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PALESTINE, ISRAEL, AND THE POLITICS OF POPULAR CULTURE

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ELLIOTT COLLA

Sentimentality
and Redemption:
The Rhetoric of
Egyptian Pop
Culture Intifada
Solidarity

Although it was produced long before the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, the LiveAid-style pop ballad “al-Hulm al-‘arabi” (The Arab dream) was transformed into an anthem to the Palestinian struggle in the months following the beginning of the uprising.¹ Like other pop tributes to pan-Arab unity and Palestine, “al-Hulm al-‘arabi” was frequently broadcast in Egypt, both on radio and as a slickly produced video.² The original video, replete with images of real Arab suffering drawn from the first Intifada and the Gulf War, was revised after October 2000, adding footage of Muhammad al-Durra and others killed during the uprising. Featuring singers from Egypt and all over the Arab world, the song presents an uplifting but ultimately vague pan-Arab message:

Generation after generation, we will live on our dream
And what these generations say today will last our lifetime . . .
That’s our dream, for all our life
An embrace that gathers all of us together.

In terms of its musical style, Intifada imagery, and lyrical message, “al-Hulm al-‘arabi” is not extraordinary. Its sculpted vocals, earnest tenor and seamless production resemble those of many other popular music videos from the Arab world about the al-Aqsa Intifada. The song’s seemingly sincere gesture of Arab unity and solidarity with Palestine also seems straight-

forward, even unremarkably so. Moreover, because such gestures have been so ubiquitous in contemporary Egyptian popular culture in the past several years, it may be difficult to think of them as complicated or requiring anything but a cursory glance.

However, despite the apparent earnestness of these pop gestures of solidarity, there is an undeniably ambiguous quality to them. The cloyingly sentimental tone of “al-Hulm al-‘arabi” was not lost on Egyptian audiences long familiar with sentimental genres in music and film.³ Although popular, the message of “The Arab Dream” was more than once turned on its head in parody. One version, renamed “al-Hashish al-‘arabi” (The Arab hashish), equates pan-Arab dreams with drug use:

Toke after toke ruins our lungs
And what we smoke today cuts our lives in half
Perhaps a joint will get us stoned
Or we’ll get sky high with just a bit of hash.

Another parody, titled “al-Fil al-‘arabi” (The Arab elephant), turned the original, “ajyal ba’d ajyal” (generation after generation) into the ludicrous “afyal ba’d afyal” (elephants upon elephants). Other versions punctured the original pop anthem’s inflated sentiments with different needles.

These parodies were not broadcast in venues of mass culture, but circulated around their margins, on Web sites and in cafés. Admittedly, such parodic texts exist in a secondary and parasitical relation to pop culture. Nonetheless, their humor derives from mimicking a recognizable original textual referent. What the parodies of “al-Hulm al-‘arabi” all share is the way they caricature the original’s overly emphatic, earnest tone. In so doing, these versions point to ambiguities in the original text: the disconnection between the song’s pan-Arab rhetoric and the reality of inter-Arab politics, or between the singers’ high-minded moral posture and their openly commercial presentation.

We might read the parodies of “al-Hulm al-‘arabi” as a special form of cultural criticism, as each presents a skeptical *close reading* of the original’s rhetoric. Each parody diverges from the original, but its humor invariably depends on its ability to exploit an ambiguity already present in the original text. Although such parodies surface and disappear far from the mass media, they show how audiences can rewrite pop culture texts to suit their own tastes and ideologies. Moreover, they can play a crucial function for the analysis of popular culture, because they draw attention to rhetorical structures that are all too often thought to be unworthy of second thought.

In this sense, parody serves to expose what Roland Barthes called myth. For Barthes, myth was associated with a certain kind of text that presents itself as transparent and commonsensical, whose meanings are received as self-evident, taken for granted. The mythical text is that which disavows its own rhetorical status, presenting itself as if it were something natural and unadorned.⁴ The parodies of "al-Hulm al-'arabi" thus perform a critical function by deconstructing the rhetorical structures of their mythmaking. It may seem counterintuitive to place the sort of irony we find in these parodies at the forefront of a consideration of Egyptian pop solidarity with Palestine, especially given the heavy political valence of these texts and their earnest style of presentation. But parody is useful, because it highlights ambiguities in the rhetorical constructs of those texts.

I argue that most gestures of solidarity with Palestine that have become a staple of Egyptian pop culture are mythological in this Barthesian sense: they present Egyptian-Palestinian political solidarity as natural (rather than constructed) and images of Palestinian resistance as if they were nonrhetorical, transparent representations, akin to "reality" itself.⁵ The rhetoric of Egyptian pop solidarity is dominated by two familiar kinds of narrative: sentimentality and redemption. However, rhetorical analysis, like that prompted by the existence of parodic texts, reveals that the seemingly straightforward narratives of sentimentality and redemption contain complex and often self-contradictory messages. Their emphatic and sometimes catachrestic rhetoric suggests that even the most earnest gestures of pop solidarity with Palestine cannot be taken at face value.

Because the analysis of popular culture in the Middle East has sometimes assumed relatively stable, reflective models of representation, the place of irony—and rhetorical analysis—has often been too marginal. In this essay, I discuss the current state of criticism on Middle East popular culture and argue that Egyptian pop Intifadiana shows the usefulness of the rhetorical analysis suggested by Barthes in *Mythologies* and elsewhere. I next consider some prominent rhetorical issues in texts from Egyptian pop Intifadiana, which make an interesting test case for rhetorical study because they are usually seen as transparent indicators of popular sentiment. Finally, I consider some of the ways these rhetorical concerns impact the expression of political solidarity more generally. The lessons offered by rhetorical analysis are not just crucial for reading pop Intifadiana, they also serve to illuminate divergent understandings of what it means to be in political solidarity. In this regard, I consider the rhetoric of solidarity with Palestine from two different perspectives: from contemporary critical

discussions of solidarity and from Jean-Luc Godard's *Ici et ailleurs*, which puts ambiguity, irony, and the self-reflexive consideration of filmic rhetoric at the heart of a politics of solidarity. By way of conclusion, I argue that other rhetorics of solidarity are a useful gauge, not just for measuring the shortcomings of the mythological forms of solidarity that dominate Egyptian pop Intifadiana, but also for imagining others forms of political alliance.

Rhetoric and Cultural Studies

Recent cultural criticism on the Middle Eastern pop culture can be divided into three groups. One body of literature tends toward macroanalysis of pop culture networks and "public spheres." In these accounts, mass culture appears as an arena of "information" in which texts clearly reflect larger social phenomena.⁶ Another body of criticism provides ethnographic accounts of cultural reception.⁷ Both kinds of analysis often forgo the close reading of individual texts in favor of broader sociological descriptions. In these literatures little attention is paid to rhetorical issues—especially those raised by parody, irony, and ambiguity—that might complicate reflective theory. This aversion to rhetorical analysis is surprising given the array of Middle Eastern popular cultural genres and traditions that thrive on ambiguity and irony.

