1   The Social Life of Contentious Ideas

Piracy and Unruly, Translocal Appropriation in the Arab
Uprisings and Beyond

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Abstract
This chapter argues for the relevance of piracy – the unruly, translocal
and cross-border appropriation of "unpatented" models for contentious
mobilization – in triggering, shaping and fortifying the mobilizing pro-
jects of early-riser activists. The chapter considers some central forms of
piracy, undertaken by dissenting constituencies undergoing hegemonic
disincorporation, in the Arab uprisings of 2011. Piracy brings amid un-
certainty and risk a guide to mobilization, a basis of cohesion amid new
connections, and an asymmetric strategy for previously fragmented and/
or weak actors. The chapter challenges standard studies of diffusion,
faulting them for hydraulic and/or economistic approaches. Piracy can
help explain the velocity, selectivity, many-headed-ness, and force of the
translocal life of contentious ideas, shedding light on the rapid constitu-
tion of transgressive collective actors.

Keywords: piracy, appropriation, transgressive mobilization, Arab upris-
ings, diffusion

"What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish?"
— Herman Melville, Moby-Dick

The Egyptian economist and public intellectual Galal Amin came unusually
close to predicting the Arab uprisings of 2011. Nonetheless, in his first substan-
tial publication after Mubarak's fall, even he placed considerable emphasis

on the fact that Egypt had "surprised itself" in the upsurge (Amin 2011). What was at stake in 2011 was not the incremental development of a tried and tested protest repertoire, but a more radical discontinuity. How can we explain and understand the rapid and relatively sudden appearance of new collective actions by subordinated groups? In the case of the Arab uprisings of 2011, how can we account for the temporary coming together of a forceful collective agent identifiable as a rights-bearing sovereign people seeking to bring down the regime, an agent-in-becoming that was associated and partially defined by various ideas, goals, and practices that were in some significant degree innovative: the secular slogans of bread, dignity and freedom, the goal of regime overthrow, decentralized modes of organizing, unarmed but forceful, institutionally disruptive action, swarming tactics to generate crowds, pitched battles against police, and the continuous occupations of vital public space (Chalcraft 2012; Gunning and Zvi Baron 2013; Ismail 2012; Tripp 2015).

The social constructionist turn in social movement theory has increasingly taken up questions of agency and innovation (Jasper 2007; Jasper and Duyvendak 2015; Klandermans 1997; Kurzman 2004, 2012; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). One promising line of enquiry looks for answers in the study of "diffusion": the origination, circulation, and appropriation, especially cross-nationally, of ideas, models and practices relevant to collective action (Beissinger 2007; Chabot 2000; Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; McAdam and Rucht 1993; Snow and Benford 1999; Strang and Soule 1998). Paying particular attention to the case of Egypt, this chapter pursues this line of investigation, building on these studies while challenging some of their basic modes of description and explanation.

While the diffusion model has already been criticized for its linearity and Eurocentrism (Chabot 2000), this chapter suggests that the diffusion model in regards to the study of transgressive mobilization is neither appropriate nor unitary, and argues that we can usefully move beyond it altogether, referring to the social life rather than the diffusion of contentious ideas. This usage draws our attention to how social subjects in particular settings come to give value to, and actively appropriate, ideas. The chapter argues, further, that we can better understand this social life by thinking less in terms of media infrastructure, similarity attribution, and brokerage, metaphors and concepts which suffer from economism, sociological determinism, and descriptiveness, and more in terms of piracy. A focus on piracy, understood as involving unruly forms of ideational translocal appropriation, can enrich our understanding of how models for collective action cross national borders, and thus of how new collective actors are assembled in relatively rapid, powerful and partially spontaneous ways.

Piracy

"Piracy" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "the action of committing robbery, kidnap, or violence at sea or from the sea without lawful authority"; it is also defined as "the unauthorized reproduction or use of an invention or work of another." Benedict Anderson (2006) famously argues that nationalism after the late eighteenth century became modular, abstracted as a guide for action, and available for appropriation on the global stage in widely differing political, social and economic contexts. In much of Anderson's work, print capitalism and the colonial state act as sociological "surrogate parents" for the appropriation of ideas and deep horizontal ties involved in nation-ness. Anderson was eventually to suggest that such forms of prior sociological determination were not always necessary. In the afterword to the third edition of his book, Anderson considered the pattern of transnational diffusion and translation of the book itself. He conceived this pattern metaphorically as piracy, in the second sense noted above. There was, he conceded, no patent on his book, and "local initiative, rather than external coercion or slavish imitation" governed the process of translation, initiatives that were taken amid situated and diverse political struggles. One of his examples of such appropriation touched on Middle East studies, as it involved the prominent Palestinian-Israeli politician and commentator, Azmi Bishara, who wrote the introduction to an edition of the book, a publication motivated by opposition to the "slide toward apartheid" in a "Likud-ruled" state (Anderson 2006, 228-229). Anderson was to conclude that amid these unruly appropriations, *Imagined Communities* was "not my book any more" (p. 235). In some sense, the book's own intellectual model had taken on a life of its own.

The term "piracy" implies that the connections involved in the social life of models for collective action, especially those of intense interest and those forged at moments of high risk and deinstitutionalization, are made by protagonists, they are not just found in transmission infrastructures, or caused by market logics or prior sociological determinations. The first sense of piracy as defined above is also suggested, at least metaphorically. Just as pirates acquire their booty by heading toward established shipping routes, and insist in an unscheduled, risky, and unauthorized way on forging a connection with existing and routinized forms of circulation, and go on to ransack items under circulation for their own purposes, so too are connections made between challengers and existing networks of communications and the ideas circulating therein in unauthorized, variable and discontinuous ways. Appropriators, like pirates, use existing networks of communication, but their actions and purposes are not dictated by them. Their logic is unauthorized

and unruly. Their actions run according to logics not determined by official rules, communication and transport infrastructures, or institutions.

