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The Vernacular Discourse of the "Arab Spring": An Analysis of the Visual, the Embodied, and the Textual Rhetorics of the Karama Revolution

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ABSTRACT

The Vernacular Discourse of the "Arab Spring" is a project that bridges the

divide between the East and the West by offering new readings to Arab subjectivities.

Through an analysis of the "Arab Spring" through the lens of vernacular discourse, it

challenges the Euro-Americo-centric legacies of Orientalism in Western academia and

the new wave of extremism in the Arab world by offering alternative representations of

Arab bodies and subjectivities. To offer this new reading of the "Arab Spring," it

explores the foundations of critical rhetoric as a theory and a practice and argues for a

turn towards a critical vernacular discourse. The turn towards critical vernacular

discourse is important as it urges the analyses of different artifacts produced by

marginalized groups in order to understand their perspectives that have largely been

foreclosed in traditional cultural studies research. Building on embodied/performative

critical rhetoric, the vernacular discourses of the Arab revolutionary body examines other

forms of knowledge productions that are not merely textual; more specifically, through

data gathered in the Lhbib Bourguiba, Tunisia. This analysis of the political revolutionary

body unveils the complexity underlining the discussion around issues of identity, agency

and representation in the Middle East and North Africa, and calls for a critical study

towards these issues in the region beyond the binary approach that has been practiced and

applied by academics and media analysts. Hence, by analyzing vernacular discourse, this

research locates a method of examining and theorizing the dialectic between agency, citizenry, and subjectivity through the study of how power structure is recreated and challenged through the use of the vernacular in revolutionary movements, as well as how marginalized groups construct their own subjectivities through the use of vernacular discourse. Therefore, highlighting the political prominence of evaluating the Arab Spring as a vernacular discourse is important in creating new ways of understanding communication in postcolonial/neocolonial settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXTUALIZING THE "ARAB SPRING"

Background: The "Arab Spring"

Since December 17, 2010, the term "Arab Spring[1]" has been adopted to describe a

set of demonstrations dispatched by the self-immolation of a fruit vendor named

Mohamed Bouazizi (Adib-Moghhaddam; Al-Ali; Kraidy; Matar). Within weeks, what

originated as a spark with the Tunisian vendor, Bouazizi, emerged as a turmoil that

astounded the Arab region and rest of the world. Hence, the general concept of the "Arab

Spring" is that of a movement that started in Tunisia and swept across North Africa and

into the Middle East. This movement then led to the ousting of the Tunisian, Egyptian

and Libyan governments and saw significant unrest in other countries (Adib-

Moghhaddam; Al-Ali; Kraidy; Matar).

However, soon after the emergence of the "Arab Spring," academics and media

experts ran to provide diverse interpretations in regards to the origins and the motives of

the demonstrations and the revolutions as a whole, as well as to what and who should be

"blamed" for the movement. For instance, the U.S. media coverage of the "Arab Spring"

was based mainly on Orientalist storylines that categorized the "Arab Spring" as either a

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[1] In this research project, I chose to use the phrase "Arab Spring" between quotation
marks to denote the controversy around the naming of the uprisings, and communicate a
political stance in alliance with other Arab scholars and citizens (See Rami Khoury;
Ibrahim N. Abusharif; Maytha Alhassen), who do not describe the movement as a
"blooming" wave from a "winter slumber," but rather as a movements that have been
years in the making (mostly used naming is "*Karama*"/Dignity). The phrase "Arab

sweep of extremism and zealotry or a sweep of democratic reform (Adib-Moghhaddam; Al-Ali; Matar). However, such dichotomous framing ignores the stories and the bodies of many Arab men and women within these revolutions. Additionally, those framings reinforce the inevitable narratives of the clash between the West and the East; a logic that demonizes the revolutions and flattens the complex realities of the "Arab Spring" and its subjectivities. Therefore, I call for an analysis of the "Arab Spring" through the lens of vernacular discourse to challenge the Euro-America-centric legacies of Orientalism in the Western academia and popular culture and offer "new" readings to the representations of Arab[2] and Muslim[3] bodies and subjectivities.

To pursue this analysis, I consider the "Arab Spring" as an event in the Deleuzian sense (as cited in Puar). In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar calls for looking at events within a Deleuzian framework that reflects, "an assemblage of spatial and temporal intensities, coming together, dispersing, reconverging" (xviii). In other words, considering the "Arab Spring" as an event refuses binaries between past and present, between a "history-making moment" and a "history-vanishing moment," between

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[2] In this research, by Arab people, I refer to those who identify linguistically, culturally and diasporically as Arabs (not only genealogical).

[3] By Muslim, I refer to larger understanding of Muslimness that is not merely faith-based but cultural and diasporic. It is not necessarily a series of dogmatic doctrines, the definition is fluid and dynamic. In some instances, it could also refer to bodies-that are mistakenly- identified as Muslim just because of their skin-color.

"politicality" versus "stability" (Puar xvii-xx). The "eventness" of the "Arab Spring" collapses past, present and future and looks at the "Arab Spring" as a movement between the before and the after. Situating the "Arab Spring" as an event helps me look at Arab uprisings as an assemblage of theoretical interests, meaning there is not one stand, but rather as ideas that converge, diverge and merge. A movement that did not "just" emerge, rather a movement is "always-becoming" (Puar xxiv). Foregrounding the political urgency of surveying the "Arab Spring" as a vernacular discourse is imperative in forging new ways of understanding communication in postcolonial/neocolonial settings.

Preview of Chapters

     The chapters of this dissertation seek to explore and contribute to the scholarly conversation about the "Arab Spring" to understand the multiplicities of the event and the rhetoric of text, space, and the body. To offer a new reading of the Arab Spring, this dissertation explores and examines the foundations of critical rhetoric as a theory and a practice -as they emerge, specifically in Avenue Lahbib Bourgiba, in Tunis, Tunisia- and argues for a turn towards a critical vernacular discourse. The turn towards critical vernacular discourse is significant as it fosters the analyses of different artifacts produced by marginalized groups in order to understand their perspectives that have largely been foreclosed in traditional cultural studies research.

     Chapter One of this dissertation provides a background on the event of the "Arab Spring" and offers a problematization to the framing of this specific event. Then, it reviews the literature to understand and contextualize the roots of Orientalists' discourse that have emerged within that framing. This includes further, and more detailed discussions of Orientalism as a critical theory and Orientalist feminism as they relate to the field of communication more generally and rhetoric more specifically. Chapter Two draws on theories of women of color to demonstrate how they forge new understandings of the body, subjectivity and events. This theoretical section argues for the importance of theorizing through the body and lived experiences to challenge dominant binaries and produce alternative discourses. Through an articulation of Muslim feminism, a "new"

theoretical framework is introduced to speculate outside traditional frames. It also proposes a revisionist model to offer new readings of the "Arab Spring" that is not only reduced to the question of whether the "Arab Spring" is good or bad for women. This theoretical model also asks us to study the complexities of events, identities, and subjectivities. Chapter Three argues for the use of vernacular discourse as a perspective to look at the "Other" side of representations. It calls for the critique of vernacular discourse as a critical methodology to reveal the indiscernible power dynamics and discursive strategies in order to elucidate how the vernacular is used to empower marginalized identities and foster mass mobilization for social change. Building on Calafell's embodied/performative critical rhetoric, it analyzes the vernacular discourses of the Arab revolutionary body to explore other forms of knowledge productions that are not merely textual. This analysis of the political revolutionary body unveils the complexity underlining the discussion around issues of identity, agency and representation in the Middle East and North Africa, and calls for a critical study towards these issues in the region beyond the binary approach that has been practiced and applied by academics and media analysts. Hence, by analyzing vernacular discourse, this chapter locates a method of examining and theorizing the dialectic between agency, citizenry, and subjectivity through the study of how the larger social order is recreated and challenged through the use of the vernacular in revolutionary movements, as well as how marginalized groups construct their own subjectivities through the use of vernacular

discourse. Therefore, highlighting the political prominence of evaluating the Arab Spring as a vernacular discourse is important in creating new ways of understanding communication in postcolonial/neocolonial settings.

Chapters Four focuses on vernacular discourses in and about the "Arab Spring" as they emerge in Avenue Lhbib Bourgiba. It discusses the merging of rhetorical and ethnographic methodologies as a unique and beneficial way to collect data and perform the analysis. Specifically, it discusses how investigating Arab vernacular discourse can benefit from aspects of a combined methodological approach. Thus, this study of vernacular discourse utilizes these multifaceted approaches. As a researcher, I put together -in this chapter- pieces of everyday discourse, and address how they create and symbolize a larger discourse. Following the praxis of critical rhetoricians, I use qualitative methods to fill in the gap between collecting and analyzing communication on specific subjects. This particular methodology facilitates demonstrating and examining vernacular discourse as a constitutive form that assembles specific ways of understanding and framing experiences situations while always prevailing within a larger discourse. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of field notes, photographs, and from 40 hours of participant-observation over a two-week period in Tunisia. Themes and patterns that were revealed in my fieldwork and performances are discussed in more detail in this chapter.

The chapter also discusses the consequences of privileging the body and event on framing and interpreting the phenomenology of the everyday. Specifically, a rhetoric of

both the body and event vis-à-vis the "Arab Spring" are presented as a theoretical

contribution to critical rhetoric. It addresses how a rhetoric of both event and the body

can be extended to incorporate a framework for critical methods to examination of power

experienced in the revolutionary space of Tunisia. Finally, the last chapter provides

conclusions that conjoin the notions of events, body, and identity to critical vernacular

discourse and extend critical rhetorical theory, more generally, to involve a revolutionary

rhetoric of Arab subjectivities. The final conclusions of this chapter also explain the

pragmatic significance of how the praxis of vernacular discourse can facilitate learning

how the larger social order is recreated and challenged through the use of the vernacular

in revolutionary movements, as well as how marginalized groups construct their own

subjectivities through the use of vernacular discourse.

Statement of the Problem and Review of the Literature

Since the preliminary coverage of the "Arab Spring" several analysts, media reports, newspapers have constructed the movement in a dichotomous way and have reduced it to, specifically, two main inquiries: " Is the Arab Spring a wave for freeing women or oppressing them?" and "Is the Arab Spring a wave of Islamism and extremism?" Moreover, U.S. feminist movements have focused on explaining the roles of Arab women in the uprisings and have described the revolts as either "gender-emancipatory" or "gender-subordinating" (Al-Ali; Mansfield; Cole and Cole). However, the ignored stories of many Arab women and men of these revolutions offer a challenge to the framing of these discourses on the "Arab Spring." I advance that the struggles of the revolutionaries cannot be explained through "Orientalist tropes" that reduce Arab bodies, for instance, to passive victims of culture or religion. Hence, I suggest that rather than asking, " Is the Arab Spring a wave for freeing women or oppressing them?" and "Is the Arab Spring a wave of Islamism and extremism?" I ask, instead:

1.   Why does the U.S. public discourse frame the revolution through Orientalist tropes and why do U.S. feminists repeat the Orientalist rhetorical assumptions of "saving/freeing" Arabs rather than privileging their subjectivities?

2.   How can new readings of the "Arab Spring" challenge the Orientalists' legacies and offer a new understanding of Arab subjectivities?

First, I contend that mainstream rhetoric in regards to the "Arab Spring" tend to dismiss coalitions that act from the bottom up, from the private sphere to the public sphere, and from civic spaces up to the government. In particular, the revolutionary body of the "Arab Spring" has demonstrated that the cliché portrayals of Arabs and Muslims based on Orientalists' tropes and their depictions as terrorists, jihadists, evil, perpetual foreigners and divergent Others communicate a passé framing of images underlining problematic and controversial dogmatic motives (Adib-Moghhaddam). Moreover, the Arab revolutionary body rejects rhetorical assumptions that conceptualize an idiosyncratic image of "one" Islam, and contests the mainstream media's framing of Arab subjectivities as a predictable clash of civilizations between the progressive West and the moronic East (Adib-Moghhaddam). Hence, to think in such dichotomous terms of "us versus them," or "Occidentalism versus Orientalism" logic demonizes this revolutionary movement and flattens the complex realities of the "Arab Spring" and its subjectivities.

Second, it is important to note the resurgence of what I call "U.S. femininationalism," the dual movement in which certain feminist discourses have embraced U.S. nationalist agendas and have also been employed by nationalists to advance their political agendas (Building on Jasbir Puar's "homonationalism" framework). For instance, in recent years, most of the feminist efforts have been calling for the importance of saving Afghan women from Afghan men, and even soliciting for occupying-through war- Afghanistan to "induce" emancipation and salvation of the

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Afghan women Afghanistan (Abu-Lughod). Analogous accounts of liberation and

salvation were also employed to endorse the U.S. military occupation of Iraq (Al-Ali and

Pratt). In more current narrative, the U.S. involvement in Libya also adopted the popular

accounts of saving Muslim women's bodies as a valid reasoning for the U.S. intervention

and militarization (Al-Ali). Conversely, the consequences of the strong militarization in

the region and the increased rhetorical demands of U.S. feminists to save Muslim women

have affected women in North Africa and the Middle East very differently (Abu-Lughod;

A-Ali; Al-Ali and Pratt; Al-Ali). First, feminists' movements and demands are complex

and diverse, and performed with "cultural and temporal conflict and context" (Abu-

Lughod; Al-Ali). Second, the question of "women" is also complicated because women's

rights are being where images of women are coopted into public political narratives to

achieve political goals or as lenses through which to understand and justify conflicts

(Abu-Lughod; A-Ali; Al-Ali and Pratt; Al-Ali). Moreover, critical rhetorical analysis has

suggested that the convergence between women's rights, govermentality,

institutionalization, and militarism, has not often "resulted in watershed victories" for

women (MacKinnon; Puar; Al-Ali). This critical rhetorical call refuses the binary of

looking at conflicts/revolutions from a "gender-emancipatory discourses" versus "gender-

subordinate" accounts and suggests reading women stories in a more complex way (Al-

Ali). Thus, instead of reiterating the dominant question of either the "Arab Spring" was

'bad' or 'good' for "Arab women," I contend that it's more important to analyze the

discursive and embodied multiplicity of the role that both women and men actually played in the "Arab Spring." In other words, I argue that the experiences of both women and men in the "Arab Spring" were -and still are- drastically more diverse, both in relation to "the everyday" and in regards to its political implications. Hence, in this project, I am interested in exploring the multifaceted, challenging and liminal space in which- not only women- but the Arab revolutionary body relate to and with the "Arab Spring," both in terms of citizens' rights in the public and private spheres, and in terms of how those narratives are being used as arts of political accounts or an "assemblage" of gender, race, class, sexuality, democracy and Westernization. Borrowing Bernadette M. Calafell's approach to analyzing Latin@ communication studies, I propose an embodied/performative critical rhetoric to analyze the vernacular discourse of the Arab revolutionary body that explores other forms of knowledge productions that are not merely textual. For instance, considering the body as a political vehicle that was used during the "Arab Spring" brings to the forefront issues of agency, identity and representation that have been merely discussed in dichotomous ways in the media as well as academia (see also Matar). Notably, this emphasis on the embodied experience allows for reclaiming agency and representation outside the usage of the outdated Orientalist tropes, and relocated issues of domination, oppression, and misrepresentation. This analysis will also answer questions about the nature of Arab cultural production, liberalism, and representation.

Orientalism and its Legacies

Due to the usage of Orientalists tropes throughout the years in framing events in regards to the Middle East and North Africa, the Arab revolutionary movements that swept across the region puzzled several countries from Europe to North America (Adib-Moghhaddam). The so-called "wave of democratization" was not expected from citizens of the region. Specifically, Arabs and Muslims' subjectivities were believed to be unprogressive, undemocratic, dictatorial, fanatical and unchangeable (Adib-Moghhaddam). The reemergence of these characteristics during the 21st century in regards to Muslims and Arabs was-particularly- prevalent due to the ability of modern Orientalists to acculturate those historical analogies and frames of Orientalism to accommodate current political motives and domination(Haddad). In terms of the "Arab Spring," most of the current literature has examined the Arab revolutionary body through the use of "Orientalist" rhetorical assumptions that have inherited much of its text, image, and power from the ancient legacy of Orientalism (Adib-Moghhaddam). Orientalist tropes continue to influence writings, framings, and conversations surrounding Islam and Muslims through reducing and essentializing them. Islam as a religion and its "traditionalism" are seen as incompatible and fundamentally different from the advanced West, while Arab and Muslim women are seen are agentless victims of Islam in need of salvation (Haddad). Hence, my study calls us to explore these tendencies to avoid their reductive inscriptions and produce "new" meanings.

Building on these points, I situate my study in a growing field of work addressing the racialization and politicization of discourses on Muslims and Arabs. Therefore, for this section, I address the long history of contextualizing, creating, and imagining the Middle East through a Western lens within the context of Orientalism. Through offering a historical review of Orientalism, I argue that it is crucial to explain the historical roots of U.S. perceptions of the Middle East in order to understand the current Orientalist interpretations of the "Arab Spring." I also contend the importance of moving beyond Orientalists' analysis to study the uprisings.

Defining Orientalism

In 1978, Edward Said published his famous work entitled, *Orientalism*. In *Orientalism*, Said makes the argument that the long subtle ways of looking and studying the Orient are Eurocentric approaches that distorts Arab people and their cultures. This essentialized approached that were advanced by, specifically, European colonialists, have also impacted the way academics survey and examine the Orient. According to Said, the main purpose aim of highlighting Orientalism is to deconstruct the existing Western theoretical approaches and to illustrate the destructive nature of Orientalism as an academic and cultural approach towards the Middle East (Said). According Said, Orientalism is both a theory and a methodology used as analytical framework by academics to study the Middle East. It is also seen as an academic discipline of study in the West.

Orientalism, indeed, revolutionized the study of the Middle East and helped to create and shape entire new field of study such as post-colonial theory, as well as influencing diverse domains as English, History, Anthropology and Cultural Studies. It is one of the controversial scholarly books of the last thirty years. Orientalism tries to answer the question of why when we think of the Middle East, for example, we have a pre-conceived notion of the people who live there, of what they believe, how they act, even though we might have never been there, or indeed met anyone from there (Said). More generally, Orientalism asks how we came to understand people, strangers, who look different to us, by the virtue of the color of their skin. Edward Said's central argument of Orientalism is the way we acquire this knowledge is not innocent or objective, but the end result of a process that reflects certain interests, that, it is highly motivated. Specifically, Edward Said argues that the way the West, Europe and the U.S., looks at countries and people of the Middle East is through a lens that destroys the actual reality of those places and those people. It calls this lens, through which preview this part of the world, Orientalism. Hence, Said's critical theory considers Orientalism as a lens through which the West sees and interprets the East. This Eurocentric lens acts, then, as a power authority that imagines, builds, exaggerates, and circulate distorted images and knowledge in regards Arab people and cultures. As Said contends,

> Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over

it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

Orientalism, then, is a framework used to understand the unfamiliar and the strange to make the people of the Middle East appear different and threatening (Said). Edward Said's contribution to how we understand this general process, of what we can call, stereotyping, has been immense.

The Repertory of Orientalism

Said locates the construction of Orientalism within the history of imperial conquest, as empires conquered the globe, the British and the French conquered the East, not just militarily, but also ideologically. The question that the colonizers were concerned about is how can they understand the natives that they are encountering so that they can conquer them easier. This process of using abstract categories to explain people, who look different, has been going on for long time, as long as there is a contact between different cultures and people. Orientalism makes this general process formal and objective knowledge. Said quotes, Gerard de Nerval, in his book Journey to the Orient, where he wrote: "the Orient is all the same essence; unlike the West, it stays the same" (19). This ideology creates an image of the Orient outside of history. For example, when Napoleon Bonaparte went to Egypt, he invaded the place, not just militarily, but also scientifically, by recording everything about Egypt for Europe. The power and the

prestige of the European country produced a knowledge for the Europeans and for the natives, a knowledge that the native themselves cannot see (Said).