However, the ambiguities of rhetoric, form, and performance have been an important part of a third segment of the critical literature on Middle Eastern pop culture. Critics have noted unstable rhetoric around certain topics, from the traditional *mawwal* to drag performance, in Middle Eastern music, just as they have commented on traditions of ironic literature, from the *maqama* to the comic strip, and the ambiguities contained in erotic oral poetry.⁸ However, with regard to *visual* mass media (photography, film, and video) in Egypt, cultural critics have tended to read texts as if they were reflective of social and political phenomena and to imply that this reflection is transparent and stable.⁹ This tendency is due in part to the centrality of didactic generic traditions in Egyptian culture, such as social realism, which asserts claims about identity and "authenticity" (*asala*).¹⁰ In Egyptian cinema, the question of identity has been dominant and thematically connected with the twin legacies of modernization and colonial rule. As Viola Shafik observes, it is no accident that realism's referential style predominates in Egyptian cinema's late colonial and early postindependence period: "Because of its sociopolitical commitment and anti-colonialist atti-

tude, realism was considered, more than other genres, as an expression of national culture . . . Realism performs a conserving and reflective function that is immensely important for the formerly colonized, who were deprived even of their own image."¹¹

Although Shafik's comments about the centrality and motivation of social realism ring true, she, like other critics, tends to accept the rhetoric of cinemagraphic realism in Egypt as if the image of authentic Egyptian identity it offered existed in a stable relationship with a sociological type. In such cases, the rhetoric of the film text is treated as if it were natural and transparent; indeed, though much has been said about the *narrative* structures of Egyptian realist cinema, much less has been said about its *visual* structures. Some realist films may indeed suggest transparent and referential readings, but the rhetoric of other important genres in Egyptian cinema, especially melodrama, problematize such readings.¹² Similarly, the hyperbolic and often *camp* quality of melodrama draws attention to its own rhetorical excesses and disrupts the genre's apparently earnest and sincere assertions.¹³ To read texts as complicated, even conflicted, is not to privilege irony and ambiguity, but to insist on their place in pop culture production and cultural studies analysis. Nonetheless, some critics have been reluctant to read for such irony in realist cinema and other ostensibly "straight" genres. There may be good reasons for this hesitancy. As Walter Armbrust has pointed out, there are dangers that arise when critics from different cultures attempt the rhetorical reading of texts: "Americans may view classically 'bad' films with a kind of ironic detachment. I rarely noticed this with my Egyptian friends, but it is very hard to judge irony even in a tradition one knows thoroughly and even among people one has grown up with. To be sure of attitudes is hard."¹⁴ Likewise, Armbrust argues, this ironic detachment is also a register for articulating class-based notions of taste, one that allows critics to denounce (as vulgar) or celebrate (as kitsch) texts encountered in popular culture. Because Armbrust is acutely attuned to the ironic possibilities in Egyptian popular culture, his wariness cannot be easily disregarded. Nevertheless, his warning is directed against confusing the rhetorical possibilities of a text with the responses, the "attitudes," of actual audiences, in this case, American and Egyptian viewers. And though he is attentive to the internal rhetoric of popular texts, his focus is, in the end, on how they are received in the "real lives" of audiences. His focus, in other words, is on an understanding of rhetoric to be about performance and response, elocution and response, in an empirical sense.

Yet, as Roland Barthes noted, the empirical understanding of rhetoric does not exhaust the possibilities of the term, because for much of its history that tradition was more concerned with the exhaustive description of figures.¹⁵ Although it may seem strange to argue for the contemporary relevance of rhetoric as the study of figure, such a method is uniquely suited for sifting through the complicated and often self-contradictory texture of Egyptian pop culture. What, other than apparently archaic rhetorical terms, such as *auxesis* (the augmentative form of *hyperbole*) and *bathos* (an abrupt shift from an elevated to a commonplace theme), can more precisely describe the rhetorical basis on which rest the parodies of "al-Hulm al-'arabi"?

Myths of Solidarity: Pop Intifadiana

Alongside the popular protests that erupted in Egypt during fall 2000 (at the outset of the al-Aqsa Intifada), and then again in spring and summer 2002, a new pop culture of solidarity with Palestine emerged. Nowhere was this more evident than in the state media. Unlike earlier moments in the Arab-Israeli conflict, when the Egyptian media, including the opposition press, paid little, if any attention to events in the Occupied Territories, news of Palestinian suffering and militancy became a regular and prominent feature in newspapers and on state tv.¹⁶ The host of the press review program *Editor-in-Chief* urged the audience to honor the boycott against Israel and contestants on the Egyptian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* were asked trivia questions about martyr operations (suicide bombings) in the Occupied Territories. The once oppositional stance of antinormalization became the official editorial policy of the state news agencies. In Egypt's state and private media, songs, videos, films, and advertising offering frankly mercantile stereotypes of Palestinian struggle began to appear in late 2000. Images of raised guns, the Dome of the Rock, Palestinian flags, and kufiyas began to adorn cassette tapes of pop stars—even those who did little more than croon sentimental ballads. Following the siege of Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah in April 2002, a new snack food appeared in the slums of Cairo: Abu 'Ammar Corn Snacks featured a cartoon of a confused-looking Arafat wearing fatigues.

Perhaps no image was so ubiquitous as that of Muhammad al-Durra, the young boy killed in October 2000 by Israeli gunfire. Within months, the boy's picture had appeared in countless music videos and films and on products from t-shirts to boxes of Kleenex. Arguably, the primary sig-

nificance of al-Durra's image lay in the fact that it seemed to record, without embellishment, a horrific death suffered by Palestinian civilians at the hands of the Israeli military.

The video image of Muhammad al-Durra first appeared in Egyptian pop culture (and elsewhere) as a picture of the truth of Israeli crimes and Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories.¹⁷ Even if the image was deployed metaphorically, as a particular example of a wider pattern of atrocities (as opposed to the record of a single event), this did not mean the image itself was anything like a metaphor. The fact that al-Durra's death was recorded in real time and in unembellished video footage suggested that this was a literal (rather than figurative) image of a boy being killed, that it was an actual (rather than metaphorical) image of Israeli atrocity.

Admittedly, much of what lends pathos to the image is indeed its literal quality, an unadorned depiction of something that really happened. But the image, which appears to need no explanation, was always accompanied from the earliest broadcasts by commentary and narrative that helped to shape its meaning. For instance, when the video was first shown, viewers were informed that this was footage of a boy "about to be killed."¹⁸ Thus, the framing commentary played a crucial role for transforming the footage from an image of death into a familiar narrative genre: *tragedy*. By drawing attention to the narrative rhetoric of the image, I am not suggesting that its indexical gesture is indeterminate or denying that it is the record of an event that happened. Rather, I want to draw attention to how the presentation of al-Durra's image includes not just the horrific events as recorded by the video footage, but also a voice-over narrative that tells, in advance, the horrible outcome of the event before it appears visually. It is undeniably horrifying that al-Durra dies before our eyes and that we know it to be an actual event. But what is *tragic* is that we know the outcome before we see the event and yet are powerless to stop it from transpiring.