The relevant mechanisms are the inverse of those at work in the "micro-mobilization tasks and processes" delineated by Snow and his coauthors for preestablished social movement organizations in the latter's strategic attempts to align their frames, interests, and goals with previously unmobilized constituencies and thus win adherence and participation (Snow et al. 1986, 464). The logics relevant to piracy and unruly translocal appropriation are not those stemming from the interests and tasks of preestablished collective actors, but those involved in the *making* of collective actors that do not previously exist or are only latent in the cracks and tensions of existing forms of structure. The idea of piracy can help to capture some aspect of this "creative ontology."[1]

When activists seized the initiative in the Arab uprisings, and when ordinary people came onto the streets, driven by a wide variety of material and ideal interests, people were put into new relationships with one another, for which there were no routines and rules. In a sense, they were suddenly living like pirates. Ordinary hierarchies and social conventions were put to one side, and commonsense notions of space and place were shocked and even broken. The hybrid and motley social associations and recombinations that were now enacted, where Copts and Muslims, for example, demonstrated side by side, are redolent in some respects of the "multinational, multicultural, and multiracial" formations familiar to historians of pirate ships (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000, 164). The search for new forms of autonomy, "dignity" and "freedom," familiar also in pirate forms of shipboard egalitarianism, established against the hierarchies of navy and commerce, was now on (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000, 162-173; Rediker 2004, 60-82). Under these conditions, where social action lost its customary guides, new appropriations and guides for action were sought out as routes from injustice, and voraciously appropriated. These models helped now to inspire and guide the action, altering like railway switchmen, in the Weberian analogy, the tracks on which action was pushed by the dynamic of interest.

A Very Active Search

Actors engaged in piracy are understood here as having latent, enduring, socially established reasons to act. They are understood to be possessed

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1   I credit this phrase to my PhD student, Jann Lohmann.

of a strong sense of injustice and to be experiencing powerful, shared feelings of dissent. For a variety of reasons, their relationships to existing structures of power and authority are full of tension. They are not "like rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations" (Churchill, cited in Chomsky 1997, 5). They are expected to feel that transacted politics and established authorities are corrupted and incapable of tackling the injustices they feel. It is likely that they also experience established forms of contained contention as inadequate. As some Bahrainis declared on the eve of 2011, "anger and frustration is [sic] boiling among us all" (Bahrain Online, February 2011, cited in Shehabi and Jones 2015, 3). In Egypt, diverse constituencies held strong grievances in the late 2000s: industrial workers opposed deteriorating wages and the attrition of the corporatist bargain, women faced discrimination and harassment, civil servants organized against public sector cuts, the urban survivalist poor faced rising prices, corruption and official indifference and violence, pan-Arab, pro-Palestinian or local nationalists were disappointed with Mubarak's craven stance on the regional stage, educated youth chafed against political exclusion and human rights abuses, while repressed Islamists fought rigged elections, and football fans wrestled with police (Chalcraft 2014; Al-Aswany 2010). This chapter views the relevant feelings of injustice, even though they may be passionate and even angry, not in terms of male frustration-aggression (Gurr 1968), but in terms of a socially established tension between *is* and *ought* that distances subjects from existing structures of power and engages the normative and political imagination, propelling a search for alternatives. Like pirates, scattered and dissenting constituencies are disincorporated from existing hegemonic structures and alienated from existing forms of contained contention. The tension in view is an unruly latency that acts as an enabling condition for new forms of collective action: a "situational causal mechanism" (Hedström and Swedberg 1998) with an indeterminate outcome (Elster 1998). "Something must be done" is one common sentiment, but what can possibly be done, especially in the face of a lack of adequate mobilizing structures, inspirational frames, plausible opportunities, and existing repertoires.

Paying attention to the motivations engendered in situations of hegemonic disincorporation provides an explanation for why actors engage in a search to make a wide variety of "attributions of similarity," attributions which may be highly contested in a given situation. Diffusion models have studied how model transmission requires as a condition some kind of attribution of similarity between receiver and transmitter. The explanation suggests, with some plausibility, that movement actors imagine that "we

are like them and therefore let us do as they do." Such commonalities might be actual or perceived. They may be rooted in identity, "we are women," "Arabs," "Muslims," and so on, or in occupational and professional positions, or a location in some kind of relatively formalized state-based or institutional hierarchy. This approach, however, can become tautological, insofar as connections require similar conditions or attributions by definition, and therefore such attributions or conditions are not separable from the phenomenon they are supposed to explain. Beyond this, the approach can be worrisomely arbitrary in terms of the preexisting commonalities it posits as explanatory, and remains indeterminate as a causal mechanism, especially in revolutionary or potentially revolutionary situations, as such similarities may or may not come into being, or they may change over time in form or content. We are still permitted to ask what drives and motivates attributions of similarity, especially insofar as certain actors are motivated to do it, and others are not. We note that during the Arab uprisings of 2011, guardians of the status quo insisted that every country was different, that there was no reason to think that Egypt was like Tunisia, or that Syria was like Bahrain, while those determined to seize the moment asserted exactly the contrary. These different parties had different reasons to insist on similarity and dissimilarity. In short, processes of hegemonic disincorporation, engendering an active search for new forms of collective action, rather than either preexisting, static conditions of similarity, or self-propelled or purely agentic attributions of similarity, are an important part of the explanation, focusing attention on basic motivations for translocal ideational appropriation.

