

Translating Revolution: Hannah Arendt in Arab Political Culture¹

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“Notre héritage n’est précédé d’aucun testament”
René Char²

In the spring of 2012, the venerable Cairene magazine of cultural criticism, *Fusul*, issued a call for papers dedicated to the revolutions that swept across Egypt and the Arab world.³ *Fusul* was founded by the Egyptian writers association in 1980 and soon reinvented the Arab cultural scene through its wide-ranging engagement with global intellectual trends.⁴ Over the years, its editors-in-chief – ‘Izz al-Din Isma‘il, Gaber Asfour, recently Egyptian minister of culture, and Huda Wasfi – made the magazine the entry point for a new generation of Arab intellectuals into trends in literary criticism and critical theory. Translations of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Frederic Jameson, Terry Eagleton and Wolfgang Iser and many others introduced Arabic readers to recent developments in post-structuralism, Russian formalism, deconstruction, reception theory, as well as Marxist and psychoanalytical interpretations of literature.⁵

Fusul had not been a place for translating Hannah Arendt’s works during President Mubarak’s long rule. So why did a translation of her 1963 book *On Revolution* get pride of place in this seminal issue over other classics on revolution?⁶ And why did the editors choose the 1964 translation by Khayri Hammad over the much more recent translation by Atallah al-Wahhab (2008)?⁷ Perhaps *Fusul* chose Khayri Hammad’s translation of *On Revolution* because of his enormous output of translations in general and his critical com-

1 An different version of this essay appeared as “Reading Hannah Arendt in the Middle East: Preliminary Observations on Totalitarianism, Revolution and Dissent,” in Manfred Sing and Thomas Scheffler (eds.), *Rethinking Totalitarianism and its Arab Responses* (Beirut: Orient Institute, 2012), and is accessible at http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/orient-institut-studies/1-2012/hanssen_hannah-arendt. The author would like to thank John Hayden, Mazen Masri, Mai Taha and for their help and criticism on both versions.

2 Quoted by Hannah Arendt in [1963], *On Revolution*, introduction by Jonathan Schell (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 207; and in [1961], *Between Past and Future*, introduction by Jérôme Kohn (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 3.

3 “Al-thawra al-masriyya: dirasat wa shahadat, 2011,” *Fusul: dirasat naqdiyya* (Cairo: al-hay’at al-masriyya al-‘amma lil-kitab), 80 (2012), 31-300. I thank Amr Said at the Markaz al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya in Beirut for pointing me to this reprint of Hammad’s Arendt translation in *al-Fusul*.

4 Sabry Hafez, “Edward Said in Contemporary Arabic Culture,” in A. Iskander and H. Rustom (eds.), *Edward Said: Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 170-90.

5 Hafez, “Edward Said,” 180.

6 “Hannah Arendt, *Ra’y fi al-thawra*, translated by Khayri Hammad,” *Fusul* 80 (2012), 175-225.

7 *Hannah Arendt, Fi al-thawra*, translated by Attallah al-Wahhab (Alexandria: Muntada Maktaba al-Iskandariyya, 2006).

mentary on Arendt's interpretation in particular. Hammad is still revered by those Arab intellectuals who were active in the 1960s, and he appears to represent something of an inspiration to *Fusul's* translation intellectual project.⁸

Fusul's editors reprinted only the second chapter of *On Revolution* and replaced Hammad's own critical introduction, with the following, brief words: "we think that [Arendt's text] benefits us in our potential to achieve freedom and illuminate the evolving ambiguities with similarly complex situations" in history.⁹ In "The Meaning of Revolution," Arendt sets out her 'undisciplined' views on revolutions. Many revolutions fatefully mixed equality and the social question with politics.¹⁰ Even though modern revolutions replaced the ancient cycles of renewal with radical beginnings they also imagined returning to a better past and a more authentic order. In this sense, the Egyptian political theorist Mona Ghobashi asserted that "[t]he genius of the Egyptian revolution is its methodical restoration of the public weal."¹¹ What would have resonated with *Fusul's* readers after the successful overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak was Arendt's observation that revolutions do not necessarily start out as fully-fledged revolutions but can quickly become so.¹² In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria, commemorative events, reform protests or prisoner-release demonstrations turned into outright campaign to overthrow the regime – "*al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam*," in the catchy Arabic revolutionary refrain – only after brutal and botched regime responses.

The event that epitomised the Egyptian revolutionary acts of defiance or spontaneity perhaps more than any other during the 18 days of *Tahrir* Square in Cairo, was the battle of Qasr al-Ayni Bridge on January 28, 2011 during which unarmed protestors, singing the Tunisian national anthem, locked arms and overcame the armoured vehicles of the Ministry of the Interior.¹³

Many veterans of the revolutionary moment of the so-called Arab Spring can relate to Arendt's warning that liberation from oppression alone is not enough to establish the reign of freedom. She distinguished liberation "which does not require a transformation of the political order [from] freedom, which necessitates the formation of a new, or rediscovered, form of government."¹⁴ It is this freedom that has proven so elusive since the overthrow of the old regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Yemen and the counter-revolutions, especially in Egypt, while in countries like Syria and Bahrain, the liberation struggle is still on-going.

Even though Arendt did not engage with Arab politics in her lifetime, she was one of the very few anti-totalitarian philosophers whose critical vision included empathy with

8 Hafez, "Edward Said," 179-80.

9 Khayri Hammad, *al-Ra'y fi al-thawrat*, annotated translation of Arendt, *On Revolution* (Cairo: al-Dar al-qawmiyya li al-taba'a wa al-nashr, 1964), 9.

10 Arendt insists that "violence itself is incapable of speech" and therefore inimicable to politics. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 9. Yet, "violence is no more adequate to describe the phenomenon of revolution than change; only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom can we speak of revolution." *Ibid.*, 25.

11 Mona Ghobashi, "The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution," in David McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers (eds.), *The Arab Revolts: Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 39.

12 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 27-36.

13 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBtYLBQPRGQ>

14 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 25.

Palestine and illuminated the pernicious effects of imperialism on the non-west and the West alike (the “boomerang effect of imperialism in the homecountry”).¹⁵ Unlike other liberals of her age – most notably her misogynist nemesis, Isaiah Berlin who, along with his loyal biographer, Michael Ignatieff, functions as a counterpoint on liberty in this essay – Arendt time and again stepped out of what one of her most productive Israeli readers considers a Panglossian ‘liberalism of fear.’¹⁶ She was hardly innocent of some of the condescension that so defined Berlin’s and many other salon liberals’ blindness, if not outright hostility, to the world beyond European culture. Whatever her shortcomings, Arendt experimented, and she raised painful questions that her fellow travelers shied away from and that more recent ‘lesser evilists’ abandoned.¹⁷

The Arab uprisings over the last two years appear not to have brought the desired new beginnings. But they have certainly severely challenged the old ways. The dusk has not yet fallen on the ‘Arab Spring,’ and it is too soon for Hegel’s owl of Minerva to spread its wings. But we can commit to the historical record the spontaneous historical moment in which the Arab calls for bread, dignity and social justice upstaged the lesser-evil conventions in liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes.¹⁸ Compared to the nightmare scenario unfolding in Syria, the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions initially seemed complete. In both countries’ post-revolutionary elections established Islamist parties ended the revolutionary moment. But since then, many Egyptian intellectuals of the secular left have invoked Arendt’s work on Nazi Germany to warn of the violent counter-insurgent measures taken by the “Supreme Council of the Armed Forces” (SCAF) and of the Muslim Brotherhood’s subtle but systematic power grab.¹⁹ More radical activists advocate revolutionary struggle against the persistence of economic and juridical violence.²⁰ Women’s groups symbolically wielding menacing kitchen-knives demonstrate against an upsurge of sexual harassment and rape under President Mohammad Morsi’s watch.²¹ In Tunisia, too, the Islamist government has created an atmosphere of permissibility to intimidate women and assassinate political activists.²²

15 Hannah Arendt [1951], *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 155.

16 Eyal Weizman, *The Least of all Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza* (London: Verso, 2011).

17 See, for example, the late Christopher Hitchens: “this ongoing polemic takes place between the anti-imperialist left and the anti-totalitarian left. In one shape or another, I have been involved – on both sides of it – all my life. And, in the case of any conflict, I have increasingly resolved it on the anti-totalitarian side.” “From 9/11 to the Arab Spring,” *The Guardian*, September 9, 2011.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/sep/09/christopher-hitchens-911-arab-spring>)

18 For the classic text on spontaneity in revolution, see Frantz Fanon, “Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses,” *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1990), 85-118. Unlike Arendt, but like Luxemburg, Fanon insisted that revolutionary spontaneity required meticulous preparation. See Alex Levant, “Rethinking Spontaneity: Re-Reading Luxemburg through Benjamin, Gramsci and Thompson,” *Critique* 40:3 (Aug 2012), 341-61.

19 Mona Abaza, “The banality of evil: thinking Hannah Arendt,” October 15, 2011

(<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/24196.aspx>); Khaled Fahmy, “Weimar or 18th Brummaire?” March 16, 2013 (<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/66962.aspx>).

