HERE
notes from the present

Contents

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Cover by Sebastiano Buonamico

"Here-notes from the present" is written so that it can be read "as a novel": from the beginning to the end in sequence. This is **an invitation and an exhortation** to the reader: many diary pages make little sense if not read immediately after the previous ones and before those that follow.

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The Butterfly and the Boiling Point

by Rebecca Solnit

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Revolution is as unpredictable as an earthquake and as beautiful as spring. Its coming is always a surprise, but its nature should not be.

Revolution is a phase, a mood, like spring, and just as spring has its buds and showers, so revolution has its ebullience, its bravery, its hope, and its solidarity. Some of these things pass. The women of Cairo do not move as freely in public as they did during those few precious weeks when the old rules were suspended and everything was different. But the old Egypt is gone and Egyptians' sense of themselves—and our sense of them—is forever changed.

No revolution vanishes without effect. The Prague Spring of 1968 was brutally crushed, but 21 years later when a second wave of revolution liberated Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubček, who had been the reformist Secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, returned to give heart to the people from a balcony overlooking Wenceslas Square: "The government is telling us that the street is not the place for things to be solved, but I say the street was and is the place. The voice of the street must be heard."

The voice of the street has been a bugle cry this year. You heard it. Everyone did, but the rulers who thought their power was the only power that mattered, heard it last and with dismay.

Many of them are nervous now, releasing political prisoners, lowering the price of food, and otherwise trying to tamp down uprisings.

There were three kinds of surprise about this year's unfinished revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and the rumblings elsewhere that have frightened the mighty from Saudi Arabia to China, Algeria to Bahrain. The West was surprised that the Arab world, which we have regularly been told is medieval, hierarchical, and undemocratic, was full of young men and women using their cell phones, their Internet access, and their bodies in streets and squares to foment change and temporarily live a miracle of direct democracy and people power. And then there is the surprise that the seemingly unshakeable regimes of the strongmen were shaken into pieces.

And finally, there is always the surprise of: Why now? Why did the crowd decide to storm the Bastille on July 14, 1789, and not any other day? The bread famine going on in France that year and the rising cost of food had something to do with it, as hunger and poverty does with many of the Middle Eastern uprisings today, but part of the explanation remains mysterious. Why this day and not a month earlier or a decade later? Or never instead of now?

Oscar Wilde once remarked, "To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect." This profound uncertainty has been the grounds for my own hope.

Hindsight is 20/20, they say, and you can tell stories where it all makes sense. A young Tunisian college graduate, Mohammed Bouazizi, who could find no better work than selling produce from a cart on the street, was so upset by his

treatment at the hands of a policewoman that he set himself afire on December 17, 2010. His death two weeks later became the match that lit the country afire—but why that death? Or why the death of Khaled Said, an Egyptian youth who exposed police corruption and was beaten to death for it? He got a Facebook page that said "We are all Khaled Said," and his death, too, was a factor in the uprisings to come.

But when exactly do the abuses that have been tolerated for so long become intolerable? When does the fear evaporate and the rage generate action that produces joy? After all, Tunisia and Egypt were not short on intolerable situations and tragedies before Bouazizi's self-immolation and Said's murder.

Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death at an intersection in Saigon on June 11, 1963, to protest the treatment of Buddhists by the U.S.-backed government of South Vietnam. His stoic composure while in flames was widely seen and may have helped produce a military coup against the regime six months later—a change, but not necessarily a liberation. In between that year and this one, many people have fasted, prayed, protested, gone to prison, and died to call attention to cruel regimes, with little or no measurable consequence.

Guns and Butterflies

The boiling point of water is straightforward, but the boiling point of societies is mysterious. Bouazizi's death became a catalyst, and at his funeral the 5,000 mourners chanted, "Farewell, Mohammed, we will avenge you. We weep for you today, we will make those who caused your death weep."

But his was not the first Tunisian gesture of denunciation. An even younger man, the rap artist who calls himself El General, uploaded a song about the horror of poverty and injustice in the country and, as the "Guardian" put it, "within hours, the song had lit up the bleak and fearful horizon like an incendiary bomb." Or a new dawn. The artist was arrested and interrogated for three very long days, and then released thanks to widespread protest. And surely before him we could find another milestone. And another young man being subjected to inhuman conditions. And behind the uprising in Egypt are a panoply of union and human rights organizers as well as charismatic individuals.

This has been a great year for the power of the powerless and for the courage and determination of the young. A short, fair-haired, mild man even younger than Bouazizi has been held under extreme conditions in solitary confinement in a Marine brig in Quantico, Virginia, for the last several months. He is charged with giving hundreds of thousands of secret U.S. documents to WikiLeaks and so unveiling some of the more compromised and unsavory operations of the American military and U.S. diplomacy. Bradley Manning was a 22-year-old soldier stationed in Iraq when he was arrested last spring. The acts he's charged with have changed the global political landscape and fed the outrage in the Middle East.

As "Foreign Policy" put it in a headline, "In one fell swoop, the candor of the cables released by WikiLeaks did more for Arab democracy than decades of backstage U.S. diplomacy." The cables suggested, among other things, that the U.S. was not going to back Tunisian dictator Ben Ali to

the bitter end, and that the regime's corruption was common knowledge.

Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story, a 1958 comic book about the Civil Rights struggle in the American South and the power of non-violence was translated and distributed by the American Islamic Council in the Arab world in 2008 and has been credited with influencing the insurgencies of 2011. So the American Islamic Council played a role, too. […] Behind King are the lessons he, in turn, learned from Mohandas Gandhi, whose movement liberated India from colonial rule 66 years ago, and so the story comes back to the east.

Causes are Russian dolls. You can keep opening each one up and find another one behind it. Wiki-Leaks and Facebook and Twitter and the new media helped in 2011, but new media had been around for years. Asmaa Mahfouz was a young Egyptian woman who had served time in prison for using the Internet to organize a protest on April 6, 2008, to support striking workers. With astonishing courage, she posted a video of herself on Facebook on January 18, 2011, in which she looked into the camera and said, with a voice of intense conviction:

"Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire to protest humiliation and hunger and poverty and degradation they had to live with for 30 years. Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire thinking maybe we can have a revolution like Tunisia, maybe we can have freedom, justice, honor, and human dignity. Today, one of these four has died, and I saw people commenting and saying, 'May God forgive him. He committed a sin and killed himself for nothing.' People, have some shame."

She described an earlier demonstration at which few had shown up: “I posted that I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone. And I’ll hold up a banner. Perhaps people will show some honor. No one came except three guys—three guys and three armored cars of riot police. And tens of hired thugs and officers came to terrorize us.”

Mahfouz called for the gathering in Tahrir Square on January 25th that became the Egyptian revolution. The second time around she didn’t stand alone. Eighty-five thousand Egyptians pledged to attend, and soon enough, millions stood with her.

The revolution was called by a young woman with nothing more than a Facebook account and passionate conviction. They were enough. Often, revolution has had such modest starts. On October 5, 1789, a girl took a drum to the central markets of Paris. The storming of the Bastille a few months before had started, but hardly completed, a revolution. That drummer girl helped gather a mostly female crowd of thousands who marched to Versailles and seized the royal family. It was the end of the Bourbon monarchy.

Women often find great roles in revolution, simply because the rules fall apart and everyone has agency, anyone can act. As they did in Egypt, where liberty leading the masses was an earnest young woman in a black veil.

That the flapping of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil can shape the weather in Texas is a summation of chaos theory that is now an oft-repeated cliché. But there are billions of butterflies on earth, all flapping their wings. Why does one gesture matter more than another? Why this Facebook post, this girl with a drum?

Even to try to answer this you'd have to say that the butterfly is born aloft by a particular breeze that was shaped by the flap of the wing of, say, a sparrow, and so behind causes are causes, behind small agents are other small agents, inspirations, and role models, as well as outrages to react against. The point is not that causation is unpredictable and erratic. The point is that butterflies and sparrows and young women in veils and an unknown 20-year-old rapping in Arabic and you yourself, if you wanted it, sometimes have tremendous power, enough to bring down a dictator, enough to change the world.

Other Selves, Other Lives

2011 has already been a remarkable year in which a particular kind of humanity appeared again and again in very different places, and we will see a great deal more of it in Japan before that catastrophe is over. […]

Violence always seems to me the worst form of tyranny. It deprives people of their rights, including the right to live. The rest of the year so far has been dominated by battles against the tyrannies that have sometimes cost lives and sometimes just ground down those lives into poverty and indignity, from Bahrain to Madison, Wisconsin.

Yes, to Madison. I have often wondered if the United States could catch fire the way other countries sometimes do. The public space and spirit of Argentina or Egypt often seem missing here, for what changes in revolution is largely spirit, emotion, belief—intangible things, as delicate as butterfly wings, but our world is made of such things. They matter. The governors govern

by the consent of the governed. When they lose that consent, they resort to violence, which can stop some people directly, but aims to stop most of us through the power of fear.

And then sometimes a young man becomes fearless enough to post a song attacking the dictator who has ruled all his young life. Or people sign a declaration like Charter 77, the 1977 Czech document that was a milestone on the way to the revolutions of 1989, as well as a denunciation of the harassment of an underground rock band called the "Plastic People of the Universe". Or a group of them found a labor union on the waterfront in Gdansk, Poland, in 1980, and the first cracks appear in the Soviet Empire.

Those who are not afraid are ungovernable, at least by fear, that favorite tool of the bygone era of George W. Bush. Jonathan Schell, with his usual beautiful insight, saw this when he wrote of the uprising in Tahrir Square:

"The murder of the 300 people, it may be, was the event that sealed Mubarak's doom. When people are afraid, murders make them take flight. But when they have thrown off fear, murders have the opposite effect and make them bold. Instead of fear, they feel solidarity. Then they 'stay'—and advance. And there is no solidarity like solidarity with the dead. That is the stuff of which revolution is made."

When a revolution is made, people suddenly find themselves in a changed state—of mind and of nation. The ordinary rules are suspended, and people become engaged with each other in new ways, and develop a new sense of power and possibility. People behave with generosity and altruism; they find they can govern themselves;

and, in many ways, the government simply ceases to exist. A few days into the Egyptian revolution, Ben Wedeman, CNN's senior correspondent in Cairo, was asked why things had calmed down in the Egyptian capital. He responded: "Things have calmed down because there is no government here," pointing out that security forces had simply disappeared from the streets.

This state often arises in disasters as well, when the government is overwhelmed, shut down, or irrelevant for people intent on survival and then on putting society back together. If it rarely lasts, in the process it does change individuals and societies, leaving a legacy. To my mind, the best government is one that most resembles this moment when civil society reigns in a spirit of hope, inclusiveness, and improvisational genius.

In Egypt, there were moments of violence when people pushed back against the government's goons, and for a week it seemed like the news was filled with little but pictures of bloody heads. Still, no armies marched, no superior weaponry decided the fate of the country, nobody was pushed from power by armed might. People gathered in public and discovered themselves as the public, as civil society. They found that the repression and exploitation they had long tolerated was intolerable and that they could do something about it, even if that something was only gathering, standing together, insisting on their rights as the public, as the true nation that the government can never be.

It is remarkable how, in other countries, people will one day simply stop believing in the regime that had, until then, ruled them, as African-Americans did in the South here 50 years ago. Stopping

believing means no longer regarding those who rule you as legitimate, and so no longer fearing them. Or respecting them. And then, miraculously, they begin to crumble.

In the Philippines in 1986, millions of people gathered in response to a call from Catholic-run Radio Veritas, the only station the dictatorship didn't control or shut down. Then the army defected and dictator Fernando Marcos was ousted from power after 21 years.

In Argentina in 2001, in the wake of a brutal economic collapse, such a sudden shift in consciousness toppled the neoliberal regime of Fernando de la Rúa and ushered in a revolutionary era of economic desperation, but also of brilliant, generous innovation. A shift in consciousness brought an outpouring of citizens into the streets of Buenos Aires, suddenly no longer afraid after the long nightmare of a military regime and its aftermath. In Iceland in early 2009, in the wake of a global economic meltdown of special fierceness on that small island nation, a once-docile population almost literally drummed out of power the ruling party that had managed the country into bankruptcy.

Can't Happen Here?

In the United States, the communion between the governed and the governors and the public spaces in which to be reborn as a civil society resurgent often seem missing. This is a big country whose national capital is not much of a center and whose majority seems to live in places that are themselves decentered.

At its best, revolution is an urban phenomenon. Suburbia is counterrevolutionary by design. For

revolution, you need to converge, to live in public, to become the public, and that's a geographical as well as a political phenomenon. The history of revolution is the history of great public spaces: the Place de la Concorde during the French Revolution; the Ramblas in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War; Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989 (a splendid rebellion that was crushed); the great surge that turned the divide of the Berlin Wall into a gathering place in that same year; the insurrectionary occupation of the Zocalo of Mexico City after corrupt presidential elections and of the space in Buenos Aires that gave the Dirty War's most open opposition its name: Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, the Mothers of the Plaza of May.

It's all very well to organize on Facebook and update on Twitter, but these are only preludes. You also need to rise up, to pour out into the streets. You need to be together in body, for only then are you truly the public with the full power that a public can possess. And then it needs to matter. The United States is good at trivializing and ignoring insurrections at home.

The authorities were shaken by the uprising in Seattle that shut down the World Trade Organization meeting on November 30, 1999, but the actual nonviolent resistance there was quickly fictionalized into a tale of a violent rabble. Novelist and then-"New Yorker" correspondent Mavis Gallant wrote in 1968:

"The difference between rebellion at Columbia [University] and rebellion at the Sorbonne is that life in Manhattan went on as before, while in Paris every section of society was set on fire, in the space of a few days. The collective hallucination

was that life can change, quite suddenly and for the better. It still strikes me as a noble desire." […]
Hard times are in store for most people on Earth, and those may be times of boldness. Or not. The butterflies are out there, but when their flight stirs the winds of insurrection no one knows beforehand.
So remember to expect the unexpected, but not just to wait for it. Sometimes you have to become the unexpected, as the young heroes and heroines of 2011 have. I am sure they themselves are as surprised as anyone. Since she very nearly had the first word, let Asmaa Mahfouz have the last word: "As long as you say there is no hope, then there will be no hope, but if you go down and take a stance, then there will be hope."

Diaries from January to March 2011

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Silvia Brandon-Perez

Hayward, California, January 6, 2011

Yesterday was busy and lovely and exhausting; we started at the food container at about 8:40 in the morning, and it was so cold I was sorry I gave away most of my gloves when I moved to the Bay area from the Poconos. About nine families, including an older Asian woman who walked many blocks with a shopping cart to get to us, and got lost, and came when we had already closed, so we reopened to give her food.

January 1. Alexandria, Egypt. A bomb, worn by a suicide attacker, ripped through a throng of worshippers outside of a Coptic Christian church, killing 22 people.

