TRANSLATING JUSTICE:
BETWEEN AL-FARABI AND DERRIDA

Hiba Ghanem

(B.A., M.A.)

Ph.D. in Philosophy

Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion

Lancaster University

July 2015

ABSTRACT

Inspired by Derridean deconstruction, contemporary translation studies hold that translation is a process of transformation that is characterized by indeterminacy. However, little attention has been given to the political aspects of that transformation. By exploring this aspect, this thesis argues that translation is a transformation within sovereignty from a divine to a more secular model that is guided by justice. By offering a comparative reading of Derrida's and the medieval Turkish/Persian philosopher's, al-Farabi's, works on sovereignty and translation, it holds that the switch in the paradigms of sovereignty from a Derridean kingly cape to an al-Farabian *imam* implies a change in the dynamics of translating sovereignty that is aesthetic in nature.

The research starts by exploring the political and theological implications implicit in the translation of sovereignty as expounded in Derrida's 'Des Tours de Babel'. Adopting Derrida's image of the kingly cape turned into a wedding gown, it argues that the translation of sovereignty is an aesthetic shift from a divine-kingly model to a more secular one. The thesis, then, explores traces of this shift within al-Farabi's model of the Virtuous City where the weeds, dissenting citizens, contest the *imam*'s logocentric sovereignty in an affective and imaginative medium. Both models will be shown to highlight a reverse structure within the ceremonial aspect of power, which Agamben denotes as 'acclamation' or 'glory'. Acclamation's reverse role in the translation of sovereignty, the thesis argues, best figures in the political cartoons on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. These cartoons illustrate how contestation becomes a creative event of redefining sovereignty that is negotiated in terms of language and image. The Egyptian protestors demonstrate how language escapes the fatalism of its

role in mediating meaning to acquire the role of poetic mediation in linguistic play. In poetic mediation, the thesis argues, sovereignty is translated within a collectively-shared imaginative construct that a creative form of justice guides.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This thesis is entirely the work of the author and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude, though, to my parents whose affection and love has seen me through the downtimes and the peaks of writing this thesis. Without their faith in me, I simply could not have done it.

INTRODUCTION

> So let it be clear to you that the idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and *Imam* is but a single idea.
>
> Al-Farabi[1]
>
> The language of translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.
>
> Walter Benjamin[2]
>
> No doubt the cape and the folds protect the king against the cold or natural aggressions; but first above all, it is, like his scepter, the eminent visibility of the law.
>
> Jacques Derrida[3]

In 'Des Tours de Babel', Jacques Derrida borrows Walter Benjamin's metaphor of translation as a royal cape to show how translation remains 'separate' from the body of the original text. Derrida's focus on this state of separateness and difference, rather than equivalence, constitutes the main theme of research in contemporary translation studies. However, little attention has been given to the political implications of that shift where difference is marked by such terms as power, law and royalty. The fundamental role that power relations play in differentiating translation (cape) from the original (body) finds these power relations subjected to reassessment under the influence of the new *different* translation produced. This prospect of translational difference as a mechanism of power and law-making is what this thesis aims to investigate.

---

[1] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. by Mahdi, Muhsin (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 47 (#58).
[2] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), vol. I, p. 258.
[3] Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar, trans. by Joseph F. Graham (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 125–6.

This mechanism of power, the thesis will argue, is a process of transformation or difference-making that is influenced by context. The effects of context will be shown through comparing Derrida's deconstructive representation of western kinghood as cape with the eastern, Islamic notion of the king as *imam*. The earliest philosophical fashioning of the latter is attributed to the ninth century Turkish philosopher, Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Farabi (hereafter, al-Farabi). Al-Farabi is considered to be the father of Islamic political philosophy who is well-known for his attempt to marry the Platonic concept of kinghood with that of the prophet as Islamic *imam*, a legislator and supreme ruler.[4]

The thesis's comparative reading of translation as a transformation from kinghood into a western 'cape' and eastern '*imam*' aims to highlight the fundamental role that aesthetics plays in the creation of power. Translation, here, becomes a concern with artistic representation and semiotic creation of metaphors that aid in the establishment or contestation of power. To elucidate this point and show its relevance to contemporary thought, I will investigate the aesthetic media employed by the revolutionaries of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution to contest power. The study of the challenge to power in these media, such as that of political cartoons, will show how political contestation becomes a translation of the semiotic into the aesthetic. The semiotics used by the representatives of the Egyptian regime to establish power through emphasizing the signified dimension of every sign faces the unanimous voice of the people in their famous chant, '[T]he people want to topple the regime', a voice that evoked an aesthetic sense of emotional and affective unity. The aesthetic response of emotional unity, in turn, freezes the sign in its state as sign. The sign of

---

[4] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 138.

socially-constructed power, the Egyptian regime, becomes an image open to an aesthetic response, a chant in response to a poetic verse by the Tunisian poet al-Shabbi in his *Life's Will* (1933) that reads 'If, one day, the people want to live, / then fate will answer their call'.[5] In this sense, the semiotic field of the sign is translated into the aesthetic dimension of the sign as image and poetic chanting, a chanting that opens up the field of meaning through the imagination. The aesthetic and emotional aspect of that contestation will be shown to have 'brought a world into being', a world of reviving an age-old and dead theological debate on free will versus predestination.[6] The aesthetic revival of a world marked by this debate, the thesis argues, questions the notion of the political and paves a way for a politics beyond revolution and beyond contestation.

However, before proceeding to sketch the argument for my work, I would like to reassert that this thesis's focus is not on translation in its ordinary, mundane linguistic sense concerned with a source and target text. This thesis instead borrows from the field of 'cultural translation' that Anthony Pym in *Exploring Translation Theories* claims is concerned with 'translation without translations' where the concern is not with 'finite linguistic products' as texts, but much broader 'cultural processes'.[7] This 'concept of translation as a process more than as a product', Pym claims, 'enters as a model of how the voice can cross a border and continue, transformed'.[8] The voice that crosses the borders of the east/west divide and continues transformed is taken by this

---

[5] Elliott Colla, 'The People Want', *Middle East Report- The Art and Culture of the Arab Revolts*, 42 (2012) <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer263/people-want> [accessed 3 November 2014].

[6] Nicholas Davey, 'Hermeneutical Aesthetics and an Ontogeny of the Visual', in *The Handbook of Visual Culture* , ed. by Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (London, UK: Berg, 2012), p. 144.

[7] Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories* (London &New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 148.

[8] Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, p. 109.

thesis to be that of the people contesting political power, a contestation that assumes

religious and theological connotations. On the one hand, western political theology, as

in the work of Giorgio Agamben and Charles Taylor, narrates this in terms of the

interrelationship and the move from the religious to the secular. On the other, what

looks like a similar move that grapples with issues of religion/secularism in the

eastern context of the Egyptian Revolution will be shown to continue the voice of

contestation but equally transform and question the political relationship between

religion and secularism. Al-Farabi's works, which are believed by Massimo

Campanini (in 'Al-Farabi and the Foundation of Political Theology in Islam') to be

key forerunners of Islamic political theology, will inform my comparative reading in

this respect.[9]

As the theological, political, and aesthetic turn out to constitute the main cultural

levels of transformation in translation, a series of critical questions regarding the

relationship between these different levels emerges. What does it mean to speak of

politics as an act of translation? How can a translation of the semiotic into the

aesthetic redefine politics, a field whose sole concern so far has been on mechanisms

of power and governance? What is the relationship between the 'western' formulation

of politics and the 'eastern' one and what are the factors influencing the

transformation along these frontiers? How could this redefinition of translation as

transformation inform the political-theological debate today? And why does political

theology need to deal with the politics of translation in the first place?

---

[9] Massimo Campanini, 'Alfarabi and the Foundation of Political Theology in Islam',
in *Islam, The State, And Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns*,
ed. by Asma Afsaruddin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 39.

The Argument: Translating Politics and Politicizing Translation

In an attempt to answer the afore-mentioned questions, my argument will start by investigating the intersection of politics and translation through Derrida's 'Des Tours De Babel' in which he gives his deconstructive reading of Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'. My chapter adopts Derrida's metaphor of the 'kingly cape' of translation to show how the contestation of political power is a deconstruction that turns from the cosmic notion of the king as law or power represented by his cape to that of the 'wedding gown' that represents an excess dimension to politics, one aiming for justice.[10] Emphasis is put on the different levels of that transition that range from the divine to the secular in the game of power politics and from the material to the spiritual through image, sound, sign and symbol, in semiotic representative terms. This political-semiotic contestation of the kingly discourse of power is revisited in Chapter Two through the lens of al-Farabi's notion of contention employed by the 'weeds' of the Virtuous City, the citizens of the Virtuous City who refuse to adhere to the laws set by the law-giver, against its king.[11] That contention defines the medium of translation whereby rhetoric, a means employed by a king figure to establish logocentric power, is faced by activating a Derridean '*différance*' in the weeds' linguistic translation in terms of 'text'.[12] This 'active production of meaning' resonates with what Pym finds to be the basis for a view of translation as a process

[10] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[11] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, trans. by Fauzi N. Najjar (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), p. 53.
[12] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatari Chakravorty Spivak (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 65.

not a product, where 'all language use may be seen as a translation'.[13] Pym's

argument that translation is a process of transformation builds on Jakobson's claim, in

his article titled, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' (1959), that 'the meaning of

any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign' that the latter

relies on to formulate his theory on translation.[14] The weeds, thus, translate in

response to logocentric logic. By doing that, they define their identity in terms of

resistance to power. Within the local context of the Virtuous City, translation results

from the work of the imagination and desire that manifests in the weeds' contention of

and play on the images and symbols that the *imam* employs. The king as *imam*

employs symbols and mimetic similitudes to theoretical truths in order to convince the

weeds of the divine nature of these truths by which the Virtuous City operates. He

thus appeals to both logic and the imagination to maintain his rule as a sovereign.

However, the weeds invest in the imaginative faculty, through activating the

multiplication of images, in order to initiate the translation of the *imam*'s model of

sovereignty. Their translation of sovereignty assumes a creative aspect related to the

imaginary and affective construction of other city models. So, the imagination and the

affects become the tools for the translation of sovereignty through 'playing' on signs.

These contesting weeds entertain the possibility of forming other cities to distinguish

themselves from the model of the Virtuous City. They thus display the creative aspect

in the aesthetic play of signs. The creative originality of the method that the weeds

follow in their political contestation, in turn, assumes an aesthetic dimension that the

following chapter investigates.

---

[13] Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, pp. 148–150.
[14] Roman Jakobson, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 114.

The weeds' attempt to transgress power and law to reach justice in their deconstructive reading of the kingly rhetoric displays originality through the aesthetic medium. This creativity is reread in Chapter Three within the context of the Arab Spring, specifically the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, to show how aesthetics is the proper field to reflect translation as a creative form of political contestation. The aesthetic translation of sovereignty, I hold, best figures in satirical political cartoons. My interest in satire and political cartoons as a model to depict the aesthetic contestation within politics has two main reasons. For one, I take cartoons to be the model of play on words and images, the play on signs, which is employed for political ends through contesting established political power. Cartoons also illustrate the political mechanism of 'revers[ing] the traditionally accepted content of the symbol', which cartoonists employ to attack the system.[15] By reversing the symbol of power, the cartoons reflect an aesthetic mechanism inherent to the weeds' deconstruction of sovereignty. The aesthetic translation of sovereignty, I hold, needs the medium of image and language within the cartoon to reflect the dynamics of deconstruction.

By re-reading al-Farabi's model of political contestation as an aesthetic reversal, I hold that the weeds initiate what Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* calls a Derridean double reading of 'interpretation' and 'judgment'.[16] This double reading, for Critchley, sets the 'ellipsis into play'.[17] By ellipsis, I mean concepts that resist translation or the 'blind spots […] within the dominant interpretation'.[18] In aesthetic reversal, the weeds address justice through a double act of elliptical play on image and language that the political cartoons reflect.

---

[15] Charles Press, *The Political Cartoon* (London: Fairleigh University Press, 1981), p. 227.
[16] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992), p. 23.
[17] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 23.
[18] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 23.

This aesthetic reversal that the cartoons depict will be shown to play a significant role in the address to power that takes the form of what Agamben calls 'glory', or the 'ceremonial aspect of power'.[19] This ceremonial aspect of power reformulates the weeds' address to justice. In the cartoons, glory is aesthetically reversed; praise for the sovereign figure of power in the figure of a king is shown to be maintained even when popular sovereignty is liquefied by the introduction of social media.[20] The people end up acclaiming the means, as in Facebook and Twitter, in an act of 'reverse acclamation'. In reverse acclamation, the modern weeds de-glorify sovereignty, thus displaying power to be a 'void' or an 'empty throne', a throne that can never be filled.[21] The empty throne within translation, the chapter will argue, holds the promise of justice through the creative aesthetic and linguistic retake on power that it allows.

The creativity of the weeds' aesthetic translation of sovereignty will, then, be shown to be best reflected within the poetic medium.[22] The poetic voice, I argue, invests in language as a 'pure means'; language entertains the possibility of meaning without concern with achieving it.[23] This is what Agamben calls the 'inoperativ[ity]' of language which is best exemplified in the language of the poem.[24] That voice of inoperativity will be shown to qualify the weeds' address to justice as a yet-to-come state.

---

[19] Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, trans. by Lorenzo Chiesa and Mateo Mandarini (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 168.
[20] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 257.
[21] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 243.
[22] I use the term 'creative', here, to qualify the weeds' translation of sovereignty. The modern revolutionaries of the 2011 Egyptian revolution invest in the poetic use of language to challenge the regime. They thus assume a revolutionary role that is very similar to the medieval weeds. Moreover, their translation of sovereignty assumes a creative poetic aspect that questions the role of language as a medium of voicing political revolt, an argument that I further expand later on in this chapter.
[23] Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 88.
[24] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 86.

I will investigate the uniqueness of the poetic voice through the concept of the poetics of translation in both its western and eastern al-Farabian guises. The poetic, here, is taken to refer to translation as the 'voice [that] can cross a border and continue, transformed'.[25] In its western form, the poetic assumes Agamben's sense of the 'inoperativ[ity]' of language.[26] In that state of inoperative language, the poem, I argue, becomes a 'form, where all relation to what is other and finite—to what is true—has been suspended', as Yves Bonnefoy in 'Translating Poetry' claims.[27] By breaking off any relation with truth, the poem becomes a 'spiritual statement' that gains its value from being a reflection of 'shared existence'.[28] The inoperative language that manifests in the poetic moments of shared existence, in turn, loses interest in truth and turns to the realm of the imagination.

The poem, I argue, becomes an expression of a common imaginary construct that the weeds share and that is closely linked to justice. This common imaginary construct approximates Charles Taylor's definition of the 'social imaginary' as the 'common understanding which makes possible common practices'.[29] So, the poetics of translation within the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is concerned with social common practices that reinforce a contestation against power. It does so by reflecting a common understanding of justice. The critical issue is the commonality, the shared existence, which reflects the understandings through the practices. This is what I hold to take place in the people's chanting of the poetic verse, 'The people want to topple the regime', that coupled with the common marching in Egypt and other Arab Spring

---

[25] Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, p. 109.
[26] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 86.
[27] Yves Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 187–8.
[28] Bonnefoy, 'Translating Poetry', p. 187.
[29] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 171–2.

countries. The common chanting and marching and the common reinforcement of that particular verse of poetry, displays a common understanding related to justice. The chant asks for toppling the regime but does not formulate a creed or a mission statement for the future state of justice as the French revolution, for example, did. This political state of justice or messianic hope in a better future is of no precise features. The people do not know what lies beyond toppling the regime, except that it should be a better state, a state where justice could be attained.

The messianic hope, in turn, redefines the perimeters of eastern political theology within an imaginative poetic medium. The protestors reinforce the commonality of the experience through action, marching for justice as a cause and chanting 'The people want the fall of the regime'. In their common action, they subject al-Shabbi's poetic construction of the relationship between the human will and fate to redefinition. Historically speaking, the poem written in 1933 invested in the appeal to the people's will to resist French colonial rule, a rule that was justified as a deterministic form of fate that should not be resisted.[30] The relationship between political power, fate and will that the poem constructs, I argue, is a revival and a revisionist reading of an age-old Islamic theological creed of *Qadarism*. Also considered a 'heresy', *Qadarism* claimed the primacy of free will over predestination as a political ideology. In their common chant, the people echo this *qadarite* creed by aligning their common will with fate as evident in the second verse of the poem that reads as 'If people want life/ then fate (*qadar*) will answer their call'. Historically, *Qadarites* adopted a similar assertion that 'power was worthless as long as one did not prove worthy of it', an

---

[30] Khadija El Alaoui, 'Chanting Tahreer and Compassion: People as Poetry', *Tensions Journal*, Fall/Winter 2011, pp. 13–4
<http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/khadijaelalaouiarticle.pdf> [accessed 27 December 2014].

assertion which was linked to the 'heresy of free will'.[31] This heresy was employed to protest the Ummayads' claim that 'their governmental power had been a gift of God, a *rizq*, predetermined and irreversible'.[32] By reviving this politically-charged theological creed in a poetic medium, the protestors seem to redefine the perimeters of that creed to suit the modern context of the revolution.

In the modern retake on this creed, I argue, the protestors shed light on a unique linguistic dimension to this doctrine whose early traces could be found in al-Farabi's writings. An affiliate of *Qadarism*, al-Farabi defines future possibility (in his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*) in terms of the *qadarite* creed on choice and free will, a belief that some deny under the effect of 'legislation and indoctrination'.[33] He displays his affinities with this creed through language, specifically through the play he performs on the word, *qaddara*. Usually reserved for talk regarding religious fate, *qaddara* is employed by al-Farabi to refer to men making decisions, as Zimmerman remarks.[34] Linguistic play becomes an al-Farabian model of what I call, *linguistic qadarism,* a 'transformed' variant of Agamben's inoperativity. In the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the *qadarite* chant heralds in a unique modern revision of an al-Farabian *linguistic qadarism* through the political terms that the protestors struggle with in order to define the political scene during the revolution. Political terms, such as *dawla madaniyya* or 'civil state', are employed by the protestors despite the ambiguity and, sometimes, contradictory meanings they

---

[31] Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 135.
[32] Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, p. 135.
[33] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, trans. by F.W. Zimmermann (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 76–7.
[34] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, pp. cxvii–cxviii.

evoke.[35] By investing in linguistic creation and revision, the protestors illustrate their version of *linguistic qadarism*. In linguistic *qadarism,* language is no longer informative or communicative. Words escape the fatalism or *jabariyya* of already established meanings in order for language to return to a stage of inception which allows for all possibilities and forms of creative use.

However, it must be mentioned here that al-Farabi does not seem to apply this *qadarite* vision, which I claim to inspire modern protestors, in his political doctrines. Actually, his political philosophy reads more like a *Jabarite* or pre-destinarian cosmic creed on a God-ordained king who is a prophet and a philosopher and who uses rhetoric to establish ruler-ship. Al-Farabi does allow for contestation within his model of the Virtuous City, but this contestation might lead to war where the other is to be controlled or exterminated. However, another 'promising' consequence of contestation is exclusion from the Virtuous City model where the excluded entertain the possibility of constructing other city models. This construction of alternate city models, which starts with contestation within the Virtuous City, shows that the virtue that al-Farabi is speaking about is a political virtue of common choice. If the construction of a functioning city is a state of excellence, that state of excellence is given to the weeds of the Virtuous City so that they can construct a model of their own, regardless of their personal moral values. When political choice corresponds to common moral values, whether virtuous ones or not, the people assume a political identity that warrants a city model of choice, a city that may not survive the after-life, but nevertheless a functioning city.

---

[35] Mohammed Ajam, 'The Fashion of Political Terms in Egypt: A Continuous Display', *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2012 <http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=684979&issueno=12273#.V HmoCDGsVcz> [accessed 12 November 2014].

So, contestation, within the 2011 Egyptian revolution, construes a political identity through the aesthetics of the common voice that invests in *linguistic qadarism*. The people thus play the role of weeds within the revolution only to be able to assume another role related to linguistic creation. The characteristics of the role that would allow and justify the weeds' resort to *linguistic qadarism* could be found in al-Farabi's description of any nation's early development of language. In its early stages, a nation needs a category of citizens, called the 'oral transmitters of poems', who will be responsible for developing the nation's expressions and utterances.[36] These oral transmitters of poems are described by al-Farabi as a nation's first wise men who fashion a language for a nation by reflecting and correcting a nation's defective utterances as well as contriving 'uncommon expressions' to refer to unprecedented coincidences.[37] As oral transmitters, the modern weeds are concerned not with constructing a city model of choice as much as with carrying the function of linguistically building a nation from scratch. Their project, which borders on these two roles, seeks to redefine power through poetic commonality.

Their version of translation that borrows from Pym's view of cultural translation, as I previously mentioned, now borrows from the field of translation sociology. The modern weeds illustrate how translation is related to the 'formation of power relations', and thus to redefining power as a whole.[38] This latter strand of translation is best defined in Callon and Latour's 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macrostructure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So' (1981). Callon

---

[36] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, ed. by Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar el-Mashreq, 1969) in *Leneshmidt Translations Resource Library* <http://www.leneshmidt-translations.com/alfarabi_book_of_letters_english/index.htm..> [accessed 4 June 2014] (§130).

[37] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §130.

[38] Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, p. 156.

and Latour cite Hobbes's social contract as a 'specific instance' of translation.[39] Although Hobbes's social contract is concerned with giving power to the representative, Callon and Latour rewrite that contract as an act of social translation where an 'actor or force' becomes the 'spirit and spokesman' who translates the other actors into 'a single will'.[40] Within the context of the Egyptian revolution, the modern weeds as oral transmitters of poems carry out this social translation in a unique poetic form. Their concern is not with the 'who' that represents but with the voice of aspiration or will, the poetic medium of representation. The common chanting of the same poetic verse assumes the role of representing the people. As social power or public sovereignty is given over to the aesthetic medium, the latter comes to indicate what Callon and Latour call a 'society's very beginning'.[41] In sociological terms, poetic representation initiates the process of building a society. In al-Farabian terms, poetic chanting by oral transmitters linguistically rewrites a nation from scratch. In this poetic rewriting, power does not refer to the authority of the sovereign; instead, power is what Agamben calls a void or empty throne that is translated via *linguistic qadarism* with its implicit sense of affective or emotional commonality.

Conclusion

In totality, then, this thesis's focus on the role of aesthetics in the translation of sovereignty represents an invitation to reconsider the definition of politics. Politics apparently needs aesthetics if justice is to be imagined as a possibility. While semiotics reinforces the political sense of law, aesthetics, no longer an adornment

---

[39] Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macrostructure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So', in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologists*, ed. by K Knorr-Cetina and A V Cicourel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 279.

[40] Callon and Latour, 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan', p. 279.

[41] Callon and Latour, 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan', p. 279.

within politics, translates justice in the transformation of terms and significance. Law may employ language and semiotics to establish power and control, but justice as an imagined state can only translate itself through the language of the imagination which inoperative language reflects. In that aesthetic translation, questions of religion and political theology prove to be hugely relevant.

This deconstructive reading of translation that my thesis adopts could not have been formulated without the great aid of Benjamin's, Derrida's, Critchley's and Taylor's works on this topic. I am equally indebted to Agamben's writings for providing the political theological framework for my argument. My thesis simply builds up on this rich tradition to offer a comparative reading within the Eastern context that is guided by al-Farabi's rich philosophical and political works. This comparative reading of the politics of translation, it will be argued, can no longer be formulated in strictly political terms, such as resistance, subordination, or even revolution.[42] Translation, instead, is taken to highlight the aesthetic element fundamental to each of these political processes and to the more complicated, yet relevant, political concern with the religious and secular forms of sovereignty. Translation, here, indicates the aesthetic contestation that takes place within the political; political debates on the religious and the secular turn out to fundamentally be a domain of the aesthetic. So, my focus in this comparative reading is not so much on highlighting similarities or even differences in theological and political arguments

---

[42] The concern with the politics of translation originates from postcolonial studies and its interest in translation as central to 'the revolutionary moment'. For example, Maria Tymoczko (in 'Translation, Resistance, Activism: An Overview', in *Translation, Resistance, Activism,* ed. by Maria Tymoczko (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), p.1) argues that colonizers used translation as a tool to subordinate groups. In turn, these colonized groups employed 'translational resistance' in order to resist their colonizers. Translation is thus taken to be a fundamental feature of political contestation.

on secularization in different contexts as on establishing the relevance that political theology and the politics of translation bear to eastern political debate, a debate that is still in search for a way to transcend the state of revolution. To establish that relevance, my comparative reading will be structured by the following set of basic questions that need to be addressed anew if a politics beyond the revolution is to be formulated:

- What role does a deconstructive approach to translation play in redefining the notion of sovereignty within the context of the Arab Spring? What is sovereignty and what is power? Does politics have a uniform definition across different contexts and if this is not the case, how can we understand power? What does aesthetics have that can contribute to this redefinition of politics, sovereignty and power? And if this redefinition, as argued, is relevant to context, when and where does it become pertinent to political debate?

- How does a reading of translation as an artistic contestation within politics inform our understanding of power and justice? What new symbolic connotations would such concepts as violence, law, and justice acquire in this context?

- How does theology relate to the politics of translation? How can old Islamic theological debates, on free will vs. predestination, or *qadarite* vs *jabarite* ideology, inform our understanding of what is happening today in the 'eastern' political field? And perhaps, most importantly, why do we need to return to these age-old debates in the first place?[43]

---

[43] Although the plausibility of employing medieval Islamic theology to throw light on contemporary debates in Egyptian society is debatable, this approach, I will show, helps throw light on the shifting dynamics within sovereignty. This constitutes the Egyptian revolution's most important contribution to the field of politics.

-And, finally, if such terms as the secular and the religious could be reinterpreted in aesthetic terms, how would that reinterpretation affect intercultural understanding of the mechanisms of establishing power and imagining justice?

These questions, though very basic, will be the subject to which this thesis addresses itself. My intention is not to ambitiously formulate a comprehensive answer that would resolve and explain political conflict; instead, my aim is to modestly address strife in terms of a politics of translation that would emphasize the overlooked aesthetic aspects of that conflict. Perhaps establishing such a translation continuum within the political that transcends cultural divides in semiotic, religious, and aesthetic terms would enable us to better understand the undercurrents of what might seem like a 'clash' in cultural dialogue on political matters.[44] Such a hopeful research scope cannot but recognize that it will be constantly discomforted with the skepticism that such a take on the politics of translation could ever really help in overcoming political conflict. However, for the sake of this research project, I would certainly opt to maintain this hope in order to explore the possibilities and potentialities that a translation of such an outlook can have.

---

[44] Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (1993), 22–49 (p. 22).

CHAPTER 1

TRANSLATING POLITICS

> The language of translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.
>
> Benjamin[1]
>
> More or less strictly, the cape weds the body of the king, but as for what comes to pass under the cape, it is difficult to separate the king from the royal couple. This is the one, this couple of spouses (the body of the king and his gown, the tenor and the tongue, the king and the queen) that lays down the law and guarantees every contract from this first contract. This is why I thought of a wedding gown.
>
> Derrida[2]

Introduction

In 'The Task of the Translator' (in *Angelus Novus*, 1920-1926), Walter Benjamin likens the language of translation to an 'overpowering and alien' royal cape that envelops the content of the original text. It is a significant – and until now almost entirely neglected – fact that Benjamin's famous metaphor for translation is drawn from the political arena: the body of the sovereign. One of the very few commentators to remark upon this metaphor and its political implications is Jacques Derrida in his essay 'Des Tours de Babel' (1980). However, Derrida extends and transforms the metaphor by turning the cape into a wedding gown enveloping a royal couple. Derrida's wedding gown highlights the contractual nature, the wedding, of the joint between the original and the translation, what he calls a royal couple. By employing

---

[1] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 258.
[2] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.

the same image, Benjamin and Derrida highlight the state of the royal or kingly in the relationship between this original and its translation.

It is this intriguing moment in the relationship between translation and politics – where translation 'itself' seems to be originally political and politics a kind of translation – that this opening chapter will explore. This association of the cape-gown in the Benjamin-Derrida model of translation invokes a whole series of questions that this chapter will address in order to structure its argument. What are the political and religious implications of portraying translation as a royal cape? What does the political and religious add to the semiotic nature of translation concerned with signs and words? Why does Derrida choose to rewrite that cape as a wedding gown, and does this move hold any other political and religious implications for translation?

To answer these questions, this chapter will start by investigating the political implications in the cape image. The key text that will frame my discussion of the political aspects of royalty will be Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies* (1957). Kantorowicz explains the conception of kinghood in the Middle Ages in terms of its political and religious or theological aspects where the King assumes two bodies, one being the organic one that he uses to establish political power while the other is the religious one where royal rule survives the physical death of the body. The latter is what French political thought, especially the work of Pierre Gregoire, associates with 'regalia', the royal accessories of robe, scepter and crown, that display the 'visibility of God'.[3] Kantorowicz claims that the accessorial guise of royalty is a later illustration of what started as 'Christ-centered kingship', perhaps best exemplified in the work of

---

[3] Ernest H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 422–3.

the Norman Anonymous.[4] The Norman pamphleteer argues that there is a '*personae mixtae* (spiritual and secular) and *persona geminatae* (human by nature and divine by grace)' in the figure of every king.[5] The association of the spiritual with the secular on the one hand, and the human with the divine on the other, are united in this figure of the king. The king assumes secular-political and spiritually religious natures. The religious and political natures are also combined with an emphasis on the nature of the king as a human being whom only grace, 'consecration', can make divine.[6] The king, in this way, becomes a figure of many politically religious layers, the spiritual, secular, human and divine, which I will read as embodied in Benjamin's sense of the cape's ample folds.

The chapter's investigation of the multiplicity of the politically religious folds of the kingly cape will be carried out in parallel with an exploration of the aesthetic and semiotic aspects of the cape of translation. The foundational semiotic element to start with is Benjamin's notion of the word, the smallest unit of translation, which assumes the image of an 'arcade'.[7] The word's aesthetic dimension in the image will be shown to switch to that of sound as translation comes to stand for an 'echo' of the original.[8] Influenced by the works of the German romantics, such as Novalis, Benjamin uses aesthetic vocabulary to communicate his understanding of translation, thus, rendering translation an aesthetic field defined by the image and sound. Benjamin's socialist-romantic work is, in turn, read by Derrida in post-structuralist semiotic terms concerned with signs, expressions and symbols. Derrida's concern is with a 'symbolic complementarity' that connects the language of the original to that of the translation

[4] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 42.
[5] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 59.
[6] Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, p. 49.
[7] Benjamin, vol. I, 260.
[8] Benjamin, vol. I, 258.

and marks the 'being-language of the language'.[9] Translation is a concern with symbolic complementation, a reaching across between languages in symbolic terms, a state that characterizes language for what it is. This Derridean reading of translation supplies the semiotic reformulation of the cape's folds that Benjamin presents in romantically aesthetic terms.

However, Derrida's contribution to Benjamin's aesthetic notion of translation is not a strictly semiotic one as he also adds a religious, Jewish, influence. Derrida's religious input is perhaps best summarized in his claim that translation is a 'Babelian event', the well-known religious event marked by the deconstruction of pure language into multiple languages.[10] Under this influence of the religious, the semiotic-aesthetic cape folds will be shown to rework the politically theological notion of the cape as one embodying the king's two bodies to one of a royal couple enveloped with a wedding gown. Derrida's 'translation' becomes a religious event where the 'self-relation of the sacred body' is described as 'translat[ing] itself of itself'.[11] Being a royal cape, translation becomes the process through which the sacred body 'translates itself of itself' to become a wedding gown.

Finally, this move from the politically religious notion of the cape to the contractual notion of the wedding gown in the translation of the sacred body, I will argue, also marks a move from the religious to the secular as Charles Taylor has explained it in *The Secular Age* (2007). For Taylor, the conception of kinghood in the Middle Ages, which was highlighted by Kantorowicz, was a cosmic understanding that kinghood or royalty is an embodiment of a Chain of Being as a 'metaphysical

---

[9] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 131.
[10] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 131.
[11] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 133.

order' or 'law' that organizes society.[12] This, however, gave way to secularism, first

initiated by the theory of the contract that makes law and justice subject to negotiation

among parties carrying out this contract. This continuum between the divine and

secular in political and religious terms that Taylor and Kantorowicz advocate in their

versions of political theology is what I will show to figure in the translation of the

cape into a wedding gown. So, in this chapter, my argument will be that translation as

a cape-gown, indeed, holds political and theological implications that negotiate the

divine and secular in a complex relationship between semiotics, the field of signs and

symbols, and the aesthetics of sound and image.

1.1   The Fold of Image-Word as Law

I begin my discussion by comparing the aesthetic and political implications

inherent in Benjamin's smallest unit of translation, the word, and Derrida's

reformulation of that into a concern with a 'choice' of words, what he calls the 'form

of linguistic expression'.[13] In this comparison, I focus on the aesthetic dimension of

the 'arcade' metaphor to which the word is compared.[14] The aesthetic, I argue, plays a

significant role in the politics of translation that is developed by both Benjamin and

Derrida in their respective works.

For Benjamin, a 'real translation' is concerned with the literalness of words, a

literalness that is compared to an arcade.[15] A real translation must be 'transparent',

and this can only be achieved through the 'literal rendering of the syntax which

---

[12] Taylor, *The Secular Age*, p. 192.

[13] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 127.

[14] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 260.

[15] Benjamin's concern with literalness is not a concern with fidelity to the original text. Instead, translating words, for Benjamin, is concerned with form, not meaning. Through the literal rendering of syntax, words become the tool of transparency. Words allow for a transparent illustration of linguistic complementation, which characterizes the expressionless word or pure language.

proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator'.[16] This literalness of the word that distinguishes a transparent, real translation is further likened to an arcade. In one definition, an arcade is an 'arched covered passageway or avenue'.[17] Literalness, here, assumes an aesthetic dimension of the circular arch and linear passageway. This aesthetic dimension of the circular and straight is also present in another of Benjamin's 'translation' images: the tangent touching a circle.[18] For Benjamin, the tangent of translation 'touch[es]' a circle, signifying the original work that is being translated, at 'the infinitely small point of the sense'.[19] This small point of the sense acquires the same aesthetic dimensions as those of the arcade, because it is the point that joins a straight tangent to a circular figure, thus reinforcing the dual aspect of its constitution or build-up. The straight tangent of translation, or the passageway, is taken to be in contact with the circle at one point of the sense that the word has in its literalness. This point, then, retakes the form of the arcade by borrowing characteristics from both the 'circular' original and the 'linear' translation. The word, or point, is significant for the image-quality that is evoked by the reference to circularity and linearity; these are reflective of more complicated linguistic and political processes. The word, here, becomes an arcade constructed by the fidelity to the original, circularity, and the freedom of translation, linearity. In this composite construction, the word constructs an arcade of literalness, an arcade that allows for pure language to shine through.

---

[16] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 260.

[17] *Merriam-Webster*.com, 2012 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arcade> [accessed 4 January 2012], s.v. arcade.

[18] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 261.

[19] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 261.

Benjamin's focus on the word as the element of the translator is reformulated by Derrida into a 'choice of words' displayed in the 'form of linguistic expression'.[20] The German romantic influence evident in Benjamin's aesthetic construction of the circular-linear word finds a poststructuralist reverberation in Derrida's form of linguistic expression. The form of expression acquires characteristics of the arcade, the chosen words, through which it displays itself. This acquisition is displayed in the character of originality that distinguishes a translation. For Derrida, expression marks the margin of originality in the contribution of the translator, where the original form acquires the aesthetic, circular-linear, aspect of the literal words with which it aspires to write. It seems that translators strive to write in words as arcades of literalness. Originality marks their aesthetic attempt to construct the arcade in their expressions.

As an aesthetic construction, these arcade words display originality in their political implications that problematize the relationship between aesthetics and politics within a translation. The choice of words, for Derrida, plays a significant role in the 'foundation of law'.[21] By law, Derrida means the authority given to the original that demands that it be translated. He holds that this 'law first establishes itself' as a 'demand in the strong sense, a requirement that delegates, mandates, prescribes, assigns'.[22] The law of demand builds on an inherent distinction between an original work and its translation. To explain this law, Derrida refers to a 'system of oppositions', the 'polarity expression/expressed, signifier/signified, form/substance', which defines classical Western metaphysics.[23] This system of opposition, then, infiltrates into the distinction original/translation that allows for the 'acknowledgement of some originality in the translation' through the choice of

---

[20] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 127.
[21] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 127.
[22] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 116.
[23] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 127.

words.[24] The choice of words becomes a manifestation of the oppositions within classical metaphysics that justifies and gives authority to the law. The margin of originality, established by the choice of words, builds on that system of oppositions in order to found the law.

This law, which is enacted by the form of expression, is then influenced by the aesthetic dimension of the circular and linear arcade. Both Benjamin and Derrida highlight the fact that any law-making, coming up with a new law, also involves a sense of law-preservation, preserving the non-relenting need for law. Derrida argues in the 'Force of Law' (1990) that 'the foundation or positing of law' must 'envelop' the 'preservation of law and cannot break with it'.[25] The new law could be a reaction to the insufficiencies of an old law and thus a modification that shows that there is always a need, a demand, for law in general. Law-making and law-preservation, I argue, are the political reformulation of the aesthetics of circularity and linearity. In aesthetic-semiotic terms, the original demands a new form of expression in a constant, linear, state of law making, within translation. However, that state of law-making that translation depicts also inscribes a circularity of law-preservation within the original. By embedding one aspect of the law in another, Derrida draws attention to the aesthetic aspect of circularity and linearity that plays into the formulation of the law as a demand for translation.

This state of embedding within the law, in turn, holds a major political implication for the semiotic-aesthetic combination of circularity and linearity: violence. The aesthetic-semiotic dimension of translation is not only an expression of the political but a carrying out of its inherent violence. In 'Force of Law', Derrida claims that this

---

[24] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 127.
[25] Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 272.

fusion of one violence in the other is 'fundamental violence' that 'calls for the repetition of itself and founds what ought to be preserved, preservable, promised to heritage and to tradition, to partaking'.[26] This is what he defines as 'iterability' or a violence that 'inscribes the possibility of repetition at the heart of the originary'.[27] In terms of translation, traces of this sense of iterability that 'inscribes preservation in the essential structure of foundation' could be found in the law of demand that an original piece of work makes and that the form of expression shows.[28] On the semiotic level, every word, in aesthetic terms, linearly substitutes another word while circularly preserving enough sense from the original. In preservation, the semiotic-aesthetic assumes a political guise of iterability, a repetition, which is violent in nature. Translation, then, displays its political character in the tension between the linear act of originality and the circular act of preservation, a tension characterized as political iterability.

To sum up, translations employ the semiotic-aesthetic dimension of the arcade of literalness of the word for word through political iterablity to preserve enough sense from the original while replacing it with a new form of expression. In turn, this form of expression in any translation enacts a violent embedding of law-preservation, the circularity of the original, in law-making, the linearity of translation. The integration of circularity and linearity is what I call the dimension of the 'image-word', the arcade, in any piece of translation. This aesthetic integration lays manifest the violent iterability within the law and thus the general aesthetic basis of the political, a basis that I will proceed to further build on and explore.

---

[26] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 272.
[27] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 272.
[28] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 278.

1.2　The Fold of the Sound-Name as Law-Justice

We have seen in the previous section how the arcade of literalness in the word enacts a law of demand through violent iterability. In literality, a translation aesthetically preserves enough of the sense from the original while allowing variation to make new laws in each new word within translation. However, the image-word as law in the Benjamin-Derrida model is not the only concern of translation. Benjamin gives the example of Hölderlin's translations to make the point that the sense in the original work is 'touched by language' as an 'aeolian harp' is touched by the 'wind'.[29] Here, the dimension of the image acquires a new dimension, that of the sound. The result of this new aesthetic modification figures in Benjamin's description of the 'reverberation', or the echo-like quality that contributes to the harmony of the languages among the original and its many translations.[30] Through the echo, translation becomes a concern with sound in its aim to harmonize the ways of meaning, of making sense, between the original and its translation. Sense that was enacted in the arcade of the literal word, as the previous section has shown, acquires a new aesthetic guise of the sound. The sound, I argue, assumes political significance closely linked with its aesthetic aspect.

This reference to sound is especially evident in another article that Benjamin wrote under the title 'Antitheses Concerning Word and Name'. In this article, Benjamin associates sound with the name or the 'Adamite spirit of language'.[31] He claims that the 'name is the translation of the mute into sound and of the nameless

---

[29] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 262.
[30] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 258.
[31] Walter Benjamin, 'Antithesis Concerning Word and Name', in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), vol. II, p. 718.

into the name'.[32] The name aesthetically marks the sound phase that translates the

muteness of nature, described as the 'residue' of the 'creative word of God'.[33] The

name, in this sense, acquires a quasi-religious role as it gives sound to the residue of

the word of God through the human word. The quasi-religious residue is further

qualified as that of 'magic'.[34] Standing for the 'communication of matter in its magic

community', the sound-name complements the creative word of God.[35] The sound-

name becomes a manifestation of the inherent communication of matter. This

communication of matter which is translated within the name, in turn, relates back to

the word where the former is said to dwell in the latter. Benjamin argues that the

name 'no longer lives in [the human word] intact'.[36] Despite the quotation's

highlighting of the non-intact status of the name in the word, the main point is that the

name takes residence in the human word. It follows that the sound characteristic of

the name takes residence in the image word within translation.

The dimension of the sound in the name that resides in the form of the word-

arcade is rewritten in Derrida's terms as an 'accord of tongues' that a translation

allows.[37] The sound of language in the name imbues the arcade of the word with a

harmonious symphony of the languages in translation. Benjamin's sound assumes a

symphonious sense of accord in Derrida's reformulation. This harmony among

languages, in turn, is said to 'let the pure language, and the being language of the

language, resonate, announcing it rather than presenting it'.[38] Hence, the accord of

languages is possible through the sound, the announcing in the name, which allows

[32] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[33] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[34] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[35] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[36] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[37] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 131.
[38] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 131.

for pure language, or the being-language of language to resonate and announce itself. Pure language favors the medium of the sound to that of the image to announce itself through a harmony among languages in translation.

This semiotic-aesthetic aspect of translation, in turn, becomes affected by the political and law-related aspects of the word-image. Taken to indicate law in violent iterability, the image-word invests in the sound-name to announce pure language or the being-language of language. The motif of harmony that reconciles languages within translation plays into the political field through justice. The extra political dimension that reworks the significance of Benjamin's pure language in Derridean terms is found in the following quotation: 'law claims to exercise itself in the name of justice' and 'justice demands for itself that it be established in the name of a law'.[39] Name becomes the intermediary status between justice and law where justice indicates the extra political dimension that orients the annunciation of pure language.[40] Law claims that it announces justice, just as justice demands that it be announced in the law. This continuity between law and justice, I claim, is what the sound-name allows, through the announcement of pure language. The harmonious concern of all languages, it seems, is to establish a political link between justice and law through translation.

The political nature of translation, then, is affected by the link between the image-word and the sound-name, which is marked by a shift from violent law-making to establishing continuity between law and justice through linguistic harmony. In political terms, that continuity is established by Derrida through the notion of the demand within the law. That demand, being an inherent aspect of law, also becomes

[39] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 251.
[40] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 132.

that of justice that asks that it be translated in law via the name that announces

linguistic harmony. However, despite this continuity, translation presents what seems

like a juxtaposition of violence (political) with accord (linguistic) in the semiotic-

aesthetic terms of word-image and sound-name. The stage upon which this

juxtaposition occurs is the linguistic sign to which I will turn my attention in the

following section.

1.3   The Fold of the Sign as Holy Intentions

So far, I have argued that translation uses the arcade of the word to enact a law as

violent demand. This demand, in turn, is expressed by the name, the dimension of the

sound that links law to justice. By having the sound express the law in the written

word, a translation thus announces pure language, the demands of justice in the

accord of languages. As violence and accord meet in conflict, the focus shifts to a new

semiotic level of aesthetic dimensions, that of the sign.

