Burning images
*Performing effigies as political protest*
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Exercising Protest

Effigy protests in a number of Muslim-majority countries—Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine—have featured prominently in the Western news media over the past two decades. They have provided vivid symbolic images to highlight some of the most volatile international conflicts of these years. Most protests addressed the contentious military engagement of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, while some were staged as objections to a range of incidents initiated by Western groups or individuals and experienced as insults to Islam, like the Mohammad cartoons or a number of Quran burnings. Yet another cluster of effigy protests were staged in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria during the Arab Spring between 2011 and 2014, where demonstrators performed effigies depicting their own dictatorial rulers in order to change their countries’ politics.

The events I address in this more lengthy chapter did not occur in a single nation-state but were spread over many countries with different cultures and histories. While they share Islam as the majority religion, they may even be more united through their relationships with the “West,” through shared experiences of colonialism and contemporary experiences of Western cultural, economic, and military hegemony. Then again, this shared experience might be perceived as a united phenomenon solely from a Western media perspective. This perspective is often shaped by the essentializing discourse on the “Muslim world” and effigy protests tend to be framed as the expressions
of “Muslim anger” toward “the West.” Since the image collection I work with is gathered mainly from English-language media, this study examines these events through the perspective of that media. While I cannot disengage from this perspective, it does not completely determine the meaning of the images either. As photography theorist Ariella Azoulay, whose scholarship I discuss in the introduction, suggests, a photograph is a complex cultural construct involving multiple actors whose contribution cannot be entirely erased. Reading the images for the traces of the photographed subjects’ agency in relation to the historical and political context of the event, I attempt to counter the Western media framing. I then show how actors in these countries use the Western media to communicate with audiences in the West and express their resistance to the West’s hegemonic influence. Being aware that the practice of burning effigies is no more than a symptom of geopolitical developments, I attempt to delineate the genealogical lines of effigy protests in a number of Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East and South Asia. I investigate why they have recently become increasingly visible and how they function in the contemporary global media environment.

In his 1981 book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the World*, postcolonial studies scholar Edward Said had already concluded that Western media discourse about Islam is severely biased.1

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Said analyzes the relationship between the world of Islam and the West through Western media discourse on “Islam,” especially US media coverage of the 1979 Iran hostage crisis when revolutionary students occupied the US embassy in Tehran and took the embassy personnel hostage. He accuses the Western media of gross simplification and vilification when using the signifier “Islam.” Lumping together billions of people, “dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages, and, of course, all infinite number of different experiences,” “reduces them all to a special malevolent and unthinking essence.”

Thirty years later, after 9/11 and a rising tide of “Islamist terrorist attacks,” postcolonial studies scholars Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin suggest in their book Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11 (2011) that the media discourse has not changed much. The stereotype of the backward, irrational, and violent Muslim is still prevalent in Western mainstream media. Historian of the Middle East Cemil Aydin points out that the dialogic nature of the discourse of the “Muslim world,” fueled by both Western Islamophobia built on the “legacy of imperial racialization of Muslim-ness” and by various forms of pan-Islamism, developed from the “intellectual and political strategies of Muslim resistance to this racialized identity.”

While most protests I describe express, first and foremost,

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2 Said, Covering Islam, xvi.
3 Said, Covering Islam, 8.
a resistance to specific policies of Western countries, they also react to the continuous malicious stereotyping in the Western media—calling for the recognition of diverse Muslim communities and their concerns. This trend would signal the emergence, or rather, the existence of an Islamic transnational public sphere—a public sphere not bound by a nation-state but one including communities in Muslim-majority countries as well as diasporic communities in the West. Scholar of comparative religion Armando Salvatore notes that this transnational Islamic public sphere actually precedes the globalization spreading from the West. He suggests that this Islamic public sphere builds on older networks based on traditional imaginaries of justice and the common good, and the idea of a global Islamic community or *Ummah*, and that it indeed fulfills the ideas of social connectivity and the public use of reason on which sociologist Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere relies.\(^7\)

Political theorist Nancy Fraser, however, has pointed out that transnational public spheres lack the normative legitimacy and political efficacy on which the public sphere in Habermas’s political theory is based.\(^8\) In her view, they have to be seen as weak public spheres, which are not

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9 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 75–76.
empowered by institutional integration, but are merely sites of opinion and will formation. They are formed by, in Fraser’s words, “subaltern counterpublics” who express their identities, interests, and needs in contestation with the dominant discourse. Her analysis resonates with Said, Aydin as well as Morey and Yaqin who observe that the essentializing discourse of both Western Islamophobia and pan-Islamism have developed in reaction to each other.

It has to be pointed out that the protests seem to confirm the Western media stereotype, which for the most part frames Muslims as irrational, anti-democratic, and violent. This is particularly true of effigy protests as they stage images of violent death, even though they are in themselves non-violent, symbolic expressions. This reflects the viciousness of the stereotype and the circularity of the media dynamic: to become visible and heard in the Western media, protesters have to perform the stereotype of the angry Muslim. It could be seen also as an affirmative re-appropriation of the stereotype, and a sign that there is indeed reason to be angry. Having to operate under the terms of the news media, protesters from these very diverse countries use effigy protest as a strategy to gain access to the dominant Western discourse and have their voices be heard. At least to some degree, with the photographs of effigy protests in the news, they are able to regain agency and express their opinion in the public arena of Western media.

10 Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 67.
Virginia, US—Participants playing the roles of anti-American demonstrators burn an effigy outside a fake US Consulate during a US Diplomatic Security Service High Threat training program held at a mock town named Erehwon, “nowhere” spelled backwards, on a rural Virginia military base, Thursday. Two years after the deadly attack on a U.S. facility in Benghazi, Libya, the Diplomatic Security Service that is responsible for protecting some 100,000 Americans around the world has dramatically expanded training. (caption)

This Associated Press photograph of a motley group of protesters burning an effigy in an urban environment is very puzzling. At first glance, it seems to be just another protest in a Muslim country, of which we have seen so many in the last fifteen years. A closer examination reveals a number of discrepancies. The clothes worn by protesters vaguely resemble a variety of Muslim attire worn over jeans. But why would a Western-looking man—just visible at the right edge of the photograph—be talking on his telephone in the middle of a volatile protest? Furthermore, the group is strangely uncoordinated and unfocused, the performance has no center, there is no audience to address, and the place is completely nondescript. The caption of the photograph reveals that this “protest” was held outside a fake US consulate in a mock town named Erehwon. It was staged as an exercise to train security personnel for US embassies on a rural Virginia military base. The initial reason for the exercise, as stated in the caption, was the 2012 storming of the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya in which US Ambassador to Libya John Christopher Stevens and three security personnel were killed. Libyan militias had attacked the compound under the guise of region-wide protests against the inflammatory movie trailer “Innocence of Muslims”—many of which indeed featured burning effigies of President Barack Obama.¹²

A similar exercise was staged in 1961 in Salisbury,

¹² Effigies of President Obama, the film producer, and US pastor Terry Jones were burned in Pakistan (24), India (7), Afghanistan (5), Bangladesh (5), Sri Lanka (2) Palestine (2), and Lebanon (1). The film itself was never produced.
England as a British *Pathé* newsreel reports. In the British Army training scenario, the ruler of an unspecified Middle-Eastern country appeals to the British for help against an unfriendly neighbor. As part of the scenario, the troops encounter a group of “Arab” protesters who burn an effigy, shout slogans, and confront the British troops. There is a lot of irony in the voice-over and performance of soldiers playing Arab protesters. Nevertheless, the exercise acutely reveals the United Kingdom’s myth of its relevance in the Middle East. This training scenario was likely devised in reaction to certain events during the Suez Crisis five years earlier, when the UK, France, and Israel briefly occupied the Suez Canal Zone. When the British withdrew its troops, the Egyptian population in Port Said celebrated by hanging effigies of British soldiers and the British prime minister. These images appeared widely in the international news media at the time, and I assume reached a wide audience in Egypt and other countries in the region. The effigy performance in the 1961 exercise in Salisbury appears then as an echo of the 1956 effigy performance in Egypt. Just as the 2014 exercise in Virginia, it seems to have been a way to digest the strategy of the enemy and psychologically process the humiliation that the retreat from Egypt constituted. The exercises tacitly acknowledge the effigy performances’ effectiveness in delivering a message while also mockingly incorporating it into the UK’s own repertoire.