I am always amazed at the ongoing work of our people, including all the volunteers, the groups such as the South Hayward Parish, which runs this particular food pantry, and which has been giving out food and clothing and support for over thirty years, for in this "rich" country there are always people who fall through the cracks, who need food in order to feed their families. […]
Later in the day we spent a couple of hours at the Southern Alameda's Gray Panthers, and then went to visit one of my "sons" who is suffering not only from the pain of a work-related lumbar hernia but from the fact that the worker's comp carrier has stopped compensation payments so he can neither work nor support his family.
I came home to a sad story: a building in Oakland caught fire and three people died, and two others who are in the hospital are being released and have no place to go… they need clothing and food and beds. In a more caring environment, there would be a place they could turn to, an agency that would automatically provide. […]
Unquestionably, when all you worry about is the "bottom line," which seems to be the enshrined first principle of this particular empire, you become nothing but a bottom feeder. But it's a new year in a fairly new century, and I am in love with a man and a planet, and I say, let us dream on, and while we are dreaming, and praying, let us continue to "move our feet."

January 8. Tucson, Arizona. Gabrielle Giffords, a Democratic member of the United States House of Representatives, was shot in the head at point-blank range, as she greeted constituents outside a grocery store. In the attack, six people were killed, including a 9-year-old girl.

Kawagoe, Japan, January 9, 2011

Cocomino

It is my daughter's third birthday today. Her six-year-old sister planned the birthday party. She received a letter from her older sister and a set

of Anpanman pajamas. She likes Anpanman, who is a character in a Japanese *anime* [cartoon]. Then my family enjoyed playing cards, singing a birthday song and reading a picture book. After the party, my wife baked a birthday cake in the oven and my daughters topped the cake with strawberries and Japanese oranges. My younger daughter said at my family gathering, "My favorite food is pizza. When I grow up, I want to wear a kimono".

January 9. Minsk, Belarus. The government warned that it might seize custody of the 3-year-old son of an opposition presidential - candidate who was jailed along with his wife, a journalist.

Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, January 14, 2011 **Ahmed Al Omran**

Today was a huge, huge day for Tunisia. After four weeks of street protests, president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled the country. This is probably the first time we witness an Arab leader toppled by his own people. Very happy for the Tunisian people, and very proud of them. I'm especially thrilled for my friends Sami Bin Gharbia and Slim Amamou, who worked tirelessly for years to see this day. The only thing that annoyed me was that Saudi Arabia welcomed the ousted dictator to give him refuge in our homeland. But for now, let's just live this historical moment. Here's to a domino effect all over the Middle East.

At least 219 people were killed in the weeks of protests in Tunisia.

Mosul, Iraq, January 20, 2011 **"Sunshine"**

We celebrated New Year's Eve at my paternal uncle's house where we had a nice family gathering, with lots of food, desserts; we exchanged gifts, jokes, and spent a lovely time together, but came home at ten o'clock since it is not safe to be out late.
I've been so busy with college and exams, and feeling stressed because college is a mess, many

exams each day, sometimes they demand that we study subjects they haven't explained, they are very harsh. My friend says "at last we'll all graduate and become engineers, it doesn't matter whether it's in the first or second turn; we'll all be stay-at-home engineers who can't find jobs". I am trying to convince myself that this is true (except the jobs part). I'll just do what I can, no matter what the results turn out to be.

About two days ago, I couldn't reach the college because of the closed roads, and I missed the laboratory experiment. I asked if I could do it another day. He said: "If the professor allows you to do it another time, then do it, but I can't give you my approval otherwise, because I am not responsible for your personal circumstances". As if I closed all the roads in Mosul! The professor didn't allow me to do it; each time he'd say to come in another time, I kept going back again and again till the day before my exam. I asked a girl to explain it to me, but it's hard to imagine what's going on without doing it.

I had my practical exams. On the first one, we choose numbers and each number is connected to a different experiment. Well, I had kind of bad luck, I got the number of the only experiment I missed! I asked the professor to change it, but he said: "No, that's your luck". I didn't do well. On the second practical exam, I did well. On the third exam I didn't, my computer didn't work, and they didn't give me extra time. The exam is only thirty minutes and the professors restarted my slow computer three times, and brought another mouse. And in the programming laboratory, no one could answer the question!

January 15. Tripoli. In a televised address to his people on Libyan state television, Colonel Qaddafi identified the "evil organization" he blamed for unleashing a plot against public order and Arab self rule in Tunisia: WikiLeaks.

January 21. Tunisia. The powerful Tunisian trade union squared off against the interim government as thousands of protesters demanding the complete eradication of the old ruling party stormed into the streets.

Now we're having our mid-year holiday which lasts for two weeks, but our exams will be after the holiday! It's crazy, because of the Shiites' ceremony they postponed our exams. I made a schedule and I am studying over my holiday and waking up at 6:45 am! What a great holiday! We need a holiday after this "holiday"! I am doing my best, I study till 11 pm, just take a short nap, and my rests are about five minutes only. Just like every year, I am going to spend my birthday studying! But inshallah, after my exams I'll have a birthday party. Last week, I went to my best friend's birthday and we had fun. I love parties.

Turin, January 20, 2010 **Marco Novarese**

Today I gave exams again at the university. This girl's friend had just gotten 30 out of 30. A few minutes earlier, she had gotten 28: two excellent grades, but not the same, of course. As soon as I tell her friend her result, she turns to celebrate and congratulate her, but at the same time, I think I can see a veil of sadness in her eyes, perhaps inevitable; maybe I'm only imagining it, as someone who attributes importance even to the slightest differences in a grade, aiming for an impossible degree of fairness and proper evaluation. Giving everyone the same grade would be unfair, and no one would be satisfied. For a reward to make you happy, there has to be the possibility that you won't get it; and so inevitably, someone won't.

January 22. Algiers. Algerian police have broken up an anti-government demonstration by about 300 people, calling for greater freedoms.

Arctic Bay, Canada, January 20, 2011 **Clare Kines**

It is a blustery, cold day here. And although that is to be expected, our milder-than-average winter thus far has left us unaccustomed to these

sort of days. But, typically, the ravens do not seem to mind. On the drive home for lunch, they were everywhere, playing in the wind currents around buildings, hanging in the air, adjusting, tumbling.

January 24. Moscow. A suicide bomber attacked busiest airport, killing dozens of people.

But is it play? […] In truth, I don't know that it is play. It *appears* to be play. […] If it isn't play, what is it?

Typically when I talk about ravens playing in the wind they are riding wind currents on windy days. They will hang in one place, or soar up on the currents, dump the air out of their wings and drop down to catch the wind again. Some times they tumble, some times they peel away and ride the wind somewhere else. What would be the purpose of this behaviour?

I thought about that question on the way home today, and the way back to work after lunch. The route was dotted with the birds hovering, soaring, hanging in one spot. One of the key behaviours of ravens this time of year is to find enough food. Food for energy to survive and to stay warm. It struck me that a possible explanation for what it might be, if not play, would be a way of efficiently looking for food, without expending much precious energy.

Height would give the ravens a vantage point to look for food. If they could stay in one spot, high in the air, by using the power of the wind alone, they could find food at a low energy cost. What they would lose is covering a lot of ground, but they also move quickly between spots travelling with the wind. A possibility, and the only one that has come to me so far.

Still looks like play to me though.

The municipal elections that were conducted in 2005 were the first taste of democracy and governmental participation that Saudis have ever had; unfortunately it was not up to anyone's expectations. People voted according to tribal affiliation and who their sheikhs directed them to vote for. Campaigns were virtually non-existent and at the end of it all the elected were not heard of, nor results seen.

Above all, the issue that stands out the most with the 2005 elections was that women were banned from voting and nominations. The real reason was that a large faction of our society still thinks of women as property, sheep, and/or seductive, sinful creatures out to seduce them into damnation. However the official excuse was a bit more diplomatic; that it was the first experiment and that the government was not prepared, facilities-wise, to receive women voters.

Since a lot of younger Saudis have started to question the fatwas about women being incapable, lack of women-only facilities has become a favorite. This is the same excuse that is currently being employed to explain why women are still banned from driving cars, and not only by muttawas [the religious police] but also by people who seem quite pro-women in most other aspects. They say we need women traffic police, as if when an accident happens, it isn't the nearest patrol that should go to the site, but rather the one that matches the gender of the driver! They say we can't even begin to think about women driving until we have gender-segregated driving schools and traffic administration. […]

January 25. "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people," said U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

January 25. Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of people demanding an end to the nearly 30-year rule of President Hosni Mubarak filled the streets of several Egyptian cities.

Mona Seif, Egyptian, 24 Years Old

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From "Al Jazeera", February 23, 2011

I didn't think it was going to be a revolution. I thought if we could mobilise a couple of thousand people then that would be great. I was angry about the corruption in the country, about the death of Khaled Said [an Egyptian youth beaten to death by police] and the torture of those suspected but never convicted of being behind the Alexandria Coptic church bombing. I realised this was going to be bigger than we had anticipated when 20,000 people marched towards Tahrir Square on January 25. That is when we saw a shift; it was not about the minimum wage or emergency law anymore. It became much bigger than this, it turned into a protest against the regime. […]

I have never felt as at peace and as safe as I did during those days in Tahrir. There was a sense of coexistence that overcame all of the problems that usually happen—whether religious or gender based. Pre-January 25 whenever we would attend protests I would always be told by the men to go to the back to avoid getting injured and that used to anger me. But since January 25 people have begun to treat me as an equal. […] It felt like it had become a different society—there was one Egypt inside Tahrir and another Egypt outside. […]

I no longer feel alienated from society. I now walk the streets of Cairo and smile at strangers

all the time. I have gained a sense of belonging with everyone on the streets of Cairo—at least for now. Before January 25 I was tempted to leave the country. This feeling has changed now, I want to stay here. […]

Gigi Ibrahim, Egyptian, 24 Years Old

From "Al Jazeera", February 23, 2011

I started my political activism by just talking to people who were involved in the labour movement. Then I became more active and the whole thing became addictive. I went to meetings and took part in protests. […] My family always had problems with me taking part in protests. They prevented me from going for my safety because I am a girl. They were worried about the risks. I would have to lie about attending protests.

When the police violently cleared the square on January 25, I was shot in the back by a rubber bullet while trying to run away from the police as they tear-gassed us. I returned to the square, as did many others, the following day and stayed there on and off for the next 18 days.

As things escalated my dad got increasingly worried. On January 28, my sister wanted to lock me in the house. They tried to stop me from leaving, but I was determined and I went out. I moved to my aunt's place that is closer to Tahrir Square and I would go there every now and again to wash and rest before returning to the square.

At first my family was very worried, but as things

escalated they started to understand and to be more supportive. My family is not politically active at all.

The day-to-day conditions were not easy. Most of us would use the bathroom inside the nearby mosque. Others would go to nearby flats where people kindly opened their homes for people to use. I was in Tahrir Square on February 2, when pro-Mubarak thugs attacked us with petrol bombs and rocks. That was the most horrific night. I was trapped in the middle of the square. […] I thought if those armed pro-Mubarak thugs came inside the square it would be the end of us. We were unarmed, we had nothing. […]

During the 18 days neither I nor any of my friends were harassed. I slept in Tahrir with five men around me that I didn't know and I was safe. But that changed on the day Mubarak stepped down. The type of people who came then were not interested in the revolution. They were there to take pictures. They came for the carnival atmosphere and that was when things started to change. […]

The revolution is not over. All of our demands have not yet been met. We have to continue. This is where the real hard work begins, but it will take a different shape than staging sit-ins in the square. Rebuilding Egypt is going to be tough and we all have to take part in this. There are organised strikes demanding workers' rights for better pay and conditions and those are the battles to be won now.

Singapore, January 26, 2011 **Cherry Hmung**

We got up at 6 am and came downstairs. There is one bathroom downstairs, the only one we

can use. It means we are not allowed to use the one upstairs. In the sitting room there is a cupboard we use as an altar. We changed the prayer oil and lit it up. We changed the water in the flower vase. Then cleared and wiped away the ashes and dust from the cupboard. Then we wiped the other furniture in the sitting room. After we vacuumed the sitting room, it was time for washing. Some had to wash with the machine and some with their hands. The washed clothes are hung outside on bamboo poles. Sannu said we are not allowed to soak and wash our clothes together with theirs. She gave me a small pail to wash mine. For herself she used the same size as mine but a different color. Moreover we cannot hang our clothes together, meaning we have to use separate bamboo poles. Moreover when we put away the dried laundry, we have to put it away separately. That means we get their clothes and bring them upstairs first then come down again to get ours. I don't mean to break this rule but I think it's ridiculous.

January 27. Yemen. Thousands of protesters took to the streets, demanding the ouster of the 32-year-old government of Ali Abdullah Saleh.

While we did the washing she told me we could take a bath once a day, in the evening. Again she said I am lucky because I could take a bath freely. She told me about one maid she knew. She was only allowed to use one small pail of water to take a bath. And she was not allowed to use the toilet in her employer's house. She was asked to go to the nearby public toilet every time she needed it. That's really horrible, if the story she told me is true.

What I dreaded the most is cooking. I seldom cook at home and I don't like cooking much. There were so many new things to learn in the kitchen. Again, here comes another rule. "You

cannot use the same plates they use to eat," Sannu said, showing me one plate. "Remember this plate and use only this plate while you are working here." She added that our employer asked her to tell me these rules but she hated to tell me about them. She said she wished our employer would tell me herself. She taught me how to mop the floor. It hurt my back and shoulder like hell. At night, my whole body ached. I couldn't sleep. I missed home so much. And I was shocked by the rules. I didn't expect this kind of treatment in a modern country like Singapore.

Kawagoe, Japan, January 31, 2011

Cocomino

Yesterday my family went to Kawajima, a town neighboring Kawagoe, to watch the swans. Since 2003, swans have migrated from northern areas to spend the winter in the riverbed of the town from October to November. […] It was freezing cold and the temperature was three degrees. But more than 50 visitors came there: children, photographers and elderly people. On the other hand, my daughters really enjoyed sliding down the bank of the river on a piece of cardboard. My wife and I are kept busy washing their clothes every day.

January 30. Close to 99 percent of south Sudanese chose to secede from the north in a January 9-15 referendum, according to the first complete preliminary results announced today.

Riyadh, February 3, 2011

Eman Al Nafjan

With what's going on right now in Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Tunis and Egypt, I get a lot of questions about how Saudis are taking it and what the reaction is. The short answer is they are shocked and captivated but haven't made up their minds about any of it. […] They are watching, though.

February 2. Cairo. Hosni Mubarak unleashed waves of his supporters armed with clubs, rocks and knives in an assault on thousands of protesters in Tahrir Square.

