

Bravely Stating the Obvious: Egyptian humor and the anti-American consensus

By Walter Armbrust

October, 2007. Over slightly more than the past decade a number of mass mediated Egyptian comedies have depicted and criticized the United States. American journalists report on these productions with regularity, usually labeling them as straightforward manifestations of anti-Americanism, and often conflating anti-American, anti-Israeli, and anti-Semitic speech of all types.ⁱ Many of these reports argue that anti-Americanism is unrelated to American and Israeli actions, and is actually *caused* by mass media, or at least inflamed by it to the point that whatever actual objections Egyptians may have to American policies are irrelevant.ⁱⁱ This argument is particularly salient in American neoconservative publications over the past decade. American neoconservatism has in turn become closely allied with Zionist—particularly Likudist—political positions.ⁱⁱⁱ Neoconservative/Zionist organizations actively seek to shape American perceptions of undifferentiated anti-Americanism in Middle Eastern media through well-funded media monitoring operations such as the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI).^{iv}

A few years ago Egyptian media portrayals of the United States were a topic of great interest for many Americans and Europeans, or at least I thought so because I was often asked to comment on it. More recently requests for information or analysis on the topic of anti-Americanism in Egyptian media seem to have subsided. There are a number

of possible reasons for this. One of these is that attributions of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in Egyptian media have become so normative for Americans that the issue has simply receded into the background as a form of received wisdom. In other words, the neoconservative/Zionist narrative of state-controlled media instilling anti-Americanism is so dominant that nobody thinks to question it. Hence it no longer qualifies as a "story" for journalists or political scientists. Another possibility is that perhaps the Iraq war has simply displaced all other issues raised by American relations with countries of the Middle East. Perhaps the question of "what do Egyptians (and Arabs) make of the United States" no longer seems pressing due to the intensity of American engagement in Iraq.^v

However, it is often the case that how things are discussed is more interesting than the thing itself. In this case the thing is there for all to see: a negative discourse on America in Egyptian mass media. Does it necessarily follow that the discourse on America is completely un-nuanced, or that censorship invalidates links between popular culture and public opinion about American policies in the Middle East? In this article I will examine some instances of discourse on the United States, focusing largely on comedy, though I will contrast humorous formulations of opinion on the U.S. with other forms of expression. I wish to make four points:

1. Even if all mediated discourse on the United States is critical, there is nonetheless nuance and variation in the way the United States is portrayed.
2. The fact that some representations of the United States do cross lines of civility that are not condoned in American mass media should not oblige us to accept the notion that

there is no link between public opinion about American policy and mass mediated representations of America.

3. A historical view of Egyptian representations of the United States does suggest that the root of negative portrayals of America is American Middle Eastern policies.
4. Egyptian mass mediated representations of the United States ought to be taken into account in American discussions of so-called "public diplomacy."

I will elaborate these points first through an examination of "the scary stuff"—not comedy, but instances of mass mediated imagery that are straightforwardly propagandistic, and which encourage violent opposition to the United States. These are a crucial part of the context for the popular culture productions that are my main focus here. In the second part of my paper I will turn to more normative images of the United States constructed through comedy—specifically the political humor of singer Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim. I suggest that Sha'ban and a subgenre of anti-American films are better understood as a reflection of an already-existing political consensus rather than as a means of persuading audiences to *become* anti-American. I then turn to an examination of some earlier caricature images of the United States in Egyptian print media. These are valuable windows on how negative imagery of the United States began in Egyptian popular culture. In my conclusion I will turn to how this discourse contrasts with American efforts to counter it through "public diplomacy."

It is difficult to reconcile these images with the notion often bruited in neoconservative and Zionist analyses of Egyptian media that anti-Americanism or anti-Israelism are unrelated to opinions about politics, and can therefore be dismissed as nothing more than a product of state control of media or irrational hatred. Hatred is

deplorable and counterproductive for all people who wish to live peacefully, and this includes the vast majority of Egyptians. But the counterproductive nature of even the most propagandistic discourses should not exempt them from analysis. The tendency to equate all criticisms of America and Israel to blind hatred is itself a form of propaganda. A discourse expressed offensively may nonetheless contain nuances that should be taken into account.

The Scary Stuff

A prominent recent example of the purely propagandistic end of the spectrum of commentary on the United States is al-Zaura`. Al-Zaura` was^{vi} an Iraqi satellite television channel, so it does not, strictly speaking, qualify as an Egyptian mass-mediated production. It was, however, broadcast on satellite television to the Egyptian market. The station's somewhat surprising career was widely reported in Western news media,^{vii} hence it makes a good starting point in a review of how Egyptian media commentary on the U.S. filters into American and European discourses about the Middle East. The station was owned by Mish'an al-Juburi, head of the Sunni Arab Front for Reconciliation and Liberation, which won three seats in the Iraqi parliament. Its content became markedly more aggressive toward the United States and Iraqi Shi'is after the pronouncement of a death sentence on Saddam Husayn last November. Al-Zaura`'s terrestrial operations were shut down in Iraq, but it managed to continue broadcasting via satellite, at least until recently. Since al-Zaura` has been the subject of so much commentary, a few images will suffice to convey a sense of its content [Figures 1-5].

In terms of content al-Zaura` is almost identical to the video footage disseminated on many jihadist/insurgent websites. The closest it comes to humor is its employment of an image of Anthony Quinn playing the Libyan resistance leader Omar Mukhtar in the Mustafa Akkad film *Lion of the Desert*. As most reports on the station have emphasized, al-Zaura`'s significance lies in its availability. Internet sites from which jihadist propaganda can be downloaded are numerous, but not easy for novices to find. In the context of Egypt, many internet users do not have access to the sort of bandwidth required to stream or download audiovisual content.^{viii} What sparked widespread commentary on al-Zaura` was that it was broadcast not just on satellite television, but on Nilesat, which is a state-owned Egyptian company. Nilesat broadcasts to the entire Middle East, and al-Zaura` was a free-to-air channel, which means anyone able to afford the most basic satellite package could watch it. An entry-level satellite receiver, dish, and installation cost around 60 British pounds—less than the cost of a television.^{ix} It was perhaps inevitable that al-Zaura` would cause alarm in official circles.^x The U.S. pressured the Egyptian government to take the station off the air, but the Egyptians blandly refused, saying that broadcasting the station was purely a business decision.

Similarly aggressive propaganda is produced locally in Egypt and accessible to those with no expertise in computers. Consider, for example, coverage of the notoriously bungled Saddam Husayn execution in the weekly *al-Usbu'*. The entire back page of the issue published the week after the execution featured a photo of Saddam, Quran in hand, on his way to the gallows [**Figure 6—back of Usbu'**].^{xi} *Al-Usbu'* is a weekly tabloid sold in hard copy and available by internet.^{xii} In its "about" page on the internet the paper says that it "follows an independent path, though it can be described as essentially

'nationalist'.^{xiii} "Arab nationalist" rather than strictly Egyptian nationalist would be closer to the mark, as *al-Usbu's* Saddam obituary shows. The publishers of the paper are brothers Mustafa and Mahmud Bakri, who have served prison sentences on libel charges.^{xiv} Mustafa Bakri was elected as an independent Minister of Parliament in the 2005 elections, and has been in the news (both locally and globally) for leading a campaign to censor the blockbuster film *'Imarat Ya'qubian'*^{xv} on grounds that a third of the film contained "scenes of homosexuality ... that promote this corrupt practice as if it occurred in Egypt."^{xvi} Bakri's parliamentary campaign was ultimately unsuccessful.^{xvii}

In *al-Usbu's* obituary issue for Saddam the back page image of the recently executed Iraqi leader was accompanied by a Quranic verse affirming Saddam's putative status as a martyr **[Figure 7]**: "Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord."^{xviii} The passage is from Surat al-'Imran, and from a section of the chapter that refers specifically to the Battle of Uhud, which was a Muslim defeat in the early days of Islam. Specifically, as one Quran commentary put it, "The misfortunes at Uhud are shown to be due to the indiscipline of some, the indecision and selfishness of others, and cowardice of the Hypocrites" (Yusuf Ali).^{xix} Uhud was a pre-Shi'ism battle (i.e. before Muhammad's death, after which the choice of a successor to lead the Muslim community precipitated a socio-political split) in which Ali fought with the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad.^{xx} Hence *al-Usbu's* citation of the verse raises the specter of treachery without specifically calling out the Shi'ites. But the appeal to Sunni (and for many, "Islamist") sentiment is clear.

The main article on the front page of this issue gives the reader a thoroughly unambiguous exclamation point to the lurid back page: a headline screaming "Who Deserves to be Executed?" **[Figure 8]** The text glorifies Saddam: "The scene was provocative. Men with their faces wrapped, howling dogs, pushing the president to the gallows. This was Saddam: the symbol, the hero, the fighter." Bakri goes on to extol Saddam's steadfastness and faith, and claims that the same "magic" shone from his eyes as from "the eternal leader" Gamal Abd al-Nasir. The article includes prominent photos of Bush and Nuri al-Maliki, the guiltiest of the guilty in Bakri's view. **[Figure 9]** The "crime" of executing Saddam was committed by the Americans, the Zionists, the "Persians" (presumably Iraqi Shi'is), and the Zoroastrians (Iranians).^{xxi} The guilty parties are so numerous that any reader who wants to know who *really* deserves to be executed in Bakri's calculus must "do the math" almost literally.

Together, Bakri's Arab nationalist *al-Ussbu'* and the jihadist al-Zaura` are sufficient illustration of the unadulterated propaganda available to Egyptian and Arab audiences. They should come as no surprise to Europeans and Americans, given that this sort of discourse in the Arab press has been quite well covered. It is nonetheless important to remember that while this kind of material is quite accessible in Egypt, we nonetheless know very little about how attractive it is to consumers. Al-Zaura` was broadcast free-to-air, but so are approximately one hundred other channels,^{xxii} many of which feature content nominally abominable to the sensibilities of jihadists. I say "nominally" because we do not know for a fact that substantial numbers of viewers did not mix cursory inspection of al-Zaura` with browsing of the many highly commercialized channels promoting materialism. If a "jihadist" is anyone who has

watched al-Zaura`, then many jihadists may also have been watching music video sensation Haifa Wahbi's latest hits. If one counts only those truly inspired by al-Zaura`s insurgent videos, then we must surely ask, "who are they?" We do not know that a few minutes or hours of watching *jihad* produces a *mujahid* any more than a similar time watching advertisements for "American" products makes a viewer sympathetic to America. Or to put it still another way, why should exposure to high levels of televised violence in America produce "peaceful" Americans (as many Americans see themselves), while exposure to high levels of televised violence in Egypt produces "violent" Egyptians (as many American critics of Arab media would have it). All we really have is the televised texts; we have no information about how Egyptian audiences read them. The station's presentation of insurgent attacks on the United States was repetitive and often crude. No doubt the provocation of broadcasting such images openly was perceived by many. The actual use made of the images themselves is a different matter. We know little beyond the existence of the broadcasts.

