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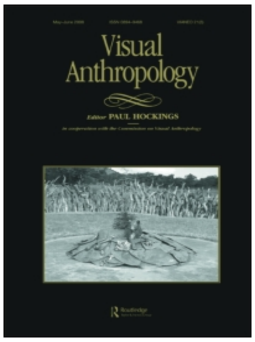

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Street Scenes: The Politics of Revolutionary Video in Egypt

Mark R. Westmoreland

Images of mass protests that arose from Egypt in early 2011 enraptured global audiences with unexpected scenes of street politics and unprecedented possibilities for political change. While the presence of thousands of cellphone cameras, perhaps hundreds of thousands, provided the technology for a multitude of witnessing, the hyper-visibility of the street in times of protest made image-making practices both threatening and powerful. The recursive rehabilitation of counter-revolutionary images happened on many fronts. Western journalists have long characterized the ''Arab Street'' as a ''barbarous urban mob'' and, despite enchantment with the ''Arab Spring,'' still perpetuated a simplistic analysis of street politics in the region. Meanwhile local television, advertising, and music videos endlessly recycled revolutionary images in superficial modes of patriotic sentimentality; while the urban poor, unable to realize the aims of ''bread, freedom, and social justice,'' have suspiciously remained the unclaimed image of the Egyptian revolution. But by attending to the social life of revolutionary street media, this article reviews the potential for emerging image practice to cultivate new kinds of political subjectivity and collectivity.

LIBERATED VISUALITIES

> It felt like people were fighting the images that had betrayed them for so long—with their own images.
>
> —*CROP* [2013]

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In a state of revolutionary flux, images of mass protests arose across the Middle East early in 2011. These scenes of chanting crowds suddenly, if momentarily, ''triggered'' new understandings of political contestation and new modes of public visual culture [Abaza 2014: 171]. The presence of thousands of cellphone cameras, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, provided the technology for a multitude of witnessing—both documenting acts of police violence and affirming the agency of mass political subjectivity. Tahrir Square, Cairo, as noted by Mona Abaza, ''became the spot to film and to be filmed, as well as being a space to see others and to be seen'' [*idem*]. The occupation of urban space enabled Cairenes to reclaim both their streets [Elshahed 2013: 20; Hyldig Dal 2013] and their images [Alwan 2011].

Prior to (and since) the revolution, in a place hyper-mediated for the touristic gaze, filmmakers and photographers filming in public commonly faced aggressive challenges from bystanders, if not authorities, who might restrict the image of Egypt violently. So while the narrator of *CROP*—the ficto-documentary about a hypothetical photojournalist at the *Al-Ahram* state newspaper[1]—could claim that the uprisings had liberated images of Egypt and people's ''fear of cameras had disappeared completely,'' this fear of cameras reveals a deeply embedded moral panic about depicting the ''negative side of Egypt.'' This restrictiveness on images made the 2011 revolution as much about overthrowing the government as subverting the iconoclasm of the Egyptian image. And yet, as Egyptians negotiated their newfound image rights, they had to contend too with the highly charged nature of this new visuality. Enacting one's newfound image-rights would often provoke the hostility of authorities trying to reclaim control over public space—like whitewashing graffitied walls and deploying ''eye snipers'' to eliminate witnesses on the front line.

While the Egyptian revolution helped open the question of which images could be shown and which could not, the counter-revolutionary rehabilitation of appropriate images of Egypt quickly determined which were permissible images of protest and which were not. In popular culture, images of the revolution quickly became appropriated and commodified. Shortly after the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak, local television, advertising campaigns and music videos endlessly recycled revolutionary images in ways that privileged superficial modes of patriotic sentimentality over the unanswered demands of the poor. Daniel Gilman [2011] noted the emergence of a subgenre of ''Martyr Pop'' in which several musicians produced videos that recycled protest videos and martyr photographs as thinly veiled PR stunts. These music videos mimic the way musicians like Ramy Essam used the slogans of the revolution as inspiration for their lyrics and performed in Tahrir during the 18-day protest. Although the revolutionary flux in politics and image culture continued for two-and-a-half years,[2] the initial ''18 days'' would typically get evoked in a sentimental or nostalgic manner. The redundancy of this initial period provoked Philip Rizk to exclaim, ''How many images of protesters do we need?''[3] While conveying a critique of both the prevailing myopic view of political discontent and those ''capitalizing on the revolution,'' this question points to an enduring and complicated relationship between the image-making and place-making of street politics in Egypt. His critique highlights the way the spectacle of the protests obscured the importance of the struggle.

Now reaching the fifth anniversary of the uprisings, we seem so far from the ambitions that they announced. There is a clear and urgent need to reassess the images that have both enraptured global audiences and propelled Egyptians toward revolt. Although hundreds, perhaps thousands, of such video clips exist online, and ostensibly characterize the new mode of protesting with a camera-phone, reputedly the most iconic images of the uprisings tend to obscure those vernacular revolutionaries who made these videos. Whereas international journalism has blindly inherited preconceived ideas about acceptable images of protest, academic scholarship has favored superficial analyses of repertoires of contestation. By tracing some of the contours around the representation of revolutionary Egypt, I reconsider the scope and scale of several images that have come to frame the revolutionary iconography in order to better understand the potential of emerging image practice to cultivate new kinds of political subjectivity and collectivity.

