Perspective on Resistance

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Brought up on the alternate use and abuse of power in Egypt for more than half a century, I only believed in Lord Acton's famous adage "Power corrupts: absolute power corrupts absolutely." However, being at an almost total remove from the disturbances of rule and the political turmoil in the middle east for a whole decade during my study in Britain, I was happy to accept what I later knew was Heidegger's theory about the "destinies of Being" (1967, 436). What Heidegger means, of course, is that "Being" has inherent laws which determine the destiny of beings. If one had to define my philosophical stand, if so it was, one would say it was a combination of Rorty's pragmatism and an almost metaphysical faith in knowledge. I voraciously read and translated all sorts of texts, and, on my return to Egypt, I found in reading and writing a source of new pleasure and an intimation of social power; especially when I wrote for the stage or translated plays which were put on the stage, I felt the power of the creator who now watches his creatures say what he wants, do what he has envisaged, and – which is more important – be what he decides them to be. It wasn't until I discovered Foucault, much later – in the late 1980s in fact – that I began to link, or to see a link, however inchoate, between power and knowledge.

In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault says "[p]ower is everywhere, not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere" (1978, 93). More fascinated, naturally, by the power/knowledge dyad than by Foucault's new definition of power, I still assumed that power pertained primarily to the political sphere, as facts in the Egyptian situation led me to believe. Not surprisingly, knowledge seemed allied to the work of the intelligence services about which I had learnt a great deal. To my yet untrained mind, living in the genial atmosphere of the English Department headed by a kindred spirit, the high-minded Hoda Guindi, I had not been introduced to the modern arts of hedging, prevarication and even chicanery in present-day ideological contestation. I still assumed that the concept of power as all-pervasive was simply a reworking of the Nietzschean philosophy of "the will to power" to which we had been introduced early in life but only as a curiosity to be wondered at, and to be kept at bay at all costs.

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Still, as I seriously continued my career as a dramatist, I began to encounter unusual forms of power, and odd means of resistance. I went back to Foucault, and, later on, in the same book, I came across a statement that spoke of power differently and in a way that explained a great deal about my 'life in theatre', to put it grandly, at the time. Here Foucault generalizes his definition of power so that it includes any kind of social action; and as social action cannot be separated from the prevailing conventions and mores in a given society, power will appear at all levels of interaction, even between ordinary individuals involved in apparently innocuous acts of persuasion, or in conversations hitherto regarded as bland or socially ritualistic. My efforts to get my plays put on the stage, especially my strange encounters with the censors, elsewhere narrated, confirmed the aforementioned Foucault statement, namely his argument that "where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently," he concludes, "this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation … [Resistances] are inscribed in the latter [i.e. power] as an irreducible opposite" (1978, 98).

As such abstractions are the stock-in-trade of all philosophical enquiry, however defined, I liked to think of the Power/resistance nexus in concrete terms: I thought of the Newtonian principle of action and reaction, and the law of inertia in mechanics which makes one action conditional on another. The solution was, however, far from satisfactory, as the Foucauldian generalization seemed to be a little imprecise. One aspect particularly troubled me, namely Foucault's tendency to believe that there is "essentially no such thing as the legitimate exercise of power," according to Wollen's interpretation (1992, 183). "If those who contest power," Wollen continues," must necessarily partake of the very mechanisms of power in their struggle to combat it – then their struggles are condemned a priori to reproduce the thing they are combating." In other words, if the exercise of power is by definition 'bad', should it be resisted in all its manifestations? Can we think of power only in terms of its imposition of conventions and mores on a given society, or an ideology dictated by a prevailing regime, or, worse still, as an anti-intersubjectivity force, forging human relations by a totalizing outlook, destroying the autonomy of individuals? Beware of the temptation to cite instances from history if you like to claim there is such a thing as benign power, for then you'll be accused of logo-centrism and bring the wrath of Derrida upon your head; and if the benevolent ruler happens to be a man, say ʿUmar ibn al-Khiṭāb, the charge will be identified as Phallogocentrim!

It was a conundrum which I painstakingly avoided. Especially as Foucault became popular in Egypt of the 1980s, I found that the more I read of this man's writings, the more confused I got regarding his (by now) well-known triad knowledge-power-resistance. As our first Cairo symposium on comparative literature drew to a close, with Foucault's ideas very much in the air, a Lebanese friend of mine (a former student in fact) bought me a book that was recently published and which revived my interest in other works by Foucault. The author of that book, Nancy Frazer, had the gumption to tackle the issue head-on:

> The problem is that Foucault calls too many sorts of things power and simply leaves it at that. Granted, all cultural practices involve constraints. But these constraints are of a variety of different kinds and thus demand a variety of different normative responses … Foucault writes as if oblivious to the existence of a whole body of Weberian social theory with its careful distinctions between such notions as authority, force, violence, domination, and legitimation. Phenomena which are capable of being distinguished via such concepts are simply lumped together … As a consequence, the broad range of normative nuances is surrendered, and the result is a certain normative one-dimensionality." (1989, 69)