The foretold death of Muhammad al-Durra is not the only tragic aspect of the image. Importantly, it also shows Muhammad's father holding him, trying to squeeze their bodies into an impossible space between a barrier and a wall. The father attempts to shield his son's body from the bullets raining down on them. This depiction of the father's failure to save the life of his own son is no less significant to the rhetoric of the image. The image is able to depict the *pathos* of both loss and death at the same time. This *pathos* of Muhammad's death is interwoven with another, as the image depicts the brutally public exposure, of a powerless and intimate fatherly sentiment that is normally the provenance of the private sphere. This aspect

of the image was not lost in the culture of Egyptian pop solidarity; indeed, the pop performer Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim recorded a hit, "Qataluni ya-Ba!" (They've killed me, Father!) that spells out the pathos of this father-son tragedy.¹⁹

The public desecration of what is normally domestic is central to the way al-Durra's image communicates innocence and violation. This particular narrative of victimization—the public violation of familial intimacy—is a common feature of sentimental narrative. In this way, al-Durra's image does more than record an unembellished fact of death and atrocity. It also narrates, through recognizable structures, a story of foretold outcomes, powerlessness, and the violation of domestic innocence. In this sense, we might say that the way al-Durra's image circulates in Egyptian pop culture exemplifies mythology in the Barthesian sense: its putative meaning (the literal image of death and suffering) obtains only by obscuring the rhetorical constructs (the framing commentary, the tragic and sentimental narrative structures) at work in the text. If al-Durra's image has circulated in Egyptian pop culture as the unembellished truth of Israeli war crimes in the Occupied Territories, it is largely because it has been presented as if it were a nonrhetorical representation.

Yet, some in Egypt recognized the rhetorical quality of al-Durra's image, even if only to protect its mythological status. Troubled about the deployment of the image on so many different cultural goods, state censor Madkour Thabet intervened: "Al-Durra's photo has appeared on most cassette tape covers, no matter what's inside. To protect this sacred symbol from vulgar commercial exploitation, I have now banned its use, except in cases where it is related to the theme of the album."²⁰ This intervention into the excessive use of al-Durra's image suggests that, at least from Thabet's point of view, there need to be norms guiding its deployment and rules for distinguishing appropriate uses from inappropriate ones. But why would inappropriate uses threaten the "sacred" character of al-Durra's image? In the language of rhetoric, what Thabet feared—the inappropriate use of al-Durra's image—might be best called *catachresis*, the strained use (or misuse) of a figure. The central significance of al-Durra's image in the culture of pop solidarity is mythological, an effect of the way it presents itself as a literal (as opposed to figurative) image, as unadorned truth rather than rhetorical affect. The image of al-Durra circulates as if it were a pure signified. Its misuse draws attention to the fact that it is not a signified, but a signifier, a piece of rhetoric. But al-Durra's image remained a "sacred symbol" only insofar as it appeared as something natural whose meaning was

self-evident, nonconstructed, generalizable. Herein lies the threat posed by catachresis to mythmaking: by drawing attention to the rhetorical structures underlying the image, excessive or strained use exposes the mechanics of mythmaking. In this way, the attention that the text's rhetoric draws to its constructed status (its figurative quality) undermines its status as sacred.

The mythology presented in the video image of al-Durra's death was a sentimental narrative about Palestinian sacrifice and tragedy. This narrative was intentionally attached to others that developed the theme by exploring images of redemption and victory. Take, for instance, the videoclip for "Ya Quds" (O Jerusalem) by the Syrian popular performer Majd Qasim, which appeared in Egypt via regional satellite stations such as Arab tv and Dream tv. In Qasim's videoclip, the singer croons as his visage, framed against an empty black background, dissolves into a dizzying montage of images: funeral mourners fade into the Jordan Arab Legion and then into a seascape; Lebanese cedars fade into pairs of cute, nesting birds, which fade into views of Jerusalem and then into an image of Arafat in tears; images drawn from Yousef Chahine's 1963 epic *Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi* (Saladin) are transposed with clips from Mustafa Akkad's 1981 tale of anticolonial resistance in Libya, *Lion of the Desert*; footage of the 1973 October war cuts into archival footage from the 1936–39 revolt in Palestine; images of fedayeen appear next to pictures of Ben Gurion, Dayan, and Meir; a Quranic verse with special reference to martyrdom is juxtaposed with pictures of the Crucifixion, pilgrims at Mecca, a Jewish West Bank settlement, and the Dome of the Rock. Some of these images, such as *Saladin* and the Dome of the Rock, make sense individually and seem to build organically on themes in the lyrics. The relevance of others is less direct but connected to the theme of anticolonial resistance. Still others, such as nesting art birds, suggesting innocence and domesticity, seem quite tangential. Taken together, these images seem to form a rhetorical hodgepodge, yet the exaggerated polysemy of the visual montage is apparently meant to amplify the message of the lyrics. What is revealing about the text's catachrestic rhetoric is that its very excess lays bare the various symbolic orders invoked by the images: the images of domesticity, violation, mourning, and personal sacrifice invoke a discourse of sentimentality, innocence, and redemption for Palestinians; the iconography of Muslim and Christian piety, and the special sanctity of Jerusalem for Christians and Muslims, suggests both the transsectarian unity of Arabs and their essential difference from the Jewish state's barbarism; and the symbolism of armed struggle creates a

transhistorical movement that links all Arabs fighting forms of colonial rule, from Crusaders to Italian fascists to Israelis. In this sense, it is the *strained use* of images that helps to reveal their rhetorical contours and to suggest how they might compose a single coherent narrative where the sentimental narrative, the Israeli violation of Palestinian Jerusalem, would find redemption in decisive military action on the part of a unified pan-Arab community.

The rhetorical strain of another popular Intifadiana video, "Ubrit thawrat abtal" (Operetta of the heroes' revolution), is even more problematic. "Operetta" opens with flames, behind which a group of performers chants and sways and fades into a scene of Middle Eastern urban ghetto, with graffiti and crowds of kufiya-clad youths waving Palestinian flags. Confronting soldiers whose helmets are emblazoned with the Star of David, the main hero of the operetta, Palestinian vocalist Yusuf al-Katri, faces the Israeli troops and sings defiantly: "Our revolution is a revolution of heroes / We stand, with stones, to die for you [Palestine]!" (see figure 18).

One by one, Egyptian pop performers (Ahmed Gohar, Hasan 'Abdel Mageed, Ahmad al-Shawki, Walid al-Husayni) pick up the song's thread. Each performer steps forward and delivers his lyrics in the face of Israeli soldiers. Behind them, against an ornate set more reminiscent of Cairo's dilapidated streets than of Gaza, "Palestinian" youths ceaselessly wave flags and hurl stones toward the camera. At times, the lyrics present a call and response. Al-Katri sings, "My roots are Palestinian, stubborn / Dying, stone in hand," and Hasan 'Abd al-Mageed sings back in empathy, "Ahhhhhh! / And we're coming / to Jerusalem, the Pure, the Luminous!" followed by the refrain, "We're not afraid, nor have we retreated a single step." By this moment, it has become clear that the "we" of the refrain refers not just to those Palestinians taking part in the Intifada but also to those Egyptians who stand with them in their struggle. This is the myth offered by the video: that Egyptians and Palestinians are naturally unified and essentially defiant. Like other pop solidarity texts, "Ubrit" makes use of video footage in the attempt to argue that its assertions reflect a literal reality. Yet, the exaggerated quality of video's earnest tone is more problematic than may first appear.

As al-Katri begins to sing, he is posed squarely *against* the camera, stone in hand, and his face is framed by his armed opponents. The lens never wavers from this position, squared against the performers, the point of view of the Israeli outpost. This contrary visual perspective serves to heighten the defiant tone of the performers' stance and, along with the gesture of

solidarity, is arguably the main theme of the song itself. While the lyrics of the song are at times addressed to Palestine, the static and contrary camera angle compels the viewer to observe the operetta from the soldiers' viewpoint. Put differently, while the video's audio text is aimed at Egyptian and Arab audiences, its visual rhetoric addresses its audience as if they were Israelis.

