Communication Technologies and the Age of Arab Nationalism

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Abstract

The 20th Century witnessed several attempts to unify the Arab peoples as a political and identitarian bloc. From the post-Ottoman pipe dreams of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali to the last days of Nasserism and the Ba'ath Party—there was no lack of leadership or intellectual rigor backing the pan-Arabist movements. As the impediments of colonial interference receded, visions of an Arab nation tantalized and propelled men of lofty ambition and iron wills. However, in spite of this seemingly rich ferment of opportunity, no lasting Arab nationalism would remain beyond the 1960s.

This failure, *though not the fault*, was with the Arab people. The failure was theirs, for none but the masses may affirm the unspoken plebiscite that envisions a unity of a people. However, the Arab people were faultless in this omission. As will be argued in the following thesis, the nationalist paradigm was simply at odds with the communications technologies available to spread the 20th Century dream of Arab nationalism.

If, as the theorists of the Toronto School contend, medium bears a more profound impact on communication than specific content, then Arab nationalism simply was dead letter from the start. The broadcast radio waves of the post-Ottoman Hejaz carried not nationalism, but tribalism *writ large*. Television networks thrived in Cairo and Riyadh,

but they did not anchor Arab solidarity. Instead, they dispersed to the Arab peoples heterogeneous oneness as subaltern collateral of the Cold War globalist order.

The current of emerging communications technologies continues to have dire and lasting consequences for the Arab world—and, increasingly, for the West as well. Networked computing technology has spawned novel and dangerous solidarities in the civic vacuum left by the age of globalist neoliberalism. These include violent jihadist ideologies such as those of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, Wahhabi fundamentalism increasingly global in scope, and the relatively moderate, though still illiberal "post-Islamism" of the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood and similar political parties. Even in those regions of the Arab world where strong civil institutions exist today, networked computing technology—by its mere existence and use—undermines the civic and social order. The vocabulary of nationalism often attaches itself to these solidarities, but they are substantively dissimilar. Whether or not the nation-state persists as a political edifice, communal identity is fast coalescing around the imaginary of the *Ummah*—the distributed, networked polity of Muslims worldwide—and not the nation.

And these developments are not peculiar to the Arab world. While the decline of nationalism, and the hollowness of globalism and post-Cold War liberalism, are today at their most pronounced in the Arab world, these are trends fast impinging on the West as well. A profusion of "small-u" *ummahs* now cast a net over the world, redistributing identity and solidarity away from the nation-state and onto collectivities of mutual interest and imagination. Worldwide, technocratic elites increasingly identify more with one another than with their countries of origin. Putatively ethnonationalist, but internationally distributed, far Right movements demonstrate greater solidarity among

themselves than towards their respective co-ethnics. These are the consequences of networked digital computing communications technologies and their effect on the imagining of communal identity.

This erosion of civil order in the horizontal babel of the Internet, World Wide Web, and social media is where the tribulations of the Arab world and the West meet at last. The globalist order brought about with the age of televisual broadcast is ending. Yet that passing age has set into motion trends that inaugurate a digital age more chaotic and foreboding than any foreseen by even the most cautious of futurists. In the coming years, the Arab world and the West will face the challenges of the networked age together. Indeed, the distinction between the Arab world and West will continue to blur, as patterns of human migration and intellectual diffusion imitate the immediacy of the hypertext. We must face this future with knowledge of the past, understanding that old mistakes must not be repeated—and that past successes cannot be retrieved. The tragedy of Arab nationalism's failure, and that's failure's inseparability from the 20th Century's precession of communications media, offers a narrative capable of explicating this dive into post-national, post-globalist dissipation. The history that follows may belong to the Arab world, but the future to come belongs to us all.

Introduction: Arab Nationalisms, Multiplicity, and Contingency

"It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around"

— Ernest Gellner

Any serious study of nationalism or the Arab world should reject appeals to parsimony at the outset. These topics will submit to inquiry from every discipline of the social sciences and humanities, from history to political science to moral philosophy and literary criticism. Their personages, motivating and competing ideologies, even physical topographies seem to shape-shift and distort according to analytic frame and abutting subject matter. Figure and ground trade places, and seem forever altered with each successive swap. Multiple analytic lenses enlighten simultaneously, yet never align to comprise a unified theory.

Even to speak of Arab nationalism is to fall prey to several misleading simplicities. Nationalism is itself a plural concept—incorporating such rationalizing conditions as ethnicity (as in the case of German and Italian nationalism), civic and philosophical ideals (France and the U.S.), and empire (Russia and the U.K.). Further preventing facile categorization, most national imaginaries have constituted themselves with some mixture of these conditions.

Even the generic category of nation, when applied to the Arab world, is an imprecise appropriation that does not fully conform to historical Arab conceptions of governance and communal identity. Three Arabic terms typically substitute for "nation," none perfectly: *dawla* (state), *sha'b* (people) and *ummah* (broadly, community). The first, *dawla*, refers to a temporary dispensation of leadership, a regime, whose "temporality

and lack of fixity are the main determining features" (al-Barghouti). The second, *sha'b*, obtains its definition from the Koran itself, and refers to an ethny or race (Ali, 41). *Ummah* hews most closely to the European concept of the nation as both people and body politic. However, the *ummah* is specifically a *distributed* unity of peoples, existing within separate geographies and under different governances. Thus, constituents of the *ummah* "might have several governments, yet demand that these governments be accountable to the collective" (al-Barghouti). While "nation" as constituted in the European context was a conditional and contested thing, its transposition to the Arab world only added further layers of obscurity.

Furthermore, Arab-world nationalisms cannot avoid the influence and, oftentimes, interference, of Islam into the constitution of communal identity. At all times, Islamism has offered itself, sometimes as a clean break from postcolonial nationalism (as was the case in Egypt), and at other times (as in the case of Algeria) as representing the "true" revolutionary nationalist spirit, which had been betrayed (Kepel, 173). But as a universalizing religion, Islam is at heart anti-nationalistic. While Islam may serve to aid in the unification of a people in national imaginary, its twin theological claims both to universality and primacy over civic matters will always pose a prominent contradiction to the nationalist project. And so, for as long as the dream of Arab nationalism has existed "these two motive elements competed with and fueled one another" (Ferdinand and Mozaffiri, 108).

Despite the challenges and complications they faced, independent Arab states did successfully coalesce in the years following the end of Ottoman and European colonialism. These states, indeed like all functioning civil societies, were possessed of

certain collective imaginaries that bound their citizens together in something approaching national solidarity. Some of these states came closer to the nationalist ideal than others.

The early 20th-Century pan-Arabism of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali, while not properly nationalist, was a nearly successful attempt to square the circle and integrate the *ummah*, *dawla*, and *sha'b* in a unified collectivity. Had it succeeded, a pan-Arab unity, both identitarian and political in character, might have developed in the Arabian Peninsula and Levant between World Wars I and II. Had it successfully done so, the history of the world would likely be profoundly different. Hussein's ultimate failure was not conceptual, but pragmatic. Lacking the political clout and military strength necessary to establish his pan-Arab kingdom in the face of British indifference and Saudi hostility, Hussein also lacked a suitable medium for spreading his pan-Arabist message to a populace that might have risen up in his support.

By contrast, the "proper" Arab nationalism of Nasser's Egypt and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party had the political momentum necessary to establish itself. It only lacked the collective affirmation of the Arab people. While this affirmation was quick in coming, it was brief in its stay. Its departure, as this thesis will claim, was occasioned in no small part by the means with which it could propagate and maintain itself through the mass media.

Beyond these examples, myriad other Arab nation states adopted, in assorted proportions, the pose and substance of nationalist solidarity. Postcolonial Arab leaders from Algeria's Ben Bella to Libya's Qaddafi stepped in to govern those populations who had, until the postwar years, been subject to secondary status in their own lands. These leaders would assimilate the apparatus of the colonial state—bureaucracy, infrastructure,

and borders—to the civic dimensions of their nationalist project. In so doing, they would struggle to animate a national spirit within the corpus of the colonial state. Many such efforts succeeded. Nationalism's easy adaptability and exportability were, after all, two of its primary strengths. The scholar of nationalism Benedict Anderson explains:

> The creation of these artefacts [i.e. qualities of nationalism] towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex "crossing" of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became "modular," capable of being transplanted with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains (4).

However, while the Arab states were successful in seizing the trappings of nationalism, they did so at a moment when the material, historical, ideological, and imaginative circumstances that gave rise to and entrenched European nationalism had long since entered their passage into night. While the characteristics of nationalism were highly portable at the time of their development, the media-historical ground against which these characteristics could flourish was singular, and nearly altogether gone by the time of their Arab adoption. At the very moment when the Arab states seized their equal share of the ideological apparatus of nationalism, the tools for reifying and sustaining a nationalist imaginary were mere decades, if not years, away from obsolescence. As the model of the nation state butted against the emerging powers of Cold War globalism and post-Cold War neoliberalism, its fragility would only increase. Upon encountering the shifting cognitive habits of humans living in the aurora of the digital age, the nationalist ideal would shatter entirely.

At all events, Arab nationalism would prove to be an imaginary at *contretemps* with the media technologies of its day. Emerging as it did at the dawn of the electric and

electronic media paradigms, it was not privy to the paradoxical homogenizing and individualizing powers of mass print that media scholars from the orthodox to esoteric generally agree were the psychic foundation upon which the nationalist imaginary stood.

Attempts to simplify the discourse of Arab nationalism are unlikely to clarify it as a subject. By applying Toronto School heuristics to this history, this thesis hopes to elucidate through complication and expansion of that discourse. This broad, media studies-based analysis is a study in vectors, of pattern recognition and media theory applied to the particular. It is presented as a test of tools and techniques, and while it aspires to offer a historical narrative, its conclusions are particular rather than categorical. This thesis claims only to offer valid analysis of those instances cited, toward the end of applying these same analyses to future scholarly works on the question of collective identity formation, communications technologies, their origins and future. As perhaps the most pressing and consequential crisis of affinity and identity on the global stage, it is critical that predictive tools be developed to forestall the rise of further violent and illiberal identitarian collectivities. This thesis is a step in the development of those predictive tools.

I: Language, Literacy, and Letters

"The Arabic word…is similar to the biological cell. The cell contains life and expresses, through the inclinations of its growth, the living being's point of view in these inclinations in such a way that they invite the sap of life to flow in them."

— Zaki al-Arsuzi

No universal formula exists to account for the emergence of nationalism in all its forms and contexts. Indeed, each strain of nationalistic consciousness, and the material matrix necessary to realize it, has emerged from its own unique historical and ideological ferment. However, there are several common factors that appear time and again in the origin of successful nationalisms. These are: adherence to a common spoken language (if not one of everyday usage, then at least one of state and intra-national commerce), the proliferation of mass-printed literature in this language, and a disseminating structure of markets and bureaucracy through which this literature and language can be spread.

Lingua Franca: Naturalizing the Nation:

Of those three factors it is language—a common tongue—that is the primordial medium of the nationalist imaginary. The lingua franca is that singular characteristic common both to ethnic group and nation (Amin and Kaplow, 21). And as such, it is nationalism's naturalizing force *par excellence*. It is the medium that bridges the gap between the biological and the imaginary, rendering credible the conceit that a geographically dispersed, even ethnically diverse populace is organically unified in the manner of a biological organism. At times, the nation-manifesting force of a common language has taken on positively mystical qualities. The brothers Grimm, whose ethnographic work represents a quintessence of nation imagining, "were certain that

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every language has its own peculiar spirit standing in mysterious relationship to the national character" (Snyder, 210). While such mysticism takes on ominous tones given subsequent German history, the more prosaic interpretation sustains: Nationalist unity is untenable without linguistic compatibility. Complications to the imposition, or instrumentalization, of a common language can prove a fundamental, even fatal, weakness to nationalist projects.

This proved to be the case in the Arab world. The *nahda*, or Arabic Renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries saw both the development of Modern Standard Arabic (Versteegh, 11.3) and the adoption of European ideologies of the nation (11.2). These are not merely parallel developments, emerging coincidentally from a period of intellectual and cultural fecundity. The two are in fact interdependent. No pan-Arabism may be practically conceived without some mode of collapsing the multivalent Arabic language. And, as mentioned previously, even at their outset European nationalisms stressed the need for a lingua franca.

Modern Standard Arabic—MSA—responded to the Arab world's need for a language suited to a modernist order characterized geopolitically by imperial nationalism such as those of the British in Egypt and French in Algeria (Abdulaziz). Prior to the renaissance of the *al-nahda*, there had been, broadly, two types of Arabic: classical and colloquial. Classical Arabic "is the language of the Koran and is rich in both religious and historical connotations," making it a challenging study for even a native Arabic speaker (Boyd, 314). Colloquial Arabic, by contrast, is less rigid and archaic, thus easier to learn. Yet colloquial Arabic "differs from one country to another and often from one area of a country to another. The spoken dialects are so different that North African Arabic

speakers often must converse with peninsular Arabs in classical Arabic or another language" (Boyd, 314). As a reifying proxy for ethnicity, Modern Standard Arabic was an indispensible adjunct to both classical and colloquial Arabic. Failing the invention of MSA, it is hard to conceive an Arab nationalist project that might have been conceived, much less implemented, successfully.

The conceit of national identity, naturalized in the mode of ethnicity via language, would suffer for credibility wherever the uniting language of business and state remained that of the departed colonial power. And so, following the age of colonialism, the Arabic language overtook those legacy tongues still grafted to the bourgeois and bureaucratic institutions of the departed colonial powers (Kepel). It would not do for a would-be Arab nation to assign its native tongue to the masses while elites retained their old language. To do so would be, symbolically, an act of deracination on the part of the national leadership—fatal to any nationalizing project. Just as the old colonial powers had to be driven from the offices of governance, so too would their method of speech be driven from the performance of governance and business.

Such was the case in Algeria, where attempt to purge the state (and embryonic nation) of colonialist language "attained jihad proportions" (Kepel, 170). Following the route of French forces, leaders of the revolution commenced a process of dedicated Arabisation, despite their own greater fluency in French. This led to president Ahmed Ben Bella's televised promise to the newly liberated Algerian people: "'Notre langue nationale, l'arabe, va retrouver sa place' (Our national language, Arabic will return to its rightful place) (Sharkey, 433). If Ben Bella's choice of language was ironic, the implementation of Algeria's Arabisation programs was anything but humorous. For 30

more years, Algeria would implement a process of forced Arabisation that was by turns lackadaisical and brutal. Berber minorities were subject to violent cultural suppression, while many Algerian elites made only a perfunctory switch from French to Arabic, and suffered no consequence as a result. Government operated on two linguistic tracks: in French for mundane operations and Arabic for those offices such as education and the courts, which required documentation or public observation. When, in 1992, Algeria erupted in a particularly self-destructive civil war, it "largely represented a battle of history and collective memory over how to be Algerian" (Sharkey, 439), which the Algerian writer Djamila Saadi-Mokrane "connected…to language politics in the context of what she called 'the Algerian linguicide'" (ibid). The struggle for the Algerian nation was a struggle over the ownership of language, and its meaning to peoples whose ties sometimes ran no deeper than the state boundaries of another nation's imperial aspirations. The failure of the Algerian government to unite its people peacefully under the common tongue of modern Arabic was the failure of the nation itself. "'Would this new nation be French, or anti-French, Arab, or Middle Eastern? No one responsible imagined that it would have the right to be [simply] Algerian'" (ibid).

Clearly, homogenizing vernacular is by no means a neutral instrument of group identity formation. In selection and implementation, the adoption of a national vernacular will do violence (symbolic if not literal) to those groups whose cultural characteristics are to be pruned in the interest of national homogeneity. Top-down nationalization project such as Algeria's are doubly at risk for this violence. Arabic in particular—even its Modern Standard form—carries with it an inescapable burden, which imposes itself wherever the language has been deployed as an instrument of nation imagining. Classical

Arabic, "from which the modern standard grew, is associated with Islam and past literary glory and civilization" (Abdulaziz, 22). It has been, and continues to be, a proxy for the Islamic confession, and its modern cognates indicate this history as surely as its historical tributaries. Arabic is, of course, the language with which the Prophet Muhammad received the Koran, and compared to which "Islamic tradition and law emphasized the sanctity [and] the distastefulness of speaking or writing another language" (Bunis, 70). The spread of Islam and Arabic are inextricably enmeshed: "[t]he cultural medium of the new religion, Arabic, spread with the message [and] by the time of the modern era and contact with the West, most of the Arab World from the Atlantic to the Gulf spoke an Arab dialect" (Holt, 12). This history constitutes the primary pitfall of Arabic as the vernacular glue of nationalist cohesion. In fact, with the spread of MSA and mass communicative technologies, this hailing is even more pronounced. If, in pre-modern times, Arabic dialects "were largely unconsciously used, today they cannot avoid being seen in relation to the written form" (Holt, 12). To speak in Arabic of any strain, it seems, is to hail the presence and influence of Islam.

However, the utility of nationally distinct vernaculars has historically depended upon their ability to supplant those languages with claims to metaphysical privilege. This process reorients the collective imaginary away from metaphysical hierarchy, and toward the more horizontal national body politic. Anderson explains:

> If all languages now shared a common (intra-)mundane status, then all were in principle equally worthy of study and admiration. But by who? Logically, since now none belonged to God, by their new owners; each language's native speakers – and readers (Anderson, 70-71).

In Europe, this process manifested itself in the gradual replacement of Latin as the language of diplomatic and trans-regional commerce by a variety of national vernaculars.

However, given Arabic's preexisting utility as both vernacular and sacred language, such a replacement has not been obtained. Arabic thus exists along a continuum between the prosaic and profound. Its codification as lingua franca is likewise the reification of Anderson's divine ownership. This has caused no end of strife in regions with significant non-Muslim minority populations.

