point of no return. Almost always it is marked off by a huge and all-inclusive repression which engulfs all sectors of the colonized people (Fanon 1966: 70).

The Syrian people are now at Fanon's point of no return.

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End Notes

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[2]Layla Al-Zubaidi, "Syria's Creative Resistance" in *Jadaliyya*, 8 June 2012.

[3]www.abounaddara.com accessed 26 April 2013.

[4]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=el38zyvRIfM accessed 27 April 2013.

[5]Amelie Rives, "Art and Revolution: the Syrian Case," in *Near East Quarterly*, 24 March 2012.

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[8]*Dissident Syria*, 93-99.

[9]Al-Zubaidi.

[10]http://monde-arabe.arte.tv/en/rima-marrouch-graffiti-war-in-syria/ accessed 11 April 2013.

[11]Tahhan was a curator for the Amsterdam exhibition, *Culture in Defiance: Continuing Traditions of Satire, Art and the Struggle for Freedom in Syria*, that featured short films, animations, songs, graffiti, art, and posters: www.princeclausfund.org/en/activities/culture-in-defiance.html accessed 21 April 2013.

[12]http://www.facebook.com/Syrian.Revolution.Arts accessed 22 April 2013.

[13]http://world.time.com/2013/02/13/the-art-of-war-syrias-artists-find-pain-and-fame-on-the-frontlines/ accessed 5 April 2013.

[14]http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2013/feb/04/syria-klimt-kiss-tammam-azzam accessed 10 April 2013.

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In Praise of Insult: Slogan Genres, Slogan Repertoires and Innovation

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I have been thinking about Egyptian protest culture for a number of years, although not always as a scholar. For the bulk of that time, much of this protest culture was largely confined to particular segments of Egyptian society, activists, intellectuals and students. The major icon of this culture, Sheikh Imam, was clearly more revered outside of Egypt than at home. However, with the January 25 uprising, what was marginal became a dominant strand in contemporary Egyptian expressive culture. Like so many others, I found myself caught up in collecting, archiving and analyzing the explosion of revolutionary culture in Egypt. Among the first things I collected were slogans.

During the Eighteen-Day Uprising, I noticed that many observers treated slogans as if they were spontaneous linguistic statements of an unambiguous popular will. This treatment both resonated and clashed with what I thought I knew about the history of protest culture in Egypt. On the one hand, it resonated with how activists themselves spoke about their own experiences in terms of surprise and spontaneity, and how they routinely considered slogans to be clear proof-texts of an articulate collective voice. But it also clashed with the fact that some of these same activists had for years been planning and practicing just such an uprising, and chanting some of the same slogans that were to resound across Egypt on January 25. The more I listened to activists, the more I began to realize that the meaning of slogans could not be reduced to their immediate context or their semantic aspect, nor was their meaning so straightforward or stable.

It was one thing to observe this, but it has been something else to try to study it. To begin with, there is not an established literature on the subject. The little scholarship that does exist approaches slogans as a particular genre of discourse (Jakobsen). What matters in this account is not so much the social

meaning of what is said as its form of articulation. Sociologists and cultural historians routinely cite slogans, though they tend to focus on the context in which they are employed (Abdallah). What matters in this account is not the form of articulation, but the meaning of the slogan in its context and as evidence of a demand being made by a social movement. Even though these approaches diverge from one another in significant ways, the tendency is to treat the slogan primarily as a semantic text.

As I spoke to activists, I began to think about slogans differently. *First, slogans are not spontaneous expressions of collective will, but they are authored so as to appear that way*. Slogans are performatives in the sense they are deliberate compositions intended not so much to reflect collective will but to create it. But more than that, slogans also reveal something about the contentious processes of meaning-making within movements that produce them. For instance, there are slogan leaders (*hattafin*) in activist groups, known for their strength, capacity for improvisation and charisma. And there are also people known for their talents as slogan composers (*mu'allifin hitafat*). As I began to ask, activists described a set of informal and formal processes that go into making slogans. This almost always involves drawing on a known corpus of older protest slogans (some going back decades), along with a known corpus of rhythms and songs. Composers invent new slogans from these bits and pieces, adding and revising and improvising all the time. Far from anonymous, some Egyptian activists—like Ashraf Khalil and Kamal Abu Eita—are quite famous as slogan composers (Mughith; Yusuf). The issue of composition thus underscores the unsurprising fact that slogans have histories.

