



**Arrays
of
Egyptian and Tunisian
Everyday Worlds**
 An update on the project
*In 2016—How it felt to live in the Arab
World five years after the “Arab Spring”*

edited by
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Crowdfunding

Meet Rabiha and Hiba, two women artisans working with *Aatik* who together wove this carpet. They, along with six other women, want to keep working together—and they need your help in order to become a self-sustainable cooperative. Thus, for everyone abroad who hasn't donated yet, please visit the page: <link>. For everyone in Tunisia who cannot contribute online, please ask your family and friends abroad to contribute to *Aatik*'s crowdfunding campaign or contact *Aatik*'s team and we will help you make a donation. Hurry, beautiful people, there are only 2 days left to #weavearevolution!

Emma and Sophie, founders of the Tunisian start-up company *Aatik*, share this post on Facebook in mid-December 2016 [**↗Social Media**]. Their objective is to keep alive the weaving tradition of the village of al-'Arūsa, a few hours from Tunis, by establishing a workshop managed exclusively by women. For this, they ask people living abroad and in Tunisia, to donate a small sum of money. The post includes a picture of Rabiha and Hiba proudly holding a blue-coloured carpet and showing their thumbs up, in a sign of confidence. And in fact, only one week later, they announce in another Facebook post: “We did it! We obtained 111% of the planned budget (3450 Euros). We are ready for a new year endowed with weaving, creativity and women power.”

The campaign launched by the women behind *Aatik* is not an isolated case. A significant number of artisans, musicians, writers, social workers and young entrepreneurs from Egypt and Tunisia resort to crowdfunding to realize their professional dreams [**↗Young vs Settled**]. They have great ambitions and creative ideas; the main obstacle they face is access to funding, particularly when firms are at an early stage. Banks simply do not want to take the risk. Administrative steps for review and approval take a lot of time and are often discouraging. Crowdfunding websites, instead, are easy to access [**↗Tricking the system**]. They allow anyone to create a page where they describe the idea of a project, give an estimated budget and schedule for its realization, and ask friends, family, like-minded people and other potential investors to contribute by donating a small amount of money within a fixed deadline. Not only international crowdfunding websites, like *Kickstarter* or *Indiegogo*, which world-renowned artists like the Tunisian singer Emel Mathlouthy (Āmāl al-Mathlūthī) [**↗Celebrities**] resort to, are used; but increasingly also *Arabic* crowdfunding websites appear, and they aim at financing *local* projects, like *zoomal* (*DhūMāl* “The one who has money”), *CoFundy* or *AfrikWity*, whose offices are in Tunis, or *Yomken* (*Yumkin* “It is possible”), and *Shekra* (from *Shārik fikra* “Share an idea”), based in Egypt.

Different websites have different policies. But usually, if the project is successfully funded, the website keeps a small percentage of the total money donated (5% for *zoomal*, or 10% for *Yomken*, for example). If the planned amount is not reached within the given time, the website may adopt two funding options: “all or nothing” (like *zoomal*), or “keep it all.” In the former, pledged money is only collected if the fundraising goal is met, other-

wise the money is returned to the backers. In the latter, the funds are collected whether the project goal is met or not.

In exchange for their support, backers can be rewarded in several ways, depending on the sum of money allocated. For example, the ones who “support a Room of art in Cairo”—a music venue that risks being shut down due to the financial crisis in Egypt [**^Dollar Crisis**]¹—will obtain honorary membership access to the venue, discounts on concert tickets and beverages, and a photo on stage with a music band performing there. The ones who support the establishment of a canteen for a primary school located on the Islands of Qarqna (Kerkennah) in Tunisia will get a boat tour of the island, a meal served in the canteen with the school pupils, and their name and picture recorded in the school annals. But more in general, donors are rewarded with the feeling that they can determine which project will be realized, and thus make a difference [**^Freedom vs Constraint, ^Individual vs Collective**]². Emel Mathlouthy uses these words to ask her supporters to help her produce her new album:

If you believe that a woman can be an independent creative and a free artist, please help. If you believe that labels aren't the only ones who should decide what has artistic value, and what you listen to, please come along on this journey... Music is in danger of being silenced.

While the campaign takes place online, the projects advertised on these websites are often conceived and launched in the new cafés [**^New cafés**]³ or in trendy co-working spaces situated in Cairo and Tunis. For example, *Aatik* was envisioned at *Co-gite*, a shared working environment which consists of a deluxe villa equipped with a swimming pool and garden, located in the posh area of Le Lac in Tunis [**^Gated communities/Compounds**]⁴. The place is managed by a Tunisian businessman who wants to offer young Tunisian entrepreneurs the possibility of brainstorming, as well as taking a nap or watching a movie together, on the model of American start-up companies. In Cairo, some of these co-working spaces consist of big flats where young entrepreneurs may work shoulder to shoulder with a translator or a graphic designer.

Thanks to crowdfunding, a number of projects in Egypt and Tunisia actually do get financed, among them a dystopic play entitled *First Draft*, set between a static present and a future marked by an environmental catastrophe [**^Hope = Despair / Hell (Dystopia)**]⁵; a two-week summer camp gathering more than sixty youngsters from Arab countries on a journey of learning and self-expression [**^Self-help**]⁶; the production of hundred videos on marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, health and more in both English and Arabic, accessible for free on the Internet [**^Baby milk**]⁷; the establishment of a Tunisian company named *Audiolaby* that produces free and paid audiobooks, podcasts and audio stories for children; a project for print on demand allowing emerging authors to decide the number and format of the books they want to publish without having to deal with commercial publishing companies; a movie on high-speed car accidents in Egypt; the restoration of the Rashīdī Institute for Tunisian Music (originally established in Tunis in 1924), with the aim of devoting part of the building to a co-working space and turning its physical library into a digital open access archive. Among the projects that do not make it: the creation of a 3D Tunisian TV comedy, and an e-commerce site for Egyptian textiles.

Crowdfunding is widespread, but it faces several challenges, the biggest being that e-commerce is not fully established in the Arab world. Many Tunisian and Egyptian citizens do not have access to a credit card in their home country, so fundraisers need to rely mainly on their fellow countrymen living abroad [↗**Migration**]. Inside the country, however, one can also use money transfer agencies, like Western Union, or organize group meet-ups. The women of *Aatik*, for instance, hold a number of roundtable discussions in December at *Cogito*, where they illustrate their project and invite their “followers” to donate to the project. *The Room* in Cairo publishes a video on their Facebook page to invite people to visit their venue and register as members to the association.

Related Entries

Arrays: Celebrities; Dollar crisis; Music; New Cafés; Social Media; Tricking the System ♦
Codes: Individual(ity) vs Community/Collectiv(e/ity); Young vs Settled; “The System” vs “the People” ♦
Codes collapsed: Normality = Heroism (Surviving); Hope = Despair / Hell (Dystopia)

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