20110819.htm (accessed 15 July 2013). Later in the year he spoke out again saying that if the government could not pass the *Lokpal* bill by the budget session of parliament then the GSB would restart their hunger strike from 30 January. See *Indian Express* (2011), '94-yr-old Gandhian "regrets" handing over Lokpal baton to Team Anna', *Indian Express*, 8 November 2011. Online at www.indianexpress.com/news/94yroid-gandhian-regrets-handing-over-lokpal-baton-to-team-anna/872591 (accessed 15 July 2013).

CHAPTER 10

'The Mother of all Strikes': Popular Protest Culture and Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in the Botswana Public Service Unions' Strike, 2011

PNINA WERBNER

INTRODUCTION

The events of the Arab Spring inspired a new sense of hope and determination among people living geographically far apart. They underscored the power of ordinary people to make a difference, their capacity to mobilise bodily against authoritarian regimes, using social media, texting and other networks of citizens or workers to protest against drastic economic cutbacks, and to demand a rethinking of current values and priorities. The rebellions of Tunisia and Egypt, epitomised in the giant gatherings in Tahrir Square, became a symbol of protest against the odds and of courage in the face of brute tyranny. They inspired a series of other rebellions elsewhere in the Arab world and huge protests beyond it. In Botswana nearly 100,000 public service trade unionists sang songs of rebellion as they gathered daily for over two months under a giant Morula tree in the capital, and in towns throughout the country.

From Egypt to Botswana, a range of quite different countries witnessed worker, youth and middle-class rebellions against the political and capitalist status quo, the privileges of a tiny, wealthy and often corrupt elite, at a time when the majority could no longer earn a decent wage. Participants stressed the democratic, egalitarian nature of their protests, animated by a spirit of inclusiveness across religion, gender, class and ethnicity. They demanded a return to the welfare state and the egalitarian principles that underpinned it. And wherever they occurred, mass mobilisations did not simply express a politics of revolt: they were, equally, staged aesthetic and poetic performances that echoed and re-echoed similar themes in song, slogans and gestures from country to country across the globe. Each protest was local and distinctive aesthetically, but they also borrowed from the rest, creating in each place a sited, vernacular cosmopolitanism.

Botswana had joined this wave of protests on 18 April 2011, with a massive strike of five public service unions jointly claiming to represent 93,000 workers out of 103,000 public sector workers, in a country with a population of 1.7 million. Although the eight-week strike began as a simple labour dispute over pay, it escalated to become a test of fundamental values of democracy, social justice, equality, freedom of speech and the right to live in a welfare state that paid its employees a living wage. It articulated the desire for 'change' with a capital C. In the present chapter I argue that the Botswana strike resembled a new social movement in forging a shared identity across a wide occupational spectrum and in mobilising the whole of civil society in a call for dialogue and justice. The strike's social and cultural effervescence negated the apparent decline of trade unions in the industrialised world – from being some of the earliest social movements to becoming highly sclerotic and institutionalised. Indeed, we need to remind ourselves that the Arab Spring in Egypt was not only massively supported by the trade unions but followed several years of workers' struggle, while in Tunisia, too, the trade union federation from the beginning played a central role in the revolution of 2011.¹

Trade unions in South Central Africa have historically always been, in many respects, cosmopolitan or 'international' in their orientation, aware even during the colonial period and more so since independence of ILO (International Labour Organisation) international law, human rights and labour struggles elsewhere.² In his magisterial survey of the 'labour question' in French and British Africa outside South Africa, Frederick Cooper documents the emergence of an emancipatory discourse of self-governance, citizenship and labour rights, and the growing international links of African unions to international labour organisations, during the period following World War II.³ There has also been a tendency within the worldwide labour movement for popular culture, songs and slogans to cross international boundaries. This internationalism has become even more marked in an age of global media news dissemination. In this spirit, the present chapter argues that in the 2011 public service unions' strike in Botswana, tribal and popular cultural traditions and ideas of authority were deployed, combined with a wider cosmopolitan consciousness of protest movements elsewhere, to create a shared popular culture of protest.

The central adversary in the strike, the government-as-employer, came to be epitomised in the figure of the President, Lieutenant General Seretse Ian Khama. Khama had been Commander of the Botswana Defence Forces before entering politics. Despite being democratically elected with wide support in 2009, his authoritarianism was perceived to stem also from his ancestry; he is the elder son of Sir Seretse Khama, founding president of Botswana and hereditary paramount chief of the Bamangwato tribe, the largest in Botswana, an office Sir Seretse abdicated when he entered secular politics. Unlike the father, the

son was crowned paramount chief (a title currently held temporarily by his brother). While his royal ancestry made him powerfully charismatic among rural folk, among workers and the intellectual elite his unwillingness to abdicate the chiefship was popularly seen as another sign of his sense of absolute entitlement and hence of his authoritarian personality. He was head of the Botswana Democratic Party, which has ruled Botswana by winning free elections without a break since independence in 1965. For unionists, many of whom support the opposition parties, this forty-five-year uninterrupted stretch of rule is seen as another sign of Botswana being a *de facto* authoritarian one-party state.

Khama is thus regarded as a highly authoritarian figure by the unions. If the strike seemed revolutionary to the media and public, it was because thus far in his presidency Khama had countenanced little dissent, was seen to have surrounded himself with yes-men and -women and to have made a series of arbitrary decisions. It is significant that 'the state' came to be culturally and symbolically constructed during the strike, and embedded in traditional notions of authority.

Like other protest movements in 2011, the strike in Botswana was aestheticised through a process of 'citation':⁴ a fusion of past images and images from spatially distant events in North Africa and elsewhere with currently invented images in new bricolages and assemblages. The 'political' thus came to be powerfully inserted aesthetically by encompassing such displaced tropes, often subliminally, through performative acts of (re)iteration, 'doubling up' and mimesis, into the new context of the strike.⁵ In particular, strikers and the media aestheticised the false pretensions of autocratic power while prefiguring, through performance, the just society. They appealed to a transcendental morality and Christian values.

Social movement theorists have debated whether the state is necessarily always the main target of social movements. Missing in this debate, however, is the fact that the state is not simply an objective reality. It must be constructed culturally and aesthetically.⁶ So too in Botswana. As in most chiefly societies in South Central Africa, Tswana traditionally have made a distinction between the *office* of the chiefship and the *incumbent* of office;⁷ a good chief is one who serves his people and they, in turn, grant him legitimacy. Schapera cites the Tswana proverb 'A chief is chief by the grace of the people'⁸ to argue that historically, good chiefs (*dikgosi*) were expected to aim for peace (*kagiso*) and harmony, and to be virtuous, generous and caring.⁹

As we shall see, this popular expectation did not accord with the tough, uncompromising monetarist policies adopted by Ian Khama as President, which he defended as aimed at bringing down the deficit and which were much praised by the IMF. The belt-tightening in the public service followed the global credit crunch in 2008, which hit diamond-dependent Botswana particularly hard. At

one point in 2008, Botswana ceased to trade in diamonds and was haemorrhaging its accumulated reserve funds. At the same time, as unionists and opposition leaders repeated in speech after speech at the strike grounds, the President was widely regarded as extremely self-indulgent and personally wasteful and his trumpeted policies towards poverty alleviation were – rightly or wrongly – rejected by workers as short-termist and idiosyncratic.¹⁰

Khama's unwillingness to meet directly with the union federation leaders, to aim for *kagiso* rather than confrontation, was another source of wide popular condemnation. This refusal, along with his various policy decisions, had made 'Ian', as my chapter will show, a worthy target of popular dissent, viewed somewhat hyperbolically as a potential 'dictator' who needed to be reminded that he was a ruler only by the grace of the people.

The different aesthetic and performative dimensions of the strike as popular protest forged, I propose, a local, vernacular working-class culture, while echoing the protests beyond Botswana. Popular culture in the strike was dramatised in multiple bodily and sentimental articulations: in the spiritual expressions of protest through prayer; in satirical humour, dances, hand gestures and songs of 'rebellion' mocking politicians and civil servants; in the stunts and forays beyond the strike grounds to invade government meetings, attend successive court hearings en masse or lend support to strikers in other towns; and in the speeches calling for change, including 'regime change', that made reference to and echoed the Arab Spring. In this latter respect the strike created a consciousness of cosmopolitan participation – for the first time Botswana were part of a wider international social movement. This fabricated not only an innovative, popular vernacular cosmopolitan culture; workers also spectacularly forged, through performance, solidarities across classes between manual workers and white-collar or professional civil servants. In many senses this was a middle-class rebellion that encompassed manual labourers as well, but it was also a working-class protest that encompassed middle-class workers. Above all, it was youthful, humorous and ludic, signalling a generational shift among public service workers. Elsewhere I document the politics of the strike.¹¹ Here I want to underscore its popular cultural dimensions.

Initially, the strike was in support of a union demand for a 16 per cent pay rise across the board, following three years of 30 per cent inflation in which public service salaries were frozen voluntarily following the temporary collapse of diamond mining in 2008. The government refused, however, to contemplate a pay hike while Botswana's economy was still in deficit and the world economy shaky, despite the rise in diamond sales during 2011. There were undoubtedly additional *political* motives behind the federation of public service unions' decision to strike, including the government's delay in forming a bargaining council, and the desire by union leaders to advertise widely the existence of the

newly founded Botswana Federation of Public Sector Unions (BOFEPUSU). But the radical erosion of their salaries was a critical factor, especially for the blue-collar workers I had studied, who were barely surviving on salaries that even before the credit crunch were well below a living wage: cleaners, cooks, groundsmen, drivers, hospital orderlies, porters, pump attendants, messengers, gravediggers, security guards and the like.

Both sides, but particularly the government, dug their heels in. The President, Ian Khama, refused to meet with BOFEPUSU federation leaders. Over time, as the strike dragged on with no resolution in sight, the federation began mobilising support from an increasingly expanding number of actors in civil society. Despite a total news blackout in the national press, radio and TV, the private media supported the strikers from the start, both the private press and private radio stations; but joining the voices calling for dialogue were chiefs sitting in the House of Chiefs, Church leaders, ex-Presidents, opposition (and some government) politicians, representatives of the Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower (BOCCIM), MPs and Parliament, the great and the good. Support came in addition from international trade unions such as Public Service International (PSI). Before the strike ended, the whole nation had in effect mobilised to demand that the President meet the strikers, which he consistently avoided doing. The scale of the strike, its national reach, was unprecedented. The unanimous support of the private press and radio created a critical public debate on matters of social justice as never before. The strike generated a profound sense that something fundamental had changed for the better in Botswana, that Botswana would never be the same again, as I was told.

Initially, the strike did not appear to be about social justice, but as it progressed and as the chasm between the workers and government became more and more evident, issues of social justice and equality, which affected in particular low-paid industrial-class manual workers, surfaced and became central to the negotiations.

UNDER THE MORULA TREE

During the whole eight-week strike workers gathered daily under a giant Morula tree in the Gaborone Secondary School (GSS) sports grounds for the whole day. Botswana is a deeply Christian country and the first hour of each morning was devoted to prayers, hymns and sermons, often taking on the character of a revivalist meeting, with singers and preachers recruited from among the workers who stood or sat in a semi-circle around the stage, under the tree (see Fig. 10.1). One of the preachers, an older man with a creased forehead, gave an impassioned prayer one morning asking God, the heavenly *kgosi* (king or chief), to alleviate the workers' pain. He called on the worldly *kgosi*, Ian Khama, not to

fail the workers. Political prayers are a generic feature of union piety. Workers have faith that God is on their side. As one speaker said on another occasion:

And so with our prayer ... being that the Lord is on our side ... So we assemble under this tree every day ... God Himself said that if there are two or three people meeting in my name, then I am the fourth one there! So too in our case, God has been here with us. He has been walking with us and encouraging us to go on.¹²

The federation's delegates' conference was opened with a prayer: 'Our father in heaven, we come before you this afternoon ... in the name of Jesus. We are gathered here Lord as your people, in your presence ... and we look upon your divine intervention.'¹³

Almost from the start of the strike, the Morula tree under which the praying, choir-singing and speeches all took place began to assume mythical, sacred dimensions, much like the centre of a pilgrimage cult. As Johnson Motshwarakgole, the Manual Workers Union Organising Secretary and uncrowned king and father of the trade union movement in Botswana, told the assembled workers:



Figure 10.1 Under the Morula tree (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.2 Johnson under the Morula tree (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.3 Carrying branches from the GSS grounds (Photo: P. Werbner).

Those of us who are gifted singers and gifted poets ... I know that there are some teachers here who are gifted at both. Let us now find a name that we can call this tree by!!! Because this is a historic Morula Tree!! We have to give it a name befitting it!! This tree is the one that will set us free!!¹⁴

As workers began to go out on forays beyond the grounds, they carried with them green branches cut from trees in the grounds (see Fig. 10.3). Although they told me the trees were merely for shade, it was evident that the branches were also a metonymic extension of the sacralised strike grounds and the sacred Morula tree to other places in the land, a further sign of the tree and ground's powerful sanctification in prayer and song.¹⁵ The tree became a symbolic counterpart to the grand structure of parliament, a *kgotla* (traditional public forum) for the workers of Botswana.

BEYOND DIVISION: SONGS OF REBELLION AND WORKER SOLIDARITY

The strike in itself was a major achievement: the first legal strike in Botswana with clear terms agreed with the government – or so the unions believed. The link to the Arab Spring had also already been established by the press, which proclaimed that 'Botswana joins worldwide uprisings as civil servants prepare to strike'.¹⁶ The very name given to the strike, 'the mother of all strikes', echoed ironically the wars in the Middle East.

By 27 April, however, what had started as a ten-day strike had turned into a strike that was extended indefinitely, after the government broke its own strike rules. Johnson Motshwarakgole stressed the achievement in the strike of worker solidarity across class in a public speech under the tree:

Yes, it was by intention that we founded ... BOFESPUSU. A union where you would find doctors for members, nurses and labourers for members – the likes of us [jokingly], the Motshwarakgole of this world!! Cleaners, clerical staff and teachers for members, social workers and drivers for members [again jokingly], bootlickers [*malope* – a reference to the scabs who had not joined the strike] for members, as well as meteorologists for members!! It was by intention that we founded such an organisation! We deliberately set out to do that!

For Motshwarakgole, long-time leader of the lowest paid, least educated blue-collar manual workers in public service, and himself claiming to be uneducated, the fact that the strike rallies transcended divisions of class and occupation between workers fulfilled a long-held dream. Worker divisions were obliterated in shared performance under the tree. As the salary gap in Botswana

has continued to widen hugely, with luxury consumption accentuating class divisions, the marginalisation of industrial class workers has become ever more evident. Johnson had worked hard to initiate and foster the formation of the BOFEPUSU federation. It was his idea, sold to the other public service workers. The reasons were presented as pragmatic. The federation would give public service unions greater clout in their bargaining with the government. But visionary, even utopian ideals of worker solidarity were explicitly articulated during the strike. Whether this solidarity could outlive the strike or not, a local working-class cultural vernacular was being created through performance, one that drew on generic folk, church and traditional ritual and ceremonial traditions shared across Botswana, and combined them with a modern worker consciousness. Motshwarakgole continued:

But what stunned me most [were] ... The songs that are sung here, and the way in which they are created ... Every time I come here, I find that there is a new song release! Every time I come here I'm told that they are doing a run-through of their new song, one that they just came up with!! So, truly, this is testament to the amount of talent we have in our midst here!



Figure 10.4 Sausages (Photo: P. Werbner).

The grounds in the capital, where I attended the strike, had a festive quality (see Fig. 10.4). Dozens of food stalls sold anything from sugar cane, watermelons, mealies (corn on the cob) and large fried *burewurst* (South African style sausages) to traditional streetcorner lunches – *seswa* (beef cooked Tswana style), lamb chops, chicken in stews, curries and roasted, cooked pumpkin, beetroot, cooked green vegetables, soup and salad – all for bargain prices. Fizzy drinks and ice-cold water were on display, while peddlers sold oranges and sweets, walking around the grounds pushing supermarket trolleys. The vendors, men and women, were doing a roaring trade. This was the beginning of the strike and workers still had money in their pockets.

Colourful clothes added to the carnivalesque atmosphere (see Fig. 10.5). Workers wore an assortment of multicoloured union T-shirts or boiler suits boasting union logos or past worker rallies. Young women, tall and slim, hair piled in pleated designs, chatted with young men in the crowd, immaculately dressed in the latest fashions. Other workers were dressed casually in jeans. Standing all day under the tree in the hot sun was an exhausting experience. By 10 o'clock the grounds began to look like a beach resort with people relaxing in cavernous folding canvas chairs, shaded from the hot sun by multicoloured golfing umbrellas that serve as parasols in Botswana. Clusters of teachers from the same school sat together.



Figure 10.5 Parasols (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.6 Rangers choir (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.7 Confrontation between Mma Bakwena and BOFEPUSU (Cartoonist: Selefu, *The Monitor*, 16 May 2011, p. 12).

The dancing and singing was repeated and elaborated day by day as dozens of new songs, dances and choir performances were invented, responding to incidents, satirising, mocking and insulting politicians and senior civil servants who were said to be oppressing the workers. The two competing choirs, Rangers and Mosquito,¹⁷ had formed during the first few days of the strike. Each had its own choir leader and its own style. Sometimes a veteran manual worker union leader would sing one of the old traditional, pre-strike union labour songs from the podium in his booming deep bass voice, but the young strikers preferred the new songs. The old songs seemed passé, of a bygone era. Audiences around the tree joined in the song choruses and, as the choirs danced, new recruits from the crowd entered the dancing circle, singing and clapping (see Fig. 10.6).

The new songs travelled throughout the country. Many made satirical comments on the current catastrophic state of workers' household economies, defiantly proclaiming they would survive since they were already indebted anyway to loan sharks (known in Botswana as microlenders):

We've Come a Long Way with the Microlenders

We've come a long way with the Microlenders	<i>Re tswa kgakala le machonisa</i>
We don't care	<i>Ga re na sepe</i>
(Even if) he/it ¹⁸ cuts, he cuts	<i>O a kgaola (x 2)</i>
(Even if) he/it takes it all	<i>O a tsaya otlhe (x 2)</i>
We don't care	<i>Ga re na sepe</i>

In another song in the same spirit workers made a gesture of throwing their wallets to the ground:

Songs attacked the Director of the Directorate of Public Service Management (DPSM) Mma Bakwena, representing government as the employer. In the words of one very popular song:

We call Mma Bakwena to us	<i>Re biletseng Mma Bakwena (x 2)</i>
To put her deep in the lion's jaw	<i>Re mo tsenye mo ganong la tau (ta-oo)</i>

Mma Bakwena's confrontation with the Unions was satirised in the press (see Fig. 10.7).

In another insult song, workers attack false rumours about them:

Mma Bakwena remove your blouse	<i>Mma Bakwena tlhobola</i>
To be flogged	<i>O kgwathe [kwata = to beat]</i>
We are ending the noise and chatter about the workers	<i>Rona, re fedisa medumo le dikgang tsa babareki</i>



Figure 10.8 Bruising battle (Cartoonist: Selefu, *The Monitor*, 20 June 2011, p. 8).

Mma Bakwena is here portrayed as a petty criminal, to be flogged in the customary court (see Figs 10.7 and 10.8).

As the strike progressed, the number of cartoons increased and songs surfaced about Ian Khama, chief target of the workers' wrath. The son of Ruth, an Englishwoman, and Seretse Khama, founding President of Botswana, Ian, a fifty-year-old bachelor, was often mocked for the grammatical errors he made in Setswana. He was described in one song as 'A predator with a lion's mane' and, in a further line, a 'toothless old lion'.¹⁹ This particular song also refers to his being a bachelor: 'He has no child, he has no "darling"', and it concludes 'A lion with a lion's mane, he should be shielding us, the workers'.

In the newspaper cartoons, Khama is depicted as angry, oppressive or trapped (see Figs 10.9–10.11).

Even more insulting was a song sung in the last days of the strike that compares Khama with Mugabe and Gaddafi, again signalling the international consciousness of the workers:

Mugabe, Gaddafi

By my father, we would rather go to prison

Truly, we swear

*Ka ntate, re ka mpa ra tsena
ka dikgolegelo*

Ruri, re ya ikana



Figure 10.9 Khama smashes car (Cartoonist: B. Chiepe, *The Monitor*, 16 May 2011, p. 6).

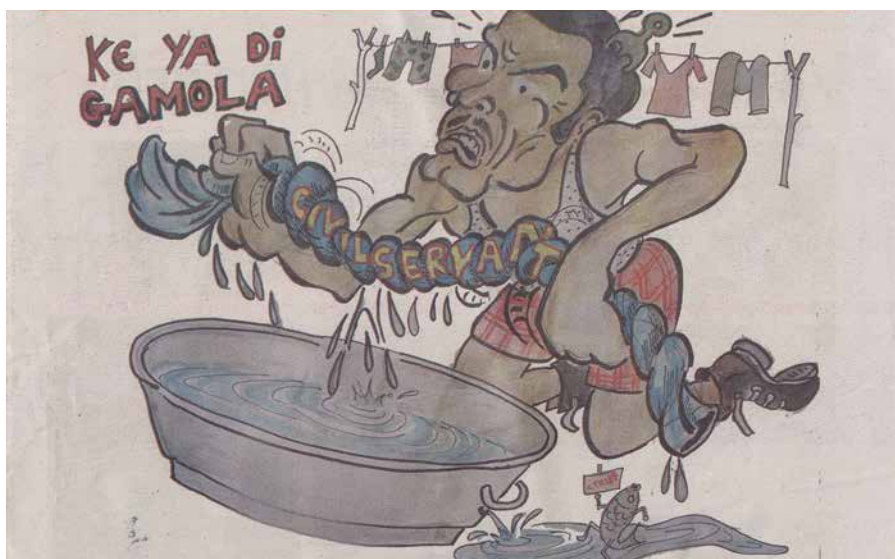


Figure 10.10 Khama: 'I'm gonna squeeze 'em' (Cartoonist: B. Chiepe, *The Monitor*, 6 June 2011, p. 6).



Figure 10.11 Khama tied to a tree (Cartoonist: Selefu, Mmegi, 17 May 2011, p. 8).

By my father, we'd rather be ruled by Mugabe	<i>Ka ntate, re ka mpa ra buswa ke Mugabe</i>
Than by Khama	<i>Go na le Khama</i>
Truly, we swear	<i>Ruri, re ya ikana</i>
By my father, we'd rather be ruled by Gaddafi	<i>Ka ntate, re ka mpa ra buswa ke Gaddafi</i>
Truly, we swear	<i>Ruri, re ya ikana</i>
Than by Khama	<i>Go na le Khama</i>

Several of the songs mock the 'balope', the so-called 'bootlickers' or union scabs who have not gone on strike but spend their time instead currying favour with the government, including government officials and ministers:

Mma Bakwena Stop Bootlicking

Mma Bakwena stop bootlicking <i>Iyelele</i> [a cry]	<i>Mma Bakwena lesa bolope Iyelele</i>
We say, isn't it just the other day That you gave us small change? Isn't it the other day?	<i>Ka re, ga se maloba O re neela chenchi? Ga se maloba?</i>
We say, you, Masisi [Minister of Presidential Affairs]	<i>Kare, wena, Masisi</i>
Abandon bootlicking	<i>Lesa Bolope</i>



Figure 10.12 Masisi (Cartoonist: A. Lekgaba, *Weekend Post*, 4–10 June 2011, p. 10).

We say, you, Matambo
[Minister of Finance]

Abandon bootlicking
We say, you, Ian [Khama]
Abandon your arrogance

Kare, wena Matambo

Lesa Bolope
Kare, wena, Ian
Lesa bogoma

In the cartoon seen in Fig. 10.12, Masisi, the Minister of Presidential Affairs, is satirised as a thug.

Another bootlicker song criticises Khama for hiding from the workers while going around villages distributing charitable handouts such as blankets in front of Botswana TV cameras.

Bootlicker (Malope)

When they see us
They hide among people
Heya, the bootlickers think, they say
Heya, Ian thinks he will be liked
by people
[When] He gives them a blanket

Fela ga ba re bona (x 2)
Ga ba re bona ba iphitha ka batho
Heela, malope ba ithaya, ba re (x 2)
Heela, Ian o ithaya ba re bo a ratiwa
ke batho
O ba phakisa mapai

Some songs drew on expressions from other Southern African languages:

Relax Guys

Relax guys, we live to be happy	<i>Phanzi madoda, re dula re thabile</i>
When Mma Bakwena lost her temper	<i>Ya re Mma Bakwena a betwa ke pelo</i>
She cut her skirt fringe [that is, she was overwhelmed]	<i>A kgaola makgabe</i>
When searching for the workers [presumably to call them back to work]	<i>A ntse a re o batlana le badiri</i>

At the grounds, the choirs enter the circle in a long line, two or three people deep. Many of the dances are adaptations of widely practised traditional folk, drinking or wedding dances. Having danced around in a circle blowing penny whistles and vuvuzelas, the singers form a semi-circle, with the onlookers clapping or joining in. But singing is an equally important part of the forays beyond the grounds. Some of the songs are borrowed from neighbouring countries, just as some of the early Manual Workers Union songs were translations of worker songs from elsewhere in Europe. The following song, which I first heard sung during the petition march to the Ministry of Health, was said to refer to one first sung when Nelson Mandela went to prison (I was told it had also been sung at the earlier Manual Workers Union 1991 strike):

You Remain to Fight for our Rights (*Ditshwanelo*)

I am being taken away	<i>Na ke saya</i>
Taken away to prison	<i>Ke saya kgolegolong</i>
You remain to fight for	<i>Lona lo sale lo lwela</i>
Our rights	<i>Ditshwanelo</i>
Even if I die	<i>Lefa ke sule</i>
I fought for our rights	<i>Ke lwela ditshwanelo</i>
You remain	<i>Lona lo sale</i>
To fight for our rights	<i>Lo lwela ditshwanelo</i>

After a petition was handed to the Minister of Health at the Civic Hall, unionists streamed out of the gates and, apparently spontaneously, danced down Independence Avenue opposite the main Gaborone mall, blocking the traffic (see Fig. 10.13). They formed two blocks, singing favourite insult songs, blowing football whistles and vuvuzelas and waving the green branches they carried from the GSS grounds. The police stood by impassively. At this point the strike was still very peaceful.

I talked to some teachers at the grounds about ‘insult’ songs (*dipina tse di roganang*). They denied immediately that the songs were insulting. What about the Mma Bakwena song, I asked. The union is the lion, that’s not an insult. What about the song that says that Khama has no child, no sweetheart? That’s



Figure 10.13 Dancing outside the mall (Photo: P. Werbner).

just a fact. He is a predator, a lion – chiefs are lions (but, they added, he is an old lion). What about the song saying they would prefer Mugabe or Gaddafi to rule them? That's not an insult either. *Malope* (bootlickers) – that's not an insult, just a statement of fact.

The implication was that the songs were in a Tswana tradition according to which 'a song contains no insult'.²⁰ Many old Tswana songs have insults, I was told, but people just tell you that it's from *bogologolo* (long ago). In Botswana, where to insult someone is said to be against the law, these responses point to the roots of union insult songs in the licence accorded traditional songs of rebellion widely sung by commoners throughout the Southern African region against chiefs on ritual occasions.²¹ Even though the songs are spontaneously produced without, it seems, consciously drawing on the past, they are understood in terms of that genre, as indeed are popular local rap songs. Despite this tradition, insult songs did provoke anger from politicians and, later, the police.

In the words of one journalist, the songs 'lampoon the wealthy upper crust for living it up while the workers do not have money to buy basic essentials'.²² Gospel songs, he continues, were converted by the workers into 'defiant lyrics'. Although such music was 'common in other Southern African nations that struggled for independence', he says, it was new in Botswana, a nation which

had had a 'largely peaceful transition to independence'. Now, however, 'the workers have given birth' to 'an essentially protest music'.

The songs represent the more exhilarating moments of fun the strike generated. They were embodied performative moments of collective creativity that built up a sense of camaraderie and comradeship across divisions of class, occupation, gender and regional origin. In other respects, of course, the strike exacted a heavy toll from workers, especially as it dragged on for eight weeks without resolution and moved to a confrontational stage when strikers were fired or denied their salaries.

COURT CASES AND EARLY FORAYS BEYOND THE GROUNDS

From the start, as we have seen, the private media in Botswana, including both the press and radio, supported the strikers. By contrast, both the government's national newspaper, *The Botswana Daily News*, and Botswana Television (BTV) ignored the strike, as though it was not happening. This news blackout was satirised by the press (see Figs 10.14 and 10.15).

Despite the official blackout, the strike was clearly regarded in Botswana as the only news in town. Instead of meeting the unions directly, Khama chose



Figure 10.14 Government news blackout (Cartoonist: B. Chiepe, *The Monitor*, 30 May 2011, p. 6).

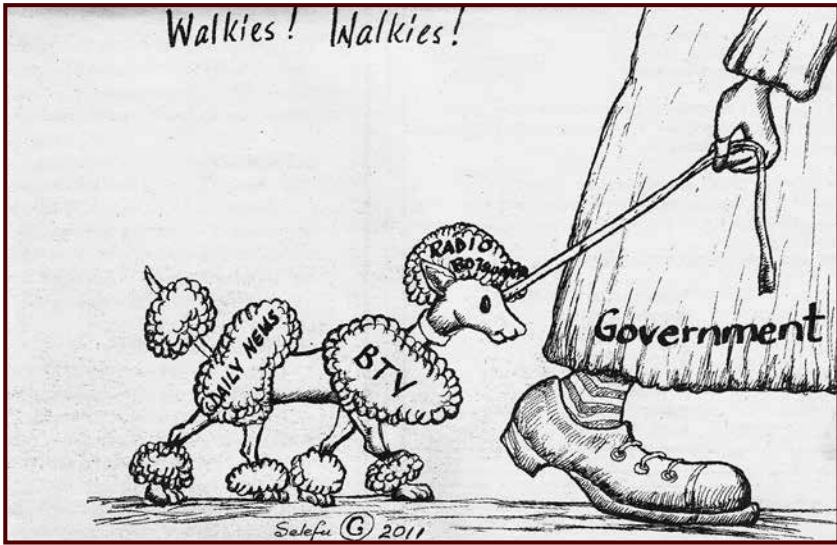


Fig: 10.15 State-owned media poodles of government (Cartoonist: Selefufu, Mmegi, 24 June 2011, p. 46).



Figure 10.16 Khama at a village campfire (Botswana Guardian, 13 May 2011, p. 12).



Figure 10.17 Advocate Chilisa at the Industrial Court (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.18 Unionists at the Industrial Court (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.19 Industrial Court orders workers back to work (Mmegi, 28 April 2011, p. 8, reprinted 25 May 2011, p. 10.).

to speak about the strike on his visits to rural areas, broadcast on BTV (see Fig. 10.16).

The strike was characterised by forays, incursions and invasions beyond the GSS grounds. The lengthy court cases between the unions and government were dramatic events which lasted late into the night and even, in one case, into the early hours of the next day. They brought workers together bodily as they sang their way to court or sat for hours on end, packed like sardines into the court's exceedingly hot, limited space, while they listened to complex technical legal arguments (see Fig. 10.17). During the second court case, on 6 May, union members from all over the country converged on the capital. The crowds at the grounds were vast, a sea of white in sympathy with the striking doctors and nurses. From the grounds they marched to the industrial court (see Fig. 10.18).

Though Facebook and the internet are not yet universally used in Botswana, everyone owns a mobile phone, and texting is constant. Strikers could assemble instantly at the Industrial Court, as in one case (in which exceptionally the union triumphed) that ended at 3.30 am, having lasted all night. Workers streamed out of the court house, dressed in white, and danced around the front court plaza and car park, singing the Mma Bakwena song. There were still at least 100 workers present. I went to bed at 4.15 am.

The fourth and final court case in this series, however, was a blow to the unions: the presiding judge confirmed his earlier interdiction ordering all

essential workers back to work. The press responded to this back-and-forth with its own brand of humour (see Fig. 10.19). This led to the second phase of the strike.

THE SECOND PHASE OF THE STRIKE: POLITICAL CONFRONTATION
AND COSMOPOLITAN INVOCATIONS

On 3 May, in announcing a five-day extension of the strike, Motshwarakgole invoked the Arab Spring explicitly:

People, let us not forget that now, as never before, nations of North Africa are freeing themselves from the chains that once bound them. The Egyptians and the Libyans are setting themselves free ... they are setting themselves free, especially taking into account that over there, people get killed for that. But over here, no one can be killed. Our arrangements are in accordance with the law. We deliberately extended this strike by five days.²³

Speaker after speaker under the Morula tree reiterated that the law had been subverted by the Industrial Court. The hardening mood was signalled by the workers' refusal to sing the national anthem which they had touchingly sung a few days earlier, during the May Day rally. In the escalating confrontation, doctors and nurses, along with many other essential service workers, refused to obey the court order and go back to work (see Fig. 10.20).

