



## **Waiting for Spring: Arab Resistance and Change**

### *Editorial Introduction*

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This essay aims to shed light on the cultural and mediated communication practices that have altered the heretofore dominance of political institutions while describing the mechanisms and expressions of resistance shaping the post-2011 Arab public sphere. Whether they are accomplished artists, experienced activists, or simply individuals who happen to have access to reach out to the world, activists have exerted disruption and contributed to the political and sociocultural transformations in the region through a variety of cultural and creative soft methods along with more mainstream actions such as street occupations, protests, and sit-ins. Digital communications have been used at different moments in activism events and have been tied to their progress. This article and the collection of papers in this special section use case studies to narrate genres of activism and discuss the roles that digital communications have played in the Arab spring mobilizations.

The topical Arab revolutions have gone through stumbling phases marked by violence, killing, protests, arrests, coups, and more, thus demonstrating multidimensional instability. Skeptics are doubtful about the outcome of the uprisings and are concerned that the revolts may result in more losses than gains. Although this might be true now in some places, one cannot deny the powerful social construct of the term “Arab Spring.” As a construct, the Arab Spring is instigated by multiple actors operating either collectively or independently, whose actions have varying intensities and impacts. They have achieved a “politics of the act,” borrowing from Lantieri and Žižek, that is “impossible” because it is breaking out of the politics of the enduring and the status quo (as cited in Glyn, 2006). What brought these actors together is the dream of better days and the hope for a better future. Although the future they strive for might be worlds apart, at some epic moment, a negotiation will occur, and a settlement that falls between extremes will be agreed upon. Meanwhile, the undeniable feat of the revolution is its making in individual

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or group actions, held together in order to express opinions that transform fear into patriotism and laissez-faire into activism. This metamorphosis from hitherto powerless inhabitants to powerful actors represents the paradigm shift enabled by the Arab Spring.

Building on a previous issue that addressed the role of new media during the Arab Spring (*IJoC*, Vol. 5, 2011), this special section begins a conversation about the genres of mobilization that have contributed to the political and sociocultural transformations of the Arab Spring. The articles aim to shed light on the cultural and mediated communication practices that have altered the heretofore dominance of political institutions while describing the mechanisms and expressions of resistance shaping the post-2011 Arab public sphere. Whether they are accomplished artists, experienced activists, or simply individuals who happen to have access to reach out to the world, activists have exerted disruption through a variety of cultural and creative soft methods along with more mainstream actions such as street occupations, protests, and sit-ins.

Battles against the system are still ongoing. Cultural differences have been at the heart of these political conflicts, tearing agents apart while each try to reorganize society according to specific beliefs and values. This is a common trait of social movements that begin culturally, says Castells (2012), and, according to Turner and Killian, they represent "the first stage of social reorganization around new values and expectations" (as cited in Lievrouw, 2011, p. 44). In 1962, Neil Smelser's *History of Collective Behavior* drew a sharp division between "norms-oriented movements" (such as social reform movements) and "value-oriented movements" (such as religious and revolutionary movements). Smelser made a further distinction between norm- and value-oriented movements and "panic responses," "craze responses," and "hostile outbursts." Wilkinson (1971) adds that "the word 'movement' and its structure of meanings itself reflects cultural movements, changes in thought and feelings of some significance" (p. 12).

The chain of events that led to the uprisings witnessed in the Arab region was initially spontaneous in nature: People assembled in the streets were driven by two things—liberation from the past, and aspiration for a new future irrespective of promoting any party or leader. These protests have not yet resulted in their desired objectives because of the political agendas articulated to identity that were injected into the public sphere. One such case involves identity debates—such as Islamism and the sectarian divisions between Shiites and Sunni, whether in Syria, Bahrain, or Lebanon—that transcend economic or security concerns. In Egypt, Tunisia, and, to some extent, Libya, political Islam has caused social, cultural, and political divisions and has introduced practices of violence and brutality. Whatever its structural causes, activism has become fragmented into divisive personal, group, and community initiatives that, at first, were socially inclusive (Castells, 2012).

### **Media Roles in Activism Activities**

More than ever before, social movements in this region are using a combination of the traditional mass media and new media. Digital communications (i.e., Internet, mobile phones, social networks, cameras, videos) have all been used at different moments in activism events and have been tied to their

progress. One can categorize the roles that digital communications have played in relation to the time of the activism.

Media and digitized communications (MDC) play a prefatory role during the birth stage of a cause. They enable awareness and carry narratives disturbing enough to constitute grounds for a cause. The flow of information enabled by MDC at this stage has both cognitive and affective functions. The first contributes by informing and raising consciousness about facts and events that will become the foundation of dissent and activism, whereas the second acts in provoking and nurturing affects toward them, such as frustration or anger. For instance, one may receive an e-mail or come across Web pages, videos, or pictures with information about abuse, reports about violations of human rights, and so on. An example of this could be accessing WikiLeaks documents reporting corruption, secret policy plans, and the like. Another example could be accessing websites reporting abuses and violations of human rights. Individuals at this stage have made an internal decision to overcome their fear and take a stand.

Thus, MDC have a prefatory role at the genesis stage of a cause.

MDC play a strategic role when used for sharing information, seeking support, or tracking funding, or when involved in evaluating risks and advocating for a cause. This is the stage where activists who have already believed in and adopted a cause decide to militate against its factors. At this stage, MDC enable a cognitive and behavioral function by providing support for both planning and action. Examples include sharing information about grounds for the cause, places to meet, and sit-ins; looking for support; or asking for donations. The strategic use of MDC is cognitive in nature because of the intentionality in the commitment to and engagement with the cause. This is in contrast to spontaneous action, when one shares what friends post on social networking sites (SNS), often without any cause-related intention.

