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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

The Voice of the Other: Representations of the United States in Egyptian Popular Discourse

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Political Science
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
Sara Pulliam

Under the supervision of **Dr. Ezzedine Choukri Fishere**

May/ 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
A. Analyzing the Arab-American Relationship.....	3
B. Critique of US Discourse in Arab-American Relations.....	6
C. Research Questions and Agenda.....	12
II. Theory, Methodology, and Literature Review.....	15
A. Can the Subaltern Speak? Postcolonial Theory and Its Shortcomings.....	15
B. Theory of Discourse and Discourse Analysis.....	21
C. Methodology.....	27
D. Arabs Encounter the West.....	29
III. Analysis of Egyptian Discourse During Obama's Speech in Cairo.....	38
A. Major Themes and Representations.....	39
B. Underlying Assumptions.....	60
IV. Analysis of Egyptian Discourse After the Death of Osama bin Laden.....	63
A. Major Themes and Representations.....	63
B. Underlying Assumptions.....	80
V. Analysis of the Egyptian Discourse after the Israeli-Egyptian Border Clash.....	83
A. Major Themes and Representations.....	84
B. Underlying Assumptions.....	94
VI. Conclusions.....	97
VII. Bibliography.....	105

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian-American relationship is complex and problematic on many levels and, similar to Arab-American relations as a whole, often draws the attention of policy makers and academics within political science and its subfield of international relations. Previous analyses of this topic have focused on the dimensions surrounding US policies in the Middle East and the consequences of these policies on both the US and the Arab region. These studies range from being scathingly critical, such as Gregory's *The Colonial Present*, to advocating for a US foreign policy that is based in rational pursuit of interests that overlooks the discontent of the "Arab street," as written by David Pollack.¹ They also vary in their theoretical underpinnings; ranging from postcolonial studies, foreign policy analysis, political economy, to realist international relations and security studies. However, regardless of where they are anchored theoretically, most of these studies focus almost entirely on analyzing US actions, their effects, and providing follow-on prescription or critique directed towards the US.

As a result, there exists an underlying assumption that the United States, generally due to its capacity as the world's only super-power, is ultimately the most important entity that can affect change within the context of the Arab-American (and Egyptian-American) relationship. However, this thesis questions such an approach. It raises a number of questions that this approach seems to ignore; are not all relationships a two-way street, even if they are asymmetrical in nature? What is the Egyptian side of the story in building and developing this relationship? What is the Egyptian contribution to- and

¹ Pollack, David, et al., "Actions, Not Just Attitudes: A New Paradigm for U.S. Arab Relations," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 2010.

impact on- the dynamics of the relationship? Why are Egyptians and/or Arabs generally depicted as passive objects or receivers (whether as solely victims, or as only allowed to react and not to initiate action or discourse) within the context of this relationship? Is this perspective silencing half of the story? Why is it assumed that one side of the relationship, even if asymmetrical in nature, has little or no relevance? Tracing the contours of asymmetrical power relations involves looking beyond one “side” of the relationship. As Foucault mentions, even within a nexus of power there exists pockets of resistance, even if “this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”² This resistance may even be substantial enough to cause “radical ruptures.” In dealing with these questions, this thesis attempts to address the Egyptian side of the equation as a relevant and meaningful player within the relationship, and therefore fills a gap in the literature dealing with Arab-American relations.

Particularly at the time of writing, questions surrounding the status of Egyptian-American relations and how the ‘United States’ is represented in Egyptian discourse has become a salient topic. Post-January 25th Egypt has witnessed what has been perceived as a new surge of the depiction of the ‘United States’ as a ‘foreign hand’ with a ‘hidden agenda.’³ Understanding how prior representations of the ‘United States’ have been constructed, changed, or utilized in the past is quite relevant to the current circumstances and the “crisis of Egyptian-American relations” and how the ‘United States’ has functioned in the role of ‘other’ to the Egyptian ‘self.’ Additionally, analyzing how

² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

³ Trew, Bel, “The Third Man in Egypt,” *al-Ahram Online*, 24 February 2012.

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/1/35184/Egypt/The-third-man-Egyptian-fears-of-the-foreign-plot.aspx>

Egyptian discourses structure social reality is also a pertinent issue as Egypt continues its transitional path in the heart of the “Arab Spring.”

A. Analyzing The Arab-American Relationship

Though the current status of Egyptian-American and the larger Arab-American relations are frequently depicted as complicated and rocky, this predicament was not necessarily always the case. Scholars like Ussama Makdisi⁴ and Michael Oren,⁵ have portrayed the beginning of the Arab-American relationship in the 19th century as having the potential for a fruitful future due to the fact that the US was not initially perceived as a hostile and occupying nation like the European colonial powers. However, as multiple works have argued, the hope that came with this beginning was soon smashed and the relationship has since been fraught with difficulties, tensions, misunderstandings, and exploitation. According to Rashid Khalidi, over the course of the relationship and particularly since the Second World War, the United States effectively stepped into the shoes of the old colonial European powers and engaged in its own particular brand of amnesic imperialism- a history of foreign intervention always conveniently forgotten, or silenced by discourse. As Britain and France did before, the United States dominated and continues to dominate the region militarily, economically, and culturally, although its forms of domination have donned different shapes than the overtly colonial past.⁶

Overlapping Khalidi’s perspective is the prevailing argument that the US has pursued its foreign policies in the region based exclusively upon its strategic interests and

⁴ Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*.

⁵ Oren, Michael, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*.

⁶ Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*.

not the liberal values that often permeate US official discourse about itself.⁷ As Little articulates in his wide survey of America's past in the Middle East, throughout the Cold-War and afterward, decision-makers in the United States consistently employed foreign policies in the region based in stability and strategic interests, oil, Israel's interests, and, in recent history, a promotion of liberal ideology. US policy makers have rarely taken Arab interests into consideration when designing their foreign policy for the region.⁸ According to this perspective, the US in its fight against communism and later terrorism⁹, pursued policies that more often than not forsook the democracy and freedom that the United States is touted to espouse, bolstered repressive authoritarian regimes, and failed to adequately address the critical issue of Palestine.

The question has been asked as to why such policies have been implemented for such a sustained period of time, critiquing what is generally represented as an unbalanced and unfair relationship. Though it is not the only possible framework for analysis, many scholars (often within postcolonial studies) have attempted to answer this question through analyzing representations of the Middle East and Arabs, such as Gregory's use of "imaginative geographies," that are prevalent within US discourse. Such a frame of analysis requires looking beyond the material, economic, and state power-relations; or domains that generally constitute the core areas of analyses in inter-state relations.

There are certainly a multitude of factors that constrain and enable actors within the dynamics of the Arab-American relationship and a variety of tools in which to

⁷ See the U.S. 2010 National Security Strategy. "And we reject the notion that lasting security and prosperity can be found by turning away from universal rights--- democracy does not merely represent our better angels, it stands in opposition to aggression and injustice, and our support for universal rights is both fundamental to American leadership and a source of our strength in the world." Obama, Barack, in The White House, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington DC: Government Printing House, May 2010).

⁸ Little. *American Orientalism*.

⁹ Khalidi, Rashid, *Sowing Crisis*, 218.

highlight these elements, one of which is analyzing discourse. From this perspective (generally regarded as post-structuralist), the representations found in discourse, be it popular, academic, and political (all over-lapping), exact a significant impact in how actors understand and produce their social reality. But, perhaps of more significance, such representations are said to both enable and constrain their available courses of action.

Given that our understanding of conflict, war, or, more generally, the space within which international politics is deployed is always mediated by modes of representation and thus by all the various mechanisms involved in text construction- grammar, rhetorics, and narrativity- we must operate with a view of politics that is sensitive to textuality.¹⁰

In other words, the political struggle itself is one over definitions, representations, the grammatical rules of how a discourse is structured, and identities (all inter-related) rather than simply material and economic factors. Therefore, analyzing politics means analyzing discourse, being sensitive to its “textuality,” or how representations and meanings are constructed through their arrangement with other texts, meanings, and representations.

In this view, politics itself is a struggle over definitions and meanings and their arrangement with each other, because such factors aid in legitimizing courses of action, affect the material and economic spheres, and have other consequences. This struggle does not occur simply within political realms but also extends into the greater arena of popular culture, media, etc. Discourse and the representations found within it, constitute a domain that actors both struggle to define and control, and enables and constrains their action whether actors are conscious of it or not. “In analyzing these patterns, the analyst

¹⁰ Shapiro, Michael, “Textualizing Global Politics,” in Der Derian, Shapiro, *International/ Intertextual Relations*, 12.

is describing not a world ‘out there,’ independent of human meaning, but rather how social meanings themselves constitute the parameters of a particular world.”¹¹ Therefore, these elements exist in a reciprocal relationship that shapes our world and the distributions of power within it; they are productive. However, “[t]he fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition.”¹² There is no suggestion in this type of analysis that there exist no other physical and independent elements at work. Finally, analyzing the dynamics of discourse is assumed to accomplish a key emancipatory goal of critical theory: through casting a light on the boundaries and constraints that shape social reality (which, ultimately, is produced by man) we are better able to understand and possibly exact control over such dynamics in order to dismantle structures of domination.¹³

B. Critique of US Discourse in Arab-American Relations

As previously discussed, a significant amount of work has been accomplished in understanding the political implications of discourse in the Arab-American relationship. Usually these analyses, which generally fall within the school of postcolonial studies and critique of Orientalism, extensively critique US academic, popular, and official discourse about the Arab ‘other’ (or opposite of the ‘self’) and the resulting implications from these constructions. According to this perspective, generally regarded as having first been articulated in a comprehensive manner by Edward Said, the ability to carry out policies abroad that seem contradictory to American values at home, in addition to the execution

¹¹ Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 85.

¹² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 108.

¹³ Campbell, David, “Poststructuralism,” in *International Relations Theories*, 223.

of America's preventative wars, has been enabled by and interwoven with a continuing discourse and representation of the Middle East that supposes authoritative 'knowledge' about the area. This discourse of what America 'knows' about the Middle East is intertwined throughout the political, academic, and cultural spheres and is constitutive of the production and reproduction of the American 'self(s)' through a process of alterity (or otherness).¹⁴ Moreover, this discourse and its resulting identities produce a hierarchical ordering of the world, which is composed of a superior 'us' and a lesser 'them.'

According to this criticism of US discourse, this American identity often revolves around the construction of "American exceptionalism" and is dangerously paired with the U.S. public's amnesiac tendency to forget their nation's past adventures in the Middle East, which are characterized as neither exceptional nor in line with purported American values. The hierarchical ordering of the world allows the values and ideals appropriate 'inside' the borders of the United States (freedom, democracy, human rights, etc.) to be rendered moot and inappropriate for the world 'outside' the borders.

Furthermore, the US government requires a certain amount of public support and approval to be able to pursue any policy abroad for a sustained period of time. The negative representation of the Middle East in discourse has long fueled a public apprehension towards Islam and the Arabs, often negating the relevance of the actual political grievances that Arabs might hold. According to this argument, such negative representations function as legitimizing tools for America's policies in the region. This culture of apprehension does not produce merely an "unfortunate" and "closed-minded" categorization of the world, but has political and material repercussions. Culture is co-produced with geographies of politico-economic power and military violence. "[C]ulture

¹⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 251.

underwrites power even as power elaborates culture. It follows that culture is not a mere mirror of the world. Culture involves the production, circulation, and legitimization of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world.”¹⁵ The ability to ‘know’ Arabs (and/or Muslims) as radical and irrational avoids recognizing any legitimacy to Arab claims and discredits resistances “merely by using the slur of ‘exoticism’ against the lexicon employed by those who are voicing them.”¹⁶ Or, in other words, by declaring such resistances as stemming from “irrational” sources such as ‘Islam’ or labeling them as “terrorism,” any underlying grievances are silenced.

As Edward Said discusses in *Covering Islam*, in American popular discourse, such as film and media, Arabs have for decades been demonized as crazy, irrational terrorists, greedy oil sheikhs, and other stereotypes.¹⁷ Or, as Little writes, “A quick look at how Arabs have been depicted in everything from pulp fiction to television during the past twenty years confirms that orientalism American style remained alive and well in both popular culture and mass media.”¹⁸ Short media clips about the region are generally restricted to images of violence, political upheaval, and poverty. It is a “scary” and inherently unstable region. “They have been fighting for thousands of years and will continue to do so” is one of the most enduring assessments. Fierke notes that, “One way of ensuring legitimacy is to naturalize and conventionalize a particular association as ‘reality’ and therefore part of the assumed world of a culture.”¹⁹ In this respect, the preponderance of negative imagery about the Middle East and the Arabs and their

¹⁵ Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 8.

¹⁶ Burgat, *Islamism in the Shadow of Al Qaeda*, 8.

¹⁷ Said, *Covering Islam*, 6.

¹⁸ Little, *American Orientalism*, 36.

¹⁹ Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security*, 86.

representation as “unstable,” “irrational,” “angry,” “barbaric,” and “dangerous” are projected into naturalized landscape of “reality” for Americans. Or, as David Campbell discusses, “the boundaries of a state’s identity are secured by the representation of a danger integral to foreign policy.”²⁰

Gregory takes this argument further in suggesting that such a representation of the Arab “reality” allows the American public to feel comfortable in the assertion that the US is justified and has the moral high ground in its continued intervention abroad and waging “The War on Terror.” These representations are more complex and powerful than simple stereotypes. Boundaries of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are also produced through visibility and invisibility. While the media’s coverage of September 11 was personal and intimate, the displays of America’s following wars were contrastingly distant and computerized. The Arab was “anonymized” and placed in a state of invisibility. It was not the Iraqis and Afghans who were dying- objectives were being met, targets were being destroyed. Warfare was being fought and projected onto television screens through the imagery of a video game and with the bravado of a reality show. It was only when the media wanted to project an image of a “grateful Iraqi people” that selective and intimate footage was shown of Iraqis. Through its selection of images to display on screen, the US media ensured that the American public would see itself as the hero in a sort of Hollywood Western and never see or remember the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians who lost their lives as a result of a war that was begun and legitimized on what Gregory perceives as false premises.²¹ Ten years later, 9/11 continues to serve as the newest justification for

²⁰ Campbell, David, *Writing Security*, 3.

²¹ Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 198-199.

an interventionist and militarized foreign policy and is burned in US popular memory as what happens when ‘they’ are not properly managed and controlled by ‘us.’

As is discussed extensively by Said and additionally by Lockman, it is not in the domain of popular culture alone where such representations are produced and reproduced. At a deeper level and perhaps more importantly is academia’s institutionalized ‘knowledge’ about the Arab world. Such ‘knowledge’ is always endowed with a voice that makes it appear to have a more authoritative and substantial claim in representing “reality,” potentially making it more potent. The intellectual circles within American society are intimately intertwined with similar negative representations of the Middle East. Academia is permeated with think tanks and the voices of scholars like Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and Daniel Pipes who echo the same media pop culture messages in a more eloquent and “intellectually appealing” form: there is something fundamentally different, timeless, and essential within Islam and Arab culture²² that prevents them from being like ‘us,’ and we must find away to “guide” them, “modernize” them, “Westernize” them, so that they are not a threat. The development of the field of Middle East Studies itself originated from traditional Orientalist scholarship (focused primarily in languages and classic Islamic civilization rather than contemporary circumstances) and was always linked to government interests, and driven to produce policy relevant knowledge that was directed towards searching for the internal characteristics that caused ‘them’ to be behind.²³

The hypotheses of why the Arabs have “missed the boat” range from pointing to a deficient component within Islam, to a propensity towards a strong or a weak civil

²² For more elaboration see Sadowski, Yahya. “The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate,” *Middle East Report* 183, no. 183 (July 1, 1993): 14-40.

²³ Lockman, *Contending Visions*, 100-148.

society (depending on which is in intellectual fashion as the correct recipe for democracy²⁴), or the medieval Arab rejection of Greek rationalism. The general prognosis within critique of US discourse is that regardless of the reason of the day, within American hegemonic discourse, both popular and academic, Arabs are consistently represented as irrational, backward, authoritarian, resistant in liberal economic reform, lacking in regard for individual rights, women's liberation, religious freedom, etc.; ironically many of the elements that American policies in the region are portrayed as complicit in causing. Most importantly, the fact that Arabs are represented as such in the dominant discourse has political and military consequences for the region, not the least of which being a continued justification for foreign intervention.

As was previously mentioned, all of these intricate and illuminating critiques have consistently focused on US discourse; in other words, the US as the main actor and target audience whose discourse and representations take primacy in analysis. From a normative perspective, the implications of such a narrative point towards the need for drastic realization, self-critique, and change on the part of the hegemonic power, or the United States. But what if this realization never occurs and, as Gregory phrases, the power-knowledge structures of the colonial past continue to be projected into the colonial present? Is this, then, the end of the story according to these perspectives? Should it be assumed that only the hegemon is the relevant actor? How does one located on the "margins" by the dominant discourse interact with it and contest it? Is it the plight of Arabs to always be regarded as the passive objects of such discourse and its political and material consequences? This thesis argues that this situation is not necessarily the case.

²⁴ Sadowski, Yahya. "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," *Middle East Report* 183, no. 183 (July 1, 1993): 14-40.

C. Research Questions and Agenda

As was previously mentioned, even within the dominant discourse there is presumed to exist pockets of resistance. This thesis locates and identifies such resistances in the Egyptian context. Although there exist other means and frames of analysis to address the dynamics of the Egypt-American relationship, including analyzing Egypt as a relevant player, this study is restricted to the realm of discourse and representation, and attempts to fill the gap left by prior works that have focused on this element of the relationship. It is an attempt to analyze and give voice to Egyptian discourse that is related to the Egyptian relationship with America and tied ultimately to the continuous production of Egyptian identity. It assumes that the discourse from the non-hegemonic power is in fact relevant and productive. It also assumes that such discourses enhance and constrain possible courses of action. Such assumptions have produced the following research questions to guide the analysis:

How do Egyptians who shape the representations of the ‘United States’ define it in their discourse? Do these discourses and speech acts place the ‘United States’ into the role of ‘other’ as part of the continuous struggle to define the Egyptian ‘self’ and identity? What are these various constructions of the Egyptian ‘self’ and identity that emerge from public discourses? What are the exclusions created in these definitions? How is the dominant discourse interacted with, taken on, challenged, and potentially transformed? Which discourses seem the most productive in transcending the colonial binaries of the past and which discourses serve as a reinforcement of current knowledge-power equations?

In order to address these questions, the analysis focuses on Egyptian popular²⁵ discourse and its various representations of the ‘United States’ and ‘Egypt,’ and their relationship to each other, over the course of three events: President Obama’s speech in Cairo on June 4th 2009, Osama bin Laden’s death on May 2nd 2011, and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) clash on the Israeli-Egyptian border on 19 August 2011. These three events were selected because they fall in the most recent two years and are likely to have generated discourse about the United States and/or Egyptian identity in relation to the United States. One of the events is President Obama’s speech in Cairo and is a “text” in and of itself and is addressed extensively by the analyzed texts. The materials for this research project are the editorials and opinion articles in three major Egyptian newspapers that are representative of different interests: *al-Ahram Weekly* as the state and establishment, *al-Masry al-Youm* as mainstream independent, and *al-Dostor* as populist (though it is noted that it changed in ownership and in nature in 2007). In this project, media is regarded as a public forum for popular discourse amongst Egyptian civil society, particularly where Egyptian intellectuals have a space to articulate their perspectives. Therefore media-framing is not involved in the framework of analysis. The events cover a time period before and after the 25 January revolution in order to capture the shift in perspective and the increase in the plurality of voices since the collapse of the previous regime and a renewed desire to redefine Egypt and its place in world politics.