The same dynamic pertains to *al-Usbu'*. Its imagery is indeed aggressive toward America and Israel—often to the point of sensationalism, and offensiveness to Jews and Israelis. But this has little to do with the question of whether its lack of civility is normative for the entire Egyptian press. *Al-Usbu'* is a weekly paper rarely mentioned in estimates of press circulation. It surely carries less weight in shaping public opinion than other papers, particularly the independent *al-Masri al-Yaum*,^{xxiii} which covered the Saddam in a comparatively bland style. The *al-Masri al-Yaum* headline was "America Presents Saddam as a 'Sacrifice' to the Civil War in Iraq; Global Division about the Execution ... Muslims Consider it a Provocation and a New Insult on the First Days of

the 'Id.^{xxiv} *Al-Masri al-Yaum* also took a low-key approach to Mustafa Bakri's campaign against *Imarat Yaqubian*, reporting the failure of Bakri's initiative straightforwardly, and perhaps somewhat slyly running a brief article in which the director of the film claimed that the controversy caused by al-Bakri only served to draw more curious viewers, thereby increasing the film's profits.^{xxv}

If *al-Zaura`* and *al-Usbu'* are in fact the extreme end of a political perspective rather than examples of normative political views, then from the perspective of those Americans and Israelis who make it their business to care about what Egyptians watch and read, the "scary stuff" ought to beg a fairly obvious question: what constitutes a normative view of the United States and Israel? As we will see (and as most readers will probably expect), normative representations of the U.S. and Israel in Egyptian popular comedy are negative. This does not mean that they are identical with the more extreme representations of *al-Zaura`* and *al-Usbu'*.

Sha'ban's Anti-American Video Clip

Sha'ban Abd al-Rahim has been a star (a dark star to his detractors) in Egyptian-American and Egyptian-Israeli relations since 2001. He began his adult life not as a singer, but as a *makwagi*, a man who irons shirts and trousers. And not just any *makwagi*. Sha'ban was meant to have been a *makwagi rigl*—a *makwagi* who operates the iron with his foot—a very humble and arduous occupation. In the 1990s when he was not ironing trousers Sha'ban moonlighted as a singer. He joined forces with lyricist Islam Khalil and recorded "Ana Bakrah Isra'il" (I Hate Israel) in 2001, and since then has produced a string of songs commenting on politics, particularly the actions and policies

of Israel and the United States vis a vis Palestine and Iraq, the Danish cartoon incident, and the execution of Saddam Husayn. His persona as a performer and a public figure is rooted in the contrast between his well-publicized humble origins and his current prominence as a playful political commentator. Sha'ban has been well covered by both journalists and academics.^{xxvi} For readers unfamiliar with him a subtitled version of one of his songs "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi" (literally "Uncle Arab," but in the sense of "hey Mr. Arab," addressed to Arab leaders) is here: **[Video 1: "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi"** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZamJloNsokw>]^{xxvii} For a transcription of the Arabic text: **[link to Ya 'Amm pdf file]**

Given the scrutiny applied to Egyptian media discourse that touches on the U.S. and Israel, it was inevitable that Sha'ban's rise to prominence in Egyptian popular culture should draw some commentary, both within Egypt and from abroad. Sha'ban's songs often include some criticism of Arab leaders. "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi" is perhaps the most prominent example. Even before "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi" there was some discussion on whether Sha'ban's performances should be thought of as oppositional, or alternatively, as a kind of safety valve that offers pseudo politics in lieu of meaningful engagement in local issues. This line of thinking raises suspicion (given much credence in American press coverage of all anti-American discourse) that official disregard of Sha'ban's songs was part a government tactic: allow criticism of Americans and Israelis and thereby deflect attention from Egyptian leaders. Sha'ban's criticism of Arab leaders in his songs just gave him a kind of plausible deniability. "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi" does indeed put its criticism of Arabs symbolically—no names named, no need for any specific political figure to object.^{xxviii}

Aside from such interpretations of official political strategy, from abroad the important issue always was the content, specifically Sha'ban's rough treatment of Israel, which was swiftly branded as anti-Semitism.^{xxix} The Egyptian government certainly does tolerate the publication and broadcast—in both public-sector and private media—of various types of discourse that vilify Israel and sometimes Jews. As previously noted, such vilification is often packaged with condemnation of the U.S.. In Sha'ban's case, however, one must ask whether some of the inflammatory speech coming from Egypt is actually generated by the expected reaction from Israel and the U.S. If the U.S. says "you can't say you hate Israel," then Sha'ban answers, "Oh yes I can."^{xxx} "Bakrah Isra'il" was the result. There is no question that his breakthrough song is anti-Semitic in American terms. Those terms, however, are formed in the context of a Jewish minority in a largely Christian nation, with overtones of the disastrous experience of Jews in Europe. By contrast, Sha'ban's terms of reference in "Bakrah Israil," were formulated in the context of nation-states.^{xxxi} Nation-states have leaders, and of course they are conventionally taken as symbols of the nations they represent. Sha'ban rudely declares his hatred for a number of national leaders in the song, including Ariel Sharon, Shimon Peres, and Ehud Barak. **[Add link to pdf file of untranslated song]**^{xxxii} He praises Egyptian leaders Husni Mubarak and 'Amr Musa, though perhaps with tongue in cheek. The song was released just after the outbreak of the "al-Aqsa Intifada," and consequently mentions Muhammad al-Durra, a Palestinian child shot in a gun battle between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian Authority police units. The video of the shooting released to the world by the television network France 2 attributed the shooting to Israelis, and al-Durra became a cause célèbre in the Arab world.^{xxxiii} Another line explains that the singer hates Israel

because of South Lebanon (i.e. the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon from 1982 to 2000), Syria, Iraq, and the Golan. Finally, while the song's praise of Husni Mubarak and Amr Musa may or may not have been intended as a left-handed compliment, the song also contains straightforwardly nationalist commentary on Egypt's own wars with Israel: "I hate Israel," sings Sha'ban, "ask the blood of the martyr; and that of those who crossed [the Suez Canal] in glorious October."

One can safely surmise that Sha'ban's breakthrough song was offensive to Israelis. It did stop short of explicitly conflating Israel and Jews, and contained enough nationalist content to qualify as political speech albeit of an inflammatory type. Nonetheless a song that begins with the words "I Hate" begs to be labeled as hate speech, even if part of the song's success may have been built on a perception of Sha'ban throwing American and Israeli attempts to monitor and control speech in Egypt back in their faces. His later videos, including "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi," were cut from the same cloth. In the case of "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi," for outside observers the song steps over the line when it claims that the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in 2001 was the work of Ariel Sharon. Claims that the 9/11 bombings were the work of a conspiracy masterminded by Israeli and/or American leaders are common in the U.S. as well,^{xxxiv} but such claims would not often be described as mainstream culture. Indeed, many Egyptians in fact *do* reject Sha'ban as a mainstream performer, or as someone even worthy of attention.^{xxxv} Sha'ban can nonetheless plausibly make claims to mainstream status, or at least to demonstrable popularity. His prominence in mass media as a performer and advertising icon is one obvious manifestation of his claim to the mainstream, but aside from that, Sha'ban has also become a kind of commercial folk figure. During Ramadan Egyptians have a

custom of carrying *fawanis* (sg. *fanus*)—lanterns—through the streets during the festive nights. During recent years some of these lanterns have been made in China in all sorts of fanciful plastic shapes. For several years (roughly 2002 to 2005) a widely sold *fanus* model was made in the shape of *Sha'bula*—Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim's nickname. **[Figure 10]** The *fanus* looks like a fat Bruce Lee doll, but it lights up and plays recorded music. The slightly corpse-like pallor of the un-lit *Sha'bula* looks a bit more lifelike with the light on. As for the music, the model I purchased has two sound tracks. One is a Ramadan song. The other is Sha'ban's signature song, "Ana Bakrah Isra'il." **[Video 2:**

Sha'ban fanus plays a Ramadan Song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZPRstL89cU> ; Video 3: Sha'ban fanus

plays "Ana Bakrah Isra'il" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyXs1qd15mM> In Ramadan of 2006 (1427 AH) the *Sha'bula fanus* suddenly disappeared from the market as suddenly as it had appeared.

One point that should be emphasized about Sha'ban is that discussion of the nature of his political expression is misplaced. He is portrayed in terms of furious accusations of anti-Semitism on one side, and a coy game of brinksmanship with the state on the other. Both accusations have a grain of truth. Sha'ban *is* skilled at walking a thin line between the Egyptian authorities on one side, and Americans and Israelis on the other. But this may be nothing more in the end than a line between "street credibility" and commercialism—there may be less at stake in the phenomenon of Sha'ban's popularity than meets the eye. At the same time, Sha'ban *is* also deliberately provocative, and indeed, offensive to Americans and Israelis. And yet there is little to be gained from pretending that Sha'ban's provocations belong in the same category as burning a

synagogue or claiming that Jews drink the blood of Christian babies. Conflating Sha'ban and well-known Western forms of anti-Semitism is a distortion. One must acknowledge the possibility that his provocations are generated by the reaction abroad—in other words he says what he says precisely *because* he knows he is being watched. The watchers themselves may also understand this dynamic and encourage it, thereby creating the object that justifies their activities.

Another point about Sha'ban that is worth making is that his opinions may be aggressive, but they are not intended to be taken as "objective," as one might take a newspaper such as *al-Ushbu'* or a "reality" video such as those broadcast by al-Zaura`. Even the Sha'bula *fanus*, marketed so depressingly to children, deserves to be understood in a more detailed context. If we are to read the "Sha'bula" *fanus* as a straightforward symptom of anti-Semitism, than should we not read other *fawanis* as symptoms of cultural leanings? Further down the street from the vendor who sold me my Sha'bula *fanus* I purchased a singing Mickey Mouse *fanus* [Video 4: Mickey Mouse fanus plays a Ramadan song <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7-BNnWQu-c>] Does the Disney mouse singing a Ramadan anthem make Egyptians pro-American?

As for Sha'ban's criticisms of the Egyptian government, I doubt he is playing the brinksman, risking official wrath at his having insulted a political patron. On the contrary, what Sha'ban does is not particularly controversial in Egypt. He provides an entertaining statement of a normative view. The normative view is not just that Egyptians disapprove of Israel. This is a given in a country that fought huge disruptive wars with Israel as recently as 1973, and which then felt a mixture of pride in its own achievement on the battlefield and displeasure at Israel's ongoing occupation of Lebanon

from 1982 to 2000, and domination of the West Bank and Gaza Strip until today. To put it differently, Egypt's historical experience of facing an American-supported Israeli nation-state on the battlefield shapes its contemporary attitudes toward the U.S. and Israel very differently than the American and European experience of grappling with anti-Semitism directed against an ethnic minority. To make such a distinction between the historical contexts of the societies involved (principally Egypt, the United States, Europe to some extent, and Israel) should be elementary. The failure to do so by so many American and Israeli observers should be regarded charitably as an egregious error. A less charitable view would be to dismiss neoconservative American and Zionist opinions about Egyptian media as patently disingenuous. Like *al-Usbu'* and *al-Zaura'*, the various organizations, think tanks, journalists and blogs that monitor anti-Americanism and anti-Israelism work in putatively "objective" genres. Sha'ban does not.

