

Translating Dissent

Discursive and non-discursive interventions in the political arena are heavily mediated by various acts of translation that enable protest movements to connect across the globe. Focusing on the Egyptian experience since 2011, this volume brings together a unique group of activists who are able to reflect on the complexities, challenges and limitations of one or more forms of translation and its impact on their ability to interact with a variety of domestic and global audiences.

Drawing on a wide range of genres and modalities, from documentary film and subtitling to oral narratives, webcomics and street art, the 18 essays reveal the dynamics and complexities of translation in protest movements across the world. Each unique contribution demonstrates some aspect of the interdependence of these movements and their inevitable reliance on translation to create networks of solidarity. The volume is framed by a substantial introduction by Mona Baker and includes an interview with Egyptian activist and film-maker, Philip Rizk.

With contributions by scholars and artists, professionals and activists directly involved in the Egyptian revolution and other movements, *Translating Dissent* will be of interest to students of translation, intercultural studies and sociology, as well as the reader interested in the study of social and political movements. Online materials, including links to relevant websites and videos, are available at <http://www.routledge.com/cw/baker>. Additional resources for Translation and Interpreting Studies are available on the Routledge Translation Studies Portal: <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/translationstudies>.

Mona Baker is Professor of Translation Studies at the University of Manchester. She is author of *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (second edition, 2011) and *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (2006), and editor or co-editor of several reference works, including the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (second edition, 2009); the four-volume *Critical Concepts: Translation Studies* (2009); and *Critical Readings in Translation Studies* (2009). She is Founding Editor of *The Translator* (1995–2013), and Founding Vice-President of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies.

“This is a volume of uncommon urgency, intellectual range, and political importance. Translation, which occupies the crossing point of discourse and power and which affects all networks of word, image and sound, must now stand near the centre of any study of global activism. The richly diverse set of contributors, the activists and scholars, the creators and analysts, located in and out of Egypt, uncover both the conceptual depth and the social force in the contemporary tasks of the dissenting translator.”

Michael H. Levenson, *William B. Christian Professor of English, University of Virginia, USA*

“If you think you know what translation means, think again. This fascinating book uncovers translation as a political act that is negotiated within the spaces that lie between cultures and languages, between the local and the global, between the translatable and the untranslatable. With rich contributions from activist translators, journalists, writers, film makers, scholars, graphic and graffiti artists, all involved in ‘translating’ the Egyptian revolution, Mona Baker has produced a provocative and enlightening volume that will change the way you think about protest, language, culture, politics and translation. It also provides insight into the chaos and complexity of the Egyptian revolution from the perspective of many of the actors involved, highlighting the role art, culture and language play in shaping our perceptions of contemporary political reality, and our understandings of violence, emotions, power, resistance, solidarity, and revolution.”

Dr Cristina Flesher Fominaya, *University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and author of Social Movements and Globalization: How Protests, Occupations and Uprisings are Changing the World (Palgrave 2014)*

“Four years into the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, *Translating Dissent* showcases translation in its broad sense as a new, radical space of intercultural negotiation where discursive and performative representations of revolt in the local and global context take place. By focusing on the recent developments in Egypt and its ongoing contests over freedom of speech and the role of political activism and dissent, the contributors to the volume have brilliantly demonstrated the possibilities offered by translation to create networks of solidarity. The field of translation and cultural studies is that much richer for their efforts.”

Faten I. Morsy, *Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Ain Shams University, Egypt*

“Reading these essays one is struck by the enormous force of creative energy that prevailed during the height of protest in Egypt. The writing underscores the ethical and political role that language, and especially translation, played in broadcasting the multi-media responses to events taking place on the

ground. The writers reveal a newly imagined collective consciousness of an alternative global future. These essays ensure that this vision will remain an active force for human rights and international solidarity.”

Moira Inghilleri, *Director of Translation Studies,
University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA*

“Rarely has scholarly work on translation been transformed into such an affective experience. The choice to let people write from the streets and from their hearts has resulted in a book that is about much more than translation. This is a book about solidarity, and it is itself an act of solidarity. It tells stories that cannot be found elsewhere, that convey not the meaning of the revolution, but the feeling. Rather than offering us a coherent work on ‘translation’, the book brings the reader into the uncertain world of the Egyptian revolution, in which every form of translation becomes a political act that inspires, moves, depresses and challenges the reader.”

