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commitment and beyond

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on/of the political
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Reflections on/of the Political
in Arabic Literature since the 1940s

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in Arabic Literature since the 1940s

Edited by Friederike Pannewick and Georges Khalil
together with Yvonne Albers

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The transliteration of Arabic names has been adapted according to the IJMES transliteration system. However, some common names and notions have been left in their commonly used spelling without further indication.

Introduction:
Tracks and Traces of Literary Commitment—
On *Iltizām* as an Ongoing Intellectual Project

Yvonne Albers, Georges Khalil, Friederike Pannewick

If one day the people will to live
Then destiny must reply;
The darkness must disappear,
And bonds must break.

These are the lines of the poem "The Will to Live" ("Irādat al-ḥayāh") written in 1933 by the Tunisian poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909–1934) to which the rallying chant of the popular uprisings in the Arab world in 2011 responded: "The people want the fall of the regime/system" ("Al-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām"). Regimes indeed fell and history is evolving. The euphoria sparked by the fall of authoritarian rulers in Tunisia and Egypt that year has now evaporated. Current developments in many countries of the region seem to be heading in different directions, towards greater fragmentation, sectarianism, and violence, witnessing a resurgence of the paradigms of the old order, such as the outworn dichotomy of authoritarianism versus religious extremism. While the temptation of authoritarianism may be strong now, and prove to be so in the years ahead, aspirations for a new era of democracy, human dignity and social justice in the Middle East and North Africa persist. The popular uprisings and ongoing struggles in the region are profoundly changing the political landscape. The category of society and the political itself have resurfaced, once more attracting public attention. The struggle for a new order challenges those traditional paradigms employed to understand the politics and culture in and about the region, burgeoning a new set of questions.

'Revolution,' as both a theoretical concept and a concrete practice, has facilitated the emergence of innovative modes of critique and allowed the reconfiguring of individual subjectivities and communal solidarities. 'Revolution' as a process is related to, shaped by, and expressed in new aesthetic and political practices as well as new channels of communication. Similar to other precedents evident in transitional moments in history, the imminent question of literature's contributory role in times of social change and upheaval is once again being subjected to reevaluation, both by writers themselves as well as in scholarly debate. At the heart of this endeavor lies the question as to the impact of literature on social reality and,

prior to that, how to understand the relationship between the literary text and reality as such.[2] In recent years, the nexus of aesthetics and politics has become a vividly and hotly debated topic among artists, intellectuals, and scholars in and outside the Arab-speaking world.

Reflecting the Political

Due both to a paradigm shift in political theory (for an overview see e.g. Bedorf and Röttgers; further Bleiker; Frost) as well as diverse experimental movements in literature and the visual arts in recent decades, introduced by way of the reception of poststructuralist, post-colonial and post-Marxist theory, the political in art (and therefore literature) is no longer mainly understood as a transmitter of a certain political ideology through the artistic medium but also as a kind of critique that primarily subverts established political and cultural orders. Herein, so the argument goes, art may provide a democratic space where the idea or the state of a community can be negotiated by its members (Rancière). This sort of critique involves different forms and strategies, for instance: corroding hegemonic orders by means of revealing and aggravating internal contradictions; re-narrating history from peripheral or non-hegemonic social or generational perspectives; and deconstructing particular elements of a given order (be it linguistic, pictorial, architectural, or performative) and uncovering the hidden mechanisms of power that constructed it. Under these aesthetic premises political art is conceived as ontologically addressed 'against' a given system (that is understood as a construct built by those who are 'in power'), so that the political in the aesthetic field is often referred to today by modes of 'dissent,' 'resistance,' and 'subversion.' That this conception is not easily applicable to the historical and contemporary aesthetic field in the Middle East becomes symptomatically evident in the complex situation of post-revolutionary Egypt—from the fall of the Mubārak regime to the Muslim Brotherhood government to the deposition of Mursī by the military in summer 2013 that eventually brought al-Sīsī to power—, a situation accompanied by violent turmoil and traumatic experiences, where a clear cut differentiation between positions supporting a given state ideology and resistance to those in power is not always discernible. From late summer 2013 onwards,[3] politics has split the public, so that observers of post-revolutionary Egypt, public intellectuals, writers, and publishers alike, have controversially debated the role authors and intellectuals are to play under such circumstances.

Taking this recent historical experience as its starting point, this book is about the relationship between literature—and to a lesser extent visual and performative art[4]—, society and politics in the Arabic-speaking parts of the Middle East and North Africa. It is an attempt—by revisiting and reconsidering the relationship of the two realms of art and politics in recent history—to come to terms with changing conceptualizations of the political in Arabic literature. The volume examines historical and contemporary conceptions of *iltizām* (literary commitment)[5] and, therein, how notions of 'writing for a cause' have been shaped, rejected, or re-actualized from the 1940s until today.

Recalling Andreas Pflitsch's comment that there has never been a depoliticized period in modern Arabic literary history, one could add that this is no less the case today: "The principal spark kindling controversy was the means of this commitment; at issue was not *whether* literature should be committed to social and political causes but *how* it was to undertake this mission" ("The End of Illusions" 29, emphasis in the original).

This book thus aims to widen the perspective on both the historical and contemporary discourses about how the political in literature is and has been understood, conceptualized,

perceived, and produced. It builds upon a number of seminal research volumes on the conceptual history of Arab literary commitment in English (Badawi; Harlow; Guth, Furrer, and Bürgel; Guth and Ramsay; Di-Capua),[6] but first and foremost Verena Klemm's pioneering and in-depth study on the issue, a work that opened up new arenas of thought by analyzing in meticulous detail the intellectual debate on *iltizām* in literary circles of the Mashriq from the 1940s until the post-*naksa* (post-1967) period, when "the fervent appeals to write *adab multazim* lost their persuasive power among the critical forces of leftist literary circles" ("Different Notions" 58). The present volume may be understood as an endeavor to further develop Klemm's seminal insights, focused mainly on the period between the 1940s and 1970s, by expanding the perspective to include more recent developments in Arabic literature and the arts since the 1990s.

Leading Questions and Concerns

Among the new questions that arose from the Arab uprisings is that of newness itself. What 'new' components can we detect in contemporary forms of artistic or literary commitment? In what way do they differ from Arabic literary practices since the late 1960s, when an affinity to what scholarship has described as 'postmodern' was first identifiable in trends like the New Sensibility? Furthermore, how easily can we conceptually dissociate these 'literatures of dissent' from literary commitment during the heydays of Arab Modernism between the 1940s and the 1960s, the literary paradigm so powerfully and deeply interwoven and coeval with political ideology and the era of decolonization? Should we dismiss the latter as a co-opted sphere that followed a politics of affirmation rather than one of critical dissent? Or did the discourses of *iltizām* in the 1950s and 1960s also carry notions of dissent and resistance that are still connected to contemporary conceptions, as the scores of references today to past writers and works would seem to suggest? To what extent do the premises of contemporary literary engagement and what has been termed the "new political" in Arabic literature (El-Ariss) differ from the premises on which mid-century historical engagement was based? And again, how does this compare to the political dimension of 'postmodern' approaches since the late 1960s, in so many ways a counter-reaction to the literature of engaged realism? None of these questions are easily answered, at least not unambiguously. There are no clearly defined lines between one historical conception and the next, but always a blurry fade-in/fade-out, as some elements are transferred while others are rejected and maybe rediscovered at another time depending on the specific relationship to the zeitgeist.

This volume contributes to the study of literary commitment in the Arab-speaking world and aims—by taking a dual comparative and diachronic perspective—to create a critical framework that addresses the concept of political engagement in contemporary Arabic literary studies. This critical investigation will cover four stages in its 'circuitous' itinerary: Starting with the present day, it will look at literary practices during the 'Arab Spring,' then track back to the beginnings of literary politicization during the 1940s and 1950s, identifying its roots in terms of the history of ideas, subsequently cross the historical caesura of the late 1960s to consider competing and conflicting re-conceptualizations and rejections of literary engagement in the 1970s and 1980s, before finally returning to a more recent period, namely the 1990s through to 2011. This structure is in no way conceived as an all-explanatory tour de force through modern Arabic literary history; rather, the aim is to discern and trace some of the main ideas formulated within Arabic literature concerning its own politics and, therein, the sometimes thinner, sometimes thicker ribbon that entwines literature with social reality.

Hence, although chapters place stress on specific decades to focus on historical accumulations of ideas, the volume proposes a non-linear reading of ideas of the political in modern Arabic literary history by beginning its exploration in the present, then rereading the past, before concluding once again in the present. The value of this approach is that it offers a dual opportunity: To reconsider both our understanding of actual positions as well as our perception of allegedly outdated notions of the political in literature and how literature renders them. The controversy surrounding *iltizām* and its legacy will thus furnish a common thread throughout the volume. With each contribution focusing on its own subject, the volume reevaluates attempts at literary engagement and disengagement respectively, i.e. the claim for artistic autonomy from the 1940s to the present day on both a diachronic and synchronic level. Attempts at periodizing historical changes in literary engagement/politics are being reevaluated—from committed literature to a New Sensibility or Postmodernism, and finally to something we might temporarily call revolutionary commitment or the 'new political'—and challenged. As such, each chapter aims to approach the question of literary engagement both as a specific period in the history of modern Arabic literature and as an ongoing project in Arab intellectual history.

Origins of a Debate

What, then, are these historical accumulations that shaped and influenced shifts regarding notions of the political in modern Arabic literature?

Discourses on the moral (and herein political) cause of literature are part of Arab literature in general, as the Arabic word *adab* for literature indicates and a rich tradition confirms. When *adab* became literary—to borrow the title of an article Michael Allan wrote in 2012—the responsibility of the writer towards moral and social development was retranslated in the Arab 'project of modernity,' the *nahḍa*. Literary commitment became a crucial issue for many writers and intellectuals in the region throughout the 1940s and 1950s, decades marked by the rising impact of existentialist philosophy, socialist ideology and the paradigm of development during and after the struggle for independence of the Arab nation states. The translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's famous article "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" in this highly politicized period had a tremendous impact on the intellectual and literary scene (→ Di-Capua[7]). First translated by Taha Husayn as *iltizām*, the term gained immense prominence, and thus the idea of the politically and socially engaged author as spokesperson of nations, political parties or ideologies became the all-embracing concept in the discourse of Arabic literary criticism in the mid-twentieth century (Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement*; "Different Notions"). Contributing to the fame of this concept on the level of society, were, following Edwar al-Kharrat (Idwār al-Kharrāṭ), "[f]actors such as the social unrest, the dislocation of the class relations ensuing upon the Second World War, the growing demands of a nationalist movement […], [and] the appalling conditions under which the poor, illiterate masses laboured" (180).

The Writer as Voice of Political Doctrines and Dissent

Over the course of these years, the social-realist approach of these engaged authors fitted well with the dominant political ideologies especially prevalent in Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq. Reciprocal interplay between *al-adab al-multazim* and the ideologies of communist, Baathist and nationalist movements and parties, themselves inspired by Marxist thought, matured and dominated the literary field in the late 1940s to the 1960s. In this context, literary

commitment—in its mainstream expressions—did not necessarily mean dissent; it was also employed to cover affirmative positions vis-à-vis hegemonic discourses and leading political doctrines.[8]

An example from Egypt standing for a different model and trajectory are the artists, poets and writers associated with the *Fann wa-Ḥurriyya* (Art and Freedom) group, later renamed *Khubs wa-Ḥurriyya* (Bread and Freedom), founded in the late 1930s around the Surrealist poet Georges Henein (Jūrj Ḥunayn) and figures such as Anwar Kamil (Anwar Kāmil) or Ramsis Younan (Ramsīs Yūnān). Henein called for an "Independent Revolutionary Art," independent from what they perceived as the reactionary cultural politics of state-regulated art and the censorship of dissenting visions, both at home as well as in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The group dissolved in 1945, Henein was forced into exile, a fate shared by several artists who refused to join the chorus of support for developmentalist and authoritarian regimes. Henein and his group—like other dissident writers such as the Egyptians Wagih Ghali (Wajīh Ghālī) or Albert Cosseiry (Albīr Quṣayrī) or the Iraqi poet Sargon Boulous (Sargūn Būlus)—remained marginal figures in the public culture of the Arab world until the 1980s; since their rediscovery in the 1990s however, they have become a major intellectual reference point for writers, artists and intellectuals all over the Arab world.[9]

Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s it became unthinkable to champion a concept of literature detached from current political and social realities. A poetic self-understanding as the teacher, guardian, or even savior of the nation became implicit. But at the same time a whole series of doubts arose—expressed more or less between the lines—as to the possibility of being able to actually exert influence on society. On the one hand, literati themselves were constantly victims of censorship, political attacks, exile, poverty, war, and eviction. Many intellectuals and writers experienced exile and marginalization and thus articulated in their writings a critique or even an ambivalence toward their own literary discourse and the role of the politically committed intellectual (→ Halabi). On the other hand, as the political situation became increasingly confusing, messy, and more or less hopeless, especially after the traumatic defeat of the Arab states in the 1967 Six-Day War against Israel and the rise of the oil-based economy in the 1970s, literati—either directly employed by the cultural apparatuses of the state or funded through journals and newspapers sponsored by the oil-rich countries—increasingly became the mouthpiece for certain ideologies or regimes, leaving them caught in an economy of exploitation where they found themselves worn down between the demands of opposing forces and eventually driven to squalor.

Post-Naksa Discourses and New Sensibility

After the 1967 war and the death of the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir) in 1970, a period of disorientation and self-doubt followed, Arabic novels calling into question the idea of literature's explicitly political position and ideological partisanship (→ Khoury). Writers and literary critics struggled to describe the new prose experiments emerging in these years, which covered a diverse array of approaches, for instance the magical realism of Salim Barakat (Salīm Barakāt), Abdelrahman Munif's (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf) re-narration of history as a counter-hegemonic act (→ Mejcher-Atassi), or the fragmented narratives of an unreliable author as practiced by Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī). What connected most of these new approaches was the profound questioning of literary realism, so long prevalent in the literary field, the authors guided by a general mistrust of modes of representation and motivated by an interest in minority perspectives. Strategies of fragmentation and decon-

struction emerged, and these were often defined, while not remaining uncriticized, as a 'post-modernist' shift in modern Arabic literature. Consequently, hijacked as it were to bolster the impression of a prosperous and just future, the notion of political commitment in literature—a direct articulation of political ideas—was reviewed or rejected by quite a few Arab writers at the time (→ Pannewick; → Halabi).

The aforementioned Egyptian writer and literary critic Edwar al-Kharrat named this experimental period, definitively crystallizing after 1967, *al-ḥassāsiyya al-jadīda*, the New Sensibility (→ Guth). At its core, the literature of *al-ḥassāsiyya al-jadīda* criticized the mimetic realism of the engaged novel that "took for granted, in whatever philosophical order it was conceived, that it was possible and even desirable to portray, or reflect, that is to represent, *the* reality in literature" (al-Kharrat 187, emphasis in the original). Reflecting the work of his generation, al-Kharrat instead pleaded for a modernist literature that was not attempting to depict reality but searching for its own poetic reality, understanding the quest of writing as "a constant questioning with no pretence to ready answers" (ibid.). He furthermore traced five currents, which he subsumed under this new literary phenomenon: A tendency towards alienation and estrangement; subjective introspection; a steering towards the mythical, the popular, and cultural heritage (*turāth*); fervent imagination and exaggeration transcending the borders of external reality; and that which is probably most close to *al-adab al-multazim*, a "neo-realist" current that adheres to the idea of literature as representation of social reality but employs new writing techniques. Beside the novels of Sunallah Ibrahim or Salwa Bakr (Salwā Bakr), with the term "neo-realism" al-Kharrat was also referring to the literary experiments of engaged Palestinian writers such as Ghassan Kanafani (Ghassān Kanafānī) (who called for a resistance literature, *adab al-muqāwama*, dedicated to the Palestinian cause as the fida'i's main weapon alongside the armed struggle) or Emile Habibi (Imīl Ḥabībī) (→ Abu-Remaileh).

Beyond Commitment—New Forms and Modes of Political Intervention

In his introductory chapter to *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, Andreas Pflitsch explains that even though the notion of reality and its representability had profoundly changed—one fact that allowed Arabic literature after 1967 and 1975, respectively, to be interpreted as "postmodern"—, two elements remained constant, the need to 'write with/for a cause' and an authorial self-perception of being a voice for the oppressed. As Munif, who did not consider himself as political or engaged in the sense of *iltizām*, emphasized in an interview in 1990:

> An Arab writer is a fida'i, a resistance fighter. In countries where freedom of opinion does not exist, parties are not allowed, where a constitution probably does exist, all those who are able to express themselves are obliged to put up resistance. Their function is to enlighten the people, to make them aware of justice and injustice, as long as legal and commonly accepted political institutions are lacking. (qtd. in Pflitsch, *Gegenwelten* 152; our translation)

Pflitsch further stresses that it was not the authors' claims to be political which vanished; rather, it was the forms and modes of political intervention which changed fundamentally. It was therefore of no surprise that authors like Rashid al-Da'if (Rashīd al-Ḍaʿīf) attacked the main medium of representation, namely language, which he saw as still ballasted with the political slogans of the 1960s and 1970s (Pflitsch, "The End of Illusions" 30).

Just the same, the fida'i-rhetoric in Munif's quote shows how certain terms and images were still vivid in the imaginative vocabulary of a generation who had witnessed and acutely

felt the defeat of 1967 and, for the Lebanese, the Civil War in the 1970s and 1980s. Literature by writers who witnessed these years still seems to feel connected to these post-*naksa* paradigms; but many of the literary experiments during the 1990s and 2000s (similar to what happened in theater and the visual arts) reveal another shift concerning the relationship between literature and the political. In post-war Lebanon, the absurdity of competing (confessional) ideologies and historiographies provoked a now harsh and explicit critique of aesthetic representation and literary mimicry (→ Albers; → Lang), and what was formerly claimed to be a universal and shared reality was now completely dismissed. As the Lebanese writer al-Da'if put it, there was no reality one could describe anymore. It was not only in Lebanon that the skeptical refusal towards any "closure of representation" (Derrida 250) was radicalized and the disbelief in an unfractured rendering of reality through artistic means took hold. The literary narratives of the "generations of the 1990s" in Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia and Morocco were also characterized by the deconstruction of the 'I' as a reliable instance or omniscient force. As Sabry Hafez remarks with regards to Egypt, the narratives of the 1990s "celebrate [the] erasure [of all established and solid things]" without being "motivated by any perception of alternative possibilities, but by a strong desire to strip reality from its legitimacy and solidity" (371). Hafez goes on to say that "heroic deliverance" is perceived by these writers as "a false hope resulting from the death of ideology, the loss of conviction and failure to re-examine the emptiness of the vocabulary of daily exchange" (ibid.). According to Hafez's interpretation, it has become difficult to find an engaged impetus in these recent literary experiments: The individual's feeling of being lost "leads him to wallow in nothingness, and to be condemned to a meaningless individualism which enhances its sense of orphanhood, marginality and insignificance" (380).

Kifāya-Rhetoric and the 'New Political'

However, this reading of contemporary literature as a "novel of the closed horizon" (also Hafez) has, by now, been revised and severely criticized. Tarek El-Ariss has pointed out that dismissing these new writings as merely individualistic and self-centered, which positions them far away from the concerns of *nahḍawī udabāʾ* or the 1950s and 1960s practitioners of *iltizām*, disregards their inherently confrontational dimension. Authors like Khaled al-Khamissi (Khālid al-Khamīsī) (*Taxi*) or Rajaa Alsanea (Rajāʾ al-Ṣāniʿ) (*Girls of Riadh*) transcend the divide between writing and activism through an aesthetic of crash, collapse and infiltration, exposing sites of vulnerability and instability in the (political/social/cultural) system, the literary text itself, and in the authorial function (→ El-Ariss). Similar to contemporaneous attempts in the field of visual and performative arts, this literature also reflects the conditions to which literary production is subjected, i.e. the book market and its mechanisms and regulations. Moreover, as Christian Junge argues in his contribution to this volume, these authors also ceased merely deconstructing community representation, reintroducing it into the literary text and thereby "facilitating total criticism and provoking radical emotions" (→ Junge).

This observable comeback of a confrontational, affective literature that dares to once again deal with the idea of a possible *communitas* can no longer be tackled solely under the 'nothing-else-to-lose' mentality of a disenfranchised, solipsistic generation. But neither is the kind of 'revolutionary' engagement which drives this new literature based on an ideology 'behind' the writings—it is, rather, located in the aesthetics itself. Therefore, it is worth considering the allegedly 'new' political in these still postmodern writings—at least regarding their predilec-

tion for figures and strategies of disruption, for transgressing genre boundaries, and for cele-
brating heterogeneity—and to read their notions of engagement, community, the public, and
the relationship between text/artwork, author/artist, and social reality against equivalent con-
cepts as manifested in the literatures of *iltizām* and beyond. Furthermore, since the 1990s and
along with the increasing impact of a global art market on Middle Eastern cultural production,
visual and performative arts have gained—after the longtime hegemony of the literary in Ara-
bic culture—an important role in the search for the 'new political' and critical aesthetic prac-
tice, which allows for and demands a perspective that goes beyond the realm of the literary
(→ Toukan, → Albers).

Of Poetics and Politics: Revolution and Literary Commitment

The first section introduces the volume's prime concern by presenting recent literary works
and practices substantiating the actuality or even longevity of literary commitment. These in-
clude examples related to political activism in the course of the 'Arab Spring' as well as au-
thorial self-conceptions of the engaged intellectual as activist. Thus, these contributions show
to what extent literature has, once again, become an important tool for articulating political
ideas and practicing social critique, focusing on revolutionary Egypt. Even though the politi-
cal ideas and values transported by these literatures may differ from the ideologies of *al-adab
al-multazim* propagated from the 1940s to the 1960s, these chapters give an impression of
how the relationship between poetics and politics is redefined again and the extent to which
this is actually opening a horizon both for new fields of literary intervention and intellectual
identities. Through this, the examination of the leading question underlying this volume—i.e.
to what degree is *iltizām* not only a specific period in Arab intellectual history but an ongoing
intellectual/political program/concept—begins in the present day and reads these actual ex-
amples against their historical background in the subsequent chapters.

The first chapter by R a n d a A b o u b a k r ("The Egyptian Colloquial Poet as Popular In-
tellectual: A Differentiated Manifestation of Commitment") considers a figure that becomes
central when reflecting on the political in the arts: The intellectual. Discussing notions of
commitment in Egyptian colloquial poetry, she identifies alternative authorial self-concep-
tions of the engaged intellectual as an activist which reveal closer links to place and class than
the ideal of the committed author proposed by Sartre. Aboubakr's chapter surveys the rela-
tionship between Egyptian colloquial poetry and European literary traditions, comparing col-
loquial to *fuṣḥā* (Modern Standard Arabic) poetry.

Be it poetry in the vernacular or in *fuṣḥā*, the aspects of resistance and dissent are at the
core of current literary developments in revolutionary Egypt. An especially intriguing trend is
how politically engaged poetry from the heyday of the Egyptian oppositional movement in
the early and mid-twentieth century is reconfigured in poems after 2011. A t e f B o t r o s
("Rewriting Resistance: The Revival of Poetry of Dissent in Egypt after January 2011 (Surūr,
Najm and Dunqul)") attempts to open up a discussion on cross-linking between motifs and
forms within a tradition of dissent and resistance in modern Egyptian literature and art span-
ning more than a century. Some poems, lyrics and images from the first half of the twentieth
century reappeared and circulated widely during the revolutionary events in Egypt and the
Arab world. By focusing on three Egyptian writers from the 1960s generation, Najm, Dunqul
and Surūr, the chapter argues that these writers are not only part of the tradition of cultural re-
sistance in their own period of activity, but, in their reception and 'afterlife,' are also a part of
contemporary revolutionary Egyptian art, particularly following the January 25 uprising.

The following chapter again focuses on recent literary developments in Egypt in the wake of 2011. D i n a   H e s h m a t ("Egyptian Narratives of the 2011 Revolution: Diary as a Medium of Reconciliation with the Political") analyzes two autobiographical narratives of the first eighteen days of Tahrir, written by two novelists of the 1990s generation, namely Ahmed Zaghloul al-Shiti (Aḥmad Zaghlūl al-Shītī) and Mona Prince (Munā Brins). Heshmat argues that these two texts represent a rupture with the themes otherwise associated with writers of this generation—themes of alienation in the public sphere and distrust of political narratives. Her chapter draws a parallel between the diary-like structure of these texts and giving expression to a "self in transition," which Heshmat argues is at stake in these narratives. Both authors document a similar process of transformation—that of someone deeply ambivalent about the political to someone who participates in the events they are describing. Thus, the format of the diary and the authors' use of intertextuality provide a means through which both writers convey not only their own personal reconciliation with the political, but also the broader renewal and reinvigoration of the political through the events of the revolution.

Routes towards a Discourse: Historical Concepts of Literary Commitment

The volume's second section focuses on the career of *iltizām* in the middle of the twentieth century. The contributions here highlight the conditions facilitating an enthusiastic and heterogeneous reception of social and political commitment across the Arab world. It furthermore identifies the socio-historical conditions and circumstances that shaped the reception and proliferation of this literary concept and presents the important pioneers and their influences, reconstructing their debates around literary commitment and identifying their key opponents. Emphasis is placed on the extent to which the discourse of *iltizām* is interrelated with the premises of the *nahḍa* as, to draw on Habermas' term, an "unfinished project" of cultural, social and political modernity/modernization.

E l i a s   K h o u r y ("Beyond Commitment") rethinks the history of literary commitment in the Arab Mashriq from its heyday to its decline after the June War in 1967, tracking this development through authors and intellectuals who contributed essentially to the discourse of *iltizām* and what followed. The defeat of 1967 not only heralded the end of the nationalistic era in the Arab Mashriq. It also signaled the end of *iltizām* as a successful literary program which had promoted a compromise between contradictory schools of thought and later facilitated the transition from a populist Nasser regime towards naked dictatorship. But instead of abolishing the problematic and loaded term *iltizām* altogether, Khoury suggests conceiving the "new writings" that emerged out of the atmosphere of defeat and self-critique as a literature "beyond *iltizām*." This enables these post-1967 attempts to be read as not totally detached and disconnected from a longstanding and powerful discourse in modern Arabic literature, allowing *iltizām* to be conceived as an ongoing, historically contingent project, a project wherein literary commitment embraces a critical attitude towards the self, society, and history.

The next chapter remains within the early postcolonial period of the mid-twentieth century, as political commitment was a main issue in public debates, and shows how *iltizām*—used as an intellectual concept—served as an effective instrument for a new generation of writers, enabling them to set themselves apart from their precursors. Y o a v   D i - C a p u a ("The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and the 'Fall of the *Udabā'*'") returns to the vivid debates of the 1950s and retraces the story of how a postcolonial generation created the idea and program of *iltizām*, eclipsing their mentors, successfully marginalizing their concept of culture and thus initiating a new postcolonial phase in Arab thought. For this generation, the

intellectual example of Moscow and Paris was the leading model. Creatively translating existentialism and Socialist Realism into Arabic, they used these newly formulated ideas to promote radical cultural change. While both camps conceived of themselves as being "committed," their actual politics and concepts were quite different, highlighting the contrast between Sartrean and Marxist-Leninist categories of thought.

By shifting the focus from the Levant to North Africa, R a c h i d   O u a i s s a subsequently leads us "On the Trail of Frantz Fanon," and thus to an intellectual who like no other took up and argued the cause of self-liberation. Ouaissa presents a political thinker who, with his opus magnum *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961 just a few days before his death, is often regarded as the prime example of the committed intellectual. However, although *The Wretched of the Earth* was translated into Arabic as early as 1963, this main work and other texts by Fanon attracted hardly any attention in the Arab world. The chapter argues that this marginalization might be a consequence of Fanon's warning that the "comprador bourgeoisie" would seize control in Algeria after independence, a critical warning that certainly did not fit in with the canon desired by those in power. Ouaissa closes his considerations by posing an intriguing question: Is it thus possible to characterize Fanon as a pioneering thinker of the 'Arab Spring' or indeed can it be argued that he actually foresaw these revolts?

Refiguring *Iltizām*: Literary Commitment after 1967

The volume's third section collects critical reckonings from both immediately after the heyday of *iltizām*, namely the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as the 1980s and onwards. It presents newly emerging positions of renaming, reframing, re-conceptualizing—like *adab al-muqāwama* (literature of resistance)—and of rejecting literary commitment which in several respects took issue with *iltizām*'s intellectual legacy and its principles. Through considering exemplary works, authors, and intellectuals, this section attempts to at least partially map the emergence of conceptions of the political in literature which scholarship used to consider 'postmodern.'

The opening chapter by S t e p h a n   G u t h ("Between Commitment and Marginalization: The 'Generation of the Sixties' in the Sadat Era") is an attempt to understand the notions of commitment propagated by Egyptian writers during the Sadat (Sādāt) era of the 1970s. After sketching the emergence of the New Sensibility movement after the June War of 1967, Guth analyzes a set of texts from the Sadat era, showing how quite a few writers used postmodern techniques without necessarily abandoning the ideal of commitment.

Different variations of commitment in the 1970s and 1980s are dealt with in S o n j a M e j c h e r - A t a s s i ' s chapter "The Arabic Novel between Aesthetic Concerns and the Causes of Man: Commitment in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and ʿAbd al-Rahman Munif." Both Jabra (Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā) and Munif, highly influential intellectuals, writers and artists, chose the genre of the novel as the major means of expression, an artistic practice offering the opportunity to express at once political dissent and the hope for a better future. Despite this similarity, the chapter shows how Jabra and Munif conceived of the novel quite differently, the former foregrounding its aesthetic characteristics, the latter its documentary qualities. These quite diverging depictions point to differences between the writers in their views on the complex relationship between aesthetics and politics, which Mejcher-Atassi investigates through the role of exile and notions of homelessness.

The following chapter by Z e i n a   G.   H a l a b i ("The Day the Wandering Dreamer Became a Fida'i: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and the Fashioning of Political Commitment") traces the

multiple meanings of the concept of political commitment in the context of the altering ideological landscape of the Arab world from the 1920s to the 1970s, taking, like Mejcher-Atassi, Jabra and his novel *In Search of Walid Masoud* (1978) as an example for his highly complex understanding of *iltizām*. Halabi describes the shifting understanding of political commitment—from anti-colonial nationalistic rhetoric, to social realism, and ultimately resistance literature. Thanks to a close reading of the discursive turn that the novel itself stages, Halabi demonstrates how Jabra challenges such monolithic understandings of *iltizām* and reveals the concept's dynamic, adaptive, and pluralistic nature. Drawing on his essay "The Rebels, the Committed, and the Others" (1980), she delineates how the opposing poles of the rebellious and committed writer frame Jabra's notion of *iltizām*.

R e f q a   A b u - R e m a i l e h ("The Afterlives of *Iltizām*: Emile Habibi through a Kanafaniesque Lens of Resistance Literature") adds another important term to the reflection on/of the political in modern Arabic literature. Discussing the notion of literary resistance with reference to the two well-known Palestinian writers Emile Habibi and Ghassan Kanafani, her chapter represents a new and valuable contribution to the glossary of *iltizām* at the height of a period of revolutionary fervor and anti-colonial struggle. Once the "poets of resistance" became known to the Arab audience outside the borders of Israel they immediately attracted enormous public attention. Kanafani's studies on *adab al-muqāwama* in 1966 and 1968 presented these at the time relatively unknown authors as the shining example of true *iltizām*. Abu-Remaileh depicts how in a somewhat isolated struggle for liberation, Palestinian revolutionary culture began to emerge after 1967, and a transnational notion of *al-adab al-multazim* began to give way to a localized battle in *adab al-muqāwama.* Abu-Remaileh's contribution reads aspects of Emile Habibi's literary work, especially his short stories, through the lens of this Palestinian model of resistance literature.

Not only *adab al-muqāwama*, but also the question of literary engagement in general foregrounds the commitment of the writer in relation to his or her addressing of a reading audience. Taking Mahmoud Darwish's (Maḥmūd Darwīsh) poem "al-Qurbān" (2001) as an example, M i c h a e l   A l l a n shows how this connection might be complicated in cases when the audience in the room where the poet might recite this text is conflated with the address staged in the poem itself. In his chapter "You, the Sacrificial Reader: Poetics and Pronouns in Mahmoud Darwish's 'al-Qurbān'," Allan shifts the focus of analysis from committed writing to the poetics of reading and asks in what ways we should read, or hear, the poem to understand commitment. The question of communication becomes central: Must a poem communicate in a particular way to be committed? By shifting between poetic writing and registers of poetic reading, Allan persuasively shows how Darwish's poem is intriguingly situated at the intersection of politics and theology, aesthetics and ethics.

The next chapter "Molding the Clay: Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb's Concept of Colloquial Poetry as Art of Resistance" L e s l i e   T r a m o n t i n i by presents another highly committed poet whose name is nevertheless missing in most of the Arab anthologies and literary dictionaries. Highly appreciated among Iraqis and other Arabs, Nawwab mocks Arab rulers and attacks their politics, accusing them of failure and treachery. His poems and famous live performances have brought him immense recognition and popularity all over the Arab world and his sarcastic political criticism has made him the lyrical mouthpiece of the 'Arab Street.' Tramontini—like Aboubakr in the first section of this volume—focuses on the hierarchical gap between *fuṣḥā* and the vernacular, in order to explain why this committed writer was, despite his popularity in general society, disregarded in official literary history. As Tramontini argues, Nawwab broke the unwritten law of the use of Modern Standard Arabic in litera-

ture when composing poetry in the Iraqi vernacular, a *faux pas* in the ideologically charged heydays of Arab Nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s.

The following chapter by S i n a n A n t o o n ("Sargūn Būluṣ's Commitment") deals with another Iraqi poet who is widely recognized as one of the most important and distinctive voices of modern Arabic poetry. Carefully reading some of Boulos' poems, Antoon argues against the mainstream reception promoting the view that Boulos distanced himself from political issues and was solely concerned with matters related to form and poetic innovation. Antoon shows the extent to which Boulos' poetry is viscerally invested in, and in conversation with, political questions of immediate and crucial consequence. The chapter claims that this Iraqi writer, by believing that poetry has a responsibility, especially in times of war, to address and engage with political events and matters, can and should be read as committed poet, but one who redefines and complicates commitment in his practice.

F r i e d e r i k e P a n n e w i c k ("From the Politicization of Theatre to Individual Humanism: Towards a New Concept of Engagement in the Theater of Saadallah Wannous") focuses on a Syrian playwright who belonged to a generation of Arab intellectuals and artists whose political and artistic self-understanding was strongly molded by the Palestine conflict. Wannous' (Saʿdallāh Wannūs) initial works reveal an intense social engagement which he characterized as a "politicizing of theater." His critical rereading of Arab history was imbued from the outset with the dynamics of social and political crises and a seemingly inexorable decline. But his self-positioning as a committed artist did not remain unchanged throughout the later part of his life. From the mid-1990s onwards, Wannous bid farewell to the idea that had hitherto guided him: That the problems of the Arab world could be traced back to simple power relations in society. Thus, he eventually came to dismiss the idea of consciously simplifying representation to ignite political change and restructure power relations, turning instead to an approach geared towards generating insights into social problems. In her contribution Pannewick raises the question whether the significant aesthetic and conceptual turn in Wannous' work from the early 1990s onwards might go beyond the concerns of a specific individual artist and asks to what extent it might signify a broader intellectual shift concerning the meaning and connotation of artistic commitment in Arabic literature.

Commitment or Dissent? Contemporary Perspectives

The fourth and last section explores literary (and in two cases visual and performative) works since the 1990s and recent conceptions of artistic commitment. The contributions here rethink their subjects in distinction from and connection to former developments (discussed in section three) and, moreover, show to what extent they are connected with similar trends and debates on the political in art/literature and the politics of art/literature taking place in other parts of the world. In this section the authors try to grasp what El-Ariss has described as the "new political" in contemporary writing and reconnect their studies with the initial question introduced in section one: To what extent can the respective works be understood (or even to what extent they describe themselves) as a form of artistic commitment that is displayed for a specific cause, and how is this cause defined?

T a r i k E l - A r i s s ("Fiction of Scandal") deals with this "new writing" which is, as he states, not confined to a certain class, gender, or political line and thus could not be classified as characteristic for a homogeneous group of individuals or a certain arrangement of similar aesthetic features. El-Ariss focuses on a set of hardships Arab writers face in the age of social media, political transformations, and the growing influence of commercial aspects on

literature. He looks for definitions of this new writing provided by the authors themselves and explores how authorial functions are produced through acts of hacking, manipulation, and marketing. Taking authors such as Youssef Rakha (Yusūf Rakhā), Abdo Khal (ʿAbduh Khāl), Ahmad Alaidy (Aḥmad al-ʿĀyidī), Rajaa Alsanea, and Khaled al-Khamissi as examples, this chapter argues that the author in these new writings could be described as scandalous, sensational, and vulgar. Refuting the historical, sociological, and formalistic approaches predominant in Arabic literary studies, El-Ariss investigates instead the political dimension of sensationalism and scandal, analyzing how literature is recorded, reimagined, and reaffirmed in cases of greed, confrontation, exhibitionism, and hacking.

Scandals and sensations trigger strong emotions: Christian Junge ("On Affect and Emotion as Dissent: The *Kifāya* Rhetoric in Pre-Revolutionary Egyptian Literature") enquires into the relationship between criticism and emotion and the way critical literature affects the reader in the subsequent chapter. He discusses the rhetoric of critique in pre-revolutionary Egyptian literature, including Alaa al-Aswany's (ʿAlāʾ al-Aswānī) *The Yacoubian Building* (2002), Khaled al-Khamissi's *Taxi* (2007), Khaled Tawfiq's (Khālid Tawfīq) *Utopia* (2009) and Magdy al-Shafee's (Majdī al-Shāfiʿī) *Metro* (2008), all of which deliver a "total criticism" that is intrinsically tied to radical emotions. Junge argues that the anti-deconstructivist *kifāya*-literature forms a sharp contrast to the self-deconstructivist writing of the *riwāya jadīda*, the "new novel," that emerged in the literature of the 1990s (and later 2000s): While the latter carefully eschew and deconstruct collective representation, works of *kifāya*-rhetoric authors such as Aswany, Khamissi, Tawfiq and al-Shafee re-introduce collective representation, thereby facilitating total criticism and provoking radical emotions. Through the examination of emotions and affects as means of understanding the political and the critical in these recent writings, Junge suggests a starting point for re-reading criticism in literature not exclusively as an intellectual operation but also as an emotional endeavor.

Reflections of the political are not only discernible in public scandals, more than once linked to a certain set of emotions and affects, but also in questions regarding the human body. The body in its capacity as an icon of protest is thus the main topic in the following chapter by Charlotte Pardey, entitled "A Body of Dissenting Images: Kamāl al-Riyāḥī's Novel *Al-Ghurillā* Read as an Example of Engaged Literature from Tunisia." Her chapter focuses on a novel written between 2007 and 2011 by Tunisian author Kamal al-Riyahi, a work whose main protagonist is said to resemble a gorilla because of his posture and the darkness of his skin. The grand finale of his life, when the gorilla climbs on top of the clock tower in Central Tunis in protest against the injustices that life has thrown at him and refuses to climb back down, forms the central motif of the novel. The contribution not only analyses this body as an icon of protest but also links the novel back to more canonical pieces of *iltizām* literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Ultimately, the question addressed is whether this novel can be regarded as an example of engaged literature from a new generation in Tunisia.

The events narrated in Riyahi's novel depict a spectacular culmination of traumatic experiences caused by social, economic and emotional marginalization and ostracism. The politics and aesthetics of violence and trauma is a major issue in quite a few novels from various Arab countries. Stephan Milich ("Narrating, Metaphorizing or Performing the Unforgettable? The Politics of Trauma in Contemporary Arabic Literature") focuses on several literary texts by younger Arabic authors from Syria, Lebanon and Iraq who consciously fuse documentation and fiction in their writings when dealing with traumatic events in quite different modes. Pivotal here is the relationship between coping with past injustices and representing, narrating and sorting deep-seated and painful experiences. These authors counter the de-

struction of meaning with a new language that, while responding to recent Arab history and the present day situation, creates not just a literary but also a political counter model. With this analysis Milich shows how writing about trauma, while coming close to eyewitness testimonies and reports, not only documents crimes and injustices and brings them to public attention, but moreover extends and renegotiates the boundaries and forms of the unspeakable.

Be it a traumatic experience, a romantic encounter, religious belief, or a criminal deed: The choice authors make regarding the subject of their literary works may be revelatory regarding one's position in their respective communities as well as on the international book market. Taking post-war Lebanese literature as an example, F e l i x L a n g ("Redeemed from Politics: Notions of Literary Legitimacy in the Lebanese Literary Field") investigates the question of the positionality of the author. Comparing different notions of what constitutes 'real' literature in the authors' eyes, he argues that the relation of literature and the author to politics and the political is a central parameter in all definitions of literature across the whole literary spectrum. As authors eschew singular, unitary models for literary 'best practice' and freely move in between the two extremes of a pure art and a social-realist understanding of literature, politics and the political take on the character of a point of reference in relation to which literary value is determined.

Asking today about the political 'intention' of an artwork (or a literary text) inevitably leads to a crucial point: How can art put forward at all abstract ideas such as justice, freedom, and humanity without falling into the trap of formulating closed concepts that serve power politics? In her chapter Y v o n n e A l b e r s ("The Empty Chair: On the Politics of Spectatorial Situatedness in the Performances of Rabih Mroué") reflects on this question by taking a closer look at the experimental work of Lebanese actor, director and visual artist Rabih Mroué (Rabīʿ Mrūwah). Although his theater clearly refuses to 'bring truth to the masses,' his performances re-actualize one of the core questions of literary engagement broached by Sartre in his writings on literature: "To whom does one write?" Mroué reflects on the specific role of the spectator in the moment of theater and in the context of an increasingly globalized art world. He thus provokes the question in how far it is still legitimate to assess artistic commitment on the basis of the artwork's references to a specific national context, and thus in relation to a specific local audience as the exclusive group to which the work of art is purportedly addressed. How this approach strikes a blow for an alternative artistic commitment is shown in a detailed consideration of his performance *Looking for a Missing Employee* (2003).

The different ways of how *iltizām* and historically related notions of commitment to a cause are revisited in Arab visual arts is also the main concern in the volume's last chapter. H a n a n T o u k a n ("Whatever Happened to *Iltizām*? Words in Arab Art after the Cold War") scrutinizes how notions of the political are visualized, narrated, and adapted in contemporary artistic practice from the Middle East, and asks whether these attempts need to be considered also as a response to a longtime hegemony of the literary in Arabic culture and the heritage of *iltizām*. Taking as her point of departure the structural and global dynamics at play in Arab contemporary cultural production since the period of the 1990s, especially after the events of 9/11 and the Second Gulf War, as well as the revolutionary processes that began to unfold in December 2010, Toukan reflects on how we are to make sense of the ongoing commitment of cultural producers in the Arab region, specifically visual artists, to "speak truth to power." Her contribution shows how processes producing artistic notions of commitment/dissent are dependent first and foremost on prevalent discourses of the 'political' in art, basically perpetuated by a global art market and international funding institutions, which

structure the ways of how a work of art is conceived today as being 'political' in a specifically defined sense.

The contributions to this book revisit the notion of commitment in Arabic literature and, through a few selected examples, also in the performative and visual arts since the 1940s. The authors offer a variety of insights into the relationships between literature/art, society, and politics in the Arab world, critically reexamining current and historical notions of the political and the legacy of *iltizām* in its dual capacity as a conceptual term and agenda. They also shed light on some of the changes in the Arab literary and cultural field taking place since the 1990s, changes which very probably laid out the routes for a new revolutionary commitment that has burgeoned since 2011. We believe that the chapters assembled in this volume reveal a profound transformation of the literary and intellectual field, a transformation that entails a transgression of those previous forms and practices of engaged/committed literature which in the past were too often limited by ideological preoccupations. Something 'new' seems to have been evolving in the literatures of the Arab-speaking Middle East since the 1990s, a 'newness' that finds its expression in a variety of phenomena, for instance the 'new reading,' i.e. a significant growth of the literary field evident in the large number of novels published year after year—often by young authors—, novels written in a new language creatively mixing *fuṣḥā* and the colloquial, articulating new ways of relating individual subjectivities to life in the city, or innovatively rereading history (and pluralizing it) to move beyond the suffocating confines of previously dominant ideologies.

Several aspects of this literary trend, which goes beyond a notion of *iltizām* as it was propagated in the highly politicized and dogmatic period of early post-colonialism, are documented in this volume. As this book shows, what is at stake here and defines the notion of being committed to a cause is the respective notion of the political. Thus, the way commitment is framed by an artist or writer in a particular historical period is basically reliant on how the political is conceived and rendered in aesthetic practice itself. Reflecting on the political as much as looking for reflections of the political in Arabic literature, which is the main task of this book, will therefore act as our guide in the effort to track the reconfigurations of literary commitment since the 1940s.

It is thus our hope that the studies collected here broaden and enrich our understanding of literary commitment: Not solely as a (past) period in Arabic literary history but as a living idea, one that is forever shifting focus as it questions the roles literature/art and the author/artist can play in and for a society. Having said this, one could argue that rather than being entirely 'new,' these current literary trends going beyond the early understanding and practice of *iltizām* are rooted in a longer historical process and an expression of a "will to live/irādat al-ḥayāh." Maybe this is a source of hope that the "darkness" evoked by al-Shābbī's poem, quoted above, will eventually disappear some day.

Notes

1   The translation, slightly revised, is by R. Marston Speight (185). Speight, R. Marston. "A Modern Tunisian Poet: Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909–1934)." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4.2 (1973): 178–89. Print.

2   These conceptual questions are dealt with in the research group *Figures of Thought | Turning Points. Cultural Practices and Social Change in the Arab World* based at Marburg University (Germany). Cf. *Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies*. 26 June 2015. Web. 18 July 2015. <http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/research/turning-points>.

3   Cf. the public statement, signed by more than 150 leading Egyptian authors and publishers of different genera-
     tions, all known for their active support of the 25 January Revolution, among them Sunallah Ibrahim
     (Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm), Bahaa Taher (Bahāʾ Ṭāhir), Miral al-Tahawi (Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī), Hamdi al-Gazzar (Ḥamdī
     al-Jazzār), and Yassir Abdallatif (Yāsir ʿAbd al-Laṭīf), issued on Facebook on 5 August 2013 (Elkersh, Saad.
     "Muthaqqafūn yuṭālibūn bi-iʿtibār jamāʿat al-ikhwān munaẓẓama irhābiyya…bayān maftūḥ." *Facebook*.
     5 Aug. 2013. Web. 18 July 2015.); a part is translated in Colla, Elliot. "Revolution on Ice." *Jadaliyya*. 6 Jan.
     2014. Web. 18 July 2015; cf. further the interview with Sunallah Ibrahim: Lindsey, Ursula. "A Voice of Dis-
     sent Joins the Nationalist Chorus: Sonallah Ibrahim Speaks About the Army, Egypt's 'War on Terrorism,' and
     the People." *Mada Masr*. 6 Oct. 2013. Web. 18 July 2015; Jaquemond, Richard. "Il y a une tradition d'osmose
     entre l'Etat et l'intelligentsia égyptienne." Interview by Christophe Ayad. *Monde Culture et Idées* 17 Oct.
     2013. Web. 18 July 2015.
4   The main focus is on (re-)configurations of the concept of commitment in Arabic literature. Due to quite a few
     similar aspects and developments in the field of visual and performative arts, we included two articles (Albers;
     Toukan) reflecting on how notions of commitment are revised in contemporary artistic practice.
5   This Arabic term, first introduced by Egyptian critic Taha Husayn (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) in his literary journal *al-
     Kātib al-Maṣrī*, is a direct adaption and translation of the idea of "littérature engagée" coined by Jean-Paul
     Sartre in a series of essays in *Les Temps Modernes* (February–July 1945) that were published a short time later
     by Gallimard under the title *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948). Cf. Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement*;
     "Different Notions."
6   Tarek El-Ariss' recently published monograph *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Politi-
     cal* (2013) has been another crucial source of inspiration for the conception of this volume. It examines the
     creation of modern subjectivities through and within Arabic literature and conducts a conclusive and revealing
     analysis of how former notions of the relation between the literary and the political have changed, persisted,
     and been re-actualized down to the present day, although not dealing with the development of literary en-
     gagement from a historical perspective in any detail.
7   This sign indicates chapters in this volume.
8   Cf. Bardawil, Fadi A. "The Inward Turn and Its Vicissitudes: Culture, Society, and Politics in Post-1967 Arab
     Leftist Critiques." *Local Politics and Contemporary Transformations in the Arab World: Governance Beyond
     the Center*. Ed. Malika Bouziane, Cilja Harders, and Anja Hoffmann. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2013.
     91–109. Print; Jaquemond, Richard. *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*.
     Trans. David Tresilian. Cairo: American U in Cairo P, 2008. Print.
9   In Egypt, the "Art and Freedom Group" was rediscovered and celebrated in the early 1990s. See for example
     the special edition of the independent literary journal *al-Kitāba al-Ukhrā*, *Al-kitāb al-thālith* (Dec. 1992).

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Part 1

Of Poetics and Politics:
Revolution and Literary Commitment

The Egyptian Colloquial Poet as Popular Intellectual: A Differentiated Manifestation of Commitment

Randa Aboubakr

There have been various representations of the committed writer in Arabic literature since the 1950s; existing side-by-side, the most discussed could be said to be the ideal of the committed author proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre in his 1947 essay "What is Writing?". Sartre's conceptualization of intellectual commitment was introduced into Arabic through the translation of existentialist philosophy during the 1940s, which directed considerable attention to the writings of Sartre and Albert Camus. In the same year of its publication in France, Taha Hussein (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, 1889–1973), a prominent Egyptian intellectual in his own right and holder of a doctorate in Arabic poetry from the Sorbonne, translated parts of Sartre's "What is Writing?", rendering the term 'engagement' as *iltizām*. This model of commitment, with its emphasis on erudition, and the self-proclaimed role of the intellectual as the bearer of enlightenment and instigator of change as well as guide and redeemer of society (Sartre 7–16), soon became the dominant model, with expected variations, and could be said to have been represented by mainly prose writers throughout the Arab region, from Taha Hussein to ʿAbdul Rahman Munif (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, 1933–2004), and from Bahāʾ Taher (Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, b. 1935) to Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī, b. 1948).

In distinction from this dominant model, Egyptian colloquial poets, even as early as the 1950s, have contributed another representation of the intellectual, one more oriented on action and more closely linked to place and class than his/her more canonical counterpart. In contrast to both elite and dominant cultural production, the cultural output of this type of intellectual has been more strongly connected to modes of popular expression existing on the margins of the more prevalent literary and cultural discourse in Egypt. In this respect, this essay begins with an exposition of some of the major tenets discernible in the dominant conceptualizations of intellectual engagement adopted in the Arab region since the 1950s, focusing not just on Sartre but also Edward Said. We shall then discuss less canonical conceptualizations of committed intellectualism which, emerging parallel to their more esteemed mainstream counterparts, for the most part were informed by Marxist-Gramscian thought. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's views regarding the sociology of the intellectual, the essay shall then proceed to survey some of the prominent representatives of this latter type of the intellectual in the field of colloquial poetry in Egypt from the 1950s onwards. For this purpose, we need to survey the relationship between Egyptian colloquial poetry and European literary traditions (primarily Modernism and Postmodernism) and locate Egyptian colloquial poetry in relation to poetry written in the more standard and official variety of Arabic, particularly in terms of legitimation and authority. Finally, we shall consider the more recent cultural and literary context in Egypt (i.e. after the January 2011 uprising and throughout the past few years), trying to outline how the particular ideal of commitment espoused by Egyptian colloquial poets is now becoming the more prevalent one, with these popular intellectuals moving more towards action-oriented commitment and street campaigning. To conclude, the question is posed as to whether in present-day 'revolutionary' Egypt, the author-intellectual is no longer (alone) at the forefront of the intellectual strug-

gle, but is sharing this space with emerging voices of campaigning-intellectuals who, though still writers, use the street rather than writing as their platform.

What Could Have Gone Wrong with the Canonical Model of the Arab Intellectual?

It is widely acknowledged by Arab and Euro-American scholars of Arabic literature and thought that commitment (*iltizām*) in Arab thought, art, and literature, in particularly as the concept evolved during the 1940s–1960s, was closely linked to French existentialism and its adaptations in Arab thought (Guth, Furrer and Bürgel xii; Klemm). The model of the committed intellectual here is primarily that of a prose writer, who uses words to effect change in the world: "M. Jourdan made prose to ask for his slippers, and Hitler to declare war on Poland. The writer is a *speaker*; he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates" (Sartre 19–20) (original emphasis). Although there were obvious varieties, one of the broad characterizations was that of the intellectual as a man of letters and more specifically a writer of prose fiction. In his *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* (2008), Richard Jacquemond maintains that the role of the intellectual, even in post-independence Egypt, has followed from the nineteenth century's 'Renaissance' (*nahḍa*) project, which perceived of the role of the intellectual as one to "raise consciousness and to educate taste. The writer's relationship with the public is therefore not so much one of producer to consumer as of teacher to pupil" (39). This, argues Jacquemond, creates a cultural field marked by "hierarchy" rather than "difference […] 'the masses' still being perceived as having an irredeemable minority status, in the legal sense of that term (that is, as minors)" (ibid.). The intellectual is a self-proclaimed prophet whose mission is to point out the path of future 'salvation' to the aspiring 'masses'—a role evidently not peculiar to the Arab region.[1] Though Jacquemond also speaks of poet-intellectuals, they remain within the confines of the prevailing image of the Arab intellectual, i.e. a published writer belonging to the petit bourgeoisie. The conceptualization of a committed writer à la Sartre involves the concept of dissent, which in turn reflects a sense of moral responsibility and the role of the intellectual as redeemer of his/her society (Guth, Furrer and Bürgel xii). This current of *iltizām*, which gathered momentum during the 1950s and 1960s (mainly the first two decades of the postcolonial period in Arab history), upheld the model of dissent in the face of the remnants of imperialist domination in the newly-liberated states, as well as against the forces of fascism, or at least defunct states in the early postcolonial period (xi).

This generation of committed intellectuals also actively engaged European intellectual traditions, and thus naturally continued an earlier 'modernizing' project dating back to the second half of the nineteenth century, a project that continues to be problematic down to the present day and may be considered as having demanded an unprecedented degree of energy and debate. This project relied heavily on translation[2] and literary emulation in an attempt to achieve a seemingly urgently desired 'synthesis' between tradition and a highly elusive concept of 'modernity.'[3] This can readily be gleaned from, for instance, the fascination with, and emulation of, movements in European thought and literature such as Romanticism during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, and later with existential philosophy, Marxism, modernist and symbolist poetry, as well as the social realist novel, particularly those from England, France and the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1950s and 1960s, being the early decades of decolonization in the Arab re-

gion, therefore saw the emergence of an intellectual who champions the cause and values of decolonization and anti-imperialism, while drawing on those very sites of colonial and imperial domination for inspiration. Most of the intellectuals emerging at that time can also be seen to have been the product of colonial education, which as Anthony Arnove in the course of examining the sociology of sub-Saharan African writers maintains, helps create a class of persons committed to decolonizing causes, yet inevitably fascinated by the culture of the ex-colonizer, and still belonging there in taste, opinion and intellect (280). This paradoxical state of affairs leaves ample space for astonishment at the conceptual ambiguities surrounding the whole intellectual project of the 1950s and 1960s, which, as pointed out earlier, continued to have a lasting hold on Arab thought, as well as at the cult of intellectualism in general.[4]

Closely linked to the ambiguous status of 1950s and 1960s intellectuals in the Arab region vis-à-vis European cultural traditions is the question of this generation's precarious and ambiguous relations to nodes of authority in post-independence settings. The newly emerging 'nationalist' and developmentalist regimes in several Arab countries, mostly led by the military, devised a strand of nationalism whereby allegiance to the people meant allegiance to the state. The nationalizing project in most postcolonial Arab countries also soon moved from the state seizing the wealth and assets from the pro-colonial lords and putting them in the service of national projects, to the state nationalizing the very field of knowledge production and exchange, which meant the subjugation of cultural institutions under the grip of the often powerful centralized state. As Soha Abdel-Kader remarks, the early post-1952 military regime in Egypt soon created the Ministry of National Guidance, with the purpose of directing the media towards adopting the ideology of the emerging state, as well as guaranteeing the state control of media discourse (228). A considerable number of Arab intellectuals from that period then became part of state cultural institutions, either because they were sincere believers in the nationalist rhetoric of education and development, or because that very 'nationalization' of cultural projects was seemingly the only viable state of affairs available to them in the new setting. Some of those intellectuals also sought a "reformulation of their orientations" as a means to avoid confrontation with oppressive postcolonial regimes which targeted remnants of colonialism, Zionist occupation, or, a little later, reactionary Islamist groups (Abū al-Najā 2).[5] Though this might not have directly prevented them from carrying out their intellectual programs, it evidently put the intellectuals of this generation in the position of an oppressed elite, which as Arnove postulates, allies the writer-intellectual to various state apparatuses (278). Indeed, not a small number of Arab intellectuals from the 1950s until now were active in state (cultural) institutions during the post-independence era, either holding political posts (such as novelist Yusuf al-Sibaʿi [Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī], who was Minister of Culture from 1973 till his death in 1987), or as key figures in state-sponsored cultural institutions (such as Salah ʿAbdul-Sabur [Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr], who was Egypt's cultural counselor in India between 1977–78, and head of the National Publishing Organization from 1979 and until his death in 1981). These official-intellectuals often acted as arbiters of taste and strongly contributed to shaping not only the intellectual climate, but also prevalent tastes in literary and artistic production. This position of gatekeeper soon became the prerogative of the established intellectual, entrusted with the formulation and protection of the accepted cultural canon. Taha Hussein and Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, 1889–1964), for instance, were staunch opponents of the use of the Egyptian colloquial dialect (*ʿāmmiyya*) in poetic and prose literary production during the 1940s and 1950s, claiming that it was backward, inferior and indeed vulgar vis-à-vis the standard official variety (*fuṣḥā*).[6]

This very stratification within the literary field points to a problematic relationship, one existing not only among intellectuals but also between intellectuals and their public. Whether with their strong affiliation to European intellectual traditions or their collaboration with some strand of state-run institution, these intellectuals gradually become canonized as 'the norm' and become implicated in nationalist projects in their capacity as educationalists, journalists, politicians, strategic planners, or indeed 'moral reference points,' thereby implicitly turning into representations of state hegemony. Through the link with either state hegemony or non-indigenous models, the intellectual-writer also emerged as an entrepreneur largely dependent on cultural capital and seeking a place for him/herself in domestic and regional literary fields, or more recently, in a globalized cultural-literary field, where the demands to produce art sanctioned by dominant taste and the demands to adopt anti-hegemonic stances often clashed, producing interesting synthesized positions. For this reason, the intellectual, especially in postcolonial settings, has become conceptually integrated into a field of cultural production informed by capitalism, and later by global capitalism, and therefore become part of a dominant class involved in negotiations within that field (Arnove 279). This approach to Third World/postcolonial intellectuals is also shared by E. San Juan, who investigates the position of the 'Third World' intellectual, more specifically the 'exiled' postcolonial intellectual, from the standpoint of the centrality of capital in the modern world, which saw the Saidian intellectual striving to find a niche for him/herself in a national and international market hospitable to the advent of that 'new' formation of the intellectual (*Racism* 13).

This situation, clearly not unique to the Arab region, has contributed to the creation of a form of intellectual elitism and the establishment of the dominant/canonical conception of the intellectual as an outsider whose relationship to those s/he 'addresses' is centered around the reified medium of writing, whereby the writing itself is supported by and appears in state-sponsored media (mainly journalism) or publishing institutions in the highly centralized new postcolonial states. This type of intellectual is strongly reminiscent of Edward Said's conceptualizations of the intellectual expounded in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1996): primarily an academic, trained in a particular discipline, and able to relate that discipline to public concerns (3). In addition to his/her position as an academic and possessor of specialized knowledge, the reification of this intellectual also stems from his/her self-proclaimed position as rare, bookish, exilic, and critically detached, which Said, with recourse to Theodor W. Adorno, formulates as marked by a writing style representing "the intellectual's consciousness as unable to be at rest anywhere" and consciously acting so as "*not* to be understood easily" (57) (original emphasis). This also means that even though s/he might not be completely detached from the present, the intellectual does not strive to have an immediate effect on the world, but only hopes "that someday, somewhere, someone will read what he wrote exactly as he wrote it" (ibid.). For both Sartre and Said, the relegation of the intellectual to the reified space of writing not only means that s/he is detached and hence not easily understood, but also that their mission to decenter hegemonic power is focused on 'writing' (which Said extends into speaking) the truth to the power in question (Said 77) rather than being engaged head-on in 'physical' confrontations with power on the ground. In spite of the fact that many of the aforementioned Arab intellectuals were persecuted and imprisoned because they dared to challenge absolute power, their strand of committed intellectualism remained, with very few exceptions, restricted to the field of writing and intellectual debate and thus removed from what San Juan terms "earth-oriented" intellectualism (*Hegemony* 10).[7]

It might be of interest in the course of examining the dominant conceptualizations of the Arab intellectual in relation to Sartrean/Saidian models to also point out how both models were, to varying degrees, informed by liberal-pluralist ideals and were consequently considerably removed from the mundane struggles of everyday lives on the margins of society. The stress placed on writing/speaking indeed constituted for both an alternative to acting. "The word is a certain particular moment of action," declared Sartre, "and has no meaning outside of it […] To speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence" (21–22). The writer-intellectual is endowed with the guiding capacity to name things for others so they might become aware of them. His function is "to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say he is innocent of what it's all about" (24). Said, too, perceives the intellectual as someone critically detached and indeed not troubled by venturing into the public sphere. Through the story he tells of his Iranian intellectual friend's turbulent engagement with the Khomeini regime, Said delivers an implicit condemnation not only of those intellectuals who venture into allying officially with certain regimes, but also of the contemporary intellectual whose interest in the 'public sphere' is not merely theoretical or academic but also involves direct participation (103–4). The intellectual who emerges out of Said's formulations is one who remains critically detached, not only by virtue of refusing to publically ally with a certain regime and act as its 'ambassador,' but also by refraining from serving "an idea as it is embodied in actual political processes, personalities, jobs" (105). Independence of mind, according to Said, necessitates that the intellectual adopts a "discreet—but no less serious and involved—way of joining up without suffering the pain of later betrayal and disillusionment" (ibid.).

Whereas, with varying degrees of resemblance, intellectuals in the Arab region from the 1950s were, in more ways than one, representatives of this kind of intellectualism, they remained, in spite of the ideal of "outsiderhood" (Said 107), staunch advocates of the causes of justice, freedom, and enlightenment. In Egypt for example, they mostly steered away from direct political activism (Qandīl qtd. in Abū al-Najā 2), and were thus—as it were— there and not there in the everyday struggle of the common people. This relative absence not only resulted from the fact that they were not involved in party politics or trade union movements, but also because they used 'writing' as the primary vehicle of communicating with their audience in a country that has not witnessed an illiteracy rate above 56% throughout its history (until the year 2000) (UNESCO, *World Illiteracy at Mid-Century* 32; UNESCO, *Adult and Youth Literacy* 13). This has limited the range of audiences for such intellectuals and confined their intellectual impact to a limited social strata. With the decline of reading habits among Egyptians and book sales plummeting, a trend that emerged at the beginning of the 1980s and has continued into the twenty-first century, the intellectual and moral reach of the dominant/canonical conceptualizations of the intellectuals remained circumscribed to specific literati circles. This is a reflection of what Sartre maintains while commenting on the vocation of the writer-intellectual:

> [T]he engaged writer can be mediocre; he can even be conscious of being so; but as one cannot write without the intention of succeeding perfectly, the modesty with which he envisages his work should not divert him from constructing it *as if* it were to have the greatest celebrity. He should never say to himself "Bah! I'll be lucky if I have three thousand readers, but rather," "What would happen if everybody read what I wrote?" (23) (original emphasis)

The engaged writer's success is treated as commensurate with the range of his readership, which in capital-dominated settings all over the world cannot be separated from sales fig-

ures. The dynamics of position-taking in an emerging literary field, which Bourdieu high-
lights (*The Field of Cultural Production* 37), established such writers as "a dominated fac-
tion of the dominant class," (qtd. in Arnove 288–89), i.e. they are dominant by virtue of
their possession of, and consequent power over, cultural capital, and yet they are dominated
"in their relations with those who hold political and economic power" (qtd. in Arnove 289),
a situation accounting for the precariousness of their positions vis-à-vis political and social
issues in their societies.

Alternative Formations of the Intellectual

The Sartrean/Saidian conceptualization of the intellectual is, as is to be expected, by no
means the only viable path of commitment, even within a highly reified intellectual and cul-
tural field like that of Egypt from the late nineteenth century onwards. Most investigations
into the nature of commitment in Arabic literature, and the role of the intellectual in Arab
thought, have stressed the varied representations of the intellectual, even within a larger and
more stable conception (Klemm 51–53). Being circumscribed by the general framework
and sociological profile discussed above, intellectuals have engaged in public discourse, so-
cial movements, and specific political issues in various ways. Bourdieu has significantly
contributed to examining the sociology of intellectuals and introduced illuminating insights
into the mechanisms of power involved in the formation and legitimation of intellectuals.
Adopting a sociological perspective informed by Bourdieu, Arnove has examined the atti-
tude of sub-Saharan African writers towards writing literature in English instead of in an
indigenous tongue, pointing out that the question cannot be adequately discussed "without
considering the position of the writer taking a stand on this issue within the restricted field
of literary production, the general field of symbolic capital, the structure of classes, and the
field of 'social space' generally" (278). Considering Ngugi wa Thiong'o's and Chinua
Achebe's differentiated stances as intellectuals who are part of the 'elite,' Arnove shows
how the educational background of the postcolonial intellectual as well as his/her class af-
filiations and position as writer distance him/her from the larger concerns of the general
population (286–87). Other conceptualizations are more conscious of the need for a
stronger link between the intellectuals and the general public, and this is the thrust of the
thought of Antonio Gramsci, and indeed of the Marxist-Gramsican tradition as a whole. In-
stead of stressing the elitism, detachment and rarity of the intellectual, underlining Sar-
trean/Saidian conceptualizations, here the emphasis is placed on the role of the intellectual
as a "social actor with a special praxical investment in ways and forms of knowing" (Boyer
and Lomnitz 105). Gramsci's conceptualization of the (organic) intellectual needed in
1930s Italy is in turn informed by his views of the contemporaneous Italian intellectual: he
sees them as having failed to truly connect with any "popular or national political move-
ments from below," a result of tendencies towards abstraction and bookishness, which
themselves are the product of these intellectuals' ties to a "caste tradition" of similar intel-
lectuals far removed from people's everyday lives (367).[8] The role of Gramsci's (organic)
intellectual as winner of hegemony and fashioner of ideologies which San Juan sees as es-
sential to the mission of mobilizing cultural products in the service of undermining state
hegemony and economic exploitation (*Hegemony* 49), is inseparable however from the in-
tellectual's very proletarian affiliations and the project of gaining hegemony from a defunct
bourgeoisie (Gramsci 309), thereby restricting such a variety of intellectualism to the con-

text of 1930s Italy. Viewing this variety of intellectual within the context of Third World postcolonial settings, San Juan sees it as not necessarily part of a new class seeking hegemony, but one which allies with the "everyday struggles of peasants, women, workers, indigenes, and the middle strata" (*Racism* 13). This kind of intellectual commitment is "earth-oriented"[9] and primarily focused on the specificities of a national context; its cultural production may include empirical data about conditions of the everyday life of the subaltern in the so-called Third World (*Hegemony* 7–10). This view of the intellectual is informed by San Juan's vocal attack on what he terms mainstream (postcolonial) cultural studies fetishization of the subaltern within a national (official) discourse (*Reading the West* 111), which cannot be adequately assessed without recourse to its alliance with the ideological state apparatus and global capitalism (*Racism* 208).

This takes us back to Bourdieu and assessments of the place of the (postcolonial) intellectual in the literary field. At the same time when alliance with the state gains the intellectual legitimacy in an emerging post-independence literary/cultural field, it also instates him/her as representative of state hegemony and perpetrator of the status quo. An important distinction made here is between the intellectual promoting diversity as a "condition of human existence" and understanding it as "the effect of an enunciation of difference," which tacitly legitimates the asymmetry of power (Scott 14). Echoes of Raymond Williams are unmistakable here. The modern-day 'Third World' intellectual embraces liberal humanist values which directly implicate him/her in the politics of global capitalism, and therefore leads to a tacit acceptance of an uneven distribution of power, rather than a radical questioning of, and a direct antagonism towards these ("Culture is Ordinary" 92–100). Although this state of affairs might seem to be slightly removed from the conditions within which the Arab intellectual of the 1950s–1970s was writing, the need to connect with a global audience and gain universal acknowledgment (conducive to legitimacy) can still be seen to have influenced the latter's intellectual and cultural project. Ever since the onset of the so-called Renaissance (*nahḍa*) project in the Arab region, and throughout most of the nineteenth century, accepting (and being accepted by) 'advanced' Western standards of modernity seemed to have constituted a condition for the emergence of mainstream intellectual discourses. In this scheme, and against the background of the intellectual being a maintainer of power hierarchies, his/her role remains, at the core, one of the dissemination of culture in society rather than one of democratization (Arnove 287). As a result of how during the past two decades, and more noticeably after 9/11/2001, global (i.e. Euro-American) book markets have become increasingly interested in writings by Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern authors, the field of translation has expanded widely. Here writer-intellectuals find themselves caught up in a position of competition, where international publishing is a strong criterion for judging a writer's excellence. In the absence of a confident indigenous literary tradition—such as magic realism in Latin America—literary production aiming at 'internationalization,' and hence added cultural capital, ends up with a flimsier connection to specific local political issues.

Egyptian Colloquial (*ʿāmmiyya*) Poetry and the Literary Field in Egypt

Existing side-by-side with the Sartrean variety, this differentiated and less prevalent variety of committed intellectualism manifested itself in the field of Arab thought/literature from the 1950s/1960s and beyond in Egyptian poets writing in *ʿāmmiyya*. Because the *ʿāmmiyya* variety of Arabic in Egypt has traditionally been looked down upon by leading literary fig-

ures, considered to be the less acceptable idiom for literary writing (Khamīs 7–13), it has often been relegated to a lesser status in the literary field. However, by virtue of the very use of *ʿāmmiyya* in poetry, and the fact that one of the prominent features of this kind of poetry is its orality, in tandem with the mobile popular nature of its performance, *ʿāmmiyya* poetry has enjoyed far closer ties to the everyday lives of ordinary people than other literary production using Modern Standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) or disseminated in print. The 'performative' aspect of this poetry means that it communicates with a large audience, while, more than its counterpart in *fuṣḥā*, it is also implicated with various forms of popular, everyday cultural production such as its affiliation with popular (satirical) journalism, for instance the journalistic writings of Yaʿqub Sannuʿ (Yaʿqūb Ṣannūʿ, 1839–1912) and ʿAbdullah al-Nadim (ʿAbdallāh al-Nadīm, 1854–1896), and its strong link to the genre of song writing and lyrics and popular theatrical performance.[10] Such aspects lend colloquial poetry a more popular/everyday character and contribute to distinguishing it from other literary production produced in *fuṣḥā*.

   Āmmiyya poetry in Egypt has its distinctive literary characteristics and social dimensions as well as a long history during which it flourished and attracted a wide audience. Unlike poetry written in *fuṣḥā*, Egyptian colloquial poetry has always maintained a close connection with the lives of ordinary people, a result of its preoccupation with overtly social and political themes and championing the cause of the oppressed and the underprivileged. Thus, it has acted as a reflection of the social struggle engaging a whole society. In addition to sustaining strong ties with indigenous literary traditions such as the *zajal* and the *mawwāl*, this kind of poetry lends itself more easily to public performances and musical treatment. The colloquial dialect as well as *ʿāmmiyya* poetry have been part of the scene of literary production in Egypt for centuries.[11]

The Egyptian *ʿĀmmiyya* Poet and Commitment

Succeeding the generation of colloquial poets and journalists of the ʿUrabi uprising (1882), a generation of iconic poets of the common tongue followed who can be said to have shaped the contemporary character of colloquial poetry in Egypt, most notably Bayram al-Tunsi (Bayram al-Tūnsī, 1893–1961) and Badiʿ Khairi (Badīʿ Khayrī, 1893–1966). Conscious of their roles in society, they introduced what al-Tunsi termed *adab al-isʿāf* or 'the literature of rescue' (Radwan 28), which meant that the poet conceived himself as entrusted with a mission to treat the ailments of society and aid those reaching out for help.

   In post-1952 Egypt this self-professed socio-political mission faced the challenge of the state's constant attempts to co-opt major figures of this strand of poetry, seeking to incorporate them into state cultural institutions.[12] This was not an easy task since some of these figures maintained an equivocal relationship to the central state. For example, Fuʾad Haddad (Fuʾād Ḥaddād, 1927–85) and ʿAbdulrahman al-Abnudi (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Abnūdī, 1938–2015), though staunch supporters of Nasser's socialist and pan-Arabist projects, were repeatedly imprisoned under Nasser for speaking out about corruption, injustice and oppression.

   Fuʾad Haddad, one of the founding fathers of contemporary *ʿāmmiyya* poetry in Egypt, is representative of a subversive discourse that sought to deconstruct the dogma and uniformity in both public morals and poetic sentiments. In the 1950s Haddad came up with the character of *al-misaḥḥarātī* or "the wake-up caller," who walks the streets and alleys of Egypt during the fasting month of Ramadan to wake people up in time to eat the pre-dawn

meal, enabling them to fast for the day that follows. The traditional figure of the wake-up caller is a friendly neighbour who performs this 'service' for the community free of charge. In adopting the figure of the wake-up caller, Haddad is able to slip into and out of one mask after another and address a variety of topics, while the 'vocation' of the wake-up caller serves the purpose of awakening people and calling upon them to take action. Haddad's collaboration with the composer Sayyid Mikkawi (Sayyid Mikkāwī) is exemplified in the production of *The Wake-up Caller* as a series of musical sketches on Egyptian television which were very popular during the 1970s and 1980s. This is an example illustrating the closer proximity of ʿāmmiyya poetry to people's everyday lives in comparison to the poetry written in fuṣḥā, whose dissemination on a large scale was much more limited by both the medium of the written word and the confinements of its recital to events sponsored by cultural institutions. Haddad's poetry articulated sharp vocal political criticism, leading to his repeated imprisonment by the Nasser regime between 1950 and 1956, wherein his communist leanings also played a role.[13]

The committed stances of these poets were not only communicated through their poetry but also evident in their activism on the ground. A notable example is Ahmad Fuʾad Nigm (Aḥmad Fuʾād Najm, 1929–2013) whose emergence on the Egyptian colloquial poetry scene during the 1950s and 1960s was in part the outcome of the political upheavals Egypt witnessed during those two decades. Between 1946 and 1952 Nigm was employed in several jobs in the Suez Canal zone and participated in the strong national movement against the British occupation. His first prison term 1960–62 was based on criminal charges for fraud. While in prison he met communist writers and thinkers such as the novelist ʿAbdulhakim Qasim (ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim) and the critic Sami Khashaba (Sāmī Khashaba) (ʿĪsā 18–20). This coincidence sharpened an already burgeoning social critical sensibility and mind, which upon his release grew stronger. During the 1960s and 1970s Nigm was strongly affiliated with the radical student movement and it was during this period that he produced his most politically-charged poetry, leading to his repeated arrest between 1972 and 1981. Nigm characteristically writes in a sarcastic tone, making figures of power in society the butt of his satire, and celebrating the endurance of not only Egyptians but all other 'resistant peoples' (Najm, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 109, 160, 586, 590). Though a supporter of the 1952 Revolution, Nigm was critical of poverty and human rights abuses under Nasser. In 1967, shortly before the defeat of the Arab armies, he wrote a biting satirical piece ("Yaʿīsh ahl baladī") attacking the corruption of the post-independence regime as well as ridiculing the cultural scene spearheaded by decadent 'intellectuals' living in their ivory towers, cut off from the people (ʿĪsā 22). During the 1970s and early 1980s, Sadat's political and economic policies became the main target of Nigm's caustic opposition. With a mixture of pride and sarcasm Nigm narrates that he was the only poet in the history of Egypt to appear before a military court because of his poetry. He had written a sarcastic poem about a symbolic figure, who obviously represented President Sadat (Najm, *Al-fājūmī* 163).

One factor strengthening Nigm's status as dissident poet during the 1960s and 1970s was his cooperation with the hitherto hardly known music composer Sheikh Imam ʿIsa (al-Shaykh Imām ʿĪsā, 1918–95). Like Nigm, ʿIsa was living a life of vagrancy in the middle of one of Cairo's poorest quarters, and together they produced a torrent of political songs whose wide dissemination throughout the Arab region became a remarkable phenomenon. The duet Nigm and ʿIsa continued to intervene in the political debate in Egypt within a public sphere tightly restricted by both the Nasser and Sadat regimes. In a book on Nigm's ac-

tivism that includes court documents of his several trials under Nasser and Sadat, journalist ʿIsa mentions an incident where Nigm and ʿIsa performed their first outspoken act of defiance against the Nasser regime. In 1969, on their way to a rural celebration of the anniversary of the death of the peasant fighter Salah Husayn (Ṣalāḥ Ḥusayn), the duet learned that the police were under orders to prevent their participation. They maneuvered their way to the village where the celebration was to be held and performed there, only to be arrested soon after returning to Cairo on fabricated charges of the possession of drugs; they remained in prison for the rest of Nasser's reign (29–30). At the end of 1971 Nigm and ʿIsa were released as part of a sweeping presidential pardon for political prisoners issued by Sadat; they quickly became actively involved in the rising leftist student movement. In addition to partaking in the famous student sit-in on Tahrir Square in January 1972, Nigm was a constant presence in student activities, leading the authorities to ban him from entering university campuses, an order he again defied so that he was arrested again in December 1972. These incidents show that Nigm, as a committed popular intellectual, fully knew that advocacy through poetry can take far more effective forms than simply writing and reciting poetry. Nigm was arrested again following the workers' protests of 1977 against the austerity measures dictated by the World Bank, as part of a violent move by the Sadat regime to curb leftist opposition (incidentally, the wide range of arrestees included five ʿāmmiyya poets) (ʿĪsā 129).

In keeping with their marginal disenfranchised position in the cultural field, these two artists did not resort to a mainstream commercial institution for the mass cultural production of their work (Mostafa 61–73); their cultural production and activism were sponsored during those two decades by modest individual initiatives. Nigm had remained a public intellectual until his death in 2013, writing daily columns in independent and opposition newspapers, holding rallies against the regime and participating in demonstrations and sit-ins. His 'earth-oriented' political activism flourished again at a late age with the emergence of the popular *kifāya* protest movement in 2004 (*Jadaliyya Profiles* n.p.) and continued into 2005 when he led demonstrations protesting against a massacre committed by the Egyptian police on Sudanese refugees in the heart of Cairo, where scores were killed and injured; his activities continued in the same year when he supported what came to be known as the uprising of the judiciary. Nigm wrote satirically biting poetry, usually in directly abusive language, about the plans, becoming increasingly apparent during the first decade of the twenty-first century, of former President Mubarak to pass on rule to his son Gamal.

The example of the popular—'earth-oriented'—intellectual represented by Nigm can also be found in Zayn al-ʿAbidin Fuʾad (Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Fuʾād, b. 1944), a poet comparatively less prolific than Nigm and not as readily famous. Fuʾad was active during the student movement in the 1970s in Egypt and imprisoned under Sadat for his involvement. He was also instrumental in the workers' movement which culminated in the protests of 1975 and the so-called "Bread Riots" of 1977. Fuʾad viewed the 1973 victory of Arab armies over Israel as incomplete and was outspoken against what he deemed exaggerated celebrations of the victory, reminding in a poem that the fight against hunger and oppression has not been won yet. Fuʾad was consequently banned from performing publicly and ultimately forced into exile. In exile he became even more deeply involved in the struggle in other parts of the Arab region: he was in Beirut during the siege of summer 1982 with his composer friend ʿAdli Fakhry (ʿAdlī Fakhrī), writing songs and singing them on the streets of the besieged city (Fuʾād). After the outbreak of the January 2011 uprising in Egypt, Fuʾad and other artists launched the initiative *al-Fann Maydān* (*Art is a Square*), taking Abdin

Square, one of central Cairo's squares adjacent to *Tahrir*, and turning it into the site of a monthly art festival. The festival brings together popular artists, performing for and with people on the streets, and is a self-funded initiative with all the artists participating as volunteers. During 2011 the initiative became more popular and extended its reach beyond the central Cairo. Its activities have, however, with the most recent political developments in Egypt since July 2013, been curtailed and most of the events suppressed by the regime (al-Fann Maydān).

From the 1980s onwards a younger generation has emerged which can be seen as a natural offspring of the elder one—some indeed are the biological offspring (Bahaa Jahin [Bahāʾ Jāhīn, b. 1956], son of Salah Jahin [Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn], Amin Haddad [Amīn Ḥaddād, b. 1958], son of Fuʾad Haddad)—who have demonstrated remarkable talent and maintained the orientation towards street activism and popular interventions. This generation is not without its own innovations and independent aesthetic character. They have imbued the language and rhythm of *ʿāmmiyya* poetry with a more experimental spirit, tried out the controversial prose poem, and engaged issues of international politics and ecology such as the US-led war on terror and corporate globalization. One of the remarkable features of this generation is the emergence and unmistakable popularity of women poets. Iman Bakry (Īmān Bakrī), for instance, writes equally comfortably in both the colloquial dialect and *fuṣḥā*. She was overtly critical of the Mubarak regime, especially during its last decade, and her poetry is soberly and sharply sarcastic. In her buffoonery and 'playing dumb' she is subscribing to a long tradition of writing in the colloquial dialect, while her play on words is shared by a number of her predecessors and contemporaries. Although a woman poet, Bakry does not seek to be a 'feminist' poet, perhaps seeing that signalling out women's rights is a luxury of the elite in a context where basic human rights are still fought for. Bakry is a lively and entertaining performer and her poetry readings attract considerable audiences, particularly from among the younger generations. Her outspokenness has led to her being frequently harassed by the regime, including the untimely termination of her contract at the Ministry of Culture and what seems to be an unofficial ban on her public performances. Attacking political hypocrisy, Bakry writes of double standards in politics, especially in the Egyptian regime's handling of the Palestinian problem. Her satirical style reached its peak during the last few years of Mubarak's reign, when the butt of her satire was the unannounced plans for passing on the rule in Egypt from father to son, known in the Egyptian media as *tawrīth* or simply 'bequest' (Bakrī 69, 97, 147).

Another example of younger *ʿāmmiyya* poets is Amin Haddad, who studied engineering. Haddad is founder and director of the *El-Shariʿ* (*The Street*) performance group established in 2000 and has collaborated with the band Eskenderella since its founding in 2005. The *El-Shariʿ* project mixes poetry, music and singing in live performances, seeking to bring the colloquial poetry of several generations to the streets. It performs at independent cultural venues such as the British Council and the American University in Cairo as well as the *Sawi Cultural Wheel* (Ḥaddād, "Amīn Ḥaddād").

This strand of intellectual engagement may be seen as representative of what Michiel Baud and Rosanne Rutten describe as popular intellectuals who develop their 'intellectual status' in the course of their activism, rather than entering the field of activism as intellectuals (8). Maintaining strong ties with their communities, it is the expression of their ideas in their poetry—addressing communal grievances and acknowledging collective protest—that inspires people to take action, not so much their own activism. This type of intellectual is simultaneously a far cry from both the Sartrean/Saidean notions of the 'bookish,' 'exiled'

and 'critically detached' intellectual, who 'speaks' truth to power, and the Gramscian 'class-rooted' intellectual not necessarily engaged in practical goals. However, they do share the amateurish and marginal status of the former and the agitational function of the latter. Popular intellectuals do not KNOW they are popular intellectuals and consequently do not call themselves so. They are engaged, critical, flippant, cynical, and unsophisticated, as strongly committed to their social and political convictions as they are to their art. Both their poetic and non-poetic interventions remain shaped by what San Juan refers to as the imperative of political commitment (*Reading the West* 4), a commitment that does not shy away from direct political statements and overtly agitational tones. These writers are involved in the double act of undermining state authority AND establishing the democratization of culture. Though they are still part of the literary field, they are, as previously indicated, in Bourdieu's terms, the dominated section of the dominant cultural elites, while their cultural and literary production remains subject to violent repression/appropriation by the centralized state.

Conclusion: New Times, New(er) Formations

Needless to say, the strand of intellectual commitment enacted by the Egyptian ʿāmmiyya poet did not present itself as an alternative to the more strongly established and legitimized forms of committed intellectualism. There were several points of connection between the two types however, both in relation to the goals espoused and to some of the modes of activism adopted. What distinguishes the two types is the position of the intellectual vis-à-vis the audience s/he is trying to connect with and vis-à-vis the centralized state; so too are some of the tactics pursued by movements and activists as well as the approach adopted in dealing with issues of significance in people's daily lives. The fact that the colloquial poet was already assigned by 'arbiters of taste' to a disenfranchised group of producers of culture meant that his/her access to cultural capital is rather limited and that s/he is therefore not able to claim any distance from the rest of the populace as producers in the "field of restricted production" (Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production* 9). With the predominance of the Sartrean/Saidean representation of the intellectual, despite all the varieties it involves, the type of activism/commitment represented by ʿāmmiyya poets was not widely acknowledged or theorized in the official realm and was thus relegated to the background of public consciousness. Across a few decades, several factors have intervened to push this type of committed intellectualism more and more into the foreground. On the one hand, the emergence of various media of mass communication and developments in information technology over the past two decades have resulted in a destabilizing of the sovereignty of reading as the principal terrain where intellectuals could come in contact with the 'populace.' It has already been observed that Nigm and ʿIsa made use of cheaply and anonymously produced mass media to extend the reach of their message. The rapid developments witnessed in digital media during the past two decades have further spurred on this expansion, resulting in a proliferation of the possibilities for forging connections between new forms of intellectual involvement and a wider range of people. To name just a few: the blog sphere, personal websites, digital literature and social media have provided means for disseminating political thought and literary writing. This can largely be done in isolation from both commercial capitalist considerations and state intervention. The newly emerging sphere of digital communication is markedly freer from state control than print media, creating a greater degree of freedom for the 'speakers' (i.e. artists and intellectuals). The perceptible move towards

digitalized media was prompted by a growing interest in popular cultural production inde-
pendent of either state control or capitalist manipulation (Williams, "Base and Superstruc-
ture" 415–18), while at the same time promoting expression of the under-represented strata
of society (Fiske 26–28). Despite Egypt's high illiteracy rate, the country has recorded
around 20% of the population using internet (EMCIT, *Report, 2011*). The broader dissemi-
nation of digitalized material is however not directly connected to the emergence or au-
thorization of popular intellectuals; rather, and more relevantly, it is an indication of a shift
in paradigm in favor of the production and consumption of popular cultural and hence to-
wards the creation of a new field of cultural expression based on a wider diffusion of
knowledge (Lu 145). This more egalitarian field of cultural production with its more re-
laxed rules of intellectual property, censorship, author-reader interaction and access to in-
formation, has naturally contributed to dismantling part of the intellectual authority and cul-
tural capital of intellectuals representing the dominant conceptualization of the intellectual.
However, digital communication cannot be expected to pervade the lives of the majority of
Egyptians. This limiting factor has been countered during the past decade by a perceptible
shift, whereby digital activist material is converted into visual and oral material which is
then disseminated by the very 'hacktivist' on the street, expanding the territoriality of this
kind of activism (Aboubakr, "New Directions" 259–63).

    The canonical intellectual has obviously failed in the context of the recent uprisings in
the region. His/her self-proclaimed role of theorist of the future, endowed with prophetic
abilities of guidance, has proven unequal to how rapidly things have developed on the
ground through the engagement of young(er) activists during the past few years. The ten-
dency of most intellectuals to theorize 'retrospectively,' and to try to understand things us-
ing older frameworks, has apparently put these intellectuals in a position of 'not-knowing.'
In addition to the fact that intellectuals in Egypt and also largely throughout the Arab region
have either noticeably failed in keeping abreast of the massive upheavals sweeping through
the region, or simply declared their allegiance to older forms of authoritarianism in the face
of sudden and sometimes violent changes, in several respects they have also stood against
and impeded change by espousing an ideal of reform (Abū al-Najā 153–57). It needs to be
stressed here that this tendency is also evident among some of the known figures of Egyp-
tian colloquial poetry themselves.[14] What is worthy of note, however, is the fact that the
type of activism the colloquial poets of the 1950s–1980s represented, which was indeed at
variance with the tactics of the established intellectuals, continued to be crucial during the
initial period of protest in Egypt and have remained so until today. This does not mean that
this emerging type of engagement/activism is restricted to ʿāmmiyya poetry or to the collo-
quial dialect. What is noticeable, however, is that there is an emerging type of engagement
characterized by a stronger reliance on real-time communication, be it through orality or
new media, an engagement that is also modest, not claiming to 'know more' or carry 'the
torch of enlightenment,' but merging with informal actors on the ground and using their
language. Intellectuals more strongly engaged in issues of public/revolutionary nature are
now most notably young(er) activists dedicated to street campaigning and orientated on di-
rect action. Unlike the dominant conceptualization of intellectuals, they do not try to 'teach'
the people but are rather engaged with them in a common battle, whereby the learning
process is mutual in the sense that these intellectuals take their material for cultural produc-
tion from what people (non-intellectuals) spontaneously produce in the much more egalitar-
ian space of popular culture. The process is more of a democratization than diffusion of
knowledge (Williams, *Resources of Hope* 4–7).

New changes require new actors, and this seems to be what is going on now. The role of the intellectual in times of cultural crisis is being redefined as a result of his/her diminishing position and influence among the populace (Lu 40).

Notes

1   See for example Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu's assessment of the self-proclaimed role of the Chinese intellectual since the 1919 movement as being endowed "with a sense of historic mission," and assuming "the position of the vanguard of 'enlightenment' and national 'salvation' for the uneducated masses" (142).

2   The Arabic term *iltizām* itself was coined by Taha Hussein, as referred to in the introduction of this essay.

3   See Radwa ʿAshur 119.

4   For a fuller discussion of this point, see ʿAzmy Bishara 59-66.

5   Abū al-Najā is building upon the ideas expounded by Qandil 85.

6   For an account of this controversy, see Khamīs 7–18.

7   Said surprisingly and inexplicably places Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State as one of the manifestations of this strand of intellectual. See Said 51.

8   These conceptualizations are similar to what Bourdieu puts forth in "Forms of Capital" 57. See Bourdieu, Pierre. "Forms of Capital." Trans. Richard Nice. *Handbook of Theory of Research for the Sociology of Education.* Ed. John G. Richardson. New York: Greenword, 1986. 241–58. Print.

9   The phrase is Bertolt Brecht's (see San Juan, *Hegemony* 60).

10 Quite a few of the salient figures of Egyptian colloquial poetry have had longstanding collaborations with like-minded musicians. There was for instance the collaboration between Bayram al-Tunsi and Sayyid Darwish (Sayyid Darwīsh) during the early twentieth century, Fuʾad Haddad and Sayyid Mikkawi during the 1950s and 1960s, Ahmad Fuʾad Nigm and Imam ʿIsa during the 1960s and 1970s, Zayn al-ʿAbidin Fuʾad and ʿAdli Fakhry during the 1970s and 1980s, and, much more recently, ʿAli Salama (ʿAlī Salāma) and Wagih ʿAziz (Wajīh ʿAzīz), and Amin Haddad and Hazim Shahin (Ḥāzim Shāhīn).

11 For a brief history of colloquial poetry in Egypt, see Khamīs 33–44, 99–114; Aboubakr, "Egyptian Colloquial Poetry" 16-17; and Radwan 25–38.

12 Al-Tunsi for instance was awarded the Supreme Council of Arts and Literature's medal by the post-1952 regime (Radwan 28).

13 This part on Haddad builds on an earlier study of mine; see Aboubakr, "Egyptian Colloquial Poetry as Subversive Discourse."

14 Following the military seizure of power from the Muslim Brotherhood president in July 2013, Abdulrahman al-Abnudi has outspokenly turned against the January 2011 uprising, and allied himself with the re-emerging old regime. Recently he wrote a poem to mark the first anniversary of the June 30, 2013 uprising, protesting against religious fascism and indirectly attributing recent protests against the military rule to foreign interference.

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Rewriting Resistance:
The Revival of Poetry of Dissent in Egypt after January 2011 (Surūr, Najm and Dunqul)

Atef Botros

Inspired by the political upheaval in Egypt and other Arab countries over the past few years, particularly by the new aesthetic practices of cultural resistance against the political powers that have emerged (e.g. graffiti and street art, online collages, rap music), this article attempts to open up a discussion on cross-linking between motifs and forms within a tradition of dissent and resistance in modern Arabic literature and art spanning more than a century. Some poems, lyrics and images from the early and mid-twentieth century reappeared and circulated widely during the revolutionary events in Egypt and the Arab world. Re-workings of artistic expressions of cultural resistance from different historic situations can be understood within the theoretical frameworks of "hypertextuality" and "transtextual coherences" as formulated by Gérard Genette (b. 1930). In his book *Palimpsests*, Genette considers a new literary work to be a result of the transformation of "pretexts." A new literary text is a "hypertext," referring to both older templates as well as reality. Genette differentiates between several kinds of hypertextual transformations, depending on the topology, narrative modes, semantic, function etc. (1–30). For this paper, new works are understood within the *poetic legacy of dissent* as a hypertext with a complex referentiality to both pretexts within this tradition and the current political and social reality. This methodology makes it possible to understand the complex overlapping discernible within a new artistic work, performance or any new kind of adaption of older artistic or literary elements.[1]

Traditions of cultural resistance challenge political power, cultural hegemony and other hegemonic ideologies (Gramsci). In Egypt, a tradition of cultural resistance was shaped in particular by several literary figures from the 1960s, foremost the poet Amal Dunqul (1940–1983), the poet and dramatist Najīb Surūr (1932–1978), the poet Aḥmad Fuʾād Najm (1929–2013), and the composer and singer Shaykh Imām (1918–1995). These and other poets and writers stand in a tradition that goes back to the first quarter of the twentieth century and can be roughly divided into three formative phases. The first phase of the modern tradition of cultural resistance is evident in the works of writers like Maḥmūd Bayram al-Tūnsī (1893–1961) and the songs of the legendary composer and singer Sayyid Darwīsh (1892–1923). This early phase of artistic resistance was related to the anticolonial movement, culminating in the revolution of 1919 and the struggle for independence and a modern, liberal constitution. The second and very rich phase of the 1960s, I would argue, can be understood in the specific context of decolonization, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the so-called intellectual crisis of the 1960s, triggered by the predicament of being straddled between upholding a progressive rhetoric while witnessing and experiencing political repression under the government of Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir. The last and very current phase is related to the democracy movements which led to political upheavals in several Arab countries at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

By focusing on three Egyptian writers from the 1960s generation, namely Najm, Dunqul and Surūr, I would like to argue that these three writers are not only part of the tradition of

cultural resistance in their own period of activity, but, in their reception and 'afterlife,' are also a part of contemporary revolutionary Egyptian art, particularly following the January 25 uprising. In different ways and with varying intensity, they became icons of political resistance. Fragments of their literary legacy are quoted verbatim in artistic products like graffiti and online collages. Some of their works have been modified, reproduced or rewritten. The main questions posed in this context are: How are these figures from the 1960s received in the new context of the Egyptian revolution? Which issues have their present-day adaptors and readers related their works to in the new political and social reality? Is it possible to say that there is a continuation of the tradition of resistance in contemporary Egyptian literature? Or are we dealing with new genres and cultural practices in which the artistic works of past figures are rewritten or re-integrated for the purpose of serving a completely new and specific function? How can we deal with the complexity of transtextuality from past literary texts into recent works produced in the aesthetic field of resistance and, moreover, the links to current political reality? I will discuss the three aforementioned figures, whereby the special case of the Egyptian poet and playwright Najīb Surūr and his role in the recent revolutionary movement in Egypt will be my main focus.

According to Antonio Gramsci, questions of cultural resistance can be addressed in terms of counter-hegemony, the possibility to revolt by subordinate groups in response to the hegemonic culture. In his preoccupation with the relationship between power and culture, Gramsci understood the concept of hegemony not only as the oppressive domination of society by the ruling groups. More important in his concept is the "consent" of most of the subordinate groups, who are almost automatically and manipulatively persuaded to follow and support the dominant establishment of power and social order. Gramsci asks why most people cannot directly challenge the hegemonic culture and break the deep-seated belief held by the subordinate that rulers are, by very definition, legitimate. Besides many conventional values, norms, perceptions, beliefs and sentiments, all factors leading to consent, Gramsci argues that language and its elements are of prime importance, for they conceptualize the world and mark the boundaries of permissible discourse. Thus, counter-hegemonic resistance can occur on the very level of language (Gramsci 262–334; Lears 567–570).

Based on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, in his "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'" (1981) Stuart Hall went beyond the binary opposition of popular versus dominant culture. Hall understands popular culture as "a point at which power relations are negotiated and contested" (Procter 33) and a site of continuous struggle for positions of power between movements of containment and resistance, dominant and subordinate (El Hamamsy and Soliman 1–7): "The popular is neither a pure sign of resistance by the people or of total domination of the people. It is not the point at which the fight has been won or lost but, rather, a site of continual struggle and negotiation between the two" (Procter 28). Or as Hall himself puts it: "It is the arena of consent and resistance" (Hall 453). Joel Beinin has discussed the tradition of *zajal* and workers poetry to show how "colloquial Egyptian Poetry affirms the historical existence of an oppositional current of popular culture" (213).

Aḥmad Fuʾād Najm and Shaykh Imām: Eyes of Words

Aḥmad Fuʾād Najm and Shaykh Imām (Imām Muḥammad Aḥmad ʿĪssā) are considered pan-Arab figures of resistance or freedom fighters. Arrested several times, they spent much of their lives as political prisoners. Their lyrical legacy was prominent in the context of the Egyptian uprising at Taḥrīr Square. Najm's poems, which were set to music and sung by

Shaykh Imām, are still very present and significant in the context of cultural resistance. Although he lived long enough to witness the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Najm wrote most of his lyrical works in the 1960s and 1970s. The artistic collaboration between Najm and Shaykh Imām led to an extensive project of political and cultural resistance. Written in very sharp, sometimes vulgar vernacular Egyptian, their songs have become a voice for workers, students and peasants repressed and marginalized by the state. The strong words sung by the very expressive, unique and rough voice of Shaykh Imām, accompanied by vivid oud melodies, denounce political power and call upon the people to reject current political reality and resort to protest (Beinin 210–14). Their huge legacy of poems and recordings are available as a template for new, contemporary artistic works, such as film, video collages, graffiti and rap music. They are quoted, modified or rewritten in these new works in different ways. One of the most paradigmatic examples of the new aesthetics of resistance, based on the 1960s legacy of dissent, is a rap song by the Egyptian group *Revolution Records*. The song was published in December 2012 under the title "Idhā al-shams ghariqat" and is based on the poem "The Eyes of Words" ("ʿUyūn al-kalām")*,* written by Najm in 1970 while in the political prison of Qanāṭir, close to Cairo. The original poem comprises one long sentence:

Once the sun drowns in a sea of clouds	إذا الشمس غرقت في بحر الغمام
and a wave of darkness spreads its hands over our world	و مدت على الدنيا موجة ظلام
and should the sight die within eyes and insights	و مات البصر في العيون و البصاير
and once our road gets lost amongst lines and circles	و غاب الطريق في الخطوط و الدواير
oh you rebel, Mr. know-it-all!	يا ساير يا داير يا ابو المفهومية
you're left with no guide but the eyes of the words.[2]	مفيش لك دليل غير عيون الكلام

(Najm 445)[3]

Revolution Records took Shaykh Imām's song and added new lyrics dealing with the current Egyptian struggle for democracy and freedom. The technique and way the song was modified into a modern revolutionary rap song made it very successful. It became the standard opening song of the group and up until May 2015 had more than 68,000 hits on YouTube. They not only rewrote the former text, not even attempting to disguise it in any way when presenting their new version, but they even showcased Shaykh Imām's original recording without any modification at the beginning of the song. The rap verses begin with Shaykh Imām's voice on loop in the background, set to a rhythmic, march-like beat. The song unifies classical oud and oriental music with modern rap. Very short fragments or words of Shaykh Imām's voice, with which the song interacts, complementing it or creating a dialogical interplay, can be heard between stanzas. In the video, pictures of Najm and Shaykh Imām are shown, along with photos from the January revolution and images of the Egyptian youth engaged in the hip-hop scene. The final result is a unique and intense collage of the voice of resistance in the global language of hip-hop.

Tracing the words back and looking at the genealogy, the beginning of Najm's poem refers to a very famous verse by the Tunisian poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909–1934): "If the people one day want to live, then destiny must respond" (500). Najm's poem begins with "Idhā al-shams," while that of al-Shābbī with "Idhā al-shaʿb." Al-Shābbī's poem assures that the revolutionary will be able to change reality. The poem by Najm refers to the "eyes of words" as a "guide," where sight is impossible due to a dark reality. However, it is not clear

how words become guides and if they can lead to the success of the revolution. Will destiny respond to the revolutionary will? The young artists of *Revolution Records* answer this question in the video's voice-over: "The dreams will not die, […] don't be silent, speak to the people and let them understand, let them know. The others are like you, but the difference is that the revolution is in your heart."

The task facing revolutionary young people here is very clear: It is to change reality and, by employing words, overcome the passivity of people. This is certainly what the rappers themselves do and what Najm and Shaykh Imām did—create a cultural revolution of words through their writing and singing.

Rap belongs to the new aesthetic practices of cultural resistance in Egypt. In the case of *Revolution Records*, older pretexts, music and lyrics from a specific tradition or legacy of dissent are arranged like a palimpsest, so that the music becomes a multilayered hypertext. The performance consciously recalls the political resistance of the 1960s, but it functions in the current style and global youth language of rap culture (Martinez). The rap artist creates a new moment of tension between the original text and the new reality, challenging the prevailing conditions, norms and values. The audience is encouraged to instigate more social than political change by talking with others about the January 2011 revolution. This is precisely the aspect wherein the old song is updated, independent of the original context of production. The new hypertext, based on a dialogue between different levels of languages, between the old words of Najm and the new rap lyrics, challenges the dominant language and functions as a counter-hegemonic act.

Amal Dunqul (1940–1983)

Some of the most quoted verses in Egyptian revolutionary art come from the poem "Don't Reconcile" ("Lā tuṣāliḥ") written by Amal Dunqul in November 1976 (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 327–40). Dunqul's poem expresses radical opposition to Sādāt's politics and the peace agreement with Israel. Almost three decades after his premature death, Dunqul, in Egypt known as the "prince of the refuser poets," has regained popularity in revolutionary circles and particularly in online activism. One of the first examples of artistic stencil graffiti was a portrait of the activist and blogger Khālid Saʿīd, who was tortured and murdered in 2010 by the police in Alexandria. The stenciled mask, depicted without a lower jaw, refers to the mutilation of Saʿīd's face in the police attack. The stencil graffiti was sprayed on the front of the Egyptian Ministry of Interior, presumably at the beginning of June 2011 (Hamdy and Don Stone Karl 72).[4] Under the mask was a verse from "Don't Reconcile": "Would my blood turn into water between your eyes / would you forget my clothes stained with blood?" (ibid.; Dunqul, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 328).

The original verse in Dunqul's poem could have been narrated by one of the victims, Palestinians or Egyptian soldiers killed during the Arab-Israeli struggle. Thirty-four years later and written under the portrait of Saʿīd, who became an icon and catalyst for the Egyptian revolution, the verse expresses the suffering of Saʿīd and other victims of the repressive security system. Shortly after the breakdown of the Mubārak regime, revolutionary young people confronted the new political power represented by the military supreme council. Saʿīd's portrait, underlined with Dunqul's words, was to be seen on the façade of the ministry building—representing the central power of the state—, a significant act of resistance and a challenge to power through art. Observing the graffiti, the public was made acutely aware of a tension between Dunqul's original verse and the current reality, personalized in the form

of Saʿīd's mutilated portrait on a building representing state power. Therefore, the graffiti may be understood as a counter-hegemonic act, since it seeks to provoke a challenge to this power constellation.

Even the title of Dunqul's poem, "Don't Reconcile," became an independent slogan and was often written under graffiti portraits of the victims of the revolution. One of the most significant examples of this is a graffiti portrait of the activist and famous figure of the revolution Aḥmad Ḥarāra, who was injured many times during outbreaks of violence between demonstrators and the police in 2011. Tragically, he lost one eye on January 28 and then the other on November 19. Through the use of a reduction technique similar to the one used to create the mask of Khālid Saʿīd, the face of Ḥarāra was stenciled in a few lines and patches, but remained recognizable. The two dates corresponding to the loss of his eyesight were placed where his eyes should have been. The Ḥarāra portrait is surrounded by verses from the same poem written in calligraphic art: "Do you think / when I gouge your eyes / fix two jewels in their place / you could still see? / Such things can never be purchased" (Hamdy and Don Stone Karl 72; Dunqul, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 328).

By the end of 2011, the graffiti had been replicated frequently in downtown Cairo and was widespread in online social media. The lines quoted in the graffiti follow the first line of Dunqul's poem: "Don't reconcile / even if they grant you gold" (ibid.). These first lines became very popular and were embedded in many online graphic collages or videos as well as other artistic works. The same verses also appear in the background of photographs of the activist Māhīnūr al-Maṣrī. She was sentenced to two years in prison on May 20, 2014, in Alexandria for demonstrating with other protesters in front of the court during the Khālid Saʿīd trial.[5]

Prior to the upheaval in 2011 only known to the limited circles of intellectuals and academics, Amal Dunqul became a famous poet and public figure over the course of the Egyptian revolution and a renowned figure often referred to on social media. Scores of videos, collages, posters and graffiti used his verses, voice and portrait. Probably for the first time in the history of Egyptian television, a long feature about Dunqul was shown on the popular program "Akhir kalām." The television presenter Yusrī Fūda hosted the poet Fārūq Shūsha and they discussed the life and work of Dunqul in the context of revolution for more than two and a half hours. Dunqul was presented as the ultimate rebel and radical dissident against power. He was a legend who died at forty-three, remembered as a great poet very much committed to the "Arab cause." With "Don't Reconcile" as his most popular poem, he became a strongly respected poetic voice of the revolution and, I would argue, the most celebrated poet after January 2011.

Some of his other poems were also rediscovered, quoted and rewritten in revolutionary cultural production. Sometimes, he was perceived as a prophet who predicted the January revolution (Dunqul, "30 ʿāman"), particularly with his poem "The Stone Cake" ("Ughniyyat al-kaʿka al-ḥajariyya"; Dunqul, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 271–78). The poem, written in the early 1970s, precisely described what would later occur in 2011 in the middle of Taḥrīr Square, where "the voice erases the rest of the darkness / it sings for the newborn Egypt" (Dunqul, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 275).

Another relevant poem by Dunqul is entitled "Spartacus' Last Words" ("Kalimāt Sbārtākūs al-akhīra"), which describes a radical intensification of dissent and refusal. The narrator of the poem is the revolutionary Roman slave Spartacus. Dunqul imagines what Spartacus' last words would have been before his legendary execution:

Glory to Satan, god of the winds	المجد للشيطان .. معبود الرياح
Who said no to the face of those who said "yes"	من قال « لا » في وجه من قالوا « نعم »
who taught Man to tear apart nothingness	من علّم الإنسان تمزيق العدم
He who said no, thus did not die	من قال « لا » .. فلم يمت
And remained a soul eternally in pain	وظلّ روحا أبديّة الألم!

| (Dunqul, "Spartacus' Last Words") | (Dunqul, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 83) |

A host of slogans were drawn from this poem, such as "Glory to Satan," "Glory to whom who said no" and "The one who said no," and they became part of the revolutionary language frequently used in social media. Dunqul wrote his poems in Modern Standard Arabic and was inspired by sacred texts such as the Bible and Qurʾan, but also by mythology (al-Dūsrī 72–111). The impact of his words within this new context is very significant. The spiritual or magical atmosphere of his poems has also been transported—and transformed—into popular slogans. Dunqul conveys the entire spectrum of tension felt during the revolutionary situation, expressing everything from the necessity to rebel and say "no" through to the hopelessness felt when governments continuously regress into dictatorship and injustice: "Dream not of a happy world / For behind every dying Caesar / There is a new one" ("Spartacus' Last Words").

This verse was especially popular after the rapid change from Mubarak to the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), Mursī and Sīsī. Through their use in online collages, posters, videos and street art, Dunqul's poems became popular beyond the circles of academics and intellectuals. This kind of popular cultural practice occurs in the public sphere, on the street or in cyber space: It is therefore a site of negotiation and where power relations are contested. It is a constant battlefield "where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost" (Hall 447).

Najīb Surūr (1932–1978)

Like Najm, Shaykh Imām and Dunqul, Najīb Surūr became a symbol of resistance and rebellion in the context of the Egyptian revolution, especially among online activists and revolutionary artists. His poems, drama scenes and own tragic biography have become a central part of the Egyptian legacy of dissent and are frequently quoted, integrated, rewritten and re-contextualized within the new culture of resistance. Although already prior to the uprising interest in Surūr was on the increase, since 2011 he and his work have been celebrated, read, remembered and rewritten as never before.[6] His plays were performed and many cultural events organized. Maḥmūd Aḥmad Dhikrī recently published an elaborate study on Surūr's diwan *Luzūm mā yalzam* (*The Necessity of What is Necessary*, 1976). Above all, the dissertation by Gorden Lee Witty can, as far as I know, be considered the most complete and extensive academic study on Surūr's life and work. In 2013, Ṭalāl Fayṣal, a young psychiatrist and writer, published a novel entitled *Surūr*, which dealt with the biography of the poet in a very innovative way: The book is a mixture of biographical facts and fiction, frequently asked questions about the poet, his life and his work, to which a variety of answers are given, resulting in multiple perspectives. We may read Fayṣal's fictional modifications as rewriting Surūr in the new context of cultural resistance. The novel can be considered a new hypertext which refers to pretexts, like Surūr's work, biography

and comments and stories about his life, as well as to the current Egyptian reality after the revolution of January 2011. The intertextual networks not only mean that new aesthetic products refer to Surūr, quote him, or reproduce his works, but also that Surūr's writing itself is a highly intensive and complicated hypertext, in itself a palimpsest. In his literary work he referred to the songs of Sayyid Darwīsh, the poems of al-Tūnsī, to prominent literary or historical figures like Don Quixote, al-Maʿarrī or Jesus.[7] Surūr also modified fragments from the poetic works of Amal Dunqul and adapted old folk ballads and songs like "Yāsīn wa-Bahīyya" and "Ḥasan wa-Naʿīma," rewriting them in the political context of the 1960s and 1970s. Again, we can trace lines through the new readings and presentations of Surūr to plot a genealogy of modern cultural resistance in Egypt.

Interestingly, Surūr was remembered in the context of the trial of the young activist and blogger Māyikil Nabīl Sanad, who was arrested on March 28, 2011 for criticizing the military.[8] A military court sentenced him to three years in jail. After a long hunger strike, he was committed to the al-ʿAbbāsiyya psychiatric clinic. Basma ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, a young psychiatrist, writer, artist and activist, along with her colleagues, refused to admit Sanad into the psychiatric clinic. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was the press officer of al-ʿAbbasiyya at the time, and she published a media report taking a radical position against the referral of Sanad, in which she disgraced the military and the authorities. In an interview she referred to the infamous legacy of al-ʿAbbāsiyya as a place misused by the authorities to eliminate political enemies of the regime by claiming they were mentally ill—one of the famous cases she mentioned was the poet Najīb Surūr (Muḥī). More than thirty years after the death of Surūr and forty years after his referral to al-ʿAbbāsiyya in 1969, the incident led to a public debate comparing the dissident poet Surūr to Sanad's struggle against political power. The significant correlation between the political revolt in 2011 and Surūr exemplifies the meaning and function of the poet in current counter-hegemonic culture.

This correlation also raises many questions regarding Surūr's relationship to power and the story of his "madness," which is still a controversial issue. It is true that he suffered from alcoholism and was mentally fragile "for most of his adult life, and was repeatedly hospitalized for his problems" (Witty 9). The talented poet, actor, playwright, theater professor and critic is said to have roamed the streets barefoot, dressed in ragged clothes, carrying a broom and begging friends for more alcohol. Did he do this because he was mentally ill? Or did he want to disgrace and provocatively scandalize his writer and artist colleagues? His friend Shawqī Fahīm later claimed Surūr had stated: "I intended to show the real face of the intellectuals with stiff collars and neckties; those who go on the street and act as if they were in London or Paris, while I felt defeated" (21).

These controversial issues are always seen and addressed from different perspectives, even in the novel *Surūr*. However, one cannot ignore the fact that Surūr, an opponent of those in political power, also had many enemies. He himself believed that the intelligence service of the Egyptian regime was behind his referral to al-ʿAbbāsiyya and he mentioned this on the records of his poems *Kuss ummiyyāt* (*Fuck You Poems 1968–1976*).[9] Fayṣal's novel presents a mentally-ill writer who is at the same time able to accomplish perfect and complicated intellectual work. According to the most circulated narratives, writings and researches on Surūr, the defeat in 1967, his divorce in 1968 and the loss of his job in the same year seem to have forced him onto the streets of Cairo and led to his personal and intellectual breakdown. In 1969 he was sent to a horrible state psychiatric ward, where he lived for six months. This traumatic experience is supposed to herald the beginning of the end for him, which came almost a decade later in 1978. Despite the question of his mental health at the

time, he was exposed to the inhumane methods of al-ʿAbbāsiyya (Witty 18–19). However, the revival of his name in the context of the new trials emerging out of the struggle between activists for democracy and the regime emphasizes that the abuse of political power continues. The reaction of the young psychiatrist shows that while times have changed for some, it stands still for the authorities.