Building on the work of the French scholar Michel Foucault, Said contends that examining the connection between knowledge, knowledge production, and power control is a fundamental step in understanding the complex nature of Orientalism. Foucault advanced that the "truth" is a type of power structures is and is, indeed deceptive. It is deceptive because when you think you are seeing "reality," it is actually an illusive and biased version, not the "truth." What the person is seeing instead is an interpretation of "reality" that has been created and assembled in a structure of hegemonic beliefs and meanings (Foucault). According to Said's underlining of Orientalism, the way Western countries view the Middle East is not "reality," but it's rather this reimagined version of "reality" that was based on a European legacy of colonialism and intervention. In other words, the West, specifically Europe, established and produced knowledge in regards to the Middle East based on what their own perception of the region. Once assembled, the Orient was then distributed to Western populations through academic and cultural outlets (Said).

During the imperial conquests of the Middle East and North Africa in the 19th century, most of the European empires established their "reality" of the region based on the hegemonic colonial ideology that believes in the superiority of the West over the inferiority of the uncivilized East (Said). Said argues that this specific ideological process

has resulted in creating a dichotomous mentality of the Eats versus the West. This reductive and simplistic lens through which the West views a while region of diverse peoples and cultures, communicates unequal power dynamic between the colonizers and their colonies (Said). Thus, Orientalism was constructed on political agendas and motives of colonial empires, which made the produced "reality" a questionable one. Western colonialism of the Middle East also used the ideology of this "God-given" supremacy as a reasoning for invasion, exploitation, and discipline of the Eastern barbaric and inferior bodies (Said 31-49). Fundamentally, Western colonialism of the Middle East was mainly reliant on Orientalism for its conquests (Said).

According to Said, Orientalism is "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts" (12). In other words, Orientalism was able to penetrate academic scholarships in the West and create a falsified understanding of the region. Hence, the widespread production of these academic and scientific scholarships- that are intertwined in the binary of the inferior East versus the superior West- gave authority and credibility to the knowledge produced by Orientalists. Said argues that Orientalism:

> Is a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases, to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is…produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power culture (as with

orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do). (12)

Additionally, Said develops his critical theory of Orientalism into two main frameworks; "latent Orientalism" and "manifest Orientalism" (206). By latent Orientalism, Said refers to the invisible and incognizant awareness process through which the West constructed the East in a xenophobic and prejudiced pattern. That is to say, latent Orientalism is based on unconscious inherent attitudes towards the Middle East rather than a product of a political intention to represent the Middle East (Said). However, when it comes to the other form of Orientalism, which is the manifest one, there is a conscious process of regulating knowledge and images about the East to constitute its "deviance" as a true reality in a formal body of academic and artistic works, from written to performed ones (Said). Therefore, due to the institutionalization of the manifest form of Orientalism, latent Orientalism was able to survive in the mindsets of a lot of people reinforcing a legacy of misrepresentation and distorts information vis-à-vis Arab and Muslim subjectivities (Said 206-210). Therefore, it is important to make clear connection between how the persistence of Orientalism has strengthened the prejudiced understandings and colonial approaches towards the Middle East, and how it has invaded contemporary societies and misinterpreted current events; such as the "Arab Spring." According to Said, those approaches are the root of Western misunderstanding of the Middle East and should be reevaluated and deconstructed.

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Twentieth Century Orientalism

According to Edward Said, the difference between European Orientalism and the

U.S. American one is that European empires had a longer legacy with holding colonies in

the Orient, long-standing relationship, and an imperial role. Thus, there is a historical

concrete experience. In the case of the U.S. Americans, there was a much less direct

contact (until the war in Iraq). Hence, originally the U.S. American Orientalism was

mainly based on abstractions. Initially the Orient was viewed to be an uncivilized and

non-dangerous distant place (Said; McAlister). Said argues that the U.S. American

Orientalism only became politicized at the beginning of the twentieth century as a

response to the rise of "Islamic terrorism," Arab opposition against Israel, and the Middle

Eastern nations strategic role in the Cold War antagonist (as quoted in McAlister). These

political events have dramatically changed the way the Middle East is perceived by U.S.

Americans and made it into "a post-modern antagonist" (McAlister). Specifically, by the

presence of Israeli/Palestinian conflict in the region, which created a misinformed

representation of the issue, and established the whole Arab world as the enemy relying on

Orientalist framings of the region. Moreover, Said recognizes that the Arab struggle for

national independence is looked up with great hostility, in the West, that is upsetting to

the stability of the status quo. Said claims that, this whole situation, makes it virtually

impossible for a U.S. American to see on television, to read in books, to see in films, an

image about the Middle East that it is not colored by the political issues, where Arabs are always played as irrational and terrorists (Said).

Hence, due the increase political interests and events in the Middle East and North Africa, several academics and analysts resumed the study and full examination of the region. One of the important and influential works that assesses the rise of this "neo" Orientalism in recent years is the critical book called *Epic Encounters* by Melanie McAlister. The differences between Said and McAlister works, is that Said examines the distinctive route of U.S. Orientalism in a post-World War II era and academics engaged in constructing the "Other" in the framework of the political scene of the Cold War, while McAlister's book analyses the social and the political phenomena, which made the MENA region highly important and politicized to U.S. Americans and how they inform and construct their own understanding of patriotism. In McAlister's words, *Epic Encounters:*

> Chronicles how, in the years between World War II and the run of the twenty-first century, U.S. Americans engaged in the Middle East, both literally and metaphorically, through its history as a sacred place and its continuing reality as a place of secular political conflict. (McAlister 1)

McAlister analyzes the national and cultural impacts of the Cold War and U.S. Americans' reactions to bodies of Muslims, Arabs, and region of the Middle East. McAlister advances the idea that the Middle East is central in contracting not only a political reality of the United States, but also a cultural souvenir that U.S. Americans use

to define themselves spiritually, morally, and culturally. McAlister's argument is based on two primary foundations. First, the United States' foreign involvement in the Middle East has significant cultural meaning to U.S. citizens (McAlister 5). Second, that "Understanding the political import of culture requires that we position cultural texts in history, active producers of meaning, rather than assuming that they merely 'reflect' or 'reproduce' some preexisting social reality" (McAlister 5). Hence, through the establishment of "moral boundaries" between civilized/barbaric, liberator/terrorist, and good/evil, U.S. citizens are able to construct a universal understanding of the Middle East, as well as themselves (McAlister). Thus, U.S. American identity within this period was established with significant dependency to the conflict with the Middle East.

U.S. American Orientalism and the Media

Building on his influential work in Orientalism, Edward Said discusses the presence of Orientalism in the U.S. American media in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Said applies his assessment of the liaison between authority and knowledge to the U.S. American media, and advances that idea that the media is comparable to the late Orientalist scholars of Europe, as a means that possess authority over knowledge production and its circulation. Particularly, media institutions hold two powerful components of impact over its consumers; first of all, the content transmitted through the media is perceived to be an absolute representation of "reality," and the "truth" to be believed (Said). Additionally,

the mass media outlets have the ability to influence the public agenda by choosing which depiction of the Middle East to broadcast (Said). As a result, the biased positionality of the mass media outlets and their power to produce information have essentialized Arab and Muslims subjectivities within U.S. public discourses, and outlined a distorts image of what the Middle East is. Consequently, the human side of the Islamic and Arabic world is rarely to be found, and the net result is a vacancy on the one hand, and the automatic images of terror and violence (Said).

Orientalism, then, is about the manufacture of the other and this other brings convenience to oneself and is mainly done for purposes of domination.

According to Said, the Iranian Revolution, for instance, in 1978/79 and the increase of terrorism against the United States forced Americans to "rediscover" the Middle East. Direct assaults against the United States and its international interests gave U.S. Americans no choice but to address the Middle East as region of substance and consequences. This rediscovery meant abandoning the traditional Orientalist perspective of the East as distant and exotic fantasy (Said). Now, the "Orient" could directly affect, influence, and confront nations of the world. The circumstances resulted in the mainstream media addressing the Middle East as a region of conflict. Hence, this historical discussion of the development of Orientalism is crucial in answering how U.S. Americans have formed understandings of Arabs and Muslims and interpreted the "Arab Spring."

Finally, I argue that Said's critical theory has been highly influential in postcolonial studies, critical cultural studies and other fields. Hence, any discussion of Western perceptions or research of Eastern societies is incomplete without reference to Said's work. It is because of this importance that I situate and contextualize my study within the legacy of Edward Said's Orientalism. Said's Orientalism serves several functions for my project on the "Arab Spring." First, Said demanded a new approach, both historically and intellectually, towards the study of the Middle East and North Afria. In terms of scholarship, academics have produced a large amount of literature in this context, and it is my ambition to survey and optimistically add to the current academic discourse surrounding the MENA region and its subjectivities. Second, the central thesis of Orientalism is that the West has a faltered and dichotomous perception of the Middle East and North Africa, which is influenced by various social, cultural, and political factors that deserve an in-depth examination. Building on this frame, I support Said's urgency to embrace a new approach to studying the Middle East in order to offer new readings of the "Arab Spring."

Colonial/Orientalist Feminism

As I advanced in the previous section, U.S. feminist movements have focused on explaining the roles of Arab women in the uprisings and have described the revolts as either "gender-emancipatory" or "gender-subordinating" (Al-Ali; Mansfield; Cole and Cole). The main framing of the "Arab Spring" has been interpreted through the inquiry of

either the "Arab Spring" is "good" or "bad" for Arab women. Here, I argue that the liberal deployment of a rhetoric that conflates Arab and Muslim womanhood with victimization, positions the mainstream "U.S. American" feminist as the feminist subject par excellence. This interpretive lens of the "Arab Spring," first, conveys a deemed antonymic relationship between "Muslim," "Arab" and "Feminism." It also communicates the resurgence of the popular Orientalist and stereotypical racial discourses on Arab and Muslim subjectivities. Hence, this intersection of Orientalism with Eurocentric imperialistic feminism traces the historical legacy of the Orientalist version of Arab and Muslim women and reifies certain events: in this case, the "Arab Spring," as the central generator of "activism and/or oppression." Therefore, in order to understand the reasoning behind the use of those Orientalist tropes by feminists, it is relevant to cover the literature on colonial/Orientalist feminism that has "shaped" the Arab, Muslim and feminism as oxymoron and non-existent. I also contend that colonial/Orientalist feminism disregards women's agencies and creates a framework of U.S. "gender exceptionalism."

Defining Colonial/Orientalist Feminism

Through Orientalist (Western researcher/travelers to the Middle East) discourses, Arab and Muslim women have been constructed as oppressed, docile, silenced, and dominated by their counterparts, the "Arab men." Leila Ahmed, a Muslim feminist and a well-known researcher on Arab and Muslim women, has argued that, "[U.S] American

women 'know' that Muslim women are overwhelmingly oppressed without being able to define the specific content of that oppression" (522). She adds that, "these are 'facts' manufactured in Western culture, by the same men who have littered the culture with 'facts' about Western women and how inferior and irrational they are" (Ahmed 522). Here, Leila Ahmed is referring to the roots of the stereotype of Arab and Muslim women in the early 19th century. In this respect, Leila Ahmed provides the example of Lord Cromer, the British consul general in early 20th Century Egypt. He famously appropriated feminist arguments to supposedly save Egyptian women by unveiling them, while he himself opposed the suffragette movement and political enfranchisement of British women in his own home country (Ahmed). In other words, for these European male travelers, the Orient is its women and the women are the focal point of this male vision of the East (Ahmed). This tendency of studying the Orient mainly through its women has also seen a revival during the current event of the "Arab Spring." However, those accepted narratives by mainstream U.S. feminists on Arab and Muslim women are fundamentally problematic as they support an epistemological and political domination of men's produced knowledge and history (Ahmed). They represent "a tokenistic apology that leaves uninterrogated a west/Islam binary" (Puar 7). According to Leila Ahmed, this rhetoric continues a long tradition of what she calls "colonial feminism" or the feminism "used against cultures in the service of colonialism" (151). Colonial campaigns against the veil and other "uncivilized" practices used a form of feminism to depict colonized

societies as backward, oppressive, and colonized women as victims in need of Western

salvation (Abu-Lughod). Hence, colonialist or Orientalist feminism is a discursive

strategy that appropriates feminist concepts for the purpose of domination not liberation.

The "eventness" of the "Arab Spring" has revitalized this form of feminism,

which deploys powerful Orientalist tropes to justify war and aggressive nationalism. It

has made Muslim and Arab women "visible" in the mainstream discourses. However, it

is a dismissive and destroyed visibility. This visibility of Arab women's bodies due to

"conflicts" could also be associated with the recent discourses on "the war on terror." For

instance, under the Bush administration, the war on terror and the fight for women's

rights became almost synonymous. In her famous radio address, Laura Bush conflated the

two most explicitly, saying, "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and

dignity of women" (Abu-Lughod). Protecting the rights of women became the most

politically powerful rationale for invading Afghanistan. This resurgence of the

victimization discourses as a justification of the military intervention in Afghanistan to

save Muslim women employs the same logic and obscures endemic sexism within the

U.S. (Jarmakani 159). The U.S. military intervention has little to do with actual concern

for Muslim women's well-being; rather Bush's neocolonial rhetoric about Islam's

inferiority employs the century old Orientalist trope that uses the status of women in

Muslim societies as justification for political domination and intervention in the Middle

East (Abu-Lughod). The U.S. mainstream focus on Muslim women is usually limited to

concerns and debates about burkas and veils (e.g. Afghan women), but overlooks the much more complex web of immediate and more urgent economic, political and social challenges Arab and Muslim women face. Further, this partial view obscures the role of U.S. foreign policy, specifically during the cold war, in co-creating misogynist regimes as the Taliban and the Mubarak regime. Moreover, the moral juncture of women's rights and imperialism divides the world in an easy grid of good and evil (Puar 52; McAlister 282). Building on these insights, McAlister argues that 9/11 and the succeeding moment of trauma in the U.S. enabled "a national amnesia" and a new narrative about the essentially "good" and benevolent nature of U.S. imperial power, manifest in the "popular" phrase "Why do they hate us?" that effaces a long historic involvement of the U.S. in the Middle East (282). With the changing power structures after decolonization and the current neoliberal trends in economic globalization that create new classes of global citizens while degrading undesired humans to bare lives (Mbembe 12), "populations are rendered vulnerable to processes of death and devaluation over and against other populations, in ways that palimpsestically register older modalities of racialized death but also exceed them" (Kyungwon and Ferguson 2). While the effects of this neoliberal and neoimperial politics affect many people differently according to class and other "assets" that might provide them with what Aihwa Ong has called "graduated sovereignty and flexible citizenship," Mbembe (12) lays out how the U.S. politics of a suspended state of emergency after 9/11 opened the gates for a wholesale perception of

Muslim citizens as potential terrorists. These perceptions "palimpsestically" (Kyungwon and Ferguson) registers over Orientalist renderings of Muslim men as "feminized, inferior and queer"; who at the same time barbarically oppress Muslim women, which in my view serves as a screen for Western men to project and fantasize about "unrestrained," patriarchal masculinity (Mbembe; Puar). More interestingly, U.S. feminist approval and appraisal of Bush's rhetoric and its neoliberal trends on women's rights, increased the misrepresentation and symbolic violence done to Muslim and Arab women.

Building on these points, I suggest that Orientalist feminism maintains two main ideologies that could be identified in what Jasbir Puar calls "U.S. gender exceptionalism," as well as the appropriation of execution of aggressive nationalist practices (under a feminist rhetoric). First, Jasbir Puar defines gender exceptionalism as "a missionary discourse to rescue Muslim women from their oppressive males" (5). She argues that this gender exceptionalism proposes that "in contrast to women in the United States, Muslim women are, at the end of the day, unsavable" (5). This rhetoric of gender exceptionalism locates the U.S. as the democratic empire and overlooks the U.S. abuses, violence and policing of gender, racial and sexual formations (Puar). It also denies Arab and Muslim women's agency and places them as victims in need of salvation. In Puar's words, such discourses "Posit America as the arbiter of appropriate ethics, human rights, and democratic behavior while exempting itself without hesitation from such

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universalizing mandates" (8). More importantly, the lack of interrogation of the

consolidation of mainstream (white) U.S. feminism along with nationalistic and

imperialistic agendas -or what I have referred to as "femininationalism"- is problematic

and dangerous. First, it denies women's agency and sees women only as passive victims

in need of salvation, rather than as active political agents. For instance, in the case of

Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, media coverage focused on the role of Feminist

Majority Foundation (a U.S. based group) in "freeing Afghan women" and the

organization was praised for its efforts (6). However, the media ignored the role of

Afghan women acting on their own behalf, despite the fact that well-established women's

groups like the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) has

been active in speaking out -for decades- against oppressive laws in the country and

against Western policies that damage women's livelihoods and communities (Puar 6).

Puar reports that the appropriation and the erasure of the works of RAWA by the

Feminist Majority Foundation was abusive and describes the foundation as a "hegemonic,

U.S. centric, ego driven, corporate feminism" (Puar 6). Hence, the implication of this

Orientalist/exceptional feminism is that it maintains that the solution to women's

problems must come from the outside (mainly Western intervention). Another vital

implication of this Orientalist feminism is the misreading of women's concerns and

demands. For instance, U.S. (white) feminists' preoccupation with the veiling and

unveiling of women does not reflect what Muslim women consider to be the most

pressing issues. As Suha Sabbagh confirms, "No Arab woman I know recognizes herself in it" (xi). This misreading of Arab and Muslim women's rights advances the idea that inequality is merely cultural, ignoring works on intersectionality and identity politics. The assumption that women's mistreatment is first and foremost grounded in an essentialized, monolithic Islamic or Arabic culture fails to recognize the plurality of gender regimes that co-exist with Islamic and Arabic cultures, and the broader social and political factors shaping gender arrangements in Muslim and Arabic societies (Mikdashi). Furthermore, the "Muslim" woman as victim storyline is a clear example of the perceived opposition of feminism and multiculturalism that has marked the dominant U.S. discourse about Muslim womanhood. Leti Volpp argues, "To posit feminism and multiculturalism as oppositional is to assume that minority women are victims of their cultures" (1185). This argument opposes race to gender and provides a theoretical basis for Orientalist/ nationalistic feminism, because it renders certain cultures or religions as inherently violent against women, while turning a blind eye to Western culture's oppression of women. Hence, it suggests that women will be better off without their respective cultures, which not only obscures the agency of women within patriarchal societies, but also condones and even encourages U.S. violent interventions to "save brown women." This view of women representing the fixed essence of women's culture, keeps local feminist women trapped in a binary logic (Volp).

Hence, I suggest that colonial/Orientalist feminism misreads and misrepresents Arab and Muslim women and makes their visibility docile.

To summarize, in this chapter, I discussed how soon after the "Arab Spring" the U.S. public discourse framed the revolutions through Islamophobia logics and Orientalist tropes that reinforced the legacies of Orientalism. However, those discourses tend to ignore movements that operate from the bottom up, from civil societies to the state (Adib-Moghhaddam; Al-Ali; Matar). The revolts have shown that stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims and that Orientalists depictions of them as the different "Other" are outdated and of questionable ideological values (Adib-Moghhaddam). More importantly, the revolts denounce discourses that pronounce the unity and singularity of Islam. It also contests the dichotomous logic of "us" versus "them," which demonizes the revolutions and flattens the complex realities of the "Arab Spring" and its subjectivities. Therefore, in this chapter, I called for a new reading of the "Arab Spring" to understand the multiplicities of the event, to challenge the Euro-Americo-centric legacies of Orientalism in the Western academia and popular culture, and to invent "new" understanding of Arab and Muslim bodies and subjectivities.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORIZING THROUGH THE FLESH

Theoretical Overview

To study the complexity of the "Arab Spring" and "its women[4]," I draw on theories of women of color to demonstrate how they forge new understanding of the body and subjectivity. Then, I theorize Muslim feminism as an example of a movement that embarks upon new spaces to understand the multiplicity and specificity of subjectivities within Muslim and Arab communities (rethinking feminism). I argue that Muslim feminism could be seen as an extension of theories of the flesh, where Muslim feminists theorize through their lived experiences and link the personal to the political. Through "fleshing" (Calafell), Muslim feminists reclaim their lived experiences and deconstruct the hegemonic universalist knowledge of feminism and struggle. They create a middle space "inbetween" the binaries to produce alternate discourses to challenge and disturb the knowledge, the representation and the discourse associated with them.

