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CounterText

A Journal for the Study of the Post-Literary

Postcolonial Springs

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Editorial: Countertextuality and the Political

The inside cover of every issue of *CounterText* contains a brief description of the journal's rationale. Here, just the once and as is appropriate in the founding editorial, is some more detail:

> From the perspective of *CounterText*, literature is not what it used to be. Whether this implies decline or evolution – or both – is open to debate. There is a perception at large that literature in its conventionally received forms is experiencing an exhaustion of some kind, or at least that its broader resonances risk being overtaken in the drifts towards image cultures, digital spaces, the technoscientific and globalisation. But there is also the sense that today the literary might simply be *elsewhere*. In that regard it seems increasingly implausible to rely on the term *literature* to serve as an adequate way of naming the various diverse and evolving contemporary manifestations of the literary. *CounterText* sets out to understand this fluid 'post-literary' reality. Grasped in this way, the post-literary refers to the domain in which any artefact that might have some claim on the literary appears. Inevitably, most of these artefacts conform to presiding conditions of the literary, doing little or nothing to challenge or reconfigure cultural givens and accepted notions of textuality. However, the post-literary domain also allows for new and exorbitant migrations and mutations of the literary that might force the very concept to be revisited and rethought. Such artefacts – works or cultural practices that appear in the post-literary as a challenge, manifesting an unorthodox or critical stand on the literary – might be called 'countertextual'. Understood in this way, the countertextual is energetic, revelatory, oriented to the future and to the chance of writing, offering a critical stance and a style of thought and expression born from the emergence of the literary's new texts and contexts. From the perspective of the countertextual, then, the literary is not what it used to be. It is, in fact, more open and freer than ever. *CounterText* is the journal that seeks to explore this perspective.

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These paragraphs are only lightly adapted from descriptions of *Countertext*'s rationale as reviewed in discussions with a number of the Advisory Board's members and with the Editorial Committee of Edinburgh University Press. They arise also from the long debates – across many months – that took place within various research seminars hosted by the Department of English at the University of Malta, all of which in some way addressed the question of countertextuality and the post-literary. A few remarks on these two terms, beyond the issues raised in the paragraphs above, are therefore in order.

To keep it more or less simple (at least to start with): if one popular view about the gradual retreat of print culture before image and digital cultures holds true, then what has progressively receded is the centrality of text within the order of the symbolic, and with it that form of art that is most directly invested in the modalities and modulations of text: *literature* (known, in a previous life, as *letters*). The natural conclusion would be that this is the time of the post-literary condition: associable with everything that reflects the precariousness of text and print culture in the 21st century, after literature starts to demonstrably (so this narrative goes) lose its resonances and its purchase within contemporaneity. The irrepressible objection, 'It is not so simple, surely,' leads to questioning what a more nuanced understanding of this condition might be, and how a *text*ured understanding of the post-literary might accordingly proceed. The journal's premise is that there thereby arises the space and time of the countertextual: a revanchism of the literary that finds it returning upon culture in affirmation of its achronic rather than anachronous qualities, very probably in forms that are not straightforwardly recognisable as literary and which extend and round out 'the "biography of the idea of literature"', in the memorable phrase of Adrian Marino (1996). What this obliges, therefore, is the identification, analysis and critique of the countertextual, both in theory and practice.

Accordingly, both this and future numbers of the journal read texts and other artefacts in some expectation of their countertextual potential, and address distinct schools and methodologies of literary criticism and theory (starting with the look in these pages at postcolonalism) in an effort to discover how their encounter with evolving understandings of the post-literary and the countertextual throws further light upon the journal's concerns and upon themselves. Some of the readings will address – not to say 'interpellate' – the countertextual and the post-literary as such; others leave them implied. Among the early numbers planned are special issues devoted to a revisitation of that fateful term, *counter*, and of the notion of the post-literary. Other numbers will look at some of the timeless themes within literary studies as well as a few emerging ones, with special issues currently being prepared around 'Scale', 'Performance', 'Electronic Literature', and 'Style' (among other topics).

It is not that there aren't misgivings prompted by this formulation of the countertextual and the post-literary. Not the least of these is the terms' echoing of all too familiar repertoires within both literary and critical discourse. For instance, they appear to bear affinities with moves and sensibilities that recall anything from the Dantean *contrapasso* to deconstructionist traversals of counterpaths, and onward to

sundry poststructuralist explorations of the *contre*, to investigations of 'literariness', to various strategies of 'writing otherwise' and to the well-known investments in diverse modes of contrariety in literary theory. Additionally, the foregrounding of textuality, whether countering/countered or not, further recalls critical orthodoxies prevalent not too long ago and amply critiqued since. Perhaps it is doubtful that the world needs yet another *post*-prefixed paradigm naming some putative contemporary condition, especially after the polyvalence of the prefix has established itself as solidly as it has in the curricula of literary and cultural studies. And yet, as editors we have been struck by the immediate resonances of the terms once they come up in conversation and debate. There appears to be acceptance that they are timely rather than fatigued. There also seems to be some degree of agreement that aspects of the countertextual are discernibly taking shape even while they elusively resist definition in a post-literary moment that perhaps needed to be named, as such, before it could start to be characterised in a manner responsive to the specificities of 21st-century compositions and practices that are *still and/or no longer* configurable as the literary. One can also, after all, be too hurried in shunning terms, protocols, and repertoires that return upon critical discourse with renewed trenchancy. It is this journal's wager and that of its contributors, therefore, that 'the function of criticism at the present time' might well be to attend to the post-literary and the countertextual and their distinct situations, challenges, and thrusts in the 21st century. And independently of the terms deployed, there is enough in literature's heres, theres, and elsewheres to make the inquiry important – for it is the critical attentions and practices that arise from the inquiry, rather than the terms they operate under, which in the end are most crucial.

Some space should be reserved for acknowledgement of the terms' previous uses. Doubtless future contributions in the journal will explore the genealogies of ideas on the countertextual and the post-literary in a fuller way than there is space for here. But it as well to point out that the latter term has been used, for instance, by David Carroll (2002), Scott Wilson (2006), and David Damrosch (2013), among others, in demonstration that it is not without critical heritage. Rumblings in French reviews about the post-literary condition, plus the bravado it can give rise to – 'La littérature meurt mais ne se rend pas!' (Beigbeder 2014) – illustrate its currency beyond English-language critique. Certainly, Richard Millet's *Désenchantement de la littérature* and *L'enfer du roman* (to cite one French critic who has taken the term and run with it) provide sober reflections as to why it would be hasty to dismiss literal understandings of the term *post-literary*, especially since they might just motivate a countering awareness of the insipidities and styleless literary contexts that Millet (2007, 2010) rails against. The term c*ountertext*, meanwhile, has been used on previous occasions to designate, for instance, the way in which, in Rabelais, '[j]uxtaposed to both the surface of the text and its implied extensions . . . is a third element, the countertext, which allows more play, more flexibility', where 'the central rhetorical device of the countertext is mockery' (Kinser 1990: 216–17). Conversely, 'the text/countertext phenomenon' can be predicated on a 'striving for non-identity', arising '[w]hen a novelist juxtaposes

his supposed notebook with his finished product, when he inserts new versions of his story within the outer version, when he fragments his narrators and characters into multiple mirror-images of themselves, . . . to avoid submitting to the dominant positivist paradigms' (Danziger 1997: 14). Other uses can be found, typically in tune with the idea that 'every text is formed by taking account of the terms and statements it rejects with every step of its progression', so that 'with every advance in the narrowing down of possible paradigms – a progression that takes place simultaneously at all levels and with the successive addition of each syntagm/segment – the countertext extends ever further the number of available counterterms and counterstatements' (McCanles 1982: 31). Perhaps, however, one of the most interesting uses of *countertextuality* occurs in an article by Harry Berger that deserves to not be overlooked. We cite it here in invitation of further exploration in later numbers of this journal:

> [D]etextualization places the product of textualization in brackets, seeks to uphold the putative 'transparency' of the sign and to reestablish the hegemony of the referent. But it doesn't restore documentary innocence. Rather, it produces an imitation or simulacrum of the document. Detextualizing enacts or stages a defense against textualization, and for this reason I call its product a *countertext*.
>
> Countertexts come in many forms. Books can be countertexts; textbooks definitely are. The Bible is the site of continual documentary and countertextual struggle. Body and cosmos are major cultural countertexts. Within and between them is an array of supporting countertexts that includes genders, lineages, ethnicities, rituals, religions, governments, and the variety of institutional discourses investigated by Michel Foucault and others. These compose into the detextualized frame of reference, the world view or framework or dominant ideology in terms of which acts of reference are shaped, encouraged, and validated or violated. Whenever textualization burrows into what Jean-François Lyotard calls 'the universe of the phrase,' it does so within this detextualized framework, and the texts it produces are always relative to some particular state or aspect of the framework; relative, rather, to two states of the framework: one is the context of the current state of documentary culture and the other is the context of the current state of interpretive discourse and practice.
>
> It is perhaps the pleasure or jouissance of the textualizing act that produces the familiar paranoia of interpretation. Anyone who spends time moving back and forth across the interpretive shuttle between innocence and suspicion, or between documentality and mischief, is liable to suspect that all documents may enact the defense against interpretation and may therefore be countertexts in disguise. . . .
>
> Countertextuality has a long history. (2003: 23–4)

It is because we agree that countertextuality has a long history, and because we wanted to look at its instantiations in the present and in settings that are not primarily textual, that we opted to focus this first number of the journal on a consideration of countertextuality and the political. There will always be the tendency with terms like *countertext* or the *post-literary* to incline toward understandings that privilege rhetoric, poetics, and the aesthetic of literariness (or its presumed waning). Typically, in such

contexts the address to the political dimension occurs in a secondary development. Though this can be extended, it may not quite overcome the suspicion that it emerged from an afterthought rather than from any integral and inceptive conceptual dynamic (talk of a 'political turn' in the later work of some literary theorists, problematic though the ascription may be, is one example of this). It therefore seemed advisable, right from the launch of this journal, to consider projections of the countertextual and the post-literary in contexts where the experientiality of life and strife is all too raw. How well do ideas like these travel in settings where power and conflict make for modes of writing that find no ready consolation, prefiguration, or adequate reference in Western pieties about the political valences of countering, and where it can in fact become imperative that, in the words of Brennan's essay in this volume, 'countertextual resistance to mere symbolism [is] part of any reasonable agenda'? In other words – or just one of Philip Roth's – what might a *counterlife* of literature be? Indeed, as editors we would point to the following statement by Brennan in illustration of an elemental vitality to countertextuality that is anything but gestural or practised: '[T]he death of subjects gives way to a multiplicity of subjects who recognise their individuality in the now disembodied demands that survive the sacrificed, and so then re-bodied by community. This is the countertextual.'

That the recognition described is predicated on poetry by Brennan on the poetry of Mourid Barghouti is a demonstration, to quote here from the blurb on the inside cover of the journal, of how '[t]he countertextual is strategic, metamorphic and revelatory of the charged evolutions and radical transformations of the literary today'. The Guest Editor's Introduction, by Norbert Bugeja, trenchantly anticipates how the essays in this number position the countertextual *in action*, as it were: in the fraught and unresolved Arab Spring, the (post-)literary writing from and around which is articulated – countertextually, one is tempted to repeat – in response to the exhaustedness of certain constructions of postcolonialism (understood both as a dynamic of governance and as a form of critical discourse). For there is, in truth, something rueful in the title to this number of *CounterText*, 'Postcolonial Springs'. It is idle to dispute that the vernal – in politics, literature, and a critical discourse like postcolonialism – did not occur in quite the way that it seemed, for one moment in time in 2010 when the talk was of an 'Arab Spring', that it just might do. The essays in this number are clear on that, but they also affirm the presence and potential of the countertextual, in readings that in the process re-examine postcolonial critique and its foundations. For if, as was suspected at the start and in our first quotation, 'the literary is elsewhere', it is just as well to have tried to understand, in this first number of *CounterText*, quite how differently situated, how other, and yet how relatable that elsewhere is.

Ivan Callus
James Corby
15 December 2014

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Guest Editor's Introduction

Postcolonial Springs? 2011 and the Articulation of Post-Despotic Culture in the Southeastern Mediterranean

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The day is a time for action, but at twilight
feeling and reason come to take account of what has been accomplished.

– Leon Trotsky (2005 [1925]: 34)

The revolution will rise up again.
Remember that I'm telling you this.
This time with greater force.

– Ahmad Fouad Negm (2012)

Postcoloniality and the Arab uprisings

In a poignant blog penned in the wake of the 2011 'Arab Spring' uprisings and a week before the UN vote on the recognition of Palestine as a state, Pankaj Mishra described the ousters of pro-American client regimes along the southeastern Mediterranean littoral as 'amounting to a second round of decolonization' (Mishra 2011). The implications of such an outlook were, of course, crucial for those eager to see how many of the opinion-oriented fora about the Arab uprisings were to be channelled into more enduring forms of knowledge. But Mishra's statement was not to pass uncontested. In a somewhat impatient announcement in his *The Arab Spring – The End of Postcolonialism*, Hamid Dabashi rushed to declare that 'coloniality is finally overcome, not prolonged in the protracted ideological procrastination called "postcolonial"' (Dabashi 2012: 9). Writing amid the euphoria of the uprisings, Dabashi perceived the

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unprecedented clamours for dignity and political freedom (*horeyya*) heralded by the uprisings as an 'overcoming of that condition in which many ideologies – from Third World Socialism to anticolonial nationalism to militant Islamism (vintage postcolonial ideologies) – were manufactured and put into practice. The epistemic condition of that state of coloniality has finally exhausted itself' (2012: 9).

Dabashi's commentary on anti-colonial nationalism and Third World Socialism seems to be pitching them, to quote Caroline Rooney's essay in this volume, as reactionary discourses 'in the sense of having been formed in reaction to the colonial predicament which thus conditions them'. Dabashi's stance might come across as hasty, to say the least. It is true that the destiny of many aspects of these ideological forces was the eventual loss of their political strength in the region. The hopes generated with the rise of Nasserism and the national liberation projects begun in the 1950s and 1960s were certainly dashed as the secular regimes born from them (in Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, the Yemen, and elsewhere) were exhausted by the 1980s, which, as Vijay Prashad has shown, saw the ejection of the socialist dream from the Arab world as well as the rise of clericalism and the parties of God (with the *vilayet-e faqih,* or guardianship by the clerics, emerging as a powerful political model in Iran and elsewhere) (Prashad 2012).[1] But the recent – and in some cases, like Syria, continuing – opposition to incumbent dictatorial dispensations in the region suggests these hopes are very much alive today. The movements of resistance towards both the *Ikhwan*'s Muhammad Morsi and to Abdelfattah Al-Sisi in Egypt spoke of an underlying, ongoing culture of countering, of denunciation and dissent that had already found some of its most fluent exposés in the liberationist discourses of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Régis Debray, and others.

The presence of this discourse continues to be felt today because, as Rooney points out in her essay in this issue, 'anti-colonial nationalism, from Fanon's support for African liberation struggles to Said's support for the Palestinian one, may be said to have as its main impetus a *wider universality* to that assumed by imperialism or globalisation'. The rebellious concatenation along the southeastern Mediterranean littoral, in the urban centres and squares of North Africa and the Mashriq – from Midan Muhammad Bouazizi to Midan ash-Shuhada to Midan Tahrir to Gezi Park in Istanbul – has marked a rallying together of manifestations of dissent that, in their strongly cross-empathetic form, all but re-invoked the ethos of resistance and joint action tendered by the voices of anti-colonial nationalism. Dabashi has spoken of the 2011 uprisings' counter-despotic stance as one of 'delayed defiance' towards the axis of domestic tyranny and neoliberal capital that – despite the efforts and intentions of the uprisings – continues to prevail in the region today. This form of defiance was heavily underscored by the manner in which these movements were, unwittingly or not, trying to implement some of the most basic tenets of liberationist discourse. The latter has emerged as a crucial source of inspiration in 2011, a rediscovered counter-narrative of grassroots political empowerment that managed to propel the revolts ahead against difficult odds. For how could their widespread rallying cry – *al-Sha'b Yurid Isqat*

al-Nizam, 'The People Demand the Overthrow of the Regime' – not be perceived in terms of Fanon's own rallying calls five decades before? As Dabashi points out, the 2011 revolts called as much for the countering of the ruling oligarchies as for the dismantling of the '*régime du savoir*' that they had embraced – one that had, after all, prolonged the autocratic forms of knowledge production originally cultivated by colonial rule (Dabashi 2011: 39). In this sense, at least, Mishra's 'second round of decolonization' acquires its fair share of resonance.

The 2011 Arab *midan* emerged, therefore, as a rallying point, that political-affective nexus in which and *through* which the 'moving consciousness of the whole of the people', and the 'assumption of responsibility on the historical scale' were expressed (Fanon 1963: 204). It was a moment of hope during which, to use Raymond Williams' terms, 'it [was] impossible to mistake the rising determination, almost everywhere, that people should govern themselves, and make their own decisions, without concession of this right to any particular group, nationality or class' (Williams 1965: 10). The delayed implementation of the Fanonian horizon of liberation expressed itself in the Libyan, Egyptian, Tunisian communities' struggle to overcome one of the worst inhibitions to the revolutionary spirit: the obstinate politics of *tawrith*, the dynastic and militarised inheritance of power from father to son that, as at the time of writing, continues to plague the people of Syria. True to Ahmad Fouad Negm's prediction that 'the revolution will rise again, this time with greater force', the ontology of Tahrir expressed itself as a renewal of the prerogative to voice a historical consciousness free of state intervention. In the *midan*, the urgency of rebellion, as a transgenerationally acquired or learnt form of knowledge, or *turath* in Arabic, thus confronted the prerogatives of inherited power, of *tawrith*, in a dialectical relation (the notion of *turath* is eloquently discussed by Joseph Massad in his *Desiring Arabs*, p. 17 and elsewhere). Read in terms of the *turath/tawrith* dialectic, the meaning of *tawrith* is not processed simply as a form of inherited tyranny, but *also* as a culture of dissenting or counter-dynastic remainders – of disobedient forms of *turath* – within it. In this sense, at least, *turath/tawrith* seems to modulate on the basic Foucauldian axiom of *pouvoir/savoir*, re-inscribing cultural knowledge in its turn as a rebellious form that is intent primarily on the disarticulation of bequeathed power. This is a post-despotic dialectic of countering based on the unrelenting opposition of subjectively inherited cultural-political wisdoms to the (inherited) sense of entitlement to executive power.

Perceived in these terms, the social and inter-communal upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings promised not to mark an exit, but an important accession into postcoloniality as a longer-term and more complex 'second round of decolonization' that continues to happen today, often by trial and error. The deep suspicion of the absolutist intentions of any faction, group, or confession gaining executive power continues to govern the ways in which opposition parties, alliances, and movements are now reconfiguring their courses of action in the wake of the uprisings – as the escalation of differences and the fracturing of political sentiments in Syria and Libya today continue to show. Rebellion as a form of

counter-politics often demands to proceed in this manner, as a series of confrontations with oligarchic/autocratic power that is often, however, deeply premised on an awareness of 'failing more and failing better' in the quest for some degree, at least, of historical justice. Addressing the future of political formations that have in some way or other outstayed their temporal window of relevance – a topic Wendy Brown has addressed in her *Politics out of History* – is a fraught and difficult task precisely because it demands to be based on the continued ethos of countering entrenched forms of power-entitlement (see Brown 2001).

The question that arises here relates precisely to the '*contre*' profile of the postcoloniality spawned by the uprisings – its accession into its proper history (*son histoire propre*) as both a latter-day inheritor of anticolonial liberationist discourse *and* as an inexorably contemporary trope of rebellious subjectivity. Despite the splits, factionalism, and internecine conflicts that inevitably were to follow, the uprisings have shown the material possibility of improving rebellious and liberatory sentiments to the status of a far-reaching communal discourse. This shift was motivated by some of the most basic forms and vicissitudes of endured experience. The protests in Tunisia and Egypt were compelled by social inequality, political helplessness, and, above all, hunger. As of mid-2010, the IMF Food Price Index rose by 30% and grain prices soared by 60% (Prashad 2012: 9). As Prashad has noted, 'Protestors in Tunisia came onto the streets in December [2010] with baguettes raised in the air. In Egypt, protestors took to the streets in January [2011], chanting, "They are eating pigeon and chicken, we are eating beans all the time"' (9). The background to these outbursts was appalling. With around half of the Egyptian population reduced to living under the $2-a-day poverty line, Hosni Mubarak, then president of Egypt, channelled $1.5 billion from Egypt's annual budget, in 2006 alone, into the internal security apparatus (15). Against this scenario, the IMF – that foremost neoliberal dispensation – praised Zine el-Abidine ben Ali's regime in September 2010 for its 'wide-ranging structural reforms' and 'prudent macroeconomic management', as well as heaping praise on the Mubarak regime in April 2010 for its five years of 'reforms and prudent macroeconomic policies' (93). In 2006 in the industrial town of al-Mahalla al-Kubra, a few miles to the north of Cairo, some 24,000 workers from the town's textile mills went on strike. This event formed the basis for the 'bread intifada' that gave shape to the April 6 Movement, marked by another mass protest in Mahalla against the inflation in bread prices, corruption, and rife unemployment (93). It was a simmering coalition of industrial, agrarian, and other sectors that by January 2011 found itself at the forefront of Tahrir (12–13).

Such chilling data about the co-existence of unequal universes formed the basis for the gathering of unprecedented crowds on the streets of Cairo, Benghazi, Alexandria, Tunis, Damascus, and Sana'a. The protestors were of course deeply conscious of their coming together as a 'constellation of rage', of their own basic status as being ostracised in the political arrangement of rule by tyranny abetted by neoliberal mercantilism, and blessed, moreover, by the EU, NATO, the US, Israel, and the IMF under the sign

of 'regional stability'. The very defining feature of this human rallying-together was precisely its vast geo-communal and inter-factional breadth, formed of the myriad narratives, communities, and gatherings of 'the abject' that this potent world-order left trampled in its wake (Chambers 2008: 3). It was this common feature of the Arab revolts, for instance, that led the Muslim Brotherhood's spiritual leader, Sheikh Yusuf Abdullah al-Qaradawi when he came to Midan Tahrir from his Qatari exile in February 2011, as Prashad observes, to tone down the confessionalist rhetoric and assert that 'in this Square, sectarianism died' (2012: 25). Even more tellingly, and in an ironic turn of phrase (considering the manner in which they would later manage their power), the Islamist Nahda Party's second-in-command, Abdelfattah Mourou, insisted with *al-Jazeera* that Nahda was out on the streets of Tunis to defend 'the right of the people to its *self* (*haqq al-sha'b li-nafsihi*)' (Prashad 2012: 24–5; emphasis added).

Coming as they are from religious quarters that carry much weight in their popular domains, al-Qaradawi's and Mourou's statements are of crucial import. However unintended by their speakers, their words embodied an uncanny awareness of the shifting terms of power brought in by the revolts. These are not statements to be easily downplayed. What they certainly did transmit was that sense in which the 'unshakable eschatology' of religion in the here and now – its revered status as both a lasting temporal power and the final and definitive rallying-ground when earthly powers fail – may no longer, when all is said and done, be derived from it (Prashad 2012: 29). Neither can it be easily or straightforwardly derived from secularist politics, with its problematic trajectory in the region. The surviving *points de référence* become instead, perhaps solely, the countering forces of cultural and historical consciousness itself – as informed modes of vigilance founded on the people's received and endured intensity of the experience of repeated subjection. In this sense, the cumulative history of subjugation under Ottoman rule, followed by colonial and then despotic governments, is seen afresh as also having acquired something of the character of an 'unshakable eschatology', one that can now return or redistribute *al-sharzeyya* (popular legitimacy) to its rightful subjects.[2] The long historical consciousness of subjection becomes the most important characteristic of the people's own right-to-self, therefore, the right to perceive oneself *without* a dictated structure, the right to inhabit, even if for the briefest of moments, as in fact happened, that Fanonian 'moving consciousness of the whole of the people' (1963: 204).

In this scenario, *al-sharzeyya* itself, popular legitimacy, re-surfaced as a crucial element in the counter-despotic inheritance of the Arab people's *turath*. Timothy Brennan, in his opening essay to this volume, describes 'the issue of political legitimacy' as 'one of the principal sources of insurrectionary anger'. With the long hindsight of colonial-despotic rule in North Africa and the Mashriq and their people's intimate knowledge of structures of foreign domination, the question of legitimacy became a central motivation of the uprisings (as Ahdaf Soueif demonstrates in her *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution*) and was a staple concern for those in revolt at least just as much as bread prices were. It was, perhaps, this very motivation that fuelled

the transmission of the desire for unprecedented self-determination among the North African communities, and gave it its resolve. The coming together of people and communities in unprecedented numbers will perhaps register in the memorialisation of the uprisings as, in Wendy Brown's words, a form of 'rupture that paradoxically gives history an immeasurable weight', that moment when power was finally spoken to by those political forces it had for so long disavowed under so many guises, such that 'the gravitational force of history [was] multiplied at precisely the moment that history's narrative coherence and objectivist foundation [were] refuted' (Brown 1995: 71).

Despite the (in many ways) frustrating aftermaths of the uprisings, I believe that this potential continues to make itself felt today, still, as a historic awareness of tangible liberatory voices, of those alliances agreed upon in the *midan*. 2011 was important in this sense, as an indelible recognition, for those left economically destitute with the marriage of capital and tyranny, that their own alliances could in some measure vindicate a long-trampled historical consciousness. Dabashi has of course insisted on this, but Prashad's concept of the 'rebellion from below' goes even further in understanding this rallying of popular feeling as one that exposed the artifice of the Arab neoliberal security state in unprecedented terms (Prashad 2012: 247). This 'constellation of feelings' (Ellis 1996: 139) has left its mark all over the recent histories of the 2011 uprisings – it disclosed itself, of course, in many performative voices during the protests – not least with the vibrant political arts scene on the streets of Cairo, Benghazi, Tunis, Alexandria, and a denunciative blogosphere that relentlessly publicised its critique of the regimes. But in some ways it also intensified after the uprisings, with the conflict between pro- and anti-Morsi supporters in Egypt, the sense of outrage at the perceived dictatorial turn of the army under Abdelfattah Al-Sisi, the anger at the capricious deployment of security forces against protesters, the sense of mistrust of NATO intervention in Libya, and various other occurrences. In this sense, the 2011 events will be recognised as having marked the emergence of political forces that – as timely counter-narratives to the tyranny-capital hydra – managed to introduce in the region what Rooney has termed 'a new universality from below, one that is by definition anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist' (see her essay in this issue).

Al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa

Amongst its other aspects, the rationale behind *CounterText* (as reported on the journal's website) embraces the study of what it terms the 'countertextual' as that which 'allows for vital and challenging migrations or mutations', and gestures towards a post-literary mode that it describes as 'strategic, energetic, metamorphic, and revelatory of the charged evolutions and radical transformations' of our time. Indeed, much of the cultural as well as political impetus witnessed in 2011 subscribes to most of these features. The more time that passes, however, the more imperative it becomes that the energies and modes of cultural communicability that emerged in

those 'metamorphic' moments continue to inspire further and indispensable counter-profiles to the reification of both cultural and political formations in the southeastern Mediterranean. This, as we are seeing, is no easy task. Israel's aggressive policies seem set to last. The current incursions and gains of the Islamic State (formerly ISIS) in Syria and now Libya, as well as the IS efforts to achieve and expand a hegemonic rule under the sign of a Sunni caliphate, have complicated an already much-fragmented situation that was originally – three years ago – conceived as a liberatory effort meant to oust the Assad regime.

Some might argue that what we are witnessing in Libya and Syria today is a state of things that seems to run counter both to our hopes for a counter-politics that confronts the dominant world and regional orders, *and* to the counter-expectations we entertain once those hopes are repeatedly frustrated. These frustrations are, in part, the result of those hopes for quick-fix miracles that persisted through the (bloody) aftermaths of the revolts – many were those, both in Arab countries and elsewhere, who expressed the hope worded a decade earlier by W.G. Sebald that '[i]t takes just one awful second [. . .] and an entire epoch passes' (Sebald 2002: 31). But what started to emerge on the ground, in reality, was the burgeoning understanding that this was just the beginning – the first intimations – of 'what it feels like to live in the psychological gulf that opens at the end of an era' – a gulf persistently marked, moreover, by the continued great power scheming and alliances in the region that Brennan eloquently critiques in his opening essay in this issue (see also Hughes 1997: x).

Such a fraught palimpsest, over such a brief but intense window of time, already coerces one to reconceive the emancipatory spirit that culminated in 2011 almost as an exercise of excavation. I have continued to recall, when thinking of North Africa's gradual permutations of social-cultural sensibility across decades of autocratic rule that paved the way for the uprisings, Raymond Williams' specific choice of words in his delineation of the structure of feeling in the second ('The Analysis of Culture') chapter of *The Long Revolution* (Williams 1961: 63). Even as Williams was writing for and from a very different social-cultural context, his specific wording has stayed and resonated with me over the past years, as I watched events evolve and factional/confessional sentiments galvanise. Its resonances in our hindsight on 2011 almost seem to beckon us from the future: 'The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period,' Williams has written, 'is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which . . . particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living' (63). This 'particular sense of life', this 'particular community of experience', 'of thinking and living', Williams had argued back in 1961, 'is a very deep and very wide possession, in all actual communities, because it is on it that communication depends' (63, 65).

I feel that Williams's conception has important resonances if thought about in light of those modes of experiencing and of knowing, of thinking and living, and of the cultures of rebellion that slowly evolved from them over decades to shape the social-epistemological processes leading to the uprisings of 2011 – including the imperative

that *that* specific cultural-political moment continues to extend and communicate itself today. Keeping close to Williams's thought about the communicability of the 'culture of a period', and considering this in the light of the fraught aftermath of the uprisings, echoes of his exhortation that 'we must keep trying to grasp the process as a whole, to see it in new ways as a long revolution' become inevitable (Williams 1961: 13). One can therefore reflect upon the pertinence of Williams's notion of the cultural possession – a difficult phenomenon to grasp with any immediacy, as Williams shows – in the context of those individual responses within the deep social-cultural substrata among the North African communities and their capillary narratives that evolved under ben Ali, Mubarak, and al-Qaddafi to eventually come to structure Prashad's subversive activity 'from below' in 2011 and beyond.

Their manifestations, these permutating forms of *turath* or inheritable knowledge, these cumulative, often memorially deposited wisdoms of experiencing formed within the dialectic of discipline and dissent – these can, perhaps, be referred to collectively as *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa,* to use a resonant Arabic descriptor. In the contexts of Tunisia, and then Egypt and Libya three years ago, the historical inscription of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* sought to forge a moral legitimacy for the 'community of experience' that arose, in the first place, from a widely endured time of subjection – a decades-long discipline/dissent relation couched within structures of despotic rule (48). The perceptions, knowledges, and realisations, both popular and individual, that gradually arose from this 'dialectics of oppression' (as 'a very deep and very wide possession') to subsequently galvanise into 2011 and shape its 'rebellion from below' are at the basis, therefore, of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* (Shatzberg 1991: 134).

The grassroots forces and efforts (the *Tamarud* movement was just one example) that worked in these countries and elsewhere to try to avert the takeover of their states either by confessional rule or state-sanctioned neoliberal mercantilism – these forces have been, in a sense, practising *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* as the natural representation of their peoples' right for an own historical consciousness, for a right-to-self, a right-to-knowledge. As Rami Zurayk had pointed out in April 2011, the *hunger* itself that structured this consciousness was not only deriving from economic urgencies; on the contrary, the latter were symptomatic of what the Arab communities were perceiving as another, widely-shared, and equally fundamental lack. The Arab regimes, Zurayk opines, 'did not realize that we were hungry for freedom, something they cannot buy and distribute to shut us up' (Zurayk 2012).

As such a countering sentiment, *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* may be seen as informing a family of recent novels and self-narratives hailing from the region, from Ahdaf Soueif's to Elif Shafak's to Hisham Matar's work and beyond. Its fabric is uncannily captured, for instance, in Hisham Matar's novel *In the Country of Men*, as the novel's child protagonist-narrator, Suleiman al-Dewani, watches the learned Ustath Rashid being tortured and interrogated live on Libyan television. Here, the sense of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* inscribes itself as a gradual emergence, as a 'dark cloud [of urine which] grew out of nowhere on the man's groin, a stain that kept spreading' (Matar 2007: 33). The image of that

silent urine stain, spreading slowly but to cumulative effect on Ustath Rashid's trousers as he is humiliated on Libyan state television, visualises one crude but intense facet of that 'sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time' – one that was happening in Muammar al-Qaddafi's heyday, in this case. *Al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* manifests itself in Matar's work as a symptom or trace of disciplinary power whose effects operate both publicly, like Ustath Rashid's televised urine stain of fear, as well as on Suleiman's fledgling inner consciousness – in Williams's terms, 'in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity' (Williams 1961: 63).

It was precisely this last phrase that repeated itself in my mind in September of 2011, as I watched Shweyga Mullah, who was taken to Malta from nearby Libya for medical treatment, give her comments to the media. Mullah, a 30-year-old nanny from Ethiopia, was very severely scalded after an al-Qaddafi family member poured boiling water over her head (Calleja 2011). What struck me was the unforgiving dialectic of her broken remarks about her ordeal, words that concealed a much deeper anguish, and that issued forth from an irrevocably scarred facial expression – for here one could visualise a cruel and psychically painful operation 'in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity' that was concurrently made manifest – communicated – through a face rigidly organised by its burns. *Al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* in Shweyga's case emerged – terrifyingly – as a trope and effect of the material as much as the experiential or discursive aspects of (post-) despotic life, and it is within this dialectical relation that the question of what constitutes the very fabric of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* as it emerged in the Arab uprisings comes into focus.

An important insight into this question emerges from Rooney's essay 'The Disappointed of the Earth', penned prior to the uprisings (Rooney 2009: 159–173). There, she diagnoses a foundational political equation that paved the way to 2011, arguing, amongst other things, that 'what is at stake is a situation in which forms of ethnic and class elitism make use of an ideology of inclusiveness without the true social and socialist base for such' (159). The structure of feeling spawned by this 'failed inclusiveness' was – according to Rooney – the profound sense of a 'crushing and chronic disappointment', as a result of the frustrated ambitions of those left without a stake in governing structures and in the possibility of bettering their own material conditions (160). *Al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* in this specific sense emerged as a dialectical activity that, in the context of the lead-up to 2011, operated between what Rooney identifies as the 'promise of redemption' and the 'unrequited nature of desire' (172). As such – as a mode of placing oneself in relation to power, and possibly as a mode of actively investing in one's own ostracisation – *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* is at once, in Williams's terms, materially structural and experientially 'delicate': one that, in Rooney's words, can '[cut] across the rigid formulations, allegiances and counter-allegiances of identity politics towards an understanding of what is both a psycho-affective and socio-economic condition' (172).

As becomes evident in Matar's text, based as it is in the late 1970s/early 1980s – those most intensive years of the discipline-dissent dialectic under despotic

rule that gradually helped spawn *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*, the latter is not straightforwardly registered as a mode of experience that simply exteriorises the visible effects of despotic power. It can refer more implicitly to the quality of marked or scarred forms of experience as these consciously apprehend and reflect on themselves – as Suleiman al-Dewani does in Matar's novel – as subject to the mark of autocratic rule. It is this self-apprehending quality that Rooney marks out and suggests as in itself a transformative moment, one that can lead to the forms of action of 'all those who would transform their chronic disappointments into cases of "specialness", "apartness" or "appointment" . . . ' (172). In this sense, the torturing and subsequent execution of Ustath Rashid in *In the Country of Men* continually impinge on the young Suleiman's rarefied awareness – or rather, they feed into the embryonic political consciousness that is slowly embedding itself within him as he watches Ustath Rashid suffer. '[T]o see Ustath Rashid arrested was different,' Suleiman argues (Matar 2007: 33). 'I had heard it said so many times before that no one is ever beyond [the regime's] reach, but to see them, to see how it can happen, how quickly, how there's no space to argue, to say no, made my belly swim' (33).

The symptoms of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*, which can, amongst other aspects, translate into 'affect[s] of disappointment', continue to emerge as potent countering forces in post-regime societies today – because its presence becomes more intense when experiences of oppression are endured repeatedly, *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* often lies at the basis of a subversive politics that operates through what Williams terms a 'documentary' culture – one that, in the context of 2011, itself worked as a direct form of countering acts of hyper-regulation (Rooney 2009: 162; Williams 1961: 57). The structure of feeling itself, Williams reminds, can take the form of a 'recorded communication that outlives its bearers', and one that bridges and carries forward 'the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible [. . .]' (57). Perceived in such terms, *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*, as in the case of the decades of dictatorial rule leading up to 2011, shaped not just the political identity of its long-standing bearers; it will also mark the stories of their inheritors, since they too, when required to act on the cusp of received modes of disciplinary violence, may be co-opted into its influence and rendered into 'hostages of [its] memory' (Vincenzo Consolo).

Messages to the President

In many ways, the inheritance of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* in the southeastern Mediterranean today is always already marking a beginning, an onset of 'the event of subjectivity, the event as political movement, the event as open-ended emergence', to use Elizabeth Grosz's words (2011: 94). One of the more readily visible manifestations of a newly-emergent politics, a highly efficient countertext to despotic rule, is the rap sequence *Rayes Lebled,* or 'A Message to the President', released by Tunisian rapper Hamada ben Aoun, also known as El General, on the 7th of November 2010 – the anniversary of Zine el-Abidine ben Ali's coup against Habib Bourguiba's government, and some six

weeks before the start of the Tunisian uprising (Ben Aoun 2010/11). *Rayes Lebled* is intriguing because in it the activity of dissent is not highlighted simply as an event in and of itself, but as a 'torrent' of rebellious anger whose rhythms deliberately mimic the kinetic force and the incessant pressure of state violence. In this way the rap sequence manages to embody the dialectic of discipline and dissent as an intertwined construction in which dictatorial power is spoken to and denounced at the very same moment in which it attempts to contain its opposition, over an intensely narrated session of four minutes. The song's music video, which played an important role in rallying popular consciousness across Tunisia, begins with a video-clip of then president Ben Ali telling a schoolboy, 'Why are you worried? Would you tell me something? Don't be afraid!' And then El General's rap sequence kicks off, 'in response' to ben Ali's request, with the words:

> 'Mr President, I am speaking today in my own name and in the name of all the people who are suffering in 2011 | there are still people dying of hunger, who want to work to survive, but their voice has not been heard | get out into the streets and see, people have become like animals | see the police with batons, takatak they don't care since there is no one telling them to stop | not even the law of the constitution . . . Every day I hear of invented processes . . . I see the snake that strikes women in headscarves | would you accept it for your daughter? . . . We are living like dogs | half the people is living in filth and drinking the cup of suffering | Mr President your people is dead | many people eat from the garbage and you see what is happening to the country | Misery everywhere . . . .' (ben Aoun 2011)

Rayes Lebled shows in an emphatic way how the region's cultural forms continue to understand the 'southern Mediterranean' identification today as alluding to an intensely politicised zone, or in Iain Chambers' words, 'a complex echo chamber where the migrancy of music suggests histories and cultures sounding off and sounding out, transforming and transmuting each other' (Chambers 2008: 48). Carrying this heritage of contamination as a focal part of its make-up, Hamada ben Aoun's sequence works as a poignant trope of endured experience – its own 'echo chamber' is a space in which the repetition of totalitarian knowledge, the long structure of disciplinary time, is countered with those rhythms capable of reorganising rebellious identity at the present loci of exclusion.

