



Abbildung 4: Erzwungene Heirat.

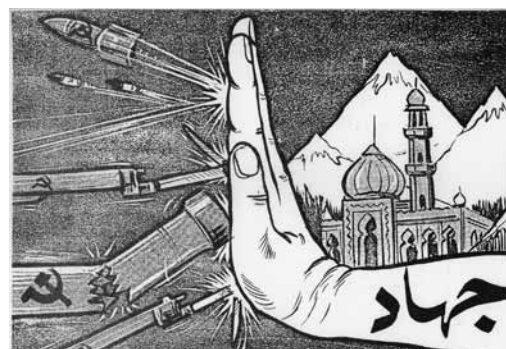


Abbildung 5: Mächtige Hand.

Die staatliche Propagandamaschinerie nach sowjetischem Agitprop-Vorbild florierte in den Kriegsjahren, fruchtete aber wenig. Plakate der Regierung gegen die Opposition ähnelten zum Teil den Bildern der *International Islamic Front of Afghanistan*. Beide Lager waren mit der sowjetischen Rhetorik und Bildsprache vertraut. Die *International Islamic Front* dürfte mehr oder weniger bewusst die «Waffen des Feindes» übernommen haben. Dies zeigt sich auch in der Rhetorik der *Šabnāma*, den im Untergrund hergestellten Nachtbriefen, einem anderen Propagandamittel des Widerstands. Das wirksamste Mittel war aber der Aufruf zum *Ġihād*. Die Religion stellte die einzige Klammer in der heterogenen Gesellschaft dar; das Bekenntnis zum Islam wirkte mobilisierend und stärkte das Selbstwertgefühl.

Insgesamt widerspiegeln die oft witzigen Zeichnungen der *International Islamic Front* die in den Köpfen vorhandenen Denkbilder und verkörpern einen

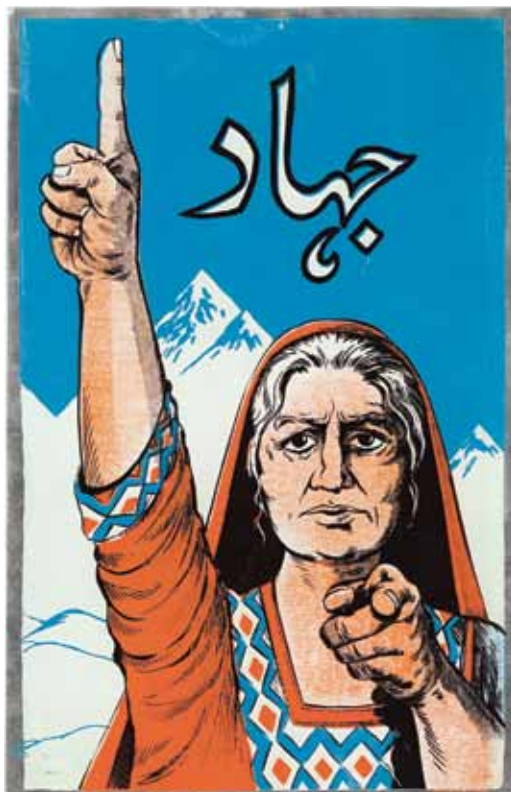


Abbildung 6: Ġihād.

Teil der Mentalitätsgeschichte des Widerstands. Nicht selbstverständlich war, dass eine Gruppe sie in so hoher zeichnerischer Qualität visuell umzusetzen vermochte.

Chebel, Melek (1995), *Dictionnaire des symboles musulmans. Rites, mystique et civilisation*. Paris.

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Henatsch, Martin (1994), *Die Entstehung des Plakats. Eine Rezeptionsästhetische Untersuchung*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York.

Hyman, Anthony (1985), «Propaganda posters of the Afghan Resistance», in: *Central Asian Survey. Incidental Papers Series Nr. 3*. Oxford.

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International Internal Islamic Front, *Charter und Begleitbrief*, undatiert. Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica, Bubendorf.

Shalinsky, Audry C. (1993), «Women's Roles in the Afghanistan Jihad», in: *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 25.

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Elliott Colla

## The Persistence of Jokes

And that is what it looks like when an Arabist starts joking about Arab jokes – jokingly funny!

(Imagined jokes!)