The confrontation with the Egyptian regime had already begun while Surūr was studying theater in Moscow (1958–1963). The United Arab Republic, consisting of Egypt and Syria and ruled by Nāṣir, had persecuted many members of the political opposition in both countries. Surūr published articles in the Soviet press criticizing Nāṣir; a particularly relevant piece was a poem about the death of the Lebanese communist party leader Farajallāh al-Ḥilw in 1961 (al-Ḥasan). Under Nāṣir, al-Ḥilw was tortured to death in a Syrian prison; his body was dissolved in acid. Surūr was shocked and wrote a radical criticism of Nāṣir in which he described him as a fascist—in response, the Egyptian authorities revoked his passport. "Depressed and alienated, he began drinking heavily," hastening his decline (Witty 14). After painful years in Moscow and around a year in Budapest, he was allowed to return to Egypt in 1964 (13–15).

Denouncing political power and writing against authority seems to be an essential feature of the poet; the theme is prevalent from his first poem "The Shoe" ("Al-ḥidhāʾ") through to his final poems, particularly in *Kuss ummiyyāt*. Both of these works played a significant role after January 2011. In September 2012, the cultural center *Sāqiyyat al-Ṣāwī*, which is considered a place of independent and alternative arts and in a sense was related to the revolution, staged a musical event based on Surūr's poetry. One of the poems read that evening was "Al-ḥidhāʾ" and the performance was circulated quickly and widely on YouTube and Facebook.[10]

I am the son of misery	أنـا ابن الشــقاء
I am the product of the cattle shed and the *maṣṭaba*[11]	ربيب (الزريبة والمصطبة)
In my village, all of them are wretched	وفي قريتي كلهم أشقياء
In my village, there is a major like a god	وفي قريتي (عمدة) كالاله
He surrounds our necks like destiny	يحيط بأعناقنا كالقدر
[…]	[…]
I have hated the God	كرهت الاله ...
And each God I have becomes a horrible image	وأصبح كل اله لدي بغيض الصور
Since this day I have learned my revolution	تعلمت من يومها ثورتي
And then I went with the caravan	ورحت أسير مع القافلة

(Surūr, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 10–14)[12]

These revolutionary lines, read in front of the young audience of the *al-Ṣāwī* cultural center in Cairo shortly after the revolution, were theatrically performed by Surūr himself for the first time in the spring of 1954 at a public poetry reading. No one introduced him and he was unknown at the time, but as Fahīm remembers it (7–8), the young rural man took to the stage and yelled these fiery words. Beyond the debate about the truth of the story (Cachia 195–204), the poem itself is a poetic expression of the depressive circumstances in an Egyptian village under feudalism and at the mercy of abusive power. Questions of social justice, resistance against repressive state power and revolutionary ideas became lifelong intellectual is-

sues for Surūr (Ṣaqr). It seems like he insisted on playing the tragic role of the rebellious repressed outsider willing to permanently confront the authorities. During an extreme street performance, he was seen dancing on pictures of Sādāt, "standing in front of the Balloon Theater, barefoot and yelling" (Witty 19). We will probably never be able to know if he acted in such an extreme manner during his one-man theater performance to dramatize his personal situation and challenge power, or if it was the result of alcohol consumption and/or mental illness, or indeed a combination of both.

The same problem, which is depicted in "The Shoe," shapes his main dramatic work: The trilogy *Yasin and Bahiyya* (*Yāsīn wa-Bahiyya*, 1965), *O Night! O Moon!* (*Āh, yā layl, yā qamar*, 1968), *Tell the Eye of the Sun* (*Qūlū li-ʿuyūn al-shams*, 1972), and *Where Do I Get People?* (*Minīn ajīb nās*, 1975). Surūr wrote *Yāsīn wa-Bahiyya* between December 1963 and February 1964 in Budapest as a verse novel and "finally returned to Egypt in April 1964, with the manuscript of *Yāsīn wa-Bahiyyah* taped around his chest so that it would not be found and confiscated by the authorities" (Witty 16). It was adapted for theater and performed by Karam Muṭāwiʿ in 1965. Based on folk ballads, legends and songs, the play was Surūr's first big success. The theme of the play is the struggle between peasants and authority, represented by the pasha of the village Buhūt, seemingly either a microcosm of Egypt or an example of the average Egyptian village. The figure of Bahiyya usually symbolizes Egypt, not only in this play. Her lover Yāsīn is killed by the authorities because he refuses to meekly accept injustice and decides to rebel against those in power; he can be interpreted as the Egyptian people or the actor of resistance (37). The play is dominated by a bleak, prophetic vision of a looming catastrophe that haunts Bahiyya; afterwards, the peasants' revolt, led by Yāsīn, is brutally quelled by the troops sent in by the authorities and the brave hero Yāsīn is gunned down. The question in the folk song "Tell me Bahiyya, who killed Yāsīn?" is answered by Surūr. The "linkage of a popular ballad from the Ṣaʿīd (Upper Egypt) with political tragedy" that occurred in the delta village Buhūt cannot be seen as an attempt to reproduce the myth of Yāsīn or create a new story out of old material (Witty 38). Rather, it is the de-territorialized story of the struggle of the marginalized against power. "Surur only took the play's framework from the tale, transposing the action into colonial Egypt in order to make his play into a denunciation of the exploitation of the peasantry by the great landowners. Above all, he pushed the 'indigenizing innovation' of the play" (Jacquemond 137). In this sense, the poetic novel, as Surūr called it, is told in a manner that the average Egyptian can relate to and even uses the language of peasants. Nonetheless, it describes a universal struggle, an all-encompassing one, and the fate of revolutions against injustice. In the prologue, the narrator tells the audience what and whom the story is about:

About Buhūt,	أقص عن بهوت،
About Yāsīn…about Bahiyyah, I narrate,	أقص عن ياسين .. عن بهية،
A tale no one has told never	حكاية لم يروها أحد،
A tale I wish to live forever	حكاية أود أن تعيش للأبد،
I wish I were Homer,	يا ليتني هومير،
or Virgil	أو ليتني فرجيل،
or that I had Dante's guitar,	أو ليت لي قيثار دانتي ..
Or Shakespearian genius	أو يراع شكسبير،
[…]	[...]

I narrate for men	أقص للرجال،
For women, greybeards,	أقص للنساء، للشيوخ،
I narrate for youth, for children	أقص للشباب، للأطفال،
I narrate for generations	أقص للأجيال،
I narrate for history	أقص للتاريخ ..
For history makers, for people	لصانعي التاريخ .. للشعوب،
I narrate for laborers, for farmers	أقص للعمال، للزراع،
I narrate for the naked, for the hungry	أقص للعرايا، للجياع،
For the hard workers under the sun	للكادحين تحت الشمس،
For the revolutionaries on every land	للثائرين فوق كل أرض،
For those who creep in the plains, in jungles, in mountains	للزاحفين في السهول .. في الأدغال، .. في الجبال،
For those who squat with their rifles	للرابضين بالبنادق،
For those who stand in their trenches	للصامدين في الخنادق،
For those who walk with horns, drums and flags	للسائرين بالنفير، بالطبول، بالبيارق،
For those who lost in honor battles	للساقطين في معارك الشرف،
I narrate for heroes climbing to gallows	أقص للأبطال صاعدين للمشانق،
Smiling ridiculously to it!	وباسمين هازئين بالمشانق!
I narrate for those in jails and bonds...	أقص للذين في السجون، في الأغلال،
I narrate for those who chant for humans	أقص للذين ينشدون للإنسان ..
the chant of struggle,	أنشودة النضال،
About Buhūt,	أقص عن بهوت ..
About Yāsīn…about Bahiyya I narrate[13]	أقص عن ياسين .. عن بهية ...

(Surūr, *Yāsīn wa-Bahiyya* 15–17)

The play and the other works that followed found their way to the Egyptian state theater, most likely because they appeared to celebrate Nāṣir's regime as a proclaimed opponent to feudalism, the pasha and the marginalization of the poor in Egypt. This is due to the fact that the plots of Surūr's works generally deal with events that preceded the July Revolution of 1952 and Nasserism, denouncing society and entrenched power structures. Surūr, indeed, had never been loyal to the regime and cannot be seen as a writer committed in any way to state ideology. His dramas were, I would argue, the only avenue he had to express his revolutionary ideas without confronting the regime directly. *Yasin and Bahiyya*, as well as his other dramas, did not celebrate Nāṣir; they were an expression of the impossibility of a successful revolution. "So do the rich in all villages," the grandfather tells the child narrator in "The Shoe" (Surūr, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 14). It thus carries the same meaning as Dunqul's poem "Spartacus' Last Words": "Dream not of a happy world / For behind every dying Caesar / There is a new one" (Dunqul, "Spartacus' Last Words"; *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 85).

Bahiyya's bleak vision, along with the play as a whole, can be seen as the "prophecy" of a coming catastrophe in the oppressive atmosphere of the 1960s. The dream is mentioned repeatedly in the play: Bahiyya and her lover Yāsīn are on a boat fighting against a fatal storm which leads to his death (Surūr, *Yāsīn wa-Bahiyya* 39).

"Bahiyya's dream" ("Ḥilm"; Surūr, *Yāsīn wa-Bahiyya* 170), written by Surūr between December 1963 and February 1964 in Budapest, was set to music and sung by Dunyā Masʿūd at the al-Junayna Theater in Cairo on October 13, 2011.[14] The young independent theater actress and singer Masʿūd is affiliated with a group of artists who see themselves—and are generally perceived as—belonging to the generation of January 25. Before singing "Ḥilm," she gave a small talk dedicating her art to all those people who have openly said "no" since 2005. In many interviews she has described Surūr as one of the most important and "beautiful fathers of the verse drama" (Al Mayadeen Culture). Like Surūr, Masʿūd also rebelled; she escaped from her parents' home in Alexandria when she was eighteen and fled to Cairo, "carrying only two books, one of them was Surūr's diwan *Luzūm mā yalzam* and the poetry collection *Rubāʿiyyāt* composed by Salāḥ Jāhīn" (ibid.).

It is probably no coincidence that Masʿūd specialized in reproducing, reinterpreting and innovating old local folk music traditions in modern art like Surūr. Masʿūd's performance of "Ḥilm" and her dedication can be considered a new reading and reproduction of Surūr's ver-ses in the context of contemporary cultural resistance and in a wider and more accessible pub-lic domain than the original work, which was the drama text or its staging. In a sense, it is a form of popularization of this text or its transition into popular culture. The same text, written by Surūr in 1963/64 in Budapest as a dissident intellectual against Nāṣir's regime, was staged 1965 in *Masraḥ al-Jīb* (*The Pocket Theater*) in Cairo. It was celebrated as an "authentic" Egyptian hymn, again denouncing the period before Nāṣir and the injustice of feudal Egypt, to venerate the new age of socialism under Nāṣir. Masʿūd's interpretation of the text as a song reworks the text in the context of the 2011 revolution. The whole performance, setting, and stage, combined with the singer, music and the other songs performed at the event, configure a new setting and provoke a new experience, one in which a tension arises between the text and the current reality of revolution. In the vernacular of Egyptian peasants, mixed with sim-ple Modern Standard Arabic, the peasant daughter tells her mother about her dramatic night-mare in which her lover is drowned. Particularly on the level of language and performance, the song can be described as the reworking of a forgotten text in a new aesthetic form and cul-tural practice, the reworking a forgotten text into popular culture in and through which positi-ons of power are negotiated, reconfigured and contested.

A similar case of transtextuality is the opening song of Surūr's drama *Where do I get people?* (1975), which is based on the folk song "Why does the Nile laugh when I go down flirting to fill the water vessels." The very simple, naïve and popular folkloristic song ex-presses the joy of peasants' everyday life, which Surūr drew on to show that reality is not like the song. His modified version of the original folk song reads:

Why is the Nile laughing	البحر بيضحك ليه
While I am walking in coquetry to fill the pots?	و أنا نازلة أدلع أملا القلل !
The Nile is angry and gloomy	البحر غضبان مايضحكش
For the unpleasant story	أصل الحكاية ماتضحكش
For its wound is still bleeding	البحر جرحه مايدبلش
For our hurt that never healed!	و جرحنا ولا عمره دبل!
(Refrain – Chorus)	(كورس الفلاحات يكرر القرار)
Wretched we, laughing from misery	مساكين بنضحك م البلوه

like fighting cocks with a good spirit	زي الديوك و الروح حلوه
Taken all of a sudden and being slaughtered	سارقاها م السكين حموه ..
While, in heart, we still have hope!	ولسه جوه القلب أمل!
(Refrain – Chorus)	(كورس الفلاحات يكرر القرار)
Our pottery pots are handmade in Qina	قللنا لجارها قناوي
It tells stories and songs	بتقول حكاوي و غناوي
Alas, the pot of humiliation	يا قلة الذل أنا ناوي
I will never drink even if the water is honey!	ما أشرب و لو في القلة عسل!
(Refrain – Chorus)	(كورس الفلاحات يكرر القرار)
In infinity we did fill the pots	ياما ملينا و ملينا ..
for others and was left thirsty by our tapster	لغيرنا .. و عطشنا ساقينا
patient we are as a sea can't quench our thirst	صابرين و بحر ما يروينا
Bearing instead of a trouble, troubles!	شايلين بدال العلّة علل
[…]	[…]
(Refrain – Chorus)	(كورس الفلاحات يكرر القرار)
Between me and you, wall after wall	بيني و بينك سور ورا سور
And I am not a giant or a bird	و أنا لا مارد و لا عصفور
Carrying a flute, a broken flute	في أيدي ناي و الناي مكسور
And in love, I become a model![15]	و بقيت أنا في الحب مثل!

(Surūr, *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 325–326)

Against the foil of the original folk song, the narrator tells the "real" story of their suffering, employing a language that is a compromise between Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Egyptian, and in a collective form of first person plural (we)—with the exception of the original sentence in the refrain. The Nile does not laugh like the original song states. Wounds have never been healed. People are laughing from misery, but fighting each other without realizing what they are doing, which leads to the misery about which they can tell jokes. The narrator is resolutely determined never to drink from the cup of injustice and humiliation, even if it tastes like honey. There are many barriers, walls after walls, between the narrator (now first person singular) and the beloved mistress. The narrator is neither a light bird that could fly over walls, nor a giant that could destroy them. S/he has a flute, but it is broken and s/he became a lover.

The play was staged after Surūr's death by Munīr Murād in 1984. It was the first time the famous, simple text was changed by adding a heavy, sad political interpretation of Egyptian reality and evoking the necessity of political change. In the same year, Shaykh Imām reinterpreted the song by making minor alterations, and it is now in his famous repertoire of resistance songs. In 1992, the song became even more popular after it was sung by Muḥammad Munīr in the movie *The Stories of the Stranger* (*Ḥikāyāt al-gharīb*).[16] It is significant that the old folkloristic song has—according to YouTube and Google search results—disappeared underneath the re-workings more and more since Surūr rewrote it. One of the meaningful modifications in Shaykh Imām's version is the verse "Carrying a flute, a broken flute,"

which was changed to "Carrying an oud, an expressive and heroic one." Shaykh Imām's intense songs still showed the hard reality, but changed the tenor, encouraging the audience to take action. While Surūr holds the "broken flute," Shaykh Imām sings with his "heroic oud." Surūr's modified song is still alive and very popular and is sung in many musical interpretations by revolutionary artists. Like Dunyā Masʿūd, Maryam Ṣāliḥ and Dīnā al-Widīdī have also performed Shaykh Imām's version since 2011.[17] The band *Iskandrillā*, which is closely associated with January 25, has also performed the song as an explicit form of cultural resistance. Some of the recordings of the songs on YouTube are combined with photos from Taḥrīr or portraits of the January 25 victims. Imām has also composed and sung two other poems by Surūr: "Ḥilū al-marākib" and "Gharīb wa gīt al-balad." In YouTube videos listed under the first title one can see Imām performing the song at a private gathering. At one point he takes the audience by surprise and interrupts the poem, improvising and mentioning Surūr before crying and grieving for him. This rare document may indicate that Imām and Surūr shared a close friendship. In any case, Imām expressed how he was moved by the tragic life of Surūr.

The last example of rewriting Surūr's works, reinforcing his significance as a part of the legacy of Egyptian cultural resistance, is "his most widely distributed" (Witty 28) and controversially discussed collection of poems *Kuss ummiyyāt*, which is usually shortened to the polite form *Al-ummiyyāt*. Surūr supposedly composed this originally oral collection of poems in stages between his personal crisis in 1968 and his death in 1978. He recited them at parties and gatherings, where they were recorded and later circulated among students and intellectuals until the 1990s. Along with other works, his son Shuhdī published them on his own website around 2001. He was then arrested and convicted of the possession of obscene materials. Shuhdī fled to Russia before the court sentenced him to a year in jail with compulsory labor in 2002. Over the course of the following years, the texts and recordings of the poems became widespread. In a powerful, rage-filled stream of consciousness lasting around three hours, Surūr presented a dark political and social satire in colloquial Egyptian, denouncing state, society and the corrupted and ignorant intellectuals of Egypt.[18] Despite the rage and obscenity, Surūr never lost his poetical touch and playful inventiveness, performing a remarkable balancing act. As El-Lozy has observed,

> Surur challenges, ridicules and denounces all aspects of official culture and its representatives, and reminds us of everything that official culture forgets, ignores, or falsifies. The list of institutions, individuals and subjects he targets is almost endless. These include, among many others, the theatre establishment, newspaper editors, Kissinger, the peace process and the open-door policy. […] In the midst of torrents of abuse and subversive and obscene inversions of popular and folk sayings and songs there are also some of the most lyrical passages ever to be found in modern Egyptian poetry. (El-Lozy)[19]

Attracting international and local attention, the publishing of the *Kuss ummiyyāt* and the court case against Shuhdī may have led to an increase in interest in not only these poems, but also in Surūr's work as a whole. And yet, the obscene, rage-filled revolutionary verses remain an inspiring source for frustrated young Egyptian rebels until today. The poems adopt an ambivalent attitude, which is also common in Shaykh Imām's songs. On the one hand, Egypt is depicted as hopeless case, ugly, corrupted and even prostituted, ignorant of external aggressors and local defilers. At the same time, it is brutal in regard to its children who love it and are fighting to change its ugly reality. However, on the other hand, Egypt is simultaneously portrayed as a beloved country full of promise, a country worth struggling and suffering for in the fight to gain its genuine freedom. Surūr unscrupulously uses a sexist metaphor to illustrate

Egypt; he describes it as a prostitute who is always opening her legs: "Look to the map, you find her opening her legs / God created her so, what can you do!" (*Kuss ummiyyāt*).[20]

He warns of more defeats, if nothing changes fundamentally, if we are not able to be "clean": "Many's the time we have said, let us become clean, but it was said 'nonsense' / so it seems sure we will have a hundred defeats, not only one" (ibid.). In this sense, the work on the revolution is piecemeal, lacking the necessary coherency for it to be successful. Thus, the endless repeating cycle of revolutions expresses the fact that they are hopeless and doomed to failure: "Many's the time we have revolutionized so that our revolutions became periodic / […] We sleep and awake to find a revolution against the revolution" (ibid.).

A part of the poem is a long message to his eldest son Shuhdī, in whom Surūr places his hope. He tells him about his long suffering, about his hunger, his exile, torture and horrible experience in the psychiatric clinic, which he understands to be an act of oppression imposed by the regime. However, he demands of his son: "Don't curse Egypt, even if you hunger like me, even if they hang you!" (ibid.). The patriotic spirit of the poet, despite his radical social and political criticism, is expressed as something he wants to pass down to his son: "Hate, hate and hate but love the Nile" (ibid.). Surūr understood himself as a first-rank revolutionary and wanted his son to be proud to say: "My father died as an Egyptian revolutionary / […] My father fought, because fighting was his passion" (ibid.). His soft tone to his son balances the very harsh, angry tone that dominates the verses. Sometimes he warned "of the coming explosion of the masses' repressed anger, and tried to be the spark to ignite this anger […] 'O people, you who've been stupefied, O silent one, Speak!' These subversive sentiments were more than enough to get his poems banned, even without the obscenities" (Witty 34).

As Witty has argued, by rendering his message in vulgar and sexist language, Surūr in fact compromised not only its specific reception, but also that of all his work. It seems clear to Witty that

> Surūr did himself an injustice by making the form of his message unpalatable to so many people who needed to hear it, but nevertheless, the *Kuss ummiyyāt* is to be taken seriously, as both a work of literature and as a social and intellectual comment on the state of modern Egypt. (35)

While Witty is basically correct in his assessment, I would nevertheless argue that Surūr himself, as a banned figure, as well as his *Kuss ummiyyāt*, have become a powerful source of inspiration for the current Egyptian counter-hegemonic culture. The quoted verses from *Kuss ummiyyāt* are widely circulated in the blogs and Facebook pages of young activists and are used as slogans for revolutionary posters and collages or video clips. Additionally, these poems have inspired the production of similar texts in what we may call this Surūr-created genre. In the introduction to the full text, the editor recommends that the readers should write their own *Kuss ummiyyāt*: "It is better if an Egyptian writes his own '*Kuss ummiyyāt*' from his own very specific location."

This idea has in fact become a trend in recent times. For example an anonymous activist inspired by Surūr's *Kuss ummiyyāt* composed his own short "national hymn": "The Egyptian National Hymn—fuck you Egypt" ("Al-nashīd al-waṭanī al-miṣrī—kuss ummak yā Miṣr"). It was played more than one hundred thousand times on YouTube up until May 2015. The text, spoken in a very angry voice, is indeed a radicalization of Surūr's text. Seemingly every taboo is broken, even the Nile, which was untouchable for Surūr. The hymn begins with:

Fuck you, Egypt, and fuck your Nile	كسمك يا مصر على كسم نيلك ..
fuck everyone who leaves you and comes back to you	كسم اللي يخرج منك ويرجع تاني ويجيلك ..
fuck your culture a heap of stones	كسم الحضارة شوية حجارة
[…]	[...]
you lie on the map opening your legs …	قاعدة على الخريطة وفاتحة رجليكي

(Miṣr umm al-qaḥba)

The reproduction of this angry, forbidden poetry using extremely crass, taboo language is not simply a continuation of Surūr's verse tradition. The newly generated texts are regularly updated with references to the current political reality. In addition, there are a number of Facebook sites under the name *Kuss ummiyyāt* quoting the text or creating new variations in response to changed realities. A host of such angry variations related to current reality and spoken in the manner and spirit of Surūr can also be found on YouTube. The use of the vulgar, sexist language usually heard in the harsh reality of Egyptian streets, can be understood as a means of challenging entrenched cultural boundaries, an attempt to spread a radical kind of counter-hegemonic culture while resisting corrupted repressive regimes. In any case, the rewriting of the verses opens a new kind of popular cultural production in which every blogger or activist is able to participate in the process of contesting positions of power.

Conclusion

In my essay I have attempted to approach new ways of transtextual connections between contemporary counter-hegemonic culture in Egypt after January 2011 and the modern literary and artistic legacy of resistance and dissent of the twentieth century, focusing on the 1960s. With the emergence of new Arab democracy movements, new aesthetic practices of cultural resistance have emerged. Not only artists, writers and intellectuals, but also everyday citizens became able to actively participate in the production or co-creation of street art, public space performances and online videos or graphic collages, etc. I started from the premise that any cultural product can be considered a complex, multilayered palimpsest (Genette), a hypertext with references to current reality, but also to older pretexts, templates, fragments, figures, and symbols. Some of these references to certain writers are frequently presented within the new aesthetics of resistance. I focused here on the reception of the literary works of three prominent figures from the Egyptian tradition of dissent in the 1960s: Najm, Dunqul and especially Surūr, themselves linked to predecessors like Sayyid Darwīsh or al-Tūnsī. I tried to examine which kind of hypertextual transformation these pretexts have undergone, but also how moments of tension between the old texts and the current reality emerge to challenge values and norms which could lead to social and political change.

As I tried to demonstrate, the three figures I selected belong to the most significant and relevant reference points for resistance in the context of the Egyptian democracy movement. However, this selection could most certainly be extended to include other figures like Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn or Fūʾād Ḥaddād, or indeed look to poetry from other Arab countries. But what do these new cultural counter-hegemonic practices mean? What conclusions can we draw from the fact that there has been a strong reception of certain figures belonging to a specific tradition of literary resistance? The reception of dissident poets from the 1960s does not necessarily represent the continuity of a long tradition, but rather signals a new aesthetic practice and

experience—connected to, but independent of the context of its original production in the 1960s. Thus, it is not merely a matter of something old being reproduced or a tradition being remembered and evoked. The new counter-hegemonic aesthetics occur mostly as a popular practice, reaching beyond the confined milieus of intellectuals and, through its engaging character, animates more people to actively participate. This new kind of cultural practice—and the tension it generates between artistic legacy and current political reality—disputes traditional values and norms, especially on the level of language itself, as Gramsci had claimed. According to Stuart Hall, such popular practices can be understood as a site where power positions are permanently negotiated and contested. The legendary, controversial poet and playwright Surūr remains an especially significant source of inspiration and a symbolic icon for the struggle between cultural activists—who filled the role of the classical intellectuals—and the political power represented in the state or sometimes other hegemonic blocks in society. Popular culture, colloquial poetry, and any kind of cultural practice which aims at appropriating public space, like street arts, try to contest and negotiate power positions. The counter-hegemonic legacy of modern Arabic culture is not like a container full of building bricks which can be used to construct new cultural products. Rather, old and new elements belong to the same continuous human project to achieve social and political change. Both the new aesthetics and the legacy are working together to concentrate and expand a new power of cultural resistance, hopefully bringing about a real shift in culture, one that is urgently needed if true social change is to take place.

Notes

1   From another perspective, Hans Robert Jauß perceived literature not within the limits of a productive moment in a specific historical context, but as the reader's experience. In this respect, the aesthetic experience of readers documents the evolution of literary works through the very moments of tension in which the reader draws a connection between the text and his or her current reality—thereby challenging values and norms that could achieve social or political change. Jauß, Hans Robert. "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft." *Rezeptionsästhetik: Theorie und Praxis*. Ed. Rainer Warning. München: Fink, 1975. 126–62. Print.

2   This translation is the subtitle of the song by *Revolution Records*. The word *sāyir* in the original text in Arabic means roamer. However, because it sounds like *thāyir*, which means rebel or revolutionary, it was instead transcribed and translated as rebel, a fortunate "mistake."

3   All translations from Arabic to English are, if not indicated otherwise, my own.

4   Pictures of the graffiti of Khālid Saʿīd were posted by the blogger Hussein Mahran: "Grāfītī Khālid Saʿīd ʿalā wājihat mabnā wizārat al-dākhiliyya fī Lāzūghlī." *Hussein Mahran*. 6 June 2011. Web. 14 May 2015.

5   Amnesty International reported on 27 June 2014 on this case: "Human Rights Lawyer Latest Victim of Egypt's Repressive Protest Law." *Amnesty International*. 27 June 2014. Web. 14 May 2015.

6   Between 2006 and 2008, the publishing house al-Shurūq (Cairo) printed many of his works with additional introductions and preceding commentary articles.

7   Surūr has written an elaborate study about al-Maʿarrī. Surūr, Najīb. *Taḥta ʿabāʾat Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*. Ed. Ḥāzim Khayrī. Cairo: Al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2008. Print.

8   Report of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. "Munaẓẓamāt ḥuqūqiyya tastankir al-ḥukm al-ʿaskarī al-ṣādir bi-ḥabs wa-taghrīm al-mudawwin Māykil Nabīl Sanad ʿalā khalfiyya tadwīna nāqida li-l-majlis al-ʿaskarī." *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights*. 15 Dec. 2011. Web. 14 May 2015.

9   I adopt the translation *Fuck You Poems* as coined by Witty for "it conveys the cultural equivalent phrase" (27).

10 See Māhir, Karīm. "Qaṣīdat al-ḥidhāʾ li-l-shāʿir Najīb Surūr." *YouTube*. 18 Nov. 2012. Web. 14 May 2015.

11 The *maṣṭaba* is an ancient Egyptian type of tomb.

12 The poem was published for the first time in *al-Risāla al-Jadīda* in August 1956.

13 The poem was translated collaboratively between myself and the Egyptian scholar Shaza Abdel-Lateef.

14 See Hassan, Sherif. "Helm Donia Massoud." *YouTube*. 5 Sept. 2013. Web. 14 May 2015.

15 As in note 14, the translation is a cooperative effort between myself and the Egyptian scholar Shaza Abdel-Lateef.

16 The story was written by Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī. The film was directed by Anʿām Muḥammad ʿAlī. The song by Muḥammad Munīr is entitled "Al-baḥr biyiḍḥak līh?" ("Why does the Nile laugh?"). See "Ḥikāyāt al-gharīb." *Al-sīnimā.kūm*. N.d. Web. 14 May 2015.

17 See El Shahed, Mohamed. "Dina El Wedidi—El Bahr Beyedhak—23-5-2013." Concert in Cairo. *YouTube*. 23 May 2013. Web. 14 May 2015. Ismail, Mahmoud. "Al-baḥr biyiḍḥak līh—Maryam Ṣāliḥ—Bayt al-Raṣīf." Concert in Cairo. *YouTube*. 10 Apr. 2013. Web. 14 May 2015.

18 For more details see Witty 27–35.

19 See further Whitaker, Brian. "One angry poet." *Guardian* 10 Apr. 2007. Web. 14 May 2015.

20 For voice recordings, many clips can be found on YouTube by searching *Kuss ummiyyāt*.

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Egyptian Narratives of the 2011 Revolution: Diary as a Medium of Reconciliation with the Political[1]

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By the time this contribution is published, more than four years will have passed since the euphoric eighteen days of Tahrir (from January 25 to February 11, 2011) which forced President Mubarak to step down. As the Egyptian revolutionary process has unfolded, there have been moments of intense political mobilization as well as moments of bloody repression and deep depression. Throughout those years, youth organizations and broad political fronts have continued to organize demonstrations and sit-ins, despite the hostility of an aggressive state apparatus. Persistent walk-outs and strikes have shown the vitality of the workers' movement in the face of still unfulfilled economic and social rights.[2] All these groups, along with many individuals, are trying to preserve the dynamic and memory of these first extraordinary eighteen days, an endeavor that seems all the more complicated by the intervention of the military in the political process and the growing polarization of public debate.

Literary and artistic narratives are part of this turmoil. In addition to the huge number of literary accounts produced around the process, slogans and portraits of martyrs of the revolution have been immortalized in the street art that has blossomed throughout urban centers in the country. Characters of diverse backgrounds on both sides of the barricades feature prominently in visual narratives. In short, a range of artistic narratives are part of the ongoing struggle to frame and understand what happened during those eighteen days and what its implications are for today and for the future. As Samia Mehrez puts it, referencing Umberto Eco, "both the revolution and its translations remain 'open texts' at the literal and semiotic levels" (*Translating Egypt's Revolution* 1).

In this paper I analyze narratives of the first eighteen days of the Egyptian revolution on Tahrir written by two novelists from the 1990s generation. I argue that these two texts represent a rupture with the themes otherwise associated with writers of this generation—themes of alienation in the public sphere and distrust of political narratives. Specifically, I argue that the format of the diary, a genre I discuss at length below, and the authors' use of intertextuality, come together to provide a means through which both writers convey not only their own personal reconciliation with the political, but also the broader renewal of the political taking place through the events of the revolution.

Māʾat khaṭwa min al-thawra, yawmiyyāt min Maydān al-Taḥrīr (*A Hundred Steps from the Revolution, Diary from Midan al-Tahrir*, 2011) by Aḥmad Zaghlūl al-Shīṭī (henceforth, al-Shiti) and *Ismī thawra* (*Revolution is My Name*, 2012) by Munā Brins (henceforth, Mona Prince), are two narratives recounting the first eighteen days of the Egyptian revolution. Born in Damietta, al-Shiti now lives in Cairo, where he also works as a lawyer in an investment company. He is well-known for his dark short stories which have received critical acclaim as iconic narratives for the 1990s generation. His first novel, *Wurūd sāmma li-Ṣaqr* (*Poisonous Flowers for Saqr*, 1990), features a tortured main character who is unable to deal with contradictions linked to the division of the society into social classes.[3]

Prince is associate professor of English literature at Suez Canal University; prior to *Ismī thawra*, she has published two novels, *Thalāth ḥaqāʾib li-l-safar* (*Three Suitcases for Departure*, 1998) and *Innī uḥaddithuka li-tarā* (*I Speak to You so that You May See*, 2008), as well as two collections of short stories.[4] In addition to her work as an academic and a novelist, she is also a translator and a public figure. Following her involvement in Tahrir, in a symbolic gesture she decided to become a candidate in the presidential election in March 2012. In 2013 she was accused of "contempt of religion" by one of her students and had to face disciplinary measures from the university's administration (Committee on Academic Freedom, MESA).

Both authors are considered part of the so-called 1990s generation—a generation that various authors have characterized as displaying a reluctance towards engaging the political and the ideological, an aversion expressed in short, fragmented writings focusing on the self. As one of the first critics to welcome this new generation of authors, Hafez defines their narratives as "novels of the closed horizon," tracing "a series of homologies between the formal characteristics of the new Egyptian novel and the haphazard nature of the 'third city'" ("The New Egyptian Novel" 61). Echoing the novelists' own description of their writings, he describes the narratives as relating a crisis "in which the I is unable to identify with itself, let alone with an 'other' or a cause" (62).

This reluctance vis-à-vis grand narratives does not mean however that these authors' texts can be dismissed as depoliticized. Though wary of the political, the writing is still political in a sense. In a study of May Telmisany's (Mayy Talmisānī) *Dunyāzād* (1997) and Somaya Ramadan's (Sumayya Ramaḍān) *Awrāq al-Narjis* (*Leaves of Narcissus*, 2001), Hoda Elsadda shows how the writing of the body, the personal, becomes political (146). More generally, as Marie-Thérèse Abdel Massih puts it, "'political' came to signify the subversion of all fixed meanings arising out of state policies and social mores. In this writing there is always a conflict between self and community, spontaneity and social order." (22–23). Echoing these remarks, Mehrez identifies "contemporary Egyptian avant-garde fiction" as sealing "the death of the family as a literary icon that represents the Egyptian national imaginary" (*Egypt's Culture Wars* 143); the collapse of the family or national icon in reality announces not the birth but the untimely death of the individual, where "the very act of writing becomes the only remaining possibility for salvation" (127).

In his study of Ahmad Alaidy's (Aḥmad al-ʿĀyidī) *An takūn ʿAbbās al-ʿAbd* (*Being Abbas el Abd*, 2003), El-Ariss goes so far as to read texts by the 1990s generation "as contributing to a clockwork of change, incrementally and locally intervening in discourse and ushering in new ideas and aesthetic and political practices" (165). While hacking away against modernity, Alaidy produces a text that defies state discourse, says El-Ariss. He dismantles old narratives, puts on trial previous genres and ways of writing, breaking with the "generation of Defeat" and interrogating "its project of modernity, the failure of which was merely exposed in the 1967 war or *Naksa*" (155). El-Ariss continues:

> Arising from texting and blogging, Alaidy's work recuperates a new mode of experience that appropriates nonverbal communication in order to shake up and awaken the common person from his/her torpor, urging him/her to take action and re-experience his/her environment in new ways. (154–55)

But while *An takūn* opens and closes on an injunction to call the cell phone number on the mall's lavatories, reproduced in the text "call me" (Alaidy 9–10, 125–26), urging the reader to take positive action and enter into a network of relationships transcending urban isola-

tion, the kind of exchange being encouraged remains cynical and unfulfilling. The first sentence in the last chapter is significant: "he wasn't a corpse yet" (125). Characters in *An takūn* are struggling to survive, but only in a stage of pre-death. The novel's rejection of dominant institutions—political, literary and familial—is difficult to define as ushering in new "political practices" (El-Ariss 165) in any meaningful sense.

Indeed, like most narratives published in the 1990s, *An takūn* still expresses defiance vis-à-vis political grand narratives and any kind of collective practice. It does not aim to shape a collective, alternative understanding of history, as Mehrez argues narratives of the 1960s had: "Whether it be through that which is articulated or that which is silenced, writers are effectively participating in a process of rewriting the dominant historical record from (an)other point of view" (*Egyptian Writers* 7).

The sense of alienation that dominates *An takūn* nurtures a feeling of impotence that structurally hampers the capacity to actively intervene in any social process or shape "new political practices." Though it differs from 1960s narratives in terms of its distancing from political grand narratives, like most texts of the 1990s generation, *An takūn* does share in the sense of alienation that defines post-1967 narratives. As analyzed by Hafez, the 1960s novels present "a group of fertile variations on the character of the outsider, from alienation to nihilism, passing through loss, rejection of life, alarm, and insecurity" ("The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties" 79). In those texts, alienation might be 'mild,' expressed in a sense of non-belonging as in *Mālik al-ḥazīn* (*The Heron*, 1983) by Ibrahim Aslan (Ibrāhīm Aṣlān), in which the narrator is torn between his native popular neighborhood, Imbāba, and the center of the city, feeling at ease in neither place; or alienation might manifest as in *Sharq al-nakhīl* (*East of the Palms*, 1985) by Bahaa Tahir (Bahāʾ Ṭāhir), where the narrator is unable to fit in with the ways of his native rural village and lives on the margins of society in the capital. Protagonists in both novels get involved in collective protests but are either unable to chant with the protesters (*Mālik al-ḥazīn*) or end up participating only by coincidence (*Sharq al-nakhīl*). This sense of loneliness within a political group is also central in Latifa al-Zayyat's (Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt) *Ṣāḥib al-bayt* (*The Owner of the House*, 1994), where gender dynamics cause the main character, Samiyya, to feel ill at ease in the leftist organization to which she belongs. Feelings of alienation in society are depicted in a more violent way in Sunʿallah Ibrahim's (Sunʿallāh Ibrāhīm) *Tilka al-rāʾiḥa* (*The Smell of It*, 1969), considered one of the iconic narratives of the 1960s generation. Leaving prison after serving a five-year sentence, the narrator finds himself unwelcome at his sisters' and friends' homes. His daily life is emptied of meaning and described in a minimalist way. In a later novel, *Al-lajna* (*The Committee*, 1981), Ibrahim offers an even more extreme metaphor of alienation when the main protagonist, subjected to a surreal trial by a jury in a language he struggles to understand, ends up eating himself.

Feelings of alienation, then, have featured prominently in narratives by the authors of the so-called 1990s generation. Yasir ʿAbd al-Latif (Yāsir ʿAbd al-Laṭīf) and May Telmissany have, each in their own way, expressed a desire to retire to the space of the suburb in *Qānūn al-wirātha* (*Law of Inheritance*, 2002) and *Heliopolis* (2000). Unable to build a sense of belonging within the contemporary megacity, both narrators reinvent a closed space, the cozy realm of the youth *shilla* in *Qānūn al-wirātha* or the familiar idealized childhood neighborhood in *Heliopolis* (Ḥishmat 263). Alienation in public space or political gatherings is also key to understanding the first novels of both al-Shiti (*Wurūd sāmma li-Ṣaqr*) and Prince (*Thalāth ḥaqāʾib li-l-safar*).

Alienation and Disillusion

Wurūd sāmma li-Ṣaqr, a short, dark novel considered al-Shiti's masterpiece,[5] begins with the death of the main protagonist, Saqr, a brilliant and tortured mind incapable of overcoming his sense of alienation and injustice in a class-divided society. His death triggers flashbacks for the four main protagonists of the novel: his best friend Yahya, Saqr himself, his lover Nahid, and his sister Tahiyya. Yahya is an activist involved in leftist circles; he is presented by Saqr as being "a true man" who evolves in "a real world," and belongs to groups "who believe in him and love him"[6] (67). But the narrative reveals his voice to be that of a stereo-typed language, constantly challenged by Saqr's sarcastic tone, and depicted as obsessively repeating the same things over and over again in a flat and overtly didactic style, regardless of the changing conversations (68–69). Saqr's lover Nahid, from a middle-upper class fam-ily, throws light on their relationship from her point of view, recounting his aggressive ex-pressions of sexual desire and his sarcastic attacks. Tahiyya, a simple and candid girl, works as a saleswoman at a grocery store while still studying; she is in love with Yahya but doubts that he will marry her.

While at the beginning of the text the reason behind Saqr's death is not clear, as the story unfolds the multiple narrative voices gradually shed light on the event that both inau-gurates and closes the novel. The chapter in which Saqr himself speaks ends with him real-izing that his relationship with Nahid is over: "intahā kull shayʾ" (al-Shīṭī, *Wurūd sāmma* 57), as if it signifies the collapse of his universe. As Saqr and Nahid are from different so-cial backgrounds, the relationship is depicted as likely to be a short-lived one, but it never-theless shapes Saqr's inner life. The social gap between them obviously haunts him, for he is repeatedly referring to the status of Nahid's father, a judge and car dealer. He further elaborates on this gap when he learns about his lover's decision to get engaged to someone else: "Her father a judge, a car dealer, a cabin in Ras al-Barr, a groom Assistant Professor, contractor, tourism, member of the National Democratic [Party], a rising Infitah star. And I am Saqr 'Abd al-Wahid, even if I were the Shakespeare of my time, I am nothing" (63, partly repeated on 65).

The name of the main protagonist is significant: al-Saqr means falcon, a lonely bird fly-ing high in the sky, a proud outsider. Similarly significant, the title of the novel refers to a re-current nightmare in which Saqr repeatedly sees a face of porcelain approaching him while wooden hands hand him "poisonous flowers." The face is never identified as belonging to anyone in particular, but the character might be read as a metaphor for Nasser, handing Saqr poisonous flowers representing the youth of the country's failed dreams of overcoming class barriers. The failure of the Nasserist state and later social and political developments not only form the historical background, they actually shape the characters' development in the novel. The death of the *zaʿīm*—"bābā Gamal" as the kids' teacher calls him (55)—in 1970 takes place while Saqr and Yahya are still adolescents. The city mourns and is so empty that Yahya asks Saqr: "Did everybody die?" (*Hal māta kull al-nās?*) (38), thus associating Nas-ser's death with that of the whole nation. Later, the failures of the state are condemned when Yahya's brother, Fathi, comes back from the front in 1973 with an amputated leg and is granted the scant recognition and reward of a job in public water closets (40). The limits of the regime's success are underlined by Fathi himself when he says to his brother: "We need another crossing" (*Naḥtāju ilā ʿubūr ākhar*) (40).

The rise of the *Infitah*'s nouveaux riches is personified by Nahid's father and fiancé, a judge who also operates as a car dealer and a tourism employee, both members of the then

ruling National Democratic Party. Saqr's revolt against what Nahid represents is equally directed against his own mother, particularly when he discovers that she deals in clothes and other goods bought at the free zone of Port Said. His revolt is at once political and driven by desperation; but while his anger is flamed by a deep understanding of the class contradictions at stake, it has no chance of effecting real change, and so ends, ultimately, with the character's death. Saqr's death—it is not clear whether he commits suicide or not—is the result of a depression that has engulfed him upon realizing the impossibility of a cross-class relationship, leaving him feeling more and more alienated in a society that has no place or need for people like him. At the end of the novel, Yahya, the teacher and principled activist, chooses to leave the country and work in Qatar. Both characters thus ultimately fail in their projects, be it on a personal or political level.

In *Thalāth ḥaqāʾib li-l-safar* the narrator has decided to emigrate and flee a depressing reality. While packing her personal belongings, photos and old dresses trigger flashbacks to family bonds and brief love relationships. An overwhelming sense of loss engulfs her as she looks at the family pictures, for half of her relatives have died since the pictures were taken (Brins, *Thalāth ḥaqāʾib* 13). The chapters in which she delves into scenes of grief and mourning lead her to express a sense of suffocation in her relationship to her mother and father. The flashbacks to her relationships, in particular with ʿAbd al-Rahman, a history lecturer, evokes memories of brief moments of political activism against the war on Iraq in 1991. For the first time she participates in a demonstration (45) but is afterwards confronted by the fact that she "didn't realize anything" (47). All the characters around the narrator take desperate actions to flee a desperate reality; her cousin Sami emigrates early on to Canada, propelled by feelings of "non-belonging and alienation": "I have no place here. I am leaving. I hate this country" (16); her friend Samira gets married because "there is no other choice" (56). Her colleague Yusuf, a desperate poet, plunges into alcohol and neglects his studies (64–68). Her friend Safaa is urged to resign from her job as a teacher because she refuses to force pupils to take private lessons and then leaves for the Gulf (71–72). Even a young man she meets on a bus by chance tells her that he is aware that his smoking will eventually lead to his death: "There is no other thing I can do. Yes, I am committing suicide" (51). She ends up with an overwhelming sense of helplessness and depression. In her extensive study of the novel, Mehrez shows that "through the constant shift in narrative point of view, from the first-person narrator in the past to the third-person narrator in the present, Munira's alienation from both icons, the familial and the national, is sharpened and intensified" (*Egypt's Culture Wars* 129). Intertextual references, first to the song "Waṭanī ḥabībī, waṭanī al-akbar" ("My Beloved Nation, The Greatest Nation") and then to Latifa Zayyat's novel, *Al-bāb al-maftūḥ* (*The Open Door*, 1960), subsequently turned into an iconic 1960s film, are borrowed moments of glory from the successful nationalistic movement of the 1960s. The references underline the present "Egyptian nation's actual disgrace" (Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars* 128).

Diaries of the Revolution

In comparison, these feelings of non-belonging and alienation, death and dead-ends are largely absent in al-Shiti and Prince's narratives of the first eighteen days of the revolution, as both authors/narrators conceive themselves as insiders to the ongoing political battle in Tahrir. Both al-Shiti's *Māʾat khaṭwa* and Prince's *Ismī thawra* cover the same period of time, beginning just before January 25 and ending on February 11, 2011. But unlike other

publications, such as fictional representations of the eighteen days sit-in on Tahrir (for example, *Sabʿat ayyām fi-l-Taḥrīr* [*Seven Days in Tahrir*] by Hisham al-Khishin [Hishām al-Khishin], 2011) or documents focusing primarily on the events themselves (for example *Al-thawra al-ān* [*The Revolution Now*] by Saʿad al-Qirsh [Saʿd al-Qirsh], 2012), al-Shiti's and Prince's narratives focus on the authors' personal experiences in Tahrir.[7] As al-Shiti puts it at the beginning of his account, he is "hunting moments that are personal to [him], with [his] eye, not that of a video camera or even the story of eye-witnesses" (*Māʾat khaṭwa* 19).

Prince's *Ismī thawra* is divided into fourteen chapters, plus the introduction. The title of every chapter is a date or an important event, such as "Friday of Anger" or "The Battle of the Camel," with the exceptions of chapter thirteen, which encompasses an entire week, and chapter three, which deals with events in the city of Suez. Similarly, al-Shiti's *Māʾat khaṭwa* is divided into twenty-three entries which correspond to either a date that covers an entire day or a portion of the day, or a breaking news headline; the exception here is the third entry, which brings together and recounts the events of a number of days.

The structure of these narratives invites us to qualify them as diaries—a genre characterized by its presentation via daily accounts. This diurnal form conveys a sense of immediacy: "There is no foreshadowing, no plot development." A diary has no beginning and no end, and moreover, the diarist presumably writes down all that goes through his or her head, without previous selection work (Sinor 191).

The diary is not a prominent genre among Egyptian autobiographical writings. The autobiographic novel is a well-established form in Egyptian literature, from Taha Husayn's (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) *Al-ayyām* (*The Days*, 1926–1929) to Radwa Ashour's (Raḍwā ʿĀshūr) *Athqal min Raḍwā* (*Heavier than Radwa*, 2013). Many novelists have published memoirs that can be read as narratives of commitment and imprisonment, such as Sherif Hatata's (Sharīf Ḥatāta) *Al-nawāfidh al-maftūḥa* (*The Open Windows*, 1993), Latifa al-Zayyat's (Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt) *Ḥamlat taftīsh: Awrāq shakhṣiyya* (*The Search: Personal Papers*, 1992) or Sunallah Ibrahim's *Yawmiyyāt al-wāḥāt* (*Diary from the Oasis*, 2004), which all relate experiences of leftist political activism between the end of the 1940s through to the 1980s, including accounts of long years of detention in the Oasis Camps after 1959. Though not organized or presented as daily entries, Sunallah's text is the only one in which unpolished notes constitute the main part of the narrative, thus fitting the category of the diary. The book, by the already respected author of *Tilka al-rāʾiḥa* and *Dhāt* (1992), was published four decades after his release and included the notes he made on cigarette paper during his five-year internment. Apart from that text however, publishing a journal or daily notes has not been very popular among Egyptian novelists. Commenting on the absence of the diary genre in the texts of the 1960s generation,[8] al-Shiti reveals that his own literary education instilled in him the belief that writing about ongoing events was a sign of immaturity, as the writer was supposed to let events ripen before writing about them (al-Shītī, personal interview).

Although al-Shiti's *Māʾat khaṭwa* and Prince's *Ismī thawra* respect and recreate the form of the diary in that they are divided into chapters or entries with dates as titles, they were in part written *after* the actual events described and cannot be considered as 'pure' diaries. Prince's narrative, as it is revealed at the end of the text, was entirely written after the events, between March 2011 and February 2012. Al-Shiti begins to write on a daily basis only on February 1. The parts concerning the preceding days are written afterwards and assembled in chapter three. Moreover, these narratives, unlike "real" diaries that may remain unpublished, are formatted for publication. As such, it is probably most accurate to consider these texts as a hybrid genre that combines elements of *diary*, *autobiography*—a

"connected prose narrative" of the self that is more stylistically crafted than the diary, and *memoir*—a kind of writing that "does not purport to tell the whole life story" (Waites 379).[9] In other words then, we might call these, as Hala Kamal puts it, "autobiographical hybrid texts" (586).

Of the three genres, the diary offers the most potential in terms of conveying an "accurate 'metaphor of self'" (Sinor 191). Felicity Nussbaum shows that "the discourse of diary is particularly open to a series of coterminous and contradictory subject positions" (129). Because of its particular treatment of time, creating "a record of the past" as well as "a crisis of attention to the present" (133), its private nature makes the diary a particularly favorable medium for self-reflection—notwithstanding social media's blurring of the boundaries between private and public. "The diurnal form allows the contradictions of the self to exist on the page. By recording daily life, the diarist creates both a continuous sense of self— what Nussbaum calls 'an enabling fiction of a coherent or continuous identity' (134) and a discontinuous, changing self—I am not the same as I was yesterday" (Sinor 191). And it is this notion of a self in transition that I argue is at stake in al-Shiti's and Prince's narratives. By exploring the potentials of the diary genre, both authors document the process of transformation from someone deeply ambivalent about the political to someone participating in the events they are describing.

Moreover, by practicing a form of testimonial writing—as "autobiography is a form of witnessing which 'matters to others'" (Anderson 126)—both authors express a desire to contribute actively to the memory of an extraordinary historical moment. By publishing their texts and thus engaging with a large public, the authors aim to share a personal experience that is inextricably intertwined with a political event. In these particular circumstances, the process of writing itself reveals a desire to transcend one's own self as a subject and produce a kind of writing beyond that which "only matters to oneself" (al-Shīṭī, *Māʾat khaṭwa* 37). By describing the self in dialogue with the revolutionary process, these texts display a deep involvement in the political movement as well as an active interaction with its actors, characteristics entirely new to the 1990s generation.

Reconciliation with Political Action

At the beginning of the narratives, both authors express their skepticism towards the growing protest movement. Al-Shiti recalls having participated in a sit-in of writers and artists protesting the bombing of the al-Qiddīsayn church in Alexandria on January 1, 2011 (al-Shīṭī, *Māʾat khaṭwa* 13) that left more than twenty dead. His depiction of the small sit-in, symbolically cornered in a dead-end street near to Talaat Harb Square, closes with a sentence typical of the minimalist reifying aesthetic ("esthétique chosiste et minimaliste," Jacquemond 486) usually characteristic of the writing of the 1990s generation: "I entered the atelier. I needed a warm cup of tea" (al-Shīṭī, *Māʾat khaṭwa* 16). With this abrupt sentence, al-Shiti distances himself from the events and returns the focus to his self and his daily routine. The sit-in in itself is portrayed as a short moment in time, something to be put between brackets.

Similarly, though Prince goes to Shoubra on January 25 in time for the start of the demonstrations, she only joins the march a few hours later. First, she expresses her reluctance, noting: "I don't like crowds. I don't like shouting, nor do I like vulgar chants" (*Ismī thawra* 4).[10] Even once she joins the demonstration, her position within it remains reluctant. She writes: "I started to move with the crowds, not quite with them, but near them. They were in the middle of the street and I was on the side, near the sidewalk" (24).

In this way she communicates a sense of being an intellectual who walks with the crowds without really mingling, a feeling that turns into an apolitical posture. But ever so slowly, she begins to join in, chanting the slogans with the other demonstrators and merging with the marching mass. From this moment she definitively abandons her position of outsider on the sidelines. The transformation is expressed by the change in the use of personal pronouns: abandoning the third-person plural (they), Prince shifts to using the first-person plural (we), now including herself in the moving crowds she was so careful to distinguish herself from at the beginning.[11]

Admiration and fascination for the young leaders of the demonstration encourages Prince to take this step. Al-Shiti expresses similar feelings: the young (*shubbān wa fatayāt*) (*Māʾat khaṭwa* 7) are identified as possessing a simple, evident genius (*al-ʿabqariyya al-basīṭa*) (112). They are depicted as a generation of action that has rid itself of a sterile ideology and managed to overcome the diseases and the obsessions of the preceding elites (*amrāḍ al-nukhab al-sābiqa*) (ibid.), the older, professional, activists (*muḥtarifī al-ʿamal al-siyāsī*) (8) whose verbiage is considered old-fashioned. This new generation is presented as the subject of the action. At the beginning of the narrative, these youths set a clear aim: promoting "bread, freedom, social justice," as the slogan goes, and forcing the president to step down. Both texts end with scenes of collective delirium welcoming the resignation of Mubarak, thus closing on the moment the second aim is achieved and marking the birth of a collective hero capable of setting aims and achieving them—a sharp contrast to the 1960s hero who is "an anti-hero, hesitant, achieving only small victories, if any" (Hafez, "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties" 79).

For both of these authors, then, admiration for the youth participating in the revolution opens the way for a reevaluation of their own previous rejection of political commitment. Their personal reconciliation is thus mirrored and spurred by the emergence of new political dynamics embodied and expressed by new political actors. What remains intact is the disavowal of the political elites, and specifically, their political discourse, now criticized as *langue de bois*.

This reconciliation with the very idea of collective political action is made possible by an evolution in the sense of alienation and isolation in the public space, a recurrent theme in the writings of the 1960s and 1990s we analyzed in the first part of this article. In contrast to the gloomy mood and sense of alienation expressed in earlier literary productions, public space, embodied by the *midān*, is here described as a space of individual well-being, where an extreme sense of solitude, of disconnect between self and others, ceases to exist. Communication between the writers and the individuals they encounter on the *maydān* is fluid, and most importantly, sincere and spontaneous. The narrator thus shifts from the position of outsider, typical in most 1960s and 1990s narratives, to a position of insider in the public space of the *midān*.

In Prince's *Ismī thawra*, the narrator identifies the *midān* as a second home in the very first chapters, and this is confirmed throughout the narrative. She feels comfortable in the crowd, and identifies herself as one of the demonstrators, holding on to the first person plural. She herself becomes an activist, distributing sandwiches and tea to the demonstrators staying overnight (96), or participating in the popular committees *lijān shaʿbiyya* mediating access to the square (137). Her *vouloir-faire* is mixed up with that of the demonstrators. The dynamics of gender alienation and oppression are even muted here, making public space feel more open for women. Prince does not describe the square as a space totally free of sexual harassment, as other narratives have naively and inaccurately asserted; indeed, she

recounts still being confronted by such harassment, but also notes that these events are rare and even present an opportunity to engage in discussion with potential "harassers." Most importantly, it is a space in which she is able to experience and live out spontaneous happiness. She describes herself getting involved twice in a circle of masculine dancers without encountering any negative reprehension or judgments (132).

In al-Shiti's *Māʾat khaṭwa*, the osmosis of the narrator-author with the crowd in the square is not as clear, nor as immediate. Al-Shiti's lingering hesitation is symbolized by the balcony from which he observes Tahrir. The balcony provides an ideal standpoint to observe and be present, without being physically involved in the events.[12] Its positioning above the square remains symbolic of al-Shiti's sense of distance, which takes longer to erode than that of Prince. The balcony represents, in Sansot's words, being torn between "a sense of loneliness and the happiness of communication" (364).[13]

Linguistically, this relative distance is symbolized by al-Shiti's enduring use of "I" in his narrative—in contrast to that of Prince, where her gradual osmosis with the collective is expressed through her shift to the first-person plural. For al-Shiti, the happiness of communication expresses itself when the narrator feels that the multiple signs in Tahrir address him personally. He writes:

> I remember a sign I saw in the square. 'Pardon me my God, I was afraid and didn't speak out against oppression for thirty years.' I wanted to say that maybe I was depressed and silent, writing my short texts that don't bother anyone but those who are like me. (*Māʾat khaṭwa* 37)

Al-Shiti describes the sign not simply to report on the signs present in the square, but to explain his own process of reflection. The sign, in a sense, mirrors his own thoughts: he expresses the guilt he feels for remaining silent for over twenty years, although for all these years he had witnessed torture, a police station located right next door to his house in Damiette: "I wake up at night at the sound of torture through hanging on the doors, or through electrical shocks on the testicles, or through plunging the head into sewer water" (*Māʾat khaṭwa* 21). Importantly, however, al-Shiti does not simply reproach himself for his silence; he also questions his stance as a creative writer, identifying his previous writings as elitist in the negative sense of the term.

Intertextuality with the 'Text of the Revolution'

I wish to turn here to discussing how these authors use intertextuality to produce a less elitist form of writing. Both texts make extensive intertextual references to what Mehrez calls "the text of the revolution," a "multilayered text" that has to be read as "layers of narrative and fields of meaning that are at once open and dynamic" (*Translating Egypt's Revolution* 1). Intertextuality here is used in its broadest sense of interaction with and quotation of texts of different genres: both Shiti and Prince introduce bits and pieces of Facebook statuses, reproduce signs on panels, bring in testimonies by demonstrators, and quote breaking news headlines. Most of their chapter titles are popular expressions that refer to well-known events of the revolution.

In this way, both the bodies and the structures of the texts reflect the collective consciousness of the demonstrators on the *midān* and their supporters during the first phase of the revolution. The narratives thus transcend each author's own personal, individual narrative of the eighteen days by integrating parts of the collective narrative.

Prince makes extensive use of testimonies by frontline actors. Descriptions of the square and events taking place are introduced via the direct discourse of the actors themselves. Testimonies are integrated as such, in colloquial terms. She thus introduces stories she has not directly witnessed—stories of spaces beyond the square or even outside of Cairo, or those of youth at the frontlines of the battle with the police. In particular, *Ismī thawra* includes accounts of violence acts against the police, like the youth who recall seeing officers and soldiers being beaten on January 28:

> I went to Friday prayer at the Mosque of Sayyida Aisha with some friends. The imam had barely finished the prayer when someone stood up and started chanting, 'The people demand the removal of the regime.' Just as we were about to leave the mosque, the riot police started shelling us with teargas and rubber bullets. We kept saying, 'Silmiya, silmiya,' but they just went on with the shelling. We tried to find a place to hide as the gas and rubber bullets continued to rain on people's homes. Suddenly, the people of the neighborhood came out chanting 'Mubarak, you motherfucker; dirty government, you sons of bitches! Illegitimate, you sons of bitches . . . .' They all had hatchets and pocketknives and they stabbed every officer and policeman they could get their hands on. (51–52)

The text thus unsettles dominant representations of the revolution as "a youth, non-violent revolution in which social media (especially Facebook and twitter) are champions" (El-Mahdi), as conveyed in both Egyptian and international mainstream media after February 2011. This intertextuality with the *parole* of frontline actors functions not only to document Tahrir from multiple perspectives, but also enables the author-narrators to produce a less elitist form of writing.

Al-Shiti describes passionate discussions on February 10, after Mubarak's famous speech in which he once more refused to step down. People discuss the possibility of leaving Tahrir and organizing a demonstration to march to the presidential palace. While listening to the arguments of other demonstrators, al-Shiti gets personally involved and uses the first person plural for the first time: "I shouted: 'If we leave Tahrir for any place we won't be able to come back again'" (*Māʾat khaṭwa* 141). These moments of personal involvement culminate in the final scenes when he shares the joy of the people dancing in the square. While standing on the balcony, he "screams with the strongest voice [he] imagined [he] possessed addressing [his] screams to those rushing in direction of Tahrir square, raising his arms strongly, intoxicated by victory: a…b…d…i…c…a…t…i…o…n" (151). The narrator has thus clearly changed from someone deeply ambivalent about any collective struggle to someone emotionally involved in the outcome of that struggle. Similarly, Prince ends her narrative by describing herself dancing in Tahrir, quoting "The Color of Life is Pink," a famous 1970s hit sung by Soad Hosny (Suʿād Ḥusnī) in an iconic film (*Ismī thawra* 244). Prince goes even further in her personal evolution by describing her own reason for writing the book as political, a desire to counter the distorted discourse prevailing in the media after the revolution: "I had to write; it was for me a way to document what happened" (Brins, "Al-adab"). She further acknowledges the deep change the eighteen days has had on her: "These were the most beautiful days of my life. I got out of the cocoon I used to live in" (ibid.).[14]

Both narratives could thus be deemed "narratives of an open horizon," in a reference to Hafez' early characterization of 1990s novels. The genre of the diary permits the expression of a self in transition, and the shift from the third-person singular to the first-person plural includes the narrator in the crowds of protestors—crowds that represent youthful, active

subjects capable of achieving a positive aim. The intertextual references constituting the structure and flesh of the narrative further lead the narrator to transcend his/her own personal self. It is still too early to affirm whether these texts mark a definitive break from the themes of alienation that previously characterized the work of the 1990s generation, but as al-Shiti puts it, it certainly seems that writing, like so much else after the revolution, "will never be the same again" (al-Shīṭī, personal interview).

Notes

1   This paper was first presented at the eleventh EURAMAL (European Association for Modern Arabic Literature) conference on "New Geographies and Genres: The Function of Literature" held at the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Madrid, 7–10 May 2014.

2   Moustafa Bassiouni gives the figure of a thousand sit-ins and demonstrations in February 2014 alone, underlining a renewed vitality of the workers' movement after a down curve following the coup of July 3, 2013. He points out "the contrast between the importance of the workers' movement and its modest conquests" (7). Bassiouni, Moustafa. "Répression par le pouvoir, division des syndicats: En Ègypte, rien n'arrête le mouvement ouvrier." *Le Monde Diplomatique* Aug. 2014: 6–7. Print.

3   Al-Shiti has published three collections of short stories, *Shitāʾ dākhilī* [*An Inner Winter*]. Cairo: Mukhtarāt Fuṣūl, 1991. Print; *ʿArāʾis min waraq* [*Puppets Made from Paper*]. Cairo: Dār Sharqiyyāt, 1994. Print; *Ḍawʾ shaffāf yantashiru bi-khiffa* [*A Diaphanous Light Spreading Lightly*]. Cairo: Dār Mīrīt, 2009. Print. His novel *Wurūd sāmma li-Ṣaqr* is currently being turned into a film produced by Mahmud Himida (Maḥmūd Ḥumayda) and directed by Ahmad Fawzi Salih (Aḥmad Fawzī Ṣāliḥ).

4   Brins, Munā. *Innī uḥaddithuka li-tarā*. Cairo: Dār Mīrīt, 2008. Print. This work appeared in English under the title: *So You May See*. Trans. Raphael Cohen. Cairo: American U in Cairo P, 2011. Print. Prince is also the author of a collection of short stories published under two different titles *Qiṭʿat al-ṭīn al-akhīra* [*The Last Piece of Mud*]. Sharjah: Dār al-Masār li-l-Dirāsāt al-Iqtiṣādiyya wa-l-Nashr, 1999. Print; *Qiṣar naẓar* [*Myopia*]. Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 2003. Print.

5   Sabry Hafez describes it as "a real new novel as it contains what can be called the taste of the eighties novels; it is a text emerging from the heart of the 1980s deceptions and from the 1970s costly ruins that killed all hope of revolt" (Ḥāfiẓ, "Wurūd sāmma" 107).

6   Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

7   This is also the case of Ibrahim Abdel Meguid's (Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Majīd) *Li-kull arḍ milād: Ayyām al-taḥrīr* (*Each Land Has its Own Birth: Days of Tahrir*, 2011). Abdel Meguid's narrative of Tahrir is not part of the focus of this article as he is not a member of the 1990s generation.

8   It is interesting to note that the Tahrir sit-in in 2011 moved a number of writers, in addition to al-Shiti and Prince, to publish diary-like texts about the events. Examples are Saʿd al-Qirsh's *Al-thawra al-ān* (*The Revolution Now*, 2012) and Ibrahim Abdel Meguid's *Li-kull arḍ milād, ayyām al-taḥrīr*.

9   "Characteristically, the focus of the memoir is on the external events or culture in which the writer lives, and the self is discussed, revealed, and explored relative to those events or that culture. Unlike the conventional autobiography, the memoir does not purport to tell the whole life story. Rather, the memoirist tends to focus on a slice of her life and the 'others' that populate it. One might characterize the memoir as an insider's subjective view of a historical moment or moments" (Waites 379).

10   All the quotes of Prince's *Ismī thawra* are Samia Mehrez' translation in *Revolution is My Name*.

11   That shift can also be noticed in ʿAbd al-Magid's narrative: from describing himself as a spectator to the ongoing battle (*a lā tafūtunī al-furja ʿalā miṣr wa-hiyya tastayqiẓ*, 50) he begins to use the first-person plural and includes himself in the crowds fleeing the police attack launched during the demonstrations of January 28.

12   Even though, sadly enough, several incidents of outsiders being shot while watching the demonstrations from their balconies have been reported.

13   "Les balcons existaient par rapport à d'autres balcons et surtout par rapport à la rue. Du balcon, l'homme apercevait d'autres personnes postées à leur fenêtre, il suivait du regard les promeneurs que parfois il reconnaissait. Le balcon invite à une attitude toujours un peu théâtrale ou du moins à une attitude où les relations d'homme à homme interviennent—tristanien, déchiré entre la distance et la proximité, le sentiment d'être isolé et le bonheur de communiquer. Il relève davantage de l'espace public que de l'espace privé. *Nous y sommes déjà dans la rue* et même en vue dans la rue" (Sansot 364).

14   Contribution by Mona Prince in a panel discussion at Cairo University that took place during the International
      Summer Academy *Aesthetics and Politics: Counter-Narratives, New Publics, and the Role of Dissent in the
      Arab World* organized from September 16–27, 2012 at the American University in Cairo in cooperation with
      the English Department of Cairo University and the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies of Philipps
      University Marburg, Germany. The Summer Academy was part of the research program Europe in the Middle
      East—The Middle East in Europe (EUME) of the Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien and the Center
      for Translation Studies of the American University in Cairo (AUC).

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Part 2

Roots of a Discourse:
Historical Concepts of Literary Commitment

Beyond Commitment

Elias Khoury

Twenty-nine years after the publication of *The Prophet* (1923) by Khalīl Jibrān, Mīkhāʾīl Naʿīma published *The Book of Mirdad* (1952). These two books followed the path of Amīn al-Rīḥānī, the first modern writer to climb the tree of prophecy with his work *The Book of Khalid* (1911).

The series of prophecies, an outcome of the literary emigrations to North America, sought to deal, in an indirect way, with the problems of social and confessional fragmentation in the Levant by creating a prophetic synthesis that can unite different religious affiliations.

I would argue that these prophetic works were not only a kind of continuation of the classical Arab literary paradigm *Poet—King—Prophet*, which reached its peak with the poetry of al-Mutanabbī (tenth century), but were mainly a response to the questions which the protagonists of the *nahḍa* (Arab renaissance) and modern Arab culture in the Levant tried not to deal with: The questions thrown up by the Lebanese Civil War in the nineteenth century (1840–1860), a conflict decisive in the creation of the Lebanese entity and whose reverberations reached Damascus. The literary and cultural reply to the combination of colonialism, modernity and confessional awareness was oblique. The reply of the founders of the *nahḍa* in the Levant was to adopt the Arab nationalist idea and struggle for independence and Arab unity, a curious way of silencing the memories of the civil war. But with the prophecies of the three Lebanese writers, who wrote their books in English, the reply was formulated in terms of preaching a new religious ideological belief supposedly capable of going beyond differences and creating a kind of new synthesis.

The spectacular popular success of Jibrān's *Prophet* is due to two elements: Its special poetic style on one hand, and its direct relationship with the language of the Gospels on the other. A language that was the outcome of the translations of the Bible by Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidiyāq, Ibrāhīm al-Yāzijī and Buṭrus al-Bustānī, and that not only left its mark on Jibrān, but also played a major role in modernizing the language and creating modern standard Arabic.

What is worth noting here is that this prophetic wave will not be limited to the literary field; it will also find more serious religious forms. One can refer here to the Palestinian Salīm al-ʿAshī, known as "Doctor Dāhish" (1909–1984), who created a new religion that became popular amongst many professionals and intellectuals and threatened the rule of Bishāra al-Khūrī, the first president of an independent Lebanon, and to Sulaymān al-Murshid, called "*al-Rabb*" ("The Lord", 1907–1946), who was executed in Syria under the presidency of Shukrī al-Quwatlī. Aided by French colonial authorities, this *rabb* was able to found a new religion derived from the Alawite sect.

Can we push the idea a little further in order to find a link between new political-ideological structures and this phenomenon? What about the *madraḥiyya* philosophy (a combination of the material and the spiritual) of the founder of the Syrian Popular Party Anṭūn Saʿāda and his attempt to create a national secular unity based upon his assumption that Islam has two ways: Christianity and Muhammadism?

Can we not also argue that the famous text by the founder of the Baath Party, Mīshīl ʿAflāq, *In Memory of the Arab Prophet*, together with Saʿāda's *Madraḥism*, represent a special kind of continuation of the literary prophecies by the three *mahjar* (emigrant) writers?

What is the relationship between the prophets of the early twentieth century and the *iltizām* (commitment) of the 1950s and 1960s? And how did the idealistic prophecies manage to adopt their new realistic forms without disclaiming their nature and objectives?

Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim and ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Anīs quoted the following sentence by Maxim Gorky to conclude their major book *On Egyptian Culture* (1955): "We have to show on the contemporary theater a realistic hero (in the broad sense) and we have to show to people the ideal human being the world is waiting for, since eternity" (131).

Isn't it strange to make the realistic hero an ideal being? And even stranger would be my comparison of Jibrān's romantic and idealistic approach with the socialist realism of al-ʿĀlim and Anīs's book, which can be considered the best theoretical manifesto of Marxist commitment in modern Arabic literature?

Before analyzing this paradox and its connotations, I want to confess that the term *iltizām* was never a part of my personal dictionary. I was, and still am, a committed citizen and public intellectual, in the sense that I feel that I have to defend the values of freedom and justice, both in my behavior and through my articles, but it has never occurred to me since I began publishing novels in the mid-1970s that my literature has to serve a cause. This is why I felt discomfort when I went back to reread the critical works of the 1950s and 1960s when preparing this piece. But to tell the truth, these readings were a great opportunity, helping me to rethink what is considered to be obvious in the history of modern Arabic literature.

The writers who accompanied my research gave me an interesting lesson about the way one can read the past. What look like major contradictions in the past (for example the literary battles between the two major journals of the 1950s and 1960s, *al-Ādāb* and *Shiʿr*) can be seen now as two colors of the same phenomenon. Both, the poetic avant-garde in *Shiʿr*, which adopted a liberal discourse, and the nationalist avant-garde in *al-Ādāb* with its existentialist discourse played a major role—of course each in its own way—in structuring the paradigm of revival (*inbiʿāth*). Even the poem that *Shiʿr* will consider the model of modernism, "Unshūdat al-maṭar" ("The Rain Song") by Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, was first published in *al-Ādāb* in 1953.

With their different backgrounds and sources of inspiration, the Marxist critics will soon join the same nationalist paradigm. Raʾīf Khūrī in Lebanon, who coined the term *al-adab al-masʾūl* (responsible literature) and whose public debate ("The Writer Writes for the Public") with Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in Beirut 1955 was a major cultural event and subsequently published in *al-Ādāb*. Raʾīf Khūrī, the editor of the communist journal *al-Ṭarīq*, who afterwards joined the Arab nationalist discourse, while his Egyptian comrades, despite years in the prisons of Gamal Abdel Nasser, joined the ideological apparatus of the regime that oppressed them. One can see this as a sign of the "treason of the intellectuals," to use the term coined by Julian Benda (cf. Said, *Representations*), or rather as a sign of a chaotic literary field, where answers were sought and forged in the atmosphere of rapid change that engulfed the Arab Mashriq after the *nakba* (catastrophe) war in 1948.

How can we understand that al-Sayyāb so easily quit his Marxist camp to join the nationalists before jumping to the liberal camp, without any changes in the nature of his poetry?

And how we can analyze the fact that a poet like Adūnīs, who began his literary career as a militant in the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), joined forces with Yūsuf al-Khāl, who was under the influence of Charles Malik (Shārl Mālik) (the Lebanese liberal philosopher), in

creating *Shiʿr*, then left *Shiʿr* to publish in *al-Ādāb*, and dedicate his poem "Introduction to the History of the Petty Kings" to Nasser, before beginning his personal adventure in *Mawāqif*?

The two terms 'treason' and 'chaos' are not adequate to describe these shifts and moves of Khūrī, al-Sayyāb and Adūnīs. Many Egyptian Marxists saw the action of their comrades as a sign of fatigue, and put it in the framework of Soviet superpower politics. But this is a long story.

On the one hand, the different approaches in the ways T. S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre were read can be a sign of immaturity. Eliot, one of the main references of the poets of *Shiʿr*, is read as a pioneer in the usage of myth in modern Arabic poetry; the impact of Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā's translation of parts of James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890) is huge in this context. But the myriad ways *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925) by T. S. Eliot were conceived are amazing. The myth as a poetical structure is read as a sign of rebirth in the works of al-Khāl, al-Sayyāb, Adūnīs and others, and thus will join the nationalist paradigm forged with the *nahḍa*.

On the other hand, Sartre's "engagement" was read as a way for instigating national rebirth in the eyes of Suhayl Idrīs and his companions in the nationalistic struggle for Arab unity and independence. And his approach to the freedom of the writer as part of the freedom of the reader was neglected. Thus Sartre will become, unknowingly, an Arab nationalist who can fill a theoretical gap in the nationalist literary discourse, which needed a vehicle so as to be able to face up to the Marxist notion of commitment.

Even Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim and ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Anīs, who attacked Eliot as a reactionary poet in their book and clearly distanced themselves from existentialism in criticizing ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī's work on existentialist ethics, *Humanity and Existentialism in Arabic Thought*, will use the Sartrean organic structure of the text in their debate with Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād.

One could refer here to Edward Said's notion of travelling texts ("Traveling Theory") to help us understand how texts can have their own destinies travelling through translations; but the insight gained would be limited, for the texts mentioned here were only like a set of key words in questioning the role of committed literary production in the complex process of nation building after independence and *nakba*.

The *nakba* showed that independence was not accomplished, and the battle with the colonial powers is still the basic issue, and thus the promises of the *nahḍa* were to be revived and fulfilled. I will not analyze the *nahḍa*, which was most certainly not an incarnation of a "liberal age" that was never fulfilled (to use the term of Albert Hourani), and I will not analyze here the typology of the three types of Arab intellectual in the *nahḍa* as set out by ʿAbdallāh al-ʿArāwī (Abdallah Laroui) in his major book *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*. But I will point out the major phenomenon that dominated the *nahḍawī* discourse, which was based upon the idea of revival or rebirth. This revival had different meanings: innovation in Islam, modernization of the army, freedom of thought, the struggle for the constitution and autonomy, etc. But the major and main target and achievement was the revival and modernization of the language.

The *nahḍa* was inspired by two perspectives: One looking to the past with the idea of reviving the golden Arab age through the language of al-Mutanabbī, and the other looking to the future, i.e. to the culture of the West as a model. But the eye of the future saw mainly the past, and the model of a writer like Khalīl Jibrān, who lived in the U.S. and visited France, was not the literary avant-garde of Europe of the early twentieth century but rather the eighteenth-nineteenth century English poet and painter William Blake.

The first past was vague and could not serve as a political model. Arab unity was a modern invention that may have existed in the past only for a brief period under the Umayyad dynasty. But the phantasm of the past dominated a modern idea of a nation that had to be created and built. This will lead to a variety of misunderstandings and will move, for example, a secular thinker like the founder of the Baath party, Mīshīl ʿAflaq, to refashion the legacy of the prophet Muḥammad into a national figurehead incarnating the genius of the nation.

The second past was European and of course entailed its military and political supremacy. This past was addressed in the questions Shakīb Arsalān took up in his essay *Our Decline: Its Causes and Remedies* (1939), which are still the major issues debated in the Arab World today.

One must admit that this complicated problem of the relationship with the West as an idea occupies a major place in modern Arabic thought and literature, extending from the series of novels feminizing the West: from Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Suhayl Idrīs and al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ to Hisham Sharabi's (Hishām Sharābī) work *Arab Intellectuals and the West* (1970).

But I think that the work of Raʾīf Khūrī on the impact of the French Revolution on modern Arabic thought was an attempt to move beyond this dichotomy and see the human heritage as a property of mankind and not of a specific culture (*Al-fikr al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth*).

The approach that Raʾīf Khūrī took must be seen in the context of the flourishing of Marxist ideology among Arab intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s. His debate with Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in Beirut in 1955 shows us that what killed liberal thought as represented by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was the political atmosphere created after the Egyptian military revolution led by Nasser. And that the disappearance of liberal thought will have a direct impact on Arab life after the defeat of 1967, which will lead, with the decline of the liberal nationalist project, to the rise—being the only alternative left—of Islamic thought and politics.

Many scholars analyze the war of the *nakba* in 1948 as the major turning point of change. After the *nakba* the military coups began, and the Arab *mashriq* (east) entered the storm of political and social change.

A new nationalist discourse emerged with the young officers of Cairo and the young teachers of Damascus. Nasser came to fill the gap created by the defeat of 1948, with an Egyptian nationalist discourse and modernist ideas, and an attempt to make Egypt like Britain as he declared in his pamphlet *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (1954). The army—in this vision—became the avant-garde and the political parties were banned. The communists and the Muslim Brotherhood faced oppression and jail, while the leader became the idol of the nation.

What is interesting to single out here is that the young officers began their political life under the influence of nationalists and Islamists, but soon found themselves on the left after the war of 1956, the undertaking of the Aswan High Dam project and the need for weapons to counter Israeli attacks on Gaza. The irony of history is that the same source of weapons that ensured the supremacy of the Israeli Army in 1948, i.e. Czechoslovakia, will be the source the Egyptians draw on to modernize their military arsenal. What interests us in this case is that the new nationalist movement faced the responsibility of governing Egypt and thus leading the Arab World.

Here arose the big questions: What is Arab unity? What is socialism? What is the Arab-Israeli conflict all about? As we can notice, these questions were not only political but also cultural, and there were no conclusive answers, except for some practical and social achieve-

ments: The agrarian reform, the construction of the Aswan Dam, and the unity with Syria, which will last no longer than three years.

In the end, the defeat of 1967 led to the collapse of the whole structure and raised questions of criticism and self-criticism.

On the literary and cultural level, the nationalist experience furnished the model of literary commitment. And this model, as we have noticed earlier, was a combination of the Sartrean concept of "engagement" and the Soviet concept of socialist realism.

Two approaches will be mixed together in order to revive the classical Arabic literary paradigm that was incarnated by al-Mutanabbī. The triangle of the poet-prophet-king will emerge once again and dominate the literary scene.

This paradigm did not come from nowhere and there is no stable reference in Arabic literary history; it was actually the choice of the *naḥḍa* and its ideological-political project.

The concept behind the project of the kingdom of Fayṣal in Damascus was to leave the Ottoman Empire in order to enter a revived Arab Empire.

Based on a dream of gory, this naivety had to face the realities created by the colonial powers after the First World War, including, as an integral part of it, the Zionist project. But these facts were unable to change the promises held out by the *naḥḍa*, and the same promises will be renewed after the *nakba* with a new nationalist movement based on the military leaders of Egypt.

This paradigm was a choice, the model was the golden language, the golden poetry. All the achievements of the so-called age of decline, from *One Thousand and One Nights* to the philosophical production, will be neglected because they fail to fit the image.

Even Egyptian modernism adopted the poet-prophet-king paradigm, for example in how Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm dealt with *One Thousand and One Nights* in his play *Shahrazād* (1934), where he shifts the center of gravity from the female storyteller to the tragedy of the male king. This shifting will be repeated by Najīb Maḥfūẓ in his novel *Arabian Nights and Days* (1981), a novel structured around the struggle for power, thus marginalizing the female character and the magic of storytelling.

What led me at the beginning of this piece to consider Jibrān was not my admiration for his *Prophet*, for I actually think this book is naïve and, for example, incomparable to his story "Khalil the Unbeliever" (1908). While Jibrān played a major role in the innovation of the language with his romantic perspective, his *Prophet* is nothing more than simplistic contemplations. It was not my intention at all to start my considerations on commitment with him, but what pushed me in this direction was Anīs and al-ʿĀlim in their manifesto about socialist realism, and what made this choice inevitable was the dominant figure of al-Mutanabbī in *The Book* (1995) by Adūnīs and the last sentence in his poem "A Grave For New York" (1971), where he transforms the figures of Jibrān and himself into representations of the river of anger that will change Arab culture.

The concept of commitment did not last for long. The defeat in the war of June 1967 not only signaled the end of the nationalistic era in the Arab Mashriq, but also the end of a literary concept that was vague and made the compromise between contradictory schools of thought in order to serve a project that created the bases for the transition from a populist regime towards bare dictatorship, a project that lead the Arab World into a negative spiral of even more defeats and disasters.

What is amazing in this story is that the literature of commitment was not a defendant of the freedom of expression, although the leftists went through their most terrible moments of

oppression under the dictatorships. The compromise with the nationalists under Soviet guidance saw them lose their moral supremacy, and when, beginning in 1966 and then after the defeat, their voices emerge, it was too late to play any serious political role, so that their innovations entered the literary scene as belonging to a new category, one we may call 'beyond *iltizām.*'

I will analyze the three moments at the beginnings of a 'beyond *iltizām*,' well aware that the line I am drawing between these moments is only theoretical, and that the role played by the new criticism and, essentially, the works of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Kīlīṭū and Muḥammad Luṭfī al-Yūsufī and Rajāʾ Bin Salāma need to be treated as an integral part of the change towards a new approach in literature.

The first moment is, to use the term coined by Idwār al-Kharrāṭ, the new sensibility (*al-ḥassāsiyya al-jadīda*). This new sensibility is the representation of the deep deception felt with the nationalist discourse. One can discern its beginnings in Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm's novel *Tilka al-rāʾiḥa* (*How It Smells!*, 1966), or in the Egyptian journal *Galleriyya 68*. But what is interesting is the deception that emerged mainly after disenchantment with the military populist regime of Egypt had set in after the defeat of 1967, which saw the old concepts of *iltizām* crumble without a struggle. Coming from the ranks of the left gave the generation of the 1960s the necessary freedom to go beyond the old concepts, with the implied or even clear blessings from some of their father figures: al-ʿĀlim will publish his book *The Trilogy of Rejection and Defeat*, a study of the literature of Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm.

A new wave began, with different tendencies that will open the way for what we can call a new writing, where the meaning of the *iltizām* will become a combination of a critical attitude and an approach towards exploring new and freer ways of writing.

The second moment is that of poetry: What is interesting in the *iltizām* movement is that it refused the suggestion of Sartre to keep poetry outside this concept. On the contrary, poetry was the center of the debate both in Egypt and the Mashriq. Even Yūsuf al-Khāl will find in the Egyptian critic Ghālī Shukrī a defender of his special form of *iltizām*. After the publications of the two works by Ghassān Kanafānī, *Adab al-muqāwama fī Filasṭīn al-muḥtalla* (1966) and *Al-adab al-filasṭīnī al-muqāwim taḥt al-iḥtilāl* (1968), the voices of the young Palestinian poets are heard: Maḥmūd Darwīsh and Samīḥ al-Qāsim will dominate the literary scene in the Arab World. Voices, resonating across the fences of the Israeli prison and representing the Palestinian minority behind the green line in the state of Israel, these voices will be conceived as a direct reply to the defeat of 1967. The beginnings of the new Palestinian poetry was a combination of romanticism and realism, the voices of Nizār Qabbānī, al-Sayyāb, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, Nazim Hikmet, will build the musical fabric and the vocabulary of this poetry. But soon, in the 1970s, the poetry of Darwīsh began its experimental journey and it echoed the Palestinian novel in its search to discover and understand the complex reality of Palestine. The novels of Kanafānī, *Return to Haifa* (1969), and Imīl Ḥabībī, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1974), will prove landmarks in the development of the post-*iltizām* literature: Kanafānī in his radical rethinking of the *nakba* and his ability to open debate on the sufferings of the other, Ḥabībī in his stylistic revolution, which continued the problematic of recreating the classical Arabic ways of storytelling, inaugurated by Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī. For his part, Darwīsh will continue his search for the meaning of Palestine as a metaphor of the human suffering, liberating his poetry from direct statements and structuring his approach around the dual (*al-muthannā*) that will shape a song of the human soul from poetry.

The third moment is the civil war: My hypothesis is that during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Lebanese novel emerged and that this novel will quickly find its special place in the new experimental wave in modern Arabic literature. The issue that the civil war revealed was the crisis of Arab modern culture and politics. Needless to say that this war was the mirror of the Arab Mashriq, and this mirror revealed the deep problems which had been suspended since the *nahḍa*. What is worth noticing here is that this war, with all its implications on the Mashriq, opened the way to profound questions; instead of only limiting writing to describe and/or formulate a position, it also became a quest for discovering self and society, the meaning and the blindness of history. This quest requires that the writer has to have an eye capable of reading the present as if it is the past, thus giving his/her text the distance and capacity to criticize, identify, destroy, rebuild and heal the wounds at the same time.

These three moments paved the way for a radically new literary scene, a scene where there are no outside references and where the writer has to reinvent his/her language in the context of rediscovering his/her self. These moments can be read as a transitional period, a shift towards a new modernist approach, an approach whereby the closed nationalist and Marxist ideologies collapse totally. And the Arab Mashriq had to face its problems— dictatorship, poverty, and occupation—without an avant-garde incarnating in its ideology the belief in historical determinism. I don't like to use the term postmodern, because of its apolitical connotations, but one cannot neglect the impact of the postmodernist techniques on writing, visual arts, performances etc.

Iraq was left fragmented after the invasion of 1991, Palestine is the last occupied country on earth, and dictatorships are destroying the Arab societies in a savage, merciless way. What is engagement in this context? Is it the role played by a new generation of activists who in the Arab Spring destroyed the wall of fear? Or do we have to accept the fact that our literary production is a way of surviving in these moments of chaos, wars and dreams?

My analysis so far can be read as an attempt to create a typology of modernism, where the nationalist approach was able to be the channel that unified the existentialism of Khalīl Ḥāwī with the Marxism of al-Bayātī, and even the so-called three moments of 'beyond *iltizām*' will figure as a kind of complex negation and continuation of the *iltizām* approach.

The big question lies now in our current history, where our cultural and artistic discourse is facing two huge dilemmas:

The first is the role of political Islam in shaping our cultural life. One can notice here that political Islam itself was never interested and/or never had the ability to enter the artistic and literary scenes in the Arab World. With the exception of the early critical works by Sayyid Quṭb (his literary criticism was written before he became a prominent figure in the Muslim Brotherhood), there is nearly nothing. Religious discourses and works aside, the only intellectual interventions in the cultural field seem to be *fatāwā* (Islamic legal opinions) against writers like Salman Rushdie, Faraj Fawda, or Najīb Maḥfūẓ. This inability to enter the cultural scene in a more constructive way is an important sign, because societies cannot be dominated without controlling its spiritual production. Even Iranian cinema will find itself shunted to the margins of the Islamic regime before it stands in direct contradiction with it. This sign, which can be seen positively by someone like myself, has a terrible impact in how a certain genre of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) dominates our societies and can lead them into a dark long period of disintegration.

The second is what one can call the integration into a global market of artistic and cultural production. This phenomenon, obviously a part of our postmodern world, can also be read as part of the disintegration of our social and political structures after decades of dictatorships.

The Arab popular revolts had to face two walls: The wall of savagery put up by corrupt dictatorships that sought to suppress the cries for freedom and dignity by destroying the country and pushing towards a civil war; and the wall of political Islam that utilized democracy and revolution as a way to impose a new type of dictatorship. In Egypt, the revolution faced the wall of political Islam and is now on facing the savagery of the first as well, while Syria faced the two walls, first the savagery of the regime and its militias, which transformed peaceful demonstrations into a continuous carnage, and then with the military confrontations that led to a regional savagery through a combination of confessionalism and fundamentalism, instrumentalized in the regional power struggle between the fundamentalists in Iran and the Gulf.

The ideological emptiness that we are witnessing is, by necessity, paving the way to a path beyond *iltizām*. I am not referring here to the terms of *iltizām* that died with the death of the national militarized project. What I mean by the term 'beyond *iltizām*' is not being passive or neutral. There is no way of being detached from the tragedy of our societies. The total integration into the global market is only a myth that will lead nowhere. What I mean by this term is a double engagement: Destroying the dominant ideologies and constructing the idea of freedom and liberation. And this can only be done in the struggle for a secular democratic society and the struggle for the existence of a free individual, who can find in literature and cultural production a way to delve deeper in the exploration of the human soul.

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The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and the "Fall of the *Udabā*"[1]

Yoav Di-Capua

Sometimes in February 1954, Taha Husayn (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) published a routine piece of literary criticism in the Egyptian daily *al-Jumhūriyya*. His topic of choice was "The Form of Literature," a subject that usually elicited little public interest and was ostensibly guaranteed to not stir up any meaningful debate. In this concise piece, Husayn called for the creation of works of art with high aesthetic value, suggesting that beauty (*jamāl*) alone should be the primary purpose of art and the main standard for its evaluation (Ḥusayn, *Khiṣām wa-naqd* 72–89).[2] While at first glance there would seem to be nothing controversial in this modest proposition, Husayn's arcane literary request was, in fact, designed to "pick a fight" with a younger class of writers. And indeed, almost immediately, it unleashed a storm in literary circles, one that would pit a young generation of writers against the established intellectual class of the *udabāʾ* (sing. *adīb*).

What was the debate about? In a nutshell, most young writers correctly understood Taha Husayn's piece as an offensive move in the ensuing battle over the shape and role of culture, and especially of literature, in the postcolonial era. In more specific terms, the debate revolved around the desired relationship between writers, writing and society. Over the next few years, literary disagreements turned into a full-fledged political onslaught against the *udabāʾ* that led to their gradual marginalization, indeed, ultimately to their "fall."

During the 1950s, the cultural assumptions of figures like Taha Husayn, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād) and Tawfiq al-Hakim (Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm)—to name a few luminaries—had come under constant attack. It was a battle they would lose. Though this clash started in Egypt, the emerging rift was not exclusively an Egyptian cultural concern but a broader Arab one. Rather than functioning as passive receivers of Egyptian intellectual wisdom, the burgeoning Lebanese, Syrian and Iraqi intelligentsias took an active position that sought to politicize culture in the service of decolonization. Indeed, from a cultural standpoint, decolonization was a trans-regional Arab affair.

The actors in this drama—their positions, dynamics and institutions—are the subject of this article. The gradual "fall of the *udabāʾ*" during the 1950s marks the actual end of an entire *nahḍawī* cycle that started after WWI. In its place, the young participants in the cultural battles of the 1950s established a new postcolonial culture in the period from 1939 to 1967. This argument is by no means original, for it builds on the pioneering work of Verena Klemm who was the first scholar to map out some of the key intellectual dynamics during the 1950s. While her important contribution stands, this article is part of a broader study that seeks to rethink the entire course of decolonization and thus challenge the imbalanced historiographical focus on the post-1967 period, which is still informed by a set of incorrect assumptions about the era that preceded it (Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement*).[3]

Such studies on the postwar era tell us that Arab nationalism and Arab secularism were defeated in 1967 and, in turn, gave rise to Islamic alternatives, mostly to fundamentalism.[4] In Arab historiography, the pre-1967 era has been extensively debated and, mostly, condemned (Kassab).

However, it seems that the basic question of *what*, exactly, was defeated in 1967 has yet to be answered in a satisfying manner. Given the fact that 1967 marked a clear setback, indeed a defeat, for the postcolonial intelligentsia, one is pressed to ask a few critical questions: Were their designs for a new era superficial? Was their relationship with the state self-destructive? Did they consider religion an obstacle? Was their transnational cultural vision inapplicable to an essentially parochial society? Were they deserted by their international partners and if so, why? Was a new form of Western domination responsible for their defeat? Undoubtedly, there is ample historiographical room for an intellectual history of 1967.

Given the fact that this era was tied to global processes of decolonization, Third-Worldism and cultural post-coloniality, it is first critical to ask what was particularly post-colonial about the Arab world during this period? Was it the proud political resistance that Pan-Arabism put up in Suez in 1956? Was it the quest for Cold War neutrality, the subsequent schemes for regional political unity or the experimentation with socialism? In other words, was the postcolonial moment in the Arab world primarily a political phenomenon? The obvious answer to this question is no. Scores of studies on literature (yet not so much on pure thought and the sociology of knowledge) uncover a rich intellectual terrain in which Arab existential dilemmas, as well as various schemes for cultural regeneration, are passionately considered.[5] This textual evidence raises further questions about the conceptual language through which intellectuals articulated and pursued their goals and about their standing in the actual cultural arena as opposed to the secluded domains of the text alone. Of equal importance, was postcolonial Arab culture a derivative framework determined by readymade notions imported from elsewhere? Were European norms underlined the new Arab designs and if so how? Or to put it differently: were Arab critics and writers engaged in mimicry and emulation or were they "original"? All of these questions are highly relevant for the understanding of the pre-war era and the question of what was defeated in 1967.

Attempting to fill a modest lacuna within this larger historiographical gap, I suggest looking rather closely at the 1950s and adding to, as well as revisiting, the above mentioned pioneering contribution of Verena Klemm. It was in the 1950s that the process of changing the intellectual guard took place in a fashion that illustrates how new intellectual authority was constructed, how the cultural field was reorganized, how the intellectual province of Beirut challenged the cultural center of Cairo and, ultimately, how all of this was shaped by the transnational context of decolonization, Third-Worldism and post-coloniality. Thus, whether up-and-coming intellectuals brought their ideas from Paris, bringing with them a new existentialist commitment (*iltizām*), or from Moscow, waving the banner of Socialist Realism, their object was to forge a new postcolonial Arab culture. It so happened that in order to advance this project, they first needed to attack their predecessors. Here is how they did it and, concomitantly, how postcolonial Arab culture looks from within.

The classic tale of the *nahḍa* as a progressive liberal march towards human betterment as narrated for instance by Albert Hourani, basically ends with Taha Husayn's cultural vision (Hourani, chap. 8).[6] It is a vision that Husayn published in 1938 in *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (*The Future of Culture in Egypt*), a seminal call for cultural renewal. The book was published in a moment of great optimism when, following the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Agreement and the 1937 Montreux Convention, it was expected that Egypt would finally win full independence. Though for a brief moment it seemed that the postcolonial era had begun in earnest, events took a different turn and decolonization lingered for at least another decade until the end of WWII. In the meantime, however, a new intellectual generation had emerged, and

when it came to postcolonial life they had different sensitivities, different politics, different sources of intellectual inspiration and different solutions. They also had a taste for radicalism.[7]

Taha Husayn was well aware of the new circumstances. And even though by the early 1940s, the postcolonial concerns of Egypt, the Arabs and the rest of the colonial world were not yet fully theorized, they were nonetheless very visible. First, and most urgently, were the profound levels of social inequality due to poverty, illiteracy and disease. This was not merely an economic problem of wealth distribution, but a political and cultural issue that Egyptians did their best to comprehend (Meijer; Johnson). Second, most Arab states still struggled with physical liberation and, in one way or another, submission to Europe's imperial calculations. Third, there was the lingering impact of colonial culture which had resulted in cultural disorientation, yielding the quest for one's authentic cultural stance. This third element was perhaps the most elusive, subjective and difficult issue to entertain. Indeed, as we shall see, during the 1950s it was this cultural domain that young intellectuals focused their attention on and sought to radically redesign.

Husayn was genuinely troubled by the postcolonial problematic. Right after WWII he published *Al-muʿadhdhabūn fi-l-arḍ* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), a socially aware work of fiction that had to be published in Lebanon because of government censorship (Koplewitz 122). Yet, social awareness aside, Husayn approached the era of decolonization from the problematic standpoint of French Enlightenment and the classic assumptions of nineteenth-century Liberalism. Simplifying the paradoxes of the Egyptian cultural domain, he famously argued that Egyptians are culturally Europeans and that Europe's historical experience is universal and hence globally valid. In other words, in place of a comprehensive cultural reconsideration, he espoused the very opposite: a deepening of the impact of colonial Enlightenment. Committed to this cause, the object of the Egyptian subject was to become the "European other." Consequently, Taha Husayn's notion of cultural self-criticism was inevitably reduced to a calculation about what should be done in order to become European. Critical chapters in *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfa fī Miṣr* follow this logic.[8] Despite the many differences between the *udabāʾ*, a similar variety of postcolonial critique was espoused by members of this intellectual class: the early writing of Salama Musa (Salāma Mūsā) about the *nahḍa* as European Enlightenment serves as one example, and there are many others.[9] Another problem which was to vex the new crop of postcolonial intellectuals was that Taha Husayn's vision was narrowly Egyptian. Husayn had little to say about the Arab world; indeed, he seems to have subscribed to the classic post-WWI assumption that the Egyptian *udabāʾ* write and the rest of the Arabs read.

Even during the "Liberation Holiday" commemorating the six months anniversary of the Egyptian July Revolution, Husayn still believed that a heavy dose of Enlightenment to the masses, a self-imposed *mission civilisatrice,* was the only cure (Ḥusayn, *Al-Ahrām* 13). This attempt to infuse the meaning of "liberation" with Enlightenment values came at a time when Marxist-Leninist and étatist thought was spreading as an obvious alternative to this vision. As Pierre Cachia has put it, Taha Husayn was "dedicated to the spread of enlightenment to the masses and convinced that when this was done the masses would inevitably be one with it" (18–19). Indeed, regardless of the political mood, Husayn was committed to the idea that against the backdrop of a democratic political marketplace, the three key issues of the postcolonial era would resolve themselves without recourse to a revolutionary phase. This belief was a political mainstay of pre-WWII Egyptian culture and the major Egyptian cultural journals of the time such as *al-Thaqāfa* and *al-Risāla* in Egypt and the Lebanese *al-Adīb,* unambiguously propagated this message.

What happened to Taha Husayn's vision after WWII? Since *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfa fī Miṣr* was only an abstract cultural plan, in 1945, when the struggle of post-independence Egypt began in earnest, Husayn established *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* (*The Egyptian Writer*), a journal and a publishing house which translated classics by foreign writers such as André Gide and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. *Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* was one of the first postwar journals with a clear intention to actualize, repackage and make relevant again his vision of Enlightenment for all. In contrast to the ideologically-driven approach of the young generation, *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* was decidedly un-ideological. Acutely aware of the rise of "ideologies" (Marxist, socialist and communist), Husayn's new journal made a Herculean effort to offset, derail or, at the very least, postpone the drive of new writers to ideologize and thus politicize culture.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

As one of the foremost late architects and standard bearers of post-WWI *nahḍawī* culture, Taha Husayn was quick to discern and evaluate the appeal of intellectual trends (Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement* 61–69). Finely attuned to France's intellectual scene, he knew something about Sartre's revolutionary ideas and even supervised graduate work on the topic (Badawī, *Sīrat ḥayātī* 155; 178–79).[10] Philosophy aside, Sartre's groundbreaking journal *Les temps modernes* posed a direct threat to Husayn's bourgeois cultural vision of "art for art's sake." Especially menacing were a series of articles on the purpose of literature which Sartre began publishing in February 1947 and later compiled in a book entitled *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Yet, even before the publication of this agenda, let alone after it, Husayn's *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* took serious issue with how Sartre reconfigured the relationship between the writer, the text, and society at large.[11]

Husayn's understanding of Sartre was sound. In his reckoning, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* sought to critically reformulate the relationship between the writer and society. It argued that since writing is a consequential form of acting/being, intellectuals should assume responsibility for their work and its surrounding circumstances. This call for responsibility *cum* professional action was conjoined with Sartre's concept of commitment (*engagement*) which, almost overnight, became a key concept of existentialism. In dealing with the enormous potential appeal of *engagement* to the young Arab generation, Husayn argued that, historically speaking, writers had always had more options to choose from than the alleged Sartrean dualities of engaged/progressive versus detached/reactionary. He also argued that *engagement* was a specific response to the unique European realities of the 1930s and to the much-regretted passivity of Sartre's generation prior to the war. Since these European circumstances had no parallel in the Middle East, Sartre's notion of commitment could not be applied to the region (Ḥusayn, "Mulāḥaẓāt" 10).[12]

After some more reading, Husayn went on to attack the three main concerns of *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*: What do we write, why do we write, and to whom do we write? Given the transformation of the Arab literary scene during this era and the emergence of new writers, these were timely questions. In his lengthy meditation on these concerns, Husayn invoked his generation's notion of "art for art's sake." Lastly, not losing focus on his mission to discredit engaged literature, Husayn criticized Sartre's unfortunate exclusion of poetry and the visual arts from the rank and file of the engaged arts.[13]

Though Husayn's insight that commitment was a cultural time bomb would prove prophetic, not all members of his generation saw Sartre's existentialism in the same light. Salama Musa, a Fabian ideologue who was no stranger to the prison cell, embraced Sartre

(Mūsā 271–80).[14] Abbas Mahmud Al-Aqqad, another pillar of Arab letters, rejected existentialism's radical individualism, commended it for protecting freedom, and reminded his readers that, beyond Sartre and commitment, existentialism is a substantial and complex philosophical tradition (al-ʿAqqād 141–55).[15] Somewhat ironically, in warning the young of the dangers of commitment, Taha Husayn gave this burgeoning intellectual movement its Arabic name: *iltizām*. Sadly, due to the 1948 War in Palestine, Husayn's Jewish publishers, the Harari Brothers, closed down *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī*. The closure of this unique platform created space for more radical alternatives.[16]

Up-and-coming Arab intellectuals in Paris were wholly taken by Sartre and his notion of commitment. One of them, Suhayl Idris (Suhayl Idrīs), was committed to bring Sartre back home. Idris, an emerging literary critic and novelist from Beirut, was one of those young Arab intellectuals who studied in Paris, experienced existentialism as a secular religion of café intellectuals, and believed that Sartre held the philosophical, moral and political keys to a new era. As the creed of large segments of the post-WWII French intelligentsia, existentialism dominated the theater, literature, philosophy and journalistic writing of the time. It was simply impossible to ignore and thus influenced the many indigenous intellectuals who came from the struggling French colonies.[17] Deeply influenced by Sartre's existential freedom and the idea of "words as action," Suhayl Idris wrote a classic Sartrean novel, *Al-ḥayy al-lātīnī* (*The Latin Quarter*) that would become an Arab bestseller. Yet, beyond literature *per se*, Idris' main preoccupation was to bring *Les temps modernes* to the Arab world and employ it as a vehicle toward full cultural transformation.

Indeed, in 1952, Suhayl Idris wrote to his friend, the Egyptian literary critic Anwar al-Maddawi (Anwar al-Maʿaddāwī) about his new agenda: "we are aiming for literature which is called '*iltizām*' or '*inḍiwāʾ*'" (e.g. committed literature) (ʿAṭiya 231–32). A year later, after returning to Beirut, the first issue of *al-Ādāb* was out. Its bold mission statement reads like the creed of an entire generation:

> At this important turning point in modern Arab history young Arab intellectuals are growing increasingly aware of the need for a literary periodical with a fully conscious message […] The present situation of Arab countries makes it imperative for every citizen, each in his own field, to mobilize all his efforts for the express object of liberating the homeland, raising its political, social and intellectual level. In order that literature may be truthful it is essential that it should not be isolated from the society in which it exists. […] The kind of literature which this Review calls for and encourages is the literature of commitment [*iltizām*] which issues from Arab society and pours back into it. […] It is the conviction of this Review that literature is an intellectual activity directed to a great and noble end, which is that of effective literature that interacts with society: it influences society just as much as it is influenced by it. […] The main aim of this Review is to provide a platform for those fully conscious writers who live the experience of their age and who could be regarded its witness. In reflecting the needs of Arab society and in expressing its preoccupations they pave the way for the reformers to put things right with all effective means available. (Idris qtd. in Badawi, "Commitment" 868)[18]

A near-copy of Sartre's agenda for *Les temps modernes*, *al-Ādāb*'s message spread in the Arab world with incredible speed. Its premise was that, due to colonialism, Arab culture was in a state of deep crisis and that intellectuals could change this situation through the writing of new literature.[19]

Al-Ādāb's frame of identification was a kind of cultural pan-Arab nationalism which spoke of a unified postcolonial Arab culture.[20] True to its vision, it hosted literary critics from across the region, supported the Free Verse Movement of Nazik al-Malaika (Nāzik al-

Malāʾika), Badr Shakr al-Sayyab (Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb) and others, published political analysis from Syria and Lebanon, and circulated a healthy dosage of Sartrean existentialism from the growing community of Arab existentialists.[21] Most writers were new to the Arab literary scene. In no time at all, by the mid-1950s, *al-Ādāb* had emerged as the most dynamic and influential cultural venue, a bastion of the postcolonial intelligentsia. Its official creed was *iltizām* and it was militant in politicizing the process of postcolonial cultural change. "At the same time, however, al-Adab was decidedly anti-Marxist and resisted the efforts of Marxist intellectuals to appropriate iltizam" (al-Maʿaddāwī 12). Much to Suhayl Idris's dismay this was about to change (Klemm, "Different Notions" 51–62; Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism").

* * *

The philosopher Mahmud Amin al-Alim (Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim) and the mathematician Abd al-Azim Anis (ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Anīs) were two rising intellectuals who, though not trained in the art and craft of criticism, decided to become literary critics. Both were Egyptian professors of the Marxist left who pursued standard university careers. Of a different background, the Lebanese Husayn Muruwwa (Ḥusayn Mrūwah) came from a devout Shi'i family in Jabal Amil and traveled to Najaf in order to be trained as a *mujtahid*. While in Najaf, he was taken by the *nahḍawī* writings of the Egyptian *udabāʾ* and became a "liberal," that is, a devout reader (and later a writer) of Arabic Enlightenment texts. He then moved to Baghdad where, in the context of the fierce political struggles of the late 1940s, he converted to Marxism-Leninism. Given the socio-economic and political conditions of Iraq, he felt the need to make sense of a reality that made no sense at all.[22] And Marxism-Leninism made everything connect. Indeed, for an entire generation of Iraqis, Marxism-Leninism made much more sense than Taha Husayn's Enlightenment creed, which had an uneasy relationship with colonialism. Lead by Husayn Muruwwa, and by way of critiquing colonial Enlightenment, an entire intellectual cohort immersed itself in Soviet Socialist Realism whose application to Arab culture targeted the *udabāʾ*.[23]

Though Muruwwa was not a literary critic, after WWII all three intellectuals identified literary criticism as a medium through which they could address the pressing concerns of their generation. And even though the two Egyptian academics and Muruwwa had never heard of each other, their unexpected meeting in Beirut in 1954 yielded what is arguably one of the most important books on postcolonial Arab culture. Granted, it was neither a balanced scholarly work nor a levelheaded articulation of their generation's concerns. Instead, it was an attack, personal as well as generational, on Taha Husayn and his class of intellectual mandarins.

The book originated, in fact, when Mahmud Amin al-Alim came across Taha Husayn's supposedly mundane piece on "The Form of Literature" in *al-Jumhūriyya,* which I cite above. Since Husayn's article challenged the young generation who had begun experimenting with alternative approaches to literary form (*shakl*) and content (*maḍmūn*), al-Alim took it as an attribute of an entire cultural approach, which he wished to destroy, and as a symbol for a generational rift. In response, he and Abd al-Azim Anis began writing a series of aggressive articles in the daily *al-Miṣrī*. Husayn replied saying that al-Alim and Anis are ignorant, superficial and, despite repeated readings of their article, remained incomprehensible (*Khiṣām wa-naqd* 90–107).

This counterattack only strengthened their resolve and a year later the two authors published *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya* (*On Egyptian Culture*). Inspired by Leon Trotsky's *Litera-*

ture and Revolution but, especially, by Ralph Fox's *The Novel and the People*, two books that attacked bourgeois realism, *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya* was a direct response—indeed a refutation—of Taha Husayn's 1938 *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (Fatḥī 90–91). In order to better understand what the book was about and how it functioned as a refutation of Taha Husayn, a few words are in order about its making.

It so happened that in late 1954, shortly before their book was ready for publication, al-Alim and Anis fell victim to Nasser's purge of Egypt's academic system. In search of income, Anis took a teaching position in Beirut. A foreigner in an unfamiliar city, he made new friends in communist circles and soon met the energetic "red *mujtahid*" Muruwwa. After being deported from Baghdad for subversive politics, Muruwwa was living and working in Beirut. As a devout communist intellectual in 1954 he had attended the Second Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow. Muruwwa and Anis had much in common. Anis thought that Egyptian literature was an ideal venue to critique the state of culture in Egypt. Muruwwa was enchanted by the promise of Soviet-style Socialist Realism and the need to destroy the old intelligentsia. Fully inspired by his experience in Moscow, he saw Socialist Realism as a new postcolonial aesthetic which had the potential to revolutionize Arab literature and culture.[24]

It was a meeting of minds, one that moved the Lebanese Communist Party, which had sponsored Muruwwa's trip to Moscow, to suggest publishing *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya* in Beirut rather than in Cairo.[25] Muhammad Dakrub (Muḥammad Dakrūb) from the communist magazine *al-Ṭarīq* took care of things (Fatḥī 90–91). The intellectual openness of Beirut undoubtedly made it a far better place to undertake such an enterprise than Cairo with its growing state-led dogmatism. The two Egyptian thinkers asked Muruwwa, as an emerging theorist of Socialist Realism, to write the preface to *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya*.[26] They were delighted with how his contribution furthered their agenda.[27]

What was the agenda? In brief, the axiom was that because "the troops of colonialism" are still at work in Egypt, there was an urgent need to purge culture (al-ʿĀlim and Anīs 20). Taha Husayn and Tawfiq al-Hakim, two of the leading representatives of established culture, were singled out as bearers and propagators of colonial cultural assumptions. As al-Alim and Anis put it, by submerging himself in the universal culture of Europe, Taha Husayn failed to account for the uniqueness of "our" culture and could only vaguely state that "Egypt has its own special expressive and intellectual schools" (19). The specific characteristics of Egypt, they contended, could not be found in Enlightenment's universalism but in the unique prevailing social realities. "If culture reflects the workings of social reality," they wrote, "and if our social reality is struggling toward liberation, then we need to define the meaning of Egyptian culture from within this social reality" (21). In other words, in contrast to the alleged universal culture of colonial Enlightenment and its Eurocentric modern ethos, the authors believed that "culture is not founded on one firm basis but is the result of a multifactored and interactive operation by society at large" (19). In Egypt as well as elsewhere in the Arab world, young writers were eager to reinvent this culture. As the Iraqi poet Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī) succinctly put it: "The search for a poetic form which did not exist in our old poetry, and the metaphysical revolt against reality as a whole,…brought (us) to discover the wretched reality in which the masses live…" (20). By way of addressing this regional problem, they hoped to create a new Arab subject and a new culture to nourish it.

Making their case specific, *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya* also described Taha Husayn and his class as disconnected "Ivory Tower" intellectuals removed from the social struggles of ordinary people. In particular, the book argued that both structurally and stylistically this kind

of literature is interested mostly in "art for its own sake" and thus perpetuates the gap be-
tween the elite and the people (al-ʿĀlim and Anīs 49–51; 95–104). In place of this litera-
ture, *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya* called for Realism as a tool for committed literature (*adab
multazim*) in the service of the people (al-ʿĀlim and Anīs 17–18). Their exemplar for
"right" literature was ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī) *Al-arḍ*
(*The Land*). In such literature, the social content reflects the commitment (*iltizām*) of the
writer to social change. This was indeed an excellent example of Socialist Realist literature,
aiming to instigate change rather than function for its own aesthetic sake, as a fount of
pleasure. The problem was that there were not many books like it.

Interestingly, in their polemical treatise al-Alim and Anis made a deliberate attempt to
appropriate *iltizām* from Idris' *al-Ādāb* and incorporate it into their Marxist schema. They
did so by discrediting existentialism as a foul project of radical individualism which "denies
the objective (social) truth of human reality" (67; 63–70). Thereafter, one can find two
competing notions of *iltizām*. The first "belonged" to Suhayl Idris and *al-Ādāb* and the sec-
ond to Marxists. Idris was unhappy with this development and with al-Alim, who until that
point wrote in *al-Ādāb* but then left for Beirut's *al-Thaqāfa al-Waṭaniyya*.[28] This intellec-
tual appropriation and the break that followed could not hide the fact that the theoretical pa-
rameters of al-ʿAlim's new Realism were vague. It was quite unclear how exactly one
would go about applying this Realism, as both writers were not well versed in literary criti-
cism. For the time being they left it as an open question. Indeed, for now, their task was not
to delve into the technicalities of literary criticism (a task they happily left to Muruwwa)
but to open a front with the *udabāʾ* and make it personal, so to speak.

By far the best articulation of the book's intentions was Muruwwa's preface which, ul-
timately, set the tone for much of what was about to happen in Arab letters during these tu-
multuous years. Muruwwa wrote of a new postcolonial Arab situation prevalent not only in
Egypt but across the Middle East. According to him, this situation necessitated a new cul-
ture and a new generation willing to destroy "old" culture. He saw much promise in a book
that called for a new relationship between writers and reality and expected that writers
would become actively involved not only in rendering an "accurate" depiction of this real-
ity but also commit themselves to its transformation. He believed that *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-
miṣriyya* was the first step in launching an objective scientific process of cultural change
(al-ʿĀlim and Anīs 1–15). This undertaking is an example of the unique nature of postcolo-
nial Arab culture where a new form of—essentially political—literary criticism sought to
change public culture.

