

Mosireen, the Egyptian revolution, and global digital media activism¹

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Abstract

The Mosireen Collective serves as a case study that represents a new form of diasporic, global media activism that operates across a series of commercial and non-commercial digital platforms (in addition to physical locations) and employs different video forms depending on the needs of the moment. Mosireen reveals a dynamic process at work where its media activism changes configurations to adapt to new circumstances all the while being deeply steeped in anarchist-based practices and certain digital logics that prioritize participants' ability to influence and restructure archival materials to produce multiple revolutionary perspectives. The Mosireen Collective stresses how struggles over narrative and archival materials play central roles in collective organizing and social transformation. Yet also worth noting is how this diasporic, global mode of media activism relies upon the labor of people from relatively elite backgrounds who speak multiple languages and can easily traverse locations due to their privileged socio-economic status.

Keywords: The Egyptian revolution; digital media activism; video activism; anarchism

Introduction

On Sunday November 25, 2019, Egyptian police raided one of the country's last independent news organizations, Mada Masr (Rashwan 2019). As many as nine armed plainclothes security officers stormed its offices and detained many of its staff. Reporters became concerned for their safety as their phones were confiscated and searched by authorities who refused to offer any information regarding their release (*Democracy Now!* 2019). The Committee to Protect Journalists has ranked Egypt the world's most aggressive jailer of journalists. Most of Egypt's privately owned media is run by intelligence agencies or allies of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who had assumed power in 2013 and has increasingly asserted dictatorial control (Associated Press 2019)

Egypt's repression against journalists gestures towards a greater struggle over how the inheritances of the Egyptian revolution are still being tallied in the ledgers of history. Protests continue to erupt throughout the country in response to el-Sisi's betrayal of the revolution's utopian aspirations (Wintour

¹ I would like to thank Kay Dickinson for her valuable comments regarding an earlier draft of this article.

2019). As Walter Benjamin reminds us, history is always relative to those who are writing it. It does not progress in a linear fashion, but instead “it became historical posthumously” (Benjamin 1968, p. 263). The Egyptian revolution might have only sparked up in 2011, but it feels both extremely distant and ever-present as events unfold in untold ways both within Egypt and in response to the weave of global revolts in Spain, Tunisia, Syria, England, the United States, Turkey, and elsewhere that Egypt belonged to.

Like most revolutions, the Egyptian uprising took on unforeseen directions as protesters occupied Tahrir Square in January 2011 and finally ousted Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. Different political factions of protesters clashed and debated the forms of grassroots power and representational democracy they should pursue. Muhammad Morsi, chief of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party, was elected president in June 2012. Struggling to control the revolutionary fervor that consumed Egypt, Morsi engaged in a series of missteps by consolidating his executive power and limiting the newly found freedoms the Egyptian people had claimed, thus triggering large protests against his control. Morsi’s defense minister Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi demanded Morsi’s removal in July 2013. Responding to the many violent street clashes between supporters and detractors of Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood, the army, and other political contingents, new elections were held in May 2014 with Al-Sisi declared president in June 2014. While occupying the presidency, Al-Sisi continues in systematically stripping Egyptian people of many of the hard-earned rights they won during the revolution.

During the height of the Egyptian revolution, The Mosireen Collective (2011-2018) occupied a prominent place both locally and globally. I argue it encapsulates a new form of diasporic, global media activism that operates across a series of commercial and non-commercial digital platforms (in addition to physical locations) and employs different video forms depending on the needs of the moment. Mosireen reveals a dynamic process at work where its media activism changes configurations to adapt to new circumstances all the while being deeply steeped in anarchist-based practices and certain digital logics that prioritize participants’ ability to influence and restructure archival materials to produce multiple revolutionary perspectives. The Mosireen Collective stresses how struggles over narrative and archival materials play central roles in collective organizing and social transformation. Yet also worth noting is how this diasporic, global mode of media activism relies upon the labor of people from relatively elite backgrounds who speak multiple languages and can easily traverse locations due to their privileged socio-economic status.²

² One caveat, however, is that one should not over-generalize about this specific form of diasporic, global media activism being discussed here. Although it represents a certain sophisticated strain of media activism, there are many other forms of local digital media activism that do not aspire towards the global or even national. Furthermore, there are endless variations of failed or unsustainable digital media activist projects that litter the web. The reasons for these failures are complex. In part they result from most organizations being under-resourced to dedicate adequate time and energy to the digital realm. Furthermore, many

The contours of diasporic, global media activism

Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall have emphasized the diasporic configurations that define many present-day cultural and political struggles (Gilroy 1993). Hall stresses how the diasporic condition both harkens back with a nostalgia for a unified past that never existed and a way forward with a more hybridized identity (Hall 2017). At its best, diasporic cultures and political resistances look forward to new forms of identity produced by the contact zones where different cultures collide and intermingle. They can undermine essentialist identities by pointing towards the ways in which culture is always remade and remixed at specific historical conjunctures (Hall 1990).

Egypt represents an ideal diasporic contact zone as the nation under Mubarak opened itself up to privatization and other tenets of neoliberalism that have increased cultural flows from elsewhere as well as relied on the exploitation of global labor (Achcar 2013; Dickinson 2018a). One result of such a system that combines authoritarianism and economic liberal features is the creation of what Aihwa Ong calls “graduated sovereignty” (Ong 2006).³ She writes, “Market-driven logic induces the coordination of political policies with the corporate interests, so that developmental decisions favor the fragmentation of the national space into various noncontiguous zones, and promote the differential regulation of populations who can be connected to or disconnected from global circuits of capital” (Ong, p. 77). As a result, a corollary “graduated citizenship” is produced that privileges certain populations over others in the matrices of neoliberalism. A group of new professionals emerges belonging to “a segregated stratosphere” that neoliberalism prioritizes (Ong, p. 80).

Not surprisingly, most of the members of the Mosireen Collective belong to this privileged professional class. Among its members are Sharief Gaber, a graduate student in law and urban planning in Texas; Lara Baladi, an artist born in Lebanon by Egyptian parents and who has lived in Beirut, London, and Paris; Khalid Abdalla, an actor in films like *The Kite Runner* (2007) and *The Square* (2014), educated in Oxford and raised in the U.K.; Jasmina Metwaly, an artist who studied in Poland and England; Omar Robert Hamilton, a filmmaker and author of British and Egyptian descent who studied in the United States; and Philip Rizk, a dual German-Egyptian citizen who studied at Wheaton College in Illinois and went to graduate school at American University in Cairo. Rizk admits during an interview: “Most of us who make up Mosireen . . . are the

activists are not well versed in strategies, tactics, and programming needed for successful digital campaigns. Additionally, often the historical conjuncture is not ripe for certain forms of digital media activism to take root. The point is: communication and film and media studies scholars need to dedicate as much time to the failed campaigns of digital media activism to gain a better sense of the existing terrain and more realistically assess the opportunities and limits that digital technology offers movement organizing.

