

The Reification of Revolutionary Consciousness: A Cultural Critique of Egypt's January 25 Revolution

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Introduction

Egypt's January 25 revolution started as formless. It preserved a non-representational and non-conceptual relation to what it was. It had no leader to give it shape; it was rhizomic and non-hierarchical in structure. Accordingly, it has stayed for almost two years as a zone of indeterminacy. These features made it structurally sublime and non-reified. At its beginning, the revolution exceeded all concepts and defied all categorizations, leading, in fact, to a problem of naming. This characteristic sublimity is in tune with the Kantian sense of exceeding the concept. As such, the revolution was both *mathematically* and *dynamically* sublime, that is, overwhelming in both size and magnitude, on the one hand, and is characterized by might that is "superior to great hindrances," on the other (Kant 2007, 90). The sublimity of the revolution was also abundantly clear in its uniqueness. Emad El-Din Shahin mentions some features of uniqueness: the largest number of protesters in history, the peaceful nature of the revolution, the classless nature of the revolution, the absence of leadership, organization and the extraordinary aura of tolerance and pluralism (2012, 47-9). As such, the revolution was embraced with the utmost optimism as one that was going to de-structure the long-standing reified political, social, and cultural life in Egypt.

Despite plenty of studies addressing one aspect or another of the revolution, a critique dealing with the disabling effect of reification is still lacking. The very few studies tackling the topic were either celebrating the dereificatory effect of the revolution or handling reification only marginally. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2011) discussed the revolution through their notion of multitude, being a force that shattered the political stereotypes seeing Muslims as incapable of democracy. William Spanos described the unnamable "event" of Tahrir Square, highlighting its lack of telos and valorizing its "unrepresentable singularity" that defied Western media representations and the "spatializing/reifying – structuralizing – logic of Western imperialism" (2012, 95). Žižek (2012) wrote about the fall of binary logic as manifested in the feeling of oneness between

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Muslims and Copts. As all descriptions of the revolution became only approximation, Dabashi (2012) argued for a need for new metaphors and a rethinking of the word revolution itself. On the other hand, Hirst (2012) studied the problematic influence of technological determinism, with reification as its inner logic, within the context of news and journalism covering the Arab Spring in general. He argued that commodification of information allowed for a reified worldview to dominate and contended that this process was at work in media coverage of the Arab Spring. Rasha Mohamed (2012) argued for the relevance of Marxism, namely the neo-Gramscian stream, for understanding the civil unrest in the Middle East, providing a very short section for the discussion of commodity fetishism in relation to the Gulf States' capitalist economy, but nothing on the Egyptian case.

The current study, therefore, provides a critical-theory-based approach to the revolutionary consciousness, using reification as its tool of analysis. The aim of this study is to investigate cultural, social, and revolutionary practices, where the disabling effect of reification is at work and to seek to understand how reification played a major role in the ways people constructed meanings about the revolution. The scope of analysis covers the period starting from January 25, 2011 to June 30, 2012, a period in which the disabling effect of reification was highly effective in turning sublimity into profanity, as manifested in the overwhelming presence of advertisements, commercial products, Friday demonstrations and its categorical demands, street art, and identitarian thinking based on binary oppositions. I hope to show how reification is highly interpretative of the proposition that the revolution was missed at the very moment it was to be realized.

Reification: An Outline

Reification etymologically comes “[f]rom the Latin *res* (thing) and *facere* (to make),” and it “literally means to make things” (Payne and Barbera 2010, 601). The analytical weight of reification in cultural and social theories is first provided by Marx and is later developed by a variety of Marxist approaches to culture and society, namely the Frankfurt School for critical theory. Marx, however, did not coin the term; he rather investigated social relations in capitalist societies in terms of commodity fetishism. In his *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Marx differentiates between two types of values attached to the commodity. A commodity, Marx argues, has both *use value* and *exchange value*. The use value is related to the usefulness of a commodity and is “conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity [and is] only realized in use or consumption;” whereas the exchange value “appears first of all as the

