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# Arab & Muslim Crises & other Vexations

From Zapatismo to Islamatismo/anarca-Islam

Mohamed Jean Veneuse

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*that make stable elements of power out of characters. Writing's to cause disequilibrium – to free what's not represented – offering new potentialities – possibility after possibility without domesticating/neutralizing/ naturalizing the theatre. Writing's to fancy gestures where the gestures aren't repeated, in decimating dialogue to deafen it till all gestures aren't an aesthetic thing or a ritual done to oneself – as if one could ever forget or repeat it...*

In the end, writing involves asking: in the name of what, in the name of who publish, divulge, and first of all write? For the text to shape itself?– for all the signs to form a dove, flower, rainstorm – lost in a desert?– for there to be 'restraint' from any possible reading? Letters as points – sentences – lines – paragraphs – surfaces – masses – wings – stalks – petals... shapes dissipating as they're already read – a drop of rain falling one after another, much less a feather or a torn leaf – all withering/evaporating ...I write because it's a sword I wield, understanding quite well that people live and die on words, the thoughts and ideas behind them, their implications, horizons, promises...On the other hand, a proper discussion on love and death and their places with respect to social movements, given they're 'one-off' experiences, now that would make for a conversation...

That's all for now – and as always whatever is of benefit here is not of my doing and is owed to inspirations of spirits, souls, seen and unseen; as for whatever shortcoming they're my own and I take full responsibility for...

Salam & Salute, better yet, Adieu & Nos Vemos, or as someone simply taught me:

Grace & Peace...

## **Selected Bibliography of References/Influences**

As to the purpose of this blog and why all this now? It's in anticipation of thoughts and ideas I discuss in *Islam & Anarchism: Relationships & Resonances* (for details see: [www.akpress.org/islam-anarchism.html](http://www.akpress.org/islam-anarchism.html)). Besides which I prefer being busy practicing what I preliminary shared above. There's someone in me who kills with a burst of laughter who ever appears to find it necessary, opportune, important to say what someone thinks, feels, lives, or anything you like, but in light of the much fetishized 'Arab Spring-Islamist Winter', everyone feels entitled to speak and act as they will, irrespective of experience and thoughtful rigor over twitter or whatever other social forums. I am therefore not competing or interested in contributing to that type of demagoguery, in screaming over the voices of others (to see who will yell louder) besides the so many people whose voices are silenced and particularly with the way people shop around for solidarity nowadays in what celebrity followings. I say this without intending to become what I despise – patronizing or self-righteous, not at all. Because though ultimately, I don't escape the slaughter, whether in moments as this or with a book coming out, for myself all this is premised on positions that anteceded all these relatively recent events, with over a decade's worth of practice, thought and reflection as opposed to momentarily uninformed commentaries, political polemics, meanderings and punditry via amateur constructed arguments. I'm not interested in becoming a subject of enunciation. Writing isn't a narcissistic act or at least it shouldn't be.

*Especially not when writing involves the fabrication of characters and characterizations that deflect attention ...Especially not, when writing has to do with stopping with birth, the way one would stop with death, without interest in the build up – culmination – evolution of characters – their aural and visual shifting from one scene to another. Rather to me writing's about being interested in character amputation and if successful, the character's carving out on the operating table – subtracting the elements*

In leu of the characters that make up these series of performances, particularly when speaking in a forum where a pen name is used, it is important to contextually claim what's written in the name of a name such as 'Jean Veneuse'<sup>1</sup>, a

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<sup>1</sup> Fanon describes Jean Veneuse as follows: "Jean Veneuse is a magnificent example that will allow us to study in depth the attitude of the black man. Jean Veneuse is a Negro. Of Antillean origin, he has lived in Bordeaux for many years, so he's a European. But he's black, so he's a Negro" (1952: 46). Veneuse represents the straw person abandoned-neurotic colonized person of color, of the negative-aggressive type, in need of decolonization. Veneuse, in Fanon's words, is "a perpetual dreamer...a real character. He never takes his nose out of his books except to scribble all over his notebooks...a sensitive person who can go from singing in Spanish to translating into English non-stop. Shy but also anxious...somewhat gloomy and taciturn by nature, but most helpful. You can trust him...a Negro we would like a lot of white boys to be like...Jean Veneuse would like to be the same as any other man, but he knows his situation is false...He's searching for serenity and permission in the eyes of the white man – for Jean Veneuse is 'the Other'"(1952: 46–63). "Andree Marielle, who is white of skin, loves Jean Veneuse, who is very, very dark and adores Andree Marielle" yet, "Jean Veneuse does not or cannot accept this, for he knows" and ponders out loud: "I wonder whether i'm any different from the rest and if I marry you, a European woman, i wonder whether i won't look as though i'm stating that not only do i despise women of my own race, but drawn by the desire for white flesh that has been off limits to us Blacks since the white man rules the world, I am unconsciously endeavoring to take my revenge on the European female for everything her ancestors have inflicted on my people throughout the centuries" (Fanon, 1952: 50–51). Veneuse's beloved writes him: "My dearest Jean, Your letter dated July arrived only today. It is perfectly unreasonable. Why do you torment me so? Do you realize how incredibly cruel you are? You make me happy mixed with anxiety. You are making me at the same time the happiest and the unhappiest of women. How many times must i tell you i love you, i am yours and i am waiting for you. Come" (Fanon, 1952: 58). Veneuse: "Your dealing with an old bear! Be careful, my dear. It's all very well to be brave, but you're going to compromise yourself if you continue attracting attention this way. A Negro. Bah! He doesn't count. Associating with anybody of that race is disgracing yourself...And yet, what fantasies! Does she really loves me? Does she really see me objectively?...Tell me, Andree darling..., despite my color, would you agree to marry me if I asked you?" (Fanon, 1952: 47, 58). Jean Veneuse is "crusader of inner life. When he sees Andree again, when he is face-to-face with the woman he has desired for so many months, he takes

pseudonym — taken from Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952)). As to who I am, well, that, for the moment, is irrelevant in contrast to the question of what I am, clarified in part by the very announcement of the Fanonian origin of the pseudonym for it to become Mohamed ‘Jean Veneuse’, along with, what have you of this very blog’s purpose, my reasons for being here...etc

## **On Positionality, A Tale of Different Logics, & The Criticality that Arabs and Muslims Learn from Social Movement Histories:**

I’m a self-identifying Muslim anarchist (specifically post-anarchist) despite my distaste and despise for the self-righteousness that comes with embracing essentialist identity politics that can be associated with the former identities (Muslim and anarchist) & any for that matter. I am someone who prefers to focus instead on the ethics and politics that ought be embodied in taking up any identity or symbol and that should’ve arrived with taking on that particular name, especially when it comes to the commitments that should and ought arrive with the categories, ‘Muslim’ and ‘anarchist’, or whatever other; & bearing in mind that morals differ from ethics; ‘thou shall not kill’ is a moral commandment but if someone walks into a public space with an AK47, people are ethically obligated, if not have the right, to self-defend themselves; ethics are provisional-situational, immanent, dynamic, connecting one’s order of tradition(s) and culture(s) with that of an others’ and in relation to ‘the other’, whereas morals are

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refuge in silence...the eloquent silence of those who ‘know the artificiality of words and acts’” (Fanon, 1952: 60)...Jean Veneuse is “ugly. He is black. What else does he [and do you] need?” (Fanon, 1952: 61).