In the Sudan, the difficult interplay of mutual aid and antagonism wrought by Arabic, Islam, and nationalism are more pronounced still. Here, "language politics helped fuel the civil war" (Sharkey, 436), as the imposition of Arabic became tantamount to conversion itself (Siddiek). At the time of its colonial liberation, Sudan was even further from a homogeneous Arab state than Algeria. South Sudan in particular, "which was mostly animistic and Christian and scarcely Arabized at all, was firmly opposed to any national project associate with Arabism—meaning, with an Islamic ulterior motive" (Kepel, 177). The postcolonial Sudanese government moved swiftly to implement its Arabisation programs despite these concerns, recruiting British and American missionaries with experience translating the Bible into Arabic (Sharkey, 435). This gesture would prove of little value. Within a decade of decolonization, stark identitarian lines had been drawn: on one side the North—Islamic and Arabic—and on the other side the South—Christian and English-speaking.

A trinity of ethnic, religious, and linguistic identity would form the crux of every major struggle between North and South from that point on. The 1957 manifesto of the Sudanese Southern Federal Party "called for a recognition of English along with Arabic as an official language; Christianity along with Islam as a state religion; and 'the transfer of the Sudan from the Arab world to the African'" (Sharkey, 435). Demands such as

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these accompanied Africa's longest civil war, which raged in the Sudan first from 1955-1972, and then from 1983-2003 (Siddiek). Attempts to solve the ongoing crisis were repeatedly forced to address the role of common language, from the Round Table conference of 1965 (Wai), to the Executive Council Resolutions of 1974 (Siddiek). Sudan's 1998 constitution, written during a period of Islamist ascendancy via the Ummah Party and National Islamic Front, stipulates Arabic alone as the nation's official language (Section 1, Para 3), whereas the Sudanese constitution of 2005, redrafted following the end of the second civil war puts English on an equal footing (Section 4, Para. 2). After winning its independence in 2011, the largely non-Muslim South Sudan established English as its official language (Section 1, Para 6), a move whose symbolic significance as act of social resistance is inseparable from its everyday exigencies (Green, 36-39).

Islamic extremists have recognized and exploited the implicit presence of Islam wherever Arabic is spoken. In Algeria, for example, the project of Arabisation came under harsh criticism for failing to separate the sacred and prosaic in its Arabic language programs. Lacking adequate faculty, Algerian schools in search of Arabic instructor often attracted "'religious fanatics', who … indoctrinated poor Algerian children into hardline Islamism while stoking popular contempt for the Algerian Francophone elite" (Sharkey, 438). The "Southern Sudan Question" is, at heart, inseparable from attempts at Islamic conversion via linguistic Arabisation. This vulnerability was by no means unique to Algeria and Sudan. Illiberal Saudi actors and other Gulf powers have "richly endowed" the African Islamic Center, whose function "was to train preachers and young elites from French- and English-speaking African countries, to imbue them with the Salafist view of Islam" (Kepel, 181). Under the auspices of the AIC, the International University of

Africa in Khartoum, Sudan, is home to the Arabic Language Institute, one of the premier schools of Arabic in the Muslim world. Arabic language instruction is often the carrot offered by Salafist missionary projects to attract the poor and uneducated to ultraconservative religious institutions. The pedagogy of the two is, in fact, often inseparable (Kepel).

"Civil" Arabic (that is, Arabic when spoken in contexts of commerce or state, regardless of its status as MSA or colloquial) cannot be wholly divorced from "divine" Arabic (that is, Arabic in the service of Islam). As the fundamental unit of nationalist imagining, the Arabic language—regardless its valence—contains the seed of Islamization. When outside forces are not present to aggravate this tendency, a relatively pluralistic nationalism with Islam as its cultural center often emerges. This was the case in Nasser's Egypt, early Ba'athist Syria, and (to a lesser extent) the pan-Arabism of Sharif Hussein ibn Ali. However, when chauvinistic or intolerant actors desire to do so, the Arabic language cannot but offer a means of undermining civic-regional or ethnonationalist unity in the interest of the global *Ummah*.

Print Media: Summoning the Imaginary

While linguistic unity constitutes the bedrock medium upon which a nationalist imaginary can be built, print media are the indispensible vehicle for organizing and codifying the national imaginary. The print technology and its affiliated markets, Anderson argues, are both the index and the engine of "wholly new ideas of simultaneity" (Anderson, 37). This is a post-religious simultaneity, horizontal rather than vertical, "transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by

temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (Anderson, 24). Both the novel and the periodical, literary forms whose rise to prominence coincide with the rise of the nation and decline of the poetic/oral/audile are devices "for the presentation of simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time,' or a complex gloss upon the word 'meanwhile'" (Anderson, 25).

This revolution in simultaneity runs side by side a radical reformulation of the individual, an individualized perspectivalism that, according to thinkers from the Toronto School, is a direct consequence of ongoing engagement with the machine-printed word. To thinkers such as McLuhan, perspectivalism is an inevitable consequence of engagement with the mass print technology, regardless of the capital and commercial methods with which it spread. "A fixed point of view becomes possible with print," (144) he writes, which:

> …exists by virtue of the static separation of functions and fosters a
> mentality that gradually resists any but a separative and
> compartmentalizing or specialist outlook…. The involuntary and
> subliminal character of this private or "fixed point of view" depends on
> the isolation of the visual factor in existence. (14).

This revolution in perspective, McLuhan argues, ultimately services a style of literary comprehension necessary for decoding and reintegrating the simultaneity described by Anderson. For whereas "to the oral man the literal is inclusive, contains all possible meanings and levels" (McLuhan, 127), the literate (i.e. visually biased) man "is impelled to separate level from level, and function from function, in a process of specialist exclusion" (ibid).

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McLuhan's diagnosis of the typographic mind is perhaps fittingly myopic. Of course, there is more to the psycho-cognitive condition of mass print literacy than individuality alone. Paradoxically, the typographically literate individual is conditioned both to perspectivalism and simultaneity. Furthermore, this paradox finds its resolution in the nationalist imaginary. It is quite impossible to separate "pure" technology from its social construction, and attempts to position one or the other as antecedent carry the inevitable charge of economic or technological determinism. Indeed, such charges would not be without merit. Typography, capitalism, and nationalism are all three the consequences and constituents of irreducible human-historical processes. To the extent that we attempt to pluck them from the broader historical field, we are merely isolating, perhaps even inventing, fragile epiphenomena that fall apart under scrutiny. Therefore this thesis does not attempt to reconcile the McLuhanite and Andersonian perspectives, but rather treats both as lenses through which to frame emergent phenomenon—to glimpse the print-capital-national trinity in action rather than dissect and freeze it with dogma.

The complex interplay of language, print markets, nationalist sentiment, and geopolitics that characterized the *nahda*, or Arab Renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, demands such an emergence-based approach. For the changes wrought in the *nahda* to "Arabic thought, public discourse on questions of identity or expressions of protonationalism" (Ayalon, 562) came bundled in both pre-formed and evolving ideologies of modernism and capital markets. There is simply no causal starting point where print capitalism, European cultural influence, or technology itself may be credited

as initiating Arab protonationalism. The former three emerge cooperatively, and out of this interplay, protonationalisms coalesce.

Historically, the inauguration of the *nahda* is somewhat less Gordian. Most histories locate the *nahda*'s origin at the Ottoman repulsion of Napoleon from Egypt. After this victory, Khedivate Mohamed Ali "encouraged young Egyptian to go to Europe, especially France, to study scientific and technical subjects" (Abdulaziz, 12). As these young intellectuals returned to Egypt and points beyond, they brought back with them "Western-inspired intellectualism, European rationalism, liberalism, socialism, Marxism, democracy, constitutional and parliamentary government, and nationalism" (Abdulaziz, 16). As well, they brought back European models of print-as-commodity and the seeds of the Modern Standard Arabic that had been developed to convey modernist concepts inarticulable in classical or colloquial Arabic.

Standardized scientific and political discourse helped to create a homogeneous bourgeois intelligentsia, in a process very closely mirroring that of European print culture. We must recognize, however, lest we lapse into crude determinism, that no technology, media or otherwise, emerges unblemished by the worldly circumstances of its birth, and "all intellectual and/or cultural work occurs somewhere, at some time, on some very precisely mapped-out, and permissible terrain, which is ultimately contained if not actually regulated, by the State" (Said, 21). Just as print media's simultaneous perspectival subjectivities and temporal unities shape the concept of the nation-state, so too do the powers of the emerging nation/state—and market—shape what print can (or may) say—and perhaps even conceive.

Printed media inarguably helps to shape the nation-to-be's conception of itself as a newly consolidated body of formerly heterogeneous parts. However, social, state and market powers ensure that the literary forms, genres, and works destined to ascend will do so by dint of their friendliness to the nation as imagined and constituted by those same social, state and market forces. In the case of the Arab world, these extra-medial conditions were arrayed largely against the nationalizing tendencies of typographic print/print capitalism. Several crucial cultural and historical mismatches —*contretemps*— between the mass print medium and social forces rendered the overall effect on the Arab world far less determinative than it had been in Europe. The result was a nascent Arab nationalism that enjoyed great intellectual and creative vitality, but remained the province of an urban, Europeanized elite.

Arab nationalists rose to stake their claims in in a very different set of material and ideological circumstances than those of print-saturated New World and European nationalists some centuries before. These circumstances provided a less-than-fertile environment for the development of national literatures, the likes of which had played so decisive a role in the formation of European nationalisms. Technologically, the Arab world print simply lacked a manufacturing and market infrastructure to match that of Europe. "Commercial printing took off spectacularly in Europe in the 16th Century, but the Muslim world saw no parallel development…while the European market for books mushroomed up to 200 million by 1600, Egypt had to wait for Napoleon and Muhammad Ali for the first printing presses" (Holt, 15). The first printing press did not appear in Egypt until 1822 (Holt, 16), and printing in Lebanon was the province of Christian missionary societies until the 1850s. All told, this gave the Arab world a scant hundred

years to develop print capitalism, and this despite the anti-nationalizing tendencies of early Arab mass print.

Lebanon and Egypt—specifically, their bourgeois urban capitals—represented the epicenters of the *nahda* print renaissance, "with its modern press producing all kinds of modern Arabic literary and scientific materials…modern schools of journalism, secular intellectualism, and modern Arabic literature" (Abdulaziz, 14). Market conditions would see to it that the nascent Arab press reinforced the Europeanizing tendencies of these social contexts. As in the European mass-print revolution, prudent investment favored the translations of existing texts. In the European case, these "back list" titles served as a foundation for the nationalizing European print revolution—as vernacular Bibles and collections of regional folklore gave shape and character to the national imaginary, while translated works of the Classical World did nothing to detract from this process.

The political and cultural context of the *nahda*, however, was not so supportive of Arab nationalism. Translated works tended to be disproportionately European (French in particular), which contributed to delays in the development of national literatures. National Arab literatures did not attain a significant presence until well into the 20th century, by which point print had long since been eclipsed as the formative psychic medium of human societies and solidarities.

The early spread of print markets *did* affect a sense of Arab unity across state borders, as commodities "from Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria reached other Arab province, and educated groups in the towns of Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and even the Hejaz became involved in the new exchange in print across provincial boundaries" (Ayalon, 561). However, this was a tenuous unity of bourgeois modernism, and "an uneasy

balance between modern and traditional styles of living" (Abdulaziz, 13), which left rural areas largely unaffected. Moreover, the works of newly inaugurated Arab press were by and large written in Modern Standard Arabic, a vernacular that to this day has not effectively penetrated rural parts of the Middle East and North Africa (Sharkey, Holt, Siddiek).

While the mass print revolution of the *nahda* is striking relative to the dearth of printed Arabic material in centuries prior, it remained "a modest trade and somewhat elitist…whose consumption required training that only few had" (Ayalon, 572). In Europe, the market for printed commodities served to drive the formation of nations, as "the logic of capitalism thus meant that…huge markets represented by the monoglot masses would beckon" (38). However, in the Arab world, the very linguistic medium that enabled the formation of print markets—MSA—simultaneously blocked the possibility of a monoglot consumer mass.

Similar, albeit less pronounced, contradictions afflicted Arab-language newspapers from the earliest days of the *nahda*. As a medium, the newspaper was resistant to the shortcomings of native content associated with literary publishing. Translated foreign content, of course, only rarely appears in the pages of the newspaper. And at any event, newspaper, in its choice of coverage and taxonomical categorization of foreign and domestic events, draws the circumference of the nation, and hails those voices within that circle—selecting their respective uniformity or diversity—to constitute the people of the nation. "What is the essential literary convention of the newspaper?" asks Anderson. "The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition…shows that the linkage between them is imagined" (Anderson, 33). This multi-perspectival quality,

which presents its discrete subjectivities in the unity of the text, is in either case an ideal vehicle for the imagining of national communities—the novel or newspaper as microcosm of the nation.

According to Anderson, the power of print news to forge a national consciousness not only resides in that perspectival quality, but also in the collective ritual of its consumption:

> [T]his extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ("imagining") of the newspaper-as-fiction… each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? (35)

In term of its epiphenomenological function as an engine of imagining, the Arabic newspaper seems as able as it European counterparts. To the extent that newspapers failed to affect the nationalist imaginary, it is likely the fault of too little time. The first Arab-world newspaper was founded in 1828 by Mohamed Ali himself (Asante, 136). Subsequent decades would see the development of a bounded but brisk news press (Ayalon). However, as is all too common in countries undertaking projects of modernization, that press was subject to "a condition that is more often the rule than the exception… This is the condition of scarcity" (Schramm, 93). Outside the hubs of bourgeois culture, there was little in the way of nationalizing press (Ayalon). This scarcity, simple lack of time, lack of support from other print media, and the same linguistic inability to speak beyond the Europeanized urban bourgeois, are enough to account for printed news' inability to enact Anderson's ceremony of national imagining.

While the book and periodical represented the prestige literary genres of Europe and the New World, they had been but two among a plethora of pre-existing Arab-world genres during the "upsurge of literary, linguistic, and journalistic creativity" (Ayalon, 562) of the *nahda*. In this oft-quoted passage, Edward Said writes:

> The twentieth-century novel in Arabic has a variety of forbears, none of them formally and dynastically prior and useful as, say, in the rather directly useful way that Fielding antedates Dickens. Arabic literature before the twentieth century has a rich assortment of narrative forms— *qissa, sira, hadith, khurafa, ustura, khabar, nadira, maqama*—of which no one seems to have become, as the European novel did, the major narrative type.

The textualization of folklore has been of the highest value to emerging nationalisms. Firstly, in the imagining of communities "the identification of which groups constituted a people had enormous political ramifications, giving folklore enormous potential to be instrumentalized at the highest political level as a legitimising discourse" (Baycroft, 2). And secondly, as a manufacturer of tradition, textualized folklore codified the mytho-historical "memory" of that so-constituted people. Baycroft elaborates:

> Collection and research into folklore took off on a large scale during the nineteenth century, at a time when [European] nationalism was an expanding political force throughout the continent. Several common features can be identified between the two, as both contain elements of the search for "the people" and its authentic voice, increasingly important in the nineteenth-century political as well as socio-cultural climate. Folklore often constituted one of the key elements of national identities, a distinguishing feature of a group of people which could be identified as a nation through their folkloric cultural practices, stories, traditions, dwellings, songs, music, costume, dialect, cuisine, etc. (Baycroft, 1).

However, the split between urban and rural populations (primarily a linguistic/literary split) tends to favor Islamism over nationalism. If classical and colloquial Arabic belong

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to the discursive cluster of Islamism and the rural milieu, then folklore is a poor instrument for enlisting rural participation in the nationalist project. Here, once more, we encounter a tangled discourse, where causal sequence is impossible to determine, but effect is quite clear. The *qissa, sira, hadith, khurafa, khabar, nadira, and maqama*—all of the genres cited by Said save for the mythic (often heathen) *ustura*—were in dialogue with a living tradition of Islam that spanned state borders. This living interaction would resist the static enshrinement of the nation-mythologizing folklorist. As for the *ustura*, enshrinement could only come as either anathema, or as one of the "superstitions" whose purging strict Islam would make a project in the late 20th century.

This set of circumstances is quite at odds with that of the nationalist European anthropologists, who were fortunate enough to work with a domestic tradition already obscured by the mists of history, and within an already weakened Christendom. The vitality of Islamic (as opposed to purely Arab) folkways would resist the necessary inhibitions which nationalist myth making places on folk traditions. Even were this not a concern, it may have been too late for those Arab intellectuals of the *nahda* upon whom this task would fall. The process of folkloric anthologization in the European context was part and parcel of a manic, encyclopedic drive to codify and archive, which seized enlightenment intellectuals. As Sommer describes, in the early years of this effort to capture and catalog the world, the disciplines of history, philology, literary studies, even the natural sciences were not sequestered as they are in today's academy. The literatures of the earliest New World and European nationalisms belonged to an intellectual milieu in which the canon of science and history were far less certain of their own thoroughness than in the postwar 20th century. Rather, they were viewed as facets of a single, emergent

scholarly discourse. Writers of emerging European nations were "encouraged both by the need to fill in a history that would increase the legitimacy of the emerging nation and by the opportunity to direct the nation towards a future ideal" (Sommer, 76).

The discursive leeway to embellish the histories and taxonomies of the nation's human constituents no longer existed three centuries after its initial European spasm. The adoption of protonationalist ideologies by *nahda*-era intellectuals was, in fact, only made possible by the closing of that discourse. By the time of the *nahda*, the history of the very nations "longing to form" (Brennan) had been long ago codified by the very colonial powers from whose identity these new nations sought to extricate themselves.

As a bourgeois, modernist, Europeanized, and often secular or even Christian-inflected phenomenon (Abdulaziz), the Arab literary renaissance was striking for the beauty, ethnic pride, and rapidity of its emergence. However, this aesthetic (perhaps even moral) triumph simply did not carry over into a national imaginary that could unify both bourgeois and peasant spheres. Whereas the typographic technology itself seems to have affected an individualizing trend among those it touched, its limited reach as a commodity limited its homogenizing capacity, and thus its utility as a driver of national imagining. It is telling that the efforts of petty-nationalist autocracies to mold the shape of literature in the shape of their will were abandoned at the very moment when those governments' credibility collapsed—the first Arab-Israeli war.