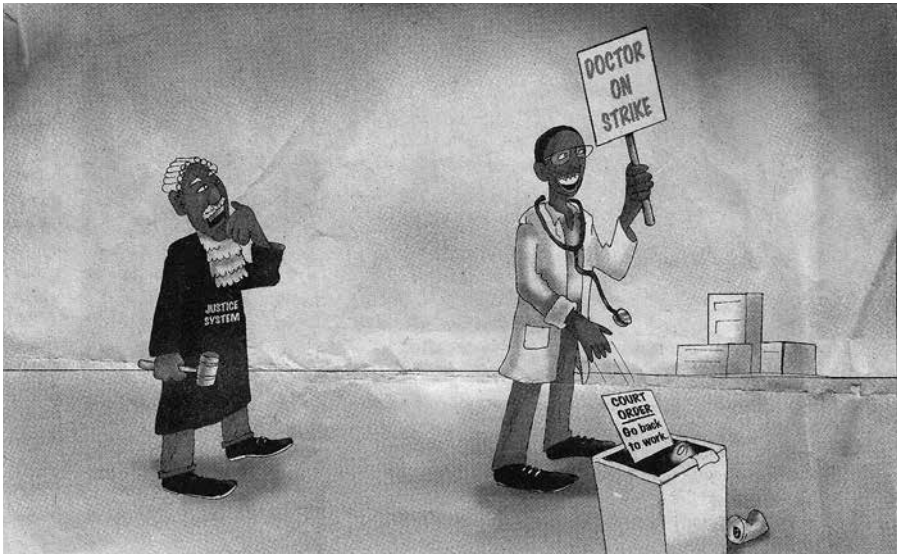


Figure 10.20 Doctor bins court order (*The Telegraph*, 18 May 2011, p. 8).

The protests elsewhere in the world were echoed in gestures borrowed internationally, though some had undergone a metamorphosis. Thus, for example, every time speakers talked about 'regime change', the audience rolled its hands in a wheel motion indicating change. This gesture took on and became a great source of enjoyment. The same word for change, *fetola*, is apparently used for marinating meat on the spit while the spit rotates. In the original Spanish protest, however, the same gesture was used to imply 'I'm bored, get to the point', a meaning adopted in the Israeli protests in the summer of 2011.²⁴ Workers shouted their appreciation using the old Manual Workers Union cry 'Viva *babereki* [workers], viva!', answered with 'Viva the spirit of no surrender!' The South American and Cuban roots of 'Viva' or 'Hula' still echo among trade unionists as these rallying cries travel globally. 'Regime change' too was a concept that had travelled – from debates about the aim of the war in Iraq, to the Arab Spring's removal of long-serving dictators, to its adoption in Botswana, a democratic country where unionists felt strongly that the ruling party had been entrenched in power for too long and that the President was too autocratic, with a tendency to disregard parliament, and might be inclined, they feared, to continue in office after his maximum two five-year terms in office ended. The ambiguity in using the call for regime change – was the call for an immediate revolution or simply a future aspiration for electoral political change? – gave ammunition to the government during the second phase of the strike.

On 17 May 2011, a week after the final court case described above, the government fired all striking essential services workers, including eighty doctors,



Figure 10.21 'Nurse, you're fired!' (Cartoonist: J. Serero, *Weekend Post*, 11–17 June 2011, p. 10).

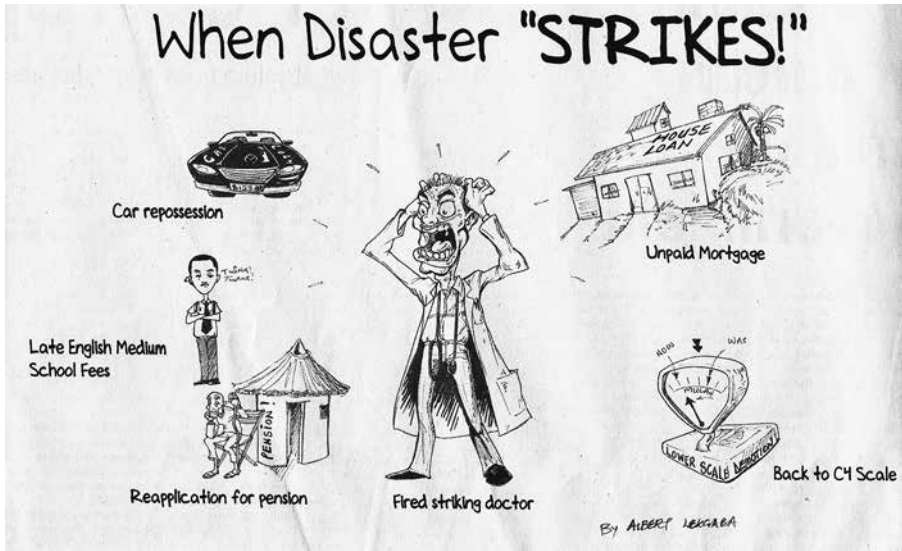


Figure 10.22 When Disaster ‘strikes!’ (Cartoonist: A. Lekgaba, *Weekend Post*, 28 May–3 June 2011, p. 10).

as well as more than a thousand nurses, cleaners and groundsmen. The news was announced on national radio and TV (see Fig. 10.21).²⁵

True to its warning, the government also did not pay the monthly salaries of more than 50,000 workers on strike.²⁶ For Manual Workers Union members in particular this was a terminal blow. Given all their loans, mortgages and other commitments, it was questionable whether they could continue to strike, as one cartoonist graphically summed up the implications (see Fig. 10.22):

The cartoon indicates the middle-class nature of workers’ lifestyles in the capital. The press reported that microlenders were refusing to lend money to strikers, who were trying to postpone their normal monthly payments of mortgages, car loans, pensions, funeral insurance, utility bills and so forth.

The final phase of the strike began at this point, with the union offering a compromise and mobilising the nation in support of a negotiated settlement. This was the phase in which issues of morality and social justice beyond the law became significant as the federation reached out to make alliances.

SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIONISM: FROM SPECTACULAR FORAYS TO MOBILISING THE NATION

Botswana is a small country. Most people in public positions know each other and networks are widely ramifying. The strike affected everyone. Many had visited the strike grounds in their respective towns, children had been rioting at

schools, hospitals were struggling to cope, businesses were not being paid, relatives of strikers were feeling the pinch, welfare recipients had not received their benefits. Day after day, for more than six weeks, the media had been dominated by reports and analyses of the strike and its implications. As it became increasingly evident that the President would not bend, that Mma Bakwena lacked the authority to negotiate and that the courts had failed to deliver, so too the union turned to mobilise a whole range of civil society actors.

In a sense, from the start the strike had the 'feel' of a social movement. It was creative culturally and its participants constantly reflected upon themselves, working collectively to forge a shared identity that would unite their different unions and suppress divisions between them. If both the leadership and ordinary workers made huge efforts to achieve unity, their *modi operandi* differed radically. The workers at the grounds drew inspiration from traditional performance genres and fused them spontaneously into a new, shared, worker ethos. They drew on international worker and protest movements in gestures, slogans and songs, and made these their own. As the strike progressed, there was a heightening sense that this was truly a people's protest, reaching beyond fruitless negotiations in stuffy committee rooms, far removed from the corridors of power and yet tangibly 'political', a lived politics.

Could one describe the strike as an expression of social movement unionism? In the South African context, Social Movement Unionism (SMU) arose when unions forged alliances with community-based groups, other social movements and political parties, such as the anti-apartheid democratic movement and the ANC during the transition to democracy,²⁷ the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the Anti-Privatisation Forum, a community-based movement.²⁸ In Botswana, in the absence of the kind of powerful mobilisation present in South Africa, the union sought other allies within civil society. Sometimes defined as 'Social Justice Unionism',²⁹ the assumption is that such new labour movements 'espouse radical change',³⁰ workplace democracy and gender equality.³¹

Writing about the 2011 strike in Botswana, Monageng Mogolakwe argues that 'Social movement unionism recognises the broadness and the interconnectedness of the interests of workers as citizens, commuters, consumers, parents, rent payers, and voters, ... [it] supersedes the notion of a single class identity and interests'.³² However, I want to suggest that in all this definitional elaboration, the original stress in new social movement (NSM) theory, as formulated by Alberto Melucci,³³ on culture, creativity and identity, is lost. Although the Botswana 2011 public service strike was not in any simple sense post-materialist, the strike combined materialist claims with a post-materialist moral demand for social justice, an innovative symbolic and cultural reconstitution of the both the state and workers-as-citizens, and widespread mobilisation of civil society associations, to create a new, hybrid social movement formation.

Peter Waterman has pointed to the resemblances between the new 1980s labour movements in Poland or South Africa and New Alternative Social Movements (NASM) in an age of globalisation – democratic, peace, feminist and environmental movements, all drawing on international networks.³⁴ It has been suggested that labour has once again become internationalist, insofar as it has rearticulated itself with popular democratic struggles,³⁵ and promotes a broader social vision.³⁶ Waterman coins a new term, ‘New Social Unionism’, to reflect the affinity with new social movements.³⁷ I prefer, however, to speak simply of ‘New Social Movement Unionism’ (NSMU) to highlight explicitly the cultural dimensions of worker mobilisation in Botswana as workers called for justice and forged a new, shared identity.

Initially, however, it was unclear whether the strike was really about social justice. The President, for one, accused strikers on BTV and in the press of selfishly and unpatriotically demanding a pay rise when, he claimed, more than half the population was unemployed and the country was still recovering from an unprecedented recession that had virtually brought it to its knees.³⁸ Vice President Merafhe mockingly noted the vast number of ‘luxury cars’ filling the GSS grounds (see Fig. 10.23).³⁹

Newspapers and cartoons recognised that a 16 per cent across-the-board settlement would favour high-earning civil servants at the expense of manual workers (see Fig. 10.24).

The move to a just redistribution of resources was first articulated in a BOFEPUSU Delegates Conference that gathered together regional representatives from all the unions. The leadership put to delegates the radical proposal to redistribute the 3 per cent government had offered, some 400 million pula, in a ‘pyramid structure’ so that low-paid workers would receive the lion’s share of the pay hike while higher-rated employees above Grade 4 would receive nothing. The idea had originated with the Botswana Council of Churches, whose Anglican Bishop offered an ‘ethical solution’ to the strike. It was supported by BOCCIM (Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry and Manpower), the Botswana equivalent of the CBI (Confederation of British Industry). Most remarkable for me was that none of the more highly paid civil servants and professionals in the federation, such as the doctors, rejected the offer, even though it would mean relinquishing the pay rise they were striking for. The idea, however, was rejected by the government.

This mobilisation of support and sympathy for the strikers across the social spectrum, from bishops to industrialists, from NGO leaders to politicians, along with the demand for a more equitable distribution of resources, a social justice vision, publicised the transformation of the strike into a social justice union movement.⁴⁰ The strike was no longer simply about pay. Pleading for a ‘suspension’ of the strike which appeared to have reached a deadlock, Motshwarakgole hinted at a greater vision:



Figure 10.23 Workers' cars at the strike grounds (Photo: P. Werbner).

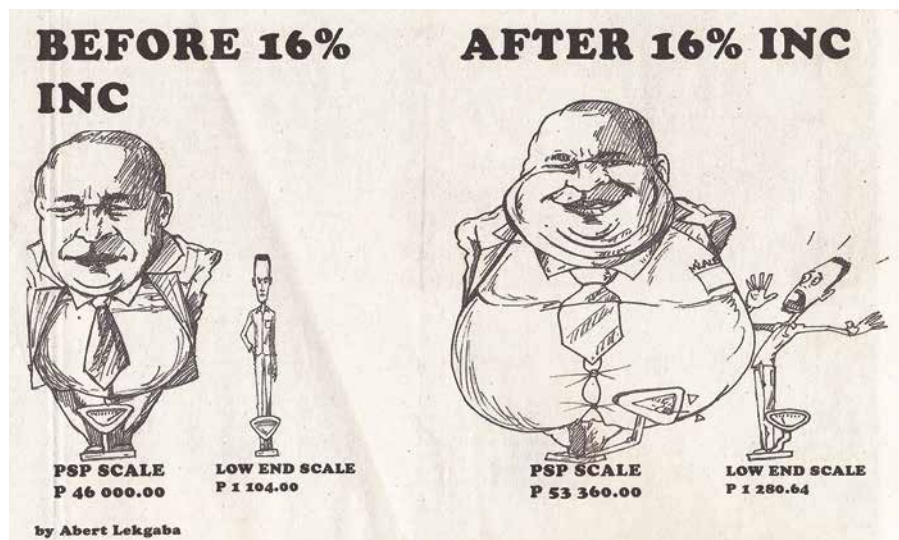


Figure 10.24 Thin and fat men before and after the strike (Cartoonist: A. Lekgaba, *Weekend Post*, 14–20 May 2011, p.10).

In the beginning, we were all about sitting under a tree and demanding our 16 per cent but now it is broader than that! ... This is proving to be the same journey that was taken by the children of Israel, that ended up taking forty years!

Motshwarakgole is implicitly voicing the hope that even if the strike is unsuccessful, it will lead to radical change, the toppling in the long term of the entrenched Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) establishment,.

His prediction that dealing with this government was like 'sitting around a bonfire with a madman' was confirmed when, on 9 June, ten days after the Delegates Conference and three days after a grand prayer meeting appealing for reconciliation, an official government press release announced the suspension of all negotiations with the federation until the strike was over on the grounds that the strike had become 'political'.

MINISTERIAL ESCAPADES

Once it had suspended the negotiations, the government embarked on a countrywide information campaign to 'explain' its response, sending ministers to convene public assemblies with local 'communities'. Well informed, the union sent workers to attend these meetings and make sure the ministers had something to answer for. At one such *kgotla* meeting, we waited and waited before eventually being informed that the Minister (or was it ministers?) had 'run away', apparently



Figure 10.25 Ministerial flight (*Sunday Standard*, 5 June 2011, p. 9).

fearing the multitude. Such failed meetings were reproduced throughout the local press and media, which had a field day, describing ministers running through the mud, desperately jumping into their vehicles. The captions tell it all: 'Masisi runs for dear life',⁴¹ 'Masisi, Rakhudu booed out of "secret meeting"',⁴² 'Ministers run for cover',⁴³ 'Ministers flee from audience'⁴⁴ (see Fig. 10.25).

THE PRAYER MEETING

By this time there was no doubt that the strikers had humiliated the government publicly and made a mockery of its venerable ministers. The workers' frustration at the government's intransigence was also becoming more tangible. It was in this context that an open prayer meeting for peace, reconciliation and dialogue assembled at the mall end of the GSS grounds, five days after these events, on the afternoon of Sunday, 5 June. This was a meeting of the great, the good and the noble: three church federations, including the Botswana Council of Churches (BCC), MPs, chiefs, government ministers and an ex-President (see Fig. 10.26).

Kagiso, my landlady, who attended as a member of one of the evangelical churches, was deeply moved by the event. It was wonderful, she said. She spoke passionately. No, the union hadn't lost because they had been outspoken and had shown they were not afraid! There had never been such a strike in Botswana before, and the government would know in the future that they can't just ignore the unions, she added hopefully.



Figure 10.26 Peace meeting (Photo: P. Werbner).

THE END OF THE STRIKE

Despite the prayer meeting's call for peace, the strike ended in conflict. From the point of view of the Manual Workers Union leadership, the strike was unsustainable. They did not have the funds to help striking unionists who had not been paid, as some of the other unions did, and their members had no financial cushion. Effectively, the government was using the strike to 'retrench' industrial-class workers, replacing those dismissed – cleaners, rubbish collectors or drivers – with contract firms, without even the usual requirement to negotiate an exit package. They were also replacing dismissed doctors and nurses. There were signs of increasing violence, greatly exacerbated by the police's over-response to minor infringements, such as road blocking and tyre-burning in the later phase of the strike. Rather than reach an unacceptable agreement with a government which had rejected the union package, the federation decided to 'suspend' the strike, meaning it could be renewed at another date. But against the union leadership, strikers throughout Botswana voted at assembly grounds to continue the strike in the face of police violence. As one said to me, we have been striking for seven weeks, how can we go back to work now, with nothing?

The next day in Gaborone, the police responded disproportionately, with teargas and rubber bullets. This contrasted with the previous eight weeks of the strike when the police were remarkably invisible at the rallies. Now, however, they encircled the perimeter fence of the grounds, three or four policemen standing together, in full riot gear, with shields, batons and helmets. One policeman filmed the assembled workers (see Fig. 10.27). It was early morning prayers, on 9 June. In one of the prayers the workers turned away from the stage towards the periphery fence, facing the police, arms lifted upwards and palms open, their eyes closed (see Fig. 10.28). Later, when I asked them if they were gesturing towards the police, to push them away from the grounds, they said no, they were just praying. One of the women preachers said, 'We are now in prison', meaning surrounded by the police. When choirs danced around the perimeter fence, I was told, mocking the police with their songs, the police responded by lobbing teargas canisters into the grounds. There was one song in particular, directed at the police:⁴⁵

Eaters on the Side

Eaters on the side [sell-outs] you are	<i>Majelathoke ke lona</i>
Who bewitched you?	<i>Le loilwe ke mang?</i>
Traitors/stooges [Zulu word] of the ruler	<i>Mpimpi tsa ba abuse</i>
Away with you!	<i>Sokela koo rona!</i>
We are going forward	<i>Re a tsamaela</i>

Figure 10.27 Facing the police
(Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.28 Police in riot gear (Photo: P. Werbner).



Figure 10.29 Regime change: Ian must go (Photo: P. Werbner).

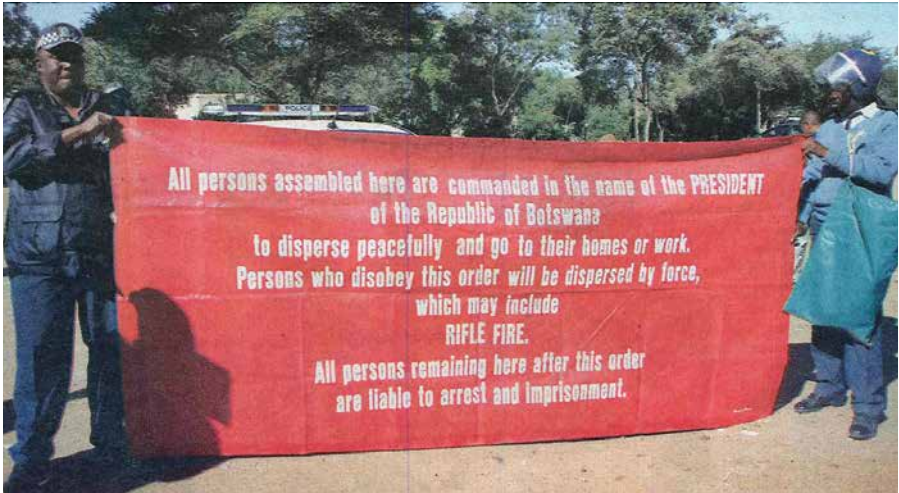


Figure 10.30 Police banner (*Midweek Sun*, 15 June 2011, p. 1).

Despite the leadership decision to suspend the strike, the following Monday about 200 strikers assembled at the GSS grounds in the capital, under the Morula tree (see Fig. 10.29). At 2 pm the police arrived in full riot gear carrying a giant red (!) banner (see Fig. 10.30) bearing the words:

All persons assembled here are commanded in the name of the PRESIDENT of the Republic of Botswana to disperse peacefully and go to their homes or work. Persons who disobey this order will be dispersed by force, which may include RIFLE FIRE. All persons remaining here after this order are liable to arrest and imprisonment. [Capital letters in the original.]

After holding up the banner, the police advanced on the strikers, brandishing guns and baseball bats. At this point the workers dispersed, running to the Civic Hall, the mall and the Anglican church. Giving chase, the police arrested some thirty people randomly at the Civic Hall. The shocking belligerence of the banner, threatening to use gunfire against a relatively small, peaceful assembly gathered in the middle of a vast, empty football field, has to be considered alongside the terrified response by government ministers to the crowds of peaceful strikers attending their meetings. No wonder one of the union leaders commented to me mournfully that 'We live in a military dictatorship!'

The police threat of violence points to a yawning social gap between the government and its own respectable, educated and hard-working civil servants. Rather than recognising that the strikers were 'one of us', and the strike a peaceful, mostly middle-class rebellion, the government seemed to have convinced itself that the strikers were a rampaging mob, out of control like the rioting school pupils who had vandalised school buildings in some towns.

The rejection of the union leadership's call to suspend the strike points clearly to the new social movement dynamic of the strike; to the autonomy, self-empowerment and democratic tradition that the strike rallies had produced. In their caucusing and open democratic debate strikers were in effect "prefiguring" the just society they hoped to create'.⁴⁶ While the leadership recognised pragmatically that an agreement with the government regarding the dismissed workers must be reached urgently, striking unionists could not be blamed for feeling that to return to work now would be to admit defeat.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has analysed New Social Movement Unionism, Botswana style, the collective creation of a shared worker identity and ethos, drawing on local popular culture and traditional modes of celebration, and echoing cosmopolitan themes from protest movements elsewhere in the world, in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. In particular, it showed, newly invented insult songs called politicians to account and reminded them that, from the President downwards, 'the chief is chief only by the grace of the people'. The emergent social movement that the workers shaped collectively was not only exhilarating: it endowed strikers with a sense of empowerment, dignity and autonomy and united them

across divisions of class, occupation, gender, education and income. But unlike the familiar old labour movement with its international political roots expressed in rousing songs of protest, solidarity, hardship and struggle, this protest was youthful, humorous, satirical and self-consciously part of a global movement, reflecting a radical generational and political shift.

Despite being largely a middle-class rebellion, the strikers' courageous willingness to be counted, to resist what was widely seen to be an unjust, authoritarian government endorsing the growing gap between rich and poor, emerged spontaneously and over time swept the whole of Botswana in its wake, from priests and chiefs to parliamentarians and ordinary folk. The values invoked in the public domain were those of fairness, justice and a return to the welfare state. Although the strike seemed, on the face of it, to fail in its stated objectives, confronted by a powerful government determined to pursue prudent monetary policies and eliminate the national deficit before the next elections in 2014, and although some workers lost their jobs and most were not paid for over two months, the events of April to June were nevertheless a watershed in the history of Botswana. During the eight weeks of the strike, strikers forged a new national and worker consciousness, and gave notice that ordinary citizens were determined to protect Botswana's forty-five-year established tradition of democracy, freedom of speech and egalitarian values.

In Egypt, the popular uprising followed mass strikes by labour unions. In Botswana, the felt experience of owning the 'political' and the obliteration of the usual social divisions between workers did not occur in what Benjamin called 'homogeneous, empty time'.⁴⁷ It was grasped by workers as a significant moment in history in which, as Benjamin put it, 'time stands still',⁴⁸ a time in which prior visions of authority were reworked, extended and revitalised in rhetoric and popular culture. As Setrag Manoukian has argued with regard to the 2009 Iranian post-election protests, the experience of 'suspended time' linked the Iranian protesters to earlier historical moments when people took to the streets, and in which political subjectivity was 'remolded and reconstituted'.⁴⁹ In Botswana, where past mass protests were few, protesters linked themselves, in time, to ritual traditional local protest genres and, over space, to world protests elsewhere, in Southern Africa and the Middle East.

NOTES

1. See www.workersliberty.org/system/files/111023mena.pdf (accessed 7 June 2013).
2. On Africa more generally see Cooper, F. (1996), *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Schler, L. (2008), 'Transnationalism and nationalism in the Nigerian Seamen's Union', special issue on 'Rethinking Labour in Africa', *African Identities* 7, 3: 387-98; on South Africa see Southall, R. (1995), *Imperialism or Solidarity?*

- International Labour and South African Trade Unions*, Cape Town: UCT Press.
3. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*.
 4. On this see Manoukian, S. (2011), 'Two forms of temporality in contemporary Iran', *SocioLogica* 3: 1-17.
 5. On performative iteration in relation to Foucault's notion of 'discourse' see Butler, J. (1993), *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London: Routledge, p. 15. On the power of mimesis see Taussig, M. (1993), *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, London: Routledge, p. 250. On hybridity as a displacement or the 'doubling up' of signs see Bhabha, H. K. (1994), *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, p. 119; also Werbner, P. (2001), 'The limits of cultural hybridity: On ritual monsters, poetic licence, and contested postcolonial purifications', *JRAI (incorporating Man)* 7, 1: 133-52, at p. 136.
 6. Thus, in a critique of social movement theory, Armstrong and Bernstein argue against the privileging in some social movement theory of the state, and argue that the state, like other institutions, is always culturally constituted, Armstrong, E. A. and M. Bernstein (2008), 'Culture, power, and institutions: A multi-institutional politics approach to social movements', *Sociological Theory* 26, 74: 74-99. See also Sartwell, C. (2010), *Political Aesthetics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 15-47 on the aesthetics of dictatorial and authoritarian states.
 7. Gluckman, M. (1963), *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, London: Cohen and West; Comaroff, J. (1978), 'Rules and rulers: Political processes in a Tswana chiefdom', *Man* (N. S.), 13, 1: 1-20; Schapera, I. (1956), *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies*, London: Watts, pp. 137, 220.
 8. Schapera, *Government and Politics*, p. 138.
 9. Gulbrandsen, O. (1995), 'The king is king by the grace of the people: The exercise and control of power in subject-ruler relations', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, 3: 415-44, at p. 421.
 10. These included *Ipelegeng*, a welfare work scheme, a 'back garden' vegetable-growing scheme and a ploughing subsidy scheme.
 11. In my forthcoming book (2014), *The Making of an African Working Class*, London: Pluto Press.
 12. Teachers' union representative, 25 May 2011.
 13. BOFEPUSU delegates conference, 28 May 2011.
 14. Speech made at the GSS grounds, 28 April 2011.
 15. Shade in Botswana has ritual meaning, linked to notions of dignity, and people avoid going into the sun bare-headed, Werbner, R. (under consideration), *Divination's Grasp: African Encounters with the Almost Said*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
 16. Tshukudu, I. (2011), '3 days to disaster', *The Voice*, 15 April 2011. Online at www.thevoicebw.com/2011/04/15/3-days-to-disaster/ (accessed 16 January 2014).
 17. Later renamed 'International'.
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PART THREE

*Beyond the Arab Spring –
American and European Protests*

CHAPTER I I

‘Vernacular Culture and Grassroots Activism: Non-violent Protest and Progressive Ethos at the 2011 Wisconsin Labour Rallies

CHRISTINE GARLOUGH

‘The essence of politics can be subsumed in the question: What are individuals capable of when they meet, organise and take decisions?’¹

Many scholars studying the Arab Spring of 2011 have characterised it as a ‘great emancipatory movement’ that was part of a ‘year of dreaming dangerously’.² Academic and popular discourse has, by and large, focused on protests in the Middle East and North Africa, with commentary on demonstrations in Greece, Spain and the UK providing important insights as well. With regard to US contexts, most discourse related to the Arab Spring of 2011 concerns the Occupy Wall Street movement that spoke to the dramatic rise of income disparity and made calls for economic reform. Ignored has been the US precursor to the Occupy Wall Street movement – the 2011 spring protests in Madison, Wisconsin. Here thousands of protesters – teachers, labour representatives, farmers, firefighters, students and nurses – marched around the State Capitol building in freezing temperatures and falling snow, to oppose the newly elected conservative Republican Governor Walker’s war ‘Budget Repair bill’ that slashed collective bargaining rights for public employees, cut \$1.5 billion in aid to schools and local government, and significantly reduced the state’s Badger Care programme that provided aid to children and adults from low-income families not eligible for Medicaid.

Although the connections between the global Arab Spring movement and the 2011 Wisconsin protests have not garnered much international attention, the similarities between these grassroots organising efforts were not lost on liberals or conservatives in the US context. Given the huge size of the protest, almost immediately many news pundits, political analysts and politicians began

to compare the Wisconsin protests to the large-scale demonstrations that had just occurred in Cairo. Even though the Wisconsin protests remained non-violent throughout, conservative talking heads appearing on Fox News and similar media outlets predicted Cassandra-like the catastrophic likelihood of ‘mobs’ developing. The conservative Republican Paul Ryan (R-WI) adopted a clear Orientalist overtone when he warned that: ‘[Walker’s] getting riots – it’s like Cairo’s moved to Madison these days’.³ Governor Walker added fuel to the fire by threatening to call out the National Guard should there be resistance to his proposed bill.⁴ Meanwhile, liberals drew much more positive lessons from the global protest, noting similarities in the visible commitment to social justice issues, as well as critiques of the corruption and political favours provided to corporations by those in power.

Of course, one of the important differences between contexts was that most of the countries involved in the Arab Spring uprisings were authoritarian non-democracies, ‘so restrictions of free expression and demand for social justice and economic justice spontaneously integrated into demand for democracy’.⁵ In contrast, in the Wisconsin protests, people were invoking histories of free speech in the public sphere and the politically progressive past of the state to claim their worker rights and standard of living now under attack.

Despite such apparent differences, there were important connections between these struggles, seen as workers’ struggles. Kamal Abbas, General Coordinator for Egypt’s Center for Trade Unions and Workers’ Services, sent a message on 21 February 2011 to the workers of Wisconsin:

I am speaking to you from a place very close to Tahrir Square in Cairo, ‘Liberation Square’, which was the heart of the revolution in Egypt. This is the place where many of our youth paid with their lives and blood in the struggle for our just rights. From this place, I want you to know that we stand with you as you stood with us.⁶

Taking note of this declaration, Noam Chomsky wrote on 11 March 2011:

Egyptian workers have long fought for fundamental rights denied by the U.S.-backed Hosni Mubarak regime. Kamal is right to invoke the solidarity that has long been the driving force of the labour movement world-wide, and to compare their struggles for labour rights and democracy. The two are closely intertwined. Labour movements have been in the forefront of protecting democracy and human rights and expanding their domains, a primary reason why they are the bane of systems of power, both state and private.⁷

Both the popular press and academic journals have noted the remarkable use of social media to overcome limitations on free speech, disseminate the latest

information amongst protesters, and demand social and economic justice. From Twitter to YouTube, social media played an important role in organising political action and community support. Social media also aided people in finding allies in distant locations. For example, Medea Benjamin from the *Huffington Post* wrote:

Egyptian engineer Muhammad Salin Nusair, the one whose photo supporting Wisconsin workers went viral, now has thousands of new American Facebook friends. He wrote in his blog that many of his new friends were surprised by his gesture of solidarity, but he was taught that ‘we live in ONE world and under the same sky’.⁸

Clearly, however, neither the global diffusion of information and expectations, nor the spread of popular movements, strategies of civil disobedience and norms of civic engagement, are new. The protests were not just the result of new social media and the impact of the internet. We need, I suggest, to take a closer look at how alternative forms of public communication aided in the framing of issues and making of claims in political discourse, and especially how dramatic performances within protest contexts provided protesters with an embodied and creative experience – in the presence of others – of interrogating exigencies their society faces.⁹

More specifically, in this chapter I am concerned with the ways in which innovative, carnivalesque street performances at the 2011 Wisconsin protests gathered large crowds, reflecting through satire and masquerade on other forms of political discourse – public speeches, pamphlets and protest signs. These playful, artistic, theatrical acts created solidarity in the face of incivility and non-recognition, as hope for reconciliation receded. Drawing upon vernacular culture, these performances offered protesters ‘the chance to participate in an experience of unmasking and condemning the powerful’ and ‘exercise one of the last rights of a citizen. The right not to believe a single word they are told’.¹⁰ Protesters transfigured notable local folk characters in uncanny but recognisable ways to enact the brutality of state violence and call attention to the dire implications of Governor Walker’s policy changes.

In order to better understand the political use of these street plays, I begin with a brief history of the Madison 2011 protests. Drawing on theories of rhetoric in philosophy, anthropology and folklore, I then discuss the importance of ‘rhetorical performance’ in linking ‘persuasion and pleasure, politics and aesthetics, citizenship and entertainment, and activism and art’.¹¹ I show how progressive Wisconsin protesters used street performances to bear witness and educate citizens, as well as respond non-violently to the stripping of collective bargaining rights, sweeping cuts to the proposed budget and the Governor’s

unwillingness to negotiate or participate in dialogue, as he rapidly pushed these changes through the legislature. Each of the performances described revolved around questions of sovereignty and the sovereign, especially where these were apparent in the broader social and cultural context that informed these protests. The answers the street plays offered revealed a good deal about how solidarity was understood and how citizens were able to mobilise the carnivalesque to convey insightful and serious concerns while calling for public engagement.

THE CONTEXT OF AN UPRISING

Beginning the day before Valentine's Day, the 2011 Wisconsin protests erupted shortly after recently elected Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker unveiled his budget plan. At the heart of his proposal was a determination to eliminate collective bargaining rights for most public employees (excepting 'first responders'), while asking the same workers to increase their contributions to health and retirement benefits. Swearing off any new tax or fee revenue, the budget also cut billions in support for schools, local government and health care for low-income families. Walker asserted that without these cuts the state would experience a shortfall of \$3.6 billion.¹²

In the wake of his budget proposal, few disputed the need to 'share the pain' in addressing the shortfalls in the state budget. Other aspects of this policy shift, however, were contested and questioned in print, broadcast and digital media outlets, in bars and restaurants, and in the family rooms of state residents. People questioned the speed with which this complex and sweeping piece of legislation was being pushed through, with very limited opportunity for deliberation or discussion over substantial cuts to services and changes in workers' rights. Others asked how this budget crisis had come about in the first place, especially in light of the fact that the Governor had inherited a surplus when entering office. Walker, they argued, gave away '\$137 million in tax breaks to corporations, leaving the state with a shortfall that cried out for a solution'.¹³

The sweeping changes advanced by Walker and his Republican allies in the state legislature reversed Wisconsin's celebrated history of labour rights and progressive politics. Wisconsin was the first to pass worker's compensation protection, in 1911, and unemployment compensation, in 1932, and hence the erosion of collective bargaining rights came as a shock.¹⁴ The response was the largest political protests in Wisconsin history, occurring within days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Like their counterparts half a world away, the protests in Wisconsin presaged broader popular discontent and the spread of the Occupy Movement worldwide.