IMAGE PROHIBITIONS

> The Street Arab has all the faults and all the virtues of the lawless life he leads. Vagabond that he is, acknowledging no authority and owing no allegiance to anybody or anything, with his grimy fist raised against society whenever it tries to coerce him, he is as bright and sharp as the weasel, which, among all the predatory beasts, he most resembles.
>
> — Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* [1890]

In battles over national reputation, the policing of appropriate images can enact intensely affective forms of social hegemony. In recounting her experience of working on *Marriage Egyptian Style* [1992], an ethnographic film about a poor, divorced mother living in Cairo, Reem Saad recounts the way Egyptian nationalists viciously attacked the film and denounced its protagonist Wiza as un-Egyptian. In their vociferous attempt to protect the reputation of Egypt, critics likened the film to an assassination attempt on national pride and issued calls for stricter censorship, punishing the filmmakers and removing the director of the National Film Center. Consider Saad's account of the film's screening at the 1992 Isma'ilia film festival: ''They were outraged and started roaring and screaming even while the film was still being shown: 'Stop this farce,' 'The Egyptian who took part in this should be thrown out of the country,' 'Take away her passport,' were some of the cries I heard'' [Saad 1998: 404]. These critiques continued the next day in front page news as a ''conspiracy to destroy Egypt's reputation'' [*idem*].

Aside from insecurities about the nation's modern progress the nationalists based Egypt's reputation upon an idealized image of its historic civilizations and an authentic peasant life apparently unchanged since Pharaonic times.[4] But, as Timothy Mitchell [2002] has scandalously revealed, contemporary notions of Egyptian peasantry draw heavily on the regressive, essentializing texts of

19th-century Orientalists. More disconcertingly, ''the nationalistic expression championed by the urban middle class is very often linked to undermining subordinate social groups, be they peasants or the urban poor'' [Saad 1998: 406]. As figures like Wiza expose this ambivalence, the gaze of foreign audiences in effect converts elite contempt for the poor and peasants into national shame, and thus ''brings into focus the issue of what images and voices are deemed appropriate for presentation'' [*ibid*.: 403]—a complex that was to continue after the initial 18-day uprising despite the liberation of image practices. In other words, Saad's film provoked the nationalists' outrage because Wiza asserted an agency disallowed to social subordinates. Confidently expressing her own opinions, in a vernacular deemed inappropriate, and without displaying the deference customary of social hierarchy, Wiza quite simply ''did not conform to the stereotype of the poor held by the urban middle class'' [*ibid*.: 409].

This prohibitive policing of Egypt's image foregrounds a politics of representation, in which the elite exploit the stigmatization of the urban landscape in a politics of risk [Denis 2006]. By promoting discourses of disorder, pollution and criminality, the elite enable radical forms of repression of the city's urban poor. Actually, in the Egyptian elite's negative projection of the poor as backward and hot tempered, they echo the international discourse of the ''Arab Street"—an expression commonly used in Western media to refer to public opinion in the Arab world [Bayat 2013: 209–220]. While the Arab press may use ''the street'' (*al-shari')*[5] to refer to public opinion in different geopolitical contexts [Regier and Khalidi 2009], the ethnicized term ''Arab Street'' often denotes the meta-tropes that had come to characterize Cairo (among other Middle Eastern urban centers) as alternately a hyper-passive tomb in a state of repressed quiescence and ''the worst kind of barbarous urban mob, threatening local and global orders . . .'' [Singerman and Amar 2006: 21–22]. For scholars of social movements who have apprehensively inherited the long legacy of crowd theory, the recurrent anxiety about the crowd has meant that many either favor models that downplay the ''nonrational'' domain of political emotion [Gould 2010] or recast the crowd with the more politically progressive terminology of the ''multitude'' [Mazzarella 2010]. In fact this anxiety about an unruly poor population carries bigotries from an earlier usage. Singerman and Amar trace the term to the 19th-century usage of ''Street Arabs'' to refer to the ''homeless hooligan boys and traffickers among the lumpenproletariat of London, New York, and Chicago, who were imagined to constitute the menacing core of anarchist cultures, vice zones, and dangerous classes'' [2006: 21]. Indeed, in his famed book *How the Other Half Lives*, the American muckraker Jacob Riis dedicated an entire chapter to ''The Street Arab'' [1890: 196–209], documenting the poor living conditions of these impoverished youth living on the streets of post-civil war New York. Although an advocate for the ''other half,'' his vilification of these poor youth presages in some strange twist of globalization a recursive anxiety about the precarious and unruly underclass that occupy the streets of the Arab world.

These pejorative characterizations obscure the structural violence of urban poverty, which foregrounds the uprisings in important ways. Pressures on the urban poor from rising levels of internal immigrants living in informal buildings without public infrastructure, moral panic about the number of children living on the streets, and the precarious forms of employment under neoliberal privatization, are some of the underlying conditions that led to the 2011 protests.[6] Indeed, among a series of strikes around the country, the brutal crackdown on textile workers striking in Mahalla al-Kubra in 2008 led to the launch of the influential April 6 movement [Khatib 2012: 130; Sabea 2014: 181–182, n. 2]. The Egyptian state made extensive efforts to silence these worker strikes. As the hypothetical narrator in *CROP* recounts, the *Al-Ahram* photojournalists would rarely be sent to cover political unrest, but never for people fighting for better conditions:

> There was an incident in Mahalla in 2008, where things went out of control. We were sent to cover a workers' strike in the factory. When we arrived the place was full of secret police, to give the impression that everything was very calm. Obviously, this was what we had to photograph, but the workers started to fight the police and we as photographers were suddenly in a line with the demonstrators. The police were now directly attacking us with our cameras. This they did not want to have pictures taken of.

In spite of the central claims for ''bread, freedom, and social justice,'' the global image of these uprisings has similarly failed to account for the structural violence faced by the urban poor, and thus to acknowledge their demands for social justice. Despite the ubiquitous presence of the cellphone camera documenting and sharing these scenes of confrontation, the urban poor have suspiciously remained the unclaimed image of the Egyptian revolution. Instead, the most iconicized images shared internationally provide a radically different understanding of the street politics that unfolded across the Middle East.

THE RETURN OF TANK MAN

> Tahrir Square may have opened a Facebook account, but it refused to have a representative face come forward as the avatar of the revolution.
>
> — W. J. T. Mitchell [2012: 9]

In a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on protest images, W. J. T. Mitchell recounts how the Egyptian Supreme Council of Culture invited him to Cairo to reflect on ''the role of images and media in the 25th January Revolution and the Occupy Wall Street Movement'' [2012: 8]. Although the invitation fell through, Mitchell uses the prompt to ask, ''Is there a dominant global image—call it a world picture—that links the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring?'' [*idem*]. Based on ''an iconography of nonsovereignty and anonymity,'' he argues that these leaderless movements encamped in prominent urban squares privileged spaces over faces [*ibid*.: 9].