Spring Festival in Egypt

The 1956 effigy burning in Egypt might have been especially humiliating for its resemblance to the British “Guy Fawkes Day” customs in which effigies are burned each 5th of November. The similarity to the British holiday was no coincidence, since Port Said at the Mediterranean entry point to the Suez Canal has a similar festival called *Harq al-Limby* (Burning al-Limby) during which effigies of the British Lord Allenby are burned.\(^\text{14}\) The traces of this festival date back to 1919, when Egypt was a British protectorate, and the Suez Canal was under British administration. During World War I, large contingents of troops from India, Australia, and New Zealand were shipped through the Suez Canal, and the costs to the Egyptian economy and population were high.\(^\text{15}\) Given their war contributions, Egyptian nationalists expected complete independence after the war. On November 12, 1918, one day after Armistice Day, a delegation of the Egyptian Nationalist movement under its leader Saad Zaghloul approached the High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Reginald Wingate. The delegation demanded discussion of Egyptian independence, but was dismissed. Instead, the commissioner ordered a crackdown on the Egyptian independence movement and had Zaghloul arrested in March 1919. The country erupted in demonstrations and strikes, sparking the first Egyptian

\(^{14}\) Al-Limby is a spoonerism of Allenby.

\(^{15}\) For example, the United Kingdom conscripted over 1.5 million Egyptians into the Labour Corps to support the British troops. *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Egyptian revolution of 1919.”
Revolution. Lord Allenby, the much-hated Field Marshal of the Egyptian Expeditionary Forces, was dispatched to suppress the unrest. It might have been at the height of the revolution that Port Said residents burned his effigy for the first time, thereafter becoming an established custom.

What inspired the Egyptian protesters in 1919 to burn their enemy in effigy is unclear. Anthropologist Mériam N. Belli describes in her book *An Incurable Past: Nasser’s Egypt Then and Now* (2013) the *Harq al-Limby*, the annual festive burning of al-Limby, based on interviews with Port Said residents conducted in the early 2000s. Some of her sources contend that the burning of Allenby’s effigy was invented by the people of Port Said, while others refer to unspecified customs from the countryside. Belli follows the latter argument and suggests that the burning of Allenby might have been an adaptation of calendrical rituals involving bonfires practiced in the Upper Egyptian countryside—without being able to point to any concrete local tradition. As an alternative, I suggest that the Port Said

residents appropriated the British custom of burning Guy Fawkes. Though I also have no concrete evidence, I present a number of clues to support my hypothesis.

The city of Port Said was founded in 1859 at the entry point to the Suez Canal in the Mediterranean Sea. When the canal was finished in 1869 and operations began, Port Said already had a sizable European population, consisting of workers and administrators of the Suez Canal. In 1882, the Canal Zone came under British control, and presence of British civil and military personnel greatly increased. In this ethnically diverse city, foreign workers interacted socially with the local population, as Belli describes.

The celebration of Guy Fawkes Day was at that time still widely practiced in the UK and its colonies. It is rather likely that the British expat workers in Port Said also celebrated their beloved custom, where their Egyptian co-workers and neighbors would witness the effigy burnings. In the UK, the holiday involved groups of neighborhood children constructing their own Fawkes effigy from old clothes stuffed with straw, and begging for “a penny for the Guy” by displaying their dummies. Neighborhoods

22 On October 28, 1969, an article in the Ottawa Citizen on Guy Fawkes Day noted “many English youngsters have already made their ‘guy’—the effigy to be burned in the bonfire.”
and even entire towns would sometimes compete for the most spectacular bonfire. The descriptions of the Port Said Allenby effigy burning by some of Belli’s informants closely corresponds to this tradition.\textsuperscript{23} Remembering the festival from the 1940s, they describe fabricating the dolls from old cloth stuffed with straw, collecting money for the celebration, and competing between neighborhoods for the most spectacular burning. That these elements were part of both Guy Fawkes Day and the al-Limby festival, supports the hypothesis that the latter was appropriated from the first.

During WWI, the presence of British military in the Canal Zone further increased. A large contingent of British troops was stationed in Port Said and even more soldiers passed through on troop transports from and to India, Australia, New Zealand, and other parts of the Commonwealth, where Guy Fawkes Day was also celebrated.\textsuperscript{24} It is again likely that the soldiers passing through or stationed in the Canal Zone, celebrated this holiday as a welcome diversion from their military duties. It might be even more likely that the soldiers burned effigies of Kaiser Wilhelm on Armistice Day on November 11, 1918—six days after Fawkes day—to celebrate the end of the war, like many of their comrades all over the English-speaking world. These celebratory burnings of Wilhelm occurred, for instance, in England, Northern Ireland, France, Australia, New Zealand, the US, and Canada. I suggest, therefore, that Egyptian nationalists in Port Said appropriated the burning

\textsuperscript{23} Belli, \textit{An Incurable Past}, 77–79.
\textsuperscript{24} Guy Fawkes Day is celebrated in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Bermuda to this day.
of Fawkes and/or of the German Kaiser to demand the end of the British occupation. From this first protest onwards it was associated with the resistance against British colonial rule and repeatedly used until after independence when it became part of the annual spring festival Sham el-Nessim in Port Said.

Great Britain granted Egypt independence in 1922, but continued to exert large influence on Egyptian politics. In 1952, the second Egyptian revolution was fought to win complete independence from Britain and brought renewed relevance to the Ḥarq al-Limby tradition as a sign of resistance. In January of that year, the effigy of a British soldier was hanged in a Cairo street.

In 1956, Great Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt and occupied the Suez Canal area and Sinai, but had to retreat under pressure from the US and Soviet Union. In Port Said, effigies of British Prime Minister Anthony Eden were paraded in December 1956. One effigy strung from wire across the street under a portrait of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser attracted a lot of media attention as it marked the end of British occupation. A film clip from the British Pathé archives shows not just the one effigy, but a second being beaten by Egyptian protesters. Three weeks later, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was burned in effigy in Arish, on the Sinai Peninsula, when Israel completed the withdrawal from the peninsula, and again in March 1957 for Gaza’s celebration of the anticipated return to Egyptian administration.
Photographs from December 1957 show President Nasser during the anniversary celebrations of Victory Day in Port Said. Surrounded by a jubilant crowd, he is seen passing under an effigy hanging above: a sign of protest turned rally decoration. The hanging effigy had again become part of the memorialization of the Egyptian struggle for independence, a symbol of victory over the despised Western powers: Britain, France, and Israel. With the success of the revolution and the renewed national pride that resulted from it, the ritual of hanging and burning effigies of Allenby became a fixed part of the memory culture in Port Said. As part of the spring festival, the Harq al-Limby was celebrated in the streets of the town, where the neighborhoods would compete in creating the best Allenby effigy and the biggest bonfire. The hanging and burning of effigies became an effective symbolic performance to protest foreign occupation and celebrate the restoration of sovereignty.