ing much for what happened the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2006, with the Mahala strikes; Mahala being the largest textile mill in the Arab and Muslim world, with a labor force that amounts to 27,000 workers, and by certain accounts the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest textile mill in the world. In fact, there’s an entire history of labor strikes, even prior to Mahala, that one can trace or backtrack to and assign significance in so far as their influence leading up to the events on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. In Tunis and before Bu’azizi there was Zouheir Yahyaoui who died on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2005 following a heart attack. Zouheir Yahyaoui died at the age of 36, having formerly spent 18 months in prison, during which time he was tortured and detained in degrading conditions. As a result of these conditions, Zouheir Yahyaoui underwent 3 hunger strikes to protest against his imprisonment. In his capacity as a human rights defender Zouheir Yahyaoui ran a website known as ‘Tunezine’(www.tunezine.com) which is/was censored in Tunisia as a result of its reporting of human rights abuses and its provision of forums for open discussion (see: www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/274). Yet there’s no Zouheir Yahyaoui international day nor does he, up to my knowledge, have a statue erected in his name as now Bu’azizi. The point being that surely there are others before Yahyaoui in Tunisia, others before Bu’azizi, others before Khaled Said in Egypt not to mention after; are their lives or sacrifices less worthy of ‘an international day’ or is it the subsequent rapidity of events (the ends ‘achieved’) that determine the ‘value’ and ‘means’ of their contributions? The very premise of iconic statues of revolutionaries are certainly not without their problems, even if seemingly warranted, given what they lead to in terms of en passes of history and what they raise of cultish personalities. In the end, what does that say though for the innumerable unnamed Bu’azizis out there then? Don’t they deserve international days in defense of causes now being rediscovered, once ‘lost’?

and dare I say decolonized *anarchic*, modes of organizing, acting, and thinking, that recognizes the interlocking nature and movements of oppressions as well as comprehends the Oedipal relationship between the nation-State (Father) and capitalism (Mother) which I've previously written about. Again, there is much the Arab and Muslim world can learn from histories in resistance the world over, let alone the Naxalites or the Zapatistas. I pray we don't just strive to rebuild the pyramid, which by far the vast majorities of our communities are certainly engaged in. The problem isn't the Muslim Brotherhood because if the opposition (Liberals, Socialists, Nasserites, whatever) were in power similar yet different problems would be taking place and other people would be in the streets of Egypt and the Middle East. The problem IS the pyramid and the fact that we refuse to move beyond a certain way of thinking and praxis.

To wrap this entry, there are histories of struggles, individual and collective, 'minor' and 'major', that antecede or precede and exceed the 'Arab Spring-Islamist Winter', every moment of every day, and that always caused the 'world to move' i.e. the world has always been in motion, it didn't start moving in 2011 or with Bu'azizi burning to death and that too has been Orientalized. As I'm not quite sure I understand the sentiments of either a 'Bu'azizi international day' or 'a Happy Bu'azizi day'. And in stating so, I neither mean to demean Bu'azizi's audacity and courage (for I'm incapable of such an immolate act myself), nor do I mean to fetishize the subsequent events European-ly dubbed 'the Arab Spring-Islamist Winter'. Rather what I mean is that I'm not interested in reductively reducing without 'adequate' account or analyses other antecedent events that led to the culminating 'Bu'azizi moment' and that's come to be taken generally en masse as 'the significant spark', no less than the false and ridiculous claim that the 'Arab Spring-Islamist Winter' was a consequence of Facebook/Twitter. To do so would be similar to focusing on the 3 days of labor strikes prior to the uprising in Egypt on January the 18<sup>th</sup> without account-

static, connecting one's self with one's immediate community and in relation to that which is transcendental; this is not to say that morals and ethics are unrelated, only that they're distinct, the latter being somewhat derivative from the former. I am writer of the forthcoming book *Islam & Anarchism: Relationships & Resonances* (see: — [www.akpress.org](http://www.akpress.org)) due out this November within which I develop an anarchic interpretation of Islam and an Islamic interpretation of anarchism — an *Islamatismo* if you will mirroring *Zapatismo*<sup>2</sup> — using the *Quran* and *Sunnah* (the book being based on my MA thesis, available on this blog, and that can also be found here: [theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)). I've also written on transgender-ism based on a case study in Egypt in 1981, and that informs my ongoing research and doctoral dissertation on *Islam & Queer Muslims: Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary World*; the contribution can be found on this blog as well as here (please see: — [www.anarchistdevelopments.org](http://www.anarchistdevelopments.org)). Where I was born, my race/ethnicity, the radical communities and movements I've been a part of, my mentors, teachers and influences can be discerned from my work, besides which it's defeatist to flaunt, to 'name drop' in this particular forum as if that's what's necessary for me to establish my credentials intellectually and at the grassroots, when arguments ought suffice to create what engagements and conversations I perceive are necessary, and aside from the cultish scenes that often enough surround activist celebrities and personalities; as for the movements and countless lives I've been a part of and shared, well, they already know me, with what that entails of responsibilities and loyalties.

I have lived a cosmopolitan upbringing and the class privilege that it comes with, both which afforded and extended me

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<sup>2</sup> A recommended reading on 'What Zapatismo is?' is John Holloway's paper titled *Zapatismo Urbano* and that can be found here: [www.squiggryrubio.net](http://www.squiggryrubio.net)

opportunities to humbly learn and journey across continents, along with experiencing the cloistered, nomadic, existence, not as lonely, but rather as alone, that such an existence can bring. All, that, perhaps, caused me to speak to as many dead writers, as I do people living, in awe of the blessing of being able to experience joy, but also seeing a world exploited, lived; the latter (i.e. exploitation) often ushering accompanying melancholic states that subsume the former (joy) — so much for joyful rebellion and militancy; and here I mean and emphasize joy, not ‘happiness’ given happiness implies seeking ‘constant joyfulness’, that can only arrive, as Friedrich Nietzsche said, at the expense of others i.e. the incessant compulsion to always be happy, and more than just being content, in the midst of what numbness is developed in relation to realpolitik outside oneself in today’s world. Indeed, I’ve spent my life tasting community but never its permanence. I am who I am, who is someone who can become, who can change, borrow, and choose, constantly striving to operate within the realm of the unbound conjunctive *and* as opposed to the disjunctive *or*. I am *and, and, and*, in relation to that which I know and have accepted upon reflection, have come to know, found disagreeable and rejected, and will never know, yet will always remain open to in so far as my finiteness as a being, ultimately, of limited capacities & capabilities of knowing, even if I’m willing to humbly learn indefinitely. *I am* undoubtedly a composition of the interactions and interplay of the milieus I’ve been exposed to since my first cry, and presence within my mother’s womb, only appearing as a voice in so far as I am coalesced to form a voice, in constant motion, in afterbirth. And finally, as I said/wrote many times before in my work: I am a fascist till I understand my fascism(s) in relation to privileges I enjoy and then taking steps to warding off those privileges and which, as far as I’m concerned, remain with me till death. After all, power, as Michel Foucault, and post-structural political philosophy, teaches does not operate according to a top down or bottom up model as classical Marx-

as the anarchist and Marxist influenced *shaheed*/martyr Bhagat Singh born to a Sikh Punjabi family and hanged at the age of 23 in India’s move towards independence. It’s to dismiss the incidents of Dharasana Satyagraha, a protest in which Indians under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, were protesting British salt tax in May 1930. A protest in which protestors were expected to ‘not use any violence under any circumstances’ but to accept that they’ll be beaten, that ‘they must not resist’, not even raising ‘a hand to ward off blows’, leaving by certain estimates 320 injured many ‘insensible with fractured skulls, others writhing in agony from kicks in the testicles and stomach’ with scores of the injured receiving no ‘treatment for hours’ and two dead (Miller, 1936: 193–199). Purportedly a ‘nonviolent’ position in which Indians marched to meet batons in British hands knowing quite likely they could die in ‘(non)violent’ protest. To maintain a binary position regarding violence and nonviolence is to be ambivalent of what the affective use violence became for the Civil Rights Movement by radicals as the BPP, Black Panther Party, and NOI (or the Nation of Islam); peoples with arms contributing to the restoration of a measure of dignity and respect to a people’s history whose dignity and respect was, and remains stolen; the city of Chicago, Illinois, with its annual African-Americans dead as a consequence of poverty stricken-gang related violence in a patronizing patriarchal society ought sufficiently testify, if the disappearance of indigenous peoples isn’t enough, not to the death but rather the lie that is the ‘American dream’.