One day after a small group of 150 protesters gathered outside the gates of the Governor's Mansion, University of Wisconsin–Madison teaching assistants



Figure 11.1 Protestors at the Wisconsin Capitol (Photo: M. Menocal).



Figure 11.2 Advocating peaceful solutions (Photo: M. Menocal).



Figure 11.3 Keep the movement alive (Photo: M. Menocal).



Figure 11.4 Bob La Follette (Photo: M. Menocal).

and professors partnered with public school teachers to launch large rallies at the State Capitol. Beginning on Valentine's Day, over 1,000 people gathered at the Capitol to deliver 'Love Notes', proclaiming their affection for the university and teachers and urging the Governor to reconsider. In the days that followed, labour leaders insisted on testifying against the Budget Repair bill. Within a week, protesters had taken up residency, occupying the State Capitol and establishing a functioning community, complete with food stations, sleeping areas and an information centre (see Fig. 11.1). Within two weeks, by 26 February, as many as 100,000 citizens peacefully circled the Capitol in freezing rain and bitter cold with protest signs (see Figs 11.2 and 11.3).

Non-violent and grassroots, the protest movement mobilised largely outside party organisations and forged loosely coordinated alliances and workplace coalitions.¹⁵ The protests soon became national and international news, drawing cable news hosts and international journalists. Support for the protesters and their cause poured in from across the nation and the globe (see Fig. 11.4), often taking unexpected forms. For example, one local pizza restaurant received orders to deliver food to the demonstrators 'on behalf of people from all fifty states, over sixty countries and Antarctica'. Such gestures became the material manifestations of worldwide labour solidarity.

Contrary to Ryan's view, there were no riots. Rather, the demonstrators were committed to the peaceful expression of their opposition, referring to their actions as 'waging non-violence'. Their preferred outlet was the protest poster, creatively crafted to address issues of labour rights, democratic process and corporate greed. Placards and signs communicated 'opinions and feelings that touch our innermost sense of who we are and our moral visions about how we should act in the world'.¹⁶ Chants such as 'Forward, Not Backward!' (referencing the state's motto, 'Forward') worked to remind listeners of Wisconsin's progressive political identity. Demonstrators not only occupied the State Capitol but also renamed it the 'People's House', reconstituting it as a place for the unacknowledged masses, rather than an institution for a privileged few.

Non-violent action continued into late spring and early summer as some protesters created 'Walkerville', a tent city referencing the Hoovervilles of the Great Depression, after the Capitol was cleared, while other activists mobilised recall efforts throughout the state. Friendship networks (including those linked by social networking sites like Facebook), workplace alliances (especially among public sector workers and their allies) and grassroots organising (particularly by labour unions and activated citizens) sustained a unified approach of peaceful solidarity. These loose networks strengthened over the months of the protest efforts, as protesters vied for public support and were supported by the energy of newly engaged citizens.¹⁷

Much of the rhetoric invoked by the protesters referenced the recorded

Workers!'; 'There is no America without labour and to fleece one is to rob the other' – Abraham Lincoln!) to claims about democratic principles and practices ('Elected to Serve, Came to Rule!'; 'Tyrants Don't Negotiate!'; 'Democracy = Dialogue'; 'My Kindergarteners are Better Listeners than my Governor!').

As these selected examples illustrate, protesters displayed considerable playfulness and creativity, drawing upon news events, historical materials, folklore and popular culture. Beyond these examples, some demonstrators drew connections to mythical, literary and movie villains. In one poster, Governor Walker was figured as Medusa with snake tentacles writhing on his head that were labelled with the names and pictures of his political supporters, such as Cowels, Kapanke, Hopper and Darling. The text on the sign read, 'Hades is Waiting for You, Hearts of Stone'. Popular culture narratives and figures were also frequently visible. Some included *V for Vendetta* ('We will be heard. We will win.'), *Star Wars* ('There is still good in you (Sky) Walker!') and *Harry Potter* ('Walker is in League with Voldemort, Muggles Beware!').¹⁸

The non-violent 'occupation' of the 'People's House' continued until 3 March 2011. During this time, folk practices increased and were central to the growing sense of community. Daily drum circles, Midwestern potluck-style eating, repurposed protest songs – all became sources of humour directed not only at Governor Walker but also at other polarising figures such as the Koch brothers (major donors to Republican and Libertarian causes) and Republican leaders Jeff and Scott Fitzgerald.

The acrimony and anger on the streets surrounding the Capitol were also evident among the legislators charged with debating and voting on Walker's controversial budget proposal. This came to a head on 17 February, when all fourteen Democratic state Senators fled across the state line to Illinois. This action was meant to deny the quorum the Republican-controlled legislature needed to force through the passage of the bill. All this was on the heels of assembly Republicans convening a floor session before it was properly scheduled.

In the early morning hours of Friday, 25 February, Wisconsin Assembly Republicans passed Walker's budget bill, which included the controversial anti-union measure, through a procedural move in which they abruptly cut off debate, approving the bill in a voice vote, 51–17. The manoeuvre caught the Democrats off guard, with many unable even to return to their seats to have the chance to vote. Consequently, the following Saturday, protests swelled to their largest numbers, with waves of up to 100,000 protesters descending on the Capitol and the streets surrounding it.

In the days that followed, Republican senators removed the overt fiscal elements from the Budget Repair bill, retaining the stripping of collective bargaining rights. This allowed them to vote on the bill without a quorum, in the absence of the Democratic Senators, passing the measure on an 18–1 vote in

favour, with only one Republican Senator dissenting. No Democratic Senators were present. On Friday, 11 March, Governor Walker signed the legislation into a law that greatly limited the ability of unions representing the state's public employees. The following day produced a huge protest, with Madison police estimating upwards of 100,000 people in attendance.¹⁹

VERNACULAR RHETORIC, FOLKLORE AND PERFORMANCE

As days passed, thousands of protesters gathered at the Capitol and a diverse array of performance practices began to emerge, ranging from protest signs to choreographed parades. Gruesomely costumed 'zombie' street performers lurched into the hallways of the Capitol to protest the death of collective bargaining. A Mardi Gras style procession was organised by National Nurses United,²⁰ an event that drew large crowds of firefighters, students and union members who marched to live jazz music, evoking a New Orleans style funeral for the death of Wisconsin's progressive ideals. Many carried hand-made protest signs, while 'pall bearers' bore black caskets with placards proclaiming 'Some Cuts Don't Heal' and 'Save Early Childhood Education'. Despite their humorous satirical theatricality, these carnivalesque performances conveyed the powerful sense of disenfranchisement and painful disacknowledgment felt by protesters.

If rhetoric is the art of persuasive speaking or writing, by extension it can be applied to other forms of aesthetic performances that aim to persuade. Clearly, performances in the Wisconsin protests were far more than just a way to have a good time or to blow off steam. They framed persuasive appeals for understanding and action. As Bryant has argued, rhetoric, understood broadly, is a form of symbolic communication that makes visible matters of contingency and 'finds a home whenever matters are ambiguous, contestable, and questionable'.²¹ In this broader sense, rhetorical performance may be found in puberty rituals, congressional debates, wartime deliberations, community narratives or even symbolic displays of the flag. Indeed, public speeches, poetry and theatre performances all have 'a distinctly rhetorical function, using imagination to create what might be called historical fictions to give power and life to ideas'.²² Similarly, folklore and popular culture are often critically appropriated in rhetorically artistic ways to make persuasive appeals grounded in ethos, pathos and logos. The fashioning of rhetoric – an explicitly cultural activity – is often a site of struggle: 'Rhetoric happens in unfinished historical episodes, wherein urgent circumstances require that we act, even though we lack complete, reliable grounds for determining what the best action might be'.²³

We are socialised into rhetorical competence, learning how to call forth the appropriate discourse and practices when confronted by crisis or need.²⁴ Rhetoricians are attuned to their cultural and social environment, able to

provide a ‘fitting response’ in performance contexts. Rituals, art, narrative and other aspects of culture provide the material orators selectively draw upon to advance agendas, educate constituencies, support social movements and constitute identities.

Rhetorical events are often inventive collaborative processes in which performers and audience members are drawn together into an engagement with ideas and problems. This was true in the Wisconsin protest where collaborative work highlighted the fact that rhetoric is ‘a creative way of being-with-others’.²⁵ Rhetoric in this view is concerned with values and ‘values are established with the aid of imaginative realisations, not through rational determinations alone and they gain their force through emotional animation’.²⁶ In the process, audience members become aware that the suffering of others is relevant to their own interests; and this, Farrell notes, is the faith of democracy.²⁷

CRITICAL PERFORMANCES FOR CRITICAL TIMES

Krampus at the Wisconsin Capitol

During the spring of 2011, carnivalesque performances at the Wisconsin protests played a critical role in calling attention to failings in the political process, widening rifts in local communities and perceptions of poor leadership. These concerns were addressed, for example, by groups of protesters masquerading as the beastly figure of Krampus. Krampus was the subject of some of the most visible and uncanny street performances during the protests, causing audiences repeatedly to break into laughter, even as they seriously protested for social justice.

Krampus, a menacing mythical figure with pre-Christian origins, has a long tradition in the Christmas celebrations of Austria, southern Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Croatia – areas from which many Wisconsinites emigrated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Travelling from house to house on 6 December with St Nicholas, Krampus judges the moral character and ethical behaviour of local children. Found wanting, children are publicly shamed and punished by Krampus who places their hands and feet in shackles or thrashes their bodies with switches, rusty chains or a whip. Extremely naughty children are thrown into a basket on Krampus’s back and hauled to his lair where they are eaten or drowned. Worse yet, others are dragged, kicking and screaming, to the nether regions.

Krampus – whose name derives from ‘Krampen’, the German word for claw – is typically figured as a hairy man-beast or devilish creature with long curved horns and cloven hooves. In his honour, on the evening of *Krampusnacht*, groups of men have traditionally taken to the streets dressed in fur and wearing intricately carved wooden masks (a disguise sometimes known as *Larven*



Figure 11.6 Krampus knocking for Governor Walker at Capitol entrance (Photo: M. Menocal).

that is traditionally passed down through generations) with pointed animal ears, an enormous tongue and an unkempt mane (see Fig. 11.6). The early Catholic Church discouraged these celebrations, and during the Inquisition strong attempts were made to end them by making it punishable by death to masquerade as any sort of evil creature or the devil. Nevertheless, the Krampus customs survived in remote villages, until, in the aftermath of the 1934 Austrian Civil War, these traditions were again prohibited under the Fatherland Front and the Christian Social Party.²⁸ Remarkably, Krampus endured this attempt at suppression as well. Today, across Europe and in diasporic contexts such as the US, *Krampusnacht* celebrations continue to gain momentum.²⁹



Figure 11.7 Shame (Photo: M. Menocal).

In the Wisconsin protests, Krampus appeared at the forefront of several marches around the Capitol, shaking his fist and bearing a sign stating ‘Walker, Krampus must talk with you’. In these marches, Krampus performs a visual argument. In this argument, his appearance provides vivid and forceful reasons for undermining any belief in Governor Walker’s moral conduct in office. Krampus’s transcendent authority to judge the Governor, deriving from his traditional role as purveyor of moral judgement that extends beyond human law, resonated with many audience members. This particular visual argument functioned as an enthymeme – an argument with gaps, left to be filled in by the audience. In this case: (1) Krampus seeks out and punishes those who behave badly; (2) Krampus is seeking out Governor Walker; (3) Walker is behaving badly. This performance drew intertextually upon an already present set of discourses at the protest that characterised the Republicans’ behaviour as ‘Shameful’ (see Fig. 11.7).

In addition, Governor Walker was derided in public discourse for behaving ‘as if’ he were a sovereign (see Fig. 11.8). Like a sovereign, he acted ‘as if’ he had the power to make and to suspend the law without limit. In doing so, he appeared to invoke ‘the exceptional right to place oneself above right’.³⁰ Moreover, like a sovereign, Governor Walker did not feel compelled to respond to citizens; rather, he seemed unbound from duties of reciprocity. In this way, Derrida notes, both the ‘sovereign and the beast seem to have in common their being-outside-the-law’.³¹

This refusal to communicate was underlined by an attending sign proclaiming ‘Walker, Krampus Must Talk With You!’ It seems that while it is clear that Krampus judges Walker to be behaving badly, he is not arriving at the Capitol to carry him off to the nether regions or cause him physical harm. Rather, even a beast like Krampus advocates ‘speaking together’ about the problems at hand – reiterating the non-violent ethos of the protest (see Fig. 11.2).

Throughout the Krampus street performances, the carnivalesque atmosphere created by the performers enhanced the masquerade’s rhetorical potential. Krampus’s antics permeated the boundaries between himself and his audience, creating an alternative space in which hierarchies were overturned through debasement and inversion: the dominant, authoritative voice of the Governor and Republican right was denied its legitimacy. Instead, humour challenged and undermined the sanctity of this voice, subverting its appearance of authoritative power.

Whose Wisconsin?: The Koch Brothers and Corporate Greed

Emerson wrote in his *Journal* that ‘Caricatures are often the truest history of all times’.³² The performers of ‘The Koch Brothers and Corporate Greed’ exploited this potentiality to convince their audiences of the evil of wealth unchecked. Through humorous parodies of excessive wealth and privilege, they offered an incisive commentary on politicians’ subservience to American plutocrats.



Figure 11.8 Imperial Walker (Photo: M. Menocal).

The performance sparked a plethora of conversations and debates amongst the protesters – regarding social justice, unions, benefits, American democracy – while also referencing larger national and international economic concerns.

For many protesters, it was common knowledge that Walker’s victory in 2010 was accomplished, in part, by the backing of the Koch brothers, who were his second highest donors (see Fig. 11.9). Fears were confirmed when

on Wednesday, February 23rd ... an itinerant blogger from western New York called the governor, posing as one of his billionaire donors, David Koch. Unlike the democratic senators, union leaders and constituents who had been calling the governor all week, he got through. It was less what Walker said that was shocking (although he confessed to considering planting troublemakers in crowds of protesters and asked for a donation to the Republican senators) than the tone of his conversation, which made it clear that he was in the pocket of big money and that his agenda and ambitions were determined by interests outside the state. Demonstrators began to target David and Charles Koch’s Madison headquarters and even conservative supporters of the governor began to squirm with discomfort.³³

Early in the protests, activists had spent considerable time trying to educate the public about the Koch brothers’ business and political interests. On websites and blogs and in flyers, they explained that the New York billionaires Charles and



Figure 11.9 The Koch brothers – Walker’s puppeteers (Photo: M. Menocal).



Figure 11.10 Welcome to Wis'koch'sin (Photo M. Menocal).



Figure 11.11 Wis'koch'sin is open for business (Photo: M. Menocal).

David Koch owned almost all of Koch Industries, a conglomerate headquartered in Wichita, Kansas. The revenues of this conglomerate were estimated to be billions of dollars, making the brothers among the richest men in America with combined fortunes only surpassed by those of Bill Gates and Warren Buffett. The Koch brothers advocated minimal social services for the needy, dramatically reduced personal and corporate taxes, and decreased industry regulation, particularly environmental regulation.³⁴ They had financially supported groups like Americans for Prosperity (the non-profit Tea Party organising group), the Cato Institute, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Reason Foundation – all of which had a history of unsympathetic views toward public sector unions.

Protesters also called the public's attention to the fact that two weeks before Walker was elected Governor, the Koch brothers opened an office in Madison. According to the Government Accountability Board's website, the firm had seven lobbyists who 'represented various Koch Industries Inc. companies on public affairs matters, including Flint Hills Resources, LP, an energy purchaser and refiner & transporter of petroleum and Georgia-Pacific, LLC a manufacturer of paper, wood products and building materials'. The group's lobbying interests were listed as 'the environment, energy, taxation, business, policy and other areas affecting Koch Industries, Inc. companies'.³⁵

As the Koch brothers became more entrenched in the local politics, protesters became increasingly concerned and public discourse circled around the question 'Who are these non-Wisconsinites and to what degree are their interests influencing the direction of our state and the development of our local communities?' (see Figs 11.10 and 11.11). During the protest they drew attention to this problem through street theatre performances. The performance of 'The Koch Brothers and Corporate Greed' was staged on the back of a flatbed truck decorated along the sides with posters stating 'Corporate Greed is Injuring America!' and 'Heal America, Tax Corporations!' In a political cartoon 'come to life', performers enacted parodic representations of nineteenth-century monopolists, dressed in top hats, bow ties and white gloves, much like the Billionaires for Bush protest group discussed by Angelique Haugerud (see Fig. 11.9).³⁶ These iconic representations of the 'upper crust' recalled past moments when big business had made for bad politics in Wisconsin. The critically appropriated images transcended their relation to the specific events of the past, creating a more expansive rhetorical framework that allowed audiences to re-imagine these narratives in relation to the contemporary corporate greed apparent in Wisconsin today. The satirical theatrical street performances also referred intertextually to local folk hero Fighting Bob La Follette's war on big business – a powerful undercurrent that was not lost on the audience (see Fig. 11.12). The rhetorical performance was supported by material documents, as protesters circulated lists of companies owned by the Koch brothers and products for boycotting.

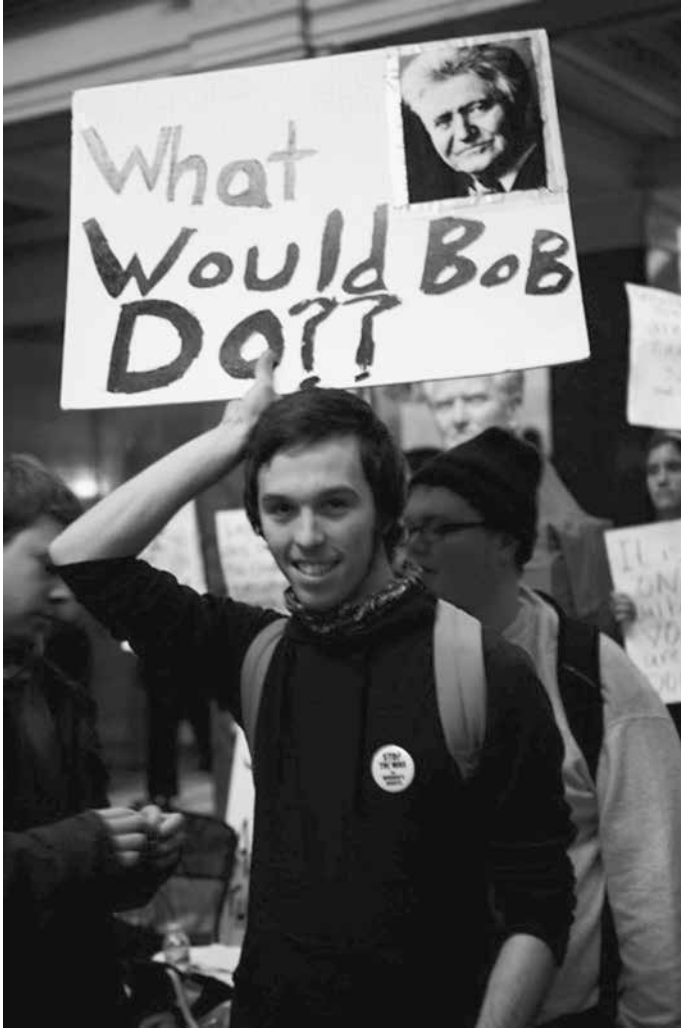


Figure 11.12 What would Bob La Follette do? (Photo: M. Menocal).

As dandified performers pulled the strings attached to Governor Walker's cartoonish head, the argument was clear. Walker was the Koch brothers' puppet (see Figs 11.9 above and 11.13). Like a lifeless marionette, he lacked the sovereignty necessary to make his own decisions. Consequently, his economic and political agenda was one determined by interests outside the state of Wisconsin. This was a theme repeated in various performances during the Wisconsin protests.

As shown in Fig. 11.13, Governor Walker was figured alternatively as a ventriloquist's dummy or marionette without a voice or a soul – merely a substitute, an object that is insensible, inanimate, uncanny, *bête* or manipulated.³⁷



Figure 11.13 Scott, who pulls your strings? (Photo: M. Menocal).



Figure 11.14 Only sheep blindly follow (Photo: M. Menocal).

This visual spectacle of the Koch brothers' excess also contrasted sharply with the thousands of 'folk' who came to protest, not only in their hard hats, firefighter gear and police uniforms, but bundled in their everyday parkas, winter hats and mittens, required coverage in the quickly dropping temperatures. Indeed, in many ways the audience became part of the performance – a sharp visual juxtaposition to the brothers' excessive wealth. The exposed tensions between the wealthy and the folk, or Wisconsinites and outsiders embodied a politics of visibility that sought to make plain the widening gap between the classes. As a radical performance, the performers created a stimulus to deliberative engagement with issues of social justice and equity.

Move on Over Walker: The Madison Raging Grannies Are Coming For You!

In this final case study of the Raging Grannies, I consider street performances that made yet another argument about where sovereignty lay at the Wisconsin 2011 protests. Wearing flamboyant kitchen aprons, wide-brimmed granny bonnets, house dresses and tattered shawls, senior women from the Madison area critically appropriated the figure of the wise 'granny' as they performed familiar folk songs set to political lyrics. The tunes, meant to provoke laughter from the audience, simultaneously reflected upon the serious challenges facing their community. As the women marched in the blustery snow, gathering crowds on street corners, the songs they performed made one overarching claim – despite appearances, sovereignty truly lay in the hands of the people of Wisconsin.

Of course, their protest movement at the Capitol was not their first gig. The Raging Grannies of Madison originated as a sidearm of the Madison chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Their first performance, in the autumn of 2003, was for crowds of Madison anti-war protesters. Their work continued to grow in the area as they sang at events for the League of Women Voters, Lanterns for Peace, LGBTQ Allies Potluck, Planned Parenthood, the offices of Congress, Labor Temple and the Social Justice Center, as well as Bob-Fest, an annual grassroots festival that celebrates the progressive legacy of 'Fighting Bob' La Follette.³⁸ The group is open to all older women who desire to work for peace, economic and social justice, and the environment. Consequently, the group is diverse in terms of age (generally 50s to 80s), economic background, religion (atheist, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and so on), sexual and even political orientations. The Madison group meets monthly at the Oakwood Retirement Village to practise their repertoire and plan their next protest performance.³⁹ Recently, they have been actively helping other Wisconsin communities form their own groups, making road trips to remote towns to start organisations such as the 'Northwoods Grannies'. As one Madison Raging Granny put it, 'We are not retiring to our rocking chairs. Instead, we are

taking care of our community in ways that show the strength of non-violence and our commitment to social justice in the public sphere'.⁴⁰

They are not alone. The Madison Raging Grannies is one branch of an established community movement linked nationally and internationally through the internet, newsletters and conferences, with chapters in England, Greece, Canada, Australia and other countries. Their history began in 1987 in Victoria, British Columbia, when ten older women who were participating in a street theatre group paddled canoes into Canadian waters to confront a US nuclear-powered warship, singing protest songs while dressed in gaudy granny gear.⁴¹ Today, their playful grassroots activism, in their local communities and around the world, is framed as a symbolic expansion of their roles as responsible grandmothers who are worried about the future health of the planet.⁴²

In Wisconsin, the performance of protest songs and narratives of labour lore have a long legacy. These entertaining songs and stories express the struggles of everyday people and play important roles in protest contexts: expressing anger toward the oppressor, unifying constituencies, releasing feelings of resentment or renewing resolve to carry on together, despite hardships, and fight for a better life.⁴³ I have argued elsewhere that such humorous protest singing has become a communicable form of wisdom, assisting *Verstehen* (understanding).⁴⁴

The Raging Grannies create their performances by taking these familiar pieces of folklore and injecting them with political humour and commentary. As one Granny noted, 'We try to compose songs with singable, repetitive choruses where people can join in. Sometimes we print out the chorus part and hand it out to the audience so they can all sing together. That's a real feel-good moment'.⁴⁵ Another Granny added, 'We take well-known Wisconsin songs and put political lyrics to them, like the "Wisconsin Fight Song" or "The Beer Barrel Polka"'.⁴⁶ This creativity is not mere nostalgia; rather, it forms a critical link between past and present in an intersubjective encounter that depends for its effectiveness both on the audience's former knowledge and on their bodily presence and participation, to revitalise the spirit of democracy.⁴⁷

At the spring protests, the Raging Grannies of Madison drew upon a deep pool of Wisconsin folklore and American labour lore, adapting more than fifty

Roll the Union On (Wisconsin)

(Key of A, start on A. Tune: 'Roll the Union On'. Lyrics: Vicki Ryder)

They give tax cuts to the rich and say it's good for you and me,
 The deficit goes up, down goes the economy.
 Our jobs fly overseas, it's plain as it can be,
 We've gotta roll the Union on.

CHORUS:

We're gonna roll, we're gonna roll, we're gonna roll the Union on!

We're gonna roll, we're gonna roll, we're gonna roll the Union on!
Oh, we don't get paid for overtime and health care is in doubt,
The rich keep getting richer, that's what it's all about.
We've got to stick together, we've got to rage and shout:
We've gotta roll the Union on.

CHORUS:

Koch Brothers and Scott Walker think they're calling all the shots,
But they haven't seen what happens when Wisconsin folks get hot,
So we'll show our solidarity from city, town and farm,
And we'll roll the Union on!



Figure 11.15 Unwanted (Photo: M. Menocal).

Their comic playfulness and experimentation with local folk forms connected the Grannies with their fellow Wisconsite protesters, while it simultaneously asked them to reflect critically about current politics.⁴⁸ Their popularity was reflected in the large audiences that gathered to listen to the familiar folk tunes and learn the new verses. One Raging Granny remembered:

I was at the protest when the temperature was 14 degrees, and couldn't feel my fingers, can't wear gloves and play the guitar. We could sing about three songs then stop for hand warming ... We would be like buskers and pick a corner or spot where there wasn't another musician or bullhorn in play. [That day] we went to the entrance of the Capitol. My thinking was that the people who were waiting to go in would like some entertainment ... We also were able to use the steps as an instant stage. We were asked to sing at the first AFL-CIO rally, and we started the event. The crowd usually loves us, and I think the younger people are encouraged that a group of older women care about what they are doing.⁴⁹

Performances of songs like the one cited below were especially important to many of the public sector workers who, at the time, felt profoundly disenfranchised both by Governor Walker's plan to strip them of their rightful standard of living, as well as a prevalent right-wing discourse that called into question the value of the professional work they did each day in schools, hospitals and offices (see Figs 11.14 and 11.15). The Raging Grannies' songs took notice of the important roles these workers played in their communities and granted acknowledgment that exceeded mere recognition politics.

In His Hands

(Tune: He's Got the Whole World in His Hands. Lyrics: Kathy Miner, Madison Raging Grannies)

1. He's got Wisconsin's future in his hands, He's got Wisconsin's future in his hands, He's got Wisconsin's future in his hands, But we're gonna take it back!
2. He's got the fate of unions in his hands (x 3), But we're gonna take it back!
3. He's got Badger Ca-are in his hands (x 3), But we're gonna take it back!
4. He's got cuts to scho-ols in his hands (x 3), But we're gonna take 'em back!
5. He's got recycling programs in his hands (x 3), But we're gonna take 'em back!
6. He's got the sale of our power plants in his hands (x 3), But we're gonna hold 'em back!
7. He's got the lives of many people in his hands (x3), But we're gonna get them back!

[spoken] BECAUSE ...

We've got the recall movement in OUR HANDS,
We've got the recall papers in OUR HANDS,
We've got the recall POWER in OUR HANDS,
And we're gonna THROW HIM OUT!!

As I have argued elsewhere, in the Wisconsin protest the Grannies' performances were meant as a 'gift' to the community. Their performances were fuelled by a feminist ethic of care that places care within conceptions of democratic citizenship.⁵⁰ They conceptualised their performances as political acts that helped citizens to recognise and judge political problems in innovative ways.⁵¹ As one Madison Raging Granny commented:

her because we care. The reason we are raging together is because we want to change society for the better. We really do want to make this a better world for our kids. And we are passionate about it, so there is a purpose to our performances that goes outside of ourselves and a sense of care.⁵²

The performances enacted a relational sense of self. At the same time the Raging Grannies' songs were brutally explicit about where they believed the fault lay.

Move On Over, Walker

(Key of E, start on B. Tune: John Brown's Body. Adapted by Susan Bickley from the Grannies' classic 'Move On Over'. Revised by Bonnie Block, Glen Benjamin, Kathy Miner, Mary Sanderson)⁵³

CHORUS: 1

Move on over, Walker, or we'll move on over you,
Move on over, Walker – we're the Grannies coming through,
Move on over, Walker, we are having you recalled – We're the Granny
Union Brigade!

You started with the teachers and moved on to nurses, too;
EMTs and Snowplow Drivers were not good enough for you.
You used your bully pulpit to abuse our unions strong – You started out all
wrong!

CHORUS: 2

Next will come the banksters, and the selling of our state
To the corporate polluters – you will not hesitate,
We see it in your budget plans: the ruin of our state,
We're not gonna take it any more!

CHORUS: 3

You snuggle up to mining magnates, and cast out the tribal drum
Maybe you just don't drink water, but all living things need some

Penokee must be saved ... and our schools and health care too
Scott Walker we're done with you.

In the public performance of these political songs, there were clearly designated enemies. Badiou has argued that a real enemy

[is] not someone you are resigned to take power periodically because lots of people voted for him. That is a person you are annoyed to see as head of State because you would have preferred his adversary ... An enemy is something else: an individual you won't tolerate taking decisions on anything that impacts yourself ... In politics, it is this struggle against the enemy that constitutes action. That is 'genuine politics identifies its real enemy' and then proceeds to address the exigencies at hand.⁵⁴

Animosity complicates processes of reconciliation and calls for consensus in the public sphere. Nevertheless, groups like the Raging Grannies argued that there could be little deliberation on the issues at stake because they were grounded in values that left no room for compromise. In response, they decided to leave aside consensus while they sought to appeal to 'the broad middle' of undecided voters, which was quite small due to the intense polarisation of the electorate in Wisconsin.

WHAT MAY COME: EXPERIENCES IN TIMES OF DISSENT

What will come of these movements, whether Cairo or Madison, remains to be seen. Certainly, in Wisconsin, the issues at stake in the 2011 protests are still to be resolved. The hundreds of hand-made protest signs taped to the walls of the Capitol have been carefully removed and archived in various historical societies and museums. During the weekly farmers' markets, however, the Raging Grannies still perform protest songs around the Capitol Square. And along the highway to Milwaukee, political signs supporting Governor Walker are still prominently featured in farmers' fields. Documentaries like *We are Wisconsin* have been produced and discussed in local town hall meetings. The Solidarity Singers and the Pipes and Drums Group are still active at community events. In the news and on social media sites, in grocery store aisles and at local restaurants, these issues are still being discussed and debated.

What can be said with some certainty is that for many protesters the embodied experience of being-with-others at these events – of marching in the snow, making protest signs and participating on some level in street performances – was in itself remarkable and changed the ways they understood themselves as citizen-actors. For many, this was their first protest event. Living through these

happenings (observing, feeling, perceiving, participating first hand) initiated them to learn alternative ways of being 'political'. As David Dayen noted,

in the bars and on the street, people who I would characterize as townies, people who weren't all that political to begin with, are incessantly talking about this issue. It has consumed the town and in many ways has consumed Wisconsin and the nation. We are finally talking about things that matter to the mass of people.⁵⁵

This journey, and the struggles that came with it, challenged citizens' understanding of their relationship to government and other powerful institutions. Consequently, the question of sovereignty and the sovereign was played out in a variety of performances. For some, this centred on imperial authority alienated from the citizenry. Others explained this by pointing to the powerful special interests that controlled the executive. Most hopeful, perhaps, were those political performances that emphasised the agency of 'the people' and their ability to challenge powerful political actors. Daniel Schultz recalls:

Tomorrow is the greatest threat there is to an unjust today. The protesters in the streets of Madison and anyone who watches them with any astuteness have learned this lesson well. The protesters have learned that their voices can be heard, that they can change outcomes, that when they stand together, they can have a future that is meaningfully different than the present. There is no political structure, however imbalanced, however stacked against ordinary people, that can withstand this mix of hope and social solidarity.⁵⁶

Experiences in times of dissent certainly include quiet moments alone, reading and responding to social media political postings. They also encompass protest performances, in real time, that engage groups of people in calls for social justice. This experience, of speaking, listening, reflecting and being-with-others, gestures toward broader issues of where ultimate sovereignty resides, and what is meant by democracy and justice, beyond the ballot box.