Marianne Maeckelbergh, *Associate Professor of Anthropology,
Leiden University, the Netherlands, and author of The Will
of the Many: How the Alterglobalisation Movement is
Changing the Face of Democracy (Pluto Press 2009)*

“In no other book did the term *translation* acquire its full significance in revolutionary networking that characterizes modern times. With the Egyptian Revolution in its focus, this is a valuable companion to all those who were or will be part of any protest movement around the globe. Brilliant.”

Mourid Barghouti, *Palestinian poet and author of I Saw Ramallah*

“*Translating Dissent* offers a compelling case study of language, art, and the mediating powers of translation during the Egyptian Revolution. The range of authors—from Cairo’s own artists, writers and film-makers to non-Egyptian activists and scholars—details translational strategies in a place-based context of revolution and dissent while expanding our understanding of translation itself. Building from Baker’s illuminating introduction to the micro-studies that follow, the volume reveals translation’s ongoing, if insufficiently recognized role in forging local solidarities as well as global networks.”

Sandra Bermann, *Cotsen Professor of the Humanities & Professor
of Comparative Literature, Princeton University, USA*

“This book offers a radical rethinking of translation and translators. By bringing together scholars of translation studies and social movements with a range of activists, it problematizes the unseen but crucial role of translation in protest and social activism. The reflections of activists on translational

practices in documentary films, subtitling, web comics and street art position translation in its broadest sense as central to protest and dissent across the world.”

Hilary Footitt, *University of Reading, UK*

“The rich studies and personal reflections that Mona Baker has collected here put translation at the dynamic centre of political praxis, while opening up the concept of translation itself, rethinking its meaning and scope by training a wide-angle lens on oppositional activism in and for Egypt since 2011. Examining a varied array of media and translational contexts, the contributors give eloquent voice to the intersections of physicality and narrative, language(s) and (other) visual forms, commitment and sheer determination that Egypt’s many oppositional acts of translation have demonstrated.”

Marilyn Booth, *Khalid bin Abdallah Al Saud Professor in the Study of the Contemporary Arab World, Oriental Institute and Magdalen College, University of Oxford, UK*

“As new and established forms of activism swiftly move between local and global realities, translation, in its many forms, becomes integral to the life of social and political movements. *Translating Dissent* makes visible precisely this kind of deep and deeply influential translation, allowing us to hear its multiple voices.”

Loredana Polezzi, *Cardiff University, UK*

Translating Dissent

Voices *from* and *with* the
Egyptian revolution

Edited by Mona Baker

All royalties from the sale of this volume are donated to Hisham Mubarak Law Centre, founded in 1999 by the late Ahmed Seif El-Islam and other human rights activists to defend victims of torture and arbitrary detention in Egypt.

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In memory of Radwa Ashour
Egyptian novelist, scholar, translator, political activist, and
lifetime campaigner for Palestinian rights



1946–2014

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Mona Baker
1 May 2015

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Walid Taher for his 'The Presidential Race' cartoon, which appears in the essay by Jonathan Guyer

17 Interview with Philip Rizk

Editor's introduction

I chose to interview Philip Rizk for this collection because I consider him one of the most critical and articulate voices to emerge out of the vigour and ensuing trauma of post-2011 Egypt. He is as uninstitutionalized as almost anyone can be in a modern society, and perhaps it is his positioning outside most mainstream institutions, including academia, that gives him a unique vantage point, one that allows him to do more justice to the complexity and passion of the revolutionary landscape in Egypt than most. Importantly, he is able to do so in English, the language in which the global public is continually subjected to an avalanche of 'expert' analyses and streamlined narratives, and in which 'native' commentators who support such narratives are prioritized and the many powerful and critical voices available in Arabic filtered out.