By 1955 all three men, Muruwwa, al-Alim and Anis had emerged as literary/cultural crit-
ics.[29] Their book could be credited with pioneering postcolonial Marxist literary criticism
which, in the next two decades, would become an influential field.[30] Yet, there was much
work ahead. Though their book was very successful in singling out individuals and literary
problems, intellectually speaking, its narrow Egyptian focus and its incoherent method of
Realism called for further work.[31] The task of elaborating a more systematic introduction to
Realism along credible Socialist lines fell to Muruwwa.

* * *

By all accounts, especially his own, Husayn Muruwwa's short trip to Moscow to attend the
Second Congress of Soviet Writers in 1954 was transformative in the sense that he discovered
the potential of Socialist Realism to usher in a new era in Arabic literature, culture and life
(*Al-Safīr* 10). Proceeding with caution however, Muruwwa stated that there is "no intention to

simply 'import' the meaning of Socialist Realism to Arabic literature" (Mrūwah, *Qaḍāyā* 87; 102).[32] Instead of wholesale application, the idea was to identify the unique circumstances of the Arab world and thus to follow the method of various Soviet peoples, which enabled "scientifically applied Socialist Realism" in accordance with their own cultural peculiarities.

Rising to the challenge, Muruwwa's 1956 book, *Qaḍāyā adabiyya*, was a careful blueprint of why and how to apply Socialist Realism in the Arab world. A decade later he published another, more complete, literary agenda entitled *Dirāsāt naqdiyya fī ḍawʾ al-manhaj al-wāqiʿī*. Both books established him as the most systematic Arab theorist of Socialist Realism. He now talked about his approach to literature in terms of a methodology (*manhaj*) of total critique, a form of philosophy for life that illuminates "[…] the most important issues of the era […] whether they were intellectual, social or political" (*Dirāsāt* 5).

Taking his statement of purpose in *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyya* to the next theoretical level, Muruwwa began his new book along more explicitly polarizing lines. "It is the nature of the 'new'," he writes, "to wish, from deep inside, to eliminate 'old' ideas, values and meaning which belong to an era whose social progressive moment is gone. And it is in the nature of the 'old' not to leave the field to the 'new' without firm resistance" (*Qaḍāyā* 5). The necessity to define, locate and then eliminate the "old" is derived from Muruwwa's dissatisfaction with how cultural and political power is divided. In search of a political and cultural revolution, the elimination of the "old" would inevitably make space for "new social groups" who would then usher in a better phase of historical development (ibid.).

According to Muruwwa, literature was the linchpin of an ongoing effort to claim culture as a revolutionary political space through "literary battles" (*maʿārik adabiyya*), a notion which during this era became extremely popular in Arab letters (*Qaḍāyā* 6-7; al-ʿĀlim, *Maʿārik*; ʿAbdallāh). With this militant mentality in mind, the dividing line that Muruwwa charted was clear: while the old-guard "Reactionary" *udabāʾ* like Taha Husayn, Tawfiq al-Hakim and, to a lesser degree, al-Aqqad doggedly believed that "politics corrupt literature," and hence called for a separation of writers, literature "and arts as a whole from the general affairs of life," the "Progressive" Socialist Realist generation insisted on "art for society's sake," thus politicizing the text (Mrūwah, *Qaḍāyā* 6–7). This act of total politicization was another characteristic of the postcolonial era which sought to replace the allegedly neutral, yet in actuality Eurocentric and equally political, critique of the *udabāʾ*.

By insisting that writers "define the social position of literary works," he distinguished "progressive" from "reactionary" writers (31). But he also took time to define these differences philosophically. According to Muruwwa, "reactionary" writers draw on an Idealist philosophy in which individual reason and consciousness constitute the first line of existence and from which everything else is derived. That which is external to the individual, including society and the economy, is relegated to a marginal level with minimal historical agency (17–18). On the other side of this philosophical divide are the Materialists. According to them, individual actions and thoughts are projected onto the world which, in turn, renders them meaningful (materializes them). It is therefore the material world that enables the thoughts of the self to be tangibly expressed and real and they should hence be the focus of all intellectual efforts (18–19). With a clear line separating the two camps, Muruwwa maintained that the inevitable outcome of Idealist-inspired art is self-referential art. Divorced from reality, this art emerges exclusively from within the self, reflects mere individual experiences and, ultimately, is directed back at the selfish concerns of the individual (17–18).[33]

With this philosophical division in mind, Muruwwa rethought the position of the literary critic vis-à-vis literature. Unlike the literary criticism of the time, which was politically free-

floating and lacked clear methodology, Muruwwa called upon the critic to become a revolu-
tionary fighter (*munāḍil*) enrolled in the ranks of the avant-garde. As his friend and colleague
Mahdi Amil (Mahdī ʿĀmil) argued, "a critic without a (political) position (*mawqiʿ*) is a critic
without methodology" and hence "without social utility" (14-15). In practical terms, the task
of the "progressive" literary critic is to thus comb through the text and determine the degree to
which materiality and the social position are articulated in a satisfactory fashion. By this time
there was already an acknowledged international pool of progressive writers who could serve
as role models, figures such as Pablo Neruda, Garcia Lorca, Aragon, and Nazim Hikmet
(Mrūwah, *Qaḍāyā* 35). Once the position of the writer and the critic was redefined, the *ud-
abāʾ* clearly emerged as a group of detached "Ivory Tower" writers, a category to which some
of their youngest followers, such as Nagib Mahfuz (Najīb Maḥfūẓ), were also consigned (37).

By the time Muruwwa had finished elaborating his vision, militancy was in the air:

> […] we call to fight the (reactionary) benighted Adab which propagates desperation and pessimism.
> This literature, which aspires to rule over people by promising a better tomorrow, instead turned its
> oppression and pessimism into a 'philosophy' and the future into a sealed wall. (40)

These were harsh words and from several members of the *udabāʾ* they provoked a defensive
reaction to the combined trends of Socialist Realism and *iltizām*.

* * *

For a heavyweight intellectual like Taha Husayn, who had courageously endured the scan-
dals and political pressures of the 1920s and 1930s, post-WWII cultural debates should
have been easy to navigate. Yet, this time, all the signs indicated that Husayn was growing
tired and perhaps even disillusioned. That much became obvious in April 1955. Four
months earlier Suhayl Idris had invited Husayn to publicly debate the question: "For whom
does the intellectual write: the elite or the people?" Husayn accepted and arrived in Beirut
for a famous debate with the literary critic Raif Khuri (Raʾīf Khūrī) (ʿArab and al-Shalaq
266; Idris, "Al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt"). It was yet another round in the ongoing discussion about
iltizām and Socialist Realism as "literature for life." Two lectures were planned for the de-
bate: Husayn was to deliver "The Man of Letters Writes to the Elite," while Khuri's lecture
was entitled "The Man of Letters Writes to the Masses." These opposing visions graphi-
cally encapsulated the cultural tensions of the last decade.

Khuri lectured first. He was polite yet polemical: "Dear Doctor, to whom do we write? To
the people or to the elite? [...] According to you, you write for the elite" (Khūrī 2). In the spirit
of the times, Khuri invoked a theory where the subject of literature are the people, this litera-
ture emerges from—and is motored by—a life-oriented popular dynamism and then returns to
inform and nourish its very source (5). While Khuri did not call explicitly for the strict appli-
cation of Soviet-style Realism, he, nonetheless, embraced Stalin's mechanistic 1934 idea that
"writers are the engineers of the human soul" (8). He was careful enough to qualify this state-
ment, saying that as long as writers do not follow blindly what had already been engineered
for them by the state and the party, they would benefit society as a whole. "This is the free so-
cialism that I believe in," he concluded, and this was his vision for Arab writers (ibid.).

When his turn came to talk about "The Man of Letters Writes for the Elite," Husayn
immediately said that he is "neither committed to defend the elite nor the people." "I simply
received an invitation from Suhayl Idris […] who asked me to talk about writing to the elite"
(Ḥusayn, "Al-adīb" 9). Indeed, the provocative title of Husayn's lecture was given by Idris
himself who had sought to dramatize the event and the ensuing publication in *al-Ādāb*. "As

far as I am concerned," Husayn declared, "the entire debate is artificial and baseless […] as in anything I had ever written I never applied 'elite' or 'people' as literary parameters. (All) I understand is literature and readers who read this literature" (ibid.). In fact, he added, "I do not believe at all in this debate" (12). Why not? Because, he said, "it is all politics" (9).

Yet, a debate is a debate and not to be undone, Husayn also took a polemical approach: "Did Sophocles write on behalf of a political party?" (10). Homer, too, wrote poetry to the elite few but "who does not read Homer now?" (13). What about medieval Islamic praise poetry (*madīḥ*), is this political (11)? As far as he was concerned, the literature of commitment was nothing but a "literature of propaganda" (14). Raising the troublesome issue of language accessibility, he said that those who truly want to write to the masses should do so in their colloquial language (*ʿāmmiyya*) and not in the standard literary Arabic (*fuṣḥā*), which the masses do not understand (16). This was a strong point as, in reality, much of what the new generation was writing was entirely inaccessible to the colloquial-speaking masses.

Generosity and politeness aside, the two writers and their respective generations shared very little. In hindsight, this debate marked the inevitable inability of the *udabā*' to continue their role as prime shapers of public culture. There were many other indications of this state of affairs. For instance, the 1953 closure of two leading *nahḍawī* journals: *al-Risāla* and *al-Thaqāfa*. As *al-Risāla'*s editor, Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat (Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt), sadly admitted, this was the end of an era.[34] In fact, even before his arrival to the debate, Taha Husayn had already noted that Beirut was emerging as the capital of Arab thought at the expense of Cairo ("Al-zaʿāma" 69–70). That same year, committed writers had established the Arab Writers Union. Though outside the purview of this article, it is worth remarking that the first two Congresses of the Union (1954, 1956) marked a shifting of the literary center from Cairo to Beirut as well as the emergence of a hegemonic form of committed literature. As one of the organizers noted, upon Taha Husayn arriving at the Second Congress in Bludan, Syria, he seemed hopelessly out of place (Mīna).[35]

On the whole, the *udabā*' confronted this onslaught as individuals and not as a group. Al-Aqqad, who was not at the center of this debate, argued that he "does not debate with communists" and thus excused himself from this exchange (qtd. in Fatḥī 90). Salama Musa and Muhammad Husayn Haykal (Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal) were too old and ill to engage. They soon passed away. Tawfiq al-Hakim, who was the main subject of criticism and still the most active *adīb*, took it quite personally. He responded by publishing *Al-taʿāduliyya: Madhhabī fi-l-ḥayāt wa-l-fann* (*The Equilibrium: My Creed in Life and Art*) in which he called for a dialectical and hence inclusive process of cultural change. "[My usage of] the word equilibrium should not be taken here literarily to mean balance, symmetry or even moderation and intermediateness," he wrote (121). Instead, "in this book, equilibrium means the movement of both acceptance and opposition to another [human] undertaking" (ibid.). His call went unheeded.

In 1963, al-Hakim made a more deliberate attempt to engage and published *Al-ṭaʿām li-kull fam* (*Food for Every Mouth*). This play addressed the classic Third-World topic of world hunger and unequal distribution of wealth between the "North" and the "South." Here he was publishing an involved, if not "committed," play about an acute world problem. Yet, committed writers were not impressed. Muruwwa, for instance, wrote that this play was a transparent response to the accusation that he was a disconnected "Ivory Tower" reader (*Dirāsāt* 33). It was another example for the existing gap between writers of different generations.

* * *

The debates, exchanges and positions discussed here served as a gateway to the process through which the *udabāʾ* gradually lost their intellectual monopoly to a new circle of intellectuals. Though incomplete, this historical episode illustrates how the new generation created an entire vocabulary whose immediate sources of inspiration arrived from Paris and Moscow. Yet, it was not simply Socialist Realism and *iltizām* per se which marginalized the *udabāʾ*; the very timing of their arrival in the region and the context in which they were put to work were also decisive, radicalizing how they were put to work: namely, decolonization and the rise of Third-Worldism.

Though the battle over the future of Arab culture had multiple cultural and political manifestations, taking their cues from Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, intellectuals narrowed it down to three simple questions: *What do we write, why do we write, and to whom do we write?* In doing so they defined literature as the arena in which efforts to instigate and push forward cultural decolonization would take place, while literary criticism was seen as the means with which they would purge their culture from colonial effects. Their goal was to extract meaning vertically, i.e. from the bottom of society upwards. Ironically however, by the early 1960s, it appears that there were far more existentialist and socialist literary critics than actual writers. This inversion also indicates that, in less than a decade, both trends proliferated to such a hegemonic level that they began developing their own dogmas and orthodoxies.[36]

As in other instances of radical historical transformation, the struggle over decolonization reopened the question of how to establish one's intellectual authority. For the most part, the new intelligentsia was largely outside the purview of state institutions which included universities and professional associations. Instead, the intellectual turn of the 1950s was informally organized around journals, newspapers, cafés and, more formally, around communist political circles and their parties. In this constellation, authority was based on the quality of writing and the mind, erudition and, especially, the practical as well as theoretical commitment to autonomous politics. Due to this quasi-independent position, in 1962 Egyptian state functionaries expressed concern over what they called the "crisis of the intellectuals" (Abdel-Malek 189–221). That is, the tendency of postcolonial intellectuals to distance themselves from, or at least to be wary of, the state.[37]

Granted, Husayn Muruwwa, Mamud Amin al-Alim, Abd al-Azim Anis and Suhayl Idris belonged to the first generation of postcolonial Arab intellectuals who had to address the semi-colonial legacy of the *nahḍa* and its leading intellectuals, namely: cultural schizophrenia and the loss of authenticity, lack of social justice, quest for physical liberation and a longing for basic human dignity. Approaching this challenge from a transnational standpoint, they sought to arrange their existence as they wished, on their own particular terms. Though to one degree or another they all held what could be described as conflicting nationalist agendas, they nonetheless had a holistic cultural vision which practically rearranged the classic intellectual division of labor in which Egyptians write, Lebanese print and Iraqis read (Ḥusayn, "Al-zaʿāma" 69–70).[38] That was another side effect of the gradual fall of the *udabāʾ*.

Beyond the specifics of the case described here, the clear generational fault line between the *udabāʾ* and their rebelling disciples provides an opening—however limited—into seeing what happened "inside" postcolonial Arab culture. This generational difference manifested itself in concrete cultural terms such as opposing concepts, language and, more broadly, both a diverse sense of as well as purpose of culture. In this new reality, not merely the literary field was rearranged but public presence as such, with very specific implications for the political arena. All along, as a new generation of intellectuals began to blur the lines between politics and culture by describing themselves as "committed," they saw no contradiction be-

tween the multiple intellectual and political projects they had endorsed and the general framework of Pan-Arabism. Indeed, one can say that Pan-Arabism was an emotional as well as a political organizing frame, but in all other respects functioned as an intellectually empty signifier. The substantive intellectual context of this era was transnational and thus globally oriented. But, to return to the question of cultural mimicry, was it original?

It is an unfortunate feature of current literature on decolonization that, if it addresses intellectual exchange at all, it does so under the framework of incomplete and unsatisfactory "borrowing" and "application" of European ideas to Third-World realities.[39] If evaluated against the original notion of Sartrean commitment and Soviet Realism, the respective Arab traditions might indeed be condemned as a "poor application" which were philosophically as well as aesthetically eclectic and, therefore, politically obsolete.[40] Yet it is utterly futile to search for an enduring intellectual integrity in the course of this process. The reality was that, though not always successful in meeting its own ends, Arab thinkers creatively reinvented, reformulated and domesticated existentialism and Socialist Realism so they could confront the formidable challenge of decolonizing their culture from a collective, transnational perspective rather than from a solitary, autochthonous standpoint.

This immense effort is a neglected episode in the intellectual history of 1967 in the Arab world. Yet the success of the postcolonial generation in gradually occupying influential cultural positions as writers, editors and critics, should not mislead us. Sadly, by 1967, many members of this class had experienced intellectual life as a process that entailed alienation, suppression, statelessness, besiegement, material poverty and disillusionment with the political process. An intellectual history that would take their story from 1939, where Albert Hourani concluded, to the war itself, and slightly beyond, is likely to shed new light on the important question of what, exactly, was defeated in 1967.

Notes

1   This article was first presented at the conference "Beyond *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*: New Directions in Middle East Intellectual History" that took place at Princeton University in October 2012. It is forthcoming as "Changing the Arab Intellectual Guard: On the Fall of the Udabāʾ, 1940–1960." *Transformations of Modern Arabic Thought: Middle East Intellectual History after the Liberal Age*. Ed. Max Weiss and Jens Hanssen. Princeton: Princeton UP, forthcoming. I wish to thank the organizers Max Weiss (Princeton University) and Jens Hanssen (University of Toronto) for their valuable comments and for allowing me to republish it here under a different title. I would also like to thank Friederike Pannewick for inviting me to present my work at the conference on "Commitment and Dissent in Arabic Literature since the 1950s."

2   Republished without the original date in: "Ṣūrat al-adab," the original *al-Jumhūriyya* article, was republished in Ḥusayn, *Khiṣām wa-naqd* 72–89.

3   For a shorter English version see: Klemm, "Different Notions".

4   For instance: Ajami, Fouad. *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice Since 1967*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981. Print; Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2002. Print; Dawisha, Adeed. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.

5   See for instance: Musawi, Muhsin. *The Post-Colonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. Print.

6   Other narratives of formative Arab thought include: ʿAwaḍ, Luwīs. *Tārīkh al-fikr al-miṣrī al-ḥadīth min ʿaṣr Ismāʿīl ilā thawrat 1919*. Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1980. Print; ʿAbd al-Malik, Anwar. *Nahḍat Miṣr: Takawwun al-fikr wa-l-īdiyūlūjiyya fī Nahḍat Miṣr al-Waṭaniyya, 1805–1892*. Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1983. Print.

7   Christoph Schumann has characterized them as a "generation of broad expectations." Schumann, Christoph. "The Generation of Broad Expectations: Nationalism, Education, and Autobiography in Syria and Lebanon, 1930–1958." *Welt des Islams* 41.2 (2001): 174–205. Print.

8   *Mustaqbal* 1: 30-9, 45-70, 71-124 and *Mustaqbal* 2: 263-74, 496-501.

9   For one of the early examples of an ubiquitous trope, see: Mūsā, Salāma. *Mā hiya al-nahḍa?* Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1993. Print.

10 Husayn was the dissertation adviser of Abd al-Rahman Badawi (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī), the leading Arab philosopher of existentialism.

11 The editorial choices of Taha Husayn and hence the reception of Sartre in Egypt were heavily influenced by the editorial line of the British journals *Horizon* and *Scrutiny*: Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā. "Jean Paul Sartre." *Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* Dec. 1945: 43–44. Print. For early critical writing about Sartre which betrays both fascination and concern, see: Baladī, Najīb. "Jean-Paul Sartre wa-mawāqifuhu." *Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* Apr. 1946: 427–34. Print. See also follow ups in June and July 1946: 50–59 and 277–83 respectively. See also: Sartre, Jean-Paul. "*La nationalisation de la littérature*, Tamim al-Adab."*Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* Dec. 1945: 239–57. Print.

12 See also critical pieces about the sanctity of "Art for Art's Sake" which anticipated Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Maḥmūd, Ḥusayn. "Al-fann min ajl al-fann." *Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* Jan. 1947: 66–73. Print; Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā. "Al-adab bayn al-ittiṣāl wa-l-infiṣāl." *Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* Aug. 1946: 373–88. Print.

13 For reasons connected with the philosophy of language and representation, Sartre excluded poetry (as well as other non-representational arts like music) from the list of committed modes of expression. Though he later reversed his position, Arab critics of all stripes found the exclusion of poetry—historically a major form of committed expression in Islamic culture—incomprehensible. Anwar al-Maddawi and Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati were among those who objected to Sartre. Cf. al-Maʿaddāwī 14–15; al-Bayātī 37; Barāda 37**.**

14 Salama Musa saw Sartre's commitment as a model for intellectual action which he himself practiced throughout his life. His systematic criticism of the monarchy landed him in prison.

15 See a reprint of two essays from the late 1940s: al-ʿAqqād, ʿAbbās Maḥmūd. *Bayn al-kutub wa-l-nās.* Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1966. 15–33. Print.

16 On the magazine as a platform for cosmopolitan Enlightenment, see Micklethwait, Christopher Dwight. "*Faits Divers*: National Culture and Modernism in Third World Literary Magazines." Diss. U of Texas at Austin, 2011. 155–92. Print. For the Harari Brothers, the Jewish publisher of *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī*, see: Beinin, Joel. *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1998. 247. Print.

17 For more on the influence of Paris on Suhayl Idris and his generation, see: Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism."

18 See also: Idrīs, Suhayl. "Risālat *al-Ādāb*." *Al-Ādāb* Jan. 1953: 1–2. Print.

19 Idrīs, Suhayl. "Miḥnat al-Adab"; Idrīs, Suhayl. "Shakāwā al-adab" 1–5. Print; "Azmat al-majallāt al-adabiyya fī-l-ʿālam al-ʿarabī." *Al-Ādāb* Oct. 1953: 12–16. Print; al-Naqqāsh, Rajāʾ. "Fī azmat al-naqd al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir." *Al-Ādāb* Nov. 1954: 8–10; 63–66. Print.

20 It is important to emphasize that *al-Ādāb* was not simply a pan-Arab Nasserist platform and that its cultural vision preceded Nasserism.

21 For instance: "Muhimmat al-adab wa-wājib al-adīb." *Al-Ādāb* Jan. 1953: 74. Print; Khūrī, Raʾīf. "Al-adab: Nāqid al-dawla." *Al-Ādāb* Mar. 1953: 5–7. Print; Idrīs, "Shakāwā al-adab" 1–9. Print; Idrīs, Suhayl. "Al-naqd aladhī nurīd." *Al-Ādāb* Aug. 1953: 1–2. Print. For a self-promoting article on *al-Ādāb*'s own achievements, see "*Al-Ādāb* fī ʿāmihā al-thānī." *Al-Ādāb* Jan. 1954: 1. Print; Badūr, ʿAlī. "Fī risālat al-adab." *Al-Ādāb* May 1954: 54–55. Print.

22 For a sketch of Muruwwa's life as he narrated it to Lebanese poet Abbas Baydun, see *Al-Safīr*, 18-24 Sept. 1985, 10.

23 For the reception of Socialist Realism in the Arab world and for the role of Muruwwa in it, see: Di-Capua, "Homeward Bound." For the positioning of Muruwwa and some aspects of Socialist Realism within the reception of *iltizām* see: Klemm, "Different Notions" 56.

24 For Muruwwa's account of his time in Moscow, see Mrūwah, *Qaḍāyā* 66–85. See also Di-Capua, "Homeward Bound."

25 Mahmud Amin al-ʿAlim met Muruwwa for the first time only in 1956 during the inaugural meeting of the Arab Writers Association in Bludan, Syria. al-ʿĀlim, Maḥmūd Amīn. "Ḥusayn Mrūwah fī riḥlātihi al-thalāth." *Ḥusayn Mrūwah fī masīratihi al-niḍāliyya fikran wa-mumārasa.* Ed. Al-majlis al-thaqāfī li-Lubnān al-janūbī. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1997. 38. Print.

26 For the Lebanese involvement in the publication process, see: al-ʿĀlim and Anīs 15–34.

27 See a letter from Mahmud Amin al-Alim to Muhammad Dakrub thanking Muruwwa and others for their critical contribution in Dakrūb, Muḥammad. "Kalimāt ʿan Ḥusayn Mrūwah wa-ʿan al-faraḥ bi-jadīd al-ākharīn." *Ḥusayn Mrūwah: Shahādāt fī fikrihi wa-niḍālihi*. Ed. Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim et al. Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1981. 153–54. Print.

28 *Al-Thaqāfa al-Waṭaniyya* was envisioned by the Lebanese Communist Party in 1952 and edited by Muruwwa and Dakrub. It would become a revolutionary literary platform bringing together Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese writers. Dakrūb, Muḥammad. "Tawhuj al-munāḍil/Tawhuj al-kitāba." *Adab wa-Naqd* (1997): 110–11. Print.

29 Typically, unlike the *udabā*' and their official affiliation with the state through political parties, academic institutions and state bureaucracy, the postcolonial generation supported themselves in teaching and journalism jobs and, as much as they could, sought to be independent of the state.

30 It later served as an inspiration for a similar book about Syria: Sulaymān, Nabīl. *Al-adab wa-l-īdiyūlūjiya fī Sūriyā, 1967–1973*. Beirut: Dār Khaldūn, 1974. Print.

31 In his preface Muruwwa alluded to both of these problems (al-ʿĀlim and Anīs 5–15).

32 After all, much of the discussion in Moscow dealt with the USSR's own cultural diversity and how to adjust Socialist Realism to the cultural specificity of each of the Soviet nations.

33 The division of reality to material entities (the economy) versus Idealist entities (mental forces, i.e. minds and their states) and the question of the relationship between them is a fundamental problem in metaphysics, which, for his own reasons, Muruwwa followed selectively.

34 The editor Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat announced the closing in *al-Risāla* and *al-Ādāb* reprinted parts of the text also registering it as an end of an era in Idrīs, "Miḥnat al-adab." See also Idrīs, Suhayl. "Maʿārik 'Al-adab wa-l-ḥayāt'." *Al-Ādāb* Feb. 1954: 70. Print.

35 The full history of Arab literary criticism is yet to be written; the following describe some of the aesthetics and personal shifts during the 1950s. Meanwhile, see Semah, David. *Four Egyptian Literary Critics*. Leiden: Brill, 1974. Print; Cachia, Pierre. "The Critics." *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*. Ed. M. M. Badawi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. 417–42. Print.

36 For a critical reassessment of *iltizām* see: Barāda, *Taḥawwulāt*.

37 In both Egypt and Iraq differences with the state took a violent turn. In Iraq, a significant number of Marxist-leaning intellectuals have been murdered and in Egypt Marxist intellectuals were systematically imprisoned and tortured.

38 Until the 1950s it was obvious that Cairo produces Arab thought and the rest of the *mashriq* consumes it. Coupled with the fall of the *udabā*', in the mid-1950s Arab intellectuals began to rethink Cairo's intellectual leadership and saw Beirut as a serious contender in this regard.

39 On this problem and that of the limitation of "reception studies" in literature and science, see: Elshakry, Marwa. "The Gospel of Science and American Evangelism in Late Ottoman Beirut." *Past and Present* 196 (2007): 173–214. Print; Elshakry, Marwa. "Knowledge in Motion: The Cultural Politics of Modern Science Translations in Arabic." *Isis* 99 (2008): 701–30. Print.

40 For the many methodological challenges of "traveling ideas," see Said, Edward W. "Traveling Theory." *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983: 226–47. Print; Said, Edward W. "Traveling Theory Reconsidered." *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000: 436–45. Print.

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On the Trail of Frantz Fanon[1]

Rachid Ouaissa

> Karl Marx was 'created' by capitalism; Garibaldi by Sicilian poverty; Lenin by the Russian aristocracy; Gandhi by British imperialism. Fanon was created by the white man. (Caute 7)

In 2011, numerous workshops, conferences and symposia were held throughout the world in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Algerian psychiatrist from Martinique, Frantz Fanon. 2011 was also the year the "Arab Spring" began. One could think that here some form of simultaneity was at work, that it was no coincidence that the rebellions on the streets of Arab countries broke out the very year Fanon and his magnum opus *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) were once more in the spotlight. The demands articulated in the rebellions targeted precisely what Fanon had warned against fifty years before, namely the abuse of power by a nationalist bourgeoisie incapable of industrialization.

With *The Wretched of the Earth* published just a few days before his death, Frantz Fanon took up the cause of the self-liberation of the subaltern like no other thinker. An active member of the Algerian liberation movement FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) whose writings serve as a source of inspiration for Palestinian resistance as well as several African revolutionaries in their struggle against colonial domination, Fanon is generally considered to be the most important theorist of anticolonial resistance (Wolter; Eckert). As far as his understanding of *commitment* is concerned, it is political *action* that stands at the heart of his political thought.

This essay explores the relationship between literature and commitment from a perspective that takes seriously the connections linking Fanon's biography to his critical writings. The various sections address the reception of this seminal intellectual by his contemporaries and in the more recent context of the Arab Spring. Fanon's writing and biography have contributed immensely to his international reputation as an engaged political intellectual, to which Jean-Paul Sartre's passionate preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* significantly contributed. Among Arab literati who understood themselves as *multazimīn*, engaged intellectuals with a social mission, Fanon's work and Sartre's idea of *littérature engagée* were familiar companions to their own literary work since the 1950s.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that the reception of Fanon in the Arab world is quite limited and often very selective. For over thirty years, Fanon's work was simply not a part of scholarly and intellectual debates. Although several public squares, streets and schools bear his name, in contrast to Sartre he was not celebrated as an intellectual in the early postcolonial period,[2] but construed as one martyr amongst many and neglected. Fanon's warning that the "comprador Bourgeoisie" could assume power obviously did not fit into the canon acceptable to those in power. This led to the author of *The Wretched of the Earth* being excluded from public debate.

As history attests, the usurpation of power by repressive regimes has seemingly proven Fanon's reflections correct. Are not—fifty years after the end of colonialism—the "wretched" from back then still the "degraded" of today? Is the colonialism of former times not similar to

the repressive regimes of today? The "Arab Spring" provides us with an excellent opportunity to reconsider Fanon's thinking on revolution, violence and liberation. Here we shall approach the theme of this volume, *reflections of/on the political in Arabic literature since the 1940s*, from the history of political ideas. Fanon is potentially instructive for linking literature and intellectual discourses to contemporary political history. Whereas the other essays in this volume look at the concept of *commitment* in terms of literature and criticism, here we shall plot the relationship connecting Fanon the writer to Fanon the activist, both parts linked in a practice of political thinking. This essay tries to link Fanon's biography and his experience with discrimination and racism in the context of the Algerian Revolution and its authoritarian turn after the independence with the failed Arab revolution of 2011.

Fanon: Biography as Method

Even though Fanon's influence was matched by hardly any other intellectual from the "Third World," his biography remains largely unknown—though integral to understanding his writing. Spread as it was across Martinique, North Africa and France, knowledge of his life is fragmentary, often focused on the specific regions of specific moments in his life. His biography is pieced together out of sketchy reconstructions. For a few years now, his work, biography and "hybrid" identity are the subject of various interpretations and have attracted the attention of a number of disciplines, among them philosophy, psychoanalysis and political theory.

Frantz Fanon was born in 1924 into a middle-class family on the Caribbean island of Martinique. He completed his schooling there with the Afro-Caribbean writer and politician Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), one of his teachers, whose idea of "Négritude" would greatly influence Fanon. During the Second World War, Fanon joined the struggle against the Axis powers, enlisting in the Free France Forces and serving in a tank division in North Africa. While in a training camp in Morocco, he encountered the deeply ingrained racism rife in the French army. Disillusioned, he saw that a "white" and "Christian" soldier was treated preferentially, while the rest of the soldiers in the same battalion were considered nothing other than cannon fodder. Within both academic circles and everyday life as well as while in the army, Fanon experienced that the real world is divided—into the world of the white man and that of the black man. The discrimination and forms of racism he encountered served as the templates for his first work *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in Lyon in 1952.

Following his schooling in Martinique, Fanon studied medicine and philosophy in Lyon. After graduating, he was appointed director of a psychiatric clinic in the city of Blida (al-Bulayda) in central Algeria in 1953, a year before the outbreak of the Algerian War. In Algeria he discovered a world of violence and repression. The racism experienced in France was expressed in outright acts of violence in Algeria. As psychiatrist and doctor, he was confronted with the firmly established "École psychiatrique d'Alger" of Antoine Porot (1876–1965), who had developed a theory on the indigenous people, characterizing them, allegedly trapped in the constraints of their own culture, as primitive, incapable of progress and violent. For Fanon, it was colonialism that was responsible for the latent aggression and unrestrained violence as well as the psychic disorders leading to, via alienation, depersonalization. He wrote:

> The first thing the colonizer learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am

leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During coloni-
zation the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in
the morning. The colonized subject will first train this aggressiveness sedimented in his muscles
against his own people. This is the period when black turns on black, and police officers and mag-
istrates don't know which way to turn when faced with the surprising surge of North African
criminality. (*The Wretched* 15–16)

As the Algerians resorted to armed resistance, Fanon made contact with the leadership of
the FLN. In December 1956, he submitted his resignation as a doctor in charge of psychia-
try. He wrote that it is absurd to want to cure people who experience systematic dehumani-
zation on a day-to-day basis (Cherki 135). After a stay in Paris, Fanon moved to Tunis,
where he came into contact with the entire leadership of the FLN. Here he also joined the
editorial team of the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid* and represented the Provisional Gov-
ernment of Algeria at many international congresses and diplomatic missions. In 1960,
Fanon was told that he was suffering from leukemia. He died on December 6, 1961, at a
hospital in Maryland, United States. In accordance with his own wishes, his body was
flown back to Algeria (Zerguini 170–72), where he was buried with full military honors in
an already liberated part of the country close to the Tunisian border. Fanon's engagement in
the FLN's struggle against French colonialism was the empirical basis for his most famous
work *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fanon's work was directly connected with the course of the Algerian struggle for inde-
pendence. His contacts with the most important civilian and military figures in the armed
uprising as well as his inclusion in the editorial team of *El Moudjahid* influenced him
greatly—and the influence was reciprocated. According to the Algerian historian Moham-
med Harbi (Muḥammad Ḥarbī), the statutes of the FLN formulated in the years 1959 and
1960, which declared the peasant community to be the main pillar of the revolution, bear
the hallmarks of Fanon's thought (Harbi and Meynier 321).

Fanon drew empirical evidence from the experiences he had working within the leader-
ship of the FLN. Relentless infighting between the military and civilian leadership, the re-
gionalists, the Baathists and the Islamists inspired him to warn against the nationalist com-
prador bourgeoisie gaining supremacy. From a contemporary perspective, some of his
assessments of the situation reveal that he not only knew what was going on within the Al-
gerian leadership at the time, but moreover, he emerges as a visionary in terms of develop-
ments in postcolonial Algeria. In conversation with Ferhat Abbas (Farḥāt ʿAbbās, 1899–
1985), one of the movement's leaders, Fanon, concerned about the ongoing conflicts within
the FLN leadership, is said to have prophesized: "Un Colonel leur réglera un jour leur
compte. C'est le Colonel Boumèdiene. Pour celui-ci le goût du pouvoir et du Commande-
ment relève de la pathologie" (Abbas 317). And so it came to pass: In 1965, Colonel
Boumèdiene staged a coup and installed himself as president of the country. He eliminated
all his political opponents and established a pan-Arab dictatorship.

One of the most important figures who influenced Fanon was Abane Ramdane (ʿAbbān
Ramaḍān, 1920–1957). Nigel C. Gibson has written: "He [Fanon] had been recruited into
the FLN by Abane Ramdane, the Kabylian leader of the FLN who became Fanon's mentor"
("50 Years Later"). Fanon was fascinated by Abane's leadership qualities, charisma, fore-
sight and cosmopolitan open-mindedness. Together with Larbi Ben M'hidi (Muḥammad al-
ʿArabī b. Mahīdī, 1923–1957), Ramdane was considered the architect of the Soummam
Congress (Muʾtamar al-Ṣūmām) held in August 1956. The goals formulated at this congress
most likely convinced Fanon that the Algerian revolution would be facilitating the creation

of a new 'man.' For Fanon, impressed by the qualitative leap and the maturity of the revolutionary aims, the Soummam Declaration made it clear just how far the FLN had come since 1954. In contrast to the first FLN declaration, which set out the goal of a democratic Algeria guaranteeing social welfare within the framework of Islamic values, the Soummam Congress looked towards far more progressive goals for an independent Algeria. In its vision for Algeria, the independent country was to be social, liberal-minded, secular and multicultural, with Algerian Jews and other minorities enjoying civil rights. Besides anchoring universal human rights in the declaration, Abane had also managed to assert the supremacy of the political over the military. Abane and Fanon were close personally as well as ideologically. In *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (1959), Fanon describes the maturity process he discerned as follows:

> Colonialism shuts its eyes to the real facts of the problem. It imagines that our power is measured by the number of our heavy machine guns. This was true in the first months of 1955. It is no longer true today. […] The power of the Algerian Revolution henceforth resides [not in the military but] in the radical mutation that the Algerian has undergone. (*A Dying Colonialism* 31–32)

For Fanon, Abane was a revolutionary and visionary, the true leader of the revolution, looking to create the basis for a new human being in postcolonial Algeria and so leaving behind the archaisms of tribal and religious thinking. Abane feared Arab-Islamist thinking from the 'Orient'; Ben Bella (Aḥmad b. Billa, 1918–2012) with his contacts to the Middle East was "a dictator in the making" (Macey 335). Thus, Abane and Fanon share the vision of a genuine revolution, one that not only liberates Algerians from colonialism but also the burdens of ʿaṣabiyya.[3] The ideas of the Soummam Platform are to be found in his book *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* (*A Dying Colonialism* 31–32). Fanon was thus all the more distraught as Abane was killed by the FLN itself in 1957. In circumstances still unclear, he was hung by the military faction of the movement somewhere near the Moroccan city of Tétouan (Tiṭwān). According to Alice Cherki, after Fanon's death his wife Josie found letters from Sartre and an empty black wallet amongst his belongings—the wallet was Abane's (153). Before his death, Fanon is reported as having confessed to Simone de Beauvoir that "I have two deaths on my conscience which I will not forgive myself for: That of Abane and that of Lumumba" (Gibson, *Fanon* 102).

After Algeria gained independence, the power elite, amongst them Bouteflika (ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Būtaflīqa, b. 1937) (Meynier 341), hitherto firm supporters of Fanon, quickly distanced themselves from his ideas. Maintaining power and preserving the interests of the privileged, adorned in a populist-revolutionary discourse, now come to the fore—just as Fanon had predicted (Ouaissa, *La classe-état algérienne* 77–128).

Fanon's Global Readers

After his death, Fanon's work was analyzed around the world and in each instance approached with a different set of questions and from specific contexts; moreover, a diverse array of academic disciplines were involved. His works have been translated into numerous languages and there is no shortage of biographies. As early as the 1960s, he became, like Che Guevara, a symbol and icon of the 'Third World' in the struggle against colonialism. Fanon's works not only contain analyses of decolonization and repression as well as reflections on the futures of 'Third World' countries—they also express the hope that a new humanity will arise, parallel to a decolonization of the existence itself.

In Africa, South and North America, and Asia, Fanon's work is not only seen in connection with colonialism, but is also harnessed for the struggle against internal repression and marginalization (Nzongola-Ntalaja; Guimarães). Besides revolutionary movements, leftist groups, and marginalized minorities, Fanon's thought is also quoted, instrumentalized and claimed by dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, for instance the Baath regime, supporters of pan-Arabism, and even radical Islamists.

After its translation into English, Fanon's work attracted such interest in the USA that, in the mid-1960s, veritable 'fan' groups and reading circles emerged. Cherki has described the reception of Fanon amongst Afro-Americans as follows: "Even if it wasn't read by everyone, *The Wretched of the Earth* became a Little Red Book or Bible—as the case may be—for black Americans" (277). Fanon became compulsory reading for the political activists of the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party. Here, parallels were drawn between French colonialism and white America, between the indigenous bourgeoisie and the black petit-bourgeoisie. The class struggle, camouflaged in color and race, was not explained by Marx, tabooed in America, but a black brother.

In Algeria, Fanon was still present until the mid-1960s before disappearing once and for all into the archives of Algerian memory and museums of martyrdom. On the first anniversary of his death, in December 1962, in his homage President Ben Bella called him "the brilliant psychiatrist, brother-in-arms, and leader, who has bequeathed us a doctrine that backs the Algerian Revolution" (Cherki 261). Further, congresses and symposia in tribute to Fanon were first held again in 1987. This period coincided with a far-reaching economic, political and cultural crisis in Algeria. The populist pan-Arabic and socialist discourses, mostly propagated by corrupted former 'Fanonists,' were no longer taken seriously by Algeria's young generation. Frustration among the young Algerian population rose to unprecedented levels. In October 1988, the Algerian youth rebelled, triggering what was known as the Algerian Spring or the October Riots, and subsequently the decade-long civil war which cost some 150,000 lives. Apart from the congresses and symposia, books and articles analyzing Fanon's work were also published, including that by the pan-Arabic Algerian thinker Mohammad El-Milli (Muḥammad al-Millī), "Frantz Fanon et la Révolution Algérienne" (1971). The editor of the Arabic version of the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid*, El-Milli, knew Fanon very well and admired him, without sharing his Marxist analysis of class. For El-Milli, the Algerian war of liberation needs to be seen as part of Arab nationalism, as the result of a rejuvenated *qawmiyya ʿarabiyya* (Arab nationalism). Believing that Fanon was first able to develop his theses and arguments while accompanying the Algerian war of liberation, El-Milli thus considers him not to be the forward thinker who laid the theoretical basis for the revolution, but rather a product of the revolution itself.

The reception of Fanon in other parts of the Arab world is very selective and marginal; overall, in comparison to other regions across the world, the range of translations, biographies, debates, essays and references to Fanon and his work is very limited.[4] For that, however, interest in Fanon began relatively early. The first translation of *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les damnés de la terre*) into Arabic was completed in 1963 and published in Lebanon. In 1970, two further works followed: *Black Skin, White Masks* and *L'an V de la revolution algérienne*, with the Lebanese publishers Dār al-Fārābī and Dār al-Ṭalīʿa. In 1971, the translation of David Caute's book on the life of Fanon by Adnan Kiali was published in Lebanon. Further publications followed in the 1970s and 1980s, also in Lebanon. The intensity of the engagement with the work of Fanon in Lebanon is due to the relative freedom of intellectual discussion at this time on the one hand, and the fact that Lebanon became the

most important location of Palestinian resistance to Israel in the 1970s.[5] Above all, Fanon's ideas were broadly discussed and adopted by Palestinian student groups in Europe (Zelkovitz 23; 179). Since then, many scholars and authors have increasingly referred to him in the context of the Palestinian question (Daʿnā). Two possible reasons for this are the work of the Palestinian-American theorist Edward Said and the re-igniting of Palestinian resistance to the occupation, resulting in the First Intifada of 1989.[6]

In the Arab world, Fanon's work was often misunderstood and even misused. It is also worth noting that while *The Wretched of the Earth* was translated into Arabic very early[7] and often misused to bolster Baathist ideology, hardly any attention has been given to *Black Skin, White Masks* (Bakkār).

Fanon the Marxist is even interpreted as a proponent of Islam. Like El-Milli, the Saudi scholar Fouzi Slisli is convinced that Fanon was impressed by Islam's power of resistance, because "[t]he Qur'an makes it obligatory for Muslims to resist and repel invasions and occupations" (24). Slisli draws a parallel between the Algerian war of liberation and today's conflicts in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq. And like El-Milli, he sees *The Wretched of the Earth* as a product of the Algerian, Islamic, and anticolonial tradition. According to Slisli, his sympathy for Islam, a religion of resistance against oppression, moved Fanon to change his name, calling himself Ibrahim Fanon (23). What the Saudi scholar, no authority on the Algerian war of independence, does not know, is that every freedom fighter was given a war name during the conflict.

This peculiar reception of Fanon and the deformation of his revolutionary thinking are widespread in both pan-Arab and pan-Islamic circles. Argumentations of this kind completely ignore that for Fanon primary solidarities, for instance cultural identities, can only be a first stage on the way to embracing universal values, beyond any form of deity. As Fanon saw it, the annihilation of the colonial master entails the annihilation of the colonized. Fanon has no interest in remaining a prisoner of history:

> I find myself one day in the world, and I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behavior from the other. And one duty: the duty never to let my decisions renounce my freedom. [...] I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction. I must constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists of introducing invention into life. In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself. (*Black Skin* 204) (original emphasis)

Throughout the 2000s a series of press articles and online publications appeared which draw parallels between the Algerian war of liberation and the occupation of Iraq. The authors usually limited their considerations to the chapter on violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* and called for armed resistance against the USA (Dūrī). With the launch of the American offensive in the Middle East after the events of September 11, Fanon is even paraphrased by the Al-Qaeda (al-Qāʿida) leadership. Ayman al-Zawahiri (Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī) employs Fanon's terminology and advocates the use of massive violence to restore the dignity of humiliated young Muslims. The Al-Qaeda leader calls for unity between the oppressed, deprived and marginalized of the earth (*mustaḍʿafūn fi-l-arḍ*) and to join forces to overthrow the arrogant rulers (*mustakbirūn*) (Karkūsh). Jessica Stern even sees a parallel in utterances by Zawahiri and Khomeini (264).

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, a host of conferences and symposia devoted to Fanon have been organized, while countless essays and special issues of scholarly journals (*al-Safīr al-ʿArabī* 2012; 2013)[8] as well as internet forums have discussed Fanon and his

work. Similar to how Hannah Arendt was rediscovered (Hanssen), the vast efforts undertaken to explain the revolts has witnessed a Fanon renaissance in Arab public debate. In 2013, the Qatari weekly *Aldoha Magazine* (*al-Dawḥa*)[9] brought out a special issue on Fanon, the essays recalling his role in the struggle against colonialism and seeking to identify his relevance for today. In a similar vein, in a special issue dated September 18, 2012, *al-Quds al-ʿArabī*[10] attempts to explain the revolts shaking parts of the Arab world by referring directly to Fanon. In most of the articles Fanon's theses on the rise of the anticolonial movement are used—in very distilled or simplified form—to explain events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. Drawing on Fanon's ideas on spontaneity, the Arab Spring is interpreted as a spontaneous revolt by pauperized and disadvantaged sections of the population against the structural and physical violence imposed by the ruling regimes (Birani).

Fanon's Postcolonial Reception

In the fields of postcolonial and cultural studies, Fanon is rediscovered in the 1990s—that is, earlier than he is in other academic circles. In these Anglo-American discussions, a Fanon revival is seen among those identified with the poststructuralist school, in theories of space, in urban geography, in gender theory through to critiques of neoliberalism, becoming almost a signature of the various 'post'-discourses. As Udo Wolter has accurately observed:

> The classic of anticolonial revolution theory from the sixties is today invoked precisely by those who wish to dismantle, through deconstructionist approaches, the bipolar contrapositions of colonial master/colonized, West/rest, civilization/barbarity, male/female as well as the essentialist ascriptions attached to ethnic and national identities, turning towards fluent, hybrid subjectivities as the basis for new cultural and political forms of resistive action. (Wolter)

The Anglo-American debate focuses primarily on Fanon's biography, seeing it as the prototype for a hybrid identity. What is remarkable, however, is that both of Fanon's classics are often considered separately. While *Black Skin, White Masks* is used as an interpretative template for explaining the postcolonial order, the Marxist discourse focuses on *The Wretched of the Earth*, declaring Fanon to be the initiator of a revolutionary project that must be defended and reflected on in the ongoing era of globalization (ibid.).

But both works are connected by a philosophical logic, one that makes it tenuous to consider them separately. Fanon combines the ideas of the young Marx and Hegelian dialectics with existentialism, which was the vogue movement of the 1950s: Both are driven by the desire to forge an emancipatory universal subject of liberation (ibid.). The problem posed in *Black Skin, White Masks* was answered in practice, namely in Fanon's direct involvement in the Algerian war of liberation, and theoretically underpinned in *The Wretched of the Earth*. *Black Skin, White Masks* summarized the experiences of Fanon with racism and discrimination, which led him to a kind of alienation. The solution for the individual alienation is the collective and violent revolt and the canalization of the individual frustration against the "Master."

The insight he believed his psychoanalytic study of patients resulted in, that violence possesses an emancipatory and liberating effect, informed his analysis of racist colonial biopower. For Fanon, the violence of the indigenous is "merely" a response to the varieties of violence stemming from the colonial master—physical, psychological, structural and cultural. Fanon wished to hold up a mirror to the Europeans and remind Europe's intellectuals and citizens of their complicity in the atrocities of colonialism. As Judith Butler has put it:

"Fanon's work gives the European man a chance to know himself, and so to engage in that pursuit of self-knowledge, based upon an examination of his shared practices, that is proper to the philosophical foundations of human life" (216).

In Fanon's view of the world, shaped by his own first-hand experience, violence and counter-violence were the fuel of the historical process:

> The violence of the colonial regime and the counterviolence of the colonized balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. The greater the number of metropolitan settlers, the more terrible the violence will be. Violence among the colonized will spread in proportion to the violence exerted by the colonial regime. […] The colonist's logic is unrelenting and one is only baffled by the counterlogic of the colonized's behaviour if one has remained out of touch with the colonists' way of thinking. […] Terror, counterterror, violence, counterviolence. […] In the armed struggle there is what we could call the point of no return. (*The Wretched* 46–47)

As Sartre emphasizes in the preface, colonial violence is systematic. The purpose of the physical, psychological and structural forms of violence is to debase, dehumanize, depersonalize and reify the colonized: "[D]ecolonization is quite simply the substitution of one 'species' of mankind by another. The substitution is unconditional, absolute, total, and seamless" (1). Violence possesses a double function in Fanon's thinking: On the one hand, it liberates the libido, dispels magic and the world of mysticism, in which violence takes place amongst the indigenous; on the other hand, it leads to a mobilization of forces against colonialism, giving rise to a kind of "class in itself" possessing a solid common conscience (Prabhu 58). Thus, it triggers a "double rupture" which can give rise to a new humanity. Fanon saw violence as the only way the colonized could liberate themselves from the abstraction of master-slave relations. At first, violence erupts spontaneously, is then canalized and forges a common consciousness in the struggle for a national identity:

> It [violence] rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilized by rapid decolonization, the people have time to realize that liberation was the achievement of each and every one and no special merit should go to the leader. Violence hoists the people up to the level of the leader. Hence their aggressive tendency to distrust the system of protocol that young governments are quick to establish. When they have used violence to achieve national liberation, the masses allow nobody to come forward as "liberator." They prove themselves to be jealous of their achievements and take care not to place their future, their destiny, and the fate of their homeland into the hands of a living god. (Fanon, *The Wretched* 51)

Fanon as Theorist of Freedom, Liberation and Emancipation

It is for this reason that Edward Said considers Fanon to be a theorist of freedom, liberation and emancipation, and not of decolonization and resistance. Said's perspective on Fanon's ideas of violence is described by Ashcroft and Ahluwalia: "the essence of liberation and emancipation is a consciousness and recognition of a universal self, which is a unification of the self and the Other" (115).

Like the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, Fanon draws insights from Marx, Hegel and Freud. After Auschwitz, Horkheimer and Adorno defended the right of the suffering and oppressed to resist. The subject of resistance is, however, not the proletariat but

an individual capable of the thoughts required for a practice leading to change, i.e. someone "exempt from the general practice" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 343).

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward W. Said suggests that Fanon was influenced by Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) (326–30). Similar to Lukács, Fanon sees violence as an act of mental will aiming to overcome reification. Said describes Fanon's idea of violence as "a cleansing force" that allows for "an epistemological revolution" (327).

Other than the young Marx, who identified the proletariat as a class that would liberate itself from labor through empowerment, in *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon focused on peasants as a class and saw violence as the instrument for achieving liberation. Under the prevailing conditions of colonialism there is—as Bourdieu has put it—no labor and much less a proletariat (Bourdieu). The colonized can only "empower" themselves by resorting to violence. For Fanon, violence is labor and the militant ready to use violence is a worker:

> For the colonized, this violence represents the absolute praxis. The militant therefore is one who works. […] To work means to work towards the death of the colonist. Claiming responsibility for the violence also allows those members of the group who have strayed or have been outlawed to come back, to retake their place and be reintegrated. Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence. This praxis enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end. (*The Wretched* 44)

At the same time, though, Fanon saw national liberation as merely the first stage of liberation. The national consciousness gained through violence, which is not to be confused with nationalism (179), is to be transformed into a social consciousness after independence.

Here, Fanon takes up an aspect of the leftist-revolutionary tradition since Marx, namely to identify a socially coherent group which, emerging out of a historically specific situation of extreme depravation, becomes the avant-garde of the revolution. Excluded from sharing in the wealth of a society and its political processes, but characterized just the same by a certain degree of homogeneity, such a group—whether it be Marx's proletariat or Fanon's "wretched"—can turn relations of domination on their head thanks to its strength of numbers, organizational skills and, propagating a cogent ideology, ability to mobilize the masses. And here is the crux of Fanon's class model: He saw the transition from revolutionary consciousness to social consciousness as impeded should a comparator bourgeoisie assume power. Or as Alessandrini puts it: "Fanon foresaw that the post-independence period would be difficult and dangerous" (*Frantz Fanon* 165).

In hindsight it was utopian and even contradictory to fabricate a society where liberation was to be based solely on "archaic" identities and violence, in the hope that, once colonialism was dismantled and overcome, they too would vanish. Fanon never furnished an explanation as to how this transition was to be implemented. Not least because he himself predicted that the national bourgeoisie would exploit precisely these values to legitimate their regime.

Fanon as a Committed Intellectual and a Thinker of Violence

With Fanon, a new type of intellectual is born. A radical intellectual, an example *par excellence* of a "committed intellectual" as defined by Edward W. Said: "Universality means taking a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shield us from the reality of others" (*Representations* xiv).

With Fanon, the revolutionary anti-bourgeoisie intellectual is born who renounces a better and more comfortable life under a white mask and takes the responsibility of becoming a voice for the oppressed and wretched (Prabhu 59). This is also the non-conformist intellectual Adorno characterized as "exempt," who—as mentioned above—embodies resistance and emancipatory efforts, cultivating a critical thinking that is still capable of initiating change and imagining a different society (*Negative Dialectics* 334). Fanon is also seen as very much a Sartrean figure, as "someone who meddles in what does not concern him" (Cohen-Solal 588–89), and a "moral conscience of his age" (Scriven 119), a "gardien des valeurs universelles" in the sense of Julien Brenda, who takes up the struggle against the untrue whole, as a famous dictum by Adorno puts it (*Minima Moralia* 57). In his resignation letter from 1955, Fanon described French politics in Algeria as systematic dehumanization, which he could no longer pass over in silence. For Fanon, the conditions were such that to stay silent was to lie. He could no longer reconcile this with his conscience.[11] The clear words and gravitas of the resignation letter recalls Zola's *J'accuse* (1898). This courage underlines how Fanon was an intellectual seeking radical change—compromise was not on the agenda; as Macey says in his illuminating biography, an intellectual who dared to think total freedom (41).

Fanon was often branded a glorifier of violence. Hannah Arendt was one famous contemporary who disparaged Fanon as a representative of violence (20; 69). The conservative French philosopher André Glucksmann even went so far as to claim that Fanon was responsible for the rise of "planetary terrorism" (Macey 21). The American philosopher Allan Bloom has portrayed Fanon as "an ephemeral writer once promoted by Sartre because of his murderous hatred of Europeans and his espousal of terrorism" (ibid.). Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* has even been compared with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (ibid.). The journalist Robert Fulford has branded Fanon "a psychiatrist, romanticized murderer" (Fulford). A more differentiated opinion is put forward by Cherki: For her, Fanon was not an advocate of but a thinker of violence. Cherki argues that the impression that Fanon glorifies violence is mainly due to Sartre's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*. For her, Sartre justified violence, whereas Fanon had analyzed it (255).

Fanon and the "Arab Spring"

The conditions that Fanon described in the 1950s naturally differ greatly from the conditions that generated the popular uprisings of 2011. In the 1950s, countries were still occupied by foreign colonial powers, their natural resources expropriated, their cultures destroyed, the indigenous populations marginalized, enslaved and degraded to second-class citizens. By contrast, postcolonial regimes, building on the national identity forged in difficult and arduous struggles, consolidated, step-by-step, authoritarianism.

And yet, there are striking similarities between the two phases. In the 1950s, the colonized masses managed to liberate themselves from colonialism, only to then acquiesce to a new dictatorial rule. In 2010/2011, the masses joined forces in spontaneous uprisings and succeeded in toppling some regimes. The spontaneity of events in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 echo the spontaneity Fanon had described for the anticolonial struggle. Even the age of those who took to the streets in revolt in the 1950s and 2011 was hardly any different. In both cases it was young people refusing to endure the living conditions in which they grew up. The slogan "ʿaysh, karāma, ʿadāla ijtimāʿiyya" ("bread, dignity, social justice") could have been chanted by the revolutionaries of the 1950s, even though its targeted addressee was different. And yet,

the transition from liberation struggle to a social revolution ushering in genuinely egalitarian and democratic structures was not successfully negotiated after independence was gained. So, too, in today's uprisings there has been no genuinely great political transformation. The outcome of the revolts in Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria, and Morocco show how difficult it is to maintain a common consciousness and common cause for any prolonged period of time, or at least long enough to instigate genuine change. The revolutionary groupings were simply far too divergent to forge a longstanding coalition, and slogans like "*al-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām*" ("the people want to bring down the regime")[12] proved ineffective because the mass of the Arab population had no means of exerting pressure to assert and impose a new social model and social contract. The "counter-hegemony" produced by the 2011 revolts was thus short lived (Ouaissa, "The Misunderstandings").

As Fanon had predicted, the bourgeoisie had seized power after the end of colonialism. Instead of socially egalitarian democracies, "state classes" were established throughout the Arab world. The grand narrative, cultural-identitarian polished ideologies, friend-enemy schemata and populist discourses became the key strategies pursued by these state classes so as to clientalize society. Thus, Arab nationalism, anti-Western and anti-Israeli narratives and egalitarian discourses are part of the legitimation strategies employed by the ruling elites in the Arab world:

> Whereas the demand for Africanization and Arabization of management by the bourgeoisie is not rooted in a genuine endeavour at nationalization, but merely corresponds to a transfer of power previously held by the foreigners, the masses make the very same demand at their own level but limit the notion of African or Arab to territorial limits. (Fanon, *The Wretched* 104)

Similar to the colonial masters, the "Mukhābarāt state" (secret service state) used tyranny and repression to instill fear and terror in society. Fanon describes this abuse of power as follows: "A bourgeois leadership of the underdeveloped countries confines the national consciousness to a sterile formalism" (144).

Besides the ideological discourses, which have even enchanted Arab intellectuals, thanks to the established rentier economy the state had at its disposal sufficient financial means to coopt or repressively eliminate different groups. The ruling class monopolized the revolutions of the 1940s and 1950s and marginalized broad sections of society. This amounted to nothing other than a kind of "recolonizing"—instead of deepening the revolution and moving towards a social-revolutionary consciousness, the ruling class developed from a class 'in itself' to a class 'for itself.' In Algeria, for instance, reference was always made to the revolutionary people in the 1960s; today, reference is made to a "famille révolutionaire." Revolutionary parties (like the FLN or the Baathists) and organizations mutated into apparatuses of domination and instruments of self-privilege. According to William W. Hansen, Fanon warned of power accumulating in the hands of the political apparatus:

> [They...] create[...] obstacles as the movement toward a collective national liberation is in danger of falling under the domination of particular elements, using nationalist slogans, who establish themselves in the name of the nation as a postcolonial "state class" and instrumentalise the revolution for their own narrow *class*-interests. (177) (original emphasis)

With slogans proclaiming the unity of language and culture, minorities were systematically set apart who refused to accept the negative 'whole' à la Adorno. Languages were banned from use and cultures marginalized. Ideologies propagating the unity of language, culture and/or religion—either Pan-Arabism or Islamism—as well as techniques of repression and the

practice of self-enrichment by siphoning off oil revenues formed the bio-power (Foucault) of a racist state. It was thus possible in both monarchies and republics for a dictatorial elite to establish itself. The formerly revolutionary popular parties were turned into pillars of authoritarian regimes: "The single party is the modern form of the bourgeois dictatorship—stripped of mask, makeup, and scruples, cynical in every aspect" (Fanon, *The Wretched* 111).

Nationalism, which Fanon had hoped would become a key and stable pillar of modern society, turned out to be the perfect conduit for ensuring the continuity of the ʿaṣabiyya esprit. The dichotomies Fanon had identified and described under colonialism, for example the colonial city and the indigenous city, were deepened and refined after decolonization, and moreover percolated into all areas of life, language, culture, religion, ethnicity, etc. The segmentation of the population based on these criteria set out by the ruling class was entwined with value judgments on social groups into whether they were developed— "évolués"—or not developed. With this replication, the Arab regimes became colonial regimes *par excellence*. The transition from community to society, in the view of Tönnies the most important criterion of modernity, was blocked in favor of a retribalization (cf. Tönnies). Drawing on the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, Sami Mahroum has identified a return to forms of 'mechanistic' solidarity in place of 'organic':

> In culturally diverse societies, such as Iraq and Lebanon, networks of social solidarity are based almost entirely on religious and ethnic affinity. In more homogenous societies, such as Libya, social solidarity tends to follow tribal and partisan lines. In Tunisia, too, there has been a similar regression to mechanistic types of solidarity organized around tribal, regional and religious identities. […] A dramatic manifestation of the mechanistic pattern of solidarity is now emerging in Syria as well. […] As the conflict intensified, established profession-based identities began to disappear, giving way to family, regional and religious solidarities. (Mahroum)

Economically, rentier states became established in the Arab region. National revenues are not deployed in a way that makes economic sense, but are at the disposal of the ruling elite who deploy them politically, i.e. to buy loyalty. The preferred area for this practice is social programs. The result is a political pact between the rulers and the ruled, based on the strategic distribution of revenues. One of the social effects of this form of politics is how it ensures education and health services for broad sections of the population and provides employment in a giant public sector. In addition, as far as the Arab world is concerned, this means that agriculture is left behind, hampered by the climatic conditions, which are exacerbated by the import strategies pursued by the ruling elite. The subsistence agriculture is insufficient to feed the rural population. The overpopulation in the cities demands that food and other consumer goods be imported. While this creates new middle classes, these very much resemble the ones Fanon described under colonial conditions. They are not politically and economically independent—their prosperity depends on the state or respectively the colonial power.

The resulting "state bourgeoisie" (Haddad) was not forced to industrialize. And herein lies the main difference to the European bourgeoisie, which had in fact used industrialization to assert its claim of political participation; in contrast, the wealth of the Arab bourgeoisie has remained trade-based (Ouaissa, "Blocked Middle Classes"):

> The national bourgeoisie, which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime, is an underdeveloped bourgeoisie. Its economic clout is practically zero, and in any case, no way commensurate with that of its metropolitan counterpart which it intends replacing. In its willful narcissism, the national bourgeoisie has lulled itself into thinking that it can supplant the metropolitan bourgeoisie to its own advantage. […] The national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped countries is not

geared to production, invention, creation, or work. All its energy is channeled into intermediary activities. Networking and scheming seem to be its underlying vocation. The national bourgeoisie has the psychology of a businessman, not that of a captain of industry. (Fanon, *The Wretched* 98)

Without industrialization however, any transition from a consciousness driven and inspired by revolution to a social consciousness is barely conceivable. To achieve this reshaping, violence, which Fanon sees as the cohesive element of consciousness, must be replaced by labor. Shaken by the economic crisis of the 1980s, most of the region's states were forced to implement structural adjustment programs and accept IMF (International Monetary Fund) conditions (in Tunisia and Egypt even earlier). This led to the state withdrawing from its social responsibilities and an end of the state welfare services. The crisis of the rentier state also meant an end of the distribution strategies securing loyalties. The proportion of socially marginalized youth increased and the demands of the middle classes for greater economic freedom became louder. The graduates streaming out of the universities (above all with degrees in technology-related areas) could no longer be absorbed by a crisis-ridden public sector. The "social pact" between the state and society was shattered. Ideologically, Islamism replaced Arab nationalism.

Under the dictate of the Washington-based institutions IMF and World Bank, the states of the Arab world were forced to remove trade barriers. The vociferously proclaimed free-trade zones turned out to be strategies for procuring privileged access to markets for Western investors. The halfhearted opening of markets was arranged jointly by the ruling classes in the Arab world and Western investors. While the former monopolize specific sectors with mafia-like practices (banking, telecommunications, food etc.), investors enjoy protection from rival regions and states (e.g. China). Through the liberalization imposed by the World Bank and the IMF, service sectors have emerged in the Arab world. Market-leading telecommunications companies (e.g. Vodafone in Egypt), banks, tourist operators, and indeed NGOs, mostly financed by the West, provide career opportunities for graduates possessing modern skills (command of English). The *Infitah* (*infitāḥ*) (opening) policies have ushered in a restructuring of society. The neoliberal alliances between broad sections of the ruling elite and international investors has resulted in a rise of opportunities for social advancement and the formation of a new "global middle class" (Cohen).

At the same time, the divide between rich and poor, the city and the countryside, and between the ruling class and citizens has widened. Similarly to the bourgeoisie of the 1960s, who as Fanon had predicted mutated into representatives of imperialism, the ruling classes in the Arab world became the 'extended arm' of the Western-dominated global finance markets: "These post-colonial leaders, in Fanon's account, look very much like the Ben Alis and Mubaraks of today, right down to their friendly relationship with leaders of the former colonial power" (Alessandrini, "Toute décolonisation" 17).

Neoliberalism magnified the parallel worlds described by Fanon. In Cairo, Istanbul and Ankara, modern and traditional ways of life and forms of consumerism exist side by side. Shopping malls and department stores, streets full of music venues, and barricaded noble suburbs for the new rich are present in every major city in the Near and Middle East. In her study on the new cosmopolite middle classes in Cairo, De Koning describes, drawing on Saskia Sassen, how they have "reterritorialized the metropolis" (19). The suburbs and districts occupied by the "nouveaux riches" are marked out by their infrastructure, with private schools, universities, supermarkets, and Starbucks, distinguishing them culturally and architecturally from the poorer quarters of Cairo (ibid.).

Similar developments are observable in most large cities of the Near East. The contrasts between the 'gated communities' and the slum-like urban quarters recall the conditions which once prevailed under colonialism. The economic disparities have become more visible and far graver in recent years. According to Rivlin during the 1990s, the Arab World suffered from rapid population growth, inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, unemployment, decline of real earnings and reliance on unstable and often external sources of income (31). Unemployment in specific groups (youths and women) and marginalized ethnic or religious groups is at over fourty percent (Dajani). The Arab Human Development Report from 2009 estimated that the rate of poor people in the Arab world, i.e. persons who have less than two dollars a day at their disposal, is 20.3 percent of the whole Arab population. As a consequence, the number of persons undernourished rose from 19.8 million in 1990 to 25.5 million in 2004 (UNDP).

Due to the family clans and oligarchical mafia-like structures, a strong tendency towards monopolization in politics and the economy is observable in many Near Eastern states. Girijesh Pant described this development as follows: "the new bourgeoisie consists of contractors, middlemen, brokers, agents of foreign corporations, and wheeler-dealers. […] They also include many of the top officers in the military establishment" (337). In Egypt, this class is known as the "Mafia of Importers" (ibid.). Politically, this class is increasingly reproducing itself, drawing exclusively on persons from its own ranks, thus excluding broad sections of society from political participation. Economic stagnation, tyrannical behavior by authorities, a lack of social justice and prospects in tandem with rampant poverty—these factors create the objective conditions for alienation amongst the masses, above all amongst the young (Meijer). Similar to how Fanon described the situation in the 1950s, different types of alienation can be considered important for explaining the radical events of 2011:

> One is a sense of alienation from the existing order. People understandably feel subject to the political and economic aspects of that order rather than feeling they belong to it. Increased urbanization in recent decades, resulting in substantial proportions of Arab populations breaking old ties to village, tribe, and family, has amplified the alienation. As a result, most of the populace in most Arab states has felt little or no stake in the established order. There was nothing to lose in shaking off that order, beyond whatever immediate pain an incumbent regime could inflict in response. (Pillar 9)

The "Arab Spring" has demonstrated that, just like primary (tribal, religious, ethnic, etc.) identities, violence, including spontaneous revolts, can function as instrument for forging a common consciousness, but is insufficient for precipitating radical transformation and installing long-term democracy.

Conclusion

It is debatable whether the conditions leading to the wars of liberation in the 1950s are comparable to those triggering the "Arab Spring." Whatever the case, Fanon was correct when he warned that a section of the middle class would take power and, in effect, reproduce the power structures and social deformations of colonialism:

> The national bourgeoisie, appropriating the old traditions of colonialism, flexes its military and police muscle, whereas the unions organize meetings and mobilize tens of thousands of their members. [...] The unions, the parties and the government, in a kind of immoral Machiavellianism, use the peasant masses as a blind, inert force of intervention. As a kind of brute force. (*The Wretched* 76)

The failure of the rentier-based development model, and along with it the major ideologies like Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism in the second half of the twentieth century, combined with an intensification of globalization, culminated in the upheavals erupting at the beginning of 2011. The revolts focused on the struggle to gain political, social and economic recognition and demanded that universal respect be paid to human dignity and that the attitude and practices of *hogra* (*ḥugra*, humiliation, deprivation of rights) be dispelled. Despite the partially positive developments in Tunisia, it would seem that the revolts have in fact led to the restoration of the old regimes in some countries (Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, Algeria and Jordan) and the decomposition of the state in others (Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen). The objective conditions igniting such social explosions have contributed to the rise of a new consciousness in segments of the younger population and other disparate sections of the population—it is clear, however, that a stable and enduring common consciousness has yet to crystallize. As in the 1950s, the spontaneous revolts of 2011 have not been converted into a consciously organized, political countervailing power. The Arab masses seem to be trapped in a kind of Fanonian vicious circle: while they can topple colonial rulers and corrupt elites from power thanks to their sheer numbers, their spontaneity catching rulers by surprise, they are unable to assert and establish a better alternative. Fanon provided a brilliant analysis of liberation through the chanelling of violence, his model is still as valid today as it was in the 1950s. It is flawed, however, by failing to take a qualitative leap from being to consciousness. Mobilization through violence is no substitute for mobilization through labor.

Both the Algerian violent revolt in the 1950s and the Arab uprising in 2011 are a result of intensive alienation and the channeling of individual frustration into collective spontaneous revolts. But they failed because of the difficulty to transform into durably revolutionary movements.

Fanon himself had an individual experience of alienation. Both as student and as soldier in the French army, Fanon learned that he is "a second class" French citizen. Fanon's answer to his individual alienation followed in two steps: writing against the established power structures and the direct involvement in collective violent revolt. Therefore, one can see the act of writing in Fanon's philosophy as a first step to overcome alienation. This means that Fanon's response to individual alienation is the collective violent revolt. Unlike Camus, whose motto was "I *rebel*—therefore we *exist*" (28) (original emphasis), Fanon's motto is "we rebel, therefore I exist."

Notes

1   The author wishes to thank Michael Allen who has taken the time to read and brilliantly comment on this chapter as it was being developed. His insights have helped shape and further sharpen some arguments presented here.

2   After an early enthusiastic reception of Sartre in the Arab World, a break occurred in the wake of the 1967 June War. See Di-Capua, Yoav. "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization." *American Historical Review* 117.4 (2012): 1088–89 [1061–91]. Web. 22 June 2015.

3   In the context of the Arab tribal society, this term means the emotional bond between the members of a family, a clan or a tribe and their willingness to hold together vis-à-vis outsiders.

4   See Terranti, Boussafsaf and Maddi.

5   See Terranti, Boussafsaf and Maddi.

6   In Iran, Fanon's name was put on the map after Ali Shariati (ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, 1933–1977) became known in the context of the Iranian Revolution. Already in 1962, Shariati had translated *L'an V* into Farsi. Fanon and Shariati stayed in contact with each other, even though their opinions diverged with respect to the role of relig-

ion. After the revolution, the mullahs briefly used Fanon's text "Algeria Unveiled" in a completely decontextualized and vulgarized way to enforce the wearing of the chador (*chādor*) (Cherki 280).

7   *The Wretched of the Earth* was first translated into Arabic by Jamal al-Atassi (Jamal al-Atāsī) and Sami Drubi (Sāmī Drūbī) in 1963.

8   *Al-Safīr al-ʿArabī* 26 Dec. 2012; 2 Jan. 2013.

9   *Al-Dawḥa* 71 (Sept. 2013).

10 *Al-Quds al-ʿArabī* 24.7179 (July 2012); *al-Quds al-ʿArabī* 25.7543 (Sept. 2012).

11 "Il arrive un moment où le silence devient mensonge. Les intentions maîtresses de l'existence personnelle s'accommodent mal des atteintes permanentes aux valeurs les plus banales. Depuis de longs mois ma conscience est le siège de débats impardonnables. Et leur conclusion est la volonté de ne pas désespérer de l'homme, c'est-à-dire de moi-même. Ma décision est de ne pas assurer une responsabilité coûte que coûte sous le fallacieux prétexte qu'il n'y a rien d'autre à faire." Fanon, Frantz. "Lettre au Ministre Résident par Frantz Fanon (1956)." *Indigenes de la République 37.* 14 Nov. 2005. Web. 22 June 2015.

12 Cf. for the various possible translations of this slogan Mehrez, Samia. "Introduction: Translating Revolution: An Open Text." *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*. Ed. Samia Mehrez. Cairo: American U in Cairo P, 2012. 12ff. [1–24]. Print.

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Part 3

Refiguring *Iltizām*:
Literary Commitment after 1967

Between Commitment and Marginalization: The 'Generation of the Sixties' in the Sadat Era

Stephan Guth

Post-World War II Egyptian history before Mubarak can be roughly divided into two main eras: The sixteen years of the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser (in office 1954[1]–1970), and the eleven years during which the country's destinies were reshaped by his successor, Anwar El Sadat (Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt, president 1970–1981). Both leaders had a considerable and lasting effect on the situation inside Egypt, across the Middle East, and on the world as a whole, and just as Nasser had tried to establish a completely new type of politics and initiated massive change by doing away with the monarchy and the old feudalist order of society, so too his successor made in turn a volte-face, implementing a set of measures that, again, were to completely change Egypt's major political orientation and the country's social structure.

In order to understand the notions of commitment Egyptian writers propagated, and/or implicitly applied in their writings, during the Sadat era, the focus of my considerations here, it is necessary to firstly briefly recapitulate what the writers had gone through during the Nasser years, for them their formative period. In a second step, I would like to quickly sketch the emergence of the so-called New Sensibility movement, seeing it here in terms of an answer articulated in the literary field to the shock of 1967; from this background we can move to the Sadat era itself, giving a brief outline of the historical facts that characterized this era before proceeding to some examples of narrative texts written during this time, asking what kind of notion of commitment is discernible. I will argue that although many writers applied the postmodernist techniques developed by the New Sensibility from the late 1960s onwards, the notion of commitment continued more or less unchanged into the Sadat era. The predicament writers thought their country was entangled in—resulting from economic and political 'liberalization'—made them stick, though with new narrative devices, to the same patriotic mission that has informed creative writing ever since the nineteenth century reform movement.

Historical Background: The Interim Period, 1967–1973

Until the early 1960s, the regime in Egypt can be characterized as "a form of semi-populist, state capitalist, developmental nationalism" (Cooper 482). Following the coup/revolution of 1952, the regime initiated a process of "comprehensive political, economic and social transformation [...], marked by far-reaching agrarian reform, the nationalization of banks, key industries, commerce and transport, massive industrialization, welfare policies and great expectations towards freedom, social justice and Arab unity" (Stehli-Werbeck 159). It did not take long, however, for political and economic failure to become evident, and the defeat in the war of June 1967 rapidly accelerated the death throes of Arab socialist ideology and the breakdown of pan-Arab dreams.[2] Nasser lost his credibility, leading to his legitimacy being increasingly questioned, and as rising public protest made clear, the regime's earlier "absorptive, expansive etatist policies had failed to create a sound political base" (Cooper 515). In

an attempt to turn around the political and economic crisis while simultaneously shoring up support for his regime, a set of "strongly class-biased" (ibid.), i.e. liberalizing, political and economic reforms was implemented with the March 30 Program in 1968. The measures launched in the last two years of Nasser's presidency were then continued—in a more radical form—in the Sadat era and after 1973 labelled, more candidly, the political and economic *infitāḥ* ('openness,' or Open Door policies).

In the cultural sphere this was accompanied by an intellectual and artistic crisis. As Stehli-Werbeck has aptly summarized:

> Since the early fifties the spirit of the age had been literary 'commitment' (*iltizām*): The belief in the writer's political role and the effectiveness of the literary word. Literary ideas of socialism on the one hand and of French existentialism on the other had been adopted, the latter fused with Pan-Arabism. During the sixties, by the 1967 defeat at the latest, the situation changed: The hitherto prevalent aesthetic conventions of realism and 'socialist realism' could no longer cope with the contradictions and the complexity of the post-revolutionary society and the feeling of disillusion, despair, self-doubt and alienation. (159–60)[3]

It is out of this situation that the so-called Generation of the Sixties (*jīl al-sittīnāt*) emerged:

> Politically shaped by the struggle for independence and the spirit of optimism after the revolution, several of them experienced repression and imprisonment as leftists critical towards the government. Also because of their critical literary presentation of reality and their experimental modes of expression, they were not supported by the official institutions [...], only verbally by the established authors of the older generations, and therefore they faced great difficulty publishing in Egypt and finding employment. (161)

Literary Background: The New Sensibility

Raised with noble, sublime ideals and nourished by the belief in a better future, to whose shaping literature had a duty to contribute and to which it must thus commit itself, the Generation of the Sixties reacted to this situation, in particular to the shockwaves of the 1967 defeat,[4] by developing a new aesthetics—the writer and critic Edward al-Kharrat (Idwār al-Kharrāṭ) called it a "new sensibility" (*ḥassāsiyya jadīda*, as in al-Kharrāṭ *Al-ḥassāsiyya*)— that sought to identify new foundations for a post-1967 literature.

Here is not the place to describe the group's discussions, findings and 'solutions' in detail.[5] What is important, rather, is to understand that the new insights they gained and the new approaches they developed were "fundamental re-alignments" (as Stehli-Werbeck has called it, see 159), albeit not in every respect.

The most fundamental aspect of the *ḥassāsiyya jadīda* aesthetics was its attitude towards language and reality. The 'reality,' spread via state-controlled media, of steady progress, a bright future lying ahead, and near victory had turned out to be a fatal lie, a mere fiction, and what is more this lie was created and perpetuated by employing a beautiful, literary, rhetorical, i.e., 'poetical' language, combined with the belief in a correspondence between reality and how it was represented. In what elsewhere has been described as a 'postmodern turn' (Neuwirth, Pflitsch and Winckler), writers began to see parallels between their own previous way of depicting 'reality' in literature (and their belief in the possibility of this essentially *mimetic* realist approach) and the way 'reality' had been presented to the people, and themselves, by the regime: Similarly to those in power, authors had also been creating images of what had seemed to them, or what they had wanted to be, an objective 'reality,' and the con-

sumers of these images had believed in the representative correspondence with reality, i.e. the truth, of this fiction. In other words, literature itself had until then been an authoritarian discourse that, despite all good intentions, had tried with the help of language to impose a certain—necessarily subjective, but believed to be objective—vision of reality on the reader and, by way of political extension, the Egyptian citizen. Most of the new styles and writing techniques developed by the New Sensibility were acutely aware of the seductive power of language and the type of 'reality' they wrote about. Poetical—which in most cases did not mean beautiful but, first and foremost, highly dense and expressive—language came to be restricted to the sub-current that al-Kharrāṭ termed the "internal-oriented, organic, inner-vision trend" (*al-tayyār al-dākhilī, al-ʿuḍwī, tayyār al-tawarruṭ*),[6] a way of writing that drew its legitimacy from the fact that writers here did not claim to talk about an objective outside world as it 'really' was; rather, the only objective world they could know something 'true' about was their own subjective way of experiencing their surroundings. In this approach it was self-evident that every statement about 'reality' outside the individual subject had been 'processed,' i.e., somehow fictionalized, when passing through the filter of the latter's perception in a process we may call intellectual and emotional 'data processing.' Poetical language could also still be justified as a means for fathoming the historical dimensions of an Arab/Egyptian identity that the regime's modernist ideology until then had obliterated or obscured, or aspects of current-day life and society hitherto neglected, marginalized, or criminalized, aspects which were undeniably there and thus constituted part of a much wider, much more comprehensive and complex reality than had previously been considered worthy of literature's attention. In contrast to the inner-oriented trend, another approach, called the "external-oriented, things-in-themselves mode of writing" (*tayyār al-tashyīʾ, aw al-tabʿīd, aw al-tajrīd*) by al-Kharrāṭ (see above, note 6), a trend of "estrangement" or "detachment/abstraction" (ibid.), resembling the notion of *reification* (French *chosification*, German *Verdinglichung*) encountered in the French *nouveau roman* (ʿUthmān 91; Farīd 199–203), *did* describe the outside world, but without the narrator commenting on it in any way, showing nothing but its surface as it appeared to sensory perception. This approach underlines the disconnection between subject and object, the narrator's feeling of estrangement vis-à-vis, and utmost alienation from, a world that no longer obeys the previously believed rules of an intelligible reality. For all their differences, both techniques shared a main structural principle however: The creation of a *contrast* (*mufāraqa*) between outside and inside, the common idea of a 'knowable,' objective world and its actual limited knowability, its appearance to the observer and the latter's way of processing this data (or their refusal to do so). This principle served "as a means of inciting in recipients an active questioning of the realities presented by fiction and thus transferring interpretative authority from writer to reader" (Guth, "Novel" 149).

Yet, however deeply the relationship between fact and fiction, between reality and literature and, with this relationship, the very foundations of the previously current mimetic approach were being questioned, the old convictions of the writer's mission as a critical instance and writing as a tool at the service of the nation—this belief and, with it, the idea of literary commitment and, ultimately, the whole project of modernity as initiated during the *nahḍa*—were never abandoned. The modernist aspects which the 'postmodernism' of the New Sensibility thus retained, even after the enormous modernist 'bubble' created by the regime had been so brutally burst, were stressed even more and indeed strengthened when Sadat took over as president after Nasser's death.

Sadat and Political-Economic Liberalization (*infitāḥ*)

In the years between 1967 and his death, Nasser had already begun to see the need for an economic and political reorientation and had initiated a number of changes.[7] This reorientation continued under his successor and was radicalized after 1973 as soon as Sadat had consolidated power. Sadat then set out to systematically empower reform-friendly groups and continued to prepare the fundamental turn that he thought would help the initiatives of the post-1967 interim period to take hold and become effective on a large scale. In short: The new *rayyis* succeeded in reorganizing, and eventually abolishing, the Arab Socialist Union in 1978, the icon of the era he was eager to leave behind; he began to work towards a disengagement from, eventually breaking with, the country's former main ally, the Soviet Union, and forced the military advisors, numbering between 17 and 20,000, still based in Egypt to return home; on the other hand, he increased efforts to improve relations with the West, introduced so-called 'free trade' zones, allowed for certain Egyptian-foreign joint ventures, granted a tax payment deferral for foreign investors (in addition to the access granted earlier to Arab capital from the Gulf), and proceeded to completely open the country for foreign enterprises, taking advantage of the successes gained in the 1973 war with Israel, which had bolstered his prestige and lead to him being acclaimed as the *baṭal al-ʿubūr*, the "hero of the [Suez Canal] crossing." A whole package of *infitāḥ* measures from 1973 to 1977 brought the final breakthrough. The new laws granted further tax exemptions and reductions, allowed the transfer of profits abroad, and granted foreign banks the right to also operate inside the country, without even having to guarantee their Egyptian employees the job security and salaries they had attained under Nasser. Existing state monopolies were consistently cutback or abolished, and the task of developing the country was increasingly transferred from politics to the dynamics of a more or less uncontrolled free market economy. These measures designed to attract investors from abroad while mobilizing the country's economic potential were paralleled by the process of rapprochement that eventually led to the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty: After diplomatic relations had been resumed in 1973, President Nixon visited the country the following year; Sadat distanced himself from anti-Western Arab regimes and worked to establish a Cairo-Riyadh-Teheran axis, entering into collaborative and exchange partnerships with two former archenemies, and this was topped by the alliance with the onetime prime archenemy, Israel, forged after he had traveled to Jerusalem in November 1977 and held a speech in the Knesset.

But while Sadat was being celebrated as a bringer of peace in the West (awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, together with Menachem Begin, in 1978), opposition to his politics was gathering, both inside and outside Egypt. Most Arab states broke off diplomatic relations with Egypt and imposed an economic boycott, leaving the country regionally isolated; the upshot was however that Sadat had to rely even more on the new ties with America. With their influence in the Middle East decreasing after the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US not only welcomed Egypt as a new ally but also made it *the* main platform for the military maneuvers and missions of its Rapid Deployment Forces. Inside the country, the unwelcomed side effects of the economic *infitāḥ*, in tandem with the peace agreement with 'the Jews,' triggered massive protests, for the economy was failing to develop the way Sadat had hoped it would. For the broader population, the liberalization of the market brought only disadvantages. Towards the end of the era Sadat, roughly two-thirds of the population was living close to, or below, the breadline (as compared to ca. thirty percent at the end of Nasser's presidency). The *infitāḥ* also led to a shrinking of the upper class, making it even

more exclusive and significantly widening the gap between this group and the rest of society. The middle classes were also among the losers. During Nasser's reign two-thirds of this group had been among those who profited most from the system, while under Sadat this number fell to only a third. The loss of status and privileges was all the more painful for this group since they could only look on helplessly while the newcomers 'took over': Alongside clever opportunists, who had managed to continue in office during the transition from Nasser to Sadat, and the old feudal upper-class, whom Nasser had already started to reinstall in good positions, there was now a new class of ambitious self-made men, former street traders, small-scale importers and others of this ilk who thanks to their business instinct, good relations with certain politicians, and a boldness in the speculative dealing of goods and foreign currency succeeded in climbing the social ladder, some even becoming respectable financiers and contractors. These groups made a lot of money quickly, mostly in the non-productive branches of the tertiary sector which were booming thanks to liberalization: Investment companies, new private banks, tourism, the construction industry, importers of consumer articles. While the market was flooded with all kinds of Western-style goods and new tourist hotels, office towers and luxury apartments were mushrooming everywhere, agricultural and industrial mass production stagnated, and along with it the export of Egyptian goods, housing construction for the broader population, and the creation of new jobs. The gap between the 'rich and beautiful' and the less affluent and prosperous increased steadily and resulted in a striking polarization in society. This was a time when inflation soared to levels of ca. twenty-five percent while the income of the majority of the population had already begun to stagnate under Nasser. For many it became difficult, or indeed impossible, to live the life that 'befitted their rank.' The worsening of the situation of these classes triggered a massive wave of labor migration, mostly to the oil-producing Arab countries of the Gulf region. On the cultural level,[8] Sadat's 'Open Door' politics brought with it the state's withdrawal of support from socialist or modernist projects. This led to shrinking employment possibilities—and hence forums for expressing their views—for many intellectuals and writers of the 1960s generation, while concurrently new types of cultural functionaries and newspaper editors etc. emerged. On the other hand, a new, more conservative religious tone was introduced into the public discourse, an effect of the labor migration to the Gulf States and the rise of oil-funded media, but also due to the changes in cultural discourse promoted by the state. Constitutional amendments such as making the sharia a major component and source of inspiration for legislation in 1971, or Sadat's pious declaration to be a believing president of a Muslim country in the same year, as well as a different attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic movement—all this departed from the modernist and developmentalist rhetoric of the preceding period.

Both Sadat's economic and cultural politics generated an internal opposition that grew stronger towards the end of his presidency: the Bread Riots in 1977, Muslim-Coptic clashes on an unprecedented scale, a major crackdown and massive wave of arrests of internal opposition in September 1981, and finally the assassination of the 'pharaoh' on October 6, 1981, by radicalized members of the Islamic movement.

The Writers' Perspective: Five Examples

What did Sadat's political reorientation and his economic 'open door' policies mean for the notion of commitment that had been so important throughout the post-World War II period? And what impact did the *infitāḥ* have on the new aesthetics that had begun to develop as an answer to the shock of 1967?[9]

Most writers of literature found themselves in an extremely difficult situation: While still struggling to cope with, and recover from, the demise of 1967, the educated middle class, to which most of them belonged,[10] was facing marginalization and, as a consequence of economic liberalization and rampant inflation, almost extinction. At the same time, they were witnessing the emergence of a modern entrepreneurial class[11] and a consumerist society in which all key values of the preceding period, the values with which they had grown up, were turned upside down. Moreover, the polarization in society became so pressing an issue that it, too, virtually forced any writer to take a political stance. It was clear that the insights the *ḥassāsiyya jadīda* had engendered on the relationship between reality and fiction could not remain on a purely aesthetic and epistemological level—they had to be put in the service of a critique of what was happening in the country. Even though mimetic realism was over, reality—the harsh reality of a 'liberalized' Egypt—was undeniably out there, and it had to be documented, understood, criticized, explained, exposed, and represented in a way that made it imperative to rebel against. The new writing techniques developed with the aim of critically questioning a past in which one had been lured into dreams of grandeur were now used to critically comment on a situation in which all previous idealism had been replaced by *laissez-faire* and the logic of the free market. For the middle-class writers, most of the great ideals of the Nasser era—promoting common welfare such as housing, food, medical services and education for everybody, equality in dignity, national pride—remained basically untouched. What was questioned was the *way* one had been made believe in the possibility of realizing the country's dream of a better future—not the ideals themselves. These remained the principle lines of orientation and the moral values it was still imperative to work for.

There is a broad variety of narrative styles in the literature from this period. This variety is due to the manifold approaches the *ḥassāsiyya jadīda* had begun to experiment with and, in the course of time, had developed further, while at the same time the older styles were still adhered to by many authors. And yet, all of them refer to the depressing realities of *infitāḥ*, and moreover do so to such a degree that the *topics* the writers of the 'Generation of the Sixties' address did not differ fundamentally from those writers of an older generation dealt with, although the latter were less concerned with the postmodern epistemological turn and the problematic relationship between fact and fiction. The following overview is based on a selection of texts I made for an earlier, and much more detailed, study of literary writing about the *infitāḥ* and its consequences (Guth, *Zeugen*). The choice—which I hope can claim a certain representativity[12]—comprises three novels that can be seen as belonging to three of the major sub-currents of the *ḥassāsiyya jadīda* as identified by al-Kharrat, and three other texts (one novel, two longer short stories) by 'traditional' mimetic realists (who, I will argue, nevertheless display a highly similar world view and pursue a notion of literary commitment that is akin to that of their younger colleagues).

Najīb Maḥfūẓ

To start with the most prominent, and also the oldest, among the 'traditional' realists, Najīb Maḥfūẓ (already aged sixty when Sadat became president), who addressed many aspects of life during the 1970s in his fiction. *Al-ḥubb fawqa haḍbat al-haram* (*Love on the Pyramids' Plateau*, 1979) (Guth, *Zeugen* 74–81), published only five years after the major *infitāḥ* laws were implemented, is the story of a young middle-class couple who cannot afford a flat of their own but marry nevertheless. Finding no other place where they can live out their love,

they choose what many like them chose in real life: To come together at night in the desert close to the pyramids where they pay a small sum to someone who assigns them a place in the dunes. Taking up one of the most pressing problems resulting from economic liberalization and the concomitant inflation—the difficulty young couples have in finding affordable housing—the story ends with a *sarcastically pointed* expression of helplessness: "And from above the pyramids, the centuries looked down upon us, clapping one hand in the other,"[13] i.e., the onetime witnesses of a great civilization and icons of national pride are now the witnesses of a national shame and disgrace.[14]

In another story, "Ahl al-qimma" ("The Upper Crust," 1979),[15] an upright petty policeman becomes privy to the activities and lifestyle of the *nouveaux riches* who have made a fortune by exploiting the 'crazy' opportunities granted by *infitāḥ* legislation. Maḥfūẓ here stages a meeting between a typical member of the educated middle class and those endangering their "source of livelihood, social status, and identity," namely the rising new *infitāḥī* group, which has begun to "[erode] the existing economic and socio-cultural system" (Shechter 23).[16] The story's main structural principle, very similar in its pointed sarcasm to that of *Love on the Pyramids' Plateau*, is its play with *ironical inversion*. Nothing is as it seems to be at first sight any more: The criminals, from whom the policeman should be protecting society, actually turn out to be very noble-hearted, while those who seem to have clean records and present themselves as generous donators to charitable causes in the media are the real thieves. The *absurdity—ʿabath*, a widespread key term, as we shall see[17]—of life in the times of *infitāḥ* is that activities which were once illegal and morally unacceptable only a few years ago are now protected by law; the average citizen is forced to choose between two alternatives which are in fact no genuine alternative at all: Either give up one's principles and humanity in order to lead a life in dignity; or stick to these principles and so abandon all hope of gaining adequate housing, of being able to educate one's children, fulfill the possibility of a love marriage, and so on.

Fatḥī Ghānim

Though more than a decade younger than Maḥfūẓ, Fatḥī Ghānim (1924–1999) can still count as another representative of 'traditional' mimetic realism. The title of one of his major novels on the *infitāḥ* years—*Qalīl min al-ḥubb, kathīr min al-ʿunf* (1985)—is already highly telling: The period is qualified as one of "Little Love... [and] Much Violence." The chain of events is full of complicated details and multiple entanglements, and accordingly rich is the inventory of characters.[18] The main conflict in the novel, however, can be seen as taking place between the old, established upper class (with a background in pre-revolutionary feudalism, represented in a public prosecutor-general, *nāʾib ʿamm*) and the group of *nouveaux riches* entrepreneurs (embodied by a man who had started out as an apprentice in a garage, but is now a millionaire and head of a giant business empire—an exemplary rags-to-riches story). The conflict is shown to be, basically, one about social prestige: Unable to compete in terms of affluence with the new parvenus, the old upper class is afraid of, and indeed also truly threatened by, a loss of status and influence, imminent due to their (relative) impoverishment, while the former 'rags' seek acceptance into the ranks of the "respectable people" (*asyād al-nās*), the "high society" (*asyād al-mujtamaʿ*). The battle is fought on several levels and with a number of weapons. While the millionaire tries to bribe the prosecutor-general and his wife, by holding out the prospect of profiting from his riches, into marrying their daughter to his son, the couple, though not really negative about

the idea, have to keep up *appearances* (*maẓāhir* is a key-word here), but this turns out to be difficult because the millionaire's son is in fact already married. (Here the gendering of the social prestige needs to be noted, with the daughter representing the old upper class, so too the corruptibility of these values, given the daughter's readiness to consent to the proposal and give up her own plans of higher education.)[19] Ghānim assigns the role of defender of true values to the prosecutor-general's son, a cultured young engineer working for one of the American-Egyptian joint venture companies, so typical of *infitāḥ*. His direct counterpart is the millionaire's son, whose major motive for wanting to marry the *nāʾib*'s daughter is in fact his wish to crush the old upper class's arrogance and humiliate them. The novel depicts the upholder of true values (who also represents the forces of love as announced in the novel's title, and, with them, humanity) as rather shy and somewhat unassertive, while the counterforces are portrayed as essentially raw and brutally violent. Although the author underlines that the actions of the latter stem from past experiences of deep humiliation, before they rose to the ranks of a social group that demands to be—and needs to be—heard, little sympathy is shown for these sons of millionaires. In contrast, in a carefully balanced parallel thread, the *nāʾib*'s son falls in love with, and eventually marries, the former wife of the 'rag' as soon as she is divorced, neither caring about her low social status nor about the blow this 'misalliance' deals on the "respectable appearances" his father the *nāʾib* and his mother are so eager to uphold.

Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm

Although once again more than a decade younger than Ghānim, Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm (b. 1937) is the 'veteran' among the three authors who in my selection belong to the 'Generation of the Sixties.' He was fifteen when the Revolution took place, thirty in the year of the *naksa*, and forty in 1981 when Sadat was assassinated. In the same year, the novel *Al-lajna* (*The Committee*), Ibrāhīm's desperately biting satire on the *infitāḥ* period, was published (Guth, *Zeugen* 114–49). *Al-lajna* shares features with two of the four main approaches identified by al-Kharrāṭ as undercurrents of the New Sensibility. Like large parts of the author's famous novella *Tilka l-rāʾiḥa* (*How It Smells!*, 1966), *Al-lajna* displays, to a certain degree at least, the characteristics of the "things-in-themselves" mode of writing that derives its narrative power from merely showing, but in minute detail, the surface of reality (scandalous, or seemingly unspectacular and boring), provoking the reader's indignation and seeking to incite in him/her a readiness to actively take a stand. In *Al-lajna*, however, this technique is not driven to its extremes, for there is a first-person narrator, himself the main protagonist, who processes his observations and findings in front of the reader. The lack of commentary offered by the "things-in-themselves" mode and the absence of emotional reactions to the scandalous surface are replaced by something different yet similar: A reproduction, extending over large parts of the text, of the official *infitāḥ* discourse. This discourse—which praises the 'civilizing achievements' of the new times and paints economic liberalization and the political rapprochement vis-à-vis the West in the brightest colors—is not at all consistent with the annoying realities of the narrator's everyday life and the tireless efforts undertaken by those controlling and steering this discourse to prevent the hero from disclosing the scores of contradictions and finding the truth behind the façades. Like Maḥfūẓ in "Ahl al-qimma," Ibrāhīm builds his narrative on the principle of an *ironical contrast*, juxtaposing surface discourse and underlying truth.[20] The analytical technique, recalling a detective novel, that the author uses in this context—solving step by step the "riddles"

(*asrār*) of the serious crimes which, as all evidence points to, have obviously been committed—produces an effect that closely resembles Maḥfūẓ's technique of pointed inversion. Both exploit the sharp contrast (*mufāraqa*) between appearance and reality[21] for an *essentially educative* mission, which testifies to how the messengers of this mission, the authors, still belong to the old type of 'teachers' writers in the Middle East have been ever since the *nahḍa* and the start of the great modernist project, where they fulfilled exactly this same function as an intellectual and moral guide. Ibrāhīm's attitude differs however from that of Maḥfūẓ in two respects. Firstly, in spite of having managed to overcome all obstacles and disclosing all the secrets behind the façades, achieving at least a moral victory, in the novel's very last sentence Ibrāhīm's hero starts to "consume [him]self" (*wa-badaʾtu ākulu nafsī*, Ibrāhīm, *Al-lajna* 154)—confronted with this powerlessness and desperation, a scandal of obscene proportions, the reader is to be provoked into protest.[22] Secondly, the author makes extensive use of *allegorical abstraction*. Events and protagonists in his novel have been deprived, for the sake of *generalization*, of their individuality (except for the narrator himself perhaps, but *he* also remains nameless throughout the story). The higher degree of abstraction underlines, by virtue of its Kafkaesque character, the absolutely *grotesque*, i.e., ridiculous and at the same time terrifying nature of what is happening.[23] (The absurdity of reality [*ʿabath*] we encountered also in Maḥfūẓ's two stories is thus raised to a higher power again.) But abstraction also gives the narrative a more coherent logical and greater representative value: The "committee" and its members, the *duktūr* ("the most brilliant Arab personality of our times" [Ibrāhīm, *Al-lajna* 34], a representative of the new entrepreneurial class), and the intellectual narrator-protagonist, function like variables in a mathematical formula which in its simplicity and lucid clarity contains much more truth than the limited number of concrete special cases from which it has been abstracted. This is what al-Kharrāṭ meant when he talked about the "rigor," "precision" and "sharp edge" that made this trend, among which he ranked Ibrāhīm and he called the "neo-realist" undercurrent (*al-tayyār al-wāqiʿī al-jadīd*) of New Sensibility, "qualitatively different" from earlier realism, instigating "a questioning of social relationships that goes deeper than has been done before, to the point of posing a challenge to the established order of values" ("The Mashriq" 192).

Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī

A different approach again is followed by Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī (b. 1945), Ṣunʿallāh's junior by almost a decade, but at the same time also a close friend of Najīb Maḥfūẓ. The style of most of his fiction falls, though only in a wider sense, into al-Kharrāṭ's category of the "contemporary mythical" sub-current of the New Sensibility, a current that in the literary critic's definition is often characterized by the "use of elements from fairytales and legends, borrowings from the grand folk epics and the inspiration of folk religion, magic, folklore and mysticism, as well as the inclusion of the subcultures of marginalized groups" (al-Kharrāṭ, "Al-adab fī Miṣr" 4).[24] In al-Ghīṭānī's case, however, the sources he draws inspiration from are to be primarily found in classical Arabic literature.[25] Like other writers, for al-Ghīṭānī this 'neo-classicism' was a way to search, after 1967, for 'the authentic,' to open up literature to aspects of Arab history and culture, i.e. an Arab identity that had been hidden, suppressed, neglected, and denied over the course of the modernization process, the intense striving to become like the West and achieve Western-type 'progress,' propagated ever since the nineteenth century but had now culminated in the most shattering defeat imaginable.

The more obvious it became after Nasser's death that Sadat was about to in fact intensify Westernization and embrace 'globalization,' the essentially postmodern "contemporary mythical" trend mutated and shifted modes, from *exploring* one's identity to *asserting* one's 'authentic,' non-Western identity.[26]

This is more than obvious in *The Epistle of Insight into the Destinies* (*Risālat al-baṣāʾir fī-l-maṣāʾir*, 1989).[27] While critics usually approach it as a novel, the title of the work identifies it as a *risāla*, a word best rendered as "epistle" in this context since the title possesses both a rhyme and the 'X *fī* Y' form typical of classical Arabic book titles. The author also imitates, over long passages, the style of a medieval historian, using many expressions that make the narrator appear, as in many classical texts, to be a pious, devote believer who has placed his life in God's hands. The chapter headings, too, break with the standards of modern literary Arabic both in vocabulary and syntax. Most importantly perhaps, the text itself clearly contradicts the norms of modern Arabic fiction: There is no coherent end-to-end thread but a large number of very different, self-contained (though sometimes interlinked) plots. In total, however, they are too loosely connected to let the whole pass as a novel, while, on the other hand, they are too interrelated with each other to be considered independent stories (by means of these cross references but also, first and foremost, through their narrator, who remains the same over the whole book and who always functions as a kind of narrative bridge between one told "destiny" and the next, adding his own comments, explanations, ideas, fears, etc., and repeating, again and again, that each of the stories told here is yet another example of what happened in the period he feels he must report about). Emulating a pre-modern narrative discourse or vernacular, all these elements underline the narrator's Arab, non-Western identity, a narrator who breaks with the conventions of modern (i.e., largely Western-style) Arabic fiction as it has developed since the late nineteenth century.

At the same time, however, the text is also very modern. Unlike in *Al-Zaynī Barakāt* (1974), an earlier novel of al-Ghīṭānī in which the author had taken the reader back to the Middle Ages, place, time, characters and events in *Risālat al-baṣāʾir fī-l-maṣāʾir* are all very contemporaneous. This creates a discrepancy between a seemingly classical, 'antiquarian' title, style and narrative attitude on the one hand and the topics broached by the text on the other.

At the same time, creating such a discrepancy also means constructing a contrast between an 'Arab(ic)' form, or appearance, and a 'non-Arab' content—a documentation of how Egypt and its people lose their identity in a process of Westernization inevitably accompanying economic liberalization. All the stories have a 'before-and-after' structure. They grant "insights" (*baṣāʾir*), as the book's title has it, into how life had been before the 1970s, how it then changed during this period, and what it then became afterwards. Not one single story tells of joyous events, all we read about are tragedies, stories of moral decay, exploitation, humiliation, etc.—an almost limitless suffering, both at home and abroad (the second part of the *Risāla* is dedicated to the situation of Egyptian labor migrants[28]).

In the face of all these tragedies, al-Ghīṭānī has his narrator take on the attitude of a witness, who with eyes sharply peeled has observed all that has gone on but feels impotent vis-à-vis the work of the almighty powers, whether Time or God, and therefore cannot do anything but record what happened. As we know however, the narrator has to be distinguished from the author, and this naturally also pertains to the narrator in *Risālat al-baṣāʾir fī-l-maṣāʾir*. Like Maḥfūẓ and Ibrāhīm, al-Ghīṭānī relies heavily on the mobilizing power of *contrast* or *discrepancy* (another possible translation of the keyword *mufāraqa*). He employs this contrast on several levels:

– In all reports "about what happened to X" (*fī-mā jarā li-...*, a frequently recurring heading), the deplorable events are told as if they were *maṣāʾir*, "destinies/fates", i.e. caused by something beyond the reach of humans and human action, something decreed by almighty God or brought about by omnipotent Time; on the other hand though, the details told in the stories and the protagonists named in them leave no doubt that—of course—people are responsible for the appalling suffering and the blatant injustice inflicted on al-Ghīṭānī's heroes. In this way, the victim-heroes'—as well as the narrator's—devotional, acquiescent, passive attitudes are contrasted with a scandalous reality. It is just not a high degree of sympathy with these fates that the author invokes in the reader by means of this contrast between the stark reality of the *infitāḥ* and how people (fail to) deal with their predicaments; moreover, the reader is also led to question the resignation on display, aware that the cause of their plight is a set of very specific political-economic circumstances, a primordial capitalist mentality, and unscrupulous *infitāḥī*s.

– Highlighting the discrepancy between the narrator's dolefully lamenting attitude and the man-made nature of the deplored reality entails a contrastive relationship between the *contents* of the narrative and the *form* in which it is narrated. As mentioned above, this form, labelled a *risāla*, "epistle," by al-Ghīṭānī himself, is reminiscent of a pre-modern, classical style and thus an assertion of Arab identity against alienation and foreign domination. The novel thus demonstrates, on the one hand, that an old 'Arab' style is absolutely capable of fulfilling the duty of reporting about, documenting, and commenting on contemporary realities. At the same time, however, as the mode of expression of a fatalistic narrator, it is shown to be the style belonging to a representative of a culture of the past, a culture that has obviously proven to be impotent in face of the changes unleashed by *infitāḥ*—otherwise it would have been able to prevent what happened, or at least to alleviate its consequences, and the book would have turned out differently. As it is, however, the book, while successfully asserting 'authentic' Arab counter-identity against the identity-destroying forces of *infitāḥ*, also bears eloquent witness to the failure of this very same project: Not only the fatalist narrator is, in a way, a tragically naive, almost ridiculous figure, but also all the good, innocent protagonists who, like him, try to uphold traditional human values against the mighty tides of 'progress' sweeping over them.

– But it is exactly this dilemma that, on another level, makes al-Ghīṭānī's way of dealing with the realities of *infitāḥ* an absolutely modern text, for it creates a *tragic irony*: While the assertion of one's own authentic Arab identity is absolutely imperative from the point of view of political and human ethics, this identity does not have, in its traditional, authentic forms, the potential to resist the aggressive forces of the new era and is doomed to fail. This is a bitter though necessary insight, and the extreme tension or polarization in the contrasts, discrepancies and ironies which al-Ghīṭānī's narrative technique creates is certainly to be seen as a means designed to ensure that this bitter truth reaches the reader. Seen in this light, the word *risāla* in the title not only signifies the genre of an epistle, thereby marking the text's Arabness, but it can, and probably should, also be read in conjunction with its other meaning, "message," and the reader may well feel that the author, as a kind of messenger, and perhaps even a 'prophet' (the prophet Muḥammad's mission is also traditionally called a *risāla*), is addressing the public with such a prophetical message.

ʿAbduh Gubayr

What was evident in the stories dealt with so far—the fact that the *infitāḥ* invoked in the authors a notion of commitment that is rather traditional in its goals (social-political criticism for the sake of the nation) even though often employing avant-garde narrative techniques—holds true also for the last text in the present sample, *Taḥrīk al-qalb* (*Getting the Heart Moving*, 1982) by ʿAbduh Gubayr (ʿAbduh Jubayr) (Guth, *Zeugen* 82–113). Born in 1948, Gubayr is the youngest and also most experimental among the writers discussed here. While al-Ghīṭānī's *Risāla* could count as a representative of al-Kharrāṭ's "contemporary mythical" trend, Gubayr's text for the most part displays features that would fall in the "internal-oriented, inner-vision" category, where a poetic language is employed for a detailed description of the inner worlds of the characters, which in turn have to be read as a mirror, however distorting, of the outside, for they are its repercussions (Guth, "Novel" 149).

There are scarcely any events in *Taḥrīk al-qalb* which could be connected to a continuous storyline following a chronology and the unfolding of a 'drama.' Instead, the reader is presented with pieces of a jigsaw given in form of interior monologues that reflect the thoughts, memories, feelings, or imaginings of the protagonists. Even the more objective passages that talk about a house and have an implicit third-person narrator are told in this mode. Thus, even if the novel seems to follow the course of one day—it opens with a morning atmosphere and closes with some evening scenes—, this is no specific day, nor can one distinguish its exact hours, or decide whether one hour perhaps does not belong to this same day but to another in the past or the future, nor is the chronology the natural chronology of the outside world; rather, it is time as a lived and felt experience. As the literal repetition of some chapters suggests, this 'inner' time is tantamount to a monotonous flow, to boring repetition, and much stagnation while outward time passes as regularly as the reader proceeds from one chapter to the next.

Yet, in spite of its highly experimental avant-garde literary form, *Taḥrīk al-qalb*, exactly like the other texts discussed so far, relies heavily on the principle of *mufāraqa*, "contrast, discrepancy." It is made up of two types of chapters that alternate regularly:

1) On the one hand, there are chapters in which a third-person narrator describes what happens, or may possibly happen, in, on, above, close to, or with a typical middle-class house. The common denominator in these sections is the house's persistent decay and, in a central chapter, its (real or imagined) forced sale at a public auction to one of the "merchants (*tujjār*) who come from everywhere," at a humiliatingly low price.[29] These 'house' sections are characterized by a strange combination of third-person narrative (which creates a certain distance and 'objectivity') and the above-mentioned interior monologue-like style, a fact that could be interpreted as if it was a kind of 'inner voice of the community's home' that was speaking here, its emotional side, so to speak, or the expression of a collective consciousness and feeling. What happens in the 'house/home' chapters is told mostly in the past tense, a fact that adds to the 'objective' character of these chapters. The visions and fantasies that appear every now and then do not contradict this 'objectivity': Although expressed in the seemingly very subjective stream of consciousness-like form, they too have the quality of objective facts since they form part of a *psychological* reality. Moreover, they are not mere fantasy but seem only all too realistic assumptions and well-founded fears about the house's imminent collapse or its future sale.

2) The 'house' chapters are always followed by sections consisting of the interior monologues of its inhabitants, the seven members of a middle-class family. In these sections

there is no 'objectivity' at all. Purely subjective, they reflect the individual worlds of thinking and feeling of the family members who live, or used to live, under its roof: Each protagonist talks to her/himself, recalls events of his/her own or the house's past, comments on what s/he is doing just now, etc. The fact that in these chapters a present tense narrative prevails adds to their immediateness.

The regular alternation between the 'house' and personal chapters contrasts the reality of what happens or may happen to the house with the inner reality of the individual psychological experiences of this reality. The personal chapters can also be read as a kind of reaction to the overall decay taking place in the 'house' sections. With its—uncommented—juxtaposition of collective history and fate on the one hand and individual reactions to it on the other, the novel is clearly another example of a text employing contrast (*mufāraqa*) as its major structural principle. As such, it supports my argument that the period in question was experienced mainly in terms of contradictions, of things previously experienced and understood as coherent and unified now falling apart, with aspects once integral parts of a greater whole (i.e. the nation) now disintegrating and no longer fitting together.

Like in al-Ghīṭānī's *Risāla*, the objective events of decay, ruin, and overall bankruptcy are experienced as if they were a fate that could not be influenced or altered by the protagonists. A feeling of impotence prevails in the personal chapters, and not only with the older generation but also with the youth. But while al-Ghīṭānī's protagonists 'only' suffer from the circumstances, Gubayr also shows that a common mode of reaction to the changing living conditions of the 1970s was frustration and the retreat of the individual into his/her own world, in a desperate attempt to adjust to the situation and make the best of it. The 'solutions' each family member finds for him/herself are therefore not really viable—and the house continues to disintegrate.[30]

Unlike al-Ghīṭānī, however, Gubayr does not heroicize the victims of the period he portrays, nor does he deplore the loss of an ideal 'Arab' identity or try to counter its imminent loss by ostentatiously creating an 'authentically Arab' style. Instead, Gubayr 'only' confronts the reader with uncommented 'facts' and lets these speak for themselves. The only way in which he 'influences' or 'imposes' his view on the reader lies—apart from the choice of topic, events, and protagonists—in the arrangement of the material, and he does this in a way that exposes the contrast between the collapse and 'sellout' of the collective (family, middle class, nation) and the reactions, or rather non-reactions, of the members of these collectives to this collapse and sellout. Thus, unlike al-Ghīṭānī's *Risāla*, the effect in Gubayr's novel is not tragic irony but a rather 'neutral,' and yet perhaps all the more accusing and challenging, assessment and almost scandalizing exposure of contemporary realities. Gubayr's style is deeply inspired by the French *nouveau roman* and, like the latter, has to be read as a radical translation of the authors' diagnosis of their own times as a period of (over-)individualization, of individuals immuring themselves, or being imprisoned, in their own solipsistic universes, cut off from dialogue with each other and therefore also failing to make an effort to save the collective, and indeed they are devoid of any sense of community. Despite their fundamentally different styles, the approaches of both al-Ghīṭānī and Gubayr reflect the high degree of theoretical discussion on narration after the shock of 1967; compared to pre-1967 literary theory, aesthetical questions were discussed, as we have seen above, with an intensity and heightened (politically informed) theoretical awareness typical of the time.[31]

Irrespective, however, of what is contrasted with what, the structural principle of contrast itself still serves very similar ends in both Gubayr's and the other texts under discus-

sion here: It is employed with the aim of exposing blatant discrepancies, inadequacies, improper responses, etc. in order to create awareness and mobilize the reader. In this sense, the title of Gubayr's text, *Taḥrīk al-qalb*, "making the heart move, mobilizing the heart,"[32] is symptomatic and could indeed aptly serve as a title or subtitle to the other works.