Seizure and Appropriation

On January 14, 2011, when Tunisia's long-standing strongman president, Zin Al-Din Ben Ali, fell from power, a new model of collective action became available for pirating. Mass protest by ordinary people had brought down a president-for-life (Owen 2012). This was a model that was not owned or controlled by its own inventors. It was now a "loose," not a "fast-fish" in the striking language of Herman Melville's classic novel, *Moby-Dick*. A fast-fish referred to a whale connected by a harpoon-line to a ship that by sea-faring custom now had ownership rights over the whale. A loose-fish was a fugitive whale that had been pursued but was not attached by a line to any given ship, and thus was no one's property by right. Across the region, sectors undergoing disincorporation were suddenly offered dramatic inspiration

in regards to a possible escape route. They set out in hot pursuit of this loose-fish. The model was seized on and appropriated by dissenters to serve in their own local and situated political struggles. Other sectors, invested in the status quo, particular regimes, or profit streams, took completely different views of this loose-fish: for Saudi Arabia, it was a form of subversion carried on by malcontents that threatened its monopoly on correct Islamic polity; for Iran, a new assertion of Islam; for Israel, a potential threat to its security and its ideological claim to be the only democracy in the region; for some in the United States, an attractive movement that was nonetheless a contagion that could upset markets and cut against US strategic alliances (Al-Rasheed 2014; Ayoob 2014; Shlaim 2014; Quandt 2014). This section argues that diffusion is too passive, slow-moving, technocratic, and infrastructural a metaphor for the active and unruly processes of seizure and appropriation at work in translocal appropriation.

Diffusion referred to a specific phenomenon in natural sciences long before sociology took it on:

> The Latin word "*diffundere*" means "to spread out." Depositing a droplet of ink in a basin of water without stirring gives a simple demonstration of diffusion. After a few hours the colour will have spread a few millimetres and after several days the solution will be uniformly coloured. Diffusion is caused by the Brownian motion of atoms or molecules that leads to complete mixing. (Mehrer and Stolwijk 2009, 2)

The basic idea is that a particular group of particles, whether of a liquid, a gas, or even a solid, undergo diffusion insofar as although initially of a high concentration, they increasingly become less concentrated in their surrounding environment, until they are completely mixed with it, as a result of Brownian motion operating to overcome over time a differential concentration gradient.

The notion of diffusion was taken up in sociology to explain policy innovation. In this version, diffusion proceeds from stage to stage among decision-makers until an innovation is either implemented or rejected. The first stage involves actors becoming aware of the existence of an innovation, and seeking knowledge about it. The second involves persuasion, whereby receivers interact with interpersonal networks and trustworthy opinion leaders, learning more about positive and negative attributes of the innovation. The third is the decision stage, involving adoption or rejection. The fourth is implementation, where innovations are translated into actual practice, and may be adapted and reinvented in the process. The final stage

involves confirmation, where actors reevaluate whether the innovation meets expectations and decide to prolong or discontinue it (Rogers 1995). The relationship of this model to the natural science model of diffusion as Brownian motion and molecular gradient, we note, is fairly remote. The policy model posits instead stages of purposive adoption and decision-making in regards to innovation, with an eye on procedure and efficiency. In general this refers to a methodical, highly rational, policy-relevant, monitorialist, and technocratic kind of behavior, where the time, resources, and information available to adopters are abundant. In some variants of the model, unsurprisingly, the institutional positions and structural similarities of receivers and transmitters play an important role. Adopters during the Arab uprisings were not established actors in structured institutional positions formulating policy, or testing new drugs, however. Their activities were high risk. Time, capital and technological resources, along with detailed, expert, statistical and technical information, of the kind envisaged in the policy model, were not available. Moreover, adopters moved in a far speedier fashion, to "concertina" the stages in order to seize the moment. They did not advance through steps in a slow and methodical fashion, but acted more suddenly and decisively, to take the "tide in the affairs of men" at full flood. In other words, technocratic, policy-making diffusion models, while giving a clear description of decision-making stages by established actors, are not so self-evidently appropriate or explanatory in regard to the high velocity of the appropriation by high-risk actors-in-formation in the Arab uprisings.

Just as the policy-related diffusion model is quite different from the natural science model, the use of "diffusion" in social movement theory is different from the policy model. The focus in social movement theory in regard to diffusion has been far less on the lengthy, methodical, adoption, decision-process, and, overwhelmingly and repetitively, on the means, media and infrastructure of diffusion. Many social movement theorists, in keeping with their eschewal of the study of basic motivations, not to mention strategic and material interests, and their interest in *how* rather than *why* questions, have considered the issue of the *means* by which information is transmitted above all, means which are often conceived of as being out there, almost as forces of nature. The question of whether the study of the means of transmission of radical ideas and practices is usefully identified by the term "diffusion" was not thoroughly addressed when the latter term was introduced into the social movement literature (McAdam and Rucht 1993). The term "diffusion" seems to have been granted a kind of self-evident validity as a basic metaphor for understanding the translocal social life of contentious ideas. Perhaps this was because of its

aura of scientific precision, or the way it used a neutral- or official-sounding term to domesticate and render legitimate potentially highly contentious and disruptive forms of action. Or it was simply seen as a catchall, general, and abstracted term "embracing contagion, mimicry, social learning, [and] organized dissemination," among other things (Strang and Soule 1998, 266). The problem, of course, with general abstracted terms, is that they can nonetheless carry baggage, in this case naturalistic and hydraulic baggage, and when they do not carry any baggage they may simply end up as "empty signifiers," allowing no more analytic purchase than the specific concepts written into them by particular authors in sometimes ad hoc ways. The naturalistic baggage, in this case, may be a major confusion, given the sharp and "primary" frame distinction, in how we "locate, perceive and label" experience, between natural and "unguided" events (like Brownian motion) on the one hand, and "guided doings" involving "will, aim and controlling effort" on the other (Goffman 1974, 21-22). Diffusion appears impossibly to straddle both primary frameworks – a blunt, confused metaphor with misleading and ambiguous consequences.

