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THE CITY AND THE JUNGLE

AFRICA AND BLACKNESS IN THE EGYPTIAN INTERWAR CINEMATIC IMAGINATION

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The murder of George Floyd in 2020 precipitated a flurry of discussion about race in the Arab world.¹ Public personalities expressed horror on social media, tutting at what they saw as an inherently American problem. Whereas long-established solidarity movements were reanimated, producing insightful discussions about race in the Arab world, so were deeply entrenched feelings of unaccountability. In one case, the singer Tania Saleh posted an image of herself in blackface, musing: “I wish I was black, today more than ever” (Osman 2020). Black Palestinian filmmaker Maryam Abu Khaled took to social media to lay out the insidious anti-Blackness that takes place within Arab countries (Reuters 2020). In the present volume, the contributions of Miranda, Hetaba and Habersky, and Hammad remind us that Egyptians’ views of blackness as Other have not only a long history, but also deep consequences for the lives of black Egyptians and immigrants.

As many critics have argued, the sudden focus on support for Black lives in the US, or the BLM movement, has obscured a longer tradition of anti-Blackness within the Arab world. There has been a pervasive silence about this history of anti-Blackness, which is only recently changing with the rise of a new cohort of scholars engaging with questions of race and racialization in the Middle East (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs 2020). Even as attention to anti-Blackness and race expands, there continues to be little academic reckoning with the twentieth-century mediascape and cinematic cultures in which anti-Blackness has proliferated (Powell 2000; Powell 2001; Powell 2003; Gordon 2008).

This chapter explores specific historical iterations of anti-Blackness with a focus on the early Egyptian cinema’s experiments with what film scholars refer to as the “jungle” genre (Robinson 2007, 296–98). At the heart of the jungle genre is an imagining of Africa that is both an expression of Egypt’s own imperial fantasies and an undeniable reproduction of widespread Hollywood tropes already proliferating in cinemas across the country. There is no doubt that Egypt’s relationship to race (and, specifically, the rise of a derisive attitude to Blackness) derives from a complex set of historical circumstances specific to its own history (Powell 2000; Powell 2003; Gordon 2008; Cuno and Walz 2010; Daly 1991). We cannot understand the rise, development, and ever-changing nature of anti-Black sentiment without exploring the sub-Saharan slave trade, racialized forms of domestic labor, colorism, Egypt’s imperial expeditions into Sudan and other territories, and highly racialized rhetoric—or the “layering of race,” to use Razan Idris’s term (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs 2020)—that have cultivated it. We must recognize the incredible power of a global flow of racialized images and cinematic motifs, which can be traced from Hollywood and that have flowed into Egypt filmmaking.

I will analyze two films, *Wadi al-nugum* (1943) and *Naduga* (1944), to show how, through a fusion of nationalist fantasies of imperial grandeur and Hollywood inspiration, Egyptian filmmakers have helped cultivate stereotypes of Africans as barbaric, violent primitives, and in doing so, seek to

enhance the modernity and sophisticated urbanity of Egyptians. In both films, the city is deployed as a central motif of Egyptian modernity, while Africa provides the “other” against which Egyptian urbanity is drawn into sharp focus. The categorization of Egypt as a “country of cities”—with buildings, courthouses, and motorized transport—sits at the very heart of the films’ claims to Egyptian modernity. To be “modern” on screen entailed a visual dissociation of Egyptians from Black Africans as well as a conversion of Egyptians into pith-helmet-wearing, gun-strapped conquerors from the city.

By representing Egyptians as imperial adventurers, *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga* blurred the lines between the colonized and the colonizers. To be sure, Egyptian cinema-goers were meant to identify not with the African characters, but with the safari-suited, Egyptian imperialists (Powell 2001, 30). This is not surprising. To a large extent, middle-class Egyptian filmmakers historically have not presented radical cinematic visions of the class and racial underpinnings of power. African characters were the oppositional visions against which Egyptians asserted their claims to modernity, international prestige, and independence. When Black characters were portrayed in the city, it was in less threatening roles: servants, doormen, and butlers. In their representations of Africa, *Naduga* and *Wadi al-nugum* reveal visions of a postcolonial order that was fundamentally racialized in nature. While efforts were made in the 1950s and 1960s, amid a political milieu of African solidarity, to offer the cinema-going public alternative images of Black people, this trend did not last. In the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a reemergence and normalization of lampooning Black characters that continues today.