All over the country, all these Saudis, who rarely watch or read the news and whose only interest in doing so is for more local social openness or conservatism (depending on their background), are now carefully observing what's going on in neighboring countries. Saudis who didn't know what the channel number was for Al Jazeera News on their receivers now have it saved on their favorites list. University and high school students are now watching the news and social media feeds on their study breaks instead of an episode of *Friends*. It's a new atmosphere. The thing that's lacking is analysis or a discussion of what it means for us. […]

Beit Sahour, Palestine, February 6, 2011

Mazin Qumsiyeh

"There is a lot of pressure on us. We are kind of scared." Omar El Shamy, one of the anti-government protestors who have been occupying Tahrir Square in Cairo for more than a week. ("The New York Times", February 6, "Quotation of the day")

No one expected what happened in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Jordan. Demonstrations last week in support of the Egyptian people were suppressed by the Hamas-ruled authority in Gaza and by the Fatah-ruled authority in the West Bank (both in violation of the Palestinian laws that guarantee freedom of assembly and expression). Thursday, plainclothes security personnel disrupted a peaceful gathering in Ramallah, arrested participants and took their video footage.

Despite illegal orders from the Palestinian Authority, Friday's demonstrations in Bil'in, Wad Rahhal, and elsewhere emphasized Egyptian-Palestinian unity in the face of oppression, and Saturday demos were held in Gaza, Jerusalem, Beit Ommar, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. Over 1000 people gathered in Ramallah. Dozens of plainclothes PA personnel tried to disrupt the demonstration and arrested people.

Havana, February 12, 2011

Yoani Sánchez

Darkness and light in Tahrir Square, a red phosphorescent glow interrupted by camera flashes and the glowing screens of mobile phones. I wasn't there, and yet I know how each one of the Egyptians felt, gathered last night in downtown Cairo. I, who have never been able to shout and cry in public, overwhelmed by happiness that the cycle of authoritarianism under which I was born has ended, I know I would do the same until I had no voice left, I would hug everyone, I would feel as light as if a huge burden had fallen from my shoulders. I have not experienced a revolution, much less a citizen revolution, but this week, despite the caution of the official news, I have the sense that the Suez Canal and the Caribbean Sea are not so far apart, not so different. […]

February 7. Zimbabwe. Defense minister has said: "Those who may want to emulate what happened in Tunisia or what is happening in Egypt will regret it because we will not allow any chaos in this country."

Columbia, Maryland, February 12, 2011

Laila El-Haddad

Yesterday, I reconnected with a former high school teacher of mine. Her name was Mary Doherty. Ms. Doherty was a mentor to me and instrumental in guiding me to where I am today. It took me years to locate her—and yesterday, finally, through the miracle of the social network, I did.
Now, this would not be a significant or blogworthy event except that this story came full-circle yesterday. Our virtual reunion coincided with the remarkable events that unfolded in Egypt. And many years ago, sixteen to be exact, Ms. Doherty single-handedly helped me stand up to the Mubarak regime. I'm not saying this to be grandiose. I'm saying it because it's true. I have always remembered this incident, which forever

February 9. Egypt. Labor strikes and worker protests that flared across Egypt affected post offices, textile factories and even the government's flagship newspaper, providing a burst of momentum to protesters demanding the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak.

changed how I found myself dealing with situations of incomprehensible repression and overwhelming odds. Namely, the lesson I learned was to never allow the situation to own me, but to own the situation.

What happened was as follows: I was part of our high school's Model United Nations club in Bahrain. We were invited to participate in another school's conference in Cairo (the Cairo American College). And so the necessary preparations were made, tickets were booked, and visas were issued. Except mine. It was 1995, and Cairo, still seething from Arafat's poorly played decision to ally himself with Saddam Hussein, was as punishment still banning Palestinians from entering Egypt. Though I was not an American citizen, the American ambassador intervened on my behalf, our school being affiliated with the Department of Defense, and one of our club's advisers being a formal naval officer. But the answer was always the same: impossible. There are orders—high ones—and nothing can change them, we were told. But Ms. Doherty, my economics teacher and head of the club, wouldn't have it. It came down to two am the morning before our group's scheduled departure.

After obtaining approval from the school—and my mother (who was well aware of the consequences of her decision, but wanted me to try anyway), Ms. Doherty decided to take me with the class to Cairo—without a visa. She stayed up until four o'clock in the morning looking for a chaperon from the school that would agree to go with me in case I got stranded at Cairo Airport. And eventually she did. We left at 8 am and by some miracle, Bahraini airport officials did not

February 11. Egypt. "President Hosni Mubarak has decided to step down as president," Vice-president Omar Suleiman announced on state television. More than 300 protesters were killed in the uprising.

February 13. Rome. Italy's interior minister said that the country hoped to send its armed forces to Tunisia to help stem the flow of immigrants, after more than 3,000 Tunisians arrived by boat on an Italian island in recent days.

notice I lacked an Egyptian visa. Eventually we made it to Cairo Airport. All of the students passed through unhindered, and then came my turn. We waited anxiously, as the customs officials flipped through my passport time and again, in search of the missing visa.

"You'll have to come with us" came the stern response, after the official finally noticed the "Gaza" stamp in my passport. Ms. Doherty, a small, strong, woman in her 60s at least, and very close to retirement, would not take no for an answer, even when I thought we should throw the towel in. She stood—not sat—by my side in the face of the Amn al-Dawla officials—the dreaded state security—to whom my case was eventually referred for fourteen hours straight, shift after shift, "no" after "no", "go back" after "go back". "Ms. Doherty, please, sit down and rest," I pleaded with her. "I will not. I will stay standing until they recognize we are not going anywhere. You will get through," she stated as though it was inevitable.

Eventually she had to continue on through with the students, and the chaperon remained with me. But she left with clear instructions to stand my ground until I got through. "But how? how can I stand up to such a system?" I asked, just sixteen years old. "You have to show them you really want it, and that you won't back down."

The next day, bleary-eyed and exhausted, I was brought into the security office for the fourth or fifth time that night, and the question this time was completely unexpected: "You're not backing down, are you?" asked the official. "No sir, I'm not," I replied bluntly. "Well young girl, you really do us proud," came the reply, in a rare

moment of sincerity. He left his office without further comment and suddenly I was ushered through customs without even a stamp in my passport. I was stunned, and would be for days and years to come.

The story does not always end this way. Years later, in 2008, when facing a similar dilemma with my two young children, we were not allowed through and eventually deported back to the United States, without valid visas. And decades before this, my grandmother was held for hours as they screened her, in the same waiting hall. And after her, my mother, newly pregnant with my brother. "Why? Why are you not letting us through? What is our crime except that we were born Palestinian?" they told the officials.

I never thought anything of my own trial, as a young sixteen-year-old—at least I didn't think of it as more than a turning point in my own personal growth. Until yesterday. When in the day of triumph, the Egyptian people banded together, and together overcame the repressive will of the regime, and overcame the fear and repression that regime had planted in their minds. And there was no turning back. They owned the situation—the situation no longer owned them. A situation that, as it affected four generations of my family—from my grandmother down to my children—has repressed them, mentally and physically. Now, it has come to an end. The people have spoken—the people have acted, and the people were heard.

Genoa, Italy, February 12, 2011 **Gabriele Serpe**

It's the fault of the stereo on the piano, "Carpet Crawlers" by Genesis. And my lack of desire to

get up. This morning it's as if the day hadn't begun, maybe it got stuck on the tips of some star during the night, and there it remained, even though the sun came up as always.

There are so many of us who decided to stay out of it all. And it's often made us feel special, rich in spirit, to know we have the strength to stick it out on the threshold. Because the world out there hasn't turned out the way we imagined it as teenagers, and then as young adults, who if we squinted could believe it was just a matter of growing up, that soon everything would be put to rights according to our expectations.

But maturity brings a sort of incrustation in the channels that feed the brain, and it hardened us, we got a bit tired. Besides, we had to stick it out and that took energy, it isn't easy to stay on the outside when everyone is passing by you to get in! We never liked it in there. Our world needed to be set free from money and ambition, from the desire to get to the top, which generates nothing but phantoms and fears. We were different. We hadn't bargained on the anxiety, the pressure, the terror of falling, the feeling that we were already in flight and had no place to land. We were caught off guard.

We saw many people go in, friends and enemies. We said goodbye from afar, they probably didn't even notice us waving at them, many of them walked on in as naturally as they would take a sip of coffee, they didn't linger, they didn't look around, or look back.

Meanwhile, the voices echoing from inside tell of an infinite number of doors, many more than we could imagine. We also hear that they all lead to the same hall, to a single vast atrium. But we

February 14. Iran. Tens of thousands of demonstrators turned out for the biggest protests the country had seen since the aftermath of the disputed re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009.

February 15. Manama, Bahrain. Thousands of protesters poured into this nation's symbolic center, Pearl Square. The crowd grew bolder as it grew larger, and as in Tunisia and Egypt, modest concessions from the government only raised expectations among the protesters, who by day's end were talking about tearing the whole system down, monarchy and all.

February 15. Malawi. A wave of social protests started in Malawi's capital Lilongwe and in the northern town of Mzuzu.

can't vouch for that, we've stopped at the first one, in front of the handle.
Stubborn, in the name of purity and glory, both of which we've read about in books and heard about in songs, we will not err. Stubborn… and in the long run, a bit frustrated as well. Those times when sudden noises and distant voices come wafting from the other side, clamoring, shouting, keen as swords.
Is it really worth it to stay outside? Have I overcome the fear of being left on the sidelines, or have I given in to what prevents me from entering the fray?
"We've got to get in to go out," that's what Genesis was singing just a few seconds ago.

Letter to My Children and Grandchildren

by Valentina Tamburro

Every person has his or her own story, his or her own journey through life. Every person carries along a fund of experience and knowledge, resulting in part from social relationships forged over the course of a lifetime. We don't always pass on the store of knowledge we carry with us, we aren't always able to hand on this legacy even to those closest to us, our children and grandchildren.
My mom used to tell me about the war, its tribulations, the things she saw in that sad chapter of history; the climate I was exposed to as a little girl encouraged me to reflect on things, to observe

how hard it was for ordinary people to eke out a living, to see the poverty around me. Frugal meals, my mother's daily sacrifices, like not eating meat; she only bought a little and only for me, to make sure I got what my body needed to grow. My mother had toiled to win a competitive examination that would give her a civil service job at the Office of Public Works of Liguria; the position was secure, but the salary was meager. She could barely pay the rent for the subsidized housing where we lived, in part because she was on her own, I didn't know my dad at all, he'd abandoned her; I saw him for the first time at the age of eight.

That's another story that deserves its own space, but I'll skip it for now.

So I was exposed to economic hardship; I never asked for anything because I knew my mom was doing all she could and asking for things meant putting her in an awkward position. I made do with what I had, no tantrums, no demands. When someone—I don't remember who—gave me a doll and some little pots and pans to play with, it was a revelation; for the first time I felt fulfilled and grateful. I kept those toys for years, and I remember I also used to play with orange peels and walnut shells, or read the comics lent to me by children who were better off. This was in the early Fifties.

My mother was always talking about school; she wasn't a particularly erudite person, but she managed to get it through my head that if I wanted to move up in the world I had to study. She said she'd make any sacrifice necessary for me to become a teacher, like her mother and aunt had been. My mother had immigrated north from Naples,

leaving friends and family in order to find work. She achieved her goal, but her homesickness never went away, you could tell from the things she said and her constant stories about what her folks were like, their character, their creativity, their unique traits. Her brother moved here to Genoa later on as well, also in search of work, and found a job at the Italsider steel mill in Cornigliano. He was married and had three children. They also scraped by with sacrifices and privations, and would often have to borrow small sums just to buy basic necessities.

We were in difficult financial straits, but I always put my faith in the future, which I imagined would be more prosperous and comfortable for me. All around I saw the reconstruction of the ruins left by the war, new neighborhoods springing up on the outskirts of the city; I saw TV for the first time at age eight. I thought human beings were amazing, the things they could create! I could go to the café and watch television, it was fabulous, I felt lucky.

I followed my mother's injunctions: study, study, study. That's what I did, not without difficulty, because for family reasons I kept moving from one school to another, and each time I had to painfully adapt to a new context. But I never gave up, I was convinced it was necessary to have a good education, if only to understand the world around me. At school I found friends and classmates to interact with; many were much better off than me financially, but I had the love my mother passed on to me with her approach to life, and generosity towards others, and the knowledge that if you fight for an ideal, you'll make it in the end.

I was studying to be a teacher when ’68 erupted; I say “erupted” because for me it was an instantaneous flash of awareness. I took to the movement, right away; I too wanted to change the world, I wasn’t satisfied with the way things were. The gap between rich and poor was too wide, I didn’t understand why society was so unjust and why there was so much hunger and poverty in the world. A new era had to begin, a new world, and who better to achieve it than young people like us? We could play a leading role in this miracle. I took part in the struggles of ’68, I found myself at student demonstrations chanting for freedom and social justice.

Until just a few years before, factory workers had their every move controlled; it wasn’t unusual for a foreman to go to the bathrooms to check that his subordinates weren’t lingering there to smoke a cigarette. They worked up to twelve consecutive hours a day, with just a half-hour break for the meal they brought from home in lunch pails, and they were often paid on a piecework basis: the more you produced, the more you earned. This spurred you to hurry up, work fast and never stop to catch your breath, almost as if you were a slave. With piecework you could barely make ends meet. Women had no rights, maternity leave was still out of the question and it wasn’t unusual for them to bind their bellies to keep the management from noticing their condition, since they risked being fired.

No, it was an unjust world; as my mother had taught me, it was time to fight, I couldn’t just stand on the sidelines, I had to do my part. And that’s what I did, even after I got married, I never hung back when there was a strike, even if it

took effort and sacrifice. The same was true of your father and grandfather Pietro, my husband, with whom I shared struggles, demonstrations, strikes and layoffs. We were convinced we had to do our part and fight to give our children a different world, one with more justice and solidarity. The Constitution was a constant reference for us, and thanks to the principles it expressed so well, we were able to bring about a change. We talked about the separation of church and state, about rights, equality, giving everyone the opportunity to study.

We took part in heated discussions and meetings, even at work and at school. I remember when I first entered the world of education as a teacher, there was still a sort of close-mindedness. I met teachers who hit pupils on the hands with rulers when they made mistakes or misbehaved, teachers who locked up their class registers and textbooks in the cabinet when substitutes came. I was horrified by that sort of attitude, but later I was lucky enough to get a place in an experimental school, open to new ideas, where they applied different pedagogical and educational methods. There was dialogue, interaction, parents took an active role in the first class councils. The schoolroom was no longer a closed environment, parents and grandparents were invited in to talk about their jobs, their technical knowledge; these were important lessons that helped the kids grow and the teachers as well. We talked about Don Milani, about the quality of public schooling, about how had to be open to all, without discrimination based on gender, religion, race, etc. The separate classes where children with learning disabilities or behavioral problems used to be relegated were

abolished. We talked about integrating handicapped children and the need for them to be with everyone else—with special assistance, of course, but together with their peers.
"L'état, c'est nous" my literature teacher used to say, and I firmly believed this was true. Working together, all of us together could turn a page in history and be governed by people who were educated, mature and responsible.
I believed in the possibility of a government worthy of our republic, our *res publica*, something that belongs to all, where everyone could contribute something for the common good. Perhaps a civic awareness had finally developed, a political awareness based on an accepted set of ethics. A cultural evolution had strengthened the values of solidarity and civic participation. Of course, many things had to be reassessed and corrected, but we were a full democracy now; with the help of technology and science, society had matured, there was no turning back.
I was wrong, boy was I wrong; the improvements had deluded me into thinking that it couldn't happen again, it seemed we would fly ever higher… and instead it happened. In 2001 in Genoa, during the G8 summit, I found out first-hand that those in command have power over everything and above all over people. I began to look at police differently, they were no longer the people to trust, no, they were the hand of power that wounds and inflicts pain. For the first time I was afraid that the right to demonstrate would be crushed; I was afraid, but I still believed that it wasn't possible for the government to include people evil enough to subjugate us again and take away the rights we had fought so hard to win.