²⁵ By popular discourse I mean the dominant discourse found in Egyptian newspapers. It is understood that access to publish in these newspapers, or the rules that determine who can be heard, is restricted to a specific group of elite individuals. In effect, the discourse itself chooses the authors. Therefore, this thesis is an analysis of representations within Egyptian dominant discourse, in addition to its relationship with American dominant discourse. However, unless otherwise noted in this thesis, the term dominant discourse is in reference to American discourse.

With the exception of President Obama's speech in Cairo, all events were analyzed from the day after their occurrence until two weeks after. As the first Obama speech was anticipated, the week prior and after was analyzed in order to capture reactions before and after the event. Therefore, the research includes a total of six weeks worth of op-eds from three newspapers. Though the results of this thesis are limited in range and are case-specific, they reveal a multiplicity of representations of 'Egypt' and 'United States,' or 'self' and 'other,' many of which appear to have implications for how actors engage in Egyptian-American relations (some much different than others).

This thesis consists of six chapters. The second chapter reviews the literature pertinent to this research, and the theory and methodology utilized in analyzing Egyptian discourse as well as the working assumptions and hypotheses of this research (based on the information garnered from preliminary research). Chapters three, four and five include the analyses of Egyptian popular discourse from the three chosen events, in addition to preliminary discussions of their implications. The concluding chapter synthesizes the findings from the analysis of Egyptian discourse during (or relevant to) these three events. It also identifies the thesis' core argument of how representations of the 'United States' have functioned in Egyptian discourse and therefore influenced the Egyptian-American relationship. It concludes with preliminary observations about the how these representations produce Egypt's 'relations' with America, which ultimately enable and constrain action.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY, METHODOLOGY, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the history of previous scholarly work, starting with Edward Said's *Orientalism*, that has addressed the implications of the colonial-colonized discourse, of which the Arab-American relationship is but one piece. It then expands on the theoretical frameworks within this broader category, ultimately ending in the chosen theoretical framework and methodology for this thesis. The chapter ends with an additional literature review, covering topics identified as relevant after the establishment of the theoretical and methodological framework and the refinement of the research questions.

A. Can the Subaltern Speak? Postcolonial Theory and its Shortcomings

The field of postcolonial studies has extensively addressed the implications of the dominant Western or imperialist discourse and how it has enabled the goals of colonialism and is one of the primary sources for critique of discourse in the Arab-American relationship. Academic works in this field, specifically critique of Orientalism, generally analyze how current Western knowledge structures perpetuate hierarchical representations of the Arab world (or a greater Orient), and how these structures of knowledge and power intertwine between academic and political realms, and therefore help facilitate foreign policies, and other actions that are detrimental and unfair to Arabs. The central theme within the critique of Orientalism, first introduced by Edward Said, is that Western Orientalist discourse, which remains inherently about domesticating and ruling over a stagnant and unchanging 'Orient,' has political and material repercussions,

not the least of which is causing powerlessness or limited agency on the part of the colonized ‘other.’ Furthermore, Orientalist discourse, is generated from itself and throughout its existence has never been grounded in and reflective of the real and material ‘Orient’ of which it is purported to be an authority on. In other words, Orientalist discourse is completely Western in origin and ultimately about the ‘West’ and its construction of ‘self’ and not about the ‘Orient.’²⁶

Edward Said’s classic critique of Orientalism was naturally the catalyst for a wave of studies in postcolonialism and critical theory, including studies that elaborated on and critiqued his original premises. Sadiq al-Azm’s “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse” suggested that Said was guilty of essentializing culture himself or what Al-Azm calls “Orientalism in Reverse.”²⁷ Through tracing Orientalist origins back to the time of the Homer and the ancient Greek representations of Asia, Said committed the same sin of essentializing the ‘West’ and more specifically the scholarly field of Orientalism. Al-Azm also went on to be one of the main critics of “Occidentalism,” another term for essentialization of the ‘West’ that is often utilized by Arab intellectuals. Hasan Hanafi, an Egyptian intellectual, actually called for establishing Occidentalism (*Istighrab*) as an institutional field of study to accomplish a reverse of what Orientalist discourse did to the ‘East.’²⁸ Al-Azm criticizes this approach for emulating Orientalism, originating from politics of resentment and an inferiority complex, and relying on the same binary of West/Orient.²⁹

²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*.

²⁷ Al-Azm, Sadik J. “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse.” In Alexander Lyon Macfie, ed., *Orientalism: A Reader*, 217-28. New York University Press, 2000.

²⁸ Al-Azm, “Orientalism and Conspiracy” in Graf, Arndt, Ludwig Paul, Shirin Fathi, and Sadiq Jalal ‘Azm (Ed.). *Orientalism & Conspiracy*. I.B. Tauris, 2011.

²⁹ Ibid.

Other scholars, such as Aijaz Ahmed and Benita Parry, critiqued Said's stance for its wholesale reliance on discourse analysis which ultimately pushes the inquirer away from the actual material and economic conditions that the colonial discourse is accused of producing and controlling.³⁰ Further critique asked questions regarding whether there is a diversification within colonial discourse, implying that it is an oversimplification to suggest that it operates in the same fashion throughout space and time.³¹ Other scholars such as Bhabha and Spivak look for ways to transcend colonial/orientalist hegemonic discourse; Bhabha³² through 'ambivalence' and 'hybridity,' Spivak through "counter-knowledges."

According to Homi Bhabha, who has expanded the realm of postcolonial theory, studies in postcolonialism or critical theory should aim to transcend the binaries initially established by colonial discourse. Or, it

[A]ttempts to revise those nationalist or 'nativist' pedagogies that set up the relation of Third World First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists the attempt at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces a recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.³³

However, the vast majority of postcolonial studies position Western discourse as the only target of deconstruction, thus neglecting the voice and resistance of the colonized subject, limiting the potential depth of analysis and the ability to transcend binaries. Said later acknowledged this deficiency in his follow on work, *Culture and Imperialism*. While he mentions that the 'colonized' have always engaged in acts of resistance³⁴, his primary

³⁰ Young, Robert. "Colonialism and the Desiring Machine" in Castle, Gregory. *Postcolonial Discourses*. Blackwell, 2001, 75.

³¹ Ibid., 75.

³² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

³³ Ibid., 248.

³⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xii.

source for depictions of resistance came from Western texts such as Austen's *Mansfield Park* and not from the works of Arab authors.

The tension between the substantive popularity of Said as a face of Arab culture and the sense among Arab literary studies scholars that he said far too little about the actual culture produced in the region parallels an older and more conceptual tension between colonial discourse analysis as pure critique of the West's gaze, and a need for a critical approach to the arts and ideas of the region that makes substantive statements about Arab actors.³⁵

This approach towards Said's work is the same critique previously made in the introductory chapter of this thesis with respect to Arab-American relations: analysis remains on the dominant discourse and the voice of the 'other,' and its resistance, is left unstudied as a legitimate actor.

Concentrating inquiry on the Arab as only the object of discourse, once again, places primacy in the 'West.' As a result, postcolonial studies then becomes an exploration of Western discourse and the Western definition of 'Self' that uses methodology from a Western intellectual tradition to reveal how this discourse perpetuates asymmetrical structures of power on the 'other.' The 'other' simply serves as a body for the 'West' to critique itself against. Focusing only on Western discourse does not generate inquiry into the material and actual conditions of the 'other' or give the 'other' an adequate role to play as a recipient and mutual shaper, or resistor, of this discourse. Similar to the colonial discourse that it critiques, postcolonial studies place the 'other's' text "forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation."³⁶ In many ways postcolonialism as an institutional discipline actually depends on the continued existence of the silenced, repressed, "good" 'other,' packaged

³⁵ Aboul-Ela, Hossam, "Is There an Arab (Yet) in this Field?" *MSF Modern Fiction Studies*, 735.

³⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 46.

together with its cultural difference, in order to better define the edges of the ‘West’ it critiques.³⁷ Or, to use Spivak’s term, it commits epistemic violence against the colonial subject through consistently defining it as the ‘other’ and merely the shadow of the ‘self.’³⁸

Proponents of Foucauldian notions of power, who comprise a significant portion of the work in postcolonial studies, suggest that true resistance against the dominant discourse is rare, if not impossible. Any resistance that does emerge will be incorporated into the framework of the dominant discourse and thus rendered inconsequential. As Spivak finds in her famous work³⁹, the subaltern does not speak. The few works that do engage in the cultural and intellectual history of the Arabs in a postcolonial context, such as Joseph Mossad’s *Desiring Arabs*, demonstrate how modern Arab intellectual discourses, both liberal and Islamist, absorbed Western frameworks and ontologies, such as the homosexual as an ‘other,’ to the extent that they became primarily “discursive derivatives of Europe.” Aboul-Ela asks if an over-fixation on the voice and agency of the ‘other’ eventually leads to essentialist notions of modernity, native culture, and blindness to the impact of European colonialism and global capitalism on all contemporary cultures. However, he also notes that postcolonialism is limited in its underlying premise that history begins with the colonial encounter and may therefore have a tendency to overlook elements of prior discourses. There are strands of intellectual tradition, culture, and discourse, usually not readily accessible or visible to Western scholarship, which continue to influence contemporary Arab thought.⁴⁰ Moreover, Foucault himself

³⁷ Ibid.,45.

³⁸ Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak*, 24-25.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Aboul-Ela, Hossam, “Is There an Arab (Yet) in this Field?” *MSF Modern Fiction Studies*, 739.

acknowledged the inherent presence of resistance to power and Bhabha⁴¹ has since elaborated on the tactics of mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and sly civility as a means of subversion to slip past hegemonic holds. However, even Bhabha's strategies of resistance are contingent on the natural flaws found within the dominant discourse (colonialism) and not a result of the colonial's or other's independent ability for resistance.

Regardless of the reason or justification, postcolonial studies have often left unexamined the possibility of the 'other,' or in the case of this thesis, the 'Arab,' as author of discourses who, consequently, also produces constructions of 'self' and 'other.' It is left to rarified theoretical speculation as to whether these discourses also propagate and repeat the same power-knowledge equations inherent in colonial discourse, or if the resulting constructions have ramifications for action. An understanding of the constraints and limitations on the other side of the presumed 'Arab-West' relationship is critical in attempting to identify strategies for resistance. The silencing of the positively associated 'other,' the eternally enshrined under-dog, assumes that there is no recourse available for resisting and changing the hegemonic representations from the 'West' unless it lies within the discourse of the 'West' itself. As a result, postcolonialism "reproduces a relationship of domination and is the most serious indictment of the institutional powers of critical theory."⁴² As the majority of postcolonial studies are focused on critiquing the 'West,' it is assumed that it is the 'West' who will have come to terms with its committed faults and injustices after sufficient self-critique so that it can then change its own course and, consequently, that of the passive world.

⁴¹ Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 46.

The research questions in this thesis do not focus on a critique of the dominant American discourse and therefore do not neatly fit in the field of postcolonial studies. However, it is recognized that postcolonial studies and critique of the dominant discourse has opened the space for the questions presented in this thesis. It has allowed the representations and discourse of the original ‘other’ to become a salient and relevant topic. As a result, this thesis is primarily in a dialogue with postcolonial studies, in search of another angle or approach with which to illuminate the same issue. It is an attempt to fill a new space that has been identified in studies of Arab-American relations and postcolonial studies as a whole: the discourse, representations, and constructions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ for Arab, specifically Egyptian, actors. In such an approach, the theories and scholarly works that concentrate on analyzing and understanding discourse, which are essentially the same frameworks utilized in orientalism critiques, are still pertinent and relevant. The lens is simply shifted to the other “side.”

B. Theory of Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Scholars working in discourse analysis vary in the extent that they embrace the “linguistic turn.” Some scholars like Laclau and Mouffe choose to see everything as discourse and relevant to social relations and reject the “thought/reality dichotomy.”⁴³ Others, like Norman Fairclough and those within the school of critical discourse analysis, see discourse analysis as relevant for many studies but not appropriate for everything, such as understanding the economy. However, all of them agree that discourse constructs our social reality, identities, social relations, and consequently interests, and power

⁴³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy*, 110.

relations. In other words, the social world is not ontologically prior to discourse, but mutually constitutive of it.⁴⁴

According to Laclau and others generally placed in the post-structuralist school of thought, the signs (or words) within discourse (or representations) are not innately endowed with meaning but acquire it through their relations with other signs and discourses. However, unlike what was argued by de Saussure, the relationship between signs and the resultant meaning are not inherently fixed. In fact, they are always subject to political struggle. Politics then becomes, ultimately, the struggle over meaning. These meanings define the world while simultaneously excluding other meanings, identities, and relations that could have been. Moreover, discourses and signs structure social reality in a manner that benefits some and not others, making interests directly tied to and produced by discourse and meaning.⁴⁵

It is perhaps more beneficial to envision discourses as nets of signs that always have the potential for being re-arranged, some signs having more potential than others to shift depending on the historical circumstances and struggles. For example, with regards to current Arab discourses, the sign 'democracy' might be tied to 'West,' 'liberal,' 'foreign,' 'heresy,' 'modernity,' etc. or it might also be related to 'Islamic,' 'indigenous,' 'Arab,' in the context of those who argue that 'democracy' has always been part of 'Islamic' thought and/or 'Arab' culture. There also exist signs and discourses that are naturalized, or seen as an objective truth and are more stable in their location (or unlikely to be able to be contested), yet this does not mean that they could not have been arranged in another fashion or that they are, in fact, an unalterable reality. They are heavy and

⁴⁴ Phillips and Jorgensen, *Discourse Analysis*, 5-6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

resilient structures that are almost impossible to dismantle or alter, similar to something like the global political economy, yet still owe their inception to man. Therefore, depending on historical circumstances, not all signs have the same potential to shift in meaning and attempts to do so can fall on deaf ears or make little sense. This situation reflects the structural constraints within discourse and therefore the constraints in the construction of meaning and social reality. Adding to this perspective, identities and power-relations, which are generated from the current discourses and social reality, also affect who has the ability to disrupt and challenge such configurations of meaning (the relationship between discourse and social reality is a two-way street). Regardless events can occur which upset the stability or hegemony of certain discourses and signs, thus making it possible for them to be struggled over and rearticulated anew.⁴⁶

From this point of view, analyzing discourse is ultimately an analysis of the ongoing political struggle over meaning and consequently the struggle over the make-up of our social reality. The purpose of discourse analysis then is to identify how particular discourses arrange signs (or how they represent something) and the resultant meanings and consequences. Usually this process involves identifying that which is taken for granted as objective or is presented as a naturalized truth; that which is a hegemonic discourse. According to Donna Gregory, “The first step in showing how a process, a perspective, a concept, or a fact is socially constructed is to distance it, to make it seem strange.”⁴⁷ Through the process of “making strange,” other alternatives, realities, and relationships that might have been possible are brought to light. Furthermore, identities or

⁴⁶ Ibid., 36-37.

⁴⁷ Gregory, Donna, U., Preface in Der Derian and Shapiro, *International/Intertextual Relations*, xiv.

interests that are constructed by the discourse as mutually exclusive or antagonistic can be shown as not inherently conflictive.

The task of the analyst is to look for the underlying assumptions that exist beneath the surface of the discourse itself. Revealing underlying assumptions, or the relationships of signs, also elucidates the implicit (and often asymmetrical) power relations and power structures that are produced and used by these discourses. Questions that arise from this process include: In whose interest is this arrangement of social reality? What are the ongoing struggles between discourses over these meanings (or intertextuality)? What are the resulting implications for power-relations between the entities and, what are the stakes?

Deconstruction, pioneered by Jacques Derrida, is one of the processes used to reveal the unstated and underlying assumptions, or arrangement of signs, within a text. Often these arrangements are hierarchical and take the form of binaries, specifically within the context of the 'Western' historical experience. A sign takes on meaning by what it is not or through exclusion, thus creating binaries. Moreover, one object is usual cast as preferable or hierarchical to the other, creating asymmetric relations.

Derrida explains that the deconstructive operation requires essentially two moves: to reverse the hierarchy and to undo the pairing. The reversal is one part of the deconstructive move. The other part is to displace the entire logocentric system for that particular text or context.⁴⁸

However, not all discourses contain hierarchical binaries. As previously mentioned, the constructed social reality can be filled with over-lapping and/or non-antagonistic representations and meanings.

⁴⁸ Gregory, Donna, Preface in Der Derian and Shapiro, *International/ Intertextual Relations*, xvi.

The struggle over meaning within discourse may often involve the process of trying to transcend previously antagonistic representations by rearranging signs and rearticulating the discourse. As mentioned by Bhabha, in the moment of disclosing or representing one's identity,

we are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the discursive strategy of the moment of interrogation, a moment in which the demand for identification becomes, primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics.⁴⁹

In other words, there is no stable and ontologically prior identity that is the all-encompassing source from which the discourse springs. Identity shifts and evolves in each articulation, and is given meaning through the other signs in the discourse and in response to the other's discourse.

Furthermore, as Bhabha discusses at length, it is in the "third space of articulation" and intersubjectivity that negotiation and reinscription occurs, and where culture (and identity), defined at a problematic of difference, emerges in hybrid forms.

The concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation. And it is the very authority of culture as a knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of *enunciation*.⁵⁰

Such a perspective also calls into question any theories and conceptions that rest on a notion of purity in identity or culture and problematizes studying identity and culture as a coherent analytical category in and of itself. Therefore, if the analyst searches only for hierarchical binaries within discourse, s/he is likely to miss an entire range of articulations, meanings, and underlying assumptions which structure social reality. S/he

⁴⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

will potentially miss the ongoing struggle over meaning within discourses, or what Bhabha refers to as reinscription. Tracing the arrangements of signs, underlying assumptions, locating what is presented as objective knowledge, in addition to locating that which is struggled over between discourses, are the tasks of the analyst; some of these items may or may not correspond to hierarchical binaries.

Finally, discourse analysis, like all areas in social science, struggles with the agent-structure problem. This problem becomes apparent in the nature of discourse itself. Analysis of a text does not require trying to unearth (if it were even possible) the author's true intent or meaning in the text but only focusing on the discourse and its relation to other texts, possibly negating the relevance of the author all together or what is known as "the death of the author." Though we might figuratively hold an individual responsible for the results of his or her text (and action), an author's speech is always subject to interpretation by others and it is these others, not simply the author, who produce its results in their continuing discourse. Derrida makes the same observation:

The absence of the sender, of the receiver [*destinateur*], from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions [*vouloir-dire*] indeed even after his death, his absence, which moreover belongs to the structure of all writing.⁵¹

However, not everyone agrees that focusing on the text implies a lack of human agency to both produce and affect the meaning of discourse (and thus social reality). It does, however, weaken the assumed direct connection between the author of a discourse (or action) and the results in produces (and continued to produce). Hannah Arendt⁵² also agrees that in spite of the fact that the author of a speech or action is generally encased

⁵¹ Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, 5.

⁵² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

with the end results it produces, as though these results were always intended by the author, in actuality the author has no real control over the outcome of his or her speech/action once it enters the intersubjective space that exists between humans. “In other words, the stories, the results of action or speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and suffer, but nobody is its author.”⁵³ Yet, in this view, the initial spark to speak or to act, regardless of controlling results, did ultimately originate from a person. The act of creating a text is still left to the author.

Even Edward Said, though often portrayed to the contrary, was not purely Foucaultian in his analysis and critique of Orientalism. He was also influenced by Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in addition to other thinkers.

