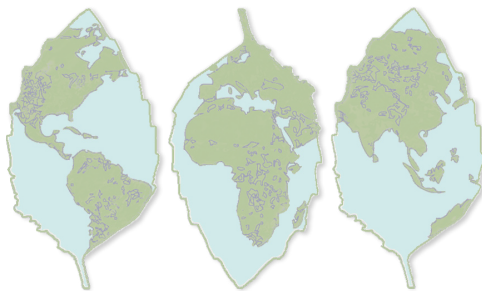


Egalitarianism and Difference in Urban and Digital Crowds: Reassessing Hay Ettadhamon



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The lives of low-income residents in the capital city of Tunis, Tunisia have been impacted materially and socially by a sudden rise in internet use following Tunisia’s revolutionary uprising in 2010-2011. In spite of pronounced financial constraint, by 2015, most households in low-income areas of Tunis were accessing the internet through cell phones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers. Here I ask: what of the purported benevolence of online “crowds” — the crowds that are sourced for their wisdom and beseeched for their cash — can be transferred to low-income neighborhoods that are perceived as crowded? In other words, what representations of low-income internet use might effectively challenge negative associations with these areas? Focusing on the experiences of women, teenagers and children undermines the masculinist homogeneity attributed to popular neighborhoods. The stakes of representation are heightened in Hay Ettadhamon – the most densely populated of all the popular residential areas of Tunis – due to this area’s recent history of revolutionary unrest and subsequent rioting. Area grievances tied to education and unemployment, which are shared by Tunisians around the country, are obscured by a circulating reputation that links crowds to danger, including the danger of crime and Islamic revival. This presentation further queries the emergence of crowd theory in terms of 19th century industrial urbanization and rationalization, considering these historical processes as perceptual grounds for problematizing urban density and protesting crowds. I in turn attempt to problematize egalitarianism – specifically rationalized notions of egalitarianism that help position online crowds as innovative and intelligent while disguising actual inequality.

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