In *Rayes Lebled*, to use Wendy Brown's words, 'politicized identity emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicization of exclusion from an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion: a protest premised on the fiction of an inclusive/universal community, a protest that thus reinstalls the humanist ideal . . . insofar as it premises itself upon exclusion from it' (1995: 65). El General's song strives to reassert this humanist ideal precisely by disarticulating ben Ali's discourse as a fiction of inclusivity, and exposing it instead as a travesty of humanist behaviour. It first displays, through replaying the dictator's encounter with the schoolboy, the 'narrative coherence' of disciplinary power, only to draw, from the dreaded possibility

of reprisal behind ben Ali's sweet-talk, the emotive tension that structures the entire song. In other words, *Rayes Lebled* works as a symptom of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*, an effect of the embedded dialectic of discipline and dissent as it impacts with urgency upon the present. In it, rebellion expresses itself *counter*-to, as a blatant form of *détournement*: El General's voice picks upon the sleek rhetoric of power and employs a rap sequence redolent with memories of repression to counter it. In this way, ben Ali's soft-spoken classroom lingo is blasted apart and re-organized against its originary intent, that of containing the child's possibility of speaking. The latter's retort is, in a subsequent act of solidarity, voiced by ben Aoun's rap sequence itself.

As a potent countertextual gesture, therefore, *Rayes Lebled* re-instates a form of legitimacy to the act of rebellion – a legitimacy that is now almost entirely based on its subject's *critical* experience of victimisation, which itself operates a redistribution of historical discourse. The impact of a long-term or 'cunicular' dialectic of discipline and dissent upon the present works to re-instate the rebellious subject as both victim *and* arbiter of one's own experience. The subject of *Rayes Lebled* has, as it were, been placed in a heightened critical/executive position in relation to its reception of state violence. The music video itself of *Rayes Lebled* evokes the rapper's own gestures, a body language in search of freedom, as a visual version of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*, in which the rebellious subject acts as a spin-off from the history of neoliberalist 'progress' that is, at the same time, both autonomous from it and critical in its regard. The song thus places its listeners in a critical position, endowing them with the severity to rethink the future political dispensation through a process of sifting and elimination of the previous one/s. The political subject of *Rayes Lebled* is propelled forward into the future by this dual residue – of responsibility towards the economically damaged present *and* towards the unvindicated disciplinary past – that follows the regime's demise. This continues to be the state of affairs today for the 'rebellion from below'. Its own angel of history is thrust ahead through a perhaps unprecedented sense of vigilance over the pitfalls of *his*toricity, or one's negative awareness of those discourses that did not, at least not in the recent past, result in viable forms of politics.

At the time of writing, more than 170,000 human lives have been taken since the beginning of the uprisings in Syria in March 2011 (Karam 2014). In 2013 alone, an estimated 6,000 Syrian women have been raped (Taylor 2013). The moment of reflection on this knowledge, on these human lives that risk fading into oblivion as new figures and statistics take the floor, cannot but require the accounting for this knowledge of loss by writing it, speaking about it, reciting it, working to articulate its actuality as an ever-present one. As the need for revolt, therefore, is carried forward into the future – as it even stares at us from the future, the worse the death tolls become – *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* continues to be present as that set of bare human signals directed towards collusive forms of power, suggesting that these have exhausted their empathetic sensoria in the drive to extend their cycle of influence. And this in the same manner that the autocratic dispensations across the region today – conspicuously, now, Assad's – continue to terrorise their way into political irrelevance. *Al-ḥāyāt*

al-maḥsūsa very often makes itself visible as an excess – a 'democratic excess', to use Jacques Rancière's term – motivated by a state's sustained abuse of its strength – a coming together of diversified forms of expression, that by means of their sheer grouping-together tend to expose the failures of state decision-making in calibrating the distribution of civic liberties and economic welfare to the levels expected by its people. In this sense, the deep consciousness of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* is, in the end, nobody's prerogative and nobody's exclusive preserve except those for whom the shifting relations of power continue to result in further economic poverty and other forms of state, confessional or faction-spawned oppression – as is the case with the ongoing killings of civilians particularly in Syria and Libya.

In a certain sense, one cannot not share, however naively, the hope that *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* can offer an important place from where to voice the political future. This is the hope that despite the factional maneouvering now widespread after the uprisings, as the reins of power continue to change hands in the name of 'democratic' quests or otherwise, those first, spontaneous and keenly meant cries of protest in 2011 will continue to determine the central role of 'rebellions from below'. *Al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* remains an underlying mode of survival wherein the incumbent power continues to face confrontation by and from the social grassroots, a condition that permits those who have remained disenfranchised *after* the uprisings to voice what they deem to be undesirable from their point of view with unprecedented conviction.

To tie up with my initial commentary – *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*, in this sense, marks those knowledges capable of embodying the constant translation of pain, of suffering, of wounded psyches, and intellects into the 'unshakable eschatology' of historical consciousness itself. As the irreducible product of the (ant)agonism of discipline and dissent, it becomes the underlying marker of a politics that inveterately refuses to invest in confessional, liberal secularist, capitalist, *etatiste*, extremist or overtly entrenched ideological narratives and other fixed political alternatives. What *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* suggests, instead, is what Edward W. Said defined as a distinctly 'life-affirming' stance – a conspicuous quality amongst the demonstrating crowds of 2011 (2004: x). As an agonistic expression of historical consciousness that was essentialized *as such* on the cusp of revolution, the longer-term effects of 2011 – in the Arab world and elsewhere – may ultimately gesture towards that political scenario intended by Daniel Bensaïd when he argued so forcefully for the laicization of the body-politic, for a recognition that politics is, *strictu sensu*, anarchic, or as Bensaïd puts it, 'without primordial foundation' (Bensaïd 2012: 26).

This recognition in itself can, moreover, offer a mode of politics that addresses the urgency 'to pursue the transformation of theological questions into profane ones and so cease to reduce the political to the social, searching for a mythical lost unity' (33). To embrace this politics would entail that one invests oneself in embracing, in Franco Cassano's terms, 'the fight against *all* fundamentalisms' (Cassano 2012 [1996]: 1). As I see it, this goal is not in itself an abstractive ideal, albeit the fact that military muscle coupled with fundamentalism – from Israel to IS right now – seems to foreclose

even its contemplation. The year 2011 has shown that Cassano's fight can indeed be conducted, in Rooney's words, 'outside any ideology, creed, set of ideals', one whose character can be expressed as, amongst other things, an 'alternative form of consciousness [that] is persistence as solidarity, as resoluteness, as genuine *comradeship*, as collective consciousness, as revolutionary faith [. . .]' (Rooney 2009: 167; see also her essay in this issue).

Such a countering stance would demand, as in Rancière's own purview, to be perceived as 'the very institution' of the political. Its existence is not only incommensurate with the remits of autocratic modes of governance; its brief is, first and foremost, to essentialise an empathetic politics of social consciousness – and to confront or rise up against its violations. The 2013 upheaval in Turkey against the abuses of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the AK Party's confessional rule offers an important example of some of the more recent and collectively expressed symptoms of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa*. In Gezi Park, just off Taksim Square in Istanbul, dissidents from all walks of life gathered to assert themselves as physically, psychologically, and intellectually impacted subjects of Erdoğan's rule: lobbies against child abuse, secularists, anarchists, feminists, LGBTQ lobbyists, leftists, Kemalists, journalists, human rights activists, and other voices gathered to demand recognition of their common front in reaction to Erdoğan's authoritarian moves. The Turkish unrest demonstrated an expression of *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* that exposed the very political tissue behind the demand for civil liberties and constitutional rights and freedoms. *Al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* was just as crucial for the causes of constitutional reform and civil liberties in Turkey as much as it determined most of the Arab revolts, and was a basic element of their demands for dignity, participation and better economic terms.

The practice of *duranadam*, or the eight-hour 'standing man' silent vigil, initiated by performance artist Erdem Gündüz in Istanbul's Taksim, and that spread like wildfire throughout Turkey, did perhaps become one of the more visual and visible manifestations of a simmering *al-ḥāyāt al-maḥsūsa* that we now have: thousands of people standing – just standing there, facing the armed security forces, doing nothing else, not even speaking – and making their existence and demands felt, present in a plain and yet profoundly strident and effective manner. The *duranadam* vigils inscribed their rebellious terms through their participants' incisive silences –the sheer intensity of a historic legitimacy accrued from their endurance of repeatedly forfeited civic and constitutional claims.

Postcolonial Springs

As the first special issue of *CounterText*, 'Postcolonial Springs' offers its readers an eminent line-up of contributions from within postcolonial studies and beyond, and brings them together to reflect upon these emergent forms of countering and countertextual positionings, of political and cultural assertion across the southeastern Mediterranean, and their implications for postcolonialist thought today. In more than

one way and in persuasive terms, the essays in this issue form an intensive conversation around the unfolding events in the region and their wider resonances. A number of these contributions orbit to different extents, and from their own specific perspectives, around representations of subversion, literary and personal experiences of revolutions and uprisings, as well as profound contemplations on the nature of postcolonial studies and postcolonialist thought today.

The opening essay to this special issue of *CounterText*, penned by Timothy Brennan, offers an incisive and engaged contemplation of what the author terms the 'Palestinian state of mind', which he defines in light of the 'damage [that] has been done to conscience by widespread silence towards Israeli occupation [. . .].' Brennan takes his cue from a personal experience of the imperviousness of liberal interdisciplinary academia in 'parochial America' towards Arab and Islamic culture, leading to a longer reflection on the persistent network of Western powers today that, having mediated the recent Arab uprisings to its own ends, continues to sustain in myriad forms an oppressive order that cripples the Palestinian effort towards self-determination. In incisive readings of poems by two seminal Palestinian poets, Mahmoud Darwish and Mourid Barghouti, Brennan explores the fraught distance between the sense of 'crushing understatement' in these works, an 'emotional tenor' that is inherently premised on its readers' will to honour its meanings, and its embattled operation within a widespread silence towards Israeli aggression – in Brennan's words, 'the disarticulation of a people'. In the final part of his essay, Brennan advocates an attunement to the political address of the aesthetics of the periphery. This is an exercise that, in refusing to rely on the tropes of a compromised literary modernism, seeks to access that 'very physical *presence* of the bodies of a collectivity in speech' within the literature of the periphery that – like the Palestinian state of mind itself – has been hitherto disparaged by Eurocentric protocols of reading.

Caroline Rooney's essay offers a first-hand account of the author's own experience of Cairo in the years leading up to the 2011 uprisings that led to the end of Hosni Mubarak's rule. Rooney's narrative evinces an active downtown cosmopolitan spirit characterised by a burgeoning sense of 'audacity' in forms of arts activism, and its attendant collective spirit of perseverance that increasingly rendered ineffective the repressive manoeuvres of Egypt's disciplinary State. Criticising the impulse to construe the Egyptian revolution in terms of a mimetic desire for a secular democracy on Western lines, Rooney insists that the Arab uprisings consisted, in many respects, of a revolution against Western-style free market neoliberalism. Countering the perpetual cynicism attendant to the latter, Rooney argues, requires a form of politicisation that maintains 'the ongoing presence of the real as a matter of collective spirit' – one that can outlast the colonial interlude by resisting the absolutist self-assertion of market fundamentalism and its collusions with 'diplo-economic cosmopolitanism' as a mode of class-discriminatory privilege, as well as the compromising nature of right-wing Islam. In the final part of her essay, Rooney raises the intriguing case of Sufism, and specifically its *mulid* rituals and its important role in the Egyptian

revolutionary effort, as a relational cultural mode with the potential to survive the will-to-dominance.

In an informed and wide-ranging re-examination of the political horizons of postcolonial studies, Benita Parry's essay argues for the crucial role of Marxism in sustaining the revolutionary impetus of postcolonialist thought. Addressing the career of the late Edward W. Said, Parry points out that while Said's approach to criticism may initially have been philological, political purpose and direction were 'thrust upon him' through the situation of his native Palestine in the 1970s, together with the retreat from radicalism within academia. The Said of this period thus urged upon intellectuals the need to engage with injustice and oppression. Parry writes of Said's 'circuitous journey' which returned him, in his later works, to a critical approach that eschewed the political, and aimed to contain conflict through his notion of the 'contrapuntal'. While Said, with many postcolonial critics, did not subscribe to Marxism, Parry suggests that his work retained a thoughtful and complex respect for Marxists such as Lukács, Goldmann, Raymond Williams and Adorno. For Parry, Said's repudiation of Marxism is 'of a different order' from that of other postcolonial critics who drag revolutionary figures such as Fanon and Gramsci into their own agenda by attempting to stabilise and attune their thought to the 'centre-left'.

Ziad Elmarsafy's essay focuses on the crucial question of locating the beginnings of the Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011. After an eloquent survey of the ideas of Arendt on revolution, Derrida on the messianic and Bloch and Marcuse on the intersection between desire and political action, Elmarsafy focuses on selected works by Naguib Mahfouz (*The Day the Leader was Killed*, *Morning and Evening Talk*) and Gamal al-Ghitani (*The Za'farani Files*), and reads these as texts with a prognostic value, texts that emit signs of the revolution to come. Through the repeated pattern of failures of desire that recurs frequently in novels written during the presidencies of Anwar al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, the conditions of impotence and anhedonia associated with the advent of capitalism become symptomatic of a dysfunctional and hopelessly corrupt society. In this framework, the articulation of desire becomes, Elmarsafy argues, the first step towards revolution.

In a timely essay that re-focuses critical attention on the centrality of the Mediterranean as an increasingly evident site of confluence between East and West, North and South, Iain Chambers challenges explanations of the Arab Spring emerging from the Occidental media, arguing that the terms of engagement set by the Arab revolts can no longer be unilaterally defined by the West. Chambers goes on to argue that the events of the Arab Spring reopen the Western cultural and political lexicon and puts into question the historical alliance between Christianity and the universalising discourses of modernity. Ideas regarding the individual, the public sphere, political agency, religion, secularism, and the state are necessarily being renegotiated in the context of the uprisings. The lived experiences of the Arab Spring slip beyond Western constructions of the events to expose the political and cultural burden of a modernity that may no longer be determined or managed single-handedly by the West. The Arab

uprisings have occurred, Chambers observes, in the same time frame as protests in several European capitals, particularly since the fiscal collapse of 2008, and while there are distinct differences in these social unrests there is also, he points out, a common factor: the rejection of the hypocrisies of the modern state. The new perspectives emerging from this confluence of experience around the shores of the Mediterranean may yield a more radical humanism within social, cultural, and political formations that are not automatically circumscribed by the global dictates of neoliberalism.

Gil Anidjar's essay offers a scathing reflection upon the occurrence of revolution in the context of user-generated content: as a self-promulgating and, purportedly, instantly consumable spectacle of power. Anidjar discusses the 'seeming collapse' of the temporal distance between the event and its narrative, its actor and its spectator, its survivor and its witness. Drawing on the valuation of spectatorship, in Immanuel Kant's insights on the French revolution, as embodying the significance of the event itself, and invoking the inherent element of 'danger' Kant perceived in the act of public utterance of judgment on the event, Anidjar postulates that in Kantian terms such judgment may only be responsibly pronounced in the immediate wake of the event as a manifestation of 'treason'. To seek to endow the revolutionary effort with the urgency of fame will be a necessarily premature gesture, and the shortening of the distance between the event and its judgment an impossible exercise, Anidjar argues, since 'we have not been granted the power to decide, much less to know whether, by our actions or reactions, we are betraying ourselves or our people or state, or whether we might be bringing about the faithful redemption of that which that people or that state of ours should already have been.'

The final piece in this special issue of *CounterText* is, significantly, a creative one, and adds a crucial dimension to the exploration of emergent narratives and forms of countertextuality in the southeastern Mediterranean today. Penned by Stephanos Stephanides, *a litany in my slumber* emerges as a profoundly important piece among the works of memorial self-narrative that are reconvening today within the cultural-political terrain of this region. *a litany in my slumber* is a fragment from Stephanides' longer 'memory novel', and previously published fragments have as their focus the author's sudden departure from his native island in October 1957. His parents had separated several years before and he lived most of his early childhood with his grandparents, during the last decade of British rule, in a rural Cyprus that has largely ceased to exist. The author's mother remarried in 1958 and moved to Taiwan with his American stepfather in the early 1960s. Earlier published fragments of this novel focus on Cyprus in the 1950s, with flashbacks to the world before that decade including the first marriages of the author's parents, the rising nationalism and anti-colonial struggle, and flashing forward to his life between three islands in the '60s. The fragment that follows focuses on the period of 1974–6, significant years for the end of dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece. The period is also highly significant because of the 1974 war in Cyprus that led to the division of the island and the evacuation of the Cypriot Greeks living in the village of the author's birth, located in the northern part of the

island occupied by Turkey. Recalling these years, the author's childhood memory of the 1950s is always present, as is his desire for his future journey that will eventually take him beyond the Mediterranean on a second Odyssey, before he eventually returns to settle on the island of his birth in the Middle Sea.

I trust that, in its breadth of contributions by scholars and writers with a distinguished background in their respective fields, *Postcolonial Springs* will serve as an informed platform for debate across scholarly, political, cultural, and activist fronts. These urgencies – foremost amongst them the realities of communities fighting for their dignity and basic rights in Libya, Syria, the Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria, the Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan and beyond, remind us that, in a scenario driven by power and profit, authoritarian and financial interests, and the neoliberalist greed that has dominated the region, our intellectual vigilance asks of us to speak out and to object with resolve. As the political map of the southern Mediterranean is drawn and redrawn, it will be indeed difficult, henceforth, to reflect on the present history of postcoloniality without readily opening ourselves to these recent clamours, these voices for social change and economic justice heralded so clearly in the *midan* in revolt.

Notes

1. This is Vijay Prashad's argument. See, for this argument in more detailed form, Vijay Prashad, *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter*, especially p. 25 onwards. *Calcification* is also the term used by Prashad.
2. See, for more on *al-sharzeyya* in the Egyptian revolution, Ahdaf Soueif, *Cairo – My City, Our Revolution*, pp. 13–14.

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Letters from Tunisia: Darwish and the Palestinian State of Mind

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Abstract:
In this timely and engaged contemplation of the 'Palestinian state of mind', Timothy Brennan takes his cue from a personal experience of the imperviousness of liberal interdisciplinary academia in 'parochial America' towards Arab and Islamic culture. This leads to a longer reflection on the persistent network of Western power today, which, having mediated the recent Arab uprisings to its own ends, continues to sustain in myriad forms an oppressive order that cripples the Palestinian effort towards self-determination. In incisive readings of poems by two seminal Palestinian poets, Mahmoud Darwish and Mourid Barghouti, Brennan explores the fraught distance between the sense of 'crushing understatement' in these works: an emotional tenor that is inherently premised both on its readers' will to honour its meanings and its embattled operation within, in Brennan's words, 'the disarticulation of a people'. In this light, Brennan's essay moves to address the unintended ironies inherent in the term 'postcolonialist critique' as it encompasses 'the metallic reality of an extravagant contemporary colonialism'. He criticises the complicity of postcolonial studies in exacerbating rather than facilitating 'the difficulty of reading peripheral value', as well as its entrenched reluctance to interrogate imperialism. In the final part of his essay, Brennan advocates attunement to the political address of the aesthetics of the periphery. This as an exercise that, in refusing to rely on the tropes of a compromised literary modernism, seeks to access that 'very physical presence of the bodies of a collectivity in speech' within the literature of the periphery that – like the Palestinian state of mind itself – has been hitherto disparaged by Eurocentric protocols of reading. In the process, and throughout, the paper provides ample reflection on the affinities between the countertextual and critical practice within postcolonial studies.

Keywords: postcolonial, periphery, the nation, politics of aesthetics, exile, Gaza, Palestine, Mahmoud Darwish, Mourid Barghouti.

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Less than a year after her Tunisian advisors declined her application as *maître-assistant*, Salwa wrote to me excitedly from Tunis with the news that she had placed an article in a special issue of *College Literature*. Five years in Minneapolis were not enough to dim her enthusiasm for the city where we had worked together, advisor and advisee, on her dissertation on the theme of disability in North African literature. Or perhaps it was only that, returning from the beach town of Sousse ('*la perle du Sahel*') to be interviewed by a jury for the opening, her questioners summarily dismissed her application on the grounds that she had no proof of PhD ('*Diplôme d'Études Approfondies*'). The paperwork had not yet gone through. President Chekili and his committee – among them Tarchouna, Ben Slimane and Libadi – admitted their error only much later. The doctorate had been in hand for over six months, but by the time they conceded the point it was too late. The University of Tunis faculty had all dispersed for vacation in August and there was nothing to be done but accept the fallback offer of becoming a 'contractual'. The following year would surely promise better things.

The much-awaited essay in *College Literature*, however, only created an unwelcome stir. Her examiners found her disability studies approach tasteless, and recoiled at her reading of the Quran in which she argued that the trope of sight in several Quranic passages was quite literal. Like so much else in that socially reform-minded holy book, she argued, it contained a call for better treatment of the blind. Especially her translation of the phrase 'his left eye, three-quarters closed' they found 'horrible'. Exiling her yet again to another year of contractual labor, they expressed what Salwa insisted was 'an unconscious ableism that translates into a strong aversion to my topic'. Write something else, do more, they counselled, but this time 'on English authors'. The letters began arriving less frequently, sent now from Zaghouan near the 'picturesque ruins of a Roman temple' close to her parents' hometown where there was (she explained) 'no easy access to the internet'.

Salwa had originally returned home, it must be said, kicking and screaming, and with a residual sense of shock. With dutiful efficiency, she had jammed eight years of training into five years of harried study, proudly announcing to her by-then familiar advisors at the International Student Service Center at the University of Minnesota that her competent management had allowed her to defend her dissertation a full three months before her visa expired in late May. In the second it took for the news to sink in, the foreign student advisor's face fell to a frown. With a sober gaze, he looked into Salwa's expectant eyes and brusquely demanded that she ready herself for imminent deportation. A post-9/11 decision by the INS (the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service) – inexplicably withheld from her and others of her status by the centre whose mandate was to help international students – decreed that the completion of one's program of studies resulted in the expiration of one's visa.

After battling the ruling with lawyers, a colleague and I moved to more long-term solutions: we would find her a job. But the byzantine insensitivities of the Tunisian bureaucracy looked puny in comparison to the *Berufsverbot* governing all attempts at

treating equally Arabic or Islamic culture in the land of local knowledge. Surveying the landscape of the liberal arts in parochial America, we found no courses in Arabic literature at our university. If the university's disciplines were impervious, so too were the interdisciplines. Minnesota had a European Studies Consortium, a Center for German and European Studies, a Center for Austrian Studies, a Center for Modern Greek Studies, Hebrew Studies, Jewish Studies, a Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, but only one or two courses, irregularly offered, on Arabic or North African literature – housed in the African-American studies department. I canvassed the chairs for adjunct money. We pointed to demonstrable need, ridiculous disproportion, and to Salwa herself, who was available. But the college got grave, could not see the need, and in the end there was no money.

We hear a great deal today about the 'in-between' as though it were a new way of being to which we should all aspire. And yet the dramas between the lines of her letter captured something of the unexalted meaning of the phrase for many who become diasporic subjects in order to work or study. I told Salwa, 'I am going to write about your difficulties, because apart from the familiarity of your situation to other U.S.-based international students, you also have sent me poems by Mahmoud Darwish from time to time, and the lyrics of Marcel Khalife, drawing analogies between their feelings and yours, finding relevance in what you called 'the inhuman Israeli concept of "transfer", the destroyed houses of Palestinians."' She replied, 'please go forward with it . . . I'm pleased and intrigued.' In my next missive I asked, 'What is the Tunisian fascination with Palestine? What has Palestine to do with the Arab Spring? Why do you even care about Tunisia with its benighted attitudes towards the disabled, its colonial hangovers? You don't even want to stay there.' And in a later letter she answered, 'because I remember the Palestinians buried in Tunisia to whom Darwish refers in a poem.'

But this answer did not satisfy me. It was too literal: she cares because Palestinians died in her country (as if there were not dozens of other countries with Palestinian graves scattered across the face of the earth!). Over half the Palestinian population was displaced and relegated to exile after 1967, now stirring restlessly in permanent refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria: more than five million souls. But think also of that domestic internment camp, that long stretch of rubble known as Gaza, only 3% of the land of historical Palestine housing 1.5 million people, most of them descendants of refugees from the 1948 war. I thought a more convincing response on her part would be more literary, more redemptively metaphorical since she clearly wanted to study literature freely, and neither the United States nor Tunisia were letting her do so for different reasons; and although she would have preferred Tunisia, all things being equal, they were not equal because of the same kinds of colonial forces (with many different inflections and local forms of expression naturally) that brought disaster to the Palestinians – that nexus of French, English, and now American control of the region devolving ultimately from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798–1801) through the Sykes-Picot Accord of 1916 right up to the recent NATO bombing of

Tripoli. In her mind, Israel was at a deep level the expression of a continuing European (and now American) process of territorial conquest – a settler colony of primarily white and Western intruders. She rallied in the next note, drawing on her craft, and giving me the literature I had asked for by illustrating her anguish in the form of Mahmoud Darwish's 'An Exile's Letter' (the translation here, otherwise unpublished, was done by her, Moustapha Marrouchi, and Wayne Tompkins):

Greetings . . . and a kiss

And now . . . what do I say now?

Where should I begin . . . where end?
The cycle of time is endless
And what do I possess in my exile
but a tiny knapsack
of breadcrumbs and longing,
and a notebook laden with grief
in whose pages I spat out
all the bitterness possessing me.

Where do I start?
Everything that has been said already
and will be said again tomorrow,
and the day after tomorrow,
doesn't cease with a single embrace,
the touch of a hand,
doesn't bring the exile home,
make the rain fall,
doesn't plant new feathers
on the wing of a lost and careworn bird.

Where can I begin?

Greetings . . . a kiss,
and then . . . and then . . .

I say to the radio: *Tell mother I am well.*

I say to a passing bird: *If you see her, O Bird,*
remember me, and tell her –
'*Well, he is well.*
He is well.'

My eyes can still see.
There is still a moon in the sky,
And my old clothes aren't quite worn out.
They're only frayed,
but I mended them
and it's all right.

And I've become a young man again.
Imagine! I'm in my twenties again –
a young man!

I face life and bear its burdens
as men do.

I work in a restaurant washing dishes,
and I make coffee for its patrons
and fasten a smile on my face
to cheer them up.

I am well.
I've reached my early twenties.
I am a young man, mother.

I smoke cigarettes leaning against the wall.

I sigh *aaah*! at pretty girls
just as other young men do,

and I say to them
O brothers, how sweet pretty girls are,
Imagine the bitterness of life without them.

Life *is* bitter

And my friend said
'Do you have a piece of bread?'

O brothers, what is a man worth
if he falls asleep hungry every night?

But I am well,
I am well.
I have a piece of barley bread
and a small basket of vegetables.

I heard on the radio
the homeless greeting the homeless.
They all said
We are well,
No one is sad

How is my father?
Does he still love and praise Allah?
And what of the children? And the land? And the olive trees?
And how are my brothers?
Have they become government workers?

Once I heard my father say
They will all be teachers

I heard him say
I go hungry so they can have books

No one in my village can read or write.

And my sister how is she?
Is she all grown up
and do young men come round to court her?

Does she still sit beside the door
praying for us all,

praying for our peace of mind and good fortune?

And how is our house,
its smooth threshold, and the stove, and the doors?

I heard on the radio
the letters of the homeless to the homeless.

All are well!

But I am grieving.
Doubts begin to consume me.

The radio brought no news of you.
Not even sad news
Not even sad news.

Mother, the night is a ravenous wolf
persecuting the exile everywhere,

opening the horizons to ghosts
while the willow trees cling to the wind.

Mother, what wrong have we committed
to die this double death,
once while still alive and, then, for good?

Do you know what fills me with tears?
Suppose I became ill one night
and disease ravaged me.

Will the evening remember an exile
who came here and couldn't go home?
Will they even remember an exile
who died without even a shroud?

The opening line establishes an ambiguity that mobilises the rest of the poem, wending, though, not towards the redemptively literary that I had first imagined, but a deliberately untranscendent actuality: what this journal, and this special issue, is calling *countertext.* On the one hand, it suggests a dramatic possibility – the poem's occurrence in the present; on the other, it purposely evokes the calculated staleness of memory. Equally, it is a letter to a loved one; and also, just one-way information-retrieval via the cold medium of radio. If the poem is taken as occurring in the present, then its strength lies in contrasting the benefaction of a 'touch of the hand' with the home the hand cannot deliver – the many and constant touches the narrator would encounter only at home. If it is taken as memory, then the chastening tone of the lines is inward-turning. For the point would then be not what is said but *that* it is said by a 'young man' who is forced to speak like a wizened old man, reflecting sagaciously upon life rather than living it. These are the words of someone yearning to be apolitical, striving for the banalities of life that politics will not permit him to enjoy. What strikes one in this poem, which is fine throughout but perhaps remarkable only in this single respect, is its crushing understatement ('All are well!'). Honour forbids him to be effusive. It leads him to expect that honour will govern his reception and make his restraint fully understood, filling in the gaps of the meaning he has been careful to leave. But he is amazed to find himself speaking in a world where so many are dishonourable. The emotional state achieved – suspended midway between the aesthetic beauty of rhetorical restraint and the dignified disinterest in, or annoyance with, the transports of verbal play in a condition of such urgency – is precisely countertextual.

What I do not say to Salwa after receiving the poem (it seems impertinent) is that I do not want Palestine to mean more to her than to me. It may be emblematic of the Arab/Muslim condition, but this particular form of brutalisation derives its authority from an ideology of the divinely chosen, and as such represents a colonial programme that symbolises the post-Soviet drift of politics more generally. Anyone living in the

United States today, of whatever background, has a claim to fear the outcomes of US Middle East policy. This is not an exclusively Arab or Muslim affair. Credible reports suggest that the George W. Bush government had been an administration with ties to a millennialist Christian sect; its leaders, moreover, recruited to its inner circles a collection of well-connected career defenders of Israeli interests, whose dubious allegiances dovetail with the American government's own. There is no particular reason any ethical thinking person would not side with their opponents. Among the most hated of these are the ones armed with little more than slingshots and bottles, some of them not yet teenagers, who had risen up for years throughout Gaza and the West Bank in one of the great liberation movements of the century, in spite of assertions that we live in a post-heroic age. The crude Qasam missiles fired from Gaza have supplemented this weaponry, as has the firepower of non-Palestinians who have also felt the brunt of the Israeli military – Hizbollah – and successfully overcome it. But the incomparability of military power remains graphic, and feeds into the mood of pessoptimism (Emile Habiby's memorable term) that permeates the poem.

The stipulated universality of literature here meets the general, not sectoral, relevance of a 'Palestinian state of mind' in that damage has been done to conscience by the widespread silence towards Israeli occupation, incarceration, assassination – the disarticulation of a people. Darwish's poem puns on the Arabic resemblance of the words *home* [*watan*] and *shroud* [*kafan*], where *home* rather means something similar to *homeland* (the French *patrie*). Living and dying in a strange land, Darwish paradoxically implies, may be necessary in order to hold one's turf coveted by invaders. The policy of ethnocide against the Palestinian people must prompt first of all a human response, which is not only about empathy but tactical considerations. For silence about Israel has weakened the prospects for change in places far from Palestine by reducing the forms of resistance to the scale of the oppressor's logic. The fundamental initial *secularity* of the Palestinian movement and its Intifada – its origins in a primarily national liberationist past – has been driven over two decades by the force of its persecutors' zealotry into an increasingly religious movement: the opposition of martyrs. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizbollah step in to replace Fatah and the PFLP in what is much more than an exchange of identities. Only the bonds of a myth beyond reason appear to be able to summon the resolve to fight a militarily superior occupier in the absence of sustained and vocal international support. Stone-throwing children only become leverage on a well-financed nuclear state when joined by the outraged voices of intellectuals throughout the world demanding UN peace-keeping troops, divestment campaigns, and war crimes tribunals. Lacking these, there will be more exploding bodies on buses and pedestrians crushed beneath cars in the market place.

How to detach the pace and form of the Intifada from the Arab Spring itself? In striking parallels with the scenario sketched above, the initially spontaneous uprisings within Tunisia following the self-immolation of the humiliated vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, and the protests in Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Morocco, Jordan, and Bahrain began as infuriated rejections of cronyism, corruption, and the military edicts of

the security state. These have, however, slowly emerged as a consolidation and formal recognition of the power within civil society of the Muslim Brotherhood, a major player in electoral contests in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Kuwait – and exemplified by the accession to power of Muhammad Morsi in Egypt, a member of the Brotherhood's political wing. It is difficult to overestimate the symbolism of Palestine for the entire movement, not only in the literal example of the Intifada as a liberatory act of dramatic, street-level confrontation with the forces of settler colonialism, but as a litmus test of pan-Arab solidarity. There is no doubt that the regimes now toppled or in danger of falling in the Levant, the Gulf, and the Maghreb had maintained their legitimacy this long in the face of popular misery by virtue of their claim to be bulwarks against the Zionist project.

As Salwa put it, 'Tunisians took to the streets, to Avenue Habib Bourguiba, facing the Ministry of the Interior and voicing in one voice "*Dégage*!" which made the former president escape. It was unprecedented and comparable to Tunisians' rising against French colonizers in the past. It was not aided by foreign forces or conceived by any party – popular par excellence.' But then, 'external and internal forces orchestrat[ed] and provok[ed] the changes to their advantage. Yesterday in the [U.S.] presidential debate the expression of "taking advantage" when talking about the Middle East was recurrent. The president mentioned that the US was the first to side with the Tunisians when the Tunisian revolution began, but it was only after the people started their unstoppable march and the world sensed that it was going in an unprecedented direction and would result in something rare, unique.' Now, she continued lamenting, 'the "moderate" *Nahdha* party [is] supported by Arab and Western powers against the best interests of Tunisian men, youth and women. . . ' (ben Zahra, 2012a).

Maan, a Syrian student of mine, a brilliant guitarist whose style was based on his training on the oud, had written to me some months before to say he wanted to meet next time I was in Europe, and to express his anxieties over the rising complexities in Syria. 'Maan,' I wrote him back, 'can you really compare the situation in Syria to events in Egypt and Tunisia? Are not the United States and the European Powers simply using the Arab Spring to redraw the political map of the Arab Middle East by means of military incursion and the encouragement and funding of civil wars based on religious and ethnic sectoralism rather than democratic aspirations? Libya particularly seemed a case of outright European and U.S. invasion; and Syria seems very similar, with Turkey and Saudi Arabia as the most immediate conduits and proxies of U.S. interests. Naturally, there was very real popular anger against Qaddafi in Libya in the Eastern provinces, but this never would have led to a sustained civil war, much less his overthrow and assassination, had it not been for Western intervention. Similarly, I realise that there is very real opposition to Asad in Syria among large parts of the population, but the evidence of Western intervention seems overwhelming' (Brennan 2012).

He responded patiently but firmly: 'Dear Professor [. . .] Your analysis of the situation in Syria could be right only [if] the current government in Syria was/is

the power which challenged or might challenge Israel. My argument is, and what is clear to most Syrians and to most Israelis I know . . . that the world is not taking any action, except for some shy steps to help refugees, for example, just because they can't guarantee to have a nice government in Syria like the current one, which did not take any action against Israel since 1973 . . . And people the[re were] getting poorer and poorer. So we had . . . reason[s] to revol[t], but first we were afraid, and second we [were] brainwashed and convinced that we should support our executioner (government) no matter what because we are in a holy war. These lies are no more accepted [by] Syrians since the beginning of the revolution. People are no more naive and simple-minded to believe these lies any more. We all wondered why we did not go to war the last 43 years. Or at least why we did not respond to the several Israeli violations to our airspace, or shelling the could-be atomic factory in the middle of the Syrian Desert or . . . etc. Why? Syrians finally started to ask questions they never dared to ask in the past. We were triggered by all the previous revolutions [that were] happen[ing] in front [of] our eyes, by our great history, by our sufferings, by our unreasonable poverty . . . etc.' There are complications with the analysis, I thought – the majority Sunni resentment of the Alawite minority in Assad's government and among the popular loyalist militias, for example, or the possibly dangerous outcome of a rebel victory given the divided opposition and its reliance on the support of other state players with their own interests. But the issue of political legitimacy in this pre-revolutionary conjuncture – indeed, one of the principal sources of insurrectionary anger – clearly seems to devolve in great measure from the symbolic potency of the Palestinian state of mind (although, of course, given Syria's geopolitical location, much more than symbolism is at stake, and a countertextual resistance to mere symbolism part of any reasonable agenda).

Although in literary studies transnationalism is widely taken to be the dominant reality, Salwa's letters from Tunisia remind us that a residual truth is more widely felt. In her outlook, as in Darwish's, it is rather *exile* that plays the larger role. The somewhat literary aura of the term – as though it were like the banishment of Catullus for crossing the Emperor – does not prevent it from persisting since it relies on an acute and very un-literary awareness of borders, policed territories, visas, deportations, and the legality conferred by citizenship. We are speaking not of a 'post-literary' condition exactly, but of an ingenious inflection of aesthetics in the periphery, 'metamorphic and revelatory' of conditions of rapid social upheaval that cannot wait for mere verbal savouring and cannot sit still before an impoverished gamesmanship of the imagination. For these poets, when speaking of exile, the nation is an uncompleted project rather than an outmoded political form or a pernicious imposition from above as it is characterised by so many of our theorists today (Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy) as involving a necessary exclusion and an exploited surplus population. The Palestinian state of mind (and how could it not appear belated to metropolitan sensibilities?) offers one of those frequent opportunities in literature when a universal condition brings one crashing back into an embattled and censored

politics of sides-taking; and where the literary pastimes of the relatively leisured force one to recognise that exile – figured as passé by a modernist critical literature based on expatriate authors, alienated counter-cultures and aesthetic nomads – is actually the current obsession and popular agenda of the politically disenfranchised.