Theories of the Flesh

Feminist history, especially in the mainstream feminist movements, presents patriarchy as a system of oppression on its own and feminist movements as an

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[4] It is important to note that I am examining the "Arab Spring," not only from women's experiences, but rather -as I referred to earlier in the contextualization of my research project- as a study of the Arab revolutionary body within an assemblage of gender, race, religion, sexuality, and nationality. Bringing theories of the flesh, and Muslim feminism into the theoretical grounding of this research is thus crucial in understanding the importance of the body in the knowledge production of the uprisings.

independent system of liberation and emancipation. As Mohanty argues, "To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being 'women' has nothing to do with race, class, nation or sexuality, just with gender" (55). In that sense, critical feminism as a social theory and as a movement cannot disregard the interlocking points of the systems of oppression such as nationalism, racism, classism and (hetero) sexism in order to question the relevance or usefulness of endeavors for liberation, emancipation or critiques to those systems (Puar). Furthermore, Chicana feminists have theorized a feminism that speaks to the needs of women of different backgrounds and struggles. The construction of "woman of color" feminism responds to the exclusion of women of color from white feminism, which claims to represent all women. In Norma Alarcón's essay, "The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism," she argues, "The fact that Anglo-feminism has appropriated the generic term [woman] for itself leaves many women in this country having to call herself otherwise, i.e., 'woman if color,' which is equally 'meaningless' without further specification" (147). Alarcón points to the way in which the term "woman" simultaneously fosters problematic man/woman gender binary, and subsumes racial difference. The term "women of color" is a political strategy used by marginalized identities to problematize fixed definitions and challenge the binary that fails to acknowledge interracial and intercultural interactions.

In the collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, there is a demonstration of how bridging the diversity of genres is necessary to articulate that multiplicity of oppression that women of color experience (Anzaldúa and Moraga). It also reveals the divergent concerns between groups, as well as the disparate issues of women within the same community. Such contradictions and conflicts point to the impossibility of formulating a fixed definition for "women of color" or "Third World feminism." In the introduction of the book, Anzaldúa and Moraga assert that *Bridge* is "a catalyst, not definitive statement of Third World feminism in the U.S" (Anzaldúa and Moraga xxvi). They also make it clear that they do not intend to construct a fixed definition for "woman of color" feminism, nor do they expect their readership to read their essays as the final word on new and improved feminism. Their model is therefore exceptionally effective as it promotes discussions rooted in tension and contradiction, and in turn it forces the readers and authors to confront and use conflict as a site for identity formation. Moraga and Anzaldúa ask people of color to examine the sources of knowledge and transform the process of theorizing. They challenge the traditional interpretations of knowledge and encourage people of color to shift the research lens to one that recognizes their own experiences. They suggest that this negotiation occurs through and within the women's bodies, which are the main site of conflict and oppression. They outline a "theory of the flesh" in order to convey the significance of the individual female body who is confronting those challenges. Moraga and Anzaldúa state

that, "A theory of the flesh means one where physical realities of our lives-our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings-all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (23). The Chicana scholar and feminist, Bernadette Calafell frames theories of the flesh as "Ways of knowing that defy dominant logics, particularly those that emerge around constructions of Otherness" (267). In other words, those feminists of color theorize a strategy of resistance that centers women of color's bodies because it simultaneously marks the site of women's victimization, and the location where women must find their strength back. Hence, theorizing through lived experience is a space for reclaiming agency and deconstructing oppression (Moraga and Anzaldúa; Madison; Hill Collins; Calafell). Feminists of color encourage women of color to use their own voices to articulate their struggles; and in doing so, those feminists legitimate women of color's voices and highlight the oppressions of women's racialized and gendered bodies (Moraga and Anzaldúa; Madison; Hill Collins; Calafell).

Women of color writers and feminists have fought structurally similar fights and used the transformative power of writing and theorizing through their bodies and lived experiences against the pervasive racist and sexist hierarchies in hegemonic culture that leave imprints on women of color's selves. I extend this argument in the specific context of Muslim feminism that theorizes outside an Orientalist and patriarchal reference frames. I believe it is important to use revisionist models that rethink and rewrite the goals and strategies of feminist movements when new perspectives emerge. Finally, I

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argue that Muslim feminism could be seen as an extension of theories of the flesh, where Muslim feminists establish a middle space "inbetween" the binaries to produce alternate discourses to challenge and hegemonic structures and discourses.

In this chapter, I argue for the importance of theorizing through the body and lived experiences to challenge dominant binaries and produce alternative discourses. Also, Muslim feminism offers a new theoretical framework that speculates outside traditional frames. I believe that it is important to use these "new" revisionist models that rethink and rewrite the goals and strategies of feminists' movements. These revisionists' models also offer new readings of the "Arab Spring" that is not only reduced to the question of whether the "Arab Spring" is good or bad for women. Those models ask us to study the complexities of identities and subjectivities.

CHAPTER THREE: TOWARDS CRITICAL VERNACULAR DISCOURSE

Methodological Rationale

In my previous chapters, I situated my study in a growing field of work addressing the racialization and politicization of Muslims and Arabs in mainstream discourses. Through an analysis of Edward Said's critical theory of Orientalism, I explored the long history of contextualizing, creating, and imagining the Middle East through a Western lens. In Orientalism, for instance, Said deconstructs the manifestations of the Westerner's representation of the Middle that appeared in literature, history, and various cultural outlets. Contemporary postcolonial scholars have also analyzed images and misrepresentations of Arab and Muslims within different cultural artifacts. However, there is a little work done on how Arabs and Muslims are negotiating their identities vis-à-vis these representations and what strategies they are using for empowerment and resistance. For those reasons, I argue for the use of a vernacular discourse perspective to look at the Other side of representations. Hence, through a review of literature on critical rhetoric and, more specifically, vernacular discourse, I illuminate how the vernacular functions not only in opposition but rather as a threat to hegemonic control as it is the means for expressing the multiple realities of people who use it. Therefore, I argue for the critique of vernacular discourse as a critical methodology to illustrate the hidden power dynamics and discursive strategies in order to illuminate how the vernacular is used to empower marginalized identities and further mobilize social change. Building on these

concepts, I contend that, by considering and analyzing the dynamic construction of discourses by those interpellated by them, we can better understand how marginalized communities construct an ontological status as a collective self through the comprehension of how they create varied subject positions. More specifically, for my analysis, I make a case for applying critical vernacular discourse analysis to the situation of Arabs and Muslims. I argue how the uprisings of Arabs and Muslims (with a focus on women) that took hold across the Arab world and the struggles that continue today don't just undermine authoritarian regimes, they also unsettle mainstream representations of seemingly war-torn, sectarian, oppressed and repressed "Eastern" societies. Hence, through a critical vernacular discourse analysis of the different forms of the uprisings, I want to infuse a different kind of conversations in regards to the Middle East and "its women."

Critical Rhetoric: Overview

One of the key significant areas of the study in communication is "critical rhetoric." In 1989, the critical rhetorician, Raymie McKerrow, advanced a theory of critical rhetoric to explore the dynamics of power in a particular rhetorical text, situation, or practice. McKerrow's rhetorical theory emphasizes a critique of the question of power, which enacts two practices: the critique of domination and the critique of freedom. In the hands of a critical rhetorician, these critiques have the obligation (in a moral sense) to "Unmask or demystify the discourse of power" (91). After McKerrow's first introduction

of critical rhetoric, several scholars have expanded on his theoretical perspective. A more recent and critical project in the communication field, which involves the study of critical rhetoric, is the analysis of vernacular discourse (Ono and Sloop; Holling and Calafell), which examines the daily interactions and discourse from within oppressed or marginalized communities. That is to say, critical rhetoricians analyze discourses in the context of the structures of power and knowledge located in larger discourses. A critique of vernacular discourse, then, offers the opportunity "To understand how a community is constructed and how that constructed community functions. . . . and to illustrate other possible realities, not to articulate a vernacular 'space' for further marginalization" (Ono and Sloop 26). Hence, for this methodological question, I begin with defining the foundations of critical rhetoric as a theory and a practice. Then, I present its critique by exploring vernacular discourse.

A significant characteristic of critical rhetoric is the focus on praxis, which is the process by which a theory or a situation is put into action, practiced, or achieved. McKerrow then asks critical rhetoricians to consider critical rhetoric as an embodied practice, not just as a traditional method. Therefore, McKerrow provides the rhetors with an orientation of placing theory into action rather than a methodology (450). That is to say, critical rhetoric is what we perform through our orientations to the world when we analyze texts. McKerrow furthers this definition by stating that,

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> Critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society-what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be consider appropriate to effect social change. (91)

In other words, McKerrow premise via critical rhetoric is a commitment to unmasking power dynamics that distort the critic's understandings of a text, situation, or culture. This vision of criticism in this context is to unmask the mobilizations of discourse, which helps reinforcing dominant systems and their discursive functions of power. In other words, critical rhetoricians should employ the "skills of a rhetorician" to "invent texts suitable for criticism" (McGee 43). Hence, for McKerrow, critical rhetoric is a form of an ideological critique of discourse that requires a morally committed scholar and scholarship. Building on this point, critical rhetoric also highlights McGee's argument that "Rhetors make discourse from scraps and pieces of evidence. Critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent" (278). McKerrow reaffirms McGee's standpoint by contending that rhetorical criticism requires rhetorical critics to take a moral position vis-à-vis their scholarship. The call of critical rhetoric continues through a rhetorical analysis of power that is interested not only in means through which power dominates and represses, but also in how power can allow for a free space for its subjectivities.

Drawing on this, McKerrow develops that critical rhetoric is comprised of the paired critiques of domination and freedom. For McKerrow, "The critique of domination has an emancipatory purpose-a telos toward which it aims in the process of demystifying the conditions of domination" (91). The critique of domination refers to how criticism could be used as a countervailing force to domination and repression. It deconstructs the discursive functions of power and how they oppress the subjects. McKerrow asserts, "There is a compelling sense in which power is negative or repressive in delimiting the potential of the human subject" (92). That is to say, in the context of the critique of domination, the role of the rhetorical critic is to unveil the discourses of power that intersect to repress and control the people. While the critique of domination is considered to be a key element in social change, it alone does not add a groundbreaking and innovative approach to rhetorical criticism. However, the critique of freedom offers a significant addition to the practice of criticism. As borrowed from Foucault, McKerrow then explains the "critique of freedom" as a "Self-reflexive technique that turns its back on itself even as it promotes a realignment in the forces of power that construct social relations" (91). Hence, McKerrow assigns another critical role for rhetoricians, which incorporating the critique of freedom in their inquiry. More importantly, McKerrow advances that power is not always or exclusively oppressive. Power is also "productive" (McKerrow 98). Thus, the critique of freedom is the continuous critique of power as marginalized groups advocate for social power. As McKerrow explains, "Results are

never satisfying as the new social relations which emerge from a reaction to a critique are themselves simply new forms of power and hence subject to renewed skepticism" (446). Critical rhetoricians then are concerned with examining how new social power could guide to not only freedom but also domination. Finally, McKerrow outlines the "principles of praxis" (100). According to McKerrow, "The acceptance of a critical rhetoric is premised on the reversal of the phrase 'public address'-we need to reconceptualize the endeavor to focus attention on that symbolism which addresses publics" (101). McKerrow's vision of criticism is an ethical call for the rhetorical critic to be fully engaged in her/his praxis. McKerrow carefully avoids outlining to the critics traditional methodological means, and proposes instead an orientation of praxis that is committed to an engaged assessment and intervention.

Following McKerrow's outline of the tenets of rhetorical criticism, Michael McGee expands rhetorical theory and its practice by merging materialist and symbolist perspectives to offer a theoretical model. According to McGee, to obtain a holistic understanding and analysis of a rhetorical situation, the critic should start by tracing the ideology in an "artifact." McGee's call for fragmentation of a discourse helps the critic to explore and expose the dominant ideology/ideologies embedded in an artifact. Embracing this ideological criticism urges the rhetorical critic to investigate, collect, and analyze a variety of rhetorical texts to fashion an analysis from "scraps and pieces of evidence" (McGee 76). This critical analogy is, specifically, applicable in the rhetorical productions

of contemporary uprisings of the "Arab Spring." Within this framework, I argue that there is not a single homogenous, all-inclusive, universally supported "Arab Spring," but instead there is a variety of movements and activities that occur across the Arab world (and I would argue globally as well) in the pursuit of political, economic and social equality. To expand more on the interplay of power and resistance, I elaborate more closely on the critique of domination and the critique of freedom as well as the tasks of critical rhetoricians within their practice. Between the two critiques and the principles of praxis, McKerrow has set out a list of tenets for critical rhetoricians to pursue a critique.

Elaborating on Critique of Domination and the Critique of Freedom

According to McKerrow, the critique of domination's main role is to deconstruct and reveal how rhetorics of power and dominance "Create and sustain social practices with control" (92). Understanding the power hidden in a rhetorical text or situation becomes the role of the critic. In other words, in the context of these rhetorical situations, the critical rhetorician looks at how discourse is being communicated by asking who dictates the following questions; who is allowed to speak? How much she/he could speak? On what issues and matters are they allowed to speak about? And when are they allowed to speak about those issues? Historically dominant systems and structures have implemented these questions into societies to control and dominate the rhetorical practices of the people. According to McKerrow, this practice of control by dominant classes over speech and action is called the "dialectic control" (McKerrow 95). Through

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an analysis of the rhetorical situation, the critic could find the dialectic of control embedded in people's discourses. Drawing on Foucault's conceptualization of power, McKerrow maintains that the critique of the discursive function of power cannot be comprehensive due to the fact that domination is always fragmented. Hence, to pursue a critique of domination, McKerrow outlines three important tenets for rhetorical critics to follow. To begin with, McKerrow asks rhetoricians to gather the different ideological fragments found in a rhetorical situation, categorize them, and then examine them. Following this rhetorical orientation, the critic could expose ideologies, themes, artifacts, and ideographs that influence the way power operates as an oppressive force. The second guideline McKerrow offers to critics is to be aware of binaries and dichotomies that look at power is a very reductive fashion. In other words, power operates in a fluid manner that moves beyond the binary of loss/gain and functions with a matrix of forces (Foucault as qtd. in McKerrow 96). Hence, with this milieu of domination, power relations communicate unbalanced equality. This matrix of power is also applicable to the context of my scholarship, specifically, in terms of understanding Orientalism in a larger matrix of power.

A final strategy for a critique of domination that I argue for is being aware of the fact that exploring domination is only a segment of the complex functions of power. For instance, if there is a critique of domination, the rhetorical critic could dismiss the chances that marginalized bodies could enact to "Varying degrees of power over others"

(McKerrow 96). This is also related to some of the critiques of Edward Said's focus on critiquing mainly domination. McKerrow sustains that attention to domination is necessary but insufficient to fuel a nuanced critique of the flow of power. Hence, the critic must also be interested in the possibility of freedom, even in the face of illustrated oppression. The critique of freedom is the investigation of the constraints of power in our daily lives. In the words of Foucault, "The work of profound transformation can only be done in an atmosphere which is free and always agitated by permanent criticism" (as qtd. in McKerrow 96). In this way, the rhetorical critic is committed to a never-ending objective (or a telos). McKerrow argues that the nature of power and the perpetual creation of new social relations characterized through authority, mandate that the rhetorical critic never ceases to engage a in critical examination vis-à-vis those unequal relations of power. This ideological criticism hopes to create a social justice platform that is not dominated by the status quo to offer a new understanding or potentialities for "thought and action" that are not immersed in subjugation (McKerrow 96). Thus, I contend that understanding power as a three part relationship is essential. McKerrow suggests that the discursive functions of power emerge from the following dynamics: power, right, and truth. They dynamics are connected to one another making power and dominance appear to be natural, hegemonic, and comprehensive. Ultimately, McKerrow reminds critical rhetoricians to be mindful of the fact that there is no relationship or situation that is free from the discursive forces of power and domination. Finally,

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McKerrow reconfigures criticism as a never-ending project that is always striving to challenge repression and domination; as well as holding the critics responsible for adhering to the ethics and responsibilities of ideological criticism.

Critical Rhetoric as a Practice

Within the context of critical rhetorical principles and terms of practice, the tenets that McKerrow outlines for critical rhetoricians received several criticisms. After this initial theorizing of critical rhetoric, a number of scholars, (see Ono and Sloop; Calafell; Holling and Calafell), were critical to McKerrow's approach. Those critics advance that critical rhetoric is not complete as presented in 1989. Hence, several scholars have forwarded convincing criticisms of McKerrow. One of the key stands of that critique that I focus on elaborating in the next section is the critique of vernacular discourse.

The Critique of Critical Rhetoric: Vernacular Discourse

The rhetorical critics Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop argue for a turn towards, and call rhetoricians to focus on the rhetorics of the oppressed. Within this framework, I second their call to focus on vernacular discourse due the importance of the studying and examining discourses developed by marginalized groups. Through privileging the vernaculars of the oppressed, Ono and sloop suggest that split between everyday acts of activism and academic pursuit of criticism could finally collapse. According to Ono and Sloop critical rhetoricians:

> Cannot take the tools they have now and blithely apply them to the study of cultures. Rather, new methods, approaches, orientations, even attitudes, toward cultures need to be created. . . . critical rhetoric must be reconceived in light of the vernacular discourse that challenges approaches founded within Western notions of domination, freedom, and power. (40)

In other words, the traditional theoretical and praxis of rhetoric focuses on dominant systems, structures, and classes, while neglecting the discursive forces of power that dismisses and erased the discourses and bodies of those in the margins. Hence, I reaffirm the call towards embracing vernacular discourse to unmask oppressive discourses for a turn to vernacular discourses to ensure the project of the critical rhetorician and adhere to the ethics of the praxis of ideological criticism. Furthermore, Ono and Sloop contend that vernacular discourse has two primary elements that could be examined: cultural syncretism and pastiche (21-25). These two characteristics of vernacular discourse are key to the construction and deconstruction of rhetorics. Their critical approach to rhetorical theory and praxis attempts to destabilize the subject position of the community of vernacular users while also de-essentializing vernacular discourses on "freedom" for instance, as the main artifact of marginalized bodies and voices (26). In doing so, Ono and Sloop demonstrate how vernacular discourse is a fluid process that is changeable and adaptable to the everyday lives of the people it is used by. Vernacular discourse could operate in a way where it affirms the identities of the marginalized communities, and another way where it represses the discourse of the people while supporting hegemonic Therefore, the usage and the fluidity of vernacular

discourse allow for a rhetorical praxis that is adaptive to the rhetorical situation or context it is applied to. Ono and Sloop advance that vernacular discourse is important as it could be used, sometimes, a counter-hegemonic and resistive of dominant systems and affirmative of oppressed voices (23). Ono and Sloop terms this discursive function of the vernacular as cultural syncretism. Cultural syncretism is a characteristic of vernacular discourse that is does not only contradict dominant ideology, but also expressive of vernacular beliefs and the cultures it expresses. According to Ono and Sloop, vernacular discourse "Affirms various cultural expressions while at the same time protests against the dominant cultural ideology" (20). Hence, this process of the vernacular discourse demonstrates how its discursive aspects are always in negotiation and development. In other words, the dynamics of vernacular discourse reveal how the focus of analysis is shifted towards the cultural productions of marginalized identities, as well as how they embrace dominant ideologies and resist them. It is also concerned with how identities are constructed in the reactive process of the vernacular.

Ono and Sloop also highlight the second function of vernacular discourse, which they term as pastiche. Pastiche has the tendency to use fragments and artifacts from popular culture to produce create new effects and meanings (23). According to Ono and Sloop, "Pastiche implies that vernacular discourse may borrow from, without mimicking popular culture" (23). In other words, pastiche is a dynamic and inventive process that takes elements from popular culture, which enables vernacular communities to establish

their own identities cultures outside hegemonic ideologies and systems. Hence, through the use of vernacular discourse a "Unique discursive form out of the cultural fragments by a concern for local conditions and social problems" (Ono and Sloop 23). However, because of the nature of borrowing, Ono and Sloop argue that aspects of dominant discourses and culture could be found in the vernacular discourses of the oppressed. Paradoxically, Ono and Sloop minimize the role of popular culture to vernacular discourse by failing to acknowledge how popular culture employs the vernacular for its revitalizing drive.