³ I would like to thank Kay Dickinson for drawing my attention to Ong’s book in her talk, “The Labour of Revolutionary Video Collectives,” *9th International Small Cinemas Conference: From the Grassroots to the Global*, November 9, 2018, Florida Atlantic University.

privileged few; speaking multiple languages, with more rights in a society with few to speak of” (Rizk 2016, p. 227-228). His comments highlight an often-overlooked class dimension that runs throughout much global media activism. Although diasporic culture and struggles relate to people of all classes, those who often participate on the frontlines of global media activism occupy relatively entitled positions. As James Clifford notes, diasporic discourses extend “to a wide range of populations and historical predicaments” with class cleavages producing widely divergent experiences and outlooks (Clifford, 1994, p. 312).

Although Mosireen incorporated a series of media practices that extended back to revolutionary film culture during the 1960s, a digital, anarchist-inflected outlook guided much of their organizing and practices.⁴ Omar Robert Hamilton observes: “That non-hierarchical open-source structure was central to the original success of the revolution and to its ability to sustain itself now. So we try to apply it to our work as much as possible” (El Hamamsy 2012, p. 48). Kay Dickinson observes how Mosireen worked “interchangeably, pragmatically, trustingly and through debate on their many projects . . .” (Dickinson 2018a). Although the inherently non-hierarchical nature of online organizing has been disproven, Hamilton’s comments nonetheless suggest how many view anarchist politics and digital logics as complementary practices.

Mosireen combines old analogue media activist practices with a digital sensibility. Maxa Zoller notes how their videos “sit between the tradition of Third Cinema, militant cinema, citizen journalism, essayist forms on experimental filmmaking, reportage and documentary” (Zoller 2014, p. 160). The types of videos they make and how they are used are altered depending upon the online platforms or physical spaces in which they are utilized. The collective harnesses many past practices found in Third Cinema, yet they cannot help but to re-inflect them in new directions that are more congruent with digital logics that emphasize a proliferation of meanings that accompany the constant reworking of video footage into new configurations (Hudson and Zimmermann 2015).

Raymond Williams’ concepts of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural practices can assist us in understanding how multiple cultural logics can co-exist in the ways in which Mosireen balances older residual analogue media activism with dominant and emergent digital media activist practices. Residual cultural practices, according to Williams, do not simply remain in the past but are “an effective element of the present” as they are reworked by either being integrated into or resisting dominant and emergent cultural practices (Williams 1977, p. 122). In regards to Mosireen, their reliance upon certain Third Cinema practices, as will be discussed in the next section, reveal residual cultural practices at work. Dominant cultural practices have a hegemonic hold upon the present, illustrated by activists’ reliance upon commercial social media.

⁴ An anarchist-inflected outlook defines much contemporary media activism. See Robé 2017.

Emergent practices, on the other hand, represent new meanings, values and relationships under development that have not completely solidified and are difficult to identify. Williams cautions when analyzing emergent cultural practices, “it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture . . . and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it” (Williams, p. 123). This paper will conclude with analyzing the emergent practices Mosireen employs in its 858 archive in opposition to the dominant commercial culture.

Residual Third Cinema practices and on-the-ground organizing

Regardless if they were aware of prior Third Cinema practices or not, many contemporary media activists nonetheless rely upon the tactics and strategies forged during 1960s media activism since they still hold relevancy for the current moment. Sylvia Harvey provocatively suggests, “it is theoretically possible for cultural production to anticipate future class needs . . .” (1980, p. 105). Third Cinema anticipated such needs in its desire to democratize cinema and ally itself to liberation struggles. In their manifesto “Towards a Third Cinema,” Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino suggest how everyday people “participate collectively in the work [of film production] when they realize that it is the continuity of their daily struggle” (2000, p. 279). Likewise, Third Cinema filmmakers declared in Algeria in 1973:

the task of the third world filmmaker is no longer limited to the making of films but is extended to other fields of action, such as articulating, fostering, and making the new films understandable to the masses of people by associating himself with the promoters of people’s cinemas, clubs, and itinerant film groups in their dynamic action aimed at disalienation and sensitization in favor of a cinema which satisfies the interests of the masses” (Dickinson 2018a, p. 62).

Although the technology and costs limited Third Cinema practitioners’ ability to achieve such goals at their moment of emergence, the proliferation of more affordable digital technology globally has made such aspirations more achievable.

Mosireen echoes such sentiments to democratize media in their manifesto, “Revolution Triptych”:

Everyday people run their own neighborhoods

Workers take over the factories their bosses abandon.

Then we too must take over the decrepit world of image creation. (p. 47)

Mosireen trained around 200 people in video production (Kasm 2018, p. 108). In essence, this impulse to train others in filmmaking speaks to the direct action impulse of both Third Cinema and anarchist politics. Being able to film for oneself revolutionary developments became an empowering gesture in its own right. As Jasmine Metwaly, a member of Mosireen, notes: “You’re there with your camera saying: we also have our way of representation. We can show this reality ourselves. We don’t need other people to come and do this for ourselves” (Metwaly 2013a). After decades of state media offering unilateral and inaccurate interpretations of events, individuals were finally empowered to not only film their own accounts but also to have them further legitimated by being incorporated into Mosireen’s archive.

Additionally, the context of the Egyptian revolution and protesters’ occupation of Tahrir Square dictated in part the incorporation of residual practices of Third Cinema where short agitational videos became a necessity in holding people’s attention and galvanizing momentum behind the revolution.

Public screenings at Tahrir Cinema also used a physical event to constitute a critical public sphere. Raw footage often served to counter disinformation from state media. For example, much footage shows protesters being assaulted by tear gas, bullets, and armored vehicles to disprove the police and military’s claims that they engaged in no wrongdoing.⁵

Mosireen members participated in Tahrir Cinema, which was held nightly over several months and provided a vital function of screening images of the revolution that were largely inaccessible to the majority of Egyptians lacking internet access (Dickinson 2018a, p. 117). Philip Rizk observes that Mosireen was “never content with the focus on the Internet audience; the Internet after all is not accessible to the majority of Egyptians and certainly not to those who we most sought to engage with . . .” (p. 229). Tahrir served as a contact zone between viral videos and those taking part in the Egyptian revolution.

Yet Tahrir Cinema provided an equally important purpose to utilize screenings as direct interventions in supporting the revolution and generating collective self-determination. Again, such an outlook stretches back to Third Cinema that argued “revolutionary cinema is not fundamentally one that illustrates, documents, or passively establishes a situation: *rather, it attempts to intervene in the situation as an element providing thrust or rectification*” (Solanas and Getino 2000, p. 277). It provides discovery through transformation by subordinating its own image making to the collective will of the people (ibid., p. 283).

Mosireen similarly argues for engaged forms of media making:

⁵ Mosireen’s 858 archive has numerous videos regarding assaults of tear gas on protesters. Available at: https://858.ma/grid/title/keywords==tear_gas (Accessed December 1, 2019).

The images must lead to provocation, not a filthy self-aggrandizing cycle of an industry of empathy.

We do not seek people's pity, we seek to drag you the viewer from your seat and into the street.

