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Pénélope Larzillière

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# The Global Politics of Artistic Engagement

*Beyond the Arab Uprisings*

*Edited by*

Pénélope Larzillière



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# Introduction: Repertoires of Engagement in Motion

*Pénélope Larzillière*

Perspectives on artistic engagement in political protest have undergone a profound renewal. Yet debate on the links between art and politics is certainly nothing new. From engaged art to 'art for art's sake' at the other end of the spectrum, the engaged artist has represented an archetypal figure since the end of the nineteenth century. But in studies on political protest, artistic intervention has long been treated as something marginal. In such works, art essentially manifests itself in its contributions to shaping and disseminating the cause, and in the figure of engaged artists and their ties to partisan apparatuses. The social and political sciences have, however, recently seen a re-evaluation of the challenges of situating the place of art within politics, which has essentially followed two lines of reflection.

First, political aesthetics scholars have argued that "not all art is political, but all politics is aesthetic" (Sartwell, 2010: 1). Protesting about the political order thus involves producing protest aesthetics that challenge dominant ideologies and representations, environments and media, and a dominant aesthetic in which the power of regimes is incarnated (Werbner, Webb, and Spellman-Poots, 2014) (in a manner not dissimilar to Stuart Hall's [1982] analyses of hegemonies). This situates us within what some have called an 'aesthetic turn' in political science. It highlights the political contribution of artistic expression, not as engaged art, which Roland Bleiker argues is just another means of delivering a political message, but where artists "challenge, in a more fundamental way, how we think about and represent the political [... which has] the potential to engender reflection that could open up to political and ethical insights" (Bleiker, 2009: 8). This brings us back to Jacques Rancière, who argued that the aesthetic becomes political when it calls into question the common norms of discourse and of thought (Rancière, 2000).

The second current of analysis emerged from the sociology of social movements. Without necessarily making the aforementioned epistemological role the heart of artistic political intervention, a whole field of research has developed over the past twenty years concerning the place of art, and music in particular, in protest (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998; Danaher, 2010; Gromis and Roy, 2013). As Balasinski and Mathieu observed in 2006, how these links interweave within social movements has remained under-researched, and they open up new lines of research in their book *Art et contestation* (Art and Protest) (2006). Since then, various studies on artistic activism, particularly

on the Arab uprisings of 2011 and 2012, but also on the *Indignados* and Occupy movements (Drott, 2018) have changed the sociological context. They closely document the concrete ways in which a repertoire of artistic action, which is also a language, has been put into place, from songs and dances on Tahrir Square and protest poetry in Yemen, to various filmed performances from Syria to Tunisia (Khatib, 2013; Werbner, Webb and Spellman-Poots, 2014; Winegar, 2018; Mohamed, Mahdi, and Dabashi, 2020). These works contributed to defining the revolutionary experience and some of the images thus produced have become iconic. Be it through raising awareness, legitimizing the cause or even defining it, art has imposed itself as a register in its own right in the act of protest. Those uprisings have seen mixed, difficult outcomes, authoritarian restorations, and violent repressions. The ‘time of the revolution’ appears to have been standalone. But it brought to light deep transformations in the relations between art and politics. Its challenges extend beyond the borders of the Arab world and the particular time of the uprisings, manifesting themselves in long-term evolutions and transnational ‘circulations’.

The context of the political inscription of art thus appears changed, which has led to an extension of political studies on this subject. The processes of ideological and political disillusionment have contributed to this. Such processes renew the social and political issues surrounding artistic interventions; artists are not only solicited to participate in awareness-raising for the cause, or in shaping it, but also to put the struggle into meaning, into words and images, and to contribute to the production of shared values and symbols, given some protesters’ refusal to relate to conventional, partisan political expressions.

This context is also marked by the importance of circulations, which include the circulation of artists themselves. Voluntary circulations linked to opportunities, invitations, and residencies have come about, furthered by their rise to visibility during the Arab uprisings. Such circulations are also integral to career paths. But forced circulations also exist, with, for instance, the exile of numerous Syrian artists fleeing repression or military service. Representations or modes of action also circulate, notably with the rise of digital activism, as do norms. Here we encounter two phenomena that another growing field of research, on art in globalization, has highlighted: the impact of globalization as a process on art scenes, and how artists themselves have emerged as vectors of globalization. This field highlights contributions made through the entrance point of mobility, but also critically assesses the current conditions of globalization, in a state of tension between processes of uniformization and inequalities.

This dual perspective allows us to consider the current conditions of artistic engagements, creating a dialogue between these two fields of research. As

such, we propose to pinpoint how the repertoires of artistic engagement in circulation are constituted. We will consider how political contexts can reinforce the meaning given to artistic interventions, without over-interpreting the role thus assigned to art – which does not represent the whole of politics – while their real impact and reception can be questioned. We consider how artistic engagements register socially, which also means professionally for these artists, going beyond a purely idealized or normative vision of the engaged stance.

We will firstly consider such politics of artistic engagement on the basis of empirical and multi-situated studies around MENA countries. While it has been almost ten years since the Arab uprisings helped to “make a generation” in the Mannheimian sense of the term (Mannheim, 1928), forging a young generation of artists, it’s now possible to consider the conditions and outcomes of these artistic engagements over the longer term, reconstructing the trajectories and career paths of these artists, from projections on their national scenes to their circulations. From the Middle East and the Maghreb to Turkey, Germany, and France, these circulations may be regional, with certain centres emerging such as Beirut and Dubai, or they may gravitate towards Europe and back. Such work is put into further perspective through crossover studies carried out in other contexts that feed the comparison: the circulations and exiles within Europe of Anatolian musicians and Sub-Saharan artists after their involvement in protest movements in 2011 and, notably, in 2016 in Gabon.

This research, with its focus on studies from ‘peripheral’ or ‘non-hegemonic’ zones, nourishes a decentred vision of the contemporary modalities of artistic engagements, from national protests to globalizations. Since these artists’ own societies have been marked by conflict and war, they particularly return to the question of relations to violence and repression in engagement. The – violent – pervasiveness of the political dramatizes the question of artistic engagements. Far from being neutral here, they are especially socially, politically, and individually loaded. This runs through their careers and outputs, as well as their art scenes. Their circulations also imply adapting to highly diverse political situations, be these authoritarian, coercive, or democratic.

## 1 Art and Engagement: Definitions and Temporalities

To assess the current modalities of artistic engagements is to adopt a point of entry, that of engagement, which constitutes a concept in the social and political sciences but one which is also subject to highly normative emic definitions. Particularly in the artistic field, it can have positive or negative connotations. Thus, our approach here is based on using (and to an extent reworking) the

socio-anthropological definitions of engagement yet taking these emic representations into account. It is not a matter of re-individualizing the figure of the artist in terms of the aforementioned normative and highly classical figure of the engaged artist, but to assess how this imaginary impacts these artists' relations to engagement and to its reception.