Despite the way *Midan al-Tahrir* [Figure 1] became a visual emblem of the occupy moment, Mitchell's broad categorization of these movements as faceless begins to break down when situated within a broader analysis of the event's visual rhetoric. While the horizontalism enacted in these public squares proved inspiring, contrary to Mitchell's claim, certain individuals did become represen-

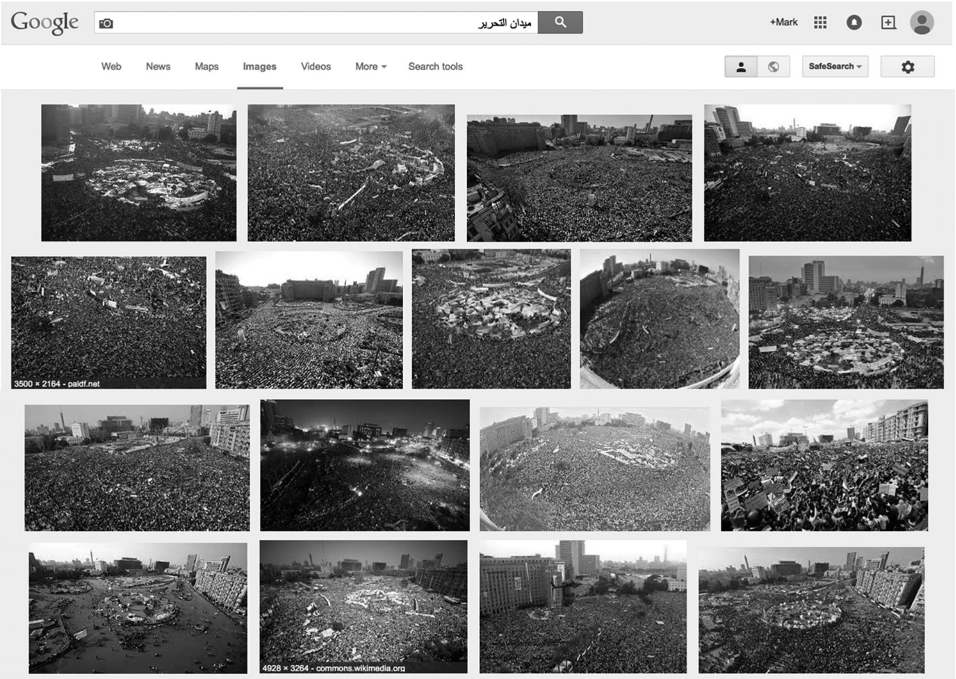


Figure 1 ‘‘ميدان التحرير’’ *(Midan al-Tahrir) April 23, 2015. (Google Search screenshot)*

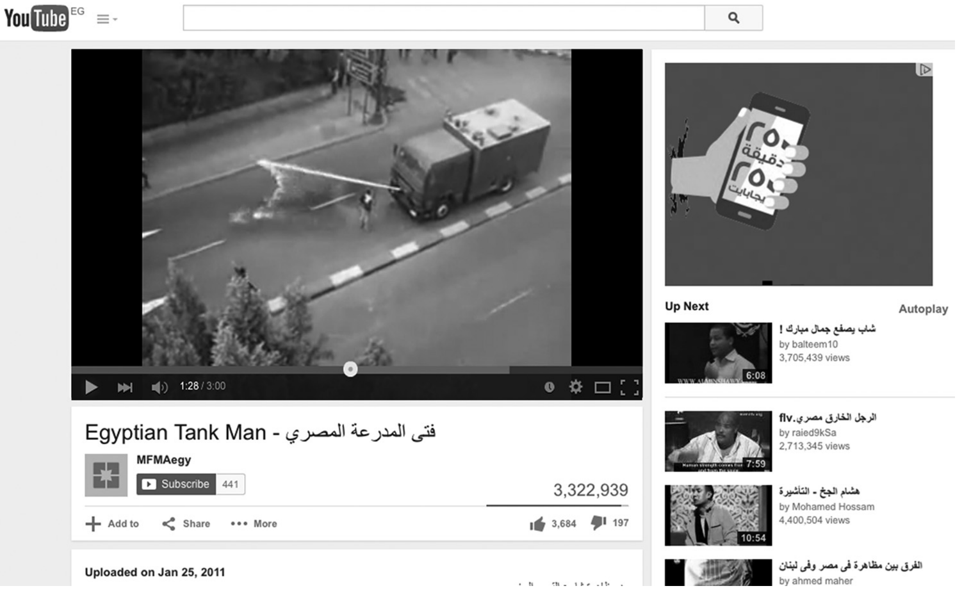
tative of the Egyptian revolution. One only need consider the centrality of the Facebook page, ‘‘We Are All Khaled Said’’ (*Kullina Khaled Said*) to disrupt this universalizing analysis [Poell *et al*. 2015]. Not only did the narrative of the police brutality that led to Khaled Said’s murder provide a poignant justification for the calls for protests on Police Day (the official holiday that initiated the January 25 uprisings), but so too did the shocking juxtaposition of his dual photographic representations. While one image is a portrait of Khaled Said as a smiling, clean-cut young man, the second provides visible forensic evidence of an unrecognizably disfigured and brutally battered face after his final hours in police custody. According to Reem Saad, this Facebook page effectively converted sympathy for this young man ‘‘into political action whose discourse and practice were novel, refreshing, and inclusive’’; thus ‘‘[t]he picture of the tortured face of Khaled Said became an icon of this [human-rights] movement and, later, of the Egyptian revolution’’ [Saad 2012: 64].