We do not seek to inform, we want you to question your apathy in the face of the killing, torture and exploitation that is forced upon us.

We do not ask for your charity, we do not ask for your prayers, we do not ask for words, but bodies. (Mosireen 2014, p. 48)

This is not to say that Mosireen lifted directly from Third Cinema practices but instead that revolutionary conditions created the need for a Third Cinema approach yet again in the present moment. Some members already had previous experience in organizing cultural events for political purposes along the lines of Tahrir Cinema. For example, Omar Robert Hamilton helped found the Palestinian Festival of Literature in 2008, which teams up artists from the United States, United Kingdom, and other Arab states with Palestinian authors. In 2012, it was held in Gaza. The event both supports Palestinian culture and also provides a public forum where Palestinian issues and resistance against Israeli occupation can be addressed (Williams 2013).

Khalid Abdalla realized the significance behind publicly screening images that had predominantly circulated over the internet in a shared physical space: "To give them a screen and to give them an audience who can hear each other and see each other and cry together or chant together or laugh together is an incredibly powerful thing" (Abdalla 2014b).

Screenings took on a life of their own despite what organizers might have intended. Abdalla recounts that screenings produce a "powerful response and mood around that you realize is the thing you have to follow, not the idea you have in your head" (Abdalla 2014b). For example, during one screening, one of the attendees is a woman whose son was killed. When her image appears on the screen, she stands in the audience recounting her son's life while the video plays behind her. According to the Mosireen members overseeing the screening: "And she says all these beautiful things, and she's crying and everyone's cheering and it's such an, not only emotional moment . . . these public screenings, they unleash something that you don't know of until it happened" (Mollerup and Gaber, 2015, p. 2915). The screenings remake the footage into something new where viewers use the images to reconfigure collective space in new directions and lead to new avenues of emotion, thought, and action.

Anyone in attendance at such screenings realized that their presence alone implicated them against the powers that be. Elaborate plans were hatched by those hosting the screening of what to do if the authorities showed up. Who would take the projector? Who would scuttle away with the laptop? Where would cables be stashed? Screenings were not simply a reflection upon the revolution's events but a continuation of them:

Being present at a screening was a potentially dangerous action, and participants at screenings were watching a past as well as a potential future . . . They were a part of what they were watching. Through the screenings they explicitly became part of the revolution because by taking part in a revolutionary event, they became endangered like others with and before them (Mollerup and Gaber, 2015, p. 2916).

Not coincidentally, Third Cinema practitioners came to similar conclusions about how screenings endangered participants by representing solidarity with anti-colonial revolt. Solanas and Getino reflect: “We also discovered that every comrade who attended such showings did so with the full awareness that he was infringing the System’s laws and exposing his personal security to eventual repression.” (2000, p. 282). This reveals again how revolutionary circumstances create similar conditions despite vast differences in times and locations. Egypt 2011 is not Argentina during the 1960s. Yet the two moments resonate with one another as the residual practices of Third Cinema make themselves manifest during the Egyptian revolution since the historical conjuncture necessitates them.

Regardless of these residual Third Cinema practices, Mosireen does not simply seize upon the past. There were many core differences between the anti-colonial revolts of the 1960s and that of the Egyptian revolution. Philip Rizk asserts, “2011 was not the ‘classic’ revolution of the socialists: students and workers taking to the streets to replace a regime with their own. No matter how hard people tried, there were no political parties with a revolutionary blueprint prior to January 25, nor have any emerged since” (Rizk, 2014, p. 35). Rizk and others have also noted the central role precarity played in the revolution. A majority of those unemployed in Egypt received no public assistance. Youth unemployment in North Africa was around 28.8% in 2011. Significant numbers of college graduates could not find work. (Achcar 2013, p. 25-35).

Although often overlooked by Western media, labor revolts were in ascendance from 2004 until the 2011 uprising (Achcar 2013, p. 125). Students, for example, supported Mahalla workers who went out on strike for better wages in 2008, establishing what became known as the April 6 Movement. Rizk punctuates, “It was precarious workers and not Egypt’s traditional working class that acted as the radicalizing factor of the revolution.” (Rizk 2014, p. 26).

Furthermore, growing access to digital technology provided vital counter-public spheres that could challenge the Mubarak regime’s narratives. Starting in the early 2000s, influential blogging sites discredited regime narratives (Faris 2103). Access to cell phone technology allowed for a greater number of people to shoot video and post on social media (Shafik 2013). Around 2005, independent film festivals emerged in Cairo that championed cell phone-made films (Salti 2012, p. 168). Finally, internet penetration of households grew from 8 percent to 24 percent from 2005 to 2010, which doesn’t acknowledge the high

usage of internet cafes by many people. (Gerbaudo 2012, 52). Facebook launched an Arabic version in 2009 (Castells 2012, p. 57).

Additionally, Palestinian youth resistance provided an inspiring model for many Mosireen members in harnessing innovative uses of digital technology with resistance movements. During the second Intifada of 2000, Palestinian youth seized the internet to connect with “their peers, friends, and relatives in the diaspora” to popularize their movement, a tactic that Mosireen members would similarly employ by reclaiming the power of the internet in mobilizing global constituencies in support of the uprising and their work (Khoury-Machool 2007, p. 230). In 2012, Palestinian youth protested against Israeli occupation and Palestinian leadership that remained disconnected and unresponsive to everyday Palestinian concerns, which resonated with Mosireen’s critique of Egyptian leadership’s similar failure to represent popular interests (Høigilt 2013). Mosireen produced a video on November 18, 2013 during the fifth day of Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people of Gaza as 500 Egyptians joined them in solidarity (Abunimah 2012). Palestinian resistance, as a result, had a strong influence upon Mosireen’s own media activism and political outlook.

An archival outlook also dictated Mosireen’s actions from the beginning that could both challenge the narratives of state media and provide a reserve where multiple participant perspectives could flourish. Regarding Tahrir Cinema Philip Rizk notes, “The intention of such videos and screenings was to translate the reality of the counter-revolution, a reality that was completely at odds with the narratives promoted by the establishment at the time” (Rizk 2016, p. 228). Mosireen didn’t even begin shooting its own videos until after the Maspero Massacre in October 2011, eight months after the revolution began since it didn’t see a need to given the enormous amount of amateur cell phone footage it intook (Hamamsy 2012, p. 47).⁶

Tahrir Cinema served as an exchange point where the archive could grow. According to Omar Robert Hamilton, “We used it as a swapping point for material—people would take footage from us and contribute whatever they had to the growing archive” (Hamamsy 2012, p. 47). Peter Snowdon has stressed how these gestures of exchange proved crucial in building trust among strangers to “open the way to dialogues and connections that are not only more complex, but also more intimate . . .” (Snowdon, 2020, p. 183). Mosireen summarized the interactive nature of the archive in its manifesto, “Revolutionary Triptych”:

The moment becomes history with the ‘save’ button, but does not stop there. It gets a second life through counter propaganda montage. The same footage on the side of the enemy becomes a dangerous weapon that needs to be turned

⁶ On October 9, 2011, protesters gathers in front of the state television and radio buildings in Cairo. Live coverage showed armored military vehicles running over protesters and killing some in order to clear them from the streets.

back at them. This footage is not for private collections. It is an oral history that becomes an active agent of resistance (Mosireen 2014, p. 52).