quantitative relation ... [which] changes constantly with time and place” (1976, 126). For Marx, as Alan How (2003, 64) explains, the greater focus is given to the exchange value, that is, to the price of the commodity on the market, which is determined by the capitalist economic relations rather than the wider economic process based mainly on class exploitation. Being highly relative, the exchange value stands for an abstraction of the commodity; that is, it is totally separated from both its use value and the human labor producing it. For Marx, “exchange value is the only form in which the value of a commodity can manifest itself or be expressed” (1976, 128). All human relations behind the production of the commodity is embodied in a *thing* freely floating on the market. This cutting off of causality, or the causal relation between the producing hands and the thing produced, is taken by Marx as commodity fetishism which “considers the exchangeability of commodities an internal, natural property of the commodities themselves,” as Isaak Rubin explains (2008, 6).

It was Georg Lukács, however, who termed this process reification in his *History and Class-Consciousness*, first published in 1923. Writing about the consciousness of the proletariat, Lukács made of Marx’s commodity fetishism his starting point of analysis, proceeding from it to his definition of reification, which later becomes the canonical definition in the field of social and cultural theory. The basis of the commodity structure, according to Lukács, is that “a relation between people takes on the character of a thing” (1971, 83). Lukács believes that the phenomena of reification cannot be separated from their economic bases. There are material objective causes for the reification of consciousness related mainly to the fact that “the [capitalist] process of transformation must embrace every manifestation of the life of society if the preconditions for the complete self-realization of capitalist production are to be fulfilled” (95). This aligns Lukács, as Grady (1996, 53) argues, with Hegel’s notion of historical teleology based on the dialectical reconciliation of opposites, or reification and dereification. For Lukács, the antithesis of reification is a revolution by the proletariat.

Lukács criticizes capitalist economy for instilling a calculative and rationalistic attitude in the unconscious of the people towards being-in-the-world. In other words, man lives cognitively rather than empathetically. This is because “for the first time in history,” as Lukács argues, “the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified laws” (1971, 51). When this process is inevitable, it is internalized as something natural. The people’s dominant way of thinking, therefore, becomes thing-like, where everything turns

into an object of knowing. It is not only the relation between men that takes the character of a thing, but objects around us lose their objectivity as they are viewed through commodity consciousness.

Like Lukács, Theodor Adorno, bases his treatment of the notion of reification on Marx's distinction between use value and exchange value. Yet, unlike him, he does not believe that the proletariat can challenge the reification fostered by capitalism. His treatment of reification is original to his thought expressed in his *Negative Dialectics*, as Gillian Rose (1978, 43) remarks. Adorno views reification in terms of his distinction between two modes of thinking: *identity thinking* and *non-identity thinking*, with reification residing in the former. In *identity thinking*, heterogeneity is reduced to sameness, or identity; an object is not what it is but what we think it is. This is what Adorno finds to be a reifying habit of thought. As it is totalizing, reductive, and coercive. This removal of the heterogeneous is an identitarian act seeking similarity and correspondence to the concept of the object.

This reifying identitarian thinking is forgetfulness. As Adorno explains, "all reification is a forgetting: objects become purely thing-like the moment they are retained for us without the continued presence of their other aspects: when something of them has been forgotten" (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 231). In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno also argues that "[t]he circle of identification—which in the end always identifies itself alone—was drawn by a thinking that tolerates nothing outside it; its imprisonment is its own handiwork" (2004, 172). Adorno accordingly rejects the reduction of labor to commodity exchange, as this is an act of identification being unjust to the laborer. For the particular labor-time loses its particularity in the universal abstract presence of the commodity. For Adorno, reification stands in opposition to dialectical thought, as it puts an end to the tension between opposites. For this reason, Adorno proposes *non-identity thinking*, a mode of thinking standing for the irreducibility of our experience of objects into concepts. As Simon Jarvis explains, "[n]on-identity . . . makes dialectical experience possible It is made possible by that which it cannot yet exhaustively think, the nonidentical" (1998, 173). For Adorno, reification is also strongly connected to culture industry, which he holds as a synonym for mass deception, where an ending sameness is created and where empty individuality is advertised, all for the sake of profit. Adorno argues that "[t]he entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms" (2001, 99). The dangerous thing about culture, under culture industry, is that it, perhaps more than anything else, conceals and legitimates inequalities.