Existing infrastructures of communication, especially social media and satellite television, but also new, private, daily and weekly print press, all of which forms of media had developed in leaps and bounds in the Middle East and North Africa region since the late 1990s (Lynch 2007), ensured a rich, speedy, and extensive flow of information outwards from Tunisia in 2011, such that any interested party was able to undertake a more or less "informed" reading of events. Communication infrastructure, what social movement theorists have called "nonrelational diffusion," involving transmission in mass and impersonal media, was a necessary condition, as it happened, for the social life of these ideas. Infrastructures of communication have long acted in this way, whether by television, radio, telegraph, or print. If there were no communications infrastructure, then there could be no mass communication. A necessary condition, however, especially one this self-evident, does not get us as far in causal terms as some seem to suppose, for whom it is enough to invoke "print capitalism" or the internet to explain the spread of particular ideas that were only expressed, transmitted and received by highly selective and particular groups or individuals. We note, indeed, that equally necessary for the existence of communication is the presence of several interested parties, motivated to give out, transmit and receive information. Without such actors, there could be no connection between points, and thus no communication.

By and large, however, during the Arab uprisings, the emission, selection, interpretation, and packaging of information, and how these moves

related to the model for collective action in question, were far from being a kind of mass, undifferentiated, Brownian motion type of diffusion. The relevant media systems did not simply channel information passively, but actively shaped the news agenda according to their ideal, material and strategic interests. As "players" engaged in strategic action (Jasper and Duyvendak 2015, 10) they cannot be analyzed as if they are natural and inert, like water and ink molecules offering a density gradient that could act as a passive medium for diffusion, especially in regard to the revolutionary ideas unleashed, which were highly problematic to many of engaged in the control and transmission of information on a mass scale. Ideational transmission in the media was heavily impacted by interests and agenda: Al Jazeera spoke in inspiring terms of "revolution," while the BBC spoke aridly of "unrest" and "clashes," often relating its coverage to diplomatic agenda. Al Jazeera played a key role as cheerleader in testimony after testimony. It was no surprise to anyone at all, on the other hand, that the Bahraini regime in 2011 immediately "used the media [...] to discredit protest leaders and their lack of 'patriotism'" (Shehabi and Jones 2015, xv).

That powerful media work in this way should be no surprise. Jackson et al. (1960) is cited (in Della Porta and Tarrow 2005, for example), as an early or even classical study of diffusion, and the role of communication networks therein. In fact, the research of Jackson and his collaborators does not mention the word *diffusion*, let alone study it as a concept. Only one factor in their multicausal explanation as to why a social movement failed to gather momentum bears on communication networks. The other factors include failings in leadership, ideology, and in staging events. On closer inspection, it turns out that even the factor "communication networks" in this study is very much a shallow, intervening variable, and that its functioning hinges on the material interests that governed the actions of the Los Angeles taxpayers' organizations. In this case, the fact that the tax interests of downtown industrial and commercial property owners were at odds with the tax interests of suburban residential property owners meant that the former did not lend their organizational and communicative weight to the tax protests of the latter (Jackson et al. 1960, 37). It was material interests, then, not the structure and nature of the communication system that governed the action. Powerful communication systems, and the ideas that they circulate, are constructed and freighted with interests and strategies. They cannot be treated as inert, innocent, connecting infrastructures, a danger in social movement studies of nonrelational diffusion, that take the naturalistic and impersonal flavor of the metaphor of diffusion, as if the hydraulic flows of gases and liquids were at stake, too seriously.

Social movement theorists have also considered relational modes of diffusion, which refer to diffusion by face-to-face ties, word of mouth, and informal networks of various kinds. The importance of rumor networks for the transmission of meaningful information about French colonialism, negotiation by religious notables, and commoner resistance has been effectively excavated, for example, in regard to anticolonial protest in nineteenth-century Algeria (Clancy-Smith 1994). For some, it is a consensual finding that face-to-face ties are the "most effective" transmitters. There are reasons to doubt this general assertion, at least in its strong version where it is elevated almost to the status of a covering law. Louër's subtle study of transnational connections showed that transnational Shi'ism became indigenized in the Persian Gulf not because of any diminution of face-to-face ties, but because over time local political struggles in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, became more important than debates and struggles centered on Qom, Najaf, and Karbala (Louër 2008). Face-to-face ties in Egypt were often used to caution against action, Tunisia-style. In some cases, protestors had to extract themselves from cautious family and neighborhood environments: one form of this applied to women, who were told they could not protest as it would be shaming to appear in public: here (civil) freedom was directly counterposed to (sexual) purity. Face-to-face ties were highly segmented: some contacts were trusted on economics but not politics, in matters pragmatic, but not in matters normative. Other ties were intensive at one moment, and severed in the next.