The Graveyard of Aesthetics

In the words of the initial approach by Norbert Bugeja, this special issue of *CounterText* raises the 'need to predicate some of [our] future insights upon the manner in which emergent and regional literatures are countering the erstwhile sublation of "the literary" itself within the interests of autocratic discourse.' I was asked to consider 'the question of how forms of postcolonialist critique will evaluate and possibly counter forthcoming representations of political and cultural consensus and dissent – as well as those forms of epistemic violence that may reassert themselves in the wake of the upheavals.' But what if the 'sublation of the literary,' which I take to mean the supersession of a specific aesthetic practice associated with the consumption and appreciation of literature, is deeply a part of the aesthetic strategies of the fiction and poetry of the periphery? What if the 'autocratic' – a sliding referent as likely to prompt thoughts of Kim Jong-Il or Islam Karimov as George W. Bush – is, like the word *terrorism*, an epithet that covers dis-symmetries of imperial value, rendering unintelligible any aesthetic that does not register as innovative in our inherited systems? I began to suggest the difficulty of reading peripheral value in my partial rendering of Darwish's poem above, but I would like to pursue it in a second reading of a poem by Mourid Barghouti below, which illustrates the kind of countertextuality to which I earlier referred. First, though, a detour through another term in the special issue description – 'postcolonialist critique'.

No parsing can salvage this phrase's unintended ironies as it encompasses with a negative (the 'post' of a supposed aftermath) the metallic reality of an extravagant contemporary colonialism – still deepening in Puerto Rico, Madagascar, Palestine, and Tibet; expanding into significant new territory in Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, Uzbekistan, and the Sahara. The scale of global capital penetration is not merely imperialism (as distinct from colonialism): that is, not merely imperialism's remote-control finance perfecting and normalising the more haphazard business ventures of an historically earlier colonialism. There is nothing so characteristic of the new today, in fact, as its recidivism in the sense that the flow of unequal exchange sought by capital involves all the earmarks of an older arrangement: in Israel, obviously, a classic European settler strategy accompanied by the familiar eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rhetoric of religious mission and the civilising of a racially backward people; but often, in pace with the new, a slightly modified arrangement elsewhere involving a massive movement of diasporic populations and a semi-permanent legion abroad – from Roatan (Honduras) to Kuala Lampur – of tourists, expatriates, language-teachers, adventurers, advisors, mercenaries, CIA operatives,

and diplomatic ensembles, all making the late-nineteenth-century era of the Berlin Treaty seem comparatively underdeveloped as colonialism goes. There has never been a time, not even at the height of the Second World War, when there were more US military bases abroad. Every invocation of the term *postcolonial* is troubled, then, since it recapitulates the strategic temporising of its inception.

Often posing as a single, coherent, philosophical and political ethics, postcolonial studies is really an uneasy mix of multiple schools of thought, criss-crossed by particular combinations of methodological differences, identitarian points of departure, regional foci, and political allegiances. These are, however, treated very unequally, and there is a tendency to deny the existence of the minority strands. The more materialist wings, operating under great pressure throughout the 1980s and 1990s, have begun finally to win the day theoretically, although without the acknowledgement that they fought these earlier battles, and often without citing the principals. Many materialist histories now being composed within the field (a recent re-politicisation that seeks to distinguish itself from the more common discursive readings of epistemes that characterised the earlier decades) are nevertheless still eager to separate themselves from the taint of association with the socialist and socialising rhetorics adopted by so many of the African, Asian, and Latin American subjects that play a role in their research. The supposed heart of the voice of the colonised within Western academia, then, stakes out a Western vantage point in the inherited Cold War terms of the discussion. And even more problematically, differences within the field tend to be rooted in the divergent social situation of the theorists themselves – whether they are or are not native, diasporic, privileged, non-white. As a result, it is difficult to talk about the *interested* nature of inquiry, perhaps, but one cannot understand the directions taken in postcolonial studies without accounting for the postcolonial intellectual as a certain mobile type in the British and US academy, as well as the contradictory role he or she played, and the ambiguity about whether one was talking when using the term *postcolonial* about an identity or an expertise. *Was* one a postcolonial, or did one *do* postcolonial work?

Postcolonial studies has been virtually defined for decades by an intense hostility to the nation-form. The prevailing belief was rather that nations are obsolete and vile, and that we live in a diasporic, transnational world (whose existence was always severely overstated). If it has long been the case that actual empires were not talked about in postcolonial studies in the present tense, and indeed, if the whole issue of imperialism as a vital aspect of business dealings and geopolitical relationships was avoided, then today it is possible to see ‘empire’ talked about everywhere in our journals, but usually only as a ‘concept-metaphor’.

How else could a field that considers itself dedicated to studying imperialism, colonialism, or their aftermath have absolutely *nothing* to say about the geopolitical strategy in Afghanistan and Colombia, the politics of Cuba, or the place of Chinese, Brazilian, Indian, and Mexican labour in a world supposedly defined by ‘post-industrialism’? Why is it considered mandatory to know Jacques Derrida but not

Karl Polanyi? To know Gayatri Spivak but not Janet Abu-Lughod, Giovanni Arrighi, or Immanuel Wallerstein? Why, at the time of the Arab Spring, is it not considered a requirement to return to the work of Samir Amin, whose continuing theorisations of the unfolding reality of imperialism in the context of the Arab Spring (and many other parts of the world) are the actual rather than putative core of any postcolonial studies worthy of the name? We need something along the lines of an intellectual and political history that could explain such an absence, while attempting to demonstrate the previous lack. Very little of the title headings in postcolonial studies flag the important aspects of empire having to do with natural resources, economic advantages, torture, genocide, occupation, or surveillance as a particularly first-world prerogative (it is, by contrast, a frequent topic in work that attacks an undifferentiated notion of the 'state'). We hear of 'resistance', but when it comes to 'revolution' – actual and of the present – only in a curiously aestheticised register.[1] We hear of the trans-nation but not the obvious resilience and persistence of the political form we are constantly told is merely an empty shell: the nation. So how, in this framework, can one begin to make sense of Chavez's Venezuela? Or Pakistan? Or, more to the point, Palestine?

Even as there is a resolute turn in the field towards the immediately political – to the situated, empirically verifiable, and politically engaged, as I said – this has been accompanied by more paradoxical developments that effectively neutralise this new and welcome emphasis. There are perhaps three main ones, exuding a necessary air of risk and novelty: (1) what might be called neo-Mannonism[2] – the view of the colonised as heroically contributing to their own colonization, seduced by a culture considered superior to theirs, in love with the culture that accompanies the figures who have made them an offer they could not refuse;[3] (2) the history of objects, a natural history to replace the history of human beings – a romance with death, and an act of purifying the inquiry by way of an oblivion that obviates commitment, or affiliation with a political force that would situate the inquirer;[4] (3) the amplified rhetoric of a communism that is not, which is to say an approach modelled on revolutionary engagement and transformation, frequently invoking Marxist traditions, but in such a way as to purge that tradition of its purported philosophical failures and crimes.[5]

What I have been figuring here as the 'belated' as it appears, at least, within the norms now prevailing in humanities theory – that is, the Palestinian embrace of the nation, its continued sense of the viability of the image of exile, its epic-heroic take on liberation – is precisely what enables the most effective commentary within the metropolis as well. It is striking and significant, for example, that the most valuable contributions to postcolonial theory – or rather, to what that theory nominally stands for – have been produced in recent years by those who either did not participate in the field's internal debates (and so freed themselves from its obsessions), or who consciously evaded or repudiated them: people like John Bellamy Foster, Naomi Klein, Rebecca Solnit, Serge Halimi, Slavoj Žižek. This fact is revealing for what it says about the roads not taken in theory, or why a form of intelligent journalism, rather than theory as such, has been able to play this role. Each of these popular critics

has done a great deal more to clarify the nature of the dynamics of global power distribution, the maintenance of inherited relations of force, and the cultural and ideological mechanisms of Western dominance than the most celebrated theorists in the postcolonial realm. In part, it is because they have not jettisoned a model of imperialism founded on conflict, on struggles among unlike constituencies, of personal interests and agendas, and of the pressures on all inquiry that derive from gatekeepers of various sorts (chairs, powerful academic publishing houses, humanities institutes, tenure-review committees, and reviewers).

How is it, then, that a hole is cut through the heart of the interrogation of imperialism by the very subfield designated to investigate it? This is an epistemological question, and involves a struggle over intellectual lineages. If *revolution*, *terrorism*, and *imperialism* are common terms of the academic discourse of late, they are usually forced by the logic of inquiry into an aestheticised register. The result tends to be a theoretical investigation of the noumenal essence of concepts whose engendered 'stuff' can then be worked on poietically, outside the demands of any partisanship, concrete affiliation, or the taking of a position. What I would propose instead in the remaining few pages of this essay is to address an *aesthetics* that turns this metropolitan concept of political art inside out, and where the meeting of the literary and the political possesses a subtler force: not a movement that announces the political in a textuality of surfaces, affects, and indecisionism but a countertextual movement whose representation of situated life constitutes an outward-turning. All of the tropes of theory (ambivalence, the multiple, death of the subject, hybridity, the fractal, the third space, and so on) derive from literary modernism. Is there a critical language, then, for our reading of the poetry of contemporary Palestine, for instance, that can operate intelligibly outside it?[6] And if not – as I am suggesting is the case – how can we do anything but cultural violence to such work within the field of postcolonial literary studies? I would make no claims to revolutionary efficacy in such an expansion of our aesthetic sensibilities, but I would contend that it is a less pretentious option than the currently prevailing one, and returns us to our nominal focus in the field. For some of the excellent work exploring the aesthetics of the poetry of El Salvador, Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Haiti have raised such uncomfortable questions of inadequacy within our modernist inheritances that a host of efforts can be seen today to revive high modernism as a profoundly political, engaged, and even anti-colonial venture – a position with which Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and more recently a number of younger critics have frequently flirted. These more contemporary studies (operating in those critics' wake) testily refute the suggestion that the modernism of T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka, Wallace Stevens, and Samuel Beckett was elitist, quiescently imperial, apolitical, and on occasion racist.[7]

Leaving aside for the moment whether such a case can be made, what bearing does this disciplinary salvation of modernism have on the Arab Spring and its Palestinian state of mind? Or to put it differently, and in the sense adduced by my subtitle for this section, is the politics of aesthetics to be understood as the act of casting real

political conflicts that involve the exploding of bodies, the writing of broadsides, the stealing of water, and the demolition of homes in terms of an aesthetically beheld concept-metaphor (such as 'migrancy,' the 'fold,' '*translatio*,' 'zoontology,' and so on) – or is it to project ourselves into the political experience of the high-stakes battles in which so many are now engaged, forgetting for a moment the comfortable abstractions required by professionalisation, and the polite in-folding of all conflict into our nominal, disciplinary focus on the literary, in order to read another's aesthetic? Take this stanza from Barghouti's 'Midnight':

> Why is it that whenever I see a man who has been murdered
> I mistake him for a person lost in thought?
>
> Here you are, collapsed on the earth
> And the earth is in good health.
>
> Your heart has stopped
> Yet the earth beneath you pulses.
>
> Your blood now circulates
> Outside the confines of your body.
>
> You were two: you and your demands,
> You went out together and fought together, only you did not come back alive.
> (Barghouti 2008, 40–42)

Although the problem of translation has achieved a new saliency in world literary studies, the political recalibrations that make Barghouti's aesthetic strategy compelling represent a more difficult translation than that which is occurring here in the passage from Arabic to English. Translation in this case is an ideological more than a linguistic obligation, so that although the sensitivity to diction, pacing, enjambment, and other features of the prosody are pronounced even in its English rendering, the poet sends us not in the direction of the concrete verbal 'thing' (language encased as a musical or imagistic problem, a theme in its own right to be analyzed in any interpretation of the poem) but towards a different kind of problem entirely, one with which we are not used to dealing given our training: that of attitude or emotional tenor. These are conveyed to us by way of vernacular language that wants more or less to get out of the way rather than draw attention to itself. Its logic is similar to that of conversational speech, where the verbal thing is unconscious (or simply impertinent) in order to leave more room for the illusion of a direct intake of feeling-meaning. This is, to put it another way, and as in so much of the art of the so-called periphery, an emphasis on the very physical *presence* of the bodies of a collectivity in speech that has been so mercilessly (and we would have to say, Eurocentrically) derided by deconstruction.

There is a playfulness to Barghouti's language (his soft appeal to our outrage when seeing the murdered as 'lost in thought') but one that is curiously beyond play,

superseding the mere adventurism of craft while adopting the register of the second person as though one could dialogue with a dead man. Can we imagine that the 'murdered' has nothing to do with the many slain under the occupation, the children with sling shots dodging tanks, the unlucky remains of the latest strafing run in Gaza? He does not say, but how could the equanimity of the voice here not be the result of a certain unwanted familiarity with the routine violence of a permanent state of siege, and so capable of prompting an attitude we call 'philosophical' ('lost in thought')? And so the insouciance of his tone, the attitude of calm observational detachment, begs to be filled in by the anguish he will not provide and that we are meant to supply.

What we have here aesthetically is an inversion of the writing *in extremis* preferred by the avant-garde, where the bohemian poet amplifies his/her voice by use of nonsense languages, manifestos, transports to African incantations in order to shatter the eerie calm of a malevolent normality. Here, by contrast, we have just the opposite: the bizarre realism of an endemic brutality, where the extreme conditions of a well-armed invasion are altogether normal. Barghouti meets it with a beautifully controlled nonchalance intentionally inappropriate to the outrage he records. Staged drama gives way to historical drama; the urge to shock gives way to a mitigation of shock by means of determination; the death of subjects gives way to a multiplicity of subjects who recognise their individuality in the now disembodied demands that survive the sacrificed, and so then re-bodied by community. This is the countertextual.

And this also is why philosophy can be said by Barghouti to arise from death, and why a dialogue can take place with the dead, since the speaker sees in the murdered a figure of her or his own thought prompted by the murder itself. The blood seeping out of the victim 'circulates', as though it were the earth that was the body politic, and we the organs. The physicality of the image – never cheaply corporeal – reverts forcefully to the spiritual. It comes to embrace the spiritual in Hegel's sense of the spirit of *Right* or Law. Spirit supersedes the earth if the latter is taken, as it too often is by others, to be a mere dumb staging ground of thought. To the poet, by contrast, the earth rather lives and is 'vibrant,' but only by way of the 'demands' that continue to live in the world the dead left behind. These are her/his half of the conversation, and the only beauty of her/his speech: the Idea rather than the linguistic thing, and just as accessible in English as in the original Arabic. The foreignness of the poetry, again, has much less to do with the language of its origin than with its unapologetic casting of the immediate facts of a contemporary imperialism in epic-heroic terms. To see these terms as beautiful, that is, to locate in the wry genius of his indirection the reassertion of an epic attitude that the anarchist avant-gardes of theory deem obsolete (every bit as much as the corporate media do and for the same reasons), is to understand what might be political about a countertextual aesthetics. This is very far from the aestheticisation of struggle one finds in so many pockets of the contemporary re-enactment of modernist 'revolt' now re-entering discourse, at bargain prices, in an age of a discredited capitalism.[8]

As Theodor W. Adorno once famously remarked in *Minima Moralia*: 'The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass' (50). There is no greater clarity, in other words,

about what distinguishes the one aesthetics from the other than the mind-clearing shock of the political world as it unfolds in civil wars, occupations, invasions, and mass protests – all of them constituting what has so loosely, and by now disorientingly, been called the Arab Spring. The art that best captures the contradictions, disproportions, conflicting programmes, and uncertain relationship to the old imperial powers in that conflating term 'Arab Spring' is an art, as I have been suggesting, that the metropolis finds difficult to enjoy or to appreciate as art. Learning its aesthetic language requires the taking-on of a sensibility that allows the reader to see much more outside the realm of art. And *that* is a politics of aesthetics worth thinking about.

Notes

1. Significantly, this is not a general lack. Excellent work on this theme can be found in area studies. This theoretically informed work is at the same time politically astute: see Fischer 2004, Hallward 2010, Dayan 1998.
2. I am referring here to the work memorably criticised by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks:* Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*. His thesis in the book may be summarised in his own words as 'Dependence expresses itself as "gratitude"' (45). Mannoni's quasi-psychoanalytic approach to colonisation moves him, among other things, to fault the communists for being unable to 'descend to the level' of the personality and for remaining in the 'abstract heights of economic theory'. Like his current avatars, he does not deny systematic economic inequality in the colonial relationship, only that it is 'embodied in struggles for prestige, in alienation, in bargaining positions and debts of gratitude, and in the invention of new myths and the creation of new personality types' (8).
3. Neo-Mannonism is implicit in the work of Homi Bhabha ('Sly Civility,' 'Of Mimicry and Man') and is given more explicit expression in more contemporary work. To take only a few examples of a very large trend, see for example, Gandhi 2006, and, for a more historically informed and thoughtful treatment of the problem, Tageldin 2011.
4. See, for example, Sloterdijk 2011 [1998], Latour 1993), Wolfe 2010.
5. See, for example, Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya's *The Postcolonial Gramsci* (2012), which draws heavily on the rhetorical and conceptual apparatus of the interwar communist movements while disavowing Marxism and communism in favor of Italian *autonomia*, Ernesto Laclau, Jacques Derrida, and others.
6. Only some of the exceptions, in work that has sensitively dealt with the poetics of the literatures of the Middle East in a criticism attentive to politics on the ground: Ihab Saloul, Fadia Faqir, Ferial Ghazoul, Joe Cleary, Salah Hassan, Barbara Harlow, Tom Paulin, Fouad Moughrabi, and Anna Bernard.
7. See, for example, Berman 2011, James 2011, James 2012, Mahaffey 2007, Mao and Walkowitz 2010. For related studies that are more skeptical of the ideology of modernism, Barrows, *The Cosmic Time of Empire: Modern Britain and World Literature*, and Brown (2001).
8. One particularly exorbitant example, again of a very crowded genre, would be Taussig 2012.

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Sufi Springs: Air on an Oud String

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Abstract:
The initial part of Caroline Rooney's essay offers an incisive account of the author's experience of Cairo in the years leading up to the 2011 uprisings that led to the end of Hosni Mubarak's rule. Rooney's narrative evinces an active Downtown cosmopolitan spirit characterised by a burgeoning sense of 'audacity' in forms of arts activism, and its attendant collective spirit of perseverance that increasingly rendered ineffective the repressive manoeuvres of Egypt's disciplinary State. Criticising the impulse to construe the Egyptian revolution in terms of a mimetic desire for a secular democracy on Western lines, Rooney insists that the Arab uprisings consisted, in many respects, of a revolution against Western-style free market neoliberalism. Countering the perpetual cynicism attendant to the latter, Rooney argues, requires a form of politicisation that maintains 'the ongoing presence of the real as a matter of collective spirit' – one that can outlast the colonial interlude by resisting the absolutist self-assertion of market fundamentalism and its collusions with 'diplo-economic cosmopolitanism' as a mode of class-discriminatory privilege, as well as the compromising nature of right-wing Islam. Rooney moves on to locate a counter-movement based on an alternative form of consciousness that manifests itself 'as solidarity, as resoluteness, as genuine *comradeship*, as collective consciousness, as revolutionary faith and [as] festiveness.' In the last part of her essay, Rooney raises the intriguing case of Sufism, and specifically its *mulid* rituals and its important role in the Egyptian revolutionary effort, as a relational cultural mode that can survive the will-to-dominance as a persistent and liberatory collective gesture.

Keywords: the common ground, remains, festiveness, utopian cosmopolitanism, the real, *mulid*, Egypt, Cairo.

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At the end of 2009, we had moved to Jordan for a year to reconnect to the region . . . But there had been no hint of revolutionary change in the air that year . . . Catching up . . . It became a lot easier when I could keep in mind, as I always tried to, that nobody had seen this coming. Nobody.

–Johnny West (2011)

Egypt, this reading of history would suggest, may indeed be ripe for one of its periodic popular uprisings. Has Washington even considered this? The evidence mostly suggests that the answer is no.

–John R. Bradley (2008)

Can you not sense by a sort of instinctive intuition . . . Can you not feel the wind of revolution in the air?

–Alexis de Tocqueville (2012)

It could be said that the Egyptian revolution confronted the machinery of neoliberal ideology with a return of the real (*Al Haqq*),[1] together with a poetics of the real. However, it immediately needs to be said that the real did not return as such, in that it is that which never actually goes away. Rather, the question is one of disavowal. In Egypt, a combination of popular culture and citizen journalism served to present the world with the undeniable. For others, the corresponding challenge is one of how to sustain a citizen academia capable of activist engagement with history in the making.

This essay was written a few years ago, as the Morsi government came into power in 2012. The events of the counterrevolution since then have led many commentators to proclaim the revolution over, a failure. However, this dismissal entails adopting a typically diachronic perspective of successiveness (a sequential logic of success/failure) that, as argued below, fails to appreciate that revolutions demonstrate the very inadequacy of such a temporal logic of finitude and the surpassed: they can neither be explained nor dismissed by it. In a recent Edward Said memorial lecture, John Pilger, testifying to the resilience of the Palestinians in a world of hypocritical denials of the injustice they contend with, states:

> Yet, a critical public intelligence and resistance to propaganda does exist; and a second superpower is emerging—the power of public opinion, fuelled by the internet and social media.
>
> The false reality created by false news delivered by media gatekeepers may prevent some of us knowing that this new superpower is stirring in country after country: from the Americas to Europe, Asia to Africa. (Pilger 2014)

This may be understood to be the living *countertext* of our times, which is not only a matter of citizen journalism but much more widely one of popular culture, a people's avant-garde. It continues and continues to grow, for it is a horizon that cannot be

kettled and cordoned off, only temporarily checked to reappear elsewhere, from the first Palestinian Intifada to the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon to the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings to the recent worldwide demonstrations over Gaza. That said, in Egypt, the recent election of President Sisi has served to create a new rift between the older literary establishment, whose support for the revolution has translated into a seeming nostalgia for the Nasser era, coupled with an implicit defense of high culture, and the grassroots avant-garde which remains strongly opposed to military control and elitist institutions.

From Your Roving Reporter: 'There's something in the air right now . . . '

It is March 2010. I'm in Cairo, in Diwan bookstore on 26 July in Zamalek, conducting an interview with Bahaa Taher that is being filmed by a friend. We've been talking for about an hour over hibiscus tea in Diwan's crowded cafe area, attracting attention, occasionally getting interrupted by fans of Bahaa Taher who can't resist a greeting of good will. Even with the bustle around us, interviewing him has been an absorbing experience because we've been having an unexpectedly candid conversation. This may be why I find myself wishing to test out the hunch with him: 'There's something in the air right now . . . '[2]

He agrees. He speaks of how it'd been in '52. He is aware of this 'in the air' from that earlier moment, which implies that revolutions never die out. They just lie low for a while, then try again. When the Egyptian revolution broke out less than a year later and I went back to my filmed recordings, the concluding words of the interview had a spine-tingling effect, Bahaa Taher saying: 'It's like a dream. It is a dream. But let us stick to this dream.' At the time, the words came across as less dramatic; rather, they were confirmation of a mood I'd been picking up on in roving around Cairo.

It began when I interviewed Khaled Al Khamissi. Khaled Al Khamissi's novel, or *maqama*, *Taxi* had been a revelation to me.[3] Aware of Mubarak's authoritarian regime, what had struck me about this work is its open and scathing defiance of the government. No fear. It was quite different to the police state I had experienced in apartheid South Africa, where so many people just kept silent about what was going on. In meeting Al Khamissi, it was striking to hear him express an unusual degree of optimism regarding the current possibilities of political resistance and mobilisation, a mood I found shared by blogger Rehab Bassam who spoke to me of a growing wave of protests against the failures of the state. Probably the most significant thing to note about Cairo in the years just before the revolution is that there was this increasing audacity, rendering the government's policies of intimidation ineffective.

The most conspicuous intimation of the coming uprising that I had in 2010 was at El Sawy Culturewheel on staging a performance of Dizraeli and Baba Brinkman's hip hop play *The Rebel Cell*, a play about rebellious anti-capitalist youth culture and civil rights (see www.music.dizraeli.com). In Cape Town, disillusioned with the fear-fed apathy of the university that had issued from repeated detentions and campus surveillance,

I had become involved in the political activism of the multi-racial The People's Space Theatre, and a lesson of this arts activism was its role in generating and spreading a collective courage and trust. It was also a case of persistence: quite a few of the productions mounted were banned on their first night, but persevering against this revealed that perseverance is in part what liberty is.

In the performance of *The Rebel Cell*, when Dizraeli offers to rap freestyle, he asks the audience to call out topics for him to improvise on. The Cairo audience shouted out: 'Democracy!', 'Votes!', 'Change of Government!' The people were demanding the fall of the regime . . .

Things were happening right under the noses of the elite, but they just did not notice, or want to notice. There was an arts venue, Makan, that Ferial Ghazoul kindly introduced me to, when she took me to an awards ceremony featuring young people who were continuing Egyptian artistic traditions, and the venue was very much a people's space: a somewhat dilapidated building that seemed to have been 'occupied' and creatively adapted. Having discovered this place, I went back a few times to hear performances of Egyptian folk music, particularly the African-inspired Zār music of the group Mazaher. The route I took was an hour's walk from Zamalek over to Downtown through Garden City to Mounira. That is, it took me from the Embassies of Zamalek by the Embassies of Garden City and past the Egyptian Parliament in Magles el-Shaab Street. On each occasion, there were what I took to be, with some uncertainty, demonstrations going on outside the parliament. These were not noisy demonstrations (such as I had seen outside the parliament in Rabat), but, I think, vigils.[4]

The demonstrators, with sleeping bags or blankets, were lined up against the railings opposite the parliament. You could see at a glance how poor they were, an unavoidable acknowledgment, while their complete silence was haunting. There were a couple of small clusters of policemen standing at either end of their line of pavement, and I wondered if the silence was because of this. The police sent over menacing looks and they were clearly armed, so I kept my distance. There were a few cardboard placards but my very basic Arabic meant I could not decipher them. My initial feeling was that this scene seemed spectral; in a strange way it was as if I were seeing a procession of ghosts representing the downtrodden throughout the ages. But then, in a sudden reverse shot, it was the demonstrators who seemed very real and very present, if only we could just speak, and the parliament building appeared like an unreal facade as if made of cardboard, and the Embassies all seemed like confectionery, meringues and cakes, displayed in glass windows, not buildings at all.

The demonstrators, out in the open air, in front of the parliament, the American Embassy close by: how could the politicians and diplomats not have seen them? They were starkly visible, in plain view.

But that's how it works. The wealthy elites turn a blind eye to the suffering on their very doorsteps, the way that people 'see through' beggars on the streets. It's an attitude of shrugged-shoulder irresponsibility and, what I will call, perverse persistence. 'Yes, they are suffering but don't ask me to do anything about it because I can't fix poverty,'

combined with, 'All that matters is that I find ways of carrying on myself, and the way to do that is to keep to my script and my role.' So, there were two kinds of persistence in play, each trying to be more persistent than the other: that of the performative pretending not to see, and that of the evident reality. You did not need Arabic to understand a certain message from those on the pavement: 'We know you can see us and, no, we can't and so won't go away.'

As for the Embassy people, I never saw them at any of the cultural venues I was going to. Rather, you'd see them at restaurants that sold alcohol, at five-star hotels, while they partied frequently in their embassies, the music spilling out onto the streets. You would not see them at Zamalek's El Sawy with its avant-garde and popular arts scene. Instead, they liked a particular Zamalek pub: when you went there you could hear a lot of different languages being spoken, Spanish, French, Arabic, and some not so recognisable. When the foreigners spoke English it tended to be in an American accent, American-taught English. Call it: diplo-economic cosmopolitanism.

'This is where we are plotting to overthrow Mubarak,' joked novelist Ahmed Alaidy, when I arrived at Mirit's, the Downtown Cairo publishing house he had invited me and another English friend over to. But was it a joke? I did not know. What was evident was that there were a lot of writers and journalists coming and going, relaying the news of the day, including what the papers weren't publishing. Fresh waves of Arabic coffee kept being made, spliffs were being passed around, and, drowning out a television playing football, there was a lot of laughter from the banter, the Egyptian sense of humour. When my friend and I left we had to double-check with each other: 'Did that just happen?' The feeling of it was of something unbelievable, not in the sense of a fiction but in the sense of hidden reality or a dream: can this dream be true?

I had one encounter with an Egyptian general, in retrospect a bizarre brush with the echelons of SCAF. I was alone in Café Riche and a man, who looked like a yacht-owner but turned out to be a general on leave from his posting in the Gulf, asked me to join his table for lunch. What slowly dawned on me was that this act of hospitality occurred mainly because he was bored and wanted a diversion. Later I read Towfiq's dystopian satire *Utopia*. The gated community protagonist complains a lot about his boredom, for instance: 'There's nothing new to stimulate your curiosity or your enthusiasm in Utopia. Nothing changes . . . .Utopia, the isolated colony that the rich created on the North Coast to protect themselves from the sea of angry poverty outside, and that now fences in everything they might want' (Towfiq 2011: 11).

I did not visit any of those neoliberal private developments of greater Cairo, with names like Dreamland. I heard about them, but it was as if they were on another planet, like the worlds of the rich in London. Still, when you see advertisements for these golden ghettos on the internet,[5] they look like gated communities anywhere, in America or Southern Africa for instance. I think of it as the gated community fractal of transnational capitalism: the old-new colonialism.

Alongside this elitism, there was a resurgence of Downtown cosmopolitanism in Cairo from about 2006 or earlier, but the cosmopolitanism in question was not a return

of something that just went away after '52 (see especially Soliman 2011). Soueif writes of it in *Mezzaterra*, as alive and well in Nasser's nationalist Egypt (Soueif 2004: 5–6). It is there in *Beer in the Snooker Club* (Ghali 1964), although ironically inflected in the context of Nasser's betrayals of communism, through to the writing of Taher, and many others, as discussed by myself and other critics (see Rooney 2011 and Naaman 2011). I will say more about this cosmopolitanism in the next section, but it differs from diplo-economic cosmopolitanism in certain significant respects.

The reason why this ongoing Downtown spirit was coming to the fore in the run up to the revolution was, I believe, because it was at *that very time* being threatened. It was being threatened, in particular, by two socio-political forces that had gained ground in the 1990s. The first of these forces to which I refer is Gulf-style Islamism, which is very right wing, conformist and homogenising (see Laachir 2012: 32–48), and as Cairenes kept pointing out to me is other to Egypt's Islam. The second of these forces is Mubarak's American-style, security-fenced neoliberalism, also right-wing, conformist, and homogenising. The forces that the cosmopolitan movement of the moment rallied to resist were market fundamentalism and right-wing Islam. The beginnings of both these forces could be traced back to Al Sadat's economic liberalisation and *Ikhwan* opposition to Nasser, but what was at stake was a resistance to what was threatening civil society right then in the present, more than a desire to go back in time to some past golden age.

Flash forward. It is September 2011. It is a fine Spring day. I'm sitting in a Hararean garden, finally back in my home city after a decade's absence, wondering what it is about the palpable magic of this place. Trying to concentrate on the sense of it, I suddenly realise what it is I have been missing about Zimbabwe: it is the way the air is. Its emptiness is a presence. It feels like a friend. It's at once cosmic, feminine, sisterly, brotherly, healing, and humble. It's a feeling of generosity and safety.

The Podium or the Pulpit

When the Egyptian revolution began, I did not particularly wish to theorise, interpret, or represent it. Rather, I wished to hang back. It was Egypt's moment and Egyptians were speaking and doing it for themselves. At most, it would be a case of noticing this, drawing attention to the Egyptian writers, intellectuals, and street artists themselves. In a Western context, the somewhat unseemly scramble of those wishing to put themselves forward as the revolution's expert explicators was rather farcical. In particular, it seemed odd that Western theorists who'd not hitherto shown any interest in Africa's liberation struggles or in Egyptian modernity were stepping up to the podium to explain or translate the significance of what was unfolding to Western audiences.

In a 'Comment is Free' article, Slavoj Žižek asserted that what was occurring in Egypt was a triumph of secularism over Islam. He writes: 'The hypocrisy of western liberals is breathtaking: they publicly supported democracy, and now, when the people

revolt against the tyrants, on behalf of secular freedom and justice, not on behalf of religion, they are all deeply concerned' (Žižek 2011b). Žižek's position is an over-simplification that serves to obscure the significance of the revolution. By pitting 'secular' against religion, he implies that secularism means atheism. However, most Egyptians are religious and the opposition to political Islam is far from being necessarily atheist, as will be explained in the next section. Secondly, Žižek appears to be one of those who had an 'Oh, so they are just like us,' reaction to the Arab Spring, this being presumably what leads him to maintain that the demand of the revolution should be construed as a mimetic desire for a secular democracy on Western lines. What this emphasis on Western democracy serves to shut out is that the revolution was in many respects a revolution against Western-style free-market neoliberalism: that is, if you look into the state of the Egypt's economy after the 1990/1 crisis with the ensuing practices of privatisation and deregulation (see Rooney 2013). The Western liberal hypocrisy is when spokesmen such as Žižek deflect attention from this through the cover up of trying to present the revolution merely in terms of a desire for Western secular capitalist democracy (which is not to rule out that some might seek this).

In spite of his initial 'support' for the revolution, Žižek soon pronounced the Egyptian revolution to be defeated, this marking no less than the end of revolution in total for him (see Žižek 2011a). Objecting to this, Hamid Dabashi writes: 'distinguished European philosophers like Žižek who wish to say something about other parts of the world need to diversify their native informants' (Dabashi 2011). But does Žižek even consult Egyptian writers and intellectuals? Dabashi speaks of 'the metaphysical fait accompli, the air in which Žižek was delivering his ruling' (Dabashi 2011). In other words, Žižek's style is that of the performative, his words loftily ruling over reality, over-ruling reality, creating their own 'reality' through dictums as, in effect, dictates.

Paul Mason in his book on the Arab Spring and new 'global revolutions' concludes that the new movements made him see that: 'now the postmodernist dreamtime was at an end' (2012; 38). What characterises this defeated postmodernism for Mason is its intellectual cynicism. He writes: 'If we look at the main intellectual contributions from the left in this period, they are effectively rationalizations of defeat [. . .] Slavoj Žižek rejected the idea that ideology was "false consciousness", arguing effectively that ideology is consciousness . . . Instead of rebellion we are reduced to perpetual cynicism' (28–9).

In my own objection to this intellectual cynicism, in a book written in 2006 entitled *Decolonising Gender: Literature and a Poetics of the Real*, I argue that the failure of postmodernist and poststructuralist theory could be specified in terms of its all-pervasive reliance on the philosophy and philosophical practice of the performative (as derived from Austin). What this amounts to across the work of French intellectuals and their British and American adherents is a mimetic compulsion and a repetition (iterative) compulsion that is given an absolute status, one that is implicitly authoritarian in its assumption of linguistic auto-realisation and in its insistent 'nothing

outside of. . . ' itself stance. This book refutes the denial of the real (including the Arabic connotations of *Al Haqq*) entailed, maintaining the ongoing presence of the real as a matter of collective spirit: the synchronous, horizontal, or lateral brother-sister relation, one that is historically realised through ongoing liberation struggles and what is posited as a long, slow revolution. For instance, the book offers the following anti-cynical invitation: 'Anyone can be part of this slow and patient revolution. We can be, if able to give up on fantasies of *self*-generation, if able to avow the feminine, if able to stop cutting ourselves off from the on-going totality that is and is and is beyond any trace. Climb on' (2007: 161). This was seemingly a strange thing to be writing in 2006, but as with the revolutionary spirit in Cairo prior to 2011, it is when this collective reality is most denied and disavowed (especially given the Iraq war), that it seems most crucial to assert it. In an Egyptian context, as I will come to discuss, this is perhaps best appreciated in Sufi terms.

Mason speaks of the complicity of the cynical left wing with the right, observing: 'The right believed that with indomitable power it could create whatever truth it wanted to' (2012: 30). He quotes Rove, Bush's senior advisor, stating: '"We're an empire now, and when we act we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality . . . we'll act again . . . and you, all of you, will be left to study what we do."'

This supposed 'creation of reality' is mere self-assertion and auto-performativity, the forcing of reality to be what you want it to be, a matter of the phantasmatic, as well as of violence against unwanted existing realities. In *Decolonising Gender*, the following observation and speculation is offered:

> With New Labour, politics has maximised the performative both in our workplaces, our educational institutions, and in terms of foreign politics where policies need not have anything to do with realities but just enact themselves 'auto-legitimately.' It is worth remembering that Edward Said's *Orientalism* is a severe critique of, not endorsement of, a performative politics.
>
> When the historians of the future look back on the 1990s and early twenty-first century, I wonder if a correlation will be drawn between the erosion of the left, the maximisation of a politics of performativity and the popularisation of the performative in academic discourse. (Rooney 2007: 215)

With the Arab Spring and the global protest movement that Mason addresses, this seems likely.

Deferral or the Avant-Garde?

If for Hamid Dabashi, the Arab Spring means the end of postcolonialism, as opposed to postmodernism, what does he mean by postcolonialism? As he explains, he means all its ideological manifestations, from those within Western academia through to the historical forms taken by liberation struggles around the world. First of all, Dabashi

states: 'In *Brown Skin, White Masks* I tried to get to grips with the singular role of comprador (expatriate) intellectuals in manufacturing consent for imperial projects by way of self-raising and other-lowering proclivities. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring . . . "these native disinformers" have been exposed for what they are and rendered entirely obsolete' (2012: 11). This parvenu, celebrity-fixated postcolonialism as a phenomenon of textual idealism is one that Benita Parry critiques, as a *radical postcolonial* critic, in her readings of Bhabha and Spivak with their emphases on mimicry, complicity, and assimilation at the expense of nativism and ongoing liberation struggles (see Parry 2004, 2012).

For Dabashi, it is not only comprador postcolonial academics who have been wrong-footed by the Arab Spring, but the postcolonial ideologies of: anticolonial nationalism, third world socialism, and militant Islamism. For Dabashi, this is because these ideologies are reactionary in the sense of having been formed in reaction to the colonial predicament which thus conditions them (see Dabashi 2012: 13 and, further, Massad 2007). I would endorse Dabashi's contestation of oppositional dualism on a philosophical level, which so often turns out to be mirrored oppositionalism or mimetic inversion, but wish briefly to question his dismissal of the postcolonial as perhaps too sweeping a gesture in historical terms.

Firstly, anti-colonial nationalism, from Fanon's support for African liberation struggles to Said's support for the Palestinian one, may be said to have as its main impetus a *wider universality* to that assumed by imperialism or globalisation. As Fanon was aware, it is the power-grabbing postcolonial or local elites who betray this utopian movement, and I assume it is this class who Dabashi correctly sees as exposed by the Arab Spring: but the very fact there was an Arab Spring means that the postcolonial subjects of the ruling elite do not necessarily agree with and fall in with their leaders. What of this *ongoing* resistance? For example, this might concern the ways in which Egyptian writer-activists, such as Al Khamissi and others, see themselves as continuing the failed or incomplete revolution of '52?