Over time, the effigy of the actual personage Lord Allenby transformed into “the Allenby” or “al-Limby,” a general figure representing evil foreign influence. As the memory of Allenby’s role in Egypt faded, his figure was often replaced by dummies representing the contemporary enemies of Egypt. In the 1970s, these were Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, in 1991 Saddam Hussein, and at the end of the 1990s Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Sometimes sports personalities, football referees, and abstract evils like “corruption” figured as the al-Limby, but it seems that the effigies never represented Egyptian politicians. A few photographs give an insight into how the effigies were used as decorations for the spring festival. Before they were burned, the al-Limby effigies were displayed for a number of days suspended above the street, on a stage filled with characters with placards indicating their names, or carried through the streets in a procession. In 2000, the Egyptian government outlawed the burning of effigies during Harq al-Limby out of fire and pollution concerns, which is why the effigies of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2001 and US President George W. Bush in 2003 were not burned but paraded and ridiculed.

From Egypt to Palestine

In addition to the effigy protests commemorating the Egyptian struggle for independence in Port Said, there are reports of a few more effigies being burned in the process of consolidating the Egyptian sovereign nation-state. In 1959, an effigy of Nasser was hanged in Baghdad for his support of the pro-Arab revolt in Mosul, Iraq. In retaliation, and because of his stance against joining the United Arab Republic under Nasser, an effigy of Iraqi Prime Minister Qasim was hanged in effigy in Cairo. After the Six-Day War with Israel, in 1967, when most Egyptian Jews were expelled from the country, effigies of Jews were hanged in the streets of Cairo and others representing Israel and the US; US President Lyndon Johnson and British Prime Minister Harald Wilson were burned in Port Said for their countries’ lack of support against Israel.

It is during the Egyptian conflict with Israel it appears that the practice of burning effigies seems to have been adopted by protesters in other countries of the region. In Tunis in 1965, an effigy of Nasser was paraded because he criticized Tunisia for not joining the Arab boycott of West Germany over its plan to recognize the state of Israel. I was not able to find photographs of the effigy parade in Tunisia, but the way the Queen Elizabeth’s effigy is hanged in Lebanon, just after the Six-Day War in 1967, on wires above the street, closely resembles photographs from instances in Egypt in 1952 and 1956 featuring effigies of British occupiers. This resemblance in form makes it seem plausible that Lebanese protesters saw the Egyptian
protests in the news and replicated them.

In 1969, an effigy of Dayan was burned by a group of children in Nablus (part of Jordan but then occupied by Israel) and in 1970 in the UK “hundreds of pro-Arab demonstrators paraded with an effigy of Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan hanging from a makeshift gallows” over ongoing hostilities during the slow-boiling “War of Attrition.” In Lebanon, US envoys were paraded and burned in effigy by Palestinian refugees in April 1970 and May 1971, when they met with Lebanon’s leaders to discuss the situation in the Middle East. Palestinian expats also burned effigies of their enemies like King Hussein of Jordan in 1971 in New York and in France of Meir, following the Israeli prime minister’s attendance at a meeting of the Socialist International in 1973. The Israeli-Egyptian peace process from 1977 to 1979 led to fierce protests in the region. Sadat effigies were burned in Lebanon (two in 1977 and 1978 and one in 1979 accompanied by effigies of US President Jimmy Carter and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin), in Palestine in 1978, and twice in Iraq in 1979. In 1978, Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), was hanged in effigy for the PLO’s resistance against the peace process between Egypt and Israel and their alleged involvement in the assassination of a close associate of Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat in Cyprus.

Protests in the Israeli-Palestine conflict that feature effigies continue, often sparked by inflammatory events like the shooting of Palestinians on the Temple Mount by a Jewish civilian in 1982, the Sabra and Shatila massacre in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon in 1982, Israeli military offensives in Lebanon and Gaza, and the assassination of Palestinian leaders. Effigy protests accompany all stages in the ever-changing never-resolving conflict. Between 1980 and 2017, all Israeli Prime Ministers and all US Presidents were burned in effigy: Menachem Begin (6), Ronald Reagan (4), Yitzhak Shamir (3), George Bush (3), Yitzhak Rabin (6), Benjamin Netanyahu (13), Bill Clinton (2), Ehud Barak (3), Ariel Sharon (19), George W. Bush (19), Ehud Olmert (13), Barack Obama (10), and Donald Trump (2).

Almost 10,000 people carrying Palestinian and Lebanese flags marched in Molems west Beirut on Wednesday to protest and Israeli’s killing of seven Palestinians near Tel Aviv this weekend. . . . The protesters burned effigies of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in front to the five-story U.N. office. (Sun-Journal, Lewiston, ME, 24 May 1990)
Most protests were staged in Palestine and also in Lebanon, which houses large numbers of Palestinian refugees. Additionally, groups in other countries often feel the urge to express their position in the conflict and pressure their governments to take action. I list a few incidents in the Israel-Palestine conflict that show the breadth of Muslim communities’ responses in many countries. In 2006, in protest against Israel’s offensive in South Lebanon, protesters burnt effigies of US President George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in Palestine (1), Pakistan (5), India (4), Turkey (3), Syria (1), Iraq (1), and Malaysia (1). In protest of the 2008–2009 Gaza War, effigies of Olmert, Bush, Obama, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni are burned in Palestine (3), Lebanon (2), Pakistan (3) Afghanistan (1), India (1), Indonesia (1), Syria (1), and Azerbaijan (1).

In this partial genealogy, I chart the use of effigies in protests in Egypt and the countries of the Levant and from the first mentioned appearance in Egypt around 1919, when they appear to have been appropriated from a British celebration to protest against colonial rule. Over the last century, effigies recur in the continuing struggle against Western influence in Egypt and the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and have become an established form to protest foreign influence in the region.
At mosques in Jordan, preachers lashed out at Arab leaders and accused them of being “puppets of the Americans and the Jews.” . . . Palestinian youths at the Ein el-Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon set fire to a Barak effigy dressed in a T-shirt splashed with red and the words “specializes in murdering children.” “Scum of the earth” was scrawled on an effigy of Albright. (Spokesman-Review, Spokane, WA, 14 Oct 2000)

In Hamas-ruled Gaza, about 5,000 supporters of the Islamic militant group marched in the streets to protest the visit, burning effigies of Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. (Kentucky New Era, Hopkinsville, 9 Jan 2008)

Protesters in Gaza City burned Abbas’ effigy, denouncing him as puppet of the United States, which lifted an aid embargo against the West Bank this week while maintaining it in Gaza. (Eugene Register-Guard, OR, 22 Jun 2007)
Hostage Crisis in Tehran

On November 4, 1979, an angry mob of young Islamic revolutionary students overran the US Embassy in Tehran, taking more than sixty Americans hostage. The occupiers demanded the extradition of Shah Reza Pahlavi who was being held in the US after traveling there for medical treatment. For weeks, demonstrations were staged for the international news in front of the embassy, and almost daily an effigy of President Carter or Uncle Sam was paraded and burned. The hostage crisis was accompanied by intense media coverage in the US, which the Iranian protesters and state officials exploited handily to demonstrate their defiance of the world power. The 52 hostages were held for 444 days and only released the day after President Ronald Reagan was sworn into office.