These remarks occur in a chapter entitled "The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing politics," and the title of her book is *Unruly Practices: Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. The passage cited above was a clear invitation for me to read Max Weber, the only problem being that many of his works in German had not been translated (into English, that is) and, if translated, were not available. When I came across something about him in English, I translated it into Arabic and it was duly published in *Fusūl*, the Arabic periodical concerned with literary criticism. But criticism in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s in Egypt took a decisively cultural turn, to the point of conflating 'critical theory', a euphemism for a certain brand of Marxism, with 'Literary Theory' as succinctly introduced by Jonathan Culler (1997) and, in Egypt and the Arab world, with 'literary criticism' as we know it in our Arabic traditions, especially since the advent of New Criticism in the 1940s–1950s. When I got hold of Weber's *Sociology of World Religions* translated and included in a huge volume entitled *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, under a different title, viz. "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions," (323–359) I found more than I had bargained for – I found a philosophical concept of art that exceeded my most sanguine expectations; but that I shall come to later. My immediate concern, however, is the Foucauldian triad.

Armed with the Weberian five categories of power – namely authority, force, violence, domination and legitimation, I could see power at work everywhere I went. My Arabic play *Al-Ghirbān* [The Crows], was staged in 1988, and scheduled to be televised in 1989. However, it was banned by the censor at the last minute when he heard that the play dealt with an apparent famine, manufactured by several wheat-growing peasants. In that play, I employed the power-resistance conflict in the verbal games of a sycophantic government minister, a hypocritical poet, and the myrmidons of the Sultan. Particularly caustic for the censor was my vindication of the innate freedom of women in the Egyptian countryside, apart, of course, from the play's mordant sarcasm of the ruler. Just as had happened back in 1964 when my *Al-Barr al-Gharbī* [The West Bank] was put on the stage, brilliant writers and critics, such as Saʿd Wahba and Ragaa ALNakkash (no less) advised me to keep clear of such heady ideas, and Mahmod al-Shiniti, then head of the State Publishing House,

commenting on my earlier *Mayyit Ḥalāwa* whispered to me: "if you like comedy so much, why ridicule the regime? Can't you write romantic comedies?"

The ban on televising my play was a watershed. In collaboration with the late Samir Sarhan, I wrote a documentary entitled Journey of Enlightenment, put on the stage in 1990, in which I said what I wanted, channeling my thought through the work of three exponents of Egyptian 'freedom': al-ʿAqqad, al-Rāfiʿī, and Taha Hussein. The authorities were definitely uncomfortable about the performance and though not a popular success, the reaction of the audiences was enough to alert the censors to the dangers of dealing with potentially flammable ideas on the stage. Its run was cut short, but I was now completely absorbed in tracing the intricacies of the verbal games of power and resistance.

In my following play *Jasūs fī Qaṣr al-Sultān* [A Spy in the Sultan's Palace], I questioned the claim made by every ruler to be enacting God's will. This was the central ploy, in an incident taken from the history of Egypt in the early fourteenth century, when the tartars had swept over the Arab East, ransacked Iraq, then the Levant, and were poised to invade Egypt. The irony is that when the tartars were eventually converted to Islam the situation hardly changed: each side believed they were heaven-inspired, and it took brute force to ensure the dominance of one over the other. If we just for the sake of argument exclude the transcendental claims, we shall easily see the Nietzschean view of power – that is, power for itself, not instrumental power – revived by Heidegger and his French followers, or his advocates, in the twenteith century. Verbal games pale into insignificance: we see neither Dr. Berne's 'games' nor Wittgenstein's 'language games': we see nature red in tooth and claw. On the way back to Egypt, having vanquished the tartars, the Egyptian army stopped over in Bilbis, somewhere east of the Nile Delta, where Quṭuz, the Egyptian ruler and commander of the triumphant army, was killed by his second in command, al-Ẓāhir Baybars who declared himself a new ruler. It is a fascinating episode in Egyptian history creatively handled by the gifted playwright Hammuda in his masterpiece *Ibn Al-Balad* [Native].

From the point of view of cultural criticism, one may easily see in it an eloquent illustration of Carl Schmitt's concept of 'decisionism'. Here is a ruler capable of taking a decision *ex nihilio*: Here is a hero who defied all the constrictions of rationalist thought and decided on the spot that he should rule Egypt. No resistance can now be brooked, as the sword spoke louder than words in the famous words of Abū Tammām (d. 231/845):

> The sword's reports are truer than letters:
> Its sharp edge separates reality from illusions.