This interview was conducted by email, over a period of several turbulent months, starting at the end of September 2014 and concluding at the beginning of April 2015, less than a month before submitting the manuscript to the publisher. Like the events and issues it engages with, it started – and continued – from a position of uncertainty and instability. As in Khalid Abdalla's contribution to this volume, the uncertainty is not glossed over, nor is it a source of despair; its acknowledgement is what allows voices like Philip's to remain critical and open to other views and possibilities. As every day brought in new developments, competing narratives, unexpected perspectives on 'old' stories in Egypt, Philip revised and tweaked his answers, and may want to revise them again in the future. For now, this is a record of one activist's reflections, at a specific point in time, on a broad range of issues, including the relationship and tension between the local and the global, the centre and the margin, the politics of language and articulation, and what forms of 'deep translation' and solidarity we need to continue the battle against our oppressors.



Philip Rizk is a film-maker and writer based in Cairo, Egypt. He studied philosophy and anthropology and has been working with video since 2009. His first film is the short documentary *This Palestinian Life* (2009). In 2010, Rizk completed the short film series *Sturm*, a two-channel articulation that explores rural and industrial ruin in Egypt. Together with Jasmina Metwaly, he formed the video collective Intifadat Intifadat in 2011, producing the series of videos *Remarking January 25*. Since 2011 Rizk has been a member of the Mosireen video collective. Metwaly and Rizk's film *Land Without* is in long-term post-production. In 2015, Rizk and Metwaly released their first feature film, *Out on the Street*, in which they engage with performativity and theatre in a work with non-professional actors exploring the social and political landscape in Egypt leading up to the 25 January revolt. *Out on the Street* premiered at the Berlinale, and a work around the film will be presented at the Venice Biennale 2015. Rizk's texts have appeared in various collected volumes, the *Journal of Human Geography* and on jadaliyya.com and roarmag.org.

Mona: Unlike most members of Mosireen, you have taken particular interest in the subtitling aspect of the collective very early on – you initiated the mailing list for subtitlers, drafted guidelines of subtitling, and engaged with subtitlers regularly on the discussion list. You had also arranged for videos produced by Intifadat Intifadat to be subtitled before you joined Mosireen. From your experience, what do you think subtitling contributes to collectives such as Mosireen and Intifadat Intifadat? How does it fit into the political project?

Philip: It is difficult to answer questions such as these when a collective is for the most part in stasis. I joined Mosireen after being part of Intifadat Intifadat; both were conceived to be deeply intertwined with the revolution, which itself is going through a hiatus, and accordingly we are not what we

once were. I would like to broaden your question for a moment by thinking through the act of translation in relation to the work of these two collectives before addressing subtitling directly.

One way I would sum up what Mosireen and Intifadat Intifadat are about is translation. We came together to try to translate the spirit of the revolt; in a sense, we sought to translate the street through images, in the hope of breeding anger, in the hope of forcing the audience to face the reality of the brutality of the regime, in the hope of instigating revolt. This goes for most of the collectives' work, but if I speak particularly of my own involvement, one of the important intentions was to dislodge the middle-class milieu of activists, of whom the collectives were a part, from the position of the main protagonists of revolt. As you well know, the narrative of 25 January that has gained the most traction amongst elites both in and outside Egypt is that the revolt was flamed by an Internet-savvy middle-class milieu; this narrative would later clearly reveal itself to be part of the strategy of the counter-revolution's undermining of the revolution. Intifadat Intifadat, which was already active during the first 18 days of the revolution, was exactly about this: the interlocutors of the revolt had to be those who carried it through, not those who were already made to represent it. After all, as Max Weber wrote years ago, representation is a structure of domination. Here, the act of translating the positions and opinions of an underclass was of the essence, in order to counter a much more dominant telling of who the protagonists of this revolt were. I remember around March or April of 2011 filming a march protesting a draft law that sought to ban protest, a law that of course was implemented at the end of 2013 and is the reason why so many are behind bars today. After the march, we gathered in Tahrir Square and I was filming a working-class man who was enraged about the scope of the law. As he referenced the revolution's key motivation, عيش، حرية، عدالة اجتماعية / *3eish, 7ureyya, 3adala igtema3eyya* ('bread, freedom, social justice'), a very shrill voice of a woman off-frame cut him off, yelling, "No, no, this is a revolution for كرامة انسانية [*karama insaneyya* (human dignity)]". The man stopped speaking immediately out of respect. I turned to find a clearly middle-class woman in her late 30s trying to convince me to stop filming because this man didn't know what he was talking about. This was a very direct experience of what was happening on a much wider scale in competition over the narrative of the revolution.

