“Writing with a Global Accent: Assembling a Transnational Graffiti Scene in Cairo, Egypt”

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My paper examines the ways revolutionary desire is articulated and interpreted through graffiti in Cairo, Egypt. For writers in Cairo, graffiti was one of many in a constellation of resistances that undermined everyday life in Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt and the SCAF-controlled interim government. Ordinary surfaces of the city were illegally marked, displaying revolutionary potentiality by allowing the seemingly powerless rhetorical openings of engagement. Far from being a monolithic discourse, graffiti created geographies of material protest that were locally enacted but globally contextualized. It is this contextualization—and an examining of Cairo’s graffiti subculture’s routes/roots—that is the focus of my paper. Using personally conducted interviews with graffiti writers in Cairo who learned their ‘art’ from U.S. based writers (discovered through social media, Flicker and countless “black book” web pages), I theoretically examine the (virtual) influences of the U.S.-based graffiti scene upon the political graffiti created during this transitional time in Egypt. Using Deleuze’s theory of “assemblage,” I map the transnational collaborations between writers in the U.S. and Egypt, specifically examining issues of gender and religious sensibilities that are negotiated in these relationships. Reading specific images of graffito in Cairo, this paper examines the polyphonic ways that the walls speak their revolutionary discourse.