> السَيفُ أَصدَقُ أَنباءً مِنَ الكُتُبِ
> في حَدِّهِ الحَدُّ بَينَ الجِدِّ وَاللَعِبِ

In other words, power now takes the form of 'force', physical and irrevocable. And as Baybars was made 'into' a popular hero around whose exploits a whole folkloric tradition took form, complete with song and dance, in Germany the arch-decisionist assumed absolute power, with the 'Enabling Act' of March 1933, showing how his 'populist' ideas served to entrench his sole power. Though the comparison is necessarily relative, a similar situation obtained in Egypt since the 1952 coup d'état which developed, eventually, into a revolution.

Let us temporarily suspend value judgment as Foucault and Derrida do, but concentrate on the structure of the mechanism of power and resistance in the two situations. In each we find the Nietzschian ideal of a man worthy of respect: a man who wills power and gets it. Thereafter follows domination, and the twin Weberian categories of authority and legitimation. For this, each leader requires apologists and philosophers, especially such writers as can interpret his decisionism as inspiration, a call from above. Having banished transcendentalism altogether, God included, Heidegger had to find a substitute in 'Being'; it is the destiny of being that spoke through the Fuhrer, he says; though in our case, it was the will of God, embodied in the high values of revealed religion, that gave his authority Weberian legitimacy. The leader may be of military provenance, but he is not required in the Egyptian situation to exhibit military ingenuity or achieve victory in any battle: he is held higher than these temporals, if not profane ends.

Most of us, me included, are nostalgic for the days of power, found in the sense of national pride restored by the leader. A whole rhetorical tradition was built on the image of the leader, especially that he verbally recovered the value of individual men and women, painted a rosy picture of the future of our country, appeared to be capable of military exploits worthy of our ancient Egyptian heritage. Some people actually believed that Muhammad Ali's dominance over the Arab East could be repeated. Those were heady days, requiring no philosophy but, most importantly, we all were young. It is the same feeling which Wordsworth had in the days of the French Revolution, with “France standing on the top of Golden hours. And human nature seeming born again.” “Bliss was it in that dawn of being to be alive,” he says; “To be young was very heaven” (xxxi, 196).

It may be difficult to disentangle myself from the nostalgia and the sense of the good old days, but for a scientific discussion of power and resistance I found in the interwar situation in Germany, and the course of the Egyptian Revolution structural parallels. Both leaders believed in military discipline, both were populist, speaking of democracy, and had immense popular backing. Both had brands of socialism variously qualified, as National socialism and Arab socialism – both of which were publicized by semi-philosophers and true philosophers, people who wholeheartedly supported the posited political creed and accused their detractors of high treason. Both 'philosophies' were formally against metaphysics, though the Egyptian brand of this trend was more Cartesian than Heideggerian—that is, allowing for the duality of body and soul, rather than totalizing everything in Being. Both thought of their

nations in racial (not racist) terms, one believing in the Aryan race, the other in the Arab race [having suspended any recourse to value temporarily]; one believed he needed lebensraum, and so sent his troops into other countries, the other believed he needed to export the 'revolution' and gain allies in other countries, sending his troops into them. Each had an amazingly essentialist outlook; and each seemed to believe in military might, but while one was backed by a real fighting army, the other was backed by linguistic might – real linguistic might.

Structural parallelism apart, substantive questions condition the quality of resistance that each exercise of power engendered. In Europe resistance was truly philosophical and the thinkers who resisted National Socialism left for the USA where Horkheimer and Adorno, for instance, worked and produced weighty and influential books. In Egypt, however, resistance took mainly the form of a return to metaphysics, in this case a reborn faith in God. Mustapha Mahmoud was a famous anti-metaphysical writer; and at one time was hailed as the first ever Arab philosopher, especially in his atheist phase when he wrote pseudo-scientific articles. Liberal thinkers in Europe had contested 'foundationalism', followed by the critical theorists who tried, successfully in many cases, to present Marxism in a new key. They were opposed to German Idealism, together with the efforts of the Vienna Circle and the Frankfurt School in the reformulation of theories of truth, ethics and epistemology. All Mahmoud did, however, was to present rudimentary scientific facts drawn from his study of medicine. I remember one article of which he was most proud, about the secret of the long life of a tortoise, which he attributed to near inactivity, while in contrast more active animals had shorter spans of life. Still a schoolboy, I was fascinated by the argument, thinking of the human analogy implied: It wasn't until much later that I realized it was no more than a poetic vision, and had nothing to do with science proper. Soon enough, with the demise of the Arab dream after the 1967 defeat, many of the more vociferous of the leader's supporters beat a regular retreat, showing that they still believed in God, and that metaphysics was not so bad after all. In his *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ* [Return of Consciousness], Tewfik Al-Hakim summed up the reaction of many intellectuals to the flawed system that was based on language, and that had led to such humiliation.