Africa on the Egyptian Screen

Released in 1943, *Wadi al-nugum* (Valley of the Stars) was the first Egyptian jungle film. Fusing together animal scenes, tribal drumming, and pith-helmeted scholars, the film follows anthropologist ‘Adli (played by Mahmud Dhul-Faqar) as he conducts field research in Wadi al-nugum, a fictional island off the coast of northeastern Africa. With camera, notebook, and gun in hand, ‘Adli encounters an African ceremony in which a tribe is sacrificing a woman to a sorcerer. ‘Adli enthusiastically photographs the event for his research. Suddenly, the woman being sacrificed, Zaynab (played by ‘Aziza Amir), begs for mercy in Egyptian Arabic. Upon hearing her Arabic cries for help, ‘Adli swells with nationalist passion and saves her. His intervention incites the fury of the sorcerer and tribesmen, who give chase. Through a clever escape plan, ‘Adli leaves the Valley of the Stars and takes Zaynab back with him to Cairo, where the film takes on a melodramatic story of love and revenge.

While *Naduga*’s plot differs somewhat—and can be described more as an adventure comedy—it also depicts a quest for a lost Egyptian woman in the African jungle. Featuring tribal scenes, wild animals, and bare-chested Black porters, the film follows Murad, who sets off into the jungle to find Nadya, the long-lost daughter and sole heir of Murad’s late employer, Khurshid Pasha. Nadya was lost during her father’s stint in Africa as a physician. Murad is accompanied by two clumsy assistants, comically named Khamis (Thursday) and Jum’a (Friday). When, during his journey into the jungle, Murad notices a photograph of a “white girl” (*bint bayda*)—note the immediate racialization—he insists it must be Nadya. Soon Murad encounters Naduga, a feisty woman clad in a fashionable floral swimming costume and protected by a gorilla named Cheetah. Murad realizes that she is, in fact, Nadya, and falls in love with her. But her greedy cousins, who covet her father’s inheritance, thwart his efforts to bring her back to Egypt. After foiling her cousins’ plans, Nadya/Naduga returns to Egypt,

inherits her father's fortune, and lives happily with Murad, a trope centralizing family at the heart of sexual/affective morality, which Abed's chapter of the present volume reminds us is still very much a part of contemporary Egyptian imaginaries.

If the storylines and motifs seem familiar, there's a good reason why. Both *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga* adapted an already popular American jungle-film genre, of which Tarzan was the most successful iteration. Certain scenes from *Wadi al-nugum*, especially the tribal scenes, appear strikingly similar to scenes from the 1932 American film *Birds of Paradise*. *Naduga's* title, and parts of its plot, were also similar to the American film *Nabonga* and even featured a similar gorilla character. Both films were released around the same time and indicate a global exchange of plots, motifs, and title names. Although it is unclear how this exchange functioned, what is clear is that Egyptian cinema-goers throughout the twentieth century consumed American films and were exposed to American racial tropes of white superiority and African barbarity.

At the time of their release, very little debate appeared in the press about the issue of race in films or in broader visual culture. In fact, during the 1930s, magazines often published racist cartoons depicting Black people as servants and lacking the smarts and sophistication of Egyptians. Tarzan films continued to be among the most popular films screened in Egypt, with Tarzan becoming a recognizable cultural icon. Johnny Weissmuller was a household name; his face and Tarzan poses regularly appeared in newspapers and magazines. In 1933, the back cover of the fan magazine *al-Kawakib* featured a bare-chested Weissmuller in a pose that alluded to the interwar primitivist fantasies of virile white men (*al-Kawakib* 1933). But *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga* not only deployed Hollywoodesque visual cues; they also relied on nationalist imaginings of Africa that were plugged into a global "dark continent" discourse central to imperialist discourse.

The idea of "Africa," as it was elsewhere, has historically been central to constructions of modernity and claims to civilization in Egypt, as Hammad's comments (this volume) on the ethnic organization of brothel hierarchies in the 1910s to 1940s illustrate. Middle-class reformers and politicians have desperately sought to fight imperial claims of Egyptian backwardness by asserting their modernity and racial superiority. A growing film industry expanded the possibilities of these claims, promising a global platform for the circulation of images of modern Egypt. In the 1920s Talaat Harb, the industrialist economist who headed Egypt's national bank and who, under its auspices, established the national film company, the Misr Company for Acting and Cinema, even argued that films could dispel any misconceptions that Egyptians were like "people of Central Africa" (Hasan 1986: 90–92). In Harb's imagination, Central Africa was the antithesis of the modern, and the embodiment of barbarism. The very idea of "Africa" functioned as a rhetorical tool in Harb's attempts to claim modernity for Egypt on the international stage. It is this image of Africa that *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga* elucidate and elaborate.