At other points, the personal and the impersonal were deeply intertwined, partly as friendships mediated mass transmission in social media, and in constructed niche-cyber-worlds likewise, in ways that disrupted the personal/impersonal binary. Disentangling transmission by face-to-face and transmission by mass media is a fraught and problematic task, when each kind of communication created in some cases the conditions through which the other worked. It was easier to persuade neighbors of, and frame information about, the violence and corruption of the regime when images and information underlining and characterizes these things were broadcast extensively on Al Jazeera. Some viewers and listeners believed that they had a more or less personal relationship to media broadcasters, and responded to the latter's emotions and reactions accordingly. In other words, we should not, wary of social movement theory's veritable cottage industry in descriptive classification, overstate the distinction between relational and nonrelational diffusion, especially when it comes to causation. This point is particularly important in an "information age," when a primary task, especially where motivations for new and risky action are involved, is selection, not simply

a passive consumption by disinterested observers (or, alternatively, consumers) of the great flood of information "out there." The sheer quantity of information available about Tunisia, once satellite and social media got fully involved, actually intensified the need for selective, rather than wholesale forms of appropriation. The deluge of reportage implied that those who did not know what they were looking for were lost. Selective readings, moreover, were highly influenced by ideal and material interests of various parties to the communication, and the actual content of what it was that was communicated. Neither interests nor content are given sufficient attention in readings stressing the infrastructural means of diffusion.

Attentive to such problems, some have considered the more active and interested elements – such as brokers, certifiers, and movement entrepreneurs – who are involved in transmission (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011). The means and media of communication were certainly developed by those who validated and transmitted the model. The concepts of brokerage and entrepreneurship, however, are sharply limited by the fact that they refer to leaderships, established organizations and the logics of market and profit. The distinctive feature of the Arab uprisings, on the other hand, was that they involved the activation of initially unorganized, first-time protestors in their hundreds of thousands and even millions, in a context where credible leaderships were often lacking as a result of state repression. The unruly entrance into the political field by a diverse array of social groups, including the rural and urban poor, gave the uprisings a good deal of their force (Chalcraft 2014). Certification by powerful figures turned off some first-time movers and activists who believed that such certification diminished, rather than enhanced, the radical appeal of their claims. Activists, like pirates, are not always impressed by authority figures, and do not always grovel for the approval of those enjoying high status and cultural capital. Protestors new and established should not be seen as engaged in continuous enterprise, obeying market rules or seeking to maximize profit: they were rapidly making active connections, sometimes on a value-rational basis, under high-risk conditions, and for political purposes.

A more unruly entry point into seizure and appropriation, interests and content, can begin with the generous definition of brokerage as the "formation of new links among transmitters and receivers" (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002, 706-708). Such a definition can point us away from markets and toward creativity. The forging of new links is precisely what was at stake when it came to the seizure and appropriation of new models for collective action during the Arab uprisings. This forging involved selection among the deluge of information that was available about Tunisia and what Tunisia meant. Those

searching for routes out of violence found something that in some latent way they were already looking for: an apparently viable model for tackling deeply felt injustices. This explains why they did not respond with indifference or rejection. For such actors, what mattered was the content: Tunisia suddenly brought into focus, and crystallized a fundamental contradiction between an active, rights-bearing, sovereign people on the one hand, and the corrupted, predatory, and kleptocratic regime on the other. The people demanded and succeeded to bring down the regime. Here in vivid form was the "'people'/power bloc contradiction" that Laclau once saw, more than the class struggle, as "the dominant contradiction at the level of a concrete social formation" which in turn constituted the "specific domain of the popular-democratic struggle" (Laclau 1979, 166). What mattered in regard to the Tunisian model, more than the media of transmission, was whether or not it provided, and was seen to provide, a new picture of the world, a new diagnosis of the situation and its dominant contradictions, and a new image of a viable path out of a situation of domination now defined with a new clarity and vividness, a track which could be taken by those getting on board the "locomotive" of new forms of collective action. A focus on means and media sidesteps these questions, avoiding issues of motivation, content, and causation, and focusing on abstract descriptions, categories and distinctions too often denuded of dynamism, stakes and significance. What was taken on, and who took it on, were arguably more important and relevant questions, in comparison to the means and media by which information was shifted, as if it were so many bales of cotton available to this or that consumer or entrepreneur or certifying authority, ready with a stamp of approval or maximizing strategy. The model for collective action was actively seized not because it resonated with some preexisting code or culture, but because it was able to give substance to an active, unincorporated normative and political imagination.

Appropriation, therefore, was fundamental: connections were made, not found. These appropriations varied greatly temporally and by relative intensity. Diffusion and transmission were just as much an effect of the multiplication of sites of appropriation as they were causes in their own right. Just as an animated flipbook presents a series of pictures in rapid succession so that an observer perceives, say, a stick-man moving from one end of the page to the other, the movement of the model across borders is an optical and cartographic effect of the fact that a number of sites seize on the idea at some geographic distance from the point of origin. What matters is neither the observer, nor the illusion of travel through space, but the seizure and appropriation of the model in various sites. Associated forms of space compression are as much effects, as they are causes, of these

appropriations, and the active search that underpins them. In fact, there are ways to grasp and specify why the Tunisian model was taken up in many, but by no means all, constituencies in the Arab world in 2011.

It is vitally important to think about "what spreads, replacing a theory of connections with a theory of connecting" (Strang and Soule 1998, 276). It seems, however, that in doing so we should avoid tautological banalities such as "practices that accord with cultural understandings of appropriate and effective action tend to diffuse more quickly than those that do not" (Strang and Soule 1998, 278). The inverse might just as well be true, especially in regard to transgressive mobilization. For example, when "cultural understandings of appropriate action" have been shattered and turned upside down by protest failure over a decade, on the one hand, and a rapidly changing horizon of possibility, on the other, as was the case for many during 2011, then a new model, such as the idea of taking on, for example, Egypt's paramilitary security forces in pitched battles, suddenly gained immense purchase. In this case, it was precisely practices that no one had previously believed to be appropriate or effective that were taken on with great rapidity. Such mechanisms were much more saliently at work in regards to explaining the immediate take-off phase of the Arab uprisings.