Political sociology refers to activist engagement as different modes of *sustained* participation in an action with a collective dimension, to defend or promote a cause (Sawicki and Siméant, 2009).<sup>1</sup> This definition is a general one. While research on activist and political engagement has greatly developed, particularly by way of processual and biographical approaches (Fillieule, 2001), there has only been a marginal focus on artistic engagement.<sup>2</sup> By questioning the links between art and politics from this angle, moving beyond the notion of protest to that of engagement, we pay particular attention to temporal layers and to long-term impacts on life stories. Artistic engagements are studied over time. It is not a question of standalone actions, such as petition-signing, but of signing on into a certain continuity of relations to the cause, although the forms of such support may well evolve. This is the particular interest of this approach. It makes it possible to study the conversions and reconversions of engagements, throughout the course of these artistic journeys, political evolutions, and circulations.

This allows us to observe the way in which the first phase of the 2011–2012 Arab uprisings represented a moment of particular visibility of artistic engagements, but also an experience that is part of a 'before' and an 'after'. Certain early signs of the Arab Spring were visible in previous mobilizations, while innovations in the artistic field furthered the possibility of setting up such a repertoire during the uprisings. In Tunisia, for example, the multiplication of artistic productions, drawings, caricatures, films, songs and videos, or even the organization of unauthorized artistic biennials from 2007, hijacked and subverted the cult of personality of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, mocking his staging and undermining his "symbolic power" (Yacoub and Zemni, 2020). Here we can see the beginnings of the repertoire of action specific to the Arab uprisings. It brought together physical occupation of space via sit-ins, demonstrations, territorial marking through posters and graffiti, and, through extensive recourse to the Internet and social media, the creation of

1 This should be distinguished from the notion of commitment used by Becker, which does not refer specifically to political commitment, but is used to account for the coherence of the actions of actors over time, due to the fact that they feel committed to one action or another through external and prior considerations, or side bets (Becker, 1960).

2 Note however the works of Roussel (2007) and Traïni (2008).

virtual public spaces (Larzillière and Petric, 2013). This virtual public space was conducive to the deployment and dissemination of parodic visuals, in spite of censorship.<sup>3</sup> Younger generations widely sustained this subversive repertoire, reclaiming a stake in community and leisure-related networks, including artistic ones, for their activist action, and maintaining forms of daily rebellions via these mediums (Bonnefoy and Catusse, 2013). If we analyse artists' engagement over their careers, these contextual changes clearly emerge. They influence the working modalities of protest-based artistic interventions, modifying the field of possibilities and the social reception of their action. This is clearly seen in the trajectories of artists from the world of the Syrian theatre, traced back by Simon Dubois in Chapter 6, and the evolution of their engagement before, during and after the uprising.

Relations to the collective arise on other terms in the case of artistic engagements, however. This dimension is not absent, but it takes complex and specific forms; it can contradict with the paradigm of the individuality of the artist, within the sets of norms around the figure of the artist. Collectives of engaged artists very much exist, engendering the creation of new spaces (artist-run spaces), especially among young people, as in the case of Bahrain (Iskander, Chapter 10). They can even take shape transnationally and register themselves within a 'Global South', as Kirsten Scheid discusses in the case of Palestinian artists (Scheid, Chapter 8). But the artists themselves often present the engaged act as an individual gesture, even if the movement or the cause is collective. Their relations to the collective within engagement mostly play out in the modalities of their involvement in the public space. Particular concern is shown for questions of reception – which are far from straightforward – rather than for formal membership, activist belonging, or activist group practices.

### 1.1 *Engaged Artists as Social and Normative Figures*

Even if artists' irreducible individuality and originality are part of the norms of the field, the social dimension of artistic positions has long been highlighted (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1992). Along such lines, engaged artists also appear as social figures. The social representations surrounding the figure of the engaged artist appear to consist of so many sets of norms, which legitimize or delegitimize political and artistic engagements, and frame their modalities, which have evolved over time.

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3 For Hamid Dabashi, these polylocal spaces where protest art develops constitute "parapublic and interstitial spaces" whose subversiveness is precisely related to their transitory and shifted character, escaping in part from the control of the State and supporting a "deferred defiance" (Dabashi, 2020: 121, 124–125).

This figure had its founding moment in the Dreyfus affair and Emile Zola's renowned *J'accuse*; it also became normative when Jean-Paul Sartre elevated the engagement of the author into an ethic,<sup>4</sup> while by contrast Raymond Aron (Aron, 1955) ruled out the idea of the engagement of intellectuals (Lambert and Matonti, 2001). The question of whether artists should engage or not, and how, lies at the heart of debates on the art scenes of the twentieth century (Denis, 2000: 19). For a time, the association of the figure of the engaged artist with the grand ideologies of the twentieth century came to delegitimize the idea of engaged art. But this figure has undergone a genuine revival via a reconfiguration of modes of engagements, which are now perceived less as political than civic. They follow on from certain changes in activism; the disqualification of the vocabulary of ideology and the rejection of hierarchical modes of organization, of the verticality of power, and of the conventional levers (unions, parties) of social mobilization (Larzillière and Petric, 2013). Thus, although the engaged art associated with the Arab nationalism of the 1970s found itself delegitimized, the figure of the engaged artist was championed once again in the Arab world in the wake of the 2011 uprisings, uncoupled from its association with regimes and political power (Jacquemond and Lang, 2019), and continues to create sense in different ways. On the global art market scene, there is growing demand for a form of art that appears engaged but not political, in the narrow sense of the term. Certain types of engaged works find their place in international biennials. Artists' repertoires have proven to be diverse, far beyond the "classical figure of the engaged artist who puts their talent and reputation to the service of causes dear to their heart" (Balasinski and Mathieu, 2006: 9), whose mode of action is essentially scandal and petition (Balasinski and Mathieu, 2006: 15).

## 1.2 *Repertoires of Engagement*

Identifying these repertoires of engagement is our focus here.<sup>5</sup> These repertoires cannot solely comprise a romantic vision of engagements, nor the norms

4 (Sartre, 1948, 1972). His private correspondence shows him to be more ambivalent, sometimes seeking to escape activism and aspiring to a disengaged literature (Noudelmann, 2020).

5 Here we can draw on, and adapt, Charles Tilly's notion of the repertoire of collective action: "The word repertoire identifies a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice. Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle, displaying symbols of affiliation, opposition, or protest, means of reporting news, and so on.... By analogy with a jazz musician's improvisations or the impromptu skits of a troupe of strolling players ... people in a given place and time learn to carry out a limited number of alternative collective-action routines, adapting each one to the immediate circumstances and to the reactions of antagonists, authorities, allies,



of committed art and its (de)legitimation, but they do face up to them. These repertoires of engagement refer to diverse registers of participation in action, over the medium or long term, to support a cause that can be very broad and pertain to a vision for society. We can as such distinguish between a directly activist repertoire of engagement, in which artists put their skills to the service of a cause, for instance by designing promotional posters for an organization, and, at the other extreme of the spectrum, a repertoire that could be described as existential, where for instance a cosmopolitan way of life is championed by a Lebanese photographer,<sup>6</sup> as a form of commitment to campaign for a different society. Without containing overtly political content, certain aesthetics or artistic tastes can be associated with the construction of distinctive collective identities, as such acquiring a protest dimension (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998; Steinberg, 2004; Mathieu, 2019). Within each repertoire of engagement, diverse modes of actions may be envisaged, depending on the discipline. These repertoires are in a state of evolutionary change. They can be grasped as situated at the intersection of actors' bids for the meanings of their actions, and of the historically situated framing of engaged activism, and particularly the receptions and readings made of it in the political field. Repertoires of artistic engagement also uniquely bring into play the positioning of artists in the artistic field and their professional careers.