I often think of the main protagonists of protest though a trope of 'the street', which of course is a very subjective, abstract category that remains constantly in flux. Without a consistent, clear position, the majority of protagonists of revolt are difficult to represent, to categorize, to generalize in the manner that is the very essence of metanarratives like those of the mainstream press or authorities. The protagonists of 'the street' are the unseen actors with enough wrath, and often with not enough to lose, to risk their lives in an attempt to oppose a regime of coloniality with full force. Most of us who make up Mosireen, on the other hand, are the privileged few; speaking

multiple languages, with more rights in a society with few to speak of. Most of us were politicized before 2011, thus we were amongst this crowd of wrath but always set apart in a vital sense. Of course the chroniclers of metanarratives are unlikely to put it in just such terms, and here clearly one of the difficulties, one of the dangers of the position we have chosen for ourselves, emerges. We place ourselves in a position of the translator, a position we cannot fully escape. Through a structure that is collective and for the most part nameless, we attempt to subvert some of the potential violence that this act of image-making and dissemination entails, but we cannot escape it completely.

I want to mention one video that had a powerful impact at a particular moment, a very brief interview with a protestor called Aboudi, a member of the Ultras. On one night of the Parliament sit-in, in December 2011, soldiers nearly clobbered Aboudi to death. One Mosireen member managed to get past hospital security and filmed him soaked in blood on his hospital bed within an hour of the occurrence (Figure 17.1). The telling of this act helped to bring about a turning point in the sequence of events in the days that followed, by revealing to many that the military men were lying when they claimed to be on the side of the protestors. Our aim was not to present breaking news; our aim was to oppose the lies of those in power. Similar to the *Kazeboon* campaign that built on the idea of Mosireen's street screenings very successfully, the intention of such videos and screenings was to translate the reality of the counter-revolution, a reality that was completely at odds with the narratives promoted by the establishment at the time. This is why for me it is so important to clearly distinguish between Mosireen and other forms of media: Mosireen is a 'media collective', not in the sense of 'press' or 'journalism' but in the sense of using multiple audiovisual media to try and communicate the protest of the street.

I have to point out that while these were always our aspirations, on many occasions we failed to reach the size of audience we hoped to engage, or we failed to reach the kind of audience we desired. At other times our videos



Figure 17.1 Testimony of Aboudi, video by Mosireen, 16 December 2011.¹

may have actually prevented people from going to the street, as it was just as easy to go on with your daily routine and at the end of it watch Mosireen's summary of that day's protests. It is hard to assess how much we really succeeded in reaching our aims. One example of this is that we tried very hard to circumvent our dependence on the Internet as the primary method of distribution of our material. Thus during street screenings for example we tried very hard to find a way to streamline the distribution of our videos through Bluetooth from phone to phone. At some point I was in contact with developers of such Bluetooth software that would have allowed us to achieve a much broader, faster Bluetooth distribution. The researchers were still in too early a development phase to provide us with what we needed. Another software we purchased failed us miserably. At some street screenings almost the entire audience would line up afterwards to receive a free CD with a collection of our videos. We encouraged online viewers to download videos onto their phones or for public or private screenings and distribute them to friends. We were never content with the focus on an Internet audience; the Internet after all is not accessible to the majority of Egyptians, and certainly not to those we most sought to engage with, but these obstacles often remained insurmountable. In certain periods our videos often screened on TV; this gave us access to a larger audience but involved all the pitfalls of following television guidelines and placed us at the whims of the editorial line of commercial TV stations. As far as I know, after 30 June 2013 not a single TV station screened any of our new videos. TV was never an outlet we could rely on. If we were going to translate the street to the street then we needed to find ways to access different constituencies. We failed in big ways to do that.