Secondly, I think it is important to investigate how third world socialism has been more effective than the economic 'liberalising' programmes that took their place. Economist Ha-Joon Chang states:

> Africa has not always been stagnant. In the 1960s and 70s, when all the supposed structural impediments to growth were present... it actually posted a decent growth performance.... The main reason for Africa's recent growth failure lies in policy – namely, the free-trade, free-market policy that has been imposed on the continent through the SAP. (2011: 122–4)

In the case of Egypt, while Nasser's leadership lacked an institutionalised democratic framework, his socialist policies were surely of more benefit to Egyptians, on the whole, than Mubarak's neoliberal ones.

Thirdly, as regards militant Islam, the Islamists were certainly wrong-footed by the Arab Spring, but as Dabashi is of course aware, it is the Islamists who were quick to

appropriate and variously re-route the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, as well as the Syrian one, so the struggle continues.

This area of what we have come to call 'postcolonial studies' has always had some difficulty with naming itself (and could well go by a different name in the future), which is symptomatic of something interesting in the light of Dabashi's position. That is, there is indeed a sense in which we (at least some of us) are working on that which has no name if it is truly a case of universality.

Dabashi proposes that with the Arab Spring we arrive at: 'The East is the West; the West is the East' (2012: 77). Might there, in this spirit, be a non-dualist way of thinking the postcolonial? I have tried to suggest such a possibility in working on animist philosophy and eclipsed enlightenments through considering that the postcolonial is the precolonial, a non-dualist proposition (see Rooney 2000: 31–156). What is meant by it is that the postcolonial is something which evades and resists colonisation. It is not therefore an 'ism', but a precolonial way of being in the world that accompanies colonialism (resisting it), thus persisting with the capacity to outlast colonialism. This precolonial-postcolonial continuity is not therefore generated or conditioned by colonialism, precisely because it precedes colonialism and continues to evade its grasp – the postcolonial names what will outlast the colonial interlude through endurance. The postcolonial (in this sense) can always be found accompanying the colonial period, right there beside it.

The precolonial-postcolonial, as that which resists colonisation, need not be called that. It does have other names. It is because it can have different names that it has no over-arching name; and the point of connection between named instances would really be a matter of analogy.

What is at stake may be called, most minimally, 'air', and what I wish to say of this air is that it is aired differently in different locations. You can play it on an oud, a rabata, a piano, an mbira. You can air it on radio stations playing hip hop, or playing reggae. You can revel in its atmosphere, or you can chant it. You can asthmatically pant to breathe it.[6]

Dabashi's chosen term for what replaces postcolonialism is 'delayed defiance', one that retrieves a cosmopolitan worldliness.[7] Regarding the question of deferral, this could be said to be the main philosophical underpinning of deconstruction, Dabashi affirming this influence. However, the very logic of deferral is inadequate, for two main reasons. Firstly, what is at stake is the *ongoing presence of the real as that which persists*, what you do not give up on or lose faith in. It may appear to go away, but in actuality it never does: it is just that we can lose track of it and need to look *around* us (as opposed to look *back*). Secondly, deconstruction seems to contest dualism through a temporal, differential staggering of the self-same, or ipseity, and what it repeatedly overlooks is the question of *non-dualist synchronicity* (which European philosophy occludes much more generally). The Arab Spring brought this synchronicity to the fore. That is, the synchronicity of revolutionary *resistance* concerns that which precisely resists deferral, resists being held back. In this sense, the avant-garde exists in advance of (pre-exists) its historical setbacks.

Remnants or Sumud?

Robert Young's recent essay 'Postcolonial Remains' comes across as if it could be a retort to Dabashi's critique, but without naming him. That is, Young asserts that postcolonialism is not over because certain problematics remain for it still to address (2012: 19–42). Amongst the remnants posited by Young here, supposedly hitherto invisible until this moment of attention on Young's part, selective attention will be paid to three particular ones: (1) overlooked aspects of settler colonialism; (2) golden age cosmopolitanism; (3) unappreciated (mainly Al Qaeda) versions of Islam.

First, as regards the oppression of the indigenous by settler societies, there has been so much work in this area, as observed by Parry in her perceptive and persuasive critique of Young's essay, that it is strange to conceive of this as an overlooked remnant in need of attention (2012: 343). Indeed, for many the very formation of postcolonial studies has been through anti-colonial critique and activism. While the most glaring *remaining* settler colonial state is obviously Israel – a current site of both the most intense disavowal as well as much citizen academia – Young instead targets *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989), as if Australians from settler heritages are to be forever frozen in the past, even as the attempt to undo the coloniser/colonised relationship often constitutes the experiential starting point of postcolonial movements.[8] It should be acknowledged that *The Empire Writes Back* challenges the inability of European theory 'to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing' (11), where Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin devote a section of their book to indigenous theories, arguing: 'The creative development of post-colonial societies is often determined by the influence of this pre-colonial, indigenous culture and the degree to which it is still active' (115). Young's *White Mythologies*, appearing a year later, offers a counter-position in framing postcolonial theory very much within French poststructuralist theory, contesting Eurocentrism in terms of postmodernism, without engaging with indigenous theories and histories. Why, over three decades later, does Young seek to project his blind spot onto Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin? Is it because, in a vaguely Kiplingesque fashion, Young seeks to promote the notion of a benign, progressive imperialism over an incorrigible settler colonialism as its supposed other (see Landry and Rooney 2010)?

Indeed, Young's championing of a certain cosmopolitanism has a reconceived or rescued imperialism as its model. For Young, there is a lost al-Andalus that stands to be reinvented through postcolonialism adopting an Ottoman model of imperial tolerance.[9] Why this imperial nostalgia as an implicit reaction to the Arab Spring? Is it because of the challenge to sovereign-proprietor forms of universalism? Young ascribes to the paradigm that imperialism is the universalism to be pitted against nationalism (Young 2012: 30–1): but, as touched on earlier, it is an error to shrink liberation movements to nationalism for, from Fanon to the Palestinian hip hop group DAM, the call is for a new universality from below, one that is by definition anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist (see Rooney 2012a).

Young speaks of his Ottoman revivalism in terms of boldly 'thinking the unthinkable' (2012: 31). What is unthinkable here appears twofold: the potential resuscitation of imperialism in the very name of postcolonialism – come now to function as an overarching brand name (rather than historically specific designation) for both a huge array of histories (from China to South America to Turkey and the Middle East) as well as for an extended field of research engulfing, for example, the terrains of religious studies, Middle Eastern studies, Ottoman studies, and so on. What I think is preferable to this is not to try and include everything in postcolonial studies but to involve postcolonial studies in dialogues with other disciplines: a case of creating spaces for others, and lateral bridges.[10] The other aspect of what is unthinkable in 'thinking the unthinkable' is that the revived ethic of tolerance Young seeks to establish is in the service of accommodation with political Islam (including especially its Al Qaeda – therefore pro-Salafiyya and Wahhabiyya-related – forms, in the context of Sunni autocracies) as constituting what Young sees as the 'contemporary Arab multiculturalism' of the Gulf states. Young goes so far as to suggest that what we find in the Gulf States is one of the 'closest modern equivalents to al-Andalus in political terms in a number of respects' (2012: 33). He also admires Al Qaeda's transnationalism as regards its ambition of founding a new Sunni caliphate and considers the example of Al Qaeda to be what helped to enable the Arab Spring (2012: 29–30).

Why Young finds this combination of petro-capitalism, Sunni authoritarianism, and religious extremism a suitable basis for toleration is baffling to me: is this the kind of toleration of Saudi Arabia that America exhibits, or of Qatar for America as it offers itself a military base for Iraqi ventures (see also the critique in Parry 2012: 350–2)? Is it cross-cultural toleration for the sake of the free market and arms market, and toleration of multiculturalism for the sake of cheap labour, even as Young is seriously concerned about the exploitation of migrant labour? The cosmopolitanism at stake here is what I earlier referred to in terms of diplo-economic cosmopolitanism. Philosophically speaking, it pertains to the Kantian understanding of cosmopolitanism as a question of nations coming together to trade: the market-place, capital cities, and capital being the gathering forces (see Kant 1991). While it is true that trade brings nations together, it does so on the basis of class division where we should rather be analysing the capitalist linkages between international elites and the anti-capitalist linkages between international protest and resistance movements.[11]

In an illuminating 2009 article on his experience of the neoliberal university in Dubai, Stephen Germic writes:

> Money moves through this place with staggering ease... Even astute pundits have accepted the notion advertised by prominent neo-conservative figures that democracy is somewhere near the top of the US agenda . . . in the Middle East. However, the interest in democracy is a ruse of the first order . . . The US, and the Bush administration more than any previous, has its 'new world order' *made* to order in Dubai . . . There is, after all, an empire to be built with stakes possibly richer than any hitherto imagined in the history

> of the world, and, most critically, the conditions are perfect: a workforce of laborers and managers acting with exactly the servility to be expected of people without rights; an unregulated system of banking and finance; and local recruits of techies and business students schooled exclusively in utility. (2009: 139)

Regarding this last point, Germic is concerned to show how Dubai serves not only to determine this new cosmopolitan empire but to provide the neoliberal blueprint of the hyper-efficient, utilitarian university, created to service this empire, which he writes of from his own experiences. This constitutes an instructive instance of citizen academia.

Coming back to the question of Wust El Balad (Downtown) cosmopolitanism in Cairo, this is something I tried to address in an essay entitled 'Utopian Cosmopolitanism and the Conscious Pariah: Harare, Ramallah, Cairo' (2011), while Naaman (2011) also addresses this topic in her recent book on urban space. Naaman, drawing on Svetlana Boym, suggestively reads *The Yacoubian Building* in terms of its expression of nostalgia for a past that comprises both a cross-cultural elite and a former national unity and patriotism.

Briefly, it seems to me that cosmopolitan Cairo has always had its elitist and revolutionary strands that cannot thereby just be conflated in the name of a cosmopolitanism in general: the development capital of today would have had its earlier counterparts while there have always been Downtown revolutionary riff raff plotting to overthrow this or that regime. In my own essay, drawing on some of the same sources as Naaman, I struggle somewhat with the notion of mere nostalgia for a former European Cairo, advancing instead the notion of 'utopian cosmopolitanism' based on a coming together of outcasts and bohemians. I identify this cosmopolitanism with a certain emancipatory spirit evident in the phases of liberation struggles that have yet to reach their goals. Because of that, this cosmopolitanism is not actually retrospective or nostalgic but *prospective and utopian*, and this is a question of what is timeless and placeless, both in being ongoing and in not being reducible to a single location. This utopianism is precisely that which refuses melancholic complicity with the loss of collective consciousness inflicted by capitalism: it is that which perseveres through grassroots adherence. For this reason, the psycho-geographies of Pamuk's Istanbul and the Cairo of Al Aswany, Al Khamissi, Towfiq and Alaidy exhibit quite different structures of feeling (for an excellent reading of Pamuk's Istanbul, see Bugeja 2012: 117–57). Moreover, just as 'nostalgic' (as opposed to say 'utopian') is not exactly the correct adjective for Egypt on the brink of the revolution, the term 'cosmopolitanism' needs to be rethought too. The term that I prefer to deploy here, following Maggie Awadalla's reading (2011) of Soueif, is 'the common ground'.

The common ground perhaps implies a negative dialectics, or even non-dialectics, of cosmopolitanism in that it concerns the affirmation of a common humanity and common purpose *in spite of* (while including the welcoming of) cultural and national differences.[12] Young's notion of cosmopolitanism is predicated on liberal tolerance, while

the radical common ground concerns strongly *positive affinities and solidarities* rather than mere tolerance. In speaking of *Mezzaterra*, Soueif dissociates it from liberal tolerance, stating: 'I am not tolerant at all. I mean, what's to tolerate?' (see Soueif 2011a).

In her response to Young's article, Benita Parry finds his post-Arab Spring re-positioning of himself as a revolutionary activist unconvincing, given his past promotion of liberal poststructuralism as opposed to radical liberation politics, together with the absence of awareness of anti-capitalist critiques in his new championing of Islamic/Islamist tolerance (Parry 2012: 356). What I would say here is that Young's assumption that postcolonial studies has been disengaged from contemporary Middle Eastern studies ignores collaborative developments that have been unfolding for some time, especially in the form of Arab cultural studies, pertaining to populist versions of Islam. My own research for almost a decade has been in this area, alongside the work of colleagues (who combine postcolonial and Arab cultural studies approaches) such as: Ayman El Desouky; Ziad Elmarsafy; Anastasia Valassopoulos; Dalia Mostafa; Lyndsey Moore; Abir Hamdar; Kay Dickinson;Thomas Burkhalter; Hania Nashef; Rita Sakr; Norbert Bugeja; Karima Laachir; Maggie Awadalla; Walid El Hamamsy; Mounira Soliman; Nouri Gana; Nadje Al Ali; Joseph Massad. When Young says that Islam has been 'unreadable' for 'most postcolonial theorists in the West' (2012: 30), whom does he speak for?

Young's conceptual dynamic could be seen as implicitly quasi-Hegelian: that is, poststructuralist postcolonial theory (as opposed to liberationist postcolonial theory), faced with the historical contradiction posed by the Arab Spring, as needing to sublate this in a new synthesis. For Young, this sublation seems to be a new imperial or overarching form of postcolonialism that discovers tolerance in Islam as a basis to tolerate Gulf Islamism. But what does it mean to tolerate intolerance and what of Islamic market fundamentalism? Since I wrote this, the rise of the Islamic State, or Daesh, makes Young's position much more stark in its implications. Leader al-Baghdadi proudly affirms their cosmopolitan inclusiveness (see Cockburn 2014: 10), their fighters in fact hailing from Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Europe, Chechnya, Africa, and so on, as they stand for the Islamic caliphate as an imperial formation across national borders. At the time when Young was making his case for Al Qaeda, Saudi Arabia was enabling the rise of ISIS in Syria, ISIS being itself a development of Al Qaeda, with America's complicity in that the desire was to use Wahhabi Islam to defeat Assad and his pro-Palestinian allies such as Hezbollah, much the way America used the Taliban in Afghanistan against Russia.

Philosophically speaking, and less hastily, Young is though possibly more Derridean than Hegelian, where he in fact specifies Derrida in his thinking of 'remains' or 'left overs' (see Young 2012: 21; Derrida 1990). It is specifically in *Glas* that Derrida asks 'what remains' for the Hegelian all-colonising dialectic to fold into itself, answering the question only in terms of Genet's pariah homosexuality, or his femininity, while he fails to engage with Genet's activist solidarity with the revolutionary movements of the Black Panthers and the Palestinians (Derrida 1990).

If you really go over to the side of the revolutionary 'remnants', 'pariahs', and 'outcasts', as distinct from the extremists, what you find is in itself *another state of consciousness*. As such, it is not an object for thought or remnants waiting to be thought of, but a way of being in and perceiving the *contemporary* world, a question of *spirit* very different to that of Hegelian self-conscious spirit. This alternative form of consciousness is persistence as solidarity, as resoluteness, as genuine *comradeship*, as collective consciousness, as revolutionary faith and, as we'll see, festiveness. What stays is this staying power, not in the form of that which is left behind but as that which is *in advance* of those who fail to abide with it, and so then need to catch up: in certain respects, it is a populist avant-garde.

Dabashi, I feel sure from his work, understands this. If it is objected that his response to the Arab Spring is too optimistic, this is to fail to appreciate the spirit of his book which has as its main impetus, I believe, revolutionary solidarity and its persistence. The academic implications of this would be the question of new forms of participation (Dabashi speaking of his work as reportage), as well as of the deployment of a poetics of reality (Dabashi considering the artistic expression of the revolution to be its own commentary).

Dabashi aptly proposes that the Arab Spring serves to reconvene the understanding of democracy. Certainly this is the case, while equally the notion of 'secularism' stands in need of being reconvened. Young does indeed entertain this, and while I agree with him that a re-reading of Al Qaeda is due, I see the questions in another light, as discussed below. One thing to be confronted here is the 'invisiblisation' or disavowal of feminine perspectives on the sacred, and the revolutionary role played by women. It is a blind spot that Dabashi contests, with his emphasis on the importance of women's contributions. Dabashi uses the term 'delivery' (2012: 252) for the new democracy movements: in its various shades of meaning, extending to 'deliverance', it is a good word to use.

Sufi Springs

When in Cairo, I went to a talk by Huda Lutfi, AUC academic and artist in which she explained her artistic practice in terms of her Sufism.[13] Then, when the Egyptian revolution broke out, I remembered this talk because what Lutfi had said about *mulid* culture seemed very pertinent to me. I sought out her work and found an engaging and informative article by her entitled '*Mulid* Culture in Cairo'. It is based on her experience as a participant-observer, Lutfi describing herself as a *mulid* lover.

Lutfi considers how the *mulids* were originally festivals linked to seasonal cycles but when 'Egypt shifted to monotheism, Egyptian festivals were no longer attached to ancient agricultural deities, but instead to Christian and Muslim saints' (Lutfi 2006: 83; see also Lutfi 1985). These ancient yet contemporary festivals are felt by their participants to be a 'liberating experience', one of 'collective merriment', and treated as 'venues for 'social and political skepticism'. Lutfi writes: 'The collective and ecstatic

mood of the *mulid* is not only an occasion for gaiety and laughter, but also one in which there is a suspension of hierarchical boundaries and roles, and in some *mulids*, such as Aisha's, even mockery of those in high places is permitted' (2006: 84). They also entail an allowance of the feminine, Lutfi writing of 'the special love Egyptians harbour for female saints' (83), while some *mulids* feature men cross-dressing. I think that these festivals, while partly carnivalesque, differ from carnivals in being celebrations of the sacred, although in non-pious down-to-earth ways. Lutfi writes: 'The opening ceremonial rituals in any *mulid* normally begin with religious speeches and recitations from the Qur'an and hadith, but the focal spiritual ritual is the *dhikr*, a mixture of repetitive liturgy, dance and chanting' (86). The desire is to transcend the 'bounded self', and communal popular culture is also celebrated through art forms such as storytelling and play-acting.

From the above, it is easy to see Midan Tahrir as a big *mulid* festival. This impression has been confirmed by various accounts of the revolution. Ahdaf Souief has spoken of how Egyptians in the square spoke of its feeling of sacredness (Soueif 2011). Sahar El Mougy has commented on the revolution as a very feminine one (what I would consider to be a case of 'decolonising gender') (El Mougy 2011). The term *mulid* derives from *Mawlid*, which means 'birth', where this is a matter of anniversaries (saints' days) but also more widely a question of seasonal renewal as well as of deliverance on a spiritual level.

More recently, Sahar Keraitim and Samia Mehrez have written a particularly significant essay entitled '*Mulid al-Tahrir*: Semiotics of a Revolution', in which she states:

> Anyone who has been in Tahrir during the initial memorable eighteen days and later through the following months will no doubt have noted the festive, creative, uplifting ambience that has dominated the midan. They will also have noted how the general dispositions of the actors in the midan bore many traces of the *mulid* celebration, a popular form of carnivalesque festivities that has been celebrated in Egypt for hundreds of years and whose rituals [. . .] were marshaled, politicized and revolutionized during the massive protests and sit-ins to sustain and transform the impetus and impact of revolt. (Mehrez 2012: 30)

Keraitim and Mehrez go on to provide evidence of the spirit of the Sufi *mulids* as permeating the activities in the square. Robert Young writes: 'Al Qaeda could be seen as one of many factors that encouraged the Arab Spring' because of its 'irreverence for tradition, and its secularisation of Islam' (2012: 30). Young's argument is that Al Qaeda is not a fundamentalist movement, yet Al Qaeda, it has to be said, is intensely anti-Sufi in its very formation and opposed to Sufi forms of reverence: to understand this, see the work of Sayyid Qutb (2011) which has been a strong influence on Al Qaeda. Where Young describes Al Qaeda as secularist and irreverent, I instead would speak of an Islamism that combines puritanical religious piety with capitalism. More specific to the case of Egypt, as reported in the *Egyptian Daily Mail*, is that Wahhabi Islamism has exhibited hostility and revulsion towards Sufism, seen as too unorthodox and too

'peasant', among other things, where Wahhabism arises because 'The Wahhabis were against celebrating *mawalid* [*mulids*]' (El Masry 2012). One of the oldest and largest Sufi orders in Cairo, El Borhameya El Desoukeya, celebrates the *mulid* of sidi Ibrahim El Desouky, possibly something Al Aswany may well have been aware of in giving the surname of El Desouky to his arguably leading character in *The Yacoubian Building*, Zaki.

When at the outset of this, I mention the candour of my conversation with Taher, this is because when I was asking him about the critique of religious intolerance in his novels, he told me that this was not from a secularist position, he being a believer, and he placed himself in the tradition of Ibn Al Arabi's Sufism which embraces different faiths non-hierarchically: affirming the spiritual common ground.

According to Lutfi, the Egyptian government (then under Mubarak) 'in alliance with the official Sufi orders – is protecting saint and *mulid* culture against the chastisement of the more puritanical Islamist groups in the country' (Lutfi 2006: 81). When Mubarak was deposed, the Islamists attacked not only Coptic churches but a series of Sufi shrines, as reported on in the Egyptian press (see also Brown 2011). The Islamists are indeed vehemently opposed to Sufism, which they do not regard as genuinely Islamic because it embraces different religious traditions, Christian and Muslim (and until recently, Jewish), celebrating their saints of both genders. While the Islamists regard this as *shirk* (idolatory), it seems to me that the Islamists find the liberated spirit of Sufism and its orality at odds with their strict textual authoritarianism: nothing outside of the one and only text. Samir Amin comments: 'The Wahhabi Islam of the Gulf states is at the opposite pole from Sufism: it is archaic, ritualistic, conformist, declared enemy of any interpretation other than repetition of its own chosen texts . . . the Sufis are allies of the democratic movement' (Amin 2012: 28–9). Also worth noting is that Islamic feminism is much more identified with Sufism than Islamism.[14]

What is amazing about this Sufi culture is its long persistence. When I went to musical performances of folk musicians in Cairo, they were singing songs that had survived across the centuries. Film-maker Ayman Al Kharrat told me that Egyptologists have found that some of these songs date back to Pharaonic times, African more than Arab as Lutfi suggests. Yet these songs can be heard today as part of Egypt's contemporary cultural dynamics. Could this oral culture be what persists, stays present, as foreign conquerors and temporary masters come and go, including of course the Ottomans (who exploited the Egyptian peasantry in ways not dissimilar to Dubai's current exploitation of foreign labour – see Mikhail 2011: 195–98), this populism outlasting the will-to-dominance that returns and returns but never itself endures? Intriguingly, while there may be much to commend Ottoman tolerance as a form of governance, as argued by Young and Landry (although I myself remain uneasy over the current trend of nostalgic neo-Ottoman revivalism), the very spirit of Sufism may be seen to be at odds with imperialism. Hoffman proposes: 'In its origins, Sufism was at least partially a withdrawal from the political and materialistic concerns of the Islamic Empire under the Umayyads. One might argue that the political prominence of the Sufi Orders under the Ottoman Empire represents a perversion of Sufism'

(1995: 15). With a more recent emphasis, Mehrez writes: 'The battle for Tahrir that we all witnessed on January 28, 2011 was not new, for the midan has forever represented the focal point during various uprisings and demonstrations throughout modern Egyptian history' (2012: 18). The 'revolution', people deciding to live, this is what never goes away.

July 2012. I am on my way to meet up with poet Ahmed Haddad who is visiting London from Cairo. I first attend some 'Poetry Parnassus' events on the South Bank, the international poetry festival of poet Olympiads. While the formal events prove interesting, they are rather elitist in structure, privileged poets flown in to grace the podium: outside there is more of a real festival atmosphere to be found, especially around a poetry takeaway van. I join the queue and order a 'welcome to London' poem for Ahmed. It is fun; strangers in the queue jesting with each other, co-creating poems with the poets in the van.

I meet Ahmed at the French Institute, and we catch up over a drink. Ahmed tells me that the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries have decided to give the Islamic parties their chance, but if they don't use it wisely, it'll be back to the streets. He tells me funny anecdotes of how when the bearded Salafis accost girls in the street over their modesty, the girls sometimes hold their own with insults and showing their shoes. Ahmed says he's here for a play-writing workshop while trying to organise long-distance rehearsals for a poetry event at El Sawy. 'What's the performance going to be?' I ask. He smiles, a little mischievously, and says, 'God is Love.' 'Perfect,' I say. Yeah, he nods.

> Of Love – may God exalt you! – the first part is jesting, and the last part is right earnestness. So majestic are its divers aspects, they are too subtle to be described; their reality can only be apprehended by personal experience. Love is neither disapproved by Religion, nor prohibited by the Law; for every heart is in God's hands.
>
> Many rightly guided caliphs and orthodox imams have been lovers. Of those who have lived in our beloved Andalusia I may mention . . . (Ibn Hazam)

Notes

1. The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic translates *haqq* as: 'true, authentic, real; right, fair and reasonable; correct, sound, valid', and *al haqq* as 'an attribute of God'.
2. For the interviews I conducted in Cairo in 2010, see Rooney 2010 (a documentary short).
3. See Rooney 2012b. I am grateful to Nadia El Kholy for introducing me to writer Sahar El Mougy, who introduced me the other writers I met in Cairo.
4. As an outsider, I don't know if they were demonstrations as such; but since the group of people appeared to be there to make some statement, I will call them demonstrators.
5. See Mivida New Cairo City Villas, Apartments and Offices < www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVPHsJb0D88 > , updated 14 July 2011.
6. This is an allusion to the asthma of Che Guevara, discussed in his *The Motorcycle Diaries*.
7. Postcolonial treatments of cosmopolitanism include Appiah 2006; Brennan 1997; Gilroy 2004; Spencer 2011, and the essays by Neil Lazarus, Stephanie Newell and Ranka Primorac in the 'Debating Local Cosmopolitanisms' special issue of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 46:1 (2011).
8. It should be understood that there is an insufficiently addressed variety of settler colonialisms. Also, if Young is routinely able to acknowledge such formative influences in the case of French immigrants

like Derrida, why is he not able to do so in the case of UK immigrants, for example, Benita Parry, Neil Lazarus, Bart Moore-Gilbert, Lyn Innes, Elleke Boehmer, and myself, amongst others? See, in particular, Parry 2005.

9. For a well-received, balanced and scholarly account of the Ottoman Empire, see Finkel 2005. Donna Landry addresses the lost opportunities of a tolerant, cosmopolitan Ottoman imperialism in 'Said Before Said' (2013).
10. I agree with Robert Stam and Ella Shohat (2012: 382) on this question of an intellectual commons.
11. In the UK, the work of the Warwick school (including Benita Parry, Neil Lazarus, Rashmi Varma, and others) is important in this respect.
12. I discuss this notion of a common humanity in Africa as well as more recently in hip hop articles. Young maintains that postcolonial studies have always othered: this is not the case, where the othering is largely generated by Western philosophy.
13. It was an interest in connecting Sufism with African animist culture that brought me to Cairo where Egyptian Sufism has Ethiopian and Sudanese influences, as well as those of trans-Saharan desert mysticism.
14. Omaima Abou Bakr (Cairo University) spoke of this at the 'Egyptian Women Artists and Writers, and Cultural Resistance', Ain Shams University, March 2013. See also, Margot Badran**, '**Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood: A Project of Patriarchal Extremism', *Al-Ahram* online, 28 March 2013, < http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/4/0/67939/Opinion/0/Egypt's-Muslim-Brotherhood-A-project-of-patriarcha.asp > (last accessed 19 October 2014).

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A Retrospect on the Limits of Postcolonial Studies

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Abstract:
Benita Parry here examines the political horizons of postcolonial studies, arguing for the crucial role of Marxism in sustaining the revolutionary impetus of postcolonialist thought. Addressing the career of the late Edward W. Said, Parry points out that while Said's approach to criticism may initially have been philological, political purpose and direction were 'thrust upon him' through the situation of his native Palestine in the 1970s, together with the retreat from radicalism within academia. The Said of this period thus urged upon intellectuals the need to engage with injustice and oppression. Parry writes of Said's 'circuitous journey' that returned him, in his later works, to a critical approach that eschewed the political, and aimed to contain conflict through his notion of the 'contrapuntal.' While Said, with many postcolonial critics, did not subscribe to Marxism, Parry suggests that his work retained a thoughtful and complex respect for Marxists such as Lukács, Goldmann, Raymond Williams, and Adorno. For Parry, Said's repudiation of Marxism is 'of a different order' from that of other postcolonial critics who drag revolutionary figures such as Fanon and Gramsci into their own agenda by attempting to stabilise and attune their thought to the 'centre-left'. Parry goes on to criticise the editors of *The Postcolonial Gramsci,* for positing Marxist thinking as a restricting framework from which the editors aim to liberate Gramsci's writing. For Parry, these reappraisals of revolutionary thinkers constitute a new form of recuperative criticism that she terms 'the rights of misprision'. If this is a strategy for 'draining Marxist and indeed all left thought of its revolutionary impulses and energies', Parry insists, 'it is one to be resisted and countered, not in the interests of a sterile rigour, but – in Benjamin's words – to rescue the past and the dead, and a tradition and its receivers, from being overpowered by conformism'.

Keywords: postcolonial studies, dialectics, Marxism, rights of misprision, revolution, contrapuntal criticism, *Aufhebung*, Edward Said.

In reflecting on the received versions of the genealogy, intellectual inspirations, and theoretical practices, together with the interdisciplinary impact, political aspirations, and further directions of postcolonial studies, I will here look at the constraints to its

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avowed radical vocation, beginning with a consideration of Edward W. Said's work and his ambiguous relationship to the field as an instance of the confines to its political horizons.

For some commentators, Said's authority was and remains literary, and indeed the argument that Said was primarily a philologist – one working 'in that tradition of left scholarship that is both historical and textual' – has been the subject of Timothy Brennan's elaborations (Brennan 2006: 241). I, however, want to gauge the legacy of the years during which Said knowingly brought politics to his academic projects. It was then that the social and ideological were intrinsic, and not just context to his study of rhetoric, narrative, and form; it was at that time that he urged the responsibility of professional criticism to engage with matters of inequality, injustice, and oppression, scorning the pretensions and timidity of the entrenched professoriat, castigating intellectuals for failing to undertake the dissenting functions of an *intelligentsia*, and in this fortifying those who were outsiders to the mood of political cynicism which then prevailed in academia.

At the same time, as I see it, Said did not start out as a radical critic, his radicalism achieved – or perhaps thrust upon him – as responses to the wider contemporary events and predicaments of the era. The first of these was an intensified consciousness of the Palestinian situation, and with this, a keen awareness of the afflictions visited on those dispossessed by colonialism (Said 2001: 119). The other was a recoil from the reactionary politics sweeping academia in the seventies, when the humanities and especially the burgeoning discipline of 'theory' flaunted their disdain for both materialist and politically-charged combative thinking.

Thus I suggest that Said's intellectual and political positions were subject to shifts as he made a circuitous journey from normative literary-critical concerns, to the integration of aesthetics and politics, and in his last years, a return to what he called a mode of dealing with the integrity of a work 'that cannot be reconciled with the world from which it came', and hence 'in a certain sense escapes its historical determinism' (Said 2005: 300). In the middle period, from the early 1970s, Said argued strenuously that because the political world is animated by the realities of power, interest, and authority, this takes the intellectual 'from relatively discrete questions of interpretation, to much more significant ones of social change and transformation' (Said 1994: 72, 82; 1984). And he went on to produce a stream of essays and interviews intended to make visible 'the actual *affiliations* that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship on the one hand, and the world of brute politics, corporate and state power, and military force on the other', insisting that the representations produced by the intellectual 'are always tied to and ought to remain an organic part of an ongoing experience in society: of the poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless' (Said 2001: 119; 1994: 84). I want to stress the inclusiveness of this abstractly stated position since Said's own engagements were more narrowly with *colonial* oppressions, which inevitably connected him, and against his own inclinations, to postcolonial studies.

The moment of Said's overtly political writings preceded – and, during the early eighties, furthered – the field's beginnings in English and Comparative Literature departments of elite institutions in the US, and later the UK. This turn has been discussed by Neil Lazarus and Rashmi Varma who give a credible account of the relation between the problematic of postcolonial studies and developments in the social world, between its genesis and an environment created by the 'savage restructuring of class relations worldwide . . . under the sign of "neoliberalism"' – this being a time when academics in large numbers were induced 'to either silently withdraw from or brazenly denounce, left politics', and demoralised, left-wing metropolitan intellectuals 'abandoned anti-capitalist ideologies, pronounced communism dead and Marxism invalidated' (Lazarus and Varma 2008: 309–331, 310, 311, 312; Lazarus 2011).

In such a *milieu*, Lazarus and Varma argue, postcolonial studies came to register a complex and contradictory response: on the one hand its practitioners adjusted to a conservative climate by describing themselves as postmodern or post-Marxist; on the other hand, because they were launching a critique of 'Eurocentrism', they could by the very nature of their pursuits, present themselves as theoretically ultra-radical. 'There are then', Lazarus and Varma suggest, 'two aspects to postcolonial studies as an academic enterprise, one accommodationist, the other subversive' – a schizoid combination which Timothy Brennan has observed of 'theory' in general, which by producing a 'philosophy of concession', repackaged 'middle-class aspiration as an epistemological break, making the rush to the center appear a bold avant-garde leap' (Lazarus and Varma 2008: 312; Brennan 2006: 10).

The will to *de facto* moderate politics was and remains prominent within postcolonial studies. From the start, the most influential critics repudiated the Marxist analysis of imperialism, with this waiving participation in a broader anti-capitalist critique – thus guaranteeing that the insurrectionary rhetoric for which some came to be renowned, was gestural, wholly concerned with colonial discourse, detached from the will to contest colonialism and imperialism as inextricable forms of capitalism, and silent about the repression and exploitation this total system had wreaked within the imperialist homelands. To this day the focus of prominent critics remains with the formation of the global economy's 'new subalterns', defined in terms of migrancy and diaspora – refugees, asylum seekers, *sans-papieres*, internally displaced persons, economic and illegal migrants (Young 2012b: 19–42; Chakrabarty 2012: 1–18). This ostentatious and exclusive privileging of 'subalternity' fails to address class inequality, occluding the assaults on the workers and the poor in the core capitalist countries, and in this violating the ethics of solidarity that has marked the internationalist traditions of the radical Left.

Said's relationship with the field was ambiguous, his work replicating the omissions indicated above, while distancing itself from its embrace of poststructuralism. The publication of *Orientalism* in 1978 destined him to be named as the father of postcolonial studies, a paternity he energetically denied, but a designation he could not escape,

since this book was crucial in generating its initial stage as 'colonial discourse analysis'. However Said's disavowal of its developing theoretical directions was to be registered in remarks faulting '[C]ults like post-modernism, discourse analysis, New Historicism [and] deconstruction' for giving intellectuals 'an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history' (Said 1993: 366–7).

Despite which, his own theoretical practice, in one significant instance, shared in misinterpreting that system of concepts and methodology that has done most to explain modern colonialism and imperialism as integral to capitalism's beginnings, expansion, and ultimate global entrenchment. This inclination was second-nature to most postcolonial critics, who like Said were haunted by Marxism, and in their alleged problematisations and corrections of that tradition of thought, blunted criticism of the very object they were purportedly subjecting to searching scrutiny.[1]

Signals of eschewing an oppositional stance were already evident during the 1980s and early 1990s in Homi Bhabha's mission to effect the 'break-up of a binary sense of political antagonism', so as to demonstrate colonialism as 'a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic)', and to displace the received perception of adversaries in conflict, with the 'in-between' space of negotiation (Bhabha 1994: 206, 108). His writings are replete with words like *ambivalent*, *borderline*, *boundary*, *contingent*, *dispersal*, *dissemination*, *hybridity*, *in-between*, *indeterminate*, *interstitial*, *liminal*, *marginal*, *transitional*, *translational*, *uncertain*, and *undecidable* – a position that refuses to acknowledge historical conditions of warring interests, aspirations, and struggle (Bhabha 1994).

During the last decade, this urge to reconciliation has been further articulated. Writing about the future of Comparative Literature, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak urges the necessity of eschewing 'the politicization of the discipline', and advances instead 'a depoliticization of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come' (Spivak 2003: 4, 13). Full-throated voice to this vocation has been given by Leela Gandhi who undertakes to provide an alternative history of anti-imperialism, one that recuperates a politics of friendship to replace a politics of conflict. This she does by looking at a small, a very small, number of metropolitan, mainly British, and all theatrically eccentric persons, whose capacity for personal 'hybridity' and empathy with 'radical alterity', she maintains, enabled them to develop an affinity with the oppressed, this constituting an ethical demonstration of 'hospitality' and 'xenophilia' that runs counter to the story of antagonism and struggle (Gandhi 2006: 7, 135, 73).[2]

Such moves may appear outlandish to those who would argue for the active *politicisation* of the discussion about Comparative Literature, let alone about the imperial encounter, as well as a concretely grounded analysis of the postcolonial within the horizons of global capitalism, vistas that span the metropolitan and the peripheral, and address the immiseration of populations world-wide.[3] Instead, the direction of the work being done within postcolonial studies hails the globalisation of capitalism as marking a foundational change in the nature of imperialism, or

a paradigm shift to a post-imperialist age. Bhabha, for example, reiterates what I find to be *the* most impoverished and mindless understanding of global capitalism: 'globalization', he writes, 'propagates a world made up of virtual transnational domains and wired communities that live vividly through webs and connectivities "on line"' – an explanation from which all mention of structural, institutional and social matters are absent, and significance accorded to the flows of populations, culture, and knowledge, to deterritorialisation, dispersal, diaspora, cosmopolitanism, and so on (Bhabha 2008: 39–40).[4]

From the start, influential critical practices promoted otiose revisions of colonialism and myopic perspectives on the postcolonial. As is well-known, the field in its theoretical orientation came to be identified with poststructuralism, and this in spite of Marxists and historical and cultural materialists contributing to the discussion.[5] This alignment was actively promoted by prominent critics antagonist to 'orthodox' Marxism as totalising, Eurocentric, dependent on meta-narratives, and whose rejection foreclosed a systematic study of the very object they purported to analyse. So if the expectation of an interested student is to find discussion of pre- and post-independence material and social conditions, she and he will soon learn to look to the abundant enquiries that were and are conducted elsewhere – in specialist domains within history and the social and political sciences, and amongst the minorities working in the field.[6]

Amongst the matters ignored in the mainstream of postcolonial criticism has been the impact of capitalism on the socio-economic forms and institutions of pre-colonial societies; the formation of classes and the transformation of indigenous inequalities into class relationships together with the introduction of new forms of inequality; the effects of combined and uneven development both structurally, socially and culturally on the making of peripheral modernity, and aesthetically on the making of peripheral modernism; the different ideologies and aspirations of the anti-colonial movements; the continuing dominion of metropolitan capitalism;[7] the class formations and conflicts in post-independence nation states; the role of coercive neoliberalism and the complicity of native compradors in the retreats of newly-independent regimes.