Before discussing the repertoires of engagement used, let us first consider the general connections between the shift to engagement and occupying a more or less central position on the artistic field. One of the classic theses on this connection relates to the autonomization of the artistic field. The figure of the engaged artist does not emerge from a fusion of the political and artistic fields, on the contrary it is a sign of the autonomy of the artistic field, since the artists draw on a legitimacy that has been acquired elsewhere, in the artistic field, to legitimize their political action (Bourdieu, 1992). Sébastien Boulay (Chapter 5) shows in his research on engaged figures in west-Saharan singer-songwriting that the national and international musical renown of certain Sahrawi singers affords them the status to disseminate their political messages. However, while the status of renowned artists amplifies the political message conveyed, Sapiro's work on the trajectories of engaged French writers during the Second World War has highlighted the correlation between a greater or lesser propensity towards engaged protest, and more or less variable degrees of marginality in the artistic field (Sapiro, 1999). The fact that it is mostly peripheral artists

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observers, objects of their action, and other people somehow involved in the struggle" (Tilly, 1993: 264–265).

6 Interview, Beirut, March 2018.

or new entrants that preferentially invest themselves in political engagement held true, once again, during the Arab uprisings (Boëx, 2013b). Moreover, studies of longer-term trajectories are now showing the notable impact of political engagement on careers, but also growing claims by artists to hold a 'pure' artistic position, as their renown increased following the uprisings. This observation could be analysed in Bourdieusian terms of the homology of the field, by which actors in different fields holding positions in the same way share the same visions of the world. In this, renowned artists tend not to be disconnected from all political engagement, but to prefer consensual and dominant causes, while protest and subversive action would be the preserve of less dominant actors within the field (Mathieu, 2019). Repertoires of engagement can also be associated with hierarchical positions within the artistic field. The most renowned artists enlist their fame, or symbolic capital, certainly because they have such capital, but also because it allows them to keep their artistic production separate. Those who have not acquired acclaim enlist their works themselves (Lambert and Matonti, 2001). This is done in diverse ways, such as conveying political messages directly or amplifying the identity of the group concerned by the cause.

But certain studies on the rap world have called for a more complex analysis, highlighting the importance of political engagement among famous stars, and the existence of differing repertoires of engagement among artists of equal renown. These highlight the extent to which issues of artistic engagement can vary from one discipline to another, and that this should be taken into account when analysing relations to engagement (Aterianus-Owanga, Chapter 3). The rap scene stands out for according high value to political engagement, where it can be a resource. But these artists' engagement does not only bring into play their positions in the artistic field. Their engagement is constructed in diachrony with political socialization (family or others), which may construct relations to engagement that place political conviction at the forefront of artistic activity, even if there are career consequences (Sonnette, 2015). This brings to mind a general point from the sociology of engagement, that is to say, the necessity of a diachronic analysis that takes the entanglement of diverse spheres into account. It would be overly hasty to associate a hierarchical positioning in the artistic field with a specific kind of relations to engagement. But each of these repertoires still differently questions the links between positions in the art worlds and engaged political positioning, putting into tension activism and the professionalization of the artist, and interacting with professional careers.

The most immediately political repertoires of engagement establish direct involvement in activist activities, mostly on the back of the skills of artists

according to their discipline, and their association with campaigns and mobilizations. Posters and drawings are produced, engaged songs are taken up during marches, artistic performances contribute to occupations of the public space, and street art marks out territory. These repertoires of artistic engagement also support the cause by creating emotions, serving as awareness-raising apparatus, and raising activists' self-awareness (Traïni and Siméant, 2009), capturing and disseminating the emotions at play around political events (Bleiker, 2009). They contribute to the rituals that unite the collective. The Turkish protesters against the regime would begin their mobilizations with collective dances and songs, some would even build up around dances taking several hours, representing the very heart of the action of protest (Selek, Chapter 7). Here, the engagement of the artists would contribute to a festive, link-forging function, and to shared emotional expressions of jubilation, enthusiasm, effervescence and energy, or of anger and pain. Laughter is one of those common expressions that unites against the adversary, demystifying regimes. We have discussed this above in relation to the Arab uprisings; it was also present during the Lebanese uprisings of 2019–2020, with the intensive circulation, notably online, of images, drawings and caricatures of the historical Lebanese political class, and on sectarianism, nepotism and economic policy (Al-Rammal, Chapter 4). Those emotions were then articulated to a symbolic work – the subversive deconstruction of adversaries – in the register of humour and derision.

Beyond simple support for the cause, the repertoire of artistic engagement can be oriented towards work of symbolic redefinition, widening its audience. For example, Palestinian rap redirects Palestinian issues from situational references to the refugees and their camps of 1948 and 1967 to a more general reference to marginality and the ghetto (Puig, 2013), making transversal identifications possible to Western scenes, and vice versa. This wider generality contributes to the legitimization of the causes by associating them with common values, rather than the interests of one or another social category. The artists draw on what constitutes both an ideal promoted in the artistic field, and the orientation of a creative work aimed at articulating the universal and the specific.<sup>7</sup>

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7 For Kant, aesthetic judgement involves entry into universality without concepts, a “subjective-universal” in a free play between reason and imagination (Kant, 1790: §22). Sartre sees in the “singular universal”, or at least in the tension it brings, the horizon of literature (Sartre, 1971: 8).