In *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga*, "Africa" is depicted as a perilous jungle-dense terrain. Ethnographic archival footage of wild animals (whether or not native to Africa, including large snakes, monkeys, bats, alligators, and tigers) reinforces the image of Africa as untamed, as does footage of dense jungle and sturdy vines from which to swing. Drumming and dancing take place around a fire, as characters played by Black actors (and others clearly in blackface) chant and drop recognizable terms like "Congo" and "Africana." In *Wadi al-nugum*, Black men menacingly point spears at the camera as others frantically drum and dance.

In both *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga*, the local Black characters, aside from the loyal servants and the tribal leaders, are voiceless. While ethnic classifications remain ambiguous, fusing Polynesian and

African tropes, Egyptian characters simply refer to the locals as “*wuhush*” (savages). In *Naduga*, Khamis and Jum’a plead with Murad not to fight the natives after they had threatened to kill him, because “they are nasty, they would do it.” In *Wadi al-nugum*, ‘Adli described the locals as *wuhush* during his nationalist-inspired rescue of Zaynab. In response to pleas from his adventure sidekick not to interfere in the tribe’s affairs, ‘Adli, with a gun in hand, retorts: “Should I leave my sister in the hands of *wuhush*?”

References to the alleged cannibalism of the Black characters are scattered throughout *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga*, and work to further distance them from Egypt’s claims to civilization. In *Naduga*, Murad’s goofy aides, Khamis and Jum’a, repeatedly express fear of being eaten in the jungle. In one scene, the loyal African guide, Cougar, joins in the Egyptians’ jokes about his own cannibalism. In jest, Khamis and Jum’a describe what they would do to the greedy cousin should they get their hands on him: they speak of undressing him, cleaning him, marinating him, cooking him, then handing him over to Cougar, who at this point replies in a thick Arabic accent, “and Cougar will eat his flesh and suck his bones,” to rapturous laughter. Later in the film, during a confrontation between Murad and the angry tribes, Khamis expresses fear of being eaten by the tribes when he cries: “They will make *mulukhiya* [an Egyptian dish made from jute leaves] from our stock.” In *Wadi al-nugum*, Zaynab’s association with Africa makes her a target for cannibalism claims. When she bites ‘Adli’s assistant on the ship, ‘Adli asks: “Are you planning to have us for lunch or what?” When ‘Adli’s assistant tells friends about their trip, she claims that inhabitants of the island “eat people. I saw them with my own eyes roasting a man.” In both films, cannibalism and allusions to it further position African characters outside the realms of modern living and humanity.

Country of Cities

In these films, images of “Africa” and “Africans” attempted to bring into sharp relief Egypt’s modernity, in which the city’s luxuries and security are central. “We are not in the jungle any more, we are going to Egypt, a country with laws and police,” ‘Adli remarks in *Wadi al-nugum*. From at least the early 1930s, representations of the city have functioned as a key motif with which Egyptian characters have laid claim to superiority and power. Filmmakers especially gravitated to a broader trend that equated modern life to city life and argued that the very production of films introduced Egypt onto the global stage as an urban, sophisticated nation. A recurring theme in early Egyptian film criticism was whether a film fulfilled its “duty” to represent Egypt as a modern nation and effectively counter negative representations of Egyptians. The duty of representation in early film criticism hinged on a broader nationalist attempt to prove Egypt’s worthiness for independence (Mitchell 1988).

Niazi Mustafa, the director of *Wadi al-nugum*, expressed similar beliefs in the power of the cinema to represent Egypt positively abroad, arguing that it constituted “a weapon to refute all that the biased/prejudiced foreigners” say about Egypt (Mustafa 1933, 8, 10). It is no surprise, then, that *Wadi al-nugum* dwelt on Egypt’s modernity—see Sinno, this volume, for more contemporary iterations of this trope. The Africa scenes in *Wadi al-nugum* only take up the first twenty-four minutes of the film, after which scenes take place in the modern facilities of the ship transporting the main characters back to Egypt. During the trip, the antics of Zaynab, referred to as “Tarzan’s daughter,” both horrify and amuse the civilized Egyptians, as she bites, growls, and gobbles down food without using utensils. Of course, ‘Adli is there to coax her back to civilization. When Zaynab cries out that she saw the sorcerer, ‘Adli rebukes her with the line: “We are not in the jungle any more. We are going to Egypt, a country with laws and police.”