In the years that followed the publication of *Orientalism*, Said tended to distance himself from poststructuralism’s rather stark and bleak view of the human condition and hope for a better world, instead embracing a more humanistic position that sustained human agency, active political engagement and the possibility of noncoercive, nondominating kinds of knowledge.⁵⁴

It is in this humanistic spirit that this thesis has been undertaken: that resistance to and relevant articulation outside the dominant discourse exist, and that structures of domination have the potential to be altered, and that though identities may be constructed through difference, they do not have to be antagonistic.

C. Methodology

The methodology utilized in this research does not follow a content analysis approach but is based in the previously discussed literature which focuses on

⁵³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

⁵⁴ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 206.

relationships between signs, struggles over meanings, underlying assumptions, and the consequences of these arrangements; it is a hermeneutical approach. Content analysis that relies on counting words or ideas and placing them predetermined categories was also not chosen because it would have more directly placed the researcher's preconceived biases on the texts rather than investigating the texts beforehand to understand the representations within them. Furthermore, categories tend to force the representations in the text into binaries when this may not necessarily be the case in the text. Therefore, analysis of the texts occurred in the form of a close read and extracting relevant representations from the text (many of which occurred repetitiously) and questioning how they functioned and how they were related to other representations.

More specifically, representations of 'America,' 'United States,' 'Obama,' etc. (all falling under the broader category of Egyptian representations of the United States) were the primary focus of the analysis. Once these representations related to the 'United States' were identified, they were analyzed for how they functioned within the text. For example, are they used as a contrast to Egyptian identity (stated or unstated)? Is identity of the 'self' in the text 'Egyptian' or something else, such as Muslim, Arab, woman, etc? Rather than assuming that these representations are always placed in a hierarchical binary or wholly solidified as mutually exclusive, the arrangement of signs and representations and underlying assumptions were freshly assessed in their relationships and "made strange" if possible. Patterns and representations that occur more frequently than others throughout the texts were also noted.⁵⁵

Through tracing the negotiation of meaning and representations found in these texts, and identifying the naturalized and unquestioned constructions of social reality

⁵⁵ All translations from Arabic sources were conducted by the researcher.

(identities, relations, interests, etc.), in addition to the unstable signs that are subject to political struggle, the research has attempted to identify underlying assumptions. Moreover, the consequences for such representations are also assessed. Some of the preliminary assumptions and questions asked included: In whose interest is this discourse? Do Egyptian discourses relate to the hegemonic discourses emanating from the United States? Do they repeat the same underlying assumptions as the US discourse? Are they entirely oppositional in nature or do they transcend binaries based on exclusion? How might they structure power-relations between the two entities or what actors perceive as an available course of action?

D. Arabs Encounter the West

Analyzing Egyptian discourse about the ‘United States’ also requires a historical background of the Arab and/or Egyptian encounter with the Western ‘other’ because it is likely that the analyzed material will touch upon these themes and strands of thought. The following section discusses works addressing the history of that encounter, the long history of Arab intellectual search for the ‘self’ and cultural critique, and the more recent history of perceptions of US foreign policy and the renegotiation or reinscription of ‘Western’ political concepts like ‘democracy.’

One of the first encounters between Arabs and the “modern” West usually cited by Arab and Western scholars alike is that of the Egyptian and Al-Azhar sheik Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi who traveled to Paris during the time of Mohammed Ali and subsequently published his Paris diaries known as *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Takhlis Bariz*. His account of Paris is a non-defensive description that often expresses curiosity and an

admiration for a number of things he observes, including nationalism and the spread of education. He does not seem to find European qualities threatening to his Islamic-Egyptian identity or somehow contradictory to it. He also does not buy into them wholesale and feel that the full package need somehow be incorporated in his own land. His European encounter occurred before Europe began its colonial projects in the region and revealed itself not as a friend but a technologically superior, invading threat.⁵⁶

Other studies that cover the first Arab encounters with the modern West describe the shock that was experienced by Arabs (and Ottomans/Turks) when realizing that they were “behind” the suddenly threatening and superior Europe. The highly criticized Bernard Lewis in his *What Went Wrong* traces this encounter back to the Ottoman Empire experience and the sudden desire to assimilate as much as possible from European modernity while simultaneously protecting Ottoman and Muslim identity. Lewis asserts that this reaction is due to the “Muslim civilization” viewing itself as superior and the inability of the “Muslim mind” to truly accept that an “infidel” was capable of being so advanced. This mindset resulted in adopting a flawed manipulation of modernity and an incorporation of only parts of it so that failure became the end result. Though Lewis’s main thesis is reliant on essentialist civilizational categories, his description of the resulting reaction, defensiveness, and angst produced by the Arab encounter of a modern and threatening Europe points to some important elements of that experience. Since the modern European encounter, many Arab writers and intellectuals have consistently tried to address a nagging sentiment of feeling “behind.” This experience was of course exacerbated when the threatening and technologically superior Europe *did* invade and occupy the Arab homeland.

⁵⁶ Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 22-25.

Rashid El-Enany's *Arab Representations of the Occident* is a study on the portrayal of the East-to-West encounter in Arabic literature and is conducted in the same spirit of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. His study is, in effect, a reverse Edward Said. According to El-Enany's findings, Arab intellectuals over the course of two centuries displayed a strong desire for emulation of an idealized 'other.' "To them the European other was simultaneously an object of love and hate, a shelter and a threat, a usurper and a giver, and enemy to be feared and a friend whose help is to be sought."⁵⁷ Additionally, the 'East' and the 'West' were, similar to colonial discourse, frequently depicted as having their own unique and stable essences. The 'West' was constructed as technological and material, but lacking in spirituality. The 'East' was its opposite and had a higher morality and spirituality. Therefore, it became a source of debate amongst Arab thinkers as to what should be incorporated from the 'West' and what should be discarded. Intellectuals like Ibrahim Abu Lughod attributed the condition of "falling behind" as a failure to incorporate the 'West' as whole, including value and culture systems.⁵⁸

As described by Makdisi⁵⁹ and Oren⁶⁰, the history of Arabs encountering America initially took place in the Arab homeland when missionaries from the United States first went abroad in the hopes of mass converting the "Holy Land." The missionaries eventually moved from purely evangelical tactics into education and, whether it was their intention or not, became disseminators of the image of America and its liberal and secular ideals. Their portrayal of America to the Arabs was highly romanticized and this benevolent representation was generally embraced by the Arabs

⁵⁷ El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident*, 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁹ Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 55-203.

⁶⁰ Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy*, 80-97.

whom they educated because the United States was not seen as a colonizing power at that time. Arabs later began to emigrate to the United States and “sharpened” their vision of the country as stories began to flow back home. Nevertheless, “American prosperity, not American imperialism, emerged as the first great, enduring Arab stereotype of fin-de-siècle America; money was what drew Syrians to America in the first place, and money is what they sent back to their families.”⁶¹ After the First World War, Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Point’s was ardently embraced and celebrated in the Arab world in spite of the fact that he is not likely to have meant it as a support for the self-determination of *all* peoples. It was not until America “betrayed” the principle of Arab self-determination during its endorsement of the establishment of the state of Israel, or the *nakba*, that the Arab encounter with the United States took a sharply different turn.

Another recent study by Alia Abu-Reesh focused on representations of the United States found in six contemporary Arabic novels. The images of America found across these novels range from positive to negative, the majority of which being predominantly negative. America and Americans are shown as materialistic and worshippers of money who turn away from spiritual values.

The consumer society is interested only in consumption, ever more consumption. Everything becomes a commodity which eventually loses its value and is thrown onto the garbage heap, even people; they, too are treated as a commodity whose value is determined by market forces, and poses no intrinsic value of their own.⁶²

In contrast to this representation, the ‘self’ or the ‘Arabs’ are spiritual and appalled with such culture. Other representations of the US include America as racist towards blacks and therefore hypocritical with respect to its foundational values. Americans are also

⁶¹ Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 99.

⁶² Abu-Reesh, A. A. “The Image of America as Reflected in Contemporary Arabic Novels.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 3 (January 1, 2011), 502.

portrayed as naïve and uninterested in the rest of the world. Abu-Reesh goes on to suggest that many of the Arab characters in these books, in contrast to Americans, are over-represented with positive values and go on to achieve greater success than their American counterparts. She suggests that this representation is indicative of an underlying defensive motive to prove that ‘Arabs’ are indeed worthy and equal to Americans.

As previously mentioned, questions about and the struggle over Arab identity, cultural critique, cultural malaise, have been a preoccupation within Arab thought for two centuries. Since the colonial era and particularly afterward, the struggle for a sense of ‘self’ has been acute. This search for the Arab ‘self’ takes place in the dominating shadow of the ‘West,’ whether it is that to be emulated, blamed, ignored, defeated, or a mixture of all of these. A few of the difficult questions often raised in light of a colonial past include

How is one to regain dignity and pride without falling into self-glorification? How is one to recover from self-hatred and overcome despair? What does it mean to have a culture of one’s own and a thought of one’s own? What is the link between having an identity of one’s own and having a philosophy of one’s own? How does one establish such an identity or philosophy? What are the pitfalls and temptations of cultural authenticity and cultural essentialism? How does one reappropriate one’s own history after it has been told and made by others?⁶³

The 1967 war with Israel was a critical turning point for Arab thought and a catalyst for an increase in two major trends: a radicalization of critique and totalizing doctrines within Islamism.⁶⁴ Salafist trends focus on tradition and look to explain the current state of inferiority or falling behind as caused by a neglect of the tenets and values associated with an idealized, and timeless Islamic golden age. Their perspective also

⁶³ Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

utilizes the same colonial binary and concept of hardened civilizational categories ('West' and 'Islam') as the famous "Clash of the Civilizations" hypothesis. The binary attributes are simply reversed. Islam, of course, is given positive connotations and the 'West' the negative.

Those on the side of radical critique, such as Sadiq al-Azm, feel that the Arabs did not engage in self-criticism and reflection after the 1967 defeat, solely blamed external factors, and attempted to mentally evade responsibility for the outcome. He suggests that the Arabs wanted to think that they had no control over the disaster whatsoever, similar to natural phenomenon or the will of God. According to al-Azm, this tendency is detrimental because self-critique is a core component of modernity and vital for achieving liberation and agency. He believes that Arabs need to embrace the material and historical circumstances of their situation and change from mythical-metaphysical thinking to rational-material thinking. Therefore, he and those with similar perspectives (such as Abdullah Laroui in his *Mafhum al 'Aql*⁶⁵) also operate from a binary that divides 'tradition' from 'modernity,' 'spirit' from 'materialism,' 'science' from 'religion,' etc.⁶⁶

Each of these sides has continued to engage with each other, resulting in large bodies of both secular and Islamic critique. Other scholars and writers such as Abdelkebir Khatibi engaged with the problem from an anti-essentialist perspective. These intellectuals "reject ideological discourses of identity and situate both heritage and even modernity within a position of *différance*, where both tradition and philosophy become objects of critique and subversion."⁶⁷ They call for the utilization of dialectic that moves

⁶⁵ Sabry, *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World*, 31.

⁶⁶ Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 78.

⁶⁷ Sabry, Tarik. *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World*, 33.

away from hardened oppositionality. However, these intellectuals form a minority perspective and have a small footprint in the history of Arab thought.

Michaëlle Browers's *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought* challenges Arab exceptionalism or the claim that Arabs are overly resistant and generally ill suited to the liberal concepts of 'democracy' and 'civil society.' She analyzes 'concepts' not as hardened constants but as contextual and subject for political struggle. She looks underneath the generally authoritarian circumstances of the region to investigate how the concepts such as 'civil society' and 'democracy,' are translated into discourse, particularly in regards to intellectuals. She approaches the translation of concepts in a similar fashion to the translation of texts. In translations, which are interpretations, a concept goes through a "border crossing" and may somehow become blurred, misunderstood, or otherwise transformed. Rather than always considering what something loses in translation, it is worthwhile to investigate what something might gain from its new, 'hybrid,' status.

Browers contests the conclusion, usually made in arguments targeting causes of Arab exceptionalism, that the concepts of 'civil society' and 'democracy' are somehow incompatible with Arab and Islamic thought. She demonstrates that although there still exists a democracy deficit in the region, there is also a shared and ongoing political discourse about these concepts. Furthermore, the frequently discussed polarization between the Islamists and the liberals overlooks the fact that underlying these two parties are a shared consensus on some aspects of 'democracy,' 'civil society,' and 'citizenship.'

In many cases these concepts have taken on the previously discussed ‘hybrid’ definitions such as an ‘Islamic’ concept of civil society.⁶⁸

Her following work, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*⁶⁹, Browsers examines the concept that Arab nationalists and Islamists are becoming closer in their values (such as Islamic liberals). She finds that instead of values merging, both groups have started to operate significantly from the same rhetorical framework: that of Western liberalism. Core concepts in both groups stem from liberal ideas like democracy and human rights. According to Browsers, the recently observed “alliances” between nationalists and Islamists in rhetoric may be based more in pragmatics due to current political circumstances. Furthermore, liberal rhetoric does not automatically lead to liberal thought and practice.

Finally and most similar to the work in this thesis, Sami Baroudi’s article “Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration’s Campaign for Democracy: The Case of the GMEI” is a study of the reactions of Arab intellectuals in op-eds to President Bush’s Greater Middle East Initiative in 2004. Baroudi finds that the majority of the reactions are negative and hostile towards the United States. He categorizes the representations of the United States into four major themes: 1) The US does not have the moral high ground to lecture the world about democracy due to the failures of its own domestic system and actions in world politics; 2) US policy is guided only by its own interests and not by ideals; 3) US discourse on democracy is a conscious and malevolent plan for furthering its own hegemony; 4) US policy makers have no understanding of the Arab or Islamic worlds. Baroudi notes that these images are the result of the American policies in the

⁶⁸ Browsers, Michaelle, *Democracy And Civil Society in Arab Political Thought*, 1-24.

⁶⁹ Browsers, Michaelle, *Political Ideology in the Arab World*, 1-16.

region for decades and the experiences of the Arab intellectuals during their formative years, particularly the humiliation during the 1967 war. He also suggests that these intellectuals have little understanding of American domestic politics and that opportunities should be created for Arabs to better learn about the United States in order to have a more “realistic” conceptualization of it.⁷⁰

The background to Arab encounter of the ‘West,’ informed some of the working assumptions and analyses in this research. It is understood that the discourses in the analyzed material are likely to be partial or entire continuations of the themes previously discussed. Likewise, some of the observations made about the consequences of such representations are also potentially relevant. For example, some of the underlying framework for ‘western liberalism,’ like ‘democracy’ as an inherently positive and universal truth (which is also part of US discourse), has frequently been incorporated in both Islamist, leftist, and liberal discourse. Additionally, representations of America as racist, hypocritical, or genuinely evil have a history extending well beyond the scope of this research. However, understanding this background also makes it easier to identify themes and representations that are potentially new and have different implications for enabling or constraining action.

⁷⁰ Baroudi, S. E. “Arab Intellectuals and the Bush Administration’s Campaign for Democracy: The Case of the Greater Middle East Initiative.” *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 390-418.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF EGYPTIAN DISCOURSE DURING OBAMA'S SPEECH IN CAIRO

On June 4th 2009 at Cairo University, the newly elected President Barack Obama gave a much-anticipated speech directed towards reconciling America's relations with the Islamic and/or Arab worlds, which had deteriorated over the course of the previous eight years throughout America's "War on Terrorism" in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other areas. The speech was an anticipated event; therefore, the date range for the articles analyzed during the speech includes the week prior and the week after the speech (28 May-11 June). Out of all the events analyzed in this thesis, Obama's speech in Cairo is the event that generated the most discourse about the United States and how it is paired with representations of the 'self,' be they 'Egypt,' 'Arab,' or otherwise. It is also unique from the following chapters because it also includes articles that directly contest Obama's discourse (the actual words in his speech) and multiple strands of American discourse, both liberal and realist. A total of 105 articles were analyzed from the three newspapers: 12 from *al-Ahram Weekly*, 61 from *al-Masry al-Youm*, and 32 from *al-Dostor*. Unlike the other chapters in this thesis, almost all op-eds from the chosen time frame addressed the specific event, America, etc., which signifies the speech's perceived importance within Egypt. The articles addressing Obama's speech and visit comprise two-thirds of the articles analyzed in this thesis, making this chapter significantly longer than the following two chapters.

This chapter and the two that follow are structured in similar fashions. The first section covers the major themes and representations of 'America' and how these representations are located and interact with those of 'Egypt.' This section also includes

an analysis of discursive struggles over various representations and meanings, whether these struggles occur with Obama's and/or America's text or with other Egyptian discourses. The concluding section builds on the discussed themes and assesses the deeper archaeological assumptions behind these representations and the struggles over meaning.

A. Major Themes and Representations

The majority of these op-eds represented President Obama's visit to Cairo as a significant event. The significance of the event was generated not only because of Obama himself or the potential for what he would (or would not) say, but also because Egypt was the chosen location for the speech, thus accentuating the perceived importance of Egypt from the American perspective. The circumstances surrounding the speech itself were represented as "unprecedented." As Abdel Moneim Said wrote,

It has generally been the custom for world leaders—US presidents above all—to address the world from the podium of the United Nations on the occasion of the annual commencement of the General Assembly in September. That an American president has decided to address a specific region of the world, the Islamic world, from an Arab capital, Cairo, is new in form and substance.⁷¹

The amount of discussion about Obama's visit was not lost on the authors themselves and many were sarcastic about the amount of interest and the obsession with Obama himself. More than one article was titled "Obama Mania"⁷² and others carried titles such as "Sheikh Obama"⁷³, or "The American Messiah"⁷⁴ or "The Mawlid of our Liege,

⁷¹ Said, Abdel Moneim, "Messages to and from Obama," *al-Ahram Weekly*, 4-11 June 2009.

⁷² el-Erian, Essam, "Obama-mania," *al-Dostor*, 8 June 2009. See also al-Hadidi, Lamis, "Obama-mania," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 9 June 2009.

⁷³ Nouh, Mokhtar, "Shaykh Obama," *al-Dostor*, 3 June 2009.

⁷⁴ Abdel Fatah, Wael, "al-Masih al-amriki," *al-Dostor*, 5 June 2009.

Obama⁷⁵.” Other authors, such as Suliman Guda⁷⁶, remark that the visit is regarded as important to Egyptians but is generally irrelevant to the majority of Americans. Though the majority of the selected articles portray a generally negative representation of ‘America’ and its past in the Arab and/or Islamic world, most of the discourses also display a hope and a belief, even if small and pessimistic, that Obama’s visit and speech have the potential to be the beginning of the underlying principle in Obama’s campaign agenda: change. There are, however, exceptions to this theme, which represent Obama and his visit as heralding more of the same American policies and biases in the region. Over all, even if the representations are negative or there are cases that suggest the speech means nothing, the amount of discourse itself is an indicator of the significance of Obama’s speech and visit to many Egyptians. The remainder of this section focuses on specific themes identified within the articles:

The Plurality of the United States

In almost all articles, both Arabic and English, the ‘United States’ or ‘America’ is represented as a distinct side that is contrasted with an ‘Arab’ and/or ‘Islamic’ world. In this representation of dual worlds or entities, the ‘United States’ is never limited by a specific racial or religious identity, only by its status as a nation-state (where it is often juxtaposed in binary with an entire ‘world’ such as the ‘Islamic world’). ‘America,’ even restricted as a nation-state, is represented as a multifaceted and dynamic society that is neither inherently Christian nor composed of a specific race. For example, in occasions that the discourse mentions the American Christian right, it is represented as one of many

⁷⁵ Mansour, Ibrahim, “Mawlid sayadna Obama,” *al-Dostor*, 4 June 2009.