20 Philip Rizk, “Egypt: The necessity of revolutionary violence,” April 7, 2013, available at <http://roarmag.org/2013/04/egypt-violence-revolution-state-collapse/>. The impunity of Mubarak’s police and army was upheld by President Morsi and under the current Sisi regime, Mubarak can expect release from prison altogether.

21 On grassroot resistance to misogyny in Egypt, follow the group “Operation Anti Sexual Harassment” on facebook.com.

22 Leyla Dakhli, “A Betrayed Revolution? On the Tunisian Uprising and the Democratic Transition,” March 5, 2013 (http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10463/a-betrayed-revolution_on-the-tunisian-uprising-and).

My article's approach to the Arab uprisings takes its cue from Arendt's account of the Hungarian revolution of 1956. In spite of its brief duration, she considered those "twelve long days" so powerful and, indeed, 'eternal' because they were the first instantiation of the very possibility of defeating a seemingly unassailable regime. Many of her emancipatory concepts – such as the power of spontaneity and the exercise of freedom – derived from her purpose to 'curate' the legacy of Budapest in 1956: "This event cannot be measured by success or defeat; its greatness rests in, and is secured by, the tragedy which unfolded in it."²³

Revolutionary Traveling Theory

Arendt's *On Revolution* is controversial for its almost counter-intuitive comparison of the American, French, Russian and Hungarian revolutions and her embrace of council democracy. Arendt claimed that the French Revolution failed to produce freedom because it tried to solve the social question by political means, which led, like Bolshevism, to a reign of terror. But she is also wary of the dictates of capitalism, which went hand-in-glove with liberalism and corrupted revolutions even as "purely political" as the American one. As Arendt put it, the American Dream's "fatal passion for sudden riches" and its "endless consumption" betrayed the revolutionary spirit "of the founders of the republic."²⁴

For a political philosopher who was so keen on transmitting the Western intellectual tradition in the aftermath of Nazism, and for whom political responsibility was so important, it is perhaps surprising how invested Arendt was in the unpremeditated political gesture. Arendt viewed the twelve days of council democracy in Soviet Hungary as a heroic revival in the lost tradition of revolutionary workers, soldiers, and municipal committees that popped up again and again in history: in Thomas Jefferson's ward system; during the Paris Commune of 1871; during the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917; and in the central European council republics after World War I. None of these "councils had [any] pre-revolutionary precedent in history," Arendt exclaimed and explained: "It is precisely the absence of continuity, tradition, and organized influence that makes the sameness of this phenomenon so striking. The outstanding characteristic of these councils is their spontaneity." What distinguished these councils and committees was that "party membership played no role."²⁵

Many scholars have felt uncomfortable with these radical thoughts on democracy. Some have all too hastily questioned their validity and the long-term workability of Arendt's theory of council democracy.²⁶ Few have investigated where Arendt picked up this idea in

See also McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, part "I. Tunisia," 13-56.

²³ Hannah Arendt, *Die ungarische Revolution und der totalitäre Imperialismus* (Munich: Piper, 1958), 7.

²⁴ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 129-30.

²⁵ Arendt, *On Revolution*, 253, 54. Luxemburg argued that "the element of spontaneity plays such a predominant part [in the 1905 revolution] not because the Russian proletariat are 'uneducated' but because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them." Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader* (New York: Monthly Review, 2004), 198.

²⁶ John F. Sitton, "Hannah Arendt's Argument for Council Democracy," *Polity* 20:1 (1987), 80-100 is unconvinced by her idea, while recent critical scholarship on conflict resolution has rediscovered Arendt's deliberative and agonistic politics: Alexander Hirsch, *Theorizing Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Agonism*,

the first place. It turns out that Arendt's ideas on council democracy were translations of her vision of a binational future for Palestine which she first articulated in her regular column "This Means You!" for *Aufbau*, the New York-based newspaper for German-speaking Jewry.²⁷ Abhorred by the prospects of the creation of a Jewish state at the expense of the native Arab population, she invoked the lost local and municipal traditions of government, where councils would "become the sites of Jewish-Arab cooperation."²⁸ As she put it, it would have the benefit of avoiding the "troublesome majority-minority constellation, which is insoluble by definition."²⁹ Arendt is quick to assert that this form of urban democracy is by no means a new idea in Palestine. She may have had an exaggerated view of what were clearly elite institutions. Nevertheless, municipal councils did develop into effective checks on state authority in late-Ottoman cities and towns.³⁰ The political experience of respecting the other's proximity survived the Mandate's divide-and-rule and settler colonialism. But then Zionist "acts of terror aimed precisely at nodes of neighbourly relations between Arabs and Jews [in places like] Haifa and Tiberias."³¹

The fact that history and international law has not been kind to Palestinians and buried Arendt's alternative vision for Palestine under the rubble of a six-decades-long Israeli occupation, raises the issue of the efficacy of either violent or non-violent Palestinian resistance.³² Here, I am more concerned with the conceptual question of the afterlives of ideas and theories once the original context and constellation have vanished. Edward Said has called this process "traveling theory."³³ I find it useful in order to problematize the binary between assimilation and incommensurability of liberal democratic models. Whether western pundits or Islamist ideologues make such claims, both put the uprisings into a place of perpetual derivation and inauthenticity.³⁴ Days before the abdication of President Mubarak, I have made the argument that we were witnessing an attempt at decolonizing the concept, history and practice of democracy and that the longevity of authoritarianism was western democracies' gift to the Arab world.³⁵ In this spirit, "Translating Revolution" is as much about articulating the place of Arendt in the Arab world as it is about how the Arab uprisings can reenergize Arendt's work and more generally, posit her insurgent liberal thought against the prevalent liberalism of fear.

Restitution & Repair (London: Routledge, 2011).

27 Hannah Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland [There is Still Time]," in *Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Cohen (New York: Schocken, 1994).

28 Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (London: Sage, 1996), 42.

29 Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland," 400.

30 Jens Hanssen, "History, Heritage and Modernity: Cities in the Muslim World Between Destruction and Reconstruction," *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 6, ed. by R. Hefner (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 544-548.

31 Arendt, "To Save the Jewish Homeland," 397.

32 Ibrahim Shikaki, "What is the 'right' type of resistance?" July 6, 2011

(<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/06/201162895553754742.html>). See also, Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011).

33 Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226-47.

34 Atef Said, "Imperialist Liberalism and the Egyptian Revolution," April 13, 2013

(<http://www.egyptindependent.com/opinion/imperialist-liberalism-and-egyptian-revolution>).

35 Jens Hanssen, "D-Day in Cairo: Decolonizing Democracy," February 7, 2011

(<http://www.stabroeknews.com/2011/features/in-the-diaspora/02/07/d-day-in-cairo-decolonizing-democracy/>).

Said's "Traveling Theory" initially held that radical theoretical insights lose their "original power" when stripped of their organic experience, open-ended context and revolutionary potential. For example, Georg Lukacs' theories of reification and totality were an outgrowth of Budapest's short-lived revolutionary democracy in 1919, a critique of Marxist economic determinism as well as a battle cry to overcome class alienation. But radical ideas either become new dogma or end up in a foretold and reconciled synthesis in academia. More pernicious, however, was the uncritical way in which Michel Foucault's epistemological critique of power, which Said himself had relied on heavily in his *Orientalism*, reifies the status quo. At best it "derives from his attempt to analyze working systems of confinement from the inside," and at worst from the resignation to ubiquitous power of counterinsurgent discipline.³⁶ But, as Said came to realize later, original theoretical insights can also have more radical afterlives than their original thinkers envisaged or come to tone down later in life. Frantz Fanon's radicalization of Lukács's theoretical resolutions was Said's case in point. In "Concerning Violence," Fanon declares that in the binary world of colonizer/colonized "No conciliation is possible."³⁷ The native struggle for recognition is a fight to the death "[f]or neither the colonist nor the colonized behaves as if subject and object might some day be reconciled."³⁸

Whether Fanon read Lukács or - more likely - developed his ideas of subject-object dialectics out of his own experience of French racism and participation in the Algerian revolution, his critique of colonial violence was so powerful that even Hannah Arendt could not bring herself to reject categorically the violence he espoused in *The Wretched of the Earth*.³⁹ Arendt's "On Violence" was an adjunctive to her earlier essay in defence of "Civil Disobedience" and generally takes a dim, Camusian view of the violence - especially subaltern violence - of the militant students' irresponsible glorification of it and Fanon's "rhetorical excesses."⁴⁰ She may have been blind to the structural and epistemic violence of colonialism.⁴¹ But she was anxious to distinguish "authentic" from gratuitous acts of violence. In a footnote to a passage aimed at Sorel's and Sartre's apparent celebration of violence per se, Arendt conceded that

"Fanon, himself, is much more doubtful about violence than his admirers. ... Fanon knows about the 'unmixed and total brutality (which), if not immediately combatted, invariably leads to the defeat of the movement within a few weeks."⁴²

36 Edward Said, "Traveling Theory Reconsidered," in R. Polhemus and R. Henkle (eds.), *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 243-46.