In a more recent development, Axel Honneth views reification in terms of his theory of recognition. He defines reification as forgetfulness of recognition and argues that “[w]hen our relation to other persons is at issue, ‘reification’ means that we have lost sight of our antecedent recognition of these same persons” (2008, 63-64). For Honneth, we do not approach the world and others cognitively or contemplatively, as Lukács contends, but ‘recognitively,’ or through empathetic and existential engagement. This general attitude led Honneth to attack Lukács’ big claim that capitalism is the exclusive source of the reification of consciousness. In opposition to Lukács’ claim that people in the age of capitalism are detached from whatever they do, Honneth poses a counterclaim, moving towards the realm of the psyche, away from the external material causes of reification, arguing that “in human social behavior, recognition and empathetic engagement necessarily enjoy a simultaneously genetic and categorical priority over cognition and a detached understanding of social facts” (52). Honneth does not conceive of reification as “an epistemic category mistake nor as a transgression against moral principles” (52). He rather believes that reification is no more than a habit or a form of behavior arguing that if reification “cannot be traced to an ascribable instance of liability or guilt,” it cannot be a violation of moral principles (53).

Reification, therefore, has been taken into various directions. Some have taken it to be a sort of hegemony over consciousness by external material forces, mainly of the capitalist market, and some argue that it is a forgetfulness of an intrinsic tendency of empathetic engagement. Still some others affirm that it is an act of thinking through identification. Bearing this theoretical package in mind, reification will be explored only eclectically and pluralistically so that reifying the notion itself can be avoided. That is, the analysis conducted below will view reification, in the light of the theoretical package above, as *the way consciousness is determined, internally or externally, in a way that misconceives the reality of either the self, the other, or the world in whole or in part*. In doing so, I hope to show *how* reification, among other factors beyond the scope of this article, gave rise to the political in its strangest moment in the January 25 revolution: a moment of “*revolver*” (the Latin root of the word ‘revolution’ indicating a rolling back), in which the old regime runs for presidency in the person of Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak’s prime minister, against the long-reified society of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Aspects of Reification in the January 25 Revolution

Reification has become manifest in different ways since the ouster of Mubarak in February 12, 2011 till the coming into office of Mohamed Morsi as president, in June 30, 2012. After achieving ‘victory’ by toppling Mubarak in eighteen days, the commodity consciousness started to function through processing the revolution into a profit-yielding thing. On the one hand, the revolution is turned into a commodity that markets other commodities. As a marketing tool, the revolution, reified as commodity, has to overwhelm the people’s consciousness in order for it to yield more profit. It has been processed from a lived experience to a product in the factories of culture industry. On the other hand, as a commodity always pretends to be better than other commodities, otherness disappears, giving way to the prevalence of identitarian thinking.

This reifying process is expressed in various ways: commodity fetishism that creeps into the unconscious through advertisements, categorical demands (or small-group protests), establishing Satellite channels named after events related to the revolution, the re-emergence of dualistic and identitarian thinking, street art, and converting quality to quantity. Therefore, the capitalist notion of profit becomes the underlying logic of an apparently anti-capitalist revolution. The revolution enters culture industry and is presented as a product. This capitalist mentality, that presents the revolution as a thing-like facticity, is voiced and strengthened through the pattern of repetitiveness.

The Revolution as Commodity

The revolution, conceived as an event or carnival, is behind the emergence of many commodities that capture the moment to keep it for individual memories, as a souvenir. The reifying power of the commodity comes when its exchange value gains dominance over its use value, making exchange value, as Lukács argues, humans’ ‘second nature,’ by the very naturalness of which “does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men’s consciousness” (1971, 86). This objectification of the revolution into things is also driven by what Horkheimer and Adorno call culture industry, which is “the process of identifying, cataloging, and classifying which imports culture into the realm of administration” (2002, 104). The total administration of the revolution through the commodities of culture industry has created a great deal of mediation in forms of commodities. The emerging culture of refusal is assimilated into sameness and mass conformity, disguised as individuality.