Yet while postcolonial studies has largely disregarded these crucial questions, Robert Young – for whom the field constitutes a 'remarkable dispersal of intellectual and political influence', its perspectives having spread amongst disciplines, 'reaching into almost every domain of contemporary thought [to] become part of the consciousness of our era' – describes postcolonialism as a 'wide-ranging political project' that has always aspired to 'turn the power structures of the world upside down, [to] refashion the world from below' (Young 2012: 19–42). To present postcolonial studies as reissuing the old revolutionary call ("The philosophers have only interpreted the world [. . .] the point is to change it") requires that this be accompanied by a coherent analysis on why and to what ends the world is in urgent need of upheaval, as well as by strategies for effecting insurrection.[8] And this agenda,

as even those only acquainted with the field will know, has been, and remains, anathema to high-profile commentators who erase conflict from their narratives of colonialism, reject the notion of struggle, and have consigned Marxist methodology to the funeral pyre – and this without observing the protocols of first examining the state of the designated corpse, and despite some prominent figures naming themselves as Marxists of a poststructuralist variety.[9]

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I have suggested that the prevalent perspectives within postcolonial studies, as well as those of Said who construed imperialism as a political dispensation imposed by a powerful 'West' on the rest of the world, distracted from an inclusive understanding of the myriad structural and social ramifications of colonisation and imperialism. Thus because entire continents of the empirical and the conceptual are missing from their maps of the world, the necessary critique is the very one occluded in postcolonial studies: that is, another cartography, one that is informed by an understanding of capitalism as a totality and hence configures the global scale of its connexions and disjunctions.

Whereas both Said and prominent postcolonial critics repudiated Marxism, I want to stress that the substance and tone of Said's abjurations were both more thoughtful, complex, and contradictory than those advanced by figures dominant in the field. If he acknowledged a dislike of all 'systems, he also conceded that he had 'been more influenced by Marxists than by Marxism or any other *ism*'; and while he refused to recognize Marxism as inherently and inescapably *critical*, during the 1970s and 1980s, he paradoxically made known his admiration for this very quality in the work of Lukács, Goldmann, Raymond Williams, and Adorno – whose writings he introduced to a generation of graduate students at Columbia and beyond, who at that time were without ready access to Marxist thought (Said 1983: 29).[10]

As a public intellectual, Said despised accommodation 'with the constituted and authorized powers of one's own society', and was contemptuous of that generation of artists and intellectuals who had volunteered to serve in the Cold War. In his books he embraced Marxists such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, Eqbal Ahmad, Amilcar Cabral, Che Guevara, and Walter Rodney as comrades in the struggle against imperialism, and called attention to the failure of postcolonial critics to acknowledge that these anti-colonial militants had confronted the contradictions and hierarchies in the institutionalised thought of the metropoles long before they had got around to doing so.

Yet none of these gestures of goodwill impinged on Said's misprision of dialectics. Brennan has argued that '[H]is now over-used term, *contrapuntal criticism*, 'was an alternative to hybridity, conjuring images less of mixture and mutual complicity than of independently directed harmonizations and contacts', while for R. Radhakrishnan it suggests a mode of reading consciously tracking back and forth across the 'activated imperial divide' (Brennan 2010: 105).[11] I see it rather as a counter to dialectics – which

provokes the question of whether a musical metaphor alluding to a combination of two or more independent themes into an interrelated polyphonic composition can do the work of thinking about a conflictual process.

Ironically, when Said in *Culture and Imperialism* set out to 'think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant', and to understand the overlapping experiences of coloniser and colonised, these affirmations are repeatedly interrupted by observations of inequality, coercion, and contest, of the 'fundamental ontological distinctions', the absolute disparity in power, the withholding of mutuality, the codification of difference (Said 1993: 36, 129, 195). Thus, on encountering and confronting such irreconcilable situations, Said finds that running like a fissure through the 'imperialist ensemble', 'is the principle of domination and resistance based on the division between the West and the rest of the world' (60). 'To tell the narrative,' he writes, 'of how a continuity is established between Europe and its peripheral colonies is therefore impossible, whether from the European or the colonial side' (308). '[H]istory', Said adds, 'teaches us that domination breeds resistance, and that the violence inherent in the imperialist contest – for all its occasional profit and pleasure – is an impoverishment for both sides' (348).

Such reversals put significant pressure on Said's usage of the contrapuntal as a means of theorising the imperial connection, since in seeking for forms of commonality, he found instead discord. They also undermine the facile notion of complicity between coloniser and colonised that became a commonplace in postcolonial studies, where persistent efforts are made to find a middle ground between the terms domination and oppression, to define colonial relationships as generically ambivalent, and to represent colonial locations as always the site of dialogue, negotiation, and mutual empathy.[12] Does Said then inadvertently undermine the explanatory potential of 'the contrapuntal'? Or would it be a sleight of hand to perceive this move as in line with Adorno's affirmation that '[A] successful work, according to immanent criticism . . . is one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised in its innermost structure' (Adorno 1983: 32)? If so, why did Said remain resistant to the dialectic, even distorting its meaning by insisting that dialectical thought routinely resulted 'in synthesis, resolution, transcendence, or *Aufhebung*' (Said 1994: 438)? Note here that the model of thesis-antithesis-synthesis as posited by Engels, Plekhanov, and Stalin is one repudiated by Marxist scholars, who have repeatedly elaborated and retheorised its import by reference to Marx's own inherent practice. Moreover, since *Aufhebung* is a concept where negation and preservation, denial and affirmation remain bound together, the process denoted is not that of concord, completion and closure, but the dynamics of further and endless contradiction. Why then should a formidably knowledgeable thinker misinterpret a methodology described by Lukács as 'a ceaseless generation and dissolution of intellectual categories', or in Fredric Jameson's words, a cognitive mode that attempts to hold together 'a conceptual coordination of incommensurables . . . within the framework of a single thought or language' (Jameson 1971: 336)?[13]

Insisting that Marxism belonged with 'the German idealist tradition of synthesizing the antithetical', Said scanted the caveat of Adorno's 'negative dialectics' and strategy of 'dialectical reversals', claiming him as an unequivocal defender of the rights of the aesthetic by dispensing with Adorno's understanding that the historicity of a work of art is a presence that is cancelled and restored (Said 2001: 565).[14] What, then, is at stake in Said seeking to detach Adorno from Marxism by disputing Fredric Jameson's location of his late style within Marxist thought?[15] 'My reading of Adorno', Said wrote in an essay of 1995,

> with his reflections about music at its centre, sees him as injecting Marxism with a vaccine so powerful as to dissolve its agitational force almost completely. Not only do the notions of advance and culmination in Marxism crumble under his rigorous negative scorn, but so too does anything which suggests movement at all. (2002: 272–3)

What can be inferred from this cryptic passage where the use of a term relating to immunisation against disease resonates a visceral recoil from an analytic category already misconstrued as practising a smooth and straightforward progression in its thinking, and predicting inevitable progress towards a desirable end-state of harmony in the real world?[16] Is he approving Adorno for draining Marxism of its 'agitational force' and its commitment to 'movement', or is he detecting a tension between Adorno as both motionless, locked within the aesthetic, and as a revolutionary commentator who protested against forms of cultural criticism that in his words, 'has wrenched the mind out of its dialectic with the material conditions of life' (Adorno 1983: 24, 27)?

These are intriguing questions I cannot answer, especially as Said elsewhere delivered glosses uncannily attuned to Adorno's thinking, as when he perceived that Beethoven's late style constituted 'a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the bourgeois order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it, thus presiding 'over music's rejection of the new bourgeois order' (Said 2002: 201).[17] So too Said fully grasped the implications of Adorno's 'rule of thumb that in the contemporary world, cultural forms that appear most distant from society – for example the lyric and dodecaphonic music – are the best places to see the imprint as well as the distortions of society upon the subject' (Said 2000: 166). And Adornian insights entered Said's own reading of Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, where he understands the Prince's consciousness of 'death, decay and decrepitude' as inseparable from '[s]ocial disintegration, the failure of revolution' and 'a sterile and unchanging [Italian] South' (Said 2006: 103–104).

Said's negligence in his formal disposal of Marxist dialectics, often countermanded in his own sophisticated practice, has affinities with but is of a different order from the revisions of postcolonial critics who conscript the work of revolutionary figures to their own agendas by resituating them as respectable centre-left thinkers. So far, attempts have been made to overpower Frantz Fanon and Antonio Gramsci with

conformism. David Macey – Fanon's most recent and, to date, his major biographer – has questioned the legitimacy of 'the postcolonial Fanon' construed by critics who dismiss as obsolescent Fanon's specific political commitments, such as struggles for national liberation, insisting that these were beliefs for which he had lived and for which he had died; while Leo Zeilig has protested that 'In the 1990s Fanon was taken up with renewed vigour by the academy . . . who presented a largely decontextualized Fanon, shorn of history. Here he was with his revolutionary urgency (and heart) ripped out' (Macey 2004: 26–29; Zeilig 2012).[18]

As for Gramsci, the makeover was begun some time ago in Italy, and continued by the Subaltern Studies Collective emanating from India in the 1980s, and new left tendencies in Europe at the same time. More recently there has appeared a collection of essays, *The Postcolonial Gramsci,* where the editors set out to liberate Gramsci's thought from the restrictions of Marxist thinking which, they complain, 'quite contrary to the spirit of Gramsci's own writing, steadfastly offer[s] a constrained framework as the *true* context of his political writing' (Srivastava and Bhattacharya 2012: 1). While the volume contains some well-researched essays, there is a recurrent and unsubstantiated theme claiming Gramsci as an unorthodox, dissident Marxist: his thought was 'unusual within the general paradigm of European Marxism; providing 'crucial tools that helped to break with Marxist orthodoxy'; he fled from Marxism's 'doctrinal inflexibility in analysing Third World struggles'; was 'against the thrust of orthodox Marxist thinking'; repudiated 'the conventional economic determinism of Marxist theory' and 'confronted the limits of Marxist theories of [his] time' (23, 43, 70, 119, 139, 197). It is as if contributors have forgotten to remember that Gramsci was a Marxist and a communist – the last word is absent from the index – and that Marxism has always generated and accommodated a variety of interpretations and elaborations.

Apropos the retrievals attempted by postcolonial studies, it should be noted that the postcolonial revision of the 'subaltern' wholly neglects Gramsci's ultimate and precise use of the term to identify the *class* position of the Southern peasantry within the Italian political order and class structure of the nineteen-twenties. This allows Robert Young in his essay in the *Postcolonial Gramsci* volume to declare that since 'the singular figure of the subaltern woman' was definitively introduced by Gayatri Spivak, '[I]n a sense it was Spivak, not Gramsci, who invented the "subaltern"' (Young 2012a: 30–31).[19]

In these manoeuvres to re-construct what was said in the past within the orbit of Marxist thinking, are we perhaps seeing an emergent mode of tendentious criticism that can be described as 'the rights of misprision', and which is not limited to postcolonial studies? Consider another instance of reappraising a dead revolutionary thinker that circumvents the known and manifest theoretical and political commitment of the person by inferring dissidence from marginalia. I refer to the commentaries on Rosa Luxemburg's *Letters* recently made by two public intellectuals, one of whom has renounced, and the other distanced herself from, Marxism.[20]

The first is Sheila Rowbotham. Her reductive review oscillates between two perceptions: one acknowledges Luxemburg's 'inspirational power as an original thinker and courageous activist in first, the Marxist Social Democratic party, and then the German revolutionary group, the Spartacist League'; her 'role as an international revolutionary figure'; 'her belief in the need for revolutionary organisation'; 'her theoretical conviction that class struggle was the key to change', her constant embattlement (Rowbotham 2011). The other, ignoring the thrust of the first, and on meagre textual evidence, seeks to resituate Luxemburg as an outspoken critic of Marxism, who was against its doctrinal nature and the organisational form of the party. On this Rowbotham rests the assertion of her importance to left feminism, even while allowing that Luxemburg never identified with the feminist movement of her day:

> My generation of left-libertarians did indeed hail Luxemburg's defiance of Lenin's 'night-watchman spirit'. Against his emphasis on the centralised party, many of us were drawn to Luxemburg's conviction that workers' action brought new social and political understandings.
>
> Luxemburg's criticism of Marxism as dogma and her stress on consciousness exerted an influence on the women's liberation movement which emerged in the late 60s and early 70s. When I was writing *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* during 1971, I drew on her analysis in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) of capital's greedy quest for non-capitalist markets, adapting it as a metaphor for the commodification of sexual relations and the body. (Rowbotham 2011)

The relevance of Luxemburg to feminist discourse is also made by Jacqueline Rose. In her widely publicised review, Rose allows that Luxemburg adhered to a Marxist credo, and rightly identifies her as 'one of the first Marxist theorists of globalisation', while making frequent allusions to or assertions of Luxemburg's dissidence concerning the concept and actuality of the party, and her breach with Lenin and Leninism. What Rose reiterates as crucial to understanding Luxemburg is that the obliqueness of her position, and her status as an outsider, 'gave her a freedom to think the un-thought, to force the unthinkable into the language of politics', adding, 'I have long believed this to be one of feminism's supreme tasks, what it has to contribute to political understanding' (Rose 2011). Principally what Rose appreciates and praises is how,

> [T]o the immense irritation of her opponents and detractors, she elevated uncertainty to a principle, a revolutionary creed. It is, as I see it, the thread that runs through her unwavering belief in democracy and freedom, as well as in socialism. Uncertainty is what allows us to see how these three depend on each other, and is the link in her life and thought between the public world of politics and the intimacies of the mind. (Rose 2011)

Peter Hudis, one of the editors of the *Letters* and who has expressed some admiration for the essay, has responded thus to Rose's stress on uncertainty:

> [W]hen it came to tracing out the trajectory of capital accumulation, uncertainty and unpredictability was not what Luxemburg emphasized. Her theory of capital accumulation was predicated on the argument that capitalism must *of necessity* take over

> and destroy non-capitalist strata in order for surplus value to be realized. No less central to her argument was her claim that precapitalist forms of land tenure and social relations would *inevitably* dissolve and be destroyed once the capital relation comes in contact with them. As Luxemburg states in her *Introduction to Political Economy* in speaking of non-capitalist social formations in the developing world (which Rose cites), 'There is only one contact that it cannot tolerate or overcome; this is the contact with European civilization, i.e. with capitalism. For the old society, this encounter is deadly, universally and without exception.' Where is the emphasis on openness and uncertainty in this formulation? Clearly, when it came to analyzing the trajectory of capital, the alienated form of objectified labor, Luxemburg emphasized predictability and certainty above all else. (Hudis 2011)

Another review by a literary academic in the US, Helen Scott, is yet more stringent in its criticism, faulting Rose for factual errors concerning her relationship with Lenin, for implying that 'Lenin and Luxemburg represent diametrically opposed traditions', and for drawing attention to her criticism of the Bolsheviks without observing 'her leadership of the illegal Polish party, or the fact that she dedicated the last months of her life [in Germany] to building a revolutionary party akin to the Bolsheviks' (Scott 2012). Rather than, as Rose suggests, reproaching 'a cause for destroying all that is finest in a human being, Scott contends that this is not only inaccurate – nowhere in the letters does she make such a charge – but in complete opposition to Luxemburg's own words and deeds. 'Not only in her writing but in her life – and death,' Scott insists, 'she committed herself to "the cause"', precisely because she saw and resisted all the ways that capitalism, imperialism, war, poverty, and oppression restrain and distort human potential: as she puts it in *The Mass Strike*, revolutionary struggle allows workers to 'overcome the levigation and the decay to which they are condemned under the daily yoke of capitalism' (Scott 2012).[21]

When reading Rowbotham and Rose on Luxemburg, I was aware of two unexamined assumptions: the first concerns the nature of letters, which except for the vain, are not written for posterity, and register thinking-in-progress, instant opinion, momentary reaction, passing irritations or enthusiasms, intimacies and so on. The other is how stultified is the prevalent view about discussion within Marxist and other left circles, where the exchange of fiercely opposed views can remain a hermeneutic discourse directed at analysing real-world situations, which is left-theory's reason for being, ideally and often actually conducted without personal rancour or the goal of winning the argument. Such instances can even be recuperated from the documents of political parties whose well-known proclivity to deadly altercation and fissure is persistently mocked, even though it is not so distant from the acrimonious splits within psychoanalytic theory or the animosities that surface in academic debate – and is perhaps a measure not only or necessarily of the will to triumph, but of taking ideas seriously.

How are we to understand the position I earlier referred to as 'the rights of misprision' when the reading of theoretical texts demands techniques other than those

specified in Harold Bloom's model of antithetical criticism – the creative misreadings of their great precursors undertaken by poets to overcome barriers to their own quest for originality? The primary consideration in glossing theoreticians must surely be whether interpretation derives from what is immanent and indispensable in the original and whether the commentary delivers retellings that are true to the thinking, commitment, and passion registered in the sources.[22] Consider then a flyer for a recent series of postcolonial seminars which reads: 'Making mistakes is an essential part of any creative and interpretive activity: reading, writing, translating and engaging with texts in their different variations.' This announcement calls on Victor Shklovsky's book *The Energy of Delusion* to ground the claim that 'misinterpreting the author's intent and following the deceptive lead of the narrative has been surprisingly productive in many representative cases across various disciplines' (Shklovsky 2007). When I consulted a colleague about this reading, I learned that Shklovsky was a Russian formalist and 'the book referenced was on how plot functions, centering not on literary interpretation but on literary production, as against anything metacritical':

> It seems to me quite deluded to represent this work as advocating misinterpretation of an author [. . .] far from anything resembling a free-floating reading against the grain, Shklovsky's argument, rather, centers on how *narrative* meanders, and thus produces unexpected links between literature and the world [. . .] It is emphatically not an argument on behalf of misinterpretation. That is itself a misinterpretation.'[23]

It is surely necessary to differentiate between responsible and reckless readings of theoretical texts, between propositions concerning the partiality and unreliability of the author, or disputing the significance of authorial intention, and that critical practice which asserts the instability of all writing, and hence authorises unlicensed interpretation and incongruous readings. The first position is related to the idea of 'symptomatic reading', a strategy for the interpretation of theoretical and literary texts suggested by Althusser and followed by Macherey, which is concerned with the meaning of a work that exceeds what is said and may actively contradict the consciousness of its producer. This is not to be confused with an entitlement to misrepresentation.[24]

Where in this scheme of things does a position advancing the notion of deliberated misreading of theoretical exegesis, including politically engaged texts, belong? If it is a strategy for draining Marxist and indeed all left thought of its revolutionary impulses and energies, it is one to be resisted and countered, not in the interests of a sterile rigour, but – in Benjamin's words – to rescue the past and the dead, and a tradition and its receivers, from being overpowered by conformism (Benjamin 1973: 257).[25] There was a time when prominent and apprentice postcolonial critics would casually dismiss or deride Marxism. This insouciant gesture may be less easy to perform now that Marxism has regained a significant place in the wider intellectual discussion.[26] At this moment Marxist scholars are re-examining and glossing the founding texts, are to the fore in advancing further analyses of capitalism, and are promoting an understanding of

globalisation as a political project directed at the world-wide restructuring of economic and social relationships.

This agenda will not be congenial to those postcolonial critics who hypostasise appearance with scant regard for empirical substantiation, and whose selective concerns serve to shrink the horizon necessary to comprehend the specificities of postcolonial societies as these exist within the total capitalist system. However, given the accumulation of research and thinking dispersed across the field, and often consigned to its margins, the resources exist for proper analysis of the present world order in registers structural, cultural, and aesthetic.

Notes

1. The disconnection of colonialism from capitalism in Said's work may have given comfort to those postcolonial critics who wanted to represent empire as a cultural event or a discursive construct. So too Said's poignant meditations on the loss and satisfaction of exile have been appropriated for both a sanguine representation of the diasporic condition that appears unaware of its own elitism, and a mindless celebration of nomadism which occludes the experiences and aspirations of those – the majority of the world's populations – who cannot migrate or would not choose displacement.
2. The blurb to Shaden M. Tageldin's book reads: 'Moving beyond the domination/resistance binary that continues to govern understandings of colonial history, Tageldin redefines cultural imperialism as a politics of translational seduction' (Tageldin 2011).
3. This is a project pursued by The Warwick Research Collective (WReC); a publication, *Combined and Uneven Development: A Theory of World Literature* is forthcoming.
4. Neil Lazarus comments on how Homi Bhabha in his 'Foreword' to the re-publication of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, without providing 'any sustained or concrete analysis of the world system', calls for 'debt relief and forgiveness' and 'a universal right to equitable development', by way of issuing a 'challenge to globalization' that is significantly lacking 'in being *anti-imperialist*' (Lazarus 2011: 181). See also Amireh and Majaj 2000. For the wider context in the study of culture and globalisation, see for example, Arjun Appadurai, 1996 and Breckenridge et al 2002.
5. From the outset, Tim Brennan maintains, dominant trends within postcolonial studies 'were driven by a set of ethical postulates popularized by poststructuralist theory: the striving for ambivalence as a matter of principle; the ardent belief that answering a question forecloses it; the elision of meaning in pursuit of epistemological doubt as a desired goal' (Brennan 2006: 139–140).
6. Said, without ever coordinating these dimensions as a totality, was attentive to many of these matters, drawing on a range of disciplines outside the domain of literary criticism when addressing the empirical world, bringing philosophical considerations to his thinking, and thus commanding an inclusive perspective which led him once to describe imperialism as the horizon of our time.
7. What also needs to be addressed is China's present negotiated pursuit of markets and acquisition of raw materials, including the lease or purchase of large tracts of land in Africa and Latin America for the growth of crops to be consumed in China.
8. Nor is this declamation compatible with the less-than-radical questioning as to 'why, millions of people in this world still live without things that most of those in the West take for granted. Clean water, for example' – a concern shared and actively pursued by countless NGOs, think tanks and charities who have no desire to turn the world upside down (Young 2012: 20).
9. Indeed, by 1998 Simon During remarked of postcolonial thought that it fuses 'postcolonialism with postmodernism' in rejecting 'resistance along with any form of binaries, hierarchy or telos', and through deploying 'categories such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence . . . all of which laced the colonised into colonising cultures [. . .] effectively became a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonialist category' (During 1998: 31).

10. More than a decade ago Michael Sprinker referred to Said's slighting of Marxism 'as a coherent – if not unproblematically unified – system of thought and action', at the core of which is the notion and analysis of the capitalist *system*. Thus Sprinker notes that although Said made selective use of Marxist concepts and paradigms, he did so without foregrounding 'the unity and consistency in thought that their political and methodological commitments impose' (Sprinker 1993/4). On Said and Marxism, see also Brennan 1992 and Said 1983: 230–242.
11. Contrapuntal criticism has been described as 'a technique of theme and variations seeking to establish counterpoint between metropolitan history and Western narratives, and other histories and counter-narratives'. See Robbins et al 1994: 11.
12. For exponents of this position see for example Suleri 1992, Bhabha 1994, and more recently Comaroff 2001.
13. Jameson describes dialectics as 'a conceptual coordination of incommensurables', that comes into being 'as an attempt to hold the[se] contradictory features of structural analogy and the radical differences in dynamic and in historical causality together within the framework of a single thought or language' (Jameson 2002: 64, 65). Summary dismissals of dialectics may send some readers to or back to contemporary Marxist exegeses of the concept. See Bhaskar 1991: 146, 147: 'any Marxian dialectic will be objectively conditioned, absolutely finitist and prospectively open (i.e. unfinished) . . . Marxist critical dialectics may perhaps best be understood as an empirically open-ended, materially conditioned and historically circumscribed, dialectical phenomenology.'
14. Negative dialectics, to cite Fredric Jameson, has no choice but 'to affirm the notion and value of an ultimate synthesis, while negating its possibility and reality in every concrete case that comes before it' (1971: 56). As Adorno wrote, 'it is precisely as artifacts, as products of social labour that they [works of art] [. . .] communicate with the empirical experience that they reject and from which they draw their content. Art negates the categorial determinations stamped on the empirical world and yet harbours what is empirically existing in its own substance. If art opposes the empirical through the element of form – and the mediation of form and content is not to be grasped without their differentiation – the mediation is to be sought in the recognition of aesthetic form as sedimented content' (Adorno 1997: 5).
15. For Fredric Jameson, 'No other Marxist theoretician has ever staged this relationship between the universal and the particular, the system and the detail, with this kind of single-minded yet wide-ranging attention [. . .] Adorno's life work stands or falls with the concept of "totality"', the instance being the economic system of late capitalism' (Jameson 1990: 9).
16. This attribution of a triumphal route towards a unity within which opposition and antithesis are instantly resolved conforms neither with Lukács' concept of totality or system as a category that 'does not reduce its various elements to an undifferentiated uniformity', nor of a dialectical process that takes place between the real and the theoretical: 'When a totality is known they [the contradictions of capitalism] will not be transcended and *cease* to be contradictions [. . .] When theory [as the knowledge of the whole] opens up the way to resolving these contradictions it does so by revealing the real tendencies of social evolution. For these are destined to effect real resolution of the contradictions that have emerged in the course of history' (Lukács 1971: 10). Steven Best's critique of the poststructuralist critique of totality sees this concept 'as a contextualizing act which situates seemingly isolated phenomena within their larger relational context and draws connections [or mediations] between the different aspects of a whole' (Jameson 1989: 344). As Henri Lefebvre proposed, it may perhaps be possible for these expressions 'to be integrated into an open totality, perpetually in the process of being transcended' (Lefebvre 1968: 111).
17. See also Martin Jay: 'The particular "catastrophe" in which Adorno was interested was the *Missa Solemnis*, which was unintelligible to most of [Beethoven's] first listeners. By returning to the seemingly archaic form of the religious mass, the composer, still himself a secular humanist, registered the failure of the bourgeois emancipation from its pre-enlightenment past. By disappointing the

expectations of his audience, he registered the growing alienation of the artist from his public . . . Perhaps most significant of all, by abandoning the sonata form with its developing variation in favour of more static contrapuntal forms, he called into question the bourgeois subject's achievement of genuine autonomy' (Jay 1984: 144).

18. Zeilig observes that 'In the 1990s Fanon was taken up with renewed vigour by the academy . . . Cultural critics and postmodernists focused exclusively on his work on identity and presented a largely decontextualized Fanon . . . Fanon became the privileged thinker of the "post-colony", and careers were made researching Fanon's thought by Anglo-American academics' (Zeilig 2012).
19. That critics can embark on such a project at a time when still unexamined Gramsci archives are being found in Italy, and major engagements with his thinking are currently being produced, can only serve to cast further doubt on the gravitas of some of the contributors. See Timothy Brennan's review essay 'Joining the Party' (Brennan 2013). This was followed up in the same issue by a response from the editors of *The Postcolonial Gramsci* ('Who Owns Gramsci? Response to Timothy Brennan', 79–86), followed in turn by Brennan's riposte ('(Dis)owning responsibility', 87–89).
20. See also Adler et al 2011.
21. Scott writes that 'Repeatedly in the letters she [Luxemburg] professes her desire to be in the midst of the struggle, employing some of her more memorable metaphors to emphasize the point. My personal favorite: "I am ready at my post at all times and at the first opportunity will begin striking the keys of World History's piano with all ten fingers so that it will really boom"' (Scott 2012).
22. Consider Paul de Man, no friend to Marxism: 'If the substantial emphasis is temporal, the structural stress entirely falls on substitution as a key concept. And from the moment we begin to deal with substitutive systems, we are governed by linguistic rather than by natural or psychological models: one can always substitute one word for another but one cannot, by a mere act of the will, substitute night for day or bliss for gloom. However, the very ease with which the linguistic substitution, or trope, can be carried out hides the fact that it is epistemologically unreliable. It remains something of a mystery how rhetorical figures have been so minutely described and classified over the centuries with relatively little attention paid to their mischievous powers over the truth and falsehood of statements' (de Man 1974: 273).
23. Personal correspondence with Keya Ganguly.
24. In Sarah Brouillette's succinct summary: Althusser 'and the tradition of inquiry his work supported were not motivated to uncover a work's wilfully intended messages . . . Literature's relationship to the totality it cannot articulate is precisely what is symptomatic, hence the structuring truth of a work can only be gleaned through attention to its very silences and absences . . . Reading symptomatically thus entails looking at the dialectical relationship between what is said and unsaid, or seen and unseen' (Brouillette 2012: 464).
25. Walter Benjamin writes that 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was"' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious' (Benjamin 1973: 257).
26. The vigour of current discussion on Marxism and Communism is evident in the distinctive and nonuniform writings of such as Alex Callinicos, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, Peter Hallward, and Bruno Bosteels; while Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière continue to engage with Marxism negatively by contemplating communism without Marxism.

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Desiring Revolution II[1]

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Abstract:
Where do revolutions come from? Where do they begin? How are we to understand, and where should we locate, the beginnings of the Egyptian Revolution of 25 January 2011? These are the questions at the heart of this essay. After a survey of the ideas of Hannah Arendt on revolution, Jacques Derrida on the messianic and Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse on the intersection between desire and political action, selected works by Naguib Mahfouz (*The Day the Leader Was Killed*, *Morning and Evening Talk*) and Gamal al-Ghitani (*The Za'farani Files*) are read as texts with a prognostic value, ones that emit signs of the revolution to come. Through the repeated pattern of failures of desire that recurs frequently in novels written during the presidencies of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, the conditions of impotence and anhedonia associated with the advent of capitalism become symptomatic of a dysfunctional and hopelessly corrupt society. In this framework, the articulation of desire becomes the first step towards revolution.

Keywords: Revolution, desire, beginnings, democracy, Derrida, spectrality, futurity, literature, messianic.

The Coming Revolution(s)

When the definitive history of the revolution of 25 January 2011 is finally written, one question that will inevitably prove contentious is that of its beginning. When did the extraordinary events that changed Egypt begin? Did the revolution of 25 January begin on 25 January, the officially recognised first day of the revolution, or did it begin with Mohammad Bouazizi's suicide in Sidi Bouzid (Tunisia) the preceding December,

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or did it begin with the many labour actions, strikes, and sit-ins that were the stuff of Egypt's daily news during the entirety of the 2010 calendar year, or was it the founding of movements like the April 6 Youth Movement in 2008 or *Kefaya* (also known as the Egyptian Movement for Change) in 2004 that started, and drove, the revolution? In fact, the more one tries to locate the beginning of the revolution, the more one is caught in a vertiginous perspective where new beginnings keep proliferating as one moves farther back in time.[2] There is a certain Derridean spectrality to the process; one in which the ever unlocatable origin shimmers under the guise of what could be a beginning but turns out not to be one.[3]

In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt reflects on the fact that beginnings and revolutions are intimately intertwined. A revolution makes it hard to think about or locate a beginning, and yet revolutions are themselves moments when something begins, something new is inaugurated. Arendt says:

> It is in the very nature of the beginning to carry with itself a measure of complete arbitrariness. Not only is it not bound into a reliable chain of cause and effect, a chain in which each effect immediately turns into the cause of future developments, the beginning has, as it were, nothing whatsoever to hold on to; it is as though it came out of nowhere in either time or space. For a moment, the moment of beginning, it is as though the beginner has abolished the sequence of temporality itself, or as though the actors were thrown out of the temporal order and its continuity. (Arendt 1990: 206)

Part of the difficulty in understanding the beginnings and causes of revolution inheres in this acausality of the beginning. A further difficulty is provided by the repetitive structure often ascribed to revolutions: despite the transcendental differences of time, space, and character, we tend to think of every revolution as a re-enactment of a previous revolution, with imperial Rome acting as a standard for the American and French Revolutions, which would themselves become models for future events, and so on. Wherever one looks, one risks finding a new beginning.

Nor is this all. Earlier in her study, Arendt links part of the revolutionary impulse to political and social agents who are – and here she quotes Sallust on the Catiline conspiracy – *rerum novarum cupidi*, covetous of new things, desiring change and lusting after novelty. It is precisely this double movement that combines sudden irruptions of indefinable origin with a constant appeal to the future that characterises revolutionary action. Every revolution is janus-faced. The coming of the revolution calls for an opening up to possibilities that surpass those available in a given political horizon of expectations at a given point in time. This desire for the new and openness to a wholly other political order is, I suggest, central to creating the acausal, atemporal phenomenon that is a revolutionary beginning.[4] Indeed, it is through that call to and from the other – the demand for revolution and the call of the revolution – that the revolutionary citizen is born.

The dynamic of opening up to the radical contingencies involved in revolutionary action, both as a response to an unbearable present and an invocation of whatever the

future might bring, is defined and shaped in Derrida's repeated pronouncements on the messianic and the futurity inherent in democracy. The idea of the messianic is helpfully elucidated by Richard Beardsworth in the following terms:

> Objectively . . . the 'messianic' comes to name the opening up to the other within any identity formation together with the latter's interruption. Subjectively . . . it names the awaiting of otherness within apparent sameness, an awaiting without horizon, divorced of religious teleology; an awaiting that is . . . the condition of all ethical and political practices. The messianic without messianism constitutes in this sense the harbouring of promise within any spatial or temporal form. (2010: 15)

The futurity of democracy was an idea that exercised Derrida repeatedly during the last two decades of his life. From roughly 1989 onwards,[5] and especially after his magisterial reading of Marx two decades ago, Derrida was relentless in reminding us that democracy is always *à venir*, always to come, which I read to mean that we can never be democratic enough; that even in ostensibly established democracies, the struggle for human rights always finds new obstacles and renewed calls for revolution; that the passage from authoritarian to democratic regimes – and indeed the evolution of rights and justice in ostensibly democratic societies – is neither simple nor straightforward. In addition to the vigilance needed to keep surviving forms of injustice and oppression at bay, the culture of democracy depends on an openness to unknown others, to unknown and unknowable possibilities and outcomes, on an infinite capacity for wanting new and more democratic societies and politics: to use another Derridean phrase, an unconditional hospitality to the other, towards that which is coming, that which is *à venir* without condition, towards guests from the future. In his analysis of the between actual and ideal democracy – an analysis that would prove prophetic in its predictions about those disenfranchised by the advent of neoliberalism – Derrida emphasises the extent to which democracy always and necessarily falls short of itself:

> It would be too easy to show that, measured by the failure to establish liberal democracy, the gap between fact and ideal essence does not show up only in so-called primitive forms of government, theocracy and military dictatorship . . . .This failure, this gap, also characterises, *a priori* and by definition, *all* democracies, including the oldest and most stable of so-called Western democracies. At stake here is the very concept of democracy as concept of a promise that can only arise in such a *diastema* (failure, inadequation, disjunction, disadjustment, being 'out of joint.') That is why we always propose to speak of a democracy *to come* [*à venir*], not of a *future* democracy in the present.
>
> To this extent, the effectivity or actuality of the democratic promise, like that of the communist promise, will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come [*à venir*] of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. (Derrida 2006: 80–1; Derrida 1993: 110)[6]

Democracy is promising but never fully lives up to its promise. The answer to that failure, however, can only be more democracy. Democracy is always *à venir*. Only democracy can save us from the shortcomings of democracy (Derrida 2003: 28–9, 62–5, 107–10, 155–61).

What, though, would it mean to want, hope for, or desire democracy or a culture of democracy in Egypt or elsewhere? One possible path of inquiry might be to read the democratic and revolutionary promises and longing inscribed in pre-revolutionary fiction. My reliance on fiction, rather than social science or history, might justifiably cause some consternation, not least because of the explosion of other forms of output – blogs, tweets, memes, Facebook posts, revolutionary chants and the like – that accompanied the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Nevertheless, I believe that the novel matters for a number of reasons, some theoretical, others practical. On the theoretical front, I am working in light of Edward W. Said's description of the novel as 'a kind of appetite that writers develop for modifying reality – as if from the beginning – as a desire to create a new or beginning fictional entity while accepting the consequences of that desire' (1997: 82). There is something inherently novelistic about beginnings. Second, in Egypt's case in particular, the very long history of repression, censorship and military rule means that the most important political ideas are, more often than not, advanced in fiction rather than 'official' or social scientific writing. This is even, or one might say especially, true of the novelist whose career as a civil servant included a stint at the state censor's office; namely Naguib Mahfouz, who has gone on record to state that his novels were the most reliable source of his political and social ideas, notwithstanding his prolific career as a journalist (Jacquemond 2003: 54–7). Finally, we might invoke the operation of Ernst Bloch's position at the interface between desire and the advent of the messianic to justify using art as a revolutionary diagnostic tool. Bloch's ideas about the anticipatory forward-looking consciousness (the 'not-yet-conscious') inscribed in the work of art informed by learned hope (*docta spes*) prefigure the call of the messianic and the *à venir* in Derrida's scheme.[7] The utterly new, the wholly other, enters the world through the work of art and revolution. Small wonder that some writers call on the register of the transcendent to describe their experience of the revolution.[8]

The migration of literature and democracy towards each other, and their opening up to the other, implies a mutual affinity and responsibility. Literature operates not only as an enabling condition of the democratic (as in Derrida's statement that neither literature nor democracy can exist without each other) but as the just response called for by democracy (Derrida 1993 : 65–66; the idea of responding to literature, and literature itself as a response, is developed at some length by Attridge (2004: 31–3, 78–92 and 2010: 1–14, 27–33)). This is not to say that the demand for greater democratic freedoms can be fully satisfied by the publication of a novel or a poem, but it is to argue for the power of literature as a generator of democracy, and to take stock of the very real threat that literature poses to anti-democratic political regimes.

The power of the literary as an anti-despotic countertext inheres in its responsibility; in its being the thing that democracy calls forth.

Perhaps what is most useful about Bloch and Derrida is the way in which their work enables thinking about the present desire for the world to come. The affective and ethical outlook needed in order to imagine and inhabit this new world is the understanding that if present wishes are to be fulfilled, they will be fulfilled in a wholly different future. The changes to the world necessary to make wishes come true risk transforming the desire that brought those changes about in the first place. Hope and desire are therefore far more radical enterprises than they might at first seem, constantly ushering in the wholly other, always at the risk of being destroyed or changed beyond recognition in the process. What they require is what Fredric Jameson, in one of his early expositions of Bloch, called 'a keeping faith with the open character of the future, a life in time which holds to the prospect of the absolutely unexpected as the only expectation: certainty, not of the abstract, but of the concrete new in its unimaginable plenitude' (1971: 127). This also gives us a first indication of what to look for by way of clues to the coming revolution in pre-revolutionary art and literature: the presence or absence of hope, and the possibility, or lack thereof, of desire.