The political friction within translation is enacted in the semiotic guise of the 'sign

character of the word' that is said to damage the 'character of the name'.[41] For

Benjamin, the foundation of the name that announces pure language is in the

communication of matter. This communication is claimed to 'take place through

similarity' or mimesis.[42] Mimesis, or similarity, here, is taken to indicate the aesthetic

reworking of image and sound discussed before. This aesthetic level is enacted

through the guise of a semiotic element that allows for the 'determinate empirical

(albeit nonsensuous) similarity', the mimesis, to 'appear fleetingly in' the 'sign

character of the word'.[43] The sign is the semiotic level of the word that allows for

similarity to appear. This similarity is further explained by Benjamin to be a 'fleeting

---

[41] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 718.
[42] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[43] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 718.

appearance of a similarity in sound [that] corresponds to the fleeting appearance of a similarity in the object'.[44] The word, here, assumes the guise of a sign whose concern is with the sound, the name, and the object connected in a fleeting appearance of similarity. However, Benjamin adds that the 'character of the name is damaged by that of the sign'.[45] Sign damages the name-sound as it hijacks the name from its 'immanent magic' and makes it a tool of communication of matter, the sound of objects.[46]

Here, the influence of the German romantics, especially Novalis, on Benjamin's thought appears clearly as the sign, in its appearance of similarity, replaces the aesthetic concern with image and song or sound. In 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen'(1798), Novalis claims that 'the sign is neither a beautiful image nor a song'.[47] While Novalis here is referring to the sign as 'the visible form of a mystical idea' as Stoljar, the translator and editor of *Novalis: Philosophical Writings* claims, his quotation highlights the fact that representations of mystical ideas, signs, do not stand for the image, the word, nor sound, the song that is established through the name.[48] This is why Benjamin felt the need to reformulate the sign to involve the fleeting appearance of similarity as an entity distinct from the name as sound and the word as image, even if it characterizes the latter.

As the aesthetic aspect of translation becomes that of a fleeting similarity that replaces the image-sound through the semiotic element of the sign, it extends its effects to the pure language that announces itself in the name. In this process, it

---

[44] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 718.
[45] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 718.
[46] Benjamin, vol. II, p. 717.
[47] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', in *Novalis Philosophical Writings*, ed. & trans. by Margaret Mahony Staljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 87 (#15).
[48] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 176 (#8).

acquires a linguistically religious significance. Pure language, for Benjamin, is the target of linguistic harmony that Derrida rewrites as the 'holy growth of languages'.[49] This being language of language is expressed through 'modes of intention', ways of meaning, which differentiate each language from another but also join them in 'linguistic supplementarity'.[50] Languages supplement one another and their supplementation is what characterizes the being of language. However, instead of announcing a pure language as something 'transcendent' to language, they announce a 'messianic end'.[51] Translations work through linguistic supplementation defined by the experience of a 'remote' sense of distance from the sacred text as a state of pure 'transferability' or 'to-be translated'.[52] The messianic end, for Derrida, is not a definite historical or religious end as much as a source of tension in the relationship between languages in translation. This tension is created as languages supplement each other with a hopeless aim of reaching the state of the sacred text where 'meaning and literality are no longer discernible'.[53] In translation, languages supplement one another, and it is this sense of distance from a messianic end that maintains their constant state of the 'to-be-translated'. So, the linguistically religious sense of the messianic end promised by intentions that supplement one another is established by the semiotic-aesthetic dimensions of similarity within the sign.

In turn, the sign employs its linguistic-religious character to redefine the politics of law-justice discussed earlier. As sound becomes a song of harmony that displays the fleeting similarity between languages, the demand that law and justice make for each other is affected by that song. Law and justice demand in intentions

---

[49] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 131.
[50] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 131.
[51] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', pp. 131–2.
[52] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 132.
[53] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 132.

supplementing one another, in mimesis, to form 'justice as law'.[54] Law imitates justice through the violent iterability that circularly preserves yet linearly founds the law of demand. The political, in this sense, again displays its inherently aesthetic-semiotic nature through the linguistic aspect of translation.

So, translation starts with the image-word that employs the inherent sound-name to announce a mutual state of demand between law and justice. However, its announcement is disrupted by the sign character of the word that inscribes similarity into the field of the political. The sign also renders translation a linguistic concern with modes of intention with a quasi-religious pronouncement, the messianic end. The mimetic sign thus links linguistic religiosity with the aesthetic nature of the political. However, this link that the sign establishes is characterized by the sign's fleetingness. The transitory state of the sign, here, entails the likelihood that it is a stage preceding another, an issue that the following section will explore.

1.4   The Sovereign King as Symbol

So far, we have seen how the religious and linguistic guises that translation assumes in Benjamin's and Derrida's works reformulate the aesthetic-semiotic concern with image-word as law and the sound-name as law-justice. The reformulation defines the political as a sense of demand that links the word and name, or the law and justice, through similarity in the sign translated in modes of intentions supplementing one another and aiming for a messianic end. However, this sense of similarity is described as fleeting. This implies that the sign is a transitory stage, after which similarity through intentions disintegrates, leaving room for a 'sign by means of which no similarity can appear'.[55] In 'Antithesis Concerning Word and Name',

---

[54] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 233.
[55] Benjamin, vol. II, p.718.

Benjamin defines this new semiotic state as that of the symbol. Because of its fleetingness, the sign undergoes a change in its aesthetic function from that of similarity to that of a post-similarity or a no-similarity state, the symbol.

Reference to the symbol in connection with translation can be found in Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' where he claims that the 'tremendous and only capacity of translation' lies in turning the 'symbolizing into the symbolized'.[56] By symbol, Benjamin alludes to 'something which cannot be communicated' or the 'very nucleus of pure language' that is symbolized in the growth of languages.[57] However, this symbolized, pure language, for Benjamin, is 'weighted down with a heavy, alien meaning' through 'linguistic creations'. This is why a translation's aim becomes that of relieving pure language of the linguistic weight by turning the symbolizing, the linguistic creation, into a symbolized. The aim of such an act is to 'regain' its state as pure language, an 'expressionless and creative Word'.[58] As an expressionless, creative Word, pure language is not concerned with expressing meaning; it assumes the state of the sacred literal language. It seems that the linguistic with religious resonances in the sign becomes a concern with the linguistic as a religious act itself. Derrida's 'promise' and Benjamin's 'God's remembrance', the God word or logos, is played out in language supplementation and the 'hallowed growth of languages'.[59] The sign of distance from the state of pure language is what allows for the growth of the symbolizing languages as a religious act or manifestation of the creative Word, the expressionless. This creative Word is best exemplified, according to Benjamin, by a translation's language characterized by the 'looseness

---

[56] Benjamin, vol. I , p. 261.
[57] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 261.
[58] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 261.
[59] Benjamin, vol. I, pp. 254–7.

with which meaning attaches' to it.[60] God's Word that was a residue in the word-image now assumes the guise of the symbolizing turned symbolized and rewritten as the creative and expressionless Word in translation.[61]

As the symbolizing becomes a symbolized and the language of intention supplementation enacts the God Word linguistically as creative Word, the political dimensions of the word-law and name as law-justice joined by demand are reworked. Within the framework of intention supplementation, the demand that united word to name is qualified as a 'desire for translation' that manifests in the religious story of Babel.[62] In this story, desire is claimed to be 'not thinkable without this correspondence with a thought of God' that would allow for Benjamin's sense of the 'correspondence between the languages engaged in translation'.[63] The desire 'to be translated' embodies the demand of two sides, that of the tribe, or any original work, and that of the 'deconstructor of the tower' or God who 'gave his name'.[64] Both the thought of God and the original work are thus indebted to the language of translation that voices their demands. On the political plane, this state of 'double indebtedness' translates into the 'double bind [which] is in the law'.[65] The law, which is enacted by

---

[60] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 262.
[61] Paul De Man ('"Conclusions" on Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', *Yale French Studies*, 69 (1985), 25-46) argues that although readings of Benjamin usually portray him as reintegrating the messianic in history, Benjamin is actually exalting linguistic suffering and the separation of the 'sacred from the poetic' (p.34). So, the pure language is only apparent in the mode of trope as metaphors and metonyms. He focuses on Benjamin's image of the fragments forming the vessel to argue that it highlights the fragmentary nature of the vessel 'we have no knowledge of' (p. 32). The fragments are said to 'follow' each other and not 'match' each other as Zohn's translation of the text claims. De Man asserts that these fragments are metonyms, not metaphors, and are not working towards a 'tropological totalization' or the pure language (p.32).
[62] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 116.
[63] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', pp. 116–7.
[64] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 118.
[65] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 118.

God or the 'proper name', demands translation yet forbids it.[66] The law, Derrida

states, cannot 'command without demanding to be read, deciphered, translated'.[67]

This state of the double bind carries on unto the demand that the law-word makes for

justice.[68] The double demand of the law for justice is thus characterized as a double

bind or a contradiction.[69] Just as justice demands to be translated into the law yet

escapes and exceeds it, both the original work and the thought of God demand

translation yet forbid it. This double bind in the demand for justice, I argue, shows up

in the guise of the 'trait' of the 'to-be translated from one language to the other'.[70]

The demand or desire can only be made through a language of traits. By the language

of traits, I mean the language that displays the demand of the thought of God and the

demand of the tribe as forever 'to be translated'. The creative, expressionless Word of

pure language becomes a language of traits. The law-word is a language of 'traits' as

---

[66] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 119.

[67] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 118.

[68] Burghard Baltrusch, (in 'Translation as Aesthetic Resistance: Paratranslating Walter Benjamin', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 6 (2010), 113-29) employs the expression 'double bind' to explain how translation, on the one hand, produces the fragment of a language that has arisen as a fragment from a previous translation, and on the other hand, 'shapes up' to a 'mode of intention' with this fragment, bearing in mind a pure and unreachable language'(p.123-4). Baltrusch uses the image of the fragments of the vessel to claim that a translation 'does not allow any symbolization of origin and calls for resistance to its totalitarian connotations' (p. 123). In other words, the pure language acts as a force that invokes resistance against the totalitarian sense of the original. Moreover, the translation works on constructing cultural 'modes of intention' while being themselves fragments of previous works while a motif of resistance is underplay, that of resistance. This is what Baltrusch claims is the 'third space of translation', a term he borrows from Homi K. Bhabha (p.124). Baltrusch also refers to Benjamin's vessel image as 'a kind of synecdoche, that is, that the pieces remain fragments even when they were considered to form part of a supposed totality, as allegorical parts of a greater language, but excluding the essentialist or foundationalist idea of a whole' (p. 123).

[69] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 274.

[70] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', pp. 118–9.

midpoint between the living subject or original and the proper name, that of God.[71]

This language of traits adopts justice as a motif that guides this double demand.

    As the concern comes to be with traits at the intersection between God and man,

our attention is drawn to the symbol of this double bind that cannot be communicated.

This symbol of the double bind, I argue, is embodied by the sovereign king whose

'body is only promised, announced and dissimulated by the translation'.[72] The notion

of the sovereign as symbol is a German romantic influence that figures in both

Benjamin and Derrida's works on translation.[73] For Novalis, a symbol stands for a

'mystical sovereign' that is denoted with a 'more estimable and more appropriate' and

'gracious, excellent person' of the king.[74] The romantic roots of kinghood shift the

whole domain of translation from that of the human and divine as God to that of the

king standing for a mystical sovereign. In translation, language shifts domains into

articulating desire through symbols of traits of a pure sovereign, an intersection

between God and man. In this sense, the political concerned with law and justice now

shifts focus to the figure of a sovereign reflecting the traits of God and man through

---

[71] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 118.

[72] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 125.

[73] The modern notion of the sovereign as symbol within German romanticism derives from yet the earlier modern literary period of the German baroque. Symbol is employed, here, to indicate the modern problematization of sovereignty that starts off with the German baroque. This fact is clearly outlined by Samuel Weber (in his 'Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt', *Diacritics*, 22 (1992), 5-18). Weber refers to Walter Benjamin (in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Trauerspiel*] (1925)) who illustrates how the German baroque is concerned with the 'lack of sovereignty', not as a theme but as a 'methodological and theoretical problem' (p.6). In the German baroque, the 'undoing of the sovereign' takes place when the sovereign is faced with a 'situation in which a decision is as imperative as it is impossible' (p.14). In this state of indecision, the sovereign becomes a tyrant who is forced to gather the power to make a decision but ends up becoming a martyr when he is faced with the 'incapacity to arrive at an effective decision' (p.15). In this sense, a sovereign is the symbol of the problematic role of the decision-maker who is incapable of making a decision. This incapability qualifies the sense of 'lack' that sovereignty starts to embody in later periods, and especially in the romantic period.

[74] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 87 (#15).

language. However, despite this change in political aspect, translation retains its fundamentally aesthetic nature, as the next section will show.

1.5   The King, Cape and Contract

Having established the politics of law-justice and sovereignty as inherent aspects of translation, we now turn to the reverse process whereby the political itself becomes inherently affected by this process of translation. Sovereignty is forever 'to be translated' into a language of traits. Translation's language enacts its 'symbolizing into symbolized' function which it borrows from sovereignty upon it. The figure of the sovereign that reflects translation's linguistic mechanism, I have previously shown, is that of the king as depicted by Novalis. However, in the process of the symbolizing turned symbolized that is outlined by Benjamin, translation turns the king or sovereign into a concern with the royal cape, or robe, that envelops this body. For Benjamin, 'the language of translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds'.[75] The reference to royalty echoes Novalis's king. However, the emphasis here is on the cape, the metaphorical guise of the king's body as symbolic of sovereignty.

Benjamin's image of the kingly cape is later borrowed by Derrida to argue that the king's body is a promise that orients translation and refashions the status of the original as a natural unity of fruit and skin. Starting with the original, Derrida repeats Benjamin's claim that what unites the tenor, the content, to the language expressing it is the 'essential core' that is 'not translatable'.[76] Derrida, however, explains Benjamin's 'essential core' to be that which holds the tenor and language together through central unity, what allows for the signified to adhere to the signifier in an

---

[75] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 258.
[76] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 125.

original work. This central unity borrows from the literality of the sacred text where the language and content are one and can only be transferable as non-translatable.[77] The central unity indicates the state of the 'to be translated' at the core of any attachment between meaning or content and language. This core is Derrida's first metaphor that allows for unity between terms in a second metaphor, the tenor and language in the original. In turn, these lead to a third metaphor that unites tenor and language in the translation. The third metaphor is one which is described as the artificial unity between king and cape that distinguishes itself from the natural unity of fruit and skin. Translation's artificiality derives from the fact that the king's body is not there in the first place. There is only a cape enveloping the fruit-skin where the 'fruit insists upon becoming the king'.[78] Translation consists of a tenor, compared to a body of the king that is only promised, and a language of translation as cape. The tenor of the original and the language that expresses it, the fruit and its skin, become a promise of a king defined by the language of the translation as cape that envelops it. The metaphorical cape function of the language of translation implies that the underlying original must be taken to be a royal body, a king, even though it is not there and is only promised.

Derrida renders this unity of tenor to language in the original and, then, unity of that original to a language of translation mediated by the king's non-existent body into a 'royal couple'.[79] By claiming that 'it is difficult to separate the king from the royal couple', Derrida draws attention to a re-conceptualization of the political aspect of the law into that of the translation contract.[80] The non-existent, promised body of the king can only exist as a royal couple, a perpetual state of jointed-ness or contract.

[77] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 132.
[78] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 125.
[79] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[80] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.

In terms of translation, the royal couple that is enveloped with a cape subjects the process of the symbolizing-symbolized to yet another symbolizing act. In this process, the focus becomes on the activating mechanism that allows for the symbolizing act to continue on its course. This mechanism is evident in Derrida's claim that the body of the king is a 'decisive signature of a contract'.[81] Being a legal document, the contract is an indication of the law that is set down and signed by two sides. However, instead of being signed by two sides, the contract, Derrida claims, is signed by the promise of a king's body. In translation, the tenor and language in the original carry out a 'first contract' that is signed by their state of promised unity as a king's body.[82] In turn, this association of the royal couple and the body of the king carries out another contract through the cape. Derrida claims that 'this couple of spouses (the body of the king and his gown, the tenor and the tongue, the king and the queen) [....] lays down the law and guarantees every contract from this first contract'.[83] The secondary contract that joins the metaphorical cape to the symbol, the non-existent body of the king, derives from the first contract carried out by the royal couple.

The political aspect of translation as a contract between the kingly cape and the absent royal body acquires its aesthetic value through the metaphor of light which both Derrida and Benjamin employ. Following the example of Benjamin, Derrida claims that the arcade of literalness 'supports while letting light pass and the original show'.[84] The source of this light, for Benjamin, is in pure language that 'shine[s] upon the original all the more fully'.[85] The German romantic resonances, especially with Novalis, in depictions of royalty resurface in this image. Novalis claims that 'the

---

[81] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 123.
[82] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[83] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[84] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 121.
[85] Benjamin, vol. I, p. 260.

sphere of light' is that found in 'every citizen' whose 'utterances become brilliant, as poetic as possible' around a king figure.[86] The light, in this image, is a sphere that indicates brilliant and poetic expressions of a citizen inspired by a king as a source for that light. This brilliance is reflected as an 'expression of the highest animation in the vicinity of the king' who is 'the sun in the solar system'.[87] So, the sphere of light that shines through the arcade has its source in the king, according to the German romantics. Its effect is brilliant expressions that are described as poetic and animated. In this image, light inspires sound; the king as light inspires brilliant and poetic expression in his sphere. This sound is classified as not only an expression but also a form of behavior, 'etiquette', on the part of citizens. By etiquette, Novalis means a form of behavior, uttering, which is 'susceptible to being regulated'.[88] Etiquette as expression, formerly indicated as sound, is presented as being inclined to being regulated by the proximity of the king. Since this king, as I have mentioned, is non-existent, the light could only be seen through its effects, the expressions of the citizens that are susceptible to being regulated by law. Within translation, poetic expression is the aesthetic reworking of the foundation of the law.

As the aesthetic focus shifts to sound in etiquette defined by law, it borrows the contract form of law to further qualify the expression of citizens. The rendering of the romantic notion of poetic expression into a Derridean translation contract, I hold, finds its political roots in the development of contract theory as outlined by Charles Taylor. Based on Grotius's early formulation of the theory, Taylor describes the contract as one carried out by individuals who 'are meant to collaborate in peace to

---

[86] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 88 (#17).
[87] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 88(#17).
[88] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 88 (#17).

their mutual benefit'.[89] In its more modern formulations, contract theory comes to stand for the first modern secular move away from the Medieval conception of political order, as outlined by Kantorowicz, where the king's 'biological existence realizes and instantiates an undying royal "body"'.[90] Contract becomes the consensual sound expression by citizens that used to indicate etiquette around light, the medieval king-figure in his cape. Derrida's focus on the contract, which joins the non-existent body to the cape and is derived from another contract by a royal couple, paves the way for contract as secular consent that dismisses the cape altogether. The shift from kinghood to contract takes place through the medium of translation in an aesthetic reformulation of the political. The metaphor of the cape is overcome by the aesthetics of sound as expression in contract.

However, before reaching that secular contractual dismissal of the cape, Derrida chooses to 'add another cape floating even more'.[91] The royal cape is said to be enveloped by a cape as a 'wedding gown'.[92] By surrounding the cape with a wedding gown, Derrida highlights another move in political theory that maintains the aesthetic aspect of the politics of translation, an aspect on which I will further elaborate in the following section.

1.6   From Cape to Wedding Gown: Law, Contract and Love

So far, I have shown how the process of the symbolizing process in translation starts off with Benjamin's illustration of the cape as an indication of the political status of the law as contract. The contract between the cape and the absent body illustrates a secular political move away from the paradigm of the divinely ordained

---

[89] Taylor, *The Secular Age*, p. 159.
[90] Taylor, *The Secular Age*, p. 161.
[91] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[92] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.

king. This political move towards secular contractual politics maintains its aesthetic,

romantic roots in poetic expression. In order to better explain this aesthetic shift from

divine to secular sovereignty in translation, I first have to shed light on another

metaphor that Derrida uses to qualify translation, that of the wedding gown

surrounding the kingly cape. For Derrida, the cape is enveloped with another

metaphorical fabric, a wedding gown that is said to float at a distance to the royal

cape.[93] He thus turns the symbolizing process of royalty to that of love which is

reflected by a wedding gown. This move redefines the political aspect of translation

through what Derrida calls the 'movement of love' that embeds contractual law and

redefines it.[94]

Derrida claims that the wedding gown is viewed in relation to an 'untouchable'

that 'orients the work of the translator'.[95] This untouchable is claimed to persist even

after the contract is signed at the small point of 'communicable meaning'.[96] The

wedding gown shifts the focus away from the contractual nature of the joint, for it is

not concerned with whether actual signing has taken place or not. Its preoccupation as

translation is with an untouchable, a symbolic sense of completeness or wholeness

that fuses the two sides of any contract in literality. With the untouchable as a

promise, the symbolic can only expand with the hope of reaching it. It is in this sense

that Derrida claims that translation puts 'language into symbolic expansion' where the

symbolic stands for the 'larger, the new vaster aggregate' that 'has still to reconstitute

something' rather than accomplish 'restitution'.[97] Translation's concern is not with

preserving the original as much as with reconstitution, forming aggregates and

---

[93] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[94] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.
[95] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 124.
[96] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 124.
[97] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.

expansion in a state of 'openness'.[98] This status of symbolic expansion is what

Derrida qualifies as Benjamin's 'movement of love' that does not 'contradict unity'; it

makes unity possible while forbidding totality.[99] Unity, or symbolic completeness,

rests in the state of possibility. Derrida's movement of love is 'the gesture of this

loving one' that 'does not reproduce' and 'does not represent' nor 'render the

meaning of the original except at that point of contact or caress, that infinitely small

of meaning'.[100]

For Derrida, this point of contact that allows for symbolic expansion is a

'marriage contract' fueled by love and concerned with a promise of this

untouchable.[101] By turning language into an act of love that preserves the law within,

Derrida rewrites Benjamin's notion of law that indicates contract and is enacted in

violence. In the 'Critique of Violence', Benjamin claims that 'the origin of every

contract also points towards violence'.[102] So, the symbolic contract within translation

preserves violence in the metaphorical guise of the cape. However, the cape is

claimed to be surrounded by another metaphorical guise, that of the wedding gown.

The law in the cape is encompassed by a romantic movement of love which Derrida

employs to redefine law. He does that by resurrecting the German romantic

resonances of Novalis's work in Benjamin's text. For Novalis, a law is 'the

expression of the will of a beloved person who is worthy of our respect'.[103] Law

becomes a linguistic expression of the will of a beloved. However, being a contract

concerned with a symbolic aggregate, the Derridean law complements the will of the

---

[98] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.
[99] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.
[100] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.
[101] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 124.
[102] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *Walter Benjamin: One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 142.
[103] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 87 (#15).

beloved, the original, with the desire of the loving one, the translation. Between the

will and desire, a symbolic system as aggregate forms itself while the translation

pursues an untouchable, a promise of symbolic completeness. In this pursuit, the

politics of law as violence is rewritten as the will of a beloved complementing the

desire of a lover in a symbolic process. The law is defined by the semiotics of

symbolism supplemented by a metaphorical expression of love.[104]

As the wedding gown encompasses the royal cape and inserts the law in a

movement of love, it reintroduces a romantic emotional dimension generated by the

image's aesthetic qualities. The wedding gown is a metaphorical depiction of not only

a symbolic contractual consent in marriage but also a romantic emotional bond. In

romantic terms, Novalis states that marriage is a 'true, indissoluble bond' that stands

for 'selfless love', which is said to occupy the heart just as 'its principle' is in 'one's

head'.[105] This marriage of selfless love is based on the model of the 'true royal

couple' that would be for the 'whole human being' just as a 'constitution' is for the

'intellect alone'.[106] The wedding gown thus becomes the rewriting of the law aspect

---

[104] Simon Critchley (in 'A Commentary Upon Derrida's Reading of Hegel in *Glas*', in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 2001), 197–226) draws attention to the religious motif underplay in the embedding of law in love. In Derrida's commentary upon Hegel's 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate', (1798-9), the former shows how the latter explains the dialectical relationship between law and love in terms of the extension of Judaism into Christianity. Love is taken to denote Christianity while law stands for Judaism. In his discussion of Derrida's reading, Critchley highlights the latter's focus on Hegel's presentation of the person of Christ as one who 'relieves the abstract rights of Judaism into ethical love' through the family (p.202). For Derrida, Hegel's depiction of the sharp hierarchical status of Christianity with respect to Judaism is anti-Semitic and reinforces a 'reduction of the other's otherness' (p.204). The question, for Derrida, would thus be how to deconstruct this philosophical reductionism and re-think the continuity of love and law or law in love. This question, I hold, appears to haunt Derrida's work in *Glas* (1974) and elsewhere. One attempt to negotiate it would be in this image of the wedding gown and cape that portrays the amalgam of love and law through translation.
[105] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 94 (#36).
[106] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 87 (#15).

of the cape into that of the marriage contract as a bond that needs the emotional dimension of selfless love. This emotional dimension, in turn, is embodied in the political figure of the royal couple that Derrida maintains through absence. The political, in this sense, reasserts itself as inherently aesthetic.

The romantic roots of this interrelationship between the political and the aesthetic in Derrida's theory of translation persist in his conception of justice. Romantically speaking, Novalis claims that selfless love, which activates the law as the will of the beloved, is preserved in the 'just man and just state'.[107] Novalis's romantic notion of justice acts in selfless love through the bond of the state. In bonding through the state, justice and love are meant to overcome raw self-interest or egoism which is marked by sensuality and is a passion marked by the weakness of the will.[108] By egoism, Novalis means the state that is run like a 'factory', a state that 'will perish' as it bases its politics upon the instrumental employment of the law to guarantee 'self-interest'.[109] In this sense, law guided by egoism is weak while that guided by selfless love in justice is stronger and would give life to the state. The state thus becomes the space that negotiates contract theory through a move towards selfless love from instrumental ego-centered employment of the law. This move, I argue, is enacted in the metaphor of the cape that is overcome by the aesthetic dimension of the wedding gown as contractual sound defined by the emotional response of love. The contract as law has to be embedded in selfless love within justice, as ethical framework, so that it does not give in to its violent nature and turn into egoism and self-centeredness. In terms of translation, the gown becomes the aesthetic translation of divine sovereignty that justifies power into what seems like a secular version of sovereignty that

---

[107] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 94 (#36).
[108] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 93 (#36).
[109] Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', p. 93 (#36).

negotiates power in emotional terms. This aesthetic translation of the political, I will next show, revisits the role language plays in negotiating sovereignty.

1.7 The Cape-Wedding Gown: The Language of Translation

Having established the wedding gown as a secular political version of sovereignty that negotiates the law in a bond of selfless love, I now turn to the rewriting of the language of translation that this political move involves. The embedding of law in selfless love through justice re-qualifies the violence inherent in law as contract. The image of the cape and wedding gown thus presents Derrida's political negotiation of 'the relation of violence to non-violence'.[110] This negotiation, Derrida claims, directly relates to the role that language plays in this translation, an issue that I further expound in this section.[111]

Derrida's negotiation of the relation of violence to non-violence in the cape-gown image builds on Benjamin's discussion of violence and language that he expounds in his 'Critique of Violence'. As I have already mentioned, in the 'Critique of Violence', Benjamin claims that 'the origin of every contract also points towards violence'.[112] Benjamin calls the contractual form of violence, 'mythic violence', where law-making and law-preserving show a constant strife for power within the state.[113] Nonviolence, for Benjamin, can never 'lead to legal contract' as contract always generates violence. This nonviolent 'sphere of human agreement', for Benjamin, is best illustrated in language.[114] In his explanation of the linguistic form of nonviolence, Derrida claims that Benjamin offers a political 'critique of the sign' that he further expounds in 'The

---

[110] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 283.
[111] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 286.
[112] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 142.
[113] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 149.
[114] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 144.

Task of the Translator'.[115] Derrida claims that language displays violence when it acts

as a means to an end, when its essence is communicative or 'semiological,

informative, representative, conventional, hence mediatory'.[116] However, this

violence of language as a means to an end, Derrida claims, is disrupted by the 'advent

of nonviolence through a certain language' of pure means, or as 'means of

communication as re-presentation'.[117] Derrida also calls the latter the 'order of

manifestation, epiphany, pure presentation'.[118] The relationship of violence to non-

violence within the political sphere is thus negotiated in the linguistic tension between

a vision of language as a means to an end and one of language as pure means, a state

of language that I will further explore in Chapter Three. However, the question I am

concerned with here is how it is possible to linguistically transpose non-violence from

the private sphere to the political sphere of state-imposed violence. A hint to a

possible answer, I argue, seems to lie in Derrida's notion of justice that allows for this

embedding of law (the cape) in love (the wedding gown).

According to Derrida, justice is a state of advent or '*à-venir*' that orients the work

of law.[119] Derrida builds this argument upon Benjamin's discussion of law and justice

in his 'Critique of Violence'. For Benjamin, mythic violence that reaffirms the law

engenders the need for 'law destroying' violence that challenges the limits of the state

and the law.[120] Law-destroying violence is denoted as 'divine violence' enacted by

God and built upon the principle of justice.[121] Derrida qualifies Benjamin's concept of

---

[115] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 286.
[116] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 286.
[117] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 284.
[118] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 284.
[119] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 256.
[120] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 150.
[121] Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', p. 149.

justice, here, as a 'justice without law, a justice beyond law'.[122] However, Derrida

also acknowledges that the 'universalization of law' is 'in-scribed in the concept of

justice'.[123] Justice thus embodies a tension between its being an excess, an *à-venir*,

and its being reducible to law. This is why Derrida claims that justice is 'the

possibility of deconstruction' that is described as 'an experience of the impossible'.[124]

This experience takes place in the 'interval that separates the undeconstructibility of

justice from the deconstructibility of law'.[125] By deconstruction, Derrida means the

condition of the unfounded foundation of the law, an unfoundedness that borrows

from the undeconstructibility of justice.[126] This is how I would explain Derrida's

claim that '[w]herever one can replace, translate, determine the X of justice, one

would have to say: deconstruction is possible, as impossible, to the extent (there)

where there is an X (undeconstructible)'.[127] Justice becomes the possible condition of

the impossibility, an *à-venir*, which acts within the law yet escapes it. In its escape,

justice creates an extra space that allows for other forces, not the least of which is love

(even if it belongs to the private sphere and assumes an aesthetic significance), to

come into play.[128] Translation, in this sense, is a double process or a coupling between

---

[122] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 286.
[123] Ibid., p. 286.
[124] Ibid., p. 243.
[125] Ibid., p. 243.
[126] Ibid., p. 242.
[127] Ibid., p. 243.
[128] Michael Dillon, (in 'Another Justice', *Political Theory*, 27 (1999), 155–75) explores the relationship between language, deconstruction and the call for 'another Justice'. For Dillon, 'another Justice' is said to 'invoke the resources of language in a tone more poetic than arithmetic'. This other Justice is a 'rearticulation of the living question of the human being' who is constituted by a 'giving composed of no permanent presents and no secure returns'. In this rearticulation, language acquires a 'liminal force' that finds 'expression in the vernacular of hospitality and possibility' (p.162). In deconstruction, language is a concern not for its signifying function, but for its being a reflection of the condition of the human being as lacking 'permanent presents'. The attempt to grapple with this condition marks what Dillon describes as

the reduction of justice to law, the cape, and the maintenance of justice's excess that can only be expressed through the aesthetic value of the wedding gown.[129]

As deconstruction is made possible by and through the translation of justice, it re-qualifies the medium of language through which this translation takes place.[130] The 'advent' of non-violence through language is described as a language of manifestation that contrasts with the violence of language as a means to an end. By referring to non-violence as a language of manifestation, I argue, Derrida invokes the religious connotations associated with the language of revelation that orients the work of translation. The language of non-violence finds its proximity in religious revelation, the literality of the sacred text as forever 'to be translated'.

The link between the religious originary, revelation, and its linguistic reincarnation, manifestation, figures in Derrida's concept of 'prayer'. In 'What is a Relevant Translation', Derrida re-writes translation's concern with the possible/impossible in deconstruction as a religious concern with prayer. He also explains translation to be 'a discourse of prayer on prayer'.[131] By prayer, Derrida refers to the request for forgiveness that marks the state of 'elevation' beyond the law:

---

the 'other politics [that] must be defined as the response to the advent of another Justice' (p.161).

[129] Burghard Baltrusch (in 'Translation as Aesthetic Resistance', 113–29) describes this impossibility inherent in deconstruction through translation as 'aesthetic resistance'. Baltrush claims that the translation is in a constant state of 'construction' that is always 'deconstructing' the original (p.128). Translations are described as shaping truths without allowing them to become 'foundational master narratives' and the truths referred to here are of a cultural nature (p.124). Baltrush calls these 'paratranslations,' or an 'open and almost "holistic" concept of translation' that 'includes all of its contexts and conditions' (p.115).

[130] For a more extensive discussion on the intersection between deconstruction and translation, see Kathleen Davis, *Deconstruction and Translation* (Manchester, United Kingdom: St. Jerome, 2001).

[131] Jacques Derrida, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', trans. by Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry*, 27 (2001), 174–200 (p. 188).

> The strength of forgiveness […] is more than just, more just than justice or the law. It rises above the law or above what in justice is only law; it is, beyond human law, the very thing that invokes prayer. And what is, finally, a discourse on translation (possible/impossible) is also a discourse of prayer on prayer. Forgiveness is prayer; it belongs to the order of benediction and prayer on two sides: that of the person who requests it and that of the person who grants it. The essence of prayer has to do with forgiveness, not with power and law. Between the elevation of prayer or benediction-above human power, above even royal power insofar as it is human, above the law, above the penal code-and the elevation of forgiveness above human power, royal power and the law, there exists a sort of essential affinity. Prayer and forgiveness have the same provenance and the same essence, the same eminence that is more eminent than eminence, the eminence of the Most High.[132]

As the discourse of prayer on prayer, translation's concern is no longer with law and with what in justice is law. The new dimension added with the symbolism of royalty surrounded by the wedding gown is that of prayer for forgiveness that is 'more just than justice' and 'more eminent than eminence'. Prayer thus belongs to the order of revelation as elevation or eminence. In the form of discourse, prayer is a manifestation of that elevation. The discourse of prayer on prayer, then, qualifies the language of translation as a language that focuses within the work of manifestation and revelation on a divine request for forgiveness.

This divine request, in turn, acquires a theological significance that marks the political concern with the excess beyond the law. In this sense, the political becomes a translation of a theological act. Earthly power, for Derrida, 'resembles a divine

---

[132] Derrida, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', p. 188.

power' when it seeks to deconstruct the law and exceed it.[133] Following Kantorowicz, Derrida explains this resemblance as the king's two bodies.[134] The cape, therefore, is a witness to this translation of the theological into a political act that is guided by the experience of the impossible, the *à-venir* of justice.

However, this divine request is not solely a religiously political act. Asking for forgiveness, for Derrida, is integral to asking and granting hospitality, the 'unconditional' welcoming of the other, which acquires an aesthetic significance.[135] Derrida claims that

> whoever asks for hospitality, asks, in a way, for forgiveness and whoever offers hospitality, grants forgiveness—and forgiveness must be infinite or it is nothing: it is excuse or exchange [and..] inversely and first of all, the welcoming one must ask for forgiveness from the welcomed one even prior to the former's own having to forgive for one is always failing, lacking hospitality.[136]

In hospitality, both host and guest are inserted in a relationship of prayer for forgiveness that exceeds the state of the law. This excess, however, is not solely an act of the divine. For Derrida, hospitality is 'an art and a poetics' on which 'an entire politics depends'.[137] The translation of the theological into the political in Derrida's formulation acquires an aesthetic value that is inspired by the love component of the wedding gown. The wedding gown of love thus denotes the extra layer of translation

---

[133] Derrida, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', p. 197.

[134] Derrida, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', p. 197.

[135] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 25.

[136] Jacques Derrida, 'Hostipitality', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 380.

[137] Jacques Derrida, 'The Principle of Hospitality', *Parallax*, 11 (2005), 6–9 (p. 7) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1353464052000321056>.

between the theological and the political that inserts both in a relationship of hospitality.

The cape-wedding gown, I hold, becomes the metaphor needed to depict the dynamics of translation as a form of hospitality. In a further elucidation of hospitality, Derrida claims that hospitality marks that state where 'each concept becomes hospitable to its other, to another than itself that is no longer *its* other [emphasis in the original]'.[138] Rewritten in terms of translation, violent law (cape) becomes hospitable to its other, non-violent aesthetics of love (the wedding gown), and in this process, opens up to an 'other than itself that is not longer *its* other' in the form of divine justice. In this negotiation between law and justice, translation as prayer acquires its aesthetic value through hospitality. Political sovereignty, now, rests upon the aesthetic translation of divine sovereignty. How this happens is what we will turn to next.

1.8   The Aesthetic Translation of Sovereignty: Madness and Silence

We have seen so far how the translation of the theological to the political acquires an aesthetic value of hospitality. Hospitality introduces aesthetics into this translation through the insignia of power, the cape of law and the wedding gown of love and contract. However, Derrida also claims that hospitality is a 'madness' that 'registers [an] autodeconstruction in every concept'.[139] When the cape opens up to the wedding gown, they both are subjected to the 'deconstructive law of hospitality'.[140] In aesthetic terms, translation becomes a concern with the state of 'fabric' of both garments, a state that Derrida describes as a 'text of artifice [that] appears on the side of the

---

[138] Derrida, 'Hostipitality', p. 362.
[139] Derrida, 'Hostipitality', p. 362.
[140] Derrida, 'Hostipitality', p. 362.

symbolic order'.[141] The process through which the madness of hospitality auto-deconstructs the cape and gown will thus be my focus in this section.

However, before analyzing the auto-deconstruction of hospitality, I need to draw the reader's attention back to translation's ideal state set in the literality of the sacred text. According to Derrida, the prayer for forgiveness that qualifies the work of the translator maintains its messianic objective in the literality of revelation in the religious text, what he calls the 'event'. For Derrida, the sacred text is the 'absolute text because in its event it communicates nothing, it says nothing that would make sense beyond the event itself'.[142] The event is the experience that characterizes the language of the sacred text as having no meaning beyond literality, or the '*pas de sens'* of pure language.[143] Moreover, the religious text as 'pure transferability' lends its effect to all texts otherwise.[144] All translation is frozen in a state of 'to be translated as law'; all translation is untranslatable, for there is no finality or final meaning to the text.[145] Translation breaks the chain of meaning and signification and rests with language that is guided by its absolute ideal of literality. From the literality of the religious text, the translator is said to receive 'all the signs of remoteness which guide him'.[146] The translator is guided by the ideal state of the religious text's literality, an ideal that leaves him with signs of remoteness that language depicts; these are the signs with which he sews the cape and attaches the gown.

Haunted by signs of a remoteness that is difficult to pin down in language, a translation finds itself 'at the edge of the abyss of madness and of silence' where

---

[141] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 125.
[142] Ibid., p. 133.
[143] Ibid., p. 133.
[144] Ibid., p. 132.
[145] Ibid., p. 132.
[146] Ibid., p. 132.

'meaning collapses'.[147] Translation experiences the madness of deconstructive hospitality where theology, aesthetics and politics are placed on one continuum. Its experience shows up in the fold of silence that it incorporates in its many folds, a silence that Derrida claims 'is not exterior to language'.[148] Silence, here, is taken to stand for Benedictine silence, which is described by Vela-Santos in his 'Verging on Divine: The Matter of Benedictine Silence and the Justification of Law and Language' as that which 'appeases or forestalls' deconstruction.[149] In silence, a translation anticipates the possibility of deconstruction inherent in language while seeking to forestall it by preserving a sense of deferral of meaning. Translation's concern with deferral of meaning finds roots in the Derridean notion of *différance* as expounded in *Of Grammatology* (1967). For Derrida, signs refer to other signs in a 'movement of *différance*' whereby signs are qualified by their difference from other signs and by the deferral of meaning to which they refer.[150] This movement is best summarized in Derrida's declaration that '*différance* defers-differs'.[151] As original meaning collapses, a translation thus lays bare this movement of *différance* of signs. These signs that are haunted by a sense of remoteness or deferral of meaning characterize a translation's navigation of this abyss of madness and silence.

A translation, in this sense, employs language that is haunted by absence. Absence renders translation a language of symptoms where the symptom indicates the 'category of "maybe", between the possible and the impossible', the exception, and

[147] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 132.
[148] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 242.
[149] Remedios Regina de Vela-Santos, 'Verging on Divine: The Matter of Benedictine Silence and the Justification of Law and Language', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43 (2011), 2337–59 (p. 2357) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.10.032>.
[150] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 60.
[151] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 66.

the state of 'meaning that no theorem can exhaust'.[152] In translation, all words are symptomatic of what they could and could not '*mean*' simultaneously, of presence that is continually haunted by absence. By meaning, here, I refer not to signification but rather to meaning in relation to what is absent. The absence of the infinite as an imperceptible state of mediation has a language of its own: the language of absences. The regular use of language can only hint at this language of absences through symptomatic signs of empty vessels and images. This is why Derrida qualifies the marrying of the two languages in translation as a 'properly symbolic event' that 'appeals to a language of the truth. Not to language that is true […] to a language whose truth would be referred only to itself'.[153] The language of translation rests within itself in a state of being symptomatic of that by which the language of signs is always haunted.

The symptomatic language of silence in translation now subjects the politics of sovereignty to redefinition. Sovereignty is no longer the power imposed by the law; instead, it is a force of 'disarm[ing]' that characterizes power itself.[154] In its divine form, sovereignty needs the kingly cape to make visible the law as 'index of power'.[155] However, that law, Derrida argues, is in a constant state of attempting to nail the infinite and excess of justice. For justice to be 'legitimate', to be acknowledged by law as law, it needs the word.[156] This word, in turn, introduces the 'force' of deconstruction that language employs to 'disarm itself from itself' and lose power enacted by the law.[157] This process is what Derrida refers to as the 'exercise of

---

[152] Jacques Derrida, 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event', *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2007), pp. 441–61 (pp. 457–8) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/511506>.
[153] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 130.
[154] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 238.
[155] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[156] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 234.
[157] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 238.

force in language itself, in the most intimate of its essence, as in the movement by which it would absolutely disarm itself from itself'.[158] Language, then, turns its force against itself in deconstruction. It initiates what Derrida calls the state of 'auto-immunity' that 'permits exposure to the other' yet is 'incalculable'.[159] Being a 'syndrome whereby any organism (a body, a belief system, even a sovereign state) is compelled to attack its own immune system in order to preserve its own life', auto-immunity characterizes language in its state of disarming.[160] Language's immune system is embodied in the law that is being attacked by the *juste* of justice, the law of justice, in order to preserve itself. Language survives only as a state of continuous deconstruction that preserves the space needed for this self-attack or disarming. Its self-preservation can only exist as symptomatic of a disarming or auto-immunity.

In terms of translation, this disarming is echoed by Derrida in his description of the 'self-relation of the sacred body' or the letter that 'translates itself of itself'.[161] Translation becomes the process of disarming in which the force of language turns against itself. In translation, language loses the arm, the weapon, for power but maintains the symptom of that power in the cape. The king of translation disarms himself; he is left with his cape as symptom of the power that he once had. His only field of the 'visibility' of the law is that of the cape.[162] However, that symptom of power, the cape, perpetuates the same process of auto-immunization that it has undergone. The cape is disarmed to become a wedding gown. So, the translation of the sacred body of the letter becomes a disarming when placed in language, a

[158] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 238.
[159] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 152.
[160] Arthur Bradley, 'The Theocracy to Come: Deconstruction, Autoimmunity, Islam', in *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic*, ed. by Paul Fletcher and Arthur Bradley (London: Continuum International Inc., 2010), p. 174.
[161] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 133.
[162] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.

disarming that gets rid of the cape, the symbol of power, law and justice as *juste*, to envelop it with the wedding gown, the metaphor of mediation in love and forgiveness.

In the process of disarming in translation, however, the wedding gown of love and forgiveness risks becoming a symbol of power that needs disarming again. I read Derrida's answer to this risk to lie in his discussion of Benjamin's axiom that there is no 'translation of translation'.[163] For Derrida, translation marks this state of transferability as cape-wedding gown that characterizes a religious text. Translation as transferability is - in the end - only a 'fabric', an artifice that can be shaped into a cape or a gown.[164] The only law left to govern translation, in this case, is the law of hospitality of one partner to the other in a wedding, the law of 'madness of hospitality', or madness as law, for the wedding is also a state of auto-immunization.[165] In one sense, madness grants 'liberty to literality' for there is no law to abide by except that of translation.[166] Derrida claims that this law of the letter, in reference to literality of sacred texts 'ceases to oppress insofar as it is no longer the exterior body or the corset of meaning'.[167] In political terms, this cessation of oppression would become a 'freedom that would no longer be the power of any subject, a freedom without autonomy', for it is interior to the body, not exterior to it.[168] However, that freedom is a madness that characterizes the state of auto-immunity. In this sense, it could be concluded that translation becomes the process where the kingly cape opens up to the wedding gown but loses itself in the process, maintaining its state as an imagined 'naked' emperor, an emperor who 'will wear new

---

[163] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 126.
[164] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 125.
[165] Derrida, 'Hostipitality', p. 362.
[166] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 133.
[167] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 133.
[168] Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, p. 152.

clothes'.[169] The emperor cannot be thought of except as in a state of the 'will', forever ready to wear, forever unable to do so. Translation loses control and regulation as it moves across the dimensions of the divine, aesthetics, and secular politics that the cape and gown denote; however, the symptoms of all these dimensions are still there in the potential state of the fabric to take shape as cape and wedding gown. However, this state of the artifice cannot translate itself except as a symptomatic language of a mad wedding initiating auto-immunity and contaminated by a silence of the empty vessels of words and images.