Thus, MDC have a strategic role at the maturity stage of a cause.

MDC play an operational role in the implementation of actions of resistance. Here, MDC materially enable protest, while giving space and place for contestation. MDC are the platforms for the activity, thus taking the place of street protests, sit-ins, or any other nondigital manifestation of action. The nondigital activities here are neither substantial to the program nor to the running of the protests since the main activities take place through MDC. A typical example involves the hacking of websites for a cause. The Avaaz campaigning community ([www.avaaz.com](http://www.avaaz.com)) is another example that offers "real virtual space" by collecting online petitions in order to change policy. Avaaz is real because it is the locus envisioned for political action dedicated to causing a change. It is virtual because this locus exists within a digitized platform. The behavioral dimension of the involvement occurs because individuals take action within this lieu.

Thus, MDC have an operational role at the climax stage of a cause.

MDC play a conveyor role in expanding the reach of an action, collecting postaction support, and following up on the conduct of an action, regardless of the platform of contestation, whether digital or nondigital. This is the phase when activists promulgate the results of their activities through pictures,

videos, statistics, testimonials, and so on. Both the behavioral and affective dimensions are dominant here: Action occurs through the distribution of content via MDC, but affect (e.g., emotions and symbols) is also displayed and developed when reporting the success of the undertaken actions or if encountering counterresistance. A typical example of this would be the pride that comes with sharing images of a crowd after a street protest—or the anger that results if police brutality has occurred during the protest—all the while maintaining the agenda until the desired change occurs.

Thus, MDC have a conveyor role at the postscript stage of a cause.

These roles are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. MDC Roles in Protest Movements.**

MDC Roles	Activist-mediated involvement	Stage of the cause
Prefatory	Cognitive Affective	Genesis
Strategic	Cognitive Behavioral	Maturity
Operational	Behavioral	Climax
Conveyor	Behavioral Affective	Postscript

These functions are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily cumulative. MDC may play a prefatory role and a strategic role, whereupon militant action occurs offline in the guise of protests in the streets, sit-ins, strikes, and so on, thus skipping the operational role. In censored environments or in places where citizens lack freedom of expression and action, the operational function of MDC is increasingly important because it offers an efficient alternative to counter the apparatus of the repressive state. One example can be found in the theatrical performances of Syrian activists Malas brothers who play their sketches and reach out to their audience through YouTube. Others use their bodies as a manifestation of dissatisfaction and to express protest online. This is the case for Amina, who reproduced Femen movement acts by showing pictures of her naked breasts on her Facebook page as an expression of her disapproval of conservative Islam. These MDC roles were aggregated from the examples that will be discussed further. While they may have some limitations at this initial stage, they offer a framework for MDC functions in social movements that could be further developed.

Activism during the Arab upheavals has not been persistently bloody and violent; it has also been artistic and cultural. Reed (2005) argues that culture has several roles in social movements. Among these are informing, encouraging, empowering, harmonizing, documenting, and making room for pleasure. Resistance has proven to be emotional and sensational (in the case of plays, movies, or songs), comical (in the case of irony, parody, or political satires), rhetorical (in the case of poetry), and occasionally physical (in the case of body activism). Whatever form they take, acts of resistance have used MDC, which played prefatory, strategic, operational, and conveyor role(s). When Egyptians chose to override the presidency of Mohammad Morsi, they went to the streets, they walked among people, they handed them petitions and collected signatures, and they also used Facebook, Twitter, and the Tamarod website to solicit signatures. They have searched for legitimacy in the streets and in face-to-face interactions on mediated platforms.

Building on activists' mediated creative tactics, this introduction narrates stories about creativity and political mobilizations during the Arab uprisings. Although almost all actions are worth discussing and recounting, the limits of space have required that we select only some of the more impactful ones that we are aware of.<sup>2</sup> Distinguished contributors to this special section will further develop specific case studies comprised in this special section of the journal.

### **Irony, Parody, and Political Satires**

Environments of dictatorship and repression leave no space for political humor and irony. Critics and activists may use coded images and subtle messages to reach the audience and elude the censors, but these have proven to be risky exercises that critics are reluctant to use. In democratic realms, political humor is a participatory form of citizenship; it is used for criticizing, revealing truth, and sharing in and nurturing a healthy public debate. Although it might lack seriousness, delivered with a certain tone or arrangement, political irony is a manifestation of civic responsibility and an approach to reform in a time when political actors "make fools of themselves" (Beja & Charrin, 2013, p. 14).

Irony is often used to denounce irresponsible, mismanaged acts, processes, as well as controversies politicians strive to hide or affairs they want to project as truth. Humorists shed light on the reality of politics and politicians through caricatures, satires, and parodies. Irony mocks politicians' seriousness while introducing doubt, a strategy used by Socrates that was much disparaged by Athens and that led to his death sentence (Peters, 2013). At birth, irony is disruptive, threatening, and constructive (Charrin, 2013).<sup>3</sup> On January 13, 2011, via an online video, Lotfi Abdelli, a Tunisian humorist, used ironic metaphor to address then-president Ben Ali as "expired yogurt," referring to the length of his

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<sup>2</sup> We are short of space to talk about poetry, but works of Fouad Nagm, Tamim al-Barghouti, and Maram al-Masri (who wrote her poems exclusively inspired from Facebook posts and YouTube videos), as well as several others are certainly notable. Political satire in Syria with the famous YouTube episodes of *Top-Goon* or the diaries of pressure cooker, both amusing and energizing or galvanizing to Syrian resistance, should have had more space.