These dynamics also tell us something about the peculiar nature of the slogan as a speech genre that is intended to circulate as an authorless text. Indeed, one index of a slogan's power is the degree to which it can detach itself from the specific conditions of its initial composition, and the degree to which it circulates as if it were the anonymous expression of a collective will. The rhetorical and social construction of spontaneity in slogans also sheds light back on the narratives of revolutionary surprise told by activists in Egypt and beyond (Polletta).

Second, slogans and chants may be composed of words, but they are not merely linguistic texts. Rather they are part of something that can only be called public performance. Thus the meaning of revolutionary slogans cannot be reduced to any semantic content, nor can it be translated as set of linguistic statements. And this is true for two reasons: 1) slogans are chanted, shouted and sung by embodied people moving, often in coordinated ways, in and through public spaces; and 2) these movements and actions are not mere context for the production of slogan meaning, but are part of the text itself.

Performance studies scholarship has been incredibly useful in this regard and offers terms and methods for expanding beyond a textualist approach not just to slogans but to protest culture more broadly. Performance also opens up a set of concepts shared and overlapping with social theory. The concept of repertoire helps anchor the study of slogans and protest culture in both social history and theater theory (Bayat; Taylor; Tilly). Likewise, theories of theater as process—such as the concepts of rehearsal, warmup and aftermath (Schechner)—open up avenues for thinking critically about activist strategies (Graeber). The embodied, scripted aspect of performance (Turner; Kapchan) intersects meaningfully with ethnographies of protest (El-Ghobashy), as well as methods and questions from crowd studies (Cannetti; McPhail).

Third, ambiguity is key to the study of slogans and slogan performance. It is true that many of the central slogans of the Egyptian Uprising were composed so as to offer a clear message to a range of audiences. It is also true that activists regularly describe their conscious decision to state their demands as unambiguously as possible. Yet even so, this process is never secure. As an example, we might consider the case of the slogan "*ʿaysh, hurriyya, ʿadala igtimaʿiyya,*" one of the first and most persistent chants of the uprising. Given the contested nature of the terms "bread," "freedom," and "social justice," and given the contentious context in which the slogan was performed by disparate groups of activists, it is doubtful whether there ever was any agreement about what it meant in concrete terms. Sometimes just the fact of repetition can introduce ambiguity into the reception of a slogan, as happened with the famous slogan "The People Want" (Colla). These are cases of ambiguity arising despite the intentions of activists to create clear slogans. The situation becomes more complicated when we consider the revolutionary slogans that were deliberately ambiguous. Some of the most creative and memorable slogans of the uprising were especially playful and relied on pun and double-entendre. Far from hindering the production of meaning in slogans, ambivalence is a rhetorical strength, though one with dangers.

Innovation

As I worked, one of the things that most intrigued me was the emergence of particular slogan repertoires within Egyptian protest culture—how slogans appear in a particular moment, how they disseminate locally or regionally, only to then disappear or reappear months later. The emergence of invective slogans was particularly compelling in this regard, since it is a story of innovation, and the partial rejection of a longstanding skepticism, on the part of opposition groups, toward using negative and ironic rhetoric in slogan performance. Despite this wariness, invective slogans became, after January 25, a core part of slogan composition and performance during protests, especially in moments of direct confrontation with the state.