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
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CHAPTER 12

Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility

CLAIRE TANCONS

While some commentators and journalists have dismissed Occupy Wall Street (OWS) as carnival, lawmakers and police officers did not miss the point. They reached back to a mid-nineteenth-century ban on masking to arrest occupiers wearing as little as a folded bandana on the forehead, leaving little doubt about their fear of Carnival as a potent form of political protest (see Fig. 12.1). In an article published on 23 September 2011 in *The New York Times*, journalist Ginia Bellafante initially expressed scepticism about ‘air[ing] societal grievance as carnival’, but just a few days later she warned against ‘criminalising costume’, thus changing her condescension to caution as she confirmed the police’s point: masking can be dangerous; Carnival is serious business.¹

The mask ban was enacted in 1845 to prevent Hudson Valley tenant farmers from resisting eviction by rioting in ‘Indian’ dress and ‘calico gowns and leather masks’.² The arrests at OWS on charges of ‘loitering and wearing a mask’ occurred on 21 September 2011, the fourth day of the movement’s occupation of Zuccotti Park. The eventual eviction from Zuccotti Park happened two days short of the movement’s two-month anniversary and planned day of action known as ‘N17’. As Kira Akerman noted:

There is almost something comical in occupiers being evicted from Zuccotti Park by the police force in the middle of the night, much in the same way Native peoples were surprised in their tents and pushed off their land ... This time white people with Mohawks and brown boots with Indigenous-inspired tassels are banging pots and pans.³

Carnival hardly exists in the United States any more. It has survived as a Shrovetide festival with Mardi Gras in New Orleans and as a summer celebration



Figure 12.1 Woman wearing scarf with police officer, Occupy Wall Street, 5 October 2011 (Photo: Aristide/economopoulos/The Star-Ledger).



Figure 12.2 Corporate Zombies walk, Occupy Wall Street, New York, 3 October 2011 (Photo: F. Franklyn, AP).



Figure 12.3 Millionaires March, Occupy Wall Street, New York, 11 October 2011 (Photo: AFP/Getty Images).



Figure 12.4 'Unemployed Superhero, Master of Degrees, Shackled with Debts', Occupy Wall Street, New York, October 2011 (Photo: J. Martin, AP).

for the West Indian community with the Labour Day parade in Brooklyn. However, the carnivalesque – as a medium of emancipation and a catalyst for civil disobedience – is alive and well, and these contemporary carnivals have retained their rebellious potential.

The encampment at Liberty Plaza, as occupiers rechristened Zuccotti Park, was under Carnival's sway – until cold weather set in and the camp was raided by police on 15 November 2011. In the early days of the movement, primal energies gave way to intentional community building and free communal feeding, bodies at play and trash on display, excess and refuse. Raised eyebrows about alleged sexual acts in the park and confessions of gluttony for the famous OccuPie pizza were all instances of the pleasures of the senses and excesses of the flesh that are common to Carnival – even under the duress of uncomfortable accommodation and police harassment.

Many occupiers have donned costumes during demonstrations. The infamous Guy Fawkes masks of the Anonymous hacktivists are still legion, and wearers have found at least one legal defender to protect their masking rights, arguing that as their sole common symbol the mask is a statement and therefore protected by the First Amendment.⁴ Perhaps more interesting than what some have called an activist cooptation of a Warner Brothers corporate product – despite the relevance of Guy Fawkes to the British carnivalesque tradition – are classic cases of hierarchy reversal, a hallmark of carnival. These include protesters dressed up as billionaires and signs reading 'austerity for you, prosperity for us'. The Millionaires March on 11 October 2011, like the drum circle outside billionaire Mayor Bloomberg's mansion on 20 November (which was as cacophonous as a charivari), belongs to the subversive realm of the carnivalesque (see Fig. 12.3).⁵ Other protesters made up as 'corporate zombies' spewed dollar bills from bloodied mouths in advance of Halloween, and then upped the ante during New York's annual Halloween parade (see Fig. 12.2).⁶

Then there were the countless examples of personal ingenuity. In the early days of the movement, a helmeted woman in fur boots and a figure skating outfit was seen riding a gold and pink papier mâché unicorn. In another case, a young man dressed up as what might be called a Zorro Graduate. He wore the black mask and gloves of the TV avenger, along with a black graduation hat and gown. He held a convict's chain and iron ball printed with the words 'student loan' and a sign reading 'Unemployed Superhero, Master of Degrees, Shackled by Debt' (see Fig. 12.4).

Artists have also answered the call to action. Peter Rostovsky and Lynn Sullivan organised The Language Experiment with about twenty other artists who came together under the name Build the Occupation. First performed on Halloween and then reiterated on N17, the group dressed in orange pie charts and 99 per cent glasses. They held signs (at first handwritten, then printed with



Figure 12.5 Build the Occupation, Occupy Halloween: The Language Experiment, New York, 31 October 2011 (Photo: B. Vicars. Courtesy of P. Rostovsky).

a font designed by Steve Robinson) bearing words in the fashion of refrigerator magnet poetry, with reference to Daniel Martinez's Whitney Biennial piece 'I can't ever imagine wanting to be white' (1993).⁷ Taken together, the performers formed living sentences, the written equivalent of the 'human microphone', the occupiers' signature voice amplification technique. These occupation builders delivered collective messages that were permutable at will, if within the range of a carefully chosen consciousness-raising vocabulary (see Fig. 12.5).

Yet the most poignant message might have been the simplest, exemplifying the merit of 'less is more' (however un-carnavalesque that may sound). The photograph of a young blond man, his mouth taped closed by a dollar bill with '#occupy' handwritten on it, has become iconic of the movement. Or maybe it is because of the American flag tucked in his backpack, putting the whole scene into context.

Still more minimalist, 'baring it all' had been a strategy of (un)masking at Liberty Plaza, as long as the weather allowed. In a corporate world where the clothes make the man, with men in suits (aka the 1 per cent) protected by the blue shirts (regular police officers) and the white shirts (the commanding officers of pepper-spraying fame) from the occupiers (aka the 99 per cent), the spectacle



Figure 12.6 Marcelo Expósito, *Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance)*, 2004. Video still. The film documents J18 (Source: C. Tancons, 'Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque As Protest Sensibility' for *e-flux journal* 30).

of nudity is a good reminder of the common human nature of the 100 per cent.⁸

However, we shouldn't see Carnival merely for the costumes. OWS might well be another Carnival Against Capital – a tactical reterritorialisation of public space and political discourse, of social formation and cultural production, carried out as a concerted effort to regain democratic rights and liberties.

'OCCUPATIONIST INTERNATIONAL': CARNIVAL AND ANARCHISM

In fact, carnivalesque protests were a staple of the anti-corporate globalisation movement. The Global Carnival Against Capitalism (or J18), organised by the activist group Reclaim the Streets, was an international subversive street party that took place on 18 June 1999 to coincide with a G8 summit in Cologne (see Fig. 12.6). It updated Mikhail Bakhtin's characterisation of Carnival as a topsyturvy world where laughter subverts authority.

Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, a study of folk culture in the work of French Renaissance writer Rabelais, was written in 1940 but not published in Bakhtin's native Russia until 1965 due to its veiled critique of Stalin's purges. The American and French publications of the book (in 1968 and 1970, respectively) gave

European and North American anarchists an anti-hierarchical societal model that appealed to their revolutionary aspirations. But it was French situationist Raoul Vaneigem, in his book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*,⁹ who fuelled the May 1968 student movement with what could be called Carnival liberation theory. Presciently, Vaneigem wrote that 'a strike for higher wages or a rowdy demonstration can awaken the carnival spirit', and 'revolutionary moments are carnivals in which the individual life celebrates its unification with a regenerated society'.

What seems to prevail in the American incarnation of the Occupy movement is a softer latter-day anarchism inherited from the commune movement of the 1960s and the intentional communities of the 1980s. The latter were themselves indebted to the Situationist International and the Italian autonomist movements, and were compounded in American anarchist Hakim Bey's *Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ)*, the tactical field manual of alter-globalisation activists since 1985.

While the word 'carnival' is not to be found in *TAZ*, 'occupy' is. Bey writes, 'Because the State is concerned primarily with Simulation rather than substance, the TAZ can "occupy" these areas clandestinely and carry on its festal purposes for quite a while in relative peace.' This statement aptly summarises the pre-emption situation at Liberty Plaza, with an emphasis on 'relative peace' given the treatment of occupiers by the NYPD, and a de-emphasis on 'clandestine' occupation given the media coverage the movement has garnered.¹⁰ However, only one report to date (in *The New York Observer*) has explicitly linked OWS and *TAZ*.¹¹

A link that has been more widely made has been between OWS and *The Coming Insurrection* (2009), a pamphlet written by The Invisible Committee, a French insurrectionary anarchist group. Glenn Beck has hysterically attacked *The Coming Insurrection*, indicting it as the inspiration for OWS and the international upheavals that preceded it, from the Greek protests of 2010-11 to the UK student movement of 2010 and the Arab Spring. (The latter was first acknowledged as a source of inspiration by the occupiers themselves.) The pamphlet proclaims that 'we live under an occupation, a *police* occupation', and states that 'we don't want to occupy the territory, we want to be the territory', thereby reversing the rhetoric of occupation (as in the (Un)Occupy Albuquerque movement). It casts a pessimistic light on a state of de facto capitalist colonisation of the world.¹² Since the eviction of OWS and other encampments, the need to de-territorialise the occupationist strategy and 'be the territory' has never seemed more urgent.

The Invisible Committee can be seen as the latest link in 'the theoretical lineage ... constructed in retrospect [by international activists] to serve the interest of [the] contemporary radical project,' as Gavin Grindon has put it.

Grindon initially identifies Bakhtin, Vaneigem and Bey as part of this lineage.¹³ However, what one might call the 'Occupationist International' freely borrows from the anarchist toolbox, using Bakhtin's therapeutic laughter, resurrecting Vaneigem's insurrectional ardour and implementing Bey's guerilla tactics, while at the same time rejecting The Invisible Committee's exhortation to abolish general assemblies. General assemblies have been one of the core characteristics of OWS, introduced by Spanish activists involved in the M15 movement.

Breaking from this anarchist lineage is former French Resistance fighter and concentration camp survivor Stéphane Hessel. His pamphlet *Time for Outrage*, published in French as *Indignez-vous!* in 2010 and translated into English by The Nation in early 2011, has been credited as a source for the Spanish movement, where protesters were referred to as 'los indignados', and now for the American movement, where occupiers are referred to as 'les indignés' by the French media.¹⁴

But David Graeber – the anarchist, activist and professor of anthropology who was called the 'anti-leader' of OWS by *Bloomberg Business Week* and who wrote cogently of the movement's aim as 'recapturing the radical imagination' – has a singular manifesto of his own.¹⁵ His *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*,¹⁶ a sprawling history of debt and its economic and cultural implications, might well be this generation's treatise of *savoir-vivre* (to borrow from Vaneigem's original French title), leaving the Canadian anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters*, which this summer sent out the call to occupy Wall Street, to do the branding.¹⁷

For, in addition to indicting financiers directly, as in the 'People's Trial' of Goldman Sachs on 3 November 2011, OWS also targets the financial system as a whole. Thus, it brought renewed momentum to the Move Your Money campaign, whose latest initiative was Bank Transfer Day on 5 November 2011. This gives credence to the notion that OWS is not so much waging an economic war as it is waging a war against the economy, possibly one of the most anarchist statements imaginable in a state of corporate occupation.¹⁸

CARNIVAL, CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY

Just as the economy is the crux of the movement's concerns, it is also at the core of Carnival. The few contemporary commentators who try to establish a link between – to borrow Grindon's categories – 'carnavalesque attacks upon a shared popular culture' and 'carnival as part of a shared popular culture', usually look to Europe for models of Carnival. But the carnivals of the Americas provide both explanations for and alternatives to the United States' economic plight.

Carnival was widely practised in the Americas, where colonisation and slavery replaced European feudalism and servitude, and where plantations afforded experiments with capitalism that would later develop into British industrialism.



Figure 12.7 Portrayal of Dr Eric Williams at Carnival in Trinidad after the first PNM (People's National Movement) victory at the polls in 1956 (Photo: G. Ifill. Garnet Ifill Photograph Collection. The Alma Jordan Library, the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago).

In the Old World as in the New, Carnival thrived on the extreme disparity between masters and their subjects or slaves – what today we would call wealth inequality. Role reversals alleviated a brutally divisive social system by crowning servants and slaves king for a day. Carnival created an opportunity for society to cohere anew, at least for the duration of the festivities.

With this understanding of the structural dynamic of Carnival, it is not surprising to see carnivalesque strands appearing in America's frayed social fabric at a time when the rich have never been richer and the poor never poorer. Just as for Graeber the current debt crisis is part of a larger story, so is OWS's carnival. As Graeber explains, 'Throughout history, debt has served as a way for states to control their subjects and extract resources from them (usually to finance wars). And when enough people got in enough debt, there was usually some kind of revolt.'¹⁹ It is in this sense that capital and Carnival are opposite sides of the same coin, telling the same story from economic and cultural perspectives, respectively. Carnival is not merely a cultural practice recuperated by the global

anarchist movement and instrumentalised as carnivalesque during protests. It harks back to ancient human archetypes in calling for a reversal of the status quo as a means to mediate between opposite ends of the social spectrum and to create a shared, if fleeting, space to live side by side – a sort of Foucauldian heterotopia, or lived utopia.

In stalwart Carnival countries, the century-old festival has failed in recent decades to generate political momentum around key societal issues. Instead, it has succumbed to forms of rampant consumerism and escapist fun that only has political relevance for its power to distract from politics. And yet, despite these cautionary tales, Carnival countries and cities offer alternatives to mainstream economic and cultural life that are worth examining.

In Trinidad and Tobago, which has a longstanding history of rebellion at Carnival time, access to the carnival experience within a costumed band includes perks on the road such as music, drinks and toilet and made-in-China beaded bikini for women or trunks for men up to \$1,500 each – turning exotic bodies into tourist commodities. The ‘ole mas’ tradition, which, much like the Occupy movement, included cardboard placards adorned with political slogans, once offered a healthy public forum for political commentary but is now largely extinct (challenging one occupier’s belief that ‘My Cardboard Can Beat Your Billboard’). Only a small enclave of artists keeps the ole mas tradition alive. In the mid-1980s, Peter Minshall’s *Rat Race* mas band took Port of Spain by storm with



Figure 12.8 Cat in Bag Productions, *Cobo Town*, 2010 (Courtesy of Sean-Drakes.com).

its army of masqueraders dressed as rodents holding speech bubbles admonishing greed, gossip and gullibility in the local vernacular (see Fig. 12.9).²⁰ In a DIY style similar to this vanishing Carnival tradition as it could still be observed in 2005, artists Ashraph Richard Ramsaran and Shalini Seereeram created *T'in Cow Fat Cow* (2009) and *Cobo Town* (2010).²¹ These pieces consisted of hand-lettered placards and flags bearing puns about government corruption and public complicity, such as 'The People Must be Herd' and 'Let us Prey' (see Fig. 12.8).²²

It may come as no surprise that the slow commodification and diminishing criticality of the Trinidad Carnival was initiated by the father of the independent nation. Eric Williams founded the People's National Movement in 1956 and became the first Prime Minister of independent Trinidad and Tobago in 1962 (see Fig. 12.7). Before entering politics he was a professor at Howard University in Washington, DC and the author of the landmark historical study *Capitalism and Slavery* [1944], a work so scathing in its critique of the humanitarian view of British abolitionists that it was not published in the UK until 1964. However, Williams omitted to discuss Carnival as the missing link between capitalism and slavery. As Prime Minister, Williams sought to control Carnival through the seemingly auspicious Carnival Development Committee, which attempted to censor calypsonians' tongue-in-cheek attacks on an often tyrannical political



Figure 12.9 Peter Minshall, *Rat Race*, Port of Spain, Trinidad Carnival, 11 February 1986 (Photo: N. Norton. Courtesy the Callaloo Company, Chaguaramas, Trinidad).

process. Recent developments in Trinidad and Tobago confirm the suspicions of those who believe Carnival to be a tool used by the elite to keep the masses in shackles. In late August, the government imposed a state of emergency in connection with its constitutionally questionable anti-drug security campaign.²³ So far, the population has shown little interest in protesting to maintain its civil liberties. Will bottled-up grievances explode at the next Carnival, or will they dissolve in commercialised fun?

Prior to independence, Trinidadians migrated en masse to the United States and the UK. In their adopted countries, they revived the resistant ethos of the Trinidad Carnival. In New York City, they organised Carnival in Harlem in the mid-1940s then in Brooklyn in the early 1960s. It has become the West Indian American Day Parade, better known as the Brooklyn Labour Day parade. These were fundamentally political gestures aimed at gaining recognition and staking claim to territory in a new homeland. In London, Marxist-feminist Claudia Jones organised the Notting Hill Carnival in 1959 in an effort to quell the wave of white-on-black racism that had culminated in race riots the previous year.

CARNIVALESQUE GOALS? BLACK CARNIVAL, WHITE CARNIVALESQUE

But neither in New York nor in London have black carnivals (as carried out in Trinidad or Brooklyn) and white carnivalesque (as performed in global protest movements) formed a lasting radical alliance that could combat the economic exploitation suffered by working-class communities of colour and, increasingly, the white middle class. Perhaps OWS will be the opportunity for such an alliance. Meanwhile, this lack of solidarity (reflected by the lack of diversity in protest movements) was addressed by cultural theorist Greg Tate with some measure of controversy. In characteristically colourful language, Tate wrote a radical rant titled 'Top 10 reasons why so few black folk appear down to occupy Wall Street', which was first circulated on Facebook and then published in the *Village Voice* on 19 October 2011. Many of Tate's reasons should be well taken, in particular: 'Radical Love Theory', about how the absence of blacks at OWS has spared the movement more police harassment; 'Late Pass Theory', about blacks' avoidance of unnecessary police scrutiny; and 'The Prison Industrial Complex Crickets Theory', about the demographic castration of would-be black OWS-ers who are currently incarcerated.²⁴

However, like some other commentators, Tate also takes a jab at the carnivalesque: 'As we all know, real thugs don't do demos or entertain police assault for abstract carnivalesque goals.' This leaves much to be desired in terms of what a greater understanding of the Carnival tradition could bring to the movement. (Admittedly, Tate was probably not referring to Carnival at all, as is often the case when using the word 'carnivalesque'.) Ironically, Tate's writing style



Figure 12.10 West Indian Day Parade, Harlem, 6 September 1948 (Photo: W. Smith. Photographic print. Courtesy Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

displays its own carnivalesque sensibility. In a sort of *noir* grotesque realism, Tate resorts to a raced Rabelaisian semantic field through the use of reappropriated racial slurs like ‘Negroes’, ‘Niggas’, ‘Niggerisation’ and ‘Niggerdom’. He also uses racy expressions such as ‘bootylicious’, ‘muhfuhkuhs’, ‘shit’, ‘asswhuppings’, ‘grownass’ and ‘clusterfuck’. These expressions are made up of words – booty, fuck, shit, ass – that exemplify what Bakhtin called the ‘material bodily lower stratum’. But Tate can hardly be blamed for missing the carnival point even as he uses carnivalesque language, since in the US this language is more closely associated with America’s own brand of racial carnivalesque, from minstrelsy to blaxpotation and hip hop. (It is worth noting that American minstrelsy shaped an actual carnival in the early twentieth century, namely the Cape Town Carnival in South Africa, which was formerly known as the Coon Carnival.)

Washington-born Tate would not have had the chance to see the Harlem Carnival, which was gone by the early 1960s (see Fig. 12.10). And its Brooklyn successor, much like its Notting Hill counterpart, is no longer at the forefront



Figure 12.11 Laura Anderson Barbata in collaboration with the Brooklyn Jumbies, *Intervention: Wall Street*, New York (Broadway and Bowling Green), 18 November 2011 (Photo: F. Veronsky. Courtesy L. Anderson Barbata).

of radical strategies (anti-racist or otherwise) having been tamed by too much government planning and touristic development. More generally, the dismissal of 'abstract carnivalesque goals' may evince the legacy of the rift that once separated Caribbean immigrants and African-Americans. During segregation, Caribbean immigrants, having been educated in the British public school system, were favoured for the few jobs available to blacks. This divide-and-conquer strategy prevented unity within the US's African-descended population. One of the alleged reasons why the Harlem Carnival lost its parade permit was because of a bottle-throwing incident between Caribbean and African-American participants.²⁵

Around the time Tate's statement was published, Occupy the Hood and Occupy Harlem emerged, urging people of colour to participate in the movement. In Manhattan, Occupy offshoots advanced their own agendas through direct action in Downtown/Uptown alliances. And at least two interventions have used modes of public address associated with both the civil rights movement – to which both African-Americans and West Indians contributed – and Carnival – an historical Caribbean mode of rebellion.

On 18 November 2011 artist Laura Anderson Barbata led the Brooklyn Jumbies in a performance of *Intervention: Wall Street* in Manhattan's Financial District.²⁶ As their name suggests, the Jumbies come from Brooklyn, where most Caribbean New Yorkers live. According to a press release posted on Facebook, the goal of the event was to 'ward off evil and change the mindset of those causing misfortune' (see Fig. 12.11).²⁷ In the tradition of West African stilt-walkers, Moko Jumbies embody spirits and are called upon for spiritual cleansing. Moko Jumbies have roots in the Black Atlantic world, from Trinidad and Tobago to Brooklyn, where they incorporate carnival celebrations while retaining distinct spiritual rituals. Barbata, who is from Mexico and divides her time between Manhattan and Mexico City, designed business suits ('reminiscent of David Byrne's *Stop Making Sense* big suit') for the 4-metre-tall jumbies, whose towering height was both suggestive of the Financial District's skyscrapers and symbolic of Wall Street's monumental rule over the country.²⁸ Barbata started work on this largely self-funded project in 2008 but was finally spurred to carry out the intervention by the auspicious emergence of OWS. She said that the intervention and her work overall are more about 'outreach' and 'building cross-cultural bridges' than they are about 'spectacle'.²⁹

Will the precedent set by this carnivalesque *détournement* encourage more Caribbean-Americans to participate in the movement? This is by no means to imply an essentialist view of Caribbean people, according to which Carnival is their sole or even main mode of protest. It is, however, to recognise that much like freedom songs rooted the civil rights movement, so does Carnival root the Caribbean protest tradition.³⁰ One Brooklynite of Caribbean descent,

City Council member Jumaane D. Williams, has been an outspoken supporter of OWS. He has been arrested at least twice, notably during the 17 November 2011 sit-in at the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge (fellow council member Ydanis Rodriguez was also arrested that day). Prior to OWS, Williams's last high-profile encounter with police came on 5 September, when he was handcuffed and briefly detained ... at the West Indian American Day Parade.³¹

Two days after the intervention by the Brooklyn Jumbies, the newly formed Council of Elders, an 'independent group of leaders from many of the defining American social justice movements of the twentieth century', announced an alliance of 'basic solidarity' with OWS.³² Time will tell if this gesture of intergenerational and cross-racial unity will spur more civil rights leaders of colour into action, and if the movement's non-violent *modus operandi* will prevail over police provocation. For the time being, the example set by the Council of Elders seems to have sparked the imagination of mainly white activists, as writer and cultural historian Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts remarked – with the remark not meant to indict said activists as much as to exhort those missing in action.³³ Following the passing of 'the torch of hope and social justice' from the Elders to OWS during an interfaith service at Liberty Plaza and a public discussion about 'space, liberation, and race' at Judson Memorial Church, organisers and participants set out on a candlelit vigil march from Washington Square Park to Duarte Park.



Figure 12.12 Not An Alternative, *Mili-tents*, New York: Washington Square Park to Duarte Park march, 20 November 2011 (Photo: L. Blissett).

The march was organised by the interfaith clergy group Occupy Faith NYC, the Council of Elders and various OWS-affiliated arts and culture groups such as Not an Alternative.³⁴ In addition to candles, marchers carried so-called mili-tents to symbolise occupation, and their destination prefigured a possible future occupation (see Fig. 12.12). Despite the military language of deployment and invasion the artists-activists used when discussing the dissemination of the mili-tents, these and other artistic interventions that surfaced on N17 – such as the black-and-yellow banners and placards (the latter doubling up as shields) – were not meant to encourage confrontation with the police. On the contrary, their purpose was to divert attention away from the overwhelming media focus on clashes between occupiers and the NYPD. These interventions, more recently carried out with tape, sought to dislocate the power of authority over space by appropriating and subverting the colours of official spatial signage. The mili-tents, which were held up with sticks, also recalled the umbrellas of New Orleans second-liners, that other protest-prone Carnival-inflected American tradition.

SOCIAL AID AND PLEASURE: SECOND LINERS AND MARDI GRAS INDIANS,
GEOPSYCHICS AND SURREGIONALISTS

Perhaps nobody can say whether more blacks and other minorities will rally the movement in significant numbers. Besides, as *Colorlines* editor Rinku Sen put it, ‘the question is not if you can bring people of color to the party but if they can change the music’.³⁵ But given OWS’s underlying anarchist ideology, might not the question as to ‘why so few black folks appear down at OWS’ be more productively phrased as ‘where are the black anarchists?’ In New Orleans in the late 1970s, Eric Bookhardt and John Clark, two former Louisiana activists from the Vietnam War-era counterculture, came close to circumventing the vexing disappearance of that rare species, the black anarchist: they invented one.

Earlier in the decade, Bookhardt (now an art critic and practicing Buddhist) and Clark (a philosophy professor and self-identified anarchist) were colleagues at the University of New Orleans, where they combined situationist-inflected anarchism with New Orleans’s own homegrown brand of anarchism: Carnival, or as it is known in the local language, Mardi Gras. In an email to this author, Bookhardt wrote:

Carnival almost always is an innately anarchic and psychodramatic event ... that enables everyone to visualise how things can be different and make them different, at least for a day, and that in itself is an inherently valuable, liberating, and potentially revolutionary practice.

He continued: ‘Carnival was the earliest TAZ prototype because the “king” was always a parody and people’s roles within society were always autonomously self-defined, at least for that day.’³⁶

In 1979, Bookhardt published the first edition of *Geopsychic Wonders*, an illustrated book celebrating the Crescent City’s idiosyncratic urban landscape (see Fig. 12.13). The book sparked a cult following among generations of New Orleans artists. Sharing startling similarities with the situationists’ psychogeography, whose key words it inverts, geopsychics is a tribute to New Orleans’s fertile anarcho-situationist soil.

Some artists who practise geopsychics, like the painter Myrtle Van Damitz III, have been involved in both Mardi Gras krewes and local Occupy events. In her work, Van Damitz III renders in oneiric hues the kind of transmogrified creatures seen in the waking dream that is Mardi Gras (see Fig. 12.14). An occasional member of Krewe of Eris, ‘technically the Goddess of Discord parade’, and Krewe of Poux (‘lice’ in French), Van Damitz III took part in Occupy Frankie and Johnnie’s on 21 October 2011. This was the occupation of a local furniture store threatened with corporate takeover by CVS. The store is located in the St Claude corridor, the site of New Orleans’s latest artist colony and a neighbourhood increasingly subject to gentrification.³⁷ But as Van Damitz III clarified, Occupy Frankie and Johnnie’s ‘was more a farce of Occupy, and a



Figure 12.13 Dragon Float in the Mistick Krewe of Comus parade on Mardi Gras evening, New Orleans, c. 1970s from the book *Geopsychic Wonders of New Orleans* (Photo: D. E. Bookhardt).



Figure 12.14 Myrtle Van Damitz III, *Night Walk*, 2011. Inks and acrylic on paper (Courtesy of the artist).

statement about the continuity of free expression and humor in New Orleans to make a statement and effect change'.³⁸ Precisely to the point!

The decadent disguises of Krewe of Eris make Occupy Halloween's cardboard costumes look rudimentary, while Occupy Frankie and Johnnie's so-called costumed malcontents – including artist Skylar Fein running around in a fake CVS lab coat while carrying a syringe and a wad of money – are seen as an advantage that Occupy New Orleans has over other Occupy movements. Whether or not this is true, the Mardi Gras tradition has galvanised New Orleans radicals around issues like gentrification and corporatisation, which are harshly criticised on such local blogs as *Nola Anarcha*.³⁹

Under the pseudonym Max Cafard ('cockroach' in French), Clark wrote the *Surre(gion)alist Manifesto*, which cast into words Louisiana's Creole anarchism.⁴⁰ Bookhardt created the founding figure of surre(gion)alism, Lafcadio Bogue (an Afro-Creole), whom he describes as such: 'He was also a poet as well as a philosopher, and his anarchism had its roots in his observations of nature and in his contacts with indigenous Louisiana Indians who, in good years, excelled at a lifestyle of purposeful leisure.' Knowing the life and legacy of New Orleans's free people of colour, one can easily imagine Lafcadio Bogue



Figure 12.15 Black Men of Labor Social Aid & Pleasure Club Second Line, New Orleans, 29 October 2011 (Photo: L. Watts).

as a forbearer of the Mardi Gras Indian tradition.

According to Van Damitz III, participants in Occupy New Orleans and Occupy Frankie and Johnnie's are mostly white, as are the Eris and Poux krewes.⁴¹ The Mardi Gras Indians and the related Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs are mostly black. These latter groups first emerged in the early nineteenth century among New Orleans's slaves and free people of colour, as well as among the city's mixed native Indian communities, to which the Mardi Gras Indians trace their roots. On rare occasions, white and black carnival traditions converge, as was the case on 22 October when 6t'9, a white Social Aid and Pleasure Club, invited Mardi Gras Indian Big Chief Fi-Yi-Yi and his gang to participate in their Halloween parade. But for the most part, these traditions remain separate. (One major exception is the carefully choreographed dance of Rex, an old-line (white) krewe, and Zulu, the first black krewe allowed on the official Mardi Gras parade route.) In fact, as musician and historian Bruce 'Sunpie' Barnes puts it, the Mardi Gras Indian tradition 'built off of a history of resistance to old laws that prevented blacks from masking during Carnival'.

In New Orleans, Mardi Gras remains an exercise in subtle segregation. The fact that there are not floats to give Occupy New Orleans any traction might confirm, as in Trinidad, the safety valve theory of Carnival. Occupy New Orleans officially started on 6 October 2011 and has drawn relatively few participants thus far, although Brendan McCarthy of *The Times-Picayunes* wrote

that one of their demonstrations 'had a second-line feel to it'.⁴² But then, just as West Indians played an important part in civil rights movements – most famously, Trinidad-born Black Panther Stokely Carmichael, aka Kwame Ture – so did Louisianans, including Black Panther co-founder Huey P. Newton, leader Geronimo Ji-Jaga and Justice Minister Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin.⁴³ Though there was hardly anything in the tactics of the Black Panthers recalling a New Orleans culture of celebration, the connection between black carnival organisations and black political activism is well established. According to New Orleans historian Ned Sublette, second lines 'are in effect a civil rights demonstration ... demonstrating the civil right of the community to assemble in the street for peaceful purposes. Or, more simply, demonstrating the civil right of the community to exist'.⁴⁴ Indeed, in the afternoon of Saturday, 29 October 2011 veteran activist Jerome Smith was not demonstrating with Occupy New Orleans. Instead, he was in the annual second-line parade of the Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club, along with Mardi Gras Indian Big Chief Fi-Yi-Yi. In speeches prior to the parade, the Black Men of Labor paid homage to Freedom Riders and members of New Orleans' Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter (see Fig. 12.15). Says Bookhardt,

Mardi Gras Indians are, to my mind, anarchist analogs in the sense that they are self-organising and non-programmatic expressions of an intuitive ethnoflâneur sensibility. The route is a *dérive* and they are expressions of geopsychics and psychogeography, and as such they are intuitive native situationists. Anarchists without portfolio. A perfect expression of Nola's innately anarchistic culture of celebration.⁴⁵

Can the black anarchists be found in New Orleans? If a black radical is a jailed radical at best and a dead radical at worst (there are still several Black Panthers in decade-long solitary confinement at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana), non-confrontational carnival tactics might offer a necessary outlet for otherwise radical practices. More fundamentally, the mutual aid systems under which such practices thrive have been honed for centuries in New Orleans, ensuring the city's survival. Basic survival is a radical proposition in the face of post-Katrina disaster capitalism (see Naomi Klein)⁴⁶ and gentrification-fuelled ethnic cleansing,⁴⁷ which force blacks out of the city. As Van Damitz III summarises, 'There's a lot more self-determination and group harmony in a carnival society.'

As the white middle class is driven out of their homes, campuses and banks, they are realising that the social contract no longer works for them, something blacks have felt for a long time. At this juncture, it might be critical that black carnival and white carnivalesque join forces against capital.⁴⁸

CARNIVALESQUE PROTEST SENSIBILITY

Scholars Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that ‘it actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative’.⁴⁹ They assert that ‘there is no a priori revolutionary vector to carnival’. However, at the beginning of OWS, both sceptical journalists and committed protesters made direct references to the mother of revolutions, the French Revolution. The former mocked the protesters’ disappointment that ‘the Bastille hadn’t been stormed’ (only to later ponder, ‘Carnival or Revolution?’).⁵⁰ The latter warned in a ‘memo to the 1%’: ‘The 99% are waking up. Be nervous. Be Very Nervous. Marie-Antoinette wasn’t.’ This followed Roseanne Barr’s call for the return of the guillotine in a speech at Liberty Plaza. This revolutionary chorus was met with an anthropophagic crowd menacing that ‘One day, the Poor Will Have Nothing Left to Eat but the Rich’ (or the short version: ‘Hungry? Eat a Banker’) (see Fig. 12.16).

What is at stake here is not so much whether the carnivalesque is turning OWS into a revolutionary movement. Rather, what matters is the bringing to light, through carnivalesque ritual strategy and hierarchy inversion, of the



Figure 12.16 ‘One Day the Poor Will Have Nothing Left to Eat But the Rich’, Occupy Wall Street, New York, October 2011 (Source: C. Tancons, ‘Occupy Wall Street: Carnival Against Capital? Carnavalesque as Protest Sensibility’ for *e-flux journal* 30).