In their forms of seizure and appropriation, receivers were as much like pirates as they were like brokers or entrepreneurs. The Tunisian model was not transmitted because of the routine functioning of standard communications infrastructure, but because adopters emerged suddenly, like pirates, from their hideaways, or anonymous social media locations, where their actions and motivations were not widely publicized, and seized hold of circulating information, like those who would hijack ships running to schedules and timetables, creating connections that were not already there. The mode of emergence here was more like an ambush rather than a scheduled act. We see here the voracity, suddenness, surprise, and energy of the appropriators searching for a guide to novel action, where adopters cast aside the normal rules and social conventions of social interaction and pragmatism. Search and seizure, much more than circulation, was the cause of movement across borders.

This accounted for a high-velocity modular spread, which vastly outran the actions and relatively limited constituencies of "brokers" and existing leaderships. During the Arab uprisings, appropriators were not established or highly institutionalized brokers, in any case, but emergent actors engaged in highly unofficial, unauthorized, risky and uncertified action, which disrupted and altered sites and trajectories of circulation. The pattern of dissemination, rather like the movements described in Linebaugh and Rediker's (2000)

"hidden history" of the revolutionary Atlantic, was unruly and many-headed. No surprise then, that those who did take up the model were depicted by regimes, like pirates, as "villains of all nations" (Rediker 2004). Unlike a diffusion pattern, in which there is a clear center (the ink drop) and a steady and even transmission outwards to a periphery (the increasingly ink-colored water), the cartography of ideational social life was more jumbled. Geographic proximity, or the extent of established media saturation, or personal links to Tunisia, was no guide to where or among whom the model would be seized. In proximate Algeria, for example, in spite of the fact that socioeconomic protests there continued for much of the period, and followed a rising trajectory during early 2011, the model of regime overthrow was not appropriated. In relatively far away Syria, on the other hand, or in Bahrain, where media infrastructures were no more developed, this model was appropriated. In Syrian cities, where media saturation was higher, the model spread far slower than in the provincial towns and villages. While in the UAE, where there was both media coverage and extensive social media penetration, nationals and noncitizen migrants alike remained largely quiescent.

Transformation and Its Limits

The model provided a guide to action and a basis for cohesion for a new, fragile and previously fragmented collective actor – "the people," as a rights-bearing, sovereign multitude. It assisted in constituting and articulating the new, fragile, bonds of solidarity and associative links that appeared amid the radically diverse constituencies appearing in the streets. In this it implied new ways of constructing what was held in common. It gave new practices a certain meaning, given that no one otherwise would have known in advance what such new transgressions meant, especially because normal rules and beliefs were thrown into disarray. Ben Ali's departure at the hands of popular protest could not be explained by ordinary ways of seeing because it was so unprecedented. With crowds pouring into the streets in Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen, looking to Tunisia made sense in order to make sense of "what is going on here." It allowed protestors to say, "This is what we are doing." It provided a certain, tentative, untried map of what to do: head to the square, stay there, don't be afraid, and take on the riot police. This guide to action was a blinding flash of inspiration for many: while in Egypt, for example, there had been forceful and contentious interactions with the police and security forces, especially over the previous decade (Ismail 2006, 2012), no one had seriously considered *taking on* in pitched street battles the

paramilitary riot police in Egypt, the approximately 350,000 strong ranks of the Central Security Forces, before January 14, 2011. The whole proposition was foreign to the climate of nonviolent protest during the 2000s, and seemed ludicrously nonviable in terms of the apparent balance of forces on the ground. In Bahrain there was a similar disjuncture:

> Most observers [...] reckoned that the call [for a Day of Rage on February 14, 2011] would attract the customary small number of protesters. The regime and mainstream opposition did not seem particularly worried. Both sides expected the planned action to follow the same pattern established by Bahrain protests over the past decades. A small number of protesters would converge from different towns and villages to listen to speeches and/or march through the streets. They would quickly be dispersed by security forces and be pushed back to their neighborhoods and villages. At worst, the clashes would result in injuring a few protesters, some fatally, and the arrest of more than a hundred persons. (Khalaf 2016, 1)

What transpired was something different. Bahrain's ruling family decided that the domestic security forces were insufficient, and sought and obtained a military intervention from Saudi Arabia. The Tunisian (and now Egyptian) model enabled new expectations to be formed, and provided a basis for new forms of coordination between activists and protestors, in that it suggested a common end, and gave a rudimentary set of banners and principles under which action could be joined: bread, dignity and freedom. What was at stake, to use Snow's terminology, was more than the alignment, extension or amplification of an existing way of framing the situation, that is, of saying "What is it that is going on here?" It was more a radical transformation, a "switch" in the Weberian analogy. Here was a new "keying," in the sense meant by Goffman, which redefined activities, events, and biographies that were already meaningful from the standpoint of some key framework, in terms of another framework, such that they are now "seen by the participants to be something quite else." What is involved is "a systematic alteration" that radically reconstitutes what it is for participants that is going on (Goffman cited in Snow et al. 1986, 474). Although the details, organization, and ideology of this rekeying were hardly substantive or worked out, and strategic capacities and outcomes were highly uncertain, a new way of seeing, a new horizon of expectation, was adventurously in play.

Older agencies and methods for achieving change, such as those espoused by Al-Wefaq, the "official opposition" in Bahrain, were devalued (Khalaf

2016). Existing stakes held in older patterns of subordination (crumbs on the tables of the poor, limited civil liberties, pockets of autonomy, and patronage) were devalued by the hoped-for alternatives in regard to prosperity and democracy that hove into view on all sides. Older sources of "mere" grievance, such as the succession (*tawrith*) in Egypt, whereby the son Gamal Mubarak was supposed to accede to the presidency of the father, were now defined as intolerable and beyond the pale of political normalcy going forward. Such ideas of the politically normal were in fact brand new.