In *Naduga*, while far more action takes place in the jungle, modern life in Cairo appears cyclically at the start, repeating as a repose and a safe space at the end. The film also constructs the courtroom and the concept of justice as underpinning the entire trip into the jungle; it is a space of bureaucracy and law. It is only after being granted time, by a judge, to search for the lost Nadya that Murad pursues her.

In *Wadi al-nugum*, as the returned adventurers happily drive through Cairo, Zaynab is stunned and afraid of what she sees: tall buildings, trams, trucks. She fearfully ducks in the front seat, amusing her modern friends. The car scene, shot in downtown Cairo, includes footage of the high court, neo-modernist buildings, and street scenes. After a dinner party—ruined after Zaynab bites a guest—Zaynab insists that she is “*bint nas*” (the expression literally means “a daughter of people” but is referring to a certain type of middle/upper-class woman). The dialogue points again to a deep dichotomy that necessitates a distance from the “jungle people.” “Why do they laugh at me and fear me? Am I not a human being like them? I am also a *bint nas*.” Zaynab insists on her identity, only to be replied to by ‘Adli’s mother: “You call those people in the jungle ‘people’?” In disbelief and sadness, Zaynab snaps back, “I am not from the jungle. I am from Egypt, and my mother and father are Egyptians, like you exactly.” Zaynab fights against any presumption that she is anything other than Egyptian, and in doing so concedes to the dehumanization of “jungle people.”

Naduga similarly sets up Egypt as an urban oasis. When Murad describes life in Egypt to the fascinated and naive Naduga/Nadya as they sit by a river (surrounded by plastic alligators), he exuberantly comments, “Egypt is far, far away. We must ride a ship to arrive in Egypt ... Egypt, filled with people, roads, cities, buildings, cars—hoot hoot hoot—trams—clang clang clang—and [newspaper] vendors [yelling]: “*al-Ahram, al-Muqattam, al-Musawwir, al-Ithnayn*. Egypt! Long live Egypt!” When Naduga/Nadya’s guardian is paid off by the cousins to get rid of Murad and his friends, he tells Murad, “You have defiled this pure/good land, O son of modernity/civilization (*ya wilad al-madaniya*). Leave immediately, you and your devils.” In trying to convince Naduga of the vileness of city life, the same guardian expresses distaste with what had earlier been called the “hell of modernity/civilization” (*jahim al-madaniya*). He chides Naduga for wanting to “go to the country of cities (*bilad al-madayin*) and live in the clamour with a people who worship money, and who are like fish: the large one eats the small, the brother kills his own brother, the friend betrays his friend.” He then asks, “Will you leave, O Naduga, the beauty of nature, and the love of nature, and replace love with remorselessness ... and freedom for slavery?” Taken out of context, such lines may express an underlying primitivism and a condemnation of the moral bankruptcy of urban living. But despite the perceived profundity of the film’s anti-modern attacks, an unlikeable character who hypocritically accepted the bribes—a bag of gold—from the cousins, is the one to articulate them. Indeed, expressions such as “son of modernity/civilization,” “country of cities,” and “hell of modernity/civilization” further position Egypt as a rational, industrial, and fundamentally urban nation. Any hint of primitivism is offset by the glitter of the modern, the urban, and the dizzying love for the luxuries of city life.

Blackness in the City

In *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga*, Black characters who move in urban spaces are relegated to the role of servants or butlers—tame, servile, and unthreatening. The characters are often said to be Nubian or Sudanese—reflecting a continued stereotype of domestic labor in Egypt. In *Wadi al-nugum*, ‘Adli’s nationalist-inspired impulse to save the Egyptian woman from the “*wuhush*” (barbarians) comes after

his butler pleads with him not to interfere in the affairs of the tribe, arguing that the woman might “just be a Sudanese girl.” Indignant, ‘Adli snaps back: “The Sudanese woman is my sister exactly like the Egyptian. The one Nile unites us, and if I do not defend her when she is in trouble, I would be a coward ... and I would not deserve to be an Egyptian.”

