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We Live in Cairo

TOOLKIT

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EXPERIENCE THE
art.
2018/19 Season



Welcome!

We Live in Cairo is inspired by the young Egyptians who took to the streets in 2011 to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak. This world premiere musical follows six revolutionary students armed with laptops and cameras, guitars and spray cans as they come of age in contemporary Cairo. ***We Live in Cairo*** moves from the jubilation of Tahrir Square through the tumultuous years that followed. As escalating division and violence lead to a military crackdown, the revolutionaries of Tahrir must confront the question of how—or even whether—to keep their dreams of change alive.

In the pages of this Toolkit, teachers and learners of all ages will find opportunities for in-depth engagement with the inspiration and themes of ***We Live in Cairo***. You will hear from the creative team behind the play, scholars, as well as artists and activists connected to the revolution. You will engage with the development and historical context of the play, as well as the roles of art, activism, and social media in the Egyptian revolution. Suggested questions to aid discussion and lesson plans are provided to encourage students to explore the intersections of art, activism, social media, and social movements.

See you at the theater!

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***We Live in Cairo* TOOLKIT**

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Thank you for participating in the A.R.T. Education Experience!

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We Live in Cairo: In Production



We Live in Cairo marks the third world-premiere production of the A.R.T.'s 2018/19 season. It is an ambitious musical seven-plus years in the making! This section takes a glance at some of the individuals bringing this new work to life.

First, read a synopsis of ***We Live in Cairo*** (pages 5-8) before meeting the young cast and creative team (pages 9-11). Next, explore an interview with A.R.T. Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus and ***We Live in Cairo*** director Taibi Magar and writers Daniel Lazour and Patrick Lazour (pages 12-15). Take a look at some of set and costume designer Tilly Grimes' set renderings for the production (pages 16-18) and learn about the inspiration for choreographer Samar Haddad King's movement and dance (pages 19-20). Read an essay by composer Daniel Lazour about his "Soundtrack of Arab Identity", which closes out this section (pages 21-23).



The cast of *We Live in Cairo*

Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva

About *We Live in Cairo*

We Live in Cairo begins with the cast onstage, out of character: they are a troupe of storytellers, here to tell the story of the Egyptian revolution through song and performance (“Genealogy of Revolution”). The scene shifts to 2013. In a makeshift performance space, now shuttered, a group of young activists gather uneasily. Here, they planned the 2011 protests which overthrew President Hosni Mubarak. But now, two years later, the revolution is long gone: the military has taken power in a bloody coup. The characters have just returned from a funeral—they are uneasy about seeing one another again, and about defying the new military government’s curfew. There is a knock at the door.

The scene shifts back two years. The space in 2011 is bright and lively. Inside, two brothers, Hany and Amir, perform a song satirizing Mubarak, who has been in power for thirty years and grown increasingly detached from the problems of his people (“A Decree from President Hosni Mubarak”). Layla, a photographer and a newcomer enters the space (“Layla’s Entrance”). Fadwa, an activist, wants to enlist Layla to take pictures of political street art by Karim, a muralist. Layla is nervous: she has only come to see Amir, her lover, play music. (Their relationship is a semi-secret: he is Christian and she is Muslim, a partnership frowned on in Egypt.) Fadwa persuades Layla that

About *We Live in Cairo* (cont.)

her photography could make a political difference in the age of social media (“Loud Voice”).

The next day, we see Karim painting a subversive political mural on a wall in central Cairo (“Wall Song”). He is interrupted by a police officer, who questions him, suspicious of his colorful clothes and visible piercing. Karim, however, comes from a connected family; the officer lets him go. Meanwhile, however, Hassan—a young student from a poor and conservative family—must wash Karim’s painting off the wall. Karim gets a message on Twitter: “come to the wall behind building 129.” There, Hassan, a secret fan of Karim’s work, has tried to recreate the erased mural. Karim and Hassan connect; Karim teaches Hassan how to paint.

Fadwa and Layla arrive at the mural. Layla takes a photo, and Fadwa guides her to other spaces in the city, using Layla’s photography to draw attention to poverty, corruption, and crumbling infrastructure (“Cairo Street Scenes”). Later, the young protesters are all at work together in their various forms of activism and art: Karim and Hassan make stencils, Amir and Hany write a song, and Fadwa and Layla upload photos to social media. Suddenly, however, the group get a piece of terrible news from the internet: police have brutally murdered Khaled Said, a young man, outside an internet cafe in Alexandria. The police and the government deny any wrongdoing. The group are stunned—this violence deepens their anger and grief at their government. They join silent protests marking Said’s death (“Flap My Wings”).

As protests over Said’s death continue, wider unrest sweeps the region. In Tunisia, a fruit vendor sets himself on fire following police harassment, sparking protests which result in the ouster of Tunisia’s dictator. In Egypt, self-immolations follow, and plans are made for large protests on January 25—a holiday in Egypt commemorating the police. Beginning on January 25, massive protests sweep Egypt, including more than one million people gathered in Cairo’s Tahrir Square (“Eighteen Days”). The protestors remain in place for over two weeks, resisting attacks by police and hired thugs; after eighteen days, Mubarak relinquishes power (end of Act 1).

Act 2 begins with Egypt preparing to vote: the activists celebrate their victory and debate the elections while dancing in a club (“Mahraganaat”). In a series of parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2011 and early 2012, an Islamist organization called the Muslim Brotherhood—long an oppressed voice of pietistic anti-government resistance in Egypt—wins a majority of seats in parliament and, ultimately, the presidency.

About *We Live in Cairo* (cont.)

The activists are shocked by the Muslim Brotherhood's victory: this is not the secular democracy they dreamed of and demonstrated for. The group argues about how next to proceed: Hany wants to respect the results of Egypt's first free and fair elections in a generation, while Fadwa wants to organize for the ouster of the new president, Mohamed Morsi. Fadwa is also suspicious of Hassan, whose family supports the Muslim Brotherhood and is increasingly pressuring him to leave the company of the activists. These pressures quickly fracture the friendships of the group. Hassan, especially, begins to feel that he does not belong—he runs out of the space, and Karim follows him. Karim insists to Hassan that their connection because of something that they have shared—especially in a moment when they were dancing together in the club, and, Karim implies, something that happened afterward. Hassan turns away from Karim and exits.

In the streets, a petition for Morsi's ouster gains millions of signatures through the spring of 2013. Fadwa and Layla participate in protests; Amir is disillusioned and wants to write music with Hany, recalling the better times of the revolution. Hany, however, reveals that he has applied to, and accepted a place at, Columbia law school in New York: he is leaving Cairo. As Hany departs, the army ousts president Morsi in a coup celebrated by millions—and protested by many members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hassan visits Amir and convinces him to play his music at the protests, in an attempt to unite the dueling factions.

These protests, however, quickly turn deadly: the army disperses a massive protest, killing over 1,000 Muslim Brotherhood supporters. The scene has reached the moment when the play began: the activists are gathered after Amir's funeral. The knock on the door sounds again, and Hassan enters—here to seek Hany's forgiveness for his role in Amir's death. Fadwa insists that the only way to honor Amir is to protest the new military regime; the other characters insist that protesting now is too dangerous. Fadwa rebukes their loss of resolve ("Each and Every Name"). Hany asks everyone except Layla to leave.

In a triptych of interconnected scenes, we see the impact of the crackdown on the characters in three separate spaces. Alone at the gallery, Hany and Layla mourn Amir and wonder what to do with their lives; Hassan insists to Karim that their connection was sinful, and that he has changed his lifestyle; alone at a protest, Fadwa wonders whether activism is worth its costs ("What If I Wanted More").

At the end of this shared song, Hany decides to join Fadwa's protest. Fadwa asks Hany to film her on his phone while she jumps, alone, in front of a

About *We Live in Cairo* (cont.)

police car, holding a picture of Amir's bloody face. While they prepare, Hany envisions his brother alive again, and the brighter future they imagined for themselves in 2011 ("Dreaming Words"). Hany snaps out of his vision to find himself surrounded by police.

The scene shifts to Cairo's notorious Tora prison. Layla has come to visit Hany, now a prisoner. She shares that Fadwa has been disappeared; Hany shares his faith that she will return. Layla asks Hany how she can go on, and he shares that she must try to love their country, as he does. The guards take Hany away, leaving Layla alone. Unsure of how to move on, Layla resolves to carry her memory of the revolution onward, cherishing her family and her homeland as best she can ("Finale"). The ensemble join Layla onstage. Looking outward to the audience, together they sing a final refrain from the show's first song: "I was one person / who had an idea / who made it words / and someone heard / someone heard."



Writers Daniel Lazour (left) and Patrick Lazour (right) and Director Taibi Magar (center) of *We Live in Cairo*

Photo: Gretjen Helene Photography

The Team

Creative

Director Taibi Magar: An Egyptian-American director based in New York. Her 2018 production of *Is God Is* at Soho Rep won her an Obie Award for directing. This is her first production at A.R.T.

Writers Daniel Lazour and Patrick Lazour: Brothers and collaborators of Lebanese descent. They are the 2016 winners of the Richard Rogers Award for Musical Theater for *We Live in Cairo*. This is their first production at A.R.T.

Choreographer Samar Haddad King: Artistic/Founding Director of Yaa Samar! Dance Theatre (YSDT). With YSDT, King has created over 30 original works which have been performed in ten countries across four continents. This is her first production at A.R.T.

Scenic and Costume Designer Tilly Grimes: A designer whose recent work includes projects at Playwrights Horizons, Roundabout, Atlantic, Ars Nova, WP Theatre, Red Bull in New York. This is her first production at A.R.T.

The Team (cont.)

Lighting Designer Bradley King: Won a Tony Award for his work on *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet* on Broadway and is recently nominated for his work on *Hadestown*, currently running on Broadway. He has previously worked on *Endlings*, *Burn All Night*, *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet*, and O.P.C. at A.R.T.

Sound Designer Kai Harada: Recently won a Tony and Drama Desk Award for work on *The Band's Visit* on Broadway. He previously worked on *The Black Clown* at the beginning of this season at A.R.T.

Projection & Video Designer David Bengali: Received a Drama Desk Nomination for his work on *Van Gogh's Ear* at the Ensemble for the Romantic Century. This is his first production for A.R.T.

Ensemble



Sharif Afifi plays Karim Farouk. Karim is a gay street artist who is described as energetic, privileged, and spiritual.

Abubakr Ali plays Hany Salib. Hany writes music with his brother Amir and is dogmatic in his political views.



Dana Saleh Omar plays Fadwa Bassiouny. Fadwa is a young, passionate activist, whose brashness sometimes isolates her.

Jakeim Hart plays Amir Salib. Amir is something of a rockstar who writes and performs music that inspires his revolutionary peers. He is in a secretive relationship with Layla. His brother is Hany.



The Team (cont.)



Parisa Shahmir plays Layla Hakim. Layla is a photographer and is measured and confident. She is in a secret relationship with Amir.

Gil Perez-Abraham plays Hassan Ahmed. Hassan is a student from a poor family who is slightly impressionable and searching for meaning in his youth.



Layan Elwazani is an ensemble member and an understudy for Fadwa and Layla.

Waseem Alzer is an ensemble member and an understudy for Karim, Hany, Amir, and Hassan.





A.R.T.'s Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus in conversation with the creators of *We Live in Cairo*

Photo: Liza Voll

Protest Music

*At the 2018/19 Season Preview, Diane Paulus spoke with **We Live in Cairo** Writers Daniel Lazour and Patrick Lazour, and Director Taibi Magar. In this conversation, they discuss their inspiration and writing process for this world-premiere musical.*

The A.R.T. 18/19 Season closes with *We Live in Cairo*. This new musical follows a group of young people through the events of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, when millions rose up to overthrow the president of thirty years. Could you tell us about your initial inspiration for this piece?

Patrick Lazour: The impetus for the show was actually an incredible photo [page 11] that I saw when I was in a course at Boston College called International Relations of the Middle East. It shows a group of young activists in 2011, during the eighteen days of protests, in a flat above Tahrir Square.

Daniel Lazour: *The New York Times* termed it the “Facebook flat,” because it was a crash pad in a central location where these revolutionaries could come together with internet access to have a free exchange of ideas. We were inspired by the collection of stories evident in that photo and that place. Also, Patrick and I are of Lebanese descent, and we’ve always wanted to create a show incorporating Arabic musical influences.

Protest Music (cont.)

Taibi, how did you get involved as the director of this production? What about the subject matter interested you?

Taibi Magar: When I first read the script and listened to the music, I fell deeply in love with the show for a few reasons. First of all, it is closely tied to my Egyptian-American heritage. Secondly, I read the piece shortly after the current US administration had moved into Washington, DC. It felt exciting to work on a piece asking deep questions such as, “What do you do when you’re unsatisfied with your government, even finding it to be dangerous?” It was also great to dive into the stories of the revolution and realize the magnitude of what they accomplished: amid a thirty-year dictatorship, a bunch of twenty-year-olds started a Facebook group, which sparked demonstrations by millions of people.