Conclusion

So, what happens, to go back to the question with which we started this chapter, if we read translation in political terms of a royal cape turned into a wedding gown? To put it simply, translation becomes the process whereby political sovereignty changes from the divine to the secular through an aesthetic process. The concentration of semiosis in the logos where meaning and sign coincide with divine sovereignty breaks up in a political shift to contract theory initiating the order of the secular. The breaking up of semiotic concentration takes the form of signs that can only refer to each other, as Derrida holds. However, that play of signs is subject to deconstruction that renders signs as empty vessels in a constant state of mediation, of being symptomatic of nothing but themselves as signs 'wedded' to other signs, hence, the wedding gown. In this transition, secular signs, as it were, that have lost the divine element of meaning recruit signs of other orders to make up for the loss of divine meaning. In both divine and secular forms, the sign is presented as in a constant state of reaching across enacted in the medium of aesthetics, the image. In the latter case, signs use the image qualities of the metaphor to elucidate their meaning while

---

[169] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 125.

preserving a meaning from the divine in the form of a prayer for forgiveness. These signs, however, display themselves only as symptoms that characterize the state of mediation. The language of mediation in translation cannot be narrated except in images and religious language. To translate, a translator does not deal with semiotic systems alone; his or her role implies a redefinition of the prayer for forgiveness, justice, and law. Translation as cape-gown negotiates itself in a semiotic-aesthetic interaction between the theological and the religious notion of the prayer for forgiveness and the political field of law and justice. If every linguistic system is run by its own semiotic laws and aesthetic rules of the image and the sound in emotional and religious forms, this entails that attention to translation as mediation has to mind these aspects in the peace talks that it attempts to create with other linguistic systems. Even within the premises of the same semiotic system within one language, does that not render every word a state of its own or the state a word or *world* of its own?

In an attempt to answer this question, the following chapter will be investigating the notion of mediation in what would qualify, from Derrida's perspective, as a logocentric system constructed by the ninth-century Turkish philosopher, al-Farabi. In al-Farabi's logocentric system run by an *imam*, the medievalist approximation to the western king, the question of translation becomes: how does the cape-wedding gown model of translation in mediation apply when the king is taken to be an *imam*, a medievalist approximation to prophet as king? Does the al-Farabi model allow for or foresee a Derridean move to the secular from the religious? And if so, along which lines? This is what we will turn to in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSLATING THE *IMAM*

> So let it be clear to you that the idea of the
> Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator,
> and *Imam* is but a single idea.
>
> Al-Farabi[1]

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that translation is the process whereby political

sovereignty aesthetically shifts from the accessorial divine cape to the more secular

contract-based gown. This shift is marked by signs as empty vessels of mediation that

need the supplementation of different languages, one of the image and one of the

religious prayer for forgiveness. In translation, the switch in the sounds of the

different sign systems, the different languages, is accompanied by a transformation in

the notion of mediation. This transformation is expressed in political and religious

terms related to the notions of prayer, justice and law.

The semiotic system that this chapter will investigate in terms of its relationship

with the political and the religious is that constructed by the Persian/Turkish

philosopher Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad Farab (hereafter, al-Farabi),

c.872-950. Known as the Second Teacher, al-Farabi is well known for his engagement

with Aristotle's and Plato's philosophy in his famous yet controversial *Concordance*

of the Opinions of Aristotle and Plato that left its imprints on Sufi mystical thought as

well as the more practical Islamic political thought. Borrowing from Plato's *Republic*

to write his *Virtuous City* and *The Political Regime* and from Aristotle in his

---

[1] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. by Mahdi, Muhsin (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 47 (#58)

Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione, al-Farabi constructs his own system

that fuses Aristotelian logic with Platonic politics within an overall Islamic

systemized framework.[2] From the Islamic tradition, he ponders questions of political

and religious leadership in the figure of the *imam* running a Virtuous City. This *imam*

as 'supreme ruler' and sovereign is said to receive revelation via a Neo-Platonic

emanation from Intellects ending with an 'Active Intellect' that mediates between the

'being of the First Cause' and the 'rational part of the soul'.[3] When the *imam*'s 'soul

is in union' with the Active Intellect, or 'divine mind', revelation flows.[4] By being in

union with a mediating agent, the *imam* assumes the same function of mediation, for it

is through him that revelation reaches humans. The *imam* thus embodies mediation

himself.[5]

The intriguing notion of mediation as a vehicle for revelation in the figure of an

imam, the sovereign, constitutes the framework that this chapter adopts for

reconsidering translation. The questions that will structure my exploration of the

[2] This thesis is interested in al-Farabi's work because of its relevance to contemporary debates on Political Islam. This interest has been sparked by Bassam Tibi's claim (in *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 211) that al-Farabi is important for the political debate today because his '*aql*-based [rationalist] philosophy is a lasting indication of a Euro-Islamic encounter at its very best', especially that it 'could provide the framework for Western- Muslim common ground in the age of migration'. Al-Farabi, for Tibi, highlights a concern with cultural encounter that characterizes the work of later Muslim thinkers, such as Ibn Rushd or Averroes. Al-Farabi's work, in this sense, is an early illustration of the modern concern with multiculturalism and democracy, which fundamentally question the notion of sovereignty, and which political Islamists struggle to define today.
[3] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, pp. 33–37.
[4] Mahdi Muhsin, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 155.
[5] Muhsin Mahdi (in *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy,* p.155*)* argues that the role of the divine mind 'is not merely that of mediating between God and man but also that of acting as the vicar of God in creating things here below by providing the forms to all natural beings when their matter is readied by the movement of the heavenly bodies'. It is the first notion of mediation as vehicle for revelation that this chapter takes as framework for exploring translation.

translation of the *imam* are how would the *imam*, a medieval approximation to a mediating king, compare with the cape-wedding gown model of translation discussed in the previous chapter? Would this imamate model allow for/ foresee a religious-secular move similar to the Derridean one? And how would such a system of mediation negotiate the relationship between law and justice?

2.1 Mediation: Between Al-Farabi and Derrida

To address mediation within al-Farabi's model, the chapter will start by investigating the role of the *imam* as an agent of mediation between the divine mind and reason. Through this mediation, the ruler is said to become 'wise, a philosopher, and in possession of complete practical judgment'.[6] As a philosopher, he has wisdom or 'knowledge of the remote reasons by which all the rest of beings exist and of the existence of the proximate reasons for things that have reasons'.[7] In addition to wisdom, the *imam* possesses a perfect 'practical intellect' by which he 'is able to seize upon what he ought to prefer or avoid with respect to each one of the matters [he is] to do'.[8] Besides the theoretical knowledge of causes, the *imam* is able to run the Virtuous City and guide its citizens to attain highest perfection by virtue of practical wisdom. The goal of highest perfection is defined as happiness characterized as 'the good, virtuous, and noble things'.[9] An emotion that accompanies and indicates moral perfection, happiness is imbued with theoretical and practical significance that the philosopher-*imam* as mediator nurtures in the citizens of the Virtuous City.

---

[6] Muhsin, *Alfarabi*, p. 162.
[7] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *The Political Writings: 'Selected Aphorisms' and Other Texts*, trans. by Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 30 (#37).
[8] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 33 (#38).
[9] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 24 (#20).

As the concern becomes with living an emotion of happiness accompanying ethical perfection, the *imam* gives his role in mediation an aesthetic dimension that is concerned with emotional response. Actually, al-Farabi claims that etymologically speaking, 'the idea of *Imam* in the Arabic language signifies merely the one whose example is followed and who is well-received or his purpose is well-received'.[10] Reception here marks the aesthetic dimension of the *imam*'s role. However, this 'well-reception' on the side of citizens is said to be achieved by means of persuasive arguments that aim to convince the citizens of the 'images' of the theoretical things that he 'invents'.[11] By creating images to guarantee an emotional response, the *imam* imbues mediation with aesthetic features facilitated by a rhetorical use of language. The *imam*'s mission is to persuade citizens of the images that he makes up of the religious laws with which he runs the city. It is in this sense that what is philosophy for him and is recognized with certainty becomes established or delivered as 'religion' for others.[12] He aims to create belief on the side of citizens through the creation of images that 'make them follow after an imagined form of happiness'.[13] His religious role, it seems, becomes an aesthetic exercise for the imagination that starts off with the invention of images that have emotional happiness as an end.

The *imam*'s transfer into images of philosophical percepts is what I am referring to here as translation. My argument builds on al-Farabi's own model of 'transfer' as inter-national translation or *naqla*, which he expounds in his *Book of Letters* or *Kitab al-Huruf*. *Naqla* is described as the process that follows the development of a nation's language; it is a process of transfer whereby philosophical or religious notions get

---

[10] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 46 (#57).
[11] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 47 (#59).
[12] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 41.
[13] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 41.

transferred into the discourse of other nations.[14] These nations, in turn, find

themselves inserted into a linguistic mission of coming up or adopting terms or names

to cater for the national differences.[15] This challenge of translation, I find, also takes

place locally within the premises of the Virtuous City through the figure of the *imam*.

The *imam*, however, translates the philosophical into the religious through similitudes

or images. His model of intra-national transfer or *naqla* replaces the linguistic with

the aesthetic to perform the same mission, negotiating the relation between

philosophy and religion. [16]

So, the first part of the chapter explores the semiotic and linguistic system that al-

Farabi constructs and that the *imam* relies on to fulfill his role as mediator. I will,

then, investigate the *imam*-as-translator who creates images to induce an emotional

acquiescence, happiness. In this process, he qualifies mediation by giving it an

aesthetic guise with a religion-creating function that is carried out via persuasive

methods, political oratory. Rhetoric is employed 'to arouse the resolution' of citizens

---

[14] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, ed. by Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar el-Mashreq, 1969) in *Leneshmidt Translations Resource Library* <http://www.leneshmidt-translations.com/alfarabi_book_of_letters_english/index.htm..> [accessed 4 June 2014](§§148-151).

[15] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §154.

[16] Leo Strauss (In *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952), p.15) highlights an important discrepancy in al-Farabi's definition of the king among his different writings. This discrepancy relates to the link between philosophy and religion in the person of this king-*imam*. In al-Farabi's *Plato*, Strauss argues, al-Farabi substitutes 'politics for religion'. Al-Farabi associates the philosopher with the king, but he does not call this king, a legislator. He thus establishes the connection between philosophy and sovereignty, but not religion. Al-Farabi shows that philosophy needs the supplementation of the "royal art" (not religion) in order for the public to attain happiness. By this substitution, al-Farabi, Strauss claims, lays the 'foundation for the secular alliance between philosophers and princes friendly to philosophy' and 'initiate[s] the tradition whose most famous representatives in the West are Marsilius of Padua and Machiavelli'. This substitution to which Strauss points, however, does not occur in al-Farabi's other works with which I deal in this chapter.

to acts leading to happiness.[17] By employing political oratory, the *imam* aims to cause the 'souls of the citizens to grow reverent, submissive, muted, and meek' and in favor of the acts he espouses or 'confident, spiteful, insolent, and contemptuous' of 'everything contrary to these acts'.[18] Language, in this regard, employs the aesthetic medium of images for the creation of emotional ends linked to and leading to action.

The aesthetic element that qualifies the mission of the *imam*-as-translator is further described by al-Farabi as aiming to strengthen the 'part of the soul that is naturally equipped for happiness'.[19] The 'natural' becomes the field of work for the *imam*-translator. Language is used by the *imam* to train the souls of the masses and nurture the natural or rational as well as 'appetitive' qualities of the soul.[20] Among the appetitive qualities that the *imam* is said to instruct and that the second part of the chapter will focus on is his notion of justice or '*adl*.[21] Justice is claimed to be an appetitive moral of the soul that the *imam* as law-giver or legislator is supposed to train in his 'formation of character' of the citizens.[22] It indicates what Mian in 'Muslim Political Philosophy and the Affective Turn: Farabi on Language, Affect, and Reason' calls the 'excess of reason (i.e. affect)' that a law-giver trains via religious images or similitudes. [23] In this process, justice interacts with law and the latter with the former to form the city built on justice-law or law-justice. This interaction between justice and law, I hold, would qualify as al-Farabi's notion of virtue within his Virtuous City.

---

[17] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 38 (#44)
[18]Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 38 (#44).
[19] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 37.
[20] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 14 (#7).
[21] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 16 (#8).
[22] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 35 (#39).
[23] Ali Altaf Mian, 'Muslim Political Philosophy and the Affective Turn: Farabi on Language, Affect, and Reason', *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, 4 (2011), 47–70 (p. 50).

However, the reliance of the *imam* as mediator/translator on natural dispositions to establish his rule meets with the very nature of natural disposition, non-uniformity or difference in reception that the last part of the chapter will investigate. Among the citizens of the Virtuous City, there spring 'weeds' whose 'position in the cities is like that of the darnel among the wheat, the thorns growing among the crop, or the other grass that is useless or even harmful to the crop or plants'.[24] Divided into six classes, these weeds share in their contestation of the images the *imam* evokes. They carry out their contestation in different manners because of the differences in their natural dispositions, their rational and appetitive moral abilities. They thus challenge the *imam*'s address to natural dispositions, or what al-Farabi calls the *imam*'s 'instruction'.[25]

By attempting to contest the *imam*'s sovereignty by activating natural dispositions that escape the *imam*'s address, the weeds show how the *imam*-as-translator becomes an *imam*-in-translation. When the *imam* as translator/ mediator relies on communicating with the natural through the aesthetic, he unintentionally, it seems, places himself in translation. The weeds only play the role of catalyst in this process. The *imam* translates himself by himself through his very reliance on the aesthetic medium to address natural dispositions.

In translating the *imam*, the weed's skepticism, I argue, displays a mechanism of contesting images that seems to aesthetically echo the Derridean notion of *différance* as raised in *Of Grammatology* (1967). For Derrida, signs refer to other signs in a constant state of *différance,* difference with other signs that also indicates the differed status of meaning. He describes this process as the 'production of

---

[24] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 42.
[25] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 35 (#39).

differing/deferring'.[26] In the previous chapter, I showed how the signs in *différance*
mark the abyss of madness and silence that a translation navigates. In this chapter, I
rethink translation through al-Farabi's *imam* model to investigate for hints, if any, of a
possible *différance* at work.

My investigation revisits the Aristotelian traces within al-Farabi's writings by
following Derrida's example. Derrida introduces *différance* to deconstruct
logocentrism, or the 'metaphysics of presence' within Western philosophy, that
privileges a 'transcendental signified'.[27] His deconstruction emphasizes *différance* as
a '(pure) trace'.[28] The trace is the 'originary condition of mediation, synthesis or
complexity, rather than a present being, thing or entity' that characterizes the state of
every sign as sign.[29] Derrida also refers to this originary state of mediation as '*arche*-
writing' or originary writing that deconstructs the opposition between speech and
writing.[30] Whereas Aristotelian logocentrism took writing to be a supplement to
speech, Derrida shows that writing is more 'originary' and is what defines the state of
all signs, spoken or written.[31] All signs are always in a state 'of mediation, difference
and relation'.[32] How al-Farabi's model rewrites this state of the sign in mediation thus
becomes my question for this section of the chapter.

Transposing the mediatory state of the signs from the Western context to the
weeds' construction of images, I argue that the movement of *différance* takes place in
aesthetic terms. In the al-Farabian version, the appetitive or affective constitutes a

---

[26] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 23.
[27] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 49.
[28] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 62.
[29] Arthur Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide*
(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 75.
[30] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 56.
[31] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 61.
[32] Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology*, p. 54.

foundational aspect of the sign. In oral speech, signs differ by virtue of the body part involved in their production. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, al-Farabi highlights the 'differences in the parts of the mouth that are actively or passively involved in producing the various sounds' and that constitute the 'differentiae of letters' in speech.[33] Sound is described as an 'affective quality (*kayfiyyat infi'aliyya*)' that is the principle for differentiating among letters, the material of expression in speech.[34] Writing then preserves the affective response, the sound, by recording the medium of the letter as material of expression. So, it could be said that script is not subordinate to speech in the Aristotelian sense; writing follows after an aesthetic refinement of speech that is linked to the affective quality just as speech follows after a refinement of the affective quality of sound. Mediation as originary trace, in this sense, can only be taken as a state of what I call 'affective tracing', and it is this affective tracing that differs among nations and characterizes translation.

So, the model of mediation as *imamic* transfer or translator-in-translation, which al-Farabi offers, seems to be following similar Derridean semiotic motifs. The 'divine' logocentric notion of sovereignty is deconstructed in an affective move towards what can be taken to be the secular: the nation's natural dispositions that include moral virtues, especially justice. In this model of translation, the chapter will argue, the notions of divine and secular are renegotiated in aesthetic terms as the affective traces prove to be integral to the semiotics of speech and writing.

---

[33] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, p. 16.
[34] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, p. 16.

2.2 Language: Semiotics and Affective Aesthetics

Before exploring the role that the *imam* plays as mediator, it is necessary that I explore the semiotic dimensions of mediation within al-Farabi's philosophy. I shall thus begin my discussion by investigating the development of language in a nation as outlined in al-Farabi's *Book of Letters* or *Kitab al-Huruf*, his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* as well as his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione or Kitab al-Ibara*. For al-Farabi, a nation develops its own language according to its own 'natural make-up' which starts off with gesturing and producing speech sounds.[35] These speech sounds depend on 'the character and temperaments of the organs of people' who dwell in the same place.[36] Speech is primarily taken to denote an organic natural response to sense perceptions. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, al-Farabi defines sound as 'essentially an affection of the senses' or '*kayfiyyat infi'aliyya*' that is the 'genus of the material of expression', the letters.[37] Describing the sound as an affection is an addition that al-Farabi integrates into his discussion of Aristotle's logic as Zimmerman, the translator of *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione,* claims. As an affective state, sound becomes the natural basis that characterizes the uniqueness of every nation's language. Upon that affective uniqueness, words and sentence construction later develop in a process that 'involves both our cognition and our affective sensory apparatus'.[38]

---

[35] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §121.
[36] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §146.
[37] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, pp. 16–7.
[38] Mian, 'Muslim Political Philosophy', p. 56.

Al-Farabi further maintains the value of the affective in his explanation of how speech and script, writing, develop in a nation through the medium of the 'letter'.[39] He first highlights the distinction that Aristotle makes between 'expression', *alfaz*, and sound.[40] Sound is the genus of letters that is also produced by birds and signalizes the terror, pleasure or aggression they feel.[41] The latter is said to be better understood through the works of 'those versed in the meters of poetry of that language who are concerned with the letters of their language'.[42] Sound, in this sense, is concerned with the affective distinction among letters. On the other hand, expressions or *alfaz* are claimed to 'signify by virtue of being common signs' so that 'when someone hears them, the thing of which the expression in question has been made, a sign comes to his mind'.[43] Al-Farabi claims that these expressions 'distinguish nations'.[44] Expressions become a nation's attempt at conventionalizing its natural affective responses of sound through letters. Through convention, an expression maintains the affective element, the sound and its emotional connotations, even though the speaker might not be experiencing the affect at the moment of speaking.

Following the Aristotelian tradition, these expressions are said to be common signs, nouns, verbs, etc., that structure speech preserved by script. Speech or *qawl* is explained to be 'what comes out in the voice', *sawt*, and 'signifies in the first place thoughts in the soul'.[45] Al-Farabi explains these traces in the soul by distinguishing them from pure 'thoughts', for traces indicate 'the images of sense objects according to the sensation one had of them […] and other things, like the goat-stag and similar

---

[39] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, p. 16.
[40] Ibid., p. 16.
[41] Ibid., p. 20.
[42] Ibid., p. 16.
[43] Ibid., p. 11.
[44] Ibid., p. 12.
[45] Ibid., p. 11.

things, which the soul invents by combining images'.[46] Traces in the soul thus

indicate thoughts, sensations, images and their combinations that speech signifies

through the medium of letters. Primarily constituted of sensations and images, traces

in the soul need the medium of the affective, the letters, to vocalize themselves. In

turn, when this speech is put in writing or script, it is said to rely on convention and

'mnemonic signs'.[47] Under the effect of memory, letters become mnemonic signs that

are used to preserve and inscribe the affective-sensation correspondence.

Natural make-up and the affective-sensation, in turn, become the foundations for a

nation's formation of its own language and lexicon. From the affective state of letters

that imbues speech and writing, a nation is said to develop its utterances and

meanings through dialectical methods until they reach the investigation into

theoretical philosophy as 'in the time of Plato' and 'in the days of Aristotle'.[48]

Philosophy is claimed to be taught to 'the elect' by means of 'demonstrative methods

only', a method which I will discuss later on, while common instruction of the

'multitude' takes the form of 'dialectical, rhetorical, or poetical methods'.[49] Here, the

poetic and rhetorical imbue the teaching of philosophy with the affective-sensation

dimension spoken of earlier and which I will be exploring more extensively in

Chapter Four of this thesis. However, my interest here is in the fact that the

instruction of the multitude proceeds by 'imag[ing] forth such theoretical intelligibles'

and 'excel[ling] in discovering each one of the political activities useful for the

attainment of happiness, and excel[ling] in using all the means of persuasion about the

theoretical and practical matters that are appropriate to teach to the multitude'.[50]

---

[46] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[47] Ibid., p. 13.
[48] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*,§§142-3.
[49] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*,§143.
[50] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*,§144.

Teaching the multitude, then, resorts to the creation of images via rhetorical and poetic methods, which I take to constitute the medium of the affective aesthetic. By the aesthetic, I mean images that have affective connotations where emotions also play a major role.[51]

Instruction, however, is not restricted to the aesthetic aspect of language. Affective aesthetics plays a role in forming opinions as a form of 'religion' or *milla* of the multitudes.[52] Al-Farabi defines the *milla* as the process 'by which the multitude is taught, its character is formed, and it is made to do everything with which to achieve happiness'.[53] In this case, religion is defined by the response the *imam* awaits from the citizens: total belief and submission to his instruction. Citizens are supposed to directly believe in the images that aestheticize philosophy and tie it with emotional ends, happiness. The shift from philosophy to religion is thus marked by the persistence of the affective through an emphasis on the aesthetics of imaging and the emotional. The integration of the affective, emotional and imaginative in the development of language, therefore, highlights the aesthetic element that is deeply embedded in al-Farabi's version of the Aristotelian semiotic system.[54]

---

[51] Ali Altaf Mian (in 'Muslim Political Philosophy', 47–70) argues that there is a 'unison of reason and affect' in al-Farabi's 'grounding of social and political existence in language' (p.48). Mian distinguishes between the affects and emotions through emphasizing the non-rational aspect of emotions in the form of passions. He adopts Michael Hardt's definition of the affect (in *The Affective Turn* (2007)) as the integration of the reason and the passions in the 'way we think of the human condition' (pp. 67-68, note 2).

[52] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §144.

[53] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*,§§142-4.

[54] George Steiner (in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)) argues that 'language is more than communication'; it is 'the dynamic mediation between poles of cognition which gives human experience its underlying dual and dialectical form' (p.86). Here, Steiner refers to Wilhem von Humboldt's *On the Differentiation of the Structure of Human Language, and its Influence on the Spiritual Evolution of the Human Race* (1883) in which the latter argues that 'different languages engender different spiritual constructs of reality' (Steiner, p.88). The reference to spiritual constructs and cognition is what I take to

2.3 The Semiotic-Aesthetic Medium: The *Imam* as Mediator

So far, I have shown how language within the al-Farabian system is marked by the embedding of affective aesthetics in semiotics, which is employed for the 'instruction' of the masses.[55] The person ascribed with instructing the multitudes in philosophical truths through persuading them of the images is the *Imam*, the ruler figure with unique attributes. The *imam* is a 'Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator' who is able to communicate effectively with these masses.[56] The *imam* thus performs a unique communicative function that acquires aesthetic significance, which I devote this section to explore.

As a sovereign, the *imam* is said to possess twelve innate qualities and six conditions that must develop in his character after maturity. Among the twelve innate qualities of perfection, he is said to have 'fine diction, his tongue enabling him to explain to perfection all that is in the recess of his mind'.[57] This innate communicative ability, along with all the other qualities, then, becomes the foundation for the skills he acquires after maturity. These include wisdom, complete prudence, excellent persuasion, [and] excellent imaginative evocation'.[58] In addition to his possession of the theoretical knowledge that constitutes his wisdom as a philosopher, the *imam* should develop the practical aspects of that wisdom, taken here to signify the particular conditions that facilitate the application of theoretical knowledge.[59] To help establish these political conditions, the *imam* must be able to produce imaginative

---

correspond with the relationship of speech to the affections, imagination and memory in al-Farabi's work.

[55] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 35(#39).
[56] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 47 (#58).
[57] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State: Mabadi' Ara Ahl Al-Madina Al-Fadila*, trans. by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 249.
[58] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 37 (#58).
[59] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 45 (#56).

impressions that are convincing enough for the citizens to follow. The images that he creates are supported by persuasive arguments to form the religion or *milla* of the masses. When the masses become 'believers' in the images that the *imam* creates, the *imam* will have fulfilled his function.[60] The *imam* is recognized as an *imam* only after he becomes the 'model, someone to be copied in his ways of life and his actions, [and] someone whose declarations and counsels are to be accepted'.[61]

The *imam*'s instruction relies on creating imaginative impressions to convince the public of the 'theoretical virtues' that he intellects because of his 'superior natural dispositions'.[62] The *imam* cognizes these theoretical virtues by virtue of possessing 'great and superior natural dispositions, when his soul is in union with the Active Intellect'.[63] The Active Intellect is the last and tenth intellect in al-Farabi's Neoplatonic cosmology that 'bridges the gap between the heavenly or celestial world and the sublunary world' and is the agent of delivering revelation.[64] In *The Political Regime*, this intellect is described as being the agent of 'mediation' between the 'first Cause' and men.[65] This state of unity with the Active Intellect is incumbent upon the *imam* having superior natural dispositions necessary for him to receive revelation. In fact, the possession of superior natural dispositions defines the true notion of the *imam*'s sovereignty, as al-Farabi claims. To be a sovereign or a 'prince', the *imam* is said 'to possess the power of the greatest ability'.[66] His power is not dependent on external things; instead, it is a result of 'his art, skill, and virtue' being very powerful. Only a 'great power of deliberation, and great power of [moral] virtue and art' can

[60] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 41.
[61] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 37 (#58).
[62] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 36.
[63] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 36.
[64] Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent : Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 117.
[65] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 37.
[66] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 46 (#57).

lead to the *imam*'s skill and art being powerful.[67] It is upon fulfilling these conditions

as a sovereign with superior natural dispositions that the *imam*'s soul becomes unified

with the Active Intellect. In this state of unity, the *imam* assumes the role of the

Active Intellect; he becomes an agent of mediation himself. By virtue of this

mediation, the *imam* becomes a philosopher through the overflow of the divine mind

to reason. Besides being a philosopher, he becomes 'a prophet, warning about future

events and telling about particular things existing in the present' through the overflow

to the imagination.[68] The *imam* thus combines two roles, philosopher and prophet,

through his role in divine mediation.

As an agent of mediation characterized by the overflow of the divine mind to

reason, the *imam* is charged with the mission of instructing men in the philosophical

truths that overflowed. This model of instruction is said to 'proceed by speech

alone'.[69] It involves 'the sciences whose ultimate purpose is to make the beings and

what they contain intelligible with certainty'.[70] These sciences consist of two

components: the principles of instruction and the principles of being.[71] The principles

of being are Aristotle's four causes: the 'formal cause', the 'agent', the 'material

principle', and the 'final cause'.[72] The principles of instruction are:

> (1) the conditions and states of the first premises and the order of their
>
> arrangement if they are to lead the investigator necessarily to the truth itself and to
>
> certainty about it; (2) the conditions and states of the first premises and the order
>
> of their arrangement when they cause the investigator to wander from the truth,

---

[67] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 46 (#57).
[68] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 244.
[69] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 35 (#39).
[70] Ibid., p. 13 (#2).
[71] Ibid., pp. 84–5 (§7).
[72] Ibid., p. 15 (#6).

perplex him, and prevent him from perceiving even where the truth of his problem might lie; (3) the conditions and states of the first premises and the order of their arrangement when they provide belief and persuasion about a problem and make one even fancy that this is certainty although it is not; (4) the conditions and states of the first premises and the order of their arrangement when they lead the investigator not to the truth itself but to a similitude and image of truth.[73]

These principles of instruction refer to the logical syllogistic arts of rhetoric and poetry along with demonstrations and sophistry. According to Fuad Said Haddad in *Al-Farabi's Theory of Communication*, the 'arts of communication constitute [….] various levels of the process of instruction'.[74] Here, Haddad is referring to the five communicative arts of demonstration, dialectic, sophistry, rhetoric and poetry which are integral to al-Farabi's theory of instruction described above. Obviously, the *imam* as mediator masters the art of communication according to context. This is why he chooses to resort to persuasive arguments, rhetoric, to instruct the 'vulgar' of the 'similitudes' that he constructs.[75] The vulgar only know the similitude or likeness created by these principles of instruction.

In his role as mediator or instructor, the *imam* creates images to convince the masses that he deserves to be their ruler. He thus carries out an aesthetic function, the creation of images, with political ends. The citizens are supposed to imagine the principles through having 'imprinted in [their] soul[s] their images, representations of them, or matters that are imitations of them'.[76] The *imam* thus communicates with the imagination of the citizens aesthetically through the creation of images,

---

[73] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 14 (#4).
[74] Fuad Said Haddad , *Al-Farabi's Theory of Communication* (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1989), p. 123.
[75] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 36 (#40).
[76] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 40.

representations and imitations. Aesthetic communication with the citizens'

imagination is then supposed to prepare the citizens' minds to receive the principles

mediated by the divine mind:

> The relatively extensive and unusual account of the imagination in the Virtuous
>
> City presents it as a power that is continuous and communicates with the
>
> powers of sense perception, on the one hand, and of reason, on the other. It
>
> provides the link that unifies the process of human cognition. And it plays an
>
> active, creative role as mediator. It receives information from either reason or
>
> the senses, transforms it, and transmits it to, or prepares it for, the other power.
>
> Its first activity in this regard is preparing the way for reason to grasp the first
>
> principles of knowledge provided by the active intellect or divine mind.[77]

As a medium of mediation between the senses and cognition, the imagination

performs an active innate role that involves the creation of images and transformation

of information between one faculty and another. It carries out this function to aid

reason in receiving the philosophical principles that the *imam* 'in whom the divine

mind incarnates itself' is teaching.[78] However, in the case of the *imam*'s instruction,

the creation of images is not left for the imagination of the public to negotiate by

itself. The *imam* carries out this function for their imagination through the similitudes

he creates. In this sense, the *imam* could be said to be re-appropriating the innate

function of the imagination by exteriorizing it. He becomes an imagination

exteriorized, a mediating agent that exteriorizes the link between the senses and

cognition. He is now ascribed with a double mediating function: divine and

---

[77] Muhsin, *Alfarabi*, pp. 157–8.
[78] Massimo Campanini, 'Alfarabi and the Foundation of Political Theology in Islam',
in *Islam, The State, And Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns*,
ed. by Asma Afsaruddin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 162.

imaginative mediation. His divine mediation appropriates the imaginative mediation enacted within the aesthetic field. As a philosopher, he resorts to the imagination of the masses to create the imaginative impressions, images, to educate them. As a prophet, he needs his imagination for the overflow of revelation from the Active Mind. In this sense, it could be said that the *imam* becomes a vehicle of the imagination, his own and the masses'; this is what I refer to here as his aesthetic function.

As an imagination exteriorized, the *imam* constructs images, adopting happiness as his aim. He ties his aesthetic function to emotional ends. By happiness, al-Farabi means, the emotional state that marks the 'good without qualification' that can only be achieved when citizens believe in the 'first intelligible' revealed via the Active Intellect.[79] It consists in 'the soul's dissociating itself from everything material or bodily and joining the host of the separate intelligences in the intelligible world'.[80] This form of happiness that can be achieved in this life is said to become true and supreme after death when it takes the form of salvation where 'the kindred separate souls increase in number and unite with one another'.[81] True happiness is defined as the salvation through unity that the *imam* seeks to emulate in his Virtuous City and yet of which can he only be assured after the passing away of spirits who have gained good states.

In order to reach this state of happiness, the *imam* is required to form characters, a process that defines the specific emotional response the *imam* seeks to achieve in the souls of the masses. Habituating or forming characters is defined as 'the method of

---

[79] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 34.
[80] Majid Fakhry, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oneworld Publications, 1997), p. 45.
[81] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 38.

introducing the moral virtues and practical arts in nations' through arousing

resolutions to perform acts.[82] The *imam* seeks to habituate characters by arousing in

them the 'resolution to do these acts; the states of character and the acts issuing from

them should come to possess their souls, and they should be as it were enraptured by

them'.[83] As an imagination exteriorized, the *imam* addresses the resolution to do acts

through creating a feeling of rapture aroused by speech or deed.[84] By employing

political oratory, the *imam* aims to cause the 'souls of the citizens to grow reverent,

submissive, muted, and meek' and in favor of the acts he espouses or 'confident,

spiteful, insolent, and contemptuous' of 'everything contrary to these acts'.[85] The

formation of character follows the supreme rulers' inquiry into the human nature

common to all nations and into the 'human states of character and the acts for which

all nations are equipped by that nature which is common to them' and 'by which

every nation can be set aright and guided towards happiness'.[86] So, the formation of

character takes place as a process of introducing moral virtues through images and

arguments that are compatible with every nation's states of character.

In this sense, the *imam*'s instruction aims to habituate the natural in order to

naturalize the habit, which qualifies as an act of conventionalizing. The *imam* seeks to

induce a conventional sense of the natural. By aiming to habituate characters and

mold natural dispositions, then, the *imam* acquires his role as *imam*, for

etymologically speaking, the *imam* 'signifies merely the one whose example is

followed and who is well-received or his purpose is well-received'.[87] Reception

determines the function of the *imam* as *imam*. As *imam*, his aesthetic imaginative

---

[82] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 35 (#39).
[83] Ibid., p. 35 (#39).
[84] Ibid., p. 35 (#39).
[85] Ibid., p. 38 (#44).
[86] Ibid., p. 39 (#45).
[87] Ibid., p. 46 (#57).

mediation moulds the natural dispositions of characters by arousing resolutions and acts according to a set virtue. To maintain this conventionalizing norm, the *imam* resorts to writing, another act that reinforces his aesthetic function, as the next section will show.

2.4 *Naqla*/Translation and the *Imam*: Law and Justice

As the *imam* embodies the mediation of the philosophical to create religion, his aesthetic function is carried out by establishing a link between the imaginative and the emotional. He relies on the aesthetic medium to mould natural dispositions or conventionalize them by habituating characters. The process of habituating characters takes place through the creation of images that address the imagination of every nation according to the potential of that nation. These images are said to be accompanied by persuasive arguments that can cause the souls to be either submissive or insolent. His aesthetic role, however, reinforces an overall Aristotelian logocentrism that this section will explore.

In instruction and the habituation of character, the *imam* is described as resorting to writing to preserve the arguments used to convince the public of the desired *milla* or religion. These arguments are differentiated into ones that should be kept oral for their temporary character and ones that should be both oral and written, preserved permanently 'in two Books, a Book of Opinions and a Book of Acts'.[88] This script is said to preserve 'the opinions and acts that nations and cities were called upon to embrace, the arguments by which he sought to preserve among them and to establish in them the things they were called upon to embrace so that they will not be forgotten, and the arguments with which he contradicts the opponents of these opinions and

---

[88] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 39 (#44).

acts'.[89] Opinions include 'such things as God, His attributes, the universe, and so forth' while actions refer to 'such things as prayers and civic transactions'.[90] The Aristotelian metaphysical distinction between speech and writing is refigured through this differentiation of speech into two kinds, speech/expression that corresponds with script to be kept in books and speech/expression that should not be turned into script because it is temporary. These books become a logocentric preservation of the *imam*'s arguments on actions and opinions. They are examples of the 'venerable' kind of writing which is employed 'in the service of the virtuous king and the virtuous rulership'.[91] The noblest kind of writing, in this sense, preserves the *imam*'s laws and is employed in his service to mold the characters of the citizens by investing in their natural dispositions.

These opinions and acts preserved in books are described as being set down by the law-giver who 'legislat[es] a divine law (*sharī'a*) or a religion (*milla*) for a particular nation'.[92] Opinions and actions thus indicate laws that the *imam* founds as a law-giver or philosopher-legislator. Legislation signifies 'excellence of [the *imam*'s] knowledge concerning the conditions of practical intelligibles'.[93] As a legislator, the *imam* is concerned with finding and realizing practical intelligibles so that a nation can achieve happiness. These intelligibles are, then, 'embodied in laws'.[94] The process of aesthetic instruction, then, follows on from this setting down of laws. The political, in this sense, proves to be intertwined with aesthetics:

---

[89] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, pp. 38–9 (#44).
[90] Muhsin, *Alfarabi*, p. 89.
[91] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, pp. 59–60 (#93).
[92] Muhsin, *Alfarabi*, p. 89.
[93] Alfarabi, *The Attainment of Happiness*, p. 46 (#57).
[94] Ibid., p. 45 (# 56).

The art of setting down laws requires the ability to excel in imaging forth such

theoretical intelligibles that are difficult for the multitude to conceive, to excel in

discovering each one of the political activities useful for the attainment of

happiness, and to excel in using all the means of persuasion about the theoretical

and practical matters that are appropriate to teach to the multitude. If laws

dealing with these two classes [namely, the theoretical and the practical] are set

down, and the means of persuading, instructing, and forming the character of the

multitude are added to them, then a religion [milla] will have been realized by

which the multitude is taught, its character is formed, and it is made to do

everything with which to achieve happiness.[95]

The *imam*, in this sense, renders law-making the foundation upon which a religion is

formed. The conflation of the political and religious takes place through a process of

instructing the masses in the philosophical matters via aesthetic media. His instruction

aims to persuade as well as to habituate every nation's characters.

The setting of laws by the *imam* as a founder of a religion is correlated with the

act of establishing names for these new laws. In the *Book of Letters*, this process of

naming or establishing laws is discussed by al-Farabi within the larger context of

translation as transfer or *naqla. Naqla,* or linguistic translation, involves transferring

religious laws or philosophical notions and their names from one nation to another.[96]

The process of transferring concepts is complemented by a process of name transfer

where names are taken from the language of the masses and displaced into the laws or

philosophical concepts instituted by the philosopher-legislator, the elect. Al-Farabi

explains that '[n]ames of laws of a first religion' are transferred to a new imported

---

[95] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §144.
[96] Ibid., §154.

law, and 'names of ordinary meanings' to new philosophical concepts.[97] Naming,

then, becomes the process of conventionalizing new religious laws and philosophical

meanings through transfer or translation.

Although al-Farabi's model of transfer or *naqla* involves a conventionalizing

function according to context, it maintains the traditional sense of establishing a

continuity of meanings between nations. In 'La Naqla, Étude du Concept de Transfert

Dans L'oeuvre D'al-Farabi' (that is 'Naqla, The Study of the Concept of Transfer in

the Works of al-Farabi'), D'Arcy argues:

> Ainsi, dans les §§ 154–158 du K. al-Hurūf, le lexique de n-q-l est attribué aussi
>
> bien aux notions religieuses et philosophiques transférées (huit occurrences)
>
> d'une nation à l'autre qu'aux termes transférés du langage vulgaire au langage
>
> religieux et philosophique d'une même nation (cinq occurrences). Cette dualité
>
> seule permet de comprendre le sens exact de l'opération de traduction (naqla). La
>
> traduction n'est jamais chez al-Fārābī la répétition d'un terme étranger dans la
>
> langue propre. Cela est impossible parce que ce qu'il s'agit toujours de traduire,
>
> c'est ce qui n'existe pas encore dans la langue propre. Le problème de la
>
> traduction est alors un problème de recollement. Traduire, c'est maintenir la
>
> continuité de sens entre deux nations.[98]

> Thus, in parts 154-158 of the *Book of Letters*, the root n-q-l is attributed as well
>
> to transferred religious and philosophic notions (8 occurrences) that take place
>
> between one nation and another as well as to terms transferred from vulgar
>
> language [language of the masses] to religious and philosophical language of the

---

[97] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §154.

[98] Guillaume de Vaulx D'arcy, 'La Naqla, Étude Du Concept De Transfert Dans L'oeuvre D'al-Farabi', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 20 (2010), 125–76 <http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0957423909990129>.

same nation. This duality allows us to understand the exact meaning of the

process of translation (naqla). Translation, for al-Farabi is never the repetition of

a foreign term in a nation's/one's own language. This is impossible because it is

always the case that there will be notions to be translated that do not exist in the

original language. The problem of translation, then, is a problem of establishing a

link or continuity between two languages. To translate is to maintain the

continuity of meaning between two nations.

So, the transfer of philosophical and religious notions among nations parallels a

naming process that bridges the gap between the elect and the multitudes, the vulgar.

Bridging this gap becomes the conventionalizing mechanism that aids in maintaining

the desired continuity of meaning between nations. In case the founder decides to

apply foreign names to the transferred laws, he bridges the gap again by paying

attention to pronunciation. He changes utterances to make their letters and formation

the same as the letters and formation of the utterances of his nation so that they will

find them easier to pronounce.[99] In this sense, law-making, which is complemented by

naming, constitutes translation as a process carried out by the *imam* in his aesthetic

instruction as it is primarily concerned with guarding conventional naturalness.

Instruction is thus integral to the process of transfer. It is translation only in the sense

that it is the tendency to maintain naturalness through conventionalizing; it is naming

that goes hand in hand with aesthetic instruction and habituating characters.

The natural states of character or morals of the soul that the *imam* seeks to

conventionalize are categorized into general and specific virtues. The general

'appetitive virtues' include 'moderation, courage, liberality, and justice'.[100] The more

---

[99] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §154.
[100] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 16 (#8).

specific affections include 'humility, respectfulness, gentleness, modesty, and friendliness'.[101] These specific morals 'rely on the Aristotelian notion of moral equilibrium' between two opposing moral extremes.[102] In both forms, the virtues are described as undergoing development though instruction. The latter-mentioned specific virtues are habituated via the poetic medium, which I will discuss further in Chapter Four. The former-mentioned general ones are habituated via political instruction. However, in both forms, these virtues derive their significance from their social value that instruction seeks to maintain by rendering their naturalness a matter of convention.

The most important appetitive virtue that the *imam* cultivates in the citizens as the 'foundation on which the political order is erected' is justice.[103] Justice is an appetitive moral virtue that involves the general meaning of 'a human being practicing acts of virtue, any virtue whatever, with respect to what is between him and someone else'.[104] The 'name of the more general' justice is, then, used to indicate the more particular 'species' of justice that consists of 'dividing' and 'preserving what has been divided'.[105] In *The Islamic Conception of Justice,* Majid Khadduri explains the al-Farabian notion of justice that the *imam* embodies and enacts on the political level as follows:

> […] the function of the Ruler is not just to preside over the City. He must combine all powers in his hands—executive, legislative, and judiciary—and, moreover, he must be endowed with a sense of justice which would enable him to operate the

---

[101] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 20 (#18).
[102] Mian, 'Muslim Political Philosophy', p. 63.
[103] Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (United States of America: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 85.
[104] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 42 (#64).
[105] Ibid., p. 42 (#64).

> public order in accordance with the standard of justice embodied in the Law.[..]
> the Imam is the Supreme Ruler and the source of all power of the virtuous nation
> (and potentially of the virtuous World-State). He holds the scale of justice in his
> hands, because he alone has the power to enact, interpret and apply the Law.[106]

As a law-giver and philosopher, the *imam* maintains justice through the ability to operate the public order to fulfill a standard of justice in the law; this law is that named by convention and preserved in the Book of Acts and Book of Opinions. Justice thus becomes the interpretation of law to maintain justice though the public order. This process also involves applying justice to others or through others in line with the divine law. By virtue of the *imam*'s enactment of justice, the citizens will be molded to enact justice in both general and specific senses. The citizens will demonstrate justice in the general sense of applying virtue in relation to others. They will also enact it in the specific sense of making a division and preserving what has been divided.

As the process of interpreting the law, justice qualifies the creation of images integral to law-making. Since law refers to religion as an image, justice becomes the aesthetic process of interpreting images. Justice, in this sense, indicates the selection of the right images and the interpretation of these images in order to instruct a particular nation and habituate their characters. The appetitive virtue of justice in citizens is thus molded aesthetically according to a standard of justice embodied in the interpretation of law.