Bernadette M. Calafell and Fernando P. Delgado, in "Reading Latina/o Images: Interrogating Americanos," fill in the gap of Ono and Sloop's work by exploring the vernacular material culture. Calafell and Delgado analyze Other rhetorical forms to demonstrate how the visual, for instance, plays an important role in discussing Latina/o identities. By deconstructing images and texts of *Americanos*, Calafell and Delgado establish "The power of the visual to serve as a vernacular discourse" (5) and "Explore the ways in which visual images provide arguments and counterarguments to ideologies or public memories concerning Latina/os in the US" (17). Hence, this analysis of *Americanos* enhances our understanding of marginalized bodies and the complexity of their identities, vis-à-vis their own communities and the dominant culture, through the visual vernacular "found in the cultural margins" (Calafell and Delgado 5).

Furthermore, in her book, *Latina/o Communication Studies: Theorizing Performance*, Bernadette M. Calafell, problematizes hegemonic theoretical and methodological approaches that analyze Latina@ communication studies by proposing an embodied/performative critical rhetoric. Calafell expands Ono and Sloop's critique by locating the counter-hegemonic, affirmative and community-centered characteristics of the vernacular discourse within other forms of knowledge production that are not merely textual. On exposing other forms of knowledge, Calafell states:

> This vernacular discourse does not divorce language or words from their embodied nature.... My desire in using this method is to highlight certain meaning and rhythms in language and the choice of words while privileging the importance of orality in historically marginalized cultures. (20-21)

Hence, Calafell's rhetorical-performative perspective advances the argument that critics should pay attention to rhetorical discourses that are not merely textual but also visual, verbal and performative in order to understand how history, power, and social location have shaped the form of discourses produced by and manifested within Latina@ communities.

Moreover, in Somos de una Voz?: *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces*, Holling and Calafell further Calafell's argument by theorizing a Latin@ vernacular discourse. They define this discourse "As an encompassing, though not subsuming, metatheory for critically examining the everyday sites in which Latin@s struggle over, produce, engage, enact and/or perform culture, identities and community formation"

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(Holling and Calafell 20). In other words, Latina/o vernacular discourse moves away

from the opposition between media and audience and towards the discursive strategies

employed by members of marginalized groups as participants in discourse, not to be

simply described but to be critically analyzed in the context of the structures of power

and knowledge located in larger discourses. Furthermore, Holling and Calafell develop

three primary characteristics that are necessary in understanding the complexity of

Latina/o vernacular discourse, which are: "tensions of identity, a decolonial aim, and the

critic/al role" (21). Hence, Holling and Calafell draw the connection between the

theoretical and performative as well as the role of self-reflexivity in regards to vernacular

discourse. In "Rhetorics of Possibility," Calafell contends that the rhetorical tradition is

established on a writing of rhetorical criticism that eradicates marginalized voices (32).

She furthers that point by stating that the shortcomings of traditional rhetoric are based

mainly on "The norm of the field for the critic's voice or illusion to selfhood to be

relatively absent and criticism disembodied" (35). In other words, Calafell argues that

traditional rhetoric dismisses questions of subjectivity or positionality both

methodologically and aesthetically (36). Hence, Calafell confirms the importance of

those rhetorical characteristics by asking the critics to remember that,

> If we are going to reach the texts produced by historically marginalized
> communities, we must meet these texts on their own terms
> methodologically. We must understand that they may not take traditional
> or dominant forms. (7)

Furthering this point, Calafell and McIntosh argue for analyzing the connections between Performance Studies and Rhetoric. They invite scholars to examine "how the bodies of people of color are always informed and already 'counter' to dominant ideologies that govern the public sphere" (27). By articulating the body "as/is rhetorica/l" (6), they bring to our attention the importance of studying the ignored and "Too often the mundane, everyday, acts of survival, resistance" (2), which are important in understanding how people of color use these strategies –in both the public and private spheres- to resist oppression and produce empowering spaces.

In the context of my study on the "Arab Spring," this demand is relevant as it gives me as a critic the ability to analyze how Arab women and men produce vernacular discourses in different rhetorical forms of knowledge. Hence, I contend that this line of research offers significant potential for locating new potentialities with regard to discursive contestation. Drawing on Latina@ vernacular discourse, I locate an epistemological space that argue for the examination of discourses produced by members of marginalized communities, during the "Arab Spring," in order to understand their perspectives that have largely been foreclosed in traditional cultural studies research.

Conclusion

This methodological chapter explores the foundations of critical rhetoric as a theory and a practice and argues for a turn towards a critical vernacular discourse. It links ontology and epistemology, arguing for the importance of examining different artifacts

produced by marginalized groups. It also articulates the recent analytical framework for

analyzing the construction and positioning of marginalized identities. Finally, by offering

a review of Latina/o vernacular discourse, I can now locate a way of studying and

theorizing the dialectic between agency and the subjects by looking at how the larger

dominant structures are reproduced and contested through these discourses as well as

how marginalized groups construct their own subjectivities through the use of vernacular

discourse.

Operationalization of the Analysis

The study of the discursive functions of a rhetorical situations as they relate to and interact with hegemonic systems to empower and disempower various individuals and communities-has been a crucial development in Communication Studies to understand and analyze how subjects and subject positions are produced and reproduced as well as the extent to which subjects can and do challenge and re-articulate their identity positions within ideological systems. In this study, following the tradition of Latin@ vernacular discourse, and within the context of the "Arab Spring," I argue for an Arab vernacular discourse that is "An encompassing, though not subsuming, meta theory for critically examining the everyday sites in which Latin@s [*and I add Arab*] struggle over, produce, engage, enact and/or perform culture, identities and community formation" (Holling and Calafell 20). Under this construction, I consider Arab vernacular discourse as a rhetorical space produced to negotiate acts of resistance and "tensions of identity" (Holling and Calafell 21). That is to say, analyzing Arab vernacular discourse is valuable in providing a "new" and more complex understanding of those subjectivities. As I mentioned earlier in this study, soon after the "birth" of the Arab Spring, academics, media experts framed the "Arab Spring" mainly through an Orientalist lens that characterized the Arab Spring as either emancipatory or subordinating (Adib-Moghhaddam; Al-Ali; Matar). In other words, the critics of the Arab Spring explained the uprisings mainly through a critique of domination. However, focusing mainly on the critique of domination does not provide a

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holistic understanding of the rhetorical situation. For instance, McKerrow warns critics

not to understand the world in simplistic either/or notions of power. Consequently, the

practice of rhetorical criticism would not be valid if its underlining assumption is that in

order for one community/collective/subject to gain domination, another

community/collective/subject must lose authority, instead, the Foucauldian power is

considered to be active and dynamic moving in a matrix of domination (Foucault as qtd.

in McKerrow 96). In a matrix of power, power relations are co-built and linked to one

another, privileging inequality and injustice (McKerrow). In other words, traditional

practices of rhetorical theory and practice assume hegemonic accounts of power relations,

which automatically dismisses the bodies and voices and unheard and repressed

communities. Hence, I argue as critic of vernacular discourse, I read the "Arab Spring" in

a polysemic way, thus fulfilling arrangements of critical praxis.

Furthermore, following the call for embodied/performative critical rhetoric

(Calafell) to analyze vernacular discourses, I engage a critical analysis of rhetorical

discourses of the "Arab Spring" that are not merely textual but also visual, verbal and

performative in order to understand how history, power, and social locations have shaped

the form of discourses produced by and manifested within the Arab revolutionists. By

examining a series of the protests of the "Arab Spring," I unveil how the "Arab Spring" -

visually, verbally, and perfomatively- "invent" (Calafell and Delgado) both the Arab

subject and collective. Furthermore, drawing on theories of the flesh and the importance

of acknowledging the body and lived experiences in understanding subjectivities, I consider the Arab revolutionary body as a political vehicle that was used during the "Arab Spring" brings to the forefront issues of agency, identity and representation that have been merely discussed in dichotomous ways in the media as well as academia (see also Matar). Notably, this emphasis on the embodied experience allows for reclaiming agency and representation outside the usage of the outdated Orientalist tropes, and relocated issues of domination, oppression, and misrepresentation. This analysis will also answer questions about the nature of Arab cultural production, liberalism, and representation.

To perform the analysis, I look at the different events that marked the "Arab Spring," from the graffiti in the streets, to the deployment of the revolutionary language, to the act of self-immolation. For instance, I begin my analysis by looking at the self-immolation of a fruit vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi (Al-Ali). A policewoman physically abused the young man and his products were confiscated. To protest the physical and material abuse, Bouazizi set himself on fire (Al-Ali). Within weeks, what had begun as a spark with this Tunisian vendor became what is now called the Arab Spring (Al-Ali). Bouzizi's act of self-immolation has been debated as the action that "created" the "Arab Spring." Hence, this rhetorical situation calls for a nuanced understanding of issues of history, power, social location and calls for the practice of polysemic interpretations of rhetoric to avoid linear and "colonial" conclusions of

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causality. As a critic, I also argue that rhetorical artifacts alone cannot provide me with a comprehensive understanding of this situation and I should employ a level of fragmentation (McGee). Hence, I analyze the self-immolation, the revolutionary language, and the graffiti by analyzing different characteristics of vernacular discourse from cultural syncretism to pastiche.

Finally, as a critic, I understand that the flow of power could reside in the position of me as the critic (Ono and Sloop). Hence, moving as a critic outside of my confines as a "reporter" is a crucial to the practice of criticism from a "we" stand instead of the "Othering" they (Ono and Sloop). Calafell also confirms this point by stating criticism cannot be "disembodied" and that the critic should address questions of subjectivity or positionality (based on *Latina/o Communication Studies: Theorizing Performance* and "Rhetorics of Possibility"). As far as my positionality is concerned, I acknowledge the tensions that could manifest within this rhetorical situation as I am both the critic and a member of the studied community (Calafell and Holling). Hence, I maintain throughout my study a commitment to self-reflexivity to analyze the complexities of representations, voice and the body.

Data Collection

Vernacular discourse is considered to a praxis and model for locating the rhetorics of the people in their respective communities, as well as an examination of how certain discursive models are represented and constructed. Moreover, the turn towards vernacular

discourse privileges the neglected everyday talks and spaces of normal citizens over hegemonic systems and sites. Hence, for this dissertation project, I focus on vernacular discourse gathered in Tunisia using ethnographic methods of data collection, which are rhetorically analyzed to discuss the tropes and tools used in sense-making processes that will be evoked by participants/revolutionists in and about the "Arab Spring." Specifically, vernacular discourse included in this analysis consists of discourses that emerged during from my field notes, rhetorical display or performance observed and/or experienced during participant observation, and data from photographic and video recordings that were collected over a 40-hour period during a two-week visit to Tunisia, in August-September 2013.

More specifically, I apply a combined methodological approach, which I refer to as Vernacular Ethnography, as a novel approach to studying rhetoric "in the field." Texts and performances are rhetorically analyzed, utilizing vernacular discourse analysis as an emergent methodological tool, to discuss potential consequences of privileging the revolutionary body in sense-making processes about the "Arab Spring." This reading offers a polysemic study that fulfills arrangements of critical praxis. The relationship among rhetoric, bodies, space, and power is also discussed as a way to propose integrating critical inquiry into rhetoric of events so that consequences for investigating and understanding how larger systems of power could be addressed. By investigating the way that messages are interpreted in Tunisia, rhetoric and ethnography can be combined

to more intricately study vernacular discourse in the field. Therefore, by combining traditional methodological approaches, I seek to open rhetorical and ethnographic methodologies to each other. This combination has the potential to provide new insights into the complexities of discourse, more generally, and rhetoric, more specifically. In order to effectively study vernacular discourse "in the field," the integration of text (verbal, visual, performative) and context provides new possibilities that expand the availability of and access to vernacular discourse for scholarly analysis. By combining participant-observation and rhetorical analysis approaches to collecting and analyzing data, the sense-making processes people evoke in making a particular place and event (in this case Tunisia) meaningful can be investigated more organically (as they are experienced and observed) and holistically (as one way of sense-making among many and in relation to a larger sense of the world beyond one particular place). In this approach, performances of vernacular discourse can be viewed as complex and significantly related to enactments and effects of power. Through collecting and analyzing data in multiple ways-through ethnographic and rhetorical methods-the complexities and relationships among vernacular discourse, place, space, and power is then addressed in new ways and discussed as having a wide-range of implications.

According to Denzin and Lincoln, a qualitative researcher is comparable to a bricoleur (6), similar to the analogy that Calafell and Delgado make describing the work of a critical rhetorician (see also Holling and Calafell; Calafell). They discuss the analogy

in terms of a researcher bringing together pieces of information as a way to classify

images and text into a coherent and larger tableau. Hence, the researcher has the ability to

create methods and tools that could facilitate the process of assemblages and bridging

everything together. That is to say, ethnography is a useful methodology in this project as

it enable my study of Arab vernacular discourse, in specific as: (1) it is constant and

involved, (2) it is microscopic and holistic, and (3) it is flexible and self-corrective (Eder

and Corsaro 521). More importantly, ethnography as a methodology maintains the

longevity of research and brings attention to the importance of fully embodying the

specificities of the study rather than only generalizing from the outside. Specifically, I

spent two weeks in Tunisia, spending every day participating in and observing the events

that occur both formally and on an everyday basis. These events include participating in

protests; listening to chants; watching performances; taking pictures, eating my breakfast

and lunch with everyday citizens; writing in my journal; talking to whomever sits near

me; people-watching; and even joining a tour group. I participated in every opportunity I

came across during my two-week visit. I attended every major event in the main streets of

Tunisia, and spent time involving myself with the everyday activities. I also observed

others in the main revolutionary space of Avenue Lhbib Bourgiba, Tunis, while partaking

in as much as possible. I talked to all of the different types of people I observed. I also to

talk to a variety of races, genders, ages, and roles of people present in the streets

demonstrations, coffee shops, and so on. Additionally, through informal interactions, I

gathered people's reflections of the revolutionary after they engaged in particular

activities that perform a relation to and/or symbolic interpretation of the "Arab Spring."

This allowed me to treat the sense-making processes that the participants revealed in their

vernacular discourse about the revolutions as both performative and descriptive.

Vernacular discourse, in this way, is both particular to the Tunisian and Tunisians, in the

way it allowed for unique, individual sense-making processes as well as commonly

evoked and collectively negotiated in the way it engages or dismisses alternative sense-

making processes about the space and the event more generally. In this way, I was able to

conduct a sustained study for two weeks, and an engaged study by participating in as

much and with as many people as possible.

Moreover, in order to investigate the central components of vernacular discourse

of the revolutionary body, I analyze how vernacular discourse functions, as it emerges in

the symbolic representations, performance, and/or recordings of movement collected at

the public spaces of Tunisia. I also extend this discussion to address how such a

framework can also interrogate enactments of power and resistance, such as when one

party overtly displays authority over another or when one person's interpretation of the

space/or the revolution is usurped by another's. During my ethnographic study, I also

examined how Tunisians employ discourse in an effort to evoke an ideal representation

or response and also how lived experiences are particularly evoked. Finally, I examine

how participants' vernacular discourse reflects an ongoing process of sense-making that

positions themselves in the world in different ways-particularly how evocations of place and event help them discuss who they are and how they interact with others in the square differently than elsewhere.

To sum up, I incorporated ethnography in my research for several reasons. First, ethnography focuses on reflexivity. By this, I mean that the researcher must be reflective about her/his position in the research as a way of substantiating the interpretations and findings that lead to more general truth claims. In other words, all knowledge is perspectival and must be articulated as such. In this study, my own experiences in Tunisia are an integral part of the data I present. The people I noticed, the relationships I encountered, and the functions I observed are all reflexively discussed as connecting my own experiences to the data. This helps the participants-and myself-to collectively negotiate particular meanings of the "Arab Spring" as a space and event. Hence, this project attempts to incorporate me, as a researcher, into the construction and interpretation of vernacular discourse, treating my own experiences and interpretations as an integral part of the world that I study. Rather than identifying texts and analyzing them as part of a larger, abstract social world, ethnography and vernacular discourse analysis allowed me to immerse myself in the production of these texts as a way of connecting my own personal experience and perspective to participants' construction and interpretation of the "Arab Spring" as an event in my analysis. Second, ethnography is concerned with validity. By this, I mean, "The method investigates what it intended to" (Kvale 302). In

other words, the way that our understanding of the world is constructed defines whether it is valid to others (and perhaps even to our self). In this case, I gathered data in the form of vernacular discourse as both identifiable texts and contextually situated events that are able to be experienced collectively as they emerge. The ability for data to be collected in a way in which it can be identified as a rhetorical text and also as an event that can be reflexively presented required a praxis of ethnographic methods of data collection. In this way, an ethnographic methodology enables the collection of vernacular discourse to simultaneously maintain both textual and contextual elements as integral aspects of its nature; it allowed me, as a researcher, to gather data in a way that did not force privileging one element over another in the data collection process. Third, ethnographic data collection should focus on the details of a specific situation, but in a way that helps to elucidate a larger situation of which they are a part. This study focuses on the way in which vernacular discourse in and about the "Arab Spring" is produced and how rhetoric is understood to be part of larger sense-making processes about the revolutions. Therefore, in accordance with these main reasons to use ethnography, gathering vernacular discourse benefited from ethnographic methods to offer a complete study of the vernaculars in Tunisia.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE VERNACULAR DISCOURSE OF THE "ARAB SPRING:"

FROM THE VISUAL, THE EMBODIED, TO THE TEXTUAL

Narrating the Rhetorical Body

Avenue Hbib Bourgiba in Tunis is the central boulevard that has encompassed the country's main transformations from French colonialism, to a coup, and finally an uprising. It is the space where thousands of Tunisians gathered in their pursuit of independence. After weeks of demonstrations across the country in 2011, Tunisians headed to Avenue Habib Bourguiba and demanded the former president Ben Ali to leave the government. Hence, Avenue Habib Bourguiba became the stage for Tunisia's politics and never-ending protests, projecting both the hopes and anxieties of a people bracing for change. This is the space where a young man set himself on fire screaming out that unemployment, and humiliation had forced him to put an end to his life. Hence, the Arab uprisings have changed cities like Tunis, turning the avenues, squares and traffic circles where protesters marched and died into hallowed spaces. In the early afternoon, as I cross into Avenue Habib Bourguiba with my mother, we witness how the street is guarded by riot police officers from the old theater down to the clock tower in the circle. At first, the police let people gather, and soon they fill the avenue. You see a full crowd of movement and life, which reflects the cautious hope of Tunisia's transition. Some of the bars and coffee shops stay open even with the flow of demonstrators. The atmosphere is amazing.

Soon after we enter the space, I see my mother joining the movement of street

demonstrators and repeating after them the following lines:

If one day a people desires to live,

Then fate will answer their call.

And their night will then begin to fade

And their chains break and fall.