Can you tell us about the characters we meet in this show?

PL: *We Live in Cairo* follows six young people through the revolution and its aftermath. In scenes set in 2011, we tell the story of the community and the activism that it took to overthrow Mubarak. Then, we examine the disillusionment that followed elections in 2012, and the danger and violence following the military coup in 2013.

TM: The revolution was extraordinary—but as extraordinary as it was, it has failed, at least for now. We traveled to Egypt in preparation for the production, and it was hard to look at these activists’ faces, knowing how many friends and family members they had lost. It was hard to hear people say that, in many ways, the country is in a worse state now that it was before 2011. The play navigates between these moments of extreme hope and extreme loss, asking “how do you keep moving forward?” It reminds me of a Samuel Beckett quote: “you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.” In moments of despair in protest and revolution, how do we get to the point of “I’ll go on”?

You mentioned an impulse to explore Arabic music. What were some of your specific influences for this piece, and how are they incorporated into the show?

DL: In our early work on the show, we thought about the incredible beats and rhythms in the Arab world that we aren’t exposed to in the West, and we thought that it could be exciting and theatrical to bring those to the stage. We experimented with layering Western chord progressions on top of Arabic rhythms—which is a mixture happening extensively in contemporary Arabic

Protest Music (cont.)

pop music, too. We're trying to offer something new to American theater and also reflect a conversation that's already taking place.

PL: I would also say that what—maybe surprisingly—screamed “musical” about this topic is the deep tradition of protest music both in the Egyptian revolution and also in our country. Especially during the eighteen days in 2011, there was a serious communication between Western protest music and the music of the Arab World. While we were in Egypt, a lot of the students we interviewed mentioned that they loved bands like Rage Against the Machine or the Pixies. And if you look at the student in the back of the photo, he's wearing a Johnny Cash T-shirt. It's all to say that there's a dialogue going on within the new generation, and contemporary Arab music really reflects that.



Part of the Lazours' inspiration for *We Live in Cairo* came from this photo by Ed Ou, depicting a group of activists in 2011 in a flat above Cairo's Tahrir Square.

Photo: Ed Ou/New York Times/Redux Pictures

Can you say a bit about how your experience of this photo came to life on that trip to Egypt and in those conversations with students?

PL: The trip was profound in so many ways. First of all, the students we worked with knew all of the kids in the photo. Now—even more than when Mubarak was in power—there's a lot of censorship of art in Egypt, so we were concerned. But we did a private reading at the American University in Cairo, and afterwards, it was incredible to hear how much the students wanted this

Protest Music (cont.)

story to be told, and how they saw this show as one opportunity for that to happen.

What has it been like to develop the piece in the US in relation to everything that's currently happening here?

DL: One thing that's been really exciting for me is that the creation of the show has brought Middle Eastern people together and fostered conversations about our perspectives. There's not one singular Middle Eastern experience, so the more we can participate in those conversations in honest and thoughtful ways, the better the piece will be.

PL: The contemporary US context has made the show feel more urgent for me. This country is facing many challenges today, but I think it's important to be aware of the freedoms we have here that the Egyptian people continue to fight for. It's never a one-to-one with these things, but I think bringing the story of the Egyptian revolution to people in the US at this point in time will help to broaden and illuminate the innate human desire for progress and change.

TM: In Egypt, it really felt like they're dealing with a gaping wound, compared to the bruise that we have here in the US. It was frightening to be there and to understand how the tortured relationships between the people, the government, and the media feeds fear and destabilization. I feel that every day now.

Second, I've been so inspired by moments led by youth here in the US, such as the students from Parkland, Florida. It has been great to follow their stories and see videos of them, because they remind me of the Egyptian students in our story. After a reading of the play in the US, I got a note from a friend who left the show thinking how great young people are. I think that's a very valuable takeaway from this production, because they're the generation that's going to help us get out of the current situation.

Interview by Diane Paulus, Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater.

This article originally appeared in the Spring 2019 issue of the *A.R.T. Guide*.





A set rendering of the Town House gallery in *We Live in Cairo*.

image: Tilly Grimes

Designing *We Live in Cairo*

By James Montaña

While developing *We Live in Cairo*, the creative team regularly returned to a big question: how can one faithfully represent the passion, energy, hopes, and fears of millions of Egyptians during the 2011 revolution with only six characters? The answer was not an easy one. As a team, they decided that they could only tell a sliver of this broad story and, hopefully, honor a few of the narratives by weaving them into the much larger tapestry of this momentous time. The set design of *We Live in Cairo* addressed a similar question: how can one space faithfully represent both the vastness of Tahrir Square and the frenetic and intimate energy of an art gallery that serves as an underground revolutionary planning space?

Set and costume designer Tilly Grimes' task was to guide the audience from the . Shifting from an alternative art gallery space, through the streets of Cairo, into the expansive Tahrir Square, as well as the digital spaces of social media and international news coverage, Grimes has been able to find the artistic truth of various spaces rather than recreating them realistically on stage. Lighting, designed by Bradley King, helps delineate time and space, while projections, designed by David Bengali, link the onstage action to the

THE PRODUCTION

Designing *We Live in Cairo* (cont.)



historical events of the revolution through photos, on-the-ground video, and real social media posts from the revolution and afterwards.

The set design for ***We Live in Cairo*** features a central platform that rises above the standard stage height, with various ramps that lead from the sides of the stage onto the center playing space. Rugs, which carry cultural significance in the region, appear throughout the stage and even into the house, softening the performance surface and adding texture and pattern.

An central scenic element is a wall made of concrete blocks that bisects the stage, from right to left. It represents the concrete barriers that military police erected in Cairo in an attempt to block protesters from entering the streets that led to government buildings. A feature of this wall is diverse graffiti, also important in Cairo (see article “Taking Back the Space: Graffiti and the Revolution” on page 33).

Like every good story, this set has surprises which reveal themselves over time. Designer Tilly Grimes’ set and props—realized by the A.R.T. Scenic Shop—the lighting design, and projections share in producing the physical world of ***We Live in Cairo***. It is a world that is lived-in, real, and fantastical all at once; grounded in Cairo as a place and honoring Cairo as an idea.

Designing *We Live in Cairo* (cont.)

Constructing *Cairo*

The process of making the concrete wall featured on the set of ***We Live in Cairo*** at the A.R.T. Scenic Shop.



A square of styrofoam is marked to imitate the natural gouges in concrete. Then the styrofoam is carved, giving it the rough concrete shape.

The styrofoam is mounted as the front of larger blocks, giving it larger dimension.



The wall is constructed with a dark base layer of paint on some of the blocks. Then, additional paint gives the styrofoam realistic shading.



Graffiti is painted on the blocks.



The cast of *We Live in Cairo* in rehearsal.

Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva

Creating the Movement

As the Artistic/Founding Director of New York/Palestine-based theater company Yaa Samar! Dance Theatre (YSdT), **We Live in Cairo** choreographer Samar Haddad King regularly creates work that crosses disciplines and physical borders—a necessary skill set for this production. **We Live in Cairo** writer Patrick Lazour sat down with Samar to find out more about her history in dance and her vision for this production.

Patrick Lazour: So, Samar, what made you pursue dancing and choreography?

Samar Haddad King: I feel like that question “why dance” is asked a lot, especially to Arabs. Some have the idea that our culture is more conservative and less dance-y, even though it’s quite rooted in movement, and traditional dance. I mean, technically my mom just put me into dance classes because I used to dance around a lot and sing—before I spoke, really. Dance has been the medium where I always felt like I expressed myself. For me, dance is everything. Dance is music. Dance is poetry. Dance is theater. Dance is all of these things. And you can say so much in the smallest gesture; with all of the thoughts zipping through your head all at once, with the most powerful feeling, it all comes out in this tiny gesture. This small movement can speak everything.

PL: A thousand words!

SHK: A thousand words in one little movement, yeah.

Creating the Movement (cont.)



The cast in rehearsal with choreographer Samar Haddad King.

PL: How would you describe the choreography of *We Live in Cairo*?

SHK: I never think of dance as anything separate from theater, even though obviously there is a movement component to the show. In *We Live in Cairo*, there are two large dance sequences—one is a bit of a parody, the second one is at a club. The rest of the piece is much more stylized. I think it's in showing this layer of unrelenting spirit—the unforgiving, ravenous spirit—that sometimes movement can help heighten and lift. We're doing a piece about a revolution where a lot of people gave their lives for an idea. It was life or death for them. And as theater can be about life and death, dance is the same—it's storytelling.

PL: It's what inspired the physical language of the musical?

SHK: With Zoe Rabinowitz, my associate choreographer who I've been working with for 15 years, I decided to approach the whole language of the piece based on 24-count phrase. It's 8 gestures, each with 4 separate movements. And those movements—I hate using the word “steps,” but let's say “steps”—can be applied on different scenarios depending on where your urgency is. What are you fighting for? Are you fighting for your freedom at a protest? Are you fighting freedom from all of societal pressure or all of the weight of society by going to a club and dancing it out? The gestures—we've applied them on many different scenarios within the piece—they can be funny, they can be sad, they can be angry, they can be happy, they can be all these things. It's a thought process by the performers and how they approach that specific movement.

PL: Interpret and approach. Love it!

SHK: Yeah. And the steps are just like words. They stay the same, but they're adapted. The intensity and urgency is adapted differently depending on whatever scenario they're in.



Parisa Shahmir, Sharif Afifi,
Jakeim Hart, and Abubakr Ali
in *We Live in Cairo*

Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva

A Soundtrack of Arab Identity

By Daniel Lozour

From [Columbia College Today](#)

Amidst the clutter of my grandfather's office sits an ancient iPod connected to an ancient pair of speakers. His library of 500 or so songs can be divided into three categories: Haitian music, French chanson, and salsa and merengue. Musical taste reflects our experiences, and Pappy Felix is no exception. He and my grandmother were born and raised in Aux Cayes, Haiti, which explains the kompa, twoubadou and rara. Singers Charles Aznavour and Edith Piaf are Mona's—my grandmother—favorites, so they became for my grandfather the sound of lifelong devotion. In the '50s, Felix worked as a dance instructor in Miami, teaching a generation of Americans hopped up on Latin grooves. Now he sits in his office, throws his iPod on shuffle and sways to the soundtrack of his life.

There are, however, a handful of tracks—20, maybe—that do not fit into these three categories. They are songs of Fairuz and Oum Kalsoum, the fêted divas of Lebanon and Egypt, respectively, and arguably the two most influential

THE PRODUCTION

A Soundtrack of Arab Identity (cont.)

singers in Arabic music. Although Haitian by nationality, Felix and Mona are ethnically Lebanese. Their parents—my great grandparents—left French-occupied Lebanon in the early 20th century to make a new life in the French Caribbean with the hopes of gaining a foothold in the burgeoning textile industry on the island. During the subsequent decades, Muslim and Maronite Christian Arabs became a significant minority in Haiti, learning the vernacular, baking kibbeh and doing business.

These Arabic tracks in my grandfather's library can be traced back to his childhood, when he spoke with his father and sister in Arabic that has since been replaced mostly by Haitian Kreyol. I believe he plays this music less out of willfulness and more out of an internalized obligation to keep the sounds of the Arab world in his ears and in the family.



Jakeim Hart, Abubakr Ali, Dana Saleh Omar, and Layan Elwazani in rehearsal for *We Live in Cairo*.

Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva

Since 2012, my brother, Patrick, and I have been writing and developing a musical theater piece called ***We Live in Cairo***, about the youth activists of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. In it, we're looking to explore the nature of activism in times of great hope for change (as there was during the uprising) and in times of disillusionment and fear (as there was, and is, post-revolution). During the past six and a half years, we've assembled a team of Arab and Arab-American theater makers to tell this story of the contemporary Arab world. We all bring our own cultural experiences to the rehearsal room, hyped to share what we've learned from our families, our research and our travels. We teach each other rhythmic patterns we picked up in Egypt or in Bay Ridge or on YouTube. We transcribe onto a five-line staff Arabic folk songs for which sheet music doesn't exist. We are zero, one, two, three generations removed from life in the region. We are a multiplicity of histories.

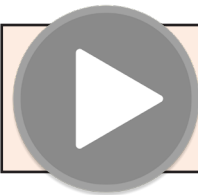
At the outset of the project, I was concerned that the score would only represent my Western-cultivated musical sensibility. My taste then was primarily for classical music and musical theater cast recordings. But what

A Soundtrack of Arab Identity (cont.)

at first was an appreciation for the music that played in my wispy childhood memories has developed into a full-blown love affair. I remember distinctly when I made my first playlist of Arabic music in freshman year, asking Pappy Felix for the titles of those Fairuz and Oum Kalsoum songs. Since then my list of favorites has expanded to hundreds of Arab artists, past and present. Singers like Sheikh Imam and Emel Mathlouthi and Ramy Essam have underscored a large portion of my life. This music has become a part of my experience—connected to real people, real stories and real emotions. Arabic music is part of my musical palette now. The tablas and the oud that are woven into the score of ***We Live in Cairo*** are not meant to signal some distant land but rather are there to evoke an identity my brother and I are getting closer to.