<sup>3</sup> Charrin's (2013) cycle of irony includes birth, growth, maturity, and decline.

term in office and calling on him to leave, using the term “*Dégage* [Go away!]!”<sup>4</sup> This is probably one of the first straightforward acts of political mockery of a president still in office in the history of modern Tunisian politics. The mockery was constructive and has galvanized energies; “*Dégage!*” was repeated during subsequent protests, both within Tunisia and in other countries where uprisings followed.

To be impactful, irony has to be followed with effective acts, says Charrin (2013)—otherwise it is vain—although Hutcheon (2000) finds that parody always has an impact. Benoit Peeters (2013) finds proof in the Arab Spring that political irony conserves all of its liberating power. Beja and Charrin (2013) note how impactful irony has been during the Arab Spring, “*Au moment des printemps Arabes, l’ironie sous ses diverses formes a évidemment exercé une fonction libératrice: elle a catalysé les énergies, elle a été la force des faibles, le terreau de leurs combats*” (p. 15).<sup>5</sup>

In Egypt, Bassem Youssef’s satirical show *el-Barnamag* [*The Program*] generated spectacular national popularity. His program, which was first streamed on YouTube, attracted more than three million weekly subscribers, and his YouTube channel is recognized as the most popular in Egypt. Youssef used *el-Barnamag* to criticize the way the media covered the Egyptian revolution. Youssef, who was present in Tahir Square in February 2011 as he helped injured activists, said he witnessed unfaithful and manipulated mainstream media coverage of the events. The large viewership of the webisodes and the confirmed success of *el-Barnamag* led to the program later being aired on the independent television channel ONTV and on the satellite channel CBC.<sup>6</sup> Youssef left his job as a surgeon and dedicated his time to writing political satires and parodies using mockery and sarcasm, a genre that he says Egyptians are not used to.<sup>7</sup> Humor has created a bond, an emotional connection, between Youssef and millions of Egyptians and other Arabs. Critical humor makes sense of serious and significant political problems while at the same time entertaining the audience. It is captivating because the audience engages with the content and realizes the necessity of political and social change; thus, it is emancipatory. À la Jon Stewart, Youssef’s show was a mixture of comedy that reviewed events in a satirical way and reported news and events that appeared in mainstream media while making them an object of ridicule.<sup>8</sup> One example is the media coverage that followed ex-president Morsi’s visit to Germany: Mainstream media had portrayed this event as successful and productive, while Youssef mocked the shortfall of this visit, as well as the

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<sup>4</sup> *Dégage* can be translated as “Go away!” or “Leave!”

<sup>5</sup> During the Arab spring, irony under its various forms has certainly had a liberating function: it has catalyzed energies; it has been the strength of the weakest, the ground for their fights (Author translation).

<sup>6</sup> At the time of this writing, the program was censored on CBC for noncompliance with the channel editorial lines, CBC reported. Media talk about state censorship for offence toward General el-Sisi and the state apparatus.

<sup>7</sup> For more about how Bassem Youssef describes his show, see interview with Megan Detrie from the *Rolling Stones Middle East* magazine at

[http://www.rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2384:bassem-youssefs-prime-time-revolution&catid=9:features&Itemid=3](http://www.rollingstoneme.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2384:bassem-youssefs-prime-time-revolution&catid=9:features&Itemid=3)

<sup>8</sup> John Stewart is an American political satirist who hosts *The Daily Show*, a show that appears on the Comedy Central channel; Stewart has hosted for 14 years as of this publication.

nonchalance of the ex-president toward protocols with chiefs of states and other diplomats. Youssef's vivid criticism of Islamists and political Islam made some public figures angry enough to take legal action against him. Youssef, however, claims to be neutral and objective; his second show of the last season on Egyptian television (Part 3) criticized the controversial events of June 30, questioned the military coup, and mocked the way el-Sisi's supporters idealized and glorified the general; the show has been suspended since then.

In Part 1, episode 3, of *el-Barnamag*, Youssef dedicates his show to the manifests of the Muslim Brotherhood at Cairo University with a sharp critique of the objectives of the protests, the marchers' rationales, the spokespersons' lies, and the foolish techniques used to persuade the protesters and the audience. For instance, while the spokespersons for the Brotherhood described the objective of the protest as support for the legitimacy of the president and the constitution, people said that they were in the street to protect Islam and secular Islamic law.

Youssef played a video broadcast live on Al Jazeera with the spokesperson of the Brotherhood saying they have two important news items to share with the crowd. First the spokesperson says that Bashar has died (which provoked enthusiasm from the protesters and made people prostrate, thanking God); the second piece of news is that Bashar has run away from Syria. In another script, while being mocking and cynical, Youssef also provides a testimonial from one of the spokespersons of the Muslim Brotherhood who testifies that Morsi is one of Prophet Mohammed's *Sahaba* [companions], that Morsi is the grandson of Omar ibn Al-Khattāb and Omar ibn Abd al-Aziz and was taken in hostage at that time (which would mean he was held hostage for 600 years). Youssef used cynicism and humor to show how foolish the information conveyed in those protests was, as people blindly trusted the narratives of irrational spokespersons.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See "We Are the Protest of Underwear" posted December 2012 on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEN8M87-xhU>



**Figure 1. Bassem Youssef in el-Barnamag.**

Ironical and satirical programs also transcend Tunisian media. TV shows such as *Labes* [*No Problem*] or radio sketches such as "Seyes Khouk" ["Go Easy on Your Brother"] are known for criticizing the state apparatus through a mimicking, satirical tone. A different genre, parody, is broadcast on Nessma TV. According to Denith, parody is "a relatively political imitation of a given cultural practice, one that employs exaggeration, often to the point of ludicrousness, to invite its audience to examine, evaluate, and re-situate the genre and its practices" (as cited in Baym, 2005, pp. 269–270). *Les Guignols du Maghreb* [Maghreb's Puppets] is a show with puppet characters that represent national and international political personalities. Inspired from *Les Guignols de l'Info* [News Puppets], a French political parody on the Canal+ channel, the puppets embrace political personalities as well as public figures and use playful roles that discredit their positions while highlighting their confusing political discourse.



