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Hassan, Hareim; Boogaart, Ronny; Garssen, Bart; Jansen, Henrike; Van Leeuwen, Maarten; Pilgram, Roosmaryn; Reuneker, Alex

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The Case of the Egypt Uprising

HAREIM HASSAN

Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Philosophy
University of Windsor
401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4
Ontario, Canada
Hassan32@uwindsor.ca

ABSTRACT: In 2011 during the Arab Spring, there were a series of shocking uprisings. This work examines the role slogans played in the Egypt uprising. This paper is relevant to the rhetorical approach to argumentation theory: Why are slogans effective in changing minds and bringing people together in social movements? An argumentative understanding of slogans explains their roles in social movements in challenging the status quo through advocating actions.

KEYWORDS: extremism, political argumentation, rhetorical argumentation, slogans, uprising

1. INTRODUCTION: A SUMMARY OF EVENTS

Due to many factors, such as unemployment, poverty, political unrest, and autocratic rules, the majority of the Arab world was in waiting for a spark to explode, politically speaking (Salih, 2013). The spark was the death of a young man in Tunisia. On December 18, 2010, a street vendor, Muhammad Bouazizi, set himself on fire after he had enough of humiliation and harassment by the police force (Salih, 2013). His death was a trigger factor to unleash years of accumulated anger of the people against the regime, and soon, thousands of people were on the street demanding the fall of the regime. The Tunisian demonstration soon, like a fiery blaze on a windy day, "spread throughout [the] Middle East and North Africa countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco and others" (Puspitasari, 2017, p. 162).

How could the death of one man bring a series of changes in countries that were ruled by an iron-fist for several decades? The answer to this question is not easy. However, what is clear is that we were witnessing a kairotic moment, politically speaking: the death of Bouazizi, however unfortunate it was, was at the right time and the right place to unleash rage in the heart of Tunisians to come on the street and demand a radical change in the status quo: topple down the regime and they achieved it. Then-president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and his family, in less than a month after the demonstration had started, fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011 (Abouaoun, 2019). Another important question to ask here is: What roles can emotions, such as rage, play in political argumentation generally and in relation to extremist demand to change a status quo specifically? How does rage manifest in the usage of slogans? I will partially address these questions in this research.

In the case of Egypt, the murder of Khaled Said was a trigger factor for the uprising (Salih, 2013). Said was killed by police on June 6, 2010. Both Bouazizi and Said, according to Puspitasari, "represented middle-class people who tried to make a living without any help from the government. Since the middle class was the people who suffered the most,

they felt related to Bouazizi and Said" (2017, p. 169). Kairotic understanding of the death of Said is relevant here, too. This is because the brutality of the police in modern Egyptian history under the rule of Hosni Mubarak was not uncommon. Yet, this particular case of police brutality hit the target: unleash the people's wrath against the regime.

The success of the Tunisian uprising in obliging Ben Ali to flee under the pressure of demonstrations after 24 years in power in just 28 days was an important external factor in initiating the popular uprising in Egypt. As a result, just 11 days after the regime was toppled in Tunisia, on January 25, a popular uprising in Egypt started, and "anti-Mubarak activists started organizing people through Facebook and Twitter to protest against then president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak" (Puspitasari, 2017, p. 163). So, the mixture of external factors, i.e., the success of the Tunisia uprising, and internal factors, i.e., the death of Said, the failure to deliver good governance by Mubarak, and the availability of social media to facilitate a common anti-regime discourse were all played important roles in what was unfolding in Egypt in 2011.