Yet Mosireen is not unique in prioritizing an archival function in their media activism. For example, the film unit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine declared in an early 1970s manifesto a need for: “Preserving the film and photographic documentation of the Palestinian revolution in a special archive, as source material not only for Palestinian film makers but also for friends wishing to share in the revolution through Palestinian films” (Dickinson 2018a, p. 96). Filmmakers and photographers realize the importance of their material in emotionally engaging people in their struggles and countering reactionary media portrayals of their movements.

Mosireen produced an updated digital media archive that would not simply provide documentation of a particular struggle, but also serve as raw material for new interpretations and movements. Although it would still be five years before Mosireen would release their digital archive, 858, where they culled 858 hours of footage for users to explore and remix, we can already witness how their activist media practices already had in mind digital futures for the work they were conducting on the ground and online.

Their archival practices in Tahrir Square were also being simultaneously conducted online. Mosireen’s YouTube channel became one of the most viewed of all time in Egypt (Kasm 2018, p. 108). In January 2011, it was one of the most visited YouTube channels in the world. After the Maspero massacre in October 2011, Mosireen became a central source regarding the revolution for commercial news media (Abdalla 2014c). Foreign media would use their videos and photographs, often without permission. Journalists eagerly wanted to trail Mosireen members throughout Cairo in order to plug in and scoop the inside story. (Hamilton 2017, p. 149). Social media played an important role in Mosireen’s ascendancy to international prominence (Dickinson 2018z, p. 117).

Social media, commercial logics, and media activism

Social media has played an increasingly important role for activists with YouTube becoming a central site for video activism (Askanius 2013 and Gregory 2012). Groups across the political spectrum battle over the platform for views and attention span (Roose 2019). Yet many valid concerns have arisen regarding the use of social media for activism. Social media sites can impute their logic on offline organizing by prioritizing short-term actions and the personalization of content online in order to harvest the largest number of views, which might undercut long-term goals (Poell and Van Dijck 2015). Additionally, a logic of aggregation might reign supreme online where participants congregate more as an atomized gathering of individuals rather than any strong sense of community. This can lead to weak ties between participants that make it more difficult to sustain movements and establish deep connective bonds (Juris

2012). Furthermore, online organizers make themselves and others vulnerable to surveillance by the state when using commercial social media websites that data mine users' information and have limited-to-no regard for users' privacy (Kennedy 2016 and Trottier and Fuchs 2015).

Yet there are many benefits as well in using social media, particularly where repressive governments operate. Many academics have stressed online media's importance in establishing some central preconditions for the Egyptian revolution since such online forums provided vital counter-public spheres that were unavailable in physical locations due to heavy state surveillance (Faris 2013 and Hassan 2015). Because Egyptian authorities failed to substantively regulate social media before the revolution, they ceded a fertile online terrain where discontent could be expressed and protests organized (Salem 2015, p. 186).

In addition to using YouTube to popularize their videos, Mosireen also started its own Indiegogo campaign to fund its work (Mosireen 2013). One could join at different sustainer levels. \$20 support enabled film screenings in their downtown Cairo space. A \$50 pledge went to building the archive. A \$100 donation supported media skills workshops. \$250 assisted Tahrir Cinema. \$500 helped fund the collective workspace. A \$1000 went towards film production. Most donations supported low-end costs—though one person donated a \$1000. Ultimately, Mosireen reached their goal of \$40,000.

A slick promotional video around three minutes in length accompanies the page. Electronic dance music plays over the carefully culled protest footage. Mosireen's professionally-grade footage is interwoven with striking yet roughly hewn amateur cell phone clips.⁷ Interspersed throughout the footage are intertitles advertising the collective's achievements: "OVER 10,000 MB OF FOOTAGE COLLECTED," "OVER 100 PEOPLE TRAINED ON A PAY-AS-YOU-CAN BASIS." When the video states, "A COLLECTIVE WORKSPACE," we see accompanying footage of a crowded room of youth smiling with camera tripods huddled around them; other participants hunched over their laptops working at a collective table; activists on the floor designing posters. The sequence encapsulates the energy of the collective as well as hints at its multimedia approach by displaying cameras, computers, and poster board as integral components. After celebrating Mosireen's impact upon commercial media by showing a list of the news organizations that have cited them, the video ends on iconic footage of two protesters waving Egyptian flags at the head of an abandoned, rubble-strewn street at night. Distant fireworks explode, presumably because of the fall of Mubarak. We stand behind the protesters, symbolically on their side. The imagery resonates with some of the more iconic images of the Arab revolution in general that often focus on one or two

⁷ The Indiegogo page and video can be found here:

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/mosireen-independent-media-collective-in-cairo#/>

participants standing in defiance.⁸ The overall video relays a sense of triumph, which will become a fleeting emotion but nonetheless remains an important index of a certain moment in time where popular power seemed in ascendance (or could at least be promoted that way in an online funding campaign with a straight face).



Image from Mosireen's Indiegogo promotional video, 2012

Omar Robert Hamilton provides sporadic updates on the webpage throughout 2012 regarding Mosireen's actions in producing videos, holding screenings, and engaging in media campaigns. For example, he writes, "One campaign we've been involved with for months has been the Right to Housing Initiative. Today we published the second video in a planned series of five that highlights the range of urban challenges in Egypt and their potential solutions" (Hamilton 2013). Such updates play into promoting Mosireen's ceaseless energy and multifaceted coverage of the revolution that remains largely ignored by commercial news media.

Yet Mosireen attempts to undercut part of the commercial logic of their Indiegogo campaign by noting under their "What You Get" section:

We've thought a lot about the perks system of these crowd funding websites. And we realised that you're not going to support us so that you can get a Mosireen t-

⁸ Some iconic photos are a Tunisian protester standing on the gun of a tank (<https://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>); an Egyptian protester against an armored vehicle (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TramJWvqenY>).

shirt or a mug. If you're going to support us it's going to be for the work, it's going to be because you consider yourself part of the global community pushing for change.

Mosireen self-fashions an idealized image of international supporters unconcerned with a simple exchange relation where they receive swag for a donation. Yet the collective nonetheless hedges its bets by stating in a following paragraph: “If you really want something in return, come by the workspace and we'll give you DVDs of films to spread around and help you make your own tea and coffee. And if you can't come by and want a DVD of our work, we'll find a way of getting it to you.” The tensions between the commercial logic of the campaign and Mosireen’s resistance towards it becomes fully apparent at this moment.