The effect of the debacle was astounding. Pondering the disaster, many hitherto staunch supporters of the regime were literally dumbfounded. Some had a nervous breakdown, and a famous poet was sent to Russia for psychiatric treatment, others soon declared that they were cured of atheism which had made them believe in the 'power of man' but now they regained their faith in God. Major hierophants of 'Arab Socialism' sought to justify their stance claiming that the 'Theory' was valid ("Look at the Soviet Union," they pointed out) but that the application was faulty; the leader was blameless, but our capitalist enemies couldn't stomach such a visionary leader whose policies did not serve their interests and so plotted to bring him down. They had a point in fact, but the validity of their argument went against the grain. Their voices were drowned out by the general realization, gradually taking shape, that the Rhetorical structure had fallen, "with hideous ruin and combustion," as a Milton

would put it, with the devastating military defeat. The Return to God, and to metaphysics, was inevitable. I remember when my wife and I were in 1969 enjoying a concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London, given by Abdul-Halim Hafiz, a member of the audience was overcome by emotion when the singer spoke of Jesus Christ, invoking the power of the Lord to help the Arabs at their darkest hour, so to speak, and began to whimper audibly. Suddenly, a Palestinian sitting next to him shouted in a semi-catatonic fit, "Now you know there's a God, don't you, you Pharaonic atheists!"

Now resistance to the power of that regime, for long silenced by the regime's secret police, and specially trained henchmen, took the twin forms indicated in the title of this address – that is existentially and verbally, The realization of the nature of the disaster was, as I have said, gradual: it took a couple of years for the people to internalize what had happened in fact. And as the prospects of change were almost ruled out, with the same ruling clique firmly in place, the first existential form of resistance took place. Under immense pressure to grant a modicum of freedom to the people, the regime allowed citizens to actually leave the country. This was first greeted with suspicion: can one actually go out of the country if one so wished? After all, it had taken me nearly seven months in 1964–5 to get an exit visa, and my old passport gave me the right to visit Libya only, then under the monarchy, and regarded as too unattractive (before the discovery of oil, that is) (Of the efforts I made to get that visa I spoke in detail in my autobiography). Things were different now: in 1968-9 according to published official figures, about one quarter of a million persons left the country, some for good, some temporarily. As resistance, this departure meant substituting *Sein* for *Dasein*, in Heideggerian terms, that is, people exchanged presence for existence. As a friend of mine owned to me at the time "I can only exist where I can speak my mind; and I do mean now to exist." He was on his way to Canada, to immigrate permanently, others left for other countries, and as oil-rich Arab countries appeared on the map, many Egyptians were quick to change their homeland for other places, forming new Egyptian colonies, as though to stress their existence.

As opposed to this form of what some have described as 'negative resistance', a huge battalion of writers and artists showed how art could be truly a positive form of resistance. Novels, plays and poems continued to be produced embodying disenchantment with the carceral society that remained unchanged, in spite of the military defeat. A common joke at the time was that, after the death of the leader (physically this time), some still wanted him to rule, rather than a member of the old military junta. Incidentally, some of those who had gained prominence under the power of the dead leader felt that the new regime, not much different in essence, frowned upon them or was at least unsympathetic to their socialist sentiments and so ran away, for short or long stays abroad. The real artists, however, whatever their ideological leanings, produced masterpieces that showed that Foucault's appeal to the "other of Reason," 'unreason', or madness, could be used as a tool in the exercise

of resistance. But I think it is perhaps the Weberian view of art, referred to in the above-quoted book, that should help us to understand how art came to constitute the language of positive resistance. His view is naturally general, pertaining primarily to the role of art in Western capitalist societies, within what he calls the "Aesthetic Sphere"; but, for our purposes; it explains how Arabic dramatists in Egypt were fascinated with the theatre of the absurd, and why they preferred to translate the term as (اللامعقول). It was Foucault's "the other of Reason," as elaborated in great detail in his Madness and Civilization (1965), especially as he attributed truly ethical and epistemological significance to the study of 'unreason' (77–84). Meanwhile Weber encapsulates the power of art in its liberatory effect; in this book he says "[under] the … intellectualism and rationalization of life … art becomes a cosmos of more and more consciously grasped independent values, which exist in their own right" (342).

According to Wollen's interpretation, "Foucault must invoke as a source of resistance an entity (or entities) that exists at a total remove from the dominant manifestation of 'power-knowledge'. In principle, such resistance must assume the form of a primordial, presocialized otherness, such as madness" (1992, 183). Wollen may not be too far off the mark, if by madness we understand what Foucault sees as the vast human resources condemned to obscurity, to silence and to repression by the exercise of "Reason." In madness he found 'natural qualities' that are liberated but which, being opposed to social norms, must be disciplined or punished. The rule of Reason cannot accept the presence of such "other of reason" which threatens its power: it fights it, banishes it or brands it as madness. In fact, as I read Foucault's explanation (and vindication) of madness, I remembered the words of Theseus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* "The lunatic, the lover and the poet/Are of imagination all compact" (1925, V. i). Seen in the light of the Shakespearean line, Foucault's claim seems to make sense: in it we see the Weberian independent values which true art embodies.