January 25, in many ways, is a symbolic day. It was declared by Mubarak in 2004 as a 'police day' and public holiday so the general public would show support for the police force and would see it as "a symbol of patriotism and sacrifice" (ibid). However, for the general public, the police were far from a symbol of patriotism and sacrifice: "For them, police was merely a very corrupt, ill-trained, has no respect towards human rights, and a brutal instrument of President Hosni Mubarak" (ibid). As a result of the uprising, now, January 25, for Egyptians, is a symbolic day of courage, sacrifice, and uprising against a dictator who has ruled them for 30 years. By noon on January 25, 2011, people poured into the streets and moved towards Tahrir Square while shouting Karama (dignity) and Hurriyah (freedom). Even though police tried to disperse the people with tear gas, "in the late afternoon, it seemed like nearly 90,000 people occupied the Tahrir Square (Liberation Square), which became a headquarters of the revolution" (ibid). To add to the symbolic nature of January 25, "while most of young policemen worked hard to control the riot in Tahrir Square, senior police officers enjoyed and celebrated their Police Day-break in the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel, not far away from Tahrir Square," not knowing that what looked like a small protest soon will be unstoppable (ibid). Later, the regime did everything to ensure it would not have the same fate as Tunisia. More than 500 people were arrested in just three days, and the internet and communication services were stopped (ibid, p. 164). Yet, the demonstrations just kept growing.

Once he realized police brutality and military muscle were no longer effective in suppressing people, Mubarak tried to lessen the anger of the Egyptian people, which was just growing, with empty rhetoric and promises of constitutional change. On Tuesday, February 1, 2011, in a speech, he promised to change the constitution to address protesters' demands and said, "Hosni Mubarak who speaks to you today is proud of the long years he spent in the service of Egypt and its people. This dear nation is my country, it is the country of all Egyptians, here I have lived and fought for its sake and I defended its land, its sovereignty and interests and on this land I will die and history will judge me and others for our merits and faults" (ibid, p. 164). These words did nothing, Egyptians knew how corrupt he was, and how he has used "his dear nation" for his benefit, and they were right. As it was later disclosed to the public, Mubarak had 40 billion dollars in his bank account while the country suffered from poverty and unemployment (ibid, pp. 167&172). After 18 days of continuous demonstration, in which 846 Egyptians were killed and around 6467

were wounded, on February 11, 2011, Mubarak handed over his power to the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces (Salih, 2013 &Puspitasari, 2017). This research investigates the rhetorical role of slogans in this important moment in Egyptian history.

2. MAKING OF SLOGANS

Argumentation was involved in many ways in the Egypt uprising, but I limit my focus to the role that slogans played as a rhetorical device. Before discussing slogans, I will briefly talk about how slogans are relevant to the rhetorical study of extremist argumentation. Extremist argumentation is challenging and aims to change a status quo radically through argumentative tools (Hassan et al., 2023).

Slogans can be defined as "the symbolic justification for [an] action. They provide a bridge or direct link to social action" (Denton, 1980, p. 12). The rhetorical study of argumentation focuses on modifications of ideas through discourse. The rhetorical approach to extremist argumentation explains how changes in the cognitive environment lead to changes in the status quo. Therefore, an argumentative understanding of slogans explains their roles in social movements in challenging or changing the status quo through advocating actions. Slogans are a rich and symbolic use of language, and "language has an internal and dialectical relationship with society; 'whenever people speak or listen or write or read, they do so in ways which are determined socially and have social effects" (Fairclough 1989: 23 as quoted by Lahlali, 2014, p. 7). Slogans' political and social effects motivate people to join social movements and advocate for changes.

Slogans are useful discursive tools for understanding the worldview of social movements: they are "the 'mental rationalizations' of a movement" (Denton, 1980, p. 16). Hence, they are shortcuts to understanding the attitude of a social movement toward the status quo: what aspects of reality should be modified or preserved? Since different social movements might disagree on the change they advocate for, slogans do not only unite people but also divide and change people's positions. In any case, slogans are essential in social movements' success since they express their ideology in a rhetorically rich manner, and they also strengthen membership affiliation (Denton, 1980).