At first, seeing my mother joining the protesters, I was petrified. The thought of

losing my mother to the brutal police force in Tunis while I was collecting my data for

my research was terrifying. As I approached my mother to displace her from the crowd,

she shouted at me saying, "These are my people, this is my cause, and 'The will to live'

has been our anthem for years." My mother's words reminded me that even with the

geographical shifting from Morocco to Tunisia, the discursive identity of an Arab or a

North African (or more specifically a Maghrebi: who are citizens of Morocco, Algeria

and Morocco that share geographical borders and a history of French colonialism)

community was carried along. The opening lines of the poem "The will to live" to the

Tunisian poet Abu Al Kacem Chebbi, have been on the tip of millions of tongues since

1930s, they have been taught in schools from Morocco to Bahrain, sung by influential

Arab stars, shouted by protesters against French and British colonizers, and written on

protest banners. I remember singing "The will to live" when I was a kid with my mother

in front of the Ministry of Education in Rabat, Morocco, demanding an educational

reform and a better treatment of teachers across the country. Hence, my mother was right, even if people's experiences across the region are different and diverse, the demands for dignity, equity, and equality echoed a sense of commonality and familiarity among the people. In the middle of the demonstration, next to my mother, I could feel a strong bond between the people, which is what giving the movement its momentum. The space of Avenue Habib Bourgiba offered my mother and I a narrative of "possible realities" (Ono and Sloop 26), which affirmed our sense of a pan-Maghrebi[5] /pan-Arab community that is living a collective experience of coming together with the aim of interrogating power and power relations with its ruling regimes. We could finally witness and live the manifestation of a poem that ends in a massive street demonstration. My mother's participation in the protest is also a manifestation of "fleshing;" of women theorizing through lived experience in a public space where they are reclaiming agency and deconstructing oppression (Calafell; Moraga and Anzaldúa; Madison; Hill Collins). In that setting, my mother used her own voice to articulate a collective struggle and join the demonstrators. Through fleshing, my mother's body communicates her voice as a protestor, as well as her voice as a veiled Muslim woman speaking against essentialism

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[5] Maghrebi people include Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, Libyans, and Mauritanians (Moors is also used as an alternative descriptive terminology of the inhabitants of the region). Maghrebis are largely composed of Berber and Arab descent with European and Sub-Saharan African elements. Brunel, Claire and Gary Clyde Hufbauer. *Maghreb Regional and Global Integration: A Dream to be Fulfilled*, Peterson Institute: 2008, 1. Print.

of the Muslimness. Her body "increasingly occupying a middle ground where the secular and religious meet or where the two collapse" (Badran, "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?"). In this demonstration, my mother is critiquing the injustices produced by an Islamic government, while simultaneously disrupting the understanding of (Western) feminist ideals and pointing to the Orientalist values and images which consider Islam misogynist by the mere occupation of her veiled body Avenue Habib Bourgiba. Her body then is a showcase of how Muslim feminism could transcend local oppression and Orientalist representations, and is an example of a middle space where Muslim women reclaim a discursive space beyond the binaries.

However, as protesters scaled the Interior Ministry's walls in the middle of Avenue Habib Bourguiba, the police started asking people to disperse and threatened to begin using violence to break up the gathering. Out of fear that the police would start firing tear gas onto the avenue, my mother and I left the space taking with us an embodied experience of hope and resistance. As we move away from the avenue, we can still see the police chasing protesters down side streets. This scene of police brutality recalled the protests that my mother experienced growing up in Morocco. I feel my mother's body still shivering from leaving the avenue that abruptly, but I can still hear her voice whispering the lines of "The will to live:"

If one day a people desires to live,

Then fate will answer their call.

And their night will then begin to fade

And their chains break and fall.

As I hold her hand, I become aware of how complex, liminal, and difficult the

space and the bodies we just embraced, it is not a mere protest, it is indeed an uprising

that has always been becoming.

Being together with my mother, sharing that moment with her, encountering those

diverse bodies and listening to their voices, established the first praxis of a revolution,

which consist of listening and collaborating. To establish this praxis, D. Soyini Madison

elaborates:

> Before a performative politics of effective dialogue can begin, the ethics of first being fully present with another requires this deep paying attention…To "be with" is to be present, not in the Derridean metaphysics of presence as pre-representational or as an absolute origin, but as an "epiphenomenon of representation": in a body-to-body convergence that pays attention to the right now and is newly comprised by all the representations, histories, and longs that came before this moment to make the now more extraordinary. These extraordinary "now moments" flourish through radical listening, demanding we pay attention to the collaborations and motions that generate our being together and what we can make together. You are intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in an Other's symbol-making practices and traditions as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires. In the face of those who say "it will never change," these human rights activists begin by paying attention and listening. On the ethical ground of being together with another and sincere listening, one may gain the invitation to speak and the trust to be heard. Then a conversation is possible that can lead to the greater possibility for alterity. (50)

Hence, this establishes how sites of performance and performative bodies cohere in the service of rights, justice, and activism through being attentive and collaborative. Making Sense of the Rhetorical Body. My mother's body as a veiled Muslim woman, her voice that conveys a pan-Maghrebi identity, and her public political performance in Avenue Lhbib Bourgiba communicate a complex discursive and embodied multiplicity that refuse the binary of looking of at conflicts/revolutions from a "gender-emancipatory discourses" versus "gender-subordinate," and reinforces the arguments that the experiences of women in the "Arab Spring" were -and still are- significantly more diverse, both in terms of the day-to-day-life and in terms of political significance. First, my mother's performance rejects the premise of colonial/Orientalist feminism, which misreads and misrepresents Arab and Muslim women and makes their visibility docile. It moves beyond the rhetorical assumption that portrays "Muslim" woman as victim narratives in need of salvation, and reclaims women's agencies and acts of activism. It also reinforces the idea that interpretive lenses that study the "Arab Spring" from Orientalist and stereotypical racial discourses.

Second, my mother's embodied act of resistance is a display of Muslim feminism. It refutes the deemed antonymic relationship between "Muslim," "Arab" and "Feminism." Calafell and McIntosh argue that "Vernacular discourse is grounded in the material reality of bodies, that 'everyday' rhetorics contrasts dominant-hegemonic discourse simply by its material differences from it" (4). Hence, my mother's

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performance is counter-hegemonic as it defies the deployment of Muslim and feminism as oxymoron and non-existent, and communicating a movement that embarks upon new spaces to understand the multiplicity and specificity of subjectivities within Muslim and Arab communities. My mother's embodied performance demonstrates the importance of looking at the "Arab Spring" as a middle ground where possible alliances between difference and diverse bodies-from secular to conservative, from men to women, from Tunisian to Maghrebi- are formed in their efforts for equality. The "Arab Spring," is indeed a space where multiple and different identities of Muslimhood in terms of ethnicity, politics and histories can come together in order to claim "Simultaneous and sometimes contradictory allegiances even as they resist globalization, local nationalisms, Islamization, and the pervasive patriarchal system" (Cooke 94).

To deconstruct the vernacular discourses experienced in Tunisia, I specifically selected graffiti, chants and the act of self-immolation in Tunisia for close rhetorical analysis. Employing the synthesized concept of embodied vernacular discourse, my analysis attempts to examine how the selected graffiti, chants, and body rhetorically constructed a Tunisian/ Tunisian- Arab community by addressing the following questions. How did they challenge dominant ideologies while simultaneously affirm their own rhetoric ("cultural syncretism")? How did they borrow from the language from the mainstream in order to challenge it ("pastiche")? How did different -personal and institutional agencies- help to shape or constrain their discourses? How did they construct

their subjectivities? However, prior to offering a close analysis of the vernacular discourses of the uprising, I provide a general analytical overview of the movement from its situationality to the outcome.

An Analytical Overview of the Situational

The act of self-immolation of Mohamed Bouzizi in Tunisia sparked the uprisings around the Arab world, which started an incredible movement of dynamism, self-expression, activism, revolutions, uprisings, and all different kinds of activities that continue to shape the Arab world. The Arab uprising is consistently changing and it has a wide variety of different manifestations, and different conditions in different countries. There is no single "Arab Spring," there is no single Arab revolution or movement, there is a wide variety of citizen dynamism and activism, expressing grievances and complaints, and aspiring to a better world. As the Arab States, in this case Tunisia, are in the process of nation state building, it is important to explore the work of Benedict Anderson to discuss how nationalism and the concept of community formation are constituted in the "Arab Spring."

In his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Anderson examines the way communities were created by the growth of the nation-state, the interaction between capitalism and printing, and the birth of vernacular languages-of-state. Anderson defines the nation as an "Imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (7). Hence, this could be reflected

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in the Arab Uprisings, as it created a constitutive, imagined community based on common demands for equal rights and against dictatorships through the re-birth of the vernacular. It is imagined because "Members . . . will never know most of their fellow members . . . yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). This could be seen in the street protests, where demonstrators do not know one another, and yet are gathered together for a common cause. On the other hand, Anderson asserts that the possession of citizenship in a "nation" allows and stimulates the individual to imagine the borders of a nation, even though such borders may not physically exist. However, in the project of the "Arab Spring," this understanding of a fixed "nation" could be limiting, as the people see the movement of the uprisings in a very fluid, hybrid, and liminal spaces that is not controlled within a physical frontier. Anderson also contends that formation of a communal is restricted. It is restricted because "Even the largest of them . . . has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (7). That is to say, the fact that "nationalists" are able to envision borderlines implies that they understand the presence of division by culture, ethnicity, and social structure among people.

Anderson also explains another essential quality of the nation, which is the sovereign. According to Anderson, a nation is also sovereign because:

> The concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm . . . nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. (7)

Hence, the sovereign state is a figurative representation of the autonomy from conventional religious institutions. It offers an awareness of social order that is necessary the sense of orderly civic society, without depending on the declining religious hierarchy. But on he other hand, when it comes to the most of the Arab nations, Anderson advances the argument that the downfall of religion in regards to sovereignty is what gave an upsurge to nationalism, conversely, religion "Defined and still defines the way of life of the inhabitants of Arab countries…and is reflected not just in government policies but in language and rituals" (Rafeedie, "Book Review"). In contrast to Anderson, Rafeedie asserts that while the nationnesses of other countries have "modern" origins, Arabness has possessed established linguistic, ethnic, and geographic unity for a much longer time. However, Anderson reminds us that the notion of a "nation" is built on the concept of a "community" due to his argument that the nation is "always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). Hence, even if there are disparities and injustice with a state, the imagined coalition among people of the same imagined state is solid and form to the chase it brings citizens together for heroic patriotic sacrifices in the names of their imagined nation. Therefore, this notion of building coalition through resistance and activism in the course of establishing "a political community" has been manifested through the Arab uprisings, which created a collective political consciousness. For instance, the practice of chants, graffiti, and other forms of resistance facilitated the

imagining of a "community," a "political community," and the rising of a "communal" or collective consciousness of a "nation."

Moreover, the expansion of the poetic protests contributed to the vernacularization of languages and spaces. The chanted couplet-slogans for example- that were constructed through the deployment of language- established unified fields of communication, which enabled demonstrators from multiple backgrounds and identities to become aware of one another via the oral and the visual. In the case of my mother, for instance, she became aware of other protesters in Avenue Lhbib Borugiba via the use of poems, even if she is geographically from a different region. Therefore, my mother and the rest of the demonstrators, consequently, became aware of the existence of the millions who share not only their "nation," but also their language of resistance. Similar to how Anderson framed that print-capitalism facilitated the imagining of a nation. Social media in the case of the Arab world, for instance, expanded the language, and therefore the cause, which enhanced the feeling of "nationalism" or collectivism.

To elaborate more on Anderson's concept of imagined communities, I want to expand its understanding and connect it to a more fluid conceptualization of a community, such as the "multitude" by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. I argue that the Arab uprising as a fluid movement constitutes an imagined community through the multitude, rather than nationalism per say. Hardt and Negri define the multitude as a leaderless coalition of horizontal structure. The movement of the multitude is difficult for

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states to contain; criminalizing those who do not abide by their boundaries is the most

states in control can do. This flow of the multitude helps create their political power,

"Empire must restrict and isolate the spatial movements of the multitude to stop them

from gaining political legitimacy" (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 397). Hence, a "collective

existence" of the multitude is important to further its political demands (Hardt and Negri,

Empire 401).

The multitude utilizes actions such as self-immolation, protests, chants and social

media as a democratic use of violence to combat political, social and economic injustices.

The "Arab Spring" initiated this democratic use of violence to support its leaderless

organizational structure. Therefore, the overthrow of the governments is only the

beginning; this multitude is demanding ultimately full democracies. The organization of

these uprisings concurs with Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined communities,"

as well as Hardt and Negri's definition of the multitude as a leaderless coalition of

horizontal structure. If leadership were to enter into the realm of the uprising, it would

undermine its power and force it to become a traditional organization. However, this is

not traditional; it is politically new. The leaderless resistance must be constituent to the

demands to encompass the needs of the entire population. It is weapons such as self-

immolation, protests, chants and graffiti that allow the leaderless organization structure to

succeed, constitutional recognition of freedom of expression "represented by the common

experiences of network relations" (Hardt and Negri, "Arabs are Democracy's New

Pioneers"). The convenient utility of those weapons allow the multitude to exemplify the power that resides upon them and opens up discussions and frustrations to further intensify the revolutions. These weapons not only mobilize the multitude but they also avoid direct surveillance from the government and cross class lines to allow more individuality to join. The embracement of pluralism within these uprisings captures the essence that is the multitude. The multitude is empowered by the differences and fluidity that enter into it. The differences end up encompassing thoughts, strategies and motivations that have the ability to become transnational through the use of democratic tools to defy dictatorships.

Therefore, citizens of the Arab world are striving for a better world that they want to create with their own hands, responding to their rights as citizens and human beings to be treated fairly by their own societies. However, the changes that are going on in the Arab region are very complex, varied, and changing fast, which makes it difficult to encompass all the details of the current situation or predict an accurate future of the Arab revolution. Rather, it is important to reflect on what happened in the last three years and think about what can be identified as new, significant, lasting, and what is just fleeting and temporary. Also, it is important to think about what has been achieved by the revolution and what is not, as well as what should be anticipated to happen in the future. However, the dilemma I faced in executing this analysis of the Arab uprising is that all the events that are happening are at the same time *sequential, simultaneous and cyclical*.

By sequential, I refer to fact that the sequence of events that are happening are never ending. For instance, every week, every month, there is something new (either positive or negative) that happens; a whole process of major historical development that keeps occurring in every country. By simultaneous, I refer to how the Arab countries are trying to do something new that no other country in the world has ever tried to do. Every single state of the twenty-two Arab countries is experiencing some level of activism, citizen expression, and demand from demonstrating in the streets to tweeting online. However, they are simultaneously trying to achieve what in Western countries, like the United States, was achieved over a period of 200 years from wars to revolutions to bringing forward new constitutions and granting equal rights to citizens. The implementation of a democratic system of governance in Western countries was indeed a long process that did not address all the issues of its societies at the same time. The difference in the Arab world is that Arab citizens are trying to solve all the issues they are facing at one time. It is very complex to simultaneously define the constitution, shape the nature of the political system, address the issue of minority rights, tackle the issue of religion pluralism, address the issue of national identity, national values, address the issue of civilian/military/police balance, address the issue of the role of women in society, address the issue of the relationship between the central government and the regional provinces; all these issues are being treated at the same time. The problem is that it is beyond human capacity to achieve satisfactory outcomes in all those areas at one and that fast. For instance, I found

out from the Tunisian people I talked to that if the government achieves some agreement on the role of Islam in the constitution for example, there will be a disagreement on the role of women in the constitution, or freedom of the press, or foreign aid… In other words, there is no linear breakthrough of the process that could be achieved. If we look at the case of Tunisia for example, first we have citizens' revolts, then the overthrown of the president, then electing a new government, and then drafting the first democratic constitution all within a period of three years.

Finally, by cyclical, I refer to how the progress of the revolution or post-revolution is taking a step forward towards a democratic transition, and then a step backward towards the old authoritarian regime. In the case of Egypt, we can see how the people ended the authoritarian rule of the military, and then electing-democratically- the Muslim Brotherhood into the government, and then ousting of the democratically elected president, and returning to the military rule. Hence, the transition is indeed a cycle of achievements and failures.

Hence, sequential, simultaneous and cyclical nature of these issues of nation-building, state building, political definitions, national values, societal relationships, identity redefinitions will take time to achieve a clear outcome for these populations.

An Analytical Overview of the Outcome of the Uprising

The Birth of the Arab citizen (citizen sovereignty)

Walking through the Tunisian streets, witnessing demonstrations, observing the graffiti on walls, talking to the people, I could not help but notice the birth of the citizens and a citizenry. You have a citizenry in a country where people for the first time could act like citizens. They do not only feel that they have rights and express those sentiments, but they also feel that they have the capacity to bring about the implementation of these rights by creating a democratic political system. Hence, the birth of the citizens and the citizenry is a new and epic historical achievement that should be acknowledged and examined thoroughly to explore new possibilities. To examine closely the concept of citizenry in "Arab Spring," I develop the idea that citizenship is performative.

Citizenship as Performative

Building on Judith Butler's (1990) work on gender performativity, I argue that citizenship's construction and performativity is similar to that of gender. First, Butler argues that gender (and "sex") are constructed categories that attempt to make the world a simpler place by dividing persons into women and men (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). Similar to the case of Tunisia, the government divided society into two categories: citizens (mainly the elites with political, economic and social power) and non-citizens (the people). These categories then inform how each of us understands the world and our place within it. As such, these ideas act as unifying concepts that consolidate identity:

that is, being born a man or a woman gives us tools to determine who we are in a way

that, for example, being left-handed does not (Butler). Comparable to that, being born a

citizen or non-citizen could inform the subjectivities about their own identities and how

they should enact them. Furthermore, gender operates as a norm that allows a person to

be intelligible or recognizable as humans to others within society. Similar to the pre-Arab

uprisings discourse, only citizens with power are considered humans and treated with

dignity. For Butler, performativity occurs upon entering discourse (which coincides with

coming into the social world). This argument develops the idea that citizenship is a

similar, fundamental basis of identity that shares many of the characteristics of

performativity that Butler discusses in reference to gender. Citizenship could be seen as

analogous in its performativity to gender in several ways. Butler includes the idea of

performativity as citationality, meaning that performative enactments of identity flow

from a recognizable norm; performativity, in order to be understood, must "cite the

conventions of authority" (*Bodies That Matter* 13-16). Thus, performativity means that

agency is "located as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a

relation of external opposition to power" (*Bodies That Matter* 15). The key to

understanding performativity and the world we create through it is to begin to see power

as it moves through us and as we act with prevailing norms or against them. Similar to

Butler, D. Soyini Madison reinforces this concept of performativity by stating,

> While on the one hand, under the overarching rubric of performance, social behavior embodies certain repetitive norms (performativity) that re-inscribe identity and belonging, thereby concretizing tradition, on the other hand social behavior also embodies behaviors that 'do something' (performative) to disrupt of interrupt these repetitions to open up possibilities for alternative actions and behaviors. (49)

Performativity is not something one voluntarily chooses, but is the:

> Forced reiteration of norms. In this sense, then, it is not only that there are constraints to performativity; rather, constraint calls to be rethought as the very conditions of performativity [which cannot] be simply equated with performance.... constraint is...that which impels and sustains performativity" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 94-95).

The goal then, is to challenge the constraints that make some bodies recognizable, while at the same time creating the subjugated whose lives are not recognizably human. This can be done, through subversion (Butler *Gender trouble*). This subversion is most evident in the ways in which some persons are not recognized as such by their failure to fit established categories of male or female (Butler). This could be seen through resistive vernacular discourses that shaped the Arab Uprisings. According to Madison,

> One performance may or may not change someone's world, but as James Scott reminds us, acts of resistance amass rather like snowflakes on a steep mountainside and can set off an avalanche. Everyday forms of resistance give way to collective defiance. (159)

Hence, those movements reclaimed the Arab citizenry by challenging the dominant ideologies. Butler claims that "'becoming' a gender is a laborious process of becoming..." (*Gender Trouble* 89-90). This notion of the effort and desire to "become"

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what one is already supposed to be reflects the language of the revolutionists who are "becoming" citizens, rather than consumers of the oppressive system through resistance.

The Birth of the Public Political Sphere

These citizens are acting in a new public political sphere that they created. Prior to the uprisings, the modern Arab world never had a credible public political sphere; a public space in which people can debate freely and without censorship political issues through the media, political parties, demonstration, non-governmental organizations, open meetings, lectures to outline the way towards a democratic system that is diverse and balanced. So, the public political sphere has now been born. It's still young and fragile, but it exists. In the case of Tunisia, you see people constantly going back to the streets manifesting their discontent with the existing political behavior of the groups in power, and expressing their desires of what they expect as their right as citizens. This repeated expression of citizen demands, expectations, and rights are taking a place in a public arena, in an open way and a legitimate way. This is new. Finally, in this public political sphere, citizens are debating and the defining what I see as the third critical element of the uprising, which is the creation of a new social contract.