### 1.3 *Engagements and the Logics of Professionalization*

The professional issues surrounding these repertoires of engagement are complex and changing. Little-known artists may gain visibility and access to new audiences. Their work also gains a social and political charge, tuning into contemporary issues, which adds value to it. While artistic work is characterized by its uncertainty (Menger, 2014), engagement can also be a producer of meaning. Collective action can give artists sense and certitude, compensating for the objective and subjective uncertainties surrounding their status, vocation and the value of their productions (Gobille, 2001). The repertoire of engagement proves to be a resource. For Turkish musicians in the diaspora, the milieu of radical activism has also been a professional and performance network (Selek, Chapter 7). Analogies between the worlds of improvised music and radical activism have also been raised, particularly in jazz circles in France (Roueff, 2001), facilitating these professional and activist circulations. The very autonomy of the artistic and political fields encourages these games of reciprocal legitimation, but they can also result in delegitimation, in so far as art comes from another order, that of the “inspired polity” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991: 83). And those who have acquired visibility and recognition through politics tend, over the course of their career, to mark out their distance from ‘political’ or ‘engaged’ art, which could undermine their artistic legitimacy. Currently, to avoid devaluing their works or practices in their own field, artists who become involved in politics are not supposed to appear too closely associated with a specific ideology or partisan organization. Syrian artists who had been closely involved in the Syrian revolution and sought to bear witness of it have stressed the term ‘independent’ (Dubois, Chapter 6). A repertoire of engagement that instead emphasizes support for general civic values reduces the tension between these respective legitimizing criteria. This is particularly the case when it makes these values emerge out of professional practices, rather than through association with certain causes and movements. This repertoire makes it possible to combine innovation in the artistic field and civic engagement. Gruber associates the occupations of places and squares, and the subsequent emergence of testing grounds for the emotional expressions of the expectations and ideals of a group, with the establishment of “citizenship rituals” (Duncan, 1995, quoted in Gruber, 2018: 119) in museums and galleries. While it is still difficult to evaluate the reception and the impact of such schemes, Sarah Dornhof shows how, through installations in the city of Marrakech, the artists of a contemporary art biennial reworked relations to the public space. The subsequent cancellation of this biennial and its relaunch via a collective of artists as a fictitious online event also contributes to recreating the virtual public space so present during the Arab uprisings (Chapter 9).

Other repertoires of engagements may be underpinned by political issues, but focus on support and societal change through the humanitarian and the social. Engagement in social and humanitarian projects, a priori less politicized, can also reduce the tension between the legitimizing criteria of the two 'polities'. In Lebanon for example, interactive artistic practice projects, notably in theatre and photography, were set up in Palestinian refugee camps, and for Syrian refugees from 2013, with the goals of social expression and reevaluation. This repertoire differently raises the question of the relations between repertoires of engagement, recognition, and professionalization. Indeed, in developing countries but also elsewhere, this represents a professional sector in full growth. Humanitarian donors and NGOs tend to link up artistic activities to their programmes, while attributing virtues of deconflictualization or empowerment to these activities. Artists can thus find a source of revenue at the same time as a form of social and humanitarian engagement, which can lead to forms of recognition in this sector. This does not prevent them from wondering about the kinds of devaluing of their work they may be risking here. The values of art championed by donors and NGOs can prove to be far from the expectations of the art worlds. This can be seen reflected in the dilemmas of photographers in Lebanon, as witnessed in the case of a photographer leading a project in a Palestinian camp. The children there are haunted by the violent situation (clashes take place between an alliance of political groups close to Fatah and jihadist groups), and their chaotic daily lives mean they find it difficult to take an interest. The photographer is worried about receiving funding from the UNHCR for a project that does not appear successful, and about her professional reputation.<sup>8</sup> Her positioning illustrates two levels of tensions: a practice of participatory art that may be out of step with local situations, particularly if directly linked to deconflictualization objectives; and conflicts of norms between an artistic scene that values subversion and originality, and development organizations that view it as a social tool for championing certain values.

At the other end of the spectrum, repertoires that are more intrinsic to the artistic field are promoted as forms of engagement. Certain artists claim to influence social change not through their involvement in collective action, but directly through their art, in a high definition of the artistic gesture. Part of this involves promoting a subversive and critical stance. In this type of repertoire, the difficulties linked to the axiological differences between the different 'polities' are far less visible. Indeed, transgression and the experience of limits is an essential paradigm of contemporary art (Heinich, 2014). We can see this

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8 Interview, Beirut, June 2018.

emerge in the speech and trajectory of a Jordanian writer who was a deeply engaged left-wing activist (Larzillière, 2016) before finding growing acclaim for his literary work. During the Arab uprisings, which played out in Jordan in 2011 and 2012 in the form of a movement that remained more reformist than revolutionary, Hisham Bustani stated that he no longer believed in the movement, and that although he respected them, the protesters had “neither ideology nor thinkers” (Morrison, 2012: 26). His repertoire of engagement was no longer an activism of direct opposition to the regime and of societal reform, but the staging, in his writing, of the contradictions and difficulties in which individuals find themselves, caught between desire for change, personal comfort, repression, and media exposure. He sees in this a dual register: on the one hand, an intimate testimony on everyday repression and, on the other hand, a radical role. For him, literature can induce real, rapid rather than gradual, upheavals in a society. This is also the approach of a new generation of Palestinian plastic artists who work on the representations and self-representations of Palestinian society, to spark change in them by constantly distorting and subverting symbols and stereotypes in their works, from Palestinian nationalism to consumerism to gender assignment (Slitine, Chapter 2). Resistance to the occupation plays out here in lifestyles that attempt to maintain an everyday ‘normality’, rather than in any heroic gestures. This repertoire of engagement can also create an imaginary around a new society, as with certain Syrian artistic practices in exile, “an instituting imaginary”, as Mermier describes, elaborating on Castoriadis, in the face of fragmentation and crisis, and the experience of exile (Mermier, Chapter 1).

Other artists go further, defining their engagement through aesthetic subversions of the very canons of their field, in the face of engaged art that is often not very innovative, even if doing so means only receiving a limited, elitist, aesthetic critical reception (Lambert and Matonti, 2001). It is then that the aesthetic itself becomes political, as can be observed here, as well as in the search for new languages that upset the relationships between theatre and documentary (Dubois, Chapter 6), and in the space opened up by the fictitious Marrakech Biennale (Dornhof, Chapter 9).

## 2 Repertoires of Artistic Engagements within Globalization

These repertoires of engagement are inscribed within multi-scale, multi-layered scenes, with distinct parameters and challenges, and are clearly marked by processes of globalization and by more or less important, more or less possible, circulations. The transnational circulations surrounding artistic activism

were particularly salient during the 2011 uprisings. Here, artistic action was combined with cyberactivism, which greatly contributes to the circulation and visibility of the artistic artefacts produced. The impact of this revolutionary artistic expression extended far beyond the Arab world; an example of this being the circulation of Egyptian street art themes. Comparisons were made with other mobilizations, such as the *Indignados*, the Occupy movements or the colour revolutions; symbols were taken up again. More recently, this circulation of symbols and references could be observed in protests in the United States in 2020 following the killing of George Floyd, which gave rise to intersecting identifications, notably in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. They are explicitly taken up in the revolutionary iconography surrounding the Lebanese uprising (Al-Rammal, Chapter 4).

The evolutions of activism come together here with the specific inscription of artistic practices within globalization, or rather globalizations. Research on these processes has highlighted a globalization of artistic scenes, and the way in which art, culture, and aesthetics, far from being marginal, are central to them (Cicchelli, Octobre, and Riegel, 2020). The challenges of cultural globalization are highlighted, from mass migration to new information technologies, and the deterritorialization of public spaces to the decompartmentalization of imaginaries (Appadurai, 1996). In this context, artists themselves, and their works, are often presented and perceived as both actors and signs of globalization, since the art worlds draw out one of the spaces of the interweaving of diversified representations (Aterianus-Owanga, Djebbari, and Salzbrunn, 2019).