Even if we restrict our attention to images from the actual protests, we still see a tendency to feature the faces of particular individuals. Philip Rizk, an activist with the Mosireen media collective, notes how ‘‘media outlets relied primarily on English-speaking activists’’ in their search for explanation. Young, middle-class and internet-savvy activists like Rizk ‘‘became the translators of a collective uprising we were far from representative of’’ [Rizk 2013b: 42]. Rizk argues that, contrary to the broad societal participation in this leaderless revolution, international journalism perpetuated ‘‘the hyper-glorification of the individual'' in ways that ''drowned out the voices of the majority'' [*idem*]. So, despite Mitchell's juxtaposition between faces and spaces, the formulaic conventions of journalism reify a dichotomy between the individualism of the celebrity activist and the communality of the public square. On the one hand, character-driven depictions from the PBS Frontline production called *Gigi's Revolution* (featuring the Egyptian-American Gihan ''Gigi'' Ibrahim) to the Academy Award nominee *The Square* [2013] became indicative of the tendency for mainstream media to push the unruly crowd into the background, while foregrounding internationally educated and politically cosmopolitan individuals. On the other hand, the iconography of anonymity that shows the crowded mass as a single, undifferentiated unit, made from a privileged aerial perspective, becomes largely blind to the social dimension of social movements. As Mikala Hyldig Dal argues, in *Cairo Images of Transition: Perspectives on Visuality in Egypt 2011–2013*, ''the bird's-eye view of a roaring square, joined in collective action against an oppressive regime, has inscribed itself into the global iconography of revolution'' [2013: 16]. Despite the significant number of non-professionals recording these events from within the crowd, a Google image search for ''Tahrir'' reproduced in Hyldig Dal's book reveals a series of similar images taken from a ''bird's-eye view'' of the square [*ibid*.: 18].[7]

These photographic depictions correlate with what was seen on satellite television. As recounted by the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, ''I was struck by the networks' consistent vantage point: a reporter speaking from a balcony or rooftop overlooking the masses below in Tahrir Square'' [2012: 21]. Such consistent framing of protesting masses from above reproduced a recognizable vantage-point of international news journalism. Consider the iconic ''tank man'' image of a lone figure in a stand-off with a row of tanks during the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing. The video and photographic depictions of this incident that made front-page news were made from the relative safety of the grand Beijing Hotel. In Jennifer Hubbert's recent reassessment of the tank man photo, she argues that the power of this image ''as an iconic moment of 'truth' was the apparent obviousness of what it taught us,'' both as evidence of the events unfolding and as an incrimination of Communist China [2014: 116]. As such, it also taught us something about notions of dissent that are quite different from Mitchell's recognition of a leaderless movement. While the name of this man is still unknown, his individuality helped to reify an ''ideal articulation of political practice,'' in which ''heroism is located in the individual'' [*idem*]. I would extend Hubbert's argument to say that its apparent obviousness also teaches us an idealized articulation of a journalistic perspective. In both cases, these obvious norms belie counter-revolutionary tendencies.

On the surface these iconic images of Tiananmen and Tahrir Squares would seem to capture the very different political sensibilities to which Mitchell was responding. Mitchell's account nevertheless flattens out some important particularities about the production and circulation of images of protest movements and protesting bodies. While the protesting masses—purportedly in the millions—disrupt the idea that the individual citizen is the ideal form of political legitimacy, there are some troubling features of production that these two images share. They are images made from a safe distance, and the photographers who made them are positioned as observers, not participants. Their position renders them invisible, disembodied and politically disengaged. This observational stance imagines an aerial perspective, removed from and incompatible with the bustle of street politics. Whereas images that frame revolutionary activists as cosmopolitan, tech-savvy graffiti artists reproduce liberal conventions of political individualism, and images that frame revolutionary activity as nonviolent mass protest ''in the millions'' favor a collective claim to speak for ''the people'' as a whole, both of these images fail to account for the proliferation of ''vernacular video'' *mass-produced* by ordinary citizens recording the events with their mobile devices and uploading them to the internet [Snowdon 2014].

Turning our attention to one of the many personally uploaded videos that gained exceptional attention, there is a hybrid interplay between iconic and ephemeral elements. Uploaded on January 25, 2011, by MFMAegy, this video entitled ''Egyptian Tank Man,''[8] received over half a million views on the first day, over 1.7 million by the second day, and 3 million over the 18 days of protest [Figure 2]. Based on these YouTube metrics it is ''[t]he most watched video over the entire 18-day 'revolution' '' [Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 2011: 585–586, 595].[9] Since very few of these vernacular videos had a viral success, it is likely that the title effects a hermeneutic short-circuit to a predetermined repertoire of protest, one that evokes the iconicity of the glorified individual against the brutality of the state. Having said that, Egyptian Tank Man also bears the qualities of a much larger phenomenon, in which an unprecedented number of non-professionals recorded these events as active participants.[10] Shot from a residential balcony on Qasr el-'Ainy Street (one of the main arteries into Tahrir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Egyptian Tank Man - فتى المدرعة المصري
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by Mohamed Hossam
4,400,504 views
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الفرق بين مظاهرة فى مصر وفى لبنان
by ahmed maher

Figure 2 Egyptian Tank Man, by MFMAegy. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWr6MypZ-JU)

Square), the camera pans back and forth between protesters and riot police. As an armored vehicle advances on the crowd one young man and then a few more perform a stand-off with the driver and his water cannon. As the scene unfolds it enacts both the individual heroism of the Tiananmen scene and the collectivity of the crowd: the hero is one among many. Rather than the aerial isolation above Tahrir the camera's hand-held movement conveys a sense of embodied exhilaration and potential risk by openly filming (and later uploading) the video. Unlike hotel-room journalism, its location on a low residential balcony situates it within the frenetic energy of the protest, most evident by its soundscape.[11] The audible vocalizations of the person filming also verbally and aurally enact resistance by yelling encouragingly at the protesters ''*Gada'*! *Gada'*!''

