Hannah Arendt has famously lamented in *On Revolution* (1963) that the revolutionary tradition of the United States was lost on the “‘revolutionary’ countries in the East” and the United States alike. The result, she argued, has “boomeranged upon the foreign policy of the United States, which begins to pay an exorbitant price for world-wide ignorance and for [American] oblivion.” In spite of the fact that Arendt worried that “Western civilization has its last chance of survival in an Atlantic community” and admitted that “American power and prestige were used and misused to support obsolete and corrupt political regimes that long since had become objects of hatred and contempt among their own citizens,” *On Revolution* has received more attention in Arab translation circles than any of her other works – including *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) which overshadowed *On Revolution* in the West and was the most discussed of her works in Arab intellectual circles.

This paper examines the two Arabic translations *On Revolution* has been accorded: Khayri Hammad’s critical translation *Ra’i fi al-thawrāt* (1964) and Attallah Wahhab’s better circulated but uncommented *Fi al-thawra* (2006). Drawing on Hammad’s distinction between ‘translator’ and ‘Arabizer’, my argument is two-fold: first, Hannah Arendt’s affirmation of the revolutionary spirit of America’s founders and her critique of the US’s straying from its ‘spirit’ is as relevant to the context of the current revolutions in the Arab world as it was to Hammad’s Nasserist context. Second, and more broadly, the approach to the western canon advocated by Hammad illuminates the possibility of contrapuntal – the term is Edward Said’s – translation; that is, to appreciate – in subversive fashion – the value of utterly Eurocentric political thought by moving away from questions of ‘applicability’ to Saidian questions of ‘elaboration’ of canonical knowledge.