> In the decades following the Second World War when many Arab nations
> found themselves forced to deal with the political and social consequences
> of independence, fiction was clearly co-opted as a means of creating
> worlds in which reality conformed reasonably closely with officially
> sanctioned versions of it. In the aftermath of the June War of 1967 such
> orchestrations of past and present fell apart (Allen, 48).

After this point, Arab nationalisms would increasingly be plowed under the blade of emergent Islamism.

Irreconcilable Differences: Anti-Nationalist Literacies

  The inconsistencies and crossed purposes of literature and nationalism in the Arab world became even more pronounced as the *nahda* gave way to the upheavals of the 20th Century. New alliances would form between a literate but devout bourgeoisie (contrasted with secular Westernized and/or Marxist bourgeoisies) and a newly literate urban underclass of young men, drawn from a rural exodus to the capitals of the post-colonially constituted nations. Rather than co-imagining a civic or ethnonational unity, these literate migrant and devout bourgeois groups would increasingly collaborate on a dream of regional (and sometimes global) Islamism. The role of literacy in this convergence must be understood.

  The second half of the twentieth century saw a massive exodus from rural areas of the Arab lands. This produced a condition of congestion in Arab urban labor markets that shook the Arab world in the 1960s and 70s (Fargues et al.). These newcomers "were confronted with challenges of every kind, for which the traditional knowledge passed on to them [orally] by their uneducated parents was largely useless…But secondary schooling and, to a lesser extent, higher education in the cities had given this new generation not only access to newspapers and books but also great expectations of upward mobility" (Kepel, 66).

  The newly literate urban underclass must have struggled to reconcile the profound rupture represented by their shift from a rural, aural way of life to an urban, print

language one. The world bequeathed by their illiterate, orally proscribed traditions ran violently up against the multivalent, perspectival matrix of literate urban life. "The social and cultural chasm between the two generations was wide and deep, and there had been nothing like it since the dawn of Islam" (Kepel, 66). But while the potentially isolating qualities of print-literacy perspectivalism were with them in force, the unifying force of the imagined national community had been abandoned following the Six-Day War, and any promise of unity within the civic state put to the lie by these young men's dire economic prospects. In such an arrangement, the living word must have seemed suddenly imprisoned, drained of its magical properties by the binding and commodifying power of print over language; yet no alternative appeared to replace it. "Social and political discontent was most commonly expressed in the cultural sphere, through a rejection of the nationalist ideologies of the ruling cliques in favor of Islamist ideology" (Kepel, 66).

Islamism as embraced by this newly urban, newly literate class represented, in part, a recoiling from the "uncertainty in the strivings of the soul" described by McLuhan as a consequence of print literacy (Kepel, 35). Vastly more credible than the nationalisms that sought to tamp it down or coopt it, Islamism promised to set the world free, to render it totalizing and alive, to breathe the power of God back into the inert, commodified word.

Meanwhile, bourgeois nationalist forces of the pro-West or Soviet-aligned type, culturally steeped in the psychic-cognitive processes of a print literacy inherited from Europe, were faced with a more violent rupture than their more recently literate counterparts. Emerging as they did, newly literate, into a world fast on its way to electronic post-literacy, these disinherited would-be nationals were in a much stronger

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position to navigate the "the vertices and matrices of thought and action" of the global electronic age (McLuhan, 35). The newly literate urban poor had no "Lockean swoon" of rationalistic phonetic-visual imbalance out of which to wake. They were therefore far more capable of adapting to the post-literate audile environment than were their Europeanized counterparts, for "[l]ong-literate cultures have naturally more resistance to the auditory dynamic of the total electric field culture of our time" (McLuhan, 33).

McLuhan wrote those words in the early 1960s, during the same years that Sayyid Qutb was penning *Milestones*, the cornerstone work of Islamist thought for that century and beyond. Qutb imagined a global Islam, where the inner/outer split occasioned by print literacy could be mended by a total integration of Islam into both political life and the everyday. That inner/outer split may explain the motive of the devout bourgeoisie upon whom various Islamic revolutions likewise depended. For their part, the devout bourgeoisie would be prone to struggle with the tendency toward internal deviation that high literacy engenders. "In a highly literate society, then, visual and behavioural conformity frees the individual for inner deviation" (McLuhan, 24). A disjunction between the secular, materialist licentiousness of the literate marketplace and the integrity of aural/spoken modes of piety would demand reconciliation for the truly devout. Divided against themselves by the interior/exterior split facilitated by print literacy, Islamism promises a return to congruity and wholeness.

Starting from that motive, a possible vector presents itself to track the devout bourgeoisie's psychic-cognitive absorption into the emerging Islamist current: the frequent and easy interactions with iconographic calligraphy that comprises so much Arabic-Islamic art and decoration. These stylized pronouncements must have appeared

similarly to underclass and bourgeoisie alike, gestalt signifiers, which "have no content but are structures like an individual melody which evoke their own world" (McLuhan, 54). When encountering the *takbir* or *shahada*, for example, phonetic literacy is quite beside the point. The script pronouncing God's greatness need not be pieced together from its phonetic components. It is an icon itself. It is a stamp, a symbol first, and the signifier of spoken language second. As such, it possesses a power as object and talisman to the audile-tactile mind, "magically potent instruments" (Harrington via McLuhan, 125).

While moveable-type presses did exist, particularly in Europe, from the Renaissance onward, the technical difficulties of moveable Arabic type, combined with material-economic and cultural/political challenges, ensured a more thriving and longer-lived practice of transcription and block printing in the North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Applying the Toronto School theory of visual-spatial hypertrophy to that history, the weakness of Arab nationalism, and strength of the totalizing audile/tactile harmony of Arabic, Arab-world letters, and the Islamist *Weltanschauung* is comprehensible.

Under the influence of this new media-technological dispensation, the devout bourgeoisie and newly literate urban underclass took up the call to denationalize and retribalize along lines that explicitly favored a pan-Islamic identity, rather than a secular civic, or ethnonationalist, one. Some of the most integral modes of nation-imagining—education, mass literacy, and managed markets—were now to be taken up by Wahhabi Islamists operating out of Saudi Arabia and financed by petro dollars. By most accounts, the years between the Iranian revolution and the Rushdie Fatwa saw the fall of the old

dispensation and the rise of this new order. Not coincidentally, this was the period in which satellite television and networked computing technology released the late-electric age into its dotage and assumed their position as the new communicative force. While the outer form of the state would persist, the "daily plebiscite" raced away from the bounded unity of text, and toward the boundary free expanse of morally absolutist cyberspace.

II: Different Wavelengths

"Unity is not an automatic act…Circumstances do not help it and development may run counter to it, towards a false crystallization of fragmentation. According to this, unity is efficiency and a creation that goes against the current and a race with time. In other words, unity is a concept of radical change and an act of struggle."

— Michel Aflaq, Co-Founder, Ba'ath Party

By the time that the Arab states were achieving their independence, the print culture that McLuhan once called "the architect of nationalism" was well on its way to being overtaken by a broadcast media dispensation that favored globalist identities and governing structures. The mid-20th Century presented a litany of the best of intentions in the worst of contexts. For Arab nationalists, it was a time defined by its *contretemps*, missed opportunities, and could-have-beens.

The emergence of the Arab states from the suspended animation of colonialism occurred precisely at this moment of reversal when those explosive, body-extending media that gave rise to nationalism abdicated their power to implosive, central nervous system-expanding electric (and electronic) media. The "specialist and fragmented civilization of center-margin structure," empire, and nationalism could not but fall before the "instantaneous reassembling of all its mechanized bits into an organic whole" (McLuhan, 92b). Indeed, Arab ethnonationalism had slight chance to gain a foothold in a milieu where the idol of the ethnically discrete 19th-Century nation state was undermined at every turn by a media paradigm of globalized electric mass-homogeneity.

Hussein Ibn Ali: King of the Arabs, King of Nothing

There was a window of time, however brief, between the fall of the Ottomans'
quasi-modernist imperial pan-Islamism and the post-Khomeini 1970s, in which a pan-
ethnic solidarity might have thrived but for the political and military interference brought
against it.

The man who might have catalyzed this quasi-Nationalist order was Hussein bin
Ali. He was, by one contemporary account, "…a romantic conservative, full of the
ancient wisdom and learning of the East and endowed with the rich imagination which
mistakes rhetoric and dreams for reality" (Kohn, 281). Subsequent histories tend to agree
with the substance, if not the Orientalist tone, of this assessment. Hussein occupied the
position of Grand Sharif, ruler "not only of the cities of Mecca and Medina, but…the
entire Red Sea coastal area of the Hejaz as well" (Lacey, 83). His legitimacy as Sharif
(or Emir) came from his position as high-ranking member Hashemite clan, that is, the
direct descendant of the Prophet Mohamed.

In the early 20th Century, the Ottoman Empire was breaking apart. Its inner unity
was fractured via the revolution of the so-called Young Turks. Externally, defeat in the
first World War resulted in the seizure and reorganization of Ottoman colonial interests
by the Allies. Amid this upheaval, Hussein saw a strange reordering of his own fortunes:

> [Hussein's] role as guardian of [Mecca and Medina] and his pedigree as a
> descendent of the Prophet ensured Ottoman support for him while they
> controlled the Hejaz. Hussein reciprocated this favoritism by remaining
> steadfastly loyal to the sultan and his position as caliph. This mutual
> goodwill would not last; after the "Young Turk" revolution in 1908, the
> political climate in Istanbul turned against Hussein because the Young
> Turks favored rival clans for his position as *sharif*. Moreover, Ottoman
> heavy-handedness toward tribal violence in the Hejaz and the increasingly

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unpopular effort toward political centralization in the Arab territories led
Hussein to move toward the burgeoning Arab nationalist cause" (Khan, 7).

The British Empire of the early 20th Century found itself in a precarious position
of its own. Alliances in World War One had forced Great Britain to abandon what had
previously been warm relations with the Ottomans. These new hostilities created
significant anxiety and discontent in Muslim regions of the British Empire—particularly
India. Britain's opposition to the Ottomans "came as a shock to India's Muslims, who
regarded the strong and seemingly perennial British-Ottoman alliance in favorable terms"
(Khan, 11). Concerned with unrest among their Muslim subjects, the British cast about
for new allies who might provide that crucial legitimacy previously provided by the
Ottoman Caliph (Khan). At that moment, Hussein was engaged in hostilities against the
Ottomans, finding himself at the center of an Arab revolt spurred on both by surging
nationalist sentiments and regional Ottoman overreach (Khalidi et. al). When Hussein
announced his intention to conquer the lands from Syria to the southern Arabian
Peninsula, and rule them in the name of Arab and Muslim unity, many among the British
Foreign Service saw a ready, if temporary solution to both their military and imperial
challenges. As an able military proxy, Hussein would serve British anti-Ottoman military
interest in the region. And with the self-proclaimed Caliph as its ally, the British Empire
might regain lost legitimacy in the eyes of her Muslim subjects (Khan).

Between 1917 and 1924 it seemed that Hussein's political ambitions might very
well have been realized. Had they succeeded, they well could have led to a sustainable
pan-Arabism—if not exactly nationalism. This position might seem contradictory, in light
of Toronto School positions on the denationalizing tendencies of radio, and that
medium's rapid emergence in the years following World War I. Hussein's Arab world

was indeed riven with intra-tribal conflict (not the least of which that of the Saudis against the Hashemites), and "[r]adio restores tribal sensitivity and exclusive involvement in the web of kinship [contra] the press [which] creates a visual, not-too-involved kind of unity that is hospitable to the inclusion of many tribes, and to diversity of private outlook" (McLuhan, 215b). The fast-spreading medium of broadcast radio would seem to be as inhospitable to "the inclusion of many tribes" in the Arab world as Europe.

Two facts mitigate this criticism. Firstly, Hussein was under no illusions as to the intra-tribal challenges facing any would-be "King of the Arabs." As discussions with Britain went on, Hussein conceded that it would be necessary that "all the amirs would maintain rule in their families, and would appoint their own officials" (Teitlebaum, 112). He proposed a **"**chieftaincy," wherein "peace and unity could only be attained in Arabia by the grant of full internal independence to the different ruling chiefs, who in their turn must recognize the suzerainty of the King of the Arabs" (Teitlbaum, 109). Hussein's strategy was therefore less the immediate establishment of a far-flung Arab "nation" than it was the superimposition of an ethnonationalist imaginary over a pre-existing mixed tribal system (Teitlbaum, 114). This strategy, while never put into practice, is further evidenced in Hussein's careful application of a self-appointed title; he had, in October 1916 "declared himself *Malik al-Bilad al Arabiyyah*, not *Malik al-Jazirah al-'Arabiyyah"* (ibid). That is, he was not the king of Arabia (a unity of place and people), but of the Arab people. By emphasizing the *sha'b* at the expense of the *dawla*, Hussein collapsed the political, ethnic, and spiritual dimensions of unification were thus collapsed into a monarchy as adaptable as it was far-reaching.

Hussein's willingness to adopt this federalist-style model of ethno-Islamic suzerainty might have offered the perfect compromise between tribal modes of governance and identity, the Islamic solidarity of the Ottoman Empire, and rising Arab ethnonational awareness. Had Hussein's pan-Arab suzerainty gained a geopolitical foothold, the fast-emerging medium of broadcast radio might have been molded by political and market conditions of the newly formed suzerainty. Liberated from the imperial nationalism of Ottoman Turkey and Britain, possessed of a yet-unshaped medium prone to far-ranging "tribal magic" (McLuhan, 297b), it is conceivable that Hussein' pan-Arabism could have been the perfect hybrid to thrive in that historical moment when the age of print nationalism gave way to that of the wireless megatribe.

The Hejaz was certainly better suited to serve as hub of a pan-Arab kingdom than its Turkish Ottoman predecessor of Istanbul. Containing Mecca and Medina, the Hejaz offered Arab constituents objects of pilgrimage—the likes of which Anderson cites as central to nationalist imaginings. In place of the daily plebiscite of the press, there would be the five-times daily *Salah*, affirming the spiritual and temporal centrality of the Caliphate' capitol. In place of the bureaucratic pilgrimage of the post-imperial New World nations, this post-Ottoman nation would assemble its subjects in the capital by divine invitation.

The role of literacy vis a vis broadcast radio likewise might have played an uncharacteristically supportive role in Hussein's strategy for pan-Arabism. Literature assisted in the early conceptual and ideological—if not practical—development of Arab nationalism in the *nahda* (Teitlbaum, 104), and it would continue to be the preferred means of communications for thinkers and theorists of the Arab nationalisms and early

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Islamisms. But lacking the history of mass print markets that did so much to (de)constitute the homogenized European nation-citizen, these works did not filter into a common civic discourse. Instead of a liability, the Arab world's sparser history of print markets would have been an asset to the pan-Arab suzerainty. Unlike "England and American [which] had their 'shots' against radio in the form of long exposure to literacy and industrialism… the old web of kinship [would begin] to resonate once more" (McLuhan, 297b) in Hussein's suzerainty.

The very lack of a preindustrial print milieu, which so undermined Arab nationalism upon the arrival of industrial mass typographic print, in fact laid the foundation for a "retribalized" form of collective identity. Areas such as the Maghreb and Arabian Peninsula (less so the Levant), which "experienced little permeation with our own mechanical and specialist culture[1] [were] much better able to confront and understand electric technology. Not only have…nonindustrial cultures no specialist habits to overcome in their encounter with electromagnetism, but they have still much of their traditional oral culture that has the total unified "field" character of our new electromagnetism" (McLuhan, 27b).

Nationalism in Europe depended first on a breaking apart of Christendom via typographic perspectivalism and a reconstitution along state lines via markets, bureaucracy, and the press. The Arab world, however, underwent no such process of desacralization. The divinely animated world, like the oral culture that sustained it, existed in an integrated field of perception, cognition, and action. Far from a liability, this inspired holism may well have worked in the favor of Hussein bin Ali's suzerainty.

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[1] McLuhan considers the mechanical and specialist culture to be a direct outcome of mass industrial typographic print.

[2] An argument could be made that the start of the digital age ought to be located far earlier, in 1938, with the invention of the first photocopier. This definition depends on a view of the digital age as one

Hussein's goal had always been establishment of a new Caliphate, with its capital in Mecca. And his claim as the Sharif "seemed to fall in line with the traditional conception of the caliphate as both a temporal authority akin to a sultanate *combined* with spiritual authority" (Khan, 10). Islam would remain the object of common spiritual identity, while the Hashemite chieftaincy could bind regional tribes together temporally in mutual support and autocratic stewardship.

The political circumstances of the late- and post-Ottoman Arabian Peninsula would never have been perfectly congruent to those that existed prior to Europe's nationalist convulsions. Its pan-Arabism would belong neither to the generic civic nationalism of French and American revolutionary rhetoric, nor to the region-collapsing ethnonationalist ideal of German and Italian theorists. The suzerainty's weak federalist structure would remove it from the imperial nationalism known to Russia and the UK. Nor, finally, does Hussein's proposed suzerainty exactly match the theocratic federalism of, for example, the Holy Roman Empire. The Arab kingdom of Hussein bin Ali promised a hybrid of them all.

Suffice it to say that Hussein's suzerainty would face a steep project of "community imagining" in order to psychically realize that which he pursued politically. However, "the restoration of direct contact between the leader and the group…wherever neotechnic instruments exist and a common language is used there are now the elements of almost as close a political unity as that which once was possible in the tiniest cities" (Mumford, 241). The broadcast radio medium possessed qualities that might have served the pan-Arab suzerainty as surely as print did European nationalism. One may easily

conceive of a "Hejazi Broadcasting Corporation" developing as a matter both of policy and technological optimization to suit these needs.