At that time, the US was closely associated with the authoritarian regime of the Shah. They had engineered the Shah’s return to power in 1953, and supported his suppression of dissent from leftists and the religious conservatives. From 1963 to 1978 the Shah introduced far-reaching reforms to modernize the country, which profoundly changed social and political structures. The disenchantment with the Shah’s policies became the driving force of a sustained campaign that lead to the revolution in 1979. It was supported by a wide coalition of religious and nationalist groups, secular and religious

students, merchants, and intellectuals. “The intensely egalitarian, anti-establishment and communitarian aspects of Shi’i Islam [were] marshalled against the tyrannical, agnostic, frivolous and iniquitous features of the rule of the elite.”

After months of demonstrations and strikes that paralyzed the country, Pahlavi abdicated and left Iran on January 16, 1979. On January 30, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from exile in Paris, where he had posed as moderate while working for the Islamic revolution. In April 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran was installed by national referendum and Ayatollah Khomeini became Supreme Leader, a supervising position above all legislative, executive, and judicial institutions in Iran.

Early on, the struggle against the Shah had been taken to the streets outside of Iran. Already in 1972, Iranian students in the UK had protested against his visit by trying to burn his effigy. These protests intensified in 1976 and his effigies were burned in the US, the UK, Italy, Germany, and India. After his abdication, Iranian protesters focused their anger on the US, which favored a moderate secular government and tried to sideline the Islamic activist movement. In February, the first effigy of Uncle Sam was burned, followed by effigies of Carter and Begin in May. In November 1979, radical students stormed the US embassy and took its personnel hostage. In the first weeks of the hostage crisis, the daily burning of Carter and Uncle Sam effigies firmly established it as a means to protest

31 They were prevented by the police from doing so.
US interference in Iranian politics.\textsuperscript{31} The first effigies were three-dimensional caricatures, often cut-out shapes with drawings of Carter or the Shah, with ridiculing and demonizing features: pointy ears, horns, and protruding teeth—the typical attributes of Satan.\textsuperscript{32} The politicians’ names were attached to the effigies, complemented by defamatory signs: the Star of David, the Swastika, dollar signs, the American Flag, the acronym CIA, or the Israeli flag.

Already since 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini had framed the Shia rituals of Ashura, which commemorates the death of Muhammad’s grandson Imam Husayn ibn Ali during the Battle of Karbala, in political terms to further his goal of establishing an Islamic Republic. The religious processions of Ashura were transformed into mass protests against the Shah.\textsuperscript{33} Part of the Persian tradition of Ashura is \textit{Ta’ziyeh}, the passion play narrating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein ibn Ali. Exemplifying Shia Islam’s position of resistance in relation to power, Ta’ziyeh is also a social and political drama, a theatre of protest.\textsuperscript{34} It provides many moments for the people to actively participate in the drama, and identify with the narrative of struggle and sacrifice. Extending the symbolism of Karbala, Ta’ziyeh lends itself as a framework to recast contemporary conflicts in the universal framework


\textsuperscript{33} Peter Chelkowski, review of “Warring Souls, Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-revolution Iran,” by Roxanne Varzi, \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East} 29, no. 2 (2009): 344.

\textsuperscript{34} Hamid Dabashi, “Ta’ziyeh as Theatre of Protest,” \textit{TDR} 49, no. 4 (2005): 92–94.
of the fight of good versus evil.

A minor event in the Persian Ta’ziyeh used to be *Umar kushan* (the killing of Umar).\(^{35}\) In that ritual, effigies of the military commander of caliph Yazid I’s army Umar ibn Sa’d, were made from wood, cloth, and straw, and filled with firecrackers and donkey turds.\(^{36}\) The effigies were paraded, mocked, and eventually burned in a carnivalesque spectacle. In an essay in the *Cambridge History of Iran*, cultural historian Peter Chelkowski explains that “during the 1978-9 revolution, the effigy of Umar was replaced by those of President Carter and/or the late Shah.”\(^{37}\) Even though the protesters might have been aware of earlier effigy protests in the region, the burning of effigies in the protests of the Iranian Revolution were thus at least partly appropriated from the *Umar Kushan* tradition. The protesters blended the Shia ritual of suffering and resistance with contemporary political activism for religious and national renewal.\(^{38}\)

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The US was symbolically tied to the first injustice, the assassination of Imam Hussein ibn Ali, part of Shia Islam’s founding myth. The US was recast as the Great Satan, the eternal force of evil that lies at the base of all conflicts and injustices. Symbolically, the exorcism of the Western Satan performed by protesters served to purify Iranian society.

Protests by Iranian students in support of the Iranian Revolution had continued in the UK, US, Germany, Iran, India, Libya, the Philippines, and Panama (where the Shah went to recover from his medical treatment). But with the hostage taking at the US embassy in Tehran, the atmosphere for Iranian students in the West and especially in the US became grim. The few Iranians who continued to demonstrate in favor of the Iranian Revolution were intimidated. Demands were made to deport Iranian students, and effigies of Ayatollah Khomeini instead of Carter were burned in counter-demonstrations on university campuses and elsewhere.

Just as the driving force of the revolution in Iran and abroad were Iranian students, the counter-demonstrations in the US were also led by students. The words of a high school student from Maine were cited in a newspaper article: “Iran burned our flag and we were insulted. So we

burned one of their flags in return.”* Student populations from different continents communicated with each other by mirroring each other’s protest vocabulary, a shared symbolic language of protest facilitated by the news media. The burning effigy became an iconic visual reference in the conflict.

Even after hostages were released on January 20, 1981, the protests continued on both sides, fueled by Khomeini’s and other hardliner politicians’ grandstanding as well as by the US’s counter-measures that were not succeeding in reign in the country in. Other conflicts merged into this growing animosity. On November 25, 1981, the *Herald Journal* reported from the Philippines: “One hundred Iranian students screamed ‘down with Reagan’, burned effigies of President Reagan, Saudi Arabian King Khaled and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in a demonstration Wednesday to protest the Saudi’s Middle East plan which implicitly recognizes Israel, police said. The demonstration took place behind the Iranian Embassy.”* Multiple issues come together here: the hostage crisis in Tehran from two years earlier, the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the Sunni/Shia divide, and the Israel-Palestine conflict—and all this happening in the Philippines, which had its own experience with US military presence and the US’s unwavering support for Filipino autocratic ruler Ferdinand Marcos. The report shows a complicated constellation of groups and interests,

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connected in dynamic transnational alliances.

Soon after the hostage crisis was resolved, the process of memorializing the revolution began. Every February during mass demonstrations celebrating the revolution and the takeover of the US embassy, effigies of Uncle Sam and the sitting US president are paraded and burned. The demonstrations against US imperialism have become a ritual in themselves, integrating the conflict with the US into Islamic Republic political-religious ritual.\(^\text{42}\) The parading, hanging, and burning of effigies was reinvented as a tradition in service of creating the imagined political community of the republic. The annual performance became a lieu de memoire, a site of memory, which scholar of memory culture Ann Rigney describes as a “self-perpetuating vortex of symbolic investment” “providing [a] common framework for appropriating the past.”\(^\text{43}\) Just as the burning in effigy of Umar in the tradition of Ta’ziyeh, burning Uncle Sam in effigy became a ritualized practice to create and foster the shared imaginaries of struggle, resistance, and overcoming.\(^\text{44}\)

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On the other side of the conflict, in the US, effigy burnings in Tehran also became a lieu de mémoire evidenced by a postcard printed in the US in 1981 with a burning effigy of Carter in Tehran. As a medium meant to communicate with and be shared, the image of Carter’s effigy came to symbolize the communal trauma of the hostage crisis.