In concluding, I’ll reiterate a certain point again, I long to see what I do not see – that with now Libya’s debt to the U.S. and NATO, as well as the situation(s) in Egypt, Syria, Tunis, Yemen, Palestine, and surrounding and enclosed Arab and predominantly Muslim spaces these movements have yet to show and prove themselves for what they are and could be. And one hopes that they will begin to strive towards autonomy oriented,



of non-violent propagators who are permitted the all too frequent impractical claim 'that nonviolence works and the principle examples are Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the U.S.' because that observation constitutes 'a great historical whitewashing' (Gelderloos, 2011). Such claims moreover are disrespectful to our martyrs in Tahrir, in Maspero, & every event since, if not in other worlds antecedent and preceding the 'Arab Spring/Islamist Winter'. Fact is 'the resistance in India was incredibly diverse, and Gandhi was a very important figure within that resistance, but the resistance was by no means pacifist in its entirety, that there were a number of armed guerilla groups, a number of militant struggles, very important riots and other strong clashes which were a part of the struggle for Indian independence. So on the one hand Gandhi basically got negotiating power from the fact that there were other elements in the struggle which were more threatening to British dominance. So the British specifically chose to dialogue with Gandhi because he was for them the least threatening of the important elements of resistance and had those elements not existed they simply could've ignored Gandhi' (2011). Above all matters fetishizing nonviolence is a whitewashing of Malcolm X's words when Malcolm says "it's a crime for anyone being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself" and the "future belongs to those who prepare for it today" (1964). Fetishizing nonviolence is to ignore George Jackson's words that "the concept of non-violence...[is] a false ideal...when it presupposes the existence of compassion and a sense of justice on the part of one's adversary. When this adversary has everything to lose and nothing to gain by exercising justice and compassion, his reaction can only be negative" (1994). Jackson, as Malcolm, of course, never laid witness to all this but I remain doubtful they would've concluded much different, both assassinated, as of course Gandhi and Martin Luther King. To adopt a dogmatic stance on nonviolence is to neglect the involvement of non-Gandhian militants,

ism and anarchism perceived, but rather power exists everywhere, and therefore it exists within us and functions through us in relation to ourselves and all else. In other words, power seduces and passes through the hands of the masters no less than those oppressed and therefore no one is ever completely an oppressor and no one is completely oppressed either.

For example: My struggle with patriarchy (and matriarchy for that matter) will never end; it is a battle I choose to engage in every day as I struggle with disentangling the patriarchal networks connected to societal sets of masculinities and hetero-normativities I've been exposed to in relation to whatever order of laws and culture, *nomos/polis*, I belong-ascribe to. And that would subsequently demand my 'becoming womyn' if I'm at all serious about taking on an anti and non-authoritarian ethics and politics i.e. an anti and non-hetero-patriarchal stance. This demands that my task in the example cited involves my engagement in attempting to 'transcend' my patriarchy even if momentarily/temporarily. Be that, for instance, through listening as opposed to just hearing (and preparing a response to what's been said, inattentive to the mother tongues expressed when womyn speak) or even becoming comfortable sharing my insecurities and emotions publicly, as opposed to embellishing and thriving on my machismo characteristics, and that a majority of men, across societies and cultures, often uncritically and without reflection embrace. The same logic, of course, could be said for embracing anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist positions and politics whereby embracing these positions doesn't place you outside them because no one is immune or righteously outside the fold of either capitalism and authoritarian practices. All which further makes embracing the rhetorical positions (*anti-authoritarian* and *anti-capitalist*) ultimately far less important or at least different than engaging in the dialectics of *non-authoritarian* and *non-capitalist* concepts and practices

that ground such positions and what responsibilities are ushered with them.

This difference between *anti* and *non* is critical given the fact that though the Zapatistas (see: ~ [enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx](http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx)), for instance, engage in anti and non-capitalist and anti and non-authoritarian practices in the caracoles/or local communities, the established Zapatista cooperatives rely on the sale of a portion of what is produced, out of survivalist necessity, to a catered revolutionary tourist industry and market in Chiapas; one only has to visit *Tierra Dentro* (see: ~ [www.tierradentro.mx](http://www.tierradentro.mx)), a popular café/restaurant and gathering center, run by Zapatista supporters, in Chiapas, to realize the impact of the Zapatista merchandise up for sale. Point being that no movement or individual can be, even with the establishment of sustainable and autonomous communities, currently, completely outside the fold of capitalism or capitalist modes of relations. And which teaches that no individual or movement ought be fetishized; let there be not one Subcomandante Marcos, Moises, or Comandante Ramona that rise, but rather thousands upon thousands, so long as they're not interested in becoming revolutionary vanguards on this planet likewise! Despite then the radical edge of the Zapatistas, numerous critiques on this count and others have respectively been launched with respect to this movement itself (see compa Ramor Ryan's article titled *Critiquing the Trajectory of the Zapatistas Movement* as part of his review of another friend and compa Niels Barmeyer's book *Developing Zapatista Autonomy* and that can be found here: [upsidedownworld.org](http://upsidedownworld.org)).

In this sense, the Zapatistas without a doubt, it can't be denied, are anti-capitalist but can never be sufficiently non-capitalist and therein is a critical difference in terms. The former term (*anti*) is concerned with rhetoric and belief and the latter term (*non*) with practical alternative economics theories, markets, concepts and practices. Furthermore, it ought be noted, that over the course of the years the Zapatis-

remember our martyrs already 'passed'? Our martyrs are not dead; they are not bones, flesh decomposed, without spirit, void of soul, but rather are present in other forms of forces, energies, risings, and crescendos of dreams yet unfulfilled and entrusted to us living — they are a reminder to us alive of the inevitability of death's advent. There are those who believe and are ready to die to uphold the nation-State and capitalism; we as radicals should have no less of a conviction in dying because dying is not the end; and, yes, undoubtedly it must be stated that our ethical and political parameters for engaging in armed conflict would radically differ from institutionalized forms of State violence. As for what those parameters are and how non-institutionalized revolutionary armed conflict would differ and take shape is another discussion altogether, for another time and place, and subject to a conversation in my forthcoming book; especially if we're talking about armed conflict different from the typical machismo character that such movements often take. We need to remember that we're already exposed to epistemic and structural forms of violence everyday, from racism to classism to sexism to ableism etc, doubtlessly the list is endless.

But, yes, discussions and studies of violence, just as love, are necessary, given I take issue with the construction of violence & non-violence as binaries given the set of ethical and political commitments that frame their intersecting and divergent understandings, histories, and their shaping of movements and a future when taken conjunctively instead of disjunctively (again the logic of AND versus the logic of OR); hence, combined instead of becoming essentialized and taken as one or the other. Hitherto I'm interested in the possibilities that could arrive in cases, as with the EZLN (or the military wing of the Zapatistas) or the Naxilites in India, and for armed conflict to remain as a tactical option and if carried out to be done in a way that respects and is observant of a certain dignity towards human and non-human life. As stated in a former blog entry: I'm sick