In this process, however, the *imam* faces the challenge of the differing natural abilities of individuals. For al-Farabi, individual 'human beings are made by nature

---

[106] Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, pp. 85–6.

with unequal powers and different preparations'.[107] The differing natural abilities

necessitate that the images be revisited to maintain justice:

> The founder is able to depict in correct images what he receives through the
> illumination of a divine mind. Because the divine mind's light informs and
> controls its perfect imagination, it is able to grasp what is given to it with the most
> perfect image possible. The problem arises because images are necessarily
> particular and corporeal, which is true of both the images depicting theoretical
> things and those depicting practical things. They are also meant to be right,
> perfect, or adequate for the particular time and place and people for whom they
> are projected. But times change, religions expand, and followers with new and
> different traditions, languages, habits, and experiences enter the fold for whom the
> older images need to be interpreted or reinterpreted. And they need to be
> interpreted correctly, that is, turned back to their source. This is why the
> philosopher who wishes to interpret the images correctly needs to be concerned
> with the nature of images as well as with the truth.[108]

The interpretation of images by the *imam*, I hold, indicates justice. By virtue of

justice, the *imam* as philosopher is supposed to answer to a nation's heterogeneity, not

only in terms of natures but also in terms of differing contexts of time and space. This

is why the *imam* and his successors are supposed to interpret and reinterpret; they aim

to maintain political justice through their ability to politically conventionalize the

natural sense of justice. The *naqla* or translation of justice as an appetitive virtue

turned political can only take place through the reinterpretation of images that the

imam carries out.

---

[107] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 35.
[108] Muhsin, *Alfarabi*, pp. 165–6.

However, this process of aesthetic reinterpretation turns out not to be such a straightforward activity. The *imam* has to answer to a branch of the citizen population, discussed next, that do not take his images at face value. They constantly challenge his interpretations through falsifying the images that he creates.[109]

2.5 *Naqla*/Translation and the Weeds

As a translator, the *imam* bridges the gap between the elect and the vulgar by providing for a just interpretation of images that address the multitudes' differing natural abilities. The laws start off as oral instructions that are preserved by the *imam* in writing or books. They are then translated into images that address the natural dispositions of the masses in order to habituate characters. In this process, legislation is the process by which the law, religion or *milla*, undergoes the effect of the convention of naming and justice. Justice is maintained through the process of selecting images that address the differing natural dispositions of the multitude. However, as this section will show, the aesthetic role of the *imam* turns out not to exist without any challenge.

In the Virtuous City, a branch of the citizens, called the 'weeds', question the *imam*'s sense of justice by challenging the images and the arguments the *imam* employs. These weeds are described as the citizens whose 'position in the cities is like that of the darnel among the wheat, the thorns growing among the crop, or the other grass that is useless or even harmful to the crop or plants'.[110] They all share in their refutation of the *imam*'s molding of characters through instruction. They thus question the legitimacy of the political mission with which the *imam* has endowed himself. Despite their refutation, they are still considered as part of the citizens and are

---

[109] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 54.
[110] Ibid., p. 42.

'submerged by the citizen body as a whole'.[111] The weeds thus acquire significance because of their role in challenging the *imam* while maintaining their citizenship. In their continuous challenge, they lay manifest the mechanisms of sovereignty that this *imam* employs to maintain power.

This branch of citizens is divided into six groups or classes who are all united in their unique aesthetic sense of revolt. Two groups contest by misinterpreting the 'expressions of the lawgiver and the statements that embody his percepts', either to 'make the things they are after appear good' or 'because of their misconception'. These are the misinterpreters or *maharrifa* and the apostates, *mariqah*.[112] Their misinterpretation takes the form of challenging the *imam*'s sense of justice which fails to address their natural disposition or ability. A third group, called the opportunists or *mutaqannisun*, substitute happiness as a goal for 'other things that man can attain by means of virtue, such as honor, rulership, wealth, and so forth'.[113] This group chooses to redefine the emotional goal of instruction as being one of material gain, such as wealth or power, rulership. Classes four and five intentionally falsify images and the persuasive arguments. While the first group is described as falsifying the images in an honest attempt at seeking the truth, the other falsifies the images because its members desire one of the aims of the ignorant cities. Finally, the last class falsifies images unintentionally due to a lack of power to cognize these images adequately. They end up in a state of perplexity that makes them contest the images via sophistic arguments.[114] Broadly speaking, these weeds are motivated by their differing natural abilities to contend with images and the emotional end tied to them. Their contention

---

[111] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 56.
[112] Ibid., p. 54.
[113] Ibid., p. 53.
[114] Ibid., p. 55.

also involves contesting the persuasive arguments and misinterpreting the expression of laws.

The weeds' natural dispositions that differ in cognitive and imaginative terms lead them to misinterpret images, arguments and laws. By virtue of their differing natural dispositions, they thus redefine justice as the act of reinterpreting and multiplying images in accordance with the different dispositions. The role of the differing appetitive or affective dispositions in this matter is described as follows:

> For Farabi, all aspects of the existence of the public multitude are tied to its specific historical, spatial-temporal particularities. What we describe as someone's disposition is therefore also a manifestation of his or her particularities. Farabi goes into a discussion of potentiality and actuality when talking about the nature of individuals. What becomes actualized in an individual, aspects of his or her cognitive and affective being, are particular natures toward which the individual is pre-disposed. What Farabi hints at is that the representational, the linguistic, and the culturally habitual come afterwards. Human bodies, explains Farabi, 'have definite qualities and compositions, and their souls are disposed towards and prepared for cognitions, conceptions, and images to specific degrees both quantitatively and qualitatively'. In other words, what is actualized into intelligible sociopolitical existence is limited by what exists potentially in the matter that makes up human bodies. He continues, 'their souls are affected by certain affections in specific ways and degrees'. Note how he pays attention to both cognition and feeling when he says that we

communicate the content of our cognition to others using the signs and sounds

that our body permits us to produce.[115]

The appetitive or affective becomes the premise of distinction among the humans'

reception of happiness. As a political value, happiness undergoes the effect of the

appetitive and affective faculties. Furthermore, differences among people are

attributed to the 'signs and sounds' that bodies allow for in conjunction with the

cognitive level attained. This natural difference, then, explains the difference in the

reception and production of images associated with happiness. The crucial point here

is that the political proves to be inherently aesthetic. By investing in this aesthetic

aspect, the weeds carry out a revolt from within the political. Their political

contestation changes from being a purely political act into an aesthetic one of

motivating the reinterpretation of images and symbols. In this revolt, they reinforce

and further expand on the entanglement of justice with the aesthetic.

   By rendering political revolt an aesthetic value set by natural dispositions, the

weeds redefine the act of translation in relation to justice. Instead of being an act

instigated by the *imam*, translation is carried out by the weeds who seek to redefine

justice. By falsifying the images and refuting the persuasive arguments as a medium

for these images, the weeds indicate the failure of the *imam* in his address of their

natural abilities. His partial failure at addressing natural abilities indicates his parallel

failure to address justice. This is why the weeds extend the function of translation by

redefining the parameters of the conventional. Translation no longer ends with the

complementary movement between the concept and the name. The weeds activate the

mechanism of multiplying images and interpretations in an attempt to preserve justice.

In this process, they jeopardize the role of the *imam* as mediator, for they re-

---

[115] Mian, 'Muslim Political Philosophy', p. 54.

appropriate the role of the imagination. The weeds lay manifest the imaginative

dynamics to which the *imam* resorts in order to maintain power. By reclaiming the

role of the imagination, the weeds also subject the preserved religious laws that are

depicted in the images to revision. This is why they set the ignorant city's morals as

legitimate ends and substitutes for the politically moral goal of happiness.

Their redefinition of law thus challenges the Aristotelian logocentric metaphysics

which the *imam* expounds in adopting books or writing to preserve oral laws. Their

challenge to Aristotelian logocentrism is enacted through translation, the mechanism

of justice, which invests in the aesthetic dimension of the affective and the image. In

their role of challenging the sovereign, these weeds become the Middle Age

precursors to what I hold to be the modern Derridean forms of political contestation.

The weeds enact an aesthetic mechanism of political revolt that outlives and extends

beyond the context of the Middle Ages. Their revolt against the *imam* is reincarnated

in the modern-day revolts whose concern, I will show in the following chapter, is not

with overturning regimes as much as with questioning the legitimacy of the political

construction upon which any overpowering, logocentric regime is built. These

parallels that I hold to exist between the weeds' aesthetic challenge of the *imam* and

the Derridean translation of sovereignty will thus be my next topic of discussion.

2.6 The Translator-*Imam* in Translation

By highlighting the aesthetic element within al-Farabi's Aristotelian-based

semiotic system, the weeds establish translation as a foundational aspect of that

system. They thus initiate an act that is very similar to the Derridean deconstructive

act of translating sovereignty, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Their

translation of sovereignty is enacted as an act of redefining justice carried out in the

address to natural abilities and dispositions. In their redefinition, the weeds extend

beyond the *imam* the act of translation or transfer reserved for him. In this process, they end up placing the *imam* himself in translation.

By challenging sovereignty through translation, the weeds carry out what would resonate with the Derridean deconstruction of Aristotelian logocentrism.[116] Logocentrism prioritizes speech 'over writing as the original or privileged means by which the presence of the logos is expressed'.[117] In al-Farabi's system, the *imam* fulfills a logocentric function as he maintains the privileged status of the philosophical truth to which he alone has access. Philosophical truth, the endowment of the Logos or the Active Intellect, occupies the signified dimension of the *imam*'s speech. This is why he later employs Books, writing, to preserve the logocentric truths that he had expressed in that speech. By enacting a logocentric function, the *imam* reinforces what Derrida would qualify as a 'metaphysics of presence' that distinguishes Western thought.[118] Derrida defines the metaphysics of presence as the 'exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire' for a signified.[119] In this sense, the weeds' revolt against the *imam*'s logocentrism could be said to be a medievalist precursor to the Derridean attack on the metaphysics of presence. The weeds thus carry out a medievalist variation of deconstruction that jeopardizes the state of the divine signified that the *imam* preserves.

In their deconstruction of logocentrism, the weeds seem to rely upon the Derridean premise that all language is mediation. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida claims that writing is another name for language itself as all language is characterized

---

[116] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 11.
[117] Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide*, p. 8.
[118] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 22.
[119] Ibid., p. 49.

by mediation, which he also calls '*arche*-writing'.[120] In the case of the *imam*, mediation is enacted by virtue of the imagination and affective aesthetics, as already discussed. This sense of mediation associated with the creation of images is employed by the *imam* to deliver the philosophical truth to the weeds and other citizens. However, instead of receiving the images as illustrations of the truth, the weeds decide to contest the arguments and activate the multiplication of images.[121] They thus distance the truth as a divine signified. In their act of distancing, they highlight the inherent inaccessibility of the truth and the state of all language as mediation.

Furthermore, the weeds' act of distancing through the multiplication of images challenges the *imam*'s logocentrism through investing in the Derridean notion of 'spacing', or the deferment of truth.[122] The *imam*'s images that 'differ in excellence' by being closer or 'far[ther] removed from the truth' are divided into levels.[123] Upon contention of these images, the weeds are described as having their 'imagination

---

[120] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 56.

[121] Michael Shalom Kochin (in 'Weeds: Cultivating the Imagination in Medieval Arabic Political Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60 (1999), 399–416) argues that al-Farabi's philosopher is a mediator between philosophy or truth and religion or politics. Kochin adopts Plato's notion of the noble lie to argue that politics is the process of creating images. The philosopher, in this sense, is supposed to embrace the power of the imagination and invest in it. He does that through instruction which is defined as the process of the 'inculcation [of] images' according to the 'class of men' and their 'respective individual nature[s]' (p.416). When the weeds thus 'find the points of contention in the images of the truth' and detect the 'lies', the philosopher is supposed to instruct them according to their abilities (p. 404). Kochin here renders images tools of instruction that act within an overall logocentric *imamic* system that links philosophy with politics and maintains the position of the weeds within the Virtuous City. Kochin's argument, in this sense, differs slightly with this chapter's argument as this chapter is concerned more with the affective role that the images play within instruction. The association that al-Farabi establishes between images and the affects compromises the link between philosophy and politics. Since images are affectively charged, instruction entertains the possibility of political contestation that places the weeds on the border within and without the city. They thus indicate the limits of logic within philosophy and politics that only the imagination can depict.

[122] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 39.

[123] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 41.

raised' to the level of the image closer to the truth.[124] The imagination as a vehicle of mediation becomes the site for hierarchical spacing of images that resembles the hierarchical vision of the cosmos. By adopting this structure for the imagination, the *imam*-instructor wants his citizens to believe that there is an end to the Derridean 'logocentric sublimation' of the images, an end that is clear and indicates full presence as truth.[125] However, the weeds respond by investing in a horizontal semiotic sense of spacing through activating the proliferation of images without the prospect of reaching a truth. In a sense, the *imam*'s vertical, logocentric sublimation of images that promises full presence as end is rewritten by the weeds as a Derridean linear spacing motivated by an absent signified. The structure of the imagination, of course, is rewritten in this process.

In their act of spacing images, the weeds thus jeopardize the status of presence or truth itself. They read the *imam*'s creation of images to mediate philosophical truth as an indication of a 'lack' inherent to the 'fullness' of that truth, a lack that is marked by the 'supplement'.[126] The fact that truth actually needs images and mediation to be delivered becomes the weeds' evidence that truth is lacking. Instead of being accessible to all, the divine signified appeals to the imagination for aid to reach the public. The truth is apparently haunted by a lack that needs the imagination to supplement. My reference to the role of the imagination as supplement here is borrowed from Derrida's commentary on Rousseau's 'Essay on the Origin of Languages'. In this commentary, Derrida claims that the imagination is a 'supplement within Nature as its play'.[127] Rousseau's state of nature is a site of play for the supplement. The supplement in Rousseau's work indicates an 'addition to something

---

[124] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 54.
[125] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 71.
[126] Ibid., p. 157.
[127] Ibid., p. 258.

that is already full' as well as a 'substitute' for 'something that is essentially lacking, insufficient in itself', Nature.[128] Derrida thus shows that presence, Nature, is continually haunted by an absence that 'always calls for supplementation in the first place'.[129] In a parallel sense, the weeds show that divine truth, an al-Farabian early variation of Rousseau's sense of fullness, is haunted by an absence that needs the supplementation of the imagination. By virtue of that lack that needs supplementation, writing as the affective dimension of semiotics becomes the weeds' version of mediation that defers presence, the *imam*'s truth, and characterizes language.

   In their contestation, the weeds thus invest in the *imam*'s distancing of philosophical truth to activate an aesthetic supplement through the multiplication of images. Their contestation takes the form of a reading that is very similar to a Derridean deconstructive reading, which I discussed in the previous chapter. The weeds read the *imam*'s absenting of truth to indicate a Derridean 'limitlessness of play'.[130] For the weeds, the images that the *imam* employs are signs rather than symbols of the philosophical truth. Reading the *imam*'s reliance on the 'becoming-sign of the symbol' in their translation, the subjects contest the images in an attempt to play back.[131] While the images and interpretations they end up with recognize the truth value of the image the *imam* tries to depict, they stand for what would qualify as Derridean counter-interpretations. These counter-interpretations show that 'we can have no pure, unmediated experience of presence because all experience is filtered through the network of differential references that is variously named the *arche-writing*, the originary trace, *différance* or the supplement'.[132] As counter-interpreters,

[128] Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide*, p. 149.
[129] Ibid., p. 149.
[130] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 50.
[131] Ibid., p. 47.
[132] Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology*, p. 113.

one class of the weeds 'put [its] fingers on the grounds of objection to those symbols [the images] and hold that they are inadequate and false'.[133] They comprehend that the *imam*'s reliance on symbols that point to a transcendental signified is a logocentric and ontotheological attempt that enacts the 'humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude'.[134] They also recognize that the *imam* resorts to multiple images as signs, rather than symbols, that they can invest in and multiply further. Although the *imam* seems to be presenting a symbol, he is in fact making the citizens 'think only in signs', in 'representamen' that 'function only by giving rise to an interpretant that itself becomes a sign and so on to infinity'.[135] They thus choose to focus on the play of differences or 'arbitrariness of the sign', the *arche*-writing. In their deconstructive double reading of the *imam*'s signs, the weeds highlight the internal lack of the philosophical truth that is supplemented by images. Supplementation opens the field for their interpretation that triggers the mechanism of multiplication in sign form.

In their reading, the weeds highlight and rewrite the mimetic aspect of the images that the *imam* employs. The images are supposed to represent the philosophical truth. The aesthetic function of representing through images, here, highlights a role for mimesis that is very similar to that Rousseau gives to imitation as the 'essence of art'.[136] According to Derrida, Rousseau discusses mimesis to show that imitation 'redoubles presence, adds itself to it by supplementing it'.[137] Imitation in images produced by the *imam* could be said to be following a similar Derridean motif. Mimesis redoubles the presence of the truth by supplementing it. The *imam*'s

---

[133] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 281.
[134] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 71.
[135] Ibid., p. 49.
[136] Ibid., p. 203.
[137] Ibid., p. 203.

imitation in image forms, pedagogically speaking, can take the guise of examples needed to 'detect certain similarities in between two different objects' as one effective method of instruction.[138] The weeds, however, trigger the multiplication of the examples in image form once they recognize imitation to be integral to the sign-making strategy that their instructor employs. This imitation makes all classes of weeds, except one, attached to the substitutive signifiers, the images, instead of truth itself. One class of weeds is described as believing that 'what they hold is the very same as what the man who really knows the truth asserts to be the truth'.[139] The weeds apparently value the signs and images as truth. They thus display what Rousseau calls, the 'perversion of imitation'.[140] They read truth in the multiplication of images. Some of them are even said to create illusions and set their own created ignorant cities' ends as the truth and as happiness.[141] They thus enact the Derridean recognition that the 'perverse use of the signifier' refers to the 'gap between the thing and its double' that is 'at once forbidden and tolerated by the structure of imitation'.[142] Derrida asserts that 'between the sense and its image' there is a 'lodging of falsehood, falsification, and vice', what he calls the evil, the 'disease of imitation' or the 'imitation within imitation', that is 'social' in nature.[143] In this sense, the weeds' imitation is perverse, for they assume that the ends or the image of happiness that they hold is the same as the truth of happiness that their instructor, the *imam*, holds. By limiting value to the images, the weeds rid truth of its value as presence; they show that imitation, by nature, allows for their perverse play on images.

---

[138] Haddad, *Alfarabi's Theory of Communication*, p. 116.
[139] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 285.
[140] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 205.
[141] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 56.
[142] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 204–5.
[143] Ibid., pp. 203–5.

In ridding truth of its presence status, the weeds rework Aristotelian mimesis into

an al-Farabian variant of 'creative imagining'.[144] The al-Farabian variant, unlike the

Aristotelian one, is not concerned with truth or presence. The weeds' form of mimesis

is an active poetic process of multiplying images that seeks to distance truth. In his

'Treatise on Poetry', al-Farabi explains poetic mimesis by claiming that 'the imitation

of a thing by that which is farthest from it is better and more complete than imitating

it by that which is nearest'.[145] By 'farthest', al-Farabi means adding a means of

mediation between the object of representation and its imitation. Mediation, here,

echoes Derrida's sense of *arche*-writing as it risks and allows for arbitrariness.

However, for al-Farabi, the poetic statement establishes this mimetic effect through a

'poetic syllogism'. This form of syllogism is not concerned with the truth. It is

described as a 'false' syllogism as it aims not for truth but for creating conviction on

the part of the hearer in the comparison or imitation made.[146] Instead of being a case

for rational and logical argumentation, the poetic syllogism displaces logic into the

sphere of the aesthetic or the poetic. This is why one class of weeds claims that 'there

is no truth at all, that the man who fancies that he is led the right path to it is deceived

and that the man who is supposed to lead people the right path is an imposter [and

swindler] who is making statements of that kind as hankering after nothing else than a

ruling position or some other good like it'.[147] By denying truth and claiming that truth

---

[144] Nabil Matar, 'Al-Farabi on Imagination: With a Translation of His "Treatise on Poetry"', *College Literature*, 23 (1996), 100–110 (p. 106) <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/25112231>.
[145] Matar, 'Alfarabi on Imagination', pp. 107–8.
[146] Salim Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes: The Aristotelian Reception* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 117–8.
[147] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 285.

is but a deception, the weeds introduce a world view that is built within the realm of the 'false', as factual, objective falsity.[148]

In their worldview, the weeds employ mimetic mediation to indicate a Derridean sense of the 'death of art' that imitation entails.[149] The truth so dear to the *imam* turns out not to be a truth, for it is perceived as plagued with lack. The philosophical truth is put to death as a lack that seeks supplementation by images and interpretations. This is why the *imam* fails to persuade all the weeds in his instruction; he indirectly teaches the reader-translators as poets to stick to signs and image interpretations and forsake logocentrism. These weeds anticipate the Derridean conclusion that 'there is nothing outside of the text'.[150] It is all a function of mediation and supplementation of a lacking truth, as it is impossible to 'gai[n] access to any pure or immediate presence that exists wholly independently of the process of difference and deferral'.[151] In this state of deferral, mimesis becomes the weeds' poetic or aesthetic concern with the proliferation of images through mediation.

As mimetic mediators, the weeds threaten the logocentric construction of the Virtuous City, which centers around an *imam*-instructor, aesthetically. They aesthetically reconstruct the ideals of the Virtuous City as images of the values of the alternate cities. In this sense, the Virtuous City becomes a text from which other texts or cities as possible images could spring. This proliferation of texts accompanies a parallel process through which the *imam* of the Virtuous City is put in translation. To respond to the weeds' contestation, the *imam* undergoes a change of function. This change of function is explained in medical terms that acquire aesthetic significance.

---

[148] Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes: The Aristotelian Reception*, p. 110.

[149] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 209.

[150] Ibid., p. 158.

[151] Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology*, p. 114.

The *imam*'s role as a philosopher, supreme ruler, prince, and legislator is likened to that of a doctor who is 'concerned with determining the intermediate actions or percepts conducing to the healthy body, or the well-being of the state'.[152] The *imam* fulfills the role of a healer for the natural wellbeing of the state. However, the wellbeing of the state is said to be jeopardized by the weeds who refuse to adopt the Aristotelian intermediate virtues. This is why the *imam* finds that he has to 'treat each class of [the weeds] in the particular manner that will cure them: by expelling them from the city, punishing them, jailing them, or forcing them to perform a certain function even though they may not be fond of it'.[153] As a healer, the *imam* perceives the weeds to be useless and harmful, deserving of jail and banishment, because they have challenged his images. Although he practices his sovereign role in the name of healing the body of the city, he seems to forsake the aesthetic basis upon which his sovereignty has been built. He forsakes his aesthetic concern with reception, as he applies force to guarantee reception. The *imam* translates into a sovereign, with the risk of becoming a dictator, who resorts to power and deprives the weeds of the protection of the city law. Instead of an instructor, he becomes a figure of power that practices force to expel and jail. In responding to the weeds, the *imam* undergoes a deconstruction of his inner coherence as he becomes a sovereign-dictator over his estate. In deconstructing the *imam*, the weeds deconstruct the logocentrism of the Virtuous City itself; the weeds show that the Virtuous City is a text from which other texts, other cities, could spring.

As poets, the weeds employ poetic mimesis to oppose the *imam* and construct images of alternate cities through evoking their value systems. Expulsion from the Virtuous City would most probably mean for the weeds that they can now construct

---

[152] Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 82.
[153] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 55.

the alternate cities whose values they evoked. Actually, by definition, the Arabic root word '*nbt*' from which the term 'weeds' or *nawabit* is derived, also means sprouts.[154] The weeds, in this sense, stand not only for an opposition but also for regeneration. The weeds are sprouts or seeds for potential political constructions defined by creative images that evoke an alternative system of values. Even if they are said to be submerged by the citizen body, the weeds remain sprouts for potential city states, potential texts, constructed along aesthetic lines. Their potential constructions follow after the weeds' 'wandering imagination (*takhayyul*) and not opinion or knowledge'.[155] In this proliferation of texts, virtues, especially justice, are rewritten in potential aesthetic terms, as the next section will show.

2.7 Justice in Translation/*Naqla*

As they deconstruct the *imam*'s writing, the weeds activate the notion of the text marked by mediation and deferment, *arche*-writing, in the play of signs. Their translation exposes the lack in the truth that needs the supplementation of images. By rendering the imagination a language of writing, the weeds redefine the dimension of the emotional or affective that the image is supposed to address. The weeds substitute desires, such as 'honor, rulership, and wealth', for the *imam*'s virtuous emotional end, happiness.[156] Happiness that corresponds with truth, in turn, becomes an inaccessible emotional state characterized by lack and in need of supplementation. Instead of happiness, the weeds imagine substitutes that take form in desires and passions of the soul. For the weeds, these desires 'discredit happiness'.[157] This choice of substitute

---

[154] Academy of the Arabic Language, eds., *Al-Mu'jam al-Waseet*, 4th ed (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al Shuruq al Dawliyya, 2004), s.v. *nbt*.
[155] Matar, 'Alfarabi on Imagination', pp. 68–9.
[156] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 53.
[157] Ibid., p. 54.

desires, like the choice of substitute images, is a consequence to the differing natural abilities and dispositions of the weeds.

By adopting the aims of the ignorant cities as desires, the weeds subject not only images but also emotions, specifically happiness, to a reinterpretation linked to natural abilities. Justice, as the quality indicating this re-interpretative act, becomes tied to the differing emotional guises for which the weeds aim. Under the influence of differing interpretations, the appetitive virtue of justice acquires different emotional connotations defined by the aims of the ignorant city. In one ignorant-city-interpretation, justice is defined as being 'identical with superiority gained by force'.[158] Justice becomes a virtue proportionate to sovereign superiority and its related emotions of fear, weakness and danger. It is described as a state of 'people apply[ing] the term "justice" primarily to actions which are the outcome of fear and weakness, and when the danger coming from the outside makes it imperative'.[159] In this state of fear, citizens no longer aim to apply virtues in relation to others; they discover that they do not need all the virtues for the attainment of their end. It is enough for them to help each other with the objective of 'attain[ing] riches' and 'enjoy[ing] pleasures'.[160] The harmony and justice which they may employ among themselves is described by al-Farabi as 'something resembling justice and is not justice'.[161] Justice, as resemblance, no longer signifies the appetitive moral sense of employment of virtues in relation with others. It is an action proportionate with the emotions of fear and weakness. These emotions displace happiness which, in turn, becomes an emotion associated with pleasures and material gain.

---

[158] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 299.
[159] Ibid., p. 299.
[160] Ibid., p. 299.
[161] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 26 (#28).

As the weeds' vision of justice to which they subscribe indicates the act of resemblance, imitation-making, it reinforces the play of signs as *arche*-writing. Mediation and justice are now concerned with the creation and invention of images and signs in line with differing desires. According to al-Farabi, man's 'substantification' is due to 'thought [or 'speech', *logos*]', but writing belongs to the category of arts 'through which something else comes from it'.[162] Although the first half of al-Farabi's statement reads as a purely Aristotelian axiom of speech's primacy in substantifying man, the second half highlights the creative power of writing by bringing things into existence. So, writing is not only an envelopment or mediation of speech, it is supposed to create existence; it is a force of creation, an art. By rendering writing a force of creation induced by the passions, however, the weed-sprouts invest in the *arche*-writing at work through these images. Motivated by the passions related to achieving superiority, the weeds enact what al-Farabi calls the 'vile' kind of writing that is employed 'in the service of tyranny'.[163] The creativity of writing is related to conquest, tyranny and force. However, this form of writing is presented as being no baser than the noble kind of writing that is employed in the service of the *imam*. Just as the *imam* has chosen to vary the images of truth, the weeds invest in the proliferation of images and multiplication of interpretations. The weeds show that both forms of writing are simply metaphoric displacements for one another. The *imam*'s goal of happiness cannot exile the work of the weeds' passions just as the weeds' sense of force is but a response that adopts and modifies the ruler's laws. Both senses of writing are variations of images as signs in response to natural abilities and in line with justice.

---

[162] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 93.
[163] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 60 (#93).

The redefinition of justice in relation to writing highlights the role that the emotions play in re-interpreting truth, the divine signified, in image form. In their reinterpretation, the weeds display hints of a poetic form of logic that destabilizes the *imam*'s philosophically political one. While the *imam* employs images in rhetoric and political oratory to convince citizens of that truth, the weeds use images for the sake of multiplication and creating emotions that rewrite that truth. They thus display what al-Farabi calls a poetic aptitude concerned with making 'excellent imaginative evocation of something'.[164] Poetic logic becomes the weeds' attempt to displace the value of truth. Truth is no longer a value that is tied with the philosophical and logical pursuits of the *imam.* Instead, it is established through connections between images that 'lack concern with truth or [are] false'.[165] On the plane of the poetic, images and the connections between them act on a pre-reflective and emotional level. In *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna,* Salim Kemal argues that the al-Farabian version of poetic discourse is concerned with inducing a ratiocinative response. Ratiocination is defined as a response or action in line with an emotion that is 'pre-reflective' or involuntary.[166] For al-Farabi, the imaginative evocation causes a person to 'seek or flee' the imagined thing 'even if he has not assented to it'.[167] By assenting, al-Farabi means, rational persuasion. In this sense, a person, under the effect of poetic logic, responds with affective spontaneity that might contradict with what he rationally or logically believes that he should do. The poetic involves reasoning in a logic that differs from that supported by the *imam*. The weeds' version of reasoning is heavily

---

[164] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 36 (#56).
[165] Salim Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 123.
[166] Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, p. 98.
[167] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 36 (#55).

charged with emotional connotations that render truth a value that is aesthetic rather than logical in nature.

To achieve justice, the weeds' emotional response redefines reasoning from being an act of philosophical logic into that of poetic logic. Poetic logic, however, entails the conscious recognition of the 'conflict of emotion and deliberation'.[168] They thus invest in ratiocinative reasoning through evoking the poetic and mimetic metaphors that reinforce the sign play. In this play, justice is rewritten in resemblance; it comes to qualify the mental exercise in 'bridg[ing] the image with its object' that is founded in mimetic translation.[169] The exercise is described as more refined the greater the distance is between the image and the object, a distance created by the introduction of different media. By engaging the mental abilities in an aesthetic exercise, the weeds allow for alternative translations of sovereign *imamic* power. Aesthetic mental exercise becomes the weeds' new notion of justice defined by bridging the gap between the image and object through an increment of distance and means of mediation. This increment in distance and media, in turn, contributes to the redefinition of ratiocination as the experience of conflict between the emotions and deliberation.

In the connections they seek to establish, the weeds now deal with the *imam* as a sovereign-dictator and not the philosopher, legislator, and sovereign prince. They translate not only his images but also the laws that he inscribes as guarantees of happiness. The *imam*'s images introduce the weeds to what would qualify as the Derridean recognition of the 'metaphoric origin of language' that lacks the dimension

---

[168] Kemal, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes: The Aristotelian Reception*, p. 45.
[169] Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2010), p. 161.

of the 'idea', truth, or transcendental signified.[170] In their deconstructive reading, the

weeds decide to invest in the metaphors that the *imam* introduces and desecrate the

dimension of truth within his images and laws. One method that they employ to

hinder the *imam*'s instruction and contest his laws is sophistry. According to al-

Farabi, the last category of weeds employs 'sophistic fallacies and deliberate

falsification' to reject the excellent city laws.[171] In *Al-Farabi's Theory of*

Communication, Haddad defines Al-Farabi's sense of sophistry as using 'borrowed

and common nouns that may have a variety of meanings'.[172] The weeds thus resort to

common nouns to contest the *imam*'s arguments and laws. In their contestation, the

weeds enact the Derridean claim that language 'plunges into the breach between the

proper and the common nouns'.[173] The weeds employ the common nouns as

'substitutes' for the *imam*'s proper nouns, laws. [174] They turn the proper noun, the sign

that the *imam* presents as the proper substantive signifier for the transcendental

signified, into common nouns in the form of Derridean names that multiply.[175] They

introduce the movement of *différance* through not only their images but also their

sophistic arguments. The play of names through sophistic fallacies, in turn, adopts the

same mimetic mechanism of the play of images with which the weeds face the *imam*.

Both forms of play become a function of justice as resemblance. Names as laws,

similar to images as signs, vary according to natural abilities and affectivity. They

both function by establishing connections and bridging gaps that defy logical

reference to truth.

---

[170] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 277.
[171] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 283.
[172] Haddad, *Al-Farabi's Theory of Communication*, p. 113.
[173] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 280.
[174] Ibid., p. 279.
[175] Ibid., p. 278.

By allowing for name-laws to multiply as common nouns chosen by the

differentia of natural abilities and connected via sophism, the weeds present their own

medievalist version of rationality. Their version of rationality highlights linguistic

mediation and deferment as a form of mimetic translation or *naqla*. They set sophism

and poetic mimesis to confront philosophical truth and deconstruct its claim to truth.

They thus offer an affective version of rationality that does not abide by logical truth

and that the latter can only express or define in such terms as 'sophism' and

'mimesis'. In this sense, the weeds could be said to introduce an amendment to the

medieval categorization of the communicative arts or the rules of instruction. In their

amendment, both language and images function by virtue of imitation for which logic

fails to set the limits.

The weeds' contribution to thought, I hold, could be found in the name of the

Virtuous City, *al Madina al Fadila*, to which they belong and from which they sprout.

Etymologically speaking, the root word *fdl* of Arabic *fadila*, the virtuous, has the

meaning of the great blessing and the surplus.[176] Virtue, in this sense, is that of the

initial state of added value.[177] The Virtuous City is virtuous by virtue of the added

value it bequeaths not only upon the political community but also upon thought in

general through these weeds. This city is the birthplace of an alternative vision of

rationality that allows for all other models of political associations to be affectively

imagined. The Virtuous City is a beginning, a necessary origin, presupposed for the

---

[176] Academy of the Arabic Language, eds., *Al-Mu'jam al-Waseet*, 4th ed (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al Shuruq al Dawliyya, 2004), s.v. *fdl*

[177] Leo Strauss (In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p.15) argues that al-Farabi calls the Virtuous City 'another city' as he means that it replaces 'the other world or the other life'. For Strauss, this phrasing by al-Farabi is actually an indication that the latter 'substitutes politics for religion'. The religious dimension of the city, in this sense, is actually a political one. For Strauss, the Virtuous City thus 'stands midway between this world and the other world, since it is an earthly city indeed, yet a city existing not "in deed" but "in speech"'.

proliferation of all possible or potential political structures that, first, have to be thought affectively.

Conclusion

To conclude this exploration of al-Farabi's version of translation, a reassessment of the opening question is due: What is the relationship between al-Farabi's *imam* and Derrida's king? And how do the concepts of translation they embody overlap with one another? The answer, I believe, lies in the reevaluation of the notions of mediation, translation and kinghood or power in the text mode the weeds initiate. In the medieval cosmological version of the Virtuous City, mediation is defined in terms of creating images that address the affective moral virtues, such as justice, according to natural abilities. Relying on this form of mediation, the *imam* seeks to reach citizens and convince them that the name, sign, signifier and signified coincide in the logocentric path to the transcendental signified, the philosophical truth. However, he receives a unique response from the weeds in his city. They not only play on signs as images but also employ sophistry or a play on names as common nouns. These citizens repeat and imitate the means, the images and names, employed by the *imam*. Being vehicles for the same act in mimetic translation, language and images thus cease to be separate domains. They form the aesthetic dimension of the political translation of sovereignty that transcends semiotic borders as language responds to images and images to words.

In this state of translation, the *imam* and the weeds offer two models of mimetic translation which differ not only in practice but also in political end. The *imam* employs mimesis as an Aristotelian imitation of presence. In this act, he resembles Derrida's conception of the king who reinforces logocentrism. On the other hand, the

weeds, whom I take to be precursors to modern day revolutionaries, employ mimesis as imaginative representation.[178] Mimesis, in this sense, shifts the value of truth to the image as they evoke the process of imitation by imaginative representation that gains value the more media are added. The weeds thus initiate what would qualify as a Derridean move towards the cape and wedding gown as media for the imaginative re-creation and translation of sovereignty. In this process, the weeds rework the whole political structure upon which the Virtuous City is built. They not only offer an alternative mode of sovereignty to that established by the *imam* but also redefine the dynamics of rationality in political thinking. The city now indicates the state of supplement from which the weeds as sprouts could spring with all potential forms of political constructions. These constructions are made possible only because of the affective rationality the weeds introduce to the political process itself. The translation of sovereignty, in this process, becomes the domain of affective or poetic rationality whose concern is with the mimetic relationship between language and images.

The promise of alternative possible political constructions that springs from strife will thus be my following topic of investigation. The best illustration of the sprouting effect within the aesthetic translation of sovereignty, I hold, could be found within the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. The Egyptian revolutionaries enact the weeds' aesthetic function through emphasizing the role of the media as a platform for their collective imaginative attempt to overthrow the regime. They will be shown to offer a Derridean double reading that deconstructs the regime as the *imam*-king

---

[178] This thesis's argument that al-Farabi's work is relevant to the reassessment of the contemporary political scene is inspired by the work of the Moroccan philosopher, Mohamad 'Abd al-Jabri. Al-Jabri (in *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique* (Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1999), p. 57) argues that al-Farabi is the Middle Ages' 'Rousseau of the Arabs' whose 'militant rationalist discourse' should be revived to re-evaluate and re-address the challenges that the contemporary Arab societies face.

figure. In their double reading, the modern weeds highlight the role of the ceremonial aspect of power. *Imamic* power, which adorns itself with a cape of logocentric mimesis, is translated through the adornment itself. By displaying mimesis to be a poetic rather than a logocentric construct, the modern weeds enact the translation of sovereignty as a form of contestation that pertains to the field of the aesthetic. They thus highlight the ceremonial aspect of power that Agamben (in *The Kingdom and the Glory*) calls 'acclamation' or 'glory' by introducing a twist into it. In their revision of acclamation, the weeds aim to contest power yet maintain their political concern with achieving a secular-like consensus aesthetically. To achieve this goal, the modern weeds find themselves facing the following questions: How can consensus, an active state of public opinion that maintains the concern with collective power, be achieved in the realm of the imagination? And what contribution can poetic logic, with its concern with the mimetic relationship between language and images, make to the contestation and the translation of sovereignty? Their negotiation of these questions shall thus be my next topic of investigation.

CHAPTER 3

THE MIMETIC TRANSLATION OF SOVEREIGNTY WITHIN THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

Introduction

In the past chapters, I have shown how translation marks the shift in sovereignty from a divine paradigm to a more secular contract-based model. In the contract model, consensus is established via means of iterability that acknowledges the possibility of repeatability or mimesis at the origin of every sign. The role that mimesis plays in creating consensus was then analyzed within the context of the Virtuous City to show how its consensual effect extends to the realm of the imagination. The weeds' version of political consensus negates that of the *imam*. While the *imam* established consensus through a *milla*, a religion, that connects images to philosophy as a value of truth, the weeds rewrote the religious as poetic, consensual and imaginative creation. Within the realm of the imagination, mimesis becomes a vehicle for a collective creation, rather than imitation, of alternative possible political constructions. Poetic mimesis thus stands as *doxa*, the public opinion or belief, which the weeds reclaim. They try to gain control over public opinion as self-generated imaginative representation that borrows from different semiotic fields, images and language, to establish its political effect.[1] Politics thus

---

[1] Joep Lameer (in *Al-Farabi and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice*,(Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994)) argues that al-Farabi's theory of religion as imitative of philosophy relies on two Platonic themes. The first is this distinction that I invest in between knowledge or *epistēmē* and opinion or *doxa,* as argued for in the *Republic*. For Plato, *doxa* is formed 'with respect to the sensible world, the objects of which reproduce the Forms, are images of them, in their own imperfect manner'. On the other hand, al-Farabi's images are explained by Lameer not to 'relate to the sensible world as with Plato, but to mental images or representations which result from the use of similes in a literary sense'. *Doxa*, for al-Farabi, is a form of popular

becomes the field of what I call mimetic translation concerned with the deconstruction of political sovereignty through a creative mimetic function.

Adopting this framework of thinking about translation as mimetic, I will now explore the Arab Spring revolutions, especially the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, as political events that advance the deconstruction of power politics. The questions that structure my exploration are: What does it mean to say that translation of power is mimetic and how does it show in the overthrowing of the regime in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution? How does consensus as collective imagination, rather than public opinion, redefine the translation of sovereignty? What happens to justice when the translation of sovereignty correlates with a collective imaginative creation that borrows from different semiotic fields? And, most importantly, what does mimetic translation have to contribute to the thinking of the political?

3.1 Mimetic Translation and Politics

In my attempt to answer the questions that I outlined above, I will start this chapter by a close reading of the deconstruction of sovereignty that the 2011 Egyptian revolutionaries perform. The reading highlights how the modern weeds' consensus takes the form of what Giorgio Agamben in his *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2011) calls 'glory'. For Agamben, glory refers to the 'ceremonial aspect of power' that shows the fundamental role that consensus, established by such practices as acclamation, plays as a foundation for power.[2] He explains acclamation to be 'an exclamation of praise, of triumph ("*Io triumphe*!"), of laudation or of disapproval

---

knowledge (p. 262). The second Platonic theme is the rule by law as an imperfect copy of the ideal constitution, an argument raised in the *Statesman*. This is evident in al-Farabi's argument that laws put by the philosopher-king are imitations of philosophical truths (p. 263). These two Platonic themes, Laemeer argues, were combined and modified by al-Farabi who, then, explains religion to be an 'imitative, popular expression of philosophical truth entire (or most of it)' (p. 264).

[2] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 168.

(*acclamatio adversa*) yelled by a crowd in determinate circumstances'.[3] Glory finds its correlates in the insignia of power, such as the empty throne and the cape, discussed in the first chapter. While the insignia of power, Kantorowicz argues, refer to the king's second body, they are taken by Agamben to refer not 'to regality, but to glory'.[4] Within the context of the Arab Spring revolutions, however, glory becomes the modern weeds' attempt to deconstruct the foundational aspect of glory to the establishment of sovereignty. The weeds thus seek to denude sovereignty from its mask in glory.

One method that the opposition adopts to deconstruct sovereignty and that this chapter is interested in exploring is the literary variation on what al-Farabi describes as the weeds' 'abas[ing] the man' in power, the regime, by creating illusions and images.[5] The weeds' translation, I argue, is best illustrated in their resort to an al-Farabian version of comedy and satire to effect that abasement. Although al-Farabi discusses the weeds' imaginative manipulation in relation to the truth, not the king, in his *The Political Regime*, he offers literary methods for abasing 'rulers of cities' in his *Treatise on the Canons of the Art of Poetry*.[6] For al-Farabi, comedy is a poetic form that mentions evil things and satirizes 'persons and blameworthy faults and unpleasant conduct'. One important feature of comedy is that it may add melodies 'in which reprehensible characteristics that men and beasts have in common are mentioned, as well as ugly physical features shared by both'.[7] The comic element abases political power by associating it with animal life. On the animal level, the

---

[3] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 169.
[4] Ibid., p. 245.
[5] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 55.
[6] Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age: Selection of Texts Accompanied by a Preliminary Study* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), p. 113.
[7] Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, p. 113.

weeds employ yet another poetic form closely related to comedy: Satire.[8] Satire has been described as 'a meter invented by musicians aimed at causing with their chant, in beasts and generally all animals, some movements which were, astonishingly, quite different from their natural movements'.[9] By inducing a non-natural movement in the animal, satire achieves the aim of comedy, the total deconstruction of the regime after its abasement. Comedy-satire thus denotes the weeds' double reading mechanism for deconstructing power.

This reading of comedy-satire that borrows from different semiotic fields is what I find to be best figured in the political cartoons on the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. The humor of cartoons is claimed by Charles Press in *The Political Cartoon* (1981) to be achieved by 'revers[ing] the content of the symbol, especially those of the system'.[10] Translation of sovereignty thus takes the form of the cartoon's reversal of the symbol that is employed to resist dictatorial regimes. These 'cartoons of opinion' are said to be 'employed frequently and effectively as an aid in building up resistance to the policies of politicians and as a weapon of propaganda, generally in ridicule'.[11] Instead of acclaiming the regime, the modern weeds are depicted by cartoons of opinion to build up consensus in the form of resistance concerned with the deconstruction of power through ridicule. They thus imbue their glorifying function with the cartoon's 'reverse' effect that the chapter will further explore.

[8] O.B Hardison (in 'Aristotle and Averroes', in *Poetics & Praxis, Understanding & Imagination: The Collected Essays of O.B. Hardison Jr*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p.23) argues that Islamic Poetics 'has initiated the process of assimilating Aristotle by misinterpretation'. One of these misinterpretations would be al-Farabi's confusion of comedy with satire. However, contrary to Hardison's argument, I hold that this confusion could be a politically-driven literary decision on the side of al-Farabi. Both genres of poetry illustrate a literary continuity that functions for political ends, the abasing of rulers.
[9] Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age*, p. 113.
[10] Press, *The Political Cartoon*, p. 227.
[11] David Keane, 'Cartoon Violence and Freedom of Expression', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30 (2008), 845–75 (p. 849).