Invective against Central Security Forces (*al-ʾAmn al-Markazi*), the police, and the military is especially widespread and serves a critical role, according to some activists, in sharpening the lines of conflict, and thus helping to ensure that "the revolution continues." The FuckSCAF slogan is such an example of this. It appeared alongside another meme, NoSCAF, modeled on the familiar commodity logo "Nescafé," in Fall 2011 as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) escalated the use of official and unofficial violence against public protest. As the protesters were killed in brutal fashion, this simple and ineloquent phrase of disgust became a surprisingly articulate—or at least effective—slogan for those rallying in solidarity with the activists in the street fighting against SCAF's rule. It circulated as a spoken slogan on streets, and as a graphic posted on walls concrete and electronic. And, like much revolutionary invective, it does not hesitate to employ homophobic and misogynistic figures of gender, sexuality, and power.

But how does such a phrase work as part of protest repertoire? What demand does it articulate? Who is the public it addresses? As a rhetorical statement, it does not make an appeal: it would not move anyone who did not already share its stance toward the target. In this sense, it tells us quite a bit about the kind of protest repertoire it belongs to—one that is closed rather than open. What needs to be emphasized is that when considered as part of Egyptian protest culture repertoires, invective is not just new—it runs counter to most of the discursive conventions employed by political activist groups in the years leading up to 2011. Until then, invective was a marginal, and often absent form of rhetoric for opposition groups.

This is a point that has been made to me by activists. Older activists underscore the idea that demonstrations are opportunities to articulate specific demands in positive terms. Protests are part of a deliberative public process to create norms and frame issues. In such repertoires, negative and jokey phrases like "FuckSCAF" are anathema.

As other activists have explained: because the Mubarak state attempted to monopolize the framing of all political discourse issues, it was incumbent upon activists to respond effectively. This entailed countering the state by communicating a clear counter-analysis of the country's problems, an alternative set of positive values, and concrete demands that were rooted in everyday life. As activists put it, because they are attempting to address a potentially general audience, the rhetorical tone most appropriate to the task of protest is one specific, serious and sincere: specific, in its demands and vision; serious, to offer an alternative to the state authority; sincere, to highlight state mendacity. Examples of this abound in graffiti as well.

We might turn again to the slogan "*ʿAysh, hurriyya, ʿadala igtimaʿiyya*" to see a mainstream example of the rhetorical conventions of activist appeals in the years predating the revolution: it is positive and concrete; specific (bread), serious and sincere. And even if it is vague about its meaning, it does articulate a set of values that might be embraced by any Egyptian.

Genre and the A7A Moment

A brief survey of slogan genres can shed light on what is unique and innovative about invective slogans. Most of the slogans that protesters chanted during the eighteen days were rhymed couplets—with regular metrical and musical patterns (though not those of the classical *fusha* tradition). As compositions, revolutionary slogans diverge from other poetic forms, particularly in terms of size. Nonetheless, this poses no problem for conceptualizing them as poetry. Like other genres of Arabic poetry, colloquial and classical, these slogans are shaped by the main formal conventions of rhyme, meter and purpose.

While there is some variation in the topics and sounds of these slogans, the majority of the slogans performed during the Egyptian revolution were of two genres, the first more or less corresponding to the classical mode called *hamasa* and the other to *hijaʾ*, or invective (Van Gelder).

Hamasa slogans might be called slogans of "zeal," and classically, the mode in classical poetry is associated with bravery and resolve during war. Examples from January 2011 would include:

-Ya ahlina, indammu ʻalayna
(People! Our people!—come join us!)
-ʿAlli, ʿalli, ʿalli-s-sot/illi yihtif mish haymot
ʿAlli, ʿalli, ʿalli kaman/illi yihtif mish gaban
(Raise, raise, raise your voice; he who shouts will never die!
Raise, raise, raise it again; he who shouts is not a coward!)