We need a way to think about Sha'ban—or really about the sort of cultural phenomena that he typifies—without falling into the trap of either taking his rhetoric too seriously or, alternatively, dismissing him as a clown or a pawn of a cynical government. My suggestion is that Sha'ban should be thought of as a key performer in what one might call a "Politicsploitation" genre. This is my own neologism, patterned on "Blaxploitation" films. These, in turn, were a subgenre of "exploitation" films—cheap films that functioned through sensationalism, by appealing to the public's more prurient interests, such as sex, violence, drug abuse, nudity etc. Exploitation films were American products, played a drive-ins and other cheap theatres, predominantly in the 1960s. "Blaxploitation" came later—the 1970s—and gained a bit more critical respectability.^{xxxvi} In many respects they were conventional exploitation films, with the key difference that

they featured all-Black casts (though not necessarily Black directors). Blaxploitation films took White stereotypes of Blacks and essentially reversed the polarity on them. Pimps, or gangsters or criminals became the heroes.^{xxxvii} Such films have been condemned as racist, but also grudgingly praised for expanding the variety of roles that Black actors could play. I think that Blaxploitation cinema is a good analogy for thinking about much Egyptian popular culture that comments on the United States and Israel—popular culture that includes films certainly, but also Sha'ban's songs and videos. Politicsploitation functions through crude national stereotypes, but is predicated on *reversing* their usual forms of representation. Sha'ban came into his own in the Politicsploitation genre when he started appearing in video clips. The stereotype he contravened was the entire genre of the video clip, which was initially modeled on American MTV. Most discussion of video clips in Egyptian and Arab print media is relentlessly critical precisely on the grounds that the genre is too derivative of its Western counterpart. Sha'ban was among the first to localize the genre in a way that nobody could miss.^{xxxviii} His video clips were both humorous and political. But crucially, Politicsploitation, like Blaxploitation, does not mean to discuss or argue. The point rather is to make the audience feel good about itself. The White hero becomes the White villain in Blaxploitation; American moral posturing becomes American hypocrisy in Politicsploitation. Who is *really* in the right is irrelevant because everyone who watches them *knows* who is right. Sha'ban, by this logic, does not try to convince anyone of anything. Instead he reflects a consensus back to his audience. The self-appointed anti-American police (and Zionist anti-Semitism/anti-Israelism police) disingenuously counsel vigilance against a spreading hate virus. But Sha'ban and other Politicsploitation

productions are not spreading a virus. On the contrary, they reflect a consensus. The question that these productions should pose is "what is the origin of this consensus"? To locate the origin in media discourse is implausible. For Politicsploitation to exist, it must *already be there*.

Politicsploitation in Cinema

Politicsploitation is also a subgenre in Egyptian cinema. In this case the stereotypes in question are *Hollywood* stereotypes. Where Hollywood films portray Arabs as backward or violent, "politicsploitation" films portray Arabs as consistently sympathetic characters who interact with arrogant, corrupt, or sometimes evil Americans and Israelis. There are a fair number of these films, dating from the mid-1990s until roughly the mid-2000s.^{xxxix} They have never come close to being a majority of the films produced in Egypt in any given year, but like all portrayals of America and Israel, they receive ample attention from foreign observers.

In the past few years films have begun to address the American invasion of Iraq as well. One of these was called *Ma'alesh, Ihna Binitbadil*, a film made in 2006, which the filmmakers translated as "Excuse us, we're being humiliated." Or it might have been better to call it "Don't mind us, we're a mess." *Ma'alesh* is not actually the best example of "Politicsploitation" in Egyptian cinema. It is more farcical than most films that deal with America, and as far as I know, received no attention in the Western press or from the various organizations that monitor anti-Americanism. One might call it a "post-Politicsploitation" film. Indeed, it may be that "Politicsploitation" or any similar attempt to adapt "exploitation" to socially ambitious ends is inevitably short-lived. A role

reversal—essentially changing the white hats to black and vice versa—creates a novelty that is marketable but hard to sustain. Blaxploitation was a brief phenomenon. The same may be true of Politicsploitation. As readers will see, *Ma'alesh Ihna Binitbahdil* eschews the basic role reversal that made Politicsploitation a marketable novelty. The film makes at least a light-hearted nod to the notion that not all Americans are bad, and suggests that it is in fact bad American leaders who are a problem. Its use of national stereotypes is farcical rather than strident. Saddam Husayn is represented in the film, but not made out to be a hero. Nor was the film a commercial success, probably above all because it lacked any marketable star.^{x1} But *Ma'alesh Ihna Binitbahdil* is nonetheless a revealing example of how the U.S. is treated in popular culture. Despite anxieties in some quarters about ugly portrayals in Egyptian media of Americans, Jews, and Israelis, the film in fact focuses on American policy toward Israel and Palestine, and toward Iraq, as the basic problem with America. It assiduously avoids anything that might be labeled "hate speech."

Ma'alesh Ihna Binitbahdil begins in the Qarmuti Café, which is a tourist venue in Nazlat al-Saman, the village at the base of the Great Pyramids in Giza. One day a young American man gets outraged at his exorbitant bill and starts a quarrel with one of Qarmuti's employees. Qarmuti tries to put an end to the fight by pretending to call George Bush at the White House. At precisely this moment, the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center comes on the television. Everyone, Egyptian and American alike, is aghast. **[Video 5: Qarmuti calls the White House on 9/11**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctomIQtMbAo>] The sympathy generated by the shocking terrorist attack actually causes Qarmuti and the quarrelsome American to make

up and become friends. Qarmuti wants the American to send him an invitation to visit him in America—with the invitation he can supposedly get a visa.^{xli} But when the American merely sends him a postcard with no invitation Qarmuti gives in to "anti-American" sentiments. He puts a "no Americans allowed" sign on the front of his café. Consequently the CIA starts watching him. Later Qarmuti hatches a scheme to ship a load of mangoes to Iraq. He sends his son on this mission, but the boy falls afoul of the regime and ends up in an Iraqi prison. Qarmuti goes to Iraq to try to find his son, and arrives on the eve of the American invasion. After accidentally falling into Saddam Husayn's bunker while trying to elude the marauding Americans, Qarmuti ends up being captured. The Americans, having had Qarmuti under surveillance since he put up the "no Americans" sign in his café, assume the café owner is a terrorist. His load of mangoes metamorphoses in the American mind into a truckload of weapons of mass destruction. Then the real fun starts. George Bush himself gets into the act.^{xlii} The Americans want to use a taped confession by Qarmuti as propaganda in their "war on terror." Bush himself directs the "film," literally putting the words in Qarmuti's mouth. When Qarmuti garbles his lines, Bush has a temper tantrum and demands that his mango-smuggling captive give the scene "a more terroristic feeling." **[Video 6: Qarmuti records a confession <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwSKi0xCvXM>].** In the end Qarmuti refuses to go along with Bush's charade. When brought out to speak at a press conference he give the game away, and immediately he's whisked off to Abu-Ghrayb. Qarmuti's "torture" scene shows him squirming as a butch American female soldier strips in front of him. Luckily for him the American friend from the 9/11 incident in Qarmuti's café turns up, now in uniform, and puts and end to Qarmuti's exposure to ... a naked

female G.I.[**Video 7: Qarmuti interrogated**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGE7aPFwqXg>

The film ends with Qarmuti's American friend helping him to escape from Abu-Ghrayb; Qarmuti locates his son, and they return to Egypt. In the final scene Qarmuti sings a song to Muhammad al-Baradei, the Egyptian-born Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, asking Baradei not to inspect them too closely, and assuring him that Mangoes, in any case, contain no nuclear material that can be used in weapons of mass destruction.

America before Politicsploitation

My examples thus far, from *al-Zaura`* to *Ma'alesh*, suggest that criticism of the United States in Egyptian mass media ranges from virulent to mild. Even the most virulent and, where Israel is concerned, patently anti-Semitic criticism claims to be a reaction to American policies and American support for Israeli policies. Both neoconservative/Zionist organizations that monitor Egyptian media and American "public diplomacy" initiatives tend to disregard such claims, focusing instead on identifying instances of inflammatory hate speech. For them, well documented (but uncontextualized) instances of extremism disqualify all criticism of America and Israel. I have contrasted some of the more extreme channels of the discourse on American and Israel (*al-Zaura`* and *al-Ushbu`*) with popular culture depictions of these nations (mainly *Sha'ban* and *Ma'alesh Ihna Binitbahdil*). They all express negative opinions about the U.S. and its Israeli ally. Given the ubiquity of alarmist rhetoric about the negativity of Egyptian mass media towards the U.S. and Israel, it is worth mentioning that

straightforward sober Egyptian media discourse also criticizes the U.S. and Israel often in fairly bland and polite language. For example, an editorial in *al-Ahram* by Ragab al-Banna, titled "America in the Eyes of the Egyptians," put it plainly enough:

The truth is that Egyptians generally consider the American people to be friends, and that American culture and the American lifestyle attract a wide portion of youth, who see America as the land of a beautiful dream of liberty and comfort. The majority of Egyptians feel hatred not of America as a nation or a people, but of an American policy that has turned, under the current administration, from a stance of friendship to one of enmity toward Arabs and Muslims, especially after the invasion of Iraq, the daily acts of indiscriminate killing and destruction, and the horrors of the Abu Ghayb prison.^{xliii}

Extremist organs and popular culture focus on the same issues. Even if one *does* want to discount the legitimacy of the more radical voices, it is almost impossible to imagine that those who control the American government do not know that Egyptian displeasure at American policy is also expressed in perfectly straightforward language. One is tempted to imagine that American officialdom simply considers Egyptian opposition to be an acceptable price to pay for maintaining U.S. policies toward Israel and Iraq that are advantageous in domestic politics, or at least advantageous in the case of Israel. It seems like straightforward power politics: Egyptians who object to American policy have proven themselves incapable of altering the alliance between Egypt and the U.S., and therefore they can be ignored. Nonetheless, the public face of the American government at least *pretends* not to acknowledge that its policy is fiercely disliked in Egypt and indeed all of the Arab and Muslim worlds. The logic of public diplomacy is that Egyptians and Arabs understand American policy incorrectly, and that their "misperceptions" can be countered by promoting more positive images of the United States.^{xliv} To put it in more concrete terms, the logic of public diplomacy is that

Egyptians have "a perception" that American Middle East policy is completely pro-Israeli, and that Israel can in fact do whatever it pleases without fear of American opposition. The official position always reserves a discrete space for promoting the notion that Egyptians just don't *understand* American policy. The American media often put it more starkly. A few years ago, shortly after the 9/11 attack, the burning question was ostensibly "why do they hate us"? From an informed perspective the question is nonsensical. Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims constantly say that hatred isn't the point, and that it's the policy that causes friction. The problem is American occupation of Iraq. It is Israeli attacks on Lebanon. It is settlements in the Occupied Territories. But most of the American public does not qualify as "informed," and hence there is still a palpable feeling among many Americans that opposition to the U.S. in places such as Egypt is fundamentally *irrational*. In this vein, opposition to America can be attributed to anti-Semitism; it can be attributed to fear and hatred of modernity. As George Bush himself put it in 2001, in a speech made to congress shortly after 9/11, "Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber -- a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."^{xlv}

Enough of the sentiment expressed in Bush's 2001 speech remains in 2007 that one is obliged to ask the question "when did it begin"? The notion that such media phenomena as Sha'ban, al-Zaura`, *al-Ushbu'*, and Politicsploitation films somehow manufactured opposition to the United States is of course not credible. But when did America actually become an issue for Egyptians?