Despite the relative recent development of video activists being able to create online fundraising campaigns for their projects, the Left has long been embroiled in debates concerning the revolutionary imaginary’s relationship to commercial spectacle. Hans Magnus Enzensberger reflected on the warped utopian promises that commercial advertising promotes and the need for the Left to hijack and reroute these hopes as their own (2000). Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques urged the Left to embrace such charitable events like Live Aid since “when politics makes contact with this culture, it finds itself in touch with the cultural language which, for the majority of young people today (and for many not-so-young people, too), most authentically express how they experience the world. (Hall and Jacques 1988, p. 253). Although such charitable donations alone might not be adequate, it “implies a commitment,” not unlike what the Indiegogo page suggests for Mosireen (ibid).

More recently, Stephen Duncombe, one of the founders of Reclaim the Streets NYC during the 1990s, stated: “Spectacle is already part of our political and economic life, the important question is whose ethics does it embody and whose dreams does it explore?” (2007, p. 175). Granted, this engagement with spectacle has become even more fraught for present day organizers and activists with the rise of social media in calculating algorithms that favor certain content over others as well the immense amount of data mining and surveillance that such platforms necessitate. But concerns over using social media for activism develops upon longer debates of the Left’s need to engage with the commercial vernacular that most people are familiar with.

Furthermore, as James Clifford notes, diasporic experiences and discourses are “never clear of commodification” (1994, p. 313). We can see Mosireen negotiating the terrain between grassroots organizing and the commodified logic of fundraising on their Indiegogo webpage as they solicit assistance from international communities for their work.

Although negotiating these commercial online sites remains problematic, part of the solution seems to be creating alternative platforms to them, which is indeed what Mosireen has done. Even though such alternative digital venues do not

provide the same traffic that YouTube and other social media sites generate, they provide autonomy from the commercial logics that dictate the nature of social media.

Digital frontiers and alternative logics: Mosireen's webpage and the 858 Archive

Mosireen created its own website where its priorities and specific ways of framing the revolution could take precedence.⁹ Arabic serves as the primary language of the site. Not all of its sections are translated into English, and the few sections that are, one must scroll down to the English translations. This serves as an important statement whereby the site prioritizes an Egyptian-centered language rather than English, which has come to metonymically symbolize that of international capital and colonization. By prioritizing one language over another, Mosireen accents the website's ideal audience: people with Arabic backgrounds and most likely having some familiarity with the issues being presented.

The website contains a number of categories: a) a "DIY kit"; b) access to a small selection of their video archive; and c) a link to their 858 archive. The "DIY" kit provides shooting advice when using a camera such as basic rules regarding lighting and framing with many accompanying illustrated examples. It also provides advice on how to craft a story with particular emphasis upon montage and other information regarding a CopyLeft philosophy and the use of open software.¹⁰



Mosireen's website, written predominantly in Arabic

⁹ The Mosireen website can be found here: <https://www.mosireen.com/street-media-curriculum> (Accessed November 30, 2019)

¹⁰ CopyLeft is an arrangement where software and creative and intellectual work can be freely shared and re-mixed as long as attribution of the source is included. Open software is freely shared among users and is often improved through crowdsourcing.

Eight categories comprise the section of videos found on the webpage: Martyrs of the Revolution; Workers of the Revolution; Social Justice (with an emphasis upon housing, education, and healthcare); the Army (regarding its multiple atrocities); Mubarak's State (emphasizing violence and torture); The Muslim Brotherhood (and its violence unleashed against protesters); Connected Struggles (with videos covering protests in Gaza, Sudan, and Syria); and, finally, a link to Mosireen's YouTube page.

Unlike YouTube where commercial algorithms manipulate viewing habits by pushing viewers to the most popular of Mosireen videos, which are often the most violent, or away from Mosireen videos altogether to related content, the Mosireen website is mostly self-contained. Unlike YouTube where the number of views along with viewing time prioritizes certain videos over others, Mosireen's website thematically clusters under-represented content of the Egyptian revolution and remixes well-known material into new configurations. But the videos as whole remain singularly focused on revolutionary moments of Egypt or other areas of the Middle East and North Africa. The website holds too many videos to adequately cover here, so instead I will highlight select videos from an under-represented category (Workers of the Revolution) and a more popular category (Martyrs of the Revolution) where remixing popular material proves a central strategy towards reinterpretation.

The first thing worth noting about the videos under "Workers of the Revolution" is that they are more professionally filmed and edited and have longer running times. Rizk and Metwaly produced many of these videos although they remain unattributed since Mosireen believes that the images of the revolution do not belong to any one person. Metwaly suggests that longer videos were needed to start covering material outside of Tahrir Square: "We started putting things together like creating story or stories. Stories about workers, about the military trials on civilians, different stories. Not just things happening in the Square. What is it that constitutes a revolution? How does a revolution happen? That is how we started filming and making these short videos" (Metwaly 2013b). As mentioned earlier, many commentators and protesters suggested that the numerous worker revolts and strikes throughout the 2000s provided key mobilizations leading up to the 2011 revolution. As a result, Mosireen similarly prioritizes multiple testimonies from diverse group of workers in its videos. Doctors, various types of factory workers, and transit workers each have short films dedicated to their struggles.

In *We Inherit Disease* the camera tracks over dilapidated factory conditions where hazardous materials have eroded through concrete and metal, gutting the factory's infrastructure as rebar pokes out dangerously through walls.¹¹ The camera meticulously documents the decaying factory infrastructure as workers

¹¹ *We Inherit Disease*, 2012. The Mosireen Collective. Available at: <https://www.mosireen.com/labour-1> (Accessed December 1, 2019).

recount dangerous working conditions where hoses blow-up in their hands and metal erodes underneath their touch. The state of ruin exemplifies the disinvestment and disregard management holds for its workers. One worker succinctly summarizes: “They inherit millions. We inherit disease.”



Showing a decaying factory in We Inherit Disease, 2012

Another untitled video chronicles the strike of Ceramica Cleopatra workers who intend on taking over their factory themselves due management’s negligence.¹² The opening of the video employs montage to juxtapose this disjunction between promotional artifice and factory conditions. A slick commercial where a camera pans across shiny white porcelain toilets in an expansive bathroom and soundbites from an interview with the corporation’s owner who asserts, “The workers know how very well I treat them. Any worker of mine is my priority” contradict footage of workers crowded together striking outside the factory exclaiming, “Who gives a damn about us?” For much of the video’s ten minutes, workers recount inadequate wages, unsafe working conditions, and an absentee owner. At one moment, a worker addresses the bone erosion he suffers from using chemicals without gloves. He displays his outstretched, gnarled and discolored hands. Another worker testifies about how after having his hands injured, the hospital compounded the problem by botching the operation leaving him with stubs for fingers, which the camera cuts to as he speaks. The factory’s neglect is written on the workers’ bodies. Accounts of neglect mount

¹² All the videos for “Workers of the Revolution” can be found at:
<https://www.mosireen.com/labour-1>

throughout the video. Finally, a worker asserts, “These workers are the most rightful people to take over the factory and run it.” He states precisely how the workers plan on occupying the factory until they gain full rights to own it.