But what are slogans exactly? According to Cail Newsome, slogans are useful rhetorical tools "by which a large group of people may express their collective ideas" (2002, p. 21). Because of this function, among other functions I will discuss later, slogans are very rich semantically speaking, even though syntactically speaking, they can often be very short and simple. Slogans are short "phrase[s], or expression[s], fittingly worded, which suggest action, loyalty, or which cause people to decide upon and to fight for the realization of some principle or decisive issue" (Denton, 1980, p. 12). Because of these reasons, I examine slogans used in the Egypt uprising to make sense of the relationship between modifications and representation of ideas through slogans and the ramifications of these modifications and representations on the political status quo in Egypt during the 2011 uprising.

According to Mukesh Trehan and Ranju Trehan, a slogan usually has the following features: "it is a short, simple phrase or a catchy sentence which is easy to remember, sweet, easily pronounceable, [and] pleasing to [the] ear" (2006, p. 121 as quoted by Michalik & Suchanek, 2016 p. 46). An essential feature of slogans that the aforementioned definitions

lack is the role of slogans in evoking strong emotions, which is a crucial aspect of the rhetorical richness of slogans and their usage in extremist political argumentation. According to Newsome, "to thrill, exhort, and inspire is at the heart of persuading an audience" (2002, p. 21). However, these features should not mislead us into believing that slogans cannot express complex and rich ideas. They are capable of "simplifying a complex system" of ideas (Newsome, 2002). For example, in the complex abortion debate, "the slogan 'Adoption—Not Abortion' reduces the complexity of the abortion issue involving social and moral issues, problems of adoption, rape, incest, and so on into a very simple alternative or solution:" to adopt and not to abort (Denton, 1980, p. 13). Moreover, since "everyone looks to see what will stick in the minds of the listener" (Newsome, 2002, p. 22), these rhetorical simplifications of complex ideas are essential in order to achieve adherence to their arguments. This is also true for political parties, not just for social movements. It can be argued that the success of a political party in an election campaign might be measured by how well they use slogans. This is how powerful slogans can be. Lasswell writes, "political campaigns […] become a battle of competing symbols, and perhaps the winner is the party that can formulate a system of symbols [i.e., slogans] that either better expresses or more effectively manages collective attitudes" (1927, p. 627).

One reason why social movements and political parties need slogans is not just because slogans can be practical rhetorical tools but also because of psychological or cognitive related factors of the audience, which reduce the public's appetite for sophisticated discourses. According to Denton:

> The public will seldom tolerate lengthy explanations or justifications of political attitudes and world views. […] 'Intolerance for depth' by the public forces social and political leaders to simplify and package their 'picture of the world,' which must produce 'impressions' of action, direction, and thoroughness" (1980, p. 13).

Slogans, in a sense, are spoon-feeding the public in plain and clear language: here is what we believe in and what we strive for because "most people would rather die than think" (Bailey 1976, p. 501). This is a rather pessimistic view, and it could be debated, but it offers some explanation of why slogans are effective communicative tools.

Although this research is not approaching slogans logically, in service of providing a balanced view of slogans, I will mention a few logical weaknesses that slogans might exhibit. In a study on one hundred slogans of advertisements, Aurelia Vasili (2018) concludes that, generally, slogans have two shortcomings, logically speaking. First, slogans are enthymematic arguments and, on purpose, lack a premise or premises that, if they were not missing, the slogans "would make the public ponder and take longer to make the desired decision or even make the opposite decision" (Vasili, 2018, p. 57). The second issue concerns the conclusion of arguments from slogans: "all of the one hundred slogans lack an explicit conclusion, makes them all fall into the category of non sequitur fallacies, that is, of errors due to the fact that the conclusion is not entailed by the premises of the argument" (Vasili, 2018, p. 60). There could be more nuanced comments on the logical shortcomings of slogans; however, as far as these straightforward logical observations go, I believe they actually show the rhetorical strength of slogans. The enthymematic nature of slogans invites the audience to be an active receiver and provide the missing premises. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that slogans can also be presented as a form of poetry because they can have a certain rhythm and music (Colla, 2013). As for conclusions not

being entailed by the premises, this is very common in the realm of inductive reasoning, in which slogans usually reside. A logical approach to slogans can be more productive if it takes the special features of slogans that we have briefly discussed.