My friends laughed and called me a «revolution tourist» – which wasn't incorrect, since part of my reason for coming was to see what was happening up close. But the other reason, of course, was to visit the state archives to check on the status of my application. Last fall, I wrote up a vague proposal for research I intended to undertake on the inefficiencies of cotton pricing in the nineteenth-century. I submitted the proposal in triplicate: one to the head of the Ministry of Higher Education; one to the section of the Ministry of Culture which oversees the administration of the State Archives; and one to the head of the particular archive for which I sought permission. I was optimistic when I first submitted my application – not just because I had a foreign research institution backing me, but because my advisor had contacted the archives director and requested his assistance in expediting my request.

But now, after these last few months, I had begun to worry that my proposal might fall through the cracks with everything else going on. Or that it might be rejected in a wave of zealous post-revolution cleaning. It was only after I arrived for my visit that I discovered that the same people I used to know at the ministry were still in charge. I scheduled a visit to the archive as soon as possible. I would pay a call to the head of the archive. I would greet him, sit with him, drink tea with him, and finally, just before leaving, hear something about the progress of my application. Years ago, the last time I was working in these archives, I used to bring this man various gifts—Edward Said's latest

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book, a Montblanc pen, particular opera CDs that he had made a point of mentioning to me. I made sure to see him whenever I was about to travel abroad and then again on my return to Cairo. Just as I left the apartment, I felt in my jacket pocket for the small box of cuff-links I had purchased in Heathrow duty-free.

The director must have appreciated my gift, because just as our interview was coming to an end, he announced that it was a shame I came all the way from Washington without getting to see what the archives had in store for me. He winked at me as pressed a button under his desk. When his secretary arrived, he told her to let me into the reading room and to make sure I was given whatever reference works I needed. He shook my hand vigorously, and I said I would back as soon as the permission came through. The next thing I knew, I was in the beautiful cool quiet of the reading room, looking through reference books.

Frankly, it was a letdown, though through no fault of the archive. I was simply not prepared to do "research" that day. Not surprisingly, I looked up things at random and found nothing at all. A couple hours passed as I skimmed registers to no avail, pretending to find important things and making notes in the only pieces of paper I'd brought with me that day—my agenda. The other researchers nodded at me as they left for lunch and I was soon alone with the sleepy assistants. I knew I was wasting my time, but I also knew it'd be stupid to leave, since who knew how long it'd be before I'd be back in here again.

I was thumbing through the letter "nun" in an index of registers for Ismail Pasha's rule. I thought first "nasij" might bear fruit, then turned back to search

through the ministries. Before I arrived at “nizara,” my eyes were struck by the citation of a complete notebook on jokes, “nukat, with multiple files. My handler was still at lunch, and so I decided to try my luck with the assistants who were there. I requested the first dossier seeing if they might deliver it.

I did not get to read the whole file, but here is more or less what I could make out from them. Some clarification is in order first. The text I was reading was a translation of the original Ottoman Turkish, the language of the state throughout this period. Like other documents and files from this period, this was a selection that was translated in 1922 by an Egyptian clerk who maintained the elegance of the Ottoman bureaucrat in the Arabic. This effendi did not just translate the documents in the file I was reading, but also summarized their contents in a lengthy introductory report, which gave a brief historical overview to the making of the file, the scope of its contents and its importance. I translate them here into English:

“Since the beginning of his reign, the Pasha’s advisors have pressed upon him the wisdom and perspicacity of gauging public opinion. Censors scan newspapers for meritorious praise and hints of dissent. They read letters sent by and addressed to important men which shed light onto the image of the ruler in the minds of those that matter most among our notables and scholars and leaders. All that is of significance in the lands of Egypt is transcribed and is thus read by our eyes, for consideration by our minds....

“The [French] doctor advised that it was not enough to survey merely what is written. True, for it is the spoken word, not the letter, which remains dearest to people’s hearts. Officers and spies – the ears and eyes of the state – are thus now sent out to cafes to collect what is said among the common folk in the cities and the provinces – unfounded gossip, treacherous planning, idle chitchat, nefarious scheming and the like. As for the wandering reciters of ballads and singers of the epics, not to mention the itinerant puppeteers and story tellers: they claim only to repeat what was handed down to them from time immemorial, but we know in actuality that they change their tunes and stories to fit the times. We have recorded all this and more.”