Most of the testimonies take place before other workers, suggesting a collective grievance. The sheer volume of testimonies regarding unsafe working conditions and low wages reveals how the mistreatment of the workers is not the result of an unfortunate but momentary oversight, but instead defines the very functioning of the factory. The workers clearly articulate this understanding through their accounts. One states: “This guy is leeching the life out of the people and puts it in his pockets, not the state.” Sherief Gaber, a member of Mosireen relates the profundity of letting workers speak for themselves: “As much as one might have an understanding of the political economy and to be able to critique it . . . to be able to hear this from a position of discrete experience and not just stay at this level of ‘me and my shop floor’ but to then to explode into the marcopolitical and the macroeconomic is one thing that is always amazing and incredibly powerful” (Gaber).



Ceramica Cleopatra workers expressing their collective grievance in a Mosireen 2012 video

Mosireen furthermore helped connect Egyptian factory workers with Zanon factory workers who occupied and took over their own factory in Argentina. Mosireen provided Arabic subtitles for the film *The Take* (2004), which chronicles the Zanon factory take over, and screened it for Ceramica workers. Samah Selim further notes, “A message of solidarity from the Zanon workers for striking Ceramica Cleopatra factory workers was also translated as part of this

Mosireen initiative and screened for the workers in Egypt” (Salem 2015, p. 85). Through Mosireen’s transnational contacts, the collective forged connections between global factory takeovers that united struggles among disparate populations. Although the Egyptian revolution had its own unique coordinates, the focus on workers’ revolts suggests a longer and larger international resistance taking place.

Mosireen’s section on Martyrs of the Revolution alternates between raw footage and a series of edited videos that are professionally shot and punctuated with testimonies. Some of the footage has not received much attention. For example, a brief one-and-a-half minute video follows a trail of blood in a single tracking shot.¹³ A row of stones on each side borders the trail with people sporadically squatting next to it. Chanting trails off in the distance, making the quiet moment unique and mournful compared to the general intensity of more popular footage documenting the revolution. A group congregates around its endpoint. The anonymity of the trail of blood, the ritualized placing of the stones around it, the congregated observers, and the relative silence of the tracking shot suggest a broader mourning for all of the martyrs of the revolution. Judith Butler notes the inherent politics that undergird mourning: because certain images of the dead do not appear in state and commercial media since they are not recognized as valid deaths “such prohibitions not only shore up a nationalism [of who can and cannot be mourned] . . . , but they also suppress any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its [the state’s] violence” (Butler 2004, p. 38). Mosireen carves out a space for the martyrs of the revolution on its website with the understanding that such a gesture represents both a personal and political stance that validates their lives through visual recognition and by the testimonies of those who love them.

Much of the footage found under this section has been excerpted and exhibited elsewhere before. As a result, many of the videos remix this footage into new configurations that often highlight relatives’ testimonies to add depth to those lives lost. The section leads with the video *Prayer of Fear*, a remix between older, iconic, amateur-shot footage and more recent footage shot by Mosireen. Many media studies scholars have suggested the importance of remix culture in creating political videos. Often such videos are comprised of a mixture of commercial content repurposed with new inflections. Yet *Prayer of Fear* only relies upon amateur and Mosireen-shot content. By doing so, it validates the importance of such footage in understanding the revolution in contradistinction from commercial accounts. Although some of this footage had circulated widely over commercial networks like Al Jazeera and CNN, Mosireen re-appropriates it away from the commercial terrain to construct an elegiac poem to the revolution and its martyrs.

¹³ All the videos regarding the martyrs can be found here: <https://www.mosireen.com/martyrs> (Accessed November 30, 2019).

Amateur footage of the revolution—undulating bodies congregated in Tahrir Square, corpses being dragged off, the vortex of movement and jostled framing while filming among the crowd, trails of tear gas descending upon bystanders—is set against the image of a lone figure, dressed in black hoodie with face covered by a gas mask. The chaotic and crowded amateur footage jars against the lone image of the figure walking along empty streets at night like an afterimage from more tumultuous days. We hear strained breathing through the gas mask while a female voice recites a poem by Mahmoud Ezzat, written for Mosireen about the revolution. Whether this voice belongs to the lone figure we see on screen is unclear. However, overall, the disjointed imagery yet meditative poem creates a dreamlike atmosphere as if the amateur footage might be flashbacks belonging to the lone figure or simply stressing the post-revolutionary effects of feeling like time is out of joint. The narrator speaks without inflection as if in shock further stressing disassociation.



An alienated figure in Mosireen's Prayer of Fear, 2013

The screen starts out black. We hear breathing and the words: “Deliver us from evil. Spare us this trial.” An extreme close up of the gas mask follows, rhythmically moving to the strides of the lone figure’s pace. After following closely behind the figure, the video cuts to celebratory footage with Mubarak’s fall: flags waving, fireworks exploding, music being played. Yet as the image continues it becomes increasingly violent, suggesting the revolution’s descent into chaos and martyrdom.

The video and poem juxtapose contradictory imagery without reconciling it, embedding us in their uncertainty and turbulence. The narrator asks: “Shall we

build a wall of pride?” We see a singular shot of nine planes ascending into a cloudless blue sky with contrails streaking behind them, an image suggesting freedom and a future full of possibilities. Then the narrator continues: “or a fountain of blood?” A shot follows of an interior cement floor. An oily substance pours down stairs flooding the floor. Inside and outside, ascent and descent of the two shots collide. Montage of opposites in action that illustrate in figurative ways the poem’s lines.

Prayer of Fear exemplifies Jacques Rancière’s notion of dissensus, a political act that creates conflict between our sensory perception and our ability to make sense of it (Rancière 2015). Dissensus unmoors habits and reroutes desires into new directions through such disorientation. Art plays an important role in fostering such dissensus. Rancière notes, “Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination disrupts the way in which bodies fit their function and destinations . . . As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective emancipation” (Rancière 2011, p. 72).

A Prayer of Fear illustrates dissensus on multiple levels. Its amateur footage reveals through its vortex of bodies celebrating and suffering how the Egyptian revolution provided a profound disruption to Mubarak’s regime and the operation of the Egyptian state. Furthermore, *Prayer of Fear* was created in 2013, after the fall of Mubarak, after the ousting of Muhamma Morsi, and during the installment of a new dictator, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. As a result, the video profoundly struggles with the revolution’s meaning and goals, leaving the viewer unsettled and uncertain of the way forward, not necessarily despondent but not hopeful either. The narrator incants: “Lead us out new like when we took the streets. A lot of kids walking. Not scared of anyone.” We see an image of youth perched on top of a high wall. Their legs dangle. Their bodies precarious. They are defiant and vulnerable at the same time, a crystalized metaphor for the contradictions of the revolution.



Kids representing hope and precarity in Mosireen's Prayer of Fear, 2013

Rancière asserts that, “The images of art do not supply weapons for battle. They help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible” (Rancière 2011, p. 103). This is precisely the discovery that many members of Mosireen ultimately had. Mostafa Bahagat realizes:

I went through the experience where I believed what I was filming would make a difference, that when people see what's happening through my eyes, they'd understand my point of view and will start reacting accordingly but later I discovered that it's not like that at all. It depressed me to realize that the camera doesn't work as a weapon. Then I realized it isn't my duty to change things but simply to document, to state what happened that it might be important in 10, 15 years if someone might want to rewrite history.” (Bahagat 2013).