We Live in Cairo will premiere at the American Repertory Theater in May. I hope that the voice of the Arab world in its diaspora is strong and affecting, and that when Pappy Felix and Mommy Mona come up—God willing—to see it, they can hear themselves in the voices of young Arab artists telling a remarkable story.

Reprinted with permission from [Columbia College Today](#)



Listen to music that inspired Daniel Lazour on his Spotify playlist, “some of my Arabic favorites.”

DISCUSSION

- Daniel Lazour describes the Arabic sounds incorporated in ***We Live In Cairo*** as elements that “evoke an identity me and my brother are getting closer to.” How could sound and music bring someone closer to exploring and defining identity?
- What multifaceted identities are reflected in Pappy Felix, Daniel Lazour’s grandfather’s, music? How can music demonstrate the multifaceted nature of one’s own identity?
- What sounds and songs would be on the soundtrack of your life and why?

A Revolutionary Time & Place



The real-life events explored in ***We Live in Cairo*** represent a dramatic moment in Egypt’s history. The eighteen days of protests removed long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak. After Mubarak’s resignation, Egypt went through a transition period that ushered in an era of governmental changes that have limited freedom of expression and increased repression on the Egyptian people—which is portrayed in the production. This section examines the history of these massive changes from 2011-2013, the years covered by the production.

Harvard professor Tarek Masoud discusses the political culture and protests that changed Egypt in “Reliving Tahrir” (pages 25-27). Then, peruse “The Egyptian Revolution: A Timeline” (pages 28-31).



Image: Al Jazeera English [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)]

Reliving Tahrir

By Tarek Masoud

On January 25th, 2011, hundreds, then thousands, of Egyptians descended upon Tahrir Square in Cairo and upon the squares and streets of other cities to call for “bread, freedom, and social justice (*`aysh, hurriya, `adala ijtima`iyya*),” and to demand an end to the brutality of their country’s police. Eighteen days later, those thousands had grown to millions, and together they compelled their country’s long-ruling dictator, Hosni Mubarak, to resign his office and flee to his seaside retreat (eventually to face trial for his misdeeds). But today, almost a decade from that event, it is hard to believe that any of those things actually happened. Bread, freedom, and social justice remain distant imaginings. Mubarak, though a little worse for wear, walks free. And the democracy for which so many Egyptians fought and died has been excised from the national agenda by a regime that is by many accounts more repressive than the one against which Egyptians rose up those eight long years ago. So decisively has the revolution of 2011 been rolled back that it is easy to wonder whether it happened at all. Was Tahrir Square just a dream?

We Live in Cairo, a new musical by Daniel and Patrick Lazour, comes to remind us that it was not, that what happened during those eighteen days in Egypt was real. The play introduces us to six young friends who throw themselves into their country’s glorious revolt against dictatorship, and who then must struggle to find their way in the chaos and discord that follow.

Reliving Tahrir (cont.)

Driven by an acoustic guitar that recalls the melodies of revolutionary Egyptian musicians such as Yasser al-Manawahly or Ramy Essam, and with a sometimes wicked sense of humor that seems borrowed from the great musical satirical duo of Ahmed Fouad Negm (d. 2013) and Sayyid Imam (d. 1995), ***We Live in Cairo*** is a remarkable work of art that will infect American audiences with the spirit and drama of a revolution now routinely declared dead by most Western interpreters of the Middle East.

And what drama there is. It is fitting that the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath should be made into a work of art, because it was itself a work of art. Those eighteen days in Tahrir were a collective act of stunning creativity by a people few thought capable of such a feat. The decade prior to Mubarak's overthrow had been filled with sober, sometimes regretful, but always certain, pronouncements on the enervation and apathy of the Egyptian public. This was a people whose silent assent to the untender ministrations of the powerful was taken for granted. And so, when they confounded expectations, awoke from their supposed slumber, and began to demand to be heard, it was not just of their leaders that they made the plea, but of all of us. And when they finally got our attention, what they showed us was indescribably beautiful. It is impossible to view scenes and photographs of the Egyptian revolution—whether taken by professionals or by amateurs clicking away on cellular phones—and not find them bewitching. In almost all of them, almost every Egyptian seems young and heroic and impossibly photogenic.

But the beauty of the revolution is only part of what makes it such fertile terrain for artistic interpretation. For the aftermath of those eighteen days was one of incredible turmoil and tragedy. No sooner had the “kids” in the Square chased away the strongman than were they too chased away, this time by dueling zealots—religious and militaristic—who captured the country's politics and spent two years tussling over who would ultimately get to monopolize it. The democratic elections that people had dreamt of brought to power not the photogenic young revolutionaries of Tahrir, but religious conservatives. The lion's share of these (including the country's president) were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood—a ninety-year old pietistic and political movement that recalls nothing so much as Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority—but a healthy contingent of them included ultra-orthodox Islamic politicians who wished to hold the line against expanding personal freedoms, keep women at home, and turn their Christian compatriots into second-class citizens. Some of us argued that the results of democratic procedures had to be respected, that the triumph of Islamists was only temporary, and that repeated elections would generate new possibilities. But such assurances were cold comfort to people reeling from the gap between their dreams of revolution and the reality of what it had wrought.

Reliving Tahrir (cont.)

Into this gap came the men with guns and uniforms. Egypt's military had long been the hegemonic power of Egyptian politics, and the democratic interlude that set in after Tahrir was one in which the gendarmes had begun to feel squeezed. Although Islamist politicians often made great shows of respect to the armed forces, the power that had passed into the hands of this assorted religious rabble could not have been viewed with equanimity by those long used to hogging it. And with every show of arrogance by Islamist politicians, every high-handed act of the country's Muslim Brotherhood president, the number of Egyptians who were willing to turn their backs on the revolution and throw their lot in with the generals grew. When the president was finally overthrown in July 2013, it was after popular protests that by many credible accounts were larger than the ones that had preceded the overthrow of Mubarak. The revolution had come full circle, except this time, the images were not of heroic young people hoisted aloft on the shoulders of a grateful nation, but of faces contorted by fear and anger, of bodies mangled by the implements of those sworn to protect them, and of a nation at war with itself.

Audiences of ***We Live in Cairo*** will experience all of this anew. The result is not just a bit of entertainment, but hopefully something more transformative. Shortly after Mubarak laid down his mantle, the American president, Barack Obama, declared that “The people of Egypt have spoken, their voices have been heard, and Egypt will never be the same.” It is a line that has not aged well—given Egypt's dramatic return to authoritarianism in the summer of 2013—and I have often quoted it ironically. What ***We Live in Cairo*** teaches me was that President Obama was right. The Egypt of today is not the same as the Egypt that existed before the revolution, if only because its people carry in their heads and their hearts the memory of that event and of what they almost achieved. And, after ***We Live in Cairo***, so will you.

Tarek Masoud is the Sultan of Oman Professor at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

This article originally appeared in the Spring 2019 issue of the *A.R.T. Guide*.

DISCUSSION

- Masoud describes the revolution in Tahrir as “a collective act of stunning creativity by a people few thought capable of such a feat.” Why would some assume that the revolutionaries would be incapable of affecting change?



Children participating in protests in Egypt, 2011

Photo: H. Elrasam for VOA [Public domain]

The Egyptian Revolution

We Live in Cairo follows six young people through the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and its aftermath, including a military coup and violent crackdown. The following timeline includes a brief version of these events.

JUNE 2010: PRESIDENT HOSNI MUBARAK

President Hosni Mubarak approaches thirty years in power. Egypt's political status quo is rife with corruption and contradictions; police harassment is especially pervasive. Small street protests are common, but larger demonstrations are quickly broken up.

On June 6, 2010, police brutally beat twenty-eight-year-old Khaled Said to death outside an internet café in Alexandria. Official police reports say that Said choked to death on a bag of hashish. This account is disproved, however, when images of Said's shattered face surface online. By the end of June, the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook group amasses thousands of members. Protests break out across Alexandria and Cairo.



Former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, 2009

Photo: Presidenza della Repubblica

The Egyptian Revolution (cont.)



Photo: Adam Makary [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)]

JUL 2010 - JAN 2011: MOUNTING ANGER

In November 2010 elections—largely considered fraudulent—Mubarak sweeps the Muslim Brotherhood (an Islamist political organization with a long history of opposition to and repression by the government) out of parliament.

Islamist and secular leaders react to the elections with anger—sporadic protests continue throughout Egypt. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, produce vendor Mohamed Bouazizi sets himself on fire to protest police harassment, sparking massive protests which, within a month, force Tunisian dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali to flee the country. These events encourage other protesters across the Middle East, igniting a wave of demonstrations termed the “Arab Spring” (primarily by Western observers).

In Egypt, a group of activists have organized small protests on Police Day (a national holiday) every year in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. In January 2011, their protest plans gain new attention (90,000 “attending” RSVPs) via the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook group.

JAN 25 - FEB 11, 2011: EIGHTEEN DAYS

National anger at years of corruption and abuse pours onto the streets of Egypt. An unprecedented coalition of groups—youth, liberals, Islamists, Christians, middle class, poor—stage massive protests in Tahrir Square. Fighting off assaults by the police and pro-Mubarak thugs (which claim almost 900 lives), demonstrators construct and share a massive tent city in the square. After eighteen days of protests, President Hosni Mubarak steps



Army tank damaged by protesters in Cairo, February 2011

Photo: Amr Farouq Mohammed from New Cairo - Cairo, Egypt [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)]

The Egyptian Revolution (cont.)

down. Power is transferred to the army as an interim measure; plans are made to hold free elections and write a new constitution (under the supervision of the army and the courts).



A young voter shows with pride proof she took part in Egypt's first widely contested presidential election, May 23, 2012.

Photo: Yuli Weeks/VOA [Public domain]

MAR 2011 - JUNE 2012: ELECTIONS

Egypt holds the first free and fair elections in its citizens' lifetimes. People wait outdoors in long lines for hours, voting in multiple elections, from a March 2011 constitutional referendum to a two-round presidential election held in May and June of 2012. To the surprise

of secularists, liberals, and international observers, voters grant a plurality of parliamentary seats to the Muslim Brotherhood in January 2012. Fearing an Islamist takeover, Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court disqualifies the Muslim Brotherhood's preferred presidential candidate, Khairat el-Shater. In June 2012 presidential elections, Mohamed Morsi—Khairat el-Shater's last-minute replacement and a relatively obscure engineering professor—is sworn in as Egypt's president, taking 51.7% of the vote. During the month-long election process, the Court intervenes again to trim Islamist sails and dissolves the parliament, setting in motion a season of intense political struggle.

JUNE 2012 - JUNE 2013: PRESIDENT MOHAMED MORSI

In the months following Morsi's election, the new president struggles for power with the army and the courts. Protests grow in tandem with an escalating economic crisis, fuel shortages, electricity blackouts, sexual assaults in public spaces, and violence against Christians. Parliament remains disbanded, while the drafting process for a new constitution begins. Opposition leaders, including liberals and Christians, fear a conservative Islamist betrayal of the revolution. The grassroots Tamarod (Arabic for "rebellion") movement collects millions of signatures calling for Morsi's resignation and for new elections.



Mohamed Morsi,
June 18, 2012

Photo: Jonathan Rashad [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)]

The Egyptian Revolution (cont.)

JUNE 30, 2013: MILITARY COUP

Protests and counter-protests marking the one-year anniversary of Morsi's election grow massive. On July 1, the army gives Morsi a 48-hour ultimatum to restore order or step down. Morsi defies the ultimatum, and protests continue to swell. On July 3, the army suspends the constitution and takes Morsi into custody. Protesters in Tahrir Square jubilantly welcome the army, led by army general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, into power.



AUG 14, 2013: RABAA MASSACRE

After the coup, Morsi's supporters occupy the square outside Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in central Cairo, protesting for his reinstatement. On the morning of August 16, police move to clear the protests. For twelve hours, protestors battle police forces, who

use helicopters, rooftop snipers, bulldozers, tear gas, and live ammunition against demonstrators. The government cites approximately 600 casualties from this attack; human rights groups estimate up to 2,600 fatalities, with approximately 4,000 injured.

2013-PRESENT: CRACKDOWN

Following the 2013 crackdown, the army imposes strict curfews and restrictions on protests, media, and art. Many leaders of the 2011 revolution leave Egypt; others, including Muslim Brotherhood members, are jailed and tortured. In 2014, army general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is sworn in as President. Parliament remains dissolved until 2015, when the army declares (and oversees) new elections. In March 2017, Hosni Mubarak is acquitted of responsibility for the deaths of protestors in 2011 and freed from detention. Mohamed Morsi remains jailed to this day.