I was wrong again, the constitution is being shredded, our rights are slowly fading away. The right to work, the right to education, the right to information, the right to culture, the right to proper assistance for the weaker parts of society, the right of immigrants to be welcomed and not pushed back into the desert as unfortunately now happens. I believe there is a troubling drift underway, but I still have faith in healthy, attuned young people, in all the people who will realize the time has come to take part in the public and institutional life of this country, with a different vision of life and the world. A vision based on values that have to do with civil and human rights. People capable of fighting against selfishness and inequality, courageous people… they exist, but it will take a lot of effort; once again we will have to struggle and resist, once again.

Havana, February 12, 2011

Claudia Cadelo

February 15. Libya. Pockets of dissent emerged in the main square of Benghazi, with people calling for an end to the 41-year rule of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.

February 17. Manama, Bahrain. A brutal government crackdown on pro-democracy protesters killed at least five people.

I received a call from a friend who recently left Cuba. At one point in the conversation he said, "This isn't another country, it's another planet." I hung up the phone and felt myself an alien on the earth. I looked out the window at the mess of wires hanging from the poles as if the hurricane had been yesterday. I went to 23rd and 12th and the traffic light was out. At 23rd and G there was electricity but the light was controlled by a policeman and the street was deserted: Raúl Castro was going to pass by.

I saw a photo of a building covered with glass—one of those modern constructions filled with light—someplace in the world and wondered when Havana is going to be reborn from its ruins.

I sit in the park and enjoy the trees. There's trash and filth everywhere, but I still love the air of my city. I wonder how long that pleasure will last.

I return home. I turn on the TV and it's the news. Fritz Suárez Silva [television commentator on international issues] is ranting about a statement by Osama Bin Laden. I doubt my own senses. I don't understand if he's defending the terrorists or saying bad things about Obama. I get lost and turn off the TV. I want to know what's happening in Egypt but on Cuban television they manipulate everything.

I look out the window again and remember the photos of the Green Revolution in Iran. I feel nostalgic. It's ridiculous to feel nostalgia for something I didn't even experience. I remember November 6 and everyone on the sidewalk at G and 27th staring, mouths agape, eyes stupid, as a group of men in plain clothes forced three young women into a car. I laugh. I can't imagine the streets of Vedado flooded with young people demanding democracy.

I'm not going to get pessimistic: I always have the Web. When I connect to the Internet the bad taste in my mouth fades. There's a sensation that the world is changing and I'm on another planet. Forget Raúl Castro's three black cars paralyzing the time of my reality even more, though it seems impossible. I remembered that public spaces no longer need to be physical. Again I feel that it's possible, that one day change will come, that the freedom of my life on the Web will one day be matched by my life on the street. It doesn't matter how much we lack. I will know to wait.

February 17. Egypt. While many here have cheered the military for taking over after last week's ouster of Hosni Mubarak and for pledging to oversee a transition to democracy, human rights groups say that in the past three weeks the military has also played a documented role in dozens of disappearances and at least 12 cases of torture.

February 17. Egypt. Hundreds of workers went on strike along the Suez Canal, joining others across Egypt pressing demands for better wages and conditions.

February 18. Bahrain. Security forces open fire on protesters. King Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa's government had warned them: march and you will be shot.

February 18. Djibouti. An estimated 30,000 Djiboutians protest in central Djibouti City. Their main demand was for President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh to step down.

I highly disagree with statements such as "I am blind, I don't see color" or when people claim that my scarf or my olive skin doesn't make them the least bit curious. Most of the time, at least where I live, people are quiet. They'd rather keep their curious thoughts to themselves in fear of coming off racist, too inquisitive and offensive. On the rare occasion, I'll meet a socially inept individual who has no issues bluntly inquiring about my race, culture or the cave I emerged from. I am well aware that when I meet a novel person, they have a set of prejudices that I must prove wrong immediately. Although there is no rule that states "I must" prove everyone wrong, it becomes a personal burden to disprove, dismantle and erase these prejudices and replace with new facts. But it's proven to be a tricky and nerve-wracking process.

Some have advised me to resort to humor whenever possible. So when approached about my origins I should make up a fake heritage for my amusement such as: "Oh, where I'm from, you ask? I'm part Irish, German, and Polish, yourself?" And go on until I confuse the heck out of the tactless individual, and have a good laugh on their expense.

Certainly, when someone meets me the first time their assumptions can be true. Portions of my life consist of your typical Arab/Middle Eastern stereotypes. I happen to be Arab; I've lived in the Middle East; I don't eat red meat; I am familiar with Indian cuisine; I cover my hair in public; I speak Arabic; I can belly dance; I cook Middle Eastern food; English is not my parents' mother

February 20. Burkina Faso. The death in police custody of student Justin Zongo sparked widespread student anger. The protests quickly spread from Zongo's native town of Koudougou to the entire country, with slogans such as "Tunisia is in Koudougou" and "Burkina will have its Egypt". Some youth groups have even compared Justin Zongo to Mohammed Bouazizi.

February 20. Morocco. Demonstrations were called by a coalition of youth groups, labor unions and human rights organizations demanding greater democracy. Several thousand people marched through the capital, Rabat—one of several cities across the country where protests were held. Five people were killed.

February 20. Libya. A five-day-old uprising in Libya took control of its second-largest city of Benghazi.

tongue; I have family abroad; I do have friends who are brown/olive skinned; and a few bearded/ niqabi/hijabi/"ethnic" friends.

I recall my freshman year in college, my "white" friends were shocked to hear me curse. "I never thought you were allowed to curse!" Or when I revealed to my high school teacher I planned to apply for college: "You are?" Or when I am asked about Afghan culture because we are all "connected" somehow.

I won't lie and claim that I've grown used to these assumptions. On the contrary, I've grown rather annoyed and paranoid. The other day I received an email from a former professor. In the body of the email, there was a scholarship and research opportunity with enticing benefits. I was pleased the professor recalled who I was and made me this offer. As I reread the email, something caught my eye: the word "minorities". To say the least, I was crushed. I've worked so hard all my life to make strides on my "own" merit, not my skin color or what my genes have determined. Is equality too much to ask in 2011?

I've been spoken down to by people in my professional and personal life. Perhaps my paranoia has been played up by these past events, but I find them all difficult to be "accidental." When someone asks if I eat red meat (assuming I am Hindu)? Or if my parents have already arranged my marriage? And if I wear that "thing" to show respect for my husband? And… the list goes on. I want to scream: leave me alone. I don't find myself wondering so much about my Caucasian friends' origins. Why are they worried about mine?

February 23. Libya. As rebellion crept closer to the capital and defections of military officers multiplied, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi called on thousands of mercenaries and irregular security forces to defend his bastion in Tripoli.

February 23. Cameroon. Opposition groups organised protests to call for President Paul Biya to leave office. Biya has been in power for 28 years. His Special Intervention Brigade crushed the protest with brute force.

February 25. Egypt. Tens of thousands of protesters returned to Tahrir Square to keep up the pressure on Egypt's military-led transitional government. The military made it clear there would be limits to further dissent as soldiers and plainclothes security officers moved into the square, beating protesters and tearing down their tents.

February 25. Jordan. Thousands of people demonstrated for political reform in Amman and in other towns.

I will say though, it's fun to see people's perception of me as a person change. I shared with one of my counselors my anxiety over attending an event out of state with no other Muslim women in sight. The counselor's advice was simple: "When someone approaches you about your scarf, and questions why you wear it, simply say: 'I am so *sorry*, is it bothering you?' and walk away."

February 25. Egypt. Many tourist sites in and around Cairo are open again. But these days the most sought-after photo is of Tahrir Square, a top destination for many of the Western tourists who have begun trickling into Egypt.

HERE
notes from the present

Globalization

by Marco Saya

This morning I noticed a
lady from the Milan beau monde
arm-in-arm with an elegant lady in a burka
As they were crossing at the light,
people looked at the strange couple
bewildered and confused…
And I was thinking…
that the other side of the road was still far-away
When the light turned green
restless motorcyclists took off
breathing a sigh of relief…

Mosul, Iraq, February 25, 2011

"Sunshine"

I had my mid-year exams, the questions were incredibly hard, and some even contained mistakes; I feel worried about my marks, and I feel worried about the finals already!
The demonstrations in Iraq are today, Friday the 25th. The government sent their assistance to al-Tahreer Square, they attacked the citizens while

they were sleeping and stabbed them with knives and ordered them to leave. But they didn't give up, and Iraqis are determined to stay and demand our rights. [Prime Minister] al-Maliki's supporters wanted to carry Saddam's photos in order to frustrate the demonstrations by pretending that those demonstrators are followers of the ex-regime!
The Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani [the preeminent cleric for Shia in Iraq] announced that it is forbidden to participate in these demonstrations, but the Shiites didn't listen and a citizen on TV said "we're not going to listen to whatever [they] announce; we're participating". I hope that from now on people will not be affected by those who speak in the name of religion.
Today is called "the Friday of anger" and this revolution is named "the al nakheel revolution", "the palm revolution". The Iraqi citizens have been through a lot, so they have gone out into the streets to make demands and protest in spite of the danger and the government's threats; they have nothing to lose anymore. Old people and young, men and women are participating and have walked a long way to reach the place where citizens are gathering as we have curfew.
My father's two cousins participated in the Mosul revolution although we're worried about them. In Mosul the police started to shoot at the citizens and five were injured. I can't wait to hear the story first-hand from my father's cousins.
The greatest thing is, the people's intention is not to make chaos or destroy things; we're not like the politicians. The people are carrying roses and green branches, and shouting "peace", as well as other great phrases that made me realize we still have heroes.

Iraq. Small, scattered protests, focusing on unemployment, corruption and a lack of services, began taking place in Iraq in early February. A nationwide "Day of Rage" called for February 25 turned violent in Mosul and other cities, leading to the deaths of more than a dozen protesters.

February 27. Tunisia. Prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, resigned after a weekend of violent protests that left five people dead in the capital, Tunis.

China. As protests swept the Arab world, on the Chinese Internet anonymous calls for a "Jasmine Revolution" have been squelched by authorities. Words like "Egypt" and "Tunisia" have been blocked on some Web searches and social networking sites have been made inaccessible.

Now I am listening to people's demands for freedom and jobs, and also hearing stories that made my heart ache. A woman said seven years ago the police took her 18-year-old son, and she hasn't seen him since, and she's hoping this revolution will bring justice and innocent people will get out of jail. And another women said she hasn't got her retirement pension for four years, she worked for 22 years, and now she deserves a good life.

Another pleasing thing is that people prayed "Friday's prayer" together in al-Tahreer in Baghdad, Sunnis and Shiites together, and they shouted "we're brothers, Sunnis and Shiites, and we're not going to sell this country". The same thing happened in Sulaymania when Kurds and Arabs prayed together. The citizens are united; it is the government that is trying to separate us, but it's not going to happen, no matter what crafty, petty plans they make.

I pray for a new hopeful future, and today I am proud of Iraqis. I know what great people we have here, and how much the Iraqis have endured not only in the last seven years, but since Saddam took control.

I've been watching the news lately, and all the Arab countries are witnessing panic, especially Libya, with el-Qaddafi's savage attempt to stop the demonstrations. I have relatives in Libya, and we were so worried about them. Aunt said that el-Qaddafi has hired mercenaries to kill the citizens who are against him.

There's no freedom in Arab countries, and in Iraq especially, but I can't believe that the people have finally realized this after years and years of silence! […] I hope that the Arab countries become

strong and people refuse to be under the rule of dictators, and find the courage to stand up to them and gain freedom just like the old, old day when the Arab countries were united and were one big nation. It was so developed and strong, and we had justice and were years and years ahead of Western countries in all kind of science and inventions, and medicine etc. It hurts me a lot because I am Arab and would like to do something myself to change the situation. I wish we could start to say "we are" instead of "we were". […] Is it true that now after so many years people have woken up? Or is it another illusion, a plan to make Arab countries hit bottom so that other countries can take control? […]

Update at 7:30 pm. The police are shooting at citizens, some have been injured and others have died, but the demonstration will not stop today.

Update at 4:30 am, February 26. We've heard from people in Baghdad that the police and national guard put concrete walls in the majority neighborhoods of Baghdad and closed all their roads, and thousands of people were forced to go home and couldn't participate in the demonstration. Some tried to knock down the concrete walls and force their way in, but the police behind those walls started to shoot and wouldn't allow them to leave their neighborhoods. If people were allowed to go out and take part in the demonstrations it would last for days.

Gaza, February 25, 2011 **Rana Baker**

A couple of days ago, after midnight, I was surfing the web to learn more about the missiles that had been fired at Be'er Sheva causing damage

in the region, while no casualties were reported according to "Haaretz". […]

Just a few minutes later, a number of Apache helicopters began to hover heavily in the sky. A sound of an explosion was soon heard; and since I live opposite Al-Shifa hospital—the biggest hospital in Gaza—I was able to see about three ambulances speeding away to evacuate potential casualties. According to the Palestinian news agency Ma'an, two Palestinians were injured in southern Gaza and one unconfirmed death was reported.

Oman. Protests began in the seaside town of Sohar in late February, resulting in deadly clashes with police. Groups of protesters around the country have since pressed for economic and political reforms.

I was extremely irritated by the air strike because the next day, along with Silvia, an activist with the ISM (International Solidarity Movement), I was supposed to go to Khuza'a, a small village in the South near the Israeli border, to film a video calling for massive boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Apartheid Israel. I knew it was going to be dangerous to go there, especially after the attacks, and that in the morning my father would ask me to stay home.

I woke up at eight o'clock and had to argue with my father for a while until he said in the end: "You want to go? Fine! But you will have to be at home in an instant if they target Khuza'a!" My father is a surgeon and during the 2008-2009 war on Gaza, he went through a lot treating the injured and running one surgery after another in the overcrowded hospital, sometimes on a freezing floor. That's how I usually translate his categorical concern about me and my family.

Due to the argument, I arrived where the taxis gather at 9:10. Silvia, an Italian, was already waiting for me and I had to apologize for not being on time. It was incredibly normal with the

taxi drivers, as if no raids had taken place a few hours ago. Some drivers were calling for people who were heading to Rafah, others were calling for Deir Al-Balah, and we, along with others, took the microbus taxi heading to Khan Younis, a small city from which we would catch a taxi headed to Khuza'a.