A secondary aim of translation, which is just as important as the first, was to connect with a global community of revolt. At key moments Mosireen played an important role in broadening the reach of solidarity protests around the world, which helped increase the pressure on the regime in particular instances. Of course there were many ways of informing outsiders of the events that were occurring across Egypt; our videos were only one of these. Here the role of subtitling, building on our effort to translate the street to a local audience, came into play. As a rule we always translated into English. Later on, especially as the translation team started growing and became one of the most effective aspects of our video-making process, we managed often to translate quickly into multiple languages.

Especially in times of ebb of protests in Egypt, we sought out connections with revolts around the world. I recall connecting with protestors in Greece and Spain, often leading to an exchange of solidarity letters. On one occasion we were put in contact with members of the self-governed tile factory Zanon in Argentina, after they had watched a Mosireen video, with Spanish subtitles, on the strike of tile workers in the Ceramica Cleopatra Company in Suez. On one occasion a series of Intifadat Intifadat videos was screened in a public square in Mexico City to passers-by, and the artist who organized

the screening handed out CDs of the films, encouraging people to organize home screenings. Through images, we were translating some of the realities on the ground in the Egyptian revolt; these images could move across continents, and on some rare occasions inspire action.

A third reason for translation, again in the form of subtitling, involved subtitling in the other direction – not from Arabic into other languages, but from other languages into Arabic. We sought to identify this moment of revolt as part of a larger protest that connected us with people and movements around the world. This meant that on occasion we translated videos into Arabic: at times short activist videos like ours and later longer feature films, which we screened in the Mosireen space in an attempt to inspire and connect our struggles to protest elsewhere.

A special example of the impact of this form of translation involved a group of workers who occupied their factory – the IFFCO plant, again in Suez. We were hosted by the occupying workers to screen Ernesto Ardito and Virna Molina's film *Corazón de Fábrica*, which was subtitled by the Mosireen translation group. Before screening the film, a translated message of solidarity from the Zanon workers I mentioned above was read to the group. The IFFCO workers at the time were contemplating strategies to intensify their protest and were deeply moved by the Argentinian workers' struggle.

Looking back at the years since 2011, I have come to the conclusion that revolt in the twenty-first century cannot happen in a vacuum or be disconnected from the global political status quo. This means that translating our own revolts and those of others and seeking inspiration from and connecting with those struggles are vital to our struggles' very longevity. If the world's superpowers politically support one dictator after another and supply the Egyptian police and military with training and weapons, if software developers from Silicon Valley make part of their profits by supplying the regimes that lock us up and torture us with the tools they need to spy on us, then how can we speak of a strictly Egyptian revolt? Unless we frustrate these political alliances, stop the weapons shipments and shut down the corporations that supply our overlords with the tools that crush us, the counter-revolution will continue to be armed to the teeth, while we take care of our dead. In Egypt there was a short-lived campaign by dock workers in Suez to block a tear gas shipment as the supplies of the Egyptian police seemed to be running out, but the repression against them was too strong, the risk-taking by colleagues too limited. There was also a campaign to try to link these efforts in Egypt to similar campaigns against weapons shipments to the Israeli and Bahraini regimes, but again the traction was too limited, the fronts of our battle were too many. The lesson to be learned is that we have to recognize the dimensions of our battle, which certainly cross national boundaries and de facto make them obsolete. In light of this, translation becomes a vital tool to link people together and wipe out the boundaries of coloniality created to contain our common struggles.

Mona: Your response to my first question confirms an impression that I developed in an earlier conversation and from following your work in general, namely that the kind of activism you have been involved in privileges the margin as a space from which a radical challenge to the status quo can be initiated and sustained, a site of resistance full of possibility, one in which you can imagine and create radical alternatives, a new world. You have a long-standing interest in workers, particularly precarious workers, who often feature in your work and have already featured prominently in our conversation so far. You comment on your blog (*Tabulagaza*) that “these people change our world” – referring to workers; not intellectuals, artists or the professional class, those with relative power and capital in society. You have also so far privileged filming outside the centre: outside Cairo (in Mehalla, Idku, Suez) and even outside Tahrir Square (in side streets, Imbaba, Tura) during the period when Tahrir was the centre of the revolution. How does this location in the social and geographical margin impact filmic language? Can you speak to and about dominance in the same language (whether verbal or filmic), in the same voice you use to speak to and about the underclass, the oppressed? Can you reflect on the implications of this location for subtitling/translation?