37 Frantz Fanon, [1961], *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1990), 30.

38 Said, "Traveling Theory," 260.

39 Ned Curthoys, "The Refractory Legacy of Algerian Decolonization," in R. King and D. Stone (eds.), *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 109-129.

40 Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972). Quote taken from her *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 20. On Camus' influence on Arendt, see Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

41 Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 26.

42 Arendt, *On Violence*, 147. Further on, she again exempts Fanon who "still manages to stay closer to reality than most" from her scorn for the rhetoric of violence in the New Left.

Arendt's surprising generosity towards Fanon in this passage, who after all conjured up anti-colonial terror as an emancipatory, creative act, suggests that she cannot quite abandon late in life what she had held dear during and after World War II: the French resistance, the Danish refusal deliver Jews to the Nazis, or the idea of a Jewish anti-fascist fighting force for Europe. Reassured by Fanon's warnings after his "Concerning Violence" chapter that the greatest threat to national independence would be the internalization of colonial violence and the perpetuation of the laws of war by the nationalists, Arendt allowed for revolutionary violence, as long as it remained spontaneous, ephemeral and got to be replaced by a higher order in which politics reigned supreme. For, as she argued,

"[t]he point is that under certain circumstances, violence – acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences – is the only way to set the scales of justice right again."⁴³

As we shall see, the revolutionaries of the Arab Spring struggled against the dual Orientalist stereotype of the Arab-terrorist and the docile Arab. They saw the disarming tactics of their non-violent protests brutally crushed by authoritarian regimes. Their ubiquitous calls of "*silmiyyan, silmiyyan*" ["peacefully, peacefully") on the streets of Cairo, Benghazi, Homs and Sana`a were drowned out by the cavalry, artillery and helicopter gunships of the old regimes until they themselves had to resort to sabotage, armed struggle and partisan warfare. To Arendt, who famously considered pacifism "devoid of reality", the distinction between the two forms of violence would have been crystal clear, as she tended to side with the "partisan [against] the machinery of state power."⁴⁴ She was deeply impressed by the *résistance* to Vichy France which was conducted underground by outlawed citizens like the poet René Char, "who without noticing it had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear [amidst] the collapse of France."⁴⁵ The tragedy of this treasure which Char's quote at the beginning of this essay encapsulated – "our heritage was left to us by no testament" – was that the "comrades-in-arms" could not take this clandestine and embattled experience of spontaneous freedom with them into the future. Their theory could not travel, for it was locked in the time of the Resistance, which only reminded the French postwar public of its shameful history of Nazi collaboration.

Let us return to the place where Arendt and Arabs first met: Palestine. For Palestine was also where many of Arendt's and Said's ideas of democratic humanism came together.

43 Arendt, *On Violence*, 64. See also Joan Cocks, "Imperialism, Self-Determination, and Violence: Rosa Luxemburg, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon," in her *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton: PUP, 2002), 45-70.

44 Patricia Owens, *Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 17-18.

45 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 3.

Edward Said, Hannah Arendt and the Binational Idea for Palestine

In the last two decades a number of Israeli scholars, journalists and artists have re-covered Hannah Arendt's work from the proverbial *oubliette* where the reception of her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem; a Report on the Banality of Evil* had consigned her in 1963. In the early 1990s, the journalist Idith Zertal investigated the memory of the Holocaust in Israel and confirmed Arendt's agony about how the Eichmann trial would inaugurate the Zionist state's exploitation of Jewish suffering during Nazi rule.⁴⁶ Eyal Sivan's remarkable documentary on the suppressed/lost/hidden footage of Eichmann at his trial in Jerusalem, *The Specialist*, of 1999 is a powerful visualization of Arendt's book.⁴⁷ Although Sivan, too, was vilified in Israel, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* soon became the first of Arendt's books to be translated into Hebrew.

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's influential and creative discussions of Arendt's binationalism and his critique of Zionism's negation of Jewish history outside Israel have been partially translated into English.⁴⁸ The Ottoman and intellectual historian, Gabriel Piterberg has expanded on Raz-Krakotzkin's work and grounded his *The Returns of Zionism* in Arendt's reading of Bernard Lazare as a conscious pariah.⁴⁹ Recently, even the former speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg, dedicated his passionate *The Holocaust Is Over: We Must Rise from its Ashes* "to the memory of the human being who before all of us was able to grasp what lurks behind the walls of fear and pain, who dared to give it an urgent voice and who managed to articulate it better than anyone else – Hannah Arendt."⁵⁰

Many of these critical minds in Israel rediscovered Arendt through the work of the Palestinian-American literary critic Edward Said.⁵¹ As far back as in the aftermath of the October 1973, Said had understood that "[n]either people can develop without the other there, harassing, taunting, fighting...The more intense the struggles for identity become, the more attention is paid by the Arab or the Jew to his chosen opponent, or partner."⁵² His affiliation with Arendt was not as formative as Gramsci, Lukács or the early Foucault but it grew the more he wrote about Palestine. What attracted Said to Arendt was her pleasures of exile – to borrow George Laming's oxymoronic book title – her celebration of worldiness and conscious pariahdom, as well as her reluctant embrace of the Western canon. Both shared an understanding of the method of reading literature to illuminate imperialism. They had an abiding and conceptual interest in what Auerbach called begin -

46 Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), and "A State on Trial: Hannah Arendt vs. the State of Israel," *Social Research* 74:4 (2007), 1127-1158.

47 Rony Brauman and Eyal Sivan, *Eloge de la désobéissance* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

48 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine," in S. Aschheim (ed.), *Arendt in Jerusalem*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 165-180; "Jewish Memory between Exile and History," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 97 (2007), 530-43.

49 Gabriel Piterberg, "The Sovereign Settler and the Conscious Pariah," chapter one of *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (London: Verso, 2008), 1-50.

50 The quote is my retranslation from the German edition, Avraham Burg, *Hitler Besiegen: Warum Israel sich endlich vom Holocaust lösen muss* (Campus, 2009), 7.

51 See, most directly Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *Exil und Binationalismus: Von Gershom Scholem und Hannah Arendt bis zu Edward Said und Mahmoud Darwish* (Berlin: Wissenschaftskolleg, 2011); also, Piterberg was the Hebrew translator of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

52 Edward Said, "Arabs and Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3 (1974), 3.

nings and what Arendt called natality, and they shared Fanon's unease with the pitfalls of national consciousness. This unease was the reason Arendt grew disenchanted with Zionism even before the state of Israel was declared, and it was the reason why Said left the Palestinian National Council in 1991. Her reaction to the creation of Israel – "humanity cannot survive the day of liberation, cannot survive liberty by five minutes" – echoes in Said's powerful critique of nationalist culture:

"Loyalty to one's group for survival cannot draw the intellectual in so much as to narcotise the critical sense or reduce its imperatives which are always to go beyond survival to questions of political liberation, to critiques of the leadership, to presenting alternatives that are too often marginalized or pushed aside as irrelevant to the main battle at hand."⁵³

In his magnum opus of 1978, *Orientalism*, Said draws explicitly on Arendt's identification of Edwardian adventurers in Africa and the Middle East with pre-totalitarian megalomania:

"Hannah Arendt has made the brilliant observation that the counterpart of the bureaucracy is the imperial agent, which is to say that if the collective academic endeavor called Orientalism was a bureaucratic institution based on a certain conservative vision of the Orient, then the servants of such a vision in the Orient were imperial agents like T.E. Lawrence."⁵⁴

It was in the introduction to his first book on Palestine that Said engages directly with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.⁵⁵ In *The Question of Palestine*, Said quoted a passage in Arendt's chapter on statelessness that represents, he argued, a rare and early recognition in the West that the creation of the state of Israel has solved the Jewish question "by means of a colonized and then conquered territory." Her quote continues:

"but this solved neither the problem of minorities nor the stateless. On the contrary, like virtually all other events in our century, the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of the stateless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people."⁵⁶

Said is acutely aware of Arendt's own Orientalism in her portrayal of the non-European.⁵⁷ Palestinian Arabs featured as both a menace and victims in the historical and physical background of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Palestinians were depicted as statisticians and part of the "Arabic-speaking...Levantine mob" off Ben Gurion's stage. At the same time, Arendt criticized that one of the main ideological motives for the trial in Jerus-

53 Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 41.

54 Edward Said [1978], *Orientalism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 240.

55 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

56 Arendt, *Origins*, 290, quoted in Said, *The Question of Palestine* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1980), xiii.