This general evolution has been analysed from various angles and is highly visible in debates on the notion of global art. While global art is sometimes labelled as contemporary art (Belting, 2009), the notion is generally used to highlight the current inscription of art practices within transnational circulations and transcultural exchanges, and the connection of cultural institutions (Buurman et al., 2018). The global impact of art markets on artistic production has been another recurring finding. There is no unanimity as to how this artistic globalization should be interpreted, in the tension between uniformization and processes of autonomy. In Buchholz's analysis of the development of a "global visual art field", she stresses a form of vertical autonomy developing in the field, which distances itself from the procedures of evaluation in national artistic scenes (Buchholz, 2016). Other studies, however, stress the hegemonic effects that stem from the standardization of structures and bodies of recognition. Precise statistical analyses have shown that the entrance of non-Western artists into 'central' bodies remains marginal, highlighting differences and inequalities in the conditions of the circulation of artists and their works (Wuggenig and Buchholz, 2005). The production of a contemporary

'globalized' canon also leads to new labels that tie artists and their works to the specificity of their nationality and culture (Bourriaud, 2009; Glicenstein, 2016). Far from just the processes of hybridization and cosmopolitanism, globalized creation also appears to be marked by an "identity market" underpinned by significant patrimonialization (Andrieu and Olivier, 2017: 14).

Arab art scenes fully participate in these various dynamics. The entry of contemporary Arab art onto the market has been reflected in sales figures since 2005–2006, as has the growing presence of Arab artists at international art fairs (Belmenouar, 2012; Choron-Baix and Mermier, 2012). At the same time, contemporary art fairs have been set up in the Arab world: Dubai in 2006, Abu Dhabi in 2009, Marrakech in 2010, and the Beirut Art Fair in Lebanon since 2010. The transnational circulations of artists from the Arab world, whether for training, encountering peers, or foreign audiences are nothing new. However, their modalities have profoundly changed in recent times. Firstly, what we might call the 'global gallery' – following on from reflections on 'global art' – which had been inaccessible to artists from the Middle East has opened up since 1993, and especially since 2001 (Scheid, 2008; Winegar, 2008; Farhat, 2009). It has entailed the development of an artistic language with common references and the incorporation of artistic creations from far more diverse geographical areas than previously. Certain artistic scenes, such as Beirut, have played a particular role by setting themselves up as a pole of cultural mediation between these various national, regional, and globalized horizons, as a space of cosmopolitization (Mermier, 2005; Rogers, 2007, 2010).

### 2.1 *Framings and De-framings of Engaged Artistic Action: Interplays of Norms on Different Scales*

Beyond national scenes, it is also through the regional constitution of an 'Arab scene', in response to both internal and external dynamics,<sup>9</sup> that these circulations and this entry to a global scene take place. The growing regional transnationalism of Arab cultural production has been noted and has been spurred on by the fragmentation of national bodies (Marchetti, 2017; Lang, 2019). Situations of exile can also contribute by encouraging encounters between artists from the various countries of the region, as Mermier shows in Chapter 1 in the case of Syrian artists and intellectuals in Germany. But the external delimitations of an 'Arab scene' also contribute, de facto, to it becoming established. As such, for many artists, it was Western invitations for 'Arab' exhibitions that allowed

9 If the notion of cultural area is to be relativized, we can note common themes and references, in tension, the Palestinian question being not the least of them (Dakhliya, 2006).



them to create links to artists from other countries in the region, some then taking part in events in other Arab countries.

This shows the influence of international and national bodies of the various ‘centres’, which also consist of assessment and evaluation bodies, authorizing officers and donors (Toukan, 2010; 2020). This influence has various levels of effect on artistic production and its themes, on the recognition of artists and their professionalization, and on their engagements. It results in circulations of norms and heteronomies. In the first instance, one can note that, for artists from non-hegemonic countries on Western scenes, there are forms of othering, or even assignments of identity on the back of regional and national origins: being recognized as an ‘Arab’, Palestinian, Syrian, or Lebanese artist, with predefinitions of their roles and thematic orientations. The theme of gender dominations is, for example, especially expected on Western scenes from Arab world artists, particularly if female.<sup>10</sup> There are forms of ‘reverse’ neo-Orientalism, in the sense that this time it is about valuing certain associated identity assignments or heritage characteristics.<sup>11</sup> Majd Abdelhamid, one of the Palestinian artists interviewed by Kirsten Scheid, refers to the subtle injunctions of foreign curators as to what will be “presentable” as “whispered blackmails” (Chapter 8). These orientations are also reflected in the perception of their engagement. These Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, or Mauritanian artists, for instance, are most often considered stakeholders in the causes to which they contribute. They rarely intervene in the role of outside actors whose very externality lends greater legitimacy to the cause (in contrast to artists in France mobilizing for migrants, for example). Or, to be more precise, while they are granted a certain legitimizing externality on a more international scene, this is tied to their artistic status as a priori ‘non-ideological’ artists, while in terms of identity, they are referred back to the causes they defend. This is one of the notable differences to more frequently studied European situations.

10 The staging of constraints that weigh on women and transgressions of those constraints, is part of Western expectations of Arab literary production. Abir Kréfa shows the importance of this for the Tunisian literary scene (Kréfa, 2014). The previously cited Jordanian writer and activist, Hisham Bustani, depicts female characters torn between their aspirations and social constraints, and mentions that he deliberately added other types of characters for the English translations of his novels to avoid an orientalist reception of his work (Bustani, 2015).

11 As Richard Jacquemond notes, “the Euro-American market continues to privilege Arab-Muslim works and authors in which it recognizes its own aesthetic codes and its moral and political values, but also its own representation of the Arab-Muslim ‘Orient’. The selection of texts that in one way or another feed its prejudices can have a stigmatizing effect on authors accused of ‘writing for export’” (Jacquemond, 2006: 614).

Another apparent impact is the discrepancy that may ensue between the objectives of international donors such as UNESCO and UNHCR, Western NGOs, or cultural diplomacy, and local practices and situations. Tensions may arise, for instance, when a donor supportive of participatory artistic workshops in camps, is faced with children producing self-portraits as soldiers, as was the case in Lebanon. Culture has been increasingly included within development policies (Kangas, Duxbury, and De Beukelaer, 2017), as a resource with artists supposedly its agents, and as an action with the supposed outcome of supporting peace and social revaluation in post-conflict policies. But the expressions and narratives that emerge during those workshops may be far from an image of victimhood. They may draw attention to the figures of the enemy, or interpret situations in a way that does not match Western donors' interpretations. Inscribed with such a framework, these projects face the usual difficulties such standardized approaches encounter, with the tendency to erase the political issues underlying conflicts. They are also often perceived as being closely tied to Western interests (Larzillière, 2019). However, even more than the content, it is the *modes* of production that are oriented as such: with artistic creation that increasingly originates from the receipt of a grant after a "well-crafted proposal", whose key audience is the funder (Scheid, Chapter 8). For these artistic scenes, it makes access to funding the preserve of socio-economic elites who are in a position to complete lengthy proposal and reports, that are time-consuming and labour-intensive (Eickhof, 2019), and who are able to master the codes and languages.