Figure 12.17 NYU4OWS, *Wally*, 17 November 2011. 'The Spirit of Occupy Wall Street at NYU' bull piñata performance, New York Stern School of Business, New York University (Courtesy D. A. Cohen).



Figure 12.18 NYU4OWS, *Wall Street Campus Cash* (Courtesy D. A. Cohen).

expanse (and expense) of the gap between the 1 per cent and the 99 per cent, and the diversity and disparity within the 99 per cent. As much a site of resistance as a relational mode, the carnivalesque occupation of Wall Street is a symbolic struggle to break the high-low binarism that has besieged contemporary American society, whether in class or race.

Beyond symbolism, what is the likely agency and outcome of this proto-carnivalesque protest? London's decade-old Carnival Against Capitalism provides some indication. It set the stage for the Battle of Seattle, the World Social Forum and other counter-summits. It also enabled the tactical media technology behind Indymedia and prefigured the current globalisation of grassroots anti-capitalist movements.⁵¹

One cannot help but hope that in New York and the other cities where the movement has taken hold, the carnival cosmology will supplant the exchange economy, as it has in Mardi Gras, allowing for a renewal of the senses atrophied by dematerialised financial transactions. But the real reversal of this carnival might well lie elsewhere, outside the United States. The Arab world is the movement's proclaimed source of inspiration, having set the tone for this century's worldwide wave of societal change. From this perspective, American citizens might be looking a lot more like 99 per cent of the rest of the world's population, no longer in the privileged top 1 per cent.

This inversion of the world order would also help break that other binary, the one between western and Arab worlds. It may also resist related reciprocal terrorism in which the body, as in Carnival, is the weapon. In response to Rahul Rao's question about what 'protest sensibility' might befit a world in which there is not one single locus of threat, these protests show that it might well be in the all-encompassing and chaotic carnivalesque. Rao posed this question in the introduction to his book *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (2010). He was responding to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's assertion in *Empire* (2000) that 'the first question of political philosophy today is not if or even why there will be resistance and rebellion but rather how to determine the enemy against which to rebel'.⁵² In their follow-up volume, *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri included a section titled 'Carnival and Movement', which was devoted to 'protests that are carnevalesque, however, not only in their atmosphere [but] also in their organisation'. They credited Bakhtin for 'help[ing] us understand ... the logic of the multitude, a theory of organisation based on the freedom of singularities that converge in the production of the common'.⁵³

Staging their carnival in the middle of a severe economic downturn – the twenty-first-century form of Lent – the Wall Street occupiers might seem to want to have their cake and eat it too. For Bakhtin following Rabelais, the essence of carnivalesque celebration was 'a feast for the whole world' in which oxen were slaughtered and shared among the citizenry, a form of wealth redis-

tribution.⁵⁴ So beware: the Wall Street bull may end up like the fattened ox of Mardi Gras, sacrificed this coming Fat Tuesday, or the next Black Wednesday.

POSTSCRIPT

I originally wrote this closing metaphor on 12 October 2011. Only a month later, it came to life. On 17 November 2011, a purple-and-golden bull-shaped piñata named Wally, ‘the spirit of Wall Street at NYU’, was castrated in front of New York University’s Stern School of Business (see Fig. 12.16 above). Wally was created by NYU4OWS, a group of artists and NYU students led by Daniel Aldana Cohen, a PhD student in sociology, with funds from the New York General Assembly’s Arts and Culture Committee. After being castrated, Wally was bashed open by the student body, aka the 99 per cent. From its bulging belly fell ‘Wall Street Campus Cash’, fake banknotes featuring pictures and financial data about NYU President John Sexton (‘Earns \$1.6 million a year’), NYU Trustee John Paulson (‘Hedge fund manager who made \$4 billion betting on the economic crisis’) and others (see Fig. 12.17). The bullfight fulfilled the protesters’ desire to ‘destroy the symbols of [the 1 per cent’s] power with a smile’.⁵⁵ Let us hope that more such prophecies will soon be realised, more ancient rituals re-enacted and new rituals invented as part of what Jack Santino, in reference to the carnivalesque, termed ‘the ritualesque’. Traditionally associated with Mexico, the piñata is commonly known to have come from Spain and become part of Lenten celebrations. It is also said to have had Chinese origins, where it was part of New Year festivities and represented ... a cow or an ox.

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CHAPTER 13

Subversion through Performance: Performance Activism in London

PAULA SERAFINI

INTRODUCTION

Although many scholars have written on the relationship between art and politics,¹ there is a significant lack of work addressing the ways in which art is explicitly incorporated into activist strategies as a political instrument. I consider that this kind of complex political phenomenon calls for updated forms of interdisciplinary analysis, including an aesthetic appraisal. In the present case, I intend to address this lacuna by suggesting the category of *performance actions* as a way of looking at political actions that have been heavily influenced by processes from performance art. This chapter will, therefore, present a theoretical background on performance art as well as four case analyses of activist groups operating in London from 2010 onwards, in order to show how aesthetics and art theory can add a new dimension to the study of political activism and social movements.

Political activism, it has been suggested, is artistically creative,² developing its message by frequently producing new material objects such as placards and other ephemera, newly formulated chants and songs, and new forms of masquerade, theatrical performances and dressing up. Its staged plays and spectacular acts of symbolic rebellion aim to reach wider audiences by drawing media attention to activists' messages, often despite a movement's limited size. This aesthetic quality of protest means that, seen historically, one may trace the story of political activism through its artistic products and performances, invented and staged in each era.

The first wave of alter-globalisation movements in the 1990s, which was associated with groups like Reclaim the Streets in the UK and Direct Action Network in the US, gave place to forms of political activism that have combined

elements from performance art, theatre and carnival.³ The second wave of alter-globalisation movements that emerged after the 2008 economic crisis, with its strong global justice and anti-authoritarian message, has reiterated the value of art and creativity as tools for political action, while at the same time making extensive use of networks and social media.⁴ Distinctively, new developments in technology have enabled activists to record and then share creative spectacles as never before, expanding the ways in which news, events and artistic performances are experienced.

My objective in this chapter, however, will not be to define and position this form of political action as a new category of artistic practice, considering that, as Kershaw has suggested:

As a consequence of radical new ways of thinking – such as deconstructionist, feminist, post-structuralist, post-colonial and postmodernist theory – the old binary opposition between, for example, propaganda and art, or politics and aesthetics, or the real and the imaginary, are deeply problematised.⁵

Rather, my objective will be to incorporate into my analysis certain categories made available by art theory and aesthetics in order to cast a new light on contemporary activist strategies.

DEFINING PERFORMANCE

Performance art has its roots in the vanguard movements of the early twentieth century, with first experiments conducted by groups such as Dada and the Futurists. It reached a new stage with the ‘happenings’ of the late 1950s in both Europe and the US by artists like Allan Kaprow and Yves Klein,⁶ and later, in the late 1960s and 1970s, with the work of Jean-Jacques Lebel, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden and the Fluxus movement, amongst many others.⁷ Performance art can be defined as a live artistic practice which focuses on the body of the performer in action, on time and space, and on active interaction with an audience.⁸ It is experimental by nature, and may include elements from dance, theatre and music.⁹ Peggy Phelan argues that the ephemeral aspect of performance is one of its defining characteristics, given that:

Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterwards ... Performance’s independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength.¹⁰

Although both share an emphasis on time and space, performance art is not the same as a theatrical performance, for in performance art the dramatic script is usually exchanged for a real-time narrative (or lack thereof), there is more room for improvisation, and both the structure of the performance and the setting (which usually does not include a stage) promote a deeper interaction with the viewer. As Bert O. States explains, theatre differs from performance because it usually means ‘a text performed “up there” by actors, with emphasis on *the thing* performed (“the play’s the thing”)’.¹¹ Performance, on the other hand, focuses on the body of the artist and the act of performing itself. Thus Marina Abramovic argues that theatre is ‘fake’ because:

[T]here is a black box, you pay for a ticket, and you sit in the dark and see somebody playing somebody else’s life. The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. It’s a very different concept. It’s about true reality.¹²

Although highly controversial and questionable – especially when challenging the ‘reality’ of theatre – Abramovic’s statement serves to illustrate the difference between theatre and performance regarding the physical and emotional involvement of the body, which is the reason I suggest performance as a lens through which to look at this type of activist practice. Amongst the actions I will be analysing throughout this chapter, the reader might note that there are many occasions of representation in which activists get into character and pretend to be someone else. This will be the case for UK Uncut activists disguised as doctors, and members of the University for Strategic Optimism posing as professors and lecturers. Nevertheless, in all cases the performance is not just an artistic act but also a political action taking place at a strategic place, where the body of the activist/performer is exposed and vulnerable – to encounters with authorities for example – and embodying certain emotions that are a direct consequence of carrying out a political action (excitement, fear, pride, joy, and so on).¹³ This means that the action is not merely a representation, but also a real-time political action.

Performance art, though it is always about a closer connection to the audience, is not always directly participative. Claire Bishop distinguishes between forms of less participatory performance, on the one hand, and, on the other, those participatory works that look to ‘collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception ... Their emphasis is on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience’.¹⁴ Within participatory art there are two modes: one that looks for participants but still maintains the figure of the author, and one that thrives on collective creativity.

The first is 'disruptive and interventionist', the second, 'constructive and ameliorative'.¹⁵ Although some activists may resort to performance because of its potential for disruption and intervention, it is within this second tradition of performance art that activists are usually inspired to engage, for participatory performance is not only a means to transmit a politically charged message, but it can be a political stand in itself by dismissing hierarchies and promoting principles of horizontalism. Philip Auslander talks about the political specificities and possibilities of postmodern performance which, by being more open and allowing the audience to impose their own interpretative system, also offers the possibility of a consciousness and moulding of the politics of representation, and hence a sort of collective power.¹⁶

Through its democratic and open nature, participatory performance therefore can be a means to creating a politically active subject that is emancipated and aware. It looks to promote equality by dismissing the hierarchical concept of the author, and looks to strengthen social bonds through collaboration.¹⁷ Victor Turner adds that performance – as opposed to the passive critique of other cultural forms – has a high political potential because:

Cultural performances are not simple reflections or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself and the drawing board on which creative actors sketch out what they believe to be more apt or interesting 'designs for living'.¹⁸

Finally, performance, using the body as the main instrument for expression, is an embodied practice. In a performance there is an inner exploration of the artist's body and, in general, an intention to extend this exploration into the audience, trying to generate an emotional reaction by stimulating the senses.¹⁹ The range of emotions that performance artists can appeal to is broad, and can range from fear to sadness, or even humour-induced pleasure. Take for example Vito Accorci's 1972 performance, *Seedbed*, in which he lay hidden under a platform built into the Sonnabend Gallery in New York, and masturbated as visitors walked around above him. Visitors could not see him, but could hear him fantasising about them from under the platform. This performance generated a mixture of feelings in the audience that was a product of a stimulation of the senses (sight, sound) and the knowledge of a sexualised body that was in proximity, sharing an intimate moment with the visitor. This stirring of emotions was intended to serve in the first place to establish a connection with the audience and, secondly, as a way of bringing into question issues of gender, violation, privacy and sexuality.

PERFORMANCE ACTIVISM

Beyond the history, definition and characteristics of performance art, the concept of *performance action* is critical, I suggest, to the study of political activism. Performance action describes a type of activist strategy that incorporates elements from performance art into political action. A performance action is therefore creative and symbolic; it is interactive, and is defined by the double role of participants as political activists and performers. It is a form of protest, as well as a play on the idea of direct action.

Performance action, like performance art, may take different shapes, attitudes and structure according to the intention and content of the action. One of the ways in which performance is used by activists is in the staging of parodies or satirical spectacles that both mock and denounce the ideologies and behaviours of governments, corporations and elites.²⁰ In their paper on spectacular resistance, Margaret Farrar and Jamie Warner argue that spectacle can be a powerful tool for expressing dissent and inciting massive action.²¹ Activists engaging in this sort of spectacular performance can be regarded as ‘culture jammers’, in their words, defined as ‘activists who deliberately subvert spectacular images in order to reclaim them’.²² As an example, they analyse the case of Billionaires for Bush, a US activist group whose members dress up as stereotypical over-the-top billionaires with top hats and fur coats, and stage ironic pro-Bush protests holding placards that state ‘Corporations are people too’ and similar slogans. Unlike the Debordian concept of the alienating spectacle²³ the Billionaires aim at spectacular performances that require interpretation and decodification on behalf of the viewer, thus fighting political passivity and estrangement.²⁴

Another way in which activists resort to performance is as a form of identity building, using it as a tool for reproducing symbols. James Jasper argues that the affective bonds with other participants, the pride of standing up for one’s values and the collective identity experienced when being part of a social movement can amount to a very pleasurable experience.²⁵ A collective performance in which the body is used as a tool and also exposed to dangers like confrontation and arrest, and where the ideology of the movement is being reproduced through action, has the potential not only for pleasure, enjoyment and other emotions, but for the strengthening of bonds and of collective identity as well.

PERFORMANCE AND CARNIVAL

Performance actions can also be carnivalesque and, indeed, the similarities between these two practices sometimes make them inseparable and indistinguishable. In *Rabelais and his World*, Mikhail Bakhtin offers a symbolic analysis of the carnival and the ‘carnavalesque’, starting from its medieval origins and

emphasising the subversive character of collective activities such as laughing, singing, eating and drinking excessively.²⁶ As Graeber notes, Bakhtin sees grotesque imagery ‘as often posed in direct opposition to the stuffy, overbearing, and hierarchical “official culture of the time”, a form of resistance against the static, lifeless asceticism that the church and civil authorities foisted on the masses’.²⁷

So what does carnival have in common with performance actions? As it occurred in Seattle in 1999, in the street parties of Reclaim the Streets in 1995,²⁸ and in many other instances of protest and demonstration, activist carnivalesque situations emerged both as a sort of subversion and resistance, and as a way of nurturing values of equality and community. For the activists, carnival was a ‘form of resistance that merges the political and the aesthetic’²⁹ and promoted values such as play, pleasure, spontaneity, excess and the reconfiguration of social hierarchies. It was about ‘rehearsing what it is like to be free, a time when power is inverted and the world is turned upside down’.³⁰ Just as in participatory performance, the carnival is a *creative, collective, non-hierarchical embodied experience*, in which the body is let loose from the confinements of manners and social norms, and becomes a channel for creativity, pleasure and joy. I therefore suggest embracing the similarities between these two practices in order to appreciate how performance can be carnivalesque, and how the carnival can also be seen as a performance.³¹

PERFORMANCE ACTIONS IN LONDON

For this study I have chosen to focus in the first place on actions taking place in London by three activist groups: UK Uncut, Arts Against Cuts and the University for Strategic Optimism. The reason behind this selection is that these groups chose performance actions as their *modus operandi* on repeated occasions. In addition, I will also focus on Occupy, a movement that spread into multiple locations across the world, and into different aspects of everyday life. Although known primarily for their occupations, Occupy activists did on some occasions incorporate performance elements into their actions, mainly as a way of reinforcing resistance symbolically. In addition, they represent the second wave of anti-austerity movements that took place in the UK after the 2008 economic crisis, emerging once the peak of the student protests had passed. Referring to them will therefore permit a wider scope for my analysis as well as allowing me to apply the category of performance activism to an inherently creative movement that does not resort to this artistic practice as its main mode of action, but rather incorporates it as an aid.

The data gathered for this study was based on first-hand observations, active participation in one action and content analysis (including of websites, texts

and YouTube videos) from actions that took place between November 2010 and May 2012. While not being an active member of any of the groups or networks studied in this chapter, with this study I aim to share with the reader the work of recent and current activist groups in London and to advocate for a kind of political activity that is embodied, creative and joyful. At the same time, however, I intend to provide a critical view, reflecting on the limitations and contradictions inherent in this kind of approach.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The global financial crisis, which developed in 2008, began in the context of the United States banking system and real estate market. Its effects quickly spread to economies worldwide, and European Union countries were no exception. The critical situation of banks in the UK led to the coalition government's announcement of austerity measures, which would serve to bail out the banks but at the cost of severe cuts to public services and considerable job losses. One of the first measures to be announced were changes to the higher education system, following the publication of the Browne Review in October 2010.³² This included devastating cuts to universities' teaching budgets and the raising of fees from around £3,000 (the fee cap at the time) to £9,000 a year.³³

The first major demonstration in response to these announcements, known as 'Demo 2010', took place in central London on 10 November 2010. It was mostly student-led but with the presence of political groups and parties such as the Green Party, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Students, as well as anarchist groups. Between 45,000 and 50,000 students, friends and supporters marched down the streets of London protesting the government's plans. According to the *Evening Standard*, 'It was the biggest protest by students since 1998, when tuition fees were first introduced by Labour'.³⁴ The placards and banners carried by the students proclaimed 'Some cuts never heal' and 'Save our education', and the chants were directed both at Prime Minister David Cameron and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. The latter was a common target for frustrated students, who angrily denounced the raising of higher education fees as an act of betrayal.³⁵ The feeling and message of the march was very clear: 'We did not cause the crisis, we will not pay for it at the cost of our education'.³⁶ Anti-austerity marches and actions would continue to take place throughout the following year, including the emergence of Occupy London in October 2011.

Parallel to the course of these demonstrations and marches, groups of students, lecturers and other newly formed affinity groups and local alliances started staging occupations, actions and teach-ins that would together amount to a vibrant network of activists resisting the 'cuts' and fighting for social change. From this context emerged the groups and the performance actions I will describe next.

UK Uncut

UK Uncut was created in late October 2010, and their first action was the occupation of a Vodafone store. Their name started circulating on Twitter and soon became well-known, with their actions and the people joining them growing by the minute. The group's declared mission is to act against the austerity measures of the government – mainly severe cuts to public services. They look to accomplish this by 'building a powerful grassroots mass movement, able to resist the Government cuts at every turn'.³⁷

Amongst UK Uncut's actions, which have included the occupation of tax-avoiding stores and companies, was the occupation of banks on 28 May 2011, an initiative called 'Emergency Operation'. Dressed as surgeons and packed with fake blood, props and informative leaflets, hundreds of activists across the UK set out to occupy and transform several branches of four major high street banks into hospitals and surgeries, in order to highlight the importance of the National Health Service (NHS), fight its privatisation and the loss of jobs, and express their outrage at the government's cuts to public services, including healthcare. Actions took place in more than ten cities (numbers varying according to the source), including London, Cambridge, Brighton, Liverpool and Glasgow. According to *The Guardian*, UK Uncut reported that forty branches of banks were closed, sometimes with activists inside and, on other occasions, prior to the protesters' arrival, forcing activists to conduct their actions outside.³⁸ The event was preceded by the circulation of a video in which activists dressed as surgeons danced whilst preparing for the action, checking a list of the essential items ('make props', 'call local media' and so on).³⁹ Humour was without a doubt an important aspect of the clip, as well as of the action.

Most of UK Uncut's actions are intended to be participatory. Moreover, the group puts great emphasis on distributing information online as well as through their actions (handing out leaflets and proclaiming the actions on megaphones) and on encouraging people to take matters into their own hands by either joining the group's actions or creating new groups (hence the promotional video and the information provided on their webpage). They are still active, and have recently carried out actions that denounced tax-avoiding companies and protested newly imposed austerity measures.

Arts Against Cuts

Arts Against Cuts was a group formed in late 2010 by artists, students and cultural workers against the Government's cuts to public services, and was specifically opposed to the reduction of funding in Arts education. On 6 December 2010, Arts Against Cuts staged an occupation and teach-in at Tate Britain, a hallowed



Figure 13.1 UK Uncut, Upper Street: 'Save the NHS' (Photo: A. Denney).



Figure 13.2 UK Uncut, Upper Street: 'Don't break our NHS' (Photo: A. Denney).



Figure 13.3 Art Against Cuts (Photo: M. Popovikj).

cultural space, after members of this group and other activists who joined them were not allowed into the prize ceremony and exhibition for the Turner Prize. Enforcing the idea that Tate would be empty without art schools, the almost 200 activists engaged in lectures, collective chanting and life drawing sessions.⁴⁰

A second action by Arts Against Cuts was the 'Orgy of the Rich' protest which took place during an auction at Sotheby's on 15 February 2011. In the middle of the auction a group of protesters who were sitting quietly inside the room started shouting and moaning in an orgasmic manner, and after some moments of suspense unveiled a banner that read 'Orgy of the Rich'. The protesters also threw fake £50 notes into the audience, and at the same time held a demonstration outside the venue which enacted a mock auction of public services. A video of this action was widely distributed on YouTube soon afterwards, and the protest received moderate media coverage.⁴¹

The University for Strategic Optimism

The University for Strategic Optimism (UfSO) is a group that was formed in late 2010 by mostly students of Cultural Studies and related subjects. They refer to themselves as 'A university [sic] based on the principle of free and open education, a return of politics to the public, and the politicisation of public space'.⁴² Being a 'University', they decided to have as their first action a lecture, held on 24 November 2010 at a branch of Lloyds Bank at London Bridge. The lecture began after a small group of people took the bank by surprise, held up a big banner with the University's logo and started a lecture that would be inter-



Figure 13.4 Occupy LSX Camp at St Paul's (Photo: D. Haslam).

rupted by a security guard just after stating the words, 'Don't be afraid, no money will be harmed during this lecture.' The lecture was called 'Higher Education, Neo-Liberalism and the State', and it presented the UfSO, aimed to expose the injustice behind the government's new measures and promoted a politicisation of public space.

The second 'lecture' took place at a Tesco Superstore on 30 November 2010 and was titled 'Market Education, Instant-Mix Degrees and the Commodification of Everything'. The lecture started with the presentation and offer of a variety of made-up degrees, ironically titled 'Creative Accounting' and 'Desire Engineering' amongst others – this being a clear parody of the path that higher education is taking in the UK.⁴³ Later on, the lecturer for the day gave a presentation about the current state of higher education, the millionaire status of some of the panellists of the Browne Review, and the consequences of the rise in fees and the ideology behind it, leading up to the final question: 'What will become of non-utilitarian learning? What will become of the Arts?' The lecture came to an end when security guards stopped the action, with the last spoken sentence being 'We, the University for Strategic Optimism, give all power to the imagination.'⁴⁴

The last example of an action by this group is the Free Free Market Market, which took place on 25 March 2011, and in which I participated. The idea was to stage a 'great education cattle market of the future' to 'help the Big Society sell

off education and public services', meaning that fake degrees and services would be on sale, and could be bought with fake monopoly money or 'cultural capital' handed out at the site.⁴⁵ An invitation circulated beforehand asking people to join in by bringing their own stalls and things to sell, or to just 'swing by and flash (mob) your cultural capital'. The group gathered outside the Institute of Contemporary Arts and then moved to a secret location: the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Skills. Once there the stalls were set up, a band started playing, and cultural capital and degrees started circulating amongst participants and the few passers-by who joined in. The action took place outside a strategic venue and tried to engage the Ministry's employees as well as passers-by, but did not quite succeed in doing so. Despite the banners and speeches made through megaphones, the idea for this performance action was not entirely clear and this may have stopped some people from joining. On the other hand, there was a well-thought-through plan of producing a video out of it, which took the form of an ethnographic study of the Free Free Market Market. Dressed as a 'stereotypical anthropologist', wearing a khaki shirt and hat, one of the members of the group proceeded to interview the different sellers and buyers who explained the ironic products and services on sale.

Occupy London

Occupy emerged as a movement in London on 15 October 2011, with a camp being set up outside St Paul's Cathedral after a failed attempt at occupying Paternoster Square.⁴⁶ The major camps at St Paul's and Finsbury Square were set up as a political statement, but not only as that. These sites were turned into living spaces in order to extend the temporal and spatial dimensions of the protest, and as an example of the reconfiguration of public and private spaces that the movement proposed. Camps were open to people who were engaged with the movement as well as to those who were not. Following the ethos of the Occupy Wall Street settlements in New York (where the movement first started), they became not only places to sleep and eat, but also centres for interaction, learning, discussion, organising and leisure. The setting up of Tent University, the kitchen and the recycling scheme, are examples of how the movement extended to multiple aspects of everyday life, and presented a prototype for an alternative social living configuration based on principles of horizontalism, cooperation and openness.⁴⁷

In contrast to other movements, Occupy did not operate only through set meetings and planned actions. The camps at St Paul's and Finsbury Square, plus other temporarily occupied sites such as the Bank of Ideas, allowed the movement to have a continuity fostered by daily interactions amongst a large number of the participants. The occupied sites also allowed the movement to

branch out into other aspects of everyday life besides protest, and to channel their creativity through a broad set of activities such as putting together a library, fixing and decorating occupied spaces, organising workshops, and managing the camps' logistics and infrastructure.

Even though creativity flourished in the daily activities at the camp, there were also specific instances in which activists engaged in protest actions that were inherently artistic. One of these took place on 1 May 2012, in the context of a 'comeback' that the movement had with a series of consecutive actions starting on the first of the month, and which I observed as part of different protest actions during that day.

The act of occupation which defines the movement made the tent a dominant symbol of Occupy, often portrayed in photographs by the media as a synecdoche for the movement. It was highly significant, then, that on such a politically charged date members of the Occupy movement decided to set up a 'flash camp' in the middle of Trafalgar Square, signalling the comeback and resistance of the movement with an act and a prop (the tent) which embodied its essence. The intention was clearly not to mark a new settlement site – since setting up tents in Trafalgar square would guarantee an immediate eviction. The intention was to make a statement, to remind the world that the fight was not over, and that occupations could happen anywhere and anytime.

Following the Trafalgar Square action, a group of around twenty activists moved on to Oxford Street, where they gathered outside different stores and proceeded to denounce the stores' tax evasion in the form of chants encouraged by a megaphone. Suddenly, after a group of around thirty passers-by gathered around to watch and take pictures, protesters lifted their tents over their heads and held them open in the air, in a symbolically charged act of subversion.

The actions of all these different groups and networks illustrate how inventive performance action can be used as a tool for political activism. By applying categories from aesthetics and art theory, I want to attempt an interdisciplinary analysis in order to shed new light on this kind of activist strategy.

THE POWER OF SYMBOLIC TRANSGRESSIONS

Performance clearly allows the transmission of symbolic messages beyond words. If we take the case of UK Uncut, dressing up as surgeons and turning banks into hospitals constituted a performance action through the deployment of familiar symbolic objects out of context, which transgressed normative assumptions of where these objects and persons belong. Activists were not occupying the place only as protesting citizens, but also as 'doctors' looking for a place to work because the hospitals had been shut down due to lack of funding. Dressing up and acting like doctors therefore made the temporary appropriation of 'inappro-

priate' spaces justified, since banks were responsible for the national debt they were not being held accountable for. The juxtaposition of two unlike orders – financial and healthcare – made for a symbolically charged action.

The action at Tate Britain by Arts Against Cuts was another example of a deeply symbolic action derived from the normative transgression of place and its 'proper' activities. The staging of the improvised life drawing class did not come from a mere desire to draw, but was a performance action looking to make a point: if the funding for art schools is cut, we will take over the museum for our lessons – the same symbolic appropriation and transformation of space that was carried out by UK Uncut.

This subversion of normative space through performance was also essential to the Occupy movement. The fact that in Occupy's action at Trafalgar Square the intention was not to actually set up a campsite but rather to send a message and state a position, suggests the element of performance in this action, which adds a further layer to the act of camping or occupying. The tent, the ultimate occupying tool, encapsulated the symbolic power of the movement, and supported bodies in action as they sat in Trafalgar Square for a few minutes before being removed by the police. Apart from the symbolic transgression of space, other forms of transgression were also used as key instruments of protests and dissent.

Carnival and Humour

The University for Strategic Optimism's use of parody, irony and humour is a good example of how performance can be a powerful creative tool for political action. When selling fake degrees at Tesco or making statements like 'No money will be harmed during this lecture', activists resorted to humour as a way of getting through to participants and audiences, appealing to emotions as well as to critical thought. Humour and satire were further enhanced by the carnivalesque elements in their actions, with performances like the Free Free Market Market incorporating music, costumes and props, which generated an overall festive atmosphere.

Parodic humour was essential for UK Uncut's Emergency Operation performance action, as well as for Art Against Cuts' Orgy of the Rich performance. In the latter, both the orgiastic bodily display and the mock auction of public services were humorous parodies of the elites. With its loud, expressive, embodied character, the orgy performance action was also carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense and, as Souren Melikian reported for *The New York Times*, many members of the audience at Sotheby's were more amused than disturbed by the whole event.⁴⁸ Angélique Haugerud, reflecting on the importance of humour in social movements, quotes a member of Occupy Wall Street who explains that 'being able to crack a joke and get people to draw on their own sense of what is right is

very powerful'.⁴⁹ Humour subverts the sanctity which modern society accords to public places of high culture, to the untouchable charisma of capitalist institutions such as banks, large supermarket chains or government ministries, and to the capitalists and political classes who dominate, reducing eminent buildings to bricks and mortar and untouchable elites into exemplars of a lowly humanity.

The Body as an Instrument

Through the embodied act of performance, activists experienced and provoked emotions, and created and transmitted meaning. The body of the performer was not only used as an artistic medium, but was also exposed as *the* political actor in its own right, facing the possibilities of confrontations with security, being arrested and even submitted to violent repression. In the case of Occupy's action in Trafalgar Square, the bodies of activists took on a further role. The act of occupying is in itself defined by the presence of certain bodies in a specific place. The body was thus not only a means for expression, but also a 'tool' for occupation.

THE PARADOX OF PARTICIPATION:
PERFORMANCE, SPECTACLE AND THE NEW MEDIA

Participation is key to many activist actions because there is power in numbers and because the intention behind their performances is to inform and invite as many people as possible to get involved in political activity towards social change. In most of the performance actions described here, participation by fellow activists and non-activists alike was encouraged, either through open calls in advance, or through attempts to include passers-by as the actions were taking place. This tendency towards inclusion can be related to the strand of participatory performance described earlier, which attempts to blur the distinction between author and audience, thus promoting a more horizontal kind of practice by turning passive spectators into active producers of meaning.⁵⁰ Participation is seen to contribute to the political objectives of the action by reproducing certain values through the processes in place.

Groups like UfSO, UK Uncut and Arts Against Cuts employed tactics that seem to be directed at active interaction with the other; at creating a disruption of everyday life by inventing an unexpected, crazy situation that would intrigue passers-by and invite them to reflect about certain issues such as the ideology behind austerity measures and the consequences of cuts to public services. These sorts of actions are not thought of as self-contained, but rather suppose interactions and negotiation, whether with the general public, workers of targeted institutions or security forces. Herein, however, lies the paradox of the movements, linked to the fact that recruitment and inclusion of members of the

public as participants in actions is always limited – one cannot include *everyone* – and sometimes it does not even succeed in including even a few from accidental passers-by. Hence, although their artistic performances were in most cases intended to be participatory, they could only (potentially) reach wider audiences through the media and online rather than at the site of the performance action. Yet the media could not substitute in the final analysis, as Judith Butler too has argued,⁵¹ for real bodies occupying real spaces.

The question then is: if most of the people who experience the action face to face are spectators instead of participants, can the action still be effective in terms of generating a response in the audience? How much gets across to an audience which is not experiencing the same emotions and sense of involvement as participants? If we go back to Farrar and Warner's argument on the political potential of spectacle,⁵² then the subversive symbolism of performance actions is arguably what is most valuable, able ultimately to make audiences reflect on the meaning and implications of what they saw, then this is true whether they are active participants or not. But then the further question may be raised; whether these ironic and humorous performances can really be effective in terms of making audiences aware and active towards political change, or whether they are merely contained experiences that become easily assimilated by the 'society of spectacle'.⁵³

The question that follows from this is: can an action potentially still be 'effective' when seen on footage as opposed to being witnessed live? A common trait among many activist groups is that the production of promotional and informative videos of their actions is as important as the performance action itself. In some cases, the actions carried out are rather small in size, or take place in locations that are not highly frequented, therefore not affecting many people directly. In these cases, the production of a video to distribute on YouTube becomes a major objective of the action, and the idea of contacting people face to face and awakening them from a state of numbness becomes only secondary. But I wonder if this is something to criticise or should we come to terms with the fact that the role of the media for activists has become crucial, and that a video online could be what triggers people into taking to the streets?⁵⁴ As Jeffrey Juris notes, the internet has not only permitted new forms of organisation, but has also made it possible to share resources.⁵⁵ This online sharing is perhaps what could ultimately make actions more valuable than their actual live performance, if we consider the number of people that can be reached online.

What is at stake when sharing a video of an action, however, is the aura of the actual, 'real' performance as an artistic 'event'.⁵⁶ If we approach these performance actions as we do performance art, we might argue that there is an aura in a performance that is only transmitted to the immediate audience, and does not translate into a recording. The aura is what makes the work of art special, irreproducible and different from mundane artifacts and situations. As Peggy

Phelan puts it, 'Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance'.⁵⁷ This raises the question: how much of the original action can therefore be captured by a video? Can the recording of an action still transmit and generate the same emotions, or will it be limited to being purely informative and/or amusing? In the latter case, would this be a loss, or just an added way of sharing and experiencing the action?