The Creation of a New Social Contract

The creation of a new social contract in the Arab world is happening for the first time in the region, publically, democratically, constitutionally, pluralistically, peacefully in an open arena in which any citizen can make her/his voice heard. This is an

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unprecedented action and has never been witnessed in the Arab world. According to the

Tunisian people I talked to, the old social contract- or what they called *the ruling*

bargain- existed between the regimes and the people, but the rules were written by the

regimes. For instance, the regimes gave the people security, subsidized "bread," and

schools, in return, the people gave the regimes absolute loyalty and power. Essentially,

this contract turned the Arab citizens into consumers. Their only role is to consume

products generated by governments, giving up -unwillingly- their political rights. Hence,

the old social contract was shaped and defined by the ruling political in power elites, with

citizens having no say or contribution to it. This time, after the uprising, the new social

contract is written by a combination of different people in society, including the people

who are ruling from the top (military, Muslim brotherhood...), and ordinary citizens.

Even if this new social contract is at its earlier stages of development, it is important to

acknowledge the effectiveness of this process. This new social contract is also based on

the principles of democratic pluralism and the rule of law, which are cherished values in

the Arab countries that have not been clearly implemented or freely experienced. To

achieve this democratic pluralistic system of governance, there should a constitution,

written by the citizens, and approved and validated by its citizens. Hence, the people are

still persistent in the streets because they want a written constitution that is credible, and

responsive to the national consensus of the citizens. This is what gave birth to the citizen

sovereignty. That is to say, the concept of the sovereignty of the citizen is a new

operational term, in which the rule of the statehood, the exercise of power, the nature of

the policies, and the quality of rights all drive their validity from the consent of the

governed. Thus, if those governed write their own constitutions and implement them,

they will give legitimacy to the public authority and the institutions of governance in

power in the Arab region.

Now, to see the manifestations of these embodied rhetorical changes in the

uprisings, I examine how the selected graffiti, chants, and body rhetorically constructed a

Tunisian/ Tunisian- Arab community by deconstructing how the revolutionists

challenged dominant ideologies while simultaneously affirm their own and construct their

subjectivities.

The Visual Space of Tunis: Graffiti

The most fascinating thing I saw in Tunisia was the range of graffiti scrawled

across the walls, advertising billboards, street signs, flower pots, park benches and any

other surface that allowed Tunisians to express their political sentiments. This captured

for me the two most important historical developments that we can identify at the end of

the third year of the ongoing Arab uprisings and transformations: first, the birth of Arab

citizens who feel they have socio-economic and political rights and are prepared to speak

out, mobilize and take action to achieve those rights; and, second, the birth of a public

political sphere in which citizens can express themselves and compete peacefully for the

exercise of power.

Citizens writing graffiti capture those two developments quite nicely, and the content of the graffiti is equally telling. The formal public space of Tunis (billboards, advertisement panels, newspapers and magazine covers on the sidewalks) was dominated by admonitions to vote "yes" to the referendum and support the interim government installed. The walls and other informal spaces reflected many more varied views, including the very common statement "*ash-shab yurid isqat annitham*" (the people want the downfall of the regime). Other graffiti called the current leader a killer, or warned that another revolution was imminent. Moreover, the use of language is important to note, but the actual variety of languages used is also significant. The graphic and stylistic methods of communicating, used in conjunction with various languages, are important structural and qualitative tools. They are used in conjunction with various languages. English was overwhelmingly used, but the non-English languages were significant to consider as this truly global conflict has political implications around the world. For instance, the graffiti I photographed in Tunisia contained messages *not only* in the Tunisian dialect; but also in Arabic and French, which are considered to be native languages of the North-African region. The other language seen was mainly English. This English presence of graffiti was not surprising, especially given that English is seen to be the mainstream international language of expression, as well as a mean to seek international support and solidarity through messages. Hence, similar to Anderson's argument that the creation of imagined communities became possible because of "print capitalism" (7). Capitalist

entrepreneurs printed their books and media in the vernacular (instead of exclusive script languages, such as Latin) in order to maximize circulation (Anderson 6-7). As a result, readers speaking various local dialects became able to understand each other, and a common discourse emerged. Therefore, the hybrid usage of languages in the graffiti in Tunisia facilitated the development and circulation of vernacular languages that reinforced a sense of nationality among the people. The hybridity of the graffiti created an imagined community based on a shared identity that brought together the personal and cultural feeling of belonging to the "nation." Thus, the imagined citizen that the vernacular of the graffiti targeted was mainly the Tunisian, the North African who share a history of French colonialism and Arab influence that consequently influenced the vernacular expressed in the graffiti. However, the imagined community -through the use of the graffiti- could also form a global/borderless community seen as the multitude. The widespread of the graffiti into other states as well as over social media also created a collective existence of a community based on demands for social justice.

As a response to the growth of the graffiti, the appointed government in Tunisia tried in places to paint over the graffiti but gave up after every wall it painted white was full of graffiti again 24 hours later (Ben Mhenni, "Graffiti in Tunisia"). So the new public political sphere that continues to experience its birth across Tunis lurches back and forth between popular sentiments that support and oppose all three principal actors who have

dominated the public power structure in the past few years-the old guards of the ex-president Ben Ali, the police, and the Nahda Party (similar to the Muslim Brotherhood).

The new element today that Tunisia still displays is that those who control the power structure do not totally control the public sphere, or the minds of all Tunisians. That is a meaningful milestone on this third year of the Tunisian and other Arab uprisings that cannot be denominated in seasons of the year, but rather only in the attitudes of individual citizens who are determined to express themselves politically and in public.

In this section, I examine discourse within some of the graffiti in Tunisia to show how the "wall streets" constructed itself as a vernacular medium through which information about Tunisians/ and Arabs is articulated. Inscribing graffiti on the walls of Tunis became a visual and a verbal voice for the people. According to a Tunisian graffiti artist, Oussama Bouajila, who inscribed several slogans and paintings on the street of the capital, Tunis, says,

> We created this graffiti movement because no one speaks about us and the problems of unemployment, poverty and marginalization that we face. So, we have decided to speak for ourselves. Why graffiti? Graffiti is more accessible for the Tunisian [citizen] who does not have access to Facebook, for instance. (Mtiraoui, "Two Tunisian Graffiti Artists")

Hence, the graffiti was transformed to a (trans)national news outlet for how these communities are viewing and interpreting the events of the uprisings.

The Revolutionary Vernacular of the Graffiti

The graffiti's vernacular discourses are revolutionary in two ways. First, they helped create a new look for the Tunisian/ Arab community in the streets and mediated images (including domestic and internationals newspapers, Facebook, and Twitter). Second, the graffiti established a hybrid vernacular subjectivity by crossing the borders between nationality origins, race, religion, class and other social categories rhetorically. For instance, Tunisian street artists did not only use local revolutionary symbols, but also reused Western and Latin American revolutionary icons.

The Tunisian protesters used rhetorical strategies including identification, satire, assemblages/mixing, and transculturalism as vehicles for content that was potentially critical of mainstream hegemonic discourse. Meanwhile, these rhetorical techniques helped establish their own vernacular

Fig. 1 Graffiti done by *Zwewla*

rhetoric ("cultural syncretism") and thus helped build a personal, creative, and liminal Tunisian/ Arab community in the streets.

One of the first graffiti to be analyzed is one found in the walls of Sousse, central East Tunisia (Figure 1). The graffiti portrays a painting of an angry, desperate man in black and white, with a caption written in Arabic -in red and black- that reads "We, the employed and the unemployed, are against injustice and exploitation." The graffiti is signed by the name "*Zwewla.*" The term *Zwewla* in Tunisian dialect means "the poor," which refers to a street art community that is famous for its graffiti in support of the poor and marginalized groups in Tunisia (Ben Mhenni, "Graffiti in Tunisia"). In this graffiti, the group Zwewla used identification – or "one of us"- rhetoric to address issues about the Tunisian/ Arab community. Identification refers to the means by which an author may establish a shared sense of values, attitudes, and interests with his or her audience (Burke). The more likely an author can talk in the audience's language through "speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying attitude, idea, identifying [his or her] ways with [the audience's]" (55), the more effectively s/he can persuade the audience. Using the strategy of identification, the group *Zwewla* constructed their graffiti persona as a struggling working-class Tunisian/ Arab with whom their Arab audience could easily identify. Like many other graffiti, the "words" and "paintings" were ordinary and familiar. Set in an artistic demonstration in the walls and written in both Modern and colloquial Arabic, the group *Zwewla* treated their audience as their friends, and conversed about their ideas, feelings, and stories. The content of the graffiti addressed heavy and complex issues. The group *Zwewla* criticized the mainstream regimes' mistreatment of

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Tunisian and Arab citizens by drawing upon the popular image of how an "Arab" looks

like and the use of the Arabic language.

Challenging and Reconstructing Subjectivity

In their graffiti, *Zwewla* sought to resonate with their Tunisian/ Arab audience by

reminding them of their shared struggles and demands. The graffiti group frequently used

the pronouns "we," "our," and "us" in Arabic to break the boundaries between

themselves and their audience and construct themselves as a member of the community.

By identifying with their audience, they voiced the outrage that the people ought to have-

one that should protest against the injustices exerted upon them by the authoritarian/elitist

regimes in the region. However, the use of the modern Arabic language mixed with the

Tunisian dialect in the written caption of the graffiti, as well as the employment of Arabic

calligraphy in the drawing communicate a hybrid and embodied discursive space. This

vernacular discourse of this graffiti first speaks directly to the Tunisian and Maghrebi

community as the written words "*khadam w battal*," "we the employed and

unemployed," are written in Tunisian/ Maghrebi colloquial not in modern Arabic. Hence,

the message is establishing an exclusive cultural identity of a shared

Tunisianess/Maghrebiness through the use of a colloquial that could only be understood

by this specific community, not all Arabs. There is an articulation of a discursive

imagining of a community (Anderson) that is not Arab, or Western, but rather

Tunisian/Maghrebi. Therefore, this message is both affirmative of the Tunisian/Maghrebi

identity and counter- hegemonic of the widely accepted notion of pan-Arab, or a unified

identity. The fact that the text is written in Arabic letters, does not make it accessible to

all Arabs, and refutes that hypothesis that all Arabs share a "one" Arab "Spring."

The second part of the text in the graffiti is written in modern Arabic, which reads

"deda addulm wa istighlal," "we against injustice and exploitation." Unlike the first part

of the caption of the graffiti, the vernacular discourse of this text is open to all Arabic

speaking identities; it is not only open to Tunisians/Maghrebis, but also Arabs. Thus, this

part of the text constructs a discursive pan-Arab unity that was not present in the first part

of the text. It also communicates different meanings and resists the constructed

understanding of Arabness. First, the issue of access to employment and social class are

articulated as problems that Tunisians/Maghrebis are –specifically- suffering from;

however, "injustice and exploitation" are issues that are shared among the Arab

communities but under different circumstances and social categories. Second, it is

important to note the diversity of what constructs Arabness and their issues are important

rhetorical constructions that *Zwewla* established in the caption of this graffiti. Through

the verbal fragments of the graffiti, the group *Zwewla* suggests the presence of hybrid,

diverse, embodied Arab identities. *Zwewla*, as rhetors, employ hybridity as a political

strategy to construct their subjectivities. In other words, through the deployment of

different languages in their graffiti, *Zwewla* confirm that their identities are "A product of

multiple cultures, having a tolerance for ambiguity" (Calafell and McIntosh 18).

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According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity as a political strategy suggests a subjectivity that troubles the boundaries of social classifications and exerts its positive influence by dancing along the borders. They are engaging in border crossing, articulating variegated discourses that are composed of many overlapping forces beyond race and ethnicity. In other words, this nuanced articulation of demands in Arabic but through the usage of two different layers-Tunisian/Marghrebian dialect and modern Arabic- both affirms and resists simultaneously the notion of pan-Arab unity that is widely spread not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but also in the West. The new meaning the caption of this graffiti creates an affirmative shared Arabnesss, while at the same time rejects the non-polyvalent aspects attached to Arabness, and constructs an individual identity of being a Tunisian/Maghrebi. It is a borderless understanding of identity. I will unpack this notion of Arabness more in depth in later examples, but this concept asserts what Calafell and Delgado's discussed in terms of the powerful abilities of visual arts, they affirm that:

> Art has the ability to communicate because it can collect images and artifacts of cultural and ideological resonance and reposition them within a given frame to *echo long-held sentiments while articulating new meanings*. (5, emphasis added)

Hence, these Tunisian political artists employed rhetorical or discursive strategies of identity construction and invention to articulate identities in the making (Calafell and Delgado).

Another frequently used technique in the graffiti is the deployment of assemblage or mixing, a type of "pastiche." The group *Zwewla* mixed many fragments of the Western mainstream discourse to serve their own argument, particularly in the form of images in their graffiti. For instance, the drawing included in this graffiti is the popular Internet meme character "Trollface" or rage comic. Trollface is an Internet character/troll that was originated in the United Stated drawn by the artist Carlos Ramirez; it is a very simple black and white drawing, asymmetrical and with an enormous grin showing two enormous rows of teeth (Brad, "Trollface/Coolface/Problem?"). Due to the unattractiveness of the face, the meme is aptly named. Also, the face is known to appear in rage or sarcastic comics. Hence, the group *Zwewla* borrowed the American Trollface concept, and mixed it with Tunisian/Arab political affects. The graffiti's drawing portrays an angry, desperate trollface. The angry affect shown in the troll's face is an articulation of the text, which communicates discontent and disappointment in a regime that let down its own citizens. Hence, the trollface is an affirmation of the Tunisian/Arab cultural identities expressing frustration and resistance. The angry face of the troll in this graffiti could also suggest that this is a counter-hegemonic message vis-à-vis the Orientalist trope that considers angriness as an Arabic trait. Here, the anger and despair are contextualized in terms of a resistive movement against injustices and exploitation.

As the analysis above suggests, *Zwewla* strategically used the "we/us" rhetoric, assembling/mixing, and satire to concurrently (dis)/identify with a Tunisian, Arab

community (ies) and –at the same time- challenge the mainstream discourse. Constructing a persona as an ordinary Tunisian/Arab citizen and talking in a personal manner, the group of artists turned this graffiti into a conversation in which they shared their personal feelings and demands with a community. This created a unique graffiti-style vernacular rhetoric, which is very different from that of conventional speeches in

which rhetors attempt to "educate" or "preach" to their audience. Moreover, the images drawn by these political artists by default served to create a new look for the Tunisian/Arab community. In

Fig. 2 Graffiti done by *Zwewla*

challenging the preconceptions of the community prevalent in the mainstream media-angry without a cause, passive, supportive of dictatorship, and obedient- these Tunisian graffitists appeared to be expressive, and rebellious in a creative way. Hence, the graffiti is not only counter-hegemonic of the stereotypes of an "Arab" persona is the West, but also resistive of the "obedient" character that the ruling regimes of the Middle East and North Africa have established for years describing its citizens. Seen in this light, this

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graffiti does present a revolutionary call in how they simultaneously create vernacular discourses while contesting mainstream discourses.

Another graffiti drawn by the group *Zwewla* that is worth examining is one that was created after the Tunisian revolution (Figure 2), where there was a rebirth within the Islamist political structure, as they became part of the government following the overthrow of former leader Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011. I found this particular graffiti in the same area as the previous one in Sousse, central East of Tunisia. The graffiti portrays headshots- in black and white- of four personalities with names written in English in upper-cases under their faces. From left to right, the headshots include the following names: BELAID, CHAVEZ, BRAHMI, and MANDELA. Over the faces of Belaid and Brahmi, you can see red ink spots over their faces, signifying blood shots that are also touching the heads of Chavez and Mandela. Finally, the graffiti is signed by the group's name -*Zwewla*- in Arabic. Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid were both opposition leaders, and both were critical of the actions of the new Islamist party. Belaid and Brahimi were assassinated, which created a turmoil in the Tunisian political scene, and forced demonstrators to go back to occupy Avenue Habib Bourgiba (Gall, "Second Opposition Leader"). Also, both Belaid and Brahmi were considered to be symbols of the Tunisian revolution that ousted the dictator regime in Tunisia. Moreover, the presence of the headshots of Hugo Chavez and Nelson Mandela suggest that *Zwewla* embraced these

leaders as political symbols because-similar to the Tunisian graffitists- they fought against marginalization, oppression and suppressing the voice of the people.

Hence, this second graffiti by *Zwewla* is producing culturally specific rhetoric within the Tunisian populations. First, the graffiti represents an affirming vernacular as it speaks to all the Tunisians who are resisting the new political assassinations and supportive of the oppositional leaders who were killed. The drawing is thus syncretic as it protests the mainstream discourse of the new oppressive government that is allowing political violence against the opposition, while simultaneously constructing its own community's rhetoric to engage them.

Moreover, the vernacular discourse in this graffiti is also constructed out of fragments of national and international cultures. The images of Latin-American and African revolutionaries and leaders and other elements from Western culture (the use of the English language) had been co-opted by those young Tunisian graffitists to express their discontent following the post-revolutionary political scene. The vernacular discourse constituted within this graffiti is a form of pastiche of cultures from different elements that have been taken from diverse context, and placed in the graffiti for the purpose of establishing new meanings and effects (Ono and Sloop 23). First, the graffiti could be accessible only to the Tunisian population. Non-Tunisians who are not familiar with the political leaders of Tunisia could misunderstand the placement of Chavez and Mandela in the graffiti. The graffiti in this instance represents what Ono and Sloop call "a broken

language [in this context there are images] [that] cannot be understood by the hegemonic

culture and therefore functions syncretically, to affirm and protest, through a pastiche of

other languages [in this example it is images]" (24). *Zwewla* are thus bringing together

different cultures to create specific cultural expressions for their community. In regards to

this fragmented strategy used by the graffitist to produce their art ("pastiche"), McGee

affirms "Rhetors make discourses from scarps and pieces of evidence. Critical rhetoric

does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation; rather, texts are understood

to be larger than the apparently finished discourse presents itself as transparent" (279).

Hence, the members of the *Zwewla* used fragments of mainstream and diverse

revolutionary images to construct their own subjectivities. Their graffiti represents a

transnational form of art where those graffitist, instead of rejecting the West, they're

embracing it through art and revolutionary symbols, but reinterpreting it to their specific

histories and to match their needs.

Deconstructing Arabness

Tunisians/ Arabs represented through this graffiti constructed subjectivities by

articulating a vernacular discourse that was beyond issues of nationality. For instance, the

first graffiti exemplifies this hybrid and embodied subjectivity. In this graffiti, which

combines Tunisian dialect and modern Arabic, brought to the forefront the diversity

within "Arabness," combating the misconceptions and biases against the notion of the

"one" Arab identity, at least implicitly. Also, *Zwewla*'s artistic works demonstrate that

they, as Tunisians, are not limited to speaking only a Tunisian-specific vernacular discourse in the graffiti. Instead, they rhetorically worked with other vernacular communities and criticized the hegemonic discourse regarding class, nationality, and social oppression. They also tried to construct hybrid vernacular subjectivities in their graffiti by challenging racial and social essentialism, and rhetorically mobilizing a political mobility and solidarity. This also confirms how the "Arab Spring," visually, verbally, and perfomatively- "invent" (Calafell and Delgado) both the Arab subject and collective. In my previous discussion of Orientalism, I mentioned how the Orient was essentially invented and constructed by Western empires in order to execute imperial ambitions and convey cultural superiority (Said), however, from the analysis of the graffiti, we can see how the group *Zwewla* are "re-inventing" the Orient, how the "Arab Spring" is producing knowledge of the Orient. There is agency vis-à-vis the construction of one's identity, discourse, and space.

In the next section, I analyze how the body was used in the revolution to contest oppression and build a community.

Self-immolation/Bouzizi as an Embodied Symbol of the Revolution

Mohamed Bouazizi is a symbol of the Dignity Revolution. Many Tunisians expressed how the 26 year-old fruit vendor was the catalyst of what they called the *Dignity Revolution* after his act of self-immolation in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. Bouazizi's sacrifice inspired many Tunisian protestors and online supporters, and within only 10

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days of his suicide, the 24-year authoritarian regime led by the President Ben Ali was ousted.