**Figure 2. Tunisian puppets *Les Guignols du Maghreb*.**

In general, Waugh states that satire is “aimed at inconsistency and hypocrisy” while guided by the objective of pointing out “the deficiencies in certain human behavior and the social issues which result from them in such a way that they become absurd, even hilarious, which is therefore entertaining and reaches a wide audience” (as cited in Leroux & Riutort, 2013, p. 39). While the Tunisian talk show hosts at first received a lot of pressure from politicians and public institutions for producing such satirical programs, this tension has now eased and the programs continue to run. However, their constructive aspect seems to have diminished since they are no longer followed by “effective acts.” Thus, their threatening quality seems to have vanished.

### **Cartooning as Genre of Activism**

Cartoons appeal to the audience because of their conciseness and humor. They express people’s concerns and ambitions through brief, visual messages and are also “readily decipherable” (Anderson, 1980, p. 286). History has shown that cartoons can have impact and can be threatening to dominant regimes. Historian Pascal Dupuy (2012) says that cartoons have first appeared with Egyptians, and then moved to the Greeks and Romans. Cartoons first emerged anarchically, and one has to go back about

3,500 years in time to the era of the pharaohs to find early forms of politicized cartoons that portrayed Egypt as a cat and the European ruler as a mouse. Cartoons only became more organized and recognized as an art form in Egypt in the early 20th century (Abu Fadhl, 2012).

Caricatures use irony to criticize and reflect on the subject, whereas, cartoons can disrupt with the information they provide. Caricatures deconstruct the power of the dominant agents: Their prestige and fictitious untouchable images show their weaknesses, mismanagement, and corruption. Sigmund Freud defined caricatures as rebellion against authority through wit. Whether the cartoon is funny or not, the wit comes from the manifestation of resistance and from standing up against authority, which is of great merit in itself, according to Freud (as cited in Gokhale, 2013).

The February 25 Egyptian revolution helped ease the political repression of Egyptian cartoonists who could finally freely criticize abuses. This environment did not last for long; shortly after, conservative Islamists brought a court case against cartoonist Mustapha Hussein for mocking religion after he published a cartoon in the newspaper *Akhbar Al Youm* that mocked Salafis' appearance, beards, and dress.

Also in *Al Masry Elyoum*, the cartoonist Ahmad Nady portrayed the signatories of the "Al Azhar document to denounce violence" as naked and cheering with glasses of wine in their hands and with Morsi instructing his security forces to act as they please since there would no longer be political coverage of the protests. The document was severely criticized by activists who felt betrayed by the signatories, especially those activists who signed the document, for letting down protesters who would be unprotected from police violence. The chief editor was forced to apologize after receiving complaints, and the caricature was banned.



**Figure 3. Banned caricature that criticizes signatories of "Al-Azhar document to denounce violence."**

Censorship has not vanished in the region. After the optimism and hopes that came along with the revolutionary events of 2011, some media continue to tell cartoonists what they can and cannot portray, forcing them to be mindful of the prohibited themes. The Internet has come as a relief to these cartoonists, who find alternatives to traditional media in which to publish their "unacceptable" cartoons. Their message can still be disseminated thanks to MDC. As Egyptian cartoonist Okasha said,

My newspaper asked me few times to lighten up in order to pass this period and avoid clashes with the Brotherhood. However, my harsh satirical cartoon found its way to Facebook and other social media websites. Other cartoons were published on European cartoon websites and in American newspapers. (Khallaf, 2013, online)

The new technologies have not only helped spread the message of cartoonists and enabled them to connect with their audience but also contributed to the reshaping of the art of cartooning. Animation and interactivity, for instance, have brought new possibilities to the art of cartoons. When designing their cartoons, cartoonists are often mindful of electronic distribution; their artwork may end up not only in print publications but may also circulate and be stored on social networks, on websites, in videos, and in emails accessible from computers or mobiles and smartphones. Cartoonists themselves have developed blogs and websites where their audience can view their work. The Tunisian cartoonist Nadia Khiari started

creating cartoons on January 13, 2011, immediately after ex-president Ben Ali's last speech when he tried to comfort the population with the famous sentence "I understood you." Khaiara's character Cat Willis was born at that moment, and Willis now figures into all her caricatures and cartoons, which embrace both political leaders and Islamists. Khiari first shared her caricatures with her friends on Facebook and was subsequently overwhelmed with requests to follow Willis' adventures. In the week following Willis' debut, Khaiari received 900 Facebook friend requests; her pool of fans (to whom she sends daily cartoons through Facebook and Twitter) now counts more than 20,000. Through Willis, Khaiari said she combats phalocratic doctrines and religious conservatism that threaten today's Tunisian society (Meddeb, 2013). Technology has helped cartoons develop, modernize, reach out, and, most important, continue to disturb while playing both an operational role (during the climax of the Tunisian uprisings, for instance) and a conveyor role (during the postscript phase).