Failures of Desire

It is to these imaginings of the unimaginable that we now turn, through the fictions of upheaval in Egypt as a way of thinking about those past moments when promises were made, or held forth as new beginnings and hope reborn. President Sadat's policy of moving the Egyptian economy away from the path of *dirigiste* socialism and towards the neoliberal 'Open Door' (*Infitāḥ*) policy after 1974 brought about serious social upheaval in Egyptian society, with fortunes being made and unmade with dizzying speed, the large middle class becoming increasingly impoverished and all that had hitherto seemed solid melting into air.

Quite a few of the novels written in Egypt during this period, and precisely the ones that tackle the impact of the *Infitāḥ* policy, speak not of the joys of increased democratic freedom – of which there were very few – but of the failures of this new, supposedly generous liberal economic system, to deliver. Oddly enough, the most important locus of that failure is desire. Now, this is a very curious phenomenon: the critiques of global capitalism in the Arabic fiction of this period can, and sometimes do, take the form of a lone hero fighting a desperate battle against the Egyptian republic's subservience to American imperialism and deregulated capitalism – this is what happens in Yusuf al-Qa'id's *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-'ān* [*It is Happening in Egypt Now*] (1974), Son'alla Ibrahim's *The Committee* (1981) and *Zaat* (1992) – or of a very long rant that narrates the breakdown of everything and every social relation as in Yusuf al-Qa'id's *Shakāwā al-Miṣrī al-Faṣīḥ* [*The Eloquent Egyptian's Complaints*] (1981–85). The more frequent pattern in the novels of the 1970s and 1980s, however, is that any discussion of political or economic change

immediately focuses on a failed relationship, a failed love affair, or the impossibility of marriage, as though the dream (or nightmare) of love, narrated realistically, were the royal road to the political unconscious.[9] Nor, as Wen-chin Ouyang has recently demonstrated, are failed relationships in the Arabic novel limited to narratives written about revolution or political turmoil, but the consistency with which the impossibility of desire recurs for reasons other than social convention in the fiction of the 1970s and 1980s calls for analysis.[10]

Consider Mahfouz's *Al-Karnak* (1974 [*Karnak Café*]), part of Naguib Mahfouz's verdict on the failures of the 1952 revolution and the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser (and Rasheed El-Enany's analysis of the political evaluations running through the Mahfouz canon: El-Elany 1990: 72–86). Although the central theme of the novel is torture and rape in the brutal prisons of Egypt during the 1960s, the plot itself is driven by the (ultimately unsuccessful) love affair between the owner of the Karnak café and a student activist. As we will see shortly, this is not the only example of a political critique being worked out through a problematic of failed desire. Although the idea of the chosen couple is as old as *Theagenes and Chariclea*, something strange seems to befall the Egyptian fiction of this period: rather than being separated by pirates or oppressive social laws, the couples in many of the novels of the 1970s and 1980s cannot be together simply because they cannot afford to do so. Egypt's new economic system leaves nothing to be hoped for and nothing to be desired because both desire and hope somehow became impossible once neoliberal consumer capitalism invades the country.

An even more literal version of the failure of desire is provided by Gamal al-Ghitani's *Zafarani Files* [*Waqāʾiʿ Ḥārat al-Zaʿfarānī*, literally *The Events of the Zaafarani Quarter*].[11] Although it was not published until 1976, the novel was written between 1973 and 1975, which is to say during the years of the inauguration of Sadat's *Infitāḥ* policy. The style of the novel is a common one in the early works of Gamal al-Ghitani: it is written as a series of police reports, or police informers' reports, that then slip into free indirect discourse occasionally punctuated by stream of consciousness narration. The plot is simple: one day, all the male inhabitants of the Zaafarani alley are suddenly rendered impotent, and all the women sterile. Desire has run its course and outlived its usefulness. Eventually it transpires that the condition of impotence, which is quickly labelled *Zaʿfarānism*, has at its origin a spell (or, as al-Ghitani puts it, 'The Talisman') cast by the invisible and mysterious Sheikh Atiya, around whom the action revolves. Consequently, things go from bad to worse: marriages break down, people become violent, men go mad, women fight, the police reports that are the novel's vehicle become increasingly urgent and alarming, but at no point is there a return to 'normalcy'. The novel ends with a series of dispatches from around the world indicating that *Zaʿfarānism* has reached the farthest ends of the globe: there are huge sit-ins at hospitals in Buenos Aires, riots in Paris, a global run on aphrodisiacs and so on. The last line in the novel announces the end of humanity as we know it: 'The age of the Talisman has begun. Let the world change' (al-Ghitani 1990–1997, 4: 292).

The secretive Sheikh has a plan. It is not just a question of ruining his neighbours' sex lives, but rather of changing the world in terms that sound Stalinist: the Sheikh's aim is the abolition of differences and the establishment of freedom of choice as a fundamental political principle. After the shock of universal impotence, people will, the theory goes, love each other and co-operate, all the world's people will be 'leaves on the same tree, pearls on the same necklace, stars in the same constellation, gazelles in the same desert patch. The entire world will hear the truth' (al-Ghitani 1990–1997, 4: 193–4). At the close of the novel, there is a messianic dispatch from India announcing that the Sheikh's principles will now take over the world: 'Farewell to the dark ages, falsified truths, death by hunger, unhappy love, frustrated hope, oppressed desire, false promise, despotic regimes, inconsistent justice, the complication of the easy and the simple . . . It won't be long now' (al-Ghitani, 1990–1997, 4: 292). The Sheikh has triumphed, and far from being limited to a poor neighbourhood in Cairo, the phenomenon of *Zaʿfarānism* is now globally triumphant.

Although the date of the composition of the novel might make it conceivable that it is one of the many works critical of the Ab del Nasser presidency that were published in the 1970s, quite a few of the plot details and the rest of al-Ghitani's career as a novelist cast some doubt on that particular reading.[12] One of the most striking features of *The Zafarani Files* is the repeated reference to the commodities that fill people's lives: not only do all of the characters spy on each other (along with the police), but they all seem to keep careful note of each other's possessions and dietary habits: we find out who has a radio cassette recorder,[13] who has a new fridge and so on and so forth. This circulation of commodities, coupled with *Zaʿfarānism*, attests to something far more sinister: the failure of desire *as a productive social force* rather than a reactive mechanism. Furthermore, the text makes clear that the years before the epidemic of impotence were hardly good ones: there were massive social inequalities leading to a sharp rise in prostitution, with Egyptian women routinely being sold to the highest bidder – a social anxiety widespread in *Infitāḥ* Egypt. The Sheikh's absurd instruction that everyone start using the phrase 'Time to flee' as a standard greeting echoes Americanisms like 'Gotta go' or 'See you later' that were starting to circulate in Egypt during the *Infitāḥ*. The failures of the revolution and *Infitāḥ* are not only failures of policy, al-Ghitani seems to be telling us, but failures of desire that persist and worsen as the Egyptian republic moves from a model of putatively independent development to parasitical international capitalism. The inhabitants of the Zafarani neighbourhood may desire, but they cannot reproduce themselves as a society. Worst of all, the only end to the damage caused by unregulated capitalism will be a political order far more repressive than those that have gone before, in Egypt and elsewhere. Al-Ghitani's satire therefore stands as a searing indictment of the damage wrought by *Infitāḥ* policies and a stark warning as to where failures of desire can lead.

In the late 1980s, after the assassination of Sadat and during the early years of the Mubarak era, Naguib Mahfouz directed his wrath at the madness that was Egypt's *Infitāḥ* policy and the very real destruction that it brought about.[14] Once again,

the most symptomatic register is that of desire. As early as 1979, in a story titled 'Ahl al-Qimma' (roughly 'The Elite' or 'The People of the Peak'), Mahfouz has former criminals bragging about their new status as top businessmen enjoying state police protection, while law-abiding citizens go begging, and how the government has become the biggest thief of all. Inevitably, there is a question of marriage: a former criminal changes his name, becomes a wealthy businessman and tries to marry the beleaguered protagonist's daughter (the protagonist is a policeman). The spectre of runaway capitalism and utterly impossible relationships is foregrounded even more emphatically in *The Day the Leader Was Killed* (1985). The novel involves formal techniques that Mahfouz employed before, namely in *Miramar* (1969) and *Karnak Café* (1974). Each chapter title is a character's name, and in each chapter we 'hear' that character's thoughts. This internal focalisation is one of the many ways in which Mahfouz tries to underline the use of the novel as a form that transcends any number of individual, isolated minds, though the transcendence in the case of *The Day the Leader Was Killed* starts to look very shaky indeed, partially because of the breakdown of values and mores and utter hopelessness that the novel narrates.

Now, in a novel titled *The Day the Leader Was Killed*, published some four years after the president is assassinated by Islamist extremists, we might expect Mahfouz to allude to Islamist-inspired extremism as a social and political development. In fact we get nothing of the kind: we are squarely in the context of the middle-class Egyptian family uneasily navigating its way through the country's political history. The novel starts with the awakening of the grandfather Muhtashimi Zayed, born, like Mahfouz, in the early 1900s. He has lived through the revolutions of 1919 and 1952 as well as the defeat of 1967.[15] He has had a good life, was something of a casanova in his youth, had a successful career as a teacher, taught five future cabinet ministers, and is now ready to welcome death, happily and without despair. Muhtashimi Zayed is also the only person in the novel who was able to live, and love, in anything like a coherent way.

Muhtashimi lives with his son, Fawwaz Muhtashimi, his daughter-in-law and his grandson, Elwan Fawwaz Muhtashimi, to whom he is very close. The reason they all live together is because they cannot afford to live separately. The faintly incestuous atmosphere of a cramped apartment containing multiple generations, as well as the crime around which the plot revolves, convey a reversal of the vector of desire as described in Freud's *Totem and Taboo*: instead of the horror of parricide and incest prohibition leading to exogamy and the foundation of society, with desire moving from the particular to the general by being projected outside the family and against the control of the father, it remains trapped within the stifling space of the family with no possibility of political development or cultural accomplishment (Freud 1955: 140–61; cf. Boltanksi 2011: 196–200) The parents, Fawwaz and Hanaa, are totally overworked – since one job no longer pays the bills – and still cannot afford a place of their own. The couple at the centre of the novel are Elwan and Randa, both of whom work in dead-end jobs in the public sector and are unable to save enough to get married. All suffer, all embody the fact that the *Infitāḥ* policy does not work; none of

the characters (except for the grandfather) can afford a basic life. Muhtashimi Zayed has at least lived long enough to remember life before the devastation of the *Infitāḥ* divides his life into two epochs, BI and AI (Before *Infitāḥ* and After *Infitāḥ*).

Elwan Fawwaz Muhtashimi makes his entrance with a long rant about the manic speed with which everyone moves in capitalist Cairo, and the unbounded inflation that drives thousands of Egyptians to the Gulf to earn their keep and others into 'exile' in the West, while doctoral students take part-time jobs as sex workers to finance their studies. A telling moment comes when Elwan reminisces about the good old days when his father played with him and his siblings at home – something he could afford to do because he had time, because he was not working three jobs to make ends meet – and then immediately slips into a meditation on the father of the nation (Gamal Abd El Nasser) and the people's desire for him:

> My mother and father were always around. There was talk and laughter and enthusiasm for our studies [*ḥamās al-dirāsa*] and the dominance of heroism [*saṭwat al-buṭūla*]. We are the people. The people's heart chose you [this sentence is addressed to Abd El Nasser]. Love was a bunch of flowers wrapped in hope. We lost our first leader [Abd El Nasser again]. And our first pop star [probably Abdel Haleem Hafez]. An opposing leader [Sadat] led us out of defeat [through the 1973 war] but spoiled the joy of victory. A victory in exchange for two defeats. (Mahfouz 2008: 24)

The two defeats refer to the unpopular peace treaty with Israel and the Open Door policy.[16] Once again, we have a failure of desire: the Egyptian people desired Abd El Nasser but that got them nowhere. Elwan's reverie locates a very Marcusean moment in the narrative: the memory of a past happiness begins a process that will culminate in a revolutionary eruption. While this may at first seem to contradict Bloch's and Derrida's future-oriented, messianic mode of thinking, we would do well to bear in mind those powerful sentences from the opening of *Eros and Civilization*:

> The liberation of the past does not end in its reconciliation with the present. Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer [i.e. the person doing the remembering], the orientation on the past tends towards an orientation on the future. (Marcuse 1987: 113–14)

Marcuse insists on the value of the memory of gratification, and the preservation of promises and potentialities, as the source of revolutionary energy, and on the externalisation of that actual (as opposed to possible) Utopia as the task that befalls society as a whole in its search for justice. Marcuse values the moment where 'The *recherche du temps perdu* becomes the vehicle of future liberation' (1987: 18).

Eventually Elwan and Randa's relationship breaks down under the unbearable pressure of the new economy. This pressure gets a little help from their aptly named boss, Anwar Allam – the fact that he shares Anwar Sadat's forename is deliberate. Anwar Allam, as it turns out, is busy scheming to break up Elwan and Randa. Anwar

is the voice of the *Infitāḥ*: he is charming, smooth, goes on endlessly about being 'smart' and reasonable in Egypt's new, capitalist age. Anwar succeeds, and ends up marrying Randa, who quickly discovers that she is being used as a trophy wife: her job is to entertain and, if necessary, sleep with Anwar's business chums. In the meantime the boss's widowed sister tries to seduce Elwan. On 6 October 1981 – the day of the assassination of Sadat – the entire country stands still, stunned by the event, with one notable exception: Elwan goes to Anwar Allam's villa in a fit of pique and decides to beat him for what he did to Randa. During the beating Allam dies: the novel's oscillation between the assassination of the president and the accidental murder of the 'leader' of the company foreshadows the strong correlation between labour action and revolution of 2011. Mahfouz's use of form is also noteworthy: the plot thuds along for a while before a sudden event breaks the pattern of monotony and despair. It is as if Mahfouz wanted to teach the reader to expect, or at least look forward to, irruptions and upheavals; as if a critique of capitalism and an induction into democracy depended on the reader's capacity for expecting the unexpected.

In *Morning and Evening Talk* (1987) Mahfouz returns to another formal experiment that he first started using in the early 1970s: the biographical dictionary. Here again, every chapter title is a character's name, but instead of internal monologues we get vignettes about each character's life, covering multiple generations from the late eighteenth century to the 1980s. In *Mirrors* (1972) the use of the form was primarily autobiographical, reading like a large portfolio of characters and types. By the late 1980s something seems to have changed: despite the far greater chronological reach of *Morning and Evening Talk,* the novel-as-biographical-dictionary is thinner, the novelist's voice more neutral and distant than that of *Mirrors*, the overall impression one of a world in terminal decline narrated by a chronicler rather than a novelist at the height of his powers (Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize one year after the publication of *Morning and Evening Talk*). This aspect of the novel is not accidental: Mahfouz clearly aims at conveying the tumult of Egypt in the neoliberal moment, with a weakened state apparatus, an increasingly absent rule of law and fragile moral order. If narrativity, as Hayden White (following Hegel) argued, implies the existence of the rule of law, the state and a subject inscribed within their framework, then Mahfouz's amorphous storylines and *in medias res* relation of dozens of human lives, unencumbered by exposition or resolution, indicates the failure of that state and the impending end of the moral and political order associated with it (1987: 14–22). The attrition that characterises *Morning and Evening Talk* is that of a world increasingly bereft of moral subjects. In *Morning and Evening Talk* Mahfouz uses form to show his readers just what the novel is reduced to in the age of rampant corruption and moral disorder.

Perhaps what is most striking about the vignettes that make up *Morning and Evening Talk* is that they are all more or less the same, except for the ones that are chronologically situated in the age of the *Infitāḥ*. Here we see a version of *The Day the Leader Was Killed* narrated from the other side: people who were excluded by the 1952

revolution return to create startling amounts of wealth, young apolitical technocrats do the same, while the other Egyptians around them either carry on unnoticed and unnarrated or simply disappear altogether. Although at first the names indicate a network of family relations and genealogies dominated by the names of the most prominent families among them, it quickly becomes clear that the reproduction of the social order through the institution of the family has been interrupted very seriously by the *Infitāḥ*, which has proven to be more nefarious in its effects than all the wars and revolutions of the previous two centuries put together. By the end of the novel, the only remaining order is neither social nor familial but linguistic. The only thing left standing is the list of character's names in alphabetical order. We are still in the realm of the failure of desire and reproduction.

As a recurrent theme in the Egyptian fiction of the past four decades, the failure of desire under capitalism foregrounds the latter's most obvious defect as a political and economic system: capitalism is a world where everyone is free to choose and have anything – any commodity or service – except the capacity for desire, which is to say, the capacity for life itself. The exclusion of desire under neoliberalism belies its endless claims about freedom of choice and action among and between rational subjects. The fact that the Egyptian people were left with nothing to desire and nothing to hope for under Mubarak made his ouster inevitable. The lesson of Mahfouz, al-Ghitani and their comrades is that desire is precisely the most threatening, because the most uncontrollable, aspect of political life, which is why Egypt's authoritarian capitalists saw fit to try to eradicate it as early as possible within the neoliberal phase of the country's history. In so doing, they clearly underestimated the people that they ruled but failed to govern.

The revolution takes place with the first articulation of desire. The wheel of democracy turns when the people say 'The people want. . . '. Literature provides the first loci and voices associated with that wanting, providing the ground for Bahaa Taher's statement that literature 'not only promotes democracy; it *is* democracy' (Rooney 2011: 369).

Notes

1. This article continues an argument first presented in my 'Alaa Al-Aswany and the Desire for Revolution' (Elmarsafy 2013). Parts of both papers were presented to and benefitted immensely from audiences at the universities of Lancaster, Queen Mary, Manchester, and Wadham College, Oxford, as well as exchanges with and suggestions from Arthur Bradley, Lynne Pearce, Jane Elliott, Benjamin Poore, Matthew Bevis, Elleke Boehmer, Ankhi Mukherjee, and Dalia Mostafa. My deepest thanks to them all. Transcriptions from Arabic follow the *IJMES* system except in those cases where different transcriptions are more widespread and better known: hence Naguib Mahfouz rather than Najīb Maḥfūẓ.
2. Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's memoir of the revolution usefully starts with an account of the author's participation in previous acts of resistance in Egypt, underlying the vast differences of scale, tone, and strategy between pre- and post-25 January political action (Abdel-Meguid 2011: 8–18). A longer history of Egyptian popular struggle, written in a different register and especially effective at doing

away with mythologies about the 'apathy' of the Egyptian people pre-January 25th, is found in Cook 2012.

3. The standard reference on this question is Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, but in this instance I am borrowing the language of Fredric Jameson, Marx's Purloined Letter' (Derrida 2006; Jameson 1995: 85).
4. My vocabulary here alludes to Derek Attridge's suggestive work on the idea of creation as the creation of the Other, which is itself something of a response to Derrida's *Psyché*. See Attridge 2004: 19–34 and Derrida 1998: 60–61. Derrida goes so far as to argue that it is not we who call out to the other, but rather that we are constituted by that very moment; that we are constituted by the instant in which we call for revolution. See J. Hillis Miller's useful treatment of this idea (2002: 337–39).
5. Not coincidentally, this is a date that has repeatedly been invoked by writers and commentators trying to make sense of the bewildering concatenation of events that goes by the name of the Arab Spring, although it is far from clear that the histories of the two dates are comparable, nor is it clear that all the putative fruits of democracy have reached the populations who sacrificed their safety and well-being to bring about the revolutions of 1989 or 2011.
6. It bears pointing out that theocracy and military dictatorship are Francis Fukuyama's examples of paradigmatic anti-democratic regimes, taken from his *The End of History and the Last Man* and to which *Spectres of Marx* was, in part, a response. Derrida's point, of course, is that there can be, and often is, something anti-democratic at work even in putatively established democracies.
7. See Bloch 1997: 5:10. See also Hanna Gekle's gloss on *docta spes* (1988: 60–61). It bears pointing out that at times Bloch's language foreshadows the language of the literary production of the revolution in an uncanny manner. Bloch's exposition of the not-yet-conscious describes it as pointing towards something new that is dawning up [*eines heraufdämmernd Neuen*]. The title and refrain of Tamim Barghouti's poem, "Yā Maṣr hānit we bānit" (roughly "O Egypt, the hour has come" or "O Egypt, the time is so close"), which was composed on 25 January, 2011 and aired on 27 January 2011, clearly speak to the messianic sensibility at work in the revolution using luminous imagery reminiscent of Bloch's. In particular, the fourth stanza of the poem employs prosopopoeia to 'invite' the morning in:

    > The morning is curious about what we will do tomorrow
    > His hand is on the door; he is afraid to touch the handle
    > Come in, sir, at your ease, the country is free,
    > We are tired of looking at the morning from the outside. (Barghouti 2012: 12).

8. In addition to Tamim Barghouti (see previous footnote) see the opening of Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's memoir: 'I saw that I would need a language from heaven [to talk about the revolution], or at least from an interface [*barzakh*] between earth and heaven' (2011: 5).
9. This is not necessarily a strictly Egyptian phenomenon: the impossibility of marriage as a result of capitalism's failures was recently underlined by Spyros Haritatos, a popular Greek radio talk show host in a commentary on the failure of repeated attempts at agreeing a bailout package: 'With such measures how will Greeks survive? How will they be able to even marry?', quoted in *The Guardian*, 9 February 2012. Available online: < http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/feb/09/eurozone-crisis-live-greek-bailout-deal >
10. Ouyang's cogent argument – that 'when the love story observes the rules of propriety, the nation-state coheres' – is deployed over the course of the entire literary history of the Arabic novel to great effect, showing the direct link between social mores and narratives about the nation-state. See Ouyang 2012: 25.
11. Joseph Massad argues that al-Ghitani uses this novel to critique the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser by putting forth the idea that 'the Nasirist system brought about equality among the citizenry through the castration of men' (2007: 326). As will quickly become clear, I read the novel from a different angle, seeing impotence and *Za'farānism* as diseases of deregulated capitalism.

12. A much stronger and more open critique of the Abdel Nasser years is found in al-Ghitani's *Zayni Barakat* (1971), while a great deal of admiration of Abdel Nasser and utter contempt for Sadat – reaching the point of admiration for his assassin – are found in his *Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt* [*The Book of Revelations*, 1980–1986].
13. This particular commodity is not neutral: the circulation of polemical speeches on cassette tape and the ease with which such tapes were exchanged became a powerful revolutionary medium in the 1970s, as witnessed in the examples of Sheikh Kishk in Egypt and Khomeini in Iran.
14. See 'Abd al-Ghanī's comments about the 'circus of the *Infitāḥ*', especially with reference to *The Day the Leader Was Killed* in *Naguib Mahfouz* (163–80).
15. In 1919, a mass movement for Egyptian independence from British rule culminated in Egypt's first revolution of the twentieth century. Although Egypt was declared independent in 1922, ongoing imperialist interference coupled with a monarchy that was widely considered corrupt and feckless resulted in the 1952 *coup d'état* – also known as Egypt's second revolution, or the revolution of July 23 – that saw Egypt's King Farouk deposed, Egypt declared a republic, and power pass to General Muhammad Naguib, one of the 'Free Officers' who led the coup. Gamal Abdel Nasser eventually took power in 1954 and presided over an Egyptian republic with a strong socialist and anti-imperialist agenda. His presidency lasted until his death in 1970, when he was succeeded by Anwar Sadat. Shortly before Abdel Nasser's death, republican Egypt suffered its worst military defeat during the June 1967 War, the consequences of which are still very much alive today.
16. In 1979 Presidents Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Menachem Begin of Israel signed the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty in the wake of the Camp David Peace Accords that they had agreed the previous year. On both occasions President Jimmy Carter of the United States facilitated negotiations and witnessed the agreements. Although very popular in the West, earning Sadat, Begin and Carter the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978, both the treaty and the accords were widely criticised in Egypt and the Arab world, where they were considered a wholesale abandonment of the Palestinian cause and, in many respects, an assault on Egypt's dignity and sovereignty.

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Lessons from the South

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Abstract:
Iain Chambers' essay challenges explanations of the Arab Spring emerging from the Occidental media, arguing that the terms of engagement set by the Arab revolts can no longer be unilaterally defined by the West. Chambers stresses the centrality of the Mediterranean as an increasingly evident site of confluence between East and West and between North and South. He goes on to argue that the events of the Arab Spring reopen the Western cultural and political lexicon, and put into question the historical alliance between Christianity and the universalising discourses of modernity. Ideas regarding the individual, the public sphere, political agency, religion, secularism and the state are necessarily being renegotiated in the context of the uprisings. The lived experiences of the Arab Spring slip beyond Western constructions of the events to expose the political and cultural burden of a modernity that may no longer be determined or managed single-handedly by the West. The Arab uprisings have occurred in the same time frame as protests in several European capitals, particularly since the fiscal collapse of 2008, and while there are distinct differences in these social unrests there is also, Chambers observes, a common factor: the rejection of the hypocrisies of the modern state. The new perspectives emerging from this confluence of experience around the shores of the Mediterranean may yield a more radical humanism within social, cultural, and political formations that are not automatically circumscribed by the global dictates of neoliberalism.

Keywords: The South, Mediterranean, Occident, space, secularism, translation.

When mass protests and regime changes swept across North Africa in the Spring of 2011, and subsequently triggered turbulence in Bahrain and a bloody civil war presently being waged in Syria, Occidental journalism and political commentary was initially taken by surprise. The status quo – and not only for Arab dictators – had

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seemingly crumbled overnight. The situation was eventually brought into perspective and under Western eyes through a series of explanatory frames – educated unemployed youth, the new social media, state oppression, and the lack of democracy – that responded to Occidental criteria of analysis. Of course, in the contemporary conditions of planetary modernity all is somehow connected, nothing takes place in a vacuum, and the languages, technologies, and ideologies of the West clearly played a significant role. However, rather than measure such events – their perceived achievements and failures – against a presumed Occidental template, it is perhaps politically and historically more significant to register the emergence of a series of interrogations that invest both the protagonists and those of us observing from afar. It is also important at this point to register that the processes and procedures under discussion are still very much in progress: the question of rights and liberties – social, political, human – remains open, the subject of discussion, debate, and continuing struggle. A previous political landscape, which had been thoroughly endorsed by Western powers and diplomacy, is clearly in ruins. The assumption that only the Occidental 'we' has the right to define 'freedom' and 'democracy' has clearly been rendered vulnerable to unsuspected historical operations and cultural forces.

What emerge from this picture are critical prospects that criss-cross the Mediterranean, rendering proximate its northern and southern shores, shredding the confines between Occident and Orient. When the terms of political, historical and cultural freedom are exposed – for whom, where, when, and how? – a whole critical lexicon comes under review. The assumed temporality of political and historical progress, the accumulative power of its linear development, are skewed into another space in which modernity is neither mono-dimensional nor homogeneous. The downfall of Mubarak, the daily protests in Tahrir Square, were not simply Egyptian matters. Their resonance was not restricted merely to the Arab world. A political lexicon that many consider to be complete and fully achieved in the governing bodies and institutional authorities of the West has been reopened and newly researched, traversed and translated. Understandings of the individual, the public sphere, political agency, religion, secularism and the state suddenly become vulnerable to renegotiation in events that rudely punctuate flawless abstractions.

As we, too, are learning, nothing is guaranteed. Rights and freedoms can be rolled back. In the name of security, driven by the imperatives of governance, there can always occur a turn in the screw. In a world that increasingly does not recognise human beings, only citizens and subjects, the categories that supposedly secure the polis are always open to unsuspected interpretation, redefinition, contestation and ideological spin. Our conceptual securities become the agonistic sites of historical processes and cultural struggle that do not necessarily mirror the critical and political imperatives of the West. This introduces us to a profound countertext of Occidental modernity. On the other side of the page, or else retrieved from the seeming blankness of the margins, both the ethics and aesthetics of 'reading' the world come undone. Picking up the pieces, re-assembling the elements of a previous hegemonic order now

mixed with other incentives and stories to tell, is to push our understandings out into unsuspected and unprotected spaces. Here, negotiating a world that consistently exceeds my ken, distinctions and divisions, and their accompanying academic and disciplinary authorisation, becomes altogether more vulnerable. A body of knowledge, a corpus of understanding and the authority of its literature, is wounded. There is now a cut that perhaps can never be healed.

What is presently occurring in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean – in Egypt, Israel or Syria – throws an interrogating light across the West. Not only does a colonial past, etched in the actual frontiers of these states and, in particular, in the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, continue to haunt the dramatic conflictuality of the area, but understandings are overwhelmingly directed and disciplined by Western constructions of Islam and the Arab world. In an unfortunately under-read book by Edward Said – *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997 [1981]) – the precise political and cultural prison house of such constructions is caught in its brutal historical weight. Precisely by slipping beyond these constructions and reworking and translating the political and cultural lexicons of modernity, the West is now confronted by a modernity that is not merely 'ours' to administer and define. In the transit of translation, which as Walter Benjamin has taught us is always a two-way process in which the original is subsequently impossible to reconstruct, unexpected versions emerge. As Salman Rushdie put it some time ago, this is how newness enters the world (1992: 394).

After all, explanations that run along the grooves of precarious livelihoods, youth unemployment, and the frequent unaccountability of government are an increasingly global condition and not simply restricted to the south of the planet. Revolts in Tunis and rioting in south London are not the same thing. They are differentiated in all manner of complexities, but they are also bound together in the overarching procedures of a neoliberal global order. Here, in the resonance and dissonance of different localities, we also touch the paradoxes of the present conjuncture: registering in the Arab world demands for freedom, change, and accountable government, while in the West these perspectives are often publicly in retreat. To register the proximity of the dramatic visual presence of events unfolding on the African and Asian shores of the Mediterranean draws the West, however reluctantly, out of its self. Massacres, dictatorships, police brutality, people on the street voicing the sacred lexicon of Western liberalism – 'freedom', 'democracy' – cannot be ignored. There was no burning of US or European or Israeli flags; simply the disquieting spectacle of people apparently taking the political rhetoric of the West seriously; often far more seriously than the West itself. The languages of the West have exceeded any single point of 'origin'; they are clearly no longer its property, to be defined and managed solely according to its will.

What is exposed, perhaps unwinding in what until yesterday were the autocratic states of North Africa, is a profound challenge to neoliberalism, to its individualist and fundamentally anti-social and anti-democratic logic. Beyond the slogans of democracy

and constitutional reform there is emerging in the Arab world the fundamental contestation of the hypocrisy of the modern state, particularly after the fiscal crash of 2008, which considers only the welfare of its elites throughout the world, rather than that of the majority of its population. There are significant planetary communalities here. The public financing of stability and not of change, the rescue of banks and the bailing out of corruption rather than people, is part of a planetary drive towards privatising profits and socialising losses. Ultimately, the on-going struggles for change in the Arab world, the unexpected outcomes of a social networking that stretches from the blogosphere to the street, are also profoundly about processes of democratisation and their absence, not only in the rest of the world, but also in the West itself. The necessary re-reading of modernity proposed in the present moment invites us to consider in particular its composition in the complex meshing of liberalism and capitalism. This is a political economy – the very term and practice itself a product of this formation – in which Occidental economical, political, and cultural power presents itself as a hegemonic force on a planetary scale. It is where state, nation, market, and 'civilisation' are increasingly wedged or striated within each other's making, and their separation increasingly rendered untenable. It is about a 'way of life'. This is why we are talking about a political economy and not simply about economics.

Abu Atris, the pseudonym of a writer working in Egypt, suggested on the Al Jazeera English website on 24 February 2011 that what was under way in the revolts in North Africa was also a revolt against neo-liberalism and the policing of its logic by subordinate client states in the Arab world (the page now appears under Armbrust 2013). The systematic conflation of business and politics under the impact of privatisation, forcibly bringing society under the rule of the market, is not only typical of the situation in 'advanced Western democracies'. Egypt and Tunisia have been neoliberal states for decades. The proximity of Arab leadership to the Bush administrations, or, over a longer period of time, the direct involvement of the Italian government in the Tunisian state, is mirrored in public figures (which in Egypt includes the upper ranks of the military) having a foot in both politics and business. Government is there to defend free market fundamentalism, to divert financing from the public to the private sector, or rather to privatise and plunder public resources, and to ideologically block considerations of poverty and questions of social and economic justice. In this scenario, the proximity of Cairo to Washington, or of Tripoli to Rome, reaches its obscene extremes when warfare comes to be organised through neoliberal principles and increasingly privatised: contractors in Iraq, mercenaries in Libya.

Beyond the West

For the problem, rarely acknowledged, is that there does not exist a unique or homogenous West, or East; there exists no such *thing* as Islam or Christianity. The world cannot be othered in such simplicities, and civilisation or truth cannot be immediately identified with one or other of the antagonistic poles. To insist on the

idea of Islam as a thing, condensed in the figure of the armed terrorist or the veiled woman, that is, in a clear image to be confronted, contested, and eventually converted to our way of life, reveals, as Edward W. Said and Gil Anidjar have explained, the centrality of religious discourse to the making of the modern West. As a category of interpretation – like 'race' and 'ethnicity' – the concept of 'religion' is an invention of Occidental modernity and its planetary pedagogy.

> El Jadida. It is the hour that milk is delivered. The hour that I love the most in my city, peopled still only for an instance by those who have to rise early: street cleaners, fishermen, donut vendors, the devout, vegetable sellers, the custodians of the public ovens. One after another they wish me a "luminous day" while I wander the streets and alleys. Come with me into the old Portuguese town where the past has been restored in the smallest detail. In this space, the size of a public square, there, flanking each other are a mosque, a church and a synagogue. What is this Islamism? This word does not appear in our dictionaries. I learnt of its existence in the Western media. (Chraibi 1997; my translation)

The disquieting historical conclusion, that we rarely confront, is that European Christianity is perhaps the proper name of Occidental modernity and its globalisation. Secular, lay thought is sustained by a disposition of faith: the belief in the teleological redemption of time as 'progress'; in the call to save the world and render it subservient to a unique image; in the humanist mastery of the cosmos; in the mission to create an exceptional state, or the 'city on the hill', sought by the Puritans in the colonies of north America (and the Jesuits thousands of miles further south on the same continent). As Antonio Gramsci reminds us, the relationship between religion, the state, and the political formation of the West is inseparable. Elsewhere, I have argued that the secular West is sustained by this 'invisible order' (Chambers 2012). In strictly historical terms no one would contest this affirmation, particularly in the context of the violent affirmation of the constellation of European colonialism. But to insist today on this dimension frequently promotes critical embarrassment and silence. Today, the question of religion is associated with other places, and other epochs, with another culture: somebody else's property and problem, certainly not belonging to *our* modern world. Some years ago, the Egyptian scholar Leila Ahmed noted that in the struggle of Western women for their rights and freedom no one ever suggested that they should abandon Christianity in order to obtain them. Today, it is precisely this option – the abandonment of what, after all, is a variant of a shared monotheism – which the West demands of Muslim women (see Ahmed 1993). Such a request obviously presumes that Islam and modernity are separate entities, rather than profoundly entangled in a complex European and extra-European formation. That one can be modern, a Muslim, and a woman clearly undoes any singular definition of modernity, its politics, practices, and possibilities (see Mahmood 2005).

From this awareness it becomes possible to grasp the sense of an eventual humanism that is disentangled from the hypocrisy of a 'Europe which never stops talking of

man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world' (Fanon 2004: 235) The humanism that Fanon sought, to replace a 'jumble of dead words' (2004: 11), has the vital responsibility to host requests and desires that exceed the will of the West. To cross this threshold is to sound the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of a Europe that achieved its apex in the colonial instance that, in turn, was stabilised and perpetuated by racism as a founding structure of Occidental modernity. Here there would be much to say on the vicinity of Fanon and Foucault around the central idea of race and racism as the central disposition of modern bio-power.

Apart from secularism, the other key concept invariably deployed in the registration of apparent difference between Europe and the rest of the world is that of the 'public sphere'. Together with secularism, the public sphere is considered central to the formation and exercise of modern democracy. Here, in the public exposition of individualism and rationalised interests, the modern bourgeois order was apparently formed (see Habermas 1992). It tends to be assumed that the rest of the world lives the concept of the public sphere as an absence, rather than being the site of other modalities of public encounter, confrontation, and expression (see Salvatore 2011). The opacity proposed by embedded practices and lives elsewhere confound Occidental rationality seeking to render the world transparent to the universalising desire of its will. If modern anthropology has begun to understand this, much of the rest of the social and human sciences still remain very much in the dark. The so-called 'Arab Spring', unauthorised by Western politics, culture and its sciences, has operated a cut of this type. What emerges is that the Occidental blueprint cannot be simply copied or imposed. Its languages and technologies may well open up local counter-spaces and narratives – from rap music, heavy metal Islam, and social networks to pressuring political institutions to change – but they are always in transit, without guarantees; their apparent roots in the West provide somebody else's routes. The West, in becoming the world, loses its 'origins'.

The question of secularism and the public sphere should therefore not be understood simply in terms of their sociological specificity: the historical products of local forces, political desires, and cultural constraints. As cultural practices and historical forces they contribute to an altogether more extensive debate, and the eventual elaboration of a convivial critical space that is neither limited to Islam, the Arab world, nor to the West. The translation by the West of its other, and that of the West by the other, however asymmetrical the relationship, is by no means a one-way traffic. This is why the planetary transit of the West – its political languages, technologies and modalities of knowledge – poses a far more significant perspective than that of mimicry, mistranslation, and presumed 'betrayals'. In this sense the daily practices of realising political processes able to negotiate and configure the historical and cultural conditions of life in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean pose a series of interrogations that arrive at the heart of the global pretensions of democratic thought. The assumption that democracy is forever Occidental in

provenance, practice, and participation necessarily comes undone. If the West has become the world, it can no longer claim a unique centre or single authority.

As the infinite passage of music teaches us, the discourse and structures of democracy, faith, and the public sphere can be duplicated, dubbed, and remixed in multiple and unauthorised versions. The encounter with other historical traditions, cultural patrimonies, and modalities of reasoning instigates *mutual translation* (however uneven the forces in play). It inaugurates processes that can no longer be understood in a unilateral fashion. 'Freedom' and 'democracy' are not exportable items, 'religion' is not merely a timeless dogma: all are historical practices that emerge from complex human fashioning. Learning from a multifarious world that has not simply been proximate in its thought and culture to the West, but also deeply imbricated in its formation and language (from science and medicine to language, literature and the culinary arts) is not merely a matter of adjusting a repressed historical archive. Listening and responding to the southern and eastern shores of the present-day Mediterranean is, despite its obvious economic and political subordination to Euro-American interests, to take an apprenticeship in the justice of a democracy yet to come: both there and here.