Gada' refers to brave and noble people ''willing to sacrifice their lives for the dignity and good of the whole nation'' and reflects the ''ability to use measured violence in proper contexts'' [Ghannam 2012: 33]. As Philip Rizk reminds us, ''Despite the glorification of an eighteen-day revolution as non-violent, violence has been a part of this revolution since the first stone was thrown on 25 January 2011'' [2013a]. In arguing for the necessity of revolutionary violence, he recognizes the key role violence played in the contestation over political legitimacy. But whereas the state commonly employed thugs (*baltagiyya*) to intimidate its citizens, the ''notions denoted by such terms as *gad'ana* and *baltaga* differentiate, commend, and condemn different uses of violence and how they relate to specific contexts and social inequalities'' [Ghannam 2012: 33]. Egyptian Tank Man, despite the derivative naming, introduces a step toward recognizing local understandings of violence among those who are most often associated by elites as part of the unruly poor.

The international support for these uprisings apparently perpetuated a trope of nonviolence. On the one hand, the aerial vantage-point favored the characterization of the protest that would appear distinctly different than the trope of the Arab Street as ''a brute force expressed in riots and mob violence'' [Bayat 2013: 211]. On the other hand, the BBC Trust Report showed a consistent journalistic bias in reporting the 18-day protests as nonviolent demonstrations for democracy [Mortimer 2012]. Although exceptions to these vantage-points certainly exist the formal qualities of these iconic images have significantly contributed to prescribed, acceptable modes of mass dissent. Furthermore this is not to deny the largely leaderless horizontalism of these uprisings, nor to dismiss the nonviolent strategies of protest, such as chanting *selmiyya* (''peacefully'') as ''a way of encouraging people to resist the mimetic pull of military aggression'' [Butler 2012: 129]. Nevertheless, the predominance of these sanitized images of protest flags the need to more rigorously consider the way images made by protesters provides a very different kind of revolutionary iconography.

MILITANT VIDEOMAKING AND VERNACULAR REVOLUTIONARIES

> And their basic gesture is not ''linguistic,'' but physical: not the image as representation, but the unauthorized and transgressive presence of the body that films in a public place, recording and participating in a collective event, against the will of the state.
>
> —Peter Snowdon [2014: 411]

Arguing that the inability of words to alter the *status quo* makes violence a necessary path, but without ‘‘the guts or know-how’’ to fight in the streets Philip Rizk (among other Egyptian video activists) sees his filming as a way to participate on the front lines of resistance against injustice [Figure 3]. As he accentuates the importance of risk in the filmmaking and filmgoing processes, his perspective reminds me of the principles of Third Cinema and specifically Solanas and Gettino’s characterization of militant cinema as ‘‘unfinished, unordered, violent works made with the camera in one hand and a rock in the other’’ [1976: 57]. These repertoires of militant cinema reverberate with the media activism of street politics today in ways that further highlight the affective significance of violence among a variety of protest movements around the globe. McAdam’s work [1996] on the U.S. civil rights movement’s use of ‘‘strategic dramaturgy’’ to make abuse visible to an outside audience demonstrates that managing audiences expectations has been a longstanding concern of social movements. Although localized social movements increasingly create mediated political spectacles intent to ‘‘speak to the distant’’ [Cottle and Lester 2011], the various audience sensibilities near and far present important challenges for activists trying to cultivate new political publics among diversely situated populations.

Livia Hinegardner-Stone[12] notes how activists in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico, have become critical of a human-rights approach to videomaking that relies on

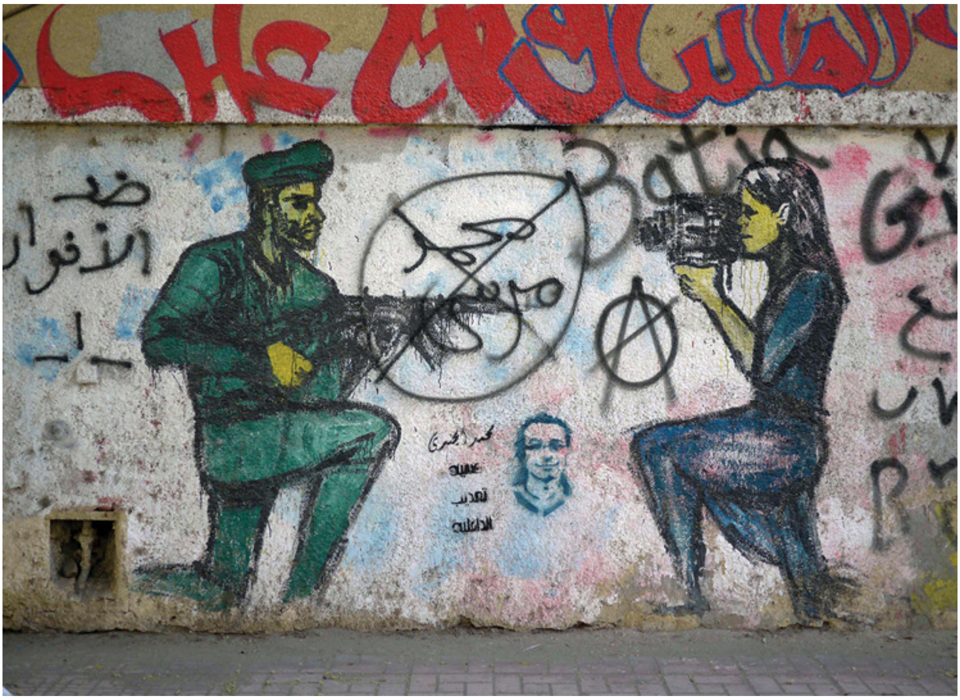

Figure 3 Graffiti on Martyr’s Wall, Mohammed Mahmoud Street, Cairo, April 26, 2013 (Photo by author)

communicating political ''abuses to the 'outside' world'' in the hope of ''creating political pressure through shaming perpetrators of abuses'' [Hinegardner 2009: 172]. Whereas images of victims may fit well within a paradigm of human-rights causes, and even provide evidence of police violence, such images of repression perpetuate notions of passive victimization and ultimately fail to address and indeed make visible the more elusive forms of structural violence [Stone 2015]. This model also relies on a notion of action that involves formal political steps within institutions (either NGOs or governments), which assumes that legal pathways are actually accessible. In a context where such prospects remain unrealizable, one Atenco activist tells Hinegardner-Stone ''the goal of making films is not to change laws, but to create a new culture of politics in Mexico'' [2009: 184]. In this context, rather than images of ''suffering bodies,'' filmmaking becomes a form of political action, even militancy, in which activists give greater significance to dramatically staging ''scenes of confrontation'' [Stone 2015].