Though meant to underscore the stance of opposition, the angle of the video lens is only one way in which the text's visual rhetoric conflicts with the apparent message of the song's lyrics. The images of nonstop street action are juxtaposed with familiar footage of real-life scenes: funeral processions, the faces of grieving relatives, bloody confrontations, wounded casualties. The effect of the video footage initially seems indexical, intended to root the operetta in actual events taking place in Palestine. But the repetitive media images of suffering and oppression begin to jar with the scripted tenor of the music video. Moreover, as much as the video footage appears to signal real-life events, the repetition of stock-footage imagery in this video (as in others), gives it a clichéd, already-seen quality. Thus, while the rhetorical use of video footage gestures again toward the real, the hyperbole of these real-life images draws attention to their generic status. Likewise, the sets and costumes, apparently designed to create a real sense of urban occupation grit, also appear exaggeratedly composed.

The point is not to criticize "Operetta" for being unrealistic, but to show that its inflated rhetoric, intended to emphasize the real-life quality of its depiction of Palestinian defiance, is more complicated and confused than might first appear. Moreover, the video's stance of solidarity is muddled, not simply because its hyperbolic gesture of defiance undermines itself, but also because it combines symbols and genres whose meanings do not cohere. The serious moral message of the text—drawing a sharp division between occupier and occupied, oppressor and resister—is perhaps badly suited to the music video genre, with its performers' slick choreographed movements, crisp costumes, and the elaborate set.

Amid the text's rhetorical confusion, other symbolic systems also fail to cohere. Throughout the video, flames are superimposed over the checkpoint scene. Like other Egyptian pop culture texts that draw analogies between present-day Palestinian suffering and the past suffering of European Jews, the video's superimposition of flames marks an attempt to invoke the Holocaust for the Palestinian cause. But this rhetorical gesture is juxtaposed to a frankly racist graffito—"la li-l-yuhud" (No Jews)—prominently

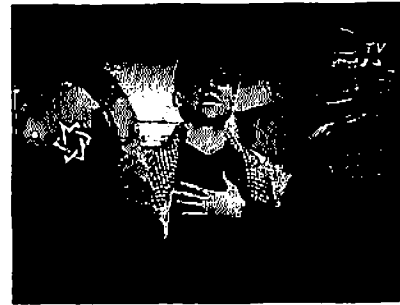


FIGURE 18. Palestinian singer Yusuf al-Katri, "Operetta of the Heroes' Revolution" video.



FIGURE 19. "No Jews": Egyptian singer Ahmed Gohar, "Operetta of the Heroes' Revolution" video.

emblazoned on one wall of the set (see figure 19). In the context of the video's other messages, this slogan seems to reverse the usual lessons of the Holocaust and suggests that European Jews deserved to suffer genocide. It also appears to interpret Palestinian suffering as the result not of Zionist colonialism, but of Jewish existence itself.

Here it is obvious that the rhetoric of the video operetta is not just confused but *preposterous*. The term remains useful, as Jonathan Goldberg has argued, for exploring discursive confusions. The preposterous is the Anglicization of the term from classical Greek rhetoric, *histeron proteron*, "a form of disordered speech in which the cart is put before the horse."²¹ In the context of this video, we might correctly call preposterous the reversals in which Israeli racism toward Arabs is answered with anti-Jewish slogans and the Holocaust is suggested to belong more properly to Palestinian than Jewish history. To call a rhetorical figure, such as the use of a symbol or slogan, preposterous is to criticize its impropriety. But what other word better describes the video's attempt to reverse sedimented symbols of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust by invoking them alongside the defiant, political slogans

of the lyrics, alongside the pop style of the emphatic choreography and the sentimental singing, alongside video footage that gestures toward tragedies from the actual Intifada? What causes problems for "Operetta of the Heroes' Revolution" is, for the most part, not images, camera angles, and slogans that are "improper." Rather, it is the exaggerated attempt to combine them in a rhetorical equation that proves impossible to sustain. Again, the strained deployment of figures reveals the mythical contours of the text: the attempt to expose Israeli crimes against Palestinians by linking it to the history of European anti-Semitism; the assertion that pan-Arab unity and militancy is natural; the attempt to illustrate the urgency of the Palestinian situation by couching it in a sentimental register of suffering, loss, and mourning.

At first glance, no statement of pop solidarity could seem more straightforward and earnest than the message of the most spectacular example of pop Intifadiana, Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim's infamous hit, "Akrah Isra'il" (I hate Israel), released in fall 2000. Against an indomitable dance beat, Sha'ban belts out lines like:

I hate Israel, and will say so if asked
 God willing, I'll be killed for it or thrown in prison . . .
 I hate Israel, and I hate Ehud Barak
 Because he's got no sense of humor and everyone hates him.

When the song first came out, the Israeli ambassador officially complained to the Egyptian government, creating a minor diplomatic crisis. Most critics have interpreted the song's text as an unambiguous declaration that resonates with popular Egyptian opposition to Israel's policies toward the Palestinians. Likewise, Egyptian critics, especially leftists, sought to claim Sha'ban as a voice of popular opposition, expressing in direct and simple phrases the natural solidarity between Egyptians and Palestinians. Yet, further consideration of the song in light of Sha'ban's notorious career suggests that its rhetoric may not be so simple.

The words that most offended Israel's ambassador, and bluntly indicated Sha'ban's oppositional views, were those of the title and its repeated refrain: "I hate Israel." However, the emphatic words originated not with the performer or his lyricist, who had titled the song "I Don't Like Israel," but with the state censor, Madkour Thabet, who changed the title to "I Hate Israel" to better reflect "the state of people's feelings."²² Likewise, Sha'ban was reportedly encouraged to balance his attacks on Israeli leaders with praise for the Mubarak regime. Thus, "I Hate Israel" includes lines such as:

I love Hosni Mubarak because his heart is so big
 He weighs every step he takes with his conscience . . .
 I love 'Amr Moussa, his thinking is judicious . . .
 I love Yasser Arafat, he's the dearest one to me.

Sha'ban's energetic praise for Mubarak and Egypt's foreign minister 'Amr Moussa begs the first question of panegyric verse: Is the singer sincere? Here, the character of the poet is an important context for evaluating his sincerity, and Sha'ban's reputation is one that undermines any such claim, for he has always bragged about his drug use, lack of education, and rough and thuggish lifestyle.²³

Only months before "I Hate Israel," Sha'ban released another hit, "Habbatal al-sigayyir" (I'm going to quit smoking), which appears to embrace a message of middle-class morality and to decry the ills of carousing:

I'm going to quit smoking, and become a new person
 On January 1, it's over! I'm going to start working out . . .
 I'm going to chew king-size seeds, and drink my tea light
 I'm going to go down to the market and buy a clean new shirt.

Barely able to stop from laughing as he sings, Sha'ban goes on to list the various ways he is going to straighten out. Although he does mention the health dangers associated with smoking, his noble intentions are put into doubt by his playful delivery. And, as he sings about relaxing on the grass ("al-hashish"), it is clear that the "grass" to which he refers may not be so innocent. The message of this text is certainly at odds with the surface of the word. It is hard to imagine that listeners, hearing the hyperbolic lyrics and his comic delivery, thought that Sha'ban actually meant to change his life to suit in accordance with mainstream norms. Quite the opposite: the song itself, by mimicking those values to such exaggeration, holds them up to ridicule.