Philip: I am uncomfortable speaking about the margin as a whole, in a generalized manner. When I reference the margin it is usually as a space, one which hosts a community out of which a certain revolutionary tendency has arisen, but not one that summarizes a community. I cannot speak about the margin *in toto*. The space of the margin in my view comprises a majority of the population, so it is in a way actually speaking more to whom it excludes, rather than to whom it includes. It excludes people like myself, in a milieu of privilege. I am not saying that the revolution was only comprised of this margin; there were many from the non-margins revolting. What I am saying is that without the margins we would have continued to be a small group protesting on the steps of the Journalists’ Syndicate, where protests used to take place on a regular basis under the Mubarak regime. Only once that space of protest opened up to include the wider population was there potential for *intifada*, uprising. This dynamic is quite consistent if you look at Egypt’s recent past: 1977, 1989, 2008 – these are moments when people from the margins revolted.

First I need to say that in part this emphasis is brought about by my own presence in that space, though I am a privileged member of society to be speaking on behalf of others. With my height, my slightly accented Arabic and my obvious dual national origin, I am always a stranger in the midst of that ‘outside’, that ‘margin’, which has made it very often difficult to be there. I had to learn not only the language spoken in the margin, but the body language, the non-spoken language, though by no means would I claim to have excelled at it. It took time to learn the rules of those different margins – of course the margin is not all the same, not an undifferentiated

space. This also meant that I was an easy target at times for those who did not want me there. And it means that, except on rare occasions, I do not enter such a community without a guide known to the community who can make my presence there, and especially the camera, welcome. It is precisely also being the stranger, the mutt, the neither–nor that places me outside. This weakness of position allows me in, in a different way.

The margin allows for a rich filmic language; it is a visual landscape often unfamiliar to the familiar viewer. Whether it is the inner makings of an industrial workspace or the *3ashwa2yya* (underclass neighbourhood),² you are taking the viewer on a journey. But this journey itself is a luxury, for who is watching these sorts of images online but the privileged few with time to spare?

The majority of work of both collectives I have been involved with used a largely uniform filmic language. This is a problem, a shortcoming that we tried to move beyond but struggled to do so. For various reasons I have grown discontented with the particular documentary format that we used. For one, unless you have the means to reach new audiences as the *Kazeboon* campaign did very effectively, by setting up screenings in the street, the format itself brackets the particular type of audience you can access. Further, with the classic documentary mode there is a tendency to delimit yourself to the realm of the given, rather than moving into a realm of the possible, the realm of the imaginary. This is one of the main reasons I am no longer working on such videos, and along with Jasmina Metwaly after many years of work have recently completed a very different kind of project, a feature-length film called *Out on the Street*.

When I first met with one of the participants in *Out on the Street*, a project that embodies this approach of working with people from the margins, one of Ahmed's first observations was that he would have to use the language of his neighbourhood, the language of the street. I couldn't have been happier to hear this. Though at times I would need translations and explanations of expressions Ahmed and the other protagonists used, this was exactly the type of element that Jasmina and I were looking for in the project: to hear about the margins not only through my filmic expression of the margin, but through the language of its inhabitants, their perception not only of the margins but of the centre. That is of the essence in *Out on the Street*, a film that seeks to engage the imaginary, that includes documentary footage but moves beyond it by using performance in an attempt to engage another sphere of reality.

How some of these verbal and non-verbal dimensions of the film will be translated is a big task that requires a lot of space for negotiation. Translation involved a very long negotiation process with two professional translators, Jasmina, our producer and conversations with the protagonists themselves. We also had as an aid a researcher who spent years living and doing her PhD work in one of the neighbourhoods where many of the participants live. At the end of the day, translation of the verbal content of the film will

not suffice. I believe the image does not need translation, the audience will read it; often a non-Arabic-speaking viewer will read what an Arabic speaker cannot understand. In some ways, the image is the language of the margins. Like so many of the stories told in the videos of Mosireen and Intifadat Intifadat, I feel the film tells a global story that crosses boundaries of (verbal and filmic) language. To the best of our abilities we will emphasize the utility of verbal language to help traverse these boundaries, but at some point the language of the body, of the eyes and of collective movement and the cinematic will do the work that verbal language cannot.