This relates to Maple Razsa's insights about the way activists in the former Yugoslavia obsessively watched footage from different protest movements as a form of ''riot porn.'' Rather than representations of suffering bodies as helpless victims, these ''activists sought out, watched repeatedly, even valorized, unruly and insubordinate bodies, especially those confronting state violence'' [Razsa 2013: 2]. While ''porn'' carries negative associations of a gluttonous, gendered gaze, the affective link ''between sensual images of bodies and the actual bodily reenactment of direct action'' [*ibid*.: 15] helps to expand the range of media practices associated with resistance-by-recording from the act of filming during protests to specifically politicized viewing practices.[13] Providing a common experience of state violence, on the one hand, and the desire to enact tactics adopted from other movements, on the other, these viewing practices worked ''to facilitate emotional relationships with activists elsewhere, to steel themselves for physical confrontation and to cultivate new desires and therefore new political subjects'' [*ibid*.: 2]. While this generative cultivation of alternative political subjectivities helps situate viewing practices within diverse frameworks of solidarity, the affective intensity of militant activist video may shock more refined sensibilities, as some audiences may not take pleasure in these scenes as ''riot porn'' but feel fearful of them as ''riot horror'' [*ibid*.: 15]. As Hinegardner-Stone notes, not only did scenes of visible confrontation often make middle-class Mexican and international viewers uncomfortable, if not frightened, but these privileged audiences also related more to depictions of ''victimization and suffering'' than ''stories about triumphing over adversity and the evils of a corrupt government'' [2015: 182]. In tracing these developments in Latin America and Eastern Europe, Stone's and Razsa's studies point to an important shift away from a communications model toward an understanding of video as a form of political action in its own right. In Egypt this echoes the way video activists consider media less ''a tool for the transmission of information'' than ''a tactic for producing new environments and collectivities'' [Mollerup and Gaber 2015: 2906].

Emerging from a local context of political upheaval these vernacular videos ''function less as the documentation or representation of a political process that is already given in reality, than . . . [making] new forms of political process possible'' [Snowdon 2014: 403]. The recording and circulating of videos of protest enact something akin to ''a mimetic claim to citizenship'' popularly signaled in the locutionary claim of ''the people'' [Butler 2012: 122]. Elliot Colla argues that the slogan, *al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam* (''the people want the overthrow of the regime/system''), both ''created the sense there was a social actor'' known as ''the people'' and ''proved there was an Egyptian people capable of revolutionary action in the first place'' [2012]. Given the diversity of constituents, ''revolutionaries have been quite aware that their success depends on their ability to control the metaphor of the collective singular, 'the people' '' [*ibid*.]. But in Judith Butler's argument that ''the people'' constitute a performative event, rather than a pre-existing entity, she reminds us that ''this performativity is not only speech, but the demands of bodily action, gesture, movement, congregation, persistence, and exposure to possible violence'' [Butler 2012: 120]. The register of bodily precarity becomes particularly revealing when considering the subjectivity of street politics, because while ''the bodies on the street are vocalizing their opposition to the legitimacy of the state, they are also, by virtue of occupying and persisting in that space without protection, posing their challenge in corporeal terms . . . '' [*ibid*.: 124].

The proximity to protest violence serves as a powerful politicizing force on the sensorium of everyone present, which makes these amateur recordings an extraordinary ''resource for understanding the subjective experience of the ordinary people who find themselves on the front line of revolutionary struggle'' [Snowdon 2014: 401]. Like the Egyptian Tank Man video, the majority of videos depicting the Arab Uprisings came from non-professional videographers. Expanding Snowdon's use of vernacular video, we could say that most of the images uploaded online come from what we might call ''vernacular revolutionaries.'' In contrast to the celebrity status achieved by some activists who became representative of the uprisings, these vernacular revolutionaries are almost completely anonymous. And unlike the Egyptian Tank Man, the majority of videos uploaded to YouTube get far less viewings. Among the countless videos shot in and around Tahrir the vast majority will never be uploaded to internet hosting platforms or shared through mobile networks. Importantly, this also means that these videos are not produced within a pre-constituted circuit of protest movements. These are not activist videos drawing upon rehearsed tactics and strategies for translating between different dissent movements. And yet, by responding more to the visceral rawness of amateur video than the high production values of international media, some activists explicitly draw upon the revolutionary practice of spontaneous cellphone filmmaking to contest the inherited notions of appropriate and acceptable forms of protest. The appearance of cellphones raised above the heads of the crowd has quickly become a recognizable gesture of witnessing, not from the eye position but a screen in your hand, walking in a protest march or perhaps running for cover. As such, following Jacques Rancière [2006], Snowdon argues [2014: 403] that the content of the videos is of less political significance than how they constitute an ''aesthetic revolution'' that enacts the political on sensory and formal levels. To gain a better understanding of how these videos become politically generative within the context of protest thus requires attending to their social life as street media.