What about Sha'ban's praise for Mubarak's regime in "I Hate Israel"? Despite (or because of) his hyperbolic rhetoric, no one would argue that his music voices an official position. Sha'ban remains barred from state radio and television on the grounds of his "vulgarity." The parliamentary media committee chair declared: "Sha'ban does not represent any artistic or cultural value. In addition, his weird attire, which is far from good taste, affects our youth who are influenced by what they see on television."²⁴ But do Sha'ban's exclusion from state media and the mass popularity of his tapes make him an oppositional figure? Again, the answer seems ambig-

ous.²⁵ But even then, no one could credibly argue that Sha'ban himself adheres to any line of solidarity with the Palestinian uprising, for, as he made clear in interviews, the motivation for his song had to do with business, not politics: "I'm really happy that our politicians feel it's so important to talk about a simple man like me. These people say that I'm a rough man. But who cares? Every time they talk about me, I sell more records."²⁶ Meanwhile, in 2001, as thousands of Egyptians began to boycott U.S. corporations that do business with Israel, Sha'ban was hired by McDonald's to sing a jingle about their new McFalafel sandwiches: "If you eat one bite, you can't stop before finishing the whole roll."²⁷ Sha'ban was fired shortly thereafter, when the American Jewish Committee pressured the company to drop him. This nexus of state censorial management, commercial appeal, and oppositional posturing that helped to produce and broadcast Sha'ban's supposedly straightforward anti-Israeli pop hit illustrates the ambiguity that stands at the heart of Egypt's pop culture of solidarity with Palestine.²⁸

Myth and Solidarity

Solidarity is not discovered by reflection, but created. — RICHARD RORTY, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*

Solidarity does not include unqualified support . . . rather it excludes unqualified support. — AGNES HELLER AND FERENC FEHÉR, "Citizen Ethics and Civic Virtues"

Given the ambiguity of Egyptian pop Intifadiana, it is difficult to say what sort of solidarity politics it enables. Moreover, the implicit politics of pop solidarity diverge strongly from the oppositional politics of Egypt's antinormalization movement. Antinormalization, at least at its high point in the 1980s, foregrounded images of collective action and historical narratives of opposition.²⁹ Far from being part of the mainstream of commercial culture institutions and the state media, antinormalization discourse critiqued them from outside. The rhetoric of today's pop Intifadiana, by contrast, tends to highlight—mythologize—the actions of individuals motivated by spontaneous, eruptive feelings rather than historical understandings.

The narrative structures of sentimentality and redemption constitute the bulk of the messages offered by the pop culture of solidarity, and the myth of the Palestinian uprising they construct is a problematic one. In

the pop myth of the *sentimental* Intifada, Palestinians appear as innocent victims, passive recipients of Israeli barbarism. Palestinians occupy one of the positions offered by the al-Durra image: the dying child or the grieving parent. In pointing out that such images form the basis for a familiar, generic narrative of innocence, I am not suggesting that they do not reflect actual and sadly common occurrences. Rather, I am drawing attention to how they construct a particular narrative, one in which Palestinians appear as objects of Israeli history rather than subjects of their own history. Alongside sentimentalism operates the other central myth, the Intifada as *redemption*. This narrative focuses on the heroic images of armed militants and the iconography of martyrs, both unintentional (like al-Durra) and intentional (suicide bombers). Whereas the sentimental narrative tells a story of passivity, the redemptive one articulates a particular sense of Palestinian agency. The first narrative highlights the dispossession and violation of Palestine, the second, its recovery through exceptional acts of violence and sacrifice. Again, such acts are indisputably a part of contemporary Palestinian experience. Nonetheless, Palestinian intellectuals have criticized the mythologization of martyrdom actions.³⁰ For instance, filmmaker Sobhi al-Zobaidi has pointed out that the glorification of the Palestinian martyr leaves little space for collective action.³¹ Moreover, this narrative privileges violence over other important means (boycotts, peaceful demonstrations, steadfast refusal to leave) by which Palestinians resist the occupation. Such narratives elevate the singular over the collective, the heroic over the mundane, and privilege spectacular forms of resistance over others.

As I have been arguing, these pop Intifadiana texts share the tendency to present images as natural and transparent, as inherent truths rather than as figures deliberately created and juxtaposed. Such images circulate not so much to exemplify or symbolize, but to *be* the victimization of the Palestinians living under military occupation. As myth, where "things appear to mean something by themselves," the images presented by Egyptian pop solidarity appear as facts.³² Rhetorical analysis shows that not only do these texts actively work to construct narratives, but they do so in a way that consistently disavows this agency. I have been arguing that it is the disavowed presentation of sentimental (or pathetic, or redemptive) images as natural, transparent truth that constitutes the mythical quality of Egyptian pop solidarity discourse. But this argument begs a series of questions: What might other, less mythological solidarity politics look like? What kind of solidarity politics might be enabled by a practice of representation that did

not seek to disavow the agency of mediation but to own it? Finally, might not rhetorical construction be seen as a form of agency, one that was not at odds with, but rather a constitutive part of political solidarity?

These questions appear all the more urgent given their strong resonance with the critical literature on solidarity, whose recurring argument is whether this state is natural or willed, and whether it is based on an assertion of shared identity or one of difference. In contemporary philosophical and sociological literature, there is a rough consensus that political solidarity is not a relationship of natural unity, nor does it reflect a shared identity. Anthony Giddens, for whom political solidarity implies reciprocal obligation, ties the concept of solidarity to Durkheim's observation about modern shifts from "community" (received social bodies) to "association" (actively constructed social organizations).¹¹ For his part, Jürgen Habermas associates solidarity with a Sartrean notion of "commitment," that is, a willed, active engagement.¹² The question of solidarity has had an especially central place in the work of Richard Rorty, who has developed it along antiessentialist, anti-identitarian lines. Solidarity, he writes, "is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences as unimportant when compared to similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of us."¹³ In Rorty's "liberal ironist" conception, solidarity is made, not given; moreover, it is a dialectical process, where any sense of "we" moves to consideration of "them." Michael A. Principe has further developed this active sense of political solidarity, stressing that rather than being associated with shared identities, solidarity is precisely a mode for thinking through coalition based on difference. His argument begins with the observation that some concepts (such as Rorty's) privilege the notion of "being in solidarity" over "acting in solidarity." Drawing on a Sartrean concept of responsibility, Principe overturns the notion that solidarity is primarily concerned with commonality, a notion he associates with the term "being." For him "acting in solidarity" stresses that solidarity is not about the assertion of shared identity, but is the ability of different groups to act in alliance: "[An] advantage of this theorization of the relationship of solidarity to responsibility is that it makes much more sense of how we can stand in solidarity with those that are unlike us. It seems important that we be able to act in solidarity with those that are at least in some important senses not 'one of us.'" ¹⁴

It may seem abrupt to bring this literature to bear on the texts of Egyp-

tian pop Intifadiana, but this juxtaposition does reveal one of its mythical assumptions: that Egyptian solidarity with Palestine is natural and based on an implied identity shared by Egyptians and Palestinians. The fact that terms (such as obligation, responsibility, dialectical relationship) associated with this critical tradition of theorizing solidarity are notably absent from the texts of pop solidarity further underscores the problematic nature of Egyptian solidarity myths.¹⁵