This is clearly manifest in the T-shirts that bear the sign of being-there. “I was there on Tahrir Square 2011” (“Ägypten T-shirt” 2011) is a sentence written on a T-shirt stressing both individual existence along with the fetishism of a place.

This reduction of the lived experience, of a signified or praxis, into a signifier to be owned, can be described, in the words of Alan How interpreting Adorno, as a reaction to “the loss of an individual’s sense of personal significance in this impersonal world” (2003, 68). This act stresses the existential dimension of thereness, that is, a kind of situatedness of one’s own making. Written in English, the slogan confirms visibility on a world scale, a celebration of the full presence of that which has for long been in the void. It also fixates/freezes the revolutionary flux on a commodity in order to be able to sell. This commodification spreads a sense of completeness while the revolution itself is far from it. In addition, giving much importance to the ‘image’ during the revolution has disguised the priorities of the ‘real,’ that is, the revolution itself. As Frederic Jameson writes: “If we follow [the] argument about the omnipresence and the omnipotence of the image in consumer capitalism today, then if anything the priorities of the real become reversed, and everything is mediated by culture” (1979, 139). Jameson means that everything is mediated by its representation, mainly, in this case, through the image.

The problem with this mediation is that it becomes a thing in itself, almost achieving for itself a relative autonomy unrelated to the revolution. Banners and signs carried by protesters have, in a large part, indulged in an implicit competition over which is the funniest, cleverest, or most expressive. Reifying the revolution in the visual has led to fetishistic images that represent the revolution in terms of commodities that convert the new experience into a thing. This puts between the revolution and the new world/experience it creates a fake world of consumption spreading the feeling of sale mania, where everyone wants to own *something*, as a souvenir. Therefore, the primal truth of the revolution is disguised. To be overly mediated, the revolution has been taken into the media. This is described by Maxa Zoller as an “aestheticization of the revolution in popular commercial culture” (2014, 149). This aestheticization, Zoller argues, has turned the revolution “from an event into an image, from a process into a product” (149). This imaging, in turn, has stripped the intrinsic values of the revolution after giving it a functional presence in talk shows (especially on ONtv) and street art (mainly graffiti), although the latter is meant to resist and therefore takes people away from their petrified modes of social existence.

To take the graffiti of the martyrs as an example, street art could not escape the commodification and the totality of culture industry. Although the revolution started as formless, that is, sublime, graffiti turned this sublimity into icons. Hundreds of martyrs have fallen since the January 25, 2011. Yet, it was the killing of the young Copt, Mina Danyal (in the Maspero incidents in October

2011) that provided the first icon. The second icon came with the killing of the Azharite Sheikh Emad Effat (in Mohamed Mahmoud Street in December 2011). These two icons, along with the martyr, Khaled Said (tortured to death by the police in Alexandria only six months before the revolution, and who was widely considered the spark of the revolution), have become the major icons of martyrdom, whose graffiti spread far and wide, creating a reification of martyrdom structure. As representing iconic martyrs, these graffiti quickly found their way to other forms of cultural artifacts: medallions, billows, necklaces, and scarfs, among other things. Street art itself underwent a process of commercialization. As Mona Abaza explains,

graffiti has been used and abused by various actors. It has been commercialised and commodified, precisely through the growing interference and agendas of international funds, organizations, cultural centres, curators and the so-called ‘gatekeepers’ of the art world as well as the media coverage which offer programs and propose spaces through funds for celebrating street art, music and artistic expression. (2013)

The overwhelming presence of the martyrs, in the form of images and graffiti, turned from deploying and galvanizing the living for action into a thing-in-itself. They become part of culture industry; and “more culture leads to more reification,” as Ross Abbinnett puts it (2006, 23).