The radio broadcast medium is not an inherently hypercentralized one. As the early American broadcast market demonstrates, radio technology is as amenable to peer-to-peer communication or community-scale broadcasting as it is to clear channel monopoly (Wu). Decisions made at the governmental level profoundly impact the circumference and fervency of the electromagnetic macrotribe. Nazi policies of mandatory collective listening demonstrate, contra McLuhan, that Teutonic "earthiness" is not the sole explanation for the führer-worshipping mystical qualities of the German electro-tribe. Meanwhile, American policies favoring "clear channel" commercial radio oligopolies constituted the American electro-tribe as a putatively apolitical consumer collective. There is simply no telling how the policies and regulation of a pan-Arab radio industry might have shaped solidarities and identifications across the Hejaz and Arabian Peninsula.

In much the same way that Hussein's suzerainty hybridized an array of imagined communities, so too could might have a "Hejazi Broadcasting Company" done the same. Hussein would have been assuming power at a moment of radical under-determination in the shape, structure, habits and practice of radio broadcasting. Far from the fractive "fission" of that McLuhan prescribes to "'backwards' and oral cultures that are just coming to individualism and nationalism" (McLuhan, 175c), a "Hejazi Broadcasting Company" may have been crafted to strike the necessary balance between ties of kinship, the alliances of statecraft and commerce, and the solidarity of ethnonationalist identity.

We must not allow interpretive models developed to explain a specifically European history to straightjacket our ability to compare or speculate on Arab world equivalents.

Such interpretive models must remain the province of speculation, however, as Hussein' pan-Arabism did not have the full support of the media-societal dispensation into which it emerged. Aspects of the media environment in which the Hashemite revolt took place ensured that the tribalizing power of the radio would never enjoy the opportunity to overcome the circumstances of global geopolitics. Politically, there is Britain's withdrawal of support for Hussein to account for. Indeed, most histories of the Hashemite revolt are little more than accounts of this reversal. The British foreign services that had obliquely promised diplomatic and military support for Hussein reversed policy amid a flurry of Middle-Eastern realignments surrounding the Balfour Declaration (Khalidi et. al). This ensured the collapse of Hussein's envisioned suzerainty, while installing the less forward-looking (to say the least) political and affective imaginary of Saudi monarchy and Wahhabi Islam as ruling dispensation across most of the Arabian Peninsula.

At the level of medium, too, circumstances would fall quite short of the potential. Hussein himself was personally ill-equipped to exploit the "electronic tribal campfire" of radio. Raised in Ottoman Turkey, in the Hashemite court far from the Arabian Peninsula he sought to lead, Hussein's formal Arabic was "a byzantine farrago of subjunctive and gerundical clauses in the style favored by functionaries of the Ottoman court" (Lacey, 84). When upset, "he lapsed readily into Turkish"(ibid). By most historical accounts, he simply lacked personal charm. Hussein was performatively incapable of assuming the

role of political leader *cum* broadcast celebrity in the manner of those Roosevelts and Nassers to come.

Furthermore, lacking an independent, domestically controlled system of regulation, subsidy or investment, radio in the Arab world was forced to develop according to the timetable and market dictates of its colonial managers. As a result, "Arab world states were late in developing both domestic and international radio broadcasting services. Partly as a result of the French and British colonization of the region in the 19th and early 20th centuries, there is a tradition of listening to foreign broadcasts in this highly oral culture" (Boyd, 284). Whatever "retribalization" or "fission" occurred as a result of this arrangement, the outcome of its interplay with market and geopolitical events may be seen today, in "the rise of religiosity in tandem with the advent of Western-style commercialism," resulting in "a variety of socio-cultural articulation and disjunctions" (Kraidy, 11). The relationship between Arab world and West remains one heavily mediated by broadcast news and entertainment, and questions of ethnic and regional identity continue to be negotiated along lines where national distinctions and ethnic solidarities are anything but settled.

In any event, the case of Sharif Hussein demonstrates that media ecology alone is both indispensible and inadequate to chart the rise and fall of socio-political paradigms. Politics, pivotal individual figures, and prevailing media's cognitive inducements are each a necessary but insufficient cause. Politics, of the material sort exemplified by Sykes-Picot and the Saudi seizure of the Arabian Peninsula, represent material cause. The personalities of pivotal figures constitute formal cause, while the bias of prevailing media act as efficient cause. As for final cause, that is the question over which scholarly and

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religious wars alike are fought. Perhaps it is the conclusion of the capitalist order (whether in collapse or final, permanent, global dominance), a mysterious momentum inherent to mankind's communications technology, or the destiny of a worldwide caliphate. Perhaps it is all three.

Almost a Nation: Nasser, the Ba'ath Party, and the UAR

With Hussein bin Ali's dream of a pan-ethnic Arab confederation now replaced by the more prosaic Saudi monarchy, pan-Arabism would not see another significant opportunity to assert itself for nearly fifty years. That opportunity arose in the middle of the 20th Century, coalescing around two loci of thought and revolution: the charismatic leadership of Gamal Abdel al Nasser in Egypt, and the intellectual and revolutionary ferment of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in Syria. Nasser was the "father of a nation" *par excellence*: charismatic, singularly willed, equally a true believer in both the dream of Arab nationalism and his own right to lead. For its part, Ba'athism was both intellectually rigorous and morally tenable, a fusion of socialist populism and Arab identity stripped largely of the Islamist imaginaries that would have been the glue of Hussein's suzerainty. These movements would intermingle and even ally, attempting to spread a pan-Arab state from North Africa to the Levant.

However, in spite of having some of the best political thinkers and actors at its disposal—in spite of its historical deportment in the vacuum of the post-imperial-colonial world order, 20th Century pan-Arabism failed to thrive. By the 1970s, it would be essentially a dead letter. Ba'athism survived in name only, a gross mockery of its former self, deployed only as ideological cover for a few cruel despots. Like so many

charismatically inspired social and political movements, Nasserism would not long survive the death of its namesake, either. A succession of military dictators followed, for whom the goal of Arab unity was at best a last priority.

The balance of global power in the mid-20th Century would appear an environment even more hospitable to surging Arab nationalist sentiments than Hussein's Hejaz. However, it, too, was not to be. The invisible conditions of human perception, cognition, and action occasioned by prevailing media were simply out of key with the tune of ethnonationalism. It was a tragic contretemps between the twin nationalisms of the Ba'ath and Nasser, on one hand, and the detribalizing, globalizing psychic order of televisual media on the other.

As the disruptive medium of the inter-war period, radio lays claim to shaping those grandiose dreams of pan-Arabism that occupied postcolonial leaders and revolutionaries for almost half a century. For while "[a]s the printing press cried out for nationalism, so did the radio cry out for tribalism" (McLuhan, 49)." The pan-Arabisms of Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Ba'athists inflated this tribalizing tendency to grandiose proportions, emerging as they did from of the hybridized nationalist imperialism of the telegraph era. Despite wielding the force of passions and personalities equal to any *Première République*, these nationalisms would always lack a certain necessary coherence. Here, in the 20th Century, the contretemps between political fortunes, imagined community, and the cognitive conditioning of prevailing media tech, achieves it greatest level of discord. The retribalizing passions of the "electronic campfire" may have once provided a type of social glue for embryonic pan-Arabisms envisioned by Hussein, Nasser, and the Ba'athists. But no sooner had the political fortunes of the Arab world

finally aligned to be hospitable to such a pan-Arab imaginary than would then encounter the de-tribalizing, globalizing force of televisual media.

When Egypt first won its independence in 1922, electric media was racing to overtake print as the dominant mode of mass communication worldwide. In the Arab world, where print already lagged, the gap between the two was narrower still. The extreme visual hypertrophy—which McLuhan attributes to literate (and by extension nationalistic) cultures—did not set in here to the functional exclusion of other media as it did in Europe. In large part, this was due to the intrinsic sanctity of the Arabic oral tradition in Islam, which could not easily be subsumed into a print-vernacular Arabic. As a result, cultural production in Egypt culture, therefore resided before WWI) in a "functional equilibrium between printed mass media and a manuscript culture predicated on the spoken word" (Armbrust, 158). Following WWI, cultural production "must be seen increasingly in terms of interlocking media systems" (Armbrust, 161). In both cases, and therefore throughout the history of modern Egyptian politics and media, the nationalizing force of print capitalism "functioned within a hierarchy of other media" (Armbrust, 162). That "extreme phase of alphabetic culture [i.e. print] that detribalizes or decollectivizes man in the first place" (McLuhan, 180a) simply never arrived in Egypt, as circumstances forbade the extremity of print capitalism that Europe experienced during its own nationalist convulsions.

In Egypt following the First World War the influence of electro-magnetic and broadcast media culture promoted its own distribution of sense-ratios, and identitarian orientations. Despite infrastructural homologies in "the specialist and pyramidal forms of structure" (McLuhan, 160), these broadcast networks served to undermine the centralized

hub-and-spoke federalisms of nation-states. In the first place, "[t]he earliest radio broadcasts within the Arab world were of extra-national origin. Italy was the first, followed by Great Britain, Hitler's Germany, the Soviet Union, and France in the run up to the second world war" (Boyd, 286). Even as broadcast radio matured as a medium and industry, under a contract with the Marconi Corporation, "[t]he physical facilities, if not the entire tone of Egyptian broadcasts under the Marconi contract [1932-1947] were unmistakably British" (Boyd, 17).

Following the cancellation of the Marconi contract, and in part taking advantage of a weakened postwar Britain, Egypt nationalized her radio in 1947. A mere five years later, revolutionaries led by Gamal Abdel Nasser would depose the Egyptian monarchy, expel the British once and for all, and undertake the nationalization of Egypt herself. Nasser, a handsome and charismatic orator seemingly tailor-made for mass broadcast media, would struggle to "line up rationalization of different domains" (Armbrust, 159) to extend the national imaginary "to the human contents of national spaces" (ibid) beyond the Sykes-Picot borders imposed by the now-departed colonial governors and encompass ever-expanding swaths of the Arab world.

Egypt would be the first Arab country "to construct high-powered mediumwave and shortwave transmitters to reach the indigenous population as well as to carry the Nasserite Pan-Arab message to the remainder of the Arab world" (Boyd, 15). Nasser saw broadcasting "as a means of bypassing the print media that were primarily responsive to the literate elite who could both afford publications and read them" (Boyd, 4). He understood that radio would be his greatest asset in rationalizing the commonality of far-flung and often illiterate Arab peoples, once declaring "My power lies with the Arab

masses…The only way I can reach my people is by radio" (Boyd, 320). Radio was, by his own admission and in no uncertain terms, the font of Nasser's populist political power. As a means of generating more of that power, Nasser "expanded radio diffusion, put Radio Cairo under his direct control, and operated it…to expound viewpoints of the Arab nation, reflect the hopes and fears of the Arab countries…unite the Arabs and mobilize their forces to achieve Arab unity" (Cull, 16).

Nasser's post-revolutionary move to boost the broadcast range even beyond the legal borders of the Egyptian state (Boyd) had the effect of positioning Cairo as the center of listeners' media worlds (at least for the duration of a broadcast), while simultaneously minimizing the importance, or even existence, of national borders in the region. Nasser's was an electromagnetic rationalization of Arab nationhood with his own cult of personality (along with language, religion, and ethnicity) as a primary domain of rationalization. So long as the technology and the man remained at the apex of their influence, it was a winning combination. The Arab nationalist imaginary spread.

As Nasser was casting his electromagnetic glamor across Egypt and beyond, another powerful engine of Arab nationalist imagination coalesced around a cadre of Syrian intellectuals. The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was the brainchild of Michel Aflaq, a Greek Orthodox Christian from Damascus, Salah al-Din Bitar, a Sunni Muslim, and Zaki al-Arsuzi, an Alexandrettan from the heterodox Alawite Shia sect. Coming as they did from three tribally and religiously disparate origins, their political ideals and aspirations coalesced around two key, and interdependent, ideals: socialism and Arab nationalism (Devlin).

Of these two, Arab nationalism would prove the most durable. "The party had been founded at an opportune moment. For twenty years or more, the belief that the Arab people were one and of right ought to be politically united had been gaining greater and greater acceptance in Arab intellectual circles" (Devlin, 27). From the outset, "[t]he common factor uniting the people who associated themselves with the party, as the first organized political movement to preach total Arab unity, was a belief in Arab nationalism and unity" (Devlin, 27). Socialism came as a slightly later addition to the party platform, included to buttress the goal of pan-Arab solidarity. When socialism eventually fell away from the party platform, Arab unity would remain.

The three founding fathers of Ba'athism were intellectuals of the colonial variety, hyper-literate, Sorbonne-minted, awash in the Bergsonian philosophical fashions of their day. As such, it is no surprise that the three found it easy to constitute themselves as "generic" Arabs, irrespective of sect, and the three took it as their mission to reconstitute the Arab people as a unified ethnic front. Circumstances clearly had not brought about such an arrangement unassisted, following the French colonial departure from Syria, and so "[t]he special role of the Ba'ath in leading the Arab nation came to be the dominant theme of the party fairly early in its history. The party constituted the vanguard (*tali'ah*) of the people…this new generation was to breathe life into Arab society" (Devlin, 32).

While the Ba'ath Party had aspirations (eventually realized) to seize power politically, their mission was always, explicitly and primarily, one of rationalizing the imaginary of a unified Arab people. To this end, Arsuzi proved himself a genius, stepping over the disunities of formal and vernacular Arabic to craft a theory of linguistically-rationalized nationalism that was at once credible, inspiring, and spiritually profound.

Arsuzi would have rejected the modernist Andersonian model of nationalism, wherein nationalism is "a process of attempting to line up rationalizations of different domains…the range of which corresponded to markets" (Armbrust, 159). However, Arsuzi would have concurred that the establishment of affinity and solidarity—"rationalization" in Andersonian terms—"began with language" (ibid). The two thinkers diverge over the question of the "national genius or spirit" (Omar, 24), Anderson rejecting it at the outset and Arsuzi embracing it.

Arsuzi's works on language and the Arab nation would be heavily influenced by the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson. In Bergson's view, "language expresses abstraction, and therefore cannot express the cosmic message" (Omar, 26). In Bergson's system of thought, language was a crude instrumentality, conditional and arbitrary, which attempted to give shape and permanence to an absolute that was both timeless and ever becoming. These ideas profoundly influenced Arsuzi's debut work *The Genius of Arabism is in its Language*. In it, "Arsuzi provides an explanation of *ishtiqaq,* the ability of Arabic to derive it lexicon from a number of basic roots which are highly evocative of concrete, natural sounds and images" (Omar, 27). Arsuzi adapted Bergson's ideas to his own attempts at formulating the linguistic constitution of the Arab people.

> "The root of Arabic, he believed, correspond to the images and sounds of nature, and the movements and primordial emotions of the human body. Arabic grammatical structure and the rules govern derived Arabic words, according to Arsuzi, seem to be also in congruence with the natural order" (Omar, 35).

By positing the genius or spirit of the Arab people in a pre-material essence, descended into materiality via language, Arsuzi broke from the Islamizing tendencies of Arab nationalisms such as those of Nasser and Hussein. He positioned the Arabic golden

age in the pre-Islamic period of Arab history, when in his opinion "Arab culture formed naturally and spontaneously, a continuation of the underlying primordial, mystical-organic life force" (Omar, 30) before Islamic conquest diluted it with the assimilation of foreign cultures and ethnicities. All Arab peoples were thus party to the genius of the Arab nation, regardless of creed, sect, or tribe. Arsuzi's Bergsonian philosophy thus "provides an insightful epistemological explanation for the capability of Arabic [and the Arab people] to grow and change while remaining the same" (Omar, 35).

Ba'athist nationalism as conceived by Arsuzi was explicitly metaphysical in character—not institutional, cultural/historical, or market-driven. Arsuzi's nationalism was an "irrationalization" of the domain of language, one perfectly suited for the metaphor of the spirit and the airwaves. Arsuzi's irrationalized linguistic nationalism also differed from those of Europe as it was *affirmatively dynamic*. Like so many European nationalisms, Ba'athist linguistic nationalism hearkened back to "the nation's Golden Age, when a people form their authentic self" (Omar, 24). However, unlike European Nationalisms, it did not seek to revive this golden age and suspend it in an indefinite, perpetual "now." Rather, Arsuzi's linguistic nationalism posited a vital source out of which the Arabic tongue should draw its national spirit in an ongoing process of linguistic variation, evolution, and coalescence.

One might easily speculate how such an ethnonational mysticism might have resonated in the early 20th-century milieu of radio-mediated retribalization. Arsuzi's mystical "irrationalization" of the Arab peoples circumvented the roadblocks to print-visualist textuality thrown up by colonialism. Colonialism "institutes a print culture predicated on visualism, and which inheres in texts rather than men…the textual

transformation enacted by colonial discourse cannot be pushed to its logical extreme" (Armbrust, 158). Therefore the interplay of colonial print culture and a pre-existing "manuscript culture predicated on the spoken word" (ibid) forbade the extreme visual hypertrophy upon which the paradox of individualizing/homogenizing nationalism relies. While a "[f]ragmented, literate, and visual individualism is not possible in an electrically patterned and imploded society" (McLuhan, 51b), a linguistic spirituality, divorced from creed or sect, which posits an essential identitarian core to the language of a people is perfectly consonant with the hub-and-spoke, network-and-affiliate anatomy of the broadcast radio dispensation.

However, yet again the timing of a vital Arab Nationalist imaginary failed to line up with the communications technologies that would condition its constitutive subjects (i.e. the Arab masses) while reaching those same masses. For the purposes of constructing historical narrative, we may pinpoint the nexus of discord in the three-year life and death of the United Arab Republic, or UAR. The United Arab Republic was the short-lived confederacy organized by the Syrian Ba'ath Party and Nasser's Egypt. The Union was inaugurated on February 1, 1958, and dissolved on September 28, 1961. It had been undertaken in a spirit of enthusiasm and goodwill, as "many Arabs came to believe that the long-sought Arab unity was now within reach" (Devlin, 117). The Syrian Ba'ath party went so far as to dissolve, "turning over virtually complete power to President Nasir, and trusting in his good will and good judgment" (ibid).