In proposing an alternative vision, as far as I'm concerned, there are three things that need to occur together/simultaneously for change/or a 'revolution', preferably 'liberation', to happen and without which we ('the radical Left') won't realize the potentials that exist with this epoch: a) the creation, construction and building of sustainable and alternative autonomous spaces be they permanent or semi-permanent (from urban social centers to rural/desert communitarian ethically and politically based projects or how else did the Muslim Brotherhood succeed post-uprising but by being prepared having built a base composed of their own communities with their own hospitals, schools, indeed becoming a community sustaining itself, building roots urbanely and rurally, even developing an Ethics of Disagreement, *Usul lil-Ikhtilaf*, and an Ethics of Hospitality, *Usul lil-Dhiyafa*, as practices within its communities etc); b) propaganda/public educative assemblies and the expansion of a civil disobedient movement through direct action (perhaps one of the few things somewhat already obsessively re-occurring in Egypt – though not to the level necessary in quality with respect to decolonized education); c) and, third, the preparation for armed conflict; given as Frantz Fanon argued that one cannot engage in decolonization without engaging in violence. This need to prepare for armed conflict, besides the two tactics of, first, creating sustainable alternatives, and, second, the expansion of a civil disobedient movement, are all on par belong to what a *bio-diverse strategy of resistance* (Arundhati Roy, 2007) can constitute, and without which there can never truly be liberation and let that be what is being proposed as contours of an alternate diverse strategy. After all, if capitalism were to collapse this instant what economic alternatives exist in Egypt, in Arab and Muslim communities, that can be used to replace it, except by those who would find themselves partaking in both direct action and the construction of alternative worlds, while understanding the ineffable necessity for martyrs. How else are we to honor and

tas, as a movement, have developed a somewhat 'isolated' position despite their international call outs and messages. This certainly limited the scope of the Zapatista movement's potential to grow further and to affectively reach others, for example 'activists/revolutionaries' in the Middle-East; this is particularly important given that Arabs and Muslims need and have much to learn, in their own languages yet through the experiences of others as the Zapatistas, of what alternative socio-political and economic modes of organizing exist, and what they entail, especially when oriented towards decolonized, horizontalist and radical alternatives that can spur their/our collective imagination to new heights. It's only recently that more activists, Arab and Muslim, in the Middle-East have come to know of the existence of the Zapatistas, what their ethical-political stances are, what they represent and what they're against. This is unfortunate given the positive influence autonomous and anti-Statist, *anarchic*, movements, as the Zapatistas, can have on the movements of the so-called/ dubbed 'Arab Spring/Islamist Winter' – particularly given what Orientalizations have camouflaged these movements. It can't be denied that since their full fledged appearance in 1994, the Zapatistas have experienced poor solidarity on the part of 'revolutionaries' who arrived from all over the world with their orientalist agendas and conceptions of what it is to be revolutionary, as well as what it is to stand in solidarity and engage in autonomous experiments with them; this certainly contributed and led to the 'isolated' position the Zapatistas took in the years following 1994, though that within itself is changing, with what we, activists, have learned theoretically and practically since of what it means to stand in solidarity with, or better yet what it means to cultivate *friendships* with 'the Other' inter and cross-continentially. Therefore, though I disagree with the isolationist logic adopted by the Zapatistas, I fully respect and understand it given it was necessary. Those of us keen intellectually and practically have learned

much about ‘solidarity’, and friendships, and yet still there is infinitely more to learn – but that’s always going to be the case. However we must collectively grow, we must together hold each others hands and teach one another, asking what each individual and community knows, if we’re to move forward; for how else learn if we don’t interact with each other, across superficial and not so superficial geopolitical and cultural boundaries in order to counter and resist capitalist nation-States to build instead worlds bound together by non-authoritarian and non-capitalist relations, subjects, indeed alternative political economies. The Zapatistas do partake in non-capitalist relations but certainly not enough and that’s precisely the problem; every movement has its limits and the Zapatista’s objective has always been to act non-hegemonically and therefore they’ve always been keen not impose themselves or what they think on others, yet at the same time their goal has been to see other communities burgeon and stand on their own, so that we might connect with each other and truly collectively create new meanings of what it is to be human and to connect with this earth. Therefore what the Zapatistas always expect(ed) is that others, all over the world, build spaces of their own and for these island spaces to no longer be isolated, but rather interacting, so that we can collectively engage with one another along the above and different terms in the creation of worlds that are interested in accepting, and not just tolerating one another’s existence, on this fine earth. In sum: it’s definitely possible to be anti-capitalist but to be completely non-capitalist, no, at least not yet.

That’s precisely why my work and social movement focus is on engaging with alternatives to capitalist nation-States, and more than just on the level of polemics and rhetoric. My trajectory has been the discursive identification of decolonized Islamic parameters, concepts, and practices that inform the very core of an Islamic non-capitalist economics and non-

armies. Young men will go forth to battle; married men will forge weapons and transport munitions; women will make tents and clothing and serve in hospitals; children will make lint from old linen; and old men will be brought to the public squares to arouse the courage of the soldiers, while preaching the unity of the Republic and hatred against Kings”.

## **By Way of Conclusion:**

Personally, I am not interested in reforming systems that in truth are not reformatory but rather purgatory, and whose foundations and logics are built on, tied to and sustain doctrines of Enlightenment rationales propagated by the US and colonial and imperial hegemonies before them. And though I could never deny that making demands, and squabbling over rights from the nation-State can legislatively and judicially alter minor conditions for some constituent minorities, in some instances, nevertheless this happens only so that living becomes more tolerable, not to mention this often occurs at the expense someone else (i.e. other minorities). In sum, to me playing to a politics of seeking and demanding recognition, as Charles Taylor, Frantz Fanon and Glenn Coulthard, argued is ultimately finite and limited in its scope and vision because the system isn’t interested in accepting, but rather, at best, tolerating dissent. For example, queer marriage in Canada is legalized and yet despite the right to marry, to this moment LGBTIQ marriages hardly enjoy the rights/privileges (adoption, inheritance etc) that heterosexual couples do and in fact end up reasserting the hetero-patriarchal character and reifying the fascistic nationalist tendencies that Canada, as a settler nation, engages in; through homo-nationalism, pink-washing, settler-colonialism, and what Joseph Massad’s terms the ‘Gay International’.

my blog entry titled: *On Usul al'Ikhtilaf & Usul al'Dhiyafa & Epithets on Love* for further clarification). This speaking happens, without the 'knowledge' based background, through reading and ijihad, necessary, let alone the social movement experience of experimentation and history (that movements in Latin America and North America have had for instance) to define and ground in practice newly found and decolonized ethical and political commitments. Again, all this is not or shouldn't be surprising as mentioned earlier given the only way that the concepts and practices that would ground such politics and ethics can appear is tied to the project of decolonization and reindigenization, and which hasn't been embraced as a critical component by most of the movements in Egypt and the Middle-East that are striving for liberation. What are Egyptians/Muslims/Arabs learning from the social movement history in North and Latin America that precedes and exceeds theirs on a multiplicity of levels, least of which is with respect to notions of autonomy and sovereignty, and that would have Egyptians/Muslims/Arabs humble themselves?

A Renewal of Knowledge/Education is desperately needed in the analyses undertaken and it is this absence of 'intellectualism' and literacy that explains the predominant denial amongst most Egyptians, for the longest time (and arguably still), that the Security Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is a junta and part and parcel of Egypt's military industrial complex with geopolitical and economic interests and stakes at large (least of which is in relation to Palestine and Israel). This of course is accompanied, part and parcel, by the overwhelming ambivalence we, Arabs and Muslims, have of the modern militarization of civilian societies (hospitals/schools/prisons) and that has been ongoing for at least 600 hundred years dating back to Maurice de Nassau, and not just beginning with the Napoleonic conscription/ institutionalization of the military following Napoleon's 1793 declaration that "all Frenchmen are permanently requisitioned for service into the

authoritarian politics; indeed the construction of an Islamic interpretation of anarchism and an anarchic interpretation of Islam. It's useless to critique a system, as capitalism (its modern prevalent formation and breed – neoliberalism, diverse as it is) or the nation-State, unless one truly understands how capitalist nation-States to one degree or another function; it's even more useless to critique capitalist nation-States if you're incapable of then proposing alternatives to them and that's the central problem I have with just adopting an anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian rhetorical stance, merely built on critique, critique, critique. It's easy to revolt, more challenging to provide visions of alternatives. As I stated numerous times, and will never tire of saying: It's not about seizing power but knowing what to do with the power 'seized' the moment and day after i.e. how will we, as indigenous peoples, individuals and communities, organize ourselves and our lives differently.