Another lieu de mémoire in the Iranian calendar, Quds Day (International Jerusalem Day) was initiated by Ayatollah Khomeini with a fatwa early in the Iranian Revolution in October 1979. The marches and effigy burning in support of the Palestinian cause and against the state of Israel and its control of the holy city of Jerusalem emphasize an imaginary “Muslim world” to unify diverse Muslim communities around the world. Before 2002, Quds Day was mainly celebrated in Iran and by allied Shia groups close to its politics in Iraq and Lebanon. Since 2002, it has become more widespread and demonstrations now occur in Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Nigeria as well as minority-Muslim countries like the US and Canada, and some countries in Europe and South Africa. While Quds Day is largely

organized by Shia groups, it nonetheless resonates across Muslim communities, recalling the conflict with Israel and the principled position of Iran in it. Under the guise of liberating Jerusalem, Khomeini and his successors tie the conflict between Iran and the US to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, embedded within a larger narrative of the struggle between the “Muslim World” and “the West.”

Effigy protests in Iran, according to this genealogy, were adapted from a traditional practice that mockingly denounces the evil enemy during commemorations of Ashura. Similar to that in Port Said in Egypt, the practice became part of Iranian memory culture, an invented tradition in support of the official version of Iranian identity. While in Egypt commemoration was established by local communities, in Iran the protest practice and re-enactments were promoted and framed by state actors. In both the original effigy protests effectively use international media to communicate transnationally with diverse publics.

The Rushdie Affair

In 1989, a controversy around the book *The Satanic Verses* by British Indian author Salman Rushdie led to a major international crisis that shook the West’s confidence in its relationships with Muslim communities in their midst and abroad. The book was published in September 1988 in the UK and drew immediate criticism from British Muslims as insulting Islam, demanding it be banned under British blasphemy laws. Because both the publisher and government officials failed to respond to complaints, UK activists organized national and international publicity campaigns. After two large demonstrations in Bolton and Bradford, where the book and an effigy of the author were burned, the protests succeeding in winning media attention. The anger spread to the protesters’ countries of origin, inciting protests in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh that became increasingly violent.

On February 14, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran weighed in on the side of the protesters and issued a fatwa, condemning Rushdie and his publishers to death and calling on Muslims worldwide to execute his verdict. The fatwa raised the stakes in the controversy enormously. Afterwards, the conflict about respecting Muslim values in British society was elevated to a mortal struggle between the honor and sanctity of the Islamic religion and Western

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Democratic values like freedom of speech.50 The fatwa changed the character of effigy burnings from largely symbolic expressions to violently charged threats on Rushdie’s life. Concerned that someone would act on the fatwa, Rushdie went into hiding.

In the months following the fatwa, protests were staged in India, Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, and Thailand. In the West, Muslim communities protested against further translations and distribution. Large demonstrations took place in the UK, France, the Netherlands, Canada, and the US. Protesters employed threatening and violent rhetoric, bookshops were firebombed, and effigies burned. In Beijing, Muslim students protested against the book and its author. The book was banned in Iran, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, Sudan, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Thailand, Tanzania, Indonesia, and Singapore.51 In 1999 and 2000, demonstrations against Rushdie erupted again in India when the government granted him a visa to visit the country. When Queen Elizabeth knighted Rushdie in 2007, it was seen as an affront and protests were staged in a number of countries, which in India and Pakistan featured effigies of the author.

“I am Shetan Rushdie” reads the sign around the neck of the effigy burned in front of the largest mosque in New Delhi in 1989. Like many effigies in Iran, effigies paraded and burned in the UK had Satanic features: horns,

pointy ears, and protruding teeth—not surprising since the title of Rushdie’s book references Satan. Rushdie came to embody a specter of Muslim anxiety, the emigrant apostate who succumbed to Western secularism and relativism, a traitor to his own culture.52 In the West, the affair stirred up anxieties about a supposedly threatening rise of Islam in Europe and the incompatibility of Islam with Western liberal democracy. It was an early example of a conflict framed in cultural terms, rather than colonial or military ones. Since the year 2000, this has become increasingly common, as the genealogy of effigy protests in Afghanistan detailed in the following section reveal.

Occupations of Afghanistan

Between 2005 and 2015, effigy protests in Afghanistan against Western policies successfully caught the attention of the Western news media. The practice, though, appears to have been adopted there rather recently. Until 1983, not a single political protest seems to have included the burning of effigies in Afghanistan. A survey of the English-language Afghani newspaper the Kabul Times from February 1962 to September 1983 results in eighteen articles that mention burning effigies in protests.\(^53\) Seventeen of these took place outside Afghanistan, in Asia (7), Europe (6), and the Americas (4). These contain reporting on a motley of international conflicts, such as Malaysian students protesting against Indonesia over border disputes in 1963, Filippino students protesting against Malaysia in 1968 over claims to Malaysian Sabah on northern Borneo, or Irish-Americans in New York protesting the death of Bobby Sands, member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army in 1981, during a hunger strike while in British detention. While the Kabul Times only served an English-speaking audience in Afghanistan, it does indicate that burning effigies was not a domestic protest practice. Just one report, from March 24, 1983, mentions effigy burnings in Afghanistan. This protest was a state-sanctioned mass

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demonstration organized by the communist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). This celebratory “grand march” in socialist fashion, displayed “the will of the people” in commemorating the fifth anniversary of the socialist Saur Revolution and coincided with the Nauruz new year celebration. The pictures accompanying the article, however, reveal that demonstrators did not burn effigies of Reagan and Bush, but instead burned a large placard with a cartoon denouncing the American interference in the civil war.

The line to actual effigies being burned leads to Iran, when Afghans living in Tehran took up the practice in response to the Soviet Army invading Afghanistan in December 1979. The Saur Revolution in April 1978 against Afghan President Mohammed Daoud Khan had been followed by an uprising in the east of the country, supported by Pakistan and the US, which lead to the government losing control over large territories outside the larger cities. Because of the increasing rivalry inside the leading socialist party PDPA the Soviet Union decided to intervene and invade the country on 27 December 1979 to support Deputy Secretary of the PDPA Babrak Karmal against his rival Hafizullah Amin, General Secretary of the PDPA. Less than a week later, in the midst of the ongoing hostage crisis and demonstrations against the US in front of its Tehran embassy, Afghan expats staged a protest against the Soviet invasion, carrying effigies of Karmal and Soviet Union leader Leonid Brezhnev. I presume Afghan protesters witnessed the nearly daily effigy burning of the Shah and Carter either live or through the media. Seeing the Iranian
student protests gain global media attention, they probably realized the performance’s potential to publicize and support their cause.

In January, similar protests against Soviet invasion were staged in New York in front of the United Nations, in Bangladesh, Canada, and Thailand with effigies of Brezhnev. Additional protests were held in Turkey and Paris. Also in January 1980, the foreign ministers from thirty-four nations at a conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation adopted a resolution demanding “the immediate, urgent and unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops” from Afghanistan. While protesters in Bangladesh and Thailand were local Muslims, those in New York and Canada were Afghan expatriates protesting by burning Brezhnev in effigy.