There is a small body of aesthetic works that take solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement as their theme and root their articulation of solidarity in a critical reflection on the media through which such representations occur.¹⁶ Perhaps no filmic text better embodies these insights than *Ici et ailleurs* (Here and elsewhere). In spring 1970, Jean-Luc Godard's collaborators, Anne-Marie Mieville and Jean-Pierre Gorin, traveled to Jordan to shoot a film not just about the Palestinian resistance movement but in solidarity with it. Commissioned by the PLO and the Arab League, Mieville and Gorin shot some of the most interesting footage extant about this phase of the Palestinian struggle. In accordance with the original producers, the footage was initially organized under five slogans of the Palestinian resistance: "The Will of the People," "The Armed Struggle," "Political Work," "The Prolonged Struggle," and "Until Victory." Had the September 1970 events not intervened, this might have turned out to be a straightforward propaganda film, a myth of solidarity par excellence. However, after the September slaughter of thousands of Palestinians by the Jordanian army, this unedited footage took on new significance. Many of the fedayeen who had been filmed were now dead, and so was the guerrilla movement in Jordan. *Ici et ailleurs* did not appear for another four years, by which time the fedayi image of Palestinian liberation had been eclipsed by images of Palestinian terrorists whose name, Black September, commemorated the death of armed resistance from Jordan and inaugurated another, increasingly media-focused strategy of struggle.

When the revised film appeared in 1974, the images of the murdered revolution had been reassembled so as to reflect critically on the formal problems of political and aesthetic representation. Using the very elements of mythmaking—from the five slogans to cliché images of Palestinians in armed struggle—Godard's film presents a solidaristic text that simultaneously asserts and deconstructs its gesture of solidarity. The form of solidarity that *Ici et ailleurs* articulates is one that constantly problematizes itself by embedding its message in a critical analysis of the conditions of its own rhetorical construction. At no time does Godard's assertion of soli-

clarity appear taken for granted, natural. Indeed, much of what the film has to say—about the vanguardism of Palestinian leadership, the European and Palestinian fetishization of revolution, or even the gesture of making political film—is critical to the point where it is easier to see how it diverges from, rather than allies itself with, those people and projects it depicts. But this very difference is a marker of the unique kind of solidarity it has to offer.

Ici et ailleurs presents a systematic lesson in the rhetoric of cinematic texts. It begins by considering molecular units of the cinematic medium, still photographs, commenting on the new meanings created when two images are juxtaposed next to one another. Thus, the presentation of an image of Hitler next to Lenin begins to imply a troubling association, if not equation between Nazism and Sovietism. Later, when images of Kissinger and Moshe Dayan are added, these associations widen to include U.S. power and Zionism. The film then reflects on the metaphoric play of montage, the quick replacement of one image by another that creates the illusion of the moving picture. Next, the film didactically shows how sound creates and intensifies the meanings at play on the visual register. Finally, *Ici et ailleurs* adds voice-over commentary that at times overscores and at times undermines the audiovisual text of the film. At each level, *Ici et ailleurs* is concerned with how meaning is created by the juxtaposition and substitution (through editing) of different texts: whether it is one image placed next to another in a single frame, images that replace one another sequentially through montage, or a sound placed next to an image, and so on.

To a large extent, it is the flexibility and precision of the film's framing pair of metaphors, *here* and *there*, that allows it to explore so thoroughly a range of issues around the filmic medium. The film reflects on the play of signification in these terms: *here* stands in for the images (or sounds) presented, and *there* becomes the meaning created by their juxtaposition and montage. At times, one sense of *here* in the film is associated with the material signifiers (images, sounds) of the text, while *there* is associated with the signifieds (such as those created by the startling associations of images). But, even as the film creates associations (such as those between Nazism, Sovietism, Americanism, and Zionism), it does so in a way that deliberately avoids positing identities between signifiers and signifieds. At no point does the film explicitly draw an equation between Hitler, Kissinger, and Dayan, though the suggestion is quite strong. The very instability and contingency of these significations is signaled by the terms *here* and

there, terms that, we should remember, point only to a shifting relationship and never an actual place.

Ici et ailleurs also interrogates the relationship of the photographic image and the material thing it purports to represent. In this way, *here* again signals to the filmic text's signifiers, and *there* indicates the referents they depict. Again, the metaphors suggest that this relationship between signifier and referent is one of radical difference. Indeed, any notion of an identity between Godard's images of Palestinian revolution and actual Palestinian revolution is made tenuous by the fact that the 1970 image depicted something that no longer existed in 1974. In this sense, Godard's images of revolution eclipsed the movement. The film thus radically reconsiders what is sometimes assumed to be the most natural meaning of the photographic image: its capacity to record. Godard's critical engagement with the filmic medium underscores the fact that it is not an index of an existing referent, but the index of an absent referent. Indeed, rather than suggesting a sense of *here*, the filmic signifiers of the text suggest something else, an *elsewhere*.³⁹ In this way, *Ici et ailleurs* insists on a relationship with its putative object of study—Palestinian revolution—that stresses critical difference rather than mimetic identity.

It is at this moment that Godard's critique of representational *politics* begins to show itself. Rather than assume identities, whether between signifiers and signifieds or between signifiers and referents, Godard reflects on the formal means by which the filmic medium poses such identities in the first place. The film suggests that such assertions are the effect of substitutions: the signified that replaces the signifier, the signifier that replaces the referent. For Godard, this act of substitution is at the heart of mythical forms of solidarity; indeed, what *Ici et ailleurs* suggests is that the solidaristic text that presents images of others' struggles as if they were natural and transparent (as if they were noninterpretative, as if they were facts) is to replace actual struggle with its image, to replace a movement with representations. This act of substitution is, for Godard, an act of violence.

But this act of violence is more than an issue of the filmic medium, for the substitutive logic of the mythical form of aesthetic representation is also that of vanguardist forms of political representation. One of the many senses of *here* and *there* developed in *Ici et ailleurs* is the distance between the vanguardist leader/film director and the movement/image of his creation. Like realist cinema, the ideology of vanguardism disavows any distance between *here/there*, image/revolution, party/people. This disavowal is crucial if the second term, the created figure, the text is to take on a

life that appears to be independent of the author. Godard's critique shows that this blurring serves to hide the first terms (here, image, party, author), while also privileging them over the second terms (there, revolution, people, text). In this vein, *Ici et ailleurs* returns often to the staged quality of the relationship between leaders who speak on behalf of the Palestinian movement and the people in the movement who are spoken for. At one point in the film, a young Palestinian woman speaks to the camera in an apparently unscripted moment about her aspirations for the revolution. Later, the film replays this footage, though this time there is a woman's voice-over revealing that the moment has been scripted by the director: not only is the spokeswoman not who she first seemed to be, but we are told that her words were fed to her by a director who stands off-camera. This standing off-camera constitutes the mythical disavowal of political vanguardism and its central problematic: the image and the party become (and stand in for) the revolution and the people; it effectively speaks for the movement while admitting only to an act of speaking about.⁴⁰ As such, the discourse of vanguardism proposes a language of presence and transparency, while its grammar functions in terms of proxy and replacement. *Here* becomes *there* by means of a series of equations and proxy substitutions, a technique the film associates explicitly with fascism. Godard's aesthetic strategy is to put these rhetorical structures back into the frame of the film so as to denaturalize the kind of ventriloquism that drives actors, whether they act in film or in political movements. In Barthesian terms, *Ici et ailleurs* presents both the myth of the solidarity (vanguardist) text and its deconstruction.