By playing on the representation of the symbol of the system through reverse acclamation, the cartoons illustrate the Derridean double reading discussed in earlier chapters. The system's depiction will be taken to highlight an accepted commentary that is exceeded by an ellipsis in its reversal. The Derridean double reading of commentary and ellipsis is explained by Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992) to be a reading that 'interlaces at least two motifs or layers of reading, most often by first repeating what Derrida calls "the dominant interpretation" of a text in the guise of a commentary and second, within and through this repetition, leaving the order of commentary and opening a text up to the blind spots or ellipsis within the dominant interpretation'.[12] In this double reading of commentary and ellipsis, translation indicates the process of the opening up of ellipsis in a dominant interpretation as a sovereign one. The deconstruction of sovereignty thus becomes an elliptical opening up marked by a mimetic play of signs that shows up at the moment of reverse acclamation.

In reverse acclamation, elliptical reading emphasizes the role of mediation in the play of signs. Mediation thus becomes the vehicle for de-glorifying sovereignty. Mediation's role in glory could be traced back to Agamben's differentiation between subjective and objective glory. By subjective glory, Agamben refers to the Jewish tradition whereby acclamation is the 'natural and joyous reply of men to the manifest glory of God' which is replicated in the 'honor bestowed upon profane powers' or political figures.[13] The subjective form is what takes place in the holistic state or nation state that is founded on the immediate presence of the acclaiming people. Objective glory, on the other hand, refers to the 'neutralized state that resolves itself

---

[12] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 23.
[13] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 200.

in the communicative procedures without subject'.[14] The clearest manifestation of the

objective form of glory in a neutralized state is the media that have allowed for the

dissemination of glory yet have maintained dominance over all areas of social life.[15]

While both forms of glory are fundamental aspects to the establishment of consensual

power, it is the objective form, I argue, that initiates the deconstruction of

sovereignty. Objective glory, I will show, is employed by the weeds to de-glorify

sovereignty by giving value to the media. In their reverse acclamation, the modern

weeds glorify mediation, social media, Facebook and Twitter, instead of the regime.

These mediatic means are thus not taken for what Agamben claims is their value as

means of social communication that disseminate glory.[16] Instead, the media are

employed to create a public imagination, not opinion. The modern weeds thus glorify

the imagination and set it against the subjective glory reinforced by the regime.

By acclaiming mediation, the modern weeds reinterpret the de-glorification of

sovereignty as carrying out a creative revelatory function. De-glorifying sovereignty

involves a state of language that Agamben characterizes as 'inoperative'. By

---

[14] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 258.

[15] Ibid., p. 256.

[16] This chapter differentiates between the role that social media, such Facebook and Twitter, play and that played by the regular media. The role of the latter is what Agamben explores extensively in many of his writings, and especially in his essay titled, 'What is an Apparatus?' Agamben (in 'What Is an Apparatus?', in *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009)) claims that the media are a form of what Foucault calls the 'apparatus' as a 'machine of governance' (p.20). For Agamben, an apparatus is 'anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings' (p.14). Although the media are taken by Agamben to assume a role in governance through a process of 'desubjectification' where individuals lose subjectivity to the machines or the media only to gain subjectivity in spectral form, their social media relative, I argue, plays a slightly different role (pp.20-1). Social media liquefy sovereignty; however, the notion of sovereignty and governance that they maintain is dedicated to the 'invention' of new use or profanation rather than the maintenance of an opinion.

inoperativity, Agamben refers to the non-instrumental use of language as the state of the purely 'sayable'.[17] In that state, language entertains the possibility of meaning without concern with achieving it. In his explanation of Agamben's notion of inoperativeness, Leland de la Durantaye claims that 'inoperativeness is not laziness or inactivity, it is the open space where formless life and lifeless form meet in a distinct life-form and form of living that are rich with their own singular potentiality'.[18] Inoperativity thus indicates the open space of potentiality. De La Durantaye refers to Agamben's *Profanations* to explain the inoperative to be a deactivation of an old use of anything. Inoperativity is thus non-instrumentality. It is the state in which the focus shifts to the quality of pure means of something that cuts ties with its usual ends. Sayability thus qualifies the state of imaginative representation that is neither informative nor communicative. Language, for Agamben, becomes a potential not to signify, a Derridean trace that displays 'potentiality that is capable and that experiences itself'.[19] However, in order for language to experience itself, it must first unfetter itself from its instrumental function in glorifying sovereignty. By reversing their acclamation, the modern weeds break this link between glory and sovereignty, thus, exposing or revealing that which glory conceals: the 'void'. By void, Agamben means the empty throne or the cape without the king, the 'sovereign figure of glory'.[20] The empty throne of power, this chapter holds, marks the imaginative element within politics that manifests itself with the de-glorification of sovereignty. In that state of

---

[17] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, pp. 251–2.

[18] Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 331.

[19] Giorgio Agamben, 'Potentialities', in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. & trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (California, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 216.

[20] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 245.

the empty throne, inoperativity assumes a creative function that holds the promise of

opening law and language up for play.

3.2 Political Cartoons on the Egyptian Revolution

The political cartoons' potential as a translation medium for creating consensus

and challenging the dominant sense of glory is best explained in Charles Press's *The*

Political Cartoon (1981). Press traces the history of cartoons from their Egyptian

roots to their more current status as a force creating the current world politics'

'climate of opinion or consensus'.[21] According to Charles Press, the 'first known

political caricature seems to have been done 3000 years back—a portrait of the

founder of the Sun God religion, King Akhnaton of Egypt, father-in-law of King Tut

(ankhamen)'.[22] These cartoons are distinguished by their being 'a graphic art of the

comment […] that muse upon the ridiculous and the incongruous in life' and whose

repeated theme is the 'contrast between reality and the ideal'.[23] Their political role is

claimed by Press to be in their 'ability to join with other media critics in creating a

climate of opinion or consensus' through 'peddling assumptions about the conditions

and problems facing the society, the nature and even sometimes their solution'.[24]

Political cartoons become the aesthetic remodeling of secular political consensus that

I referred to in Chapter One as a wedding gown.

The cartoonists' ability to create an opinion of consensus is claimed by Press to be

due to their being 'critics [who] not only interpret specific policies and politicians to

those publics which pay attention to them, but they also project a judgment about the

system itself—whether it should be regarded as legitimate and deserving of loyalty or

---

[21] Press, *The Political Cartoon*, p. 49.
[22] Ibid., p. 33.
[23] Ibid., p. 11.
[24] Ibid., p. 49.

not'.[25] These cartoonists appear to be offering a double reading of their own, a double reading that is not far away from a Derridean double reading, composed here of an interpretation and a judgment. The first reading of interpretation correlates with a Derridean sense of commentary that acts within the totality of reality and politics. This first reading, then, is complemented by a judgment which sets the ellipsis into play. This judgment, for Press, indicates the critic's assessment of the system's social justice.[26] Here, the system's social justice constitutes the judgment that exceeds the first reading of commentary. Moreover, by resorting to this double reading of commentary and judgment in his cartoons, the cartoonist— Press claims—is able to address the 'intellect, conscience, and emotion'.[27] The cartoonist does so by first presenting a 'picture of reality that artists present to us as the essence of truth', second 'sketchily impl[ying], as to what they recommend ought to be done on behalf of the deserving' and third 'creat[ing] a mood telling us how we should feel over what is happening—amused, chagrined, or any one of the pedal stops up to outrage' through artistic technique and allegorical imagery.[28] So, the cartoonist uses his/her artistic technique to present a reading of commentary confined within the premises of political truth; this reading is then followed by an ellipsis of judgment that creates a mood about social justice. The cartoonists thus depict Press's climate of consensus. However, this climate of consensus is founded on the belief that political conditions could be otherwise.[29] The consensual belief that things could be otherwise is what I

---

[25] Press, *The Political Cartoon*, p. 51.
[26] Ibid., p. 51.
[27] Ibid., p. 62.
[28] Ibid., p. 62.
[29] Satire's concern with changing the status quo through ridicule could assume a conservative stance or a more revolutionary form. Griffin (in *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction,* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), p.149) explains Ronald Paulson's distinction between conservative and radical satire by claiming that the 'conservative wants to conserve the best of tradition, the radical or revolutionary

take to echo Critchley's 'dissensus communis' defined as a shared belief in the 'ideal image of the world' depicted in jokes.[30] Here, ellipsis is taken to denote the disjunction between the real and ideal that the cartoonist qualifies by issuing a judgment. For Critchley, jokes are a form of consent that is not a shared common understanding, a sensus communis, but more a shared concession to an ideal image of the world, a dissensus communis. Humor thus qualifies the ellipsis that opens the reading up to alternative versions and alternative readings of consensus.

The cartoons' cognitive, normative and affective influences in forming a dissensus communis, I hold, are illustrated by Press's citation of the historian W.A. Coupe who distinguishes cartoons into three general classes: the descriptive, laughing satirical, and destructive satirical.[31] The three types are held to be reflected in the incongruity between the real and the ideal which is 'at the heart of all satire'.[32] The last class or destructive satire is said to question the system's legitimacy or attack what the cartoonist regards as a 'particularly virulent enemy of the system or of the way of life he or she cherishes'.[33] It is the approach favored by revolutionaries regardless of their political orientation.[34] This is why political regimes react violently to these cartoons. The cartoons' major role as a tool of satire in the collapse of a number of despotic regimes around the world, such as that of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the military in Latin America, is claimed by Freedman in 'Wit as a Political Weapon:

---

wants to return to the roots to find a purity that has been corrupted'. Juvenal is taken to indicate the former while Lucian is taken to refer to the latter. Both forms of satire, for Griffin, are 'oriented towards an ideal in the past' despite their apparent difference. The notion of the ideal that both forms of satire maintain is the interest of this chapter. However, the notion of the ideal which is adopted by this chapter does not necessarily limit its orientation to the past.

[30] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 90.

[31] Press, *The Political Cartoon*, p. 75.

[32] Ibid., p. 75.

[33] Ibid., p. 78.

[34] Ibid., p. 78.

Satirists and Censors' to be the reason behind the censorship that these regimes, including the Egyptian regime, imposed on them. In Egypt, censorship, forbidden by constitution but allowed during a state of emergency, has been activated by imposing this state of emergency since the (now ousted) president Mubarak took over in 1981.[35] Thus, most cartoonists avoided the presidential taboo until 'at last the taboo was smashed beyond repair by the massed protesters exultantly waving caricatures of Mubarak in Cairo's Tahrir Square'.[36] Similiarly, Issandr El Amrani in 'Three Decades of a Joke that Just Won't Die', claims that political cartoons have been the Egyptian's 'aggressive weapon of political dissidence' towards their ex-president, Mubarak.[37] Egyptians, it seems, resort to cartoons as a means of what the sociologist Max Weber called the 'moralization of hurts' where the sense of deprivations indicate an injustice that can only be overcome through reform.[38] Political cartoons have been used as a method of expressing political dissidence as a form of sensus communis achieved by the dissensus communis, whereby 'humour familiarizes us with a common world through its miniature strategies of defamiliarization'.[39] In this world, there is political consensus around the necessity of reform for the purpose of justice. However, this consensus is achieved only by defamiliarising the regime as

---

[35] The state of emergency marked by the disruption of the rule of law has been discussed extensively by such thinkers as Agamben, Schmitt and Benjamin. In response to Benjamin's and Schmitt's take on the subject, Agamben's notion of a state of emergency or state of exception is explained by de la Durantaye (in *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*) to be 'a revolutionary state in which a totally different- and difficult to define relationship of law to life would prevail' (p. 345). Agamben's state of exception indicates the 'originary form of the law' that is 'disactivated' in order for it be 'irreverently to[yed] with' (p. 346). This is why Agamben calls for a Benjaminian '*real* state of exception' as a desirable state where all instrumental use of law would be abolished (p. 344).

[36] Leonard Freedman, 'Wit as a Political Weapon: Satirists and Censors', *Social Research*, 79 (2012), 87–112,271 (pp. 91–92).

[37] Issandr El Amrani, 'Three Decades of a Joke That Just Won't Die', *Foreign Policy*, 2011, 89–90 (p. 90).

[38] Press, *The Political Cartoon*, p. 113.

[39] Critchley, *On Humour*, p. 18.

real and evoking a sense of potential ideal in overcoming this real, an ideal that

renders the modern weeds into sprouts- an argument I made in Chapter Two.

By seeking to revolt against despotism and raising the issue of justice and

indignity, these cartoons acquire an ethical significance.[40] The political cartoons'

revolutionary and ethical potential is what I take to echo Critchley's claim in *The*

Ethics of Deconstruction that the Derridean *clotural* reading is that which allows the

question of ethics to be raised within deconstruction. Ethics indicates an 'interruption

of ontological closure' which is achieved through presenting a 'history read from the

standpoint of the victims of that history'.[41] The revolutionaries become the victims of

history who initiate an ethical interruption to the ontological closure that the regime

imposes.[42] Their ethical interruption takes the form of a *clotural* reading that the

---

[40] This study is interested in satire for its revolutionary potential. However, it must be mentioned that satire has not always been historically associated with revolutionary potential. To this effect, Griffin (in *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction,* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), p. 154-60) argues that satire 'can rarely be measured in terms of political change or even personal conduct' (p.160). For Griffin, satire acquires its importance from its being 'intellectually subversive', not practically so (p.159). In satire, 'moral victory is more important than local political victory' for 'it has not been convincingly shown that satire has the power to encourage the actions or alter the attitudes of its readers' (p.154-9). However, Griffin does not completely deny the political effects that satire sometimes has; he remarks that a satirist 'may lose some battles yet will eventually win the war' (p.159). It is in this sense that I argue that satire, within the Egyptian context, is politically and practically relevant. The widespread employment of political cartoons to satirize the regime is taken to indicate a culmination of a history of battles that has led to the revolution and resulted in the people eventually winning 'the war' or the revolution, in this case.

[41] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 30.

[42] Reread from Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History' (in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Others (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003)), Critchley's victims of history assume the title of the oppressed whose task is to initiate a 'state of emergency' which is 'not the exception but the rule' and that really defines the appropriate conception of history (p.392). Benjamin's state of emergency would not involve a promise of redemption; instead, it 'must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it' (p. 391). So, the state of emergency is that where Benjamin's oppressed allow for 'spiritual things' that are 'alive in this struggle as confidence, courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude,

cartoons capture graphically. This reading is described as a 'movement of alterity'

that interrupts the first reading, the commentary or the 'logocentric textuality' that is a

'patient and scholarly commentary following the main lines of the text's dominant

interpretation'.[43] So, the first reading that the political cartoons depict is that shedding

light on the finite totality of the commentary. This finite totality of commentary, I

hold, figures in depicting the opposition of the weeds to the regime. This is a

commentary because it maintains the guise of the political act built on the binary

opposition of regime/victims or ruler/ruled. However, this commentary is interrupted

via a second reading that indicates an ethical ellipsis captured by the joke. The joke

presents the ethical movement, the openness to alterity, by raising ethical questions

related to justice through evoking potential political consensus as an imaginative ideal

that could escape that condition of political opposition.[44]

   In this chapter, the cartoons' revolutionary potential, as has been mentioned, will

be analyzed within the contemporary context of the Arab Spring.[45] This chapter will

---

and have effects that reach far back into the past' to 'call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers' (p. 390).

[43] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 30.

[44] Michael Dillon (in 'Jacques Derrida', in *Palgrave Advances in Continental Political Thought*, ed. by Terrell Carver and James Martin (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 260-73) claims that Derrida's deconstruction marks the 'possibility of another kind of politics' or 'another kind of belonging'. This 'belonging together revolves around the insatiable call of the ethical to which Derrida claims that we are continuously exposed by virtue of the wholly Other' (pp.266-7). In this sense, the Egyptian revolution demonstrates an attempt to grapple with the 'call of the ethical' which the regime attempted to suppress and deny. The protestors demonstrate what Dillon calls the 'comprehensive political responsibility […] towards a future that we have to be 'hospitable towards' (p.272). Their revolution redefines the political in their hospitable response to an unknown future that they decide to embrace.

[45] Here, it must be mentioned that the historical role that cartoons play is not always discussed as a purely revolutionary one. Spielmann (in *Cartoons From Punch* (London: Bradbury and Agnew, 1906), p.v.) claims that the cartoon 'is not to be considered merely as a comic or satirical comment on the main occurrence or situation of the week, but as contemporary history for the use and information of future generations cast into amusing form for the entertainment of the present'. The

limit its scope to cartoons featuring in the Arab media to show how these cartoons depict a double reading of the Egyptian revolutionaries' experience. These cartoons will be analyzed for the reading of commentary in the representation of the system, the Egyptian regime or the ousted president Mubarak, which the revolutionaries reverse. I will investigate this against the backdrop of Agamben's notion of glory built on acclamation. Collective hailing, in this reading of commentary, is taken to stand for the revolutionaries' attempt to desecrate and profane the regime instead of to praise it. The regime as a manifestation of sovereignty thus undergoes a process of de-glorification in what I call 'reverse acclamation', a concept which I explain further next.

3.3 Reverse Acclamation

Political cartoons dealing with the 2011 Egyptian Revolution can be interpreted as depicting the political struggle as a double reading initiated by the weeds. In their political reading, the weeds' commentary highlights their attempt to deconstruct power through reducing the sacred shield of power to profanity. In subjective glory, acclaiming the king assumes a negative sense of denouncing him. However, in order to desecrate his sacred shield, the weeds highlight the role of *arche*-writing and mediation as a semiotic field to verbalize any acclamation. They thus incorporate the other form of acclamation, objective glory, to effect their profaning act. The voicing of glorification, in its subjective and objective forms, is thus reversed from an act of praise to that of de-glorifying or overthrowing the regime that this section shall proceed to explore.

---

cartoon's contemporary historical role is taken in this chapter to give credibility for the victims of history by being a documentation of their revolt through the entertainment that the joke offers at present.

One element of sacredness that the regime employs to reinforce its sovereignty and that the revolutionary weeds seek to deconstruct is that of acclamation, but in reverse negative form. Agamben claims that the acclaiming people is one form of the glorious apparatus through what he calls 'immediate and subjective glory'. This form of glory takes place in the holistic state where the people hail a sovereign symbol of power. These two constituents of glory, the acclaiming public and the sovereign symbol of power, figure in almost all of the cartoons dealt with in this chapter. However, the main feature that these cartoons focus on is what I call 'reverse acclamation' where acclamation is employed to overthrow the sovereign symbol instead of praise him. Such a state is what I hold to figure in the following cartoon:

Fig. 1. Mubarak clings to the throne. [46]

This cartoonist presents a double reading whereby all components of subjective glory are present as *desecrated*. The king is represented on his throne in the presence of a public that would otherwise be hailing his presence. However, that acclamation, instead of expressing praise, requests the king to depart. The banners that are held up read 'Leave' and address a king clinging to a throne that is on the verge of being toppled. In this sense, subjective glory employs its own mechanism of praise to introduce profanity into the shield of sacred spirituality that the king attempts to

[46] Nasser Al Ja'afari, Mubarak clings to the throne [Cartoon], *Alarab Alyawm*, 7 February 2011, p.16.

create. Through reverse acclamation, the king or *imam* figure is presented as a political functionary subject to the collective will of the weeds.[47] The figure of the sovereign is thus made profane after its sacred shield which 'separated and petrified' it is 'disenchant[ed] and return[ed] to use' by the modern weeds.[48]

In their reverse acclamation, the weeds not only desecrate sovereignty by turning the content of acclamation from praise into a departure order but also by delivering that acclamation in a sovereign comedic and satirical form. The weeds employ al-Farabi's poetic satire to ridicule sovereignty and induce an unnatural movement on the side of the regime: departure. Before inducing the unnatural movement, the weeds, however, need to compare the king to an animal before employing satire to induce the now transformed animal to follow orders and leave. This is what I hold to figure in the following cartoon:

Fig.2. Mubarak should leave. [49]

---

[47] I employ 'reverse acclamation', here, to later highlight the role that mediation plays in the deconstruction of sovereignty. Political formation, in this sense, is still negotiated and problematized in terms of sovereignty, but in the negative German baroque mode of the 'lack of sovereignty'. Whereas sovereignty used to originally stand for the immediacy of decision-making in the pre-modern period, it is faced with the realization of its incapacity to make a decision in the modern period (cf. footnote 73). This incapacity of making an immediate decision, or the implied reliance on mediation, is what I claim the cartoons to highlight in the state of reverse acclamation. This state, I argue, holds a promise for politics.

[48] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 74.

[49] Saad Hajo, Mubarak should leave [Cartoon], *Al-Safir Newspaper*, 2 February 2011, p.16.

The poster on the back of the king with the crown, the regime, shows the king without the crown and looking like a pig. The king assumes the insignia of power, the crown of glory, which Agamben claims is 'derived from the diadem that is owed to the triumphant imperator or athlete as a symbol of victory and expresses the glorious quality of eternal life'.[50] However, in their satirical stance, the weeds turn the king into an animal who can be trained to follow orders and carry out an unnatural movement, departure. They thus reduce his sacred shield of crown and throne to profanity. He assumes an animal nature that is ready to follow orders and leave — however, not without a fight:

Figure 3. A smooth transition of power. [51]

Negative or reverse acclamation delivered in satirical form is then employed by the weeds to introduce the opening up of ellipsis by reinforcing *arche*-writing and mediation. The caption in the cartoon before last reads: 'Whether *King* or *Writing*, we do not want you!' This is an Egyptian variation on the coin flip phrase 'heads or tails'. Interestingly, the Egyptian coin has historically had the face of a king on one side and writing on the other; thus, highlighting the correlation of the notion of kinghood to writing. As a logocentric preservation of speech, writing is taken to indicate the law that the weeds seek to appropriate to fight back the regime. Reverse acclamation, which the weeds employ to profane the spiritual shield of the king, double-reads the

---

[50] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 247.
[51] Abdallah Jaber, A smooth transition of power [Cartoon], *Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2011, p.30.

semiotic tools of logocentric sovereignty, of the primacy of speech over writing, which the king employs. In a Derridean attempt to deconstruct power, the weeds show how the king establishes and secures his power through speech that is primarily a writing of law. Instead of presenting acclamation of the king via speech (as in speech bubbles, for example), the cartoon before last and the one preceding it capture their address via writing. Their acclamation is expressed via held banners or written captions with the phrase 'Leave'. The weeds thus employ the king's own implicit tool of sovereignty, writing, against him. They thus reduce the king to silence in the non-verbal depiction of a king clinging to his throne as language ceases to aid him. In their acclamation, the revolutionaries display signification as *arche*-writing by practicing the Derridean 'writing as an event of reading'.[52] By setting up the mechanisms of writing, writing as practiced by the regime and *arche*-writing as endorsed by the weeds, as a continuation of one another, the cartoon hints at the consequence: silence. In the horizontality of semiotics and logic through *arche*-writing, the death of the subject, discussed in the earlier chapter, ensues.[53] Silence, illustrative of the dead subject, beholds the king in desecration and the throne in emptiness as it opens the reign of mediation, the graphic media, for reading.

By introducing *arche*-writing to illustrate that mediation is integral to sovereignty, the weeds highlight the other form of glory that Agamben calls objective glory. Agamben claims that the glorious apparatus includes the 'mediatic and objective glory of social communication'.[54] Objective glory is the form of glory in which the cartoons invest so as to portray liquefied sovereignty as mediated public acclamation. Instead of the immediate presence of the citizens to acclaim a king, the media are

---

[52] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 159.
[53] Ibid., p. 71.
[54] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 258.

introduced to liquefy sovereignty while maintaining the guise of glory as acclamation. In the objective form of glory, '[w]hat was confined to the spheres of liturgy and ceremonials has become concentrated in the media and, at the same time, through them it spreads and penetrates at each moment into every area of society, both public and private'.[55] Although Agamben claims that his reference to the role of the media is that of it being an 'originary democratic phenomenon', he emphasizes Habermas's conception of popular sovereignty that 'dissolves itself and is liquefied in such communicative procedures'.[56] The media, therefore, liquefies sovereignty while designating glory itself. *Arche*-writing as mediation, in this sense, becomes but another apparatus of glory assigned with the mission of dissolving sovereignty.

The mechanism of dissolving sovereignty is best illustrated in the following cartoon where both subjective and objective glory are put in engagement with one another. Mediation, the TV set as indication of objective glory, intercepts subjective glory, the acclaiming people's address to the sovereign figure of glory, the king on his throne. As in the previous cartoons, address to the king is a case of reverse acclamation. However, this time, a play on language and semiotic fields is the focus:

Figure 4. The people want to topple the regime.[57]

[55] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 256.
[56] Ibid., p. 257.
[57] Amr Selim, The people want to topple the regime [Cartoon], *Almasri Alyoum*, 30 January 2011, p.16.

On the verbal level, the TV represents the people who ask the regime to leave in their famous declaration, 'The people want the fall of the regime', *nizam*. On the other side of the monitor, the now ousted president sits in his throne telling himself in vernacular Egyptian Arabic what translates as 'Thank God, my name is not the regime', and is meta-phrased as 'Thank God, not my name the regime'. On the non-verbal level, the Egyptian cartoonist's first reading as commentary highlights the order of the logos by depicting glory through the acclaiming people along with the throne, the governmental appropriation of glory as power.[58] However, being a joke, the cartoon invests in the incongruous representation between the reality and the ideal. The people, instead of acclaiming the king, are, in fact, asking for his departure and for a fall of the regime. The king's only response to these appeals is to sit, relaxed, in his throne which has become the couch of a TV viewer. He has become a passive spectator on sovereignty, a sovereignty that is detached and denuded from its mask in glory.

The modern weeds thus inscribe a reverse form of acclamation that they associate with denouncement and condemnation instead of praise.[59] In their reverse acclamation, the translation of sovereignty takes place through denuding sovereignty from its mask in glory. However, their reverse acclamation acquires its major significance because it highlights how the weeds initiate an ellipsis that reads the

---

[58] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 239.

[59] As 'reverse acclamation' becomes an illustration of the lack that characterizes sovereignty, it could point to the state of political promise that this lack holds. Michael Dillon (in *Biopolitics of Security: A Political Analytic of Finitude* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p.13) qualifies Samuel Weber's 'lack of sovereignty' that characterizes the German baroque as a 'deficiency of the sovereign', and 'therefore on the stage that it fails to command, enter other formations of power, other rules of truth and truths of rule'. The deficiency of the sovereign, therefore, is indicative of a promise that other formations of power are possible. Politics, in this sense, becomes a preoccupation with redefining the formations of power beyond the question of sovereignty itself.

negative of deconstruction in mediation.[60] What this means is what we will turn to next.

3.4 Inoperativity and Mediation

In the previous section, we have seen how in a state of revolution, subjective glory in the form of acclamation can be employed as a tool to desecrate the government and de-glorify sovereignty. Double reading represents the mechanism whereby acclamation assumes a reverse form that not only profanes but also employs the government's own tool, writing, against it. Through their elliptical reading captured by the cartoons, the weeds draw attention to *arche*-writing and mediation as integral to the deconstruction of sovereignty. Social media as mediation become further means for the liquefaction of sovereignty.

The media's role in liquefying sovereignty is discussed by Agamben in relation to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). For Agamben, the 'spectacle' is the 'expropriation and the alienation of human sociality itself' whereby, as Debord claims, the 'social relation among people [is] mediated by images'.[61] In this new sociality, the real world is transformed into an image and images become real.[62] Images thus mediate the relationship between people. For Agamben, the resulting spectacle, the society mediated by images which stand for 'means [being] simultaneously ends', marks the alienation of sociality.[63] However, alienation is not

---

[60] For Critchley (in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp.21-9), reading for the negative is the practice of deconstruction that is not a negative act of demolition. Deconstruction is rather the reading that 'destabilizes the stability of a dominant interpretation' of a text by saying what 'philosophy is unable to say'. It is with destabilizing interpretation that this chapter grapples.

[61] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, ed. by Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, and Brian Massumi, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 78.9.

[62] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 78.9.

[63] Catherine Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), p. 126.

restricted to images; it also affects language. Agamben comments that '[w]hat hampers communication is communicability itself' characterized by the 'alienation of language itself, of the very linguistic and communicative nature of humans'.[64] Language is alienated or separated from the sphere of the profane, the 'free use of man'.[65] Alienation of sociality and language via the spectacle thus reinforces a notion of sovereignty built upon 'exclusion and violence'.[66] This is why the profane, the return to 'common use', becomes the only means available to overcome sovereign exclusion. One form that overcoming sovereignty takes, I argue, is a liquefied form which, Agamben in *The Kingdom and the Glory* claims, is carried out by social media. Social media become a means for the non-instrumental use of language that is marked by the process of returning language to the field of the common.

Social media, therefore, facilitate the translation of language from alienation, the sphere of the sacred, unto profanation through the liquefaction of sovereignty. In *The Kingdom and the Glory,* Agamben calls the non-instrumental or profane use of language, inoperativity.[67] By inoperativity, Agamben 'highlights the power of a relation to things, concepts and ultimately law itself that desacralizes and plays with things as a child does with toys'.[68] Language becomes inoperative when it is played with and loses its instrumental function to inform or communicate information. Playing with language through inoperativity represents Agamben's response to Derridean deconstruction that 'choos[es] to dwell in aporias and harness their strength rather than see[k] a way out of them'.[69] While Derrida's deconstruction allows for an 'indefinite deferral of signification' through ellipsis, Agamben takes it

---

[64] Agamben, *The Coming Community*, pp. 79.0–81.2.
[65] Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, p. 127.
[66] Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, p. 175.
[67] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 239.
[68] Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, p. 131.
[69] Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben,* p. 190.

to reinforce an instrumental use of the inoperative. In Derrida's version of double reading, the ellipsis constitutes the means whose end is the opening up of a text to further interpretations. However, for Agamben, that only leads to a 'nothing' that is 'dangerous for those around it only when it is closed off as sacred, presented and prized as something that is the province of the few'.[70] This is why Agamben proposes profanation or play of language that allows for 'invention' to overcome the status of the sacred that deconstruction could assume. The profanation of language or the 'creation of new use' is only possible by 'deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative'.[71] One example that Agamben gives for the inoperativity necessary for profanation is that of the poem that loses its communicative end and rests with sayability.[72]

Language's sayability or inoperativity is what I hold the cartoons experiment with by depicting the failure of communication between the sovereign, the king as president, and the acclaiming people. Here, I would like to highlight that the notion of inoperativity that I adopt for my argument in this chapter focuses on the failure of communication, language facing and experimenting with the possibility of becoming a means without an end. Whether sayability of the poem or the quality of being a pure

---

[70] Ibid., p. 190.

[71] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 86.

[72] Agamben borrows the notion of inoperativity from Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1986). Nancy (in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor, trans. by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)) argues that the 'inoperative community' indicates a 'being-in-common [that] is not a common being' (p. 29). It emphasizes 'communication' and 'exposing sharing' that is 'prior to any address in language' (p. 29). This community as communication is concerned with the 'appearance of the between as such' and rejects any 'connection or joining from the outside and from any notion of a common and fusional interiority' (p. 29). In other words, the inoperative community is what rejects the *bios*, the outside, and the *zoe*, the fusional interiority. This is why Nancy, echoing Blanchot's claim that a community cannot take place through the domain of 'work', claims that community is 'not a work or even an operation of singular beings' and is 'made of the interruption of singularities, or the suspension that singular beings are' (p. 31).

means is a state that the modern weeds successfully reach is a question which I will delay answering to the following chapter. So, on the path towards the state of being a pure means, language, I argue, shows the first signs of inoperativity in the cartoons through the people's and the president's statements in which, as Agamben quotes Spinoza to say, 'language, which has deactivated its communicative and informative functions, rests within itself, [and] contemplates its power of saying –*potenza di dire'*.[73] The statements are in a deactivated mode in terms of communication and information giving. In this deactivated mode, language opens itself up to the possibility of a new use. Language's inoperativity, therefore, marks the moment of 'profanatory potential' that this chapter centers around and that presents itself in comical form.[74]

Going back to the following previously-discussed cartoon, the inoperativity of language is represented by the failed communication between the acclaiming people and the sovereign, the president as king. The loss of communication is effected through a play on the proper name. The people ask for the 'fall of the regime' while the president is grateful and thanks God that his name, *ism*, is not the regime, *nizam*:

Figure 4. The people want to topple the regime. [75]

---

[73] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, pp. 251–2.
[74] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 88.
[75] Amr Selim, The people want to topple the regime [Cartoon], *Almasri Alyoum*, 30 January 2011, p.16.

By thanking God, the ultimate Glory, the president appropriates the acclaiming people's expression into the sphere of the logos, the proper name. He sits on the throne and thanks God that his name is not the regime. By reinforcing the logocentric reading of the people's claim, the president practices the reading of commentary that Critchley, referring to Levinas, calls the language of the Said, the logos, and the finite totality. The king's inoperative disarticulation through the proper name, the Logos, aims to return the performative Saying of the citizens to the Said, the name. The king tries to preserve the status of acclamation as praise for him as sovereign by diverting the collective desecration away.

In order to effect this re-appropriation, the king relies on a disarticulation or play with language that assumes ethical significance associated with his own downfall.[76] Through disarticulation, the king as *imam* involuntarily applies what Critchley calls the 'logic of the fault' which is marked by the ethical nature of the Saying preserved within the Said. For Critchley, the 'logic of the fault, of violence and ingratitude, is not accidental but essential to the ethical event of the text', for ingratitude is a 'necessity or fatality within ethical Saying'.[77] Through the faulty reading in disarticulation, the president cannot escape the ethical Saying that the weeds initiate, for his faulty interpretation becomes an event of Saying itself. He highlights the failure of meaning making inherent in the logocentric law system he represents. This, in turn, works against him as representative of the symbolic order. Here, it must be

---

[76] Differentiated from Derrida's focus on the semiotic nature of play, Agamben's sense of play assumes a quasi-political sense related to law. Mills (in *The Philosophy of Agamben*, pp. 125-6) explains Agamben's sense of play to be that which 'allows for the profanation of the law, where this is understood as the non-instrumental appropriation of law and ultimately its deactivation'. This sense of play does not mean 'simply the annihilation of law nor the constitution of a new law; instead, it is law rendered inoperative, and as such, the gate to justice'. Justice indicates a state of the world that is no longer ruled by law.

[77] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 137.

mentioned that faultiness and violence are taken to be instances of opening up to the Other that are neither for nor against the logocentric work. Knowingly or not, the president starts his own process of descent the moment he resorts to faulty interpretations of the direct Other, the citizens in this case. His faulty reading through disarticulation opens up the dimension of ethicality through inoperativity. Inoperativity, which constitutes one of the mechanisms of glory itself, initiates a movement of ethicality that jeopardizes glory from within. The mechanism through which inoperative language in the cartoons jeopardizes glory is what we will turn to next.

3.5 Inoperativity and the Ethicality of Mimetic Translation

As already mentioned, Agamben highlights the work of glory through its two apparatuses: the acclaiming people as people-nation and the mediated people-communication. What starts off as reverse acclamation with subjective glory, the weeds taking acclamation as a guise to make their request for the king to leave, becomes a state of liquefied sovereignty through mediation, so far depicted in the TV set. Mediation allows for reverse negative acclamation to present itself as inoperative language and disarticulation or play taken for amusement in these cartoons. However, as this section will proceed to show, disarticulation highlights the generative role of mimesis as a vehicle of profanation in this state of inoperativity.

By playing on language and images, political cartoons portray the role mimesis plays in inoperativity. Recall that mimetic translation was taken to denote two aspects of translation that differ in reference. The *imam* adopts what qualifies as logocentric mimesis in the imitation of presence. On the other hand, the weeds introduce the Derridean notion of mimesis as iterability, yet with a twist. Their twist makes iterability a case marked by aesthetic imaginative representation (discussed in

Chapter Two). The possibility of repetition integral to the sign becomes a condition

of repeatability marked by aesthetic imaginative means. Whether imitation in

cartoons involves language or image, it becomes integral to the functioning of

inoperativity.

In the case of the following cartoon, the inoperativity of language is evident in

disarticulating the proper name, as I discussed earlier. This time, however, the

cartoonist depicts it as being a mediated address from the revolutionaries through

social media, Facebook. Disarticulation that started off on the side of the king, in the

earlier cartoon, now extends to the revolutionaries who finally managed to actualize

their ethical appeal to topple the regime. Their ethical appeals for the regime to leave

start off as a deliberate disarticulation in which the revolutionaries refuse to say the

name of their ex-president and insist on using the noun, *nizam*, regime, to address

him. Then, as the cartoon shows, when their appeal finally succeeds, they celebrate

the king's downfall by employing mimesis to rework or imitate the name of the

sovereign, the president, Mubarak:

Figure 5. Mubarak successfully removed.[78]

[78] Imad Hajjaj, Mubarak successfully removed [Cartoon], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 14 February 2011, p.19.

The cartoon congratulates Egyptians on their feat in the expression of joy written next to the flag. The graphic medium instructs readers to '*say mabrouk*', or congratulations, 'NOT *Mubarak*', a homonym indicating another expression of congratulations, usually associated with formal Arabic, but also the name of the president, Husni Mubarak. The instruction is delivered in a mediatized version of social communication whereby contacts can be deleted on Facebook. Social media that stand for people-communication, objective glory, allow for the inoperative disarticulation in language, the cessation of the informative meaning in the word, Mubarak, to function in favor of the deletion of Mubarak, the deletion of the image of the ousted president. So, disarticulation works on the order of the logos to cancel an image of the president as king in an ethical appeal issued by the weeds. Again, disarticulation through imitation of language brings ethics into the equation. The modern weeds' concern is with the prospect of justice that is depicted as a cancelation of this representative of the sovereign.

Besides working on the order of the proper name, the mimetic translation which is fundamental for inoperative language extends its effects to the image in mediatized creation to face emotions induced by sovereign exclusion, fear generated by the sense of sacred-induced alienation. The media's role in activating inoperativity through image is represented in Arabic cartoons through what I hold to be Derrida's reformulation of Rousseau's 'perversity of imitation'.[79] One of the signs that is subjected to the play of imitation in a lot of Arabic cartoons is that of the pyramid, as a symbol of the Egyptian notion of kinghood. For example, in the cartoon below, the protestors are represented as having constructed a protest tent that imitates the pyramid. They are also represented as using the computer, the main means for social

---

[79] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 203–5.

communication or objective glory, to help them face the sovereign. They thus display

the role that mediated imitation plays in relation to inoperativity:

Figure 6. The pyramid of fear [80]

The writings on the tent read: 'We will not be afraid', and the caption over the

pyramid reads, 'The pyramid of Khofo' a homonym indicating not only the name of

the oldest and strongest pharaoh, Khofo, but also the Egyptian slang word for fear.

The pyramid is the symbol for fear and kinghood. This pyramid and its related

caption, however, are brought to stark contrast with the caption over the tent that

rhymes with that over the pyramid yet reads: 'Conquered his fear'. The caption also

borrows the same letter formation of that over the pyramid. In this case of mimetic

translation in inoperativity, the fear induced by the pyramid of fear, the symbol of the

king, wakes the weeds up to a Derridean recognition that fear lies at the origin of

language.[81] This is why they seek to appease this fear by constructing another sign of

sovereignty, the tent, to imitate the pyramid in mimetic translation. They also

emphasize mediation through the image of the computer, or technology, as a tool for

social media access. Mimetic translation thus becomes one distinguishing feature of

inoperativity that is marked by overcoming the sphere of sacred exclusion and fear.

---

[80] Imad Hajjaj, The pyramid of fear [Cartoon], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 10 February 2011, p.19.
[81] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 277.

In this state of mimetic translation in inoperativity, fear is not the only dynamic of sovereignty that the weeds deconstruct in the name of justice. In the cartoon above, there is an interesting play on the time frame where antiquity or majesty in the build-up of the pyramid is brought into stark contrast with modern technology and inexperience of construction. The weeds break the effect of molding through memory by activating the signs of modern technology and instant access allowed by social media. The essentiality of time to the deconstruction of sovereignty negotiates itself in a play on the notions of synchrony and diachrony which I reconsider in the light of Derrida's and Agamben's works. The Derridean perspective is what I borrow from Critchley's double reading of Levinas's texts. Double reading, for Critchley, displays the ethical gesture of the text through a reduction of the synchronic to the diachronic as a 'time of justice'.[82] The diachronic is the time of the now that social media communication allows without necessitating the presence of the people addressed. For Critchley, there is a 'reduction of the Said to the Saying' in double reading; this reduction is marked by a move from synchrony to diachrony or from the synchronic reduction of 'time to space' to the diachronic 'coming apart of time' or the 'the time of the lapse'.[83] He emphasizes Levinas's Bergsonian claim that 'diachrony is the real time of Saying, whereas synchrony is the abstract time of the Said', for 'diachrony is the primordial, or authentic, time from which the vulgar, inauthentic conception of time as synchrony is derived'.[84] Through play on the time frame in mimesis that emphasizes the lapse in the now moment, these citizens initiate the *ouverture* of ethics and the question of justice.

---

[82] Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (New York: Verso, 1999), p. 155.
[83] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 165.
[84] Ibid., p. 166.

For Agamben, however, the reduction of synchrony to diachrony as a time of justice is rather a 'crossing' of the two in what he calls the *archē*. For Agamben, the *archē* does not have a merely chronological meaning as the beginning or start of history. Rather, it signifies 'not a given or a substance, but a field of bipolar historical currents stretched between […] an archi-past and the present'.[85] He gives an example of the *archē* in the photograph that is taken to signify an original. The *archē* is supposed to make 'the inquirer's present intelligible as much as the past of his or her object'.[86] Through an image, an inquirer sheds light on the present through highlighting in this present an unknown aspect that has archaic value. This process, which he calls the 'archaeological', allows the inquirer to put the image or the thing investigated to a new use as each new image becomes an original up for study.[87] This putting to new use marks the striving for justice.

Agamben's notion of justice as a profaning or putting to new use of an *archē* is taken here to mark the cartoon's activation of the Saying that is not exhausted by a Said. While social media are a medium for Saying that deconstructs and de-glorifies sovereignty, their presentation in cartoons as such renders them an element of the *archē*. So, when the cartoonists juxtapose the pyramid to the tent in the cartoon above or social media to the Eagle of Saladdin in the following cartoon, they do not solely represent the deconstruction of sovereignty through a reduction of synchrony to diachrony. They could be said to be investigating justice by bringing to light an *archē* that could be put to new use. In the cartoon below, for example, social media, Facebook, are represented as being at the heart of what stands for the Egyptian historical legacy, the Eagle of Saladin:

---

[85] Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. by Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 110.
[86] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, p. 32.
[87] Ibid., p. 31.

Figure 7. Facebook and the Eagle of Saladin. [88]

In this cartoon's highlight of an *archē*, Facebook, featuring an Egyptian salute, is placed within the heart of the Egyptian flag's Eagle of Saladin. Saladin is the first sultan of Egypt who received the title of king, or *malik,* and is known for 'uniting, under his own standard, all the Muslim territories of Syria, northern Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt'.[89] Double reading features, here, in the doubled interpretation of glory. The symbol of sovereignty, the Eagle of Saladin, corresponds to the historic logocentric reading that is disrupted by the ellipsis of the now initiated by the 'economy-glory apparatus'.[90] The objective glory of mediated social communication that liquefies sovereignty is presented to hold subjective acclamation at its heart. In turn, objective glory, Facebook, is at the heart of the symbol of sovereignty, the Eagle of Saladin. The mimetic aspect of translation plays with glory through presenting it in three forms that are imitative of one another, an iterability that only the cartoon as a manifestation of an *archē* could capture. The cartoon's crossing of the synchronic with the diachronic through mimetic translation presents the attempt to shed light on

---

[88] George Bahjouri, Facebook and the Eagle of Saladin [Cartoon], *Al-Ahram Newspaper*, 14 February 2011, p.10.
[89] Paul E. Walker, 'Saladin (Ayyubid Sultan)', in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/518809/Saladin> [accessed 4 January 2013].
[90] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 251.

an *archē* of de-glorifying sovereignty. This, in turn, opens up the question of ethics
and justice that I will proceed to discuss in the following section.

3.6 The Struggle for Justice

The double reading of the weeds depicted by the cartoons captures the rupture of
ellipsis through inoperative language. By disarticulation, inoperativity shows its first
traces that are marked by language which ceases to operate for informative or
communicative purposes. Language is, instead, frozen in image form subject to play
in new use through mimetic translation. Mimetic translation reveals an *archē* inherent
in the negativity of acclamation in the mediated liquefaction of sovereignty. Liquefied
sovereignty, in turn, opens the question of elliptical ethics as a political struggle for
justice, a struggle that this section devotes itself to explore.