57 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xix.

alem was to show the world “the connection between the Nazis and some Arab rulers.”⁵⁸ She could barely contain her *Schadenfreude* when the court failed to link Hajj Amin al-Husayni to Eichmann, and she goaded Ben Gurion to go after members of the German government, instead.⁵⁹ Finally, Arendt devotes three pages of her postscript to the Israeli massacre at Kafr Qasim in 1955. The judges brought up the sentencing of Israeli soldiers who had killed Palestinian families at Kafr Qasim at the Eichmann hearings, as proof that ‘superior orders’ was not a valid defence in Israel. Arendt, who then looked into the cold case, contradicted the judges and exposed how Israel exploited crimes like these as emblems of democracy while the perpetrators were, in fact, released soon afterwards.⁶⁰

In a late essay, Said returned to Arendt’s work in an attempt to formulate an alternative to the Oslo Peace Process and its attendant land-for-peace, two-state solution. In one of the first articulations of a one-state solution in the mainstream media, Said recalled the legacy of “a small but important group of Jewish thinkers (Judah Magnes, Buber, Arendt and others) [who] argued and agitated for a binational state.”⁶¹ The first president of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Judah Magnes had been a long-term critic of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 because “he felt that Britain had no right to promise the land of Palestine to any people and that their promise could only lead to the hostility of the Arabs living on the land.”⁶² He founded the *Ihud* (Unity) Party in 1939 which revived the binational legacy of Brit Shalom circle around Martin Buber of the 1920s and “made the Arab question one of the central issues addressed.”⁶³

Magnes’s position paper “Toward Peace in Palestine,” published in *Foreign Affairs* in January 1943, caught the attention of Arendt.⁶⁴ While Arendt shared Magnes’s faith in a binational federation for Palestine, she felt strongly that his idea for an Anglo-American umbrella protecting the federation would nip the possibility of true independence and equality between Jews and Arabs in the bud. In lieu of Magnes’ top-down approach, Arendt proposed two original alternatives, one at the imperial and one at the local level. At the imperial level, she considered the emerging British Commonwealth a federal project that could, if fully committed to equality, eventually “confront” British colonialism. A federated Palestine would be a model for a united Europe both of which would be safe places with equal rights and identical political status for all citizens.⁶⁵

However, neither Arendt nor Magnes could fathom the obvious Arab response to their binationalism; that it was a binationalism that would turn Jewish refugees into settlers in Palestine. Albert Hourani, the young Oxford-trained, British-Arab official who challenged Magnes’ testimony at the Anglo-American commission of Inquiry on Palestine in 1946,

58 Hannah Arendt [1963], *Eichmann in Jerusalem a Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 10. The court established that Eichmann had no such connections, 235.

59 Ibid, 13, 19.

60 Ibid, 292-3. See also Danny Orbach, “Black Flag at a Crossroad: The Kafr Qasim Political Trial (1957-58),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2013), 491-511.

61 Edward Said, “The One-State Solution,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 10, 1999.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/10/magazine/the-one-state-solution.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

62 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl [1982], *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 225.

63 Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis of Zionism (This Means You), 22 Oct., 1942,” *Jewish Writings*, 178-9.

64 Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 226.

65 Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis of Zionism, February 1943,” in J. Kohn and R. H. Feldman (eds.), *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 184-5, 336.

made a convincing case for a single, democratic and secular state which would be culturally and geographically Arab and in which the stipulations of the St. James conference on Palestine of 1939 applied: Jews are granted the same full civil and political rights as Muslims and Christians, control of their own communal affairs, municipal autonomy, Hebrew as a second language, and a share in the government of the Palestinian community.⁶⁶

On Revolution: The Task of Khayri Hammad

In 1955, Nasser inaugurated the “Thousand Books Project” in an attempt to make available and affordable to an Arabic audience the most important texts in European and Third world culture. The project mobilized the Egyptian intellectual elite to help educate the masses and was, while it lasted, remarkably successful as 19th-century European novels and 20th century philosophy and plays by among others Camus, Sartre and Brecht, were translated almost instantaneously.⁶⁷

Having established the Palestinian connection in the encounter between Arendt and Arabs and the “golden age of translation” in Egypt, let us return to Khayri Hammad’s *Ra’y fi al-thawrat*. This Palestinian translator’s precocious sense of equality and affinity with Arendt empowered him to extract the world view of the original text and imbue it with that of his own context. As we shall see, Hammad’s approach constituted a conscientious alternative to Arabic translation practices before and after Nasser’s “Thousand Books Project.” Hammad was a widely-respected public figure and a member of the illustrious group of Palestinian humanists that included Abdul-Rahman Bushnaq – more about this Arendt translator below; the American University of Beirut historian Niqula Ziadeh; the novelist/artist and Shakespeare translator Jabra Ibrahim Jabra; and many others. They all went to school at the Arab College in Jerusalem and then studied at AUB and/or Cambridge. Hammad, for his part, taught at secondary schools in Iraq after graduating from AUB until the British imprisoned him for his participation in the Kaylani coup of 1941. He returned to Palestine in 1943 to become a newspaper editor at *al-Difa’*. During the *Nakba*, Hammad fled to Amman, where he found employment at the Hashemite court. Between 1956 and 1962, he worked in Beirut before settling in Cairo to emerge as a writer, prolific translator, and publisher amidst the Arabic literary effervescence at the height of Nasserism. He was General Secretary of the Palestinian writers’ and Arab journalists’ unions. Later, he also served on the executive committee of the Egyptian Higher Council for the Arts and Culture. By the time of his death in 1972, he left over 100 studies and translations of modern classics on literature and politics, including Machiavelli, Oscar Wilde, and Ernest Hemingway, Charles de Gaulle, Jawaharlal Nehru and Anthony Eden, Harold Laski and Henry Morgenthau.⁶⁸

Hammad used the introductions of these translations to reflect critically on the task of the Arabic translator. He returned again and again to the distinction he made between

66 Albert Hourani, “The Case Against a Jewish State: Albert Hourani’s Statement to the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry of 1946,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35:1 (Autumn 2005), 87.

67 Richard Jacquemond, *Traductions arabes d’auteurs d’expression française: Bibliographie – Egypte, 1952-1989* (Cairo: Service culturel de l’Ambassade de France en Egypte, 1990).

68 Muhammad ‘Umar Hamada, *Mawsu’a a’lam Filastin fi al-qarn al-ashrin* (Damascus, Dar Kutaiba, 2000).

ta'rib (Arabization) and *tarjama* (translation). Whereas in the Arabic renaissance of the 19th century, *ta'rib* was an excuse for loose adaptation of the originals, Hammad argued that a translator was required to combine fidelity and accuracy with an idiomatic mastery of the mood of the original text. The central task of the Arabic translator, as he saw it, was *al-naql*, a concept – central to the Arabic translation schools in Abbasid Baghdad and Andalusian Toledo – which meant both “to convey meaning” and “to transfer knowledge.”⁶⁹ And this task was an urgent one. He claims in his introduction to the Eden translation: “In our current age, we need the transfer urgently for we are trying to travel in one single year where others have travelled for decades. It will be enough only if we aspire to all the achievements of the civilized nations.”⁷⁰ Expressions like these bore both the scars of colonial belatedness and the impatient optimism of decolonization.

Hammad introduction to the Arendt translation reveals little about the commission of the work other than that this translation was intended as part of the series *kutub siyasiyya*, in which “we translate into Arabic key theoretical books from around the world that delve into the treasures of history and the depth of human experience, however great our disagreements with the content might be.” Throughout the text, Hammad voiced his disapproval of Arendt’s uncritical view of the West in general and the United States in particular. Yet, he was impressed by what he considered Arendt’s fair, subtle and meticulous treatment of revolutions. He credits the book with the rare gift of bridging the “deep divide between the traditional bourgeois- and the progressive socialist world.” For there is, he continues, “nothing that links them except a small isthmus of liberal thought... in the new sense of liberalism of being free of the shackles of dogmatism whether on the right or the left.”⁷¹

Hammad tried to counter the spectre of derivative and dependent emancipation by invoking the concept of *ta'rib* – Arabization. As he sees it, unlike a translator, an Arabizer would write back at the Western author and would pick up on Eurocentric assumptions in the original text, in a sort of contrapuntal approach to translation. Hammad’s mantra is in evidence in the footnotes to his translation of Arendt’s *On Revolution*. Hammad’s extensive footnotes turn the book into a virtual conversation between two ideologically opposed thinkers at a shared moment in world history. In his one hundred footnotes to the translation he criticized, from a socialist or an anti-colonial perspective, this or that point of Arendt’s unorthodox analysis. This practice may not meet the aesthetic standards of some translation theorists and may, indeed, not work in fiction where it may obstruct the intimacy of the source. But Hammad managed to surrender his Arabic to the particular tone of the original English while endowing his footnotes with the very kind of agonistic approach to politics that Arendt has preached in *On Revolution* and elsewhere.⁷²

Both Arendt and Hammad abhorred – for different reasons – reducing liberalism to economics, and both believed in the positive potential of revolution, but from diametric-

69 Sulayman al-Bustani [1904], *Ilyadh Humirus, mu'araba izman wa 'alayha sharh tarikhi adabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1977), 25-6, 66-7, 68-106.

70 Ahmad Hassan Hamid, “Khayri Hammad ra'id al-tarjama fi al- 'asr al-hadith,” n. d., n. p. (<http://scholar.najah.edu/sites/scholar.najah.edu/files/conference-paper/khairi-hamad-pioneer-translation-modern-age.pdf>) last accessed November 8, 2012.