Moreover, slogans do not necessarily have to be fallacious to create adherence, and not all effective slogans are fallacious. According to Newsome, who applies the Aristotelian framework of rhetoric to slogans, "slogans work best if they are composed of meaningful, persuasive messages that move the audience on the basis of *emotion, reason, and credibility*" (2002, p. 31 my italic). In this analysis of slogans, I am mainly focused on "their role of providing rationalization of action, attitudes, and beliefs" (Denton, 1980, p. 16). This approach fits the rhetorical approach to extremist argumentation: challenging and changing a status quo radically through the means of argumentation.

3. SLOGANS IN THE 2011 EGYPT UPRISING

The time frame of the Egypt uprising that is the focus of this research is relatively short. However, in terms of the rhetorical usage of slogans, it is probably the richest timespan in modern Egyptian history because of what they helped achieve: toppling down the Mubarak regime. By observing the slogans used during the uprising, a correlation can be made between the slogans used and the overall public consciousness of the Egyptians. Slogans modified the cognitive environment of Egyptian society, and this modification reflected in changing the overall consciousness in the way that "It has shifted from a discourse of complete allegiance to the regime into a discourse of total defiance and accountability; from a discourse of 'long live sir' to 'down with the dictator" (Lahlali, 2014, p1). It can be argued that slogans were not just a way to represent the collective will but also an active factor in modifying and directing the collective will (Colla, 2013). This is partly because slogans did not always spontaneously emerge during emotionally charged rallies, but some activists were studying slogans in advance, drafting and improvising them. For example, Ashraf Khalil and Kamal Abu Eita were two famous slogan writers (Colla, 2013). So even though there were moments of spontaneity, overall, slogans were well-thought-of before they were chanted in public. This is not easy to achieve because "a slogan's power is the degree to which it can detach itself from the specific conditions of its initial composition, and the degree to which it circulates as if it were the anonymous expression of a collective will" (Colla, 2013, p. 38). So, slogans were seen as spontaneous even though, at times, they were deliberately constructed, and they were directing and modifying the collective will, even though they were seen as passive representations of the collective will. This clarifies the rhetorical richness of the slogans and the success of the slogan writers in understanding their audience: the protestors. In this section, I will analyze different types of slogans that were used during the uprising.

4. CLASSIFICATION OF SLOGANS

Many slogans were used during the uprising with different languages, demands, and ideological backgrounds. Different slogans had different natures, such as "liberal, secularist, and religious nature;" however, despite the diversity of Egyptian people, they

were all united by one goal: Mubarak must leave (Lahlali, 2014, p. 3). Because of the diversity of slogans used, careful study of them requires classification to avoid hasty generalization. We start with two main types of slogans: invective and zeal slogans.

1.1 Invective and zeal slogans

Overall, slogans in the Egypt uprising can be classified into two main groups: zeal or bravery (hamasa) and invective or insulting (hija) (Colla, 2013). Roughly speaking, the ethos of zeal slogans is futuristic, while the ethos of invective slogans is rejecting the present. In other words, in using invective slogans, protestors were radically opposing the current status quo, while by using zeal slogans, they were arguing for replacing the current status quo with a preferred one. The most obvious realization of what they were opposing and hoping for was Egypt without the Mubarak regime.