Hamasa poetry encourages one side in a conflict and champions those who take its cause. These slogans speak to positive, solidaristic values, and they form the backbone of protest culture from before the revolution. They name the community (the people, the nation), and they extol its virtues. What was radically new about these slogans was not the words, but their performance in a march, and this performance testified to a solidarity that was not only the theme of the slogans, but their instantiated goal. Indeed, participants in the Egyptian Revolution routinely testify that the act of joining the demonstrations fundamentally altered their feelings and understandings of themselves, their communities and the *possible*. Some descriptions of revolutionary feeling bring to mind Victor Turner's concept of "communitas," or Emile Durkheim's

Figure 1. Sincerity in verse, Arbein Police Station, Suez. "Each time I walk past you, O Arbein Police Station / I listen to cries and complaints coming from inside you / I see water on your walls and wonder: / Is this water, or the tears of those you have mistreated?" Riyad el-Helwani (Suez Poet, January 25 Youth). Photo by author. Used by permission.

notion of "collective effervescence." What these descriptions suggest is that there was more at stake in poetic slogans than the creation and distillation of semantic meaning. These slogans were performatives, which, under the right circumstances, created the movement they spoke of.

In contrast, *hija*ˀ is invective or insult poetry, and overlaps considerably with satire and lampoon more generally. It would not be wrong to think of *hija*ˀ poetry as a form of hate speech, since it is intended to injure its targets. From the first hours of protest on January 25, invective formed a core part of slogan performance, particularly in those places where activists found themselves surrounded by riot police. Invective employs the same moral economy as hamasa—only in reverse: heaping scorn on the enemy—naming him as foreign, traitor, oppressor and coward.

If *hamasa* slogans consciously appeal to gathering and building, as the root of the word (*h-j-w*) suggests, *hija*ˀ slogans seek to separate and tear down. Like hamasa, the performance of invective involves the act of naming (in this case, an enemy) and defining a situation where something is at stake. The stakes of insult, however, are higher, or at least, more immediate, for once the specter of shame is brought into the performance, someone must lose either those who are hurling insults, or those who are its target (Elliott). An insult cannot

be taken back, and there are repercussions for its utterance. Now, as before the revolution, there are legal consequences for engaging in insulting public figures (Carr). Examples from the uprising would include:

-Huwwa Mubarak ʿayiz eh?/kulli-nas yabos riglayh?
-La Mubarak, mish hanbos/bukra ish-shaʿb ʿalak haydos!
(What the heck does Mubarak want?/Everyone to kiss his feet?
No, Mubarak, we won't kiss/Tomorrow the people will be walking on you!)
-Ya Gamal ˀul l-abuk/kulli-masriyin biyakrahuk!
(Hey Gamal [Mubarak], tell your father/Every Egyptian hates your guts!)
-Irhal yaʿni imshi / Ya-lli mayafhamshi!
("Depart ye" means "get lost"/You thick-headed idiot!)
-Hadrat al-sada al-zubbat/ʿala idaykum kamm wahid mat?
(Respected officers, Respected Sirs!/How many people have you killed?)
- Gamal Mubarak, batil!/Suzanne Mubarak, batil!/Ahmad ʿEzz, batil/Habib al-ʿAdli,
batil!/Batil, batil, batil!
(Gamal Mubarak, useless!/Suzanne Mubarak, useless!/Ahmad Ezz, useless! /Habib al-Adly, useless!/Useless, useless, useless!)

Figure 2. "Gaban [Coward] Mubarak: Where's my Daddy?" Image from *Egyptian Revolution Protest Manual (How to Protest Intelligently)*, 2011. (http://publicintelligence.net/egyptian-revolution-protest-manual-how-to-protest-intelligently/)

Some observations could be made. First, the choice of targets—Mubarak, his family, business associates, top figures like Ahmad ʿEzz and Habib al-ʿAdly, and the repressive state apparatus in general. Each was associated, in the opposition media at least, with the most egregious aspects of the Mubarak regime. When the Mubarak regime (minus Mubarak) reconstituted itself in the form of SCAF, the army assumed the mantle of target.