But the UAR was not a gateway into a pan-Arabist future. In both motivation and execution, it was a product inaugurating the age of televisual globalism. Many of these pressures within Syria were the result of TV-era momentum toward globalization. At this

point in history most Arab states found themselves riven with ongoing power struggles between U.S. and Soviet-backed factions, such that, by as early as the 1960s "the inter-Arab state system became highly polarized and fell further under the influence of the great powers, becoming more dependent on them for economic, military and political support" (Gerges, 293). In Syria, "both the army and the political élites were experiencing increased pressure from the [Soviet-backed] communists" (Palmer, 51). Rather than submit to the Soviet pole of the globalist order, the Ba'athists and ordinary Syrian people alike thought their odds would be better by consolidating authority into an Arab locus of power, Nasser himself.

The balance of power between Egyptian and Syrian players during the UAR years would unfortunately mirror Egyptian broadcast hegemony. Egyptian officials operating in Syria were met with the resentment of cultural imperialists, as "Syrian élites felt that they were being relegated to secondary positions, and that the Egyptians were trying to run the whole show" (Palmer, 55). Stereotypes of supercilious cosmopolitan Egyptians and paranoid rural Syrians further soured relations (Devlin).

In an attempt to salvage what was becoming an increasingly untenable political alliance, Nasser further consolidated political and communicative control under his own dictate. "There were not, in fact, sufficient, necessary and effective ties between the Syrian and Egyptian Arab people to establish immediate unity…except one thing—Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir…[and] [o]ne person is not enough to make unity" (Palmer, 59). In the analogy of state as televisual broadcast, Nasser was the central hub of the prime network. Around the electric campfire of radio, he was the chief *par excellence*. In effect, Nasser doubled down on hub-and-spoke configuration that works so ably to promote televisual

media and global imaginary, but is antithetical to nationalizing projects. As a result, "existing administrative capability was reduced by the excessive centralization" (Palmer, 62), creating a "paradoxical situation…in which the union was beset by too much centralization on one hand, and not enough on the other" (Palmer, 63). Syrians bristled under the preeminence of specifically Egyptian influence, and what they saw as a lack of reciprocity in the project of pan-Arab unity. Egyptians, for their part were "especially caustic, referring to the nationalist response in Syria as 'effervescent sentimentalism'" (Palmer, 58). With such discontent rampant among the élite, only the Arab masses remained to imagine the Arab nation into being. But such an achievement could only be accomplished via mass media of a different sort than that which was available. And so it was not achieved at all.

When popular support, too, failed to materialize. Nasser blamed himself for failing to reach the peoples of Egypt and Syria with a "signal" powerful and compelling enough to bring the UAR project to fruition (Palmer, 57). On this matter, Nasser and the Ba'athist Michel Aflaq were in agreement:

> The level of consciousness among the majority of the people and popular movements in the two countries lacked maturity and order. Many people entered these unity movements for parochial reason, without willingness to bear the full burden and responsibility. This attitude encouraged deviation…[a] weakness in the level of consciousness…(Aflaq, 202-203, via al-Fasal)

And so, regional pan-Arab nationalism of the sort envisioned by Nasser and the Union of Arab Republics had proven an impossible hybrid. The UAR was, conceptually,

too indebted both to the grandiosity of its late colonizers' imperial nationalism and the retribalizing energies that would characterize the brief dispensation of broadcast radio's primacy. It was simultaneously too early and too late to effectively redirect these forces to the ends of Arab unity. The UAR, and the ethnonationalist imaginary it represented, presaged the cross-borders identitarianism of post-Khomeini global Islam, as well as the model of federated nation states later put into action by the European Union. However, in both its contiguous regionality, and hub-and-spoke geopolitical orientation (with Cairo at its center), the UAR was a chimera, an artificiality, belonging to a media-technological context that never was and never will be.

The televisual age was at hand. With it came a new, globalized imaginary of human contiguity. "The globe would become joined through the blood system of electric wires that would shrink the planet into a single community with an all-inclusive newness" (Antecol, 2). We must recognize that it was unnecessary for television to fully proliferate in the Arab world in order for this shift to have occurred. As a globalizing medium, television need only have permeated a part of the world to enact its worldwide spread. The West, as both the televisual and military-economic powerhouse of the 20th Century, need only have oriented itself to this new televisual cognitive style for the impacts to be felt worldwide.

The Western-birthed televisual cognitive style is often painted in sympathetic, if not worshipful, tones. It was seen "as the catalyst toward an interconnected, organismic, and holistic global village" (Antecol, 2). McLuhan was less sanguine about this shift than typically is perceived. He stipulated that the global village was "a place of very arduous interfaces and very abrasive situations" (TVOntario). However, while cognizant of

cultural clashes that would take place, McLuhan remained naïve to the economic and diplomatic predation that would accompany the new order. Even Egypt, the dominant media force in the mid-20th-century Arab world, would not prove immune.

Radio remained a popular medium in the Arab world even after the arrival of television. However, as it was forced to cede ground to the televisual paradigm, it began to emphasize greater regionality, leading to precisely the ultra-insularity and tribalism that was its primary bias and hazard. In the Arab world since the 1960s "the rise of domestic radio services that cater to the needs of the local populations has made it unnecessary for nationals to tune to radio services of other countries to obtain news and entertainment programming" (Boyd, 324). The period of ethnonationally-dominated broadcast was too brief—not to mention compromised by imported content—to in any way concretize the establishment of civic national identity.

Moreover, ample radio broadcasts still existed to enflame tribalistic hostilities and undermine the program of unity. This was exploited by French propagandists via Radio Free Egypt, which "bombarded Syria with reports that Nasir was planning to relocate over a million Egyptians in Syria" (Palmer, 65). Reports such as these only further damaged Syrian-Egyptian relationships riven with already growing resentments and mistrusts. Its expansion, ascent and significance now plateaued, radio, unrestrained from the biases by state control, shook what little stability belonged to an already tottering ethnonationalism attempting to draw itself up upon the rickety scaffolding of a rapidly globalizing world.

As the legacy of the charismatic would-be father of a nation Gamal Abdel Nasser faded, television was establishing itself in the processes of cultural production in the Arab

world. Nasser's legacy of investment in Egyptian electricity, long line, and broadcast infrastructure, Egypt was positioned to dominate regional broadcasting and production. However, Nasser's policy of supporting the spread of television was fundamentally at odds with his Arab nationalist ethic. By virtue of Nasser's talent and resolve, television amplified Egyptian dominance over regional cultural production, shoring up the petty nationalism of the post-imperial Egyptian state while culturally enfeebling neighboring civic-national projects.

Television producers and programmers across the Arab world "generally relied on Egypt as a source of Arab-produced material for television when politics would permit it" (Boyd, 46). Gulf states used Egyptian studios to produce content specifically for export. Foreign production companies paid for Egyptian talent and tech. This led to increased competition with Egyptian-specific production, which in turn led to the government to regulate foreign production in Egypt. "This move prompted the producers to rent studios in Great Britain, Germany, Greece, Jordan, Bahrain, an Dubai, to import Egyptian talent and to tape programs that they sold directly to Arab world television stations" (Boyd, 46). In an apparent inversion of the experience of the apparatchiks of the colonial Americas, who came to understand themselves as a people through their geographic and bureaucratic peregrinations (Anderson), the processes of Egyptian television production built a technocratic pilgrimage that implicitly undermined the civic nationalisms of regional neighbors, and eventually their own as well.

It would seem that as he strove to realize his pan-Arab imaginary, Nasser's televisual aspirations were at odds with his goals. And yet, their fates remained bound up. As Nasser's pan-Arabism would dissolve in the emerging globalist dispensation, so too

would Egyptian television. The fortunes of Egyptian television and President Nasser would mirror one another, and their failures would be as one:

> During the early years of Egyptian television, [Nasser] utilized television indirectly as a tool of mass mobilization, televising political events rather than staging political events for television. During the 1967 war with Israel, Egyptian television lost credibility because of its propagandistic coverage…Nasser took responsibility for the defeat and alluded to resigning in a speech tailored for the media…Egyptian television went through years of decline (Kraidy, 15).

Nasser did, in fact, resign, only to return and lead for two more years until his death. Like his regime, television would carry on, a proud but depleted icon with nationalist aspirations and globalized liabilities. After the failure of the Six-Day War, Egyptian television was forced to adopt a slate of mediocre programming from the Soviet bloc (Boyd, 42). In response to its relationship with the Soviets, the technical infrastructure of Egyptian television was badly diminished by Egypt's inability to trade with the West (ibid). Some years later, after relations resumed with the West, Egypt branched out into American and British programming (Boyd, 44). While this may have improved the quality of entertainment on Egyptian TVs, it only shifted the locus of cultural production from one claimant to the globalist throne to the other.

By 1979, countries such as Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq stopped purchasing Egyptian television. This move, given a different techno-historical timeline, might have helped to shore up the nationalisms of these countries in spite of McLuhan's theories. However, 1980 marked the end of television, and the beginning of computers as the medium of psychic influence. It was too little, too late.

If analyzed tetradically (or if simply observed in real time), it becomes apparent that when pushed to its extreme, globalism is in fact imperial in character. The Cold War dialectic between USA and USSR affected the expansion of globalism as a practice while determining also the location of the axis of global empire. While the states founded and/or seized by nominally Ba'athist and pan-Arabist leaders like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi had pretensions of both nationalist and pan-Arab ideals, they "were ultimately to become corrupt family fiefdoms reliant on total control by a secret police" (Cockburn, 407). Whether these autocrats were wholly cynical from the outset, or whether "pure" national and ethno-national ideals were corrupted along the way, is somewhat beside the point. The era in which Gaddafi, Hussein, and their ilk assumed power was one in which such national and ethnonationalist modes of affinity and solidarity were wholly against the grain of the ascendant psycho-cognitive media matrix of broadcast globalism. Most post-Arab Nationalist states fell under the patronage/control of one or the other power vying for centrality in the new globalist dispensation. Syria found a tenuous alliance with the Soviets, while Egypt and her strongmen made common cause with the United States.

Countries such as these "all depended either on an alliance with the Soviet Union or at least sufficient rivalry between the superpowers in Washington and Moscow to give them space to pursue independent policies" (Cockburn, 407). That is to say, they were integrated into the emerging globalist dispensation. Far from a competition between two titan nation-states, the privilege of historical distance now permits us to see the Cold War in a new light: as the struggle between two loci for centrality in the globalist order. Much as Constantinople and Rome vied for centrality over Christendom, so too did the USA

and USSR for the global marketplace and mediasphere. It was only their respective identitarian legacies as multiethnic nations that obscured this reality.

For the Arab states, this obscurity would prove far less convincing. Nationalism, while still conceptually present, "no longer provided the ideological glue necessary to hold together and motivate people who were fighting a war…loyalty to the nation could seldom compete successfully with the loyalty of Shia and Sunni to their own communities" (Cockburn, 403).

The End of Arab Nationalism

Those successive Arab nationalisms which occurred briefly between the period of decolonization and the late twentieth century proved at best a hollow shell, possessing the form of nationalism borrowed from Europe, but ultimately lacking the same material and psycho-cognitive ballast (we might even say, illusions) that allowed nationalist constructions to persist over so many European decades. Indeed, as the electro-magnetic interregnum drew to a close, eclipsed by the retribalizing late electronic and early digital dispensation, Arab world nationalisms were revealed to represent merely the terminal stage of imperial European nationalism.

This period belongs to the age of analog electro-magnetic communications, lasting no more 150 years, if we are to set its boundaries at the first functioning telegraph lines of the 1830s and the development of ARPANET in 1961.[2] Given its brief historical moment, which McLuhan could not reasonably be expected to have anticipated, his view

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[2] An argument could be made that the start of the digital age ought to be located far earlier, in 1938, with the invention of the first photocopier. This definition depends on a view of the digital age as one defined specifically by mass cut-and-paste technology, rather than the packet switching upon which the Internet depends (which is at root simply a rapid practice of cut-and-paste).

of the electro-magnetic age as a wholly new dispensation of global awareness, similar to Chardin's noosphere, may be excused. Certainly, when applied to the case of nationalist imaginaries, this was not a new era, but a period of acceleration, extension, and reversal. Perhaps it is better to consider this age of radio and television's greatest psychic influence as a transitionary period, characterized by hub-and-spoke network styles of communication and government, starting big and ending bigger.

The latter era of maximalist global hub-and-spoke markets, government, and cultural production, which leads history into the digital age, begins the cognitive shift toward hyperindividual perspectives of a sort unimaginable even at the height of mass print's influence. The fate of nationalisms in the Arab world fits far more neatly into such a narrative historical model. Arab nationalism, quite unfairly, arrived only as the final, terminal consequence of the imperial nationalisms begun by Napoleon, Victoria, and (to put too fine a point on it) James K. Polk. Whether Hussein's suzerainty, Nasser's paternal cult of personality, or the Ba'athist socialist mysticism, Arab nationalism attempted to reproduce a historical process that had already reached its senescence, in a cognitive milieu made increasingly inhospitable by a global, eventually digital, media infrastructure.

III: Imperium Obscura

"Syria is not for the Syrians, and Iraq is not for the Iraqis. The earth is Allah's."
        —Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Caliph, *ad-Dawlah al-Islamiyah* (The Islamic State)

As the 21st Century unfolds, we are witnessing the precession of yet a new technological equinox. Now it seems all too possible that that the geopolitical and mediated social fortunes of the Arab world are in synch at last. Far from a cause for celebration, however, this should be occasion for great concern. For the harmony of digital media and the late-globalist order is not a song of peace, but of crisis and violence. Digital modes of communication descended upon corners of the Arab world starved of stable national identities, bereft even of the pseudo-nationalist autocrats who once ruled as proxies of the global hegemons. The outcome is proving to be a war of all against all.

The early 2000s marked the turning point between the age of televisual globalism and that of networked digitality. It would prove an epochal shift, first in a profound alteration to the balance of power—and later, of fear. For the purposes of historical narrative, we may pinpoint the arrival of civil war to Iraq as the horizon at which the envelope of optimism—both in globalism and digital technology—collapsed. The newly undisputed global hegemon, the United States, found itself savaged, stymied and ultimately repelled by small, quick moving, and most remarkably, *unpopular* squads of Sunni rebels both at home and abroad.

This tipping point coincides with profound changes in the programming and infrastructure of communications technology. It is the moment when consumer broadband began its proliferation of the first world. It is that window in which object-oriented programming languages attained primacy overs their more linear and

hierarchical procedural predecessors. And social media began its rapid spread to every corner of the globe. In all three cases, speed and decentralization went hand in hand, politically and technologically, validating McLuhan's observation that "when the instant speed of information movement begins, there is a collapse of delegated authority." (McLuhan, 247b).

Indeed, with the spread of digital networks, the speed of communications reached velocities and volumes undreamed of in the broadcast age. And as these networks proliferated in the early 00s, delegated authority in the Arab world was collapsing faster than it could be seized or assigned.

The Shape of Terror: Meta-Networked Jihad

It was in this ferment that a new breed of networked terrorism, "of networked organizational designs, and related doctrines, strategies, and technologies" at last metastasized (Arquilla et al., 80). One may draw a sharp, straight line through the evolution of contemporary Arab and Islamic terror ideology, and overlay it with perfect congruity to the shift from broadcast to digital communications technology. Early Islamist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb, who worked in the late-print idiom in the mid-20th Century and ran fatally afoul of Nasser's early broadcast pan-Arabist project, saw little violent application of his ideas while alive.

Moreover, as works of literature, books such as Qutb's *Milestones* were vulnerable to the falsifiability of text, and "while popular, had been discredited by *sharia* experts" (Ingram, 22) whose Nasserite-friendly judgments could be spread more quickly than Qutb's objections. With only his printed words to reach the faithful, and these

vulnerable to the negative exegeses of more reputable authorities, Qutb's influence would remain sub rosa for decades. Qutb would not live to enjoy the full impact of his work at the end of the 20th century, when they were at last harnessed by the next generation of jihadis, amplified and spread by communications technologies that Qutb could hardly have foreseen.

That subsequent generation would find its apogee in the person (and persona) of Abdullah Azzam, the charismatic "Father of Global Jihad" (Riedel) whom Osama Bin Laden described as "not an individual, but an entire nation by himself" (Ingram, 25). Azzam was no layman like Qutb, but an accomplished Islamic jurist who relied on "an oratory style that was eloquent, passionate, and direct" (Ingram, 22). Yet in the late 1970s, an age of broadcast image and sound, when Azzam developed his global profile opposing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he cultivated his image as "warrior-scholar," favoring "long, flowing robes, as well as the black-and white *kaffiyeh* of the Palestinians" (Ingram, 22). Pictures such as these appeared side-by-side images of Azzam orating in publications (ibid), while dubbed cassettes of his many speeches circulated throughout the Sunni Muslim world, charming and inspiring the mujahedeen who would drive the Soviets from Afghanistan and go on to form the nucleus of al Qaeda (McGregor).

The proliferation of satellite television in the Arab world disciplined its viewers toward renewed solidarity (often with an Islamist twist). It likewise imposed on its viewers visions of sometimes objectionable, sometimes tantalizing Western culture. Azzam would adapt militant Islamic ideology in a mode that was befitting his era's paradigm of mass globalized broadcast—drawing strength and credibility from this new

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globalized cognitive scope while offering himself and his movement as the shield and sword by which the intrusive West could be beaten back, and punished.