In Arabic drama such independence was achieved by going to history, as though to create situations with values unrelated to the present but which in fact help the audience to make better sense of their immediately lived experience. For the 'other of Reason', many dramatists enjoyed writing in the manner of Theatre of the Absurd. Tewfik Al-Hakim did both. He wrote some plays avowedly 'absurd', namely *Yā Ṭāliʿ al-Shajara* [O Tree-climber], *Maṣīr Ṣarṣār* [The Fate of a Cockroach], and *al-Ṭaʿām li-kull Fam* [Food for Every Mouth], and one long play designed by his own admission to represent the conflict between Power and the Law, viz. *al-Sulṭān al-Ḥāʾir* [The Sultan's Dilemma]. Both kinds represented art as a language of resistance; and in each case we have an absurd situation, created by the 'other of Reason'. Even the 'law' in the latter play must be seen as a product of 'unreason', specifying that if a powerful man, in Nietzschian terms, ascends to the throne when in fact he had once been a slave, his legitimacy requires that he must be 'freed' first (more of this later)—most of the Mamluks who had ruled Egypt in the era prior to the Turkish occupation in 1521 were European slaves. The solution was that someone should buy him and

'free' him before allowing him to exercise his power. When the buyer happens to be a prostitute, the 'other of Reason' takes centre-stage. Similar handlings of bizarre situations in the drama of the period occur prominently in the works of Mikhail Roman, Sa'd Wahba, and Rashad Rushdy. Salah Abdul-Saboor's five plays in verse, written in 1969, in a sudden flowering of genius, comparable only to Keats's, show to what extent the 'other of Reason' was used as a language of resistance. Lewis Awad, the most authoritative critic of the time (and of all time I would say) wrote two reviews of *Yā Ṭāliʿ al-Shajara* in *Al-Ahram*, in two successive weeks; presenting two contradictory interpretations, one showing that it is indeed in the 'absurd' tradition, exploring its 'other of Reasonness' features, the other suggesting that it is a philosophical meditation on the nature of absolutism. When I asked him which approach he preferred, he answered me with a question: "Which do you prefer?" It was a question for which I had no answer, then or now.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can now see that it was the rhetorical nature of the regime's power that generated the language of resistance as art. While people still debated some of the Weberian categories of power – authority and legitimation – the air was vibrant with lively contestation, or 'academic bombardment', with argument pitted against argument, and all things seemed to show that the language of power has met its equal in a superior language of resistance – art.

In my anthology of *Modern Arabic Poetry in Egypt* (1986) I offered examples of Abdul-Saboor's lyrical poetry of resistance. Shortly after the 1967 war, in a little volume of verse, he struck hard at the highfalutin claims of that era about the Arabs being a united nation, credited with glorious deeds. Meditations on a Wounded Time shows in poem after poem how ridiculous such claims were. Here the poet draws pictures of the Arab past where the single ruler – as Caliph, as provincial governor, as small official – practices dictatorial rule. The typical Arab potentate in Abdul-Saboor poetry was a sensual man given to a life of pleasure, perhaps as a result of the sudden affluence brought about by the riches gained from the newly-conquered lands in the past, or from the newly-acquired oil-wealth at present. The poet here resorts to parody, portraying these rulers as surrounded by sycophants and self-seekers, in classical Arabic that recreated the vaunted past in painfully grotesque forms. Influenced, no doubt, by the great thinkers of the time, he could reveal the consequences of the monopoly of power by one individual – the crushing military defeat, the loss of Sinai, the oil-wells in the Gulf of Suez, and the Suez Canal revenues.

Equally problematic and prominently figuring in the afore-mentioned volume, was the concept of freedom. It was Zaki Naguib Mahmoud who showed that this concept had been handed down from our ancestors almost intact: a free man was the opposite of a bondman. To be born in slavery meant that a man was not in possession of his full rights as a human being: he would not be in command of himself, as drawing his power and will from those of his master. This was equally true of both sexes, of course, but slave girls had a lurid history in major works of Arabic

literature, such as *al-Aghānī* [Book of Songs] and the great *Alf Layla wa-Layla* [One Thousand and One Nights]. The word free and its cognates, therefore, carried nothing of the modern political or intellectual significations. It was the 'free men', not the slaves, who were required to fight for their country; they could own property (including human chattel) and engage in properly organized matrimonial arrangements. This historical feature, bequeathed by the Roman Empire to the people of the Arab east was truly a stumbling block confronting the exponents of enlightenment, notably Taha Hussein. In his The Future of Culture in Egypt, Hussein could advocate the adoption of Western culture in toto, claiming that ours was a Mediterranean culture, but his totalizing effort floundered on the tradition of bondage. It may appear odd to hear the famous advocate of women's rights in Egypt, Huda Shaʿrāwī, proudly state that slaves in her household were kindly treated, as late as 1924. Now regarded as a harbinger of the feminist movement in the interwar period, her memoirs show that the tradition of contrasting freedom with slavery did not die outright, even with the royal decree prohibiting the use of slaves in household work. In Saudi Arabia, King Faysal, a truly enlightened man, God rest his soul, ordered an official ban on slavery in 1961.