Photo: Jim Mattis [Public domain]

Timeline compiled by Robert Duffley and Elizabeth Amos.

This article originally appeared in the Spring 2019 issue of the *A.R.T. Guide*.

Art in the Time of Revolution



A section of the Mohammed Mahmoud Street Wall outside the American University in Cairo honoring the martyrs of the Egyptian Revolution. Featuring the works of artists Ammar Abu Bakr and Alaa Awad.

Photo: suzeinthecity.

Protests unfold in many forms. The massive protests of the Egyptian Revolution inspired many young artists to transform their rage and passion for governmental and societal change into stunning works of art. The young protesters of ***We Live in Cairo*** sing, paint, or photograph the revolution, leaving indelible marks on the walls and hearts of the country. This section looks at the role art played in fueling a revolution.

First, read an interview with Suzeinthecity, an Egypt-based blogger who chronicles and analyzes Egyptian street art and artists (pages 33-37). Next, be introduced to multi-faceted visual artist, Ganzeer, (pages 38-40) whose street art, posters, graphic novels, and ever-growing body of work continue to reframe the conversation about Egypt's political crisis. Finally, explore the music that fueled the protests in "The Songs of the Egyptian Protests" (page 41-42) from *NPR*.



Photo: suzeinthecity.

Taking Back the Space: Graffiti and the Revolution

An interview with Suzeeinthecity, Egyptian photographer, blogger, and chronicler of Egyptian street art.

In 2011, Soraya Morayef, also known as Suzee, began to document the array of graffiti appearing on the walls in Cairo and across Egypt on her blog, Suzeeinthecity. Her photographs reveal the myriad of artists who have and still are highlighting the desire, pain, and a vision of Egypt's past, present, and future. In April 2019, Morayef answered a few questions about her work, the role of graffiti in the Egyptian Revolution, and the future of Egypt.

Morayef holds a BA in journalism from the American University in Cairo and a masters in Creative and Cultural Industries from King's College London. She was interviewed by James Montañó, Education and Engagement Fellow at the A.R.T.

Tell us a little about yourself—do you consider yourself a journalist and/or an artist?

I would call myself a writer. It has always been my passion ever since I was

Taking Back the Space (cont.)



Photo: suzeintheity.

nine. I started the blog a few months after the 18 days of Tahrir and it all happened organically. When I joined the protests in Tahrir I had missed the first few volatile days, and when I entered Tahrir, the square was full of posters, stickers, graffiti, and a few murals. And because I was too scared to join the front lines and too shy to be involved in any kind of community work, I felt that the only service that I could do was to document it. And I wasn't alone in this because there were thousands of people taking photographs as well. I think we were all very aware that we were experiencing a monumental moment in our history, and an unprecedented experience that previous generations had never encountered. And there was a need to document and archive and remember every single moment: the slogans, the songs, the experiences, the

interactions, the faces, and so on. A friend suggested that I post the photos on the blog so that they could share it with other people, and that's how it happened.

I would never call myself an artist. I was never remotely interested in picking up paint or a stencil. I felt like that would make me a cheat somewhat, because I was committed to the cause by documenting it, but I didn't want to copycat others.



Layers of graffiti on a cement blockade in Cairo, 2011.

Photo: suzeintheity.

Taking Back the Space (cont.)

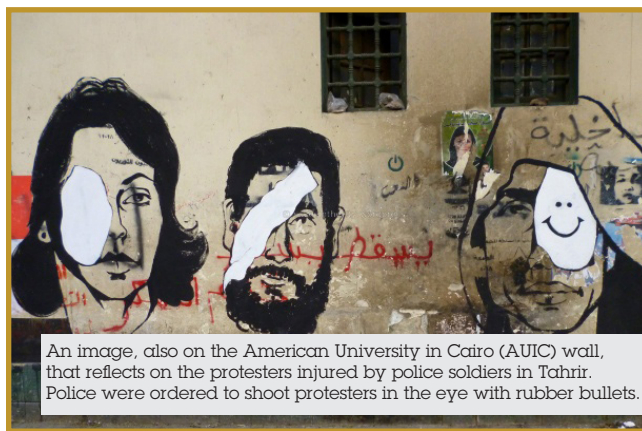
What role do you think graffiti played in the Egyptian Revolution?

I think graffiti had a huge impact on our lives as Egyptians and on the world outside of Egypt. It visually documented and archived the events of the revolution, highlighted stories that were often misrepresented or completely ignored in both Egyptian and international media, and gave voices to the voiceless: martyrs, mothers of martyrs, the poor, the jailed, those who disappeared, the unfairly treated. It took power away from the state. Think of it this way—the streets were never ours. We were always just inhabitants of a country that didn't belong to us. Everything was state controlled and regimented and we [the citizens] were expected to toe the line. What graffiti did, aside from your basic act of vandalism, was to enable normal citizens to take back the space from the state, and feel like we had agency and ownership over it. And I say “we” because they did that for me.



Portraits of some of the martyrs in Tahrir Square, Cairo. Mural by Alaa Awad. Portraits by Ammar Abo Bakr.

Photo: suzeinthecity



An image, also on the American University in Cairo (AUC) wall, that reflects on the protesters injured by police soldiers in Tahrir. Police were ordered to shoot protesters in the eye with rubber bullets.

Photo: suzeinthecity

They did that for the Egyptian community. Obviously there were critics, and people who just saw it as vandalism—and obviously there were many artists whose work wasn't memorable or even visually attractive. But when you look at the images coming out during the first three years after the revolution, I think it had an impact on Egypt, the Middle East, and the Western world.

What role does graffiti currently play in Egypt?

The role that graffiti plays in documenting this part of our history is incredibly valuable. There is no state memory of the revolution. All of that has been erased, manipulated, and sabotaged. If you walk into a book shop you can no longer find any books, or references, or paintings, or images of Tahrir. This may be due to population fatigue, but I think it's also due to the state. Documenting these photos of the graffiti—and all of the other people who have produced books, articles, and films on the graffiti—means that there is still digital memory of an event the state is trying very hard to make us forget.

Taking Back the Space (cont.)

The fact that a lot of the graffiti can be understood without speaking Arabic means that these artists created images that transcend borders and languages, which can address an international audience. Again, at a time when Egypt is often misunderstood, or the events that unfolded in the country



Photo: suzeenthcity.

during the revolution were depicted in the media from one perspective and completely misanalyzed by correspondents or news agencies, these [artists] were the people on the ground. They were kids—some of them still in school, some at university, some had never gone to university—but they were from the streets. They had their feet on the ground and their ears to the ground more than anyone. So, they knew what was happening. They understood the need, they understood the hunger, and they understood the desperation and the rage more than any of us could.



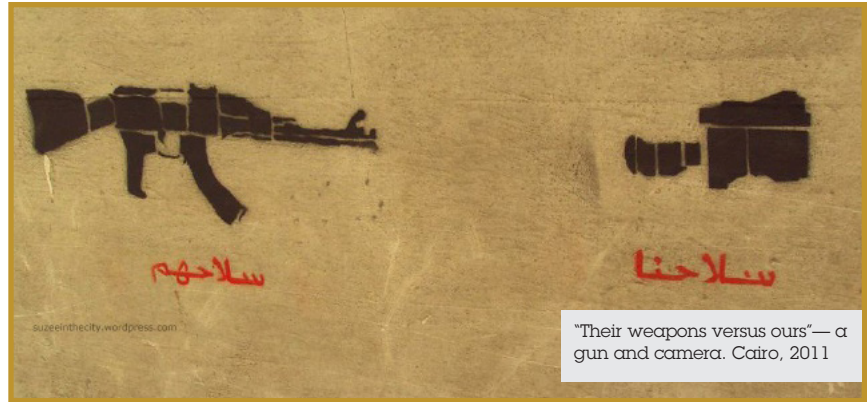
Photo: suzeenthcity.

Part of the cycle of street art is the attempted erasure or censorship of work deemed subversive and anti-government. The top piece, painted by Ganzeer, depicts a military tank bearing down on a boy riding a bike, carrying the city on his head as one would carry a loaf of bread. The panda to the right is from graffiti artist Sad Panda. Later, pro-government forces painted over almost the entire work, leaving a solitary tank. Later, artist Mohamed Khaled added the "Green Monster"—a military policeman eating a protester.

Taking Back the Space (cont.)

What are your hopes for Egypt moving forward?

I would love to have a more optimistic or hopeful commentary on this. If you had asked me ten years ago, I would have had a lot to say. But now I have no hope for Egypt and...it is very sad. When the eighteen days ended, I remember someone very wise saying to us that we would not see the changes in our lifetime, but hopefully the next generations would. And that gave us hope. I think the reality today is that the next generations will not have a brighter future at all. They have been silenced and squashed and killed and disappeared and jailed and extradited. I think everyone just lives in a state of fear. People don't talk about politics. They avoid referring to the past. We are fatigued and exhausted, and I think definitely post-traumatized. There is some form of post-traumatic numbness going on, within my community, within social circles at the very least. I used to have huge ambitions for Egypt and for myself and there were eighteen days that showed us this could be the most beautiful country in the world. It had such potential and I was so proud to be part of it and to be living in it. And now, my hope is to just be able to live.



Click the above image for a short video highlighting the street art and artists in Egypt.

DISCUSSION

- How does graffiti manifest the spirit of revolution/protest?
- In what ways did occupying the streets with art take power back from the unjust state?



"The Army Above All", 2013



Images: Ganzeer

"Who's Afraid Of Art?"—a 2013 work critical of then-General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi—now the President of Egypt—and his ongoing attacks on free speech.

Portrait of an Artist: Ganzeer

By James Montaña

Rising as an important voice in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, visual artist Ganzeer has continued to make art that questions and challenges Egypt's oppressive leadership. He was detained in 2011 by Egyptian authorities amid the protests during the Revolution, and deemed part of a "terrorist organization" by the Egyptian media in 2014 for participating in a street art campaign called "#SisiWarCrimes" with an artists collective. This campaign called attention to the abuses by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who would soon become President of Egypt.

Ganzeer works in several different media and styles and has garnered much attention in Egypt and around the world. His website states:

Ganzeer operates seamlessly between art, design, and storytelling, creating what he has coined: Concept Pop, a brand of cultural insurgency that utilizes the aesthetics birthed by Pop Art in tackling the subject matter typically ascribed to

Portrait of an Artist: Ganzeer (cont.)



Photo: Gigi Ibrahim from Cairo, Egypt [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)]



Images: Ganzeer

"Mask of Freedom" 2011. Ganzeer was detained for posting these stickers/posters.

Conceptual Art. His medium of choice as described by Kaelen Wilson-Goldie in *Artforum* is "a little bit of everything: stencils, murals, paintings, pamphlets, comics, installations, graphic design," and more.

The American Repertory Theater was privileged to have Ganzeer design the poster for ***We Live in Cairo***, as well as participate in the lobby experience for the show. He graciously answered a few questions for the Toolkit:

Can you tell us about yourself? Where did you grow up? Where do you call home?

I grew up in Cairo, and it's still the place I call home even though it's been a good five years since I've been back.

How did you find your way to graffiti/visual art? Are there specific artists that inspired you?

Aya Tarek was part of an Alexandria-based crew and invited me to join them for a weekend in 2008, I believe, and that was my first time messing with graffiti/street art. They were all a lot younger than me and doing really fantastic work.

What role did graffiti play in the Egyptian Revolution? What role does it play in Egypt now?



Image: Ganzeer

"Of course, #2" by Ganzeer. Image reads, "The army protected the revolution, of course." Referencing a 2012 incident, where police attacked a woman, tearing her shirt and exposing her blue bra. The video of the incident was posted online and widely shared.

Portrait of an Artist: Ganzeer (cont.)

Graffiti was just as much a part of the revolution as every other method of protest. It's hard to pinpoint exactly how influential it was on the outcome of things, there's no doubt it was major. I can't tell you much of anything about Egypt now, given that it's been half a decade since I've left.

What hopes do you have for the future Egypt?

I just hope the original demands of the revolution are achieved: Bread, freedom, and social justice.



"Salute to the Martyrs" January 2012. From Ganzeer's website: After the fall of Mubarak in February 2011, a spokesperson for the Egyptian Armed Forces saluted the martyrs on public television. In the months that followed, however, as the Egyptian military's approach in ensuring the country's transition from dictatorship to democracy proved to be a farce, Egyptians continued to protest and stage public sit-ins. These actions were met by violence from the Egyptian military, causing more casualties among the country's unarmed populace. Pictured above is my reaction to these unfolding events. The text reads "salute to the martyrs".



Click the above image for a video looking at an interactive installation by Ganzeer and Yasmin Elayat in Cairo. Click the CC button for captions in English.