⁷⁶ Guda, Suliman, “Obama allathi yuhyi al-mawta,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 6 June 2009.

currents in this dynamic and changing ‘United States,’ just as Obama himself is the very personification of ‘change.’ Furthermore, President Obama’s ethnic background is a matter of high interest and there exist very few texts that do not mention him as the “black president” on at least one occasion.

Obama is the “black president” who is represented as having origins in the “third world.”⁷⁷ His presidency is represented as a victory over the obstacle of racism that is portrayed as inherent to ‘America.’ Essam el-Erian’s article captures this sentiment: “Definitely, he is a different president and was able through his personal efforts to overcome the obstacles to arrive in the White House, and produce a new history of America the racist that does not have mercy on the weak and loves power in all things.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, because Obama has both “third world” and “Muslim” roots, he is “closer” to the Arabs than his predecessors, implying a linear or even hierarchical ordering of race and/or ethnicity. Osama Atwan mentions that Egyptians feel as though they could invite Obama for a plate of *koshary* or a cup of tea.⁷⁹ In other words, Obama has the ability to have closer “access” to the Arab and Muslim world on account of his origins, whereas the counter-situation is not implied. The Arabs and/or Muslims do not somehow have greater access to America. Furthermore, Obama’s ethnicity does not appear in any text as a reason that Arab-American relations might see better days.

Obama is represented as a symbol of the victory of the American ‘melting-pot,’ seen as part of America’s dynamic and flexible identity, which is also paired with its power. Wael Abdel Fatah writes that although the United States is a failing empire,

⁷⁷ al-Hadidi, Lamis, “Obama-mania,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 9 June 2009.

⁷⁸ el-Erian, Essam, “Obama-mania,” *al-Dostor*, 8 June 2009.

⁷⁹ Atwan, Osama, “Mama Amrika wa khalti Fransa,” *al-Dostor*, 9 June 2009.

America is characterized by its ability to absorb blows and get new ideas from its shores, announcing the end of racism by electing the first black president, who is not only a symbol of victory for those of African origin but also of a hybrid and mixed culture. Indeed he is a mixture of black and white, Muslim and Christian, African immigrants and Europeans.⁸⁰

This representation of ‘America’ as a diverse melting pot is almost an exact replica of American discourse about itself and why it is perceived as “exceptional.”⁸¹ ‘America’ becomes an identity that encompasses everything, including all races and religions. Though the world may be divided into ethnicities, races, and cultures, ‘America’ has the ability to supersede and reflect all of them, making it somehow “superior” and the others limited and weaker. It then has the authority to speak to and ‘know’ all cultures, races, and ethnicities as it includes them all.

Unlike the ‘United States’ in these discourses, the ‘Arab’ and/or ‘Islamic’ worlds are restricted by definition to an ethnicity, religion, or ancient civilization, though this includes multiple nation-states. As previously mentioned, the ‘United States’ is rarely signified as inherently Christian or representative of a specific ethnicity, although racism towards African Americans is mentioned. In this arrangement of meanings, the US is flexible and dynamic and the Arab/Muslim world, even though it is comprised of multiple modern states, is homogenous and static. Wael Abdel Fatah writes,

Because the Arab people are stiff like their rulers, a quick answer to Obama’s shifts will not come...the rulers became animated blood or frozen in the picture of the dilapidated Ottoman rulers that sit in their palace, a symbol of an aged power.⁸²

⁸⁰ Abdel Fatah, Wael, “Imbraturiyat Obama,” *al-Dostor*, 4 June 2009.

⁸¹ See the 2010 National Security Strategy, “As a Nation made up of people from every race, region, faith, and culture, America will persist in promoting peace among different peoples and believes that democracy and individual empowerment need not come at the expense of cherished identities. Indeed, no nation should be better positioned to lead in an era of globalization than America--- the nation that helped bring globalization about, whose institutions are designed to prepare individuals to succeed in a competitive world, and whose people trace their roots to every country on the face of the Earth.” Obama, Barack, in The White House, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington DC: Government Printing House, May 2010).

⁸² Abdel Fatah, Wael, “Al-Khuruj min al-masyada,” *al-Dostor*, 7 June 2009.

This representation is in many ways reminiscent of orientalist discourse about the stagnant and unchanging Middle East. Unlike the young and flexible America that can rejuvenate itself, the Arab world is literally frozen and ancient. It has no wellspring from which change and rejuvenation can emerge.

The nation-state vs. civilization (religious or ethnic) arrangement is also likely influenced by the fact that Obama's speech was explicitly directed to the Islamic world, and his original text (in this particular dialogue) produced an 'Islamic audience' in its calling⁸³. As a result, many of these articles are responses as the Muslim (and often Arab) audience that was initially established during the announcement of the speech and, for this event, initiated the representation of a plural 'United States' contrasted to a 'Muslim' or 'Arab' world that is subsequently represented as restricted. These articles, both before and after the speech, are responses and not necessarily initiators of this segment of discourse. Through Obama's speech they were pre-defined as an 'Arab' or 'Muslim' audience. Furthermore, the discourses in the articles discuss grievances as 'Muslims,' and less frequently as 'Arabs.' These grievances extend to fellow Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other locations. The foundation that bonds these peoples and their grievances are the fact that they have a 'Muslim' identity. Other representations of multiple religions and identities, or of the general plurality of the region, are not found in the majority of the texts.

⁸³ The Official White House website for the speech states that it is directed to Muslim communities around the world. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/NewBeginning>

There are, however, variations to this trend of representation. For example, Osama Ghazali Harb⁸⁴ writes a letter to Obama specifically answering as an Egyptian, a member of the political opposition, and not as an Arab and/or Muslim. Moreover, this text is a speech to Obama (not vice versa). Ghazali Harb states that ‘Egypt’ is the first recipient of Obama’s speech and not the ‘Arab’ and/or ‘Muslim’ worlds. In his address, he explicitly sets up a binary between the ‘United States’ and ‘Egypt’ and goes as far as saying that they are complete opposites. ‘Egypt’ is one of the oldest political entities while the ‘United States’ is one of the most modern. The ‘United States’ is decentralized, and “exploding in local and individual power,” while ‘Egypt’ is highly centralized and full of obstacles to creativity and uniqueness. Ghazali Harb goes further, stating that ‘Egypt’ has been a highly centralized political system since the time of the pharaohs. Yet, speaking as a member of the opposition, he also does not insinuate that there is no resistance or plurality within ‘Egypt.’ Furthermore, though ‘Egypt’ and the ‘United States’ are complete opposites, they are in need of each other. The United States is inspired by Egypt’s historical wisdom and Egypt is inspired by America’s creativity and “holiness of freedom.”⁸⁵ Though generally negative in its representation of Egypt, this binary of stark opposites is not inherently oppositional or conflictive in nature. Furthermore, this text is one of the few occasions that the authoritarian conditions of Egypt are specifically addressed and placed at forefront of concern (as opposed to focusing only on Palestine and/or America’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). Moreover, Ghazali Harb writes as a member of political opposition, transcending what is often represented as the usual established channels of how inter-state ‘relations’ are carried out.

⁸⁴ Ghazali Harb, Osama, “Khitab ila al-ra’is Obama,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 30 May 2009

⁸⁵ Ibid.

However, it remains a representation of solid and defined oppositional categories, leaving little space for transcendence.

Democratic, Hypocritical America

America, even in the most critical of these texts, is still represented as a democratic and free state (internally) whose elections are meaningful, thus ascribing meaning to Obama's incumbency. Although it may practice a double standard abroad, American citizens do not have their freedom violated and live in desirable circumstances. With occasional rare exceptions, this same democratic America is often described as hypocritical abroad when it comes to its own norms and values; or what America is supposed to "stand for." However, there is almost unilateral agreement of what America's values are "supposed" to be (usually lining up with American discourse about itself) and that these values are inherently positive and even universal: democracy, human rights, freedom, etc. None of these terms are contested in these texts, and are given a positive and desirable connotation. They are often used to show how the United States is violating its true identity and values by engaging in wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, maintaining Guantanamo, and the incidents of torture at Abu Gharib. Therefore, in these representations, the US is regarded as contradicting its own dominant discourse. As Ezzedine Fishere writes, "We blame America not for its values but for violating them when it comes to dealing with us. A fresh start is therefore possible, if your administration upholds the values you committed yourself to."⁸⁶ Therefore, this representation of America, in agreement with what constitutes as American values, is

⁸⁶ Fishere, Ezzedine, "Celebration Time is Over," *Al Ahrum Weekly*, 4-11 June 2009.

used as a tool to critique America's foreign policy, which is generally regarded as a function of rational pursuit of objective strategic interests.

America, Pursuer of Interests

American hypocrisy abroad is generally represented as resulting from America's pursuit of "rational" strategic interests. In these representations, it is assumed that the United States has objective and unquestionable strategic interests in the Middle East or Arab world, be they Israel's security, oil, or general world hegemony. In other words, the Middle East and/or Arab world is a central and undeniably important world region, particularly to America. According to the texts, though Obama's speech may be about reconciliation and suggest that America's ideals and interests do not need to be mutually exclusive, his speech is still only about pursuing these same 'interests.' However, his tools to obtain them are diplomacy and soft power as opposed to his predecessor's use of force and preventative wars.

In this representation, Obama's message has very little to do with achieving the region's interests and is only about the welfare of the United States. There is often a distinction drawn between actions and words. Though America's discourse might revolve around human rights, freedom, etc., it actually behaves otherwise. As Ayman el-Amir states, "The Muslims who Barack Obama intends to address on 4 June cannot help but see that Washington is speaking from both sides of its mouth when it comes to Arab and Muslim concerns."⁸⁷ Sahar Gamaara also writes,

[B]arack that heads the council of world management, does not have to force the world to give up the policy of double standards, and will not provide a "free" gift to the Arabs who bowed to the occupation of Iraq. Indeed, he works to cool the

⁸⁷ el-Amir, Ayman, "Muslim Expectations," *al-Ahram Weekly*, 28 May- 3 Jun 2009.

volatile region around the Zionist entity, achieving the American strategic interests first, and insurance of the “pampered” Hebrew nation with its nuclear fortifications.⁸⁸

Although America is represented as having strategic interests, these interests are never fully explained or expanded upon. They are stated as an unquestionable truth. These interests range from being based in support of the “Zionist entity” to being a result of a general ideology against Islam or Arabs. Moreover, no one contests the idea that America’s interests are fixed or objective, or defined by perception and/or subject to political struggle. They are irrefutable, suggesting that there exists no possibility or strategy attached to trying to change America’s interests.

Furthermore, representing America as only pursuing strategic interests in its foreign policy also challenges the relevance of Obama entering the presidency. In other words, there is no difference between Bush, Obama, or any other individual who enters the White House because this change does not affect America’s strategic interests. Mokhtar Noh captures this idea well when he writes, “The important thing sir, is that the age of Obama will pass, and after him will come the age of ‘Sokohama,’ and then return to the age of the grandson of the grandson of Bush and then the seventh son of Clinton, and nothing new will happen...”⁸⁹ This theme is rooted in basic realpolitik. The break between what America does domestically, including its supposed diversity, and what it does abroad is rationalized or naturalized by the construction of inherent strategic interests. America’s foreign policy, though not “nice,” is represented as rational because it is founded in pursuing unchangeable truths. Multiple texts include remarks such as,

⁸⁸ el-Gamaara, Sahar, “Sihr al-hurriya, Obama, nasir al-muslimin,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 29 May 2009.

⁸⁹ Noh, Mokhtar, “Shaykh Obama,” *al-Dostor*, 3 June 2009.

“there are no miracles in politics”⁹⁰,” or that “interests and not relations are the basis of politics now.”⁹¹ This representation accepts pursuit of these interests as justifiable in that they are rational. It is also a replica of American realpolitik discourse that justifies actions abroad through the same rationale.

The Sick, Yet Powerful Empire

The US as an occupying world empire is a prevalent representation across the texts. However, when the ‘United States’ is portrayed as a world empire, it is usually in conjunction with being a failing and sick power that is still reeling from the past eight years of President George W. Bush. In this theme, the largest blows to the American empire are its financial crisis and the loss of face that America has experienced not just in the Islamic world but also across the globe. In many texts, Obama’s election is represented as tied to this situation in that he is presumed to embody the American peoples’ new hope to change America’s internal direction and to correct its image in the world. As Hassan Nafaa writes, “America is not just going through a foreign policy crisis, but also an existential one, so to speak. It is the multifaceted ailment of America that brought Obama to power, and he knows that.”⁹² Therefore, though Obama may have the ability to woo his audience and convince Egyptians that he is present on their behalf, in actuality Obama’s speech and behavior is again about America’s interests and repairing its empire. He was elected by the American public in order to solve America’s national problems, particularly its financial crisis, and not those of any other nation. As,

⁹⁰ Abdel Fatah, Wael, “al-Khuruj min al-masyada,” *al-Dostor*, 7 June 2009.

⁹¹ al-Hadidy, Lamis, “Sharraft ya,sayid Obama” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 2 June 2009.

⁹² Nafaa, Hassan, “They Didn’t See Eye to Eye,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, 28 May-3 Jun 2009.

Mosbah Qutb mentions, Obama's real desire in delivering the speech in Cairo is to ensure that America remains the world's top economic power.⁹³

Although America is a "failing empire," it is still represented as being the world's only superpower, and Obama is referred to more than once as the emperor or ruler of the world. America may be a wounded tiger, but it is still a tiger in the end. Mahmoud 'Imara⁹⁴ mentions that many people hope for America's decline as a result the current financial crisis or China's inevitable rise. He then proceeds to argue against the tenability of this wish through listing 'data' as unquestionable indicators (such as number of top universities, average median income, and national budget in comparison to China) that America will not lose its place as the world's single superpower anytime soon. Following his representation of America's abundance and power, he contrasts this to the Arab world. He asks his readers to be honest in looking for the answer to the Arab situation and then states that it comes from addiction to rumors and conspiracy theories. Echoing the most blatant examples of classic orientalist thought, he mentions that Arabs produce thoughts from the Middle Ages and will, if they reject Obama's outstretched hand, miss the train of civilization and urbanization.⁹⁵ Therefore, 'America' even in a weakened state still retains regenerative and flexible properties that will keep it on top. In opposition to this, the Arabs are represented as stagnant and stuck in the Middle Ages, and in danger of the 'world' turning its back on them and being left behind. Furthermore, the world is constructed as a linear path to modernization where America (and the rest of the world) has left the Arabs behind.

⁹³ Qutb, Mosbah, "al-Sabi' awalan," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 10 June 2009.

⁹⁴ 'Imara, Mahmoud, "bil-'Arqam, a'rif Amrika," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 8 June 2009.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

America, Supporter or Hostage of Zionism

The most repeated representation of America in the discourse about Obama's speech is America's relationship with Israel and the Arab-Israel conflict as a whole, particularly in regards to Palestine. In this theme, the keys to change in the Arab world, and a symbol of its stagnation and humiliation, revolve around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Any reconciliation between America and the Islamic world, or even change itself, can only be achieved through placing the Palestinian crisis at the top of the agenda.

El Kersh writes,

It is precisely this that makes us, time and again, eager to point out that no change will arrive in the Muslim world except through the gateways of an Arab Jerusalem, after the Palestinian rights are retrieved and a Palestinian state is established, and through adequately addressing the long register of grievances of Iraq, Sudan and Afghanistan.⁹⁶

America is represented as a friend of Israel and/or controlled by a "Zionist entity" who then has the ability to continue afflicting atrocities on the Palestinian people who also represent the injustices afflicted on the Arab world as whole. Some of these representations range from seeing space between 'America' and 'Zionism' while others regard them as essentially one and the same thing. One author writes that,

Our strategic analysts talk with nihilistic logic about the lack of difference between Bush and Obama, and all who arrive to the White House, to consider them merely tools or décor that can only implement a hidden agenda to the benefit of world Zionism...⁹⁷

Through focusing almost exclusively on Palestine, the author's gaze is shifted away from any of America's complicity in Egypt's internal domestic problems and critique of its behavior is placed in an external location. Some representations go as far as reducing all of Obama's speech as entirely directed towards the Israeli ambassador and journalist who

⁹⁶ El Kersh, Assem, "Reaching Out," *al-Ahram Weekly*, 4-11 June 2009.

⁹⁷ Sharfeddine, Nabil, "A 'diqa'una al-Amrikan," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 1 June 2009.

were also present at Cairo University (for reassuring the depth of the US-Israeli strategic relationship).⁹⁸ The speech then has nothing to do with the ‘Arabs,’ or ‘Muslims’ but only to do with ‘Israel.’ They are represented as invisible or irrelevant even in the event where they are theoretically the key audience.

Perhaps of more interest, the Palestinian issue (in addition to Iraq and Afghanistan) is almost always represented as solvable by the United States and not by another entity (including the Arab world), whether this entails Obama cutting the relationship with Israel or being able to thwart the powers of the Israeli lobby on Congress. Focusing on Palestine as the embodiment of Arab grievances leaves many other issues unspoken, namely the US support for Egypt’s authoritarian regime and perhaps the grievances that are more likely to directly affect the livelihood of Egyptians. However, as previously stated, because Obama is giving his address to the ‘Muslim world,’ even if he is speaking from Cairo, much of the responding discourses revolve around speaking in a voice as the Muslim world and not always as Egyptians.

America, the Irrelevant

A more rare but interesting theme is the representation of ‘America’ as irrelevant and powerless in affecting any change in the Arab or Muslim world. Usually discourses that carry this representation have a mocking or sarcastic tone towards Obama’s visit to Cairo and the excitement that has been generated in Egyptian society. In “Obama is Coming!” Bothaina Kamel⁹⁹ facetiously tells the Egyptians to “jump for joy” (like children) because Obama comes bearing toys, milk, and honey and will solve all

⁹⁸ Mansour, Ibrahim, “Obama wa al-tatbi’,” *al-Dostor*, 6 June 2009.

⁹⁹ Kamel, Bothaina, “Obama gai,” *al-Dostor*, 3 June 2009.

problems. However, she goes on to conclude that though Obama may represent change, he will not be able to do anything for Egyptians unless Egyptians decide to change themselves.¹⁰⁰ Another satire piece by Ghada Sherif represents Obama's visit as not having political significance but because she asked him to marry her. She then humorously discusses how all of the plans revolving around Obama's speech were actually wedding arrangements and details. She concludes hoping that the wedding will not be destroyed by all the people who think that Obama's visit to Cairo is about politics because, ultimately, the visit is about romance. In other words, Obama's visit is politically irrelevant.¹⁰¹ Representing Obama or 'America' as unable to be an agent for change implies that the true catalysts for changing regional or Egyptian circumstances lies with the people of the area themselves. Therefore, action and the outcome of the region's future are placed in the hands of the Egyptians, and/or Arabs.

Obama, the Magician

One of the predominant themes in the texts is that the 'America,' represented and personified as Obama and/or his administration, is entirely rational, unified, and calculating. Obama's skills, particularly in speech and rhetoric, are intended to woo the Egyptian audience and are part of a calculation that is often represented as conniving, duplicitous or even as a gift of "poisoned honey" to the Egyptians. In more than one article, Obama is referred to as a magician or likened to the conductor of a symphony who is able to drug his audience with his melodies¹⁰². In fact, Amr Abdel Hamid dedicated an entire article to disproving (through discussing teleprompters) what it

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Sherif, Ghada, "Da Obama hiyakhudni bil-salama ya mama," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 2 June 2009.