‘Adli’s claims to both masculinity and Egyptianness rest on his rescue of the potentially Sudanese woman. It is important to note that ‘Adli’s sidekick is his Sudanese servant (played by Mohammad Kamil, who was typecast in this role). It takes an Egyptian to remind his Sudanese counterpart of their unity. ‘Adli’s reprimand of his Sudanese servant and his ironic insistence on their unity embodies the tension that has underlined cinematic representation of Sudan. In Egyptian films, while Black characters were indeed part of the nation, they were not equal compatriots, but servants. Sudanese and Nubian characters (identified by their accents) played the role of domestics, butlers, or doormen. Countless Egyptian films have incorporated Sudanese or Nubian servants. They include *Rabha* (1943), *Qalbi dalili* [My Heart Is My Guide] (1947), *Layla bint madaris* [Layla the Schoolgirl] (1941), *Layla* (1942), *Si ‘Umar* [Mr. ‘Umar] (1941), and *Layla bint al-akabir* [Layla, Daughter of Aristocrats] (1953). Cinematic depictions of the Sudanese or Nubians as servants were not new to the Egyptian entertainment industry, but can be traced back to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Egyptian theatrical productions (Powell 2003, 64–104, 168–216). The effects the deep penetration these tropes have had in Egyptian popular culture can be seen in the prejudices faced by Sudanese immigrants and refugees in Egypt today, as documented by Hetaba and Habersky and Miranda’s chapters in this volume.

Following the analysis of Cedric Robinson, we can clearly see here that depictions of the Black servant and the Black tribesperson are closely related (Robinson 2007, 298). *Naduga* and *Wadi al-nugum* teased the boundaries between melodrama and jungle films in a way that unites the two images of Black characters. In both films, the jungle remains untamed. Black people there remain a threat to be killed or co-opted. In Egypt, Black characters exist as domestic tools, slotted into the hierarchies of home and further alienated from urban life. If the jungle genre depicted the racial struggle between Egyptians and Africans, then the shift to a melodramatic genre declared victory in the domesticated finale.

Postrevolutionary Representations

Representations of Africans changed after the 1952 revolution as the new regime propagated a strict anti-colonial ideology (Gordon 2008, 67–90). From around the mid-1960s, the Ministry of Culture even banned American-produced Tarzan films because they reflected a “colonialist outlook” (Pace 1968, 115.) The ministry lifted the ban in 1968, with stern warnings that such films would remain under the watchful eye of the censorship board.

Egyptian filmmakers dramatically shifted film representations of Sudan and dropped older stereotypes of Black Africa. The Sudanese–Egyptian Niazi Mustafa, who directed *Wadi al-nugum*, used the new political milieu after the revolution to overturn the negative images he previously had produced. In 1958, Niazi Mustafa directed his second jungle film, *Isma’il Yasin Tarazan*, which represented a more modern image of Sudan, reflecting a new phase in the Egyptian–Sudanese relationship (Gordon 2008, 147–51). In the film, the traditional motifs of the jungle genre—the tribal dancers around a fire and threatening Black people—did not appear. By revolving around the quest to find the lost heir to an Egyptian millionaire’s fortunes, *Isma’il Yasin Tarazan* defined the Egyptian character’s journey to Sudan as one motivated by economic greed, and by doing so, it took a subtle

swipe at the real motivations of Egyptian excursions into Sudan. But in comparison to Mustafa's previous jungle film, *Wadi al-nugum*, Isma'il Yasin Tarazan functioned as a powerful critique of the power dynamics that had informed older Egyptian cinematic representations of Africa.