For more information on Ganzeer visit: <https://www.ganzeer.com>



Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva

The Songs of the Egyptian Protests

In ***We Live in Cairo***, the character Amir uses songs to ridicule the corrupt authority and to lay bare the aspirations of the young protesters. This was the reality on the ground in Cairo in 2011: alongside the street artists, musicians were giving artistic voice to the pain and dreams of the protesters during the Egyptian Revolution.

In February 2011, NPR examined the music of the Revolution in “The Songs of the Egyptian Protests” by Elizabeth Blair. This article takes a broad view of the artists and musical works that fueled the protests.

[Click here for the NPR Article](#)

Artist Spotlight: Ramy Essam



Photo: Shakh1999 [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)]

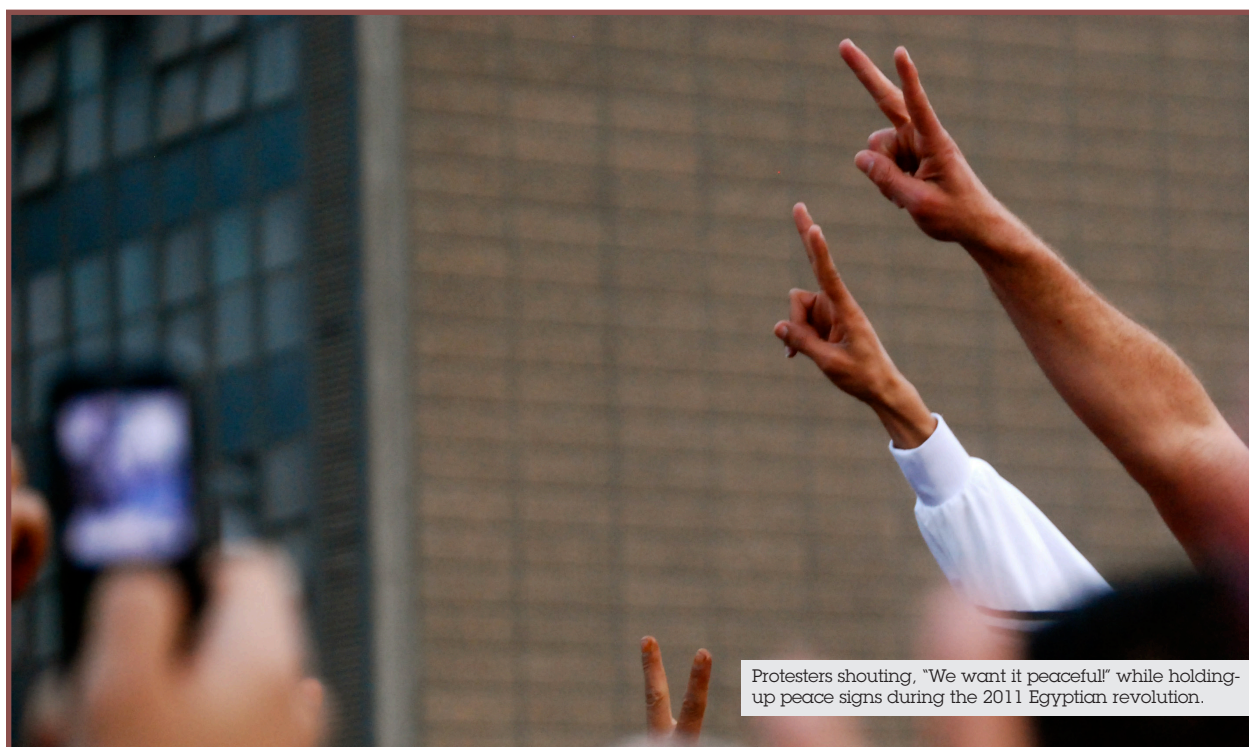
One powerful voice of the Egyptian Revolution was singer/songwriter Ramy Essam, who swiftly gained national and international attention in 2011 for his protest music, which spoke directly to the anger and demands of the revolution. At only 24 years of age, Essam was hailed as the “Voice of the Revolution” and his song “Irhal” (“Leave”) became an anthem, calling for President Mubarak to step down. On the eve of Mubarak’s resignation, Essam led thousands of protesters in Tahrir Square in singing, “Down Down Hosni Mubarak ... The people want to dismantle the regime He is to go, we are not going ... He is to go, we won’t leave ... We all, one hand, ask one thing, leave leave.”

In March 2011, not long after Hosni Mubarak stepped down, Ramy Essam and more than 100 people were arrested in Tahrir Square by the Egyptian police. He was tortured for hours before being released. In 2014, his music was banned in Egypt and he moved to Sweden and then Finland for his own safety. Essam currently tours the world and continues to release music that criticizes the current corrupt regime in Egypt. He hopes to return to Egypt someday and sees hope in the Egyptian youth creating art in this tense time. In a 2017 interview for the *Middle East Eye* he said, “Artists are their only hope – culture the only tool that can show them the way. It’s so hard to demonstrate now in public, but we can still sing.”



Click the above image for a video of thousands of protesters singing with Ramy Essam.

Social Media & Activism



Early media analysis of the Egyptian revolution referred to the protests as the “Facebook Revolution,” noting the essential role social media played in disseminating information about the protests to people on the ground, doctors assisting the wounded, and the news media abroad. It is clear that internet communication dramatically changed the way people around the world engaged in Egypt’s political shift. However, recent critical analysis has shifted away from the idea that the revolution was “Facebook’s Revolution,” reexamining social media’s role in the protests. This section explores social media, its role during the revolution, and its limitations in sustaining long-term change.

Written in the immediate aftermath of revolution, “Behind Egypt’s Revolution: Youth and the Internet” (pages 44-49) from *Public Radio International*, gives a bird’s-eye view of the technologies that fueled the protests, written in the immediate aftermath of Revolution. Then, follow the eighteen days of protests in Egypt through Tweets from people on the ground in Cairo in “Tweets from the Revolution” (pages 50-55). Finally, read an excerpt from scholar Zeynep Tufekci’s incisive book *Twitter and Tear Gas* (pages 56-59), which critically examines the power and frailties of social media in Egypt’s Revolution and revolutions across the globe.



Protest signs lauding the role that Facebook played in the protests. February 1, 2011.

Photo: Rowan El Shimi [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>)]

Behind Egypt's Revolution: Youth and the Internet

By Jon Jensen
February 13, 2011

CAIRO, Egypt — Abdel Rahman Faris never saw it coming.

When the news of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's resignation reached Faris' tent in Tahrir Square on Friday, the 30-year-old blogger, along with tens of thousands around him, erupted in jubilation.

Faris was one of several youth activists behind what was planned to be a small demonstration in Egypt's capital on Jan. 25.

But the result — tens of thousands of protesters spontaneously taking to the streets of Cairo — defied all expectations.

"None of this could have happened even in our wildest dreams," said Faris. "Our maximum objective was to move with 5,000 people around Cairo. We never even thought we would reach Tahrir."

Behind Egypt's Revolution: Youth and the Internet (cont.)

Very few people in the Middle East could have imagined that Mubarak's regime — which reigned supreme for 30 years — would be toppled in a mere 18 days, following massive protests and strikes across the Arab world's most populous nation.

After all, Mubarak's Egypt was the model of stability in the Middle East. Small-scale street protests had become increasingly common in recent years, but these were easily quelled by the country's all-powerful internal security forces.

Egypt's recent uprising, inspired by similar unrest in neighboring Tunisia in January, arose seemingly without external causes or premeditation by any one group, while at the same time attracting a broad range of Egyptians that transcended political, social and cultural divisions.

But the initial days of the demonstrations, in Cairo at least, were meticulously mapped out — at least one month in advance — by a group of young Egyptian activists long determined to bring about political change.



Photo: Mariam Soliman from Cairo, Egypt. [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)]

Interviews with two members of the so-called Revolutionary Youth Council — a group of 14 tech-savvy Egyptians selected to represent thousands of young protesters in Tahrir Square — shed some light on the ways that social media, secrecy and strategic maneuvering were deployed to counter Egypt's vast security apparatus and eventually topple one of the most entrenched autocracies in the Middle East.

"We didn't plan the demonstrations that happened in Tahrir [starting in January]. We were just a catalyst in the chemical equation," said Amr Salah, a 25-year-old human rights activists with a university degree in chemistry.

Salah and Faris met each other at a small protest a few years ago.

Both champions for human rights, Faris drew inspiration from Voltaire's

Behind Egypt's Revolution: Youth and the Internet (cont.)

Enlightenment writings, and Salah from documentary films on the 1989 democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe.

“I dreamt that we could do the same thing in Egypt,” said Salah.

In 2008, they both found a potential vehicle for change in the Sixth of April Youth movement, a group of activists who used Facebook to encourage solidarity with striking textile workers in the northern Delta town of Mahalla. Low workers' wages, along with rising food prices, sparked the largest demonstrations in Egypt since bread riots in the late 1970s.

Egyptian security forces eventually crushed this protest — but not before they took note of several of the young activists.

Salah said security followed him closely and called him often after 2008. In 2010, Salah disappeared when he was arbitrarily detained for 30 hours — security gave no notification to his terrified family.



Faris has been arrested at least once per year since 2005, most likely, he says, because his family belongs to the banned Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Largely due to the fear of similar arrests, Egyptian youth activism remained out of the mainstream until the summer of 2010, when a young Alexandrian named Khaled Said was found dead, allegedly tortured and killed by the police in Egypt's second largest city.

An anonymous Facebook group — run by an Egyptian Google executive named Wael Ghonim — was launched to disseminate news about Said, which re-inspired young political activism in the country. The page received hundreds of thousands of fans within months.

“Before, when we called for something on Facebook, we didn't get a lot of feedback. But after Khaled Said, people really started responding to calls for solidarity,” said Faris. “That page was able to easily gather people in groups online, because it was harder and harder to do it on the street.”

In late 2010, members of the Revolutionary Youth Council began to plan a solidarity protest for Khaled Said for early 2011.

Behind Egypt's Revolution: Youth and the Internet (cont.)

Members of the Revolutionary Youth Council deliberately chose Egypt's national Police Day — Jan. 25 — to publicly disdain rather than commemorate a security force marked by a long history of brutality and human rights abuses.

But none of them envisioned that their plans would eventually spark the largest popular uprising in Egypt's modern history.

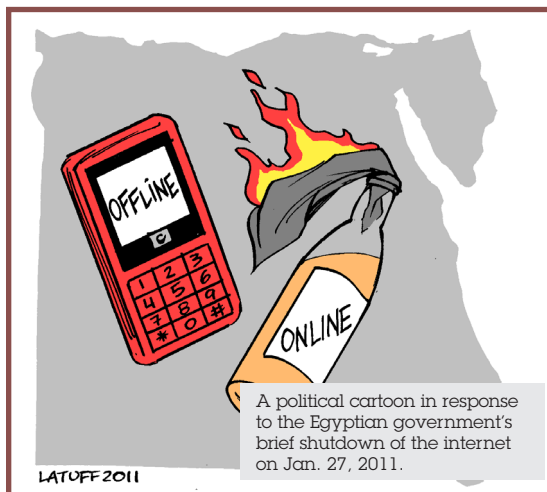
The group used a combination of coordinated tactics — including the use of Facebook and Twitter — to deceive state security forces regarding their intentions.

Strategy sessions were always conducted in different locations and, as an extra precaution, an “intelligence unit” conducted reconnaissance of the specified meeting places an hour in advance to ensure police were not lying in wait for them, said Faris. Mobile phones, which members believed to be under surveillance, were turned off during meetings.

“We also took the batteries out, because the police have the ability to listen in even when phones are off,” said Salah.

Members of the group agreed not to sleep at their own houses one week before the Jan. 25 protest.

When that day came, thousands of heavily armed Egyptian security forces were waiting, having fortified their positions at several key locations throughout Cairo. The government fell back on familiar tactics: enclose activists and force them to tire behind a thick cordon of baton-wielding riot troops, utilize violence at will, and detain protesters en masse to slow their momentum and instill fear.



Egyptian youth activists, however, attuned to security tactics following years of smaller-scale street protests, devised a “cat and mouse” strategy to conceal their launching points and surprise the police.

Facebook groups, widely believed to have been under surveillance by security, were used as a diversion or decoy, not as the primary means of organization.

Behind Egypt's Revolution: Youth and the Internet (cont.)

"We knew the police were following us so we lied online," said Faris.

Activists organized the marches on Jan. 25 by going back to the original social network: face-to-face communication. A return to basics was crucial after the government cut off all means of communication — including mobile phone networks and the internet — after the first three days of the protests.

The true locations of meeting points were only discussed in person, and these could be changed quickly at any sign of danger, since group members could reach more than 300 of their fellow activists in fewer than five minutes via an informal telephone network.



As a result, the police were caught off guard, spreading out in massive numbers in precisely the wrong locations around Cairo.

"We forced the police to distribute their forces. They never knew where we were. We could mobilize our people before security found out," said Salah.

Twitter and Facebook were used to direct larger crowds, but only once protesters were actually set in place, marching on the streets.