Whereas Qutb had argued for the primacy of offensive jihad over defensive (Stahl), Azzam went further still, collapsing the distinction between *jihad al-akbhar* (spiritual struggle) and *jihad al-asghar* (war). To wage war, Azzam argued, was to struggle spiritually. To pursue spiritual purification without waging offensive war on behalf of Islamic truth was futility. From that position, Azzam sought to expand the attack on *jahiliyya*—heathenry, roughly translated—to a global stage (Ingram). The very notion of national borders, such as those imposed by Sykes-Picot, were anathema as they had been "drawn up…by the *kuffar* [unbeliever, derogatory]" (Azzam, 77). Wherever secularism, science, and materialism reigned, all *jihad fard'ayn* (able-bodied Muslim men) were obliged to struggle on behalf of the Ummah. Almost by definition, this included any place whether the commodities of reception (television, bookstall, or boombox) could meet Azzam's transmissions—or vice versa

Azzam's most infamous protégé, Osama bin Laden, is a rather transitional character in the evolution of jihadist organizational structure, in spite of his centrality to the course of recent U.S. history. Like the media paradigm in which he was most active— that of the 1980s and 90s, roughly—bin Laden marks a rather rapid shift, "favoring and strengthening network forms of organization [and the migration of power] to non-state actors, who are able to organize into sprawling multi-organizational networks" (Arquilla, 81). While bin Laden participated in this shift, it is worth noting that bin Laden himself did not greet the flattening of jihadi organization with unqualified approval. Bin Laden,

who "preferred complex operations," found himself out of step "with Al Qaeda's fragmentation into multiple regional groups" (Sivek, 584).

That fragmentation began in no small part due to al Qaeda's loss of its operating bases in Afghanistan. However, while bin Laden and his deputies escaped eastward, new modalities of planning and organization within the al Qaeda network were emerging. These new methods employed digital communications technologies, such that al Qaeda's directorship would never again be so consolidated. Even had bin Laden held his position, the dispersal of operations and messaging were likely bound to have come about, albeit perhaps more slowly, as the group's messaging strategies, both public and internal, moved toward ever-increasing use of varied digital tools: "e-mail lists, blogs, forums, chat rooms, games, social media groups, magazines, and videos for flexible, global distribution, with little real threat of censorship" (Sivek), for "although these formats permit infinite reproduction of al Qaeda communications, they also fragment[ed] its messaging" (ibid).

Not coincidentally, this dispersal and distribution of jihadist communicative action occurred at that moment in computing history around the turn of the millennium when the object-oriented programming paradigm had eclipsed procedural programming as the dominant machine language idiom. In contrast to earlier "top-down approaches that sought to describe complex systems at the macro level of the complexity itself," object orientation "is a design strategy for modeling highly complex systems as smaller interacting elements that are finitely computable" (Alt, 280). That is to say, that while procedural programming and its cohort root represented a departure from the purely computational machine and assembly languages of 3rd generation assembly languages,

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they retain a hierarchical and linear command structure. Procedural outcomes do not emerge asynchronously, but chronologically. Actions are not the result of myriad discrete elements constituted "such that an accurate simulation of complex behavior emerges, bottom-up from the sum of individual interactions" (Alt, 280). Rather, procedural outcomes conclude as the terminal step in a progression of cause and effect.

Conversely, object-oriented programming consist of commands "in which data and instruction are bundled into discrete objects that behave like individual computers themselves and communicate with one another to carry out complex…tasks in parallel" (Alt, 284). As alluded to in the above paragraph, this work is distributed and non-hierarchical, and its outcomes are emergence-based (Alt, 280). This is the very model of command and action that itself emerged from the splinters of al Qaeda Central in the early 2000s. Jihadism post al-Qaeda Central does not exist as such until an outcome emerges from the interaction of non-linearly, non-hierarchically related actors. In the interval—what Giles Deleuze deems "affect" or "what occupies the interval…between a perception…and a hesitant action" (Deleuze, 61). This *late-bound* action—the execution of each act of this new "object-oriented jihad"—presents an example of a new "generative violence," in which both destruction of the *kuffar* and establishment of the global caliphate emerge in discrete loci, out of a discourse of hostility. This departs from the top-down—or perhaps more aptly, *center out*—pattern of ideological violence that has prevailed in most other historical contexts. In its place, a matrix of meaning, a *plan d'immenence* provides the raw material for an almost infinitely malleable combinatory potential of violence.

So it is less significant that terrorists and insurgents were *using* networked digital technology to organize attacks and communicate with the world at large than the fact that al Qaeda and its associates had begun morphologically to imitate the structure of those of digital networks through which they worked. The use of digital communications tools had begun as a strategic necessary. But in the end those tools would discipline the hierarchical "al Qaeda Central" organization into anachronism, for "[t]o behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it" (McLuhan, 46b). As the fall of the Taliban scattered al Qaeda geographically, these new digital tools were—by dint of their affordability, reproducibility, and resilience— simultaneously removing the need for a strong, centralized al Qaeda leadership. This, in turn, allowed for various AQ "spin-offs" to emerge from Al Qaeda Central: Al Qaeda in Iraq, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, in Palestine, Somalia, the Levant, the Indian Subcontinent…the list goes on. By the end of the 2000s, al Qaeda had dispersed so thoroughly that it was, in the words of CIA psychiatrist Marc Sageman "just a loose label for a movement that targets the West. There is no umbrella organization" (Allum, 58).

With Al Qaeda Central receding as the indispensible font of organizational, military, and media expertise, many jihadists found it expedient to distance themselves from the al Qaeda brand altogether. This "rebranding" served several purposes. First, it expunged the stain of failure that accompanied al Qaeda's various defeats in Afghanistan, Anbar Province, Iraq at large, and Pakistan following the capture and execution of Bin Laden. It also enabled jihadists to expiate themselves from guilt in the many atrocities committed against Arabs and Muslims worldwide in the name of al Qaeda (Helfstein,

Abdullah, al-Obaidi, 2-7). Most prominent among these rebranding strategies was that undertaken by the group formerly known as al Qaeda in Iraq, who in 2012 declared its establishment of a Salafist caliphate in northern Iraq, and renamed itself the Islamic State in Iraq.

The Islamic State needs little introduction at this point. Its colorful atrocities and barbaric governing practices have earned it media attention that even the late bin Laden, with his now-quaint DVD dispatches, might have deemed excessive. The Islamic State accomplished what Islamists from al Qaeda to the Muslim Brotherhood have failed to do: organized a Salafist body politic, both regional and transnational, physical and virtual. As such, IS represents both the hypertrophy, and the reversal of the digital decentralization that began in the equinox of al Qaeda Central.

In a region beset by inter-tribal rivalries, the Islamic State attempts to reduce micro-tribal fractiousness, and replace it with a pan-Sunni protocol. This was, in fact, the driving factor behind early resistance to the group (then still operating under the AQI banner) during the so-called Anbar Awakening. IS encourages laypeople the world over to ally and identify with itself, incorporating lone wolfs and wannabes the world over in a virtual, invisible caliphate. Under such a distributed modality of affect and action, an IS affiliated jihadist "may be both subnational and transnational [and] odd hybrids and symbioses are likely" (Arquilla, 83). It is here that the "capital U" *Ummah* of the past meets the "small u" *ummah* of the future.

Many odd structural hybrids have shaped the Islamic State, its attendant satellites, and scattered supporters so as to defy easy categorization or counterattack. As Arquilla,

Ronfeldt, and Zanini explain in their eerily prescient 1999 analysis *Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism*:

> "Networks come in basically three types (or topologies):
> - The *chain network*, as in a smuggling chain, where people, goods or information move along a line of separated contacts, and where end-to-end communication must travel through the intermediate nodes.
> - The *star*, hub, or wheel network, as in a franchise or a cartel structure where a set of actors is tied to a central node or actor, and must go through that node to communicate and coordinate.
> - The *all-channel* network, as in a collaborative network of militant small groups where every group is connected to every other." (84)

The Islamic State partakes in all three of these structural topologies more or less equally, weaving them into a fluid meta-network that functions equally well for the purposes of disseminating propaganda, encouraging lone wolf attackers, waging war on the ground, coordinating with sleeper cells abroad, and even providing the mundane services of a municipal government in those territories they have seized and held.

Of these three networks, the chain and star need little by way of explanation. The chain network is employed in IS practices such as the running of arms, and the smuggling of immigrants from IS-held territory into northern Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State has made use of existing organized crime chains, "capitaliz[ing] on existing routes…utilized for drug trafficking and other illegal activities" (Spahiu). These chains frequently originate in the Balkans, which act as headwaters both for guns flowing into Western Europe and fighters heading south. This strategy is in fact part and parcel of IS's development as a self-defining jihadist organization. It was refusal to respect existing

clandestine chain networks that led to IS founders' greatest defeat prior to the establishment of the Caliphate. When, in the mid-2000s, the forces of Al Qaeda in Iraq were driven from Anbar province, it was in so small part due to frustration felt by previously cooperative tribal powers over AQI's takeover of oil smuggling routes (Montgomery, 272). The emerging, digitally topological organization of AQI/IS had suffered by failing to integrate itself into longstanding linear chain networking structures. In its ensuing "years in the desert" AQI would learn their lesson from this misstep.

By the same token, the star network is the classic structure of the insurgent guerilla group. Organizations from Al Qaeda Central to the PKK and Irish Republican Army have made use of the star network model. As a model of insurgency, the star network is a product of the broadcast era, comprised of spokes emanating from affiliate hubs of delegated authority, which in turn link to a central governing body in the manner of a television network. In the case of the Islamic State, the supreme Caliph oversees a cabinet of five agencies (Military, Consultative, Judicial, Defense, and Information), who in turn legislate and enforce the laws of the Caliphate (Neriah). In its military and governing structure, the Islamic State bears little difference from the rebel groups and would-be coupsters that preceded it.

However, it is in the third dimension of network topology—the all-channel network—that the Islamic State distinguishes itself from all that came before. IS is at the forefront of this innovation in large part due to good historical-technological timing. Prior to the saturation of digital communications technology "the all-channel [network had] been the most difficult to organize and sustain, historically, partly because it may require dense communications" (Arquilla, 85). But in the early 2010s, digital communications

technology, global Salafism, and the largely ungoverned swath of territory in Northern Iraq and Syria aligned in unforeseeable ways to welcome the arrival of an entirely new modality of identity, solidarity, governance, and violence.

Let us call this new dispensation the Distributed Caliphate, so as to distinguish it from the military and bureaucratic edifice of the Islamic State proper. The Islamic State proper is a network characterized by high connectedness and high dominance, which is to say "a system with a high number of links, but a very skewed distribution of those links" (Jackson). All roads—ideological, spiritual, military, or otherwise—funnel into the same leadership and messaging cohort. It is to this cohort that the chain and star network styles primarily belong. But the Digital Caliphate is a system of high connectedness and low dominance, "a high number of links…evenly distributed across system components" (ibid). It is both an all-channel network and a meta-network fusing past and present modalities.

The three network structures described by Arquilla et al. help us to understand how contemporary jihadism has managed to coordinate its ideological and coordinating topologies into vastly complex and resilient meta-networks. From the IS bureaucracy and terror cells, to the imagined community of the IS *ummah*, it is a tangle of "networks within networks, connections within connections, and links between individuals that cross local, nation, and international boundaries" (Economist).

Fragmentation and multiplicity of organizational structures not only increase the reach and resilience of IS/Digital Caliphate, they also undermine its enemies' ability to "command and control…during high impact, intense, crises" (Goodman, 208). This decentralized meta-network, like the "internet's decentralized structure, with its origins in

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military networks designed to survive nuclear strikes, now gives jihadi networks tremendous resilience" (Economist). Across-the-board obliteration is essentially impossible.

In this quasi-indestructible, unexpurgated archive, the great preachers and orators who inspired so many to take up the Salafist jihad live on. Mere data storage has rendered the likes of Anwar al-Awlaki and Abdullah Azzam immortal. Hence, the moral and ideological infrastructure wrought by the Islamic State will be practically impossible to stamp out. Denazification was a success. Debaathification, less so. But there will be no de-Salafization so long as the 'web and 'net adhere to their current morphologies. Indeed, to structurally alter them in such a way would be to render both unrecognizable from the tools we use today.

Not only does the Digital Caliphate resist destruction, it even demonstrates characteristics of antifragility. That is, periodic shocks to one element strengthen the network overall. Twitter bans lead to the adoption of better-encrypted social messaging apps (Paraszczuk). Within the EU, counterintelligence resources are inversely proportional to interstate counter-terrorist cooperation; the more cooperation exists between counterterrorism forces, the fewer the resources are typically available (Simcox). Territory lost in Iraq or Northern Syria provokes jihadists to return home to Europe and wage jihad in less chaotic environs (Dwibhashyam). Even as the Islamic State crumbles as a place and governing body, the Digital Caliphate expands everywhere and nowhere, *imperium obscura*, a scattered, invisible empire of Salafist faithful bathed in the blue light of the terminal glow and waiting to arise.

The Ummah as Rhizome: The Hypertext and the Lone Wolf

The Digital Caliphate is both everywhere and nowhere. Its borders are the contours of digital data itself. It exists wherever the vast, seething chaos of digitally encoded information is navigated according to the pan-Sunni Salafist protocols that emanate from its counterpart in the real-world Islamic State organization. With those tools, the lone subject weaves his place in the Digital Caliphate, using the raw materials known as hypertext.

McKnight, Dillon, and Richardson describe hypertext as, "simply stated…*nodes* (or 'chunks') of information and *links* between them" (McKnight, Dillion, Richardson, 2). This is indeed a simplified description, accurate insofar as it goes. However, it does not do justice to the vast "omniterminousness" of the hypertext ideal as described by Tedd Nelson, where each quantum of information, is neighbor to every other ("transpointed"), permanent, nested within its corollaries ("transcluded"), immovable yet imminent, and indestructible (Nelson).

A better description may be found in Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome. The hypertext, like the rhizome "connects any point to any other point" (Deleuze and Guattari, 408b). In the hypertext, all quanta of information are equidistant. "It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills" (Deleuze and Guattari, 409b). And yet, "[i]t is composed not of units but of dimensions or rather directions of motion" (ibid). Therefore the hypertext ideal is *hyperarchical*, "permitting the same material to be organized into simultaneous alternative structures – hierarchies, sequences, hyperplexes" (Nelson, 1b). The Salafist discourse is in a part a discourse of navigational protocols for generating these alternative

structures, a fluctuating map "that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exit and its own lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 409b).

If it will endure the limitations of definition, we might say that the hypertext is the aggregate of all digitally networked information when appreciated for its rhizomatic qualities. The World Wide Web, a finite and merely *polyterminous* data hoard, represents a compromise on that rhizomatic hypertext ideal (an insupportable corruption by the standards of Ted Nelson). But the WWW's omnidirectional navigating structure is, at its core, a child of the hypertext.

In both its ideal and practical forms, the theory of the hypertext is indispensible to understanding the process of extremist and terrorist radicalization. Authorities have been confounded in their efforts to combat extremist messaging online. This is in no small part due to the unpredictability, if not indeed chaos, inherent to the character of hypertextual readership. As with all digital media, what is liberating is rarely stabilizing.

When the question of counter-messaging online is raised, it is invariably assumed that doing so will be through the creation of *competing* media—content platforms, forum posts, video content, etc. What authorities in the realm of counterterrorism seemingly fail to understand is that in the hypertextual milieu of the World Wide Web, there is effectively no such thing as competition. All sites, pages, and applications—but for the odd password or paywall—are part of a single non-linear rhizomatic document, in which "[t]here is no distinction between existing and potential documents: all exist in an 'eternal present'" (Jackson).

Antiradicalization projects are, understandably, reluctant to link to jihadi content, not wishing to grant it extra exposure or implicit legitimacy. However, by attempting to create a separate, sequestered digital text, counter-jihadi narratives will unfailingly suffer from a credibility gap, for "[t]he essence of hypertext is…in breaking down constraints posed by having to interact with physically separate individual documents. Each reader or user is able to interact with any material however he or she wishes" (Jackson). Any antiradicalization effort that fights against this defining "omniterminous" quality of the hypertext is in effect confessing its own coercive intent to the user.

By contrast, content occupying the pro-jihad discourse tends to recognize the unconstrained quality of the hypertext, indeed embraces its polyterminous qualities. Extremist media primarily seeks "to provide its audiences with a 'competitive system of meaning which acts as a lens through which supporters are compelled to perceive and judge the world" (Ingram, 4)—the Protean map of Deleuze and Guattari. The cartographers of hypertextual jihadism draft their navigational protocols with the assumption that their target audiences are inevitably saturated in statements of orthodox liberal modernity. Therefore, they seek not to limit the range of inquiry, but to provide a moral and ideological polestar by which readers may orient themselves.

Even with content creators this pose of neutrality prevails. Pro-jihadist websites often present mainstream media reports "in an unbiased way and then contrasting them with Jihadist reports (backed up by selective photographic or video evidence), inviting its audience to differentiate" (Awan, 77). In doing so, they preempt the distrust otherwise generated by flat refusal to engage anti-jihadist discourse. Such a frank engagement with their foes offers jihadist groups a significant advantage on the moral battlefield, where

such asymmetrical warfare is largely won and lost. It stands to reason that further empirical research, quantifying the ratio of jihadist-to-mainstream outlinks against the opposite, is a critical component for crafting counter-jihadist communications strategy.

Still more communicative asymmetries emerge from the implicitly top-down character of counter-terrorist messaging, in contrast to the much more commonly peer-to-peer rhetoric posed by IS web outreach. In the hypertext "all texts are virtually present and available for immediate access" (Heim, 35). In such an arrangement, inter-platform information structures are irremediably flattened (even if, *intra*platform, they remain largely hierarchical). This points to yet another difficulty in the production of counter-extremist messaging. While counter-jihadist content may not typically link to it pro-jihadist counterpart, the two are nonetheless coterminous, superimposed features of the pan-dimensional hypertext topology. To present the counter-narrative is therefore to reify the narrative.