71 Hammad, *Ra'y fi al-thawrat*, 5.

72 Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror; Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: PUP, 1999), 107-127.

ally opposed positions. Arendt's preceding two works, *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future*, had recovered the political thought of the Greek and Roman traditions for modern philosophy. In *On Revolution*, Arendt recuperated and redeemed freedom and revolution. Both ideals had been unduly discredited in the illiberal age of the mid-20th century: freedom had become a ruse for imperialism and capitalist domination, while revolution was viewed as the reckless domain of military plotters and irresponsible radicals. Liberal and social democracy, as well as single-party communism, were counter-revolutionary. They all feared the radical possibility that a political space of public freedom could be established in which people would take their common concerns into their own hands as free and equal citizens. A couple of years after Frantz Fanon had famously warned against post-revolutionary atrophy in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Arendt also expressed her worry about the way all party systems, whether single or multiple, betray the spontaneous outpouring of political freedom during a revolution.

Recent scholarship on political theory has identified the link between empire and the historical formation of liberalism.⁷³ Hammad's translation anticipates these post-colonial critiques and represents the wider intellectual mood during the historical moment of Third World empowerment. In dozens of footnotes, Hammad criticizes Arendt's "biases and blindspots." He argues that Arendt's comparison between the American foundational myth of "lovely equality" and the violent excesses of the French Revolution fails on two accounts. First, it is hardly accurate to talk of equality "in a country where banking houses and oil barons rule."⁷⁴ Second, he questions the notion that the American Republic flourished because it provided material gains, whereas the French Republic failed because it did not alleviate poverty in spite of all its proclamations.⁷⁵

Hammad defends the achievements and, indeed, the "necessity" of socialism. Not only have "socialist countries have been effective in combatting poverty," he writes, but in the Third World where white minorities have ruled since the onslaught of colonialism, the time for indigenous majority rule had come.⁷⁶ Hammad's footnoted translation expresses the gulf of experience that separated the post-colonial world from post-totalitarian Europe. Arendt writes as a minority victim of the violent passions of majority rule. Hammad's comments, on the other hand, represent the hope that after decades of minority rule by colonial and local elites, a revolutionary Egypt would finally emancipate the oppressed majorities of the population in the wider Arab world.⁷⁷ Arendt's false universalization of European history was symptomatic, notes Hammad, of a wider Western inability to reflect on its limits and responsibilities.

Hammad is also very sensitive to Arendt's total disregard for the plight of the black and native populations in North America. As a displaced Palestinian and a prolific translator of English-language history books, Hammad was in a position both to empathize with the

73 Uday Sing Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire; a Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press: 2009).

74 Hammad, *Ra'y fi al-thawrat*, 29.

75 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 213.

76 Hammad, *Ra'y fi al-thawrat*, 137.

77 This anti-colonial conception of revolution was expressed in Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo: Smith, Keynes & Marshall, 1959 [1953]).

victims of the American genocide and articulate the injustice committed against fellow indigenous populations. Thus he muses on Arendt's fascination with the Mayflower Compact: "It is a strange phenomenon in all American writing: They talk about their land as if it was empty and not inhabited by indigenous peoples."⁷⁸

In sum, Hammad's treatment of Arendt's *On Revolution* elevates the translated book from a mere literary copy to a historical document. He produced an original intervention in anti-colonial scholarship. With Hammad, we witness the subversive appreciation of the value of utterly Eurocentric political thought by moving away from questions of reproduction and application to Saidian "contrapuntal elaborations" of canonical knowledge.

The Politics of Translation

Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought of 1961 was Hannah Arendt's favorite book and the only other of her books that was translated into Arabic before the end of the Cold War and the Lebanese Civil War collided in 1990. 'Abd al-Rahman Bushnaq's *Bayna al-madhi wa al-mustaqbal* of 1974 was a straight translation without any introduction or additional footnotes.⁷⁹ I will leave the quality of the Arabic translation for a later examination. In the meantime, the value of the text for our purposes lies in the few glimpses into the origins of the project that the book's cover and first pages reveal. Unlike Hammad's independent and critical translation of *On Revolution*, Bushnaq's was "an authorized translation."⁸⁰ Dr. Zakariyya Ibrahim, a Sorbonne-trained professor of critical theory at Cairo University, served as the supervisor of the translation project. The flap further discloses that the book "was published with the cooperation of the Franklin Foundation, Cairo – New York."

What was the "Franklin Foundation"? Who was behind it? What came to be known as "The Franklin Book Programs" was launched at meeting of the American Library Association's International relations committee and the American Book Publishers Council's Foreign Trade Committee launched in 1951.⁸¹ This non-profit project made accessible over 3,000 American works for "developing countries" over the next three decades.⁸² The idea was to professionalize local publishers and distributors and to involve leading intellectuals from these countries to advise and chose which books were most suited for translation. Arabic was the first language the programme targeted and the first office in the

⁷⁸ Hammad, *Ra'y fi al-thawrat*, 205.

⁷⁹ Bushnaq had a very similar biographical journey as Hammad. He was born near Tulkaram in 1913, was educated at the Arab College in Jerusalem before pursuing an undergraduate degree at AUB in literature. He then went to Cambridge where he graduated with an MA in literature in 1937. He returned to Palestine to teach English literature at his alma mater before becoming editor of the journal *al-Muntada*. After the *Nakba* he fled to London where he worked at the Arabic desk of the BBC with many other Palestinian refugees. In 1954, he settled in Amman to work for the Arab Bank. From the early 1960s, Bushnaq worked in various high-ranking capacities in the education sector of the Jordanian state.

⁸⁰ Published in Cairo by Dar al-Nahda misr lil-taba' wal-nashr, Feb. 1974. Dar al-Kutub no. 1870/1974. It appeared in the series "*buhuth fil-fikr al-siyasiyya*."

⁸¹ Louise Robbins, "Publishing American Values: The Franklin Books Program as Cultural Diplomacy during the Cold War," *Library Trends* 55 (Winter 2007), 638-50.

⁸² For an account by the main architect of the Franklin books programmes, see Library of Congress librarian D. C. Smith, Jr., "Books for Developing Countries: The Franklin Book Programs," *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, 40 (1983), 254-265. I thank Mary-Jane Deeb for alerting me to this programme and for giving me a copy of this article.

Middle East was opened in Cairo. Its director, Hassan Galal Aroussy, was supposed to take the “challenge of Communism [to] bookstands” in Free Officers’ Egypt and Mossadegh’s Iran. By the time the Cairo office of the Franklin Book Programs contacted Professor Zakariyya Ibrahim to oversee the translation of *Between Past and Future*, the American members of the board of directors had become disillusioned with Washington policy makers’ mistrust of the project for its local contacts and with the bad press it received from intellectual circles in the Middle East.

The Franklin translations of American modern classics clearly could not compete with Nasser’s own “Thousand Books project,” or the boot-legged Arabic translations (or simply the circulation of the ideas) of the Marxist-Leninist canon⁸³; much less with tricontinental revolutionary texts by Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Ho Che Min or Mao Tse Tung.⁸⁴ Shortly before its dissolution in 1978, one board member lamented “Alas! Our, shall I say hidden, fight against Communism has not produced the effects we all wanted.”⁸⁵ The Franklin project’s Soviet counterparts, too, would have considered their translation efforts unproductive if their goal was to stem the tide of capitalism in the Middle East. In the 1960s and ‘70s, theory traveled in two directions. On the one hand, Marxist and tricontinentalist texts traveled to the Middle East as Arabic revolutionary manuals, or Arabic translations of liberal classics were read – particularly by Lebanese former Marxists – with a view to diagnose the internal contradictions of their societies and to account for the persistence of human unfreedom.⁸⁶ On the other hand, many of the thirdworldist texts inspired the student revolutions and critical developments in the humanities in Europe and North America.⁸⁷

Between Authority and Freedom: Liberalism of Fear versus Breaking the Wall of Fear

Two of the eight exercises that constitute *Between Past and Future* are particularly relevant for our understanding of the contemporary Arab world: “What is Authority?” and “What is Freedom?” In the first, Arendt made a three-way distinction between the “pyramid-like” structure of authoritarianism, tyranny – “the wolf in human shape” – and “onion”-shaped totalitarianism. Authoritarianism is a type of “government structure whose seat of power is located at the top from which authority and power is filtered down to the base in such a way that each successive layer possesses some authority but less than the one above.”⁸⁸ We may think of the “*gumlukiyyas*” – or hereditary presidencies – in Tunis, Egypt and Syria. In tyranny, by contrast, “it is as if all the contiguous layers of the pyramid were destroyed, so that the top remains suspended by the proverbial bayonets,

83 Fadi Bardawil, *When all this Revolution Melts into Air: The Disenchantment of Levantine Marxists* (New York: Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 2010).

84 Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 20.