But, as the film asserts, the move to deconstruct is not opposed to the gesture of solidarity. That is because the other sense of *here* and *there* developed in *Ici et ailleurs* quite explicitly critiques what it takes to be empty forms of solidarity. Throughout the film, images of Palestinians in struggle are contrasted with images of a bourgeois family (including the filmmakers) involved in the mundane rituals of commodity culture, from eating dinner to watching television. The juxtaposition is startling and suggests that if there is solidarity between the French middle class and Palestinians in revolt, it is neither dialectical nor one of mutual obligation. It is the utter failure to act in solidarity with Palestinians that shows the emptiness of the claim to be in solidarity. Coming in the wake of 1968, some of the text's sharpest barbs are directed at the failures of revolution in France, or, in the terms of the film, revolution *here*. When a voice-over repeats the enigmatic statement "Pauvre revolutionnaire: millionnaire des images," it ad-

dresses the status of the image that third world revolution came to have in small circles of French intellectual life following 1968.⁴¹ In so doing, it poses uncomfortable questions about solidarity politics that turn first world intellectuals toward third world struggles and that make the term "Palestine" synonymous with "revolution" and "elsewhere," where revolution *over there* might serve as a consolation for the failure, or postponement, of revolution *here*.

It is this last point that contains some of the most profound critiques for rethinking the sort of solidarity politics offered by Egyptian pop Intifadiana. In the text of *Ici et ailleurs*, the failures of the PLO in the 1970s are ascribed not just to mythical forms of propagandistic culture and to problems in the representational politics of vanguardism, but also to the place of solidarity in the field of revolutionary political practice. Importantly, Godard's critique of these failures is offered sympathetically—not to denounce the political struggle of Palestinians, but to learn from it. No less important, especially for the concept of solidarity, Godard associates these issues formally and materially with radical French politics in the late 1960s: the critique of the rhetorical structures of Palestinian struggle is brought to bear on the politics of the French left as well. In this vein, Godard argues that solidarity with others elsewhere may be a slogan raised by militants unable (or unwilling) to engage in meaningful revolutionary action in their own local contexts. As *Ici et ailleurs* suggests, the rhetorical drawing together of divergent struggles may be the condition of solidarity politics, but such a politics always rubs up against the mythical sort of image critiqued in the film. Such an image may serve to replace the revolution that it purports to depict *there*, and also the revolution that needs to take place *here*, whether that place refers to Amman, Paris, Cairo or even to the place from which I am writing, Providence.

Notes

1. Produced and aired on satellite channels in 1998, the song features singers from around the Arab world (except Iraq) with a special emphasis on Gulf stars. Performers sing in their own national dialect of Arabic, enacting a tableau of unity-through-variation that stands in stark contrast to the actuality of inter-Arab politics during this period. For a critique of the song, its lyrics, and history, see Joseph Massad, "Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 3 (spring 2003): 21–38, and in this volume.

2. Others include 'Amr Diab's "Jerusalem" and Walid Tawfiq's "Cry of the Stone."

3. See Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and

the Cultural Politics of Modernity," *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local*, edited by Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 190–210. On melodrama in Egyptian cinema, see Yves Thoraval, *Regards sur le cinéma égyptien 1895–1975* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), 21–78; Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 128–143.

4. Barthes invokes the word "myth" to describe the semiological process involved in the transformation of values into fact, or of figurative language (which is rhetorical and value-laden) into language that is said to be transparent, literal, and value-free. The point is not to deny the possibility of truth claims generally, but to explore a specific kind of truth claim that poses itself as nonrhetorical. See *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 130. For Barthes, one of the most seamless forms of myth was "the fact," a statement that, in modern society, has come to have the highest form of authority precisely because it is a sort of description that is ostensibly free of interpretation, value, and rhetoric. For a more recent consideration of the rhetorical figure of the fact, see Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Barthes's link between myth and nature is provocative: "What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality . . . what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality . . . A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature" (*Mythologies*, 142).

5. For the sake of clarity, I draw a distinction between the commercial, Egyptian pop culture of solidarity with Palestine (which is the subject of this essay) and other, more activist-based forms of Egyptian political solidarity with Palestinians. Indeed, the depth of oppositional solidarity practices among Egyptian leftists and Islamists has been profound at times; importantly, its tones both jibe and conflict with the account of pop culture solidarity I am presenting here.

6. See Jon Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, edited by Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 41–56; Dale F. Eickelman, "Communication and Control in the Middle East: Publication and Its Discontents," in *New Media in the Muslim World*, edited by Eickelman and Anderson, 29–40.

7. See Katherine E. Zirbel, "Playing It Both Ways: Local Egyptian Performers between Regional Identity and International Markets," in *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, edited by Walter Armbrust (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 120–145; Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially the chapter entitled "Popular Commentary, Real Lives," 116–164.

8. See, for example, Virginia Danielson's careful attention to the rhetoric of musical performance—stress, repetition, and embellishment—in *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Ted Swedenburg on the multiple, divergent meanings created by transgender performance, "Saida Sultan/Danna International: Transgender Pop and the Polysemiotics of Sex, Nation, and Ethnicity on the Israeli-Egyptian Border," in *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, edited by Walter Armbrust (Berkeley: University of California Press,

2000), 88–119; Marilyn Booth, on the unstable rhetoric of irony in the early twentieth-century literature, *Bayram al-Tunisi's Egypt: Social Criticism and Narrative Strategies* (Oxford: Ithaca Press, 1990); Walter Armbrust's close reading of *Ghazal al-binat* in "The Golden Age before the Golden Age," in *Mass Mediations*, edited by Armbrust, 292–327; Allen Douglas and Fedwa Malti-Douglas on the formal qualities of cartoon genres, *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); and Lila Abu-Lughod's delicate reading of the ambiguities at play in colloquial poetry, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

9. A welcome exception to this is Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

10. On *asala* and the recurring figure of *ibn al-balad*, see Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*, 25–7 and Jessica Winegar, "Claiming Egypt: The Cultural Politics of Artistic Practice in a Postcolonial Society," PhD diss., New York University, 2003, 148–161. On social realism in Egyptian cinema, see Thoraval, *Regards sur le cinéma égyptien 1895–1975*, 21–78; Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 128–143.

11. Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 211, 212.

12. Additionally, as Hosam Aboul-Ela has argued, Isma'il Yasin's classic comedies, especially his parodies of popular films (such as *Isma'il yuqabil Raya wa-Sakina* [Isma'il meets Raya and Sakina]), thrive on exposing the rhetorical quality of categories like identity and authenticity on the levels of both narrative and image, and throw them into confusion ("Subverting the Dominant Paradigm: Ismail Yaseen and the Picaresque Hero in Egyptian Cinema," paper delivered at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting, San Francisco, November 2001).

13. See Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1989), and Lila Abu-Lughod, "Finding a Place for Islam: Egyptian Television Serials and the National Interest," *Public Culture* 5 (1993): 493–513, and "The Objects of Soap Opera," 190–210.

14. Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*, 196–197.