As far as I could gather, the spies soon found themselves overwhelmed with this kind of work. The-

re was simply too much material. They soon decided to ignore “idle chitchat” and “unfounded gossip” on the grounds that it was difficult to ascertain popular will from such vague sources. They concentrated instead on schemes and plans and also, interestingly, the telling of jokes, which were collected by this same network of government agents.

Sitting in the archive, my stomach rumbling with hunger, I imagined this same anonymous Egyptian effendi selecting, summarizing and translating the best political jokes of the 1870s. His introduction focused on the last years of that decade, when the speculation, greed and corruption of the ruling class provoked foreign interference and set in motion the British occupation of the country. The corruption of the era was so thick, you could smell the revolution that was going to come. I imagined what this bureaucrat was thinking about as he worked on the eve of formal Egyptian independence, decades after the events recorded in the registers. Most of the jokes he summarized were about the nepotism of the Royal Family, and the propensity of the sons of high officials to use their privilege for ill-gotten gain. Here are some jokes in that genre:

- A minister came home one day to find his son had purchased a chic new horse-drawn coach from Paris. The Minister asked, “Son, how did you buy this?” The son answered, “With my own money.” The father then asked how, since the son’s allowance would not cover such an extravagant expense as this. The son replied, “I paid for it from the allowance you give me, fair and square. You can check with the merchant who sold me it.” The minister, disbelieving his son, decided to visit the merchant. The man beamed when he saw the Minister at the door of his shop and invited him in. The minister asked him whether it was true that his son had purchased the coach from him, and the latter replied, “Of course, your Highness. And what an honor it is for you to visit my humble store.” The minister thought for a moment, then asked, “Did he pay you in cash, or in credit?” “Of course, your Highness, he paid in cash, though his credit would always be good with me.” The minister considered the matter further. “How much did my son pay?” The merchant laughed and twisted his moustaches. “Ahh, sir, you are embarrassing me! I did give him a good deal on it.” The minister demanded, “How much did

he pay then?” And after a long silence, the merchant whispered, “Five pounds.” The minister thought for a moment, then took out his checkbook and wrote a check for ten pounds. Clapping his hands he barked, “That’s a great price. I’d like to buy two more of the same.”

- A Bey was walking in the desert and came upon a magic lamp. He rubbed and rubbed and out came a genie. “Your wish is my command!,” roared the genie to his new master. The Bey roared back, “No – your wish is my command!”

- A Minister was walking in the desert and came upon a magic lamp. He rubbed and rubbed and out came a genie. “Your wish is my command!,” said the genie to his new master. The Minister began listing his wishes, when the genie stopped him. “Hold on,” he said, “Are you sure you want these? I just did this list for your son yesterday.”

- The Khedive’s youngest son asked his father for a palace. Being generous, the Khedive built one for him in Alexandria. The son moved in with his family, but not a month went by before he came back to his father to complain, “We need a bigger palace, father. That one is too small.” The father, who could never fail to please his son, built him another palace, this time in Aswan. Not a month went by before the son came back to the father, “Father, this one seems even

smaller!” The Khedive scratched his head. “Son, I’ve built you two lovely, spacious palaces—one at each end of the country. What more can I do for you?” The son thought for a moment and asked, “Here’s what you can do for me – knock down the walls and build add-ons until they connect!”

- A Pasha was walking in the desert and came upon a magic lamp. He rubbed and rubbed and out came his son. The Pasha asked, “What are you doing in there?” “I’ve gone into business with the genie!” the son laughed.

There were many more variations, each duly recorded and categorized by genre. Not long after I finished reading the jokes filed under the category of “jinn,” the director burst into the room. The employees suddenly woke up and saluted their boss and his guest, another professor visiting from abroad. I was not surprised when the director introduced me in English as his “disciple.” The three of us exchanged small talk about research. The director asked me whether I had had an interesting time, and I admitted I had. He then called the assistants over to help me return the books I had been perusing. He smiled and said he would soon speak with the Minister of Higher Education and that perhaps in two more months, God willing, my permission would come through. I promised I’d be in touch as soon as I returned to the States.



Aus: Ali Dilem, 2011 : Algérie, mon humour ! Casbah Editions, Alger.



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