**Figure 4. Birth of Cat Willis after Ben Ali's statement "I understood you!"**

#### **When Breasts Speak for a Cause . . .**

The body has long been a vehicle for political dissent in the West, in the service of environmental, political, and economic causes, to name just a few. Lunceford (2012) writes that there has been an "explosion of nudity in political and protest action" (p. 2). In the Arab region, the body reflects the "untouchable." It is covered and protected in respect for religious beliefs and the ideal of virginity. Nudity and its referents are taboos; an example is the controversy and heated debate that the theatrical

Moroccan work *Diallyi*<sup>10</sup> has provoked in Moroccan society (Amine, 2013). Tattoos and body piercing are most often subject to condemnation and disapproval. "Pull your skirt down!" is a command that is very familiar to many little Arab girls. No wonder, then, that Amina's political statement of being topless, showing her bare breasts on Facebook, shook Tunisian society. Amina, 19 years old, used the materiality of her body to speak for women's freedom. She has challenged social mores and traditions to express her disapproval of a gendered society, one that is turning into a "religious dictatorship," she writes from prison in a letter she addressed to the Tunisian society in July 2013. She has also challenged the court when she disobeyed the requirement to wear a *sefsari*,<sup>11</sup> which is used in morals trials. Amina used her body as a canvas for activism with the intent to free women at a time when Islamists, the Nahdha ruling party, and their ambiguous relationship with the Salafis were perceived as a threat to Tunisian modernity after January 2011. Although the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi was a more dramatic sign of body materiality for a cause, Amina's topless appearance on the Internet has attracted almost the same national and international attention through MDC.<sup>12</sup> Contrary to Bouazizi's act, Amina was largely reprimanded rather than being supported for her demonstration. Even feminist movements and women's associations (such as the modern group Tunisian Association of Democratic Women) were divided between supporting Amina and condemning her act as a result of cultural pressure. The support Amina gained online was rather impressive; for instance, an online petition to protect Amina from Islamist threats was signed by 100,000 supporters. Her pictures spread across Facebook within seconds, and she has had hundreds of thousands of views on sites like YouTube, news websites, tweets, and blogs. However, only a single march was recorded in the streets of Tunisia in support of Amina to ask for her liberation from prison. Her Facebook page has been hijacked, and her posts have been replaced with religious content.

Daring, anticonformist Amina has mobilized unilaterally and independently at a time when most nudity protests are performed collectively in the streets. The Internet and SNS have played an operational role while giving Amina the confidence, courage, and ability to express her civil disobedience electronically. Although she took her topless picture in the privacy of her room, by posting it on Facebook, Amina has acted in public to give voice to the women she said she wanted to protect. The intensity of this act has succeeded in bring massive attention to her cause, and millions of people, whether with approval or disdain, have been reached and provoked to think about her act.

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<sup>10</sup> *Diallyi* is a play that was produced after a 16 years old girl who was forced to marry her rapist had committed suicide (in 2012). The play aimed to combat against patriarchal power structures and conservatism while underlying feminine difference. The play is a narrative of female sexuality.

<sup>11</sup> A Tunisian *sefsari* is a traditional one-piece garment covering the body from head to toe. It is required to be worn at morals trials and tribunals. Once the judge was seated, Amina abruptly removed the *sefsari* in a sign of disobedience, saying, "I did not do anything wrong to wear this."

<sup>12</sup> Most notably, other body materiality for a cause has been hunger strikes by prisoners or human rights and freedom of speech defenders.

### Resistance on Banderoles and Street Art

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the banderole has been used as a contestation tool and “an indispensable accessory for manifestation” (Artieres, 2013, p. 19).<sup>13</sup> Banderoles are rallying tools that protesters walk behind showing consensus and agreement while disclosing their identities.

The banderole’s role is to inform; it drives attention, but its most important role, argues Artieres (2013), is to structure the protest. The lead banderole unifies, although subgroups may follow with different banderoles. For instance, some Egyptian protesters held “We are all Khaled Said” placards, but their overall goal, that is, to ouster Mubarak, is consistent with that of the group. In the early days of the Arab Spring, banderoles called for democracy and the end of dictatorship. Protesters were united, and their calls to the regime singular: *erhal* [leave].



**Figures 5 and 6. Convergent meaning of banderoles in Egyptian protests.**

Images were also used as visual records, argues Lina Khatib (2013). They circulate among both nondigital and digital media, serving bloggers and television channels by documenting the spectacles. Whether recorded on mobile phones or digital cameras, images were used strategically and tactically. Khatib reports how a manual named “How to Protest Intelligently” advises people how to protest. The manual is distributed both online and offline and demonstrates “a high awareness of the visual message sent by the style of the protests, and the power of symbolism” (p. 145). The manual includes various tactics such as instructions for taking pictures of protesters carrying roses and flowers and heading to targets such as government buildings; other instructions include taking pictures of veiled and unveiled women to show the inclusiveness of the protests (p. 146).

Banderoles and placards have had to accommodate the hybrid media environment. New media platforms have introduced a new requirement to banderoles and street posters, which is digital visibility. Well aware that their banderoles and posters might go online and become distributed through a variety of online platforms when captured by cameras, mobile phones, or recorders, activists have had to consider

<sup>13</sup> In the original French text, “Accessoire indispensable de la manifestation.”

the size, color, and material of these banderoles in order to fit and be visible when captured by a device and subsequently digitized.