And so in a rapidly changing earth, this fragile position of building 'a tiny little isolated island' is unsustainable, even if undoubtedly originally attributed to and as cause of horrible experiments with 'solidarity', as stated, and in spite of the creative and singularly resistant world(s) the Zapatistas created, taught and introduced us to. Nevertheless, in hindsight it implies the pertinent need for us to build/construct alliances and friendships beyond bleak understandings of 'solidarity' in our expansion of *our* networks, our webs, and 'rhizomes', or otherwise we risk unstable solitary positions. The Zapatistas themselves are struggling currently in Chiapas & the Lacandon jungle given the circumstances the Zapatistas now face with exuberant NGO presence in the surrounding territories and provocation(s) by government supported paramilitaries let alone the power itself of (neo)liberal capitalism; circumstances have only worsened with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) coming to power and Enrique Pena Nieto's election, and yet still, all this is to say nothing of the fact that this earth itself is responding, whether we like it or not and whether we are prepared for

it or not, with its own speed, pace, rhythm to the disrespect and indignity it faces i.e. the Tsunamis, Earthquakes, droughts and all that arrives with climate change, so let's not be so arrogant as a species so as to think and assume that the Earth will wait for us to correct our ways. It's this isolated position then that for communities that sought to follow the Zapatista's example (as those in San Juan Copala, Chimalapas, even APPO during Oaxaca's uprising of 2006) that is disappointing.

## **The Power of Decolonization**

The only way forward is to know what we're specifically talking about and what the similarities and differences between us (i.e. those of us who identify as Arab and/or Muslim) and others are; particularly others who share our commitments all over the world i.e. if we are to build alternative worlds and connect with each other. This involves knowledge and not polemics. After all, in what reality do we imagine capitalists and authoritarians allowing us to construct the worlds we imagine and envision, let alone ceding their power!

Now, and as to peoples who identify as Arabs and Muslims, let me claim the following argument in our regard, as it's an extension of what's been documented and written here, and moreover, on this blog: We're undergoing crises of thoughts, acts, wills and hearts given our ongoing colonization, not having partaken in the decolonization of ourselves or our traditions. In 'post-colonial societies' (an ironic term given we never truly engaged in decolonization and reindigenization) as Egypt's we, Arabs and Muslims, have been facing these crises and are complicit in them, bare minimum since 1798, with the Napoleonic invasions that remained till 1801, followed by the British conquests, the carving of the region, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. We, as Arabs and Muslims, predominantly, have not partaken in projects of decoloniza-

been tied to the ethical and political commitments we share and believe in.

In the end, of course insurrections, 'revolutions' can never be planned, but they can and must be prepared for. Personally, I don't find 'democracy, freedom, bread, social justice' to be specific demands whatsoever. What specific mechanism is to be enacted in relation to the aforementioned slogan is the question, particularly in a society whose institutions are rotten in their core? What democracy – representative, or direct – let's talk specifics or is it not the case that even Nazism proclaimed itself democratic; does the corporate oligarchic United States of America, and its military and prison industrial complexes, built on Enlightened doctrines of Manifest Destiny, liberty bells, and the enslavement of indigenous peoples, African Americans, Hispanics and minorities of all kinds, proclaim itself democratic? What democracy are we speaking of, or are Anarchists, autonomists, and the Zapatistas not striving for a particular decolonized vision of democracy too? What freedom are we speaking of – the liberal version that would have us imprisoned by individualist economic woes of the few in a tyranny of the majority of our fellow species? What do we mean when we speak these abstract, empty words, that have become nothing more than abused rhetoric, and that we have allowed our tongues to wantonly and impotently utter?

Because the undoubted crisis in Egypt, in truth, besides over 90 million people who 'all of a sudden' have discovered the potential of their own agency is that most self-proclaimed 'revolutionaries' all think they've got 'the solution' and that they're all capable, astonishingly enough, of speaking politics (through grand slogans and the rhetoric of 'freedom', 'democracy', and 'social justice' without the necessary specificities that ought underline/grid and ground these terms in decolonized education and praxis). Even worse, this speaking happens with the predominant absence of a desire to listen to each other, let alone knowing how to ethically disagree amongst one another (see

as grapevines; again, I'll refrain here from delving deeper on this critical point that otherwise would entail a more comprehensive discussion, once again, of who/what is a Muslim – 'Islamist', let alone the unsustainability of the category 'secular' in an era of failed state multiculturalism.

Nevertheless, I know this approach (appreciating culture & religion and neither neglecting one or the other) is particularly necessary in a situation where God – the pharaoh Mubarak – is 'dead' as most people (least of which is Morsi) become demagogues vying for a displaced God's space and power (as disappearing God doesn't disappear God's power-laden vacuum, and that this supposedly murdered God left behind). For make no mistake Mubarak was never an autocratic ruler and certainly neither is Morsi – no one ever is in a position of 'absolute power' otherwise what happened on January 25<sup>th</sup> wouldn't have happened; it had to happen – a people had to realize & transcend the apathy & fear pent up over decades if not more, and not just because of their immiseration as Marx and Engels write.

And so yet still, to this moment, the kettle boils, with most Egyptians/Muslims/Arabs complicit and responsible for upholding the system they partook in and contributed to for 30 or so odd years if not for generations; our agency cannot be denied unlike many and undoubtedly others have orientalized. We are complicit in the end in what happened before and what continues to happen now. In truth, the overwhelming 'national and patriotic unity' exhibited during the 18 days is what bound us together, when it should have been the politics and ethics that we wanted to construct this new society upon; a discussion that was predominantly unaddressed at Tahrir. It is the weak bond of 'national unity' that bound us together initially and that had us tear each other apart after, when the stronger bond ought to have been our visions of what the next day following ought look like and that, again, should have

tion (that have a beginning but never an end) nor have we truly engaged in re-indigenizing neither our traditions nor ourselves. We (particularly those of us who consider ourselves to be among what could be termed the radical anti-colonial and anti-imperial Left) have not undergone *Tajdeed*, renewal of self-being, but rather have been caught somewhere between *Islah*, reforming the self-being, in relation to what we perceive ourselves ought be, and *Taqleed*, emulating or copying, in this case, at best, 'White-European revolutionaries of past' and their social movement theories and legacies. The holy trinity of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky serve as an example of this when one examines, for instance, the political orientations of current movements as that of the 'Revolutionary Socialists', and what fetishized focus there is on strictly applying a class analysis in combatting capitalism, without considering the necessity of applying too an immanent critique of the nation-State, to the say the least, and learning what social movement theories (from all over the world since Marx, Trotsky and Lenin) can teach our social movements in the contemporary.