The claims made against these targets, theft, corruption, murder and illegitimacy, are also not surprising, since all are well-founded and longstanding complaints about the crimes of the Mubarak regime, still unprosecuted by courts of law. As the Mubarak regime was tried incompetently in court from 2011-12, invective helped to stage carnivalesque trials in Tahrir Square.

While each invective emanates from a legal and/or moral norm, its relation to that norm is negative or ironic. These slogans do not seek to rectify a

Figure 3. Graffito: Boursa, Downtown Cairo, June 2012. Photo by author. Used by permission.

broken norm. Rather, they seek to hurt the one who has broken it.

The literature on invective stresses that it does not intend to correct a situation so much as it means to harm the honor of a target. As a political weapon, it strikes at the legitimacy and rectitude of the powerful. Here we can begin to make sense, if that is the right word, of the invocation of very familiar terms used to impute inversions of power and rectitude by way of familiarly regressive categories of masculinity and femininity, sexual activity and passivity, moral purity and filth.

One of the most unexpected accomplishments of the revolution has been the normalization of the term *aha* (usually transliterated in the Arabeezi characters, a7a) in public discourse. A uniquely Egyptian word, a7a means, roughly, "fuck that," or "fuck it." It is by no means a new feature of idiomatic Egyptian Arabic. What is new is the ubiquitous use of the word in public discourse—it is shouted at demonstrations to communicate disdain, scrawled across walls, typed across social media. The word has a semantic meaning—again, of disgust or contempt—but more importantly, its appearance in popular public spectacle signals a break with prior structures of politeness, a reminder (or threat) that the rules of language itself might themselves be overturned by revolution. Part of its significance, in other words, has to do with the embodied experience of enunciating the taboo word in public.

Figure 4. Cartoon at Tahrir Protest against Mubarak Trial Verdict, June 1, 2012. "Don't worry—as long as I've got you on my back, you'll be safe." Photo by author. Used by permission.

Repertoires

The most important thing to say about invective is that it appears as part of a wider set of performances. And the context of performance demands that we consider slogans not just in terms of semantic meaning or as discursive genre, but also as embodied actions taking place in particular situations. There are also props, tools, postering, and giant puppets, to borrow from David Graeber, and rough music, to borrow from E.P. Thompson.

Figure 5. Downtown Cairo Graffito, June 2012, in wake of the arson attack on the Shafiq Presidential Campaign headquarters. "Shafiq: Torching your HQ was just the dress rehearsal, you son of a bitch." Photo by author. Used by permission.

The occasional quality of such performances may suggest a near-infinite number of renditions, but as Charles Tilly reminds us, the repertoires of contentious performance are in fact limited. For Tilly, "contentious gatherings"—such as public assemblies, demonstrations, marches, and strikes—are the primary actions that form a social movement. With each action, activists attempt to build upon and learn from the successes and failures of previous actions. Tilly calls this process of learning, revising and improvising a "repertoire" and stresses that this repertoire plays a role in standardizing and limiting the nature of contentious performance.

Figure 6. Downtown anti-SCAF Graffito, June 2012. "Supreme Council of A7A." Photo by author. Used by permission.

To illustrate how scripted the performance of invective can be, we might turn to an infamous video from May 2011 (White Nights Media, "Mish nasyin al-Tahrir"). The scene is a "dakhla" or "tifo," a rowdy spectacle performed by Ultras (hardcore fans) at the outset of each half of a match featuring Zamalek and Ahly, the country's two largest football teams. Here we can see a couple thousand members of the Zamalek White Knights Ultras club delivering

Figure 7. SCAF Nursing at Mubarak's Teat. Tahrir Demonstration, June 2012. Photo by author. Used by permission.

an insult to the police who are stationed in the foreground. The particular insult has to do with bragging to the police that it was they—the Ultras—who beat them soundly in street fights during the uprising. You can hear the warm-up-the chant ("heidy-ho") at the beginning of the clip. This is significant—it is a regular warm-up exercise that Ultras use to get large numbers of participants into synch with one another.