The street has become a place for defiance among civilians or between civilians and government. Street art documents and witnesses these conflicts. For instance, a group of Tunisian youth has produced a school mural reflecting the realities and challenges they are living through. Shortly thereafter, another group painted over the same mural, writing, "Do your prayer before your death" (Khadhraoui, 2012). This negotiation of space has continued, following the pattern do-undo-redo. It manifests the oppositional praxis of everyday life; each expresses dissent in a unique way and uses strategies and counterstrategies to communicate the meaning of their everyday lives through cultural productions (De Certeau, 1990). In Syria, graffiti has become a war on the walls since protesters and opponents to the regime expressed their support through symbolic and artistic productions. In Libya, political cartoonist Kais al-Hilali has turned Gaddafi into a subject of ridicule on Benghazi murals, when painting rats and mice, in reference to Gaddafi's speech in which he compared protesters to rats and mice.

Today, street art represents a rupture with the past, when citizens and artists were muted by force or self-censorship. This is an achievement of the revolution, manifested by its liberating power. Art is no longer limited to the approved circle of artists, under scrutiny of security agents. Rather, it has become accessible to people who can react to one another and to their daily lives. Scrutiny might still exist in certain places and at certain times, but there is evidence of resistance to censorship from the liberated populations and a commitment to protect the liberty of their cultural productions.<sup>14</sup> Artists are constructing a symbolic space in which visual icons are sending political and social messages and the aesthetic is peripheral.

### **Music for Change: Freeing Rap**

Music is strongly connected to the events of the Arab uprising. Emel Mathlouthi, a Tunisian singer whose songs were banned in Tunisia before the revolution, chanted "*Kilmti Horra*" ["My Word Is Free"] in a demonstration before the ouster of Ben Ali (Arcos, 2013).<sup>15</sup> Mathlouthi's activist repertoire was not well known in Tunisia because of a government ban, and she confesses that she moved closer to the Tunisian audience when she moved to Paris thanks to the Internet, which provided a channel through which her audience could listen to her songs and watch her video clips. The Internet, playing an operational role, was the point of contact between her and the Tunisian public that she could not reach during Ben Ali's rule. Mathlouthi's songs were repeated in the Tunisian protests, and they have also traveled to Tahrir Square.

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<sup>14</sup> One case in point is the events at El-Abdellia art gallery in Tunisia where Islamists put up a fuss because of some paintings they claimed offensive to Islam.

<sup>15</sup> Emel Mathlouthi was also known for the song "*Tounes Ye Miskina*" ["Pitiful Tunisia"] that was produced in 2005, but banned from Tunisian broadcast channels. Since then, she has lived in Paris, where she says she is free to develop her repertoire. See <http://www.npr.org/2013/01/05/168627909/emel-mathlouthi-voice-of-the-tunisian-revolution>.

Rap singer El Général was the first to post a straightforward rap song in which he addressed the president about government abuses, corruption, and the misery of the population.<sup>16</sup> In December 2010, before Bouazizi's self-immolation, El Général uploaded his song "*Rais Lebled*" ["Mr. President"] on YouTube; shortly after, and with the acceleration of the events after Bouazizi's self-immolation, El Général wrote and uploaded a second song, "*Tounes Bledna*" ["Tunisia Our Country"], which also called for resistance and activism. El Général's Facebook page was blocked, and he was arrested by the state police. "*Rais Lebled*" was chanted abroad thanks to the Internet, which gave El Général the ability to reach a global audience. *Time* magazine listed him one of the 100 most influential people of 2011. The subversive rap music genre has developed in the region since the turmoil, and several followers of El Général, such as the Yemeni Mohammed Al Adroei, have emerged and continue their revolution.<sup>17</sup>

A cultural element within the larger hip-hop movement, inherited from Afro-diasporic communities in America, rap music has kept its style when practiced by Arab youth in colloquial Arabic; the cultural expressions used by Arab rappers also include dance moves, fashion and dress patterns, song themes, body movements, and tones, all of which contribute to the hip-hop spectacle (Rose, 2008). New media has not only enabled the distribution and spread of rap music, it has contributed to the creation of the resistance and the revolutionary Arab spirit. When El Général was arrested because of his song, news of his arrest covered social media and blogs. Even those who did not know the song were directed to YouTube to watch and listen. As a result, the number of downloads of the video has doubled. The inciting call for freedom and resistance has touched millions of people who watched the video and shared it, which resulted in sit-ins in the streets, protests for El Général's release from jail, and calls for the cessation of censorship.

Arab rappers use social networks to distribute their music because of the small market size. When Tunisian rapper Alaa Yacoubi, known as Weld el 15, uploaded his song criticizing the police force and their abuse of citizens, the video registered 800,000 views. He was arrested by the police while performing on stage during a summer festival and subjected to violent treatment. Rappers have revolted against lack of freedom of expression and abuses that have continued even under the new Islamic political regime.

### **Blogging and Its Becoming . . .**

One hundred sixty Tunisians set themselves on fire and died between December 2010 and March 2013 (Agence France Presse, 2013). In each case, the tragedies were uploaded to the Web, social networks, and traditional media. However, no protest followed; no one went to the street expressing solidarity or anger and calling for change as when Mohammad Bouazizi self-immolated, despite the fact that unemployment and the economic crisis have both worsened since January 2011 (Lagarde, 2013), leaving the country in threatening conditions

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<sup>16</sup> El Général's real name is Hamada Ben Amor.

<sup>17</sup> This music is in contrast to the commercial, apolitical rap music that existed before the revolution.

In Egypt, we have witnessed the supremacy of military power and a quasireturn to the prerevolution regime. Protests are still taking place, but online activism has become peripheral. In Syria, blogger Razan Ghazzaoui testifies that the blogosphere has no influence at all, and even if protesters take pictures, they will not be uploaded on blogs. (Jeune Afrique, 2011, online) One reason for this is the extreme government control exerted over the population, which is driving their fear.