In a related context, advertisements, a most prominent feature of the reification of the revolutionary consciousness, made much use of the overflow of patriotism and post-uprising optimism. The revolution’s incomprehensibility and formlessness had a good deal of uncertainty as far as marketing is concerned. Faced with an unknown future, the marketers’ profitable decision was to embrace the revolution. The “Quilt of the Revolution” (2011) is a TV advertisement that marketed a quilt containing the colors of the Egyptian flag. In the advertisement, a woman, dressed in the same colors of the flag, appears in a bedroom trying to wake her husband up. The husband says that he is *striking* under the quilt, setting an example of how the sublime presence of the revolution becomes profane. The use value of strikes is converted to exchange-value. Another advertisement, marketing a beer brand, tells the viewers to “be manly because Egypt needs strong men” (Sherbini 2011). This highly signification-breeding advertisement hits in many directions none of them revolutionary. The patriarchal aura is even against the great presence of women in the revolution. Beer is presented *pharmakonically*, that is, indeterminately. Will it raise the revolutionary consciousness, or, as a sign of consumption with symptomatic

drunkenness, lead to its eclipse? Against this manliness-based manipulation, the *motherland* is celebrated by a mobile company marketing itself through a famous patriotic song, “Egypt is my Mother.” The same company extends its motherly/national guise to an advertisement expressing the world’s fascination with the Egyptian revolution by fixing billboards on the streets of Cairo with quotes by world leaders in praise of the people of Egypt. Profit and the fear of losing commercial benefits are behind all this commodification. This same telecommunication company has yielded to Mubarak’s regime demanding the cutting off of service at the beginning of the revolution, in an attempt to decrease the numbers of protesters. As Matt Bradley observes in his “Revolution Sells in Egypt,” after thousands of protesters ousted Mubarak in three weeks, “the enthusiasm for revolution has been redirected and repackaged for television ads, billboards and jingles selling products including hair gel, soft drinks and candy” (2011).

Categorical Demands

The revolution is viewed by many as the goose that lays golden eggs. Categorical demands, or small-group protests, spread everywhere asking for improvements of salaries. That is, they were mainly driven by economic rather than political reasons. The long-repressed working class has rebelled against its reified status as producers alienated from their own labor. University professors, teachers, public sector officials, doctors, bus and train drivers, postmen, and engineers, along with other social groups, have also joined categorical protests for the same economic reasons. These groups started to organize strikes and sit-ins nationwide in order to force the government to comply with their demands. These protests have their own indeterminate character. On the one hand, these categorical demands-based protests, are criticized as a threat to national security, at a time of crisis. “Critics of strikes,” as Hesham Sallam explains, “regularly invoke the expression ‘the wheel of production must turn’ as a means of telling protesters to go back to work” (2011, 21-22). These protests are viewed as chaotic and opportunist in nature. On the other hand, their demands are defended as being a natural outcome of the income injustice in the country.

Nonetheless, as the whirlwind of reification must turn, engulfing almost all aspects of social activities, these categorical demands turn the revolution into an *opportunity* to gain something tangible for individual entities. That is, the notion of instant profit is also present here. Some even made it explicit that these profit/justice-seeking protests are driven by the counter-revolution force in order to show the revolution as mere act of exploitation of a time of instability and

fluidity. “In March,” as Sallam writes, “Justice Minister Muhammad al-Gindi said that labor demonstrations are not spontaneous but a manifestation of an organized ‘counter-revolution’ staged by remnants of the old regime” (2011, 21-22). Although this is a dehistoricization of the demands expressed in the protests, the repetitive pattern in which they appeared was reifying and has led to a further reduction of the revolution as profit, mainly when these rights are not formed into a grand narrative of justice, that is, creating a dialectic of universal and categorical demands; they rather appeared as fragmented protests with personal goals. The outcome is a reifying gaze upon these demands, a gaze using the revolution of absurdity and lack of a sense of the ‘greater good.’