[Figure 11] In mass mediated Egyptian popular culture, America first appeared in the print medium. Figure 11 shows an Ahmad Higazi cartoon from the 1970s, or possibly the 1980s. The original publication was most likely in the magazine *Ruz al-Yusuf*, or possibly one of the other major publishing houses in Egypt.^{xlvi} Such cartoons were the tip of a very large iceberg of discussion over America's role in Egyptian affairs.^{xlvii} This cartoon shown in Figure 11 is quite simple—just Uncle Sam saying "yes" to both the Arabs and the Israelis. But his hat is upside down when he speaks to the Arabs, indicating his duplicity. The final frame shows Uncle Sam standing with the Israeli, telling the Arab "NO" in loud and uncertain terms, and the Arab meekly accepting his lot.

During this period—the 1970s and 1980s—it was print media, and to some extent audio cassettes (recorded sermons) that provided the most lively forums for discussing politics. Without the less centralized control of audiovisual media afforded later by globalization, the state set the parameters of discourse more narrowly in the 1970s and 1980s.^{xlviii} Print media, also subject to greater state control in this period, was nonetheless always a much broader stream of discourse than the audiovisual media. Consequently, in print media a degree of intellectual ferment could develop even in an era—the 1970s and 1980s—regarded by many as perhaps the most culturally stultifying in Egypt's modern history. In the 1970s and 1980s America was not an important theme in audiovisual media. But as Higazi's cartoon demonstrates, the United States was, by this time, an element of a larger discourse about Israel. Why was this so? The answer is obvious: it was the first time American influence on the politics of the region came into public consciousness.^{xlix} The U.S. had become Israel's main material and political

supporter during and just after the 1973 October War. This is a well-known fact, but given persistent attempts by neoconservative and Zionist interpreters of Egyptian media to decouple Egyptian opposition to America (i.e. "anti-Americanism" as it is usually labeled) from objections to American policy, it is nonetheless worth reiterating.¹ If Egyptian mass media of the 1990s and 2000s can be cast as an irruption of irrational hatred of America and Jews, then it really does seem necessary to go back to this period and just think about what it must have been like for those who lived through it. Wars against Israel were a dominant fact of Egyptian life in the 1960s and 1970s. More Egyptians died in wars against Israel than any other Arab nationality. By the time Egypt had finished with the October War in 1973, Egypt had been fighting Israel fairly continuously for six years: the June War in 1967, followed by the War of Attrition, followed by the October War. Disruption to daily life was enormous. Disruption to the economy was massive. Military service was often extended for years. In the mid-1970s, when Higazi's cartoons began appearing, Egyptians had *no idea* if the fighting was over, or if hostilities would break out anew. So when U.S. aid to Israel went into the billions annually in the mid-1970s why should it be seen as irrational for Egyptians to understand American policy as aggressive?

[Figure 12] Look at the cartoon in Figure 12 and imagine the emotions of a population in which everyone had been in the army, had family members or friends in the army, had lost people in the war, possibly been displaced from their homes, and had suffered endless disruption resulting from being in a state of war? "It's not enough to recognize Israel; you have to kiss its feet and salute its flag." Americans are constantly invited to sympathize with *Israelis* living in a constant state of war; they are also quite

well accustomed to the notion of Jews as victims in the greater scheme of things (i.e. in the context of the Holocaust), Israel dished out more punishment than it took in these wars. Indeed, Israeli military prowess is strongly represented in American popular culture.^{li} Israel itself invested heavily in promoting an image of military invincibility. And yet the effect of these wars on the Arab societies that fought them is never invoked for Americans. It should come as no surprise that Egyptians themselves have very different stories to tell than the ones we hear in the U.S..

Of course the October War was followed by Sadat's trip to Israel in 1977, the Camp David Accords in 1978, and a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979.

[Figure 13] Peace with Israel brought Egypt into an alliance with the United States.

Egypt became a recipient of U.S. aid. As one sees from the cartoon shown in Figure 13, there was plenty of suspicion of this aid. Remember this comes on the heels of almost a decade of hard fighting. But it also bears remembering that American aid to Egypt has always been fact given under very different terms than the aid that goes to Israel.^{lii}

Again, this is a well-known fact, but it is important to think about it in the context of persistent allegations that Egyptian attitudes toward the U.S. are somehow the product of nothing but irrational hatred stoked by irresponsible media. It is not uncommon for Egyptian objections to American aid to Israel to be dismissed on the grounds that Egypt is also a recipient of U.S. aid. But if one looks at foreign aid in straightforward terms as an attempt by the U.S. to buy loyalty, Egypt is drastically underpaid. One can do the math based on the proportion of money to population.^{liii} But such a calculation still overstates the effect of the aid given to Egypt. U.S. aid to Egypt had to be administered through the Agency for International Development. This means that a lot of aid money

designated as going to Egypt actually went to Americans. Currently we hear about this in the context of Iraq. There have been exposés of the huge waste of resources devoted to supporting Americans living in the Green Zone in Baghdad.^{liv} Everything is done to enable American civilians working in Iraq to live as if they were in the United States. Everything is imported; nothing is purchased locally. American subcontractors make huge fortunes just from supplying the lifestyle of Americans living in Iraq ostensibly for the purpose of rebuilding it. But the wastefulness of Americans working in Iraq bears a passing resemblance to business as usual. It was the same for Americans living in Cairo as AID subcontractors. Large portions of the 2 billion dollars a year in American aid to Egypt was actually spent on American subcontractors. This was not hidden to Egyptians. It was a matter to be commented on. **[Figure 14]** It was not just Americans who profited from American aid. But it also was not as if the remaining money that didn't go to Americans was just divided up between the population at large. Egyptians also profited. The cartoon in Figure 14 comments on the public intellectual Abd al-Azim Ramadan, who went on record as saying that Egypt should "remove its mental block" against normalizing relations with Israel. As you can see here, Ramadan—otherwise a very well established public intellectual—was pilloried by Higazi; Higazi insinuates that Ramadan took money from the Americans—he starts out as a learned doctor diagnosing a mental block, becomes "a poor fellow who just wants to make a dime [or actually "qirshayn"—two pennies]." As one reads the successive Abd al-Azim Ramadans from right to left one sees that the final Ramadan has filled out. He has been transformed into a "fat cat"; an opportunist. And the agent of his transformation is spelled out: "We're okay with the American cultural invasion." Indeed, the cartoonist shows him getting fat off of it. It is

portrayed as not just a cultural invasion, but a coopting of intellectuals and key sectors of the middle class and military through international aid.^{lv}

Now, moving on to a slightly different issue, one of the greatest Egyptian objections to the normalization of relations with Israel that Abd al-Azim Ramadan is perceived to have supported lies in the fact that after Egypt made its separate peace with Israel, the Israelis intensified their settlement building in the Occupied Territories and carried out numerous military actions against groups in Lebanese territory. **[Figure 15]** My final Higazi cartoon alludes to this; two Israeli soldiers stand outside the officers' mess, saying that it's too early for lunch so they may as well go bomb Lebanon before coming back to eat. They carry large weapons with "USA" written on them. This, remember, is from the 1970s, or at most early 1980s.

Conclusion

Ahmad al-Higazi and Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim are worlds apart in the cultural hierarchy—the former respected, the latter largely ignored by anyone with intellectual aspirations. Nonetheless one can draw a fairly straight line from one to the other. By the time one gets to Sha'ban the discourse has diversified in terms of the media in which it appears. "Anti-Americanism" is perhaps more in the mainstream by the 2000s. It is well worth noting that 9/11 is *irrelevant* to the expression of Egyptian criticisms of the United States, except insofar as it drew America into creating a new grievance to add to the old ones. The criticism was there long before 9/11. Criticism of American policy toward Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon have been consistent for three decades. If the U.S. stays in Iraq for three decades criticism of an American presence in that country will also be

consistent. For most non-neoconservative or non-Zionist observers of Egyptian media this is all fairly obvious. For them I have said nothing new, and indeed many academics may well be inclined to reject the entire *topic* of "anti-Americanism" as nothing more than a fulfillment of an America-centric view of the world. Nonetheless there is a persistent and influential campaign to depict Egyptian media portrayal of the United States (often together with Israel) ahistorically, devoid of the context that links negative portrayals of America/Israel to straightforward political opposition. Viewed ahistorically Egyptian media discourse on America/Israel inevitably appears virulent and hate-filled. When such labels as "anti-American" or "anti-Semitic" are applied, they tend to flatten out all variety, so that the bland *al-Ahram* editorial explaining that Egyptian opposition to American policy does not equal opposition to American culture, or the politely farcical *Ma'alesh Ihna Binitbahdil*, are drowned out by *al-Usbu's* chilling glorification of a murderous dictator.

[Figure 16] There is something breathtakingly disingenuous about the American response to the political criticism that underpins discourse on the United States in Egyptian media. The real question about Egyptian popular discourses on the United States is not what motivates them. The question is rather what keeps the Americans from just telling the Egyptians that they can do nothing about it, so they may as well shut up. Putting it this way sounds callous and undiplomatic, but it could hardly be less effective than the so-called "public diplomacy" campaigns that are ostensibly designed to represent America to Arab publics. Several of the better-known current "public diplomacy" initiatives are not the result of 9/11, or even of the Bush administration. They were already on the drawing board toward the end of the Clinton administration. I was in

Washington at the time. It was 2001, but before 9/11. I was invited to attend a focus group meeting to discuss new initiatives to replace the old Voice of America. The new scheme that was to replace VOA was exactly the sort of privatization plan for which the Bush administration has become infamous. In any event, I and the other members of the focus group were given a preview of the concepts for Radio Sawa ("Radio Together"), the television station "al-Hurra" ("the free one" as it's often called), and a magazine called *Hi*. The magazine presumably needs no translation. The focus group was asked if we thought American public diplomacy would be more effective if it were packaged in a way that would appeal to youth—popular music for the radio broadcasts, "lifestyle" programming for the television channel and magazine. Of course there would be serious content as well—content that would, by definition, be required to represent the American government's point of view. Every single person in the group replied that the youth-oriented package would only be effective if the policy it represented was changed. If the policy stayed the same, the audience would see right through it, and the new format could even be counterproductive.

A few months later—post 9/11—the new public diplomacy initiative came on line. Unsurprisingly, the advice of the focus group was completely ignored.^{lvi} As far as I know Radio Sawa and al-Hurra are still in operation. At least al-Hurra was the last time I flipped through the Nilesat channels in Cairo. The private companies who subcontracted this job have various means of claiming that their projects are a success. "People watch it," or so they claim. I have never met anyone who said they watched it, but that, according to the advocates of al-Hurra and Radio Sawa, is just because it is uncool to admit it openly. But they still watch in secret. Maybe so, but of course such convoluted

claims for listenership are almost impossible to contest. The fate of the magazine is perhaps more instructive. It was meant to be sold, and I once even found a copy on a newsstand in a luxury hotel. Large portions of print runs were given away. But it simply takes more effort to pick up a magazine and read than it does to tune in a radio program. *Hi* magazine began publication in 2003 in a print run of 55,000 copies, 95% of which were given away. By 2005 publication of the magazine was suspended in order "to assess whether the magazine is meeting its objectives effectively"^{lvii}

The image in Figure 16 shows a billboard advertising *Hi*. I saw it while in a taxi in Alexandria. When it came into view my jaw dropped to the floor, and I immediately made the driver stop so that I could photograph it. I can only imagine that the digitally doctored image of Abraham Lincoln raising his hand in a "hi" gesture must have totally mystified about 99 percent of the population of Alexandria. I may have been the only person in the city who got the joke (or more precisely, the only person who perceived it as a joke). I have always imagined that Egyptians who saw the image must have thought it was an American-sponsored billboard of one of the Elders of Zion put up in their cities as a provocation. I hasten to add that of course I am aware that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a well-known anti-Semitic fake that probably began in Czarist Russia, and is now widely available in Arabic translation throughout the Arab world. In reality the vast majority of Egyptians were probably just stumped by the strange sight Abraham Lincoln saying "hi". Most probably ignored it, just as they ignored the magazine it advertised.