On the way Silvia called Yamen, a friend of hers who lives and works in Khuza'a at the National Village Improvement Center and who is basically a civil engineer, to guide us through the village. I was amazed that almost everyone in the microbus and later in Khuza'a thought that I was a foreigner! Silvia suggested that this was because I was speaking English with her and because of the color of my eyes and hair.

Within thirty minutes, the bus dropped us in Bani Suhaila street in Khan Younis, where we took another taxi that carried us to Khuza'a, to Yamen's workplace. […]

Someone who doesn't know Khuza'a and enters it for the first time learns a lot about it once his eyes fall upon its vast green acres and its rural buildings, and from the horizon one can tell a lot about the occupation. Three hundred fifty meters away from the Israeli border, one realizes that he's a likely target, realizes from the proximity of the watchtowers that he has to think carefully before he acts so as not to become a suspect. And because I was aiming my camera at their towers I was almost in full danger, under no mercy but the mercy of the live ammunition that could be fired at me at any moment! I can now recall the voices of Silvia and Yamen asking me to step down from the rubble where I was

standing, telling me that what I was doing was not necessary and could cost me my life.
There, leaving our footprints on one of Khuza'a's unpaved roads, we passed by a fence through which we saw two old women weeding out grass that had grown too tall due to the rain. "Hello," I said to the women, raising my voice to make sure they could hear me. "Hello to you," the women replied. "Can I come in?" I asked. "Yes, you're quite welcome," said one of the women, moving towards the locked gate to open it for me.
Silvia and Yamen waited for me on the road; they were used to the village. Silvia had come here many times and Yamen already lives in the village. The women were kind to me and generous. They were funny and extremely curious; they kept asking questions about my nationality, where I live, my work, and what I was doing in the village. They asked me to take pictures of them and offered me tea, but Silvia and Yamen were waiting outside and I had to leave, promising that next time I would have my tea with them.
Joining Yamen and Silvia again, Yamen suggested that we visit the Al-Najjar family, a family that has "so many stories to tell and whose house lies really close to the borders," as he said. On the way we passed by a school which was the only remaining school in the village after the Israeli brutal attack on Gaza.
It took us fifteen minutes on foot. There, a woman (Um Anas) greeted us very kindly while other women brought plastic chairs to the balcony. Um Anas sat on the stairs and two others sat on the threshold stoop. I asked Um Anas to come and sit instead of me, assuring her that I was fine with the stairs and that I didn't feel tired. She

refused to take my place, saying she knows that we in Gaza City always sit in chairs and that she's a farmer and farmers always sit on the ground!

Wafaa, a member of the family, appeared a while later. Wafaa told us her story. She is sixteen years old, she was shot in her knee two years ago just after the war while going to school in the early morning. "I was just going to school when they shot me, I was fourteen years old, I know I can walk but I wish I could run like I used to before," she said, and Silvia's video camera recorded it. I asked her if she wants to continue her studies after high school, she said yes and that she wants to become an artist.

She then invited me to see a portrait of her brother who was killed by the Israelis. Wafaa wept while telling his story. "He was out with his friend, dinner was ready and we were waiting for him when we suddenly heard a gunshot, we went out and it was him lying dead on the red ground."

Tea is a ritual in Khuza'a; whenever you knock on a door they won't let you out unless you drink a cup of tea. We had our tea with the family; it was very sweet, its taste contrasting with the bitter taste of the stories that crept into each sip. "They bulldozed 25 square meters that belong to us, they turned our land into a road for their tanks," Um Anas said with a tinge of pain in her eyes. We spent one hour in their house, then we thanked them for their generous hospitality, promised to visit again, and left.

We continued our march, the sun was vertical and I had to take my jacket off and cover my head with it. We met a man on the road, he was cutting the good tomatoes from a heap of

branches. “Come take pictures of me and give me money,” the man shouted. “I have only twenty shekels in my bag” I replied. “Twenty shekels now, but at the end of the month you’ll get $1000.” “We are just volunteers, we don’t get paid,” I answered. The man laughed and so did we. But fun doesn’t last long in this village. We were soon videotaping a man whose house had been completely destroyed during the war and who still lives with his wife under the rubble. […]

Havana, March 2, 2011

Rebeca Monzó Mieres

Many years ago, while studying journalism, I had a teacher who taught Marxist philosophy, in a totally original way. At the beginning of each class, writing a saying from a popular Spanish proverb on the blackboard and taking that as a point of reference, he would explain the philosophical categories that related to that issue. He also told us that all wisdom was present in the chosen proverb. Thus I also acquired the habit, which I am rarely able to abstain from.

Once again, yesterday, listening to the shortwave, I was amazed by the statements about the dictator Qaddafi made by the Venezuelan leader—“I cannot condemn him from a distance, he is my friend, my friend forever, the friend of our people, Qaddafi is like Bolivar”—and other nonsense. Now the false news that leaked last week saying the country had offered asylum to the tyrant made sense. Then came to mind two very wise proverbs: “where there’s smoke, there’s fire,” and another that says, “birds of a feather flock together”. To paraphrase the title of a popular TV program here, I say: you can draw your own conclusions.

March 1. Libya. Around 140,000 people have fled Libya’s fighting for neighboring Egypt and Tunisia, the United Nations refugee agency said.

March 1. Eritrea. An exiled opposition force has called for Egypt and Libya-type mass protests to end the rule of president Isaias Afeworki. The Eritrean leader has been in power since 1991. Eritrea is a one party state, without legally functioning political opposition.

The blue sky is so intense it blinds me. It's not hot. The sea below, and the line of the horizon perfectly straight. Today Havana is beautiful. This island doesn't deserve *this*, I say out loud without realizing it. I smile and think I don't deserve it either, nor the guy crossing the sidewalk in front of me. No, he doesn't deserve *this* either.

Power, the worst drug in the world. I imagine Raúl Castro resigning from his offices at the Party Congress… dreams cost nothing.

I walk through Lennon Park and a teenager tells a group of girls that she took part in the repudiation rally against the Ladies in White [wives and other female relatives of jailed dissidents] last Sunday, that she insulted them. I stop short. I'm wearing earphones to avoid hearing the stupidity of people like this, but it manages to get into my ears and drill into my brain.

I turn off the music, walk back and ask her, "Why did you scream at the Ladies in White?" She's afraid. "I don't know, everyone was screaming." "No, not everyone. I never screamed. Why did you scream?" "I don't know." She was ashamed. Her friends were perfectly silent. "Next time think better of it," I say and leave.

The sky was as blue as blue, and although I could no longer see the ocean I sensed it—we islanders always sense it—and it still wasn't hot. Paradise, I thought, paradise in hell.

I look at the girls from afar. No, they don't deserve it, not even they deserve it.

March 7. Libya. As wealthier nations send boats and planes to rescue their citizens from the violence in Libya, on the outskirts of Tripoli thousands of migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa have been trapped with scant food and water, no international aid and little hope of escape.

March 8. Kuwait. More than 1,000 protesters turned out in Kuwait City to call for political changes.

Hammangi

by Daniele Comberiati

HERE
notes from the present

There are times, however rare, when we have a sense of anticipating history. A friend who was on a "mission" in Tripoli a few months ago talked about a "city that was changing" and a Qaddafi who "couldn't go on forever". I listened absent-mindedly, more interested in the family aspects of his story—his father had been one of the few Italians to remain in Libya, of his own free will, after the rise of the Colonel. In the light of the current convulsion on the other side of the Mediterranean, his account seemed a useful starting point for reflecting on the complex relations between Italy and Libya: the colonial "undertakings", concentration camps, civil war, postcolonialism, right up to the present war.

Tripoli, 2 January 2011

"Calzoni, you said? The name doesn't ring any bells, but if he was Italian he was buried here, no question. Since the government gave us back the money for rebuilding, we've put all our dead in together. I'll just go and look, but you wait here and don't move, eh!"

The caretaker goes off, muttering something in Arabic to a youth who stays beside me, standing guard. Instinctively I clutch my bag closer to my stomach, hoping he won't notice.

Hammangi Cemetery, two kilometres from the centre of Tripoli, where in spite of the season the

heat is suffocating, and the low palm trees fail to provide shade for the dead. I'd never thought about the fact that people can be buried even in hot stifling places like this, where it already seems like hell. The dazzling white marble gravestones, recently cleaned, add to the heat. I try to make out the silhouette of the caretaker, Guido, against the light. He hurries back towards us, hot and sweaty.

"Nothing, not even in bay twenty. I mean, mistakes have happened now and then, can't say they haven't. You remember the state the cemetery was in before the rebuilding? A disgrace: bones scattered around, bodies without names—you'd think we'd only just lost the war… Like I was saying there's been a few mistakes: sometimes an Italian ended up in the middle of the African corpses, among the askaris… mind you it's rare, eh, but if you like I'll take a look…" And he abandons me again.

The youth is still watching me incessantly, and I get the feeling he can see through my bag, and that he knows who I am and why I've come here. Outside, Balbo's [the Italian governor of Libya during the fascist occupation] two great lions sleep motionless in the sun. They're made from white stone and it gives off a blinding light. From the street the cries of vendors and the sounds of traffic can be heard. Tripoli has changed, an Italian at the hotel told me yesterday. The huge skyscrapers in the city centre, the constant ringing of mobile phones and the omnipresent advertising seem to prove him right. Tripoli has changed even for me, although I'd never seen it before. But I'd travelled its streets hundreds of times through the words of my father: my primary school was in Via Lazio, he said again and again: a 1930s building

just like the one we lived in, in Garbatella. And he told me about Antonos, his Greek classmate, who was jailed in Athens during the dictatorship of the Colonels. About twenty years later, when he was free, he had written a letter, but they never managed to meet again. Green Square, where today horrendous traffic jams build up, was for my father the symbol of the new Libya. He believed in Qaddafi, right from the start. He would meet his friends behind the statue of Septimius Severus, who he used to say "was urging Libya to look towards Europe". And at the Caffè Italiano, when he was a bit older, he had his first romantic meetings with girls. He always talked about a beautiful Armenian girl, who if he had wanted…

Tripoli must truly have changed, since I've found nothing of what he described. The places have slipped past my eyes as they can do for any tourist, and all my mind retains is the incessant noise of the traffic and the acrid smell of the cheap petrol that spreads through the air, turning it greyish and gassy.

Guido is coming back, shaking his head as he approaches. "Nothing among the Africans either. I reckon he definitely isn't buried here, I dunno what to say. A doubt just crossed me mind: your relative wasn't Jewish, was he? Because this is the old Catholic cemetery—the Jews had the one in Hara, that's their ghetto. Honestly though, I don't know what's happened to it now…"

Now it's my turn to shake my head. Guido notices I'm disheartened and offers me a cup of tea, abruptly dismissing the boy.

"I know, I know" he says sympathetically, "it's unbelievable when you think we're in such a bad way, and it was us who conquered all this land

and farmed it. Before us, in the 1800s, it was a desert. Now look at it: olive trees, vegetables, fruit, oilfields. They've got rich, they have. And us? First they kicked us out, now they've given us this cemetery, like a consolation prize… and it doesn't even have all our dead in it… And you know what pisses me off more than anything? Y'know what I really can't stomach? Our people died for this country, certainly not for Italy. Sure, Italy gave them a kick in the ass. But this country, Libya, gave Italy two. Take me for example: my grandpa came from Rome, but my dad was born here. Both of them worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then in 1970 we all went back to Italy. In a camp they put us, didn't they—and here we'd had a house with seven maids, we were providing for two families. And never a single problem eh, not one complaint from them. After Qaddafi came they were happy for a couple of days, and then they started wishing we were still here. I come back ten years ago: in the beginning I started rescuing the memory of our dead: papers and photos and objects and stories. Then after they restored the cemetery, they offered me work here; I said yes straight away, because I never felt right in Italy…"

As he speaks I have the unpleasant feeling that the breath of his words is adding to the suffocating heat. My hands start to feel itchy—the first sign of anxiety. I want to escape and be alone in the cemetery, to drop it all just anywhere and get back home as quickly as possible. The bag I'm still wearing has produced a damp ring of perspiration on my shirt.

Guido however doesn't seem to notice anything and continues undaunted, showing me some photos.

"Look, this one's historic, my grandpa took it. It's in Green Square, where the statue of Qaddafi is now. Look: the statue of Mussolini on a horse with the Islamic sword. I'd of given anything to see that with my own eyes! Claudio Villa, he came to Tripoli for a concert in 1969. I've even got his autograph: To Guido with best wishes, Claudio Villa. But we saw Totò and Alberto Sordi too, only I was too late to get their photo. But whoever would've thought in the sixties that we'd end up like this… Anyway now the world's changing here too eh, in Libya as well. Qaddafi won't last forever, he's got bright kids, and he's changed a bit too. You see how many Italians have already come back the last few years? Bit by bit they're changing here too…"

I thank him and say goodbye so I won't be forced to listen to him any longer. I take a taxi to the hotel, where the semidarkness of the room at last refreshes my memories. And my sense of guilt.

I didn't manage it, Papa. I haven't kept my promise. I waited for the right time, the moment when I could scatter your ashes on your soil, but I failed to do it. They didn't leave me alone even for a second, and the heat, the suffocating heat, and all that blinding marble… But I know you'll say I'm just making excuses. And this time you're right. I didn't manage it because I didn't want to. What have you got to do with Libya, what have you got to do with Hammangi? I only knew you in Rome, and for me your past was a book filled with stories that you opened and leafed through every now and then, letting us glimpse a few pages and a few drawings. But nothing else.

What have you got to do with Hammangi? And most of all, what have you got to do with Guido,

and with all the homesick colonialists that are buried there? You were different, Papa, you don't deserve to be alongside them. I know the Libyans are buried there as well and not all the dead are equal—those were different times. But you took a risk, you made a choice, or rather you made a number of choices. And when you went away, when you left Libya, your story was infinitely richer than the history of the two countries.
Maybe it's better like this, Papa, and for once I'm the one who has made the decision instead of you.

In the evening I phone home but am not able to speak to my mother. My sister tells me she slept a lot again today, and she's a bit better but doesn't want to see anyone yet. Then she asks me: "Have you done it?"
From the other side of the Mediterranean I suddenly feel too close. There's very little time to think, and I decide to lie. But my voice comes out as a sort of wheeze: "Yes." My sister sighs and wishes me goodnight. Perhaps she's being ironic, because I already know I won't be able to sleep.
I decide to go out. Tripoli has changed, but there doesn't seem to be much in the way of nightlife. The Italian at the hotel mentioned a semi-underground place, open mainly to tourists, where it's possible to drink alcohol and meet other foreigners. I try to remember which room he's staying in, but in reception they tell me all the guests have already gone out. I go for a walk into town and opt for a Lebanese restaurant recommended in the guide: the food isn't bad actually, the stuffed vine leaves are good and the hummous is really tasty. After I've finished eating, the busy atmosphere of the city swallows me up again. A vanilla gelato, and then I'm back at the hotel.