Mimetic translation as a vehicle of imitation in image and language employs its
inherent inoperativity to investigate the ethical framework necessary to accomplish
political justice. Although this chapter adopts an Agamben-inspired view on justice as
a non-instrumentalization of language, it holds that such cannot be reached except via
a Derridean-inspired ethical framework. I borrow the argument for an ethical
framework for political justice from Critchley who claims that ethics is 'ethical for the
sake of politics'.[91] He explains, 'ethical obligation to the Other opens into wider
questions of justice for others and for humanity as a whole'.[92] In order for the ethical
to become a vehicle for the political, Critchley adds, it is necessary for a community
to have a double structure.[93] This community of double structure is defined as 'a

---

[91] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 223.
[92] Ibid., p. 226.
[93] Gavin Hyman (in *Traversing the Middle: Ethics, Politics, Religion* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), pp.114-22) argues that Critchley 'was mistaken to look to Levinas' to provide Derrida with the 'ethical and political supplement' that deconstruction needs (p. 122). Both, for Hyman, need the supplement of an

commonality among equals which is at the same time based on the inegalitarian

moment of the ethical relation'.[94] A community needs to emphasize a sense of

commonality that, however, guards difference as inegalitarianism. The commonality

of the equal, in what he calls 'ethical love', requires a 'doubling of discourse,

whereby the response to the singularity of the Other's face is, at the same time, a

response to the prophetic word, to the word that makes the community a

commonality'.[95] This appeal to ethical love that marks the address to justice is what I

hold to figure in the double reading that this cartoon presents:

Figure 8. The most beautiful valentine [96]

The caption reads: 'The most beautiful Valentine', a Valentine marked by the

computer screen that reads: 'We love you, Egypt! The youth forum'. The lady in front

---

'unequivocal universal' or a 'guiding positive universal vision' within politics (p. 120). Levinas's ethical contribution outlines what 'politics should avoid: totalitarianism, violence, fascism', but it does not provide a 'substantive vision of that which politics should promote' (p.118). However, Hyman admits that 'there are circumstances in which such political modesty may be appropriate' as 'the domain of the universal does potentially harbor totalitarian outcomes' (p. 120). I take the Egyptian revolution, in this sense, to be one such circumstance. The Egyptian revolutionaries struggle with the deeply-rooted political universal in the guise of the nation-state. This universal has justified and led to the totalitarian agenda that the former regime carried out. This is why, I argue, 'political modesty', Critchley's project, is a possible framework to revisit the revolution. The revolution outlines the attempt to expose the universal, the nation-state project that led to a totalitarian regime, to the singularity constructed by the protestors. This exposure may not lead to a 'guiding positive universal vision', but it does start a process of reassessing a universal (the nation state) that has long been left unquestioned.

[94] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 227.

[95] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 227.

[96] Imad Hajjaj, The most beautiful valentine [Cartoon], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 15 February 2011, p.19.

of the screen is Egypt as she wears a pyramid crown with the name, 'Egypt', engraved

on it. The computer screen, the medium for objective glory, communicates a message

of love, in what could be read as an appeal to justice, a justice that has discarded of

the president, through a love message to the queen, Egypt. [97]

However, the cartoon's play on ethical love draws attention to a struggle that the

weeds face in their address to justice, signified by the cartoon's choice of image to

refer to Egypt. The struggle is depicted through the weeds' challenge to overcome

subjective glory. To explain this, I recall my discussion in Chapter One about

Novalis's 'will of the beloved' and Derrida's 'movement of love'.[98] Love was

discussed then within the context of the wedding gown that signifies consensus or

contract theory. Consensus denoted the movement that complements the will of the

beloved with the desire of the loving one, the translator, in an aggregate symbolic

system that makes unity possible while forbidding totality.[99] This movement of

complementation was said to address an untouchable, the promise of justice.[100] Justice

allows the complementary movement of love through consensus that unifies but does

not totalize. In a similar fashion, I take the scene of glory, presented in the above

cartoon, to ponder consensus as a case of popular sovereignty. In this scene,

acclamation joins the people in objective glory through mediatized social

communication or acclamation that voices love. However, in the objective glory of

liquefied sovereignty, they choose to address justice through presenting it as a

---

[97] In a discussion of Bataille's notion of love, Nancy (in *The Inoperative Community*, p.38) holds that '[l]ove does not complete community', but rather 'exposes the unworking and therefore the incessant incompletion of community'. Love, Nancy argues, 'exposes community at its limit'. Love is another form of 'unworking the community' or rendering it inoperative.

[98] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.

[99] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 122.

[100] Ibid., p. 122.

sovereign, a queen variation of a king with a crown.[101] The cartoon thus presents the

challenge that the weeds face in negotiating ethical love and justice. Their nation-state

model is not over yet, for the message totalizes difference in a single address to a

beloved in the figure of a sovereign. In other words, ethical love seems still to be in

the process of making, for the will of the beloved is still confused with the desire of

the loved one, and the movement of love is still in its crib. The cartoons depict the

weeds' struggle to fashion consensus through presenting how semiotics fails to supply

them with media, language and image, to properly address justice and establish ethical

love. Mediated justice is reduced to the figure of the sovereign. The revolutionaries'

message of love is a song of praise to the queen that has not yet become the hymn of

pure inoperativity or sayability.

However, these cartoons still celebrate their attempt at ethical love and address to

justice in the struggle.[102] For example, the address to justice is represented in the

following cartoon as the mission of the athletes who are passing the torch on. The

torch, known to be lighted by the rays of the sun through a mirror held by a priestess,

is believed to be an indication of peace and brotherhood. By partaking in this race, the

---

[101] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 256.

[102] Ziad El Marsafy (in 'Action, Imagination, Institution, Natality, Revolution', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19 (2015), 130–38) explores the creative aspects of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution by referring to Hannah Arendt's concept of 'action' as natality or creation. He argues that 'by bringing people together, action […] makes the world and takes us farther away from the worldless universe of oppression and dictatorship' (p.136). The protestors, in this sense, become 'exemplary political actors capable of serious feats of imagination and protest, ones that have radically and definitively redefined the spaces we inhabit as something other than places devoted to violent control, injustice and oppression'. In their protests, 'those revolutionary writers, fighters, teachers and protesters; those people [define] the condition of natality and of this new citizenship that is (still) being born in Egypt' (p.137). The protestors thus conceive a new form of citizenship in their creative action. This new citizenship is defined by their address to justice that they carry out through ethical love. In this address, it could be argued that the protestors' chants are instances of linguistic natality or a natality to which language is sensitive.

citizens of Egypt and Tunisia reinforce brotherhood and peace. They thus embody an attempt at the Levinasian sense of commonality as ethical love and difference:

Figure 9. The Arab race.[103]

By depicting the revolutionaries' attempt at ethical love through their race, the cartoon hints at a finish line to which the race will eventually lead. Their finish line, as depicted in the following cartoon, announces justice as a democratic project which can be reached. The weeds thus come to stand for Critchley's 'citizenship as philosophical activity' where Democracy, the political construction for justice marked by the power of the people, is perceived not as an existent political form but as a 'project to be attempted'.[104] The project of Democracy that the race leads to takes on the guise of the sun in the following cartoon:
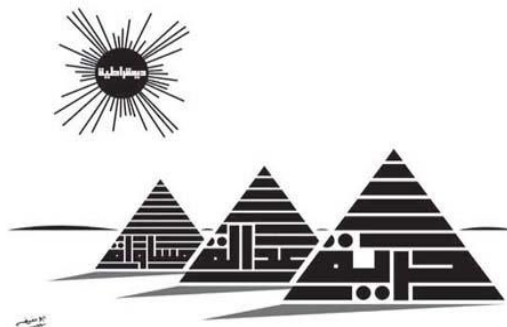

Figure 10. The sun of democracy.[105]

The Sun in the cartoon says 'Democracy'. The pyramids read 'Freedom, Justice, Equality'. So, the citizens as athletes practice ethical love through the brotherhood of

---

[103] Nasser Al Ja'afari, The Arab race [Cartoon], *Alarab Alyawm*, 13 February 2011, p. 16.
[104] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp. 238–240.
[105] Mohamad Abu-Afifa, The sun of democracy [Cartoon], *Al Ghad*, 4 February 2011, p.12.

the torch. Similarly, they recall Critchley's sense of philosophy, which is obviously very different from al-Farabi's logocentric sense of philosophy as divine truth, through perceiving of democracy as a project or a Derridean 'to come' state that can eventually be reached.[106]

However, the citizens are again depicted as resorting to the same glory symbols, the sun and writing, language, which the sovereign employs to establish power. They thus lay bare the fact that instrumental logic upon which the king-*imam* relies to establish power persists. Although their race for democracy succeeds in ridding the king of his crown, cape, and insignia of power, such as the pyramid, the weeds end up employing the same symbols, insignia, they seek to abolish. In the earlier cartoons, the queen wears a crown, and the pyramid, though imitated, reads democracy. Borrowing Critchley's terms, the employment of the same symbols of the king means that the spirit of philosophical questioning has not broken loose of the fetters of law-related symbolism. In Agamben's terms, the weeds still struggle to depict the status of Agamben's 'law, and politics, deactivated in play' and thus 'the gateways to a new happiness'.[107] For Mills, when law is 'rendered inoperative', it becomes what Benjamin calls 'the gate to justice'.[108] As the cartoons show, their race still adopts king-related symbolism as that of the sun that shines upon Egypt:

[106] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 64.
[107] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 76.
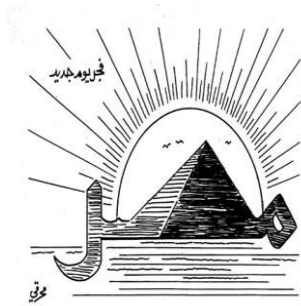[108] Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, p. 126.

Figure 11. A new sunset.[109]
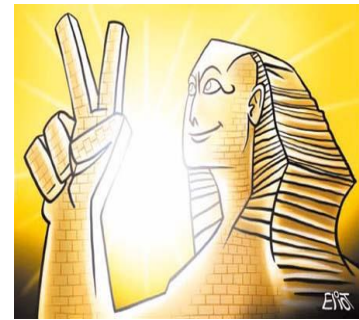

Figure 12. Good morning, Egypt.[110]

Figure 13. The victorious Sphinx.[111]

The first and second cartoon read a 'New Dawn' and a shiny 'Good morning, Egypt' while the third cartoon presents the light and the sign of victory from Egypt's historical symbol, the Sphinx. In these cartoons, the pursuit of justice fails to escape the symbolic mode. The cartoons' double reading becomes an attempt at grappling with Agamben's question whether 'it is possible to think politics—beyond the economy and beyond glory'.[112] So far, my discussion has shown that the attempts have struggled to do so but have not fully succeeded: these attempts to overthrow the dictator in the name of the people are still caught in the same instrumental logic that produced dictatorship in the first place. Instrumental logic hampers the attempt of mimesis to indicate the trace through imaginative creation; the weeds can only imitate immediate political presence through its insignia of power.

Within the limits of mimetic translation, the weeds continuously face the *archē* of the insignia of power which reduces them to subjective glory. Subjective glory, in turn, prevents the weeds from liquefying sovereignty in the form of objective glory. They thus highlight the Agamben-related fact that these two forms of glory are

---

[109] Abdallah Mahrouqi, A new sunset [Cartoon], *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, 12 February 2011, p. 28.

[110] Habib Haddad, Good morning, Egypt [Cartoon], *Al Hayat*, 13 February 2011, p.10.

[111] Elie Saliba, The victorious Sphinx [Cartoon], *Al Watan Newspaper*, 12 February 2011, p.31.

[112] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 259.

actually 'two faces of the *doxa*'.[113] Consensual public opinion, the *doxa*, glorifies the

instrument of objective glory, social media, instead of employing it to liquefy

sovereignty. As the cartoon below shows, the revolutionaries end up acclaiming the

means of mediation as a condensation of the mediatic glory of social-communication:

Figure 14. Hailing social media. [114]

In this cartoon, social media as the means of the liquefaction of popular sovereignty

become the subject of popular acclaim. The weeds underscore what Derrida claims is

the very structure of the sign that operates by Rousseau's 'disease of imitation' or the

'imitation within imitation' that is not a disease in the first place.[115] The signs of

sovereignty and glory can only operate by substitution, or mimetic translation, where

the media stand for the cape and crown. The weeds thus emphasize the logocentric

appeal of al-Farabi's category of citizens who assume that 'what they hold is the very

same as what the man who really knows the truth asserts to be the truth'.[116] Their

public opinion or *doxa* is summarized in an acclamation or glorification directed to

one figure and one sense of truth, that of the one sovereign, whether it takes the form

of the media or the king's cape. In this cartoon, the revolutionaries maintain their state

---

[113] Ibid., p. 258.

[114] Jihad Awartani*, Hailing social media* [Cartoon]*, Alwatan Newspaper*, 30 January 2011, p.31.

[115] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 205.

[116] Alfarabi, *On the Perfect State*, p. 285.

as the people-nation despite the role that the people-communication media played; it seems that popular sovereignty is not fully liquefied as yet.

Not only are the weeds still in a state of subjective glory directed to the media as the new sovereign, they also seem to be employing this new sovereign to imitate and thus displace the old sovereign, the president. Through mimesis, they limit justice to imitation, then, the replacement of sovereignty in image form:

Figure 15. 'Departure Day'. [117]

Social media in the letter-image, the symbol for Facebook, assume the language status of the people whose banners lose linguistic content. Facebook is also the torch of brotherhood, unity, and ethical love, discussed earlier. The revolutionaries seem to talk in images as they employ the image of Facebook to confront what used to be the direction of their acclamation, the king as sword. Although the people-communication means hailed by the people-subject against the sovereign is supposed to reach justice, the struggle is still presented as a confrontation, a duality of good and evil, on which the historical and logocentric sense of authority rests.

In this confrontation, the sovereign, the ex-president, destroys the remote control in the cartoon below as he tries to reverse the effect of what the media faces him with. Logocentric thought, symbolized by the king, cannot acknowledge mediation or

[117] Hassan Blaibel, 'Departure Day' [Cartoon], *Al-Mustaqbal*, 4 February 2011, <http://www.hassanbleibel.com/FrontEndArchive.aspx> [accessed 12 September 2012].

arche-writing. This is why from the perspective of the king, the media are reduced to a window in the following cartoon:
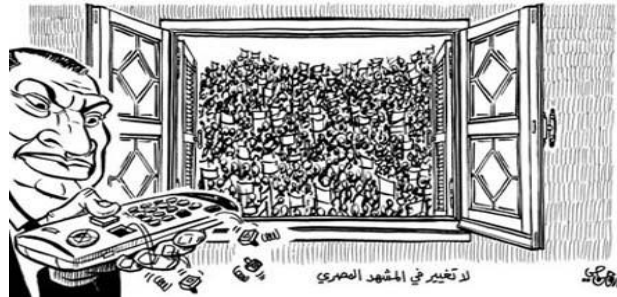

Figure 16. No change in the Egyptian scene. [118]

The caption reads, 'No change in the Egyptian scene'. The media, the reign of the image, become the window facing the president with imminent reality. The subjective glory of the people-nation is perceived by the sovereign as an imminence that the window presents. This is why the president reduces the media, employed by the weeds to desecrate him, to technology, a remote control in the hand of the sovereign, with which he can manipulate the scene of acclamation at any moment. The ex-president tries to manipulate the image through its language, technology, yet fails.

His failure is depicted in a scene that captures the comic sovereign instance of political transformation that can only be translated in mimetic terms. Within the field of Derridean semiotics, the cartoon depicts the scene of reverse acclamation as one where the public hold banners that read nothing while the president is reduced to silence. It is neither writing nor speech that the cartoon wants to highlight; the cartoon underscores the abyss of madness and silence, which I discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. This silence, Derrida claims, is not 'exterior to language;' it indicates the absence that characterizes language and renders translation a language of

---

[118] Arman Homsi, No change in the Egyptian scene [Cartoon], *Annahar*, 6 February 2011, p. 10.

symptoms.[119] Through this silence, semiotics undergoes the effect of 'inoperativity' as it hands the reign over to the aesthetic. Our focus now turns to the affective as a force that imitates semiotics and formulates a politics of potential that the last section of this chapter will explore.

3.7 Justice, Potentiality, and the *Archē* of the Empty Throne of Power

The weeds' struggle for justice has met with the failure of semiotics to supply them with signs and symbols of justice that are not imitative of sovereignty. The failure of semiotics thus limits them to subjective glory within a nation state. Despite their resort to the media to liquefy sovereignty in objective glory, they are still portrayed, at face value, as subject people glorifying a sovereign. However, as already discussed, their glorification is actually a case of reverse acclamation or a 'de-glorification'. In their reverse acclamation, they employ mimetic translation as aesthetic imaginative creation to expose the *archē* of sovereignty or power that glory covers up. They translate sovereignty by exposing the empty throne of power or Agamben's notion of the 'void' that glory conceals. The void marks not only the absence of the sovereign but also a state of the limit of language in glorification. In this state, language becomes inoperative as an 'Idea of language' or language's end.[120] This is what Agamben labels the state of potentiality.

The modern weeds translate politics from divine to secular, from cape to gown, by taking the desecration of the sovereign's insignia of power, discussed earlier on, to be a mimetic effect of their acclamation. Mimetic translation makes the desecration of power resemble an acclamation through inoperativity. In acclamation, the weeds render inoperative the voice by rendering desecration a form of praise that celebrates

119 Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 242.
120 Agamben, 'Potentalities', p. 47.

what Agamben calls the void as the 'sovereign figure of glory'.[121] These protestors

are actually asking for a sovereign, the king, to depart so that the sovereign figure of

glory, the void, could manifest itself.[122] The weeds are not concerned with the

departure of the regime as much as with acclaiming this void that they judge to be a

relief from repression. Relief from repression is taken here only in the sense that the

void or empty throne is the denuding of sovereignty from its masking in glory. In this

act of denuding, the modern weeds seek to expose the *archē* in sovereignty that could

open up the throne, and hence the insignia of power, to new use. The empty space, the

empty throne, thus activates Agamben's sense of potentiality of the 'not to be'.[123] The

empty throne indicates the quality of pure means that could rescue language from

instrumentalization as a glorifying apparatus for sovereignty. Acclaiming the void or

the empty throne is what I hold to figure in the following cartoon:

Figure 17. The scream of the youth [124]

The weeds' glorification, which desecrates in praise and praises in desecration, is

directed towards the void, the empty thrones. The cartoon, captioned with the phrase

'the scream of the youth', marks the revolutionaries' celebration of their success in

ousting the president. Their scream is not depicted as speech. Instead, it is presented

---

[121] Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, p. 245.
[122] Ibid., p. 207.
[123] Agamben, 'Potentalities', p. 182.
[124] Omayya Joha, The scream of the youth [Cartoon], *Alraya Newspaper*, 12 February 2011, p.30.

as an empty and angry shout whose force creates the void and overturns the throne

that would usually hold it secure. The affective aspect of energy in the voice and

anger is what matters in this depiction. Instead of having acclamation stand for

Agamben's sense of the 'eternal amen' raised in paradise, the place of happiness and

justice, it becomes a neutral case of high sound whose energy is in its loudness and its

mimetic repetitiveness, not in its being a case of glorification. This energy of loudness

and mimetic repetitiveness imposes upon Benjamin's sense of pure language or the

sound, still unfettered by signs, signification and all linguistic function. Pure

language, in this sense, plays its notes through energy or loudness, not words.

Inoperativity celebrates the void in a language of sayability, an ability to say or

not say, which cannot be uttered in semiotic means. It marks a vision of language that

pits Agamben's notion in juxtaposition with Derrida's. Here, 'the key moment [is] the

point of articulation and division itself', says Catherine Mills in commentary upon

Agamben's take on language. Whereas Derrida emphasizes the 'divisions of

presence/absence, sensible/ intelligible, or signifier/signified' in the *différance* of the

two sides, Agamben focuses on the division itself. For Derrida, the voice is a

'phenomenological voice' that 'keeps or guards silence'.[125] This voice 'maintains its

self-presence and presence to meaning by cutting off all relations with the outside, the

exterior and the worldly—that is, with textuality in general'.[126] From a Derridean

stand-point, the shout is the phenomenological voice that disrupts relation to textuality

or 'verbal communication'. 'Non-verbal communication' thus marks what Critchley

calls, 'ethics'.[127] The ethical originates from the phenomenological voice that explores

itself by absenting the world. By exploring the voice as a writing, Derrida introduces

---

[125] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 177.
[126] Ibid., p. 177.
[127] Ibid., p. 178.

the trace as a *différance* of the two sides or *arche*-writing. On the other hand, Agamben freezes the division or point of articulation as a 'tension that preserves difference while establishing unity'.[128] This point of articulation qualifies the moment of inoperative language as that which unifies while establishing difference through acclamation and language that is purely sayable. This point of articulation seems to divide the phenomenological voice within itself without breaking it. It preserves difference while founding unity in the voice. This is what I claim to figure in the move from the field of semiotics to that of the affective and aesthetics that the cartoon depicts. The affective state of anger preserves difference through the loud and repetitive notes of pure language; however, this difference is not pronounced as difference but as a unity of political significance in the space of the voice.

The political significance of the open mouth that utters this shout of semiotic silence, this inoperativity, is taken up by Jean-Luc Nancy in his *The Inoperative Community* (1986). For Nancy, the open mouth stands for 'exposing sharing' that is 'prior to any address in language'. Nancy explains this exposure to be 'words [which] do not 'come out' of the throat (not from the 'mind' 'in' the head): they are [instead] formed in the mouth's articulation. This is why speech—including silence—is not a means of communication but communication itself, an exposure'.[129] This open mouth as communication becomes, for Nancy, 'the limit at which all politics stop and begin'.[130] Its political significance lies in the fact that it denotes a community in which the voice that is 'always divided from itself, always different' announces a law

---

[128] Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, pp. 45–6.
[129] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor, trans. by Peter Connor and others (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 30–31.
[130] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 80.

and denotes a 'logos of the community'.[131] Nancy's open mouth is the precursor for

the moment of division as inoperativity that Agamben later expands through

acclamation. In the inoperative language of the open mouth, politics becomes 'that

way of opening community to itself', to its being a voice. Nancy's notion of politics

in an inoperative community is further explained by Critchley to be that which

explores *le politique,* politics as essence, instead of *la politique* or the 'political [that]

is founded philosophically'.[132] The latter is taken to hinder the exploration of the

former. In this sense, the open mouth is the voice that escapes the chains of

philosophy in order to articulate '*le politique*'*,* politics as essence. The voice of

inoperativity thus marks the initial point from which the exploration of *le politique*

can start.

In the attempt to think *le politique* that the voice of inoperativity allows, I have

suggested that the affective, imaginative and aesthetic could be the field to explore. *Le*

politique becomes the exploration of politics as a potentiality in the 'existence of non-

Being' of a community. This community is constituted of people who are capable of

their own 'lack' and where every individual is 'in relation to [his or her]

incapacity'.[133] In this community of potentiality, 'human beings are the animals who

are capable of their own impotentiality'.[134] Agamben hints to this state in what he

calls the sphere of politics as 'pure mediality without end' which is 'not a state but an

event of language'.[135] The political notion of sovereignty, in this sense, becomes an

event of language marked by 'de-glorification' which exposes the empty throne of

---

[131] Ibid., *p*. xxii.
[132] Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp. 203–206.
[133] Agamben, 'Potentalities', p. 182.
[134] Ibid., p. 182.
[135] Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes of Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 115,6–116,7.

power as a medium or means without an end. This capacity of the inoperative voice to articulate a politics of potentiality as essence is what I will take on in the following chapter through a study of the media that the voice takes in poetry with their affective and their imaginative potentials.[136]

Conclusion

So, to sum up, we return to the questions with which we started our exploration: What does mimetic translation mean and what does it contribute to an overall exploration of politics? And why approach a rather serious venture through the comical and satirical? On one level, it is only the comical and satirical that can provide us with space to play with the limits of language and explore for possibilities of profanation or new use. The translatability across the semiotic fields of image and language is carried out in a mimetic form in which the image imitates language and language repeats the image. In this mimetic translation, however, repeatability is an imaginative representation, concerned with the media introduced to emphasize creative difference.

The cartoons on the Egyptian Revolution engage with the political through the insignia of power, glory. Glorification, a fundamental aspect of sovereignty, becomes the very element that jeopardizes sovereignty when it takes a reverse form. In reverse acclamation, modern weeds preserve the guise of glory, consensus, while profaning the sovereign. Profanation becomes the linguistic means that rids all that denotes sovereignty from its shield of sacred exclusion and brings it back to common use as a

---

[136] Here, it must be mentioned that while Nancy argues that *le politique* is an exploration of politics that is not philosophical, Agamben explores the political from within the domain of philosophy, as *la politique*. Agamben wants philosophy to be able to theorize the non-Being of a community. However, I hold that there are some elements of Agamben's *la politique*, such as his notion of inoperativity, that need to be considered alternatively, in affective and imaginative sense, in order for the exploration of *le politique* to proceed.

state of being a pure means without ends. The media, the chapter has shown, plays a fundamental role in this process through reducing to inoperativity all ends of language and law. Perceiving social media's potential to initiate inoperativity, the modern weeds turn to it to displace sovereignty. However, in their act, they lay bare an *archē* of the empty throne of power or the void that glory conceals. Sovereignty is revealed to be nothing but a shield, a throne, which harbors and promises nothing but emptiness within. The void becomes the promise of justice that could bring back to common use all that was surrounded by that shield of sacredness.

Moreover, as the cartoons have shown us, the state of the void marks the revolutionaries' collective attempt to deconstruct sovereignty through the power of the imagination that manipulates representation. Their collectivity that is distinguished by its affective and emotional aspect voiced frustration and desire for change. This emotional and imaginative aspect, as the following chapter will show, holds promises on the political level. On the political plane, the imaginative signifies potentiality that hands the reigns of politics over to the aesthetic and imaginative, the poetic, to fulfill what semiotics has failed to achieve. The poetic marks the attempt of politics to theorize and carry out justice as a process of profanation that highlights the quality of pure means of language and law. The political mechanism through which justice becomes a concern with profanation shall thus be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE 2011 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION: POETIC TRANSLATION AND THE NEW MORAL ORDER OF JUSTICE

Introduction

We have seen in the past chapters how translation is the aesthetic process of overcoming sovereignty within language that is marked by a paradigmatic shift from a cosmic divine to a more secular contract-based model. In this process, justice becomes the concern with returning to common use what has been relegated to the sphere of sacredness and separation. This sphere of sacredness defines language as a tool for a particular end; language is defined in terms of its instrumental purposes, i.e. communication or information-giving. However, within the context of the Arab Spring, I have shown how language loses its instrumental character as it becomes a tool for experimentation. Linguistic experimentation takes the form of the protestors' public acclamation that is employed to overthrow a dictator instead of acclaim a sovereign. In what I called 'reverse acclamation', the protestor weeds illustrate a dynamic process underway in language whereby language suspends its status as a means to a specific end and thus becomes de-instrumentalized. Although the apparent employment of language can be said to be the political mission of overthrowing dictatorship, the previous chapter has shown that this instrumental purpose is nothing more than a ridding of the sacred shield with which power wraps itself. Power becomes an empty throne, a shield or cape, which marks the opening up of language for new creative use, a use that this chapter will proceed to explore further.

To investigate the essential role of language in establishing and, in turn, deconstructing sovereignty within the context of the 2011 Egyptian evolution, this

chapter will explore the slogans and chants of the revolution, especially that of '*al sha'ib yureed isqat al nizam*' or 'the people want to topple the regime' that marks the start of the revolution in Egypt and in other Arab Spring countries. My exploration will be guided by the following questions: What role did slogans and poetic chants play in the revolution and in overcoming dictatorship? How does the poetic modify translation as the negotiation of the divine with the secular, and what is the role of the poetic in rewriting the political-theology of translation? What does chanting as a ritualistic practice with poetic content reveal about how the Egyptian protestors give meaning to the role of revolutions? And finally how could the poetic as a creative tool contribute to political deliberation on the revolution? In all these questions, I investigate how linguistic play could shed light on a construction of political theology that is unique to the translation of sovereignty.

4.1 Linguistic Experimentation and Re-writing Political Theology

To address the relationship of poetry and political theology, I will start my exploration by examining the act of chanting and demonstration as ritualistic practices. In 'The Poetry of Revolt', Elliott Colla claims that the act of 'singing and shouting with large groups of fellow citizens has created a certain and palpable sense of community that had not existed before'.[1] Chanting, according to Colla, has played an essential role in consensus-making and community building within the revolution. Inspired by Charles Taylor's concept of the 'social imaginary' as outlined in his *A Secular Age*, I take chanting to be a ritual or common practice that is made possible by a common and shared understanding of what a community is. Taylor explains the social imaginary to be 'the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings',

---

[1] Elliott Colla, 'The Poetry of Revolt', in *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt*, ed. by Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing (London: Verso, 2012), p. 50.

a way which is 'often not expressed in theoretical terms' but rather in 'images, stories, legends, etc'.[2] The act of chanting thus becomes a common practice which lays bare 'a widely shared sense of legitimacy' and a common understanding that involves a refashioning of social surroundings.[3] As a practice that manifests a shared understanding, chanting took place alongside demonstration, another ritual that plays a major role in modern secularism. According to Taylor, a demonstration indicates a ritual that involves the understanding that protestors 'remain within certain bounds, both spatially (don't invade certain spaces), and in the way it impinges on others (this side of a threshold of aggressivity—no violence)'.[4] The very act of demonstration is an act that is 'already in our repertory' as demonstrators 'know how to assemble, pick up banners, and march'.[5] Demonstration and chanting are the two forms of practices that this chapter will investigate as displaying a common understanding and a shared sense of legitimacy that marks the translation into what seems like a modern secular sphere.

Within the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the shared sense of legitimacy and construction of meaning, I hold, is established by a poetic imaginative impulse that characterizes the demonstration and chanting. The protestors defied the regime by chanting 'the people want to topple the regime', a chant which is inspired from a poem written by al-Shabbi (1909-1934) under the title 'Life's Will' (1933). The particular verse of concern to this study is the first that reads: 'If the people want life, then fate will answer their call'.[6] By constructing their chant from al-Shabbi's poem, the protestors display a collective sense of meaning-making that characterizes

---

[2] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 171–2.
[3] Ibid., p. 172.
[4] Ibid., p. 173.
[5] Ibid., p. 173.
[6] Colla, 'The People Want'.

their state as a nation. I am informed in making this argument by the framework that al-Farabi establishes for a nation's development of common opinion. For al-Farabi, the emergence of poetry is founded upon a nation's use of the 'meanings' paradigms and images as means of making them understood or as substitutes for them'.[7] In this sense, a nation's common paradigm of meaning-making and metaphorical construction manifests itself primarily through their poems. Poems and common chanting, then, reflect their world view that defines their identity, their moral beliefs and their common interpretation of the world.

Within the modern context, the role that al-Farabi gives to poetic speech becomes relevant only if reread through the lens of the role that Taylor gives to romantic poetry in modern secularism. Despite the wide historical gulf between al-Farabi's medieval and Taylor's contemporary philosophies, they both highlight the formative aspect of poetry in the construction of a community's paradigm of meaning-making. Taylor claims that the modern social imaginary is built upon the 'decline of the old order with its established background of meanings [that] made necessary the development of new poetic languages in the Romantic period'.[8] Romantic poetry thus reflects the decline of an old moral order and its background of meanings and the rise of a new one. Much similar to the argument made by al-Farabi, Taylor shows how poetry, in the romantic form, is directly connected to a background of meanings, what he calls a moral order. While poetry within al-Farabi's philosophy fits into an overall cosmic order, its role in the training and formation of the imagination is indicative of its function in the construction of a more secular-like moral order. The weeds rely upon the imagination to construct a moral order that differs and eclipses the Virtuous City's cosmic construction. Their employment of poetry's formative role, therefore, would

---

[7] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §129.
[8] Taylor, p. 353.

predict Taylor's formulation of the role that romantic poetry plays in the construction

of the modern moral order. Taylor's arguments, in this sense, takes al-Farabi's

argument a step further by shedding light on the change in meaning-making and

moral orders that poetry can reflect.

In line with the above argument, I will devote the first part of the chapter to

investigate the moral order that the chant, which is inspired by al-Shabbi's poem,

portrays. The first verse that reads 'If the people want life, then fate will answer their

call', I will show, sheds light on an important paradigm of meaning-making that the

chant 'The people want to topple the regime' emphasizes. The paradigm, which I am

referring to here, is the portrayal of a nation's formation of the collective will. While

the verse links the collective will of the people with the desire for life to which fate

will answer, the chant defines the people's will as a collective wanting to topple the

regime. The political desire for toppling the regime thus qualifies the collective sense

of the will as a desire for life that religious fate will realize. This, I argue, constitutes

the moral order which the protestors seem to portray in their chant.

The link that I build between the collective will, fate and political liberation as the

moral order that the protestors rely on is justified by the historical underpinnings of

al-Shabbi's poem. Al-Shabbi wrote the poem in 1933 in an attempt to urge Tunisians

of the time to resist French colonialism. Resistance to colonial subjugation is the

impetus behind the poem's apparent investment in the doctrine of free will against

what El Alaoui calls the 'anti-life forces' of colonialism. These forces, El Alaoui

claims, are still at work in modern Tunisia.[9] Within the Egyptian context, in 'Islamic

Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement', Abdulkader Tayob

makes the similar claim that the revival of the doctrine of free will has played an

[9] El Alaoui, 'Chanting Tahreer and Compassion', p. 13.

essential role in overthrowing colonialism in the Arab World. Tayob quotes Kerr's *Islamic Reform and Legal Theories of Muhamad 'Abdu and Rashid Rida* (1966) to show how Egyptian thinkers, such as Muhamad Abdu, revived the *Mu'atazili* belief in free will 'in the hope that it will redress the fatalistic attitude that many Egyptians had adopted to their political situation'.[10] Tayob's quote, here, draws attention to the essential role that the revival of the *Mu'atazili* belief in free will played in resisting colonial rule and as inspiration for poets, such as al-Shabbi, to motivate people to action. This theological and political revival of the debate, I argue, lives on and resurfaces in the chants of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. By chanting for the collective will, the Egyptian protestors resurrect the age-old belief and present a moral order where free will could overcome modern-day political subjugation that invests in religious fatalism.

The reliance on theological discussions of free will to overcome political subjugation actually extends farther back than the *Mu'atazilite's* eighth to tenth century formulation of this creed. Historically speaking, the *Mu'atazila* is a ninth-century-school within Islamic theology that is based on rationalism. The school's investment in the doctrine of free will has roots in a seventh century philosophical school of free will called *Qadariyya. Qadarites,* adherents of *Qadariyya,* adopted the assertion that 'power was worthless as long as one did not prove worthy of it'. To defend their argument, they invested in the 'heresy of free will' to protest the Ummayads' claim that 'their governmental power had been a gift of God, a *rizq,* predetermined and irreversible'.[11] The *qadarite* movement was thus as much a political movement that sought to overcome the political sovereign power in rule at

---

[10] Abdulkader Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995), p. 23.
[11] Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, p. 135.

the time as it was a religious movement that advocated free will to justify its political stand. The *qadarite-mu'atazili* doctrine of free will thus presents a moral order that interconnects religion or theology with liberation from political subjugation or fatalism, an interconnection that the 2011 protestors seem to resurrect in their chant.

However, the modern resurrection of this theological and political debate acquires unique features that reflect a secular shift within this moral order. Having sampled the works of the Romantic School, al-Shabbi reformulates the doctrine of free will in his poem romantically: *qadar* or fate becomes a response to the human will for life.[12] By qualifying the will as one concerned with a desire for life to which fate responds, the poem modifies the moral order of earlier times. Whereas the *qadarite-mu'atazilite* moral order presents will and fate in a fight to establish hegemony over one other, the romantic moral order offers a more complementary portrait of the work of the free will and fate. Fate becomes a response that complements the desire for life, the romantic notion of free will, in order to overcome political subjugation. In this modern moral order, fate no longer signifies political subjugation nor justifies it. This new moral order echoes Taylor's notion of the social imaginary that breaks off with the pre-modern 'cosmic imaginary' which is built upon a pre-modern hierarchical political model of the king ruling a kingdom.[13] However, instead of a complete break, the Egyptian social imaginary maintains elements from the cosmic scheme, i.e. the notion of fate. This is why I argue that the modern moral order marks a secular shift within a cosmic imaginary, rather than a complete division from it. Justice becomes the medium that allows for this shift.

---

[12] Moulay Youness Elbousty, 'Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi's "The Will to Live": Galvanising the Tunisian Revolution', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18 (2013), 159–63 (p. 160) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2012.729719>.
[13] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 323.

The modern secular shift within the cosmic imaginary is especially made evident on the linguistic plane, just as in Taylor's modern moral order. According to Taylor, modern poets made up 'new languages' and explored words 'with their ontological meanings as it were in suspense'.[14] Similarly, the modern protestors carry out a linguistic mission that introduces the secular shift within their cosmic moral order through word play. The protestors, I argue, follow the example of al-Farabi, an affiliate of the *Qadarite* movement, who translated his implicit belief in *Qadariya* through a play on the term *qadar,* as the translator of his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, Zimmerman, argues.[15] In his *Commentary,* al-Farabi refers to the human will, usually called *irada*, as *qadar*. Linguistically speaking, *qadar* or fate could indicate God's ordinance or human prediction. However, al-Farabi conflates the two in his attempt to defend and endorse his political and theological beliefs. Al-Farabi's play on word meanings presents a linguistic scheme that the protestors reproduce in their romantic exploration of word meanings related to their revolution. By exploring and playing on terms, the protestors emphasize a secular-like streak of linguistic play, a *linguistic qadarism*, that breaks the link between words and their ontological meanings.

The modern protestors, mimicking what could be called the al-Farabian model of secular-like language play, introduce their reformed moral order through coming up with what looks like a new language. The protestors introduce a unique use of terms, sometimes translated, to signify the political aspects of the revolution. One such term is al *dawla al 'aamiqa* or 'deep state'.[16] Another term of interest is *al dawla al*

---

[14] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 351–7.
[15] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, pp. cxvii–iii.
[16] For Issandr El Amrani (in 'Sightings of the Egyptian Deep State', *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 2012), the term 'deep state' originates from

madaniyya or 'civil state'.[17] The modern weeds employ these terms to label political

phenomena that they found that they were struggling with and facing for the first

time. In this creative role, the protestors highlight the role of the linguistic medium

through the political expressions that they translate or borrow yet attempt to put in

new use. The expressions acquire new and sometimes opposing connotations in the

naqla or transfer that the weed protestors perform. These protestors thus mimic the

role of what al-Farabi calls the 'oral transmitters of poems' who are a nation's first

wise men who are concerned with fashioning a language for a nation by correcting

utterances and creating 'uncommon expressions' for previously unnoticed

coincidences. They are also said to 'contrive names' for that nation.[18] By creating a

new language from borrowed expressions in *naqla* or transfer, the protestors initiate a

quasi-act of nation-building through reforming the moral order of that nation. The

protestors' translation, in this sense, becomes a paradigmatic secular shift within a

divine moral order that takes place through the de-instrumentalization of language.

The de-instrumentalization of language results from the creative mimetic translation,

which I argued for in Chapter Two. In their *naqla,* the weeds-oral transmitters of

poems display the imaginative creativity of mimetic translation through articulating

ambiguity within language. Instead of using language to denote or create a reality, the

---

Turkey and is employed in Egypt to refer to the security agencies and state
bureaucracy whose influence the revolution disrupted but the army later reasserted.
[17] Fawaz A. Gerges (in 'The Islamist Moment: From Islamic State to Civil Islam?',
Political Science Quarterly, 128 (2013), 389–426) claims that the term 'civil state'
has been employed by the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s to show that they no
longer favor the theocratic Islamic state model. Avoiding the use of the expression
'secular state' that is associated with irreligiosity, they resorted to the term as an
escape mechanism. However, Arab Islamists, Gerges argues, have not formulated a
political theory that would explain what they mean by a civil state, hence, the
ambiguity of the term that has been invested in by the many secular and religious
parties and that this chapter explores.
[18] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*,§130.

protestors show how language itself is a field of a secular play within the divine whose anchor is in the field of the social imaginary.

4.2 The Poetic Medium and the Chants of the Revolution

The chanting of poetically inspired slogans was one feature of the Egyptian social imaginary that distinguished the 2011 revolution. As in earlier versions of Egyptian uprisings, the 2011 revolution demonstrated how poetic chants have always been the '"soul" of the revolutionary moment'.[19] According to Elliott Colla in 'The Poetry of Revolt', chanting has the 'power to express messages that could not be articulated in other forms, as well as to sharpen demands with ever keener edges'.[20] Within the context of the Egyptian revolution, chanting thus became an act of demand and struggle that was not 'reducible to a text'.[21]

Historically speaking, poetry has always played a major role in almost all Egyptian uprisings:

Many of these revolutions have had their own poets. 1881 spawned the neo-classical *qasidas* of Mahmoud Sami la-Baroudi; 1991, the colloquial *zajals* of Bayram al-Tunsi. Salah Jahin became one of the leading colloquial poets of the 1952 revolution, and his patriotic verse became core material for 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz, who pinned his career to Nasser. From the same period, Fu'ad Haddad's *mawwals* also stand-out—and are still sung today. Since the 1970s, it has been Ahmad Fu'ad Nagm who has played the leading role as lyricist of militant opposition to the regimes of Egypt. For forty years, Nagm's colloquial poems— many set to music by Sheikh Imam- have electrified student, labor, and dissident

---

[19] Lewis Sanders IV and Mark Visonà, 'The Soul of Tahrir: Poetics of a Revolution', in *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*, ed. by Samia Mehrez (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), p. 213.
[20] Colla, 'The Poetry of Revolt', pp. 49–50.
[21] Ibid., p. 49.

movements form the Egyptian underclass. Nagm's poetry ranges from praise (*madh*) for the courage of ordinary Egyptians to invective (*hija'*) directed at Egypt's overlords- and it is no accident that you could hear his songs being sung by the leftist activists who spearheaded the first day of revolt on January 25. Besides these poets, we could mention many others—Naguib Surur, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Abnoudi, Tamim Barghouti—who have added to this literary-political tradition in their own ways.[22]

Since 1881, chanting has taken on different poetic forms, whether praise or invective, to express the revolutionaries' political dissidence and create change. Political opposition has since taken the guise of chanting that was closely intertwined with the literary tradition of poetic construction.

Among the many poetic chants of the revolution, this chapter is interested in that of *al sha'b yurid isqat al nizam* or 'The people want to topple the regime'. The slogan cites the opening line of Abu Qassim al-Shabbi's 1933 poem, 'The Will to Live':

If, one day, the people want to live, then fate will answer their call

And their night will then begin to fade, and their chains break and fall.

For he who is not embraced by life's passion will dissipate into thin air,

Woe to him whom life loves not, against the void that strikes there,

At least that is what all creation has told me, and what its hidden spirits declare.[23]

Another translation of this stanza reads:

When people choose

to live by life's will

[22] Colla, 'The Poetry of Revolt', p. 49.

[23] Colla, 'The People Want'.

Fate can do nothing but give in;

the night discards its veil;

all shackles are undone

Whoever never felt

life celebrating him

must vanish like the mist;

whoever never felt

sweeping through him

the glow of life

succumbs to nothingness.[24]

The first verse that reads: 'When people choose to live by life's will' or 'If, one day, the people want to live', is the source from which people borrowed and replicated the call: 'The people want to topple the regime'.[25] In chanting, the protestors translate the poem's will for life as a political desire for the toppling of the regime, thus establishing the close link between the political and literary traditions.

The slogan was not the only political translation of the poem's first verse. The poem was resurrected in the work of an equally distinguished Egyptian poet, Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi. Hijazi employed the verse to write a new ode to the Egyptian Revolution. In 'The Soul of Tahrir: Poetics of a Revolution', Lewis Sanders IV and Mark Visonà translate Hijazi's poem as follows:

---

[24] Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi, 'Life's Will', in *Modern Arabic Poetry : An Anthology*, ed. by Salma Khadra Jayussi, trans. by Sargon Boulat and Christopher Middleton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 97.

[25] Colla (in 'The Poetry of Revolt', p.50) lists many reasons for the widespread employment of the slogan inspired by the poem. Among these is the slogan's clarity compared to the subtlety of the more ironic slogans. Another reason is the slogan's regular metrical and stress rhythms as well as the fact that its cadence is borrowed from pre-existing slogans whose rhythm is a 'familiar part of the soundtrack of Arabic-language activist public culture'.

If the people will to live today

Then they must be free from fear

And carry in the palm of their hands

Their soul

And follow it deeply into danger

In order to earn their fate!