This, finally, is the 'disjunctive' time – to use Homi Bhabha's term (1994: *passim*) – of the postcolonial present. It is a time that is neither linear nor monolithic, and exposes modernity to other dynamics in the planetary present (see also Mezzadra and Rahola 2006). It is right now being explored in events, cultural practices, and political struggles from Tunis to Tehran. This is a time that is divided from a unique temporality and is always out of joint with respect to a singular will. As a temporality that is folded into the uneven specificities of place, and their particular powers of transformation, it promotes the emerging critique of the assumed 'neutrality' of the Occidental view: its political framing, its historical verdicts, and the knowledge apparatuses of its social sciences. Political, sociological, and historical knowledge – their 'objectivity' – is now rendered accountable in another, unsuspected critical space: all to be renegotiated in a displaced positionality.

In underscoring how we are diversely placed, and yet ultimately connected, these comments have simply sought to propose a modality of criticism that is ultimately willing to expose itself to a Mediterranean whose histories, cultures, and possibilities are irreducible to the presumed authority of its northern shore. Is this what we might mean by a postcolonial Mediterranean? Perhaps. It is certainly a proposal for a new, more open, multilateral critical space.

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The Work of Treason in the Age of User-Generated Content Revolution

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Abstract:
Gil Anidjar's essay reflects upon the occurrence of revolution in the context of user-generated content: as a self-promulgating and, purportedly, instantly consumable spectacle of power. Anidjar discusses the 'seeming collapse' of the temporal distance between the event and its narrative, its actor and its spectator, its survivor and its witness. Drawing on the valuation of spectatorship, in Immanuel Kant's insights on the French revolution, as embodying the significance of the event itself, and invoking the inherent element of 'danger' Kant perceived in the act of public utterance of judgment on the event, Anidjar suggests that such judgment may only, in Kantian terms, be responsibly pronounced in the immediate wake of the event as a manifestation of 'treason'. To seek to endow the revolutionary effort with the urgency of fame will be a necessarily premature gesture, and the shortening of the distance between the event and its judgment an impossible exercise, Anidjar argues, since 'we have not been granted the power to decide, much less to know whether, by our actions or reactions, we are betraying ourselves or our people or state, or whether we might be bringing about the faithful redemption of that which that people or that state of ours should already have been.'

Keywords: treason, revolution, spectatorship, posthumousness, fame, judgment, morality.

'Fama,' famously wrote Hannah Arendt, is a 'much-coveted goddess', one with 'many faces'. Accordingly, Arendt continued, 'fame comes in many sorts and sizes – from the one-week notoriety of the cover story to the splendor of an everlasting name. Posthumous fame is one of Fama's rarer and least desired articles; although it is less arbitrary and often more solid than the other sorts, since it is only seldom bestowed

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upon mere merchandise. The one who stood most to profit is dead and hence it is not for sale' (Arendt 1968a: 1).

Ours is the society of the spectacle, the speeding fame ('the one-week notoriety of the cover story') and marketing ('desired articles . . . for sale') of persons and things, of everyone and everything. Who has not known and embraced this banality by now? (see Debord 1995; there is nothing banal about Debord's diagnostic, of course, but the phrase or idea and its vicissitudes have themselves itself reached a kind of fame that poses a problem). Yet who could refrain, by the same token, from coveting notoriety, even – and sadly, perhaps above all – the kind 'bestowed upon mere merchandise'. The rhythm of the new, which, sustained by the new media, has long overtaken the 24/7 news channels, is only matched by endless pronouncements on the new and unprecedented (see North 2013; Groys 2014). Both intensify the desire for and accelerate the cycle of fame to a puzzling extreme. Events themselves appear to be measured by their popularity alone (undiscriminating as that still is). We seem, at any rate, to have reached a tipping point, one where, though it is undoubtedly true that power too needs glory, as Giorgio Agamben has recently recalled, it is becoming evident (if not new) that power is bound for glory, that it is bound by glory (Agamben 2011). The glory hole of the machine (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), that is, the hole of the glory machine, is feeding off power itself, something that does not, to be sure, diminish power's reach, but does define it, altering the ever youthful appearance of power under the mesmerising guise of the new – change you can believe in.[1] For it is the spectacle (fame and notoriety) which grants power the ever-renewed patina of planned obsolescence.

We have heard that everything used to happen for a reason. Perhaps it is so. By now everything might be said to happen for two reasons. The logic of the occurrence, and with it of our existence, is constantly and consistently split between that which happens and that which must be known – again, by way of fame and notoriety – to happen. No war ever was fought exclusively on the battlefield. History was always split between event and narrative (*Historie*, *Geschichte*). Still, centuries might need to pass for literature to come about, for a Homer to come to terms with the eradication of Troy, to build up Achilles' 'posthumous fame'. The event acquired its fame slowly, and never surely. And whereas actors (I am using the word very broadly) used to turn, or wish to turn, into witnesses, the temporality of things has certainly shortened the time needed to transform every actor into a simultaneous witness, indeed, a spectacle in their own right, and a spectator still, to boot. Like information, fame and notoriety must be immediate and 'the sign of history' is already . . . history (Lyotard 1988: 164–65). Thus, the awareness, once obvious, that the witness's perspective could not suffice to encompass the fullness of the event (at the very least, the witness needed to turn historian, and await the verdict of the ages) is coming undone, vanishing as the curtain rises on the next occurrence.[2] Imagine, as Gil Scott-Heron (1970) did, that the revolution may not be televised. What then of judgment? This is yesterday's news, demanding our most immediate (and deficient) attention. What of the necessity

or pseudo-necessity to pronounce on the event and its newness, on the seasons of the revolution? Who could resist – on the basis of actually existing ignorance – the invitation or opportunity to pontificate (or, alternatively, to blog) on the remote events surfed, signed, and delivered by the click of a, well, remote?

'We are here concerned only with the attitude of the onlookers as it reveals itself in public while the drama of great political changes is taking place,' explained Immanuel Kant as he elaborated on the 'sign of history' and commented on the French Revolution (Kant 1991: 182). For the philosopher, it was already the case that the spectacle, the fame of the event – in other words, the spectators' response – constituted the ultimate meaning of the event.[3] 'Their reaction (because of its universality) proves that mankind as a whole shares a certain character in common, and it also proves (because of its disinterestedness) that man has a moral character, or at least the makings of one' (Kant 1991: 182). But the universality of which Kant speaks is sustained by a clear and definite distinction between event and meaning (or judgment), between actor and onlooker. Kant is in fact famous for the reservations he expresses about the actions of the revolutionaries themselves. He embraces spectatorship instead, for this is where the sign of history is found. Kant is participating in the promotion of what would come to be called 'the global village', now our globalised world, a world in which fame, notoriety, and spectatorship (like watching a video going viral, going and vanishing) is tantamount to activism, where the revolutionaries want nothing less than to be televised.[4] As perhaps they must.

But Kant was also relying, and quite specifically so, on a notion of spectatorship he called 'disinterested': he was writing of onlookers who 'openly express universal yet disinterested sympathy for one set of protagonists against their adversaries, even at the risk that their partiality could be of great disadvantage to themselves' (Kant 1991: 182). Importantly then, spectatorship – which Kant would never have seen as a form of historical action or activism – had to carry a risk. It meant danger, it was 'fraught with danger', for those who looked on approvingly (Kant 1991: 182). Thus 'I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a sympathy which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger' (Kant 1991: 182). It is this very real danger (not the freedom of speech, but the danger of public utterance) that led Kant to the conclusion that solidarity (what he calls 'sympathy') 'cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race' (Kant 1991: 182). Without danger, in other words, there is no morality in advertising, that is, no morality in spectatorship.

A romantic notion, no doubt, and all-too heroic. It belongs to another age, an *old* age, a literary age. Unsurprisingly so given the time at which Kant writes. Who after all could claim disinterestedness today? Who could describe themselves as mere onlookers 'not themselves caught' in the events, as true witnesses expressing 'universal yet disinterested sympathy for one set of protagonists against their adversaries' (Kant 1991: 182)? Who could wish and affirm themselves exposed, not to the direct consequence of the occurrence, perhaps, but to 'the risk that their partiality could

be of great disadvantage to themselves' (Kant 1991: 182)? These are unfair questions, I think. That is, unless they carry in their answers evidence of the endurance of Kant's romanticism. Are we not all caught in the events? Enduring the direct or indirect consequences or worse, caught in military and economic webs, and participating in the elections of a regime that, however distant, intervenes, manages, or manipulates outcomes and policies of the numberless kind (I leave aside planetary concerns as I write, in case it is not clear, from the United States of America).[5] Are we not, finally, seeking legitimation, perhaps even approval, at any rate protection, from our adversaries? There are indubitably degrees of implication, as there are moments of fame, but unlike the seeming collapse of the distinction between actor and spectator in the age of user-generated content, the distribution of danger, as Kant's standards have it, hardly seems equal, or even pertinent.

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It might come as a surprise, but perhaps because it occurs on a different order of temporality, it seems to me that what Kant is talking about, the danger or risk he identifies, is also not as new as it appears, nor has it quite passed yet from the world. It is in fact very old, local more than global, and its pertinacity cannot be gainsaid. Kant is talking about fame, to be sure, and about the spectacle (call it the old-new media, or call it literature), but he understands it, as Arendt well recognised, from the perspective of judgment. The question his onlookers themselves were raising, which Kant, again, implicitly identifies, is 'are we faithful or unfaithful?'[6] More precisely, Kant's argument about the French revolution has everything to do with the possibility of treason. Consider that those who, from afar, judged and approved of the French Revolution were taking a risk. They were putting themselves in danger, not because they supported a popular cause in their own neighborhood, nor because they were buying and redeeming continents – and themselves – by way of brightly-colored products; nor finally, because they were conducting the work of 'information' that had already been initiated by the global media and, more importantly, by their own government (recall, in the proximate situation of widespread persecution, 'the principle that one can resist only in terms of the identity that is under attack', as explained by Arendt (1968:18)). Rather, the danger they were exposing themselves to had to do with the possibility of being understood (not simply misunderstood) as manifesting treason, the onset of revolution in their own country or, minimally – as Kant openly preferred – the onset of constitutional reform. Minimally, Kant too 'provides a fertile basis for examining the traitor as a significant figure . . . in violent and uncertain processes of state making' and elsewhere.[7]

Revolution is treason. Treason is revolution.[8] Ultimately, that is what Kant is telling us. And to seek notoriety for our treason, and particularly good notoriety, is to defeat our own endeavour – as actors or as spectators. This means that the simultaneity that now joins us, that binds the actor and the spectator, or, in another register, the survivor and the witness, that simultaneity, however actual, is also, strictly speaking, impossible (on the distance – or lack thereof – between witness and survivor, see (Agamben 1999

and Nichamian 2014). The difference, in other words, cannot be cancelled or bridged, nor has it been, because we have not been granted the power to decide – much less to know – whether, by our actions or reactions, we are betraying ourselves or our people or state (or those we are concerned about), or whether we might be bringing about the faithful redemption of that which that people or that state of ours should already have been. Kant is very clear on the distinction, indeed, the distance, between the revolution and the judgment (necessary as it is) it can elicit: 'The revolution which we have seen taking place in our own times in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such a price, even if he could hope to carry it out successfully at the second attempt' (Kant 1991: 182). The distance is so very great between the action (revolution) and the judgment of the spectator (information) and Kant opens it even further when he posits an equally infinite distance between the spectator and the (future) actor, the next instance of revolution. So, there must be judgment, there must be a witness, but that witness cannot be the actor, nor does the act of witnessing bridge the distance that separates it from the event, from the meaning and judgment of the event. Even when the two occur simultaneously, as they seem to today.

Today, as yesterday, the only responsible assertion, on the part of revolutionary actors and on the (distinct) part of the onlookers is: 'we are traitors'. But that assertion, spoken or not (for silence might remain golden), does not help, justify, or guarantee anything. It does not bridge the distance, in other words, it does not cover the division and the discrepancy that must linger between actor and spectator, between the revolution and its evaluation or judgment. Nor could it. 'We are traitors', then, because we do not decide, nor can we know, the meaning of our actions, the nature or worth of our fame, nor can we ask, therefore, for an unambiguous, or risk-less, recognition, for instantaneous and righteous (?) fame. Recognition, just like revolution, does occur, of course. There are always spectators. Testimony endures beyond the destruction of witnesses. *Es gibt Zeugnis*, in other words, and posthumous fame too. But – in the turmoil of revolution – there are only traitors.

There is no fame for traitors, none good anyway. Most of them are locked away somewhere dark and damp, or worse. That key has been thrown out; there's neither remote nor substitute for it, and it is unlikely to be found for centuries. No spectacle there, nor literature, except for the theatre of the obscene (the photos do come out, another spectacle, and then what?). The revolution will not be televised. It cannot. That is because when it comes to treason and to revolution, to treason as revolution and revolution as treason, 'it is too early to tell' (as Zhou Enlai is reported to have said when asked about the French Revolution). Kant had said it before. It is always already too early to tell, even if we are already too late. We are, at any rate, traitors. To seek fame for anything else would be just as realistic as to seek to profit from *posthumous* fame; to abide by the exclusive and relentless rule of the new. It would be just as good as to advertise ourselves as mere merchandise.

Notes

1. Hannah Arendt writes that 'The modern concept of revolution, inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before, is about to unfold, was unknown prior to the two great revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century'. Diagnosing and exemplifying this concern with the new, with 'the experience of man's faculty to begin something new', Arendt cannot but argue that it is itself new. 'Antiquity was well acquainted with political change and the violence that went with change,' she writes, 'but neither of them appeared to it to bring about something altogether new'. Arendt does suggest that the investment in 'a new beginning as well as a unique, unrepeatable event' may be quite old, going back to Christian philosophy, at least. (Arendt 1990: 28, 34, 21, 27)
2. Arendt understands this transformation as the fallacy of a philosophy bent on 'describing and understanding the whole realm of human action, not in terms of the actor and the agent, from the standpoint of the spectator who watches a spectacle' (1990: 52).
3. Arendt writes that 'Kant said explicitly that he was not concerned with the deeds and misdeeds of men that make empires rise and fall, make small what was formerly great and great what was formerly small. The importance of the occurrence (*Begebenheit*) is for him exclusively in the eye of the beholder, in the opinion of the onlookers who proclaim their attitude in public. Their reaction to the event proves the 'moral character' of mankind. Without this sympathetic participation, the 'meaning' of the occurrence would be altogether different or simply nonexistent' (Arendt 1992: 46). For more on 'the sign of history' see Lyotard 1988 (especially pp. 164–65) and Lyotard 2009.
4. The rapidity with which the KONY 2012 campaign rose and vanished speaks to the matter. Described by an Australian news site as 'truly phenomenal; new and old media collided in a viral frenzy of social activism as the collective power of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube delivered the word 'KONY' into every household.' See http://www.news.com.au/national-old/kony-2012-how-the-phenomenon-faded/story-e6frfkvr-1226334893369 (last accessed 13 September 2014). The campaign was immediately taken as a 'sign of history,' an indicator of the new 'Spring of nations', itself the harbinger of a new dawn, or golden dawn, or something.
5. See, for starters, Turse 2008. Note, as Turse does, that 'by the time of Eisenhower's farewell address, the military-industrial complex was already well entrenched in American life and the public was not up to the task of checking, let alone reversing, its power – especially in the Cold War world' (15). In this book and those he wrote afterward, Turse makes clear that things have not gotten better.
6. Derrida 2001: 398n7. Derrida is raising this question in relation to his engagement with the work of Emmanuel Levinas, but one could easily argue that, though mostly implicit, this is a central question of deconstruction, the question in deconstruction, deconstruction as that which occurs, the event. 'I am at war with myself,' among Derrida's last words, translates: I am at once faithful and unfaithful to myself, always already a traitor. See Derrida 2004.
7. I have learned much from Thiranagama's reflection and from the entire collection, which concludes, appropriately enough, with an afterword by Stephan Feuchtwang entitled 'Questions of Judgment.'.
8. Since writing these remarks, I had the occasion to hear Zvi Ben-Dor explain that, in the Bible, prophecy is treason, treason is prophecy, an argument that seems to me more provocative and far-reaching than what I am able to propose here, which might thereby have been rendered obsolete (as if it could ever have been otherwise).

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a litany in my slumber

Stephanos Stephanides

Tesseris Trikomitisses mes to steno me kopsan
tzi itoun verkin ologrison tis kathemias i koxa

[Four women of Trikomo crossed me in the alleyway
And beams of pure gold glist'ned from the girdles round their waists]

– Couplet from Cypriot Oral Tradition

What is this life? An illusion
a shadow, and a fiction.

– Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream* (from Segismundo's monologue) (2012: 58)

And this island: who knows it?
I spent my life hearing names I never heard before.

– George Seferis, 'Helen' (1981: 355)

I escaped the 1974 war on the island by a strange twist of fortune. I had not lived on the island since 1957 when Demosthenes took me away furtively, and now for the first time since then, Demosthenes suggested that we visit the island together. *We'll spend some time in Trikomo,* he said. *We'll stay with Elengou*. I was overjoyed. Demosthenes knew I harboured a grievance and a mostly concealed anger toward him, since he took me away suddenly from the island in the Middle Sea without explanation, far away from my *amor matris* and with no promise of return. I had gone back to the island only twice in the '60s when I was a teenager. Katerina bought my tickets. He got in a panic when I received the ticket the first time, and we got into a long argument about whether

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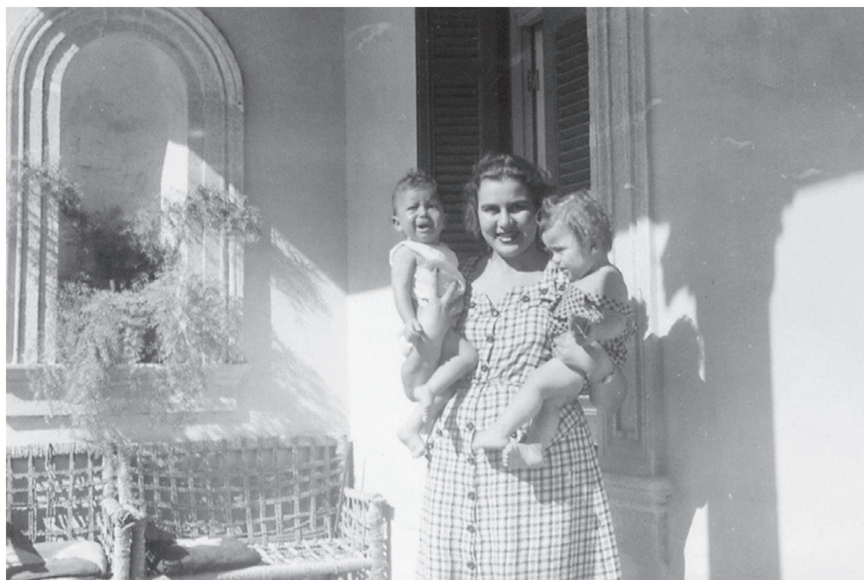
I should go or not. On the second occasion Katerina came to take me herself. We met in London to travel together. She insisted I cut my hair and bought me a new outfit of clothes, so I would not be conspicuous as an Englishman when I entered the village. *You speak Greek like a Turk, and I cannot take you to your grandmother dressed like an English boy*. Demosthenes was still disturbed at my longing to return to the island, and seemed to feel my stubborn clinging to my childhood memories as a threat. It was as if my return would have been a kind of patricide. He always seemed to underestimate how close the village had held me in its embrace and he thought that by now I should have got over it. Katerina's family always related the story of Demosthenes taking me away to the island in the northern sea as a kind of *pedomazema,* or *devşirme*, as her mother Milia would say, who would tell Katerina: 'Go bring the boy to me. I want to see him once more before I die. Chrisostomos died heartbroken because he never saw him again.' At the end of my second visit she wept, saying she would not see us again. She died ten days after we left.

Demosthenes got upset at this talk of child-snatching. He would argue that he was my father, not a Janissary, and he had a right to take me away whenever he wanted. I still remembered when he suddenly imprisoned me in a damp house with a coal fire in the darkness of Manchester as if I were some Segismundo and I had to learn that life is a dream and dreams are only the dreams of dreams. He dumped me in Manchester with Rona, Nina and Auntie Noreen and went back to Bristol on his own. Theios Georgios could speak to me in my tongue, but I never saw him in the house. He was always



in a place called Didsbury where he owned a hotel called the El Morocco. *How can I speak to them?* I asked Demosthenes desperately. *You have to learn English!* he retorted emphatically. Did he want to prevent me from inheriting the island in the Middle Sea? Why did it bother him? If it was his kingdom he had abandoned it. What had he done to be flailed by the wind and the goddess Iris? Why did he snatch me away with him as he sailed off with the wind? Not long after coming ashore at Dover and making our entry onto the island through a tunnel like the mouth of a whale, I became rebellious and resilient. I refused to stay and integrate in the life of this other island, as it now seemed was Demosthenes' intention. He did not know how to handle me. He did not have the wisdom of the sibyls. His knowledge was of a different kind. I understood mysteries the way the sibyls taught me but Demosthenes, I now realised, had become unpredictable. Or so it was for me. I am not sure how far ahead Demosthenes had planned to leave me in Manchester. I was never sure of his plans. Was my exile to Manchester planned? The English had sent the revered Archbishop Makarios into exile in the Seychelles because he threatened to expel them and rule the island himself. But why did Demosthenes leave me in Manchester? I was not an archbishop and I was just a boy. All I did was to refuse to speak English. In Cyprus they wanted to ban English from schools. Why did I have to learn it and why did I have to stay here? And where was Katerina and when would I see her again? Did he think I was dangerous because I threw vinegar at the picture of the Queen in the school he put me in for a few weeks in Bristol? He was the one who told me that the Queen was German, just like the one in Greece, so why should we want *enosis* if we could be independent? He now told me that we were in

their country and we had to respect their queen. He took me to Manchester after the winter solstice during the darkest time of the year when the *kallikanjaroi* are all around creating mischief in people's houses. The sibyls would have made *lokoumades* to entice them onto the roof terraces the night before the epiphany and then shut them out of the house. They would keep some *lokoumades* for me to eat inside the house, and the next morning they would bring a priest to bless the house sprinkling water all around with a sprig of holy basil, which according to Elengou was brought to the island from India by Ayia Eleni, Mother of the Emperor Constantine. There were no roof terraces here and Auntie Noreen did not know how to make *lokoumades*, so I had to sleep inside a cold dark house inhabited by *kallikanjaroi* and people who only spoke English, and no priest would come on the day of epiphany to bless the house. Demosthenes said I had to learn the address off by heart because if I got lost no one here would know where I live if I simply tell them the name of my uncle or grandfather. So I had learnt to recite 97 Egerton Road North, Walley Range in a way that the Mancunians would understand. Rona became my Ariadne on this rough isle and she taught me to follow the kerb closely to find my way to Oswald Road School when I could not see in front of me because of the fog. And with time, like Rumi, I would realise that darkness can also be my candle. English poets and seers I would later read in school, John Milton and Gerard Manley Hopkins, would teach me how dark thinks the light as I wake to feel the fell of dark dark dark dark amid the blaze of noon, and one day I would aspire to become a 'poeta de la noche' like Lorca.

When in 1974, in early spring, Demosthenes unexpectedly suggested we go to Trikomo together, I felt that this would mark a new turn in the relationship. And Elengou, my only surviving grandparent, had turned 80 the summer before. She wanted to see us before she died. In my childhood she ordered the world for me, instructing me in the rituals of nature, cycles of life, family histories and genealogies. But then on April 25th of 1974 the Portuguese 'carnation' revolution took place. I was excited. I had travelled to Olissibona the previous two summers, imagining the journey of the second Odyssey and continents across the ocean beyond Hesperia. Virtually all the students in the University hostel where I stayed were from the overseas provinces – as the Portuguese called their colonies – and in despair about the colonial war. They anxiously anticipated that the regime would fall and warned me about who to speak to and who not as the student residence had its spies. I had to return to Lisbon and join the revolutionary celebrations. I would use some of my post-graduate travel assistance research grant to study Portuguese poetry in the Lisbon archives for a few weeks in the summer months. *Let's go to Cyprus in September instead,* I said to Demosthenes. I wanted to go to Lisbon while at the same time I frantically anticipated my return to Trikomo in early September. Demosthenes agreed, so, in early July, when the academic year was over, I set off for Lisbon instead of Trikomo.

I had first travelled to Iberia at the beginning of the decade, enjoying seas and oranges and the smell of olive oil – healing the pains of nostalgia for a lost childhood. My dream was to embrace the whole of the Mediterranean, from Andalusia to Istanbul,

from Tangier to Alexandria, Beirut, Damascus. First I would find the Garden of Hesperia and then see what roads there were beyond. The ancients located the Garden of Hesperia in Iberia, and I decided I would set off to find it. I had to find the golden fruit. I wondered what kind of fruit I would find and of what colour and hue. Would it be an orange or a pomegranate? An old schoolteacher told me the *portokali* reached the Ottoman empire from Portogalia and that's why we call it *portokali*. But then I learnt the Portuguese brought it from Asia, and the orange was not known to the ancient Mediterranean people. Could the golden fruit be the pomegranate? The sibyls mix its seeds with sesame seeds, blanched almonds and grains of boiled wheat, making *kolypha* to feast on in commemoration of the dead. A fruit for a requiem, for mourning and renewal. Elengou told me that Stephanos would sell pomegranates to Arab merchants who came to Famagusta. He liked talking to them in their language and on their ships about life in his beloved Alexandria. They would use the pomegranates to make molasses, as we do with carob and with grapes. I also learnt that the Maltese call the pomegranate Lightning Fruit because it bursts open when it ripens, leaving a crack in its skin resembling a flash of lightning. And in Spanish, it has the same name as the city of Granada. Whether orange or pomegranate, if it was the golden fruit it would reveal itself when I least expected it, as the world revealed its secrets. It will cast shadows where there is light and light will unfold where there are shadows. It will open up densities into spaces and new directions for the spirit. Different people took me to different parts to find the golden fruit. In early spring, I hitchhiked to Valencia with Javier de Blas to sleep among the orange groves. I shivered all night with cold, even inside my sleeping bag. I learnt that orange pigmentation was a response to the chill of the Mediterranean winter, whereas in tropical climates they remain green. In April I went on an endless train journey to see oranges blossom on the patios of Seville. Guitars strumming and rhythmic clapping would echo in their perfume. But Lluísa Marí believed the best time to see the Garden of Hesperia was in January, on the island of Mallorca. So we went to stay at the town of Soller after travelling on the night boat. We ate *ensaimadas* with our coffee for breakfast and walked up a mountain trail from where we saw the golden fruit glittering below in the winter sunlight, all the way to the sea.

I had spent the sixties moving between three islands, like three fragments of myself that I could not piece together in any way into a whole. My life seemed totally incongruous. I had expanded my sense of self and home from one island in my early childhood to three islands in my teenage years. And that's how I became Solo Trismegistus. I shared a legacy with Hermes Trismegistus who hailed from Alexandria like my gradfather. So I would be Alone, and three times powerful. This was better than being alone one time. In a multiplicity of aloneness you could never be lonely. Three different lonely voices talking inside of me sought out new voices. Each island voice brought me in touch with myself in a different way, and now the Garden of Hesperia opened up new roads and promises. Yet I remained always in mourning and in longing for the island in the Middle Sea, and I did not want its sensuality and beauty to fade

from my memory. And Katerina still reigned like Queen Maya on the Ilha Formosa in the China Seas. I spent summers there with her, and I became apprentice to Buddhism and the worlding of the world. And with time I began to grow attached to the island in the northern sea, when in the sixties it displayed a flamboyant sensuality I hadn't seen before. In my teens, I blossomed with the times, although never quite forgetting the island I first saw veiled in a foggy darkness, enveloping damp, cold terraced houses. But I had found gods and muses and poets to guide me in its ways. I trailed through its fields and country lanes on long summer nights eating wild berries, drinking from its streams, and lying in its green meadows. Some nights I would cycle or walk through fields to Oldland Common and meet Sally outside her farmhouse. We would kiss behind the stables where she kept her horses. She was top of the literature class at school and liked to talk about books and sometimes would get tickets for us to go to the Bristol Old Vic. I told her she reminded me of Helen Schlegel in *Howards End.* She told me I would like *Passage to India* even more. Especially since I was a colonial. She was right about the better book, but she did not resemble Adela Quested in any way. Her father had been an officer in the British army and served in the island in the Middle Sea in the 50s. We wondered what is would have been like if we had met there as children.

Each island had brought me some pain and sorrow, with great moments of joy. I carried them with me like congestions of karma waiting to be released. Each island telling me the world's secrets in a different way. I wanted to know more so I had to break the island triangle. If I was melancholic or nostalgic, this did not grip me in inertia. It set me in motion, and with ambivalence of purpose I would travel with libidinous excess and a rucksack on my back, lay my body down anywhere, making it porous and vulnerable to the world's touch, following whatever my soul desired.

If I say 'soul' and not 'heart' as idiomatic English might require, it is because I hear my grandmother speaking in her tongue: *oti i psyche sou lahtara*, *whatever your soul desires*. 'Psyche' pronounced *psee-shee* means 'soul' in the island's dialect. Whenever I asked the sibyls *what are we going to do now?* they would sometimes utter this phrase like a magic incantation, invoking multiple possibilities in my imagination and opening up a dilemma of desires and impossible choices. Where did my *psee-shee* come from? It was my *psee-shee* but how did I know it and how did I make up my mind? Or did my spirit make up my mind for me? The reverbation of *psee-shee-psee-shee* was like a whispering of secrets in a murmur of voices impregnated with a longing to unfold into a sea of expectations. Who knows how it did it and for what purpose? Sometimes it took you in one direction and then another. The whole world is a secret hidden inside us, revealing itself only when you least expect it; the greater the revelation, the greater the rush like the acacias outside my window running up and down the hillside in a flurry of green and yellow. Or like running into the warm October sea below the church of Ayios Filon and feeling it embrace you like a touch of honey from Ttallou's beehive, or silk woven on Alisavou's loom with the thread made by worms fed with

the leaves from her mulberry trees. When it touches your skin, it feels like the touch of some goddess and your *pseeshee* floats away wherever it desires. But *pseeshee* might be imprisoned in bodies and sometimes change colour. I watched the chameleon – the lion of the earth – change from brown to green as it moved up the tree in Elengou's courtyard, and I would roll around on her earthen floor freshly sprinkled with water to see if my skin would change colour.

It was a meaningful coincidence that Demosthenes and I were planning to return to Trikomo in early September 1974. It was the same time of year that we went to the village together for the last time in 1957, before he took me away from the island. August had ended and summer had ended, but I didn't feel like summer had ended. People had a sense of an ending because they had to return to work or school. I resisted a sense of an ending by anticipating a sense of beginning without knowing what kind of beginning, since I always wanted to live in a joyful state of uncertain flux where there are no ends. We were driving to Trikomo to a beginning or an end or a crossroads of eternal return. The fields had changed colour. When we left the spring before they were green covered with red poppies and splashes of yellow dandelions, rushes of irises wild and purple. I wondered what colours were unfurled over my school, if red, white and blue, or blue and white, if the English had imposed a curfew and if the school would be open or shut. Demosthenes had not spoken about school. He kept in touch with news about the struggle and he received news about who the English had captured and who they had killed. He was always talking in the *kafeneio* while playing

backgammon but he had not said much to me about his conversations. And I had not bothered to inquire about school. I preferred not to. No hurry. Not eager to go back to any school. Whatever he had in mind, he would tell me soon enough. Right now as we drove he enthusiastically jolted my gaze skyward to see the swallows' line of flight and the diving of the sun, the *vouttiman iliou*, as he called it, quoting a line from Lipertis, one of the island's dialect poets. I had no idea of his plans or dreams, nor that he had planned his own line of flight when he told me to look at the sky and see how the September clouds were coming. The swallows were gathering for their flight to the south. If I had known that Demosthenes himself was also planning a line of flight – sailing north not south – I would have told him he was going in the wrong direction. Or why go anywhere? The days were still hot, so there was no reason to fly away yet. Right here was just fine for the moment. As we drove from Salamis along the coastal road, I stuck my head out of the open car windows to feel the waves of changing days spread out in yellowing fields, unfolding in front and inside me under the ripening sun sinking in between the mountains, catching fire in joyful exit into the dying embers of dusk like a final moment of illumination and hallucination. Why was the sun dipping or diving silently, I wondered, or perhaps it was making a sound in the far distance I could not hear? What kind of sound would it make as it set fire to the mountains or quenched its own heat as it sank into the sea? Could the sun be numbed into silence? My ears were clogged up with seawater and maybe that's why I couldn't hear it. The sibyls knew how to unclog ears with words of olive oil warm to the ear, like the magic of their language. I stuck my head out the window to seize the sensuality of my thoughts in the dusty sweetness lingering and licking me with a tongue of warm air and sea, clinging on until – until as long and as far as I could stretch out the borders of my barefoot summer – until whenever and however far that might be. Demosthenes told me sharply to bring my head back in before I lost it, as he veered to the left of the hot asphalt road to make room for an oncoming car and suddenly turned off, churning the dust over a trail through the wheat-whispering fields, heading toward the village, avoiding the main road. After the admonishment, I pulled my head inside, now covered with a membrane of dust particles and chaff. Satisfied to have another layer of grime over the sea brine and sand grains that covered my skin. My body exuded the nectar of the sea. I pulled my legs onto the hot cracked leather car seat and turned my attention from my head to the soles of my hardened, calloused feet, contemplating the secrets they had absorbed all summer long from the skin of the uneven earth humming in the exhilarated heat. I knew the warmth would linger until the sticky web of October and the feast of *Ainakoufos* – Demosthenes would call him Ayios Iakovos – but I insisted on calling him *Ainakoufos* as that's how I heard the Trikomites call him. He was the healer of hearing so if you were deaf, *koufos,* or had an ear ache, you went to the church to make a votive offering or a prayer and then receive warm drops of olive oil in your ear and listen for the sounds of the world and even of heaven, they said, if you close your eyes and pray. His feast was on October 23rd. The day after my birthday. Lalla the Lightfooted, who was present at my birth in the house

with the green balcony just up from Ayios Iakovos church, said I came into the world accompanied by *pana'yri* sounds and smells from across the square. You would hear the grapes squelch as they burst their skin with joy and the cracking of the almonds and intoxicating smells of deep fried *loukoumades* dripping in honey, almonds roasting, grapes matured with concentrated sweetness metamorphosed into all possibilities and forms we dreamed and conjured up, *epsima*, *petimezi, palouze,* sweet then creamy, then *sojouko* hanging on string, and the *pana'yrkotes* rousing the spirit with the plenitude of sounds of lute and violin, feet hopping and waists gyrating in the fumes of *zivania* poured in small glasses. My nose would draw close to the brim of a small glass, in anticipation of an order of intoxicating moonshine I was not yet allowed to enter. In a few years I would be allowed to sip sweetish wine diluted with water. The adult world was handed down to me diluted, and I did not know that this return to Trikomo was hail and farewell for Demosthenes. And so it was for me too, although he didn't tell me. In October I would be somewhere else under the cloud-capped sky and I would not enjoy the wealth of October in the Middle Sea for many years to come.

Perhaps that's why Demosthenes wanted a quiet entry to the village that day. He said there would be no passage for the car through the throng of people on their Sunday afternoon stroll along the road lined with acacias and eucalyptus trees, nor through the dusty seaward trail through the orchards with ripening September figs. If we had continued straight on the main coastal road from Famagusta, we would have ended up at the little church of Ayios Iakovos opposite the Cinema Hellas and the *kafeneio* of the

Anagenesis Association. Here Demosthenes usually met his cronies, to chat and catch up on the news on who the English caught, killed, or imprisoned, how his football team was doing, who had left the village or the island. If we took that road we would get there in the middle of the afternoon buzz. When people finish their walk, they would either fill the Cinema Hellas or slowly make their way home, stopping to speak to everyone they saw along the way.

I knew all the ways to enter and exit the village depending on how you travelled, whether you went on foot, on donkey, or on bicycle. There were stony trails through the surrounding fields, and pathways through groves and orchards. If you went on asphalted roads, there were only two ways to enter or exit. I had travelled every way and on every kind of vehicle. I mostly travelled on foot unless I went way beyond the village boundaries. I would follow Elengou everywhere on foot, to the cemetery, and to the small stony church of Ayia Anastasia that stood alone on an elevation in the middle of a field, or to her sister Ttallou to fetch honey, to Lefkou's sheepfold to fetch milk, *halloumi, anari*.

Or if I did not venture out with Elengou, I would wait for the older boys wandering by the house of Milia and Chrisostomos where I lived and trail behind them into the olive groves. I would shout 'Wait! Wait! I'm coming too. Take me with you.' Milia would stand at her door shouting at us, too arthritic to chase after me and catch me as I ran away quickly to get out of reach of her voice and pretend I didn't hear her in case she wanted to call me home. The fields opened up to the sea and I knew if we walked far enough we would smell the salt. Milia called out to the boys to keep an eye on me: 'Watch out for snakes! Don't let him walk barefoot! Don't lose him! Make sure you bring him back – all of him.' The older boys told me about snakes. The black snake was good and there was no need to be afraid because it wasn't poisonous. Pappou Ksharis enticed one with milk to keep it near his granary to keep away the rats. Unlike the *koufi* that was poisonous. And it was deaf. That's why it was called *koufi*. It was no use shouting to scare it away. I found a big stick to walk with like the older boys, and we thumped them on the ground as we walked on the trails in the fields so the viper would run away with the vibrations.

When we entered the village that day in early September of 1957, I had been away since late spring and I was excited at the thought of the crowd taking their Sunday afternoon walk, going to the cinema and the coffee shop. I wanted to flit around and in and out among the people and see what was new in the village and tell them of my journeys around the island. People walked in rows of three, four or more, arm in arm, stopping and chatting and circling around at the end of the road, and I loved to jump about like a grasshopper moving up and down, grabbing people by the hand and walking with them for a while before running off to join another group. But I raised no objection to the quiet entry through the fields that Demosthenes had taken today. Greater was the pull of the familiar strip of road where I could glide freely through houses, in and out of covered hallways, arched porches and open yards with enclosures for chickens, goats, rabbits. Yaya Elengou and Yaya 'Milia, like crumbling

pillars of wisdom and weary guardian spirits, were my cornerstones in this little piece of street that was my cradle – the cocoon of my pupation. All the neighbours in-between their houses I would call *Thkeia*, not because they were real aunties, but in respect of a kinship based on the proximity of dwelling. Whenever I returned, I would want the whole street to know I was back. So I would go freely into any of their houses shouting *Thkeia!* at the top of my voice – there was Thkeia Maritsou, Thkeia Rikkou tou Koutoumba, Thkeia Niki tou Pappou Kshari. Today I will shout as I enter: *Thkeia. It is I. I am here. I have returned.*

Elengou had received word of our imminent arrival from the boy in the *kafeneio*, who was sent by the bus driver we saw on the road near Salamis the day before to give her the news that we were coming. I imagined her waiting for me as always, with a bucket of well-water and an aluminium cup ready to bathe me, pouring fresh well-water over my head, making my skin shudder until the touch of her hands like hard oiled aromatic wood let the blood flow through my veins. As she scraped sea debris from the soles of my feet, breaming me like a boat, I would glow like a new vessel ready for sailing. I glimpsed unheard memories in the frail hair under her *kouroukla*, tied for housework without the *skoufoma* she wore to cover every strand as she went on her excursions beyond the surrounding houses for an errand, or a visit to some other part of the village. The darkest shade she saved for wakes and funerals, and I would go with her like a dog-star of nocturnal rites and dreams of kin and ancestors, sisters and saints invoked in a murmur of voices raspy like the earthen floors of the houses. Elengou's voice still held the ineluctable trace of dewy dusk softening the contours of this stark, thorny paradise, wise like Pherepapha touching everything in motion, trading sorrow for wonder in exuberant song. Her children told me when she was young her voice would bring under-worlds to over-worlds when the paschal full moon passed over, cracking the egg of the world in the rush of spring and melody of orange blossoms.