The inheritances of the images captured remain uncertain. Perhaps some might be important years later for those who want to rewrite history and imagine new futures. But the videos document concrete actions at a certain moment in time that resist the abstractions of the State the often downplay or completely elide everyday people's ability to assert collective power in toppling state authority, if only for a brief moment, and asserting new ways of being, acting, thinking, and filming in the wake of such popular resistances. *Prayer of Fear* demonstrates where past and present collide in its poetic configuration where footage shot during the white heat of the revolution jars against more somber footage of the present moment. The video illustrates Walter Benjamin's observation of the

articulation of the past “as it flashes up at a moment of danger,” with the danger being the assumption of state power in the form of el-Sisi. *Prayer of Fear*’s poetic form represents dissensus in action where images from the past and present crash, where hope and fear blur.

By the time of the creation of *Prayer of Fear*, many members of Mosireen were feeling the limits of traditional documentary cinema. Aida Elkashef, who was briefly a part of Mosireen before moving on to pursue her own creative projects, notes during the early days of the revolution, “We don’t understand what is happening or we don’t know where we are going . . . And to produce a film about that was just wrong to begin with on so many levels” by leaving a sense of false hope or certainty that simply didn’t exist at the time (Elkashef 2014). Philip Rizk felt documentary’s limited range as it played to small, self-selective audiences unlike earlier moments where footage was constantly being shown in public settings like Tahrir Square. Similar to Elkashef, he also felt that the form of documentary “delimit[ed] yourself to the realm of the given, rather than moving into the realm of the possible, the realm of the imaginary” (Rizk 2016, p. 232).

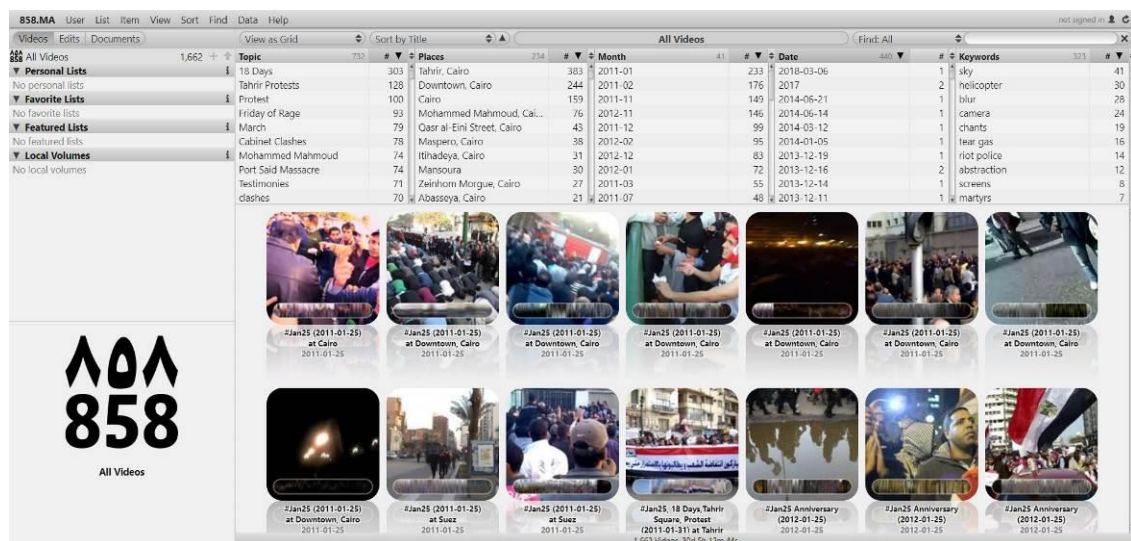
Growing misgivings about documentary form, activist burnout, and the increasing danger posed against any form of independent media by the el-Sisi regime caused Mosireen to stop video production in 2013. Yet their project was not over but instead took on a new incarnation as they dedicated their energies to producing one of the most remarkable online databases of archival footage yet produced: the 858 archive.

Mosireen members held retreats outside the country during 2016 where they discussed developing a new archive (Mosireen 2018). Debates ensued as to what to call it with main points of contention being between calling it “an-archive,” which gestured towards Mosireen’s anarchist tendencies, or something more specific to the Egyptian revolution. Neither side could agree on a name so they compromised by calling it 858, based on the total amount of hours of raw footage the archive hosted at the time (Mosireen unknown date). The raw footage runs from minutes to hours. Footage can be searched by place, topic, date, and certain keywords. Some of the material has been translated into English but most has not. The sheer volume of unseen footage is overwhelming yet intoxicating along with the freedom to roam throughout it without any external distractions like ads popping up or algorithms suggesting new paths to follow.

Mosireen felt the creation of an independent raw footage archive as necessary for multiple reasons. First, much of the material from the various so-called Arab Spring revolutions had been scrubbed from the internet. Google announced in 2017 that it removed over eight million videos based on a machine-learning algorithm. Mosireen members noticed how many non-violent videos from the Syrian revolution went missing as a result. Therefore, there was a need for an independent archive that could safely house such footage (Mosireen unknown date).

Second, Mosireen felt that the fragmented nature of the archive best mirrored the turbulence and kaleidoscopic views of the revolution. One unnamed Mosireen member notes how the archive “is the only form that can accurately represent the revolution, I think, because it is not authored and it is not linear and it is not one narrative. It is totally poly-vocal and messy and with hundreds of different cameras at different times all putting something together something that is not an A to B story. Somehow, it is the most parallel form to the one the revolution itself took” (Mosireen 2018).

But in order for the archive to properly represent the poly-vocal nature of the revolution, the collective felt it needed its own space free from the commercial logic of YouTube. Although much of the material is available on YouTube, Mosireen stresses that the 858 website “has its own totality and its own flow, so that you can take your own path through it as a viewer, which you don’t get on YouTube so much because you are surrounded by the sea of everything else. There is something in the separatedness and the containment of it that makes it a longer and larger experience” (Mosireen 2018). The experience is unique since the archive harkens both backwards and forwards—both to the web 1.0 before it had been commercialized but also an act of resistance in the present as it asserts an autonomy free from capitalist logic that dictates most online platforms. Navigating the site feels like both a residual and emergent practice—respectively a moment before capital hostilely took over cyberspace and a distinct resistance against a near capitalist monopoly of the web. The site confronts users with nothing but their own choices determining the videos they explore, a disorienting experience where we are normally accustomed to information overload from the circuits of capital attempting to cull our choices.