Conclusion

It is no wonder then that the samples discussed above, despite the considerable differences in their authors' ages and individual aesthetic solutions, are united in their portrayal of the *infitāḥ* as a period in which things are falling apart, characterized by often 'crazy' contradictions, blatant discrepancy, or even absurdity. While the political system itself is only rarely dealt with as straightforwardly as by Ibrāhīm in his *Al-lajna*, the disastrous impact of *infitāḥ* politics on society is addressed in its multiple forms in virtually all texts from the period. The prevalence of social over political criticism (as literary topics at least) can be explained from the fact that the *infitāḥ* obviously was experienced, physically and in everyday life, first and foremost as a consequence of the economic opening rather than as a political event, and as something the most drastic effects of which were felt primarily in the changes, brought about by the liberalization of the markets, in the make-up of Egyptian society and its value system. Of the texts discussed here, it is only Ibrāhīm who organizes his text as a clash between an intellectual and the political-economic oligarchy, representatives of the ruling elites, or 'the system.' All other texts focus on and are built mainly around *social* problems, such as the imminent demise of the middle class and/or clashes between the latter and the emerging *nouveaux riches*,[33] and the way the *individual* experiences and reacts to these problems, changes, clashes, and contradictions. While the older generation (Maḥfūẓ, Ghānim) still adheres to a more or less traditional mimetic realism, others (Ibrāhīm, al-Ghīṭānī, Gubayr) make use, though in varying degrees, of the new narrative techniques developed in the critical interim period between 1967 and the *infitāḥ*. However, the swiftness and force with which *infitāḥ* hit the vast majority of the population, shaking the very foundations of its value system—a system until then largely dominated by traditional middle-class values—, prevented the avant-garde from further elaborating, or 'philosophizing,' on the implications of the post-1967 political and aesthetical discussions, so that they were forced to draw on the notion of commitment that had informed public writing ever since the fusion, after World War II, of the Sartrian idea of *littérature engagée* with older concepts such as "national literature" (*adab qawmī*), "realism" (*wāqiʿiyya*), and "social criticism" (*naqd ijtimāʿī*). Even though the concept of 'reality' and the hitherto prevailing mimetic realism were thoroughly questioned immediately after 1967, the writers did not give up the idea of literature as a useful tool and continued to see themselves as critical servants of society and the nation. Thus, in the end, although many writers applied postmodernist writing techniques, the notion of commitment remained an essentially modernist one: It was still informed, though perhaps with an intensity diminishing under the sheer persistence of the *infitāḥ* mentality, by a belief in the meaningfulness of literature's contribution to the grand project, which had emerged during the *nahḍa*, of reforming society and, through pointing out its deficits, weaknesses and evils, of showing the nation a way out of its present crisis and helping to guide it towards a brighter future. The literature of the 1970s and early 1980s has therefore still preserved—with due modifications but unaltered in its very essence—the old belief in the knowability of reality and, consequently, in the describability of these realities, or the many dimensions of reality. And it is because of the

continuity, in its essential traits, of pre-1967 notions of literary commitment into the Sadat era and because of the polarizations in society brought about by *infitāḥ* that much of the literature of this period has retained, and often also regained, a highly moralist character.[34] The conviction, produced by the post-1967 discussions, that literature should do everything to avoid being authoritarian and instead encourage the reader's own cognition and ethical judgement, made the writers choose narrative techniques which were geared to fostering exactly this 'democratization' of the reader. At the same time, however, all the authors considered in the above essay had recourse to the more subtle ways of equipping their texts with a high degree of moral(ist) urgency and with messages that were hard not to get.

Notes

1   From 1954 to 1956 as the chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, as president of the Republic since 1956.

2   Massive, largely leftist student protests (1968, 1973) notwithstanding.

3   The most comprehensive study on *iltizām* so far is: Klemm, Verena. *Literarisches Engagement im arabischen Nahen Osten: Konzepte und Debatten*. Würzburg: Ergon, 1998. Print. For a condensed version, see also Klemm, Verena. "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizām*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq." *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 3.1 (2000): 51–62. Print.

4   For a reading of this shock as a 'loss of father' trauma, cf. the study by Naguib.

5   The interested reader will find general outlines in Stehli-Werbeck or my own overview: Guth, Stephan. "Literary Currents in Egypt since the Beginning/Mid-1960s." *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature*. Vol. 1. *From Modernism to the 1980s*. Ed. Gail Ramsay and Stephan Guth. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011. 85–112. Print; as well as, in greater detail, in the collections of articles on the New Sensibility by al-Kharrāṭ, *Al-ḥassāsiyya*, or in Kendall's monograph.

6   Al-Kharrat, "The Mashriq" 189–92 (for terms in English), and al-Kharrāṭ, "'Alā sabīl" 9–11 (for the Arabic terminology) in al-Kharrāṭ, Idwār. "'Alā sabīl al-taqdīm." *Al-Karmil* 14 (1984): 5–14. Print.

7   For an overview see, e.g., Cooper (in English, written still from within the period) and Guth, *Zeugen* 3–16 (in German, from a later perspective, based on the more in-depth studies by Pawelka, Krämer, and Fahmy); Pawelka, Peter. "Auf tönernen Füßen? Von Nasser zu Sadat: Ägypten heute: Sozialökonomische und innenpolitische Grundlagen der ägyptischen Außenpolitik." *Der Bürger im Staat* 31.1 (1981): 40–49. Print; Krämer, Gudrun. *Identität und nationales Interesse: Ägypten und Husni Mubarak*. Ebenhausen: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 1986. Print; Fahmy, Khaled Mahmoud. *Legislating Infitah: Investment, Currency, and Foreign Trade Laws*. Cairo: American U in Cairo P, 1989. Print. Political-economic analyses seem to agree in their observation of, as Cooper has it, "a fundamental continuity between the Nasser and Sadat regimes" (481) rather than a shift; in fact, "[e]conomic reform in 1968 was the jumping off point for the economic liberalization in 1973" (484), "the basic parameters [...] changed direction in the 1967–1971 period" (496).

8   For the remaining part of this paragraph, and the whole next, I am gratefully indebted to George Khalil's suggestions and wording.

9   For a brief characterization of some periodicals in which relevant questions were discussed cf., e.g., the studies by Rayan and Kendall.

10 On account of their affiliation with modern (higher) education and white-collar state employment as well as their status between the (mostly urban) lower class (*ahl al-balad*) and the upper class (*ahl al-dhawāt*), Shechter sees this middle class as a direct descendant of the nineteenth/early twentieth century *efendiyya* group.

11 Called *ahl al-infitāḥ*, or simply *infitāḥī*s, in Shechter (passim).

12 For general overviews of the literature of the period see, e.g., ʿAzib, Yusrī. *Al-qiṣṣa wa-l-riwāya al-miṣriyya fī-l-sabʿīniyyāt: Dirāsa*. Cairo: n.p., 1988. Print; Fontaine, Jean. "Le nouveau roman égyptien, 1975–1985." *IBLA* 158 (1986): 215–62. Print; Ibrāhīm, "Mulāḥaẓāt"; Kassem, Céza and Malak Hashem, eds. *Flights of Fantasy: Arabic Short Stories*. Cairo: Elias Modern, 1985. Print; al-Kharrāṭ, *Mukhtārāt*; "Al-adab fī Miṣr"; Khashaba, Sāmī. "Jīl al-sittīniyyāt fi-l-riwāya al-miṣriyya: Taḥqīq fi-l-uṣūl al-thaqāfiyya." *Fuṣūl* 2.2 (1982): 117–23. Print; Kilias, Doris. "Ägyptische Prosa heute." *Weimarer Beiträge* 35.2 (1989): 293–313. Print; Surūr, Ḥasan. "Bibliyūgrāfiyā ʿan al-riwāya al-miṣriyya, 2: Min ʿām 1975 ilā 1987." *Al-Qāhira* 88 (1988): 63–66. Print.

13 *Wa-hiyya taḍribu kaffan bi-kaff*—a common gesture in the Middle East, expressing baffled helplessness.

14 A very similar plot is staged in the film *Al-ḥubb waḥdahu lā yakfī* (*Love Alone is Not Enough*, 1981), dis-
    cussed in Shechter 23. The fact that economic pressure often makes marriage impossible is also central in
    many other films studied by Shechter (27–30).

15 For a detailed analysis see Guth, *Zeugen* 65–74. The story has been turned into a film (1981) with the same ti-
    tle, discussed by Shechter (e.g. 26), who however seems to be ignorant of the Maḥfūẓian story that served as
    the film's model.

16 Shechter calls the *nouveaux riches* the "ultimate nemesis" of the middle class (25).

17 Cf. in this context esp. the studies by Ballas, S. "Le courant expressionniste dans la nouvelle arabe contempo-
    raine." *Arabica* 25.2 (1978): 113–27. Print; Farīd, Māhir Shafīq. "Tajribat al-ʿabath bayn al-adab al-gharbī
    wa-l-qiṣṣa al-miṣriyya al-qaṣīra." *Fuṣūl* 2.4 (1982): 223–38. Print.

18 Detailed synopsis in Guth, *Zeugen* 26–34, analysis 35–64.

19 Education or, rather, its deterioration and the corruptibility of this "pivot of the Egyptian modernization pro-
    ject" are "the most prevalent theme" in the cinematic social dramas studied by Shechter (24).

20 On irony as the basic structural principle in four Egyptian writers of the period, cf. Draz' enlightening study:
    Draz, Ceza Kassem. "In Quest of New Narrative Forms: Irony in the Works of Four Egyptian Writers: Jamāl
    al-Ghīṭānī, Yaḥyā al-Ṭāhir ʿAbdallāh, Majīd Ṭūbyā, Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm (1967–1979)." *Journal of Arabic Lit-
    erature* 12 (1981): 137–59. Print.

21 This contrast, typical of "highly ideologized policy," had made political analysis difficult already in the post-
    1967 Nasser years where, as Cooper stated, "form and content tend[ed] to diverge drastically" (495). Judging
    from the prevalence of *mufāraqa* as a main structural principle of representation in the texts studied here, the
    gap evidently has become a major characteristic of life under *infitāḥ* conditions (as experienced by the edu-
    cated middle class, at least).

22 For a slightly different reading of the closure of the novel, cf. Alkodimi and Omar 60: Alkodimi, Khaled A.,
    and Noritah Omar. "Satire in Sonallah Ibrahim's *The Committee*: An Allegory to Ridicule Capitalism." *GEMA
    Online Journal of Language Studies* 10.3 (2010): 53–65. Web. 25 July 2014.

23 Because the *infitāḥī* is often ridiculed on account of "flashiness and bad taste (esthetic and social)" (Shechter
    29) the figure is also a late reflection of the Francophile fop (*mutafarnij*) of early *nahḍa* narratives. (On the
    mutafarnij, cf. Guth, Stephan. *Brückenschläge: Eine integrierte "turkoarabische" Romangeschichte [Mitte
    19. bis 20. Jahrhundert]*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003. Print. 10–47 and 262–63, with further references). The
    mutafarnij, however, still lacks the terrifying aspect that is so prominent in the *infitāḥī*.

24 On elements of old myths in narrative prose cf. Munīr, Surūr and Khafājī. On the use of 'inherited' stylistic
    elements in general, cf. Walther, Wiebke. "Traditionsbeziehungen in der modernen arabischen Prosaliteratur."
    Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft 7 (1985): 63–90. Print; for recent decades esp. 80–90.

25 On the attitudes of this period's writers towards the literary 'heritage' in general, cf. the studies by Boullata,
    Issa J. "Contemporary Arab Writers and the Literary Heritage." *IJMES* 15 (1983): 111–19. Print; Malṭī-
    Dūglās, Fadwā. "Al-ʿanāṣir al-turāthiyya fi-l-adab al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir: Al-aḥlām fī thalāth qiṣaṣ." Trans. ʿIffat
    al-Sharqāwī. *Fuṣūl* 2.2 (1982): 21–29. Print.

26 Implicitly, the trend of course also 'subverts' Islamist readings of the cultural heritage. But such a reading was
    probably not intended by al-Ghīṭānī here, otherwise he would have provided, with all probability, some hints
    suggesting such a reading. In his *Waqāʾiʿ ḥārat al-Zaʿfaranī* (*The Incidents in Zaafarani Alley*, 1976), at least,
    such hints are quite obvious (topic, setting, parodistic imitation of fundamentalist discourse, etc.).

27 For a detailed analysis, see Guth, *Zeugen* 150–99 (in German) as well as the more concise presentations in
    Guth, Stephan. "Authenticity as Counter-Strategy: Fighting Sadat's 'Open Door' Politics: Gamal al-Ghitani
    and The Epistle of Insights into the Destinies." *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*. Ed. Angelika
    Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler. London: Saqi, 2010. 146–57. Print.

28 Labor migrants also populate the cinematic social drama of the same period, cf. Shechter 25; 30.

29 The fact that the chapters containing the house's public sale are placed exactly in the middle of the novel sug-
    gests that the text is organized around this worst-case scenario as its very center.

30 For an overview of community narratives in modern Egyptian fiction since the early twentieth century, cf.
    Guth, "Between *ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ*".

31 For details cf. esp. Barrāda, Muḥammad, ed. *Al-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya: Wāqiʿ wa-āfāq*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Rushd,
    1981. Print; *Fuṣūl* 2.2 and 2.4 (1982); Kendall; al-Kharrāṭ, *Al-ḥassāsiyyah*; Mabrūk, Murād ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.
    Al-ẓawāhir al-fanniyya fī-l-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra al-muʿāṣira fī Miṣr, 1967–1984. Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-
    ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb 1989. Print; Munīr, Surūr and Khafājī; Stehli-Werbeck.

32 The fact that Gubayr placed the 'house' chapters that contain the public sale incident right in the middle of the text (cf. above, note 29) gives sufficient proof of the dramatic, emotionalizing, 'heart-moving' character of the novel: the auction is organized, structurally, as the novel's point of culmination. Emotion and pathos are further enhanced by the poetic, often almost surrealistic language, cf. Guth, *Zeugen* 91.

33 Writing more than fifteen years after my PhD thesis on the *infitāḥ* narratives (Guth, *Zeugen*), but obviously ignorant of the existence of this study, Shechter, who looked at cinematic representations of the period, came to more or less identical conclusions (see 33–35).

34 Shechter even speaks of "the establishment of an oppositional orthodoxy to the *infitāḥ*" (24).

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The Arabic Novel between Aesthetic Concerns and the Causes of Man: Commitment in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and ʿAbd al-Rahman Munif

Sonja Mejcher-Atassi

<div dir="rtl">

أنا الذي ليس لي إلا القلم؟ لا الليل والخيل ولا البيداء تعرفني...

</div>

I who have nothing but the pen? Neither the night nor the horseman nor the desert knows me …
(Jabrā and Munīf 264)[1]

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, 1920–1994) and ʿAbd al-Rahman Munif (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, 1933–2004) contributed significantly to the intellectual life, literature, and art of *Sharq al-mutawassiṭ* (*East of the Mediterranean*, 1975), as reads the title of one of Munif's novels, meanwhile a classic of prison literature in the Arab world. Both Jabra and Munif chose the genre of the novel as a major means of expression, *the means of expression*, an art practice that offered an outlet for political dissent and an anchor for hopeful dreams at once. Whereas Jabra conceived of the novel as "the meeting point of the creative arts known to man since earliest times" ("On Interpoetics" 210), Munif described it as giving voice to "the history of those who do not have a history" (Munīf, *Al-kātib wa-l-manfā* 43). These depictions of the novel, one foregrounding its aesthetic characteristics, the other its documentary qualities, point to differences between the writers in their views on the complex relationship of aesthetics and politics that this paper sets out to examine—differences within a spectrum of shared interests and anxieties.

In the first part, the paper examines the role of exile ascribed by Jabra and Munif to the formation of the intellectual. In the second part, it turns to notions of homelessness in the form of the novel, engaging with theories of the novel by Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin. As Edward Said says, "the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world," a world that resembles fiction. Referring to Lukács' notion of transcendental homelessness, he points out that "[i]n the epic there is no *other* world, only the finality of *this* one. […] The novel, however, exists because other worlds *may* exist, alternatives for bourgeois speculators, wanderers, exiles" (181–82). As I argue in this paper, commitment in Jabra and Munif is closely tied to depicting such alternative, other worlds in the novel, and thus with the act of creation. The paper focuses on two novels in particular: Jabra's *Al-baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* (1978; trans. by Roger Allen and Adnan Haydar as *In Search of Walid Masoud*, 2000) and the first volume of Munif's five volume *Mudun al-milḥ* (*Cities of Salt*, 1984–1989) entitled *Al-tīh* (1984; *The Wilderness* trans. by Peter Theroux as *Cities of Salt*, 1989).[2]

Exile

Born in Bethlehem and having studied at the Arab College in Jerusalem then at Cambridge University, Jabra found exile in Baghdad after the *nakba* of 1948. As a literary writer (of novels and poetry alike), translator (of Shakespeare, Faulkner, Beckett and others), university professor of English literature, lover of classical music, art critic, artist, and intellectual, he became a well-respected figure in Baghdad's cultural life. Familiar with both Arabic and Western cultural traditions, it was in literature and art that he saw the hope for a better world. Embracing many ideas from the *nahḍa*, the so-called Arab renaissance or awakening of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he firmly believed in the necessity to modernize Arabic culture, taking from the Arabic-Islamic heritage that which is alive and leaving aside what is dead.[3] He ascribed a special role to intellectuals who feature prominently in his novels. As he explains in an interview with Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī) in 1978, intellectuals, and more broadly the field of cultural production, play a key role in the Arab world as "agents of change."

فأنا أرى أن للمثقفين في العالم العربي دورا كبيرا مهما حاولت بعض القوى حجبه عنهم. لا يزال المثقفين هم المغيرون وهم الثوريون الحقيقيون سواء حملوا السلاح في سبيل هذا التغير أو لم يحملوه، الثقافة هي التي تغير في النهاية، و إذا لم تغير تكون قد عجزت عن اداء دورها.

> I think that the intellectuals play an important role in the Arab world that those in power have tried to conceal from them. The intellectuals continue to be the agents of change and the true revolutionaries, whether they carry arms for the sake of this change or not. In the end, culture makes a difference. If it does not make a difference, it fails in the performance of its role. (Khūrī 188)

Munif, celebrated after his death as "Arabian master" (Hafez) and "Arab citizen *par excellence*" (Anis), was more interested in politics than in literature when he first met Jabra in the early 1950s in Baghdad. Of Saudi and Iraqi background, he grew up in Amman where he had joined the Baath Party in the late 1940s, becoming a member of its regional command, before he started his studies in Baghdad. He left the party when it seized power in Syria and Iraq in 1963. Looking back at the turbulent years in Baghdad preceding the Baghdad Pact and foreshadowing the Revolution of 1958 that brought down the British-backed monarchy, he sets himself and his political comrades apart from an older generation of "men of letters" whom he describes as meeting at the Brazilian Café in the buzzing al-Rashīd Street and dreaming about changing the world. Describing them as "dreamers," Munif accentuates their detachment from the very reality that surrounds them, counting among them the Iraqi poets Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb), ʿAbd al-Wahhab al-Bayati (ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī), Qazim Jawad (Qāsim Jawād), and Buland al-Haydari (Buland al-Ḥaydarī), as well as the Iraqi sculptor Jawad Salim (Jawād Salīm)—and right in their very midst Jabra (Munīf, *Lawʿat al-ghiyāb* 111).[4] Munif's sketch-like description was not devoid of humor but it came with sincere reverence. Over a decade older, Jabra was to become a close friend when Munif returned to Baghdad in the 1970s. Together they wrote *ʿĀlam bi-lā kharāʾiṭ* (*A World without Maps*, 1982), a novel that has been described as a novel on the art of novel writing (al-Mūsawī 282). The *hazīma*, the Arab defeat in the June war of 1967, had not only alerted Munif to the Palestinian cause and the profound crisis facing the Arab world, it had played an important role in his taking up writing. It was in Beirut that Munif started to pursue his interest in writing—first in journalism, then in literature—in a serious way. His first novel *Al-ashjār wa-ightiyāl Marzūq* (*Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq*, 1973) opened a

new world to him. Different from his youthful political activism and far from political power, it presented a new and compelling means to contribute to the dream of "a more humane, free, and just society."

منذ إنجازي روايتي الأولى، الأشجار...واغتيـال مـرزوق في ربيـع 1971، تأكَّدت أنّي اكتشفت طريقي، و إنّي مـن هـذا الطريق أستطيع أن أسهم في تغيير المجتمع وخلق مجتمع أكثر إنسانية وحرّية وعدالة، منذ ذلك التاريخ و حتّى الآن أجد أن الرواية هي عالمي الحقيقي، و إنّي عن طريق هذه الوسيلة يمكن أن أحارب القبح والقسوة والهمجيّة والتخلّف، وأبشر بعالم أفضل، بحيـاة غنيّة تستحقّ أن تعاش، خاصّة بالنسبة للأجيال القادمة.

> Since the completion of my first novel, *The Trees...and the Assassination of Marzuq* in spring 1971, I became convinced that I discovered my way to contribute to changing society and to creating a more humane, free, and just society. From that time until today, I find that the novel is my real world and that by means of the novel I can combat ignominy, cruelty, savagery, and backwardness and bring news of a better world and a rich life that deserves to be lived, especially with respect to the coming generations. (qtd. in Campbell 1274)

With the publication of *Sharq al-mutawassiṭ* in 1975 Munif established his name as a novelist and became known for his commitment to the *qaḍāyā al-insān*, the causes of man. He went back to the novel in the early 1990s with *Al-ān ... hunā: Aw sharq al-mutawassiṭ marra ukhrā* (*Now and Here, or East of the Mediterranean Once Again*, 1991), political dictatorship and prison having remained a harsh reality of everyday life. As the novel's title indicates, most of Munif's novels are located East of the Mediterranean, in which city or country exactly is left open. This ambiguity is telling. "[T]he Arab calamity is the same everywhere," says Munif, "it goes hand in hand with poverty, terror, and annulled passports" ("Clashing with Society" 11). Munif remained outspoken about his political ideas, even when he devoted himself entirely to writing—in his literary work as well as in his socio-political publications. A good example is *Al-dīmuqrāṭiyya awwalan, al-dīmuqrāṭiyya dāʾiman* (*Democracy First, Democracy Always*, 1992) in which he expresses his commitment to democracy not as a magic key or a solution in itself but as a means to keep political power in check. So too is the thrust of his book *Al-ʿIrāq: Hawāmish min al-tārīkh wa-l-muqāwama* (*Iraq: Sidenotes of History and Resistance*, 2003), which describes Iraq's modern history as a national struggle against colonial rule, recalling Iraq's will to independence in light of renewed war and occupation. Munif was a fierce critic of Saddam Hussein, while at the same time he condemned the Iraq war of 2003 which re-ignited his political radicalism of former days. Jabra, who never partook in any form of organized political action and continued his life in Baghdad until his death in 1994, tried as much as possible to stay out of political debates.[5] Nevertheless, he and Munif found common ground in their belief that change is possible in and through cultural production.

Both Jabra and Munif were at home in more than one city in the Arab world, and yet at the same time they remained homeless. No matter how much Jabra participated in the cultural life of Baghdad and indeed other cities—notably Beirut where he was a known figure in the literary field, with most of his books published there and his regular contribution to the literary journal *Shiʿr*—his Palestinian identity and exile from Jerusalem remained a central fact of his life. He asserts:

إذا لم أكُن فلسطينياً فأنا لست شيئاً.

> If I was not Palestinian, I would be nothing. (Khūrī 181)

The centrality of exile in his intellectual endeavors, overpowering yet empowering him, can be compared to Said's notion of exile as contrapuntal, as Zeina G. Halabi has convincingly outlined in her contribution "The Day the Wandering Dreamer Became a Fidāʾi: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and the Fashioning of Political Commitment" to this volume. While by no means diminishing the loss exile always entails, Said nonetheless maintains that it makes possible an originality of vision and thus carries the promise of change.

Jabra's first book of poetry *Tammūz fi-l-madīna* (*Tammuz in the City*, 1959), published by Dār Majallat Shiʿr in Beirut, places the promise of change, here embodied by the Mesopotamian God of vegetation, into urban culture. Jabra was introduced to the journal's founder Yusuf al-Khal (Yūsuf al-Khāl) through their common friend, the Palestinian poet Tawfiq Sayigh (Tawfīq Ṣāyigh), whilst on a Rockefeller scholarship at Harvard University in the early 1950s. The journal's liberal outlook corresponded more to his ideals of individual freedom than the political overtones of the literary journal *al-Ādāb*, which was more closely influenced by ideas of literary engagement as formulated by the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre.[6] Like other Arab poets at the time, Jabra enthusiastically made use of myth in his poetry, inspired by ideas of rebirth as they circulated in English literature, in particular in T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. As Jabra points out in his article "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," Eliot drew on the very myth that enabled Arab poets to establish a link with their region's tradition while calling for new beginnings, the myth of Tammuz as rendered popular by James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which Jabra translated partially into Arabic (82–83). Referring to modern Arab poets as "voices crying in a wide intellectual wilderness" (*Al-nār wa-l-jawhar* 157), Jabra saw in their call for rebirth a moment of truth anticipating the self-criticism that came to the fore after the Arab defeat in the June war of 1967. "Spring after spring in the deserts of exile," as reads the first line of his poem "Fī bawādī al-nafī" ("In the Deserts of Exile"), he held on to the memory of his homeland Palestine in his writing. In his novel *Al-safīna* (1970; trans. by Roger Allen and Adnan Haydar as *The Ship*, 1985), he depicts a group of Arab intellectuals on a cruise in the Mediterranean. Surrounded by the sea, the past takes hold of them through a series of flashbacks, which draw them back to the land—"land as both the heritage of the past and aspiration for the future," as Roger Allen points out in *The Arabic Novel* (178). This connectedness with the past, the importance of cultural memory for the future, was anticipated by the modern art movement in Baghdad in which Jabra, a founding member of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art (Jamāʿat Baghdād li-l-fann al-ḥadīth), next to the Iraqi artists Jawad Salim and Shakir Hasan Al Said (Shākir Ḥasan Āl Saʿīd), played a leading role. He writes in the group's second manifesto from 1955:

تتألّف جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث من رسامين ونحاتين لكل أسلوبه المعين. ولكنهم يتفقون في استلهام الجو العراقي لتنمية هذا الأسلوب. فهم يريدون تصوير حياة الناس في شكل جديد، يحدده إدراكهم وملاحظاتهم لحياة هذا البلد الذي ازدهرت فيه حضارات كثيرة و إندثرت ثم أزدهرت من جديد. إنهم لا يغفلون عن إرتباطهم الفكري والأسلوبي بالتطور الفني السائد في العالم، ولكنهم في الوقت نفسه يبغون خلق أشكال تضفي على الفن العراقي طابعًا خاصًا وشخصيةً متميزةً.

The Baghdad Group for Modern Art consists of painters and sculptors. Everyone has a specific style but agrees that in order to develop this style you have to draw inspiration from the Iraqi atmosphere. They want to represent the life of the people in a new form, based on their understanding and observation of the life of this country in which numerous civilizations have flourished, fallen into oblivion, and flourished again. They do not ignore their intellectual and stylistic ties to the prevailing artistic development in the world but, at the same time, they seek to create forms that grant Iraqi art a special mark and a distinctive character. (qtd. in Āl Saʿīd 29)

The group's interest in merging tradition (*turāth*) with modernity (*ḥadātha*) in order to produce art of international significance yet local character, caught on not only among artists but also architects and writers (Jabra, *A Celebration of Life* 169). Jabra himself draws a parallel between the Baghdad Group for Modern Art and the group of poets associated with the literary journal *Shiʿr* in Beirut (Khūrī 184–85). As I shall elaborate below, the insistence on the local character also proved crucial for Munif and his understanding of the Arabic novel.

The great extent of Munif's symbolic capital, accumulated over the years and carried like a suitcase full of books and papers from one Arab city to the other, gave him a preeminent position in the literary field. His political outspokenness and intellectual integrity had gained him much respect among the younger generation of Arab writers but it also caused him serious trouble. In 1963, the year the Baath Party seized power in Syria and Iraq, his Saudi citizenship was revoked. He subsequently held different passports but was unable to solve the problem of citizenship permanently.

> I have been travelling with an Algerian passport, or one from Yemen, or one from Iraq, since 1963 until today. I've been unable to solve this problem, which is overwhelming, if only for the sake of my children, not mine. Where others look for sustenance alone, I search for identity and belonging which are part and parcel of my character and work. (Munif, "Clashing with Society" 9)

Although Munif was at home in the Arab world at large, he was aware of the harsh realities of exile, opening his essay *Al-kātib wa-l-manfā* (*Writer and Exile*) with the words:

<div dir="rtl">

أن تكون منفياً يعني أنك، منذ البداية، إنسان متّهم.

</div>

> To be exiled means, to begin with, that you stand accused. (85)

Whereas Jabra and Said stress an exile's originality of vision while not diminishing the loss exile always entails, for Munif an exile does not only "feel [his] difference" (Said 182), he stands accused. Munif points to the severe accusation an exile is faced with no matter where he turns. According to him, the exilic intellectual is an agent of change who stands accused because of the very potential of change he embodies, the threat his dreams, once put onto paper and held up to the faces of those wielding power, represent.

Homelessness

Both Jabra and Munif wrote autobiographies, engaging in a genre that played a key role in the formation of the Arabic novel (Reynolds; Ostle, de Moor, and Wild). While their texts recall the authors' childhoods in their cities of birth, Bethlehem and Amman, these locations can hardly be called places of origin. Despite the love and comfort provided by the close network of family ties in these accounts, the locations are sites of movement and travel in a rapidly changing world. This holds true especially for Munif's *Sīrat madīna* (1994; trans. by Samira Kawar as *Story of a City: A Childhood in Amman*, 1996), which already in its title foregrounds urban change and turns the city into the protagonist. Born to a father from Najd in today's Saudi Arabia and a mother from Baghdad, the traditional trade routes Munif's father embarked on in search of a living had vanished as national borders were drawn onto the map of the Arab world after World War I, paving the way for new routes of travel, expulsion, and exile. As James Clifford points out in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, "[i]t is impossible to think of transnational possibilities without recognizing the violent disruptions that attend 'modernization,' with its expanding markets, armies, tech-

nologies, and media. Whatever improvements or alternatives may emerge do so against this grim backdrop" (10). On the borderline of historiography and fiction, Jabra's first autobiography *Al-biʾr al-ūlā: Fuṣūl min sīra dhātiyya* (1987; trans. by Issa Boullata as *The First Well: A Bethlehem Boyhood*, 1995) is a captivating account of life in Palestine prior to the *nakba* of 1948.[7] Similar to other autobiographies written by Palestinian authors of Jabra's generation, such as Hala Sakakini (Hāla al-Sakākīnī) or Hisham Sharabi (Hishām Sharābī), and Walid Khalidi's (Walīd Khālidī) ground-breaking study *Before their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1948*, it reclaims a history that has been negated by the Zionist propaganda of describing Palestine as "a country without a people for a people without a country."[8] Published at the outset of the Palestinian intifada and read against the context of Israeli occupation, its many references to oral traditions of storytelling, schools, newspapers, magazines, and books attest to the rich cultural heritage and spread of education in Palestine prior to 1948. Giving voice to seemingly marginal events and people swallowed up "by the ocean of life, which does not give many the chance to stop to catch their breath" (Munif, *Sīrat madīna* 13; *Story of a City* 5), Jabra's and Munif's autobiographies partake in writing "the history of those who do not have a history"—a task Munif ascribes to the novel (*Al-kātib wa-l-manfā* 43). Written from the perspective of the second half of the twentieth century back onto the realities of life prior to 1948, they not only aim at recovering a past forcibly erased by Zionist propaganda and Israeli occupation, in leaving traces for future generations they explore other, alternative worlds.

Whereas Jabra contributed to a number of literary forms, Munif focused on the novel, which in its "transcendental homelessness" best suited his aesthetic as well as political needs. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács describes "transcendental homelessness" as a key feature of the novel, which he defines as "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88), a world that grants no homecoming, a prosaic world marked by the traumata of the modern world, in particular World War I. In the Arab world, World War I was a traumatic experience as well. It explains much of the hardship and poverty Jabra describes in *Al-biʾr al-ūlā*. The turning point however came with the *nakba* of 1948, mercilessly shattering people's hopes and dreams. It comes as no surprise then that Munif describes the second half of the twentieth century as "the era of the novel" (*Al-kātib wa-l-manfā* 40), explaining its rise against the backdrop of the Arab defeats since the *nakba*, in particular in the June War of 1967.

Reading Jabra's and Munif's novels against the background of the *hazīma*, the theme of homelessness clearly stands out. Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud* starts with the disappearance of its protagonist, and his absence runs through the novel as leitmotiv. His friends back in Baghdad set out to find explanations, as rumors spread that he emigrated to Canada or Australia, was murdered, returned to Palestine, or joined the fedayeen, the Palestinian resistance fighters, in Lebanon. His involvement in the Palestinian resistance is mentioned throughout the novel and his son Marwan, who had joined the fedayeen in Beirut, is reported to have died a martyr in the Lebanese civil war. Walid's friends are left with their memories, piles of paper, and a tape. Walid had recorded his thoughts on the tape while driving, heading off into the desert, towards the border crossing of al-Rutba, where he was last seen. The tape was found in a small Chinese tape recorder in his car, left in a no-man's land, about fifty meters from the Iraqi border. His disappearance at a border crossing recalls the situation of Palestinians in exile as described in Ghassan Kanafani's (Ghassān Kanafānī) *Rijāl fi-l-shams* (1963; trans. by Hilary Kilpatrick as *Men in the Sun*, 1999), where the protagonists die in search of a living while trying to cross from Iraq into the oil-rich Kuwait in a water tank.

Different from Kanafani's focus on ordinary people, Jabra's novel is set in the privileged context of Baghdad's intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, and artists, and through their accounts gives "a microcosm of bourgeois society in Baghdad," as Stefan G. Meyer says (50). Their conversations move back and forth between politics, art, and everyday life: from the "wave of arrests" in Baghdad to Gamal ʿAbd al-Nasser, the Baghdad Pact, modern poetry, the Baghdad Group paintings, and stories of love. Amid all this intellectual chatter, Jabra's firm belief in cultural production as a "means of doing away with at least some of the chaos and the conflict"—to quote the ending of his essay "Modern Arabic Literature and the West" (91)—comes to the fore in the voice of one of Walid's friends, Ibrahim al-Hajj Nawfal:

كنت أقول لسوسن: « الفن يشير إلى تحرر الإنسان في ساعات ابداعه، ليعطي مذاق الحرية للآخرين إلى الأبد. رسـومك دليـل واحد، دليل على محاولتك التحرر. عندما أتحدث عن الفن، أنا لا أتحدث عن رسومك وحدها، أو عن الرسم فقط. أقصد بالفن كل ابداع، بالصورة أو الكلمة. كتاباتي، وكتابات كل شاعر أو روائي سحقت كيانه حمّى الخلق. كلنا عبيـد، وكلنا نريد أن نتحرر. وأن نهب الآخرين ما نحظى به في لحظات النشوة الأليمة الهائلة.»

> "Art alludes to the liberation of man at the time of his creative impulse," I used to tell Sawsan, "and as such it can give other people the taste of freedom forever. Your pictures are a proof of this, a reflection of your attempt to find liberty. When I talk about art, I'm not talking about just your pictures or even only about painting. By art I mean all creativity, whether in pictures or in words. My writings, like those of every poet or novelist, find their existence crushed by the fever of creation. We're all slaves; we all want to find liberty, to give other people what we artists gain in those moments of incredible, painful ecstasy." (Jabra, *Al-baḥth* 328–29; *In Search* 250)

Creativity, expressed in pictures and words, is presented here in terms similar to Barbara Harlow's definition of cultural resistance as "an arena of struggle" (2) through which liberation is made possible. This signals a shift in the relationship of aesthetics and politics that brings Jabra's novel written in exile close to the literature of resistance, as rendered prominent by Kanafani's study *Adab al-muqāwama fī Filasṭīn al-muḥtalla: 1948–1966* (*Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948–1966*, 1966) which draws a distinction between literature written under occupation and in exile.[9] Reading the novel in the historical and socio-political context of national liberation struggles from Palestine to Algeria, Walid's transformation from intellectual to fida'i, as outlined by Zeina G. Halabi, makes perfect sense. In the novel, however, this transformation is left open; it is presented as one of a number of possible explanations to Walid's disappearance, if the most compelling and heroic version. Walid's story ends in uncertainty, suspended at the border crossing of al-Rutba. Similar to a black hole in which the novel's protagonist disappears, together with the hopes and dreams attached to the role of the intellectual in the Arab world, the border crossing, and more specifically the no-man's land between the borders, is the very opposite of the exile's idealized homeland. Accordingly, the novel's protagonist is placed in a precarious situation with regard to his identity; stripped of his past, he is a no-man, unless he lives on in his friends' memories as a Palestinian intellectual or finds resurrection as a fida'i— Jabra's words quoted above come to mind: "If I was not Palestinian, I would be nothing" (Khūrī 181). Different from Ulysses who identifies himself as no-man in his cunning scheme to escape the Cyclopes in Homer's epic, Walid's life is one continuous search to assert his Palestinian identity. His odyssey does not come to an end; he does not regain his country, name, fame, and family. The open-endedness of the novel is crucial. There is no sense of an ending, no homecoming. As much as the novel can be read as a farewell to intellectual chatter in coffee shops from the Tigris to the Mediterranean, it refrains from giv-

ing a clear vision for future action à la Fanon. The reader, much like the other characters in the novel, is left with a riddle, trying to make sense of Walid's and by extension his/her and our own individual and collective lives. This attempt takes place in and through the very form of the novel, its fragmentation and incorporation of other forms of expression, such as audio-visual media, the tape, Walid uses to record his life.

Similar to Jabra, Munif focused his early novels on the role of the intellectual in society. In his later novels, however, such as *Cities of Salt*, he turned to the community that is society. Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud* and Munif's *Cities of Salt* could not be more different at first glance: one is set in the intellectual circles of Baghdad's bourgeois society, the other in the small desert community of Wadi al-Uyoun. Nevertheless, the novels share some key characteristics, such as the absence of their main protagonists, who come to life through the narratives of others and appear like legendary figures: Walid Masoud the intellectual turned fida'i who returns to his homeland Palestine, as some of his friends say, in Jabra's novel and Miteb al-Hathal, the Bedouin rebel who resists foreign interests and the transformation of his land triggered by the discovery of oil in Munif's novel. Moreover, both novels bear witness to the region's modern history, negated and effaced by colonial claims, war, occupation, and petrodollars. In Munif's case, the documentary character of his novel has at times overshadowed its experimental zeal and provoked some to reduce *Cities of Salt* to "the grand oil novel of the lands in the Gulf" (Ajami 125). In his review of *Cities of Salt* in *The New Yorker*, John Updike goes so far as to accuse Munif of being "insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel" (117)—here, the exilic writer literally stands accused of breaching the very form of the novel. Munif himself however conceived *Cities of Salt* as part of a project "to fashion a novel that is uniquely 'Arab' in its view of history as well as in its narrative style," as Meyer points out (72).

Munif's attentive perceptions of the desert and their meticulous rendering, for instance, have to be seen in the larger context of turning to the Arabic literary heritage as way of creating a narrative that does not follow Western models only but stands out for its local characteristics in both content and form. The desert oasis of Wadi al-Uyoun in *Cities of Salt* is more than a geographical place. It is described as "a salvation from death," "a miracle," and "earthly paradise." Its description shares many characteristics with the Qurʾan's imagery of paradise (notably in sura 15: 45–46 and in sura 55: 46–50). It thus stands—to once more draw on Allen's description of how land is represented in Jabra's *The Ship*—as "both the heritage of the past and aspiration for the future," and it is clearly an antipode to the border crossing of al-Rutba in Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud*. Its unspoiled, heavenly character of former days contrasts to the harsh reality after the discovery of oil, as seen through the eyes of Miteb al-Hathal's son Fawaz on his return to Wadi al-Uyoun. The transformation of Wadi al-Uyoun and the surrounding desert, triggered by the discovery of oil, goes hand in hand with profound socio-political changes and raises crucial questions:

كيف يمكن للأشخاص والأماكن أن يتغيروا إلى الدرجة التي يفقدون صلتهم بما كانوا عليه، وهل يستطيع الإنسان أن يتكيف مع الأشياء الجديدة والأماكن الجديدة دون أن يفقد جزءاً من ذاته؟

How is it possible for people and places to change so entirely that they lose any connection with what they used to be? Can a man adapt to new things and new places without losing a part of himself? (Munif, *Mudun al-milḥ* 156; *Cities of Salt* 134)

In drawing on the Arabic literary heritage, Munif is, in fact, engaged in a larger project, namely trying to rescue part of his very identity. Only through its local character, he asserts, can the Arabic novel attain international significance.

كلما ازدادت روايتنا محلية كلما أصبحت عالمية، بمعنى آخر كلما كانت أقرب إلى الصدق في تصوير الجو المحلي، وكلما كانت أعمق في حياة الناس حتى لو كانوا مجموعة صغيرة كلما أصبحت أقرب إلى العالمية.

> The more our novel is local, the more it becomes world-class. In other words, the closer it comes to sincerity in portraying the local atmosphere and the deeper it goes into people's life, even if they are only a small group, the more it approaches being world-class. (qtd. in ʿĀbidīn 199)

Munif's concern with the Arabic novel's local character has much in common with the Baghdad Group for Modern Art's call to produce art of local identity yet international significance. It brings Jabra and Munif, the militant and the dreamer, together in their search for new ways of expression, pushing the borders of the very form of the novel to new horizons.

In its transcendental homelessness, the novel as a form granted homecoming to Jabra and Munif. Their novels, however, brake away from the melancholic longing for a lost homeland as described by Lukács; rather, in the Bakhtinian sense of homelessness they show a reckoning with exile as a condition of loss yet intellectual freedom and creativity, no matter how much the exile stands accused.[10] Challenging the given order of things, Walid Masoud in Jabra's novel and Miteb al-Hathal in Munif's novel are true if absent heroes, larger-than-life images of unrealized potential—and as such they carry the promise of a better world in line with Bakhtin's optimistic reading of the form of the novel as unravelling seemingly stable systems of power by means of heteroglossia, the diversification and fragmentation of speech types and voices in the novel whose hybrid nature stands in opposition to authoritative discourse (Bakhtin 37 and 342–43). Read in this light, Jabra's and Munif's novels undo existing power relations in content and form, offering visions of hope through their larger-than-life heroes. While their heroes' traces are lost in a no-man's land in Jabra's novel and in the vast deserts of the Arabian Peninsula in Munif's, a multitude of narrative voices come to the fore, drawing a powerful if fragmentary picture of their respective societies.

Conclusion

With *In Search of Walid Masoud* Jabra embraced ideas of political commitment and the revolutionary context of his time, in particular the Palestinian resistance, coming close to Munif's much more pronounced political stance and the rebel Munif envisioned with Miteb al-Hathal in *Cities of Salt*. In opting against any sense of ending and homecoming, leaving the outcome of his novel and its protagonist's fate open, Jabra, at the same time, held on to his belief that change can only take place in and through cultural production. Coming from political activism, Munif met Jabra in this belief with his insistence on leaving traces. In contrast to the great Abbasid poet al-Mutanabbi (al-Mutanabbī), who placed the pen and the sword on equal grounds into one hemistich, Jabra and Munif were left with only the pen to write against power. In the end, not the pen but the sword held out misleading promises, as Jabra implies when referring to the so-called Tammuz-poets (*al-shuʿarāʾ al-tammūziyyūn*) as "voices crying in a wide intellectual wilderness" (*Al-nār wa-l-jawhar* 157), reversing Abu Tammam's (Abū Tammām) often quoted saying that the word cannot stand up to the sword due to its false promises. It was in fiction, and more precisely in the form of the novel, that Jabra and Munif placed their hopes for a better world. In "The Rebels, the

Committed, and the Others," Jabra describes the rebel as "an undigested element" in society whose "concern remains with individual dignity and freedom whenever threatened, regardless of the source of such a threat" (196). His marginality is at the basis of Walid Masoud's and Miteb al-Hathal's disappearances in Jabra's and Munif's novels. There is no place left for rebellion, neither in the bourgeois society of Baghdad, faced with growing political authoritarianism, nor in the new societies of the Arabian Gulf, built on petrodollars. In the form of the novel, however, rebellion is possible; the larger-than-life images of Walid Masoud and Miteb al-Hathal do hold a promise.

Commitment in Jabra's and Munif's novels is more closely tied to changes in art, especially the advance of the novel in the second half of the twentieth century, rather than to a programmatic political vision. Commitment is expressed through artistic innovation. There is a close relation between the act of creation and an act of resistance, as Gilles Deleuze argues in his famous essay "What is the Creative Act?" (328). Between aesthetic concerns and the causes of man, Jabra's and Munif's novels offer a poetics of leaving traces, of recording and documenting our lives for future generations while opening up to alternative, other worlds. Both Walid Masoud and Miteb al-Hathal are compelling characters because of the potential they embody to take up political action and armed struggle, at a time when grand narratives of revolution and resistance figured prominently—but also, and possibly more importantly, because of the change in artistic practice that made them possible to begin with, such as the narration's increased fragmentation through which their larger-than-life images take shape against the background of their absence. Walid Masoud stands out here because he chose to record his life on tape, heading off into an unknown future, embarking for another world, while his intellectual friends back home—much like Jabra in his "second well" in Baghdad—still struggle with the written word to reconstruct, if in fragmentary and contradictory ways, the story of his life, and by extension the stories of their own lives. With this shift from verbal expression to audio-visual media, which the novel incorporates as "a meeting point of the creative arts known to man since earliest times," Jabra might have gone way beyond the historical context of his time, opening up to other worlds—different from this world in political and artistic terms.

Leaving behind the sixties generation of intellectuals and their debates about commitment in coffeehouses and literary journals alike, he points to the idea of documentation, as it came to the fore only with the so-called documentary turn in artistic practices of the nineties generation.[11] I would like to end with an example of the documentary turn in artistic practices, in which a tape also figures prominently: Walid Sadek's 1997 installation *Ākhir ayyām al-ṣayfiyya* (*Last Days of Summer*). Here, we have an actual tape, a cassette box, which features a photograph of Sadek and his younger brother as children dressed in militia clothes and carrying guns, Sadek a real one and his brother a toy. The photo was shot during the early years of the Lebanese civil war, maybe a couple of years before Jabra's novel was published. The tape is empty but its booklet contains the lyrics of well-known songs by the Lebanese musical diva Fairuz (Fayrūz), modified by Christian militia at the time of the 1976 siege and massacre of Tel al-Zaatar (Tal al-Zaʿtar) refugee camp in Beirut to defame their political adversaries, the fedayeen, and more generally the Palestinians. As we look at Sadek's tape, the lyrics modified by the Christian militia resume in our ears, no matter how much we might have tried to erase them from memory. Whereas Jabra used words to evoke the audio-visual medium of the tape to incorporate it into his novel, in Sadek's installation the material object of the tape stands as a reminder of words, engendering manifold narratives in our minds.[12]

Notes

1   If not otherwise indicated all translations from Arabic are my own.

2   A number of ideas put forward in this article can be found in my book *Reading across Modern Arabic Literature and Art*. Reichert: Wiesbaden, 2012. Print; examining Jabra's and Munif's views on the complex relationship of aesthetics and politics in comparative perspective, however, further accentuates their takes on commitment.

3   This idea is further elaborated in Jabra's article "Modern Arabic Literature and the West," as well as in Elias Khoury's interview with Jabra "Ḥiwār maʿa Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā" (Khūrī 192).

4   The passage is also quoted in Zeina G. Halabi's contribution to this volume, "The Day the Wandering Dreamer Became a Fidaʾi: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and the Fashioning of Political Commitment," in which she employs Munif's description of Jabra as dreamer to trace the transformation of the Palestinian intellectual to resistance fighter in *In Search of Walid Masoud*.

5   An exception is his 1989 interview available on YouTube praising Saddam Hussein. "Jabra Ibrahim Jabra Praises Saddam Hussein." Interview by Jeff Harmon. *YouTube*. 30 July 2010. Web. 30 Apr. 2015. It has to be pointed out that Jabra, who was on a state scholarship and continued his life in Baghdad, did not usually give such interviews. Rather than criticizing the interviewee, we might want to criticize the American interviewer Jeff Harmon instead. In the end, Jabra was neither a man of politics and state, nor a man of social, economic, or military reform but a man of literature and art, as Issa J. Boullata (ʿĪsā Bullāṭa) points out in *Nāfidha ʿalā al-ḥadātha: Dirāsāt fī adab Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā*. Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2002. 51. Print. See also Boullata, Issa J. "Living with the Tigress and the Muses: An Essay on Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā." *World Literature Today* 75.2 (2001): 214–23. Print.

6   See Klemm, Verena. "Different Notions of Commitment (*Iltizām*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq." *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 3.1 (2000): 54. Print. See also her longer study *Literarisches Engagement im arabischen Nahen Osten: Konzepte und Debatten*. Würzburg: Ergon, 1998. Print. Mitteilungen zur Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der islamischen Welt 3.

7   He wrote a second autobiography about his first years in Baghdad, when he met his wife, entitled *Shāriʿ al-amīrāt: Fuṣūl min sīra dhātiyya*. Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1994. Print.

8   The slogan was coined by Israel Zangwill, a devoted supporter of Theodor Herzl, in "The Return to Palestine." *New Liberal Review* 2 (Dec. 1901): 627. Print. It did not claim that Palestine was uninhabited. The Zionist movement was well aware of the sociopolitical reality in Palestine. But it linked the political to a religious discourse, as Albert Hourani points out in "The Decline of the West in the Middle East II." *International Affairs* 29.2 (1953): 158–60. Print.

9   Jabra explicitly refers to the Palestinian literature of resistance in "Modern Arabic Literature and the West" (87).

10 On the different notions of homelessness in Lukács and Bakhtin, see Neubauer, John. "Bakhtin versus Lukács: Inscriptions of Homelessness in Theories of the Novel." *Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives II*. Spec. issue of *Poetics Today* 17.4 (1996): 531–46. Print.

11 The documentary turn has been described mainly in regard to Lebanese post-civil war artists. See especially Cotter, Suzanne. "The Documentary Turn: Surpassing Tradition in the Work of Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari." *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*. Ed. Paul Sloman. London: Black Dog, 2009. 50–1. Print. Artistic practices by artists, such as Khalil Rabah in Palestine, or Hanaa Malallah, Sadik Kweish, and Kareem Risan in Iraq, however, suggest that it is a larger trend in the region. On the generation of the 1990s in Iraq, see my article "Contemporary Book Art in the Middle East: The Book as Document in Iraq." *Art History* 35.4 (2012): 816–39. Print.

12 I have discussed Sadek's installation briefly in my article "Art and Political Dissent in Postwar Lebanon: Walid Sadek's *Fi ananni akbar min Bikasu* (*Bigger Than Picasso*)." *IJMES* 45 (2013): 535–60. Print.

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The Day the Wandering Dreamer Became a Fida'i: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and the Fashioning of Political Commitment

Zeina G. Halabi

> Events have become so momentous that all our faculties have shriveled up trying cope with them. The disasters we've suffered can't be dealt with in verbal form; all the words have been pulverized.
> (Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Walid Masoud* 74)

Introduction

In April 2010, a car explosion in Princesses Street near the Egyptian embassy in Baghdad killed seventeen people. It also destroyed a deserted two-story house and all that it contained. In the rubble, there were plays by Anton Chekhov, novels by Ghassan Kanafani (Ghassān Kanafānī), translations of Shakespeare and Faulkner, paintings by the Iraqi Shaker Hasan (Shākir Ḥasan), sculptures by Muhammad Ghani Hikmat (Muḥammad Ghanī Ḥikmat), countless classical music records, and a cornerstone brought from the debris of a home in Palestine (Shadid). Destroyed but not lifeless, the house spoke of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's (Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, 1920–1994) intellectual sophistication and trajectory from Palestine to his Iraqi exile. Originally from Bethlehem, Jabra pursued higher education in England, and eventually settled in Baghdad where, starting in the 1950s, he was at the center of the Arab and particularly Iraqi cultural vanguard. A novelist, poet, artist, critic, and translator, Jabra was, in the words of Issa Boullata "a true Renaissance man (who) has been rightly considered a strong force for modernism in the Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century" (215).

Jabra saw in the exilic intellectual's liminality an advantage that reinforced his critical sensibilities and enabled him to lead the desired leap into the modern. In his numerous essays, novels, and poems Jabra engaged the themes of loss and displacement and represented exile, despite its tragic consequences, as the desired ethical position of an entire generation of Arab intellectuals, whether displaced or at home. Jabra's literary discourse significantly drew on the archetype of the Palestinian intellectual, an exilic modern subject in a modernizing yet troubled Arab world. Specifically, Jabra's characters in *Al-safīna* (1970; *The Ship*, 1985), *Al-baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* (1978; *In Search for Walid Masoud*, 2000), and *Yawmiyyāt sarāb ʿaffān* (1992; *The Journals of Sarab Affan*, 2007) are exilic Palestinian intellectuals navigating an Arab world enchanted by the promises of modernity yet shackled by consecutive political setbacks.

Jabra's oeuvre poses a set of critical questions: Why did Arabs lose Palestine in 1948? Why were they defeated again in 1967? And what exactly is the responsibility of the Palestinian exilic intellectuals toward Arab societies as they embrace modernization? Jabra searched for answers to the first question in Arab culture, specifically in the question of modernity and tradition. He observed that the *nakba* was symptomatic of the multifaceted Arab defeat that was not only political and military, but also cultural and epistemological. If Ar-

abs had lost Palestine, it was because they were "cheated and betrayed by a thousand years of decay" ("The Palestinian Exile" 82). Arabs, he thought, "had confronted a ruthless modern force with an outmoded tradition" (ibid.). Put differently, the Arabs' retrograde political, cultural, and scientific institutions were accountable for the loss. Therefore, the problem was clear, and so was the solution: Arabs had to embrace modernity by inventing "a new way of looking at things. A new way of saying things. A new of way of approaching and portraying man and the world" (ibid.). Jabra believed that it was the responsibility of Palestinian exiles to lead the way.

By the mid-1960s, the postcolonial hopes of modernization and emancipation were gradually thwarted by the militarization of regimes in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. The *naksa* in 1967 was thus the last installment of a series of consecutive political defeats that transformed the ways in which Arab authors conceived of themselves as agents of change. In what ways could these internal setbacks be explained? And what were the implications of these successive losses on the role of the Arab writer? Jabra conducted another project of introspection, which this time was more inward and personal. He probed, not the state of archaic Arab traditions, but his understanding of aesthetics and politics. Jabra questioned the viability of his word-centered episteme and saw in his fascination with humanism, modernism, and aesthetics the cause for the renewed experience of defeat that his writings conveyed. In *In Search of Walid Masoud*, I suggest, Jabra articulates his growing ambivalence toward his own literary discourse and reconfigures the role of the politically committed intellectual.

In order to gauge the complexity of Jabra's understanding of political commitment (*iltizām*), one needs to trace the multiple meanings of the concept in the context of the shifting ideological landscape of the Arab world from the 1920s to the 1970s. The commitment to a politically-oriented literature that engages the social and political realities of its time, had not been foreign to Jabra. It had been at the forefront of critical debates in Egypt and the Levant with the emergence of the nationalist anti-colonial cultural vanguard since the 1920s. The politically-driven writers of the time were predominantly nationalist intellectuals addressing the budding national community as they construed an anti-colonial rhetoric. Their poetry, Jabra notes, was "oratorical, militant, and of an instantaneous effect" ("The Rebels" 191).

The understanding of political commitment that we know today was popularized in the 1950s. Verena Klemm notes that *iltizām*[1] became the governing literary ethos a few years following the 1948 publication of Sartre's *What is Literature?* (51–52). Translated and debated on the pages of the Lebanese literary journal *al-Ādāb*, Sartre's[2] concept of *littérature engagée* provided the philosophical framework that positioned literature at the intersection of existentialism and emancipation ideologies.[3] But the variant of *iltizām* that *al-Ādāb* promoted was continuously in dialogue with proponents of social realism who had been dissatisfied with the individualistic sensibility of existentialism.[4] The *naksa* in 1967 radicalized the scope of criticism and engendered a literary and critical discourse that promoted Palestinian armed struggle against Israeli occupation, a brand of *iltizām* that Ghassan Kanafani (Ghassān Kanafānī) had coined 'resistance literature' (*adab al-muqāwama*) in his seminal book *Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine 1948–1966* (1966). It is in the context of this shifting understanding of political commitment—from anti-colonial nationalist rhetoric, to social realism, and ultimately resistance literature—that Jabra's *Walid Masoud* appeared.

The title character Walid Masoud is Jabra's mirror image: an established Palestinian exilic intellectual who left Palestine in 1947 and later became a catalyst for change and innovation in Baghdad. Following the 1967 war, Walid witnessed the limits of the discursive sepa-

ration between aesthetics and politics. Unlike Jabra, who remained in Baghdad until his death in 1994, Walid disappeared a few years after the 1967 war amidst rumors that he had joined the Palestinian resistance in a refugee camp in Beirut. As such, the "mystique" of the Palestinian intellectual wandering in exile gave way to the Palestinian freedom fighter rooted in the refugee camp. As he reconstructs the disappearance of Walid Masoud, Jabra laments his alter ego and his own intellectual project that could not resist the political and epistemic aftershocks of the 1967 defeat. Furthermore, the novel reveals Jabra's distinct understanding of political commitment in dialogue with—but also in opposition to—the multiple conceptions of *iltizām* that his peers had fostered. In *Walid Masoud*, Jabra articulates a more idiosyncratic and nuanced conception of political commitment. By closely reading the discursive turn that the novel stages, I hope to show how Jabra challenges monolithic understandings of *iltizām* and reveals the concept's dynamic, adaptive, and pluralistic nature. The significance of Jabra's fashioning of *iltizām* in *Walid Masoud* becomes clear only when compared to his pre-1967 understanding of the role of the exilic Palestinian intellectual.

The Wanderers

In a seminal autobiographical essay, "The Palestinian Exile as Writer" (1979), Jabra reminisces on his displacement from Bethlehem, his exasperating journey through Damascus, Amman and Beirut, and his new life in Baghdad.[5] Jabra remembers his indignation in 1948 when an Iraqi customs officer addressed him as a Palestinian refugee: "I was not a refugee, and I was proud as hell" (77). Jabra's distinction between refugees and intellectuals, or asylum seekers and exiles, is central to his conception of the exiled Palestinian. He understands the paradox of the Palestinian exile as simultaneously tragic and empowering. The tragedy of the *nakba* that caused the dispersal of an entire people and the loss of historical Palestine was due to the inability of Arab traditions to withstand the thrust of modern colonizing forces. But that same tragedy was empowering because it scattered educated Palestinians all over the Arab world and transformed them into a leavening force in their new host societies (85).

The liminal state of being neither in Palestine nor entirely in Iraq fosters the exilic Palestinians' mobility, both physical and intellectual. By means of their deracination, exilic intellectuals become permanent inhabitants of the border, a liminal space between political and intellectual identifications. Jabra's description of this state of non-belonging caused by literal and metaphoric homelessness evokes Edward Said's concept of "secular criticism," a state of intellectual displacement that paradoxically enables critical and creative power. As secular critics, Said notes, exilic intellectuals embrace a paradigm that is "life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interest of human freedom" (29). Exploring the genealogy of exile in the Euro-American tradition, particularly in the representations of European intellectuals such as Adorno and Auerbach, Caren Kaplan builds on the Saidian archetype of the secular critic and argues that contemporary conceptions of exile draw on the necessary intertwinement of three constructs: exile, intellectuals, and modernity. As such, in its celebration of singularity, solitude, and alienation, the concept of exile has defined modernist sensibilities and has been considered both the precursor and the outcome of a distinctively modern subject position (Kaplan 50). It is within this conceptual framework that Jabra understood the role of Palestinian exiles in the Arab world.

Jabra identifies himself and his educated peers, not as refugees in need of assistance, but as an emerging community of educated mobile intellectuals, navigating smoothly across po-

litical and ideological borders. They are "wanderers" ("The Palestinian Exile" 77),[6] "knowl-
edge peddlers" (ibid.), exchanging knowledge for survival, all at the service of their host so-
cieties. Exile also signifies an elevated cultural capital, the holders of which are in command
of their fate and a force of change in the lives of others. Jabra sees his Palestinian peers as a
"leavening force for a meaningful future for Arabs everywhere" (85). Palestinians

> […] were suddenly everywhere: writing, teaching, talking, doing things, influencing a whole Arab
> society in most unexpected ways. They were coping with their sense of loss, turning their exile
> into a force, creating thereby a mystique of being Palestinian. (84)

Such was the Palestinians' magic: their unmatched ability to transform the tragedy of dis-
possession into a mythical power of change that enabled Arab modernity. Jabra explains the
bond that tied Palestinian exiles to the wider Arab world:

> Right from the start Palestinians had declared that their fate and the fate of the Arab nation were
> interlocked, were in fact one. Palestinians could not fail, except by the failure of the whole Arab
> nation. But they also knew that so much depended on themselves: on their efficacy as a leavening
> force for a meaningful future for Arabs everywhere. (85)

By virtue of their education and displacement, which accelerated their dissociation from pa-
rochial identities, Palestinian intellectuals emerge as archetypical modern and humanist
subjects. For Jabra, the exilic intellectuals' border position and critical abilities are not only
the precursors, but also the precondition for a modern and critical outlook on the world. In
other words, only Palestinian intellectuals, who are endowed with intellectual liminality and
critical sensibilities, are capable of ushering Arab societies into modernity.

By means of their physical and intellectual displacement and liminality, Jabra maintains,
exilic intellectuals are catalysts for change, fully committed to the causes of their age. Their
transnational identity structure and distance from centers of power facilitates their mission.
But it is precisely the intellectuals' lack of rootedness that points to their limitations. Kaplan
argues that the defining yet problematic property of exile, as it appears in modernist literary
traditions, is its favoring of theoretical constructs at the expense of its involvement in the
material world. She notes that "the modernist trope of exile works to remove itself from any
political or historically specific instances in order to generate aesthetic categories and ahis-
torical values" (28). Jabra's notion of the politically-driven (Palestinian) intellectual en-
folded tensions specifically in the intellectual's word-centered epistemic model and its bi-
nary structure (theory and praxis; aesthetics and politics; intellectuals and refugees).
Whereas Jabra's conception of the role of the intellectual, as I show below, was celebrated,
it was also critiqued for its ahistorical and apolitical undertones, particularly in the wake of
critical historical junctures such as the 1967 war.

The Dreamers

When Jabra settled in Iraq in 1948, the country was laying the ground for the two decisive
decades that transformed the Iraqi political and cultural scenes. The Iraqi *udabāʾ* (men of
letters) and artists, of which Jabra was the main figure, were searching for alternative
modes of expression and experimenting with modernist tropes in art and literature in order
to read the world anew. Poets of the New Verse Movement[7] sought to modernize the classi-
cal Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*) by exploring new themes, imageries, and unconventional vocabu-
lary.[8] Despite its pioneering vision, the literary discourse of Jabra's generation remained

elitist insofar as it pertained to art and literature alone (ʿAzzāwī 11). Although they had a clear modernizing project, the *udabāʾ* were far from espousing an explicit ideological discourse in which to frame it. In the aftermath of the two consecutive coups that ultimately led to the establishment of a violent and authoritarian Baath regime, Iraqi intellectuals were gradually polarized and the majority of the *udabāʾ*, including Jabra, withdrew further from the Iraqi political scene (13).

Jabra's role in the vibrant Iraqi culture confounded his admirers. Although critics and a young generation of militants were moved by the depth of his innovation, they were nevertheless astounded by his escapism regarding the critical Arab political juncture. For instance, the novelist ʿAbd al-Rahman Munif (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf), Jabra's longtime friend, remembers: "The main concepts that motivated Jabra were innovation, critical rebellion, and his commitment to contemporary issues. Jabra achieved it all through knowledge and creativity" (*Lawʿat al-ghiyāb* 118).[9] Munif identifies his Palestinian friend as "one of the most prominent Arab intellectuals since the 1950s," who "contributed to the genesis of Iraqi culture [*takwīn al-thaqāfa*]" and to laying "Iraq's cultural foundations [*al-taʾsīs al-thaqāfī*] by means of his translations, lectures, and theories on modern poetry" (*Al-qalaq* 74). Here, Munif does not situate Jabra within the Iraqi cultural field, but historicizes Iraqi culture as a subnarrative in Jabra's long trajectory. Furthermore, Munif does not shy away from placing Jabra on the level of the divine as he attributes to him the power of cultural genesis (*takwīn al-thaqāfa*), or the capacity to conceive the Iraqi cultural scene and lay its foundation. Munif believes that the modernization of the Iraqi cultural scene would have been unimaginable without Jabra's contributions and leadership. In this sense, Munif's depiction of Jabra is aligned with Jabra's own vision of the exilic Palestinian, himself included, as a catalyst for change. But underneath Munif's admiration of Jabra, one can read the beginning of a generational dissent:

> It was common for many, myself included, to cross al-Rashid Street daily and stand before Barāziliyya café in order to observe, and maybe hear, those dreamers [*al-ḥalimūn*], who wanted to transform not only Iraq, but the entire world. There were (Badr Shakir) al-Sayyab, (ʿAbd al-Wahhab) al-Bayati, Jawad Salim, Muhyi al-Din Ismaʿil, Qazim Jawad, (Buland) al-Haydari, Husayn Mardan, … and in their midst was Jabra! […] We used to feel sorry for them for being dreamers, as opposed to us militants [*al-siyāsiyyūn*] who carried alone the burden of change and were the only ones qualified for this mission! Nevertheless, we used to share with our peers some of what we had heard from these artists and men of letters [*adabātiyya*] about their desire to change the world! (*Lawʿat al-ghiyāb* 111)

Central to Munif's recollection of Jabra and his generation is the allegory of the dreamers. Munif refers to the intellectuals he used to admire as *ḥalimūn*, the quixotic characters that transform the Baraziliyya café—one of the most vibrant Baghdadi intellectual venues[10]—into a space where dreams, fantasies, and idealism were continuously performed, yet unrealized. Munif's ambivalence appears in his reference to the *udabāʾ* as *adabātiyya* (colloquial for 'practitioners of *adab*'), which reveals a combination of deference and cynicism toward Jabra's generation of *udabāʾ*. Whereas Munif recognizes the importance of these intellectuals, he nevertheless associates them with bygone times when the political and the aesthetic were in fact distinct. Central to Munif's ambivalence towards Jabra is a different understanding of the role of the novel. As Sonja Mejcher-Atassi argues in her contribution to this volume, although both writers conceived of the novel as catalyst for change, Jabra foregrounded the aesthetic qualities of the novel and Munif underscored its material, documentary qualities.

Halim Barakat (Ḥalīm Barakāt) voices a similar concern about the centrality of the word in Jabra's oeuvre. He noted that before *Walid Masoud*, Jabra's novels had been "novels of non-confrontation" (*The Arab World* 221) as they had avoided engaging the political struggles that marked Jabra's times. Later he adds,

> Jabra Ibrahim Jabra discovered that the Arab had been subject to all sorts of pressures, restraints, and oppression, until he became crushed and shackled by his reality. He therefore sought to free himself from his reality through fantasy, which has grown gigantic wings; fantasy that he has unleashed while remaining in place. Is this the tragedy of the contemporary Arab, I wonder? ("Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā" 111)

If more accusatory than Munif, Barakat understands Jabra's humanist sensibilities as fantasy, an escapist intellectual venture that fails to attend to the demands of the Arabs. Such was the predicament of Jabra and his generation: They were cultural innovators, idealists, and dreamers, whose modernizing power was undisputed; but they were also *adabātiyya*, not explicitly twining the literary to the political in a context of consecutive military coups and successive Arab political and military setbacks. In their recollections of Jabra, both Munif and Barakat expose the conceptual fault lines of Jabra's early understanding of the role of the writer, a state that favors word over praxis. The dichotomy of dreamer/militant, to which Munif and Barakat point, will mature in the 1960s and explode following the 1967 defeat. As *Walid Masoud* reveals, Jabra captures the growing ambivalence toward his generation and channels its own anxieties as its role began to change. The novel also stages Jabra's disillusionment with his word-centered episteme, reflected in the multiple narratives surrounding the disappearance of the title character Walid Masoud.

The Disappearance of the Intellectual

Rebecca Carol Johnson writes that *Walid Masoud* is about a search that is both a process (*baḥth* as investigation) and an outcome (*baḥth* as research) (178). It "brings into focus," she adds, "both the product of intellectual inquiry and its process, as it takes as its object knowledge, the intellectual, and the very project of intellectual production itself" (ibid.). The search is revealed in a polyphonic, intertextual, and disconnected narrative, in which the reader witnesses the disillusionment of a group of Iraqi intellectuals and their shared guilt facing the tragic disappearance of their friend Walid Masoud in 1970s Baghdad. The novel portrays 1950s and 1960s Baghdad at the height of modernist trends in literature, architecture, and the arts. It is the city where western, particularly Anglophone literature and philosophy, are translated and debated by Walid's Iraqi friends, all members of a rising class of scholars, doctors, journalists, financiers, artists, and bureaucrats who regularly challenge traditional values and celebrate their individualism. It is a circle of bourgeois intellectuals, all well-versed in the western humanist tradition and driven by the need to build and perform a modern Arab subjectivity. In their conversations and incessant debates, they reflect on the role of the intellectual in modern Arab societies, the importance of promoting vanguard art, and the aesthetic and ethical functions of modern poetic trends.

Walid's car is discovered on the border road that links the Iraqi and Syrian customs stations. A tape is found in the abandoned car; on it Walid had recorded what seems like his last words: a stream of consciousness narrative depicting disconnected memories from his childhood in Palestine, his activities in the Palestinian resistance against the British mandate, and his Iraqi exile. Puzzled by the content of the tape, Dr. Jawad and his friend Amir

invite Walid's closest friends to make sense of their disconcerting discovery. Together they listen to his voice as he reflects on his relationships with lovers, friends, and rivals. Walid also mourns in this tape his teenage son Marwan, a Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) fida'i who was killed in a military operation in the Galilee. Right before his disappearance, Walid had been outspoken against the complaisance of Arab regimes with the occupation of Palestine, which leads his friend Jawad to believe that he was assassinated. Another friend, the psychiatrist Tariq, who treats Walid's female lovers, believes that Walid had been suffering from an acute bipolar disorder that may have driven him to commit suicide. However, Walid's lover Wisal, who is familiar with his latest underground political activities, has evidence, undisclosed to the readers, that Walid neither killed himself nor was killed. She claims, that Walid had, in fact, staged his disappearance from Baghdad and joined the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. In the absence of definitive answers, Walid's friends conduct an internal search for all the reasons, personal and political, which may be behind his disappearance. The conflicting narratives of Walid's disappearance, as Samira Aghacy argues, "provide[] a sense of deferred meaning in that each attempt to speak of him is not seen as the ultimate truth but, rather, of yet another in a series of multifarious discourses" (60).

As an exilic intellectual, Walid is a Saidian secular critic, a liminal subject drawing on his mastery of the literary and philosophical word to induce change. Walid's friends remember him as the archetypical Renaissance man: a charismatic and wealthy Palestinian financier with an exquisite and eclectic cultural capital that materializes in his fine taste for Baroque music, contemporary English poetry, and modern Iraqi art. His confidant Ibrahim declares that Walid's mission was to "foster the new spirit based on knowledge, freedom, love, and a revolt against looking back—all this was a means of achieving the complete Arab revolution" (Jabra, *Walid Masoud* 244).[11] In addition to a collection of short stories as well as a first volume of an autobiography—incidentally bearing the same title as Jabra's autobiography[12]—Walid's friends speak of his groundbreaking philosophical treatise entitled "Man and Civilization" ("Al-insān wa-l-ḥaḍāra"), in which he probes the essence of humanity, progress, and civilization (57). Walid was driven by the need to build a "new spirit," a budding Arab subjectivity that stems from the rejection of backward traditional and metaphysical structures that impede the progress of Arabs toward modernity. In this sense, Walid was a man of his time, channeling the concerns of Arab thinkers and their debates on questions of authenticity, innovation, and the delicate equilibrium that constitutes the modern.

Both Jabra and Walid were depicted as Renaissance figures and both espoused a humanist and modernist conception of the role of the writer. As Palestinian exiles in Baghdad, they were both celebrated as catalysts for change. Ibrahim situates Walid as "one of those exiles" who "shake the Arab world" (244), establishing a causal relationship between the generation of Palestinian exilic intellectuals and Arab cultural innovation. Furthermore, like Munif, who situated Jabra at the core of the Iraqi cultural bloom of the 1950s, Ibrahim believes that:

> Walid was the kind of Palestinian who rejected, pioneered, built, and united (if my [Iraqi] people can ever be united); he was a scholar, architect, technocrat, rebuilder, and violent goader of the Arab conscience. […] Where you find outstanding achievement in science, finance, ideas, literature, or innovation, you'll come across that exile Palestinian: he'll be doing things, urging, theorizing, and achieving everything that's different. Wherever there's anything worthwhile, involving self-sacrifice, you'll find the Palestinian. (ibid.)

When Munif remembers Jabra, as I have shown earlier, he associates him with Genesis (*al-takwīn*), or the moment of conception of the modern Iraqi cultural scene. Similarly, when

Ibrahim remembers Walid, he resorts to a semantic field that equally evokes creation and genesis. He imagines Walid as an "architect," a "rebuilder," a "violent goader," and a source of "innovation" and "achievement." Ibrahim also portrays Walid, as well as all exilic Palestinians, as messianic figures who sacrifice themselves for the salvation of all Arabs. Furthermore, Walid's divine qualities become visible in his portrait as a forger of "Arab conscience," or a man who has given Arabs a sense of self by means of his writings. Walid, however, was not the only holder of power; he was indeed a "kind of Palestinian," or a member of a generation of exilic Palestinians possessing the power of genesis. But both Jabra and Walid experienced the limits of this discourse following the political turmoil of Iraq in the 1960s and the defeat of the *naksa* in 1967. Pondering on the collective despair surrounding him, Walid probes, for the last time, his role as an intellectual in exile:

> Events have become so momentous that all our faculties have shriveled up [*qazzamat*] trying to cope with them. The disasters [*fawājiʿunā*] we've suffered can't be dealt with in verbal form; all the words have been pulverized. (274)

Walid's modern Arab subject that he had conceptually forged as a sublime figure driven by humanist and ethical sensibilities, was suddenly dwarfed (*qazzam*), humiliated, and ridiculed. In the wake of the *naksa*, bereavements (*fawājiʿ*)—a term evoking disaster, the loss of loved ones, and insurmountable pain—have become a collective and unspeakable loss, so immense that it renders those driven by the power of the word irrelevant. Walid's disappearance in 1971, a few months after the death of his son Marwan, differs from Jabra's own exilic narrative. Whereas Jabra withstood Saddam's repressive regime and remained in Baghdad until his death in 1994, his mirror image disappears, reportedly to join the Palestinian resistance in Beirut. "Similar to a black hole in which the novel's protagonist disappears, together with the hopes and dreams attached to the role of the intellectual in the Arab world," as Mejcher-Atassi astutely observes in her contribution, "the border crossing, and more specifically the no-man's land between the borders, is the very opposite of the exile's idealized homeland." As such, in the context of ideological fissures and intellectual self-doubt, where did Walid go when he vanished? In Johnson's succinct words, it is unclear whether Walid dropped "*out* of the world or *into* it" (186; my emphasis). In other words, what was more real, more urgent, and more consequential? Was it the world of ideals that the dreamers (*ḥālimūn*) of Baghdad had inhabited or the world of militants, refugees, and freedom fighters into which the *naksa* had propelled Walid?

The Emergence of the Fidaʾi

Walid Masoud appeared in 1978, at the critical historical juncture that saw the radicalization of Arab thought and poetics. The rapid defeat of Arab forces in 1967 as well as the militarization and bureaucratization of regimes in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq exposed the revolutionary dearth of postcolonial Arab regimes. The neutralization of the rhetoric of emancipation created an ideological void that led thinkers to expand their critical scope further by drawing on the radical and radicalizing force of the Palestinian cause. As such, Marxist and nationalist thinkers, who had been disenchanted with state-controlled agendas of emancipation, tied the Palestinian cause and armed struggle to their ideological agendas.[13] They saw in the Palestinian resistance in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan a true revolutionary force of change that would ultimately trickle down to their respective states and societies. As they theorized and romanticized Palestinian armed struggle, Arab thinkers and novelists created a

"mystique"—to retrieve Jabra's own term—but this time of the figure of the fida'i.[14] The fida'i emerged at this point as the more radical, more pragmatic, and less tainted voice of change coming from the refugee camps. Anouar Abdel-Malek describes this hopeful moment:

> Everything indicated despair. And then, from the heart of the night, there came a gleam of hope. The people of the tents, the anonymous men and women, children and old people of Palestine embarked upon the only valid course open to a nation stripped of its homeland and faced with that ethnic, cultural and political racism which lies at the core of all imperialism. [...] The historical merit of the Palestinian resistance, led by Al-Fatah (founded by Yasser Arafat on 1 January 1964), is to have objectively shown the national movements of the Arab world that the time had come to replace the armory of criticism with the criticism of arms. (19)

The problem was thus in the "armory of criticism," the critical corpus that had become withdrawn from the imperatives of the times. As such, the "criticism of arms," or change induced by military force, became the Arab intellectual's only remaining option. The power of this statement lies in Abdel-Malek's ability to channel yet transcend Jabra. Retrieving Jabra's old mantra, that the fate of the Palestinian exiles and the Arab world were intertwined, Abdel-Malek draws not on the intellectual in exile, but on the militant refugee. Hence, in the aftermath of the 1967 watershed, the fida'i became the new Arab hero. But Abdel-Malek was not alone in projecting onto the fida'i the anxieties and aspirations of his times. The fida'i also captured the imagination of other Arabs, particularly Iraqi, intellectuals. ʿAzzāwī remembers that the Palestinian fida'i was romanticized in popular imagination because "Palestinian guerilla fighters were not part of an organized army led by generals, but were young men like us with different revolutionary ethics," and because they embodied the deep need to revolt against authority (190). He adds that his generation was hopeful that the fida'i (from the Arabic *f-d-y*), the freedom fighter, the redeemer, and the hero "will constitute the nucleus of a revolution that will change the Arab world in its entirety" (ibid.).

As the new Arab hero, the fida'i featured more and more in literature increasingly mobilized by the urgency and ideological valor of the Palestinian cause. The eminent Iraqi Muhammad Mahdi al-Jawahiri (Muḥammad Mahdī al-Jawāhirī) turned an elegy to a fallen Palestinian leader to a panegyric of the fida'i in "Al-fidāʾ wa-l-dam" (1968). In Syria, Nizar Qabbani (Nizār Qabbānī) wrote "Ifāda fī maḥkamat al-shiʿr" (1969), while the Palestinians Fadwa Tuqan (Fadwā Ṭūqān), Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh), Samih al-Qasim (Samīḥ al-Qāsim) among others, all saw in the salutary figure of the fida'i the hope of a renewed Palestinian and subsequently all-encompassing Arab revolution.[15] The fida'i also enraptured novelists, including Halim Barakat in *Days of Dust* (1969, Eng. 1974)*, Tawfiq Yusuf ʿAwwad (Tawfīq Yūsuf ʿAwwād) in *Death in Beirut* (1972, Eng. 1976) and more importantly, Jabra in his depiction of Walid Masoud and his son Marwan. Jabra's fida'i appears in *Walid Masoud* in the wake of the 1967 war and its ensuing deep political and epistemological crises. A few months before he vanished, Walid hints at this own exit:

> Speaking out is a completely foolish thing to do now, and convinces no one. No one even listens. It's like beating a drum among the deaf. The only courage that deserves to be translated into action is challenging death with raised fists and violence, thereby using death itself to trample down death, as in the death of a freedom fighter [fidāʾī], for example. (Jabra, *Walid Masoud* 4)

In both Jabra's and Walid's post-1967 world, the word of the Palestinian intellectual in exile is no longer heard, as listeners have become deafened by the cacophony of futile intellectual debates. Now considering the intellectual's critical agency of speaking truth to power

("speaking out") a foolish act, Walid dramatically declares the demise of both his own intellectual project as well as that of an entire generation of Palestinian exiles. Courage, power, and change are no longer the privilege of the intellectual; they have been passed on to the Palestinian fida'i.

Following the 1967 war, Walid traveled to Lebanon to see his teenage son Marwan, who had abandoned his prestigious boarding school and moved to a Palestinian refugee camp. Marwan's rebellion began when he rejected education, the cultural capital that distinguishes Palestinian exiles from refugees. In Marwan's new world, only refugees are the catalysts for revolutionary change. Marwan tells his father that the refugee camp was the "forgotten essence [*jawhar*] of life" (211), and thus a stark contrast to his exilic father's marginal, superficial, and ephemeral world of words. Marwan reminisces on his last conversation with his father, who had expressed his desire to join the Palestinian resistance:

> Operations involve lots of hard training beforehand; they need young men who can run hard, jump, go hungry, and put up with hardship. My father thinks he's still the young man he was twenty-five years ago. I told him if he wanted to commit suicide, to find some other way of doing it. He got very angry and we had a big fight; he swore at me and then went back to Baghdad. (213)

Although the binaries of refugee/exile and militant/intellectual persist, the power structure that governs them is now reversed. In a sober and assertive tone, Marwan inadvertently draws the portrait of the post-1967 Palestinian: The new revolutionary heroes are no longer the "knowledge peddlers," the "dreamers," and the "wanderers" who Jabra had eloquently represented and Walid had embodied; they are the militants emerging from the cultural and political margins of the refugee camps. Away from books, paintings, and class privileges, Marwan redefines masculinity in opposition to intellectual achievements and associates it with physical strength and endurance. Furthermore, unlike the intellectual defeated by the emasculating effects of exile and state persecution, the fida'i is portrayed as the embodiment of an idealized masculinity in comparison to the powerlessness of the exilic intellectual. Whereas Walid exhibits his masculinity discursively in male-centered intellectual circles and performatively with his lovers, Marwan's masculinity materializes on the level of practice.[16]

As such, the exilic wanderer that Walid had enacted becomes redundant and ceases to be useful to the Palestinian cause. Following the stormy meeting with his son, Walid realizes that both his paternal authority and intellectual legitimacy have been severely damaged and that not only is he ineffective as a Palestinian intellectual, but he is also incompetent as a father. Walid realizes that he is incapable of conceiving (*takwīn*) the promised transition to the all-encompassing revolution that he has professed. In this moment of self-doubt, the fida'i, the rebellious son of the Palestinian exilic intellectual, emerges from the Palestinian refugee camp and revives the concept of the refugee that Jabra had rejected earlier in his career. The power of the fida'i is thus commensurate with his ability to expose the discursive shortcomings of his Palestinian other, the exilic intellectual. As the Palestinian exilic intellectual subsides and the freedom fighter emerges, Jabra's understanding of *iltizām* materializes.

The Fashioning of *Iltizām*

The disappearance of the intellectual and the emergence of the fida'i in *Walid Masoud* reveal Jabra's nuanced conception not only of Palestinian displacement, but also of the role of the intellectual and literature of commitment. Jabra's critics and peers saw in the fida'i of *Walid Masoud* Jabra's long awaited embrace of revolutionary rhetoric. Whereas Barakat in-

terpreted *Walid Masoud* as a turning point in Jabra's trajectory, Munif was delighted that Jabra had "at last thrust (his) hand into the fire of revolution" (Elgibali and Harlow 54), for it signaled that he had finally realized the importance of twining the literary to the political imperatives of his time. The welcoming of Jabra to the prolific and established community of writers of *iltizām* implied two critical points: First, that Jabra had not been a politically committed writer; second that *Walid Masoud* easily fits the common understanding of *iltizām*. Points to which Jabra responded:

> And as for my having thrust my hand decisively into the fire of revolution, this may be due to our having become, one and all, a part of this fire, a fire which we want to continue burning in the Arab mind. […] And perhaps the highest aim to which a novelist can aspire is to ignite this flame—this revolutionary fire which becomes a kind of immanence in man's life. (ibid.)[17]

Although he does not deny the revolutionary undertones of *Walid Masoud* and the need for an alternative and more radical mode of engagement in literature, Jabra articulates an ambivalent position toward the so-called "revolutionary fire." By being "part of the fire," Jabra acknowledges the revolution's appeal, but also its power to set him and his generation of dreaming humanists on fire should they insist on remaining withdrawn from the demands of all that is urgent and real. In that sense, *Walid Masoud*, as Johnson argues, was indeed a novel of recognition, in which Jabra and his alter ego Walid identified and reconstructed the very moment they began experiencing the fallibility of their word-centered episteme. But Jabra's response is not without paradox. Commenting on the discursive rupture that critics saw in this novel, Jabra downplayed the importance of this shift and argued that *Walid Masoud* is, in fact, part of his continuous project of questioning and exploring revolutionary modes of writing:

> Even if a given work of art seems a turning point in the thought and style of its author, it is in fact (once its implications and recesses are probed) part of an ascending line, which can be traced back to his starting point. (55)

Despite Jabra's paradoxical interpretation of the significance of *Walid Masoud* and his ambivalence toward the concept of "revolution"—and by extension "commitment"—one could delineate his complex understanding of *iltizām*. In an essay entitled "The Rebels, the Committed, and the Others" (1980) Jabra returns to the pressing question: What is a committed writer? *Iltizām*, he notes, had become the means for those living in exile, in the sense of exclusion and marginality, to break their intellectual isolation and rejoin their social and political community, or what Jabra derisively calls "the tribe" (195). Hence, the "committed" writers are for Jabra neither the Saidian secular critics nor the militant fida'is. They are the sellouts, the apologists, the partisans, and the regime sympathizers who fail to continuously engage in self-reflexive modes of writing.[18] Jabra understands the "committed" writers in contrast to the "rebels" who entwine their sound critical sensibilities to an overarching concept of justice, creativity, and a disposition toward continuous opposition and dissent. Rebellion for Jabra entails "a moral and philosophical attitude adopted by an individual who aspires to effect a change in the lives of men as individuals" (ibid.). But this change cannot be organized, controlled, and dictated by a power or authority such as regimes, political parties, and institutions. It needs to continue to disrupt the hegemony of the dominant group. Thus, unlike the "committed" writer, the "rebel" for Jabra should preserve his individualism and stay "an undigested element: his concern remains with individual dignity and freedom whenever threatened, regardless of the source of such a threat" (196).

As such, the opposing poles of committed versus rebellious writers frame Jabra's conception of *iltizām*. If *iltizām*, as it gradually grew to be, strictly conveys a close adherence to Arab nationalism and social realism, then before *Walid Masoud* Jabra had been a self-proclaimed "wanderer" and as Munif and Barakat saw him, "a dreamer." However, if *iltizām* preserves the writer's individualism and favors social emancipation and a commitment to the causes of society, then Jabra was right in claiming that he had already been at the forefront of the politically committed writers the moment he became an exile. *Walid Masoud* reveals how Jabra's understanding of the role of the writer had come a long way: From his Palestinian exile, to his position in the Iraqi cultural vanguard, and all the way to the Lebanese refugee camps—Jabra's *iltizām* was thus an intricate affair that involved the various ways he saw himself as a writer, the ways his critics saw him, and the transformation of the concept of *iltizām*, following the ideological fashions of Jabra's time.

Notes

1 Taha Hussein (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) was the first to coin the expression *iltizām al-adab* in a review of the debate on *littérature engagée* that appeared in Jean–Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*. See Verena Klemm's discussion of the etymology of the term in Klemm, "Different Notions."

2 Yoav Di-Capua shows how Sartre's support of Israel in 1967 created a rift between him and Arab intellectuals, namely Raif Khuri (Raʾīf Khūrī) and the founder of *al-Ādāb* Suhayl Idris (Suhayl Idrīs), who reimagined *iltizām* in distancing himself from Sartre. See Di-Capua, Yoav. "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization." *The American Historical Review* 117.4 (2012): 1061–91. Print.

3 Verena Klemm discusses in detail the significance of *al-Ādāb* in the debate on political commitment (51–53).

4 Among them are Raif Khuri, Husayn Muruwwa (Ḥusayn Mrūwah), Salama Musa (Salāma Mūsā), Mahmoud Amin al-ʿAlim (Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim), Muhammand Mandur (Muḥammad Mandūr), and Rajaʾ al-Naqqash (Rajāʾ al-Naqqāsh) (Klemm 54).

5 Although Jabra's autobiographical essay appeared in 1979, or a year after the publication of *In Search of Walid Masoud,* its narrative time is set in the late 1940s and 1950s.

6 Jabra interestingly ties the notion of wandering to the Jewish experience of displacement: "Way back in 1952 I wrote about the Wandering Palestinian having replaced the Wandering Jew. A historical horror, which over the centuries had acquired the force of a myth, seemed after 1948 to come alive again. It was ironical that the new wanderers should be driven into the wilderness by the old wanderers themselves" ("Palestinian Exile" 77).

7 Not only was the nomination of the Free Verse Movement controversial, there were also different interpretations of the scope of its intellectual and poetic project. Whereas Nazik al-Malaʾika (Nāzik al-Malāʾika) believed in the necessity of drawing on Arabic poetic classical tradition, Jabra called for a break with traditions and an embrace of contemporary western poetic trends. See al-Tami, Ahmed. "Arabic 'Free Verse': The Problem of Terminology." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24.2 (1993): 185–98. Print.

8 Similar trends emerged in Iraqi art associations, particularly in *Société Primitive S.P.*, founded by Faʾiq Hasan (Fāʾiq Ḥasan, 1914–1992) and the Baghdad Modern Art Group founded by Jawad Salim (Jawād Salīm, 1919–1962). See Greenberg, Nathaniel. "Political Modernism, Jabra, and the Baghdad Modern Art Group." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010): n. pag. Web. 6 Apr. 2014.

9 All translations from *Al-qalaq wa-tamjīd al-ḥayāt* and *Lawʿat al-ghiyāb* are my own.

10 Barāziliyya café was a meeting point for college students, intellectuals, poets, and writers. The golden age of the café was during the 1950s when artists and writers such as Jabra presented some of their most creative works there. See ʿAzzāwī (197–204) for a brief survey of the most influential literary cafés in Baghdad.

11 All quotes from *In Search of Walid Masoud* are from Roger Allen's and Adnan Haydar's English translation. Specific Arabic key terms are from the original Arabic text.

12 Walid Masoud's biography is entitled *The Well* (*Al-biʾr*), which is also the title of Jabra's autobiography. *Al-biʾr al-ūlā: Fuṣūl min sīra dhātiyya* (1987). For an analysis of the biographical references in Jabra's novels, see al-Shaykh, Khalīl Muḥammad. "Sīrat Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā wa-tajalliyātihā fī aʿmālihi al-riwāʾiyya wa-l-qaṣaṣiyya." *Al-qalaq wa-tamjīd al-ḥayāt: Kitāb takrīm Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā.* Ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf. Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1995. 71–95. Print.

13 On the emergence of the PLO and the rise of Palestinian armed struggle, see Sayigh, Yezid. *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print. On the radical and radicalizing effect of the Palestinian guerrilla in south Lebanon, see Meier, Daniel. "The Palestinian Fidâ'i as an Icon of Transnational Struggle: The South Lebanese Experience." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41.3 (2014): 322–34. Web. 31 Aug. 2014.

14 It's worth noting that although literary references to the fida'i multiplied after 1967, the fida'i appeared as early as 1930 in "Al-fidā'ī", a poem by the Palestinian Ibrahim Tuqan (Ibrāhīm Ṭūqān). The poem was translated by Salma Khadra al-Jayyusi as "Commando" in Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, ed. *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. 317–18. Print.

15 Khalid Sulaiman retraces the depiction of the fida'i specifically in Arabic poetry in Sulaiman, Khalid A. *Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry*. London: Zed, 1984. 139–48. Print.

16 See Samira Aghacy's close analysis on the trope of masculinity, defeat, and the portrait of the intellectual in her analysis of *Walid Masoud* (59–68).

17 The interview with Jabra was originally conducted by Najman Yasin. It first appeared in Arabic in *al-Jāmiʿa* VIII: 4 (December, 1978) and was subsequently translated by Alaa Elgibali and Barbara Harlow.

18 Jabra is unequivocal about this kind of politically committed authors: "At best, nowadays, writers may be given directors' appointments in the Ministry of Culture and Guidance or editorial posts on nationalized newspapers. Or they are adopted by political parties. Unless they have prodigious talent and originality, they soon become the apologists of prescribed policies and shifting ideologies. They become 'committed'" ("The Rebels" 195).

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The Afterlives of *Iltizām*:
Emile Habibi through a Kanafaniesque Lens of Resistance Literature

Refqa Abu-Remaileh

Two of the most well-known Palestinian writers never met. Emile Habibi (Imīl Ḥabībī) (1922–1996) and Ghassan Kanafani (Ghassān Kanafānī) (1936–1972)[1] had a virtual meeting of sorts—a meeting in print, in the 1960s. Habibi was living 'inside' in Haifa under Israeli occupation, and Kanafani 'outside,' a stateless refugee floating in the diaspora. Across borders and restrictions, a silent dialogue was brewing, but any hopes of further encounters, whether real or virtual, were cut short by Kanafani's tragic assassination at the hands of the Israeli Mossad in Beirut in 1972. As redemption perhaps we know that the debate continued to simmer posthumously. We know this not because Habibi lived on or directly addressed Kanafani, but rather because we know it followed Habibi to his own grave. His final, and only, words on the matter were engraved on his tombstone in 1996: "I stayed in Haifa." Habibi, the "all-sarcastic enchanter," as Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh) named him in the obituary of the same title (Darwīsh, „Emile Habiby" 95), was with one stroke of a sentence asserting a Palestinian presence to transcend his own, and also simultaneously responding and challenging Kanafani's novella *Return to Haifa* (1970).[2]

Some of the most poignant literary exchanges in Palestinian literature have revolved around in/outside dialectics. The more silent Habibi/Kanafani duel, according to Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī), was one of the main reasons behind Habibi embarking on writing his satirical masterpiece novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, published in 1974. I will touch on the in/outside debate later in the paper, but first, I will turn to the literary moment that brought Habibi and Kanafani together. That moment revolved around the publication of Kanafani's studies on Palestinian literature in the late 1960s. Although he is best known as a prolific writer of short stories and novellas, such as *Return to Haifa*, *Men in the Sun* (1962), and *All That's Left to You* (1966), Kanafani was also a critic, historian, journalist and theorist of the Palestinian resistance. His diverse repertoire included two landmark works on what he called *adab al-muqāwama* (resistance literature). His first study, "Adab al-muqāwama fī Filasṭīn al-muḥtalla" ("Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine"), published in 1966, took the Arab world by storm. It introduced the works of the then unknown "poets of resistance": Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim (Samīḥ al-Qāsim) and Tawfiq Zayyad (Tawfīq Zayyād). Resistance literature was a new and valuable contribution to the glossary of *iltizām* (political and literary commitment) at the height of a period of revolutionary fervor and anticolonial struggles. Critics rallied around those newly discovered voices and agreed with Kanafani that they were the shining example of true *iltizām* and a model for every writer in the Arab world (Klemm 57).

It was in the second volume, *Al-adab al-filasṭīnī al-muqāwim taḥt al-iḥtilāl 1948–1968* (*Palestinian Literature of Resistance under Occupation*), published in 1968, that Kanafani includes a short story by a certain Abu Salam in the anthology section. Abu Salam was in fact Emile Habibi's folksier pen name in his early literary days. Habibi was indeed the father of a son he named Salam (peace) so that he can be known as the 'father of peace,' as he

explains in *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian Fairy Tale* (83). It was perhaps also a way to distinguish his fictional literary writing from his well-known persona as a public figure, leader, politician, editor and journalist. As the only short story included in the predominantly poetic anthology of resistance literature, it is clear that Kanafani had a sharp eye for spotting the emerging aesthetic force behind a unique blend of irony, satire, humor and tragedy that Habibi would later become famous for. I will turn to look at Kanafani's studies in more depth. This is part of a broader research initiative to explore key Palestinian critical and theoretical contributions, not as peripheral theoretical frames, but rather as rigorous critiques of their own society and contexts. In this spirit, I will read Habibi's works through Kanafani's lens of resistance literature.

Kanafani's Resistance Literature

The rallying reception of Kanafani's work was in many ways telling of a collective sense of guilt. The world, and the Arab world in particular, had turned a blind eye to those forgotten Palestinians who remained in their towns and villages after the 1948 *Nakba*. They found themselves confined under military occupation in the new state of Israel, becoming strangers and refugees in their own homeland. At worse, they were seen as collaborators or traitors. Kanafani's studies twisted the arm of such clichés: not only did he shed new light on the young voices emerging from under occupation, he also held them up as the essence and heart of the Palestinian struggle.

   In 1966, Kanafani was writing at the height of a global revolutionary moment. His second study, however, was published one year after the devastating defeat of the 1967 war. The defeat shook to the core strongly held ideals in the Arab world, and instigated a loss of faith in the role of the politically committed writer. Despite the collective disillusionment that cast a dark shadow across the region, Kanafani's second study reasserted the role of literature and cultural resistance as part and parcel of the armed struggle, an idea that was gaining more ground amongst Palestinians in the diaspora. Although *iltizām* was fizzling out elsewhere in the Arab world, it was growing new roots in the Palestinian context through its offshoot resistance literature, a strand of "*al-adab al-thawrī*" (revolutionary literature) (Klemm 57) that was developing before 1967, but which went on to have a longer life through Kanafani's works.

   Kanafani's studies are, on the one hand, a product of a Palestinian revolutionary moment that recognized the importance of literature and the arts in serving the cause. On the other hand, they also reveal a unique ability to transcend Kanafani's own context and look beyond. In the late 1960s, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) set up various art and film units, and so did other factions, for example the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), of which Kanafani was a member and a spokesperson. A 1982 PLO poster—the product of the plastic arts unit—quoting the leader of Fatah, Yasser Arafat, captures the idea of an all-encompassing revolution: "This revolution is not merely a gun, but also a scalpel of a surgeon, a brush of an artist, a pen of a writer, a plough of a farmer, an axe of a worker."[3] But, Kanafani's own vision of resistance reached beyond that of the *fidāʾī* soldier-poet analogy. It turned its attention, even amidst a surging armed struggle, away from the battlefields to the relative quiet of the occupied 'inside' where Kanafani located the heart of the resistance. Going against the grain of the time, his definition of a literature of resistance assigned value to the indirect and obtuse: aesthetics, humor, satire and folk wisdom. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the questions raised and issues de-

bated in Kanafani's studies, more than forty years on, continue to be relevant, and in some cases, still unresolved today. The seeds of cultural resistance that Kanafani planted set Palestinian literature, for better or for worse, on a new path of self-awareness, one that continues to struggle with or against a notion of resistance.

On *Iltizām* in Occupied Palestine

As well as acting as anthologies of literary works which would not have been available to an Arab audience at the time, Kanafani's studies are also aimed at raising awareness. Much of the writing is informative, given the embarrassingly little knowledge an Arab audience would have had at the time of the situation of Palestinians who had remained in their homeland in 1948. Kanafani documents the existence, conditions and literary production of those Palestinians *taḥt al-ḥiṣār* (under siege). There are statistics, examples and anecdotes to illustrate the picture he was painting of Palestinians under siege. In *Al-adab al-filasṭīnī al-muqāwim*, Kanafani draws on the philosophy of *ṣumūd* (steadfastness) (25) and relays the gravity of the battle the Palestinian population living under occupation are waging. A clear sense of urgency underlines Kanafani's words in *Al-adab al-filasṭīnī al-muqāwim* as he outlines Israeli policies, through discrimination and martial law, towards the psychological, political, economic, cultural and physical annihilation of a people and their history in the name of so-called 'security' (38).

One of the early features of resistance literature, which endows it with a special status according to *Al-adab al-filasṭīnī al-muqāwim*, is an "early awareness" (54) of political and literary commitment. Unlike their Arab counterparts, Kanafani writes, the question of *iltizām* was not a subject of debate amongst Palestinian intellectuals living under occupation (39). Rather, it evolved naturally in circumstances of heightened urgency:

> Daily Israeli challenges required literature to develop quickly, shortening the 'childhood' phase, which the contemporary Arab literary movements had spent in a long debate about the extent to which art can be committed, and whether committed art can be creative. The weight of the Israeli oppression itself gave a quick solution to this debate. In other words: The question of committed literature was not a subject of debate amongst the vast majority of Palestinian intellectuals. Debate was seen as a luxury that no one could afford. (ibid. 39)[4]

As Kanafani described it in *Al-adab al-filasṭīnī al-muqāwim*, a 'conscious resistor' or 'conscious *iltizām*' (*al-muqāwim al-wāʿī*; *al-iltizām al-wāʿī*) had developed of its own accord in occupied Palestine. He suggests that unlike elsewhere in the Arab world, resistance poetry did not begin by demeaning the value of the word in the difficult battle it was waging, but rather recognized its role, cherished it and considered it essential and indispensable (65). Kanafani thus asserts that the role of resistance in occupied Palestine is one of combatting Israeli narratives of hegemony, cooptation and accusations of backwardness, which he saw as more potent forms of oppression than arms and violence (43). This was the background which prompted the development of a *ḥaraka adabiyya multazima* (a committed literary movement), "one of the best resistance literatures in contemporary history" (41), Kanafani writes, and one that is "distinctive for its deep vision and early understanding of elements that Arab intellectuals only realized later, especially after the 1967 war" (54).

Prose Resistance?

Kanafani based his analysis of resistance primarily on the works of what became known as the trinity of young poets from occupied Palestine (Darwish, al-Qasim and Zayyad).[5] Although poetry maintained its dominant status, prose writing developed beyond Kanafani's conception of it—especially evident in Habibi's career—and even introduced new elements to the debate. As a prose writer himself, Kanafani was not demeaning the role of narrative fiction in resistance. Rather, he was highlighting a context whereby censorship and threat of arrest made the transmission of prose more difficult. Poetry, according to Kanafani's 1966 study "Adab al-muqāwama fī filasṭīn al-muḥtalla," was at the time mainly circulated in villages, at local festivals and through memorization (47). The development of a symbolic style in the poetry, he notes, helped defy the censor. The need to rely more on the aesthetic, the obtuse, the indirect rather than the political, made for a much more active and participatory reception experience. "People understood," Kanafani writes in his 1968 study, "that they have to decode meanings themselves" (39).

On the other hand, the short story, argues Kanafani, suffered from too many artistic shortcomings. Narratives were too preoccupied with social situations, Kanafani explains in his 1968 study, and an inability to reach the aesthetic depths of poetry to be considered resistance literature (63–64). He does make the point, however, that this is not because poetry is the better entrenched form of art, but is also due to difficulties in publication and distribution of longer prose works under military rule (ibid.). On the future development of prose writings, Kanafani predicted quite rightly in his 1966 study, that with the splitting of the Israeli Communist party in 1965 into Arab and Jewish factions, the party's Arabic newspaper *al-Ittiḥād* would become an important outlet for emerging Arab writers (57). In fact, *al-Jadīd*, the literary supplement of *al-Ittiḥād* was precisely the venue through which Habibi's short stories were initially published and later his novel, *The Pessoptimist*, was serialized before it was released as a book in 1974. In the Palestinian context, the concept of resistance has evolved into an overarching frame that extends beyond poetry. Beyond Kanafani's seminal works, it remains an understudied, albeit widespread phenomenon. It is worthwhile to build on and expand Kanafani's conception of the notion of resistance to other genres and media. Beginning with Kanafani's own point of departure for prose genres—Habibi's short story—I will highlight how Habibi's works surpass, further nuance, enrich and challenge the concept of resistance literature.

Resistance on Two Fronts

In his 1966 study, Kanafani described resistance literature in occupied Palestine as fighting on two fronts: The front of raising awareness of the oppressive conditions under occupation, and that of subverting Zionist myths, claims and accusations (127). No other people are simultaneously so well acquainted and so victimized by Zionist policies as the Palestinians who remained in what became Israel after the 1948 *Nakba*. While raising awareness was not a task they had self-consciously taken on in the early days, it became the outcome of a struggle with what it means to be Palestinian in the face of daily oppression. Their daily clash with Zionism was what endowed them with their unique position according to Kanafani. This daily resistance was not fought sporadically on battlefields and was not a premeditated ideology. It was rather an existential, psychological and physical clash with an ideology that aimed to erase Palestinian presence from the land. The absurd condition of

being present in but absented from one's homeland formed an important backdrop to the works of Habibi and others. Although Kanafani was among the first to draw attention to the idea of daily resistance beyond armed struggle, its permutations are often under-explored in analyses of Palestinian literature in Israel.

In this sense, Kanafani was pioneering in the keen attention he paid to the impact of Zionist propaganda and its creation of narrative. As well as writing a separate volume devoted to Zionist literature entitled *Fi-l-adab al-ṣahyūnī* (*On Zionist Literature*) (1967), in his 1966 study he includes a section that examines Arab characters in Zionist novels. Through his own research, Kanafani finds that Zionist literature has questions but no clear answers. In other words, the further away Zionist ideals are exposed to be from reality, elaborates Kanafani in his 1966 study, the more difficult it becomes to complete the story (117, 125). In contrast, Kanafani asserts that resistance literature "does not ask questions but knows the way" (125).

Looking back to that period, Mahmoud Darwish writes in his introduction to Kanafani's complete works that Kanafani not only lifted the veil of secrecy over what was being written in occupied Palestine, but he also "studied the opposite of this literature and a source of its dialogue" ("Ghazāl" 22). By analyzing Zionist writing and its role in the formation of the Zionist entity and consciousness, Darwish continues, Kanafani "highlighted the destructive role of Zionist culture" (22) and the way it was used to brainwash Palestinian students (23). Therefore, at the heart of resistance literature lies a 'dialogue with its opposite' and the real battle, according to Kanafani, as set out in his 1966 study, is in "facing another literature that tries to overshadow and obscure the Palestinian narrative" (91).

Literary Resistance in Abu Salam

In his works, Habibi takes on many of the tenets that Kanafani highlights as the essence of resistance literature. Raising awareness is perceptible in the extent to which Habibi goes to document and explain, often in footnotes, asides, non-fictional elements and quotes, Palestinian history and geography. The 'dialogue with the opposite' forms the basis of his narrative strategies in countering and subverting foundational Zionist myths and narratives. Through linguistic word play and satire Habibi twists and turns stereotypes on their heads to expose lies behind the cartoon-like images of Palestinians in Israel. The clearest example is the story of Saeed, the protagonist, who is himself a collaborator, and who through his misadventures inadvertently creates a counter-narrative that deconstructs and challenges hegemonic paradigms, both Zionist as well as Arab.

What is most fascinating about Habibi's work is not how it fits into a literary mold and fulfills the tenets of resistance literature, but rather how it takes Kanafani's initial remarks on resistance in prose into an aesthetic realm beyond their original conceptions. Habibi's works weave a rich and complex tapestry of resistance that informs and asserts presence, that subverts, inverts and defies, that re-writes and re-interprets, and that remembers and historicizes. Ultimately, Habibi's works raise profound questions about the manipulation of truth in the process of narrative construction itself.

The short story Kanafani selects to include in the anthology section of his 1968 study appears under the title of the name of the author, Abu Salam (Abū Salām). In the footnote Kanafani indicates that it is the second short story of a work in six sections entitled "Sextet of the Six Days," but that it is also a stand-alone short story initially published in *al-Jadīd* that same year. In the book version of Habibi's *Sudāsiyyat al-ayyām al-sitta* (*Sextet of the*

Six Days) (1969), the short story appears under the title "Wa-akhīran nawwara al-lawz" ("At last, the almonds have blossomed"). The story, as it appears in *Sudāsiyya*, tells of a young man who decided to write about Haifa and Nazareth, inspired by Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and a certain "magical duality" (29) in his life. The story is ultimately about love, memory, the past and survival—all recurring themes in Habibi's later works. A narrator relates how a man, who was once brimming with life and hope in his youth, kills his memory to keep a clear conscience (31). The man, a good friend of the narrator, goes in search of the protagonists of a very beautiful love story that he remembers from his youth. He visits his friend seeking help in putting the pieces together. While relating all his efforts, the narrator realizes that his friend has forgotten that it was his own love story that he is pursuing and that "lit up our youth" (38) and wonders "how is it possible for someone to kill such love in his heart?" (37)

The short stories of *Sudāsiyya* were written after the 1967 war and emphasize one of the unintended consequences of the Israeli occupation of all of historic Palestine: reunions. After twenty years of separation, Palestinians were able to reconnect to each other and to the rest of the Arab world. The stories tell of an awakening, of a repressed love and love for the homeland that is reignited after a period of isolation. Habibi returns to this theme later in his life and further develops it in novel form in *Ikhṭiyya* (1985) and *Sarāyā*. Habibi's short stories in *Sudāsiyya* document the often-overlooked experience of Palestinians 'inside' emerging from the shock of isolation to the shock of waking up to "all Palestinians being in the same prison" (8). However, Habibi asserts that those who "remained in the playgrounds of childhood are studying the land and its contours with their bare feet" and are more faithful to the land than those owners of bygone orchards who sold their homeland (ibid.). This kind of 'documenting with bare feet' becomes one of Habibi's narrative strategies in tracing Palestinian history, past and present, through its geography. There is an implicit mission in raising awareness and capturing a Palestine lost to most Palestinians, but there is already also a perceptible element of defiance. Habibi's aim, as stated in his introduction to the *Sudāsiyya*, is to subvert the meaning of what the Israelis called the six-day war and "to show the other face of the tragedy of this war" (8). In this way, Habibi tests his defiance and counter-narrative strategies with the *Naksa* of 1967 in the *Sudāsiyya*, using it as a basis to tackle the roots of the tragedy, the *Nakba* of 1948, in his later novels.

The seeds of resistance literature, as Kanafani saw them, are firmly planted in Habibi's early short stories. But it is in *The Pessoptimist*, written a few years later, that Habibi's narrative ingenuity shines most brightly. By making direct interventions into the historical record, imparting new previously concealed facts, Habibi begins a process of re-writing, inverting the foundation texts of Zionist discourse, challenging the hegemony of the Hebrew language, and twisting Palestinian and Arab ideals. One of the early scenes in the novel is the gathering of fleeing Palestinians in the al-Jazzar mosque in Acre the night before their deportation and condemnation to a life of dispossession as refugees. Angelika Neuwirth has done work on the inversion of biblical and messianic ideas in Habibi's work. She highlights the scene in the al-Jazzar mosque as an example of inverting the messianic Zionist idea of the "ingathering of the exiles" and exposing it in its Palestinian reversal: *lamm al-shaml* (family reunification) (208), the gathering before exile.

Through his love for the Arabic language—he never wrote in Hebrew—Habibi draws on the *turāth*, the Arab literary heritage, as well as Palestinian folk knowledge and history to create a rich multilayered narrative that simultaneously asserts Palestinian presence and counters Zionist claims. Highlighting the entangled roots of Palestinians to the land exposes

the falsity of claims such as 'a land without a people for people without a land.' Political criticism is also enshrined in puns that play on the similarity between Hebrew and Arabic. For example, when Saeed first arrives back in the city of Haifa—having fled with his family in 1948 and returned—he is welcomed by an Israeli soldier who greets him in Arabic: "*Ahlan wa sahlan fī medinat Israel!*" Saeed panics and misinterprets the statement to mean that the Israelis have changed the name of his native city into the city of Israel. Later on he realizes that with the slight differences of stress the same word means "state" in Hebrew, and that it is not only his city that has been renamed but the entire country is now called Israel. In another episode Saeed's aunt mispronounces the Arabic word "*maḥṣiyya*" to mimic the Israeli pronunciation "*makhsiyya*," which creates a comic tension that draws an equivalence between being counted in the Israeli census (the former) and being castrated (the latter). The use of Hebrew in Habibi's works exposes a certain intrinsic affinity between the two languages that the Israeli state will diligently strive to repress or coopt. Interjections into the Hebrew language of Palestinian experiences also takes away from its exclusivity as a "vessel that contains Jewish memories" (Neuwirth 202).

Through numerous language-based interventions, Habibi shows the flip side of language-as-salvation, which Kanafani held in high regard, to also expose language-as-deception and propaganda. Habibi goes even further, using puns to break away from the canons of Palestinian symbolism, for example, playing on the similarity between the words *fidāʾī* (resistance fighter) and *faḍāʾī* (extraterrestrial). Breaking through the language barriers, Habibi was able to create one of the best-loved Palestinian anti-heroic characters in Saeed. Kanafani may have foreseen an element of self-criticism but he may have not imagined how narratives will develop to also be critical of nationalism and Arab and Palestinian heroic stereotypes. A reaction against the burden of responsibility as well as the accusations of collaboration from the Arab world, Habibi's character Saeed is no heroic fighter, martyr or liberator, he is a fumbling, anti-heroic fool. He is also not the kind of collaborator the state wants, which becomes evident when his excessive loyalty to the Israeli state lands him in jail. Even the ideal of a deep-rooted connection to the land is shattered at the realization that Saeed does not know the names of many of the villages in his own country. This is where Habibi appeals to the *turāth* through numerous references and footnotes, but he also subverts canonical knowledge and uses it to expose falsehoods, revealing that the "gap between cultural rhetoric and current fact is too great" (Heath 167).

Habibi exposes the full extent of how language is a double-edged sword, but eventually returns to the idea of language-as-salvation. Ultimately, through the letters he writes from outer space, Saeed narrates his own story. The role of the writer, as Kanafani and others have envisioned it, is associated with the language-as-salvation trope. In fact, as well as seeing *The Pessoptimist* as a series of counter-representations and subversive deconstructions, it is also the story of how Saeed became a writer who breaks the silence of his generation and remembers, narrates, and historicizes. However, to fulfill his mission, as Neuwirth argues, Saeed would have had to free himself:

> […] he has stepped out of the mythical triad configuration—real homeland, the intellectual as its liberator, and the ideal homeland […] Only now can he follow his mission to recall what has been lost, without mythically 'bringing it back.' (216)

Saeed 'brings back' his narrative not only through language but also the exposure of the silence that veils the lives of Palestinians in Israel. In *The Pessoptimist*, language and speech are set in contrast to the keeping of secrets and a forced fearful silence. There is the example

of an entire village in *The Pessoptimist*, the unrecognized village of Salaka, which, according to Israeli authorities, does not exist. Its real presence is thus ensured through its population's strict rules of silence. Saeed's narrative tells a story of repression of language and speech, but by doing so he is also constructing a new world-historical order—that of the marginal, peripheral and oppressed—which can be the mark of a Palestinian return to history.[6]

One of the most remarkable features of Habibi's works is the humor created out of the tension between satire, irony and tragedy in the narrative. While this tension is already present, albeit subtly in *Sudāsiyya*, it is in *The Pessoptimist* that it is at its sharpest and most animated. It is also remarkable that Kanafani in his 1966 study had paid special attention to the role of the tragi-comic in resistance literature. Kanafani writes that, in the context Palestinians found themselves in under occupation, the writer finds nothing more serious to deploy than irony (67), what he called *al-baliyya al-latī taḍḥaku* (the tragi-comic) (70). He saw in irony a kind of *ṣumūd*, but believed that this *al-sukhriyya al-ṣāmida* (steadfast satire) (69) springs from a faith that what is happening is a temporary trial and that the nightmare will one day pass (ibid.). This was in 1966, when many believed the liberation of Palestine was possible. However, after the 1967 war, Habibi and others realized that the Zionist machinery is no passing matter, and took irony and satire to more sophisticated levels as a strategy of counter-narration in prose. Through an interesting connection between irony, folk wisdom and folktales, Kanafani brings about the beginnings of a conception of 'folk satire.'