55 Iran, Pakistan, and India, where most effigy burnings occurred—had absorbed large numbers of expatriates and refugees from neighboring Afghanistan.
It was only ten years after the end of the Soviet occupation that effigies first began to appear in protests taking place within Afghanistan. In 1999, when the US pressured the Taliban government to extradite Osama bin Laden, protesters in Afghanistan burned President Bill Clinton in effigy. Two years later, after 9/11, President George W. Bush issued an ultimatum to the Taliban government once again to extradite Bin Laden, the suspected mastermind behind the attacks. When the Taliban did not comply, Bush ordered the invasion of Afghanistan and the ouster of its government. Demonstrators in Afghanistan again responded to US pressure by burning effigies of Bush (3), and many more were burned by sympathetic protesters in neighboring Pakistan (20), where the practice is very common. The US military engagement in Iraq in 2003 had even wider global resonance. Before the actual invasion in March, effigy burnings of Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair already took place in Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Syria, Egypt, Australia, the UK, the US, Canada, and Peru.

The fourth anniversary of the Soviet takeover in Afghanistan was marked Tuesday by refugees chanting “Death to the Russians” in India, anti-Soviet demonstrations in Thailand and West Germany and a sharp rebuke by the European Common Market. . . . In Iran, Afghan Moslems set Soviet flags afire and burned Karmal in effigy in Tehran, the Iranian national news agency reported. 56

New Delhi – More than 2,000 stone throwing Afghan refugees burned effigies of Russian President Constantine Chernenko in front of the Soviet embassy today to mark the fifth anniversary of Moscow’s invasion of Afghanistan. (New Straits Times, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 27 Dec 1984)

In Karachi, about 500 Afghan refugees burned effigies of Karmal and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to chants to “Death to the Soviet Union.” (Montreal Gazette, 28 Dec 1985)

The Hague — About 1,000 protesters marched on the Soviet embassy in the Hague on Sunday and burned an effigy of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to mark the eighth anniversary of Moscow’s military intervention in Afghanistan. The protesters, many of them Afghans, also burned Soviet flags at the demonstration. (Manila Standard, Philippines, 29 Dec 1987)

In New Delhi, about 300 chanting Afghan refugees burned an effigy of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev during protests marking the anniversary of the Soviet intervention. (New Straits Times, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 29 Dec 1988)

From 2005 on, effigy protests became more common in Afghanistan. Between 2005 and 2015, effigies were burned on sixty-one occasions. Only three of those burned represented Afghan politicians, while the others predominantly were Western heads of state. Obama was burned thirty-one times in effigy and Bush on seven occasions. Nine effigies represented politicians from neighboring countries Pakistan and Iran. Twenty-three protests were held against US military operations resulting in civilian casualties, but even more demonstrations—twenty-six—protested intended or perceived insults to Islam.

The roots of effigy practice in Afghanistan apparently lie in its appropriation by Afghan migrants, students, and refugees in Tehran and other countries outside Afghanistan. These expatriates most likely introduced it to the country after the Soviet Army withdrawal, becoming a well-established practice by 2015. Less than half of the protests addressed US military operations in Afghanistan, focusing instead on insults to Islam. This hints at the unifying effect of conflicts that turn on cultural issues between Islam and the West.
Insults to Islam

The unifying effect of cultural conflicts extended to Muslim communities around the globe. To a Western public seemingly small incidents could cause international crises in the relationship between the “West” and the “Muslim world.” In 2005, reports of a Quran desecration in US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay sparked protests that featured effigies of President Bush in Pakistan (9), Afghanistan (1), and Indonesia (1). Even wider resonance had the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in September 2005.57 In the Western media the cartoons were described as the exercise of free of speech; from a pious Muslim perspective, these were blasphemous insults to Islam.58 After a judicial complaint against the newspaper was dismissed, Danish imams campaigned to spread the knowledge about the cartoons. Protests by Muslim communities across the globe erupted in February 2006. Effigies of the cartoonist, the editor of the newspaper, Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and Bush were burned in Pakistan (18), Turkey (1), Afghanistan (1), India (1), and Palestine (1). Some protests became violent.

57 These protests may seem a recent phenomenon, but already in 1966, Muslim students in Srinagar, India burned an effigy of UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson to protest a cartoon published in the London Times. The New York Times reported: “The cartoon depicted Mr. Wilson as Mohammed and President de Gaulle as a Common Market mountain, an allusion to the proverb: ‘If the mountain doesn’t come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain.’ ”Indian Moslems Burn Effigy of Wilson to Assail Cartoon,” New York Times, November 12, 1966.
The protests in India were organized not by Muslim groups but by communists who had close ties with Iraq under Saddam Hussein. and more than 200 people were killed. Saddam Hussein’s death sentence in November 2006, and his undignified execution in December, led to protests featuring effigies of Bush in Pakistan (3), Nepal (1), Bangladesh (1), Jordan (1), and India (8). In March 2008, the release of the film *Fitna* (Arabic for trial, affliction, or distress) by Dutch right-wing populist politician Geert Wilders led to effigy protests in Pakistan (4) and Afghanistan (2). In October 2009 and February 2012, soldiers from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan inadvertently burned copies of the Quran, which sparked effigy protests in Afghanistan (11) and Pakistan (4).

Even more widely protested was the Quran burning by small Florida fringe church Pastor Terry Jones in 2010 on the anniversary of 9/11 to draw attention to—in his view—Islam’s violent and evil nature. His publicity stunt received wide notice in the US and beyond, as US politicians of the highest rank tried to persuade him not to go through with it. In the end he agreed, but the harm was already done. Protests erupted across the globe; effigies of Obama and Jones were burned in Pakistan (2), Afghanistan (1), India (1), and Iran (1). More than twenty protesters were killed in clashes with the police in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Indian Kashmir. Jones might have felt these outcomes confirmed his views. In April 2011, the pastor reiterated his intent and burned a copy of the Quran in spite of renewed rebuke, resulting again in protests and more than twenty deaths in

59 The protests in India were organized not by Muslim groups but by communists who had close ties with Iraq under Saddam Hussein.
In the domestice sphere, pastor Jones also targeted President Obama and the Democrats for their policies. In 2012, he exhibited an effigy of Obama hanging from a gallows in front of his church. In January 2013 he announced the National Burn Effigies of Obama Day and torched effigies of Obama and President Bill Clinton.

Afghanistan and Pakistan. Again, effigies of Obama and Jones were burned in Afghanistan (4) and Pakistan (4).60

In September 2012, a California man produced a “trailer” to a movie called *Innocence of Muslims*, denigrating Muslim beliefs, and posted it online. After a period of promotion by among others, Jones, awareness of the film spread. Protests erupted in countries with large Muslim populations, often staged in front of US embassies. Protesters were killed in Tunisia, Yemen, Sudan, and Pakistan. In Benghazi, US ambassador John Christopher Stevens and three security personnel were killed in an attack on the compound of the American diplomatic mission. Effigies of Obama as well as the film’s producer and, again, Jones were burned in Pakistan (24), India (7), Afghanistan (5), Bangladesh (3), Sri Lanka (2) Palestine (2), and Lebanon (1).