Organizers may have played a role in bringing record numbers of Egyptians to the streets by highlighting the connection between politics and living conditions.

Salah chose the working-class suburb of Imbaba as the site of a protest on Jan. 28 to appeal to poorer Egyptians, many of whom lived close to the poverty line as food prices were soaring.

"We needed to make the connection between liberty and bread to attract

Behind Egypt's Revolution: Youth and the Internet (cont.)

broader support,” said Salah, who called up to onlookers watching from balconies to join the march on the 28th.

Late on Friday Jan. 28, with swelling crowds advancing in the tens of thousands, Egyptian security forces fell back — eventually disbanding after the armed forces were called in to defend the capital. That night, the crowd set up a beachhead in Tahrir Square. Over the next two weeks, hundreds of thousands of anti-government protesters successfully held that ground, chanting in unison for Mubarak to leave.

When Mubarak departed on Feb. 11, Egyptians exploded into days of celebration with vuvuzela horns, drums and fireworks on the streets of Cairo.

For the young activists who drove Egypt's revolution, social media was important, but not everything. “We were active on the street well before they were using the internet,” said Faris.

Salah hopes that their tactical use on the internet will be replicated in neighboring countries whose people live under similar authoritarian regimes.

The shockwaves of Mubarak's ouster resonated around the Middle East, with solidarity protests springing up almost instantly on the streets of Algeria and Yemen.

Still, Salah finds it hard to believe that a group of young Egyptian activists challenged — and eventually beat — Mubarak's state security.

“I can't even describe in words how it feels to have won,” said Salah. “I'm waiting for someone to wake me up from the dream.”

This story is presented by [The GroundTruth Project](#)

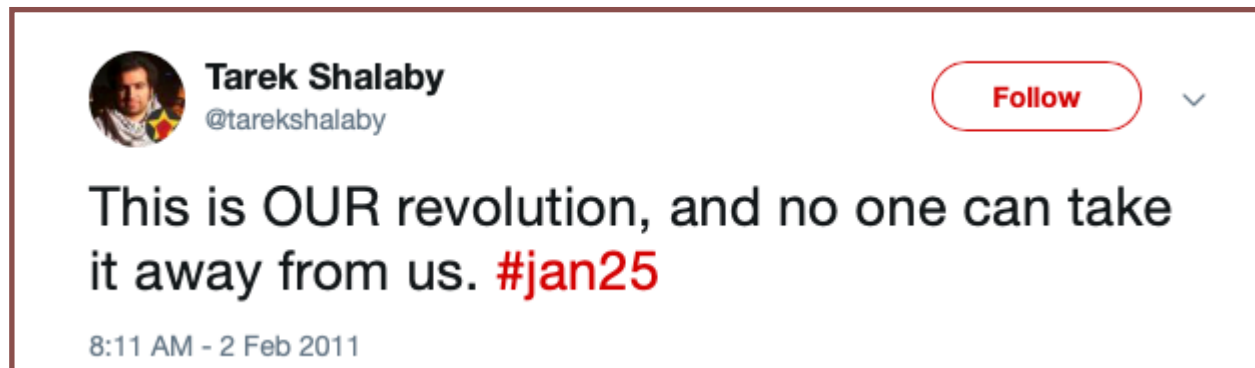
Jon Jensen/GlobalPost, courtesy PRI®

Reprinted by permission of PRI/PRX. Original article can be found [here](#).

DISCUSSION

- How was social media used as a strategic weapon in the 2011 Egyptian revolution?
- What made Egypt's youth best equipped to challenge and topple Mubarak's entrenched regime?
- Can you think of examples where young people lead the charge in protest movements of the past or protest movements today?

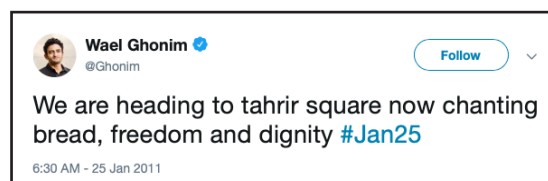
Tweets from the Revolution



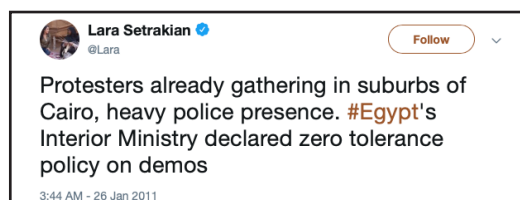
Beginning on January 25, 2011, Egyptian protesters began an eighteen day campaign to oust President Hosni Mubarak. The days were marked by clashes between protesters and police, which resulted in numerous arrests, injuries, and fatalities. News of the protests spread quickly on social media, mobilizing new protesters and informing doctors where to locate the injured. International press breathlessly recounted the momentous crowd, which was gathering around Tahrir Square and quoted Tweets in minute-by-minute news reports.

The eighteen days of protest and resistance ended with Vice President Omar Suleiman announcing the resignation of Mubarak. Below is a sampling of some of the Tweets that tell the story of those days:

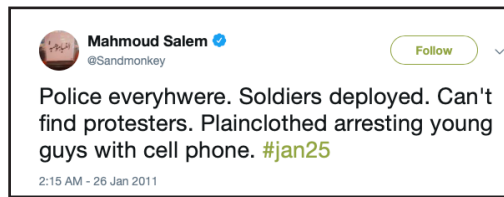
January 25, 2011



January 26, 2011



Tweets from the Revolution (cont.)



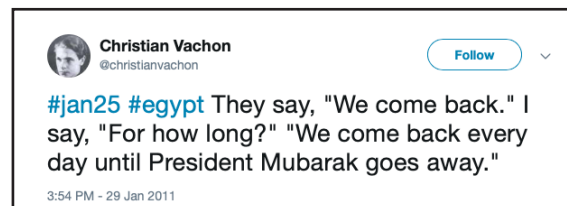
January 27, 2011



January 28, 2011




January 29, 2011



Tweets from the Revolution (cont.)

January 30, 2011

 **Lara Setrakian** ✓
@Lara

Follow

Mohammed El Baradei and Muslim Brotherhood turn up at protests in Tahrir Square. It's a broad constellation pushing against Mubarak. #Jan25


10:50 AM - 30 Jan 2011

 **benwedeman** ✓
@bencnn

Follow

Cairo tense as curfew approaches. Begins in 25 min. Men, boys on almost every corner with sticks and knives. Looters beware. #Jan25 #Egypt

5:35 AM - 30 Jan 2011

 **Christian Vachon**
@christianvachon

Follow

#Egypt #Jan25 In taxi driving through Cairo. Taxi driver says "Mubarak is one. The people of Egypt are many."

1:05 AM - 30 Jan 2011


January 31, 2011

 **Lara Setrakian** ✓
@Lara

Follow

They've told people to protests in their own neighborhoods if they can't reach Tahrir Square. Barriers & checkpoints around the city. #Jan25

6:42 AM - 31 Jan 2011

 **Alaa Abd El Fattah**
@alaa

Follow

note banks can't operate, medicine and food supplies not flowing. yet state tv operational, regime newspapers get distributed #Jan25

2:39 AM - 31 Jan 2011

 **benwedeman** ✓
@bencnn

Follow

Heard in Cairo: "This is lesson to all miserable dictators everywhere: your regimes are as solid as a house of cards. Go now." #Jan28 #Egypt

2:01 AM - 31 Jan 2011

February 1, 2011

 **benwedeman** ✓
@bencnn

Follow

Protestor in #Tahrir square says " Mubarak may have thick skin but we have sharper nails" #jan25 #Egypt

2:48 AM - 1 Feb 2011

 **Mahmoud Salem** ✓
@Sandmonkey

Follow

i've never seen mubarak so nervous #jan25 #egypt

1:20 PM - 1 Feb 2011

 **سلطان سعود القاسمي** ✓
@SultanAlQassemi

Follow

Mubarak "I am addressing the farmers, women and men, everyone in Egypt, I did not seek this position. Everyone knows my sacrifices"

1:02 PM - 1 Feb 2011

Tweets from the Revolution (cont.)


February 2, 2011

 **Nic Robertson** ✓
@NicRobertsonCNN

Follow

This morning, Alex seemed on verge of going back to normal but early calm evaporated when aggressive pro#Mubarak groups showed up #egypt

9:41 AM - 2 Feb 2011

 **Mona Seif** ✓
@Monasosh

Follow

2 of my friends confirm another one is shot through the head, dead. My friend called me crying #Jan25 this is awful, something has 2 b done

7:29 PM - 2 Feb 2011

 **Nicholas Kristof** ✓
@NickKristof

Follow

In my part of Tahrir, pro-#Mubarak mobs arrived in buses, armed with machetes, straight-razors and clubs, very menacing.

6:44 AM - 2 Feb 2011


February 3, 2011

 **سلطان سعود القاسمي** ✓
@SultanAlQassemi

Follow

Al Arabiya from medical sources on the ground: more than ten deaths & 1500 injured in attack on protesters in Meydan Tahrir

12:28 AM - 3 Feb 2011

 **Sharif Kouddous** ✓
@sharifkouddous

Follow

Hundreds of people are sleeping next to each other in the grassy area in the middle of the square. Packed together close. #Egypt

12:46 PM - 3 Feb 2011


February 4, 2011

 **Mahmoud Salem** ✓
@Sandmonkey

Follow

The scene of Tahrir right now is incredible. Millions of people praying. Reverence. Very powerful. It looks like Mecca in haj. #jan25

2:38 AM - 4 Feb 2011

 **Mosa'ab Elshamy** ✓
@mosaaberizing

Follow

Loads of people intending on sleeping in Tahrir tonight. Learnt from the mistake of leaving on Tuesday which made thugs' job easier.

10:18 AM - 4 Feb 2011

 **Mahmoud Salem** ✓
@Sandmonkey

Follow

This, more than anything, has been a war of ideas. Ours is freedom, personal rights & end of dictatorship; theirs isn't. #jan25

8:07 AM - 4 Feb 2011

Tweets from the Revolution (cont.)


February 5, 2011

**Mahmoud Salem** 
@Sandmonkey

Follow

According to police sources, about 10,000 people got rounded up in the past 2 days & then released for lack of space in jails.
[#jan25](#)

12:18 PM - 5 Feb 2011



**Rowan El Shimi**
@Roueishimi

Follow

As soon as prayer finished everyone starts chanting "down with mubarak" can't get over it. [#jan25](#)

8:03 AM - 5 Feb 2011

February 6, 2011

**Mosa'ab Elshamy** 
@mosaaberizing

Follow

I know new steps have to be taken soon but the fact that we can still gather 100s of thousands for the 13th day is a huge feat.
[#Tahrir](#)


6:18 AM - 6 Feb 2011

**Blake News** 
@blakehounshell

Follow

Lots of reporters starting to leave Cairo; news organizations returning to more normal global coverage.


11:00 PM - 6 Feb 2011

**Mostafa Hussein Omar**
@moftasa

Follow

A couple getting married in Tahrir. Unbelievable. [#egypt](#) [#jan25](#)

6:18 AM - 6 Feb 2011


**Mohammed Yahia**
@MohammedY

Follow

Amazing unity today between Muslims and Christians. Both showed respect, understand and sincere love to each other [#Jan25](#)

6:40 AM - 6 Feb 2011



February 7, 2011

**Mostafa Hussein Omar**
@moftasa

Follow

Tahrir square is the biggest brainstorming & think-tank in the middle east and possible the world now. [#egypt](#) [#jan25](#)

3:42 AM - 7 Feb 2011



**Mosa'ab Elshamy** 
@mosaaberizing

Follow

The government has issued a 15% pay rise to workers' wages. Mubarak strips a little more everyday. [#Jan25](#)

6:24 AM - 7 Feb 2011

February 8, 2011

**Mona Seif** 
@Monasosh

Follow

we are surrounding the ppl's assembly building. We'll take back what is rightfully ours: Egypt [#Jan25](#)

7:36 AM - 8 Feb 2011

**ashraf khali**
@ashrafkhali

Follow

More Tahrir welcoming committee chants: "We're staying, we're staying/We're waiting for the millions" [#egypt](#)

3:17 AM - 8 Feb 2011

Tweets from the Revolution (cont.)