Other football clubs have composed their own invectives—and some of these slogans have entered the catalog of famous revolutionary chants, particularly when there are bloody skirmishes between revolutionaries and police. During protests, you can still hear revolutionaries—many Ultras, many not—singing these songs. So too has the ubiquitous phrase, "All Cops Are Bastards," found mainly in the abbreviated graffiti meme, A.C.A.B., spread beyond the confines of ultras subculture.

As Muhammad Gamal Bashir has described, this sort of performance is not spontaneous, but practiced and ritualized. It is an authored composition—we might even call it poetry. I have heard very complicated song performances that go on for five or ten minutes, with hundreds of young men singing intricate lyrics, with nothing but drums and song leaders ("capos") to keep them in line. It takes a lot of organization and communication for participants to perform such songs in unison. The performance demands rehearsal, warm-up, cool downs. There is nothing that is not deliberate in this scene: the

banners ("baches"), the rhythms, the song leaders, all coordinated with one another, each organized by committee, though always around a set of agreed upon values. Even the video footage here is part of this show, since individual Ultras are assigned the task of recording each Ultras event, and controlling, in a real sense, their representation in the media. And since then, these recordings have been studied and discussed and then emulated by thousands of other protesters.

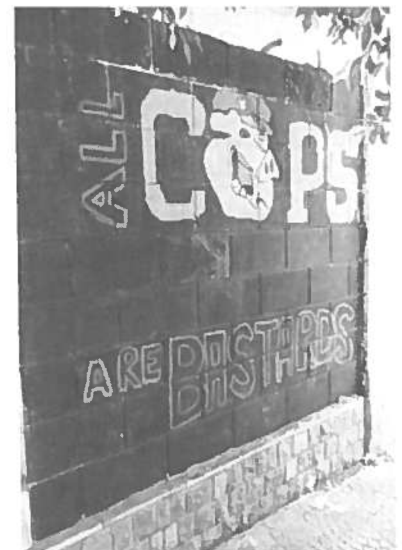

Figure 8. A.C.A.B. Ultras Graffito outside Ministry of Interior, Lazoughly-Falaki, Cairo. June 2012. Photo by author. Used by permission.

This example—rooted in a striated, multiple context of performance, recording and dissemination—suggests how complicated the production of slogans is. The activists composing and performing this song in this video are motivated by a complex range of allegiances and aspirations that connect sports and politics, irony and truth-telling in unexpected ways. They rehearse, they warm up, they perform, they put their bodies on the line. And yet, they also insist on recording and broadcasting this performance on their Youtube Channel. I began with the observation that the study of slogans needs to be rooted in the study of embodied performances rather than media texts. This example turns us back, and shows that often the broadcast and rebroadcast of slogans across media is not secondary to the production of meaning, but rather that we need to see slogan production as part of a loop.

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Staging Tahrir: Laila Soliman's Revolutionary Theatre

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> 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.
>
> "Will to Live" Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābī[1]

One of the most inspiring aspects of the Egyptian revolution was the outpouring of creative expression that accompanied the uprising's social and political movements in the form of protest songs, poetry, slogans, chants, graffiti and installation art, street theatre, cartoons, among other forms of artistic inventiveness. Creative dissidence has always been an integral part of protest movements, as argued by Iraqi poet Sinan Antoon (2011):

> Poetry, novels and popular culture have chronicled and encapsulated the struggle of peoples against colonial rule and later, against postcolonial monarchies and dictatorships, so the poems, vignettes, and quotes from novels were all there in the collective unconscious.... The revolution introduced new songs, chants and tropes, but it refocused attention on an already existing, rich and living archive.... Contrary to all the brouhaha about Twitter and Facebook, what energized people in Tunisia and Egypt and elsewhere, aside from sociopolitical grievances and an accumulation of pain and anger, was a famous line of poetry by a Tunisian poet, al-Shabbi.

Antoon evokes Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābī, whose poem "The Will to Live," referenced in the epigraph, symbolized the battle cry of Tunisians in the