Mona: Is it possible in your view to imagine alternative modes of film-making that acknowledge subtitling as an integral part of the semiotics of film, and as deeply embroiled in the politics of language and place?

Philip: I don't think one needs to speak of alternative modes of film-making but instead think of the integration of a radical politics into all levels of the process itself. In my view this is really a matter of priorities. Film-makers often prioritize narrative over much else; often we prioritize image over sound while filming; and rarely do we think about the dimension of subtitling, which ought to be a key element of the editing process. I think it is due to the nature of the rush of Mosireen and Intifadat Intifadat videos, the speed with which they had to be produced and released, that we didn't prioritize this element enough. Too often I think we were already thinking about the next video that needed to be worked on while we were finalizing the current one. Without the involvement of the amazing subtitling team that eventually took that entire responsibility on themselves I think we would still have put out a lot of videos without subtitles or with very poor translations. I think some of the articles in this volume, such as the essay by Salma El Tarzi, explore the lost potential in ignoring this element quite effectively. When we ignore the element of subtitling, we lose the radical potential for a global audience.

Mona: As you have already pointed out, the margin is not an undifferentiated or uniform space. How do you address the challenge of incorporating and doing justice to the multiple voices and experiences of people who inhabit this complex space? And how important is it in your view for subtitles to enact a political principle such as respect for diversity – perhaps by capturing nuances of register, dialect and idiolect? Do you ever reflect on how such linguistic features contribute to your project, or do you assume that the visual element (how someone looks, what they wear, etc.) and the content of what they say (rather than how they say it) will more or less deliver the political message and communicate the commitment to diversity?

Philip: I just go with the flow, honestly. I try to speak to men and women, young and old, those with clear articulation of events as well as those who



Figure 17.2 *Non-stop Security Attacks in Simon Bolivar Square*, video by Mosireen, 28 November 2012.

are more disarrayed in their discourse. I feel sometimes the discourse of diversity can be overbearing. I always try to film with the margins within the margins; in most cases these are women and children or those perceived by their peers to be less articulate. They are not always easy to access. I usually work alongside another person, often a woman, who might have access to people I am not allowed to talk to. On many occasions a crowd will automatically provide us with someone who is well spoken, someone older, someone with better education, a natural leader in their midst. Often we would spend quite some time engaging that person and then start seeking out others. At the end of the day, a lot of the selection happens in the editing process, and the person we filmed with most might not even appear in the film. Often the less articulate portrayal of events is to the point and more powerful. I remember a Mosireen video (Figure 17.2)³ where we asked people at the front lines why they were there; we did not film their faces, we just took the audio. Few of the people we spoke to at the front lines were well spoken in the traditional sense; they did not go on long diatribes about their political vision like many people who are usually asked to stand in front of a camera. They would say things like “I am here because I have no future, I am here because I am dead either way, I am here because they killed Jika”.

In subtitling it is important to me to translate the meaning of things; there is no such thing as literal translation. I think the reading of class needs to be done by the viewer, the visuals of the space tell a lot about the luxuries that a character has access to. If we film in someone’s house that consists of two rooms where clearly the TV room is transformed into someone’s bedroom at night and the kitchen is at the doorway, I see no need to add emphasis on this in the subtitles. I also don’t want the subtitles to become a crutch

for the visual language. Subtitles help make the film translatable but ought not to be used to make the filmic language itself more accessible. We usually rely too much on words, and so we need to draw limitations on what we expect them to do.

Mona: When I interviewed you in January 2014, you made it clear that on the one hand your priority as a film-maker is to engage an Egyptian audience. At the same time, you mentioned several times that it is important to connect with other protest movements globally, and that there are certain connections on the global level that you have been nurturing for years. Can you reflect on the challenges of attending to the specificities of the local struggle and setting out to address a local audience on the one hand, and on the other, the desire to reach out to and seek solidarity from similar movements in other parts of the world? What impact does this tension have on subtitling and translation in general?