¹⁰² Abdel Rahman, Amira, "Obama, al-takhdhir bil-Qur'an," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 11 June 2009.

mentioned as a prevalent myth that Obama had improvised or memorized his entire speech, much to the amazement of the majority of Egyptians.¹⁰³

Ultimately, Obama may say the same things as his predecessor and seek only to enhance US interests, but somehow his magic dupes the audience. In these same articles the audience, and Egyptian society as a whole, is represented as responding emotionally and even irrationally to Obama's skillful rhetoric and charisma. Many authors were dismayed or confused¹⁰⁴ by the extent of clapping that Obama received throughout his speech, particularly when he recited verses from the Qur'an or mentioned the accomplishments of Islamic civilization. This emotional characteristic is described as a point of weakness that is inherent to Egyptians.¹⁰⁵ In this discourse, the 'Egyptian mind' is represented as inherently emotional, and even given feminine attributes that are arranged to imply a negative connotation. Perhaps the most direct and critical author within this particular theme is Ibrahim 'Eissa, who describes his disgust with the audience response as 'humiliation,' 'shame,' and 'embarrassment.'¹⁰⁶ 'Eissa likens the general reaction to Obama's speech to the behavior of housewives¹⁰⁷ and even prostitutes¹⁰⁸ who are seduced by flattery. He goes on to mock Egypt's "mustached" or "manly" society that actually behaves in a manner similar to that of a young woman who is overcome by emotion and shouts her love to a famous celebrity on a stage.¹⁰⁹

In these representations, it is Obama who is represented as the main actor or the initiator. He is the giver of a speech, a wooer, a deceiver, a magician, and nothing less

¹⁰³ Abdel Hamid, Amr, "Obama, al-Irtijali," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 11 June 2009.

¹⁰⁴ el-Shorbagy, Manar, "Aswat Obama al-thalatha," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 10 June 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Atwan, Osama, "Mama Amrika wa khalti Fransa," *al-Dostor*, 9 June 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Eissa, Ibrahim, "Asmarna agmal min asmarhum," *al-Dostor*, 6 June 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Eissa, Ibrahim, "Limatha lam yalqi al-jamhur al-dabadib 'ala Obama," *al-Dostor*, 7 June 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

than the ruler of an “empire.” The Egyptian audience is portrayed as the reactor or the passive entity that is under Obama’s influence and skill. Obama is represented as in the position of power, even though he is also coming to make amends and heal rifts between the American and the Islamic world. His position of power is contrasted to that of an inherent Egyptian weakness, reflective in irrational emotion and susceptibility to flattery that ultimately signifies a deep hurt, insecurity, and a longing for a past greatness. Furthermore, Obama is in a position to ‘know’ Egyptians or the ‘Islamic world’ to the extent that he can use it, such as quoting the Qur’an, to exploit emotions and gain the advantage. Though the Egyptians may also “know” Obama, his background, and his country or culture, this fact still does not allow them to be in a position of power or use this information to their advantage. The Egyptians are the passive audience whose “actions are always reactions” according to Ashraf al-Husiny. “I mean, why do we want others who are not us to lead on behalf of us... Or, are we addicted to watching and observing?”¹¹⁰

Although the audience in Cairo University and Egyptian society as a whole are represented as bedazzled by Obama’s speech and rhetoric, none of the authors’ voices themselves suggest that they themselves are under the same spell. The negative portrayals of the Egyptian audience function more as self-critique and analysis rather than simply pure emotional disgust or humiliation. After describing Obama’s brilliance and the audience reaction, the authors express their dismay through stating that, in actuality, Obama said very little that differed from the statements of his predecessor. In other words, they unravel his speech and pair it with other themes such as rational pursuit of US interests or, more often than not, deeply rooted in a Pro-Israeli or Zionist agenda.

¹¹⁰ al-Husiny, Ashraf, “al-Hakim Basha, Obama,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 1 June 2009.

Therefore, the articles suggest that the authors ‘know’ and are showing the ‘truth’ behind the circumstances of the speech and that ultimately, neither they nor necessarily Egyptians as a whole are duped by false charms and empty words.

Controlling Obama’s Gaze

Running in a different direction than the theme that places Obama in the position of “performer,” this representation reverses the scenario. This theme takes on literal and deeper meanings in regards to Obama or ‘America’ as the actor who is “seeing” and may not see everything. Controlling what Obama literally “sees” or the meaning he ascribes to what he sees is described as struggled over by various entities, particularly the ruling regime. Belal Fadel asks what would happen if Obama were to suddenly deviate from the pre-planned route to Cairo University and see the poorer areas of Cairo. He sarcastically remarks that should Obama decide to do so, the regime would react by telling him that the slums around Cairo University were a giant laboratory experiment for the students or that Zahi Hawass would tell him that the poor sewage conditions were actually the first open air museum of ancient Egyptian bathrooms.¹¹¹ In this representation, as in his article the day before, Fadel suggests that the Egyptian regime has the ability to impact Obama and swindle him about the true conditions of Egypt. Fadel jokes that should Obama return to the White House and begin drafting amendments that allow him to remain president for life, then it would be confirmed that the “wise leaders” of Egypt had in fact impacted Obama during his visit.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Fadel, Belal, "Istibaha," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 3 June 2009.

¹¹² Fadel, Belal, "Istibaha," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 2 June 2009.

Ayman Nour's article, "The Egypt that Barack Obama will Not See," carries the same theme, although images of America are almost non-existent in his article. In his text, Obama is represented as passing observer who will never see the "real Egypt" and is a catalyst to reflect on Egypt's corruption, poverty, and authoritarianism. He wonders why Egypt must choose between "backwardness" and "extremism."¹¹³ Other articles, written by Ibrahim Mansour, discuss how Obama's visit impacted regular Egyptians, particularly those near the official route that Obama would take. He described how citizens were told it was a day off from work and blocked from entering and leaving their houses so that Cairo would be free of traffic and its citizens. Furthermore, he sarcastically thanks Obama for coming to Cairo because it forced the regime to remember its responsibility in cleaning the streets and clarified how much the regime treats its citizens with contempt. He asks whether American citizens would be treated the same way should the situation be opposite and Mubarak visited the United States.¹¹⁴

In this representation, it is important to control or enact a performance for Obama and/or America. In most cases, the Egyptian regime is represented as winning the rights to control this performance and marginalize its own people in the process. In fact, Ibrahim 'Eissa writes of his intention to boycott Obama's speech partially for this reason; participating in the speech makes one guilty of colluding with the regime to present the "right" picture to Obama.¹¹⁵ Controlling the content of this performance is represented as a struggle over power and intertwines with the idea that the 'West' or 'America' has the authority and power to 'see,' 'know,' and 'judge' Egyptians and their circumstances. The outcome of this gaze and the impression that 'America' has of 'Egypt' results in political

¹¹³ Nour, Ayman, "Misr allati lan yaraha Barack Obama," *al-Dostor*, 2 June 2009.

¹¹⁴ Mansour, Ibrahim, "Shukran Obama," *al-Dostor*, 5 June 2009.

¹¹⁵ Eissa, Ibrahim, "2499 Law samaht!" *al-Dostor*, 4 June 2009.

and material implications. Therefore ‘America,’ represented in a position of power, is an entity to be performed for and convinced that your performance is the ‘true Egypt’ that Obama or America will know and direct its actions towards. This representation is also related to the struggle to affect representations in the dominant discourse that emanate from America and is discussed later in the next section.

America, Seeker of Moderate Islam

This theme falls under the previous theme of “performing” for ‘America’ and controlling what Obama or America “sees” and the meaning ascribed. ‘America’ is represented as still reeling from the attacks of September 11th and ambivalent in its relationship with Islam as a whole. However, America, particularly since Obama’s presidency, is trying to repair its relations with ‘Islam’ and assert that ‘America’ is not at war with ‘Islam’ and that ‘Islam’ is not synonymous with ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism.’ In parallel with this new policy, ‘America’ is searching for “moderate Islam” in order to combat “extremism” or degenerations of ‘Islam’ that produce terrorism. Or, as Obama said in his speech, “Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism – it is an important part of promoting peace.”¹¹⁶

Since ‘America’ is attempting to make amends with the ‘Islamic world’ and build bridges, many texts mention that it is the voices of “moderate Islam” who need to heal the rift. Abdel Moneim Said writes, “Yet what Obama is probably really interested in hearing is the message from the moderate Arab countries, which frequently know how to express what the US and its allies want.”¹¹⁷ Ensuring that ‘America’ qualifies you with

¹¹⁶ Obama, Barack, Speech in Cairo, 4 June 2009.

¹¹⁷ Said, Abdel Moneim, “Messages to and from Obama,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, 4-11 June 2009.

the tag of “moderate” means that you will find yourself in its good graces. Osama Heikal suggests that Obama chose to give his speech from Egypt not just because it is the “heart of the Islamic world” but also because it is “moderate” and fights terrorists.¹¹⁸ Sheikh Ali Gomaa of Al Azhar writes a letter to Obama that is another strong example of this same type of discourse:

It is important to stress that Islam is capable of existing in all ages and building bridges with all civilisations, a fact that has been substantiated by history and confirmed by Islamic sources of authority at all levels. This obliges dialogue with voices of Islamic moderation, which should be used as a frame of reference for the advancement of mutual understanding between the Islamic and Western worlds, so as to usher in a brighter future and pave the way for equitable cooperation in which both the Islamic world and the US can attain their interests in a continually just manner in which no party transforms itself into an executive instrument for actions that ultimately conflict with their own interests.¹¹⁹

Therefore, much of the discourse is molded around trying to fit the American discourse and acknowledge a separation between moderation and extremism. In the theme, ‘Islam’ is represented as compatible with liberal values, pursuit of rational interests, and again carries an assumption that these elements are positive and even universal.

The theme of performing for ‘America’ and controlling its definition of ‘moderate Islam’ is taken deeper with Dr. Rafik Habib’s article, “Message of the Regime to America through the Brotherhood.”¹²⁰ This article describes the political stakes in the ongoing struggle to define the Muslim Brotherhood as an extremist movement, as opposed to a moderate and reform movement with which the US administration can work. According to Habib, the regime’s recent crackdowns on the Muslim Brotherhood

¹¹⁸ Heikal, Osama, “Kayfa nastafid min fursat Obama,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 30 May 2009.

¹¹⁹ Sheikh Ali Gomaa, “Welcome Mr. President,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, 4-11 June 2009.

¹²⁰ Habib, Rafik, “Risalat al-nitham li-Amrika ‘abra al-Ikhwan,” *al-Dostor*, 30 May 2009.

serves multiple purposes, one of which is to signal to the United States that it will not tolerate dealings with an “extremist” and illegal entity. According to Habib, if the United States were to recognize the Muslim brotherhood as a legitimate, moderate, and reformist entity, then it would be a massive societal force. Once again, ‘America’ plays the role of judge or arbiter, or the entity that assigns the label of “moderate” or “extreme” and subsequently empowers the winners of this performance.

Another thread in this struggle over representing “moderation” and “extremism,” is the contestation over the definition of these terms and others such as “resistance” and “terrorism.” As Ibrahim ‘Eissa points out, Obama’s speech discusses the necessity of fighting terrorism but there does not exist a complete agreement on what terrorism is. He goes on to add that when Obama states that violent resistance is not legitimate, particularly in regards to the Palestinians, he forgets his own country’s armed resistance during the American revolution.¹²¹ Or, as Manar al-Shorbagy asks, does America consider Nelson Mandela to be a terrorist?¹²² Therefore, in this struggle, the discourse emanating from the US is reassessed and arranged to be reflective of a double standard. Other texts contest the origins and catalysts for extremism, generally suggesting that they are rooted in the unresolved issue of Palestine in which America is a culprit.

Idealized America as an Unusual Tool for Critique

In some of the texts, “classic” and “idealized” representations of America are reframed and then utilized to contest meanings in Egyptian discourse. For example,

¹²¹ Eissa, Ibrahim, "Wa ‘alaykum al-salam," *al-Dostor*, 5 June 2009.

¹²² al-Shorbagy, Manar, “Aswat Obama al-thalatha,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 10 June 2009.

Husnin Krum¹²³ suggests that Obama's speech should have "given the Egyptian liberals a lesson." In this representation, 'America' is democratic and respectful of individual freedoms, including the freedom to practice one's religion. Krum cites portions from Obama's speech where he criticizes nations in Europe and other regions for restricting women from being able to wear the hijab, etc. in the name of secularism. According to Krum, Obama and 'America' embody the true meaning and respect for these types of individual freedoms. Therefore, what he represents as Egypt's "liberals" are flawed in their critique of the hijab because they violate the tenets of true liberalism and freedom, as embodied by America and Obama's words. As the title of the piece sarcastically suggests, Obama in this representation is "biased" towards those who are "banned" (or the Islamists) and "extremists," thus utilizing a dominant representation of 'America' in an unusual pairing with Muslim rights.¹²⁴

B. Underlying Assumptions

Significant portions of the previously discussed representations, and struggles over meaning, carry the same underlying and generally unstated assumptions. In all texts, the 'United States' is assumed to be rational, unified, and calculating, even when it is shown to have diversity, multiple political currents, or governmental checks and balances (thus at times demonstrating a contradiction within the same article). Whether US intentions are grounded in pursuit of strategic interests, true and sincere reconciliation, part of a Zionist plot or bias, or a general bias against Islam, they are rational and calculated. Furthermore, every word of Obama's speech is reflective of a well-defined

¹²³ Krum, Husnin, "Hal in haz Obama 'ila 'al-mahthura wa al-mutatarrifin ba'da difa'ih 'an al-hijab?" *al-Masry al-Youm*, 1 June 2009.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

agenda, be it rooted in American foreign policy or targeting constituents back home. What is unstated is that according to this assumption, ‘America’ does not make mistakes even if it can be regarded as immoral or biased in its actions. This representation also leads to the assumption that all words or actions carry a unified intent directed towards ‘Egypt’ or the Arab and Muslim world that it should, in turn, produce a corresponding desired reaction.

Another underlying assumption is that relations between the ‘United States’ and ‘Egypt’ or the Arab and Muslims emanate from a government-to-government relationship. While many of the texts represent ‘Egypt’ as having a split between the regime and its population, America is ‘democratic’ and has unified voice and intention that is propagated from the American government, specifically the US president who is generally represented as the embodiment of ‘America.’ Other relations that transcend or fall underneath state-to-state relations are not considered as part of the Arab-American relationship. America interacts with Egypt and the Arab/Muslim world exclusively through its government. As a result, any action taken by ‘Egypt’ with respect to this relationship should be channeled through the Egyptian and US governments. Such a representation also limits who has the capacity to interact with and engage ‘America’ or with ‘Egypt.’

Additionally, in all cases, the ‘Muslim’ and ‘Arab’ worlds are represented as strategically significant and relevant to the United States. As has been the case in the past, the US is unlikely to shift its attention away from the region in the future, making it an inevitable force to be dealt with whether it is benevolent, neutral, or hostile to Arab interests. Therefore, America is assumed to remain pertinent and relevant to regional or

Egyptian interests and must be considered a significant actor in the political scene. As a result, leaving 'America' out of the picture seems to be an untenable course of action in this representation. Furthermore, 'America' is always *in* the 'Arab' world but there is never a representation of 'Egypt' *in* 'America.' The space for the Egypt-American 'relations' always occurs in Egypt yet 'America' is represented as the entity carrying out action.

As 'America' is almost always considered a relevant and permanent actor, its multiple representations can be used as tools within the texts to illustrate and argue a variety of perspectives. 'America' is a tool for self-critique whether this directed towards a stagnant, authoritarian Egypt or for highlighting a bias against Muslims. It can be used as representing the root cause of regional turmoil and extremism or as having the agency to solve pertinent issues. More often than not, representations of 'America' exist to elaborate on regional issues and elements. Or 'America' exists as a tool to examine the 'self,' whether this is done in a hierarchical fashion or transcends oppositions and power equations.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF EGYPTIAN DISCOURSE AFTER THE DEATH OF OSAMA BIN LADEN

Unlike the amount of discourse generated about the ‘United States’ during the two weeks surrounding President Obama’s speech in Cairo, the death of Osama bin Laden prompted significantly less discussion in the three analyzed newspapers. Because this timeframe falls approximately three months after the Jan 25th 2011 uprising in Egypt, many of the op-eds and their topics (not part of this research agenda) revolve exclusively around Egypt and the Arab world and have no mention of the United States. American forces killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan on 2 May 2011. Therefore, the range of dates for the discourse analyzed start from 3 May and end on 16 May 2011. There were 29 articles that included substantial representations of ‘America’ during this timeframe (in stark contrast to the 105 articles from the preceding chapter). Only 14 of these 29 articles directly discuss Osama bin Laden’s death, indicating what appears to be minor interest in the incident. The other 15 articles included in this chapter explicitly discuss the ‘United States’ or ‘America’ but generally in the context of the Egyptian revolution and the Arab Spring as a whole. As these representations still fully fit the purposes of the research agenda, they were included in the analysis. Fifteen, or about half, of the analyzed articles came from *al-Dostor*, ten from *al-Masry al-Youm*, and four from *al-Ahram Weekly*.

A. Major Themes and Representations

The themes within this analysis carry some similarity with previously discussed topics, such as America’s pursuit of interests and support of Israel and Zionism. However, there are also many new types of representations, which never appeared in the

over 100 articles from the previous chapter. It is recognized that the dynamic of media censorship, which was still fully in place during Obama's speech, is likely to have changed and affected the range of possible published discourse, as are the events from 25 January 2011. It is clear from all the analyzed articles that the time of "reconciliation" and "change" with America, often presented as a possibility during the timeframe of Obama's speech in Cairo, is long past. In these representations, 'America' is not only represented negatively, but more often than not as enemy number one for the Egyptians, Arabs, and their interests.

America, the Vengeful

Somewhat similar and related to the representations of America as hypocritical with regards to its own and international norms and values, is the theme that killing Osama bin Laden was a pursuit of revenge rather than justice. Therefore, 'America' is ultimately hypocritical and does not follow its own purported standards. According to this discourse, Osama Bin Laden is an accused person and not necessarily just a 'terrorist,' contesting the American discourse of the 'war on terror,' and 'terrorism' in general as being qualified as an illegitimate type of warfare that also places the labeled 'terrorist' outside of traditional rights. In these discourses, bin Laden deserved a trial as any accused person deserves, and his death was an indication of America's desire for revenge. However, with these representations also comes the idea that America is weaker and more vulnerable for having violated these values. 'America,' through its own actions (and as a reaction to bin Laden), has unraveled its own narrative about itself.

Ghada Karmi writes in *al-Ahram Weekly* that bin Laden's death was ultimately a summary execution where the US played judge, jury, executioner, and funeral director.

She discusses the Americans celebrating in the wake of bin Laden's death,

For them, a man who had masterminded the attacks of 11 September 2001 -- that came to be known simply as 9/11 -- and caused such pain and suffering had received his just desserts. None of the revelers paused to ask whether this was a legal action commensurate with the much-vaunted US promotion of democracy and the rule of law. It was not...[K]illing Bin Laden might have been sweet revenge and given a boost to Obama's re-election chances, but when the glow is over its after-effects in terrorist retaliation will likely strike many countries, including the US itself. Yet none of this deflected America from its obsession with Bin Laden and its thirst for retribution.¹²⁵

In other words, America violates norms of justice, generally featured in its own discourse about itself, to assuage the wounds and sate its anger from the events of September 11th.

In this representation, 'America' and 'Americans' are more emotional than rational.