If the people will to live today

Then the slaves must rise

In fury

Endure the bite of hunger

But not endure the bite of the shackles. [26]

In this poem, Hijazi is said to clearly 'develop the themes of Al-Shabbi's first stanza— freedom and chains' as an 'official call to arms, motivating *Al-sha'b* [the people] to action'. [27] Hijazi writes his ode to motivate action by emphasizing the political aspects of al-Shabbi's poem: freedom from the chains of servitude and subjugation. The political theme of freedom in Hijazi's and al-Shabbi's poems thus proves to be the impetus for action on the side of the people, an action that first started with chanting for the fall of the regime.[28]

---

[26] Sanders IV and Visonà, p. 230.
[27] Ibid., pp. 230–1.
[28] Sanders IV and Visonà (in 'The Soul of Tahrir', pp.213-248) offer and discuss the translations of the revolution's poems and songs in order to show how themes, such as identity, are in a continuous state of change as the revolution progresses. They claim that intertextuality and the structural complexity of the texts continuously challenged their attempts to translate these poems. Describing these challenges as instances of 'resistance to translation', they define translation as an act of 'creative design rather than the orthodox practice of an invisible translator'. Translation, for them, indicates a creative process and an interpretation of the structure of the original text whereby a translator negotiates challenges only to be transformed himself/herself in the experience of liberating an original text (p. 242).The creative aspect of translation is an issue that I will further explore later on in this chapter. However, I should mention

In a move very similar to Hijazi's, yet with a more satirical tone, the hip-hop artist, DJ 3mr 7a7a or 'Amr Haha writes a song titled 'The People Want Five Pounds' Phone Credit' in an obvious attempt to mock the poetic slogan 'even as he champions it'.[29] Haha's song supports the poetically-inspired slogan only to reveal the 'tiredness of the slogan' which has become a 'discursive scaffolding for hanging every new demand'.[30] The song thus becomes another translation, a social one, which reflects the close links between the political and literary within the social imaginary of the Egyptian revolutionaries.[31]

By adopting and rewriting the verse from al-Shabbi's poem, Haha's song and Hijazi's poem illustrate a distinctive feature of the 2011 Egyptian revolutionaries' social imaginary: their collective interpretation and reformulation of their social surroundings in political-literary terms. The protestors assert their collective will and desire for decent life and political change through the poetic medium. As an element of the social imaginary, poetry becomes the impetus behind not only voicing political demands but also revolutionary demonstrations and action on the political field. How poetry motivates political action is thus the question I devote the following section to explore.

here that my notion of translation differs from Sanders IV and Visonà's as I posit translation to indicate a political and theological negotiation that takes on a linguistic aspect, and not a linguistic experience that transforms a translator in the original text's mode of survival.
[29] Colla, 'The People Want'.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Elliott Colla (in 'The Poetry of Revolt', pp.47-52) comments on the genre of the poetry that distinguished the revolution as one that 'has real potential for humor and play, reminding us of the fact that revolution is also a time for celebration and laughter' (p.49). By rendering revolt a time of celebration, poetry draws attention to its own potential to rewrite a revolution. In this sense, Colla argues that the 'poetry of the streets' is a form of 'redrafting the scripts of history in the here and now' (p.52). Poetry thus redrafts historical scripts through the different forms it takes, satirical or otherwise.

4.3 Poetry: Between the Social and the Cosmic Imaginary

The practice of common chanting that spread all across Egypt and other Arab Spring countries shows that there was what Taylor calls a 'shared sense of legitimacy' given to this act and the poetically inspired slogan, in particular.[32] I argue in this section that this sense of legitimacy is derived from a common background of meaning making that is displayed in this poem. I build this argument on the role that al-Farabi gives to poetry in the reflection of a nation's common 'meanings' paradigms'.[33] The common paradigm of meaning-making is taken here to be reflected through the images that constitute the people's 'social imaginary', defined by Taylor as the way to collectively imagine a social life.[34] It is by exploring the poetic that this section hopes to shed light on this social imaginary of the protestors.

Poetry, according to al-Farabi, involves creating imaginative impressions that tie in with moral conditioning. All poetry, for al-Farabi, aims at the improvement of the rational faculty and the 'accidents of the soul' in order to approve the good and scorn the evil things.[35] It breaks down the excessiveness of the accidents of the soul related to weakness, such as pity and grief, and those related to strength, such as anger and pride, and brings them back to moderation. The poetic imagination thus acquires a moral dimension that ties in with moderation and reinforces the values of good or evil. In poetry, the creation of imaginative impressions influences rational development and the performance of action consequent to this development. Besides rational development, the correction of the accidents of the soul that lead to good

---

[32] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 171–2.
[33] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*, §129.
[34] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 156.
[35] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 36.

action can only be achieved through an imaginative impression that involves response, approving the good and holding in scorn what is evil. Action is thus determined by the imaginative, which is integral to the rational and constitutive of the moral sphere. In this sense, it could be argued, following the suggestion of Taylor, that the imaginative plays a significant role in constructing a moral order. Within this moral realm, poetry aims to train and improve the soul so that it becomes a moderate one whose accidents are applied in good deeds.

However, in *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna*, Salim Kemal draws attention to another function of poetry that is more reflective of a poet's apprehension of the world and the process of meaning-making. Kemal argues that for al-Farabi, poetry is 'self-reflective because it shows us how we operate generally, and poets succeed not just when they promote good through the content of poetry but when the exercise of their poetic art addresses and examines the very mechanisms by which we apprehend objects and events at all'.[36] The moral order that poetry constructs through its content induces self-reflection on the mechanisms of apprehension and making sense of the objects of perception. The poetic reflects the way in which people process meaning or moral values and make sense of the world around them.

Within the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the slogan inspired by al Shabbi's poem could thus be read to reflect the revolutionaries' apprehension of life's events. The particular representation of life that reflects their apprehension is in the first verse of the poem that reads: 'If, one day, the people want to live, then fate will answer their call'. The slogan replicates the emphasis of the poem on the people's will or want to resist tyranny and attain freedom. According to Khadija El Alaoui in

---

[36] Salim Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 128.

'Chanting Tahreer and Compassion: People as Poetry', the fact that the slogan repeats the anti-colonial poem serves to show that a similar motif is still underplay:

> The Tunisian people's chant of their quintessential, anti-colonial poem, composed for their grandparents to resist 'the nights' and 'chains' of (French) colonialism, suggests that the fight against anti-life forces is not over yet. The culture of colonialism structured through the logic of few masters and masses of slaves has never vanished but mutated into a new form: vassal states, or what sociologist Fatima Mernissi calls 'initiative deprived states', serving an imperial order now led by the United States. Al-Shabbi's poem centered on people and their will-to-life blessed by all creation—except perhaps those who cannot relieve themselves from the burden-to-subjugate—beautifully and powerfully captures what Tunisians were about to achieve: the ousting of a local dictator, who had the support of France and the United States, and the inspiration of a whole region to pour into the streets to end oppression. It is important to note that, like Darwish's poetico-political quest during the siege of Beirut, Al-Shabbi does not claim to be the one who knows and therefore teaches what oppressed people should do to end the 'nights' and break the 'chains'. He simply uses the materiality of language to express and bear witness to what 'all creation' has told him. It is in this sense that the poet names the open secret: after all the hidden spirits do not hide, but declare their desires and aspirations, which the poet defiantly captures and disseminates in poetic form.[37]

The motif of resistance to anti-life forces, colonialism, persists in a metamorphosed form of resistance to modern-day dictatorships which the poem advocates through the romantic reference to nature. The chanters replicate this poem because it reflects their

---

[37] El Alaoui, 'Chanting Tahreer and Compassion', pp. 13–4.

apprehension of life and their construction of a unique moral order. This order, a secret that nature communicates, defines the resistance to power as a collective will for life that fate will reward.

By preserving the role of fate as an answer to the people's will that nature announces, the poem reflects a moral order that renegotiates the social imaginary in terms of what Taylor would call, the cosmic imaginary. For Taylor, the cosmic imaginary defines the place of nature in our moral sensibility.[38] However, instead of taking nature to reflect a chain of being instituted by fate and enacted on the social platform, the protestors seem to introduce a rewriting of that order whereby resistance to power on the social and political plane negotiates that relation.[39] How this new moral order negotiates the relation between the cosmic and social is what I will turn to next.

---

[38] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 323.

[39] Mariz Tadros (in 'Introduction: The Pulse of Arab Revolt', *IDS Bulletin*, 43 (2012), 1–15) argues that the events, chanting and peaceful demonstrations, which took place in Tahrir Square, created 'a space and time-bound moral economy' that was not reflected in the 'power configurations' after the revolution (p.10). Tadros draws attention to the transitory nature of the moral economy within a state of revolution. This moral economy is described as being space bound, for peaceful demonstration was a characteristic of the revolution, only in Tahrir Square but not in the whole of Egypt. It was time bound as the agreement between Islamic and secular parties to raise only patriotic slogans was dispensed with after the ousting of Mubarak. After the revolution, tolerance was abandoned in favor of reinforcing hierarchies. Although Tadros highlights the fact that the moral economy was transitory, he claims that 'keeping the memory of the moral economy of Tahrir Square alive is important for youth activists' to resist any claims of ownership of the revolution that other political forces may make (p.11). Tadros's insistence that the memory of the moral economy be kept alive to reinforce a sense of agency is my impetus to investigate whether a time and space bound moral economy could not be indicative of a more subtle understanding of what constitutes a moral sphere, an understanding that could reinforce the choice that a transitory moral economy be cherished in the form of memory.

4.4 The New Moral Order : Rewriting *Qadariya*

The moral order constructed by the protestors in their poetically-inspired chants preserves elements of the cosmic, fate, in the form of a response to a political will for life. Through depicting fate as a response to the people's political will, the poem resurrects an age-old doctrine of free will that has historically been resorted to in order to resist rulers who justified their rulership as fate-ordained.[40] By reviving this debate through the poem, the protestors present an imaginary that puts the cosmic in negotiation with the social.

Historically speaking, the revival of the doctrine of free will is claimed by Abdulkader Tayob in *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth Movement* to have played a significant role in overcoming colonial rule throughout the Arab World. Tayob mentions how the Egyptian revolt against British colonial rule invested in the revival of the ninth-century *Mu'atazili* belief in free will by such thinkers as Muhamad Abdo.[41] The *Mu'atazila* is a school of Islamic theology that is said to have created the 'first orthodoxy in the Muslim world that extended beyond one locality'.[42] Its adherents adopted what was known as the heresy of free will, a belief affiliated with the earlier philosophical school of *Qadariya* that argued that

---

[40] Ziad Elmarsafy (in *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 1-22) argues that literature provides a space for the 'interrogation of the sacred' where the 'transcendent calls forth patterns of questioning and interrogation that are recognizably literary'. Literature, for Elmarsafy, 'constantly involves questioning limits: between the human and divine, the self and the Other, the self and the world, and so on', that are best expressed by the two 'idioms that are deeply concerned with limits, namely mysticism and deconstruction' (p.9). By literature, Elmarsafy means Arabic novels; however, the same could be argued to hold for Al-Shabbi's poem. The poem interrogates the sacred in a romantic fashion that evokes the *mu'atizilite* creed of free will. By responding to this poem in their chants, the protestors thus highlight the romantically theological interrogation of the sacred that the poem allows. Their chants, in this sense, are extensions and responses to that interrogation.

[41] Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa*, p. 23.

[42] Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology,* p. 6.

'power was worthless as long as one did not prove worthy of it'.[43] The *Qadariya* adopted the doctrine to challenge the school of *Jabariya* or pre-determinism endorsed by the political authorities of the time. While the former group advocated the notion that free will or *irada* qualified fate or *qadar*, the latter held that *qadar* determined choice, *irada*. The latter position was advocated by the political authority, the Ummayad Caliphate, as a justification for their legitimacy to hold rule that was pre-determined by God. The whole debate was thus a political manipulation of religious doctrines whereby the *Qadarites* resisted the *Jabarites'* imposition of sacredness upon political authority. In this sense, the *qadarite* heresy of free will would be the earliest manifestation of a recurring motif that would later resurface in different historical periods to justify both rebellion and resistance to imposed political rule.

The particular revival of this debate in which this chapter is interested is that of the Egyptian revolution chant. The notion of *qadar* is rewritten in this chant from a deterministic justification for political authority into that of a response to the collective free will. Al-Shabbi's first verse is stated in the conditional form: 'If, one day, the people want to live, then fate will answer their call' or 'fate can do nothing but give in'. The word that al-Shabbi uses in his poem for fate is *qadar*, also signifying power or predestination, and for choice is *arada*, a derivation from *irada*. When the protestors chant that they want, *yureed*, to topple the regime, they thus affirm their *irada* or choice for life, free will, which fate will answer to by helping them in breaking the chains of dictatorship. In this revival of the *qadarite* belief, the protestors allow for the political, the toppling of the regime, to mediate the relationship between the free will and fate.

---

[43] Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, pp. 6–135.

By rendering fate a response to the collective will, the protestors re-negotiate the significance associated with the sacred shield of *qadar* in political terms. Instead of *qadar* denoting a determinism of necessity that political authority imposes, it assumes the guise of a response to the free will as a choice of possibility. They present the will as a form of an al-Farabian choice concerned with future possibility. Believed to be sympathetic to the *qadarite* belief in free will, al-Farabi defines choice in terms of future possibility.[44] In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, al-Farabi redefines the Aristotelian sense of possibility as one dependent on choice, a claim that some deny under the effect of 'legislation and indoctrination'.[45] Choice takes two forms: choice as a rational development of the will that can only be for the possible, and pure will which can be appetitive or imaginary and can desire the 'possible or impossible', such as the desire 'not to die'.[46] Possibility is thus the criterion for distinguishing between the imaginative and the rational will. However, this possibility is denied when political indoctrination comes into play. The indoctrination of political authority advocates necessity as a form of fate that is antinomic to the possibilities of choice. Within the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, echoes of this early *qadarite* realization show up in the chant whereby the cosmic notion of fate is no longer a deterministic rule of law; instead, it is a divine response that acts in parallel and as a response to the people's rational free choice of political liberation.

As the people's chant aligns the rational will with the divine through political resistance to dictatorships, it presents a construction of a new moral order that integrates elements from the cosmic into the social imaginary of the people. The

---

[44] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, p. p.cxvii–iii.

[45] Ibid., pp. 76–7.

[46] Abu Nasr Alfarabi, 'A Letter in Reply to Certain Questions', in *Collection of Various Treatises*, ed. by Muhammad Ismail, Arabic ed. (Cairo, Egypt, 1907), pp. p.107–8 (n.31).

protestors develop the awareness that the general free will must be guided by the principle of justice marked by political resistance to repression in order for divine fate to answer them. In this sense Michael Wahid Hanna writes in 'Egypt and the Struggle for Accountability and Justice' that there is a 'newly mobilized political consciousness among certain sectors of society no longer amenable to the logic of blunt repression' which has 'led to fresh calls for justice' ever since the start of the revolution.[47] Although Hanna is speaking about transitional justice here and is disappointed with its development since the revolution, he draws attention to the fact that justice has become the aim for the collective free will. The collective will asks for justice in the hope that fate will answer its call. Despite current failures, Hanna claims, these calls for justice entertain the 'possibility for future correction'.[48] The calls keep alive the possibility that justice will be achieved and fate will answer their appeal.

In their new moral order guided by justice, the protestors render the divine order as an addressee that is appealed to in a Derridean form of conjuration. By responding to the verse in the conditional voice (if....then), the protestors perceive the poem to articulate a wish or promise. The poem has the condition 'if the people want life', as a prerequisite to a result, which is that 'Fate will answer their calls'. Implied herewith is the assumption that the condition is a prayer or call, a call that the actual chant echoes and affirms. In this sense, the chanters could be said to voice what Derrida calls in his *Specters of Marx* (1994), a wish or conjuration. Derrida defines conjuration as 'the appeal that causes to come forth *with the voice* and thus it makes come, by definition,

---

[47] Michael Wahid Hanna, 'Egypt and the Struggle for Accountability and Justice', in *Transitional Justice and the Arab Spring*, ed. by Kirsten Fisher and Robert Stewart (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 185.
[48] Hanna, 'Egypt and the Struggle', p. 185.

what is not there at the present moment of the appeal'. [49] The concern, here, is not descriptive for the 'voice does not describe, what it says certifies nothing; its words cause something to happen'.[50] The chant thus calls forth a future possibility of justice whereby fate will work in accordance with the people's collective will to topple the regime. Their prayer activates the poetic sense of the Derridean '*condition of possibility* of the event [which] is also its *condition of impossibility*'.[51] Their chant is a prayer in the guise of an assertion that opens up the field of possibilities in the interaction between choice and fate through justice.

The prayer for toppling the regime is communicated as a rational choice addressed to fate and mediated by justice. Within the context of the poem, justice becomes the medium of translation that negotiates the relationship between the secular, rational collective will and the divine notion of fate. Recall that in Chapter Two, justice was argued to be a practice of reinterpretation and resemblance-making that the weed protestors carry out. Their chant for the fall of the regime becomes their interpretation of the life that they want. They thus take the notion of life in the first part of the verse as an invitation to open interpretation of what the possibilities of choice are. By selecting the fall of the regime, they voice an interpretation that ponders questions of life, want, and law as preliminary to an answer from fate in proportion to the interpretation they offer. The poem is not phrased as 'If you want fate to answer your call, then you must choose life'. Instead, it had the divine answer, *qadar*, as consequent to wanting or choosing. The revolutionaries thus involuntarily draw attention to the underlying understanding that divine answer can only be consequent

---

[49] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, p. 41.
[50] Ibid., p. 41.
[51] Ibid., p. 65.

to the right interpretative address. So, if fate answers their call, then, they must have addressed it with the right interpretation within the moral realm of justice.

By voicing their prayer in a poetic medium, the protestors imbue their interpretative justice as a medium between the secular and divine with the poetic moral concern with the moderation of excesses. As a medium of interpretative regulation, justice moderates the *qadarite* anarchy of absolute and secularly formed free will and the *jabarite* dictatorship of an absolute sovereign's will. What justice thus seeks to rectify is the excess or state of absoluteness on both sides. The protestors chant for a state of *qadarite* choice in moderation that aligns the rational with the divine and defeats political and deterministic *jabariyya*. In this process, justice indicates the moral realm of moderation that mitigates polarization and mediates binary oppositions. In this realm of justice, Egyptian political actors, for example, found that 'drafting a permanent constitution' as a 'consensus document' should avoid the risk of the 'polarization of politics along an Islamist–secular divide'.[52] Their sense of agency is concerned with justice as moderation to avoid the absoluteness of both the secular and the Islamic.[53] Their modern reformulation of the medieval

---

[52] Laurel E. Miller and others, *Democratization in the Arab World: Prospects and Lessons from Around the Globe* (RAND Corporation, 2012), p. 100 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg1192rc> [accessed 28 November 2014].

[53] Sarah Hawas (in 'Global Translations and Translating the Global: Discursive Regimes of Revolt', in *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*, ed. by Samia Mehrez (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), pp.277-305) claims that the secular is a site of 'mis- and distranslation' within the Egyptian Revolution (p.290). The categories of 'Secularism' and 'Islamism', according to Hawas, are 'contingent on very specific narratives' that create certain political imaginaries (p.289). For Hawas, the 'debates around the secular—or civil—character of a state as opposed to a religious—specifically Islamic—state are mistranslations of a much more complex reality'. This complex reality invests in the inimical categories of the secular and Islamic to reflect the antagonism around 'the structural integrity and meaning of a democratic and sovereign state in the twenty-first century'. She argues that secularism, 'in its multiple negotiations, is variously a fundamental tool of orientations toward a specific construct of the 'global' and therefore a highly potent mechanism of depoliticization and ultimately subjugation'

Qadariyya and *Jabariyya* opposition employs interpretation as a medium guided by a wishful attempt at moderation.

As justice becomes an interpretative address to fate, it introduces a new moral order that integrates elements of the cosmic, fate, into the social imaginary of the protestors. The revolutionaries now chant and demonstrate with the background assumption that the missing link between the free collective will and fate is interpretation that regulates the excesses of both sides. The manner of figuring out the right interpretation that would align and moderately regulate the secular and the divine will thus be my next topic of discussion.

4.5 The New Moral Order of Justice

So far, we have seen how justice introduces a new moral order for the protestors through attempting to align the divine with the secular. In this new moral order, the divine promise of *qadar* is maintained as an answer that is negotiated in secular terms of agents rationally choosing means to achieve interpretative and moderating justice. Within the political realm, justice assumes the guise of a poetic chant for the fall of the regime. However, the chant discussed so far is not the only one indicative of what justice as interpretation means for these protestors. Their new moral order of justice acquires political significance that this section will further explore.

(p. 290). Hawas's argument is pertinent here as it draws attention to how the categories of the secular and Islamic are being used to depoliticize and redefine the notion of a nation's sovereignty by inserting it into the wider construct of the global. Although my argument does not touch on the aspect of globalism, I agree with Hawas that the secular and Islamic are created constructs. However, I strive to show that protestors, in their chants, negotiate the deterministic aspect associated with these constructs (and reinforced by the global script) in order to align them not as oppositions but as hues on a continuous spectrum.

Another chant that played a significant role in the revolution is one that outlined the demands of the protestors for 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice'. In this chant, justice acquires a social, economic form:

Social justice [is] one of the major frames of the Revolution and it continues to motivate protest and collective action, particularly since economic conditions have worsened. Revolutionaries, civil society groups, and new political parties articulate an agenda around social justice as they demand bread (or more abstractly, an adequate standard of living), the equitable and efficient delivery and provision of public services and stronger labor rights.[54]

Equal social rights is one important demand of the revolution that continues to fuel different uprisings. Besides praying for freedom from repression, chanting for equal social rights becomes another form of the revolutionaries' address to fate. Their chanted prayer, here, takes the guise of the rational demand for equal rights or social justice that has historically been one deciding factor within politics.

Taken at face value, the protestors' demand seems to re-enact a cosmic imaginary, not very different from that al-Farabi presents in his model of the Virtuous City. In *The Islamic Conception of Justice,* Majid Khadduri claims that al-Farabi's 'rational justice is ultimately connected with the destiny of man'.[55] Justice is founded upon the premise that 'eternal happiness in the hereafter […] where Divine Justice prevails' is the natural consequence to rational employment of noble choice in line with rational

---

[54] Kareem Ibrahim and Diane Singerman, 'Urban Egypt: On the Road from Revolution to the State? Governance, the Built Environment, and Social Justice', *Égypte/Monde Arabe*, 2014 <http://ema.revues.org/3281> [accessed 29 November 2014].
[55] Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 87.

justice.[56] Within the Virtuous City, rational justice consists of 'dividing' goods and 'preserving what has been divided'.[57] For al-Farabi, the good things that form justice include the rights to security, wealth, honor, and dignity. Each individual is entitled to a 'share according to his deserts' and any 'decrease or increase is an injustice (*jawr*)' where 'the difference must be returned to the party to whom it should belong'.[58] Within the cosmic model of the Virtuous City, justice is a politically procedural role of allocating rights and property according to deserts and preventing injustices or the abuse of these rights. Rational justice is a political mission where rightness and wrongness are defined in terms of the just distribution of rights. Recall that man's power to choose was defined in terms of a rational decision to do what is 'noble or base, and because of it there is reward and punishment'.[59] The rational element of choice is thus aligned with divine reward or punishment through justice. If a man's power to choose is employed in the service of rational justice, then it will be rewarded with a state of happiness that is not only earthly but also eternal. Justice is the political medium that negotiates this alignment of the rational to the divine.

In social terms, chanting for social justice and equal rights voices a promise of happiness that could be actualized in a Virtuous City-like structure that is predictive of heavenly bliss. *Qadar* or fate, in this sense, becomes the divine promise of happiness in the hereafter if man applies his choice in the political realm in accordance with rational justice. By chanting for happiness, the protestors voice a messianic hope for an earthly model of justice, the Virtuous City, which is predictive of the heavenly one. The latent sense of messianic hope is what both Muhsin Mahdi and Leo Strauss claim to feature in al-Farabi's construction of the Virtuous City. In

---

[56] Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception*, p. 87.
[57] Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, p. 42 (#64).
[58] Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception*, p. 87.
[59] Alfarabi, *The Political Regime*, p. 34.

Al-Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy, Muhsin Mahdi claims that there is a messianic hope in al-Farabi's work whereby the Virtuous City becomes a wish that the people seek.[60] Toppling the regime, in this sense, would be the condition for the creative construction of this city's paradigm of happiness and justice. Similarly, Leo Strauss claims that al-Farabi calls the Virtuous City 'another city', for he seeks to 'replace the other world or the other life by the other city' that 'stands midway between this world and the other world, since it is an earthly city indeed, yet a city existing not "in deed" but "in speech"'.[61] The Virtuous City is a wished-for state of rational justice for which the revolutionaries chant. This wished for state does not necessarily aim for the Virtuous City in itself. As argued in Chapter Two, the weeds find their preferred models in other city structures. However, their constant striving to achieve that desired city model is still portrayed by al-Farabi as guided by a promise of happiness. In this state of promise, the weeds are citizens who neither belong nor are excluded from their city. They can only voice their wish and constantly contest power. Speech, here, is taken to indicate a Straussian reformulation of the Derridean voice that conjures, the prayer. Chanting is a form of speech harboring a wish, an *arche-writing,* where signs are means for mediation and *différance* of this wished-for state.

Within the context of the Egyptian Revolution, the protestors offer their chant as an interpretative medium to voice their wish to create their version of justice. The chanters redefine their sense of agency in what sounds like Taylor's notion of the 'collective power and efficacy' that ushered in secularism in the West. For Taylor, this collective efficacy is based on justice, equality, liberty and even solidarity. It has

---

[60] Mahdi Muhsin, *Al-Farabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 168.
[61] Leo Strauss, *Persecution and The Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1952), p. 15.

created modern new spaces which assumed a moral power defined by 'the people [as] sovereign', instead of subject.[62] Although Taylor is speaking here about Western secularism, his claims, I argue, echo in the protestors' chant. For Sander IV and Visonà, the revival of al-Shabbi's words 'gave agency to the people (*al-sha'b*), and articulated their power as 'the will of the people' (*iradat al-sha'b*)'.[63] The protestors could be said to re-appropriate sovereignty from the field of cosmic hierarchies run by a sovereign king into the sphere of the collective. They seek to topple the regime run by a king-like figure who is supposed to ensure rational justice in order to take it upon themselves to secure the rights that this sovereign should have provided. An example of this gained sense of collective sovereignty is when the protestors and local communities formed *Ligan Cha'biyya* (or neighborhood committees) to guard the security of neighborhoods around the country after the security forces failed to do so. They enacted a refined sense of agency that seeks to re-appropriate the shield of sovereignty based on dictatorial allocation of rights and returns it to the field of the collective.

However, the protestors' refined sense of agency was continuously defined by chants that voiced demands. Hanna, whose work on transitional justice I mentioned earlier, argues that Egyptians issued new calls for justice in their newly mobilized political consciousness as they found it increasingly and repeatedly difficult to achieve that justice. In these calls, the protestors presented a refined moral order characterized by a collective attempt to attain the promised justice of the sovereign people. However, one important feature of this promise is that it must remain a promise, forever to be achieved, forever acting as an impetus for action. In this sense, Taylor claims that the acquired agency of the modern sovereign people remains a

---

[62] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 577.
[63] Sanders IV and Visonà, 'The Soul of Tahrir', p. 229.

promise that can be measured in the 'bitterness of the disappointment when it fails to materialize'.[64] He gives an example of this promise in the new space of 'submission to God' or 'purified Islam' that the Egyptian controversial scholar and Islamic theorist, Syed Qutb, calls for in his *Milestones*.[65] The promise of achieving a purified and refined version of the current state defined by a sovereign people is the impetus for any revolution. For Taylor, it is the promise's failure to materialize that actually fuels revolutions and defines agency. Taylor's reading of the development of secular agency, I argue, however, is not a totally fitting description for the moral order the Egyptian revolutionaries construct. The protestors' messianic hope entertains the possibility of materializing if addressed with the right interpretative act of justice. It highlights the role that interpretative justice plays in negotiating the secular and divine. The protestors' sense of agency, then, is not built so much on maintaining a dream as on interpreting that dream. They seem to be on the lookout for the right key, the right interpretation, which can unlock the opposition set between the secular and divine.

To unlock that opposition, the chanters employ the poetic chants to voice their interpretations. By seeking to overturn a ruler, they render their chants instances of reverse acclamation, discussed in the previous chapter. In their reverse acclamations, the protestors seek to rid the dictator of the sacred shield of *jabariyya* or determinism. The regime takes determinism as a kingly cape that justifies its right for ruler-ship and governance. However, when the protestors chant to rid him of that cape, they employ a poetic medium with imaginative attributes. Their interpretations create a wedding gown that unites the secular with elements from the divine. Divine fate escapes the hegemony or cape of *jabarite* determinism and creates a contract with the *qadarite*

---

[64] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 577.
[65] Ibid., pp. 576–8.

possibilities of choice though the chants. The poetic medium of contractual interpretation, however, entertains the question as to the role that language plays in this process. This is what I will turn to next.

4.6 From Inoperativity to Linguistic *Qadarism*

So far, I have argued that the chants are tools for addressing fate through interpretation. Poetic interpretation guided by justice is the attempt to align the secular with the divine by ridding each of the cape of sovereign determinism. In their new moral order, the protestors introduce signs of what Taylor calls creation. For Taylor, a modern moral order is distinguished by a 'subtraction theory' whereby elements of the cosmic are subtracted from the moral sphere, only to be replaced by an 'unprecedented creation'.[66] Taylor gives an example of this dynamic through the creative development of the 'new poetic languages' that marked the Romantic era. The creation of a new language, for Taylor, was a necessary development that followed a decline in the 'old order with its established background of meanings'.[67] Decline necessitated that a new language be developed to construct a new paradigm for meaning-making, a paradigm that I take to be not very different from which al-Farabi claims that poetry constructs. This is how I propose that the Egyptian Revolution chants could be read. Through their chant, the protestors attempt to subtract the *jabarite* background of meanings by toppling a regime that reinforced a cosmic hierarchical order. Politically speaking, the poetic promise that fate will answer the people's *qadarite* choice is a reading of subtraction that necessitates that the people topple the regime in order for the collective will to creatively align with divine answer. On the linguistic plane, the dynamic of subtraction and creation takes on a unique creative form through the poetic medium in which it enacts itself.

---

[66] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 578.

[67] Ibid., p. 353.

As creative agents, the protestors carry out a linguistic mission, first discussed by al-Farabi, which is very similar to that performed by Taylor's creative romantics who adopted poetry to experiment with language. The protestors introduce their creative linguistic function through repetitive replication of the chant; they formulate their commonality upon an act of replication or oral transmission. The oral transmission of poems is claimed by al-Farabi to be the mission of the 'first wise men' of a nation who govern this nation through 'correct[ing] the language in that nation'.[68] These wise men come into being after the development of a nation's language in both rhetorical and poetic forms, the artistic forms that 'are meant for everyone'. [69] The poetic is thus a formative component of a linguistic commonality that precedes the function of oral transmission. The task to orally transmit the poems that constitute this linguistic commonality, for al-Farabi, falls upon the first wise men and first governors within a nation. Wisdom characterizes the governing role of these oral transmitters who are described as those 'who govern [the nation], and those to whom recourse is had concerning the language of that nation'.[70] So, the earliest form of governance of 'the multitudes', or the common people within a nation, is a linguistic one.[71] The linguistic, in this sense, marks the first shield or cape of sovereignty that the later political form will preserve. This is why the first political ruler of a nation, the wise *imam*, is described as carrying out a linguistic function to establish his rule. He employs rhetoric and relies upon similitudes, as discussed in Chapter Two, to persuade the multitude of his governing authority. He establishes his governing role through a shield of linguistic sovereignty. So, when the protestor- sprouts employ

---

[68] Alfarabi, *Kitab al-Huruf*,§130.
[69] Ibid., §129.
[70] Ibid., §130.
[71] Ibid., §138.

poetic chanting, these wise oral transmitters seem to construct a shield of linguistic commonality which is as sovereign as that employed by the regime.

As a nation's first wise men, the protestors' linguistic governance is established by their fashioning 'uncommon utterances' and 'contriv[ing] names' for 'certain coincidences'.[72] Their linguistic role could be described as one of linguistic creation which, when considered within the context of the Egyptian revolution, ushers in what Taylor would qualify as a new moral order. By regressing to the early stages of the creation of a nation, the protestors challenge an established current moral order by attempting to create one with no blueprints except that of poetry. Their linguistic creative model constructs a newly established moral order through the *qadarite* poetic chant that they replicate. Just as the *jabarite/qadarite* debate was translated into the modern political field as a justification for overturning the dictatorial regime, this debate resurfaces in the modern linguistic plane through linguistic play that characterizes this debate. The *qadarite/jabarite* debate thus becomes a linguistic function as much as it is a political one. It is a linguistic mission that characterizes the role of the protestors as first creative governors of linguistic play or linguistic *qadarism*.

The link between the *qadarite/jabarite* debate and linguistic play is one that I hold to find its first traces in the work of al-Farabi. Although he was not a Muslim scholar himself, al-Farabi is believed to adopt the *qadarite* heresy of free will and to reflect it in his work. In his *Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, al-Farabi employs the term *qadar* to refer to man's choice, instead of divine ordinance, to evoke the connotation that ordinance does not solely take a deterministic form. In his translation of al-Farabi's work, F.W. Zimmerman notes that:

---

[72] Ibid.,§130.

Man's *qadar*, i.e. his power to choose between alternative courses of action, was among the first topics of Islamic dialectics. Anti-predestinarians were therefore called *qadarites*.[…] One of the words [al-Farabi] uses for 'decide' is *qaddara*, which, if said of God, means 'ordain, predestine', and 'guess, predict' if said of men.[…]. His argument implies that *qaddara* in the sense of 'ordain' can with perfect propriety be said of men: within a limited sphere, man has power over events. In the terms of Muslim heresiology this makes him a *qadarite*. His use of *qaddara* in this passage should certainly be understood as an allusion to this label, and possibly as a veiled declaration of solidarity but mildly qualifies his general refusal to make common cause with Islamic scholarship. Primarily, therefore, his pun would seem designed to annoy the predestinarian majority among Islamic scholars.[73]

The play on the sense of *qadar* that al-Farabi carries out highlights the linguistic phenomenon of play that characterizes this debate. The language of *qadar* as deterministic fate constitutes a shield to justify political authority. By borrowing the term, *qadar*, from the religious moral field of *Jabariyya* and displacing it into the moral field of *Qadariyya* or free will, al-Farabi shows how language could be a tool to liquidate political hegemony upon terms of religious significance. By displacing the term from one field to the other, he draws attention to linguistic play as one practice that sheds light on the dynamics of paradigm shifts in meaning making that characterize the *qadarite/jabarite* debate.

Within the modern Egyptian context, the linguistic role in paradigm-shifting shows up in the protestors' attempt to fashion and experiment with names to denote

---

[73] Alfarabi, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, pp. cxvii–iii.

unprecedented phenomena that distinguished the revolution. The protestors are reported to have employed such borrowed names as *baltagiya* for 'thugs', *al dawla al amiqa* or 'deep state', and *dawla madaniyya* or 'civil state' to name but a few of these phenomena.[74] In this process of *naqla*, the protestors suspend the established meanings of these words. They thus enact a subtraction of the cosmic, established hegemony of the original meanings of words and a creation of a quasi-new language. By re-fashioning these names, the modern oral transmitters echo the role that Taylor ascribes to the modern romantic poets who explored words 'with their ontological meanings as it were in suspense'.[75] Just as the romantic poets, for Taylor, took art to denote not mimesis but creation, the modern protestors handle words with a creative artistic streak. They demonstrate a *qadarite* understanding that established political meanings are a *jabarite* form of determinism of meaning that should be overcome in order for words to acquire new denotations. The words' acquisition of new denotations marks a shift in paradigms of meaning making that predict the possible construction of a new moral order.

The *qadarite* subtractive overcoming and suspension of politically *jabarite* meanings allowed such terms as 'deep state', *dawla 'amiqa*, and 'civil state', *dawla madaniyya* to be put to new use. The former of these terms acquired a new meaning during the revolution while the latter lost the dimension of meaning altogether. In commenting on the new use of these two terms, Hassan Nafiah claims that the expression 'the deep state' was a successful linguistic move whereas that of the 'civil state' was a cause of apprehension on his part:

---

[74] Daily News Egypt, 'New Website Seeks to Define the Vocabulary of the Egyptian Revolution', *Daily News Egypt* <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/06/04/new-website-seeks-define-vocabulary-egyptian-revolution/> [accessed 20 November 2014].
[75] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 351.

ويبين أستاذ العلوم السياسية بجامعة القاهرة، الدكتور حسن نافعة، أن هذه المصطلحات تكون موسمية،
بما يشبه «الموضة»، فهي تظهر ثم تختفي، أو تتوارى قليلا لتظهر في ثوب جديد، وقد تتغير دلالتها
من وقت لآخر حسب الوقت والظروف السياسية السائدة عند إطلاقها. موضحا أنه منذ قيام الثورة
المصرية ظهرت مصطلحات عدة كانت لها دلالات معينة، بعضها كان موفقا وبعضها غير موفق،
وبعضها أدى إلى عدم فهم وسوء استخدام وبلبلة فكرية

ويرى دكتور نافعة أن الدلالة الأساسية لاستخدام مصطلح «الدولة العميقة» في مصر كان «موفقا»
في الوقت الذي كان كثيرون يبحثون عن مصطلح دقيق يصف الحالة المصرية، فالفكرة الأساسية من
إطلاقه وصفت أماكن التأثير الرئيسية داخل المجتمع، التي هي خارج تأثير قوى الثورة والأحزاب
الجديدة، حيث يسيطر عليها النظام السابق الذي امتد على مدار 60 عاما، وبالتالي كان استخدامه موفقا
بدرجة كبيرة، على الرغم من أنه مصطلح غير مصري وليس كاتب مصري من ابتكره ولكنه منقول
عن الثقافة الفرنسية

وعلى العكس يرى أستاذ العلوم السياسية أن من أكثر المصطلحات سوءا في الاستخدام كان مصطلح
«الدولة المدنية»، الذي شاع كثيرا منذ قيام الثورة، حيث انتشر توظيفه بدلالات وسياقات مختلفة،
فهناك من يوظفه في مواجهة «الدولة الدينية» أو الدولة أو الأمنية أو العسكرية، رغم أن المصطلح في
الأساس غير موجود في الأدبيات السياسية الغربية[76]

Dr. Hassan Nafia, professor of Political Science at Cairo University, explains that these terms/expressions are seasonal, or 'fashionable'; they appear and then disappear, or hide for a while only to appear in new attire. Their significance changes occasionally according to the time and prevailing political conditions. He pointed out that since the start of the Egyptian revolution, several terms with certain denotations have emerged, some of which were successful and some unfortunate; some of which led to misunderstanding, misuse and confusion […]

---

[76] Ajam, 'The Fashion of Political Terms in Egypt'.

Dr. Nafia holds that the basic significance of the term 'deep state' in Egypt was 'successful' at a time when many people were looking for an accurate or precise term to describe the Egyptian condition. The basic reason behind its widespread employment was that it described the focal points of influence within the community, which transcended the influence of the forces of the revolution and the new parties that had been manipulated and controlled by the former regime for over 60 years. Its use was thus largely successful, although it is not an Egyptian term and is not invented by an Egyptian writer and has, instead, been borrowed from French cultural writings.

On the contrary, the professor of Political Science believes that one of the badly-used words is that of the 'civil state', which was popularly used since the revolution. It was employed with different denotations and in different contexts. There are some who employed it to challenge the notion of the 'religious state' or state security or the military, even though the term is basically non-existent in Western political literature.

Employing new terms and contriving new uses for established names was an unprecedented linguistic trend that distinguished the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Protestors contrived what seems like a new language through translating the significance of such terms as the 'deep state' as well as suspending the established meanings of terms, such as *baltagiya* or 'thugs'. By playing on terms, they enacted the mission of oral transmitters and wise governors who fashion a language, a political language in this case, for the multitudes. Their creative mission, furthermore, acquires the character of linguistic play as evident in the case of the term 'civil state'. The suspension of the meaning of words led to the experimental employment of the term to denote different and opposing things. Through word experimentation, the

protestors could be said to have ushered in a new political ontology or state of chaos, a state that would explain the feeling of apprehension on the part of Dr. Nafia.

Linguistic play, however, has not always been met with disapproval. A contrasting and more optimistic view that focuses on the creativeness of linguistic play is the 2013 *Qamoos al Thawra* or the *Dictionary of the Revolution.* The dictionary documents the meanings of terms that the revolution has generated. As a whole, the project describes its mission as 'a free space for everyone to talk' as it allows for the recording of words in *aa'miyyah* or colloquial Arabic.[77] This is to differentiate it from *fusha* or standard Arabic. In an interview with Patrick Kingsley of *The Guardian*, project manager, Amira Hanafi, claims that the dictionary records the changes since the 2011 Revolution and is a 'snapshot of a country undergoing immense flux'. Terms document the change in the people's perception of the events within the revolution. More specifically, the documented terms reflect how 'the factions have competed to impose their narratives on highly contested events'.[78] Words acquire meanings through narratives imposed by political factions thus demonstrating how sovereignty is negotiated through fights to establish a *jabarite* sense of political determinism to certain word connotations. Political parties invested in the suspension of word meanings in their attempt to allow for political determinism to establish hegemony over the people's creative linguistic play.

The linguistic negotiation of sovereignty extended past word-play to involve language registers. The *Dictionary of the Revolution* records the meanings of terms in colloquial Arabic thus giving credibility to the language of the people. However,

---

[77] Daily News Egypt, 'New Website Seeks to Define the Vocabulary of the Egyptian Revolution'.
[78] Patrick Kingsley, 'Egypt: After the Revolution Comes the Battle for Language', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/egypt-battle-for-language-dictionary-revolution-amira-hanafi> [accessed 1 December 2014].

colloquialism was not the only unique feature of the street. The slogan '*al shai'b*

yureed isqat al nizam' or *'*the people want to topple the regime' is described as

'straddl[ing] colloquial Egyptian and standard media Arabic'.[79] By employing

classical or standard Arabic to voice their demands, the chanters rid the regime of

another cape of determinism that it employs to justify its sovereignty, the classical use

of language.[80] They redefine sovereignty in terms of its first traces in linguistic

governance by oral transmitters who roam the streets chanting to topple the regime.

This play on registers, in turn, imbues other chants with an infusion of classical

Arabic and informal colloquial expressions. An example of this is '*eish, hyrriya,*

3adala igtima3iyya' or 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice'. The first of the three terms is

the colloquial Egyptian term for bread, *'eish*. However, it is also a case of the standard

Arabic meaning for the word 'life' or 'survival'. As an expression to indicate bread or

life, *'eish* stands for the process through which the people negotiate the sovereign

shield linguistically, not only in terms but also in registers.

This linguistic play, in the example of the last chant, is accompanied by calls for

freedom, a notion that is being redefined through a documented term in the *Dictionary*

---

[79] Colla, 'The Poetry of Revolt', p. 50.

[80] Niloofar Haeri (in *Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt, (*New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)) claims that Classical Arabic is the 'official state language' in addition to its being 'the language of religion'(p.2). However, Haeri argues that the complexity of the language situation in Egypt cannot be 'reduced to one of "modernists" versus "traditionalists" or "Islamists" versus "secularists"' (p.20). *Fusha* cannot be said to play a traditionalist or islamist role, just as the vernacular register cannot be claimed to reflect secularism or modernism. This is why some modernist Egyptian poets, Haeri shows, have employed *fusha* or Classical Arabic in prose writing. *Fusha* is perceived by these poets as a 'language that provides space for modern and alternative ways of thinking and being' even if others still held that it is a 'language that is used by those in power for the purposes of political domination'(p.140). The conflicting understanding of the role that register, specifically *fusha*, plays in unsettling the traditionalists vs. modernism and the Islamist vs. secularist debate is what I hold the protestors invest in to voice their demands and rework the opposition.

of the Revolution. The change in word meanings implies a change in the world view of the agents giving the meaning as they struggle for language to create a linguistically-material world reflective of their changing perspectives. Instead of employing language as an instrumental tool to establish ruler-ship, the protestors invest in what I take to indicate a *qadarite* revision of the inoperativity of language. Terms constitute a field of building blocks that can be employed to construct a new world. The *qadarite* spirit in redefining terms and re-appropriating registers, a linguistic form of *qadarism*, could thus be said to be the oral transmitters' discovery of the power of words in negotiating an established political ontology. The play on words takes place in a double move: the first is a deconstructive move in which words become signs whose differed meaning could be invested in to unsettle an established system. The second that is my interest here is the creative investment in an unsettled system to construct linguistic equations that could unlock a new world. Linguistic terms are keys that unlock and blocks that build a world past the politics of sovereignty.

Conclusion

So, what has our discussion on poetic chanting revealed about the Egyptian protestors' understanding of the role of language in overcoming dictatorships? The answer —which I hope has become clear by now— is that the poetic indicates the imaginary openness in the closure of ritualistic practice that has allowed for the people to imagine and call for a just life through a revolution. By enacting the role of oral transmitters of poems, the protestors detach acclamation from sovereignty and re-direct it to the commonly formed will. However, that *qadarite* understanding of the will is not an assertion of the general will that takes on the guise of commonly held

opinion, which marks the Western form of public sovereignty for Agamben. Instead, it is a linguistic will that seeks to play on the authority of signification and the denotative meanings of words. It involves the creation of a political word-view through a revisionist use of words that invests in the inoperativity of language. Terms and names are perceived as keys that could unlock a reality and define a whole new political ontology.