The weight of the international bodies is undeniable, with strong asymmetries between centres and peripheries, and within the various scenes, depending on whether or not there is the possibility of circulations, and of inscription in their framing. These also concern the posture of the engaged artist on themes (pacifism rather than resistance, for example) and modes (such as encouraging humanitarian or social repertoires, rather than overtly political ones). But to only note this facet would greatly diminish the composite and contradictory nature of these processes. As national and local reconfigurations are at work, they are as much the object of subversions and reframing as those, for instance, concerning orientalism in artistic works. Within these scenes, there have been lively discussions about the suitability or not of working with these types of donors, and the adaptations or questioning that may prove necessary. Such processes lead less to unambiguous logics of either standardization or identity patrimonialization (Andrieu and Olivier, 2017), than to the interplay of norms on different scales that artists include, adapt, challenge, or transgress. As such, rather than unanimously affirming the figure of the 'global artist' at

the risk of eliminating asymmetries and inequalities, or, on the contrary, offering a univocal reading based on hegemonic processes, it is a matter of showing, in a detailed, situated way, the contextual emergence of new practices, of reconfigurations and diversions, and of constructions and deconstructions of different scales of norms. Circulations play out between local, national, regional, or globalized scenes, with different structures, and the norms at stake are combined there in diverse ways.

Artists from 'peripheral' scenes gain access to Western scenes less through direct contact than through induction into diasporic networks, which is itself largely dependent on their pre-existing local roots. This potentially surprising finding appears to be a transversal and structuring element, for artists from sub-Saharan Africa as well as from the Arab and Muslim world, from across various disciplines, be it dance, music, or literature (Andrieu and Olivier, 2017; Aterianus-Owanga, Chapter 3; Mermier, Chapter 1; Selek, Chapter 7). The place of these political organizations within these diasporic networks may also be completely at odds, from the important role of left-wing political organizations for Anatolian musicians from three generations of 'circulations' into Western Europe to estrangement for today's Syrian cultural networks (Selek, Chapter 7; Mermier, Chapter 1).

In all these cases, circulations imply steering between distinct contexts of reception, giving rise to differentiated political expressions. By comparing the trajectories of engaged rappers from three countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Alice Aterianus-Owanga demonstrates how the political specificity of their national configurations 'follows' them throughout their careers, but also how, in return, their projection into a world of 'translocal' art makes their repertoires of engagement evolve. If, for example, as some Palestinian artists assert, their work appears as necessarily political, and, moreover, is received as such, their repertoire of engagement still evolves towards more personalized and subjectivist registers, which we can also relate to certain global evolutions in activism.

### 3 Protest, Violence, and Repression

These artists' trajectories and circulations are also trajectories of exile; forced trajectories to flee the violence of repression and coercion for some among them. And whether they stay or leave, their societies of origin are marked by conflict and war, as are their artistic scenes. As such, without reducing them to this aspect, which could carry over new forms of labelling, it is conversely

important not to conceal them within the false uniformity of a globalized, pacified space. In terms of relations to protest and to artistic engagement, this impact can be read on two levels.

The first concerns how artistic scenes constitute themselves in such contexts, particularly in the face of authoritarianism, when processes of autonomization are often curtailed (Iskander, Chapter 10) and production is marked by censorship and repression. Politics and economics combine here to limit the possibilities of expressing any critical artistic creation. Official censorship bodies (such as in Jordan, which saw a large-scale export of its literary production to Lebanon to bypass censors)<sup>12</sup> or the ubiquitous security apparatus characteristic of authoritarian regimes tracks down any expression of opposition to the regime. More indirect intimidation strategies are used, with the instigation of smear campaigns against artists, as in Ben Ali's Tunisia, which left their marks on the post-2011 art scene (Boissier and Guellouz, 2019). It makes it impossible for artists to access the equipment they need for quality productions, as with filmmakers in China (Amar, 2015, quoted in Mathieu, 2019), or to raise the funds necessary for production owing to centralized, discriminatory state policies or collusion between elites who hold economic power and forms of authoritarian liberalism. The more the tools of technology or institutional access are necessary to artistic productions, the greater the impact.

But the parameters at work in the constitution of art scenes in authoritarian or conflictual contexts do not boil down to the direct impact of coercion. Rather than viewing it as a unified regime contemporary analyses of authoritarianism have shown that authoritarian processes play out differently in different fields. Art scenes sometimes constitute an alternative arena of protest, because they are less subject to repression than activist organizations and they offer roundabout possibilities for protest expressions. As such, we can analyse the involvement of intellectuals in the cultural sphere in Cuba after the fall of the wall (Geoffray, 2009), and since 2018 the San Isidro movement, a collective of dissident artists and intellectuals. The action of Syrian artists prior to 2011 drew on the opening speech of the regime to instigate certain activities, and in so doing contributed to its legitimization, while also opening up occasional possibilities for alternative public expression (Dubois, Chapter 6). This constitutes the whole ambiguity of action within the authorized limits of an authoritarian regime. Relations to the international sphere also offer certain possibilities and resources. There is now a certain demand on the international

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12 On another scale, the Chinese literary, musical, and independent film scenes are another example of the impact of censorship, but also of the circumvention strategies used by artists and of their association with social movements (Veg, 2007; Amar, 2020).

art market for engaged art. And beyond classic, official cultural prescribers (institutions, critics, art historians, etc.), reception and recognition mediators have greatly diversified; new media is not the least of those vectors. This has notably been reflected in attention garnered from 'subaltern' Western audiences, of which Palestinian rap is an example.

The second level of impact concerns the experience of artists faced with situations whose combined violence, injustice, and urgency press for engagement. Some of these artists, and particularly photographers who, having also worked as journalists,<sup>13</sup> mention traumatic experiences that have radically changed their relationship to their practice. Here, the repertoire of engagement of testimony takes on a particular acuity, at the intersection of the lived experience of the artists, and of expectations on national and international scenes. At the national and regional level, the pervasiveness of the political situation, of violent experiences involving entire populations, and references to collective destiny, all call upon the artist to take on a role of grand witness or even narrator, which also contributes to identity constructions and the dissemination of causes. Yet this role also echoes, differently, the expectations on globalized scenes, as these conflict zones' topicality creates demands for urgent testimony. The effects of hegemony also influence this role attribution, with their association with a collective 'other' and the reception of their works as documents about their societies.

This testimonial repertoire of engagement also entails certain professional difficulties when it involves producing works. As Benoît Denis explains in his discussion of the case of literature:

Testimony, because it fully accomplishes this harmony of a work and a life, is the basic form of engagement [...]. But testimony is also the curse of the engaged artist and an impoverished form *par excellence*, because it is barely literary, devoid of that power of evocation and transformation that we attribute to fiction.