85 Robbins, “Publishing American Values,” 646.

86 Jens Hanssen, “Reading Hannah Arendt in the Middle East.”

87 See for example, Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012).

88 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 98.

over a mass of carefully isolated, disintegrated, and completely equal individuals.”⁸⁹ Gaddafi’s ‘egalitarian’ *jamahiriyya* of Libya springs to mind. Unlike authoritarianism and tyranny, argued Arendt, “the proper image of totalitarian rule and organization seems to me to be the structure of the onion, in whose center, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does – whether he integrates the body politic as in an authoritarian hierarchy, or oppresses his subjects like a tyrant – he does it from within, and not from without or from above.” When authoritarian and tyrannical rule shifts into totalitarianism, as in Germany during the Nazi *Gleichschaltung* and in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war and the international sanctions in the 1980s and ‘90s, there occurred a concerted assault on “the most general and most elementary manifestation of human freedom” – spontaneity.⁹⁰

“What is Authority?” contained the gist of Arendt’s later reflections “On Violence.” Genuine political power is the antithesis of violence, for if a government acts tyrannically and employs violent means, it commands only obedience and submission but not authority. In fact, her definition of power was almost synonymous with the empowerment to act freely:

violence is no more adequate to describe the phenomenon of revolution than change; only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom, can we speak of revolution. ⁹¹

In “What is Freedom,” Arendt dissects the relationship between politics, freedom and liberation. These reflections were significantly at odds with liberal orthodoxy in general and Isaiah Berlin’s dominant “Two Concepts of Liberty” of 1958, in particular. The difference between Arendt’s ‘active’ freedom in and *through* politics and Berlin’s individual freedom from any political interference merits a wider discussion than I can offer here.⁹² Suffice it to distinguish his ‘liberalism of fear,’ a notion that kept authoritarianism in the Middle East in place since decolonization, from her spirit of empowerment, a notion that affiliates readily with the Arab uprisings of 2011.

In “What is Freedom?” Arendt returns to the Hungarian revolution and its politics of spontaneity, as well as to the Aristotelian ideas she laid out in *The Human Condition*, namely that the essence of human nature is participation in public and political life.⁹³ In contrast Berlin viewed revolution as a threat to the cornerstones of negative freedom:

89 Ibid., 99.

90 Ibid., 96.

91 Ibid., 25 27-9.

92 Not least because there are also so many intellectual and biographical similarities between the two; scepticism of reason and unreason, embrace of reality and respect for facts. For a comparison of their views on Jewish emancipation, see Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton: PUP, 2002), 71-91; On their rivalry, see David Cauter, *Isaac and Isaiah: The Covert Punishment of a Cold War Heretic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 264-71.

93 Arendt, Hannah [1958], *The Human Condition* (Chicago: UCP, 1989).

pluralism and individualism.⁹⁴ The Cambridge historian of ideas, Quentin Skinner, takes Arendt's side in the dispute:

“the greatest contemporary philosopher who has tried to make sense of exactly this [idea that] ... the fullest freedom is the engagement with that life ... is Hannah Arendt, especially in her essay “What is Freedom?” ... What she says is blazingly paradoxical but I hope you will see what she means. I quote her: ‘Freedom consists in politics. For the activity of self-government and the social virtues this requires is the activity in which we most fully realize most fully our natures, and freedom is that self-realization.’”⁹⁵

The reason Skinner finds this formulation paradoxical is because liberals, like Berlin, whom he treats “with a certain amount of respect”, are suspicious of who determines what human nature is.⁹⁶ Attempts at doing so, they claim, have led to catastrophic results ever since Rousseau discovered “the Greater Good of the General Will.” Berlin treated Thomas Hobbes as the godfather of “nineteenth century liberalism” and his *Leviathan* as an insurance against the “excesses of self-realization.” Arendt, by contrast, vilified Hobbes (“where the condition of all liberty is freedom from fear”⁹⁷) in a brilliant section on imperialism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. For her Hobbes' ideas were almost proto-totalitarian for the violent way in which “the Commonwealth...provideth for every man, by Victory, or Death” and makes theoretically conceivable Cecil Rhodes' desire to “annex the planets.”⁹⁸

According to Berlin, decolonization consisted of violent struggles for recognition; but they were waged merely for freedom from insult, and not for freedom from fear. As his biographer, Michael Ignatieff, notes approvingly, “to call national liberation a fight for liberty was to mistake the motives behind such colonial revolts, and hence to guarantee disillusion when they fail to deliver the emancipation they promised.”⁹⁹ Instead, negative freedom was more likely to be administered by benevolent colonizers (“some higher and remoter group” in Berlin's abstraction) than by self-rule.¹⁰⁰ Arendt, too, was aware of what Fanon has memorably called “the pitfalls of national consciousness.”¹⁰¹ But she was far more worried than Berlin about the persistence of the old imperial ways. She famously lamented in *On Revolution* that the revolutionary tradition of the United States was lost not only on the “revolutionary' countries in the East” but, significantly, also on the United States. Instead, “fear of revolution has been the hidden leitmotif of postwar American foreign policy in its desperate attempts at stabilization of the *status quo*.” This approach, she argued, has effectively “boomeranged upon the foreign policy of the United States, which

94 Isaiah Berlin [1958], “Two Concepts of Freedom,” *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: OUP, 1969), 162.

95 Quentin Skinner, “What is Freedom,” Public Lecture, Cambridge University, August 7, 2008: postcast.

96 Skinner himself champions a return to a conception of neo-roman liberty, at the centre of which was freedom to act independently, and which was displaced by the 19th -century utilitarian tradition which Berlin canonized.

97 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 149.

98 Arendt, *The Origins*, 139-47.

99 Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 227.

100 Berlin, “Two Concepts,” 157.

101 Frantz Fanon [1961], “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, with a foreword by Jean-Paul Sartre, (London: Penguin, 1990), 119-65.

begins to pay an exorbitant price for world-wide ignorance and for [American] oblivion.”¹⁰²

Even though she was unabashedly Eurocentric – more than once she worried that “Western civilization has its last chance of survival in an Atlantic community” – Arendt was one of the first liberal thinkers to admit that “American power and prestige were used and misused to support obsolete and corrupt political regimes that long since had become objects of hatred and contempt among their own citizens.”¹⁰³ Of course, this critique is now well established.¹⁰⁴ Mahmood Mamdani reminded us of Jeannie Kirkpatrick, US ambassador to the UN and architect of Reagan’s policy towards the Third World, who famously distinguished between left-wing dictatorships which she labeled as “totalitarian” and which required regime change, and right-wing dictatorship whose “authoritarianism” should receive military, financial, ideological and logistical support.¹⁰⁵

‘Lesser Evilism’: the American Invasion of Iraq and Arab Authoritarianism

In a 1964 article for *The Listener*, Arendt revisited her *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* books, and introduced a new category of evil.¹⁰⁶ This form was neither the “radical evil” of Hitler’s and Stalin’s rule – or, as we shall see below, Saddam Hussein’s rule in Makiya’s *Republic of Fear*; nor was it “banal” – the characterization she so controversially applied to the administrative mass murderer, Adolf Eichmann. Rather, her new object of critique was “the lesser evil.” This new concept was to guide her work on US politics during the Vietnam war in *Crises of the Republic*.¹⁰⁷ More immediately, ‘fear of worse’ framed her understanding of the evident double standards and contradictions between irresponsible political practices and their philosophical justification. She argued that whether it was employed in foreign interventions like Vietnam or by native leaders, ‘the lesser evil’ “is one of the mechanisms built into the machinery of terror and criminality” for it is a ruse “used in conditioning the government officials as well as the population at large to the acceptance of evil as such.”¹⁰⁸

Not all lesser-evil compromises are objectionable in principle, nor is ethical maximalism an inherent virtue. But as Weizman argued, the humanitarian principle of proportionality, for example, while ostensibly invoked to diminish excessive use of force, merely

¹⁰² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 207-9.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press & Doubleday, 2004), which starts with a discussion of Arendt’s work.

¹⁰⁵ Jeanne Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships & Double Standards,” *Commentary* Nov. 1979. Patricia Owens notes that “Arendt was horrified that *The Origins* ... became a staple of Cold War propaganda.” See her “Beyond Strauss, lies, and the war in Iraq: Hannah Arendt’s critique of neoconservatism,” *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007), 270.

¹⁰⁶ Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship,” republished in Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited and with an introduction by J. Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 17-48.

¹⁰⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, “Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship,” 36.

augurs the “potentiality of the worst.”¹⁰⁹ Such nuances were lost on the Canadian journalist, and politician Michael Ignatieff, who – in the aftermath of 9/11 – made an impassioned “case for empire [because America] has become, in a place like Iraq, the last hope for democracy and stability.”¹¹⁰ Subsequently, Ignatieff advocated – in a total misreading of Arendt’s sustained critique of the logic of ‘necessity’ and ‘lesser evil’ – the temporary suspension of civil and human rights in order to protect citizens of liberal democracies from possible terrorist blowback.¹¹¹ As a human-rights champion, he naturally had qualms about the legality and the after-effect of this scheme. But he reassured his readers that this was an age-old conundrum and quickly offered up an extended manual on how to bring into effect “Empire Lite” with the least possible moral compunction and juridical resistance. The doctrine of lesser evil helps liberal democracies maintain ethicality “when the law must sometimes compromise with necessity[:] the suspension of civil liberties, the detention of aliens, the secret assassination of enemies.” Remarkably, Ignatieff drew on the very article in which Arendt had criticized the lesser evil doctrine, in order to validate it: “Arendt once argued that being able to think for yourself is a precondition for avoiding evil.”¹¹² If only Ignatieff had not thought so much for himself. But he is not the only public intellectual who misrepresented Arendt in order to legitimize the invasion of Iraq.