Mohamed Bouazizi is a symbol not only for Tunisians, but also for the rest of the Arab world because his actions were an inspiration and a catalyst to fight against the government. All of this testifies to the fact that the blood of Bouazizi has given a heavy duty to the Arab people, Arab elites, political groups and social forces to act. According to several Tunisians, the revolution started in conjunction with the sacrifice of Mohamed Bouazizi because on the day he set himself on fire, a resistance front started organizing and coming together to back the people of Sidi Bouzid, consisting of union members, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and all sections of civil society.

The name "Mohamed Bouazizi" also became a catalyst for other Tunisians citizens, including university students and the unemployed. The Dignity Revolution was largely then a reaction to long-accumulated economic grievances, but without Mohamed Bouazizi, the protests might not have been initiated. Only a few days after Bouazizi's death, a university student named Ali Zarei and Hussein Nagi Felhi, also unemployed, committed suicide by climbing a high-voltage electric power line (Saleh, "Tunisia: IMF"). Furthermore, six months later, at least 107 Tunisians tried to kill themselves by setting themselves on fire ("Tunisia one year on: New Trend of Self-Immolations"). These incidents made the issue of Bouazizi's death even bigger as their self-harming behaviors might have triggered people to think about the reasons that would let these

young people find death more attractive than life. These incidents also reinforced

Bouazizi's status as a hero and led revolutionary actions of the oppressed Tunisian youth

to fight for their dignity. Bouazizi's body represented the unfairly oppressed crying out in

anger, and symbolized the oppressed Tunisians who, afraid, could not speak out.

However, his brave action allowed their anger to explode at the same time and start the

revolution together as a society. Mohamed Bouazizi, the first martyr of the Arab

Revolution, chose to die for the cause of living in dignity. This also affirms the argument

that self- immolation, in this situation, conveys a rhetorical act; it is "a powerful

rhetorical act that utilizes self-inflicted violence as a means of performing a visual

embodiment of violence done by an 'other'" (Murray Yang 2). The resonance of the

performative act of self-immolation creates an embodied space of resistance, activism

and agency.

Challenging Domination Through the Use of the Body

Using cultural syncretism, pastiche, embodied/performative vernacular and Hardt

and Negri's concept of power, I examine how self-immolation's vernacular discourse

interacts with mainstream discourses. By doing so, I seek to extend Ono and Sloop's

theoretical approach, an approach originally theorized within print media to include the

material body. First, Hardt and Negri argue that the sovereign, as defined by Foucault as

that which has power over life and death, "Relies on the consent or submission of the

dominated" (*Multitude* 54). Second, Calafell and McIntosh call for a focus on turning

towards "discourses of the body" and its performances to consider the "body as/is

rhetoric/al" (6). For instance, in Tunisia, under the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali, the

oppressive government restricted political and economic freedom, simultaneously

tolerating local corrupted government (Anderson). Therefore, Ben Ali had absolute

power over the lives of his citizens. However, the weakness of the Ben Ali's government

was exploited when those in the margins rejected the regime by turning life itself,

through the destruction of their own body, into a weapon (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*

54). Hence, the Tunisian citizen relied on the body as an embodied political power to

defy the dominant ideologies. Following Ono and Sloop, Delgado and Calafell, and

Holling and Calafell's approach, I treat the act of self-immolation's vernacular discourse

as performative and embodied. To elaborate more on the politics of the body, Calafell

and McIntosh state that, "Embodied rhetoric derives from the materiality of the body and

its negotiations in relation to hegemonic rhetorical discourses" (3). In other words,

vernacular discourse is performative in the sense that the line between vernacular and

mainstream content is always fluid. Specifically, "Performance as a theoretical trajectory

reveals the body as a site of knowing and doing. When we focus here agency is returned

to the body" (Calafell and McIntosh 14-15). In that sense, within this performative

framework, there is a privileging of the body as a space for empowerment and resistance

opening up for new possibilities. On the other hand, the concept of "cultural syncretism"

suggests that the creation of vernacular rhetoric and the contestation of mainstream

discourse happen simultaneously. To this point, Hardt and Negri explicitly contend that

self-immolation (as well as suicide bombing) radically challenges the absolute authority

of the sovereign power (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 332). The destruction of one's own

body can be seen as a rejection of the subjugation of the sovereign power, by reclaiming

one's own political freedom and agency through death. Calafell and McIntosh affirm that,

> Embodied rhetoric derives from the materiality of the body and its
> negotiations in relation to hegemonic rhetorical discourses. Thus,
> communities may organize around 'ideas' […], but vernaculars of the
> body are carved out by marginalized bodies intrinsic to their difference
> from the dominant; this is not a community built on ideas, but a
> community build on their embodied difference. (3)

Therefore, there is a rejection of oppression while at the same time a creation of new

subjectivity (cultural syncretism).

The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi created a new subjectivity among the

Arab populations, exemplifying a complete and absolute rebuttal to the oppressive

government,

> When life itself is negated in the struggle to challenge sovereignty, the
> power over life and death that the sovereign exercises becomes useless.
> The absolute weapons against bodies are neutralized by the voluntary and
> absolute negation of the body. (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 332)

The widespread vernacular vis-à-vis Bouzizi's sacrifice for justice allowed the

Tunisian revolution to create a wave of liberatory demonstrations throughout the Arab

region. The performance of self-immolation created a new look of the Arab body and

subjectivity; in other words, "The aesthetic qualities of [this] performance disrupt[ed]

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representational politics and jar[red] correlations between the politics of the body and discourse" (Calafell and McIntosh 11, based on Foust's concept of resistance as a mode of transgression). Hence, Mohamed Bouazizi's actions flourished a revolutionary spirit within the "youth bulge" that is present in Middle Eastern societies, "60 percent of the population is under 25 years old, with a median age of 24" (Al-Momani 161). Young people within these nations have been unable to achieve their potential because of the rising unemployment and poverty. This has lead to an enormous dissatisfied young population eager to create change. Tunisians identified with Bouzizi's performative act and employed the "one of us" rhetorical strategy to keep the momentum of the revolution alive. The new subjectivity created by Bouazizi ignited the flame that was waiting to be lit, "with their freedoms continuously thwarted and confused, their socio-economic states declining, and their education lacking the necessary facets for progressive social action, it took only a spark to ignite the masses" (Al-Momani 162).

Language as a Vernacular Discourse

This section investigates the explanatory power of language usage in describing why the "Arab Spring" is both a local and transnational regional phenomenon. Language is a critical component of the "Arab Spring" uprisings. In countries, like Tunisia, where certain kinds of speech and particularly anti-regime expression are monitored, regulated, and punishable by both legal and extra-legal means, an imperative like "*Dégage*" ("leave/ get out") is interpreted by the regime as action. Language mixing and code switching

between modern Arabic, colloquial Arabic, French, and English in the context of the

"Arab Spring" reflect an intended level of audience engagement and involvement. In the

"Arab Spring," involvement is a choice the chanter makes after determining a

communicative aim and finally delivering it at a code choice based on her/his perception

of the intended audience. The chants are designed to increase public engagement and

sustain the tenor of the uprisings in order to provoke the revolutionary movement, or

action. The language of the "Arab Spring" is a critical form of action. The shouted

slogans of the demonstrators take the form of couplets with predictable and simple

rhyming patterns that set the tone and meter of the protests. These revolutionary chants

and slogans,

> carry the sentiments and objectives of the revolutionaries across national
> and international borders, down streets and alleys, but also transmit the
> entitlement, the right, the messages, and the drive to revolt into the mouths
> and feet of the public at large, but also into the language of spectators
> who, in turn, are driven to activism. (Colla, "The Poetry of Revolt")

In participating in a protest one understands her/his words to be a form of

revolutionary activism, or involvement. In most cases, the language of the "Arab Spring"

slogans has been mainly colloquial Arabic (mixed with French and English words),

which, this research argues, contributes to the transnationalism of the uprisings because

dialects are perceived to be the authentic speech of the people and therefore travel more

easily across borders. With the words of the people echoing across borders, revolutionary

action is inspired. Elliot Colla ("The Poetry of Revolt") explains that the "slogans the

protestors are chanting are couplets—and they are as loud as they are sharp." This poetry

is "not an ornament to the uprising," but rather it is a veritable "soundtrack and also

composes a significant part of the action itself" (Colla, "The Poetry of Revolt"). In the

"Arab Spring" uprisings, then, poets are warriors. This analysis suggests that the chanters

in the uprisings believe the revolution to be popular and, while they perceive their

audiences to be Arabs of all nationalities, they choose to speak and be moved by

colloquial rather than modern Arabic. While the regime speaks modern Arabic, the

protestors speak their dialects to engage locals and use modern Arabic to interact with

and spread the revolution regionally.

The People Naming the Movement: Is it a Revolution or a Spring?

The terminology used to describe the revolutionary movements that swept the

Middle Eats and North Africa have been very diverse and different from one country to

the other, and one media outlet to the other. One of the phrases that received most of the

popularity, specifically, among Western nations is the term "Arab Spring." Conversely,

as I arrived in Tunis, from the Taxi driver who picked me up from the airport, to the

receptionist at the hotel I stayed in, I started realizing how incorrect and offensive the use

of the phrase "Arab Spring" is to the people. According to many of the people I talked to,

the reasoning behind the inappropriateness of the phrase the "Arab Spring" is that it does

not reflect the sacrifices and the reforms that citizens, specifically of Tunisia, have

endured. This phrase is dismissive of the people's struggles and what they have fought

for throughout the revolts. Upon my discussions and conversations with several Tunisian men and women, I've come to learn the different words they use to communicate the revolutionary movements in Tunisia. First, the Tunisian people employ the term "Thawra," meaning revolution in Arabic to refer to their political actions and what they have being doing throughout the revolutions. Second, when Tunisians describe the communal revolutionary movements across the region, they describe it by deploying the terms "Thawarat" (meaning revolutions), "Intifada" (meaning uprising), "Nahda" (meaning renaissance), and "Karama" (meaning dignity). However, the terminology that is preferred among several men and women in Tunisia is the phrase "Thawrat Al Mowaten Alaarabi" (the revolution of the Arab citizen), referring to the holistic meaning behind the revolutionary movement and how it is a call for democracy and social justice for all citizens in the region. This phrase translates the activism, engagement, and agency that people have embodied since the birth of the Arab states.

Hence, several Tunisians find the term "Arab Spring" a weak detonator of the movement, and an illusive lens that does not mirror the reality of the unlimited demonstrations and protests that are still taking the streets of the Arab world. According to several Tunisians I talked to, the phrase "Arab Spring" implies the notion of waking up in the spring season after taking a long-term sleep during the winter. This notion communicates that Arab people throughout the region enjoyed being passive citizens under dictatorships without arising and revolting. This idea is indeed dismissive of the

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social and political actions that the people of the region have taken before, during, and after the revolutions or the "Arab Spring." Another critique by the Tunisian people is that the word spring denotes a seasonal passage, a temporary movement, rather than an enduring reformative movement. This transitory implication of the "Arab Spring" rejects the long-term demands of the revolution, and minimizes the fights and struggles the revolutionaries have experienced. To many of the Tunisians, the movements were not a "spring" as it caused the deaths and injuries of many citizens who resisted the authorities.

Other citizens that I talked to in Tunisia also expressed how the term "Arab Spring" expresses the legacy of Orientalist tropes in explaining events vis-à-vis the movements. This specific terminology reinforces the inevitable narratives of the clash between the West and the East; a logic that demonizes the revolutions and flattens the complex realities of the "Arab Spring" and its subjectivities. It also essentializes the revolutionaries by depicting them as agentless victims of their respective political regimes who have finally awakened from their submissive and voluntary oppression. In other words, revolutionary, self-determinant, self-assertive Arab citizenries are not tied to a season, but rather to a vocabulary of movement and resistance. Hence, changing the language that frames the revolutions is one of the first steps into breaking the Orientalist's inherent legacies and reclaiming agency. Discarding the phrase "Arab Spring" and using an active and resistive terminology is the initial point into fully learning about the revolutionary body of these movements.

The Cultural (re)Production of Revolutionary Chants

One of the creations of the Tunisian revolution is the originality of its poetry that the revolutionists developed into "couplet-slogans" as a means of the uprising. The chants should be seen as a "language uprising" first (and a verbal occupation of the public space). Those chants created a vocabulary that defies the public fear of speaking against governmental institutions and its holders. D. Soyini Madison citing Jan Cohen-Cruz on street performance argues, "Cohen-Cruz writes, 'When one needs most to disturb the peace, street performance creates visions of what society might be and arguments against what it is.'" (167). Hence, when the people started shouting out the chants expressing their discontent with the oppressive regime, they fractured a chain of years of censorship, of speaking up against injustices. Couplet-slogans such as "*We will not remain silent/quiet*" and "*No fear, no horror, power to the people,*" created an atmosphere where the Tunisian citizens, for the first time, can practice their right to free speech. The chants also created a sense of community and collectivism that unified the Tunisian people and brought them together for action. The chants also created a political platform, and social stand against the regime from a public space (something that was exclusive to private spaces).

Most of the mottos, either chanted or written came with new social, economic, and political demands to the government, as well as exposing the corrupted actions of the government and the leaders. The following are examples of the chants I recorded during

my fieldwork in Tunisia, which –occupied- and still occupying the new political public sphere in the country:

"To the Government of thieves, Employment is our right," "Employment, freedom, and collective dignity." "Free, free Tunisia, and the Assassins out"

Dégage!

Ennahda dehors. Assassins out.

Ennahda Assassin

Tunisie Libre. Trabelsi: voleurs dehors.

Game over

Dégage

Dégage is one of the iconic mottos of the Tunisian revolution. Dégage is a French term used in the colloquial Tunisian dialect meaning "leave/ get out" in reference to the uprising in 2011 to overthrow the president Ben Ali and his government. The phrase got its popularity during the January 14th uprising in Lhbib Bourgiba Street from determined protesters denouncing the corrupted and abusive actions of the government.

Dégage is also seen at the "symbol" of the Tunisian anger that did not only mirror the people's discontent with the government, but also forced president Ben Ali to leave the government and escape. Hence, Dégage was transformed into a political motto that symbolizes a unified voice of the Tunisian people coming together to challenge a dictatorship and revolt against the police state. The Tunisian people gave a new meaning

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to the French word "Dégage" that it does not only mean "leave or get out," but it's rather redefined as call for democracy, for change, and hope.

The term "*Dégage*" has also outspread to other Arab states, including Libya, Egypt, and Syria. Using the Arab form of "*Dégage=Ir7al*," the people in those countries have been repeating the phrase " *Ir7al ya Mubarak*," "*Ir7al ya Morsi*," "*Ir7la ya Bashar*," "*Ir7al ya Qaddafi*," voicing their discontent with the government and calling for an outcast of those leaders. The following is the original chant entitled Dégage by Joumaa Boualib, which is still repeated in the streets of Tunis by thousands of demonstrators as a symbol of the continuation of the revolution,

"Dégage!" for the sun to come back

Dégage so that safety that we knew before you occupied us comes back

Dégage so that we can taste the bread and olive oil without sorrow or a fight

Dégage so that we can bring back the hope to rebuild our dreams

Dégage!...

So that our fears from you can leave us

So that we can be able to sleep without nightmares

Without spies in our windows

or espionage agents in our skies

Dégage!

So that we can finally breathe

Dégage!.....

I spent quite a bit of time walking all around Tunis to speak with Tunisians from different walks of life, but mostly to get a feel for the rhythms of street life and the public arena that ultimately will shape the course of Tunisia 's future. Experiencing my first demonstration that was taking place in Lhbib Bourgiba was most noteworthy mainly for showing how Tunisians are continuing struggles for freedom, dignity, democracy and whatever other desired objectives ordinary Arab men and women seek as they continue exiting from the dark chamber of their frozen history of the past half century or so.

Another important motto to the Tunisian revolution is "*Bread and water and Ben Ali No*." This is a very unique motto to the Tunisian revolution that was not seen in the rest of the Arab world. The protesters repeated, "*Bread and water and Ben Ali No*." The motto sent a clear message to the government that the revolution is not only about the poor living conditions of the people and the high food inflation that Tunisia is experiencing, but it's about reclaiming agency and dignity from the police state the corrupted government. The Tunisians I had the opportunity to talk to expressed that the mottos of the Tunisian Revolution was a call for "*dignity before bread*." The motto was an awakening call for the ex-president Ben Ali communicating that people will not be controlled by subsided bread anymore, in return for absolute power to the government.

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Implications of Dégage

The term *Dégage* speaks directly to critical rhetoricians as it is a call to focus on the rhetoric of the oppressed. As they define it, vernacular discourse is "Speech that resonates within local communities. This discourse is neither accessible in its entirety, nor is it discoverable except through texts. However, vernacular discourse is also culture: the music, art, criticism, dance, and architecture of local communities" (Ono and Sloop 20). In other words, the Tunisian colloquial term *Dégage* was only accessible to the local Tunisians, its significance was not accessible to non-Tunisians.

Hence, as a vernacular discourse, the chanting of the phrase *Dégage* affirms the culture it expresses. In other words, the syncretic aspect of *Dégage* is a discourse that is not just in opposition to the dominant regime in Tunisia, but expressive of vernacular beliefs and subjectivities. It is affirmative of the hybrid Tunisian subjectivity that crosses the borders between French and Arabic. It is a language of a multicultural identity. However, using the French terminology as the main slogan in the Tunisian revolution could also be seen as reinforcing the dominant ideology of colonial and imperial mentality that embraces French means as a way of liberation, specifically that Tunisia was a French colony. According to the French president, Francois Hollande, "Speaking French, is also speaking the language of human rights because human rights were inscribed in the French language" ("Allocution de Son Excellence Monsieur François Hollande Président "). In other words, Hollande reinforces the idea that language and

culture are intertwined: if you speak French, you think French, you act French, and you embrace stronger ties with France. Therefore, speaking French in the Tunisian revolution could maintain the dominance of the French over their former colony by taking credit for the uprisings. But on the other hand, the usage of the term *Dégage* has always been paired with Arabic words, there has always been a mixing of Arabic and French in this revolutionary slogan, such as *"Dégage ya Ben Ali,"* *"Dégage ya Shafar."* Therefore, this fragmented deployment of different languages from two different cultures is creating new effects (pastiche). As Ono and Sloop write: "Pastiche implies that vernacular discourse may borrow from, without mimicking, popular culture" (23). This borrowing from a Western culture and mixing it with an Arabic culture allows vernacular communities to constitute their own cultures outside the hegemonic ideology, but also means that fragments of dominant ideology-French- may find themselves expressed within vernacular discourses. However, Dégage resulted in a transformative end. The chanted slogan transformed from being the rhetoric of the oppressed to being a dominant voice that changed the system, and ousted the authoritarian regime.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I use the synthesized concept of "embodied vernacular discourse" to examine graffiti, language, and self-immolation's vernacular discourse from three angles: content, agency, and subjectivity. I found that analyzed vernacular discourses did demonstrate some revolutionary potential.

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First, this analysis communicates how my mother's performance in Avenue

Lahbib Bourgiba is a manifestation of the participation of Muslim and Arab women in

the "Arab Spring." Her performance conveys a complex discursive and embodied

multiplicity that refuses the binary of looking of at conflicts/revolutions from a "gender-

emancipatory discourses" versus "gender-subordinate," and reinforces the arguments that

the experiences of women in the "Arab Spring" are significantly more diverse, both in

terms of the day-to-day-life and in terms of political significance. My mother's

performance created a space where possible alliances between difference and diverse

bodies are formed in their efforts for justice.

Second, *Zwewla* specifically challenged the hegemonic views about

Tunisians/Arabs while simultaneously establishing their own vernacular rhetoric and thus

(re)building a new community through the graffiti. They also constructed hybrid

subjectivities by travelling along the borders of different vernacular communities, and

deconstructing the differences among Tunisians/Maghrebis and Arabs. Indeed, *Zwewla*'s

vernacular discourses are "Fragmented, unconnected, even contradictory or momentarily

oppositional" (McKerrow 451). Their graffiti represents a transnational form of art where

those graffitist, instead of rejecting the West, they're embracing it through art and

revolutionary symbols, but reinterpreting it to their specific histories and to match their

needs.