February 9, 2011

 **Jon Jensen** 
@jonjensenCNN [Follow](#) 




Here's the new signing greeting visitors to Egypt's parliament: 'Down with the regime.'
[#jan25](#) [#Mubarak](#) <http://yfrog.com/h42q7dvj>

5:04 AM - 9 Feb 2011

 **benwedeman** 
@bencnn [Follow](#) 

[#Egypt](#) schools and universities to remain closed next week-midterm break extended.
[#Egypt](#) [#Jan25](#) [#Tahrir](#)




6:50 AM - 9 Feb 2011

 **Mona Seif** 
@Monasosh [Follow](#) 

By the parliament building, mood is so lively, songs, drums,claps & chants [#Jan25](#)




10:32 AM - 9 Feb 2011

February 10, 2011

 **Mosa'ab Elshamy** 
@mosaaberizing [Follow](#) 




It's day 17 of our revolution. Can't help but feel how near the end has become. Very optimistic about tomorrow. [#Jan25](#)

12:09 AM - 10 Feb 2011

 **Egyptocracy** 
@Egyptocracy [Follow](#) 

[#Mubarak](#) just portrayed to the world what 30 years in power does to a person. [#Egypt](#)
[#Jan25](#) [#Tahrir](#)

1:08 PM - 10 Feb 2011

 **Mosa'ab Elshamy** 
@mosaaberizing [Follow](#) 

This pathetic speech migh've just pushed people to the edge now. Thousands calling for a march to presidential palace tomorrow. [#Jan25](#)




1:38 PM - 10 Feb 2011

February 11, 2011

 **Mohamed ElBaradei** 
@ElBaradei [Follow](#) 

Egypt Today is a free and proud nation. God bless

10:04 AM - 11 Feb 2011

 **Mona Seif** 
@Monasosh [Follow](#) 

I can't stop crying & laughing [#Jan25](#)

8:50 AM - 11 Feb 2011

 **benwedeman** 
@bencnn [Follow](#) 

17 days that shook the world. [#Egypt](#) [#Jan25](#)
[#Tahrir](#)

8:27 AM - 11 Feb 2011



A protester kicks a canister of tear gas back to the police. January 28, 2011.

Photo: Mariam Saliman from Cairo, Egypt [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)]

Social Media in Tahrir: An Excerpt from *Twitter and Tear Gas*

By Zeynep Tufekci

*Author and scholar Zeynep Tufekci has studied the use of digital communication in various social movements across the world. This excerpt comes from her 2017 book *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Through first-hand accounts and her keen scholarship, Tufekci paints a powerful picture of the strength, the frailties, and the traps that digital communication can be in times of tumult and revolution.*

This excerpt comes from the introduction of the book. In it, Zeynep Tufekci reflects on the use of digital communications in Egypt's 2011 Revolution.

I visited Tahrir Square after the most tumultuous days of 2011 were over in Cairo, but protests were still ongoing. The Egyptian military had not yet organized the coup that would come two years later. The square seemed vast

An Excerpt from *Twitter and Tear Gas* (cont.)

while I was standing in the middle of it during a protest, but from my high-rise hotel next to it, it seemed small and insignificant, lost in the sprawling expanse of Cairo, home to more than twenty million people in its metro area. It was a choke point for Cairo traffic, but traffic seemed to be in a perpetual jam.

Yet in 2011, Tahrir became a choke point for global attention. Digital networks allowing the protesters to broadcast to the world raised the costs of repression through attention from a sympathetic global public. Digital connectivity had warped time and space, transforming that square I looked at from above, so small yet so vast, into a crossroads of attention and visibility, both interpersonal and interactive, not just something filtered through mass media. Throughout the eighteen days of the initial Tahrir uprising, I turned on the television only once, wanting to see how networks were covering the historic moment of Mubarak's resignation. CNN was broadcasting an aerial shot of the square. The camera shot from far above the square was jarring because I had been following it all on Twitter, person by person, each view necessarily incomplete but also intimate. On television, all I could see was an undifferentiated mass of people, an indistinct crowd. It felt cold and alienating. The television pictures did not convey how today's networked protests operate or feel.



A protester waving the Egyptian flag. February 1, 2011.

Photo: Kodak Agfa from Egypt [CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)]

Scholars have often focused on the coordination and communication challenges that people engaged in collective action face. If authorities control the public sphere, how will activists coordinate? How will they frame their message in the face of corporate or state media gatekeeping and censorship? How will they keep free riders, who want the benefits that protests might win but do not want to pay the costs of protest, from skipping out and waiting for others to fight and take risks? How will they counter repression by security forces that have superior means and can inflict suffering, torture, and death?

None of those dilemmas have

An Excerpt from *Twitter and Tear Gas* (cont.)

gone away, but some of them have been dramatically transformed. Digital technologies are so integral to today's social movements that many protests are referred to by their hashtags—the Twitter convention for marking a topic: #jan25 for the Tahrir uprising in January 25, 2011, #VemPraRua (“Come to the streets”) in Brazil, #direngezi for Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, Turkey, and #occupywallstreet. Activists can act as their own media, conduct publicity campaigns, circumvent censorship, and coordinate nimbly.

Sometimes, networked online political action is derided as “slacktivism” or “clicktivism,” terms that suggest easy action requiring little effort or commitment. At other times, people assume that movements fueled by social media are organized by people with “weak ties”—people we do not know well—unlike protests of the past. However, these perspectives assume that people who



A protester in Tahrir Square, hailing Facebook as a fighter for justice. March 2012.

Photo: InsideOut Today [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>)]

connect online are doing things only online, and that the online world is somehow less real than, and disconnected from, the off-line one. In contrast, people nowadays also join protests with people with whom they have “strong ties”—family and close friends—and people connect online with other people with whom they have both weak and strong ties. Symbolic action online is not necessarily without power either—rather, the effect depends on the context. When Facebook friends change their avatar to protest discrimination against gay people, they also send a cultural signal to their social networks, and over time, such signals are part of what makes social change possible by changing culture. Many protesters I talked with cite their online political interactions as the beginning of their process of becoming politicized. It is not even clear that all online acts are really as easy as “just clicking.” In a repressive country, tweeting may be a very brave act, while marching on the streets may present few difficulties in a more advanced democracy.

In 2011, I observed how four young people, only two of whom were in Cairo, coordinated supplies and logistics for ten large field hospitals at the height of some of the worst clashes in Egypt. They accomplished this feat through creativity and youthful determination, but it would have been nearly impossible without Twitter, Google spreadsheets, SMS (text messaging or “short messaging services”), and cell phones. In the same time frame, I watched another four college students in Turkey establish a countrywide citizen journalism network, reporting news, busting censorship, and other-

An Excerpt from *Twitter and Tear Gas* (cont.)

wise countering deep polarization. They did this in their spare time, with no funding, fueled only by grit, creativity, and caffeine (preferably from coffee shops with free Wi-Fi). I saw countries with authoritarian-leaning governments lose control over the public sphere, while in democratic countries, issues that had been sidelined from the national agenda, from economic inequality to racial injustice to trade to police misconduct, were brought to the forefront through the force of social media engagement and persistence by citizens.

But I have also seen movement after movement falter because of a lack of organizational depth and experience, of tools or culture for collective decision making, and strategic, long-term action. Somewhat paradoxically the capabilities that fueled their organizing prowess sometimes also set the stage for what later tripped them up, especially when they were unable to engage in the tactical and decision-making maneuvers all movements must master to survive. It turns out that the answer to “What happens when movements can evade traditional censorship and publicize and coordinate more easily?” is not simple.

This article is excerpted from Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest by Zeynep Tufekci. The full text of the book is available on the [author's website](#) for free, through a Creative Commons license. A print edition is also available through [Yale University Press](#).

Zeynep Tufekci is a contributing opinion writer for The New York Times, an associate professor at the University of North Carolina School of Information and Library Science, and a faculty associate at the Harvard Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society.

DISCUSSION

- In what ways did social media bolster the collective action in Tahrir? In what way did social media hinder in the collective social movement in Tahrir?
- What current forms of collective activism are fueled by social media? Can you think of social media hashtags that have defined modern day activism and movements?

Educational Activities

Lesson Plan Index

ART-IVISM

Pages 61-63

In this activity, students will analyze the role that different mediums of art have played in social movements and revolutions throughout history. They will research and explore the different kinds of art that emerged from the various movements. Students will present on one specific artist or piece of art from their assigned movement, and ultimately create their own artistic piece in response.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **We Live in Cairo**.*

POETRY OF THE REVOLUTION

Pages 64-69

Students will be introduced to the poetry of the Egyptian Revolution. Students will then read and interpret “The Will To Life”, a poem by Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi. Students will then create a own short poem in response.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **We Live in Cairo**.*

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Page 70-72

In this activity, students will analyze a major historical conflict by imagining how the conflict would have been portrayed via social media. Students will then be assigned to research various American conflicts before creating an imaginary Twitter profile representing the experiences of one person who lived through their assigned conflict.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **We Live in Cairo**.*

Lesson Plan: Art-ivism

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze the role that different mediums of art have played in social movements and revolutions throughout history. They will research and explore the different kinds of art that emerged from the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa, and the Cuban Revolution. Students will present on one specific artist or piece of art from their assigned movement, and ultimately create their own artistic piece in response.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **We Live in Cairo**.*

SUGGESTED MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

ARTS.C.07.09: [HS] - Identify artists who have been involved in social and political movements, and describe the significance of selected works.

SL.PK-12.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

HSS.USI.T4.02: Using primary sources, research the reform movements in the United States in the early to mid-19th century, concentrating on one of the following and considering its connections to other aspects of reform:

a. the Abolitionist movement, the reasons individual men and women (e.g., Frederick Douglass, Abbey Kelley Foster, William Lloyd Garrison Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Charles Lennox Remond, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, David Walker, Theodore Weld) fought for their cause, and the responses of southern and northern white men and women to abolitionism.

TIME

One class period with a second as an optional extension activity.

Class one: 35-45 Minutes

Class two (Optional Extension): 20+ Minutes

MATERIALS

- Computers
- Writing Utensils
- Paper
- Projector

PROCEDURE

10 minutes:

1. Begin by explaining that art has played a major role in revolutions and movements throughout history. Share [this 4 minute clip about Egypt's musical rebellion](#) that accompanied the Egyptian Revolution in 2011.
2. As a class, discuss the following questions:
 - Why was mahraganat important in this revolution?
 - Can you think of any other movements or revolutions throughout history that music has played a major role in?

5 minutes:

3. Transition by explaining that music is not the only medium of art that has played a significant role in revolutions throughout history. There have been great movements

Artivism

supported by graffiti artists, dancers, actors, comedians, etc.

4. Break students into small groups. Assign each group to one of the movements below. Note that there can be multiple groups working on the same movement.

15-25 minutes:

5. Students will research the art that evolved and inspired throughout their movement, ultimately deciding upon one type of art to focus on (i.e. music, poetry, sculpture, painting, theatre, dance...), and eventually narrowing down to one specific piece of art or artist that contributed to the movement. Starting sources for each of the movements are listed below.
6. Students will then write a brief paragraph in their groups describing both the role that their piece of art, or artist, played in the movement.

5 minutes:

7. Each group will select a representative to present their paragraph to the class.

VARIATION:

Students may also work as individuals instead of in groups. If this is the case, students may hand in their paragraphs instead of presenting them.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION

1. Students are individually assigned to create their own piece of art in response to their social movement as homework. These pieces can be a poem, a song, a dance, a photograph, a painting: truly anything that resonates with them. Prompt them to consider the following questions as they create their piece:
 - How do I relate to this movement?
 - Where is this movement today?
 - How can I best express this movement?
2. Students are instructed to write a few sentences describing how their piece relates to the movement as a whole.
3. In the following class, have students display their pieces and descriptions around the room, and engage in a “museum walk” of the class’s pieces.
 - NOTE: consider any restrictions you may need to set on the use of multimedia/performative elements in order to have students present efficiently (i.e. perform for the class after the walk, videotape the piece and display it on a computer, submit song lyrics or the script of a play instead of performing).
4. Discuss the experience of creating and seeing what others created with the class.
 - What was challenging about creating your own piece?
 - Why did you choose the medium of art that you did?
 - Did anything surprise you as you walked around the classroom?
 - What pieces struck you? Why?

REFLECTION

- In your opinion, are some mediums of art more powerful than others in social movements and revolutions? Explain.
- Can you think of any examples of art that have had a powerful impact on you? What kind of art was it? What was it about the piece that moved you?
- How is art involved in social movements today?