'Revolutionaries', particularly revolutionary socialists (who I respect deeply beyond imagination yet who I vehemently disagree with in terms of order of tactics and strategy, let alone analyses) mostly believe that as long as independent syndicates are established and strikes continue (i.e. direct action and the great heartbreaking martyrs who rise and fall with them despite the fact that our blood isn't cheap!), that 'all will be well'. Revolutionary socialists are predominantly and solely focused on worker and mass mobilizations without sufficient putting into question the category 'worker', and envisioning how such a category intersects with race politics or true quests to integrate gender, age, ability, sex and sexuality into the picture, not as less or more important/significant than class but on equal footing with it towards an anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle. After all, we do not

lead single issue lives; class issues are only part of the problem, not everything. I say all this while finding myself ill of the approach of harkening back to 'party politics' and a white European classical Marxist/Leninist formula (even if tweaked 'just for Egypt') concerned with taking over the nation-State to establish workers tribunals, councils and a new vanguard movement by those formerly oppressed. Indeed, vanguard movements that having already internalized oppression will undoubtedly pass it on and repeat it because oppression isn't restricted to class conflicts but rather is concerned with the lesson of questioning the origins and foundations of what we know or presume to know i.e. the colonial and imperial legacies we were left with and that demand decolonizing and reindigenizing of all of us Arabs and Muslims across the Pacific and the Atlantic. As stated, an immanent critique of the nation-State is pivotal, given the imagined and superficial uniformation and unification that the nation-State engages in towards nation-building as it constructs a citizen psyche that in dissent and imaginaries is constricted through an invented hierarchical national unity; among the pivotal functions of the nation-State is, after all, the neutralization and naturalization of a people's passivity in consolidating its power over a populous in the name of national interests and security; where democracy becomes defined and identified strictly by the ballot-box. We've internalized the necessity for nation-States as a mode of socio-political and economic organizing. We (Egyptians-Arabs-Muslims) need to decolonize ourselves and our traditions and re-indigenize and renew ourselves through reinvented concepts and practices to correspond with particular ethical and political stances not only in relation to ourselves as individuals and communities but also in relation to 'nonhuman' and 'other than human' life. We need to re-understand what it is to reconnect our spirits, bodies, hearts to the land, to live on the land instead of relying on the urban

required is that we breed new ways of living and hence my advocacy for a reinvention anew of decolonized Islamic concepts/principles/practices, and doing so using the Quran, given that undeniably and 'rightfully' any (non)Muslim is bound to ask: show me where God says I need to be anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, anti-racist-queerphobic- sexist-ablest etc. Not to mention that decolonization is necessary to counter the accusation that all that is being stated here (regarding the relationship and resonances between Islam and Anarchism) is a *bida'a*, or a Western invented importation that corrupts a purportedly 'pure Islam'.

A critical issue that warrants mention is that I believe too in the value of both culture and religion, and maintain that while both intersect and interplay, I believe they are both distinct and relational. Indeed, that there are ethical and political commitments that undeniably arrive with embracing Islam (and that's to be understood as dead, and only alive through the Quran, and perhaps the Sunnah, to varying degrees, that binds Muslims across their 73 or so odd sects). And so I'm always concerned with neither drifting into the realm of cultural relativism nor to cede the theological ground of argumentation as some 'secularists' would like me, to neoconservatives and neo-liberal-reformists, given that I take religion's space as that which is inherently political, therefore rejecting the Augustinian and Eurocentric view of the possibility or need for separating between religion and politics to mark the difference between savage and civilized. Religions are arguably the first forms of social movements, and even the faithless have faith (or at least ought to) in something greater than themselves that ushers forth humility, hope and affirmation to continue struggles if not for themselves then for the generations to come. Indigenous communities and movements of Americas which I have been a part of make no separation – between faith in a Creator and our/their political and ethical responsibilities as Caretakers with both faith and politics intertwined



'cop-watches', indeed taking control of their own affairs and decision making, before 'the people's army' treacherous intervention. But beyond that, such a spirit and the spirit that drew many to Tahrir, with their brushes and brooms following those 18 days, to scrub and clean its pavements 'disappeared'; it was not Tahrir that need scrubbing per se but rather the streets, our neighborhoods and communities, indeed 'our insides', our hearts and minds. That is, what was necessary was for us to engage in *jihad al-nafs* and struggling w/ourselves as individuals and as communities, indeed the cultivation of new revolutionary beings. Another way of putting it is that this 'disappearance' shouldn't be surprising because such practices haven't been internalized enough by 'revolutionaries' for them to become a part of the revolutionary character that then sustains and truly transcends and creates new horizons for itself, those involved and others beyond; what was and remains necessary is the creation of sustainable alternative communities. Of course, undoubtedly, maintaining such a momentum, beyond that experienced in 18 days, is difficult and challenging but that is precisely the point and necessity in undertaking such a task, and engaging in the potentials that can come with revolutionary becomings, with all their intensities, as peoples became in a sense different peoples – creating all-together radically new differing horizons; the way, for instance, the first Muslim polities in Mecca and Medina, not to idealize, underwent transformation to build new societies in character, even if merely for a time, but certainly that extended beyond 18 days, and based on ethical and political foundations tied to Islamic concepts and practices of social justice and which I regard as anarchistic in character then, just as much as I see the need for such a return to this anarchic character now; Muslims must realize that Shariah which certainly isn't a monolith depends on Fiqh, also not a monolith, and which ultimately is dependent on socially just ethical and political pillars established before all else. What is

cosmopolitan metropolis and the industrialized machina of Capital.

In this sense, our colonial and imperial encounters have left us, Arabs and Muslims, caught between two foci of loyalty, two mutually exclusive images to serve: one was the colonially imposed focus of loyalty, the nation-State (a Eurocentric concept and construct): Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, Lebanon, etc, and the other is Ummah, and which as an Islamic/Quranic concept/practice Arabs appropriated for their own purposes to refer to an Arab Ummah (i.e. an Arab polity) just as Arabs appropriated the Quranic and Islamic concept of Qawm to refer to Arab Qawmiyyah; to say the least this move by Arabs racialized an Islamic term, to the point that we've internalized this racism as Muslims and Arabs ourselves and reify it amongst ourselves (First come the Arabs of the Arabian peninsula, then the North Africans, the Palestinians, the Jordanians, the Lebanese, the Syrians, then the Sub-Saharan, the South-Asians, White Converts and everyone else, in terms of of who is a 'first class' Muslim, a 'second class' and so on and so forth). Not only that but as Arabs we've internalized an ongoing 'Islamophobia' heightened post-9/11 buying into the false binaries of secularism/Islamism (without even calling into question the construction of such Eurocentric categories or their etymologies, and speaking of them as monoliths), not just in the 'Global North' but also in the 'Global South'. After all, and briefly, the charge that political Islam is dead or that it can be killed is ludicrous. For if what is meant by political is 'Islamism', then it needs to be clear, as will be demonstrated in my forthcoming book *Islam & Anarchism: Relationships & Resonances* (2013), that this is not a monolithic category, is a colonial construct, appearing, early 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, as in Voltaire's play *Fanatisme* (1736) as a synonym – in English, Islamismus in 1696, and Islamism in 1712 – for Islam, in line with other European constructs as Mohammadanism' (Kramer, 2003: 65–77), & what followed of Enlightenment rationales, & attempts

at forcing this alienated Other and those colonized to forcibly swallow and accept a 'secular modernity' at the expense and irrespective of what may follow of their crises of identity; for instance, as will be discussed in the book, having to choose between their loyalties to identifying first as Arab or Muslim. This is the same modernity that operated and marched under the flag and auspices of doctrines of Manifest Destiny<sup>3</sup> and was responsible for the genocide of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, giving us civilized modern concepts and institutionalized practices as the prison and military industrial complexes that we, a yet colonized people, have built our 'post-colonial' nations on. Aside from 'Islamism' then, and which as stated will be discussed soon enough, if by 'political Islam' what is being suggested is that Islam is not inherently political and is or becomes politicized by 'fanatics' then that is also a problematic assumption, as any faith based movement is, arguably, inherently political through the socially just pillars it establishes for self-identifying members of its polity and communities, if not too in ethical relation to other human beings and non-human life, indeed this earth, as will be proven, at least, in relation to Islam in the book.