In unruly, translocal appropriation we can construe a causal mechanism relevant to the charismatic moment of early rising radical action. For protestors, the power of the Tunisian model enabled them to declare, implicitly or explicitly, in prophetic mode: "It is written, but I say unto you." In other words, the "holy scriptures" governing the rules of power, politics, and protest could be thought against, profaned, and considered inapplicable. In this case, it was not religious blessing or charismatic leadership, but unruly translocal appropriation that was at work.

Once the model was appropriated, like pirate booty, it was taken over, transformed and translated, applied to all sorts of purposes, potentially far from its meaning, form and practical application and results in Tunisia. Among US-based Leftists in the 1960s, forms and ideas drawn from the Third World national liberation struggles were adapted in "hybrid, provisional and partial manner" (Young 2006, 15). The same could be said of the Arab uprisings. What mattered now were the new contexts in which the model was applied, movement dynamics, and the ongoing course of the political struggle. There are sharp limits to reading this process in terms of mimesis. In some respects, every local context *was* different, although not necessarily in the ways power holders had said. The unruly appropriation of a new model for collective action by no means implied its success. Instead it meant its attempted application in a new political, economic, social and cultural context. This raised formidable new problems for activists of overall cohesion, organization, and strategy, especially in the face of activists' shallow organizational and ideological depth, their lack of a real mass base, the opportunities opened up for those, particularly but not only among Islamists, who worked to segment "the people," the repression wielded by regimes, the repressive or ineffective stances taken by regional and international powers, and the failure of any state to champion or export the new politics. Indeed, the very suddenness of the piratical mechanism virtually ensured that the new mass actor "the people" be highly decentralized, highly uncoordinated, and to some extent dispersible. Its hopefulness may have been quite inappropriate to the harsh realities of state repression: in

Syria for example, the regime reacted to significant challenge as it always had – with extensive and intensive repression and violence.

The forms of coeval appropriation considered here are not confined to the 2011 uprisings. It has been very important, for example, for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for Palestinian rights, since its inception in early 2000s, to assert a similarity with the translocal BDS campaign that helped to bring down Apartheid in South Africa (Barghouti 2013). Opponents of BDS contest the analogy as best they can. Moreover, piracy should not be understood to stem above all, or in any automatic way, from recent developments in the new media, the internet, or globalization. The piracy metaphor is intended to challenge such linear, faceless, apolitical, and West-centric views. The model of the Islamic revolution in Iran of 1978-1979 was an inspiration to Islamists old and newly mined, Sunni and Shia, from Morocco to the Philippines. It was nowhere fully replicated. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Maoist and Guevarist model of the people's guerrilla war had a significant social life of its own, notably in Algeria (1954-1962), South Yemen (1963-1967), Palestine (1964-1982) and Dhofar (1965-1975) (Chamberlin 2012; Khalili 2007; Takriti 2013). Dispossessed Palestinians scattered in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and Egypt after 1948 were engaged in an active search for models of collective action. It was this as much as sociological commonality that saw them looking with intense interest at Cubans, Algerians, and Vietnamese, and their anticolonial models of the people's guerrilla war, after the Cuban revolution of 1959 (Khalili 2007). The Nasserist model, involving a revolutionary coup without an organized mass base, carried out by patriotic Free Officers against their commanders, and in the name of national independence and socioeconomic progress, was attempted (after the success of July 23, 1952, in Egypt) in Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the 1950s, and succeeded in Iraq (1958), North Yemen (1962), and Libya (1969), changing the face of the region (Chalcraft 2016).

In the colonial period, Fawzi Al-Qawuqji, the Ottoman-trained military officer and peripatetic proponent of Arab nationalist armed struggle from the 1920s to 1948, wrote in his memoirs that "[t]he doings of the hero Abd Al-Karim [in Morocco] – truly these were the inspiration to us in our revolution [in Syria]" (Qawuqji 1995, 104). Abd el-Krim himself, who led the armed struggle against Spanish and then French colonialism in Morocco in the 1920s, was impressed by the Young Turks and the republican armed struggle of Atatürk (Pennell 1986, 258). The general strike that inaugurated the Great Revolt in Palestine (1936-1939) was modeled on the Syrian example of a few months earlier. Palestinians hoped to repeat the electrifying success of the 50-day general strike in Syria, which had

just led to the French announcement in March 1936 that they would seek a treaty of independence with Syria (Nimr 1990, 87-88). Ahmad Sharif Al-Sanusi, the exiled head of the Sufi Sanusiyya of Cyrenaica, who had been conducting an armed struggle since 1911 against Italian conquest in Libya, was to be found in 1921 in northern Iraq, exhorting in Islamic terms tribesmen there to pick up arms against the British (Wahab 1967, 105). Here were indications that the rugged, patriotic armed struggles of the interwar period in Iraq 1920, Turkey 1920-1922, Morocco 1921-1926, Libya 1921-1929, Syria 1925-1927, and Palestine 1936-1939, were linked by more than just local and endogenous circumstances or nonideational translocal forms. These examples suggest that coeval ideational appropriation has a long history in the region.