MOVEMENTS AND STARTING SOURCES

Civil Rights Movement in the United States

[Visual Art and the Civil Rights Movement](#)

[Music and the Civil Rights Movement](#)

Art-ivism

[Photography and the Civil Rights Movement](#)

Arab Spring in the Middle East (Excluding music in Egypt)

[Poetry and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011](#)

[Graffiti and the Tunisian Revolution](#)

[Music and the Yemeni Revolution](#)

Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa

[Music and Anti-Apartheid Movement](#)

[Dance and Anti-Apartheid Movement](#)

[Theatre and the Anti-Apartheid Movement](#)

Cuban Revolution

[Visual Art and the Cuban Revolution](#)

[Music and the Cuban Revolution](#)

[Dance and the Cuban Revolution](#)

Lesson Plan: Poetry of the Revolution

OBJECTIVES

Students will be introduced to the Egyptian Revolution through the sources included in the Toolkit, gaining a broad understanding of the different kinds of art that were involved in the Egyptian Revolution. Students will then read and interpret “The Will To Life”, a poem by Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi, which was used as a battle cry throughout the Revolution, and finish by creating their own short poem in response.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **We Live in Cairo**.*

SUGGESTED MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

R.PK-12.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10 (and 11-12.10): By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

TIME

45 Minutes

MATERIALS

- Poem Handouts (pages 66-69)
- Paper
- Writing Utensils

PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the students to the Egyptian Revolution (you may use the timeline or article by Masoud for guidance).
2. Briefly present each of the following kinds of art, and describe the role that they played in the Egyptian Revolution:
 - Graffiti (refer to “Taking Back the Space: Graffiti and the Revolution” article in Toolkit)
 - Music (refer to “Protest Music” article in Toolkit)
 - Poetry (refer to <https://www.thedailybeast.com/egypt-protesters-using-poetry-to>)
3. Hand out “The Will to Life” (handout). The poem is broken up into 3 chunks, 1/3 of the class should be given each portion to read individually.
4. Have students gather into groups based on which part of the poem they read. Prompt students to discuss the following questions:
 - What was your reaction to reading this poem?
 - Did this poem make you feel any specific emotions? What were they?
 - Why do you think this poem was important to the revolution?
5. Briefly discuss the significance of the poem.
 - The poem was written by the Tunisian poet Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi in the early 20th century when Tunisia was colonized by France. Throughout this struggle, four lines from “The Will to Life” became the battle cry of the people in protests and on the streets. These lines were chanted and posted over social media throughout the middle east in

Poetry of the Revolution

2011, becoming a “battle cry” for many revolutions throughout Arab Spring:

*If one day, a people desire to live,
then fate will answer their call
And their night will then begin to fade,
and their chains break and fall.*

6. Students create their own poem in response to “The Will to Life”
 - Students are instructed to think about a current social movement or cause that they feel passionate about. Students are then instructed to create their own 6-12 line “battle cry” poem for this movement. This may be assigned as homework or turned in if time allows at the end of the class period.

REFLECTION

- What was the most challenging element in creating your own poem? What was the most rewarding?
- When was a time that poetry or lyrics moved you? Was it the words that inspired you? The rhythm? The stylistic choices?
- In your opinion, are some mediums of art more powerful than others in social movements/revolutions? Explain.

Poetry of the Revolution

The Will to Life

By Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi

Part 1

If, one day, the people wills to live
Then fate must obey
Darkness must dissipate
And must the chain give way
And he who is not embraced by life's longing
Evaporates into its air and fades away
Woe to one whom life does not rip
from the slap of victorious nothingness
Thus told me the beings
And thus spoke their hidden spirit.
The wind murmured between the cracks
Over the mountains and under trees:
—If to a goal I aspire,
I pursue the object of desire and prudence oblivate
Neither the rugged canyons will I shun
Nor the gushing of the blazing fire
He who doesn't like to climb mountains
Will forever live among the hollows
The blood of youth in my heart roars
And more wind in my chest soars
So I hearkened, and listened to the thunders' shelling
The winds' blowing and the rain's falling

And Earth said to me—when I asked her,
“O mother, do you hate humans?”
“Among all the people I bless the ambitious
And those who taking risk enjoy
Those who don't keep up with time I curse
And I curse those who lead the life of a stone.
The universe is alive; it loves life
And despises the dead, no matter how great they are
The horizon doesn't embrace dead birds
And bees don't kiss dead flowers.
Were it not for the motherliness of my tender heart
These holes would not have held the dead
Woe to those whom life has not ripped
From the curse of victorious nothingness!”

Poetry of the Revolution

The Will to Life

By Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi

Part 2

On one of those autumn nights,
With sorrow and boredom burdened,
I got drunk on the stars' light
And sang to sadness, until it too was drunk
And I asked darkness: "Does life bring back
Youth to what it had withered?"
Darkness' lips did not speak
And the dawn's virgins did not sing
The woods told me with tenderness
Lovely, like the fluttering strings,
"Come winter, foggy winter,
Snowy winter, rainy winter,
Dies the magic, the branches' magic,
The flowers' magic, and the fruits' magic
The magic of the soft and gentle evening
The magic of the luscious and fragrant meadow
Branches fall along with their leaves
And flowers of a dear and blooming time
The wind plays with them in every valley,
The flood buries them wherever it goes
And all die like a marvelous dream
That in a soul shone and disappeared
The seeds that were carried remain
A reservoir of a bygone beautiful era
A memory of seasons, a vision of life,
And ghosts of a world steadily vanishing;
Embracing, while it is under the fog,
Under the snow, and under the mud,
Life's untentious spirit
And spring's scented green heart;
Dreaming of bird songs,
Fragrant flowers and the flavors of fruit.

As time goes by, vicissitudes arise,
Some wilt, and others live on.
Their dreams become wakefulness
Wrapped in dawn's mystery
Wondering, "Where's the morning fog?
Where's the evening magic? and the moonlight?"

Poetry of the Revolution

And the mazes of that elegant bed?
The singing bees and the passing clouds?
Where are the rays and beings?
Where is the life I am waiting for?
I'm thirsty for light over the boughs!
I'm thirsty for the shade under the trees!
I'm thirsty for the spring in the meadows
Singing and dancing over the flowers!
I'm thirsty for the birds' tune
For the breeze's whisper, and the rain's melody!
I'm thirsty for the universe! Where is existence?
When will I see the anticipated world?
It is the universe, behind the slumber of stillness
In the tunnels of the great awakenings"

Poetry of the Revolution

The Will to Life

By Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi

Part 3

It took only a wing flap
Till her longing grew up and triumphed
The Earth shattered those above her
And saw the world's sweet images
Came spring with its melodies
With its dreams, its fragrant juvenescence
And spring kissed her on the lips kisses
That return the departed youth
And said to her: you have been given life
And through your treasured progeny immortalized
Be blessed by the light, and welcome
Young age and life's affluence.
He whose dreams worship the light
Is blessed by the light wherever he appears
Here you have the sky, here you have the light
And here you have the blooming dreamy soil
Here you have the undying beauty
And here you have the wide and glowing world,
So swing as you like over the fields
With sweet fruits and luscious flowers
Whisper to the breeze, whisper to the clouds
Whisper to the stars and whisper to the moon
Whisper to life and its longings,
To the charm of this attractive existence

Darkness revealed a deep beauty
That kindles imagination and thought inspires
And over the world extends a marvelous magic
Dispatched by an able magician
The candles of the bright stars illumined
The incense, the flowers' incense perished
A soul of singular beauty flickered
With wings from the moon's luminosity
Life's holy hymn resounded
In a temple dreamy and enchanted
And in the universe it declared: Aspiration
Is the flame of life and the essence of victory
If to life souls aspire
Then fate must obey.

Lesson Plan: Social Media and Social Movements

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze a major historical conflict by imagining how the conflict would have been portrayed via social media. Students will then be assigned to research The American Revolution, The American Civil War, World War I, or World War II. Finally, they will create an imaginary Twitter profile representing the experiences of one person who lived through their assigned conflict.

This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of *We Live in Cairo*.

SUGGESTED MASSACHUSETTS STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

HSS.USI.T1.06: Describe the key battles of the Revolution (e.g., Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill, Trenton, Saratoga, Yorktown); the winter encampment at Valley Forge; and key leaders and participants of the Continental Army.

HSS.USI.T5.04: Analyze the roles and policies of Civil War leaders Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Ulysses S. Grant and evaluate the short- and long-term impact of important Civil War battles (e.g., the Massachusetts 54th Regiment at the Battle at Ft. Wagner, and the Battles of Bull Run, Shiloh, Fredericksburg, Antietam, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Appomattox).

W.11-12.3.d: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and figurative and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

TIME

Handout (Page 72)
Writing Utensils

MATERIALS

Picture from Facilitator to display
Recording Device/Cellphone for interviews (optional)
Paper and writing utensils for note taking and drafting

PROCEDURE


- Students will be assigned to one of the following historical conflicts (depending upon which is most relevant to course studies). Links to timelines of events are listed below.
 - The American Revolution
<https://www.britannica.com/list/timeline-of-the-american-revolution>
 - American Civil War
<http://www.historyplace.com/civilwar/>
 - World War I
<https://www.historyonthenet.com/world-war-one-timeline>
 - World War II
<https://www.historyonthenet.com/world-war-2-timeline-2>
- Using the Twitter feed handout and the rest of class time, each student will create a twitter feed representing one person's experiences during the chosen conflict. An example is

Social Media and Social Movements

provided below. Students may choose a historical figure, or create their own character who was lived during the conflict.

3. Students must create a username for their character, draw in a profile picture (or print and attach a photo if homework), and create at least 5 tweets. Tweets must be 140 characters max, and each must include a date and relate to the events that transpired.
4. Encourage students to think creatively. Emphasize the importance of understanding “character”. Prompt students to consider their character’s age, voice, societal rank, education level, and where they are from.

Example Fictional Twitter Feed




NAME: William Shakespeare

USERNAME: @willyshakes


FOLLOWERS
3.4 million

FOLLOWING
5k


DATE: 1612

 Shakespeare signing off! #retired


DATE: 1593

 There's a small choice in rotten apples #teaser #TamingOfTheShrew


DATE: 1954

 Go give @LCM a follow! You won't be disappointed by our troop!

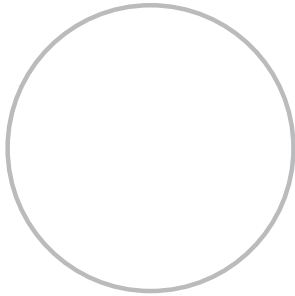
DATE: September 20, 1592

 I disappear for 7 years and this is how I'm welcomed back?@RobertGreene thanks for your kind words #not

DATE: November 28, 1582

 Now join hands, and with your hands your heart #justmarried #Hathaspeare

Social Media and Social Movements



NAME: _____

USERNAME: @ _____

FOLLOWERS

FOLLOWING

DATE: _____



DATE: _____



DATE: _____



DATE: _____



DATE: _____



Resource List

To Read:

- [“Eight years after Egypt’s revolution, here’s what we’ve learned about social media and protest”](#) Incisive analysis looking at the lessons learned from the “Facebook Revolution” and the “Twitter Revolution” and how social media continues to change protests around the world. Written by Killian Clarke and Korhan Koçak for *The Washington Post*.
- [“Revolution in Cairo”](#) – Frontline’s online resource examining the events leading to and following the Egyptian revolution. This resource contains articles, timelines, and videos.
- [Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East](#) – New York Times international correspondent David D. Kirkpatrick tells an eye-witness account of the massive political change in Egypt from 2011-2013.
- [Lissa](#) – A fictional graphic novel which follows two friends coming of age in Cairo and Boston, brought together by medicine, friendship, and revolution. Written by Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye, and illustrated by artists Sarula Bao and Caroline Brewer, with special artwork by Ganzeer.

To Listen:

- [“Ramy Essam: The Singer of the Egyptian Revolution”](#) – A 2011 NPR profile of singer Ramy Essam following his detainment and abuse at the hands of Egyptian police.
- [“Ganzeer in America: Get the joke? Can we take it?”](#) – A 2015 Radio Open Source conversation with artist Ganzeer about his new work and new life in America. Ganzeer reflections on his vision of America today, how it currently affects his artmaking, and the connections he sees between America of 2015 and Egypt in the modern era.

To Watch

- [Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution](#) – In this YouTube series, Director Leil-Zahra Mortada interviewed a variety of women in 2012 who participated in the Egyptian Revolution. Each story recounts their

experience protesting or reporting on the events. Some stories contain violent content.

- [The Square](#) - A 2013 Egyptian-American documentary film by Jehane Noujaim, which depicts the ongoing Egyptian Crisis until 2013. The full film is available to stream on Netflix and Amazon.

From our friends at Primary Source

What Teachers Need to Know Podcast: The Middle East

Primary Source has 12 episodes focusing on the Middle East in the What Teachers Need to Know podcast series. Designed for teachers, this podcast offers vital insight for understanding world cultures and current events so that you can facilitate deeper learning about the world with your students. Meet subject-matter experts and explore online resources that can help make a complex and dynamic world accessible for K-12 classrooms. Together, we can prepare the next generation to be informed and engaged global citizens. You can find the podcasts here:

<https://www.primarysource.org/for-teachers/podcasts>

The “Arab Spring” Webinar: Four Years Later (Part 1)

In 2011, much of the Middle East and North Africa seemed poised to embark on new paths toward democratic change. In 2015, with civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen and with a military-based regime tightening its hold in Egypt, much of that promise seems to have gone unfulfilled. What happened? Did the Arab Spring inaugurate any lasting and meaningful positive change in these countries or others in the region? And what can we expect to see in the coming years? Barbara Petzen of Middle East Connections joins Primary Source to discuss the legacy of the Arab Spring and how we can address it in the classroom.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-K4rMMiPNQ8>

Primary Source is an education nonprofit offering professional development and curriculum resources to K-12 educators for more culturally responsive, globally inclusive teaching. They can be visited at www.primarysource.org