STREET MEDIA

> I take pictures that night of what turn out to be hundreds of people gathering and watching. In the photographs they are totally transfixed, with intent expressions and concentration showing on their faces. For much of the event, however, people are not silent but vocally engaged with the events on the screen, with everything they see, with the people around them, with the presenters and the presentation. They argue, they discuss, they laugh at what they see and at each other.
>
> —Sherief Gaber, Tahrir Cinema, summer, 2011 [Mollerup and Gaber 2015: 2904]

While ''the people'' became a prominent moniker in slogans and chants, I found that several activists in Cairo more commonly registered their allegiances with ''the street.'' Its streets provided the stage for the carnivalesque aspects of the uprisings [Mehrez and Keraitim 2012] and became the site of the subsequent formation of a new public culture [Abaza 2014]. The street also hosted horrific battles in its role as ''the modern urban theater of contention par excellence'' [Bayat 2013]. But as Philip Rizk conveyed to me, the street is not merely a space or a site of contentious politics but a political subject in itself. This is not the riotous mob of the ''Arab Street,'' but indicative of ''those with enough of a cause to put their life at risk.''[14] Rizk's critique of celebrity activism notwithstanding, we should be clear that many privileged activists in Egypt have also risked their lives to empower ''the voice of a *street-level* perspective'' [Aboubakr 2013: 261]. Drawing upon the notion of ''everyday cosmopolitanism,'' in which people must negotiate difference on a routine basis, Asef Bayat also does not imagine the street as merely a space or platform for politics, but ''a complex entity wherein sentiments and outlooks are formed, spread and expressed in a unique fashion'' [2003: 11]. While indicative of the everyday sphere where people work and perform their routines, the street is at once a public sphere where people negotiate resources and ideas, a hostile zone filled with human and non-human refuse, and the site of contempt from which privileged classes retreat into malls [Abaza 2006] and coffee shops [Koning 2006]. As the chaotic street is something that the elite wish to conceal—as both a symptom and a symbol of social inequality—the hyper-visibility of the street in times of protest makes image-making practices both threatening and powerful.

And yet, despite the centrality of the street politics, much more of the international commentary has instead celebrated the role of social media for supposedly enabling political dissent, in which Facebook, Twitter and Google appear to have sponsored Revolution 2.0 [Ghonim 2012]. These commentators assume uncritically that these events privileged an international audience. This model of visibility [Thompson 2005] mirrors the human rights communication model that compels agentially privileged outsiders to act on behalf of the enfeebled locals. Of course, the proliferation of protest placards in English speaks undeniably to a global political sensibility, but these may blind us to those images not specifically intended for international audiences. In contrast to the idea of a social media revolution, Helga Tawil-Souri argues for ''the 'placeness' of the uprising and of media networks'' [2012: 88] to redress the technological deterministic, apolitical and ahistorical aspects of this reading. But neither should we dismiss the significant role of information and communication technologies, nor assume a strong dichotomy between online and offline activism. While earlier crackdowns on street protests served as one driver toward activist blogging [Khatib 2012], Randa Aboubakr suggests that the internet's limited reach in Egypt (only 30 percent of the population in 2011) had been at least one factor contributing to the way digital initiatives became relocated to more public spaces and in turn incorporated in the lives of ordinary people [2013: 259].

By taking digital material back to the street, activist groups like Mosireen and Askar Kazeboon could address people directly and thus transcend, in small measure, some of the impediments of the digital and literacy divides. During the initial protests when Tahrir Square became an encampment of sustained occupation, several filmmakers and activists created a Media Tent to gather videos and other media from demonstrators for online upload [Raoof 2011]. After the military forces initially cleared the square some of these activists regrouped and formed the Mosireen media collective [Stuhr-Rommereim 2011]. As their video archive grew so too did their membership and also initiatives from producing and uploading videos to training programs for activists elsewhere in Egypt. While Mosireen generated significant online following and garnered record hits on their YouTube channel with their video coverage of major battles and massacres [Trew 2012], in Jasmina Metwaly's opinion Mosireen was more effective when redirecting the power of digital media to more public spaces.[15] The impromptu initiation of Tahrir Cinema provides the most prominent instance of this effort. During the July 2011 sit-in, which would be forcibly dispersed by military police on August 1st, activists realized that many protesters had never seen ''the iconic images from the initial 18 days of uprising across Egypt'' [Mollerup and Gaber 2015: 2905], and so set up a projector and started screening such footage.[16] As with the Media Tent in Tahrir Square during the initial protests, these screenings also initiated a site of exchange where both activists and vernacular revolutionaries would donate footage to be screened and incorporated into the growing digital archive. As such, the circular movement between online and offline activism still maintains ''the centrality of street activism'' [Aboubakr 2013: 256]. And by emphasizing the street as the site of viewing it also spoke to the crucial task of getting people on the street.

Unlike the packaged analysis of news coverage or the aerial perspective that became iconic of Tahrir, activist street screenings typically featured either visceral footage of street protests and street battles or personal testimonies of ''military trials, torture and mistreatment at the hands of security forces'' [Taher 2011]. By accepting ''open submissions'' from people on the street, Lara Baladi argues, ''Tahrir Cinema informed and raised discussion among demonstrators'' [Schoene 2012]. Noting the ''difference between watching TV and seeing something that has been filmed by someone just like you,'' Khalid Abdalla says that the initiative provides ''a feeling of possession'' [Stuhr-Rommereim 2011]. These screenings often offered moments of personal recognition, as reported in the *Egypt Independent*, ''When a clip from the morning of 10 April showed young men displaying the bullet casings they found on the ground after the military cleared the square the night before, one spectator was prompted to stand up and tell his parallel story'' [*ibid.*]. But the dialogic dimension also allowed for ''heated debate'' [Enders 2012]. Jasmina Metwaly recounted to me the way provocative scenes also generated discussions about the veracity and possible manipulation of the footage.[17] While the content of these videos is certainly significant, Mollerup and Gaber argue that the images alone are meaningless: ''Only when they enter into a conversation with their surroundings, and when people see them and reflect on what they see, do they become alive and become actors in the revolution themselves'' [2015: 2913]. The corporeally shared experience of danger and resistance enabled these street screenings to harness a transformative power [*ibid.*]. These screenings of ''sensuous struggle'' apparently had the ability to provoke spontaneous marches, enacting what Jain Gaines calls ''political mimesis'' [Gaines 1999]. Mollerup and Gaber recount watching ''people go from unresponsive bystanders to active participants in a political demonstration in the course of a screening'' [2015: 2917].