CONCLUSION

Performance, I have argued, is a powerful tool for political action, thus making art theory and aesthetics useful frameworks for the study of particular forms of political activism that engage in this type of artistic practice. I argue that the arts – and in particular performance art – are appealing to activists because through embodiment and emotions, collective symbols and carnivalesque humour, performances can create temporary situations of freedom, transgression, reflection and mutual empowerment for participants and perhaps in a secondary sense, for audiences as well. Their political potential is that the freedom they invoke 'is not just freedom *from* oppression, repression, exploitation – the resistance of the radical – but also freedom *to reach beyond* existing systems of formalised power, freedom to create currently unimaginable forms of association and action – the transgressive or transcendent sense of the radical'.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the grey area in which art and activism blur is a powerful one precisely because of this lack of definition. As BAVO explain when describing Rancière's point of view, the uncertain position between the autonomy and heteronomy of art in regard to politics makes it:

difficult for the politicians involved to 'aestheticize away' the accusations expressed by the artist, [and] dismiss them as 'merely art'... [because] the political accusations are too direct for this. On the other hand, it denies politicians the opportunity to defuse the indictment in the usual way, with familiar political arguments: it is too artistic for that.⁵⁹

It is yet to be seen, however, what the larger political implications are of the circulation of these performance actions through the internet. The excitement, joy and even fear involved in taking part in or witnessing an action first hand cannot be captured by recordings. What the internet allows, however, is the opportunity to reach mass audiences across the world; to share information and tactics, and maybe inspire others to get out on the streets and take matters into their own hands.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 14

Spain's Indignados and the Mediated Aesthetics of Non-violence

JOHN POSTILL

'If the *indignados* are so angry, why are they laughing so much?'

Eduardo Romanos¹

'15M nonviolence is not passive, it is neither abidance by the law nor an adherence to political convention. Rather it is active, rebellious, disobedient and creative.'

Amador Fernandez Savater²

PREFACE

In July 2010, I moved with my family from England to Barcelona, in Catalonia, Spain, to conduct fieldwork on social media and activism for a period of twelve months. Having previously carried out field research on internet activism in Malaysia in 2003-4,³ I was eager to learn whether post-2004 platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were making any significant difference to the everyday practices and collective actions of activists, albeit this time in a very different corner of the world.⁴ As a Spaniard, a reluctant Spaniard but a Spaniard all the same, this was my first experience of 'anthropology at home' after many years living and working abroad.

When planning the year ahead I did not expect the #SpanishRevolution (as the *indignados* movement was originally known), certainly not in Catalonia, with its strong tradition of regional nationalism and reluctant Hispanity. Indeed, the day before my arrival, a million people had protested in Barcelona against a ruling by Spain's Constitutional Court limiting the region's autonomy. Protesters marched behind a banner that read, in Catalan: 'We are a nation. We decide'.⁵

By October 2010, the nationalist tide had subsided and I began to worry that I may not have much internet activism to research in Barcelona. Meanwhile, the city's small but lively 'free culture' scene had attracted my interest. Free culture activists fight to liberate 'all individuals and authors/artists from the abuses of the cultural industry trade'.⁶ Their movement is intimately tied to the global struggle for internet freedom epitomised by platforms such as Wikileaks and Anonymous.⁷

My research fears were assuaged in December 2010 when free culture activists and internet rights lawyers successfully mobilised to delay the passing of an unpopular copyright bill known as *Ley Sinde* that the Spanish government had drafted under US pressure,⁸ as revealed by Wikileaks. When the government, backed by the other main parties, passed the law early in 2011 despite the popular outcry, leading internet activists created the online group NoLesVotes. This group called on Spanish citizens not to vote for any of the major parties as a response to this perceived betrayal. NoLesVotes soon joined forces with Anonymous and other non-traditional formations to create an umbrella platform named Democracia Real Ya (DRY). It is no coincidence that DRY's Barcelona home base was the free culture centre Conservas, or that its Madrid equivalent was the 'hackerspace' Patio Maravillas.

On 15 May 2011, DRY launched street marches across Spain under the slogan 'Real democracy now! We are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers'. While the marches were well attended, they were not envisaged as a preamble to Tahrir-style mass occupations. As I headed for my Barcelona home after a long day of marching, I had no inkling that this was merely the beginning of a tidal wave of protest that would reach beyond Spain's borders. The turning point came in the early hours of 16 May, as a group of some forty protesters decided to pitch camp at Madrid's main square, Puerta del Sol, instead of returning to their homes. One of them, a member of the hacktivist group Isaac Hacksimov (once again, the digital activism connection was not accidental), explained later: 'All we did was a gesture that broke the collective mental block'.⁹ Fearing that the authorities may evict them, the occupiers sent out calls for support via the internet. The first person to join them learned about their collective action on Twitter.

By 17 May the number of Puerta del Sol campers had swollen to 200 and by 20 May nearly 30,000 people had taken the square. This demographic explosion was mirrored online as countless Twitter threads, Facebook conversations and blog posts were hastily produced and shared. Dozens of other cities around Spain followed suit, and the nascent indignados/15M movement was now a global media event. Soon it would inspire, like the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt before it, similar developments around the world, including the Occupy Wall Street movement later in the year.¹⁰

INTRODUCTION

One remarkable feature about Spain's indignados movement, noted by numerous observers, is its untiring commitment to non-violence, even in the face of riot police provocation and brutality. Compared to other southern European states such as Greece or Italy, Spain's protests have been relatively free from violent actions on the part of the citizenry.

But why are Spain's indignados so devoted to non-violence? After all, long decades of activist and scholarly debate on the effectiveness of non-violence as a protest strategy have not settled the issue either way.¹¹

One main focus of the non-violence literature has been the part played by the media, particularly the mass media, in the development of non-violent social movements. Thus Vamsee Juluri has called for a rapprochement between the philosophy of non-violence and media studies as a way of exposing 'foundational myths about violence in the media',¹² such as the myth about violence being natural, historical or cultural. For his part, Samad argues that non-violence 'minimizes the loss of human lives, compared to wars or armed conflicts, and is apt to bring about real political change'.¹³ However, he cautions that further research is needed in order to contrast the effectiveness of this strategy in different political and historical contexts. David Sumner examines the role of the print media and TV in the 1960 Nashville Student Movement, in the US state of Tennessee.¹⁴ Students regarded the media as a key means of garnering public support for their cause. Their commitment to non-violence was amply covered by the media and 'helped show that if violence occurred, the students were not the ones who initiated it', for they were portrayed as 'the good guys'.¹⁵

A better known example is that of Martin Luther King Jr, whose moderate stance and mastery of public relations won him the hearts and minds of America's left-liberal media establishment: 'The fact that African-American ministers and non-violent leaders like King called on African-Americans to "love their enemies" particularly caught the attention of the media and allowed the movement to gain liberals, white sympathizers and donors'.¹⁶

Samad argues that technological changes were integral to King's success.¹⁷ By 1958, over 80 per cent of US households had a TV set and over 96 per cent a radio. This put an abrupt end to African-American invisibility, providing 'a window through which millions could watch the black struggle'.¹⁸ Without the mass media, concludes Samad, King would be today 'an unsung clergyman'.¹⁹

Other authors are less persuaded, however, about the merits of non-violence as a political strategy. For instance, William Meyers agrees that King played an important part in the anti-segregation movement, but he was by no means the only party involved.²⁰ There was, in fact, a wide spectrum of groups that formed a common front around this issue, including the Black Panthers, Black Muslims

and a motley of anarchist, communist and other formations. For Meyers, the lead role was actually played not by non-violent activists but by the National Guard and its credible ‘threat of violence’:

When Presidents of the United States decided to send in the National Guard to desegregate schools in southern states, the racists had little choice but to back down. Whether the President, Congress or Supreme Court [...] did it out of the goodness of their hearts, or because they feared a violent revolution that would overthrow the government, or because some marchers took oaths of non-violence, in the end it was violence and the threat of violence that ended segregation.²¹

With the spread of the internet and mobile phones over the past two decades, the question of the technological mediation of non-violent protest has acquired greater salience. Drawing from multi-sited research in Barcelona and other European cities in the early 2000s, the anthropologist Jeff Juris explores ‘the complex relationship between performative violence and mass-mediated constructions of violence’,²² taking the anti-G8 protests in Genoa as his main case study. Juris defines performative violence as ‘a specific mode of communication through which activists seek to produce social transformation by staging symbolic rituals of confrontation’. Unfortunately for activists, the conventional mass media frames of the day undermined their strategy by interpreting these confrontations as wanton violence.

Juris conducted fieldwork before the current global boom in the uptake of social media and smartphones. At the time, activists had access to indie/alternative media, listservs, email and websites, but mass ‘social Web’ platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube were not yet in existence. This contrast raises the question of what difference, if any, the new media technologies have made to the recent waves of protest in 2011 and 2013.

Social movements scholars such as Manuel Castells and Zeynep Tufekci contend that media technologies are ‘game-changers’.²³ As millions of citizens gained access to the internet and mobile phones, says Tufekci, autocrats in countries such as Tunisia or Egypt were no longer able to impose informational embargos on localised protest. As a result, local information/action trickles turned into nationwide cascades that the authorities could not contain. On the other side of the debate sit scholars such as Evgeny Morozov who denounce as hyperbole accounts that explore the emancipatory potential of the new technologies.²⁴ Meanwhile, a growing number of authors, including anthropologists, are seeking to steer clear of the polemics in order to develop nuanced accounts of the part played by digital media in recent protest movements.²⁵

In this chapter, I take my cue from the latter scholars to explore the mediated

aesthetics of the new movements at a time of rapid technological change, a question that has not yet received sufficient attention. Drawing from both my own fieldwork in Barcelona and from a critical reading of the indignados literature – most of it published in Spanish and unknown in the Anglophone world – I ask what part, if any, the new social and mobile media have played in the emergence and stabilisation of a distinctive non-violent aesthetics in Spain. My argument is that this new aesthetics is indeed complexly mediated, both by ‘traditional’ mainstream media and by new platforms and technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and smartphones. After a brief overview of the indignados movement, I then identify five key principles of its protest aesthetic, concluding that this new aesthetic has positioned Spain – until recently a technological laggard with a dormant civil society – in the global forefront of techno-political innovation and social change.

THE INDIGNADOS MOVEMENT

Spanish activists and observers alike agree that the 15 May protests were long overdue. The collapse of the housing market in 2008 had left the Spanish economy in a feeble state, with an overall unemployment rate of 45 per cent among young people, and millions more having to survive on low-paid or seasonal jobs. The combination of a political class discredited by a string of corruption cases, an electoral law that perpetuates a two-party system and the precedent of pro-democracy uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt all set the scene for a spring of discontent in Spain.²⁶

The encampments rapidly evolved into ‘cities within cities’ governed through popular assemblies and committees. The committees were created around practical needs such as cooking, cleaning, communicating and carrying out actions. Decisions were made through both majority-rule vote and consensus. The structure was horizontal, with rotating spokespersons in lieu of leaders. Tens of thousands of citizens were thus experimenting with participatory, direct and inclusive forms of democracy at odds with the dominant logic of political representation. Displaying a thorough admixture of utopianism and pragmatism, the new movement drew up a list of concrete demands, including the removal of corrupt politicians from electoral lists, while pursuing long-term revolutionary goals such as giving ‘All Power to the People’.²⁷

By the middle of June 2011 most encampments were dismantled following arduous consensus-seeking assemblies. The aim was to take the movement from the central squares and streets to the neighbourhoods (*barrios*), but not without first warning the authorities that protesters ‘know the way back’. Neighbourhood assemblies were created in many localities, albeit with uneven levels of participation.²⁸ At the same time, increasing attention was paid to the elaboration of

concrete objectives, for example a fairer distribution of the available work, the right to a home or stripping the political class of its privileges.²⁹

In the autumn of 2011, Spain's indignados aligned themselves with related movements in Portugal, Greece, the US and other countries, setting off simultaneous demonstrations in over a thousand cities around the globe on 15 October. Both Twitter and smartphones played an important role here, along with live streaming and aggregator sites, in bringing together multiple networks of protesters around a set of Twitter hashtags (keywords). Collective Twitter accounts were particularly important bridges across the various locality-based movements.³⁰

In Spain, the indignados movement has continued to evolve as a loosely articulated constellation of techno-political ideals, practices and actions. For example, in May 2012 a group called 15MpaRato was created to take legal action against Rodrigo Rato, the former IMF managing director and chief executive of Bankia. That same month Bankia had requested a €19 billion bailout from the Spanish government. In less than two weeks, the new platform had built a strong social media profile and raised sufficient money through crowdfunding to initiate the legal process.³¹ As a consequence, Rato appeared in court that December to face charges of 'fraud, embezzlement, falsifying accounts and price manipulation'.³² Other ongoing initiatives include the Mortgage Victims Platform, the Casa Precaria in Madrid (offering advice on self-employment), a Catalan network of cooperatives, and the Citizens' Tide, 'a coalition of 350 organisations ... that have mobilised hundreds of thousands against privatisation and austerity'.³³ Writing in late April 2013, Katherine Ainger aptly concludes: 'Two years ago the *indignados* occupied the plazas of cities across Spain to protest against the crisis and demand a "real democracy". Now, it seems, indignation is becoming a generalised condition.'³⁴

A MEDIATED AESTHETICS OF NON-VIOLENCE

As said earlier, Spain's 15M movement is famed for its non-violence. The indignados have always been swift to respond to repeated attempts by certain conservative news media to attach a 'radical aesthetic' to the movement, countering these media representations with widely shared digital content such as YouTube videos showing police provocateurs disguised as 'skins' or 'radicals', scenes of peaceful sit-ins brutally broken up by the police, posters of demonstrators facing riot police with open hands raised in the air and chanting, 'These are our weapons' (*Estas son nuestras armas*) (see Fig. 14.1), and so on.

If the noun 'aesthetic' (in the singular), can be defined as 'a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement, [e.g.] *the Cubist aesthetic*',³⁵ here I will use the term 'protest aesthetic' to mean 'a set of principles



Figure 14.1 Poster announcing a non-violence workshop organised by two indignados platforms in Burgos (Spain) in May 2012 (Source: Democracia Real YA Burgos).

underlying the subcultural work and style of a particular protest movement', in this case the Spanish Indignados/15M movement.

Five key principles underlie the indignados aesthetic. First, a firm rejection of the 'diverse tactics' of earlier mobilisations such as the anti-corporate globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which included (ritually) violent tactics.³⁶ This principle was already in evidence during the launch of *Democracia Real Ya* in Barcelona in the Spring of 2011, which I attended, and continued to shape the movement's evolution during and after the May 2011 occupations. Second, the strategic use of humour,³⁷ and more specifically of 'jocose emotivity'³⁸ both externally (against the ruling elites, the media, the police, and so on) and internally (as a way of relieving stress and building solidarity among protesters). Third, sophisticated digital practices across the porous social/mainstream media divide, deftly exploiting the unique affordances of different technologies, for example the virality of the microblogging site Twitter³⁹ or the indexicality of YouTube videos.⁴⁰ Fourth, the spread of free software/culture ideals and practices through techno-political experiments with direct democracy undertaken in public spaces.⁴¹ Fifth, a perpetually transient temporality in which the immediate and ephemeral are accorded the same weight as the enduring and long term.

I will now consider each of these aesthetic principles in turn, before recapitulating the argument and concluding with some suggestions for further research.

REJECTION OF DIVERSE TACTICS

Samad argues that movements which adopt non-violence must be fully devoted to it, for there is no room for half-measures.⁴² For example, the second Palestinian intifada's non-violent actions were overshadowed in both the Arab and western media by images of 'armed battle'. Most Spanish indignados have likewise stressed the incompatibility of violent and non-violent tactics, eschewing the 'diversity of tactics' that characterised protests against corporate capitalism in the early 2000s. This quote from a Catalan activist captures that earlier ethos:

One thing has become clear: we have to coordinate direct action with all other types of protest. Who knows when a sit-in or a Molotov cocktail will be useful? It depends on the moment. And according to Asian wisdom: 'always do what the enemy least expects'.⁴³

By contrast, for most 15M participants violence should be rejected in all situations, as violence 'always places itself at the heart of the action, like a whirlwind that suctions and drags everything else'.⁴⁴

15M is a nonviolent movement. This is so essential to it that it wasn't even a decision taken in an assembly [...]. We don't decide our DNA, we start from it. [...] Nonviolence does not mean nonconflict. The nonviolence of 15M is not passive, it is neither abidance by the law nor an adherence to political convention. Rather it is active, rebellious, disobedient and creative.⁴⁵

For the indie radio station Onda Precaria 15M non-violence is 'a methodology inscribed in the movement's DNA as a strategy to thwart efforts by the rulers and security forces to portray us as a destructive, anti-system minority [*una minoría antisistema rompелotodo*]'.⁴⁶

15M activists regard nonviolence as being as essential to the movement as its collective intelligence, horizontality, heterogeneity and inclusion.⁴⁷ Non-violence is a source of strength, not weakness, a collective strategy founded on the belief that it will eventually pay dividends. For Aurelio Sainz Pezonaga,⁴⁸ non-violence is intrinsic to the movement's 'revolutionary logic', in the sense of not regarding anyone as an enemy, not even politicians, bankers or the police. This was neatly captured, he adds, in the chant 'Police, join us!' (*¡Policía únete!*) heard in the early days of the encampments. In sum, non-violence trumps the supposed efficacy of violence, putting an end to the 'tyranny of testosterone'.⁴⁹

So far the strategy has proven to be a success, but there have been setbacks as well. Let us consider first the high points, starting with the May 2011 occupations. These were portrayed by the centrist and left-leaning news media as peaceful, multitudinous and non-partisan. Images of law-abiding citizens 'making history' were created and disseminated widely by both professionals and amateurs across a huge range of platforms,⁵⁰ with the notable exception of *Intereconomía* and other conservative media outlets hostile to the new movement. A second high point was reached on 27 May 2011, when Catalonia's riot police used calculated brutality to break up a peaceful sit-in at Plaça de Catalunya. According to 15M activists:

Fifteen people were injured, as protesters used non-violent resistance to defend the occupation. The level of police of brutality can be exemplified by pictures taken of a riot officer breaking a protester's wheelchair. This potent image, along with the twitter hash tag #Bcnsinmiedo (Barcelona without fear) spread rapidly through the internet, becoming one of the most popular global twitter topics for that day. Within hours, solidarity protests were planned in every city across the country under the banner 'We are all Barcelona'.⁵¹

However, a few weeks later, on 15 June, this peaceful image was tarnished when irate demonstrators harassed Catalan politicians as they entered the regional parliament in Barcelona. This incident provoked a brief crisis within

the movement as its spokespersons sought to distance themselves from it. As reported by *El País*:

Politicians of all parties were verbally abused and in some cases pushed around (*zarandeados*) when they tried to enter [...] the Parliament building. The strong police cordon could not prevent some violent scenes. [...] [Protesters] painted a black cross on [the regional MP] Montserrat Tura's raincoat, who said that if the 15M movement wishes to gain prestige, 'this cannot be based on spray and on marking people as if they were targets. This behaviour is reminiscent of the Nazis.'⁵²

Fortunately for 15M supporters, the damage was contained through a counter-demonstration held on 19 June at which large crowds clearly reaffirmed the movement's non-violent credentials through embodied, mediated performances such as holding their hands up in the air while chanting 'These are our weapons' (see Fig. 14.1). Contrary to activists' complaints about the news media conspiring to label 15M as a violent movement,⁵³ most mainstream outlets were broadly sympathetic to the movement. For example, the centre-right newspaper *El Mundo* reported that on 19 June 15M 'put on display an undeniably peaceful intent which allowed it to recoup the credit it had lost after the violent siege of the Catalan parliament'.⁵⁴ A week later, the centre-left *El País* (traditionally close to Spain's Socialist Party, PSOE), reported that 71 per cent of citizens surveyed regarded 15M as a peaceful movement and 'only 17 per cent see it as being radical'. The report concluded that the movement had managed to retain 64 per cent of popular support a month after its inception, 'burying the idea that the incidents linked to the movement had undermined it'. Indeed, '79 per cent [of Spaniards] believe the indignados have good reason to protest and support them'.⁵⁵

Another challenging episode for the movement's non-violent reputation took place in August 2011 when media reports linked 15M to a Madrid march opposing the funding of the Pope's visit to Spain with taxpayers' money, which ended in clashes with Catholic pilgrims. Although a 15M general assembly had decided not to join the anti-Papal march organised by a number of secularist platforms, some news media highlighted the 15M banners on display. The dangers of being seen as supporting the anti-Pope demonstration had been aired online by 15M supporters in previous days, including by a user of the link-sharing site Menéame whose comment was widely recommended by other site users:

I think stepping into the minefield [*fregao*] of the anti-Pope demonstration wouldn't be desirable for 15M. Think about it, you only need to give them half a reason to call us crusties [*perroflautas*]⁵⁶ and other nice things, if on top of it we join the demonstration, no one will take us seriously.

The crisis was once again overcome via highly visible displays of non-violence. As in previous incidents, this reaction was warmly received by the mainstream media, with the predictable exception of the more conservative outlets. These successful damage limitation exercises have been a recurrent pattern in the movement's first two years of life. In June 2013, the left-leaning radio network *Cadena Ser* (owned, like *El País*, by the PRISA group) published the results of a survey it conducted among social media users in collaboration with DRY and other indignados platforms. Again, it reported a high level of support for the 15M movement, with 80 per cent of internet respondents having 'maintained their interest in, or connection to, 15M', adding that these results confirmed the ongoing erosion of Spain's two-party system⁵⁷ – a conclusion entirely congruent with the indignados' worldview. Moreover, the movement has no shortage of influential supporters working with(in) leading news organisations as reporters, photographers, editors, bloggers, guest columnists, whistleblowers and so on.⁵⁸ Pending systematic research on this matter, the notion that the mainstream news media as a whole are conspiring with the political and financial class to undermine the 15M movement appears to be unwarranted. As media anthropologists have demonstrated in a range of cultural contexts, including in authoritarian countries such as Egypt, the mass media are always sites of contestation rather than the conspiratorial monoliths they are often made out to be in the activist imagination.⁵⁹

JOCOSE EMOTIVITY

A second key principle of the indignados' non-violent aesthetic is their strategic use of humour, more specifically a jocose style of articulating emotions. Although emotions and affect are important areas of growth in social movement theory, to date protest humour has been relatively neglected in the literature.⁶⁰ At the same time, there is strong evidence to suggest that activists and protesters around the globe are using both old and new forms of humour as part of their repertoires. For instance, the international platform Movements.org declared June 2013 'Dictator Appreciation Month', asking citizens around the world to contribute materials to their expanding 'laughtivism' web resources '[b]ecause we love sarcasm'.

Deborah Gould⁶¹ quotes Brian Massumi⁶² who defines emotions as 'the expression of affect in gesture and language, its conventional or coded expression': 'Whereas affect is unfixed, unstructured, and non-linguistic, an emotion is one's personal expression of what one is feeling in a given moment, an expression that is structured by social convention, by culture'.⁶³

This is an intriguing distinction between affect and emotion, particularly in its stress on the momentariness of emotions, but Gould's exclusive locating

of emotion within the realm of ‘personal expression’ is problematic. Instead, I wish to expand this definition to suggest that an emotion is an expression of what a person *and/or a collectivity* (e.g. a Puerta del Sol assembly, a Twitter trending topic) is feeling in a given moment, an expression structured by social convention, *by technology* and by other cultural elements.

In a recent paper, Eduardo Romanos addresses the puzzling question, ‘If the *indignados* are so angry, why are they laughing so much?’⁶⁴ His answer is cogent: the *indignados* use humour strategically, and they do so both instrumentally and expressively. In Weberian terms,⁶⁵ their humour is at once value-rational (*wertrational*) and instrumentally rational (*zweckrational*): ‘Value-rational action is “determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, independently from its prospects of success”’.⁶⁶

For Romanos,⁶⁷ then, there is far more to *indignados* humour than merely having a good time, for protesters are ‘aware of a number of benefits associated with the use of humour that [go] beyond having fun’. This can be seen in the workshops run by activists to foster individual and collective creativity around, for instance, the making of witty placard messages. Many of these messages ‘subverted already familiar texts’ from popular or political culture, for example ‘It’s not a crisis. It’s just that I don’t love you any more’ (*‘No es una crisis, es que ya no te quiero’*).⁶⁸

Another 15M analyst, Antón Fernandez de Rota,⁶⁹ finds a parallel in this subversive language with political humour in the former Soviet Union. This author borrows from the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak⁷⁰ the notion of *stiob* (or hyperidentification), an approach employed by Russian critics of the communist regime. The ‘jocose emotivity’ (*emotividad jocosa*) of *stiob* was neither sarcasm nor cynicism:

[Yurchak] employs this Russian term to describe a satirical or jocose style that differs from sarcasm, cynicism and other forms of absurd humour by demanding an *overidentification* with its target, thereby purporting to support the very same thing it ridicules.⁷¹

Similarly, the *indignados* are subverting Spain’s existing political language through slogans such as ‘We are not anti-system, the system is anti-us’, by ‘playing *stiob* with the liberal dictionary and phraseology’.⁷² In addition, Spain’s *indignados* have frequently resorted to humour to highlight police provocation and violence through slogans, blog posts, tweets, YouTube videos and other media forms. For instance, a November 2012 tweet directed its readers to an embedded YouTube video showing peaceful demonstrators confronting alleged police infiltrators. The author did this by cleverly remediating onto Twitter

the popular chant 'Spooks, you morons, you think we can't see you?' (*'Secreta, idiota, te crees que no se nota?'*).⁷³ In doing so, the indignados are using humour to distance themselves from mainstream media portrayals (real or imagined) of the movement's 'radical', 'skin' or 'violent' aesthetic. For example, in September 2012 the collective account of the Leganes (Madrid) assembly shared via Twitter a YouTube video showing, once again, police infiltrators: 'So the "radical aesthetic" types are the same ones who are helping to arrest people.'⁷⁴

Indignados often take aim at the mainstream media through slogans such as 'Don't turn off your TV, you may accidentally think' (*'No apagues la televisión ... Podrías pensar'*).⁷⁵ One habitual practice is to humorously counter representations of 15M protesters as 'crusties' (*perroflautas*, see above) popular with Spain's reactionary news media. One widely shared instance of this line of defence involved the conservative, anti-indignados *Intereconomía*, 'doubtless the TV channel that generated the most laughter'.⁷⁶

One particularly celebrated moment was a stunt [*montaje*] that took place in Plaça de Catalunya. [A] 'rich kid' [*un niño pijo*] who claimed to be part of 15M but [felt out of place surrounded by joints and crusties, was silenced by] an avalanche of roars of laughter [that] burst in front of the cameras and went on to set cyberspace abuzz, ridiculing the more nostalgic sector of the right.⁷⁷

Jocose emotivity can be used both externally, to attack the news media, the police or politicians, and internally, with the aim of fostering a sense of solidarity while relieving stress among protesters.⁷⁸ An example of the latter orientation was the 'aerobics assemblies' held on 12 and 19 June 2011, prior to the general assembly at Puerta del Sol, where '[a] group of activists dressed up in tacky and grotesque gym clothes took over the assembly'. Following a series of fitness routines in which the non-verbal language used in assemblies was parodied, the performers became embroiled in an absurd argument over how to redecorate one of the encampment kitchens. The performances 'served to cool tempers at moments of great stress caused by the intervention of the police or internal arguments'.⁷⁹

VIRAL REALITY

In the Introduction to this volume, we learned that during the Botswana protests a new form of egalitarianism emerged across class divides through 'shared celebratory practices and shared suffering'. This was certainly the case in the streets and squares of Spain, too, but here we should also stress the pervasive mediation of *new technologies of sharing*, especially social networking sites and smartphones. With the explosive uptake of these media in recent years, hundreds of millions

of citizens around the world have acquired the ability to decide how and with whom to 'share' digital content.⁸⁰ While early cyberspace scholars announced the coming of an age of 'virtual reality',⁸¹ what we are witnessing today is rather the rise of a shared *viral reality*, i.e. the accelerated co-production and sharing of news and opinion by media professionals and amateurs through social/viral media.⁸² The mainstream media may have retained the ability to set the day-to-day current affairs agenda,⁸³ but they must now contend with the citizens' new power to share (or not to share) a potentially viral item.⁸⁴

Like protesters in other countries, Spain's indignados have made sophisticated use of viral technologies to pursue non-violent ends whilst denouncing physical and/or symbolic violence by the police and the ruling elites. Jeff Juris and Maple Razsa describe how the Occupy movement made effective use of 'the viral flows of images and information generated by the intersections of social and mass media' to mobilise and inspire many thousands of people across America and beyond.⁸⁵ Although police violence contributed to the diffusion of the Occupy movement, it also 'drove activists into submerged forms of organizing'. Juris makes a connection between police violence, social media virality and the growth of the Occupy movement:

Like the 'viral' images of New York City police pepper spraying two women at #Occupy Wall Street, videos of the eviction and the aggressive police response, including their wrestling to the ground of several clearly nonviolent members of Veterans for Peace, circulated widely via social and mainstream media platforms, generating widespread sympathy for #Occupy Boston. This afternoon's march ... would again draw several thousand protesters. It would also be one of more than a thousand October 15 #Occupy protests around the world, a testament to the viral circulation of protest in an era of social media.⁸⁶

Along similar lines, Joan Donovan describes Occupy as 'a social change network that leverages both online and offline social networking to propagate ideas and produce distributed direct actions'.⁸⁷ Comparable processes have taken place in Spain, for instance, following the earlier mentioned eviction of protesters from Barcelona's Plaça de Catalunya on 27 May 2011 which 'went viral' within a matter of minutes.

In the 15M imaginary, today's viral sophistication portends tomorrow's political emancipation. The indignados' exaltation of virality is a form of discourse in which technology and grassroots politics are seen as being inextricably tied. Virals are regarded as an expression not only of popular indignation but also of an increasingly internet-savvy citizenry taking on an obsolescent system run by technological illiterates. Thus the influential 15M activist and researcher Javier

Toret, a psychologist by training, argues that the viral technologies helped to create 'a collective mood' in Spain. Before the 15M movement, he jokes, 'we nerds [*frikis*] of the world were all alone and friendless'. For Toret, 'emotions are political' and 15M tweets carry twice as much 'emotional load' (*carga emocional*) as non-15M tweets. This renders them inherently more 'viral'.⁸⁸

Digital content related to the movement often carries not just an emotional load but also an explicit message urging recipients to share it widely. For instance, in March 2012 the indignados platform NoLesVotes shared on Facebook a skillfully designed poster. This design centred on a striking image consisting of a classic protest fist holding an iPhone accompanied by the Spanish text (my translation):

OUR ONLY WEAPON IS REALITY
THERE IS NO DEFENCE AGAINST IT
RECORD
PHOTOGRAPH
SPREAD

This brief text and picture capture with rare clarity the indignados' dual commitment to viral reality and to non-violence – indeed, in the 15M universe the two are mutually constitutive. That is, 15M non-violence and its necessary counterpart, police and government violence, can only become a reality in the public consciousness if citizens make use of their mobile and online devices to 'record, photograph, (and) spread' them. In terms of Peirce's semiotics, 15M (audio) visual propaganda exploits the iconic indexicality of film and photography,⁸⁹ that is the direct causal link obtaining between a photographic or filmic image and the object it represents (in this case, police brutality), in order to bolster the movement's non-violent credentials.

To summarise, Spanish protesters have learned to combine two distinct technical affordances – photographic indexicality and social media virality – to great rhetorical and aesthetic effect. As always with social innovations, though, these advances carry with them unintended consequences.⁹⁰ Thus the indignado author Isaac Rosa warns that the long-term exposure to violent materials via social media can lead to the 'normalisation' of police violence as an entertainment genre:

It is now customary to spend the day after a strike or demonstration watching the hundreds of videos of police brutality that circulate through social networks. The [14 November] strike has, as expected, added a few more titles to our film library. [...] We share videos, examine photographs more suited to a forensic inquiry (split heads, bruised backs, even eye-gouging) and gather information to count the victims: how many wounded, how many

arrested, how many journalists assaulted, how many police infiltrators [...]. It's beginning to feel like a routine, another day in the cycle of protests.⁹¹

PUBLIC HACKERSPACES

Although the popular revolts in Tunisia, Egypt and other Arab countries were a source of great inspiration to indignados and occupiers on both sides of the Atlantic, we should not lose sight of another key source of ideas, technologies and personnel, namely the free culture/internet freedom movement epitomised by formations such as Wikileaks, Anonymous, the P2P Foundation or the Free Culture Forum. Over the past few years we have witnessed the mainstreaming of this broad movement, with previously marginal, 'geeky' initiatives such as Wikileaks or Anonymous becoming household names around the globe thanks to the complicity of mainstream media such *The Guardian*, *El País* or *The New York Times*. I propose to call this trend *the mainstreaming of nerd politics*.⁹²

The link between this global trend and the 2011 and 2013 waves of protests remains poorly understood. An ideal entry point to this question is *The Revolution Will Be Digitised*, a prescient book completed by the journalist Heather Brooke as the Tunisian uprising was breaking out in December 2010.⁹³ Brooke investigates the goals and activities of internet activists in the United States, Iceland, Germany and other countries as part of an inquiry into the 'Information War' pitting them against powerful governments and corporations. She notes the centrality of 'hackerspaces' to their endeavours. These are horizontal, democratic physical spaces devoted to 'playfully creative problem solving' (i.e. hacking) shaped by their users' pragmatism and anti-authoritarianism.⁹⁴

Transposing this idea to the 2011 movements, I wish to suggest that geeky indignados took their hackerspaces to the streets and squares of urban Spain where they hybridised them with other context-specific practices and technologies. In doing so, they created new forms of techno-political praxis, civic engagement and protest aesthetics, some of which later diffused to the United States and elsewhere via the Occupy movement where they continued to hybridise and mutate.