Moreover, the revolutionary language used in the uprisings is an important finding to note. The language is affirmative of the hybrid Tunisian subjectivity that crosses the borders between French and Arabic. It is a language of a multicultural identity. Another important finding of this study is the agency created through self-immolation. The destruction of one's own body can be seen as a rejection of the subjugation of the sovereign power, by reclaiming one's own political freedom and agency through death. Therefore, there is a rejection of oppression while at the same time a creation of new subjectivity. Bouzizi's death created a subjectivity among the Arab populations, exemplifying a complete and absolute rebuttal to the oppressive government. Therefore, this analysis affirms the argument within rhetorical criticism that rhetoric is both affirmative and counter-hegemonic (See Burke; Boyd; Ono and Sloop; Holling and Calafell).

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS OF VERNACULAR DISCOURSE IN THE "ARAB

SPRING"

Arabizing Vernacular Discourse

Returning to the research questions I posed at the beginning of this project, the

graffiti, the chants, and the act of self-immolation constitute an embodied vernacular

rhetoric through their execution of enduring rhetorical transactions surrounding cultural

(re)production of discourses. The vernacular discourses created during the "Arab Spring"

accomplished the construction of arguments for the uprisings and against the

authoritarian regimes, as well as a resistive momentum, through the primarily use of

those means. As suggested, the graffiti, and the revolutionary chants challenged the

hegemonic frames and discourses surrounding the Arab subjectivities. In terms of policy,

the government in Tunisia responded by limiting vernacular contestation through painting

over the walls that contain the graffiti, for example. At the same time, the circulation of

the chants, the graffiti and the act of self-immolation, functioned rhetorically to challenge

mainstream media coverage of the movement and the people.

The Arab uprisings, thus, brought attention to vernacular discourse as medium of

dissent, through acts of self-immolation, street chants, and graffiti. They reaffirmed the

centrality of the vernacular, more specifically, in public struggles around cultural, social,

and economic ideals that are bound to animate the emerging body politic. The visibility

and appearance of vernacular discourse are indicative of the characteristics of larger

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dilemmas around national identity and political participation in the Arab states. Scholars have long argued that orientalist discourses about the voices and the bodies of Arabs and Muslims reinforce processes of domination and Othering in a neocolonial context (Abu Lughod; Ahmed; Puar, Said). What this project attempted to highlight is the need to investigate the Arab vernacular, beyond orientalist gaze, as a discursive site for political-meaning making within national histories that are informed by but irreducible to colonial experience. Hence, unpacking and distinguishing local political discourses disturbs the fixed binaries of East/West, and provides more insights to the realities of these subjectivities. It gives agency to Arab subjectivities to (re)create the Orient and its knowledge production.

The vernacular discourses in the "Arab Spring" also addressed the role of citizen in steering a democracy through an examination of the rhetoric that influenced the general climate of public spheres and public opinion, and created a political public sphere. The vernaculars of the Arab Spring created a solid argument in the region that the citizen matters. It started to put in place the essential building blocks of democratic systems; from the implementation of pluralistic citizen participation, to creating more mechanisms of accountability. The vernaculars of the people implemented these rules in the soil of Tunisia. The graffiti, the acts of self-immolation, and the chants disclosed how members of the Tunisian society discovered and clarified their shared interests and engaged in exchanges that shaped their opinions on issues of common interest. Paying

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close attention to how members of society engage in public dialogue reveals a picture of citizens who are contentious on matters that affect their lives. This project contributes to the conceptual framework, of vernacular discourse, to understand how the rhetorical character of formal and informal communication is formed, expressed, and how it shapes identities. It also explores the role of cultural production of discourses in shaping the recent political transformations in Tunisia.

More importantly, the project of examining Arabs' communicative expressions is crucial in highlighting the "voices" of the people, and in creating new ways of understanding communication in postcolonial/neocolonial settings. The vernacular discourses of the "Arab Spring" voice specific communicative practices from localized Arab communities and explore their significance for Arab subjectivities and the politics of national and cultural belonging. The chants, the acts of self-immolation, and the graffiti sought to explore the plurality of Arab discourse and cultural expression, the resonances that make a pan-Arab identity, as well as the hybridity that comes from multiple voices and bodies. The goal of this project is forwarding a theoretical and methodological grounding for the study of Arab communication, or vernacular discourse. In other words, through the employment of a "metatheory" (Holling and Calafell), this research systematizes a model for studying Arab voices and symbolic practices sensitive to a nuanced understanding of embodiment, identity, resistance and power.

This deployment of a metatheoretical perspective could be seen through an overview of the chapters of this research project. For instance, the first chapter of the dissertation explores the multiple foundational elements in the knowledge production of discourses around the "Arab Spring," as well as the general mediated construction of the "Orient," including the history of the theoretical foundations of the study of Orientalism as a critical theory and Orientalist feminism as they relate to the field of communication more generally and rhetoric more specifically. The second chapter examines the importance of theorizing through the body and lived experiences to advocate for challenging dominant binaries and producing alternative discourses to the understanding of activism and resistance in the Arab uprisings. Building on Muslim feminism as an extension of theories of the flesh, where Muslim feminists theorize through their lived experiences and link the personal to the political, which offers a metatheoretical framework to explore the close relationship between the role that voice, verbalization and embodied expression in constructing and challenging representation. The "fleshing" as a theoretical platform provides a nuanced approach to applying vernacular discourse as methodology to the analysis of discourses on race, postcolonialism, resistance, democratic reforms, borders, trans/national identity and the voices of expression crafted by Arab communities in response. The final chapter surveys the Tunisian "Arab Spring" as a case study to critically analyze the cultural (re)production of the uprisings, from the border blurring elements of the usage of hybrid vernaculars in the graffiti and the chants,

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to bodily performances of street demonstrations and self-immolation. This chapter

deconstructs how voices of normal citizens engage in trans/national political issues and

negotiate dominant discourses of nation, justice, and inclusion. Extending on Calafell and

Holling's theoretical conceptualization of Latina/o vernacular discourse, which describes

Latin@ voices as those that "interact with and against prevailing discourses about and/or

concerning Latin@s" and entail both "liberatory and constraining dimensions" (xvii); this

research project expands to include Arab voices and bodies that also contest

marginalizing relationships and representations, while at the same time construct their

subjectivities in a multifarious dynamic process. The vernacular discourse of the "Arab

Spring" furthers people of color's scholarship to integrate Arab voices and bodies by

calling for an interdisciplinary approach to studying Arab communicative expressions.

The practices of the Arab citizen in the uprisings revealed a "liberatory" voice that is

worth of study and analysis, a voice that is both "precious and tenuous" (Ono and Sloop).

    In other words, vernacular discourses of the "Arab Spring" created complex

articulations of identity construction and performances in "new/complex" political spaces

that embrace and challenge –simultaneously- dominant ideologies and cultural practices.

This complex conceptualization of vernacular discourses of the revolutionary body in this

project opens up issues of agency, identity, and representation that have been merely

discussed in dichotomous ways, and voices a revisionist model of reading Arab

communicative practices to move beyond reductionism and embrace multiplicity to "Be

heard in a variety of ways, and in different positionalities" (Holling and Calafell xviii).

The project also highlighted the importance of understanding citizens' ways of communicating conflict, and the significance of holding active communicative practices that enable power-negotiations between citizens and the leaders.

The Contextualization of the Content Contribution of this Project

In many ways the "Arab Spring" can largely be understood as the movement of voices, bodies, ideas, and political and social objectives across political borders through the medium of visual, textual, and embodied vernaculars. This analysis has demonstrated how the "Arab Spring" that started with Bouazizi's self-immolation in December 2010, which initiated a regional revolt strengthened by a set of solid principles and demands developed not in the pages of a scholarly article or the work of a recognizable analyst but through the bodies of normal citizens and the improvised protest-slogans that circulated in the congested squares of Arab neighborhoods from Tunisia to Syria. The vernacular discourses of the "Arab Spring" destroyed the censorships and the fears that kept the voices and the bodies of the Arab citizens "hidden" for years in their respective countries. The cultural (re)production of the vernacular from blazing revolutionary language as *"karama"* (dignity), *"assulta lisha'b"* (power to the people), and *"thawra"* (revolution) grave new meanings to voices and to the identities of the people. It reconstructed a powerful active vernacular and gave rise to new citizenry and active political spheres.

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The "Arab Spring" has proven that even with the high security control that citizens endured for years, the dynamic, counter-narrative discourses that were articulated by countless individuals overtook the regime's rhetoric, and indeed its control over of the people and the state. The spontaneity of people's vernaculars also helped make the uprisings unstoppable and inevitable in the face of control.

The chants of the revolution, the language of revolution, and the performance of the revolution provide critical socio- and politico-vernacular contexts that contribute to a fuller understanding of the overall regional situation and the localized iterations of the Arab revolutionary moment. In Tunisia, the critical vernacular discourse analyses of the graffiti and the language help to demonstrate and interpret mass-scale popular reactions in and outside of a politico-vernacular context. Relying largely on the framing works of Ono and Sloop, Calafell, and Holling and Calafell, my findings support the theory that vernacular discourse act as a carrier and conveyor of revolutionary sentiments, as well as a visible validator of the voices and bodies of the marginalized who created an identification space allowing the people to embody the *"thawra"* (revolution).

It is also important to note how the "Arab Spring" has stemmed from a multilateral historicity, which requires specific attention rather than broad generalizations. My mother's opening piece in the beginning of Chapter Four, which articulated her participation in the street protest and her reiteration of the poem *"The will to live"* to the Tunisian poet Abu Al Kacem Chebbi from the 1930s, is especially

memorable moment for its preface that reminds the reader/researcher that Arab revolts and reform movements are nothing new and cannot be simply ascribed to the emergence of Twitter or a seasonal "awakening" of a people. It is also an acknowledgement that each performance and form of the uprising in the Middle East and North Africa is Arab and not an abnormality or a victory for the seemingly non-Arab "West." To assume or argue otherwise would underestimate the revolutionaries and perpetuate the most devious of stereotypes that essentialize a diverse grouping of peoples as somehow unthinking, stationary, complacent automatons rather than vibrant, reflexive, intelligent, thoughtful human beings capable of discerning their own destinies and, indeed, in the words of Edward Said, able to speak truth to power.

As for the brave individuals who continue to struggle against violent oppression, and express themselves fearlessly with a newfound strength and collective consciousness that gave birth to the "Arab Spring" and its many vernaculars and socio-political identities, it is critical that academia respect the absolutely irreducible complexities of what these demonstrators, artists, and everyday citizens are doing. From Michelle Holling and Bernadette Callafell to Lila Abu- Lughod, they formulate the discourse of identity formation within a vernacular of overlapping tensions that is vital to consider in analyzing the inter-relations of vernaculars, resistance, and national identity in the "Arab Spring." Identity formation, according to Abu-Lughod, takes place "Between practices and their justifications, between ideals and behavior, between simple prescriptions and

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multiple interpretations, between a sense of the universal and the complexity of local and individual experience" (25). Indeed, the identities of the revolutionaries protesting in Tunisia and across the Arab region are being formed and re-formed in the between spaces of politics, society, culture, religion, economics, and, importantly, the vernacular. Hence, the revolutionaries created "Spaces for connection across difference based on shared feelings of Otherness, [and/] or collectively should not be downplayed where there are possibilities for coalition building, particularly in contemporary political climates" (Holling and Calafell 22).

My findings also illustrate examples that resonate with the theory and the praxis of vernacular discourse, in the case of the "Arab Spring," it acted as a carrier and conveyor of revolutionary sentiments. The graffiti artists, *Zwewla*, challenged the hegemonic views about Tunisians/ Arabs while simultaneously establishing their own vernacular rhetoric and thus (re)building a new community through the graffiti. They also constructed hybrid subjectivities by travelling along the borders of different vernacular communities, and deconstructing the differences among Tunisians/Maghrebis and Arabs. Their graffiti represents a transnational form of art where those graffitist, instead of rejecting the West, they're embracing it through art and revolutionary symbols, but reinterpreting it to their specific histories and to match their needs. Moreover, the revolutionary language used in the uprisings is an important finding to note. The language is affirmative of the hybrid Tunisian subjectivity that crosses the borders

between French and Arabic. It is a language of a multicultural identity. Another important finding of this study is the agency created through self-immolation. The destruction of one's own body can be seen as a rejection of the subjugation of the sovereign power, by reclaiming one's own political freedom and agency through death. Hence, the usage of the graffiti, revolutionary and hybrid language, and self-immolation, serve as an event-catalyst by providing communicative expressions that can readily and quickly travel across borders. These communicative expressions are tools and weapons in the hands of the graffiti artists, and the mouths of the demonstrators as they offer a resource and technique with which to strengthen a resistance on the individual and collective levels against what they articulated as domination, corruption, injustice, or simply the stagnation of the status quo. These voices, images, words, rhythms, and bodies form a vernacular of opposition that can, as this research project argues, be considered the language of the "Arab Spring," and it is a vernacular used transnationally in the Arab region that in and of itself is a critical form of revolutionary activism. That said, it can also be, and is, used to push physical actions towards social change to further a regional, yet highly localized, political reform agenda.

The vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" initially aimed at initiating the breakdown of long-time dictators and succeeded with incredible rapidity at ousting the regime of Tunisia's Ben Ali in the case of Tunisia. The vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" communicates a set of attitudes and ideologies that are, arguably, born out of a

spirit of anger and frustration, and the desire to improve one's standing and change society, and the nation state, for the better. This revolutionary spirit is perhaps summarized best in the political transnational phrase that swept across Tunisia and the rest of the Arab region, and built the collective political consciousness: *"Dégage"*(leave).

Synthesizing an Assemblage of a Hybrid Articulation of Vernacular Discourse

The contextualization of vernacular discourse in the study of the "Arab Spring" suggests the importance of considering "hybridity" as a characteristic of vernacular discourse in terms of its subjectivity, agency and content. Through the case study of Tunisia, this research shows how and to what extent a vernacular discourse is hybridized in terms of these characteristics. Hence, I call for critical rhetoricians to use hybridity as a political strategy to read the construction of subjectivities in their respective vernaculars. As such, I suggest the following model of analysis to consider while studying vernaculars of the "Arab Spring":

1. Examining the Hybrid Assemblages of Agency

In this research project, I treated the agencies of the vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" as hybrid. By agency, I refer to the ability of an agent to act in either the textual, or visual, or embodied spaces of a specific context (in the case of the "Arab Spring" it is an assemblage of vernaculars). The agencies that help generate the vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" are hybrid in that personal and institutional agencies are intertwined in the making of these vernaculars. On the one hand, the popular

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Tunisian graffiti on the walls of the street claim a type of personal agency, and indeed individuals do have the agency to post their own arts and political demands on the walls and articulate their vernacular voices. On the other hand, the street walls, the platform on which these vernacular voices are shared, is institutional. It is a space controlled by the security apparatuses of the government that could arrest people for "polluting" the public sphere. Hence, the graffitists analyzed in this research had to negotiate their own personal agency with the government's institutional agency to participate in the public sphere. In order for them to practice their art in a public space, they had to embrace the government's rules of survival. One important rule of survival is making the graffiti at night-when no one is watching- to avoid the government's surveillance and restrictions. As such, this mode of analysis suggests the significance of exploring how citizens' personal agencies and government's institutional agency collectively shape or constrain vernacular discourses on either private or pubic spheres, and in particular, how political graffitists in this case cope with the government's priority for social order.

2. Examining the Hybrid Assemblages of Content

Vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" extends Ono and Sloop's (2005) theoretical approach, an approach originally theorized within print media, to the graffiti, chants and bodily acts. The research also builds on Holling and Calafell's conceptualization of Latin@ Vernacular Discourse to include Arab subjectivities. Using these approaches, I studied the vernacular discourse as hybrid. In the case of the "Arab

Spring," the usage of language is a manifestation of a hybrid Tunisian identity that crosses the borders between French and Arabic. It is a language of a multicultural identity. The hybrid content of the graffiti exposes a complex way to describe and analyze the people of the Middle East and North Africa. The close-analysis of the hybrid content of the graffiti, for instance, brought to the forefront the diversity within "Arabness," combating the misconceptions and biases against the notion of the "one" Arab identity. Furthermore, while there are studies that have looked at the role of popular mediated images as a medium for deconstructing representations and agency, very few of them have conducted systematic discourse analyses on the content of the vernacular, a gap this research project aims to fulfill. Hence, it is important for rhetoricians to analyze content from a hybrid lens to uncover issues related to their studied communities, and challenge traditional constructionism of identities that is prevalent in mainstream discourses.

3. Examining the Hybrid Assemblages of Subjectivity

This research project on the vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" brought attention to the significance of analyzing how normal citizens use hybridity as a political strategy to construct their subjectivities. The deployment of hybridity as a political strategy refers to a subjectivity that troubles the boundaries of social classifications and exerts its positive influence by dancing along the borders (Bhabha). In other words, the hybridization of subjectivity disrupts its traditional formation, and establishes a queer and

ambiguous subjectivity, which offers a new space where the discursive (re/de)constructedness is witnessed. That is to say, for a critical discourse analysis, it is important to engage in border crossing, articulating variable discourses that are composed of many overlapping forces beyond focusing on one single identity. For instance, the deployment of different languages in the Tunisian chants, such as *Dégage*, challenges the essentialized categorizations that reinforce a Euro-Americo-centric perspective of an authentic "Arabness," and employs a hybridity strategy that articulate discourses by traveling along the borders of several intersecting groups involved in subjectivity construction (e.g., Arabs/Tunisians/Maghrebians/ French; an assemblages of multiple cultures and historicity).

To summarize, the synthesizing of a hybrid articulation of vernacular discourse urges scholars to consider the vernacular discourse of the "Arab Spring" as hybrid in terms of subjectivity, content, and agency; and explore their hybridization processes. The project also calls for employing hybridity as a political strategy to examine how everyday citizens use this method to (re/de)constructing their subjectivities.

Expanding the Project on the "Arab Spring"

Assessing the relational efficacy of vernacular discourses in shaping the revolutionary body in the "Arab Spring" requires an examination of the different Arab States as well as the conduct of interviews of different voices from the region to provide a more holistic study of the Arab vernacular. The participant observation I engaged in

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helped construct an embodied vernacular, which adds an important dimension of credibility to what I termed the "resonance" of my arguments about the relationship between the vernacular discourse and the (re/de) construction of Arab subjectivities. However, as I started the collection of my data in July 2013 (during the ousting of the Egyptian former president Mohammed Morsi), the Internal Review Board (IRB) advised me not to conduct interviews with the revolutionists in the region, as not to endanger their beings or mine, as a researcher, and wait till the turmoil is resolved. Hence, for next year, I will seek another approval from the IRB to conduct further interviews with informants in the Arab region and revisit my findings of the vernacular. Besides, another significant step for this research project is to further analyze the different vernaculars deployed in the different Arab states and conduct a comparative analysis of those vernaculars. Although this step would require collaboration and larger research funds to cover travel research expenses, the findings will conceptualize Arab vernacular discourse on a much larger scale.

The other step moving forward for this study, I suggest that it is also significant to explore how "affect scholarship" would add new ways of thinking vis-à-vis the "eventness" of the "Arab Spring." The "affective turn" in social sciences indicates that there is a limit to representational analyses (Puar). For this study, I am also interested in exploring the affective turn in the scholarship in order to bridge representational politics and affect rather leaving behind representation. I think it would be relevant to investigate

how these "seemingly opposed theories" could enrich each other by providing a comprehensive analysis of identities. For instance, Jasbir Puar, building on Brian Massumi's work, argues that identity is a retroactive categorization of the emergent, unfolding present. That is to say, these retrospective categorizations necessitate a representational politics that tells only part of the story and maintains a central role for the subject (Puar). What is necessary, as Puar states, is "an epistemology of ontology and affect, a representational schema of affect" (207). In other words, rather than claiming an escape from or leaving behind representation, it is the tension between symbolic systems, processes of signification, and affect that could become central to the analysis of the event (Puar). Hence, to conceptualize the "Arab Spring" through the theorization of "affect," would prioritize movement over placement in talking about what Arab bodies do rather than what they are, what Arabness has come to mean, how it has come to be felt and deployed. Answering those questions through an affective lens would add new readings to the literature on the "Arab Spring."

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