Invective, i.e., insulting slogans, played an important role in intensifying and prolonging protesters' anger against the Mubarak regime. The invective slogans were partly caused by the accumulated dissatisfaction of Egyptians under Mubarak's rule for decades and partly by the death of protestors who were killed brutally by the armed forces during the uprising. As a result, invective slogans fueled the anger of people, which led to further clashes between the security force and protestors, which led to more casualties. A key example of the invective slogan was: "aha SCAF" slogan: fuck Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. This three-letter word, aha/a7a, is "a uniquely Egyptian word, means, roughly, "fuck that," or "fuck it" (Colla, 2013, p. 40). The aha word appeared in insulting slogans in various ways: "it is shouted at demonstrations […], scrawled across walls, [and] typed across social media" (ibid. 44). The level of anger and dismissal in this simple word was unprecedented in Egyptian history. An autocrat ruled Egypt, and this type of public denouncement of the authority was simply unacceptable and came with a heavy price. Until 2011, invective slogans were "a marginal and often absent form of rhetoric for opposition groups" (Colla, 2013, p. 40). So, as the protest began and security forces began killing protesters, "this simple and ineloquent phrase of disgust became a surprisingly articulate—or at least effective—slogan for those rallying in solidarity with the activists in the street fighting against SCAF's rule" (Colla, 2013, p. 40). This shows, at the right time and place, solidarity and collective will across diverse people can be strengthened not by sophisticated discourse, but rather a simple "fuck it" phrase.

We begin to appreciate the magnitude of the insulting rhetoric if we consider the context. In a democratic society, insulting slogans might not be as effective or shocking as it is in an undemocratic society. This is partly because freedom of speech has already allowed citizens to use insulting rhetoric to express their contempt many times; thus, it is no longer unexpected and shocking. However, to directly and publicly insult the authority, including the president, in an undemocratic regime like Egypt, where the freedom of speech was a sham, depicts the extremity of the mindset. This, as explained in the first section, came with a heavy price- several hundred protestors were killed. These slogans both represented an extreme mindset in demanding radical change, i.e., change of regime and encouraged this extreme mindset to continue despite the murderous response by the regime.

A key purpose of invective slogans was to deprive the Mubarak regime of any legitimacy. It is used to express a rhetoric of total dismissal: We are not here to ask for reform in this or that aspect of the regime; we are here to topple the regime. This explains

why protests kept growing even though Mubarak promised many changes. This clearly shows the extremity of invective slogans: demanding a radical change. One way to deprive legitimacy of the authority is to label the head of the state and other high officials "as foreign, traitor, oppressor and coward," and invective slogans were used effectively in this direction (ibid. 42).

4.2 Zeal slogans

We can only see part of the picture through invective slogans, the part of 'turn down the regime,' and we need to consider zeal slogans to see the other part, 'building a new regime.' Through insulting slogans, protestors were building a wall between themselves and the regime, but through zeal slogans, they turned down any barriers between them, so they came together, supported each other, and became one united force. Let us read two zeal slogans; the Arabic and English versions of slogans are provided to notice their rhythm and their meanings.

The first example (ibid. 41):

-Ya ahlina, indammu 'alayna

(People! Our people!—come join us!)

Above all, this slogan is a call for solidarity. Those who are already on the street speak to those who, for whatever reasons, have not yet made up their mind to join the uprising. The audience here is not the regime, as it is the case in invective slogans; the audience is fellow citizens. When the audience is the regime, the rhetoric is hateful, dismissive, ridiculing, and delegitimizing, but when the audience is the Egyptian people, the slogans are appreciative, well-coming, solidifying and encouraging. Invective and zeal slogans, in a sense, are in dialectical relations: invective destroys, but zeal rebuilds, destroying what the regime wants but building what the people want. In other words, the dialectic is between maintaining the regime's status quo and the yet-to-come protestor's status quo.

The second example (ibid)

Alli, alli, alli-s-sot/illi yihtif mish haymot

Alli, alli, alli kaman/illi yihtif mish gaban

(Raise, raise, raise your voice; he who shouts will never die!

Raise, raise, raise it again; he who shouts is not a coward!)