DENIS, 2000: 48

A tension is at work here and is exacerbated by violent and coercive contexts. The urgency of the situation can take over, making the testimony fall within a different temporality from that of artistic creation. In Syria, in 2012, videographers had to choose: produce videos as quickly as possible to reflect

13 Interviews with the Lebanese photographers Aline Manoukian and Patrick Baz, Beirut, February 2018, and with the Palestinian photographer Rula Halawani, November 2016, during her residency at the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France.

the situation, or take time for a more formal, thorough work (Boëx, 2013a)? Where does the priority lie? The posture of testimony necessarily influences the content of the work and its form. Significant evolution and reflexivity emerged along these lines among Syrian artists after 2011, as they went back over different ways of ‘documenting’ events. In the literary field, more intimate fictional forms developed, articulating subjective experiences and confrontations with collective events (Mermier, Chapter 1). Such artistic engagement can also operate by inscribing the memory of acts of violence, disappearances and repression into the public space. This is the case in Mexico, where forms of memorial artistic expression are being put in place in a participative process together with victims’ associations. They contribute to the production of alternative narratives to those of the ‘victors’, mixing emotions associated with the memory of the dead and the victims, with calls for justice and the work of symbolization (Melenotte, Chapter 11).

While the conditions for artistic production are particularly difficult in these contexts of conflict and violence, they also translate into greater visibility in Europe and the United States (Lang, 2019). In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the urgency of witnessing also encouraged artists to adapt their productions and material to better disseminate it on digital media (Daghmi, 2018). The circulations that can then operate transform the conditions of engagement, notably with respect to issues of (de)legitimization. How do you best get your voice heard? In a safer exile, but under fire from criticism? By using international recognition to gain a new national audience? By refusing to leave and staying as close as possible to those struggling? These diverse trajectories play upon the conditions of the reception of artistic works, as Sébastien Boulay discusses by comparing the careers of engaged singers from Western Sahara (Boulay, Chapter 5). Such circulations also entail confronting different political regimes, from coercive to democratic contexts. The circulation of these artists, between diversely configured public spaces where audiences, expectations, and public policies are in conflict, raises new questions about the role of state policies in globalized circulations. Here, these public policies are also policies of repression.

#### 4 Presentation of the Book

The objective of this work is to illuminate from within the complex contemporary fabric of artistic engagement and its most striking evolutions. Drawing on multi-situated studies, within a decentred perspective from the Arab world and beyond, it highlights the diversity of repertoires of engagement in the

context of artistic globalization and of circulation between highly diverse political environments, be they authoritarian, coercive, or democratic. To do so, we approach this global policy of artistic engagement from three angles. The first focuses on current reconfigurations of artists' repertoires of engagement. The second highlights the ways in which these circulations and exiles influence and represent a range of issues surrounding visibility, legitimation, and delegitimation as far as these artistic engagements are concerned. The third deals with the normative framing and deframing of artistic criticism, which is experienced as a repertoire of engagement, proposing other narratives of the social and alternatives spaces of expression.

This work is the outcome of research carried out within the framework of the international 'Global Art? Circulation and Artistic Engagements' programme at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Foundation and international study days there. These embraced an interdisciplinary approach that combined sociology, anthropology and the political sciences, and multi-site field research based on mixed methods: the reconstruction of artist trajectories, qualitative interviews, gathering documents and iconographies, and participant observation in various types of spaces (exhibitions, biennials, theatre scenes, artist collectives, demonstrations, etc.).

#### 4.1 *Part 1: Moving Repertoires of Engagement*

The contemporary engagements of artists play out according to distinct repertoires, where relationships to the political and professionalization are articulated in diverse manners. These repertoires of engagement have undergone profound renewals, which can be situated within general developments in activism. Since the turn of the century, a civic and horizontal, project-based, more personalized activism has developed, seeking to distance itself from structured ideologies and conventional political organizations. It aims for new collective forms of politics, and reshaping the relationship between the individual and the collective in the political action.

This evolution became particularly apparent during the early days of the Arab uprisings, but also in the *Indignados* movement. It continues in other contemporary movements. But these repertoires are also dependent on the internal evolutions of art scenes, and how the place of engaged artistic action is defined and redefined there. Particularly notable are forms of increasing intimacy in relations to historical experience. This development is also ultimately a part of globalized circulations and exile. Moreover, technological developments relating to a 'digital turn' are profoundly changing the conditions of circulations of artistic artefacts, and the parameters of an artistically engaged public space.

In this way, Franck Mermier analyses the current recompositions of a Syrian cultural scene in exile after the state of war in Syria, from Istanbul to Berlin via Beirut or Paris. As actors of the Syrian revolution of 2011, these intellectuals and artists occupied public spaces, reinvented national narratives and symbols, and documented events including for an international audience. In exile, the conflict's violent development can lead to a certain political disengagement in the classical sense of the term. But the repertoires of engagement of a younger generation, and its creation, are reconfiguring in two key directions. Bearing witness, documenting and developing a counter-narrative are important, in reflexive and intimate forms, particularly in literary fiction. A second repertoire has emerged with a political construction of the cultural, in a performative register where, faced with the dislocations of exile and the "fracture of violence" (Picard, 2018, quoted in Mermier, Chapter 1), it is a question of looking ahead to a new Syrian society and reconstructing a common referent.

Marion Slitine's study of the evolution of Palestinian artists' engagements draws attention to the specificity of the repertoires developed by a young generation of post-Oslo plastic artists.<sup>14</sup> The previous generation situated their work within the continuity of the national cause, supporting the construction of a heroic national narrative. In complete contrast, the younger generation subscribes to the subversion and reimagining of norms and symbols related to the Palestinian cause, but also to neo-liberal referents. It is less a matter of depoliticization than of registering engagement into intimate and daily experience in the face of occupation, and also into forms of social actions. These 'globalized and connected' artists draw on new media and social media to overcome the confinement and fragmentation of the Palestinian territories, projecting themselves onto a globalized art scene and taking up its codes.

By drawing on the trajectories of engagement and the circulations of young rappers from Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, Alice Aterianus-Owango contributes another point of comparison to the development of these repertoires of engagement and the transnationalization of collective action. She firstly shows that relations to engagement are central and highly valued on the rap scene, demonstrating the necessity of a discipline-specific understanding of the place of engaged artistic action. Their repertoire of engagement unfolds with an engagement through works, through songs of direct or indirect criticism, but also direct involvement in political activism. Uniquely, economic entrepreneurship can also be depicted and experienced by these rappers as forms of engagement. Comparison is made between the trajectories of rappers from three different countries – Gabon, Senegal, and Burkina Faso – where

14 The Oslo 1 and Oslo 2 Agreements were signed between 1993 and 1995.



experiences of protest movements have diverse outcomes. Although they share common ideals and networks, their paths bear the marks of specific national politics. As Alice Aterianus-Owanga points out, it is only in the intersection of these levels that we can understand the differentiated impact of engagement on their careers.