Satellite Mediation

Satellite channels have proliferated after the toppling down of Mubarak. Many of them bear names signifying relatedness to the revolution. Most of them, through tens of talk shows, tried to present themselves as the spokeschannel of the revolution. Among these channels, for instance, are: *Al-Tahrir* (named after Tahrir Square), *Misr 25* (Egypt 25, referring to January 25 revolution), and *Misr Al-Hurra* (The Free Egypt). Most of the owners of the channels were businessmen in Mubarak’s regime. What these celebratory channels spread is that the revolution is over and that it is time now for telling the audience the narrative(s) of the revolution. The Tahrir Channel, for instance, adopted the slogan “*al-sha‘b yurīd tahrīr al-‘oqūl*,” roughly translated as “the people demand the liberation of minds.” This slogan postulates that the old dictatorial hardware of the state has been changed and now people are to change their cultural superstructure in order for them to be up to the revolutionary post-Mubarak era! In addition, the same channel reifies the Square by spreading the false consciousness related to its centrality, that is, Tahrir Square as the logos of the revolution. This, in fact, is in discord with its slogan calling for new consciousness. As Mamoun Fandy points out, the Arab revolutions have started, geographically, at the margin rather than the center. He makes it clear that

the Arab revolt actually emerged in the small Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, 210 km southwest of the capital, when a policewoman slapped the face of a young man pushing a vegetable cart. The local people saw this as a slap to their own faces. When the young man set himself on fire in protest, their shame and humiliation went deeper. ... In Egypt, too, the strongest protests and the backbone of the Egyptian revolution were in outlying towns such as Suez and Alexandria, even if Cairo and Tahrir Square dominated television screens (2011, 222).

The *Tahrir* Channel, among others, furthered the reifying process by reducing, in an identitarian way, the all into the one, the irreducible object of the revolution into the reductive conceptions of the subject. Such satellite mediation decentered revolutionary subjectivity itself. That is, there was a whole world of culture industry standing between the people and the revolution. This mediation created images (which highlighted the imagined over the real), re-activated binary thinking, and more importantly enframed the revolutionary reality in order to help control its progress.

Identitarian Thinking

Another crucial reifying aspect is the re-emergence of dualities, based on identitarian mode of thinking. This started with the fixation of the binary opposition pronounced by Mubarak himself in his often-quoted phrase, “either me or chaos,” included in a speech in February 1, 2011. Each economic crisis, each outbreak of violence, and each irresponsible act of freedom was a fixating element in this duality. Another more important act of binary opposition was embodied in the civil/religious state debate. The reified manifestation of this binarism is the act of choosing the members of the Second Constitution Committee according to civil and religious orientations. Although the Arab Revolution in general “has been instigated by the multitude of identity-less identities – those who don’t count,” as Spanos (2012, 103) puts it, the institutionalization of the revolution has revealed the latent reification in the binary logic that started to prevail. The reified perception of the Egyptian affair in terms of religious/civil duality was, to a great extent, responsible for the loss of the Egyptian cause related to the eventually crystalized essence of the revolution: the aspiration for a non-military regime in Egypt.

The fixation of this duality has led to a political blindness preventing an appropriate response as to what track the revolution must take. This reification of the religious/civil duality has become a hidden source of controlling consciousness. As it replicates the alienation inherent in the solid duality of self/other and subject/object, creating a process of positive dialectic trying to compromise both of them in a synthesis of closure that eventually achieves the telos of world history. As Timothy Bewes argues, “[t]he progressive alienation, and self-alienation, of men and women is identical to the process of reification, a product not only of modernity but of dialectical thought *per se*” (2002, 70). This reified duality does not only thingify what is meant by religious and what is meant by civil, it also controls the very reaction of people towards the two concepts that have already undergone a great deal of mystification.

Such reifying religious/civil state binarism did lead to the forgetfulness of the 'state' as middle term. Forgetfulness of the 'state' in the interest of an identitarian conflict marginalized the revolution itself. This binary opposition has been rekindled by the media backed by Mubarak's regime; such media has installed in people's minds the idea that 'civil' is the opposite of 'religious.' Although the first eighteen days of the revolution set an example of the unity of the Egyptians, where Christian protesters used to "form a protective cordon around their Muslim countrymen so they could pray in safety. . ." only to be followed by Muslims protecting Christians on their Sunday Mass (Kennedy 2011), dualist identitarian thinking was restored when talk about gains came to the fore. Along with this dualist identitarian thinking came a reified view of the other, fostered by actions on the ground and heated debates on TV talk shows. This reification of the revolutionary consciousness has eventually culminated in a revolution very much grounded in its etymological root of *revolver*, to roll back. If Tahrir Square as "event" is a bringing out of absence, or void, to presence, as Badiou (2012, 84) argues, the restoration of the reifying dualism has foregrounded the need for sending the void *back* to where it was kept.