Moreover, as a flattened information structure, "[h]ypertext renders readers of a document simultaneous authors of that document…[S]uch a system is highly transformative, redefining the traditional relationships of author and reader or text and commentary by eliminating the boundaries and hierarchies" (Jackson). Such a quality is particularly unsettling given jihadist digital media's other role as "particularistic ethnic media" (Awan, 79). Here the bias of the hypertext is to massage a seamless unity between explicitly jihadist and tamer niche content targeting especially orthodox Muslims. In this there is no "radicalizing" leap to make within the hypertext; the jihadist text naturally follows the ethno-particular, and vice versa. By contrast to this seamlessness, the relationship of hypertext reader/author to blandishing governmental

content is one of pronounced resistance. Such is the case in diaspora Muslim communities, where "the consumption of alternative news media is often based upon mistrust and cynicism towards 'Western news'" (ibid).

Given the seamlessness of the hypertext, with its successive linking of jihadist and more prosaic content—given the incongruity between the loudest voices of deradicalization, endowed with all the power and authority of the state and capital, and the flattened, anti-hierarchical medium of the digital hypertext document—we are justified in wondering if concerted anti-jihadist content might not often amount to a net harm.

At the very least, it has not solved the problem of "self-radicalization," the process by which an individual moves "from radical rhetoric to the rhetoric of radical action" (Picart, 360). As anti-jihadist content has proliferated in the hypertext of the Web, so too have real-world attacks by so-called "lone wolf" jihadis." An independent study conducted by PBS's *Frontline* concluded that the number of lone wolf attacks in the U.S. has increased from 23 in the 2000s, to 35 just between 2010 and 2016 alone.

These lone wolves are motivated by a plethora of grievances, and are frequently inspired by as many (sometimes contradictory) terrorist ideologies and organizations. While certain European lone wolf terrorists have been linked to particular terrorist organizations (Moreng), lone wolf terrorists operating in the United States have only rarely demonstrated such ties, and often are just as motivated by personal grievance and mental illness as by structured political or religious ideology (Pascarelli). The difficulty and strategic importance of separating these two types of solo actors has led the American scholar Max Abrahms to coin the term "Loon Wolf" to describe unaffiliated

terrorists with mixed motives and affinities (Wen). To separate such actors from the "jihadi network terminals" discussed above, we will employ this distinction as well.

The loon wolf is both denizen and excrescence of the hypertext. While the lone wolf may occupy a position in a chain or star terrorist networks, the loon wolf belongs exclusively to the all-channel Digital Caliphate. They do not receive ideological marching orders from any one leader in the global jihadist movement. Rather, they may theoretically pay obeisance to *all* leaders in the global jihadist movement. Indeed, they may, as Orlando mass shooter Omar Mateen did, "blend group affiliation and ideological motivation," pledging allegiance to mutually antagonistic terror networks such as ISIS and Hezbollah (ibid). In the codespace where all statements are coterminous, the loon wolf may "conflate personal grievances with terrorist ideologies, 'combining aversion with religion, society, or politics with a personal frustration" (Pascarelli). They may do so as a multiplicity of selfhoods emerges in the staccato shift from platform to platform, page to page—both the reader (schizoid) of the hypertext and its author (integrated). It is small wonder, then, that "group affiliation matters less than his broader commitment [to] his idea of jihad" (ibid).

Ideological inconsistency and psychological instability are not the sole difficulties in identifying loon wolves and predicting their behavior. The loon wolf is as much an object of cultural and commercial instability as subject of his own caprices. The idiosyncrasies of the web as a commercial and cultural platform wield their own peculiar influence on the loon wolf. As previously alluded to, the practical utility of the World Wide Web with the extravagant cross-referencing of Tim Berners-Lee's hyperlink has replaced "[Ted] Nelson's vision of the universal document" (Jackson). The hyperlink

empowers the designer to beat paths through the hypertext, and while the user may select from a dizzying number of paths—or even jump from trailhead to trailhead via the web browser's URL bar—he is nonetheless bound. The presence and appearance of links are subject to influences ranging from a "communicative choice made by the designer" (Jackson) to the demands of the news cycle, the advertising-driven returns of the search engine or the data-mining motives of social media. To the loon wolf, buffeted by objective material conditions but directed by an askew interpretative lens, "personal ideology may be less of a conscious decision and more aligned with the ebb and flow of popular movements – the flavor(s) of the day." The psyche of the loon wolf is a funhouse mirror of media discourse. His declaration of motive is the distorted echo of our own discursive cacophony. The commercial and cultural frenzy of hypertextual expansion, interpreted through his kaleidoscopic affective and ideological lens, makes it exceedingly hard to track the loon wolf through the hypertext, predict the eruption of his violence in the real world, or even notice him coming in the first place.

The lone/loon wolf represents a profound departure from state, and even non-state, violence of earlier times. They represent a new "generative violence," which emerges in discrete loci, out of a discourse of hostility. This departs from the top-down—or perhaps more aptly, *center out*—pattern of ideological violence that has prevailed in most other historical contexts. In its place, a matrix of meaning shapes the almost infinitely malleable hypertext to beg the question of jihad to nationless and alienated youth.

Western counter terrorism is proving as ill-equipped to navigate the hypertextual topology of the World Wide Web as Western militaries were to operate in the mountains

of Central Asia. In the same way that Western militaries were hindered by an ungainly hierarchical command structure, so too are our counter-messaging efforts held back by a broadcast-era ideology of centralized messaging, and the vestiges of print linearity that was the patrimony of Western nationhood. Western power, global in reach, founded on a history of nationalism seeks to thwart a distributed, semi-hierarchical enemy in a theater of war that favors decentralization and flexibility. The very nature of the present conflict may mitigate against a favorable outcome for the West. Indeed, the bias of digital media may be on the side of jihad.

The Arab Spring: Social Media and Mirage Democracy

One might seek hope in the proponents of open society and liberal democracy, who after all have the same access to the tools of networking and communications as the likes of IS. However, as is becoming increasingly apparent, digital communications technologies simply do not favor the open, pluralistic mode of social order sought by the defenders of democracy and human rights. This claim is not mere pessimism. Hard experience and the empirical forensics of human tragedy are casting serious doubt on the efficacy of digital media to counterbalance the forces of extremism that have harnessed them to such advantage.

There is a persistent, popular sentiment that digitally mediated revolutions of the type typified by the Arab Spring ought to lead directly to liberal democratic reform (Peña-Lopez). A half-decade of evidence to the contrary is dismissed as irrelevant to the inherently democratizing character of social media. Within this discourse, so prevalent among popular news and opinion commentariat, one may blame geopolitical exigencies;

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some crudely blame an "anti-democratic" cultural character of the Arab peoples. But to criticize the central communicative medium of the Arab Spring protests is a position outside the realm of seriousness and respectability.

Such enduring faith in the innate goodness of social media is naïve at best, and naked ideology at worst (Morozov). It is as though the shapers of policy and opinion were themselves half-comprehending McLuhanites in the thrall of Facebook and Twitter's most unctuous spokespeople. So the rhetoric went: as social media were inherently equalizing, they must be inherently democratizing (Gladwell). Logically, any unrest that used the tools of social media should, too, enjoy a bias toward liberalization, equality, and democracy. The medium was the message. QED.

And yet, reality has failed to match this rosy determinism. The ouster of Egypt's Mubarak in 2011 was followed by creeping Islamist incrementalism, which in turn gave way to yet more military dictatorship (Chehade) and a new era of intrastate warfare (Bradley). Libya, plagued by a "weak and under-legitimised government seeking to impose control over a myriad of militias, fighting to retain their military power and geographic autonomy," today teeters on the brink of total state failure (Dodge, 2012). Even Tunisia, often cited as the lone Arab Spring success story, has descended into turmoil, suffering "no fewer than five major terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State" since the revolution (Bradley, 67-68). Indeed, "Taken as a whole, the region is far more violent, polarized and destabilized than before the Arab Spring phenomena" (Chehade).

Popular consensus is correct insofar as a small but effective group of social media users inside Arab countries (Egypt and Tunisia in particular) did help to inspire and

organize activists during the protests (Howard and Hussain). However, those digital

revolutionaries proved unable to execute the post-revolutionary "founding" necessary to

turn unrest into lasting political reorganization (Frost, 2016). In terms of providing

critical inspiration to the Arab Spring protests, "not…as the cause of the revolution, but

rather as a facilitator of revolution" (Halverson *et al.*, 2013), social media deserves its

plaudits. But as a matter of state building, social media not only fails to assist, but likely

serves as an impediment to the establishment of stable, moderate, secular governance.

Critical literature of the Arab Spring points almost universally to social media

memorials for Khaled Saeed and Mohamed Bouazizi—young victims of state violence in

Egypt and Tunisia, respectively—as the sparks that ignited longstanding political

resentments. As a rallying tool, social media played the role of "virtual reliquary," an

online destination where digital pilgrims could converge to make common meaning from

the deaths of these martyrs (Halverson *et al.*). These virtual reliquaries served to

"alleviate the responsibilities of beginning," setting the revolutionary zero point where

the rupture between old and new order could conceptually manifest (Frost, 278).

As more citizens made the digital pilgrimage to these virtual reliquaries, network

effects soon took hold and "the wide communication opportunities provided by social

media produced the necessary bonds, as well as the shared political imaginary, amongst

protesters and disaffected citizens to transform them into revolutionaries" (Halverson *et

al.*). In spite of that developing critical mass, revolutionary praxis remained reflective of

its mode of founding; it was a rebellion occasioned by communications technology and

as such remained rooted in the sharing of affect and information online. Each Arab

Spring country required its own respective flashpoint in order for shared sentiment to

expand into nation-state-specific street protest. In Egypt, for example, it was only when soon-to-be-ex-president Hosni Mubarak shut down Internet access in an effort to quell growing unrest that protesters took to the streets en masse, as Egyptians sought one other out without mediation (Frost).

Yet protests of the sort typified by Tahrir Square could never escape their origin, "which favors the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere" (Gladwell). To use a distinction made popular by sociologist Robert Putnam, social media is a *bonding* rather than a *bridging* mode of communication (Putnam, 2000). In this heuristic, bonding social technologies strengthen intragroup solidarities among existing homogeneous populations. Bridging social technologies, by contrast, link disparate homogenous groups to create inter-group affinities. Social media—in the short-term and when activated by compelling viral content—serve as a bridging medium, connecting people from disparate sects, social class, and regions in shared information and sentiment. Connections based on access to information cluster around singular bundles of information and/or affect, as with the virtual reliquaries of Saeed and Bouazizi. Gradually, "ideologically similar but politically distant groups sorted themselves out over time: Multiple Islamist clusters became a single Islamist cluster, multiple activist clusters became a single activist cluster" (Aday, Freelon, Lynch).

Furthermore these bundles of viral content are not successive, nor subject to replicability, nor do they necessarily carry over into face-to-face interaction (the bridging social technology *par excellence*). On a long enough timeline, social media consistently revert to their primary character as a bonding mechanism for homogeneous affinity

groups. That is, given only a little time, social media promotes sectarianism and not plurality.

Indeed, as the rallies and optimism ran their course, it was not open pluralism that filled the power vacuum left by departing despots such as Mubarak. The weak bridging technology of social media was incapable of creating inter-group solidarities that would allow for the emergence of a pluralistic dispensation. And lacking a foundation of liberally minded "free riders" (those friendly to revolution or reform, but personally uninvolved), the democratic revolutionaries of the Arab Spring were unable to dominate the post-rebellion founding process in the manner that Islamists would in many Arab Spring countries. In Egypt, for example, religious parties "dominated political society through side-lining the left, liberal, and post-Islamic revolutionaries, not to mention women" (Bayat, 596). In Egypt's post-revolt 2012 parliamentary elections, overwhelming power (70% of seats) was split between the hardline Salafi Islamist Bloc and the more moderate, Islamist Freedom and Justice Party (Kirkpatric). Nationalist, liberal, and left wing coalitions split the remainder amongst themselves. Islamist parties—or, charitably, "post-Islamist" parties (Hoyle) such as the Muslim Brotherhood—were able to seize the political high ground thanks to their integration into the very warp and weft of Egypt's most venerable and pervasive institutions—the mosques, charities, and schools—that constitute the Egyptian social fabric. By contrast "[T]he protagonist revolutionaries remained outside of the centres of power, because they were not supposed to seize state power; they were not planning to. When, in the later stages, they realized that they should, they lacked the resources—the kind of organization, powerful leaderships and a strategic vision" (Bayat, 597). While mediated

intergroup affinities may effectively rally demographically and regionally distributed actors, those affinities alone cannot promote the organization required to seize and hold political power. They are, at best, indifferent to the transition from mediated affinity to in-person solidarity.

Malcolm Gladwell, writing for the *New Yorker,* makes a parallel critique: the forging of affinities via online communication by no means translates into military success (Gladwell). While characteristically glib, he is also correct. The outcomes of all coups are, in the final tally, based on a calculus of unequal violence, and the coordination of military or paramilitary strategy is not an open source affair. As we have seen, digitally transmitted messages may provide the spark that lights a revolutionary fire. Subsequent media narratives such as that of a "Twitter revolution" may likewise inspire support from techno-infatuated cosmopolitan observers—no mean contribution in a world where the press, digital capital, and government increasingly cross-pollinate. These conditions are highly consequential to the revolutionary ferment. But in the end they do little but serve as crowd-sourced public relations for the more ruthless and/or militarily capable blocs who typically emerge victorious.

In Egypt, for example "post-revolution, winners are not those who once created the wonders of Tahrir and its magical power, but those who skillfully mobilize the mass of ordinary people" (Bayat, 595). For even when the coup is bloodless, revolutions forged in the digital world face a potentially insurmountable challenge when crossing the threshold from "beginning" to "founding" (Frost). Indeed, the very bias of the digital medium may forbid such a transition. Social media's decentralized, flattened, peer-to-peer communication bias undermines leadership in those contexts where contingency and

consensus are impracticable—such as the governance a post-revolutionary state. The nation state is intrinsically hierarchical, while "Facebook and the like are tools for building *networks*, which are the opposite in structure and character, of hierarchies" (Gladwell).

To the extent that social media *do* "provide leading voices of a revolution" they do so with "the focus on individuality [that] runs counter to the origins of political power" (Frost, 281). The spirit of personalization, social media's core promise, "actually demands the impossible, transforms all actors into hypocrites" (Arendt, 88) by promising consensus through hyperindividualization. The act of post-revolutionary founding, to say nothing of the ongoing art of forging democratic consensus, requires the subsumption of the idiosyncratic individual into the generic citizen. The forging of identitarian solidarities requires, at the level of imaginary, an element of individual homogenization. Arendt bases her critique of "the social" style of politics around this need for subsumption. One may also hear echoes of Anderson in this critique. To relate this to the Arab Spring: social media destroys the generic constituent, while Islam exalts a radical homogenization in the sight of Allah. [3] In every degree—metaphysical, symbolic, and practical—social media lacks the traits necessary for a successful post-revolutionary founding, while Islam exceeds.

By this calculus, the liberal aspirations of the secular Arab Spring would have been doomed even if reformers had enjoyed an opportunity to address the puzzle of post-revolutionary founding. If the Internet "empowers the strong and disempowers the weak" (Morozov, xvii), then digitally mediated reform, even when driven by the most humane

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[3] "Apostles! [...] Your community is but one community, and I am your only Lord: therefore fear Me. / Yet men have divided themselves into factions, each rejoicing in its own doctrines. Leave them in their error till a time appointed." (Quran 23:53-59)

of intentions, is at grave risk for abuse. The social media networks through which inspiration for the Arab Spring were transmitted are far from the civic utopias presented in their marketing materials. And the character of social media networks is not at all one friendly to democracy or equality when engagement is sustained over any length of time. Rather, the social character of these platforms is one of intense insularity, intolerance, and regular upheaval (or, in the parlance of our times, "disruption").

Contrary to techno-utopian promises of a world without provincialism, the most sustaining connections that social media furnish are those among users with already-strong identitarian affinities. Highly evocative memes such as the virtual reliquaries of Saeed and Bouazizi's martyrdom may briefly connect members of disparate sects and factions in common cause. But in less pivotal moments, when shared enemies as loathsome as Hosni Mubarak are harder to come by, social media is far more apt to connect Egyptian Salafis with their Saudi counterparts, ISIS rebels with the Georgian hardline, and a panoply of Islamist intolerance with the American extreme. A 2016 empirical study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* summarizes the situation as follows: that "social homogeneity is the primary driver of content diffusion, and one frequent result is the formation of homogenous, polarized clusters" (Watry). It is important to point out that the homogeneity described by the National Academy of Sciences is not the broad civic homogeneity that Arendt and Anderson consider indispensible. Rather, thanks to social media's bias toward hyper-customizations and niche marketing, it is closer to what legal scholar Cass Sunstein terms "enclave extremism" (Sunstein). That is, the tendency for groups of like-minded people to self-segregate, mutually reinforcing and even amplifying one another's ideology. Sunstein

explains that enclaves of like-minded people, such as those found in niche and targeted

media demographics, tend to squelch moderation, disagreement, and suspension of

judgment. In fact, enclave extremism tends to push consensus further toward

fundamentalist interpretations of group ideology as a mode of establishing group

cohesions and individual status within the group. On the Internet in particular "those who

want to find support for what they already think, and to insulate themselves…can do that

far more easily than they can if they skim through a decent newspaper or weekly

newsmagazine" (Sunstein).

However, on the Internet, enclave extremism is not merely a question of voluntary

insulation. The morphology of social media is itself radically biased toward crowd

aggregation (Lanier), while incentivizing the proliferation of shared content over original

content. These biases tend to reduce cross-cutting (exposure to perspectives outside of

one's ideological network), as members within a cluster of accounts circulate the same

shared items. According to independent empirical research, such political homophily is

even more pronounced in networks holding extremist positions (Boutyline and Willer).