Rayane al-Rammal's focus of study offers further contributions with a presentation of digital activism in the protest movement in Lebanon since 2019. In this way, we see, 'live', how digital artists take part in the movement, constructing and supporting a revolutionary narrative. An 'art of the revolution' is developing, with a humorous and derisive iconography that deconstructs the policy of the Lebanese government, challenging its political class and sectarianism. It equally proposes a new social project. This engaged younger generation has displayed strong mastery of new media and social networks; it takes part in the globalized circulations of protest referents, taking up and reinterpreting symbols and events from other regions of the world.

#### 4.2 *Part 2: Artistic Visibilities and Political Circulations in Diaspora*

Just as networks of artistic creation are reconfiguring themselves in the diaspora, so is engaged artistic action. Whether artists are present on a temporary or more permanent basis, as part of their career development or in exile while fleeing war and repression, they see a transformation in the conditions for the reception of their work and for their engagement. Diasporic networks can offer them specific resources, provided this younger generation negotiates its place as 'new arrivals'. But their engagement is also perceived in a new light. It may well be more visible, but also less legitimate owing to its distance.

By comparing the trajectories of engaged figures in West-Saharan singing-songwriting, Sébastien Boulay shows how reception in diasporic networks is articulated with projection onto international scenes, with repercussions for singers' possibilities of engagement. Attaining recognition ensures them a position and a certain protection to disseminate a political message, either through directly politically engaged song or in public statements distinct from their artistic register, which may explore more universal or intimate themes. But their position is also perceived in relation to national, social, and historical interpretations of the political role of musicians. The target audiences at the time of these exiles or displacements may be different, from West Saharan singer-songwriters seeking to appeal to the international community, to exiled Mauritanian rappers in Canada developing a highly subversive register, relying on the sharing of video clips directly aimed at a national audience of young people in particular.

For the Syrian theatre artists whose trajectories of exile Simon Dubois analyses, first to Beirut and then on to Europe, this displacement has indeed entailed the growth of a foreign, even global audience. It has had a profound impact on their theatrical practice, which is not to say that they only met the expectations of this audience. On the contrary, it also encouraged them to reflect on their engagement and the challenges of documentary theatre as a means of bearing testimony, denouncing, and also challenging European stereotypes and representations of Syrian society. The sizable changes in the political context brought about by these circulations have also reconfigured the positions of this younger generation in the artistic field. These new arrivals come to occupy a central place, while what was a marginal practice becomes a repertoire of engagement. Its reception in Europe affords them new resources and visibility.

The younger generation of Anatolian musicians in Europe studied by Pinar Selek were able to make a place for themselves by drawing on activist innovations from protests in Turkey, and on the activist and international cultural networks created at this time. This articulates professional practice and an engaged stance, notably alongside the radical left. In contrast to the Syrian artists, these Anatolian musicians were able to depend on a third generation of immigrants and their educational and cultural capital, some of whom master the codes and resources of the art scene. Those artists, too, have to deal with certain forms of identity labelling or expectations from cultural institutions, while their repertoire of engagement pushes for overcoming communitarian segmentations and for a cosmopolitanism nourished by multiple, fluid, cultural referents.

#### 4.3 *Part 3: Contest and Critique in a Globalizing World*

While the narratives of societies are an integral part of political processes, engaged artists can bring to the fore symbolic work on identity and normative framings and unframing. This artistic gesture can particularly come to bear on issues around memory by producing alternative narratives to official discourse, and the representation of denied memories of violence and political disappearances. These frameworks play out at the national level, but are also related to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes in a globalizing world. This critical work is also carried out within the artistic field, in the questioning of dogmas and its canons, which for certain artists represents a repertoire of engagement.

In this way, Kirsten Scheid examines how young Palestinian artists seek to escape identity labelling on the Palestinian question, and the heavy influence of international donors, by joining a collective of artists from the Global South.

This collective work involves in-depth reflection on vocabulary, categories at work, and the impact of donors' organizational workings on artistic creation. It aims to deconstruct them and to distance itself in order to develop alternative projects and narratives, anchored locally but connected to one another, horizontally and transnationally. The artists' engagement here imagines an autonomous, but not isolated, policy of artistic production in the Palestinian Territories. This creation process is also conceived as a form of social engagement, in that it could integrate local reception of these artistic forms and help to modify the ways in which Palestinian society is experienced, perceives itself, and projects itself, in all its plurality.

Sarah Dorhof considers how fictional artistic projections are experienced as a repertoire of engagement that allows the displacement of hegemonic representations, notably colonial ones, in the context of the Marrakech Biennial. Following this event's cancellation in 2018, a collective of Moroccan artists stepped in to create a fictional online biennial. In doing so, internal criticism of the artistic field developed, calling into question the conventional prescribers of contemporary art. But its projections into a fictional space also express the will to reimagine territory and thus nourish a social imaginary of dreams and utopia, at the very time when the country is entering a phase of 'renormalization', far from the mobilizations of 2011 and 2012.

Iskander also considers how alternative art scenes, in this case real, namely artist-run spaces, promote artistic creation in Bahrain, far from national political heritage injunctions and sectarian hierarchies. These spaces also bear witness to a social practice, particularly among young people. Artists had played an important role in the 2011 uprising, from caricature to street art, photography to songs, and poetry to writings. The repression that followed resulted in their erasure from politics. In these spaces, the artists had renewed opportunities to engage in what here is a social repertoire.

These forms of artistic engagement, based on alternative narratives to official politics, can also involve the symbolization and inscription of memorials in the public space, as Sabrina Melenotte shows. In Mexico, a protest art of memory is developing, diverging from institutional memorial policies on the violence and death associated with the state repression of 1968, the war against drugs, and migration. 'Anti-monuments' are being erected, designed in a participatory manner with victims' associations, then being collectively appropriated. These personalize the victims, with memory becoming a political language consisting of demands for justice and challenges to impunity. These protesting, critical expressions stand apart from official artistic commissions, which are perceived as denials of the memory of the victims, and of the political and social concerns currently at stake.

## 5 Conclusion: A New Generation?

Political, social, and critical repertoires of artistic engagement prove to be diverse, and in ongoing motion: from the production of protest iconography or performances during mobilizations to documentation and testimony, from participative workshops to symbolic work on norms and stereotypes. New generations' mastery of digital tools contributes to the transnational weaving of references and circulation of artefacts, promoting horizontal and cross-border collaborations to overcome the confinement of coercion and repression, without, however, eliminating the hierarchies associated with centre/periphery effects. Here a contemporary fabric of artistic engagement, composite and in a state of tension, emerges together with certain shared challenges, which are globalized but not uniform. For these young generations of artists, these engagements translate into artistic production that consists less of specific political references than of the staging of situated subjectivities which experience in their bodies and in their emotions, frequently violent social and political situations, and use of subversive, provocative vocabulary in the search for their meaning.

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