Calculative and Instrumental Reason

The concrete revolutionary act of demonstrating has been phrased in numbers and conceptualized in signifiers. The multitude that once ousted Mubarak in eighteen days has become a thing and has been given an ontological status, in a reifying fashion that can affect a change, the same status given to the SCAF (The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), that "guarded and protected" the revolution. The multitude has been processually expressed and fixated in what is exclusively coined by the Egyptian revolution as "*millionyya*," translated interchangeably, in media and studies, as million-man rally, million-man march, or million-man demonstration. Since January 25, 2011, there has been calls, almost each Friday, for a *millionyya* for a different reason. The repetitive pattern has turned the tumultuous presence of the people in the then-reified Tahrir Square into a concept changing with every *millionyya*, that is not necessarily and actually consisting of a *million*-man march. Part of the dereifying sublimity of the famous eighteen days was in its all-inclusiveness, incalculability, and unlimitedness. All this has been reduced to a *millionyya*, with a pinpointing name.

On February 18, 2011, one week after the toppling of Mubarak, there was the *millionyya* of Victory and Continuation, celebrating the achievement. In February 25, 2011, another *millionyya* (the Friday of Salvation) was arranged to get rid of the government headed by Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak's prime

minister. The *millioniyya* of National Unity was arranged on March 11, 2011, expressing a continuation of the slogan “Muslims and Copts are one hand.” The pattern went on every Friday, and the names given to each *millioniyya* were always spectacular: *Refusal* (March 11, 2011), *Saving the Revolution* (April 1, 2011), *The Second Revolution of Anger* (May 27, 2011), *The Wheel of Production and the Renaissance of Egypt* (June 4, 2011), *Loyalty to the Martyrs* (July 1, 2011), *Last Warning* (July 15, 2011), *Correcting the Path* (September 9, 2011), *Restoring the Revolution* (September 30, 2011), and “*Thank You, Now Go Back to Your Barracks*” (October 7, 2011), to give but a few examples in 2011. In the first half of 2012, there were *millioniyya* marches that embodied political polarization and antagonism between parties. For instance, the *millioniyya* of *Completing the Revolution* (January 25, 2012) has witnessed a disagreement concerning whether to complete the revolution or celebrate it. On April 6, 2012, a *millioniyya* was arranged for the support of the Islamist, Hazem Salah Abu Ismael, against charges of forging his mother’s nationality, which will jeopardize his candidacy for presidency. This particular *millioniyya* is the clearest example of how the multitude got reified in the interest of a single person with so many followers.

Apart from the Hollywood aura around the names, the war of *millioniyya* marches has taken a form of demonstration of power, especially in 2012. The reified concept of *millioniyya* deluded the people as for the number and, therefore, the quality of demands. If reification converts the concrete into abstract, it also “converts quality into quantity” (Berger and Pullberg 1965, 208). This is very much obvious in the *millioniyya* arranged on December 2, 2011, under the slogan of *Rehabilitation*. This *millioniyya* was held intentionally in two different places. The first was held in Tahrir Square and was dedicated to commemorating the martyrs of Mohamed Mahmoud Street (those who were killed at the gate of the Ministry of Interior); the second in Al-Abbasiyya Square, supporting the SCAF and the newly-appointed prime minister Kamal Al-Ganzouri.