The kind of satire Kanafani invokes is very much present in Habibi's works and gives the narrative its distinctive edge. As well as the use of Palestinian colloquial, which invokes folk traditions and sayings, Habibi also uses Palestinian folk literary forms, such as *khurāfiyya* (Palestinian folktale) and *usṭūra* (legend), folk figures such as al-Khaḍer (after the figure of Saint George) and numerous folk songs as well as reference to folk medicine, plants, history and geography. Habibi's elaborate narrative strategy of drawing on the Arabic *turāth*, Palestinian folk, as well as references to world literature in narrating the Palestinian story creates a tragi-comic tension that produces powerful counter-narratives and what Kanafani calls *al-taḥaddī* (the challenge) in his 1966 study (78). The relationship between the tragi-comic, irony, satire, humor and folk, all of which are elements Kanafani brings to the fore, are worth more extensive exploration in the wider context of Palestinian literature to further understand their role in storytelling and resistance.[7]

The Kanafani Effect

The issues that Kanafani raises about his own conception of resistance literature are candid and relevant. One of the main points he discusses is a certain state of exception that he sees as inevitable when historicizing, analyzing and writing about Palestinian literature. In the preface to his 1966 study, Kanafani writes that attempts at historicizing the *adab al-muqāwama* of a certain people is usually undertaken after liberation (29). However, he continues, in the Palestinian case there is an urgent need for the Arab reader in general, and the dispossessed Palestinian in particular, to be constantly informed, in dialogue, and engaged with what is going on in the occupied lands—where the essence of the cause lies (ibid.). He confesses that his research lacks the 'cold objectivity' of academia. This is because the literature itself developed under abnormal and unique conditions, meaning that it cannot be made to submit to any preconceived standards. That is not to say that Kanafani's analysis of the poems he includes in his study is free of criticism. For example, writing about Darwish's early poetry in his 1968 study, Kanafani points out that one is shocked to find a gap-

ing aesthetic weakness (56). Similarly, he criticizes Samih al-Qasim for his excessive ro-
manticism and limited horizons (ibid.). However, Kanafani goes on to trace the develop-
ment of the style of these poets and their aesthetic and poetic leaps (56–57).

In part, Mahmoud Darwish directly responded to some of the questions Kanafani's stud-
ies raise and the way it has impacted Palestinian literature. There is no doubt that Kanafa-
ni's studies, which gave Palestinian literature emerging from under occupation a more en-
lightened status in the struggle, contributed to the rise of the 'poets of resistance' from
invisibility to stardom. In his introduction to Kanafani's collected works, Darwish writes: "I
was born before, but it was you who announced my birth" (18). Until Kanafani coined the
term, Darwish writes that they did not know they were writing resistance poetry, let alone
poetry: "We were writing poetry without knowing that it was poetry. We were shouting, suf-
fering, protesting, and we didn't own any other tools of expression" (19). Darwish con-
fesses that within their own context they were not taken seriously. In fact, the only poetry
that was held in regard was the poetry that came from outside.

Habibi makes similar comments in the prologue of *Sudāsiyya* regarding prose writing.
He writes that it was in fact recognition garnered from the 'outside' which made people
back home pay attention to the works being published by *al-Jadīd* and other literary outlets
(8). Although he does not mention Kanafani directly, he refers to the Lebanese magazine *al-
Ṭarīq*, which included one of his stories in its special issue on Arabic literature in Israel in
1968, in turn facilitating the *Sudāsiyya*'s publication at *al-Hilāl* in Cairo in 1969, and the
stories were thereafter turned into radio plays by various stations in the Arab world: "The
Arab world took interest in our writing after 1967," Habibi wrote in the prologue of *Sudāsi-
yya*, "because they realized they had neglected us" (8). In the introduction to Kanafani's
collected works, Darwish elaborates on the "injured Arab mentality" (20) that rediscovers
Palestinians under occupation since 1948:

> The Arab discovery that the Arabs in occupied Palestine speak Arabic, love their country, and hate
> oppression was a stunning revelation […] stunning to the point of shame. However, this allowed
> these newly discovered voices to spread and overcome the barriers and walls. (21)

Darwish however cautions against a kind of 'state of exception' that worships everything
that comes out of the occupied lands. In his introduction, Darwish describes the aftereffects
of their newly-found fame once Kanafani had directed the spotlight at their work:

> [S]ome of us fainted from this sensuousness, and others began designing poems for the vocal
> chords of the presenters, and some of us were anxious and afraid of the responsibility. (20)

Darwish also warns against artistic merit being only a virtue of "geography as a non-nego-
tiable gift" (21). Rather, Darwish saw in the attention of their new audiences an incentive to
develop and grow, not to settle down and bask under the banner of Palestine: "Writing can't
achieve its resistance function unless it is good writing. Bad writing which incites, under
any slogan, is as harmful as the worst weapon" (13). Darwish uses Kanafani himself as an
example of a writer who worked tirelessly to perfect his art, insisting that it was not the bul-
lets of the enemy that are the measure of his achievement, nor should his creative value be
seen only in his death—"Kanafani was a writer of life," Darwish proclaimed (12). How-
ever, Kanafani's own writing did not escape criticism when, as Darwish explained, it
"transformed from a style of calm description to higher and more complex aesthetic
realms" (14). Once Kanafani's writing reached a more complex stage, it did not escape
from the difficult question of audience and reception that hovers over the works of many a

writer and poet, especially in the context of conflict and revolution. The question that haunted Kanafani's late works, as Darwish put it in his introduction, was the accusation: "who understands this style?" (ibid.).

With this question of accessibility of poetry or prose, Darwish quite rightly points out that it is rare for the nation to dominate as it does in Palestinian literature (16). This is why Palestinians "have no mercy for their writers," Darwish writes (ibid.)—they demand a kind of "model nationalism and subservience of steel" (ibid.), he explains, and they do not allow their writers to be "anything less than soldiers or priests" (ibid.). Darwish attributes this to having no faith in the effectiveness of literature to compensate for the humiliation when Palestinians "lost everything and owned nothing more than words" (ibid.). Darwish does not blame Kanafani, but rather raises important questions about the exploitation of the concept of resistance in the context of an ongoing struggle. After all, Kanafani successfully broke the siege around the situation of Palestinians in the occupied lands, Darwish reminds us in his introduction, enacting their *ṣumūd* through works of poetry (20). He warns against finding virtue in writing merely from the 'inside,' which he himself eventually chooses to leave to live in the 'outside' of exile.

The debate initiated through Kanafani's resistance literature in the late 1960s develops an interesting dialogue on inside/outside. The outside admired the resistance of being *taḥt al-iḥtilāl*, while the inside admired the self-confidence of exile, and life under the sun (*taḥt al-shams*). Habibi's short stories give an insight into the beginnings of this dialogue after a twenty-year separation. In the short story "Umm al-rubābīkiā" ("The odds-and-ends woman"), part of Habibi's *Sudāsiyya* collection, the narrator relates: "They shouted in our faces, did you not refuse to immigrate with us to Yathrib?" (41) The sentence reveals Koranic language influences: Yathrib is reference to Medina and the prophet's immigration there after persecution in Mecca. Although Habibi comes from a Christian background, he was well versed in the Koran and its language influences are evident in all of his words. The narrator then continues to call the dispossession after the *Nakba* of 1948 the "*sifr al-khurūj al-awwal*" (the first exodus), a twist of language that swiftly transforms from Koranic to Biblical allusion, referencing the second of the five books of the Old Testament, Exodus, but applying it to the Palestinians. Such examples are referencing a larger question that dominates the narrative of *Sudāsiyya*: Why did those who left leave and why did those who stayed stay?

A dialogue between two young women prisoners, one from the inside (Haifa) and the other from the outside (Jerusalem), who find themselves under the same Israeli prison roof in the short story "Al-ḥubb fi-l-qalb" ("Love in the Heart") in *Sudāsiyya* raises further questions not just about leaving and staying but also about return. The young narrator from Jerusalem, through letters to her mother, tells us about her new friend's love for Fairuz's song "Rājiʿūn" ("We shall return"). She asks her friend to explain what moves her about the song when, the narrator wonders, "you stayed in your homeland, never had to leave and don't need to return?" (87) The friend replies: "My homeland? I feel like a refugee in a strange country. You dream of return and you live with this dream. But I, where shall I return to?" (ibid.). When asked how she sees the future, the friend from Haifa replies distressed: "Every time I think about the future I see the past […] The future that I dream about is the past. Is this possible?" (89) The Jerusalemite narrator poses the question to her mother who had refused to return and visit Haifa: "Were you afraid to feel what this girl from Haifa feels?" (ibid.) The young woman then wonders whether the tragedy of those who stayed was greater than theirs.

In a much later work, his last work, a memoir entitled *Sirāj al-ghūla* ("The Ogress' Lantern") (1996), Habibi directly addresses some of these questions. He writes that "the tragedy

of the Palestinian people was all-encompassing affecting those who left (*tarakū*) and those who were left (*turikū*) finding no difference between the two" (37). However, given the choice, and despite finding nowhere in their homeland to be except *raʾs al-khāzūq* (the tip of a stake), Habibi writes in *Sirāj* that "we prefer *raʾs al-khāzūq* in the homeland rather than *riḥāb al-ghurba* (spaciousness of exile)—we found it full of nails and *khawāzīq* (tips of stakes), big and small" (18). What preoccupies Habibi, however, are "separations and imagined meetings" (9), as he writes in the prologue to *Sudāsiyya*. Kanafani was also preoccupied with this theme and it is Kanafani's representation of an imagined meeting that infuriated Habibi. Kanafani's novella *Return to Haifa*, set after the 1967 war, relates the story of a husband and wife who return to Haifa in search of a baby boy they left behind as they fled their home and village in the war of 1948 (*Palestine's Children*). They find that their son, Khaldoun, was adopted by a Jewish woman and, now named Dov, he is a soldier in the Israeli army. The flawed descriptions of their journey to Haifa (Kanafani himself never returned) and the representation of their eventual meeting with their son is what Habibi took issue with and was at the bottom of the virtual debate. It is said that Habibi wrote *The Pessoptimist* in response to *Return to Haifa* to forge a new image of the Palestinians who remained in 1948.

According to the Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, in an article entitled "The Mirror: Imagining Justice in Palestine," Habibi misread Kanafani's novella, interpreting Khaldoun/Dov as the symbol of the Palestinian minority that remained on their land in what became Israel. Khoury argues that through the mirror of Dov, Kanafani was creating the image of the new Palestinian, who, like the new Israeli, will refuse memory and the past, condemn the cowardice of his fathers during the *Nakba*, and search for a new beginning ("The Mirror"). Khoury writes that Habibi frowned at and totally dismissed such an interpretation without further explanation. It was only when Khoury saw the words on Habibi's tombstone, 'I stayed in Haifa,' that it all came together. The real essence of the struggle between Habibi and Kanafani, Khoury writes, was not about Khaldoun/Dov but about who writes the Palestinian story. Is it "the one who stayed in Haifa or the one who has been dispossessed from Akka?" asks Khoury (Khūrī 10).

"What are you searching for?" Darwish asks Habibi in the poem "An appointment with Emile Habibi" about their anticipated meeting in Haifa, which was to mark Darwish's first return to the city after his long exile ("Mawʿid" 112). The meeting, a literary duel "between two roosters" as Darwish describes it in the poem (ibid.), failed to take place—Habibi passed away shortly before Darwish's arrival in Haifa. In the poetic dialogue, however, Habibi's voice does respond: he is searching for "the difference between here and there" (ibid.). "Perhaps the distance," Darwish suggests, "is like the 'and' between here and there, a metaphor for the distance between what is real and imaginary" (ibid.). This persistent question clearly preoccupied Habibi throughout his life, and is perceptible in his literary works since the *Sudāsiyya*, perhaps further egged on by Kanafani's labeling but also provoked by his imagined return to Haifa. Although they each had their political differences, Darwish is keen to note in his obituary "Emile Habiby: You All-Sarcastic Enchanter" that Habibi chose to re-name himself at his death with "I stayed in Haifa" not because he wanted to distinguish between "those who stayed in the exile of their identity and those who want to return to the identity of their exile" (96). Rather, it is to engrave what does not need to be reconfirmed, Darwish writes, except to "confront a time during which the mother's legitimacy was put in doubt" (ibid.).

Conclusion

If Kanafani, Habibi and Darwish have something in common, despite their physical, intellectual and political differences, it is that they realized they were fighting a war of narratives in their search for a homeland of words. This is what Kanafani's studies on resistance literature tried to highlight early on—the importance of the battle of narratives together with, but also above and beyond, the armed struggle. Indeed, the relationships, between memory and the past, inside and outside, between those who stayed and those who left, between Palestinians and Israelis, have been re-written, re-interpreted and redeveloped since Kanafani's volumes on resistance literature. Habibi is an excellent case study in highlighting the elements of prose narratives that Kanafani could only touch on in his short life so brutally cut short. Kanafani was able to anticipate the potential of satire, comedy and folk wisdom, but he probably did not imagine what Habibi was able to do with these elements in his folk satire masterpiece *The Pessoptimist*.

Both Habibi and Kanafani held in high regard what Habibi called 'documenting with bare feet' Palestinian life in Israel. However, it was Darwish that drew attention to the dangers of exploiting the virtues of the direct connection with the land as a non-negotiable gift. What is clear is that the notion of resistance persists and so does the question of inside/outside. However, in light of ongoing conflict and tragedies since Kanafani's untimely death, as well as changes on the ground which have effectively merged the old 'inside/outside' under the same prison roof, the crucial question remains: What is resistance? What is the meaning of resistance in all aspects of life now that the revolutionary context of the 1960s and 1970s has metamorphosed into an era of endless so-called peace processes? Ultimately, the state of exception that Kanafani points to in his studies, combined with his chosen methodology, lead to larger questions that challenge the conventions of criticism. Has there been indeed an inability to theorize in times of upheaval due to a certain intellectual interruption? How do we then approach literature coming out of more than sixty years of conflict and upheaval? What are the new spaces for contesting conventions that it creates? These elements and questions are ripe for further research. Although we are still mourning the recent loss of the last of the trinity of resistance poets, Samih al-Qasim, we need to look and delve more deeply into the works of the younger generation of writers who have experimented with and transformed the notion of everyday resistance.

Notes

1   In addition to the references in the Works Cited and for further reading on the two authors see: Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1995. Print; Meyer, Stefan G. *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2001. Print. SUNY Series in Middle Eastern Studies; Wild, Stefan. *Ghassan Kanafani: The Life of a Palestinian*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975. Print; Sa'di, Ahmad H. and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. Print; Taha, Ibrahim. *The Palestinian Novel: A Communication Study*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. Print; Matar, Dina and Zahera Harb, eds. *Narrating Conflict in the Middle East: Discourse, Image and Communications Practices in Lebanon and Palestine*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. Print.

2   Wherever a published English translation of a text exists, the English title of that translation will be used throughout the article. However, page numbers always reference the original Arabic text.

3   The poster may be viewed online at the Palestine Poster Project Archives. "This Revolution is Not Merely a Gun." *The Palestine Poster Project Archives*, n.d. Web. 1 Dec. 2014. Also of interest is an article: Barker,

Catherine and Dan Walsh. "Palestine Posters Archive Nominated to UNESCO Memory of the World Program." Mondoweiss, 16 Aug. 2014. Web. 11 Jan. 2015.

4   All translations from the Arabic texts are mine.

5   For selected English works see: Nassar, Hala Khamis and Najat Rahman, eds. *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile's Poet: Critical Essays*. Northampton: Interlink, 2007. Print; Al-Qasim, Samih. *Sadder Than Water: New and Selected Poems*. Jerusalem: Ibis, 2006. Print; Adonis, Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim. *Victims of a Map: A Bilingual Anthology of Arabic Poetry*. London: Saqi, 2005. Print; Darwish, Mahmoud. *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. Print; Darwish, Mahmoud. *The Butterfly's Burden*, Seattle: Copper Canyon, 2007. Print; Darwish, Mahmoud. *In the Presence of Absence*. New York: Archipelago, 2011. Print.

6   For more on resistance literature, theory and politics, see Harlow 30.

7   In addition to Ghassan Kanafani's and Barbara Harlow's work on Palestinian resistance literature, see also: Barsamian, David. *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward Said*. London: Pluto, 2003. Print; Coffin, Nancy. "Engendering Resistance in the Work of Ghassan Kanafani: All That's Left to You, Of Men and Guns, and Umm Sa'd." *Arab Studies Journal* 4.2 (1996): 98–118. Print; Kilpatrick, Hilary. "Commitment and Literature: The Case of Ghassan Kanafani." *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 3.1 (1976): 15–19. Print.

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You, The Sacrificial Reader:
Poetics and Pronouns in Mahmoud Darwish's "al-Qurbān"

Michael Allan

On January 29, 2001, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh) stood before an admiring audience at the Cairo International Book Fair in Egypt. He recited on this occasion a few of his poems, including what was then one of his most recent, "al-Qurbān" (Darwīsh 7–9).[1] Two days later, on the first of February, he repeated this poem to a crowd that erupted with thunderous applause, as though themselves moved by the poem's immediate address. In the days following this reading, Nur Elmessiri reported on the remarkable event: "The spectators clap approvingly of the double bind," he tells us, "They understand the imperious demand 'Do not break. Do not be victorious. Be in-between, suspended'" (Elmessiri). His account highlights an important detail linking the poem with those in the room: "There is a complicity between the 'we' of the poem and the we who are the clapping audience in the 6 October Hall at CIBF [Cairo International Book Fair]." It is this "complicity"—the bond linking the poem and its audience—that underscores both the power of poetic address and the ethical potentials staged ever so effectively in "al-Qurbān." Almost more than the "we" from whom the poem is spoken, Darwish delivers powerfully through a direct appeal to "you," who is called forth singularly in the opening lines and welcomed to the intersection of politics, theology and ethics. Caught in the play of pronouns, the poem is temporally torn between the address within the scriptural story it describes, the audience present at Darwish's recitation and its reception with each subsequent reader.

The question of literary engagement tends to focus centrally on the commitment of the writer and the situation linking a literary work to its audience (Allan). In "al-Qurbān," however, this connection is complicated. Here, the complicity between the "we" of the poem and the audience in Cairo turns on a fundamental ambiguity, one that conflates the audience in the room with the address staged in the poem itself. If the poem is committed, if there is a resonance for those applauding, then it is seemingly contingent upon how the poem comes to be heard. This particular occasion marks one instance in which the poem takes place, but it also frames an ambivalence between the place *in* the poem (a scriptural scene) and the place *of* the poem (at the Cairo International Book Fair). Shifting the optic of analysis from committed writing to the poetics of reading, we might ask: in what way must we read, or hear, the poem to understand commitment? The play of pronouns underscores the bifurcated address to the "you" in the poem and the "you" reading the poem. This formal play with lyric address—as well as the various registers of political and religious intelligibility—suggest that the historicist logic (central to those who understand Darwish in terms of commitment) is merely one way to derive meaning from the poem.

In what follows, I both draw from and contrast my analysis to those many scholars and critics who read Darwish as committed by situating his poetry in a specific time and place (Harlow; Asfour).[2] Part of my goal is to consider the stakes of reading as it plays out in the poem, on the one hand, and as it plays out in the poem's reception, on the other. In what terms is a poem politically intelligible, and what other logics are integral to reading and fee-

ling with the text? Must a political poem presume a certain reader or a certain reading prac-
tice to be understood as engaged? Ultimately, must a poem communicate in a particular
way to be committed? By shifting between poetic writing and registers of poetic reading, I
hope to suggest that the poem offers not so much a message or a slogan, but the poetic con-
ditions for imagining situations otherwise—a framework at the intersection of politics and
theology, aesthetics and ethics.

Whether the recitations to audiences in Cairo, Beirut or numerous iterations online,
"al-Qurbān" resonates strongly with audiences beyond a particular time and place, across lan-
guages, territories and traditions. On its own, the poem takes place in a complicated temporal-
ity that highlights the mythological moment of a scriptural past, the committed political pre-
sent and its future readings. The complex connection has to do, in part, with the particular
mode of address Darwish employs—one that implicates you, the reader, directly in what is
described, mixing the poetic structure with the recitation of the poem. In the first line, the
poem calls out to you to step forward: [هيا تقدم أنت وحدك]. The lines that follow construct a spe-
cific scene: you, surrounded by the diviners [حولك الكهان], are asked to come forth to the stone
altar [المذبح الحجري], to rise firmly [فاصعد أيها]. In this first stanza, the poem presents a crucial
distinction between "we," plural, and "you," singular. It adds the diviners [الكهان] who surround
you and are imaginably distinct from the us who speaks the poem. In this emergent triangula-
tion of the "we" (who speak), the "you" (who is addressed) and the "them" (the diviners), the
terrain is set for an ethical relation that turns not on the classic Levinasian invocation of "I"
and "you," but upon the "us" and the "you" (Benveniste).[3] This subtle shift sets the grounds
for this most intriguing poem that engages a known religious narrative and does so within the
context of a specific political situation, shortly following the start of the second Intifada in
Palestine.[4]

If we take the "you" in the poem's opening lines to refer to the reader of the poem, then
to whom does the "we" refer throughout the poem? Not simply the poet's voice speaking to
the reader, this "we" complicates the problem of poetic address—and the entire relationship
between the poem, scripture and reader. Within the opening scene, with you stepping forth
to the stone altar [المذبح الحجري], we might wonder if you, the reader, are indeed what has been
sacrificed. Gone is the sense of a lone poetic voice addressing the crowds, and instead, we
find ourselves implicated in the realm of the collective poet and the individual reader. Al-
ready in the poem's first few lines, poetry has been turned on its head with its collective ut-
terance. In this sense, the poem echoes the dynamics of lyric criticism, which as Michael
Warner notes, proliferate interpretative possibilities:

> Lyric conventions, which are automatically in place when we read a text as lyric poetry, allow for
> very special interpretations of things like mode of address and circulation; our misrecognition of
> the text seems to be necessary for producing some of the lyric's most valued attributes of deep
> subjectivity. (80)

What Warner here glosses as misrecognition is at the heart of my interest in pronouns. In
what ways does a poem call to the reader, and what reading practice is ultimately privi-
leged? What constitutes the "mis" in the various recognitions at stake? When, if ever, is a
poem such as "al-Qurbān" in time and place?

While the pronouns frame the poem as a question of reading, they also invoke a certain
temporal ambiguity about the moment of the poem's address. The "you" to whom the poem
calls forth is not simply the reader of the poem, but is worked through and incorporated into
the scriptural story from which the poem's narration derives. Within the question of pro-

nouns, then, is embedded a fundamental ambiguity regarding the time in which the poem is read. Are you, the lone reader who picks up the poem to be read? Or are you, rather, the scriptural sacrifice thrown to the stone altar? A response to this question would necessarily turn on a particular temporality, linked to whether the poem addresses the here and now of the reader or the then and there of the scriptural narrative. This seemingly trivial distinction actually underscores the larger question of engagement [الٱلتزام] in the work: that is, whether it is read as a commentary on the immediate historical reality in Palestine or the scriptural narrative of the sacrifice. In what way, ultimately, does the poem call out to you, and in what way is the calling made intelligible to the reader? The pronouns, as such, not only raise the ethical stakes of the poetic text, but set the conditions for poetic free play, i.e. for the relation of reading to scriptures and ultimately to engagement.

What is especially striking is how Darwish, once known as the poet of the resistance [شاعر المقاومة], invokes an explicitly theological register in this poem, incorporating the story of Mary from the Qur'an.[5] The relationship between poetics and the theological, on the one hand, and aesthetics and the political, on the other, comes to the fore most prominently when we consider the role of the pronouns in the poetic narrative.[6] If we entertain the theological and political registers of Darwish's poem, then how might we understand the poem, not simply within the binary logic of politics and religion, but as it raises a fundamental aesthetic question? What is it to read the poem, individually, and what structures render it aesthetically, politically or religiously meaningful? What are the relationships between these three registers? By posing these questions, I am not looking to extract from the poem, as many may be inclined, a reading of scripture or a political allegory. Instead, the poem's provocation seems to lie in what it offers by way of the very problem of reading, i.e. how the poem calls out to the reader. Flirting with the most sacred of narratives, the story of the sacrifice, Darwish's "al-Qurbān" drives us to the heart of the political theology of reading, the ambivalence of sacred writing and its symbolics. To read the poem, to be addressed in its opening lines, is to be called into the poetic logic of scriptural intelligibility, a manner of knowing otherwise.

I would suggest that even though the timing of the poem's publication is indeed crucial to its political reading, the poem itself remains obscure and curiously forecloses any particular allegorical legibility.[7] It thus stands in an intriguing position, not simply as a political poem, but a poem that urges a consideration of what constitutes political engagement. Politics here is not given, nor invoked in any direct manner. What Darwish offers instead drives to the heart of poetic language and its oblique relation to ethics, aesthetics and politics. Language, seen either as the referential historical tongue or as the expressive Romantic voice, is thrown into question, and the poem folds together numerous voices, echoes and resonance, all of which challenge the analytical frame of critique. Resisting legibility as a political message and as theological commentary, the poem demands that we question our mode of reading itself. Let us endeavor, then, to conduct a reading of a different sort: not a turn to the historical nor to the genealogical, but to the importance of the detail and to the capacity of a single poem to militate against a general theory of politics.

What follows traces the particularities in Darwish's poem, focusing both on the various registers of the poetic language and the challenge of political reading. My essay is divided into three sections, each of which points to a nuance or problem raised in the text. The first section addresses the role of linguistic abstraction and political intelligibility; the second focuses on the problem of intertextuality and formal integrity; and the third explores the role of guilt and accountability at stake in the poem's affective interpellation of the reader. While each section roughly corresponds to a portion of the poem's own formal structuring,

no section plays the exclusive role of explication—so much as problematization. My concern, then, far beyond an assertion of what the text means to say, is how the poem stages the problem of engagement at the level of form, poetic address and ultimately reading.

Abstraction and the Mirage of Meaning

From the opening stanza, setting the stage of the poetic pronouns, Darwish's poem turns towards an affective register, making recourse not to legible symbols, but to a level of abstraction. If the first stanza grants a visual scene of a stone altar, the sacrifice and the diviners, then the second stanza effectively empties the visual, with you being asked to fetch water from the blurriness of the mirage [هات الماء من غبش السراب]. The second stanza invokes the love between us and you, and drives further into a realm of abstraction, invoking deserts [الصحراء], voices [غناؤنا المبحوح] and blood rites [في دمك الجواب]. The past reemerges in tense and tone, for, as the poem tells us, we did not kill you [لم نقتلك], we did not kill the prophet [لم نقتل نبيا]. The immediacy of the sacrificial scene gradually recedes into an invocation of a history and the possibility of a profound and amorous relation between you and us. The pronouns, situated initially in the present tense, are simultaneously filled out with echoes of the past and emptied with poetic allusions of fleeting appearances. Already by the third stanza, the seemingly concrete scenario collapses amidst the intricate valences of a poetic language that is itself resistant to an immediate comprehensible vision or allegory.

Along with the conceptual inversions (the blurriness of the mirage [غبش السراب]), Darwish invokes a certain amorous relation between you, who reads, and the us, who speaks. This love extends boldly into the next stanza, when the poem elaborates and thickens the interaction, pointing to the judgment day [القيامة]. There is a cry to be tested in the metallic dust [المعدني الهباء], which is followed by an assertion of you who died to know how much we loved you [ومت لتعرف كم نحبك]. With the collapsing of your brimming heart [قلبك المللآن], the verse ends with an invocation of ripe dates [رطبا جنيا], a motif drawn directly from the story of Mary in the Qur'an.[8] The you and the us fold together in dialogue, oscillating in the direct address and the scattering of poetic allusions to the scriptures. The seemingly simple story, plotted for us in the first stanza, explodes in the third with visions and structures of guilt, innocence and pleas coming into play. What Darwish offers is neither a reading of scripture as doctrine (grounded in the authority of the diviners) nor its emergence entirely as symbol and myth.[9] Instead, drawing directly from its language, references and emotional force, the poem folds the reader into its narrative, shifting between a preexisting story and direct address and complicating the temporality of the scene in which it comes to be read.

It is worth noting that the poem derives its force not solely from its invocation of the sacrifice, nor from the flirtation with the scriptural register, but in large part from its capacity to engage the dialogue between the you and the us. The direct address draws the poem out of its status as a sacred textual object, known in written form, and animates it as an interpellation, calling out to the reader. And yet, this poetic calling invites a crucial question: how might we come to terms with the fact that, on the one hand, the poem speaks to you, the reader, and, on the other, refers to you, the sacrifice, the Christ figure? Is the poem folding along political, theological and ultimately ethical lines in order to demonstrate how you, the reader, poetically become the sacrifice? In what way is the poem to be read, either as speaking directly to you, in the world, or speaking to you, through the figure of the sacrifice? What emerges in this conundrum highlights a split between the discursive and deictic status of poetic language—between the direct address to a reader, situated here and now,

and the scriptures of a sacred past. The poem calls out to you to step forth, while leaving open the very question as to whom this calling is addressed.

This question is underscored further not only in the interplay of the discursive and narrative levels of language, but also, as the second and third stanzas show, with the poetic abstractions. With this in mind, we might see the poem itself at the crossroads of various possible ways of reading, leaving in abeyance the resolution of how to know, feel and understand its words, rhythms and sounds. Rather than postulate an ideal reader capable of understanding the scriptural references in full, the poem negotiates a path between you, intelligible scripturally as Christ, and you, intelligible politically as a historically-situated reader. Not simply mythological, nor explicitly religious, then, "al-Qurbān" comes to fold reading upon itself, calling the reader forth, as a sacrifice, and exploding the sacred language of scripture into the poetic practice of reading. What subsides in the process is any particular meaning, any set allegory, and instead, the poem gives itself over to be read amidst a scattering of poetic and scriptural allusions, none of which finds referential stability in the carefully orchestrated lines.

The first few stanzas introduce not only the possibility of a religious scene, a mythological register in which to comprehend the poem, but also its linguistic dissolution into various poetic figures, driven to the limits of sense. And so too does the poem take the reader, ambiguated in the time of reading, in order to throw into question how the ethical crisis staged could be understood. Gone is the sense in which the scriptures exist mythologically as an allegory to be discerned, and instead, the poem brings the scriptures to life, taking narration into discourse, taking the abstraction of a story into the direct interpellation of the you who reads. Intelligibility here is not simply a matter of ascertaining what the poem says, but a matter of being moved by the poem, its rhythms, its figures and its references. Ensnared in the age-old poetic conundrum, Darwish's poem adheres to what Roman Jakobson (alluding to Paul Valéry) describes as the "hesitation between sound and sense," or what Giorgio Agamben glosses as the tension between "the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere" (109).[10]

Aesthetics, Repetition and the Purposeless Poem

As the poem continues in the fourth stanza, this appearance of meaning [صورة المعنى] effectively inverts the initial stanzas, taking essence into the realm of appearance and shifting the very grounds of comprehension. The seemingly vivid descriptions with which the poem begins are gradually disarticulated in a series of abstractions, poetically intelligible and only seemingly grounded in scripture. You did not return to your bodily limbs [فلا ترجع إلى أعضاء جسمك], the poem tells us. Leave your name in the echo of something [واترك اسمك في الصدى صفة لشئ ما]. The various poetic complexities, from the blur of the mirage from which to fetch water to the echo of something, render meaning merely an appearance, as fleeting as the image of the witness and the martyr [شهيدا شاهدا], the smiling face [طلق المحيا] with which the fourth stanza ends. It would seem that the immediately recognizable religious register within which the poem begins has, by the third stanza, scattered into Darwish's poetic language.

Yet, at the very moment the poem seems to fold itself into the hoarse voices in the desert [غناؤنا المبحوح في الصحراء], a question emerges in the fifth stanza, shifting from the realm of abstraction back into a direct address, calling unto you to respond. Which is it, of the favors, that we deny [أي آلاء نكذب]? Who will purify us other than you? Who will free us other than you? The poem fills out the line of questions, incorporating references to carpenters talented in the construction of wooden crosses, and shifts into the future anterior in the sixth stanza: we will say to you, we did not cry [سنقول: لم نخطئ]. Temporality folds further upon it-

self as the apparent present tense of the address draws back to a body born and risen again, to a "you" who has lived a past. If the rain does not come, the poem tells us, we will wait for it, and we will sacrifice your body again. The verse ends with an exclamation, the first of the six stanzas: how many times you return alive [كَم من مرة ستعود حيا]! The journey from the opening scene to the resonant echoes of the sacred past returns again to the interaction between the you and the us, and now, between the registers of life and death.

From the waves of abstraction to the intertextual dispersal, the poem grants temporary sense upon itself, repeating its opening structure, the direct address to the you, the sacrifice, in the seventh stanza: come forth alone [هيا تقدم انت وحدك]. With this repetition in mind, we might say that the poem reads within itself as a text formally unified, and yet intertextually dispersed. On the one hand, to read the poem solely in terms of its scriptural references, as it draws from and reworks the story of Mary, would be to necessarily skirt the poem's own formal structures. And yet, on the other, to assume that the scriptures are read mythologically would be to overlook some of the ways in which the poem enacts a certain aesthetic discourse, replete with rhythms, motifs and stanzas.[11] What we encounter, then, in this seventh stanza's repetition of the opening lines is nothing short of a calling out to the reader, whose position, now more than ever in the poem, is that of a participant in its aesthetic integrity. The you, once the reader of the poem, is folded into the logic of the scenario and carried through the various conceptual inversions in the poetic logic of scriptural intelligibility.

If I emphasize the seventh stanza, I do so because this repetition inaugurates the emergence of a poetic parallelism, in which the poem comes to exist as a text with its own formal logic. Far from the realm of statement, which might appear an implication of the discursive register, the poetic repetition folds the text upon itself, back within its own construction. This repetition grants immediate insight into the singularity of the poem, and poses a crucial challenge to intertextuality. If we are prone to read the text intertextually, as it draws from and sites other works, we arrive at an understanding of the poem in its dispersal, as it is integrally linked to other texts. And yet, what a formal concern for the reading offers is the text's implicit engagement as an aesthetic work. It is, after all, at this moment that the poem asserts its singularity, and in this singularity there lies the fundamental literary dimension of the poem's purposeless purpose. If the first few stanzas lay out the terrain of the narrative logic, alluding directly to the scriptures and invoking linguistic abstraction, then the seventh stanza folds the text back unto itself, a repetition from within.

With these dimensions of the poem in mind, intertextuality arrives at its limit: reading, as such, becomes the open question of the poem, and hermeneutics collapses into what emerges as the appearance of meaning [صورة المعنى]. My goal here is not to argue that Darwish resists intertextuality, for he clearly draws references to other texts, but rather to insist that reading, as such, be found from within the particularity of how the poem works with these references. It is, after all, through citation that the story of the sacrifice is brought to life differently, shattered in the polyvalence of poetic free play. In as much as poetry negotiates a relationship with the language it invokes, so too does it complicate the mythological references of which it is comprised.

An alternate reading could easily look to how Darwish's poem, consciously or not, reformulates the scriptures, adapting them to the poem's formal particularity. In fact, this line of reading has been fundamental to the political readings of Darwish, in which his references to the Qur'an are analyzed in terms of the faithfulness of their motivation. Is it, such readers ask, blasphemy to invoke the Qur'an in an allegorical manner? Other readers, pointing to the importance of the poetic register, could easily claim that the Qur'an is a text like

any other, to be read and understood within the context of the poem as a text. While here I point to the importance of the poem's aesthetic dimensions, and notably the repetition of certain structures throughout, I am ultimately interested in driving towards a relationship between pronouns and the emergence of a formalist ethics—not simply through the analysis of how a text is understood, but more particularly through conflicting registers at play within the text. Rather than insist upon religious blasphemy, on the one hand, or political engagement, on the other, we might wonder how the poem itself ambiguates the registers, leaving us to question the very basis of politics and religion.

Accusation and Accountability

While the poetic address and the aesthetic integrity of the poem underscore the competing registers of intelligibility in the first few stanzas, near the end of the poem, the emphasis changes. As this second half of the poem unfolds, there is a notable shift from the discussion of the you, which begins the poem, to a description of the faithful we. In the seventh stanza, you, alone above the lyricists' abyss [هاوية الغنائيين], contrasts with we, the hollow men asleep in the saddle [الفارغين النائمين على ظهور الخيل].[12] If the first half of the poem establishes the various scenes, then the second half, flirting with abstraction, raises ethical concerns regarding the sacrifice itself. The interplay between questions and accusations, between observations and denials, leads to a direct celebration. We depend upon your blood, the poem tells us in the eighth stanza, guide us, light the way for us with your pure blood. From body to blood to messages, the poetic discourse shifts, teetering between the various registers of divine language: the body, the flesh and the sacrifice itself. The words of the poem allude at once to the divine story, known to all, and to the various shifting pronouns, when the we speaks to the you.

The importance of this rhetorical shift is crucial, seeing as it takes the story, set in the third person, and implicates it directly in the logic of the accusation, contingent upon the us and the you.[13] The verse that follows in the ninth stanza claims that no one apologized for your word, and that when asked by Rome, we replied that we were not of you, and ultimately delivered you to the executioner [وأسلمناك للجلاد]. At this point in the poem, we have a cry for forgiveness, staged somewhat ironically, with a reference to a minor betrayal [الصغيرة خيانتنا]. The interactive dimension of the poem, its attentiveness to the us and you, enables a prolonged emphasis on our disposition in light of you, that is, the description of an encounter with the divine and the sacrifice which ensued. This section also underscores accountability, staged here in terms of guilt and innocence, and the role of apology.

The poem then moves to the future tense in the tenth stanza, as though to emphasize a pact to come, claiming that we will believe the vision, the marriage between the Holy Spirit and the sacred body [الزواج الفذ بين الروح والجسد المقدس]. The praise continues, and you are addressed for being higher and higher, having descended only to have been sacrificed on the wooden cross [خشب الصليب]. You, the stultifying riddle [غزا عصيا], are the light connection [همزة الوصل الخفيفة] between the gods in the sky and us. The proclamation serves as an apparent confession of faith, a notable shift from the previous reflections on the guilt of the sacrifice. The celebratory tone, its call for guidance, signals a utopian and seemingly hopeful shift towards what is to come. By this ninth stanza, then, we have moved from the small treason to a plea for forgiveness to the ultimate proclamation of faith.

The last stanzas of the poem abandon discussions of guilt and accusations and lead towards a bold conclusion, drawn directly from the story of Mary in the Qur'an. To reach this closing point, with all of its linguistic eloquence, the poem calls forth a celebration of you. Let

every verdant thing celebrate you [ليحتفل بك كل ما يخضر], the poem tells us in the thirteenth stanza, and the trail of a butterfly [الفراشة] serves as the poem, the very lightness of meaning. You are to be celebrated as well by everything not possessed by memory [لم يمتلك الذكرى], the resplendent moon. Pointed and powerful as the invocations of butterflies, trees, stones and moons are for this stanza, they function poetically, ultimately transforming metaphor and myth, scripture and language, to a movement of the emotions, the elegiac conclusion of the poem.

Prior to concluding, the poem opens up the possible negation in the fourteenth stanza of all that has been said, urging you not to break, for your break would break us [فإذا انكسرت أكسرتنا]. If you triumphed in our destruction, you would destroy our temple as well: life and death, death and life, the images fold back and forth upon themselves towards the conclusion of the phrase, with the invisible vision, the ghostly apparition [طيفا خفيا]. What had been celebratory is thus also foreboding, warning of the implications of an abandonment, a destruction. And crucially, what had been celebratory also folds within the poetic motif of invisible vision, throwing into question the status of poetic seeing. The language through which the reader sees flutters back and forth in these last stanzas between scriptural reference and poetic free play.

In the end, then, the poem returns in the fifteenth and final stanza to its scriptural beginnings, taking the poetics of language towards the Qur'anic story of Mary. With a declaration of the height at which you remain, the poem invokes the following proclamation: that you are our most beautiful martyr [أجملنا شهيدا]. The brief phrase is straddled by parallel constructions on either end, and it echoes the fourth stanza with the invocation of the witness and the martyr, lexographically entwined as they are. We see in revelation your purple shadow a map [ظلك أرجواني الخريطة]. Then, concluding boldly, the poem draws in the quote of the story of Mary, that peace be upon you the day you are born in the country of peace, the day you die, the day you rise from the darkness of death alive!

I have traced the various contours of the poem not to suggest that Darwish resists intelligibility, nor to derive from his poem any one particular message. In fact, if anything, we might say that the poem derives its effectiveness precisely from staging questions, emotions and scenes, without necessarily allowing them to unfurl as any one message. Unlike those readings that take myth as the basis of poetics, here the scriptures function obliquely in the poem: neither fixed, nor reverent, but reanimated in the ambiguity of the pronouns and the temporality within which the poem is read. As the poem nears its end, as the last few stanzas unfold across the page, you, the reader, are called into the accusation and celebration. And it is precisely by being called into the poem that the mythological register, dependent on the third person level of narration, gives way to the discursive: you, as it turns out, are addressed only ever through your relation to the scriptural sacrifice. You are sacrificed in all too many ways: both thrown to the altar and dissolved into the composite of readers.

Pronominal Ethics: Toward the Question of Engagement

I have walked through the poem in order to underscore some of the complexities at play in its language and the challenge of extracting any one particular reading, either as a commentary on politics or on religion. Indeed, one could easily point to the term martyr [شهيد], which recurs twice in the poem, as evidence that it should be read in relation to contemporary politics in Palestine. One could also point to the quotations of the Qur'an to suggest that the poem is itself a reading of scripture. My point, however, is not to delineate ways of reading and argue on behalf of one being more convincing than the other. Instead, as I have tried to

show, reading itself is at stake in the poem, in a way that allows us to consider in greater detail the location of politics and the problem of engagement. The questions raised in Darwish's poem are thus not to be framed in terms of an opposition between politics and religion, but rather as the ambivalent imbrication of reading practices staged in this poetic text.

We have seen how the various twists and turns in poetic intelligibility drive the reader from scripture to abstraction, from accusation to confession, but what intervention does Darwish make and in what terms is the poem to be understood? The questions his poem raises, more than answers, ultimately drive us towards the ambiguous and often tense relation between aesthetics and politics, which is, as I have argued, at play here ethically. It is the ethical invocation of the poem, its capacity to call out to the reader, which strikes me as its strongest provocation. This ethical invocation, integral to the poetic address, helps to draw the reader into the text and ultimately animates an alternate form of engagement—not by means of the immediate here and now of history, but by the resonance of the structures of guilt, innocence and accountability. We thus move between the role of the figure, staged in the opening stanza, and the role of the accusation, within which you, the reader, are implicated.

What is most striking, then, is not that the ethical is a retreat from politics, but rather that the poem throws into question the grounds upon which ethics and politics would align. Rather than answering questions, the poem poses them to you, the reader, as part of the scripture. What the poem does not address is how these questions should be answered, and as such, the political grounds of the poem resist intelligibility. The space that is opened up, which I frame here as aesthetics, allows us to consider how it is that politics is, at base, ever made thinkable. The legibility of action, the relation of cause and effect, is itself thrown to the altar, most poetically in the wavering between figure and abstraction.

At a time when Darwish's poetry itself has been put on trial, we realize the gravity of the questions posed here. I allude to the three occasions in which Marcel Khalife was accused of insulting religious values for his musical adaptation of Darwish's poem, "Anā Yūsuf, yā abī," which includes lines drawn from the Qur'an. There are those for whom this poem calls to mind the importance of a Palestinian national literature and for whom engagement entails the capacity of a text to comment and affect its immediate surroundings. There are those *other* readers, however, for whom the theological references resonate differently: not as mythology and allegory, but as a blasphemous recontextualization of sacred scripture (Chalala).[14] In the court of law, where freedom of speech confronts accusations of blasphemy, which reading practice triumphs? What reading does the law espouse, and in what way does the law govern how such poetic texts are read? While the scope of these questions far exceeds the argument of this essay, it points us in possible directions for considering the implications of how the reader, framed here within the open question of address, might be understood to matter in the context and delimitation of the literary field.

I end not with any grandiose conclusion, still less with any synthesis of the poem as an overarching theory. What I offer instead is a series of questions for how we might further develop the relation between literature and politics, and how, as readers, we might come to terms with the position of specific reading practices. What must literature do to be understood politically? To what senses does literature appeal to move its reader politically? As I have tried to argue here, not only does poetry make available a certain category of the reader, interpellated through address, but it also constitutes the possibility of a political imagination, integrally related to the actions, responses and social education of its readership. In this way, if history is an analysis of lived events, then literature and poetry urge us to consider *how* it is that these events are not only lived, but imagined.

With this in mind, we are led to consider not only what Darwish's poem offers by way of politics, aesthetics and ethics, but more fundamentally still, the role of engagement. Lest it seems that the unintelligibility of the poetic register renders all actions meaningless, it is important to recognize the stakes of poetic engagement. What is intelligible may not be any statement or message to graft onto the lived world; instead, "al-Qurbān," calling you to the altar, leaves you implicated in a series of questions and ultimately susceptible to the play between forgiveness and accountability. And moving from statement to question, you, the reader, the sacrifice and the scapegoat, remain the site, if not the source, of the answer.

Notes

1   The poem appeared in print as Maḥmūd Darwīsh, "al-Qurbān," and in a translation by Nur Elmessiri as "The Offering" in *Al-Ahram Weekly* 8 Feb. 2001. The translation follows the same stanzas as Darwish's poem, and I have adopted my own rendering of the poem in the essay, but include the poem at the conclusion of these notes for the reader to follow.

2   I am referring, in part, to the work of Barbara Harlow, for whom Darwish is one of a series of engaged Third World writers. Her book, *Resistance Literature*, points to Arabic literary figures such as Darwish, Sonallah Ibrahim (Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm), Ghassan Kanafani (Ghassān Kanafānī) and Etel Adnan (Ītil ʿAdnān), and to a range of Sub-Saharan African and Latin American writers: Bessie Head, Omar Cabezas, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Nadine Gordimer, to name just a few. In addition to Harlow, however, I am also thinking of a trend in modern Arab poetics to position Darwish within a constellation of resistance poets, notably in the work of John Asfour, *When Words Burn*.

3   I refer here to Emmanuel Levinas, in particular, though the work of Martin Buber, among others, could be useful for considering the ethical stakes of I/you. Much of what follows draws from the distinction between the narrational and discursive registers of language in the work of Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*.

4   In an interview with Fakhri Saleh, Darwish notes that "al-Qurbān" was one of two poems he wrote at the outset of the second Intifada. He elaborates in his comments on the relationship between poetry and politics, noting that the scene invoked in the poem is general and not a specific incident, see: Darwīsh, Maḥmūd. Interview by Fakhrī Ṣāliḥ. *Mahmoud Darwish Foundation*. Mahmoud Darwish Foundation, n.d. Web. 14 June 2014.

5   While it is not my goal here to point to the poem's borrowings from the story of Mary [مريم], it is worth noting that there are, throughout the poem, particularly towards the end, verses that have been nearly transposed from the Qur'an. Ahmad Ashqar published an extended analysis on religious symbols in "al-Qurbān" specifically, but ignoring the ambiguities of address, he ultimately undermines the poetic complexity of Darwish's work, see: Ashqar, Aḥmad. *Al-tawrātiyāt fī shiʿr Maḥmūd Darwīsh min al-muqāwama ilā al-taswiya*. Damascus: Cadamus Books, 2005. Print.

6   The question of the poetic time echoes debates in lyric poetry regarding the question of poetic address. My argument here assumes to a certain extent an interplay between the reader of the lyric poem and the Christ-figure at stake in the lyric address. Part of the split between the theological and the political reading, I am suggesting, has to do with the capacity to collapse the time in the poem's narrative, that is, to see how it resonates with a contemporary political context and how it relies on scripture. The poem, we might say, is itself a reading of the scripture. For an especially insightful reading of Darwish's poetry with attention to temporality, see: Sacks, Jeffrey. "For Decolonization." *Arab Studies Journal* 17.1 (2009): 110–28. Print.

7   My reference to the allegorical register of understanding points towards the work of Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin, within the realm of aesthetics and politics, as well as to Frederic Jameson's now notorious essay on Third World allegories. My argument is not to suggest that Darwish's poem be read allegorically or not, but rather to ascertain what would be at stake in the reading practice of the allegorical, and therefore, political understanding of the text. See Benjamin, Walter. "The Baroque German Drama." *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. London: Verso, 1998. Print; De Man, Paul. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. Print; Jameson, Frederic. "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (1984): 65–88. Print.

8   See the story of Mary verse 25 for the reference to ripe dates [رطبا جنيا].

9   I allude here to the work of Talal Asad for whom the interpretation of the scriptures mythologically marks a particular moment in the history of reading practices. In his recently published *Formations of the Secular*, Asad dedicates much of his first chapter, "What Would an Anthropology of the Secular Look Like?", to the role of mythology, citing in particular its role in modern Arab poetics. From a number of poets addressed, Asad focuses quite extensively on Adonis, founder of the *Shiʿr* group and "a self-described atheist and modernist" (54). When Asad takes up Adonis, he pays special attention to myth, claiming that "Adonis alludes to mythic figures in a self-conscious effort to disrupt the Islamic aesthetic and moral sensibilities, to attack what is taken to be sacred tradition in favor of the new—that is, of the Western." Asad goes on to generalize further and suggests that this "use of myth in modern Arabic poetry is part of a response to the perceived failure of Muslim societies to secularize" (ibid.). Warning that "an atheism that deifies Man is, ironically, close to the doctrine of incarnation," Asad reads Adonis on his own terms, focusing on how myth is, for Adonis, plural, as against the "fundamentalist (*asuli*) form of Islamic thought," which "has acquired the character of law—of commandment—and so is not apparent [...] as myth" (56). In this way, Asad recapitulates a rather famous line of reading modern Arab poetry, based to a large extent around Badawi's work, but traced out as well in the writings of Jaroslav Stetkevych, who Asad cites with apprehension, and Angelika Neuwirth. My purpose here is not to belabor any general theory of poetics so much as to investigate the ways within which reading is theorized in a particular poetic text, in this case, Darwish's poem.

10   I refer here to Giorgio Agamben's essay on the particular tension, "The End of the Poem," in his book, *The End of the Poem* (109). Agamben's essay focuses on enjambment as the defining characteristic of poetry, drawing from the work of the French linguist, Jean-Claude Milner.

11   My reference to the mythological reading of the scriptures alludes to a shift in Biblical criticism during the early modern period. There are numerous studies that address this shift, the emergence of Higher Criticism, in great detail, notably Debora Kuller Shuger's, *The Renaissance Bible,* but also in more general terms, Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular*. Asad cites the work of scholars such as Michel de Certeau, for whom the shift involves the 'deontologizing of language,' which Asad glosses as "the split between a deictic language (it shows and/or organizes) and a referential experimentation (it escapes and/or guarantees) structures of modern science, including 'mystical science'" (38). Asad suggests that this transformation in language leads to a fundamental transformation in reading practices, relating, in particular, to the reading of the scripture. The scripture, at once the divine word of God transmitted through prophets and religious scholars, comes to be understood mythically, as a hermeneutic question of symbols and meaning.

12   I note here the allusion to T.S. Eliot's 1925 poem, "The Hollow Men." The influence of T.S. Eliot on modern Arab poetry has been analyzed extensively in Moreh, Shmuel. *Modern Arabic poetry 1800-1970.* Leiden: Brill, 1976. Print.

13   There is an important line of argument that could well be worked out about the relation of the sacrifice to the discursive register of language. In her book, *The Renaissance Bible*, Deborah Kuller Shuger points to the novelty of human sacrifice within the emergence of natural law during the Renaissance. She contrasts descriptions of human sacrifice by Grotius and Frazer, noting how the principle of substitution becomes a problem in Christian law: the accused cannot substitute another to be punished in his/her place; see especially chapter 2, "The Key to All Mythologies." Darwish's use of the discursive register of language is novel in so far as it turns on the shifter, infinitely substitutable, and relies on the ambivalence of various possible registers of reading.

14   I am referring here to the characterizations of Islam that prevail in the media coverage of the trial: on the one hand, we have discussions of rights, liberties and freedom of speech, and on the other hand, less analyzed, we have discussions of piety and respect for the sacred text. See, for example, Elie Chalala, "Marcel Khalife Faces Charge Over Darwish Poem."

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Appendix

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ألقربان

محمود درويش

هيَّا... تَقدَّمْ أنتَ وَحدَكَ، أنتَ وَحْدَكَ.
حولكَ الكُهَّانُ ينتظرون أمرَ الله، فاصعَدْ
أيُّها القربان نحو المذبح الحجريِّ، يا كبشَ
الفداءِ — فدائنا... واصعدْ قويًّا

لَكَ حُبُّنا، وغناؤنا المبحوحُ في
الصحراء: هاتِ الماءَ من غَبَش السراب،
وأيقظِ الموتى ! فَفي دَمِكَ الجوابُ، ونحن
لم نقتُلْكَ... لم نَقْتُلْ نبيًّا /

/ إلاّ لنَمْتَحِنَ القيامةَ، فامتحِنّا أَنتَ
في هذا الهَباء المعدنيِّ. ومُتْ لتعرفَ
كم نُحُبُّكَ... كم نُحُبُّكَ! مُتْ لنعرف
كيف يسقط قلبُكَ الملآن، فوق دعائنا،
رُطَباً جَنِيّا.

</div>

لَكَ صُورةُ المعنى. فلا ترجع إلى
أعضاءِ جسمكَ. واترك اسمَكَ في الصدى
صِفةً لشيءٍ ما. وكُنْ أيقونةً للحائرين،
وزينةً للساهرين، وكُنْ شهيداً شاهداً،
طَلْقَ المحيّا

فبأيِّ آلاءٍ نكذِّبُ؟ من يُطَهِّرنا
سواك؟ ومن يحرِّرُنا سواك؟ وقد
وُلِدتَ نيابةً عنَّا هناك. وُلِدْتَ من نور
ومن نار. وكُنَّا نحن نجّارينَ مَوْهُوبينَ في
صُنْعِ الصليب، فخُذْ صليبَكَ وارتفعْ
فوق الثُريّا

سنقولُ: لم نُخطِئْ، ولم نُخطِئْ. إذا
لم يهطُلِ المطرُ انتظرناهُ، وضحَّينا بجسمكَ
مَرَّةً أخرَى. فلا قربانَ غيرك، يا حبيب
اللهِ، يا ابنَ شقائق النعمان. كَمْ مِنْ
مرّةٍ ستعودُ حيّا!

هيّا، تقدَّمْ أنت وحدك، يا استعارَتَنا
الوحيدةَ فوق هاوية الغنائيِّين. نحن الفارغين
النائمين على ظهور الخيل... نسألكَ الوفاءَ،
فكُنْ وفيّاً للسُلالةِ والرسالة. كُنْ وفيّاً
للأساطير الجميلة، كُنْ وفيّا!

وبأيِّ آلاءٍ نكذِّبُ؟ والكواكبُ في
يديك. فكُنْ إشارتَنا الأخيرةَ. كُنْ عبارتَنا
الأخيرةَ في حُطام الأبجديّة «لم نَزَلْ
نحيا، وَلَوْ موتى». على دَمِكَ اتَّكَلْنا.
دُلَّنا، وأَضِئْ لنا دَمَكَ الزكيّا!

لم يعتذر أَحَدٌ لجرحك. كُلُّنا قُلْنا
لروما: «لم نكن مَعَهُ». وأَسْلمناكَ للجلّاد.
فاصفحْ عن خيانتنا الصغيرةِ، يا أخانا
في الرضاعةِ. لم نكن ندري بما يجري.
فكُنْ سمحاً رَضِيّا

سَنُصَدِّقُ الرؤيا ونؤمنُ بالزواج الفَذِّ
بين الروح والجَسَدِ المقدّس. كُلّ ورد
الأرض لا يكفي لعرشك. حَفّت الأرضُ،
استدارتْ، ثم طارتْ، كالحمامةَ في سمائكَ —
يا ذبيحتنا الأنيقةَ. فاحترقْ، لتضيئنا، ولتنبثقْ
نجماً قَصِيّا

أعلى وأَعلى. لَسْتَ منّا إن نزلتَ
وقُلْتَ: «لي جَسَدٌ يُعَذِّبني على خشب
الصليب». فإن نَطَقْتَ... أَفَقْتَ، وانكشفَتْ
حقيقتُنا. فكُنْ حُلْماً لنحلم. لا تكُنْ بَشَراً
ولا شجراً. وكُنْ لُغْزاً عصيّا

كُنْ هَمْزَةَ الوَصْل الخفيفةَ بين آلهة
السماء وبيننا. قد تمطر السُحُبُ العقيمةُ
من نوافذ حَرْفك العالي. وكن نور البشارةِ،
واكتب الرؤيا على باب المغارةِ، واهْدِنا
درباً سويّا

وليحتفلْ بِكَ كُلُّ ما يَخْضَرُّ، مِنْ
شَجَرٍ ومن حَجَرٍ، ومن أشياءَ تنساها
الفراشةُ فوق قارعة الزمان قصيدةً...
وليحتفلْ بِكَ كُلُّ مَنْ لم يمتلكْ ذكرى،
ولا قمراً بهيّا

لا تَنْكَسِرْ! لا تنتصرْ. كُنْ بَيْنَ —
بَيْنَ مُعَلَّقاً. فإذا انكسَرْتَ كَسَرْتَنا. وإذا
انتصرتَ كَسَرْتَنَا، وهَدَمْتَ هَيْكَلنا. إذنْ،
كن مَيِّتاً — حياً، وحيّاً — ميتاً، ليواصِلَ
الكُهَّانُ مهنَتَهُمْ. وكُنْ طيفاً خَفِيّا

ولتَبْقَ وحدك عالياً. لا يلمسُ الزَمَنُ
الثقيلُ مجالَكَ الحيويَّ. فاصعَدْ ما استطعتَ،
فأنتَ أجملُنا شهيداً. كُن بعيداً ما استطعتَ
لكي نرى في الوحي ظِلَّك أُرجوانيَّ الخريطةِ.
فالسلامُ عليك يَوْمَ وُلِدْتَ في بلد السلام،
ويَوْمَ مُتَّ، ويَوْمَ تُبْعَثُ من ظلام الموت
حيّا!

Molding the Clay:
Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb's Concept of Colloquial Poetry as Art of Resistance

Leslie Tramontini

Many Arab literary critics claim that political commitment in literature is nothing new to Arabic poetry, and that it has in fact existed for a long time, ever since pre-Islamic poetry. Usually, the only literature they discuss is that of classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*). However, poetry in the vernacular or spoken Arabic (*ʿāmmiyya*) has also played a great role—and still does—in commitment and engagement. This fact is often neglected, denied or ignored, mostly for ideological reasons. The educators of the *nahḍa* (Arab Renaissance) since the end of the nineteenth century regarded a standardized form of classical Arabic language as the basis for achieving a renaissance of Arab culture and modern national education. Various forms of Arab nationalisms denied the right of existence to dialectal literature, favoring *fuṣḥā* for reasons of politics and ideology. Analogously, in scholarship colloquial poetry has received less attention and less study than *fuṣḥā*-poetry. The aim of this article is to analyze political notions of colloquial poetry by one of Iraq's most outspoken and most committed poets, Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb. As a case study, I will present an analysis of his famous poem written in the southern Iraqi dialect, *Li-l-rayl wa-Ḥamad* (*For the train and for Ḥamad*, 1969), arguing that even a plain love poem composed in a way that does not conform to standard convention may bear notions of commitment and resistance. A short overview on the development of both colloquial poetry and the notion of *iltizām* (commitment) until the 1960s will help contextualize my hypothesis.[1]

Commitment in Poetry

Marilyn Booth in a 1992 article argues that colloquial poetry by its very definition is "an art of iltizām (commitment) par excellence, although the degree, direction and expression of iltizām vary along the entire spectrum of personal, political and poetic outlooks" (463).[2] Colloquial poetry has a long tradition, reaching back to the Andalusian *zajal*-poetry of the twelfth/thirteenth century and has taken on different forms in the various Arab regions. At the turn of the century, the *nahḍa*'s emphasis on reform and education saw a standardized/classical Arabic language not only as an instrument for modernizing state and society but also as a tool against colonialism. This contributed to the modern perception of the classical and colloquial as two distinct realms, not just as overlapping registers on one larger scale.[3] This provoked a new quality and kind of resistance that was articulated in the colloquial. In contrast to literature in *fuṣḥā*, which very often was an elitist affair addressed to a certain quite narrow social group of educated people, with its direct and precise expression poetry written in the vernacular could easily reach the whole population. One of the main aims of traditional colloquial poetry has been the creation or assertion of "collective sentiments" (Booth 465) and social criticism. Its political potential helped to inspire emotions, shape public awareness, and mobilize for change. Colloquial poetry played an important role in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, the Maghreb, offering itself—quite naturally so to say—as the medium of mass communication. It often took on satirical overtones combined

with harsh social criticism, a language and way of saying things which people could relate to directly and in which they could even participate in a kind of 'democratic' inclusivity.[4] It is this liberating notion which distinguishes it from most of the *fuṣḥā*-poetry.

The twentieth century strengthened the concept of the Arab poet as a political figure. Especially in Iraq, there was a strong local tradition to commitment, as seen in the neoclassical poetry of the 1920s and 1930s, which in some cases may have lacked aesthetic values but was decidedly and explicitly committed. Poets such as Ruṣāfī, Zahāwī and Jawāhirī clearly expressed their social criticism, strove for democratic change and women's liberation, and called for education; however, they used the old traditional style and did not experiment with form. Although until now classical poetry in the *ʿamūdī*-style (classical *qaṣīda*-form with two hemistiches) is still very popular in Iraq, it was the development of Free Verse (*shiʿr ḥurr*) at the end of the 1940s, combining political commitment with a new aesthetic poetical form, which became distinctive and had a huge impact on modern Arab poetry.[5]

When Sartre's concept of engagement was translated into Arabic,[6] it rapidly conquered the Arab literary world. In the high tide of *iltizām* as a literary concept in the 1950s, it exuded a hitherto unknown enthusiasm and optimism; Arab poets and authors rushed to adapt the term enthusiastically into their concept of writing. It was its notions of freedom, responsibility, and political participation which were eagerly integrated into a transnational and pan-Arab vision of a new order of Arab societies. Writing without a political message seemed impossible, out of step with the times. What was required was the writer as an avant-garde and intellectual spearhead of the nation, mobilizing people to share his worldview, in deep trust that literature can change the world.

However, very soon, with the ongoing colonial presence and the need for political action, revolution, and resistance, *iltizām* more and more came to mean party affiliation, usually to the Communist or some leftist party.[7] Poets and authors with diverging party affiliations or ideologies fought fierce battles as to who was representing the authentic voice of the people. Although in some cases this literature remained hollow and very often propagandistic, at the same time a new literature came into being, characterized by an urgent but subtle subtext of the necessity of political agency.

In retrospect, it seems that, from its onset, this equation of party affiliation and *iltizām* was doomed to fail: The inflationary use of the term in literary circles made it brittle and frail, creating many rivaling sub-notions (Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement* 210). With the renewed expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from their homes during the *naksa* of 1967, with the Algerians struggling in the aftermath of a bloody liberation war, with the death of Gamal Abd al-Nasser (Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir) heralding the end of Nasserism and 'classical' Arab Nationalism, and later followed by the Lebanese civil war which raged for fifteen years, the hopes for democratic and pluralistic change crumbled and Arab countries slid into more or less repressive political systems. Countries like Iraq developed exhaustive intelligence units—imported from Western or Eastern allies—and perfected a wide range of surveillance systems, side by side with an ever-increasing cult of the leader. In such a reality *iltizām* was not what it used to be in the 1950s when the message was clear: To struggle against foreign colonial imperialists and the ruling feudal classes.

After the *naksa*, poets called for a new kind of *iltizām* which was to grow organically from the inside, possessing the aesthetic quality of the poem without however ignoring social criticism.[8] Within just a few years post-*naksa*, as homegrown autocrats and despots succeeded in taking power and started subjecting their own people to repressive systems, writers stopped simply harboring hope for a better future; rather, a new period of doubt and

disorientation started. Writing turned to the expression of a more individual and often rather pessimistic world view; poetry especially took on a tone that was dark, obscure, and very often hermetic, introverted and focused on the self rather than on society.[9]

Nawwāb's Concept of Commitment

At around this time, at the end of the 1960s, Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb (b. 1934 in Baghdad) published his first anthology (*dīwān*) in Iraqi vernacular—though he had been composing and reciting his poetry ever since the late 1950s. Nawwāb is an excellent example of a poet who runs counter to currents and trends, swimming against the tide. For him, literature in itself is a stage for resistance, refusal, and commitment, free from ideological restraints. He offers an encompassing definition of politics: "For me, a truly political point of view touches upon all aspects of life."[10] While Nawwāb has been a committed and engaged poet both in his colloquial and *fuṣḥā*-poems, the official language politics of Iraq in the 1950s and 1960s with its focus on Arab Unity, had a hampering effect on colloquial poetry.[11] In the ideologically charged heydays of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, when the notion of Arab nationalism was based heavily on classical language (*fuṣḥā*), Nawwāb—though being a staunch supporter of the idea of Arab unity and independence—followed his own mind to compose poetry in the Iraqi vernacular. In an interview in 1999, Nawwāb described his concept of colloquial poetry:

> Poetry in the vernacular is neither anti-Arab nor opposed to the idea of Arab Unity; rather it is an enrichment for poetry […] Both colloquial and *fuṣḥā*-poems have their own merits and priorities and their own universe. It is like working with completely different material: to carve a rock is totally different from molding the clay […] The dialect is like fermenting clay. During my first visit to the South Iraqi marshes I felt this. The marshes are full of water and clay, its nature all free flowing, and both water and clay in the most diverse forms. Colloquial has to be used with love so that it takes the form we want. (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 69–71)

Nor can his poetry be easily categorized in terms of content: He writes with an angry pen and heart.[12] His cause is the Arab cause (*al-qaḍiyya al-ʿarabiyya*) in its many facets: the feudal situation, poverty and social injustice, discrimination, the Palestinian catastrophe and the apathy of Arab leaders. His nationalism is not limited to Iraq but embraces the Arab nation as a whole, and more importantly, it is devoid of any ideological affiliations and full of compassion for the sufferings of the suppressed people:

> In colloquial poetry I talk about the Iraqi situation, the farmers' cause, for example. The colloquial is more direct, more melancholic. In *fuṣḥā*-poems I deal with the Arab cause in a more comprehensive way […] Colloquial is more capable of mobilizing people than *fuṣḥā*. (ibid.)

Although he had been an active member of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), he refused to be manipulated by ideologies;[13] rather, he followed a humanistic sort of commitment, compassionate with his contemporaries and especially the downtrodden, the ones without a voice, the unheard and suppressed. His own ordeal is very often cited as a symbol for his resistance and capacity to counter the hegemonic discourse: As an ICP member he was sentenced to death in the political turmoil of the year 1963, which was later on commuted to a life sentence. His spectacular escape from the notorious prison Nuqrat al-Salman in the middle of the Iraqi desert has earned him respect from colleagues.[14] In the aftermath of this escape, he hid in the southern marshes until he had to finally leave Iraq for good, settling down in Damascus after several spells in other Arab capitals; he is meanwhile probably in the Emirates.

Notwithstanding his fame and popularity among Arabs, research on Nawwāb is still scarce. In Arabic, quite a few books on him have appeared recently but most of the studies focus on his *fuṣḥā*-poems. He does not usually feature in poetry anthologies, an exception being S. Simawe and Weissbort,[15] who have included Nawwāb in their anthology of Iraqi poetry. In Western academia, as far as I am aware, there seem to be hardly any studies on him, an exception here is Carol Bardenstein's excellent and insightful study on his *fuṣḥā*-poems.[16]

In his most famous (*fuṣḥā*-)poems like *Watariyyāt layliyya* (*Night strings*), "Al-musāwara amām al-bāb al-thānī" ("Agitation in front of the second gate"), "Jisr al-mabāhij al-qadīma" ("The bridge of old delights," usually referred to as "Tall Zaʿtar"), Nawwāb transcends narrow confines, speaks up in front of social and political weakness and cowardice, and mocks the rulers without fearing personal reprisal. Nor does he succumb to the ruling literary tastes of his time.[17] He resisted becoming a slave to any ideology or party politics, mercilessly attacking the ignorance and apathy of the rulers:

> This is an Arab night.
> The massacre was conveniently extinguished before the summit meeting
> I accuse the mammoth of Nejd and his disciple,
> The pimp of Syria and his side-kick
> The judge of Baghdad and his testicle
> The King of Syphilis … little Hassan the Second
> The blotted rat of filth in the Sudan
> And the one sitting beneath the square root sign on the sand
> of Dubai, all wrapped up in his robe
> And the one in Tunis too, all bow-legged from calf to neck
> (Simawe and Weissbort 173)
>
> Alright alright, I'll make an exception, for the poor wretch
> in Ras al-Khaimah (174)
> […]
> Have you heard, oh Arabs of silence?
> Have you heard, accursed Arabs?
> The hatred has reached the wombs!
> […]
> Palestine is being erased from the womb!
> The adherents of the American religion in Mecca
> And the markets are at their peak!
> It's a public auction, oh noble ones! (171)

Social justice and the idea of belonging without bowing to ideological constraints are more important for Nawwāb than official recognition. The *enfant terrible* of Iraqi poetry constantly embroiled in conflict with the ruling parties, be it the monarchy or the military rulers, or afterwards the Baath Party from the end of the 1960s onwards, Nawwāb was deeply convinced of man's right to political participation and to full social responsibility. In the stormy period of the late 1950s, Nawwāb endorsed the prospect of armed resistance in the marshlands of the Iraqi south, arguing that the geographical and the social space there were suitable for a revolution starting from the countryside (Yaḥyā 115).

In his colloquial poetry, Nawwāb could build on the experiences of the generations before him, not only poets like Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān and Aḥmad Shawqī, who also composed both poetry in the vernacular and in *fuṣḥā*, but also Iraqi poets like Ḥājj Zāyir (d. 1920) and ʿAbbūd al-Karkhī (1861–1946; Booth 467). It is generally acknowledged that he revolution-

ized the diction of colloquial poetry, bringing to it new dimensions and opening up unforeseen horizons in Iraq.[18] Inspired by his experience of imprisonment, escape, and hiding in southern Iraq and driven by his conviction of social and political justice, he appropriated rural imagery and ideals and integrated them into his poetry. At the same time, Nawwāb was not disconnected from the new poetic trends; on the contrary, he was very much affected by the Free Verse movement (Booth 478) and the various experiments with form and content that had taken place since the end of the 1940s in Iraqi poetry. In his 1969 *dīwān*, he combined these avant-garde trends with the colloquial poetic tradition. This resulted in poems which were well known in Iraq in the 1960s, as his contemporary and fellow poet ʿAlī Jaʿfar al-ʿAllāq put it: "His poems kept reaching us, we knew them by heart, we sang them! It was as if a nightly rain poured down on us, or a wind coming up from a deep abyss. They were public property!" (150)[19]

Both in his colloquial and his *fuṣḥā*-poems, Nawwāb used dramatic and structural elements to build up tension, such as dialogue, questions and answers, and techniques of varied repetition which lead to a transgression of genre boundaries. His public poetry readings were live performances which have earned him wide acclaim and popularity all over the Arab world. He explains his special relationship to the audience as such:

> Arab poetry, be it in classical Arabic or the vernacular, differs from other [poetry traditions] by its rhythmic cadence and melodious music which addresses both eye and ear. That is why to recite and declaim poetry [aloud] is the very essence of Arab poetry, since pre-Islamic times until now [...] Out of this conviction I cut down the distance between me and my audience with my poetry sessions. I don't really care much about my poems getting published in papers, journals or even books. (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 32)

At another occasion he has stated: "I find that in most poetry readings my poems reach the audience although my anthologies are not widespread; sometimes, in some Arab countries, I am astonished at how much so! This means that poetry has not lost its impact and power" (69).

In an interview with the Kuwaiti writer Nūr al-Qaḥṭānī, Nawwāb brings another notion into play:

> The political systems are afraid of the power and the atmosphere which the poem in the poetry reading creates, [...], it is an electrifying atmosphere which pushes [people] towards refusal and provocation, arousing awareness. (75)

Tapes of his poetic sessions circulated underground and were secretly sold, and nowadays on YouTube one can watch him laughing, crying and shouting his verses.[20] The written word seems only of secondary value for him, as he has stated himself; until now, no authorized collected works of his have yet to be published.[21]

The most famous of Nawwāb's early colloquial poems which has earned him almost immediate and lasting fame in Iraq is entitled "Li-l-rayl wa-Ḥamad". It was published in the first 1969 anthology of the same name which consists of only colloquial poems. In this anthology, his compassion for the underprivileged and his commitment is obvious through the subjects he chooses: farmers, local leaders, tribesmen who resist the feudal system, their struggle and strife, prisoners and the injustice inflicted on them. Colloquial poetry with its mainly political overtones, however, can also be directed towards the articulation of the inner feelings and emotions of the people, forming another kind of resistance, one not just limited to the political level but also embracing the poetic and aesthetic level. Nawwāb himself has said in a 1999 interview: "In the colloquial, emotions and images stemming

from my inner self, from aesthetics, images and music, are dominant" (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 73). This is quite obvious in the poem "Li-l-rayl wa-Ḥamad," as Saʿdī Yūsuf (1934), Naw-wāb's contemporary and poet-friend, has stated:

> Muẓaffar pushed me to be a poet. "Al-Rayl wa-Ḥamad" [sic][22] itself pushed me. In these days, ap-plause was appreciated and pure. This anthology came as love poetry, it went against the tide. But who else could be a poet if not the one swimming against the tide? (qtd. in Yaḥyā 21)

The poem has to my knowledge not been translated into English or German. Indeed, it is a challenge to any translator. Its language is inspired by rural songs and rhythms, many words are not found in dictionaries, and the idiomatic expressions are sometimes incomprehensi-ble without explanation and comments. As is the case with any kind of orally transmitted literature, one finds a plethora of variations with diverging, missing, or omitted verses. These different versions in social media and pirate copies make academic work and analy-sis rather a challenge. In my translation of the poem I will follow the text of the Damascus reprint of the *dīwān* (2008) and the comments and explanations of the Iraqi literary critic ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Luʾluʾa.[23] Due to the obstacles described, the following translation will have to remain an approximation and a preliminary undertaking.[24]

Analysis of the Poem

For the train and for Hamad [25]   للريل[26] وحمد

She loved him by the morning dew   على ماء الصبح احبته

by the water of the night the moon [shone] on the departure   على ماء الليل كان للهجر قمر

and the train passed by   ومر قطار

We passed by you, Hamad, sitting in the night train   مرّينه بيكم حمد، واحنه بغطار الليل

hearing the grounding of coffee beans, smelling sweet cardamom   واسمعنه، دك اگهوه وشّمينه ريحة هيل

O train, howl of misery! Howl of yearning, o train!   يا ريل صيح ابقهر صيحة عشگ يا ريل

Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain[27] هودر هواهم، ولك، حَدر السنابل گطه

Hey you with the turquoise ring, who fixed the golden nose ring   يا بو محابس شذر[28]، يلشاد خزامات

O train, by God slow down when the one with the mole passes by   يا ريل بالله. ابغنج من تجزي بام شامات

Don't leave, don't go away, my heart has not yet died   ولا تمشي مشية هجر.. گلبي بعد ما مات

Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain   وهودر هواهم، ولك، حدر السنابل گطه

Roll by at the station, full of sorrow and grief, o wagons!   جيزي المحطة.. بحزن.. ووْنين.. يفراگين

They didn't enjoy us with their love, so shame on you to enjoy!   ما وتّسونه، ابعشگهم عيب تتونسين

O train, enflame in sorrow since that's what lovers are   يا ريل چم حزن.. اهل الهوى، امچبين

Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain   وهودر هواهم، ولك، حدر السنابل گطه

O train, it turned out all wrong, love is a lie   يا ريل، طلعوا دَغش.. والعشگ چذابي

That follows me my whole life long and does not quench my fire   دك بيه كل العمر ما يطفه عطابي

We walk the same way, my path [is] yours   نتوالف ويه الدرب، وترابك ترابي

Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain   وهودر هواهم، ولك، حدر السنابل گطه

I want to be the right one for Ḥamad and for no one else!	آنه ارد ألوگ الحمد ما لوگن لغيره
The cool morning breeze makes me shiver and the coins [on my veil/dress] jingle softly	يحفّلني برد الصبح وتلجلج الليره
O train when we were young we played and pranced together	يا ريل باول زغرنه لعبنه طفيره
Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain	وهودر هواهم، ولك حدر السنابل گطه
Ḥamad is [fair skinned] like wedding silver, [intoxicant] like a Nargile	چن حمد فضة عرس.. چن حمد نرگيله
With blue tattoos, with hitched up frock [for work]	مدگگ بي الشذر ومشلّه اشليله
O train, don't rush my dear, let me sweet talk to him	يا ريل.. تگل يبويه وخل أناغيله،
perhaps my sad sweet talk will make the partridge yearn	يمكن أناغي بحزن منغه ويحن الگطه
I'd like to buy a little bell and wear the nose ring at night	أرد اشري جنجل والبس الليل خزامه
and sketch with tears of joy the stars, the wind, and moles	وارسم بدمع الضحج نجمه وهوه وشامه
O sweet one among the stars like a golden buckle	ويا حلوه بين النجم طبّاگه لخزامه
Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain	وهودر هواهم ولك حدر السنابل گطه
O bosom, a warm hand full, tightened by the cool morning breeze	گضبة دفو، يا نهد لملمك.. برد الصبح
When the train wagons pass, their air makes them tremble, o smooth one	يرجفتك ، فراگين الهوه يا سرح [29]
O train don't wake them up, it hurts	يا ريل لا .. لا تفزّزهن تهيج الجرح
Let them grow under the silk [like] partridges	خليهن يهودرن حدر الحراير گطه
Your fringes, the sun and air are like joyous trills	چن گذلتك والشمس والهوه هلهوله
Tender silk threads! Silk is normal for you!	شلايل بريسم والبريسم إلك سوله
Gold radiates, o comb! O people! How long is it	واذري ذهب يا مشط يلخلگ اشطوله!
as long as your hair! And the cold air makes the partridge sleep	بطول الشعر والهوى البارد ينيم الگطه
Just now my eyes were filled with laughter and chat	تو العيون امتلن.. ضحجات وسواليف
My breasts round small birds, fluffy	ونهودي زمّن والطيور الزغيره تزيف
O train our love drifts along [like a boat] with no oars	يا ريل سيتّس هوانه وما اله مجاذيف
Their love has grown, my dear, the partridge hidden in the grain	وهودر هواهم ولك حدر السنابل گطه

The reception of this poem has been phenomenal, with nearly every Iraqi knowing at least the first lines by heart. Colloquial poetry has a long tradition in Iraq—as it does in many other Arab countries—however, as Nawwāb himself says in the 1999 interview, this poem opened up a new dimension in Iraqi poetry:

> I would have never thought that one day I would submit this poem for print, or that it would gain such celebrity. I wrote it because I felt [the mood of] it, an inner delight, full of melody and emotions. It was special circumstances then, I wrote the poem at night, with a pen and paper under my pillow, in the dark. I started with it in 1956 and finished in 1958 [...] I consider it a transition to a new way of writing poetry in the vernacular [...] It was influenced by the artistic atmosphere at home, with paintings and music: my father used to play the oud and my mother the piano, and all this Kerbela atmosphere helped me compose this poem... (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 71)[30]

One of the great advantages of colloquial poetry is the absence of a literary canon and of strict prosodic rules, which gives the poet room to creatively experiment with rhyme and meter, to invent his own poetic forms, and to be more flexible with language and the choice of words. Nawwāb describes it this way:

> The grammatical nature of *fuṣḥā* could be called a rock which has to be sculptured: there is grammar and linguistic rules and rhetoric devices and the dominance of the literary traditional canon [...] Colloquial poetry is like clay since it is indulgent; it is distant from grammar and the rhetoric heritage which binds the *fuṣḥā*-poet to certain dimensions. The deflections of the dialect and the possibilities to assemble words allow the poet such an abundance and freedom to derive new words which don't exist and to give them meaning. In classical Arabic this is not possible. (69–70)

The southern Iraqi dialect lends the poem a flowing harmonious melody and rhythm; the stanza form and the refrain turning it into a song-like poem. Looking at most Arabic editions, prints or internet publications, there are hardly any lines or stanzas discernible, but a prosodic analysis shows that in fact they are evenly composed lines. Going by the rhyme, it is obvious that there are ten stanzas. Luʾluʾa claims that the poem is composed in the classical meter *basīṭ* (*mustafʿilun / fāʿilun / mustafʿilun / fāʿilun*) which—as far as I can see—is the case at least with the first few lines (212). Nawwāb himself however, in another example of transgressing boundaries, states explicitly that he is not "accurate" with the meters in his colloquial poetry (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 73).

The ten stanzas consist of four lines, the last of which forms the refrain. The poem is composed as a dialogue (a poetical form Nawwāb favors to build up tension) between the girl (remaining without name) who sits in the train and passes by, and Ḥamad who sees the train passing. The first stanza sets the scene of farewell and departure. In the second and third stanza, Ḥamad describes the beautiful girl with the mole and the golden rings, confirming his love for her. Like her, he addresses the train directly, this time by calling the wagons to slow down when passing, and blaming them for not stopping and letting him meet her. He is also in a state of despair and sorrow. The fourth stanza is polyvalent and could be spoken by either of the two; with a melancholic overtone it draws general conclusions, such as love is a lie. With the fifth stanza the girl confirms Ḥamad as her only love since childhood days, going on (sixth stanza) to depict his beauty and manliness (fair skinned, tattooed as usual with tribes folk, hard working and industrious). In the seventh stanza the perspective changes from her (first two lines) to Ḥamad, who compares the girl to a golden buckle, followed (eighth stanza) by a description of her breasts, full and round, but despairing over the train. Here the images of grain and hair are fused, leading into a lengthy description (ninth stanza) of her hair: blond, long, voluminous and smooth like silk. In the sixth, eighth and ninth stanzas, the refrain is varied with the partridge (breast) figuring in different contexts: yearning for love, growing and finally sleeping, indicating a motion towards the end. The last stanza is again from the girl's perspective, recalling the serenity and carefreeness of the past and complaining about the unknown future and destiny which is out of their hands (the boat without oars).

The refrain ("the partridge hidden in the grain") forms the nexus of the poem: an allusion to the girl's breasts hidden under her voluminous blond hair (*sanābul*), referring to an ideal of beauty common not only in rural Iraq. This line with its quite obvious erotic undertones is the main metaphor of the poem, representing the inner feelings, (sexual) longings and yearnings of the lovers.

Next to this dominant image of eroticism, the poem is characterized by the dialogue between the lovers. Throughout the dialogue that moves back and forth, the train remains the first addressee for both of them: the dialogue generates changing perspectives that interweave and complement each other, bound together by the same refrain. The refrain introduces the third perspective: the anonymous 'narrator,' the train. So, in fact, the poem consists of the dialogue between the lovers plus the third voice of the train in the refrain. In most of the refrains the train 'answers' to their pleas, commenting on their love, thus structuring the poem. The lovers perceive the train as a loved yet feared rupture of rural life: the peaceful imagery of night and memories of the loved one, the atmosphere of gold and silver, stars, wind and the cool morning breeze is harshly disturbed and ultimately destroyed by the ruthless train crossing the land. The train is made of iron, of tracks fixed firmly in the ground, not allowing any deviation or individual detour, hinting at the unattainability and impossibility of the lovers' love. Without any means of steerage, the train mercilessly decides their destiny. The misery of the girl not being able to reach her lover, while yet being so close to him, is symbolized in the train's screeching wheels, expressing her despair and longing. In a more political reading, it could also represent the misery of oppressed Iraqis through the centuries, as one of the innumerable comments in internet has put it;[31] the train as a symbol of man's powerlessness vis-à-vis destiny, symbolizing the harsh realities of life and the futility of human endeavor.

The train as an object of poetical interest goes back a long way in Iraqi poetry. One of the pioneers of Free Verse, Nāzik al-Malāʾika (1922–2007), in her poem "Marra al-qiṭār" ("The train passes"; 1948), masterly evokes the nostalgic romantic mood of a train passage.[32] In her poem, the train represents unfulfilled longing and lost expectations, whereas Nawwāb varies the theme of life as an endless journey into the unknown, evoking a melancholic mood of farewell to characterize the impossibility of love, with the train representing vainness and futility.

Of course, poems are always open for interpretation—in fact they beg for interpretation. Reading this seemingly innocent pure love poem in a politicized way—in an attempt to find out what the poet "really" means when he writes what he writes—we would be confronted with the full panorama of Iraq's modern history: the girl on the train and Hamad as a hardworking farmer would stand for the oppressed classes who—in the 1950s—were still prey to Iraq's harsh feudal system; the train itself – the main obstacle for the reunion of the lovers—would symbolize the closed society which observes so many conventions and imposes taboos on a love relationship that the lovers cannot reach fulfillment. The impossibility of their love would not only represent the impossibility of personal emotional fulfillment but also the futility of political and social participation and self-determination in a strictly hierarchical structured society. And finally, the rather optimistic tone which dominates the whole poem (in the steadily repeated line "their love has grown") would indicate the optimism in the late 1950s that a revolution is near and that things will change, that the Iraqi people will become aware of their inherent power and will rise up against oppression, tyranny, and exploitation. Whichever way the reader decides to understand this poem, there are always multiple layers of meaning underlying the text and resonating with the reader.

Nawwāb himself was very confident that his readers/listeners would grasp the multiple meanings of his poem; he achieved perfection in using the creative freedom inherent to colloquial poetry to transgress literary norms and conventions (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 69). Luʾluʾa, recalling the immediate relationship colloquial poetry establishes with the audience, holds this poem to be "authentic without any norms from outside" (220). While Nawwāb's *fuṣḥā*-poems

undisputedly demonstrate his strong political commitment, his poetry in the vernacular forms a unique art of commitment and resistance against the current literary and political trends of his time. Making sure he reaches his audience directly, without detour via the classical language, incorporating their imagery, ideals, and emotions into his poem, and appealing to their sentiments directly, Nawwāb in this poem is committed not in terms of open political criticism, irony, and cynicism, as in most of his other poems, but rather in a more subtle way, respecting the dignity of the people by echoing their language, their feelings, and their pride while defending their cause.

Notes

1   I would like to thank my colleagues Dr Laith Hussein, Marburg, Dr ʿAlī Jaʿfar al-ʿAllāq, UAE, and Dr ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Luʾluʾa, London. Without their precious help this article and analysis would not have been possible.

2   Booth gives an informative and concise overview on the history of the development of colloquial poetry.

3   Taha Hussein (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn), who was not an Arab nationalist but a classical renaissance man, maintained: "I am and shall remain, unalterably opposed to those who regard the colloquial as a suitable instrument for mutual understanding and a method for realizing the various goals of our intellectual life because l simply cannot tolerate any squandering of the heritage, however slight, that classical Arabic has preserved for us. The colloquial lacks the qualities to make it worthy of the name of a language, I look upon it as a dialect that has become corrupted in many respects" (qtd. in Haeri 301). Haeri, Nilufer. "Conceptualizing Heterogeneity in Arabic." *Egypte/Monde Arabe* 27–28 (1996): 301–15. Web. 25 Nov. 2014.

4   The inclusive aspect of such a poetic tradition can best be seen in the Gulf countries' *nabaṭī* poetry—the local form of colloquial poetry which is still very much alive: in TV, there are poetry contests comparable to contests like "America's got Talent" or "Deutschland sucht den Superstar" where the audience participates enthusiastically in composing the best *nabaṭī* verses. The Abu Dhabi "Million Poet" (*shāʿir al-milyūn*) has, since its inception in 2007, attracted a lot of participants. On *nabaṭī* poetry, see the informative study by Sowayan, Saad Abdullah. *Nabati Poetry: The Oral Poetry of Arabia*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. Print. See also my German translation of Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's (Muḥammad b. Rāshid Āl Maktūm) *nabaṭī* poems: *In der Wüste findet nur der Kluge den Weg*. Munich: Hanser, 2009. Print.

5   The poets of the 1950s and 1960s generation did not expressively refer to neoclassical poetry as their source of inspiration, but rather positioned themselves in contrast to the short but quite formative romantic phase that Arab poetry witnessed in the 1930s and 1940s, like the Apollo group in Egypt and the *Mahjar* poets.

6   "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?", published in serial form in 1947 and immediately transmitted to the Arab audience by Taha Hussein in his journal *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* 3 (1947): 9–21. Print. See also Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement* 62.

7   See Klemm's detailed account of the various models and kinds of *iltizām*: the socialist-Marxist one and the Sartre-inspired notion of liberty and responsibility fused with Pan-Arabism ("Ideals and Reality" 145). Klemm, Verena. "Ideals and Reality: The Adaption of European Ideas of Literary Commitment in the Post-Colonial Middle East: The Case of ʿAbdulwahhāb al-Bayātī." *Conscious Voices: Concepts of Writing in the Middle East*: *Proceedings of the Berne Symposium, July 1997*. Ed. Stephan Guth, Priska Furrer, and Johann Christoph Bürgel. Beirut: Orient-Institut der DMG, 1999. 143-52. Print. Beiruter Texte und Studien 72. See also Yaḥyā's criticism of the apparent connection between ICP and *iltizām* (111).

8   Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh) and Adunis (Adūnīs) declared the "outward oriented" *iltizām* which commented on social and political events as passé, defining it as the end of idealism (Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement* 209). They wanted to transcend the superficial notion of refusal (*rafḍ*) or counter-reaction (195).

9   On the later development of *iltizām* and other forms of engagement and commitment, see the other contributions in this volume.

10 Nawwāb during one of his performances, qtd. in Simawe and Weissbort 151; there is also the full translation of the poem.

11 For a detailed discussion of this aspect see ʿAllāq 151.

12 I have elaborated elsewhere on Nawwāb's political commitment: "Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb" and "*Place and Memory*." Tramontini, Leslie. "Muẓaffar an-Nawwāb." *Kritisches Lexikon zur fremdsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*. 2014. Web. 14 July 2015. Tramontini, Leslie. "*Place and Memory:* Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and

Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb Revisited.” *Visions and Representations of Homeland in Modern Arabic Poetry and Prose Literature*. Ed. Sebastian Günther and Stephan Milich. Hannover: Olms, 2015 (forthcoming).

13 “*Ḥīnamā lam yabqa wajh al-ḥizb wajh al-nās qad tamma al-ṭalāq*”—“If the party does not resemble the people anymore, than the divorce has taken place”, as quoted in al-Usṭa, ʿĀdil. *Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb: Al-ṣawt wa-l-ṣadā*. Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2002. 66. Print.

14 ʿAlī Jaʿfar al-ʿAllāq, himself a renowned poet and literary critic, describes his escape as *usṭūrī*, mythological, fantastic (150).

15 See Simawe and Weissbort, *Iraqi Poetry Today*.

16 Bardenstein, “Stirring Words”, one of the few studies in English, offers a detailed analysis of his long poem “Jisr al-mabāhij al-qadīma.” I have also come across Gohar, *Journey in the Middle East*, who in his chapter (91–152) on Nawwāb and the black US American poet Amiri Baraka (1934–2014) deals with commitment and resistance but unfortunately in a rather repetitive and descriptive way, see Gohar, Sadiq M. *Journey in the Middle East: The Discourse of Violence and Racism in American and Arabic Literature*. Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012. Print.

17 See Bardenstein’s excellent analysis of his poems and performance.

18 Jād Allah in his foreword: “Nawwāb’s colloquial poetry opened up a new poetic school in style, vision, and treatment [...] addressing both intellect and heart” (32). Al-Nawwāb, Muẓaffar. *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila li-l-shāʿir Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb*. N.p.: Dār Ṣādiq, n.d. 9–97. Print.

19 Also see Bardenstein 5, on professional musical versions of Nawwāb’s colloquial poetry.

20 See e.g. “Arwaʿ mā qāl Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb.” YouTube. 5 July 2010. Web. 14 July 2015.

21 The *Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* I am working with does not include any of his colloquial poetry; and his long poem “Jisr al-mabāhij al-qadīma” is not printed in its entirety, only the second half. This is typical with Nawwāb’s poetry and not helpful at all for close text analyses.

22 The title of the poem is “Li-l-rayl wa-Ḥamad” (For the train and for Ḥamad), but in many versions the “li-” is deleted and rendered as “al-” (The train and Ḥamad).

23 Al-Nawwāb, *Li-l-rayl wa-Ḥamad*; Luʾluʾa, “Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb.”

24 I am very grateful for any comments, corrections and feedback on the translation.

25 The “lead text” or dedication is written in modern standard Arabic, setting the scene.

26 *Rayl* is an Iraqi adoption of the English word “rail,” meaning train.

27 This refrain is very difficult to translate and without comments by native speakers would have remained a riddle to me: The explanation of the root h-w-d-r in internet sources ranges from “to increase, get stronger and firmer” to “dwindle, vanish”; e.g. *Muntadayāt aḥlā al-salawāt*. Web. 14 July 2015. < http://ahlaalsalawat.montadarabi.com/t2565-topic > (although not very academic yet quite useful). Luʾluʾa interprets it as “to grow”; and Woodhead, Beene and Stowasser’s *Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic* does not list the word at all. Apart from this, the image of the partridge hidden in the wheat field forms a provocative and hardly eligible metaphor: according to the comments, Nawwāb alludes to the girl’s breasts under her blond plaited hair.

28 Sh-dh-r: *Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic* (238) gives the meaning: turquoise blue; many internet comments say: golden.

29 *Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic* (217) gives the following three notions: to roam freely, to be distracted, to forget.

30 On the impact of his politicized Shiite home, see also the interview with Sinan Antoon from the year 1996: “Muzaffar al-Nawwab remembers a distant childhood.” *Al-Ahram Weekly*. 17 Apr. 2003. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. Also see ʿAllāq 148.

31 See e.g. Ḥāmid ʿAbd al-Karīm, Fāris. “Qirāʾa fī qaṣīdat Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb Al-rayl wa-Ḥamad.” *Babylon Center*. Web. 4 Jan. 2015. < http://www.babylon-center.net/?articles=topic&topic=1549 >.

32 See the analysis of the poem by al-Thāmirī, Ḍiyāʾ Rāḍī. “Qaṣīda ‘Marra l-qiṭār’ li-Nāzik al-Malāʾika bayna maqūlat al-shāʿir wa-maqūlat al-shiʿr.” *Majallat al-qādisiyya fī-l-ādāb wa-l-ʿulūm al-tarbawiyya* 7.3–4 (2008): 55–62. Print.

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Sargūn Būluṣ's Commitment

Sinan Antoon

> Such is the poet
> He who is surrounded by the tribe's cries
> as he roams the ruins
> elegizing the people of his city[1]
> (Būluṣ, *ʿAzma ukhrā* 118)
>
> [W]ho even mentions the war that is raging all around them,
> and is on the front pages of every paper in the world? I see
> most American poets today as so many ostriches looking for
> the nearest pile of sand in which to bury their heads.
> (Būluṣ, "An Interview")

After his death at a hospital in Berlin in 2007 Sargūn Būluṣ was mourned throughout the Arab world and its diaspora. He was and will always be widely recognized as one of the most important and distinctive voices of modern Arabic poetry. Sadly, however, his poetry has yet to receive serious critical attention.[2] The well-deserved attention in newspapers and other outlets by peers and critics in the Arab world often overlooks one important dimension of his work; the political, and focuses solely on issues related to poetics. This typical gesture segregates the two categories and assumes a clear border between them in general.[3] Moreover, it often implies or suggests that distance from "politics" (whatever that means) is a prerequisite for a more genuine or powerful poetics. This "depoliticization" may be attributed to a number of other reasons in Būluṣ's case. Unlike most of his peers and major poets of the previous generation he was never a member of any political party or movement when he was in Iraq, nor did he explicitly support any reigning ideology throughout his years in exile. This, however, should not necessarily mean a disinterest in the political or a distance from it. Perhaps another reason for this misperception is Būluṣ's affiliation and work with the Lebanese journal *Shiʿr* (1957–1970) in its heyday. *Shiʿr* and *al-Ādāb* (1953–2012) were the two major platforms and poles of literary production in the very tumultuous times of the late 1950s and 1960s, with the latter espousing pan-Arabism and advocating "commitment" literature, whereas the former advocated a liberal outlook.

I have tried elsewhere[4] to read Būluṣ's late poems differently in order to show the extent to which his poetry is viscerally invested in and in conversation with political questions of immediate and crucial consequences. This essay builds on these attempts and advances the claim that Būluṣ can and should be read as a "committed" poet, but one who, as I will try to show, redefines and complicates commitment in his practice.

I would like to make a few short stops before reaching my final destination. Both will help us in seeing that political questions and concerns were neither absent, nor were they only an effect of the most recent war in Iraq in 2003 as some have suggested. The first example is a poem Būluṣ wrote in the mid-1980s entitled "Jallād" ("Executioner"):

Executioner!   أيها الجلاد
Go back to your little village   عُد الى قريتك الصغيرة
Today we have fired you and eliminated this position   لقد طردناكَ اليوم، وألغينا هذه الوظيفة.

<div align="right">(Būluṣ, Al-wuṣūl 121)</div>

This short but powerful poem was written and published at the height of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) when the Iraqi regime was considered a secular buffer against the Islamic Republic and thus a strategic ally of major Western powers. The regime's brutality was on full display on the battlefront against external enemies, but also on the home front against its own citizens. Yet hundreds of Iraqi and Arab poets and intellectuals, including tens of luminaries, and tens of Western journalists and academics were singing its praises or rationalizing its politics.

The poem is the antithesis of the state-sanctioned and state-supported encomia of the great leader churned out at the time by many Iraqi and Arab poets, particularly at the annual *al-Mirbad* festival which became a platform to co-opt poets and writers and to reproduce the culture of war. The first line is a summons that strips away the discursive masks, medals, and rank of the addressee. He is nothing more than what he is in actuality: An executioner, an instrument of brutality and violence. The poem performs and imagines a reversal of the power dynamics and agency so that the collective "we" issues the order instead of receiving or obeying it.

Another short poem from the same period is "Taqrīr min al-jabha" ("A Report from the Front"):

I am a soldier   أنا جنديٌّ
I sleep   أنامُ
behind barricades   خلف
dreaming of my wife   المتاريس
and my house   حالماً بزوجتي
not   وبيتي
my enemy's miserable face   لا
as he dies   بوجه عدوّي
                                                                 البائس
                                                                 إذ
                                                                 يموت.

<div align="right">(Būluṣ, Ḥāmil al-fānūs 83)</div>

Here, too, the poem shatters the official discourse of the Iran-Iraq war and represents a different set of relationships between soldier and enemy. The title "report" is neither innocent nor incidental of course, but it is a report that is void of heroic discourse and propaganda. The soldier has no desire to defeat his enemy, or even see him die for that matter. His death is not celebrated, nor does it have any meaning. There are no national symbols or markers of difference or moral superiority. There are only two enemies and the soldier's dream is to return home, i.e. not to wage war or take part in it. The war is devoid of meaning and purpose.

Būluṣ did not only address Iraq-related themes in his poetry. There are numerous subtle references to visceral political questions related to the United States (where he had been living since 1967) as well, both as a settler-colonial country, and as a global imperial power. One example is "El Salvador":

This song, for which you are secretly braiding a long rope, will go on We will write history with utmost possible care this time	هذه الأغنيةُ التي تجدلون لها حبلاً طويلاً في الخفاء إنّها ستستمر. سنكتبُ التاريخَ هذه المرّة بأقصى ما يمكنُ من الحذَر.
Gentlemen, What have you done to the world? I am addressing the major criminals among you Those who mint the money of insomnia for minor peoples armed with worms and dollars, with Pershing missiles and news agencies	أيّها السادة ماذا فعلتُم بالعالم؟ أخاطبُ المجرمين الكبارَ بينكم أولئك الذين يسكّون نقودَ الأرق للشعوب الصغيرة مسلَّحين بالديدان والدولارات بصواريخ بيرشنغ ووكالات الأنباء
Who assigned the whole world, or even anything, to you? **Who are you?**[5]	مَنِ الذي أوكلَ اليكم بالعالم، بأيّ شيء؟ **مَنْ أنتم؟**

(Būluṣ, *Al-wuṣūl* 87)

Such poems are never mentioned or acknowledged by critics and readers. They would disrupt and complicate the notion that Būluṣ distanced himself from political issues and was solely concerned with matters related to form and poetic innovation. The poem above features a nexus of themes (permanent war(s), the writing and erasure of history, and the global military-industrial complex) that Būluṣ will revisit and further develop in his late poetry and particularly in his posthumous collection *ʿAẓma ukhrā li-kalb al-qabīla* (*Another Bone for the Tribe's Dog*, 2008). There is no doubt that the devastation of the 1991 Gulf War had a major effect on Būluṣ, not only as an Iraqi, but as a resident and citizen of the United States. It marked the beginning of a bitter disenchantment with any ideal or idealized image of what the United States was or is. "Everything was exposed in the [1991] Gulf War […] It was a bloodied mirror. America had nothing more to offer, as far as I was concerned," said Būluṣ (Antoon). And further:

He was so upset that he abandoned a massive project of translating 20th-century American poetry into Arabic that he had been working on for years and began to spend as much time in Europe. The political aftermath of September 11th left him further alienated. (ibid.)

In "Ḥadīth maʿ rassām fī Nyū Yūrk baʿd suqūṭ al-abrāj" ("A Conversation with a Painter in New York After the Towers Fell") he wrote:

I see Rodin's finger in all this	أرى أصبعَ رودان في كلّ هذا.
I see him standing there at the gates of hell pointing to	أراهُ واقفاً في بوّابة الجحيم، يُشيرُ إلى
an abyss from which the beasts of the future will charge, there	هُوّةٍ ستنطلقُ منها وحوشُ المستقبل، هناك
where two towers fell and America went mad	حيثُ انهارَ بُرجان، وجُنّت أمريكا

<div align="right">(Būluṣ, ʿAẓma ukhrā 171)</div>

9/11 begat the so-called "war on terror" and that implied two brutal wars and military occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The silence of the great majority of American poets about the war's effects greatly disappointed Būluṣ. He expressed this sentiment in an interview, asking rhetorically: "[W]ho even mentions the war that is raging all around them, and is on the front pages of every paper in the world? I see most American poets today as so many ostriches looking for the nearest pile of sand in which to bury their heads" ("An Interview").

This clearly indicates that Būluṣ believed that poets had a responsibility, especially in times of war, to address and engage with political events and matters. This is manifested in Būluṣ's last collection where war and its effects are a major theme. Another important and related concern or theme is both the challenge and urgency of representing war. The poem "Rassām al-ahwār" ("The Marsh Painter") exemplifies this notion very well and illustrates the main argument of this essay:

The horse's cry at the walls of the Guernica is in his dream	في حُلمهِ صرخةُ الحصان على أسوار غيرنيكا
Its terrified eye is an apple afflicted by lightening	عينُهُ المذعورةُ تُفّاحة رازَها البرقُ.
	في حلمه عينا المرأة الباكية
The two eyes of the weeping woman in Jawad Salim's "Liberty Monument" are in his dream	في «نصب الحريّة» لجواد سليم.
	وهو يُفضّلُ فتاة سلفادور دالي إذ تسلخُ فَروةَ البحر
He prefers Salvador Dali's girl as she skins the sea's fur off the shore sands like a handkerchief to his stupid giraffes stacked all the way to the end of the horizon drawers full of fire dangling from their chests	عن رمال الشاطئ كأنّها منديل على زَرافاته البلهاء المتراصفة حتى آخر الأفق تتدلّى من صدورها أدراجٌ مليئة بالسنة اللهَب...
. . .	في الحلم أو في اليَقظة في ساعات طوافه بين المكاتب
in dreams or when awake in the hours he spends between offices with a bucket and a mop polishing floors as he sings a sad *abudhiyya* in banks[6] which hum with the desolation of trading nights	بسطلٍ ومسحةٍ، يلمّعُ البلاطات وهو يُغنّي أبوذيّةً حزينة، في بُنوك تطنُّ بوحشة ليل التجارة مُطلّاً أحياناً من شرفةٍ ما في مدينةٍ ما
looking out at times from a balcony in a city (Madrid, London, damp like trampled mucus, or perhaps Paris) dreaming of who knows what of who knows whom	(مدريد، لندن الرطبة كُمخاط بّزاقة ديسَت تحت القدَم، أو ربّا باريس) حالماً من يدري بماذا من يدري بمَن، قبلَ أن يعودَ ثانيةً إلى مهمّة التنظيف

before going back again
to cleaning
with the sorrow of one who knows
that he will never return to the marshes

**(It was mentioned in the news that certain
birds in the Hebrides Islands in Scotland,
which have been migrating every winter for
thousands of years to the marshes in south-
ern Iraq have in recent years found that the
marshes they wintered in are no longer in
existence, and so they were scattered and
lost. No one knows of their fate)**[7]

whenever he reads the news
whenever they bury a marsh
whenever they burn a map
and obliterate a world from existence, he starts
    to paint *feverishly*
a new painting inspired by the marshes:
every catfish, buffalo, crow
every net cast in the wind for fishing
every boat floating like a cradle or a coffin
on a sea of mud, in his room with its one tiny
    window
like a monk's cell, where he paints the
    marshes

when its people fish standing on boats
with a harpoon or nets
under the sun or with lamps

بوجوم من يدري
أنّه أبداً لن يعود إلى الأهوار.

وكلّما قرأ الأخبار

(جاء في الأخبار أنّ طيوراً معيّنة في جُزر الهبريدس
بأسكتلندا اعتادت أن تُهاجر في الشتاء إلى منطقة الأهوار
في جنوب العراق منذ آلاف السنين، وجدت منذ بضع سنوات
أنّ الأهوار التي كانت تُشتي فيها، لم يعُد لها وجود،
فتشتّدَت وضاعت ولا أحد يعلمُ مصيرَها.)

كلّما رَدموا هوراً، كلّما أحرقوا خريطةً
وأزالوا عالماً من الوجود، بدأ يرسمُ محموماً
لوحةً جديدة تستلهمُ الأهوار:
كلّ جُرّيٍّ، جاموسةٍ، غُراب
كلّ شبكة مَفرودة للصيدِ في الريح
كلّ مشحوفٍ طافٍ كالمهد أو التابوت
على بحرٍ من الغرِين، في غرفته ذات الكوّة الوحيدة
كزنزازة ناسك، حيث يرسمُ الأهوار

عندما يصطادُ أهلها وَقوفاً في المشاحيف
بالفالة أو بالشِباك
في الشمس، أو على ضوء الفانوس.

(Būluṣ, ʿAẓma ukhrā 73–75)

The title of the poem encapsulates its pivotal point: The desire to and urgency of represent-
ing and preserving a devastated space/place. It is important to note that the marshes of south-
ern Iraq were drained by the previous regime in the 1990s to punish political opposition and
resistance. Tens of thousands of its inhabitants were displaced (Wood). While there have
been attempts to rehabilitate and replenish the region after 2003, U.S. and coalition military
occupation and bombing campaigns disrupted bird migration routes (let alone causing the
death of thousands of humans) ("War in Iraq").

The painter's dreams feature two iconic works of art. Picasso's *Guernica* is perhaps the
most recognizable modern work of art/protest against war on a global scale. Jawad Salim's
(Jawād Salīm, 1920–1961) *Liberty Monument* is one of the most important and recognizable
monuments in Iraq and the Arab world. It depicts the struggle of the Iraqi people against colo-
nialism and oppression and celebrates the July 14 Revolution of 1958 which overthrew the
pro-British monarchy and ushered in the republican period. The intricate and specific details
in both cases involve the suffering of a human and an animal (the horse's terrified eye and the
weeping eyes of the woman). The poem's first three segments focus our attention on minute
details in works of art that represent attempts at encapsulating and representing monumental
political events. The third segment imparts another aesthetic preference that may be read as a
critique of frivolous experimentation (Dali's "stupid giraffes"). The remainder of the poem
follows the painter's daily routine. It is important to note that the painter is more of an arche-

type. He could be in Madrid, London, or Paris as we read in the fifth segment. An archetype of a refugee or an exile who struggles to make ends meet (he is not a "professional" artist) and who is racked "with the sorrow of one who knows / that he will never return to the marshes." At this point in the poem Būluṣ inserts a prose paragraph that is typed in bold and kept in parentheses. The paragraph could be taken from a news item or report and indicates that the marshes where the birds sought warmth are "no longer in existence, and so they were scattered and lost. No one knows of their fate." An obvious parallel is established between the painter and the birds, both of whom cannot return to what once was home for so long.

The final segment in the poem is the most crucial for our purposes. Here, the immediate reaction and response to destruction and obliteration is incessant aesthetic representation: "whenever he reads the news, whenever they bury a marsh / whenever they burn a map and obliterate a world from existence, he starts to paint feverishly." The urgency of preserving and representing obliterated spaces, inhabitants, and species is brought home. With the dedication and solitude of a monk, every minute is to be dedicated to taking stock of every disappearing being, act, and ritual.

One can also read the poem as a powerful statement about the task and responsibility of the artist in times of war and what is to be done when one's home is being obliterated and forced into extinction.

A careful reading of Būluṣ's poems shows that while he never espoused a specific political ideology or joined a political party, this should not be grounds to ascribe any neutrality onto his persona or poetry. The examples in this essay suggest that a concern with politics as a nexus of power and its manifestations and destructive effects was always there. It only intensified and matured as Būluṣ himself did. He was firmly against using poetry as a platform or megaphone for politics. But many of his poems are perfect examples of how a poet who was at the forefront of formal innovation can still engage the political questions of his/her time and do it with haunting beauty.

Notes

1 All translations are mine.

2 The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature does not even have an entry for him! See: Scott Meisami, Julie and Paul Starkey, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print. One of the few serious treatments (in Arabic) appears in Ṣāliḥ, ʿAlī Ḥākim. *Al-wuqūf ʿalā ḫāffat al-ʿālam: Maḥmūd al-Braykān wa-Sargūn Būluṣ* [*Standing at the Edge of the World: Maḥmūd al-Braykān and Sargūn Būluṣ*]. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2013. Print. The second half of the book is devoted to Būluṣ's work (75–140). For a brief overview of his life and impact, see: Antoon.

3 See, for example, Saʿdī Yūsuf's eulogy of Būluṣ, where he insists that the latter "was not political, but he was more courageous than many poets who sought the help of politics as a lift, but they abandoned it when it spelled danger. He stood against the occupation, not as a politician, because Sargon Boulus was not a politician at all. He stood against occupation […] His entry to *qasidat al-nathr* is quite different. It is not the Francophone entry to the text in a dark period of the life of French poetry: Rimbaud uprooted from the barricades of the commune. […] His entry was the American poetic flood. The glory of the linked text. The claims of student protests where the poem, the guitar, and the public square are [together]. Many may not know that Sargon Boulus used to roam around with a group to recite poetry in American towns and villages. […] A drum, a guitar, and a harmonica." See: Yūsuf, Saʿdī. "Al-shāʿir al-ʿirāqī al-waḥīd [The Only Iraqi Poet]." *Al-Akhbār* 23 Oct. 2007. Web. 28 Feb. 2015. For an excellent critique and rebuttal, see: Jihād, Kāẓim. "Al-siyāsa wa-l-shiʿr: Sargūn Būluṣ namūdhajan [Politics and Poetry: Sargūn Būluṣ as Example]." *Al-Safīr* 26 Oct. 2007. Web. 28 Feb. 2015.

4 See my article: "Tārīkh Sargūn Būluṣ maʾsāwī wa-l-waṭan khārij al-aswār [Sargūn Būluṣ's History is Tragic and the Homeland is Beyond the Walls]." *Al-Ḥayāt* 19 Oct. 2012. Web. 28 Feb 2015. See also: Antoon, Sinan.

"'What Did the Corpse Want?' Torture in Poetry." *Speaking about Torture*. Ed. Julie Ann Carlson and Elisabeth Weber. New York: Fordham UP, 2012. 134–49. Print.

5   The bold type is in the original.

6   *Abūdhiyya* is "a kind of blues […], sung by the peasants and fishermen of our South, and which has its origins in ancient Sumerian lamentations and elegies" (Būluṣ, "An Interview").

7   The bold type is in the original.

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From the Politicization of Theater
to Individual Humanism:
Towards a New Concept of Engagement
in the Theater of Saadallah Wannous[1]

Friederike Pannewick

This chapter deals with the question how the notion of 'writing for a cause' has been shaped, criticized, or re-actualized by Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous (Saʿdallāh Wannūs) (1941–1997). This internationally acclaimed author belonged to a generation of Arab intellectuals and artists whose political and artistic self-understanding was strongly molded by the question of Palestine. Wannous' initial works reveal an intense social engagement which he characterized as a "politicizing of theater" (*tasyīs al-masraḥ*) (Wannūs, *Bayānāt* 38).[2] His critical rereading of Arab history was imbued from the outset with the dynamics of social and political crises and a seemingly inexorable decline. But his self-positioning as a committed artist did not remain unchanged throughout the later part of his life. Since the mid-1990s, Wannous bid farewell to the idea that had hitherto guided him: That the problems of the Arab world could be traced back to simple power relations in society. Thus, he dismissed the idea of consciously simplifying representation that aims to ignite political change and restructure power relations, and turned instead to an approach that was to generate insights into social and individual human problems.

Furthermore, this chapter asks whether the significant aesthetic and conceptual turn in Wannous' work from the early 1990s onwards might go beyond the concerns of a specific individual artist, leading us to ask whether—and if so, to what extent—it might signify a broader intellectual shift impacting on the meaning and connotation of literary commitment in Arabic literature. If we assume that something essential changed at this time, we might then ask: What is this change all about? And what about the notion of the political in the arts—did it remain the same in the 1990s as Wannous and others of his generation changed their literary style, abandoning a "politicizing of theater" in favor of a call for individual humanism? And to what extent do this dramatist's writings of the 1990s in this respect converge with and come to resemble the literary writing of the so-called generation of the 1990s aptly analyzed in this volume's chapters by Tarek El-Ariss and Christian Junge?