As I explained in the preface, the influence of the free culture scene on Spain's 15M movement was seminal. According to Bernardo Gutiérrez, Madrid's hackerspaces have evolved a unique twenty-first-century hacker aesthetic distinct from the aesthetics of other free culture hubs in Europe.

From the end of the '90s, free culture became entangled in Madrid with social movements [located] in squats [*centros okupa*] such as El Laboratorio. While Berlin's squatters are still wedded to a punk aesthetic and a classic anti-

Fascism, in Madrid's over thirty Squatted Social Centres, a new networked world is being created – a horizontal, aggregating world. A new world imbued with a hacker ethic that dissolves all online/offline borders. [...] [These centres] are extensions of the squares occupied in the spring of 2011.⁹⁵

Other advocates of free-culture inspired political reform (or revolution) are, however, more cautious.⁹⁶ Following fieldwork at the intersection of Madrid's free culture and indignados scenes, the Spanish anthropologist Adolfo Estalella stresses the enormous effort of 'translation' required when seeking to apply online 'logics of collaboration' to offline contexts – the same conclusion reached by Christopher Kelty some years earlier following transnational ethnohistorical research on the free software movement.⁹⁷ Adolfo Estalella notes that when the notion of commons (*procomún*) is invoked in 15M circles, this is often done in dramatic terms.⁹⁸ Thus the commons becomes both 'a threatened good' (*un bien amenazado*) and a dramatic genre designed to produce a new 'urban sensitivity' through neighbourhood assemblies and other grassroots formations.

These caveats notwithstanding, the hybridisation of hacker/free culture and protest ideals, practices and aesthetics is a multifarious process with potentially far-reaching consequences. Spain's ongoing techno-political experimentation and innovation are undeniably world class – a result of Spain's unique combination of a bankrupt political economy, a thriving squatter-hacker subculture and a vast pool of qualified young people unable to find employment and therefore able and willing to invest their creative labour in the new movement.

PERPETUAL TRANSIENCE

The fifth and final principle in the indignados' protest aesthetic is its perennially transient temporality. By this I mean the paradoxical blending of ephemerality and endurance in 15M participants' orientation towards the future. On the one hand, the indignados borrow from Mexico's Zapatistas the idea that 'We walk, not run, because we are going very far'.⁹⁹ This idea can be seen at work across the vast universe of 15M discursive practices, both online and offline. As the activist anthropologist Asur Fuente put it in June 2011, 'One cannot demand an ideology [*un ideario*] from 15M, for what they are looking for is a social change. Besides, you cannot expect the same from a one month-old movement as you do from a 130-year-old party'.¹⁰⁰ In some contexts, the idea can take on more of a free/hacker culture character, for instance in the public space experiments discussed in the previous section in which, by analogy to free software coding, modifying and sharing, the indignados' outputs can be seen as 'techno-political prototypes' that are perennially 'in beta'.¹⁰¹

On the other hand, indignados' personal and collective actions are characterised by an 'inevitable and attractive aesthetic of the urgent and fleeting'.¹⁰² In the occupied spaces, new forms of popular action arose that did not require to be expressed 'through lasting artistic manufactures, but rather through a common creativity that emerged spontaneously out of the need to be there and to protest'.¹⁰³ This fleeting quality is beautifully captured by the 'analogue Twitter' co-created by Plaça de Catalunya occupiers and 15M sympathisers in mid-May 2011, at the height of the encampments (see Fig. 14.2). This 'fantastic invention' consisted of a large pedestal covered in post-it notes. Passers-by were encouraged to share their brief thoughts and messages with fellow citizens and visitors. In effect, this was microblogging transposed from the internet to a physical space: 'When the wind blows, [the post-it notes] are as ephemeral as tweets'.¹⁰⁴

Perpetual transience is also present online, and particularly on Twitter. If YouTube quickly emerged as the ideal platform on which to share evidence of police brutality, owing to the inherent indexicality of its audiovisual format



Figure 14.2 An 'analogue Twitter' created by occupiers and visitors of Plaça de Catalunya, Barcelona, in mid-May 2011. 'When the wind blows, [the post-it notes] are as ephemeral as tweets' (Senabre, 2013) (Photo: E. Senabre Hidalgo, Estigmergia.net).

(see above), Twitter is the world's pre-eminent site for the collaborative making and unmaking of transient publics. Although efforts were made in the past to form Twitter 'tribes' (known as Twibes) around shared interests such as soccer, sociology or Bollywood, these all foundered. Instead, the hashtag-driven logic of Twitter favours users' engagement with one another via fleeting threads of conversation, not enduring groups.¹⁰⁵ Over time the indignados have learned how to 'work the algorithm' so that their concerns will become 'trending topics' on Twitter, thereby helping to shape the political and media agenda.

To recall Habermas's famous distinction between 'the lifeworld' and 'the system',¹⁰⁶ the indignados may practise and preach 'real democracy now' in their lifeworld assemblies, but when it comes to their hopes for systemic change, they expect to attain real democracy only at some undefined point in the future. As they are wont to say, 'This is only the beginning.'

CONCLUSION

In July 2011 the Spanish radical leftist website *Kaos en la Red* published a rant by the hip hop artist Nega that goes to the heart of this chapter.¹⁰⁷ Charging against the 'slogans and false prophets' of the nascent indignados movement, Nega's critique can be summed up in three main points. First, he attacks the indignados' 'almost pathological obsession' with non-violence – not the non-violent civil rights protests in 1960s America, but rather a 'decaffeinated' version whose advocates 'would not hesitate to brand as terrorists the hippies who chained themselves to the rail tracks to stop weapons from being shipped to Vietnam'. To Nega, the 15M notion of non-violence was designed by the large media corporations: whilst throwing paint or an egg becomes 'terrible anti-system violence', the latest labour reform is not violence but unavoidable collateral damage. Second, he regards 15M as anything but a radical movement. Being radical is 'getting to the root of a problem', not dreaming up bland slogans such as 'For a just justice' that even the most reactionary sectors of the right would subscribe to. Given that the indignados' intellectual referents are contemporary media personalities rather than 'Marx, Mao or Marcuse (or Debord, Foucault or Sartre)', we should not expect from them profound or radical graffiti (after all, this would be vandalism). At best we can hope for dull cardboard slogans such as 'We are not anti-system, the system is anti-us' or 'They don't represent us'. Third, Nega argues that the 15M movement suffers from a culture of immediacy. Being 'slaves to the ephemeral', the indignados are caught in an endless loop in which they produce prodigious numbers of 'little books' (*libritos*) with titles such as *Be Outraged*, *Commit* or *React* that 'saturate our bookshops' and are recommended by the country's main department stores.

This is not the place for an extended response to this spirited piece. Instead,

I will use it as a way to recapitulate my argument about the mediated aesthetics of 15M non-violence. Let us first take up Nega's remark about the indignados' 'almost pathological obsession' with non-violence. As we have seen, there were sound historical reasons for choosing non-violence. This strategy possesses a logic of its own, a logic that is regularly reaffirmed through technologically shared images, words and deeds, namely the belief that violence and non-violence are incompatible. By rejecting the 'diverse tactics' and 'radical aesthetics' of previous mobilisations against corporate globalisation,¹⁰⁸ the indignados managed to include in their struggle millions of Spaniards who would have otherwise kept their distance from the protests. This is succinctly captured in the slogan 'Without violence there are more of us' (*Sin violencia somos más*).¹⁰⁹

An avoidance of radical aesthetics, however, does not mean that the indignados movement lacks radicalism. In early 2011, when Spain's political class approved copyright legislation under US government pressure, as confirmed by Wikileaks via *El País*, the same internet activists who had campaigned to block the new legislation went on to form NoLesVotes, a platform that called on the Spanish people not to vote for any of the major political parties. Shortly thereafter, NoLesVotes formed a coalition with Anonymous, Juventud Sin Futuro and other emergent groups under the umbrella platform Democracia Real Ya (DRY) which organised the 15 May 2011 marches that were to transform Spain's political climate within days.

This amounted to a schism between vast sections of the Spanish population led by 15M 'non-leaders' and the political and financial elites – with the police, the media, academia and other societal fields finding themselves caught in the middle of a protracted conflict that is far from being resolved at the time of writing (June 2014). In other words, by declaring a radical break from the existing political order – representative democracy – the indignados are paving the way for radical change. Whether this will take the shape of gradual reform or sudden revolution remains to be seen, but we can be certain that there will be no returning to Spain's stagnant 'transition culture'¹¹⁰ that followed the end of the Franco regime in 1977.

Finally, the accusation that the indignados are 'slaves to the ephemeral' is baseless. The 15M movement has in fact developed a political aesthetics that conjoins the ephemeral with the enduring. Twitter trending topics, tent cities, Facebook groups and *barrio* assemblies may come and go, but the widespread realisation that Spain's political system is in acute need of repair (or replacement) has not gone away. We caught several glimpses earlier of how the indignados language has entered Spain's 'national conversation'. Ironically, this was possible thanks to the support of the supposedly pro-Establishment news media. Recall, for instance, how the centre-left broadcaster *Cadena Ser*, traditionally close to the PSOE, 'confirmed' the erosion of Spain's two-party system

on the basis of a survey jointly conducted with several indignados platforms.

A key finding of this research is indeed the gap between 15M rhetoric about a monolithic 'mainstream media' (*los medios de comunicacion*) seeking to undermine the movement, and the actual discursive practices of news media organisations which are often, in my experience, quietly pro-15M. Further research is urgently required on the actual (as opposed to imagined) coverage of the movement by the mainstream media. Such research is likely to complicate these simplistic portrayals. Indignados activists are understandably prone to 'outing' police infiltrators via social media, but we should not overlook the importance of the movement's own 'discursive infiltrators', that is, journalists, intellectuals, artists and others who are active 15M participants, or at least supportive of the movement, and help to shape public opinion in their favour through their mainstream reporting, commentary, art installations, and so on. All in all, far from being Nega's shallow, 'decaffeinated' version of the 1960s civil rights movement, the indignados' mediated aesthetic has been pivotal to the growth and maintenance of the movement, as well as transforming Spain into an unlikely global leader in techno-political innovation.

Further comparative work is also needed on the diachronic and processual dimensions of mediated aesthetics in Spain and other states. In the contemporary era in which variously positioned political actors (rulers, politicians, activists, journalists, citizens and so on) have access to multiple media, when analysing a struggle it is crucial that we establish which media ensembles – or media mixes – came to the fore at which particular stages of the conflict.¹¹¹ Here I have only been able to sketch the unique aesthetic 'package' that makes up the 15M movement in a rather synoptic, 'snapshot' manner. A future diachronic, phase-by-phase analysis¹¹² of how this political aesthetic unfolded over time will allow me to shed light on its 'field dynamics',¹¹³ not least on the part played by old-school leftists like Nega who feel excluded from the indignados' inclusiveness.

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CHAPTER 15

The Poetics of Indignation in Greece: Anti-austerity Protest and Accountability

DIMITRIOS THEODOSSOPOULOS

The official policies of austerity and restructuring implemented as a remedy to the financial crisis have fuelled intense public discontent and inspired local narratives of indignation in Greece. Since 2011, indignation has become a master trope of protest¹ that communicates a wide array of meanings that are used by local actors in Greece to come to terms with the crisis. At the international level, as Daniel Knight perceptively observes,² the Greek crisis itself has been employed as a trope for issuing a warning about what may happen to those who resist neoliberalism's economic logic. At this particular juncture, however, Greek citizens care less about the appropriation of 'their' crisis abroad than about the consequences of the crisis in their everyday life.

Two years after the introduction of austerity measures was announced to the Greek public, the crisis itself and its repercussions are still issues that many ordinary citizens in Greece debate in their everyday conversations. They talk about their current predicament with 'rhetorical force and purpose'³ and use rhetorical arguments to persuade others – their interlocutors – 'but also themselves'⁴ about one or another explanation of the crisis. In this chapter, I refer to this particular type of local rhetoric as indignant discourse. As Michael Herzfeld notes, the term rhetoric often involves a clear distinction between 'the rhetorical and the real',⁵ a demarcation that is too artificial to capture the purposeful ambiguity and irony of Greek everyday unofficial discourse. Thus, I confine my use of the term rhetoric to refer to political party discourse, and I follow Herzfeld in using 'social poetics' – the poetics of indignation, as my title suggests – to refer to the everyday pursuit of meaning and accountability in crisis-afflicted Greece.⁶

Focusing on the poetics of indignation, I explore anthropologically two key concepts that figure prominently in Greek anti-austerity discourse as this

has been articulated in the context of the crisis: ‘indignation’ (*aganáktisi*) and ‘*mnimónio*’, a word the Greeks use to refer to the austerity measures. I follow the transformation of the indignation discourse from an early stage of spontaneous protest (summer 2011) to its subsequent appropriation by party politics. During this period, indignation, which originally signalled a departure from official political lines, has been used to encourage the restructuring of Greek official politics and the crystallisation of new political formations, legitimised via parliamentary elections. Yet, despite the representation of anti-austerity discourse in the parliament – and its relative officialisation by association with the legal structures of power – indignation remains an important concept in local contexts and continues to inspire a bottom-up exegesis of the crisis.

The poetics of indignation in Greece do not merely represent a discursive weapon or a responsibility-evasion tactic, but rather epitomise an attempt to explain the crisis and negotiate accountability in the context of the crisis. Beyond the level of party politics, indignation with austerity remains the common thread of a versatile local discourse, which encourages local actors to embark on an exegetical pursuit for meaning in unofficial everyday conversation. It is this pursuit of meaning and its diversity that can be best captured through an anthropological lens, offering an insight into the crisis that diverges sharply from the generalising accounts of the Greek crisis in the media. Such an ethnographic approach, with its focus on thick description, can make a critical contribution to the social scientific theorising of the crisis, which is currently dominated by economic accounts and statistics.⁷ In fact, a currently expanding anthropological literature of the Greek crisis has recently emerged to which this chapter makes a direct contribution.⁸

Following an interpretative approach, I begin my anthropological analysis by outlining the context of discontent in Greece along with (and following) the interpretation of the concepts that make it meaningful. This is because my main focus is not on the anti-austerity protest of summer 2011, or the period of complicity to party politics that followed it, but rather on the concepts of indignation and austerity themselves, and their significance in shaping local interpretative trajectories of the crisis in Greece. The local views I draw upon were presented to me during fieldwork in the town of Patras, a medium-sized town in southern Greece. My respondents, ordinary middle- and working-class citizens, indignant with the austerity that has plagued their lives, are mostly people with whom I have shared views about politics for longer than a decade.⁹ Their arguments have provided me with a partial but nuanced account of the Greek anti-austerity discourse, the ambivalences that it engenders and, more importantly, the aetiology of the crisis as this is debated in everyday, unofficial conversation about accountability.

INDIGNATION AS A TROPE

Since the beginning of the crisis, the notion of ‘indignation’¹⁰ has been central to everyday discourse in Greece; so central that I have recently described it as a ‘master trope’ of protest.¹¹ It figures prominently in the vocabulary of almost everyone in Greece and it is used, I will argue, to negotiate much more than the word itself. We can better grasp the versatility of indignation, if we appreciate its metaphorical potential – drawing on Fernandez¹² – as referring to actions and words that communicate a variety of hidden messages. Thus, indignation has been used extensively in the context of the crisis – in Greece and elsewhere – to negotiate figurative arguments, which clarify the position of local actors (arguing from dissimilar political affiliations), and also, more importantly, to articulate diverging sets of meaning, primarily, although not exclusively, about accountability.

In its metaphorical capacity, indignation links different narratives of accountability together. These include, first and foremost, the representation of being taken by surprise, as most crisis-afflicted respondents in Patras did not expect this turn of events. The figurative use of indignation communicates anger towards those politicians who were aware of the nation’s bad economic state, and kept this information hidden from the public until one day the bad news suddenly exploded into the public sphere. Indignation also targets those many politicians in successive governments who created the conditions of debt (and lack of transparency) that resulted in the current situation. It further relates to a perceived sense that the crisis represents a perversion of the natural expectations in life: one goes to university to receive a degree in order to acquire a good job, but now there are no jobs for young people; within the labour market, the previous expectation of salary increases or promotions is met instead with reduced salaries and significant threats to jobs. Instead of economic prospects improving over the course of one’s life – a norm established in Greece in the last forty years – they are now ominous and dire.

As the play of different figurative images associated with indignation unravels in everyday discourse, it engenders identifications with new subject positions: the indignant protester, who may also be the indignant young unemployed, the indignant pensioner (whose pension has been devalued), the indignant parent (previously encouraged to bear many children to counter the nation’s demographic decline, and who has now lost several child-related benefits), the indignant shop owner (whose clientele is now diminished), the indignant taxpayer (whose reduced salary cannot accommodate the increased rate of taxation). Such new and old identities of indignation communicate, in turn, with familiar figurative permutations of political subjects: the indignant conservative (who sees stability falling to pieces), the indignant socialist (who sees

hard-won benefits vanishing one after the other), the indignant communist (who says ‘I told you about capitalism before, but you didn’t listen’) and, to add a sinister figurative distortion, the indignant fascist (who hates ‘the migrant for having a job while “he” hasn’t’).

Indignation, in its many and constantly transforming figurative combinations, brings closer together politics with arguments about ethical conduct, to communicate messages about the collapse of the moral community. There is a profound sense of injustice emanating from the experiences of the crisis at the local level: it is felt, embodied, omnipresent in everyday life. This feeling of overarching unfairness – ‘some others have benefited from the Greek debt’, ‘some others have appropriated the money and are not paying the consequences’ – permeates the discourse of my respondents in Patras and is underlined by indignation, its figurative and polysemic capacity for meaning. ‘Yes, we are indignant,’ my respondents repeat in arguments that start and end with this powerful trope: here indignation becomes an introduction and a conclusion to larger narratives that describe and evaluate the crisis: it embraces those narratives and connects their constituents in a meaningful whole.

In this broader sense, indignation links the current predicament of austerity with previous crises experienced in the past; for example, memories of famine, war, poverty and social inequality in the twentieth century.¹³ Suffering, as many anthropologists maintain, is a major theme in the modern Greek moral imagination¹⁴ and resonates with an ‘agonistic’ ethos¹⁵ and a view of life as a constant struggle.¹⁶ In its re-emergence as a metaphor of indignation, the suffering of the austerity-afflicted community provides a solid foundation for criticising visible examples of injustice and inequality in the world economic order (such as the current economic crisis). Local political narratives, Pnina Werbner explains, often encourage intimate connections between ‘the moral community, the aesthetic community (or interpretive community) and the community of suffering’.¹⁷

In this respect, indignation with austerity provides local actors with an opportunity to ‘globalise their local predicaments’ within a broader ‘moral narrative’,¹⁸ articulating arguments that seek the attention of power-holders (those politicians, at home or abroad, who shape economic policies). Thus, far from being merely a ‘weapon of the weak’ or a discourse hidden from public view,¹⁹ indignation with austerity in Greece attempts to challenge dominant explanations of the crisis, and, as I will shortly explain, has inspired lasting changes to the Greek political landscape. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to admit that indignation with austerity in Greece is a force to be reckoned with: it inspires persuasive figurative arguments and anti-hegemonic explanations of power, but also social change.

‘MNMÓNIO’: THE SPECTRE OF AUSTERITY MEASURES

Soon after the imminent possibility of bankruptcy was announced to the Greek public in 2009, the Greek government attempted to implement a series of austerity measures, including cuts in salaries and benefits and increases in taxation. These unpopular measures – revised and expanded by successive governments since 2010 – have been referred to in Greece by a particularly generalising term, ‘to *mnimónio*’, which translates into English as ‘the memorandum’ or, in bureaucratic language, as the memorandum outlining the Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece. This programme was introduced as a condition for Greece receiving a substantial bailout, and it is this very conditional nature of the arrangement that has led many local actors in Greece to perceive the *mnimónio* as a foreign and/or top-down imposition, rather than an agreement aiming at economic recovery.

In local conversational contexts in Greece, but also in the rhetoric of political leaders and the reportage of most journalists, the *mnimónio* is treated as a highly reified concept: a societal force, a living organism or monster that threatens the survival of the primary social economic unit – the household – and, by extension, the social values that encourage and sustain its reproduction. Such is the unpopularity of the *mnimónio*, taken as a concept and policy, that one major political party (PASOK) has crumbled as a consequence of introducing the first version of these measures, losing much of its public support, while other political parties from the left and the extreme right, have risen by rhetorically-manipulating the avalanche of negative associations related in an all-inclusive manner to this reified concept. Yet, for most Greeks, the *mnimónio* is not a mere concept.

The reification of austerity measures as *mnimónio* has offered compelling metaphorical opportunities for arguments and political mottos that inspire indignation and facilitate the articulation of the poetics of discontent. Austerity, in all its manifestations, has acquired a name in everyday discourse, and its name, *mnimónio*, enables local actors to negotiate accountability in simple and unidirectional terms, making pointed evaluations. These involve (1) those economically powerful and foreign Others who have introduced the idea of the *mnimónio* (such as, but not exclusively, the European Commission and the IMF) and imposed it on Greece; (2) those who have negotiated the *mnimónio* with the foreign agents and voted for it in the Greek parliament (pro-*mnimónio* political parties or MPs); (3) those fellow citizens who tolerate or, rather, do not explicitly react against the *mnimónio* and thus appear to be complicit in the logic of austerity. In contradistinction, there are those who resist the *mnimónio* in occupation or in protest, those who oppose it in the parliament (the anti-*mnimónio* parties – in Greek, *anti-mnimoniaká kómata*) and those who openly

express an anti- *mnimónio* stance (*anti-mnimoniakí thési, -ápopsi*) and who make the majority of the voices heard in the everyday.

Since the very beginning of the post-crisis era, the poetics of discontent in Greece have transformed *mnimónio*, a previously empty, bureaucratic and not very frequently used term, into a versatile discursive weapon that points a finger at the root causes of austerity. Some people are seen as having introduced the *mnimónio* (this anti-social, ultimately bureaucratic idea); some others have accepted it (in the guise of various types of economic rationality); while many others detest it and do not see it as necessary. Thus, in everyday discourse in Greece, the *mnimónio* can be seen as being imposed hegemonically by others, rationalised as an excuse to introduce western structures of efficiency and/or transparency, used to rhetorically capitalise from the crisis and collect votes. The *mnimónio* can also provoke, agitate, harm and instigate resistance or, more widely, indignation.

Considering the recent nature of the *mnimónio*'s signification as the reified spectre of austerity, its contribution in negotiating the responsibility for the crisis has so far been enormous. If with respect to its use in conversation the *mnimónio* is a discursive weapon and a rhetorical tool, in its more abstract conceptualisation as a term synonymous with austerity, it has become (and continues to become transformed) into an embodied experience of limitation, a reversal of the usual social expectation of advancement in one's life, a source of despair. For those among my respondents in Patras who see themselves as ambitious and hardworking, the *mnimónio*, they argue, has set a ceiling to their ambitions or prospects in life: their university degrees have not materialised into jobs, their work investments have not materialised in promotions and their businesses have ceased to expand and are, indeed, in most cases shrinking. For those in Patras who are less ambitious or satisfied with the art of living 'with less', the *mnimónio* is seen as the embodiment of an anti-social, calculative and impersonal logic that closes all previously acceptable routes of getting by in life. It is a heavy burden (*éna város*), as they say, that directs their lives towards poverty. Thus, for example, I was told that:

Life here is not as it used to be. Now we live with the *mnimónio*, this monster that is haunting our lives. We have returned back to [living as in] previous times (*se álles epohés*). (sixty-five-year-old man in Patras, Greece, July 2012)

Once the children had more than their parents, and the grandchildren much more than their grandparents. Now has come the *mnimónio* making us all poor once more. The young now live with the reduced pension of the old. (forty-five-year-old woman in Patras, April 2013)

All this injustice that you see – the poverty, the unemployment – has a name: it is called the *mnimónio*. We, the young, believe that there is only one way out ... the *mnimónio* has to die. (twenty-two-year-old university student from Patras, June 2012)

Here, indignation and the *mnimónio* (the reified embodiment of austerity) are used as figures of speech with imaginative moral, rhetorical force: they depict a world of agonistic conflict between Greek citizens and the constraints set by their government and/or the international establishment.

THE PROTEST IN THE SQUARE: BEYOND TRADITIONAL POLITICS

The 2011 summer protest in Syntagma Square has become emblematic of public resistance to austerity in Greece. Although it was not, by any means, the only expression of resistance to austerity, it is seen by many in Greece as representative of spontaneous – not politically manipulated – indignation towards those responsible for the crisis. The targets of indignation were particular politicians, political parties, financial institutions, foreign nations and systemic factors, such as capitalism and globalised neoliberalism in all its manifestations. The protest united a great number of citizens who had previously supported the two main political parties that had shared power in Greece from 1974 to 2010 – ‘people who did not know politics beyond partisan voting’²⁰ – but who appeared willing (and for some this was the first time) to challenge the two-party political establishment or, at least, to think beyond established political loyalties.

This particular (summer 2011) protest ‘in the square’, as it is referred to by many in Greece, was inspired by the Spanish Indignados movement,²¹ and similar square occupations realised in other anti-global-local nuclei of resistance at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. As I have argued in previous work, the global media, perhaps paradoxically, can play an important role in subverting globalised forms of hegemony.²² In the case of the summer 2011 protest in Greece, internet-based social networks, such as those generated through Facebook, contributed to the mobilisation of the Greek indignant movement.²³ The response of the majority of the protesters was spontaneous, and as many among my respondents emphasised, the spirit of the protest departed from pre-existing party political lines.²⁴ It was ‘something new, something blameless,’ explained a respondent in Patras who participated in the protest in Athens; ‘we felt as if we had turned our backs on a failed political system’. Here was another moral trope, that of purity or blamelessness, to add to the rhetorical repertoire of local protesters.

A sense of *communitas* – in Turnerian terms – was enhanced by the anti-structural form of encampment at Syntagma Square: an ordinarily formal space



Figure 15.1 View of the protesters' encampment, Syntagma Square, June 2011 (Photo: D. Theodossopoulos).

was temporarily occupied by tents, camping equipment, kiosks and various information stations that disseminated news, arguments and alternative political views. During the most mundane periods of the protest, the residents of this encampment retired to their tents, shared food, played music, danced and interacted with the passers-by: pensioners who frequent the square's benches, the homeless, immigrants and, more importantly, many ordinary 'unlabelled' citizens who visited the square driven by curiosity, or with the deliberate intention of expressing their sympathy.

The upper part of the square, directly in front of the parliament, became the locus of confrontational indignation, demonstrated in front of a substantial police force patrolling the area and guarding the parliament, 'the regime' (*to kathestós*) responsible for governing the nation, legitimised by thirty-seven years of uninterrupted representational democracy. The police in turn responded to indignation by communicating their determination to enact enforcement – police practices can be seen as a symbolic language²⁵ – in many cases by engaging in violent confrontation with the protesters. In contrast to this arena of dramatic protest, the 'lower square' where the encampment was laid out was for the most part a space where the protest was communicated in a dialogical form; the protesters articulated their views through dialogue with one another



Figure 15.2 Indignant protesters in front of the Greek parliament, June 2011 (Photo: D. Theodossopoulos).

and exchanged ideas with passers-by, most of whom were also indignant. In the ‘lower square’, explains Stathis Gourgouris in an article in the *Greek Left Review*,

a whole other scene of collective self-organisation has been established: a first-aid station under a tent and then a proper hospital at the entrance to Syntagma metro station; a media centre operating the website www.real-democracy.gr, in addition to voluminous other press work; a radio station, also streaming on the web; a neighbourhood organisation centre that coordinates similar activity in various parts of the city; a translation centre for non-Greek visitors, activists and foreign correspondents; fully functioning stations for daily needs (kitchen, bathrooms); a performing arts centre; a central organisation table that handles the day-to-day requests by individuals for the agenda to be discussed publicly; and a number of designated areas in the square where people sharing a specific concern can gather separately. All such groupings remain rigorously unaffiliated with any identified political agency or party.²⁶

The social and ideological heterogeneity of the protesting crowd, including the protesters that inhabited the occupied square, contributed to an overall sense of liminality, an anti-structural feeling of unity, which contrasted sharply with the structured fragmentation of ordinary politics. ‘There was a spirit of freedom,’ said two of my respondents from Patras, reflecting retrospectively about their time ‘at the square’. Freedom here represented, as many other respondents clarified, an escape from established political theorising, a belief that the particular movement was ‘pure’ (*katharó*) and ‘spontaneous’ (*afhórmito*), uncontaminated by party politics. Writing about this period a year and half later, it is now easier to acknowledge the infiltration of ultra-conservative indignants – the ‘dark’ aspect of indignation²⁷ – at various points during the demonstrations, especially in the confrontational space of the ‘upper square’.²⁸ But in the ‘lower square’ the discourse of the majority reflected a profoundly non-violent, anti-neoliberal orientation, and a systematic questioning of ideas taken for granted by mainstream politics.

A central position widely expressed by many protesters, but also by indignant citizens who did not participate directly in the 2011 protest, or any public protest, was that the Greek debt was a consequence of the mistakes of others (bankers, politicians, corrupt civil servants), not the responsibility of the ordinary people who were the main victims of the austerity. This idea was encapsulated by the slogan ‘We don’t owe, we won’t pay!’ and inspired a wide array of related arguments that challenged the economic rationality of international politics, and the particular imposition of the austerity measures (the *mnimónio*) on Greece. Instead of the Greek debt being blamed for the problem, a position represented by international media reporting,²⁹ these arguments focused on neoliberal economics, seen as the real cause of the crisis. From the point of view of the protesters ‘in the square’, the possibility of bankruptcy at the national level was perceived as a ‘threat’ used to force the Greek public to comply with austerity measures. Thus, in many arguments expressed during the protest the threat of bankruptcy was nothing more than propaganda orchestrated by the government, the EU and the IMF. Many protesters with whom I talked, first in Athens and later in Patras, refused to calculate the economic consequences: ‘Let’s go bankrupt!’ they proclaimed, ‘we have nothing to fear.’

AFTER THE PROTEST: COMPLICITY WITH PARTY POLITICS

In comparison to the excitement and ideological effervescence of the protest, the period that followed seemed to many protesters an anti-climax. This is a more general characteristic of resistance movements: exhausted protesters need time to recover from protracted periods of activism, occupation or demonstration, especially those who have families with young children and/or full time jobs. During the late stages of the occupation at Syntagma Square, those protesters

who were unemployed and without dependants were the most resilient; and, in fact, for some the liminality of the protest came to be structured in (anti-structural) everyday routines. As a lukewarm protester who stayed ‘in the square’ on an on-and-off basis described with mixed admiration and irony, his fellow occupants ‘would rise from their tents when the sun was too hot to sleep, do their email during the peaceful moments of the protest, shout at the police with audacious spirit [*me palikarismó*] and then stay awake late every night talking, smoking, relaxing’.

In all respects, however, readjustment to normal life after the protest was experienced by many as disappointing: this was a return to an everyday reality of increasing austerity. Even protesters who did not sleep in the square but participated in the protest for a few hours every other day shared this general feeling of disappointment. For example, a first-year university student from Patras – for whom the 2011 occupation ‘of the square’ had been her first activist participation – talked about ‘a tightening [*sténema*] in her life’, a perceived sense of limitation in voicing indignation in public. With self-irony she stressed that she knew ‘nothing would be the same as before, because nothing was the same anymore!’ A year after the 2011 occupation of the square, I recorded similar testimonies from young Patrinoi: ‘I felt a void within me [*ena kenó*],’ said a university graduate with a postgraduate degree from the UK, ‘a return to the same life [*epistrofí sta ídia*]: unemployment and dead ends [*amergía kai adiéchoda*].’ A friend of his, also unemployed, added: ‘For as long as [the protest at] the square lasted we had a voice [*óso krátise i platía eíhame logo*]; now we have left the managing of our lives to others [*tora afsame tin diahírissi tis zoís mas se állous*].’

It is important to shed some light here on who those ‘others’ are who are locally perceived as managing the representation of indignation politically in the time that has followed the 2011 protest. Two subsequent national elections in Greece, held on 6 May and 17 June 2012, have changed the political landscape dramatically. One of the two political parties that had dominated Greek politics since 1974, PASOK, was radically reduced in size during those two elections, and has since further withered away in popularity. Yet the two-party political dynamic that has structured – and, according to some respondents, ‘confined’ – political life in Greece for the last thirty-five years has now been adopted again in a familiar bipolar formation. SYRIZA, a previously small political party from the left, has grown spectacularly in size and is now officially leading the opposition, while it continues to attract enhanced public support.

SYRIZA, in comparison to the moderately socialist PASOK, advocates a more left-wing political vision: it has captured more than half of PASOK’s electoral body, but also contains a smaller percentage of voters with radical left predilections. Several of my respondents in Patras argued that SYRIZA had also captured the spirit of the protest, voicing anti-neoliberal indignation now

channelled via formal political representation. Those who support the party communicate a sense of optimism and hope about the future. Some said that ‘the old two-party system has now collapsed’. For example, a respondent from Patras who was previously a committed PASOK supporter but had now joined SYRIZA, explained, ‘Some of us feel that we won! The protest at the square was not for nothing! The left is gaining strength and the austerity measures are now seriously opposed in parliament.’ Another respondent, however, who had always been a devoted supporter of the Communist party, expressed some scepticism, which was shared by many conservative voters: ‘Don’t have any illusions,’ he said. ‘SYRIZA is the old PASOK.’