While the 1952 revolution and the end of British colonialism did not entail a radical rejection of anti-Black stereotyping in Egyptian cinematic culture, they did open up the possibility of reinventing Egypt's relationship with Africa through a reconsideration of the colonialist image. However, nothing changed structurally. Problematic Tarzanesque images persisted in Egyptian popular culture. Perhaps the apotheosis of this persistence was an image on the cover of *al-Musawwir* in February 1954 depicting Free Officer Salah Salim in shorts swinging from a tree in the "jungles of the South" and his Egyptian companion, the colonel Gamal Thabit, clasping his hands around his mouth in a Tarzan war-cry pose. The caption read: "An Egyptian Tarzan in Sudan" (*al-Musawwir* 1954). In 1953, while Muhammad Naguib bolstered Sudanese–Egyptian unity, child star Fayruz and one of the biggest male stars of the time, Anwar Wagdi, engaged in an offensive blackface scene in one of the year's biggest movies. Although there were efforts to curb the trend, and throughout the 1960s critics paid particular attention to race in films, anti-Black images and the marking of Africa as a site of adventure, danger, and comic relief continued to shape visual practices throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Conclusion

Anti-Blackness has manifested in various ways in Egyptian cinematic culture, whether through blackface performances, jokes about Blackness, or the promotion of white standards of beauty. This chapter explores one iteration of anti-Blackness by examining the jungle–city dichotomy that was at the heart of Egyptian imagining of Blackness and of Egypt as representative of urban modernity. Central to interwar Egyptian claims to modernity and urban sophistication were images of "Africa" as wild, untamed, and in need of conquering. Early Egyptian representations of Blackness played into these notions, functioning at the intersection of global visual tropes inspired by dominant Hollywood images. *Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga* overturned representations of Egypt's colonial dependency with fantasies of imperial power. Using the same representational motifs that governed Egypt's own colonization—crude stereotypes, binaries between barbarian natives and sophisticated white-collar adventurers—*Wadi al-nugum* and *Naduga* constituted affirmative celebrations of Egyptian civilization and modernity. The films provide important case studies for the role of race in the making of a modern Egypt, calling attention to how cinema was deeply implicated in histories of anti-Blackness that continue today. The films also invite us, by way of widening the scope of research, to interrogate more seriously the role that representations of Africa and anti-Blackness have played in visions of national liberation.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is a revisiting, expansion, and adaptation of Elsaket 2017.

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VIRAL VISUALITIES, IMAGE CYCLES, AND MOSIREEN'S REVOLUTIONARY ARCHIVES

MARK R. WESTMORELAND

As many authors of this collection relate (Khalil, Ahmed, Awadalla, and Fallas, among others), the uprisings and downfalls across the Arab world that began to unfold at the end of 2010 marked a watershed moment in Egyptian history for the growth of all sorts of popular movements and initiatives.¹ They also provided fertile territory for citizen journalists and activist filmmakers to document both the assembling of mass protests and the atrocities of state violence. In Egypt, images played an unprecedented role during the initial uprising—from the frenetic scenes of spectacular violence to the online circulation of vernacular images, to the rescreening of protest videos on the streets, to the handmade posters that provided English captions for foreign viewers of the events. Most of the people drawn to these street protests with their cameras had been neither politically active nor skilled in newsmaking beforehand. And yet, the videos they shot and shared provided the main source of information for people across the globe before the major news outlets arrived on the scene (Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 2011). The dominant narrative in global media quickly became about “Revolution 2.0” (Ghonim 2012) and the capabilities of new mobile, interconnected digital technology. Cellphone cameras enabled an unaffiliated network of filmers to easily document and upload their videos—both for viewers only a few blocks away and for audiences watching thousands of miles from the scene, although only a small number of these videos went truly viral. However, the collective recording of these events—producing thousands of videos from a multiplicity of perspectives—provided momentary street-level glimpses of mass movements (Westmoreland 2016).

Although the videos circulating on social media and televised on satellite networks bore witness to the unprecedented events unfolding from a variety of vantage points, the shared exhilaration of these rebellious images often gave way to fleeting sensationalism. This mediated phenomenon mistakenly decontextualized images from the spontaneous and improvised practices that created, collected, curated, and continued to care for them in the weeks, months, and years ahead. Despite being largely uncoordinated acts, the process of shooting video and uploading it online is an important context for thinking through the range of filmmaking practices needed to create and sustain an unaffiliated record of the revolution (Westmoreland 2020). As Alisa Lebow (2018c) notes, “It was crucial not only that there were cameras there to document it but that there was a place where that material would be stored, to be used to contest the government claims.” Disconnecting these practices from celebratory discourses about social media helps bring the mundane features of the revolutionary archive into focus.

The Street View

Many activists in Egypt risked their lives to empower “the voice of a street-level perspective” (Aboubakr 2013). The streets of Cairo provided the stage for the carnivalesque aspects of the uprisings (Mehrez 2012) and became the site of the subsequent formation of a new public culture