Philip: It differs significantly, depending on the kinds of videos. Testimonies for example stand for themselves to a great extent, but as the political situation got more convoluted here it became important for us to take a very clear stance on issues. There was a period where the local press was extremely antagonistic towards violence used against the police. We made a video called *Why Riot?*, which was really taking a stance with the street and against a lot of elites, many of them supporters of the revolution who would say these are not legitimate ways to revolt. We were saying they are (Figure 17.3).⁴

This was a clear message to the local population, but I would expect that similar conversations are happening elsewhere around the world – you just need to look at what happened in Syntagma Square, Turkey or all over Brazil, for example. Taking a stance for the necessity of violent protest



Figure 17.3 *Why Riot?*, video by Mosireen, 18 March 2013.

against the brutality of the state here as elsewhere unites us with protestors around the globe. One of the things that may have been hard to follow for an audience, whether local or global, is that many of our videos provided little context to the background of events depicted in the video. We usually used as a point of departure the assumption that the viewer ought to be familiar with events leading up to the political starting point of a video; after all, we are not media reporters, not reporting. I think much of this tension otherwise has already appeared in the answers to previous questions. Overall, it was a matter of time, it took a lot of effort in looking up people, making the connections and when screenings happened elsewhere it required getting them screening lists, video files, making sure subtitles were up to date and in the right language, and in some cases that someone was available to talk to the audience on Skype afterwards. This took a lot of time and kept one away from what was happening here, so there was not always time for attending to a global audience really.

Mona: In the same interview, you referred to the ability to connect with other movements as ‘one of the easy consequences’ of what Mosireen was doing, even though it was not why Mosireen was established. Given recent events in Egypt and the reduced space of protest and of interaction with the domestic audience, does the ability to connect with movements outside Egypt assume more importance now? One example I can think of is the *Egypt Solidarity* campaign, whose priority is clearly to engage a global audience, including the Egyptian diaspora. The *Egypt Solidarity* site currently features no language other than English. Do you envisage a more or less central role for translation within Egypt-related political initiatives in the next phase, and why?

Philip: The response to this question is much more bleak than you might expect. We spent two-and-a-half years giving the movement our all and now many of us are tired, recovering from some form of depression or simple disappointment, or tending to friends in jail. As you well know the regime fought back, and with a vengeance: the prisons are full, the risk of just going to the street with a sign or a chant is such that it could mean too many years in prison. The infectious disease of fear is back. In this environment our activities have been reduced, there is a lack of energy, a lack of hope and a lack of audience, and what our societies need now is much more than some videos. But all this said, I have not lost hope. I believe that with the new excessive measures of repression, the austerity measures, inflation and its impact, especially on the margins, this regime will not last for long. Though the next battle will be a much bloodier one.

There was a man I filmed on the morning of 8 April 2011, after the military had entered the Square in the early hours, killed an unknown number of protestors, injured and arrested others. After an account of what he saw that morning, the speaker describes the Egyptian regime’s



Figure 17.4 *The Remnants of Colonialism: Eye Witness of the Square Massacre*, 8 April, video by Intifadat Intifadat, 9 April 2011.

logic of coloniality (Figure 17.4; starting at 5:15 on the video),⁵ colonial structures inherited from our past occupiers that today are under the auspices of local elites but function according to the same logic as they did in the past. Neo-colonialism is a global condition; that is what we are up against.

At the end of the interview the man says that in order to fight back, we need to get rid of the entire system, not just the remnants. This attack that the man on the margins is speaking of can only happen when we do it together. This is a global battle and this is what gives me what hope I have left. In order to fight back we must connect, we must communicate, we need to learn solidarity, we must translate in more ways than just verbal translation, we must attempt a translation of the streets, a deep translation. Collectively we must move on to somewhere new. Where that is, we will find out in the process, here and elsewhere.

Notes

- 1 Available at <http://youtu.be/MChw2kqlRG8> (accessed 31 March 2015).
- 2 See Gaber, pp. 100–1, for a discussion of *3ashwa2yyaat*.
- 3 Available at <http://youtu.be/Gwb0PJryFm8> (last accessed 31 March 2015).
- 4 Available at http://youtu.be/b_ywo_XZh1s (last accessed 31 March 2015).
- 5 Available at <http://youtu.be/agxaNWW8ccM> (last accessed 31 March 2015).