Will you ever sing again, Yaya? I asked as she rubbed me dry. Then she burst out with a few lines. *Your eyes have stung me, but I hold them with pride, if days pass without seeing them, I cry and I am not appeased*.

Τα μάτια σου με κάψανε
μα εγώ τα καμαρώνω.
Σαν κάνω μέρες να τα δώ

κλαίω και δεν μερώνω and then she stopped suddenly and said *run along now* and I joyfully repeated the rhyme *kamarono merono,* as I made a dash down the street as swiftly as a September lizard darting in the golden idleness of the summer's overflow to my childhood shelter. My childhood home was with Chrisostomos and Milia. I always slept in my brass four-poster bed, with a mosquito net protecting me like a tent. They would be waiting for me, balmy as the evening dusk after the fierce light of day had grown dim. Chrisostomos went up the ladder to the roof terrace where he would take in the melting magma of his tribe of stars. He would not stay there the whole

night as he did on August nights, but descend into the shadows of night, appearing and disappearing in the shifting light of the paraffin lamp flickering in hesitant delight, as riotous life turned into dream and the names of the sibyls a litany in my slumber: *elengou*, *marikkou*, *stassou*, *ttallou*, *koullou*, *lefkou*, *rikkou*, *maritsou* until the *ou* turned to *oummm*, and then I would fall into the dreamless sleep that comes after the moment in the night when the nightingale stops singing, when a thick veil of darkness seals memory behind closed doors and window shutters. Dawn would break the seals once more aided by the sound of brooms clearing the dirt into the street. Chrisostomos will perform morning ablutions over an aluminium basin in the yard, seeking the melody within him to breathe out the light:

ni pa vou ga di ke zo ni
doxasi to deixanti to phos
pa di pa ni pa
terirem terirem

I loved to hear the night litany at the Church of Panayia. If the *psaltes* were good they would seize the mystery of angels and nightingales and the *terirem* would make your head swirl like a dervish.

We were only in Trikomo for a few nights when Demosthenes announced he would take me to Engomi, a village west of the island's capital, to stay with my uncle Pheidias and his family, and I could go to school there for a while. I did not suspect that it would only be for three weeks, and then we would go beyond the island's shores. Chrisostomos and Milia seemed on the verge of tears when I picked up my clothes from their house. They did not know Demosthenes's plans for me, but they realised for sure that it was the end of my life with them. I was their first grandchild and they had nurtured me since infancy when Katerina and Demosthenes separated. I declared confidently that I would return soon. I won't miss the *pana'yri* of Ainakoufos for anything, I said.

On the last day, Elengou took me to Chrysanthi, her old schoolteacher. She was about fifteen years older than Elengou. She was the first teacher appointed for the first girls' school in the village founded at the end of the 19th century. Chrysanthi came to the village as a young teacher from the capital and she married Alexandros, the uncle of Chrisostomos, who owned the Han. The oldest family photo I have is a school photo of Chrysanthi with her class, including Elengou when she was ten. Chrysanthi lived in the rooms upstairs. Downstairs were stables for camels, horses, donkeys and mules. I went downstairs to watch the camels with fascination, as if they were sages and saints with calloused knees. They were kneeling in meditation like Ainakoufos, patiently waiting to hear the sounds of an invisible world to come. I ran up the stairs from the courtyard to the kitchen to inform Elengou and Chysanthi that I wanted grated *anari* on half the macaroni and *saltsa* on the other half, but I did not want *anari* on top of the *saltsa*. I liked to taste them separately. After lunch, Chrysanthi gave me a *loukoumi* and a little sip of

coffee, so she could read my cup as she liked to do for Elengou and all her former pupils when they visited her. She did not wear a headscarf like the village women even though she was a widow. Her hair was tied up in braids or in a bun. She looked into my eyes as she spoke, only occasionally looking inside the cup where she saw a beautiful lady, even more beautiful than Rita Hayworth, who would give me new clothes and perhaps a new toy. So far it was obvious. Nothing new here. Katerina gave me something new every time we met. If she could not decide between two shirts, she would buy me both. Then there was an open road, and many journeys to places I hadn't been before. She saw a train. I had never been inside a train. The limited train service on the island had closed down.

*

So in 1974 my revolutionary spirit drove me toward Olissibona, but Trikomo and Elengou never left my thoughts. We always talked of revolution and now one happened by surprise and I had to go there and see the process. I thought Franco would die first and this might then bring change to Portugal and eventually, hopefully, the dictatorship would fall in Greece. But things had happened differently. It was not long after I arrived in Portogalia when my Levantine Isle hit the Portuguese headlines. Archbishop Makarios, the President, had been overthrown in a coup organised by the ultra-right EOKA B backed by the Greek Junta. In response, Turkey invaded and occupied an area of the island around Kyrenia, on the northern coast. The Archbishop was missing and presumed dead but he reappeared, like Rasputin. He said he read his own obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*. He had been rescued in a British helicopter and was reinstated a few days after the coup. I was not sure what all this would mean for the island. There had been violent conflicts in '63, '64, '67, the UN was brought in in '64, then there was the looming shadow of the Greek military junta since '67, which posed a threat to the Archbishop as he formed a coalition with the left. I communicated with postcards in those days, so I wrote to Demosthenes, promising to follow up with a phone call when I found time to go to the *telefónica* to make an international call and he could give me his take on the situation. I never made the phone call and I got a brief but somewhat pessimistic reply to my postcard letter about waiting and seeing what would happen next. Days went by and I heard no news. I was absorbed in the archives in the mornings and sought out the pulse of the streets in the afternoon and evening. I would sometimes seek out the political rallies and revolutionary speeches and then go chasing poetry and song, drinking *vinho verde* and eating sardines grilled on charcoal along the way. I often wandered around with a Welsh friend called Richard Rees who I called Ricardo Reis after one of the heteromyms of Fernando Pessoa, whose footsteps we followed around Lisbon. He suggested that I invent three heteronyms to write about my personae on three islands. Then there were various friends from lands colonised by the Portuguese. Among them were the Goan born Linda de Souza and Alvaro Araújo, a teacher of literature and a journalist from the province of Para in Brazil. He had long black shiny hair and sharp cheekbones and a wide smile. When we met I asked him if

he was Tupí and he answered: *Tupí or not Tupí. That is the question.* I only got half the literary joke at the time and later he gave me a copy of the *Anthropophagic Manifesto* by Oswald de Andrade where the phrase appears. We would all stroll to the *barrio alto* to listen to *fado* and talk of notions of *saudade*. An Andalusian in the group said it was the same as *solea*, which was derived from *soledad*. I told them of the *Amanes* of Asia Minor and wanted to sing *Ah, Aman Aman*, but I couldn't sing like I did when I was a boy. Alvaro taught me the words of the song *Chega de saudade* (enough of longing) *se ela voltar, se ela voltar, que coisa linda, que coisa louca, if she return, if she return, how lovely, how crazy,* the sad melody of longing dissolving into the rhythm and the verb in future subjunctive. Perhaps the future should always be in the subjunctive.

It was on the day after the August 15 holiday that we went to meet the Brazilian crowd on the beach with their musical instruments, singing, dancing, drinking *caiperinhas*. When I arrived, one of the party asked me *O meu cipriota, voce liu as notícias? Do you know what's happening on your island?* He showed me the newspaper. The Turkish army had made a second advance since the July occupation of the area around Kyrenia. The newspaper had a map of the island with a line drawn through it, indicating how far the Turkish army had advanced. The island was split in two. Before I had time to get into silent brooding, I excused myself from the company to get a train to the *telefónica* to call Demosthenes and get more details. My stay in Lisbon would be coming to an end and I had to quickly tie up loose ends and take my leave. I had a warm send-off from my friends, with wishes for my eventual return to my island in the Middle Sea after the war was over, and when I was ready for a second odyssey they would welcome me in Brazil with open arms. I went back to Bristol to spend some time with Demosthenes.

I still wanted to go back to the island that September, and he scoffed at my naivety. Was I crazy? *To do what? What do you think you can do? Fight the Turks?* He finished all his sentences with *listen to me, my son. Use your scholarship and finish your thesis and the world is your oyster. Trikomo is gone. The island is doomed.* Demosthenes had spoken as if he was finally vindicated for taking me away from the island as a child. If I had been there, I could have been missing or dead, or in some prison camp in Turkey. But I still wanted to see Elengou, even though Trikomo was now under Turkish occupation and we could not cross the ceasefire line. *Elengou would probably not remember you*, he said. *She is mostly living in the 1930s and she'll think you are your grandfather Stephanos arriving from Alexandria.* I didn't want to believe she would not remember me. Senility had set in, he said, and she did not even remember there was a war and that the island was now divided. She lived with Theio Pheidias in the village of Engomi, where they had taken her after the July coup. When left alone she would set off to go back to Trikomo on foot until the police would find her and bring her back to Engomi. He also heard from Pheidias that their sister Maroulla had escaped from Trikomo, walking through the fields carrying whatever she could in a small bag to flee the oncoming Turkish army, and she found her way to Larnaca where she took a ship to Piraeus. We imagined she was with her eldest daughter Elli who was a music teacher and lived in Athens with her husband, a Greek rock musician.

I went back in despair to Cardiff and tried to settle down to write up my thesis. First I had to write an essay report on the research I had done had done in Lisbon to present to Alexandre Pinheiro Torres, but I was moving along at snail's pace. It didn't take much to distract my attention to other things. I became friends with Roberto D'Amico, an Argentine actor and director, a fellow at the University theatre who drew me into his plays, and I spent more time learning long monologues than writing my research. People were always passing through, coming and going to different places and sleeping over on the floor with their sleeping bag. Eugenio Navarro shared a house with me for a while and was another major source of distraction. He came from the Gran Canaria, and had lived, as I did, on this northern island since he was a boy of eight and was eager to leave. We would sing together Bob Dylan's lines: *there must be some way out of here*.

In March 1975, I was surprised to hear that Henry Kissinger would visit Cardiff. Why would he come to Cardiff, of all places? He was coming to visit his friend and British counterpart James Callaghan, a Cardiff man, who was Foreign Secretary at the time. I was pulled into activity by a guy called Mike who was a member in the IMG. We would sometimes have a drink in the Student Union, and he tried to get me to go to their meetings. I rarely went – I thought them dreary and portentous. I knew they thought I was too arty, bohemian or too *lumpen* to dedicate myself fully to the revolutionary struggle, and probably more interested in Trotsky's relationship with Frida Kahlo than the significance of the 4th International. However, whenever they organised a free bus to London for a demonstration I always signed on and was ready to go and march, especially if someone like Tariq Ali was speaking. This time Mike wanted me to help mobilise victims of US foreign policy in the East Mediterranean to march in protest against Kissinger's policies. Bring together any refugees I knew from my island. I told him that my compatriot Aydin Mehmet Ali would be better than me at such things – she was like the Pasionaria or a Rosa Luxemburg of the Levantine Sea. But she must have left Cardiff, as I hadn't seen her for years. Mike remembered her when she ran for President of the Student's Union in the early '70s. He called her a Vanessa Redgrave type. Vanessa was one of my favourite thespians. But Mike meant it as a disparaging remark about her affiliation with the Workers Revolutionary Party, a rival Trotskyist group. So I volunteered to help anyway I could, make placards, distribute leaflets and try and get people involved.

As we were marching and shouting *Ki-ssin-ger Mur-de-rer*, I spotted someone dressed in what resembled the long robe of a Greek Orthodox priest. At a distance I thought it was Theio Panayiotis, but I had to get close to see for sure. Demosthenes had announced a couple of years before, with some amusement and his usual scepticism about the clerics, that his friend had been ordained into the priesthood taking on the name of Papa Loukas. I hadn't seen him for years and I still remembered him as I first saw him on the day of our arrival on the island in the northern sea. He was a moustachioed patriarch and seemed much taller and overpowering then. Now, with his longish priestly hair and beard he looked quite different from a distance, but when

I came close, the face was unmistakably his. I didn't know what to do at first – whether to call him *Theie* and kiss him on each cheek or to call him *Pater* and kiss him on the hand as my grandmother had taught me to do to the priest who offered me the bread after I took communion. I was dithering for a while, and then went for the safer choice and kissed him on the cheeks as he would have expected from a younger kinsman. This was the safer choice for a number of reasons. If the comrades I was marching with saw me kissing his cheeks it would look rather comradely, and they might think he was some kind of red priest like the ones in Latin America. Kissing his hand would have been evidently Orthodox, yet it could be theatrical, and I liked theatre. Theio Panayiotis also had a sense of theatre in the ritual performance of the church. He had instilled in me the ritual theatre of the church before he joined the priesthood when he was the chief *psaltis* in the Greek Orthodox church in Bristol's Ashley Road. He assigned me to recite the Lord's Prayer in the litany on Sundays. I would enter with great solemnity facing the congregation and then make a turn to face the altar as if I were about to speak to god himself, and then I would begin dramatically: *Pater Imon.* He also had a great sense of rhythm and pace in ritual processions, and on Holy Thursday he put me in the lead of the procession bearing the cross, while other boys followed with other church paraphernalia as he would punctuate the rhythm and feeling of the drama with great talent and skill. The priest said I was a saintly boy, while Demosthenes smiled with gentle mockery. As I was sizing up the trappings of Theio Panagiotis and his new identity as priest I had a flashing glimpse of my lost childhood. He was also taking me and my clothes in, probably disapprovingly, wondering who I had taken after with my unkempt hair and dingy clothes laundered weekly but without discrimination of colour mix, temperature or type of cloth. My sweater was dotted with burns from cigarette ash. He must have thought that Demosthenes had led me astray toward the left and even atheism, but Demosthenes himself dressed very neatly and cleanly. Always a *leventis*. Despite the obvious initial awkwardness of body language in the mutual recognition and adjustment to our changed relative physical shape and size and the garb that now identified us, our exchange was warm and we exchanged some words about *agona, epistrofe, anastasi, struggle, return, resurrection. Come to church for Pascha! Look after your father as he grows older!* We suddenly moved apart as the demonstration reached a frenzy when Kissinger's car approached and people tried to break through into the area cordoned off by police. I didn't see him again for twenty-five years, when he was an officiating priest at Katerina's funeral rites. We had both resettled in the Middle Sea again by then. He kissed me like a kinsman saying *eonia tis i mnimi,* eternal be her memory.

As I went off after the demonstration, I remembered when I had first met him on the first day of our arrival on the island in the northern sea. At the beginning, we slept in a room above one of his restaurants. He had trained as a cobbler at a young age and because of his mellifluous voice he was recruited by the Church as a *psaltis*. He emigrated to Britain in the mid-thirties, living at first in Cardiff, then for a while in Southampton, and eventually settled in Bristol. When I met him, he was already a

successful restaurant entrepreneur, owning by this time a whole chain of restaurants and bringing people over mostly to work in the kitchens. Many of them were young women from Trikomo or other Mesaoria villages such as Lefkoniko, Avgorou and other smaller villages. So he had created a whole clan of Mesaorites around him, and he talked and moved around with great authority, looking like a moustachioed *mukhtar* and *archontas* in his own village. The *archontiko* was a tall Victorian house several storeys high somewhere on Gloucester Road, or maybe it was Cheltenham Road. At first I was in awe of the house and I ran up and down the stairs exploring. The house was on a slope and the entrance was high above the road. You had to climb twenty or thirty concrete steps to get to the front door where 'Trikomo House' was written as a tribute to our native village. There was a basement, several floors and an attic, and I loved running up and down to explore and meet the numerous Trikomo women who lived in the house with his family. They worked in the kitchens of the restaurants day and night and all week long, and otherwise kept house. Unlike the kitchen staff in the restaurants, all the waitresses were English. They would refer to Uncle as 'the Godfather' among themselves, and otherwise he was known as Mr Michael among the English as they couldn't pronounce Mikhailides. He only became Papa Louka when he was ordained into the priesthood.

It turned out that although he had been a childhood friend of Demosthenes, our kinship was through Katerina. As soon as we met he went to great pains to explain our connections. He told me a lot of names I hadn't heard before. The British tried to establish surnames, but before that people were known by their fathers or grandfathers, or by epithets and nicknames people gave them, and sometimes prefixes like *Hadji* or *Papa*, if they had made a journey to the Holy Land or if they had become priests. So you had to know genealogies to really understand family connections. His father was old uncle Styllakos, he informed me, who was married to Aphrodite, daughter of Euphrosyne, the younger sister of old Kakoullou who was the daughter of Papalouka. Demosthenes was impatient with talk of lineage and hailing of ancestors and was about to turn the conversation elsewhere when I suddenly got excited about hearing about old Kakoullou, Katerina's great-grandmother who lived to be a hundred and ten or even older according to some, as they did not know the exact year of her birth. I knew all about her so I picked up the conversation. People attributed her longevity to a shot of *zivania* or wine every morning with her breakfast, I said. And I also knew that she was the daughter of our revered ancestor Papaloukas, the priest and teacher who had gone to Smyrne to train in Byzantine music with maestro Nikolaos, and when he came back he travelled to churches around the island, training people to chant. Theio Panayiotis told me more about Papalouka. He was born in Lefkoniko but while in Trikomo at harvest time, he courted and married a young woman called Marikkou who came to Trikomo to thresh the fields with her brother Achilleas. Papaloukas married her and settled in the village, becoming a Deacon of the Church and eminent leader in the village. When the island became a British Protectorate in 1878, he led a delegation to meet the new governor of Famagusta,

Lieutenant Swaine, and asked for assistance to feed the villagers whose grain crop was suffering with the drought, and there was not enough food to eat. We thus established our lineage and kinship proudly, speaking especially of those who were priests and teachers as we were the royal family in the village. I wanted to speak more about Kakoullou, her husband Menoikos Liasis and their six sons, one of whom was my great-grandfather Dimitris, but Demosthenes took the conversation in another direction, and they started talking about business. There was evidently some allegiance between them that brought them together in times of crisis or of need. It seemed a strange connection that this man who was a pillar of the church and restaurant entrepreneur would reach out his hand to someone who was of the secular – probably atheist – left. Yet he had brought Demosthenes to join the clan, to sort out his book-keeping and accounting, and the documentation for people he was bringing over from the Middle Sea. The management of the paper work of his businesses had got out of control, and he wanted one of his own people to sort things out for him. Demosthenes was like a *koumbaro*, well-educated for his time, spoke good English, and was experienced in accounting and book-keeping. I do not know who initiated this allegiance of friendship and business. Whether Panayiotis had made a work proposal to Demosthenes and it suited him as he was looking for an exit from the island in the Middle Sea, or whether Demosthenes wrote to Panayiotis for the same reason and it suited Panayiotis's needs. I did not know the motives or the plot that brought about this journey. But in years to come I would learn that this was not the first time Demosthenes had run off somewhere and his friend Panayiotis was there to give a helping hand.

He always seemed a bit stern and I shied away from him, trying to keep a distance, but when we went to Trikomo House on Sundays I could be among the frolic and gossip in the kitchen. There I felt I was in the village and all the girls would speak in a dialect that I understood perfectly well, and would call my name affectionately in the diminutive, as the old sibyls would do in the village. One Sunday he called me from the kitchen. I sensed that perhaps he wanted to make me happy since he had been told I was not settling in well to my new life. He wanted to make me the centre of attention and give me a chance to exhibit my talent for oratory and performance, which he was certain I possessed as he had identified me with the caste of descendants of the likes of Papaloukas. Uncle himself was said to be a manifestation of this legacy, with his fine singing voice that had destined him to the Church. He said he had heard I was very talented and I could sing and recite poems, and asked me what I would perform for our company today. I thought first of one my favourite songs from the film *Stella:* 'O Minas Exei Dekatris,' 'The thirteenth day of the month.' He didn't expect me to volunteer a song of doomed passion from the film *Stella*. *Something more patriotic, perhaps?* He suggested. I was out of practice as it already felt like years I was on this other island, and I did not sing or recite poems every day as I did in school before we left the island in the Middle Sea. He lifted me up on a chair so everyone could see me while I declaimed loudly, giving special emphasis to words like *andreiomenei* to show I could say difficult words that I could barely understand. I managed to get through the first two verses

of the *Hymn to Liberty* by Dionysis Solomos up to *Haire Haire Elefteria* without hardly stopping for breath, and cognizant of singing something about an awesome sword and the earth and the bones of dead Hellenes of long ago rising again and hailing liberty. He clapped saying *bravo bravo* and pulled me close to him saying if I practice saying the *Pater Imon* with similar eloquence, he would let me recite it during the liturgy the following Sunday. Yes, Theie, I agreed, anxious to rush off to the kitchen, but he gestured me to sit down close to him with the men at the table. I did not realise how soon I would forget this poem by this Hellenic Romantic national poet in my new environment, and that that evening might have been the last time I ever recited or sung it. Decades later I found an English translation by Kipling rendered freely in his own way without ever mentioning Hellenes and without the emotional Romantic flow of the Greek of Solomos. *We knew thee of old, O, divinely restored, By the lights of thine eyes, And the light of thy Sword. From the graves of our slain, Shall thy valour prevail, As we greet thee again, Hail, Liberty, Hail.*

In the meantime, Demosthenes was teasing his priestly friend with anti-clerical jokes. He told the story of an Englishman who hailed a village priest saying *ha-ire ha-ire*, pronouncing the *ai* as a dipthong after the classical pronunciation he had learnt at Oxford. The priest who was not used to hearing it pronounced thus thought he was calling him an ass – *ga'ire ga'ire* in the island dialect. Was the Englishman foolish and the priest stupid? I didn't quite get the point. They poured more wine and Demosthenes started saying how this patriot poet Solomos spoke Italian before he learnt Greek, and even his famous poem that had become the Greek National Anthem was inspired by some famous English poet called Lordos Vyronas. I didn't understand the point of all this talk since they both agreed on freeing the island from colonial rule. But Demosthenes was sceptical about who would be fit to rule. I didn't understand that he was saying that our priests who wanted to liberate the Hellenes of Cyprus knew less about Hellenism than our British rulers who were educated in the Classics. Uncle remained stern and unflinching despite the taunting and tantalising about priesthood and patriotism, and began to explain how the Europeans were our friends and after a complaint from Greece to the Court of Human Rights, they would investigate human rights abuse by the British who were imprisoning and killing our youth fighting for our freedom. I was getting tired of this political talk. My thoughts had turned to Katerina. Every time I heard the name of Dionysis Solomos I would think of Katerina meandering like a river, defining her own route from her apartment overlooking the Venetian walls, disappearing into the moat, and re-emerging on the other side, sauntering past the statue of Solomos who would turn his head and call to her: *Haire, Haire*. I pretended I wanted a glass of water and made a quick escape back to the kitchen, where the conversation was much more lively and I could speak with the women as if I were at home in the village. I remember Georgina, Lola, Loulla, Maroulla, uncle's wife Koulla, his sister Kyriakou, and his daughter Niki, all gathering around and laughing merrily, teasing me because I wanted to sing o 'Minas Exei Dekatris' for Theio Panayiotis. They asked me what other film songs I knew. I volunteered Ti einai afto pou to lene agape'

from the film *The Boy on a Dolphin*. I saw it at the Cinema Hellas, in the open air the previous summer. After we watched it at the cinema, we would watch it every night from someone's rooftop terrace at a distance without hearing the dialogue well, which most of us couldn't understand anyway because it was in English. Nor could we read the subtitles at a distance. But we already knew the story and we would explain what was happening to those who hadn't seen it. Sophia Loren played a spunky beautiful Greek peasant woman called Phaedra from the island of Aegina who earned a living diving in the sea for sponges. A greedy and wily English art collector, played by Clifton Webb, paid her to dive for the bronze boy on a dolphin lying at the bottom of the sea, from a shipwreck in ancient times. She outwitted him and saved the statue for the Greek government, its rightful owner. An American played by Alan Ladd fell in love with her and helped her save the statue from the Englishman. The role of the American caused controversial debate. Some just accepted that he was a Philhellene. The communists said the Americans were as imperialist as the English. The nationalists thought a Greek should have played the romantic lead. As long as it was not Giorgos Fountas, I protested. He killed Stella, and if he gets jealous he'll kill Phaedra too. But we were all in love with Sophia Loren and when she began to sing the song in Greek and her face filled the screen, we stopped arguing and stood up and sang with her with passion and panache, especially with the repetition of the refrain *s'agapo, s'agapo, s'agapo.*

*

I think it was around the time of the anti-Kissinger demonstration that Toni Rumbau and his wife Mariona Masgrau came to stay. They were on their way to Lisbon from Copenhagen. She had been given political asylum in Denmark to escape persecution for distributing illegal propaganda in Franco's Spain and now that Portugal was democratic, they would go to Lisbon and wait for Franco's death so they could return to Spain. They were talking about starting a puppet theatre. She would make the puppets and he would write the scripts. I was reading Italo Calvino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies*, where the characters told their stories with Tarot cards. Toni went out and bought me a pack of Tarot cards so we could tell each other stories. He hoped to find inspiration for the adventures of his puppet character Malic who would travel around the Mediterranean and around the world. We wondered what stories the cards told about us. Mariona saw Eugenio riding a horse with naked innocence and the sun shining upon him, whereas she saw me overcast by deceptive shadows of moonlight, and she saw a hermit-like figure inching along with a lantern and hoping for a revelation to show the way forward. I would have to bide my time and the moment for the way out would come, I thought. Since the war the village lingered in my imagination like a ghostly hallucination. The allure of the world was always there, but where in the world to go? Perhaps somewhere beyond Hesperia, I thought. I could of course be diligent and practical. Just get on and finish the thesis and go wherever there was an academic job, as Demosthenes and my supervisor were expecting.

In October that year Lluísa Marí came from Barcelona. She wanted to give birth to her baby daughter in London so she would not have to declare a father on the birth certificate. In Franco's Spain birth certificates had to include a father's name. Eugenio and I brought her from the hospital in London to Cardiff, where she stayed for a while with her baby daughter. Lluisa declared us godfathers even though she did not declare a father. We invented a ritual and bathed the baby girl in a big ceramic bowl I kept in my room. I told them that on my island you had to wash the baby's diapers for at least three days to seal the godfatherly commitment, and we did that too. So we became *koumbaroi*. Lluísa returned to Barcelona, and a few weeks later, in November, Franco finally died.

Soon afterwards, Eugenio decided to go to Barcelona and check out the scene. The city was overflowing with new life. He left with about a day's notice and as usual left a trail of unfulfilled commitments that I had to answer when people came looking for him. The next day someone turned up on the doorstep looking for him, with a violin in one hand and a squash racket in the other. I told him that he had gone off to Barcelona the day before. He looked at me in disbelief: *But we made a date to play squash at the Student Union just three days ago. He is an impetuous Canary*, I replied. *You leave the cage door open for a minute and he'll fly away. And this one is from the Great Canary. You know Canaries well?* he asked. *Are you a Canary yourself? No, I'm from another island. In the Middle Sea. Sadly, they eat song birds there. I haven't lived there for years. What island are you from?* I asked, suspecting from his cadences that he was from the West Indies. *From Guyana*, he said, *and it's not an island. Aren't you a West Indian?* I said. *I'm West Indian from South America*, he continued. I tried to get him to explain how the West Indies got to South America but he just wanted to play squash. *I can't help you*, I said. *I've never played. And so when is Eugenio coming back? Probably next week, but perhaps never. You never know with Canaries. They don't always find their ways back.* He was bemused, not knowing if I was joking or playing around with him for whatever reason. I was just bantering flippantly – a little impatient at habitually explaining Eugenio's unpredictable moves to friends or lovers who came looking for him. But I was also curious. I had never met a Guyanese before. I turned the conversation to his violin and I learned he was a student in the Music Department, but he had no interest in continuing the conversation. He seemed irritated, perhaps at my frivolous chatter or because he had been stood up by Eugenio or because he just wanted to play squash.

As it turned out I was intuiting what would happen when I said Eugenio might never come back. His moves had always been unpredictable. I received a post card telling me he was not coming back at all. I was not altogether surprised, although I was left speechless at the suddenness and resoluteness of the decision. He had teamed up with our friends Toni and Mariona to set up a puppet theatre group called *La Fanfarra*. They had great success in the streets of Barcelona and were received with zealous enthusiasm. He had decided that his vocation was to be a *titiritero* – a kind of Catalan *karagkiozliki*, I thought. He would write a letter to the University terminating his studies. He instructed me to pack up his belongings until he might be able to make

a trip and pick them up. I could keep his bed frame and mattress if I wanted. He knew I always coveted it. It was a huge mattress in a wooden frame close to the floor, like a raft over a dirty pool of water in the form of a shabby blue-grey carpet stained with spilt red wine and coffee. When we spoke on the phone, I took on a paternalistic tone at the abandonment of his studies, like an older brother trying to talk some sense into him. I was a few years older, and a post-graduate teaching assistant. I sometimes gave him tutorials so I spoke like a teacher. *You'll graduate in a year and a half. Why don't you wait and then you can do what you want?* No way. This was the moment and he could not miss it for anything. He had made up his mind and he was sure this was what he had to do. I was secretly envious at this reckless expression of freedom and independence. I tried not to show it. Milia had taught me to be mindful of the envy of others and not to let my envy touch those I love. So I wished him success. *Mashallah*, I said, to ward off the evil eye, and to hedge my bets with the divine as Milia taught me, I sealed it with the sign of the cross from right to left in the Orthodox way. Milia said, *if you cross yourself when you say 'praise Allah', you are protected from both Christian and Mussulman.* She learnt this from her kin in the mixed village of Ayios Sozomenos. I did not want to project an eyeful of envy on my friend. I would bide my time and wait for the opportune moment to get up and go and follow the call when I heard it inside me. These things happened unexpectedly, I thought, so I tried not to expect it. But I was highly susceptible to suggestion.

A few weeks later, I think it was still winter, several Hellenes suddenly approached me in the student union. I was taken aback – not knowing where they had come from – and I was somewhat anxious about what kind of speech would come out of my mouth. They spoke smoothly and rapidly, punctuating everything with *re malaka*. I spoke Cypriotica in Bristol kitchens now and again, remembered some chants and prayers from church when I was a boy, and had some knowledge of classical Greek as Mr Sykes, my Latin teacher, volunteered to teach me in the sixth form. He said *since you are a Hellene and you want to study literature at university, you should learn to read Plato and Homer in their own language.* But I only heard *kalamaristika* – as we call it on my island – from the movies I saw when I was a boy. But they weren't too concerned about my way of speaking. Mike of the IMG told them I was a Hellene with politically progressive ideas who spoke English like a native. One of them remembered seeing me kissing a priest at the Kissinger demonstration. They wanted me to be on the executive board of the Hellenic Society. With my command of English I could represent them well in the Student Union. I was hesitant. Another distraction. I will never finish the thesis, nor leave this island in the northern sea, I thought. But their energy was contagious and I liked the idea of becoming a kind of dragoman and learning to imitate their kind of speech and rhetoric. I could still speak to Elengou if I met her but I would have to read Antonio Gramsci in Greek to debate with these guys. Before I knew it I was pulled into a flurry of activities, endless political argument, cooking, eating, dancing, singing. Most were there only for a year doing their MA before going back to Greece. Vassilis, a fervent Communist Party supporter, but a little crazy, charming and fun to be with,

handsome and long-haired like a rock star, had bought a Land Rover which he was planning to drive to Athens. Four of them were going together and they had room for one more. Come with us, *re malaka.* You can stay with my family the whole summer. Since you love poetry, we'll get to Athens on time to see Ritsos recite his poetry at the Communist Party rally. I said I would think about it. I thought about it. A few days later I told him I would go. And I would not come back, I added. I will find a job and stay. He looked at me with astonishment and admiration at my resoluteness, and told me to reduce my belongings to a minimum. I took a rucksack with my clothes and a box of notes for my thesis research neatly organised with references and bibliographies on index cards, a typewriter, and a few favourite books and LP records. We took the raft-like mattress I inherited from Eugenio, which fitted neatly into the back of the vehicle for three of us to sit. I left the rest of my belongings in Demosthenes' garage. He was shocked at my sudden decision, and so was my thesis supervisor. If I didn't produce a thesis, I would have to pay back my scholarship money. Don't worry, I said. The thesis is all in my head. *We want it typed on A4 paper*, the professor said, *not just in your head*. I will write it within a year, I said with great confidence as he looked at me with disbelief. I sat at the back of the vehicle looking at the road we left behind us, as I used to do as a boy sitting on an ox cart on the way to the potato fields by the sea shore. Soon I would also cross the sea to Elengou, I thought. But not long after I arrived in Athens, I received news that Elengou had passed away soon after her 83rd birthday. I never saw her again, but I would always hear her voice.

I never returned to live on the island of the northern sea, and I would spend years on another Odyssey in the Americas before I settled again on the island in the Middle Sea. And it would be many more years before I got to Trikomo, which was called Yeni Iskele by its new inhabitants. In the spring of 2003, on April 23rd, two days before the 29th anniversary of the Portuguese revolution, the checkpoints across the divide were opened for the first time. No one knew for how long, or if this move might lead to reunification. Thousands lined up to cross from south to north and north to south. I never believed that Elengou had died. She has grown small and invisible, like the Sibyl of Cumae. I hear her speak as she brushes against the leaves of my basil plants when I water them. She sings and tells me stories. Sometimes she speaks of the four women of Trikomo in rhymed couplets. She will stop after the first line: *Tesseris trikomitisses mes to steno me kopsan* and then wait and see if I remember the second line of the couplet. I wonder if she will remind me of the missing line once I reach her house in Trikomo. Will her house still be standing?

Glossary

Amanes	a popular mode of singing and genre of song expressing emotional intensity and feelings of grief and lament. Originating in Byzantine and Ottoman musical traditions with lyrics exclaiming *Aman Aman* (from the Arabic, Lord, have mercy!).
Anari	a Cypriot ricotta-type cottage cheese.
Archontas/Archontiko	a wealthy person recognised for leadership and generosity /a house or mansion in which he resides.
Ensaimadas	Mallorcan sweet bread. Usually eaten for breakfast.
Epsima	grape must.
Fado	Portuguese genre of music infused with melancholy, longing, and often resignation giving it the name of *fado* (fate).
Halloumi	a Cypriot cheese traditionally made of goat and sheep milk, but now frequently with cow's milk.
Hermes Trismegistus	Hermes "Three-times Great" is attributed with writing the Hellenic-Egyptian *Hermetica* in the 2nd or 3rd century CE
Kalamaras/ kalamaristika	name by which Cypriot Greeks refer to Greeks from Greece, and the way they speak the Greek language (*kalamaristika*), in contrast to the Cypriot vernacular Greek.
Kafeneio	coffee shop.
Kallikanjaroi	malevolent goblins that stay underground sawing the world tree. They surface at the winter solstice and stay until the epiphany when the sun moves again.
Karaghiozi	main character in the Greek shadow puppet tradition. Deriving from the Turkish shadow puppet tradition of *karagöz* (meaning black eyes). The suffix *liki* (from Turkish *lik*) turns it into a collective or abstract noun.
Koufi	poisonous snake aka *fina*. Blunt-nosed viper. *Vipera lebetina*.

Koumbaros	form of kinship known as *koumbaria* acquired by serving as godparent and/or best man/woman at a wedding. *Koumbare* is also a familiar form of address among men e.g. mate, buddy. Fem., *koumbara* or *koumera*.
Kouroukla	aka *mantila*, *tsimperka*, headscarf traditionally worn by all women. Colours and designs change with age and marital status. Nowadays they are only worn by some older women in the rural areas of Cyprus.
Leventis	a gallant male. Derived from Italian *Levanti* referring to people from the Levant, or Eastern Mediterranean, and taking on negative connotations.
Loukoumades	deep fried dough soaked in honey and cinnamon (from Turkish *lokma*)
Loukoumi	sweet based on gel and sugar, most commonly flavoured with rosewater, bergamot orange and lemon (from Turkish *lokum*).
Mukhtar	elected head of a village or neighbourhood (*mahalla*).
Palouze	dessert of grape must thickened with flour.
Pana'yri	Cypriot pronunciation of *panigyri*, a feast or public celebration on a holy day or saint's day. The participants, the *pana'yrkotes,* sell seasonal products, food and drink, and the festive atmosphere is enhanced with music, dancing and singing.
Pappou	grandfather.
Pedomazema	a collection of children. Describes the practice in the Ottoman empire of abducting Christian pre-adolescent boys for training as Janissaries and indoctrination into Islam (Turkish *devsjrme).*
Petimezi	grape molasses (Turkish *pekmez*).
Pherepapha	one of the variations of the name Persephone.
Psaltis (pl. *psaltes*)	official singer in the Orthodox Church.
Re malaka	*re* is a familiar interjection to address someone. *Malaka* literally translated into British English *wanker* but is used among friends to simply mean 'dude.' It is insulting to use with strangers and may also be used pejoratively to call someone a jerk or a fool.

Saltsa	sauce.
Skoufoma	a *kouroukla* which covers the hair, forehead, and ears. A black one is worn by old women, widows and those in mourning. A white one may be worn as protection from the sun when working in the fields.
Soujouko	(aka *shoushoukos*) candle-shaped sweet made of stringed almonds dipped into *palouze* and hung up to dry so it may be sliced with a knife.
Theios, Theia	uncle, aunt, and familiar form of address for elders. In Cypriot vernacular Greek it is often pronounced with a k inserted before the diphthong.
Terirem	improvised melody around syllables without meaning like repeating a mantra: te-ri—rem-ri-ri-rem.
Titiritero	puppeteer.
Yaya	grandmother.
Zivania	grape-based distillate traditionally made at home or in monasteries in Cyprus.

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after Humanism (Routledge, 2001), and more recently *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008), and *Mediterraneo Blues: Musiche, malinconia postcoloniale, pensieri marittimi* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2012). He is also editor with Lidia Curti of *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (Routledge, 1996). He is presently Director of the Centre for Postcolonial and Gender Studies at the Orientale.

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