In conclusion I will simply note that all the public diplomacy in the world will remain impotent in the face of Sha'ban and Politicsploitation. Or even in the face of the

absurd Saddam propaganda published in *al-Usbu'*. There is perhaps more hope for America in the fact that criticism of U.S. policy has become so routine that the public may become bored with it. Not that the public is not serious about its criticisms. American officials seem to operate on the assumption that either Arab criticisms of U.S. policy do not matter because the Arabs cannot do anything about it anyway, or that massive subsidies to a heavily armed and frequently hostile state right next door to Egypt somehow is none of their business and should not matter to Egyptians. If one really wanted to pursue this topic, the real question should not be posed from the American side; it should not be "why do they hate us?" We know the answer to that. A few of them certainly do hate us, but they and a crushing majority of their fellow citizens, who do not necessarily hate us, all object to our policies. Instead, the question should be posed about the *Americans*: Do any of them really believe that Egyptians are not serious about what they say about our policies? It hardly seems credible, but perhaps there are a few who genuinely believe that Egyptians just do not understand our intentions, and that they can be persuaded. If so, it seems to me they have their work cut out for them. Because for most Egyptians Sha'ban stated it succinctly: "*al-sura wa al-kitaba; Amrika wa Isra'il*"; "heads or tails; two sides of the same coin: America and Israel." What really matters to Egyptians most is what America and Israel do, not what they stand for. That, at any rate, is what they have been saying in their media for the past thirty years.

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ⁱ Reports on increasing anti-Americanism in Egyptian news media and expressive culture have been appearing in the American press long before the September 11th 2001 attacks. See, among potentially many other examples, Howard Schneider, "Egyptian Film Satire Skewers U.S., Israel; Movie Draws Standing-Room Crowds," *Washington Post*, October 7, 1998; "Saidi at the American University (Cairo) Egyptian Comedy Angers Israel" <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/saidi.htm> (Originally published on August 31, 1998, accessed August 17, 2007).

ⁱⁱ Adel Darwish ("Anti-Americanism in the Arabic Language Media" in *Middle East Review of International Affairs* <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2003/issue4/jv7n4a4.html> accessed on August 17, 2007) crystallizes this argument. A corollary to such arguments is the assumption that censorship prevents the publication of pro-American viewpoints, hence it follows (according to those who want to convince American readers that anti-Americanism is driven primarily by Arab media) that the removal of censorship would result in both a decrease in expressions of anti-Americanism/anti-Semitism, and the airing of pro-American/pro-Israeli views.

ⁱⁱⁱ The roots of American neoconservatism go back as far as the 1950s, as a reaction to the emergent "new left" movement. In the post-Communist era neoconservatism's intense anti-communism was transposed into a rhetoric of "culture wars" within American domestic affairs, and has also been increasingly realigned as anti-Islamism (or, as the movement's proponents would put it, as a campaign to compel democracy on Muslim nations and societies). The 9/11 attack made anti-Islamism virtually a constitutive feature of the movement (though certainly not its only constitutive feature), and made a close alliance with right-wing Israeli positions inevitable. Most observers feel that the neoconservative movement truly came into its own first with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, but particularly in the current George W. Bush administration. So-called "Christian Zionism" has played a role in the political coalition that brought the current Bush administration to power. But the coalition that supports neoconservatives politically is not reducible to neoconservative philosophy or ideology. For a view of the philosophy of neoconservatism by an author who embraces the term, see Irving Kristol,

"The Neoconservative Persuasion," 20 August, 2003 (http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.19063,filter.all/pub_detail.asp accessed on September 24, 2007). On the link between Likudist policy and American neoconservatism, see "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," a report prepared for the Institute for Advanced Strategic Studies, which is a Jerusalem-based think tank with an office in Washington ("A Clean Break," Richard Perle et al., <http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm> accessed on September 24, 2007).

^{iv} MEMRI's website (<http://www.memri.org/> accessed on August 17, 2007) provides translations free of charge to users from the media of a number of Middle Eastern states, mostly Arab, but including Turkey and Iran. According to the organization's original website, the operative principle in selecting texts to be translated is that they serve the "continuing relevance of Zionism to the Jewish people and to the state of Israel" (<http://web.archive.org/web/19981202233541/http://www.memri.org/index.html>). MEMRI was founded by former Israeli intelligence officer (assuming intelligence officers actually retire) Colonel Yigal Carmon, and Meyrav Wurmser, who is a hard-line Likudist. Consequently the material MEMRI translates from the Arab media tilts toward representing Arab discourse critical of Israel and Jews, much of which is anti-Semitic. The statement acknowledging the organization's Zionist orientation appeared on the site in 1998, when MEMRI was founded. It can still be viewed on the Internet Archive (<http://www.archive.org/index.php>).

Although Carmon and Wurmser acknowledge their status as MEMRI's founders in other venues, all disclosure of the organization's ideological orientation has since been removed from the site. This is not an indication of a change in the Zionist agenda disclosed on MEMRI's original site. A search for the term "Israel" on the current site (as of August 28, 2007) using MEMRI's own search engine yields 2087 hits out of 2089 documents archived on the site. In other words, virtually everything on the site is about Israel, even though the organization's "about us" page (<http://www.memri.org/aboutus.html>) does not mention Israel once, and claims blandly to provide "timely translations of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish media, as well as original analysis of political, ideological, intellectual, social, cultural, and religious trends in the Middle East." The removal of evidence of MEMRI's political affiliation is clearly aimed at preserving its credibility as a source for journalists and commentators.

^v Another possibility is that interest in the phenomenon of anti-Americanism has not actually waned. My impression of decreasing interest in the issue may be a product of nothing more than my own refusal to respond to most requests for information or opinions on the matter.

^{vi} "Was" is probably the correct tense, as al-Zawraa seems to have been finally removed from the airwaves after a surprisingly long campaign by American officials. The shutdown was reported by the BBC Monitoring service according to Radio Netherlands Worldwide ("Iraq: "Insurgent" Al-Zawraa TV no longer observed," <http://blogs.rnw.nl/medianetwork/?p=8520>, accessed August 28, 2007).

^{vii} For example, "Insurgent TV channel turns into Iraq's newest cult hit," by Michael Howard in *The Guardian* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,1990545,00.html> accessed on August 28, 2007). Many blogs also commented on the al-Zaura` phenomenon. For a summary of the details of the station see Lawrence Pintak, "War of Ideas: Insurgent Channel Coming to a Satellite Near You" (http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/pdblog_detail/070110_war_of_ideas_insurgent_channel_coming_to_a_satellite_near_you/ accessed August 28, 2007).

^{viii} However, it should be noted that jihadists upload video in many different compression formats, including formats small enough to be loaded onto video-equipped mobile phones. Accessing these formats requires a higher degree of technical proficiency and these phones are quite expensive. Providing access to such imagery by satellite broadcast is a significantly larger scale of dissemination.

^{ix} I purchased a basic satellite package for about £60 three years ago, but it is likely that they can go for even less. Many cafes provide public access to satellite broadcasts, and a single installation is often shared by several households. In a nutshell, even though Egypt is far from a wealthy country in Middle Eastern terms, access to satellite broadcasts via Nilesat can be had by almost anyone.

^x However, at least one blog site (dedicated to military strategy from a conservative pro-American point of view) speculated that U.S. intelligence officers initially wanted to keep the site operating because it provided information on the insurgency ("al-Zawraa: Muj TV," by Bill Roggio, http://billroggio.com/archives/2006/12/muj_tv.php accessed on August 28, 2007).

^{xi} *Al-Ussbu'* (hard copy edition) 8 January, 2007, back page.

^{xii} The URL to the *al-Ussbu'* site is <http://www.elosboa.com/elosboa/issues/543/0100.asp> (accessed on August 28, 2007). Its editors, Mahmud and Mustafa Bakri, have been in and out of prison on libel charges. However, Mustafa Bakri became an independent Minister of Parliament in the 2005 elections, and was most recently in the news for fomenting a campaign against the film *'Imarat Yaqubian* (directed by Marwan Hamid in 2006) on grounds that it contained "scandalous scenes and screaming depictions of open homosexuality for a third of its length" ("Ard *'Imarat Yaqubian* 'ala Lajna bi-Majlis al-Sha'b," http://www.cinemattechhaddad.com/Cinemattech/WrightsInCinema/WrightInCinema_Special/WrightInCinema_Special_32e.HTM, accessed August 28, 2007).

^{xiii} *Al-Ussbu'* online, "About" page, <http://www.elosboa.com/elosboa/admin/about.asp> accessed on August 31, 2007.

^{xiv} Accusations of libel in Egypt are often a means for the government to suppress political opponents ("Egypt," World Press Institute,

http://www.freemedia.at/cms/ipi/freedom_detail.html?country=/KW0001/KW0004/KW0091/&year=2000 accessed August 31, 2007). For details on Bakri's case see "Egypt: Human Rights Developments," Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/mideast/egypt.html> accessed August 31, 2007) and "Two journalists imprisoned for libel," Reporters without Borders (http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=7045 accessed on August 31, 2007). A brief description of the challenges faced by publishers in Egypt can be found on the blog of journalist Issandr El Amrani ("A Quick Guide to Publishing in Egypt," <http://arabist.net/archives/2005/06/04/a-quick-guide-to-publishing-in-egypt/> accessed August 31, 2007).

^{xv} *'Imarat Ya'qubian* (The Yacoubian Building) was directed by Marwan Hamid in 2006. It is based on a novel by the same name, written by 'Ala` al-Aswani. The film is structured around the lives of a number of characters who live in (or on top of in the case of the poorer characters) a downtown Cairo apartment building. It is credited with raising a number of issues normally off limits in films and, to a lesser extent, literature. The film's portrayal of homosexuality that formed the basis of Bakri's campaign was rather more normative for Egyptian cinema than one might have thought given the outcry about it (in other words, it was a fairly negative portrayal). The film also implies that Islamist extremism is a reaction to local political and economic conditions rather than a purely ideological opposition to modernity. In this claims that the book and film's capacity to break taboos are perhaps more warranted.

^{xvi} "112 Na`iban Yutalibuna Lajna Barilmaniyya li-Mushahadat Film," *Al-Masry al-Yaum* online, <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=22458> (accessed on August 31, 2007).