And further, one could ask in what way Wannous' literary turn might be part of what has been described as the "inward turn" (Bardawil) and disenchantment of the 1960s leftist intellectuals and thus also the result of the collapse of the Left after the June defeat suffered by the Arab armies against Israel in 1967. Fadi A. Bardawil rereads the critical literature written after 1967 by the Marxist Syrian thinkers Yāsīn al-Ḥāfiẓ (1930–1978) and Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAzm (b. 1934), showing how books like these, "now considered classics of post-1967 modern Arab political thought," reveal a kind of "turning of the critical gaze inwards, focusing on the level of social structures, culture, and values while seeking to move beyond analyses restricted to the political surface, such as those which theorized the defeat as a result of imperialism or the 'shortcomings of the Soviet Union'" (95). This inward turn implied an essential transformation of the leftist intellectual's self-understanding. As Bardawil points out:

Dwelling in the ruins of the Left, the militant intellectual's locus shifted from the vanguard and 'organic' intellectual of the 1960s and 1970s, calling on the masses to revolt, to the individual critic, who has lost his revolutionary organizational moorings, becoming the lone guardian of the Enlightenment's temple. (102)[3]

Notions of the Political

During what has been called an "aesthetic turn in international political theory," a term coined by Roland Bleiker in an article from 2001, the political value of the aesthetic has been reclaimed, "not because it can offer us an authentic or superior form of insight, but because the modern triumph of technological reason has eclipsed creative expression from our political purview" (529). But how to reclaim the political value of the aesthetic has been discussed rather controversially. "For some," states Bleiker,

a piece of art that represents nothing outside of itself lacks political relevance. By contrast, those who defend the autonomous work of art locate its political relevance precisely in the attempt to create a critical distance from moral norms and social practices. (529–30)

Art is autonomous and it is not, as Adorno would say. In 1962, Adorno, in his critique of Sartre's essay "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" (Adorno), expressed his skepticism towards overtly political art—a position already evident in his discussions with Walter Benjamin in the 1930s—and affirmed "his belief in the critical power of autonomous art, a position which in the later 1960s was to bring him into conflict with a new generation of radical student activists" (Harrison and Wood 779). In 1962, Adorno somewhat modified his earlier claim that to write poetry after Auschwitz would be barbaric, revealing the dilemma facing committed art: "For its very commitment required, as he put it, an *entente* with the world which was to be affected. The paradoxical result was that only the autonomous work of art could be the site of resistance to the competing interests of a debased reality" (ibid.).

"I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," said Adorno in this essay from 1962,[4]

it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature. The question asked by a character in Sartre's play *Morts Sans Sépulcre*, 'Is there any meaning in life when men exist who beat people until the bones break in their bodies?', is also the question whether any art now has a right to exist; whether intellectual regression is not inherent in the concept of committed literature because of the regression of society. (Adorno qtd. in Harrison and Wood 779–80)

Yet, as Adorno states later on,

it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it. The most important artists of the age have realized this. The uncompromising radicalism of their works, the very features defamed as formalism, give them a terrifying power, absent from helpless poems to the victims of our time. (780)

While Adorno admits the importance of art, he is deeply concerned about the danger of doing injustice to the victims through aesthetic representation:

The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylization, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have

had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. This alone does injustice to the victims; yet no art which tried to evade them could stand upright before justice. (ibid.)

He feared that decidedly political, committed art is a kind of accommodation or compliance, for it often becomes involved—and entangled—in a good cause, one that is already a political trend. Autonomous art contains a critical potential precisely because it refuses to identify with the social-political, a refusal stemming from its latent impetus towards an 'it-should-be-otherwise' (782).

For Adorno, this autonomy of art has its limits: whereas the artwork loses its historicity by consciously distancing itself from the goals of representation, it nonetheless remains historical in as far as it cannot be understood outside the cultural realm in which the perceiver moves.

Autonomy of Art vs. Political Positioning in Arabic Literature

The act of turning suffering into images and fiction and the risk that these images are then made available for consumption by the very world which had perpetuated the injustices in the first place, is not only a crucial issue for Adorno but also for Arab artists in the twentieth and twenty-first century. The relationship between the literary text and reality is continuously being subjected to reevaluation, both by writers themselves as well as in scholarly analysis. In Arabic literature, the risk of committed literature being co-opted and employed to cover affirmative positions vis-à-vis hegemonic discourses and leading political doctrines has been at the heart of heated public debate since the 1940s. Literature's potential to conceal or reveal social injustice and political persecution or torture has been discussed quite controversially. Lebanese novelist and journalist Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī), whose novel *Yālū*[5] deals with excessive torture in its main plot, reflected in an interview on the potential danger facing an author when writing about this form of violence (Interview by Mohga Hassib). He contradicts the opinion of South African novelist J. M. Coetzee, who has written about torture in his novels, saying that representing torture is particularly difficult, and that one is caught between ignoring it and reproducing it.

In an article in the *New York Times Book Review* Coetzee confessed that "torture has exerted a dark fascination" on himself like on other South African writers (13). In a study of Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*,[6] Susan Van Zanten Gallagher describes the two moral dilemmas a writer faces according to Coetzee when depicting this "dark chamber":

> First, he or she must find a middle way between ignoring the obscenities performed by the state, on the one hand, and producing representation of these obscenities, on the other. Coetzee objects to realistic depiction of torture in fiction because he thinks that the novelist participates vicariously in the atrocities, validates the acts of torture, assists the state in terrorizing and paralyzing people by showing its oppressive methods in detail. Yet these acts must not be hidden either. (Gallagher 277)

Coetzee's suggestion is thus to creatively face this dilemma: "The true challenge is how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (13). Khoury's position differs from the one expressed by his South African colleague:

> I don't agree with this concept because in my personal experience, while writing *Yalo*, I was not reproducing torture. I was tortured myself, I felt torture myself on my body and on my soul. If you put read *Yalo* in its own context—it is a novel about writing a novel—Yalo was taken to jail, he was obliged by his interrogators to write his life story so he wrote his life story 7 times and the novel is the outcome of what he has written.

> Writing and re-writing is a kind of going through the deepest parts of the human soul which can
> be a parallel to torture. […] Now the same mechanism—if writing is a kind of rewriting which all
> writers got through—is parallel to this feeling of torture in our souls but it is also a kind of healing
> to our souls. […] Writing is a mechanism of resistance, a mechanism against torture. It is much
> more complicated than our friend Coetzee said. […] *Yalo* was a testimony against torture and for
> me it was dangerous in the sense that I went also through these things, through this horror and I
> had to stop writing for several times, I couldn't continue. But at the end, I saw it was worth it be-
> cause I was giving a very special testimony about the situation in my country and in the Arab
> world. (Interview by Mohga Hassib)

These reflections about the problematic representation of violence in Arabic literature point
to the more general danger inherent in an instrumentalization of committed art in the con-
text of political dogmas. Arab authors are well aware of this ambivalence of literature rep-
resenting violence in state prisons for example, which might validate these violent acts and
assist the state in frightening people by showing its oppressive methods in detail. This fear
of assisting an oppressive state by depicting its atrocities in literary texts recalls in a certain
way the fear Adorno expressed in the context of German literature after the traumatic ex-
perience of the Nazi dictatorship. He described the risk that overtly political, committed art
could serve as a kind of accommodation or compliance by becoming involved in political
causes.

Writing as being parallel to a certain feeling of torture but also a kind of healing, as an
act of resistance, and a means for combating the oppression of the individual—are all also
characteristics of Syrian playwright Wannous' theater works in the 1990s. *Al-ightiṣāb* (*The
Rape*), which could be regarded as the first play of a new stage in his writings, a drama ana-
lyzing human cruelty and its use of torture and violence, is a harrowing analysis of violence
in a state where the rule of law is flouted (to be dealt with in more detail below). But al-
though this Syrian author—one of the most important playwrights of the Arab Middle
East—dared to violate a taboo in Arab society, namely to consider the other side in the Near
East conflict and think about Israelis as people and individuals, and not as a faceless "en-
emy," his position vis-à-vis the political transformations of his society in the near future
was rather skeptical.

Saadallah Wannous and the Politicization of Theater

At the end of his life, which was cut short by illness, Wannous gave a bitter appraisal of the
situation in an interview with the Syrian stage director Omar Amiralay:

> How is our generation to ever be laid to rest and find peace of mind? It will carry around in its
> thoughts a dull horror. It will resemble a wound. It will be the horror at the age they have lived
> through and the bitter, lifelong disillusionment. For Israel will still be there. Even when our gen-
> eration dies. (Amiralay)[7]

But this author was by no means always so resigned and disillusioned. After a childhood
spent in a village on the Syrian coast near Ṭarṭūs, Wannous studied journalism in Cairo in
the 1950s. At the beginning of the 1960s, his theater career commenced with a few experi-
mental plays influenced by Surrealism and the Absurdist theater. In 1967/8, he studied the-
ater at the Sorbonne under the guidance of Jean-Marie Serreau, before becoming editor of
the children's journal *Usāma* (1969–1975). In 1971, he wrote a film scenario that was cen-
sored by the Syrian government despite gaining international acclaim at festivals in France

and Egypt. After once more studying French experimental theater in Paris during 1973, Wannous took over the editorship of the cultural section of the Beirut daily *al-Safīr* (*The Messenger*) two years later. In 1976, he founded the experimental *Qabbānī*-theater in Damascus and in 1977, the theater journal *al-Ḥayāt al-Masraḥiyya* (*Theater Life*), where he remained editor-in-chief until 1987.

International in his orientation, Wannous was an intellectual who saw himself as part of a worldwide avant-garde movement. The early phase of his writing, from the beginning of the 1960s to the end of the 1970s, was formatively influenced by Erwin Piscator's political theater, but above all by Bertolt Brecht's didactic theater.

His initial works reveal an intensive social engagement, which he characterized in his theatre manifesto *Bayānāt li-masraḥ ʿarabī jadīd* (*Manifesto for a New Arab Theater*, 1970) as a "politicizing of theater" (*tasyīs al-masraḥ*). In a phase marked by significant social developments triggered by the national defeat at the hands of Israel, universally felt to be a "catastrophe," Wannous bravely and provocatively formulated the lineaments of a "politicizing" aesthetic which was to make Arab theatre into a vehicle of hope, instigating political reforms and motoring processes of democratization: "We perform theater to develop and change consciousness. We want to deepen the grasp of our collective consciousness for our shared historical consciousness" (*Bayānāt* 24). Wannous' critical rereading of Arab history was thus imbued from the outset with the dynamics of social and political crises and a seemingly inexorable decline.

The first of his plays that was to match his aspirations of political enlightenment was *Ḥaflat samar min ajl khamsa ḥuzairān* (*Gala Evening for the Fifth of June*),[8] where in an ingenious play-within-a-play Wannous staged the traumatic events of recent Arab history. Although written under the direct influence of the June defeat of 1967, the play was first permitted to be performed in Syria in the early 1970s. Wannous' demand to activate the political consciousness of his fellow citizens was spectacularly successful in this case: around 25,000 people attended the 44 performances put on in Damascus' experimental *Qabbānī*-theater, a sensational response yet to be repeated in the history of Syrian theater. From the beginning, though, it was to be feared that the government would not tolerate a political mobilization of the population of such dimensions. This play poses the question as to who was responsible for the most momentous defeat suffered by the modern Syrian state, without sparing the government from criticism.

Over the course of the next ten years, Wannous wrote several plays based on such political commitment, and these were produced on stages throughout the Arab world. At times, he took up stories and themes from the *Thousand and One Nights*, at others he experimented with traditional Arab coffeehouse storytelling or ancient Arabic epics—common to all these dramas was the appeal to approach and appropriate history and the shared Arab cultural heritage *critically*, and not to idealize. It was his passionately pursued goal to understand the causes behind the decline through a critical account of history and the cultural heritage, and thus eventually to identify a cure to the malaise.

Between Commitment and Despair

In 1996, the complete works by Wannous were published in three thick volumes amounting to a massive 2,200 pages. Wannous dedicated this oeuvre to his daughter, her generation and the generations to come:

We have often dreamed of leaving behind fairer times and a flourishing land for you. Without having to feel ashamed, we have to admit that we were defeated and have left behind nothing but destruction and collapsing countries. I want to make it clear […] that the ideas we defended were not wrong; neither the idea of freedom, democracy, rationality, nor that of Arab unity and social justice. But our generation failed to understand how to help these ideas triumph. I wish that this despondent tone is merely the dictate of illness […], and I hope that the strength hidden in you is stronger than our defeat. Who knows, perhaps you can find the magic spell that makes the times fairer and allows the land to flourish. (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 1)

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, Wannous became imbued with such a strong sense of the crisis of the age that it encroached upon and damaged his entire personal life, an affect he emphasized repeatedly in various statements.

The personal dismay and sadness felt by the artist when faced with contemporary political constellations is a characteristic feature of the emotional and intellectual itinerary of many of the authors who had committed themselves to "engaged literature" (*adab multazim*), which in the 1950s and 1960s meant the majority of Arab writers. Given the oppressive situation in Arab countries, it seemed to these artists that it was simply impossible to present and practice an "art for art's sake" detached from everyday politics. The defeat suffered by the Arab states at the hands of Israel in the 1967 June War precipitated the first dramatic collapse of this literary movement, hitherto optimistic and firmly believing that the world could be changed. Wannous described this traumatic experience gripping an entire generation in an interview in 1997:

The defeat of '67…That was the decisive moment in our collective and individual history. And to be honest: the crisis that broke out made us happy. An idea had become entrenched in our minds: after years and years of mendacious talk we believed that the defeat of 1948 [of the Arab armies and the subsequent founding of the state of Israel] had a single cause, namely betrayal and the purchase of inferior weapons. It thus had nothing to do […] with the superiority of Israeli soldiers. We were even led to believe that they were scared, timid, that they were incapable of confronting their enemies. From then on, it seemed that victory over Israel was possible at any time. In 1967, I was not overly optimistic. But I'd never thought that our troops, above all those in Egypt and Syria, were in such a state of inner disarray. We only discovered this during the Six Day War of 1967. […] Our trauma was enormous. We were wounded, humiliated to the core. (Amiralay)

Ten years later, President Sadat (Sādāt) became the first Arab politician to travel to Israel on official business where he outlined his plans for peace in a speech to the Israeli parliament. A world came crashing down for Wannous and a whole generation of committed intellectuals in Arab countries. With this unilateral peace offer of 1977, which left unanswered the key issues of the situation of the Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem and the occupied territories, a comprehensive and coherent solution to the Near East conflict seemed to recede into the distance. Wannous tried to take his own life on the night of this momentous event:

The news sent me reeling. It was evening…sunset. To ease the unbearable tension I took a sleeping tablet. […] Two hours passed. Then I woke up, even more tense and anxious. It was completely dark. I tried to kill myself during the night. It was a time of silence and distress. I read and pondered. I was continually compelled to face up to the painful questions of history. (Amiralay)

Wannous did not write a single play for the next twelve years, and focused instead on writing essays and journalistic texts. He first broke his silence in 1989 with a play that was as celebrated as it was controversial—a play that attempted to relate to the Palestinian conflict from an Israeli viewpoint: *Al-ightiṣāb*.

In this play, originally conceived by the author as an adaptation of Antonio Buero Vallejos' drama *La doble historia del doctor Valmy* (1969), Wannous portrays an Israeli security officer who can no longer cope psychologically with torturing Palestinians during interrogations. He becomes impotent and visits a doctor. During the consultation, incidents from interrogations are shown in flashbacks: a Palestinian is beaten and castrated, his wife then raped before his eyes, all before he is murdered. Parallel to these scenes, in which the secret service member is also presented at home, the author unfolds the history of the suffering of the victim's family. The dramatic highpoint of the play is the attempt by the Israeli to break out of the spiral of violence with the help of the doctor. But instead of letting him go, his colleagues murder him, among them his stepfather, chief of the secret service. His wife is raped by one of his colleagues and flees to the United States. The Palestinian wife of the victim, abused by the same Israeli, assumes the place of her husband in the resistance. In the last act, the doctor and the figure of the author take the stage and state their positions against the repression and violence being practiced by both sides.

The Rape marks a turning point in Wannous' dramatic writings. For the first time, the focus is put on the individual, instead of collective, physical and psychological consequences and implications of political oppression. This drama deals with interpersonal problems and provids psychological studies and achieves multidimensional characterization on both sides, the Israeli and the Palestinian. The enemy that has been depicted since decades as a dehumanized monster and as "a united, homogenous block" in Syrian literature is now depicted as an individual suffering from Israeli state violence, just like his victims:

> My play tells about a Jewish man. He denounces the abuse and torture of Palestinians by the Shin-Beth [secret service]. I was subsequently accused of being an Israeli sympathizer. I was seen as paving the way for reconciliation. But my goal was to put an end to our feelings of shame. I wanted to destroy the notion that Israel is a taboo, a united, homogenous block. An enemy that has to be annihilated before it annihilates us. I've called this notion the 'retreat into the eternal animosity.' (Amiralay)

Although a number of Arab and in particular Palestinian critics condemned this play as being biased towards Israel, it nevertheless proved to be probably Wannous' greatest success. It was performed at Arab festivals in a variety of productions and was the subject of critical appraisal in a flood of secondary literature. The fierce reactions—the play was banned in Syria before its premiere—allow us to deduce that the author had gotten to the heart of the matter. It was his first direct and clear political response as an artist in a state strictly censoring such open displays of opinion. The staging of the play in Syria in December 1990 was only permitted in the form of so-called public rehearsals held in a small room; a proper premiere in a theater was prohibited. In contrast, the text could be purchased in Syrian bookstores without any problem. The censorship authorities held the written expression of an opinion to be harmless, but prevented a staging of the same text. Due to its eminent public character, theater has always attracted the vigilant eyes of rulers and those in power. But despite the ban placed on staging *The Rape*, it was obvious that as the country's most famous playwright Wannous enjoyed an exceptional position. His terminal illness, which broke out shortly after the Gulf War, lent his words even greater weight. For his own part, Wannous stylized himself into a victim of the political history of his age, portraying his illness and imminent death as the result of unsolved political problems:

> I have the impression that our life is an endless series of setbacks. The last setback was especially painful. I believe that it caused the cancer I'm suffering from. With setback I mean the Gulf War. It killed our last hope. It is no coincidence that my first tumor appeared at the time. To be more precise: as the US was bombing Iraq. (Amiralay)

From Didactic Theater to Psychological Studies

In the following years, from 1991 to his death in May 1997, he wrote, as he put it, against death. The perspective evident in his writing shifted after the outbreak of his illness, and along with it his literary techniques and characterization of figures. From the parable-like style of his politically accentuated didactic theater, where the figures were examples, in the final phase of his creative life, Wannous addressed specific individual themes, exploring interpersonal problems, furnishing psychological studies, and achieving multidimensional characterization. His late dramas reveal narrative finesse with novel-like traits, just as much closet dramas as they are for theater production.

In an interview with Mari Elias in the mid-1990s, Wannous explained a crucial turnaround in his work as stemming from the realization that, by the turn into the 1990s at the latest, political involvement in the Arab world was hopeless ("Wir sind zur Hoffnung verurteilt!" 39). The opposition groups in society were marginalized, the established political forces rotten to the core and hopelessly factionalized. Belief in being able to change the world through struggle, heroic acts, and martyrdom was suddenly revealed to be an illusion. In these years Wannous bid farewell to the idea that had hitherto guided him: that the problems of the Arab world could be traced back to simple power relations in society.

The literary form and thematic changed accordingly in Wannous' work. From the consciously simplifying representation, aiming to ignite political change and restructure power relations, he now turned to an approach that was to generate insights into problems of the individual in society, as well as minority and gender issues. More difficult than instigating a change of regime, so Wannous in 1995, is "to stir a society adhering to and petrified in superstition" (ibid.). This new style of drama led Wannous to a kind of aesthetic liberation and self-discovery:

> For the first time I've a sense of how writing can be a liberating act. Previously, I had certain ideas: I imposed a kind of self-censorship. An inner censorship which—as I imagined it—consisted in repressing everything that was of secondary importance, and left me to deal exclusively with the purportedly big questions. For the first time, I feel that writing is enjoyable.
> I was of the view that personal worries or individual problems were bourgeois, were superficial, unimportant affairs which one can put to one side. My whole interest was focused on grappling with and understanding history, and I thought—wrongly—that I had to avoid the traps of petit-bourgeois literature and go beyond all that was individual and personal. For this reason, I never felt as if entirely at one with myself in my work as playwright. (39–40)

Succeeding *Al-ightiṣāb* as first endeavor of a new psychological approach, the five plays Wannous wrote in the 1990s before his tragic death in 1997 reflect the new self-understanding of this author.[9] These dramas no longer contain a simple and clearly political message or ideology which addresses "the people" or "the masses"; the addressee here is rather the individual, or a limited group of open-minded and attentive persons who are astute enough to understand the veiled articulation of harsh political and social criticism.

In his play *Ṭuqūs al-ishārāt wa-l-taḥawwulāt* (*Rituals of Signs and Metamorphoses*, 1994), whose premiere in Beirut stirred passionate debate, Wannous "imagines the brothel as a space of radical performance, a joyous narcissism that transforms the individual—performer and audience, courtesan and patron" (Ziter 178). A married woman in nineteenth-century Damascus rebels against the moral double standards of her society and thus un-hinges the social order of her city. Her husband, a reputable citizen is caught red-handed with a courtesan. The scandal seems perfect, but the deceived wife, called Muʾmina ("one who believes or is faithful"), offers her husband that she take the place of the prostitute at night, enabling her husband to thus rehabilitate his honor. She is prepared to undertake this intrigue under the condition that he accepts a legal divorce, allowing her to escape from the odious marriage. After the divorce, her personality transforms dramatically. She offers the residents of her city her services as a prostitute under her new name "Almāsa" ("diamond") and thus causes a lot of trouble. Even the mufti falls in love with the new courtesan and grants her more rights than she had while married. Her inner liberation and courage to transgress traditional role models and restrictions is passed on like an infectious disease to other marginalized figures in the patriarchal society. The mufti's bodyguard confesses pub-licly his homosexuality and encourages others to follow his example. But in the tragic end of the play, Almāsa is murdered by her own brother in a desperate act to save his honor.

According to Joseph A. Massad, this drama "stresses the quest for individuality and in-dividualism in a society that represses both" (359). The individual struggles hard to over-come or subvert a preexisting order that in this play is "identified as patriarchal and espe-cially violent in the suppression of women and men who depart from acceptable sexual practice. Sexual oppression as the wellspring of other forms of oppression (and not political oppression alone) is presented as the soul-destroying normalcy of society" (Ziter 181).

The Collapse of Totalizing Discourse

Since the late twentieth century such an emancipatory rhetoric has become increasingly prominent in Arabic literature, targeting the critical consciousness of the *individual* and no longer aiming at reaching "the people," the masses, the collective and social classes who needed to be "enlightened," as the politically committed Arabic literature had striven for in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s.[10] Interest now revolves increasingly around the individ-ual and his/her involvement with society; it is all about processes of consciousness and how individuals gain insight out of their encounters with society, the economy and politics. This art eschews representing and communicating fixed worldviews, value systems or ideolo-gies. Faced with the post-modern fragmenting and fissuring of traditional value systems, points of orientation and social structures, a process decisively shaped by globalization and new elites, the prevailing tendency is to call things into question, engendering a climate of deep existential doubt, skepticism and disorientation. More than ever, clear messages and firmly established value systems seem problematic and lacking in cogency—or, precisely because of the general postmodern insecurity, they become increasingly attractive.

Kamal Abu-Deeb discussed in an article dealing with the "collapse of totalizing dis-course" that the radical transformations since the late 1970s have coincided historically with what might be called "the crisis of ideology and authority" in the Arab cultural and po-litical world:

The great ideological projects of the fifties and sixties reached a point at which they appeared to have lost their appeal to large sections of society; such dreams as the nationalist, socialist and secularist ones have been said to have failed to fulfill the great expectations which they had been thought to be capable of fulfilling; a sense of disillusionment and loss began to dominate Arabic discourse in its various forms. […] A more personal, anti-ideological or non-ideological art, an art evolving outside the space of consensus, has been taking shape […] on the level of the language, structure and imagery of texts. (335–36)

Art Outside the Consensus

Abu-Deeb speaks of an "Aesthetics of Contiguity" in literary texts where "the notion of unity began to lose credibility," a "multiplicity of voices/narrators" and a "language of possibilities, uncertainty, alternatives and contradictions" dominate (339). The author discusses two possible ways of theorizing these transformations: one is the interpretation as a process of *fragmentation* "which will lead to the collapse of all notions of center, unity, cohesion, harmony as well as oneness and singularity" (340); the second possible interpretation is to conceive these new phenomena as "an emergence of a spirit and vision of *multiplicity* and a renunciation of singularity and monotheistic ideologies" (ibid.). Abu-Deeb adds here a third theoretical possibility which he discusses in his article at length:

> that the collapse of totalizing ideologies and 'grand narratives,' as Lyotard calls them, and the crumbling of unifying theories, both in the West and in the Arab world, are connected to the proliferation and coming to prominence of marginalized discourse and minority consciousness. (ibid.)

It is my hypothesis that this form of criticism is a general characteristic of Arab societies at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is a response to and so a consequence of many postcolonial Arab regimes which withheld even the most elementary rights and advancements of modernity from its citizens, reducing any belief in a capacity to effect political and ideological change into an absurdity. Representative examples of this trend would be, beside Wannous' dramas like *Munamnamāt tārīkhiyya* (*Historical Miniatures*, 1992) or *Ṭuqūs al-ishārāt wa-l-taḥawwulāt*, Nihād Sīrīs' novel *Al-ṣamt wa-l-ṣakhab* (*The Silence and the Roar*, 2004), as like as the novel by Lebanese writer Hudā Barakāt entitled *Ḥajar al-ḍaḥik* (*The Stone of Laughter*,[11] 1990). The English novels by Lebanese-American author Rabih Alameddine *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* (2001) and *Koolaids: The Art of War* (1998) could also be considered as part of this tendency towards individualized subversive humor and criticism.

In these novels and plays of the 1990s and early 2000s, the "I" takes center stage; the action revolves around it instead of the "we." From my point of view, this development is a sign, if not of individualization processes, then at least of the advancing atomization of Near Eastern societies.

Wannous retained his unstinting commitment to Arab society up until his tragically early death. But how commitment is displayed in his plays of the 1990s is quite different from those plays he wrote in the two decades before, marking a transformation of this dramatist's understanding of engagement in literature. Adorno expressed—against the background of totalitarianism and Nazi ideology in Germany—his apprehension that decidedly political, committed art might be a kind of accommodation or compliance because of its prevalent involvement in a good cause, which is at the same time a political trend (cf. Harrison and Wood 782):

> Even the sound of despair pays its tribute to a hideous affirmation. Works of less than the highest rank are even willingly absorbed, as contributions to clearing up the past. When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder. (Adorno qtd. in Harrison and Wood 780)

Because of this skepticism towards committed literature, Adorno argued in the 1960s in favor of autonomous rather than committed works of art in Germany. In his argumentation, autonomous art contains a critical potential exactly because it eschews identifying with the social-political.

Wannous, in the context of an endless series of political setbacks in the Arab world, renounced in the last phase of his writing the idea that a change in power relations would automatically change society from within. He modified his dramatic style accordingly from a conscious (Brechtian) simplification of representation with the aim of igniting political change and restructuring power relations to an approach that was to generate insights into social and individual human problems. In a way, this deeply disenchanted Syrian author reached a point of disillusionment and despair where he lost his belief in the power of the word to change a political system. He realized that committed art would always run the risk of simplifying reality in order to bring it in line with a political ideology. In Wannous' interviews and essays quoted above, he more than once describes his new understanding of the notion of the political and the role of a committed artist in the Arab world. He renounces his call of the 1970s for a "politicization of theater" and starts to reflect on another form of art that might convey his urgent humanistic messages to his society.

This way, his new position gravitated towards Adorno's argument that only the autonomous work of art could be the site of resistance vis-a-vis the competing interests of a debased reality and that it is time to cease playing along with the hegemonic culture which had produced mass murder and unspeakable atrocities. Commitment requires a problematic entente with the political sphere, but at the same time it is "virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice" (Adorno qtd. in Harrison and Wood 780). Adorno's reflections on engagement in the arts resulted in a paradoxical position: Art is autonomous and is not—and such an ambivalent or dialectical position might be common to both, Adorno and Wannous, who while never abandoning his self-conception as a committed writer, came to understand commitment to society and the individual very differently in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Syrian dramatist's final plays testify to the pressing wish to give essential humanistic messages to his fellow Arabs on their journey to an open society. These messages have fallen on fertile ground in Syria and Lebanon in recent years. Since 1997, a series of important studies on his dramas of the 1990s have emerged.[12] The award given by the *International Theater Institute,* an affiliate of UNESCO, on World Theater Day in 1996 played an important role. On the occasion of reading his international message, which criticized Syrian society but also the government in no uncertain terms, a large event was held in Syria's largest festival hall, the Masraḥ al-Ḥamrāʾ. Wannous ended his speech with the words: "Our lot is to hope, and what happens today cannot be the end of time." (*Al-aʿmāl al-kāmila* 44; "Theater" 15).

In a foreword to an anthology focusing on Arab theater and especially the writings by Wannous[13] entitled "Hope Arising from Despair," Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury highlights the essential role artists like Wannous, Syrian documentary film director and prominent civil society activist Omar Amiralay (1944–2011), and Saudi-Iraqi-Jordanian-Damascene novelist ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf (1933–2004) played in founding "a new culture, one which only

fully emerged with today's generation of Syrian men and women who were bringing about a revolution from the heart of oppression and despair" ("Foreword" x). Khoury points at the fact that Wannous died fourteen years before the start of the Syrian upheaval in March 2011, but that

> of all the Syrian writers, he has been the most present since the outbreak of the revolution. He has been a beacon not only because he authored the difficult beginnings but also because his words carry both the fervor and the great despair of the future. His sorrow signified the hope he forced upon himself and, in turn, his country. […] If the Arab revolutions stem from questions of culture and politics, then the body of work penned by Wannous, long before the outbreak of uprisings, forms the intellectual roots of the Syrian revolution. (xi–xii; xiv)[14]

Notes

1 Some of the material presented here has been already dealt with in my chapter „Historical Memory in Times of Decline: Saadallah Wannous and Rereading History." *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*. Ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler. London: Saqi, 2010. 97–109. Print. For more detailed analysis of this playwright cf. Pannewick, Friederike. *Das Wagnis Tradition: Arabische Wege der Theatralität*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000. 271f.; 287-299. Print; Pannewick, "Saʿdallāh Wannūs."

2 All translations are—if not indicated otherwise—my own.

3 Bardawil also points out that this position became more and more normalized among this group of disenchanted Arab Leftists: "Faced with secular but authoritarian regimes on the one hand and an Islamic revival on the other, the disenchanted Leftists radicalized their criticisms of their societies. Shifting the analytical gaze inwards to the social structure and culture of these societies, inaugurated as a minoritarian position in the wake of 1967 and driven then by the ethical impulse to take responsibility for one's defeat, became more and more normalized among disenchanted Leftists" (103).

4 Written in 1962, the essay was published in English translation by F. McDonagh. See Adorno, Theodor W. "Commitment." Trans. F. McDonagh. *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978. 300–18. Print.

5 See Khūrī, Ilyās. *Yālū*. Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2002. Print; Khoury, Elias. *Yalo*. Trans. Peter Theroux. New York: Picador, 2009. Print.

6 See Coetzee, J. M. *Waiting for the Barbarians*. New York: Penguin, 1980. Print.

7 All translations of the transliterated passages of Amiralay's interview with Wannous are my own.

8 For a more detailed synopsis and interpretation, cf. Ziter, Edward. "Refugees on the Syrian Stage: *Soirée for the 5th of June.*" *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre.* Ed. Eyad Houssami. London: Pluto, 2012. 11–27. Print; Al-Saleh, Asaad. "The Legacy of Saadallah Wannous and *Soirée for the 5th of June* amidst the Arab Revolts." *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre.* Ed. Eyad Houssami. London: Pluto, 2012. 77–91. Print; Pannewick, "Saʿdallāh Wannūs."

9 These five plays comprise of *Munamnamāt tārīkhiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1994. Print.), *Ṭuqūs al-ishārāt wa-l-taḥawwulāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1994. Print.), *Yawm min zamāninā* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1995. Print.), *Aḥlām shaqqiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1995. Print.), and *Malḥamat al-sarāb* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1996. Print.).

10 Some of the following reflections have already been presented in a study on Iraqi writer Sinān Anṭūn's novel *Iʿjām* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2004. Print; see also the English translation: Antoon, Sinan. *Iʿjaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody.* Trans. Rebecca Johnson and Sinan Antoon. San Francisco: City Lights, 2007. Print.). Cf. Pannewick, Friederike. "Dancing Letters: The Art of Subversion in Sinān Anṭūn's Novel *Iʿjām.*" *Conflicting Narratives: War, Trauma and Memory in Iraqi Culture.* Ed. Stephan Milich, Friederike Pannewick, and Leslie Tramontini. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2012. 65–74. Print.

11 The English edition was published as Barakat, Hoda. *The Stone of Laughter*. Trans. Sophie Bennett. New York: Interlink, 1995. Print.

12 Cf. e.g. Al-Ruwaynī, ʿAbla. *Ḥakī al-ṭāʾir: Saʿdallāh Wannūs*. Cairo: Dār al-Mīrīt, 2005. Print; al-Mukhlif, Ḥasan ʿAlī. *Tawẓīf al-turāth fi-l-masraḥ: Dirāsa taṭbīqiyya fī masraḥ Saʿdallāh Wannūs.* Damascus: Dār al-Awāʾil, 2000. Print; Munīf, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and Faiṣal Darrāj, eds. *Saʿdallāh Wannūs: Al-insān al-muthaqqaf al-mubdiʿ*. Damascus: Kanʿān Print; Baṣal, Muḥammad Ismāʿīl. *Qirāʾāt sīmyāʾiyya fī masraḥ Saʿdallāh Wan-*

nūs: Nuṣūṣ al-tisʿīnāt namūdhajan. Damascus: Dār al-Ahālī, 2000. Print; ʿAmmār, Fātin ʿAlī. *Saʿdallāh Wannūs fi-l-masraḥ al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth.* Al-Safa: Dār Suʿād al-Ṣabāḥ, 1999. Print.

13 Cf. Houssami, Eyad, ed. *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre.* London: Pluto, 2012. Print.

14 It is important to note that this statement by Khoury was made in the early period of the Syrian revolution when civil and peaceful resistance was still visible in this country, which has since experienced an increasingly tragic vicious circle of violence. Nevertheless, during an international conference on Wannous at the American University Beirut in April 2015, this statement has been repeated by Khoury and was approved by several young Syrian actors and stage directors present at this conference ("On Wannous," Department of English, the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies, CAMES, and the Center for American Studies and Research, CASAR, April 1, 2015).

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Part 4

Commitment or Dissent?
Contemporary Perspectives

Fiction of Scandal[1]

Tarek El-Ariss

> "Who are you?? Why are you pretending to be me? Release this username.
> You are a phony. All followers please note."
> —Salman Rushdie to an imposter on Twitter[2]

Since the beginning of this century, the Arab world has been witnessing a literary boom that made being an author *cool* again. New voices are emerging from an array of presses such as Merit, Shourouk, and Malamih in Cairo, and Adab, Saqi, Jamal, and Jadid in Beirut, to name a few. This vibrancy has greatly benefited from various local and international writing festivals (Hay), awards (International Prize for Arabic Fiction or the Arabic Booker), and literary magazines and websites (*Banipal*, *Wasla*, *Kikah*). New novels and short-story collections exhibit multiple forms of linguistic play and narrative structure, mixing techno-writing with *jāhilī* poetry, the diary genre with political critique. With varying aesthetic qualities, they include one-time hits and bestsellers, vulgar scandal literature, experimental texts and postmodern takes on the Mahfouzian narrative. They also involve abundant references to works by international authors such as Milan Kundera, Paolo Coelho, and Chuck Palahniuk, and are systematically in dialogue with popular culture and film both in the Arab world and in the US. While some are self-published and circulate within small communities of readers, others are marketed by larger presses and play into a new culture of "celebrity literature," with media limelight and big-budget translation deals. These works could be found in bookstores in Cairo and Beirut, or circulate online as PDFs, which allows them to reach a wider audience in countries where they might be censored or are simply unavailable. Given their modes of production and circulation, themes and narrative structures, these texts refigure notions of canon, authorship, readership, and the literary in a rapidly changing technological and political environment.

This heterogeneous body of works hailing from different parts of the Arab world and the diaspora has often been ignored or sidelined for being insufficiently engaged in combatting imperialism and neoliberalism. These works have been reduced to class-based critiques of economic privilege, or read as a manifestation of new forms of disenfranchisement. For instance, Sabry Hafez identifies the new Egyptian novel as "the novel of the closed horizon," which narratively and aesthetically reflects a claustrophobic material reality tied to poverty and urban sprawl in modern day Cairo (Hafez 62). This new writing has also been dismissed as individualistic and self-centered, dealing with questions of desire and everyday life, a far cry from the concerns of *nahḍawī udabāʾ* (literati)[3] or the 1950s and 1960s practitioners of *iltizām* (political commitment).[4] Moreover, sensationalist, scandalous, and tell-all narratives, which are of particular interest in this study, have been cast in postcolonial criticism as enactments of a voyeuristic Western gaze onto Arab society and Islam.

In her study of Egyptian avant-gardism from the 1960s, Elisabeth Kendall offers a nuanced definition of "generation" as a group of innovators partaking in the same spirit and impetus in "a liminal space of contestation and change" (Kendall 4).[5] The new writing I engage operates across class, gender, and political lines, and thus could not be associated with

a cohesive group of individuals or a set of isomorphic aesthetic qualities. Rather than produce a conclusive account of a new literary genre and identify its main protagonists, it's important to analyze the ways in which a complex interplay of aesthetic, commercial, and political forces shape the contemporary scene of writing. This requires a new set of critical terms and concepts that adequately engage interactive spaces of literary production mediated by the Internet, global culture, and travel and displacement in the Arab world and beyond.

This article focuses on the tribulations of the Arab author in the age of social media, political upheavals, and the commercialization of literature. It examines how new writing is defined by its practitioners, and how authorial functions are produced through acts of hacking, manipulation, and marketing. Focusing on authors such as Youssef Rakha (Yūsuf Rakhā, b. 1976), Abdo Khal (ʿAbduh Khāl, b. 1962), Ahmad Alaidy (Aḥmad al-ʿĀyidī, b. 1974), Rajaa Alsanea (Rajāʾ al-Ṣāniʿ, b. 1981), and Khaled Alkhamissi (Khālid al-Khamīsī, b. 1962), I explore questions of ethical ambivalence and aesthetic fluctuation, translational politics and canon formation, which arise from threatening and violent encounters occurring on the street, in writing workshops, and on Twitter. I argue that the author, traditionally understood as the function of discourse in Foucault or as the object of sacrifice in Barthes, emerges in new writing as scandalous, sensational, and vulgar. Contesting formalistic, historical, and sociological approaches in Arabic literary studies, I explore the political dimension of sensationalism and scandal and examine how literature is recoded, reimagined, and reaffirmed in instances of greed, exhibitionism, confrontation, and hacking.

The Scene of Writing

Hacking is rapidly replacing terrorism as the new threat to world order. The media landscape abounds in scandals of hacking emails, mobile phones, and websites, and tampering with *secure* structures in order to obtain and spread classified information. Jinn-like, hackers are both good and bad, and thus ambivalent in their social and political aims and constitution.[6] In Britain, the scandal of Rupert Murdoch's *News of the World* has been making headlines since 2009, highlighting hacking as a way of obtaining and producing news.[7] In May 2010, Iraq-based Specialist Bradley Manning, 22, collaborating with a hacker in California, copied thousands of classified documents and diplomatic correspondences and leaked them to Julian Assange, *Wikileaks*' founder (Bumiller). The hacking in both cases caused scandals for the Rupert Murdoch media empire, British and American governments, and political groups and organizations the world over. *Anonymous*, an organization of anarchist hackers or hacktivists, systematically targets government sites and financial institutions. *Raise Your Voice*, a self-proclaimed offshoot of *Anonymous*, repeatedly hacked the Lebanese government websites in April 2012, protesting economic policies and inadequate social services (Holmes). This organization's video manifesto portrays an individual wearing the mask featured in the film, *V for Vendetta* (Dir. James McTeigue, 2005), an iconic symbol associated with recent protest movements in the Arab world and elsewhere ("Anonymous #OpLebanon Announcement").

Associated with infiltration, scandal, and leaks, hacking is the instrument of activists, conscientious objectors, media moguls, disgruntled fans, and random saboteurs [*kharāb-kārī*, in Farsi].[8] In April 2012, Twitter witnessed a series of hackings targeting Saudi authors and intellectuals, including Abdo Khal (Bashraheel). Khal's novel, *Tarmī bi-sharar* (*She Spews Sparks*, 2009), which earned him the Arabic Booker prize in 2010, exposes modes of racial, political, and sexual violence and inequality in an unnamed Gulf kingdom. When the

hacking occurred, Khal intervened to disown the hijacked account, "Abdokhal," which was spewing all kinds of vulgarities and indiscretions aimed at embarrassing the author and destroying his reputation. As a result of this hacking, Khal lost his 50,000 followers. As an act of tampering, hijacking, and infiltration, hacking delivers a blow that suddenly wipes out the author's identity and readership.

The hacking of Khal's account exposes the vulnerability of the author and intellectual online. In this attack, it is the signifier itself—the award-winning author with thousands of followers—that was knocked down. Hacking the author thus unsettles the economy of literary production, in particular the public engagement (on Twitter) that complements and sustains it. Participatory debate and the critique of power, which imagine a Habermasian public sphere online, collapsed in one blow.[9] The weakness of passwords and the instability of the virtual text refigure the relation between Tweeting and writing, the public intellectual and the novelist. In this context, identity theft and mimesis cast hacking as an infiltration and a violation of the very notions of identity, authorship, writing, and debate.

Hacking is a bricolage with wide ranging aesthetic, social, and political repercussions. Andrew Ross argues that Steven Levy's cult novel, *Hackers* (1984), established hacking as "libertarian and crypto-anarchist in its right-to-know" (256). Ross argues that hacker activities were presented as a romantic counter-cultural tendency" (ibid.), only to degenerate into a form of "techno-delinquency" and then crime. *The Jargon File*, an online resource for hacker subculture, defines the "cracker" (a type of hacker) as someone who "stretches the capabilities of programmable system"; "delights in having an intimate understanding of the internal workings of a system"; "programs enthusiastically (even obsessively)"; or is a "malicious meddler who tries to discover sensitive information by poking around" ("Hacker"). These various characterizations involve systematic acts of writing, knowing, and revealing. Hacking a website could involve writing a malicious program that infiltrates and infects it. It could also occur by overloading the site with requests that it cannot handle; this process depends on a consorted attack by a group of individuals who all send requests simultaneously in order to crash the site.[10] In this sense, hacking exposes the inability of the *secure* system to handle the overwhelming requests, thereby stretching its limits and forcing it to recant its protected status. Hacking thus consists of writing practices that generate specific affects, centered on the name, signifier, and signification as such. Crash and collapse, and infiltration and replication expose [*tafḍaḥ*] sites of vulnerability and instability in the system, the text, and the author function.

Hacking as a process of exposing vulnerability has various applications from the digital world to political and literary models. Author, blogger, and activist Youssef Rakha[11] sounded the alarm on literary hacking or "hacking the literary" in an article in *Al-Ahram Weekly* in 2010. Unlike the saboteurs who hacked Abdo Khal's Twitter account, the hackers according to Rakha are wannabe authors, mobbing Cairo's literary scene. As Rakha goes into a bookstore holding a creative-writing workshop, he notices a strange-looking crowd that seems out of place in the close-knit literary circle with which he is familiar. Rakha then sarcastically points out that the unfamiliar faces are those of engineers, aspiring to enter the literary field through mimetic desire and groupie behavior. "For a moment it seemed as though a mafia of those lever-wielding un-poets were ambushing the literary sphere, infiltrating writerly circles all across the city, befriending with a view to replacing true writers and eventually, well— eliminating them" (Rakha). The crescendo in Rakha's text moves from terms such as "mafia" and "un-poets" to "ambushing," "infiltrating," "replacing," and "eliminating." Rakha thus describes an attack or an aggressive take over that threatens to erase "true writers." A flash

mob, which unexpectedly appears at the event, stuns the author and takes him by surprise. The fear of elimination is the effect of a hacking that seeks to infiltrate the literary scene and reproduce itself en guise of destroying it. Rakha's literary anxiety echoes the hacking of Khal's account, which overrides yet replicates the author and his text, redirects his tweets, and re-appropriates his function altogether. The literary workshop, like the author's Twitter account, becomes a site of vulnerability that both empowers and undermines the author—the "true writer" of the literary text.

A new literary canon emerges from a liminal space of potential and possibility, which becomes exposed in the act of infiltration. Having distinguished un-poets from "true writers," Rakha proceeds to name the latter. The threat of elimination at the hand of an insidious and destructive mob leads him to identify the representative figures of a new generation of Egyptian authors:

> [These authors] might be called the Twothousanders but not only because they started publishing after 2000. People like Nael El-Toukhy, Ahmad Nagui and (to a lesser extent) Mohammad Kheir and Mohammad Abdelnaby also share something more profound. They are all internet-savvy, down-to-earth agents of subversion as interested in things as they are in people and as closely connected to pop culture, communications technology and the global media as they are to literary history. Kundera is their Balzac, Mahfouz their Greek tragedy. They are cynics and jokers and glorifiers of what they refer to (admittedly often with ignorance) as kitsch. By and large they eschew poetry; and until the Egyptian quasi-literary blogging craze fizzled out, many of them professed to eschew print publication. They may not always have as much access to non-Arabic culture as they claim or desire, but their position is truly postmodern in the sense that they own and disown many histories at once; they don't have a problem revolving around the commodity as a mode of being; they don't have a problem with commodification. In short, they live mentally in our times—and they try to do it unselfconsciously. (Rakha)

In a Hegelian moment, which is experienced as a fear of death and erasure, Rakha embraces the position of the critic who assesses a literary work, identifies its main protagonists, and establishes its aesthetic values. This moment of consciousness calls attention to the vulnerability of the literary work—its compromised position at the workshop for new writers—yet simultaneously asserts its literary worth and significance. This double movement is key for understanding how hacking and infiltration stage moments of *faḍḥ* [exposure, exposition] online, in public forums, and in texts. Hacking thus threatens and consolidates at the same time. The negation, through Foucault this time, is productive of discourse, that is, new writing. In this context, the attribute "truly postmodern"—as opposed to "phony" or "fake" postmodern—that Rakha employs does not announce the end of literature à la Fukuyama. Rather, it carves out a literary space for those authors threatened by mimicry and elimination.

Rakha presents the historical and technological context of new authors—playful hackers and "agents of subversion" in their own right. He identifies their position vis-à-vis world literature, new media, and political participation. Furthermore, he addresses their relation to the canon associated with Mahfouz, which he incorporates as "Greek tragedy" in a new literary setting. The reference to Mahfouz ties in to the "truly postmodern" framework Rakha introduces as a direction, motif, and orientation in new—and noteworthy—works. As he situates new writing in relation to Mahfouz, he claims a literary trajectory that unsettles yet refigures—instead of breaking with—tradition. The politics of the canon in this context are complex; they operate across philosophical and literary models that position Arabic literature in a larger comparative context. Articulating the new author's relation to blogs and print, Mahfouz and Kundera, Rakha suggests that the new author, operating across media

and genre, is by no means a free floating entity, lost and unhinged. Nor is he/she simply an innovator in the tradition of Arab and European modernism discussed by Elisabeth Kendall or Stefan Meyer in their different studies of Arabic experimental literature.[12] The "true writer," though innovative and complex, lies at the intersection of a multiplicity of media and literary traditions and practices that are identified, if not produced, in a moment characterized by the fear of elimination and mimetic anxiety. This releases new writing in Rakha's characterization from a fixed and homogeneous literary model that could be clearly identified. Instead, this characterization relegates new writing to a series of events, accidents, and scandals that shape and produce it.

Scandal in Translation

Aligning hacking with new writers performing a systematic infiltration and "knocking down" of literary spaces points us to Rajaa Alsanea's text, *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* (*Girls of Riyadh*). This tell-all novel was published by Saqi Books in 2006 and subsequently translated, not without controversy, by Marilyn Booth for Penguin, in 2009.[13] Booth, along with other critics, identifies in the production and translation of Alsanea's work the process of "hacking the literary." While Rakha describes how engineers or un-poets[14] mob the literary scene, Booth engages the celebrity author of the literary hit by examining the way her work is produced through the manipulation of translation, circulation, and media. Whereas the hacking of Abdo Khal's Twitter account knocked down the literary signifier—the author—by eliminating his readership, hacking in Alsanea's context serves to consolidate if not construct the position of the author of a bestselling novel.

   Girls of Riyadh tells the story of four girlfriends as they flirt, fall in love, get married, divorce, travel, and drive around Riyadh in SUVs with tinted glass. The novel weaves in the role of the external narrator, Rajaa herself, who introduces every chapter as a weekly email sent after Friday prayer to Saudi Internet subscribers. Alsanea starts her chapters by acknowledging the readers' responses to her emails. She claims that due to revelations, *faḍīḥa* (scandal) in an email from last week some readers were angered. She also critiques Saudi authorities' alleged intention to ban her site and prevent her from sending the weekly scandals. Setting itself an imagined origin in cyberspace,[15] the novel takes email—an older technology compared to Twitter—as her narrative model. This techno-fictionalization of the authorial position transforms the author into a character in her own text, writing herself as a persecuted yet courageous young woman, armed with the power of scandal, and confronting political power and disgruntled readers online.

   Alsanea's literary narrative about the exposure of the intimate, the social, and the political enacts a breakdown of the imagined boundary between private and public. The *faḍḥ* [exposure, exposition], in this context, unveils the erasure of the very notion of the private. Alluding to Alsanea's framing of her task as a *faḍḍāḥa* (exposer, scandalizer), Moneera al-Ghadeer suggests that the author's play on the word *fataḥ* (open) and *faḍaḥ* (expose) is fundamental to the narrative. Specifically, Alsanea appropriates the register of *faḍḥ* from an Oprah-like TV show, which airs via satellite on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC). Alsanea *hacks* Zaven Kouyoumjian's *Sīreh w-infataḥit* (open talk), transforming it into *sīreh w-infaḍaḥit* (scandal talk), thereby accentuating the process of scandal and unveiling. Discussing the translation of Alsanea's phrase, Marilyn Booth notes: "The literal meaning of this cyber-transliteration is 'A life story and it has been exposed'; the verb *infaḍaḥ* implies exposure of something disgraceful or shameful" ("Translator v. Author"

204). In doing so, Alsanea "provokes the phantasm that ultimately intensifies the interest in gazing at *Girls of Riyadh*" (al-Ghadeer 299), thereby transforming the narrative into "a peephole into what a young woman sees in her society" (ibid.). However, this peephole expands in order to expose the author herself in the process of exposing her society and producing a literary hit.

Appropriating Zaven's TV show as *sīreh w-infadaḥit*, Alsanea takes the act of writing on stage, into the studio, in front of the cameras, and under the projectors' lights. According to *Lisān al-ʿarab*, *faḍaḥ* means "to expose a misdeed" (Ibn Manẓūr 190–91). Specifically, Ibn Manzur emphasizes the visual aspect of *faḍīḥa*, comparing it to the sudden advent of morning light that exposes (as in exposure to light) the true shape, color, and contours of an object. It is also used in the context of awakening the sleeper in the morning (*faḍaḥah al-ṣabāḥ*), catching him or her off guard. In this sense, the stage (*scène* in French, as in "scene of writing") functions to "shed light" on a topic or a social or political practice (in an Oprah-like show), which is simultaneously exposed in the process of *faḍḥ* (exposition, exposure). The chronicle of *faḍāʾiḥ* in Alsanea's text (the weekly emails) is thus implicated in its process of production, blurring the distinction between subject and object. The desire to be on stage and acquire recognition as a courageous woman author from Arabia with translations in multiple languages coincides with the desire to expose the social and political context from which the work arises. Specifically, Alsanaea's chronicle of scandals becomes exposed in the process of translation. The true scandal, it turns out, lies in the construction and manipulation of the author-narrator function—a form of hacking that produces the literary hit.

The author's intervention in the process of translating her work into English sought to minimize if not altogether dismiss the role of the translator. In a series of articles, Booth exposed (*faḍaḥat*) this intervention that aims at "effacing the translator" and "dismissing her reading of the text" ("The Muslim Woman" 153). This dismissal, argues Booth, produces and consolidates the position of the Arab woman writer as "celebrity author" (ibid.). The politics of translation and editing subject the translator to market forces, wherein the publisher sides with the author of the coveted work as she alters if not neutralizes the expert's translation. The threat to the translator's role and the attempt to eliminate it operate as an attack, an infiltration, and a hacking of the economy of literary production (writing, reading, translating, and publishing). And just like Rakha distinguishes between un-poets and "true writers" when threatened by the hacking mob in Cairo, Booth explains what distinguishes the literary work from the ethnographic account when she experiences erasure herself. In her *faḍḥ* of Alsanea's and Penguin's practices, Booth identifies a genre of "Orientalist Ethnographicism," which packages and transforms the fictional text with an Arab female narrator and author into an authoritative testimony that provides a window into her culture (151). Both in Rakha's and Booth's cases, the threat of elimination through infiltration and mimesis produces a literary model or canon that reaffirms the aesthetic and the literary. The hacking/*faḍḥ* dialectics thus operate as a process of anchoring new writing along a trajectory that is new yet recognizable, innovative yet literary nonetheless.

Exposing the structure of editorial and economic power integral to the work's circulation and notoriety, Booth "sheds light" on the scandalous author herself, the alleged *faḍḍāḥa* (exposer, scandalizer) of Saudi society. In this context, the process of veiling and anonymity associated with the Arab woman *writing* her culture becomes something that exposes its own pretenses to and staging of this structure of desire. The *faḍīḥa* (scandal) that the translator enacts is of the literary *faḍḥ* itself as a quest for a stage (TV interviews, fame, limelight) and readership. In this context, *faḍḥ* implicates, exposes, and takes over the act of

writing, promotion, and translation. It also shifts the emphasis from the alleged object of scandal—Saudi society—to the process of literary production, which engulfs the *faḍḍāḥa* and hacker of the literary hit who initiated it in the first place. *Faḍḥ* thus becomes a kind of dangerous and wild writing, a set of practices that unfold beyond the text in order to shape its circulation, reception, and translation.

Hacking Rites

In *An takūn ʿAbbās al-ʿAbd* (*Being Abbas el Abd*) (2003), Ahmed Alaidy stages hacking as the framework for a scandal within modern Arabic literature.[16] He sheds light on a crisis that both threatens and reaffirms the literary work, as in Rakha's and Booth's models. This experimental text incorporates techno-writing into a fragmented narrative about a young man ruminating over amorous encounters, politics, philosophy, and history in modern day Cairo. The narrator hallucinates, picks fights, swears, and engages in a scathing and violent indictment of Egypt's cultural and political establishment. Alaidy's text exposes modes of ideological complicity that tie in the production of an antiquated literary canon with a project of modernity that has—always already is—gone awry. Echoing Rakha's description of Mahfouz as new Arabic writing's "Greek tragedy," Alaidy articulates a break with a previous generation of Arab authors—the "generation of Defeat" (Alaidy 41/36).[17] Alaidy identifies (and identifies with) the "I've-got-nothing-to-lose-generation," seeking to expose the political and ideological bankruptcy of a "defeated" and corrupt Arab literary establishment. Specifically, Alaidy casts himself and his generation as breaking with the literary and political heritage of the *naksa*, the Arab defeat against Israel in 1967. The *naksa* is associated with the collapse of the Arab project of modernity as well as with the erosion of literature's ability to engage social and political reality. According to Alaidy, the generation of Defeat is a paralyzed and paralyzing generation, unable and unwilling to recover from Arab modernity's dystopic moment.

The 1967 defeat did not put an end to the Arab project of modernity but rather exposed its instability and vulnerability. When the defeat occurred, it is rumored, Nasser turned to his officers declaring: *Itfaḍaḥnā* (we've been exposed).[18] The *faḍīḥa* (scandal) of 1967 is not only embodied in the military defeat itself, which could no longer be kept secret from the public a few days into the war, but also in the pretenses of the project of Arab modernity itself, its utopia and ideology in the context of pan-Arabism and Nasser's Egypt specifically. Describing the shock of 1967, Angelika Neuwirth observes that "Egyptian literary figures such as Sonʿallah Ibrahim (b. 1937) and Gamal al-Ghitani (b. 1945) had articulated the unfounded basis of nationalist rhetoric in their novels years before the dénouement of Nasserism" (42). The stunning defeat to Israel, the *faḍīḥa*, thus exposed that which is already *mafḍūḥ* [exposed], compromised, and shaking, namely the underlying Nasserist articulation of Arab modernity. Alaidy's "I've-got-nothing-lose" generation thus exposes the generation of Defeat's loss as a *faḍīḥa*—a loss that had always existed.

Naksa's scandal, the *faḍīḥa*, is mediated through a structure of hacking that comes into Alaidy's novel from the digital world. Alaidy discusses hacking in a passing yet important reference to a teenage hacker who infiltrated and uploaded music to the Pentagon Website (Alaidy 98/96). Exposing the vulnerability of the impenetrable structure—site of American military power—hacking exposes (*yafḍaḥ*) the weakness in the system, or, the system as weak, vulnerable, and compromised. The website's weakness reflects the problematic nature of the discourses and practices that underlie it: American interventionist ideology and military operations from Vietnam to Iraq. The hacking thus exposes both a flaw in the regis-

ters of both computer security and political legitimacy. Intervening abroad in order to make
America secure, as the story goes, is exposed through its own insecurity and weakness.
Hacking exposes that which lacks legality and security at the same time.

Having outlined the structure of hacking, Alaidy extrapolates, claiming that these days
everything gets hacked, "*ḥatta al-ḥukūma bi-tithāk ʿaynī ʿaynak*" (Even the government gets
hacked, right before your eyes) (Alaidy 98/96).[19] Alaidy stages hacking, as a performance of
infiltration—of the weakness of the ideological and historical narrative, and the literary and
cultural establishment that continues to sustain and embody it. Alaidy's text exposes a scene
of denial and complicity that holds literature—new writing—hostage. Hacking thus targets
not only the government as such, but rather a series of "oppressive power relations" that take
different shapes and forms (May 12). These power relations are in part represented by the
generation of Defeat, which laments, according to Alaidy, 1967 as the moment of destruction
of Arab modernity and the advent of political and cultural paralysis, complicity (Camp
David Accords), and totalitarianism (Mubarak). Thus, the experience of loss with which
Alaidy wants to break is a moment of historical misrecognition. New writing arises in this
context as a dismantling of this structure of loss and its association with nostalgia, melancho-
lia, paralysis, and ruins that are linked to 1967 yet go beyond it.

1967 in Alaidy's model is the *faḍīḥa* that was covered up. In this context, hacking ex-
poses the complicity of the intellectual and political establishment in covering up this
faḍīḥa (scandal). The *faḍḥ* staged in Alaidy's text, figuratively perpetrated by the Russian
teenager and the new author alike, "makes a scene" of that which is already *mafḍūḥ* (ex-
posed). Thus, hacking as *faḍīḥa* does not reveal a secret or an inside, but rather that the
economy of secrecy, veiling, and loss is already both at work, and compromised and frac-
tured. The *faḍīḥa* consists in the realization that decay is not internal or unseen but public,
"*ʿaynī ʿaynak*" (right before your eyes), caught in flagrante delicto by the new author
(Menninghaus 134). Hacking as *faḍḥ* exposes the fact that the *ḥukūma* (government), as a
multiplicity of discourses and practices, is already *mithāka*—hacked, stripped naked, and il-
legitimate. This stages a break with the pathos of loss and defeat, which is constantly reen-
acted in Arab cultural and literary discourses on imperialism and colonialism, tradition and
modernity, and home and exile. Alaidy's text, among others, unsettles the structure of debt
or cross-generational transference in order to create the possibility of movement, play,
transformation, and confrontation.

Alaidy's work and tactics should be positioned in relation to the 1960s generation of
Egyptian modernism that gave us authors such as Sonallah Ibrahim, hailed by Alaidy as his
literary inspiration.[20] In her reading of the relation between journalism and literature at the
intersection of social and political change in Egypt, Kendall focuses on avant-garde authors
writing for the journal *Gallery 68*. According to Kendall, these innovators evolved from a
long tradition of journalism and subversive and marginal literature to produce *al-adab al-
jadīd* (new literature) (188). This new literature, she argues, was intimately tied to experi-
ences of shock and disappointment with the political and cultural establishment blamed for
the 1967 defeat (85). Though Alaidy's writing claims to be post-loss ("I've-got-nothing-to-
lose generation"), it is tied nonetheless to a tradition that stages the tension between the
literary and the non-literary at the intersection of journalism and literature, activism and art.
Acts of hacking and exposing thus stage both breaks as well as continuities with literary
traditions, thoroughly undermining the author/intellectual model foregrounded by *iltizām*
(political commitment) and the *udabāʾ* (literati), which was shaken in 1967[21] and again in
2011.[22]

Slapping the Author

Khaled Alkhamissi's *Taxi: Ḥawādīt al-mashāwīr* (*Taxi*, 2006) presents a series of conversations with Cairo's cabdrivers as a *faḍḥ* of the practices of power, and of the role of the intellectual and author in engaging these practices. The narrative is constructed as a stage for the accumulation of *faḍāʾiḥ*, mediated by the narrator's questions about the economy, the government, and daily life. From the TV stage of Zaven's show, *sīreh w-infataḥit* (open talk) and Alsanea's *sīreh w-infaḍaḥit* (scandal talk), we move with Alkhamissi to the cab as the stage and in-box of *faḍāʾiḥ*. A journalist by training, Alkhamissi produces a diary of his interviews with drivers conducted over the course of a year. Fictionalized as a character in his own text, Alkhamissi relates encounters that take drivers back to their youth either as moviegoers in the 1980s, soldiers in the 1970s, or foreign laborers in Gulf States. Aligning Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak eras, these stories operate as a *faḍḥ* of the current state of affairs and of the historical trajectory underlying it.

In her review, Omayma Abdelatif argues that "*Taxi's* brilliance is that it captures the point at which cabs cease to be just a means of transportation and instead become a space for debate and exchange, at a time when all other public spaces, including the street itself, had become inaccessible under the brutal force of the police state" (81). In this context, the street has moved outside of the street in order to reclaim it through the literary work. This street—which has been emptied out of its occupants who moved into cabs and went on Twitter—was flooded with protesters, slogans, and signs during the 2011 protests. However, while Abdelatif emphasizes the taxi as a space of "debate and exchange," it is both a literary and political performance, which stages the process of writing and circulation as *faḍḥ*. On this new stage, the roles of journalist, author, and driver are unsettled, throwing into disarray both the text's narrative and language.

The *faḍḥ* that arises from this new literary and material space—the cab—takes shape through a series of linguistic and narrative transformations. Whereas the conversations are in *ʿāmmiyya* (spoken Arabic), the author's reflections and narrative voice are in *fuṣḥā* (formal Arabic). However, as the bulk of the text is devoted to conversation, *fuṣḥā* appears as the incongruous text, out of place, belonging to a different register, temporality, project, and space. As the conversation evolves over the course of the work, it is as if the street takes over the narrative. This accentuates the vulnerability of the narrator's voice, making it unstable, and gradually uneasy.

With over a dozen editions and translations into several languages, Alkhamissi writes in his preface that *Taxi* seeks to reproduce "street language," which is "special, raw, alive, real" (al-Khamīsī, "Preface" 9–10).[23] This street language of new writing, which we find in Alaidy's text as well, should thus be contrasted to the language of power and its multiple fictions (ideological, political, and literary).[24] In *Taxi*, the author/narrator instigates the process of *faḍḥ* from a distance—from the back seat, both literally and figuratively—thereby turning the driver into a *faḍḍāḥ*. This back and forth between the two transforms the text into a crucible for stories in circulation, and endows language itself with an affective characteristic that confronts the language and abuses of power. In one instance, a driver describes how a policeman in civilian clothes rode with him only to extort money by threatening to take his papers and arrest him should he refuse to pay. Alkhamissi experiences this disguise of the law—disguising yet exposing its own corruption—as a "violent slap" in the face (Alkhamissi 19/155). Exposing a model of abuse through processes of storytelling and circulation, the driver's language and account slap the narrator and violently unsettle his position in the text.

A violent slap ignited the Arab uprisings in Fall 2010. Mohammad Bouazizi immolated himself after he was slapped by a governmental municipality woman who prevented him from selling his goods in a marketplace in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia. In *Taxi*, the story about police corruption slaps at the author's discourse and position. Specifically, the slap exposes the narrator who wants to locate *faḍīḥa* somewhere else, putting it in the mouth of the driver. *Faḍḥ* as a slap exposes in this context the fictionalization of the author as the *muthaqqaf* (intellectual) who records and analyzes yet resists and avoids direct confrontation with or indictment of the practices of power. The slap targets Alkhamissi's separation from his object of analysis, thereby fracturing the boundary between customer and driver, researcher and native informant, and intellectual and the person of the street. The "raw" *faḍḥ* that Alkhamissi instigates gradually engulfs him and violently displaces him from his seat. The affective language of the street and the stories it produces slap, arrest, and shake up the author's position and language in *Taxi*.

In *Islam on the Street: Religion in Modern Arabic Literature* (2009), Muhsin al-Musawi argues that the project of Arab modernity and its *nahḍawī* literary apparatus suppressed the Islamic referent by casting it as a signifier of backwardness and primitivism. This, according to al-Musawi, led to a dangerous disconnect between the Arab intellectual and the masses. Such disconnect operates along various registers, including the primacy of *fuṣḥā* over *ʿāmmiyya*.[25] Examining this dynamic in *Taxi*, one could claim that "affect," a force and duration, which binds space-time through an "impingement" on the body (Massumi 27), arises in the interstices of the disconnect al-Musawi identifies. Beyond questions of communication, representation, and critique, "affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Gregg and Seigworth 1), thereby exposing (*yafḍaḥ*) the gap, separation, compromise, and complicity. Affects are "forces or intensities […] that pass body to body" (ibid.), enacting and exposing breaks, ruptures, and fractures in discourse and in subject positions, and thus creating the possibility for new connections and movements. Emerging from linguistic registers, bodily postures, modes of circulation on the street and online, and arresting images and stories that slap and knock down, affects circulate from one mode of writing and storytelling to another. Affects are embodied in the forms of scandal, hacking, and confrontation I identify in these texts. The break with the generation of Defeat in Alaidy is refigured in Alkhamissi's text through an affective relation across bodies, language use, and reactions. This creates an opening through which new modes of confrontation, play, and writing emerge.

The story that slaps Alkhamissi violently in the face is aligned with the slapping of the government, which trembles and shakes due to a protest by 200 Kifaya activists surrounded by 2.000 security officers. Describing this scene, one driver states that the government is so afraid that "its knees are shaking. I mean one puff and the government will fall, a government without knees" (Alkhamissi 22/182). The satirical yet powerful account of the shaking government is associated in the driver's discourse with the fear of demonstration. The police state counters this fear, suggests the cabbie, by raising prices and scaring people with the economic situation, thereby forcing them to think only of their livelihoods. The shaking of the knees and the demonstration cause an interruption in circulation. The ensuing traffic jam requires the rider to pay more for the story, ten pounds instead of three, in order to reach his final destination in downtown Cairo.[26] Slapping, shaking, and trembling thus describe the work of language, narrative, and political confrontation. This clockwork of driving, storytelling, and demonstrating is mediated through an affective register that both calls attention to a new writing mode and a new critique of power and of the role of the au-

thor/intellectual. This new writing and critique break down the boundaries between author and text, the *faḍḍāḥ* and the process of *faḍḥ*, and usher in an untamable discourse and a dangerous writing that contest the limits of the text, the diary, the novel, and *adab* (literature in the literati's sense).

In Alaidy's model, the government is weak, decaying, and vulnerable—a *faḍīḥa* exposed in the process of hacking. In *Taxi*, this vulnerability is exposed through modes of circulation and an affective language emerging from the distorted body of the driver in his shabby and claustrophobic cab. The trembling of the knees brought about by the demonstration is precisely the *faḍīḥa* of the weakness and paranoia of a "*hukūma bint ʿarṣ*" (son of a bitch government) (Alkhamissi 39/336). Alkhamissi thus describes an act of hacking perpetrated by 200 protesters that managed to infiltrate the system and expose (*yafḍaḥ*, make a scene of) its weakness. Similar to Alaidy's account, the government is staged in *Taxi* as being *mithāka* (hacked but also "fucked"), trembling and shaking.

Exposing the hypocrisy of the political system, a driver explains how the government makes up traffic regulations in order to extort money. "We live a lie and believe it. The government's only role is to check that we believe the lie, don't you think?" (Alkhamissi 40/348) The affective register of the driver expressed in a raw language shatters the official narrative as a lie, or an *old* fiction. The *new* fiction slaps, makes one tremble, unsettles, and in the process fractures the narrative of power. The literary work thus counters another fiction—the lie or "the same old story"—, which is *mafḍūḥa* (exposed), unable to veil its production, shakiness, and instability. From the street scene of the Kifaya demonstration to the circulation of cabs generating stories and exposing social and political corruption arises a new mode of staging the political in Alkhamissi's text. New writing, as opposed to old fiction, is a site of confrontation, *faḍḥ*: an undoing of the fiction underlying the discourse of power. The driver's discourse is "raw and real" not because it uses street language or spoken Arabic, but rather because it produces a new kind of narrative that exposes and affectively confronts the lie, that is, political fiction.

Taxi reproduces the effects of riding: the crooked body posture and uncomfortable seats, the heat and stench in the cab, traffic sounds, and the radio tapes playing sermons, music, and news.[27] As the narrator rides, he accumulates stories, which collectively constitute *faḍīḥa*'s spectacle of political abuse, extortion, corruption, and the shaky and panicked government. Enticed, slapped, and overtaken by the chronicle of *faḍāʾiḥ*, the narrator, who was thus far collecting stories, instigating and recording them like a social scientist conducting an experiment, slaps back at the end. Through a transfer of affects—between the cabdriver and the rider, the street and the text—the narrative shifts to a direct and violent confrontation with power. Alkhamissi "takes his gloves off" to slap government practices and old fiction. Unlike the *fuṣḥā* (formal Arabic) framing in each chapter, which captures the author/intellectual's voice, chapter 49 starts in *ʿāmmiyya* (spoken Arabic), employing the first person pronoun. Alkhamissi relates that having finished his tour of Azbakiyya's booksellers, he decided to take the metro to Giza, only to discover that service was disrupted. Looking around in the station, he noticed a sign that reads: "The Metro Underground: Mubarak's Gift to His People" (Alkhamissi 182/1770). The author, continuing in *ʿāmmiyya*, launches a scathing attack against Mubarak, "Lord of the Universe and of Our Master Mohammed" (ibid.), exposing his shameless claim to public funds, which could be dispensed and offered as a gift from the ruler to *his* people. Shifting registers by appropriating the raw language of the street, Alkhamissi abandons the cautionary framing of his critique and the *fuṣḥā* that had afforded him the distance to confront political power head on.

In this satirical and violent diatribe, the identity of the narrator (Alkhamissi) is fused with the voice of the street, the raw language of *faḍḥ*. The author finally embraces the position of *faḍḍāḥ* both by accumulating the drivers' micro-*faḍāʾiḥ* (stories) and publishing them in a book, but also, staging himself in another register, through a direct confrontation with the police state. In this case, *faḍīḥa* operates both diegetically and extra-diegetically, linking modes of circulation to confrontation, and demonstration to the revolution to come. Confrontation staged through literature thus moves from *iltizām*'s and the prior *nahḍawī* critiques of social and political inequalities, colonialism and imperialism, to *faḍīḥa* as a mode of exposing, causing a scandal, and "making a scene." This *faḍīḥa* is staged in the cab, a place of physical distortion, decay, circulation, and storytelling. The critique of power associated with the author/intellectual conducting research and publishing a diary becomes consumed and engulfed by its object of study: the street, the taxi driver, and social and political corruption and abuse. The findings of Alkhamissi break with their neatly fictionalized frame in the shape of a published diary, taking over his narrative, language, and author/intellectual function. This transformation points to a new form of confrontation of power that emerges simultaneously with a new aesthetic and affective model of writing at the intersection of the novel and the diary, the text and the blog, and the literary and the political.

Conclusion

In Alkhamissi's text, the author/intellectual is unable to remain above the fray, safe in a public sphere where he interacts along fixed and recognizable rules of engagement, debating political issues, conducting experiments, and writing books. The author in this context goes on Twitter or down to the street only to be overwhelmed, slapped, and shaken. The new text exposes and unveils but also reproduces the affect, the outrage, and the stench of the cab. This process unsettles the author's function and the literary space in which it prevails. The author, either on Twitter or in the cab, with his/her body bent over and crooked from typing or riding, succumbs to that which he/she seeks to describe, discuss, expose, and fictionalize. As a stage of confrontation, *faḍīḥa* thus involves both the *fāḍiḥ* and the *mafḍūḥ*. The government's vulnerability is confronted by another vulnerability, that of the author, who, in the process of exposing and hacking it (Alaidy), exposes the *faḍīḥa* of his own vulnerability (Khal, Alkhamissi). The acts of writing and *faḍḥ* also expose in Alkhamissi's case the interplay of language, the shift from *fuṣḥā* to *ʿāmmiyya*, the formal to the raw, and from the old fiction and Arab modernity's narrative of loss, to new writing. The position of the author riding cabs and asking questions collapses in the narrative. The raw language of the driver and the circulation in the taxi drag the authorial position into that which it sought to represent, analyze, and control from a distance. We move in this context from models of critique and dialectical engagement to making a scene, *faḍīḥa*, an act of confrontation that infiltrates and becomes embodied in the text. The new authorial position, scandalous and scandalized, moving back and forth between "the scene of writing" and "making a scene," challenges our reading of the political in the context of *iltizām*, *adab*, and *hazīma* (the defeat of 1967). It also contests the Habermassian model of the public sphere, which presupposes an ethical and rational subject engaging in "civilized" and rational debate and exchange. In this new setting, the author is compelled to expose him/herself in the process of exposing the other.

Like the author, the critic is equally implicated in identifying an elusive model to associate with this new scene of writing. Hacking's ambivalent nature and attenuated political aims refigure questions of activism, ethics, literature, and the law, and shifts the debate

from the critique of imperialism and colonialism in the context of loss as *hazīma* to infiltration, *faḍḥ* and flash mobs. Unsettling the models of ideology and causality—"What caused the Arab Spring?"—through which political action, resistance, and protest have been traditionally explained, hacking's multiple scenes and scandals (*faḍāʾiḥ*) require an engagement with notions of affect, compulsion, simultaneity, instantaneity, and the circulation of texts, images, and stories both online and off. The economy of *faḍḥ,* vulnerability, and confrontation identified in these texts breaks with previous conceptions of the literary, the author, and the relation between the intellectual and power. Replacing these "older fictions" are new genres and writing practices that embrace the street, Twitter, vulgarity, and rawness. The aesthetic characteristics of these new texts are constituted and recognized in instances of hacking and attack, which are unpredictable and threatening. These texts and modes of circulation give rise to new forms of imagined communities, political authority, subjectivity, and authorial functions.

That said, I'm not presenting here a comprehensive account of new writing; this is impossible at this stage and would require at least a couple of decades before we could begin to understand these texts' aesthetic and political significance in a larger historical context. All one can do is expose (*yafḍaḥ*) the way new writing is being defined and practiced by its practitioners (authors, poets, bloggers, translators) as they struggle with, dismiss, and reassert the question of literature. In this context, new writing could be examined in instances and events, scandals and acts of hacking, wherein the literary and the author function specifically are both staged and undermined. The critical assessment of new writing could only engage with and align these elusive moments of rupture and signification, which offer new sites of meaning and thus require further investigation that might take the field of literary studies in new and unpredictable directions.

Notes

1 This essay is a reprint of "Fiction of Scandal," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 43.2–3(2012): 510–31. Print. I would like to thank Moneera Al-Ghadeer for the invaluable insights and suggestions that helped shape this article. Names of writers discussed here are as they appear in their social media communications and writings. When referencing texts, the first page number refers to the Arabic original, the second one to the English translation (ex: Alaidy 41/36).

2 When Salman Rushdie decided to open a Twitter account, he realized that someone had already usurped his name. In addition to addressing the imposter directly as quoted in this passage, Rushdie "then faced the indignity of having to prove his identity, answering a barrage of obscure questions from would-be followers about, among other things, his late sister Nabeela's nickname, and the sometime hiding place of the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz." Henley, Jon. "Salman Rushdie's Twitter Debut." *The Guardian* 20 Sept. 2011. Web. 5 Mar. 2015.

3 Authors and intellectuals in the *nahḍawī* tradition such as Taha Hussein (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, b. 1889), Tawfīq al-Haqim (Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, b. 1898), and Yahya Haqqi (Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, b. 1905).

4 The notion of *iltizām*, which echoes the Sartrean model of *littérature engagée*, takes shape in the Arab context of anti-colonial struggle, class struggle, and pan-Arabism from the 1950s onward. Though it is Taha Hussein who first coins the word *iltizām* in 1947, it is Suhayl Idris (Suhayl Idrīs, b. 1923), author of *Al-ḥayy al-lātīnī* (*The Latin Quarter*), who becomes its most recognizable advocate. Idris's journal, *al-Ādāb*, founded in Beirut in 1953, becomes one of the crucibles for *iltizām*'s leftist and nationalist articulations through literary criticism and philosophy from across the Arab world. For more on this application in a number of postcolonial novels, see al-Musawi, Muhsin. *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. Print. Given its various articulations by Arab intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s, *iltizām* calls for a literature that socially and ethically engages Arab reality within a larger nationalist narrative of progress and emancipation thereby critiquing modernist aesthetics as bourgeois and regressive. *Iltizām* thus becomes a vehicle of social and political transformation through writing and cultural production. For more on this point see Khaldi, Boutheina. "Multi-

ple Intellectual Engagements?" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 197–226. Print. See also on the rever-
berations and the situation in the 1950s across the region in poetry and criticism, al-Musawi, Muhsin. *Arabic
Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print. Discussions in Arabic are
many, especially in the writings of the 1960s, by ʿAzīz al-Sayyid Jāsim, Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ, Ghalī Shukrī, Iliyyā
Ḥāwī and others in *al-Ādāb* journal.

5   Also see Kendall, chapter three for a rigorous engagement with the theoretical framework of this term.

6   In the hacking world, there are white, black, and grey "hat crackers," thereby characterizing various ethics and
aims of infiltration. See "Black Hat." *The Jargon File*, n.d. Web. 5 Mar. 2015. <http://www.catb.org/jargon/
html/B/black-hat.html>.

7   As a result of the scandal, which involved hacking family victims' mobile phones in order for the newspapers
to influence events and increase sales, a British parliamentary panel found Murdoch "unfit" to run his corpora-
tion. See Burns, John, and Ravi Somaiya. "Panel in Hacking Case Finds Murdoch Unfit as News Titan." *The
New York Times* 1 May 2012. Web. 5 Mar. 2015.

8   I would like to thank my colleague, Prof. Faeqah Shirazi, for this reference.

9   Egyptian writer and journalist Ibrahim Farghali claims that online interactions often involve a certain tone and
mode of expression that break with "the propriety of bourgeois and middle-class conventions." See Farghalī,
Ibrāhīm. "Al-internet…ka-fāḍāʾ li-l-thawra. [The Internet… as the Space of Revolution]." *Ibrāhīm Farghalī*,
19 Mar. 2012. Web. 5 Mar. 2015. <http://ifarghali.blogspot.de/2012/03/avatar.html>.

10 This is called a "denial of service" (DOS) attack.

11 Rakha is the author of *Kitāb al-ṭughrā*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2011. Print. He keeps a blog entitled, *The
Arabophile* http://yrakha.wordpress.com/tag/youssef-rakha/

12 While Meyer reads modernist innovation in the sixties in the works of Sonallah Ibrahim (Ṣunʿallah Ibrāhīm)
and Edward Kharrat (Idwār al-Kharrāṭ, b. 1926) in relation to European authors such as Camus (Meyer, Stefan
G. *The Experimental Arabic Novel*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2000. Print), Kendall maintains that the
avant-gardist of the sixties publishing in the journal *Gallery 68* should be "judged by its distinctiveness and
specific concerns rather than its provenance in or ability to match to European or American culture" (145).

13 This controversy became public when Marilyn Booth first wrote a Letter to the Editor in the *Times Literary
Supplement*, 27 September 2007, which she eventually developed into a series of articles.

14 Alsanea is a dentist by profession.

15 For a recent epistolary novel structured as emails, see Ezzat al-Qamhawi (b. 1961), al-Qamḥāwī, ʿIzzat. *Kitāb
al-ghiwāya* [*Book of Seduction*]. Cairo: Dār al-ʿAyn, 2010. Print.

16 For a detailed discussion of this work, see El-Ariss, Tarek. "Hacking the Modern: Arabic Writing in the Vir-
tual Age." *Comparative Literature Studies* 47.4 (2010): 533–48. Print.

17 "Egypt had its generation of the Defeat. We're the generation that came after it. The 'I've-got-nothing-to-lose
generation'" (Alaidy 41/36).

18 Jaroslav Stetkevych related this episode at a conference at Columbia University in May 2011.

19 There is a play on the meaning of the words *hāk* [infiltrate] and *nāk* [fuck] in this phrase.

20 In fact, Alaidy dedicates the book to Sonallah Ibrahim and Chuck Palahniuk (b. 1962), author of the cult novel
Fight Club (1996).

21 For a discussion of the structural transformation in writing after 1967 and the gesturing towards conservative
politics, see al-Musawi.

22 When the wave of uprisings swept through the Arab world starting fall 2010, they exposed (*faḍaḥat*) the com-
plicity of many Arab intellectuals and established authors with authoritarian regimes.

23 The preface is different in the Kindle, English edition I refer to below, which was translated by Jonathan Wright.

24 There are many post-revolution caricatures that represent Mubarak as someone who speaks only *fuṣḥā* and is
unable to understand or communicate in *ʿāmmiyya*. This is in reference to his last three political speeches es-
pecially, when he was refusing to step aside and thus ignoring the people's demand.

25 Also see Fahmy, Ziad. *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture*. Stanford:
Stanford UP, 2011. Print.

26 Downtown (*wusṭ al-balad*), the site of the Kifaya demonstration, became the epicenter of the demonstrations
that overthrew the government in February 2011.

27 This brings to mind Charles Hirschkind's reading of Muslim sermon tapes played in cabs to produce an archi-
tecture of sound and morality that counters the one sanctioned by the prevalent power structure. See Hirsch-
kind, Charles. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia
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On Affect and Emotion as Dissent: The *Kifāya* Rhetoric in Pre-Revolutionary Egyptian Literature[1]

Christian Junge

> Taha lost all awareness of what he was doing and leaped toward him, letting out an inarticulate, high-pitched cry like an angry roar.
> *The Yacoubian Building* (Al Aswany 242/342)[2]

> I could readily have throttled him […]. But I'm an idiot, because now I'll die from the rancor. I should have killed him, a life for a life.[3]
> *Taxi* (Al Khamissi 20/18)

> It's a beautiful thing to hate truly and passionately.
> It's been ages since I hated anything this sincerely.
> *Utopia* (Towfik 103/131)

> A terrible rage rises within me… THWACK!
> *Metro: A Story of Cairo* (El Shafee 14/20)

Political dissent[4] as expressed in literature has often been analyzed by focusing on thoughts, ideas, and values. Such a reading, however, limits our understanding of social and political criticism to reason and misses out how it relates to the "other of reason," namely affect and emotion (Böhme and Böhme 13). While probably every formation and expression of dissent includes affective and emotional dimensions, it is a feature of many artistic, and especially literary, works to foreground this realm of life and experience. Against the background of a new interest in literary studies in 'feeling' rather than 'thinking' (El-Ariss, *Trials* 4–8), I shall focus on affect and emotion as expressions of political dissent in pre-revolutionary Egyptian literature.

While most scholars agree that affect and emotion have to be clearly differentiated, there is no consensus on how to define affect and emotion. New affect theorists, notes Ruth Leys, emphasize the autonomy of affect with regard to rationality. Affect is here understood as a non-conscious, non-semantic, pre-subjective, unintentional (i.e. not object-focused) strong corporeal intensity (436–39). Elaborating on a missing half-second between bodily event and the mind's consciousness thereof, Brian Massumi describes affect as too quick, too divergent, and too excessive to be fully grasped by consciousness (28–34). "As such, it is not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique" (28).

In contrast to the autonomy of affect, appraisal theory discusses emotion as interacting with the mind. Emotions here are "embodied, intentional states governed by our beliefs, cognitions, and desires" (Leys 437) that are closely linked to rational and mental processes, yet distinctive from them. Since we cannot deliberately elicit or fully control emotions and since they rather happen to us, emotions restrict our alleged rational autonomy. Nevertheless, this conflict makes us at the same time aware of our subjective beliefs, cognitions and desires (Demmerling and Landweer 11–12). In this context, Martha Nussbaum refers to

emotion as 'upheavals of thought' "suffused with intelligence and discernment, and thus a source of deep awareness and understanding" (i).

Having said this, I do not intend to apply an all too fixed or exclusionary[5] schemata of affect and emotion to the literary text. Rather, I seek to be attentive to the expression of both affect and emotion in the literary text as either autonomous to, or in dialogue with, rationality and retrieve their particular concepts and functions from the literary text itself. I have chosen four different prose texts to analyze: Alaa Al Aswany's (ʿAlāʾ al-Aswānī) *The Yacoubian Building* (2002), Khaled Al Khamissi's (Khālid al-Khamīsī) *Taxi* (2007), Ahmed Khaled Towfik's (Aḥmad Khālid Tawfīq) *Utopia* (2009), and Magdy El Shafee's (Majdī al-Shāfiʿī) *Metro: A Story of Cairo* (2008). These stories share several common features: They are often considered 'low-brow literature,' they deliver a very outspoken social and political criticism, and they were published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a period that in this regard may be labelled as 'pre-revolutionary.' I will not entertain the idle discussion whether or not the 25th January Revolution was predictable; instead, I will discuss the affective and emotional matrix of the late Mubarak era as the *yawm al-ghaḍab* (Day of Wrath) loomed. By concentrating on affects like screams and outbursts along with emotions like anger and hatred, I shall thus be interpreting crucial moments in the protagonists' lives, when they, suffering from injustice, suddenly feel that 'enough is enough,' that things cannot go on like this and that things *must* change.

In order to grasp this phenomenon terminologically, I adopt the Egyptian protest slogan of *kifāya!* (Enough!), which became so prominent in the last decade of Husni Mubarak's reign[6] and in my view accurately expresses the tight interaction between political demands and emotional expression. Specifically, the political slogan *kifāya!* demands intellectually that a situation be changed or brought to an end, while the personal exclamation *kifāya!* expresses the feeling that one cannot bear this situation any longer. I argue that the four texts—along with other contemporary Egyptian and Arabic texts[7]—rely on what I call '*kifāya* rhetoric': They narrate and incite the feeling that 'enough is enough.' Moreover, in the realm of fiction, they facilitate 'acting out' and 'living through' different forms of dissent and resistance. With this in mind, I specifically focus on narratives of violence.[8]

Literature in Transformation: The 1990s vs. the 2000s

Before I turn to the texts themselves, it may be useful to outline some features of this kind of 'popular literature' from the first decade of the twenty-first century. This can best be achieved by comparing it to the avant-garde literature of the so-called "generation of the 1990s" and its successor, including writers like Mustafa Dhikri (Muṣṭafā Dhikrī, b. 1966), Ibrahim Farghali (Ibrāhīm Farghalī, b. 1967), Miral al-Tahawy (Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī, b. 1968), Mansoura Ez Eldin (Manṣūra ʿIzz al-Dīn, b. 1976), and Youssef Rakha (Yūsuf Rakhā, b. 1976), who engaged in writing a 'new novel' (Hafez). Informed by postmodernist and post-structuralist aesthetics and poetics, they carefully eschew or shatter collective representation and clear-cut dichotomies; in contrast, the *kifāya* literature reintroduces collective representation and clear-cut dichotomies. Towfik's dystopic novel *Utopia*, for instance, imagines Egypt's social fragmentation as a total division between poor and rich in the year 2023. In other words, while the 'new novel' is mostly self-deconstructive, i.e. it explicitly foregrounds deconstructive readings of its text (Junge, "I Write"), *kifāya* literature is often anti-deconstructive, i.e. it emphasizes the construction of relatively stable textual meaning, at least in regard to their representation of social and political drawbacks. Against this back-

ground, Farghali polemically calls Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* "a merely propa-
gandist and directly political speech," where the "Arab author becomes a political combat-
ant" and literature a "social document" (Farghalī). Nevertheless, this tendency towards the
unencrypted or plain text (Junge, "Genug" 132) may be seen as the poetics of hyperbole,
seeking to be as outspoken and scandalizing as literature can be after postmodernism.

These 'popular novels' became extremely fashionable and constituted the phenomenon of
'Arabic bestsellers' that gained new reading audiences both in the Arab world and the West.
This unprecedented success is often attributed to its simple, vernacular language and a clear
plot that allows for easy and fast reading (Rooke). Rakha, for instance, claims in one of his
polemics against *The Yacoubian Building* that Al Aswany uses "a sloganeering and free-
press inspired 'revolutionary discourse'" (165) that fails to constitute an artistically substan-
tial "revolutionary language" (162). Al Aswany composes "an unchallenging soap-opera-
style plotline, summons up what humorous and/or sermonizing rhetorical power he has"
(156) and stays within the "verbally inherited wisdom of the average downtown Cairo café-
goer on appropriately 'universal' ideas: right, wrong, funny, sad" (ibid.).

I am not quoting these critiques in order to discredit the novels I wish to consider, but
merely to emphasize that these texts turn against an artistic and elitist concept of literature and
demonstrate the extent of the scandal this kind of popular fiction has provoked in the literary
field (El-Ariss, "Fiction of Scandal"). They return 'scandalously' to storytelling, appeal to the
ordinary reader, and combine commitment with entertainment. Thus, a literary mélange
emerges that interestingly enough does not take the edge of its social and political criticism
but rather quickens its pulse. While the postmodernist Egyptian novel is certainly not devoid
of affects and emotions (Junge, "Emotion in Postmodernism"), *kifāya* literature has the na-
ivety or courage to put forward *aggressive* affects and emotions, like screams and hatred, and
thereby forges a new aesthetics of violence. As a result of suffering from social or political in-
justice, the protagonists mostly direct their affects and emotions outwards, to another person
or group; they no longer internalize but externalize aggression. In contrast, the protagonists of
the 1990s direct their frustration and suffering mostly inwards. Instead of anger and hatred,
they emphasize emotions like fear and desperation (ibid.). Hafez describes Cairo's claustro-
phobic urban situation, in tandem with the suffocating social and political conditions, as a
"closed horizon" that informs the novel of the 1990s (Hafez). Facing this closed horizon, most
of the protagonists avoid open confrontation and aggression, preferring strategies of subver-
sion and deconstruction. Against this background, I read the affects and emotions in the *kifāya*
narratives as the attempt to break through the political bell jar of the late Mubarak era, albeit
not subversively but outright scandalously! In fact, these texts try to incite in the reader the
feeling that 'enough is enough': *al-ṣabr lahu ḥudūd* (patience has its limits), as an Arabic say-
ing goes.

Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*: On Screams and Relief

The emergence and trajectory of *kifāya* moments in life can probably best be observed in Al
Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* (*ʿImārat Yaʿqūbiyān*, 2002).[9] Set in downtown Cairo
during the First Gulf War, it enfolds a broad communal narrative of Egypt by telling the life
stories of the inhabitants of the Yacoubian Building, each of them furnished with a different
background. Among them is Taha el Shazli, the doorkeeper's son, an ambitious youngster
who turns into an Islamist terrorist. Coming from the lower stratum of society, he aspires to
enter the Police Academy and to climb up the social ladder. Although he passes the exams

with extraordinary results, he is eventually rejected due to his social background; his subsequent complaint is turned down as allegedly unfounded. Frustrated by omnipresent social inequality, he soon turns toward the *Jamāʿa Islāmiyya*, or Islamic Group. Following an antigovernmental demonstration organized by the *Jamāʿa*, Taha is arrested and during interrogation brutally sodomized with a broomstick. This visceral moment is painfully expressed in an excruciating scream. It is the climax of an anti-deconstructivist representation of all-embracing social injustice and governmental despotism that dominate everything, even—and particularly—the body. In addition, it constitutes the *kifāya* moment of Taha's life, when he can no longer bear it and feels the urgent need to act at all costs. "I'm not afraid of death any longer. I've made up my mind to be a martyr" (Al Aswany 190–91/268). After suffering such radical humiliation, his sole aspiration is absolute retaliation, so he joins the militant wing of the *Jamāʿa Islāmiyya* and subsequently becomes involved in an assassination plot. However, during the painstakingly planned attack, he suddenly recognizes the targeted person as his torturer in prison. Disregarding the plan, he leaps towards his torturer, screaming, before watching the man die. "God is great" (242/342) shouts Taha, only to himself die soon after, struck down by bullets.

Taha may be taken as the clear-cut representation of an Islamist terrorist, a figure spawned by the social injustice and governmental despotism that allows no other outlet for dissent than militant religious-fundamentalist opposition. Focusing on torture, the act of anal rape during interrogation is understood as the governmental attempt to emasculate Taha. This refers to a whole thematic complex in modern Arabic literature, where the sodomized man functions as an allegory of the downtrodden and defeated citizen, while societal decay and governmental oppression is expressed in terms of 'deviant sexuality' and most often homosexuality (Massad 388–410). Refusing to meekly succumb to corruption, Taha, in contrast, might provide "a counterexample of manhood, one that prefers death to being feminized in this manner" (399).[10] As for emotion, Taha's reaction is an expression of wrath, a reaction to suffered injustice that strongly violates moral norms. It is closely intertwined with the aspiration of retaliation addressed against a particular person or group (Demmerling and Landweer 287–310). Hence, the police officer's death seems to be a case of exacted revenge. Having outlined these interpretations of politics, sexuality, and emotion concerning Taha's fate, what can our reading of affect contribute to the understanding of Taha's expression of dissent?

First, it emphasizes Taha's feeling and highlights therefore the difference between visceral sensation and verbal expression, between affect and ideology. When Taha is sodomized, he starts screaming "until he felt that his larynx was bursting" (Al Aswany 153/216).[11] Reading this scream literally, it pushes the possibility of expressing pain verbally to its limits, since Taha's larynx is bursting. "The failure to express pain," as Elaine Scarry elaborates in *The Body in Pain*, "will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation" (14). Yet even after detention, Taha has no real chance to express his all-pervasive pain. On the verge of collapse, he meets a sheikh from the *Jamāʿa Islāmiyya* who is not at all interested in listening to Taha's troubling account, but only agrees to help him when Taha expresses his pain in an Islamist fashion, namely by adopting the formula of martyrdom. Later, in the boot camp, Taha works hard to fulfil his role as a terrorist, but once the training is to be put into practice and the attack goes ahead he suddenly drops out of his role. When he recognizes the targeted person as his torturer, Taha loses "all awareness of what he was doing and leap[s] toward him, letting out

an inarticulate, high-pitched cry like an angry roar" (Al Aswany 242/342). This 'non-conscious sensation and act,' namely affect, contradict the Islamist conviction that admonishes "personal feud" (169/237), preferring to re-direct anger "against the whole regime, not against particular individuals" (168/237). Taha's leap, scream and steadfast staying at the site of the attack contravenes and ruins the plan; affect is here stronger than ideology; it is not Islamism that governs his action, but affect. Paradoxically, due to Taha's affective intervention, the attack appears even more ideological: having finally proclaimed, "God is great," he dies shortly after, although precisely this operation was *not* planned as a suicide attack. In my view, reading affect in regard to dissent has to trace and decipher such expressed forms like the scream, which are not fully—or even misleadingly—covered by verbal expression and therefore often neglected. Or in other words: The non-verbal scream tells us much more than the Islamist formula about the (in-)expressibility of pain and its far-reaching political consequences (Scarry 11–19).

Second, reading dissent affects in literature also offers an insight into the impact they have on the reader, how he/she senses dissent. In the final scene, when Taha loses all his awareness, the narration is significantly detached from thought and interpretation; instead it meticulously follows movement and sensation. Struck by a bullet, Taha first sees his body bleeding and then feels a coldness that is transformed "into a sharp pain that seize[s] him in its teeth" (Al Aswany 243/343). He falls to the ground screaming out in pain, while the dreadful pain gradually disappears until Taha senses "a strange restfulness engulfing him and taking him up into itself" (ibid.), where he only hears distant murmurs and recitation, "as though welcoming him to a new world" (ibid.). Besides this final thought of the protagonist—or the narrator's interpretation—of a new world to come, the scene is devoid of any awareness, thought, or interpretation, narrating Taha's unfiltered sensation *before* he interprets it and gives meaning to it. Thus, Taha sees and senses death before he thinks and knows that he's about to die. I would argue that this passage is more concerned with the visceral sensation of dying than with an ideological representation of death. Seeing it in this light enables us to eschew questions related to the meaning of the represented fatal scream—e.g. mundane pain, divine punishment, or personal agony—and move beyond representation, shifting our attention to the scream's intensity and the effect it has on the reader.

Gilles Deleuze describes this shift from representation towards sensation in his study *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. The Irish-born British painter Francis Bacon (1909–1992), whose oeuvre is deeply concerned with screams, once stated that he wants "to paint the scream more than the horror" (Deleuze 38), i.e. his interest was in rendering the intensity of the event (screaming) rather than providing the explanatory context (horror) that causes the scream.[12] This confrontation of the spectator with the visceral intensity of the event evinces what Deleuze calls a "violence of sensation" (39): It acts immediately and forcefully on the nervous system of the spectator (34–43). Following Marco Abel, who has recently applied this term to the analysis of film and literature (1–10), I would like to investigate the intensity of Taha's fatal scream on the reader. Although in general Al Aswany's plot-driven and tell-it-all novel certainly does *not* move beyond representation, Taha's scream possesses in my opinion (and personal sensation) a remarkable intensity for the reader. While it says nothing about the horror of torture, terrorism and death, it makes the reader sense a scream's fading out and away. Unlike Taha's first larynx-shattering, painfully pervasive and persistent scream, Taha's mortal cry is a receding visceral spasm and gradual transition to a detachment from the body itself. Thus, unlike the disquieting dissident affect under torture, the reader may sense here a relieving dissident affect: A strange, inexplicable, and engulfing restfulness

in the midst of action. Moving from sensation back to interpretation, one may call this the promise of dissent and resistance, which is interpolated in the muted relief from pain. But is this a viable and promising affect for political dissent? Ziad Elmarsafy has recently analyzed the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desire of beloved couples in Al Aswany's novel, seeing them as a political-democratic force. He surmises that aspiration is a "very individual experience, [one that] is always and everywhere capable of generating a powerful political change. Even under the most oppressive conditions, people's desire is the one thing that cannot be controlled, which is why it could and did bring down the Mubarak regime" (28–29). Similarly, I wish to analyze here uncontrolled and uncontrollable affects and emotions as forms of dissent, namely as an uncompromising *kifāya* feeling that stems equally from on the acuteness of pain as on the desire for relief from it.

Al Khamissi's *Taxi*: On Outbursts and Sympathy

While al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* retraces the formation and impact of *kifāya* moments on the course of a life, Khalid al-Khamisi's *Taxi*[13] focuses on daily upheavals and expressions of the *kifāya* feeling. In this semi-documentary, semi-fictional text,[14] Al Khamissi gathers brief accounts of taxi drivers in Cairo, recorded between April 2005 and March 2006, at the peak of the political *Kefaya* demonstrations. *Taxi*, as Omayma Abdel-Latif has put it, "captures the point at which cabs cease to be just a means of transportation and instead become a space for debate and exchange, at a time when all other public spaces, including the street itself, had become inaccessible under the brutal force of the police state" ("Cairo's Taxicab's Confessions"). Rendered in Egyptian dialect, these accounts intend to quite literally give voice to the "simple people" (Al Khamissi 7) and galvanize the otherwise self-absorbed intellectuals. Thus, Al Khamissi dedicates *Taxi* to "the life which is latent in the words of simple people. May it swallow the void which has haunted us for many years" (7). El-Ariss analyzes this dynamic between driver and narrator as a "fiction of scandal" at work, where the narrator records the drivers' exposure (*faḍḥ*) of social and political drawbacks and personal misery as scandals (*faḍāʾiḥ*), and thus becomes an exposer and scandalizer (*faḍḍāḥ*) as an author. Simultaneously however, the narrator is exposed and scandalized (*mafḍūḥ*) as an intellectual 'out of touch' with those peoples' lives; their narratives are a "violent slap" (Al Khamissi 20/19) in his face (El-Ariss, "Fiction of Scandal" 524–29).[15] While El-Ariss is interested in exploring the affects depicted in these encounters, I wish to extend the focus to the moments after an affect becomes manifest, after the 'missing half-second' when processes of signification take place and emotion arises. Specifically, I am interested in how and why the drivers' outbursts incite the narrator's—and possibly also the reader's—sympathy.

My starting point is the driver's "hidden transcript" of dissident emotion and opinion. James C. Scott understands the "hidden transcript" in terms of an "arts of resistance" which "subordinates" cannot express openly in public, i.e. in the "public transcript" dominated by the hegemonic powers, but only clandestinely:

> For most bondsmen through history [...], the trick to survival [...] has been to swallow one's bile, choke back one's rage, and conquer the impulse to physical violence. It is this systematic *frustration of reciprocal action* in relations of domination which, I believe, helps us understand much of the content of the hidden transcript. At its most elementary level the hidden transcript represents an acting out in fantasy—and occasionally in secretive practice—of the anger and reciprocal ag-

gression denied by the presence of domination. Without sanctions imposed by power relations, subordinates would be tempted to return a blow with a blow, an insult with an insult, a whipping with a whipping, a humiliation with a humiliation. […] The frustration, tension, and control necessary in public give way to unbridled retaliation in a safer setting, where the accounts of reciprocity are, symbolically at least, finally balanced. […] [I]t's crucial to recognize that there is an important wish-fulfilment component to the hidden transcript. (37–38)

Following Scott, I read Al Khamissi's *Taxi* as a hidden transcript of dissident emotions in pre-revolutionary Egypt. Often suddenly revealed in an outburst, the drivers express in many ways their "frustration of reciprocal action" or, in other words, suffered injustice with no hope of retaliation. One driver for instance had a client who turned out to be a police officer. Not only did the officer refuse to pay, he took the driver's money and insulted him. "I could readily have throttled him but I thought of my kids and the old woman. But I'm an idiot, because now I'll die from the rancor. I should have killed him, a life for a life" (Al Khamissi 20/18).[16] By explicitly evoking the formula of reciprocity, the driver expresses the emotional dilemma of a "subordinate" facing the powerful. "The cruelest result of human bondage is," Scott writes, "that it transforms the assertion of personal dignity into a mortal risk. Conformity in the face of domination is thus occasionally—and unforgettably—a question of suppressing a violent rage in the interest of oneself and loved ones" (37). The driver has no other option but to act out his anger clandestinely, i.e. in the taxi. He thus indulges in rude insults and curses against the police.

For the narrator, this driver's story is not merely a "violent slap" in his face, the aspect pivotal to El-Ariss' study, but he confesses to have never felt more "sympathetic" (Al Khamissi 20/19) to a police victim before. Sympathy,[17] as Martha Nussbaum defines it in reference to Aristotle, is "a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune" (301). The narrator's sympathy with the driver is thus based on three cognitive value judgments (304–27): 1) The driver's misfortune is serious or even existential; 2.) The misfortune is not the driver's own fault; and finally, 3.) The narrator may suffer a similar lot. The driver's 'lose-lose situation' vis-à-vis the police officer 'slaps' the intellectual narrator and gives him a 'taste' of the driver's lot. Sympathy is a socializing emotion that stems from "shared vulnerabilities" (321) and facilitates the establishing of new—or renewed—common ground between 'the simple' people and the 'intellectuals.'

I would argue that this common ground does not rely on opinion in the first instance but emotion. The angry driver condemns all police officers as thugs and thieves. Some people apparently advised the narrator/author to qualify the driver's generalization. "I didn't take their advice," the narrator/author says in brackets, "because he [i.e. the driver] was absolutely not in a state to talk reasonably or refrain from exaggeration" (Al Khamissi 20/19). Rather than using the driver as the mouthpiece of a well-balanced, fully reasonable critique, the narrator foregrounds the driver's pent-up emotional state. Or put another way: The driver's allegation may not be wholly *truthful* as a rational critique, but yet fully *authentic* as emotional expression. Even if the narrator may not agree with the opinion fully, he may sympathize with the protagonist. This tendency towards exaggeration is not restricted to *Taxi*, but constitutes the *kifāya* rhetoric at large. In El-Ariss' terms, it exposes *and* scandalizes at the same time. And this scandalizing exaggeration elicits precisely sympathy.

It is one of *Taxi*'s merits to push this scandal to its extreme and thereby probe the limits of the narrator and the reader's sympathy. In one story the narrator meets a driver who overtly indulges in a religious-misogynist tirade against women, interpreting their alleged moral decadence as a sign of the approaching eschatological Hour and finally ends up joyfully imag-

ining all women roasting in hell. Although the narrator does not share this view, and seized by affects flees the taxi in a rush, in his final commentary he reassesses the situation cognitively and emotionally. By alluding indirectly to the "frustration of reciprocal action," he interprets the driver's longing for the end of the world as a longing for "justice against tyranny and oppression" (47/50). Using terms highly charged with value like justice and oppression, the narrator now establishes a different relationship to the driver and explores a shared vulnerability, namely the fragility of justice. The narrator's belated commentary is clearly an act of sympathy[18] and restores common ground, though this does not suggest any condoning of the misogyny and hatred of the driver's tirade.

And still another 'turn of the screw': While chatting casually with another taxi driver, the narrator is suddenly exposed to the full scandalous truth:

> Everything I've told you was bullshit. I'm afraid, but I'll speak to you frankly so you're in the picture with me. If I could, I'd kill you right now and have everything you have. I'd do it right away. If I was arrested, it wouldn't matter much to me, at least in prison I'd find someone to feed me. (193/193)

The narrator flees the taxi and is "slapped in the face by a hot blast of air from the polluted streets" (194/195). The story ends with this scandalous slapping and leaves everything after the 'half second' of the affective moment triggering the narrator's flight to the reader. Unlike the authorial framing in the two preceding stories, it is now left to the reader to—if at all— (re-)evaluate this scene. Could we feel sympathy? Paradoxically, I would argue yes. As long as we evaluate the driver's misfortune as grave and undeserved and agree in a shared vulnerability, his uttered—and at the same time withheld—murderous inclination appears, as Scott has put it, to be "an acting out in fantasy [...] of the anger and reciprocal aggression denied by the presence of domination" (37–38). This does not mean that the possibly elicited sympathy is here free from fear or leads to ethical approval. Rather, the *kifāya* rhetoric scandalizes the exposing of a protagonist's *kifāya* feeling in order to arouse sympathy *before*—or *beyond*—moral reasoning. In other words: The reader may ethically disapprove or intellectually disagree with the protagonist's opinion or action, but may also still feel sympathy for the protagonist's plight. Even though it may not induce an intensive physical feeling this glimmer of compassion might nevertheless inform the reader's attitude towards society. Through experiencing shared feelings and vulnerabilities *kifāya* narratives restore a burgeoning common ground between the 'simple people' and the intellectual.

Towfik's *Utopia*: On Hatred and Revolt

The most drastic *kifāya* narrative is Ahmed Khaled Towfik's[19] novel *Utopia* (*Yūtūbiyā*, 2008). Drawing on speculative and horror fiction,[20] *Utopia* imagines 'what if' the socio-spatial fragmentation and the unfettered neoliberalism of the late Mubarak era was to continue: It is the year 2023 and Egypt is a land divided. The poor majority lives in a slum called Shubra. Totally abandoned by the government and without any public services, raw violence rules the streets. In contrast, the rich minority lives in a gated community called Utopia. Enjoying material abundance and spoilt by moral laisser-faire, Utopia's bored youth indulge in a cruel hobby. They kidnap people from Shubra, hunt them down in the desert with jeeps before killing them and severing an arm as souvenir. This completely anti-deconstructive representation of socio-spatial fragmentation (Junge, "Genug" 133–36) forms the basis for the novel's *kifāya* rhetoric. Told by two young first-person narrators, Alaa from

Utopia and Gaber from Shubra, the novel remarkably provides, in Scott's terms, the hidden *and* the public transcript of Egypt. When, during a kidnapping in Shubra, it is found out that Alaa and his girlfriend are from Utopia, Gaber rescues them, hoping that he can educate them about the injustice and feel Shubra's misery. Eventually Gaber takes them back to Utopia, but Alaa has not learnt a thing. In the end he kills Gaber. My reading focuses on the emergence and impact of Gaber's hatred, seeing it as a debate on the avenues and limits of dissent and resistance.

Gaber is a highly sophisticated and yet poor inhabitant of Shubra, who may be called the 'last intellectual' and forgotten 'moral conscience' of a divided nation (Towfik 104/131–32). "I've read everything […] [u]ntil I ended up not belonging to the Others and not belonging to Utopia. In every situation, I am strange, different, peculiar, foolish, uncomfortable and uninte-grated" (109/138). Despite the milieu in which he lives, he rejects violence, drugs, and sex without love; despite the harshness of his surrounding he is still interested in books, history, and politics. His readings of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842) (108–09/137) and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Abnūdī's poem "The daily sorrows" ("Al-aḥzān al-ʿādiyya," 1981) (142/176) clearly reflect his critical awareness; and as in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), books in general function here as the germ of dissent and critical thinking (85/110–11). In short: Gaber has not internalized the totalitarian dystopian system like the in-habitants of *both* Utopia and Shubra. Thus, in the midst of total decay, he preserves political memory and resists moral corruption. He is however no naïve do-gooder. Sheltering the cou-ple from Utopia he experiences an emotional awakening.

> I used to hate the two of them like cockroaches. It's a beautiful thing to hate truly and passion-ately. It's been ages since I hated anything this sincerely. I encounter everything with a profound feeling of disgust, but not hatred. You don't hate spittle. You are only disgusted by it. (103/131)

Gaber describes a crucial transformation from non-aggressive rejection, i.e. disgust, to ag-gressive rejection, i.e. hatred (Demmerling and Landweer 107–08), with far-reaching con-sequences. He now decides to make them suffer at the prevailing misery in Shubra, and this suffering is not merely to educate them but is an act of revenge. He even considers raping Alaa's girlfriend as an act of humiliation. Despite his hatred Gaber categorically rejects the killing of humans, since not killing is "the sole proof that I have that I'm still human, and haven't turned into a hyena" (Towfik 104/131), the fate befalling many Egyptians.

> The Egyptian character has suffered a lot of damage in the last hundred years; it's like a wife whose husband treated her brutally for several years until she ended up closer to brutishness and viciousness. The more ignorance grew, the less the cerebral cortex dominated behaviour, making the crimes committed by the lower classes bestial, in the literal meaning of the word. Eventually, the murderer […] [is] content to repeat: 'The devil made me to do it.'
> It's a beautiful thing to hate. (103/132–33)[21]

Gaber's concept of hatred fully acknowledges the pleasure of overt aggressive rejection, but in contrast to other concepts of hatred (Demmerling and Landweer 295–99) it demands moral restraint and respects human dignity. Thus, he criticizes blind hatred in favor of a conscious hatred that is fully capable of reasoning and legitimating the dissent. At the cen-ter of Gaber's dissent is the notion of humanity. While the dystopian system dehumanizes the people of Shubra as the 'other to human,' degrading them to animals (Towfik 87/113), Gaber seeks to assert his humanity at all cost. When considering raping Alaa's girlfriend, he suddenly feels unable to do so. "Is this the dominance of Utopia," he wonders anxiously, "or is it the power of a sweeping conscience" (117/147) that prevents him from taking re-

venge? Gaber answers this question at the end of the novel. When Alaa asks him why he has helped him to escape, Gaber simply responds: "Because I want to do it" (142/175). With this claim of dignity and autonomy, the intellectual Gaber succeeds in expressing radical dissent and remaining a human, *both* of which are inherent in his concept of conscious hatred. So far so good—but what if Gaber's engagement turns out to be in vain?

How this speculative novel narrates its denouement carries meanness to the extreme: Not only does Alaa murder Gaber and severe his arm, but he also rapes Gaber's virgin sister Safiya, whose name literally means "the pure one" in Arabic. The *kifāya* rhetoric pulls out all stops to scandalize, to give the reader a violent slap in the face. On the diegetic level, the exposure of the crime enrages the people of Shubra, it "inflamed their passions" and was the "straw that broke the camel's back" (Towfik 153/187). For Shubra's inhabitants, Gaber's death provokes a moment and feeling of *kifāya*, triggering a violent revolt. Though they have as good as no chance against the well-armed Utopia, they are now determined to revolt at all costs – they just cannot endure the situation any longer. The novel ends with the vision of the bloody revolt to come.

The intellectual Gaber, however, imagines an uncanny ending. "One day, I will die, and I'll come back to haunt them [i.e. Utopia] in the guise of a demon or a ghost, and I'll make their lives hell" (109/139). In this dehumanizing dystopia, the intellectual can no longer influence society as human, but only alienated as a ghost. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the *unheimlich* as the instance where a once familiar but now suppressed belief uncannily comes back (Freud, "Das Unheimliche"), we may also read the death of the last intellectual as the moment when an allegedly outmoded desire for a bloody revolution (Towfik 91/118) uncannily returns to the people of Shubra and finally succeeds in frightening the people of Utopia—and probably the reader too. With Gaber's death, hatred emerges *without* any moral restraints.

In general, *kifāya* narratives do not present feasible ways out the political bell jar, but rather unfeasible ways—or what had hitherto seemed unfeasible. Since everything else has become impossible, this is a radical way to fathom new possibilities: To make the reader feel the urgent need for change and thus force him/her to think about how to transgress the *status quo*. In this respect, violence does not convey a ready-made solution but rather works as a disquieting and sometimes even uncanny catalyst to trigger such a new thinking.