The political situations in these countries have changed; they share fewer similarities today compared to before the revolution. Several scholars have discussed the bloggers' contribution to the so-called success of the regime change (see the Features section in *IJoC*, 5, 2011). We will not go back to the rise of the Arab blogosphere and its role in the Arab revolution; however, we will look at its development and evolution. The example of Tunisia is interesting because of its pending political status, but also because of the social and popular frustration, which is similar to prerevolution time.<sup>18</sup> As expressed above, the population's economic condition is worsening and social violations are occurring, and one could see grounds being laid for serious protests.

Where is the blogosphere in all this? Where is the voice of the bloggers who were the recognized drivers of the revolution to the point where they were awarded a Noble Prize?<sup>19</sup> Elements of answers can be found in network theory.

The work of Davis (2009) discussing the role of blogs in American politics is very interesting to examine. Davis refers to the agenda setting theory and argues that bloggers have the ability to affect what people think. Bloggers have agendas, take sides, make alliances, and "seek to place those agendas before the public and compel other players to address them" (pp. 12–13). Davis also recognizes that bloggers have to go beyond the blogosphere to influence the larger political environment. Tunisian bloggers were very active doing so during the revolution. They were influential both internally and externally (i.e., *Nawaat* with the distribution of WikiLeaks, *Tunisian Girl* with reporting from Sidi Bouzid, etc.). After the revolution, they gained access to the media, they were involved in politics, they were offered jobs in the government, and so on. So it is legitimate to expect a more active role from bloggers working the 2013 political crisis.

The network perspective on the media suggests that there are links between producers, consumers, tools, and content "Using a network perspective, researching the media refers to studying linkages and relationships between tools, content, producers and consumer" (Howard, 2011, p. 8, italics in original). This linkage was very strong at the dawn of the Arab protests, and researchers have pointed out that the network system has constructively helped in driving people to the street and, thus, influenced the outcome of the protests (Achcar, 2012, Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011, Castells, 2012).

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18 At the time of this writing, the ruling party and the opposition entered into another political crisis (disagreement about a new government, the ANC has suspended its work, etc.).

19 Lina Ben Mhenni, a Tunisian blogger, was nominated for the Nobel Prize for her blog *Tunisian Girl*.

There is reason to believe that links under the network have been disrupted and that this disruption has occurred between nodes. The bond that linked actors for collective action has weakened. The reciprocity and mutuality principles have been relaxed. The singular claim of the revolution has been transformed, and actors have become divided based on their cultural capital, while the network's "modes of coordination" have also been disrupted, leading to a breakdown of the social capital (Diani, in press).<sup>20</sup> Ipso facto, activists have lost their solidarity and the unity that they shared before the revolution, a time when they had one enemy and one common objective: to free their country from dictatorship. Recent political and religious divisions have engendered partisanship that has affected the strength of the network between its members and led to its vulnerability. Political affiliations have divided bloggers, who have embraced different visions. The shared imagination in terms of Appadurai (1996) that moved them to collective action in the 2010–2011 revolts has now become entwined in different meanings. Interviews with Tunisian bloggers that we conducted in Tunis during July 2013 have revealed that not only have bloggers become politicized, they have also become subsumed competition that has affected their relationships. Bloggers became stars and experienced a certain divination reserved for cinema stars, in Edgar Morin's sense of the term. Bloggers are under the gaze of the broadcast media and on stage in national and international conferences and seminars, talking about their contribution to the success of the revolution. Jealousy, rivalry, and competition came between them (Abid, 2011). Some became better positioned than others, whereas they once were united: The media, the spotlight, and the "star system" has divided them, creating a discomfort and introducing friction that has poisoned their prior unity.

This rupture does not weaken or alter how we approach the revolution from a network perspective; rather it is a manifestation of the network's links between agents who work constructively when they are healthy.<sup>21</sup> Any crack between these links renders fragile the network society. Both change and variations in the goals or agendas may occur, causing a structural transformation in social capital. But while waiting for spring, one must trust that a negotiation will occur at some point and that an equilibrium will be reached in favor of a harmonious society.

### **Introducing the Articles**

Mohammed el-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis, in "Blogging Against Violations of Human Rights in Egypt: An Analysis of Five Political Blogs," their contribution to this special section, examine instances when Egyptian blogs worked together to protest violations of human rights and limitations to freedom. Looking at five political blogs dealing with violations of human rights and limitations on freedom, the authors detail the blogs' contributions to the political mobilization in Egypt. A spectrum of comments on these blogs enabled the authors to conceptualize how the blogs served as a form of public mobilization, a means to document government violations of human rights and limitations of freedom, and a way to provide online deliberation on political change.

Although he highlights the potential of Twitter as a tool for liberation in "#Hashtags for Change:

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<sup>20</sup> For cultural and social capital, refer to Castells (2012).

<sup>21</sup> These early reflections about the network disruption in the Tunisian case are being developed by the author in another work in progress.

Can Twitter Generate Social Progress in Saudi Arabia,” Ifran Chaudhry discusses the limitations of social networks as tools for mobilizing people. In his contribution to this special section, he examines the extent to which Twitter can introduce social change for women in Saudi Arabia. He argues that the culture of repression and surveillance implemented by the government and protected by its male-ruled society inhibits women’s aspirations for liberalization despite the broad adoption of social media, in particular Twitter, by Saudi females. Although the latter defy state authorities and broadly engage in Twitter campaigns such as the #women2Drive campaign, transformations on the ground—within urban space—have yet to occur.