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60 In the domestice sphere, pastor Jones also targeted President Obama and the Democrats for their policies. In 2012, he exhibited an effigy of Obama hanging from a gallows in front of his church. In January 2013 he announced the National Burn Effigies of Obama Day and torched effigies of Obama and President Bill Clinton.
In January 2015, two members of Al Qaeda in Yemen attacked the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, killing twelve and injuring eleven, over the publication of cartoons critical of Islam. France and much of the world was in utter shock. A mass demonstration was staged in Paris, drawing millions. The marchers expressed solidarity with the victims through the slogan “Je suis Charlie.” Reacting to the Paris marchers, counter-demonstrators in Muslim countries carried the slogan: “Je suis Mohammad,” “Je suis Muslim,” or “If you are Charlie, then I am Kouchi,” referring to one of the attackers. Effigies of *Charlie Hebdo* and French President François Hollande were burned in Pakistan (7), India (2), and Afghanistan (1). Even though the incidents interpreted as insults to Islam led to condemnations in many Muslim-majority countries, larger protests often took place in countries that were already embroiled in military conflicts with the US and its Western allies. Therefore, it is impossible to see the conflicts about cultural dominance as isolated incidents. Rather they should be seen as occasions on which the anger about systemic disadvantages and the experience of cultural, military, and economic domination are expressed to transnational Muslim and Western audiences.

As I argue in chapter 3, media images are extensions of the performances, and constitute a relatively direct form of communication between protesters and audiences. As visual forms of communication, they function across language and cultural barriers. Even though they are framed and mediated, images are less filtered than, for instance, a newspaper report of a protest written by a
foreign correspondent. In addition to the symbolic visual expression, protest signs in English or French that are legible in many photographs also transmit protesters’ voices. Images of protests are traces of their speech, carrying their intent fragmented and simplified but relatively undistorted. Using this and other spectacular visual forms of protest, even groups with a low level of organization are able—to some degree—to transmit their arguments. The burning or hanging of effigies is understood as an especially potent way by which to communicate through media.

These protests communicate anger tied to specific incidents, and denounce the injustices suffered. Recognizing protests by Muslim communities as legitimate, albeit antagonistic, expressions of discontent toward specific Western policies and attitudes, they should also be seen as attempts at cross-cultural communication through the news media, expressing Muslim values and sensitivities to Western publics. What Salvatore describes as the Islamic transnational public sphere overlaps with those in the West. The concerns voiced in the former are transmitted to the latter through various media channels, just as expressions of opinion in Western public spheres, as with the Muhammad cartoons, were received in public spheres in Muslim-majority countries. This process of contestation and exchange expands the discursive space of the news media, allowing for the inclusion of diverging voices and opening both publics’ memories and identities for change.61

At the very end of 2006 AD another group of Egyptian workers, angered at the denial of their year-end bonus and the corruption of their managers, quit work and shut down their workplaces. The strike startled the Egyptian people, and apparently the government and the government-owned employer as well. . . . Workers blamed the new chairman of the company, Mahmoud El-Gibaly, for squandering company assets in corrupt deals and appointing incompetent cronies to high positions. They carried coffins labeled “El-Gibaly is dead” and hung him in effigy. After five days, the government retreated and offered to restore the bonuses.62

Arab Uprisings

The Arab Spring of 2011 serves as a vivid example of the convergence of diverse public spheres and the emergence of transnational alliances. Demonstrators stood up to their governments and protested against the corruption, nepotism, social inequality, and structural poverty that marred many of the autocratic regimes in the region.63 These protests led to enthusiastic rejoinders of solidarity from opposition groups in countries across the globe.

In Egypt, the growing discontent was first channeled by the grassroots labor movement that emerged in 2000. Activists organized a large number of strikes and demonstrations involving some effigy hangings and burnings.64 Activist groups from the labor movement became the motors of the popular uprising in 2011.65 From the start of these protests on January 25, effigies of President Hosni Mubarak appeared in Tahrir Square, the earliest rudimentary cardboard cut-outs, covered in slogans and drawings or photographs of Mubarak and hanged from traffic lights.

As described in chapter 3, on February 1, activists in Tahrir Square staged a mock trial, mock execution, and mock funeral with three, now much more elaborately produced, effigies of Mubarak and two other members of the government. Two of the effigies were hanged and the third was paraded on a stretcher through the crowd and torn to pieces.
The mock trial of Mubarak on Tahrir Square was repeated at least twice: April 8, 2011 and June 8, 2012, commenting on developments of his second official trial. These performances included a bench of judges, prosecutors, and the accused, who in these cases was represented by an actor wearing a Mubarak mask. One demonstration staged by a pro-Mubarak faction elsewhere in Cairo, featured an effigy of Mohammad ElBaradei, a leading dissident and vocal critic of the government with the slogan: “Yes to Mubarak—No to traitors.” All other effigies I found were displayed in protests against the ruling government. Most of them featured representations of Mubarak, but after he was ousted, protesters directed their anger toward his successors. An effigy of Omar Suleiman, Director of General Intelligence Directorate, who served briefly as vice-president (January 29–February 11), was hanged in April 2012. Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) of Egypt, who ruled the country immediately following Mubarak’s ousting in February 2011 until June 2012, was hanged in effigy three times, in April and November of 2011 and February 2012. In February 2013, President Mohamed Morsi was hanged in effigy, and in June and November of the same year his successor President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

On a few occasions, effigies of foreign adversaries were hanged in Tahrir Square. Some were the usual suspects: personifications of Israel and its secret service Mossad. In January 2012, an effigy of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was hanged by Syrian emigrants and refugees in protest of his refusal to step down. I found evidence of thirty-six
effigies created in Egypt between 2011 and 2014. Only one effigy, of former SCAF member Hassan al-Roweny, was burned. All others were hanged, from buildings, lamp-posts, and traffic lights, most of them (27) in Tahrir Square. On several occasions, effigies were presented as defendants in mock trials, underwent mock executions, and were buried in mock funerals.
During the trials against Mubarak, his sons, and fellow government officials, effigies were often clad in orange prison jumpsuits, immediately recognizable from their use at Guantanamo Bay detention camp and Abu Ghraib prison. One photograph shows a row of eight effigies of Mubarak and co-defendants in the trial, hanging from a large wooden beam strung up between a lamp post and palm tree. On several occasions, protesters paraded or displayed smaller effigies of ousted government members outside the Egyptian police academy in Cairo where Mubarak’s actual trial took place. Clad in orange and bound in shackles with nooses around their necks, they hung from miniature gallows—some of them had their heads cut off, bloody and dangling, with photographs of the accused pasted on (January 2012, February 2012, June 2012, May 2013).
They took me to a mini Madame Tussauds, on a raised dais in a main street, of life-size effigies of a clownish Mubarak and his family, above all his son and heir Gamal, now in prison. It also included rows of members of his coterie and a ghoulish Mu’ammar Qadhafi. Men, women and children were gazing and taking photographs. The atmosphere was that of a fairground. “Next week we will burn them in a public show of solidarity,” one man said.66

In nearby Port Said, the April 2011 Harq al-Limby was also characterized by the revolutionary Tahrir spirit. The al-Limbys burned that year were Mubarak, his wife, their son Gamal, and a row of government officials. These domestic villains were joined in effigy by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. In 2013, the al-Limby was Morsi, who had tried to ban the festival.67 In 2014, local artist Mohsen Khodeir made effigies of then Turkish Prime Minister (now President) Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Qatari royal family, Obama, Netanyahu, and Egyptian satirist Bassem Youssef to be burned on Harq al-Limby.68 In 2015, Khodeir modeled the hooded fighters of ISIS and their victims in a replica of gruesome media images.