This in turn creates a feedback effect, which encourages illiberal political engagement

while discouraging moderation:

> "[T]he higher homophily rates of more conservative and ideologically
>
> extreme individuals could have significant consequences for the emergent
>
> dynamics of their respective political networks. These rates should, *ceteris*
>
> *paribus*, result in networks that embed their members in denser webs of
>
> like-minded associations, which could then insulate individuals from the
>
> demotivating effects of dissenting views, and may enable political
>
> behaviors to spread faster than they would through sparser networks. Our
>
> results thus suggest that homophily might provide a structural advantage

to the mobilization of right-wing or politically extreme social movements relative to left-wing or moderate ones. We would similarly expect the negative effects of network homogeneity on tolerance and understanding to be unevenly distributed" (Boutyline and Willer, 15-16).

The consequences of this bias toward insularity and extremism should be readily apparent for those unfortunate secular and pluralistic activists of the Arab Spring. It should also give us pause. Far from empowering the voices of moderation and modernization, all but the most speculative and hopeful observers are reaching the conclusion that social media actually favors illiberalism. Perhaps all hope to the contrary was a mere accident of history and markets. After all, "Egyptians who did use social media during the revolution were generally young, middle class, well educated, and politically inexperienced" (Frost, 274). Such individuals tend toward both early technological adoption and political liberalism. But as social media trickles down to the older, less extensively schooled, and poorer, there is no reason to expect it will take the values of the young and middle class with it.

We must even start to question whether social media is not a pervasive threat to all political orders—new or old, revolutionary or reactionary, or otherwise. Networked solidarity and coordination, which digital technology and social media in particular facilitate, are excellent tools for attacking established authority. In fact, their very presence may pose a constant source of insecurity (disruption) for whoever holds the reigns of state. As Frost (citing Innis's and Arendt's analyses of the American founding) points out, the act of post-revolutionary founding requires a temporal remove from the frenzy of insurrection. Time must slow down to facilitate human-paced communication, which is essential for setting a durable political dispensation. This need does not end with

the founding stage of a new governmental dispensation, and from an Innisian perspective, the hyper-rapidity and ephemerality of digital communications creates a dangerous vacuum of time-consciousness. This "overwhelming 'present-mindedness' of the modern psyche" forbids a human-paced rate of communications (Frost, 276). That reduction in pace, Arendt and Innis both believe, is crucial to soothing the fury of revolutionary upheaval "in a way that moderates political excess" (ibid). This retreat into founding is in short supply to modernity, and wholly absent from the present-shocked digital sphere where social media reside (Rushkoff). The perpetually unsettled murmur of social media may even lead to a dialectic of chaos and authoritarianism, as perpetual disruption must be met with increasingly repressive force. The consequence for the Egyptian Arab Spring was "increasingly unhealthy forms of authority," which began with the Muslim Brotherhood (arguably an improvement over Mubarak), and quickly progressed to military dictatorship and the current Islamist insurgency (inarguably much worse). In Libya, where authoritarian alternatives to the Qaddafi regime were in shorter supply, this dialectic has tended to favor chaos. As Westerners see our own political processes increasingly disrupted by fringe actors with social media acumen (Resnik and Collins), we may do well to take Arab Spring and its fallout as cautionary lesson.

Finally, the Arab Spring did not occur in a geopolitical vacuum. It was a drama played out upon the world stage, one whose primary actors were all-too-aware of how foreign powers might view the tumult (and seek to influence it). The imaginary represented in Western narrative of the Arab Spring is characteristic of what Evgeny Morozov terms "strong Internet freedom," that is, "as an enabler of some kind of 1989-inspired bottom-up revolt, with tweets replacing faxes" (Morozov, 230). Western

exuberance over the digital quality of these rebellions may even have tilted the

sympathies of a public all-too suspicious of Western meddling in the Arab world away

from the young, middle class moderates who dominated social media—and toward the

forces of religious and military authority that came to dominate post-rebellion states. The

hype ascribed to social media and its savvy revolutionary users may well have soured

those "free riders" mentioned previously on the prospect of throwing their lot in with the

liberal factions of the Arab Spring. Perhaps they, like many outside the sphere of Western

identity, perceive the web "as some kind of a 'made in America' digital missile," whose

very presence points to American intrusion in foreign affairs (Morozov, 236). As

Morozov goes on to point out, the lip service American observers pay to social media

revolutions "is not going to alter what motivates the United States to behave as it does in

the Middle East" (Morozov, 232). We must at some point begin to question whether the

United States truly wants the democratic factions of such uprisings as the Arab Spring to

succeed, or whether these actors merely provide moral cover for our policies of regime

change and expansion of markets for nominally American global IT corporations.

The Caliphate is at Hand: Digital Culture Against Modernity

We must begin to seriously interrogate whether digital media, the Internet and

World Wide Web in particular, are not the very engines of these convulsions in social

disorder and generative violence. The liberal democratic project is, in the final

estimation, a *literary* project. Like natural philosophy or Diderot's *Encyclopédie* who

were its siblings in the Enlightenment, liberal democracy is predicated on the belief that

the affairs of men are governable by appeals to universal principles that are logical,

linear—fit to print. Hence, liberal democracy dissents of itself by appeal to the text. For

this reason, most significantly, liberal democracy was able to extend the franchise beyond

the racial, sexual, and economic provincialism of its early proponents. By appeal to the

logic of the text—whether the U.S. Constitution, Voltaire, or rationalist Biblical

exegesis—the disenfranchised might argue against the liberal democratic order that they

might be better included therein.

By stark contrast, the appeal to terroristic extremes is *poetic*. The Salafist ideal to

which contemporary jihadis subscribe aspires to "expose the roots of modernity within

Muslim civilization—and in the process resort[s] to a somewhat freewheeling

interpretation of the sacred texts" (Kepel, 220). In so doing, it partakes of the same

romanticism as the extremism of the far right: a Romantic love of the distant, a fetish for

ruins. The call to jihad is an appeal to the audile and the tactile, *to feeling*. While "the

substance of the future vision may be only vaguely defined, its moral worth is clear and

appealing to the terrorist" (Arquilla, 76). The Hypertext, social media, indeed the very

interpersonal structuring bias of the Internet itself are nonlinear, inferential rather than

logical, hyperpersonal rather than universalist. *Poetic rather than literary*.

It must be said: in spite of all superficial appearances and marketing claims to the

contrary, social media, the World Wide Web, and the very Internet on which the former

two rest, are *anti-democratic* in their current constitution. Digital communication

technologies as they exist today are destructive of liberal democratic social and political

institutions. The promise of liberation-by-Internet has soured within a scant decade of its

announcement, and the network reveals itself as an agent of disruption, displacement,

whose only stability rests in the power monopolies of its operators. This dark reversal of

digital age utopianism, and the arrival of seemingly unsnuffable networks of religious terrorists, may in fact be co-morbidities of the Internet's very structure.

The force of televisual globalism, which bears the same responsibility for our remaining global order as it does our discord, is far from spent, though its zenith is passed. It will struggle with this new dispensation as the globalist epoch retreats into its silence. Already we see the shape of identitarian violence to come, a decentralized, hierarchically flattened, guerilla army distributed around the globe, drawn to—and drawing inspiration from—hubs of activity where the most committed congregate in common cause. The future of global civilization will depend in no small part on either digital technology's assimilation into an as-yet unforeseen geopolitical order capable of enduring these tempests—or eclipse by a communications technology, the contours of which have yet to be conceived. Whether in triumph or defeat, the coming years will be characterized by ongoing disruption. Contrary to the Whiggish techno-optimism peddled by well-compensated proponents of digital technology, which promises a never ending spree of consumer novelty, the technological drivers of this disruption will continue to operate as engines of war.

Conclusion

The Arab world's legacy of half-realized nationalisms has, regrettably, paved the way for many of the problems that plague it in this digital era. While technocratic globalist politics and their economic corollary neoliberalism may have until very recently sustained the Western *Weltanschauung*, the Arab world enjoyed no such privilege. Its institutions of communication, cultural and political production had been alternately seized, starved, or gutted throughout the 20th Century by a hyper-centralized televisual globalism centered in the far away reaches of Washington and Moscow. And now the distributed sectarianism of the digital age runs roughshod through the ruins.

As the vestiges of the globalist imaginary dwindle, the networked Western world may find itself in similar straits as the Arab world when it was loosed into an age of dwindling nationalisms. The West is at a conceptual disadvantage regarding this emerging paradigm similar to the Arab world's with nationalism. In the same way that neither *ummah,* nor *sha'b,* nor *dawla* captures the meaning of "nation" a conceived by European and New World revolutionaries, so too does English (lingua franca of the West) lack a semantic and conceptual frame to describe the digital-age *ummahs*. This may explain why the blend of distributed identity and moral totalitarianism of Islamism has spread so rapidly while first world analogs such as white nationalism and Christian Identity have been much slower out of the gate. The *ummah* is morphologically congruent to the anatomy of distributed, networked communications technologies. The West (and, it should be said, those remaining intact Arab-world nation states) are bound by institutional inertia, committed to a psycho-technologically obsolesced way of being, and ill equipped to integrate its people into the world of the future. Recent shifts in the

political fortunes of the U.S. and Europe, toward populist, right-wing, and ethno-identitarian movements, muddy the analytic waters. Intellectual movements such as the French *nouvelle droit* and American alt-right, and political parties such as UKIP and the Front Nationale, retrieve the rhetoric of civic and ethnonationalism. However, like the Islamist "Capital U" *Ummah*, they are essentially tribal, global, and distributed in character. We see evidence of this in actions that belie greater affinity for one another than their co-ethnics. As the centralized, hierarchical, televisual globalist age is shot through with distributed, tribal polities, these characteristics will begin to seem less contradictory. What will remain after the globalist imaginary disintegrates will be myriad overlapping meshes, thousands of ummah-like (though by no means necessarily Islamist) distributed polities. The potential for chaos and violence is tremendous.

Whatever solutions may be found must be likewise solutions for the West, Arab world, and the whole globe. We in the West must understand that our peace cannot come at the cost of ongoing chaos in the Arab world, nor anywhere else. Not only is this a moral imperative, it is the only approach that offers us any hope for security, much less peace. There is no single solution to the challenges posed by digital communications media. Convergence has rendered communications technology multivalent, while the redundant infrastructure and global reach of the 'net render it highly resistant to censorship—particularly at its fringes. Any strategy to remedy sectarian extremism fostered by digital communications technology must comprise a suite of tactics. Since this thesis has been presented from the perspective of a Western outsider, these proposals are directed to the possibilities of Western (specifically American) policy. They are

offered in a spirit of realist noninterventionism, recognizing that meddling in the affairs of Arab states has typically caused more tragedy than triumph.

I. Fork the Internet

Proposals to abandon the Internet and build alternative distributed communications networks have circulated since Douglas Rushkoff's January 3, 2011 *Shareable* article *The Next Net*. Early discussions such as these were motivated by concern that government and corporate power could too easily disrupt the flow of controversial or revolutionary data. However, the experiences of the Arab Spring—and the foreshadowing of Western political upheaval driven by otherwise negligible Web movements—should lead us to question whether protecting the average web consumer from government oversight is the worth the empowerment of marginal bad actors.

Simply put, the average Internet user, who logs on primarily for the purpose of entertainment and socializing, has no use for immediate, unqualified access to every channel of information available online. The Internet was once understood as a network of networks. Its unified character is in part a consequence of the globalist dispensation under which it was first engineered. While freedom of information and expression must never be suppressed, the judicious reseparation of computer networks based on use-case would offer greater opportunities for oversight and intervention in the case of extremist abuse.

As casual users devote more of their time online to a handful of platform monopolies, it seems appropriate to develop a system of protocols that is less open and interconnected than today's Internet. Maintaining universal access to all appropriate

networks would be an ongoing political challenge, requiring national and international standards protecting peaceful dissent, petition, and redress of grievances. This is not a steep price to pay. The ideology of unchecked information flow has tended to originate with the interests of runaway capital and right-wing libertarianism—only to trickle down to Islamists and extremist of all stripes.

A forked Internet could provide civic and consumer protection to everyday 'net users (not to mention improve user experience), while limiting the reach of violent and intolerant ideologies. Alternate networks for capital and military uses would better protect important virtual infrastructure from attack. Scholarly networks might still offer a wide array of provocative data for those willing to seek it out and evaluate it in a critical spirit. Outrage and vituperation might cease to be lucrative sources of consumer engagement. When bad actors develop their own networks (this is inevitable), these would be easier to shut down, as they would bear no connection to the commercial web upon which so much of the everyday function of society relies. By networking all networks, the Internet renders every computer a part of the extremist infrastructure. A forked Internet would return ideological ownership where it belongs.

By forking the 'net, and tightly regulating protocols on the most trafficked networks, we might effectively abridge the hypertext without reducing overall access to information. The architecture of networked information would have at least the opportunity to resolve somewhere between the hierarchy of the broadcast dispensation and the Babel of today's Web. Violent totalitarian ideology would no longer form a seamless continuity with the mundane activities of day-to-day Web use. We would

reduce the ability of Islamists and other extremists to radicalize online without undermining civil liberties or the smooth functioning of society.

II. Engineer Pro-Social Media

        As this thesis describes, social media as it is currently constituted is inherently factionalizing—but perhaps this needn't be the case. The tendency of social media to amplify sectarian conflict presents a terrific challenge to future politics, but not an insurmountable one. There is no theoretical prohibition against engineering social networks that forge positive solidarities with real-world extensions. However, it is unlikely that pro-social networks can be designed within the Silicon Valley paradigm of rapid, unsustainable growth in pursuit of inflated IPOs. Pro-social networks will require the involvement of government regulatory bodies. This will require ongoing politics. Action of this sort—negotiated, ongoing, and complex—are anathema to the ideology of social network capitalists. But given the social media industry's responsibility for the chaos of the late Arab Spring, this reluctance alone should indicate that publicly overseen social media is an experiment worth pursuing.

        Adjunct social media ought to be consciously engineered so as to develop coalition-building technologies, which supplement social media's factionalizing tendencies in healthy and productive ways. The lessons of the Arab Spring show us that 1.) pro-social networks must incorporate a significant in-person component *prior to crisis* in order to be effective, 2.) communication over the pro-social network must be biased against expressions of outrage and paranoia, and 3.) pro-social networks must be designed in a context of functioning civic institutions.

Due to the complexity of the systems in question, a mere top-down nationalized social network—call it the "Palo Alto Project"—would likely result in the unforeseen outcomes that have proven so destructive in other contexts. The iterative, multivalent start-up approach does offer some benefits here. Perhaps a period of open, partially subsidized experimentation might be followed by the issuance of monopoly or oligopoly rights. Certain antitrust exemption might be offered in exchange for ongoing governmental oversight and regulation in the public interest. This was, in effect, the outcome of the High Performance Computing Act of 1991. The HPC was a highly effective act of legislation, albeit aimed at pro-capital "deregulatory" ends. A similar policy approach, expressly aimed toward reregulating information networks would likely meet with similar success.

Such a project could facilitate a renaissance of constructive grassroots politics. But such a renaissance will not occur so long as regulatory discretion (or lack thereof) is given over to the markets. The ideology of disruption and short-term profit that drives investment and innovation in the world of networked computing leads to disruption and short-term satisfaction in societies that embrace it. The complex order of liberal democratic societies cannot emerge from the chaos of a society whose civic and economic institutions are in disarray. Rather, in such cases authoritarianism and tyranny impose themselves as a desperate measure against further conflict. We may argue about the precise mechanisms by which this occurs. But from Egypt to Libya and Syria to Iraq, recent history provides us with an unambiguous heuristic: Liberal democratic institutions, indeed civil society itself, is a profoundly fragile thing. Social media disturbs it at our peril.

III. Embrace the Via Negativa

Finally, we must simply cease repeating our mistakes. We must reject the ideology of disruption and change for change's sake that has been the credo of the technocratic neoliberal order. We must abandon interventionist idealism, grandiosity, and adventurism and embrace peaceful, defensive realism. Such an anti-strategy would minimize the destructive, unintended consequences that seem a condition of Western involvement in the Arab world. This "negative approach" would likely wreak less unintended havoc, as "[t]he entire idea of *via negative* is that *omission* does not have side effects and branching chains of unintended consequences—hence robust" (Taleb). The 'net is the institutional memory of society. In this respect it is biased in favor of omissive strategy and policy. We have a record of our mistakes. We needn't repeat them.

Perhaps Arab nationalism, with its brief successes, its many near misses and its disappointing conclusion, has another lesson to teach as well. As we enter a new communicative, cognitive, and social epoch, we should not attempt to repeat out past successes, either. The social, political, cognitive, creative, even metaphysical conditions of prior epochs are not transplantable into a new age of radically novel media and redistributed sensory ratios. Nor can we reverse-engineer the successes of the past using the tools of the present. Nationalism—and, indeed, globalism, too—is old wine, and no new skin will make it less sour.

As with the other above recommendations, a policy of mindful inaction will require an active culture of politics. The laissez faire determinism of technocratic neoliberalism has shown us time and again that networked computing technology is

neither inherently democratizing nor inherently peaceful. Left to its own momentum, it is an agent of hypertrophy—of runaway capital extraction and virulent social division.

Struggling against this technocratic tendency is perhaps a greater challenge even than contending with a violent, distributed Islamism. For while the distributed Salafist *Ummah* is new and widespread, the technocratic capitalist "ummah" is no less so. Both share the qualities of distributed, leapfrogged solidarities, which ignore state borders and constitute a self-imagined polity, united via social and digital business networks that supersede civic national borders or ethnicity. And while the Salafist *Ummah* wields the weapons of insurgent and asymmetric warfare, the technocratic capitalist "*ummah*" controls the still-robust arsenals of the fast-disintegrating globalist edifice. When this technocratic elite at last divorces its imagined self from the globalist order that spawned it, it will be a fearsome power to contend with. The threat it will one day pose to liberty and human rights may prove the most dangerous of all.

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