Other articles in this special section contribute to the discussion about the genres of political mobilizations and shed light on the practices of activists in defying the apparatus of the state in order to achieve political change and social transformation.

Ahmed Al Rawi’s article, “The Arab Spring and the Online Protests in Iraq,” documents another genre of political mobilization, one in which citizens’ anger was aimed at public services and corruption. The study argues that the government’s efforts to obstruct this contention proved inefficient thanks to the online activism of Iraqis, both in Iraq and the diaspora, who used YouTube videos extensively.

The article “Egypt’s Unfinished Revolution” identifies signs of the revolution’s progress and argues that the Internet is both form and content that work cohesively in a mutual relationship. Authors Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander locate the key dynamics of media production and consumption by revolutionary activists in the shifting balance of forces between revolution and counterrevolution on the wider political stage. The authors use case studies grounded in revolution and counterrevolution to show that media used by revolutionary movements are structured as organizations to express collective voice both online and offline.

In “Mediating the Discourse of Democratic Uprising in Egypt: Militarized Language and the ‘Battles’ of Abbasiyya and Maspero,” authors Mervat Youssef, Heba Arafa, and Anup Kumar discuss a common genre of political activism: street protests that turned into violent confrontations between protesters, security forces, and, ultimately, the military. Activists and journalists alike created tension by using an uncommon repertoire when discussing and reporting the events of Abassiya and Maspero. The authors discuss how clashes with army forces were interpreted with a military narrative borrowed from familiar regional conflicts and examine the role media narratives play in the continuity of discontinued clashes.

Nermin Allam introduces the concept of virtual dissidence as a form of contention in the Arab democratic uprisings, in contrast to social media activism that she argues is vague and fails to capture the complexities that are involved. The author adds virtual dissidence to the modular repertoire of contention between governments and dissidents in “Blesses and Curses: Virtual Dissidence as a Contentious Performance in the Arab Spring’s Repertoire of Contention.”

“The Cultural Logic of Visibility in the Arab Uprisings” uses an articulation between media and space to discuss perceptions of the way media structured the uprisings. Through case studies, Hatim el-

Hibri uses the conjunctural analysis approach to reveal strategies and tactics of visibility characterizing the events.

### **Concluding Remarks. Artistic Resistance, Digital Technologies, and Effectiveness**

The Arab uprisings have displayed creative strategies of resistance and mobilization, not the least of which are artistic. Artist Tourki confirms that "we are living a real artistic revolution" (2013, p. 67); actor and producer Heddaoui, notes that being an artist today is already a revolutionary act, and already politically incorrect (Ben Hamadi, 2013, online).<sup>22</sup>

How effective resistance is may be measured by the occurrence of change or by how much activism it triggers on the ground. Artistic resistance, either online or offline, may also be assessed by how much censorship and how many arrests and violations of artists' rights it engenders. Assessing resistance is no longer limited to street counts or arrests. When discussing the underground culture through the theatrical art of the Malas twins, who performed from their bedroom when in Syria, Ziter writes that "attending such a theatre, whether being tens in the bedroom or thousands at computers is the equivalent of taking part in a demonstration" (2013, p. 146). Syrian Ahmad and Mohammad Malas reached out to hundreds of thousands of their public through YouTube and Facebook; both networks helped them design their combat and gain "confidence" (ibid., p. 138). And despite the threats they have received, the Malas twins continue their activism thanks to new technologies. As they write, "we persist in resistance because new technologies have given us new options and have transformed who we understand ourselves to be" (ibid., p. 138).

One cannot talk about creativity and the effectiveness and drawbacks of artistic political resistance in the Arab region without mentioning Naji al-Ali, a Palestinian cartoonist and the creator of Handala, the icon of Palestinian political resistance and defiance in the Arab world, decades before the Arab uprisings. Naji al-Ali's assassination in 1987 is proof that creativity creates disruption. More recently, in 2011, proregime militias killed Libyan political cartoonist Kais El-Hilali for painting a disturbing mural.

Controversies introduced by Bassem Youssef's *el-Bernameg* also speak to the effectiveness of artistic and creative activism; journalist Rania Khallaf (2013), for instance, considers that *el-Bernameg* "was a main factor in the change of the second wave of revolution that climaxed on June 30" (para. 1). Many Egyptians share her position and agree to the sociopolitical impact of the program as the following cartoons testify to this phenomena.

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<sup>22</sup> In the original French text, and while commenting on the arrest of the Tunisian rappers, Heddaoui says "être un artiste c'est être politiquement incorrect" and "être un artiste c'est déjà un acte révolutionnaire".



**Figure 7. The Bassem Youssef's effect (1).**

Translation: First, left: "It's making a lot of trouble." Second, right: "The constitution??" First: "No, Bassem Youssef." (By Mostafa Salem. Published in *Al-Shorouk* Newspaper, September 10, 2013. Available at <http://oumcartoon.tumblr.com>)



**Figure 8. The Bassem Youssef effect (2).**

Translation: "The son of a bitch divorced me mammy, because he caught me watching Bassem Youssef behind his back!" (By Amro Selim. Published in *Al Shorouk newspaper*, December 27, 2012. Available at <http://oumcartoon.tumblr.com>.)

Activists proved that creativity helped entertain while maintaining the spirit of the citizens, and kept audiences abreast of what was happening. While waiting for the Arab Spring, we have examined some practices and manifests of resistance to help us understand the cultural achievements of the Arab uprisings and how new technologies have helped Arab activists in this journey.

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