In the wider world, similar forms of piracy have been at work. For example, in the case of the search for liberty among the slaves of San Domingo in the 1790s, few would have pointed to sociological, positional, occupational, or identitarian similarities between Afro-Caribbean slaves in the Caribbean and Parisian Jacobin lawyers or the sans-culottes of the Faubourg Saint Antoine, prior to the assertion by slaves that they were indeed similar to these revolutionaries, in that they were all men and thus should enjoy the Rights of Man declared in 1792 in the French National Convention (James 1963). Similarly, Cynthia Young's study shows how the US Third World Left, in the 1950s and 1960s, "turned to Third World anticolonial struggles for ideas and strategies that might aid their own struggles against the poverty, discrimination, and brutality facing peoples of color" (Young 2006, 2). This time around the model was not the First but the Third World. Young's study captures the point about the importance of an oddly underappreciated motive for looking abroad and beyond: to acquire leverage amid a locally situated political struggle. Young suggests that through acts of appropriation, local struggles could be depicted in more compelling terms. This does not go very far in conceptualizing what this "more compelling" aspect involves, but it certainly offers a fundamental rationale for the active search for spatially removed models of collective action.

These examples suggest a number of observations in regard to translocal appropriation. First, that it is not a creature of the new media or post-1990 globalization. Second that it is not a prisoner of infrastructures of connection: even where such infrastructures were highly underdeveloped by twenty-first-century standards, challengers found ways to seize on contentious ideas. As in the old Arabic proverb: *al-labib takfihi al-ishara* (For the wise man, a hint is sufficient): the idea being that in so far as merely a glimpse of an alternative can resonate with existing exigencies, it might

be sufficient to stimulate action. Third, that it is an unruly phenomenon, which does not depend on preexisting forms of similarity. Attributions of similarity may be made between widely differing constituencies for political reasons. Appropriations may not be done in propitious contexts, and are no guarantee of success. Fourth, that it is a many-headed phenomenon, capable of inspiring ordinary people (i.e., those not normally engaged in activism), to make a first-time, transgressive move into the political field, accounting for the force and capacity of the upsurge, which changes the existing balance of forces in ways that does not just rely on "brokers" or "entrepreneurs" (i.e., existing leaderships). Finally, to invoke historical examples where markets or at least capitalism were either hardly existent, or instantiated in fundamentally different and uneven ways, it helps to underline the inadequacy of market metaphors (such as brokerage) in coming to terms with the reasons why actors act to appropriate. The argument here situates such actions instead in contexts of hegemonic disincorporation. In all the examples above, subjects and citizens searching for routes out of specific forms of violence and alienation appropriated, sometimes at great speed, models for collective action pioneered by others in order to deliver transformation, in ways that were constitutive for subsequent collective action.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to contribute to explanations of the sudden emergence of revolutionary actors in various parts of the Arab world in 2011 by looking at the unruly, translocal appropriation of a model of collective action pioneered in Tunisia. Like the literature on ideational diffusion, it accepts that ideas play a role in coordinating the action of new movements, and can help explain their incidence, forms of cohesion, content, goals and practice. It nonetheless has suggested a number of important limits on the utility and capacity of conventional characterizations, involving metaphors of diffusion, relational and nonrelational mediation, attribution of similarity, brokerage, and movement entrepreneurship to characterize and explain why ideas cross borders. These concepts struggle to explain the motivation for the adoption of a new model. They pay little attention to power-laden forms of structure and destructure, consent, and alienation. They do not go very far in grasping and explaining how identifications of commonality across borders can suddenly come into being, or get perceived and constructed on new bases. They struggle to account for the crucial selectivity of appropriation. They do not identify the functions and purposes

of appropriated models for movements. And they struggle to account for the first-time protestors of vast masses of ordinary or nonactivist sectors. They rely too much on deterministic, natural science and market metaphors, at the expense of metaphors more adequate to unruly political dynamics.

I have suggested, therefore, that rather than thinking in terms of the outworn metaphor of the diffusion of models for collective action, we might be better served by thinking in terms of their social life. Instead of a hydraulic pattern of linear diffusion, what was at stake in Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen was the social life of a contentious idea, a social life involving many-headed, sudden, high-velocity, and unruly translocal appropriation, and one not always destined for either continuous and entrenched organizational embodiment or for success. This unruly, translocal appropriation can be likened to piracy, involving search, seizure, and translation of transgressive models for collective action, which now served as the basis for new forms of solidarity among previously heterogeneous actors.

This chapter finds enabling conditions for piracy, in prior, inherited, and directly encountered patterns of hegemonic disincorporation. Feelings of injustice based on a social tension between *is* and *ought* engage the normative and political imagination in a latent and potentially unruly search for new means of collective action to address injustice. This chapter sees this search as fundamental to the motivations of those who were hugely inspired by the model for collective action unleashed by the fall of Ben Ali at the hands of the people. Attributions of similarity were rooted in these contexts, rather than in preexisting similarities of sociology, occupation, ethnicity or position. Those sectors who maintained key stakes in existing forms of hegemony tended to reject the Tunisian model as inapplicable to their situations and societies, while those experiencing a latent search for new forms of the common seized on the similarities between their interests and actions and those of the Tunisians.

What mattered were not infrastructures of communication, whether relational or nonrelational, but how such infrastructures and the information they contained were ransacked and made appropriate in a wide variety of local contexts. What was at stake was neither expert, stage-by-stage, policy adoption, nor Brownian diffusion, but the seizure of a model capable of rekeying a worldview. Exhilaration coursed through the crowd because the model was felt to be eliminating the tension between is and ought. The protagonists came from all walks of life: they were neither necessarily preexisting activists, nor were they institutionalized, nor acting according to market logics, as metaphors of brokerage, entrepreneurship, and certification tend to imply. Protagonists acted more like pirates: they rewrote the

rules of contentious interaction, or acted as if older rules were no longer applicable. Thinking in terms of piracy can assist in making sense of the forms of creative ontology and revolutionary becoming that are sometimes at work in transgressive mobilization, without explaining these forms away via structural determinism on the one hand, and without seeing them as entirely unfathomable, arbitrary, and unpredictable on the other.

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