El Shafee's *Metro*: On Stick Fighting and Rage

With my fourth and last example I turn to a subversive *kifāya* narrative. Magdy El Shafee's[22] graphic novel *Metro* (*Mitrū*, 2008) opens with an impressive ekphrastic *kifāya* moment: Angrily creased bushy eyebrows, a determined fixed gaze, a sternly wrinkled forehead, and the announcement of a bank robbery. "I don't remember when I became so angry" (1/7, see figure 1). Shehab is a young promising software engineer who goes bankrupt in Cairo's venal economy and feels trapped in a "cage": Outside the cage lurk the big businessmen and the corrupt state, inside the cage are the poor miserable masses who have never tried to escape (4/10). In searching for a way out Shehab and his friend Mustafa pull off a bank robbery and go into hiding until the coast is clear. While in hiding Shehab almost accidently exposes Cairo's sprawling, yet not all-embracing corruption. The catalytic action of the story also includes a homicide, an attempted rape, police brutality during political demonstrations, and betrayal—Mustafa, his friend, business partner, and accomplice in the heist, runs away with the money. But Shehab also finds uncorrupted sites of freedom, for instance

Figure 1 (al-Shāfiʿī 7)

at a *Kefaya* demonstration or by falling in love with Dina. The final sequence, when Shehab intends to symbolically leave the metro station called Mubarak, might be interpreted as the juncture where Shehab makes his dissent known: He leaves the subway, symbol of his underground activities and at the same time the political state under Mubarak. Like the other *kifāya* narratives, *Metro* exposes moments and feelings of *kifāya*, but it differs from them in its less generalizing representation of corruption, the optimistic vision of a vivid non-violent democratic opposition, and the subtle critique of resistance by all means possible. With respect to this critique I would like to analyze the predicament of violence and affects inherent to *kifāya* literature.

As a graphic novel *Metro* has many more artistic devices at its disposal to express affect and emotion than a novel. *Metro* places great store on conveying the immediate sensation of affect in violent scenes, not relying solely on words but also on single lines, drawings, or the arrangement of the pictorial panels. When Shehab enters the bank director's bureau during the robbery, the panels suddenly topple from the fixed horizontal into a dynamic diagonal order. From a bird's-eye perspective, the reader/spectator observes Shehab at the center of the page jumping and smashing his stick forcefully on the bank director, whose glasses shatter. "Today, bones will break like our young dreams are smashed. WHACK!" (31/37, see figure 2). On the level of visual representation, violence empowers Shehab to break through the bell jar of the 'closed horizon' and retaliate. On the level of visceral sensation, the reader/spectator is exposed to the amazing fluency of movement and the impressive embodiment of smashing that overthrows the fixed horizontal and breaks through to a dy-

Figure 2 (al-Shāfiʿī 37)

namic diagonal; it is the sensation of a violent and pleasant dynamism that merges, to a certain degree, violence with pleasure.

"Since I was little, I've always loved Bruce Lee" (30/36). Having learned stick fighting in Upper Egypt from an early age, he masters the weapon of the *baltagiyya* (thugs) that the government deploys against protesters. But Shehab reclaims the stick for himself and violence for his aims. When thugs attempt to rape his girlfriend Dina, Shehab suddenly appears on the spot as an elegant man, tall protector and athletic fighter, the stick in his hand transgresses the scope of the panel and merges into the action on the next one. "A terrible rage rises within me…THWACK!" (El Shafee 14/20). Though the term 'rage' may be an apt transcript of Shehab's affective state, the Arabic original speaks of *dafqa rahība* (a terrible outbreak/outburst/gush), not denoting the quality, but rather the intensity of this affective 'blow.' Later, when the same thugs attempt to rape Dina a second time, Shehab's blow is much greater. Across four pages spanning eighteen panels, the pictorial scene of violence unfolds a tremendous intensity that in length turns into a pictorial scenario of movement and sensation detached from words and representation. As verbal communications almost collapses completely, the reader/spectator 'hears' Shehab's smashing stick—"Whoosh! Bam!" (72/78, see figure 3)—and the thugs' screams—"AAAAAAH!" (73/79), while the tumultuous surrounding turns into a flat monochrome background against which a 'violence of sensation' is projected: Thanks to his rage, Shehab again successfully defends Dina.

However, *Metro* also deconstructs this violent and pleasant affect. While Shehab expresses no sympathy at all for the dying thug–"What goes around comes around" (75/81)—, the

Figure 3 (al-Shāfiʿī 78–79)

graphic novel literally draws a different picture. On one and the same page, it brings to-
gether Shehab's care for Dina with Mustafa's care for his brother Wael (74/80), on a double
page the death of a protestor with the death of the thug (76–77/82–83), and on a subsequent
double page the care for their corpses (78–79/84–85); after all, violence has two faces and
they are both human beings. The thug's death propels the *kifāya* narrative in a different di-
rection. It is the tragic predicament of violence that Shehab has killed, apparently without
knowing, the brother of his friend Mustafa, while Mustafa himself apparently does not

know who has caused his brother's death. After having lost his brother, Mustafa decides to run away with the money. "No one gave him a drop of respect in his whole life," Shehab concludes when reflecting on Mustafa's treachery, adding: "not even me" (86/92). I read this self-critique as a repercussion of violence and affect, a smashing of clear-cut dichotomies between good and bad, opposition and government, protestors and thugs, pleasant and painful. *Metro* exposes this predicament of violence and affect, not in a scandalous way but subtly. In this sense *Metro* narrates the departure from the *kifāya* narrative to a different form of expressing dissent and engaged resistance.

Kifāya as Literary Strategy: Moment, Feeling, and Rhetoric

> And lastly, anger is always accompanied by a certain pleasure, due to the hope of revenge to come.
> *The 'Art' of Rhetoric* (Aristotle 1378b/173)

To sum up, I have discussed the *kifāya* narratives in pre-revolutionary Egyptian literature by way of three structural features, namely the moment, feeling, and rhetoric of *kifāya*.

1) I understand the *kifāya* moment as a turning point in the narrative when a protagonist or group decides to cross a hitherto uncrossed ethical line and aggressively issue demands, often leading to violent retaliation for suffered injustice (e.g. Taha's turn to terrorism). The *kifāya* moment unfolds its impact on the course of events and may best be analyzed by narratological means. However, one narrative may have multiple and different *kifāya* moments (*The Yacoubian Building*), omit the narration of a distinct *kifāya* moment (*Taxi*), or end with the emergence of such a moment without narrating its further course (*Utopia*). The analysis of the *kifāya* moment may also shed light on the main sociopolitical problems (e.g. social fragmentation and despotism) and their possible outcome (e.g. revolt and terrorism).

2) With *kifāya* feeling I am referring to the painful feeling of a protagonist resulting from a situation experienced as unbearable and leading to outward aggression. Relying on my initial differentiation between emotion and affect in regard to their interaction with cognition and rationality, I consider emotion to be a judgment value of an unbearable situation (e.g. Gaber's hatred) and affect as the immediate bodily sensation of such a situation (Taha's pain). More importantly for the *kifāya* feeling, emotion and affect are both expressed *outwardly* and *aggressively*. This may be best explained by the comparison with Sonallah Ibrahim's (Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm, b. 1937) novel *The Committee* (*Al-lajna*, 1981). While the protagonist in Ibrahim's novel faces situations unbearable to him, he eventually redirects his aggression from the committee to himself; this inward turn is literally self-consuming. In contrast, the *kifāya* feeling directs its aggression externally (Gaber's attempted rape, Taha's scream). The analysis of the *kifāya* feeling thus provides the hidden transcript of affect and emotion in pre-revolutionary Egypt, including screams, outbursts as well as anger and hatred.

One might call this *kifāya* feeling a desperate desire for resistance at all costs. Yet I would argue that the *kifāya* feeling does not foreground *desperation* but rather *pleasure*. Aristotle attributes to anger "a certain pleasure, due to the hope of revenge to come" (1378b/173). Likewise, the protagonists of the *kifāya* narratives experience a wide range of pleasures (Taha's relief, Gaber's hatred, Shehab's rage). These pleasures arise when,

to draw on Scott's idea of the hidden transcript, "frustration, tension, and control necessary in public give way to unbridled retaliation [...], where the accounts of reciprocity are, symbolically at least, finally balanced" (38).

3) With *kifāya* rhetoric I address the possible effect of a *kifāya* narrative on the reader based on the assumption that it intends to incite a literary *kifāya* feeling. The starting point is what I have called an anti-deconstructive representation of socio-political grievances that furnish a generalizing and exaggerating view on society rather than a detailed and well-balanced critique. This anti-deconstructive starting point leaves no doubt about the legitimacy of dissent and resistance; the crucial question is not if but how to resist. The main literary strategy is—according to the discussed texts—to make the hidden transcript public. Thus, in his critical assessment of *The Yacoubian Building* Massad wonders "why the author (and perhaps the publisher) thinks that the novel's major function was to render visible and audible that which has been hidden and muted" (389). In this regard I find El-Ariss' term "fiction of scandal" helpful because it brings two connected yet different strategies, namely to expose and to scandalize, organically together. Once again with reference to *The Yacoubian Building*, Massad remarks that there is "an obvious need here to sensationalize, to tell what is already known as if it were new in order to induce moral panic" (ibid.). Indeed, the exposed socio-political grievances are in most cases not new phenomena, be it in public or in literary discourse; in fact, it is rather due to its scandalizing exposure that they are *newly* experienced. The *kifāya* rhetoric, I would conclude, is not so much about changing opinion but rather about intensifying experience; to make the reader feel that 'enough is enough.' From this perspective, the analysis of affect and emotion becomes indispensable for approaching dissent in this kind of literature. Alternatively, *kifāya* literature reminds us that dissent is not merely about opinion and value. Derived etymologically from the Latin compound *dis* and *sentire*, the latter meaning "to feel, to think" ("Dissent"), the English word dissent becomes a 'dis-sentiment'; a disapproval in both thinking *and* feeling.[23]

Notes

2   I quote the English translation of the primary literary sources first, followed by the Arabic original. I always follow the English translations; modifications are indicated in the endnotes or discussed in the text.

3   Note the modification of Wright's translation that renders *ghill* as bitterness.

4   The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines dissent as "[t]he difference of opinion and sentiment" and "disagreement with a proposal or resolution." While political dissent in a narrow sense might be understood as the explicit disagreement with the government and its policies and practices, I use here the term 'dissent' in a broad sense, namely as disagreement with—and disapproval of—a political, social, and economic system, including the different ways of experiencing and expressing it.

5   I believe that the literary text can be analyzed in regard to both affect and emotion, precisely *because* affect and emotion are different phenomena. Thus, the analyses of affect and emotion do not exclude each other, rather "[t]he issue is to demarcate their sphere of applicability" (Massumi 7).

6   The *Egyptian Movement for Change* (*Al-ḥaraka al-miṣriyya min ajl al-taghrīr*), informally called—and transcribed—as 'Kefaya Movement,' was founded in 2004 and publicly demanded that Mubarak step down. "With

its simple message, 'enough,' Kefaya was able to mobilize and embrace diverse groups" (Lim 236), see: Lim, Merlyna. "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011." *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 231–48. Print. In my article terms like *kifāya* literature do not directly refer to the Kefaya Movement, although the texts I analyze in this article and their authors and publishers are in different ways linked to the Kefaya Movement. The influential publisher Muḥammad Hāshim of the publishing house Dār Mīrīt, responsible for the first edition of Towfik's *Utopia* and Al Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*, "credits Kefaya with the inspiration for his commitment to cross all the red lines" (Edwards, Brian T. "Cairo 2010—After Kefaya." *A Public Space* 9 (2009). Web. 16 Oct. 2013). Al Aswany, whose *The Yacoubian Building* was published two years before the Kefaya Movement, is seen as one of its leading figures. Al Khamissi tried to document the Kefaya demonstrations and to "write a book that expressed the tone of society in the moment, and the state of anger on the streets I saw very clearly" (Jacquette). Finally, the Kefaya demonstrations and slogans are described in El Shafee's graphic novel *Metro*.

7   The *kifāya* narrative—or some of its features—are closely linked to what Tarek El-Ariss has called in an inspiring study the "Fiction of Scandal," including for instance the Saudi-Arabian writers al-Sanea (Rajāʾ al-Ṣāniʿ) and Khal (ʿAbduh Khāl) (>El-Ariss, "Fiction of Scandal").

8   *Kifāya* rhetoric must not be reduced to narratives of violence, though they may appear as one of their distinct narratives because of the aggression depicted and exposed. This restriction with regard to violence is all the more important from a postcolonial perspective, since some Arab critics and authors, like Farghali and Rakha, criticize the biased literary representation of, and academic focus on, violence as neo-orientalist. However, instead of analyzing narratives of violence one might as well analyze *kifāya* rhetoric in narratives of kinship, sexuality, and love for instance.

9   Alaa Al Aswany (b. 1957) is a dentist by profession, and a journalist and writer. His novel *The Yacoubian Building* became a bestseller in the Arab World and beyond, since translated into more than twenty languages. In 2006, a screen adaptation was shot that featured several stars, often referred to as the most expensive production in the history of the Egyptian film. Al Aswany has so far published two further novels, namely *Chicago* (*Shīkājū*, 2007) and *Cars Club* (*Nādī al-sayyārāt*, 2013), several short stories, including the story collection *Friendly Fire* (*Nīrān ṣadīqa*, 2004), and finally several collections of his journalistic work, including *Why Don't Egyptians Revolt?* (*Li-mādhā lā yathūr al-miṣriyyūn?*, 2010) and most recently *Did the Egyptian Revolution Go Wrong?* (*Hal akhṭaʾat al-thawra al-miṣriyya?*, 2012).

10 For the act of anal rape as an interrogation technique, see the widely debated case of a courageous young Egyptian man in the year 2007, who was the first victim to sue his torturers who were then sentenced to prison for three years (Mekay, Emad. "Torture Ruling Boosts Rights." *Inter Press Service: Journalism and Communication for Global Change.* 8 Nov. 2007. Web. 12 Dec. 2013).

11 Note the modification of Davies' English translation that renders *tatamazzaq* as "ripped open."

12 This remark refers in particular to his *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953), showing a distorted version of Diego Velázquez's (1599–1660) *The Portrait of Innocent X* (1650). On Bacon's canvas, however, the pope's portrait is barely recognizable. Instead, the viewer is overwhelmed by the pope's intensive scream—which, one should note, Velázquez did not draw. "The entire body escapes through the screaming mouth. The body escapes through the round mouth of the Pope […], as if through an artery" (Deleuze 28).

13 Khaled Al Khamissi (b. 1962) is a journalist and novelist. His first literary work *Taxi* became a bestseller in the Arab World and has been translated into many other languages; in Cairo it has been recently adapted to the stage. His first novel is *Noah's Ark* (*Safīnat Nūḥ*, 2009).

14 In regard to genre, Al Khamissi refers in an interview to *Taxi* as a *maqāma* (session) in the style of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century socio-critical *neo-maqāmas*, e.g. Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī's *A Period of Time (Ḥadīth ʿĪsā b. Hishām,* 1907) (Jacquette).

15 In a linguistically playful way of reasoning, recalling both French post-structuralist practices and classical Arabic usages of *ishtiqāq* (word derivation), El-Ariss draws his inspiring analysis from *faḍaḥa* in the sense of "to expose a misdeed," but also in the sense of "awaking the sleeper in the morning" (*faḍaḥa al-ṣabāḥ*). Stemming from these findings of critical exposure and affective awakening or scandalization, El-Ariss uses several word forms, most notable *faḍḍāḥ* (exposer, scandalizer), where both meanings coincide ("Fiction of Scandal" 518–19). In my analysis the recurrent terms "to expose" and "to scandalize" draw on El-Ariss' elaboration of the "fiction of scandal."

16 Note the modification of Wright's translation that renders *ghill* as bitterness.

17 A note on terminology: The common English translation of the Aristotelian *eleos* is 'pity.' In contrast, Martha Nussbaum uses in her study 'compassion,' while she claims that all three English terms, namely pity, compassion, and sympathy, can be used interchangeably (301–04). Following the English translation of *Taxi*, I will use sympathy as the translation for *taʿāṭuf*.

18 At first glance, one might think here of empathy rather than of sympathy. Empathy, as Nussbaum defines it, is "an imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the sufferer" (327) that does not include a feeling for the sufferer's plight nor does it involve a judgment of the sufferer's plight as bad. With regard to the latter aspect, Nussbaum gives the example of a sadistic torturer who might well be (and most probably is) able to reconstruct the suffering of his victim or even uses his empathy in order to 'improve' the cruelty of his practices. Yet, the empathetic torturer probably does not consider the suffering of his victim as bad, but rather as good or joyful. Nevertheless, Nussbaum credits empathy as an important—but not necessary—for sympathy (329–30).

19 Ahmed Khaled Towfik (b. 1962) is a doctor, translator and writer for youth and adult literature, mostly in the realm of horror and speculative fiction. His immense oeuvre of more than two hundred books includes the literary series *Metaphysics* (*Mā warāʾ al-ṭabīʿa*, from 1992 till 2014) and *Fantasia* (*Fantāziyā*, started in 1995). While his serial works find a wide youth readership, Towfik gained attention among literary critics with his socio-political novel *Utopia*. His latest novel is the social thriller *Bayonet* (*Al-sinja*, 2012).

20 For a discussion of Arabic science fiction, see the studies of Snir, Hankins, and most recently and comprehensively Barbaro. See: Snir, Reuven. "The Emergence of Science Fiction in Arabic Literature." *Der Islam* 77.2 (2000): 263–85. Print; Hankins, Rebecca. "Fictional Islam: A Literary Review and Contemporary Essay on Islam in Science Fiction and Fantasy." *Foundation* 105 (2009): 73–92. Print; Barbaro, Ada. *La fantascienza nella letteratura araba*. Rome: Carocci, 2013. Print.

21 Note the relocation of this passage in the English translation to a different passage than that in the Arabic original (Towfik 103–04/131–33).

22 Magdy El Shafee is an illustrator, cartoonist and writer. His first graphic novel *Metro* was briefly banned after its publication for allegedly offending public morals. It was republished in 2012 and has been translated into English, Italian, and German. El Shafee edits *Dushma* (*Bunker*), a comic journal for young adults. While genuine Arabic comics have been published since the 1950s (Douglas and Malti-Douglas), artistic comics and graphic novels explicitly for adult readers emerged in the 2000s and became a burgeoning genre during and after the so-called Arab Spring (Gabai). See: Douglas, Allan and Fedwa Malti-Douglas. *Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. Print; Gabai, Anna. "Von Mickey Mouse bis Handala." *Qantara*. 25 Jun. 2013. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.

22 Completing this essay in the post-post-revolutionary era during the reign of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, one has to add that some of the dissenting authors discussed here, like Sonallah Ibrahim and Alaa Al Aswany, have joined the 'authoritarian turn' of the Egyptian Intelligentsia, as a recent panel discussion organized by the magazine *Bidoun* and *New Directions Press* has aptly called the defense of the continuing state violence, especially against Islamists, by some Egyptian intellectuals (Rosetti). Against this background, the *kifāya* rhetoric of prose literature discussed here seems all the more to be a pre-revolutionary phenomenon, while one may wonder at the same time about affect and emotion involved in this 'authoritarian turn' and how they will—or will not—be expressed in future literature. See: Rosetti, Chip. "'Baffling and Disappointing': On the 'Authoritarian Turn' of the Egyptian Intelligentsia." *Arablit*. 12 Sept. 2014. Web. 13 Sept. 2014.

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A Body of Dissenting Images:
Kamāl al-Riyāḥī's Novel *Al-Ghurillā* Read as an Example of Engaged Literature from Tunisia

Charlotte Pardey

Introduction[1]

As a "piece of glowing ember," a man falls from a tower in central Tunis. This image is not very far removed from the man who set fire to himself in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010. While the latter ignited the Tunisian uprising of 2010/2011, the man on the tower is the central image of Kamāl al-Riyāḥī's novel *Al-Ghurillā* (*The Gorilla*, 2011). With W.J.T. Mitchell, I intend to consider literature as, aside from being literal, also a visual art form. That "images, pictures, space and visuality may only be figuratively conjured up [...] does not mean that the conjuring fails to occur or that the reader/listener 'sees' nothing" (*Picture* 96). In the following I would like to reflect on the images in al-Riyāḥī's novel before employing them to identify and examine the social and political issues the novel addresses and engages with.

The concept of engaged literature or *adab multazim* entered into the Arabic literary scene around 1947 as a translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of *engagement*, which privileged literature that expressed the "commitment of literati to revolutionary values" over literature following the paradigm of art for art's sake (Klemm, "Literary Commitment" 149). Since then it has undergone various interpretations, ranging from those of a Marxist leaning to existentialist positions. Engaged literature may have been committed to the support of a certain government or may have served as a form of literary protest, leading M.M. Badawi to state that "the most common denominator in all the usages is [...] the need for a writer to have a message, instead of just delighting in creating a work of the imagination" (2–3). While engaged literature is generally studied with respect to the main centers of literary activity (such as Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq, later on Palestine with the 'resistance poets' around Maḥmūd Darwīsh), this paper looks at al-Riyāḥī's novel as a Tunisian example of modern day literary engagement.[2]

The editor of the Lebanese monthly periodical *al-Ādāb*, Suhayl Idrīs, described *adab multazim* in 1953 as "effective literature that interacts with society: it influences society just as much as it is influenced by it" (qtd. in Badawi 12).[3] Elsewhere Idrīs is quoted as regarding "responsible identification with 'society' and 'epoch,' as well as sincerity in literary production guarantee[ing] true *iltizām*" (Klemm, "Literary Commitment" 151). Both claims, literature's interaction with society and identification with its concrete historical surroundings, will be followed up in my analysis of *Al-Ghurillā*.

I hope to show that this novel is exemplary for the engagement of the multi-media uprisings of winter 2010/2011. As such, the span of its references is sweeping: From global pop culture through to religion, it includes TV commercials and is narrated by multiple narrators to escape a patronizing auctorial narrator. It is not the resistance poet who is telling the story here (neither directly nor behind a mask of allusions), but different sections of society or 'communal narrators,' and it is this approach that sets the novel apart.

Several allusions or partial images are brought together in the central image of the man on the tower—referred to as 'the Gorilla' throughout the text—to form what I would like to call a *composite image*. In all of these allusions and images bodies are dominant and, as Mitchell writes, "the language of the human body" is used "as a vehicle for narrative, dramatic, and allegorical signification" (*Picture* 26). With regards to *Al-Ghurillā* I wish to argue that protest, racism, and the Tunisian uprising are discussed via the employed images. The partial images that I shall analyze in greater detail are Jesus, Bilāl the muezzin, and King Kong—this is the groundwork necessary to gain an understanding of the composite image of the Gorilla.

Plural Narratives—Plural Truths: Kamāl al-Riyāḥī's *Al-Ghurillā*

'The Gorilla' is Ṣāliḥ's nickname, given to him as a child because of his dark skin and ape-like posture. He is subjected to exclusion and racial discrimination from infancy, growing up as an adoptee without an established family background. At the beginning of the novel he climbs the famous Seventh November Clock Tower in Tunis, chaining himself to the dial of the clock. An audience of onlookers and security personnel quickly gathers around the tower. These onlookers, former companions and adversaries, as well as the Gorilla himself narrate his story in retrospect. Speaking from various standpoints (both literal and figural), they reveal what has led to the occupation of the landmark, which the authorities as well as the gathering spectators understand as an act of protest. The main device used in accomplishing the occupation, in defying the authorities, and communicating the protest is the Gorilla's body: Never described or discussed neutrally it is always connoted as one that is black, male, and underprivileged, and—as I hope to show—this makes racism a central concern of the novel.

The narrative structure of the novel is fragmented to create plural truths. Shifting through a host of narrators, the storyline focusing on the Gorilla occupying the tower is interwoven with the personal memories of other characters, thus giving a broad picture of Tunisian society.

There are also accounts by an omniscient narrator without focus on the Gorilla or another character, e.g. in the chapter "Kalām fi-l-binā'"("Conversation on the building"; al-Riyāḥī 97–100), which contains a section on the clock tower, the surrounding square and its forgotten history while describing the process of the clock's assembly. Other accounts are first-person narratives, for example the chapter "Karṭūsha" (fr. 'cartridge'; 156–164), which opens with the character Karṭūsha's thoughts on the Gorilla as a muezzin.

The Gorilla's voice is heard both indirectly as well as directly over the course of the novel. An example of the former is the chapter "Ṭifl Būrqība yanḥuru irthahu" ("Bourguiba's son kills his inheritance"; 130–33) where "his eyes wander over the roofs of Tunis. Below him is mankind like the fan community of a famous singer—Michael Jackson, maybe. They are standing there for a spectacle without sound" (130).[4] A direct perspective can be found in the chapter "Al-Ghurillā ʿalā al-sikka" ("The Gorilla is on the street"; 22–26), in which the Gorilla thinks back to an event two years ago, when he ran amok and fired his weapon on visitors of Bourguiba's mausoleum where he was working as a guard: "That night, two years ago, I had not anticipated what would happen to me. The hysteria that took hold of me and made me fire all those bullets in Bourguiba's final resting place dissolved itself like dark clouds" (22).

Yet, in most accounts an onlooker is the focus of the omniscient narrator: This perspective becomes very clear in the sections featuring Ḥabība (a prostitute and former lover of the Gorilla), e.g. in "Ḥabība tashtaʿilu fi-l-sāḥa" ("Ḥabība lights up in the square"; 32–36).

The power lighting the square beneath the clock tower has just been cut, and so the Gorilla's body on the tower disappears from view. To usher in her memories the text describes Ḥabība lighting a cigarette that illuminates her face for a moment, "as if she had to ascertain her position for the narrator" (32). This direct reference to a narrator occurs rarely however; most of the other chapters focus on onlookers without drawing attention to the narrator interchanging with first-person narrations.

As the Gorilla's only clear cut opponents, the authorities are represented in the accounts of ʿAlī Kilāb, a former criminal and social climber with contacts to the ruling family and a career—merely alluded to—in the Armed Forces. His and the Gorilla's paths have crossed several times before. The Gorilla once refused to pay protection money to the extortionist ʿAlī Kilāb and a feud has simmered ever since. As soon as he finds out that it is the Gorilla who has occupied the tower he breaks off his vacation and heads for the square, immediately interfering with the authorities' work. He orders the intimidated officers to wrap a plastic cover around the bottom of the tower as this would help them to bring down the Gorilla unhurt and without causing a stir among the bystanders (see "Bayt min juthath" ["A house of dead bodies"]; 80–85). However, the genuineness of ʿAlī Kilāb's intention is challenged by the later chapter "Kalālīb" ("Many dogs"; 94–96) where the plastic cover turns out to screen scenes of torture:

> We were informed that ʿAlī Kilāb had positioned dogs and wires, realizing his plan by himself so that it all seemed natural and not like an electric shock. The young officer had warned him that what he was doing was against the law. [...] With every electric shock the Gorilla was swaying. (94)

Interesting here is also the use of the collective "we" to refer to the narrative voice, which is however not taken up again in the chapter.

Doubt is cast on several accounts, making them seen unreliable and evoking a sense of uncertainty. The earliest look back at the Gorilla's life, the description of his adoption, is found in the chapter "Fī maqhā Tūnis ḥadīth gharīb ʿan aṣl al-Ghurillā" ("In Café 'Tunis' there is weird gossip about the origin of the Gorilla"; 37–41): An old man on the square recognizes the Gorilla from his work in a children's home thirty years ago, where childless couples could pick out a child who suited them. He tells a second old man—with a certain sympathy—that the poor wretch (al-miskīn) was the baby no one wanted. The latter however disregards this account as idle talk (ḥikāyāt fārigha). Another section where doubt is cast is the beginning of "Al-Ghurillā yataʾammalu ibṭahu fi-l-samāʾ" ("The Gorilla watches his armpit in the sky"; 58–62): Here it is stated that no one understands what is going on in the Gorilla's head and that the previous narrator (Shakīrā, a transvestite) is just an old gawker unable to get through to the Gorilla's heart and mind (cf. 58).

This unreliability is paired with accounts which seem to verify the oddity of the black man on the tower: Twice chapters with the title "Khabar ʿājil" ("Breaking News"; 30–31)[5] present television news coverage stating that a young black man (shābb aswad) has refused to come down from the tower for the last two hours and that conflicting opinions regarding his identity and his demands abound. The mention of "demands" alludes to the fact that his behavior is perceived as protest. Aside from their verification effect, the news broadcasts enable a 'view from a distance' that at the same time brings the Gorilla's message closer: He is incomprehensible for the people on the square but, as the first chapter explains (11), seems to be understood via the broadcast.

It is apparent that the narrative structure is fragmented and due to frequent switches maze-like; different views and opinions are mixed together, creating the illusion of orality. Actions

are not explained with the intention of making them understandable but are rather shown in a way that forces the reader to make up his or her own mind. The effect created is best captured by the theatre and performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of the 'performativity of texts': Texts acquire performativity due to their ability, in the act of being read, to produce something they are not yet themselves (136). They create repercussions in readers through structural devices like the ones described. As Fischer-Lichte sees it, readers immerse themselves in a text, devouring and incorporating it. What is read becomes part of them and can thereby have somatic (i.e. physiological, emotional, energetic) effects. The immersion, additionally, leads to a liminal situation detached from real life which allows for new possibilities of imagination, reflection, emotion, and through this, transformation (138).

The narrative structure with its different perspectives on a protagonist understood as an 'other' in various moments of exclusion suggests a discussion of the problem of representation (as described by G. C. Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 1988). This, however, demands an analysis of the employed images and how/by whom they are produced. For now, the act of reading as a performance, as an interaction between different voices in the text and the individual reader can be understood as a specific realization of the "ethical encounters" Sara Ahmed has suggested in her *Strange Encounters* (2000) as a way of avoiding the issue of representation. In an ethical encounter "hearing does not take place in my ear, or in yours, but in between our mouths and ears" (Ahmed 158), it is "not only a meeting of bodies, but between bodies and texts (the face to face of intimate readings) in which the subject is moved from her place" (40).

The Gorilla is formed by images others have of him but also through his embodiment speaking for itself. This allows, to speak with Sara Ahmed, "[t]he strange body [to become] a fetish which both conceals and reveals the body-at-home's reliance on strangers to secure his being—his place—his presence—in the world" (54). The perspectives of various counterparts on this 'other,' this 'strange body' are given to the reader, reflecting or making accessible different aspects of Tunisian society.

Towards the Gorilla as a Composite Image

Images understood as allusions to figures and pictures of popular knowledge partake in the creation of the textual world: Through their innate performativity they offer material to the individual reader to recreate the fictional reality presented and appeal to the collective memory of the readership. Here, Mitchell's conceptual differentiation between image and picture is of importance:

> You can hang a picture, but you cannot hang an image. [...] It is what can be lifted off the picture, transferred to another medium, translated into verbal ekphrasis [...]. The picture is the image plus the support; it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium. (*What do Pictures Want?* 85)

Al-Riyāḥī's uses various allusions to create the image of his protagonist. The allusions or partial images that I will address are Jesus, Bilāl the muezzin, and King Kong. I will show how they are used to discuss protest, racism, and the Tunisian uprising, before evaluating the novel's engagement.

The Gorilla's occupation of the clock tower can be considered a commentary on protest which, in common usage, refers to the declaration of dissent with *something*, an act of objection or a gesture of disapproval. In the more narrow sense as defined by Harry Pross, it is

the public disagreement with preceding information or a position with two addressees: The initiator of the information or position and an audience which is meant to be won over to the opposition. Both addressees and the protester are connected by a *common issue*, and the protest itself is understood as an act of communication between them (qtd. in Virgl 27–28, 60). This *something* against which the protest is directed, or the *common issue*, actually seems to be missing in *Al-Ghurillā*. The Gorilla gives no explanation as to his actions, but is instead described as speaking unintelligibly (al-Riyāḥī 14). He does not call his occupation of the tower a protest. He merely enters a forbidden space and refuses to leave it, meanwhile exhibiting his body (8). Others, however, interpret his action as protest: An audience gathers immediately (ibid.), while the security forces feel affronted and try to prevent onlookers from taking pictures (10). The Gorilla's actions are described as "a big crime and an unforgivable act of rebellion (*maʿṣiyya*)" (ibid.). These reactions could be due to the historical importance of the clock tower, erected in commemoration of Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn Bin ʿAlī's coup, replacing a Bourguiba statue when the latter was ousted from power, a historical detail the novel explains in a footnote (7; 9). By disregarding a ban on entering the space, the Gorilla questions the authority of the President; the fact that he is black and at the center of attention means that he is countering strategies of silencing that are part of the discrimination against black Tunisians.

That the Gorilla does not articulate an *issue* could make it debatable whether his actions are really a form of protest: Virgl writes that without a goal or demand it is impossible to mobilize others, and that the issue has to be relevant for society and bring social contradictions to the public's attention (45; 75; 86–87). However, I would argue that the novel shows in its narrative structure and images that the Gorilla offers messages to the different characters who see protest in his actions and, in the end, themselves protest against his murder by the authorities: The half-naked body of the Gorilla is directly opposed to a regime that does not refrain from displaying its brutality against his vulnerability. But, as Mitchell writes, "[t]he attempt to destroy or kill an image only makes it more powerful and virulent" ("Future" 139). Thus, when the spectators witness that the Gorilla is being riddled with bullets, uproar breaks out. They scream "Murder! Murder!" and later "Leave! Leave!", showing their disapproval of the security forces' actions (al-Riyāḥī 177–79). Although the Gorilla dies, he lives on in the protest of the people. In contrast to the Gorilla's occupation of the clock tower, their protest has a clear issue galvanizing their dissent: The authorities' repressive dealing of the incident.

The message of protest is conveyed in images either connected to the Gorilla by onlookers or embodied by himself, and these are sometimes alluded to in the text directly, sometimes indirectly. One image is that of Jesus on the cross as captured in numerous iconographic representations. The similarity between poses, positions, and actions evoke the association. The Gorilla is elevated above those who describe him, while his body is fastened to the clock with his leather belt (8). He asks for water, a policeman brings it to him and uses a rope to pass it to the Gorilla (11). This could be compared to Jesus' thirst on the cross that was quenched with vinegar handed up to him with a sponge (John 19, 28–30). The Gorilla is described as bare-chested after throwing away his shirt "to seek refuge in his nakedness" (al-Riyāḥī 25), yet at the same time surrendering his bodily integrity to the will of the authorities. Thinking about his unknown black ancestors, the Gorilla resolves that even his hidden origin no longer matters now that he was on top and could light his cigarette on the stars, the moon, or a shooting star (59), a thought that alludes to and evokes a certain transcendence.

The authorities eventually shoot the Gorilla after the electric current they had circuited to the tower had proven ineffective in getting him to descend. The scene is graphically described:

> The Gorilla screams in his defiance. Bullets riddle his body [...]. He opens his arms and his head to God's seeing eye. He awaits the bullet that splits his guts and goes into his heart [...]. He cries his final cry like a king who has lost his troops and for whom nothing remains but to pray with his eyes. […]
> He lifts his arms. [...] He opens his hands to allow history to run its course. It removes him to God's eye. His vision blurs and he flies into the darkness below as a piece of glowing ember. (177-78)

His arms (at least ultimately) are outstretched to the sides as he dies in an act of self-sacrifice. While his soul is taken to God, his physical being is turned into a self-consuming object expressed in the metaphor of the glowing ember.

The description of the Gorilla's end can also be read as a reply to Saeed the Pessoptimist, the satirical anti-hero of Emile Habiby's (Imīl Ḥabībī) political parody *Al-waqāʾiʿ al-gharība fī ikhtifāʾ Saʿīd Abī al-Naḥs al-mutashāʾil* (1974; trans. *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*, 1985): Saeed, a Palestinian collaborator with Israel, finds himself on top of a stake not knowing whether he is dreaming or awake:

> So, why am I still here on this stake, being bumped and buffeted by the cold, without a cover, back support, or companion. Why don't I go down? [...] Why hesitate? For fear of falling from my enormous height down into the depths below, like a duck killed by a hunter to suffer pain and to die? (Habiby 118)

If we transpose this question to *Al-Ghurillā*, the plausible answer is that his death triggers resistance, for it moves the people to protest.

In terms of other examples of engaged literature, similarities with Jesus on the cross might be seen as an allusion to the poetry of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb or ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī amongst others, both of whom used Jesus as a mask to express the ideal of the suffering revolutionary (al-Sayyāb's poem "Al-masīḥ baʿd al-ṣalb," "Christ after Crucifixion," 1957, and "Ughnīya ilā shaʿbī," "A Song to my People," 1956 by al-Bayātī; Pinault 118). For both Muslim and Christian poets, "the figure of Christ [functioned] as a secular symbol of political struggle and social commitment, as an image of suffering undertaken on behalf of one's people" (Pinault 125). In al-Bayātī's poem one finds parallels to al-Riyāḥī's description of the Gorilla: Jesus is shown "alone, upon the cross," with a "shadow, which spreads its palms out to the stars" and he is watched by his people, "you who lift up your brow" (qtd. in Pinault 120). While the aspects of victimization and self-sacrifice are embodied in the Jesus image, in the last mentioned poem however, death and sacrifice are transformed through a "poetic imagination [...] into a conscious act of sacrifice and salvation" (Pannewick 109), and this is even more so the case with the Gorilla's death.

Parallel to Jesus, the Gorilla is likened to Bilāl the muezzin, a positively connoted black figurehead in *ḥadīth* literature and seemingly one of Prophet Muhammad's earliest companions. Bilāl is described as a slave of African heritage (ʿArafat suggests Ethiopian; 1215) who was born in Mecca. Considered the second convert to Islam, his owner inflicted punishment and torture on him because of this conversion. Abū Bakr bought and freed Bilāl from slavery, after which he became Muhammad's personal servant. As the first muezzin in Islam, Bilāl gained great prestige during his lifetime (ʿArafat 1215; Rahal 20).

The reference to Bilāl occurs in different chapters of the novel. In the above mentioned adoption scene, the first reaction the prospective adoptive mother utters when shown the black baby, is "By God, he is black, a slave?!" [*waṣīf*, lit. "slave," fig. "black"]. Only when the warden remarks that the baby also belongs to God's creation, the husband changes his opinion, reminds his wife of Bilāl and they adopt him (al-Riyāḥī, 39). The reference is taken up again in Karṭūsha's account (see above) who likens the Gorilla on the tower to Bilāl in his function as Prophet Muhammad's muezzin: "This is the prayer call that shakes up the city. The Gorilla is a muezzin. [...] The Ethiopian Bilāl forever" (156).

The reference to Bilāl embodies discrimination and stereotypes regarding black skin: By showing the very first reaction of the future adoptive mother, the novel alludes to the general connection black skin provokes in society, namely servitude. The majority of the black population of Tunisia (estimated at between eight and twenty percent of the overall population depending on the sources[6]) are descendants of sub-Saharan slaves brought to Tunisia during the slave trade until it was officially banned in 1846 (Rahal 13; Jankowsky 380). Black skin is still associated with "sub-Saharan primitiveness" (Jankowsky 377), which was targeted during former President Habib Bourguiba's modernization drive. Race and ethnicity were not discussed in Tunisia prior to the Tunisian uprising (375–77; 379), and still in line with Bourguiba's politics it was propagated that the country was a homogenous nation without minorities.

In the adoption scene, the cruelty and injustice in possibly leaving behind an orphaned baby due to his skin color is easily perceived by the reader. This is an instance of performativity, for the discrimination with which society treats black people is shown in the reaction of the mother rather than told directly or interpreted (one of Fischer-Lichte's principles partaking in the performativity of texts, see above).

The reference to Bilāl in the adoption scene is positively connoted for the characters concerned. The repetition of this reference for the Gorilla on the tower can therefore also be considered an expression of benevolence in honor of its occupation and the Gorilla's dark skin. Alluding to one of the Prophet's companions who was black yet highly esteemed, functions as an argument against stereotyping dark skin. Calling the Gorilla a muezzin alludes to his function as a role model. The Islamic prayer call includes the lines "*ḥayya ʿalā al-ṣalāt*" (hasten to prayer), "*ḥayya ʿalā al-falāḥ*" (hasten to success), and "*al-ṣalātu khayrun min al-nawm*" (the prayer is better than sleep).[7] Similarly, the Gorilla calls on the people to protest with his physical presence in a forbidden place. He awakens an awareness for the suppressive regime in their hearts and inspires them to join the struggle despite all the trials and hardships this might entail. The protest is likened to an act of worship.

The third image I would like to address is that of King Kong, the giant ape a white explorer captures and exhibits, provoking the animal's destructive escape through city streets which ends on the pinnacle of a tower. In the 1933 original film by Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack it is the Empire State Building in New York where the ape is ultimately killed. Cynthia Erb writes in her analysis of *King Kong* and its reception that its protagonist is "one of the best-known characters ever produced by the Hollywood cinema and a figure repeatedly activated in art and mass culture" (1), spawning a vast array of film versions.

In the present novel reference to *King Kong* is mostly through allusions, beginning with Ṣāliḥ's nickname 'the Gorilla' (coined during a game of football when the other children noticed "that his arms in a weird manner stretched out until they reached the edge of his knees"; al-Riyāḥī 29) and ending with him climbing and dying on the tower.

There are also direct references to *King Kong* however. In one chapter the Gorilla sits in a cinema watching a King Kong movie. The chapter states that "[t]he night of *King Kong* was not an ordinary night at all" (42), which can be interpreted as describing the situation on and around the clock tower but also as a comment on the novelty of the narrative. The narrator of this chapter, Shakīrā the transvestite, fancies the Gorilla and imagines that his facial features converge with the ape on the screen, leading her to wish herself to be the beautiful woman in King Kong's palm, "flying in a world of illicit lust" (45). In this last scene the application of the *King Kong* image to the Gorilla becomes especially clear. Shakīrā alludes to his blackness and virility at the same time, repeating a common racist stereotype fostered against black men in Western pop culture[8]: "The smell of negroes (*al-zunūj*) is exceptional. [...] His smell intoxicated me and an idea developed in my mind: Sex with a black man would certainly be a different experience and a delicious closure for this Saturday night entertainment" (44–45).

The King Kong story has been widely analyzed with reference to the question of its racist potentials, reflecting ideas of civilization and modernity versus the 'other,' the uncivilized 'exotic' prevalent in the 1930s as the first film version was shot. However, Erb sees the acknowledged popular influence of *Frankenstein* (1931, James Whale and Mary Shelley) as an indicator that *King Kong* possesses a dual quality. Beside its undeniable racism, it was also meant to show that exploitation will blow up in the exploiter's face (xvii).

In an interview with Sousan Hammad, al-Riyāḥī comments on the problem of racism in Tunisia in relation to liberation, unequivocally stating that for him the two are connected:

> We [...] will not be liberated until we liberate ourselves from the racist views we have over other races and religions. [...] We are still racist to the bone. Attempting to hide or silence this fact will not help with the matter because we are a sick society which still suffers from the complexes of colour and race. (qtd. in Hammad)

The author also reveals that he feels highly sympathetic to black people by heritage and history, for his own grandfather was called a "negro" (ibid.).

The King Kong theme shares the aspect of victimization already evident in the Jesus image, and this shows that the images are not strictly separate from one another but blur into each other like transparent layers of paint. Their parallel application to the protagonist of *Al-Ghurillā* lets the Gorilla crystallize into a composite image who as a character is only rarely described in his outward appearance without calling on images as mediators. For example, although a central element of the narrative there are only occasional references to the darkness of his skin, yet he is likened to Bilāl and an ape which *shows* (as opposed to *describe*, see above) him as black.

Despite his nickname the protagonist of *Al-Ghurillā* remains human, no metamorphosis takes place and the animalistic or even monstrous is only ever played with. In the epilogue entitled "January 14th 2011," however, this play becomes real: The (fictionalized) author describes the last stages of the novel's production in the middle of the Tunisian uprising. Taking refuge from Tunis in the countryside to finish his manuscript he had almost missed the upheavals. When he finds out about them and returns to the capital, he accidentally gets caught in a street fight and has to protect his house from thieves. He sees a car approaching when he suddenly feels black fur growing on his skin and his bodily frame enlarging. Ultimately, he lifts his fists and beats his chest like a gorilla (al-Riyāḥī 190). This is interesting since Erb notes in her study that one of the King Kong story's most "intriguing aspects [...] resides in the invitation to identify with the position of a tormented monster, known for his strange love, but also for the enormity of his urban rebellion" (11) against civilization, captivity, and exploitation.

And an identification is what occurs here on different levels. First of all, the fictionalized author identifies with his protagonist, taking up the ape metaphor. Through the protagonist, an identification with King Kong is implied, which embodies the essence of the uprising, the impulse to rebel. Indirectly, there is also an identification with Muhammad Bou Azizi and his self-immolation. This is forged by connecting the entire novel to the Tunisian uprising in the epilogue, but also through allusions such as the Gorilla's end, described with the metaphor of the glowing ember and his act of self-sacrifice that incites others to protest. The aspect of rebellion that is part of the King Kong image is thereby emphasized and the epilogue hints at the political engagement of the novel, connecting the protest on the content level to the actual uprising on the streets. The epilogue blurs the lines between author and protagonist, between reality and fiction, clearly identifying with the social context of Tunisia. This is even more so the case as the fictionalized author mentions being approached by the *New York Times* to write an article about the uprising. A link to the article al-Riyāḥī wrote about the events is provided. In fact, large sections of the epilogue are identical with the article published as an eyewitness account (Riahi, "A Night in Tunisia"). One difference between the two, however, is the emphasis the epilogue places on the act of writing, for the author a place of refuge when he is out on the street and keeping guard of his house. He describes his impulse to express his helplessness in writing, grabbing hold of his ballpoint pen (*qalam al-raṣāṣ*) while the bullets (*al-raṣāṣ*) ricochet around him (al-Riyāḥī 189).[9] Unique in the epilogue is also his metamorphosis into a gorilla beating his chest. The gesture in itself signals dominance and serves to express empowerment against all odds, especially as it is shown in a moment of acute fear. Although the author in this scene is not fighting against the regime but rather protecting his home and belongings, the gesture can be read as a reflection of how the uprising brought with it a sense of empowerment for many Tunisians. At the same time, it refers back to the novel and its protagonist.

To summarize our analysis: There are various aspects to the composite image the novel creates in its protagonist, instances of victimization and self-sacrifice from the allusions to Jesus on the cross, racism and discrimination against black people as well as allusions to Islamic culture and tradition from the Bilāl references, which situate the character of the Gorilla in an Arabic and/or Tunisian context, and lastly, a critique of racism and colonialism as well as a notion of rebellion in allusions to the King Kong story. The Gorilla's end shows him as an image of dissent: The authorities kill him because he is the living and unbearable image of one who has defied their repression and mobilized a crowd of onlookers, who eventually even take his side.

These various aspects of the Gorilla find expression in the accounts of different narrators and the multi-perspectival structure of the novel. Depending on the experiences the narrators shared with the Gorilla and their respective social backgrounds, they take different stances and create a multidimensional image. Through references to Jesus, Bilāl, and King Kong, this multidimensional image is larger than life, and so resonates with possibly different meanings for the various narrators. The narrative structure described can be seen as a communal approach instead of a top-down perspective that alludes to certain heroes or images from an elevated position. The narrative is fragmented, contains various ideological views, and as a result refrains from direct indoctrination. Rather, the issues the novel raises (racism and protest against the authoritarian regime) are "performed" by the text: Situations are shown and not told. The gaze of the others (i.e. the onlookers, members of the security forces etc.) on the 'other' (the Gorilla as an excluded black man) shapes the narrative and

the reader's experience of the text. Aspects of Tunisian society are presented in these perspectives, revealing underlying problems such as the importance of ancestry in an authoritarian regime where gangsters gain positions of power through personal relations to the ruling family but an adoptee has trouble to even get married because he has no family background.

Aspects of the narrative can be considered as instances of 'othering,' such as the Gorilla's representation in the accounts of the onlookers. These accounts are however contrasted with the Gorilla's own perspective as well as his bodily presence. His body dominates all aspects of his image: His unfortunate position in society is constructed based on his physical features; his protest and the mobilization he triggers by occupying the tower are physical; the self-sacrifice is physical, surrendering his body to the violence of the authorities. The Gorilla is however not a passive, silent object: He speaks through his body, to both the gathering crowds as well as to the reader.

As a result of the narrative perspective and the images employed—which all conform to the production of textual performativity—, the reader is enabled to embody different aspects of the Gorilla while reading. I understand this to be a prime example of an "ethical encounter" (see above). Parallel to the crowds who ultimately protest against his treatment by the authorities, the reader, seeking to understand the reasons behind his actions, is led to empathize with the Gorilla, thus in turn responding all the more fervently to the gruesome instances of torture that he has had to suffer.

Conclusion

To evaluate the novel's engagement I would like to refer back to Suhayl Idrīs' demand that engaged literature should be in interaction with society and identify with its context. *Al-Ghurillā* clearly interacts with Tunisian society, firstly by giving voice to its members, in the novel a cast of figures as diverse as a black Tunisian, a transvestite, and one of the ruler's cronies. Secondly, Tunisian society in the phase of the novel's production is shown in the reference to the Tunisian uprising. The narrative is indeed interacting with recent events in Tunisia, especially apparent in the connection between the epilogue and the author's journalistic eyewitness account. All of this leads to a close identification of the novel with the Tunisian context, alluding to problems in Tunisian society: Protest and mobilizing the people are shown and the issue of racism against black Tunisians is unraveled. The overall criticism however is against authoritarian rule.

Through the performativity of the text, the reader's attention is drawn to these problems but granted space to make up his or her own mind. Various perspectives are included thanks to the multiple levels of the narrative structure and the images employed. The key images—as I hope to have shown—are drawn from a global, multimedia context, including references to *ḥadīth* literature as well as Hollywood movies. In combination with the multiperspectival narration, this allows the protagonist to crystallize as a composite image featuring aspects of Bilāl the muezzin, Jesus, and King Kong.

A host of (sometimes unreliable) narrative perspectives is used to escape a single patronizing or ideological viewpoint. It is not the resistance poet who is narrating the story here (neither directly nor behind a mask of allusions) but different sections of a pluralistic society. There is no 'bigger truth' because every onlooker as well as every reader interprets the composite image of the Gorilla differently, forming various truths. The Gorilla's protest is given no definite aim. The onlookers' individual interpretations, however, lead to collec-

tive action: When the authorities try to kill the Gorilla, those who witness the scene unite in protest. The black man who falls from the tower ignites their uprising, just like Muhammad Bou Azizi's self-immolation functioned as a catalyst to the protest in 2010/2011.

Notes

1   This article draws in part on my previous article "Space and Experience for the Racially Marked Body: Kamal al-Riahi's *al-Ghurillā*." *Experiencing Space, Spacing Experience: Concepts, Practices, and Materialities*. Ed. Nora Berning, Philipp Schulte, and Christine Schwanecke. Trier: WTV, 2014. 169–182. Print.

2   The general focus on the literary centers is reflected in the research on *iltizām* such as Verena Klemm's articles "Changing Notions of Commitment (*Iltizām*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq" (2000) and "Literary Commitment Approached through Reception Theory" (2000) or M.M. Badawi's chapter on "Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature" in his *Modern Arabic Literature and the West* (1985). Badawi, however, mentions that Tunisian authors and critics addressed the issue of literary commitment during its heyday (1, also see Mikhail's passing remark on committed poetry from the Maghreb: 597). Additionally, one finds references to engaged literature in studies on Tunisian literature, (e.g. in Svetozár Pantůček's *Tunesische Literaturgeschichte* (1974) and Jean Fontaine's *La littérature tunisienne contemporaine* (1990)).

3   Badawi quotes the editorial note to the first volume of *al-Ādāb* from January 1953 (12).

4   All quotes from *Al-Ghurillā* are my translation.

5   The second chapter of 'Breaking News' can be found on pages 154–55.

6   There are no authoritative statistics as Taoufik Chairi, president of the Association for the Defence of the Rights of Blacks (ADAM), confirms (Ata, "ADAM"); however, in articles published in Tunisian media outlets since the uprising in winter 2010/2011, the estimates vary between eight (Béhi, "La Communauté Noire") and twenty percent (El Shikh, "La Tabou du Racisme").

7   The final phrase is only used at the Sunni morning prayer call.

8   In Western popular culture the stereotype of the black man as "outside the normal realm of (White) masculinity," "as 'other'" and as "a sexual monster" was spread at the end of the nineteenth century, when white conservative Americans "saw the end of slavery as bringing about an unleashing of animalistic, brute violence inherent in African American men" (Dines 291–93). Dines, Gail. "King Kong and the White Woman: Hustler Magazine and the Demonization of Black Masculinity." *Violence Against Women* 4.3 (1998): 291–307. Print.

9   The parallelism of bullets (i.e. weapons) and the pen (i.e. writing) is interesting here, since in committed poetry the comparison between writing and fighting is commonly drawn; see, e.g. Nizār Qabbānī's poem "Hawāmish ʿalā daftar al-naksa" ("Annotations to the Notebook of the Disaster," 1967), where the author writes "Heavy-hearted country of my birth / without warning you transformed me / from a poet singing for love / to one writing with a knife" (for the translation, see: Gettleman, Marvin and Stuart Schaar, eds. *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader*. New York: Grove, 2003. 194. Print).

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Narrating, Metaphorizing or Performing the Unforgettable? The Politics of Trauma in Contemporary Arabic Literature

Stephan Milich

> But one should never speak of the assassination of a man [or woman] as a figure, not even an exemplary figure in the logic of an emblem, a rhetoric of the flag or of martyrdom. A man's [woman's] life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol. And this is precisely what a proper name should always name.
> (Derrida xiv)

Introduction

"Gina was a playful 2-year-old German shepherd when she went to Iraq as a highly trained bomb-sniffing dog […]. She returned home to Colorado cowering and fearful. A military veterinarian diagnosed her with post-traumatic stress disorder—a condition that some experts say can afflict dogs just like it does humans" (Elliott). This quote from an article on a 'traumatized' bomb-sniffing dog in occupied Iraq, which German internet media outlets also picked up and spread, tells the story of the German shepherd Gina in a way that sparks the reader's sympathy for the unfortunate 'US dog.' Undoubtedly heart-wrenching, the story also plays with the seemingly curious notion that an animal can be traumatized. While the Iraqi population goes unmentioned, on several occasions the report refers to the frequent occurrence of severe traumatization amongst US soldiers. While there are only few resources available to help victims in Iraq and other countries compelled to "deal[ing] with the resulting physical, psychological, and financial aftermath of traumatic events" ("Trauma and PTSD" 1), not only do most US soldiers but also American German shepherd gods get to 'enjoy' a trauma therapy, enabling them to be deployed again militarily once they have recovered: "A year later, Gina is on the mend. Frequent walks among friendly people and a gradual reintroduction to the noises of military life have begun to overcome her fears […]" (ibid.).

A deft piece of journalism arousing the emotions of the reader, this narrativization of a trauma and its concomitant political and historical de-contextualizing of the story of Gina from its embedment in the occupation of Iraq is merely *one* example of a 'trauma-political'[1] practice that not only comes to the fore in politics and the media but also in literature and art. Problematic, this practice needs to be queried whenever it becomes apparent: The representation of violence and injustices perpetrated on humans (and animals), which leave behind lasting damage on individuals and communities alike, and its aestheticizing and artistic reworking demand a general re-contextualization and a specific naming of the ethical and political positions, interests, and 'truths' inherent to the respective work.

As part of the trend to pointedly connect documentation and fiction[2] in literary writing, since the beginning of the new millennium an increasing number of prose texts, poems, and

plays by authors from various Arab countries have drawn on traumatic events or circumstances and convincingly worked through them narratively.[3] This new Arabic trauma literature carries forward reflections on the possibility of literary writing during and after human disasters (and the difficulty in adequately representing and narrating them) in a *new* way, not only raising the question of the referentiality of literary texts by simultaneously engaging the assumptions of modernism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, but also challenging the discursive, epistemological, and power-political privileged position of the 'West.'

By re-contextualizing the political causes and social consequences of traumatization and placing them in hitherto unconsidered or silenced politically explosive interrelationships, this literature is one of the most relevant forms of literary political writing today in Mashriq and Maghreb societies. In contrast to the often strongly ideologized "committed literature" of earlier decades, its aim is to shed light on the politically- and socially-motivated roots and entwined causality of injustice, violence, and disenfranchisement without propagating a single, solely valid view of reality. Besides the socio-political concerns, at its best this literature refuses to indulge in the instrumentalization of human suffering and ordeals, and so thus possesses a healing moment.

This article will thus focus on literature and drama texts written by Arab authors (from Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt) who draw on very different narrative and representational strategies when approaching traumatic events and the effects of traumatic experiences and situations.[4] Pivotal for the artistic engagement with trauma—the narrating, reassembling, and 'rendering-into-form' of life-threatening, painful past events and experiences which are difficult to access in memory—is the tension-filled interrelationship between coming to turns with the past and public recognition on the one hand, and the healing of and liberation from the damaging consequences inflicted on the individual by traumatization on the other. The authors often describe not only a social condition experienced as traumatic and how it is being dealt with, but they also reflect on the elusive secondary effects and repercussions of traumatization on the individual and collective level, in my view a priority key perspective for analyzing and gaining a deeper understanding of the 'internal' problems besetting Arab societies.[5]

The four examples to be discussed below move from 1) a traumatization on the national level (Palestinian community) addressed by a poem, and 2) the individual traumas of refugees stranded in Syria and the "damaged life" (Adorno) of a member of the Syrian opposition in a novel, through to 3) traumatizing horror stories about Iraqi migrants, and finally 4) biographical theatrical work in Sudan and Egypt.

The very different forms of text and literary expression show the degree of metaphorization writing about trauma can assume. Moreover, they raise the question as to why an author decides to emphasize the moment of the liberating and healing effect of narrating, while declaring the aesthetic or political dimension to be of secondary importance; or conversely, why writers use traumatic subject matter to explore primarily new aesthetic and literary forms, to invent narrative techniques, and more or less allow direct political demands to slip into their writing. Here the authors are always bound to prevailing literary and artistic discourses; at the same time however, they are also influenced by the reality of society and socio-political discourses (co-)generating this reality, which may, when faced with extreme suffering and injustice, force them to feel that it is improper to give priority to aesthetic concerns. In this context, the position from which an author writes is significant since it makes a difference whether he or she includes autobiographical material in his/her writing, bearing witness to his/her own traumatization, or if he or she re-narrates, for instance,

accounts or testomonies of other persons affected by trauma. Decisive in representing traumatic events is, finally, the genre or literary form chosen by the authors (poetry, horror, documentary novel, choreography, biographical theatre). In our first example the choice of the genre of poetry goes hand in hand with a metaphorization or allegorization of the traumatic situation.

"Chewing Until Death": A Case for Dealing with Collective Traumas Differently (Zakarīyā Muḥammad)

One of the outstanding poems about memory by the Palestinian poet, novelist, and visual artist Zakarīyā Muḥammad (b. 1951 near Nablus; in the following Zakaria Mohammed) is "Al-lijām" ("The Bit") from 1991. A verse from his long poem *Heatstroke* (*Ḍarbat shams*) gives a programmatic expression of the uncompromising resolve of his introspection[6] and the awareness of the painfulness involved when reflecting on one's own past and present: "This is our finger / wet to explore the wind / wounded by our endless questions (47–53). Taking center stage in the silent scene of "The Bit" are a questioning teenager and a chewing horse:

> A boy examined a black horse
> And a white sun that shone on its forehead
> The horse watched nothing
> It was only chewing
> Standing like a statue on three hooves
> With its fourth hoof
> It barely touched the ground
> The meadow was green
> And the sun was white under the blaze of the horse
> There was no bit in its mouth
> Although it was chewing and chewing
> Blood spilled over its lips
> The Boy asked: What is the black horse chewing?
> What does the horse chew?
> The horse was chewing the bit of memory
> The bit of memory made of stainless steel
> To be champed on until death.
> (*Al-jawād* 9–10)

"The bit of memory" seems to be the only food the animal has, its sole activity is chewing and thus remembering. Although there is no mention of what is being remembered, the pain evoked by the image suggests that it is definitely something difficult to digest, a set of memories perpetually recurring—intrusive images of memory which are not communicated to the reader nor the puzzled boy. The creature simply cannot garner any attention for the present moment, for its sole present is that of memory. The act of remembering described here has something eerie about it because the "bit," lodged in the mouth, cannot be seen, and this is reinforced by the apathy and apparent automatism with which the horse chews. Utterly absorbed, the horse is oblivious to the lush, nourishing grass and the warmth of the sun, chewing on and on and on, while "standing like a statute on three hooves […]."

Asked about the relationship between poetry and memory, Zakaria Mohammed refers to "The Bit," underlining not only the pain but the 'imperative to remember':

> […] but when for example I speak of a horse that chews the bit until blood drips from its mouth, but the horse just keeps on chewing, I am alluding to the act of remembering, to the pain of remembering. Remembering as an open wound. I speak about the obligation to remember, because forgetting would mean that the crimes will be repeated. (qtd. in Milich, *Poetik der Fremdheit* 284)

The invisible wound out of which blood begins to trickle during the process of remembering is not allowed to heal. This wound—and this is the task of the poet—has to be kept open and alive in consciousness through a poetry that remembers. Taking the mentioning of a "statue" as a metapoetical reference, the poem itself may be understood as an image of remembrance or a poetic statue that, like the chewing horse, remembers something that cannot be seen, remains unnamed, and is therefore voice- and formless. But once one relocates the scene into the psychological realm, it becomes possible to consider it in terms of a family constellation (Jacob Moreno, Virginia Satir) or more generally as a psychodrama in which the hitherto unseen mechanisms, affects, memories, and relational constellations become manifest through spatial arrangement and reenactment by persons who to some extent are not involved; these are then shown in a way that renders them, for the very first time, comprehensible.

By lending more weight to the traumatic quality of this image of remembrance, this shift in focus opens up the possibility to accentuate the interpretation somewhat differently. Seeing the young boy as a symbol for a new generation that has to look on while the older generation of their parents, afraid and powerless, remains captured in their traumas, living dissociated from their bodies and feelings—or more precisely, for this very reason does not live—, allows us to read the poetic image as an allegory of the collective traumatization of the older generation of Palestinians, who threaten to wordlessly pass on their trauma to the next generation. Judith Herman has pointed out the ambivalent repercussions of dissociation: "Though dissociation offers a means of mental escape at the moment when no other escape is possible, it may be that this respite from terror is purchased at far too high a price" (239). And Nora Amin, whose theatrical work we will discuss in detail in the final section of this article, adds a further aspect from her experiences in theatre: "[…] and since the body is the carrier and keeper of those experiences the easiest thing to do is to shut the body down. In reality, though, the body never shuts down, it only refrains from expressing itself, but the experiences continue to exist and to re-cycle themselves" (27).

Frequently used alongside bodywork in therapeutic practice, the formation of personal metaphors can put the "unspeakable" into images and "counter the concretizing thinking prevalent in repression" (Fischer and Riedesser 268). Going beyond mere verbalization, the metaphorization of traumatic experiences can possess an illuminating and healing effect that enable persons affected to share their experiences in the form of images within their stories, to express them publicly, and as a result demand recognition, which in turn can facilitate working through a traumatic experience.[7]

Actually associated with the qualities of pride, beauty, and vitality in Arab culture, here the horse is symbolic of the whole Palestinian community forced to persist in a state of painful memory. This interpretation is reinforced by the color symbolism subtly blended into the poem, with the four featured colors (black, white, green, and red) matching those of the Palestinian national flag.

Crucial in this interpretation is that the bit is forged out of "stainless steel," a metaphor that powerfully visualizes not just the pain but the potential endlessness of the act of remembrance. Here the ongoing trauma is only lived out and not worked through. This begs the question: Is there no other choice than continual repetition of past experience? Is there noth-

ing that can be done to prevent the repetition of the crime, in this case the injustice suffered over the course of the *nakba* and subsequent expulsions, with the consequence of tormenting oneself until death without being able "to learn to live finally" (Derrida xvi–xvii).

Interestingly, the poem avoids directly mentioning the 'perpetrators' or the causes of the trauma impacting on the chewing horse. The aim is not to assign guilt and express recrimination, nor is it to ideologically exploit the trauma depicted; rather, the poem seeks to critically reflect on how Palestinian society (or societies) deals with the situation.

In keeping with the high degree of metaphorization of the trauma (the allegory of the horse etc.) and commensurate with the spectrum of the lyrical forms of expression, neither the character and the repercussions of the trauma are specifically named, nor are any references made to the everyday life of the people; instead, as I read the poem, on the level of the politics of memory the question is raised if not a different way of dealing with the traumatic past is needed, one that enables the people to live again, no longer forcing them into remembering until they die and does not leave following generations helpless and baffled. At the same time, Mohammed drastically illustrates that "traumatized people relive in their bodies the moments of terror that they cannot describe in words" (Herman 239).

By inviting several interpretations, the poem raises a host of highly relevant political and social questions, all of which appeal to the reader's imagination to reflect anew on the traumatic experience of privately and collectively shared history.

With the criticism of the practice of remembrance, aimed at Palestinian society as a whole, the poetry of Zakaria Mohammed remains on the level of a collective trauma. In narrative prose however, situations, actions, events, and processes taking place between and within protagonists can be illuminated in terms of individual psychology and worked through in the literary material; here it is possible to explore and rethink the linkages between public and private, between the family enclave and the socio-political field, but also between the conflicting narrations of national history and the attempts to interpret social conditions. This is undertaken by the novel—first published in 2009—*Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ* (*Guardians of the Air*) of the Syrian author Rūzā Yāsīn Ḥasan (b. 1974 in Damascus, she fled to Germany in 2012; in the following Rosa Yassin Hassan).

Fiction as Documentation of a "Damaged Life": The Traumas of Others and their Translation into the Syrian Context (Rosa Yassin Hassan)

The main protagonist in *Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ* is ʿAnāt Ismāʿīl, a young Syrian woman who works as an interpreter for the Canadian embassy in Damascus, translating interviews with asylum seekers from various Middle Eastern and North African countries. Years ago she met Jawād, active in the leftwing opposition; shortly after beginning their relationship he was arrested and spent the next fifteen years in prison as a political prisoner. After his release it soon becomes painfully clear that the separation—similarly as in the case of two other couples they are friends with where the men also spent time as political detainees—has left behind deep scars. Disastrously, they fail to articulate these changes and express their new needs. Increasingly Jawād withdraws into himself before deciding one day to immigrate to Sweden, confronting her with a difficult choice: either she comes with him to Europe and so becomes an asylum seeker herself, or she remains in Syria alone. ʿAnāt decides to stay in the house of her father, who is suffering from a heart condition; she falls pregnant however the

night before Jawād is due to leave. During the nine months of her pregnancy ʿAnāt remembers key events in her life, recounts the family history (in particular that of her father and mother, who against her will was forced to die an unworthy death in an intensive care unit from complications of her cancer illness), and the stories of couples who were close friends and whose relationships also failed because of the not immediately obvious repercussions of political imprisonment, brutal torture, and years of separation. In interior monologues ʿAnāt reveals her emotional and sexual needs, her longings and her critical views of her private milieu and society. Towards the end of her pregnancy ʿAnāt quits her job because she can no longer maintain the necessary professional distance to the traumatic stories of the refugees. Increasingly reclusive, her child is born on the very day her father suffers his third heart attack. Leaving open the fate of the father and the future of all its characters, the novel ends with the young mother falling into a deep sleep, leaving behind all her worries and fears for a while. Despite the uncertainty surrounding future events, the deep sleep lends the traumatic narration a form of closure, possibly indicating a sense of reconciliation which in turn evokes forgetting as a possible way of overcoming trauma.[8]

Thanks to her profession ʿAnāt—like her Canadian superior Jonathan, mainly responsible for deciding on the asylum applications—is at once a witness of and intersection point for numerous individual stories of suffering and ordeal told by refugees from the Mashriq and North Africa, the victims of dictatorship, civil war, and rape. This narrative setting enables the author to weave a diverse array of traumatic stories into her novel, to bring these ignored and 'silenced' stories to attention, and to describe as concretely and precisely as possible the consequences for the respective persons. The author deliberately brings together the Syrian-Arab experience and traumas of non-Arab minorities (Kurds, Turkmen, Chaldeans) as well as those of people from neighboring countries, an attempt to do justice to all the stories of suffering and prevent a hierarchization of victim status. In my eyes a case of 'literary' trauma politics considering a hierarchy of victims to be an improper and immoral act, this undertaking thus contrasts starkly to the aforementioned tendency, dominant in official American trauma politics, to whitewash such stories or reverse the status of victims and so serve broader geopolitical interests.

In an obvious contrast to the poetry of Zakaria Mohammed, Rosa Yassin Hassan largely avoids a metaphorization of trauma and writes in a documentary manner, incorporating reports from human rights groups as well as expertise from the fields of psychology, history, and the social sciences. In some passages Hassan seems to directly draw on specialist knowledge and characterizations from trauma therapy. In the case of a former militiaman from the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the victim of extreme torture whose body displays several burn wounds from a fan heater, through a moment of inattention ʿAnāt herself triggers a panic-driven fear response: "Stimuli with a low degree of similarity to the traumatic situation can provoke a full relapse into the state of panic," write Fischer and Riedesser (264), explaining the impact and intensity an inadvertent re-experiencing of a traumatizing situation can have. After Salva Quajee, the Sudanese asylum seeker, has left the room under shock a first time, Jonathan, as routine has it, simply calls for the next applicant to enter; despite his serious traumatization, Quajee tries not to imperil his only remaining hope of starting a new life in Canada and enters the interview room again:

> Instead of another applicant it was Salva's black face that returned. He peered into the room through the slightly ajar door and wanted to enter. Sighing deeply it seemed that he wanted to get over his problem and get through the interview. He's probably dreamt of immigrating for years!

But as he caught a glimpse of the heater for a second time, the same scene played out. That was my mistake again. I should have hidden the heater in time, but I was too wrapped up in my own shock and feeling nauseous. (Ḥasan, *Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ* 22–23)

The young translator, too preoccupied with the feelings and emotions triggered by her own personal story and the intense contact with the traumas of others, can no longer meet the challenges posed by her work. She senses that the boundaries between her and the fates of the refugees are becoming increasingly blurred, how the traumas of others are nestling within her und re-echoing, turning "the world into one big torture chamber" (22). In particular the final asylum interview in the novel with the proud and attractive Iraqi Kurd Fathia creates an inextricable knot out of admiration, hate, and inferiority in the young overwhelmed translator, an encounter characterized by counter-transference that ultimately leads to her quitting. This secondary traumatization, also known as the helper or vicarious trauma, leads to helpers or persons in comparable situations being no longer able to deal with their own stress, so that the feelings in the traumatized person are, as it were, ignited in them. Towards the end of the novel Jonathan for example admits to ʿAnāt that "he will never forget what he's gone through here, he'll never get over this bitter experience. He may even have to regularly go to the psychologist for the rest of his life, just to feel a bit safe again" (241).

Just like her Canadian superior, ʿAnāt becomes increasingly aware that the asylum procedure resembles a session with a psychologist, the "inquiring, inquisitorial stance" behind the questions "reminding the patient of interrogation under torture" (Fischer and Riedesser 266). Asylum seekers, who in fact urgently require expert and professional therapeutic support, have to face up to an examining authority and go through strenuous questioning so as to gain merely the prospect of escaping their existence as refugees.

Rosa Yassin Hassan draws on expertise from trauma research and integrates it into her narration. Interestingly, the author refrains from explicitly describing the Syrian figures in her novel as suffering from traumatic symptoms. This is particularly evident in retelling her family history: Although full of traumatic events (very early marriage of the mother Jamīla and early death of her sister Sanīya, suicide of the daughter Sabah), these are never seen or described as such, in contrast to the refugee stories. Nevertheless, these events in the lives of the family members have lasting negative effects which remain somehow intangible and, hidden beneath the surface of everyday life, thus misunderstood.

In her book *Nīghātīf: Min dhākirat al-muʿtaqalāt al-siyāsiyyāt* (*Negative: On the Memories of Female Political Prisoners*), referred to as a *riwāya tawthīqiyya* (documentary novel) and published in a series of the Cairo Institute for the Study of Human Rights (CIHRS), Hassan also rarely delves into the psychological effects of the brutal violence suffered by female detainees in state prisons[9]—although the book, which also served as a source for a few episodes and details in the novel to follow, features numerous descriptions of torture. One exception is where the author, now speaking from the perspective of a co-prisoner, reports the case of Majd A. (45 ff.), who for weeks on end was exposed to various torture methods and eventually suffered such grave psychological damage that the prison administration saw itself forced to admit her to a psychiatric clinic. There however she is treated with electro shocks, which not only results in the complete dissociation from her body and mind but the compulsive act of wanting to constantly swallow her tongue:

Majd's condition deteriorated further when, after prolonged requests, she was finally taken to the hospital, where the only treatment was electro shocks! […] Actually supposed to be therapy, these shocks were meted out like torture! […] Her condition increasingly worsened, she couldn't speak

or walk. Broken and worn out, she was returned to her double cell. [Back again in prison] she incessantly tries to swallow her tongue. (46–47)

With all these incidents in mind, the author puts herself in the position of the female prisoners and rhetorically asks how is the experience of imprisonment, torture, and violence ever to be forgotten: "How can we ever manage to wipe Majd A., even years after her release, from our memory?" (45).

For the main committed to the documentary character, this book closely related to the novel *Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ* also provides in the extensive footnotes the key dates in the lives of the women prisoners and short biographical notes. In contrast to Hassan's novel, it primarily shows an outside view on the situation of the women, but at times nonetheless gives profound glimpses into the inner lives of the prisoners—or respectively it leaves this to the imagination of the reader, so as to—presumably—avoid a dramatization and fictionalization the author considers inappropriate.[10]

In contrast, the novel *Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ* is not just a reckoning with the traumatizing circumstances impacting so gravely on personal lives produced politically in Syria and the repressive rule of the Baath Party. It is also a plea against the unequal recognition of disparate trauma histories, trying to avoid a hierarchy of victimhood. No longer able to cope with the task of translating the traumas of refugees from Iraq, Sudan and other countries in the region because the shocks and burdens in her own life have pushed her to breaking point and beyond, the dividing line between the Syrian 'normality' of the protagonist and the traumatic conditions in Mashriq and North Africa, although from the outset fragile, now suddenly collapses. Through the interviews the translator comes to realize more and more clearly that hidden psychological and emotional wounds fail to find official recognition, the wounds suffered by the wives of Syria's political prisoners just as little as those of the traumatized refugees, who have to show clear signs on the bodies of violence inflicted by others if they are to gain official asylum status:

> The medical reports always describe the physical symptoms of the refugees. Only the physical, at the very most those obvious psychological effects which later develop into mental illnesses. But there are also scores of refugees who have been mutilated, their insides torn apart and souls severely damaged without any of this leaving clearly visible marks on their bodies. And for this reason their chances of being granted asylum sink dramatically. Everything they tell is doubted from the outset. (Ḥasan, *Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ* 22)

And later in the text we read:

> The problem is that we are only convinced of harm when it has left behind physical marks! The scars from where the cuffs have cut into Jawād's wrists are still visible today. We think about the years he spent in prison and the endless torture. It's absolutely terrible, I don't want to play it down, but who asks about the psychological and emotional injuries inflicted on so many women like myself?
> That's what I was thinking during every interview I translated when I saw how the asylum applicants tried to get embassy officials to accept their applications. It is really so, why shouldn't I say it: a cutoff hand or a burned patch of a body guarantees that the asylum seeker immediately escapes their hell, while we don't bother to look after a soul that is charred to a cinder and ravaged in its deepest recesses. (246)

But—as I interpret the novel—it is not these obvious and clearly visible wounds which cause relationships to break up, or make it almost impossible for people whose existence and human dignity have been damaged to find their feet again after imprisonment or illness,

or indeed trigger developments sending out waves across all of society, waves of new violence, further damage, and fatal misunderstandings. Seen in this light, Jawād's decision to move away and gain some distance to these events, hoping to reconnect to himself in a new environment, is understandable, even if exile often turns out not to be a suitable place for restoring health due to the absence of a trusted milieu and social isolation. Whether he would have immigrated had ʿAnāt told him that she was expecting his child is something the novel leaves open. Shortly before giving birth the mother-to-be sends him an email and tells him that he is about to become a father; she has mustered the courage to take this step after rereading his last letter to her in which he tenderly expresses his love and promises to always wait for. With this liberating act the novel ultimately emphasizes the inner strength of traumatized people, showing that they are very much capable of breaking through a silence erected in the wake of a trauma and take charge of one's life again.

Written in 2009, the novel reads like an ominous sign of things to come, as if it were a presage to the events of 2011 which, with the Baath regime deciding on an escalation of violence, have plunged the country into war and triggered a refugee disaster. A country that once took in refugees has itself turned into the country with the most refugees worldwide. Rosa Yassin Hassan has already written a new novel trying to come to grips with this recent turn of events: Published in July 2014 by Riyāḍ al-Rayyis (Beirut), *Alladhīna massahum al-siḥr* (*Those Touched by Magic*) reads in parts like a series of fateful blows strung together. The psychological and emotional effects of the decade-long Asad dictatorship as well as the brutal suppression of the Syrian revolution have to be better understood and worked through on both the social and individual levels, otherwise new fatal social developments loom.

By adopting a documentary form manifest in the footnotes, the use of human rights' reports or historiographic information as well as the concrete and detailed description of the events taking place, the writer stresses the realist character of the narrative. By interweaving this 'realist' character with a number of rather postmodern literary devices like the deft changing of narrative perspectives and the host of flashbacks, Hassan has found a middle way that seeks to reconcile political with human and artistic concerns.

Arab Horror Fiction: The Traumatization of the Reader (Ḥasan Balāsim)

In his volume of stories *Majnūn sāḥat al-taḥrīr* (*Madman of Freedom Square*) the Iraqi author and filmmaker Ḥasan Balāsim (b. 1973; in the following Hassan Balasim), since 2004 resident in Finland, portraits the disorder and chaos that in his view not only characterizes the recent history of Iraq, turning it into a total trauma. The kidnappings, suicide bombings, and mutilation of corpses, on the increase ever since the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 are told in a way—through shock—that seeks to negate the distance between the reality of the depicted events and that of the reader. Added to these stories from inside the country are those of Iraqis who have set off for Western Europe to seek asylum. One of Hassan Balasim's narrators characterizes these immigrants as the "human cattle of the East [on the way] to the farms of the West" (*Madman* 69)[11]. Exile and homeland become two sides of the same horrific reality of life from which there seems to be no escape for Iraqis. The narratological devices employed for this purpose combine the techniques of European ghost stories and horror films with events taken from various media reports, thus tying together fact and fiction. The collective trauma is comprised of countless individual traumas afflicting Iraqis, without the author indicating the slightest possibility of ever escaping from the traumatizing

Iraqi reality, no matter whether a protagonist is still living in the country or now resides in the supposed safety of exile. A trauma-less reality is a reality in which the latent and omnipresent horror has yet to manifest. In the short story "Shāḥinat Birlīn" ("The Truck to Berlin"), the narrator explains how he would represent such material if he were to render the story again: "I would record only the cries of terror which rang out at the time and the other mysterious noises that accompanied the massacre" (ibid.). It suffices to document reality as it is—in its purest form—to produce stories smashing the confines of our imagination. But Balasim even goes a step further: In the following sentence he sarcastically considers its potential for a commercial artistic work: "A major part of the story would make a good experimental radio piece" (ibid.).

In terms of its subject matter "The Truck to Berlin" is in the tradition of the migration novel *Rijāl fi-l-shams* (*Men in the Sun*, 1963) by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani (Ghassān Kanafānī, 1936–1972). As in this pioneer work, one of the first to show the inhumane ordeal fleeing refugees were exposed to when the Middle East conflict forced them to migrate, the migrants cooped up in a truck also perish in horrific circumstances in Balasim's story. And yet almost forty-five years later, the migration journey embarked on more or less voluntarily, the striving for a better life somewhere holding out a promising future, features moments which witness a barely conceivable rise in horror. The view of the world as "fragile, frightening and inhumane" (Balasim, *Madman* 70) is articulated by the narrator, who himself wishes to migrate to Europe but eventually scraps his plan due to this terrifying story, told to him by an Afghan called Ali living illegally in Istanbul: "Ali the Afghan says that there were thirty-five young Iraqis, dreaming youngsters who had made a deal with Turkish smugglers to carry them in a closed truck exporting fruit from Istanbul to Berlin" (72). The first three days, as the truck is on the road, go according to plan. During the third night however, the driver suddenly changes direction, speeds up before slowing again due to a poor road until he stops altogether: "The truck suddenly came to a halt, the driver turned off the engine and an eerie and mysterious silence reigned inside the truck to Berlin, a satanic silence that would bring forth a miracle and a story hard to believe" (73). And now begins—set to last another three days—the countdown, which the narrator describes in gruesome detail:

> On the third day there was complete chaos. Some young men who still had the energy to hang on to life tried to break down the truck door, while others kept shouting and banging on the walls. One of them was begging and pleading for a gulp of water. The sound of farts and insults. Quranic verses and prayers recited in loud voices […] I am not writing now about those sounds and smells which come and go along the paths of secret migration, but about that resounding scream which suddenly burst from the chaos. […] It was a scream that emerged from caves whose secrets have never been unravelled. When they heard the scream, they tried to imagine the source of the voice, neither human nor animal, which had rocked the darkness of the truck. (74)

In a mixture of laconic detailed description and vague inklings of the lurking horror that unhinges the imagination, the reader finally finds out what happened at the very end of the story:

> When the policemen opened the back door of the truck, a young man soaked in blood jumped down from inside and ran like a madman towards the forest. The police chased him but he disappeared into the vast forest. In the truck there were thirty-four bodies. They had not been torn apart with knives or any other weapon. Rather it was the cloaks and beaks of eagles, the teeth of crocodiles and other unknown instruments that had been at work on them. The truck was full of shit and piss and blood, livers ripped apart, eyes gouged out, intestines […]. (75)

One of the Serbian policeman who discovers the truck and the bodies insists that the survivor and murderer metamorphosed into a wolf shortly before disappearing into the forest, but neither his wife nor his colleagues present at the scene believe his version of the story. Just like the policeman, Balasim relates unbelievable terrifying incidents which, although taking place on the margins of Europe, are haunting the seemingly secure world of Western prosperity. Writing about this real-existing horror not only aims to shock the reader and inscribe images of horror in their memory; the trauma-political cause the author is advocating entails confronting the reader with the stark consequences when the need to help is neglected and the indifference of letting the prevailing situation of flight and migration simply to proceed amounts to nothing other than a mass murder of persons dislodged from and dispossessed of their homes and livelihoods. Balasim thus not only simply tells the stories of the traumatic lives of many Iraqis; through shocking turns of events and a skillfully composed narrative that builds suspense he also seeks to disturb his readers, leaving them haunted or at least forcing them to reflect. To ignore these voices, so one possible consequence, would be tantamount to missing a chance to enhance one's own humanity.

In new Arab horror literature, most prominently works by Ahmad Saadawi (Aḥmad Saʿadāwī) (*Frankenstein in Bagdad*, 2014) and Balasim, key features of Magical Realism from South America are escalated into the traumatic, an escalation that not only depicts and narrates traumas as incidents but leaves the reader shocked, or at least imposes the burden of being an indirect witness to the horrors taking place every day. Similarly to Rosa Yassin Hassan, Balasim is constantly seeking to maintain a connection to the social and political reality; in contrast to Hassan however, he uses the supernatural to crack open its edifice, for "all it needs is a little shake for its [the world's] hideous nature and its primeval fangs to emerge." Balasim's narrator insists that this is not only some allegory of horror but reality itself. (Balasim, *Madman* 69)

This supposed agenda of the Iraqi exile author is taken up by the British publisher Penguin, which in 2014 had brought out its own edition of the stories previously published by Comma Press that had sold very well, and praised the book in the dramatizing words demanded by marketing, claiming that for the first time and like never before "we" [the Western reader] can get a feel for the nitty-gritty of the war and enter into "a world not only of soldiers and assassins, hostages and car bombers, refugees and terrorists, but also of madmen and prophets, angels and jinni, sorcerers and spirits" (*The Corpse Exhibition*, back cover).

Whilst celebrating Balasim as an authentic voice speaking from the very heart of events, although he has been living in Europe for years, his prose, addressing a Western audience, contains a problematic component however, reinforcing the one-dimensional perspective on Iraq and the Middle East as a place of devastation and stomping ground for terrorists, losing sight of how it is not the people who are causing the spiral of violence but rather the circumstances with their historically evolved and produced identities, collective experiences, and the power vacuum since 2003 in the country once occupied by the United States.

We need to bear in mind the dozens of novels and (auto-)biographies by US and British soldiers, more or less successful in fulfilling literary aspirations, which have flooded the Anglophone and global book market after 2003, whereas in the US, UK, or Germany hardly anyone read the latest novels by Iraqi authors translated from Arabic. But it is precisely in contemporary Iraqi literature that we find outstanding prose works which, in a literary convincing manner, depict the traumatizing conditions Iraqis have been forced to live in for several decades—and thus, from an internal perspective, present a far more varied and realistic picture of Iraq and the human fates played out there.[12]

Seen in this light, the following jacket text promoting the Penguin edition of *The Corpse Exhibition* seems to merely reinforce the already existing asymmetrical power relations between Arab societies and the 'West': "This blistering debut by 'perhaps the best writer of Arabic fiction alive' (*The Guardian*) is the *first major* [italics mine, S.M.] literary work about the Iraq War from an Iraqi perspective." The question emerging here is whether stories like those penned by Balasim, which when read cursorily appear to confirm the 'Western' view of the Middle East, are bestsellers in Europe and the USA because they—in consequence of their focus on violence and trauma—can be incorporated, transcending the narrow confines of cultural reception, into the familiar, canonized, and cultural-political controlled literature discourse.

Depending on the contextualization of the works and the way it is read and interpreted, Arab 'trauma fiction' can morally jolt, evoke the sheer unbearable situation of violent societies and forecast possible consequences; on the other hand however, it runs the risk of bolstering popular prejudices and clichés about Arab societies in accordance with a "latent Orientalism" (Edward Said) that still continues to exist, thus merely serving to satisfy the Western desire for strange horror stories and sensation.

Performing Trauma to Transform it:
The Theatrical Work of Nora Amin

In March 2007, the Egyptian director, actress, and author Nora Amin held a theatre workshop commissioned by the Sudanese NGO *Siha Network* in ad-Damazin involving fifteen women aged between eighteen and fifty-six traumatized in the long Sudanese Civil War(s).[13] The workshop aimed at "the transformation of the personal experience from an inner non-verbal form, mostly existing in the senses, to a verbal communication expressing a story or a live statement, and carrying a highly dramatic structure and performance" (Amin 8). Usually, writes Amin, she works with the forum method of Augusto Boal.[14] This was not completely possible in this specific context however, "since I was working with traumatized people who were still under the effect of the war and its consequences" (Amin 13). One condition necessary for the forum method of theatre, a relative freedom to perform and the ability to slip into other roles, was not given initially because the women had to first feel their way into their own experiences and transform the memories buried deep within into actions, images, movements, and stories in order to even be able to communicate these experiences, present and share them publicly. In this special context of socio-political and psycho-social theatrical work Nora Amin emphasizes that the psychological components have priority, simply due to the intended workshop process but also for moral reasons:

> […] I had to seek a method to accommodate both the strong psychological component of the material and the theatrical techniques I was aiming to teach as a form for communication. Always, the psychological component comes first. (ibid.)

The joint work revolved around concepts like trust, shame, and guilt as well as solidarity and entailed a close form of community arising out of the theatrical work, pivotal in allowing the difficult, painful experiences to come to light. The simplest of methods like forming a circle "helped everybody to see each other and feel surrounded by that collective caring energy" (14). The circle brings together the dispersed, separated fragments of feeling and memory and enables a connection and confluence of hitherto unconnected individual stories into a social or, at least, a collectively shared narrative. Besides the fundamental work with

the body, the breath, the voice, and the senses, it was foremost important, so Amin, to work the experiences into a solid and stable story, "strongly rooted in the memory yet firmly grounded in a performance" (15). The workshop director needed to be very careful and sensitive when dealing with the pitfalls and threat of setbacks so as to let the participants feel that they themselves decide on how quickly they wish to advance in the process of "emplotment" (Hayden White) and performance. At the same time, she filtered out forms of expression communicating the trauma which emerged in this process, allowing them to flow into the performance: "The slightest movement or gestures is a carrier of significance. The face could tell it all, even if it looks absent, or if the eyes look down or to nowhere, this is all expressive and [a]live" (Amin 16). The physical exercises undertaken in the second step lead to a more relaxed posture. At some time the decisive move forward is made: With an eye on the past, gaining a presence as a respected and active member of the community, "an existence which denounces the sources of pain, violence and oppression. If her experience can come into that existence, it would mean that she is free, as well as reconciled with her part, and able to move on" (18). The learning their own role and story by heart, necessary for the performance, means that the incidents in the past experienced as trauma enter into the present, so as to be recognized, finally, as the past but certainly not to be forgotten. This three-step translation process, which can take place in different forms, returns the traumatic event or the situation experienced as traumatic from the past to the past—via the 'detour' of the present. The movement is that of a new positing of the person in a "positive existence" (21) which, in the here and now, has restored faith in the world and retrieved lost hope. As early as 1978 Hayden White had given a practical and precise definition of trauma that sheds further light on the already deep understanding of trauma in the context of Amin's theatrical work:

> It is not that the patient does not *know* what those events were, does not know the facts; for if he did not in some sense know the facts, he would be unable to recognize them and repress them whenever they arise in his consciousness. On the contrary, he knows them all too well, in fact, that he lives with them constantly and in such a way as to make it impossible for him to see any other facts except through the coloration that the set of events in question gives to his perception of the world. (White 86–87)

During the whole process Amin was mindful to observe the behavioral codes, values, and social norms indebted to the Sudanese context and prompt the participants to incorporate them into the theatrical work as needed so as to ultimately find an individual and simultaneously collective form for expressing theatrically the pain and the injustice suffered. The last step taken in the performance, which goes beyond merely a testimonial in narrative form, is displaying the effects and repercussions of the war and violence on the community and thus by extension the whole of Sudanese society. Amin describes this final step as follows:

> As much as one is able to project her story, as much as she is free from it and powerful enough to disseminate it to the whole world. To live it is one thing, to perform it in public is another. The workshop helped everybody to live with—and to perform—the truth. […] The stories were fused and hence represented everybody, they were the stories of each and all. (20–21)

In a unique way theatre thus sets a framework setting that enables traumatized persons to step out of their isolation, makes visible and contests asymmetrical power relations, and eventually shows ways out of seemingly dead-end situations, as well as presenting an opportunity for victims to try out courses of action to reinforce their resilience for the future.

Even if this theatre work is in the first instance conceived as a therapeutic shelter and the artistic quality of the performance is not given priority, it is nonetheless one example of Arabic cultural production with political brisance which, in times of extreme situations and a world out of joint, refuses to see artistic creativity as separate from people and communities. The main concern is to focus on essential human rights, as Judith Herman demanded in an afterword to her classic study *Trauma and Recovery* from 2001: "Only an ongoing connection with a global political movement for human rights could ultimately sustain our ability to speak about unspeakable things" (234).

The ethic of this art, which should not be ignored by literary studies and criticism, lies not least in raising awareness for how previously artificially erected boundaries between art and life are hardly maintainable given an exceptional extreme situation lasting decades that has traumatizing effects on manifold levels. Only then can art become a democratic space in which truths and views can be discussed and negotiated. Aesthetic, beauty, and form do not necessarily play a less important role, but they are no longer permitted to exert their repressive representational power. Because the person comes first, the form—should it lay claim to remain humanistic—counts which can unfold while not remaining separated from human concerns and the needs of those affected.

Conclusion

All four of the examples discussed in this article are concerned with a situation in which trauma is not some onetime event or recurs on just a few occasions; trauma here is a permanent characteristic of a life, an emotional experience and a reality that has become normality, one that for many of the protagonists (ʿAnāt in *Ḥurrās al-hawāʾ*, the boy in *Al-lijām*) begins with or is indeed there prior to their first biographical recollections. For them there can be no return to a previously existent intact normality. The conventional conceptualizations of trauma (esp. PTSD) developed in Europe, Israel, and North America are insufficient for understanding the characteristics of trauma prevalent in Arab societies with a violent history which can be traced back to the respective beginnings of European colonization or indeed even further.[15] But how can we adequately describe and apprehend a permanent state of self-reproducing and at times mutating violent living conditions in numerous countries across the globe when, based on Freud and more recent psychotraumatic models—with few exceptions—, trauma is defined by its singularity?[16] By breaking through the boundary erected between art and life on the one hand, and evoking trauma as a condition of social life on the other, contemporary Arabic literature on trauma sharpens an awareness for forms of traumatization which until recently were not only rarely considered in conventional media reports and indeed even in many psychological studies, but also often already embedded in cultural hegemonic discourses or de-contextualizing medical paradigms. Contemporary Arabic literature on trauma is not merely concerned with depicting the dehumanizing brutality of events but also, by creating a literary counter project that can assume form in varying ways (metaphorization, narrativization, performance), it seeks to again 'humanize' the world and those affected, to restore the dignity circumstances had threatened to rob them of. The pioneers of this new political writing style, which partly superseded the earlier *adab multazim*, were—besides prose authors like Sonnallah Ibrahim (Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm) and Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī)—Arab exile poets of the 1980s and 1990s such as Saadi Youssef (Saʿdī Yūsif), Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh), and Sargon Boulos (Sarkūn Būluṣ), who called for a new humanity in the sense espoused by Edward Said and in meta-

phors, scenes, and descriptions rendered tangible the damage inflicted on individual lives and the traumatic living situations characteristic of life in many Arab societies as well as in exile/diaspora communities.

The texts and theatrical work analyzed here also counter an ideological practice in which psychological traumas are uncoupled from their socio-political causes and how they have come about historically. Arabic trauma literature searches out the buried traces of earlier violence and injustices so as to finally narrate them, to voice them publicly, and reveal their long-term effects.

When faced with the complexity, intricate entanglements, and latency of traumatization, for a consideration of trauma oriented on cultural studies it seems necessary to resort to the psychotraumatic and socio-psychological knowledge of Arab psychologists and therapists specializing in trauma; at the same time however, this is of course no guarantee that the needs of those affected by trauma are addressed. Nevertheless, art has an inherent potential to put an end to dehumanization, both the long-term shockwaves of past instances as well as those still occurring today, by translating—as narrativization, metaphorization, film version or (theatrical) representation—the experiences of trauma into language and setting into motion processes of humanization, so as to give things "everybody would prefer to forget, but which could never be forgotten" (Amin 21) their proper place and lend them, commensurable to the experience, meaning, color, and tonality.

The literary reworking of traumas, intimately tied to the ethics of writing, avoids earlier ideological practices of engaged authors, positions art and literature in the middle of reality, and is—by not propagating truth but inquiring into the reality of the marginalized and disenfranchised—necessarily political, as a statement by Nora Amin taken from a documentary on the performance of Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People* (*ʿAdū al-shaʿb*; La Musica) by her ensemble La Musica in Egypt in 2013 underlines:

> It is on the edge between theatre and truth […] it transports theatre to another place that is not necessarily a representation, but a real act that we experience together, even if it is momentarily placed in a performance… (*An Enemy of the People: The Journey to Survival*, 51:20–36)

Not only political, media-based, and literary texts run the risk of succumbing to specific interests and agendas; the writing of scholarly texts on trauma in literature and art is also fraught with danger when the traumas described are taken up, inserted into the argumentation chains typical of academic discourse, and in the process shrouded more in mystification than constructively elucidated. For this reason, in the context of cultural trauma politics, as propagated not only by state authorities and politicians but also artists, intellectuals, journalists, and activists from civil society, cultural studies need to critically inquire into the power structures, political interests, and conceptual basic assumptions sedimented in the material they analyze. To conceive trauma as the "impossibility of narration"[17] or of representation is a proposition that should neither be generalized nor universalized; rather, it has to be examined in its specific context, since empirically, trauma cannot be reduced to unrepresentability. In contemporary Arabic literature on trauma, many stories told, no matter how painful and difficult to understand and to narrate, are representable and comprehensible. In similarity with African fiction on trauma, one could say that "these works are 'engaged literature' in a renewed Sartrean sense" (Eaglestone 82), since they want to inform readers about silenced or forgotten but ongoing realities in order to change them, realities that for the victims are hardly forgettable, continuously entering and disturbing their lives.

Notes

1   With the term cultural 'trauma politics' I am referring to the ideological practice, consummate to the ideological or ideological-critical stance of the author, that takes up psychological traumas, integrates them into a specific narrative, and instrumentalizes them for political purposes/interests—or alternatively critically addresses such an instrumentalization of trauma.

2   See Ghazoul, Ferial. "The Imaginary and the Documentary: Cultural Studies in Literature, History, and the Arts." Editorial. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 32 (2012): 8–9. Print.

3   For studies examining trauma in recent Arabic literature and film, see for example the essays in Ghazoul, Ferial. "Trauma and Memory." Editorial. *Alif: Journal of Contemporary Poetics* 30 (2010): 8. Print; Di-Capua, Yoav. "Traumatic Subjectivity of Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm's Dhāt." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43.1 (2012): 80–101. Print; Milich, Pannewick and Tramontini.

4   The most frequent term used in specialist psychological literature is *ṣadma nafsīya*. A definition of the Arab equivalent is given for example by Ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Ṭāhā, Faraj. *Mawsūʿat ʿilm al-nafs wa-l-taḥlīl al-nafsī: Al-juzʾ al-thānī* [*Encyclopedia of Psychology and Psychonanalysis*]. 2ⁿᵈ ed. Riyadh: Dār al-Zahrāʾ, 2010. 438–39. Print.

5   In order not to overemphasize trauma or to pathologize another culture or society, it is crucial not to look only at endogenic factors, found within the 'social life' of Arab societies, but also to take into account the external factors that are relevant for the specific context, as e. g. colonial legacies, international interventions and re-colonizing politics as well as economic and geo-strategic politics and interests.

6   For a detailed analysis of his poems, see Milich, *Poetik der Fremdheit*.

7   In an earlier article, I tried to show how—in the poetry of the Iraqi Kamāl Sabtī (d. 2006)—the psychological mechanisms of traumatization are transformed into linguistic structures which largely dispense with metaphorization. See: "The Other Martyr: The Trauma of Exile and War in the Poetry of Kamāl Sabtī (1955–2006)." (Milich, Pannewick and Tramontini, 141–60). In retrospective, I would modify my conceptual approach to Sabti's poetry, being more cautious in drawing on generalizing statements and assumptions that understand trauma e. g. as the impossibility of narration.

8   See also the end of the story "Al-arshīf wa-l-wāqiʿ" ("The Record and the Reality") by Hassan Balasim: Balasim, *Madman* 12.

9   In her preface to *Nīghātīf* Rosa Yassin Hassan relates how during the project she increasingly sought out former female prisoners to record their stories and experiences; eventually she saw herself forced to forgo including any further examples of the fate befalling women so as to finally conclude the documentary novel. Many of the Syrian women, in particular the "Islamists" amongst them, were simply not able to tell many things because of the sheer horror of their experiences. Hassan saw herself faced with the choice of either recording authentic experiences or remaining loyal to her literary writing (11–12).

10 A revealing foil for comparison here would be the well-known but little acclaimed Syrian prison novel Khalīfa, Muṣṭafā. *Al-qawqaʿa: Yawmiyyāt mutalaṣṣiṣ* [*The Shell: Diaries of a Voyeur/Stowaway*]. Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2008. Print. I am thankful to my colleague Huda Zein for calling my attention to this biographical novel.

11 For the Arabic texts, see: hassanblasim.com. Web. 20 Apr. 2010.

12 In some of these works the authors make use of allegorical descriptions of a turbulent animal world, alluding to the state of a society that is completely falling apart, for example the pigeons seized by panic in Abbas Khider's (ʿAbbās Khiḍr) novel *Die Orangen des Präsidenten* (2011) or the drama *The Bird Breeder* by Sarem Dakhel (Sārim Dākhil) (2014). Perhaps the most impressive example of an allegorical representation of animals in contemporary Iraqi literature is to be found in Betool Khedairi's (Bitūl Khuḍayrī) second novel *Ghāyib* (*Absent*, 2004): the appalling living situation under the embargo of the 1990s causes the bee colonies kept by Abu Ghayeb right in the middle of Baghdad to become so aggressive that they annihilate themselves in the end. Khuḍayrī, Bitūl. *Ghāyib* [*Absent*]. Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2004. Print.

13 Nora Amin documented the project in the bilingual—Arabic and English—book *Theatre for Change: A Training Workshop with Women from South Blue Nile*. Here, she writes: "The group of women included teachers, students, social activists, housewives, and average community women. […] Women participating in the workshop were either shot at and severly wounded during the war or had been captives or had a first degree relative (father, husband or son) killed due to the war. The majority were displaced by the civil war in Sudan over different periods of time" (23–24).

14 See Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto, 1979. Print.

15 It is significant that Frantz Fanon develops his analysis of the colonial situation on the basis of his experiences as a psychiatrist in Algeria. The traumatization caused by colonialization is nothing other than the starting point for further traumas, a spiral continuing down to the present day. See Fanon 181ff. See also Rachid Ouaissa's contribution to this volume, as well my article "Translating the Unforgotten: Trauma in Contemporary Arabic Literature" in: *Art and Thought* 102, November 2014. Web.

16 See the pioneering papers of a conference on trauma and politics organized in 2013 by Medico International. "Trauma und Politik: Dokumentation der Fachtagung am 24.01.2013 in Frankfurt/Main." *Medico International*. 5 Jan. 2013. Web. 3 July 2015.

17 See e.g. Assmann, Aleida. "Three Memory Anchors: Affect, Symbol, Trauma." *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies: Proceedings of the Third Summer Academy of the Working Group Modernity and Islam Held at the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society in Beirut*. Ed. Angelika Neuwirth. Würzburg: Ergon, 2001. 57. Print. Beiruter Texte und Studien.

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Redeemed from Politics:
Notions of Literary Legitimacy
in the Lebanese Literary Field

Felix Lang

"My way out of politics was literature...I could find all my answers there." This is the answer Hala Kawtharani (Hāla Kawtharānī),[1] a Lebanese author in her thirties, gave me when we talked about her first encounter—while studying at university—with the work of the 'war' generation (Kawtharani, pers. comm.).[2] For anyone familiar with the novels she is referring to here—in essence the most prominent works of early 1990s Lebanese literature—, it might not be immediately evident how they would in fact be an avenue for leaving politics behind. Hoda Barakat's (Hudā Barakāt) *Stone of Laughter*,[3] Rashid al-Daif's (Rashīd al-Ḍaʿīf) *Dear Mr. Kawabata*,[4] or Elias Khoury's (Ilyās Khūrī) *The Journey of Little Gandhi*,[5] to name just three titles explicitly mentioned over the course of the interview, deal with the devastating effects the country's 1975–1990 civil war had on individuals and society as whole, a conflict that confirmed the failure of ideologies, shattered a host of dearly-held truths and beliefs, and resulted in a crisis of meaning. These novels deal with what Terry Eagleton once called "politics killing people"; hence, one could assume that readers would find themselves fully immersed in eminently political situations and issues from the first page to the last. In order better to understand statements like Kawatharani's, my aim here is to shed some light on the interconnectedness of politics, literature, and the construction of literary value in the contemporary literary field in Lebanon.

The main argument I wish to pursue is that in Lebanon literature and the author are fundamentally defined in relation to politics. Drawing on interviews and data from long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Beirut from September 2011 to April 2012, as well as published interviews, articles and book reviews, I will begin by showing how literature is cast as a way of deliverance from politics on both an individual and social level. In a second step, I will show how the opposition to politics, one of the paramount values of the literary field, is integrated with and perpetuated through the two major models of what is considered 'legitimate' writing in the Lebanese literary field. In conclusion, I will then briefly sketch how these findings relate to the history of the Lebanese literary field.[6]

Literature, Politics and the Political

To begin with, the notion of politics needs to be clarified. Commonly, a writer like Khoury, an intellectual known throughout the Arab world for his regular interventions in debates ranging from the freedom of speech to the Iraq War and the Arab Spring, would not be categorized as a-political. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it seems useful to adopt a distinction between politics and the political that has become a pervasive feature of political theory and philosophy (Bedorf). In the schema of this distinction, politics denotes the institutions, mechanisms and processes of government, and political representation; the political, on the other hand, is comprised by all those interventions concerning the *polis* that do not take place within or through this formalized and institutionalized framework.

In a (Western) academic context, politics and the political cover all kind of institutions and interventions commonly described with the adjective 'political.' However, my fieldwork data suggest that among Lebanon's writers the use of the attribute 'political' is very much limited to interventions pertaining to what, according to the definition above, is in fact the realm of politics. The political is understood in terms of party politics, characterized by a sectarian communitarian logic. The widespread discrediting of politics and its major actors among the authors, and the wider secular liberal milieu to which they belong, certainly plays a role in this respect. Thus, interventions which would be characterized as political in the Euro-American literary field are explicitly described as a-political or supra-political;[7] authors who we would normally think of as political commentators claim a position outside of politics.[8] Therefore, my claim that literature is defined in opposition to politics is not tantamount to saying that authors shy away from pressing social and political issues and devote themselves to innocuous descriptions of natural beauty or the like.

In fact, it is often precisely by addressing issues such as these that authors assert their opposition to the field of politics. The following two quotes may serve to illustrate how the majority of Lebanese writers reject outright the Lebanese political system. Here is how the Francophone poet and novelist Hyam Yared (Hiyām Yārid)[9] develops this thought in an interview:

> Je pense [...] que la société libanaise parfaite serait une communauté d'électrons libres régie par un système laïque. C'est impossible au Liban où la constitution définit déjà l'emprise communautaire. Cela génère féodalité, clans etc. (qtd. in Chemla)

> I think that the perfect Lebanese society would be a community of free electrons regulated by a secular system. This is impossible in Lebanon, where the influence of sectarianism is inscribed in the constitution, leading to feudalism, clans and so forth.[10]

Iman Humaydan (Īmān Ḥumaydān)[11] has expressed a similar idea:

> I hope that this new generation realizes that we can't go on as we are, that we can't continue to define ourselves by the religious or ethnic community we belong to. We must really, with real commitment, try to work towards a state, a real state—which so far has never existed—a state in which we all see ourselves as citizens and not as sectarians—not as members of a sect, not as members of a community, but as Lebanese. (qtd. in Mirza)

Both writers position themselves in opposition to politics in these statements. The logic of the field of politics, understood to work on the basis of sectarian divisions and patronage, is seen to stand in the way of the development of a viable, secular democracy. Apart from illustrating the rejection of the logic at work in the field of politics, these statements also provide us with an impression of how politics is delineated from what would be commonly understood as the political. Writers are far from disinterested in things concerning the *polis*—they only reject its current institutions, political parties, and the sectarian logic they embody.

None of the writers I spoke to had much to say in defense of Lebanon's political system;[12] quite generally, it was considered to be undermined by sectarian structures, to be corrupt and undemocratic, in short a failure that in the long run will prove unable to provide the Lebanese people with lasting peace. In itself this view is far from extraordinary and likely to be shared by a fair number of Lebanese and foreign observers alike. What is more remarkable, however, is just how central the theme of politics is in defining 'legitimate' literature in the Lebanese literary field.

Literature as Redemption from Politics: The Individual

When we look at the way Lebanese novelists have talked and written about literature over the past twenty years, we find that one of the most persistent and widespread tropes is how writing is cast as a personal deliverance from politics. Literature and the author are not simply set at a distance from the machinations of the field of politics: they are directly opposed to it. Thus, the idea of a redemption through art features constantly in the biographies of writers in Lebanon, irrespective of their age. Many of the younger writers who experienced the civil war as children or adolescents (what I term the 'second generation') locate the stirring of their interest in writing and literature in the seemingly endless hours spent in shelters or their homes while the conflict raged outside. When schools were closed and their parents forbid them from playing outside, reading remained one of the few ways to pass the time—also during power cuts when the television failed to work (Abirached, pers. comm.; Najjar).[13] Rabee Jaber (Rabīʿ Jābir)[14] also places his first memory of writing in the context of the civil war, when he produced a series of philosophical texts during the long days of shelling in 1983 (*al-Nahār*). In many of the accounts given by writers, the reading/writing child is juxtaposed to the exploding shells, constructing an opposition between the world of war and the world of letters.

The idea of literature as a means to deal with the experience of war, itself seen as a product of the essentially incomprehensible laws of the field of politics, is also reflected in the notion, stressed by many authors, of writing as a cathartic experience. "J'écris parce qu'un jour, j'ai commencé à écrire sous la pression de la guerre" ('I write because one day I started writing under the pressure of the civil war,' Zein, "Il n'est de vie" 183), writes Ramy Zein [Rāmī Zayn],[15] while the novelist Humaydan believes that "writing and publishing gave [her] another life after the war" (pers. comm.):

> I wrote *B as in Beirut* and, by doing so, I was extracting this pain out of me and putting it on paper, extracting the violence that war did to me and to my mind, and my general state of being. (ibid.)

Yared thought that "l'écriture et la littérature m'ont sauvés des non-dits et du silence" ('writing and literature saved me from the silence and what was left unsaid,' pers. comm.). Elias Khoury also sought refuge in the world of letters from a political reality that had become increasingly oppressive in its incomprehensibility:

> In 1976 I stopped fighting. […] I think it had a lot to do with the feeling that there was nothing to be seen any more. The socio-political reality was a nightmare. Nobody knew any more what he was doing, who was fighting whom, why we were fighting each other...I began my work as an intellectual. (qtd. in Mejcher 133)

Eventually it was literature, Khoury claims, which opened his eyes for the shortcomings of political ideology or what we might call the logic of the field of politics:

> [In my novels critical of the war] I used to write the opposite of what I was living but I used to really believe in the ideology of politics and I used to think that literature was something else. Then I discovered that life and literature cannot be separated so much, and that there must be something wrong in our optimistic ideological approach. […] Ideology cannot work in literature, and it cannot really work in life either because it covers reality and it covers atrocities and I cannot be part of that. (134)

The redemptive quality of literature is premised on a dichotomy between culture and nature. The war is cast as a return to a primordial, natural state of being—"primitive," "tribal," "hors de l'histoire" (primitive, tribal, out of history) in the words of the author and cultural editor at *al-Safīr*, Abbas Beydoun (ʿAbbās Bayḍūn) (pers. comm.). It is, in one word, uncivilized; an idea expressed by distinguished critic Youmna al-Id (Yumnā al-ʿĪd) in an early work on Lebanese Civil War literature:

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الحرب فعل تدمير...تدمير كل شيء: لبشر وما بنوه، التاريخ والحضارة، الحياة والذاكرة. وبهذا المعنى لا يمكن الحرب أن تكون عاملاً رئيسياً في الثقافة، لأن ما يدمر هو ضد وخارج، وليس في الحرب خارج الثقافة وضدها، وما هو في الثقافة ومن أجلها، أو معها، هو المقاومة، مقاومة الحرب. (15)

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> War is destructive...it destroys everything: humans and what they built, history and civilization, life and memory. In this sense war cannot be a major factor of culture, because that which destroys and is aimed 'against' it lies 'outside,' and not 'in' culture. War is outside culture and against it, and what works 'in' culture, with it or for its sake, is the resistance, the resistance against war.

The resistance to war is equated with resisting a sectarian political system seen as lying at the heart of the vicious circle of recurring violent conflict. While the 1975–1990 civil war may have been the formative conflict for most Lebanese novelists alive today, we also need to keep in mind that the conflict is not seen as having ended with the Ṭāʾif Agreement of 1990: it has just continued in various guises throughout the authors' lives.[16] It is through war and violence that the field of politics makes its influence felt in the lives of the authors and the Lebanese population at large. Yared, in the following extract from an interview, makes clear the relationship she sees between writing and the socio-political system:

> Chez moi [l'écriture] a commencé par la révolte, au moment où je me suis opposée à des impositions familiales, sociales, culturelles, des stéréotypes de toutes sortes. Après, il faut décider de faire un choix: choisir cette écriture pour elle-même, après qu'elle se soit construite contre des ordres archaïques de penser. (qtd. in Chemla)

> For me, writing began as a revolt, at the moment where I opposed myself to familial, social and cultural impositions and all kind of stereotypes. Afterwards, you have to make a choice: choose writing for its own sake, after it has constructed itself in opposition to archaic patterns of thought.

Common to all these accounts is how the civilizing force of literature makes it possible for the authors to go transcend the state of savagery into which their compatriots had descended. In the last decade of war, while other youths might have been out on the streets bullying neighbors or harassing women, killing or getting killed, Rabee Jaber was writing philosophical texts, Ramy Zein penning a first novel he would later denounce (pers. comm.), and Zeina Abirached listening to her neighbor reading Balzac (pers. comm.). While other erstwhile militants might suffer from repressed traumata, harboring feelings of revenge which may feed into the next outbreak in the cycle of violence, Iman Humaydan and Rashid al-Daif are committing their grievances to paper, extracting the venom and breaking the vicious circle of aggression and counter-aggression.

Literature as Redemption from Politics: Society

As we have seen, writing and reading are understood as a personal, individual mode of resisting 'the war' and hence, by extension, the field of politics. In reading and writing the au-

thors contest the dominion of the forces of politics by retreating into a "world apart" (Bourdieu 48), a world in which the laws of politics are suspended. It is in and through literature that wounds can be healed and a certain degree of agency attained.[17]

However, the belief in the redeeming qualities of literature and culture generally goes further. At various times Lebanese writers have professed their belief in the power of culture to redeem, as it were, the political from politics. This idea probably became most clear in the aftermath of the civil war in the 1990s, when writers, critics, and artists were at the forefront of a movement arguing for a thorough debate on the country's past; in stark contrast, the economic and political elites—the players in the field of politics—were determined to let bygones be bygones and look ahead to the future. As best they could, the players in the cultural field, be they journalists, architects or directors, made the war a subject of their work in the hope to kick start a truly national debate on the violent past, a debate that was always connected to a secular democratic political project (Haugbolle 74–84).

Although the debate on remembering the war lost steam towards the end of the 1990s, and never had much purchase beyond the country's intellectual elite, the idea that literature had a role to play in salvaging Lebanese society was still very prominent in interviews, especially with younger writers in 2011. Consider the following quote from a talk by Humaydan:

> During the war, we got afraid of the idea of losing what we thought we possessed. As a result, literature was transformed into an attempt to archive the country, piece-by-piece, place-by-place, fragment-by-fragment. It was the fear of loss that made our literature take the nature of an archiving device, where one needed to register the slightest detail, as if literature had a mission of salvation. ("Writing and Memory")

It is not only her explicit use of the word "salvation" but the idea expressed: literature in a way makes up for the failures of politics, which has led to the destruction of the country in the first place. Going a step further, Francophone novelist Yared sees art and culture as indispensable for human liberation:

> Culture and art can lead us to freedom, or at least put us on its road. Walking on it is a matter of constant breaking free. Therefore only creativity as human beings, artists, and politicians can take place, can be defined, and can define humanity and societies. If art gets us free, then a free nation can be born. ("Writings from Lebanon")

The "free nation," we may assume, is one whose citizens are no longer subject to those "archaic patterns of thought" Yared had criticized in the previous quote.