^{xvii} Bakri's own paper gave little coverage to the issue, at least in its online version. *Al-Usbu's* most extensive report on *'Imarat Ya'qubian* came in a translation from a *New York Times* article on al-Bakri and his campaign against the film ("Mustafa Bakri: al-Ajinda al-Amirikiyya Tarawwuj al-Shawadh fi Misr," *al-Usbu'* online, <http://www.elosboa.com/elosboa/issues/507/boloteka19.asp> accessed August 31, 2007). For the original article by Negar al-Azimi, see "Prisoners of Sex," (<http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FB0E17FB3A5A0C708CDDAB0994DE404482> accessed on August 31, 2007).

^{xviii} *The Holy Quran* iii, 169, Yusuf Ali translation (see <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/003.qmt.html> accessed on August 28, 2007).

^{xix} This is from the introduction to Surat Aal-'Imran in the Yusuf Ali interpretation of the Quran (*The Holy Quran*. 1984. Text, translation and commentary (parts I to XXX) by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, iii. 149-180, p. 121.

^{xx} *The Holy Quran*. 1984. Text, translation and commentary (parts I to XXX) by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, C. 59, on lines 149-180; p. 160-161.

^{xxi} A seemingly identical copy of Bakri's text is also online at: <http://www.elosboa.com/elosboa/issues/510/bealakl.asp> accessed on August 31, 2007):

^{xxii} This is the number listed currently on the Nilesat website (http://www.nilesat.com.eg/channel_list_101.htm accessed on August 28, 2007).

^{xxiii} *Al-Masri al-Yaum* is thought to be the fourth largest paper in Egypt, and the largest not owned by the state (Arab Press Network, <http://www.arabpressnetwork.org/home.php?lang=ar> accessed on August 31, 2007). An International Research and Exchanges Board survey of media in the Middle East and North Africa sensibly divides the non-public-sector Egyptian press into three categories: the nationalist press (with *al-Usbu'* at the forefront); commercial publications; and papers committed to liberal viewpoint and high levels of professionalism, with *al-Masri al-Yaum* as the outstanding example of the category (IREX, *Media Sustainability Index: Middle East and North Africa*, http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_MENA/2005/MSI05_MENA_EG.pdf accessed on August 31, 2007).

^{xxiv} "Amrika Tuqaddim Saddam 'Qurban' lil-Harb al-Ahliyya fi al-'Iraq; Inqisam 'Alami Haula al-I'dam ... Wa-l-Muslimun Ya'tabirunahu Istifzazan wa Ihanatan Jadidatan li-Humma fi Awwil Ayam al-'Id." *Al-Masri al-Yaum* online, December 31, 2006 (<http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=42956> accessed on August 31, 2007). Having been in Cairo at the time, I found I did not even have to ask people what they thought of the execution. Without any prompting from me many Egyptian friends and acquaintances ranging in outlook from very secular to very religious volunteered opinions about the Saddam execution that the tenor of the *al-Masri al-Yaum* headline captured very accurately.

^{xxv} "Al-Istajwabat al-Barlimaniyya Da'afat Iradat 'Imarat Yaqubian'," *al-Masri al-Yaum* online, 28 August, 2006 (<http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=22455> accessed on August 31, 2007).

^{xxvi} In the press and blogs Sha'ban is a frequent topic (of both vilification and praise, depending on the source). A Google search under various transliterations of his name (Sha'ban/Shaabab/Shaban Abd (al-)/Abdel Rahim/Raheem) will yield many hits, mostly on articles and blogs critical of him. The same search using Arabic characters will hit mostly articles and blogs praising him. Academics have not ignored him. James Grippo and Joel Gordon both provide excellent analysis of Sha'ban's career (James Grippo, 2006, "The Fool Sings a Hero's Song: Shaaban Abdel Rahim, Egyptian Shaabi, and the Video Clip Phenomenon." *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 16 (<http://tbsjournal.com/Grippo.html> accessed on August 18, 2007; Joel Gordon, 2003).

"Singing the pulse of the Egyptian-Arab street: Shaaban Abd al-Rahim and the geo-pop-politics of fast food." *Popular Music* 22(1): 73-88).

^{xxvii} Many of Sha'ban's songs have been digitized and uploaded to Youtube and other video forums. Several of Sha'ban's fans have uploaded "Ya 'Amm 'Arabi." Copies of Sha'ban's musical commentary on the Saddam execution can also be found on such sites.

^{xxviii} On the other hand, in Sha'ban's breakthrough hit, "I hate Israel," he actually praises Arab leaders. After the "I hate Israel" refrain, the song contains the lines "I love 'Amr Musa" (former Egyptian Foreign Minister and currently Secretary General of the Arab League; *ahibb 'Amr Musa bi kalamuh al-mauzun*—for his "balanced talk") and "I love Husni Mubarak" (*ahibb Husni Mubarak, 'ashan 'a'luh kibir*—because "his mind is big," i.e. he is smart) One of the things that makes Sha'ban entertaining is his capacity to leave the listener unsure of the singer's capacity for irony. I tend toward the interpretation that Sha'ban's love for Amr Musa and Husni Mubarak is ironic, i.e. he really means to convey precisely the opposite of his words. Others have argued with me vehemently that Sha'ban really is a *makwagi* to the core, which is to say, they think a *makwagi* must inevitably lack the intelligence necessary to convey irony. I can only say that I disagree.

^{xxix} After his 2001 breakthrough hit he was briefly hired by McDonalds to do an advertising campaign for the "McFalafel" sandwich. But McDonalds voided the deal when a lobbying organization called the American Jewish Congress protested. Joel Gordon, who wrote an article on the incident in the journal *Popular Music*, noted that neither McDonalds nor the American Jewish Congress were willing to go into details about what happened, but both were adamant that Sha'ban had been hired and then fired because of objections to the song that had made him marketable in the first place (Joel Gordon, "Singing the pulse ..." p. 80).

^{xxx} One occasionally hears the opinion by both Sha'ban's supporters and detractors in Egypt that the singer's fame was "made in America" in the sense that official American and Israeli disapproval added immensely to his "street credibility." Such allegations are ultimately impossible to prove. A CNN interview early in Sha'ban's rise to fame is often mentioned. For example, the notion that American attention was initially crucial to Sha'ban's rise was well expressed by a blogger named Mahmud Qa'ud: "Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim is a simple Egyptian citizen who lived a hard life, worked for a long time as a *makwagi*, doesn't read or write well, and who was a professional popular (*sha'bi*) singer. If not for the American satellite channel CNN, which presented its viewers with a report on him in the year 2000 because of his song 'I Hate Israel,' he would have remained like the rest of the professional singers of the sidewalks, popular quarters, and weddings. Nobody but the residents of those areas would have heard him" (Mahmud al-Qa'ud, "Sha'ban 'Abd al-Rahim: A Man in the Age of Pansies,"

http://makaoud.maktoobblog.com/419433/%D4%DA%C8%C7%E4_%DA%C8%CF%C7%E1%D1%CD%ED%E3_%C7%E1%D1%CC%E1_%DD%EC_%D2%E3%E4_%C7%E1%E3%CE%E4%CB%ED%E4 accessed on September 11, 2007). This is the introduction to an essay in praise of Sha'ban. Qa'ud's blog page identifies the author as

an Egyptian, but has a Saudi flag flying above his name. The contents of the page are quite extreme.

^{xxxii} In the context of nation-states American official policy regarding anti-Semitism is increasingly indistinguishable from very expansive standards for defining anti-Semitism used in American domestic discourse, particularly on college campuses. In American academic contexts conservative Zionists would explicitly equate anti-Semitism with "anti-Israelism." Official policy is sympathetic to such views (see a United States Commission on Civil Rights report titled "Campus Anti-Semitism," <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/081506campusantibrief07.pdf> accessed on September 5, 2007). Similar standards to those outlined by the USCCR report in a domestic academic context have made their way into initiatives to make the United States the global policeman of anti-Semitism (see the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004, http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ332.108 accessed on September 5, 2007). The codified statute of the Act is made available online by Cornell University (http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode22/usc_sec_22_00002731----000-.html accessed on September 5, 2007), and the first report resulting from the Act is on the U.S. State Department website (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/40258.htm> accessed on September 5, 2007).

^{xxxiii} As far as I know there was no video associated with "Ana Bakrah Isra'il." However, an internet search using various transliterations or Arabic script will yield numerous hits to streaming audio files of the song.

^{xxxiii} The authenticity of the video was later challenged by various critics. For a summary of the criticisms, see Ellis Shuman, "German TV: Mohammed a-Dura likely killed by Palestinian gunfire" (March 20, 2002, http://www.israelinsider.com/channels/diplomacy/articles/dip_0182.htm accessed on September 3, 2007). Both the criticism and the use of the video footage were highly politicized. The only official investigation of the incident was carried out by the Israeli Defense Forces. There was no autopsy or ballistics report. What is clear in the present context is that neither Sha'ban nor anyone else in Egypt was in a position to investigate anything. Sha'ban rode a wave in this case, but he cannot be sensibly accused of creating the wave.

^{xxxiv} The most active and apparently well-funded American 9/11 conspiracy site is "911 Truth" (<http://www.911truth.org/> accessed on September 5, 2007).

^{xxxv} From the academic and cultural gatekeepers' perspective, singers such as Sha'ban are most often dealt with by haughty inattention. From a less distanced perspective, criticism focuses on Sha'ban's lack of sophistication, and perceived lack of skill as a singer. See, for example, a Youtube clip from a television program in which comedian Wahid Sayf making harsh comments about Sha'ban, but pointedly not criticizing the content of the songs (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uryOdxJIpFo> accessed on September 11,

2007). Sayf himself is no paragon of good taste for most of those who detest Sha'ban as a degenerate clown. His relative proximity to Sha'ban on the hierarchy of taste was presumably what made the segment noteworthy enough that someone put it on Youtube.

^{xxxvi} The recent revival of exploitation film conventions in *Grindhouse*, a 2007 big-budget film directed by Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez, shows that the genre at least has influential fans, if not a great deal of critical acclaim.

^{xxxvii} Well-known examples of the genre include *Shaft*, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadass Song*, *Foxy Brown*, *Mandingo*, *Superfly*, or *Blacula* (an all-Black version of Dracula).

^{xxxviii} A caveat: the stereotype of video clips as nothing but copies of a Western model probably would not hold up to close scrutiny. It probably is roughly true that before the early 2000s Arab music videos were mainly about love, but it is not a foregone conclusion that even the love songs were straightforward copies of Western love themes.

^{xxxix} A straightforward enumeration of the films that address the theme of America is complex, and is beyond the scope of this article. I will, however, address both the representation of Americans and the representation of Islamists in Egyptian cinema in a chapter in the forthcoming volume *Film and Politics in the Middle East and the Maghreb* (Josef Gugler ed., University of Texas Press).

^{xl} The star of the film was Ahmad Adham, very much a second or third tier comedian in Egyptian theatre, cinema, and television. The film was reported to have been one of the poorest earners in the summer and fall of 2005 ("Iradat Aflam al-'Id..." *al-Sharq al-Awsat* <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=24&issue=9848&article=333240> accessed on September 12, 2007). Reviews that I have found online suggest a rather warmer opinion among those who have seen the film (e.g. "Ma'alesh Ihna Binitbahdil: Al-Sinima 'ala Tariqat al-Qarmuti." *Al-'Arabi* 14 August, 2005, <http://www.al-araby.com/articles/972/050814-972-art02.htm> accessed on September 12, 2007).