67 “Port Said’s Allenby effigies wear masks of Erdogan, Qatari Emir,” Cairo Post, April 21, 2014.
The protest movement that came to be known as the Arab Uprising began in Tunisia and quickly spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. In Tunisia, no effigy burning or hanging was reported, but the act that started the movement was a related symbolic act. In an act of self-sacrifice, street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in response to the confiscation of his wares and humiliation suffered at the hands of municipal officials. Out of desperation, he turned himself and his suffering into a sign, making visible with his body the injustice of the social system and the violence enacted by the government. The violent image of a burning body—registered as a mental image since no photographs of the incident exist—draws likeness to the burning of effigies, even though self-immolation is on a completely different scale of physical violence.

In Yemen, a day after an activist hanged an effigy of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Zinjibar on February 28, 2010, the activist was killed by security forces who raided his home. A year later, in February, April, and October 2011, Saleh effigies were hanged in a few demonstrations against the government demanding democratic reforms drawing on the influence of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. In November, Saleh resigned from his post and left for Saudi Arabia. In Syria between July 2011 and June 2012, effigies of Assad were hanged on five occasions in various cities under rebel control, and outside Syria in Turkey, Lebanon, and Yemen. In Libya, all the effigies that appeared in the rebel stronghold Benghazi and in other rebel-held cities, depicted Gaddafi. These hangings also connoted the desire
for justice and punishment, even though formal legal procedures are not visibly referenced. Gaddafi’s effigies were strung up, stabbed, or depicted with blood-stained faces prescient of the way he was later killed and his body exhibited in order to produce a final debasing image of the dictator.

Neither in Libya, Syria, nor Yemen was it customary to hang or burn effigies before the Arab Spring. In a short span of time, the movement became transnational, exemplifying how a weak opposition movement accumulates the strength to profoundly influence domestic politics and a region’s imaginaries. Furthermore, it inspired movements in many other countries through sharing ideas, strategies, and practices.⁶⁹

Protests at the Limits of Western Democracy

The genealogical lines of effigy protest I describe here make clear that they did not occur throughout an amorphous “Muslim World.” Instead, effigy protest emerged at specific historical moments of colonial conflict and military interventions in the Middle East and South Asia. In these genealogies distinct ways of transfer appear: in Egypt, the British holiday tradition was appropriated as a tool against British rule and postcolonial influence; in Iran, a domestic Shia ritual was adapted for political use against US influence; in Afghanistan, Afghan emigrants in Iran and elsewhere adopted the practice and later took it back home. The first genealogical line can be drawn from Egypt’s early twentieth century anti-colonial struggle against Britain to protests against Israel; the second from the 1979 Iranian revolution to protests against the Soviet Union’s occupation in Afghanistan in 1979 and against Israel’s denial of Palestinian’s rights. In the beginning of the new millennium, these lines seem to blur as protests spread more widely across the region in protests against US-led invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in response to incidents experienced as insults to Islam.

Seen from the historical trajectory of Islam, the “West” is often considered a “hostile hegemonic geopolitical sphere,” impossible to escape since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and broadly responsible for a historic decline since the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{70} Emphasizing the

\textsuperscript{70} Mohammed Arkoun, \textit{The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought} (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 16.
central role of justice in Islam, Islamic reformist philosopher Chandra Muzaffar proposes that Muslim reactions to Western domination “may in fact be a cry for justice, a plea for a more equitable relationship with the West.”  

After 9/11, the US embarked on the so-called War on Terror, pressuring the government in Afghanistan to extradite Osama bin Laden. The War on Terror metastasized with military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, the Sahara, and the Philippines, with enormous consequences for countries and people, and still there seems to be no end in sight. Judith Butler writes that “the infinite paranoia that imagines the war against terrorism as a war without end will be one that justifies itself endlessly in relation to the spectral infinity of its enemy, regardless of whether or not there are established grounds to suspect the continuing operation of terror cells with violent aims.”  

The War on Terror created a state of exception outside of any legal framework, based on overwhelming military power, and one-sided sense of justice in which the US President assumed power over life and death. It could be argued that in the US, the president as absolute sovereign—in European history closely tied to the use of effigies (see chapter 2)—has reappeared. The frequent protests in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq between 2001 and 2013, burning effigies of President Bush and his successor President Obama, point to the limits of Western democracies, beyond which lies the state of emergency.

characterized by injustice and sovereign abuse of power.

The sense of injustice extended far beyond the military. Promoting Western liberal democracy self-servingly as the only and universally legitimate form of governance, as Bush did in a 2003 speech, fails to “recognize that different life worlds produce their own cultures with their own horizons of intelligibility.” Theorists of radical democracy have challenged this Western-centric perspective, pointing to “liberal democracy’s intertwined history with, legitimations of, and key complicities with, capitalist rule and expansion.” The economic and cultural dynamics tied to the globalization of Western capitalist modernity is making alternative forms of living increasingly impossible. These imposed “Western values” are then experienced as violence and injustice. As symbolic expression, effigy protest facilitates communication in an emerging transnational and cross-cultural public sphere, communicating the lack of accountability and means for redress in a globalizing world outside democratic control, and dominated by Western nations, economic systems, and political discourse.

In October 2009, protesters in Kabul burned an effigy of Obama in protest against the burning of a Quran.

75 Conway and Singh, “Radical Democracy,” 692.
by ISAF troops. They carried a banner reading: “No Democracy—We want just Islam.” The second part can be read as: “We only want Islam” but also as “We want the Islam that is just.” Rejecting Western domination, the sign expresses the wish for justice and self-determination—a truly democratic impulse.

Many posters and banners carried in effigy protests are written in English and seek dialogue with an international Western audience. Sometimes the messages are not very sophisticated: “Hate America,” and Crush America” (Pakistan, 2011), “Black dog Obama” (Afghanistan, 2012), or “World’s biggest terrorist Bush” (India, 2006). Others are also very clear but more pronounced, like “JUSTICE NOW!” (India, 2013), “We want peace in Iraq” (Bangladesh, 2003), or “Stop Killing Innocent Libyans” (Sri Lanka, 2011). Some slogans try to communicate the Muslim values that were injured by the events, which sparked the protests: “Kill us but don’t insult our Prophet” (Bangladesh, 2012) or “We are ready to Die for the Honour of our Holy Prophet—From: District Bar Association, RWP” (Pakistan, 2012).
Some address Western audiences, like the one announcing a boycott of Danish products after the publication of the Mohammad cartoons in a Danish newspaper: “Not sale Danemark products” (Pakistan, 2006). After the attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, protesters’ communication with Western audiences is layered. Protesters in India, burning an effigy of ISIS, declared: “We stand with Paris,” adding another voice to the discussion.

In 2011, the effigy protests of the Arab Spring movements opened another chapter: here the effigy protest was reimagined against oppression by domestic regimes. Protests suddenly aligned with the Western self-image of free democratic expression, and proved inspirational for Western audiences. The movements corrected—at least to some degree and for some time—media discourse about Islam’s incompatibility with democracy and led to new alignments and affiliations in the transnational, cross-cultural public sphere. Building on the findings in this chapter, in the next I focus on a short period in one country, investigating a string of effigy protests in Baghdad between 2005 and 2009 against US military occupation. I follow the question regarding how Islamic and Western attitudes toward images influence each other and how this interplay is reflected in effigy protests.