Our language, therefore, as used in opposing domination, that is, as a resistance tool, militated against the adoption of the modern concept of freedom for quite a while. A distinction had to be made in this connection between the word 'servant', as applied to all people as God's worshippers (عباد الله) and as applied to a caste of slaves, originally captured in war and 'sold to slavery' (as Othello recounts to Desdemona's father), or as later captured by the European slave-traders in Africa. As in English, and possibly in other modern languages, the word 'slave' has lost its old literal meaning in Arabic and became a trope. One encounters various figurative uses of the term in Arabic poetry and in Shakespeare, and, of course in Hegel's theory of the master-slave relation.

The 'slave trope' worked very well in poetry in the interwar period and Lucentio's cry "O let me be a slave to achieve that maid/Whose sudden sight has enthralled my eye" (The Taming of The Shrew, I, i. 17-18) is matched by Shawqī's:

> My master who had my soul in his hand,
> Has lost it, may his hand be blessed!
>
> مَولايَ وَروحي في يَدِه
> قَد ضَيَّعَها سَلِمَت يَدُه

The advent of the Apollo School in Arabic poetry in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s changed everything. Under the influence of the English romantic tradition, poets could deal with freedom in its modern sense, supported no doubt by the political thinkers of the time who introduced the modern concepts of democracy, the constitution, parliamentary life and so forth. Resistance now looked to the poet for a new interpretation of ‘freedom’, endowing it with almost metaphysical and indeed, cosmic power. With Shelley’s dictum in mind – the poets are the unacknowledged

legislators of mankind – Ali Mahmoud Taha could describe the poet in the following image:

> [The Poet] comes down to earth, like a beam of radiant light,
> With a sorcerer's wand, and the heart of a prophet.
> هَبَطَ الأرضَ كالشعاعِ السنيّ
> بعصا ساحرٍ وقلْبِ نبيّ

Gone is the old opposition between servant and master, bondman and freeman etc. The new concept had already been built up in Europe in the nineteenth century by Hegel himself in his celebrated characterization of history as "progress in the consciousness of freedom" (1953, 24).

However, liberation for the Egyptians meant, primarily perhaps, getting rid of British occupation. This occupation was seen as the major obstacle to the freedom of the people, as the British colluded with the corrupt monarchy to play havoc with the country's fortunes. There were various aspects of the concept of freedom in those days, but 'freedom' became the main weapon in the arsenal of resistance. The articles, studies and books produced at the time seemed to be obsessed with the idea of freedom. As Wordsworth had believed that social freedom should be based on individual freedom (1970, 104), the poets, especially, were at the vanguard of the freedom-quest. Poets of the Apollo school now regarded themselves as poets of resistance, not by actually attacking the regime, or even foreign occupation (though nobody doubted it was the arch-enemy to freedom) but by being 'free' in the modern sense of the term: they wrote poetry which aesthetically bespoke liberty and exalted the freedom of the individual; without actually attacking old and threadbare motifs their whole generation had been brought up on, they dealt with natural beauty, with free love, and with poetry itself as the key to freedom. Poetry seemed to re-assume its traditional function as embodying the ethos of the Arabian community – a function that had been submerged by the centuries of foreign rule. Apollo members, poets and critics, translated a good deal of English romantic poetry, especially Shelley's, in unprecedented profusion. 'Ode to a skylark' was translated seventeen times, and Arab ears now heard of the nightingale, the thrush (that is, the thrush nightingale) the martin, the blackbird etc. They were all symbols of freedom, and represented their efforts to break free of the oppressive reality. A notable feature of these poets was their wedding of the secularist teachings of their contemporary thinkers to the sense of freedom that their faith in God gave them: and people who believe that freedom is a god-given attribute of every individual do not hesitate to resist injustice, however powerful. The whole movement in fact became an exercise in resistance. It was no coincidence that the army officers who opposed the king and resisted the oligarchy called themselves 'Free Officers'.

A closer reading of the Apollo school of poetry will reveal a bold tendency to self-expression that Arabic poetry had missed since the second ʿAbbāsid era, in the

ninth century A.D. Images of sensuality were back, and some of these proliferate in songs by famous singers. One poem by Bishāra al-Khūrī makes use of Ben Jonson's 'To Celia' [Drink to me only with thine eyes …] in presenting a rare example of how love can conquer time itself:

> Give me that cup to drink, my perfection,
> Not to relieve my passion: you are my passion …
> Pour it from your lips into mine,
> Then merge your eyes into mine,
> As though you were I,
> And managed to condense time
> Into a drop of wine
> In our cup

> يا حبيبي بأبي أنت وأمي أسقنيها
> لا لتجلو الهم عني أنت همي
> صبها من شفتيك في شفتيَ
> ثم غرِق ناظريك في ناظريَ
> واختصر ما عليك او عليً
> ان تكن انت انا
> وجعلنا الزمن قطرة في كأسنا

But the sensuous experience was felt to be liberating: the fact that as art it has broken a taboo makes it almost iconoclastic, an intrepid attempt to break the rules of the 'unspoken'; and the fact that this song by 'Asmahan' was often broadcast by the Egyptian radio until very recently meant that the listeners either tolerated the experience or simply didn't fully understand the words. Look at those lines specifically:

> Such are lovers: whenever they fear
> Boredom, they are revived by kisses.