Ten years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, it is pertinent to recall how one of its most fervent supporters invoked Arendt’s reflections on authority in the book that, more than any other, shaped US decision-making on Iraq.¹¹³ The Marxist engineer-turned neo-conservative political advisor, Kanan Makiya, is widely credited with being the first Arab author who has applied Arendt’s phenomenology of totalitarianism to Ba’athist Iraq.¹¹⁴ He may have understood Arendt better than Ignatieff did, but he did even more damage than the hapless Canadian liberal.

Makiya’s *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (1989) stands as an important monument for Hannah Arendt’s presence in the Middle East. His book argued that since the second Ba’athist Coup in 1968 and in particular since Saddam Hussein’s presidency in 1979, Iraq slid into totalitarian rule. In his footnotes, Makiya occasionally references Arendt’s *The Origins, On Violence* and “What is Authority?” to carry his thorough documentation of the excesses of Saddam Hussein’s regime.¹¹⁵ But his analysis falters when he locates the root causes for totalitarianism in Iraqi society’s antisemitism and in Arab intellectuals’ support for Saddam Hussein. No credible evidence has emerged so far that the regime succeeded in inculcating Iraqi society with such antisemitic propaganda as Makiya recorded on Iraqi state media and as was characteristic of Nazi Germany.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, he establishes an analogy between anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism and third-world na-

109 Eyal Weizman, *The Least of all Evils*, 20.

110 Michael Ignatieff, “America’s Empire Is an Empire Lite,” *New York Times*, January 10, 2003.

111 Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton: PUP, 2004).

112 Ignatieff, *Lesser Evil*, 21-22.

113 Kanan Makiya, “An Iraqi Discovers Arendt,” *World Policy Journal* 22 (2006), 83-6.

114 Mouin Rabbani, “Unmasking Makiya: Iraq and Arab Intellectuals,” *Third World Quarterly* (1994), 342-49.

115 For a more rigorous account of Saddam Hussein’s rule of terror, see Joseph Saso, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (New York: CUP, 2012). For life under his rule, see Dina Rizk-Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom and Remembrance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013).

116 Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear. The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 49-58.

tionalism and the imperialism and the pan-movements of Arendt's analysis.¹¹⁷ By portraying the Arab left as front organizations which normalized Iraqi totalitarian rule, Makiya perverts Arendt's profound argument that European racist discourses and genocidal practices were imported by Central-European pan-movements.

It is not necessarily unethical to use scholarship in support of an oppressed people.¹¹⁸ But no former Arab leftist personally profited so much by destroying so much as did Makiya who has been 'rewarded' with a named chair in Islamic and Middle East Studies at Brandeis University. One is reminded of Arendt's distinction between "ex-communists" who make a new living out of their political conversion and "former communists" who do not seek personal, professional or political gain by it.¹¹⁹

Concluding Revolutions: Between Liberation and Violence

In a recent article for The New York Times, Makiya made the claim that "the toppling of the first Arab dictator, Saddam Hussein, paved the way for young Arabs to imagine [the Arab Spring]."¹²⁰ Even though the opposite is probably closer to the mark, namely that the turn to civil war and jihadism, especially in the Syrian uprising, is a consequence of the US occupation of Iraq, Makiya's narrative exemplifies the on-going hermeneutic battles over the sources and nature of the uprisings in the Middle East that Mohammad Bou-azizi's self-immolation in Tunisia sparked in December 2010. Some cite the Lebanese Cedar Revolution after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri that ended the decades-old Syrian military presence in the country. Others give credit to the inspiration of the Iranian green movement because of parallels with the uses of mobile electronic communication devices.¹²¹ Meanwhile, The New York Times and other American news outlets have credited the veteran political scientist Gene Sharp's manual for non-violent resistance with the Egyptian revolution.¹²² The "facebook-phenomenon," the Arab 'youth bulb', the global food crisis, the Egyptian marriage crisis or Cairo's housing scarcity were all part of the neo-liberal constellations that made the revolutionary uprising inevitable after it occurred.¹²³

All these causes are insufficient to explain when, where, and especially how the protests erupted. Many participants of the 'Tahrir Commune' who ousted President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, insist that it was the solidarity movement around the Palestinian resistance against Israeli Apartheid particularly since the second Intifada, the

117 Arendt, *Origins*, 222-266.

118 For more nuanced Arendtian accounts of Saddam Hussein's rule that incorporate analytical variables internal to Iraq, see Hanssen, "Reading Hannah Arendt in the Middle East."

119 Hannah Arendt, "The Ex-Communists," in her *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited and with an introduction by J. Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 391-401.

120 Kanan Makiya, "The Arab Spring Started in Iraq," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013 (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/opinion/sunday/the-arab-spring-started-in-iraq.html?_r=0). See also, Haytham Bahoora, "On Iraq War Revisionism: Kanan Makiya and the Arab Revolutions," April 17, 2013 (http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11256/on-iraq-war-revisionism_kanan-makiya-and-the-arab-).

121 Hamid Dabbashi, *The Arab Spring: the End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

122 http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. See, by contrast, the *Tahrir* manual: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/01/egyptian-activists-action-plan-translated/70388/>

123 Gelvin, James, *What we need to know about the Arab Revolutions* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 24.

protests against the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as the textile factory labour action in the Nile Delta in 2007 and 2008 that galvanized the core of the anti-Mubarak protestors. These most recent events, in which 25,000 Egyptian workers laid down their work, were supported by social activists called “The April 6 Youth Movement” who transmitted the strikes to the internet.¹²⁴ It was the martyrdom of one of their own, the blogger Khaled Said who was beaten to death by Egyptian security forces in July 2010 that reenergized the anti-Mubarak protest movement. Groups like “April 6” and “We are all Khaled Said” emerged as tenacious organizers of the protests, particularly as they started to make common cause with the youth organizations of emergent opposition parties, like the *al-Ghad* party or the *Kifaya* movement.

But credit for the overthrow of Mubarak is a hotly contested issue in Egypt itself where the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood and the ruling military junta that ousted President Morsi in a coup on July 3, 2013 have spun heroic narratives of their contribution. Arendt’s ideas sketched above help disaggregate the long-term, structural factors from the conjunctural factors leading to revolt, and both of these from the forces that determine whether genuine transformation, counter-revolution or civil war follows after the revolutionary moment. Broadly speaking, the different trajectories each uprising took depended on whether the ancient regimes were willing to use brute force for their survival – like in Syria, Libya and also Bahrain; those unable to rely solely on violence – like the negotiated revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and, to a different degree, in Morocco and Yemen – and those oil monarchies which were able to mix violence with economic incentives in order to stifle dissent almost totally.

In Egypt, the revolutionary moment occurred, because, according to Mona Ghobashy, the country’s “three organizational infrastructures of protest” - association, workplace and neighbourhood” managed to link up.¹²⁵ Through a number of social media decoys and word-of-mouth mobilizations, the masses of people overwhelmed the misassembled police and security forces and poured into Tahrir Square on January 28, 2011. After this day, as the activist-journalist Ahmad Shokr recalled, “*Tahrir* was elevated from a rally site to a model for an alternative society [where] a spirit of mutual aid prevailed.”¹²⁶

In the Syrian uprising, Omar Aziz was the mastermind behind the local co-ordinating councils before he died under torture in Adra prison on February 17, 2013. According to one obituary, Aziz returned to Syria to set up alternative “networks of solidarity and mutual aid” that could perform basic functions of state, constitute a clandestine space for ‘thinking in dark times’ as well as “providing logistical, material and psychological support for displaced persons and prisoners’ families.”¹²⁷

The striking simultaneity of the Arab uprisings carried enormous historical meaning and affected Arab intellectuals deeply. An editorial in *al-Akhbar*, Beirut, during the eighteen days of Tahrir Square expressed how this more than any other event, epitomised the wholly unexpected Arab defeat of defeatism: “young Egyptians are struggling not only to

124 Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing (eds.), *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest and Social Change in Egypt* (New York: Verso, 2012); Joel Beinin and Hossam Hamalawy, “strikes in Egypt spread from Center of Gravity,” and Hesham Sallam, “Striking Back at Egyptian Workers,” *The Arab Revolts*, 83-99.