^{xli} The notion that any written invitation from an American would be sufficient to secure a visa to travel to the U.S. used to be widespread in Egypt. I have not encountered it in years. Possibly the 9/11 attack has put an end to the urban legend about the efficacy of any form of invitation in getting a visa.

^{xlii} Played by the George Bush impersonator Brent Mendenhal. Mendenhal's impersonations of Bush range from advertisements for Rabbit Pachinko Parlors in Japan to the Jay Leno Show (<http://www.gwbushimpersonator.com/appear.html> accessed on September 12, 2007).

^{xliii} Ragab al-Banna, *al-Ahram*, 12 September, 2004, p. 11.

^{xliv} The official brief of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs:

1. Offer people throughout the world a positive vision of hope and opportunity that is rooted in America's belief in freedom, justice, opportunity and respect for all;
2. Isolate and marginalize the violent extremists; confront their ideology of tyranny and hate. Undermine their efforts to portray the west as in conflict with Islam by empowering mainstream voices and demonstrating respect for Muslim cultures and contributions; and
3. Foster a sense of common interests and common values between Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths throughout the world (<http://www.state.gov/r/> accessed on September 12, 2007).

^{xlv} The full text of Bush's speech:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> accessed on September 12, 2007).

^{xlvi} My source for Higazi cartoons is *Karikatir Hijazi, Fannan al-Hara al-Misriyya* (The Caricatures of Ahmad Higazi, Artist of the Egyptian Street). Compiled and introduced by Muhammad Baghdadi. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Misri al-Arabi. Some of these can be more precisely dated than others, but they are all clearly from the mid-1970s to early 1980s, when the 1973 October War was still very fresh in everyone's minds, and the issue of normalizing relations with Israel first arose due to Sadat's peace initiative.

^{xlvii} Egyptian debates about relations with Israel following the October War are the subject of a forthcoming D.Phil (Ph.D.) dissertation at Oxford University by Dominic Coldwell. Coldwell's thesis makes use of the press (e.g. weeklies such as *Ruz al-Yusuf*, Islamic publications such as *al-I'tisam*, and student newspapers), memoirs, poetry, cassette sermons, and films (a number of which treat the wars with Israel, though with little if any attention to the role of the United States). Coldwell's Master's thesis, which the dissertation extends, can be viewed at <http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/Coldwell.html> (accessed on September 13, 2007). For present purposes, it is important to emphasize that the cartoons discussed here are indeed a small part of a long-running and acrimonious debate about the meaning of the October War and its importance for the unfolding of subsequent events (which Coldwell's Master's and Ph.D. work richly documents).

^{xlviii} The condition of the cinema was different than for radio and television. Cinema was half-privatized in the early 1970s (the state ceased financing films, but maintained a grip on the means for producing the films, hence private filmmakers were obliged to rent government facilities). The 1970s and 1980s were a period of huge economic upheaval in the industry, as the state's role in (and patronage of) film production steadily declined, and the oil-producing Gulf developed as the main export market. Political films of the period were greatly occupied with the economic and social dislocations caused by the new "open door" economic policy. A number of films treated the wars with Israel, but there were no films that made America a major preoccupation, and indeed, very few images of America or Americans at all in the cinema. This was the case *before* the

1970s, all the way back to when Egyptian cinema began in the 1930s. In all narratives involving foreigners Europeans, particularly Britain as the former colonial ruler, figured much more strongly than Americans. It should also be noted that the depiction of *any* foreigners was a decidedly minor theme in Egyptian cinema throughout its history. Where the theme of the "non-local" was a concern, films were very greatly preoccupied with the depiction of either hybrid Egyptian characters (combining salutary aspects of Europe such as science and technology with markers of local authenticity), or alternatively, with the depiction of "border straddlers"—"fake foreigner" Egyptians, sinister by virtue of not fitting within any of the "known" social categories (i.e. neither Egyptian nor European, or, one might say, neither fish nor fowl). In the cinema it was not until the mid-1990s that America became an issue—when the "politicsploitation" genre began. Even then the conventions for depicting Americans were broadly similar to those employed in depicting Europeans in earlier films.

^{xlix} Of course the first actual significant intervention in the region took place in the larger Cold War context that shaped the Suez War of 1956. The U.S. compelled the withdrawal of the Tripartite forces that had occupied the Suez Canal zone. However, the American role was essentially invisible in popular culture. The extent to which it was the subject of discussion in that era's press discourse (aside from popular imagery) about the meaning of international events for Egypt is an important matter, but beyond the scope of this paper.

ⁱ U.S. Aid to Israel jumped from \$492 million in 1973 to \$2.6 billion in 1974. Throughout the rest of the 1970s U.S. aid to Israel remained at a level of about \$2.3 billion per year, then climbed to around \$3 billion per year from the 1980s on. These figures are stated on the web page of the Jewish Virtual library ([http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/U.S. Assistance to Israel1.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/U.S._Assistance_to_Israel1.html), accessed on September 14, 2007), and are based on U.S. State department sources. Estimates of U.S. aid to Israel by parties that oppose Israeli political agendas argue for much higher levels of aid. According to these critics U.S. loan guarantees since the 1991 Gulf War total another \$2 billion per year (and these "loans" are inevitably forgiven, turning them retroactively into de facto grants). "Consequential" aid (tax deductible donations by American citizens) result in another \$1.5 billion per year in U.S. expenditures on Israel (<http://www.miftah.org/Display.cfm?DocId=3326&CategoryId=4> accessed on September 14, 2007).

^{li} Melanie McAlister's *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (University of California Press, 2001) provides an excellent account of how American attitudes toward the Middle East were shaped by their own constructions of race and how, in this context, admiration for Israeli domination of Third World opponents articulated with frustration at America's own failure to defeat a Third World nation in Vietnam.

^{lii} U.S. aid to Egypt has averaged a bit over two billion dollars per year since 1979, compared to the afore-mentioned (and conservatively estimated) three billion for Israel.

The relative populations of the two countries (around 67 million for Egypt; 7 million for Israel, including its 20 percent non-Jewish minority obviously makes the per capita level of aid to Egypt far smaller than aid to Israel. The terms of aid delivery to the two countries also differ significantly. Israel is given considerable freedom to spend U.S. aid as it pleases, whereas Egypt has much less discretion and must spend a large portion of its U.S. aid on U.S. contractors. One suspects that few Egyptians are aware of the exact figures in relative aid given to them and their neighbors. But the Ahmad Higazi cartoons do suggest an awareness of the general shape of the playing field. For a detailed breakdown of U.S. aid to Israel see Zunes, Stephen. "The Strategic Functions of U.S. Aid to Israel." <http://www.eroj.org/Palestina/zunes.htm> accessed on September 14, 2007, originally published in *Middle East Policy* (4, 4), October 1996).

^{liii} For the U.S. to equalize its aid to Egypt and Israel on a per capita basis would require funding Egypt to the tune of 36 billion dollars per year (or reducing aid to Israel to approximately 170 million dollars instead of 3 billion). Since my discussion is historical I am using a population figure of 5 million for Israel and 60 million for Egypt. Both countries have higher populations now than they did in the early 1980s (currently 6.5 million Israelis, 5.2 million of whom are Jewish and therefore far more likely to benefit from American aid, versus about 67 million for Egypt). My figures are therefore a rough estimate for a twenty-year period. But they accurately reflect the massive disparity in American expenditures on the two countries.

In the U.S. aid to Egypt actually *is* often viewed as a kind of purchase of Egyptian loyalty. A recent spate of articles in the U.S. press asked pointedly what had been gained by U.S. aid to Egypt since 1975 (e.g. Charles Levenson, "\$50 Billion Later, Taking Stock of U.S. Aid to Egypt," *Christian Science Monitor* 12 April 2004 <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0412/p07s01-wome.html> accessed on September 14, 2007). But if purchasing loyalty is the purpose of giving foreign aid, it may be surmised that the U.S. has simply been too cheap with Egypt. American aid to Israel over the same period has been approximately \$78 billion according to sources sympathetic to Israeli goals. (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/US_Assistance_to_Israel1.html accessed on September 14, 2007). But again, a per capita breakdown of aid to the two countries suggests vastly greater expenditures on Israel than on Egypt even before any considerations of such factors as the much more favorable terms on which aid to Israel is granted.

^{liv} For example, Rajiv Chandrasekaran's *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (Knopf, 2006).

^{lv} This of course is precisely the attitude that makes it easy for the Egyptian government to suppress foreign-funded civil society NGOs. For a full account of Egypt NGO laws, including restrictions on foreign funding, see Mohamed Agati, "Undermining Standards of Good Governance: Egypt's NGO Law and Its Impact on the Transparency and Accountability of CSOs," *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* 9 (2), April 2007 http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ijnl/vol9iss2/special_4.htm accessed on September 14, 2007).

^{lvi} Not that anyone in the group actually thought that the government's policy would change because it made effective public diplomacy in the Middle East impossible. But I at least thought that a straightforward U.S. government information broadcast would at least be respected as honest, whereas the "youth" and "lifestyle" format under consideration would be immediately seen through by youth throughout the region.

^{lvii} The sales figures for *Hi* magazine are from a General Accounting Office report (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06535.pdf> accessed on September 14, 2005). Unsurprisingly, the report claimed that the magazine was thriving online, with 3 million hits in December 2005 alone. This does not seem to have saved *Hi*. A 2004 State Department website (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2004&m=September&x=20040915180703ESnamfuaK0.2612116> accessed on September 14, 2007) gives the URL for the Arabic-language *Hi* magazine as <http://www.himag.com/> —a dead URL as readers will see. An English-language version of *Hi* — *Hi International* — seems to survive. See <http://www.hiinternational.com/> (accessed on September 14, 2007). *Hi International* bills itself as an "International Immigration" blog. All the postings seem to be from within the United States, and none of the postings seem to have generated any comments. The full text announcing the suspension can be found on the State Department's website, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/58401.htm> accessed on September 14, 2007.

Figure 1: Voice over: "We will not surrender. Victory or death."

Al-Zaura` station identification using a clip of Anthony Quinn from Lion of the Desert, a 1981 biopic of Umar Mukhtar, the famous Libyan resistance fighter against Italian occupation in the early 20th century. The film was directed by Syrian Mustafa Akkad. From Al-Zaura`, January 3, 2007



Figure 2: The Lion of the Desert clip segues into the Al-Zaura` station logo, reiterating Umar Mukhtar's defiant "Victory or Death" slogan. From Al-Zaura`, January 3, 2007



Figure 3: Iraqi militants firing a mortar. The target is not shown. From Al-Zaura`, January 3, 2007.



Figure 4: A presumed American military vehicle marked by an arrow (often the targets show in the videos are more distinct). From Al-Zaura`, January 3, 2007.



Figure 5: The American vehicle as it is bombed. Such scenes are repeated several times in successively slower motion. From Al-Zaura', January 3, 2007.



Figure 6: "He lived as a hero; He died as a man" (back page of *al-Ussbu'* Jan. 8, 2007.



Figure 7: "Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord." (Surat Aal-'Imran, 169-171). From *al-Ussbu'* Jan. 8, 2007.