More daring is the short poem by Ali Mahmoud Taha entitled "A Confession." Confessional poetry is little practiced formally, but the Arabian Nights is full of such verse, in classical and Egyptian Arabic. With the liberatory function of art now acquiring the role of resistance, Ali Mahmoud Taha could write:

> If I have toasted many girls,
> Filling my cup to the brim,
> Loved all sweet maidens,
> Being fond of beauty of all kinds,
> Have believed in love for one
> Then for many, now in hope now in despair …
> I live in spirit totally free
> In the world of art,
> With purity filling my senses;

I have a heart as white
As lilies of the field,
Heaven-endowed with divine fire,
It is my lyre to whose tunes I sing
And in solitude
To myself I sing.

إن أكن قد شربت نخب كثيرا
ـت وأترعت بالمدامة كأسي
وتولعت بالحسان لأني
مغرم بالجمال من كل جنس
وتوحدت في الهوى ثم أشركـ
ـت على حالتي رجاء ويأس
وتبذلت في غرامي فلم أحـ
ـبس على لذة شياطين رجسي
فبروحي أعيش في عالم الفنْـ
ـنِ طليقاً والطهر تملأ حسي
تائهاً في بحاره لست أدري
لم أزج الشراع أو فيم أرسي
لي قلب كزهرة الحقل بيضا
ء نمتها السماء من كل قبس
هو قيثارتي عليها أغني
وعليها وحدي أغني لنفسي

The protasis, as you can see, does not lead naturally to the apodosis: that is, the long conditional sentence, with many clauses, is intended to look like the regular Christian confessional, especially a salacious line which I omitted (one can take so much explicitness these days), but it is the apodosis that carries his argument. Art is a liberating force. And the liberation is both sensuous and spiritual: the tunes of his heart are god-given (Jonson says: "the thirst that from the soul doth rise, Doth ask a drink divine"), and the fire in the heart makes purification possible, insofar as his heart is originally as white as the Biblical lilies of the field.

So much for art as a language of resistance: in it Foucault's 'other of Reason' spoke loud and clear. But when a regime fails to heed both reason and the 'other of Reason'; when the values of crony-capitalism, consumerism, and the covetous designs of a ruling clique turns deaf to all calls for reform, for performing the proper duties of government, the resulting apathy could reach its critical mass. When people are reified to the point where their very being is threatened, an explosion must occur. It happened at the level of consciousness first: people asked vital questions about their existence: Did the cynical regime recognize their 'Being'? Here, what we have is an existential question: are we, the people, there or not? And resistance to the government's denial had to be existential, that is proving 'being' [Heidegger's *Sein*] with presence [*Dasein*]. Led by the young, through internet channels, people of all

walks of life congregated everywhere in Egypt – in major cities all over the country – with the sole purpose of showing that they were fed up with the whole bankrupt set up, and the message was simply: “You have forgotten our existence, but we do exist.”

Initially, it was the Heideggerian principle of physical existence (physic) that dominated the movement: “A human being exists” was the ‘foundation’ in his formally anti-foundational system, that is, one may doubt any or all theories about man advanced since the Eleatic days in ancient Greece, but not the material fact of existence. Later on, when Heidegger created the expected links between both ‘presence’ and ‘being’ on the one hand and his ontology on the other, a kind of correspondence was born between the ontic categories and ontology. In other words, the things that are give to the abstract notion of Being its proper meaning.

When Jean-Paul Sartre took over the seminal link between the ontic categories and Being, he developed the basic idea of being into a variety of thought centering on the freedom of existing beings, and the responsibility therein entailed. For him, ‘being in itself’ should lead to ‘being for itself’, that is, being as a physical reality should lead to consciousness, especially of being for others, which means solidarity. Here the existential freedom of choice and responsibility turns into a sense of solidarity in being – a key concept in Sartre (1956, 115, 240–241).

So when the people of Egypt took to the streets in January 2011, the move may be seen in more than the initial Heideggerian terms: indeed they are present but their presence [*Dasein*] says that they exist even in Sartrian terms. It was not simply that the Egyptians ‘lost their fear’, as some foreign journalists characterized the event at the time; but rather that the Egyptians – with a long history of existential resistance – were now in solidarity against oppression, a Sartrian solidarity with Heideggerian roots.