125 Mona Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution,” 33.

126 Ahmad Shokr, “The Eighteen Days of Tahrir,” *The Journey to Tahrir*, 41-7.

127 Budour Hassan, “Rest in Power,” February 24, 2013. <http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=6752>

get rid of President Hosni Mubarak but also to restore the self and the dignity of Egypt and Arabs from the abyss of defeat.” Since the Egyptian military defeat in the June 1967 war against Israel, the editorial continues, Arabs have suffered from the Camp David peace process, from the unfettered occupation of Palestinian land, the civil war in Lebanon, militant Islam, the slaughter in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and under the on-going American occupation, and the looting of national wealth by comprador business elites aligned with their dictatorships. This then becomes a moment of cultural catharsis that has the potential to liberate Arabs from almost half a century of crippling self-doubt and humiliation.¹²⁸

Here our Arendtian reading of the Arab uprisings interlocks with how we can re-read her work in light of them. Arendt’s approach to the Hungarian revolution has provided the most fitting framework of analysis on two accounts: Methodologically, she isolated the promise of the twelve days of Budapest from the backlash of the Soviet invasion afterwards to make the wager that the power of the idea of resistance would outlive the reality of the violence of the tanks. This approach allowed her to speak of revolution even though it was short-lived. Arendt gave an account of how the Hungarians spontaneously challenged the realm of the politically imaginable, enacted human freedom, and built new forms of democratic organization.

Bahrain’s Pearl Square protests from February 15 to March 15, 2011 have come close to the fate of the Hungarian revolutionaries when Bahraini Defence forces killed dozens and arrested hundreds of demonstrators, King Hammad ordered the demolition of the square and Saudi tanks entered the country.¹²⁹ As prominent human rights activists and many medical staff have become political prisoners, Bahrainis continue to defy the brutal clamp down of their peaceful protests.¹³⁰ But the sectarian counter-insurgency that the government employed has come to characterize the way most other Arab states have tried to delegitimize the uprisings, raising the spectre of the Lebanese- or, pace Makiya, the Iraqi civil war.

Nowhere is this spectre looming more menacingly than in Syria where President Bashar al-Assad has warned of ten Afghanistans if the opposition won. The conflict started out timidly with the families of the southern town of Der’a demanding the release of their teenage boys who were caught graffitizing the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionary slogan *al-sha’b yurid isqat al-nizam* in mid March, 2011.¹³¹ The peaceful mass protests that swept across Syrian towns and villages Friday after Friday were met with the state’s bullets, mass arrests and torture. When news appeared of the torture of children, most infamously the 15 year-old boy Hamza Ali Al-Khatib, the popular cartoonist, Ali Farzat, got his fingers broken, and the witty bard of Hama, Ibrahim Qashoush, had his throat slit by regime thugs in the spring of 2011, the demonstrators turned to armed struggle and the Free Syrian Army formed. Since then, the popular uprising has become a regional and international imbroglio: neighbours, Gulf states and members of the UN security council

128 Khaled Saghiye, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/3435>

129 McMurray and Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, part “V. Bahrain,” 205-46.

130 Zainab Khawaja, “A Letter from a Bahraini Prison,” March 24, 2013, and Nabil Rajab, “Letter from Prison,” April 9, 2013; both translated by www.jadaliyya.com.

131 Reinoud Leenders, “Collective Action and Mobilization in Dar’a: The Anatomy of the Onset of Syria’s Popular Uprising,” *Mobilizations: An International Journal* 17:4 (2012), 419-434.

are fuelling the blazes; mercenaries are infiltrating the battle. The spectre of total collapse looms ominously over Syria. Today, the country is divided and the conflict is so hopelessly drenched in sectarian vitriol that many commentators have given up; and many on the left have lost interest: The Syrian opposition in exile has made too many errors of judgment, the Free Syrian Army has too much blood on its own hands and the global jihadists are bound to reap the ruins of liberation.

What made this revolutionary moment possible in the first place was its utter spontaneity and the total absence of any conspiracy, real or imagined. As this storm of protests gathered force, it exposed the flawed logic that expanding the realm of freedom necessarily means expanding the realm of accepting Western hegemony. In fact, it suggested that oppressive Arab regimes sustained (and were vitally sustained by) liberal democracies in the West in the name of the stability of the lesser evil doctrine whose unholy trinity is oil, Israel and Islamophobia. One of the most striking aspects of the Arab uprisings was the instant move to self-organization the moment the state collapsed or abandoned its administrative functions. What started off as *ad hoc* public security and protection operations morphed into democratic forums that discussed the referendum on the constitution, exchanged information, ran neighbourhood elections, and launched accountability campaigns over the coming months. What started as human protection and basic services ended up to be electoral laboratories.

Many ordinary Syrians who had gotten by under the oppressive rule of the Assad clan had appreciated the stability and the modicum of prosperity it provided.¹³² This arrangement rendered Syrian authoritarianism resilient and adaptable.¹³³ Perhaps the uprising was not worth the price of over 130,000 dead Syrians. Perhaps keeping quiet after the Der'a protests would have been the lesser evil. Moreover, as sympathisers of Ba'athism, Hizballah and the Iranian government insist, Syria is the linchpin of anti-imperialist deterrence against Saudi-Israeli-US hegemony in the region. Ironically, such lesser-evil logic has much in common with Michael Ignatieff's approval for the use of torture in the War on Terror. It also enjoys the unlikely company of hawkish Israeli think tanks and notorious Islamophobe neo-cons, like Daniel Pipes, who advocate arming Assad in order to prevent greater evils.¹³⁴

The revolutionary moment and the radical possibilities of the Arab Spring has now passed, as counter-revolutions –supported by reactionary forces on the Arabian Peninsula – have nipped the political visions of the Cairo commune and the local coordinating communities in Syria in the bud. The revolutionaries of the first hour are limited to preserving the memory of the early days for new generation, much like Arendt attempted for the Hungarian uprising. In Egypt, this work is conducted not only against the army under General Sisi which took advantage of the *Tamarrud* million-(wo)man march on June 30, 2013 to get Morsi to resign and staged a coup d'état four days later. The return to military rule was in itself deeply disturbing for the revolutionaries. What frustrated their work even more was the wide-spread support for Sisi in the Egyptian middle class even and especially after the army's massacres of hundreds of protesters on August 3, 2013. Despite

¹³² Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹³³ Joshua Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

¹³⁴ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/apr/11/pipes-argument-assad/>

their own opposition to Morsi's politics, they, too, have been criminalized and arrested by a new authoritarian regime that can act with impunity because most liberal parties sanction it as the of two lesser evils.

The task of upholding the principles of the revolution is even more dangerous inside Syria, and betrayed by the international left outside. When units of pro-Assad forces gassed hundreds of people in rebel-held neighborhoods on the outskirts of Damascus on August 21, 2013, and President Obama threatened with US military strikes, the international community gathered around slogans of anti-imperialism and chanted "give peace a chance." Assad's two-and-a-half years of brutal counter-insurgency has garnered no such outpouring of pacifism as Syrians continue to endure the lesser evil logic of Western apathy. The US military strikes were called off after intense imperial squabbles at the UN. This is celebrated as a great victory of anti-imperialism¹³⁵, even though the US military had no interest or paymaster to execute the threat, while Republicans revive utterly discredited, Bush-style muscular militarism.¹³⁶ The elephant in the room that makes it impossible for the global left to declare its solidarity with the embattled Syrian revolution is geopolitics.¹³⁷ The refusal to declare solidarity with the Syrians inside Syria who struggle against Iran-and Hizbollah-supported regime forces as well as against Gulf-backed jihadists is costing lives and defers indefinitely a political solution. As Yassin al-Haj Saleh, one of the many René Chars inside the Syrian revolution who are still alive to continue their struggle against the overwhelming odds, reminded the readers of the *New York Times*:

"In the West, reservations about supporting the Syrian rebels that once seemed callous and immoral are now considered justified because of the specter of jihadism. But this view is myopic. Jihadist groups emerged roughly 10 months after the revolution started. Today, these groups are a burden on the revolution and the country, but not on the regime. On the contrary, their presence has enabled the regime to preserve its local base, and served to bolster its cause among international audiences. It is misguided to presume that Mr. Assad's downfall would mean a jihadist triumph, but unfortunately this is the basis for the West's position. A more accurate interpretation is that if Mr. Assad survives, then jihadism is sure to thrive."¹³⁸

135 Rami Elamine, "Defeating the Enemy," September 22, 2013.

http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/14262/defeating-the-enemy_a-response-to-khalid-saghiehn

136 Michael Wilner, "McCain calls Dempsey's warning against attack on Syria 'disingenuous'," *Jerusalem Post*, August 2, 2013. <http://www.jpost.com/Syria-Crisis/McCain-calls-Dempseys-warning-against-attack-on-Syria-disingenuous-321858>

137 Khalid Saghieh, "Sleeping with the Enemy," September 15, 2013.

http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/14157/sleeping-with-the-enemy_the-global-left-and-the-no

138 Yassin al-Haj Saleh, "A Syrian's Cry for Help," *New York Times*, September 9, 2013,

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/10/opinion/a-syrians-cry-for-help.html?_r=0