Tripoli, 3 January 2011

The following morning inspiration struck. A kind of epiphany on the road to Damascus, except that I had it on the road to the beach. My flight was scheduled for nine in the evening, so I had all day to wander around the city and surrounds. I had thought of going to see Leptis Magna and its ruins, but it would have been more of a chore than anything else: I've never been particularly passionate about ancient history and I've always found archaeological remains boring. So, still feeling guilty, I decided to go and look at the sea. I went down to the coast near Tripoli, and there my father's stories found peace. The sign was faded but still legible: *Ristorante Italiano Calzoni*. If I think carefully about it, I can remember some of the dishes on the menu: fish specials, obviously, black spaghetti made with cuttlefish ink (local coastal cuttlefish, he was keen to tell the customers), linguine with sea urchins, risotto with tiny scampi. Although the interior of the place is a ruin, it's possible to imagine on the wall the huge portrait of Qaddafi in a green shirt that my father had commissioned from a fine arts student. What year could that have been? 1971 or 1972, no later. His choice had been a strange one—absurd in some respects. When the Colonel took power the Italians began to leave. Those who stayed had to flee in a hurry in 1970, in what is remembered as "the exodus of the twenty thousand". Colonialists, usurpers, fascists. Those were the insults the Libyans shouted at Italians on the street, after years of repression. My father's family lost everything: my grandfather's law practice was confiscated, and so was his house at the beach, and the new law concerning foreigners meant that Italians

were banned from the profession. They all left, fleeing from a life that would have been very hard indeed.

My father, though, was different. His library, filled with books by Gramsci and Bakunin, must have seemed in those weeks like a window opening onto his future. In Qaddafi he saw a socialism that was African, Pan-Arabian and internationalist. In the young colonels now in power he saw the possibility of a new, great, socialist state, a guide for its brother nations. 1970s Italy seemed to him, in that moment, a miserable place.

He learned to write Arabic, which he already spoke. He obtained permission to open the restaurant on the coast. He was one of the few foreigners who stayed, and one of the very few Italians. Sometimes, in front of the customers, he would shout in Arabic "Long life to the Leader", addressing the big mural at the back of the room, so that everyone would hear him. It was his way of overcoming mistrust in others—his way of saying to them: I'm like you, really, I'm exactly like you. But it couldn't last. And, deep down, he knew it too.

He fled three years later through Tunisia, hidden in a lorry, his mouth filled with the dust of the desert for two days. The Revolution had turned out to be a military dictatorship and Qaddafi a crazy autocrat, and the socialist ideas had been carried away on the ghibli, the hot desert wind.

When he met my mother, back in Rome, he waited years before talking to her about his past. And he did the same with my sister, who never really learnt about his life in Tripoli. It was only when I was born that all of a sudden he loosened up. My

mother has always maintained that what changed him was the birth of a male child to whom he could pass on his experience. But according to my sister it was my whining and inquisitive nature that made him feel obliged to defend me. According to other relatives it was a matter of the simple preference that often exists between parents and children. Anyway in that moment, standing in front of the rocks, it seemed to me that his past fitted perfectly into place between the rocks and the sea.
The idea did not come out of the blue, in fact it seems to me I've always had it, and I waited through Hammangi and the hotel only so I could savour the moment more intensely. I look behind me: this time there's nobody there and I'm truly alone. I take his ashes out of my bag and scatter them on the sand and in the sea.
I've done it, Papa. Now you're exactly where you wanted to be, even if you never realised it. Between the land and the sea, and between your two countries.

Back in the hotel I had a rest at last, before going to the airport. I called home: my mother was there, happier and pleased to hear my voice.
I've done it, Mamma. Papa is resting in peace.

Kawagoe, Japan, March 11, 2011 **Cocomino**

There was a massive earthquake in Japan. So I can't go home because all the trains are stopped.

Tokyo, March 11, 2011 **Yuji Kitajima**

That was indeed the largest earthquake in my life. I was home, but the trains are not running

at the moment. There are many people who cannot go home tonight. […]
Oh, no. It started shaking again!

Tokyo, March 12, 2011

Lea Jacobson

March 11. Japan. Explosions and leaks of radioactive gas took place in three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station that suffered partial meltdowns, while spent fuel rods at another reactor overheated and caught fire, releasing radioactive material directly into the atmosphere.

So it's yesterday at 2:45 or so. I am underground, on the Marunouchi line between the Hongo Sanchome and Korakuen stations. […] Then the train stops abruptly. I first assume that we hit something, or someone has committed suicide, which happens more often than we like to talk about in this country. […] "Train operation has stopped because of an earthquake," the voice of the conductor says. Umm, we know, I think to myself as the other passengers and I hold onto our seats. "Train operation has stopped because of a strong earthquake," the loudspeaker again proclaims the obvious. "Train operation has stopped because of a very strong earthquake," he says again after the shaking still hasn't stopped.
Luckily, before the conductor can declare the existence of a very, very strong earthquake, the ground seems to settle down. Nobody is saying a word. Two *ojii-sans* sitting across from me are the only ones who dare to open their mouths, and even then they only let out muffled, guttural non-words like "ah" and "ooh," in their deep old man voices. Other than that it is dead silent. "This is the strongest tremor I've ever felt in my life," the old man, the first of anyone around me to speak in a complete sentence, quietly tells his friend, who nods in agreement. I take a closer look at his face. He appears to be about 70.
Then more shaking. Passengers hold on to their seats, as if we were in a tin can being shaken by

some naughty kid. Just don't try to open it and you will be fine. Or so says Our Fearless Conductor. "Inside the train is the safest place to be." His voice echoes throughout the cars. "Whatever you do, don't open the emergency doors. Do not exit the train. Inside the train is the safest place to be." His voice quavers, making him seem less sure of himself. Still a few moments later, his voice resounds quite loudly again. "*I repeat, do not exit the train!*"

Exit the train? I think. Really? Exit the train and do what exactly? Hop out and wander alone through an underground train passage? It sounds ridiculous. It is ridiculous and it is horrifying. Horrifying, because there is absolutely nothing we can do but be still and wait, and hope, for the cars to move forward again. To do anything but nothing would not only be futile, it would be insane. So I just sit there with my head in my hands, trying to banish any thoughts of fire or derailment or oxygen supplies from my head. It is hard to do, but I manage because something even more pressing is on my mind: where is my husband right now? Where is my very close friend, who is seven months pregnant? […]

Finally, finally the train starts to move. The Marunouchi line usually runs underground, but makes cameo appearances above street level at a few stations. The station we are heading to, Korakuen, happens to be above ground. As the train inches up towards daylight, I am in the front car, where a few people are now rushing up to accompany me there, to look out the window. As the train creeps above ground we all hold our breath.

"Daijoubu da sou." The old man across from me tells his friend, as the city, still standing, comes into view. "It looks alright." "Sou mitain da na." His friend responds. "It seems like it does." "Demo, kaeranai to wakannai na," The first man is sure to qualify. "But you don't really know until you get home." "Kaeranai to wakaranai." I hear this phrase repeated over and over as I get off the train and take refuge in a nearby park. We won't know how bad it is until we get home. And for most of us, without working trains, home is suddenly very, very far away.

As I pace around this park in circles, unable to keep still for more than a moment, everyone is clutching a phone, yet almost no one is speaking into one. There is no reception. Not when the entire city—no, the entire country—is trying to call each other at once. In this park, nobody knows what is going on. There are sirens and helicopters, which all seem to be headed towards the same location, but that is all we know. We hope that our loved ones are not also in that direction. But we cannot know for sure. […]

As I was exiting the station I noticed one little girl who was crying. Almost immediately, a complete stranger—a woman of about my age—approached and comforted her, offering the girl the use of her cell phone and proposing that they stand in line for the pay phone together. As I am circling the park a half hour later, I notice that this same woman is still by the girl's side. The girl (apparently joined by a friend now) is no longer crying. […]

About an hour later, when I finally get text messages from my husband and my close friend—

informing me that they are ok—I decide to go to work. Work is in Myogadani, one station over from Korakuen. I decide to walk the rest of the way, to the house of the small children I am scheduled to tutor in English that afternoon. But tutor is a big word. Actually, I just play with them. I have known this family for years. All I want is to see a face that I know. I am tired of walking in circles by myself.

When I get there, the children's mother is quite surprised to see me, but welcomes me in all the same. It isn't until I see the TV screen in their house that I realize how horrible this disaster truly is. I play with the kids while their mother locates her husband and other members of her family on a cell phone app of sorts. Every time I look up from the books I am reading to them, to sneak a glance at the destruction on the TV, the kids look up too. So I try not to look up from the books or the games. When I am done teaching her kids, the mother invites me to stay the night, because the trains still aren't running, but I decide to walk home. I need to walk home.

"Kaeranai to wakaranai," I tell her. I won't really know what's going on until I get home. So she feeds me *onigiri* [rice balls], I hug her kids, and I am on my way. About three hours of walking later, I feel immensely grateful and fortunate to reach my apartment, where there is only some minor drywall damage. But most importantly, I am grateful to see my husband, who has just walked all the way home from his job in Chiba prefecture to our apartment in Ryogoku. I have not let him out of my sight since.

March 11. Libya. Rebel lines began to crumble before an onslaught of airstrikes, tank and artillery fire, and relentless siege.

Yesterday was Japan's biggest earthquake. I was working in Tendo, Yamagata, just one hour and thirty minutes from Sendai. It was around 14:00 and I was in class teaching when everything began to shake. People were screaming in the street and we stood outside our building in the snow. A bus was waiting at the bus stop, shaking, full of people. The buildings were shaking too as if they were made of jelly. The rattling was so loud and it was difficult to stand up. We waited outside in the cold for about an hour until all the shocks had subsided. The city was out of power and signal lights ceased to work. Cars crashed outside the school and sirens of ambulances, police and fire brigades filled the air. […]

I couldn't contact Yuuri since she was working at the Richmond Hotel in Yamagata and had to stay to help guests. I was worried but told to go home. My home was fine and nothing had fallen off much, my new LED TV was still standing so I was relieved. I secured everything I could and went back out to try the shops for supplies. Nothing. Everything was closed. Trains had stopped and traffic was erratic. The snow was coming down heavy so I decided best to stay home. People were in their cars keeping warm. […]

I put on as many clothes as I could and kept trying to reach Yuuri. Just after 21:00 Yuuri said she was coming home by taxi. It was good to see her and we quickly went to bed to keep warm. […] I got up at 9:00 and it was cold. I made Yuuri a hot chocolate and boiled a pot of water to use to get washed in. Work was closed, but I saw people in the supermarket, so I got some

instant ramen [a Japanese noodle dish] and some coffee. I got some heat packs too just in case. The supermarket was dark and the cash machines were all offline. The queues were astronomical and I got back at about 11:00 to find the power back on. I got the heating on and put on the news. Ishinomaki, where I was going to work instead of Tendo, was destroyed. The city of Hachinohe where I used to visit and take my parents had been washed away, and Sendai were I was out shopping the week before was devastated. Figures are coming in as over 1000 people dead. Right now the nuclear reactor in Fukushima, a few hours south, is venting radiation. We have been told to stay home and be prepared for more tremors and power outages. It is now nearly 23:00 and we are feeling tremors. […]

Riyadh, March 12, 2011

Eman Al Nafjan

March 12. Japan. Japanese officials issued broad evacuation orders for more than 200,000 people living near two nuclear power plants whose cooling systems broke down as a result of the earthquake.

Friday was Saudi Arabia's "day of rage", planned for and anticipated for weeks. But when the event came, there wasn't even a grumble—unless you count the protests in the eastern province which had been going on for a week. The protests in the east, where the Saudi Shia minority is concentrated, were mostly to call for the release of political prisoners. However, across the country there was silence. Many were expecting it to be that way, but some wonder why.

Two main factors played a role in this silence. The first was the government's preparation, with the interior ministry's warning and the senior clerics' religious decree prohibiting demonstrations and petitions. During the week there was also a huge campaign to discourage demonstrations. Saudis were bombarded on TV, in text messages

and online with rumours that the demonstrations were an Iranian conspiracy, and that those who went out in the streets would be punished with five years in prison and fines in the thousands of riyals. Finally, on Friday itself, there was an intimidating security presence all over the major cities, with checkpoints on the roads and helicopters flying above.

The second and more important factor discouraging protests was a huge question mark regarding who was calling for them. What started on a Facebook page as a call for the creation of a civil society with a list of demands including a constitutional monarchy and a call for public freedoms and respect for human rights eventually turned into a page where sectarianism was openly practised and Islamists were praised. The grassroots movement was gradually taken over and given a Jihadi name: Hunain, recalling a famous battle in the early history of Islam. Sa'ad al-Faqih and other anti-monarchy people took over. On his channel, Islah TV, he assigned locations and gave instructions on how to conduct a protest, with tips ranging from what to wear to what to do if tear gas gets in your eyes. He hijacked the grassroots movement for reforms into an outright call for an end to the monarchy and the creation of a new Islamist state—a cause similar to what Bin Laden and al-Qaida were calling for. These types of calls no longer have support within Saudi Arabia. […]

Cairo, March 13, 2011 **Mahmoud Salem**

Dear Free People of Egypt, it's a lovely day to be talking to you all in a Mubarak and NDP

[National Democratic Party, the former ruling party since its creation in 1978] free Egypt. It's been quite the undertaking, and many people were terrified, injured or killed, but we somehow managed to do it. Congratulations on that to all of us. Pats on the back, everybody!

Naturally, we (the revolutionaries) still don't think the battle is over. The Mubaraks are still free, alongside with all the corrupt NDP officials in all branches of government, not to mention all the state security and police officers who spent the last three decades terrorizing, monitoring, torturing and killing those they were supposed to protect. The political prisoners and detained January 25 protesters are still unlawfully in prison, the stolen money is still in foreign countries, and the minimum wage of 200 dollars a month for all Egyptians is still not enforced. There is also the matter of transparency of the government (financially and operationally) and having the country run by civilians instead of a military junta, a new constitution to be drafted instead of one that gives absolute power to the head of state, political freedoms to all Egyptians, enforceable bill of rights to all Egyptians, equal rights to all women, equal political rights to Egyptians living abroad and/or born or married to a foreigner, freedom of the media, etc. etc. I don't want to bore you, but, yep, lots of work is yet to be done, and it's taking far too long by those in charge to get done, which is making us unhappy. And unhappy protesters usually protest. It's just a fact of life.

But we are hearing that some of you are unhappy with all this protesting. We are hearing that you think we are kids with no purpose or jobs, who

are currently destroying the country and the economy by all of our protesting and demands. We are hearing that you just want stability and security, and that we are not listening to all of you or your concerns and that we are no different than the dictator we just toppled. Please be assured, this is not the case here, because you are our people, and your concerns are the same as our concerns. We must admit that we are surprised by such accusations, and some of us are not taking it well, while others don't have time to respond because, let's face it, trying to find out whether your friends are killed or not, and trying to free them from being court-martialed in the new democratic Egypt, all the while addressing a the new referendum, and the issue of Copts getting murdered, churches being burned and such other sectarian strife issues that plague us, well, it could become a consuming full-time job. Our sin might be that we are so used to fighting those small (in your opinion) battles that we are not focusing enough on explaining our point of view to you and how we are on the same side. For that we apologize and we hope you forgive us. Now, on to your concerns.