To all eyes the people of Egypt have spoken, but their speech was not verbal; it was physical and existential. Whenever a slogan was created, it was ‘negative’, such as ‘go’, ‘Game Over’ etc; but the physical reality spoke louder than words. Tony Blair said it was a popular revolution; Hilary Clinton concurred; but the crowds did not seem to have a positive idea of what they wanted. When the authorities tried to crush the ‘rebellion’ by force, the protesters thought that the security forces were the enemy and public order broke down. However, when a verbal formula for the ‘revolution’, was devised – namely (عيش/حرية/عدالة اجتماعية) it was as vague as the motto of the French Revolution (liberté, egalité, fraternité) which did not prevent a brilliant military commander from becoming a dictator, making a mockery of liberty (by occupying other countries and depriving them of their freedom); of equality, by regarding all men as equal, though some were thought ‘more equal’ then others; and of fraternity where the French in Europe and Egypt showed themselves brothers to none but their own kith and kin. Consider the first of our Egyptian triad: (عيش) which obviously means ‘life’, or perhaps ‘livelihood’, as in Shukry Ayad’s masterpiece al-*ʿAysh ʿala al-Ḥāffah* [Living on the Edge], or in Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm’s famous lines “O

rulers! We live in dire straits, for you have failed to secure our livelihood” [أَيُّها المُصلِحونَ ضاقَ بِنا العَيـ/شُ وَلَم تُحسِنوا عَلَيهِ القِياما]. Now qualified by President el-Sisi as ‘dignified life’, at the time it could not have meant anything other than human existence, perhaps with nuances suggesting the ‘staff of life’, bread, a meaning alive in Egyptian Arabic at least since 1828 when Edward Lane wrote his *Customs and Manners of the Modern Egyptians*.

The third element of the triad, ‘social justice’ is no less problematic. If by ‘social’ is meant ‘social conditions’, modern thought has shown that no amount of political or ‘social’ effort can change these overnight. If what is meant is ‘economic justice’ in the sense of a more equitable distribution of national wealth, the means of achieving this will vary from straightforward socialism to ‘compassionate capitalism’. The crux is, however, the real meaning of ‘just’, interpreted in the previous sentence as ‘more equitable’. Justice is, however, a relative concept which functions very well in the abstract but fails to achieve anything like consensus in practice. It is a controversial concept used demagogically, and sometimes in earnest, without ever having a definite signification.

In fact, one cannot be certain of any definite sense of any of these words, as language here is secondary to existence as resistance. Searching high and low, I found no memorable positive speeches by the ‘orators’ of the 25th January ‘uprising’, no disquisitions on the meaning of the ‘movement’, except, of course, for a few quips (amusing or otherwise) that could flesh out the ‘revolution’ linguistically. This is Derrida’s realm, par excellence; and whatever sense you choose to attach to freedom, the Orwellian doublespeak will be there. The proliferating lawlessness that ensued was variously interpreted as organized crime, as a national campaign of predation, but also as Chaos, pure and simple. One is reminded of Thrasymachus in Plato’s Republic, on law and lawlessness, of William James's pragmatism (defining truth as what is good for you to believe in) or indeed freedom as anarchy, which Matthew Arnold felt would ensue from the ‘human sciences’, avant la letter, and which many philosophers, from the Frankfurt school onward, have called in question. Some of those philosophers, even though competing in their renunciation of metaphysics, have found themselves, noles voles, supporting Arnold’s ‘panacea’ – religion.

Enter the Muslim Brotherhood. A more golden opportunity could never have presented itself: the existential resistance was real enough, but it lacked efficiency because of its lack of what may be called a ‘steering ideology’. When a reigning power is removed, a vacancy is inevitably created: and the hitherto ‘banned’ society claimed to have the ultimate authority – a power that could never be resisted, the word of God. This is the only kind of power against which no kind of existential or linguistic opposition can be successfully mounted. While some intellectuals questioned the Brotherhood’s claim that they represented the word of God and the will of God, many devout Muslims saw in the brotherhood a possibility of real change, as the Imams of mosques consistently indicated in their Friday homilies. “It

is true," someone wrote, “you cannot prove they are holy men; but can you disprove it?”

Appropriating existential resistance, the Brotherhood used the language of metaphysics to win over the masses. Words that can have no precise meaning were used in the main by the leaders of that society, so as to abort any possible opposition: who can oppose concepts like charity, love, hope, benevolence, compassion and so forth? Never dealing with particular issues pertaining to praxis, the brotherhood claimed to be the real conceptual power that resisted and, finally brought down, the ancien regime. They exploited the innocence of a huge section of the population, and so managed to seize power. And the rest is history.

My point therefore is that Weber’s distinction of the forms of power could be expanded to include the power of being, insofar as existential resistance could bring down that power: the brotherhood used all five categories, it is true, to acquire power; but being in power they acquired an existential power which only existential resistance could bring down – on the 30th of June 2013.

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