

seeks to broaden the discussion and introduce scholars to theoretical frameworks outside their regular remit rather than to provide a final and definitive study. Accordingly, creating an eclectic theoretical framework is appropriate. While the book is limited by its reliance on mainstream IR theories, as a whole, it represents an impressive effort and succeeds in opening up new frontiers of theoretical cross-disciplinary exchange. Among its many potential audiences in the field of Middle East studies, this book is well suited for undergraduate students, who will likely find it provocative, persuasive, and difficult to put down. ✂

DOI:10.1017/rms.2018.69

Deniz Solmaz
Munzur University

MARWAN M. KRAIDY. *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World.* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2016). Pp. 304. \$19.95 paper. ISBN 9780674980051.

In *The Naked Blogger of Cairo*, Marwan Kraidy provides an engaging and illuminating account of what he terms “creative insurgency” in the Arab world, a notion he develops in order to “explore the mixture of activism and artistry characteristic of revolutionary expression” as he “tracks the social transformation of activism into Art and ensuing controversies” (3). The human body is at the heart of creative insurgency, as “tool, medium, symbol, and metaphor” (5), and is employed in the book as an “organizing principle” to understand creative insurgency (8). Kraidy introduces three varieties of creative insurgents: “Burning Man”, the violent, desperate protest exemplified by Mohamed Bouazizi, the literal burning man who “set the Arab world aflame” on December 17, 2010; “Laughing Cow”, the humorous attacks that slowly eat away at the power and status of a dictator such as former President Mubarak; and “the Naked Blogger”, represented by Egyptian blogger Aliaa al-Mahdy, who posted nude photos of herself as an act of political and social protest. These three varieties also illustrate what Kraidy calls the “two styles” of creative insurgency: the radical mode of Burning man, taking the form of violent and explosive outbursts; and the gradual mode of laughing cow, which over the years “subverts the norms of sovereign power” (18). The third variety, the Naked Blogger, represents a combination of the two modes. As these cases suggest, the bulk of his material stems from Tunisia and Egypt, but Kraidy also includes other examples, both from these countries as well as from

Syria and Lebanon. The book is eloquently written, the arguments clear and accessible, and the cases presented are engaging and intriguing.

Kraidy's analysis provides many important insights for understanding the popular uprisings, their background, and social changes currently taking place in the region. While in discussions on the so-called "Arab Spring" it is often the explicitly political expressions and actions of protesters, the structural conditions for regime stability, or the actions of regional and international actors that are given prominence, Kraidy aptly illustrates the importance of individual action, of long-term processes of resistance and social change, and of art and cultural production both in terms of mobilization and motivation for rebelling against a regime, but also in terms of actually resisting and fighting power – the "concrete practices of rebellion" (7) that go beyond the uprisings. In particular, he convincingly demonstrates how cultural production contributes to countering hegemonic discourses, distorting official propaganda and levelling the playing field between people and the regime, thus removing power from the latter in a very concrete way.

In focusing on these alternative forces, Kraidy also provides an important contribution to the debate on the role of social media and other online platforms in popular protests, both in practical terms and in relation to the more theoretical debates on how to best understand the use of such platforms. By showing how they are deployed both for production and dissemination as part of a wider pan-Arab public, and often in combination with traditional media, he offers clear examples of the mechanisms and importance of these platforms, an analytic focus that has often proved difficult to follow, not least when tracing long-term effects. As Kraidy points out, these forms of creative insurgency also target patriarchal structures in society more generally, which, of course, are important in supporting the regimes, in turn explaining why regimes in response target more than just explicit attacks on governing bodies. Importantly, rebellion against what often is referred to as "traditional norms" does not equal a rebellion against traditional cultural expressions, and a key tactic of creative insurgency is using local references that are widely recognizable in society – another important observation that is highly relevant for debates on online platforms, and to discussions of globalization and cultural production more generally. Finally, Kraidy's approach is very effective in highlighting processes of ongoing social change, which are perhaps too often overshadowed by the shattered political aspirations of the popular uprisings. These processes and the

forces behind them will “stay with us for a long time” (223), continuing to affect developments in the region despite political setbacks.

Kraidy does not seek to establish the direct impact of the cases he presents, which, as he argues, could be a very difficult task, if not impossible. Similarly, Kraidy does not make definitive claims in terms of the representativeness of his examples. His concern is to provide cases through which he can present and analyze the phenomenon of creative insurgency. Even so, it would have been beneficial to know more about how he came to select these cases, how he identified and gathered his material, and the extent of said material. Furthermore, while he provides intriguing discussions on results and reactions invoked by the cases he studies, a more systematic tracing of this would also have been interesting. Concerning representativeness, the inclusion of the “Naked Blogger” case also raises some questions; not least as it is presented side-by-side with the other more broadly appealing cases, and even provides the name for the book. While Kraidy critically discusses the actions of the blogger, the broad condemnation she received in Egypt, and the different interpretations of her campaign, there is a clear danger that too much is read into an act of insurgency that represented very few and was seen quite differently by those engaged in broader campaigns of rebellion. Moreover, when, as Kraidy correctly points out, the regime attacks the female body in order to deny women political participation, insurgency is directed at countering this. Yet, in this context, other examples such as the campaign against sexual harassment in Egypt (which Kraidy does mention) would seem to be a highly relevant and perhaps more representative case given its broad appeal. This campaign explicitly worked to demand such participation, and to counter hegemonic narratives of harassment, and it was even quite successful and managed to establish harassment and violence as societal problems that the state should deal with.

That being said, Kraidy presents highly interesting perspectives and identifies crucial features of resistance, power, and creativity in a connected Middle East in a book that is both engaging and illuminating and will be of interest to anyone concerned with the contemporary Middle East, from a variety of disciplines. ✂

DOI:10.1017/rms.2018.70

Jon Nordenson
University of Oslo