However, 'America' is still fully capable of pursuing its desires, even if they are rooted in an emotional and flawed concept like revenge. Pursuing revenge may be a catalyst for more terrorist attacks, ultimately resulting in a weaker and more vulnerable 'America.' In Kharmi's representation, the US is harming itself. However, in other representations bin Laden is more closely attributed to causing the undoing.

Mohamed Amin¹²⁶ says that it is not only Arabs who question the manner of Osama bin Laden's death but also the 'Christian West.' He states that Western critics also consider the killing to be a "revenge operation," and describes a moment of soul searching occurring in what he represents as a separate civilization (the West). He uses perspectives he states as coming from religious figures like Domenico Mogavero, the Diocese of Mazara del Vallo who believes that "there is no justice in revenge." In this

¹²⁵ Karmi, Ghada, "Bin Laden and the Palestinians," *al-Ahram Weekly*, 12-18 May 2011.

¹²⁶ Amin, Mohamed, "Maqam sayidi bin-Laden," *al-Masry al-Youm*, 8 May 2011.

representation, he implies legitimacy or authority on the part of a religious figure, casting a religious identity to the entity he refers to as the 'West.' If the 'Christian West' also finds the killing controversial, the manner and validity of the death has even more doubt cast upon it. Amin goes on to add that the Arab Spring has managed to change the perception of 'Arabs' in the 'West' and that now they are no longer shackled with being associated with Osama bin Laden and terrorism. He suggests that the problems between the 'Arabs' and 'West' should be overcome with 'civilizational conversation' and the realization of justice, not revenge¹²⁷. In his text, 'America' has stepped outside the bounds and the approval of both 'civilizations.' It has breached the moral authority of both and is not the powerful and unchallengeable 'America' often portrayed in other texts.

Hassan Nafaa represents the manner of Osama bin Laden's killing in a similar perspective. In his piece, "American and bin Laden, Who Killed Who?"¹²⁸ the manner of bin Laden's death is a "stain on the forehead of America," and a victory for bin Laden. As a result of his actions and the manner of his death, history will treat bin Laden with respect and regard him as having the attributes of both Che and Gandhi, with a unique Islamic flavor. He becomes a legend while 'America' has weakened and defaced itself before the world. In this representation, though 'America' has acted outside the bounds of morality and/or international law, it has ultimately lost in the end, thus insinuating that bin Laden ultimately "killed" 'America' or what 'America' is "supposed" to be. Again, as in the previous representations of this type, 'America' has become less powerful and tainted as a result of its actions though 'American' intentions may have been otherwise.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Nafaa, Hassan, "Amrika wa bin Laden: man qatala man?" *al-Masry al-Youm*, 4 May 2011.

Slightly different than Kharmi, ‘America’ was undone or “killed” by only a single man who, according Hassan Nafaa, was not back by any nation or state and fought for what he believed to the very last drop of his blood. Whether ‘America’ undoes itself or is undone by Osama bin Laden, it is no longer invincible.

America, the Hated

‘America’ is represented not just negatively but as an extremely malevolent entity in eleven of the texts, or approximately forty percent. Two of the texts explicitly address ‘America’ as an internationally hated entity and claim that this hatred is increasing daily. According to Mokhtar Nauh¹²⁹, the international hatred of the United States is so powerful that he predicts America’s destruction within the next ten years. Similar to previously discussed texts, he also sees the death of Osama bin Laden as a catalyst that will incite more violence against America and its interests. In the end, he mourns the death of bin Laden because he is the true “giant” who made America seem like the “dwarf” that it is. Ali al-Sayid¹³⁰ makes a similar case, stating that America, after killing Osama bin Laden, is more threatened than any time since September 11th. His description of America captures the extremely negative portrayal of ‘America’ in these texts and is also tied to the previous theme addressing ‘America’s unjust vengeance:

If the greatest nation in the world does not try the accused, or act justly with a prisoner, and honor a corpse, indeed it is the lowest of nations in the world. If civilization and development do not reflect humanity there is no value in it, and if there is no fair law embodying it, then it is titled as a criminal state, transformed into a gang of unlawful killing. America is thus a nation that the law does not limit nor is it deterred by the stream of blood, which flows in every spot where it exists.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Nauh, Mokhtar, “al-Qizm al-Amriki wa al-‘imlaq bin-Laden,” *al-Dostor*, 5 May 2011.

¹³⁰ al-Sayed, ‘Ali, “bin-Laden, tha’iran,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 8 May 2011.

¹³¹ Ibid.

While America's discourse represents Osama bin Laden as a terrorist and a criminal, in this representation the signs are reversed and it is 'America' who is the 'criminal state' and the cold-blooded killer. Its civilizational progress is bankrupt because it contains no humanity or value.

Furthermore, 'America' in these types of representations is completely and entirely antithetical to Arab and Egyptian interests. The relationship is a purely oppositional and uncontestable binary. Without giving extensive reasoning for this representation, it is simply and unquestioningly known that 'America' is out to attack and destroy Arabs. For example, Mohamed Habib writes a long article listing a variation of domestic and internal reasons that he is worried about the fate of Egypt. However, he ends his article with a warning about the dire threat on the horizon,

Indeed, the American administration or the European Union are not reform institutions, nor a charity association, but the owner of a scheme aiming at the knees of the nation, dividing its roots, dissolving its identity, corrupting its ethics, looting its goodness, as well as eliminating its cultural specificity and obliterating landmarks of its civilizational heritage...not to mention ensuring the interests of the Zionist agent and guaranteeing its crushing ascendancy over all Arab nations.¹³²

'America' and the 'West' will do everything to pull the 'Arab' civilization, or the 'self,' apart and degrade its past. Yet while 'America' is a hated and nearly evil entity in many of the texts, the majority of the time its bloodthirsty actions are represented as ultimately leading to its destruction. Therefore, 'America' may be powerful but it also carries a fatal flaw, able to be exploited by one man. In this context, 'America' is able to be defeated and not likely to remain at the pinnacle of the world system indefinitely.

¹³² Habib, Mohamed, "Qaliq 'ala Misr," *al-Dostor*, 16 May 2011.

CIA America

Although there were four times as many articles in the previous chapter, none of them contained this type of representation of the ‘United States.’ Approximately one-third (10 of 29) articles contain this type of representation, all published in *al-Dostor* with the exception of one from *al-Masry al-Youm*. Five of these articles (half) were written by the same author: Dr. Rifaat Sayid Ahmed. This theme contains an unclear and ambiguous ‘America,’ most of the time crossing the line into what might generally be regarded as conspiracy theory. In all the variations of this representation, the ‘United States’ is represented as a sinister and somewhat invisible force, usually associated with the CIA or operating through “secret projects,” and is plotting against the Arabs or Egypt as a whole. Much of this discourse revolves around the secret American plans to “steal Egypt’s revolution” and not the death of Osama bin Laden. The reasons behind such sinister plans are rarely examined in detail and are haphazardly attached to America’s “rational” pursuit of interests. This theme is the closest to representing America as an irrationally evil and sinister “boogey man,” who hides in the closet at night. It is not a country with peoples or an administration, but a ‘force’ or an ‘entity,’ similar to the personified ‘Zionist entity.’ Furthermore, these texts represent the general news, such as bin Laden’s death, as not true and an illusion. ‘America’ is so powerful that it has the ability to fabricate a fake world with fake events. In contrast to the previously discussed representations, this theme contains an ‘America’ that is almost unstoppable. The only sure safety is to be aware and on the look-out for devious American plans or those who throw in their lot with ‘America.’

When Osama bin Laden's death is discussed in these articles, it is portrayed as fabricated or as having potentially happened at another time and as part of a larger American production or fabrication. As Mohamed al-Shafaa asks, "Who is sure this isn't just a Hindi film?"¹³³ He goes on to question the validity of the news because bin Laden's death achieves America's and Obama's interests (such as increasing re-election chances), because there exists no film of the raid, and because bin Laden's body was rapidly disposed of at sea. Due to the surety that the US possesses the technological means to prove Osama's death, the lack of such proof means that the news is false and any following proof is certainly fabricated.

Abdullah al-'Ashaal¹³⁴ goes as far as saying that Al Qaeda itself is an entirely fabricated phenomenon, though he is not fully clear as to whether it is Israeli, American, or both (he suggests all in multiple manners throughout the article). While he does not overtly question the timing or feasibility of Osama's death, he represents Al Qaeda as the fabricated excuse utilized by both the United States and Israel for foreign intervention. He also states that there existed no proof from the American September 11th investigations that Al Qaeda actually exists or that Osama bin Laden was behind the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. 'Ashaal argues that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda have always been bad for Arab interests because they are utilized as a legitimizing tool for interference. Moreover, Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda do not affect US and/or Israeli interests and are not threatening to them, contrary to how American discourse portrays the threat of Al Qaeda. Therefore, because they are bad for Arab interests, Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden must actually be under the control of

¹³³ al-Shafaa, Mohamed, "bin-Laden, brubaganda Amrikiya," *al-Dostor*, 5 May 2011.

¹³⁴ al-'Ashaal, Abdullah, "Usturat al-Qa'ida fi al-istratijiya al-Amrikiya," *al-Dostor*, 13 May 2011.

‘America.’ The least “sensationalist” of the articles that suggests the fabrication of Osama bin Laden’s death comes from al-Barghoty¹³⁵ writing in *Al Masry Al Youm*. He states that it is well known that Osama bin Laden died the previous April and that the United States simply stole his body and waited for the right timing for the announcement of his death (which ultimately centers on helping Obama’s re-election chances). Therefore, the death of bin Laden is a fabricated performance driven by America’s domestic politics.

In all of these articles, the representations of ‘America’ contain an automatic assumption that anything that is believed to achieve American interests must have extensive scheming and intentionality behind them. Killing the leader of the organization responsible for September 11th is not enough to explain the event. The event is more sinister than this goal and, in fact, the event is not even real. It is part of an intricate and active scheme that involves timing, presidential election calculations, or other reasons. In these representations, there are no bounds to what ‘America’ can do or fabricate. It could be the force behind anything, especially if that anything is detrimental to Arabs. Moreover, if anything is perceived as achieving an American interest, then it was also planned and part of one of these elaborate and comprehensive schemes. ‘America’ is ultimately inescapable and the ultimate enemy. This binary is not only oppositional but includes an ‘other’ who is frequently and actively on the offensive. That ‘other’ needs no extensively defined reasons for these actions because the identity itself automatically establishes the conflict.

The articles regarding America’s role in the Arab Spring also carry these same assumptions in their representations. In the series of articles written by Rifaat Sayid

¹³⁵ al-Barghoty, “Qataluh am saraqū juthatahu?” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 4 May 2011.

Ahmed, Al Jazeera is represented as playing a part in America (and Zionism's) fabrication of Arab world events, including the Libyan and Syrian revolutions. He discusses the testimony of Luna al-Shebl, a former employee of Al Jazeera who he says resigned from her position in protest. According to the articles, she states that Al Jazeera has a special private room, known as the "black room," where news is fabricated, particularly about Syria.¹³⁶ Moreover, there has been an American plan for regime change in Syria since the time of Bush and Blair, and that this current uprising is part of this plan. In other words, "we" or Arabs should not support the Libyan or the Syrian revolutions because they are actually CIA planned and part of a scheme to destabilize the region, though Ahmed does not explain why this might be an American plan. It is represented as simply a given and known truth. However, in contrast to these assertions, Ahmed also states that "the only revolutions in the region are the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions..."¹³⁷ These are the "real" or "clean" revolutions, and should therefore be defended. They are for some reason not part of a regional destabilization plan.

In his articles a few days later, Rifaat Sayid Ahmed specifically targets foreign NGO's within Egypt as part of an American plan to "Americanize" Egypt's revolution. He asserts that Egypt's true sons, its "real people" made the revolution, not these activists, students, brokers and human rights centers that joined at the last minute to fulfill America's plans.¹³⁸ He writes yet again the next day

We said yesterday that there are suspicious roles undertaken by some of the human rights organizations and political activists to steal the revolution through their cooperation with American and European institutions linked with and close to American and Western intelligence. Today we will finish observing the most

¹³⁶ Ahmed, Rifaat Sayid, "Dawr al-Jazira fi sina'at thawarat al-C.I.A.," *al-Dostor*, 5 May 2011.

¹³⁷ Ahmed, Rifaat Sayid, "al-Thawarat al-Amrikiya tankashif Luna al-Shibl wa fadihat al-Jazira," *al-Dostor*, 4 May 2011.

¹³⁸ Ahmed, Rifaat Sayid, "Marakiz huquqiya tasriq al-thawra," *al-Dostor*, 8 May 2011.

prominent of these Western institutions that work in Egypt to steal the revolution and penetrate it in order to transform it into an American revolution (trivial) and trivial Americanized revolutionaries.¹³⁹

When taking all of his series of articles together, ‘America’ is represented as both being complicit in fermenting chaotic and destabilizing revolutions in Syria and Libya, while also trying to “steal” Egypt’s “pure” revolution in order to trivialize it (or to keep it from being destabilizing). Explaining reasons behind America’s insidious intentions is never undertaken, especially when it seems that if one takes into account all that ‘America’ is supposed to be doing then its plans would actually seem irrational or conflictive in nature. In this discourse, ‘America’ is simultaneously trying to destabilize the region and keep revolutions under control. In other words, ‘America’ carries with it a meaning that can be utilized in a multitude of ways, divorced from explanation, in order to accentuate a point or prove something to be insidious and a threat to the ‘self.’ ‘America’ the ‘boogey man’ lurking around every corner and being identified with ‘America’ is the most damaging accusation that can be made because it is inherently ‘anti-Egypt,’ ‘anti-Arab,’ and ‘anti-revolution,’ ‘anti-democracy,’ etc.

One of the articles, not specifically within this theme, discusses the topic of how affiliation with ‘America’ is the “kiss of death” for any political entity in post-revolution Egypt. Manar al-Shorbagy¹⁴⁰ writes a letter to President Obama telling him that it is understandable that America pursues its interests (which do not lie with the Egyptian revolution) and that he should think twice before listening to experts who argue for American funding and training in Egypt. She actually encourages him to not support “our revolution” because doing so would be counter productive (since ‘America’ is something

¹³⁹ Ahmed, Rifaat Sayid, “Lusus, lakin nushata,” *al-Dostor*, 9 May 2011.

¹⁴⁰ al-Shorbagy, Manar, “Risala lil-ra‘is Barack Obama,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 11 May 2011.

you as an Egyptian must endeavor to not be associated with). She also places Egyptians in a place of strength; the Egyptians were able to peacefully overthrow a regime that was fully backed by America until the end. Therefore, Egyptians are in little need of American assistance.

These representations of ‘America,’ and what al-Shorbagy acknowledges, but is not a part of herself, are simplified and ambiguous. This ‘America’ is unquestioningly hostile to true Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims. It is the ‘other’ that is always actively aiming to undermine ‘us,’ and can be seen everywhere. There is no need to look behind why this ‘other’ is so adamant in ‘our’ destruction because it is represented as a given truth that this constant menacing drive is present inside of it. Additionally, ‘America’ is seen primarily as an intelligence apparatus and a state. It’s internal politics, citizens, plurality, etc. makes no appearance to mention. ‘America’ is massively solid, always “evil,” unified, and fully intentional. As its malevolence can be utilized in any scenario, there exists no need to pair it with a fully “rationalized” explanation for events. ‘America’ can actually appear as the devious agent behind multiple events that, when analyzed together, make little sense.

America and Egypt’s Sectarian Issue

Though America’s role in sectarianism is not one of the most prevalent themes throughout the articles (it appears in two of them), it is interesting because sectarian issues were not mentioned in any of the articles analyzed in the previous chapter. During the same time frame as Osama bin Laden’s death, Egypt witnessed an outbreak of sectarian violence in the Imbaba area of Cairo. This instance of sectarian strife prompted

a significant amount of articles (more than Osama bin Laden's death) and with it some associated representations of 'America,' many of which overlap with previously discussed representations.

The two authors who discuss America's role in sectarianism place the 'United States' on the side of the Coptic Christians. According to Selim Azuz¹⁴¹, the Copts actually supported Hosni Mubarak and were not with the revolution. He also states that they treacherously asked for protection from the United States during the sectarian clashes, giving the US a pretext for intervention in Egypt's internal affairs. Mohamed al-Shafay¹⁴² also echoes much of the same narrative. 'America' can be expected, as part of its plans to divide Egypt, to come to the aid of the Coptic Christians and to actually create a Coptic state in Egypt. Though he does not explain how, he more than suggests that 'America' is ultimately behind the sectarian strife in Imbaba. In this depiction, 'America' is functioning as the threat that is trying to divide the 'self.' In the face of such a threat, all internal divisions must be quelled.

These articles can also be considered a subset of the articles discussed prior to this section. 'America' in these articles functions in the same fashion in that it is trying to unfold its sinister plots in Egypt. However, rather than functioning through NGO's or other "brokers," it is affiliated with the Coptic Christians, thus taking on a sectarian tone. Somehow the Coptic Christians are represented as more likely to be affiliated with the 'United States' than they are with 'Egypt' or the revolution. Malevolent and plotting 'America' functions as a means to slander the Copts, or function as al-Shorbagy's political "kiss of death." It clarifies what and who is part of the 'self' or 'Egypt' and who

¹⁴¹ Azuz, Selim, "Tahashamu!" *al-Dostor*, 14 May 2011.

¹⁴² al-Shafay, Mohamed, "al-Mukhattat al-amriki li-inhiyar Misr," *al-Dostor*, 14 May 2011.

is a threat to it. Furthermore, when ‘America’ is represented in this fashion, it focuses the gaze on an external catalyst and its agents as the provocateurs for internal issues. It becomes impossible that these events could stem from “real Egyptians” but only from a nebulous, ever-present, and all-powerful entity that is ‘America.’ Therefore, internal introspection of the ‘self’ is delayed or canceled in entirety, and the locus of action or change also left to the demonized and powerful ‘other.’ Moreover, the ‘self’ must guard against a force that is trying to divide and fracture it. Any divisions inherent within the ‘self’ must be remedied or ignored because they present to potential for exploitation from the ‘other.’

America, the Counter-Revolution

In the context of the Arab Spring and the Egyptian revolution, ‘America’ is always placed on the side of the old regime and/or the post 25 January counter-revolution. ‘America’ is actually a supporter of ‘authoritarianism,’ and engages in ‘imperialism.’ ‘America,’ contrary to its own discourse, is not about ‘democracy’ or ‘freedom,’ at least when it comes to Egypt and the Arab world. In fact, according to these texts, it is the Egyptians who carry these values. Furthermore, if Arabs and Egyptians continue to follow these values then they can overcome past domination. Therefore, the core characteristics traditionally associated with ‘America’ in the dominant discourse, actual become tools with which to “fight it.” As Mohamed al-Shafay states, “Americans look for their interests and Zionism’s interests with customers and dictators. It is necessary that we look for our interests with freedom, democracy, parity, dignity, and

nationalism.”¹⁴³ Al Bayati et al. write in a similar fashion though through an imperialist as opposed to an anti-Zionist lens,

By depending on the people's interests and will, the Egyptian revolutionaries can lift Egypt from blindly following US imperialist and compromising comprador agents' diktats and build, both politically and economically, an independent Egypt that bases its policies on the interests of the Egyptian people and on reciprocal benefits with its friends. The imperialist crisis, the failure of liberal and neoliberal globalisation, Egypt's potential together with Arab solidarity and cooperation, would help in building a strong democratic modern and advanced Egypt in which its people live in prosperity, justice, dignity and freedom.¹⁴⁴

This representation splits the Egyptians and Arabs between regimes or comprador class and the people. The interests of the regimes lie with a unified ‘America’ who has objective interests. ‘America’ is rarely split between its government and population, though it is often referred to as the “American administration.” In other words, ‘America’ is the government, and is presumed to also represent the people. Thus the American government and the American people have the same interests, unlike how the situation is represented in Egypt. Moreover, ‘America’ performs the function of representing the previous regime as not part of the ‘self’ and against the interests of ‘Egypt.’ The ‘revolution’ and ‘revolutionaries’ are now part of the definition of ‘Egypt.’