Here, it can be argued that there are indirect and direct audiences. The indirect audience is people who want to join the uprising but hesitate. The direct audience is protestors on the street. The common message, though, for both audiences is encouragement. The first part of the slogan speaks to the fear of the indirect audience, the fear of punishment by the regime, which might include death, by reminding them that history will remember those who die with dignity for the sake of the noble cause and thus don't fear death. In the second part, the message fuels already courageous people on the street to be even more courageous and chant more loudly. The overall message is the encouragement to defy any fear, including the fear of being murdered by the security forces.

We would underappreciate the role slogans played in the uprising if we only examine them semantically and analytically because "there was more at stake in poetic slogans than the creation and distillation of semantic meaning. These slogans were

performatives, which, under the right circumstances, created the movement they spoke of" (Colla, 2013, p. 42). In other words, in expressing the protestors' demands, the slogans were also modified and recreated them. The rhetoric of slogans, then it can be argued, has a double-edged effect: in expressing what a social movement wants, it recreates it.

In the section "Making Sense of Slogans," we have seen references to the rhythmical element of slogans as an important rhetorical feature. The environment in which a message is exchanged plays an important role in the syntactical and semantical construction of that message. Slogans usually are intended for public demonstrations. Therefore, a rhythmical element of slogans is useful so that they can be easily chanted by the crowd on the streets. If we examine the last slogan mentioned above, we clearly see its rhythm. Of course, in a translated version, this aspect of the slogan is not as clear as in the original language- Arabic. As rhythm makes slogans easier to chant, it encourages more members of the demonstration to join the chanting; as a result, they feel more connected. Rhetorically speaking, successful slogans are those that generate an energetic environment in which the attendees of an event are filled with passion and enthusiasm. This shared energy, even if it is not created by slogans, is certainly maintained and augmented by it. It is part of human nature that members of any group, including a social movement, strengthen their bond through shared messages, and we see this in many social, political, religious, and even sports events. Moreover, the rhythm of slogans makes them memorable, thus keeping the demand of the movement fresh in the memory of the members.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Slogans play a crucial role in any social movement. They can function as a discursive net in which they connect all the members to certain demands they argue for. It is interesting how thousands of people rally around certain slogans. Here, it can be argued, cognitively speaking, the members of a social movement are glued together by simple words or phrases that we call slogans. It shows, rhetorically, how rich and complicated slogans can be.

Rhetorically rich Slogans can have the following features. They have a rhythm which makes them easily chanted and remembered. They evoke emotions, usually passionate and encouraging emotions. They can simplify complex discourse into simple yet effective phrases or short sentences. They capture the collective ethos of the movement in the sense of speaking on behalf of each and every member of a massive amount of people. In this context, collective ethos means 'speaking on behalf of a group' (Amossy, 2018). Moreover, slogans can strengthen the group identity of the members of a movement, not just because slogans can express what they all want, but also through chanting them all together passionately and loudly. Last but not least, in expressing the demands, slogans can recreate those demands in the cognitive environment of the general public and in the minds of members of a social movement.

In the case of the Egypt uprising in 2011, slogans played an important role in manifesting and feeding an extremist mindset. The mindset was extremist because it aimed at a radical change in the political status quo: a regime change. The goal was achieved. However, although it could be important, changing the head of the state does not guarantee full-fledged systematic change. According to Heba Morayef from Amnesty International, "The situation in Egypt is significantly worse today [2021]. If you look at the number of journalists in prison, if you look at the number of human rights defenders in prison… the

numbers are just crazy (VICE news, 2021, 22:17-22:36]. So, things did not go as the Egyptians dreamed of. For example, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi seized power through queue in 2013 from elected president Mohammed Morse, who was elected in 2012. More than 300 protesters were killed who demonstrated against the queue. Moreover, in a very questionable election, the same person, el-Sisi, won 97% of the votes in the 2018 election. Thus, although the movement successfully forced Mubarak to step down, Egyptian people still are far from living the democratic system they dreamed of. The story of the Arab Spring is to be continued.

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