As the creative aspect of the revolution, name-giving redefines translation as the shift from a divine to a more secular model. Translation is concerned with justice that negotiates that shift. To align the divine and the secular, justice moderates and regulates the excess status, the determinism, of a *jabarite* divine that is appropriated politically. Justice challenges the political divine that justifies dictatorial power as a determined or *jabarite* political fate. As a medium of regulation, justice also moderates the excess of *qadarite* secularism that seeks to place the political will within the sphere of public sovereignty formed in solely rational terms. Instead of secular rationalism, the imaginative now evokes a sense of commonality that invests in the linguistic to construct a new moral order. Within the context of the Egyptian Revolution, linguistic creation marks this new moral order of justice within the translation of the divine and secular. So, even if the revolution today does not seem to have succeeded on the political level, its linguistic creation could, at least, be said to have succeeded in destabilizing frames of reference.

By destabilizing frames of reference, translational justice, or *'adl*, not only moderates excesses through political liberation but also indicates the state of constant change inherent in this process. One of the variations of the term *'adl* in the Arabic

language is *'adala* which means 'to change or deviate from an established decision'.[81]

Through deviating from the established meanings of terms and names, the Egyptian protestors thus practice justice in their attempt to reach political justice within translation. One important constituent of the creative process that they initiate is change or transformation, experimentation until a commonly formed word could be contrived, a word that could unlock a whole new world.

Within translation, the slogans and political terms are no longer concerned with making truth statements about the world. In fact, concern with truth would indicate fatalism or a *jabariyya* within language that limits the possibilities of that linguistic tool, the word or slogan. The words acquire what correlates with Derrida's sense of 'performative force' or the sense of promise within language. To explain this promise, Derrida refers to Austin's sense of the performative force (i.e. a promise, demand, request, etc.) that 'produces or transforms a situation, it effects'.[82] Austin distinguishes the performative transformational utterance from the 'classical assertion, the constative utterance' that has its referent 'outside of itself'.[83] Whereas performative utterances produce and transform the state of the world, constative utterances present what would qualify as a fatalistic view of language, where language and word meanings are determined by the referent in the outside world. However, Derrida deconstructs the constative/performative dichotomy by claiming that all constatives are actually performatives that entail a messianic promise. In every constative, there is a silent promise with a messianic motif; it brings about or makes a state of affair arrive. In the case of the Egyptian Revolution, each term seems to attach

---

[81] Academy of the Arabic Language, eds., *Al-Mu'jam al-Waseet*, 4th ed (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat Al Shuruq Al Dawliyya, 2004), s.v. '*adl*.

[82] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Mehlman Jeffrey (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 13.

[83] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 13.

a *qadarite* sense of the will to this Derridean promise of a future state of affairs. The people direct their will towards this state of the unknown; they have chosen to adopt, embrace and bring forth the promise inherent in language. In a sense, the revolutionaries could be said to offer a reverse witness statement; they have witnessed an image of a promised state of affair and are struggling to fit their witness statement within a linguistic mold.

However, this reverse promise that unravels a new unknown world is also one that linguistically necessitates that some terms may phase out in order to be replaced with others. One particular chant that I have discussed before, the slogan 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice', bears witness to this process. The slogan has now become a chant for 'Bread, Social Justice' where the term 'freedom' has fallen out of use. Although this phasing out is attributed to the 'preoccupation with [economic] issues [that] distracts attention from the expansion of political rights', it shows how a linguistic phenomenon could mark a shift in common political or economic priorities.[84] In this sense, the phasing out of the term *huriyya* or freedom marks a necessary and natural linguistic development that is part of any act of creative justice. By phasing out, terms lose apparent instrumental use but not force; their force redirects itself inwards to join other terms that have phased out in order to constitute the origin from which later revolutions spark out. Revolutions, I hold, originate from the hidden force of phased out linguistic resources that cannot but erupt into chaos when the build-up becomes a little too much.

---

[84] Miller and others, *Democratization in the Arab World*, p. 105.

CONCLUSION

THE POST- REVOLUTION TRANSLATION OF SOVEREIGNTY

This thesis has sought to show the role that a deconstruction of translation can play in redefining sovereignty within the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Creative justice, I argued, motivates a translation of sovereignty that takes place within a linguistic and imaginative medium. In this medium, Agamben's inoperativity and Derrida's performative promise work within an overall framework of linguistic *qadarism* that renders political theology, the concern with the divine and secular, a mission of the poetic. Four years after the start of the revolution, and almost four years after beginning this thesis, I now conclude by revisiting this initial research question and these subsequent findings that I outlined. The question and answers, I find, need to be subjected to the harsh scrutiny of the recent and current post-revolution proceedings. In their scrutiny, these proceedings challenge my argument by posing the following question: where are we today, four years after the revolution, in terms of the creative translation of sovereignty that this thesis outlines? Does this creative translation of sovereignty persist today post-revolution, and if so, in what form?

Four years after the revolution, the media headlines continue to display ambivalence in their assessment of the revolution and its repercussions. While a *CNN* headline announces 'Mubarak is Cleared: Egypt's Revolution is Dead',[612] *The Washington Post* headlines a response to *CNN*'s article by the following: 'The

---

[612]Ian Lee, 'Mubarak Is Cleared: Egypt's Revolution Is Dead', *CNN* <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/29/world/africa/egypt-mubarak-analysis/index.html> [accessed 26 March 2015].

Egyptian Revolution Isn't Dead Because It Never Happened in the First Place'.[613] The

state of confusion is attributed by Eric Trager, the author of *The Washington Post's*

aforementioned article, to the current military regime's continued repression of citizen

dissent. This repression started with the military's control of the state media

to discourage further revolutionary activity after Mubarak was ousted.[614] The

persistence of repression within and by state institutions has recently further translated

itself in the clearing of Mubarak, the epitome of repression that the 2011 revolution

aimed to curb. As hope for progress seems to fade, Cambanis, a journalist in *The*

Atlantic, headlines his article by asking: 'Is Egypt on the Verge of Another Uprising?'

He describes how upon the eve of the fourth anniversary of the January 25th uprisings,

'things are anything but quiet, despite the best efforts of Sisi's state'.[615] A very similar

position is taken by Vltcheck who describes in 'The Arab Spring is Dead: Egypt's

Failed Revolution' (2013) this unsettled aspect of the Egyptian scene post-revolution

as follows:

> There is no logic in all this. The military wants to retain its hold on power. The
>
> Brotherhood wants to come back and rule. It is not about social justice, or
>
> education, or alleviation of poverty. It is not about jobs or even about in which

---

[613] Eric Trager, 'The Egyptian Revolution Isn't Dead Because It Never Happened in the First Place', *The Washington Post*, 4 December 2014 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/04/the-egyptian-revolution-isnt-dead-because-it-never-happened-in-the-first-place/> [accessed 26 March 2015].

[614] Trager, 'The Egyptian Revolution Isn't Dead'.

[615] Thanassis Cambanis, 'Is Egypt on the Verge of Another Uprising?', *The Atlantic*, 2015<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/01/the-egyptian-revolution-four-years-later/384593/> [accessed 26 March 2015].

direction Egypt will go, politically or ideologically. It is not really even about

Egypt, anymore![616]

By mourning 'that beautiful dream and that compassionate Revolution, that Arab

Spring [that] are all dead!', Vltcheck best depicts the pessimistic media outlook on the

Egyptian political scene after the revolution.

The general mood of ambivalence that characterizes the international media's

assessment of the revolution is nothing but a reflection of the confusion of local

Egyptian analysts in evaluating this revolution. Analysts seem to be divided in their

characterization of the revolution as being a case either of complete failure or of a

promising resistance to power. The former position is taken by Samuel Tadros in

'Egypt's Failed Revolution' (2014). Tadros argues that the protestors have failed to

think of sovereignty beyond the struggle of black and white or 'between good and

evil, between a corrupt regime and forces for change'. The protestors have sought to

overturn a regime and enact the forces of change without getting 'involved in the

details of the society'. Involvement includes the 'traditional method which requires

[one] to visit villages, campaign, mobilize the vote, and make compromises with

[one's] opponents'.[617] For Tadors, the protestors have not mastered the principles of

secular sovereignty that would involve compromise and public engagement with all

sectors of society.

In a similar sense, Abeer Radwan, in 'How the Egyptian Revolution Emphasized

the Sovereignty of the People' (2011), relates the challenges that the revolution poses

to the question of sovereignty. She argues that there has been 'excessive confidence in

---

[616] Vltchek, 'The Arab Spring Is Dead: Egypt's Failed Revolution' <http://rt.com/op-edge/egypt-revolution-failed-arab-spring-849/> [accessed 3 March 2015].

[617] Michael J. Totten, 'Egypt's Failed Revolution', *Dispatches* [online blog]*, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/michael-j-totten/egypts-failed-revolution> [accessed 25 February 2015].

the people's role [that] has inclined the Egyptian people to believe in only their own sovereignty'.[618] That rudimentary form of sovereignty has met its first obstacle in formulating consensus on the procedures to select representatives for the people. This obstacle, Radwan holds, could only be overcome through national dialogue.

Despite the general mood of pessimism that characterizes these assessments of the revolution, other studies have chosen to underscore the innovative attempts in the protestors' resistance to imposed authority. The protestors, these other studies show, have displayed creativity through the artistic and literary media that they have employed in their resistance. For example, in 'Stripping the Boss: The Powerful Role of Humor in the Egyptian Revolution 2011', Mohamad M. Helmy and Sabine Frerichs argue that the protestors have resorted to humor and ridiculing power in their 'renewed belief in self-efficacy'. The protestors have enacted a 'festival of resistance, with people dancing, chanting and laughing in a marvelous spirit of community and political determination'.[619] In this festival of resistance, their innovative sense of self-efficacy has successfully challenged the regime's imposed sense of authority that builds itself on dynamics of fear.

In a similar focus on the role that popular artistic expression plays in rethinking sovereignty, Luca Mavelli, in 'Postsecular Resistance, the Body, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution' (2013), argues that resistance has taken on a Habermasian 'postsecular' form. This postsecular form centers around the image of the tortured

---

[618] Abeer Bassiouny Arafa Ali Radwan, 'How the Egyptian Revolution Emphasized the Sovereignty of the People', ed. by Csaba T. Chikes, *Amercian Diplomacy*, 2011 <http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2011/0912/oped/radwan_egyptianrev.html> [accessed 20 February 2015].
[619] Mohamed M. Helmy and Sabine Frerichs, 'Stripping the Boss: The Powerful Role of Humor in the Egyptian Revolution 2011', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 47 (2013), 450–81 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12124-013-9239-x>.

body. For Mavelli, the protestors' 'politics of resistance' escapes the polarization of

religion and the secular as it centers itself on the image of the tortured body, the

imagination.[620] Mavelli adopts Maha Abdelrahman's definition of the secular as the

'power to define the space and meanings that religion may occupy in society' and that

the state had controlled for a long while.[621] By investing in the image of the tortured

body, the protestors thus display an indifference to that version of the secular. The

imagination becomes a Foucaultian site of resistance to the polarization of the

alternative 'regimes of power and knowledge'.[622] By relying on the imagination as a

site of resistance, the protestors thus rethink politics past the polarization of the

religious and the secular regimes of power that the older regime maintained.

Despite the apparently diverse, positive and negative, outlooks within these

readings of the revolution, I take them to actually highlight the creative translation of

sovereignty that I argue for in this thesis. The translation of sovereignty within the

context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution has been an on-going struggle and shift from

a politically imposed divine model towards a more collective and aesthetically secular

one. I read Radwan's and Tadros's commentaries to underscore this struggle in the

protestors' rudimentary sense of popular sovereignty that could not think of itself in

secular acts of negotiation and compromise with others. For Radwan and Tadros, the

protestors seem to sink back into a divine model of sovereignty that the regime

imposed; they remove the regime, only to replace themselves as sovereigns. However,

Radwan's and Tadros's readings seem to miss the point that collective sovereignty

does not necessarily build itself in the political arena. It can form in imaginative,

---

[620] Luca Mavelli, 'Postsecular Resistance, the Body, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution', *Review of International Studies*, 38 (2012), 1057–78 (p. 1074) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000472>.

[621] Maha M. Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), p. 108.

[622] Mavelli, 'Postsecular Resistance', p. 1078.

emotional and poetic terms. For example, the people's collective model of sovereignty breaks the fetters of instrumental or political logic in such media as political cartoons and poetry, as we have seen in this thesis. Cartoons and poetic chanting profane or play with the sacred elements of imposed sovereign power. Here, such studies as Helmy, Freirichs's and Mavelli's serve to underscore the protestors' politics of profanation that destabilizes the politics of power and sovereignty. Their studies show that collective sovereignty is redefined through the emotional and aesthetic aspects associated with it. Political sovereignty established on fear, for Helmy and Freirchs, is replaced by sovereignty based on collective humor, sarcasm and word play. While sovereign-induced-fear is employed to affirm the continued control of the regime upon the people, sovereign-embodied-laughter can only evoke collective madness. Madness is a dynamic that is clearly not associated with power and one that could only forecast the emptiness of the throne of power in the far future. Similarly, Mavelli argues that the protestors employ imaginative indifference to the secular and religious regimes of power. Although the notion of the religious and secular, here, differ with the ones I adopt for this thesis, Mavelli's postsecular maintains the promise of the empty throne of power through imaginative indifference. Indifference qualifies an emotional sense of collectivity that is reflected in the people's response to an image. This is why I hold that imaginative indifference and laughter are not simple strategies of resistance that emphasize self-efficacy and disregard for the religious and secular. Instead, they are emotional responses that rewrite the dynamics inherent to power and that render power an empty throne that can only be expressed in imaginative terms.

In their politics of profanation, the people creatively translate sovereignty beyond the political sense. They display the emptiness of the throne of power – an emptiness

that becomes their incentive for more creative output. Their imaginative creativity shows in their experimentation within language, for example. Language no longer fulfills its officially set role of communicating meaning. Political expressions, such as 'civil state', assume too many opposed meanings to bear any meaning at all. By displaying the emptiness and futility of the instrumental role ascribed to language, the protestors lay bare a Derridean deconstructive 'play' within language. In this sense, Ahmad ElShiekh writes in 'Between the Signifier and the Signified Falls the Signification: Reflections on the Use of Political Terms in the Egyptian 2011 Events' that signification within the revolution loses its path between the signifier and signified. Terms, like justice, have political meanings that fail to realize themselves in reality and could be mistaken for injustice, and vice versa.[623] Although ElShiekh sees in play a proper description for the state of confusion in which all Egyptians are, I hold that this confusion is but a form of linguistic potentiality that announces the release of language from its fatalistic mission or its socially and politically dictated instrumental use. In this release, the empty throne of power becomes the impetus for the artistic and creative translation of sovereignty.

In order to make this argument, I started by exploring the translation of sovereignty within a comparative framework whereby I employed Western postmodern thought to reread early Islamic medieval philosophy. Derrida's writings allowed me to investigate the translation of sovereignty as a deconstructive tendency within logical rational thought. The insignia of power, such as the cape and throne, are employed by the regime to signify a divine-like sovereignty. However, by overthrowing that regime, the protestors render the cape a wedding gown as they

---

[623] Ahmed Abdel Azim ElShiekh, 'Between the Signifier and the Signified Falls the Signification: Reflections on the Use of Political Terms in the Egyptian 2011 Events', *Studies in Literature and Language*, 5 (2012), 44–49 <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320120502.1752>.

enact a secular form of popular sovereignty. In this attempt, the protestors shed light on what Derrida calls the king's absent body, a body that is forever absent and forever ready to be shrouded. However, in that absence of the body and the emptiness of what Agamben calls the throne of power, the protestors find a promise or the 'gateways to a new happiness'.[624] Their promise lies in contemplating the state of the emptiness upon the throne and the absence of the body whereby whatever is deemed sacred and worthy of power within the political sphere is returned to common use and subjected to play.

This deconstructive translation of sovereignty informs my reading for similar traces within al-Farabi's medieval thought. Divine sovereignty in the guise of the *imam* invests in political *jabarite* determinism of rhetorically creating similitudes for divine truths. However, the weeds of the Virtuous City, the medieval version of modern protestors, employ *qadarite* free will to poetically contest the *imam*'s images and resist his sacred shield of similitudes. Instead of a king or *imam*-centered sovereignty, the weeds introduce a collective sense of the will that is aesthetically creative.[625] Sovereignty is translated within an imaginative and affective context. In that translation, the Derridean cape and wedding gown become the sacred set of images dictated by the *imam* as a reference for power. Just as power cannot translate itself except through sovereignty in both the divine cape form and the secular

---

[624] Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 76.

[625] Al-Farabi's contribution to the question of the Muslim notion of sovereignty, as *imam* or *caliph* (the two terms are used interchangeably), lies in his philosophical reformulation of this political concern. For Marcia L. Colish (in *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.141), al-Farabi 'recast[s] the *caliph* as philosopher-king of Plato's *Republic*' and 'correlates the hierarchy of offices in the *caliph*'s bureaucracy with the Neoplatonic chain of being'. However, for Colish, al-Farabi's philosophy 'had no influence on later Muslim philosophy or statecraft'. In this sense, it can be argued that the Islamic framework for sovereignty differs according to each philosopher and the period of concern to the researcher.

wedding-gown one, it cannot translate itself except through the images and the affects on which each form of sovereignty relies. In the weeds' redefinition of sovereignty, language functions not as an instrumental tool to communicate signification but rather as a set of keys to creatively unlock new realities wholly based within the imagination.

By investigating the translation of sovereignty within this comparatively dialogical framework, this thesis sheds light on the role that justice plays in orienting that translation. In the first chapter, I argued that the translation of sovereignty, from a Western Derridean perspective, marks a shift from a divine paradigm to a more secular understanding of semiotics. The divine paradigm of sovereignty is depicted by a cape as the insignia of divine power. Derrida translates this cape into a wedding gown as an insignia of collective and contractual secular power. Sovereignty, for Derrida, can only be communicated in translation between these two paradigms of insignia: cape and wedding gown. The former conceals the absent body of the king while the second encloses the absent body of the people. In semiotic terms, the insignia of power translate as signs that have lost the dimension of the divine signified. In order to conceal its inherent loss, the sign contracts with the aesthetic image as an expressive symptom of that loss. Contract indicates the condition for supplementation; signs cannot self-fulfill and thus constantly need the supplementation of other signs or images. Contract is guided by the messianic hope of achieving justice, a justice that cannot be uttered except as a prayer for forgiveness for this constant need for supplementation. In this state of the wedding-gown-contract, mediation becomes the key concern of translating sovereignty that aims for justice.

In the second chapter, I explored traces of this Western postmodern framework of translating sovereignty within al-Farabi's medieval thought. By taking the *imam* to

indicate a divine figure of the king, I showed how this *imam* employs mimesis to mediate theoretical truths through rhetoric. Being a philosopher-king, the *imam*'s intellect is also in contact with the divine mind through emanation. The truths that he communicates to the citizens of the Virtuous City via mimetic mediation preserve traces of illumination from the Active Intellect. Mimetic mediation that distinguishes politically divine sovereignty, however, is the same tool that the protestors employ to deconstruct that notion of sovereignty. Whereas the *imam* employs mimesis by imitating truths through images, the weeds reformulate mimesis to indicate the multiplication of images in relation to the emotional and imaginary construction of other city models that are yet-to-come. The translation of sovereignty takes the form of redefining emanation as man-made mimetic creation of images. Justice, for the weeds, is an appetitive moral of the soul that correlates with the very act of multiplying images in relation to constructed value.

Adopting this comparative framework of translating sovereignty, I moved on in Chapter Three to investigate collective mimetic creation within the context of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Political cartoons were investigated as the media for the mimetic play of images and signs integral to the affective translation of sovereignty. Depicting the people's attempt at toppling the regime, the cartoons display how the people introduce secular sovereignty as they collectively face the divine-like model imposed by the regime in an affective display of unified sarcasm. The cartoon depictions highlight Agamben's notion of glory or praise fundamental for the establishment of sovereignty. However, the protestors are depicted to employ the dynamics of glory to profane, instead of praise, the regime's divine model of sovereignty. Instead of acclaiming the sovereign, the protestors praise the media that deliver that glory. By displaying glory as a medium for both praise of mediation and

profanation of a sovereign, the cartoons show how glory assumes a reverse form whereby glory rests within itself and discloses the empty throne of power that sovereignty, in both divine and secular forms, relies on and shields. In reverse acclamation, the emptiness of the throne promises justice through withdrawal from sovereignty. Justice is the promise that it is possible to bring back to common use all that was deemed to be sacred by sovereignty. One tool that the protestors attempt to withdraw from sovereignty and that the cartoons shed light on is that of language that is used in praise and profanation. Language ceases to instrumentally communicate analytic logical meaning and is, instead, characterized by play. Linguistic play utters the hope for justice where the throne of sovereignty is left empty within translation.

In the last chapter, I embarked on investigating the de-instrumentalization of language through the poetry of the revolution. Poetry negotiates the translation of cape-wedding gown, or the divine-secular models of sovereignty, through reflecting a shift in the social imaginary, taken to mean the common paradigm of meaning-making, of the protestors. One common paradigm is that of the free will/ pre-determinism or *qadariya/jabariya* debate that resurfaces in the people's modern imaginary concerning sovereignty. Poetic language articulates a secular free will impetus that breaks with the sacred paradigm of already-established meaning-making. However, it still aligns itself with the divine notion of fate as an affirmative emanation of created meaning. The protestors come up with such terms as 'civil state' or *dawla madaniya* in order to bring about, name or shed light on a political construction that does not exist yet. This political construction at the moment seems to have no meaning at all because of the many contradictory meanings it already entails. By negotiating a world vision through poetry, the protestors enact the role of oral transmitters of poetry who are responsible for making up names and fashioning terms.

They become the builders of a nation that is yet to come, the nation within justice marked by freedom from the fatalism of language, or the fatalism of the already-established meanings within language. The aesthetic translation of sovereignty between the divine and secular thus is a form of articulating a creative impetus guided by justice that seeks to unlock a certain freedom within the fatalism of language. This linguistic freedom, or what I call *linguistic qadarism*, lays bare the empty throne of power that maintains the promise without the prospect that it will be filled. The protestors are left with the mission of offering a reverse witness statement, a linguistic mold for a promised state that they can only do through the imagination.

Let me close, here, with some more evidence, besides language, that the creative translation of sovereignty in Egypt is still ongoing today. Despite the general pessimistic and ambivalent readings that the media, which I referred to earlier, present, there are hints that the promise within translation survives. As already mentioned, strife in the name of justice is ongoing and shifting in the current forms it takes. The most important of its forms is that of popular artistic creation, whether in drawing, political cartoons, or music. After the military government has taken over, political cartoons, for example, continue to emphasize the divine model of sovereignty that the government embodies and against which protestors continue to struggle. One sample cartoon below focuses on depicting the artistic aspect of this struggle. The following cartoon is created by the Egyptian cartoonist Andeel who posted this cartoon on his Facebook page in October 2013 after his cartoon was rejected by *Al-Masri Al-Youm*, the newspaper for which he was working:[626]

---

[626] Carol Hills, 'Two Cartoonists in Egypt Push the Boundaries of What's Acceptable and Find a Ready Audience', *Public Radio International* <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-05-15/its-back-mubarak-era-egypt-political-cartoonists-find-portraying-sisi-limits> [accessed 25 March 2015].

الصنايعي: عيب عليك ياباشا أنا عامل لك حاجة نضيفة،
مش أقل من ٣٠.. ٤٠ سنة شغال معاك زي
الحلاوة إن شاء الله.

Figure 1. 'The Craftsman'.[627]

The 'new pharaoh' that is being sculpted has the face of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the current Egyptian president. The caption reads: 'For shame, sir! I'm really doing a proper job on this one - it'll work like a charm for 30 or 40 years at least! God willing'.[628] Al-Sisi is the new face for the pharaoh as the divine model of sovereignty that the cartoonist, the representative of the people, satirizes. Andeel presents the cartoon as a popular form of art that protests against sculpture, an engrained and durable artistic form. The political cartoon thus depicts the people's persistent struggle against the divine model of sovereignty. This struggle takes the form of the cartoon's double reading of sovereignty through focusing on artistic expression, popular drawing vs. sculpting. This growing awareness of the role of popular artistic expression as witness statements prompts Ganzeer, an artist who participated in a global graffiti campaign against al-Sisi, to write that 'critical artists should be seen as a source of information to the State. By paying attention to what we do, perhaps the State can better understand popular grievances and adjust its policies and governance

---

[627] Andeel, 'The Craftsman' [Facebook post], 23 October 2013<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153381591275224&set=a.13866 5530223.232104.777560223&type=3&theater> [Accessed 10 April 2015].
[628]Hills.

accordingly, rather than invest so many resources into trying to shut us up'.[629]

Ganzeer's message outlines the critical role that art can play not only in political

decision making but also in the translation of sovereignty from a divine to a popular

model.

The role that popular art plays in rewriting the translation of sovereignty

resurfaces also in musical expression. Electro shaabi, also known as *mahragan* or

festive music, is one form of musical expression that has been growing in popularity

since the 2011 revolution. This style 'reflects the reality, values and ideologies of

Egyptian youth, referencing the language, fashion, and dialects of the working classes

left behind by the political process'.[630] Popular festive music gives space for the social

sector that has been marginalized by political struggle. The people rewrite the struggle

against the divine and imposed model of sovereignty not through a political struggle

for a collective model of sovereignty but through collective artistic expression.

Through this collective artistic expression, the youth insist that the 'talk about the

streets, this is politics', as one electro shaabi star states. The youth redefine the

political concern with power and authority into that with the 'talk about the young

people and how they feel'.[631] In their redefinition, they present their ongoing attempt

at fashioning an Agambenian inspired politics of profanation. Their profanation is

evident in the messy and 'insanely annoying' aspect of the music, the 'volume, the

[629] Jonathan Guyer, 'Picturing Egypt's Next President', *The New Yorker* <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/picturing-egypts-next-president> [accessed 29 March 2015].
[630]Pete Kowalczyk, 'Cairo's Underground Producers Defy Military Rule', *Dazed* <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/20043/1/egypts-underground-producers-stand-against-military-rule> [accessed 25 March 2015].
[631] Kowalczyk, 'Cairo's Underground Producers'.

intensity', that they make.[632] Songs are not written to deliver a message; instead, songs rewrite power in volume and intensity. In artistic expression, the youth strive for justice through de-instrumentalizing language. Language seems to be restored to its status as pure means when it matters only in terms of the volume of the music in which it is delivered and the emotional response it causes in the audience. By focusing on rhythm and emotional response, the people rewrite the translation of sovereignty past the models of divine sovereignty and collective secularism. Their translation lays bare the empty throne of power through artistic creative expression.

Instead of rendering power a collective dynamic within sovereignty, the Egyptian youth increasingly resort to popular artistic techniques to rewrite the dynamics and definition of power itself. They thus display and embellish what Claude Lefort calls the 'empty space' of power. According to Lefort, power 'cannot be occupied - it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it - and it cannot be represented'. [633] As an empty space, power cannot be said to 'reside in society' nor can it be appropriated by governments. This only shows that power is a constant state of contestation or 'controlled contest with permanent rules'.[634] However, what this thesis has hopefully made clear by now is that the Egyptian youth are rewriting this power dynamic. In their struggle, the youth highlight Lefort's emptiness of the space of power, Agamben's void and Derrida's absent body, only to show how it translates itself through popular artistic contestation. Popular art, for the Egyptian youth, does not take authority necessarily as its aim; it might invest in power only so that justice can be persistently pursued. Musical noise and popular cartoons

---

[632]Andeel, 'You Just Got Mahraganed', *Mada Masr* <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/culture/you-just-got-mahraganed> [accessed 26 March 2015].

[633] Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Thought*, trans. by David Macey (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988), p. 17.

[634] Lefort, *Democracy and Political Thought*, p. 17.

are the people's newly constructed field of justice to which law will have to answer.
Law's mission cannot be limited to a simple rational act of curbing or even protecting
these artistic forms of expression; law's task, it now seems, is to provide these fields
with material that will promote their creative potentials as witness statements.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abou-Afifa, Mohamad, The sun of democracy [Cartoon], *Al Ghad*, 4 February 2011.

Academy of the Arabic Language, eds., *Al-Mu'jam al-Waseet*, 4th ed (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al Shuruq al Dawliyya, 2004)

Abdelrahman, Maha M., *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004)

Agamben, Giorgio, *Means Without End: Notes of Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000)

———, 'Potentalities', in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. & trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (California, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

———, *Profanations*, trans. by Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007)

———, *The Coming Community*, ed. by Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, and Brian Massumi, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

———, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, trans. by Lorenzo Chiesa and Mateo Mandarini (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007)

———, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. by Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009)

———, 'What Is an Apparatus?', in *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009)

Ajam, Mohammed, 'The Fashion of Political Terms in Egypt: A Continuous Display', *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 2012 <http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=684979&issueno=12 273#.VHmoCDGsVcz> [accessed 12 November 2014]

Alfarabi, Abu Nasr, 'A Letter in Reply to Certain Questions', in *Collection of Various Treatises*, ed. by Muhammad Ismail, Arabic ed. (Cairo, Egypt, 1907)

———, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, trans. by F.W. Zimmermann (London: Oxford University Press, 1981)

———, *Kitab al-Huruf*, ed. by Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar el-Mashreq, 1969) in *Leneshmidt Translations Resource Library* <http://www.leneshmidt-translations.com/alfarabi_book_of_letters_english/index.htm..> [accessed 4 June 2014]

———, *On the Perfect State: Mabadi' Ara Ahl Al-Madina Al-Fadila*, trans. by Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

———, *The Political Writings: 'Selected Aphorisms' and Other Texts*, trans. by Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001)

———, *The Attainment of Happiness*, in *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. by Mahdi, Muhsin (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962)

———, *The Political Regime*, in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, trans. by Fauzi N. Najjar (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963)

Al Ja'afari, Nasser, The Arab race [Cartoon], *Alarab Alyawm*, 13 February 2011

Al Ja'afari, Nasser, Mubarak clings to the throne [Cartoon], *Alarab Alyawm*, 7 February 2011

Al-Jabri, Mohamad'Abd, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique* (Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1999)

Al-Shabbi, Abu Al-Qasim, 'Life's Will', in *Modern Arabic Poetry : An Anthology*, ed. by Salma Khadra Jayussi, trans. by Sargon Boulat and Christopher Middleton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987)

Andeel, 'The Craftsman' [Facebook post], 23 October 2013<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153381591275224&set=a.138665530223.232104.777560223&type=3&theater> [Accessed 10 April 2015]

Andeel, 'You Just Got Mahraganed', *Mada Masr* <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/culture/you-just-got-mahraganed> [accessed 26 March 2015]

Awartani, Jihad, Hailing social media [Cartoon], *Alwatan Newspaper*, 30 January 2011

Bahjouri, George, Facebook and the Eagle of Saladin [Cartoon], *Al-Ahram Newspaper*, 14 February 2011

Baltrusch, Burghard, 'Translation as Aesthetic Resistance: Paratranslating Walter Benjamin', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 6 (2010), 113–29

Benjamin, Walter, 'Antithesis Concerning Word and Name', in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), II

———, 'Critique of Violence', in *Walter Benjamin: One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979)

———, 'On the Concept of History', in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Others (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), IV

———, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), I

Blaibel, Hassan, 'Departure Day' [Cartoon] , *Al-Mustaqbal*, 4 February 2011, <http://www.hassanbleibel.com/FrontEndArchive.aspx> [accessed 12 September 2012]

Bonnefoy, Yves, 'Translating Poetry', in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

Bradley, Arthur, *Derrida's Of Grammatology: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

———, 'The Theocracy to Come: Deconstruction, Autoimmunity, Islam', in *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic*, ed. by Paul Fletcher and Arthur Bradley (London: Continuum International Inc., 2010)

Callon, Michel, and Bruno Latour, 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macrostructure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So', in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologists*, ed. by K Knorr-Cetina and A V Cicourel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)

Cambanis, Thanassis, 'Is Egypt on the Verge of Another Uprising?', *The Atlantic*, 2015 <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/01/the-egyptian-revolution-four-years-later/384593/> [accessed 26 March 2015]

Campanini, Massimo, 'Alfarabi and the Foundation of Political Theology in Islam', in *Islam, The State, And Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns*, ed. by Asma Afsaruddin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Cantarino, Vicente, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age: Selection of Texts Accompanied by a Preliminary Study* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975)

Colish, Marcia L., *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400-1400* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1997)

Colla, Elliott, 'The People Want', *Middle East Report- The Art and Culture of the Arab Revolts*, 42 (2012) <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer263/people-want> [accessed 3 November 2014]

———, 'The Poetry of Revolt', in *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt*, ed. by Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing (London: Verso, 2012)

Colmo, Christopher A. *Breaking with Athens: Al-Farabi as Founder* (United States of America: Lexington Books, 2005)

Critchley, Simon, 'A Commentary Upon Derrida's Reading of Hegel in Glas', in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 2001), 197–226

———, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida,Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (New York: Verso, 1999)

———, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002)

———, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992)

Daily News Egypt, 'New Website Seeks to Define the Vocabulary of the Egyptian Revolution', *Daily News Egypt* <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/06/04/new-website-seeks-define-vocabulary-egyptian-revolution/> [accessed 20 November 2014]

Davey, Nicholas, 'Hermeneutical Aesthetics and an Ontogeny of the Visual', in *The Handbook of Visual Culture,* ed. by Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (London, UK: Berg, 2012)

Davis, Kathleen, *Deconstruction and Translation* (Manchester, United Kingdom: St. Jerome, 2001)

De Man, Paul, '"Conclusions" on Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"', *Yale French Studies*, 69 (1985), 25–46 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2929923>

Derrida, Jacques, 'A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event', *Critical Inquiry*, 33 (2007), 441–61

———, 'Des Tours de Babel', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar, trans. by Joseph F. Graham (New York: Routledge, 2002)

———, 'Force of Law', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002)

———, 'Hostipitality', in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002)

———, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatari Chakravorty Spivak (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)

———, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000)

———, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005)

———, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Mehlman Jeffrey (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988)

———, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994)

———, 'The Principle of Hospitality', *Parallax*, 11 (2005), 6–9 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1353464052000321056>

———, 'What Is a "Relevant" Translation?', trans. by Lawrence Venuti, *Critical Inquiry*, 27 (2001), 174–200

Dillon, Michael, 'Another Justice', *Political Theory*, 27 (1999), 155–75

———, *Biopolitics of Security: A Political Analytic of Finitude* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015)

———, 'Jacques Derrida', in *Palgrave Advances in Continental Political Thought*, ed. by Terrell Carver and James Martin (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Durantaye, Leland de la, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009)

El Alaoui, Khadija, 'Chanting Tahreer and Compassion: People as Poetry', *Tensions Journal*, Fall/Winter 2011 <http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/khadijaelalaouiarticle.pdf> [accessed 27 December 2014]

El Amrani, Issandr, 'Sightings of the Egyptian Deep State', *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 2012 <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero010112> [accessed 28 March 2015]

———, 'Three Decades of a Joke That Just Won't Die', *Foreign Policy*, 2011, 89–90

Elbousty, Moulay Youness, 'Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi's "The Will to Live": Galvanising the Tunisian Revolution', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 18 (2013), 159–63 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2012.729719>

Elmarsafy, Ziad, 'Action, Imagination, Institution, Natality, Revolution', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19 (2015), 130–38 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2014.982917>

———, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt3fgs8v> [accessed 25 June 2015]

ElShiekh, Ahmed Abdel Azim, 'Between the Signifier and the Signified Falls the Signification: Reflections on the Use of Political Terms in the Egyptian 2011 Events', *Studies in Literature and Language*, 5 (2012), 44–49 <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320120502.1752>

Ess, Josef van, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006)

Fakhry, Majid, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 1997)

———, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991)

Freedman, Leonard, 'Wit as a Political Weapon: Satirists and Censors', *Social Research*, 79 (2012), 87–112,271

Gerges, Fawaz A., 'The Islamist Moment: From Islamic State to Civil Islam?', *Political Science Quarterly*, 128 (2013), 389–426

Griffin, Dustin H., *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994)

Guyer, Jonathan, 'Picturing Egypt's Next President', *The New Yorker* <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/picturing-egypts-next-president> [accessed 29 March 2015]

Haddad, Fuad Said, *Al-Farabi's Theory of Communication* (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1989)

Haddad, Habib, Good morning, Egypt [Cartoon], *Al Hayat*, 13 February 2011

Haeri, Niloofar, *Sacred Languages, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

Hajjaj, Imad, The most beautiful valentine [Cartoon], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 15 February 2011

Hajjaj, Imad, Mubarak successfully removed [Cartoon], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 14 February 2011

Hajjaj, Imad , The pyramid of fear [Cartoon], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, 10 February 2011

Hajo, Saad, Mubarak should leave [Cartoon], *Al-Safir Newspaper*, 2 February 2011

Hanna, Michael Wahid, 'Egypt and the Struggle for Accountability and Justice', in
    Transitional Justice and the Arab Spring, ed. by Kirsten Fisher and Robert
    Stewart (London & New York: Routledge, 2014)

Hardison Jr., O.B, 'Aristotle and Averroes', in *Poetics & Praxis, Understanding &*
    Imagination: The Collected Essays of O.B. Hardison Jr, ed. by Arthur F.
    Kinney (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1997)

Hashem, Nedal, 'The Egyptian Revolution in the Arab Cartoons', in *Arab Cartoon*
    House <http://www.arabcartoon.net/en/gallery/egyptian-revolution-arab-
    cartoons>[accessed 4 December 2012].

Hawas, Sarah, 'Global Translations and Translating the Global: Discursive Regimes
    of Revolt', in *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*, ed. by
    Samia Mehrez (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012)

Helmy, Mohamed M., and Sabine Frerichs, 'Stripping the Boss: The Powerful Role of
    Humor in the Egyptian Revolution 2011', *Integrative Psychological and*
    Behavioral Science, 47 (2013), 450–81 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12124-
    013-9239-x>

Hills, Carol, 'Two Cartoonists in Egypt Push the Boundaries of What's Acceptable
    and Find a Ready Audience', *Public Radio International*
    <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-05-15/its-back-mubarak-era-egypt-political-
    cartoonists-find-portraying-sisi-limits> [accessed 25 March 2015]

Homsi, Arman, No change in the Egyptian scene [Cartoon], *Annahar*, 6 February
    2011

Huntington, Samuel P., 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (1993), 22–49

Hyman, Gavin, *Traversing the Middle: Ethics, Politics, Religion* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013)

Ibrahim, Kareem, and Diane Singerman, 'Urban Egypt: On the Road from Revolution to the State? Governance, the Built Environment, and Social Justice', *Égypte/Monde Arabe*, 2014 <http://ema.revues.org/3281> [accessed 29 November 2014]

Jaber, Abdallah, A smooth transition of power [Cartoon], *Al Jazirah*, 4 February 2011

Jakobson, Roman, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London & New York: Routledge, 2004)

Joha, Omayya, The scream of the youth [Cartoon], *Alraya Newspaper*, 12 February 2011

Kantorowicz, Ernest H., *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957)

Keane, David, 'Cartoon Violence and Freedom of Expression', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 30 (2008), 845–75

Kemal, Salim, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes: The Aristotelian Reception* (London: Routledge, 2003)

———, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991)

Khadduri, Majid, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins
    University Press, 1984)

Kingsley, Patrick, 'Egypt: After the Revolution Comes the Battle for Language', *The
    Guardian*, 18 July 2014
    <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/18/egypt-battle-for-language-
    dictionary-revolution-amira-hanafi> [accessed 1 December 2014]

Kochin, Michael Shalom, 'Weeds: Cultivating the Imagination in Medieval Arabic
    Political Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60 (1999), 399–416
    <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhi.1999.0026>

Kowalczyk, Pete, 'Cairo's Underground Producers Defy Military Rule', *Dazed*
    <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/20043/1/egypts-underground-
    producers-stand-against-military-rule> [accessed 25 March 2015]

Lameer, Joep, *Al-Farabi and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic
    Practice* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994)

Lee, Ian, 'Mubarak Is Cleared: Egypt's Revolution Is Dead - CNN.com', *CNN*
    <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/29/world/africa/egypt-mubarak-
    analysis/index.html> [accessed 26 March 2015]

Lefort, Claude, *Democracy and Political Thought*, trans. by David Macey
    (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988)

Mahrouqi, Abdallah, A new sunset [Cartoon], *Akhbar Al-Khaleej*, 12 February 2011

Marks, Laura U., *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*
(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press,
2010)

Matar, Nabil, 'Al-Farabi on Imagination: With a Translation of His "Treatise on
Poetry"', *College Literature*, 23 (1996), 100–110
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/25112231>

Mavelli, Luca, 'Postsecular Resistance, the Body, and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution',
Review of International Studies, 38 (2012), 1057–78
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000472>

Merriam-Webster.com, 2012 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arcade>
[accessed 4 January 2012]

Mian, Ali Altaf, 'Muslim Political Philosophy and the Affective Turn: Farabi on
Language, Affect, and Reason', *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, 4 (2011),
47–70

Miller, Laurel E., Jeffrey Martini, F. Stephen Larrabee, Angel Rabasa, Stephanie
Pezard, Julie E. Taylor, and others, *Democratization in the Arab World:
Prospects and Lessons from Around the Globe*
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg1192rc> [accessed 28 November
2014]

Mills, Catherine, *The Philosophy of Agamben* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008)

Muhsin, Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. by Peter Connor, trans. by Peter
        Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis,
        Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy
        in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press,
        2006)

Netton, Ian Richard, *Allah Transcendent : Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of
        Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989)

Novalis, 'Faith and Love or The King and Queen', in *Novalis Philosophical Writings*,
        ed. & trans. by Margaret Mahony Staljar (Albany: State University of New
        York Press, 1997)

Press, Charles, *The Political Cartoon* (London: Fairleigh University Press, 1981)

Primavesi, Patrick, 'The Performance of Translation: Benjamin and Brecht on the
        Loss of Small Details', 43 (1999), 53–59

Pym, Anthony, *Exploring Translation Theories* (London &New York: Routledge,
        2010)

Radwan, Abeer Bassiouny Arafa Ali, 'How the Egyptian Revolution Emphasized the
        Sovereignty of the People', ed. by Csaba T. Chikes, *Amercian Diplomacy*,
        2011
        <http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2011/0912/oped/radwan_egyptianre
        v.html> [accessed 20 February 2015]

Saliba, Elie, The victorious Sphinx [Cartoon], *Al Watan Newspaper*, 12 February
    2011

Sanders IV, Lewis, and Mark Visona, 'The Soul of Tahrir: Poetics of a Revolution',
    in *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*, ed. by Samia
    Mehrez (Cairo, Egypt: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012)

Spielmann, M.H., *Cartoons From Punch* (London: Bradbury and Agnew, 1906)

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York:
    Routledge, 1993)

Steiner, George, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford
    University Press, 1975)

Strauss, Leo, *Persecution and The Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press,
    1952)

Tadros, Mariz, 'Introduction: The Pulse of the Arab Revolt', *IDS Bulletin*, 43 (2012),
    1–15 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2012.00285.x>

Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age* (London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007)

Tayob, Abdulkader, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa: The Muslim Youth
    Movement* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1995)

Tibi, Bassam, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and
    Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008)

Totten, Michael J., 'Egypt's Failed Revolution', *World Affairs Journal*

<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/michael-j-totten/egypts-failed-

revolution> [accessed 25 February 2015]

Trager, Eric, 'The Egyptian Revolution Isn't Dead Because It Never Happened in the

First Place', *The Washington Post*, 4 December 2014

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/04/the-

egyptian-revolution-isnt-dead-because-it-never-happened-in-the-first-place/>

[accessed 26 March 2015]

Tymoczko, Maria, 'Translation, Resistance, Activism: An Overview', in *Translation,*

Resistance, Activism, ed. by Maria Tymoczko (Amherst and Boston:

University of Massachusetts Press, 2010)

Vaulx D'arcy, Guillaume de, 'La Naqla, Étude Du Concept De Transfert Dans

L'oeuvre D'al-Farabi', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 20 (2010), 125–76

<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0957423909990129>

Vela-Santos, Remedios Regina de, 'Verging on Divine: The Matter of Benedictine

Silence and the Justification of Law and Language', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43

(2011), 2337–59 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.10.032>

Vltchek, 'The Arab Spring Is Dead: Egypt's Failed Revolution' <http://rt.com/op-

edge/egypt-revolution-failed-arab-spring-849/> [accessed 3 March 2015]

Walker, Paul E., 'Saladin (Ayyubid Sultan)', in *Encyclopædia Britannica*,

Encyclopædia Britannica Online

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/518809/Saladin> [accessed 4

January 2013]

Weber, Samuel, 'Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt',

Diacritics, 22 (1992), 5-18

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/465262.pdf?acceptTC=true> [accessed 5

November 2015]