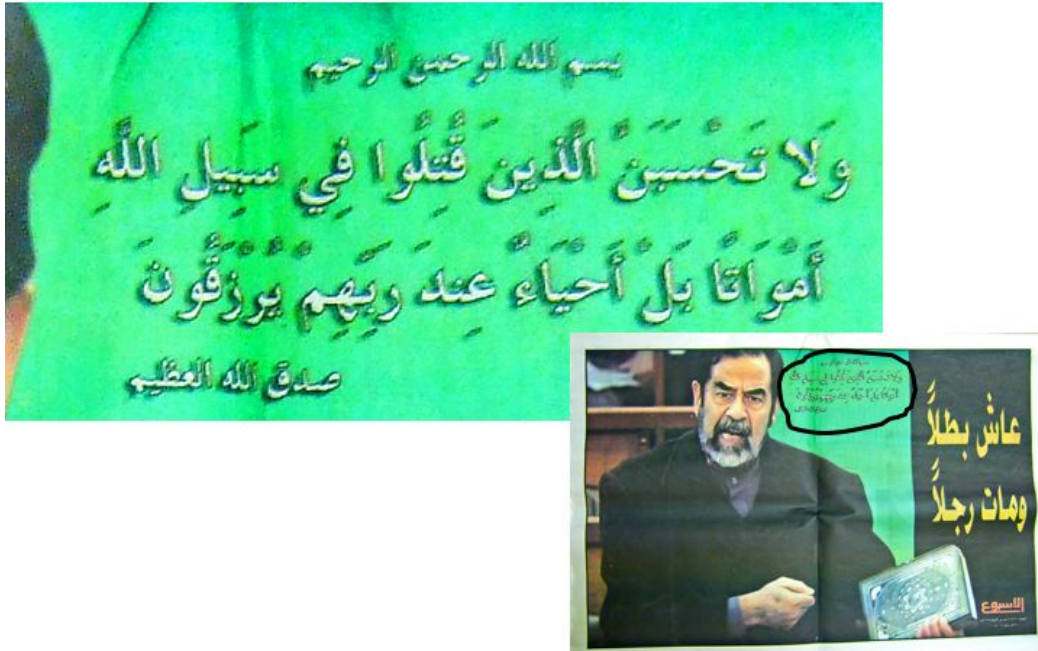


Figure 8: "Who Deserves to Be Executed?"

Mustafa Bakri, *al-Ussbu'* Jan. 8, 2007, front page.

من يستحق الإعدام؟!

بالعقل

بقلم: مصطفى بكري

كان المشهد مثيراً.. رجال ملثمون، كلاب تعوى، تدفع بالرئيس إلى المقصلة.. إذن هذا هو صدام، الرمز، البطل والمناضل.. كنت أدرك منذ البداية أنه سيبقى شامخاً حتى في لحظات الوهن والضعف، لم يساورني الشك قيد أنملة، كنت أقرأ حجم الإيمان بداخله، أنه إيمان لا يقزعزع، صمود أسطوري، إنه رجل بمعنى الكلمة.. في عام ١٩٨٩ كانت تلك هي المرة الوحيدة التي التقى فيها الرئيس.. نظرت إلى عينيه وأنا أصفحه إنهما تمتلكان ذات السحر الذي كان يشع من عيني الزعيم الخالد جمال عبدالناصر.. ذهبنا لنهتئته بنهاية الحرب مع إيران، لكن كلماته كانت تقول إن ما هو قادم أخطر بكثير..

ليس مهما لك رئيس دولة وتمتلك حصانة، ليس مهما أن تقارن موقفك في مواجهة من حاولوا اغتيالك والتجسس، موقفك بوش أو انتقامك من أفغانستان ودول أخرى بسبب أحداث ١١ سبتمبر المهم أن تقتل ويبدأ الأمريكان والمصاهرة والغرس الجوس.

هل تعرف لماذا؟

لأنك يا سيدى رفضت الصلح مع المصاهرة.. لأنك يا سيدى أعددت جيش القدس.. لأنك يا سيدى أطلقت ٣٩ صاروخاً في قلب العدو الصهيوني.. لأنك يا سيدى قررت واثق الحاصر ٢٥ ألف دولار لأسيرة كل شهيد

الصهيوني، إنهم عبدة الدولار وخونة الأمة.. سيجسروا الأعمال ووقفوا العقول، وأطلقوا المصنوعات.. واستهناوا بالامة وتاريخها، حملونا المسؤولية عن كل الحروب، تناسلوا أننا كنا ندافع عن أوطان سرفت وأراض استعصيت، أساوا للقومية، ووجهوا الاتهامات للصهيونية، وشككوا الأجيال الجديدة في التاريخ.

يا سيدي الرئيس..

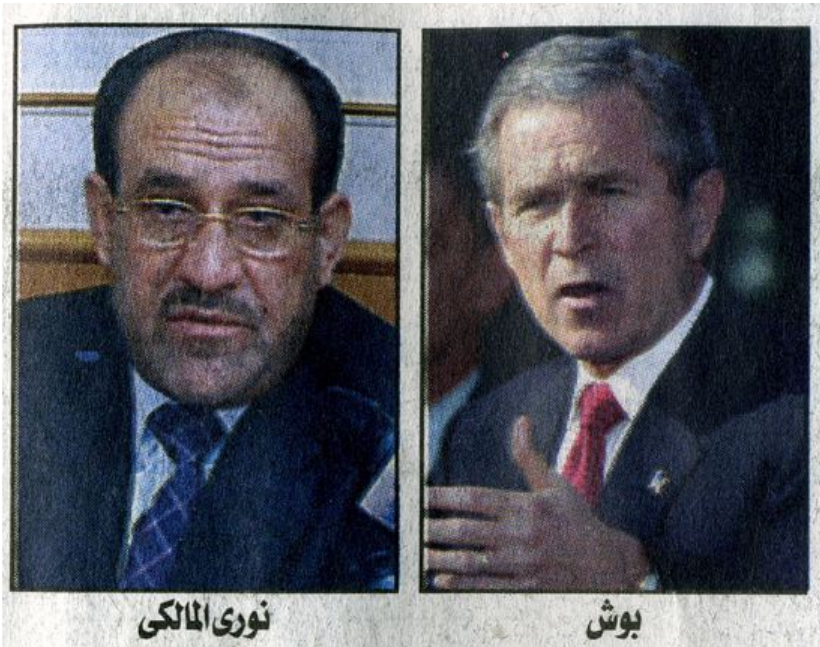
وخرج إلى الناس في الشارع قبل احتلال بغداد..

صدام ابداً لم يكن جباناً، لو كان جباناً لهرب من العراق أو استجاب لعرض كونداليزا رايس الذي أبلغته للرئيس بتأمين خروج صدام من العراق، لقد رفض وقرر أن يقاتل أعداء العراق حتى النفس الأخير..

كانت القاذبات تحاصره من كل اتجاه، وحتى أولاده وأسرتهم ظلوا معه حتى اللحظة الأخيرة، لم يهرب قسماً ولم يهرب عدى ولم يهرب حفيده مصطفى بل قاوموا مقاومة أسطورية وقتلوا أكثر من ٢١ أميركياً قبل أن يستشهدوا على يد الجيش الجرار الذي حاصرهم براً وجواً..

بعد أن علم صدام باستشهاده ولده

Figure 9: "They killed you, sir, because they were afraid of you. They were afraid that you would reveal their secrets in unbiased courts; afraid that you would tell many things that would embarrass the elder Bush and the American leadership; that you would expose



the ambitions of the Persians, and the suspicious role of the Arabs in helping their enemies to squander the resources of the Arab nation, and to threaten Arab national security." From "Who Deserves to Be Executed?" Mustafa Bakri, *al-Ussbu'* Jan. 8, 2007, front page.

Figure 10:

The *Sha'bula fanus*, un-lit and lit. These were widely available between roughly 2002 and 2005. In Ramadan that fell in 2006 they disappeared from the market.



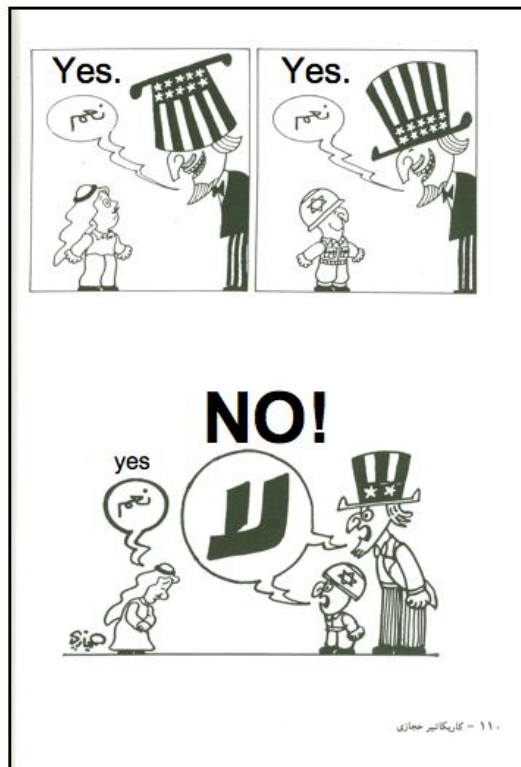


Figure 11

Ahmad Higazi cartoon. From Karikatir Hijazi, Fannan al-Hara al-Misriyya (The Caricatures of Ahmad Higazi, Artist of the Egyptian Street). Compiled and introduced by Muhammad Baghdadi. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Misri al-Arabi, p. 110.



Figure 12

Ahmad Higazi cartoon. From Karikatir Hijazi, Fannan al-Hara al-Misriyya (The Caricatures of Ahmad Higazi, Artist of the Egyptian Street). Compiled and introduced by Muhammad Baghdadi. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Misri al-Arabi, p. 106.



Figure 13

Ahmad Higazi
cartoon. From
Karikatir Hijazi,
Fannan al-Hara al-
Misriyya (The
Caricatures of
Ahmad Higazi, Artist
of the Egyptian
Street). Compiled
and introduced by
Muhammad
Baghdadi. Cairo: al-
Markaz al-Misri al-
Arabi, p. 128.

Figure 14

The Dr. thinks that what separates us and Israel is a "mental block" which can be solved by dialogue, and Abd al-Azim is a poor fellow who just wants to make a dime. Ramadan is of



the opinion that
we're okay with
the American
cultural
invasion so we
should also be
okay with the
Zionist cultural
invasion
because adding
to a good thing
makes a double
good thing!

Ahmad Higazi cartoon. From Karikatir Hijazi, Fannan al-Hara al-Misriyya (The
Caricatures of Ahmad Higazi, Artist of the Egyptian Street). Compiled and introduced
by Muhammad Baghdadi. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Misri al-Arabi, p. 114.

Figure 15



Ahmad Higazi cartoon. From *Karikatir Hijazi*. Fannan al-Hara al-Misriyya (The Caricatures of Ahmad Higazi, Artist of the Egyptian Street). Compiled and introduced by Muhammad Baghdadi. Cairo: al-Markaz al-Misri al-Arabi, p. 112.

— It's still a bit early for lunch. Let's go bomb south Lebanon and come back later.

"Hi" magazine advertisement in Sidi Bishr, Alexandria. "Now on the market: Hi, and the conversation begins. Monthly, youthful, comprehensive."



Photographed in November 2003.

Figure 16