Additionally, within this theme, the US is generally not an all-knowing or all-powerful entity but is represented as caught off guard by the Arab revolutions. The Arab revolutions were not part of its calculation and went against American interests. The US was taken aback and unsure of how to react to the situation, unlike the skillful magician Obama presented in the last chapter. This theme is one of the rare cases where representations of ‘America’ are associated with confusion, powerlessness, and even irrationality. However, there also exist discourses that suggest that once ‘America’

¹⁴³ al-Shafay, Mohamed, “bin Laden brubaganda amrikiya,” *al-Dostor*, 5 May 2011.

¹⁴⁴ al-Bayat, et al, “Tasks and Difficulties Ahead,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, 5-11 May 2011.

regained its feet and understood the situation, it started putting forth all its efforts to control or outright “steal” the revolution. El-Hassan writes,

Today, the US may be tempted to use its old tricks to abort or dilute democratic movements in the Arab states in order to ensure that small groups, "moderates" according to the US, come to dominate the politics of the Middle East rather than nationalists or Islamists who are perceived to be extremists in US eyes.¹⁴⁵

Other authors are little more extreme in their representation of America’s actions to “control” the Arab revolutions. According to Selim Azuz¹⁴⁶, the current Egyptian leaders have not been paying close enough attention to American plans for interfering in Egypt’s internal matters. Before he attacks what he states are the American ambassador’s arrogant orders (which he compares as reminiscent of the British High Commissioner of the colonial era) in regards to investigating sectarian strife in Imbaba, he details his representation of the American role in the Egyptian revolution. Although this is not the case, ‘America’ is trying to represent itself as having played a role in the revolution, particularly through it’s “agent” Wael Ghonim. According to Azuz, the US was against the revolution the entire time, siding with former president Mubarak. He also discusses two events: the “stolen” American embassy vehicles that ran-over and killed Egyptians and Hillary Clinton’s famous “stability speech” at the beginning of the uprising. He suggests that the vehicles were not in fact stolen, but intentionally given to the Interior Ministry to kill protesters. Furthermore, Hillary Clinton’s speech was actually the “secret password” to unleash the interior ministry’s forces in the protesters. Though this representation of ‘America’ overlaps with other “conspiracy-theory” representations, it still contains an element of confusion on the part of the ‘United States.’ The Americans

¹⁴⁵ El-Hassan, Hassan Afif, “Prospects for an Arab Renaissance,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, 5-11 May 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Azuz, Selim, “Tahashamu!” *al-Dostor*, 14 May 2011.

were caught off guard and were ultimately trying to do “damage control” in order to direct the revolution in the appropriate direction. ‘America’ is one step behind ‘Egypt’ in this representation.

America’s Less Than Perfect Democracy

The final theme in this chapter was only present in one of the articles centering on Osama bin Laden’s death and was not present in any of the articles in the previous chapter. However, it is the first representation that actually questions the quality of America’s democracy internally. In all other articles, America’s lack of democratic quality is represented as being attached to its foreign policy. Regardless of being non-democratic outside its own borders, it still often retains its place as the most advanced and democratic nation in the world. In the linear path of modernization and development, ‘America’ is always the final destination or the perfect example. However, when El-Hassan discusses the prospects for a new Arab *nahda* or renaissance, he outlines the problems with US democracy and why it might not be the most desirable path to pursue for Arabs. He writes,

There are questions about US democracy even today. The candidates with the most money are the most likely to win US elections, and the rules employed in the US presidential elections may not allow the candidate preferred by the majority of voters to become president. When more than two candidates run for the office of president, the winning candidate may also have a plurality of states but not a majority of votes.

In fact, in 12 cases since the election of Andrew Jackson as president of the US in 1828, the winning candidate has not been the first choice of the majority of voters. This makes the US system even less democratic since the president’s power has been growing at the expense of the legislative branch. ”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ el-Hassan, Hassan Afif, “Prospects for an Arab Renaissance,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, 5-11 May 2011.

There are multiple examples for Arabs to choose from on their path toward ‘democracy,’ not to mention extensive historical examples of challenges faced during other transitions. However, ‘America’ is not necessarily the “best.” El-Hassan’s representation of the Arab predicament certainly accentuates what he perceives as daunting challenges ahead, but his text is unique in that it carries the idea that Arab actors have the agency to choose their form of governance from a variety of historical experiences. Even more, ‘America’ is represented as a complicated democratic system that ultimately may not be the best or ideal model, should any model be followed. The Arabs then have the right to critique and evaluate what ‘America’ usually holds a monopoly on in dominant discourse: democracy.

B. Underlying Assumptions

As was the case in the preceding chapter, all of these texts carry in them an assumption that the US has objective and static interests in Egypt and/or the Arab world. Throughout the articles in this chapter, the US’s interests are represented as being in opposition with the Egyptian revolution (though at times suggesting that this is not the case with respect to the Syrian and/or Libyan revolutions). As a result, it becomes logical and unquestionable that the US should promote authoritarianism or attempt to “steal Egypt’s revolution” because these American interests are objective and unchangeable. They are uncontested, unlike the definition of democracy or who truly represents democracy. This assumption has repercussions on what action is available. It denies the idea that America’s interests could be shifted or that they could eventually lie with the “revolution.” In the new Egypt, now potentially more representative of the Egyptian

people, America's interests are inherently oppositional to Egyptian interests. It is a zero-sum game in which the only recourse is to try to root out 'America,' its agents, and to confrontationally face it. Or, in the very least, one must contain 'America,' thus devoting considerable energy to it, in order to achieve Egyptian interests.

Additionally, the representation of 'America' is fairly simple and very static. It is represented primarily as an unchanging force that exists everywhere, always actively pursuing its agenda. It is detached from its location in 'America' and represented as everywhere, primarily in the Middle East. Moreover, it is a hostile and completely oppositional 'other.' It is a performative term that can be used to paint others at home as hostile, a threat, or somehow not Egyptian, such as NGO's or the Coptic Christians. If you are with 'America' you cannot be with 'Egypt' or the revolution. You are also with 'Zionism' or 'Israel,' which is rarely distinguished as a separate entity from 'America.' This oppositional force is always trying to divide and separate the 'self' or 'Egypt' in order to destroy it. Thus the response must be to hold together, quell dissent, and stand united in the face of an ambiguous threat that could be present anywhere.

Whether 'America' is represented as vengeful, simply pursuing strategic interests, hated, etc., it is shown in these articles (as opposed to the previous chapter) to also be weakened and less powerful as a result of its actions. Each of these themes point to America's violation of international norms and values, be they international law, democracy, respect for human rights, etc. It is because 'America' is violating these "essential truths," and increasing its hatred internationally, that it will ultimately pay the price or undo itself. Beneath this representation is the assumption that these elements are in fact universal and objective truths. They reflect an acceptance of what was traditionally

held to be 'Western' conceptualizations of the world system: the universality of democracy, international law, human rights, etc. In other words, it reflects an internalization of the dominant ontology for viewing the world system.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF EGYPTIAN DISCOURSE AFTER THE ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN BORDER CLASH

On 19 August 2011, the Israeli Defense Force (henceforth referred to as IDF) crossed the Egyptian border into Sinai in pursuit of terrorists and, for widely contested reasons, killed Egyptian soldiers in the process. This event sparked significant controversy in Egypt, and ultimately resulted in a confrontational mass protest at the Israeli embassy in Cairo and the evacuation of the Israeli ambassador from Egypt.¹⁴⁸ The discourse analyzed in this research covers the two weeks immediately following the border clash. The dates range from 20 August-2 September 2011. The two issues from *al-Ahram Weekly* cover the time frame of 25-31 August and 8-15 September¹⁴⁹ due to the fact that it is a weekly publication and discourse prompted by this incident would have occurred in later issues.

During the initial planning of this thesis, it was assumed that this incident would have prompted extensive discourse about the United States because of its frequent association with Israel in Egyptian and Arab discourse. However, while there were a multitude of articles discussing Israel and the Camp David accords, this incident resulted in the least discourse about 'America' of the three analyzed events. A total of 21 articles featured significant representations of the United States: 3 from *al-Ahram Weekly*, 5 from *al-Masry al-Youm*, and 13 from *al-Dostor*. As is the case in the previous chapter, many of

¹⁴⁸ Egyptians stormed the Israeli embassy on 9 September 2011. This event, therefore, does not fall during the timeframe analyzed for this thesis.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/201199225334494935.html>

¹⁴⁹ *al-Ahram Weekly* had no publication for the dates of 1-7 September 2011.

the articles revolve around the Arab uprisings as a whole and are not always related to the event itself (the IDF-Egyptian clash)¹⁵⁰.

A. Major Themes and Representations

Some of the themes and representations of the United States discussed in this chapter are very similar to previously discussed themes that appeared in the previously discussed articles, displaying a continuity in how the ‘United States’ functions in Egyptian discourse. However, many of these representations have shifted from their previous shapes to produce a world where ‘Egypt’ is positioned with the initiative and ability to act independently from ‘America’ and its domination. ‘America’ is generally represented in a weaker position than it was in the preceding chapters.

American and Zionist Interests

American support of Israel and Zionism is a recurrent theme throughout all chapters in this thesis. However, there is often variation in the space represented between ‘America’ and ‘Zionism’ or ‘Israel.’ In the two preceding chapters, many of the texts represented the United States and Israel as two separate entities, and occasionally as having separate objective interests. In the vast majority of the texts surround the IDF clash on the Egyptian border, this previously depicted separation of interests and identities is nearly nonexistent. Moreover, ‘America’ is attached more often to an abstracted ‘Zionism’ as opposed to the nation-state of ‘Israel.’ The abstract “America-Zionism” is large and static, yet it contains little other detail aside from a malicious opposition to Egyptian and Arab interests.

¹⁵⁰ Eleven of the articles have primary topics other than the IDF-Egyptian border clash.

General Talaat Muslim's¹⁵¹ article explicitly references this combination of the United States and Israel. Throughout the text, he describes the challenges that he believes are threatening Egypt. He expresses that he is worried that the Egyptian leaders and Egypt as a whole is "unconscious" and not aware of everything occurring around it and in it. Before he starts specifically discussing these challenges he states,

There is no doubt that the challenges that stem from Israel and the United States are the most important of these challenges and it does not seem that we have a vision of how to treat them. I want to indicate here the coming challenges from Israel, despite that I am fully convinced that it is not possible that we separate between the coming challenges from the United States or those contained by Israel.¹⁵²

In Muslim's representation, there is no difference between the United States and Israel, at least from the perspective of Egypt and the threat that this entity poses. Rifaat Sayid Ahmed, like others who simply combine the term together, refers to the "Zionist-American enemy¹⁵³" in his piece detailing conspiracies in the region and Egypt. Mohamed al-Shafay describes the crime of Hosni Mubarak and his regime in obeying "Zionist-American pressure"¹⁵⁴ to marginalize Sinai. Gamal As'ad explains in more detail why he considers there to be no difference between the United States and Israel. He writes,

The thing that lifts and exalts and assures and consecrates the American-Israeli relationship in the region is the consideration that Israel is the friend and partner and colonial settlement base of America and that protects American interests in the Middle East, this region that was and still continues to be a strategic treasure to colonialization...¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Muslim, Talaat, "Qabla an nafiq 'ala al-tahdidat," *al-Dostor*, 21 August 2011.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ahmed, Rifaat Sayid, "al-Mu'amara, 'auda ila wathiqat Yadlin," *al-Dostor*, 31 August 2011.

¹⁵⁴ al-Shafay, Mohamed, "Sina', wa qowat al-qatl al-thulathiya," *al-Dostor*, 24 August 2011.

¹⁵⁵ As'ad, Gamal, "al-Rabiy' al-'arabi, wa al-fawda al-Amrikiya," *al-Dostor*, 28 August 2011.

Not only is Israel represented as a protector of US interest, but it is also the physical embodiment of American colonialism: its settler base.

Essam el-Erian¹⁵⁶ also utilizes the America-Zionism¹⁵⁷ representation though he does not locate it as the primary regional actor in the Arab world. The text discusses the history of events in the region, specifically related to Egypt's role and leadership. According to el-Erian, it was President Sadat's death and Mubarak's succession to the presidency that ultimately caused Egypt to lose its role as the leader of the Arab world. In other words, Mubarak was too incompetent to handle the challenges of the presidency unlike his predecessor Sadat. The text represents the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, etc. as the result of a power vacuum left by Egypt's exit from its regional leadership role. Iraq and others were trying to fill Egypt's place. It was this situation that also led the Gulf States to run to 'America' and 'Zionism' for protection. Therefore, though 'America' and 'Zionism' are represented as oppositional and powerful entities, they are not given full credit for the state of affairs in the Arab region. Recent history has been a result of Egypt's action or lack of action and skill, embodied by former president Hosni Mubarak.

In all of these discussed discourses, 'America' is again a monolithic and intentioned entity, which is combined with an equally monolithic 'Zionism' and/or 'Israel.' It is extensive, powerful, impenetrable, and unquestioningly hostile to 'Egypt.' The 'America' often represented as pluralistic in the first chapter has utterly disappeared in this theme. Furthermore, this representation is combined with the additional representation of the Middle East and the world in general as defined by objective

¹⁵⁶ el-Erian, Essam, "Dawr Misr al-'arabi wa al-iqlimi," *al-Dostor*, 24 Aug 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Essam El-Erian does distinguish somewhat between 'America' and 'Zionism' though he refers to "America and its follower, Zionism."

strategic interests. It is rational for ‘America’ and ‘Israel’ to be combined in interests if their identity is interpreted as being one and the same. This restrictive representation produces the available action that Egyptians might pursue with respect to these American interests. In dealing with this entity, one must deal with the combined power of ‘American-Zionism’ and the assumption that there is no difference in identities, perspectives, or interests. It denies a possibility that these US interests are contestable, separable, or oppositional to Israeli interests. It denies a possibility that American interests could lie in another location, or that there is a way to engage in the struggle to align them differently. Moreover, reproduces the discourse that there are such things as ‘interests’ in the ‘Middle East’ and that ‘America-Zionism’ should be attempting to acquire or control them. It carries the same framework as American realist discourse about the Middle East, its inherent strategic interests, in addition to the representation of Israel as America’s unchanging friend and ally.

America, Containing Revolutions

Similar to the prior chapter, ‘America’ is represented as siding with the old-regime or counter-revolution in the context of the Arab Spring. In this event, this theme takes on the idea of containment. Now that the evolutions have occurred, ‘America’ is trying to do everything possible to control them or limit their impact. These representations include the previous assertions that ‘America’ is “trying to steal the revolution” and “put it in its little pocket¹⁵⁸” to the milder representation of trying to influence them. Alaa al-Aswany,¹⁵⁹ in his discussion of the border incident, also

¹⁵⁸ al-‘Abidi, Essam, “Bagaha amrikiya jadida,” *al-Dostor*, 25 Aug 2011.

¹⁵⁹ al-Aswany, Alaa, “Kayfa narud al-‘udwan al-Isra’ili?” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 23 Aug 2011.

discusses an article written by Noam Chomsky stating that America does not actually fear Islamists but the true independence of Egypt. Furthermore, it will do everything in its power to control what follows Mubarak (as was indicated by the attempts to push Omar Suleiman or Ahmed Shafiq into the presidency immediately following Mubarak's departure). 'America' will pursue this route, or any route, regardless of ideology or a presumed abhorrence of political Islam. America always pursues its strategic interests.

According to Magdy Ahmed Hussein¹⁶⁰, who spends most of his article discussing the Libyan revolution, the US will try to do whatever is best for its 'interests,' whether this involves dividing a country or keeping it unified. Regardless, US interests are represented as oppositional to Arab revolutions and interests. They are challenges that must be overcome. He writes,

In the second stage of the revolutions that overthrew similar dictators, the greatest difficulty is when the Americans try to contain these revolutions and empty their content from them, and preserve the normalcy of the Arab nations, only giving them new names of rulers and some reforms in the nature of the political system in them.¹⁶¹

Similar to Essam el-Erian's article, Hussein ends stating that the success of the Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Libya, in the face of the American challenge, is dependent of the success of Egypt's revolution. Therefore, it is in the hands of 'Egypt' to control the fate of the Arab world and overcome the attempts to contain the revolutions in the region. 'Egypt' must not wait passively, but take action.

¹⁶⁰ Hussein, Magdy Ahmed, "Tahdiyati ma ba'da suqut al-Qathafi," *al-Dostor*, 25 August 2011.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

America, the Inaccurate

Somewhat linked with the ‘America’ that needs to contain the Arab revolutions is the theme that the US is inaccurate in its failure to predict or accurately assess these revolutions. In many other discourses, of which Edward Said’s *Covering Islam* is an example, the American inability to truly and accurately “see” the Arab world is part of its power and is one of the predominant reasons for its “unjust” actions. For example, US discourse that conflates ‘Islam’ and ‘terrorism’ has been held partially responsible for producing the nature of the “war of terrorism” (afflicting predominantly the Arab/Muslim world). In other words, this “blindness” does not necessarily harm ‘America’ but somehow harms ‘Arabs’ or ‘Muslims.’ Furthermore, during the Obama’s visit and speech in Cairo, much of the discourse revolved around controlling what Obama saw, or performing for ‘America’ so it judges the situation in a manner favorable to one’s interests, whether you are regime, civil society, etc. America’s perspective or gaze was always represented as a source of power and contesting what is seen does not affect American power but one’s own. However, in this chapter (in addition to the preceding chapter) the inability of the United States to accurately “assess” the Middle East has somehow caused it to be in a less powerful position.

Amin Shalabi¹⁶² writes about the surprise that American Middle East experts had during the beginning of the Arab Spring and likens it to their dismay during the September 11th attacks. He states that the US experts misjudged the affects of neoliberal economic reforms, the impact of the military in politics, and the influence of Arab nationalism in the region. He goes on to write that,

¹⁶² Shalabi, Amin, “The US’s Defective Crystal Ball,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, 25-31 Aug 2011.

It is well known that US civil society organs and the scholastic community, in particular, are active participants in shaping US foreign policy thinking. In view of the blurred crystal ball that American Middle East experts have used to probe Arab societies, it was not odd that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would appear before the television cameras in the early hours of the Egyptian revolution to state, "The Egyptian regime is stable and Mubarak is a reliable ally of the US." That assessment certainly did not withstand the onslaught of the Egyptian revolution and it was not long before Washington decided that Hosni Mubarak was no longer an ally but a burden.¹⁶³

The US "probes" Arab societies and uses a "crystal ball." Yet, in this representation, it still does not have the ability to know or understand these Arab societies, much to its detriment. The 'Arabs' have the ability to surprise 'America' and take their own actions and initiatives that are not influenced by nor necessarily constrained by 'America.' The US in this representation is the reactor who is playing catch-up. The 'experts' who are paid to understand 'Arabs' are flawed in their gaze, unable to penetrate or understand. Furthermore, though this text looks *inside* 'America' and *sees* civil society, Middle East experts, and policy makers. Regardless, 'America' is still defined by its strategic interests and has simply been unable to realize them as a result of its own deficiency. However, in this representation it is still the case that 'Egypt' and the Arab world as a whole is 'penetrated' and 'probed' by 'America.' There is never a suggestion that 'Egypt' has the possibility to do the same to 'America,' or that 'America' in can be penetrated internally.