Reified in itself, the *millioniyya* concept also reified the concept of the people. In almost every *millioniyya*, a spokesperson stands and speaks on behalf of *the people*, in an identitarian way. Hence, in the December 2, 2011 *millioniyya*, for example, there were certain individuals who spoke on behalf of *the people* in both locations. This makes one wonder about what the ‘people’ means. Based on quantity rather than quality, the *millioniyya* marches started to reify precepts in concepts and use them emptily. The ‘people’ is sometimes viewed as supporting the SCAF and sometimes as demonstrating against it. Each side

views the people reductively in an identitarian way of thinking. This has even happened early enough, after Mubarak stepped down. The people is reified by the “activists who, after the eighteen days had ended, said they would just call the ‘twenty-five million’ back to Tahrir if the politicians did anything they didn’t like” (Seikaly et al. 2015). The quantitative view of the people, supported by the notion of *millioniyya*, is a reification of it. Besides, both the *millioniyya* and the *people* stand for the notion of enframing, to use Martin Heidegger’s terminology. The very aim of this enframing is to keep things as a standing-reserve (Heidegger 1977, 28). Ultimately, the primal truth of the revolution as a revealing and an opening is concealed.

Repetitive Patterns in the Revolution

It is worth noting that the reification of the January 25 revolutionary consciousness was wrapped in a repetitive pattern. The repetition of the sudden economic crises and the repeated occurrences of insecurity as represented in bank robberies and banditry, has led to reified reactions towards the revolution, reactions that viewed it as the root of all evil. Of reification and repetitiveness, Axel Honneth writes that reification “signifies a habit of thought, a habitually ossified perspective, which, when taken up by the subject, leads not only to the loss of its capacity for empathetic engagement but also to the world’s loss of its qualitatively disclosed character” (2008, 109). This repetitiveness has led to camouflaging people’s recognition of the revolution; that is, the real was perceived in a reified way. As Honneth argues, “[w]e must consequently conceive of the process of reification as precisely that occurrence through which the genuine, involved human perspective is neutralized to such a degree that it ultimately transforms into objectifying thought” (2008, 125). This very issue found embodiment in a well-known phrase called the “Couch Party.” The phrase refers to a divide that was there since the start, referring to a group regarded as a party. This divide “had sprung between the Egyptians in the square and those outside . . . who prefer to sit at home on their couches watching government television” (Cambanis 2015, 60). This party had no empathetic engagement with the multitude revolting against injustice. The Egyptians in the squares and other spaces of the revolution have tried to construct a world that is all-inclusive. Such a world sounded, in the famous eighteen days, like one without closure, a world-construction in motion. The reality of a world like this “must be constructed and re-constructed over and over again. That is, the world must be continuously *realized*, in the double sense of this word, as actualization and as recognition” (Berger and Pullberg 1965, 201).

The revolution was presented as a thing-like facticity that controls the consciousness of the people all along the way through its demise. The Egyptians have made the revolution; they must shape and control it. What happened in the first year is that the revolutionary order started to be set as something over and against the idea of the revolution itself. It started to face the revolutionaries as an external facticity not of their own making. The revolution seemed to take its deterministic course that was embodied in the presidential election and the coming into office of the ex-President Mohamed Morsi in June 30, 2012, a paradigmatic moment that explains a lot of the alienation of the revolutionaries in the years that followed. As Alain Badiou describes it, a moment like this represents “a trap set by the old historical oppressor” (2012, 55).

Conclusion

The reduction of the revolution to the quantitative logic of capitalist market is nihilistic. This nihilism is responsible for the devaluation process directed against the January 25 revolution, as a unique event in Egyptian history. If the sublime eruption of the January 25 revolution, along with the Arab Spring, was to herald a new epoch in world history, an epoch that inaugurated a third millennium with a cry for freedom and the rights of the repressed, a cry of the unidentified multitude, reification has been a crucial element in revealing how capitalism has penetrated the unconscious of the people. In such an epoch, the marginalized were to achieve self-presencing. Yet, processes of reification as absencing have worked against the self-presencing of the proletariat and the repressed.

Awareness of the aspects of reification can help raise an understanding of how we construct meanings about revolutions and movements of social change. This awareness also helps the multitude not to be used by competing forces as tools, in the name of either patriotic or religious ethos. Revolutions reach their realization when they do not reach a moment of closure and when there is a kind of artful tension between the ruling class, on the one hand, and the multitude, on the other, in a way that does not allow the integration of the multitude into capitalism, neither for patriotic nor religious reasons, as its own favorite instruments.

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