One year after the protest, local commentary in Patras reflects an awareness that the new political legitimisation of indignation – via parliamentary elections – has drifted away from the original spirit of the summer 2011 occupation. Many indignant respondents, particularly supporters of SYRIZA, were satisfied with this transformation, which they saw as ‘natural’, a confirmation of democracy and its ability to reflect local indignation in the constitution of the parliament and the reconfiguration of political power. ‘The people (*o laós*),’ many stressed, ‘have punished, with their votes, the political parties that led Greece into this situation.’ It should be noted, however, that SYRIZA is not the only party that represents – and has benefited from – this recent ‘parliamentisation’ of indignation.

Two political formations from the right wing of the political spectrum also assert the idiom of indignation. One of these represents a politically conservative-cum-nationalist anti-austerity position (Independent Greeks), while the other is explicitly and unashamedly a fascist political formation (Golden Dawn). The parliamentary representatives of these two parties – with as many as twenty and eighteen MPs respectively – have appropriated what was previously an anti-structural discourse of indignation, but also a critique of western hegemony that sounds almost left wing but is now put in the service of a defensive nationalism and xenophobia. I will further reflect on the poetics of this ungainly rhetorical trajectory in my conclusion, but for now I will end this complicated detour into Greek politics with an important clarification.

A significant number of respondents in Patras who also claim to be indignant about the crisis and its repercussions on their lives are uncomfortable with the political appropriation of indignation. These include, first and foremost, supporters of the Communist party who oppose the pro-development (*anáptixi*) narratives of most other parties, and feel that SYRIZA and the parties on the extreme right are using the suffering of the everyday people for populist vote-hunting purposes. Similarly, many supporters of the three parties that constitute the current government – a coalition led by the conservatives (New Democracy), the remnants of PASOK and a smaller party from the left (Democratic Left, or DIMAR) – feel uncomfortable with the practice of using ‘indignation’

as an oppositional strategy. The most conservative among them criticised the anti-austerity protest from its early, spontaneous phase,³⁰ while those from the left target SYRIZA's political exploitation of indignation. 'We are left-leaning [*aristeroi*] too,' one DIMAR supporter told me in Patras, 'but we are not thirsty for political power.'

BLAME AND ITS MANY TRAJECTORIES

The anthropological study of blame has been established by, and is often associated with, the anthropology of Greece. This association is mostly related to the work of Michael Herzfeld, who has discussed blame in the context of Greek everyday discourse. Well before the crisis, Herzfeld discussed how blame operates in everyday life, in responsibility-evading tactics that negotiate accountability discursively while facing the immediate injustice of bureaucracy or evaluating the role of foreign nation states and Greece's relationship to the world.³¹ Herzfeld underlined the defensive nationalism inherent in the Greek etymology of excuses, but also took care to highlight the creative agency and irony engendered by everyday blame-oriented arguments. His work opened the way for subsequent anthropological accounts that take unofficial Greek discourse on accountability seriously without 'pathologising' the responsibility-evading local actors.³² In this respect, the anthropology of Greece has established a tradition of studying blame without turning blame into the practice of blaming.

The attention devoted in the anthropology of Greece to the aetiology of blame in local conversation has also set a foundation for approaching local Greek rhetoric from an anthropological perspective. This was partly accomplished by prioritising the ethnographic study of the *imponderabilia* of Greek political discourse, including the rhetorical tactics of local actors, situated on the periphery of economic power. Frustrated by their powerlessness in influencing significant timely events, local Greek actors address the power inequalities that constrain their lives with exceptional rhetorical eloquence and persuasion, a skill apparent in the narratives and arguments of the majority of Greek men and women. Yet this sustained anthropological attention to local political discourse in Greece has not relied on the notion of rhetoric as an analytic construct primarily for two interrelated reasons: firstly, in an acknowledgement that the term rhetoric 'perpetuates the real-ideal distinction', with the implication that the rhetorical may be less than real;³³ and secondly, because an emphasis on the rhetorical dimension of local political discourse may contribute to its easy dismissal as emotional, manipulative or inconsequential.

Placed within this theoretical context established by the anthropology of Greece before the current crisis, the discourse of indignation that emerged with the protests of 2011 calls attention to three general directions of blame expressed

in local conversations explaining the crisis. These three explanatory directions of blame communicate with and reinforce each other in the overall context of indignation, and very often appear within the same conversation or narrative. Thus, they do not represent impermeable or fixed categories, but rather sources of inspiration for constructing arguments and transferring meaning – intertextually – from one type of political exegesis to another. In acknowledgement of their explanatory capacity, and in a deliberate attempt to further depathologise the attributions they entail, I refer to these three directions of blame as ‘exegetical’ – inspired by Herzfeld’s attention to political narratives of accountability as exegesis.³⁴

The first direction of exegetic blame in Greek indignation discourse targets foreign nations that are economically more powerful than Greece (such as Germany and the US) and/or systemic factors, such as the EU economy and neoliberal capitalism more generally. In this particular type of political indignation, the tactic of caricaturing more powerful others is interwoven with analytical threads generating a sharp local critique of power that combines irony with an awareness of political economy. In its exaggerated form, this particular type of exegetic blaming is articulated in everyday conversation as the relentless downgrading of particular nations representing ideal types: the heartless Germans, the capitalist Americans – a tactic that aims to caricature economic power and those perceived as representing it, the leaders of nations or institutions. Since 2011, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and the IMF director, Christine Lagarde, have been the target of relentless critical commentary, often expressed with satirical embellishments and wit.³⁵ This is a tactic that closely resembles local Greek commentary on US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia.³⁶

The second direction of blame in the post-crisis Greek discourse focuses on Greek politicians and political parties – primarily, but not exclusively, the two parties that dominated political life before the crisis. Pre-crisis political life in Greece was founded on delayed reciprocity between voter and political representative,³⁷ an unwritten contract of trust which the elected MPs of the post-crisis era are not in position to maintain, since nowadays there are no inexhaustible public funds to allow them to extend favours or safeguard social benefits. This general failure of the politicians to meet their part of the bargain has weakened their power and has encouraged the overturning of PASOK and its partial replacement by SYRIZA. Still, many among my respondents in Patras thought that the future success of SYRIZA would depend on its ability to defend ‘jobs and hard-won social benefits’ against austerity, and maintain a standard living among the average lower-middle-class Greek family.

The overwhelming majority of my respondents were critical of the untransparent spirit of reciprocity between voter and political parties, accusing patron-

client relations of being anachronistic, a deeply rooted relic of the past. Yet, at the same time, all blame the politicians (and the political parties), not the individual voter, for perpetuating political favouritism even during the austerity. Similarly, many citizens of diverse political affiliations accused the pre-crisis political parties of overspending, while most simultaneously complain about the cuts in public spending at the present time. This apparent contradiction, however, embraced another more implicit source of indignation, which emerged in the arguments of voters from both the traditional left and the right: some Greeks, they claimed, had benefited more than others from the overspending of previous decades. A disaffected supporter of PASOK put this in perspective:

Yes, I admit that there has been waste [of public resources]; for years, the government's wealth and EU benefits have been distributed unevenly, unjustly! But now comes the *mnimónio* [austerity arrangements] which says all Greeks should pay the consequences of the old injustice! Why should we all pay for the mistakes of the politicians? Not everybody has benefited in the same way.

The third trajectory of blame relates to this internal perception of inequality in Greek society, as many respondents believed that the previous lack of transparency in managing public wealth – and the discrepancies that arose from it – should be taken into account in times of austerity. Here the target of local criticism shifts temporarily away from the realm of the powerful and concentrates on socioeconomic groups in Greek society, mostly occupational categories, which are perceived as bearing some responsibility for the nation's predicament. One of the major occupational groups that is frequently blamed in Greek local discourse are the civil servants (*dimósioi ypálli*), who are often treated in everyday conversation as an undifferentiated, generalised category. They are criticised by citizens working in the private sector, but in some cases by people who are civil servants themselves, for enjoying privileged job security, low working hours with not-fully-justifiable benefits and, more importantly, for having acquired their jobs through political mediation.

'The civil servants are the curse of the nation [*i pligí tu éthnos*],' said a retired lady in Patras, who earlier in her life worked as a secretary in a private company: 'they work less, they have all sorts of *extras* [privileges, benefits] and don't have somebody above them to say "work more, work more!" 'They are responsible,' she concluded dramatically, 'for the collapse of Greece [*gia tin katrakíla tis Eládas*].' In sharp contrast, other citizens in Patras who were civil servants or pensioners blamed their fellow citizens who worked in the private sector for contributing to Greek debt through consistent tax evasion. Medical doctors who maintain private practices and restaurant owners were examples of frequently criticised

occupational categories, renowned for not issuing receipts, a practice so deeply established in Greece that many of my respondents confessed that they were ashamed to ask for a receipt. Then, 'when the government wants to make cuts,' many respondents argued indignantly, 'they cut salaries and pensions.' In austerity-ridden Greece – or 'under the fear of the *mnimónio*', to convey more accurately the poetics of Greek indignation – in this case civil servants and pensioners are widely perceived to be 'the first victims'.

CONCLUSION

In a recent article in *Current Anthropology*,³⁸ written immediately after the protest summer 2011, I put forward two interrelated arguments that emerged from my ethnographic observations. Firstly, that local voices of indignation in Greece have been much more complex, diverse and self-critical than the international media has portrayed them to be; therefore, ethnographic attention to the meanings of discontent contributes towards the de-orientalisation of the Greek crisis, encouraging a move away from prejudiced or even sympathetic stereotypes (such as 'the ungrateful Greeks' or 'the poor Greeks'). Secondly, that despite its diversity and contradictions, local indignation about the crisis generates cultural meanings that may embrace or challenge western economic narratives. This negotiation of meaning at the local level, I have argued, can encourage a discursive self-empowerment, which in turn may inspire social change, as evident from the restructuring of Greek political parties in the last couple of years.

However, even if we assume that change at the level of politics may be superficial – for example, one political party (SYRIZA) replacing another (PASOK) without challenging the bipolar structure of two-party political representation – I hesitate to treat the discourse of indignation in Greece as a mere discursive tactic or a weapon of the weak. There is more cultural logic and exegetical purposefulness here than James C. Scott's classic analysis of how the weak use slander against the powerful.³⁹ In the context of Greek indignation, blaming the powerful does not merely act as an ephemeral weapon, but also highlights an interpretive trajectory that outlines potential explanations of historical or political causality. Through blaming the powerful, the downtrodden unravel their culturally established logic and a set of principles or reasons that explain their resistance or critique of power. From a local point of view, being indignant can be seen as a complex and long-term process of interpretation, one that addresses and renders meaningful what is perceived as an unjust and unequal world.

In this respect, indignation can be seen not only as a tactic of evading responsibility, but also, and primarily, as a committed pursuit of accountability. Such

an approach can contribute in depathologising local discontent, a perspective followed by several anthropologists of Greece before the crisis.⁴⁰ In turn, the depathologisation of local discontent entails the recognition of its complexity and the purposeful search for explanations by indignant local actors. My respondents in Patras, for example, examine the responsibility of foreign nations, and systemic factors, using what Sutton has described as ‘analogic thinking’⁴¹ – the use of lessons from the past to explain the present;⁴² they make sense of the current crisis by identifying recurrent patterns of inequality in international politics. They also blame Greek politicians and political parties, whose previous overspending has benefited some citizens more than others. Even occupational categories – the civil servants or particular employment groups in the private sector – do not escape from the relentlessness of local critique, as indignation in everyday conversation highlights endemic political dysfunction and lack of transparency.

There is also a more sinister twist in this search for accountability, which has become more noticeable during the crisis. This relates to a growing suspicion towards migrants, who have become an additional category of blame, a generalised category of foreigners, often visible, on the streets.⁴³ A strong sense of defensive nationalism motivates such blaming, which is rooted in older xenophobic narratives. In the discourse of the extreme right, the critique of western hegemony and foreign intervention in Greek politics – appropriated by older, familiar arguments developed by the left – merges with the condemnation of powerless migrants (who represent the proximate concrete Other close to home). I have referred to such interpretative combinations as the ‘dark’ side of Greek indignation,⁴⁴ which nevertheless represent one trajectory of a more widespread pursuit of accountability. Yet such misguided interpretative threads should not distract attention from the overwhelming desire of the Greek public to explain a crisis perceived as having arrived unexpectedly with direct and dire consequences for most families.

An overall local perception that the financial crisis in Greece represents an ‘unnatural’ perversion (or reversal) of people’s expectations in life – a view that one’s entitlement to a better life should increase (rather than diminish) in the course of one’s life – permeates and motivates the search for explanation in the local articulation of indignation. Some political parties (from the left and extreme right) have appropriated this indignant desire for accountability; even political parties that do not explicitly challenge the economics of austerity try to appear more accountable than before. In this respect, indignation has triggered more widespread responses in Greek society. In local contexts of conversation, the term indignation (*aganáktisi*) has become a potent metaphor for negotiating accountability, a master explanatory trope in the poetics of discontent. Similarly the term *mnimónio*, signifying a reified conceptualisation of austerity measures

and their consequences, facilitates the articulation of pointed arguments about causality and responsibility: somebody is accountable for this austerity-monster. The complex explanatory threads of the crisis are still unravelling in local ‘indignant’ conversation and will continue to do so, extricating accountability and inviting further anthropological engagement.

NOTES

1. Theodossopoulos, D. (2013), ‘Infuriated with the infuriated? Blaming tactics and discontent about the Greek financial crisis’, *Current Anthropology* 54, 2: 200–21.
2. Knight, D. M. (2013), ‘The Greek economic crisis as trope’, *Focaal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 65: 147–59.
3. Carrithers, M. (2005), ‘Why anthropologists should study rhetoric’, *J. Roy. Anthropol. Inst.* 11: 577–83, at p. 579.
4. Carrithers, M. (2009), ‘Introduction’, in M. Carrithers (ed.), *Culture, Rhetoric and the Vicissitudes of Life*, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 1–17, at p. 1.
5. Herzfeld, M. (1997), *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation State*, New York: Routledge, p. 140.
6. *Ibid.*; Herzfeld, M. (2009), ‘Convictions: Embodied rhetorics of earnest belief’, in I. Strecker and S. Tyler (eds), *Culture and Rhetoric*, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 182–206.
7. See Papagaroufali, E. (2011), ‘Harbingers of the “Greek crisis”’, in P. Papailias (ed.), *Beyond the ‘Greek Crisis’: Histories, Rhetorics, Politics*. Hot Spots Forum, *Cultural Anthropology*. Online at <http://culanth.org/?q=node/432> (accessed 16 January 2014); Hirschon, R. (2012), ‘Cultural mismatches: Greek concepts of time, personal identity, and authority in the context of Europe’, in K. Featherstone (ed.), *Europe in Modern Greek History*, London: Hurst & Co.; Theodossopoulos, ‘Infuriated with the infuriated?’.
8. Herzfeld, M. (2011), ‘Crisis attack: Impromptu ethnography in the Greek maelstrom’, *Anthropology Today* 27, 5: 22–6; Kalantzis, K. (2012), ‘Crete as warriorhood: Visual explorations of social imaginaries in crisis’, *Anthropology Today* 28, 3: 7–11; Hirschon, ‘Cultural mismatches’; Knight, D. M. (2012), ‘Cultural proximity: Crisis, time and social memory in Central Greece’, *History and Anthropology* 23, 3: 349–74; Knight, ‘Greek economic crisis as trope’; Dalakoglou, D. (2012), ‘Beyond spontaneity: Crisis, violence and collective action in Athens’, *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 16, 5: 535–45; and the Hot Spots Forum in *Cultural Anthropology* (2012). Online at www.culanth.org/fieldsights/275-hot-spots (accessed 16 January 2014).
9. See Brown, K. and D. Theodossopoulos (2000), ‘The performance of anxiety: Greek narratives of the war at Kosovo’, *Anthropology Today* 16, 1: 3–8; Brown, K. and D. Theodossopoulos (2003), ‘Rearranging solidarity: Conspiracy and the world order in Greek and Macedonian commentaries of Kosovo’, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 5, 3: 315–35; Theodossopoulos, D. (2004), ‘The Turks and their nation in the worldview of Greeks in Patras’, *History and Anthropology* 15, 1: 29–45; Theodossopoulos, D. (2007), ‘Introduction: The “Turks” in the imagination of the “Greeks”’, in D. Theodossopoulos (ed.), *When Greeks Think about Turks: The view from*

- Anthropology*, London: Routledge, pp. 1–32; Theodossopoulos, D. (2007), ‘Politics of friendship, worldviews of mistrust: The Greek-Turkish rapprochement in local conversation’, in Theodossopoulos, *When Greeks Think about Turks*, pp. 193–210; Theodossopoulos, ‘Infuriated with the infuriated?; Kirtsoglou, E. and D. Theodossopoulos (2010), ‘Intimacies of anti-globalisation: Imagining unhappy others as oneself in Greece’, in D. Theodossopoulos and E. Kirtsoglou (eds), *United in Discontent: Local Responses to Cosmopolitanism and Globalization*, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 85–102; Kirtsoglou, E. and D. Theodossopoulos (2010), ‘The poetics of anti-Americanism in Greece: Rhetoric, agency and local meaning’, *Social Analysis* 54, 1: 106–24.
10. The English term ‘indignation’ bears tribute to the Spanish *indignados*, who started the movement that inspired the respective ‘Greek indignant movement’ (*Kinima Aganaktismenon Politon*). This connection, as well as the term’s subsequent use by protesters, protesting authors and journalists, has widely established the terms indignation/indignant as the English equivalent of the Greek *aganaktisi* (noun) and *aganaktismenos* (adjective). This translation is favoured by most dictionaries and is the one most widely used. Anthropologists, in an attempt to capture the polysemy of the term, have introduced alternative terms to discuss Greek indignation: ‘exasperation’ (see Herzfeld, ‘Crisis attack’; Kalantzis, ‘Crete as warriorhood’); ‘infuriation’ (see Theodossopoulos, ‘Infuriated with the infuriated?’); and ‘rage’ (see Panourgia, N. (2011), ‘The squared constitution of dissent’, in Papailias, *Beyond the ‘Greek Crisis’*).
 11. Theodossopoulos, ‘Infuriated with the infuriated?’
 12. Fernandez, J. W. (1986), *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
 13. Knight, ‘Cultural proximity’; Knight, D. M. (2012), ‘Turn of the screw: Narratives of history and economy in the Greek crisis’, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 21, 1: 53–76.
 14. Dubisch, J. (1995), *In a Different Place: Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics of a Greek Island Shrine*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
 15. Herzfeld, M. (1985), *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
 16. Du Boulay, J. (1974), *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; Dubisch, *In a Different Place*; Friedl, E. (1962), *Vassilika: A Village in Modern Greece*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston; Hart, L. K. (1992), *Time, Religion, and Social Experience in Rural Greece*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Kenna, M. E. (1990), ‘Family, economy and community on a Greek island’, in C. C. Harris (ed.), *Family, Economy and Community*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, pp. 143–63; Theodossopoulos, D. (2003), *Troubles with Turtles: Cultural Understandings of the Environment on a Greek Island*, Oxford: Berghahn.
 17. Werbner, P. (2002), *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims*, Oxford: James Currey, p. 61.
 18. *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 56.
 19. Scott, J. C. (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Scott, J. C. (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
 20. Panourgia, ‘The squared constitution of dissent’.

21. In mid-May 2011, the Spanish indignados in the Puerta del Sol Square, Madrid, voiced an enticing invitation many in Greece couldn't ignore: 'Don't make so much noise, you'll wake up the Greeks!' As it transpired, there were thousands of indignant Greeks who responded to this call by participating in the protest of summer 2011.
22. Theodossopoulos, D. (2010), 'Introduction: United in discontent', in D. Theodossopoulos and E. Kirtsoglou (eds), *United in Discontent: Local Responses to Cosmopolitanism and Globalization*, Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 1–19.
23. Papailias, P. (2011), 'Witnessing the crisis', in Papailias, *Beyond the 'Greek Crisis'*; Theodossopoulos, 'Infuriated with the infuriated?'; and for Spain, see Postill, J. (forthcoming), 'Democracy in the age of viral reality: A media epidemiography of Spain's indignados movement', in D. Vidali and T. Tufté (eds), 'Media ethnography and public sphere engagement', *Ethnography*, special issue and Postill, this volume.
24. Cf. Dalakoglou, 'Beyond spontaneity'.
25. Dalakoglou, D. (2011), 'The irregularities of violence in Athens', in Papailias, *Beyond the 'Greek Crisis'*.
26. Gourgouris, S. (2011), 'Indignant politics in Athens: Democracy out of rage', *Greek Left Review*, 17 July 2011. Online at <http://greekleftreview.wordpress.com/tag/gourgouris> (accessed 16 January 2014).
27. Theodossopoulos, 'Infuriated with the infuriated?'.
28. Cf. Kalantzis, K. (2013), 'Comment on Theodossopoulos', *Current Anthropology* 54, 2: 212–13.
29. Cf. Knight, 'The Greek economic crisis as trope'.
30. See Theodossopoulos, 'Infuriated with the infuriated?'.
31. See Herzfeld, M. (1982), 'The etymology of excuses: Aspects of rhetorical performance in Greece', *American Ethnologist* 9: 644–63; Herzfeld, M. (1992), *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*.
32. See, for example, Sutton, D. (1998), *Memories Cast in Stone: The Relevance of the Past in Everyday Life*, Oxford: Berg; Sutton, D. (2003), 'Poked by the "foreign finger" in Greece: Conspiracy theory or the hermeneutics of suspicion?', in K. S. Brown and Y. Hamilakis (eds), *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, pp. 191–210; Brown and Theodossopoulos, 'The performance of anxiety'; Brown and Theodossopoulos, 'Rearranging solidarity'; Kirtsoglou, E. (2006), 'Unspeakable crimes: Athenian Greek perceptions of local and international terrorism', in A. Strathern, P. Stewart and N. Whitehead (eds), *Terror and Violence: Imagination and the Unimaginable*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 61–88; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 'Intimacies of anti-globalisation'; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 'The poetics of anti-Americanism in Greece'; Theodossopoulos, 'Infuriated with the infuriated?'; Knight, 'The Greek economic crisis as trope'.
33. Herzfeld, 'Convictions', 183; see also Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*, p. 140.
34. Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference*; Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy*.
35. Merkel is often referred to as a female Adolf Hitler, an association explored in arguments, jokes, graffiti and carnival impersonations: in the Patras carnival of 2013, impersonators dressed in Nazi costume and wore a wig with Merkel's characteristic hairstyle. Lagarde, on the other hand, is portrayed as 'harsh *but* dressed stylishly'.

36. Cf. Brown and Theodossopoulos, 'The performance of anxiety'; Brown and Theodossopoulos, 'Rearranging solidarity'.
37. See, for example, Campbell, J. (1964), *Honour, Family and Patronage: A Study of the Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, a classic and still relevant account of patronage; see also Loizos, P. (1975), *The Greek Gift: Politics and Solidarity in a Cypriot Village*, New York: St. Martin's Press; Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood*.
38. Theodossopoulos, 'Infuriated with the infuriated?'
39. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.
40. See, for example, Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference*; Sutton, 'Poked by the "foreign finger" in Greece'; Brown and Theodossopoulos, 'The performance of anxiety'; Brown and Theodossopoulos, 'Rearranging solidarity'; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 'Intimacies of anti-globalisation'; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 'The poetics of anti-Americanism in Greece'.
41. Sutton, *Memories Cast in Stone*.
42. See also Stewart, C. (2012), *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Knight, 'Cultural proximity'; Knight, 'Turn of the screw'.
43. Herzfeld, 'Crisis attack'.
44. Theodossopoulos, 'Infuriated with the infuriated?'

About the Contributors

Hazim Al-Eryani graduated from the Fletcher School at Tufts University where he focused on Development Economics and Middle Eastern Studies, and wrote his thesis on external intervention in Yemen, titled ‘The balancing act: Internal conflicts and external intervention in Yemen’. Prior to Fletcher, he completed a Bachelor’s degree in International Relations from Boston University, and worked with organisations such as Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group. He recently completed an internship with the Rafik Hariri Center at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC where he closely monitored Yemen’s transition. His particular focus is on the application of mediation and negotiation in the Arab transitions.

Rayman Aryani is a recent graduate of Harvard University where he received a degree in Government with a focus on comparative politics and constitutional design. After experiencing the Tunisian revolution first hand, Rayman travelled home to Yemen for the spring and summer of 2011, where he had a front row seat at the historical events that took place in the country. Rayman’s research interests include history and politics of the Middle East, development economics and social entrepreneurship. He currently works at Google in California and has a dream of one day establishing a start-up incubator in Yemen.

Steven C. Caton is Khaled bin Abdullah bin Abdulrahman Al Saud Professor of Contemporary Arab Studies in the Anthropology Department at Harvard University. His research has focused on the Arabian Peninsula, especially Yemen, and of late has concentrated on the politics of water sustainability. His primary publications on Yemen include two books, ‘*Peaks of Yemen I Summon*’:

Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe (1990), *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation* (2005) and *Yemen*, editor and author (2013).

Igor Cherstich is a Social Anthropologist trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He specialises in the Anthropology of Islam and his academic interests cover the Ethnography of North-Africa, Sufism, Rituals and Politics. Fluent in Arabic, Igor has conducted extensive ethnographic research in Libya, studying Libyan Sufism and focusing on the role of miracles and secret knowledge amongst local Sufi communities. He has taught courses on Sufism, Anthropological Theory and Anthropology of Islam in the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Aga Khan Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations and the Institute of Ismaili Studies as well as providing consultancy for Leiden University. In addition to his anthropological publications, Igor has also published extensively on Libyan politics in newspapers, blogs and magazines, participating in TV and radio interviews both in the UK and abroad.

Christine Garlough is an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies, as well as an affiliate of the Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore, and the Department of Theatre and Drama. Her interests revolve around the areas of feminist theory, philosophy and rhetoric, performance studies and critical social theory. Her work with grassroots groups has focused on the use of performance to make claims about issues of social justice and human rights. This research has been published in outlets such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Journal of American Folklore* and *Women’s Studies in Communication*. She is the author of *Desi Devas: Activism in South Asian American Cultural Performance* (2013).

Simon Hawkins is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. He first came to North Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer in Tunisia in 1988. His research in anthropology examines the positioning of the local in the global, paying particular attention to the intersection of gender, language, modernity, nationalism and religion. He is currently completing a multi-year ethnographic project with salesmen in Tunis’s old city, the medina. In addition to this participant observation, he has used the tools of visual anthropology, historical and linguistic analysis. He has published in a range of journals including *Ethnology*, *City and Society*, *Identities* and *Journal of Religion in Africa*.

Tamar Katriel is Professor in the Department of Communication and Faculty of Education at the University of Haifa, working in the areas of the Ethnography of Communication and Media Anthropology. She is author of *Talking Straight: Dugri Speech in Israeli Sabra Culture* (1986), *Communal Webs: Communication and Culture in Contemporary Israel* (1991), *Performing the Past: A Study of Israeli*

Settlement Museums (1997), *Dialogic Moments: From Soul Talks to Talk Radio in Israeli Culture* (2004), *A Hebrew Collection* (1999) and a range of articles in journals and books. Her recent work deals with various forms of grassroots activism in the Israeli context.

Oren Livio is Lecturer in the Department of Communication at the University of Haifa. He received his PhD from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on discursive and cultural negotiations of national identity, citizenship and military service, particularly in the Israeli context, as well as on the theoretical implications of the relationship between discourse and space in contexts associated with civic participation and protest. His work has appeared in *Journal of Communication*, *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, *The Communication Review*, *Mass Communication and Journalism Quarterly* and *Israel Studies Review*.

Christopher Pinney is an anthropologist and art historian. He is currently Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London. From 2007 to 2009 he was Visiting Crowe Professor in the Department of Art History at Northwestern University. His research interests cover the art and visual culture of South Asia, with a particular focus on the history of photography and chromolithography in India. He has also worked on industrial labour and Dalit goddess possession. His publications include *Photography and Anthropology* (2011), *The Coming of Photography in India* (2008), 'Photos of the Gods': *The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (2004) and *Photography's Other Histories* (co-edited with Nicolas Peterson, 2003).

John Postill is Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow at RMIT University, Melbourne (2013–16), and Digital Anthropology Fellow at University College London. His publications include *Localizing the Internet* (2011), *Media and Nation Building* (2006) and the co-edited *Theorising Media and Practice* (2010, with Birgit Bräuchler). Currently he is conducting anthropological research on new forms of digital activism and civic engagement in Indonesia, Spain and elsewhere. He is also writing a book provisionally titled *The Information War: Digital Activism and Popular Protests in the 21st Century* and the co-edited volume *Theorising Media and Change* (with Elisenda Ardèvol and Sirpa Tenhunen).

Hanan Sabea is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the American University in Cairo. She received her PhD in Anthropology from Johns Hopkins University in 2001. Her research examines the dynamics of land and labour on plantations in colonial and postcolonial Africa, their implications for remoulding state-subject relations and the production of the histories thereof. Her current projects engage the question of the political and its imagination

in relationship to emerging forms, spaces and practices of citizenship. She has published articles in *Journal of Historical Sociology*, *African Studies*, *Feminist Africa*, and *International Journal of African Historical Studies* and *Cultural Anthropology*, and is the co-author of *Visual Productions of Knowledge: Toward a Different Middle East* (2012).

Paula Serafini is a PhD student at King's College London's Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, where she is researching the role of the arts in contemporary political activism in the UK. Prior to King's College she received an MA in Anthropology and Cultural Politics from Goldsmiths College and a BA in Art History and Management from Universidad del Salvador (Buenos Aires). Her main research interests are activism and social movements, modern and contemporary art, cultural performances and contemporary aesthetics. Parallel to her research, she is currently an Editorial Contributor for *Cultural Anthropology Online*.

Kathryn Spellman-Poots is an Associate Professor at the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations. She received her MSc and PhD in Politics and Sociology from Birkbeck College, University of London. Her areas of interest include Shia Muslims in Europe, the Iranian Diaspora, transnational migration networks, and gender and religious practices in the Middle East and North Africa. Her publications include the monograph *Religion and Nation: Iranian Local and Transnational Networks in Britain* (2005) and she has co-edited *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices* (2012). She previously taught the sociology of religion, migration and gender at Syracuse University, London campus. She is on the Editorial Board of *The Middle East in London* magazine at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Claire Tancons is a curator, writer and researcher with a focus on Carnival and public ceremonial culture, civic rituals and popular movements. Often working within the context of international biennials of contemporary art, she has developed alternative genealogies and methodologies for thinking and presenting performance. A graduate in Museum Studies and Art History from École du Louvre and the Courtauld Institute of Art, she has lectured internationally, taught at IUAV University in Venice and written extensively about Carnival, the carnivalesque, performance and protest, in *NKA*, *Small Axe* and *Third Text* and *e-flux journal*. She is currently co-curator of *En Mas': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean* (CAC New Orleans, 2015) and curator of *Up Hill Down Hill: An Indoor Carnival* (Tate Modern, 2014).

Dimitrios Theodossopoulos is a Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent. He is currently working on ethnic stereotypes, exoticisation, indigeneity, authenticity and the politics of cultural representation and protest in

Panama and Greece. He is the author of *Troubles with Turtles: Cultural Understandings of the Environment on a Greek Island* (2003), editor of *When Greeks Think about Turks: The View from Anthropology* (2006) and co-editor of *United in Discontent: Local Responses to Cosmopolitanism and Globalization* (2010) and *Great Expectations: Imagination, Anticipation and Enchantment in Tourism* (2011).

Dalia Wahdan is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Foundation for Liberal and Management Education, India. She published *Governing Livelihoods in Liberalizing States* (2010) and *Politics of Planning Egypt's New Settlements* (forthcoming) and holds a number of awards and post-doctoral fellowships such as Middle East Research Competition Award (2008–9), research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi (2010) and Fellow of the Higher Education and Social Inequality Program, New York University (2012). She is currently working on the concept of civic state in post-uprising Egypt as a fellow at Institut für Soziologie Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg.

Martin Webb is a lecturer in anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research interests cross anthropology and development studies, with a particular focus on citizenship, transparency, accountability and urban anti-corruption activism. He carried out his doctoral research in Delhi, India, focusing on the role of class, social connection and the politics of urban space in the city's transparency and accountability activism scene. He has published the role of rhetoric, representation and authenticity in activism and movement politics in India (*Contemporary South Asia*) and on transparency activism in India (*Political and Legal Anthropology Review*).

Pnina Werbner is Professor Emerita of Social Anthropology, Keele University, and author of 'The Manchester Migration Trilogy', including *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis* (1990/2002), *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims* (2002) and *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult* (2003). In 2008 she edited *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives* (2008), and is the editor of several theoretical collections on hybridity, multiculturalism, migration and citizenship. She has researched in Britain, Pakistan and Botswana, and has directed major research projects on the Muslim South Asian, Filipino and African diasporas. Her forthcoming book is *The Making of an African Working Class: Law, Politics and Cultural Protest*.

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