Politics and Literary Value

The self-fashioning of the authors and their notions of literature and culture show that the opposition to the field of politics is central among what Bourdieu calls the values of the field. In his model these values are certain principles over which the struggle for symbolic capital is waged. In order to gain recognition, authors must show themselves and their texts to be in agreement with these values. It is this agreement which confers legitimacy on literature and writers alike. Thus, independence from politics becomes an important element in the definitions of legitimate literature currently prevalent in the Lebanese literary field.

The definitions of legitimate literature explicitly and often implicitly advanced by writers and critics do not necessarily add up to consistent models. Defining literature, in the

present context, is best understood as a social process: It is a way of relating to other writers, drawing lines between different groups, and defining one's position in the world of literature. Here I am following Bourdieu, who, in his seminal study of the nineteenth century literary field in France, noted that "the majority of notions which artists and critics employ to define themselves or to define their adversaries are weapons and stakes in struggles" (297). Literary value in this case is not a quality inherent to a text, but a function of social relations between writers, publishers, the book market, and critics.[18]

In Lebanon it is possible to discern two major models for legitimate literary production. A neo-realist paradigm[19] wherein author and text are an integral part of a socio-political reality and the literary value of the texts is a function of its relationship to this reality; and secondly, a universalist paradigm where the author-figure is dissociated from social reality and literary value is absolute. While the former is more closely associated with the local literary field, the latter is more in touch with the notions of legitimate literature prevailing at the center of the global literary field. These two paradigms for literary production with their rather different ways of constructing literary value do not always sit comfortably with each other. In fact, they are contradictory in many points. In criticizing literature in particular, authors will freely rely and draw on elements from both paradigms. Yet, as long as we see the defining of literature as a social practice rather than an enterprise with the aim to construct an abstract and coherent ideal model of literature, this fact is hardly surprising. What might be more revealing and fruitful is that independence from the field of politics is of central importance in both paradigms.

The Neo-Realist Paradigm

In the Lebanese literary field, and possibly in the wider Arab literary field, the dominant model for literary production can be described as 'neo-realist.' Richard Jacquemond, who coined this term in his study of the Egyptian literary field, lists the following elements:

> [...] an attempt to grasp 'reality', notably in its marginal aspects and those ignored by other forms of social discourse; the use of dialogic or polyphonic narrative methods that express the plurality and fragmentation of reality; the impossibility of giving a totalizing or univocal representation of reality; the refoundation of identity through the exploration of either elite and literate or popular forms of heritage [...]; and the liberation of the potential of Arabic language by bringing idiolects and sociolects together in the literary language. (*Conscience* 219)

All these elements are used in Lebanese authors' definitions of what makes good or legitimate literature and what the role of the writer should be. The "grasping of reality" and especially its marginalized aspects is maybe one of the most important criteria, one frequently used for positioning in the literary field.[20] In fact, a closer relationship to reality is what is taken to be the distinguishing feature of the new Lebanese literary tradition that developed during the civil war. As such, it is contrasted to the Romantic idealizing image painted of Lebanon in the prewar years. In the words of Abbas Beydoun, himself an eminent representative of this new literary tradition, prewar literature "did not embrace completely Lebanese reality," failing to deal with the "religious conflicts, social divides, the social tensions. Literature avoided to talk about reality." The first novels on the war reveal "a much more intimate, a much closer connection to reality" however: "Lebanon is no longer idealized, it's a fierce, bloody, abominable reality" (pers. comm.).

But realism is not only called upon to mark the break between artistic generations and support the consecrated authors' claims to dominant positions in the field. It is also used as a means for precisely marking one's position within the field. Thus, the novelist Ramy Zein bases his criticism of Francophone literature on the fact that its authors, mostly part of the Francophone bourgeoisie, belong to "a different planet" and write "in a language which does not reflect the country's cultural diversity" (pers.comm.).

As a further example we might cite a newspaper article by the Arabophone novelist and journalist Rabee Jaber in which he voices the same idea, postulating the duties of the fiction writer as follows:

لا يُطلب من الكاتب غير هذا: أن يكون صادقاً. أن يكتب من أجل الكتابة. أن يكتب لكي يكون مرآة العالم. (Jābir)

> Nothing is being demanded from the writer save this: that he be sincere. That he write for the sake of writing. That he write in order to be a mirror to the world.

As a part of this project of grasping reality, introducing different socio- and idiolects, accompanied by the general ambition to rejuvenate literary language which Jacquemond marks out as constitutive of the neo-realist paradigm, is also important in Lebanese postwar literature. Elias Khoury's introduction of colloquial Arabic into his novels, not only on the level of dialogue but of syntax more widely, is a perfect example. He explained his motives in an interview with Sonja Mejcher, making clear the connection between a fuller, more realistic depiction of the world and the use of the colloquial: "[a]s long as the official, written language is not opened to the spoken language, it is a total repression because it means that the spoken, social experience is marginalized" (Mejcher 138).

Not only the veterans of civil war literature but younger authors as well, such as the Anglophone The Amazin' Sardine,[21] who often renders dialogue in Lebanese dialect, take up this line of reasoning:

> When an English person thinks what the fuck am I thinking, he writes: what the fuck am I thinking. When I think: *shū ʿam bfakkir*, I can't write that. I have to retranslate my words into some kind of obscure archaic Arabic that does not really speak for me. *Mā hādha alladhi ufakkiru fīhi* and I would never say that, I wouldn't even think that. (pers. comm.)

Like Khoury, Amazin' Sardine criticizes the use of a certain language—*fuṣḥā* Arabic in this case—on the basis of its inability to fully reflect his experience of the world.

The idea of literature or the writer as a mirror of society, which we encountered in Jaber's text above and is very common in the local literary field,[22] seems to point to a rather positivist notion of reality. But writers in fact actually agree that fictional writing should encompass more than just objectively observable phenomena. Indeed, it is literature's ability to convey a wider vision of reality, capable of including different and at times contradicting narratives, offering different points of view without having to establish one as 'right' or 'correct,' which ensures a somewhat privileged access to reality. As Jaber writes:

أنظرْ إلى هذا العالم واكتبْ ما ترى. ولا تنسَ الخيال. تذكرْ دائماً فلاسفة القرن التاسع عشر: الواحد يحتاج إلى الخيال حتى يرى في الأشياء لا ما صنعته الطبيعة بالفعل ولكن ما حاولت صنعه أيضاً ولم تستطع. (Jābir)

> Look at this world and write what you see. And don't forget the imagination. Always remember the nineteenth-century philosophers: one needs imagination to see in the things not only what nature really made, but also what she tried to make and wasn't able to.

On the formal literary level, this view of reality is translated into the "dialogic or poly-phonic narrative methods" Jacquemond counts amongst the elements of the neo-realist paradigm.

Literature, we realize, is conceived of as a specific mode of apprehending and knowing the world. Here the neo-realist understanding of literature draws from a traditional Arab idea of *al-adab*, which assigns literature the double function of instruction and entertain-ment (Jacquemond, *Entre scribes* 25). As Jacquemond remarks, the novel in particular has traditionally drawn its legitimacy from its claim of being a "truthful discourse" (*Conscience* 88), an idea still present in contemporary Lebanon.[23] Contemporary Lebanese writers might prefer to speak of a discourse of 'truths' rather than a singular, monolithic truth; they might have replaced the idea of educating their readers with the idea of offering different perspec-tives, most notably those perspectives obscured by the dominant forces in the field of poli-tics. Yet, ultimately they have remained committed to writing and reading as an emancipa-tory undertaking. Writing is a mode of critique, a way of "questioning preconceived ideas" (Humaydan, pers. comm.). Offering counter-hegemonic readings of history, different per-spectives and truths, literature in general and the novel in particular "permits societies or groups to think about themselves" as Khoury put it in an interview in the early 1990s ("Politics and Culture"). As the neo-realist paradigm claims, it is through literature that we arrive at a fuller understanding of the world.

In the neo-realist paradigm literary value is created in and through the relationships the au-thors and their texts have to a concrete historical and social reality. The use of colloquial lan-guage is not commendable as such; it is valued because it is necessary for adequately repre-senting a specific social reality. Counter-hegemonic truths only make sense vis-à-vis precisely defined hegemonic truths related to a specific historical situation. Text and author are thus tied to a specific social context. Of course the text, as a product of art, can and does transcend this situation. This, however, is not essentially required in the neo-realist paradigm.

It is not difficult to see how this model for legitimate literary production integrates the values of the field and, in particular, the opposition to politics: The different elements of the neo-realist paradigm implicitly formulate a social role for the writer. The value of literature is—not exclusively but to a considerable part—determined by its power to contest the logic operating in the field of politics. The power it has to give a voice to those silenced by the dominant discourses of the literary field and the power it has to furnish a more complete picture of reality come together to form the basis of an emancipatory project, offering a mode of knowing and understanding of the world—purportedly—uncorrupted by political and religious ideologies, by communitarian and confessional thinking. Legitimate literature is literature that contests the hegemony of the field of politics.

The Universalist Paradigm

The model of literature sketched above is the dominant one in the literary field. Yet, it is in-sufficient to explain a whole set of tropes writers used in defining legitimate writing in in-terviews and conversations. Arguably, these tropes can be grouped in what I propose to call a 'universalist' paradigm for literary production, a paradigm that, in its basic assumptions, differs markedly from the neo-realist one described by Jacquemond.

The universalist paradigm shares many elements with models of literary production prevalent at the center of the global literary field. In the contemporary Euro-American field, literature is not commonly understood to have any precise political function. As Pascale

Casanova argued in her study of the global literary field, these central literary spaces displaying a high degree of autonomy have become depoliticized, while the literatures of the periphery are more likely to embody the notion of a political function of writing:

> The political dependence of emerging literary spaces is signaled by the recourse to a functionalist aesthetic and, taking the criteria of literary modernity as measurement, the most conservative narrative, novelistic and poetical forms. Conversely, […] the autonomy enjoyed by the most literary countries is marked chiefly by the depoliticization of literature: the complete disappearance of popular or national themes, the appearance of 'pure' writing—texts that, freed from the obligation to help to develop a particular national identity, have no social or political 'function'—and, as an aspect of this, the emergence of formal experimentation, which is to say of forms detached from political purpose and unencumbered by nonliterary conceptions of literature. (199–200)

The neo-realist model of literature prevalent in the Lebanese literary field is clearly at odds with the "dehistorisized, denationalized, and depoliticized conception of literature" (Casanova 23) posited as universal by the institutions of consecration in the global literary field. Nonetheless, recognition by the institutions of the global literary field remains one of the major aims of Lebanese and, more generally, Arab writers. The struggle for recognition in Paris, London or New York is fought, however, on the basis of a different notion of legitimate literature. In order to lay claim to a position in the global literary field, Lebanese authors have to profess as their own the values underpinning what is considered legitimate literary production.[24]

The basic difference between the two models for legitimate literary production lies in the way they construct literary value. As we have seen, writing and reading in the neo-realist paradigm are very much a means to achieving a specific end: In writing counter-hegemonic views of reality are produced with the aim of subverting the narratives produced by the dominant players in the field of politics. In this paradigm literary value depends to a significant extent on its relationship to a specific socio-political context; it is relative. In the universalist paradigm on the other hand, the literary value is posited as absolute. Whether a novel is deemed good does not depend on the social, economic or historical context in which it was written; nor does it depend on the text's capacity to redeem its author from the traumata of war or to present the stories of the marginalized. Rather, it retains its value outside the context of its inception.

To become absolute, and by the same token universal, the texts need to be dissociated from the author as a social being, otherwise they remain bound to a specific socio-economic reality, a literary market, and the struggle for recognition played out amongst the players in the literary field. The author, no longer a social actor, is now replaced by a mythical author-figure, what Bourdieu calls the "uncreated creator" (190–91). Lebanese writers and critics display what we could call tropes of self-effacement, indicating the importance of the notion of this "uncreated creator" in the literary field. Quite generally, the authors I interviewed were more eager to talk about their novels than about themselves: "it is not important how I conceive myself" Elias Khoury advised me a couple of minutes into our interview, adding that he thought I had come to talk about the characters in his novels (pers. comm.). Interestingly, this tendency was more pronounced amongst the consecrated writers, possibly oriented more towards the global literary field.

That the necessity of self-effacement is also used for positioning in the literary field is witnessed by Rabee Jaber's remark dismissing self-important fellow writers:

غير مهم كثيراً ما يحويه كتابك بين الغلافين الأول والأخير. فقط الغلاف الأول مهم: هنا يكتبون اسمك. والغلاف الأخير أيضاً: هنا

يتحدثون عنك. هذا هو الأساسي. لا أحد يقرأ كتباً هذه الأيام أصلًا. (Jābir)

> It doesn't really matter what your book contains between the front cover and the back. Only the cover is important: that's where they put your name. And the back as well: that's where they write about you. That's what is essential. Nobody reads books these days anyway.

Across the board, writers saw interest in the person of the author as a sign of poor or "mundane" cultural journalism. Ramy Zein, for instance, who collaborated in the first couple of issues of the Francophone literary monthly *L'orient littéraire*, identified the emphasis placed on interviews at the expense of reviews as one of the main reasons for his quitting the project; book-signings—the "landmark events of Beirut literary life" as Zein called them with a fair dose of irony (pers. comm.)—were widely regarded as unpleasant but necessary concessions to the publishers' financial interests.

Arguably, the operation of dissociating the text from its author as a social being equally contributes to defining the Lebanese literary field in opposition to politics. Conceiving of the author as a lone genius and "uncreated creator" effectively removes them from the field of politics and the purview of its sectarian communitarian logic. In literature a family name or a religious affiliation, which in many ways determine the lives of Lebanese people, are supposed to be irrelevant.

The "de-socialization" of text and author is complemented by the act of situating them in the wider tradition of world literature, which amounts to a claim to universal literary value. When Elias Khoury told me he felt he belonged to the generation of Dostoevsky (pers. comm.), this was mainly a jocular way of criticizing a narrow understanding of the notion of the generation, which he felt was too biological. But in doing so he replicated a pattern that emerged in all my interviews with writers and those published in the local cultural press: Whenever writers were asked about their influences, most of the authors named would be part of the canon of Euro-American literary tradition. The names of Russian writers, such as Gogol, Chekhov, or for that matter Dostoevsky, and French authors such as Gide, Balzac, Racine and Corneille would be the most frequently mentioned. While Francophone writers emphasized the French literary tradition, Arabophone writers would occasionally include classical Arab poets in their list.

Cultural journalism, and reviews in particular, offer other instances of how Lebanese literature is incorporated into the dominant Euro-American literary tradition. Comparisons were frequently drawn between a Lebanese author's work and the canonized writers of the global literary field. For example, one reviewer placed Jaber's novel *Al-iʿtirāfāt* (*Confessions*, 2008) into the tradition of autobiographical writing from Rousseau, Gide, Sartre, Yourcenar, and De Quincey (ʿĪd, Rāshīl). In another case, Lebanese Civil War literature more widely is compared to canonized war literature such as the work of Malraux, Barbusse, and Tolstoy (Dūrliyān, "Riwāʾī yasḥar al-tārīkh").

The claim to universality is yet another way of asserting distance to the field of politics. Writers claiming to be part of the universal tradition of World Literature are in fact joining, as it were, an abstract lineage removed from political and economic power relations. In this world a writer's success does not depend on their nationality, religion, financial means, or the color of their skin. Nor is it essential that they lend their voice to the marginalized. As an "uncreated creator," the writer is mysteriously endowed with the capacity to produce literary value.

Politics and the History of the Literary Field

The literary field in Lebanon is fundamentally defined by its relationship to the field of politics: Evident in the way the reputedly redemptive power of literature is emphasized by writers from all sections of the field, the role it plays in their autobiographical narratives and more generally their self-fashioning as writers, as well as the prominence given to certain elements of the paradigms for legitimate literature.

This importance of politics presents an interesting twist to Bourdieu's model. The main threat to the autonomy of the literary field in nineteenth-century France, he argues, resided in a production geared towards marketability (121–27). In Lebanon however, we do not find a comparable segment of low-brow literature profitable enough to enable the writer to make a living. Historically, the literary field has been concerned, at least since the 1980s, with asserting its autonomy vis-à-vis the field of politics. The appearance of the civil war novel, which later rose to become the dominant mode of literary production, a position it arguably still holds today, has been crucial in the formation of the literary field. Widely thought to represent the beginning of a distinctly Lebanese novelistic tradition,[25] the civil war novel was the child of a group of leftist writers and erstwhile combatants like Elias Khoury and Rashid al-Daif, who, as little as ten years earlier, might have endorsed fervently an idea of literature as an instrument of class struggle—a literature at the service of politics.[26] However, witnessing Lebanese society slide into a class-war gone wrong, the authors increasingly distanced themselves from all kinds of ideologies and absolute truths. In the words of Abbas Beydoun, the country's writers and intellectuals formed a "third sector" in the divided city of Beirut and "condemning the war [became] the duty of a writer in Lebanon" (pers. comm.). In other words, the writers took a step back from the field of politics. They no longer positioned themselves as players in the field of politics but in opposition to it. They thereby asserted the relative autonomy of literary production, in Bourdieu's model a precondition for constituting the literary field as a space with its own set of values and rules. In this sense, the Lebanese literary field in its present form is very much founded on this opposition. Its hard-won autonomy, its very existence as a "world apart" is premised on the rejection of politics.

Notes

1   Hala Kawtharani, born 1977, has published three novels to date. Her first novel, *Al-usbūʿ al-akhīr* (*The Last Week*, 2006), dealt with the issue of civil war memory.

2   Interviews I conducted during my fieldwork are referenced with the date they took place in the reference list. Quotes are from interview protocols, as most authors did not wish to be recorded.

3   Hoda Barakat, born 1952, is one of Lebanon's most highly acclaimed female novelists writing in Arabic.

4   Rashid al-Daif, born 1945, is one of Lebanon's best-known novelists. Among many other novels he is the author of *Dear Mr. Kawabata* (1995), a work regarded as one of the most important examples of Lebanese post-civil war literature.

5   Elias Khoury was born in 1948. He published his first novel, translated as *Little Mountain*, in 1977. Since then he has become one of the most widely acclaimed Arab authors as well as an influential intellectual in the Arab world and beyond. His work is widely translated.

6   My analysis is based on Bourdieu's concept of the literary field. Bourdieu envisions the literary field as the relatively autonomous space of literary production. This space is characterized by the relations between different authors who find themselves competing for symbolic capital. This competition is governed by a particular set of rules and values which are relatively independent from the logic of other fields, such as the fields of politics and economics. Writers who seek recognition must show themselves and their literary products to be in keeping with the values of the field; only in this case are they recognized as legitimate by the other players (Bourdieu).

7   One example is the way Hyam Yared and Iman Humaydan (on the authors see below) conceived of the newly founded division of the PEN club in Lebanon, which they hoped would provide a "non-political" (Humaydan) or "supra-political" (Yared) platform for writers (pers. comm. February and March 2012 respectively). Yared also said she preferred to think of her commitment as "social and humanist" rather than political, because political to her meant 14 March and 8 March (the main rivalling parliamentary blocs).

8   This in itself is not particular of Lebanon. For Bourdieu, it is one of the defining features of the classic intellectual that they intervene in the political field in the name of supposedly universal values and principles which are in force in the literary field: "[…] the intellectual asserts himself against the specific laws of politics (those of Realpolitik and reasons of state) as defender of universal principles that are in fact the result of the universalization of the specific principles of his own universe [i.e. the literary field]" (130).

9   Hyam Yared, born in 1975, is one of the most prominent Francophone authors of the younger generation. She has so far published several collections of poetry and three novels. The latest is *La malédiction* (2012). She works for the Lebanese magazine *Femme* and the French radio station *France Culture*.

10 All translations are, if not indicated otherwise, my own.

11 Iman Humaydan, born 1956, is a Lebanese novelist and journalist writing in Arabic. She has published three novels so far. Her first novel, *B as in Beirut,* has been translated into a number of European languages.

12 I conducted interviews with twenty-three Lebanese novelists, most of them resident in Beirut.

13 Zeina Abirached (b. 1981) is a Francophone graphic novelist. Alexandre Najjar is the author of numerous historic novels in French. Working as a lawyer and journalist, he is an important figure in the Francophone segment of the literary field.

14 Rabee Jaber, born in 1972, is one of the best-known Lebanese writers of his generation. Since the early 1990s he has published close to twenty novels. In 2011, he won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. He is the editor of the cultural supplement of *al-Ḥayāt* newspaper.

15 Ramy Zein was born in 1967. He teaches Francophone literature at the Université Saint Joseph in Beirut and Tripoli. He has published three novels, most recently *La levée des couleurs* (2011).

16 The claim that the war never ended but continued in different forms has become something of a cliché in the discourse of Lebanese war memory. It appeared in interviews with most writers.

17 This point is made at length in Cooke's work on the "Beirut Decentrists."

18 I am not concerned here with the single author's notion of literature as much as with collecting a number of ideas and elements used in definitions of literature which are current across the literary field and are used by most of its writers in their bids to establish their credentials.

19 I borrow this term from Jacquemond, who used it in his analysis of the Egyptian literary field. See Jacquemond, *Conscience*.

20 Arguably, the 'grasping of reality' comprises all other elements of the neo-realist paradigm rather than being one of them, as Jacquemond seems to suggest. Eventually, polyphonic narratives, the use of idiolects, heritage or the rejection of 'univocal representations of reality' all form part of the endeavor to truthfully portray reality.

21 The Amazin' Sardine is an Anglophone author born in 1984. He has published two collections of poetry. At the time of my fieldwork, he was working on a novel and gave regular readings/performances. He teaches English at the Lebanese American University.

22 See Yared; Khoury, "Politics and Culture"; for reviews see Abū Nāḍir, Rayḥānī.

23 See, for instance, the following review of a novel by Jaber: Dūrliyān, "Al-ḥarb."

24 Translation was a central issue for most authors I spoke to. Writers would routinely inform me about the number of languages into which their work had been translated as a way of establishing their credentials; untranslated writers saw translation as the only way to fulfill their dream to be able to live from writing. The fact that two of the most prestigious awards for Arabic literature, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction and the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature include the translation of the winning works into English also points to the importance of translation.

25 While novels were written in Lebanon before 1975, authors and many academics now agree that the civil war novel marked the beginning of a distinctly Lebanese novelistic tradition.

26 In his novel *Dear Mr. Kawabata* al-Daif uses passages from his own early work in which he glorified political martyrdom (Neuwirth).

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The Empty Chair:
On the Politics of Spectatorial Situatedness in the Performances of Rabih Mroué

Yvonne Albers

> [T]he reader I am addressing […] has not the ignorance of the noble savage to whom everything has to be explained on the basis of principles; he is not a spirit or a tabula rasa. […] I reveal certain aspects of the universe to him; I take advantage of what he knows to attempt to teach him what he does not know. Suspended between total ignorance and all knowingness, he has a definite stock of knowledge which varies from moment to moment and which is enough to reveal his historicity. In actual fact, he is not an instantaneous consciousness, a pure timeless affirmation of freedom, nor does he soar above history; he is involved in it. (Sartre, "For Whom Does One Write?" 69)

> 'Not-knowing' is [...] my starting point. When I present a work, I come with no knowledge to give to, or to impose upon, the audience. […] I continuously reveal my shortcomings and lack of knowledge by sharing my questions and doubts with the audience, as I think this is precisely the confrontation with my own and others' lack of knowledge that makes one want to question the world we live in. (Mroué qtd. in Hlavajova, Winder, and Costinaş 13)

The Probable // Intro

How can an artist engage in a kind of work that supports "a diverse, complex, and comprehensive dialogue," that emphasizes differences rather than "simplifies thorny issues into easy binaries," and that puts forward "abstract ideas such as justice, freedom, or humanity without falling into the trap of formulating closed concepts that serve power politics" (Mroué, "What Has Slipped Away" 115)?

In an essay published in an anthology on the artistic legacy of the Syrian dramatist Saʿadallah Wannous (Saʿdallāh Wannūs), Lebanese actor, director and visual artist Rabih Mroué (Rabīʿ Mrūwah) elaborates on these questions and arranges them around a central concern: The social and therein political significance of theater today. Mroué here defines the political potential of theater in terms of its capacity to transgress the real as "a space of probability, […] in which one can play with the law, […] to break taboos and destabilize rigid beliefs" (ibid.). Especially in countries where "the civil state finds itself weakened in the presence of the security state," the importance of theater is grounded, as Mroué explains elsewhere, in its relationship to the court trial: "In theater as in courts, the trial takes place in front of an audience, the only difference being that the theater, at least in principle, does not issue any judgements in favor of this or that party" ("Foreword" x).

The 1960s can be seen as the period in which what can be called a 'political theater' was formed in Lebanon (Bellan 30). Since then, we find other approaches that also place particular attention on the audience by drawing a link between theater and the trial, using the stage as a space for public contestation. During the civil war in the 1970s and early 1980s, the experimental and politically engaged theater artist Roger Assaf (Rūjī ʿAssāf) turned away from the classical stage as a springboard of the revolution to come and a like-

minded leftist bourgeois audience, aiming to bring the theater back to the 'ordinary people.' In his *Masraḥ al-Ḥakawātī* (*Ḥakawātī Theater*), he opened his stage for the socially and politically disadvantaged. Here, an audience of workers, farmers, and refugees got the chance to tell, discuss and contest their stories and fate by directly participating in the theatrical performance, an approach that sought to activate those whose voices remain usually unheard and to create a feeling of identity by recalling a shared, collective memory (Pannewick 260–70; Bellan 33–40).

In comparison to Assaf's idea of a committed theater that addresses a specific local audience with their specific existential needs as an underprivileged part of Lebanese society, Mroué, as I will argue here, also centers on the spectator as the crucial element which characterizes theater as a political space. But unlike Assaf and a generation of committed artists who became politicized in the 1960s and 1970s, Mroué, born in 1967 and part of an artistic milieu commonly framed as Lebanon's 'postwar' or 'post-*Ṭāʾif*' generation, approaches the question of the audience from a rather different angle: "Theater stresses differences rather than similarities; it stresses confrontation rather than agreement. It is a place for uncertainty, a place for the struggle of ideas […] in the presence of an alert audience […]" ("Foreword" xi).

The following analysis strives to explain this specific position of the spectator in the theatrical approach taken by Mroué. It will show how his conceptual approach undertakes a critical examination of *spectatorial situatedness*, revealing that it is not the artist and his intention, but first and foremost the spectator who brings the 'politics' into theater. With a genealogical look at two of Mroué's early stage works, I will show how spectatorial reception, as a production of knowledge that is historically and locally embedded, turned out to have a strong and powerful impact that influenced the 'message' of Mroué's early stage work *Three Posters* (*Thalāthat mulṣaqāt,* 2000, together with Elias Khoury [Ilyās Khūrī]) and restricted the message the performance was initially meant to communicate; in a second step, I shall look at how Mroué's subsequent work *Looking for a Missing Employee* (*Al-baḥth ʿan muwaẓẓaf mafqūd,* 2003) then took this matter seriously, investigating and actively exposing how spectatorial situatedness threatens communication between an artist and his audience and to what extent this insight provokes a re-definition of artistic commitment and its realm. Although the performance is rooted in and refers to the specific context of postwar Lebanon, it questions the idea of a local spectator as addressee, an idea that had long characterized the discourse on artistic commitment.[1] In the light of the ongoing internationalization of contemporary artistic production from the Middle East, and with the interest of this volume on the longevity of *iltizām* as a prevailing figure of thought in Arab cultural discourse, this chapter will thus close with a question: Is it still legitimate—or indeed even substantial—to define artistic commitment as necessarily addressed to a specific local or national audience?

Fabricating Truth

> "Please, don't get me wrong…"
> (Khaled Rahhal in *Three Posters*)[2]

Darkness. The audience's gaze is captivated by the only thing visible, a monitor showing a young man wearing a military shirt and a black beret with a five-pointed star, sitting in front of several martyr posters: "I am the martyr comrade Khaled Ahmad Rahhal." Speak-

ing directly into the camera, Khaled openly testifies that he is ready and willing to commit a suicide operation the following day against the Israeli troops who are, as the spectator learns, still occupying southern Lebanon. In the few minutes that comprise this recorded testimony, the aspirant martyr relates his biographical background, such as how he joined the Lebanese Communist Party and the National Resistance Front after 1982, and expresses his whole-hearted conviction that this war against the Israeli occupation is "the war worth dying for." After sending his last regards, the recording stops and starts anew: Khaled will present his testimony two more times, each time slightly different than before, skipping earlier information, adding new passages, meandering between official rhetoric and personal confessions. After the third take, the stage door beneath the monitor opens and reveals Khaled Rahhal, alias Rabih Mroué. While the audience realizes that the testimonies just shown were obviously not real video documents but a live broadcast from the backroom, Mroué introduces himself, Rabih Mroué, as a former resistance fighter. He would now inform the spectators that—other than what was told on the video—Khaled did not die in the south fighting the external enemy, but in one of the internecine battles in West Beirut in 1987. Mroué dedicates what follows to the martyrs of the national resistance: A second video testimony recorded by the martyr Jamal al-Satiʾ, who committed suicide during the war in 1985. Again, the monitor starts by showing a young man in a similar surrounding— but this time the video appears to be 'real' historical footage. Similar to before, this young aspirant is introducing himself and detailing his motifs for the envisaged suicidal operation against the enemy (Israel and its Lebanese allies), now and then stumbling over his own words while facing the camera. And again, the audience will see and hear three different takes of Jamal repeating his last testimony, in each of which he modifies subtle details.

Conceived as an intrinsically self-critical work clearly addressing Lebanon's civil war past (1975–1990), the mixed-media performance *Three Posters*, created and performed by Lebanese writer Elias Khoury and theater artist Rabih Mroué, presents a view on the defeat of the Lebanese Left during the civil war by revealing the role the Left had played in the process of 'making martyrs.' As the example of Khaled Rahhal shows, many leftist suicide missions targeted the 'brother enemy,' hostile Lebanese groups, and served as a key weapon in fighting the civil war. Ensuing from this, the performance considers the paradoxical status of the video document: It is a form of testimony that bears witness to someone who *de facto* does not yet 'exist'; the martyr-to-be presents herself as a martyr before the event of martyrdom (i.e. the mortal self-sacrifice) has even actually taken place. By merging factual, fictitious, historically preserved and recently produced documents, the spectator gains an insight not only into the process of how martyrs, but also how history is made: All these documents, more or less trustworthy, more or less authentic, are just one small part of a huge 'data base' that was able to percolate to the surface of discourse, while the rest of the footage containing all the other historical truths decays in storage.[3] This application of historical video footage in combination with both recorded and live broadcast video material challenges the viewer's intuitive trust in the cogency and self-evidence of documentary images—a strategy Mroué will pursue in his later works, for example *Looking for a Missing Employee*.[4]

With its trip into the archives, the performance pursues a critical historiography that will become a key feature of Lebanese artistic production of the postwar period: Since the Ṭāʾif agreement failed to unify the competing memories of the different sectarian groups after the war, increased attention was paid to the *archive* as the location for storing latent memory, resulting in a remarkable creativeness in the field of documentarist artistic strategies.[5] *Three*

Posters can be characterized as an early attempt at experimenting with archival material, aiming to deconstruct "documentarism as politics of truth" (Steyerl): It focuses on the perspective of the Lebanese Left and its specific postwar narrative, but refuses to uphold one of "the myths of [Lebanon's] false victories" (Mroué, "Histories"). Instead, it points the finger at the movement's involvement in the internecine warfare and the ultimate failure of its leading mission—obviously the unpleasant elements in its auto-narrative.

Despite its appeal to a specific historical and regional context, the performance also seemed to have hit a nerve beyond Lebanon's borders: After its premiere at the Ayloul Theater Festival Beirut in September 2000, the performance soon left the Lebanese stage, invited to many international festivals over the course of the ensuing years.[6] On the one hand, this success may be explained with regard to a conceptual concern that links *Three Posters* with contemporary attempts in the international art and theater scene, especially regarding its post-dramatic style[7] and its documentarist approach described above, which introduces art as a locus of critical historiography and enables the performance to be related to, as Hito Steyerl has put it, a "documentary turn" that took place in the field of the visual and performative arts in the 1990s.[8] On the other hand, the travels of the performance coincides with a hitherto unprecedented interest in the subject of political martyrdom and the Islamic world in general caused by the events of 9/11. Unsurprisingly, the strong religious dynamic that was subsequently adjudged to be intrinsic to the phenomenon of suicidal operations also greatly impacted on the Western reception of *Three Posters*: The audience was reading the performance against the background of recent global political developments, disregarding the specific historical situation it was referring to (see also Bleeker 197). Absurdly, *Three Posters* hence itself fell prey to a medial representation whose constricted focus seemed to be more convincing than everything the performance was offering.

Finally, Mroué and Khoury came to the decision to cease showing their work, as it obviously could not be understood other than through this lens. In 2004, Mroué instead produced the video lecture *On Three Posters: Reflections on a Video Performance* which serves less as a kind of substitute than "a supplementary text that introduces a secondary layer of critical reflection on the challenges of appropriating a videotape that was never intended to be shown in public" (Elias, "Stage and Screen"). Recorded by a camera, Mroué reflects retrospectively on this experience:

> Many aspects of the performance were lost when it traveled—but this is natural because we did not, in any way or form, expect the foreign audience to comprehend the nuances in our critique of our experience. We had produced the performance with a Beirut audience in mind and we knew that a foreign audience would have little knowledge of the details of our history, and of our civil war. […] In retrospect, especially with regard to the media coverage we received, we failed in communicating this crucial distinction. (Mroué, *On Three Posters*)

It is this 'failure' of the communicative process between an artist and his (foreign) audience that is of interest in this quote, and it is crucial when reflecting on the question as to what exactly defines artistic commitment today. So could they, the artists, have done better in communicating their 'message,' their political intention to the people? An intention that—though self-critical—clearly locates the artwork (and the artists themselves) in Lebanon's political landscape, and that means taking a stand on a specific national phenomenon? If the belief in the possibility of a clear-cut and unblemished translation is already abandoned, and if the failure of transmitting a certain artistic idea is *a priori* accepted as an ineluctable fact, this begs the question as to how far we are able to ultimately define the commitment of

an artist as politically motivated *intention*, since the result is totally dependent of an act of reading that, in turn, is itself conditional on cultural, political, and social knowledge. Taking *Three Posters* as an initial experience of this concern, it would be thus legitimate to read Mroué's subsequent work as exploring the role of the spectator in the process of knowledge production. In his lecture performance *Looking for a Missing Employee* (2003)[9] it is thus not primarily the authenticity of a specific truth that is at stake, but the truths which are produced by the spectators in the course of the very activity defining them: Spectating. Here, the experience of failure is rendered and elaborated into failure as a conceptual approach.

Looking for a Missing Actor

> "I am not sure … I can't find it … At this point, I was getting confused."[10]
> (Actor 1 in *Looking for a Missing Employee*)

Again: Darkness. And again, the audience would not find a person on stage, but instead two screens at the back, one television screen up the front, placed on a table, behind an empty chair. Actor 1 (Rabih Mroué) sits in the middle of the auditorium at a rest table with a bunch of notebooks. They contain the results of extensive and meticulous newspaper research which he will present in the course of the next two and a half hours, relating the very dubious and opaque story of Rifaat Sliman, a former employee of the Lebanese Ministry of Finance who disappeared one day in September 1996. Actor 1's account is complemented by Actor 2 (Hatim Imam [Ḥātim Imām]) who sits in the back row: Synchronously to the narrative, he offers illustrations, drawn live in real-time at the performance, as a second, visual representation of the main plot and its actors which is shown on one screen, while the other screen features the content of Actor 1's notebooks and the television screen broadcasts an image of his face. However, the story of this employee turns out to be a proper political scandal: Rifaat Sliman was accused of having embezzled a large amount of money with which he tried to flee across Lebanon and Syria, an incident Lebanon's rivaling political camps and officials immediately tried to misuse for their own political ends. Actor 1's archived media footage covers not only the chase after Sliman, but also the mudslinging in the high ranks of parliament, all the while complemented by private statements from Sliman's family members.

Apart from the scandalousness of his story, Sliman is introduced as just one example from thousands of individuals who 'vanished' during and after the civil war and have never reappeared again. Due to the passing of the amnesty law in 1991 that exempted former members of militias from criminal prosecution in the name of national reconciliation, no serious measures have ever been undertaken to address the killing of 100,000 civilians and the disappearance of approximately 17,000 persons; no one has ever been prosecuted for these abuses. The complete absence of any serious governmental enquiry into the fate of the missing, which basically informs *Looking for a Missing Employee*, has, as mentioned earlier, inspired—or maybe even forced—many Lebanese artists who started being active after the *Ṭāʾif* agreement, to "provide platforms for the critical examination and recovery of collective memory in Lebanon" (Elias, "Artistic Responses").[11]

At the beginning of the performance, Actor 1 implicitly points to this dark chapter of Lebanon's (post)war history and explains to his audience the reasons for his obsession with this specific missing employee: Even though, as the spectators will learn in the course of

the exhaustive criminological journey, a fragmented corpse identified as that of the employee was found three months later, these mortal remains could never really prove Sliman's actual death, for the corpse was headless. Similar to the martyr comrade Khaled Rahhal, whose life is captured on hold on videotape, Sliman remains in a state "between life and death" (Mroué, "Fabrication" 114), in which neither one of the two is proven. The only option, Actor 1 suggests, to bring to an end this Godot-like state "that delivers us from the pain of waiting, the thought of waiting, the thought of searching," is the deliberate disposing of any memory of the person, for "such death cannot take place unless it's inside one's head." As consequence, it is the story of the missing person that has to be retold "in order to kill it and put it to rest" (Mroué, "Looking").

It is exactly this early sentence that clandestinely announces the spectator's exceptional role during the next few hours: Only the act of narration itself, as the statement of Actor 1 suggests, can bring back the order of things, i.e. the logical and ontological difference between death and life. But this act can only serve as a legitimate declaration of death since it is witnessed by a public: It is they who, through their witness, authorize the facticity that results from this act.[12] The order of things can thus only be brought back as far as the narration conducted proves itself reasonable for this community of witnesses. In the following paragraphs, we will see that it is not the missing employee Rifaat Sliman, but the spectator and her specific situatedness as a witness who will turn out to be the true protagonist of the performance. A performance which, by the way, Mroué mainly presented outside Lebanon and was thus, similar to *Three Posters*, mostly attended by non-Lebanese audiences.[13]

Narration

The spectator has, however, quite a hard time justifying her position as a witness, for she is only the last one in a chain of transmitters, taking into account that she is only third in line after the primary witnesses, whose conflicting narratives are published in the daily newspapers, and Actor 1, the secondary witness who himself has never actually *seen* the employee but is responsible for the choice of particular articles used and those now disregarded, depending on how much reliability he attributes to the respective material.

Thus, quite soon it turns out that the most disturbing factor which massively impedes the comprehensibility of Sliman's story is not the excessive material but the narrator himself, who seems to trust neither the documentary sources he has chosen nor his own capacities as a collector/narrator, accentuated by the fact that he seems to possess only limited powers of memory. What remain completely opaque are the criteria the narrator has set for choosing his material: Not only the process of collecting this information seems to be random and generally unfiltered, but also the collection finally presented to the public seems quite arbitrary. In most of the cases, Actor 1 painstakingly mentions both the name of the paper and the date of publication, creating a timeline of the story's most crucial events. In other cases however, without warning he jumps back and forth in this timeline, or might causelessly skip place and date or other basic facts of the report, and instead delve into minor matters, or suddenly throw in curious but totally unrelated facts that have nothing to do at all with the case.

At other times, he stresses that many of the articles he is presenting is not original material, but photocopies which were very often hard to obtain, for the original material has been either already taken by somebody else before him or used as a cleaning rag, so that the stains have made these texts extremely difficult to decipher or indeed even unreadable.

Thus, he warns his audience not to view this material too naïvely: "One should never trust a photocopy!" (Mroué, "Looking"). This recommendation that it is better to mistrust the reliability of unoriginal material is already absurd, for it is mediated through unoriginal material itself: Actor 1's video image on stage.

What is basically at stake in these examples is a narrative strategy that plays fact and fiction against each other by fictionalizing authentic documents and authenticating fictitious facts, thus making them indistinguishable. Similar to *Three Posters*, Mroué again plays with the idea of evidence as the basic characteristic we usually ascribe to historical documents which are taken to prove the past existence of a specific historical truth. But unlike in his earlier work, interrogating the constructedness of knowledge is at play in not only a quite amusing, but also a very eidetic form: What is exposed is a narratology that is based on collecting, copying, cutting, collaging, and gluing. This strategy not only reveals the materiality of knowledge and therefore its perishability, but also the reproducibility and arbitrariness of what we perceive as 'truth.'

Moreover, as Actor 1 never hesitates to 'uninstall' his own person as actor/artist in front of an increasingly confused public, the focus of the examination shifts from the causality of the story to the trustworthiness of the narrator himself. Mroué's absolute mistrust in his own capacity to find and present evidence for the 'true story' he claims to be searching for only leads to another piece of evidence i.e. his refusal to represent himself, the artist, as intellectually and morally superior to his audience, means that he instead positions himself as the spectator's accomplice in the process of a joint investigation (Husemann 87).[14]

Translation

The strategic revelation of knowledge gaps is continued on the level of translation. At the beginning of the performance, Actor 1 leaves his first trace. Looking straight into the camera, his image on screen explains to the audience:

> As you see, I am not a good translator and I am not a qualified one, and all my documents here are in Arabic, but I decided to speak in English so we can skip the subtitles and this will allow me to look into your eyes and you look into my eyes. (Mroué, "Looking")[15]

Over the course of the performance it becomes clear that the decision to offer a complete translation of the performance text into a language promising the broadest common ground for an international audience will not enable fluent, barrier-free communication between actor and audience; on the contrary, it will reveal its very impossibility.

Time and again, Actor 1 exposes his own inability to transfer the figurative and poetic style of the Arabic language properly: "This is really difficult to translate to English!" (Mroué, "Looking").

Additionally, he only rarely explains the Lebanese socio-political context (e.g. the political affiliation of the three newspapers to respective political camps) and forgoes introducing the main political actors and their affiliations to a specific party bloc. While the lesser-informed spectator will already miss many of the allusions and scarcely understand the context, fully reliant on his individual background knowledge, the linguistic diffusion exacerbates this predicament. Since the documents presented are without exception in Arabic, the relationship between the spectators and Actor 1 is characterized by a reinforced dependency, for they are forced to rely on the latter's English translation: The Arabic documents, which should prove the facticity of the story, remain—similar to a song of Fayrouz

he would sing at some point—illegible hieroglyphics, an unreadable representation of 'something' the spectator is not able to compare to what Actor 1 claims as its content. This strategy expands the play between factuality and fictionality on the level of language. And this strategy also proves itself effective vice versa: Though an Arabic-speaking audience would be able to read the presented documents, it would not necessarily be able to verify the English translations offered by Actor 1 and the conclusion he draws from them.[16]

With the question of language and translatability, we come to an important point: Although the artist has chosen a language characterized as the most global of all contemporary languages, it is exactly its pretended transnational compatibility which calls attention to a Derridean *différance* that takes place in each and every act of translation, be it linguistic or contextual. Lebanese artist Joana Hadjithomas describes the nature of translation and its importance in the realm of contemporary Lebanese artistic production (Cotter 27): *Latency*, a leading concept of postwar Lebanese artistic investigation, following Hadjithomas, signifies an absent existence, a second world, after which we aspire, but which will escape our presence. Mroué takes up this thought: "Maybe this is one of the roles of translation, to be too late, to delay things. […] If we accept this very simple definition of translation, we have to accept that there are borders and there is what is called 'here' and 'there'" (30).

As such, it is not only the missing employee who is—as Khaled Rahhal before him— "here and [ ] not" (Mroué, "Looking"), or all these other missing people whose stories are hidden in the archives of Lebanon's untold history. By exposing the nature of translation to be that of a deferral, it is also the act of communication between actor and spectator that is condemned to be deferred and, therefore, not to succeed. But the failure of the communicative act does not necessarily lead to a recipient who is at the mercy of an unreliable actor: By dethroning language, one of the most powerful orders, the spectator is invited to overcome the translational gap individually by building her own bridges of comprehension. That said, whatever the actor might say and whatever the spectator might understand, it will neither be a congruent representation of the actor's original intention, and nor will there be a congruent, equivalent reception between one spectator and another.

Space

As we have just seen, *Looking for a Missing Employee* deals with an ontological state that characterizes the protagonist Sliman's 'being-in-the-world' but is also constitutive of this performance's specific situation: Absence. The missing person, who once belonged to the sphere of presence, is now "here and [is] not," "present, but invisible," "not dead and not quite alive" (Mroué, "Looking"). The state of absence is not to be understood as a state of *not-being*, for then we would confound its counterpart *presence* with *existence*. In contrast, "in the notion of absence there still lies, as the term suggests, a kind of being, therefore a presence that is already implied and presupposed" (Siegmund 63).[17] *Absent* is a person or an object with whom or which the subject is unable to communicate or enter into an unmediated relationship with, since it lies beyond the realm of the subject's presence.

But absent is not only the missing employee, but also the actors who have made their exit *a priori*, who have left the space assigned to them empty, namely the stage, and relocated themselves in the space of the auditorium. Through this arrangement, Mroué withdraws one of the theatrical situation's defining characteristics, the presence of a sensually perceivable body on stage that enters into a co-presence with the spectators, who become part of a live event. Thus, the absence of the body on stage first renders the state of absence

physically experiencable, and secondly, it challenges the spectator's disposition: Because the division between the stage and the audience usually defines the binarity of those who are watching and those who are acting, the empty stage—now home only to images—blurs the borders between these two subject categories. When the pretended actor, now situated among the spectators, faces the stage and the images shown there, the spectator's eye and hence attention, conventionally fixated on the stage, are split: Flickering back and forth from the bodiless stage towards the mediated image of the absent actor and onto the actors' present body situated in the auditorium. The line of the spectatorial gaze now depends on the individual prioritization of each spectator. The audience's traditional view as one collective view towards the stage is now multiplied into a multitude of lines of sight which may also eventually cross each other. So even if the coordinates of the performance are still directing the gazes, they reveal what is usually hidden behind the phantasm of representation: It is the eye of the spectator only which creates coherence and endows what is happening with meaning: "The spectator watches himself and the others watching. Here, theater as a realm of experience becomes also a laboratory of vision, as the look at the look of the others is part of the process" (Deck 17).

The priority of sight, considered the most developed and therefore most reliable sense faculty of human beings, is also indicated in the English translation of the performance's title[18]: *Looking for a Missing Employee* deconstructs our belief in the sense of sight we usually confidently and unquestioningly follow. Through this, the performance enables its spectator to appreciate the other individuals who are present in the same space and who also have to make their own choice, namely to decide which perspective might promise the highest level of authenticity. Due to the withdrawal of an actor from the stage, his absence marked by his video image, who then relocates his physical presence in the audience, the conventional mode of reception is interrupted. Finally, the spectator is released from his traditional dependency on the actor or the action on stage as the source of a higher truth that is transmitted down to her.

Fully aware that they are in fact the only present entity in this performance, the spectators' consciousness of this situation is taken to its extreme in the final sequence of the performance. After being briefly interrupted by a video trailer, Actor 1's face reappears for the last time on screen, addressing his closing sentences to the audience. Then the image suddenly freezes and stares into the audience hall. The spectator, up until now always able to correlate the visual representation with the present actor as its origin, will this time not find anybody sitting next to her: Actor 1's chair is empty. In retrospect, the spectator realizes that the final image is a pre-produced video tape, whose place and time of origin has escaped notice and is no longer bound to the physical presence of the actor. Through the dissolution of physical reference, viewing the origin of representation is rendered impossible and deferred into absence. It is exactly this rendering impossible of the look back to a supposed beginning that Mroué understands to be one of the core aims of his artistic research, be it the origin of an image or a story told: "Looking for the beginnings is a form of assassinating the present and its experiences, accusing of betrayal, in order to annihilate any alter vision" (Mroué, "Histories").

Dissolving the physical actor with a document of his bygone presence finally removes the physical co-presence of actor and spectator, and along with it the already dysfunctional dichotomy of these two subject categories. After the employee and then the actor (Mroué, "ʿAn *al-baḥth*"), it is now the spectator who finally vanishes. The only remaining subjects are a group of individuals, whose relationship to each other is heterogeneous but otherwise

undefined. After 'the true story' is deconstructed as a myth, and the artist as the privileged holder of exclusive knowledge is dethroned, it is only this individual, released from the spectacle, who in the end remains without any instance to rely on—except the other individuals around her. This final resolution leads the spectator's attention to what she always does but is usually never aware of: her situatedness is now rendered visible, but not as a passive position as part of an audience collective, but an always active positioning in a community of other individuals.

The Empty Chair // Outro

As we have seen, *Looking for a Missing Employee* offers a three-step answer to the politics of spectatorial situatedness in *Three Posters*, allowing us to now return to the question of commitment.

First, the artist's deconstruction of interpretational sovereignty results in an epistemological complicity that releases the spectator from a hitherto hierarchical relationship based on the qualitative difference between 'looking' on the one side and 'acting' on the other, creating instead an equal relationship between the two. This is the first crucial difference to former artistic positions such as Assaf's *Ḥakawātī*, who integrated the audience into the theatrical process, albeit forgoing any reflection on the hidden power structures shaping the construction of this process, and thus perpetuating the artist's epistemological sovereignty.[19] Instead, it is the insight into aesthetic experience as an equally valuable form of activity that enables French philosopher Jacques Rancière to identify it as the genuine emancipatory and thus political potential of theater, a reconfiguration he describes in his essay "The Emancipated Spectator":

> Emancipation starts from […] the principle of equality. It begins when we dismiss the opposition between looking and acting and understand that the distribution of the visible itself is part of the configuration of domination and subjection. It starts when we realize that looking also is an action which confirms or modifies that distribution, and that "interpreting the world" is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it. (23)[20]

Second, this emancipatory experience now not only affects the relationship between artist/actor and spectator, but also the relationship between one spectator and another, part of a community temporally assembled in the same space. The experience of being part of a community results from the insight into the equality between the individuals' different comprehensions of an event, be it the performance itself, a contradictory story of a missing employee, or the video of a suicide bomber shown after 9/11. It stands in contrast to former audience approaches like that of Assaf, who decisively addressed in his *Masraḥ al-Ḥakawātī* a specific social collective with a shared collective memory/identity (e.g. southern Lebanese villagers, Palestinian refugees), assuming a common epistemological ground of this collective and thus a common reception of the performance. On the contrary: Spectatorial situatedness here is defined by the very impossibility to define this group *a priori* or address it in its specificity. Instead, it is conceived as a gathering of individuals, characterized by the dissonance of their altering heterogeneous 'knowledges' and thus the ungivenness of a common ground. Their individual acts of looking are understood as a practice of translating that is, as Mroué defines it in his essay quoted at the outset in terms similar to Rancière's terminology, basically a "dissensual" practice (Mroué, "What Has Slipped Away" 119).[21]

Conceived as a practice, the situatedness of the spectator is thus, third, never a passive position but an always active positioning that takes responsibility and raises ethical questions. This brings us back to the trial and the spectator as witness: Western audiences' 'alternative reading' of *Three Posters*, differing from its intended meaning and drawing an analogy to the Islamist martyrs who attacked the World Trade Center, offered a striking example of how spectatorial situatedness (as both spatial and discursive locatedness) is always bound to a specific knowledge that shapes our reception of mediated events. Finally, it is not the long-missing employee the spectator found, but herself as a perceiving individual/citizen producing meaning and fabricating truth. Someone who for that however, fully realizes that the act of spectating and the knowledge that derives from it can never be detached from the presumptions, beliefs, convictions, the different 'truths' this individual brings to the act of spectating and the politics inherent to these truths.

* * *

So the dilemma now faced is: If spectatorial situatedness subverts the idea of "art with a cause," since the belief in the homogeneity of *cause* (artistic intention) and *effect* (aesthetic reception) needs to be abandoned, what remains left of the concept of artistic commitment?

It is important to stress that—although Mroué refuses to uphold any "essential truths" ("Histories")—a performance like *Looking for a Missing Employee* is not at all detached from a specific local context nor interest, i.e. the situatedness of the artist: Like most of Mroué's works, the performance relates to a chapter of Lebanon's tumultuous history, tackling the effects of state-ordered collective amnesia and prevailing sectarian thought, while inquiring into the necessary preconditions for a functioning democratic state based on the idea of the equality of the citizen as an individual. Especially in societies defined by a "complete absence of democracy and the rejection of pluralism and difference of opinion" (Mroué, "What Has Slipped Away" 115), theater may become an experience of a temporal, transient "performative democracy" (Weibel qtd. in Berger 308), an enactment of a yet-to-come democratic society through the empowerment of the spectator as a citizen.[22] Although Mroué's approach can be considered as locally 'rooted' because it draws on a specific local archive, he refuses to address a specific local audience:

> [T]hinking about the audience as a theatre-maker is a problematic issue. If you start to put an audience into your mind, you will start to work for these people, either to provoke them or to convince them or to satisfy them. Either way it would mean making a compromise. If you think about a specific audience, you are getting yourself into a trap. ("It's a Total Experiment")

Is his refusal to conceive of a specifically defined addressee tantamount to again calling for an aesthetic universality, an "art for art's sake"? It seems useful here to remember that Sartre in his discourse-founding texts on literary engagement (*What is Literature?,* 1949), initially abandoned the idea of an "abstract universality" ("For Whom Does One Write" 154), resorting to the nature of the subject as "being situated" (150). "Situatedness," a key term in existentialist philosophy as the "essential and necessary characteristic of freedom" (ibid.), is—as discussed above—defined by a specific historical and cultural context the subject is 'thrown into' and which he shares with other subjects of his time and place. But unlike what we have seen in Mroué's approach, Sartre's concept of situatedness presupposes a common ground to which the knowledge of a community collectively relates. For Sartre, not only the engaged writer, also the engaged playwright is thus asked to refer to this situation in his theater work, aiming to "fuse all disparate elements in the auditorium into a single unity by

awakening […] the things which all men of a given epoch and community care about" ("Forgers of Myth" 39). Although he now conceived the activity of the reader—as well as that of the spectator ("Why Write?" 47)—not as passive consumption but a creative act (which Mroué in principal might support), he installs the writer as a guiding instance, rendering reception into a productive process of "directed creation" (45).

Mroué obviously disagrees with these two premises, firstly that of the artist as a guiding voice who directs the spectator by referring to, secondly, a supra-individual historical situatedness. Still, his approach converges with Sartre in a crucial third point: The inevitability of the situatedness of both artist and spectator evokes a shared responsibility in "an unjust world," a responsibility that becomes visible in the aesthetic event through a "moment of reflective consciousness" (Sartre, "For Whom Does One Write?" 159). Thus, instead of reclaiming *universality*, Mroué's focus on the situatedness of both artist and spectator is characterized by its very opposite, a conviction as to art's absolute *contingency*. An approach that is not so much relativist (the classical accusation leveled against the 'postmodern') as it is *relational* and, as such, concerned with the inter-personal relations which shape both the moment of art/theater as well as the life of the *polis*.[23] Interestingly, the rejection of the congruence between a *fictitious* spectator (who is conceived *a priori*, and pre-located by the artist in a specific region and cultural context) and a *factual* spectator (who remains with a blind spot regarding nationality, local belonging and cultural knowledge) turns into a retry of one of Sartre's core questions which sparked the *iltizām* discourse in the 1950s: "For Whom Does One Write?"[24] But now, it is supplemented by a second interest: "And how do we do so?"

Mroué's reloading of this key question of artistic commitment starts from the presumption that there is no communication process without intrinsic power structures. Accordingly, power relations not only pervade every single aspect of social life (state politics, media, collective memory, etc.) but also the realm of art—an implication which clearly upholds the rejection of aesthetic autonomy. According to the art historian Claire Bishop, it should be considered the analytical "task" of art practice today to "assess the *quality* of the audience relations it produces, the subject position it presupposes and the democratic notions it upholds" (Bishop 78). Even if the institutions of art and theater in particular are, as Mroué states, "among the rare spaces where one *may* be permitted to depart from the law and social norms," they are also conditional of the power relations, i.e. the 'politics' shaping sociopolitical reality, and as such can never be a space detached from the 'world outside,' but only be fully understood in relation to those factors framing, directing, and regulating both its production and reception ("What Has Slipped Away" 114). Especially with regard to the increased interest of the international/Western art scene Lebanese and Middle Eastern artistic production has enjoyed over the last few decades, the ways funds are distributed and artworks are circulated have fundamentally affected cultural production in and from the Middle East. Asking about the quality of Mroué's 'committedness' when there is no local audience clearly addressed by his work, it seems crucial to ask to what extent this conceptual abandoning of the fictitious spectator is essentially tied to the increasing internationalization of the factual spectator in the course of a globalizing art scene and its "politics *of* art," which set the parameters of what is then labeled as "the political […] *in* art" (Toukan 150).[25] The question of the addressee in relation to contemporary artistic commitment becomes even more absurd when we take into consideration that the 'crisis-ridden countries' of the (Arab) global South (such as Lebanon, Egypt, and currently Syria in particular) are said to have a specific need for critical artistic undertakings that challenge a democrati-

cally indigent local audience, and in which the artist's national self-understanding and responsibility are a crucial part of a work's legitimacy. It seems barely surprising, though, that Rabih Mroué is repeatedly interviewed about his fictitious spectator, i.e. the audience he has in mind (e.g. Mroué, "It's a Total Experiment"; Hlavajova, Winder and Costinas), while artists from the global North are usually only rarely asked to localize their addressee in terms of belonging to a national group. It so happens that this prime example of blaming a Lebanese artist for having failed 'his' (i.e. local) audience and then misappropriating this accusation to have it serve as a rationale against the commitment of the artist, or respectively to deny the political impact of the artwork, is in fact itself built on a powerful representation: It assumes that a national (Lebanese) or regional (Arab) audience is probably rather weak on the level of democratization and freedom of speech and thus needs critical artistic inquiry if it is to continue to, quoting Kant, "emerge from his self-imposed immaturity." It is not only problematic that such a representation recalls the idea of artistic superiority criticized by artists like Mroué, and implicitly sustains the coherence of cause and effect; it also upholds a neo-orientalist discourse concealed behind a normative claim of what defines political art in a globalized art world.

This perspective may ultimately point to the politics inherent to the question of the spectator and the necessity to differentiate between a fictitious and a factual one when talking about contemporary artistic commitment from the Arab world. It leaves us with a question however: Is it still legitimate to assess artistic commitment on the basis of the artwork's references to a specific national context, and thus in relation to a specific local audience as the exclusive group to which the work of art is purportedly addressed? It has been shown that also for Mroué the question "For whom does one write?" represents a guiding concern when fathoming the politics of art. *Looking for a Missing Employee* reveals a committed stance that relies on the necessity of radically raising this question while refusing to offer any answer. Thus, while this committed artist may have given up his guiding role, he has not relinquished his responsibility in an "unjust world." Instead, he has put it on a table between an unknown spectator and himself. His chair is empty.

Notes

1   For a discussion of literary commitment and the reader as its addressee, see Michael Allan's contribution to this volume as well as his insightful analysis "Reading with One Eye, Speaking With One Tongue: On the Problem of Address in World Literature." *Comparative Literature Studies* 44.1–2 (2007): 1–19. Print. I also owe him my sincere thanks for his thorough edits and encouraging comments on this chapter.

2   As textual basis, I am using the translated performance text in Fundació Antoni Tàpies 101–13.

3   The archive has become a key concept in recent cultural theory that came along with a Foucaultian understanding of historiography as archaeology. Further, I here refer to Aleida Assmann's concept of cultural memory where she differs between two types, storage memory and functional memory. Assmann, Aleida. "Archive im Wandel der Mediengeschichte." *Archivologie: Theorien des Archivs in Philosophie, Medien und Künsten.* Ed. Knut Ebeling and Stephan Günzel. Berlin: Kadmos, 2009. 165–76. Print.

4   For a thorough analysis of the performance see Elias, *In Focus: 'On Three Posters' 2004.*

5   One of the most prominent representatives of this documentarist approach realized mainly in lecture performances is Walid Raad (Walīd Raʿd) (Nakas, Kassandra, ed. *The Atlas Group (1989–2004).* Cologne: Kadmos, 2006. Print). But also in the field of photography, video art and plastic arts there are other 'archive artists' such as Lamia Joreige (Lamyāʾ Jurayj), Joana Hadjithomas (Jūwāna Ḥājī Tūmā) and Khalil Joreige (Khalīl Jurayj), and Akram Zaatari (Akram Zaʿtarī). In 2012, Zaatari organized a symposium in which the concept of the archive as an aesthetic historiography was discussed in the context of postwar Lebanese artistic practice: "History of the Last Things before the Last: Art as Writing History" (Nov 30–Dec 1 2012, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut).

Wilson-Goldie, Kaelen. "Digging for Fire: Contemporary Art Practices in Postwar Lebanon." MA thesis. American U Beirut, 2001. 108–69. Print.

6   E.g. in 2001 at the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna), in 2002 at KunstenFESTIVALdesArts (Brussels), In Transit (Berlin), Fundació Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona), Theater der Welt (Bonn), Witte de With Festival (Rotterdam). From 2004 the performance was replaced by the video screening *On Three Posters: Reflections on a Video Performance*.

7   Established by Hans-Thies Lehmann, the label *postdramatic* describes a tendency in Western avant-garde theater since the 1960s. It covers theatrical and performative approaches which are very often devoid of a classical dramatic text, preferring instead non-linear and/or fragmented narratives, favoring intermedial formats, and aiming to tear down the fourth wall to actively expose the illusion of theatrical representation. Through this, postdramatic theater strives to produce an effect amongst the spectators and raises their awareness of being an active part of the theatrical event. Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theater*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

8   It seems rather telling regarding Mroué's position in the field of international contemporary performance art that in 2012 he and Hito Steyerl presented a joint lecture-performance at the Tate Modern: "Probable Title: Zero Probability" in which the two artists try to develop a narrative on 'probability,' a mission which (expectably) turns out to be a hopeless endeavor.

9   The performance was funded by the Beirut-based Association for Plastic Arts *Ashkal Alwan* and shown for the first time in November 2003 during the association's second edition of *Home Works*, by now the most important festival on arts and cultural discourse in Lebanon. An excerpt of the performance text was subsequently published in the festival's documentary book *Home Works II. A Forum on Cultural Practices*. Ed. Christine Tohme. Beirut: Ashkal Alwan, 2005. 132–39. Print. Mroué's much-praised work has been regularly invited to numerous international art and theater festivals, most recently in 2014 to Vancouver's Performing Art Festival PuSh.

10   Throughout this paragraph I am quoting from the unpublished English translation of the performance text handed over by the artist (no page numbers inserted).

11   For further insight refer e.g. to Young, Michael. "The Sneer of Memory: Lebanon's Disappeared and Postwar Culture." *Middle East Report* 217 (2000): 42–45. Print.

12   I here refer to John L. Austin's theory of speech acts, more specifically the category of the "illocutionary act" that depicts speech acts in which we "do something in saying something." As an intrinsically performative act, it only functions in a communication structure, which makes Austin's premises of utmost importance for the analysis of theatrical communication. See also Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print.

13   The following three paragraphs are an abbreviated and modified version of my analysis in: Albers 37–66.

14   German dramaturge Pirkko Husemann locates here the characteristic effect of the lecture performance, in which "the audience questions its own perception" caused by the self-questioning of the directors, actors, or choreographers, which in turn ideally leads to a complicity between production and reception: "This two-sided self-reflexivity locks production and reception together as accomplices into one relationship, in that both sides take part simultaneously and sometimes of equal measure in the production of sense and knowledge" (Husemann 87; trans. in Bleeker 182–83).

15   This explanation was added by Mroué for the English translation of the performance text and is skipped in its Arabic version. Mroué stresses that *Looking for a Missing Employee* is the only one of his performances he wanted to have translated completely into English for the international guest performances.

16   Of course, this strategy of 'linguistic diffusion' may also be read as an allusion to the multilingual background of Lebanese society, who are, depending on the individual's social and ethnic background, either French, English, or Arab educated. The Lebanese frequently describe themselves as not being at 'home' in any language.

17   All translations are—if not indicated otherwise—my own.

18   The Arabic original title *Al-baḥth ʿan muwaẓẓaf mafqūd* is most probably a reminiscence to Marcel Proust's cycle of novels' *In Search of Lost Time*, respectively *Remembrance of Things Past* (orig.: *À la recherche du temps perdu*; arab.: *Al-baḥth ʿan al-zamān al-mafqūd*), in which the role of memory and its boundedness to material objects is central. As a conceptual thought, this is not only at stake in *Looking for a Missing Employee*, in which the reconstruction of a past event is itself reconstructed through documentary material, but also, as mentioned earlier, in the overarching discourse of postwar Lebanese artistic production.

19   I have demonstrated elsewhere the difference between Assaf's and Mroué's audience approach by referring to their differing conceptualization and implementation of the *Ḥakawātī*-figure. See Albers 61–66.

20 In this essay Rancière discusses the position of the spectator in theater who was, throughout the history of theater, perceived as a (compared to the actor) passive, ignorant subject that either needs to be educated, enlightened, or at least activated. He deconstructs this still prevalent discourse as one of epistemological inequality and as another example for the "partition of the sensible," a theory he developed in his same-titled essay (*Le partage du sensible*, 2000).

21 Rancière's writings on aesthetics have attracted much attention in discussions on the politics of contemporary art and also gained discursive importance in the field of Lebanese contemporary artistic production. In 2005, he was invited to give a lecture in the course of the third edition of *Home Works*. For Rancière's lecture "Some Paradoxes of Political Art" see the festival documentary book *Home Works III. A Forum on Cultural Practices*. Ed. Chaza Charafeddine, Masha Refka, and Christine Tohme. Beirut: Ashkal Alwan, 2008. 44–57. Print; for the position of his thought in the current discourse of the Lebanese artistic field, see Toukan 136.

22 The conceptual analogy of spectator = citizen / audience = society is to be understood not only in distinction to former attempts of artistic commitment in Lebanon and Arab art history, but also in connection to a strong tendency in Western performance art since the 1970s, where the question of participation and activating the audience was a core issue of political/artistic intervention (Berger 308–10). Mroué has often referred to these avant-gardist attempts as one of his main artistic influences, dealing with some of their works in his performance *Who is Afraid of Representation?* (2004). For a thorough analysis of this performance, see Bellan 145–54.

23 In this interest Mroué's approach can be interrelated to a tendency in the field of international visual and performative arts Nicholas Bourriaud has described as "relational aesthetics" (*Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Presses du Réel, 2002. Print), addressing artistic attempts which "seek to establish intersubjective encounter in which meaning is elaborated collectively" and thus "entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and its audiences" (Bishop 54). Such artistic attempts are closely interlocked with the question of political participation as a basic democratic right oppressed in societies that are defined by a "complete absence of democracy and the rejection of pluralism and difference of opinion" (Mroué, "What Has Slipped Away" 115).

24 For the historical debate between Taha Husain (Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) ("Al-adīb yaktubu li-l-khāṣṣa" [The author writes for the elite]) and Ra'if Khoury (Raʾīf Khūrī) ("Al-adīb yaktubu li-l-kāffa" [The author writes for the people]), see Klemm, Verena. *Literarisches Engagement im Nahen und Mittleren Osten: Konzepte und Debatten*. Würzburg: Ergon, 1998. Print. 77–80; Di-Capua, Yoav. "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization." *American Historical Review* 117.4 (2012): 1061–91. Web. 24 Nov. 2014.

25 See also Toukan's contribution to this volume.

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Whatever Happened to *Iltizām*?
Words in Arab Art after the Cold War

Hanan Toukan

In Palestinian artist Yazan Al-Khalili's (Yazan al-Khalīlī) 2013 photographic installation *Scouting for Locations: Film Title: Traces of a Scream* (figure 1 and 2 below) a search takes place for a film crew that has disappeared while scouting locations for a film based on an adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's (Ghassān Kanafānī) novel *Men in the Sun* (*Rijāl fi-l-shams*, 1963), planned to be shot in Sharjah. What supposedly remains of this crew are photographs taken of possible locations for shooting the film, and a scream that was heard in an empty, dimly-lit alley. The artist's project sets out to find those who have disappeared by reconstructing their journey and their encounters, investigating the scream that eerily lingers on in the alleyway, roaming the streets, spaces and alleyways of Sharjah. The artwork itself is made up of a series of photographs as well as the text written by the artist recounting the story of the scream, its possible meanings and myriad detonations. In the artist's words:

> The scream is examined as proof, but no one is certain who's scream it was; the crew's or that of the witness of their disappearance. These photographs were found in an email sent to their producer without any details. We organise them on a wall in a timeline chronicling their movement in the city, looking for clues we find that many witnessed their disappearance but no one remembers them, everyone remembers the scream that night but no one recollects its author. The project is scouting for a public space in the public space through the possibility of a scream. Whose voice is heard? who is there to witness? was that scream the result of fear or was it a demand for visibility? can one be invisible in the public space? or is it even a public space if the public is invisible? perhaps that scream is the demand for visibility? but isn't demand for visibility in the public space a demand for political existence! Someone said that the crew are still roaming in the city, scouting for public spaces, that is why they will not be found, as soon as they enter the public space, they are devoured by invisibility. The inaudible scream that lingers in those photographs perhaps brings into question their political existence. (al-Khalili)

Complementing Khalili's text is a series of photographs of the "search" that takes place. The images in the photos depict a desolate, dry landscape with vacant lots, deserted restaurants and seemingly empty high rises, sparsely dotted with Asian workers appearing only as props against an otherwise bleak backdrop of a city devoid of a soul. Poignant in form and elaborate in the nuanced complex of narratives, the images tell of the cruel dynamics of capital and transnational migrant labor flows to the Gulf. What Khalili's art work seems to recall most of all is the predicament of the individual in the Middle East today. Inspired by the characters in Kanafani's book, Khalili's hollow spaces devoid of voices, of life in fact, ironically recall with painful urgency protagonist Abu Al-Khaizaran's repeated cries of "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank?" (Kanafani 74) upon discovering the death of three Palestinian men he attempted to smuggle in his truck from Basra to Kuwait. In the novel Abu Al-Khaizaran is delayed at the border by officials who laugh about his supposed relationship with a dancer in Basra, instead of completing the necessary paperwork in a timely manner. Upon his release, Abu Al-Khaizaran rushes back and opens the water tank to let the men out, already suspecting what he will find: three dead bodies. He decides to bury

Figure 1. (Courtesy of the artist)

Figure 2. (Courtesy of the artist)

each in his own grave when he arrives. However, too tired, he instead leaves the bodies by the garbage dump. In the morning the bodies are discovered by municipal employees, and are buried under official auspices (73). Abu Al-Khaizaran returns once again after abandoning the bodies to take their money and belongings.

For al-Khalili, resurrecting Abu Al-Khaizaran's pained wails is an ode to the Palestinian people in a changing world, specifically, in a globalized world where the principal issues of the age-old Palestinian struggle are now also the central tenets of larger transnational struggles. These struggles are related to migration and labor flows, the movement of refugees and their human rights, the securitization of states and the legalities of illegitimately constructed borders and walls. They include and also reach beyond the scope of an anticolonial nationalism and the narration of a people struggling against the routine Israeli tactics of constructing an undisputed history, territoriality and identity in Palestine that have tended to dominate the representation of the struggle in the twentieth century. Hence in *Scouting for Locations*, Kanafani's commitment to the Palestinian struggle is not abandoned, only contextualized and historicized within some of the twenty-first century's most gripping global challenges. Here the notion of a public space—or lack thereof—and the "invisible" voices and bodies at play within them are therefore both testament to and statement on the dire situation of South Asian workers in the Gulf today as well as a reminder of the Palestinian voice devoured in dominant diplomatic discourse. Thus, the border-crossing Palestinian smuggled across vast Arab territory and through the bureaucracies of border posts in search of a decent life is also the South Asian worker in the Emirates of today. In its fusion of publicness, visibility and voice with time, place and identity, the artwork—like the novel that inspired it and which often reads like a stream of consciousness that shifts from the third person to the second by way of flashbacks that blend senses together—is formally and conceptually experimental.

Khalili, whose work was commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation for its 2013 biennial, is not alone in his endeavor to reach back into modern Arabic literary history and, specifically, the era of *iltizām* in literature in order to make art in and about today's Arab World. Arabic literary texts in visual art have historically been used as both the subject or the object of the artwork itself in various ways: as narrative or statement, as recorded speech and even as sculpture or performance.[1] In Marwa Arsanios (Marwā Arsāniyūs) and Lawrence Abu Hamdan's (Lūrins Abū Ḥamdān) *The Pessoptimist Marathon Reading* (2012), a live reading session lasting six hours by six fellow artists, which took place simultaneously in Ramallah, East Jerusalem and Beirut, the subject is *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (*Al-waqāʾiʿ al-gharība fī ikhtifāʾ Saʿīd Abī al-Naḥs al-mutashāʾil*, 1974), the political satire by the Palestinian novelist and communist party co-founder Emile Habibi (Imīl Ḥabībī). Inspired by Habibi's musings on movement, border crossings, smuggling and boundaries in the aftermath of the *nakba* in 1948 through the satirical narration of the double life of Saeed, the Palestinian citizen of Israel, Abu Hamdan and Arsanios saw in the novel a contemporary relevance. Engaging the text through the reactions it provoked from the participants, the subjects of politically dictated borders and the resultant fractured, decentered and dislocated psyches of postmodern identities in the Arab region were highlighted. More than that, the work—when viewed especially within Arsanios's larger oeuvre which includes scrutinizing reading, writing and publishing and their relationship to the public in the region's modern history of nation-building and anti-colonialism—seems to be sardonically commenting on the long-gone promises of regional liberation, unification and independence that came with the heady days of Arabism's finest moment in the 1950s and 1960s.

The appropriation of legendary texts as a central vehicle for articulating counter-hegemony, either by challenging the notion that an artwork should consist of a physical object or by probing the relevance of historical texts to the trials and tribulations of the contemporary moment, is a trend more specifically associated with young contemporary artists in the region.[2] Indeed, with the general global shift towards ideas and systems that invite the viewer to engage with an intellectual concept rather than just experience an affective encounter with the art, text took on an even more important role for many artists. It is, however, this "dematerialization of the art object," as it has been termed (Lippard viii),[3] and its concomitant ephemeral and transient nature as well as its links to external sources of funding and the ironies of Gulf monarchial patronage, that has been at the heart of the skepticism greeting contemporary artists of the post-Cold War generation in the Arab region. To be precise, al-Khalili, like many of his contemporaries, is part of a generation of cultural actors that came to the fore subsequent to the end of the Cold War in 1990 and the manifold regional reconfigurations of the political landscape, such as the dwindling of Soviet influence in the region, the onset of the First Gulf War and the subsequent sanctions on Iraq, the 'end' of the Lebanese Civil War, the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli Oslo Peace Accords and the Jordan-Israel Wadi Araba Treaty, all of which unfolded instantaneously.[4] This generation has been lauded for its post-ideological character, and at the same time criticized for proposing seemingly normalized, apolitical or anationalist artistic and cultural practices more generally.

Moreover, the postmodern visualities associated with this generation of artists, and which parallel the global art world's tendency toward and interest in conceptual projects embedded in metaphorical approaches that reject "totalizing" theories of history, are deemed to stand in direct contradistinction to the committed art undertaken in the service of a broader social and political cause. The latter is understood to have been the norm practiced by the predecessor generation of anticolonial and postcolonial visual artists and writers—the 'iltizām generation' as they are commonly referred to.

Yet, what I would like to argue here, is the fact that iltizām or any historically related notions of commitment to a cause or dissent in the arts are revisited, re-appropriated or commemorated at all; and the way they are rearticulated, visualized, narrated, revised and adapted in contemporary art practice and the processes that bring them into being is dependent first and foremost on the prevalent notion and understanding of 'the Political.' In other words: What commitment is and how it manifests as a counter-hegemonic act depends on how politics is practiced, conceived, understood and resisted in any respective historical era. Accordingly, the political is the medium through which the changing conceptions of commitment and dissent are expressed in cultural production. By taking various examples of artworks and their discursive and material (re-)presentation as critical, subversive or resistant in the local and global spheres and within the channels of production, display and dissemination that the contemporary art world affords them, this chapter focuses on the legacy of iltizām. Specifically, it questions if any form of iltizām continues to exist at all and if so, probes its impact on today's meaning of the political in art, as is evident amongst the generation of artists and arts production in the post-Cold War era in Lebanon and Palestine. Thus, taking as its point of departure the structural and global dynamics at play in Arab contemporary arts production since the period of the 1990s, especially after the events of September 11, 2001 and the Second Gulf War, as well as the revolutionary process that began to unfold in December 2010, the essay grapples with how we are to make sense of the ongoing commitment of cultural producers in the Arab region and specifically visual artists to speak truth to power—in the new visual form it is taking and the structural dynamics it is imbricated in.

Following this, and in line with Lila Abu-Lughod's warnings against romanticizing resistance (42), the chapter interrogates prevalent interpretations of these new visualities as embodiments of a new political composed of alternative civic practices and new spaces of dissent, emancipatory experiences and subjective micro-resistance by asking whether every visual expression of dissent is in fact an act of dissent. Seeing—again to borrow from Abu-Lughod—resistant cultural production as a diagnostic of power (ibid.), the chapter asks if it is possible to read *iltizām* in literature as only one form of enactment of the political amongst myriad other aesthetical forms that evolve with the passing of time. Through this querying, the chapter uncovers how the dichotomy of the politics of art, i.e. the structures and processes that create art, versus the political in art, in reference to its affectively emancipatory potential and politically sensorial nature, has been constructed to account for the various ways art's counter-hegemonic role may manifest itself.

The Challenge to the World as Text

Historically, Western representations of Arab culture have tended to privilege the spoken and the written word as the highest form of intellectual practice. By extension, visual representations of thought, concepts and sentiments have traditionally suffered from a legitimacy deficit in the academic milieu, often considered 'non-Islamic.'[5] Hence, scholarship in Middle Eastern Studies generally has by and large neglected artistic and aesthetic practices as socially, politically, and culturally formative sites worthy of examination. By the same token however, the modern and contemporary visual arts spheres in the region have been incapable of penetrating the popular imagination or competing with the dominant position that literature has in Arab high culture or that music occupies in Arab popular culture (Laïdi-Hanieh). And this, despite the visual arts or at the very least individual artists' centrality in informing many of the debates around modernity and tradition, such as the Baghdad Group, the Bread and Freedom surrealist group in Egypt in the earlier part of the twentieth century or—as in Beirut—artists' historical participation in the tensions emerging between modernist journals like *Mawāqif*, *Shiʿr* and *al-Ādāb*. In the case of the many young visual artists in the region today, their relationship to the larger cultural sphere is most discernible in the ways in which they speak back to and rework the interpretations of literary legends in their multimedia-based works. Yet, since the turn of the millennium, the Middle Eastern visual arts terrain has witnessed major transformations that have allowed for its increased visibility, arguably posing a challenge to literature as the dominant cultural voice representing the region, at least at the global level. This tension between the two mediums is part and parcel of the global development of visual culture both as subject matter and lived experience, which has contested the hegemony of the word over the image. As visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff compellingly argues: "the visual disrupts and challenges any attempt to define culture in purely linguistic terms" (5). He further posits that the visual is to postmodernism what literature was to modernism (ibid.). Beginning in the late nineteenth century and extending throughout most of the twentieth century, colonial power, modern technology, discursive modernist praxis and a modern re-organization of society in the Middle East fostered the formation of the postcolonial national state primarily through the channels of urbanization and print cultures (most notably magazines, newspapers, journals and novels). Today, fragile states, corrupt regimes and structural violence imbricated in imperial wars and ongoing colonialism have resulted in mass exile, disrupted lives in the diaspora, and frequent migrations across national and transnational borders. These distortions have arguably nurtured a generation of dislocated selves who no longer claim to speak

for a nation or community in the face of an empire but rather—through the production of culture—as political subjectivities with a transnational frame of reference. As an amalgamation of vision, thought, text, image and phenomenological experience, the field as a whole, especially when viewed within the context of the new media revolution, creates politicized subject positions. This production of political subjectivity, in turn, occurs through a framework "in which the viewer exists in and contributes to a society marked by practices of looking" and interacting with the many "visual industries that cater to an ever-expanding public" both participating in and receiving these signifiers (Gruber and Haugbolle xxiii). For the new media revolution is understood to have affected all forms of communication whether image- or text-based, from the acquisition of information, to its communication, manipulation, storage and dissemination, allowing for a novel eclecticism in the employment of texts in connection to images (Manovich 5). Consequently, visual literacy and the impact of visual forms of thinking and working today arguably play a more crucial role in how society shifts and progresses than they ever have historically. At this historical juncture, the disjointed, de-territorialized, fluid and accessible nature of visual culture as both lived experience and cultural as well as political practice, often involving a synthesis of text and image, has become the dominant medium for dissenting voices in the region. Nowhere is this growth in the visual production field as a channel of protest, dissent and political voice more evident than in the myriad forms of production emerging as part of the Arab revolutionary process that began in Tunis in December 2010. From political cartoons, to hip-hop and rap, street graffiti, public art performances and installations as well as video and internet art, and experimental poetry and literature, the cultural production of the Arab revolutionary process has been largely transmitted through a global visual scopic field, even when it is written or oral.[6] In turn, the growing academic concern with the visual cultural production of the region is both testament to the expanding modes of representing its histories, subjectivities and different forms of resistance to power as well as an acknowledgment of a gap in studies on the visual field as a crucial site of study into the societies, politics and cultures of the region in their own right.

As the section below shows, the tension between the visual and the textual—whereby the former, when considered, has arguably often been incorporated into literally traditions rather than being appreciated in its own right—is further complicated today, specifically in the case of the contemporary visual arts field, by its proximity both to 'suspect' sources of funding as well as patronage. These come in the form of either international development organizations (such as the Ford, Soros Foundations and USAID [United States Agency for International Development]), bilateral organizations (like the Goethe and Heinrich Böll Institutes or the British Council), or the monarchial regimes of the Gulf. The tension is equally compounded by the "persistence of a constructed oppositional binary between 'traditional Islamic' arts and 'new' arts. This binary is based on a perceived historical discontinuity between the two" (Amirsadeghi, Mikdadi, and Shabout 8). Moreover, the fact that the contemporary art form itself and the "boundaries between what is and what is not visual art are increasingly blurred as to become barely discernible" (Makhoul 24), intensifies this already complicated relationship. Video art for instance, arguably the most critical, widely used and circulated of the new art forms sits resolutely between film, painting, literature and theater, borrowing from and yet also critiquing each by refusing to be limited to any discipline. Concurrent with these trends, when the giants of commitment such as Samih Al Qassem (Samīḥ al-Qāsim), Emile Habibi, Mahmoud Darwish (Maḥmūd Darwīsh), Ghassan Kanafani and Hannah Minah (Ḥannā Mīna), amongst others known for having formed the cultural backbone of a century of resistance to colonial subjugation and its aftereffects appear in contemporary visual art,
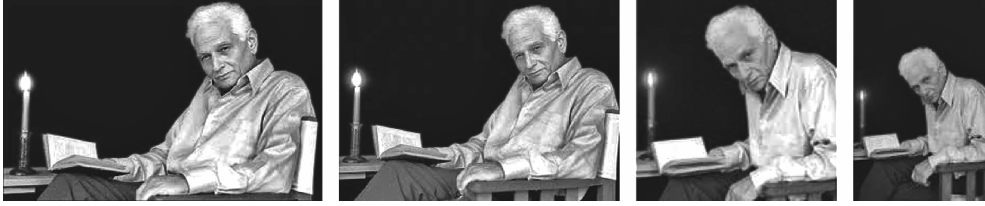
Figure 3. 'Jacques Derrida' taken by Joel Robine on Derrida's emblematic white chair. *From Oraib Toukan, Google-gazing, ongoing, on representations of the intellectual.* (Courtesy of the artist)

they are not so much disavowed as lamented in conceptual, formal and aesthetical terms. These figures are, although admired, often also bemoaned and interrogated through different art forms for embodying a failed aesthetics of resistance. Artists today return to them to understand their critical role in the life, death and afterlife of a botched modernist project of liberation where the centrality of writing was an unquestionable tool in the collective experience of subjugation and hence resistance and commitment to change.

Proposing the text as an artistic strategy, visual artist Oraib Toukan's (ʿUrayb Ṭūqān) powerful experimental essay, written in English, "We, the Intellectuals" intervenes in the world of intellectual ideas through an online arts and culture platform (figure 3). In her piece Toukan questions the notion of commitment to a cause and its historically paradoxical relationship to ideology, institutionalism, intellectualism and its dominant role in the region's processes of liberation and nation-building. In the artist's words:

> […] painter Ismail Shammout was a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) before he became Palestinian Director of Arts and National Culture in 1965; the novelist and poster artist Ghassan Kanafani was a spokesperson and a writer for the Marxist Leninist movement of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1967 until he was assassinated by the Mossad; cartoonist Naji Al-Ali joined the Arab Nationalist Movement (and was barred a few times too many for lack of party discipline) before he too got assassinated, and so on. Kanafani once summed it up by saying: "My political position springs from my being a novelist. In so far as I am concerned, politics and the novel are an indivisible case and I can categorically state that I became politically committed because I am a novelist, not the opposite." ("We, the Intellectuals")[7]

Through her written piece Toukan underscores the phenomenon of commitment to a cause that manifests itself within the framework of the organized, top-down institutionalized politics of state formation. Through her writing, the artist playfully interrogates the historic relevance of dissenting intellectual voices—both in the anticolonial struggle and the subsequent nation-building project—in regard to the meaning of resistance in the cultural production taking place in the contemporary context of the Arab World.

Likewise, in Ramzi Hazboun (Ramzī Ḥazbūn) and Diaʾ al-Azzeh's (Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿAzza) "Motionless Weight" (2009), a blue free-flowing bag discarded at the start of the four-minute video, takes the viewer on a journey through and past the crowded streets, alleyways and walls of post-Oslo Ramallah (Hazboun and Al-Azzeh). Beginning with the bag flowing across a book kiosk, allowing a glimpse into the type of "high" and "low" translated and local popular literature on sale, the journey finishes at the memorial site and tomb of Palestine's "Poet of Resistance" Mahmoud Darwish. Along the way the bag lingers in front of a mural of Darwish gazing at the scores of people going about their daily business without so much as a glimpse at the mural before them, before arriving at the Ramallah municipality garbage dump. The short film, a video essay, interrogates post-Oslo Ramallah's neoliberal

urban symbols. Through the specter of Darwish presiding over crumbling walls, alleyways and disinterested people, the poet's musings on the tension lying between presence and absence in his prose poem "Absent Presence" ("Fī ḥaḍrat al-ghiyāb," 2006) is pointedly alluded to in a nod towards the failures of Oslo, the delusions of supposed statehood and the PA's (Palestinian National Authority) rhetoric of resistance. Twinning Darwish's grand memorial and the specter of his image in the street with the city's garbage dump, al-Azzeh and Hazboun, like Toukan, are also concerned with what critical voices from the past represent in our contemporary world. Al-Azzeh, however, cogently juxtaposes these questions against the PA's imperatives of profit, free exchange, open markets and consumer subjectivity in neoliberal times, issues that place Palestine in a global context and transnational frame.

On Resistance, Critical Practice and the Institution

Works like those described are in line with what is known in the global art world as critical art practice insists it is doing: making interdisciplinary art that intervenes in the political as opposed to making political art. Critical art practices and artists who see themselves as critical, seek, amongst other objectives, to transform the world through activist, socially engaged and intellectual approaches, the creation of radical social collectives and alternative art spaces, as well as the construction of utopian imaginings and representations of the dystopias of our age. The latter endeavors to give a voice to the marginal and oppressed, authoring radical manifestos to adress social inequalities and, last but not least, intervenes in social, political, intellectual and economic norms and flows. Sometimes object or display oriented, other times interactive or performative or indeed encompassing curatorial and institutionally organized work, what is understood as a critical practice may, according to Dan S. Wang writing in *Art Journal*, draw from multiple formal and technical traditions, even within the confines of a single work. In his words: "What critical practices share is a fundamental aspiration: to present questions and challenges about the way the world is […]. Thus, critical practices are always in a basic sense politicized" (69).

Related to one of the central issues for artists who identify themselves as critical today, is the question of their relationship to the processes and structures shaping their work. Contextualizing artists' own formal and conceptual questioning of the boundaries of art's reception by institutions, audiences, communities and constituencies, in addition to interrogating the latter's interactions with the political, public and artistic fields are central to understanding what has been termed the "artist as public intellectual." This term is employed in relation to the role artists play in society as organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense (Becker 13–14). No longer relegated to the gallery space, museum or artist studio, art has now taken on a social, political, technological and cultural life well outside those nodes of production and exhibition. The artist, or more specifically the representation of the artist, is therefore no longer of "the artist on the fringe," the "bohemian," the "socially irresponsible," the "fraudulent" and the "esoteric" (11). Rather the artist, or at least some artists, are increasingly taking on the role of critiquing and thereby effectively engaging the public and private spheres through accessible visual experimentations that tenaciously insist on representing society to itself.

Yet, on the notion of critical art as counter-hegemonic practice some—such as artist and theorist Hito Steyerl—have maintained that "[e]ven though political art manages to represent so-called local situations from all over the globe, and routinely packages injustice and destitution, the conditions of its own production and display remain pretty much unexplored" (Steyerl). It has also been argued that in the era of neoliberal globalization, corporate and state

powers have transformed the institutions and conventions of contemporary art to adapt art's social functions to the needs of the new world system (Stallabrass 34–36). This includes, above all, a process of producing and exhibiting that valorizes culture within the larger remit of "cultural policy"—a professionalized form of art where, as some have suggested, politics becomes the art of display (Leslie). In the context of the Arab World, the past decade has witnessed a flourishing of what are often—and arguably—referred to as "independent" or "alternative" art spaces, artist-run and artist-led projects, biennials, festivals, exhibitions and other events understood to be self-organized structures operating adjacent to the official apparatuses of the state. This phenomenon occurred coupled with a return to "cultural diplomacy" as well as "civil society and democratization" programming on behalf of international donor organizations working in the field of development in the region, first in the 1990s and then with full force after the events of 9/11 and again with the onset of the revolutionary process in 2011. Concurrent with the transformations in the structure and type of aid directed at civil society, including the NGO-ization of the culture sector, an exponentially growing Gulf-based market comprised of a momentous infrastructure of commercial galleries, collectors, and world-class museums has also flourished. These include the existent Sharjah Biennial (accompanied by an extensive program of events for "alternative" arts) and Art Dubai (a first-class art fair), the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, venues in which most critical contemporary artists of the region have either exhibited in or aspire to do so.

Consequently, these internationally-funded pockets of what is broadly categorized as visual artistic production and increasingly gained a foothold at the turn of the millennium, are often located at the heart of tense debates which tend to conflate foreign-supported democracy with neoliberalism and imperialism. These debates emerged in most domains of foreign-supported civil society NGOs throughout most of the region from roughly 1990 onwards. Here the heated deliberations on the relationship between cultural production and international support often get wrangled in defensive takes on what especially post-1990 visual artists operating in these fields understand as attacks on their perceived "in-authenticity due to what are sometimes regarded as aesthetical re-adjustments being made with the production of internationally funded (read western) 'post-modern visualities'" (Toukan, *Art*).[8]

Emblematizing how international cultural assistance has been historically perceived by cultural producers and resonating with relevance to their counterparts today is an incident which occurred around the financing and aesthetical trends of one particular literary journal: *Al-Hiwar* (*al-Ḥiwār*) in 1960s Beirut. In 1957, the poets Yousef el-Khal (Yūsuf al-Khāl) and Adonis (Adūnīs) (regarded as the leader of the modernist movement in Arabic poetry) founded and edited *Shiʿr*, a magazine for contemporary Arabic poetry. This was to inaugurate modern Arabic poetry. For eleven years, between 1957 and 1970, the magazine struggled against what it perceived as outdated and archaic poetical theory and practice. This precipitated a reflection on the role of Arab nationalism in the loss of the rest of Palestine in 1967. Adonis himself, who was never fully trusted by Arab nationalists, later launched the daring literary journal *Mawāqif* where he and his colleagues delved into a reassessment of the political style of the two decades that had passed and of the very language and vocabulary of politics of the time. At the same time, a bifurcation was taking place in the literary field that art historian Kamal Boullata claims was also very relevant and reflected in the visual arts ("Artists" 25). The first current, according to Boullata, called for a *littérature engagée* as popularized in the immediate post-World War II era, when the French existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre applied a basic existentialist tenet to art: That a person defines her/himself by consciously engaging in willed action. The position was a reaction against the second wave re-

flected in the creed of "art for art's sake." Among Beirut's most influential literary journals, *al-Ādāb* represented the former trend while *Shiʿr* espoused the latter view. Beirut's small size and close-knit community of artists and intellectuals then, like today, facilitated easy collaboration between the two, helping to "elevate the visual arts to share the space traditionally dominated by the oral arts," as Boullata explains (ibid.). On the one hand, the artists whose figurative language perpetuated a narrative pictorial art seemed to echo the metaphorical imagery popularized by the poetry introduced in the pan-Arabist *al-Ādāb* founded and edited by the writer and literary critic Suheil Idriss (Suhayl Idrīs). The poets associated with *Shiʿr*, on the other hand, valorized the more abstract and experimental artists. Out of *Shiʿr* evolved another magazine founded by Tawfik Sayigh (Tawfīq Ṣāyigh), named *al-Ḥiwār*, dedicated to modernism in Arabic poetry. The magazine, which first appeared in Beirut in 1962 thanks to the efforts of the CIA's shadow organization, the *Congress for Cultural Freedom*, founded in 1950 as part of the United States' commitment to extending the ideals of liberal democracy well beyond European parameters in a Cold War world, faced relentless attack from Communists and Nationalists (Saunders 334). It ceased publication in 1967 in a dramatic chain of events, which began with Sayigh's discovery of the source of his journal's funding, a court case brought by *al-Ādāb*, Sayigh's depression, and his subsequent untimely death in an elevator (Boullata, "The Beleaguered Unicorn" 69). The drama revolving around *al-Ḥiwār* continues to resonate in the contemporary consciousness of Arab cultural producers crudely divided along binaries of progressive/conservative, modern/anti-modern, and authentic/inauthentic, measured in accordance to where they stand in regards to the question of commitment to change and the role of the artist in social and political progress. It is precisely here, nestled in between these tense discussions, that the fraught relations between the postmodernist artist expressing critique visually and the committed modernist intellectual armed with the legendary power of the word become most animated, for the latter generation of writers, poets, and visual artists indirectly continue to haunt debates on what it means to be committed and resistant in cultural production. This haunting occurs mostly because their revolutionary conscience is what they consider to be the yardstick by which today's younger counterparts' achievements on the global level are to be measured. As the director of a contemporary art house cinema in Beirut of the post-1990 generation put it:

> This generation in my opinion got stuck in the 1960s. They can't come out of it. They did something great then, but they are stuck in it and they have not been able to progress. They are kind of living off of the legend they created, and they still think that the revolution must start from the same place. (Toukan, *Art* 73)

"Starting the Revolution from a Different Place"

Speaking of the art world generally, the artist Hans Haacke acknowledges that there is a widespread assumption in the public, and often among art professionals as well, that art has nothing to do with politics and that politics can only contaminate artworks. For Haacke, this is an interesting sociological phenomenon (Bourdieu and Haacke 88–89).

Like Haacke, I find the meaning of the "political" in art to be grounded in sociologically discursive formations. Consequently, I work my way up from the premise that it is the "politics" of these formations which account for the nuances in the shifting understandings of the "political" as it pertains to cultural production. As such, my reading of art and its relationship to culture, society and politics is based on Chantal Mouffe's articulation of the relationship between the "political" and "politics" (101). By "politics" Mouffe refers to the ensemble of

practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual and "constitutive of human societies" (ibid.). The "political" for Mouffe is the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations and works to resist or reinforce hegemonic "politics" (ibid.). In either case, the field of the political is reformulated as a hegemonic one, because she articulates it as a set of antagonisms that are essentially always bidding to consolidate social power. Envisioning the "political" in Mouffeian terms means that we see power, conflict and antagonism as innate to debates about cultural production and its meaning and relationship to society. Hence, to borrow from Abu-Lughod once again, by reading resistance (in cultural production) as a 'diagnostic of power,' it is suggested that the hegemonic conception of the "political" in art and its materialization as resistance, dissent or subversion is itself a reflection of the politics of art that is at play in any period.

In conversation with Stephen Wright, a Paris-based art theorist for the *Out of Beirut* (2006) Modern Art Oxford exhibition catalogue, Bilal Khbeiz (Bilāl Khubayz)—poet, essayist, journalist and prominent commentator and actor in what is known today as Lebanon's post-civil war contemporary art scene—draws a line between the pre- and post-civil war generations of Lebanese artists, the start of a new era after the war and the delineation of new identities as part of that process. Khbeiz states that there existed a *total* subservience of the arts to the politics of the Arab liberation movements prior to the war:

> Where a poem may resemble a tear, a painting may amount to a scream and a novel may exceed expectations, the arts were always successful in communing with their audience. In that context, the artist was like Rilke, the person most capable of expressing general and common emotions. (Wright 68)

Khbeiz here posits the Lebanese pre-civil war generation of artists and writers upon whom he is reflecting as concerned with outright political art (as opposed to politically critical art) by emphasizing its link to prevailing ideology. Comparatively for him, the arts today have managed to "escape the edicts of politics" (ibid.). Khbeiz is part of a generation of contemporary post-war multidisciplinary artists, writers and architects, and their supporting networks and organizations, based in Beirut who emerged from the rubbles of the Civil War and the ambiguities of the *Ṭāʾif* Accords that supposedly ended hostilities in 1990, responding in their work to a very particular post-violence scenario. These particularities propelled them to: firstly, subvert understandings of how the history of the Civil War might be read and narrated; secondly, to interrogate and challenge the traditional role of cultural institutions and the commercial gallery system in the creation of art often by incursions into public space, whether physically or conceptually; and thirdly, to probe prevalent and accepted understandings of hegemony and ideology in identity formation. They did so through what they often describe as an 'introspective' turn which entailed a move away from what they saw as their predecessors' tendency to 'write back to the empire' within the confines of the metanarratives of history. Whether *iltizām* proper or the legacy it left in the wake of its collapse in 1967 with—in the words of Lebanese journalist and poet Youssef Bazzi (Yūsuf Bazzī)—"its leftist revolutionary tone" and "immense amount of anger, despair and the call for revolution […] a call made in a singing and somewhat naïve tone" (4); it was the conception of a committed dissident speaking on behalf of society by holding a mirror up to itself that was in the process of being visually deconstructed and then reconstructed though a self-understood, non-ideological form and introspective process of making art.

Lina Saneh (Līnā Ṣāniʿ) and Rabih Mroué's (Rabīʿ Mrūwah) performance *Biokraphia* (Beirut, 2002) questions the conventional interview format common to documentary practices that often pose versions of history as conclusive. Oscillating between the role of victor, victim and subject under interrogation, the protagonist—Saneh herself—stands before a glass tank full of water which hazily relays images of her face to her audience. Alluding to television monitors and constructed narratives, the content and form of the piece grapples with the indeterminacy of a fragmented identity at play within the confines of what was in 1990s Beirut an existent and formal hegemonic narrative propagating an amnesia of the war in order to go on living. In this example, the 'introspection' or the 'auto-critique,' often articulated in the various interviews carried out with members of the post-war generation, in order to locate itself vis-à-vis the pre-war one, is aptly demonstrated in the following excerpt from the performance:

> You're still thinking with the logic of the enemy. The enemy thinks that our work is provocative. They accuse us of being influenced by the West. Of being cerebral. Formalist. There's no story here...no actors…We have suffered and are still suffering from the homogenization of the Arab and Islamic identity. But in reality people are not all proud of this identity. This is our reality; and what I did was attempt to tell the truth. We don't remember that we're Arabs until the Americans and the Israelis bomb Beirut, the West Bank, or Iraq… in times of crises. ... It's only when things like this happen that this instinct in us is stirred. Our loyalty is instinctive; therefore it's not positive. In this context, the Arab identity can be considered an issue or matter, which in itself imposes upon us the inevitability of fate and destiny. (Saneh and Mroué)

The work as a whole touches upon crucial issues regarding an artist's position in the era of globalization by tackling—head on—local political, sexual, and religious taboos. Most relevantly for our concerns here, it attacks norms and conventions and teases out the seemingly hypocritical in Lebanese and Arab society at large. Ibrahim Abu-Rabiʾ, scholar of Islamic and intellectual thought, argued that contemporary Arab thinkers of all hues and inclinations are grappling with questions of modernity, postmodernity, and globalism with a twofold purpose (186). Firstly, to reflect on the challenges the phenomenon of globalization has posed to the Arab World; and secondly, to assess the overall trajectory of the Arab World over the past century or so (ibid.). Yet, despite the added challenge of grappling with the wave of globalization and the 'New World Order' that pulled Lebanon in after the end of its Civil War, the introspection transmitted in *Biokraphia* is in fact part of the larger dynamics that Abu-Rabiʾ discusses.

Interestingly, this generation of artists is often framed, especially by international onlookers of the scene, as one of the products of an exceptionally brutal war that forced a break with the past. This stands in stark contrast to the interpretation of them as a perpetuation of a new form of introspection in cultural production that is in fact a continuation of a larger history of war, revolution, oppression and resistance in the region.[9] Yet, the post-war generation's introspective tendency is also one that is an integral part, in fact a continuation, of a larger movement of intellectual thought that seeks to address the internal workings of Arab society, mentalities and relationship to modernity. This move was set in motion after what the pre-Civil War generation, ironically echoing contemporary Lebanese artists' choice of terminology about the Civil War, refers to as the cataclysmic experience of the *naksa* (the day of the setback)—the loss of the rest of historical Palestine to Israel in the Six Day War of 1967.

Following this, and in the words of novelist Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī) writing about artist's migration between places, languages, and tools. "The artists and writers of our times do not return to a place of stable values and forms. Their very being is afflicted by a crisis,

searching for a significance in the only reference available to them, namely in the very artistic forms they create" (82). The pre-1990 generation of cultural actors in Palestine and Lebanon, and particularly those most active in the period of the 1960s, articulated the political in terms of "modernity," understood as a comprehensive cultural project that aims at social and political change, understood not as a historical process, but rather as a value in itself, an instigator of social transformation and not its result, as the Lebanese poet and novelist Abbas Beydoun (ʿAbbās Baydūn) once described it (27–30). In contrast, for some members of the contemporary generation, particularly those with transnational ties, the point of artistic creation is self-referential and primarily about a critical and often conceptual engagement with an aesthetics localized within the domain of a global conception of art, even if it does extend itself outwards to society through public festivals, artistic interventions in public space and interventions into the political and social spheres. Thus, while the previous generation of artists and intellectuals shaped its purpose in direct relation to society by conceptualizing modernity as an endpoint and modernism as an aesthetic tool in the process of postcolonial identity negotiation and nation-building, the post-Cold War generation of Arab artists aims more at interaction with and inclusion in a "global" art discourse, and thus as part of a process of deconstructing and rethinking modernism and its related cultural practices as a project. Hence, for one generation, art was meant to be for a purpose, more than for its own sake, an educational or developmentalist tool, directed towards state and society and used in 'speaking back to the empire' and its after-effects. For the subsequent generation, this very idea was to be refuted, deconstructed, and reworked, allowing, as I argue here, for a "re-visualization" of the postcolonial entity primarily vis-à-vis itself rather than a "writing-back" to the former empire. Consequently, whether or not the generational introversion that Khoury describes as a crisis in the quote above is in fact symptomatic of the loss of meaning and purpose generally associated with postmodern literary and visual production, as he hints is in fact true, what is more relevant, at least for our purposes here, is what this perception represents. In other words, Khoury's framing of the post-Cold War generation's cultural production as crisis ridden, is in and of itself indicative of the existent generational tensions over the meanings and contexts of the political. Viewed through the lens of a contentious generational divide, one may argue that cultural production—a process constituted of artefacts that may or may not emanate a transcendent "political"—is also a state of being that is translated and explicated in terms that are always a manifestation of the larger critical condition of society itself.

Conclusion

In Jumana Manna's (Jumāna Mannā) short video "Blessed Blessed Oblivion" (2010) Palestinian male thug culture is the focus. Inspired by American underground experimental filmmaker Kenneth Agner's short film *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965), Manna's twenty-minute piece is a voyeuristic gaze into East Jerusalem's underworld of marginalized male Palestinian youths (figure 4 below), showing their hungry sexual appetites, raunchy jokes and the crude working of their imagination. By juxtaposing their seemingly hedonistic and depoliticized lives against the main protagonist's recitation of martyred poet Abdel Rahim Mahmoud's (ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Maḥmūd) well-known poem "Al-shahīd" ("The Martyr," 1936), running intermittently through the length of the video, Manna insinuates that humor, recklessness and lack of discipline may in fact be forms of subversion and thereby everyday resistance in and of themselves. Moreover, by referencing the notion of commitment existent in the 1930s, a period before the historical era of *iltizām* officially 'be-

Figure 4. (Courtesy of the artist)

gan,' Manna, like other artists of her generation bluntly reminds us that counter-hegemony in the colony and post-colony are not only linked but also lived, renewed, recreated and modified unremittingly. Within this frame of reference, what distinguishes the post- and pre-Cold War generation of artists and writers in Palestine and Lebanon is not whether or not they employ strategies of subversion against the grand narratives of Western progress and its violent repercussions, as they both do that. Rather, it is the variance in the tools appropriated to carry out this feat of countering hegemonic discourses and practices that marks each generation. As Meier, writing of the generation of Arab contemporary artists of the post-1990s era, explains: "their work certainly interrogates this relationship, but colonialism and the independence struggle is a past these artists did not personally experience," and because of that "their multimedia or post-media work consciously overturns modernist visual vocabularies and concepts" (15). Following this, I would suggest by way of conclusion, that the divergent conceptions of resistance and the political and the chosen mediums of their expression, be read as temporal and spatial variations in articulations of 'speaking back' to the colonial encounter and its various manifestations, whether imperial, colonial, postcolonial or neocolonial. One related question that remains however is why post-Cold War multimedia artists today insist on revisiting the concepts and practices of cultural resistance from a bygone era of which they are deeply critical, instead of abandoning it all together and engaging their own fellow writers on contemporary aesthetical concerns? *Iltizām* was once a concept and aesthetical practice anchored in an uncompromising leftist ideology of commitment to a cause and responsibility toward the people. Yet, as demonstrated here and as has been relatedly argued elsewhere about the changing conceptions of *iltizām* in relation to especially Arab Leftists, Nationalists and later Islamists (Klemm 58), the term in its different guises has always encompassed an understanding of the need to resist empire, a commitment to revolutionary change and the relationship between cultural production and society necessary for each to flourish. In the final analysis, the persistence of the term *iltizām* and the different meanings and practices that emanate from it is, if anything, testament to its enduring legacy, the continued appeal of the iconic figures

associated with it, and the imaginings of commitment and resistance that they practiced and inspired. These conceptions of the political in art continue to sit deeply, albeit often uneasily, in the consciousness of various post-*iltizām* generations of cultural producers.

Notes

1   The appropriation of writing, in the form of quotations, words and single letters has historically appeared in the works of many Arab artists. Iraqi Ghani Alani (Ghanī al-ʿĀnī), Egyptian Ahmed Mustafa (Aḥmad Muṣṭafā), Lebanese Samir Al-Sayegh (Samīr al-Ṣāyigh), Etel Adnan (Itil ʿAdnān), Aref El Rayyes (ʿĀrif al-Rayyis) and Salwa Raouda Choucair (Salwā Rawḍa Shuqayr), Palestinian Kamal Boulatta (Kamāl Bullāṭa), Syrian Mahmoud Hamad (Maḥmūd Ḥammād) and Algerian Rachid Koraichi (Rashīd al-Qurayshī) are amongst the many others who have explored the rich literary tradition of the region and transformed it into sculpture, painting, drawing, etching, book art and more recently performance and video art. For more on the use and power of the written word in the works of Middle Eastern Artists today see the online archive of the British museum's 2006 exhibition "Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East" (http://www.british museum.org/wordintoart/).

2   In contrast to the employment by previous generation artists of the word, letter or scripture to explore the relevance, multi-dimensional meanings and cultural meanings imbued in their respective forms, contemporary artists such as Walid Sadek (Walīd Ṣādiq) have more recently proposed bringing words into the domain of the visual and effectively making the text, essays, musings and prose the artwork in itself. On another level, some artists like Samah Hijjawi (Samāḥ Ḥijjāwī) in her 2009 project *Where are the Arabs*, a public performance in Amman that reenacts former Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser's (Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir) powerful oratory skills and inspirational speeches, questions the power of language and its relationship to the public in the contemporary Arab World. Palestinian artist Sharif Waked's (Sharīf Wākid) 2009 video *To be Continued...* employs the tradition of storytelling, so intrinsic to Arab (and Persian and Indian) oral culture, through a suicide bomber's reading of excerpts from *One Thousand and One Nights* in order to ultimately defer his self-immolation.

3   In her seminal publication Lippard focuses on the web of ideas and practices that have been termed conceptual art. She argues that in their critique of the art object, conceptual artists set out to reshape the art world into a network of ideas and critique rather than a marketplace of artifacts for sale.

4   In Egypt, these shifts in aesthetical styles after 1990 were reflected most strongly in the generation of poets that came to be known as the '90s generation' for their use of the personal voice and concerns of the street or spoken Arabic poetic forms.

5   This phenomenon has had the effect of marginalizing the visual heritage of both the Ottoman Empire as well as the vast Indo-Persian artistic tradition from mainstream representations of the region's culture.

6   See for instance the myriad forms of experimental writing and prose emerging in the internet or even the rise of spoken word poetry, which is part performative and circulated on the web. See also the different forms of experimental music circulated on the web placing as much emphasis on the image as the music.

7   The issue of the intellectual is similarly taken up by Egyptian artist, writer and musician Hassan Khan (Ḥasan Khān) in his online journal article "In Defense of the Corrupt Intellectual." *E-Flux* 18 (2010). Web. 2 June 2015.

8   In an interview with T. J. Demos for *Art Journal*, Lebanese curator Rasha Salti suggests that multimedia conceptual practices have today become "legible" and therefore should no longer be regarded as inauthentic. This challenge of being regarded as "inauthentic" or "illegible" was, according to her, overcome by addressing the shortage in venues for contemporary art and building up relevant audiences (109–112). See Dagher, Sandra, Catherine David, Rasha Salti, and Christine Tohme. "Curating Beirut: A Conversation on the Politics of Representation." Interview with T. J. Demos. *Art Journal* 66.2 (2007): 98–119. Print.

9   According to art historian Sarah Rogers, "the dominant critical paradigm for Beirut is a locale in which the violent history of the civil war produced a tabula rasa for visual practices" (191). See Rogers, Sarah. *Post-War Art and the Historical Roots of Beirut's Cosmopolitanism*. Diss. MIT Boston, 2008. Print. Portraying Beirut's art scene as "proto-institutional," western critics have promulgated an understanding of an art scene operating in a void. The sort of introspection that Saneh and some of her contemporaries refer to is similarly posited as hypermodern and emergent from a cultural tabula rasa in intellectual thought. See Wright, Stephen. "Like a Spy in a Nascent Era: On the Situation of the Artist in Beirut Today." *Beirut, It's Not Easy to Define Home*. Spec. issue of *Parachute* 13 (2002): 13–33. Print.

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S t e p h a n   G u t h studied "Islamwissenschaft," Modern German Literature and Philosophy at the universities of Bonn and Tübingen and attended lectures at Cairo University. He received an MA in 1987 and a PhD in 1992, both from Bonn University. From 1996 to 2007 Guth taught and researched at the Institute for Islamic and Middle East Studies, University of Bern, where from 2003 onwards he was also PD (Privatdozent). Since 2009 he is a Professor at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages of the University of Oslo. His teaching focuses on Middle Eastern literatures, especially Arabic and Turkish of the modern period, the languages of the 'Islamic World,' and conceptual history. Guth is the author of *Brückenschläge: Eine integrierte 'turkoarabische' Romangeschichte* (Reichert, 2003) and *Die Hauptsprachen der Islamischen Welt* (Harrassowitz, 2012) as well as co-editor of several volumes, including *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) and *Conscious Voices: Concepts of Writing in the Middle East* (Steiner, 1999).

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D i n a   H e s h m a t is Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature at The American University in Cairo (AUC). She teaches modern and contemporary Arabic literature, focusing on Egyptian novels and short stories. Her research interests include the representation of urban spaces in literary narratives as well as figures of revolt and resistance in modern and contemporary Egyptian literature. Heshmat completed her PhD at the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris III, 2004) with a dissertation entitled "The Evolution of the Representation of the City of Cairo in Modern and Contemporary Egyptian Literature," published in Arabic at al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Thaqāfa (Cairo, 2007). She earned her DEA (equivalent Masters) at Paris IV-Sorbonne with a thesis entitled: "Ibrāhīm Aṣlān's Mālik al-Ḥazīn: Marginality in the City." Before joining the AUC she taught Arabic Language and Literature at Leiden University (2009–2013). Heshmat also translates Arabic literature into French and many of her translations have been published in *Al-Ahram Hebdo*.

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This book is about relations between literature, society and politics in the Arab world. It is an attempt to come to terms with the changing conceptualizations of the political in Arabic literature in recent modern history. It examines historical and contemporary conceptions of literary commitment (iltizām) and how notions of 'writing with a cause' have been shaped, contested, re-actualized since the 1940s until today. Against the backdrop of the current social and political transformations in the Arab world, questions on the role of the arts, specifically literature and its politics, arise with immediacy and require profound reflection and analysis.

The chapters reexamine critically both current and historical notions of the political in modern Arabic literature as well as the legacy of iltizām as a term and an agenda. Literary commitment is understood here not just solely as a (completed) period in Arabic literary history but also as a vivid, changing and continuing idea that questions the role of literature and the author in and for a society.