Egypt goes to America

In all other articles analyzed in this thesis, the space or the setting for action occurs in Egypt or the great Arab and/or Muslim world. Moreover, the Egyptians receive actions from 'America' and the best available course of action remains resisting through

¹⁶³ Ibid.

decrying ‘America’s hypocrisy, not being duped by ‘America’ and knowing the intentions behind such actions. In contrast to this represented situation, Mohamed al-Ziyat¹⁶⁴ writes an article about the Egyptian Major General, Murad Muwafi (Director of Egyptian General Intelligence), traveling to the United States during a crisis of Egyptian-American relations revolving around US funding of NGO’s in Egypt, the discovery of an Israeli-American spy, and the heavy influx of American officials into Egypt in general. In this discourse, ‘Egypt’ is going to ‘America’ to express its position and demands from a level of equality. It is ‘America’ who must listen and receive. The rulers of Egypt, represented positively and as part of the revolution in this article, will not be compliant like the previous regime and will retain the ability to make all final decisions in Egypt (as opposed to America). Al-Ziyat writes,

Indeed the Egyptian leaders are interested in clarifying the nature of the new Egyptian reality, refusing any American attempts to restore the impact in producing Egyptian political decisions internally and externally, and that the American administration clearly understand that Egypt of the revolution witnessed large change, including the orientation of foreign politics, and that it is necessary that bilateral relations between Cairo and Washington be founded on the mutual interest of each side, and that it is no longer acceptable to formulate these relations to include the compatibility, aspirations, and demands of Tel Aviv, and on account of the pressure of the Zionist lobby in the United States.¹⁶⁵

In this representation, Egypt-American relations have arrived at a new juncture in which the “new Egypt” will conduct its policies independent of American influence and in accordance with its objective strategic interests. Furthermore, it is ‘Egypt’ informing the ‘US’ who must understand or ultimately face the consequences. Though the US political system is understood by ‘Egypt,’ such as the effect of the Israeli lobby, this

¹⁶⁴ al-Ziyat, Mohamed Mugahad, “Hal tatajawaz ‘ilaqat al-Qahira bi-Washintun azmataha al-haliya?” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 28 Aug 2011.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

acknowledgement does not mean that ‘Egypt’ will tolerate relations that are not in its interests. Like the theme depicting ‘America’ as inaccurate in its ability to understand the Arab revolutions, this representation places ‘Egypt’ in more powerful position vis-à-vis America.

America and Christian-Salafis

One of the twenty-one articles, written by Ahmed Roushdy, features representations of ‘America’ but looks at the greater ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’ worlds as a whole. He takes a unique stance on both Christian and Muslim extremists that he refers to as Salafis. Throughout the article he explores the meaning of the word ‘Salafi,’ arguing that it has been changed over time, and that the current individuals who identify themselves as Salafis in the Arab world are not authentic or reflective of the original meaning (and are actually Wahabis). The new meaning of Salafi, which he then applies to some Christians, is related to a perverted extremism, which follows strict forms of religious interpretation and sees the world as split into oppositional religions or civilizations. The “Christian Salafis” are represented by individuals like Norway’s Anders Breivik who, because of his hatred of Islam, killed ninety-three people and advocated for a European crusade against Islam. The author then goes on to identify the neoconservative movement within the United States as another strand of these “Christian-Salafis” who consider Islam to be the number one enemy. The two types of Salafis, Christian and Muslim, feed from each other’s constructions of the world and have the potential to lead to further chaos.

After the recent massacre by the Norwegian fanatic, it is not difficult to anticipate more of the same from such Christian Salafis against Muslims and against so-

called Muslim Salafis in particular. The Christian Salafis' certitude about the dangers of Islam to Europe may turn into another crusading war. The so-called Muslim Salafis and extremists will welcome this as a call for *jihad*, or religious struggle. This will cause chaos, and the loser will be Islam and the Muslim countries, though time will prove that the so-called Muslim Salafis are not really genuine Salafis at all.¹⁶⁶

The majority of the article actually focuses on Roushdy's interpretation of the history of Islamic thought, particularly with regard to the Salafi branch. He positively describes Islamic thinkers like Mohamed Abdu as "true salafis" who do not see Islam as inflexible in rules, consider *ijtihad* (or interpretation) a legitimate source law, and do not see inherent opposition between 'East' and 'West.' His description of Mohamed Abdu and Islam in general is worth quoting at length:

Abdu did not find a conflict between Islamic rules, properly interpreted and understood, and modern scientific knowledge, a matter then neglected in many Muslim countries. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with some Muslims' behaviour. After his return from a trip to Paris, for example, Abdu said that "in France I saw Muslims but no Islam. In Egypt I saw Islam but no Muslims." What he meant was that Europeans were in some sense better Muslims since their modern and democratic societies were applying the egalitarian principles of the Quran more than traditional Islamic countries. Before Abdu's time, and up until today, the genuine Salafist movement has been tarnished by extremists who wrongly call themselves Salafis.

In reviewing the history of Islamic jurisprudence, one realises that the political system established by the Prophet during his refuge in the city of Al-Madina and after his victorious return to Mecca, was based on a civil, democratic and just government that maintained equality among the people with no discrimination between an Arab and a Persian, or between Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁶⁷

In Roushdy's text, the binary between the 'West' and 'Muslims' is loosened and intertwined. Each can have similar and compatible qualities. Moreover, none is inherently hierarchical to the other. Though he discusses Abdu's experience in encountering the

¹⁶⁶ Roushdy, Ahmed Naguib, "Will the Real Salafi Please Raise His Hand?" *Al Ahram Weekly*, 8-14 September, 2001.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

‘democratic’ and ‘egalitarian’ societies of Europe, he adds that these values are actually Islamic in origin. At one point he states that civilization Western actually owes its development to Islamic civilization.

The representations in this text utilize similar ontology from Orientalist discourse and Western discourse: civilizational categories, democracy as a universal truth, etc. However, these representations are historically contextualized and their traditional locations (democracy as lying in the domain of the ‘West’) are disturbed. In this text, not only is ‘democracy’ not in opposition to ‘Islam,’ but is actually one of its original values. Additionally, these values that are held in the dominant discourse to be inherently ‘Western’ or even ‘American’ were actually a transmuted from ‘Islam’ to the ‘West,’ performing the intertwining of the two civilizational categories. For Roushdy, this relationship is the ‘truth’ and those who would struggle to construct the world into stark oppositions, or ‘Salafis,’ are the greatest threat.

B. Underlying Assumptions

In all of these themes, excluding the last theme dealing with the label of ‘Salafi,’ the ‘United States’ is represented with elements of an unchanging and old order. ‘America’ is almost inseparable from ‘Zionism,’ the old authoritarian regime, and the objective strategic interests that are supposed to lie with these entities. The representation of ‘Egypt,’ however, has changed. It is no longer the old regime that is stagnant and that bows to American and/or Israel interests. The ‘self’ is revolutionary Egypt, which has overthrown domination by these old elements though it is still in a struggle with itself to overcome the remaining elements of the old regime. The texts assert that ‘Egypt’ is

changing, and is different from its past. It has new interests which lie with the people of Egypt and not the prior regime, to which 'America' is paired. Moreover, it has the opportunity to impact and influence its own fate and, at times, that of the region.

In previously discussed discourses, particularly in the chapter addressing President Obama's speech and visit to Cairo, 'Egypt' is represented as 'static,' 'stagnant,' and unchanging. 'America' is represented as flexible, hybrid, and able to rejuvenate itself in order to face the crisis of the moment. This collection of discourses inverts this relationship. 'Interests' do not change and 'America' is still trying to pursue them in any manner possible. 'America' does not change and has always had the same agenda, revolving around these same interests, in the region. 'America' is its old self and, consequentially, is represented as weaker in power as a result. 'America' was unable to predict the new Egypt, and understand the revolution, though it may try to control or contain it. 'America' functions as a monolithic 'other' for the 'new Egypt' to actively resist and define itself against.

Nevertheless, these representations still operate inside the dominant discourse of 'strategic interests,' 'sovereignty,' and the assumption that the Middle East and/or Arab world contains these interests or even "strategic treasures" that various actors are trying to control. It accepts sovereign states and rational pursuit of interests as the ontology of the world. Moreover, relations between 'America' and 'Egypt' take place through this prism of interests and sovereign nation states, and not through any other types of relations. Therefore, dealing with 'America' or other foreign entities must either occur internal to the state of Egypt, or through the official state apparatus. For example, 'Egypt' asserts itself to 'America' through General Muwafi's visit to the United States. Other

types of interaction and relations are precluded from these representations, thus producing very specific course of action to be followed in carrying out these relations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The thesis has shown how ‘America’ has operated as an ‘other’ in the production of the Egyptian ‘self,’ with each representation re-defining a ‘self’ with different attributes. These ‘Americas’ and ‘Egypt’ all produce different available courses of action within Egypt-American ‘relations’ as a whole. The examples within this case study also point to a shift in representations of ‘America’ and ‘Egypt’ over the course of two years, encompassing both pre and post-revolutionary Egypt. Nevertheless, most of the narratives about ‘America’ still have their roots in prior discourse and representations. Yet, especially after the 25 January 2011 events in Egypt, the representations and meanings of ‘America’ are positioned in new locations and function in new ways.

In the articles focusing on Obama’s visit in Cairo, representations of ‘America’ were numerous and detailed. ‘America’ was often depicted as ‘plural,’ ‘youthful,’ ‘regenerative,’ and ‘changing.’ Obama himself represented the very embodiment of change. Additionally, though Obama’s rhetoric may not have reflected the true intentions of ‘America,’ he was still ‘skillful,’ or a ‘magician’ who was able to ‘woo’ and ‘intoxicate’ his Egyptian audience. ‘America’ and Obama always ‘know’ what they are doing and how to do it. This representation facilitates a sharp contrast with representations of ‘Egypt;’ it is ‘old,’ ‘stagnant,’ ‘oppressed,’ living in past glory, ‘wounded.’ This binary of representation is almost an exact replica of orientalist discourse. Whether these discourses blame ‘America,’ Egyptians themselves, or another entity, the binary remains hierarchical, placing ‘America’ ahead of ‘Egypt’ on a teleological trajectory of progress. As it has been located throughout more than a century

of intellectual thought, 'Egypt' is trying to catch up to the modern world.

There are also other representations of 'America' as powerful that fall outside of this specific binary. For example, regardless of whether President Obama is interpreted as the performer who is giving the speech, or the observer who is seeing 'Egypt,' he is placed in a more powerful position vis-a-vis 'Egypt.' The audience is wooed by his 'poisoned honey' and his 'access' to them as a 'colored' president with both 'third world' and 'Islamic' origins. What Obama sees and interprets from his visit to 'Egypt,' whether it is 'real' or not, is represented as a subject for struggle between Egyptian actors. Often the goal is to fit within the American framework of 'moderate,' so that 'America' will look upon you as a friend. It is imperative to ensure that other actors and groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, do not achieve such a label in American eyes because this favorable interpretation would empower those groups. In many ways, 'America' is like parent that must be convinced of one's side so that rewards will follow and be kept out of the reach of others. To have power in 'Egypt,' one must generally deal with 'America.' Underneath this dynamic lies the assumption that 'America' as a force in 'Egypt' is unchanging and present. 'America' is always *in* 'Egypt.'

Representations of 'America' in the events following Obama's speech in Cairo (Osama bin Laden's death and the IDF incursion) generally take on a more reified, and abstract form. With a few key exceptions, there is very little depiction of anything internal to the 'United States,' aside from Obama's re-election concerns and the Israeli lobby. 'America' is a sinister force present inside the borders of 'Egypt,' and it has secret dealings and paid agents oriented around aborting the Egypt revolution, possibly dividing 'Egypt,' furthering 'Zionist' interests, etc. Moreover, it is intentioned, rational, and

unitary; it is not plural. It is also the antithesis of 'Egypt' or the complete oppositional 'other.' Represented as an existential threat, 'America' is used as a tool in the struggle to define who is 'Egyptian,' or with the revolution, and who is not. The old regime is always placed as in cahoots with 'America,' and is therefore not part of true 'Egypt' but an alien force that had played the part in oppressing 'Egypt.' In other occasions, groups like the Coptic Christians, NGOs, and individuals like Wael Ghonim, are represented as associated with 'America' and therefore not part of 'Egypt' and a threat. Ultimately, these types of representations of 'America' are associated very little with the 'United States' but are used for internal political struggles. Such representations function to eliminate difference within Egypt or the 'self' in the face of a sinister and plotting 'America.'

The representations of 'America' post-25 January are not always positioned in a hierarchical location to 'Egypt,' though 'America' is still represented as a threat. In many cases, even those involving a sinister 'CIA America,' the United States is depicted as having been caught off guard by the Egyptian revolution and ultimately the actions of Egyptians. It is playing catch-up to Egypt. 'America' is not always "all-knowing," nor does it necessarily have the capability to affect the change it wants to occur within 'Egypt.' Additionally, there are also some representations that do look 'inside' America, and place it in a geographic location other than 'Egypt.' In al-Ziyat's¹⁶⁸ article, General Muwafi is going to America to convey Egyptian intentions and announce that 'Egypt' will be independent and free from American meddling in its internal affairs. Moreover, 'America' will have to be aware of and respect this position or it will pay the price. It is a

¹⁶⁸ al-Ziyat, Mohamed Mugahad, "Hal tatajawaz 'ilaqat al-Qahira bi-Washintun azmataha al-haliya?" *al-Masry al-Youm*, 28 Aug 2011.

representation where ‘Egypt’ is depicted as acting and seizing the initiative. For el-Hassan¹⁶⁹, even ‘America’ does not represent the pinnacle of democratic progress because it too has flaws in its internal political system. ‘America’ is no longer the end-state on a teleological path to modernity and, in fact, ‘Egypt’ might have the opportunity to better perfect it.

Although there exist multiple representations of ‘America’ and ‘Egypt’ within the Egyptian discourse analyzed in this thesis, there also lays a deeper observation that applies to the majority of articles. In almost all instances, there exists a normalization of the same underlying framework, or ontology, as much of American discourse, both realist and liberal. As a result, this thesis is predominantly in agreement with Joseph Mossad’s findings:

The most successful pedagogy that Orientalism and the colonial encounter would bequeath to these Arab intellectuals was not, however, the production of the national historiographical response, although that was indeed part of it, but an epistemological affinity that would inform all their archaeological efforts.¹⁷⁰

As has been discussed extensively, much of Egyptian discourse structures the world as based on objective strategic interests; it produces a world based on the basic tenets of realism. That is, these strategic interests do not change and are part of the “real world” that is separate from discourse, identity, social relations, etc. These interests are not open for negotiation as to whether they are really strategic interests or not, or whether they might be related to identity, perception, etc. As a result, it is “rational,” or it becomes normalized for a nation-state to pursue these interests, whether they fly counter to values

¹⁶⁹ el-Hassan, Hassan Afif, “Prospects for an Arab Renaissance,” *al-Ahram Weekly*, 5-11 May 2011.

¹⁷⁰ Mossad, Joseph, *Desiring Arabs*, 5.

or not. Therefore, though America is often criticized in the text for forsaking democracy and human rights, it is still understood that it is taking these actions in pursuit of strategic interests. Moreover, the Middle East and Egypt are a “strategic treasure” in the world that is to be struggled over, just as it has been during the colonial era, American neocolonial era, etc.

These representations of America structure the nature of Egyptian-American relations, what constitutes these ‘relations,’ and construct available courses of action for actors. In these representations of the world, ‘relations’ occur between governments. They are literally about state-to-state relations. What is internal to the nation-state, i.e. ‘America,’ is represented through the organs of the government and is therefore erased as part of the representation. Indeed, while depictions of Egypt are rich and multi-faceted, always distinguishing between the regime and the people, ‘America’ is rarely represented in this fashion. ‘America’ is distinguished as the Obama administration, or a more abstract ‘America’ or even ‘American-Zionism.’ Therefore, relations with ‘America’ occur through this official channel alone. This assumption restricts who has the ability to have what constitutes as ‘relations’ with ‘America,’ i.e., official government channels only (and subsequently restricts who in America has ‘relations’ with Egypt). These relations are not represented as encompassing interactions between civil societies, corporations, or other entities that transcend the boundaries of nation-states. In fact, it is often when ‘America’ is found outside these traditional official boundaries that it is represented as a sinister and interfering ‘foreign hand,’ which is trying to divide the Egyptian ‘self.’

It is not only the realist perception of the world that makes an appearance in

Egyptian discourse. In the process of critiquing America for violating its values comes the underlying agreement on what constitutes American values: freedom, democracy, human rights, etc. Additionally, these values are accepted by the discourse as universal truths that should be sought out and adhered to. Though ‘America’ may be violating its own rules as to what constitutes the world order, Egyptian discourse still agrees with American (particularly liberal) discourse on the make-up of that order.

Adoption of the ontology of the dominant discourse does not inherently eliminate any possibility for representations within this framework to alter power-relations or potential for action. In other words, it is not wholly necessary to throw off the “shackles” of the dominant discourse in order to resist. In some cases, the internalization of the dominant discourse is not fully complete and hybridization can occur, as was seen in the representation of the United States as a terrorist state. Reversing the relationship that is articulated in the discourse of ‘the war on terrorism,’ it becomes the ‘United States,’ who as a nation-state, not an illegal-combatant, is outside of the borders of the accepted world order and is not playing by the ‘rules.’ It is the murderer and criminal that does not reflect the values of democracy, and human rights. More over, it becomes the Egyptians or Arabs as a whole that are represented as espousing, and reflecting these values, particularly after the events of the Arab Spring. Though this reversal is still playing out within in same ontology, meanings and locations have shifted from their normalized locations, namely American monopoly over ‘democracy’ and its presumed leadership of the world order. The arrangement of signs also changes the arrangement of power, exhibiting a contestation and resistance of American discourse and power that is not always starkly oppositional and has the potential to slip past the holds of domination.

To conclude, this thesis has proceeded with the assumption that there is a relevant Egyptian side to discourse within the context of Egyptian-American relations that also contributes to the dynamics within the relations. It has demonstrated that like the discourse emanating from the United States, the discourse in Egypt also contains constructions of ‘self’ and ‘other,’ which also have varying implications for the power relations between United States and Egypt, in addition to implications for Egypt’s internal political struggles. Additionally, Egyptian discourse and its representations of ‘America’ also often intertwine with American dominant discourse, and much of it has operated from the same frameworks and ontology as the dominant American discourse. Yet, even so, there are changes across time and anomalies in the group that produce a different ordering of the world and the Egypt-American relationship. Articulations within the framework of the dominant discourse still produce different social realities and power relations that affect the relationship. Moreover, articulations within the same ontology are still capable of resistance, and at times even hybridization and transcendence.

The research within this thesis, as was established in the introduction, was directed entirely towards understanding Egyptian discourse and its impact on Egypt and Egyptians. While understanding and being aware of these discourses may be of interest to certain audiences in the United States, this thesis is neither about the United States nor a prescription for its foreign policy. Additionally, this thesis originally began with the ambition of further analyzing the enabling and constraining factors for action produced by the representations within Egyptian discourse. However, due to the scope and complexity of the project, this aspect of the discourse was only briefly touched upon. Further research could build upon the information developed within this thesis and

analyze the impact of these representations on Egyptian actors, such as their effects on the formulation of Egyptian foreign policy.

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