You are concerned about the lagging state of the economy and the losses that were caused by the revolution and all of our protests, and you just want everybody back to work, without asking yourself how is it that our economy was so weak that all it took to destroy it was less than two months of protests, while a country like France has nationwide protests all the time, and their economy isn't collapsing because of it. You are also forgetting that the other main causes of the lagging economy are the complete and total

corruption in all government institutions (state, municipal and local), the military curfew that's completely destroying our logistical operations and tourism, the absence of security (more on that later), and the total confusion of (the many, many, many) foreign investors—who want to come to Egypt now and invest—in regards to who they could talk to in order to come here and invest, given that the civilian government has no power and the military council isn't exactly approachable.

You are concerned about the thugs attacking and robbing you of your property and demanding the return of the police and security, but you are forgetting that the police (who acted no different than the thugs except having a shiny uniform) used to rob you every single day. And about those thugs who are terrorizing you, who let them out of their prisons in the first place and then refused to arrest them? Oh yes, I remember, the police. Silly us for demanding that they get held accountable for their actions. We should beg them daily—like you—to come back to work unconditionally after they betrayed their oath to protect us and put us all in grave danger. Our bad.

You are concerned about your kids getting killed by thugs (who, again, reminder, are unleashed by the police), but you were not concerned that they were getting killed daily by the polluted water, the poisoned meat and fruit and vegetables, the completely unsafe roads and public transportation options, the complete and utter catastrophe that is health-care and Egyptian public hospitals, where far more people die than get better and where any Egyptian would rather not put foot inside if they can afford to go to a private hospital

(which isn't always incredibly better). Lest we forget, even the grandson of our former President died in one of them. But yes, the thugs are the problem. Our bad.

You are concerned that the Islamists are going to take over the country and turn it into Afghanistan, and yet don't seem concerned with taking concrete steps to ensure that this won't happen without impeding their rights. A good way to do so is to demand the overhaul of the Egyptian education system, the end of bigotry and discrimination against minorities in all job positions (private or public), the removal of hate-inciting imams or priests from mosques and churches, and in case all of the aforementioned are too much for you to handle, you could simply stand for religious freedom and equal rights to all in Egypt, especially Egypt's Christians, who in case you didn't hear are getting attacked and their churches are getting burned and you don't seem to care. We would recommend you take a small visit to the Maspiro protest [in front of the National TV building in Maspiro district] and talk to "those people" and understand the issues at hand, but we also should understand that this would take some time from your busy schedule of complaining about us ruining everything. Our bad.

We get it. We see how we are irresponsible. How we are ruining the country. How we are not concerned about you. We are evil. A cancer that has plagued this fine and healthy nation. You are right not to like us. You are right to hold protests against protesting and only 500 of you would show up on a Friday and then claim you are talking in the name of the silent majority. Those millions of us who went down to support those

demands are only from every social class and religious background and from both genders. We are in no way representative, especially that the majority of people in Tahrir right now are the poorest of all the protesters, who are told to go home and live on twenty dollars a month salary until we figure all of this out in six month to a year, and all of your Korba Festival buddies are too busy to go there anymore. You want the ones who are still there to go home and leave us alone. After all the ones in Tahrir now are poor. They smell. Can't have that! Egyptian people are not smelly or poor, of course. Shame on them for defaming us all.

So, since we are such a public menace and refuse to listen to reason, I have a proposal to all of you that will surely make you happy: How about we take all those people who took part in the revolution and supported it, and give them a piece of land in Egypt to create their own failed state on? Maybe somewhere in Sinai, on the beach, say Sharm el Sheikh for example? Yes, give us Sharm and some backland and leave us there, so you can continue living your lives in peace and stability. We will give you back the Mubarak Family (we are not big fans) and we recommend you give us all those people you don't like in return: you know, those annoying minorities, like the Copts, the Bahaais, the Shia, the Jews, the Nubians even. Yes, get rid of the races you dislike as well. We will take them all. We will even divide the people up fair and square and ensure that none of us remain with any of you. Ok? Let's start right now. […]

You can have a country where women suffer from oppression, sexual assault, genital mutilation

and honor killing, we will have a country where women are in all positions of power, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation absolutely not tolerated, and where one gender doesn't see that it has the right—in the name of honor—to oppress, beat and violently murder the other gender. We won't tolerate that happening to our women; you can do with yours what you please. You can keep a constitution that got amended so much in the past seven years and still discriminates against many Egyptians and gives the President absolute power, and we will have one that ensures the rights and equality of all of our citizens (no matter where their parents come from or whom they marry) and where there are checks and balances against executive power. You can keep an economy that is plagued with inefficiency, corruption, poverty and monopoly. We will have one where entrepreneurship is encouraged and supported, our country open to all investments, and our workers are guaranteed a living wage. You can keep a public school system in shambles and half of the population being illiterate, and be forced to pay for public schools and private tutoring for your children. We will have public schools that are well funded and teachers who are well-trained and well paid. You can have your healthcare system being a complete and total fiasco where apathy and complete lack of concern for the patients' well-being is what defines it, while our public hospitals will be properly funded and staffed and those who due to negligence harm or kill a patient will be held accountable. You can have a country where people believe that being civilized is to go for one day and clean Tahrir Square up, while we will

believe that true civilization is ensuring that our government cleans our street up and as for us, well, we just won't litter. You can have your internal security services spying on you, arresting you indefinitely, collaborating with terrorists to attack your churches (if you continue to have any), torturing and/or killing you, and your police to bully you and blackmail you. Our internal security service won't do that to us and our police will protect us, will uphold the law, and, god forbid, reduce crime and put criminals in jail instead of letting them out. You can have an army that dictates orders to you; we will have an army that obeys us.

As you can see, what we are asking for is totally unrealistic and we are completely dedicated to destroying ourselves. If we are truly such a problem, we urge you to help us make that happen, so we can get out of your hair as soon as possible. But if you are insane and unreasonable like the rest of us, please join us and help us. We don't want our own state, we want to do this here. We want our country, Egypt, to be the best country it can be. One where we all can live and coexist; one where the state is healthy and functions and all are represented and have rights. That's what we always wanted and called for, and we don't know when that message stopped being clear to you. We are not saints. We make mistakes and we are not above criticism of any kind. You have the right not to help rebuild the country, and you have the right to criticize those who are trying to do it, but you don't have the right not to help and only criticize that things aren't exactly to your liking. If you don't like something, change it.

That was the lesson of the January 25 revolution after all, you know? […]
Sincerely, Mahmoud Salem (a January 25 protester)

Who's who in the new Egypt

by Jacob Høigilt

[…] Who are the actors that have succeeded in bringing down Mubarak's regime, what are their aims, and what support base do they have? […] They are the many-stranded but disciplined youth movement; the Council of Wise Men (lajnat al-hukama'); the National Association for Change; and the Muslim Brothers. In addition, the paper will devote some space to the Egyptian judges, who occupy a crucial position in the current situation. […]

The youth movement was instrumental in mobilizing the popular demonstrations from 25 January onwards. It has shown itself to be at once a fluid and highly disciplined body, made up of young Egyptians from the lower to upper middle classes—youths with higher education who are frustrated with the lack of opportunities and political freedom in Egypt. As several groups and environments have come together at Tahrir Square, various names for the whole movement seem to circulate among Egyptians, some of whom speak of the "January 25 movement" or "January 25 party". However, two central milieus

associated with it are the 6 April movement and the Facebook site "We are all Khalid Sa'id". Their constituencies probably overlap to a great extent.

The 6 April movement was established in 2008, in sympathy with striking textile workers in the industrial town of al-Mahalla al-Kubra. The movement describes itself thus: "We are a group of Egyptian Youth from different backgrounds, age and trends gathered for a whole year since the renewal of hope in 6 April 2008, in the probability of mass action in Egypt which allowed all kind of youth from different backgrounds, society classes all over Egypt to emerge from the crisis and reach for a democratic future that overcomes the occlusion of political and economic prospects that society is suffering from these days".

"We are all Khaled Sa'id" (Kullina Khalid Sa'id) is a Facebook group established by Google executive Wael Ghonim, who created it as a reaction to the torture and murder of 28-year-old Khalid Said by two policemen in Alexandria in June 2010. Apparently, Said was tortured and murdered because he filmed the two men while they were engaged in selling drugs in a café. Photographs of his battered face were circulated on the internet and public outrage followed. […] Wael Ghonim was one of the key organizers of the huge protests on 25 January that started off the Egyptian uprising.

These two groups and twitter accounts close to them have mobilized massively via internet, making and distributing posters, slogans and coordinating demonstrations, as well as providing discussion forums that have featured lively and massively attended online discussions. Until the

demonstrations started, internet activism was dismissed as unthreatening by the Egyptian security apparatus, probably on account of the failure of the April 6 movement to mobilize in 2008. However, this kind of activism proved itself to be a formidable mobilizing force during January 2011.

Prior to the big demonstration on 25 January, the aims of the youth movement were rather general. For example, the "We are all Khaled" Facebook site identifies some basic aims: advocacy of human rights, creating a platform for Egyptians to share their concerns about violations of these rights, and promoting activism in order to ensure that Egyptians are guaranteed respect of their constitutional rights by the authorities. The group explicitly states that it has no political or religious affiliation, and that it is open to all Egyptians regardless of religion, class, political views or country of residence.

Given its lack of a political programme and direction beyond demands for fundamental political reform, the youth movement has until recently been regarded as first and foremost a potent conveyor of dissatisfaction. One long-time observer of Egyptian society interprets it as the revolt of a middle class that is well connected to and informed about global events and frustrated that the rest of the world seems to progress while their own society does not. It is noteworthy in this regard that one of the most important concepts for the demonstrators has been "dignity".

For the youth, dignity may not be only about the treatment they receive from the police and the political system, but also about the image of Egypt abroad. These characteristics would perhaps make

it seem unlikely that the remarkable youth rebellion becomes anything more than a broad protest movement. However, there are signs that it may solidify into a more purposeful movement. […] Both movements [the 6 April movement and the Facebook site "We are all Khalid Sa'id"] have apparently managed to ally with industrial workers in places like al-Mahalla al-Kubra, as shown by the general strike of 20,000 workers on 9 February. The industrial workers are a group that carries great political weight.

As of 9 February, there is some confusion about the council of wise men (lajnat al-hukama'). There seem to have been at least two, possibly three, such councils, made up of self-declared independent academics and businessmen, who have taken it upon themselves to act as a kind of mediator between the protesters and the regime. Two of them seem to have merged into one, which is composed of personalities closely affiliated with the publishing house and daily newspaper "al-Shuruq". This section will focus on that council, as it has gained significant public recognition. […] The council supports the youth movement, and apparently its demands are identical with those of the movement. […] Significantly, its language towards the regime and the army has sharpened gradually and [its] demands were stated again more forcefully, after the council had met with representatives of the youth movement who asked them to act as intermediaries between them and the regime. Thus the determination of the young people seems to have affected and emboldened older and established public actors, putting ever more pressure on the regime to engage in meaningful and substantial reforms of the system.

The National Association for Change was created by Muhammad al-Baradei in 2010, when he returned to Egypt to advocate for change, introducing himself as a possible candidate for presidential elections in 2011. The association's aims are centred on constitutional reform to allow democracy to prosper, and the association's spokesmen have repeatedly stressed that it is a broad movement of which al-Baradei is a symbol and not a leader. Almost all opposition groups, including the Muslim Brothers, but with the notable exceptions of the established and tolerated opposition (al-Wafd, Tagammu' and the Nasserist party), joined the Association. […]
Its demands resonate to a great degree with the demands put forward by the youth movement. Al-Baradei has also been a public supporter of the youths, although he is criticized for not engaging properly with them—he has visited Tahrir Square only once, on 30 January. Nevertheless, the Association has at least one representative in the youth coalition headquartered on Tahrir Square. This representative states that al-Baradei's role is not to directly head a political movement, but to employ his international standing in the service of the youths by publicly supporting them, negotiating on their behalf and securing external support for them. […]

The Muslim Brothers (MB) was slow to join the demonstrations. This may be explained both by the organization's inherent cautious behaviour in Egyptian politics and its fear that early involvement would have led the authorities to crack down hard on both the MB and the demonstrators in general. This calculation proved to be correct, as

both President Mubarak and vice President Omar Suleiman have tried (unsuccessfully) to portray the demonstrations as fiendish plots by the MB and other Islamist organizations to destabilize Egypt. However, the MB's pragmatism might also have caused it to lose popularity among the young and to widen the already existing gap between its ageing leadership and its younger activists. […]
In any case, the MB has employed an increasingly confrontational stance towards the regime of Omar Suleiman, powerfully stating its complete solidarity with the protest movements and the young people at Tahrir square.
The ultimate aim of the Muslim Brothers is, needless to say, the establishment of an Islamic state. This is a cliché, and a meaningless one at that, because there are many different interpretations of what an "Islamic state" should look like. In the case of MB, it has become increasingly clear over the last ten years or so that their aim is a democratic state in which power is transferred peacefully by means of regularly conducted elections, and within a robust system of checks and balances. They have stayed true to this aim both in their discourse and in their internal political practices. […]
Lastly, it is important to note that the youth movement's committee of ten who act as representatives of the various tendencies among the demonstrators includes two young Muslim Brothers, one of whom is Muhammad Abbas. Notwithstanding this fact, and the fact that several young Islamist activists are present among the demonstrators, Islamist slogans have been conspicuously absent from the demonstrations so far. […]

Egypt's legal experts will have an important role in the days ahead. Importantly, there already exists a strong reformist and independent-minded tendency within the Egyptian judiciary, even if the judges have not occupied centre stage during the past three weeks of demonstrations. What are the forces within the judiciary that might gain a prominent role in the near future? The judicial apparatus is widely respected among Egyptians. In particular, a large group of independent-minded judges who were central in the judges' club in the 1990s and 2000s enjoy great credibility among informed Egyptians. The reason for this is that these judges have consistently struggled against the executive's attempt to arrogate ever more power to itself at the expense of the judiciary and people's basic rights as citizens. […]

In relation to what is presently taking place in Egypt, the independent judges' traditional positions are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, they have never been a driving force for democratization or popular political participation as such. Their main concern has been to protect the integrity of the judiciary and to defend the principles of liberal constitutionalism, including people's right to basic freedoms. On the other hand, they are a natural ally in the people's struggle against an authoritarian order, since they have clearly tried to defend the citizenry from a predatory state. […]

Previously, the independent Egyptian judges have taken care to frame their activism in strictly legal terms, avoiding direct participation in politics. However, in the time ahead it is reasonable to assume that legal questions will be one of the core issues in the struggle between the military

regime now in place and the popular reform movement. The judges may well turn out to be one of the movement's most important cards, and their position and relations with the regime and different reform actors should be followed closely.