As such, and as far as I'm concerned, since 1798 both imaginaries, pan-Arab and pan-Islamic or pan-Muslim, have been caught between harkening for a true(r) sense of, for example, Egyptian belonging – from which before the 'Arab Spring-Islamist Winter' we were displaced – and choosing between an Arab and Muslim Ummah in belonging. An ordeal

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<sup>3</sup> Briefly, the Doctrine of Manifest Destiny is the Christian religious fervor spawning "the Second Great Awakening", and that led many European settlers to believe that "God himself blessed the growth of the American nation" at the expense of the genocide of Indigenous peoples of the Americas. In other words, "Native Americans were considered heathens. By Christianizing the tribes, American missionaries believed they could save souls and they became among the first to cross the Mississippi River" and build their new world. For more details, see: ~ [www.ushistory.org](http://www.ushistory.org)

tions – I believe revolutions require a double movement (internal and external transformations of individual-communitarian-societal character). Revolutions will always remain indefinitely incomplete because of the power dynamics, differentials and relations that will forever undermine/underpin them, and that sustain oppression while also providing liberatory potentials with them. All one hopes for in the end is delineating power differentials between us, as individuals and communities, not getting rid of them. I therefore don't believe Egypt nor the Middle East has undergone a revolution yet, preferring instead terms/concepts like 'revolt', or 'uprising', even 'insurrection', but certainly not revolutions. This is because I believe in the need to differentiate and distinguish between the way revolutions are documented (or written about historically) and people's revolutionary becomings (i.e. what ontologically and epistemologically changes/takes place/happens when a people rise – physically, emotionally, mentally, individually, collectively and that leads to certain transformations of consciousness individually and collectively). The two, the way revolutions are documented and people's revolutionary becomings, are two different things, because they relate to two different sets of people in the process of casting off a shame or responding to that which is intolerable. 'Revolutions' ought be premised on dealing with practical questions – how are you going to deal with recycling, garbage, what are you going to do with a nuclear plant, the army, indeed how are you going to reconceive your relationship to land through decolonization and reindigenization & beyond the individualist sense of self and land, indeed this earth's utilitarian use.

And so, to me, the 18 days were 18 days, an instant and moment in time, that ought not be fetishized, even with the *anarchic* character in which millions of Egyptians deterritorialized what ought to have already been regarded public space; organizing security checks points, necessary food and shelter, with some neighborhoods arranging their neighborhood

by modern States, and is behind the propagation of a ‘politics of nationhood’ and that reinforces divisions between us as a species.

*The conclusion of this section being:* Arabs-Egyptians-Muslims need to decolonize and re-indigenize.

**Note:** By pointing to ongoing colonialism I don’t mean to equate/totalize or homogenize ongoing colonial and imperial orders and their corresponding structures that function on disappearing Indigenous peoples in settler societies (as Israel, Canada, Australia, the US and other Indigenous communities across the Pacific) with the ‘franchise colonialism’ experienced elsewhere in ‘postcolonial’ societies or nations in the Middle East. After all, certainly dynamically, the tactics and orders/structures of institutions at the level of the locale vary, are dialogic, contingent, provisional/situational. Nevertheless remains the shared insidious and parasitic affect that informs and underpins colonialism and imperialism globally, that would allow us to speak of, say, ‘Integrated Worldwide Capitalism (IWC)’ irrespective of its variant neo-liberal capillaries and their functioning, or nation-States for that matter. This underlies, from an intellectual perspective, the importance of always addressing and situating in context our analyses from a social movement perspective i.e. both the local and global connections, showing how and where links exist, are interdependent, and independent of each other.

## **Reflections on the Uprisings of the so-called ‘Arab Spring/Islamist Winter’:**

Besides the problems associated with the Eurocentric and colonial term ‘Arab Spring’ – coined by Marc Lynch in the Journal of American Foreign Policy and critiqued by Joseph Masad in an article titled *The ‘Arab Spring’ and other American Seasons* (see: [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)) for its Orientalist connota-

that we’ve yet to ‘reconcile’ if that is at all possible within the framework of capitalist nation-States and the colonial and imperial logics that we’ve internalized and that guide and inform our contemporary misunderstood definitions. Of course, none of this should be surprising if Arabs (re)constructed an Arabic term (*Dawla*) to correspond to the European idea/model of nation-States. Again, Arabs did this, with a concept, in reality derived and appropriated from the Quranic word (D-W-L) & whose meaning in fact revolves mainly around the notions of temporality, change and rotation as opposed to a fixed order in which a nation aspires to organize itself (if the nation predated the state) or a fixed order of things in which the nation should aspire to organize itself (if the state predated the nation). The word *Dawla*, however, does not signify ‘the modern nation-State’ despite its abuse and molding as such by Arabs, but rather signifies ‘to turn, alternate, or come around in a cyclical fashion’ i.e. to undergo revolutionary activity constantly. *Dawla* stems from the verb ‘dal’ which morphologically, as well as semantically, falls between the verb *dar* (to rotate) and the verb *zal* (to go away, or fall). Temporality and succession are thus essential connotations for the meaning of *Dawla*, with anything that’s circulated from one hand to another referring to a *Dawla*, as much as it can also mean the condition of well-being, for one person or a group of persons, since such condition will sooner or later end, by the death of the people who are enjoying it, if not by any other means. Chapter 59 of the Quran, the ‘Chapter of Exile or Banishment’, Verse 7, for example, speaks of Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) distribution of the spoils of war to those in need, “so that it may not just make the circuit (*dulatan*) among the wealthy of you”. Similarly Chapter 3 of the Quran, the ‘Chapter of the Family or House of Imran’, Verse 140, speaks of the cyclical nature of human vicissitudes, so that triumph one day is replaced by defeat another day. To say all this is to truly say little regarding the complicit acceptance

of a majority of us (Muslims/Arabs/Egyptians), till recently, of the reality of capitalist nation-States as ‘modern’, ‘enlightened’, ways to engage in civic organizing. We, as Arabs and Muslims, have yet to truly dream, as we confront the origins of ongoing histories and traumas and whose confrontation is a necessary component of decolonization if we have any hope of somewhat healing. It is only with decolonization, with understanding our traditions and histories that unimaginable horizons beyond the 18 days of Tahrir will appear.

We need to decolonize concepts and practices as ‘nation’ that are pivotal given our internalization of colonial understandings of ‘nation’ that are prevalent amongst us. In decolonizing the idea of ‘nation’, in my work, I defer to the Islamic concept and noun *Qawm*, or ‘people’ (Al-Barghouti, 2008: 178). For though in Islam our species descends from Adam and *Hawa’a*, or Eve, *Qawm* is utilized in the Quran and Sunnah to distinguish between different peoples. *Qawm*, itself, is comprised from *Shu’ub*, the plural form of *Sha’b*, or ‘great tribe’, itself ‘a parent’ formed from ‘smaller tribes’ called *Qa’ba’il*, the singular form of which is *Qabilah*, and to which they refer their origin and comprise them. What constitutes *Qawmiyyah*, if one can presume it exist in Islam, is radically contra distinct from the colonial and racialized Arab understanding of *Qawmiyyah*, which since 1798 has focused upon Arab *Qawmiyyah* or pan-Arab nationalism. After all, the Gracious, *Ar-Rahman*, Allah, says in the Quran “We created...and made you into *Shu’ub* (big tribes) and *Qa’ba’il* (smaller tribes)”, the intent being that these *Shu’ub* and *Qa’ba’il* “might come to know each other” (The Holy Quran, Chapter 49, Chapter of ‘The Apartments’, Verse: 14–16). According to the Quran thus, this creation composed of differing *Qawm*, or peoples, and irrespective of how large or small they are in numbers, are to know one another beyond nationalist sentiments, ethnicity and race (sexuality etc), and without imposing their wills on one another. Embracing this logic implies that Arabs and