CONCLUSION

More attention has been paid to the role of social media in circulating these images globally than in assessing the actual images that both enraptured global audiences and propelled Egyptians toward revolt. But now that the revolutionary period in Egypt has seemingly come to an abrupt halt and the prohibition on public image-making has been forcefully reasserted, there is an urgent need to understand the significance of these images for future political imaginaries. In accounting for some of the ways these images enact politics across screens and in the streets, I have tried to better apprehend the generative potential of protest images. By enacting new forms of media practice in the making, sharing

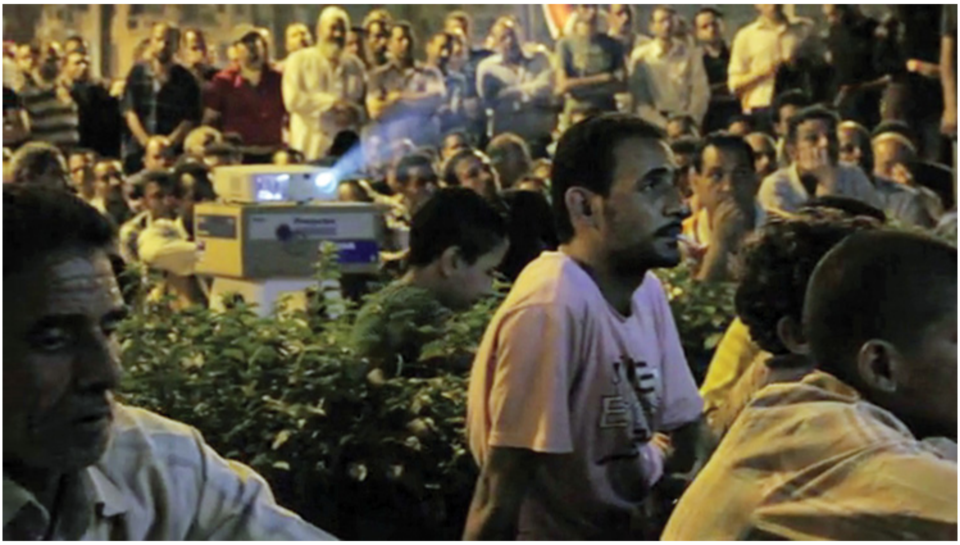

Figure 4 Tahrir Cinema. (Photo courtesy of the Mosireen Collective)

and screening of images of street politics, activists cultivated new aesthetic possibilities for political subjectivity and collectivity during the Egyptian uprisings. In a radical reversal of the disembodied aerial gaze and the faces of a select few, consider a counter-image [Figure 4]—taken among the crowd sitting on the street looking up toward a makeshift screen to watch projections of themselves as part of a dynamically expanding revolutionary narrative.

NOTES

1. As the narration of *CROP* is drawn almost entirely from documentary interviews with photojournalists, documentary photographers and photo scholars, with the filmmakers, the narrator of *CROP* serves as a plausible everyman re-voicing these interviews in an autobiographical manner.
2. For further analysis of the visuality of the revolutionary period see Hyldig Dal [2013] and my review essay of it [Westmoreland 2015].
3. Pers. comm., Cairo, February 2011.
4. For instance, Yasser Alwan demonstrates how *National Geographic* reproduces the same imagery of Egypt that Maxime Du Camp had photographed in the 19th century [Alwan 2014].
5. I follow the transliteration conventions of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES).
6. Consider a film project like *Out in the Street* [2015], in which Philip Rizk and Jasmina Metwaly used collaborative theater with poor and working-class Cairene men to perform the tensions around the privatization of a factory.
7. While Hyldig Dal performed her Google search in January 2013, I reproduced the same kind of image results in April 2015, in both English and Arabic searches.
8. Accessed 18 March 2014; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWr6MypZ-JU.
9. Despite the way amateur videos uploaded to the internet far outstripped professional journalism in viewership during the first days of the uprising, Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian's analysis [2011] of mainstream media amplification demonstrates how satellite television came to dominate coverage of the uprisings after the Egyptian government cut internet and cellphone services off.
10. Although beyond the scope of this article, the algorithmic logic of Google's artificial intelligence to populate a search query for ''Tahrir'' suggests that such iconic images rely on metrics that are easily abstracted and may decontextualize the experience of both those in the images and those making the images. While YouTube's metrics can trace the popularity of a singular item through time, this juxtaposition elides the ontological difference between the still photographs generated in a Google Image search and a YouTube video search—which may imply photography's claim on iconicity at the expense of video's inherent ephemerality—a Google Video search for ''Tahrir'' reveals a more disturbing difference. Four of the ten results on the first page reference sexual assault and nearly all of them are hosted by major news outlets.
11. But see Hassan Khan's *Blind Ambition* [2012] as a rejection of the familiarity of Cairo's hustle and bustle soundscape.
12. Livia Hinegardner now publishes under the name Livia Stone.
13. Razsa draws upon the notion of ''political mimesis,'' introduced by Jane Gaines [Gaines 1999], which draws upon Linda Williams' idea of body genres—that is, the way horror makes you shriek, melodrama makes you cry, and porn makes you cum

[Williams 1991]. Political mimesis thus refers to the way protest on screen can work on audiences on an affective level.

14. Interview with Philip Rizk, Cairo, April 10, 2013.
15. Interview with Jasmina Metwaly, Ras Sedr, March 14, 2015.
16. These screenings continued in Tahrir during subsequent sit-ins, but were not limited to Cairo. ''Mosireen has held regular public screenings that have taken place in 15 of the country's 27 governorates'' [Enders 2012].
17. Interview with Jasmina Metwaly.

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