The non-commercial logic of Mosireen’s 858 website

The site's autonomy from capital and other distractions is important in allowing users to interact with materials in the most direct fashion possible. Mosireen sees the archival material's primary purpose to be used and remixed into new configurations. Mosireen encourages, "What we need is to find new ways of looking at things, and for new eyes to look at this footage, get in there and pull out things that we haven't seen yet, because we've spent three years editing stuff, then three years indexing it, so we need a new perspective" (Mosireen 2018). They want to utilize the full potential of the digital environment. As Dale Hudson and Patricia Zimmermann note, screens serve less as surfaces in a digital world and more as interfaces and points of contact between physical and virtual worlds (2015, p. 16). 858 becomes such a contact zone.

This is precisely how I have used the archive in my own classes. Students are assigned to pick a minute's worth of raw footage from the archive and to pair it with one of the assigned class readings about the Egyptian revolution: an interview with Mosireen about the archive, Mosireen's manifesto, "Revolution Triptych," and sections from Omar Robert Hamilton's novel, *The City Always Wins*. Students present for five minutes and field questions for a remaining another five minutes. The content covered in class, I announce in advance, will be dictated by the students.

Some students rise to the occasion while others go through the motions. But, in general, many students engage more thoroughly with the archive than I anticipated. The experience is unique to many of them who have never had such self-contained online experiences with a site. Many are completely unfamiliar with a non-commercial website, and the newness of the experience both seems utterly foreign and yet captivating. Out of this engagement, sometimes a truly new vision emerges between the student's interest and the archival material.

One of my students picked a clip of people praying in public at night in Tahrir Square.¹⁴ The video only lasts for roughly a minute as we watch people bow and exclaim, "Allah Akbar," over unsteady cell phone footage. My student, who is half Middle Eastern, said the clip reminded her of her father who grew up in Lebanon and experienced war there at fourteen. The clip "reminded me of my father and the hardships he had gone through when he was in Lebanon, fighting men while he was only in middle school. The faith he had kept for many years after reflected itself within those men who chose to resort to peace and perseverance [as seen in the video]." She continues that watching those on video exclaim "Allah Akbar" was a profound moment since it was "something that is familiar to Middle Easterners" and not assumed to be a "phrase of terrorism" that it is "for Americans after 9/11" (Melkonian 2019).

The personal way in which this video resonated for the student as well as her eloquent explanation before the class provided a stirring moment. She asserted her Middle Eastern identity, reclaimed a phrase that has been demonized by Islamophobes, and showed how the struggles occurring in Egypt can relate to

¹⁴ The video can be found here: <https://858.ma/BWK/player/00:08:23.154>.

past struggles within the Middle East and impact a younger generation. She illustrated a contact zone between physical and virtual worlds, personal and political spaces, and relayed a moment of the Egyptian revolution that shuttles among past and present concerns. Through her analysis, my student revealed how her struggles, her father's struggles, the struggles of Lebanon and Egypt are all related and part of an invisible continuum that a well-selected image can help unlock with fresh eyes. If there is any emergent practices that 858 forges, it is this: the ability of non-commercial forms of the digital terrain to interface with everyday people's lives where historical and geographical connections can be deepened and enriched. It reveals a moment of self-discovery while sifting through the databases of other people's struggles in the desire to better understand them and see how they unite with aspirations of our own. 858 suggests the new possibilities that digital archives unleash when utilized in thoughtful directions.

Additionally, the encounter between Mosireen's archive, an anonymously shot video, and a user navigating the website embodies a diasporic cultural moment at work. As Stuart Hall observes, such encounters are "able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak" (1990, p. 236-237). Elsewhere, he notes how "culture itself has been fundamentally and irrevocably diasporized . . ." as capital itself has increasingly stretched itself across the globe and provided expanded communication and transportation technologies (2017, p. 169). This is reflected in Mosireen's practices that seize upon these technologies to exploit them for more democratic and liberatory purposes. The 858 archive shuttles between documenting the concrete struggles occurring at distinct times and places and providing a digital platform that allows such raw material to be incorporated into other struggles and lines of thought whatever they may be. The archive represents a new form of potential collectivity that encourages autonomy and self-determination on users' part by confronting them with 858 hours of raw video footage to see what they might make of it. One can view the archive as an extension of the revolution in assisting people with seizing control of their lives outside of the circuits of capital and explore where the past and present might converge in new directions forward.

Conclusion

The Mosireen Collective signals the ways in which much global media activism has been developing: diasporic in nature, anarchist-inflected, and reliant on a certain level of class privilege to pursue its ends. Mosireen's multiple iterations and ability to work across digital platforms and physical spaces shows a dynamic type of media activism at work that is responsive to the various historical moments and pressures it operates within. Their use of video has morphed throughout their development. The collective began by compiling and screening mostly other people's rough footage in Tahrir Square and elsewhere. As the revolution continued and more coherent stories were needed about

groups outside of Tahrir Square, Mosireen began producing their own short-form videos that they posted on YouTube and on their own website. Such global digital media activism both employs commercial platforms for publicity and fundraising while maintaining more autonomous digital sites that prioritize other less acknowledged perspectives of the revolution. Although the alternative forms of representation that Mosireen promoted remain important, equally worth stressing is the dynamic ways in which the collective altered its practices to new demands.

The collective not only reveals a multifaceted approach to digital media by employing commercial and non-commercial forms as well as understanding the ways in which digital and physical terrains must interface, but it also relates how various forms of cultural practices overlay one another. Their residual practices of a Third Cinema intersect with dominant practices of social media websites while attempting to establish emergent non-commercial modes of digital interaction with the creation of the 858 archive. These negotiations between commodified and grassroots forms of culture signal that complex ways in which media activism and diasporic struggles mobilize upon both. Neither occupy a purified terrain but instead chart through messy realms between already existing cultures and unforeseen paths into the future.

The Mosireen Collective also directs attention to the privileged place many media activists occupy in such diasporic struggles and the challenges in allying themselves with working-class movements. This is not a new challenge but has often arisen within innumerable social movements of the past where cross-class alliances were being forged. Walter Benjamin, for example, posited the intellectual as a betrayer of one's own class by transforming oneself "from a supplier of the productive apparatus into an engineer who sees it as his [sic] task to adapt this apparatus to the purposes of the proletarian revolution" (1978, p. 237-238). But the danger, however, as Benjamin points out, is that "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes, indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question" (1978, P. 229). We witness this in action as Mosireen attempted to adapt various forms of commercial technologies like social media, video cameras, and cellphones in new directions that serve broader constituencies than they were originally meant for as well as challenging the very apparatus of production that made them possible in the first place. This challenge consumes most diasporic media activist collectives like Kazeboon and the Syrian-based Abounaddara in navigating commercialized platforms and technology along with their own class privileges in their pursuit of democratizing digital media and harnessing it for revolutionary purposes.¹⁵ Such collectives can never be free of such contradictions, but their work can become blueprints and/or

¹⁵ Ryan Watson writes about Abounaddara in his forthcoming book, *Radical Documentary and Global Crisis: Militant Evidence in the Digital Age* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 2021).

warnings regarding paths forward and dead ends that future diasporic movements might take in overcoming class, geographical, gender, racial, ableist, and many other divides. The Mosireen Collective marks one of the most sophisticated recent iterations of diasporic, digital media activism we have witnessed so far.

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