States thrive on creating false unity but also because they codify and legalize hetero-patriarchy through law in an attempt at delineating fluidity that may and could creatively arrive with alternative imaginations of family, love, compassion, forgiveness and community (Piscatori, 1986: 77; Habeeb, 2011, emphasis added). Therefore, as Al-Barghouti writes, “just as ‘Ummah’ was mistranslated into ‘nation’ by Europeans, Arabs have had problems with translating the term ‘nationalism’ into Arabic” (2008: 178). And thus though presently, the word for ‘nation’, “has two Arabic translations that are sometimes seen as mutually exclusive: ‘*Qawmiyyah*’ and ‘*Wataniyyah*’”, my work defers and distinguishes between the two, with *Qawmiyyah* referring to belonging to “a certain group of people, ‘*qawm*’” whereas “*Wataniyyah*, on the other hand, means belonging to the homeland, to a certain territory: ‘*watan*’” (2008: 178). This is an important distinction given as stated that it’s modern States that manipulate nationalistic sentiments, imprison their imaginings, when it is possible to imagine nations, but more so peoples, no longer obsessively bound by statist imaginaries that facilitate the evocation and morphing of nationalism through the shameless conformist promotion of loyalty and devotion to the State, to create exclusionary territories while producing the commoditized patriotic rhetoric and phantasies that accompany it; a case example of this was the common theme slogan ‘Egyptian worker go back to work for your nation and country’ post-uprising. Hence lies the reason behind which the pivotal question of ‘narratives of the nation’ is central to any liberatory struggle because as Lisa Brooks teaches, there exist “notions radically different from colonial definitions of nationalism, and that are not based on the theoretical and physical models of the nation-state” (Brooks, 2006: 244 in Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011). We need to, indeed must, dismantle colonial notions of ‘nation’, through engaging in non-conformist decolonized indigenous meanings of it. It’s this concept’s creative imaginings that facilitates the manipulation of its power

similar and divergent, non-monolithic interpretations that exist of Anarchism. What will always be more important than a sheer name, a label, and category, is what is believed in thoughts, and followed through in ethical and political commitments, practices and principles that affirm that identity, and that subsequently affect the contours of the relationship to anything and anyone one else.

My work is therefore doubtlessly predicated on comprehending that though nationalism is limited in its imaginary the true problem does not reside in 'nationalism' per se (because there's nothing wrong, as stated, with taking pride in where one was destined to be born, one's culture and tradition). Rather, the real problem is in the territorial concept and post-colonial Arabic notion that plays upon sentimentalist hearts and that is *Wataniyyah*, or 'patriotism'. Like Emma Goldman writes:

"Indeed, conceit, arrogance, and egotism are the essentials of patriotism. Let me illustrate. Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who have had the fortune of being born on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all the others...The awful waste that patriotism necessitates ought to be sufficient to cure the man of even average intelligence from this disease. Yet patriotism demands still more. The people are urged to be patriotic and for that luxury they pay, not only by supporting their "defenders," but even by sacrificing their own children. Patriotism requires allegiance to the flag, which means obedience and readiness to kill father, mother, brother, sister" (1917). *Wataniyyah* as underlined previously always acknowledges an absent consensus on the legitimacy of modern States; a colonial and imperial construct, and the most active contributor, and agent of heteropatriarchy and homo-nationalism, not only because modern

Muslims were wrong and mistaken to accept in the first place the colonial Machavillian and Manichean delusional construct – the nation-State, and that is based on the idea of divide and conquer. For Muslims this further implies going beyond, as stated, an *Arabization* of Islam, or other racialized forms of colonial hierarchizations of it. It is Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who uttered in *Khutbat Al' Wada'a*, or 'Farewell Address':

"All humankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is brother and sister to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one Ummah. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim, which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves" (Muhammed in Turner, 2006: 35–36).

Both God and Muhammad's anteceding testimonies, visions, above, not only demonstrate that Muslims are required to believe in different peoples, irrespective of their size, large or small (through quantitative qualifiers or groupings as *Qawm*, *Shu'ub* and *Qa'ba'il*) but also that these people(s), are to strive to know, interact and share with each other and other worlds beyond their own selves what is of benefit to all; and of course trustingly doing so in accordance with particular ethical and political principles and affinities, without compulsion, and with dignity and respect in relation to human and non-human life. The point being: borders between us, literal and metaphysical, need to be broken and reimagined along non-patriotic, non-racial/sexual (etc) contours; and bearing in mind that nationalism is different from patriotism and which I'll get to and expound upon shortly; for indeed that there's nothing wrong with taking pride in where one was born so long as it doesn't lead to isolationist, puritanical,

essentialist identity/blood politics and the self-righteous logic that accompanies it, a sentiment that modern States thrive on.

Which leads me to state this critical point: There are constraints to what can be construed as *Qawmiyyah* or 'peoplehood' in light of the fact that the emphasis in Islam, the Quran and Sunnah, is on the non-racialized and non-territorial Islamic concept *Ummah*, that is used to refer to the 'universal community of Muslims irrespective of borders, cultures, and nationalities', too racialized by Arab nationalists to refer solely to Arabs as stated; i.e. an *Arab Ummah* (Al-Khouli, 1981: 51; El-Najjar, 2001). I will not delve deeply here into the pivotal question of who and what is a Muslim and which, to me, briefly, let me claim: has always been tied to the ethics and politics that would guide a socially just movement, upon whose establishment, it could be determined who is in and out any vision of what could constitute a Muslim Ummah; this question will be addressed more adequately in my book forthcoming via AK Press (see: ~ [www.akpress.org](http://www.akpress.org)).

Nevertheless, it ought be understood that etymologically Ummah is designated in *Lisan al-Arab*, one of the most authoritative Arab dictionaries written by Mohammad Ibn Makram Ibn Manzhour Al-Ansari (1233–1311 AD), as emanating from the root "*Amm* which, as a verb, means to head for, to quest, to lead, to guide, or to mean and to intend...[while] as a noun means destination, purpose, pursuit, aim, goal and end", and which in Islam entails the preservation of ethical and political principles to earthly existence (Al-Barghouti, 2008: 37). An "Ummah follows itself, follows an image of itself, yet it and its image are, at least etymologically one," writes Al-Barghouti (2008: 39). That is, "each Muslim follows all Muslims" and the "physical existence of individuals is called an Ummah" is "when these individuals have an image of themselves as a collective, and when this image is guiding them to do things in certain ways distinct from others" (Al-Barghouti, 2008: 39). Furthermore it is to be understood that "Ummah

could be only one person, if that person had a creed by which they defined themselves and that was expressed in their actions, even if no one followed them in their quest" (Al-Barghouti, 2008: 39). Prophet Abraheem, upon him be peace, is illuminated in the Quran as an Ummah unto himself, when the All-Knowing, *Al-Alim*, Allah, says, "Surely Ibrahim was an Ummah obedient unto God a man of pure faith and no idolater" (Chapter 16, Chapter of 'The Pilgrimage', Verse 120). No less critical to comprehending Ummah is the fact that this concept isn't constrained or solely applicable to Muslims, when Prophet Muhammad stated that the Jews of *Bani'awf* and *Bani Najjar* "are an Ummah with the believers (Muslims)" (Al-Barghouti, 2008: 61; Ibn Hashim, 2: 109–112). Which can also be understood that they form an Ummah beside other believers, Muslims, with their own religion(s) and tradition(s). The issue was not that Bani'awf and Bani Najjar belonged to a different ethnicity-race for they were Arab-Jews, and in retrospect they were "to be treated as one community with the Believers", as dictated by Muhammad in the Charter of Medina (Al-Barghouti, 2008: 61; Ibn Hashim, 2: 109–112). Clearly, it can be discerned then that a decolonized understanding of Ummah implies that it is therefore not exclusively for Muslims or Arabs for that matter!

It's in this sense too that nationalism possess limits, as being Muslim doesn't necessitate belonging to 'the Ummah', especially if one gives due consideration to the socially just particulars that give rise and found this Ummah in the first place, let alone the identity Muslim; the same claim can be applied to anarchism i.e. just because you identify as an anarchist (like the example of anarcho-capitalists) doesn't imply that you necessarily belong to what classically is understood as an anarchist community (given the anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist commitments that traditionally ground politically such communities) and not to dismiss too the different meanings to what identifying as an anarchist is, let alone the