15. Roland Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: An Aide-mémoire," in *The Semiotic Challenge*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 11–93. "Figure" derives from the Latin *figura*, meaning "the made" or "the composed." In the long history of the study of rhetoric, it has most often been paired with (and opposed to) the term "trope," from the Greek *tropēin*, meaning "to turn," or "to swerve." Since Quintilian, rhetoricians have defined these terms in different ways, though most often the definitions have sought to distinguish "figurative language" from "normal language." Metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are just three examples of figures whose meanings are said to diverge from "normal," "proper," or "literal" uses of language. Since Aristotle, the philosophical study of rhetoric has been motivated by a desire to divide reason and logic (which is associated with language assumed to be plain, transparent, unadorned, and nonfigurative) from poetry and eloquence (associated with "turn of phrase," or trope, and "composition," or figure). One of the chief accomplishments of poststructuralist thought has been to show that these divisions between reason and rhetoric (and between normal and figurative language) are arbitrary and untenable. For a lucid summary, see "Figure, Scheme, Trope," in T. V. F. Brogan, ed., *The New*

Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 90-93.

16. See Mustapha K. El-Sayed, "Egyptian Popular Attitudes toward the Palestinians Since 1977," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 4 (summer 1989): 37-51; Kareem Yehia, "The Image of the Palestinians in Egypt, 1982-85," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 2 (winter 1987): 45-63, and "All Our Destinies," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, July 4-10, 2002. On the discourse of antinormalization and the new forms of solidarity politics in Egypt, see my "Solidarity in the Time of Anti-Normalization: Egypt Responds to the Intifada," *Middle East Report* 224 (fall 2002): 10-15.

17. In the Arab world and elsewhere, there was little debate about the truth of the image. However, in the United States, many aspects of the image's truth were disputed in the mainstream press: quoting Israeli army spokesmen, the *New York Times* first implied that Muhammad al-Durra had been killed by Palestinian rather than Israeli bullets, then later acknowledged that while he may have been struck by Israeli fire, it happened during a cross-fire with Palestinian gunmen. Other commentators in Israel and the United States asserted that al-Durra's father bore primary responsibility for bringing the boy to such a dangerous place. Still others argued that Palestinian militants, when they realized the political capital to be gained from such an image, moved so as to draw Israeli fire toward the father and son. Two and a half years after the event, James Fallows has summarized the history of the ideological struggle for control over the image, giving special privilege to the scientific exactitude of Israeli accounts while describing Palestinian accounts as rhetorical and mythological. Despite the logical incoherences of its "radical indeterminacy" assertions, Fallows's essay asserts that (1) it was probably not an Israeli bullet that killed him; (2) al-Durra was perhaps not even killed; (3) his death was staged by Palestinians to make myth; and (4) we will never know definitively because "the case will remain in the uncomfortable realm of events that cannot be fully explained or understood." James Fallows, "Who Shot Mohammed al-Durra?," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 2003.

18. In this sense, al-Durra's image resonates with Barthes's analysis of the image of the convict Lewis Payne on the eve of his execution. In his discussion, Barthes describes the disconcerting fact that the photograph records not just the image of someone who is dead, but also someone who is going to die. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 94-97. Barthes's curiosity, even skepticism, about the recording capacity of the photographic image shows that even what appears to be the most transparent aspect of the most "non-figurative" of expressive mediums exceeds itself.

19. From Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim's cassette "al-Karh shay' qalil, ya Isra'il!" [Hate is a small thing, Israel], Cairo, al-Wadi li-l-intaj, 2002.

20. Quoted in "Intifada Becomes Theme of Egyptian Films, Songs, Art," *Middle East Times*, September 26, 2001.

21. Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodomietries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 4.

22. Andrew Hammond, "When Israel Talks, Cairo Listens," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, September 1, 2001.

23. Tarek Atia, "Shaaban," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 18-24, 2001.

24. Quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, January 18, 2002.

25. The influential literary journal *Akhbar al-Adab* debated whether to compare Sha'ban to Shaykh Imam, whose populist songs inspired an earlier generation of leftist activists: "There is another culture that we don't know anything about, and that is the culture of the lower classes . . . It is a culture marginalized by resentment and arrogance from the cultural elite." Quoted in Hammond, "When Israel Talks, Cairo Listens." On Shaykh Imam, see Kamal Abdel-Malek, *A Study of the Vernacular Poetry of Ahmad Fu'ad Nigm* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990).

26. Quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, January 18, 2002.

27. Associated Press, June 16, 2001.

28. See Joel Gordon, "Singing the Pulse of the Egyptian-Arab Street: Shaaban Abd al-Rahim and the Geo-Pop-Politics of Fast Food," *Popular Music* 22, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.

29. See, for example, *Samidun* (Standing fast), a magazine published by university staff members in the National Committee for Solidarity with the Palestinian and Lebanese People in 1983-1984; *al-Muwajjaha* (Confrontation), published by the Committee for Defense of National Culture during the 1980s. On antinormalization cultural politics, see Barbara Harlow, "Mismar Goha: The Arab Challenge to Cultural Dependency," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (winter 1988): 109-129.

30. On the debates about the discourse of martyrdom in Palestine, see Lori Allen, "There Are Many Reasons Why: Suicide Bombers and Martyrs in Israel," *Middle East Report* 223 (summer 2002): 34-37.

31. See Sobhi al-Zobaidi's remarkable video diary of life under occupation, *Crossing Kalandia* (Tel Aviv: FPAD, 2002). See also Rema Hammami, "Interregnum: Palestine after Operation Defensive Shield," *Middle East Report* 223 (summer 2002): 18-27.

32. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143.

33. Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 124.

34. Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, edited by Peter Dews (New York: Verso Press, 1992), 60-61.

35. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 192.

36. Michael A. Principe, "Solidarity and Responsibility: Conceptual Connections," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 31, no. 2 (summer 2000): 143-144.

37. Importantly, a few pop Intifadiana texts do attempt to express solidarity with the Palestinian struggle by reflecting on their own rhetorical figures and their media of expression, and do assert a difference (rather than natural identity) between Egyptians and Palestinians. For instance, the popular Egyptian film *Ashab walla biznis* (Friends or business) uses the Palestinian Intifada to present a moral lesson about the Egyptian mass media. *Ashab Walla Biznis* (video, Al-Duqqi: al-Sibka Vidiyufilm, 2002, directed by 'Ali Idris) presents solidarity between Egyptians and Palestinians as a relationship learned and made (rather than naturally assumed); it underscores the different and divergent roles played by Egyptians and Palestinians working in solidarity with one another; and it includes a formal consideration of its medium within the frame of its representation and suggests that representation is a constitutive act (rather than window onto) acts of political solidarity.

38. A short list of works in this vein would have to include Elias Khoury, *Bab al-Shams* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1999) and Jean Genet, *Un captif amoureux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).

39. Here, Godard's exploration of the medium resonates with Barthes's discussion of death and the photograph in *Camera Lucida* and André Bazin's discussion of the photographic image as a process of mummification in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 9–16.

40. The phrasing is from Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 258–259.

41. It is significant to note how exceptional the solidaristic gestures of Godard and Genet were in the context of progressive French intellectual circles that have been traditionally unsympathetic to Palestine. See Joseph Massad, "The Legacy of Jean-Paul Sartre," *al-Ahram Weekly* 623, January 30–February 5, 2003; and Adam Shatz, *Prophets Outcast: A Century of Dissident Jewish Writing about Zionism and Israel* (New York: Nation Books, 2004).

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