The picture that emerges from this overview is one in which all opposition actors that have succeeded in assuming a public role gravitate towards the youth movement. This is a fact whose significance extends far beyond the emergence of young people as new players on the Arab political scene, which has been dominated by middle-aged and elderly men until now.

Young Egyptians, for all their social, political and cultural differences, have managed to unite in setting a radical political agenda—and the older, more established players on the scene who have managed to assume a meaningful role have conformed to this agenda. The council of wise men, Muhammad al-Baradei's National Association for Change and the Muslim Brothers have all embraced the demands of the young people, and these associations have allowed themselves to be used by the young people to further their demands, rather than the other way around.

In contrast, the established and tolerated opposition (Wafd, Tagammu' and the Nasserist party), which is already tainted by its toothless opposition during the Mubarak era, have rendered themselves irrelevant by ignoring the young Egyptians and engaging in separate talks with the regime. […]

It is apt to describe the uprising of young people that began on 25 January as not only a revolt against a fossilized regime, but against a whole

generation of political actors who have failed to achieve much, regardless of whether they were in position or in opposition. What we are witnessing is the young population seizing the political initiative, not only from the authoritarian state, but from the entire older generation of politicians in Egypt. […]

Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, March 16, 2011 **Ahmed Al Omran**

I had an interesting, albeit infuriating, conversation with a conservative friend of mine last week (yes, I do have conservative friends, can you believe that?). My friend said Saudis should not respond to the calls to protest posted on Facebook because if they do they would be ungrateful to their country. I was gobsmacked. "Huh?! What do you mean?" I asked. "Our government has given us everything," he said. "In the past, our nation was a made up of poor tribes fighting each other over food and water. Look at us now. Look at our cities, our universities, our hospitals. Our country is the homeland of Islam. You should thank your lucky stars you where born here. Those who call for change are evil, because they want to waste all these great things that we enjoyed for so long. They want to replace safety and stability with mayhem and chaos, and we must not let them achieve that." After he finished that monologue, I ended the conversation. […]

March 15. Bahrain. Following fighting between protesters and police, a military force from Saudi Arabia and neighboring Gulf states entered Bahrain at the royal family's request. In the crackdown on dissent that followed, security forces cleared demonstrators from the Pearl traffic circle in Manama, imposed a curfew and arrested opposition activists. Several people were killed. The government also demolished the monument in the middle of the Pearl roundabout that had become a symbol of the opposition.

Kawagoe, Japan, March 16, 2011 **Cocomino**

We used to take for granted we would always have access to power. Yesterday what we took for granted disappeared completely. Only three

hours of electric outage confused us. We understood what it was like to live with no lights for the first time, although we knew about countries which often have electric outages. […]

In our house, our daughters were singing songs and telling their stories in the dark, although they were scared that our house was haunted by ghosts. We were talking to each other more than before. We had nothing to do after the talking. We went to bed at 20:00! So I got up at 3:00.

March 16. Japan faced the likelihood of a catastrophic nuclear accident after an explosion further damaged one of the crippled reactors and a fire at another spewed large amounts of radioactive material into the air.

I haven't worked for three days because some trains are still out of service. I have to stay home with my youngest daughter. We can't go out anywhere because of the lack of gasoline, pollen allergy, and radioactive risk. Hmmm.

Yesterday's list of what we did: I did laundry and cleaned the house. I made bread with a baking machine because most bread was sold out at the store. We read aloud from many picture books. We ate from lunch boxes (*bento*) that my wife cooked, because the school has not provided lunch for my eldest daughter. We had a nap by a window facing south. […]

Tendo, Japan, March 19, 2011

Colin Mitchell

Right now I am struggling with the idea of evacuation or staying. Although the situation now is fine in Yamagata, things could change. For instance, we could run out of food, and we are running out of fuel. The nuclear power plant could explode or melt down. I'm worried if I wait too long then transport will be impossible to use due to overcrowding. At the same time, I can't turn my back on my co-workers and students who remain here. […]

March 17. The United Nations Security Council voted to authorize military action, including airstrikes against Libyan tanks and heavy artillery and a no-fly zone.

I just don't know what to do. Should it make me angry that teachers in Yamagata have evacuated to America? It means now I have to travel to Yamagata, while transport is not good and being outdoors is not good. I have to get the bus at 9 pm and travel for an hour to get home. So now if I leave, I leave more work for others. I could be putting others in danger. I hope the other teachers are safe, but was there a real need to leave?

March 18. Sana, Yemen. Pro-democracy protests exploded into violence, as government supporters opened fire on demonstrators, killing at least 45 people.

Bologna, Italy, March 25, 2011

Francesco Selis ("Franz")

Although it was already dark out, I steered the gallop of my travelling companion (my cab) not towards the city, but to a country house I always pass by on my jogging sessions, with a sign out front advertising apples and pears for sale. With a bit of effort I singled it out in the dark; the gate was open and I drove in, just enough to keep from blocking the street. Inevitably, I was greeted by the watchdog as an unwelcome guest; illuminated by my low beams, it started barking furiously and jumping around in the space granted by the chain that, luckily for me, it was tied to. The two buildings on either side of the courtyard were completely dark, while in the rear the third, a sort of shed or workshop, had a dim white light in its two large windows, but still gave the impression of being deserted. There were four doorbells by the gate, two of them with no name; I started ringing: first one, then another, then all four. Nothing doing.

Then, as I was about to get back in the car, in a hurry to put an end to that desperate barking, out of the dark, on my left, a person appeared: "What's up, chief?" he asked. I hate being called

March 18. Syria. Security forces fired on protesters who had gathered in the southern city of Dara'a.

March 19. Libya. American and European forces began a broad campaign of strikes against the government of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, unleashing warplanes and missiles in a military intervention on a scale not seen in the Arab world since the Iraq war.

March 19. Dara'a, Syria. More than 20,000 people marched in funerals for protesters killed in demonstrations yesterday, and the police used truncheons and tear gas to disperse the mourners.

"chief": usually either I don't answer, or I retort that I'm barely even in charge of myself, but this time the relief of having found someone won out: "I wanted to buy some fruit, are you the person to ask?" The guy immediately changed his tone, more relaxed and friendly, and told me to follow him into a garage.

About sixty years old, a pleasant, harmonious face already a bit darkened by the sun, his speech peppered with a few droll expressions in dialect: "What did you want?" "A few apples and a few pears." "Sorry, but I'm out of pears by now, you'll have to wait a couple months for those." "That's a shame, the ones at the supermarket are always hard as rock and I never buy them, even though I really like pears." "Of course, they pick them still real green and sell them hard, and they got no taste; whereas I let the fruit ripen on the tree. Here you go," and he shows me two piles of crates, no more than two or three high, containing apples, red on one side, yellow on the other: "How many you want?" "Kilo of each kind, I guess." "Nope, not by the kilo, I only sell by the crate." "Okay then, how much a crate?" "Three euros. You'll finish them, you'll see, they keep; better the red ones, the golds are already riper." I can see that myself: some of the yellow apples are slightly wrinkled, whereas the reds, though not as ripe as he makes them out to be, all look sounder and more trustworthy. "Okay, I'll take red, you got two euros' change?" "Yeah, I've got it", and he opens his coin pouch and starts rummaging around.

"You know they told me," he adds, "that you can tell mine are good from the seeds, because the ones you usually buy are black, and in mine

March 22. Oman. Protesters demanding the ouster of several ministers set up a tent camp at a government complex in the capital, Muscat.

March 23. Dara'a, Syria. At least six people were killed when security forces attacked protesters who had taken refuge in a mosque.

March 23. Jerusalem. A bomb exploded at a crowded bus stop near main bus station, killing one woman and wounding at least 24 other people. It was the worst attack in Jerusalem in four years.

they're white, that's the sign they ripened on the tree." "Great, if they're good I'll come back, and tell my fares about you, too. I live close by, in Borgatella, maybe you've seen me around: I always pass by here when I go running, that's why I saw the sign." "Is that right, you mean running on foot?" "Yes," I look him in the eye, smiling, "I passed by just a few hours ago, you see what a gorgeous day it was?" "Right," he says with a hint of a smile, "well, later on we have cherries, too, and then the kind of peaches you can split in half and get the pit out easy." "Mmm, fabulous!" I reply as I carry the crate to my trunk. "You go ahead and pull in further, to turn around. There's not much traffic right now, but sometimes it's dangerous. One lady who tried to back out almost had a real bang-up." "Oh, thanks, I'll take you up on that. Bye, thank you!" "Goodbye." I see him head back into the darkness he emerged from, as with a few cranks of the wheel I point Big Mama towards the open gate.

Kawagoe, Japan, March 25, 2011

Cocomino

March 24. Equatorial Guinea. After banning the planned mass protests, government sent out massive police forces to prevent any possible gathering of persons opposing the repressive regime of lifetime President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who is also the current chairman of the African Union.

Our worries never seem to end. The government and the news are giving us daily worries about the aftershocks, the radiation, the radiation-polluted vegetables and the electricity outage. We are becoming confused by the various information. We don't know the most dangerous issues. Some people who live far from the devastated area became sleepless or feel quaking even though no earthquake is occurring.
Yesterday there was the following news. "Tokyo metropolitan government officials advised residents in most part of the capital to refrain from

using tap water to feed infants." However hard the government explained the safety of water for adults, most people rushed the shop and bought up lots of mineral water soon after the announcement. One reason behind this is that most people don't really believe the government. […]

Karkur, Israel, March 25, 2011

Liza Rosenberg

Sometimes you hear a blast, but other times, the first thing you hear is a siren. You pause. You wait. Do you hear another siren, perhaps several? And then you sigh sadly and pick up the telephone to place a round of calls, because you know that more than one siren usually means a terror attack has taken place and you need to make sure that everyone is accounted for.

Sometime in either 2001 or 2002, during the height of the second Intifada, I upgraded my cell phone package so that I'd be able to make international calls. I was working in Netanya at the time—preferred target of terrorists due to its relatively close proximity to the Green Line [the demarcation line set out in the 1949 Armistice Agreements between Israel and its neighbours]—and needed to be able to ring my parents in the US whenever an attack occurred somewhere close by; I wanted them to hear the news from me first.

Those were frightening, stressful days, when lunchtime venues were selected based on whether there was a security guard at the door (and we were all quite happy to add an extra shekel or two to the bill to ensure that the guard remained) and people eyed each other warily in the streets, looking for signs that something might not be quite right—perhaps someone wearing a jacket

March 25. Amman, Jordan. Hundreds of protesters set up camp in a main square yesterday, saying they would remain there until the prime minister left and other demands were met. Today, government supporters clashed with the protesters. One person died and 120 were injured.

March 25. Syria. Troops open fire on protesters in several cities.

March 25. Abidjan, Ivory Coast. At least 700,000 people have fled their homes. Daily gunfire spurred by Laurent Gbagbo's efforts to stay in power after losing a presidential election in November has pushed thousands of residents out of neighborhoods surrounding the city's central districts.

or coat on a warm day or carrying what looked to be an unusually heavy bag.

Adding to my stress was the fact that bombs were also exploding around the area in which I lived (and still live). Not only was Hadera—another frequent target of attacks—only ten minutes away, but buses and shared taxis were exploding on the main highway that passes near our home. And these weren't even my closest brushes with terror. Once I missed a bombing at my train station by mere minutes, finding out what had happened from friends and relatives calling to find out where I was, knowing that I was often at the station at that time, waiting to be picked up. Another time, I waited for a bus at a bus stop in Tel Aviv, where 24 hours later, a suicide bomber blew himself up.

But there are probably very few Israelis who haven't somehow been touched by terror, either directly or indirectly. Everyone has their stories, their close calls. Everyone knows someone who has been a victim, or maybe they've even been a victim themselves. The degrees of separation are few. I and my experiences are by no means unique, and I'm quite certain that the feelings I experienced upon hearing of Wednesday's terror attack in Jerusalem were not unique either.

For those of us who lived through the terror attacks of the 90s and the second Intifada, there was a palpable, depressing sense of déjà vu, made even worse by the escalation in rocket fire from Gaza and other terror attacks in recent days and months. We continue to go about our business because this is what we do—and quite resolutely at that—but our determined state of normalcy is accompanied by uncertain thoughts of what

may lie ahead in the days and months to come, hoping that the future will not be reminiscent of the dark, violent days of the past.

Kawagoe, Japan, March 29, 2011 **Cocomino**

At last I could buy gasoline last weekend after waiting in line for only thirty minutes. I didn't think that it was so difficult to buy gasoline. It's been only two weeks, but it feels a lot longer. It is easy to say that you shouldn't use your car or you had better use less energy. Our lifestyle hasn't particularly changed much yet. For example, when it rains, we feel it is tough to take our two young daughters to school or the nearby store by bicycle or foot. Our destinations are so far to walk to. If we are able to buy gasoline as easily as before, we will never change our way of living. Changing our way of living requires a big change in city planning. "Compact city" is an old-fashioned term among city planners because motorization and the information society have progressed so much. However, we should rethink the new "compact city". […]

Contributors and translators

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notes from the present

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Cocomino: "I live in Kawagoe city, Japan. I have two young daughters. I have studied architecture and city planning." His diary entry is drawn from the blog *Life in Kawagoe* (http://cocomino.wordpress.com). We thank him for allowing us to publish it. pp. 15, 25, 60, 83, 87, 90

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Francesco Selis ("Franz"), born in Bologna, Italy, in 1955, now lives in San Lazzaro di Savena (near Bologna). He's a taxi driver. His diary page, translated by Johanna Bishop, comes from *Franz-blog.2* (www.franz-blog.it). We thank him for allowing us to publish it. p. 85

Gabriele Serpe was born in 1984 in Genoa, where he still lives. A songwriter, author and journalist, he has published two collections of poetry and, as a songwriter, two albums. His diary page has been translated by Silvia Renghi. p. 30

Rebecca Solnit, born 1961, lives in San Francisco. She has worked on environmental and human rights campaigns since the 1980s. She has been an independent writer since 1988, and is the author of twelve books as well as essays. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications in print and online, notably at the website Tom dispatch.com (http://www.tomdispatch.com), from which her essay is drawn. We thank her for allowing us to publish it. p. 3

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Number 24 (April 2011), "caregivers" **- back cover**: "Long Live the Kababayans, New Heros of the Philippines" - **contents**: diary pages from the Philippines, Canada, the United States, Afghanistan, Italy, Singapore, Israel, Jerusalem, South Korea, Iraq, China, Russia; *Caregivers*, by Massimo Parizzi; *Toiling Far From Home for Philippine Dreams*, from "The New York Times"; *From a Maid's Diary*, by Jazeann; *An Advertisement*: "the biggest original Filipino musical"; *Persons/Non-Persons. Reflections on an Ethical and Pedagogical Dilemma*, an essay by Gianluca Giachery; *Refuge*, a poem by Chandra Livia Candiani; *On Filipino Dreams and Middle Eastern Routes*, an essay by Claudia Liebelt; *Foreign*, a poem by Ingrid Coman.

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